

Heavy hitters join Ducks in Las Vegas

■ The wrestling team travels to Las Vegas for an invitational competition featuring many of the country's top teams

By Chris Cabot
Oregon Daily Emerald

The Oregon wrestling squad continues its season today near the bright lights of the Las Vegas strip, joining 53 other schools at the Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational.

For the 19th consecutive year, the tournament attracts the top teams from around the country, including 11 teams ranked by Amateur Wrestling News in the top-20 poll, led by No. 5 Illinois.

The competition begins today at the Las Vegas Convention Center and continues through Saturday evening. All of the Ducks' Pacific-10 Conference opponents will also travel to Las Vegas, including No. 10 Arizona State and No. 11 Boise State.

The road trip to Las Vegas will be a return home for senior Eugene Harris, who will wrestle in the 165-weight class. Harris is 4-1 overall and currently ranked No. 16 in the nation by both collegiate wrestling ranking organizations InterMat and W.I.N. Magazine.

InterMat ranks four other Oregon wrestlers in the top 25 — No. 9 Shaun Williams at 125 pounds, No. 14 Jason Harless at 133, No. 19 Brian Watson at 141 and No. 8 Eric Webb at heavyweight.

The Ducks are 2-0 so far this season, with wins in dual meets at Stanford and Davis. They also competed in the Southern Oregon Open on Nov. 17, when Harless and Watson came away with individual titles. Harris also wrestled his way to a championship co-title with sophomore Luke Larwin, who competed in the tournament unattached.

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Essig

continued from page 9A

school system as a teacher, administrator and even principal at North Eugene High School.

Now Essig runs his own business, Don Essig and Associates. He sets up seminars, retreats and workshops for businesses and groups around Eugene.

"I'm a teacher, really," Essig said about his company. "When I do leadership stuff, I'm really teaching."

He plays golf — he is a remarkable five-handicap — and travels to Oregon road games. But really, Essig said he most enjoys the two or three hours that he spends behind the microphone every Saturday.

"It's fun to be able to use something that God gave me, a great voice that's recognizable, and I get to contribute to sports when I was never a real athlete," Essig said. "That's my contribution to the game."

Duck fans may be familiar with Essig's quick comments during games. When an opposing quarter-

back throws a ball into the stands, he offers, "Complete pass to section 22." When an opposing running back slips on the field, he quips, "Six yards and tackled by AstroTurf."

"Somewhere along the line, I've acquired what I call a pretty good, dry sense of humor," Essig said. "If things happen during the game, I'm not opposed to make some smart-aleck remark about it. It's not going to hurt anybody."

Essig has his opinions on Oregon sports as well. Though he was a student at Oregon State, Essig calls himself "100 percent Duck." He says that the Pit Crew isn't as loud as it used to be, but that fan support for football is through the roof.

Among Essig's favorite Duck moments are Kenny Wheaton's famous interception against Washington, Ron Lee's half-court shot to beat Stanford in the 1970s and Oregon's toppling of John Wooden's UCLA Bruins at McArthur Court.

For Essig, sports and life often intertwine.

"If I make a mistake, I hear about it," Essig said. "But I ask those peo-

ple, tell me about the 1,200 times — I figured it out one time, and during a regular football game I'm going to give that crowd about 1,200 different pieces of information — so I blew a couple, tell me about the 1,198 things I did right.

"I think that's one thing that's wrong with business. You always have meetings to discuss what's going wrong, what about focusing on the things you did right?"

Essig takes his philosophy of life and applies it to both work and play — he gets paid virtually nothing by the Athletic Department for his announcing duties — and says he is content.

"I tell people that I'm 63 going on 30," Essig said.

And on Saturday in the Civil War game against his alma mater, when everyone in the stadium will play their hardest, root their loudest and pour all their emotion into a football contest, Essig will be right there with them.

Without a silly cold to hold him back.

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Men's

continued from page 9A

before returning to practice today.

Oregon knows it can't afford to look past the Pilots. Portland is 2-2, with wins over Cal-State Riverside on Nov. 17 and Idaho on Wednesday, while its first loss was a hard-fought 96-90 overtime contest at Idaho State.

That other loss came against top-ranked Duke in the Blue Devils' home opener at rowdy Cameron Indoor Stadium. So Kent knows the Pilots will be battle-tested and eager to play the Ducks on their home turf.

"This is probably their biggest home game of the season," he said. "It's going to be another tough game on the road for us."

Oregon had trouble with Portland last season, winning only 66-60 at Mac Court, but Kent said both teams have changed dramatically.

"People need to get off last year," Kent said. "We're a much different team. And Portland is going to be a different team with a different coach and a different system. I don't think you can compare the two seasons."

Casey Frandsen and Coky Rochin lead the Pilots with 18.5 points per game while Rochin also leads the team in rebounds with nine per game.

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