Sports

Photo of the Day | Men's basketball



The University of Connecticut men's basketball team advances to the Final Four after a huge win against Duke on March 29, 2026. Braylon Mullins scored the game winning three pointer with only three seconds left in the game, securing the Huskies a 73-72 win.

PHOTOGRAPH BY EMMA MEIDINGER, ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Mercyhurst abruptly announces end of men's ice hockey program

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On Friday morning, Mercyhurst University announced on social media that the men's hockey program would be ending operations immediately. The announcement was sudden for all involved in the college hockey world, and the response has been ugly.

Mercyhurst is a private institution located in Erie, Pa., which has played at the Division I level in all collegiate sports it participates in since the 2024-25 academic year.

The only exception was hockey, where they began D1 play in the 1999-2000 season due to the NCAA's allowance for hockey-only Division I memberships.

The Lakers only made the NCAA tournament three times in their history at the Division I level, with their last coming in 2005. All three appearances came from conference title victories against Quinnipiac.

The program saw moderate but limited success in the next decade, finishing with a conference-best 12-5-1 record in 2017-18 but falling to Robert Morris in the conference semis. Mercyhurst has not finished above a .500 record since and has seldom come close.

The school's move to D1 for other sports resulted in higher travel and scholarship costs for the athletic department. This, combined with the consistently struggling team, are what likely caused this decision to be made, though Mercyhurst's official statement called it "strategic program adjustments" with no other specification.

Reports came out that head coach Rick Gotkin, Mercyhurst's coach for 37 years, only found out five minutes before the players did that the program would be ceasing operations. Gotkin was set to retire and was planning to pass the role onto Tom Peffall for the 2026-27 season. Now, Peffall is left without a job.

The main source of discourse has come from player outrage as the move was extremely unexpected for them as well. Multiple players took to social media to express their thoughts about the situation. One of the common sources of anger regarded the events of the prior day, where the players were requested to ask friends and family to donate to the program without much explanation as to why. Not even 24 hours later, they were gathered into the locker room to learn the fate of the program.

Two players who spoke out on Instagram are sophomore defenseman Kaden Muir and junior forward Sean James.

In a comment thread under everythingcollegehockey's Instagram post reporting the news, Muir says he "wishes you guys could see how they handled this with the players... honestly disgraceful", and when prompted by another user on whether this was foreseeable in anyway, he simply responded with "nope."

James's statements were posted on his Instagram story, saying that the team was informed about the decision and were given "absolutely no reason as to why."

James also said that the news was posted on social media before the players even got out of the locker room where it was announced, and most did not get the chance to tell their parents themselves due to the abruptness.

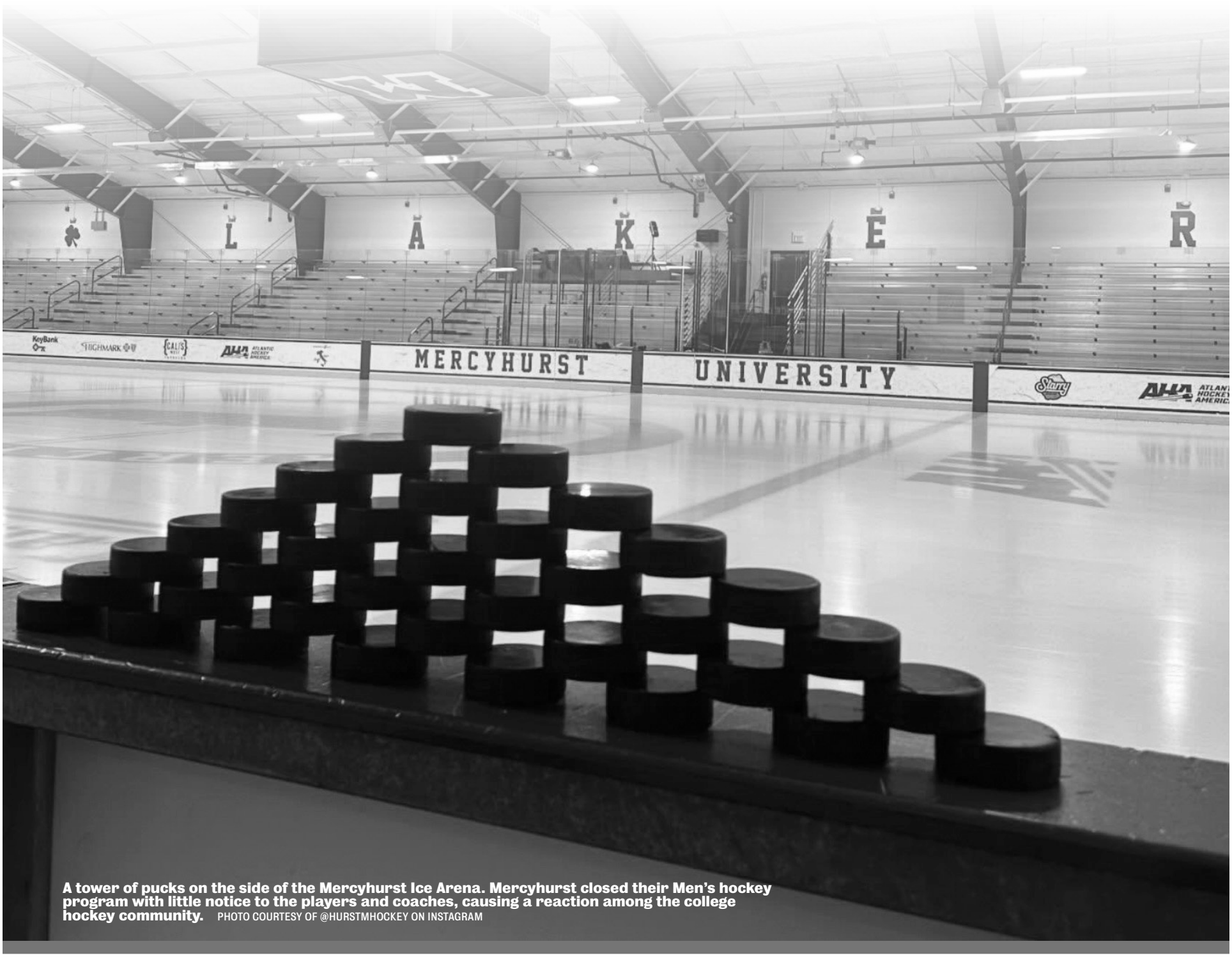
Mercyhurst's president, Kathleen Getz, is set to retire after this academic year. She was not in attendance when the players were told, according to James's post.

Aside from the graduating class, all the players on the roster now need new homes. Mercyhurst's struggles this year combined with the influx of CHL transports means the bottom of the roster have likely seen the end of their D1 careers and will need to move to USports or other places.

A petition has risen to try and get Mercyhurst to only pause the program while they reconfigure things to allow the program's long-term survival. According to the organizers, the petition has over two thousand signatures and over three hundred from Mercyhurst alumni. Though it is a Hail Mary, this strategy worked when Robert Morris similarly announced the closure of their programs back in 2021 before announcing they'd return in 2023-24 due to the pushback of the college hockey community.

Erie will still have hockey even with the closure of the program. The women's program was one win away from the NCAA tournament this year and will continue its operations, and the OHL's Erie Otters remain.

But unless the salvage attempt succeeds, the city will lose one of its hockey programs for good.



A tower of pucks on the side of the Mercyhurst Ice Arena. Mercyhurst closed their Men's hockey program with little notice to the players and coaches, causing a reaction among the college hockey community. PHOTO COURTESY OF @HURSTMHOCKEY ON INSTAGRAM