

■ Men's track

Ducks' chances slim for capturing NCAA title

Oregon earned its sixth Pac-10 Conference title since 1979 this year, which jumped the team to a No. 3 rank

BY BRIAN SMITH
SPORTS REPORTER

The Oregon men's track and field team closes out its 2005 track season this week as the Ducks compete in the NCAA Division I Outdoor Championships beginning Wednesday.

Entering last week's West Regional Championships, Oregon had an outside chance of capturing its sixth team title after the team's victory at the conference meet May 15.

Now, after a good, but not great, performance at Regionals and with the absence of defending NCAA champion Tommy Skipper in the pole vault, who no heighted at Regionals and failed to qualify for this year's meet, the Ducks' chances for their first title since 1984 have diminished considerably.

After earning their sixth conference title since 1979 this year, the Ducks vaulted into the top three in national rankings, according to trackwire.com. The Ducks were also projected to finish third in the upcoming national meet. However, the projection was based on the assumption that Skipper would come back and successfully defend his title, despite missing most of the outdoor season due to knee surgery.

As of June 3, the Ducks had fallen to No. 14 in both the national rankings and projected finishing rank.

Even with Skipper out of contention, Oregon has a very real shot at improving on its ninth-place finish last season — best since another ninth-place finish in 2001.

"We're looking to go down there as a team and place in the top five

and bring home a trophy," Oregon junior sprinter Matt Scherer said. "Individually, we are just going to try and place as high as we can in our events."

The Ducks are still sending a deep and talented field to Sacramento, Calif., where 15 individuals will compete in 12 events.

Oregon, along with the rest of the field, will be looking to knock off defending national champion Arkansas, which is a favorite to win its 12th outdoor title under head coach John McDonnell. From 1992 to 1999, Arkansas took home eight consecutive team titles. The Razorbacks have stayed at the top of the rankings for the season after winning the 2005 NCAA Indoor Championship and the Southeastern Conference Championship.

The Razorbacks will have two individual champions returning to defend their titles, headlined by Wallace Spearmon's run at his second straight 200-meter crown. This season, Spearmon has run a personal and world-best time of 19.97 seconds.

The Duck contingent will be led by Eric Mitchum, two-time regional and conference champion in the 110-hurdles.

The junior finished second in last year's NCAAAs with a personal best time of 13.38 seconds. So far this season, the best time in the 110 has been 13.38 seconds, set by Tennessee's Aries Merritt.

Mitchum is currently ranked fourth in the nation with a time of 13.56, which he set at the Mt. SAC Relays.

"It's going to be a fast race," Mitchum said. "So just got to run as fast as I can, and the time will take care of itself."

Mitchum will be running in the 110 with teammate A.K. Ikwuakor, who has lowered his personal best in the 110 to 13.83 this season.

Also in the sprints, Oregon's 400 tandem of Scherer and senior Kedar Inico look to jump into the top eight and secure critical points for the Ducks. Inico has won his past two races, including his unexpected victory at the Pac-10s.

Scherer and Inico will also buoy the 4x100 and 4x400 relay squads. Both squads have had record seasons and should be able to finish in the top five. The only question rests with the left hamstring of Jordan Kent. The sophomore pulled out of the 200 at last week's Regionals to rest and prepare solely for the relays.

Oregon senior Leonidas Watson will lead the Duck field events. The St. Louis native is competing in the long and triple jump for the first time in his career.

Last week at Regionals, Watson recorded a personal best of 26 feet, 3/4 inches in the long jump, a mark that Watson is only content with.

"I got a lot more," Watson said. "I only did that on my third jump, so if I'd taken three more, I don't know what would of happened. So after that, I was just trying to save myself. I'm not peaking now, I'm just getting started."

Oregon pole vaulter Jon Derby will also be making his first appearance at nationals after finishing tied for third at Regionals, clearing 16-7 1/4.

The four-day event will begin at 11 a.m. on Wednesday.

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Oregon junior Jon Derby vaults during last week's NCAA West Regionals in which he tied for third. Derby will now compete in this week's NCAA Outdoor National Championships.

TIM BOBOSKY | PHOTOGRAPHER

■ Women's track

Sarah Malone seeks elusive NCAA championship

In postseason play so far, the senior won a Pac-10 title and rewrote the school's record in the javelin

BY STEPHEN MILLER
SPORTS REPORTER

Sarah Malone wrote a to-do list on a picture of herself that a friend printed for her last year.

The fifth-year Oregon senior won her first javelin title at the Pacific-10 Conference Championships three weeks ago and finally crossed that off the list after having finished as the runner-up in her three previous trips.

Also crossed off the list are: NCAA West Regional champion and Oregon school record-holder in the javelin, for which she adjusted the mark from 179 feet, nine inches to 186-10 on May 28.

Going into the NCAA National Track and Field Championships in Sacramento, Calif., Malone only has two things left to cross off her list, and one of them can be taken care of this week.

"An NCAA championship is still

sitting there, and to become an Olympian," Malone said. "So those are the last two I'm waiting to scratch off, and that's what I'm looking forward to doing."

Malone's mark of 186-10 measured as the second-best throw in the nation by a collegian behind Air Force junior Dana Pounds (188-8). After Malone's Regional-clinching toss, she said her plan was to "just keep this momentum going and take it on to NCAAAs."

Oregon junior Roslyn Lundeen sits at No. 16 on the national list for the javelin. She received an at-large berth with a sixth-place finish at Regionals and the fourth-farthest distance recorded this season by an athlete that did not qualify automatically. Her season best is 155-9, and her personal best is 166-11.

For the other Ducks headed to Nationals this week, the goal is just to

improve their personal records.

Senior Kayla Mellott is ranked 27th overall in the 400 hurdles with a season and personal-best time of 60.13 seconds. The Bellingham, Wash., native is looking to improve on that time and break a coveted barrier.

"My main goal is just to run a PR," Mellott said. "My goal this whole year has been to go sub-60 (seconds), and I have been way too close way too many times. My chances are dwindling, so that's what I'm going to focus on at Nationals."

Mellott altered her stride pattern late in the season, but her times have stayed fairly consistent.

"I've run under 60.50 four or five times this season," she said, "and there's something to be said about being consistent, but I'd also still like to have another big breakthrough."

Two more top-20 throwers and Oregon record holders, senior Bree Fuqua and junior Brittany Hinchcliffe, are slated to compete this week.

Hinchcliffe is No. 17 on the hammer throw list with a best sling of 199-2. Fuqua's mark of 53-11 in the

shot put, which set the program record early this season, ranks 12th in the nation.

"I have some big throws in me that I haven't thrown in a competition yet," Fuqua said. "I've fouled a few in meets that have been pretty good. I just need to do that (this week)."

The Polson, Mont., native also received an at-large bid in the discus (165-4).

"The discus was really a shot in the dark that I made it," Fuqua said. "It'd be nice to end my career on a high note and do well personally."

Senior sprinter Sofie Abildtrup will represent the other half of Oregon's running corps. She finished fourth at Regionals (53.63) and is ranked 27th nationally (53.48). Her personal-best time is 52.92. UCLA's Monique Henderson holds the fastest collegiate time in the country at 50.78.


Junior Lauryn Jordan will compete in the heptathlon for the Ducks. She posted a score of 5,299 points at the Pac-10 Multi-Event Championships.

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TIM BOBOSKY | PHOTOGRAPHER

Oregon senior Sarah Malone can cross another goal off her to-do list if she earns a victory at the NCAA National Championships this week. She ranks second overall (186-10).



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