Talent and skill prepare Quinnipiac volleyball for a strong season

By ALEXANDRA MARTINAKOVA
Editor-in-Chief

Okay maybe this time, it really will be "third time's the charm."

Quinnipiac volleyball got very close to the MAAC title in the last two years, but was ultimately — in a very deja-vu-like manner — shut down by the reigning Fairfield Stags.

And as usual at this point, the Bobcats earned the No. 2 spot in the pre-season ranking, right behind the reigning Stags.

But as before, the Bobcats are not held down by the past, rather they're excited for the future.

"You know when you do something for the first time, you don't really know if you are doing it right or wrong, what's gonna happen next," said graduate student opposite Elena Giacomini. "That hesitation… you really get a fresh start. The team is like almost half new too."

Probably the biggest news of the pre-season is the hopeful return of senior outside hitter Ginevra Giovagnoni, who was out all of last season after suffering a knee injury in a pre-season game, and yet still earned a spot on the pre-season All-MAAC team.

However, her return still isn't 100% confirmed, as her photo on the website still remains unchanged from last year's roster.

"I'm really excited for her to play," Giacomini said. "She's starting to practice again, a little drills and stuff, but I'm confident that with time she's gonna get back on court. I didn't get to play with her but my teammates did and they know how important she is for us. We're just waiting for her moment to come."

Alongside her the team is boasting five new faces — all of which hail from Europe.

"I think it's the hardest part, cause we have so much talent on our team," Giacomini said. "The girls are so young, talented and very determined. The talent and skill part are definitely not the problem. But managing to get to do that will definitely be the hardest part. I think we're doing a great job at communication. It's something that has to be built person-to-person."

These faces include outside hitter Vittoria Tonelli and middle blocker Asia Belli from Italy, setter Klara Olszewska from Poland and — another, though this time identical — pair of twin Turkish players, opposite Azra Ozbiltekin and outside hitter Sahra Ozbiltekin.

And it seems like they are more than ready to make their mark. During the team's opening weekend at the Bradley Invitational — where the Bobcats managed to claw out a win against Western Illinois — all of them, except Azra, had their chance to play; even if Olszewska only got to make one assist across the three games.

But it will be very difficult for the young setter to see any sort of play time with senior setter Damla Gunes back for her final year.

The 2024 MAAC Setter of the Year and pre-season All-MAAC team passed 3,000 assists over this weekend and has been the starting setter since her first year. It is safe to assume she will fight to keep that spot for her final year in Hamden.

Speaking of players to watch, Giacomini has been named the Pre-season Player of the Year, only the second Bobcat to ever earn that honor, right behind Giovagnoni.

"I am always very honored for all of this, because it's really a lot," Giacomini said. "I didn't expect it when I arrived. I feel like it's more about my responsibility towards my team, to try every day to inspire them. I don't think this is something that is so far from any of them. It's a product of our work, I don't think I could've done it with other people."


PEYTON MCKENZIE/CHRONICLE

The Italian native was the secret weapon in the Bobcats' arsenal last year, with 429 kills and 30 service aces, earning her the title of MAAC Player of the Year.

"I'm really glad to be back," Giacomini said. "The first year, everything was so hectic. Now I know what to expect and I think I'm gonna be able to enjoy it more. I found friends here and I wanted another chance with the people I love spending time with."

All in all, the Bobcats are in great shape. Senior outside hitter Yagmur Gunes had a great season and fell one kill short of 400 kills. Junior outside hitter Leilanikai Giusta also racked up over 300 kills last season, but has yet to make an appearance this season. Senior middle blocker Milena Silva is also set to surely see more playing time on the team, since senior Tuana Turhan has not seen a lot of game action in recent years yet.

Last year's additions to the team are also expected to step up. With libero Fa'ave Kimsel Moe '25 now gone, sophomore Carola Negron Diaz will most likely fill her shoes as the starting libero with sophomore Yasmina Baum as her back-up.

Before the Bobcats return to their den and face the well-known opponents, their pre-season schedule includes a lot of travel — from the Bradley Invitational this past weekend, through Townson-Morgan State Invitational and College of Charleston Invitational to Cherry and White Invitational.

