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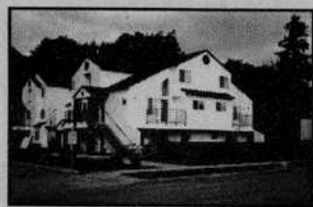
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Mediocre finish for golfers

■ The Oregon women's golf team finishes in the middle of the Bruin Classic pack

By Peter Hockaday
Oregon Daily Emerald

The Oregon women's golf team's latest tournament was played in a town with an odd name: Temecula, Calif.

It was just about the only thing different from the norm for the Ducks.

Oregon finished in the middle of the pack, a familiar result lately for the Ducks, at the Pioneer Electronics Bruin Classic Tuesday. They finished 11th in the 18-team field at the Menifee Lakes Country Club. The Ducks shot a total score of 926, three strokes behind 10th-place Long Beach

State.

As usual, Jerilyn White paced the Ducks, shooting good first and last rounds to end up 16th overall. White shot a 2-over-par 74 in the first round and an even-par third round to finish with a 223 total.

Ducks Claire Hunter (231, 46th), Dawn Berry (232, 50th) and Kathy Cho (236, 68th) all ended in the middle of the pack of individual golfers. Megan Heckerth (239, 79th) and Lacy Erickson (242, 85th) also competed for Oregon.

The Ducks' hiccup at the Bruin Classic came during the second round, Tuesday's morning round, when they shot a combined 316 as a team. Oregon had shot 303 to open the tournament Monday, and closed with a 307 in the afternoon

round Tuesday.

Pepperdine beat out Oklahoma by six strokes to win the team crown at the tournament. The Waves won on the strength of a second-round 286, the low round of any squad at the Bruin Classic.

Southern California, California and UCLA rounded out the top five teams. Those three schools, along with Oregon and Washington State — who finished 16th — represented the Pacific-10 Conference at the tournament.

The teams around Oregon all finished close together. Eighth-place San Diego State finished seven strokes ahead of the Ducks, who also finished tied with the Wolf-pack of Nevada for 11th. Thirteenth-place San Francisco finished only four strokes behind Oregon and Nevada.

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bined 40 points to California and Stanford, but had a chance to get back on the winning track against Washington at home.

It didn't happen. A controversial 72-71 defeat to the Huskies dropped the Ducks to 1-3 in league play and they would never recover.

"We lost a lot of games this year that we would have won last year," Graham said. "I'm disappointed, but not discouraged."

This year's version, led by freshman point guard Luke Ridnour, Jones and Bracey, did produce one magical night. Sitting at 2-5 in the Pac-10, Oregon desperately needed a big win to turn around its season. It got just that in a 79-67 victory against then-No. 7 Arizona that sent The Pit into a frenzy.

"That win was sweet," freshman forward Luke Jackson said. "But the thing that surprised me about this season was that we never really could put it all together."

Jackson described the season as "up and down, with a lot of down." That can certainly describe Oregon's final 10 games, in which the Ducks could only muster two victories (at Washington and Oregon State).

"The thing that was different about this year's team than the last

three years is that we didn't finish strong," Graham said. "We didn't get over the hump."

The Ducks still had hope for a third straight postseason appearance with an invitation to the NIT but were shutout from the 32-team field when certain bubble teams for the NCAA Tournament didn't make it.

"It feels horrible," said senior forward Bryan Bracey, who was Oregon's only selection on the All-Pac-10 team. "Not even getting into the NIT hurts. But I feel blessed to have been a part of this team. I had a great experience here, the best time of my life."

"It just goes by so fast." Oregon will also lose big men Julius Hicks and Flo Hartenstein, leaving considerable holes at the post positions. Kent wasted no time in his recruiting efforts and has been out of town all week trying to find solid replacements with his three available scholarships.

"Every season's different, and we had so much talent, but didn't do what we wanted to do," Hartenstein said. "We had higher goals. Especially after you have such a good year last year and then really have the opposite this year. But life goes on."

The losing season was especially tough for the freshman competitors Jackson and Ridnour. The roommates came from winning high school teams and do not plan

on again going through a stretch in a season in which they lose 13 of 16 games.

Both admitted to hitting the typical "freshman wall" late in the season and were admittedly worn down in the last few games. But with a year's experience of taking the Pac-10's best shot, they feel confident in leading the Ducks back to the Big Dance.

"I feel bad for our seniors," said Ridnour, who was awarded Pac-10 Freshman of the Year honors on Monday. "I can't wait for us to get another try. We don't want this to ever happen to our program again."

Next season will be slightly different for the Pac-10, as it brings back the conference tournament that will be played during the week prior to the NCAA tourney. Because of this change, Oregon's Pac-10 season will begin earlier than usual.

As of now, the Ducks are tentatively scheduled to face the Arizona schools on Dec. 20 and 22 at McArthur Court. Oregon then travels down to the desert two weeks later for a date with the Wildcats in Tucson on Jan. 3.

"It crunches our schedule with games before Christmas," Graham said. "But the league tournament helps so many teams, so it's worth it."

"We would have been a great team this year for a Pac-10 tournament."

Hockaday

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the Ducks upended then-No. 7 Arizona at McArthur Court. There was also that game in Seattle, when all five starting Ducks scored in double figures to blow out the Washington Huskies.

In every other Pac-10 game, though, the Ducks played like a intramural league team that had just formed the night before — turnovers and sloppy play along with flashes of individual brilliance were the earmarks of the team.

"The chemistry of the team needs to be able to go 40 minutes," Bracey said. "That's what it takes, and when you don't have that it hurts."

Can a player score 36 points in a game and have his team still lose? Jones scored 36 in Oregon's loss at Arizona State. Can a team go nearly undefeated in the preseason and then only win five of their final 18 games? The Ducks went 9-1 in the preseason, then 5-

13 the rest of the way to barely salvage a .500 record.

How about that preseason though? Oregon should have played all their 2000-01 games against the Denvers and the Northern Arizonas of the world. Even though some would put a very large asterisk next to that 9-1 preseason — none of the Ducks' preseason opponents went to the NIT or NCAA Tournaments — they did look good, didn't they?

They were runnin' and gunnin', just like the old times when Alex Scales and Darius Wright would run the floor at Mac Court to the delight of Duck fans. Ridnour was the young architect of an offense that was averaging more than 80 points a game, while Bracey led the Pac-10 in preseason scoring.

The momentum continued when the Ducks blew out Oregon State in Eugene. But then they went on the road to the Bay Area, and instead of a split or two close losses, Oregon was embarrassed by both Northern California

teams. The Pac-10 season was all downhill from there.

Still, there is hope for next season. There is always hope, when you talk to Ernie Kent, who is at this moment on a recruiting trip, most likely scouring junior colleges for a big man.

Obviously the core of a good team is in place. Ridnour and Jackson aren't going anywhere, and they represent a quality recruiting class that should lead to future four-star classes. If Jones can finally become a consistent force, if Chris Christoffersen can become the inside presence he was at times this season and if Anthony Norwood can find his outside shot, the Ducks could be contenders once more next season.

For now, though, Oregon will just have to pick up the pieces of those broken beakers lying around and hope that next year's chemistry experiment won't be such a disaster.

Peter Hockaday is a sports reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald. He can be reached at phockaday@yahoo.com.

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