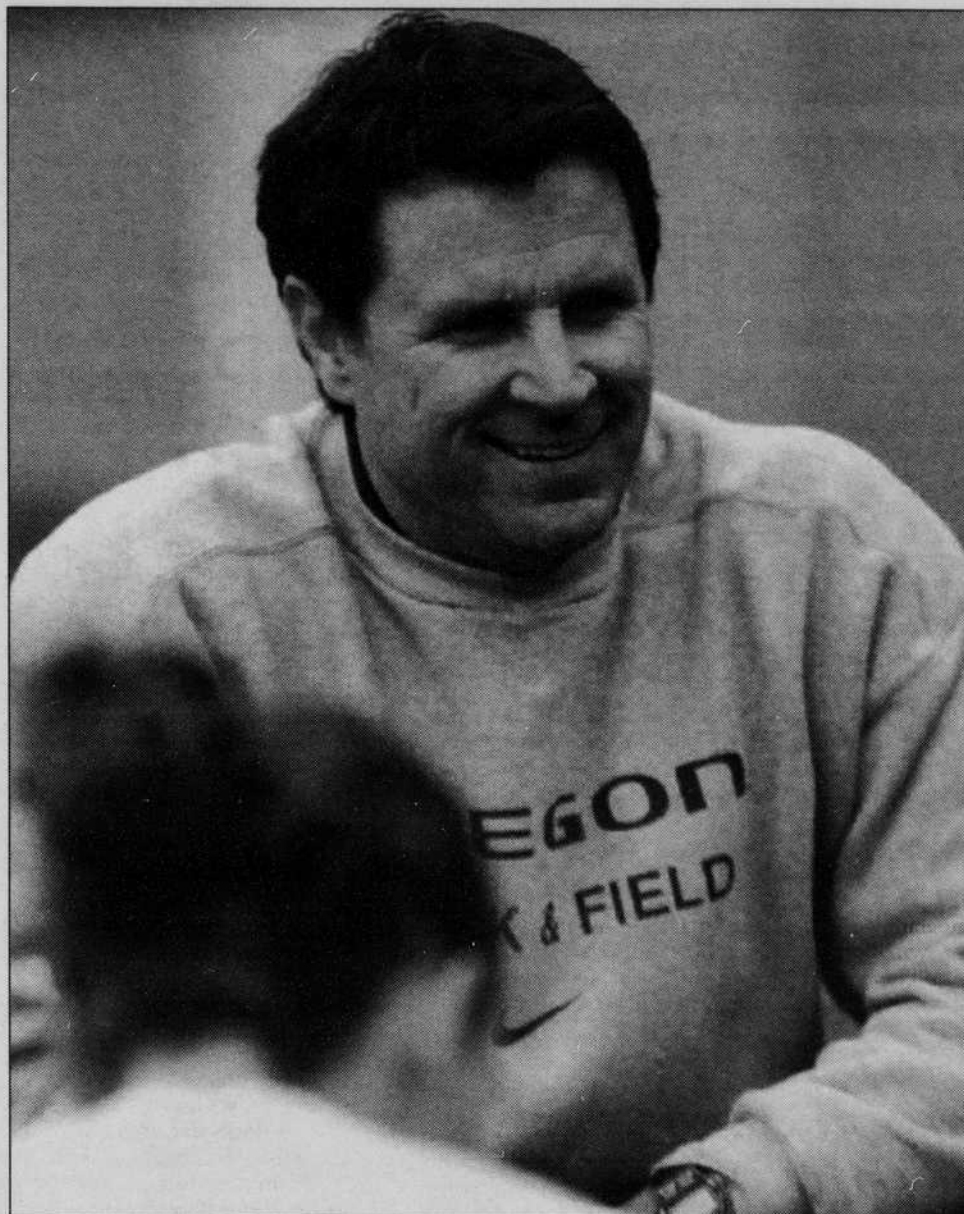


Thursday, May 27, 2004

## Guiding Light

Oregon track and field assistant coach Rock Light returns to coaching after an eight-year hiatus and successful stint at LSU



Geoff Thurner Oregon Media Services

Oregon assistant coach Rock Light oversees the women's hurdles, sprints, relays and heptathlon.

