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# Duck Season

March 2022



## 'EXPLOSIVE AT THE PLATE'

Freshman Paige Sinicki brings hustle and competitiveness to this year's Oregon softball team.

# Duck Season

2022

**DuckSeason**, the Emerald's quarterly sports magazine, is published by Emerald Media Group, Inc., the independent nonprofit news company at the University of Oregon. Formerly the Oregon Daily Emerald, the news organization was founded in 1900.

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# TANNER SMITH

## SEIZES THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD IN 2022

*Tanner Smith has answered Oregon baseball's leadership call in the young season.*

BY CHARLES GEARING • TWITTER @GEARINGCHARLIE

After Kenyon Yovan, Aaron Zavala, Gabe Matthews and others moved on to professional baseball, it was natural to wonder who, if anyone, would lead the 2022 Oregon baseball program.

"Instead of replacing them, it's more about how we can all play our roles," Oregon center fielder Tanner Smith said.

With the Oregon baseball season underway, Smith has begun to answer the leadership question. For him, being a leader, whether vocally or by example, is nothing new, and he's ready to assume the all-important role on this year's team.

Starting in high school, Smith's leadership and people skills have been a strength of his. And by Smith's junior year at Servite High School, the varsity baseball team was his team. He was well-liked, mature and prolific on the field.

"An exceptional human being," Servite assistant coach Duane Page said. "Probably what I respect the most about him is his ability to be a great teammate, friend and leader. It's easy to like a player for what they bring to the baseball field, but I think what makes him special is the things that he brings to the table that most people don't see."

Page remembered first coaching Smith during the Servite baseball offseason camp before his freshman year of high school. Smith made a lasting impression on Page, not just with his talent, but with the way he carried himself. At his first summer scrimmage at-bat, he nailed a triple into deep right, good enough to earn Smith a permanent spot on the varsity roster.

Smith's competitiveness and talent got the best out of his high school teammates.

"His desire to win and to be great is extremely high, so I think that when the players heard him saying 'hey, what you're

doing isn't going to produce wins for us,' they just took it to heart," Page said.

From freshman to senior year, Smith never played a game of lower-level high school baseball.

He holds the Servite program record in varsity games

played, making his mark in league All-Star games during his junior and senior seasons. He was a four-year letterman with the program and was ranked a top-25 outfielder in California by his senior year.

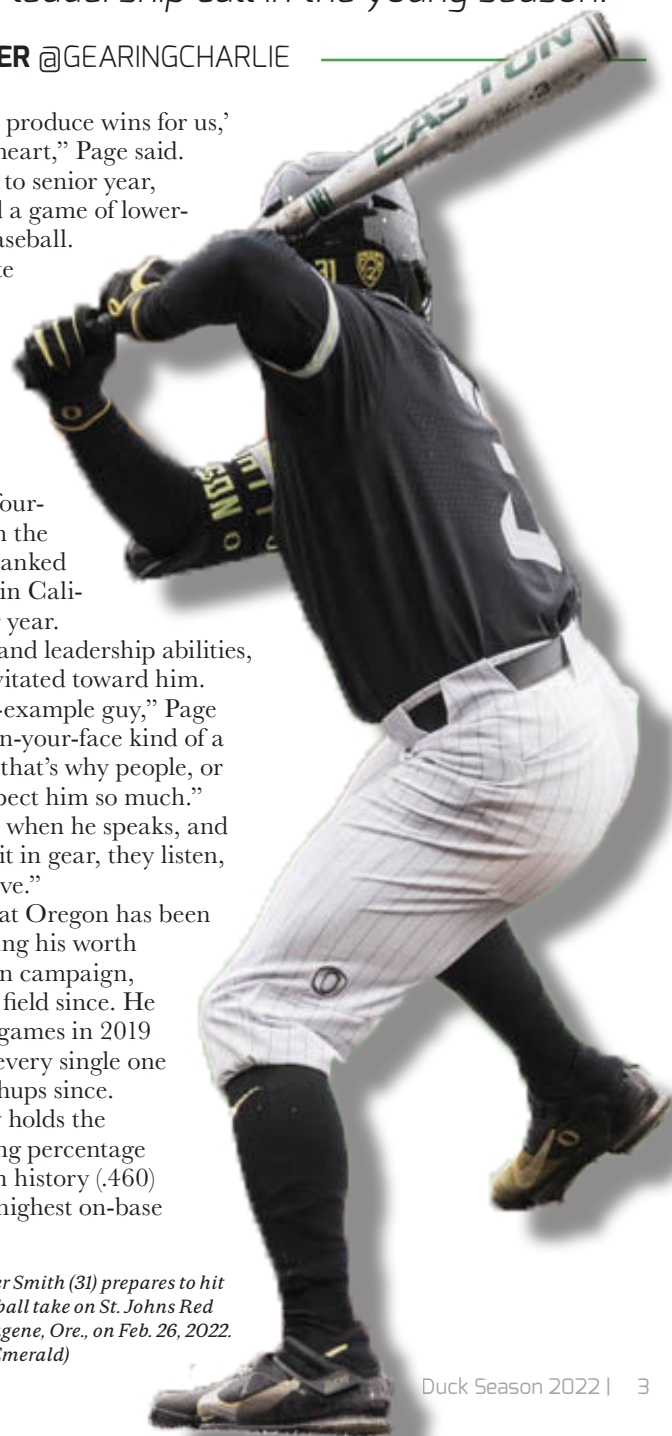
With his talent and leadership abilities, his teammates gravitated toward him.

