

SPORTS

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NBA Playoffs:
Boston vs. Indiana
11 a.m. Saturday, ESPN

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Softball heads to streaking UW, sinking UCLA

The Ducks have a travel-heavy weekend against two of the Pac-10 Conference's top teams

By Mindi Rice
Senior Sports Reporter

It is one of the stranger road trips in the Pacific-10 Conference.

In Pac-10 softball, there is no Southern California and no Washington State, which means that No. 3 UCLA and No. 5 Washington are travel partners.

So when it comes time, as it will this weekend, for No. 14 Oregon to face the schools on the road, the Ducks have a long weekend of traveling in store for them.

Oregon (30-10 overall, 4-2 Pac-10) faces the Huskies (28-7, 4-0) at 1 p.m. today before flying to Los Angeles. The Ducks face the Bruins (27-5, 0-4) at 2 p.m. on Saturday, and then at 1 p.m. on Sunday.

"It's the most bizarre road trip that I've ever gone on," Oregon head coach Kathy Arendsen said. "To know that you're going from Eugene to Seattle, and then flying after the game the same night to LA, to play the next afternoon against the defending national champions is incredible. But everyone does it, so we're all at the same disadvantage."

One of the more enjoyable parts of this wacky roadtrip is how many of the players will return to their home state in the same weekend.

Six Californians — Beth Boskovich, Julie Jaime, Lindsey Kontra, Jenn Poore, Breanne Sabol and Ann Marie Topps — and four Washingtonians — Dani Baird, Suzie Barnes, Kristi Leiter and Ashley Richards

— will be a bit closer to home for at least one day this weekend.

Baird, a Mt. Vernon, Wash. native, will have her parents at the game, although they aren't

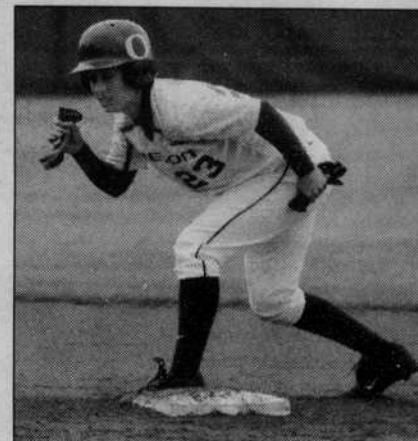
strangers to Oregon softball. Baird said that her parents travel to most of her games in Oregon and even to some in California.

"It's always a nice feeling to look up in the stands and see familiar faces," Baird said. "Last year, my whole high school team came down and supported me, so I have a lot of hometown support."

Last year, Oregon swept the Huskies in two games in Seattle. This year, the Huskies are 4-0 in the Pac-10 for the first time in Washington history, coming off a two-game sweep of UCLA.

"(This weekend) is scary because Washington is playing incredibly well," Arendsen said. "We beat them twice in Seattle last year, I'm sure they haven't forgotten that."

The trip to Easton Stadium, the Bruins' home, won't be any easier. While the 0-4 start makes UCLA look like the weak link in the Pac-10, the defending national champions are still one of the more feared



Adam Amato Senior Photographer
Dani Baird is one of four Washington natives who will play in their home state Friday afternoon when the Ducks face Washington.

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Duck men face Mt. SAC Relays, Oregon Invite

Skipper leads a quartet of Oregon pole vaulters into the Mt. SAC Relays this weekend in California

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

The Oregon men's track and field team will compete in the Mt. SAC Relays this weekend before heading home for the Oregon Invitational on April 23-24 at Hayward Field.

The Ducks will see action in five events during the Walnut, Calif. meet, highlighted by Tommy Skipper competing in the pole vault and Eric Mitchum running the 110-meter hurdles on Sunday.

Skipper, who cleared 17 feet, 5 inches at the Pepsi Team Invitational on April 10 at Hayward Field, said that Oregon pole vaulters are focusing on improving their technique for bigger meets, such as the Oregon Invitational or the Pacific-10 Conference Championships in May, rather than worrying about height.

"We're trying different things," Skipper said after the Pepsi Team Invitational. "We're all trying to improve our technique right now. None of us are worried about our height at this point. Obviously it's nice to come out and jump 18 feet every day but that's not what we're trying to do."

Skipper broke the Oregon pole vault record when he cleared 18 feet, 8 3/4 inches during the indoor season in Nampa, Idaho. The previous Duck record of 18-6 1/2 was set by Kory Tarpenning in 1985.

