Huskies Take Mid-Winter Break Before Last Chance Qualifier

On the Track: Washington’s track squads break this week for the first time since early January, as they prepare to conclude the 2002 indoor track regular season with the Husky Last Chance Qualifier Track and Field Meet at Dempsey Indoor. The qualifying meet, scheduled for Sat., Mar. 2, will provide hundreds of the nation’s top collegiate athletes with a final opportunity to achieve or improve qualifying marks for the 2002 NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships, Mar. 8-9 in Fayetteville, Ark.

Last week: The University of Idaho’s Vandal Indoor was the site of the most recent in a three-week string of Husky indoor school records. Senior Kelsey Sheppard tore through 400 meters in 55.11 seconds to win the event and break her own school mark of 55.38 set during the 2000 indoor season. Sheppard’s victory was one of four by Husky athletes at the meet, which featured Division-I and Division-II schools from throughout the Northwest. Joining Sheppard on the victory stand was freshman Lisa Gibbs, who won the 3,000 meters in 9:55.78; the men’s 4x400-meter relay team of Cristian Adams, Phil Tabor, Sean Williams and Greg Forni, whose time of 3:14.21 was the ninth-fastest indoor 1600-meter relay of all-time at UW; and 2001 indoor All-American Brad Walker, who won the pole vault in 16-6 3/4 while competing unattached. Washington’s jumpers competed separately in Friday’s McDonald’s II Invitational in Moscow, with sophomore Brittiny Roberts posting the third-best indoor triple jump in school history with a mark of 39-10 1/2, more than eight inches better than her previous best.

Indoor Season Recap: The 2002 season has been a roller-coaster ride for Washington’s coaches, athletes and fans. The Huskies christened their new indoor track and field home, Dempsey Indoor, with five collegiate meets, including a series of thrilling duals between the women’s squads of Washington and the University of Oregon. Senior LeTesha Moore kicked off the year’s first meet with a school record in the 60m dash, one of the first events ever contested at the new facility. The Martin

Rankings Remarks

Men in Top 25
Washington’s men’s team remained in the top-25 of the U.S. Track and Field Coaches’ Association Dual Meet Power Rankings for the sixth-consecutive week. The Huskies are 22nd in the USTCA rankings, which project dual-meet scoring between the nation’s top collegiate squads. Washington’s point total of 239.87 placed it behind Pac-10 rivals Oregon (No. 21) and Arizona State (No. 13). The University of Alabama held onto No. 1 for the second-straight week. In the Trackwire 25, which ranks teams based on projected finish at the 2002 NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships, defending national-champion Tennessee held on to the top spot, while Washington remained unranked.

Women
The Husky women’s squad sits 27th in this week’s USTCA rankings with a score of 235.32, fourth-best among Pac-10 conference schools. Florida held steady at No. 1 for the second week in a row, totaling 307.43 points. Washington State was the highest-ranked Pac-10 school, coming in eighth with 260.38. In the Trackwire 25, Louisiana State opened up a seemingly insurmountable double-digit lead over national contenders Florida and South Carolina, while the Husky women went unranked.
Luther King, Jr. holiday weekend provided Husky head coach Orin Richburg with the chance to treat Northwest track and field fans to back-to-back-to-back days of thrilling action on the UW campus. Additionally, several individuals have shined for Washington in 2002. Freshman pole vaulter Kate Soma broke the school’s indoor record in just her second collegiate meet, and then extended that mark by nearly six inches more later in the season. Distance runner Eric Garner found success on the Dempsey Indoor track, posting a runaway school record in the 3,000 meters and Washington’s top indoor mile mark in nearly 30 years, while senior Kelsey Sheppard bested her own school mark in the 400 meters. With the UW Husky Last Chance Qualifier still on the schedule, it is certain that Dempsey Indoor has more surprises in store.

