

■ Duck soccer

Ducks can't nail win to end season

Seniors Christine Mintz and Kelly Baird, with a combined 98 starts, ended their Oregon careers Sunday

BY BRIAN SMITH
SPORTS REPORTER

The Oregon women's soccer team tried its best to send off seniors Kelly Baird and Christine Mintz with a win in the final weekend of the 2004 season but came up empty.

The Ducks came close on Friday night, recording a 1-1 tie against Arizona State, and ended up losing to newly crowned co-Pacific-10 Conference champion Arizona 2-0 on Sunday.

The weekend results dropped the Ducks to 3-13-3 overall and 0-7-2 in the Pac-10 for the season. For the first time since the program attained varsity status in 1996, the Ducks were held winless in conference play.

More important than the loss to Arizona were the final collegiate matches of Mintz and Baird. Junior forward Mele French and senior team manager Kim Paiement were also honored in a brief ceremony during team introductions on Sunday. French ended her career earlier this season after battling recurring concussions and problems with migraines. Paiement has worked with the Oregon team for the past four years. She assisted the Oregon coaching staff by overseeing the team's equipment needs and various travel issues.

"It's bittersweet to say good-bye with a loss," Baird said. "I'll really miss the girls on the team. We've been close in the outcome of almost every game, but regardless (of the score), the chemistry has been unbelievable."

Oregon falls to Arizona

The Ducks had a chance to ruin the Wildcats' first-ever shot at a conference title on Sunday. Arizona needed a win against Oregon to clinch a tie with No. 14 UCLA after losing to Oregon State 1-0 on Friday.

The Wildcats got on the board early with a goal by Candice Wilks from six yards in the 10th minute. The senior forward collected the ball from 20 yards wide right of the goal and worked her way through a couple of Oregon defenders before her shot

found the right corner of the net.

Oregon had a couple of chances to respond in the first half, including a shot from freshman Kami Kapaku in the 27th minute that scooted just wide of the goal.

However, the Ducks spent most of the day playing defense and looking for chances to get back in the match. For the day, Arizona led in shots (15-5), corner kicks (5-3) and shots on goal (7-4).

"Today we were a little bit out of it and never established a flow in our play," Oregon head coach Bill Steffen said. "We worked hard and got some chances, but we didn't get any of the breaks. We were on the outside looking and waiting for something to happen, but it never did."

The Wildcats added an insurance goal in the 47th minute when Arizona defender Vanesha Bailey took a 19-yard shot from the right that arched into the left corner of the net.

"It's frustrating because we wanted to win our last game," Mintz said. "But unfortunately, it's a fitting end to the way the season has gone. We haven't had any luck (all year)."

Ducks pull even with Sun Devils on penalty kick

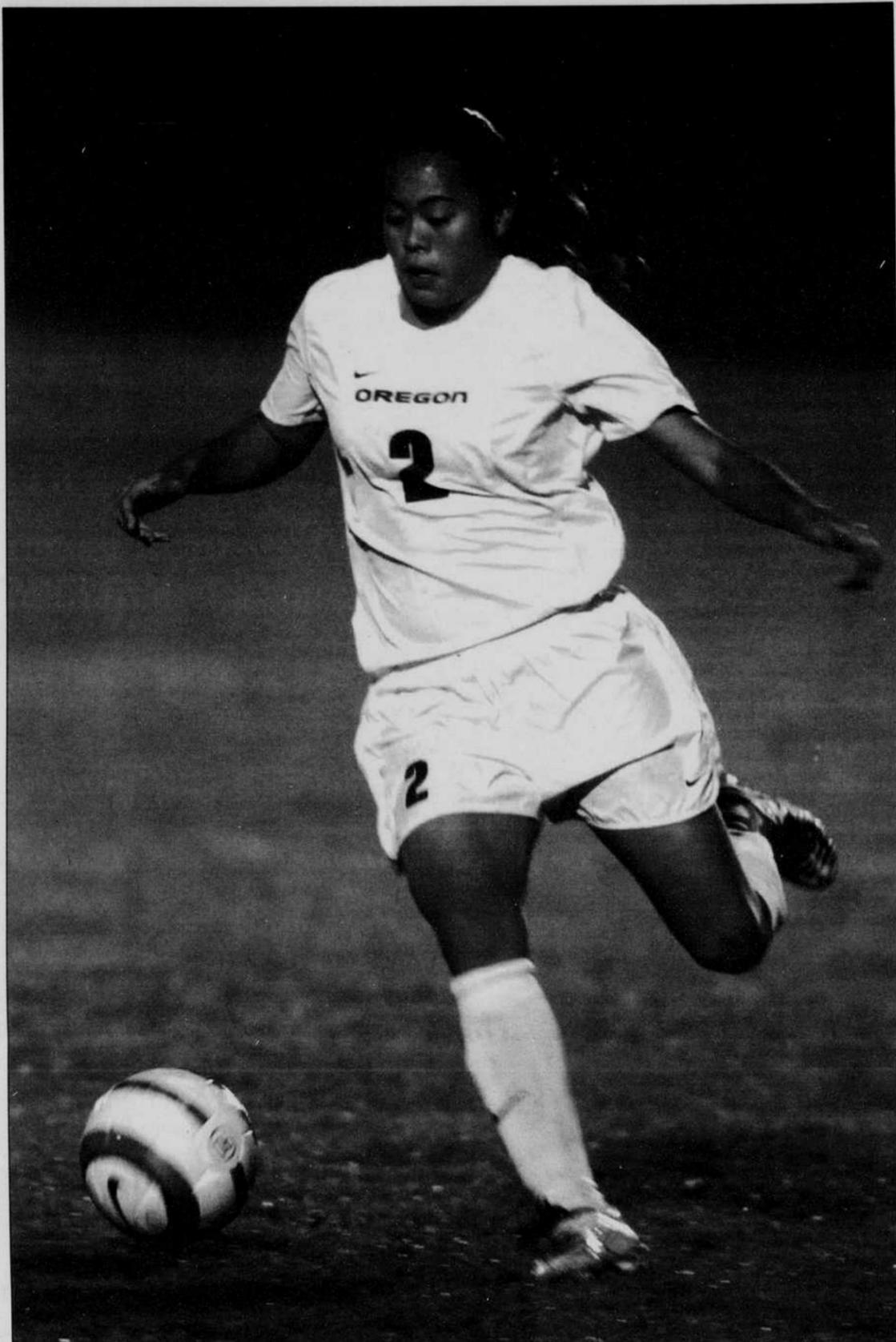
On Friday, Oregon fell behind to Arizona State in much the same fashion as in the game against Arizona: early.

