



Thursday, February 22, 2001

## Ice hockey team reaches national playoffs

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

In only its second season, the **OU Black Bears** ice hockey team has qualified for the American Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA) Division II playoffs.

The Black Bears tied for fourth in the ACHA's Central Division and has a 19-10-1 overall record. Of the league's 98 teams, only 16 qualified for the playoffs, which begin February 28 at Indiana University. OU's first opponent will be Central Connecticut.

"We're ecstatic and excited," Black Bears coach Anthony Jalaba said. "There's a lot at stake here. It's only a difference in degree from the Stanley Cup playoffs. A lot of the teams who made the playoffs are ones we've seen before and we've beaten some of them. Most of those teams have playoff experience, but we really feel that with our talent, every game is up for grabs."

Qualifying for the national playoffs is a lofty goal realized, considering this is the first season the club team is eligible for post-season play. The team finished 16-12-1 in the 1999-2000 season.

"Our initial season went very well," Black Bears assistant coach Tom Ricketts said. "We wanted to finish over .500, generate fan support and attract quality players. This year we've been extremely pleased. We have a better record and a larger fan base, and we experienced international competition with a tournament in Iceland."

In November, the club was invited to play in the Fire N Ice Saga in Iceland. The Black Bears faced top club teams from the United States, as well as the Icelandic National Team, which competes in World Championship play. Jalaba said he looks forward to competing in another international tournament next season.

For its home games, the club plays at the Rochester Onyx Ice Arena and occasionally at the Troy Sports Center, averaging more than 500 fans per game. Besides the increased attendance, the team also is drawing more attention from potential players. Ricketts said he expects 40-50 players will try out for four open slots next season.

"The amount of enquiries about playing for our team has increased tenfold," Ricketts said. "We literally get 10 enquiries a week, whereas last year we received maybe two or three a month."

Jalaba said the club is a viable option for hockey players who want to continue playing at a high level, but not participate in a travel program.

"It's nice that OU has a collegiate team," Jalaba said. "OU is an option for those hockey players who want to stay close to home and get a college education. It's a team a lot of guys want to play for."

For schedules, statistics, game reports and a team roster, visit the **OU Black Bears** website. Information on the ACHA tournament can be found at [www.indiana.edu/~iuhockey/nationals.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~iuhockey/nationals.html).

### SUMMARY

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