"He's a lead-by-example guy," Page said. "He's not an in-your-face kind of a leader, and I think that's why people, or kids, or players respect him so much."

He added: "But when he speaks, and tells people to kick it in gear, they listen, and they always have."

His experience at Oregon has been similar. After proving his worth during his freshman campaign, he's seldom left the field since. He started all but two games in 2019 and has started in every single one of the Ducks' matchups since.

Smith currently holds the fifth-highest slugging percentage in Oregon program history (.460) as well as the fifth-highest on-base



*Ducks outfielder Tanner Smith (31) prepares to hit off a pitch. Ducks Baseball take on St. Johns Red Storm at PK Field in Eugene, Ore., on Feb. 26, 2022. (Maddie Stellingwerf/Emerald)*

*Oregon's Tanner Smith (31) swings for the ball. The Oregon Ducks Baseball team takes on UCSB on March 5, 2022, at PK Park. (Molly McPherson/Emerald)*



percentage (.400). Last season, Smith tied for second on the team in batting average, posting a .324 mark.

Now, with a chance to be leader in the locker room as well on the field, the progression appears seamless.

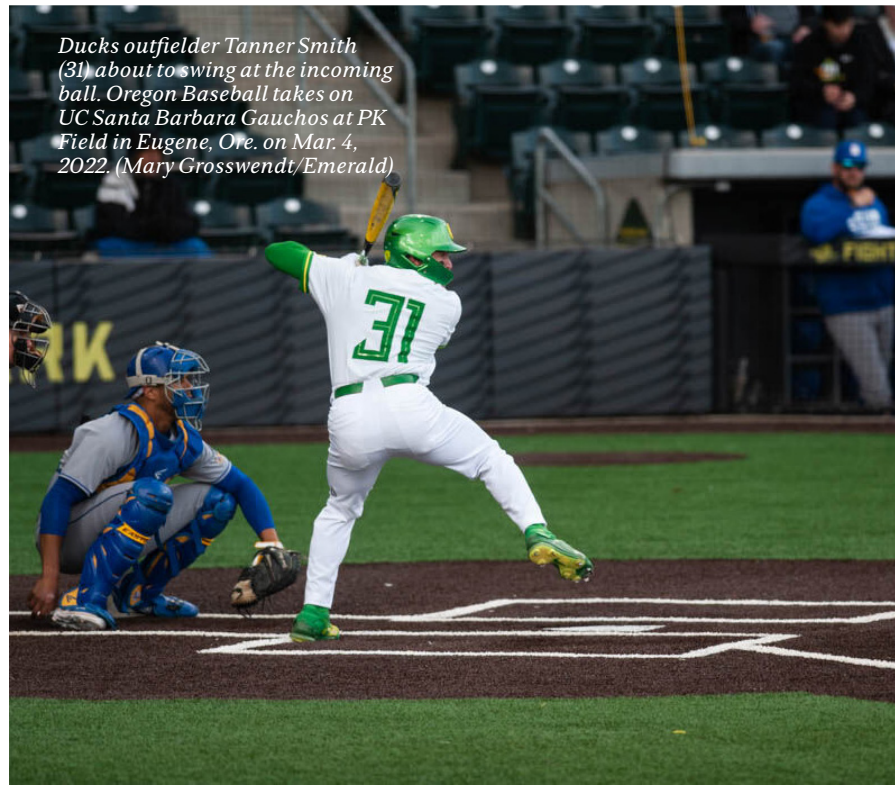
“Not just on the stat sheet, but more off the field and in the locker room is where I need to put my focus and to try to lead this team in whatever way I can,” Smith said.

Oregon baseball (7-5) has huge aspirations for 2022, and Smith has played his part.

