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## Hockey club sets sights on national title

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Oakland University's men's hockey club set two goals for itself this season: to win 20 games and take first place in the Greater Midwest Hockey League (GMHL). The club accomplished both by posting a 20-6-4 regular season record and 7-2-1 mark in the GMHL. To top it off, the team also received a bid for the third consecutive year to the **American Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA) Division II National Tournament**.

"Our chances of winning a national title are definitely good," said OU senior and first-year head coach Craig Furstenau. "This could be our best chance if we stay focused and play intelligently."

The University of Southern California is hosting this year's tournament, which begins on Wednesday, March 6. The games are at the Disney Ice Arena in Anaheim. OU will play Indiana, Colorado and Central Connecticut State in a round robin format in one of four pools. The pool winners advance to the semifinals. The semifinals and final will be played March 1.

Oakland is one of only 16 teams that qualified for the tournament based on its regular season record.

"There is no doubt in my mind that the talent and program as a whole has grown over the past year," Furstenau said. "We've made tremendous progress and the schedule has become tougher. In our last six games, we've held each of our opponents to two goals, which is outstanding. We've played better in our last five games than we have all season long. We did lose 3-2 in overtime to Miami-Ohio (in the GMHL playoffs), but we played well enough to win. Miami-Ohio is arguably the best team in the country.

"If we can pick up our play one more notch, I think we have a chance to win the nationals."

The team changed its focus from offense to defense after last season.

"Last year we had an offensive minded team," Furstenau said. "I decided we needed to put a lot of emphasis on defense. We're playing smarter hockey this year. A lot of that is experience, and we have about half the team back from last year. And the new guys have provided us with a little bit extra. You don't expect freshmen to be as big at contributing to a team's success, but our freshmen have provided us with a lot of strength."

One of those freshmen is Chris Ballach, who has teamed with senior Shaun Zeldes to provide one of the best goaltending tandems in the league.

"Goaltending really is our biggest strength. It's amazing, really, to have two such talented goalies on one team," Furstenau said. "And we have six to seven top-notch defensemen. (Senior) Karl Borgquist has been dominant on defense and is up for All-American. I tell our players that we only need one or two guys to score goals – the rest of them need to do their part. Everybody is playing their role."

Another strategy Furstenau employs is using four different lines to rattle opposing defenders.

"Each of our lines has its own style. It's hard for other teams to counter that," Furstenau said. "(Sophomore forward) Ryan Teasdale and (junior forward) Ron Kolito have provided much of our offensive punch, and Kolito is our leading scorer.

"Basically, we try to get the puck to all four of our lines and wait for the other team to make mistakes. We have three to four different styles of forechecking. Sometimes we give the puck to the other team and our forechecking creates turnovers. We use speed, short shifts, wear the other team down, and wait for our scoring chances to come. Usually our success has come from following that plan."

Furstenau says his team has the talent to win its first title. But it needs to work on its mental game to become a champion.

"We have yet to play an entire 60 minutes of good hockey. Maybe we play 45 or 50 minutes of solid hockey, but we've had our mental lapses," Furstenau said. "For some reason, we've had a bad second period all year, but we have a lot of momentum in the third. Sometimes I think we don't shoot the puck enough but try to be a little too fancy. I'd like to see them try the simple

plays more often. Sometimes we start out flat, but once we get going, we're fine. But you can't do that against really good teams.

For more information, including statistics, records, a team roster and ACHA Tournament updates, visit the [OU Men's Hockey Club](#) Web site.

**SUMMARY**

Oakland University's men's hockey club received a bid for the third consecutive year to the American Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA) Division II National Tournament, which begins Feb. 26 in Anaheim. The club accomplished posted a 20-6-4 regular season record and 7-2-1 mark in the Greater Midwest Hockey League.

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