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SPORTS

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

Thursday, April 22, 2004



Alex Tam
Holding court

UO tennis deserves additional attention

A couple Oregon teams out there are representing this school well despite falling under the radar screen for most of their seasons.

These athletes may not have the presence of football, basketball, or even the track and field athletes when you walk around campus. Their fan base is probably smaller than your average crowd for a local high school basketball or football game. Or, to put it in perspective, their crowd for each home game is probably less than 5 percent of a sold-out McArthur Court.

Which teams and what sport is this, you ask?

The Oregon men's and women's tennis teams, who will compete in the upcoming Pacific-10 Conference Championships in Ojai, Calif., beginning today.

After having the chance to cover the tennis teams during the past year, the competitive spirit each of these athletes exudes closely parallels those of any other sport. Their matches can be decided by mere inches on the court. The climax can be as exciting and anticipation-filled as the final minute of a deadlocked hard-fought basketball game or a crucial last-minute drive on the gridiron to capture an important victory.

They also enjoy the same hated rivalry with our pals up north in Washington. Oregon's men earned bragging rights for a short period this season when they defeated the Huskies for only the sixth time in Oregon history — out of 113 attempts. Their losing streak to Washington at the time simply "haunted" the Ducks over the years, according to head coach Chris Russell. However, that victory was as compelling as any other when the dual match tiebreaker came down to each team's No. 1 player.

The women are also engaging in their greatest success in more than a decade. Their record of 16-8 and winning percentage of .667 is their best since the 1992-93 campaign. That year, the Ducks won 24 of their 29 dual matches to finish second overall in the conference.

Behind the success of both squads are a couple special players and rare talents who don't come by too often. They are athletes you want to build your program around.

For the women, Daria Panova is arguably one of the top 10 players in the entire country. Panova is currently 10th in the nation, according to the Intercollegiate Tennis Association rankings. She is the reigning Pacific-10 Conference Women's Player of the Year, holds the Oregon record for most wins in a season with 32 and has won three straight conference championships as a singles competitor.

She is only a junior.

"She's pretty much one of the ten people in the country who can win a national championship," women's head coach Nils Schyllander said in the fall. "She's a world-class player."

On the men's side, junior Sven Swinnen

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Sophomore Eric Mitchum recorded the country's second-fastest time (13.50 seconds) in the 110-meter hurdles during the Texas Relays earlier this month.

Emerald

CLEAR HURDLING AHEAD

Eric Mitchum's focus on the technical aspects of hurdling has made him one of the nation's best

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

Eric Mitchum has an eye for detail. Before every race, the sophomore focuses on many of the intricacies that come with being a successful hurdler. Mitchum knows he must regulate his arm speed and foot work and use proper body lean when vaulting over hurdles if he's going to be competitive.

Once the starting gun fires, however, Mitchum explodes off the line and heads toward the first hurdle when suddenly everything becomes a bit fuzzy.

"It's kind of a blur," Mitchum said. "I remember parts of a race but not the whole thing. I always remember the first hurdle and that's about it. After that, it's all in parts."

Judging by Mitchum's performance this year, clarity between the first hurdle and the finish line must be unnecessary. The Calumet City, Ill., native garnered All-American status in the 110-meter hurdles during the indoor season, and he set an Oregon record Sunday with a time of 13.53 seconds at the Mt. SAC Relays in Walnut, Calif.

It has been Mitchum's hard work and attention to detail that has earned him a spot among the top collegiate hurdlers in the country, along with the respect of Oregon sprints coach Dan Steele.

"Hurdling is one of the most technical events on the track," Steele said. "You have to combine tremendous coordination with raw foot speed. Eric really wants to be a great hurdler. He's asking questions every

day and you can't give him enough information."

Four years ago the idea of hurdling had yet to cross Mitchum's mind. The 6-foot-2 speedster had grown up as a basketball-loving small forward. He started competing in track and field as a freshman at Mt. Carmel High School in Chicago as a way to stay in shape for basketball season. While the trend continued into his sophomore year, an afternoon of fun and games would change the direction of Mitchum's life in athletics.

Mt. Carmel hurdlers were relegated to practicing indoors because the school didn't have its own track. One day after classes, Mitchum came across some friends who were taking part in hurdling practice at school. Mitchum decided to give the hurdles a shot and impressed

his coach, Jim Weber.

"Hurdling was a big accident," Mitchum said. "My friends were hurdlers and we practiced on the second floor of the school. Here I am screwing around with them one day and the coach made me a hurdler."

Getting the necessary practice repetitions was difficult for Mitchum, though, because the school lacked more than just a track.

"My junior year we had one hurdle and my senior year we had three," Mitchum said with a smile. "You can (get work done), but it takes a long time."

As he improved, Mitchum remained a relative unknown, and Oregon was one of the few schools that

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UO women finish eighth at Pac-10s

UCLA's Charlotte Mayorkas takes home the individual title with a 2-over-par 218

By Brian Smith
Freelance Reporter

The Oregon women's golf team recorded its highest finish at the Pacific-10 Championship in three years Wednesday.

Shooting a team score of 318, the Ducks finished in eighth place — the same position they had at the beginning of the day.

"We gave it a good shot, even though we felt we could have played better," Oregon head coach Shannon Rouillard said. "The

greens were very challenging and if you left your approach in the wrong spot, it could cost you at least a stroke."

WOMEN'S GOLF

Despite the eighth-place finish, the championship caliber of the competition and the difficult par-72, 6,405-yard Saticoy Country Club course, the Ducks will return home from Somis, Calif., a stronger and more intelligent team.

"We maintained our position and that will help us," Rouillard said. "We wanted to use this tournament to prepare for the

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Club lacrosse makes big improvements

The Ducks head into the Pacific Northwest College Lacrosse Tournament as the No. 1 seeded team

By Kirsten McEwen
Freelance Reporter

For the first time in Oregon's Club Sports history, the men's lacrosse team has a shot at winning the Pacific Northwest College Lacrosse League title.

After going 8-0 in league play and beating Simon Fraser University outside Vancouver, British Columbia — a team that has never lost on its home field — the Ducks have good reason to believe this year belongs to them.

"This year we are all committed to

one goal — St. Louis," senior Joshua Waldman said. "We want to live up to the dream that some of us have set since our freshman year."

On Sunday, the Ducks ended their regular season undefeated, the last win

coming at home against rival Oregon State. Not only did Oregon players feel good about their 16-5 victory over the Beavers, but the win also gave the Ducks the No. 1 seed in the Pacific Northwest College Lacrosse Tournament.

The tournament will be in Seattle on April 30 to May 2 at Mercer

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Club Sports