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JANUARY 2024
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END OF BIG 12 ERA

Preview spring sports at OU from basketball to wrestling



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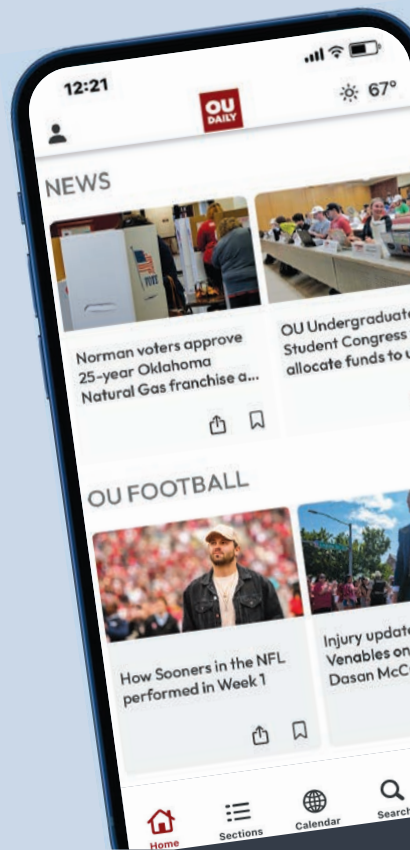
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COVER PHOTOS BY REGHAN KYLE (TOP LEFT), JENNA BURRESS (TOP RIGHT),
ADEN CHOATE (BOTTOM LEFT), BOB NGUYEN (BOTTOM RIGHT)



JENNA BURRESS/OU DAILY

OU men's basketball head coach Porter Moser during the game against Arkansas-Pine Bluff on Nov. 30.

'FIX WRONGS AND BUILD ON RIGHTS'

Moser revitalizes roster following 15-17 season

BY GRACIE RAWLINGS • GRACIE.M.RAWLINGS-1@OU.EDU

In 2018, Porter Moser orchestrated a private jet from Chicago to San Antonio and made seating arrangements at the Alamodome for his mentor, former colleague and college coach Tony Barone.

There, a Moser-led Loyola University Chicago team would compete in its first NCAA men's Final Four in 55 years. Two decades before, the tournament took place at the same venue. However, instead of watching their team play in the postseason, Moser and Tony were fired from their posts as assistant coach and head coach, respectively, at Texas A&M.

During this full-circle moment, Tony's son Brian watched as Moser made plans for his dad, who was battling lung cancer, to be at the tournament and to relish in the irony of the situation up until the final days before the Ramblers tipped off.

"The one thing that Porter has always done for my family is

that he has always shown up," Brian said. "He has always shown up for us in times of need, in times of sadness and in times of success."

To Brian, that is who Moser is, but after two seasons with Oklahoma, many are questioning his identity as a coach.

Coming off a last place finish in the Big 12 and two seasons without an NCAA tournament appearance, Moser faces many obstacles heading into the 2023-24 season.

With a roster that is unrecognizable from a year ago, Moser has crafted a 15-man lineup on his own — something he wasn't able to do during his first two seasons with the Sooners — and has seen an improvement in athleticism, length and speed during the offseason.

But the journey from last to a spot that is worthy of postseason contention is long. It is one that spans over 30 regular season

games, colliding with ranked opponents Kansas, Houston, Arkansas, Texas, North Carolina and Baylor.

Despite its initial difficulties, potential hardships and inherent expectations, this season possesses similar challenges to Moser's prior coaching endeavors and are all aspects of collegiate basketball he's navigated before.

The identifiable style of coaching he developed at Texas A&M, established at Arkansas-Little Rock, carried to Illinois State, Saint Louis and Loyola, and brought to Oklahoma, is what Moser has stood by over his 33-year career. This season, that foundation must be able to withstand the pressures of a new roster, a difficult schedule and a final season in the Big 12.

"I feel like every year, he gets his players in there and his culture in there," Brian said. "Now, the question is, are teams good enough to beat those principles or are you good enough to

stand on them?"

To OU's head coach, revitalizing a team is just a part of the job, and stepping up is not just something he did for Tony, it was something he learned from him. Now, in his third season with the Sooners, Moser plans to do what he has always done.

"Coach Tony Barone was a big influence on me, my college coach," Moser said. "I coached for him, and he was a huge influence and helped teach me what I know about building programs, especially from the ground up."

'Fix wrongs and build on rights'

Brian can remember the phrase "do more" printed on the back of his shorts when he played for his father and Moser at Texas A&M.

Moser had come up with this phrase for his players and emphasized it, even to the point of embroidering it onto their clothing, but, after leaving College Station, he couldn't just preach the motto — he had to live it.

And he did.

The Naperville, Illinois, native was handed a last place team at Little Rock, a last place team at Illinois State and an eighth place team at Loyola. With goals to build a winning program at each of these schools, Moser challenged the way things had been done prior to his arrival in hopes of changing past outcomes.

"Well, the one thing is, every program that I have inherited (I think) has been in last place," Moser said. "What I have done is, I've built them up and really tried to change the culture, and I think that has been the biggest part of my coaching."

With programs like Loyola, where Moser coached from 2011-2021, this method worked, and he accumulated a record of 188-141, which was highlighted by the trip to the Final Four. But despite his decade of gradual growth with the Ramblers, this was not always the case.

His time at Illinois State, which has been reflective of his two seasons at OU, was turbulent. Moser accumulated a losing record in three of his four seasons and had the lowest winning percentage of any coach who had been with the Redbirds for more than two years.

The struggles were obvious, but Brian, who joined Moser at Illinois State as an assistant, applauded the young head coach for working with what he had, even when it didn't fit his system.

"He was very willing to think outside of the box while building a team and creating a culture," Brian said. "You have to think outside the box until you get your guys in there and until you get the talent you need in there. I think he was very willing to adjust, learn and fix wrongs and build on rights."