In the 10th minute of the match, Arizona State's Katie Leahy won a battle for the ball against Baird in the right corner of the field. Baird tried to stay with Leahy, but slipped. Leahy took a shot from 15 yards left that Oregon goalkeeper Dominique Lainez deflected, but the ball still dribbled into the net.

"I thought I could beat her (to the ball), and I overestimated," Baird said Friday.

The Ducks answered with a penalty kick by junior midfielder Cristian Higa in the 67th minute. Higa's kick went right while Arizona State's goalkeeper Kim Bingham went left.

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NICOLE BARKER | PHOTOGRAPHER

Oregon junior midfielder Cristian Higa scored the Ducks' lone goal of the weekend during their draw against Arizona State Friday as Oregon finished the 2004 soccer season with a 3-13-3 overall record. Oregon fell 2-0 to Arizona during its final match of the season Sunday.

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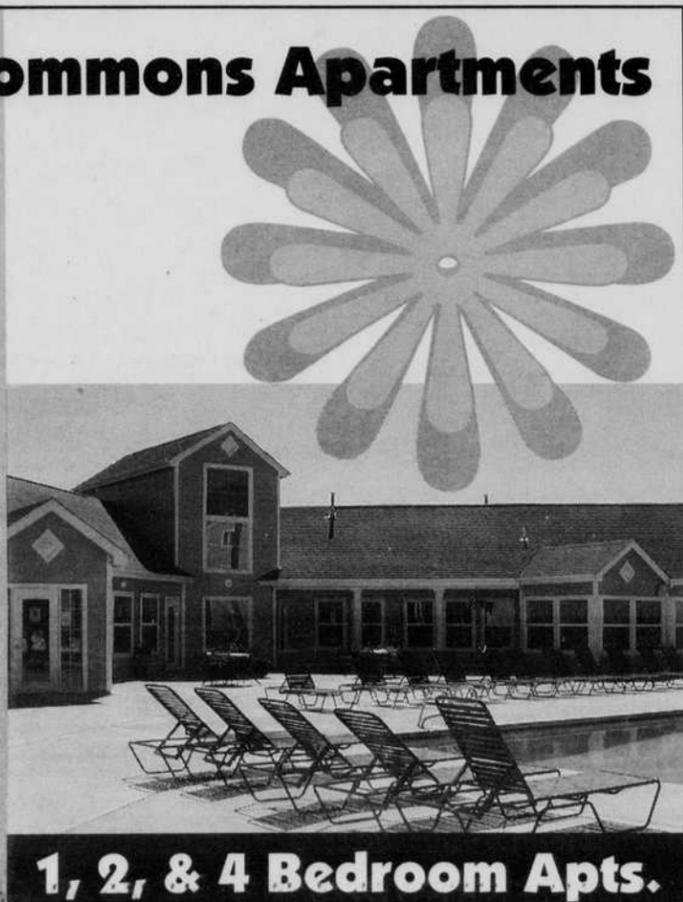
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