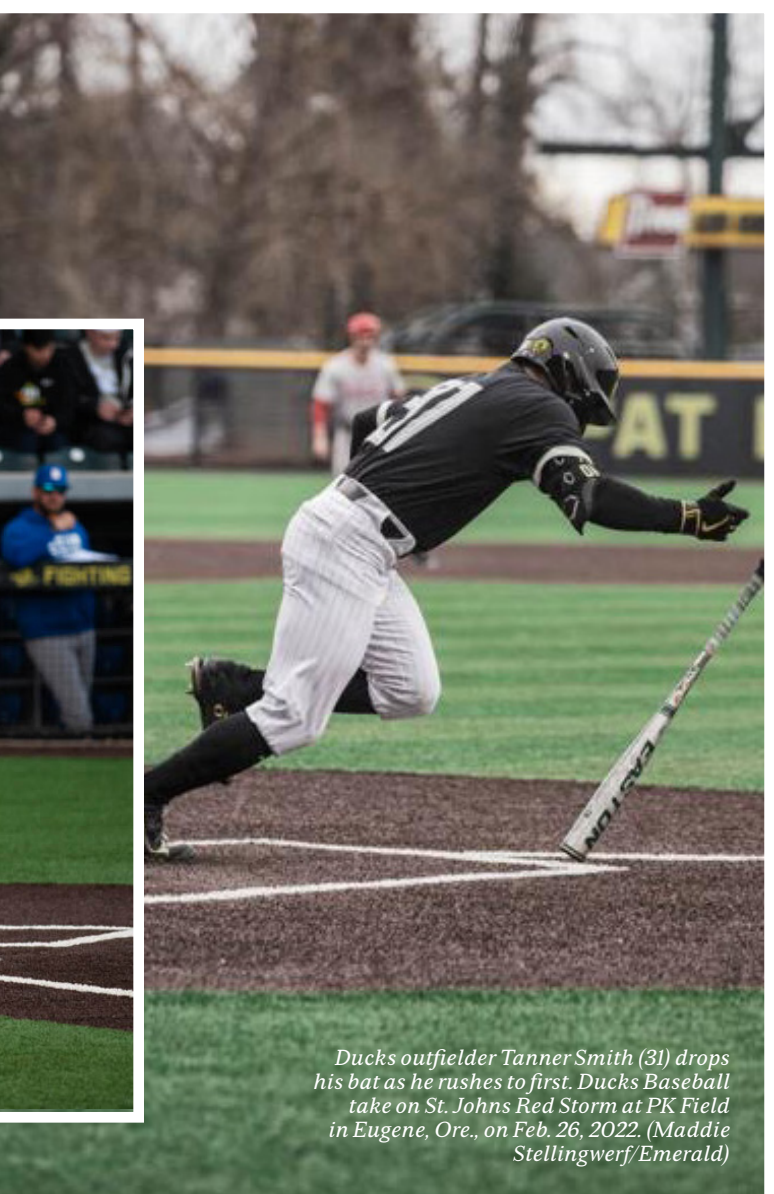
After a slow first series of the season, he’s bounced back. He’s had 15 hits thus far, with five RBIs.

On March 6, the junior posted two doubles and a homerun. As has been the case throughout Smith’s baseball career, his teammates followed suit. The team, following up on his breakout performance, struck out only twice all day.

With Pac-12 play approaching for the Oregon baseball program, Smith will need to continue to be a strong example for his younger teammates through his play, his competitiveness and off-field leadership.



*Ducks outfielder Tanner Smith (31) about to swing at the incoming ball. Oregon Baseball takes on UC Santa Barbara Gauchos at PK Field in Eugene, Ore. on Mar. 4, 2022. (Mary Grosswendt/Emerald)*



*Ducks outfielder Tanner Smith (31) drops his bat as he rushes to first. Ducks Baseball take on St. Johns Red Storm at PK Field in Eugene, Ore., on Feb. 26, 2022. (Maddie Stellingwerf/Emerald)*