There was clash instead of cohesion and before his eventual termination at Illinois State, the pressure from the community was obvious, not only for the head coach, but also for the players on the team.

Boo Richardson, a guard for the Redbirds during Moser's last season at Illinois State, remembers his head coach and the hardships that the team faced during their 15-16 finish that season.

"Sports is a win-hate situation," Richardson said. "You win, everybody loves you, you start to lose some games and people question the players and coaches. Moser is built for stuff like that, he is a great guy and you can't take that away from his character, but as a coach, I didn't really get the best of him."

That feeling was replicated in the past 2022-23 season. The Sooners struggled, especially during conference play, posting a 5-13 record, and Moser was forced to be creative while navigating rosters he didn't recruit.



ADEN CHOATE/OU DAILY

Sophomore guard Otega Oweh and junior guard Javian McCollum during the game against Green Bay on Dec. 16.

Now, for the first time since his arrival at OU, he has the opportunity to coach a team that he designed.

"This is my first year, right now, that the whole roster is guys that I recruited," Moser said. "This is the first year at Oklahoma, and I really like the speed and athleticism, and I love that we got gym rats."

'We're going to do it'

"Be a sponge," Porter Moser said to Daniyal Robinson during his first season as a graduate assistant at Arkansas-Little Rock. "Soak in the knowledge."

This piece of advice would follow the now-head coach at Cleveland State, as he sat alongside Moser at Arkansas-Little Rock, Illinois State and Loyola. Robinson learned from the Sooners head coach, watching him struggle and watching him succeed, and absorbing the lessons that accompanied both the wins and the losses.

Over the course of nine years, he noticed two things about Moser — he knew the game of basketball, and he loved coaching student-athletes.

"He's very passionate about teaching," Robinson said. "From early on, a big part of what he did was player development and that is something that has stuck with him. I think it has been at his core from day one."

Development will be an important part of OU's game this season. Last year, the Sooners boasted the Big 12's second-worst offense, scoring 67.7 points per game. OU was also last in rebounds per game, fourth to last in assists and second to last in steals.

With an obvious passion for the sport, Moser often leads his team with a fiery persona and a determination to challenge any opponent, but in the Big 12, which is arguably the best conference in college basketball, any team in the league will capitalize on a lack of fundamentals.

Through the same ideologies Robinson watched his mentor establish over nine seasons, Moser will attempt to teach his team the game, while still prioritizing a player-coach relationship both on and off the court.

Greg Dilligard, former Illinois State small forward, is a testament to this fact.

"Through those four years, he taught me a lot," Dilligard said. "I saw both sides of him, the coaching side and the personal side. He just taught me a lot of stuff about making sure I worked hard, keeping up the work ethic and fighting through adversity."

"I mean to this day he's still somebody that I've always looked up to, and he's just somebody I've learned a lot from in my life."

Moser has failed, but he has also succeeded. In the midst of a new season, he is determined to apply the lessons he has learned and take the opportunities that lie ahead in stride.

"I've inherited last place teams but this wasn't a last place team, it just didn't have a roster," Moser said. "So, we've had to build it up from the beginning. So, I know how to do it. We're going to do it."

EXERCISE & SUBSTANCE MISUSE

We've heard it all already. From “exercise is great for your mental wellbeing” to “it keeps your mind focused”, people have a general idea about the the benefits exercise.

But, there's a still a lot more info that college students who don't normally exercise could learn.

Claim 1

“athletes are at a higher risk of misusing substances”

Though athletes have higher than average drinking rates, they **smoke significantly less** than the rest of college students.¹ Unfortunately, some athletes may **misuse opioid prescriptions** for chronic sport injuries.²

Claim 2

“exercising can help with substance use disorder”

Working out regularly can help with symptoms of depression and anxiety, which can be common for people with SUD.³ Activities like **jogging, resistance training, yoga and walking** can also curb cravings for many substances.³

Claim 3

“being around peers that exercise helps you exercise”

Exercising regularly is great. A study in Scholar Journal found working out is a better way to curve. While building healthy friend groups helps with SUD, **exercise must be a personal commitment.**





ADEN CHOATE/OU DAILY

Junior guard Payton Verhulst during the game against Oral Roberts on Nov. 12.

SEASON'S NOT OVER YET

Sooners aim to end Big 12 journey on a high note

BY BEN SUEY • BENJAMIN.P.SUEY-1@OU.EDU

Oklahoma is seeking a strong finish in last season of Big 12 play after a less-than-ideal start to the 2023-24 season.

The Sooners are coming off the heels of a strong 2022-23 season that ended with a 26-7 record, a Big 12 regular season title and a No. 16 ranking in the final AP Poll.

Third-year head coach Jennie Baranczyk lost significant pieces from the previous season; most notably the trio of Madi Williams, Ana Llanusa and Taylor Robertson. The Sooners faced another hurdle when redshirt senior forward Liz Scott suffered a season-ending shoulder injury in the preseason.

OU retained senior forward Skylar Vann, who's averaging a team-high 13.9 points and 7.2 rebounds per game. Senior guard Aubrey Joens is entering her second year with the Sooners after transferring from conference-foe Iowa State and is averaging 10.9 points off the bench while shooting 37.2% from 3-point range. Senior guard Nevaeh Tot is also a returner after starting

all 33 games last season and has led the Sooners with 3.4 assists per game thus far this season.

OU took to the transfer portal and acquired junior guard Payton Verhulst, a former consensus five-star recruit who was ranked the No. 12 player nationally in the class of 2021 by ESPN. Verhulst transferred to Oklahoma during the 2022-23 season after playing eight games with Louisville but was forced to sit out for the Sooners the remainder of the season. Verhulst has already made a name for herself at OU. Particularly in show-stopping moments such as her 32-point stance against Oral Roberts on Nov. 12.

