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Senior Day Sparks Central as Urgency Fuels 86-75 Win

By Andrew O'Sullivan
Staff Writer

On Saturday, Feb. 21, at 1 p.m., there were three NCAA Division I women's basketball teams that had yet to notch a win this season: the Valparaiso Beacons, the Niagara Purple Eagles and the Central Connecticut Blue Devils. By 3 p.m., there were only two.

In their penultimate home game of the season, the CCSU Blue Devils women's basketball team achieved its first win of the season against the visiting Chicago State Cougars, with the final score of 86-75.

The game, which was Central's 26th of the season, took place on the designated Senior Day to celebrate graduating players, including Northeast Conference standouts Lucia Noin and Kayla Henry.

CCSU's most recent game against Chicago State was a decisive 75-69 loss in Illinois,



The Blue Devils celebrate their first win of the season on Senior Day.

Steve McLaughlin

and the team came into the game looking to turn its season around with only three games remaining after Saturday's matchup.

Chicago State started the game with possession and took an early lead, holding an 8-2 advantage over the Blue Devils four minutes in.

Central was able to keep the Cougars in check with points from Noin and Cierra Pearson, with the two teams ending the first quarter within a basket at 19-16 in favor of the visitors. Kiyah Lewis kicked off the second quarter for CCSU with shots from all areas of the court, but the Cougars continued to keep up the same pace as the

two teams remained almost equal on points for the rest of the second quarter. With contributions from Christa Ramos in the closing minutes, Central trailed by just a point at the half.

Noin was the first to score in the second half, and both teams swung momentum back and

forth as four-point leads were traded by both sides. Noin again led the team on a run midway through the third quarter with added Ramos defense and Mia Toure buckets, but Chicago State continued to stay right on its heels, with both squads drawing multiple fouls in the latter portion of the quarter that contributed to the overall point total.

Up two points to begin the final quarter, and with a victory reasonably within grasp, the Blue Devils turned on the jets with Noin and Nicora Patrick leading the team in scoring.

The defense from Central was finally able to stifle Chicago State halfway through the quarter, and added buckets from Lewis and Pearson brought the Blue Devils' lead up to 10 points with only a handful of minutes of game time left.

see *Senior Day* on page 6

The Importance of a Service Dog

By Nicolina Coronis
Assistant Lifestyle Editor

For many students, service animals are something they may see around campus but might not fully understand.

During a recent presentation delivered by adjunct professor Molly Carta, she turned curiosity into clarity, walking students through the complex process of obtaining a service dog and offering a firsthand account of what it means to rely on one every day.

Alongside her was her Lab-Golden crossbreed, Slate, her service animal provided by the organization Canine Companions. Slate is 3 1/2 years old and loves long walks and lamb chop toys, but he also has an important job.

Slate is a trained service animal, taught to perform tasks that accommodate Carta's physical disabilities. He is trained to complete a variety of tasks, such as picking up items, opening and closing doors, and turning on light switches.

These tasks make life possible for people with physical disabilities. Carta explained the rules of having a service dog, including where they can go, everywhere except sterile hospital areas. Churches and other religious institutions reserve the right to deny a service animal in their space.

Carta also emphasized the importance of knowing the difference between a service animal and a therapy animal. "Four on the floor" is a saying Slate and other service animals are taught.

"[Slate] should not be jumping

up, he should not be sitting in a seat, he really shouldn't be doing anything ... he should be invisible," Carta said. "He should be under a table if I'm in a restaurant, or tucked away underneath me in a way that is not going to be in the way of anybody."

Carta brought attention to the "gray area" in service animal legislation. Service animals are required to perform a task related to an owner's disability, but these dogs can be privately trained.

Within the service animal community there are discussions about what makes a service animal a service animal, and the proper way to train said service animal.

"There's a lot that goes into animal training, and the dog trainers are phenomenal

see *Service Dog* on page 2

My Heights? Wuthering.

