

After rough first half, UO can only move forward

■ There have been positives for the Oregon volleyball team this season, but not many in a winless first half

By Hank Hager
Oregon Daily Emerald

The first half of the Pacific-10 Conference volleyball season is over, and the Ducks are staring at a goose-egg for the fourth time in the last five years. At 8-12 overall and 0-9 in conference play, Oregon has a dismal record, but is not necessarily a dismal team.

"If you eliminate the outcomes and look at it, I still think we're one of the top 50 programs in the country," head coach Carl Ferreira said.

There have been positives, such as the emergence of Lindsay Closs and Stephanie Martin in their first year with the program, but there have also been the negatives. Because this team is young, more mental mistakes are made than most would like.

As a group, this team has talent. But what has been most important is its ability to forget about the last match and deal with the current opponent. It hasn't been easy, but it's been done.

"It's kind of defining in terms of the character of the kids on this team," Ferreira said. "To be emotionally down, it's very easy to have a fragmented emotion after some of the outcomes that have happened."

After 20 matches, here is the mid-season review of the Oregon Ducks.

Offense: Senior Monique Tobbagi and juniors Closs and Martin have been the soul of the team and have accounted for most of the Oregon offense. Tobbagi leads the team with 249 kills, and Martin is close behind at 236. But more importantly, Closs and Martin have been the sparkplug of the offense, which has been dismal in recent years. It hasn't been good enough to get an Oregon conference win, but it is on the rise. **Grade: B+**

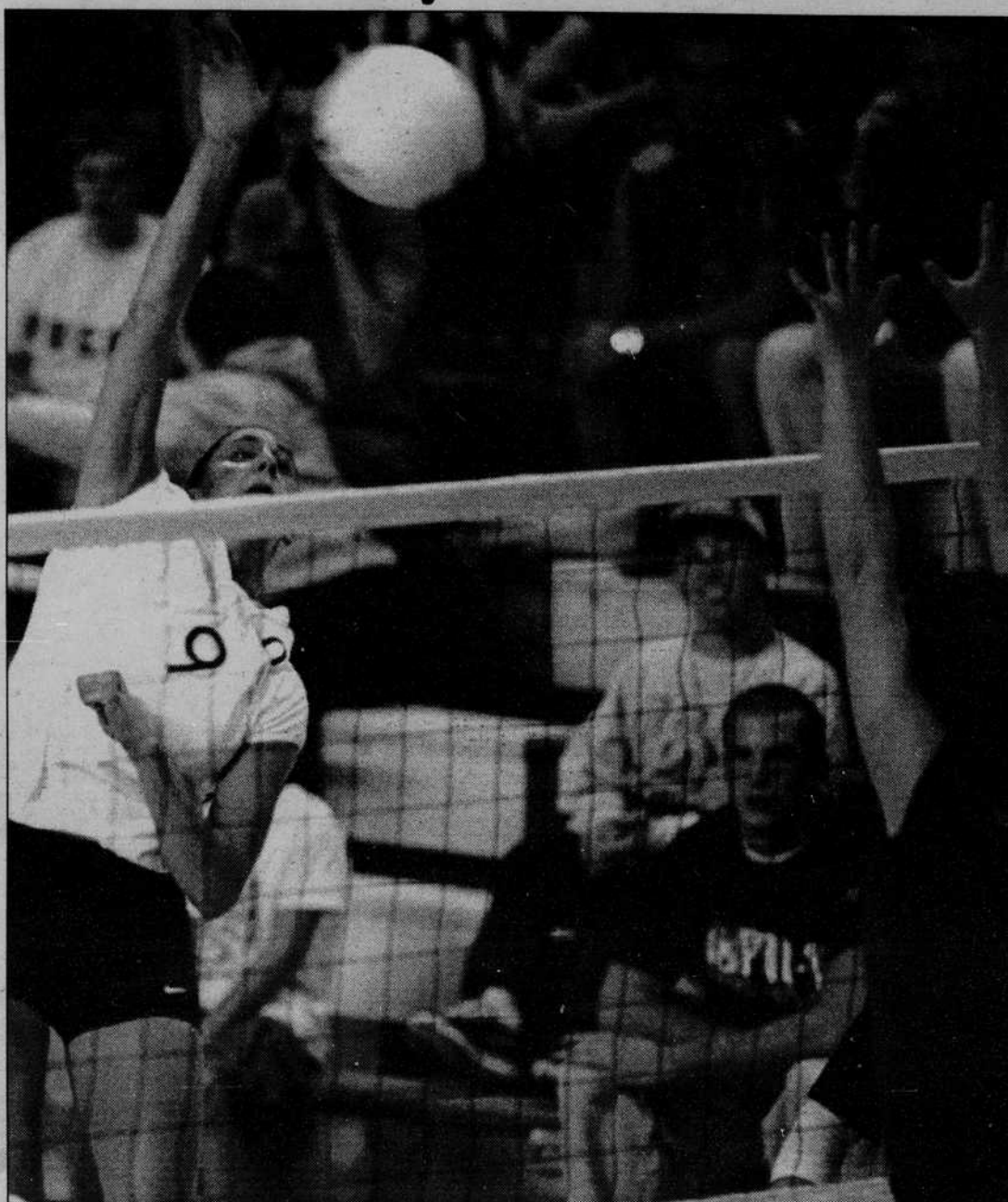
Defense: All hail Lindsay Murphy! The sophomore has been stellar for the

