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THE OLYMPIC CLUB

FIELD HOCKEY TEAM MAKES HISTORY WITH FOURTH NATIONAL TITLE

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by Tim Taylor (Contributing member), photos by Anson Tan

Since its 2016 inception, our field hockey team has won the USFHL National Championship an incredible four times (2019, 2022, 2024, 2026).

In this year's national championship game, our Olympians faced Washington FHA, a pesky opponent it had already defeated during pool play. These games are high-intensity, high-stakes. The teams clashed in St. Louis, Missouri, in a tournament with intermittent rainstorms, which, if you're from the Midwest like me, you know dropped raindrops that feel more like water balloons.

I first spoke about the championship with two players: incoming Commissioner Mollie D'Arcy Rice, a forward who played at Durham University in the UK, and team captain and departing Deputy Commissioner Janaye Sakkas, a center midfielder who played at UC Berkeley. Sakkas said, "There's a lot of pressure on us, but you just have to go back to loving the game and forgetting about the outcome." This year, the OC started by winning the qualifier in Moorpark, California, where they dominated, as the

Back row (l-to-r): Lizzie Barminski, Brynn Gitt, Alexa Murray, Lisa Lohre, Mollie D'Arcy Rice, Meredith Chandler, Tara Natesan, Emma Christus Klein, Marissa Baker. Front row: Savannah DeVarney, Hannah Santos, Janaye Sakkas, Fenella Scutt, Agustina Singh, Delfina Druetta, Scout Butler.



FOURTH NATIONAL TITLE

competition in general on the West Coast isn't collectively as strong.

"I'd say we are the strongest team on the West Coast by far," Sakkas said. "Obviously, we're the best in the nation now, but we are a very strong team. I would put money on us to also be competitive against some college teams. That's how strong I feel we are — we are at the caliber of some Division I teams."

The team is filled with a fascinating distribution of experience. Scout Butler, Alex Murray and Hannah Santos are new team members. Savannah "Sav" DeVarney and Lisa Lohre have been on the team together since its inception, 11 years ago.

DeVarney and Nicole (Ng) Rose were the original commissioners of the team. Brittany Knouse and Sakkas took over in 2023. Under their leadership, three important developments followed:

1. Knouse was instrumental in bringing in Mike Barminski, a current U.S. Men's National Team player, as our coach.
2. Leadership turned a difficult 2025 performance into a winning 2026.
3. Half of our four national championships (2024 and 2026) came in Knouse and Sakkas' three years leading the team, and Sakkas has been on the field for all four of them.

DeVarney said, "Brittany and Janaye took this team further than I ever





imagined we could take it. Their DNA is on it now, and it's better than where Nicole and I left it. The squad they've built is one I'm lucky to play on."

In 2025, the Club struggled to field a full team, and the players' performance reflected it. They placed at the bottom of their pool and missed the playoff rounds, which almost never happens.

Coming into 2026, they collectively recommitted.

This year's national championship took place in St. Louis. For any of our "born and bred" in San Francisco members, St. Louis in midsummer has humidity that feels like you are walking through air made of melted cheese. In that humidity, you can soak a t-shirt waiting for a ride for more than five minutes.

The OC opened the tournament, playing Philly Premier, and prevailed with a mix of "both physical stamina and mental resilience," Lohre said. D'Arcy Rice and Agustina Singh each netted goals in a 2–1 victory.

The next game, against Washington FHA, was delayed at 0–0 in the third quarter, due to lightning. Per league rules, the game resumed the next day with a shootout. Butler, Sakkas and Singh found the back of the net.

"Meanwhile, goalkeeper Hannah Santos delivered a stellar performance, blocking a crucial Washington attempt to secure the win and the top seed in our pool," Lohre said. I learned that goalies typically stop 20–30% of the shots, so Santos coming up huge for us was essential.

After dispatching DC Dragons with a tidy 1–0 win, with Marissa Baker scoring the game-winner, it was on with a semi-final battle against the defending national champ and No. 1 seed, Atlanta FHC.

"It was a heavyweight battle of possession and tactical skill. Sav put the OC on the board first, but Atlanta quickly found an equalizer. Refusing to back down, Fenella Scutt executed a brilliant

Marissa Baker carries the ball down the field.

backhand shot to reclaim the lead, with Janaye picking up her second assist of the match. From there, the OC played smart, high-tempo possession hockey to close out the game and punch their ticket to the final," Lohre said.

