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OU's soccer teams poised to repeat

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Oakland University's men's and women's soccer teams will kick off their seasons with a new state-of-the-art home field scoreboard and a bright outlook for 2003. In pre-season polls of the soccer coaches, both OU's men's and women's teams were chosen to finish first in the Mid-Continent Conference, as they each did last season.

Oakland's **men's team**, which finished 10-8-3 in 2002 and made its first appearance in the Division I NCAA Tournament, returns 10 starters and 19 letterwinners from last season. Included in the group are all of the team's top scorers from a year ago and the squad's starting goalkeeper.

The group of returnees is led by junior forward Philip Braathen, who was last year's Mid-Con Player of the Year, leading Oakland with eight goals and four assists. Sophomore goalkeeper Jeff Wiese was named the Mid-Con Newcomer of the Year after posting a 1.19 goals-against average and making 83 saves in his first season. Senior defender Jason Perry and junior defender Ryan Rzepka also return – both were selected first team All-Mid-Con last season. Rzepka also received the Mid-Con's 2002-03 Male Scholar-Athlete of the Year award, the most prestigious individual honor given by the league.

Oakland's **women's team**, which has won the last three Mid-Con Tournament titles, finished 10-12-1 and appeared in its second straight NCAA Tournament in 2002. Senior midfielder Erica Demers, who had five goals and seven assists and won the Mid-Con Player of the Year award last season, returns along with sophomore forward Kristi Swaving, who had eight goals and five assists and won the Mid-Con Newcomer of the Year Award. Oakland also returns three other players who received all-conference honors last season – senior goalkeeper Sarah Buckland, senior defender Therese Bjorke and junior midfielder Katie Arnott.

The goals both teams rack up will be displayed on the new scoreboard at the west end of the field. Standing more than 50-feet over the playing field, the scoreboard will enable fans to easily get game information. In addition to displaying game time and score, the board also indicates shots, corner kicks and saves and includes a scrolling, programmable message center.

The scoreboard, which replaces a smaller, portable system, was made possible by a \$30,000 gift from the **OU Alumni Association**. The scoreboard upgrade is the next step toward the goal of completing a new stadium to benefit OU's soccer teams as well as attract OU alumni and soccer enthusiasts to campus.

"The alumni board recognizes that where there is a strong alumni association, there is a strong athletics program," said OUAA board member Gregg Garrett, who helped develop the gift proposal. "We wanted to continue to nurture that relationship here at Oakland."

The new scoreboard also reflects Oakland's commitment to developing one of the premier soccer programs in the state, if not the region.

"We now have a stadium-worthy scoreboard to go with our exceptional natural grass field," said Assistant Athletic Director for Finance and Administration Simon Dover. "It makes an amazing first impression on students, athletes and coaches. We want to have the best soccer complex in Michigan, and the contributions made by the alumni association toward that goal have been huge."

The first home game for the men's team is against Marquette on Sunday, Sept. 7, while the first home game for the women is Friday, Sept. 26, against Southern Utah.

For more information on the stadium or to make a contribution, contact Brian Arbeiter at (248) 370-3190 or arbeiter@oakland.edu. For rosters, schedules, games stories and more information on OU's men's and women's soccer teams, visit the **OU Athletics** Web site.

SUMMARY

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Conference, as they each did last season. The goals both teams rack up will be displayed on the new scoreboard at the west end of the field, made possible by a \$30,000 gift from the OU Alumni Association.

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