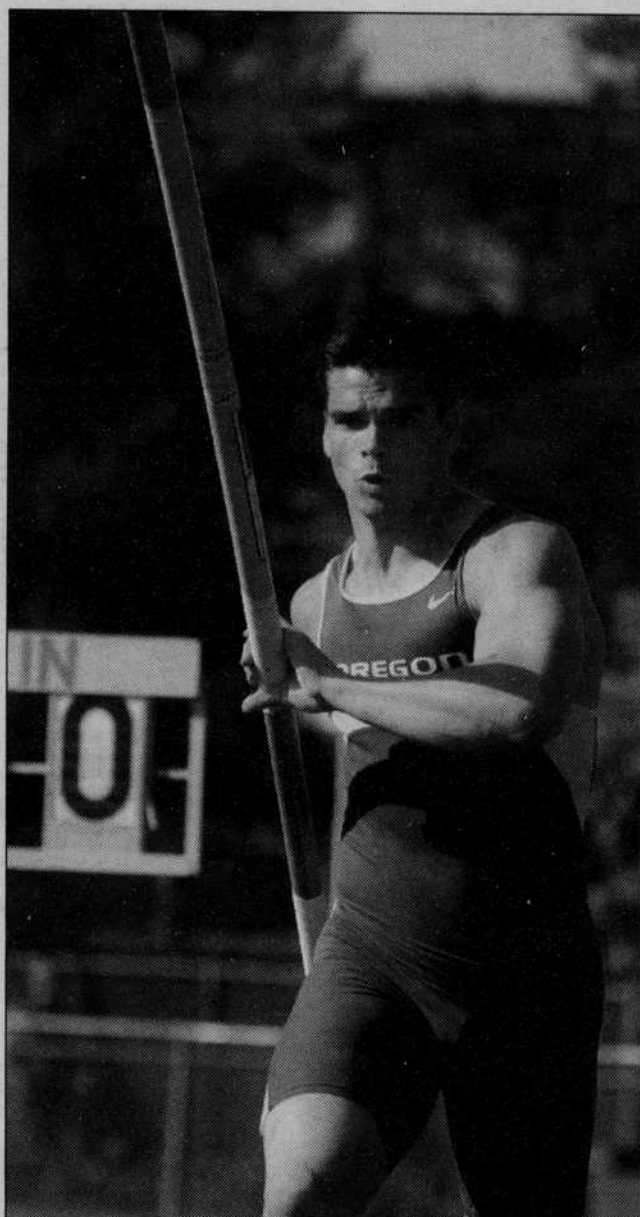
Also competing in the pole vault for Oregon will be Trevor Woods, Jon Derby and David Moore.

Woods, an All-American from Coos Bay, finished second (16-9 1/4) to Skipper at the Pepsi's.

On the track, Mitchum is coming off a successful showing at the Pepsi's where he won the 110 hurdles (13.70 seconds) and 400 hurdles (51.47). The Calumet City, Ill. native had added motivation down the stretch of the 400 hurdles as teammate Brandon Holliday finished a close second (51.52).

"It always helps to have someone there with you," Mitchum said.

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Lauren Wimer Photographer

Tommy Skipper said that Oregon pole vaulters are focused on improving their technique. He'll compete in Walnut Creek, Calif., this weekend.

Oregon women confident going into California

The Oregon women hope their confidence stands heading into this weekend's meets

By Alex Tam
Sports Reporter

A positive attitude is beginning to surround the Oregon women's track and field team.

One week after their surprising win at the Pepsi Team Invitational, the Ducks look to continue their momentum heading into this weekend's meets, starting with the Mt. SAC Relays in Walnut, Calif., on Saturday. A split squad consisting of eight women will compete at the Long Beach Invitational in California.

The talk among the women is about what record is going to be broken next. Several personal bests are falling after each subsequent meet, which is a sign that things are improving for the women's program.

Senior Kirsten Larwin, who finished second at 13 feet, 1 3/4 inches in the pole vault at the Pepsi Invite, said she is satisfied with her performance thus far and her goal remains the same Saturday.

"I'd like to PR just like I want to do every weekend," Larwin said. "I'm just going to go in there focused and try to make everything on my first attempt because that's really important."

Larwin, a Eugene native, said her consistency at clearing bars more than 13 feet this year gives her confidence heading into every meet.

"This outdoor season has been going exactly how I wanted to," said Larwin, who ranks third all-time in Oregon history at the pole vault. "Things are shaping up the way I want them to."

Her leadership is helping guide her fellow pole-vaulter, freshman Emily Enders, through her first year at Oregon. Enders will compete alongside Larwin in the pole vault at the Mt. SAC Relays.

Enders, a Snohomish, Wash., native, is one of several

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UO defense set to pick up where it left off in 2nd scrimmage

Having appeared a bit rusty at first, the Ducks are recovering from the loss of a few of their key players this season

By Hank Hager
Sports Editor

The first time out, the Oregon defense proved to be ahead of the game.

This time out, can it do the same?

Jerry Matson sure hopes so. The linebacker was a mainstay during the Ducks' first spring scrimmage last week. Oregon plays in its second on Saturday.

"Round two, it's always interesting, the buildup," Matson said. "You always get the little conflicting things between the offense and defense."

As much as the rustiness of the Oregon offense was expected in the first big workout of the spring season, the defense's ability to play together was a surprise. Not because it's still early in the year, but because of who the Ducks have lost.

Oregon has lost players at each facet of defense — at the secondary, linebacking and line positions.

Matson, for one, must feel like he's on an

island out there. With Kevin Mitchell and David Martin having departed, the senior is the only returning starter at linebacker.

"I think it's uncertain at this point simply because Anthony Trucks is not practicing,"

Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti said. "I think there's great competition right now between (Reggie) Kerney and (A.J.) Tuitele. I think that's created a competitive environment at that same back position. I think at the will

backer position, Ramone Reed has shown up

and done some very good things."

Igor Olshansky left the Ducks early and Haloti Ngata is still recovering from a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee. To compound the team's lineup problems, Devan Long has not been cleared for the spring and Robby Valenzuela was banged up early on, most notably with a sprained ankle that has not completely subsided yet.

"We like to have a lot of depth because we can look back and see guys who can step up and play for us," Valenzuela said. "Right now,

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DUCK FOOTBALL