

Oregon Club volleyball set to host tournament

The Student Rec Center will host volleyball's Saturday tournament fundraiser

By Kirsten McEwen
Freelance Reporter

Seven teams will travel to Eugene on Saturday to compete in the Second Annual Northwest Collegiate Volleyball Classic. The tournament will be hosted by the Oregon men's Club volleyball team and will feature teams from Oregon, Washington and Idaho, as well as Canada.

Club Sports

The event will run all day Sat-

urday at the Student Recreation Center, and eight teams including Oregon will compete in pool play in the morning hours and move onto bracket play in the afternoon.

The Ducks will face two teams in pool play they have never seen before — Simon Fraser University and Humboldt State — in hopes of gaining a top seed to start off bracket play.

Volleyball coordinator Kyle Sinner said the team is "definitely looking to take first place" in this weekend's tournament.

"So far our season has gone well," Sinner said. "We have grown a lot and we should be very seasoned for nationals."

Nationals will be held in Charlotte, N.C., April 8-10.

On a roll

Gonzaga caught a glimpse of the Oregon men's lacrosse team's potential Saturday.

The Ducks defeated the Bulldogs, 24-1, on home turf and have recently been transformed into a nationally ranked team.

Men's Club lacrosse captain Jim O'Neill said he has seen the program grow from a team that "nobody took seriously" to a team that is currently ranked 11th nationally.

O'Neill said the season took another positive turn when the Ducks beat No. 8 Simon Fraser, 9-8, on Feb. 22. It was the first time Simon Fraser had lost at home, and also the first time the Ducks had ever defeated the club.

Oregon will travel to Bellingham, Wash., on Saturday to play Western Washington, and they will then play Pacific Lutheran on Sunday in Tacoma.

"Western Washington put up 15 points against Simon Fraser but ended up losing," O'Neill said. "They will definitely give us a good game."

Oregon's next home game will pit the Ducks against Colorado State, last year's national champions. The game will be played March 12 at 7 p.m. on Oregon's turf field.

Duck Bill Chill

Hosting its only triathlon of the year, Oregon's Triathlon Club is preparing for the Duck Bill Chill, which features beginning triathletes.

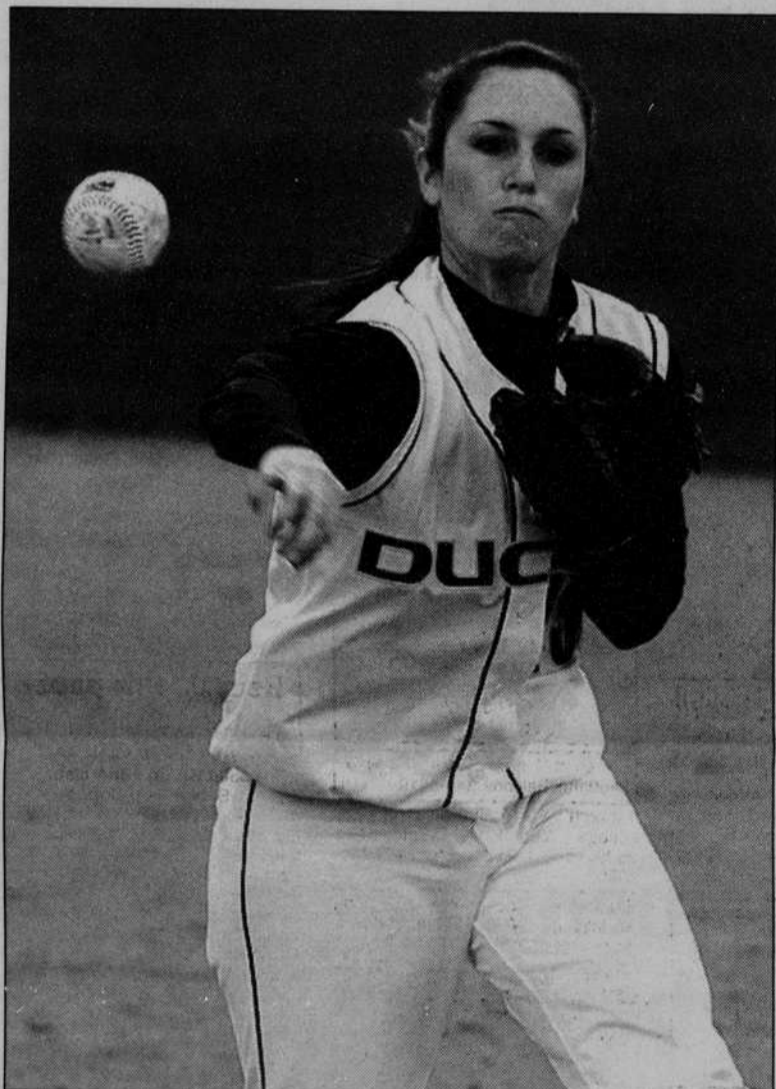
On April 10, triathletes of all skill

levels are invited to participate in the Club's fifth-annual fundraiser and race.

