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Women's basketball team ready for 2003-04 season

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

Last year, **OU's women's basketball team** head coach Eileen Shea-Hilliard came close to orchestrating an improbable conclusion to the season. She accepted her new job just three weeks before the first game and proceeded to lead the team to the Mid-Con Tournament championship. However, a championship repeat faded for Oakland in the closing seconds of the game. As the 2003-04 season gets under way, thoughts of a narrow defeat still linger in the minds of those returnees as they prepare to make another run at the Mid-Con Championship and a berth in the NCAA Tournament.

Ready to lead the race is Amanda Batcha, Anne Hafeli and Jayme Wilson.

Batcha, a junior, was Oakland's most dominate presence inside last season as she led the team with an average of 10.1 rebounds per game and grabbed 6.69 defensive rebounds to lead the conference. She finished the season ranked 22nd in the nation in rebounds per game and led the conference in multiple rebound games with 15.

Sophomore guard Hafeli came on strong during conference play and become a constant in OU's starting lineup. As a starter, she averaged 11.3 points and 2.6 rebounds. Her ability to make three-point shots, coupled with an automatic touch at the free throw line, shows how well she's adapted to the college game. Her 35.2 shooting percentage from three-point range was eighth in the conference, and her 88.4 percent from the free throw line led the team and placed her second in the Mid-Con.

Wilson, a sophomore guard, gave Oakland fans a glimpse of things to come, quickly maturing into a seasoned veteran while registering six 20-point games. She was named to the Mid-Con all-newcomer team and received honorable mention all-league honors. She averaged 15.5 points, second on the team and third in the conference, and was ranked 15th in the nation for three-point field goal percentage at 43.1.

Shea-Hilliard is aware that making it back to the championship game will be no small task in a tough Mid-Continent Conference. She knows much work is needed to improve over last season, especially with the loss of two experienced seniors.

"We lost two seniors with a lot of experience and leadership," Shea-Hilliard said. "We have some experience coming back, but we are going to be young and make mistakes. I'm looking for my freshmen to become sophomores and my sophomores juniors and my seniors not to be inexperienced by mid-way through the season.

"I think our post game needs to improve and our point guard play needs to become more consistent. I think those are two things we need better production in this year."

The Golden Grizzlies are not taking the easy road leading up to conference play. They open their season Saturday, Nov. 22, against Boston College, a sweet 16 team last season that lost to Connecticut, the eventual national champion.

"Boston College will be a great challenge for us on the road," Shea-Hilliard said. "When you're young, you have no fear, and I'm hoping that's how we approach the game."

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

SUMMARY

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