

"I think we can compete with anyone in the nation at home. We're a little shaky on the road sometimes, but Portland State coming in here, Oregon State — any of them — we will win."

Oregon volleyball player Kelly Russell on this week's matches.

■ In my opinion



LUKE ANDREWS
EXCESSIVE CELEBRATION

Emotional win proves Ducks have character

I thought I had seen it all at Autzen Stadium. That was until Saturday, when I witnessed a 67-year-old man gleefully storm the field after the final pass of the game had sailed over the head of its intended target and the Ducks had sealed a 27-20 overtime win against California.

With his arms raised, this man began to leap uncontrollably. Grinning ear to ear as he ran into the arms of a 6-foot-3, 290-pound lineman who hoisted him in the air — it appeared he'd just won the lottery.

Of course, this man, Phil Knight — the 46th richest man in the world — isn't really in need of money these days. What he and other Duck fans desperately wanted Saturday afternoon was a victory against No. 23 California.

It was a game that marked the fork in the road for the Ducks as many questions were to be answered in the 60-plus minutes of football played on a windy and soggy day in Eugene.

How would the two new quarterbacks grasp the system in their first big game? How would the offense react to new quarterbacks? Can the defense continue to make big plays to help an offense that sometimes gets sidetracked?

The emotions of Knight following the game told the entire story.

It wasn't pretty. In fact, at times it was downright ugly. But the Ducks never folded, and the desire, determination and overall character of this football team became quite evident.

Not too many teams can lose a three-year starter at quarterback and still knock off a ranked opponent as the Ducks did Saturday.

The national media and countless others across the country doubted Oregon's chances, and there were a handful of opportunities for the Ducks to pack it in against the Bears.

With just over a minute to go, Cal had a first and 10 at Oregon's 33-yard line with the game tied at 20. But on their next two plays, the Bears lost 11 yards and were out of field-goal range.

Beyond the obvious talent level and caliber of players Oregon has, this team also possesses the most important ingredient of all: heart.

As senior running back Terrence Whitehead put it: "We kept fighting."

Is this a team of destiny?

It may appear that way. If you take a trip back in time, to the year 2001, you will recall that Joey Harrington and company routinely came out on top with improbable victories. It seemed as if luck was always with the green and yellow.

I can sense the reemerging theme.

Dixon, Leaf and Oregon's offense may not have the fire power that the 2001 team did, but they certainly possess the confidence to consistently win the close games.

Oregon's remaining schedule pits it against two teams, Washington State and Oregon State, with a combined conference record of 3-9.

They are two games the Ducks should win.

I just hope, for the sake of Phil Knight's health, Oregon doesn't need overtime to get the job done.

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■ Duck soccer

Season ends with loss to Stanford

The Ducks said goodbye to seven players, but will return a strong, young nucleus for next season

BY SCOTT J. ADAMS
SPORTS REPORTER

The 2005 soccer season came to a close Sunday for the Oregon women who fell 2-0 to Stanford in front of an audience of 387 at Papé Field. The loss may have spoiled the Ducks chance of becoming the first team in school history to end with a winning record, but they did manage the program's second .500 season (9-9-1 overall, 1-8-0 conference).

