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‘I just had to believe in myself’

How Jackie Grisdale is making the most of her final season in Hamden

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If you’ve watched Quinnipiac women’s basketball for any period of time within the last five years, you know the name of graduate student guard Jackie Grisdale. You know the points, the accolades and the player who has made a name for herself in this historic program

The Poland, Ohio native is currently in the midst of her final season as a Quinnipiac Bobcat. A career that she described as one of the biggest blessings of her life.

“I’m super grateful that every day, I get to wear Bobcats across my chest,” Grisdale said.

From a very young age, Grisdale was surrounded by the sport. Her father, Ken, was the head coach of the boy’s basketball team at Poland Seminary High School. Her mother, Kim, played on the Division III Kenyon College Owls, graduating as the school’s all time leading scorer.

As it turns out, the history-making gene is genetic within the Grisdale family.

When her time in a Bulldog uniform came to a close, Grisdale held the career scoring record in boys and girls basketball (1,530), at her high school, as well as the career, single season and single game record for made three point field goals with 221, 71 and 10 respectively.

It’s the kind of high school career that would attract several NCAA Division I teams. But in a shocking turn of events, Grisdale left Poland with zero scholarship offers. Knowing that her future in collegiate basketball was in question, she decided to take control of her own destiny.

How? By sending highlight reels to coach after coach, in hopes that one person would see it and give her a chance.

Quinnipiac head coach Tricia Fabbri gave Grisdale that chance.

From the second they interacted for the first time, the two hit it off and sparked a relationship of mutual trust and understanding. Fabbri gave Grisdale a shot on the roster as a non-scholarship player, giving her the opportunity that she’s always wanted.

Grisdale took it and never looked back.

“She took a chance on me and I try my best every day to make sure she’s happy with that chance,” Grisdale said. “The bond we have is something special and it’s going to way beyond these years at Quinnipiac.”

Year one as a Bobcat for Grisdale started out rough. For the first nine games, she scored a combined 13 points and recorded. She would have her first breakout game against the St. Peter’s Peacocks on Jan. 17, 2022, recording 14 points.

Two weeks later against the Niagara Purple Eagles, Grisdale would erupt once more. She would knock down six three pointers, and nine total field goals, finishing the game with 26 points in Quinnipiac’s comeback victory over the Purple Eagles.

It was the kind of performance that proved herself both to Fabbri and the rest of the team that she was here to stay. So much so, she was given a scholarship after her first year, cementing her spot in the program for the years to come.

In her sophomore campaign, Grisdale would build off a solid first year in Bobcat gold. She would start all 30 games, shooting 40% from the field and 30% from beyond the arch to the tune of a near ten points per game average.

That steady climb of improvement continued into her junior season. In the first five games of her first season as a captain she averaged 15 points per game and drained 13 three pointers. It became clear that she was turning her first two years of growth and development into a career year.

But then, her momentum came to a screeching halt.

Grisdale came down with a lower body injury in a game against College of the Holy Cross that would sideline her for the rest of the 2023-24 season. Despite being off the court, the process still taught Grisdale more about herself.

“I saw so many different things from the bench that I completely missed while on the court,” she said. “It really opened my eyes up to a whole different world of basketball.”

Off the court, it reinforced the mentality that got her to this point.

“I just had to believe in myself,” she said. “I feel like I had to learn how to lean on other people.”

When Grisdale finally got back to the court, she did exactly what she set out to do in her junior campaign; have a career year.

Her senior campaign saw her set career highs in made field goals (114), three pointers (75), assists (40), steals (37), rebounds (118), and points (358).

To say it was a historic season would be an understatement.

As a team, the Bobcats finished the year 28-5 and made it to the finals of the MAAC Championship. It was their best record and finish since the 2016-17 squad that made program history, reaching the Sweet-16 of the NCAA Tournament.

That championship loss ignited a fire inside of her to do what Bobcat greats of the past have done so many times; bring championship gold back to Hamden.

“I want that MAAC Championship. It’s my number one thing,” Grisdale said.

Now, in the final chapter of a career that can only be described as extraordinary, Grisdale is in a perfect position to do just that.

Twenty two games into the year, Grisdale is leading the team in points (310), made three pointers (60) and points per game average (12.9). As of publication, the Bobcats are undefeated in conference play and hold the top spot atop the MAAC standings.

Success like that comes from Grisdale and fellow captains junior forward Anna Foley and senior forward Ella O’Donnell leading by example and setting a standard that the rest of the squad can buy into.

“We all lead in different ways,” Grisdale said. “Ella’s one of the hardest workers out there every single day. Anna has so much basketball IQ … There’s just so much that each of us does to contribute to that overall leadership that makes this team special.”

One of the other core beliefs of the leadership group is fostering an open environment where everyone is comfortable speaking their mind.

“I don’t care if it’s (freshman guard) Ella Ryan coming in and saying something to the team, I want to hear that,” Grisdale said. “ (O’Donnell and Foley) both foster that belief and that trust in the whole team.”

In her sixth game of the season against the Boston College Eagles, Grisdale drilled the most impactful longballs of her life. One that etched her name into history as the 28th member of Quinnipiac’s 1,000 point club.

“Gratitude is the first word that comes to mind,” She said. “I’m really grateful to every single girl that I’ve played with and every coach that has ever coached me.”

In the end, Grisdale’s gratitude for Quinnipiac University and Quinnipiac athletics simply cannot be quantified.

“Whatever comes next, I’m ready because of the great people around me that have formed me into the person that I am today,” she said.

Grisdale arrived in Hamden as a wide-eyed kid searching for a chance. She leaves having built a legacy defined by resilience and a leadership style rooted in gratitude. Whether the season ends with Grisdale hoisting championship gold or not, her impact on the program will be felt for years to come.

When the No. 21 comes off her back for the final time, one thing is certain; Grisdale won’t walk away wondering what could’ve been. She took her chance and made the most of it.

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