This set up a finals rematch with Washington FHA. In the fourth quarter the score was tied 0–0 and the OC was awarded a penalty corner, which is essentially a set play. For field hockey newbies like me, a penalty corner is awarded when there is a foul near the goal, unlike in soccer, where a corner is awarded when the ball goes out of bounds off the defending team.

A player known as an "inserter" (DeVarney in this case) drags the ball from the baseline to the top of the circle around the goal. The next player (Lohre) stick stops the ball, and a player (Singh) shoots it toward goal. In this case, D'Arcy Rice deflected Singh's shot onto a defensive player who illegally stopped the ball with her body on the goal line, resulting in a penalty stroke (similar to a penalty kick in soccer).

When it comes to this stroke-taking, Lohre is our team's GOAT.

"Lisa, in addition to being our absolute rock for the team as the center back, she's also an instrumental stroke-taker," DeVarney said. "She's converted every stroke into a goal for us. I think a goalie has saved only one of her strokes in her entire career."

I've done numerous profiles of our teams in The Olympic Club, and our field hockey team is the best example of a group that is quick with the praise while collectively being humble. Lohre's the GOAT stroke-taker; it's an understood fact, and one she recognizes objectively.

With just a few minutes remaining after Lohre's goal, "the drama wasn't over," she said.

Washington was awarded a penalty stroke, and the title rested upon the sturdy shoulders of our Dominik Hašek ninja-level goalkeeper Santos, crouched ready to stop the ball like a lioness protecting her cubs.

She faced down the shooter, making a spectacular save to secure the national title. Our team became the first ever team (men or women) to win four times.

Some incredible stats:

- Eight of the nine goals we scored came from different players.
- Emma Christus Klein, D'Arcy Rice and Singh all made the All-Star Team.
- Singh was the MVP of the tournament.
- Sakkas and DeVarney have played on all four teams that won nationals.

Founding a program of this caliber took work. "I wasn't a member, and I was coaching at St. Ignatius High School,"

Brynn Gitt, Agustina Singh and Fenella Scutt defend against a Washington FHA player in the finals.





Mollie D'Arcy Rice, selected to the tournament All-Star Team, beats a Philly player.

DeVarney explained. "I was coaching Alison Davis, and her father, Brian Davis, was on the Board at the time. It was around 2013, when they were trying to recruit more women. Brian heard that I was recreationally putting together teams for competitive tournaments, and encouraged me to consider adding field hockey to The Olympic Club. It wasn't easy; it wasn't just like, 'Hey, I'll invite you to start the team.' He partnered with me in convincing the Board over a few years," she said.

The challenge was that she knew The Olympic Club values winning, and they didn't think the West Coast really had what was needed.

"But I knew that I had amazing people like Lisa and other founding members like Kendall (Beveridge) Liss, Nicole (Ng) Rose and Caitlin Beatty," she said. She leveraged the competitors she had already gathered to provide the foundation. She even presented a slideshow with pictures of all 25 women. "These are all the women we're going to bring together," she said.

Over time, the team learned that sustained success would depend on three foundations:

1. The quality of the people they recruited — and who those people subsequently recruited. That compounds. It is not one person's culture; it is a selection standard that was handed down. Great people recruit other great people, and culture forms from that collective DNA and shared values.
2. The Olympic Club's model. What the Club encourages and instills in all of its teams is what makes sustained dominance possible (and sets us apart from clubs that don't have an institution they are part of). Continuity of play, long-term teammates, cross-sport bonding, the expectation that you are in it for years. Most other clubs at nationals rebuild their rosters constantly year over year.
3. The strength of our system. Strong coaching and a structure new members can slot into quickly. That is why people succeed with us fast.

Together, those three foundations completely transformed the team's recruiting. The team now has an influx of prospective members contacting The Olympic Club directly about the field hockey team.

None of this is passive. The team's leaders and players work at it, including maintaining relationships with the local college programs and hosting scrimmages against their teams. That is how they stay a known quantity to players who are

about to graduate and are wondering what comes next.

Local college graduates are choosing to stay in the Bay Area, partly because it is the chance to keep playing the sport they dedicated their lives to. Butler, for example, played at nationals directly after graduating from Stanford.

People from around the world even ask some version of "I am considering taking a job in San Francisco, is there any field hockey there?" and the Club gets recommended.