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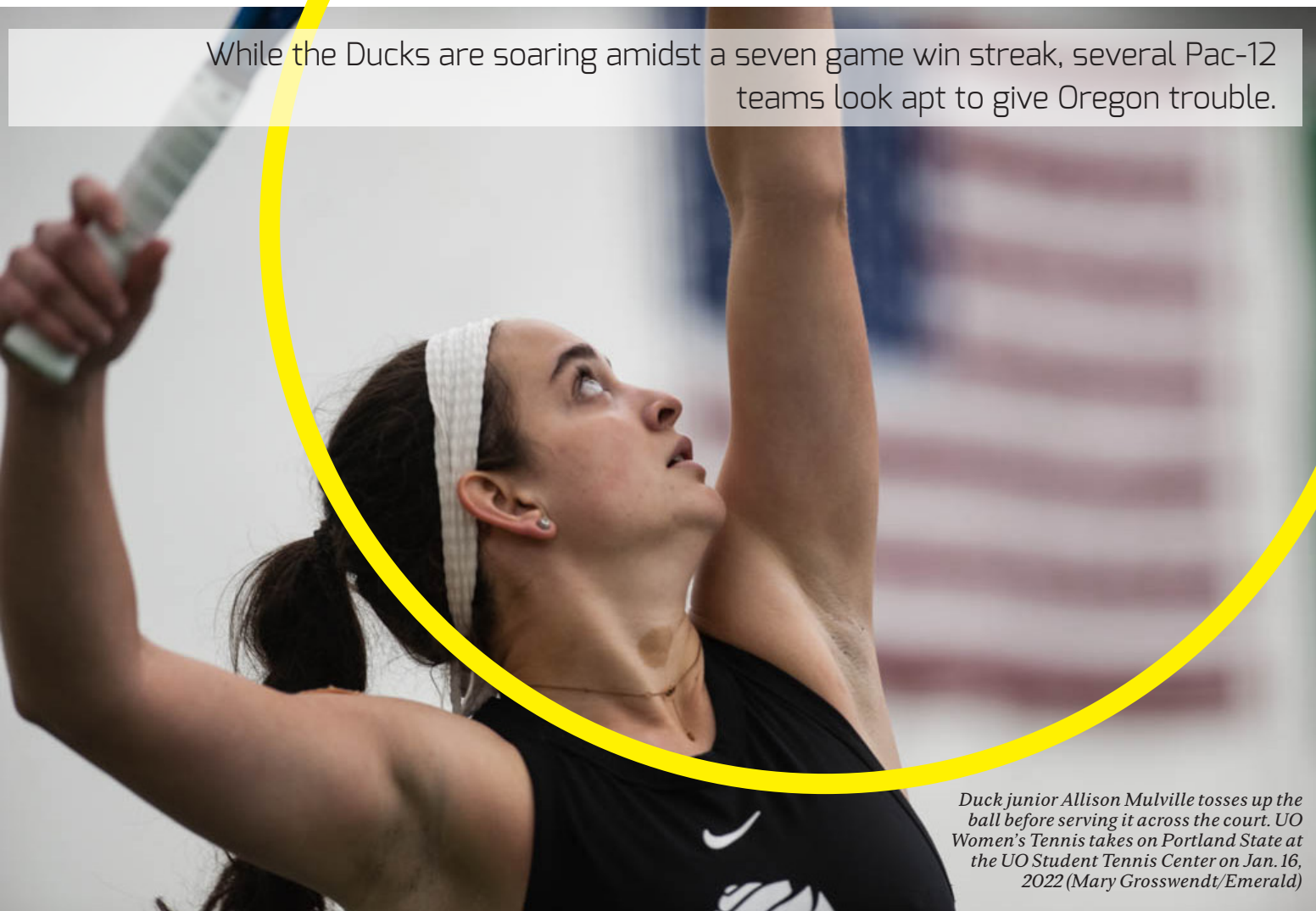
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# OREGON WOMEN'S TENNIS LOOKS AHEAD TO CONFERENCE PLAY IN LOADED PAC-12

While the Ducks are soaring amidst a seven game win streak, several Pac-12 teams look apt to give Oregon trouble.



*Duck junior Allison Mulville tosses up the ball before serving it across the court. UO Women's Tennis takes on Portland State at the UO Student Tennis Center on Jan. 16, 2022 (Mary Grosswendt/Emerald)*

BY BRADY RUTH

The Oregon women's tennis program (8-2) kicks off conference play on Friday, beginning its quest for dominance in the Pac-12.

"I'm a little bit nervous," Oregon freshman Sophie Luescher said. "It's my first year so I don't know what to expect."

This season, the Pac-12 hosts nine ranked teams, several of which look like they could put a damper on the Duck's hot

start.

"It's definitely a different look," Oregon sophomore Myah Petchey said. "But I'm excited. We have no pressure going up against these players so I'm just going to go out there and hopefully show them what I have."

Last year's conference play was incredibly mediocre for Oregon. Last season's Pac-12 contests saw the Ducks post a

*Duck freshman Sophie Luescher lunges across the court as she gets the ball over the net. UO Women's Tennis takes on Portland State at the UO Student Tennis Center on Jan. 16, 2022 (Mary Grosswendt/Emerald)*



*The Ducks gather around for a pep talk before their next set. UO Women's Tennis takes on Portland State at the UO Student Tennis Center on Jan. 16, 2022 (Mary Grosswendt/Emerald)*



5-5 record and a second round exit in the conference playoff tournament. Highlighted by wins against No. 25 Stanford and No. 38 USC, the Ducks demonstrated their ability to compete alongside high-caliber teams. This year, they'll have a great chance to demonstrate their talent in a loaded Pac-12.

"The Pac-12 is a really tough conference," Oregon's Allison Mulville said. "There's a lot of really great teams. There's a lot of talent."

The frontrunners for the Pac-12 title all hail from the state of California. Cal (No. 10), Stanford (No. 25), UCLA (No. 16) and USC (No. 21) are all among some of the top programs in the conference. These teams, along with No. 17 Arizona State, all are coming off strong seasons in 2021 that resulted in national tournament play.

