

■ In my opinion



JEFFREY DRANSFELDT
THREE TO WIN

Ducks still talented, still seeking an identity

Fans confidently walked out of McArthur Court after the Oregon women's basketball team won its season opener 80-30 against an overwhelmed St. Francis (Pa.) team Friday.

Talk of midseason form and NCAA postseason berths floated around.

Oregon received a heavy dose of reality the following night with a 51-46 loss to No. 21 Temple.

What does this make Oregon — elite or a middle-of-the-pack team? Oregon showed flashes against a Temple team that returned three starters from a 28-4 team in 2004-05.

Center Gabrielle Richards confirmed her status as Oregon's inside presence with consecutive nights setting her career high in points twice with 19 against St. Francis and 20 against Temple.

I predicted big things two weeks ago and still do, but after Saturday I have several questions.

Oregon is a collection of talent without a defined go-to scorer, which Richards may well become. Saturday Temple negated her presence the final two minutes and forced Oregon to find scoring elsewhere. After Richards, a second scorer never materialized when Temple closed on an 8-0 run.

Great teams have players to turn to for big shots in pressure situations. Chelsea Wagner and Brandi Davis highlight the possibilities for the Ducks. Will Oregon develop a regular last-second option or rely on a scorer-by-committee approach? Wagner took Oregon's last shot against Temple off a pick and role with point guard Kaela Chapdelaine.

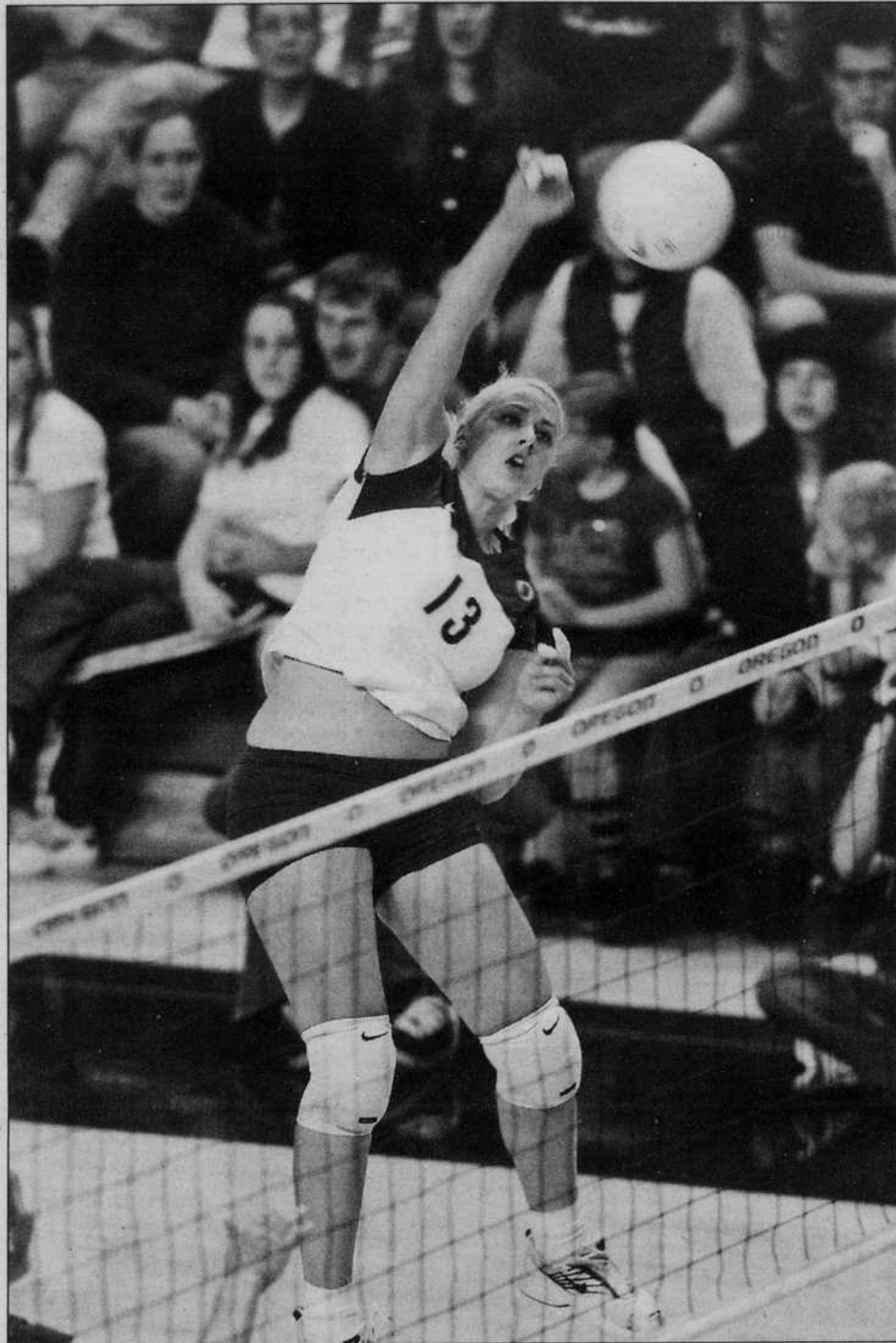
Along that line, when Richards has an off-night, who picks up the slack? Oregon's 6-foot-6 center Jessie Shettlers can rebound and play defense, but can she finish consistently on offense? Eleanor Haring can create her own shot, but will she do it late in games?

