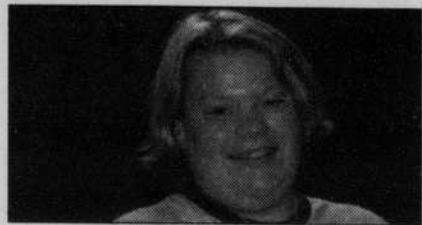


Wednesday, May 19, 2004



Mindi Rice

The girl and the game

Pitcher believes pressure will help

If past precedence holds true — and in collegiate softball there is a tendency for history to repeat itself — then a team's pitcher is the key to whether or not a club finds success in the postseason.

For Oregon, that fastball — or rise ball, as the case may be — falls in the glove and on the shoulder of the Ducks' everything-but-an-ace Ani Nyhus.

Nyhus, the blond-haired wonder who started 29 of Oregon's 57 games this season, carried the Ducks throughout most of the Pacific-10 Conference season.

"I think that there is going to be pressure there for me to step up right now," Nyhus said at the team's practice Monday. "I think it's going to be good pressure though, I don't see it as anything that is going to take me off my game."

Since the early days of the season, Nyhus has been the local media darling, with feature stories about her written by local newspapers and television stations calling about her every two weeks. While she nervously fidgets in front of the camera, when they say "thank you," she breathes a sigh of relief, turns back to the bullpen and resumes practice with her catcher, Amie Morris.

Nyhus doesn't mind the attention all that much, but she would be happier just pitching. But she really doesn't like being called the staff's "ace."

However, when it comes to postseason play, facts are facts. Nyhus has thrown 175 2/3 innings this season and has faced 637 batters. Senior Anissa Meashintubby and sophomore Amy Harris combined for numbers only slightly higher than Nyhus' — 187 1/3 innings and 685 batters. Lefty Lindsey Kontra rounds out the Oregon staff, facing 100 batters in 26 1/3 innings thrown.

"The thing about our team is that we have so much depth in our pitching staff," Nyhus said. "Like (pitching coach Mike White) keeps saying, no matter what, one day it could be someone else that just steps up and has the big couple weeks where they're just really on."

