

2005-06 Year a Special One for Menlo Athletics *by Chris Giovannetti*

WHEN ATHLETIC DIRECTOR CAITLIN COLLIER arrived at Menlo College in 1997, the Oaks' varsity squads—and women's teams in particular—were in a period of stagnation. On-field success waned and roster numbers were so low that some female athletes played up to three sports just to fill out teams.

How times have changed.

During the 2005-06 school year, the Menlo Athletic Department experienced its highest aggregate success in over a decade as the Oaks volleyball, women's soccer and women's basketball squads all won California Pacific Conference titles; the men's wrestling contingent took eighth at the NAIA National Championships and the men's basketball team turned in its best finish in six years.

"This has been the best overall year for athletics since I've been here," said Collier, also the women's basketball coach. "The growth has been tremendous, especially in women's sports. There is a culture of success and commitment to quality here now, which is bringing everyone up."

With Menlo's baseball and softball teams wrapping up their respective seasons, the following is a brief recap of the year that was in Menlo athletics:

VOLLEYBALL

For the second consecutive season, Menlo captured the California Pacific Conference title and advanced to the NAIA Region II playoffs to face a familiar opponent: undefeated, top-seeded and national No. 1 Fresno Pacific. The Oaks fell, 30-12, 30-18, 30-15, but still finished 18-7 (13-1 Cal Pac). Additionally, sophomore **Christa Hewett** was named Cal Pac Libero of the Year while outside hitter **Malia Pires** garnered Freshman of the Year accolades. Joining the pair on



the All-Cal Pac team was junior **Sanoe' Eselu**, sophomore **Courtney Adaro** and four-time honoree **Kari Shimomura**.

During the past two seasons, the Oaks are a combined 39-10 and have won 31 of 32 Cal Pac matches.

"Despite the number of injuries we endured, it was still another great year," said head coach **Bill Imwalle**, who had just two players suit up for every match. "To have a two-year run like we've enjoyed is a great accomplishment for our program."

WOMEN'S SOCCER

When head coach **Owen Flannery** arrived in Atherton three years ago, he inherited a program that hadn't won a match in three seasons. In 2005, Menlo completed an historic worst-to-first turnaround, posting a 13-5-1 record and sweeping through the Cal Pac to the program's first league title. Menlo advanced to the NAIA Region II play-

offs for the first time in school history but fell to Point Loma Nazarene in the first round, 2-1. Menlo players collected a slew of accolades, led by senior forward **Ja'Net Lawrence**, who became the program's first All-American and All-Region II award recipient. Joining Lawrence on the All-Cal Pac team were defenders **Molly Flanagan** and **Jo Thomas** and forward **Sheryl Cumine**. Forward **Rachel Anden**, who led Menlo with 12 goals and 28 points, headlined the Oaks' second team picks alongside forwards **Katie Gravett** and **Ryanne Bergstrom** and defender **Kerry Gaiz**.

"This is the third season in a row we've produced an historic effort, and we're looking forward to setting another precedent next year," said Flannery, who won a program-high five matches during his first season in 2003 and 13 the following year. "With the strong returnees we have and the recruits we have coming in, 2006 should be our best year yet."

MEN'S SOCCER

With 10 years of service, **Len Renery** is currently Menlo's longest-tenured head coach. In that decade, however, his Oaks had failed to reach the heights they climbed to in 2005. Menlo's 11-7-1 finish was Renery's highest single-season victory total and the program's best mark since the 1992 Oaks went 12-5. Behind leading scorers **Mike Sharabi** (12 goals), **Armando San Vicente** (nine goals) and **Aiden O'Flynn** (eight goals, six assists), the Oaks outscored their final five Cal Pac opponents, 32-1, and streaked to a third-place finish in the Cal Pac standings to nab the final NAIA Region II playoff spot.

O'Flynn and senior defender **Hal Eckensweiler** were selected to the All-Cal Pac first team while San Vicente and freshman forward **Gary Hodgson** garnered second team honors.