The triathlon will take place on the Oregon campus and will include a 500-yard swim in the Student Recreation Center pool, a 12.4 mile bike course on the Willamette Riverbank Trail and a 3.1 mile run through the University's campus.

Participants can register online at <http://www.goodrace.com>, and entry fees are \$25 per individual and \$45 per relay team before April 1. After April 1, entry fees will include a \$5 late fee. The entry fee includes a race souvenir and post-race food and refreshments.

Kirsten McEwen is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.



Adam Amato Senior Photographer

Breanne Sabol is one of three Ducks to improve her batting average from the 2003 season.

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Arendsen said. "We had to show up to play in every game and we did. We also demonstrated some real killer instinct, getting on top of teams and continuing to stay with it, not resting on our laurels. We finished games well."

Oregon is picking up steam from the beginning of the season. With a considerably younger team than 2003's squad, Arendsen had some early concerns about finding consistency.

Now the Ducks are on the attack. In the Aggie Invitational, they outscored their opponents 35-5 in the five victories. After posting an impressive

fielding percentage last season, Oregon is fielding .972 right now.

"That (percentage) puts you as one of the best defensive teams in the country," Arendsen said. "It's another big step up. We're awfully proud of that."

There was also early concern about offensive production. Three hitters have improved their batting averages from last season by at least .150, including infielder Ashley Richards. Richards is batting .412 this season after ending last season with a .185 average.

"Right now (our hitting) is pretty solid," Richards said. "People are being pretty consistent and that's all we can ask for."

Team USA is the first of two Olympic teams that Oregon will play this pre-season. The Ducks open play at Howe Field on Wednesday when they host Team Canada.

"It's a chance for us to kind of see where we measure up. We'll actually be a valuable team for Team USA as far as a scouting report for Team Canada. For our players, it's a dream come true to play against these national powers."

Kathy Arendsen
Oregon head coach

Contact the senior sports reporter at mindrice@dailyemerald.com.

ROETMAN

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possession of the 2003-04 Pac-10 title as the Cardinal settled for a split championship with Arizona.

Even though it seems Oregon's chances would be slim to none in a potential second-round matchup with Stanford, a Duck victory isn't that far-fetched.

As Oregon showed in last week's upset of mighty Stanford, the key to beating the Cardinal is shutting down senior All-American forward Nicole Powell.

Taking Powell out of her game is easier said than done, but Oregon forward Kedzie Gunderson did a phenomenal job Feb. 26.

Gunderson's not the quickest or strongest defender, but what she lacks in physical tools she makes up for in mental muscle.

The 6-foot junior found a way to get inside Powell's head by using veteran defensive tactics. Along with a quality overall defensive effort, Gunderson pulled, bumped and pushed on Powell when she got the chance, frustrating the National Player of the Year candidate.

When it came down to crunch time, Powell — who was held without a field goal in the first half — was complaining to officials instead of focusing on the game.

If Gunderson can rattle Powell for a second time, anything is possible.

If Oregon somehow advances to the semi-final round, it would face the winner of the game between No. 4 UCLA and No. 5 Arizona State. The Ducks have beaten the Bruins once and should have beaten the Sun Devils in a meeting at McArthur Court on Jan. 24.

From there it's on to the championship game and a likely date with No. 2 Arizona. The Ducks were a couple of made free throws away from upsetting the Wildcats on Jan. 22.

Is a Pac-10 Tournament championship and an automatic berth into the NCAA Tournament likely for the Ducks?

No. But they can certainly make life difficult for others.

Contact the sports reporter at jonroetman@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

FIGHTING

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let Oregon State get a couple of wins or Washington State get a couple of wins and then us lose a game and not be guaranteed of getting in," Jackson said. "These games and every game I've ever played in has been important, especially at home."