By Ron Marq
Design and Layout Editor

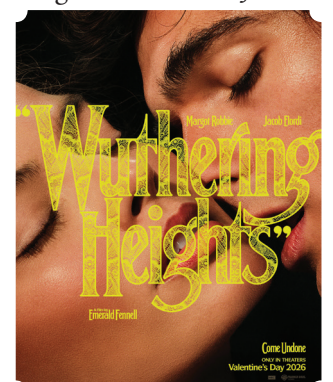
The hotly anticipated film adaptation of Emily Brontë's iconic romance novel, "Wuthering Heights," was released alongside its soundtrack by English chanteuse Charli xcx.

While the film, starring Margot Robbie and Jacob Elordi, has received mixed reviews, the album has drawn a glowing reception for its dazzling structure and rawness.

On the heels of the "Brat" phenomenon of summer 2024, Charli drifts into a sonic landscape that's centuries removed from a nightclub or arena. Originally asked by "Saltburn" director Emerald Fennell to contribute a song for the film, xcx instead insisted on making a full album.

Entangled in Victorian-style strings, wailing lyrics of unrequited love and the immaculate production of Finn Keane, formerly known as EasyFun, this soundtrack not only captures the forlorn romantic vibe of the novel and film but also harkens back to xcx's debut art-pop album, "True Romance."

The ominous opening track and lead single, "House," features spoken word from Velvet Underground founder John Cale



see *Heights* on page 4

About

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SCAN FOR OUR LINKS



Service Dog continued from front

individuals who put a ton of work into these dogs ... and when you're actively training your own dog, you don't have that background," Carta said.

There are dicey areas in the world of service animals and therapy or emotional support animals.

"ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) says providing comfort and support is not a task directly related to a person's disability. You could make the argument for PTSD or anxiety, but at the end of the day, comfort is not a task ... comfort is a feeling or emotion, but not a task," Carta said.

That is a key difference between the two. A service dog performs tasks that the owner cannot do.


"[Slate] knows 16 different words that can be translated into 60 different commands," Carta said.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ESA AND SERVICE ANIMAL

ESA	SERVICE ANIMAL
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PROVIDES EMOTIONAL SUPPORT • NOT REQUIRED TO BE TRAINED • NO PUBLIC ACCESS RIGHTS • CAN LIVE IN HOUSING WITH NO-PET POLICIES 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PERFORMS TASKS FOR A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY • INDIVIDUALLY TRAINED • HAS PUBLIC ACCESS RIGHTS • CAN GO NEARLY ANYWHERE WITH HANDLER

PRESENTATION:
LIFE BEYOND THE LEASH

Molly Carta, MS, CRC, LPC
Department of Counselor Education & Family Therapy

 **Thursday, February 19, 2026**
2 - 3 PM


 **Central Community Health Education Clinic**
180 Paul Manafort Dr., New Britain, CT
Accessible via CTFastrak Bus Stop #144


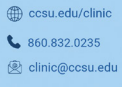

Learn how service dogs make a profound emotional and practical impact through personal insights and demonstration.

Explore what it truly means to live life with a service dog and how service dogs can enhance independence, safety, and confidence in daily life for people with disabilities.

Topics will cover:

- Training
- ADA Requirements
- Service Dog Etiquette



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Central Community Health Education Clinic

Molly Carta ran an event to inform the CCSU community about the importance of service animals; Department of Counselor Education & Family Therapy

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A SETUP FOR A
COMEBACK!

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MARIELIZ. WANTS. MORE. PERIOD.

By Ron Marq
Design and Layout Editor

Marieliz Vazquez is a Senior business management major, who started from square one and made her own experience. While not having the most solid academic foundation, she has ushered herself into business ownership and self-love.

“Central has pushed me to do better for myself academically and personally. I didn’t have the strongest start but I motivated myself and had to do better despite wanting to give up.”

Joining *WFCS 107.7 The Edge* four years ago was one of her proudest moments that’s solidified lifelong friends and marketable skills. ‘I’ve had support from family, friends, and professors.’ I’ve learned to change my thinking; think on the reward of the payoff versus the pain of the journey. Admittedly, she takes inspiration from the triumphant Hannah Montana (Miley Cyrus) track “The Climb”.