By Alex Tam  
Sports Reporter

A new course at Oregon began last fall. The professor of that course: track and field assistant coach Rock Light.

The 46-year-old Light, in his first year at Oregon, is one of several new teachers brought in by head coach Martin Smith to revive a women's program in flux the past couple seasons.

"The classroom is Hayward Field to me," Light said. "That's where I practice my teaching. Everyday that (my athletes) come to practice, I want them to feel that they are going to get better and learn."

Learning and listening to the Lamar, Colo., native would be wise on the part of the track athletes. Light, who last coached in 1995 at Louisiana State, assisted the Tigers to four NCAA titles, 13 Southeastern Conference titles and 12 school records. He now oversees the women's sprints, hurdles, jumps and heptathlon events.

"A few individuals have an opportunity to do what they love to do," Light said, "and this is what I absolutely love to do."

In 1995, he left LSU to become a financial adviser at Merrill Lynch after being given an offer he "couldn't refuse." However, his love for track and field stayed with him. For the next eight years, Light served as an instructor at the USA Track and Field Coaches Education program to develop curriculum for track coaches around the country.

The determination to return to coaching, though, resurfaced last October as a result of the resignation of Oregon assistant coach Steve Silvey. Less than a month later, Light received a phone call from Oregon.

"Coach Smith asked how serious I was to get back into coaching and I said it depends on the situation," Light said. "I got here in the morning and by the afternoon, I was hopeful that they would offer me the position."

In mid-November of last year, the Ducks announced his hiring as the final piece of a new coaching staff fully committed to a long-term plan of becoming a national power.

Upon his arrival, many of the women athletes immediately took notice of his credentials. They

believe his addition is one of the main reasons behind the improved attitude surrounding the team this season.

"He's just so motivated and encourages every single one of us to be the best," junior sprinter Michelle Donovan said. "There's nothing fun to train for if you're not going to be the best, and he wants to get all of us there."

Sofie Abildtrup, another junior sprinter, said Light's care for his athletes on and off the field is a reason for the success she and the team have experienced this season.

"He's so involved with all his athletes," Abildtrup said. "He knows what to look for. He really looks at the individual and tries to figure out how he can help that athlete the most."

Abildtrup, who is competing in her first and final year at Oregon, remembers her first workout with Light immediately after his hiring. Abildtrup, a Denmark native, recalls her coach telling her that he enjoyed what he saw and offered her a spot on the team.

She has now developed into one of Oregon's top all-time sprinters, ranking in the top 10 in the 200- and 400-meter events, and also serving as the anchor of the 4x400 meter relay team.

"Even though I wasn't a part of the team at that point, I felt like he really wanted me to be a part (of it) eventually," Abildtrup said. "That was really encouraging."

Light's versatility to coach successfully at several different events is proving to be an asset. In addition to seeing new personal bests among the sprinters, records are also falling within the jumpers units.

Rachael Kriz, a junior from Toledo, Ore., began high jumping last fall. Learning an entirely new event was difficult at first for Kriz. But with her continued work with Light, Kriz earned a personal best with a mark of 5 feet, 6 inches, placing her fifth at the Pacific-10 Conference Championships two weeks ago. The mark also earned her a spot at NCAA Regionals this weekend.

"I have so enjoyed working with him," Kriz said. "He is an awesome coach with lots of energy and just out there for the kids. I really like

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## Colorado State takes down UO in first contest

The Ducks fall 10-1 against undefeated Colorado State in the first game of the NCBA World Series at McKechnie Field in Florida

By Kirsten McEwen  
Freelance Reporter

Their first game in Florida was an eye-opening experience.

As No. 8 Oregon (19-7 overall, 13-5 Pacific Mountain Conference) took on the No. 1-ranked team in the country on Wednesday at the National Club Baseball Association World Series in Bradenton, Fla., the Ducks knew they were going to need a little luck to get by their first round opponents.

