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REGIONAL DISPUTE

The regional qualifying tournament has been around for two years and gets mixed reviews

Lauren Wimer Senior Photographer

Javelin thrower Sarah Malone opposes the regional qualifying system because it makes the season longer and interferes with Finals Week.

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

Include an extra meet in the season schedule, or give athletes more time to train?

Allow more athletes a chance to compete for a national title, or leave the system alone?

These questions were posed in the late 1990s when the U.S. Track Coaches Association brought up the idea of expanding competition opportunities at the NCAA Championship meet.

While track and field had more participants than any other Division I NCAA sport, the national championship meet was capped at 756 participants; 378 for both men and women.

The Division I Championship Cabinet agreed that more opportunities to compete for a national title were necessary, but a simple increase in the championship meet cap wasn't enough. The cabinet insisted that a qualifying system be devised that would send the most deserving athletes to the final meet of the season.

After much debate between coaches and the NCAA Track and Field Committee, the result was a regional qualifying system that was approved by the NCAA in 2000 and put into use for the first time last year. The national meet cap was raised to 1,088 (544 men and 544 women) and the country was split into four regions (West, Midwest, Mideast and East), with each region hosting a qualifying meet for the right to go to nationals.

Regional qualifying marks and times were implemented during the regular season to determine which athletes would be eligible to compete. Once the field was set, the top five finishers in each event from each region, would advance to nationals. If 20 athletes per event didn't equate to enough participants to fill the national meet cap, at-large candidates would be added from a descending-order list of athletes who entered the regional meet with a high rank but failed to crack the top five during competition.

Mark Bockelman, assistant director of championships for the NCAA, said the highly competitive regional meets that took place for the first time last season were good for track and field.

"If you feature four meets all around the country, all at the same time, it will bring a good amount of attention to track and field," Bockelman said. "The product on the field of the four regional sites last year produced good, competitive track meets. Then we had an outstanding championship meet as

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UO men, women Northridge-bound for regionals

The Ducks' field athletes lead the way as seven Oregon women rank in the top 10 heading into the NCAA West Regional Qualifier today

By Alex Tam
Sports Reporter

The road back to national prominence begins for the Oregon women's track and field team at the NCAA West Regional Qualifier today in Northridge, Calif.

The two-day competition, held at the Matador Track and Field Complex, is one of four regional meets this weekend. The top five finishers from each regional event will earn an automatic bid to the NCAA Championships, which start June 9 in Austin, Texas.

The field events are expected to net the Duck women the best scores.

WOMEN'S TRACK

Kirsten Larwin enters the pole vault ranked fourth in the West after earning a personal record of 13 feet, 6 1/4 inches at the Pacific-10 Conference Championships two weeks ago. Larwin, a senior from Eugene, was hobbled by a foot injury at this time last year, but is now in full health and hopes to end her year on a high note.

"I'll do my best to try to shoot for that top five," Larwin said. "It's one more meet to prepare and it's more time to get that much better. Last year at this meet, I knew I wasn't going to do well."

Larwin said she hopes her career best is good enough anyway for an NCAA at-large bid. After the regional meets are over, the NCAA committee will select five to eight athletes, who did not finish in the top five, to be invited to the national championships based on season bests.

Fellow Oregon pole-vaulter Emily Enders is on the cusp of earning an automatic invite in her first year competing at the collegiate level. Enders, a freshman from Snohomish, Wash., is rated sixth after also achieving a personal best at the Pac-10 Championships with a mark of 13-2 1/4.

One of the most anticipated events going into regionals is a



Lauren Wimer Senior Photographer

Rachael Kriz enters the high jump at the NCAA West Regional Qualifier in Northridge, Calif., with a top mark of 5-8.

rematch of Southern California's Inga Stasiulionyte and Oregon's Sarah Malone in the javelin throw. The two are ranked first and second in the region, respectively, and have had epic battles, the most recent coming two weeks ago at Pac-10s.

Malone, who is ranked third nationally, led the event after the first two rounds before Stasiulionyte, the 2001 NCAA Javelin champion, took over first place after three throws with a mark of 177-4. The USC senior never relinquished the lead and ended up winning her fourth straight Pac-10 javelin title.

Other Oregon field event hopefuls include Bree Fuqua in the shot put (sixth, 52-5 1/2) and the discus (14th, 164-0 1/2), Clarice Hayward-Lee in the triple jump (11th, 40-8 3/4) and Rachael Kriz in the high jump (16th, 5-8).

On the track, the Ducks have three athletes ranked in the top

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Senior Brandon Holliday is one of several Oregon athletes who will attempt to qualify for nationals with a top-five finish at the West Regional Qualifier

By Jon Roetman
Sports Reporter

It's time to put up or shut up for several members of the Oregon men's track and field team.

With competition in the NCAA West Regional Qualifier beginning today in Northridge, Calif., the chance has arrived for a Duck athlete to earn a ticket to the National Championships with a top-five finish in his respective event.

If an athlete fails to crack the top five, however, this sunny weekend in California could mark the end of the 2004 season.

Senior Brandon Holliday, a 2003 NCAA Qualifier in the 400-meter hurdles, is one such athlete who faces a do-or-die scenario. He enters the meet with the fourth-best time in the West (50.52 seconds), but only ranks 14th nationally. If he fails to finish in the top five this weekend, he is likely too far down the descending-order list to receive an at-large bid.

The Beaverton native, who is coming off a fourth-place finish at the Pacific-10 Conference Championships, said while his Oregon career has had some bright moments, it wouldn't be complete without another trip to nationals.

"I'd hate for my career to end at regionals," Holliday said. "I want to go to nationals. One of my goals is still to be All-American, and in order to do that, I need to crack the top five. If I didn't make the top five, it wouldn't have been a terrible career, but it wouldn't be a good way to end it. I would be crushed if I didn't go to nationals this year."

Another Oregon athlete facing similar circumstances is Leonidas Watson. The junior transfer from St. Louis Community College will compete in the long jump and the triple jump for Oregon, but has some work to do in order to qualify for the latter.

Watson ranks fourth in the West in the long jump

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