Marieliz wanted to own a business but not sure in what field. Needing motivation, she centered her heritage as a second-generation born Puerto Rican and started the Puerto Rican catering business called ‘Mari’s Cooking’ three years ago at only 20 years old! #girlboss

It felt right to apply what she was learning in real time instead of what had to be memorized in classes. As if she wasn’t doing enough, her podcast, ‘Chronically Off-Beat’, also highlights the peaks and valleys of personal life alongside student life with various guests.

She can be found on Instagram and TikTok @mari.elizzz as well as @mariscooking !



Marieliz Vazquez / Instagram @mari.elizzz

Four Years of Building Coming Together: Grace Lawton’s Journey With CCSU

By Elijah Hernandez
Co-Editor-In-Chief

Feet squared, dirt kicked, sun beaming, Grace Lawton doesn’t fold under the pressure of the opposing pitcher’s stare; she fixes her hand positioning and hits dingers.

Lawton is a senior at Central Connecticut State University and is one of the veterans on the school’s softball team. She has earned accolades such as the NEC All-Rookie Team, NEC Academic All-District selection and, most recently, the NEC All-Tournament Team.

But her journey to get here was far from simple. In high school, Lawton said the tournament circuit was where performance mattered most for college recognition.

“It’s pretty influenced by tournament teams; high school softball isn’t really a part of recruiting because college

coaches just look at tournament teams in the summer,” she said. “I played for this Rhode Island Thunder team, and I’m from New Hampshire, so I had to drive an hour and a half to practice. The team that I got recruited from was during my junior year in high school, and I was on a national team, so we played in California, Georgia and all around New England.”

Batting 100 home runs in the three seasons she played with the Rhode Island Thunder, Lawton proved herself to the coaching staff at CCSU, but it wasn’t an easy path.

“For those few years you’re trying to get recruited, you’re kind of living out of a suitcase in the summer because you’re constantly traveling,” Lawton said. “You’re young, so it’s fun, but it’s definitely a lot.”

However, when it came time to show her skills to the current assistant coach of the softball team, Pat Holden, she said he thought she and a teammate were a good fit.

“You email coaches, see how it goes, and they’ll come watch you play. Pat just happened to see me and my friend play; we actually got recruited at the same time. We emailed him back, and he invited us on campus, and we got the offers.”

Signing day for Lawton was a major accomplishment in her athletic career, marking the reward for years of effort. The transition from playing with organizations like her high school or the Rhode Island Thunder to playing at CCSU wasn’t difficult.

THIS WEEK’S CAMPUS EVENTS

Anime Club

Devils Den @ 10pm: Anime Family Feud
Thursday, March 5 @ 10:00 PM [EST]
Student Center, Semesters Cafe

Karate Club

Workout & Tournament
Saturday, March 7 @ 10:00 AM [EST]
Court 1 @ Rec Center

DanCentral

Auditions Spring 2026
Sunday, March 8 @ 9:00 AM [EST]
Dance Education Center, Room 001

Book Club

Fanfic Night!
Tuesday, March 10, at 3:00 PM [EST]
Marcus White Hall Living Room

Lawton attributes her success not only to her teammates and her own work, but also to the tips and advice from Holden that she said have elevated her game.

“A big part of his hitting style is hitting home runs, and I did that in tournament ball, and he liked that, so he recruited me,” she said. “That’s a big part of all our practice. We’re not trying to get hits; we’re trying to hit home runs. That way, even if you miss a little bit, it’s still a hit instead of a little bloop.”

Even though Lawton is a power hitter, she said the work she did with Holden was still beneficial.

“He definitely helped my swing a lot, because I used to kind of cock my hands back, and then my eye level would kind of drift,” she said. “But he showed me videos of MLB hitters, and they don’t move their hands at all when they go to swing, and that helps your eye level stay normal, and it has definitely helped my swing a lot. I think my hitting’s definitely improved since being here. His motto is ‘hit home runs,’ and he has a sweatshirt that says ‘#barrels.’”

With CCSU’s softball team, Lawton said the bond they have created has helped facilitate a winning culture.

