

NOTRE DAME FENCING – 2003 NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP REVIEW AND NOTES

There will be no need to take down the #1 flag that flies on the flagpole outside the Joyce Center. Such was the case last year, when the 2002 Notre Dame fencing team (led by the nation's top-ranked men's squad) ended up on the wrong end of another agonizingly close finish at the NCAA Championships. But now the flag proclaiming that a Notre Dame team is No. 1 can remain on display, following the fencing team's triumph at the 2003 NCAAs.

After nearly a decade of frustrating near-misses and an assortment of strong individual showings that were tempered by the missed chances in the team competition, the Notre Dame fencing team captured the program's sixth all-time NCAA title and first since 1994 – following a tension-filled final day of action at Air Force's Cadet Field House.

Notre Dame finished as the runner-up to Penn State every year from 1996-2000, also finishing third in '95, '01 and '02. First-year Irish head coach **Janusz Bednarski** witnessed each of those close calls, after joining the ND staff in 1995.

"This championship is a great moment in the history of Notre Dame fencing and a deserved reward for our great senior class that has trained so hard in trying to win a national title. It also is a tribute to our former head coach Yves Auriol and to my current assistant Zoltan Dudas, as they both played such important roles in developing this group of champions," said Bednarski, whose many fencing accomplishments include coaching his native Poland's Olympic team.

"We have had great talent in previous years but this was a special team that trained hard all year in pursuit of this goal while giving great support to one another. We had a constant emphasis on team goals and that's what this team was all about. All of Notre Dame can be proud of what they have accomplished."

Here's a closer look at Notre Dame's national title performance and some final program notes for the 2003 season:

FOUR-TEAM BATTLE – Notre Dame entered the NCAAs with the top-ranked men's team and the No. 3 women's squad, with the Irish and Ohio State representing the only teams to qualify the maximum 12 fencers (two per weapon) ... weather conditions crammed the four-day event into a two-day format and the Irish headed into Sunday with a three-point lead over St. John's (108-105) followed closely by defending champ Penn State and OSU (the top four were separated by just six points) ... men's round-robin bouts concluded on Sunday morning and ND (144) retained a narrow cushion over SJU (140), PSU (138) and OSU (134) ...the final women's bouts ultimately would determine the champion and the Irish used 38 wins to hold off longtime rival Penn State (182-179), followed by the Red Storm (171) and the fading Buckeyes (167).

COMBINING FOR A TITLE – The unique format of the NCAA Fencing Championships features equal contributions from the men's and women's squad and gender equality certainly played a leading role in Notre Dame's championship performance ... ND's 182-point total included nearly identical contributions from the six men's fencers (94) and the six women (88), with two from each gender advancing to the semifinals of their respective weapons ... the ND women did play a larger role in head-to-head bouts vs. the other top contenders (Penn State, St. John's and Ohio State), going 19-17 in those key bouts compared to 12-20 by the men.

ELEVEN ALL-AMERICANS – Notre Dame's 2002 team members combined for 10 All-America finishes at the NCAAs (most in the program's history) but the 2003 squad did them one better, with 11 All-America performers (six men, five women)... it also marked just the second time in ND fencing history (also 2001) that all six Irish competitors earned All-America status (the 2000 and '02 ND teams also feature five women All-Americans (awarded to top-12 finishers) ... here's a quick look at Notre Dame's point breakdown in the 2003 round-robin bouts (top-12 equals All-America status):