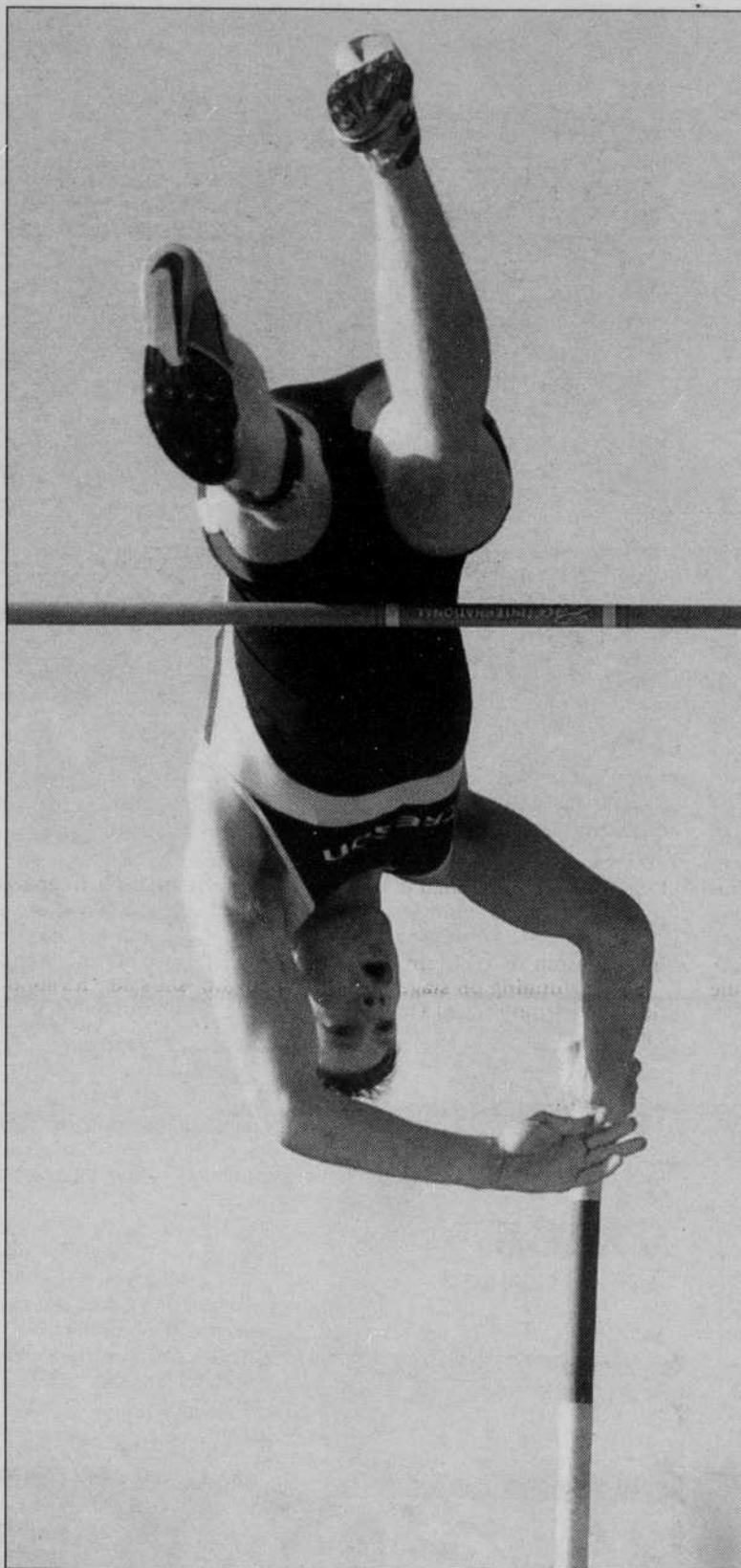
"I hope that it's me. I hope that I can step up this week and that I can really produce for our team because I think that's something that I need to do, for myself too. I think that's the benefit of having such a strong pitching staff."

The depth of Oregon's pitching staff was pushed in the final two weeks of Pac-10 play. Nyhus, who was on a roll early in the season, seemed ineffective against Arizona and Arizona State, California and Stanford the second time around. Oregon was 1-5 in those final games.

"I'm disappointed with the last couple weeks," Nyhus said. "My inconsistency is really frustrating me. I'll go and throw a good game against Stanford and then I'll turn around the next day and just not have my stuff at all. It's frustrating right now."

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Senior takes fifth at conference meet



Danielle Hickey Photo Editor

Trevor Woods said he'll need a clearance of 17-8 at the West Regional to make nationals.

Trevor Woods' clearance in the pole vault Friday was one reason Oregon nearly finished first in the Pacific-10 Championship meet last week

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

Trevor Woods knew the pole vault competition would be tough when he entered last week's Pacific-10 Conference Championship meet.

The senior had cleared a season best 17 feet, 1 1/2 inches two weeks prior to his trip to Tucson, Ariz., but ranked only seventh in the conference. With the likes of UCLA's Yoo Kim, Pat Luke and teammate Tommy Skipper vying against him, Woods would have to bring his "A" game to even crack the top seven.

The Coos Bay native stepped up that game, finishing fifth (16-11 1/2) behind three fellow All-Americans.

"I got higher than I was pegged to get points-wise," Woods said. "I thought I could get second or third, but I've got to walk away happy with fifth."

While Woods was happy he could contribute points to the team, he was disappointed Oregon couldn't hold off UCLA for the Pac-10 title. The Ducks had a 67-49 lead on the Bruins after the first day, but fell 143-130 after Saturday's action.

"Naturally, I'm a little disappointed that we didn't pull it out," Woods said. "But we didn't throw it away. We had points here and there, but UCLA had a great meet."