“The coaches are really big on making us teammates and picking each other up,” she said. “I’ve played with this girl Skylar — she’s my second baseman — we’ve played with each other since freshman year, and we have that huge trust between us. If any of us makes an error, we’re all there for each other. We’re not really stressed about it; we’re just focused on the next play. It’s like a clean slate.”

The work she does in the field reflects the work she does in the classroom, as being named to the NEC Academic All-District Team is one of her proudest accomplishments.

“I know it’s cliché, but it’s all about time management. I only have softball maybe three hours a day when I’m just practicing, so as long as you’re using that time in-between class, and I’m home by four or five, so I get home, I shower and I’m doing homework by six,” she said.

She has positioned herself so her post-graduation plans do not hinge solely on the success of her softball career. She plans to go into the medical field, and her studies are an integral part of her lifestyle.

Lawton attributes the growing recognition of collegiate softball to the NCAA Tournament and sees a bright future for younger players. She recalls when she was younger and the feelings she got from the game.



Grace Lawton (21) is entering her senior year and has NEC championship hopes for the season/NEC

“I played baseball when I was younger, and my nickname was G-Money,” she said. “I was always a hitter on the team, so it’s kind of stuck. I grew up with that nickname; my mom calls me that all the time.” She said she has a positive outlook for the rest of the season and reflects on the work needed to reach her position.

“I’m pretty excited for this year because I think we’re going to do pretty well. I feel like the grind of it all for four years inevitably makes you a better player,” Lawton said. “Our team’s meshing well right now, and we did really well last year. I think we still have that strong base, and we have a lot of really good freshmen coming in. I think it’s going to be a good year.” “Shout out, Coach Gross. He’s been phenomenal. He pushes us a lot, and he knows his shit.”

Heights continued from front before erupting into a raw, noisy cry for help to escape a house of one’s own devising.

The next track, “Wall of Sound,” has no kick or snare but is carried solely by strings, vocals and a bass synth, capped by a swelling crescendo reminiscent of “A Day in the Life” by The Beatles.

The following track, “Dying for You,” contains spliced strings and electronic beats similar to those found in “brat” and other Charli albums, while maintaining the overarching theme of surrendering to possessive love and its consequential pain of obsession.

“Always Everywhere” carries one of the film’s simplest yet purest messages: being helpless in the face of all-encompassing love. This sentiment is echoed in “Chains of Love.”

“Out of Myself” takes lack of ownership to a whimsical yet darker level, as the line between eroticism and self-destruction erodes.

The short but sweet, interlude-coded track “Open Up” urges the listener to open one’s heart in Charli’s classic vulnerable form. “Seeing Things” blurs desire and reality with the fluttery feel of an early-to mid-2000s indie-pop track, almost reminiscent of



Kate Bush’s 1978 single “Wuthering Heights.” “Altars” offers the rugged and surrendered state of a lover, almost in direct contrast to the newlywed Charli. “Eyes of the World” features her frequent collaborator Sky Ferreira, begging for their feelings to be seen by all to free them from inner turmoil.

“My Reminder” falls a bit flat in my opinion. It feels simplistic, like a stale version of “brat’s” “Apple.” Perhaps that is due to

the subdued surrender of facing one’s past — not directly referencing a lover, but possibly a family member.

The capstone of the album, “Funny Mouth,” is a dreamlike questioning of a lover. With swirling chords, emotional strings, electronic stabs and key changes, Charli assesses her lover’s words.

This album positions itself not so much as an interpretation of the film but as an extension of Charli’s artistic sensibility.

It hallmarks her growth, confidence, songwriting and topical range. It’s quite a feat to pivot from singing about partying to exploring tender matters of the heart.

This is less an album to casually consume and more a piece of art to experience.

