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Photo by Tracy Dreslinski  
 After a state runner-up finish last year, the Auburn Hills Oakland Christian boys soccer squad is striving to get back to the finals. Pictured, Oakland Christian senior forward Jacob Stanko dribbles around Pontiac Notre Dame Preparatory senior John Gulvezan during their game Aug. 21. The Lancers prevailed 5-0.

## Taking the next step

### Auburn Hills Oakland Christian boys soccer seeks to repeat success

By Sue Teggart  
 C & G Sports Writer

AUBURN HILLS — Last year, the Auburn Hills Oakland Christian boys soccer team made history by appearing in the school’s first Division 4 state title game.

And while a season of firsts ended with a second-place finish after a 2-1 loss to Muskegon Western Michigan Christian, the Lancers want to apply what experience they gained to this season.

“We come with high expectations to try to surpass our finish of last year,” coach Dick Harding said. “We know that everything has to work right in order for that to happen, so we’re hoping for another chance at the state title.”

After graduating just three players, the Lancers return a strong senior class that has already taken on the mantle of leadership. Helping the team take the next step are 12 returning players, nine of whom started.

“Most of these nine returnees are two- and three-year starters, so for some of them it will be their fourth year,” Harding said. “So if the team jells together, if they play together as one and sacrifice for each other, we should do well.”

After posting a 21-6 overall record and finishing second in the Michigan Independent Athletic Conference Blue Division (5-3) last year, the squad kicked off its season 5-0 overall, most recently with victories over Pontiac Notre Dame Preparatory and Royal Oak Shrine Catholic.

Paving the way for OC are senior captains Josh McKenna of Rochester Hills, Jacob Stanko of Holly and goalkeeper Kramer Everett of Clarkston. They’re hoping to lead their team to a MIAC title — a feat the squad hasn’t achieved in four years.

“We have a strong group of upperclassmen this year, and they’re really hungry for a

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state title and a conference championship,” McKenna said. “We’re going to have to raise our level of play.”

With a roster that features depth and experience, including key players at the heart of the field and on the attack, OC could find itself in the mix come tournament time.

“We have our entire center midfield back,” McKenna said. “With a strong core group of guys back, its really hard for us not to have really high expectations.”

Ultimately, Harding said, the goal is to continually develop so that by the end of the year the squad is peaking at the right time.

“If we come to work, we should be a good team,” Harding said. “If we think something is going to be given to us, we’re going to have a rude awakening.”

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