

Returning track women see new leadership system



Oregon redshirt junior Sarah Malone won the javelin at the Oregon Preview with a throw of 175-7 after sitting out last season as a redshirt.

Erik R. Bishoff
Photographer

New Head coach Martin Smith brings a to Oregon a philosophy focusing on an all-around team

By Alex Tam
Sports Reporter

A new year. A new coach. A new system.

A new era dawns upon the Oregon women's track and field team heading into the 2004 season. With longtime track and field head coach Tom Heinonen retiring after 27 years at the helm

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came in to fill the vacancy left behind. Sixth-year men's head coach Martin Smith steps in to revive a struggling women's program.

Redshirt senior heptathlete Abby Andrus said there is a bright outlook for the squad with the new coaching staff.

"As a team, we're all looking pretty good," Andrus said. "As a team, I think we are improving."

Andrus is one of the Ducks' top athletes this season as she ranks in the top 10 in Oregon's all-time lists in hurdles. Andrus, a Peoria, Ariz., native, is seventh all-time in the 100-meter hurdles

at 14.00 seconds and sixth all-time in the 400-meter hurdles at 59.90 seconds.

Andrus said she has many goals she wants to accomplish in her last year as a Duck. One of those is earning All-American honors for the multiple events she competes in, including the high jump and long jump.

Redshirt junior Sarah Malone is another Duck with high hopes coming into this year. After sitting out 2003, Malone said she is glad to return to the field of competition as a javelin thrower under the guidance of new assistant coach and four-time Olympian Lance Deal.

Malone, a two-time NCAA qualifier, holds the javelin school record at 179-2 from the Oregon Twilight meet two years ago at Hayward Field. Despite missing last season, she came back to earn first place in the javelin throw at the Oregon Preview meet two weeks ago with a mark of 175-7.

Even though the women's team is in a rebuilding period, Malone said she has set high standards for herself.

"Our team goals are not exactly where we want them to be," Malone said. "My personal goals are to be a Pac-10 champion and contend for the national title."

Long jumps are another focus area that have seen improvement behind a new team philosophy that emphasizes both field and running events.

Junior Maegan Traver said she has benefited from that new philosophy.

"So far this season, it's a complete 360 from last season," Traver said. "We've been specializing in the jumps ... (and also) speed and power." Traver set a new personal best in the long jump with a mark of 38-2 at the Stanford Invitational meet last weekend. But she still sees room for herself to grow.

"It was good, but it's only the beginning of the season," Traver said.

In the high jump, redshirt junior Rachael Kriz leads the Ducks after taking first place in the event with a mark of 1.68 meters at the Oregon Preview. Kriz said she is happy about her efforts so far.

"High jump is taking off," Kriz said two weeks ago. "Hopefully that's going to excel and it's great to have some great coaches."

Nevertheless, Kriz said the transition toward combining the men's and women's programs has not had a big effect on her as the goals remain the same.

"It's pretty much same old, same old," Kriz said. "We're here to get the job done, so whatever is going to get the job done better, let's do it."

Contact the sports reporter at alextam@dailyemerald.com.

Skipper headlines track squad with high expectations

Tommy Skipper leads a talented Oregon men's track and field squad into the tough outdoor season

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

Tommy Skipper stood at the beginning of the pole vault runway during the Oregon Preview on March 20, disappointed with the performance he had just given.

MEN'S TRACK

He had failed three consecutive attempts to clear a height well below the 18 feet-8 1/2-inch mark he set during the indoor season.

It wasn't the type of day the freshman envisioned having during his first meet at Hayward Field.

"Terrible," the Sandy native said. "I'm ashamed of myself."

Funny thing was, he won the event after clearing 17-6 1/2.

Talk about high expectations.

Skipper may well be the crown jewel of this season's Oregon men's track and field team. The 2003 Track and

Field News' Boys Athlete of the Year is one of Oregon's most highly decorated recruits. His mark of 18-8.75 was tops in the nation during indoor competition. Skipper also finished second at the NCAA Indoor Championships and earned All-American honors by clearing 18-4 1/2 in Fayetteville, Ark.

While Skipper was unable to carry the momentum of All-American honors at the NCAA Indoors to his performance at the less-decorated Oregon Preview, his mere presence created a buzz.

Despite being a low-profile meet, 2,331 people were on hand to see the phenom make his Hayward Field debut. Even though Skipper wasn't at the top of his game that day, there will be plenty of other opportunities for the young pole vaulter.

"I was really excited to give it my best in front of a great crowd," Skipper said at the meet. "I know things will continue to get better, and I tried to use the winds the best I could. (Even after last week's NCAA runner-up finish) I tried to come in here focused with the same type of energy. If you don't get up for all meets equally, you can get over-excited for the bigger meets, and not be ready for the ones you need to take seriously."

Although Skipper is an attraction, he is only one of many talented athletes on the Oregon squad.

Sophomore Eric Mitchum has been impressive during the early part of the season. The Calumet City, Ill. native earned All-American honors at the NCAA Indoors with a time of 7.74 seconds in the 60 hurdles. He also won the 110 hurdles at the Oregon Preview where he ran a 13.91.

Mitchum said he has been looking forward to the outdoor season. "Outdoors," Mitchum said, "is what track and field is all about."

Redshirt junior Leonidas Watson is one of Oregon's top jumpers. Watson made his outdoor jumping debut last weekend in Tucson, Ariz., winning the long jump at the Jim Click Shootout with a mark of 25-4 1/2. During the indoor season, Watson garnered All-American honors in the long jump with a mark of 25-2 1/2. He also placed first in the 100 meter dash at the Oregon Preview with a time of 10.66.

Before coming to Oregon, Watson was a two-time junior college national champion in the triple jump and a two-time national runner-up in the long jump at St. Louis Community College.

Watson said he has enjoyed the perks of moving to the Division I



Erik R. Bishoff Photographer

Freshman Tommy Skipper hopes to continue the success he experienced during the indoor season. His mark of 18-8 3/4 was tops in the nation during indoor competition.

level, which include better training facilities, stiffer competition and, best of all, increased fan support.

One of his favorite experiences came during the Oregon Preview when he heard the crowd cheering him on.

"It was a good turnout fan-wise," Watson said. "We never really had

home meets (at SLCC) so it was cool."

It got even better during his victory lap after winning the 100.

"It felt good," Watson said. "People actually knew my name."

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