

2002-2003 OUA CHAMPS !



GOLD MEDALLISTS: University of Toronto
SILVER MEDALLISTS: McMaster University
BRONZE MEDALLISTS: University of Western Ontario

OUA Playoffs @ Queen's

February 14-15, 2003

SEMIFINALS:

Toronto 8 York 3

FINALS:

Toronto 10 McMaster 1

INDIVIDUAL PLAYOFF RECORD

	S (W-L)	D (W-L)	XD (W-L)	Overall (W-L)
Gordon Chiu	0-0	2-0	1-0	3-0
Denis Daly	0-0	1-1	0-1	2-1
Mike Glenney	2-0	0-0	0-0	2-0
Alex Green	0-0	1-1	0-0	1-1
Sam Lam I-I	0-0	0-0	1-1	1-1
Stephen Lau	2-0	2-0	0-0	4-0
Edith Chow	2-0	2-0	0-0	4-0
Anca Gaspar	1-1	2-0	0-0	3-1
Ling Ho	0-0	0-0	1-0	1-0
Karen Li	0-0	0-0	0-1	0-1
Amy Mader	2-0	2-0	2-0	4-0
Jessica Shiu	0-0	2-0	0-0	2-0

Individual Awards for Toronto

OUA FEMALE MVP: Edith Chow

OUA FEMALE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR: Amy Mader

OUA MALE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR: Stephen Lau

OUA ALL-STARS: Edith Chow, Anca Gaspar, Sam Lam
 Stephen Lau, Amy Mader

OUA Regular Season Standings

EAST DIVISION Team	Ties		Matches		Points
	Won	Lost	Won	Lost	
Toronto	13	1	119	35	26
York	9	5	99	55	18
Ryerson	6	8	60	94	12
Queen's	2	12	43	111	4

WEST DIVISION Team	Ties		Matches		Points
	Won	Lost	Won	Lost	
Western	11	3	91	63	22
McMaster	10	4	97	57	20
Waterloo4	10	71	83	8	
Brock	0	14	30	124	0



Left: Gordon Chiu hits a jump smash as Stephen Lau waits at the front in the Semifinals.
Right: Anca Gaspar hits an overhead in the finals.

Varsity Blues Win Gold

No one said it was going to be easy. Despite finishing the regular season in first place overall, we knew the playoffs would be a struggle. Even the badminton gods tried their best to stand in our way, but in the end nothing could stop us from taking home the OUA gold medal.

With our semi-final on Saturday morning, we left Toronto on Friday night. Unfortunately, we left slightly late and got caught in traffic. Thus we had to hurry to Queen's, and arrived just in time to get our line-up handed in. Later on, the troubles continued as we had some vehicle problems at the hotel. These incidents brought us back to reality, reminded us that everything was not going go as smoothly as planned, and helped us get focused for the upcoming matches.

Our opponent for the semi-final on Saturday morning was York University. We had beaten them twice during the year, and did so again, taking the tie 8-3. This set up a tie for the gold medal against an energized McMaster Marauder team, who were riding a wave of momentum after defeating the Western Mustangs. For the first time in at least six years, Western would not be playing for the gold medal, ending their three year reign atop the OUA.

In the gold medal matches, McMaster ran into an equally pumped up Varsity Blues team. The male members of the Blues, after playing second fiddle to the females all year, finally showed what they could do. Stephen Lau defeated John Durden, Michael Glenney beat Mike Thich in a hard fought three setter, Alex Green and Denis Daly handled Mike Thich and Tim Dalseg in two sets, and Stephen Lau and Gord Chiu beat John Durden and Chris Barnes in two sets.

The women played as they had all year, dominating their competition. Edith Chow did what she has done so many times for the Varsity Blues, going out first and winning the number one women's singles match. Amy Mader, our import from Saskatchewan, took care of the second women's singles. The third women's singles match was our only loss in the finals, as Anca Gaspar lost to Erin Parkes in three sets. Both women's doubles teams, Edith Chow and Amy Mader, and Anca Gaspar and Jessica Shiu were victorious.

All these matches, however, were simply the supporting act for the match of the tournament, and possibly the season. The number one men's singles match was the first match on court, the seventh to finish, and the sixth win for U of T, giving us the gold medal. Sam Lam defeated Kokkee Chen 17-16, 12-15, 15-10, in just under 2 hours. The match featured entertaining play for the crowd, and mixed some well deserved breaks with some periods of stunning play. With the tie decided, we were able to relax and enjoy the rest of the matches.

