

## Keep on doubting the Ducks

*An examination of the Oregon men's improbable run to the NCAA Tournament*

By Zach Silva  
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After watching the University of Oregon men's basketball team defeat Washington last Saturday night in a game that sent the Ducks to the NCAA Tournament, I sat down to try and put my excitement into words. We had done it, we had won four games in four nights and defeated an allegedly good (but probably bad) Washington team. It was pure bliss.

Upon reviewing what I wrote that evening, I found that this is how I started: Hahahahahahaha oh my.

It, uh, wasn't my best opening sentence but maybe it is the best way to capture the true emotions of the moment. How else do you properly convey just how absurd it is that this Oregon team is now going to the big dance?

In the show "Modern Family" the character Phil Dunphy gives one of my all-time favorite lines when he says, "Key to a good birthday? Low expectations." While Mr. Dunphy - who is played by Oregon fan Ty Burrell - is just talking about birthdays, it sure seems like he is also talking about sports. Expectations are the lens that all seasons, whether successful or not, are viewed through. So if you expect your team to do well and they do, your expectations are met and everyone is happy. But that is often not the case and most certainly not the case with this particular Oregon team.

The expectations at the start of the season for the Ducks were sky high. They were ranked 14th in the country and it was assumed that Bol Bol was going to lead the team to the promised land. But from the time of that preseason ranking in November all the way to the second blown lead against UCLA in February, the season was on a downward spiral.

Bol was hurt, the team was 6-8 in the Pac-12, no lead was safe and, ultimately, the team just wasn't very fun to watch. It became a chore to watch them as they continued to find new ways to lose. Everything was bad and the season was in free fall. The expectations for the team going forward were at an all-time low.

At that point, the Ducks had four games left in the regular season and it was easy to convince any Oregon fan that they could lose out. Anything was on the table. And just when you count out a Dana Altman-coached team, they find a way to win. Convincing sweeps of both the Arizona and Washington schools heading into the Pac-12 tournament created more confusion about this team. Were they no longer.....bad?

Heading into the tournament, I had a conversation with low-key Oregon sports historian slash my best friend as we determined that the Ducks were equally likely to lose in the first round as they were to win the entire tournament. This was the enigma

**DUCKS** see B2

## Lions break the ice to start the season



Cottage Grove senior Erick Giffen attempts to clear five-foot-10 in the high jump at Pleasant Hill last Wednesday.

PHOTOS BY ZACH SILVA/CG SENTINEL

### Cottage Grove has top finishers in first meet of the season

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Now that the snow has melted, it was time for the ice to break.

And last Wednesday the Cottage Grove track and field team warmed right up as they competed in the first meet of the season at the Pleasant Hill Ice Breaker. Competing against 16 teams from the 1A classification to 4A, the Lions were looking to shake out the cobwebs as they enter the season.

"I thought they came out strong and did amazing for only having a few practices due to the snow," said first-year Cottage Grove head coach Gyna Walton. "I just pretty much told them to do the best they could be that

we have only had a few practices."

While the team results were not calculated, the Lions had top finishers throughout the meet. On the boys side, it was junior Jimmy Talley leading the way for the Lions finishing first in the 800 (2:08.87), along with second place finishes in both the 1500 (4:20.29) and as a member of the 4 x 400 relay team. Talley, who took second at state last season in the 3,000, came into the day focused on getting back to top form.

"Well, I know there isn't going to be much competition - I guess there was more than I thought," Talley said on thinking about his second place finish in the 1500 in which he was a second behind first place. "But anyways, it was just kind of using it as a workout day. Usually I don't run two running events and I'm running three running

events total so it's kind of just for a workout."

In the high jump, Cottage Grove senior Erick Giffen cleared 5-foot-10 and took third place in the competition. Giffen is the back-to-back champion in the Sky-Em high jump. He finished fourth in state as a sophomore and after an injury last season finished 12th.

"At this point, I'm just trying to build my confidence. At the end of last year, my confidence went a little bit down, obviously. I'm just trying to stay positive with all my teammates and myself," said Giffen. "Make sure I'm working hard inside of practice and outside of practice. And hopefully get some (personal records) this year."

The other top finisher for the Cottage Grove boys was junior Mitchell Krokus in the triple jump with a jump of 40-feet-07.50-inches. Krokus, who



Cottage Grove junior Jimmy Talley kicks his way into first place in the 800.

started triple jump in the middle of last season, won the Sky-Em title last year and took 11th at state.

For the girls, the team saw the most success in the high jump. Sophomore Avery Hutchins

took fifth at four-foot-eight while sophomore Matty Ladd and freshman Gracie Arnold finished first and second respec-

**LIONS** see B3

## Warriors glide into opening day victory



PHOTO BY ZACH SILVA/CG SENTINEL

North Douglas junior Nicki Derrick was back in the pitching circle after missing her sophomore season due to injury. In her first game back, Derrick made her presence felt as she struck out 11 batters and gave up just two hits on the day.

### Derrick returns, Warriors start season with home victory over Glide

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It was an exciting sight for the North Douglas softball team: junior Nicki Derrick in the pitcher's circle. After leading the team to the state title in her freshman season, an ACL injury sidelined Derrick for her sophomore year. But last Saturday, she was back in action for the first time as the Warriors started the season at home with a 6-3 victory over Glide.

"It was really nice. Honestly, doesn't feel like I skipped a year. Sometimes I forget I skipped a whole year of softball," said Derrick after recording 11 strikeouts and giving up two hits.

Facing Glide, North Doug-

las was diving straight into the season against a top-team. Last year at the 3A level, the Wildcats finished in sixth place and made it to the state quarterfinals. Now down to 2A, Glide was ranked 11th in the preseason coaches' poll and received two first place votes. In the same poll, the Warriors are ranked as the number four team in the state at the 1A/2A level.

But it was the Wildcats striking first in the second inning. With the bases loaded and no outs, Derrick struck out a pair of batters before a flurry of North Douglas mistakes. A batter was walked followed by an overthrow and a dropped third strike that all resulted in three runs for Glide.

"We struggled with defense a little bit. We've been on our field since Monday. I think we've only had two real fielding days so it was kind of as expected," said

Derrick. "I think we're going to get to work and get it figured out. Our bats are kind of what saved us a little bit. Our momentum really shifted once we got our bats going and then it just transferred to defense."

For North Douglas head coach Jesse Rice, he was more blunt about the team's early lapses. "We gave them those three runs, that was mental errors," said Rice. "(But) this team didn't lower their heads, didn't get down, they just said, 'Ok, no problem.' They kept playing their game and we ended up winning. It's quite a group of kids."

Not only did the Warriors not give up any more runs on the game, but in the third inning their bats came alive. The team saw three doubles in a row from freshman Halli Vaughn, junior

**WARRIORS** see B2

## Athlete of the Week



*This week's athlete of the week is Cottage Grove sophomore Matty Ladd. At Wednesday's track meet Ladd took first in high jump, second in triple jump, was on the fourth place 4 x 100 team and took eighth in the 100.*



Matty Ladd looks to clear four-foot-10 at last Wednesday's meet.

PHOTO BY ZACH SILVA/CG SENTINEL