UCLA took home the Pac-12 regular season championship in 2021 in a year that saw the Bruins boast an impressive 10-0 conference record. Cal got hot come bracket play, eliminating Oregon en route to a Pac-12 championship. Both these programs are expected to have impressive years in 2022.

"We're always excited to play Pac-12 teams," Oregon coach Courtney Nagle said. "You're always going to play strong teams, strong players, and it's always going to be a battle."

The Ducks are soaring high right now on the backs of freshmen Sophie Luescher and Karin Young, but Oregon's hot start to 2022 and 8-2 record is only good enough for fourth place

entering conference play. Utah leads the pack with an 11-1 record. Arizona (8-2) and Stanford (6-1) also sit above the Ducks in the standings. But the Ducks have momentum on their side.

"We're on a really good run now," Luescher said. "But we're going to play high ranked teams when we play Pac-12, so I'm excited to play higher ranked teams to see where we're at."

With all the talent flowing through the Pac-12, it would be surprising if the conference doesn't end up with at least six teams in the national tournament. The upcoming schedule will likely pose a challenge for the Ducks as they have to face new opponents, travel habits and locations.

"The biggest difference for us is that we've been indoors quite a bit," Nagle said. "We haven't had an outdoor match yet this season. Going to California we're going to be outdoors at Cal and at Stanford."

The bottom line for the Ducks is clear: Look towards youth to excite; lean on experience to lead. Oregon senior Allison Mulville has played in the conference for multiple seasons now and has the best idea on what to expect.

"Starting conference play, every day is going to be a fight," Mulville said. "Every day is going to be a battle. You always have to expect these teams to be coming after you."

Oregon is young, talented and hungry. If the Ducks pre-season results are a sign of what's to come, they have a legitimate chance to contend in the deep Pac-12 conference.

# 'THE FEMALE PETE ROSE':

## Paige Sinicki making strong first impression for Oregon softball

BY MOJO HILL • TWITTER @MOJOHILL22

**The freshman has settled in nicely, already making an impact in her initial taste of collegiate softball.**

She hustles. She hits. She makes electric plays.

The Ducks have a new star on their hands. It comes in the form of a freshman who Oregon coach Melyssa Lombardi deemed “the female Pete Rose” before the season. She’s a young player who has come onto the college softball scene with fire and determination, led under the wings of the team’s experienced leaders.

Paige Sinicki wasted no time in proving her talent. She got the opening day start at third base and smacked a two-run single in her first collegiate at-bat.

“I feel like I was in a dream at one point, where I was in the dugout like, ‘Wow, we’re really playing Ole Miss,’” Sinicki said.

Sinicki collected six hits in her first nine collegiate at-bats, but it wasn’t just the bat that was impressive. She lived up to the “female Pete Rose” scouting report in an instant, stealing three bases in her first three games.

“She’s a hustler, and she’s a competitor,” Lombardi said. “Every single day, she shows up and gives it her all in ev-

erything we do. She never, ever lets up. And she just competes, and she makes the people around her compete.”

She also made impressive plays in the field, switching between third base and shortstop as needed. The Ducks are set at those positions with Rachel Cid and the return of Jasmine Williams, but now they’re arguably deeper on the left side of the infield.

Lombardi’s praise for Sinicki continued: “She’s excellent on defense. She’s explosive at the plate. She’s got great speed.”

After an impressive first three games, Sinicki fell back to Earth. She went 0-for-5 against UC San Diego on Feb. 12 as part of a 1-for-14 stretch.

But a massive opportunity revealed itself on a silver platter for Sinicki on Feb. 18. The Ducks had a doubleheader against Baylor and were coming off their first loss of the season earlier that day. Sinicki had yet to collect a hit in either game. She came up to the plate in the sixth inning with two on and one out: Oregon leading 3-0 — a chance to break it open.

She delivered, smacking her first career home run over the left-center field fence.

“It’s just an amazing feeling to go back to home plate with all my teammates,” Sinicki said of the homer. “It was just awesome.”

Sinicki’s passion and energy in the field stems from her love of the game. She said simply being on the field with her teammates fires her up and that she would “go through a wall” for any of them.

“I’ve always been that player that would go for it, and I think it’s helped me become the player I am,” she said.

For Sinicki, the key to settling in at the college level has been to slow the game down. She does this with the help of her teammates — players like Cid, Williams, Terra McGowan, Allee Bunker and Brooke Yanez who have helped ease any nerves.

“I’ve been playing with these girls for a couple months now, and I’ve been really able to pick their brains and really get to learn so much from them,” Sinicki said.



*(Courtesy of Scott Boldt)*



*"I've always been that player that would go for it, and I think it's helped me become the player I am."*

The leaders on the team have aided her in various ways.

