



Thursday, November 8, 2001

International student-athletes focus of forum

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

International student athletes were the focus of the "OU Wide World of Sports" forum held Thursday, Nov. 8, as part of Oakland University's **Cultural Awareness Week** events.

Of OU's 375 international students, 33 are student-athletes. Representing those athletes were Haitham Hassan of Egypt, who swims the butterfly, backstroke and individual medley for the men's team; Tamara Swaby of Jamaica, who swims the butterfly and freestyle for the women's team; and Shahar Klovin of Israel, a midfielder for the men's soccer team. Also on the panel were Jon Teal, assistant men's swimming coach. Lisa Heaps-Seguchi, assistant director of the International Students and Scholars Office, was the moderator.

During the forum, held in the Oakland Center's Fireside Lounge, the panel was asked for their thoughts on a variety of issues that face international student-athletes, ranging from the difficulties they encountered moving to the United States to the cultural differences between them and their teammates.

Hassan, a senior mechanical engineering major, said he had spent a year and a half speaking with different swimming coaches in the United States before deciding where to attend college.

"I had no idea what to expect from the United States," he said. "I sent between 100 and 200 e-mails to different schools. The Olympics was my goal, and I wanted to be in a place that would help me reach my goal. The coaching staff at OU was what convinced me to come here."

Hassan realized his dream last year when he represented Egypt as a swimmer in the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. He said the regimen of the OU swimming program helped him attain his goal.

"The discipline of the system at OU helped me a lot here," Hassan said. "At home, if I missed a practice, maybe the coach would call, but it was really no big deal. I also wouldn't do any running or weights on a regular basis. Here swimming is really competitive. If I miss a practice, not only would my coach be mad, but my teammates would be angry if I didn't show up."

Swaby, a senior Human Resource Management major, said the competition in the United States is very different from those in her home country.

"There is no college swimming at home in Jamaica," she said. "In the United States, with the huge competitions between different colleges, it makes you try much harder to do better."

One of the more difficult transitions for Swaby was adjusting to the harsh Michigan winters after living in Jamaica.

"At first, it was a little hard," Swaby said. "I had never been in snow or weather this cold, but I gradually got used to it. And we spend all of our time competing indoors, so the weather is not really a problem."

Klovin, a freshman Business major, came to the United States this past September and has never seen snow. He said he first learned of OU from Israeli soccer players.

"Ten years ago, I knew of three Israeli soccer players who went to OU and they recommended the program to me," Klovin said. "I respected their opinion and looked into the program. The transition here so far has not been that difficult. Sometimes you have to adjust, but the conditions are great here and I have great teammates."

Teal said that besides helping their foreign teammates adjust to life in the United States, OU's student-athletes can learn a lot from international athletes.

"Having international athletes exposes our players to different cultures and makes them more sympathetic to people from other nations. It makes our teams more diverse and exciting," Teal said. "The transition for the international athlete to OU is pretty smooth. They are immediately placed in a group setting to help give them some direction and have a great support system in the Athletic Department. It also helps our programs because the more international students we bring here, the more exposure

we have around the world. It's a domino effect."

Sophomore Lydia Boar, a Biology and Pre-Dental major, said OU's international athletes bring a lot to OU's campus community.

"You get to see the world through a different perspective," she said. "It's nice to see the world through their eyes."

OU's **Cultural Awareness Week** conclude Friday, Nov. 9, with "A View of the Future," a panel discussion of the value of internationalism on campus, from noon-12:45 p.m. in the Oakland Center's Fireside Lounge; "Breaking Down Barriers: Opening Windows to the World," a celebration in honor of the destruction of the Berlin Wall, from 12:45-1 p.m. in the Lake Ontario room of the Oakland Center; and performances by the African Ensemble "Akwaba" & Steel Drum Band "Pan Jumbies," at 8 p.m. in Varner Recital Hall.

SUMMARY

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