"Last year was perhaps the best we had as far as on-field talent was concerned, and our starting 11 was the top

"This has been the best overall year fo

unit in my tenure,” said Renery, whose Oaks were the only Cal Pac team not to lose to eventual conference champion Dominican, drawing, 0-0, in double-overtime. “Our attitude, fitness level and the number of people rising to the occasion in key situations were second to none in my career at Menlo.”

FOOTBALL

Though Menlo went winless (0-10), the Oaks produced several notable achievements. Menlo was one of just two schools to hold defending national champion Linfield under 40 points and limited the Wildcats to just a field goal in the second half of their October meeting. In the most dramatic outing of the year, the Oaks pushed Colorado College to three overtimes in the season finale before falling, 58-52. Senior wide receiver **Eddie Eyo** posted just the sixth 1,000-yard receiving season in Menlo history and first since current Denver Bronco **Nate Jackson** in 2001.

CROSS COUNTRY

Head men’s wrestling coach **Keith Spataro** took the reins of the program in 2006 with the men’s team claiming fourth at the Cal Pac Championships and the women’s squad taking fifth.

WOMEN’S BASKETBALL

A regular-season and postseason California Pacific Conference title, 19-game winning streak, program-best 25-4 record, .862 winning percentage, final No. 11 national ranking and an appearance in the round of 16 at the NAIA Division II National Championships all combined to create the most successful season in the eight-year history of the Menlo program. Aside from new program records for wins, fewest losses and winning percentage, the Oaks recorded the program’s first undefeated home season (12-0), posted the program’s best road ledger (9-2) and set new marks for average margin of victory (17.6) and total points scored (1,835).

In addition, sophomore guard **Kepua Lee** (page 20), who set new single-season program records for points (491) and scoring average (17.5), was selected to the 2006 NAIA Division II All-America third team and named the Cal Pac’s Player of the Year. Joining her on the All-Cal Pac team was senior forward **Nicole Johnson** and senior guard **Shannon Riley**.

MEN’S BASKETBALL

Hired shortly before the start of the 2003-04 season and left little time to recruit, head coach **Kevin Nosek**’s first Menlo squad went 4-22. Fast-forward two years and the Oaks (17-11) missed the NAIA Division II National Championships by a single game. Menlo, which earned the fourth seed for the Cal Pac Tournament, upset top-seeded Dominican, 64-49, in the semifinals before falling in the title bout to Holy Names, 86-69, and missing an automatic bid to the national championships.

“We established ourselves as a top-tier team within the Cal Pac this year and reached some preseason goals we set, namely finishing top-10 nationally in field goal defense and rebounding differential and posting a 3.2 cumulative team GPA,” Nosek said. “All along we thought we belonged and deserved to be in the Cal Pac title game. I think we’ve set a precedent for future teams, and we’ll continue to strive to reach the



NAIA tournament.”

Senior **James Gilkey** was named to the All-Cal Pac team for the second-consecutive season while sophomore wing **Bryon Wesley** was named the conference’s Defender of the Year.

MEN’S WRESTLING

Most programs might consider a 13th-place national finish a noteworthy season. For the precedent **Keith Spataro**’s Oaks have set, 13th place is in the nether regions of NAIA wrestling. Menlo improved on its 2005 NAIA National Championships finish with an eighth-place showing at this year’s tournament. Menlo also showcased the 141-pound national champion in senior **Joe Garcia**, who downed Cumberland’s **Brad Cooper**, 3-2, in his title bout. Also earning All-America honors were seniors **Alfonso Paez** and **Pablo Sanchez** at 133 pounds, senior **Kyle Bickford** at 157 and junior **Tyrell Blanche** at 197.



“We made strong gains this season, both in improving our national standing and in reestablishing our recruiting parameters,” Spataro said. “We’ve been going through a transition in trying to figure out what type of athletes fit at Menlo and in our program. We made great strides for the future, and we should be reaping the benefits shortly. Everything we did in the recruiting process was important. It’s been a good year on and off the mat.”

WOMEN’S WRESTLING

With World University Games participant **Sara Fulp-Allen** fighting injuries over the winter, a young Oaks squad posted a season-best third-place finish at January’s Lady Oaks Open. **Chris Giovannetti** is Menlo College’s Sports Information Director

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CAITLIN COLLIER