Efficiency and defense leading men's basketball toward MAAC Tournament

By CAYDEN STEWART
Staff Writer

Every year, the goal for all college basketball programs across the country remains the same: punch your ticket to the madness.

March Madness is one of the few stages Quinnipiac men's basketball has yet to play on.

This maddening lack of madness has been on the brink of ending in recent years, though, as just last season the Bobcats were two conference tournament wins away from a spot in the national tournament. Once again in 2026, Quinnipiac is looking to make a push towards March.

A MAAC Championship is the lone path to a national tournament berth for Quinnipiac, and following a weekend split against Merrimack and Siena, the Bobcats find themselves third in the conference, just 3.5 games back of the first-place Warriors.

Quinnipiac's overall record of 18-10 is among the best in the conference and includes impressive wins over Pittsburgh and Siena.

Its keys to victory have remained consistent all year: outshoot and be more effective than the opponent. The Bobcats' nearly 63 shots per game rank No. 33 nationally and lead the MAAC with 76.6 points per game.

Quinnipiac also boasts excellent scoring diversity, with five players averaging double figures this season. Among these five is freshman forward Keith McKnight, one of three freshmen to be in the top seven for the Bobcats in scoring.

In addition to his scoring ability, McKnight has shown great skill in keeping possession and limiting mistakes, areas Quinnipiac head coach Tom Pecora has emphasized repeatedly throughout the season.

"He doesn't turn the ball over and there's not many freshmen who do that," Pecora said. "He's never not responded to the call. I know he's going to go in and compete."

Freshman guard Tai Turnage has also received high praise for his veteran-like mindset. Senior forward Amarri Monroe commended Turnage following a win against Niagara on Feb. 7.

"I think Tai is the reason we won this game today," Monroe said. "The last couple of minutes he made us dig on defense. He makes sure we're guarding. If we're not guarding hard enough he'll let us know."

On the defensive end of the floor, the Bobcats hold opponents to just a 42.3% field-goal percentage ranking in the top quarter of the nation and fourth in the conference.

Part of the reasoning for this lack of opponent efficiency stems from Quinnipiac's second place ranking in both blocks and steals per game among MAAC teams. Further, the Bobcats rank in the top 50 nationally in steals per game.

Monroe leads the charge in the steals category, with his 2.4 steals per game not only ranked No. 15 nationally, but also helping push him to the top of Quinnipiac's all time leaderboard.

The Preseason MAAC Player of The Year has been back to his dominant self this season, leading the team in total points, rebounds and steals, while ranking second in assists and blocks.

Monroe's pure leadership has also been on full display, as he earned major kudos for kicking a pass out to sophomore forward Grant Randall, resulting in a game-winning three-pointer against Niagara.

"There's not many guys who were Preseason Player of the Year who are so unselfish that they would kick it out," Pecora said.

Sophomore guard Jaden Zimmerman is also hardly one to forget. Zimmerman's 16.3 points per game this season lead the team, and he has found a new level of confidence in a bigger role this year.

"I feel like nobody can stop me getting downhill," Zimmerman said following a win against Rider. "When I get the ball in transition, my eyes are just on the basket."

Other veterans, such as senior guard Asim Jones, have also been great promoters of good locker room vibes and teamwork this season.

"(Jones) had trust in me," Turnage said after the Niagara win in which he was subbed in for Jones. "He told me after the game 'we needed you out there.' That was really cool."

This has the makeup of a championship team and has a path to the national tournament. The primary key to Quinnipiac's success is forcing opponents to play to their own style. This style, aforementioned, is high-tempo and possession-based.

Quinnipiac's 70.2 possessions per 40 minutes is by far the most in the MAAC and No. 52 in the country. If the Bobcats can stay efficient in shooting from the field, especially from three, they could certainly give a scare to a top-seeded team.

