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Golfers play on despite tragedy

■ Despite the tragic events of Sept. 11, the men's golf team pulled off the tournament win with flying colors

By Jesse Thomas
for the Emerald

It was a day in which the Oregon men's golf team had planned on simply playing another 18 holes and, if all went well, walking away with a win.

But the Ducks soon found out it would be a day that would change their lives forever.

As the team headed to the Mallard Creek Golf Course on the morning of Sept. 11, they heard the tragic news about the first airliner crashing into one of the World Trade Center towers in New York.

Oregon then had to decide as a team whether it was going to play golf at all that day.

"The coach suggested there was nothing we could do as far as being here and everything going on there, so he suggested it might be better that we play rather than watch," junior John Ellis said.

Oregon began team play one stroke ahead of Washington State for first-place after the first day. Doing its best to keep focused, Oregon finished out strong.

The Ducks finished the day six-under-par to win the tournament, easily edging Arizona by 12 strokes.

"That was the most satisfaction I've had in my 10 years since I've been here," Oregon head coach Steve Nosler said. "They handled everything and the success they had in a very professional, very mature way."

Although the team was satisfied with the victory, it was bitter-sweet in light of everything that had happened that day. It was difficult for the players to concentrate because things on the golf course just weren't the same on that eerie day.

"Your bad shots that day didn't mean as much as they would in a normal tournament situation," junior Chris Carnahan said. "We just went and played with the same mentality that golf's not really on your mind right now."

Carnahan was the defending champion of the tournament and finished high again this year with a second-place performance, just two strokes behind champion

Sean Deacon of Oregon State.

Carnahan also shot a tournament-low, six-under-par 65 in his last round. Senior Aaron Byers was right behind with a third-place tie at three-under-par, which matches his top finish as a collegian.

Also placing for Oregon was senior Brandon Harnden, who had his best finish in nearly a year with a tied-for-eighth-place, and Ellis tied-for-19th place.

"To win a tournament would be a really big deal and to be in the hunt, but as this day took on, it was kind of a numbing day," Byers said. "You had really no emotion. You just went out and we got the job done."

"The coach suggested there was nothing we could do as far as being here and everything going on there, so he suggested it might be better that we play rather than watch."

John Ellis
junior, golfer

With that job finished, the team embarks on what they hope to be a long and successful season. Oregon ranked as high as 20th in the country last season, but fell just short of qualifying for nationals.

"We were good enough to go to nationals," Nosler said. "We should have gone."

The players' goals this year are realistic, but are certainly easier said than done. Oregon aims to win the Pacific-10, go to regionals and then reach nationals. And with a strong tournament win already under their belt, which the Ducks haven't solely won since 1991, the team appears headed in the right direction.

"This is probably the best golf team I have been a part of here at the University of Oregon," Carnahan said. "Our team chemistry is far and above more than it's ever been."

The Oregon men appear to be worth keeping an eye on this year. The Ducks go after their next "W" at Washington this weekend when they participate in the Husky Invitational.

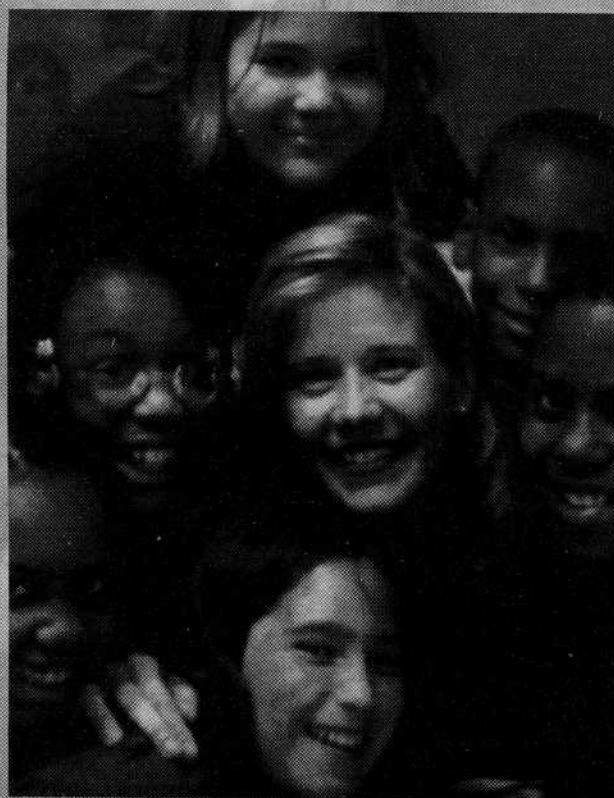
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