Men's Foil (35-11) – sr. **Ozren Debic** (4th, 18-5; Zagreb, Croatia), soph. **Derek Snyder** (5th, 17-6; Chatsworth, Calif.)
Women's Foil (38-8) – soph.'s **Andrea Ament** (3rd, 19-4; Gates Mill, Ohio), **Alicja Kryczalo** (4th, 19-4; Gdansk, Poland)
Men's Epee (32-14) – soph. **Michal Sobieraj** (1st, 20-3; Krakow, Poland), sr. **Jan Viviani** (10th, 12-11; Haworth, N.J.)
Women's Epee (28-18) – jr. **Kerry Walton** (5th, 15-8; Londonderry, N.H.), sr. **Meagan Call** (10th, 13-10; Eugene, Ore.)
Men's Sabre (27-19) – sr. **Matt Fabricant** (6th, 15-8; Elizabeth, N.J.), sr. **Gabor Szelle** (11th, 12-11; Budapest, Hungary)
Women's Sabre (22-24) – jr. **Destanie Milo** (6th, 16-7; Knox, Ind.), jr. **Maggie Jordan** (21st, 6-17; Maplewood, N.J.)

Note: Debic and Viviani became four-time All-Americans, Call (also '00, '01) and Szelle ('99, '00) earned the honor for a third time – while Snyder, Ament, Kryczalo, Sobieraj and Walton repeated as AAs in their second NCAA appearance ... Fabricant (9-14 in '02) and Milo (16-30 combined in '01, '02) made key jumps en route to All-America finishes.

FOUR OF THE BEST – In the individual competition (which does not factor into the team scoring), ND sophomore **Alicja Kryczalo** repeated as the women's foil champion with a 15-12 win over Stanford's Iris Zimmerman (the '01 NCAA champ), after besting Irina Khouade of St. John's in the semifinals (15-6) ... Kryczalo's classmate **Andrea Ament**, the '02 runner-up, took home third-place honors in foil (7-15 loss to Zimmerman, 15-10 win over Khouade) while sophomore men's epeeist **Michal Sobieraj** repeated as an All-American with the best round-robin record (20-3) before winning his semifinal vs. fellow Poland native Adam Wiercioch of Penn State (15-12) and losing an overtime title bout to Air Force's Seth Kelsey (8-7) ... senior **Ozren Debic** placed fourth in the men's foil competition, after losses to SJU's Nitai Kfir (11-15) and Yale's Cory Werk (4-15).

SPIRITED WIN – Notre Dame’s cheering section at the NCAAs included three seniors (and former All-Americans) – epeeist **Anna Carnick** and foilists **Liza Boutsikaris** and **Forest Walton** – who helped lay the foundation for the 2003 national title ... several walk-ons also were in attendance to support their teammates, as was former ND head coach **Yves Auriol** ... junior **North Carey** served as the No. 3 epeeist throughout the '03 season and earned an alternate spot in the NCAA field (as did Carnick and Walton) ... Carey is slated to join his namesake as the eighth father-son combination ever to earn monograms with the Notre Dame fencing program ... **North Carey, Sr.** – who made the drive from Los Alamos, N.M., to help cheer the Irish to the national title – earned four monograms as an epeeist from 1970-73 (42-16 record).

FANTASTIC FINISH – Several ND fencers turned in key wins down the stretch to provide the narrow margin of victory ... two of the more noteworthy wins in Sunday’s men’s bouts included **Matt Fabricant** (5-4 Sunday record) and **Gabor Szelle** (4-5) besting Serhiy Isayenko of St. John’s in the final round (those wins essentially provided the 144-140 edge over SJU heading into the women’s bouts) ... the ND men’s foilist faced a lighter schedule on the final day but epeeist **Michal Sobieraj**’s undefeated Sunday (9-0) included big wins, 5-2 vs. Princeton’s Soren Thompson (the '01 NCAA champ), 5-4 vs. Thompson’s teammate Benjamin Solomon and a sweep of Ohio State’s Brian Gross (5-3) and Spencer Jones (5-0) – with **Jan Viviani** going 4-5 on the last day ... **Kerry Walton** (8-1) and **Meagan Call** (7-2) closed strong on Sunday, after facing all of the fencers from the contenders on the first day ... women’s sabre also was wrapping up at the same time as epee and **Destanie Milo** turned in a strong 7-2 showing that included a 5-4 opening win over Rutgers’s Alexis Jemal (the eventual NCAA champ), a 5-1 win over OSU’s Marguerite Plekhanov ... one of the day’s big moments then saw **Maggie Jordan** shake off an 0-7 start and defeat Penn State’s Austin O’Neill (5-2) before a stunned O’Neill was swept away by Milo (5-0) – for a pivotal four-point turnaround that set up the final bouts (see below).

