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## NCAA TRACK & FIELD CHAMPIONSHIPS

The Oregon fling quartet

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In Lance, we trust.

Such is the unofficial credo of the University of Oregon throws contingent, a hard-working group of athletes determined to put its collective stamp on the NCAA Outdoor Track & Field Championships this week.

Their mentor is four-time Olympian Lance Deal, who won the silver medal in the hammer throw at the 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta. The UO throws coach still holds the American record of 270 feet, 9 inches.

Five of his athletes qualified for the NCAA meet in Sacramento, which opens Wednesday.

Four of them will step onto the national stage as reigning Pac-10 champions - Britney Henry (women's hammer), Brian Richotte (men's hammer), Ryan Brandel (men's javelin) and Rachel Yurkovich (women's javelin).

"It's not the biggest group we've taken to NCAAs," Deal said. "But they certainly have the best chance of contributing to the team results. ... All of them are poised to do really good things."

Each thrower has traveled a separate, and sometimes circuitous, path to Oregon. But without exception they say the guiding light on their journey was Deal's background as a world-class athlete.

"The main reason I wanted Lance as a coach is that he's been at the level I hope to be at someday," said Yurkovich, a sophomore who is the NCAA favorite in the javelin and UO record-holder at 189-11.

"Just being around him and learning the mental aspect that he can bring. He knows what's important."

A prime example came at the NCAA West Regional meet two weeks ago.

Before the meet, Deal had advised Yurkovich to rest an aching right shoulder by limiting herself to one throw, knowing full well that a top-five finish at regionals would secure a trip to the NCAAs.

But she was hyped up about taking on Mallory Webb, a former teammate at Newberg High School and longtime rival at Fresno State. Yurkovich, unbeaten against collegians this season, couldn't bear the thought of losing to Webb in front of the hometown fans at Hayward Field.

So, Deal placed a phone call to his friend and mentor, sports psychologist Scott Pengelly, and asked for help.

Pengelly replied by sending Deal a famous photograph of two people fencing inside

an alligator's mouth, which asked two questions: "What's the greater enemy and how are you going to deal with that?" He included a passage from Kenny Moore's book, "Bowerman," in which the legendary UO track and field coach showed Moore how to be successful without over-training.

It all helped Yurkovich, quite literally, see the "bigger picture."

"It was an important meet in front of a home crowd and there were people competing that I wanted to beat," Yurkovich said. "Lance helped me realize what was more important, and that I could (get to NCAAs) on one throw if I really put my mind to it. He helped me see the bigger picture."

As it turned out, Yurkovich was able to accomplish both tasks.

She won the regional title with a single toss of 178-9, the eighth time this year she has thrown 172-5 or better, an impressive body of work.

It's a common theme this year among the UO throwers, including sophomore Ashley McCrea, who earned an NCAA berth in the javelin by placing fifth at regionals and stands sixth all-time at Oregon (166-8).

None of the Ducks has reached this point by chasing a big early-season mark. They have upped the ante at each successive competition, consistently hovering near their PRs at the recent Pac-10 and regional meets.

The process has given each thrower confidence that their best is still to come.

No one is more excited about that than Richotte.

The fifth-year senior is seeded eighth in the hammer but has beaten two throwers ranked ahead of him in the past two meets. He has a PR of 223-3 and ranks fourth on the all-time UO list with a season-best mark of 222-11.

The native of Berkley, Mich., enrolled at Oregon during winter term for his final season of eligibility after competing one year at the University of Detroit, and two years at Radford University in Virginia.

He placed 10th at the NCAAs in the hammer throw as a sophomore, then was 13th at the East Regional last year and failed to qualify for nationals.

"I've been waiting a year to get back to this meet," he said. "It's been circled on my calendar for a long time. ... Any time you're around your PR in consecutive weekends, you're ready for a breakout."

Richotte thought such a performance would come last year.

Among collegiate hammer throwers, he had the sixth-best mark in the nation heading into the regional meet, but his grandmother passed away early that week, and he flew home to

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