“[Williams] has helped me slow down the game, being on the left side with her,” Sinicki said. “And [Bunker], telling me to keep on top of my schoolwork and softball, I think that’s helped.... [McGowan] can just look at me, and she’s like, ‘Just breathe,’ and I’ll breathe at practice and zone back in.”

Sinicki does more than just zone back in, hustling and going hard on every play. When she’s out in the field, she’s locked in and has her sights squarely set on winning.

“Paige just goes for it,” Bunker said. “She has zero fear for her safety sometimes.”

The Ducks — “Version 4,” as they’ve dubbed themselves — still have a long way to go this season. Sinicki has already proven she belongs.

Now, it’s just about reminding herself what she’s been preaching since day one.

“If I can just slow it down and keep having fun with my girls, and just keep supporting each other, it makes the game really slow down,” Sinicki said.

“

It’s just an amazing feeling to go back to home plate with all my teammates. It was just awesome.”

**PAIGE SINICKI**

Oregon Softball player



*(Courtesy of Scott Boldt)*

# WHY IS DIVISION I TENNIS INTERNATIONALLY DOMINATED?

NCAA Division I tennis has the highest percentage of international student-athletes, and there's a multitude of reasons why.

BY GABRIEL MARVIN

Out of the nine student-athletes on the University of Oregon's men's tennis team, five have 10-hour plus flights when they make a trip back home.

It has become increasingly common for international students to venture to the United States in pursuit of competing in NCAA Division I athletics, and tennis is a sport that has seen its international presence increase dramatically over the past decade.

More than a handful of teams' rosters only have one American. This trend has become increasingly popular; between 2014 and 2019, the percentage of first-year international students on men's Division I tennis rosters jumped from 50% to 61%, according to NCAA Research.

International players have proven why tennis coaches and recruiters at UO, and so many other colleges, have traveled great distances to ensure these individuals compete for their teams.

Among the top four ranked singles players on Oregon, three hail from outside the U.S.

The limited alternatives available to overseas tennis prospects correlates to the amount of international prospects choosing to play in the U.S.

Take senior and No. 1 singles player for the Ducks Joshua Charlton, for example.

"It's a tough decision because if you're not going to college you have to back yourself up and play low-level professional tournaments," Charlton said. "But that's tough to do, when you're 18; you need to build up your body and build up your game."

Charlton came to Oregon from Australia when he was just 18 and even admitted that some alternatives offer a comparable level of competition to men's Division I tennis.

"I think the level of Division I is just unreal," Charlton said. "You have a lot of the top players in college who when the season ends, are going out and playing professionally."

There are some adjustments international student-athletes have to make when coming to the states for the first time. Head coach Nils Schyllander understands these adjustments and the apprehension that comes with them because he was in their shoes when he was a teenager coming from Sweden to play tennis at Northern Arizona University.

"Having him, who's experienced that before, they know what it's like when you're missing home and being a part of a new culture, and you can feel so isolated sometimes," Charlton said.

Sophomore Swede and No. 4 singles player for the Ducks Jesper Klov-Nilsson noted the importance of a coach like Schyllander, who is from his home country, and how it affected his recruitment.

"I wanted to make my own decision, but at the same time he made a pretty big impact," Klov-Nilsson said.

Oregon's men's roster is more than half international and are just one of hundreds of NCAA Division I teams that have a roster majority of international student-athletes.

Something can be said about the correlation between the



*Ducks junior Joshua Charlton throws the ball up for a serve. Oregon Ducks men's tennis take on Portland State Vikings at the Student Tennis Center on Feb. 6, 2021. (Maddie Stellingwerf/Emerald)*

Jesper Kloy-Nilsson, sophomore, prepares to serve. The University of Oregon's men's tennis team defeated Stanford 4-2 on April 16, 2021. (Will Geschke/Emerald)



highest ranked American professional tennis players and their decision to go to college or turn professional. Out of the top 10 ranked American tennis players, only four of them chose to play collegiately.

Looking at the last five NCAA championship teams, only one of them (Texas in 2019) had half of its roster made up of foreign athletes. It would make sense that recruiting only international prospects likely results in higher championship odds, but when fighting for a team title, where someone is from doesn't matter.

The increase in international student-athletes has a huge impact on the chances for high school tennis players in the U.S. to make a Division I roster. According to Scholarship Stats, a high school tennis athlete in the U.S. has a 0.6% chance of making a Division I roster.

With some teams like TCU, whose roster is made entirely of international student-athletes, many talented high school prospects don't stand a chance of getting a scholarship.

