

# OSU women emerging despite coronavirus setbacks

By ANNE M. PETERSON  
Associated Press

CORVALLIS — Perhaps no women's team in the Pac-12 has had it rougher this season than Oregon State.

And yet, the Beavers seem to be gaining momentum.

Oregon State heads into the final weekend of the regular season — and a potentially defining game against rival Oregon on Sunday, Feb. 28 — having played just 14 total games, fewest in the conference.

The Beavers had nine games postponed because of the league's coronavirus protocols. They were not rescheduled.

"For us, it was outside adversity that made us tighter," coach Scott Rueck said. "There were no fractures and have been no fractures within our group. We've chosen to stay together through it and that's a hallmark of our program. It's what we expect. It's what we talk about when we say we are family. Families get tighter through adversity and they problem solve well. That's what we've always done. And to this team's credit, they've done an incredible job of it."

After opening the season at No. 18 in the AP Top 25, Oregon State dropped out of the rankings with consecutive December 2020 losses to Utah, Oregon and Washington State. But the Beavers (8-6, 6-6) have won five of their last six, including a statement-making 71-64 victory over No. 8 UCLA on Sunday, Feb. 21.

Over the last six games, the Beavers are shooting 49.8% from the floor, while making 50.9% of their



Amanda Loman/Associated Press, File

Stanford's Cameron Brink (22) tries to block a shot by Oregon State's Aleah Goodman (1) during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game in Corvallis on Saturday, Feb. 13, 2021.

3-point attempts to lead the nation.

They are led by senior Aleah Goodman, who is averaging 19 points over her last seven games and 16.6 points overall. Goodman made highlight reels last weekend with a three-quarter court shot in a 77-52 victory over USC.

Another reason for the rise is the addition of freshman guard Talia Von Oelhofen, who joined the team in January after leaving high school early. She's averaging 11.9 points off the bench.

Rueck noted that Goodman, a senior, has set the tone for the team while it faced the coronavirus shutdowns.



Amanda Loman/Associated Press, File

Oregon State coach Scott Rueck yells instructions to players during the second half of an NCAA college basketball game against Stanford in Corvallis on Saturday, Feb. 13, 2021.

"This team, to their credit, has been relentlessly positive. And I would say that

is mostly loaded on Aleah Goodman's shoulders as our most vocal leader on this

team. You tend to go the way your leaders go and she, Taya Corosdale and this team have chosen to control what they can control and to remain positive through it all, to the point where, I mean, I can't say every single day, but pretty much every day has been fun."

Under Rueck, Oregon State has been a consistent performer on the national stage, making six straight NCAA Tournament appearances and four straight Sweet 16 berths.

"They're a very talented offensive team," Stanford coach Tara VanDerveer said. "They have a lot of weapons and (Rueck) does

an excellent job with their team in terms of running the offense."

Fourth-ranked Stanford has already clinched the regular-season conference title heading into next week's conference tournament in Las Vegas. Ninth-ranked Arizona, No. 10 UCLA and No. 14 Oregon are also in the Top 25 in the traditionally strong Pac-12.

February 28 will be rivalry day in the conference to close out the regular season. In addition to Oregon State at Oregon in Eugene, other games include Arizona at Arizona State, Colorado at Utah, Cal at Stanford and Washington at Washington State.

Despite its lack of games, Oregon State currently appears on the bubble to make the NCAA Tournament field. A victory over the Ducks or a strong showing in the conference tournament could cement an at-large spot for the Beavers.

Oregon coach Kelly Graves said there's a significant difference between this Oregon State team and the one the Ducks beat 79-59 in December 2020 in that they're doing everything better.

"They haven't played a ton of games," Graves said. "They've (had) a lot of time to focus on them and they've done a great job. I think Talia has come in and really helped them, has given them another weapon."

Rueck said he's confident Oregon State is coming together at the right time.

"I think we still have room for growth, no question," Rueck said. "But I do believe that we're playing our best basketball right now."

## Nichols:

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from other meets started to get posted and I slid to 20th."

With runners also competing in other distances, they pulled out of the 1,000, moving Nichols up to 14th.

"It worked out good for me," Nichols said. "I was on pins and needles waiting. Tuesday night (Feb. 23), I got a text from my coach that said, 'Pack your bags, you are going to South Dakota.'"

Prelims for the 1,000 will be run Thursday, March 4, with the finals (top 8) Saturday, March 6. The top eight athletes earn All-America honors.

"That's the plan," Nichols said of making the finals.

### An obscure distance

As a senior at Heppner, Nichols won 2A state titles in the 800 meters, 3,000 meters, and ran the anchor leg on the 4x400 relay team that also won state gold and smashed the school record by more than 3 seconds.

At the college level, there are a plethora of distances

to choose from during the indoor season, including the 600, 800, 1,000 and the mile.

Welch said he felt the 1,000 played to Nichols' strengths.

"He is a good middle distance runner, and it was an event I thought would

*"HE IS A GOOD MIDDLE DISTANCE RUNNER, AND IT WAS AN EVENT I THOUGHT WOULD SUIT HIM WELL"*

— Ben Welch, EOU track coach

suit him well," Welch said. "When we were recruiting him, it was an event I thought he would do well at. He has good speed, good range and he runs tough."

Nichols still is on the fence.

"I like and dislike it," Nichols said. "It's a weird distance to adapt to. At an indoor meet, it's five laps.

Outside, it's 2½."

With a shortened indoor season (two meets), and both meets held outside, Nichols said he doesn't know how well he will run indoors.

