

COLLEGE SOFTBALL | OREGON DUCKS

Freshman shortstop Alyssa Brito has emerged as key player

BY JAMES CREPEA

The Oregonian

EUGENE — Opportunity first came knocking for Alyssa Brito in the offseason.

The former top-40 recruit, but there wasn't necessarily an obvious opening on Oregon's infield for her to play immediately. Jasmine Sievers opting out of the season due to her pregnancy created an opening at shortstop, where Brito has taken over and gotten off to a red hot start.

"Coming in I knew I had to compete," Brito said. "We're at a collegiate level now that everybody is good. Coming in I didn't really have any goals such as that, but I said to myself compete every day, give everything I've got every practice and every day. Competing constantly."

Brito earned the starting job and leads the No. 8 Ducks (7-0) with a .389 average through their first two weekends, with two home runs and seven RBIs. Making those figures all the more impressive is Brito opened 0 for 6 with a couple of walks and is 7 for her last 12.

"She brings a great energy to our team and we have seen it in practice," center fielder Haley Cruse said. "She is a superstar, and I know she's going to continue to build off of that."

Brito's first clutch hits came in the comeback win over Grand Canyon, when she hit a two-run double to tie the game and a critical RBI single, both with two outs. She had a pair of solo home runs and an RBI triple during two wins last weekend at Fresno State, earning Brito Pac-12 freshman of the week honors, and been perfect in the field thus far.

"Alyssa has been excellent on defense," Oregon coach Melissa Lombardi said. "You can

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— Alyssa Brito, Oregon Ducks freshman softball player

see her bat is starting to get a little hot as well."

Both of Brito's home runs last weekend were well beyond the fence, though her teammates haven't been surprised by the power she's displayed.

"She would hit 300-foot home runs at practice," second baseman Allee Bunker said. "We're like, 'OK, she's going to do big things for this team.' Her fielding at short is incredible, as you can see the past couple of weekends."

As Oregon prepares for its toughest games yet, with top-ranked UCLA twice and against Utah during a trip to Tempe, Ariz. on Sunday and Monday, Brito has become a major player for the Ducks.

The former three-time California all-state honoree has played with and against several of UCLA's players before, so the heightened level of competition shouldn't be daunting.

"I think my hard work and dedicating myself a lot to getting better every day has helped me over the years and I've tried to carry that into college and do the best that I can each game and put everything out there," Brito said. "I want to go in there and be aggressive and also make that at-bat as tough as possible on the pitcher, that's challenging them. Just try to pass the bat to my teammates and get something going."



Bryan Byerly/Utah Athletics file

Oregon State's Taylor Jones (44) elevates for a jump shot over Utah's Lola Pendande (12) on Jan. 31 in Salt Lake City. Jones had 15 points and six rebounds as the Beavers won 84-74.

Revenge

Continued from B1

COVID-19 has taken much away this basketball season, but in a weird way delivered a gift to the Beavers' roster in Talia von Oelhoffen.

A senior at Chiawana High in Washington and a November OSU signee, von Oelhoffen opted to graduate early and enroll at Oregon State for winter quarter. She didn't officially practice with the Beavers until four days before her Jan. 24 debut.

Von Oelhoffen has been beyond advertised. She has scored in double figures in five of seven games, including a career-high 19 points against USC. Between von Oelhoffen and Goodman, the Beavers are sure to have a dynamic lead guard on the floor for 40 minutes.

Much has been made of von Oelhoffen's precocity, but Graves thinks it's overrated. She's a good college player, whether von Oelhoffen is 18 or 22.

"These kids are playing at a high level in club basketball. Her age, I don't think it really matters," Graves said. "She's a good fit for them. She's patient. She can really shoot the ball, she's an excellent passer. She really plays well in their pick and roll."

The adversity of 2020-21 hit Oregon State squarely in the jaw early this season. Rather than shrug and make the best of it, the Beavers adapted and flourished. OSU is 14 games into the season, and as coach

"It's almost March, and because of that, there's this massive urgency to grow quickly."

— Scott Rueck, Oregon State women's basketball coach

Scott Rueck said, "in a normal year and normal amount of games we played for us, it would be about Jan. 10. We would have just played our first weekend in Pac-12."

Nothing normal about this season.

"Obviously it's not. It's almost March, and because of that, there's this massive urgency to grow quickly," Rueck said.

Graves believes the lack of games has played in Oregon State's favor. The Beavers have played Pac-12 front-runners Stanford, Arizona and UCLA once each, rather than twice like Oregon and other Pac-12 teams.

"They've had a lot of time to focus on them. They've done a great job. They look really good," Graves said of OSU.

Sunday returns the series back to its uber-competitive nature of the past few years. The only thing missing are packed houses in Gill Coliseum and Matthew Knight Arena because of COVID-19.

"It's not the way you want, for sure. The fun of this is going into a hostile arena," Rueck said. "Unfortunately and sadly, we are getting used to it. But it's certainly not nearly as fun."

Yelich

Continued from B1

He spent the initial stages of spring training in 2019 working his way back after a fractured kneecap had ended his 2019 season prematurely. The Brewers believe he will benefit from having this entire preseason to get ready for a more typical 162-game campaign.

Just don't assume the dis-

"I feel like you need to be motivated every year. If you're not motivated, stay at home, kind of, in my opinion. A major league season requires so much out of you. It asks for a lot. And you have to give the game a lot. If you're not willing to meet the game at that level, it's not going to go well for you."

— Christian Yelich, Milwaukee Brewers outfielder

appointment of 2020 has put a chip on Yelich's shoulder. Yelich doesn't believe any ad-

ditional incentive is necessary. "I feel like you need to be motivated every year," Yelich

said. "If you're not motivated, stay at home, kind of, in my opinion. A major league season requires so much out of you. It asks for a lot. And you have to give the game a lot. If you're not willing to meet the game at that level, it's not going to go well for you. So like I said, previous seasons are irrelevant, in my opinion. They have no bearing on what you need to do in the future. Every year's a fresh start."

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