USA’s Top Dawg: As a reflection of the high esteem in which he is held by track and field coaches and administrators around the country, Husky head coach Orin Richburg was elected to head the U.S. National Team at the 2001 World Track and Field Championships, the most prestigious honor for a track-and-field coach in a non-Olympic year. Richburg capitalized on the opportunity, directing the U.S. to a meet-high 19 medals, including nine golds. In his 17th year at UW, Richburg is responsible for molding the Husky track squad into one of the nation’s elite dual-meet teams, as evidenced by both teams’ top-10 finishes in the 2001 U.S. Track Coaches’ Association Dual Meet Power Rankings. Richburg was an All-American sprinter at Kent State, and has mentored four Olympic athletes in his 17-year tenure at Washington.

Record Redux: When senior Kelsey Sheppard finished her 400-meter run in 55.11 seconds at last week’s Vandal Indoor, it marked a repeat performance in more ways than one. Sheppard’s indoor school-record mark was the fourth by a Husky this season, and bested her own school record of 55.38 set in 2000. Sheppard, a graduate of Lake Washington High School in Kirkland, placed 20th in the 400-meter hurdles at the 2000 NCAA Championships, and owns top-10 UW marks in both the 100- and 400-meter hurdles.

Garner-ing Acclaim: Over the past few weeks, sophomore Eric Garner has established himself as not only the Huskies’ man to beat in 2002, but one of the school’s top distance competitors of all-time. A 2000 graduate of Kelso High School, Garner battled injuries through his first year and a half at Washington, running competitively for the first time in February of 2001. Since then, Garner has steadily improved, capping his two years of effort with a dramatic 4:03.04 mile win at the UW Quad Classic on Feb. 2, Washington’s fastest indoor mile since Greg Gibson ran 3:59.1h in 1974. The following week, Garner added the school record in the 400-meter hurdles at the 2000 NCAA Championships, and owns top-10 UW marks in both the 100- and 400-meter hurdles.
An Honor Overdue: In compiling Washington’s all-time indoor top-10 marks this season, it appears that a school record set in the season-opening UW Open Indoor Track and Field meet was overlooked. Washington senior LeTeshia Moore blazed to victory in the 60-meter dash in 7.60 seconds, faster than any female Husky runner to come before.

Pole Results: No unit in the Husky arsenal has been more effective in 2002 than the women’s pole vaulters. Four women’s vaulters have met or exceeded the Pac-10 qualifying standard, while junior Sandy Erickson, sophomore Alexis Jaime and freshman Kate Soma have already combined to post three of Washington’s top-four all-time indoor marks. Soma’s NCAA provisional and school-record mark of 12-11 1/2 at the UW Invitational eclipsed her own school record of 12-5 1/2 set just two weeks prior at the Husker Invite. In just five weeks of competition, the Portland, Ore., native has raised the school’s indoor pole vault record by nearly a foot, from 12-0 3/4 to 12-11 1/2, achieved at the UW Invitational on Feb. 9.

Leading the Pac: Already this season, nine Huskies have earned berths at the 2002 Pac-10 Championships. Freshman pole vaulter Kate Soma bested the Pac-10 standard by nearly two feet with a school-record vault of 12-11 1/2 a the UW Invitational, while fellow vaulters Sandy Erickson (11-11 3/4), Alexis Jaime (11-6 1/4) and Tayler Wilkins (10-11 3/4) have all bested the Pac-10 standard. Joining the terrific vault quartet will be triple jumpers Brittiny Roberts and Marcus Kelly, both top-10 Pac-10 finishers in the event in 2001, high jumper Frank Remund, the ninth-place conference finisher in 2001, shot-putter Kameko Gay, who threw the hammer at the 2001 conference meet, and sprinter Kelsey Sheppard, who qualified with a school-record mark in the 400 meters.

Fab Freshmen: The early returns from Washington’s class of 2005 are promising. Portland, Ore., native Kate Soma earned an NCAA provisional-qualifying mark in the pole vault at the UW Invitational, while no fewer than four Husky freshmen currently lead the squad in their event, including Soma, Cherron Davis (shot put), Lisa Gibbs (3000m), high-jumper Sidney Brown and shot-putter Jeff Wallis.