With the NCAA West Regional Qualifier less than two weeks away, Woods said he needs to clear at least 17-8 to have a shot at going to nationals. While Woods fell well short of that mark Friday, he has cleared it before, with a personal best of 18-0 1/2 in 2002.

MEN'S TRACK

Double Duty

While it is common for athletes to compete in several events during the course of track meet, Skipper went a step further.

The freshman competed in the pole vault and javelin simultaneously during Friday's action.

After clearing his opening vault (17-3 1/2), he ran 40 meters across the infield to throw the javelin. His second throw traveled 215-2, which put him in second at the time. Satisfied that his throw would hold up points-wise, he returned his focus to the pole vault, where he won with a clearance of 18-3 1/4.

His mark in the javelin was good for fifth at competition's end.

"I didn't know what to expect in the javelin," Skipper said, "and I tried to get a solid huck in there early so I wouldn't have to take all my attempts in the jav' and focus solely on the pole vault. In both events, I wasn't trying to over-scrutinize anything. I'm a 'fly by the seat of my pants' kind of guy so I was more focused on just competing than heights, distances, etc. If you can't focus on the competition part, you can lose track of what's really important."

Skipper entered the meet with the Pac-10's top clearance of 18-8 3/4 from the indoor season. Despite this, UCLA's Kim was ranked higher nationally during the outdoor campaign. Other than a little trouble early in the competition, Skipper turned what was supposed to be a showdown of two great pole vaulters into a one-sided show.

"Tommy got into a rhythm like no other," Woods said. "All that work he put in during the spring was paying off. He was a horse. Nothing was going to keep him from that title and he just ran away with it."

Moving up the list

Senior javelin thrower Adam Jenkins moved into third on the all-time Oregon list with his performance Friday. After struggling with his

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Florida clubs dominate No. 4 regional

Many clubs competing in Tallahassee hope to make it to the World Series

By Mindi Rice
Senior Sports Reporter

In the No. 4 NCAA Softball Regional Tournament, four schools are hoping for help from a little thing called home-state advantage.

While host school and No. 1-seeded Florida State will have the most claim to that advantage, Florida, South Florida and Bethune-Cookman also want to feed off the short travel plans.

Long Island is the only other team of the eight that doesn't have to change time zones. Ohio State also heads to Tallahassee, Fla., with hope of a Regional title while Cal State Northridge and Oregon will make the longest trip.

For a closer look at the region, the teams are broken down in order of their seeding:

DUCK SOFTBALL

No. 1 Florida State

Florida State (57-9 overall), ranked No. 5 in the ESPN/USA Softball Top 25, won its 10th conference title in the past 13 years to earn its fifth consecutive regional berth.

Leading the way for the Atlantic Coast Conference champions are Casey Hunter, ACC Tournament MVP, and Jessica van der Linden, a finalist for USA Softball Player of the Year. Hunter has a 0.52 ERA in 230 2/3 innings pitched while van der Linden has started every game for Florida State and is batting a team-leading .384.

"I don't know too much about Long Island (Florida State's first opponent), but I do know that they are a conference champion and very well coached," Florida State head coach Dr. JoAnne Graf said in a release Sunday. "At this level anyone can beat anyone else. We will go into this game the same way we would if it were UCLA."

Florida State will face Long Island at 2:30 p.m. Thursday in the final first round game.

No. 2 Oregon

In head coach Kathy Arendsen's second season, the No. 12 Ducks (38-19) continued to find new feats; this time, beating each Pacific-10 Conference opponent at least once for the first time since 1998. Offensively, third baseman Ashley Richards (.317 batting average) and catcher Jenn Poore (.312) lead the way, as the two have held the team's top two batting averages most of the season.

"I think this is an excellent opportunity for our team," Arendsen said Sunday. "We have played at Florida State and we have traveled to Florida this season, so I feel that the players know a little of what to expect. It's very exciting to be continuing our season and to have this opportunity."

The Ducks play Bethune-Cookman at 9:30 a.m. Thursday.

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