

# GYMNASTIC TEAMS MAKE IT COUNT

OU BECOMES FIRST SCHOOL  
TO CAPTURE BOTH MEN'S AND  
WOMEN'S NATIONAL GYMNASTICS  
TITLES IN SINGLE SEASON.

BY JAY C. UPCHURCH



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amaraderie among student-athletes on the same university campus comes with the territory. Teammates go through a natural bonding process that often forges close friendships, but the University of Oklahoma's gymnastics teams have taken the togetherness theme to a whole different level. Sharing the Sam Viersen OU Gymnastics

Center keeps them closely linked and universally focused on their respective goals. An average day at the practice facility finds the two squads simultaneously training in a mutually supportive environment that has become known for producing champions. *continued*

Men's photo by Amy Sanderson/RW Studios  
Women's photo by Amy Pyle



**N**ever has that been more evident than during the 2016 season when the men's and women's programs made history by capturing a pair of national gymnastics championships. They did it on the same day — April 16 — with memorable performances that ultimately added up to an unprecedented sweep of the two titles.

“For both teams to go out and perform like they did and win national championships — what an incredible way to finish off a great season,” says junior Chayse Capps, who helped the OU women earn their second national title in three seasons. “Obviously, our teams spend a lot of time together training in the same facility and we are a very tight-knit group — always pulling for each other and feeding off each other's energy and success.

“To share this experience with the guys — and do something that has never been done before — is truly amazing.”

A few hours prior to the team championships, head coaches Mark Williams and K.J. Kindler exchanged well wishes via a series of phone texts that ended with a Williams' text that read, “Let's Make History!”

It was a simple communication that turned out to be prophetic.

The Sooners men took center stage first in Columbus, Ohio, and dominated from the opening rotation, wasting little time successfully defending their 2015 national title. Williams' crew put the finishing touches on a second straight undefeated season by recording the largest margin of victory in NCAA history — 443.400 to 434.050 for runner-up Stanford.

“It was very sweet, definitely a great way to finish off the season,” says Williams, reflecting on the program's 10th overall national championship and his seventh title since taking



Amy Pyle

**OU senior Haley Scaman closes out her collegiate career with a stunning floor exercise that was ranked the highest among the women's NCAA Gymnastics Championships.**

over as head coach at OU prior to the 2000 season. “Our guys hit 100 percent, and you honestly can't ask for anything more than that. I'd probably go as far as to say it was the best overall performance of any national championship team since I've been here.”

Oklahoma's mission statement for 2016 was simple enough, “Defend for 10.” And despite losing seven seniors from the 2015 national title team — including five All-Americans — the Sooners entered the new season ranked No. 1 nationally.

They opened in January with an impressive team win at the Rocky Mountain Open and then methodically rolled over every single opponent the rest of the way, earning a spot in the NCAA team championship field by a 14-point margin over their nearest rival in the NCAA preliminary qualifying round.



Amy Pyle



Amy Sanderson/RW Studios

Junior Chayse Capps, left, became only the second woman in OU history to earn All-American honors on four events and the all-around. Redshirt senior Sergey Resnick, right, was one of five OU men to win All-American status during their national championship rout.

“Last year’s team was special because of the seven seniors who would not be denied a national title, and that was a really great story,” says Williams. “Last year’s team also scored higher and had two more individual national champions, but this team really had no weaknesses. It’s just a great group of guys who worked hard together all season and were probably better prepared than we ever have been.”

“I’m extremely proud of the way they handled themselves with everything that goes into trying to defend a national title like that. They represented the university extremely well.”

En route to the team title, the 2016 Sooners also crowned a pair of individual champions, including true freshman Yul Moldauer, who became the eighth gymnast in school history to earn the NCAA all-around title. The Arvada, Colo., product also earned All-American honors on the parallel bars and floor exercise.

Meanwhile, junior Colin Van Wicklen was first in the floor exercise and also garnered All-American status in the vault and high bar events. In all, the Sooners earned 16 All-American honors that were divided between seven competitors.

Seniors Kanji Oyama and Sergey Resnick, along with junior Allan Bower, sophomore Hunter Justus and freshman Levi Anderson were also recognized as All-Americans for

their respective efforts at nationals.

What was the key to the team’s success?

“Mental toughness,” says Van Wicklen. “We were determined to defend our title, and this team’s focus and belief that we could handle any pressure and adversity we faced was a big factor. That made it possible to go out and win in every situation.”

