



USC's Rachel Woodward (33) is averaging 4.5 points and 3.1 rebounds per game for the 7-6 Trojans.

Eric Bish Freelance Photographer

# Trojans climbing to top of Pac-10

USC is tied for second in the Pac-10 after surprising themselves with a 4-1 start to their conference season

By Mindi Rice  
Senior Sports Reporter

The Trojans are pushing their way up the Pacific-10 Conference ladder.

After a 14-17 record landed USC in a tie for fifth at the end of the Pac-10 season last March, the Trojans have picked up steam this season and are 4-1 in conference play.

"Everything we hoped we were going to get out of (a tough early schedule) last year, we were able to get this year," head coach Chris Gobrecht said Tuesday. "We were able to come out feeling very positive and like we still had a chance to win in the Pac-10."

USC (7-6 overall, 4-1 Pac-10) returned four starters from the tough nonconference season it played a year ago. Gobrecht spaced out the difficult games this season, and she said it will be a big help when they make the tough trips during conference play.

"Anytime you're on the road it's tough," Gobrecht said. "We've only been on the road once. Stanford's got a lot of tough things to do as well as any of us. Stanford has yet to be tested. Washington almost got them, but Stanford really has yet to be tested."

The Trojans recently survived a visit from the Washington schools, taking care of Washington State, 82-52, on Sunday. Meanwhile USC beat Washington, which was chosen to

finish ahead of them in the conference, 70-50, on Friday.

Senior Rometra Craig led the Trojans with 13 points against Washington, while fellow senior Ebony Hoffman led USC with 16 points Sunday.

Junior Rachel Woodward contributed 10 points off the bench between the two games.

After losing six consecutive games to the Huskies, sophomore Meghan Gnekow and her teammates especially enjoyed the victory. The first-year starter scored nine points in 23 minutes and led the Trojans with eight rebounds.

"I've been practicing all week on how to guard Giuliana (Mendiola) and had watched film before the game to get a feel for what I was doing," Gnekow told the Los Angeles Times after the victory against Washington. "But it wasn't just for me; our whole team did a great job of not letting them catch the ball and run her plays."

### Not-so-happy birthday

The Huskies' loss to USC came on the same day as the younger Mendiola sister, Giuliana, turned 22 and two days after Gioconda Mendiola's 23rd birthday. While Giuliana Mendiola is second in the Pac-10 with 19.6 points per game, the Huskies (8-7, 1-5) have lost three straight games.

"The urgency is there, and it's only getting more intense," Mendiola told The Seattle Times after the loss to USC. "You can't lose four games in the Pac-10 out of five and sit back and say, 'Well, I'm OK with it. We'll get better.' We still have a lot of confidence in each other, but we need to get this done. Soon."

Contact the senior sports reporter at [mindirice@dailyemerald.com](mailto:mindirice@dailyemerald.com).

# Chute, Blank turning careers into coaching gold

The two former intercollegiate athletes have lent a helping hand and their expertise

By Kirsten McEwen  
Sports Freelancer

With two former varsity Oregon volleyball players serving as coaches for the men's Club volleyball team, coordinator Kyle Sinner believes the two will be one of the main reasons the team will have a successful season.

"It's so important that we have a strong coaching staff," Sinner said.

"The girls that we have are amazing because they work us to death and it is totally needed. They bring such a depth of knowledge to practice. It helps us feel like a real team."

While the majority of club teams are coached by student participants, men's volleyball players consider themselves lucky to have

former setter Sydney Chute and defensive specialist Diana Blank as coaches.

"Having a coach-player relationship is important," Sinner said. "It is just a lot different than having your own teammate coach you."

With two stellar coaches, seven returning players and four rookies, including two exchange students, the men's volleyball team will enter its first tournament in Walla Walla, Wash., this weekend. They will challenge such Northwest schools as Idaho State, Washington State and Pacific.

Although this weekend's tournament is important, the team is preparing for back-to-back tournaments in California in February. The 18th Annual Collegiate Far Western Volleyball Invitational, held Feb. 14 and 15 at UC Davis, will be the team's first major tournament and will serve as their last chance to compete before attending the San Diego State University 2nd Annual SoCal Classic.

"This will be our first year going to the SoCal tournament, and all the big schools will be there, so we will be the little guys going in there to show them what's up," Sinner said.

The Ducks will begin spring term by hosting regionals at the University. Seven teams will compete on April 3 and 4 and will vie for a top ranking to take to nationals, which will be held in Charlotte, N.C.

"We are for sure looking to take the region," Sinner said. "A top ranking is important if we want to place well at nationals."

Sinner said the team's goal is to finish in the top 10 at nationals, which would be a major improvement after placing 25th at last year's tournament.

"I think we have a pretty good shot," he said. "If we do these major tournaments at Davis and at San Diego, I think we will definitely have

the confidence to get it done."

### Greek Weekend

Oregon ice hockey caps off the Annual I-5 Cup this weekend at Lane County Ice Arena. The I-5 Cup is awarded to the team — either Washington or Oregon — that has the best record after four games. The Ducks are down 2-0 after losing both games against the Huskies in Seattle. The Ducks will play Washington at 7:30 on both Friday and Saturday night.

The Ducks are also sponsoring Greek Weekend, an event in which University sororities and fraternities show their support for Oregon ice hockey. The greek house with the most members in attendance will receive \$1 for every ticket sold on Jan. 16 and 17. The money will be donated to the charity of their choice.

Fourteen games in, Oregon is still searching for its first win of the season. After a weekend without games and an entire week of practice to prepare, the Ducks look to capitalize on their rested legs.

Kirsten McEwen is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

## Club Sports

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