

Friday, February 22, 2008

OU hockey club takes aim at national tournament

Oakland University's Men's Club Hockey team's season is drawing to a close. The men will participate in the American Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA) Division I National Tournament. The defending national tournament champion Grizzlies are ranked 12th in the coaches poll and will take on fifth-ranked Oklahoma University in the first round.

The tournament, which takes place March 1-5 in Rochester, NY, features the top 16 teams in the ACHA Division I hockey.

"We started the season with 15 new players, more than half the team. It is important that, as young players, they learn how to prepare themselves mentally and physically for the college game," said Head Coach Sean Hogan. "We try to maintain the same focus all season. Preparation is the key to our success at OU. It is also the responsibility of each player to make sure they are physically and mentally prepared."

Ranked number 12, the Grizzlies are an underdog in this year's tournament, much like the team was last year — and they surprised many, including themselves, by winning the national tournament in their first year in Division I.

"We are being overlooked again, but I think that helps us. I don't think many people have us advancing past Oklahoma, as they are a tremendous program. Playing an underdog role helped us last season and I hope it motivates us again," Hogan said.

The team has not played Oklahoma since the 2005-06 season. To prepare, Hogan plans to exchange game tapes with other teams who have played them recently.

With the season over, the team has a record of 22-9-0-1.

"I think we did well this season. We lost some games that I feel we should have won and have not played as consistently as I would have liked. I think that is attributable to how young we are this season. As this freshman class continues on, we should be a solid program for years to come," Hogan said.

This season was a rebuilding year for the team, which saw many players move on as a result of graduation. One included Will McMahon, who was the ACHA tournament's Most Valuable Player last year.

McMahon still attends many games to see his younger brother Kyle play with the team.

"The team has had a great season so far, considering they have so many new faces on the bench. A team loaded with freshmen and sophomores tends to struggle at times, but overall, OU has been in every game," McMahon said. "They've lost a few tough ones, but I'd chalk it up to youth. If the team is firing on all cylinders coming into nationals, they could be a scary team to play against. I wouldn't want to face them in the first round."

McMahon and the other veteran players played with the team through a move from Division II to Division I and helped lead the team to national tournament titles in three of the last four years.

"There is no substitute for experience. We are going to have to out work every team in every game if we want to advance through the tournament. Having veteran players last season was a big bonus," Hogan said.

However, Hogan cited freshman Kevin Kranker, senior Brent Cooper and junior Jarret Samp, as players on this year's team who have provided leadership.

"We have 15 new players and many of them are new to college hockey. However, almost all have played in very tough junior leagues and that helps with their maturation process," Hogan said.

For more information on the team, visit the **OU Men's Club Hockey** Team Web site. For more information on the team's progress through the ACHA Division I national tournament, continue to watch **The News at OU**.

SUMMARY

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Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Friday, February 22, 2008
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Friday, February 22, 2008
Article Start Date: Friday, February 22, 2008