

SPORTS

Best bet
MLB Spring Training:
San Francisco vs. Chicago Cubs
11 a.m., ESPN

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Thursday, March 4, 2004

Softball anticipates Team USA matchup

Oregon takes its 10-game winning streak to Florida for six games, including a battle with Olympic hopefuls

By Mindi Rice
Senior Sports Reporter

This year, the Speedline Invitational in Clearwater, Fla., is more than just a tournament for No. 16 Oregon.

DUCK SOFTBALL

After the Ducks (13-4) play five games in the tournament, they will face their toughest competition yet: Team USA.

"We're just going to take them one pitch and one inning at a time," Oregon pitcher Anissa Meashintubby said.

Team USA is 10-0 in its "Aiming for Athens" tour. The team of Olympic hopefuls is in the midst of a national tour, playing collegiate teams at tournaments across the country.

In comparison, the Ducks are on a 10-game winning streak. After starting the season 3-4, Oregon has picked up steam and finished its past two tournaments undefeated.

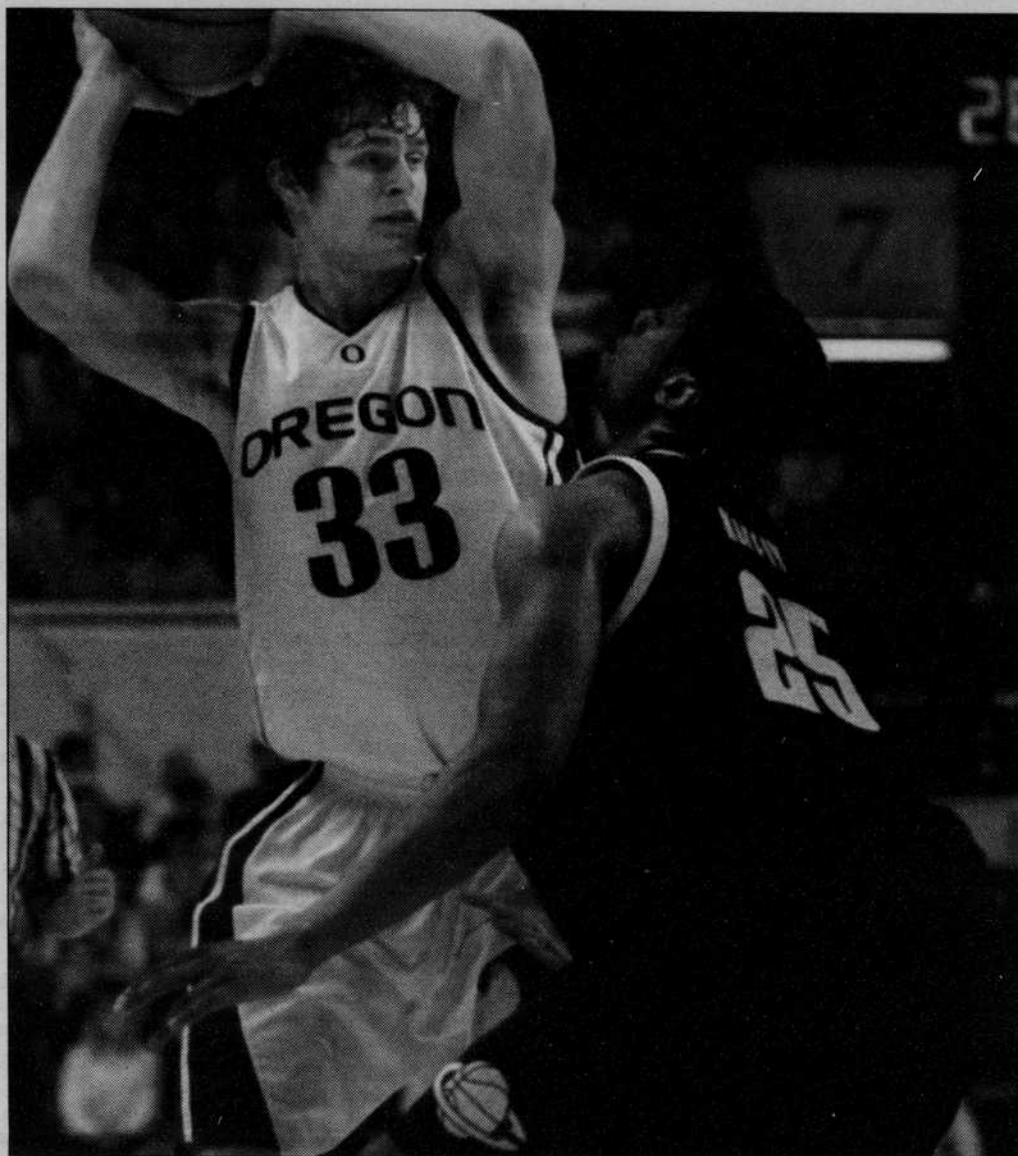
"We are a better team than all the teams, other than Team USA, that we're playing (in Florida)," Oregon head coach Kathy Arendsen said. "But that doesn't guarantee you anything. It just means that there's some expectation there."

Oregon has moved up the rankings during the past weeks. After starting the season at No. 13, the Ducks dropped to No. 20 and No. 21 after their first two tournaments. With the winning streak in action, Oregon is back up the charts to No. 16 in the ESPN.com/USA Softball poll and No. 14 in the NFCA/USA Today poll.

