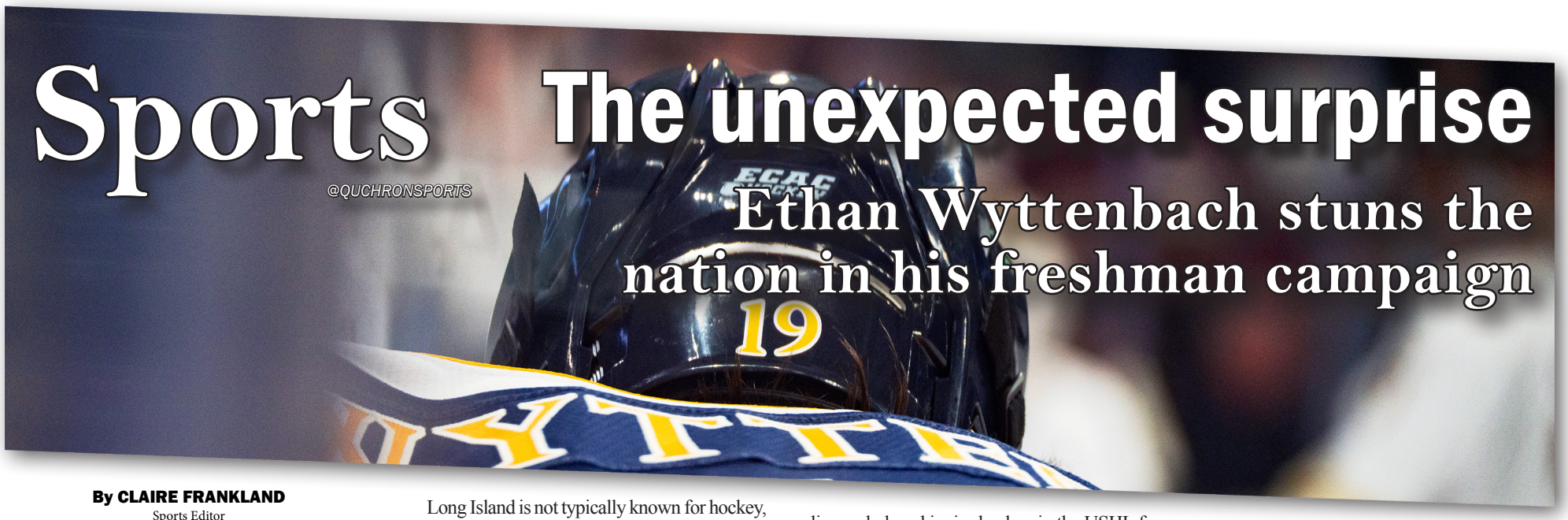


# Sports

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# The unexpected surprise

## Ethan Wyttenbach stuns the nation in his freshman campaign

**By CLAIRE FRANKLAND**
Sports Editor

As of Feb. 18, the No. 1 point scorer in NCAA men's ice hockey plays in no other than the Eastern College Athletic Conference. Not the Big 10 or National Colleigate Hockey Conference or Hockey East.

Quinnipiac freshman forward Ethan Wyttenbach, the 144th pick by the Calgary Flames in the fifth round of the 2025 NHL Draft has taken college hockey by storm, making him one of the most unexpected stars of the 2025-26 season.

"I think I'm surprising people in some aspects," Wyttenbach said.

NCAA men's hockey players are often older than typical college freshmen, with many opting to play junior hockey first, which serves as a pre-pro development league for players typically ranging from ages 16-20.

Wyttenbach is a true freshman, turning 19 on Feb. 10, which is more of an exception in college hockey than the majority.

"Coming in, a lot of the guys are a lot older than me, so it's definitely new faces," he said. "You don't cross paths with a lot of those guys, especially playing youth hockey and just things like that, because of the age gap."

For Wyttenbach, there's one main ingredient for his success this season: confidence. A feeling that has stemmed from his youth, through juniors and now to collegiate hockey.

"It's just a confidence thing… I think you can come in and you could be scared, and you can kind of have that mindset where maybe you might not be as good as you could be," Wyttenbach said. "I felt just kind of being myself, being confident, playing my game and just kind of coming in as quick as possible and being someone that could be leaned on in different situations was awesome."

Hockey has always been deeply rooted in the Wyttenbach family. His father, Andrew, and two uncles played Division I ice hockey at Cornell University.

"Obviously, I saw my dad doing it, and as a kid, you always want to do what your dad does. And I think I kind of just fell in love with the game on my own and as I grew up, he was my coach," Ethan said.

Andrew, who worked in the marketing industry in New York City, left his job and bought Long Island Sports Hub, which he still owns to date, furthering Ethan's hockey development.

"I mean, it means the world to me," Ethan said. "You don't have to go rent ice. Don't have to find ice an hour away, just like little things like that that you might take for granted. But, when you think about it, put it kind of into perspective, it's super cool."

Long Island is not typically known for hockey, let alone NHL prospects. Of course, like any other place, it has its fair share of professional players like Boston Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy and New York Islanders forward Kyle Palmieri.

"I was obviously fortunate enough to where the hockey on Long Island maybe wasn't the biggest thing. But I think kind of as I was growing up, it started getting bigger and just big names coming out of the Island," Ethan said. "It's kind of bringing hockey back to Long Island, in a sense."

The Roslyn, N.Y. native played 10 seasons with the Long Island Gulls, a youth program out of Syosset, N.Y.

The Gulls have a small but known history of athletes who have competed for their organization, including McAvoy and New York Rangers defenseman Adam Fox. Ethan's current teammate senior forward Jeremy Wilmer and Quinnipiac commits center Jack Genovese and forward Nicolas Sykora also played for the organization.

