

Oglethorpe University

Stormy Petrels

MENS BASKETBALL NEWSLETTER

Volume 6

October 2008

Issue 1

2008-2009 Season Preview

Expectations are high for the Oglethorpe University Men's basketball team in 2008-09. The Petrels are coming off a surprising season in which they recorded their most wins in ten years and highest conference finish in thirteen years. They were picked to finish 7th, but finished 3rd in the regular season conference standings (2nd in the division) behind two teams that were both ranked in the top 10 in the nation in the final national poll. With both of those teams losing several key players, the Petrels hope to contend for their first SCAC Championship since the 1993-94 season.

The Petrels are not without their losses, either. They lose three senior starters in 2nd Team All-Conference post Ahmad Kareem Shaheed, Craig Jackson, and Nick Watterson. They also lose some athleticism off the bench with the losses of Chaz Smith and Eric Palmer. In all, the Petrels lose about 50% of both their scoring and rebounding from last season.

They do return five players that saw significant playing time, however. Last season's SCAC Newcomer of the Year, forward Todd Ward (6'5; Venice, FL) returns for his first full-year in a Stormy Petrel uniform. Starting guards David Allison (5'10; Stuart, FL) and Joe Kennedy (6'1; Gainesville, GA) also return to give the Petrels one of the top guard tandems in the conference. Sophomore guard Alex Richey (6'1; Alpharetta, GA) and junior forward Eddie Buckley (6'5; Hernando, FL) also return with a year of experience under their belt. Rounding out the returners are two players that figured to have been in the playing rotation last year before suffering season ending injuries. Sophomores Wade Weldon (6'1; Dunwoody, GA) and Robertas Kleiva (6'5; Vilnius, Lithuania) should be major contributors this year.

The Petrels welcome six newcomers this season, as well. Chris Schneider (6'5; Gainesville, GA), Erik Strong (6'5; Stone Mountain, GA), and Mark Woodhull (6'5; Canton, GA) will be competing for time in the post, while Sam Purdy (6'5; Palm Harbor, FL), Chandler Rierson (6'3; Calhoun, GA), and Matt Webb (6'2; Atlanta, GA) will provide depth at the perimeter positions.

Look for the Petrels to tweak some things on both sides of the court while continuing to play an up-tempo style of basketball that has them at or near the top of the conference in scoring, three-pointers made, steals, and turnovers forced year in and year out. Although the squad has no seniors this year, Head Coach Philip Ponder is still optimistic, stating, "A lot of people are pointing to the fact that we have no seniors and that next year is going to be our year. I'm thinking 'why not this year?' I think we have the pieces to be a lot better than people think if we stay healthy and one or two of the new guys can step up and contribute as freshmen."

Petrels Go Undefeated in Europe

Over the summer break, the Oglethorpe University men's basketball team took its' first overseas excursion, playing three games and visiting numerous cultural and historical sights in France and Italy. The team flew into Paris, France and spent four nights there. While in the "city of lights," the team took in many of the famous museums and landmarks, including the Louvre Museum, the Museum D'Orsay, the Arc de Triumphe, the Palace of Versailles, the Eiffel Tower, and the Champs Elysee.

The team also took a day trip up to the Beaches of Normandy, where the legendary D-Day invasion took place. The players walked along the stretch of beach known as Omaha Beach, viewing the historical plaques and monuments, while also climbing the cliffs, where they found and climbed into old German bunkers. Following a trip to the Omaha Beach museum, the day culminated with a trip to the inspirational United States Memorial Cemetery.

While in Paris, the team played two games and won both in convincing fashion. The Petrels won the first game by the score of 101-66, with forward Eddie Buckley leading the way with 26 points, followed by Wade Weldon with 20 and Alex Richey with 19. In the second game, the Petrels jumped out to a 12-0 lead and nailed 14 three-pointers to finish with a 94-69 victory. Joe Kennedy led the squad with 27 points and Weldon pitched in 20. (*Continued on Page 2*)

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The team then flew to Rome, Italy where they were based for the remainder of the trip. While in the "eternal city," the players visited the famed Colosseum and the Roman Forum, along with other popular sights such as the Trevi Fountain, Spanish Steps, and Piazza Navona. The highlight of their stay in Rome was the trip to the Vatican Museum, the Sistine Chapel, and St. Peters Cathedral. Another highlight was a day trip to the beautiful Tuscan city of Florence.

The Petrels played one game in Rome, as well, and finished their European tour with a perfect 3-0 record by recording a 102-76 win. The Petrels once again came out hot, jumping out to a 10-0 lead. The team finished with a staggering 17 three-point field goals, as Kennedy once again led all scorers with 27 points, and Weldon finished with 19.

The trip was a great success, and a great cultural, educational, and basketball experience for the team. Head Coach Philip Ponder had this to say, "This was an experience of a lifetime for these guys. I think it was not only a great educational experience for the guys, seeing all of these things that they have heard, read, and studied about, but also a great experience in terms of team-bonding. I think this experience is going to make us a better team. This is something I hope we will be able to do once every few years, so that everyone that comes to play at Oglethorpe will get to experience something like this during their career."

Petrels to Face D1 Ga. State on Oct. 30

The Oglethorpe University Men's Basketball team will tip-off the 2008-09 season with an exhibition game vs. the cross-town Div. I Georgia State Panthers on Thursday, Oct. 30 at 7:30pm. This will mark the second consecutive season that the Stormy Petrels will start their season with a Div. I exhibition game. Last year, the Petrels put a scare into the Div. I Samford Bulldogs, taking a 31-30 lead into the half and only trailing by four with four minutes to play before succumbing by the score of 75-62.

This season's Div. 1 opponent should be an even tougher test for the Petrels, as the Panthers, led by 2001 SEC and National Coach of the Year Rod Barnes, return their top three scorers, and will add five ACC, SEC, and Big East transfer newcomers to their line-up. Leading scorer Leonard Mendez (16.0 ppg) returns along with fellow starters Trae Goldston (9.3 ppg), and Rashad Chase (7.5 ppg). 6'10 post Xavier Hansbro and 6'7 forward Trey Hampton, both from Ole Miss, and 6'8 forward Bernard Rimmer, from Mississippi State, will bolster the Panther frontcourt, while 6'1 guard Joe Dukes from Wake Forest and 6'4 guard Dante Curry from South Florida dramatically improve the Panther backcourt.

Georgia State will be by far the most talented team the Petrels have faced since playing the Davidson Wildcats in a regular season game in November of 1999, three days after the Wildcats had defeated the North Carolina Tar Heels. "This is a classic David vs. Goliath match-up," Head Coach Philip Ponder noted, "We know we'll have to bring our A game and they'll probably have to not be at their best, but we're looking forward to it and we're going to compete hard. We put a major scare into a DI team last year and we beat a DII team (Morehouse) a couple of years ago, so anything can happen, but this will be the best team we've faced. It'll be fun going up against a team of this caliber."

Boys and Girls Club Work Continues

The Oglethorpe University Men's Basketball team has continued its work with the Brookhaven Boys and Girls Club this fall. For the past five weeks, each team member has volunteered for two hours per week at the club, taking part in activities ranging from helping with homework to working with the sports programs. In all, the team has contributed a combined 140 hours of volunteer service this fall. This marks the 5th consecutive fall in which the team has worked with the Brookhaven Boys and Girls Club. In November of 2006, the team was named the Boys and Girls Club Volunteer of the Year for the entire Metro Atlanta area.