Carolyn Ganes returned this season after redshirting in 2004-05 and has posted positive results with 15 and 18 points in two exhibition games and 15 points in the season opener with the smoothest stroke you'll ever see. Defensive match-ups kept her off the court against the quick posts of Temple. The result: In a physical game, Oregon lost a valuable scoring option with scoring at a premium.

These questions and others need to be answered if Oregon plans to exceed the media prediction of fifth place in the Pacific-10 Conference and surpass last season's second appearance in the NCAA Tournament.

Oregon must start gelling now with three winnable home games left (Nevada, Arkansas, Drake University) before spending all of December on the road with difficult road

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Mira Djuric slams the ball in Oregon's five-game loss to Oregon State last week. Djuric is tied for sixth in the Pacific-10 Conference in kills with 4.29 per game.

NICOLE BARKER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

■ Duck volleyball

Djuric still adjusting to playing in the U.S.

The Serbian nearly ended up in New Orleans before deciding to test herself against the Pac-10

BY JEFFREY DRANSFELDT
SPORTS REPORTER

Mira Djuric, the powerful hitter in Oregon's volleyball lineup, almost never arrived in Eugene.

The exuberant hitter with a strong serve chose the University of New Orleans before help from a familiar face and the lure of Pacific-10 Conference competition drew her here.

Oregon landing Djuric, who leads the Pac-10 in service aces, is an important step in becoming a competitive program, coach Jim Moore said.

Moore completed a busy travel schedule this offseason with trips to Las Vegas, Omaha, Neb., and Australia. Moore expanded his recruiting to include Belgrade in Serbia and plans to visit more countries. His trip to Belgrade helped secure assistant coach Marko Majstorovic.

Prior to joining Oregon, Moore worked in the same conference as assistant coach and recruiter Nikola Petrovic. Petrovic took a job at the University of Alabama-Birmingham instead of Oregon, but told Moore about Majstorovic.

Moore e-mailed Majstorovic on a Monday. By Wednesday Majstorovic had paperwork and information necessary to come to the United States, he said. Majstorovic knew Djuric from her play with the Serbian Junior National Team. When she picked New Orleans, he said he helped persuade her to

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■ Club men's soccer

Ducks seek to score tournament victory

The team believes they have enough talent to return from Alabama this weekend with the Open Division championship trophy

BY JACOB MAY
FREELANCE REPORTER

The men's club soccer team recently completed its regular season and is now focused on competing in the national tournament this weekend in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

The team is carrying plenty of momentum into the tournament. It has a perfect record of 4-0 and has beaten its opponents with a combined score of 21-3, including a 5-0 shutout of rival Oregon State.

Leading scorers on the team include forwards Jason Modahl and Chris Platt who have each scored five goals during the season.

So far the season has exceeded team coordinator Patrick Drake's expectations because the team has been able to obliterate its opponents. He believes the team has been able to control ball possession for nearly 75 percent of each game.

"We expected to dominate, and we have

been," Drake said.

Although their success has proved they will be a worthy opponent in the tournament, the team still needs a little fine-tuning because their previous opponents did not challenge the team's minor blemishes.

"The last thing we need to work on is set plays. That is our biggest weakness right now — free kicks," said Drake.

Drake attributes the team's success to a variety of different aspects: solid defense, solid attacking, finishing and all-around strong play.

Drake believes the team will come out of its group first in a crowd that includes Georgia Tech, Wisconsin and Southeastern Louisiana. Drake considers the competition in this group light and he expects to face the team's toughest opponents in the semifinals.

The men's team will be playing in the Open Division because there is no regional qualifying tournament in the northwest area.

The academic calendar forces the men's team to start competition too late into the season because most schools start at the end of August.

The team will not be competing for the national title, but will still face stiff competition. Cal-Berkeley, for instance, was in the semifinal of the Championship Division, but this year will play in the Open Division after not qualifying for the main tournament.

Next year Drake hopes the team can start practicing earlier in order to go to the regional qualifying tournament, which will take place in California.

"There's really no way for any Northwest team to qualify because all the qualifying regions are in Arizona, Utah and California," Drake said.

The best the club can hope for is to win the Open Division, which consists of 16 teams separate from the championship bracket. Team members are confident they can come out as Open Division champions.

"We expect better competition, but we have enough talent to go far," Modahl said.

After the tournament the club team will begin its indoor soccer season at the beginning of winter term.