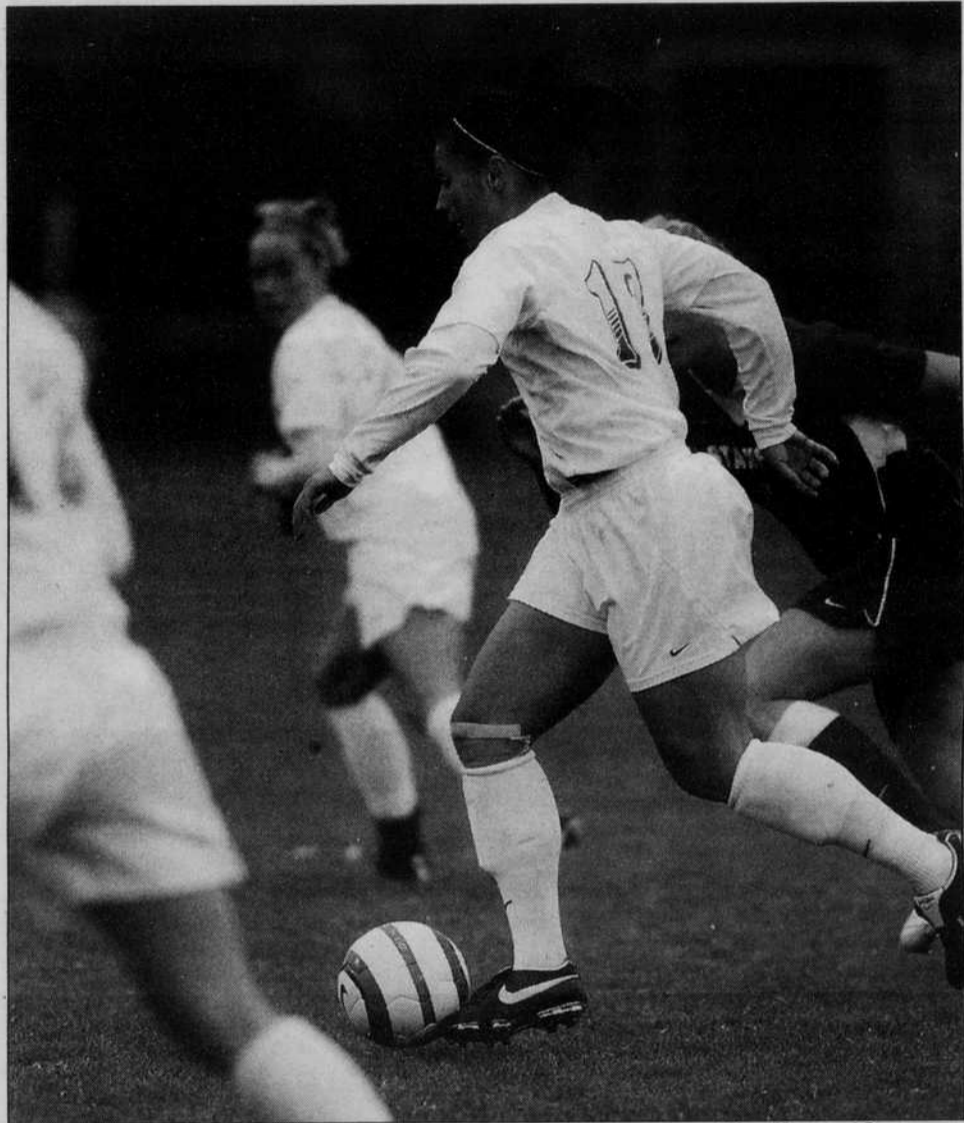
The scene on Oregon's sideline following the game was typical of any season-ending game. The players who usually speak in post-game interviews with restrained words and stone faces struggled to hold back tears. It was as big of an outpouring of emotion as one could ever see out first-year head coach Tara Erickson's squad, which bid farewell to seven players.

"We played hard and finished on a positive note for the seniors and had a .500 record," Erickson said. "Not knowing what to expect going into this season with a new coaching staff and a lot of new players, we have to look at this as a positive."

The Cardinal broke the stalemate in the 30th minute when freshman midfielder Kelley Birch came off the bench to score her second goal in as many games, marking the eventual game-winner. Senior forward Martha West was credited with the assist, but also added a goal of her own in the second half. West fired an unassisted shot from 15 yards out past Oregon goalkeeper Jessie Chatfield in the 70th minute. It was one of Stanford's 16 shots taken in the game, which was 10 more than the Ducks could muster. Senior midfielder Andrea Valadez of Oregon thought she and her teammates played hard despite the loss.

"I think we left it all out on the field," Valadez said. "We battled as hard as we could, but didn't get the result we wanted."

