



Friday, November 2, 2001

OU women aim for NCAA Tournament berth

The Oakland University **women's basketball team** is relying on a wealth of experienced players to build upon one of its most successful seasons. The team is coming off its first 20-win season at the Division I level and advancing two games into the Mid-Continent Conference Championship. But this season, the Golden Grizzlies hope to extend its postseason by gaining a NCAA Tournament berth.

"Each season we have advanced one more round," said head coach Beckie Francis. "We made it to the Mid-Con championship game last season and the next step is advancing to our first ever NCAA tournament appearance."

The team, which opens its regular season on Friday, November 16 at the University of Florida, has nine letterwinners returning to help achieve this goal. Heading up the class are seniors Sarah Judd and Lori Kipp and junior Katie Wolfe. Judd ranks second on the Mid-Con active scoring list with 1,352 career points. Kipp finished second on the OU squad with 100 assists last year. Wolfe led the Grizzly offense in conference play with 16.1 points per game.

"Anytime you have three players returning with that kind of experience, you have a chance," Francis said. "Their leadership has shown in the preseason on and off the court."

The NCAA Tournament has eluded the Golden Grizzlies thus far in its first two seasons of eligibility. But Francis said the team now has the experience to get there.

"The first two seasons we were the newcomers on the block," Francis said. "We felt our way through the tournament process and learned more every game. With two seasons of tournament experience we are more ready to handle what lies ahead this season."

To prepare for defending its regular season title, OU has scheduled a strong group of non-conference opponents. The Golden Grizzlies open the regular season against No. 14 Florida. OU then returns home to face in-state rival Central Michigan on Tuesday, Nov. 20. Afterwards, OU will face Detroit-Mercy, Michigan State, Boston College, Dartmouth, No. 16 Georgia and No. 25 Michigan.

"By bringing teams of this caliber into our arena it says a lot about how far we have come in a short period of time," Francis said. "Playing top notch programs will show us where we are, how far we have to go and how we get to the next level."

In facing these teams, OU will rely on its depth, particularly in the guard position. The returnees include Kipp, junior Romica Clint, sophomores Jodi Young, Bobbie Bieszki and Jasmin MacAlpine. Freshmen Ashley Holenka and Leigh Tully also will battle for playing time.

"I think we have some really good battles going on at the guard position," Francis said. "With the combination of experience with Clint and Kipp, plus Jasmin who transferred from Kalamazoo College and sophomore returnees Young and Bieszki, I am very pleased at the level of competition in practices."

The one weakness that OU recognizes is its size and rebounding. Francis will look to Connie Longer and Amanda Batcha to help out the core of Judd, Wolfe, Naomi Nickleberry and Sarah Yaksich.

"We have been a very poor team at rebounding in years past," Francis said. "I am happily surprised with Amanda's progress, Connie has had some good practices and I think Judd is set to have an explosive senior season."

"I think we have a good mix of new and experienced talent. Through the preseason they have worked hard and I think they will get a chance to see what they are made of early when we play those great teams in our own backyard."

After having won two consecutive Mid-Continent Conference regular season championships and reaching the Mid-Con Tournament Final, the Golden Grizzlies are ready to move to the next level and begin a new era for OU women's basketball.

For rosters, schedules, statistics and a detailed season outlook, visit the **women's basketball** pages on the **OU Athletics** Web site.

SUMMARY

Oakland University's women's basketball team is relying on a wealth of experienced players to build upon one of its most successful seasons — its first 20-win season at the Division I level — and hopes to extend its postseason by gaining a NCAA Tournament berth. The team has nine letterwinners returning to help achieve this goal. Heading up the class are seniors Sarah Judd and Lori Kipp and junior Katie Wolfe.

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