The Sooners also added senior guard Lexy Keys from in-state rival Oklahoma State via the transfer portal. Keys averages 7.8 points per game, boasting 36.4% accuracy from field goal range. Freshman forward Sahara Williams, a former five-star recruit, has emerged as a rising star in the women's basketball world,

averaging 10.6 points and 5.9 rebounds per game.

After a hot 5-0 start to the season and rising to No. 22 in the AP Poll, the Sooners now sit at 10-6 nearing the halfway mark of the season. OU lost to Princeton and Tennessee in the Fort Myers Tip-Off before suffering its worst loss yet 76-92 to UNLV in Norman.

The Sooners began their last run through the Big 12 with a 69-52 win over UCF on Dec. 30. The last ride will include a game against Kansas State on Jan. 31, Cincinnati on Feb. 20, Texas on Feb. 28 and Kansas on March 2, as well as a home-and-home matchup against Oklahoma State on Feb. 3 and 24.

Remaining home games of the year feature TCU on Feb. 7 and No. 10 Baylor on Feb. 14. The Sooners will also go on the road to face Iowa State on Feb. 10.



JENNA BURRESS/OU DAILY

OU women's basketball head coach Jennie Baranczyk during the game against UNLV on Dec. 9.

PRESEASON PREPARATIONS

Baranczyk counts on fresh talent following loss of veteran players

BY BEN SUEY • BENJAMIN.P.SUEY-1@OU.EDU

In the fourth quarter of the second round of NCAA's 2023 Division I Women's Basketball Championship, Oklahoma led UCLA 54-53.

Though originally trailing in the first half, spectacular performances from redshirt seniors forward Madi Williams and guard Ana Llanusa catapulted the Sooners to a 22-3 run to take the lead going into the final stretch of the game. However, a dedicated UCLA team led by guard Charisma Osborne rallied in the fourth quarter to win the game 82-73.

So close. Yet another tough second-round exit for the Sooners.

The loss in the tournament capped what was otherwise a good season for Oklahoma. A program that was struggling to make the tournament before was now consistently breaking in. On top of that, the 2022-23 season ended with a 26-7 overall record, which included a 14-4 run in Big 12 Conference play, only

two losses at home, a No. 16 ranking in the final AP Poll before the tournament and the Sooners' first regular season conference title since 2009.

However, the end of the season brought overwhelming roster changes. OU's star players, Williams and Llanusa, graduated. Oklahoma also lost guard Taylor Robertson, a 3-point sharpshooter. Then, three days before OU's season opener, redshirt senior forward Liz Scott, another pivotal piece in the Sooners' arsenal the previous season, took to social media to announce that she'd be sitting out the regular season due to a shoulder injury.

In one offseason, Oklahoma lost a significant amount of talent that helped OU head coach Jennie Baranczyk lay the foundation for where the program is now. With the losses of veteran leadership, the 2023-24 season brings a challenge, which began against Wichita State on Nov. 6 at the Lloyd Noble Center in

Norman.

"We celebrated that class in an incredible way," Baranczyk said. "The really cool thing about them is they want tomorrow to be better than yesterday. That's the alumni here. You name the alum from this program and that goes back a long time."

This season, the Sooners have faced some of their toughest nonconference opponents yet, including matchups against future SEC opponents at Ole Miss on Nov. 9 and Tennessee on Nov. 25 as part of the Fort Myers Tip-Off. OU also faced Virginia on the road on Nov. 19, Princeton on Nov. 23 in Fort Myers and North Carolina on Dec. 19 in the Jumpman Invitational in Charlotte.

With that much loss and a tough Big 12 slate ahead, some teams would buckle under the pressure. However, Baranczyk sees the transition between seasons as no worry at all.

"I think we're lucky that that's just been part of the



SUTTON SPINNER/OU DAILY

Senior forward Skylar Vann during the game against Grambling State on Dec. 1.

foundation,” Baranczyk said. “It’s just the next people up, right? We’re the gatekeepers of this program. That’s what we look at, less than how we need to replace people.”

Luckily for Baranczyk, her team is not without talent. One of the bright spots of Oklahoma’s offseason was the arrival of former five-star recruit, freshman forward Sahara Williams. During her senior year at West High School in Waterloo, Iowa, Williams averaged 21.2 points and 10.1 rebounds per game. Her efforts helped propel West High to the state finals and even earned her a gold medal at the 2022 3x3 World Cup. Williams received offers from Power 5 programs such as Iowa, Iowa State and USC.

“To come here, I could do my own thing,” Williams said. “Jennie is from Iowa, so I feel like she could kind of understand where I was coming from. Building my own legacy, doing something new. It was just really homey. Jennie has been recruiting me since I was in the seventh grade, so we have a pretty good relationship.”

Williams showed her prowess early in an exhibition match against West Texas A&M in October when she scored 20 points and grabbed 11 rebounds in 22 minutes. Williams wasn’t the only one who showed off her skill set as senior guard Lexy Keys, a transfer from rival Oklahoma State, scored a game-high 23 points. Like Williams, she seems to have already found a home in Norman, thanks in large part to Baranczyk.

“So far it’s been awesome,” Keys said of her time at OU. “I think I’ve grown a lot since I’ve been under (Baranczyk). Especially in the confidence realm, trusting myself more on my instincts and staying true to how I play.”

Baranczyk praised Keys’ performance in practice.

“She has been phenomenal,” Baranczyk said. “She has been a great, great fit. She’s blue collar, she’s from here, that’s what we want to be able to do, so it just means a little bit more. ... When she first got here, I think she almost took a little bit more of a back seat. I think now you can really start to see her. Defensively, I think she does a great job. Obviously, (she can) shoot the basketball. Her off-ball movement is phenomenal and it’s just somebody you have to have in your program. So it’s been really fun and really easy to coach her.”

