

■ In my opinion



CLAYTON JONES
SEVENTH INNING STRETCH

Softball has shot to turn year around against rival

As many Oregon fans descend on Hayward Field this weekend to attend the Oregon Invitational, another interesting development is happening just down the road at Howe Field.

The Oregon softball team is at a pivotal point in its season as rival Oregon State comes to town Saturday and Sunday, with a game at 1 p.m. each day. The ninth-ranked Beavers are atop the Pacific-10 Conference with an 8-2 record while the Ducks are trying to keep afloat. After starting conference play with a 3-7 record, Oregon was destroyed by No. 6 Stanford and let one go against No. 3 California last weekend.

(Don't fret, track fans; your ticket to get in the track meet will allow you entry into the softball games so you won't have to pay twice.)

Oregon's season is at a point right now in which it can go in one of two directions. The Ducks could pick up a win or two this weekend and regain any confidence that could have been lost after their disparaging defeats last weekend, or they could continue on their downward-slope toward the bottom of the conference.

Oregon is a team that has challenged for a spot in the Women's College World Series for the past two years but has looked a bit shaky of late.

Early season fielding problems seemed to have come back to haunt the team and have been putting extra pressure on the pitchers to get additional hitters out.

Duck ace Amy Harris has been pitching great for the Ducks and still boasts a very respectable 1.40 ERA, but she only has a 12-9 record to show for it. While Harris has been on the mound this season, the Ducks have given up 17 unearned runs in 139 2/3 innings pitched (she has only given up 28 earned runs).

Offensively, the Ducks have shown promise, led by their youngsters. Freshman Lovena Chapat has been the most consistent hitter, batting .339 on the season. Fellow freshman T.J. Eadus has also stepped up and leads the team with a .360 average, though that number has dipped a bit since starting Pac-10 play.

One player for the Ducks that doesn't seem to get a lot of notoriety is sophomore Kristi Leiter. Usually relegated to designated player or pinch hitting duties, Leiter is the second-leading hitter on the team with a .354 average and always seems to get a hit when needed. The only obstacle for her and head coach Kathy Arendsen is finding a place for her to hit.