"It's gonna be tough travelling that far that much," Giacomini said. "But we have a chance to make it important, make it time that has value in it. I'm sure it's the right way to go into season. It's like doing the tough things first so the things after that look easy."

So once again, on paper, Quinnipiac is in great shape to take on its MAAC opponents, but the fate of that wished-for MAAC title is only in their hands and not in the stars.

The Bobcats are set to travel on Sept. 5 to Baltimore, Maryland to face Morgan State, Towson and Stonehill. Their season opener is set for Sept. 26 against Sacred Heart at their turf, before coming back to Burt Khan on Oct. 3 to face Caniscius.



TYLER MIGNAULT/CHRONICLE

Quinnipiac huddling up against Merrimack on Oct. 3.

Quinnipiac women's soccer finding its identity after shocking 2024 campaign

By CLAIRE FRANKLAND
Sports Editor

The pressure of staying on top is challenging, especially for a team holding the back-to-back champions title. Quinnipiac women's soccer fell to that pressure in its 2024 campaign, ending its almost two year long undefeated streak and handing its title to Fairfield.

After an unexpectedly shocking season, Quinnipiac women's soccer sits in a rebuilding state in the No. 2 spot on the MAAC Preseason Coaches' Poll.

"We just had a meeting, just going over finding our identity as a team again," senior defense Madison Alves said. "I think it can be a little tricky when you lose so many, pivotal players in that previous season."

Going into this season Quinnipiac lost nine players, athletes who provided a lot of depth to its roster making them a strong, talented and competitively unmatched team.

Many of these athletes including Courtney Chochol '24, Roman Rachel '24 and Asiling Spillane '24 led the Bobcats in goals combined, contributing to 17 of the 32 goals the Bobcats put up. In net, two time MAAC Golden Glove Winner and All-MAAC First Team goaltender Sophia Lospinoso was a strong force, with a 0.838 save percentage in 19 games played.

And while they lost nine athletes, nine freshmen have joined the squad this year in hopes to reclaim the MAAC Title.

"They're definitely still adjusting, and we have to give them the benefit of the doubt, and know that, we're the only ones that are gonna push them and make them feel comfortable," senior defensive midfielder Molly Andrews said. "It can come from the coaches, but at the end of the day, it's the team around us."

Quinnipiac's senior class is not afraid to step up to the challenge, with two MAAC titles under its belt, while also experiencing the difficulties of last season's fall. The challenges the senior squad has faced during their four years in Hamden, prepares them for the trials and tribulations this season presents.

"Our senior class, we've gone through a lot of ups and downs since we've been here, and we have been very successful, but we've also started seasons not the strongest," Andrews said. "To know that we're not even in MAAC play yet, and we need to just fine-tune things, and just stay confident and true to who we know we are."


TRIPP MENHALL/CHRONICLE

Quinnipiac in a team huddle against Iona on Nov. 3.

Quinnipiac has consistently had a strong offense, outscoring its opponents 32 to 14 last season, with an average of 1.60. The Bobcats also put up 298 shots to their opponents 197 shots during the 2024 season.

On the other hand, Quinnipiac has struggled with their number of fouls, with 214 fouls to its opponents 173 last season, with 22 yellow cards.

Yet, Quinnipiac doesn't see its physical game as a weakness, but rather one of its highlights to its style of game, defined by pace and speed.

"We match up physically very well," Alves said. "We've really touched upon our pace, and our coaches really emphasize that whether it's on the wings, the middle, defensively, we have the pace throughout the field."

The Bobcats opened up their season with matchups against Hofstra, Stony Brook, Syracuse and LIU, falling 0-3-1 before MAAC play even starts. In their non-conference matchups, the Bobcats have struggled to connect, being out scored 9 to 2 by their opponents, with a 0.5 goals per game compared to 2.25 by its opposition.

If the Bobcats hope to return to the MAAC Championships and reclaim its title, fixing the small errors will aid the team's overall success throughout conference play.

"These are just little moments that, again, we can fix, and at the end of the day, we did create chances within these games, so it's important for us to remember that," Alves said.