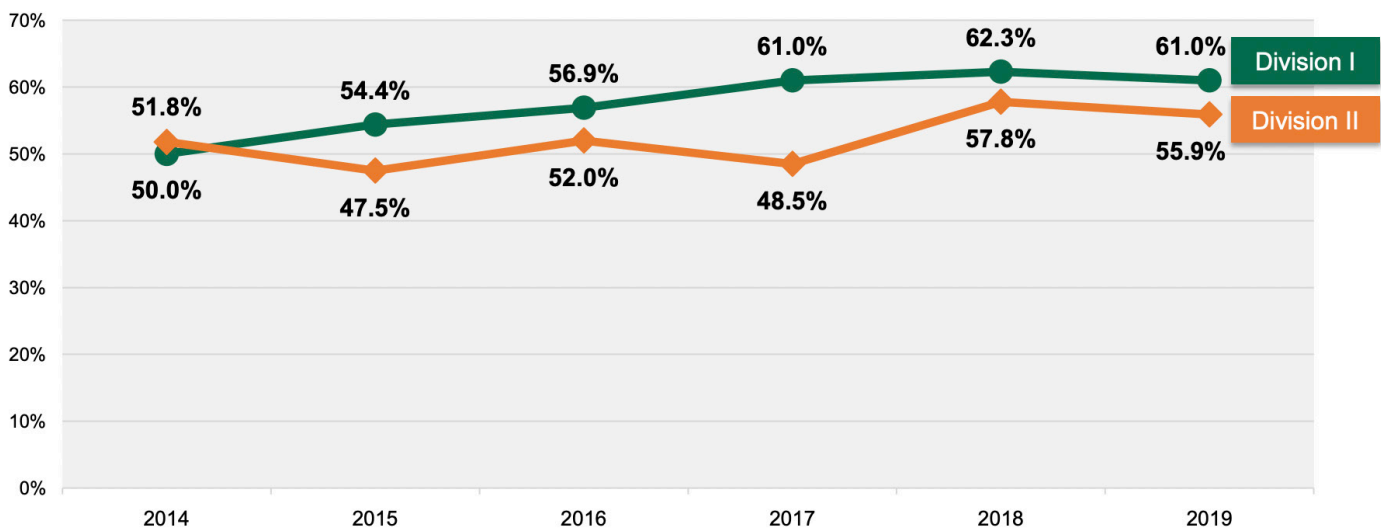
Regardless, the path to NCAA Division I tennis isn't any easier for foreign prospects. Student-athletes like Oregon junior and No. 3 singles player Ivailo Keremedchiev mentioned the difficulty of getting recognition when he played in his native Bulgaria.

"[In Bulgaria] they have a national sports academy, but it's not very good — they only have 20-30 decent players over there," Keremedchiev said. "It's a very poor education level. So that's why I wanted to get away from there."

With the takeover of international student-athletes in college tennis, it would be hard to deny the improvement of competition level compared to a decade earlier.

The limited opportunities, improvement of competition and difficulty of even making it to the Division I level highlight why tennis has become one the few NCAA sports that is dominated by non-americans.

### Trends in Percentage of International Men's Tennis Student-Athletes



Total Numbers

|     | 2014 | 2019 |
|-----|------|------|
| DI  | 251  | 297  |
| DII | 226  | 233  |

Note: Data shown are for first-year student-athletes.



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# PAC-12 WOMEN'S TENNIS OPPONENT PREVIEW

BY BRADY RUTH

*Duck sophomore Myah Petchey prepares to return her opponent's serve. UO Women's Tennis takes on Portland State at the UO Student Tennis Center on Jan. 16, 2022 (Mary Grosswendt/Emerald)*

The Ducks look ahead towards their remaining opponents, all stemming from the talented Pac-12.

With one weekend and the entire 2022 preseason in the books, the Pac-12 is already taking the form of a talented conference. With nine of 11 teams nationally ranked, every opponent on the Oregon schedule could prove dangerous. With each team having played at least nine matches so far, the sample size is more than adequate to deliver a Pac-12 preview on what to expect from the conference in 2022.

**ARIZONA WILDCATS (No. 44) (9-3, 1-1 Pac-12):** The Wildcats boast a great record, but their resume leaves something to be desired. Last year, Arizona finished 10th in the conference with a 2-8 record. This year, the Wildcats have been solid, but without a ranked win (or any ranked players), they don't pose a legitimate threat to take a conference championship back to Tucson.

**ARIZONA STATE SUN DEVILS (No. 17) (8-3, 1-1 Pac-12):** Arizona State looks to be a solid contender in the Pac-12 this season. The Sun Devils had a good run last season, making the national tournament and falling to eventual NCAA champion Texas. While not a heavy favorite in the conference, a No. 17 ranking is nothing to ignore. Patricija Spaka and Domenika Turkovic come in as the No. 49 ranked duo in the country and intend on causing havoc for Pac-12 opponents.

**CALIFORNIA GOLDEN BEARS (No. 10) (7-5, 1-0 Pac-12):** The top ranked team in the Pac-12 enters the season looking to defend its tournament championship in 2021. The Golden Bears went as far as the third round in the national tournament and will look to continue as a tennis powerhouse in

2022. Cal is led by No. 48 Jessica Alsola who has been dominant in her singles matches and is also featured in the No. 45 duo in the country when she's paired with Erin Richardson.

