

SPORTS

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Best bet
NHL Playoffs:
St. Louis vs. San Jose
7 p.m., ESPN

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Mindi Rice

The girl and the game

Time has arrived for Duck softball

If ever Oregon wanted to make a name for itself in Pacific-10 Conference softball, now would be the time.

With a 3-1 start, the No. 14 Ducks are third in the Pac-10, right behind Arizona and Washington, and playing with the confidence of a team that has done this before.

This? What is this?

This is making a mark.

This is Oregon reminding the conference and the country that there are more teams than those that practice in California and Arizona.

This is the Ducks making it known that they will be going to an NCAA Regional tournament in May.

This is Oregon trying to not get swept by any Pac-10 team for just the second time in conference history.

This is the Ducks looking for a conference record above .500 for the first time since 1989.

It's a difficult thing to do in the Pac-10. Oregon has finished the season with a .500 conference record three times — 1990, 1993 and 1994 — and above .500 once, in 1989. Last season, when the Ducks finished tied for third in the Pac-10, they were 10-11 in the conference.

This isn't your average 3-1 start, either. All three teams — then-No. 16 Oregon State, then-No. 3 California and then-No. 11 Stanford — were ranked ahead of Oregon when the teams played.

Perhaps the biggest win — although an argument could easily be made for each of the three — was Friday's 4-0 victory at California. The Ducks hadn't won a game in Berkeley since 2000.

"It always feels good to beat Cal," Oregon catcher Jenn Poore said. "Or any of those teams. It felt really good (Friday) because it felt like, for once, we had everything together. Our defense was playing well, we had pitching and we had offense."

If Oregon keeps everything together, the Ducks will be one of the feared teams when the time comes for regional tournaments.

For now, Oregon is still working to gain respect from other Pac-10 schools. Even after last season's third-place finish, the Ducks were unanimously picked to finish eighth in the eight-team conference in the preseason coaches poll.

No. 1 Arizona and No. 2 UCLA remain at the top of the national standings, despite UCLA losing two during the weekend. Both losses were to the Wildcats. California dropped a whopping one spot to No. 4 after losing to Oregon and splitting with Oregon State.

Washington, which is tied for first in Pac-10 standings, is No. 7 nationally, while Stanford stayed at No. 11. Oregon State remained, literally, one step behind the Ducks, moving up to No. 15.

Arizona State fell victim to the rare

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Erik R. Bishoff Photographer

Sarah Malone has come back to a revamped Oregon program with new hopes and goals for the 2004 season.

Throwing for more

Sarah Malone overcame injuries and personal issues to prevail as one of Oregon's best athletes in 2004

By Alex Tam
Sports Reporter

One year ago, Sarah Malone contemplated quitting her javelin career.

Her frustrations boiled over to the point that the desire to throw for the Oregon women's track and field team nearly disappeared. Communication between the redshirt junior and the previous coaching staff broke down.

"Throwing has been the one thing that I always felt I could hold on to," the Newberg, Ore., native said. "But the last three years were starting to slip away. I wasn't happy toward throwing, and that really took its toll on me personally because that is such a huge part of my life."

Malone also struggled with chronic back pain during her first three years in Eugene, which led to her sitting out last season. After never being given any significant time off from her coaches, she battled a case of depression and wondered whether Oregon was the right place for her.

Then, a change in command occurred.

Men's head coach Martin Smith entered this year to oversee the women's team and revive a rebuilding program. Four-time Olympian Lance Deal joined to be the new throwers coach. Deal created a renewed sense of energy throughout the squad, and especially in Malone.

"Coach Deal is the best thing that's ever happened to me," Malone said. "He is the reason why I'm still throwing, to be honest with you. He cares about us as people — not just as athletes — on and off the field."

Malone now sits atop Oregon's record books in the javelin section at 179 feet, 7 inches — a mark achieved

at last weekend's Texas Relays in Austin. The former All-American will compete at the Pepsi Team Invitational meet Saturday at Hayward Field.

Her performance in Texas stands now as her proudest accomplishment in her career.

"Lance has done a lot for me," Malone said. "To be able to use my performance (at Texas) as a reflection of his coaching means a lot to me. I want people to realize he is an exceptional javelin coach. I want to prove to other people that he knows what he's talking about."

The first time the two met was at a local track camp. Deal, a 1996 Olympic silver medalist, was nervous about instructing javelin throwers in an event he never competed in. He asked Malone to help him out, and she willingly did. Since then they've developed a close relationship.

"It was really nice to have somebody that mature and knowledgeable," Deal said. "All of the athletes are just a pleasure to work with, and Sarah is no exception. I love my job, and a lot of that has to do with Sarah."

Malone's javelin career may not have existed without the persistence of her high school track and field coach at Newberg High School, Joe Boutin. Malone's first true passion was basketball; she started each game for her freshmen squad and led it to an undefeated record.

But her life changed one afternoon her freshman year. While watching her friend compete in the discus, a man tapped her shoulder from behind, and she turned around.

"He asked me to come over and throw a javelin," Malone said. "I've never seen one before, and I was like 'hell no.' I was wearing jeans and street shoes, and I wasn't in any position to be doing any athletic activity."

An argument transpired during the next 10 minutes

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Dotts set to make outdoor debut

Roderick Dotts will make his outdoor debut for the Ducks on Saturday at the Pepsi Invite

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

Roderick Dotts is anxious.

The junior transfer from Barton Community College in Great Bend, Kan., will make his 2004 outdoor debut for the Ducks during Saturday's Pepsi Team Invitational at Hayward Field.

Dotts will compete in the 800-meter race as Oregon battles Washington, Colorado and Minnesota.

MEN'S TRACK

Just getting the chance to compete during the outdoor season has been a challenge for Dotts.

The East St. Louis, Ill., native battled through knee and hamstring injuries during what he called a "non-impressive" indoor season. Dotts said he's pain free now, but has a mental challenge to overcome.

He has yet to adjust to the added scrutiny that comes with running track in the Pacific-10 Conference, rather than at the junior college level, Dotts said.

"I thought it would be pretty good, but I'm finding it hard to adapt," Dotts

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Injury has UO's White sitting out

Jimmy White's experience will be missed as the Ducks face tough competition

By Brian Smith
Freelance Reporter

Senior Jimmy White, the co-captain of the men's golf team, has been nursing a broken wrist since early March.

White suffered the injury during a strength and conditioning workout of pickup football.

DUCK GOLF

That's where things got a little murky.

According to White, the team was playing tackle football on the turf field inside the Moshofsky Sports Center when White and a fellow teammate collided in a freak accident.

"During workouts, we play a little football for



White

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