Ducks, recording 178 digs on the year, good for almost 2.5 per game. Tobbagi, proving she is an all-around excellent player, is second on the team in digs, and has backed up Murphy in virtually every game. As a team, though, Oregon often looks confused when attempting to stop the opponent, and with the exception of a loss to Gonzaga on Tuesday, has looked worse in recent matches. **Grade: C-**

Coaching: Ferreira's second year as Oregon taskmaster has not been how he would have envisioned it, but by all means, it is not completely his fault. His players love playing for him, and believe in the system he has set forth. One major change he has implemented this season is the move back to the one-setter offense. Last season, senior Julie Gerlach and junior Sydney Chute shared the floor but were unable to make the offense move. This season, Chute has been the primary setter, opening up an additional spot that has been well-used in the team's offense. **Grade: B-**

Mental Approach: A young team is one that is hard to control when it comes to thinking about the match and not just playing in it. Two mental errors that have plagued the Ducks involve net errors and service errors. Often, when on a major run, the Ducks have a net violation, taking their momentum away. The same is true for service errors, which often keep the Ducks from establishing their offense. **Grade: C**

Overall: Again, this year's squad is a young team, but there is often no excuse for a winless first half. However, in the stacked Pac-10, any squad not currently in a volleyball hotbed (e.g. Washington, Oregon, Cal) will have trouble competing with the Stanfords and USCs. But the Ducks have let some wins slip out of their hands, especially in non-conference matches against Idaho State and Gonzaga. Instead, they should be 10-10 overall. **Grade: C**



Adam Amato Emerald

In 20 matches this season, senior Monique Tobbagi (9) has shown the skills that have made her an all-Pac-10 performer. As a team, the Ducks have shown signs of brilliance, but did not win a conference match in the first half of the season.

Murphy

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of the time and boring. Really boring."

After the homesickness kicked in, Murphy transferred back to Oregon, where her parents could watch her play.

Since coming back to Eugene, Murphy has played a key role on the Oregon squad, as a hustling, bustling and reliable midfielder. Murphy has played in all but one game since transferring to Oregon, and her shot and point totals have gone up each season as she has grown more confident with Steffen's system.

Despite her offensive improvements, Murphy says she has been working hard on her defensive skills as well.

"This is the first year I've thought about where I fit in on de-

fense," Murphy said. "I've worked on it a lot, because it's sort of been my weakness my whole life."

With Murphy's help, and the defensive help from other midfielders such as Sarah Denner, Starr Johnson and Ann Westermarck, the Ducks have allowed an all-time low 1.93 goals per game this season.

This weekend, the Ducks will be without Murphy's presence for the first time since early 1999. Her teammates said the experience will be odd.

"It's a big loss for us," said senior Chalise Baysa, who has also played in every game since 1999. "She's a good player. She's one of the best on the team. We've just got to have confidence in all our players and make up for the loss of her play."

Murphy might compete in the regular season's final two games,

Annie Murphy, Oregon midfielder



Number: 14

Year: Senior

Hometown: Eugene

High School: South Eugene High

2001 goals/assists/points: 3/1/7

Quote: "I'm going to miss having 20 friends that you get to talk to every day. We all have a good time together. We're serious, and we want to win, but we have fun. That's what makes our team special."

at Washington and Washington State. She will most likely play if the Ducks make it to the NCAA Tournament.

While she will be forced to watch this weekend's games from the sidelines, Murphy will always have those few seconds from her thriller in Tempe, when she saved the Ducks' season, for a few weeks at least.

"I didn't save it," Murphy said, laughing. "It wasn't like I was the only one playing that game. We all deserve credit for that win."

But Murphy deserves some credit for the win. She did, after all, experience agony and ecstasy, all in the same moment, all in the name of an Oregon victory.

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Tobbagi talks and isn't afraid to say what she thinks. Closs also isn't afraid, and even Lauren Westendorf, a freshman who has probably never been in this position before, is vocal about the team.

But it takes courage for athletes to chat after a loss, especially when they gave everything they had on the court. It takes a special athlete to play with heart and then do the same off the court. And even though the Oregon women haven't been able to make it work on the court, they've still been successful. They've given it all, and in the long run, that's what is truly important and what people will remember the most.

Hank Hager is a sports reporter for the Emerald. He can be reached at hankhager@dailyemerald.com.

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