This achievement was the culmination of five years of hard work to build a championship team; hopefully the first of many to come!

-Michael Glenney, Co-Captain and Varsity Board Representative

Comments on the Gold

"The gold medal not only represents the tremendous dedication and hard work displayed by everyone involved with the team; it is also a symbol of our thanks to those who have supported us along the way."

-Christine Chen

"For me, winning the gold means dreams DO come true. Being part of the team was an awesome experience. It is not only about the gold medal, but it is also about all it took to get us there! Special thanks to all!"

-Anca Gaspar

"Throughout my four years at U of T, I've been part of a contending team, then a rebuilding team, and then back to a contending team. Having a dominating record and winning the OUA championships this year was exhilarating and this is no doubt only the beginning of success for the Varsity Blues Badminton Team."

-Edith Chow

"Winning gold at the OUA Championships was a great experience - all the hard work paid off! However, looking back at my four years as a Varsity Blue, it was those hours of hard work with my teammates that I enjoyed the most."

-Denis Daly

Ontario Cup 2003

The Ontario Cup, held January 3-5 at Humber College, was the first team event outside of the university sanctioned events in which we participated this year. The format was similar to that of the regular sectional tournaments, but our opponents were much stronger than usual.

A team from Manitoba was our first challenge, but we did not perform well against the talented team, winning only one out of seven matches. In the next round, we faced a similar fate against a team composed of the best players of Lee's Badminton Club, which included some of the top junior contenders in the country.

We continued to battle hard into the next day of competition, losing our first tie but successfully defeating the team from Central Ontario. Riding on the high of winning our first tie of the tournament, we went into the playoff matches in the final day feeling more assured of our ability to win. Our renewed confidence was reflected in our play as we won both ties. This included a victory against the Manitoba team we had lost to in the preliminary rounds.

This tremendous effort secured a fifth place final standing out of 10 teams, with the top 4 teams consisting mainly of nationally ranked players. This experience gave us the opportunity to compete against a variety of players, with a wide array of styles. We overcame a slow start and finished strong, and we carried this momentum into our second half of the season.

-Edith Chow

Cambrian Open

On Friday, January 17, Vik Mohindra, Kenneth Lee, Karen Li, Christine Chen, Michael Glenney, and Norman De Fon Sing met at the Athletic Centre at noon. The team rented a new van to take the four-and-a-half-hour trip to Cambrian College in Sudbury. Mike was our driver!

The tournament was part of the OBA provincial circuit, and it lasted for the whole weekend. It started on Friday at around 5:30 p.m. with the men's singles. Nathaniel Allard, a Harwood player, met up with us at the gym, but lost in the quarters to national team member Stefan Wojcikiewicz. Vik reached the B semi-finals.

On Friday, the matches were over at around 1 a.m. The team stayed at a Cambrian player's house, and by the time showers were taken it was already 2:30 a.m., and the next day games started at 9 a.m.!

Saturday was the day for doubles games. Vik played with Kenny; they reached the B finals. Norman played with Nathaniel and reached the semis of the main round, but lost to the eventual winners Marcus Wong and Andrew Chin 15-9, 15-9. Karen Li and Christine Chen made it to the C final. In mixed, they paired up with Mike and Kenny. Both teams lost in the C semifinals.

It was a great trip however, and excellent playing experience for those who competed!

-Norman Dean Fon Sing

Cambrian or Varsity Blues - OUA or OCAA - Which is Better?

On February 9, U of T held a mini-tournament to get some extra tournament style play the week before the OUA Playoffs. The Cambrian College team from the OCAA made the trip down from Sudbury, and Ryerson attended as well. U of T divided itself evenly into two squads, and the four teams played a day-long round robin. Nathaniel Allard and Chris Erven, from Waterloo, were added to the Cambrian roster for the tournament. When the day's ties had come to a close, U of T and Cambrian ended up in a three way tie for first place. Thus the burning question of which league is stronger remained unanswered. There was a lot of great competition over the course of the event, and it was undoubtedly a great way to prepare for the playoffs.