The Ducks finished the Aggie Invitational on Sunday with a 5-0 record. Oregon racked up two wins against Southern Mississippi, two against Penn State and one win against then-No. 23 Texas A&M, the tournament host.

"It was a really wide variety of teams,"

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Danielle Hickey Photo Editor

Luke Jackson (33) will play his final two games at McArthur Court on Thursday and Saturday.

Ducks fighting to cement Pac-10 Tournament berth

Oregon's second-to-last home game this season comes tonight against USC

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

Oh, how the years have come and gone.

James Davis, Jay Anderson, Andre Joseph and the perpetual Duck, Luke Jackson, are set to play their final games at McArthur Court on Thursday and Saturday.

Those years have dusted through Eugene, blanketing the area with NCAA Tournament appearances and Pacific-10 Conference Championships.

Thing is, this season is a little bit different than

what that quartet is used to.

Tonight's game against Southern California — tip is 5:30 — could be the start of the end for Oregon this season. The Ducks know they will need to win one of two games against the Los Angeles schools this week to guarantee a Pac-10 Tournament appearance.

Oregon (12-11 overall, 7-9 Pac-10) wants that win tonight. It doesn't want a do-or-die situation Saturday when UCLA visits.

"We don't want to take anything for granted and

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Jon Roetman
Roughing the passer

Oregon could be menace in tourney

I can't believe I'm saying this, but here it goes: Watch out, Pacific-10 Conference Tournament participants, here comes Oregon.

The women's tournament begins Friday in San Jose, Calif., and the Ducks appear as if they could make some noise.

With wins over then-No. 10 Stanford and California to close out the regular season last week, Oregon has transformed itself from dead money to a potential sleeper.

I'm not saying the Ducks are going to win the tournament. I'm just saying they could make life difficult for others.

No. 8 Oregon faces No. 9 California on Friday. It's a matchup that favors Oregon after the Ducks figured out a formula for success in Saturday's 77-62 win against the Golden Bears.

California is one of two teams in the Pac-10 that Oregon was able to dominate inside sans Cathrine Kraayeveld. The Ducks repeatedly pounded the ball inside to Andrea Bills, who dropped in a career-high 22 points on 9 of 14 shooting.

Defensively, Oregon switched to a zone in the second half, forcing California — the worst three-point shooting team in the Pac-10 — to take outside shots. The Golden Bears struggled, shooting 38 percent from the floor, and never settled into a rhythm.

If Oregon can get past California, it's on to face No. 1 Stanford in what equates to a home game for the Cardinal. While San Jose is also close to Berkeley, the Golden Bears' home record (9-7) isn't nearly as daunting as that of the Cardinal (14-1).

Not only would Oregon have to face Stanford on its turf, the Cardinal will be out for revenge. A 67-66 loss to the Ducks last week cost Stanford a shot at having sole

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Emotion helps Oregon duck Washington domination

The Oregon men learn to keep their feelings in check during recent play

By Alex Tam
Freelance Reporter

The Oregon men's tennis team can be considered an emotional squad. At times, that helps pump up players to a higher level.

But at other times, emotions can hinder their play and cause things to go wrong.

The Ducks (7-2 overall) steered their emotions in the right direction during Sunday's upset of No. 18 Washington. Oregon head coach Chris Russell said he was proud of the way his team competed from start to finish and how hard the players focused on defeating the Huskies — a team that has historically dominated the Ducks.

"We didn't let things get away from us," Russell

said. "I think before, we got excited about getting a doubles point or having a lead or chances like that. That's why I'm proud of the guys. They didn't get ahead of themselves."

Oregon's win was only the fifth victory in the history of the program against its Seattle foe. The Huskies still have an impressive 107-5 all-time record against the Ducks.

"We don't really want to say it, but we have been haunted by that for awhile," Russell said. "(For now), we're no longer haunted."

Crowd factor

Fans filled the bleachers to create a rowdy atmosphere at the Student Tennis Center during the men's victory. At one point, during the No. 1 singles matchup between Oregon's Manuel Kost and the Huskies' Alex Vlaski, Vlaski complained to Pacific-10 Conference officials that the crowd was too noisy during play and was hampering his concentration.

The men's team has received support from its

counterparts, the Oregon women. The men recognize and appreciate the support.

"The women's team has been some of our best supporters the past two or three years," Russell said. "They have made monumental differences in what we have been able to do in some of these matches."

Russell said the loud environment Sunday is partly due to the excitement his team hopes to generate at every match for the rest of the season. "I felt the energy is what we're trying to create out here," he said. "The atmosphere where people can come out and have some fun."

Women taken down

Whether it was playing outdoors for the first time since last October or playing three of the nation's top 10 teams, the women are mired in a three-match losing streak.

In losses to top-ranked Stanford and No. 9 California, the No. 24 Ducks failed to win a single dual match point in consecutive 7-0 defeats.

The women did not win a single match in doubles or singles over the weekend.

Oregon junior Daria Panova, ranked seventh in the nation, lost both of her singles matches to drop her singles record to 7-3. The last time Panova lost two straight matches occurred in April 2003.

Oregon head coach Nils Schyllander said the past two opponents, Stanford and California, showed why they are national powerhouses year in and year out and how any mistake can prove costly.

"We needed to play with more of a sense of urgency," Schyllander said.

The women, who started the season by winning nine straight games, will continue action against more nationally ranked schools this weekend when the team travels to take on No. 12 USC on Friday and eighth-ranked UCLA on Saturday.

Alex Tam is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.