

■ Duck soccer

Oregon faces Wildcats, Sun Devils

The defense-minded Ducks get off to the best start in school history to Arizona this weekend

BY SCOTT J. ADAMS
SPORTS REPORTER

If you made it out to Papé Field recently to watch the Oregon women's soccer team practice, you would not be able to tell it has the two biggest games of the season thus far next on its schedule.

All week, head coach Tara Erickson has maintained a focused but loose tempo for her team, which opens Pacific-10 Conference play on the road in Arizona against the No. 23 Wildcats today. Oregon plays at Arizona State Sunday.

"Practice has been a little light-hearted but in a good way," Erickson said. "We're not trying to overemphasize how we play, thinking, 'Oh my gosh, this is the Pac-10 opener, we need to do everything perfectly because now things count.' There is only so much you can do in two practices and we're trying to do things right and have some quality minutes this weekend," she added.

Oregon is off to the best start in program history, but there is room for skepticism surrounding the success. Their opponents have notched victories over teams with wins and/or ties against top 25 teams, but they have yet to do the same. This weekend is the biggest opportunity for the Ducks to legitimize the progress made since last year's three-win season. Also, they can take position in the conference standings. Erickson likes her team's chances against the Arizona schools and understands the magnitude of this weekend.

"I'd like for us to go in and win, that's what we'd like to do obviously. I think we can beat, and much less play even, with both teams," Erickson said. "This will be the indication of how well we can compete with other Pac-10 teams, and it's a good opener for us to have, even though it is on the road — it'll be a good measuring stick for us."

Unlike the Ducks, the defending Pac-10 champion Arizona Wildcats (5-3-2) limped through their non-conference schedule that featured four top 25 teams. All of which accounted for either a tie or a loss — the last having come one week ago at the hands of No. 18 Brigham Young. Despite Arizona's rough start, they are still one of the best teams in the conference under last year's Pac-10 Coach of the Year Dan Tobias.

Leading the Wildcats in the field is senior forward



NICOLE BARKER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Andrea Valadez battles for a loose ball in Oregon's 2-0 win over South Dakota State. Valadez has played a significant part in helping the Ducks to their best start in program history.

ward Mallory Miller, who already has a team-high 10 goals this season. Miller has played her best in home games at Arizona's Murphey Stadium, where she has posted eight of the Wildcats' nine goals. She has helped the team draw tremendous support from their fans (Arizona boasts an average of 747 fans per game).

Like their rivals from Tucson, Ariz., the Sun Devils (5-4-2) have been up and down in non-conference play, with much of their success coming at home. Senior forward Elizabeth Bogus is two assists away from ranking second in all offensive categories. Starting alongside Bogus in Arizona State's 11 games has been a trio of fresh-

man defenders. Fifth-year head coach Ray Leone of the Sun Devils has followed suit with Erickson, opting to call upon his younger players to make contributions this season. Leone's freshmen Kylla Sjomann, Emily Coehlo and Brooke Simons earned starting spots in the off-season. As of late, fellow rookies Alex Dunsdon and Christine Nieva have done the same.

Oregon is riding a seven-game unbeaten streak thanks to contributions made from the entire roster. They have marked a page in Oregon's record book for the best non-conference record in school

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■ Duck tennis

Departure of seniors leaves large shoes to fill

Oregon is optimistic this year, despite losing top players Sven Swinnen and Manuel Kost

BY STEFANIE LOH
FREELANCE REPORTER

He's still here, but not really. Sven Swinnen spends his afternoons practicing with the men's tennis team as he works toward finishing his degree, but he effectively ended his career as a Duck last season.

Now Oregon's most prolific tennis player is biding his time until graduation, after which he will attempt to make a name for himself on the professional tennis circuit.

Swinnen was to the men's tennis team what current Detroit Lions quarterback Joey Harrington was to Oregon football back in 2001, when Harrington led the Ducks.

In his four years as a Duck, Swinnen completely rewrote the Oregon men's tennis record books. Among other things, the Wurenlingen, Switzerland native brought the program its first ITA tournament title (2004 West Regional) and its highest individual player ranking ever when he entered the 2004 season ranked No. 9 nationally.

This year, the Ducks have lost Swinnen and fellow highly-rated Swiss Manuel Kost. Second-year head coach Kevin Kowalik is determined not to allow the loss of the team's two best players to stand in the way of Oregon's success this year.

Kowalik's personal vision this season is for the Ducks to take their overall win-loss percentage up to at least a .500. "We've been tied for seventh in the Pac-10 over the last couple of years. This year I'm shooting for fifth or sixth," Kowalik said. "That would hopefully put us within the top 30 in the country."