With so much talent returning next season, the Sooners will have a realistic opportunity to win a third straight NCAA championship — a feat that has not been accomplished since

**“Not winning it last year only motivated us that much more to go out and accomplish all of our goals this season.”**

the mid-1980s when Nebraska finished off a string of five consecutive titles.

### Make It Count

After a disappointing third-place finish at nationals a few months earlier, the OU women began the 2016 season ranked No. 1 nationally. But they stumbled out of the gate with a season-opening dual loss against LSU in Baton Rouge.

It would prove to be the Sooners’ only loss of the regular season, as Kindler’s crew regained the top spot in the rankings

by mid-February and rolled its way into the postseason. Once there, OU won its NCAA regional and then qualified for the NCAA Super Six for the fourth straight season.

By all accounts, Oklahoma was the favorite to win the title at the Fort Worth Convention Center.

“We were in a similar position in 2015 — ranked No. 1 and undefeated all season,” says Kindler. “But we did not go out and earn it at nationals, which was really tough. It basically turned out to be a learning experience for the team that these girls were determined not to let happen again.”

The team motto all season had been, “Make It Count,” and that’s exactly what the Sooners did on Saturday night, just hours after the OU men had finished their season with an NCAA title.

“Not winning it last year only motivated us that much more to go out and accomplish all of our goals this season,” says Capps. “We didn’t dwell on that disappointment, but it definitely made us more determined.”

Capps helped lead the way for the Sooners, earning All-American honors on all four events as well as in the all-around, thus becoming the only OU gymnast other than the legendary Kelly Garrison (1988) to accomplish the feat.

“We found out the men had won their championship during our meet and that really gave us a boost of energy and motivated us even more to make history,” says Capps, a junior from Plano, Texas.

Despite a slow start on the vault, OU’s collective confidence grew with each solid performance through the bars and the beam events. Still, with LSU, Alabama and defending national champion Florida right on their heels, the Sooners were well aware they needed to be near perfect on the floor exercise.

“Going into our last rotation, our team was in a good place mentally. I could tell they were ready to go after it,” says Kindler. “And that’s what they did.”

Sophomore Natalie Brown got the Sooners off to a good start with a 9.9 that was followed by Capps (9.9125), junior Charity Jones (9.9) and senior Keeley Kmiecik (9.9). Sophomore AJ Jackson’s effort resulted in a 9.9125 that pushed OU to the top of the team leaderboard. Senior Haley Scaman closed things out with a spectacular 9.95, the best floor score of the finals.

“I’m very proud of this team. They worked extremely hard



**Coach Mark Williams said the key to the Sooner men’s success — including that of All-American sophomore Hunter Justus — boiled down to mental toughness and determination to defend a national title.**

to put themselves back in this position — and to finish it off like they did was amazing,” says Kindler, who guided the OU women to their first-ever national title in 2014. “We had the talent and determination, but also great team chemistry with this group. I’ve always believed that good chemistry helps win championships and that was evident this season.”

That chemistry helped the Sooners earn a total of 18 All-American honors at nationals, including the five by Capps. Kmiecik finished off her career by picking up three first-team All-American honors (all-around, vault and floor), while Scaman was recognized for her efforts on the vault and floor.

Also earning All-American recognition were Jackson (floor and bars), Brown and Jones (beam), freshman Nicole Lehrmann (bars, beam), senior Hunter Price (vault) and junior McKenzie Wofford (bars).

“It was even more special for our team to go out and win after we found out that Coach Williams’ guys had defended their title,” says Kindler. “There’s a definite sense of camaraderie between the two programs, especially training in the same facility like we do. I believe it creates a special environment where we all push each other to be better and really support each other.”

A sample of that support was evident April 16 as the men celebrated their national championship by watching the OU women capture their own 1,000 miles away in Fort Worth.

“We got to watch the women compete on TV back at the hotel in Columbus before we had our team banquet. And it was great to see Coach Kindler’s team perform like they did to win their championship,” says Williams, who pointed out that OU’s club team also captured the national club title the same day to complete the 2016 gymnastics trifecta.

“That day, our programs here at the University of Oklahoma did something that had never been done before and may never be done again. And that’s pretty special.”



*Jay C. Upchurch is editor of Sooner Spectator.*