

Volleyball: Blocker intimidates opponents with presence and statistics

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Heather Madison and Sarah Mason, who transferred to Hawaii.

"I loved everything about it from volleyball to school — the town," Bitter said of the University.

Starting with her freshman season in the fall of 2003, Bitter had expectations that have remained high to this day. Even if Oregon doesn't have the conference success she desires, knowing she's a part of the

turnaround is a good feeling.

"This is a new era of Oregon volleyball," Bitter said. "This is not the same Oregon team that has been here the last two years when I was here."

Bitter projects an intimidating presence, posting a Pac-10-leading 110 blocks in 2003 and leading Oregon with 11 solo blocks, 62 block assists and 73 total blocks in 2004. This season, Bitter has 13 solo

blocks, 39 block assists and 52 total blocks through 17 matches this season.

She had nine kills and a .316 hitting percentage last weekend against No. 17 USC.

"She needs to keep the ball well above the top of the net and she did that against a team that's very big and a big block on that side of the net," Moore said.

The only thing holding her back,

Moore said, is her lack of experience. Club volleyball is routine for college players now, something Hooper and Bartholomew did, but the multi-sport Bitter didn't. Bartholomew said club provides top-notch competition and opportunities for exposure to colleges.

The more she plays, the better she'll be, Moore said.

"Physically, she's incredibly gifted," Moore added.

All having reached the pinnacle of college volleyball, this weekend reunites the trio — each separated by a grade, but tied together by high school volleyball in a football town.

"It makes me really proud to be from Roseburg," Bitter said.

"I'm excited to see (Bitter) play and play against her," Bartholomew said.

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Soccer: Ducks prepare for games against UCLA and the USC Trojans

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offense, Erickson will have her team move as many as five defenders into the backline to strengthen the defense, an adjustment that ultimately weakens the offense. It is not the first time Erickson has made this adjustment. While coaching for Portland State last year, she led her Vikings to a win over Cal State Fullerton using the same alignment.

The key to an upset win or tie for the Ducks (8-3-1) lies in the offensive production of their leading goal-scorer Nicole Garbin. With eight career game-winning goals to

her credit, the senior forward from Wailuku, Hawaii, is the difference-maker for Oregon. In last Sunday's 3-0 loss to Arizona State, Garbin was held to just two shots and failed to score against Arizona, which topped the Ducks 4-2 on Friday. As long as Garbin is on the field, Erickson feels her offense is a threat to any team, including UCLA.

"Nicole Garbin is always at least a scoring threat," Erickson said. "She can single-handedly turn a game around for us, and every team we face knows it."

To make their game against UCLA

even tougher, Erickson's squad may have to play without seniors Andrea Valadez and Cristan Higa. Both starting mid-fielders were injured last Friday against Arizona. They were sidelined for most of practice this week to recover, but even with the time off, Erickson insists they are still a game-time decision. Should they not play, Erickson could duplicate her starting roster used against the Sun Devils, calling on freshman Taylor Callan to fill in for Higa and junior Sabrina DeMonte to replace Valadez. Erickson was pleased with the way Callan

and her other starting freshmen played last weekend.

"They played well, but they're still learning," Erickson said. "You want to see your freshmen do well and have success, but you can't expect them to be game-changing players."

On Sunday, the Ducks face another talented Pacific-10 Conference opponent in USC (7-4-1) who, like their rivals from Westwood, Calif., feature premiere players. Erickson stated earlier this week that a win over the Women of Troy hinges greatly on the play of

Oregon's offense.

"They are a young but talented team," Erickson said. "Some of their players have international experience, and they are definitely a team riding on individual talent. In order to beat them, you have score goals because they are definitely going to."

Kickoff for the UCLA game is scheduled for 5 p.m. tonight at Papé Field and noon on Sunday against the Trojans.

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