

Goin' down GUNNIN'

■ Junior Connie McMurren has been through the worst season of her softball career, but she's still hungry for a win against Cal

By Adam Jude
Oregon Daily Emerald

With every delivery, Connie McMurren belts out an ear-jarring grunt that would make Monica Seles proud.

The grunt is typically a sign of all-out effort, characterized by an extreme physical movement, often occurring during the performance of a physical event.

For McMurren, however, the grunt has had different meanings this season.

The ace of the Oregon pitching squad, McMurren is battling through the worst season of her life—but she's not alone.

After three straight NCAA Tournament appearances, the Ducks have had their worst season in head coach Rick Gamez's five-year tenure.

Heading into today's 2 p.m. game against No. 6 California, Oregon is 28-37 overall this season and a dismal 1-17 in the Pacific-10 Conference.

McMurren has 17 of those losses in the circle—the most in the Pac-10—but two less than she had last year. Her nine wins this year, though, are seven less than her 16-19 record in 2000.

"I feel responsible for the outcome of the year," McMurren said. "I carry a lot of that on my shoulders, but at the same time, we have had a problem scoring runs this year. It just compounds into a vicious cycle and we can't seem to break out of it."

Before defeating Portland State on Wednesday, McMurren had lost 12 straight decisions, a span that dates back to a March 12 victory over Purdue.

To McMurren's credit, the Ducks are only scoring an average of 3.4 runs per game this season, compared to 4.6 runs

per game last year.

"We just need to get the love of the game back," McMurren said. "It's been such a huge struggle this year that we've lost our focus. We need to ask ourselves 'Do we still want to play softball?'"

"I can honestly say that I still love to pitch."

Perhaps the pressure got to McMurren this season. As the Ducks' opening day starter, McMurren had high expectations after her 2000 season that included a 1.79 earned run average. Or perhaps, because she'd never really lost before, the junior from North Eugene High School just didn't know how to react when hit with a rough spell.

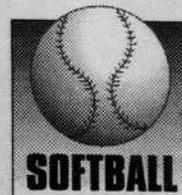
As a high school senior, McMurren was a first-team all-state selection after going 18-0 with a 0.00 ERA, including six no-hitters, 22 shutouts and 335 strikeouts. In three years at Oregon, McMurren has led the team in innings pitched each season while recording 361 strikeouts, second on the school's all-time list. She is on pace to become Oregon's career strikeouts leader, surpassing Rachelle Taylor's mark of 474 set in the early '90s.

McMurren is also sixth in the record books with 40 career wins.

"She's always had it," sophomore second baseman Alyssa Laux said. "It's good to see her pitching well again."

Regardless of what has happened this year, one thing is for certain: The fire in McMurren is still burning. The McMurren of old came to life Wednesday as she pitched a brilliant, complete game shutout against Portland State, allowing four hits and seven strikeouts while walking one. The offense, after scoring just two runs in the first game of a doubleheader, also picked up for McMurren, belting 11 hits in a 7-0 victory.

With the win, McMurren lowered her ERA from 3.52 to 3.35.



MCMURREN

Staff ace Connie McMurren said she feels responsible for Oregon's rough season. McMurren is 9-17 this season, but shutout Portland State Wednesday while striking out seven.

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Twilight falls on Oregon's regular season Saturday



Lucretia Larkin is on the verge of qualifying for the Pac-10s

■ The Duck women will look for both improved marks and improved national standings.

By Peter Hockaday
Oregon Daily Emerald

In the words of Oregon women's track and field coach Tom Heinonen, this weekend's Oregon Twilight meet is supremely important and inconsequential at the same time.

"The Twilight is different things to different people," Heinonen said. "It's a little tune-up for some and a last chance for others."

The Twilight is the Ducks' last regular-season home meet before they start the postseason at the Pacific-10 Conference Championships next weekend. For some Oregon athletes, that means this weekend's meet is the last time they can



■ Kasahun looks to break four minutes in Twilight Mile, other Ducks looking for high marks

By Robbie McCallum
Oregon Daily Emerald

It'll be twilight. The air will be cool, the shadows will be long and the wind will be calm. In other words, it'll be perfect running conditions.

The Oregon men's track and field team hopes to take advantage of such good conditions this Saturday at the annual Oregon Twilight meet at Hayward Field.

Only a handful of Ducks will compete at Saturday's meet, which will mark the last chance for Pacific-10 Conference and NCAA qualifying marks.

Senior distance runner Michael Kasahun, who has provisionally qualified for



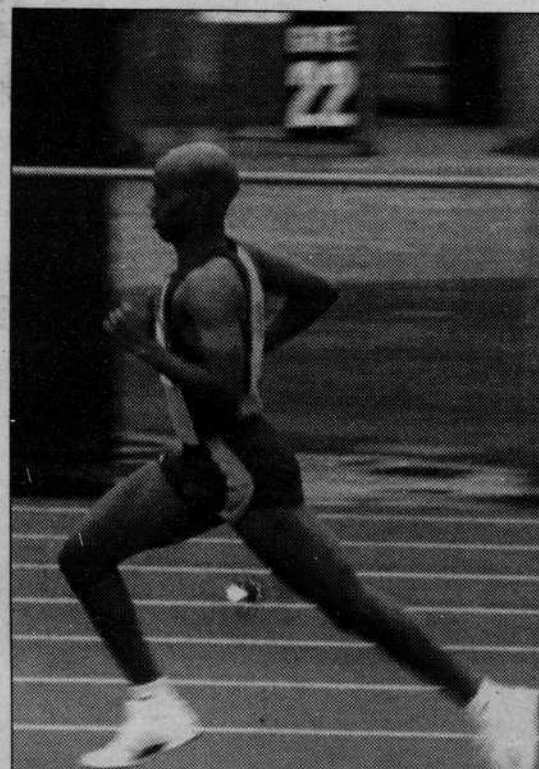
On Tap:

What: Oregon Twilight meet

Who: Oregon men's, women's track and field teams

When: Saturday, 4:30 p.m.

Where: Hayward Field



Senior Michael Kasahun is a provisional qualifier in the 5000.

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