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For Immediate Release

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Cal Poly Women's Lacrosse is No. 1 Team in the Nation

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- For the sixth year in a row, the Cal Poly Lady Mustangs Women's Lacrosse team returned home victorious from national collegiate championships, finishing the season as the No. 1 team in the nation.

After a battle with arch rivals University of Michigan in Dallas the weekend of May 13, the score was Michigan 7, Cal Poly 12.

The Cal Poly Men's Lacrosse team also ended the season well, finishing at No. 8 in the nation after championships the same weekend.

The women's season started with the fourth head coach in as many years. Head coach Eric Thomas had spent the three previous seasons working with the team, however, and had high expectations. "From the first day of practice, I knew our team had all the right chemistry to win our sixth national championship," said coach Thomas. "I am continually amazed at the heart and talent of the Cal Poly players. From the moment they got to practice in January, they played together as a team. They all work together to help everyone improve and that is the secret of our success."

The Women's Lacrosse team season started strong with very convincing wins over the team's league opponents. But then in mid-season, California's unbelievable winter rains dealt the team a blow: they were unable to practice for seven weeks.

The Lady Mustangs then traveled to Colorado State University, Fort Collins, for a tournament with the best teams in the country. "We played amazingly well considering our lack of practice, but fell short to Colorado State University and Michigan," Thomas said. "CSU is the team we beat for the championship last year and is an incredible team. But the loss to CSU didn't sting as bad as the loss to Michigan, a team we knew we could beat."

After returning from Colorado, the Lady Mustangs faced UCSB and Santa Clara University -- winning both games. "By the time league championships came around, we were back to ourselves, blowing away the competition to win the championship. Once we got back to form, our team was untouchable," Thomas said. On its path to the title, the team defeated No. 15 Oregon 19-3, No. 7 Florida 18-2, and No. 6 Colorado 10-6.

In the playoffs, the Cal Poly Women's Lacrosse team extended its all-time winning streak at nationals to 21-0 by
This year's team was led by six seniors: captain Meryl Rodgers, Shelby Hunter, Becky Mischenko, Danielle Burchett, Laura West, and Erin Bivens. The offense can fire from all angles with Rodgers, Kaitlin Chandler, and sisters Janelle Jones and Brittany Jones as well as others leading the attack. They posted a record 59 goals in the national tournament, breaking the previous record by 7 points.

"What makes this group of girls so unique is their ability to play always as a team," said team captain Rodgers. However, the backbone of the team is its defense, Rodgers said. "We're the only team in the nation that has been able to perfect the zone defense, and this has been a key to our success.

Even the top offenses in the nation fail to score on Cal Poly's defense, as was seen in the second half of the national championship game versus Michigan. The Lady Mustangs' defense allowed only two points in the half, shutting down Michigan's offense almost completely. Overall in the tournament, the defensive unit allowed only 18 goals in four games.

"The defense is such a cohesive group it's difficult to highlight just one player as outstanding," Rodgers stressed. Though the women's lacrosse team will lose six graduating seniors, five of whom are vital members of the defense, the team will remain strong next year with the returning talent of players as Julie Friesen, Jaime Oetman, and Molly Sauer.

"Our seniors are an amazing bunch who will be completely irreplaceable. They are responsible for the amazing season and the unity of our team. Our four new girls are incredible and will help continue the success of our program," Thomas said. "With both Jones sisters returning next year, look for us to continue to dominate every aspect of the game."

Said Rodgers, "I know they will continue the winning tradition of Cal Poly Women's Lacrosse. One phrase sums up this team: friends first -- champions always."

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Editors note: Photos of the team are available; for jpgs contact Teresa Hendrix at thendrix@calpoly.edu.