Owls seek return trip to state playoffs
By Vytas Mazeika Daily News Staff Writer San Jose Mercury News

Foothill College won't have to log much mileage in its quest to return to the women's water polo state championships.

The road begins today at home in the quarterfinals of the Coast Conference playoffs, which the No. 10 Owls will host in Los Altos Hills. Top-seeded Foothill (17-5, 7-0 Coast) is the prohibitive favorite this weekend -- the Owls have won their conference eight of the past 12 years -- and seeks back-to-back NorCal titles after winning its first in school history last season.

To achieve that feat, Foothill would only have to drive to College of San Mateo for next week's NorCal playoffs.

"Very excited to be close to home so the kids can sleep in their own beds and we don't have to deal with travel," Foothill coach Jeff Bissell said. "Obviously, if we make it to state championships, we'd have to travel to Riverside. But we're not looking forward past this weekend. We have to take care of business."

The Owls take on No. 8 Ohlone today at 2 p.m., with the semifinals scheduled for Saturday morning and the championship game at 3:40 p.m.

Sophomore Deanna Farley leads Foothill with 48 goals, but five other players have scored at least half that much -- Alexandra Chapa (40), Marissa Sendejas (34), Paly grad Shameem Jalil (26), Woodside grad Megan Bordy (24) and Riley Negrete (24).

"We have multiple girls who can get the job done," Bissell said. "We have done a good job supporting each other, playing as a group."

The defense is anchored by Foothill goalkeeper Ashley Arras, whose 320 saves (14.5 per game) lead the state by a wide margin.

"Ashley in the cage has been our rock," Bissell said.

On the opposite side of the bracket, Cabrillo and CSM -- the No. 2 and No. 3 seeds, respectively -- will likely battle for a spot in the finals.

"There's been two different sides to the coin with four dominant teams," CSM coach Randy Wright said of the Coast Conference. "I never want to say it's pre-determined, but I'm going to say it's going to follow suit with 1-2-3-4 going to the semifinals."

CSM (10-10, 5-2) lost 10-4 last week at Cabrillo, which isn't the biggest team in the pool but provides other challenges.

"We're not looking to get muscled, but we do have to be prepared to deal with their quickness," Wright said.
First, the Bulldogs must get past sixth-seeded De Anza in today's quarterfinals at 1:15 p.m. CSM will rely on scoring from Shelby Chung (49 goals), Jasmine Zaldivar (44) and Erica Staben (31).

"You want that game where it all clicks, everybody is on cue," Wright said. "And we've had glimpses of that; it would just be nice to put it together for 32 minutes. It's a lot to ask for, but if you're going to do it, now is the time."

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