

Sports Editor:
Hank Hager
hankhager@dailymerald.com

Best bet
NHL Playoffs:
Dallas vs. Colorado
7 p.m., ESPN2

Wednesday, April 7, 2004



Alex Tam
Holding court

Post play is big key in college basketball

This time of the year is a basketball fan's fantasy.

After enduring hours of college basketball the past couple of weeks, it is now time to gear up for the NBA playoffs. However, in the midst of watching each of the 64 games of the NCAA Tournament zip by, one question popped into my mind.

What ingredients must a basketball team have to be successful?

Obviously, having a great coach is one, but that can only take a team so far without a talented lineup to grace the hardwood.

No, the answer to that question lay down low in this year's NCAA men's basketball championship game between Connecticut and Georgia Tech. The two centerpieces in the middle — the Huskies' Emeka Okafor and the Yellow Jackets' Luke Schenscher — were the keys for each of their respective squads down the stretch.

In fact, having dominant big men in the post on the offensive and defensive ends is the recipe for success on the college and pro level. On offense, the ability to score inside opens up the whole perimeter game. On defense, the big men are the anchor. They can change the flow of a game by disrupting their opposition's inside attack and forcing outside shots.

Okafor, the consensus college player of the year, is one of those rare athletes who has the combination of size, agility, strength and even intelligence — not just intelligence on the floor, but in the classroom as well. The Houston native will graduate after his third year in school and will likely be selected with the first pick of this year's NBA Draft.

He carried Connecticut to its second title in six years behind a 24-point, 15-rebound performance Monday. Okafor also is the leading shot-blocker in the country at a little more than four per game.

"He's an incredibly bright young man, obviously," Connecticut head coach Jim Calhoun told the Associated Press after the win against Duke. "He's awfully special. He's the best player in America. He's the best role model I think in college basketball. I've said that before so many times."

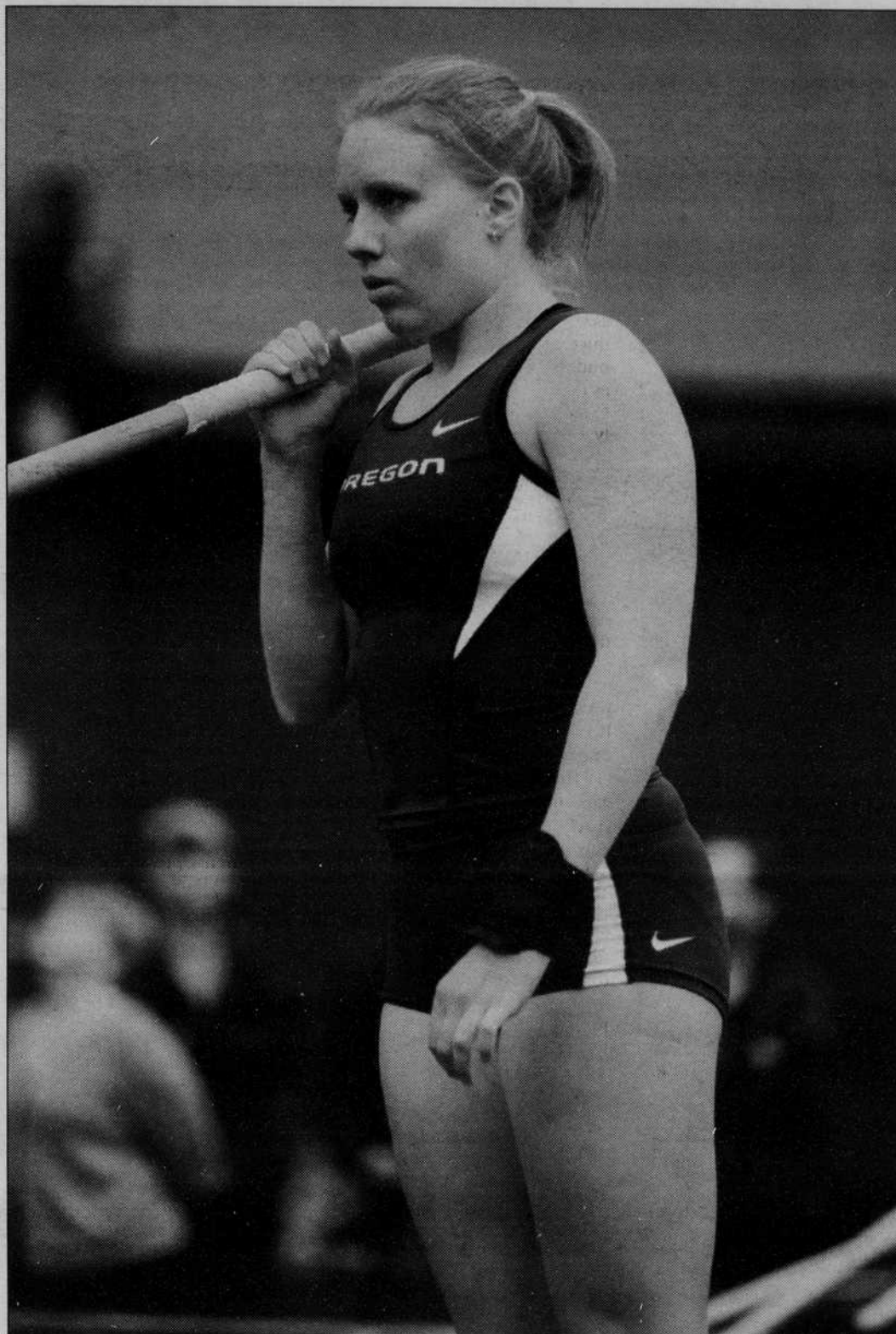
And don't forget the 7-foot-1 Australia native, Schenscher, who averaged 14 points and 11.5 rebounds in the Final Four.