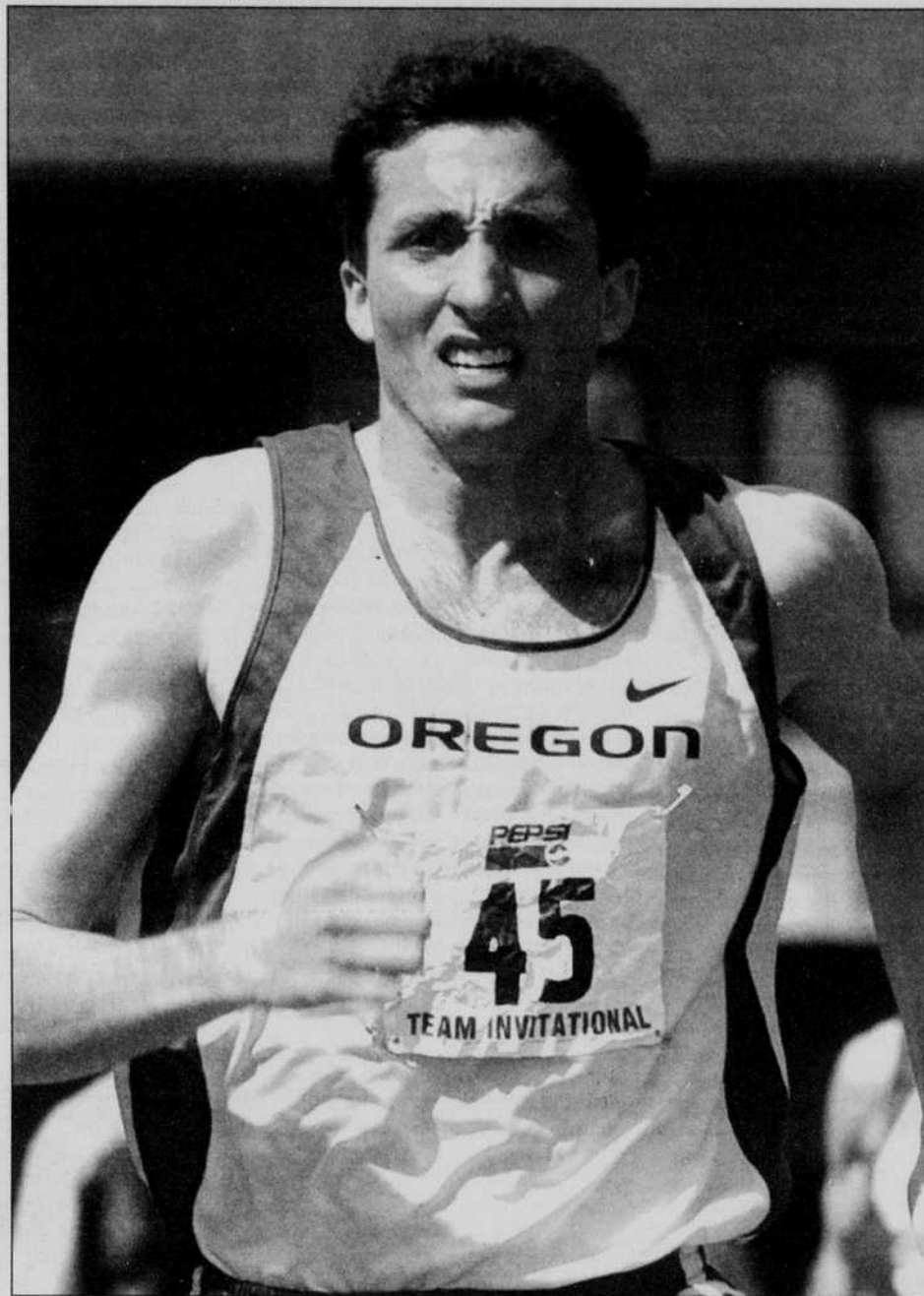
The Ducks are also featuring maybe the best .190 hitter in the conference. Senior second baseman Erin Goodell may be sporting a batting average below the Mendoza line, but she gets hits when they're needed. She actually has more RBIs (17 — third on the team) than hits (16).

So if the Ducks not only want to contend but make it to the world series this season, the defense must get better or they could be destined for the bottom of the conference.

And going against their in-state rivals gives them the perfect chance to turn it around.

claytonjones@dailyemerald.com

■ Men's track and field



LAUREN WIMER | PHOTOGRAPHER

Oregon senior and All-American Eric Logsdon, the Ducks' top returning distance runner, is on the verge of breaking into Oregon's all-time top-10 in the 5,000 meters.

13:43.82

Senior Eric Logsdon is vying for a spot on Oregon's all-time 5,000 meters top-10 list

BY BRIAN SMITH
SPORTS REPORTER

13:43.82.

It's one of the more heralded marks for Oregon harriers.

Breaking it means a place on Oregon's all-time 5,000 meters top-10 list among legends such as Bill McChesney Jr., Alberto Salazar and Steve Prefontaine.

Oregon senior Eric Logsdon not only wants to add his name to that list but get it up as high as he can before the end of the year.

Even after his coach and recruiter resigned in the middle of the season.

Even after a volunteer coach jumped on board a few weeks later.

Logsdon isn't going to let those distractions keep him from running a time of 13 minutes, 43.82 seconds.

Former head track and field coach Martin Smith wouldn't let that happen.

But if you ask Logsdon, personal records are only a good side note to helping the team as a whole. The goal is helping

the team finish as high as it can at nationals. The byproduct, he'll tell you, is that a runner needs to run fast to accomplish that.

Logsdon's desire to focus on the team, rather than himself, came from the recently departed Smith.

"One of the things that was emphasized with Coach Smith was that you can never lose your focus for a second, you can never break down," he said. "No matter what's happened around you, whether it is on the track or just in general in your life, you can never let anything distract you from what your goals are."

"Just because he's not here doesn't mean that we've lost that lesson, and we are no longer able to do that."