More new faces that have joined the Sooners include junior guard and former ACC All-Freshman selection Payton Verhulst, who sat out most of last season after transferring to from Louisville. In-state recruit Landry Allen, who averaged 17.2 points and 9.1 rebounds a game during her senior year at Tuttle, also joined the fray.

“You knew (Allen) was Sooner born, Sooner bred,” Baranczyk said. “She has really great touch. ... Her little turnaround shot, her length, she’s from here, all those things. There were obviously some questions in terms of her physicality: Can she play at this level? Can she guard at this level? Without (Scott), she’s going to get a lot more opportunity than she probably would. ... She has shown the biggest improvement of anybody on our team and every single player would tell you that.”

It isn’t just the new players that have kept the Sooners competitive. Returning for OU this year is senior forward Skylar Vann. Vann, coming off a career season and breaking several records including being the only Division I player to average 11.5 points without a start, has emerged as one of the team’s leaders.

“Skylar is so solid,” Baranczyk said. “It’s been fun to see her

process through everything. Just kind of playing in the first year, then all of a sudden it’s trying to manage all that emotion and the expectation. To be able to watch her in the offseason really just kind of get to work and understand she’s a lot better when she has fun and when she’s really competitive in all those little details. So that’s where she’s kind of led from that space. She speaks up. Again, another player that’s really confident.”

When asked about how she handles her responsibilities as a designated leader, Vann, as Baranczyk described her, seemed confident and not the least bit worried.

“I played with three really great girls, (Williams, Llanusa and Robertson), my whole career here,” Vann said. “My leadership has really come from them, I think because they’ve led me since my freshman year. I’m really blessed to have that experience of being behind that and using those tools that I learned from them now.”

Senior guard Nevaeh Tot, who became the first player at OU to notch three consecutive over 100-assist seasons since Morgan Hook, will also be returning this year, as well as sophomore center Beatrice Culliton.

Culliton is especially looking forward to nonconference play early in the year to find out how the Sooners match up with some of the best teams in the nation.

“I think it will challenge us and that’s something that Jennie wanted to do,” Culliton said. “She wanted to put us in an uncomfortable position early on so we can see and learn and do great. She really believes in us. I’m actually really excited. The preseason is going to be really tough this year, but it’s also going to be fun. I think we’re going to excel in whatever we do.”

GAME, SET, MATCH

Women's tennis returns to the court for 2024 season

BY LOUIS RASER • LOUIS.D.RASER-1@OU.EDU

Oklahoma women's tennis entered the 2024 season fresh off an impressive 2023 campaign.

Led by eighth-year head coach Audra Cohen, the Sooners finished 22-10 and 8-1 in Big 12 play last season, and claimed the Big 12 regular season title for the second consecutive season. OU advanced past the NCAA Regionals by defeating Hawaii and Washington before finishing its run with a 4-1 loss against then-No. 3 Georgia in the Sweet Sixteen.

The Sooners return senior Dana Guzman, who led the team with a 26-9 overall singles record in 2023. Guzman also compiled a 25-10 overall record in doubles.

OU's roster is filled with youth, as it contains four freshmen and two sophomores. Guzman and Florencia Urrutia, who transferred to the Sooners after spending two seasons at Miami (Ohio), then two more at Kentucky, make up the two seniors on the roster.

OU also added juniors Ava Catanzarite, who transferred from UCLA, and Alina Shcherbinina, who transferred from Baylor, to its roster. The three transfer additions make up over half of OU's five upperclassmen.

The Sooners kicked off the 2024 campaign with a pair of wins against Wichita State and Wyoming on Jan. 12 in Norman. After back-to-back Big 10 faceoffs against Ohio State and Michigan on Jan. 19 and 21, respectively, the Sooners competed in the Intercollegiate Tennis Association Kickoff Weekend on Jan. 27-28.

OU will travel to Seattle, Washington, to play in the ITA National Indoors from Feb. 9-12. After, it will return home for battles against San Diego on Feb. 23 and NC State on Feb. 25. The Sooners' conference play will kick off with a trip to Austin to face Texas on March 3.

From there, the Sooners face Cincinnati and West Virginia on March 8 and 10 in Norman before traveling to Orlando to battle UCF on March 15. OU will be given a day of travel before it faces Houston on the road on March 17. The Sooners will face Kansas State on March 22 and Oklahoma State on March 24 in Norman. They'll travel to Des Moines to face Iowa State on March 28 then Lawrence to face Kansas on March 30.

OU will cap its season with home games against BYU and Texas Tech then road games against Baylor and TCU before competing in the Big 12 Tournament from April 18-21. There, the Sooners will hope to earn a spot in postseason play, as they did last year when hosting an NCAA Regional.



Then-freshman Romana Cisovska during the match against Minnesota on Jan. 28, 2023.

OLIVIA LAUTER/OU DAILY

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Then-freshman Kelton Christiansen during the meet against Stanford and William & Mary on Feb. 11, 2023.

OU CONTENDS FOR 13TH NATIONAL TITLE

Men's gymnastics looks to surpass previous season with solid roster

BY COYT WISDOM • COYT.T.WISDOM-1@OU.EDU

Returning a plethora of veterans, the Sooners are aiming to compete for a 13th national title this season.

In 2023, OU men's gymnastics fell short of winning the NCAA final. Led by legendary coach Mark Williams in his 24th season at OU, the Sooners finished with a 24-5 overall record in 2023 and competed in the NCAA final before being defeated by Michigan, Illinois and Stanford.

This season, the Sooners seek to return to the finals and overcome Stanford, which has won four consecutive championships.

OU returns sophomores all-around Ignacio Yockers, who ranked second nationally on pommel horse and was named

MPSF Specialist of the Year, and Kelton Christiansen, who ranked sixth nationally on high bar. Also returning is junior all-around Emre Dodanli who earned All-American honors in floor exercise and was named MPSF floor exercise champion.