"He really gave himself confidence and his teammates confidence," basketball analyst Digger Phelps told ESPN.com. "They're not afraid of giving him the ball in the paint. He's been the improvement of Georgia Tech's success."

Now, what does this mean for the future of the Oregon men's basketball team, which ended its season with a

Turn to **TAM**, page 13

UO women begin rebuilding project



Geoff Thurner Oregon Media Services

Freshman Emily Enders achieved an Oregon personal best at the pole vault at 12-9 1/2 at the Texas Relays.

A new coaching staff and philosophy are helping improve a program in flux

By Alex Tam
Sports Reporter

The Oregon women's track and field team is starting to see signs of improvement in the program's first year under new head coach Martin Smith.

Several Ducks are achieving new personal bests and are moving up the all-time Oregon lists in only the first part of the spring season.

WOMEN'S TRACK

Leading the new era for the Oregon women is redshirt junior Sarah Malone. The Newberg, Ore., native set an

Oregon school record in the javelin with a mark of 179 feet, 2 inches at the annual Texas Relays meet Saturday. Malone said the experience of going to Mike A. Myers Stadium in Austin, Texas — the site of this year's NCAA Championships in two months — was a lot of fun.

"It was great to get here a few days early so you can cheer your teammates on and get into the flow," Malone said.

However, when she compared the Texas meet's environment and its officials to Eugene, Malone said there is some similarity between the two, but Oregon is ultimately better.

"This is a terrific atmosphere and a great crowd," Malone said. "And the officials are also great — almost as good as the ones at Hayward Field."

Malone's efforts highlighted the Ducks' performance this past weekend. In her meet, she defeated some elite athletes that included the American record holder in the javelin, Kim Kreiner, and two-time NCAA runner-up and USC senior Inge Stasiulionyte.

"This is the best day and series I've had in my career and against the best competition you can get," Malone said Saturday. "Kim is an American-record holder, and Inge always throws awesome at big meets. I got better as I went along today, and that's really satisfying. That doesn't happen a lot to me, except in Texas it seems. I always seem to throw well here."

Freshman Emily Enders also came up huge for Oregon after winning the B

Turn to **REBUILDING**, page 13

Plenty of attention coming Nyhus' way

The Ducks' go-to pitcher, junior Ani Nyhus, earned Pac-10 Pitcher of the Week accolades on Tuesday

By Mindi Rice
Senior Sports Reporter

It has been a long week for Ani Nyhus.

The Oregon pitcher threw three consecutive complete-game shutouts

DUCK SOFTBALL

between Wednesday and Saturday. She has been the focus of writers and broadcasters before practice, and is still on a list of players who may be selected

for the Canadian Olympic team. By Tuesday, Nyhus (14-5) had garnered enough attention with her pitching performances to be named Pacific-10 Conference Pitcher of the Week.

"That's fun," Nyhus said of the award. "I don't really think a whole lot of awards and things like that. It's a good accomplishment for our team — with Kayleen (Hudson) winning (Player of the Week) last week and me winning (Pitcher of the Week) this week — it's good for us to get recognition like that."

On Wednesday, Nyhus threw a one-hitter against Portland State. She faced the minimum number of batters, 21, with the help of a double play in the first inning after the Vikings' leadoff batter got their only hit. On

Turn to **ATTENTION**, page 12



Erik R. Bishoff Photographer

Pitcher Ani Nyhus threw three consecutive complete-game shutouts between Wednesday and Saturday. Nyhus may be selected for the Canadian Olympic