

ONU NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS APPEARANCES RECAPS

1998 - Tulsa, Okla. (Mabee Center)

Consecutive road wins at St. Xavier University (Ill.) and Purdue University-Calumet (Ind.) gave the Tigers the CCAC Tournament title. That set up a play-in game at McHie Arena three days later between Olivet and Purdue-Calumet, and the Tigers won by 18 to advance to the national tournament.

Four double-digit scorers led the Tigers past 12th-seeded Brigham Young University-Hawaii 76-66 in a late-night first-round game. Senior Chris Graham notched a double-double — 18 points and 10 rebounds

—while sophomores Lee Coomler and Brian McCauley added 16 and 13 points, respectively and junior Jack Michaels chipped in 11 points, despite playing with a broken bone in his foot. Sophomore Drew Neal led the Tigers attack on the glass, grabbing a team-high 13.

In the Sweet 16, the Tigers again had four players finish in double-figures but lost 80-74 to upstart Central Washington University. Senior Jeremy Yoder tied a season high with 22 points, while sophomore Drew Neal recorded a double-double with 20 points and a team-high 14 rebounds.

Graham finished his Tigers' career with 1,065 points, and Yoder is still 12th all-time in rebounds with 642. The Tigers finished 28-9.

1999 - Tulsa, Okla. (Reynolds Center)

After knocking off conference champion St. Xavier University (Ill.) on the road for the CCAC Tournament title, the Tigers beat St. Xavier again two days later in a play-in game to advance to the national tournament, which had been moved to the University of Tulsa's Reynolds Center.

Junior Lee Coomler scored 27 points and the Tigers defeated 15th-seeded Spring Hill College (Ala.) 73-66 in the first round. But they didn't have much left in the tank to second-seeded Union University (Tenn.), which won 66-56 in the next round.

Freshman Zach Freeman led the Tigers with a team-high 16 points, while junior Drew Neal led the team with nine rebounds for the second straight game.

The loss ended the career of the Tigers' second two-time NAIA All-American, Jack Michaels, whose 1,612 points and 831 rebounds ranked him fifth and fourth, respectively, in school history. The Tigers finished 28-9.

2000 - Tulsa, Okla. (Tulsa Convention Center)

The Tigers won both the CCAC's regular-season and tournament titles, which propelled them to their fourth straight national tournament appearance.

Against 13th-seeded Columbia College (Mo.) in the first round, senior Lee Coomler led four Tigers in double figures with 15 points and fellow senior Drew Neal finished with 14 points and 10 rebounds in a 62-59 win.

In round two, the Tigers ran away from unseeded Lewis-Clark State University (Idaho), thanks to 21 points from Coomler and another double-double (15 points, 10 rebounds) from Neal.

That victory moved the Tigers into the national quarterfinals for the first time, where they faced 12th-seeded Spring Hill College (Ala.). The Tigers wore down Spring Hill in the second half, and a win for the defense led to a 62-44 victory that pushed the Tigers into the Final Four. And for the third straight game, the combination of Coomler, Zach Freeman, Brian McCauley and Neal again scored in double figures.

In their third game, the Tigers ran into the top-ranked team in the country, Life University (Ga.), in the national semifinals. The Tigers outscored Life in the second half, but an 18-point halftime deficit was too much to overcome in an 85-69 loss. Freeman led the team with 26 points and eight rebounds. The loss ended the careers of Coomler, McCauley, Neal, Tyler Field and Jason Mulligan, all of whom had been instrumental in leading the Tigers to their first-ever Final Four appearance. Coomler, McCauley and Neal all passed the 1,000-point plateau, with Coomler ranking third all-time with 1,913 points. Neal's 938 rebounds ranked him third, and Field's 515 ranked him fourth. Meanwhile, McCauley and Coomler are still Nos. 1 and 3, respectively, in three-pointers.

Coomler earned NAIA All-American Second Team honors while Neal was named a NAIA All-American Honorable Mention. Freeman was chosen to the NAIA All-Tournament Team. The Tigers finished 30-9, one of two times Olivet has reached the 30-win plateau.

2002 - Kansas City, Mo. (Municipal Auditorium)

A loss to Barat College (Ill.) in the CCAC Tournament championship left the Tigers needing an at-large bid to qualify for the national tournament, where they faced 13th-seeded Edward Waters College (Fla.) in the first round. Led by senior Zach Freeman's 23 points and sophomore Jeremy Riddle's 20, the Tigers overcame first-half turnovers to win 80-64, their fourth straight first-round win.

In the second round, the Tigers withstood a furious second-half rally from longtime NAIA District 20 rival McKendree College (Ill.) to pick up an 85-78 win. Freeman led the way with 35 points and 14 rebounds, while Riddle and junior Tony Hodge chipped in 18 and 13 points, respectively.

In the Elite Eight for the second time in three years, the Tigers' early lead against Oklahoma Baptist University didn't last in a 89-69 loss. In the final game of his career, Freeman recorded yet another double-double with 22 points and 10 rebounds. Freeman is still the school's all-time leading scorer and rebounder with 2,768 points and 1,234 rebounds. He also became the Tigers' third two-time NAIA All-American, and was named to the NAIA All-Tournament Team for a second time. The Tigers finished 27-9.