"I think it will depend," he said. "I haven't raced indoors, and it will depend on how good the track is."

The Ruth Donohoe First Dakota Fieldhouse at Mount Marty University is brand new.

"It's a flat 200," Welch said of the facility's track. "It's a good layout, but there is an art to running a flat 200 indoors."

### Moving up the EOU leaderboard

Nichols' time of 2:30.53 ranks him eighth all-time in the Mounties' record book for the 1,000. The school record is 2:25.51, set by Hans Roelle in 2014.

"I'm happy about that," Nichols said. "Still a lot of work to do."

Welch sees Nichols chasing, and catching, that record before he's done at EOU.

"If he can figure out how to train in the summer, he will be an absolute monster," Welch said. "He could be one of the best we have ever had."

high, while they are 42 inches at the college level.

"My legs are long enough so the adjustment wasn't bad," he said. "I do have a bruise on my right hamstring from hitting the hurdles."

Practice for the outdoor season has begun, and Maher is looking forward to the 110s, but the jury still is out on the 400-meter race. While the hurdles remain at 36 inches like high school competitions, it's the extra distance that has Maher gasping for air.

"I've run the 400 a couple of times," he said. "It's absolutely miserable."

The Yotes' 110 hurdle record is 14.87 set by Brooks Ney in 2016, while Hurd owns the 400 record at 52.89 (2012).

Basterrechea has no doubt that Maher will make an easy transition in both events.

"It's a no-brainer," said Basterrechea, who owns the C of I records in the high jump (6-9) and long jump (20-6¾). "We know what he can do in the 110s. I'm really looking forward to seeing what he can do in the 400. He should get ample opportunities to get out there and set some blazing speeds."

For Maher, he's just happy to get a chance to compete.

"I'm just grateful to have a season," he said. "I'm super eager to get on the track."

The Yotes' outdoor schedule has not been finalized, but Basterrechea said they hope to get under way the third weekend of March.

winning the heptathlon this past weekend at the C of I Polar Vortex Classic. He led the entire way from beginning to end, winning four of the seven events.

Roddedwig's point total

ranks sixth most in EOU history, while Davis' total is seventh.

The 2021 NAIA Track & Field Indoor National Championships will take place March 3-6 in Yankton, South Dakota.

## Half birthdays are a reminder of how far we've come in six months



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Ask any elementary schooler how old they are, and they will immediately tell you. It's an uncontrollable impulse for children to share how old they are, a badge of honor, even. So important is the measure of years they've survived that they might even add a fraction to that age, insistent that they're not 8, but 8 1/2 years old.

I'm no child psychologist, but even I understand that distinction is meaningful to them for a number of reasons. It shows they're just a little older, a little more educated, experienced and capable. It shows they're that much closer to the next milestone and that they've survived. Six months, to a child, is a long time.

### Six months

Mid-pando, six months can be a long time for adults, too.

The first six months of our pandemic were rough, but people adjusted. The safest, least controversial activities were outdoor activities practiced alone or in small groups. Activities like fishing. These activities flourished as people sought ways to find meaning, take care of their mental health and do something not involving a screen.

In the first six months of the pandemic, Oregon's fishing license sales surged by 18% over the previous year, per Oregon Public Broadcasting.

Our great state wasn't alone, either.

Nationally, statista.

com reports gross fishing license sales broke \$750 million for the first time in 2020. I contributed \$922.83 of that while fishing my way across the country, chasing meaning but hiding it under a mask the whole time (albeit begrudgingly after the third skin infection).

Summer came to an end, and I had my existential crisis about turning 30 in this strange new world where you had to recognize people only by their eyes.

### Six more

I opened my eyes this week to see it was my own half birthday. The calendar claims it's been just six months since I turned 30, but I've aged a lot more than that.

This was a winter full of turmoil, heartbreak, disappointment and hard times, but things seem to be looking up. As more people are vaccinated and more people survive infection, the number of potential hosts for the virus decreases, and some semblance of normalcy begins to return. It feels like we just might be clawing our way out of this pit we've been living in for the past year, and I am here for it. Restaurants are reopening, children can plan for their futures once again and for the first time in a year, planning for tomorrow doesn't feel foolhardy.

### Six more

Since months from now, I'm optimistic that life in the United States will be rich and meaningful once again.

Undoubtedly, there will be a pall of death left behind. We've all lost loved ones, and we will never forget them. We cannot forget them. COVID changed the world. Largely for the worse, and whether we like it or not,

some things will never be the same. But not all of the changes brought on by this pandemic were harmful.

Restaurants, bars, theaters and stores have never been cleaner. We have seen the glaring faults in our supply chains, health care systems and government infrastructure. Shining a light on what's broken is a great way to improve it, and we've done that.

Individually, we're now spending more time with family than ever and much to my delight, we're spending much of this time outside. Most importantly, I think we're truly beginning to see just how precious that time is.

Time is finite. We can never get more of it. Young or old, healthy or sick, the days we've been given feel more like a gift to me than ever before. I'm not saying it's been easy. The past year has been one of the loneliest of my life, but so much horror has made me appreciate joy when I find it, and I'm ready to chase it more in the coming months as it becomes easier and easier to catch.

I've already made plans for my summer, my fall and, in the general sense, my future.

Next time a little kid tells me they're 5 1/2 or 8 1/2 or 11 1/2, I'm not going to think they're naïve. They know that every day matters, and they know that in today's world, a half birthday is worth celebrating.

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Davis, a junior from Sandpoint, Idaho, qualified after

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