Although Oregon's seniors will take to the McArthur Court floor for the last time Saturday, they aren't concentrating on the festivities. The Trojans (12-13, 7-9) are the Ducks' focus tonight.

"When we play in this building, we tend to play with a lot of confidence, even though we let two games get away from us last weekend," Oregon head coach Ernie Kent said. "With the seniors' last games coming up this weekend, I expect this team to be fully confident."

If history has anything to say, the Ducks will be confident against the Trojans. On Jan. 2 in Los Angeles, Oregon defeated USC, 92-74. The Ducks led by 16 at halftime and coasted to the victory.

"We were playing really well as a team, passing the ball, giving it up, finding the open man, and everybody was on their game at that point," Anderson said. "We played a really good game. The main thing is we were giving the ball up and playing as a team."

The win came before the Trojans lost the services of junior guard Errick Craven. The Carson, Calif., native was suspended last week for the upcoming game against Oregon by the Pac-10. The suspension was issued for his part in one of two separate incidents during the Trojans'

game against California on Feb. 21.

Craven's twin brother, Derrick, was also suspended for his part in the incidents and will sit out Saturday's game against Oregon State.

Errick Craven has averaged 10.8 points this season and scored 10 in 22 minutes against the Ducks.

"When you lose one of those kids, you take a big part of what you've been doing out of the lineup," USC head coach Henry Bibby said. "But, it's a great opportunity for other kids to step up and play."

Oregon won't necessarily make any amendments to its game plan because of Errick Craven's absence. After all, as Kent said at Tuesday's practice, the Trojans are a fast team in general.

"The only difference it will make is it will allow somebody else to step up and take his minutes," Kent said. "Somebody will step into that role and realize they need to have a special game and a big game. We need to make sure to counter whoever that person is for them."

The same goes for Oregon, which needs a reliable scorer behind Jackson, who is averaging 21.7 points per game this season. Aaron Brooks averaged 16.5 points in losses to California and Stanford last week, but he is only four games off a broken right wrist.

Ian Crosswhite ... Joseph ... Davis? They're all capable and have proved during this season they can carry that secondary load.

Regardless of who steps into that role, the Ducks say they all need to focus on the Trojans.

Then they can get down to Saturday's festivities.

Contact the sports editor at hankhager@dailyemerald.com.

SPORTS BRIEFS

Duke dropped at home for first time in 41 games

DURHAM, N.C. — Maybe Paul Hewitt has been right all along. Maybe his 19th-ranked Yellow Jackets didn't reach their peak in the Preseason National Invitational Tournament. Maybe their best ball is still ahead of them.

Georgia Tech provided compelling evidence to back up Hewitt's assertions on Wednesday night beating No. 3 Duke, 76-68, at Cameron Indoor Stadium, where the Blue Devils had not lost in 41 consecutive games.

"This validates what I've been thinking as I watch tape that we're playing better. We're getting better," Hewitt said. "Right now it just validates my mind that we're playing just as well as anybody in the country."

The victory proved especially sweet to Tech seniors Marvin Lewis and Clarence Moore, who had lost during their previous three trips to Cameron. No current Yellow Jackets had ever beaten the Blue Devils, as Tech snapped a 15-game losing streak against Duke dating back to 1996. Hewitt earned his first victory in eight tries against the Blue Devils.

"I've been a part of a lot of big wins, but I don't think I've ever been as happy for a group of players as I am tonight," Hewitt said. "This is a nice moment for those players."

— Brian Murphy
Knight Ridder Newspapers

Philadelphia Eagles make free agent splash with Kears signing

PHILADELPHIA — The gate to free agency opened on Wednesday, and the Philadelphia Eagles pounced on the player regarded by many inside the NFL as the best on the market.

All that stands between Jevon Kearse and an eight-year, \$66 million contract with the Eagles is the thorough physical examination he'll undergo this morning.

The Eagles released a statement saying they had agreed to the terms of a deal, but that no team officials would have any comments until after Kearse takes Wednesday's physical.

If Kearse passes his physical, the Eagles will have themselves one of the league's most feared pass rushers and a wealth of depth at defensive end. It's not a guarantee, however, that Kearse will pass the physical. He has been slowed by injuries in each of the last two seasons with the Tennessee Titans.

Negotiations between the Titans and Kearse broke down late last week.

— Bob Brookover
Knight Ridder Newspapers