**COLORADO BUFFALOES (Not ranked) (4-5, 0-2 Pac-12):** The Buffs are likely going to be in the bottom tier of the Pac-12. They were bad in conference play last year (3-7) and don't have any ranked players ready to make a splash in 2022. However, the Buffs had a hot start. They rode a four game winning streak into conference play and snatched a win against No. 79 ranked Iowa. But Colorado can be beaten — and likely often will be.

**OREGON DUCKS (No. 49) (8-4, 0-2 Pac-12):** The Ducks have been flying high as of late, winning their last seven preseason matches and outsourcing opponents by a whopping 39-8 over the stretch. Freshman phenoms Sophie Luescher and Karin Young have led the recent surge for Oregon. The main worry for the Ducks should be youth. Their 8-4 record, while impressive, is similar to Utah's in opponent strength. Stepping up from opponents like Idaho and Seattle to powerhouses like Cal and USC will be a great test for the Ducks and a tremendous opportunity for this young roster to prove themselves in the Pac-12.

**OREGON STATE BEAVERS:** The Beavers don't have a women's tennis team. No tennis fun to be had in Corvallis.

**STANFORD CARDINAL (No. 25) (7-2, 1-0 Pac-12):** The Cardinal went 8-2 in conference play last year and earned themselves a national tournament bid. They have three

players ranked in the top 75 and pack a punch with the No. 21 ranked duo of Angelica Blake and Connie Ma. Stanford could be a team good enough to beat anyone and will be a tough squad to take down.

**UCLA BRUINS (No. 16) (6-3, 2-0 Pac-12):** Last year's Pac-12 regular season champion was absolutely dominant. The Bruins walked through the regular season, posted a 10-0 conference record and made the final eight in the national tournament. This year's Bruins squad has just as much potential. Three ranked players and two top duos have brought UCLA to a hardfought 4-3 preseason record. The Bruins have already gotten their feet wet in conference play with three games against Pac-12 opponents. A couple tough losses to Washington and Pepperdine were outshined by wins against USC and Cal. While these games won't count toward UCLA's conference record, the Bruins already know they can compete (and dominate) in the Pac-12.

**USC TROJANS (No. 21) (7-7, 1-1 Pac-12):** Despite the 7-7 record, USC is not a team to overlook. This is a squad that made the second round of the NCAA tournament just a season ago. No. 5 ranked Eryn Cayetano and No. 36 Salma Ewig lead the charge for a Trojan team that boasts four ranked players and the top ranked duo in the conference (No. 19) in Ewig and Snow Han. The Trojans started hot, jumping out to an early 5-0 record. But losses to three top-10 teams (Texas, Texas A&M and Oklahoma) brought USC back to Earth. USC entered conference play on a five-game losing streak, but make no mistake, the Trojans are dangerous.

**UTAH UTES (No. 27) (12-2, 1-1 Pac-12):** As the only team rolling into conference play with double digit wins and only one loss, the Utes have turned some heads early in the season. Without even one ranked player or duo, the Utes' successes have mainly come from one leading factor: schedule. Utah has played just one ranked opponent (No. 54 BYU) and hasn't really seen the same caliber of competition needed to establish itself as a powerhouse in the Pac-12. The Utes finished dead last in 2021, going 0-10 in the Pac-12 and serving as a layup for the powerhouse teams. That being said, stats don't lie, and clearly the Utes have something going right in Salt Lake.

**WASHINGTON HUSKIES (No. 33) (11-4, 2-0 Pac-12):** Washington was mediocre last year, posting a 5-5 conference record, but all signs are pointing up for the Huskies. Riding into conference play at 9-4 and boasting some impressive preseason wins, Washington is flowing right now and really working well together. The Huskies are definitely a team to worry about, and they'll be high on the Ducks' list as Oregon hopes to avenge a 4-2 loss from 2021.

**WASHINGTON STATE COUGARS (Not ranked) (4-8, 0-2 Pac-12):** The only sub .500 team coming into conference play really isn't a threat to anyone but themselves. A six-game losing streak that's seen the Cougars only put up 8 points isn't frightening to many in the Pac-12. They're cold. They could heat up, but there isn't much hope in Pullman this year.



*Oregon Women's Tennis players pose for a photo before the doubles matches begin. The University of Oregon Ducks faced off against the Eastern Washington University Eagles on Feb. 11, 2022. (Will Geschke/Emerald)*



*Duck sophomore Lillian Mould watches as she sends the ball over to her opponent. UO Women's Tennis takes on Portland State at the UO Student Tennis Center on Jan. 16, 2022 (Mary Grosswendt/Emerald)*

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