Despite only six shots to its credit, the Oregon offense was not without its fair share of scoring opportunities. Senior forward Nicole Garbin created two scoring chances on her own resulting in two shots lacing wide past Cardinal net-min-



KATE HORTON | PHOTOGRAPHER

Nicole Garbin (17) works her way down the field Sunday against Stanford. Garbin finished the season as the Ducks' leading scorer with 10 goals.

der Erica Holland. Early in the first half, Garbin fed fellow senior Caitlin Gamble with a cross for a one-touch shot. The ball almost traded paint with the near goalpost before heading out of bounds. Then in the 63rd minute, Garbin sent a cross to Tiffany Smith whose ensuing header went wide of the goal. The near misses were a relief for Holland who ended with two saves to

preserve Stanford's 10th win of the season. At 10-6-3 (4-3-2 conference), the Cardinal finished fourth in the Pacific-10 Conference.

Although being a senior, Garbin was not honored before the game with her fellow classmates. Garbin will petition the NCAA in

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■ Duck volleyball

Ducks nearly upset the Bruins before succumbing in five

Game one ends when a UCLA hit bounces off Erin Little's head to score the winning point

BY JEFFREY DRANSFELDT
SPORTS REPORTER

Three points separated the Oregon volleyball team from an elusive win, its first victory against a top-25 team in almost 10 years.

One night after scaring No. 16 USC, Oregon (11-13 overall, 1-12 Pacific-10 Conference) fell short in five games to No. 21 UCLA (13-8, 6-6) Friday night in front of 859 fans at McArthur Court. Today Oregon hosts Portland State at 7 p.m. In-state rival Oregon State visits Thursday.

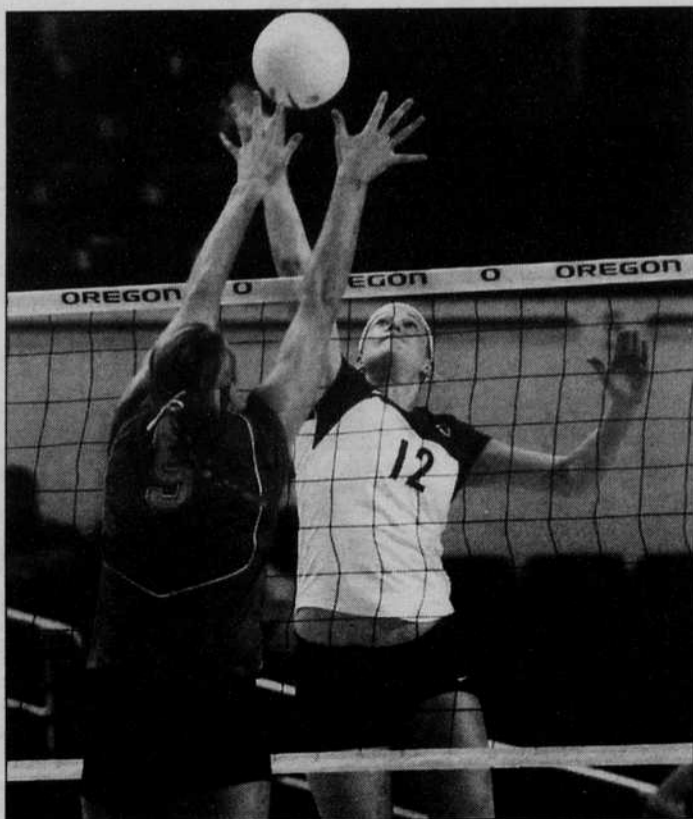
Against UCLA, Oregon started strong, taking the initiative instead

of starting from behind. Playing with a slightly injured ankle, Mira Djuric powered nine kills and an ace past UCLA's block in game one. Oregon trailed, but remained within three, 26-23, and tied the game at 26. Four times Oregon had chances to finish and finally did at 35-33 when a UCLA hit collided with Erin Little's head, bounced back across the net and fell in.

"I have never seen anything like that in my entire life — that was the greatest way to win a game," setter Heather Madison said.

Winning teams have breaks go

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ZANE RITT | PHOTOGRAPHER

Kristen Bitter (12) goes against UCLA blocker Katie Carter for one of her six kills on Friday. Bitter, Oregon's 6-foot-4 middle blocker, had six solo blocks and three assisted blocks against USC.