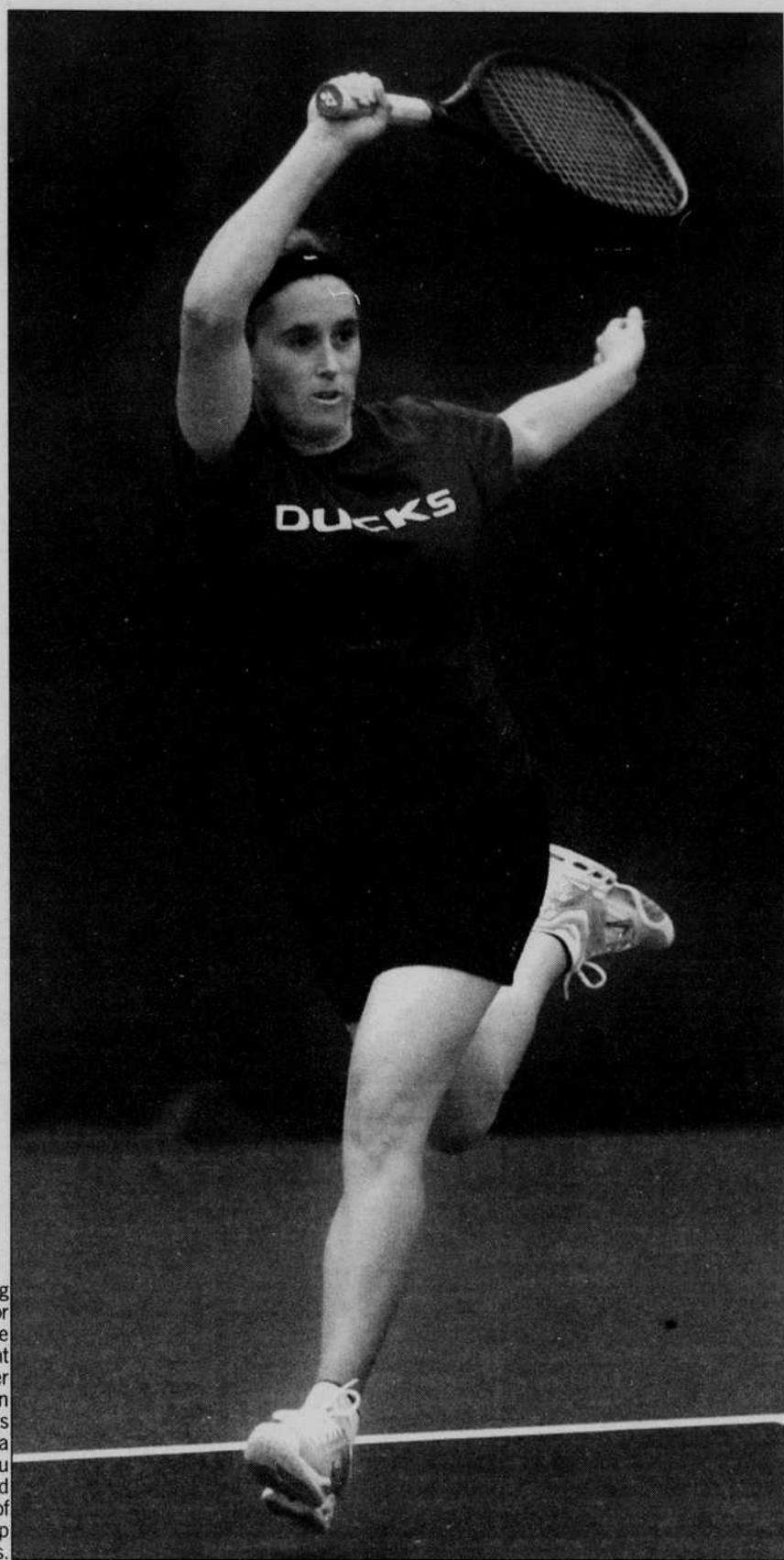


"I don't think we were going to go four-four-four-four (series sweeps), so that wasn't going to work."

Phoenix Suns coach Mike D'Antoni after his team lost to the Dallas Mavericks in Game Two



After suffering a torn anterior cruciate ligament during her junior season two years ago, Davina Mendiburu has returned as one of Oregon's top players.

DANIELLE HICKEY | PHOTO EDITOR

Women's tennis

RETURN to FORM

Davina Mendiburu, who lost her 2002-03 season to a torn ACL, looks to cap her struggle back with an Oregon win at the NCAA's

BY ALEX TAM
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

More than two years ago, Davina Mendiburu was quickly becoming one of the rising stars of Oregon tennis. She was voted the team's most valuable player following her freshman campaign in 2001, when she racked up a 16-7 singles record.

In her sophomore season, Mendiburu had already garnered 31 career singles victories — on pace to be in the top five all-time in career singles victories at Oregon. The Ducks finished that season 14-11, their first winning record in six years.

Everything was going as planned for Mendiburu as she entered her junior season two years ago. The Ducks had a junior core that consisted of Mendiburu, Daria Panova and Courtney Nagle and had hopes of making an NCAA Tournament appearance.

In the first regular season match of the 2003 season, the Ducks traveled to Boulder to play Colorado in what would be a turning point in Mendiburu's career. The match was close throughout as Oregon held a 3-2 advantage, needing just one more match to clinch the victory. Two more matches remained, including Mendiburu's.

