



Tuesday, April 29, 2003

## Lacrosse club qualifies for nationals

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Oakland University's **men's lacrosse club team**, ranked one of the best in the country, will compete for a national title at the **U.S. Lacrosse Intercollegiate Associates National Championships** in St. Louis, Mo., May 7-10. This will be OU's first-ever appearance in the national tournament since the club was established in 1995.

Oakland is ranked No. 13 nationally and will play No. 4 Michigan in the tournament's first round at 2:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 7. The winner will face either Brigham Young University or Chapman University (Orange, Calif.) in the second round Thursday, May 8.

The national tournament represents the very best in men's club lacrosse – only 16 of the nation's 160 teams receive invitations to play.

"We have a lot of seniors on the team, and when the season started, I told them this is their year to make history at Oakland," said third-year coach Dwayne Hicks. "We don't want to go out just being good. We want to do something special."

Oakland (12-2) is enjoying its best season ever. The club's only losses came against Michigan, 14-10, on March 23 and 19-8 in the Central Collegiate Lacrosse Association Championship Tournament on April 27. Oakland finished second to Michigan in that tournament.

"Our first loss came early in the season when we hadn't yet come together and gelled as a team. At the very least, we showed Michigan that we could play with them," Hicks said. "The second game against them was relatively close, but we waited too long to turn it on. We have a fast, athletic team that plays a run-and-gun style of lacrosse. Michigan is a team that waits to take advantage of a mistake.

"I think playing Michigan in the first round of the tournament helps us. Hopefully, we'll take what we learned in the first two games and change things. We'll play smarter because now we know their strengths. I hope that Michigan is actually looking forward to the next game and takes us lightly. We have the weapons and can beat anyone on any given day."

Some of the top players who have elevated OU's play this season include sophomore attackman Billy Binge, senior attackman Towbey Kassa and freshman goalie Chris Wood.

"Binge is one of the best in the country," Hicks said. "He was recruited by several schools on the east coast but decided to stay and play in Michigan, which is good for Oakland. He has a great shot, very good handling skills and good speed. You need all those assets to be a great lacrosse player.

"Kassa has been instrumental in helping the team reach the next level. He's organized, motivated and sets a tone. He also leads our attack from behind, which helped Billy (Binge) become the player that he is. If we didn't have a person with Kassa's skills, other teams would just gang up on Billy. But they have to watch both of them, which is one reason why we put up the numbers that we do.

"Wood has been absolutely phenomenal this year. He makes the saves in goal that he has to make at key times in the game. If you have a goalie that's on his game, it takes your defense to a higher level and frustrates the other team. This is one of the reasons why he was an all-state high school player last year (at Warren DeLaSalle)."

Regardless of the tournament result, Oakland's regular-season wins against clubs from large programs such as Auburn, Pittsburgh, North Carolina State and the University of Georgia gained national recognition for Oakland, Hicks said.

"We're somewhat known as a Cinderella story team," said Hicks, who played and coached lacrosse at Notre Dame and played semi-pro lacrosse in Manchester, England. "We only have 16 players on our roster while programs like Michigan have 40. Our results have proven to a lot of people that we can hang with the big boys. We're as good as a lot of bigger programs. With just 16 guys, most teams wouldn't have gotten this far. I'm really proud of our team."

For tournament news and results, visit the **U.S. Lacrosse Intercollegiate Associates** (USLIA) Web site. For a schedule, roster, game reports, recruiting information and more, visit the **OU Men's Lacrosse** Web site.

**SUMMARY**

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