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SPORTS BRIEFS

Women's basketball brings 6-foot-3 center

The Oregon women's basketball program added 6-foot-3 center Gabrielle Richards to its roster Monday.

Richards, a Seymour, Australia, native, competed for the Australian Institute of Sport and finished second in the league in rebounds per game (8.5) and ninth in points per game (13.5).

"Gabrielle is one of the top centers to graduate from the AIS program and one of the top junior players coming out of Australia," fourth-year Oregon women's head coach Bev Smith said. "Gabe has been the leader in rebounds and scoring the last two years with the AIS program and she has played an important part in the success of the Australian Junior National Team."

The 19-year-old Richards led her 20-and-under national team to an Australian championship in 2003. She was also a member of the 21-and-under national team that finished fifth at the 2003 World Championships.

Richards also received offers from Baylor, Georgia Tech, Ohio State and Penn State.

"This is a landmark recruit for our program and a lot of the credit for Gabe becoming a Duck goes to our student athletes," Smith said. "They had an immediate connection with her and through the recruiting process, they discovered a common desire of wanting to be together, work together, play together ... and to hang a banner in Mac Court."

Richards is Oregon's second Australian native on the squad. Forward Eleanor Haring of Australia was a member of last year's Pacific-10 Conference All-Freshman team.

Men's basketball hires new assistant coach

Oregon men's basketball head coach Ernie Kent announced the hiring of new assistant coach Kenny Payne last Friday.

The 37-year-old Payne replaces former Oregon assistant John Cooper, who left the Ducks in April to become associate head coach at Auburn.

"Kenny will add a wealth of knowledge and experience not only in basketball, but also in life's journeys that will benefit our program and any student-athletes who may have ambitions of playing professionally versus getting an education," Kent said.

Payne was a member of the 1986 NCAA champion Louisville Cardinals and played four seasons in the NBA for the Philadelphia 76ers. He averaged 3.5 points per game during his four-year NBA career.

In his collegiate career at Louisville, Payne scored more than 1,083 points and was a member of the All-Metro Conference team. His best year was his senior season when he averaged 14.5 points and 5.7 rebounds per game.

After playing basketball worldwide for ten different professional basketball leagues, Payne returned to Louisville and earned his bachelor's of science degree in sport administration last year.

At Oregon, Payne will help in recruiting and working with players everyday, said Kent.

"Kenny will work hand-in-hand with (assistant coach) Scott Duncan in recruiting, especially in the areas of the East and Midwest," Kent said. "And he will be active in working out our players as well as the day-to-day operations of our program."

Men's tennis signs Florida standout

The Oregon men's tennis team signed Florida high school standout Christopher Liao to a letter of intent last week, according to men's head coach Chris Russell.