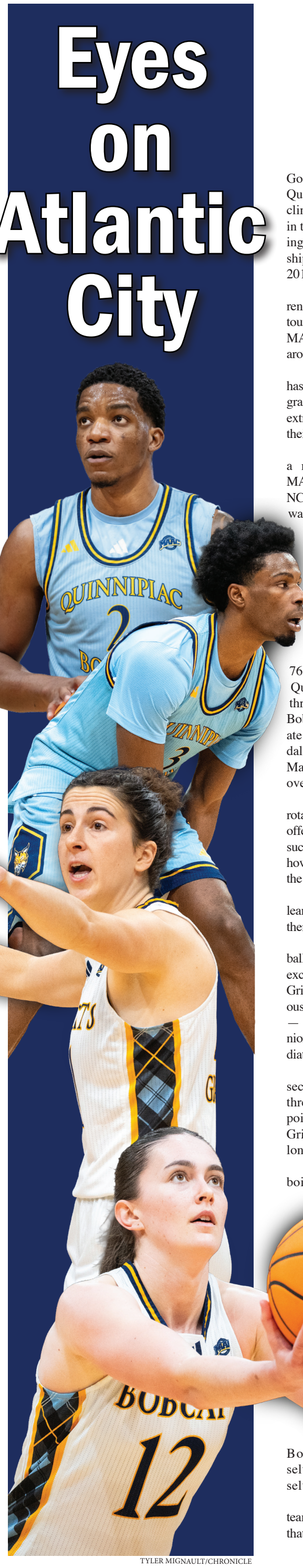
Projected top seeds Duke and UConn specifically stand out for their slow pace of play. Both rank outside the top-200 in possessions per 40 minutes, with striking similarities to the 2018 Virginia and 2023 Purdue teams, who remain the only No. 1 seed to be upset by a No. 16 seed in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

In 2018, Virginia finished dead last in the nation in pace of play, while in 2023, Purdue was in the bottom 40. Meanwhile, the teams that pulled off the stunners each ranked in the top half of the nation in pacing, with 2023 Fairleigh Dickinson just grazing the top 100.

Randall also emphasized the importance of having the right mindset going into each game. "We just have to keep that 1-0 mindset," Randall said following a win against Canisius.

Quinnipiac's pace of play being noticeably faster than each of those two Cinderellas begs the question:

What if?



TYLER MIGNAULT/CHRONICLE

How Quinnipiac women's basketball can win the MAAC

By COOPER WOODWARD
Associate Sports Editor

With its win over the Canisius Golden Griffins on Feb. 5, Quinnipiac women's basketball clinched its 12th straight berth in the MAAC Tournament, aiming to take home the championship for the first time since the 2018-19 season.

While the team has been a perennial contender in conference tournament play since joining the MAAC in 2013, the atmosphere around this group feels different.

The hunger to take home gold has always stuck with the program, but the 2025-26 team is extra hungry, especially after how their previous campaign ended.

"On the horizon, there's a more important banner, the MAAC Championship and NCAA Tournament," junior forward Anna Foley said on Feb. 12.

Here's what to know as they head into this year's postseason run.

OFFENSE

Last year's squad achieved the best finish in the tournament since 2019, falling to the Fairfield Stags 76-53 in the championship. Quinnipiac did so by using the three guard rotation of former Bobcat guard Gal Raviv, graduate student guard Jackie Grisdale and junior guard Karson Martin to light up defenders all over the floor.