The Sooners bring back veterans fifth-year senior all-around Jack Freeman and senior all-around Zach Nunez who was named an All-American on pommel horse. OU also added highly touted freshman all-arounds Arthur Ballon, a three-time national champion from Lyon, France, Colin Flores and Max Bereznev.

The Sooners opened their season against Air Force in Norman at McCasland Field House on Jan. 13. Air Force finished the

2023 season ranked eighth. Oklahoma also competed in the Rocky Mountain Open in Colorado Springs on Jan. 20.

Other notable meets for Oklahoma's schedule include at Illinois on Jan. 28, at home against Ohio State on Feb. 3, at Michigan on March 2, at Stanford on March 16 and a home-and-home series against California on Feb. 10 and March 16.

The MPSF Championship will be held in Norman at McCasland Field House on April 6.

The NCAA qualifier and NCAA final will be held in Columbus, Ohio. The NCAA qualifier will be on April 19 and the NCAA final begins on April 20.



PHOTOS BY OLIVIA LAUTER/OU DAILY

Then-junior Katherine LeVasseur during the meet against Iowa State on Feb. 3, 2023.

SOONERS GUN FOR 3-PEAT

Women's gymnastics enters season at No. 1, kicks off with wins

BY COYT WISDOM • COYT.T.WISDOM-1@OU.EDU

Oklahoma women's gymnastics are looking to win their third national title in a row, which would make the Sooners the third team in NCAA women's gymnastics history to complete a three-peat.

The Sooners are led by three-time National Head Coach of the Year K.J. Kindler in her 18th season in Norman. The Sooners finished 2023 with a 28-2 record and defeated LSU, Florida and Utah to win the program's sixth national title.

Oklahoma begins the 2024 season ranked No. 1 in the Women's Collegiate Gymnastics Association's preseason poll. OU returns junior all-around Jordan Bowers who was ranked in the top 10 in all-around nationally and has earned 12 All-American honors, senior all-around Audrey Davis who was

named Big 12 bars champion and senior all-around Katherine LeVasseur, a first-team All-American selection on vault.

The Sooners bring back veterans all-around senior Sheridan Ramsey, senior Bell Johnson and junior all-around Danae Fletcher. OU also added some notable newcomers: freshman Aspen Lenczner, a three-time level 10 national qualifier, freshman all-around Keira Wells, a three-time national vault champion and fifth-year Georgia transfer Soraya Hawthorne, an All-SEC selection last season.

Oklahoma opened the season in the Super 16 on Jan. 5 in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Sooners competed in the Collegiate Quad against Utah, LSU and UCLA on Jan. 13 in West Valley City, Utah. OU will compete in the Metroplex Challenge against

Arkansas, Washington and California on Feb. 17 in Fort Worth.

Some other notable meets for the Sooners include its second matchup versus UCLA on Jan. 21 in Denver, Colorado, a second meeting with California on Feb. 2 in Tempe, Arizona, a match against Michigan on March 1 and versus Alabama on March 17 in Norman.

Oklahoma faces Big 12 opponents Denver on Jan. 26, BYU on Feb. 9 and West Virginia on Feb. 23 in Norman.

The Big 12 Championship begins on March 23 and the NCAA Championship begins April 18 in Fort Worth should the Sooners advance.



Then-junior Audrey Davis during the meet against Florida on March 3, 2023.



BOB NGUYEN/OU DAILY

Then-freshman utility player Jocelyn Erickson and then-junior outfielder Jayda Coleman during the Women's College World Series against Stanford on June 5, 2023.

HUNGRY TO MAKE HISTORY

OU softball sets sights on fourth consecutive title

BY GRACIE RAWLINGS • GRACIE.M.RAWLINGS-1@OU.EDU

Oklahoma softball hopes to make history as it navigates its schedule during the 2024 season.

The Sooners, who defeated then-No. 3 Florida State in the Women's College World Series finals, claimed their third consecutive national championship. The back-to-back-to-back titles placed them alongside UCLA's record established from 1988-90. Now, OU hopes to be the first team in the NCAA to win four back-to-back-to-back-to-back titles.

In addition to earning another national championship, OU broke an all-time NCAA record for longest winning streak. After

an early-season loss to Baylor, OU won 53 games in a row and looks to continue their undefeated record as they start the 2024 season.

Head coach Patty Gasso and the Sooners will start the new season on Feb. 8 in Mexico at the Puerto Vallarta College Challenge. This marks the beginning of their 14-game road trip. At the challenge, OU will play Utah Valley, Duke, Washington and Long Beach State. Duke finished last season 45-10 and settled in the seventh spot in the NCAA softball rankings.

Oklahoma will then travel to play in the McNeese State

Tournament on Feb. 16 in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Over three days, the Sooners will suit up against Lamar and will face both Central Arkansas and McNeese State twice.

Next, OU will compete in the Mary Nutter Collegiate Classic on Feb. 23 in Cathedral City, California. At the classic, OU will play Mississippi State, Wisconsin, San Diego State, Notre Dame and Loyola Marymount.

When the Sooners return to Norman, they will gear up for their home debut, the OU Tournament, where they will play in their new stadium Love's Field for the first time. On March



OLIVIA LAUTER/OU DAILY

Then-junior infielder Tiare Jennings and the Sooners during the game against Kansas on April 30, 2023.

1, Miami (Ohio), Liberty, Louisiana and OU will compete in the 4,200-seat stadium. Oklahoma will also face Texas A&M Commerce on March 6 in Norman.

Entering its last season in the Big 12, OU will open conference play with a series against Iowa State on March 8-10. Continuing the home stand, OU will play a doubleheader against Tarleton State on March 12.

Traveling to Lubbock, the Sooners will continue Big 12 play against Texas Tech on March 15-17 but will quickly return to Love's Field on March 20 and square up against UT Arlington. The Sooners' annual game at the Hall of Fame Stadium in Oklahoma City will take place on March 22 against Baylor, before returning to Love's Field to finish the series.