After the resignation of Smith, Logsdon and his teammates seriously contemplated quitting the team. A few days later, they came back refocused and ready for the outdoor season with former Oregon runner Pat Tyson volunteering his services to the

distance runners.

Logsdon responded by winning the 3,000 meters in the Pepsi Invitational, the Ducks' second outdoor event of the season.

"Honestly, he is a man about it," Tyson said of Logsdon's focus. "He's not a whiner and he's not going to let this change ruin his closing time at Oregon. We all have challenges and what I think that says about Eric and Brett (Holts) is that they're survivors. They know what's really important is the team and they want the team to do really well. He could have easily taken a negative stance and pouted and got moody and made it hard on me, but I think he realizes that we are going to make this thing work."

The Canby native came to Oregon during the 2000-01 season, two years after Smith had taken over as head coach. Smith brought a desire to turn around a storied program that had fallen under the radar, something Logsdon identified with.

"I'm a native Oregonian and having grown up and

IN BRIEF

Basketball assistant leaves Oregon after 10 seasons

Oregon men's basketball assistant coach Fred Litzenberger announced Thursday he will retire from the University effective Aug. 1.

Litzenberger leaves Oregon after four seasons working beside head coach Ernie Kent. The 58-year-old was also an assistant coach with the Duck women from 1995 to 2001, during which time Oregon led the Pacific-10 Conference in defense three times.

A search for his replacement will begin in the near future.

"Fred has done a tremendous job for us in terms of the experience and tactical expertise he brought to the table," Kent said. "We're going to miss that. On a personal level, I've known Fred since 1987 when we were both assistants under Boyd Grant at Colorado State. That's an 18-year relationship, and I am certainly going to miss having him in the gym with us."

"Litz" has been part of 10 consecutive winning seasons at Oregon, including the men's trip to the Elite Eight in 2002.

Before arriving in Eugene, Litzenberger held several men's head and assistant coaching jobs, including the head coaching position at Western State College of Colorado (1994-95) and the associate men's head coaching spot at Northwestern State (1993-94). His first coaching job came in 1966 at Berthoud High School in Colorado.

Litzenberger said he plans on remaining active in the coaching profession.

"I love coaching basketball," he said. "It's what I've done for 40 years. At the same time, I think it's time for me to look at some other things and find some new challenges."

— Jon Roetman

Women's golf finishes eighth at Pac-10 championship event

The Oregon women's golf team wrapped up the 2005 Pacific-10 Conference Championships on Wednesday, finishing eighth place on the shoulders of senior Johnna Nealy, whose team-leading final score of 227 placed her in a tie for 18th place.

Following the tournament, Nealy was named to the All-Pac-10 second team — the third golfer in school history to be named to the conference's first or second team.

Nealy finished 20 strokes behind first-place finisher Louise Stahle (220) of Arizona State. The freshman from Sweden came into the tournament as the No. 1 golfer in the nation, but had to climb out of a four-stroke deficit in the final round to claim the individual title.

Kim McCready had the best final-round score for Oregon. The sophomore from Placerville, Calif., shot a 74 on Wednesday, good enough to tie for 37th. Teammate Erin Andrews tied for 28th with a 231. Freshman Victoria Wenslow (232) followed for the Ducks by tying for 31st, and Michelle Timpani (246) claimed sole possession of 47th. The eighth-place finish for Oregon came as an upset to No. 18 Stanford (932), who finished ten strokes behind the Ducks in ninth place.

No. 2 UCLA (874), the highest ranked team in the Pac-10, further legitimized itself as one of the premiere teams in the nation by holding off a late run by No. 6 Arizona State and taking home its second straight conference title. The Sun Devils (878) settled for second, followed by No. 20 Southern California, which stunned a number of other top-20 teams in the field that seemed guaranteed a top-three finish going into the tournament.

Oregon has a good chance of earning a spot at the NCAA Regionals, but will have to wait until noon Monday to find out the official postseason bids. The NCAA West Regional is scheduled to start May 5.

— Scott J. Adams