



Thursday, September 26, 2002

OU men's hockey has new coach, same goal

By **Mary E. Iorio**, OU Writer

It's 4:30 a.m. on a Thursday and Oakland University ice hockey player Sean Trueblood is up. In less than two hours, the right wing will pad up at The Onyx, OU's home rink. Before then, he's got to shower, down breakfast, pull his books together for after-practice engineering classes and drive an hour.

There's no luxury in hockey, except maybe in winning. And that's what Trueblood and the other 24 players on OU's Division II club team plan to do this year. The season starts Sept. 27 with a match up against Bowling Green.

"We're going to win, a lot," says Trueblood's teammate Chris Ballach. The sophomore joined the team this year as a goalie. "We're having high-intensity practices. The lines are getting together. We're fast."

They need to be fast, says Center Ron Kolito, a junior pre-med major. "We're not a very big team (physically). We're not going to play crash and burn hockey. We're going to win on speed."

If they do win, it won't just be just speed that takes them home. Add in talent, agility and plain old determination. The team practiced all summer, on and off the ice. Most of the players carry at least 12 credits and hold down part-time jobs to help pay tuition. From September through March, they'll hit the ice a minimum of three times per week, and often four times.

That determination took the Grizzlies to nationals last season for the second year running. Of 123 American Collegiate Hockey Association Division II club teams, only 16 make it to nationals. OU walked away with a sixth place ranking. Last season, they also pulled out a winning record, 15-13-3.

This year's 29-game, regular-season schedule pits them against Division I teams nine times. Last year, OU joined the newly formed Great Midwest Hockey League, along with Michigan State University, the University of Michigan, Ferris State, Indiana University and Miami University of Ohio.

"We have by far one of the toughest schedules in the league," said the team's General Manager Tom Ricketts. "We want to prove that we can compete against the best teams, and we want to prepare our team for playoffs and nationals."

The team heads into the season with a new head coach. Rick Kaminski comes from the University of Michigan, where he served as an assistant coach for the past four years. He helped take U of M's team to the national championships last season. Kaminski replaces OU Hockey Coach Tony Jalaba.

A strapping man, Kaminski is agile on hockey skates, sailing smoothly across the ice during practice and shouting out orders to each line as they climb the boards and take their positions.

It's glaringly bright in the Onyx at 7:15 a.m. – shockingly so compared to the foggy dusk outside. But everyone on this team is wide-awake, slamming the boards and flying after that tiny black puck. As it spins toward the other goal, the steely sound of blades hammering the ice reverberates through the arena's empty stands.

Kaminski hardly notices, too focused on the scrimmage. He started coaching when he was 18, taking on a crew of 6-year-olds on the east side of Detroit. It's a little different now, when they're 20 and three to four times bigger. But building a team still starts with the basics.

"We've been stressing team play, quickness and conditioning," Kaminski says. "We call them flow drills: positioning, passing, everything that relates to how a group of players play a game. We're not so much worried about individual skills right now as much as team skills."

More than half the team is new; about 13 players gained spots this year. Veterans returning include Defenseman and Captain Karl Borgquist, Goalie Shaun Zeldes and Forwards Scott Marlinga and Kolito. Kaminski and Ricketts expect a lot from new Forwards William McMahon, Justin Jagels and Ronnie Teasdale.

While the team dons OU black and gold for games, for practice they wear red and yellow, blue and green, black and gray – the

colors of their lines. It helps them get to know each other, to count on each other. They'll play with these guys all season, learning to anticipate hand offs, strategies, footwork, sudden turns and stops. But that predicting power hasn't happened yet. It won't happen for a few games.

"We're trying to build some team camaraderie," Kaminski said. "They're getting adjusted to playing with each other. Getting line combinations together has been a major focus early on. We'll get deeper into strategies as the season progresses."

For statistics, the season schedule and other details on the Grizzlies' hockey team, visit the [OU Men's Ice Hockey Club Web site](#).

SUMMARY

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