"It's virtually impossible to fill Sven's shoes with any one player," added Kowalik, who cites a conscientious work ethic as an important building block to set in place this year. "The goal this season is to help everybody improve about 20, 25 percent, so that hopefully will help make up for losing such a big contributor. We're going to be a blue-collar team; we're going to go out there and outwork everybody else and be in better shape than everybody else. We have to develop, we've got to get better," he said.

With five upperclassmen on the roster this year, the infrastructure of the team is still intact, so filling the gap left by Swinnen and Kost might not be as daunting as it appears.

"I think we had good leaders last year," Oregon junior Vladimir Pino said. "It wasn't necessarily just Sven who kept things going. We had three juniors who were very involved in leadership, and they're all still here as seniors this year. As for the playing side of things, I think Thomas [Bieri] or Markus [Schiller] will have to step up into the number one and number two spots."

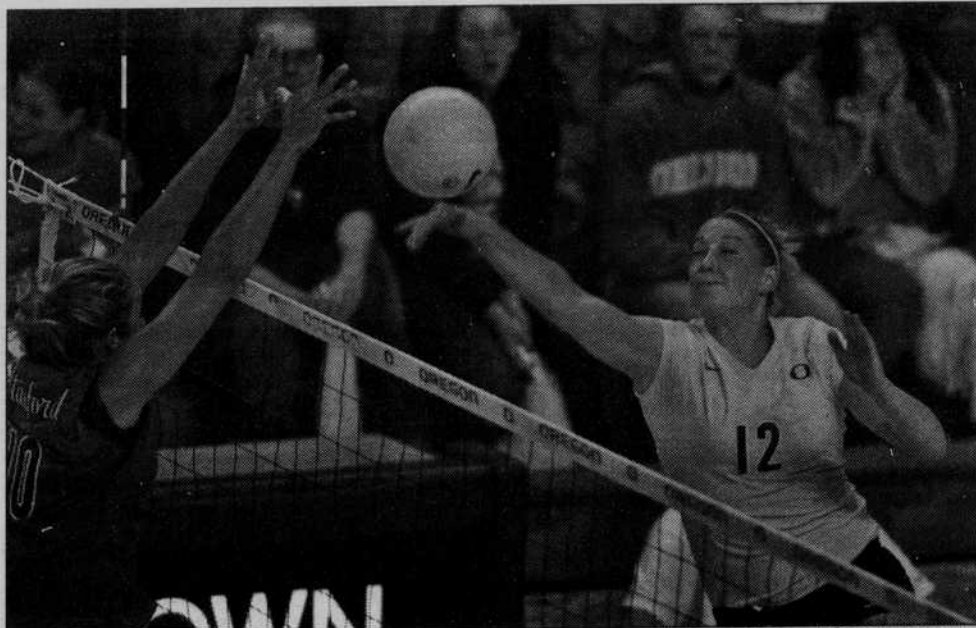
The team's three seniors are Bieri, Schiller and Arron Spencer. Schiller played at the No. 2 and No. 3 positions for most of last season, earning a 12-9 overall singles record, while Spencer rebounded from an injury two seasons ago to put up a 9-11 record playing in the No. 3 and No. 4 roster spots.

Bieri looks set to finally shed Swinnen's shadow and have his own breakout season. The Switzerland native spent the summer training independently in Switzerland and France and feels as though he's just now

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■ Duck volleyball

Volleyball looks for its first Pac-10 wins



NICOLE BARKER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Junior middle blocker Kristen Bitter taps the ball over the net against Stanford last week. Oregon plays at UCLA today at 7 p.m.

The Ducks look to improve their currently dismal record in next games against UCLA and USC

BY JEFFREY DRANSFELDT
SPORTS REPORTER

The Oregon volleyball team visits the City of Angels this weekend focused on improvement as they face No. 21 UCLA and No. 17 USC.

Oregon plays UCLA Friday at 7 p.m. and USC 5 p.m. on Sunday. Saturday's original 6 p.m. start time was moved to 5 p.m. due to the 12:30 p.m. start of the USC-Arizona football game.

Oregon head coach Jim Moore's main message is that Oregon's performance will determine the outcome of the games. What Oregon does, more so than the actions of USC or UCLA, will determine whether they will earn their first and possibly second Pacific-10 Conference win this season, he said.

"If we take care of our side and we do the things we're capable of doing, then we'll be fine," Moore added.

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