### Club Sports

Oregon was introduced to Colorado State, a ball club that has yet to lose a game, at 9:30 a.m. EST at McKechnie Field. Hot and humid weather welcomed the first game of the 2004 World Series.

The Rams (24-0 overall, 15-0 Rocky Mountain Conference) took a one-run lead in the first inning, and Colorado State scored in every frame then on except the third, en route to a 10-1 win.

Oregon's only run came in the seventh and final inning.

"Colorado is a very well-coached team and they played with

## Injury slows Swinnen at NCAAs

Manuel Kost can't break through against No. 9 Doug Stewart in Tulsa at the NCAA Individual Championships

By Clayton Jones  
Freelance Reporter

Sven Swinnen and Manuel Kost were bounced in the opening round of the 120th Annual NCAA Division I Men's Tennis Singles Championship in Tulsa, Okla., Wednesday.

"It was a tough day for both players," Oregon head coach Chris Russell said.

Swinnen, ranked 16th in the nation, was upset by William Barker in straight sets, 6-2, 6-1.

Swinnen was in control of the match early on, jumping out to a 2-0 lead. He was up 30-love in the

third game when he went wide on a back hand in the corner and strained his back.

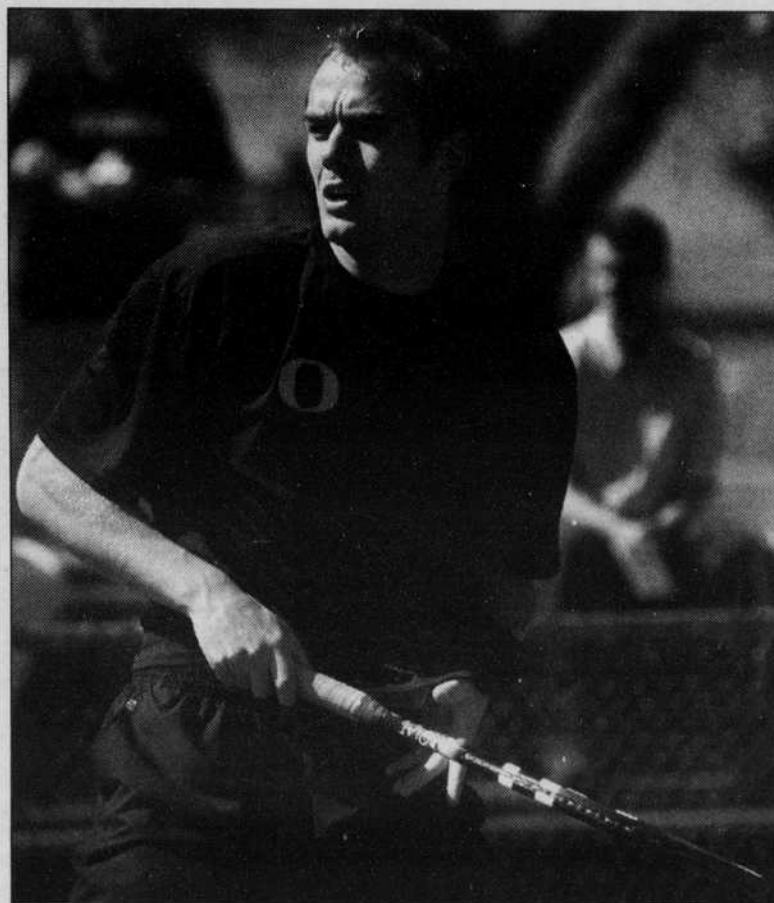
Russell said he almost stopped the match because the injury seemed to be interfering with Swinnen's

play, but the Switzerland native persisted.

"Swinnen doesn't like to make excuses, but I will tell you that if he was healthy he would have won that match," Russell said.

Swinnen fought through his injury, but he could only muster one more point the rest of the match.

"Don't get me wrong, Swinnen played a good player, but he just wasn't able to do what he usually does out there on the court," Russell said.



Danielle Hickey Photo Editor

Sven Swinnen, seen here earlier this season, lost in the first round of the NCAA Individual.