“A TEAM” CLOSSES THE DEAL – With sabre and epee completed, the title hinged on a handful of foil bouts between ND’s sophomore tandem of **Alicja Kryczalo** and **Andrea Ament** – who had earned the “A Team” nickname after blitzing the 2002 NCAA field (Kryczalo went 25-0 en route to the title, Ament 23-2 as runner-up) ... the dynamic duo picked up a key sweep earlier in the day of Ohio State’s Hannah and Metta Thompson (each bout was 5-4, except for Ament’s 5-3 win over Metta) ... the Irish fencers (and their group partner) were opposed in the final showdown by a three-fencer group headlined by Stanford’s pair of former NCAA champions (Eva Petschnigg, in 2000 while at Princeton, and Iris Zimmerman in '01 with the Cardinal) ... Penn State was lurking just a few points back (178-174) and had six bouts of its own, leaving ND’s “magic number” (ND wins/PSU losses) at three – over the course of six bouts for each team ... the drama grew as Kryczalo lost to Petschnigg and Ament to Zimmerman – but Ament’s win over Cal State Fullerton’s Senta Breden and a Penn State loss left the Irish three chances at the clinching bout ... Kryczalo faced a familiar foe in Zimmerman, a fencer she had beaten to cap her eye-popping 23-0, +100 round-robin in the 2002 NCAAs – but Zimmerman had handed Kryczalo two of her five career regular-season losses with the Irish ... Zimmerman won the first point, Kryczalo took the next two and the score was 3-3 before the native of Gdansk, Poland, delivered the national title with a 5-3 win.

MAN WITH A PLAN – First-year Notre Dame head coach **Janusz Bednarski** and assistant **Zoltan Dudas** headed into the NCAAs expecting 180 points to be the total needed to win the NCAA title ... when all the bouts were sorted out, the Irish had edged Penn State 182-179 – putting their prediction right on target.

HEAD-TO-HEAD – Notre Dame totaled a 31-37 combined record in bouts vs. the other top contenders, most notably 14-10 vs. Ohio State (12 qualifiers), plus 11-11 vs. Penn State (11) and 6-14 vs. St. John’s (10) ... the ND foil teams combined to go 16-6 vs. fencers from the contenders, with **Ozren Debic** and **Derek Snyder** going 4-0 vs. OSU, 2-2 vs. PSU and 0-2 vs. SJU while **Alijca Kryczalo** and **Andrea Ament** were 4-0 vs. PSU and OSU and 2-2 vs. SJU ... other records vs. the contenders included 4-6 by both epee teams, 5-9 by women’s sabre and 2-10 by men’s sabre.

TIGHT BOUTS – The Irish fencers won nearly 60-percent of their one-touch bouts (41-28), including a 21-10 mark in one-touch women’s bouts (5-2 in sabre, 10-5 in epee, 6-3 in foil) and a 20-18 record in one-touch men’s bouts (9-6 in epee and foil, 2-6 in sabre) ... epeeists **Meagan Call** (7-4) and **Kerry Walton** (3-1, 1-0 in overtime) combined for the most one-touch wins while **Destanie Milo**’s 25-2 record in one-touch bouts played a key role in her 6th-place finish ... **Michal Sobieraj** finished atop the epee round-robin competition, thanks to a 7-2 record in one-touch bouts (4-1 in OT) while **Jan Viviani** could have been in contention for another semifinal appearance if not for suffering four overtime losses

