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Hockey team prepares for national tournament

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Two down, one to go. That's the mantra the **Oakland University Men's Hockey Club** is following as it pursues a national championship.

After winning a second consecutive **Great Midwest Hockey League** (GMHL) regular-season title, Oakland went on to score 15 goals and allowed just three in two games to win the GMHL Tournament – the team's first-ever playoff title. The tournament win gives Oakland (25-3-3, 7-1-2 GMHL) a boost as it prepares for the **American Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA) Division II National Tournament**, which is March 3-6 at the University of Maryland.

"It's been a very good season, but we're not satisfied yet," said OU coach Craig Furstenau. "We didn't do so well at nationals last year, and a lot of our guys remember that."

In last year's tournament, Oakland lost its first game 4-3 to Indiana in overtime, which sapped the remaining strength from the injury-riddled team. Oakland finished with a 1-2 tournament record. This season the team has been on a mission to achieve a number of goals, including securing a fourth-consecutive tournament bid.

"We wanted to win 20 games, win the regular-season title, win the league title and have a No. 1 division ranking going into the tournament," Furstenau said. "We also wanted to get into the habit of winning five games in a row, which is the number it takes to win the tournament. We also won every home game this season. We've achieved all of this. Now we just have the nationals."

Tournament play is conducted in a round-robin format in four pools. The pool winners advance to the semifinals. The semifinals and final will be played March 6. OU is scheduled to play Siena, Indiana and defending champion Colorado.

"We beat Siena 4-1 earlier this year, but that game could have gone either way," Furstenau said. "The game was a lot closer than the score indicates. Siena will be our first opponent of the tournament and it may be our biggest test. They're a tough team with a lot of size and speed."

"We beat Indiana four times this season, but playing in the tournament will be different. There's sort of a revenge factor for us because Indiana is the team that knocked us out last year and we haven't forgotten that. They're a really solid team that's always been successful at the tournament."

"Colorado is obviously the team to beat. We outplayed them for most of the game in last year's tournament."

Some of the key players Furstenau will rely on to take his team to the top are goaltenders senior Shaun Zeldes and sophomore Chris Ballach.

"We've been very fortunate in our goaltending," Furstenau said. "It's been a luxury to have two excellent goaltenders, and they've really stepped up this year."

In terms of scoring, Furstenau cited the play of sophomore forwards Will McMahon and Ryan Teasdale and senior forward Ron Kolito. Senior forward Dan Oleksy also has contributed some timely goals of late.

A weakness noted last year was Oakland's defense, but it has become one of the team's strengths this season. Oakland allowed an average just over three points per game in 2003-04.

"This season we're loaded on defense," Furstenau said. "Our fifth-year senior Karl Borgquist has been his usual dominating self, (freshman) Adam Chernoby has been very solid and our best playmaker, and (junior) Anthony

Magdowski and (senior) Jason Artymovich have played really well all year.”

Furstenau is giving his team a short rest to regain some strength after a long, tough season. But Oakland will be ready to go once the team hits Maryland.

“We’ve had a very methodical approach this season,” Furstenau said. “There has been a constant reminder that, yes, we’ve achieved a lot, but we remind ourselves of our ultimate goal. The team captains (Artymovich and Borgquist) remind the younger players of the effort it takes to win the tournament.”

For more information, including statistics, records, a team roster, photos, video clips and ACHA Tournament updates, visit the **OU Men’s Hockey Club** Web site.

SUMMARY

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