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OU student receives Mid-Con's highest honor

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

The **Mid-Continent Conference** recently named Oakland University junior Ryan Rzepka its 2002-03 Male Scholar-Athlete of the Year, the most prestigious individual honor given by the league. Rzepka, a defenseman for OU's men's soccer team, is just the second student-athlete from Oakland to be selected for the honor, joining men's basketball player Myke Thom from the 1999-2000 season.

"I'm very honored to represent OU with an award of this magnitude," said Rzepka, a finance major with a 3.9 grade point average. "Most awards are solely athletic or academic in nature. This award is unique because it recognizes both. It shows you can be a good athlete and get good grades."

Rzepka has been named to the dean's list every semester at Oakland. He also earned OU's Excellence in Academics Award for 2002-03 as the top male student-athlete. He has served as a member of both the Mid-Con Student-Athlete Advisory Committee and Oakland's Self Study for Division I Athletic Certification Fiscal Integrity Subcommittee.

In addition to exceptional athletic and academic performance, awardees also must display an exemplary mental attitude toward their peers and academic and athletic mentors. Individual leadership, maturity, integrity and personal contributions to the community also are considered.

"Ryan is one of my team captains and has very good leadership skills," said OU men's soccer coach Gary Parsons. "He displays a never-say-die attitude on the soccer field. He also has one of the highest GPAs on the team. Ryan displays a positive look on everything and works hard in and out of the classroom."

Donna Free, coordinator of graduate business programs and lecturer of accounting, taught Rzepka in her Intermediate Accounting class last winter semester. She said Rzepka is one of the most dedicated students she's ever taught.

"Ryan was always prepared and wanted to learn more beyond the basic knowledge," Free said. "He participates in class discussions, asks great questions, is personable and outgoing, and you can tell he is well liked by his peers. Ryan's certainly an exceptional student, and I'm certain he'll be an alumnus Oakland will be very proud of."

Rzepka admits it hasn't been easy juggling classes with games and practices. But he's learned to manage his time wisely.

"I know my routine and what I have to do to succeed in my classes," Rzepka said. "The classes are demanding and I have to do a lot of studying. I carry a planner with me so I can stay organized."

"It's tough when your buddies are going out but you can't join them because you have to hit the books. But that's fine because I need to have good grades when I begin my career after graduation. Basically, my free time is spent playing soccer."

This summer, Rzepka played defense for the **Mid Michigan Bucks**, a Saginaw-based semi-pro soccer team in the Premier Development League (PDL). Rzepka said he'd consider playing soccer professionally should such an opportunity come his way.

"Many college players play in the PDL during the summer. It's a very high level of soccer. Most of my teammates were all-stars on their collegiate teams," Rzepka said. "Playing for the Bucks was an excellent experience. I've been playing soccer my whole life, and if I get the opportunity to play professionally I'll pursue it, because I know I'll have my education to fall back on once soccer is over."

"I plan on going for a double major by adding accounting to my finance degree. I'm open-minded and excited about both soccer and my education."

Rzepka and the Golden Grizzlies begin the 2003 soccer season Saturday, Aug. 30, at the Portland Nike Tournament in Portland, Ore. OU's first home game is Sunday, Sept. 7, against Marquette. For more information, visit the **OU Athletics** Web site.

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