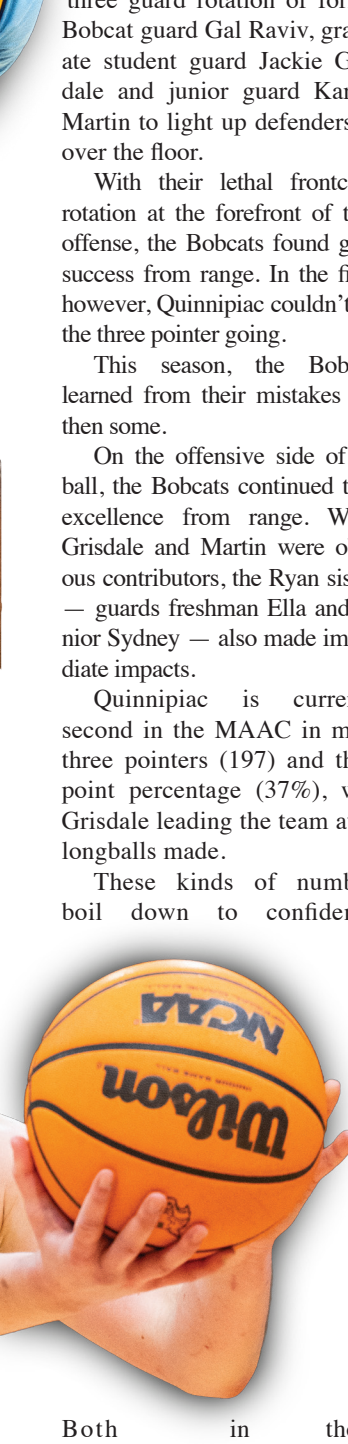
With their lethal frontcourt rotation at the forefront of their offense, the Bobcats found great success from range. In the final, however, Quinnipiac couldn't get the three pointer going.

This season, the Bobcats learned from their mistakes and then some.

On the offensive side of the ball, the Bobcats continued their excellence from range. While Grisdale and Martin were obvious contributors, the Ryan sisters — guards freshman Ella and senior Sydney — also made immediate impacts.

Quinnipiac is currently second in the MAAC in made three pointers (197) and three point percentage (37%), with Grisdale leading the team at 60 longballs made.

These kinds of numbers boil down to confidence.



Both in themselves as players and themselves as a group.

"Every time I shoot it, my teammates have the expectation that it's going to go in, therefore I can be confident that I'll make it as well," Ella Ryan said on Nov. 21. "If (Ella O'Donnell) is throwing it to me, then she must believe in me, so I can believe in me too."

The three point shot hasn't been the only area of success for the Bobcats. They've also dominated inside due to the forward tandem of senior Ella O'Donnell and Foley. O'Donnell is currently fifth in the MAAC in field goal percentage at 49%, with Foley just behind at 47%.

In order to take home the coveted MAAC Championship, the Bobcats will need to spread the scoring across the court and across the box score. Making their offense hard to stop will be crucial to postseason success.

DEFENSE

While offense wins games, a good defense is needed to hang a banner. This Bobcat defense isn't just good, it's statistically great.

Not only do they lead the MAAC in opponent field goal percentage at 36.5%, and they are No. 3 nationally in total scoring defense, holding their opponents to an average of 52.5 points per game. The only two teams ahead of them are the McNeese State Cowgirls, who sit atop the Southland Conference, and the UConn Huskies, who are the top ranked team in the country.

Perimeter defense will be the key to Quinnipiac winning its fifth conference title in program history. History shows why.

In the 2025 MAAC Tournament, the Bobcats held their quarterfinal and semifinal opponents to an average three point percentage of 26%. In the final against Fairfield, the Stags shot 53% from range. That's not mentioning three of the top six (excluding Quinnipiac) teams in the MAAC have a three point percentage of over 28%, with the Stags leading the way at nearly 40%.

To finish the job it started last season, they need to lean on the veteran presences of Grisdale to limit shots, and Sydney to grab rebounds and effectively neutralize the three point shot. Both have been steady forces on the defensive perimeter, being some of the main contributors to neutralizing each team's biggest offensive weapon.

The Bobcat locker room came into the 2025-26 season with a chip on their shoulder. Roster turnover, questions about the offense and looming doubts about its ability to perform gave Quinnipiac something to prove. Not only have the Bobcats met expectations, they've exceeded them.

With three games against conference opponents left on the 2025 schedule, the team has its eyes firmly set on Atlantic City, N.J. and finishing a job they started over a year ago, taking home the program's first championship in over half a decade.

"I believe with everything we have, we have the talent to bring a MAAC Championship and bring one home," Martin said on Jan. 29.