Before playing a series against Kansas on March 28-30 in Lawrence, OU will stop in Wichita, Kansas, for a game against Wichita State on March 26. The Sooners' series against Texas will be held on April 5-7 in Austin, followed by a series against

new conference opponent BYU on April 11-13 in Norman.

A game against Tulsa on April 16 at the Hall of Fame Stadium will close out OU's nonconference schedule. The Sooners will then play a series against Houston on April 19-21 in Norman before playing UCF on April 26-28 in Orlando.

Oklahoma will wrap up the regular season with a Bedlam battle against Oklahoma State on May 3-5 in Norman before the Phillips 66 Big 12 Championship on May 8-11.

As OU navigates the 2024 season, it will have to fill several spots as the Sooners graduated key pieces in captain and shortstop Grace Lyons, pitcher Alex Storako and utility players Haley Lee and Grace Green. Oklahoma must also find a replacement for pitcher Jordy Bahl, who transferred to Nebraska in the offseason.

The Sooners are returning 13 players and have added eight additional names to their roster for the 2024 season. The bulk of OU's offense is returning this season, and the effort will be

led by veteran catcher Kinzie Hansen alongside starters Tiare Jennings, Jayda Coleman, Alyssa Brito and Rylie Boone. Senior pitcher Nicole May looks to lead OU in the circle this season and Kierston Deal hopes to take a larger role.

Four highly ranked recruits will be joining the team this season, including utility players Ella Parker and Kasidi Pickering, infielder Nelly McEnroe-Marinas and outfielder Maya Bland. Oklahoma grabbed pitchers Karlie Keeney, Paytn Monticelli and Oklahoma State transfer Kelly Maxwell from the transfer portal. Utility player Riley Ludlam was added from the portal as well.

Oklahoma's revitalized 21-player roster looks to tackle a 52-game schedule and a final run in the Big 12 in hopes of winning the program's eighth NCAA National Championship.



PHOTOS BY REGHAN KYLE/OU DAILY

Then-freshman catcher Easton Carmichael during the first round of the Big 12 Championship against OSU on May 24, 2023.

SOONERS STRIVE FOR BOUNCE-BACK SEASON

Baseball brings new talent and strong returners to the diamond

BY SEBASTIAN CHAVEZ • SEBASTIAN.L.CHAVEZ-1@OU.EDU

The Sooners will kick-start the 2024 baseball season at the Shriners Children's College Baseball Showdown on Feb. 16-18 at Globe Life Field in Arlington, Texas. OU opens against Oregon Feb. 16 before facing future SEC opponent Tennessee on Feb. 17 and Nebraska on Feb. 18.

In 2023, Oklahoma finished 32-28, falling to East Carolina in the NCAA Charlottesville Regional.

The Sooners, led by seventh-year OU head coach Skip Johnson, will look to improve in 2024 bolstered by new transfers and high school signees.

Here are some potentially impactful games to keep an eye on:

Oklahoma's first Big 12 matchup will be a three-game series against a new conference foe, UCF, on March 8-10.

The Sooners will face rivals Texas and Oklahoma State this season. Marking the first OSU games on March 12 and the first Texas games on April 26.

OU lost four of its six games to OSU last season and will look to bounce back in what is potentially the final season of the in-state rivalry due to the Sooners' move to the SEC.

Texas could be a formidable opponent for the Sooners. Last season, Texas finished 15-9 in the conference and 42-22 overall.

OU's new roster consists of four new pitchers: freshmen Jacob Gholston, Brad Pruett and Ty Zahradnik and Wichita State transfer Austin Henry. The Sooners' roster lost the experience of five-year player Diego Muniz this offseason.

Bryce Madron, Kendall Pettis, Anthony Mackenzie and Easton Carmichael, OU's best hitters, will be returning for the 2024 season.



Then-freshman Jase Summy during the NCAA Norman Regional on May 16, 2023.

MEN'S GOLF EYES THIRD STRAIGHT TITLE

Oklahoma balances roster with experience and youth

BY LOUIS RASER • LOUIS.D.RASER-1@OU.EDU

Oklahoma men's golf is fresh off another successful season under head coach Ryan Hybl.

Hybl led the Sooners to their 12th consecutive national championship in 2023, where they finished 17th of 30 teams. After not winning a Big 12 Championship since 2018, OU claimed its second consecutive conference title in 2023.

OU brings a balance of experience and youth to its 2024 roster, which is composed of four freshmen, two sophomores, three juniors and three seniors.

The Sooners return junior Drew Goodman, OU's low finisher in the national championship last season. Goodman was named to the All-Big 12 team and finished fifth at the Big 12 Championship before earning the runner-up spot at the NCAA Norman Regional.

Jase Summy also returns to the Sooners for his sophomore season after earning an All-Big 12 selection as a freshman. The former consensus top-10 recruit in the nation finished in the top five of three events and won one.

Summy and Goodman were the two Sooners to advance to the final round of stroke play at the NCAA Championship despite the team failing to make the 15-team cut.

The Sooners begin their spring season by competing in the Puerto Rico Classic from Feb. 11-13 in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico. From there, OU travels to Las Vegas, Nevada, to compete in the Southern Highlands Collegiate tournament from Feb. 25-27.

OU has nearly a month off before it travels to San Diego, California, for the Pauma Valley Invitational from March 18-19. The Sooners have a quick turnaround and compete in the

Valspar Collegiate Championship from March 25-26 in Palm City, Florida.

The Sooners then travel to Augusta, Georgia, where they'll face off in the 3M Augusta Invitational from April 6-7. OU's final regular season outing comes at The Thunderbird from April 12-13 in Phoenix, Arizona.

The Sooners' trek to a third consecutive Big 12 title will begin on April 22 when the Big 12 Championship tees off and run through April 24. The tournament will take place in Trinity, Texas.

