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THE OLYMPIC CLUB

OC HISTORY: FIELD HOCKEY WINS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP


1st Place
USFHL
National Championship
NATIONAL CHAMPIO
CHAMPS



OLYMPIC CLUB FIELD HOCKEY WINS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

by Frank Stranzl
photos by Flat Tail Photography

The Olympic Club's tradition of athletic excellence is well-documented, dating back to its foundation in 1860. From Olympic gold to Wimbledon appearances to the many team and individual amateur titles along the way, the OC has seemingly won it all.

Thanks to a special group of pioneers, the Winged "O" can now add its first field hockey national championship to the long list of accomplishments in OC history.

Top row left-to-right: Joy Beveridge (Super Fan & Team Mom), Savannah Devarney, Lisa Lohre, Meredith Chandler, Caroline Beaudoin, Katie Garrity, Janine Leger, Merty McGraw. Bottom row left-to-right: Nicole Ng, Kendall Beveridge, Rachel Dunn, Janaye Sakkas, Katie Keyser, Caitlin Beatty, Briana Harney. Not Pictured: Lauren Livingston.

In just its fifth year as a Club sport, the OC's field hockey team defeated Philadelphia's Running on Empty 2–0 in the United States Field Hockey League (USFHL) Adult National Championship on July 15 in Newark, Del. For a program that only began organized play in 2015, that's a meteoric rise to the top. And, for five founding members who have been with the team every step of the way, the national title was especially sweet.

"In that moment, there was just so much pride," said former Commissioner Savannah Devarney. "For me, it was a feeling of, 'Okay, we've arrived.' To do this with all of my best friends on the field, friendships that we've built while putting this team together, it's just pure joy."

For Devarney and fellow founders Nicole Ng, Caitlin Beatty, Lisa Lohre and Kendall Beveridge, the championship was validation that their hard work had paid off. But, like many teams in the OC athletic community, their journey to this point transcends the box score.

HISTORY OF OC FIELD HOCKEY

Devarney was coaching at St. Ignatius in 2013 when she was approached by former OC Board member Brian Davis. After playing field hockey in Australia for five years, she had moved to the Bay Area to start her career. Davis' daughter played for Devarney's team, and the two saw an opportunity to align their goals under the Winged "O" banner: Devarney wanted to continue to play field hockey, and Davis knew the Board was keen to seek out first-class female athletic opportunities within the Club.

"Savannah is both a fantastic athlete and leader, and so I asked if she missed competition," Davis recalled. "She said yes, and proceeded to find an incredible group of professional women who also missed the competition that their college sport offered. From there, Savannah really worked tirelessly to create a sport and group of athletes that fit The Olympic Club model."

Davis helped Devarney navigate the Club's governance system, which included an initial proposal to the Athletic Committee. Once the Athletic Committee signed off, Devarney had to make her case to the Board. After a lengthy vetting process, the Board approved adding field hockey as a Club sport on September 24, 2014.

"Ever since, it has been amazing watching Savannah, and the entire Olympic Club field hockey community really dedicate themselves to being the very best athletes in their sport and committed Olympic Club members," Davis said.

BUILDING A CULTURE

There was a sense of relief once the political process had played out, but Devarney quickly turned her sights to the next steps. Two important tasks loomed: the OC needed players, and they needed a league in which to compete.

Field hockey is largely recognized as an East Coast sport, and one of the questions the Board asked Devarney was about the Bay Area talent pool. Devarney made her pitch to friends and friends of friends, women who played in college and were now living in San Francisco.

Devarney approached Beatty in 2013 about the potential for a team at the OC. Beatty had just transitioned into the junior



Tiburon native Meredith Chandler started her field hockey career with St. Ignatius, and scored in the OC's 2–0 win in the United States Field Hockey Adult League National Championship game.

varsity coaching position for Devarney at St. Ignatius, and was looking to play more competitive hockey in the Bay Area. Excited at the prospect, she decided to join forces with Devarney to help make the dream a reality.

"Savannah did a fantastic job of spreading the word, and worked hard to recruit talented athletes to join forces," Beatty said. "Our initial roster was small, and it took awhile to finally get the team off the ground, but we didn't just want to put a random group together. We wanted to establish a long-lasting program with the OC. After our first official appearance at CalCup in 2015, more people started to buy in to what we were building, and we've been growing ever since!"

"To [win this championship] with all of my best friends on the field, friendships that we've built while putting this team together, it's just pure joy." — Savannah Devarney

The first class of field hockey players was admitted to the OC on March 26, 2015. The roster grew to as many as 15 during that initial season, which set the foundation for years to come.