"Some of the best years of my life playing hockey, and definitely what contributed to where I am right now, couldn't be more happy that I'm kind of the next wave of players," Ethan said.

During his time with the Gulls, Ethan's team won the 2024 Chipotle-USA Hockey Youth Tier I 16U National Championship in Las Vegas, shutting out their opponent 2-0.

Ethan would contribute to his team's success in the tournament, tallying four goals and one assist, including the overtime winner in the semifinals to send his squad to the championship game.

"We won the national championship in Vegas, actually. So the plan this year is obviously to get to Vegas, and I think winning a national championship in Vegas again would be pretty cool," Ethan said.

If Quinnipiac reaches the NCAA Tournament and punches a ticket to the Frozen Four, Wyttenbach would have his second opportunity in Vegas to hoist a national championship trophy, in what could be a full-circle moment for the kid from Long Island.

Ethan would attend Portledge School from eighth to 11th grade, where he would ultimately commit to Quinnipiac at 15 years old.

"He finishes plays. I talk about him a lot," head coach Rand Pecknold said. "There's a lot of players at our level that create a lot of offense and a lot of scoring chances. And then he's got that next gear, and he has that ability to finish those chances. He's just next level, with not just the goal scoring but also the passes, the timing and he just finishes plays."

When it came time for his senior year of high school, hockey would take him in a different direction. Ethan took his final year of high school online and played junior hockey in the USHL for the Sioux Falls Stampede. Consequently, the same organization where his teammate, sophomore forward Chris Pelosi, played the season prior.

"Playing the USHL, which is kind of this next stepping stone for every young kid who plays hockey in the States, that was obviously super cool last year," Ethan said. "Meeting new people and getting to play in that league, which was obviously awesome and super special."

During his lone season with the Stampede, he recorded 24 goals, leading the squad, and 27 assists in 44 games played.

In April, Ethan was awarded The Gaudreau Award — etsbalished in 2025 to honor the legacy of brothers Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau — making him the inaugural winner.

Ethan would trade in South Dakota for Connecticut to kick-start his first season of collegiate hockey. And just like everything else, his confidence shone.

"You play something to be the best at it. And I think that's kind of been my mindset as I was growing up," Ethan said. "Committing to Quinnipiac when I was 15, like, just little things throughout my life to where, like, I obviously have the internal confidence, to where I can make this realistic."

Since setting foot in Hamden, he has hit the ground running, proving to be one of, if not the Bobcats' most vital asset. As of publication, he leads the nation with 51 points, while leading Quinnipiac in goals, with 21, and assists, with 30.

Ethan is just three points shy of breaking Quinnipiac's Division 1 program record for points by a freshman and eight points away from cracking the program record in points per season, which is currently held by San Jose Sharks forward Collin Graf '24 at 59.

He's also a frontrunner for the Hobey Baker Award, which has never been presented to a Quinnipiac player. Its most recent finalist was Graf, who was nominated consecutively in 2023 and 2024.

National accolades aside, Ethan has earned multiple ECAC titles, including Rookie of the Week three times, Rookie of the Month twice, Forward of the Week and Forward of the Month. On Feb. 7, he recorded his first collegiate hat-trick in the Bobcats 8-0 win over the Yale Bulldogs in the annual Battle of Whitney Ave.

"I think now coming down the stretch, where obviously I've kind of cemented myself in the lineup and just kind of showed everyone what I could do," Ethan said. "I think now it's kind of more of getting to the team game and just definitely building on little things as a team."

The Bobcats have focused heavily on that team aspect all season, making sure every athlete has the buy-in to succeed, especially for a program that introduced 10 freshmen this year.

"They brought me in right away," he said. "They treated me super well. We went out to eat, just little things like that, to where you can kind of build relationships and build chemistry off and on the ice."

The Bobcats have fostered a culture based on a foundation of buying-in, largely influenced by the leadership of Pecknold.

"He's obviously been huge for me, just learning from him, and kind of gaining as much knowledge as I can from him," Ethan said. "I think we kind of have a dialogue of maybe what I could have done, what I see here, just different things like that…he's just been awesome with showing me video and just trying to do the little things on a day-to-day basis to where that part of my game definitely rounds out."

Ethan's relationship with Pecknold allows him to improve his current game, while taking in constructive cirticsm to build upon his weakpoints.

"He scores, he's a playmaker, he's working hard, you know, working on cleaning up the other aspects of his game," Pecknold said.

Through all the success this season, Ethan continues to find confidence and support through family, an integral part of his journey.

Roslyn is only 90 minutes from Hamden, a luxury many college athletes don't have.

"I think (Andrew) being able to come to all my games now, I mean, he's pretty much at every game, so that is definitely something that a lot of people don't get to say," Ethan said. "My grandparents come to a ton of games, my siblings come to a ton of games. So just having that support behind me is definitely something I don't take for granted."

Quinnipiac is approaching postseason territorty, and has managed to sit No. 1 in the ECAC and No. 6 in NPI rankings with an injury-riddled roster.

Wilmer, an assistant captain who was on target for his most productive season yet suffered a season ending injury in November. Sophomore forwards Chris Pelosi, Quinnipiac's second Hobey Baker nominee, Tyler Borgula and senior assistsant captain and defenseman Charlie Leddy are more recent additions to the injured list and have undisclosed recovery timelines.

Ethan has spent the last few months learning what it means to be a Bobcat in every facet of the game. With several key veterans off the line sheet, it's not far-fetched to view the kid from Long Island as a skater with an invisible letter.




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