

■ Women's tennis

Ducks host USC, UCLA in last home matches

Oregon is 9-1 at home this season and is confident it can upset the No. 4 Trojans and the No. 13 Bruins

BY ALEX TAM
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

This weekend will mark the last chance for seniors Daria Panova, Ester Bak and Davina Mendiburu to showcase their talents in front of a home crowd.

The trio, along with the Oregon women's tennis team, will battle against two of the nation's top 15 teams when No. 4 Southern California visits today at 1:30 p.m. and No. 13 UCLA drops by Saturday for "Senior Day" at noon at the Student Tennis Center.

The three seniors are eager to play

their last two home matches, where they've enjoyed success throughout their career. The Ducks have compiled a 24-8 record at home over the past three seasons. This season, the Ducks are 9-1.

"We're very excited, and I think it means a lot for (us seniors), because it's our very last match here," Mendiburu said. "I hope a lot of people come and cheer for us."

Mendiburu said her team is confident about their play after upsetting No. 16 Washington 4-3 on the road March 22. The Ducks also nearly defeated No. 24 California three days

later in a 4-3 loss.

"We're playing great tennis, but I think we've reached that level, and I think we have a very good chance," said Mendiburu, who sits third all-time at Oregon in career singles wins with 68. "I really do believe we can do it if we all show up."

The Ducks believe playing at home gives them a chance to beat anyone, even the most elite teams.

"We play great here traditionally and (USC and UCLA) are not used to playing indoors," Oregon head coach Nils Schyllander said. "Anytime we play at home we feel like we have a chance to win no matter who we play. We got nothing to lose, and we're a very confident group right now."

However, Oregon realizes that

each of its opponents are playing well and are on a hot streak. The Bruins have won five straight matches, including one over Washington on the road. The Trojans, meanwhile, are on an eight-match winning streak and have lost just once this season. That loss came at the hands of defending NCAA champion Stanford on Feb. 26.

"They're two of the best teams in the country," Schyllander said. "Both of them probably have a legitimate shot at the national championship. You'll see some of the best freshmen in college tennis."

USC has two top-ranked freshmen in No. 11 Nicole Leimbach, who has a 24-8 overall record, and No. 10 Lindsey Nelson, who is 25-5 this season. UCLA is led by

freshman Riza Zalameda, who is ranked No. 18 nationally and led the Bruins with 10 singles victories after the fall season.

With Oregon's success this season, Schyllander said he believes his program should be regarded among the Pac-10's elite, along with California, Washington and USC.

"We have to be considered among them," he said. "We hope to see both of those teams in the postseason."

Panova said she is anticipating both matches to come down to the last point.

"I expect a hard match, and it should end in a 4-3 (score)," said Panova, who is 12-4 in singles matches this season. "I figure it will be long and painful, and (hopefully) we're going to win."

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Softball: Freshmen Chaput, Eadus lead Ducks offensively

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players in the top seven in home runs, Aimee Minor (9) and Sarah Hyatt (8).

As a team, the Huskies lead the conference in on-base percentage (.408) and are second in slugging percentage (.510) and home runs (35).

Trying to counteract the big Washington bats will be Oregon ace Amy Harris. The Eugene native boasts a 1.11 ERA to go along with her 10-4 record this season. She is eighth in the conference in opposing batting average, allowing hitters to bat a mere .173 against her.

The Ducks' newcomers have led the team offensively in hitting. Freshmen Lovena Chaput and T.J. Eadus have been pacing the Oregon offense. Chaput, recently named the Pac-10's Co-Player of the Week, went 6 for 13 in the past week and has solidified herself in the leadoff spot.

"It was a huge shock to be named one of the players of the week," Chaput said. "But it also is a huge confidence booster. The experience in Pac-10 play is going to be a lot different, and I don't have that (experience) like the sophomores, juniors and seniors."

Eadus has been the Ducks' most

consistent hitter and leads the team with a .386 batting average. Head coach Kathy Arendsen slipped Eadus in the lineup wherever she could early on, but the freshman has recently been a mainstay at third base.

The Oregon offense has also been doing the little things right, as they lead the conference in both sacrifice flies and sacrifice bunts. Shortstop Breanne Sabol leads the conference with 12 sacrifice bunts to go along with her .364 average. Sophomore center fielder Suzie Barnes is tied for second in the conference with seven and Goodell is tied for sixth in the conference with six.

The Huskies will feature one of two pitchers against the Ducks today. One is senior Ashley Boek, who is 10-5 on the season with a 2.21 ERA and has 97 strikeouts in 85.1 innings pitched. The only other Washington pitcher to take the mound this season has been overpowering freshman Caitlin Noble. She is 6-4 on the season, but has struck out an impressive 131 batters in 76.2 innings of work.

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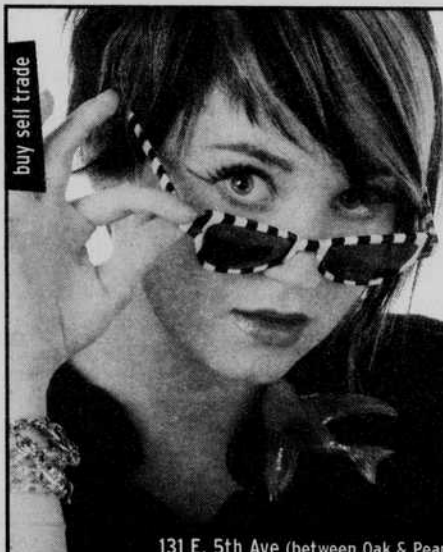
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