

College Baseball

Oregon State favorites in Pac-12, Ducks picked fourth

By TIM BOOTH
AP Sports Writer

A decade after Oregon State stunned college baseball by proving a team from the rainy Pacific Northwest can win a national championship, the Beavers are back in the discussion as one of the best teams in the country. And, nearly unanimously, the Beavers are considered the top team in the Pac-12 headed into the 2016 season. Oregon State is the overwhelming preseason favorite in the Pac-12, which features top-end depth to rival any other conference in the country. Oregon State, UCLA, California, USC and Oregon have all been ranked in the Top 25 of various national publications before the season gets started. The Beavers’ title in 2006 made Oregon State the first northern college baseball team since Ohio

State in 1966 to win the championship. And it started a run of four national titles by Pac-12 teams in the past 10 seasons, including the Beavers’ second title in 2007, along with championships by Arizona (2012) and UCLA (2013). But it’s the Beavers and their pair of standout sophomores that everyone will be chasing. Oregon State is led by first baseman K.J. Harrison and starting pitcher Drew Rasmussen, the only two freshmen chosen for the all-Pac-12 team last season. Harrison was the conference freshman of the year, while Rasmussen went 7-4 with a 2.80 ERA in 19 appearances. Expected to be nipping at Oregon State is UCLA, which has reloaded with one of the top freshman classes in the country after seeing eight players selected in last year’s amateur baseball draft, followed by California, Oregon and USC. The question will be can

Preseason Coaches Poll

- 1) Oregon State (9)
2) UCLA (1)
3) California (1)
4) Oregon
5) USC
6) Arizona State
7) Stanford
8) Washington
9) Arizona
10) Washington State
11) Utah
- *First place votes in parenthesis

anyone picked in the bottom half of the conference preseason poll jump up and challenge the expected top five? **BEAVER BELIEVERS:** Thanks to the return of Harrison and Rasmussen, the Beavers were the clear favorites as the preseason conference champs. But what makes Oregon State’s

expectation level even more impressive is the amount of youth on the roster. The Beavers have only one senior and are led by a bounty of underclassmen. Of the 35 players on its roster, Oregon State has 24 freshmen or sophomores — meaning the Beavers could be national contenders for more than just this season. **CALIFORNIA DREAMIN’:** Since the Pac-12 ended its North/South split in 1999, California has not finished higher than fourth in the standings. This could be the year the Golden Bears crack the top three. California was picked to finish third in the conference preseason poll, barely behind UCLA and well ahead of fourth-place Oregon. It is ranked in the top 15 of most national polls and is filled with depth, returning the entire starting rotation and seven of nine positional starters from last year’s team that went 36-21 and

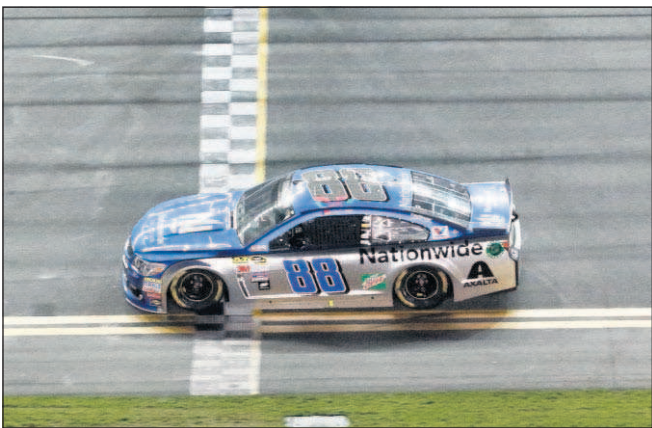
reached the NCAA tournament. **TOP TALENT:** The Pac-12 had six players selected to the preseason Golden Spikes Award watch list, the third most of any conference in the country. The list included Harrison, Stanford pitcher Cal Quantrill, Arizona infielder Bobby Dalbec, California pitcher Daulton Jefferies, Oregon pitcher Matt Krook, and Arizona State infielder Colby Woodmansee. **NEW LEADERS:** Jay Johnson has taken over for retired Andy Lopez at Arizona, while Marty Lees has taken over at Washington State after Donnie Marbut was let go. Johnson spent the past two seasons at Nevada, leading the Wolf Pack to their first Mountain West title and a 41-15 record last season. Lees was an assistant at Oregon State when the Beavers won their two national titles before moving on to be an assistant at Oklahoma State for the past three seasons.