There was also the issue of competition. While most OC teams have established leagues in which to compete, field hockey didn't have that luxury. The men's soccer team plays in a league that dates back to 1902. The Northern California Rugby Union has been on stable footing for decades, with history spanning nearly a century. Winged "O" basketball, squash and tennis teams compete in highly-competitive intra-Club leagues in addition to external tournaments and events.





Team founder Savannah Devarney helped build the field hockey program into a national champion in just five years.



Team Captain Lisa Lohre was part of the inaugural OC field hockey season in 2015.



The field hockey program had to build their own league. So, in addition to finding players to compete for the OC, Devarney and her teammates also had to recruit local competition. That effort resulted in a three-team league in Northern California, which will hopefully continue to grow.

With players and a league, the OC set out to create a national powerhouse.

ROAD TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP

The USFHL Adult National Championship began in 2017. The OC has qualified for the event every year by winning the Northern California Field Hockey Association Championship. Their best finish prior to this year was fourth in 2017.

"In 2018, many people talked about how The Olympic Club was their favorite team to watch," said USFHL President Kendra Lucking. "Their victory this year is a testament to their leadership and the hard work that they've put in since launching their program. Eyes throughout the nation are on Northern California because of their achievement, and their overall structure and leadership is an inspiration to teams throughout the United States."

With another year under their belt, the OC entered 2019 with a new goal: to win it all. The trademark teamwork that made them a popular squad at the national championships in 2018 continued to blossom, as new players learned the system alongside program veterans. That bonding transcended the playing field and branched out into different parts of the Club.

"I was really excited to play field hockey again, but in reality the best part of playing for the OC is that there's so much going on outside of hockey," said first-year defender Caroline Beaudoin. "A bunch of girls from our team play tennis, and our older teammates have done a great job of taking the younger girls under their wings, showing us how to be successful while balancing our careers and sports."

"As a team, we've really embodied the 'use your Club' motto," Beatty added. "Since we don't have dedicated practice space at the OC, we make sure to utilize the Club in other ways, including working out on the 6th floor,



Field Hockey Commissioner Nicole Ng has played a pivotal role in growing the program since its inception in 2015, and her hard work was rewarded with a national title this summer. Photo by Tee Goh.

swimming, playing tennis and participating in fitness classes. It is important to us that our players are active members of the OC community outside of our team."

The five veterans who have been there since day one built a strong core that gives new players like Beaudoin a chance to flourish. Beatty also talked about the importance of having that core group of dedicated members who can help integrate new players, which was paramount to the success of the 2019 team.

On the field, the OC continued to develop their chemistry throughout the spring, playing exhibition games against local college teams and placing third at CalCup, where many famous international professional hockey players fly in for the most competitive global tournament hosted in the United States. It all culminated with another USFHL National Championship qualification.

The OC won each of their national championship group play games by one goal, running up a 3–0 record and 4–1 goal differential in the opening days of the tournament. Their ensuing semifinal showdown with dcDragons from Washington, D.C. was the most daunting game on their championship slate. Boasting perhaps the most talented team on paper, including multiple national team players, dcDragons were among the favorites heading into the tournament. However, the Winged "O" jumped out to a 2–0 lead and never looked back.

"Eyes throughout the nation are on Northern California because of their achievement, and their overall structure and leadership is an inspiration to teams throughout the United States."
— USFHL President Kendra Lucking

"We went into that game [against dcDragons] with a championship mentality,"

Beaudoin said. "They had a center forward who played in the last three Olympics, and so we talked about not letting her touch the ball. The plan worked, and we felt like we had the national championship after winning that game."

After defeating dcDragons, many players had a feeling that the championship was theirs. When Katie Garrity scored that first goal thanks to a beautiful assist from Beaudoin, that victory seemed almost certain. And, when Meredith Chandler capped the scoring with an insurance goal in the fourth quarter, the entire team was brimming with excitement, counting down the final moments.

"After the final whistle blew, I turned to Kendall and we gave each other a huge hug. It was such an intense emotional relief to seal the shutout victory, and we both started tearing up," Beatty said. "As a team, we've come so close in so many different tournaments. It felt like everything had finally fallen into place.

"All the hours spent recruiting, planning, training, traveling and playing had paid off. We were all just so excited to earn an amazing team title against some of the top club teams in the United States."

Beaudoin, Ng and Katie Keister received USFHL National Championship All-Star Team recognition. The Olympic Club stamped its mark on the national field hockey landscape.

And, perhaps most importantly to Devarney, the team appears destined to leave a lasting legacy with a strong group of players dedicated to representing the Winged "O," while embracing the program and everything that goes with being an Olympian.

Congrats to this group of athletic trailblazers for reaching the pinnacle of their sport! ■



Fallbrook, Calif. native Brianna Harney played field hockey for Cal, and helped lead the OC to its first national championship.