DEBIC, VIVIANI BECOME A COUPLE OF FOUR-TIMERS – Men’s epeeist **Jan Viviani** and men’s foilist **Ozren Debic** posted the fourth All-America finishes of their careers ... six previous ND men’s fencers and four women have earned that distinction – with Viviani the first ND epeeist (men or women) to be a four-year All-American while Debic joined Charles Higgs-Coulthard ('87), Yehuda Kovacs ('89) and Jeremy Siek ('97) as men’s foil four-timers ... others include men’s sabres Mike Sullivan ('79), Leszek Nowosielski ('91) and Luke La Valle ('99), women’s foilists Molly Sullivan ('88), Myriah Brown ('99) and Sara Walsh ('99) and women’s epeeist/foilist Magda Krol ('00) ... La Valle, Brown and Walsh join Debic and Viviani as the only other classmates on the list ... nine other ND student-athletes have been four-year All-Americans (three women’s soccer players, four men’s distance runners, a baseball player and a men’s basketball player).

QUITE A START – Sophomore foilist **Alijca Kryczalo** continues to rack up impressive accomplishments in collegiate fencing, repeating as the NCAA champion to become the first Notre Dame fencer ever to win the NCAA title as a freshman and sophomore ... the only other ND fencers ever to win multiple NCAA titles are sabre Mike Sullivan ('77, '78) and foilist Molly Sullivan ('86, '88) ... since the combined format began in 1990, just two other women's fencers and six men have claimed multiple NCAA titles: Penn State foilist Olga Kalinovskaya ('93-'96), Yale sabre Sada Jacobson ('01-'02), Stanford foilists Nick Bravin ('90, '92, '93) and Felix Reichling ('99, '00), PSU sabre Tom Strzalkowski ('92-'94), St. John's sabres Keeth Smart ('97, '99) and Ivan Lee ('01-'02), and PSU foilist Non Panchan ('02-'03) ... Kryczalo joins Sullivan, Kalinovskaya, Jacobson and Columbia-Barnard foilist Caitlin Bilodeaux ('85, '87) as the only five women ever to win multiple NCAA fencing titles ... the all-time NCAA multiple champions include 10 in men's sabre, nine in men's foil, six in men's epee, four in women's foil and one in women's sabre ... Kryczalo's next challenge is the rare third title, a distinction owned by just eight previous fencers: Wayne State foilists Greg Benko ('74-'76) and Ernest Simon ('78-'81), NYU epeeist Risto Hurme ('73-'75), Columbia sabre Bruce Soriano ('70-'72), NYU sabre Michael Lofton ('84-'87), Kalinovskaya, Bravin and Strzalkowski – with Lofton and Kalinovskaya being the only four-time champs.

ANOTHER FOR THE TROPHY CASE – Notre Dame now has claimed six NCAA fencing championships, including men's titles in 1977, '78 and '86, the '87 NCAA women's championship and the '94 and 2003 men's and women's combined championship ... the Irish have been NCAA runner-up 11 times (every year from 1996-2000) and have finished third at nine other NCAA meets (most recently in '95, '01 and '02) – for a total of 25 top-three finishes ... Notre Dame teams now have combined to win 23 national championships: 11 in football, six in fencing, two in men's tennis and one each in men's cross country, men's golf and (most recently) women's soccer ('95) and women's basketball ('01).

INDIVIDUAL NCAA CHAMPS – Notre Dame fencers now have combined to win 18 individual NCAA titles: men's epeeists Don Tadrowski ('55), Bjorn Vaggo ('78) Ola Harstrom ('83) and Jubba Beshin ('90); foilists Pat Gerard ('77), Andy Bonk ('79) and Charles Higgs-Coulthard ('84); sabres Mike Sullivan ('77, '78), Luke La Valle ('98) and Gabor Szelle ('00); women's foilists Molly Sullivan ('86, '88), Heidi Piper ('91) and **Alicja Kryczalo** ('02, '03) and epeeists Magda Krol ('97) and Kerry Walton ('02) ... sophomore **Michal Sobieraj** became ND's 18th all-time NCAA runner-up, joining fellow men's epeeists Dennis Hemmerle ('57), Todd Griffiee ('88) and Beshin ('91), foilists Gerard ('78), Bonk ('80), Yehuda Kovacs ('86), Noel Young ('91) and **Ozren Debic** ('00), sabres Mike Sullivan ('79), Leszek Nowosielski ('91), Bill Lester ('95) and Szelle ('99), and women's foilists Heidi Piper ('90), Maria Panyi ('95), Sara Walsh ('96, '97) and **Andrea Ament** ('02).