Motorsports

Earnhardt Jr., Busch win Daytona duals

By JENNA FRYER
AP Auto Racing Writer

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Driving a car he believes is unbeatable, Dale Earnhardt Jr. added to his family legacy at Daytona International Speedway on the anniversary of his father’s death. Earnhardt won the first qualifying race Thursday night for the Daytona 500 to earn a starting spot on the second row for NASCAR’s biggest event. It was Earnhardt’s 17th career win at Daytona International Speedway. The late Dale Earnhardt leads all drivers with 34 career victories at Daytona. He was killed on the final lap of the 2001 Daytona 500. “It’s another win at Daytona for the Earnhardts, adding to the legacy,” Earnhardt said in victory lane. “We’re up here in the 50s now.” The No. 88 Chevrolet that Hendrick Motorsports brought to Daytona won three



Dale Earnhardt Jr. crosses the finish line to win the first of two qualifying races for Sunday’s NASCAR Daytona 500 on Thursday in Daytona Beach, Fla.

times last year, and Earnhardt admitted after the qualifying race that he allowed himself to daydream about winning as a tribute to his father. “I try not to make too big a deal — I told all you guys how much I like people to remember dad and talk about dad,” he said. “I’m guilty of daydreaming a little bit, about winning this race tonight because of the day.

That’s very special to me. I was glad that nothing bad happened and we didn’t tear our car up because that would have been embarrassing on a day like this.” Kyle Busch, the reigning Sprint Cup champion, won the second qualifying race, but several contenders wrecked their prized cars in a last-lap accident. Busch was trying to hold

off Jamie McMurray on the final lap and briefly blocked him. McMurray moved up the track for another try, but Jimmie Johnson was in the same space and Johnson bounced off the wall to trigger a multi-car accident. Only two spots were up for grabs in the 500. Michael McDowell earned the spot in the first race, while Robert Richardson Jr. earned the final transfer spot. Richardson only got the call two weeks ago from BK Racing. “I was at home working on my ranch,” said Richardson, who added every dollar he earns this weekend will go into a college fund for his newborn son. Richardson manages hay production as his full-time job at a ranch in Pilot Point, Texas. “The stress that I’ve been putting just on myself in general to make this race, I’ve been pacing the floor ever since I woke up this morning eager to get this race underway, eager to see how the outcome would happen.”

DISTRICT HOOPS:

Continued from 1B

Girls Basketball

ECHO 65, JOSEPH 56 — At Baker City, Kelsey Ranger scored 32 points and the Echo Cougars pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat the Joseph Eagles on Thursday in the first round of the Old Oregon League district tournament. The score was tied 44-44 after three quarters, but Echo’s strong defense held the Eagles in check down the stretch while the Cougars hit just enough free throws to seal the win. The Cougars finished with 17 steals in the game and 24 points off turnovers. Echo was 10-36 on free throws and 7-17 in the fourth quarter. Echo moves on to play Nixyaawii in the semifinals today at 6:30 p.m.

EHS (13-12) 7 21 16 21 — 65
JHS (10-12) 15 12 17 12 — 56
ECHO — K. Ranger 32, D. Tarvin 11, H. McCarty 10, T. Swaggart 10, E. Parks 2, L. Cox (24-59)
JOSEPH — S. Albee 22, A. Sykora 19, L. Makin 6, E. Hite 4, N. Williams 3, C. Wellens 2, T. Suto. (24-69)
3-pointers — EHS 7-14, JHS 1-4. Free throws — EHS 10-36, JHS 7-11. Fouls — EHS 14, JHS 26. Fouled out — E. Hite, L.

HELIX 47, PINE EAGLE 19 — At Baker City, the Grizzlies shook off their district tournament jitters to pull away from the Spartans on Thursday in the first round. “The kids were real nervous,” said Helix coach Kirk Flerchinger. “A lot of them, it was the first time they’d been here and they had a hard time getting it going.” Helix (16-8) led 19-10 at halftime, but went on a 13-2 run in the third quarter to put the game out of reach. Paden Flerchinger led all scorers with 17 points and added six rebounds for Helix. Macey Tullis chipped in 13 points. Helix moves on to face Powder Valley today at 1 p.m. in the semifinals.

PE (3-19) 8 2 2 7 — 19
GHS (16-8) 11 8 13 15 — 47
PINE EAGLE — L. Walker 10, H. Tanaka 7, B. Bell 2, Ka. Jensen, K. Whybark, K. Melchior, A. Vannice, Ky. Jensen, A. Graven, L. Blanchard.
HELIX — P. Flerchinger 17, M. Tullis 13, S. Wilson 5, A. Wood 3, C. Bennett 2, H. Christman 2, E. Fehrenbacher 2, M. Espy 2, A. Krol, M. Mize, K. Mize.
3-pointers — PE 1, GHS 4. Free throws — PE 0-0, GHS 5-8. Fouls — PE 10, GHS 3.

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