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OU athletes score in the classroom

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Oakland University student-athletes aren't just known for their excellence at sports, but also for their excellence in the classroom, with OU having one of the best student-athlete graduation rates in the state.

"An overwhelming majority of our athletes are excellent students and pride themselves on doing well in the classroom," said OU Associate Athletic Director Tracy Huth. "NCAA figures that are traditionally given use just scholarship athletes, but if you use the entire student-athlete population, then OU is well above the institutional average. As far as basketball is concerned, we are either first or second in the state, and right near the top of the conference."

To recognize their academic achievements, OU's Athletics Department created the Golden Grizzlies Excellence in Academics honor. A total of 152 student-athletes representing all 14 varsity teams and classes earned this honor for the fall 2001 term, the first in which it was awarded.

The minimum criterion for this recognition is a term grade point average of at least 3.0 with a minimum of 12 semester credit hours. Nine teams attained a 3.0 or better, led by women's golf (3.27), women's volleyball (3.26) and men's soccer (3.24).

Megan Piar, a junior on the women's softball team, recorded the top academic performance with a 4.0 GPA while completing 16 credits as a marketing major. Teammate Nina Catanzaro, a junior biology major, recorded a 3.93 GPA for the same term. Sophomore business administration major and soccer player Ryan Rzepka led all male athletes with a 3.97 GPA while completing 14 credit hours. Senior sociology major and basketball player Ryan Williams was another top scholar with a 3.94 GPA.

"As an institution, we were looking for a way to start recognizing student-athletes from a scholarly perspective," said Huth, who helped create the award. "For many of them, academics are no different from healthy sports competition. They value that and want to be not just good students, but excellent students."

The Mid-Continent Conference gives a similar award, but only student-athletes who have been at their educational institution for at least a year are eligible.

"Unlike the Mid-Con award, ours gives incoming freshmen something to aspire to in their first fall term," Huth said. "All of our awardees received a certificate and were honored as a group at one of the basketball games this winter. We had the certificates framed for the top male and female athletes and presented it to them at center court. Those certificates are now in our awards cases at the Athletics Center, as well as one for the team with the top GPA and certificates for the top individual for each team."

The Athletics Department also awards the Hollie Lepley Senior Scholar Athlete Award to one male and one female student each year. In addition to athletic and academic achievements, this award has a community service component. Huth said two additional community-service related awards will be created for next year – one of which will recognize an OU team.

OU coaches are very involved in their athletes' academic success, Huth said.

"They try to get the athletes to take the minimum number of credit hours per semester – 12 is the minimum per semester by NCAA rules. Some coaches have a rule that their players need to maintain a certain GPA to be on the travel squad," Huth said. "We also have a small room in the Athletics Center that doubles as a media room and study hall facility for the players. It has some computers with word processing functions. Some teams meet here and study, but the teams with the larger rosters meet at the library for their study halls."

"We try to get our student-athletes to realize that their athletic careers will only last so long. I always tell them that one of these days they're going to end up like their parents or me and have to go out and find a job. When these students are able to show on a resume that they've been able to make an athletic and academic commitment, then a lot of potential employers will think they are a good choice."

For more information on athletics programs at Oakland University, visit the **OU Athletics** Web site.

SUMMARY

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