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Smedstad — a three-time all-American in the 3,000 and 5,000 before coming to Oregon — figures to be one of a handful of Oregon athletes gunning for NCAA-worthy times. She joins 2000 NCAA qualifiers Karis Howell, a javelin thrower, Mary Etter, a shot putter, and Niki Reed, a pole vaulter, to form an experienced nucleus for a team that is inexperienced but talented for the most part.

Reed said that she and the rest of the athletes will try to enjoy themselves on the road to the NCAAAs.

"I have high goals for myself," Reed said. "But I'm just trying to have fun."

"I've never run at Oregon before, but people tell me it's great," Smedstad said. "It's going to be fun."

The field squads, especially the throwers, should provide the highlights for the Ducks all season. Oregon is deep at every throwing position and many of the other field events as well.

"Our throwing events are strong,

"I have high goals for myself. But I'm just trying to have fun."

Niki Reed
Oregon pole vaulter

mostly because we have an experienced, mature group," Heinonen said.

Joining Howell and Etter in the throws are senior Maureen Morrison — who has scored NCAA provisional marks but no NCAA qual-

ifying distances — and sophomore Jordan McDaniels in the discus. In the javelin, sophomore Charyl Weingarten came on strong toward the end of last season and figures to do so again this spring.

In the middle and long distance races, Smedstad and sophomore standout Eri Macdonald will try to fill the huge hole that Katie Crabb left behind. Crabb's Oregon career wrapped up at last weekend's NCAA Indoor Championships.

Reed anchors the deepest part of the Oregon team, the jumpers, which include seniors Holly Speight and Karina Elstrom, a previous all-American.

All in all, the Ducks hope that old talent and new legs will mix, and that in the end they can send as many athletes as possible to the NCAA Championships at Hayward Field.

Softball

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scored and total bases. She was also effective on the mound, picking up several big victories.

Overall, though, the transfer from Mesa, Ariz., said she expected more early on.

"I was pretty surprised by the way we came out," Wangler said of the preseason. "I thought we would do better. But we're staying positive, and we'll get better."

Offensively, the Ducks had problems with consistency at the plate during the preseason; but they expect that to come around as the season progresses.

"The offense was a little short to

start, but it's picked up quite a bit lately," Vidlund said. "We just need to try to think of it as a battle and good out as hard as we can."

"I think we're going to be fine."

Oregon finished tied for last in the conference standings last season with a 6-15 record, but head coach Rick Gamez did lead the team to its fourth-straight NCAA Tournament appearance and a No. 19 ranking at the end of the season.

Although they've started slowly, the Ducks expect nothing less than another NCAA Tournament appearance and are hoping to reach the College World Series for the first time since 1989.

But getting past their Pac-10 foes will continue to be an uphill climb: The Pac-10 boasts the best teams in

the nation.

All of the teams in the Pac-10 are ranked in the top 25, with five teams in the top 10. UCLA (29-0) and Arizona (28-0) fill out the nation's top two spots, respectively. Conference coaches projected that the Bruins and Wildcats would share the conference crown this season.

The Ducks face Arizona on March 30 in the home opener at Howe Field.

"I don't really know what to expect," Wangler said about facing the nation's top teams for the first time. "I try not to think about it too much. It's just a huge privilege to be here, and I'm really excited to play them."

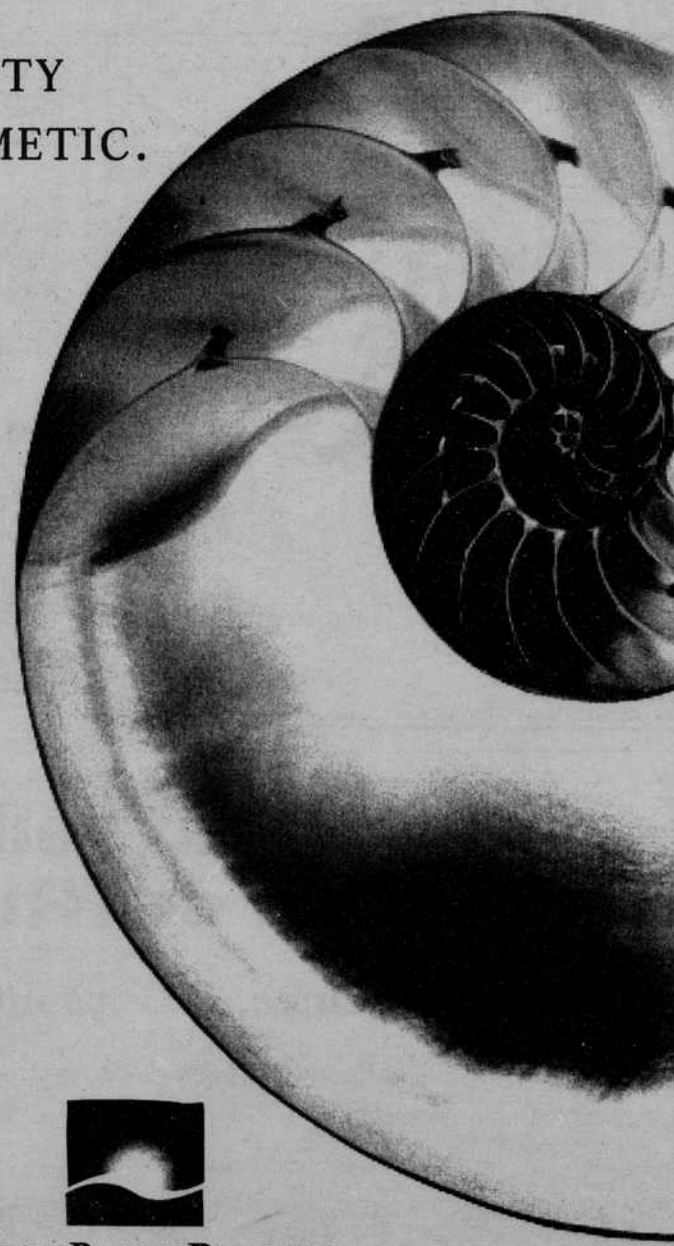
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