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## Softball team ranked high academically

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

In just its third season, Oakland University's **softball team** advanced to its first NCAA Tournament last May and became the first OU team to win a NCAA Tournament game. But while the Golden Grizzlies focused on beating their opponents, they didn't lose sight of maintaining high academic standards.

The National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) ranked OU No. 30 among all NCAA Division I softball teams with a 3.29 grade point average for the 2001-2002 academic year. The NFCA publishes the rankings each year based on cumulative grade point averages submitted by the coaches. Detroit-Mercy, which finished first with a 3.54 GPA, was the only other Michigan school in the top 50 on the NFCA's list.

"I think our players work extremely hard both on and off the field," OU head coach Mike Tomlinson said. "Steve Ogg, our previous head coach, did an excellent job recruiting good athletes who perform well academically. In just three years, I've been able to watch our players grow and maintain their academic abilities. And we're trying to maintain that as we move forward – six of our seven recruits for this year are National Honor Society members."

Some of the players who recorded high GPAs for the fall 2002 semester were junior elementary education major Bozenna Johnson, 3.95; senior psychology major Jennifer Granger, 3.91; junior general studies major Donna McCoy, 3.90; senior English major Tiffany Evans, 3.67; and senior biology major Nina Catanzaro, 3.67.

"Our players not only deal with athletics and academics but also work schedules and fund raising," Tomlinson said. "The team worked just about every weekend last fall at the concession stands for Michigan State football games and worked all the men's and women's basketball concessions at OU. It's all very demanding time-wise, but our players can't lose sight of academics."

The fact that the team plays about 60 percent of its season on the road also makes it harder to maintain a high GPA.

"It's a tricky thing to balance school with softball when you travel as much as we do," Tomlinson said. "Our players take their laptops with them, and we try to stay in hotels that have Internet hookups. Our players know that academics are very important because once they leave college, softball will be over."

The players also spend a great deal of time helping each other with their studies.

"Our team takes advantage of their off-the-field time," Tomlinson said. "There is a lot of in-team tutoring. We take the family mentality and try to help each other as much as possible. We also stress that they schedule study hours together. We've treated them as adults and allowed them to work through their studies."

To help ensure that the team remains in good academic standing, Tomlinson and his staff communicate frequently with Keith Merritt, athletic academic adviser in OU's **Advising Resource Center**, which provides tutoring services and reviews students' academic progress.

The softball team will begin its 2003 season in Gainesville, Fla., Feb. 21-23 at the Cox Communications Classic at the University of Florida. For an OU softball schedule, roster, statistics and more, visit the **OU Athletics** Web site.

### SUMMARY

The National Fastpitch Coaches Association ranked OU's softball team No. 30 academically among all NCAA Division I softball teams. The team had a 3.29 grade point average for the 2001-2002 academic year. The University of Detroit-Mercy, which finished first with a 3.54 GPA, was the only other Michigan school in the top 50 on the NFCA's list.

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