The 22-year-old Mendiburu was on the verge of closing out the Ducks' first win on the season when she led 3-1 in the final set. In the next game, Mendiburu led 40-15 and was about to take a commanding 4-1 lead.

"I remember I was coming back big time and you could tell the girl was starting to doubt," Mendiburu said. "I had the edge over her and I felt so good."

Never did she know that her next serve would be the last point of her junior season.

"I thought the girl was going to hit it down the line and she hit cross court and my foot got stuck and my knee shifted," Mendiburu said. "Then I heard a huge pop and next thing I remember I was on the ground screaming and crying."

Oregon head coach Nils Schyllander said he wasn't on the court when it happened, but he recalled hearing a "loud scream."

"We saw her go down and we knew it was really bad right away," he said.

The diagnosis later showed a torn anterior cruciate ligament and an injured meniscus in her right knee, which meant a lost season and

months of rehabilitation ahead.

One of the most promising careers at Oregon was spiraling in the opposite direction.

"At the time it was horrible," Mendiburu said. "I couldn't travel with my team and I was stuck here doing my rehab."

Teammates were also aware that one of their top players was disheartened because she wanted to contribute to the team so badly.

"She was very down," doubles partner Ester Bak said. "Just like a lot of athletes get down when they're injured when they're not able to do something that they love. I know she loves playing tennis."

But Mendiburu refused to believe her tennis career was over. In the eight months following that Colorado match, Mendiburu worked every day on getting the strength back in her knee.

"It never occurred to me that I would never play again," Mendiburu said. "I was doing the rehab and working my butt off because I wanted to be back."

When she finally returned to the tennis courts in September 2003, her coaches and teammates saw a different type of player, one who attacked more than before the injury.

"I think in a way, (the injury) was positive and it really put things into perspective for her and she realized how much she missed playing," Schyllander said. "When she came back, she really played more aggressive."

In her first season back from injury, Mendiburu recorded a then career-high 18 singles victories and anchored the No. 4 position in the lineup.

"It seems after my surgery I found the game I wanted to play and I stuck with it," Mendiburu said. "And since then, I've played pretty much the way I've been wanting to play — being aggressive and consistent."

After Oregon's subpar 10-15 record in 2003, the Ducks bounced back to a 17-9 overall record when Mendiburu returned in 2004. Oregon also appeared in the NCAA Tournament and recorded a program-best No. 23 national ranking.

"It was huge (to have her back), not only from an athletic standpoint, but she was always a leader on the court," Schyllander said. "She's a player that the other players look up to, not only on the court, but off the court as a friend and as a teammate."

MENDIBURU, page 12

Women's track and field

Malone primed for shot at Pac-10 javelin crown

The Oregon women's track team will send 24 athletes in search of its first Pac-10 Championships victory since the 1992 campaign

BY STEPHEN MILLER
SPORTS REPORTER

Inga Stasiulionyte used to dominate the Pacific-10 Conference javelin scene. The former USC star swept the javelin event at the Pac-10 Championships each season of her career, which spanned from 2001-04.

Each season, Oregon's Sarah Malone finished behind the four-time All-American and Pac-10 record holder. The fifth-year senior finally sees a clear path to a javelin title this season now that Stasiulionyte has graduated.

"I've gotten second the last three years I've been at the Pac-10's, so it will finally be a time where I can come out on top hopefully," said Malone, the Pac-10's leading javelin thrower this

season. "The competition is mostly with my teammates, past and present."

Malone will have to compete against teammates Roslyn Lundeen, Elisa Crumley and Rachael Kriz Wallace as well as Washington's Tiffany Zahn, her former Newberg High School teammate.

Malone's main competition will be junior Jenna Dean of Washington State, whose mark is only eight feet shorter than Malone's season-best of 177 feet, 3/4 inches.

Oregon will send 24 female athletes to Los Angeles for the Pac-10s at UCLA's Drake Stadium this weekend.

Multi-event athletes got a head start on

WOMEN, page 12

Men's track and field

Ducks send a veteran field to Pac-10 Championships

Oregon, which has finished in the top two for the past three years, will feature at least one top-10 athlete in 18 of the tourney's 21 events

BY BRIAN SMITH
SPORTS REPORTER

The Oregon men's track and field team continues the championship portion of its 2005 outdoor season as the Ducks compete in the Pacific-10 Conference Championships at Drake Stadium in Los Angeles on Saturday and Sunday.

Having finished in the top two in each of the last three years — first in 2003, second in 2002 and 2004 — Oregon will send a deep and veteran field in an attempt to capture its second conference title in as many years and to avenge last year's 143-130 loss to UCLA.

The Ducks return 85 of their 122 individual points from last year's meet and also feature a top-10 ranked performer in 18 of the 21

conference championship events. Oregon's roster also includes 11 NCAA veterans, eight of whom have combined for 12 All-American awards, two NCAA titles and two NCAA runner-up finishes.

Meanwhile, the defending-champion Bruins graduated four of their individual champions from last year but will present Oregon with a formidable challenge in sophomore Brandon Johnson — returning champion in the 400-meter hurdles — and junior Jon Rankin. Rankin is tops in the Pac-10 in both the 800 (1 minute, 47.11 seconds) and the 1,500 (3:39.49) this season.

The Bruins won't be the only team battling the Ducks for a conference crown.

MEN, page 12