NCAA VETERANS – The 2003 NCAAs marked the end of three of the most successful postseason careers in ND fencing history ... foilist **Ozren Debic** (73-19) now ranks second all-time at Notre Dame in career NCAA tournament wins, trailing only late 1970s sabre Mike Sullivan (95-9) ... Debic's .794 career winning pct. in the NCAAs ranks sixth in the ND record book ... epeeist **Jan Viviani** (63-29/.685) is tied with sabre Bill Lester (63-18, '94-'97) for third on the ND career NCAA wins list while sabre **Gabor Szelle** (52-17/.754) put up impressive numbers in three trips to the NCAAs ... the above trio combined for 11 All-America honors (nine of them top-five finishes) in 11 NCAA appearances, with Debic placing 2nd-5th-4th-4th, Viviani 3rd-3rd-5th-10th and Szelle 2nd-1st-11th (in '99, '00 and '03).

SENIOR SALUTE – The 2003 regular season marked the completion of one of the most accomplished senior classes in Notre Dame fencing history, with those eight fencers combining for nearly 1,300 regular-season wins and an .852 winning pct. (1,282-222) – in addition to 20 combined All-America finishes in NCAA Tournament competition ... those seniors include men's epeeist **Jan Viviani** (162-20 career regular-season record; 4-time All-American), men's foilists **Ozren Debic** (157-8; 4-time AA) and **Forest Walton** (115-28, year of eligibility left; 2001 AA), men's sabres **Gabor Szelle** (182-13; 3-time AA) and **Matt Fabricant** (151-21; 2003 AA), women's epeeists **Anna Carnick** (179-43; 3-time AA) and **Meagan Call** (168-52; 3-time AA), and women's foilist **Liza Boutsikaris** (168-37; 2000 AA).

WEAPON HISTORY – Here's an updated breakdown of Notre Dame's NCAA success at each of the six weapons:

Men's Foil (1st in '03): 42 All-America awards (12 since '90, nine since '96) ... three NCAA champions, plus five runner-ups ... four four-time All-Americans ... since '85, squad has finished first at NCAAs three times ('86, '94 and '97, '03), second four times ('85, '91, '00, '02), third three times ('87, '88, '01).

Women's Foil (1st in '03): 30 All-America awards (18 since '90, two every season from '96-'00, plus '02-'03) ... five NCAA champions, plus five NCAA runner-ups and three four-year All-Americans ... since '82, squad has finished first at NCAAs five times ('87, '94, '96, '98, '02, '03), second six times ('86, '88, '90, '91, '95, '97), third in '89.

Men's Epee (2nd in '03): 50 All-America awards (18 since '90, 10 since '96) ... four NCAA champions, plus four runner-ups and one four-time All-American ... since '85, squad has finished first at NCAAs once ('86), second five times ('88, '94, '98, '00-'03).

Women's Epee (2nd in '03): 15 All-America awards (since '95), two NCAA titles ... squad has finished first at NCAAs once ('97), second in '98, '01 and '03, third in '96, '99 and '02.

Men's Sabre (5th in '03): 53 All-American awards (20 since '90, two every year from '96-'01) ... four NCAA champions, plus four runner-ups and three four-year All-Americans ... since '85, squad has finished first at NCAAs three times ('96, '99, '00), second five times ('85, '90, '91, '97, '01), third five times ('88, '92, '94, '95, '98).

Women's Sabre (7th in '03): Weapon made its NCAA debut in 2000, with Irish fencers earning All-America in 2000, '02 and '03.