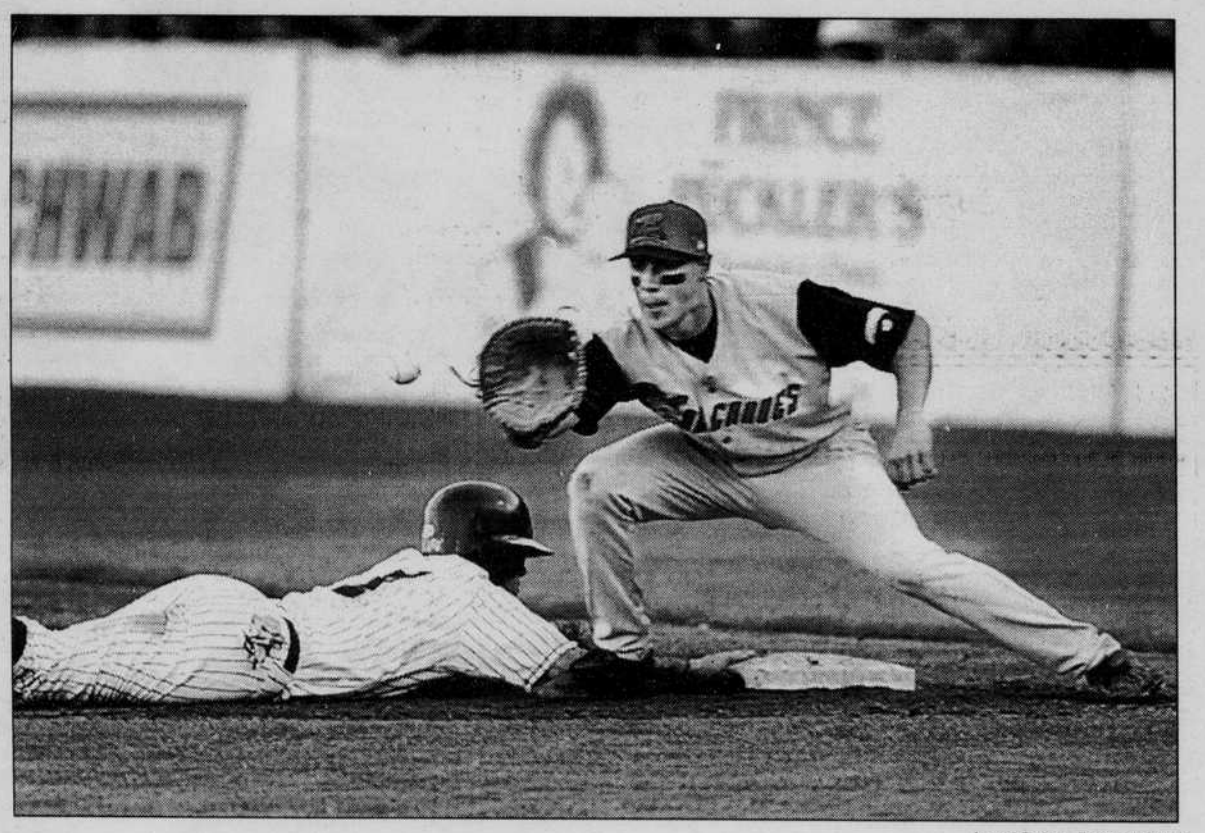
"Chris will be a great addition to our program," Russell said. "He is a big hitter with a great serve and will be able to step up and contribute as a freshman."

Liao, who was a doubles finalist and singles semifinalist in Florida, attended American Heritage High School in Delray Beach, Fla., where he reached the finals of the 2003 Class A doubles tournament and the semifinals of the singles tournament.

Liao was a key part of American Heritage winning the Florida High School Athletic Association Class A state championship in 2003 and a runner-up in 2004.

Oregon will return all but one player from last year's team who made the NCAA Tournament. Returning for the Ducks are Sven Swinnen and Manuel Kost. Swinnen was ranked 25th and Kost was ranked 66th. Oregon also returns 89 of its 96 singles wins from last year.

— Alex Tam



Jared Paben Editor in Chief

In Saturday's game against Salem-Keizer, the Emeralds left seven men on base in a 4-1 loss to the Volcanoes. Eugene also failed to record a stolen base in Saturday's contest.

EMS

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Thursday's 11-3 victory, Eugene's team ERA now sits at 4.20. Emeralds reliever Jake Vose also has played a key role in the bullpen after having given up only two earned runs in six appearances this season.

Although a loser in Friday night's loss to Salem-Keizer, Eugene starter Vern Sterry's 2.89 ERA has been a model of consistency so far this year. Sterry's record is 1-1 and he has given up only six earned runs in 18 2/3 innings.

"If our offense can contribute on a daily basis, our pitching is going to keep us in it," shortstop Sean Kazmar said.

Kazmar has been doing his part with a rising .270 batting average and a 14 game hitting streak. Kazmar is now living up to his potential as a fifth round selection out of Southern Nevada Community College. Kazmar has 20 hits so far this season, including six extra base hits.

"I've definitely met my expectations," the 19-year-old Kazmar said. "I'm here to learn, play hard every day and do my best."

Morton has also continued to play well with a .292 batting average and a team leading seven home runs. Morton added two home runs in Saturday's 5-4 win against Salem-Keizer. He also has a team leading 38 total bases and a .792 slugging percentage.

The offense, though, has been a problem so far this season.

With the team batting average at a low .228, it is slowly rising as Craig Johnson (.290 average) and first baseman Lachlan Dale (team leading 10 RBI) have increased their level of play recently. Capitalizing with runners in scoring position is what will get the Emeralds back into the race in the West Division, Howell said.

"Hopefully the guys can pull together and we'll play well in the second half," Howell said. "The bottom line is they need to make adjustments now. The longer it takes, the longer we'll lose."

Eugene wraps up its series against the Salem-Keizer Volcanoes on Tuesday. Wednesday, the Boise Hawks visit Eugene for a five-game homestand.

Steve Apel is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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