Prospective members now arrive already primed about our team's commitment to results. The conversation our players have with prospective members makes clear that joining requires a real commitment to San Francisco and to the Club, and in exchange the new member becomes part of a legacy. That is a much easier sell than it used to be.

The Olympic Club's model was already built to produce longevity and connection. What the team did not have in the early days was proof of the model working in field hockey, so they could not point at it and show people what it looked like. They were asking new members to believe in what they would become if they built it together. The team can now point to its results — something The Olympic Club values.

"The Olympic Club structure incentivizes building teams that connect and form over years," DeVarney said. "I've played with some of my OC teammates for decades now. You can't find that anywhere else, right? It encourages long-term connection. We win as a team, as a connected unit, as a strong system with core values. And no other field hockey team can say that. They don't have the longevity of the connection, the off-field fun that we have. We play other sports together at

Current captain Janaye Sakkas battles against a DC Dragons player.





The Olympic Club and have the bonding of years of playing together. That connection has translated into winning."

You can even see it in their Golden Gate Bridge picture *(opposite)*. They are proud to represent the Club and San Francisco at these events, and delight in how surprised everyone is that a West Coast club is this good and this connected. That surprise comes from their commitment to the Club, the City and one another over many years, combined with the strength of the system. The culture is unwritten but it is palpable, and everyone carries it forward. The blended result is something none of us thought was possible.

From vision to execution, DeVarney, Lohre and every player who followed have turned the team into a national powerhouse.

Like so many of us, our field hockey superstars have rich, busy personal and professional lives. That said, this sport, this team is something that quickly becomes an important central foundation in their lives, even a support they can leave and return to.

D'Arcy Rice decided to take a three-year break from the sport to work in investment banking, when she had basically no bandwidth or capacity to do anything else.

"I did love [investment banking] at the time, but after stepping away, I realize it was quite intense," she said. "I wouldn't change it for the world, because I think it's made me who I am today. But I am glad that wasn't the path I went down for the rest of my life because it would have been quite a lot."

The Olympic Club field hockey system is now strong enough that a new or returning player can slot in and succeed quickly. D'Arcy Rice's path differs from that of teammates who came through local colleges, including Butler at Stanford. Yet players arriving for completely different reasons are united by their love of the game and their desire to continue playing it at a high level.

Agustina Singh, the tournament MVP, carries the ball toward the goal.

D'Arcy Rice explained, "I think what has made The Olympic Club so special is that there's just no hierarchy. We're all one unit, which has been such a welcome change. I've had a lot of political teams, and this is not one of them."

Being an excellent player is, of course, important, but as the incoming commissioner, D'Arcy Rice knows it goes beyond that. "It's important to know whether prospective members will fit with the team. So, doing a few trial sessions of, like, 'Come along to a lift, let's all have dinner at the Club together,' because the cultural fit is just as important as how good a player they are. They can be unbelievable, they can be Olympic standard, but if they're not a nice person, the team's ruined."

After the first day of the championship, the team went out for dinner. I'm figuring, "Oh, cool, you guys went back to the hotel, showered up, got dressed to impress and went to a St. Louis steakhouse or some such high-end culinary destination."

Nope.

Our beloved, national-championship-winning team went to, wait for it, a food court. In fact, the venue is actually called "The Food Hall," which feels like one small step beyond a food garage.

Not only did they go to The Food Hall, they went in their sweaty, mud-stained uniforms. Part of why this is so entertaining for me is, I think about the potential for parents with small children to see these warriors gathering at a table, as if they were post-battle extras from the movie Braveheart.

By the end of my interviews, I understood what drives this team. Here, fun is what becomes possible after years of recruiting carefully, passing leadership forward and choosing one another again and again. Four national titles are the public record. The women laughing together in sweaty uniforms at a St. Louis food hall and beaming in the photo in front of the Golden Gate Bridge may be another explanation for why the record is unlikely to stop in 2026. ■

Top row (l-to-r): Alexa Murray, Paulina Lee, Lisa Lohre, Meredith Chandler, Brittany Knouse. Middle row: Hannah Santos, Caitlin Beatty, Mollie D'Arcy Rice, Kasey Quon, Brynn Gitt, Kendall Beveridge Liss, Zoe Randolph, Morgan Peterson. Bottom row: Lizzie Barminski, Janaye Sakkas, Savannah DeVarney. Photo by Amani Masia.