OU will hope to host an NCAA Regional, as it did last season, from May 13-15. The Sooners will then hope to advance to the NCAA Championship from May 24-29 in Carlsbad, California.

FINAL COUNTDOWN

Sooners grapple to achieve championship aspirations in last stretch of regular season

BY KATHRYN KELLY • KATHRYN.P.KELLY-1@OU.EDU

With the bulk of the season complete, the Sooners have their eyes set on big performances at the Big 12 Championship with the hope of advancing to the NCAA Championship.

Under the guidance of first-year head coach Roger Kish, the Sooners seek to improve their 9-8 record from last year.

Entering the season ranked No. 21, Oklahoma sees a mixture of experience and young talent on their roster. While seven Sooners from the previous season entered the transfer portal, eight were added to the team. Six national qualifiers returned for the season: Mosha Schwartz (141), Willie McDougald (149), Jared Hill (157), Gerrit Nijenhuis (174), Tate Picklo (174) and Josh Heindselman (285).

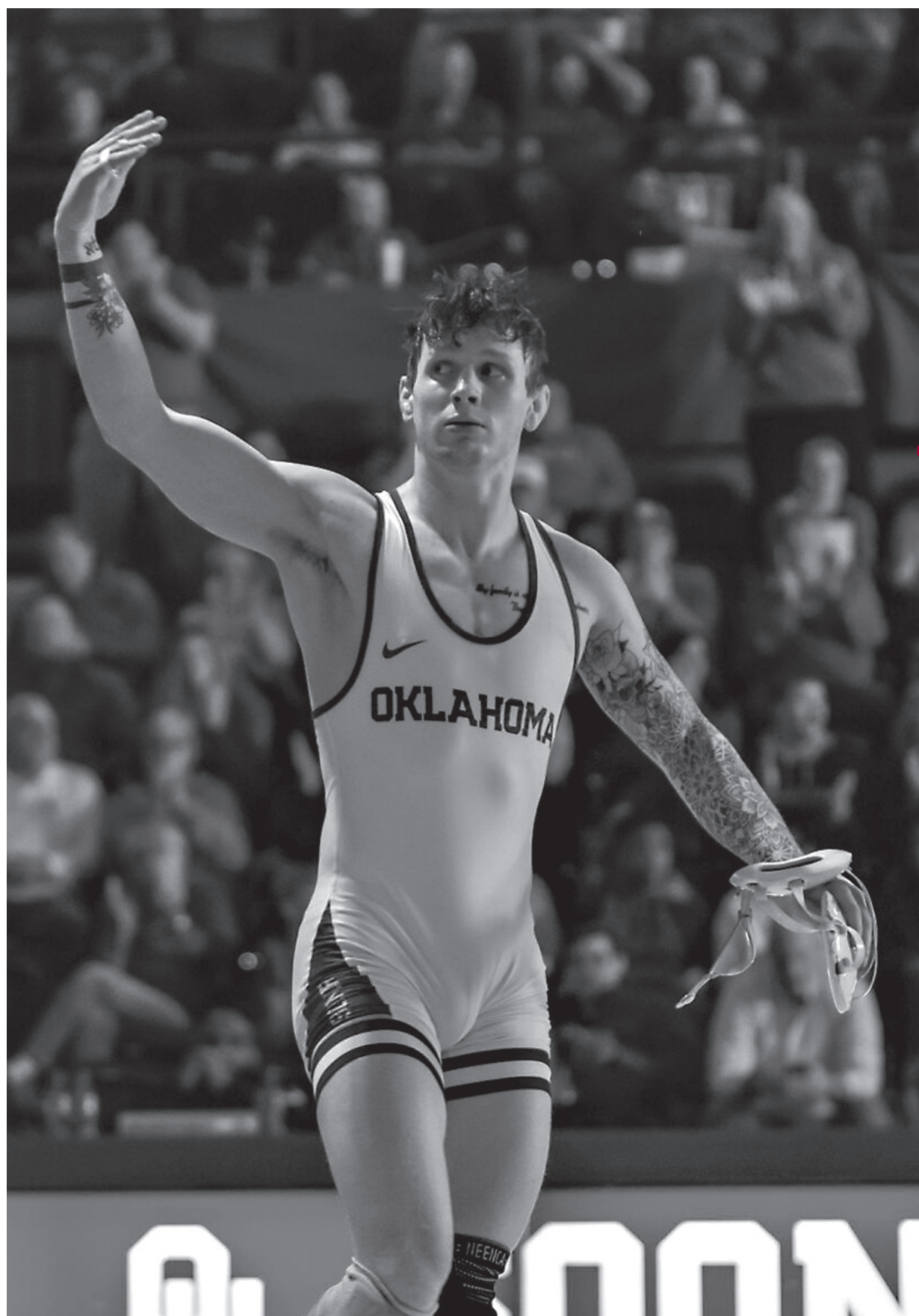
Five national qualifiers joined the Sooners: Antonio Lorenzo (125), Jace Koelzer (133), Cael Carlson (165), Deanthony "DJ" Parker (184) and Giuseppe Hoose (184). Finally, All-American Stephen Buchanan (197) transferred from Wyoming to Oklahoma.

OU's season started on Nov. 9 with a 29-11 win over Central Michigan in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. At the Michigan State Open on Nov. 11, Picklo, Buchanan and Heindselman all took titles.

Oklahoma won its next two meets at Little Rock, Arkansas, and at home against North Dakota State, followed by a 30-12 loss against then-No. 3 Missouri. On Dec. 3, the Sooners won a close match against then-No. 21 West Virginia 21-19 and lost the first Bedlam match of the season against Oklahoma State 28-9 on Dec. 10.

With a current record of 5-3, Oklahoma has four regular season games left before the Big 12 Championship. The Sooners will face Iowa State on Jan. 26, Northern Iowa on Jan. 27, South Dakota State on Feb. 9 and a rematch against Oklahoma State on Feb. 18 in Stillwater.