Sam Lam



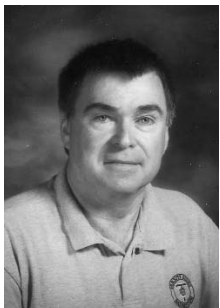
Norman Dean Fon Sing (hitting) and Vik Mohindra



Karen Li (serving) and Christine Chen



Denis Daly (hitting) and Alex Green



Wayne King

Coach's Corner

In early September, I entered the main office at the Athletic Centre and told Intercollegiate Business Manager, Frank Pindar that I thought that this badminton season was going to be different than all the others and that we would finally win that elusive OUA gold medal. And I recall that Frank reminded me that the season hadn't even started and that one shouldn't count on such things so early on in the year - perhaps good advice, but advice that I really did not heed at all this entire season. From the outset of the badminton training camp, I was quite sure that this year's team was different in that we had character, team togetherness and an overall pride that was lacking in the past four seasons. Now that the season is over and the Blues have won the OUA league championship, the OUA playoff gold medals, the OUA Female MVP, both OUA Rookie of the Year awards and five OUA All-Stars, it is perhaps time to reflect and share with everyone when I knew there was a difference and what that difference was.

The moment when this year's team character started to develop happened on the first night of training camp when a rookie, Amy Mader, stood up in our team meeting and talked about her experiences in Saskatchewan where she had represented her province at the Canada Winter Games (1995 and 1999) and her country at the Devlin Cup and how she was looking forward to this new team experience and the idea of winning a championship. At that moment Edith Chow, our team captain, looked at Amy as she spoke and the seed of our championship season sprouted - this was the beginning of the dominant women's doubles team in our league this season and the start of an amazing friendship on and off court. And then two other rookies, Anca Gaspar (from Roger Wallis' club in Etobicoke) and Jessica Shiu from Hong Kong (via Chicago) were soon added to the mix and we were on our way to an almost unblemished women's season (78 wins, 2 losses). In other years, we had depth but here we had domination and that domination ensured that our men's team had the necessary time to develop and mature into its own winning machine. And that is where the next key to the gold medal appeared.

After the second tournament at University of Western Ontario, where we lost our only round of the entire season 6-5 against Western, the coaches and the team decided that if we could strengthen our men's core team during the Christmas break, we should do so in order to make our chances of winning the gold medal more probable. And during the break, who should contact me about joining the team, but five-time OFSAA singles champion, Samuel Lam with a desire to play for the Blues. Coinciding with that good break was the return to action of last year's rookie star, Alex Green, from a serious foot injury; also involved in the midseason recruiting shuffle were former team players Shaw Hang and last year's rookie phenom, Phil Bennington. Unfortunately, we could not make room for Phil and Shaw had to be dropped for playoff play, but the necessary changes had been made to ensure overall team strength. And with the addition of these players at the critical midseason juncture, there was now less pressure on our other core players, Denis Daly, Mike Glenney, Gordon Chiu and OUA Rookie of the Year Stephen Lau. The turning point for our men's season was the first match that our new recruit Samuel Lam played against sensational Daniel Woo of York. Sam showed his grit and determination as he battled a very tough and skilled opponent to a standstill and an ultimate victory to demonstrate to his teammates the meaning of the word "character". From that match on, our men's team dominated their opponents with as much confidence as our women's team had been doing all season.

In the playoffs, we finally learned what winning a championship was all about. It wasn't unexpected nor was it hugely rah-rah emotional, but it was really satisfying, thrilling and almost surreal as everybody on the entire team shared in the victory (from the players to the managers to the coaches and to the parents and fans). There will surely be other championship titles for Varsity Blues, but this one will always be special because it was the result of careful goal-setting, consistent team leadership from our veterans, unabashed joy of winning by our rookies and most of all, a total lack of selfishness from every member of our team. The five-year road to an OUA badminton championship, touted by Liz Hoffman in my first year with the Blues program, has indeed become just that and perhaps we will continue on to more gold medals - but the first one is always special and the upcoming summer will be a time to celebrate and remember the many exciting moments of 2002-2003. Thanks to University of Toronto Faculty of Physical Education, the Athletic Centre staff, fellow coaches within the Varsity Blues program and our alumni/ae for the many words of support and encouragement: we hope you share our victory with us. We would be most pleased if you could attend this year's Alumni/ae Night on Friday May 23, and toast our Blues for the return to "championship days" - may they continue for a long time to come!

Wayne King

Thanks to Badminton alumnus Tom Muir who has agreed to represent the Badminton Legacy Fund on the U of T Sport Alumni/ae rep committee. If you are also interested in serving, please contact the Alumni/ae Office at 416-946-3714 or email bonnie.shepherd@utoronto.ca