"Soccer standout Wes Mink continues career at Oakland"

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Soccer standout Wes Mink continues career at Oakland

Although millions of kids start playing sports at a young age, few continue on to play at the college level. For 2014 Gull Lake graduate, Wesley Mink, his childhood dreams came true when he committed to play soccer at a Division I school. Mink joined the Oakland University Golden Grizzlies as an alternate goalkeeper after the team graduated two senior keepers.

The team got off to a rough 0-5 start and Mink went from coming off the bench in the second half to starting the third game of the season. The momentum soon shifted for the Grizzlies as they defeated #10 ranked Michigan State 2-0 and Mink led the team to six straight shutouts, not allowing a goal for over 579 minutes of play: a school record.

“It means a lot to me because that was what I came in trying to accomplish,” Mink said. “Having done that is great but I know I have to keep working hard because just like I wanted to win the job so do the other keepers.”

Oakland remained undefeated in ten conference games which gave them home field advantage for their league’s championship game on November 15. The Golden Grizzlies defeated Wright State 2-1 for the Horizon League Championship title.

“Winning the Horizon League Championship was a huge relief and felt like such an accomplishment,” Mink said. “In the beginning of the year the seniors told us they wanted it to be their best one yet so we had winning the championship as one of our goals and just to accomplish that and see the joy on everyone’s faces was priceless.”
The win allowed the team to advance into the first round of the NCAA tournament where they will play at Kentucky on November 20. The Grizzlies are confident going into the tournament, Mink said.

“Our expectations are to win. We know we have a good team that can compete with anyone if we play our best. We know Kentucky is a strong team but then again so are we. It should be a good battle.”

The pressures of a big tournament and even regular conference games are very different than that of a high school player, especially one that moved away from their elite travel team in the middle of their high school career.

“My transition to Gull Lake lessened the amount of practice I got in the offseason,” Mink said.

Mink continued to play for his travel team, Cincinnati United Premier (CUP), after moving to Gull Lake, driving back and forth for games and some practices. Mink said the move also made going to Oakland a more realistic choice since he now had in-state tuition.

“I chose Oakland because it was an opportunity for me to play right away and it had the academics I was looking for. I plan on studying pre-physical therapy,” Mink said. “I also like it because it is close enough to home.”

Because CUP is an elite team, Mink was able to hone his skills while competing with athletes on par with those he now plays with at Oakland.

“Playing for CUP helped prepare me for college because I was constantly playing against other D1 players who were very talented,” Mink said. “CUP gave me good training to elevate my performance.”
Mink’s head coach at Oakland, Eric Pogue, also praised CUP’s performance in the past couple of years and said he was excited to find Mink among the elite group.

“To go around and get a goalkeeper like Wes Mink to join us was a great addition for us. He comes from a great club called Cincinnati United Premier which is one of the top teams in the nation in his age group,” Pogue said in an interview with the Oakland Post. “I think we were lucky Wes got overlooked a little bit in the recruiting process, because he ended up transferring from Cincinnati to Augusta, Michigan.”

Despite playing for multiple different club teams and high schools, Mink said nothing can compare to the high-level play of a college game.

“Playing at Oakland is different because the level of play is much faster and every game is a battle,” Mink said. “There are no lopsided games. Adapting to a new team after being with CUP since I was nine is different, but I love this team.”

The team and league anticipated Mink’s arrival with high expectations of the freshman and he continues to exceed them; evident in his numerous recognitions and accomplishments this year. Mink was awarded Horizon League’s Defensive Player of the Week three times and was named to the National Team once. Coach Pogue said to The Oakland Post that the team has faced a lot of adversity and came out stronger, including his new freshman keeper.

“He’s tall, he’s lean, he’s athletic and obviously he’s a big presence in the box,” Pogue said.

Mink’s size and athleticism may give him an advantage in goal, but the expectations of a goalkeeper are often higher than that of regular field players. Because the keeper is the last person the ball goes through, Mink said he often feels the pressure when an opponent scores.
“My favorite thing about soccer, since I am a goalkeeper, is making a big save,” Mink said. “The pressures on a keeper are tough because when a goal gets scored, it feels like it’s my fault because I’m the last line of defense but I know it has to go through ten other players before it gets to me. That’s why it’s such a team game.”

Soccer may be a team sport, but Mink continually proves his individual skills in goal for the Golden Grizzlies, helping them to a 9-6-3 record during the regular season. Pogue said to Grizz League, he expects his team to continue on into the tournament season with the help and unique contribution of each player.

“We expect to compete for titles and we expect to advance,” Pogue said. “We know it's not easy but we are just really proud of our effort from back to front.”

Update: Oakland University defeats University of Kentucky, 2-0 in the first round of the NCAA tournament on Thursday, November 20.

Update: Oakland University falls to Michigan State University, 0-1 in the second round of the NCAA tournament on Sunday, November 23.