



Tuesday, March 4, 2003

Hockey club preparing for next season

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

Though the Oakland University men's club hockey team had a disappointing 1-2 record in last week's **American Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA) Division II National Tournament**, the team still had a positive year with a 20-6-4 regular season record and a Greater Midwest Hockey League championship. Not one to rest on laurels, Head Coach Craig Furstenau said the team will work on improving next season, starting this March.

"We had high expectations for this season, but we're only losing two players to graduation. Our other seniors will be eligible to play one more year, so we'll probably be better next season because of experience," said first-year head coach Craig Furstenau. "We need to work on showing up with the proper mentality for winning games. I'd like to see us do more off-ice conditioning, which we'll start in a couple weeks – we're not going to wait until September. I think we'll have our guys working out a lot over the summer."

OU received an invitation to the national tournament for the third consecutive year and had legitimate hopes of winning its first national title. But a 4-3 overtime loss in the first game against Indiana on Feb. 26 took away the energy needed to sustain a strong title drive.

"We became very deflated after that overtime loss," Furstenau said. "Indiana got out to an early lead, though we were ahead 2-1 at the end of the second period. Indiana tied the game at three with less than four minutes left. We got some good shots off in overtime but hit the posts. Indiana just got some breaks. We didn't play our best, but had some good chances to win."

OU also suffered its first injury of the season when junior defenseman Jason Artymovich was sent to the hospital for a concussion. Artymovich was released late the following day.

The team found it hard to shake off the disappointment of the first loss and was unable to make a comeback against eventual tournament champion Colorado, which defeated OU 5-2 on Feb. 27.

"The guys were really down in the dumps after the first game. The mental aspect proved to be big," Furstenau said. "Colorado scored on us quickly and our leading scorer (junior forward) Ron Kolito ended his season in the first minute of the game with a broken collarbone. He got a clean check when he least expected it.

"I'd say we really outplayed Colorado in the last 25 minutes of the game. We forced them to take some timeouts. They didn't even get a shot on goal in the final period. We played an excellent third period and made it 4-2, but it wasn't quite enough."

OU was ineligible to advance further in the tournament, which was held in Anaheim, Calif., but the team finished its season with a 5-4 win over Central Connecticut State on Feb. 28. Unfortunately, senior forward Eric Wojno suffered a broken finger and sophomore goalie Chris Ballach sprained a hip flexor.

"After playing all season with no injuries, then to have four main starters hurt over the final three games was very frustrating," Furstenau said. "But had we won that first game the mentality would've been different.

"Another thing that killed us was playing on an Olympic size ice surface, which is about 10 feet longer and 30 feet wider than we're used to. It was harder to execute our system and style of play on that surface. Usually we have an easier time of bottling up the opponent in the neutral zone, but with the bigger rink it's harder to cover the space."

OU finished 12th in the 16-team field. But by posting positive records over the past several seasons, the team has been able to attract interest from top players from as far away as British Columbia, which bodes well for future seasons.

"We have information on recruiting on our team Web site," Furstenau said. "Throughout the season we get prospect forms from about 40-50 players. A lot of people are considering coming to Oakland University because they're interested in the hockey team. We expect to have about 50 players trying out for just two to three spots for next season. Every year we have bigger turnouts, and our team is definitely improving because of it."

The men's hockey club will be holding tryouts for the 2003-04 season during the second week of September. For more information, including statistics, records and a team roster, visit the [OU Men's Hockey Club](#) Web site.

SUMMARY

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