The Big 12 Championship takes place from March 9-10, and any advancing wrestlers will compete in the NCAA Championship from March 22-24.



REGHAN KYLE/OU DAILY

Then-junior 141-pound wrestler Mosha Schwartz during the match against West Virginia on Jan. 20, 2023.

SPRING SPORTS SCHEDULE

Students can attend all home spring sporting events for free



BOB NGUYEN/OU DAILY

OU fans hold their fingers aloft during kickoff at a fall football game.

JANUARY

- 30: Men's basketball at Kansas State
- 31: Women's basketball vs. Kansas State

FEBRUARY

- 2: Women's gymnastics vs. Arizona State, Cal (Tempe, Ariz.)
- 3: Men's basketball at UCF
- 3: Women's basketball at Oklahoma State
- 3: Men's gymnastics vs. Ohio State, Arizona State
- 6: Men's basketball vs. BYU
- 7: Women's basketball vs. TCU
- 8: Softball vs. Utah Valley, Duke (Puerto Vallarta, Mexico)
- 9: Women's gymnastics vs. BYU, Utah State, Texas Woman's
- 9: Softball vs. Washington (Puerto Vallarta, Mexico)
- 10: Men's basketball vs. Oklahoma State
- 10: Women's basketball at Iowa State
- 10: Men's gymnastics vs. Cal
- 10: Softball vs. Long Beach State (Puerto Vallarta, Mexico)
- 13: Men's basketball at Baylor
- 14: Women's basketball vs. Baylor
- 16: Baseball vs. Oregon (Arlington)
- 16: Softball vs. Central Arkansas, McNeese State (Lake Charles, La.)
- 17: Men's basketball vs. Kansas
- 17: Women's basketball at West Virginia
- 17: Baseball vs. Tennessee (Arlington)
- 17: Men's gymnastics at Simpson College
- 17: Women's gymnastics vs. Arkansas, Washington, Cal (Fort Worth)
- 17: Softball vs. Lamar, McNeese State (Lake Charles, La.)
- 18: Baseball vs. Nebraska (Arlington)
- 18: Softball vs. Central Arkansas (Lake Charles, La.)
- 20: Baseball at Dallas Baptist
- 20: Women's basketball at Cincinnati
- 23: Men's gymnastics in Winter Cup (Louisville)
- 23: Women's gymnastics vs. West Virginia
- 23: Softball vs. Mississippi State, Wisconsin (Cathedral City,

- Calif.)
- 23-25: Baseball vs. Wright State
- 24: Women's basketball vs. Oklahoma State
- 24: Men's basketball at Oklahoma State
- 24: Softball vs. San Diego State (Cathedral City, Calif.)
- 25: Softball vs. Notre Dame, Loyola Marymount (Cathedral City, Calif.)
- 28: Men's basketball at Iowa State
- 28: Women's basketball vs. Texas

MARCH

- 1: Baseball vs. Pittsburgh (Las Vegas)
- 1: Women's gymnastics vs. Michigan
- 1: Softball vs. Miami (Ohio), Liberty (Love's Field opener)
- 2: Men's basketball vs. Houston
- 2: Women's basketball at Kansas
- 2: Baseball vs. Cal (Las Vegas)
- 2: Men's gymnastics at Michigan
- 2: Softball vs. Louisiana, Liberty
- 3: Baseball vs. Ohio State (Las Vegas)
- 3: Women's gymnastics vs. Texas Woman's, Clemson (Denton, Texas)
- 3: Softball vs. Louisiana
- 5: Men's basketball vs. Cincinnati
- 5: Baseball vs. Wichita State
- 6: Softball vs. Texas A&M Commerce
- 7-12: Big 12 women's basketball championships (Kansas City, Mo.)
- 8-10: Baseball vs. UCF
- 8-10: Softball vs. Iowa State
- 9: Men's basketball at Texas
- 9: Men's gymnastics vs. Navy
- 10: Women's gymnastics at Arkansas
- 12: Softball vs. Tarleton State (doubleheader)
- 12-16: Big 12 men's basketball championships (Kansas City, Mo.)
- 12: Baseball vs. Oklahoma State
- 13: Baseball at UT Arlington
- 15-17: Baseball at TCU
- 15-17: Softball at Texas Tech

- 16: Men's gymnastics vs. Stanford, Cal (Palo Alto, Calif.)
- 17: Women's gymnastics vs. Alabama
- 19: Baseball vs. Dallas Baptist
- 20: Softball vs. UT Arlington
- 22: Softball vs. Baylor (Oklahoma City)
- 22-24: Baseball vs. West Virginia
- 23: Big 12 women's gymnastics championships (Norman)
- 23-24: Softball vs. Baylor
- 26: Baseball vs. Oral Roberts
- 26: Softball at Wichita State
- 28-30: Baseball vs. Lamar
- 28-30: Softball at Kansas

APRIL

- 2: Baseball at Wichita State
- 5-7: Baseball at Oklahoma State
- 5-7: Softball at Texas
- 6: Men's gymnastics in MPSF Championship (Norman)
- 9: Baseball vs. UT Arlington
- 11-13: Softball vs. BYU
- 12-14: Baseball vs. Kansas State
- 16: Softball vs. Tulsa (Oklahoma City)
- 18-20: Baseball at BYU
- 19-21: Softball vs. Houston
- 23: Baseball vs. Wichita State
- 26-28: Baseball vs. Texas
- 26-28: Softball at UCF
- 30: Baseball at Oral Roberts

MAY

- 3-5: Baseball at Texas Tech
- 3-5: Softball vs. Oklahoma State
- 8-11: Big 12 softball championships (Oklahoma City)
- 10-12: Baseball vs. Baylor
- 14: Baseball at Xavier
- 16-18: Baseball at Cincinnati
- 21-25: Big 12 baseball championships (Arlington)

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