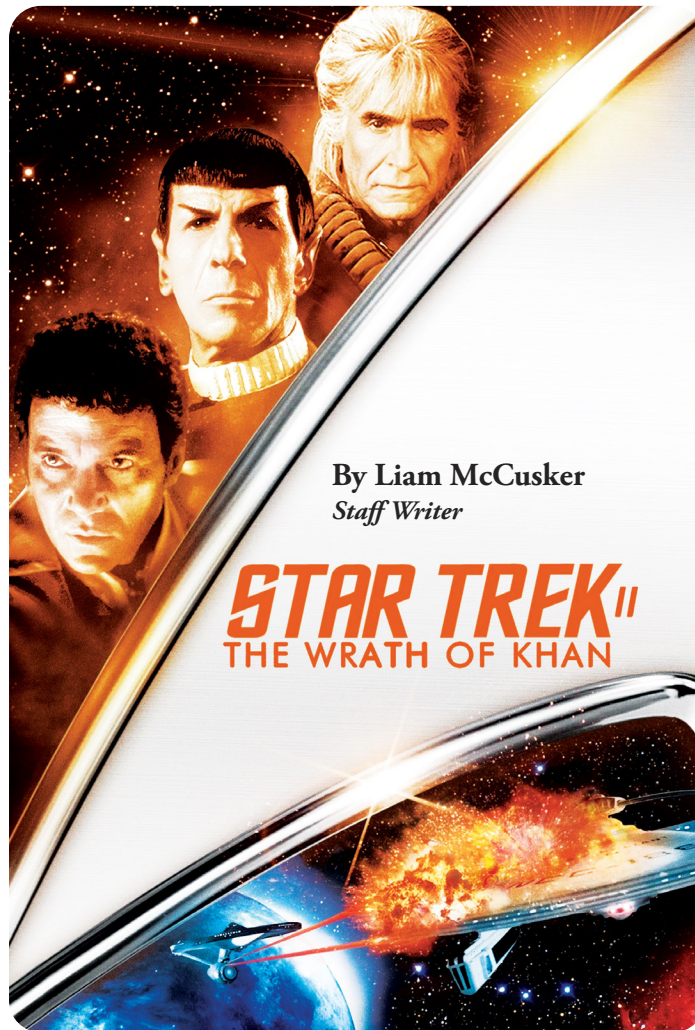
More than 40 years after its release, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* remains one of the most compelling films to watch.

Released in 1982, following the debut of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, *The Wrath of Khan* raised the stakes with more action after criticism that the first film moved too slowly. The film opens with the Kobayashi Maru, a Starfleet training exercise designed as a no-win scenario.

Viewers are introduced to Lt. Saavik, a new officer testing her command abilities.

For those unfamiliar with its history, *Star Trek* began as *Star Trek: The Original Series*, a television show that aired in the 1960s and followed the crew of the USS Enterprise as they explored the galaxy. Main characters included Leonard Nimoy's Mr. Spock, a half-Vulcan, half-human science officer, and William Shatner's Capt. James T. Kirk. Both characters command the Enterprise boldly.

By the time *The Wrath of Khan* premiered, Kirk had been promoted to admiral and Spock had become captain of the Enterprise. However, despite his new position, Spock shows deep respect for Kirk's abilities and invites him to assume command, underscoring the trust and relationship they share. The film highlights the depth of their bond.



By Liam McCusker
Staff Writer

The return of Khan Noonien Singh, played by Ricardo Montalban, heightened the film's drama. Khan first appeared in Season 1 of *Star Trek: The Original Series*, attempting to kill Kirk and seize control of the Enterprise. Kirk exiled Khan and his followers to the planet Ceti Alpha V.

In the film, Khan explains that the planet was devastated by environmental catastrophe shortly after their arrival. When Cmdr. Pavel Chekov and Capt. Clark Terrell discover Khan years later, he vows revenge against Kirk.

After commandeering the USS Reliant, Khan attacks the Enterprise and steals the Genesis Device, a project designed to create life on a new planet. When he is defeated by Kirk, Khan activates the device in a final attempt to destroy the Enterprise. To repair the warp drive and save the ship, Spock enters a radiation-filled chamber, knowing the exposure will be fatal.

The sacrifice is deeply emotional. When Kirk is summoned to the engine room, he realizes Spock is dying and rushes to his side. Separated by glass, they share one final conversation.

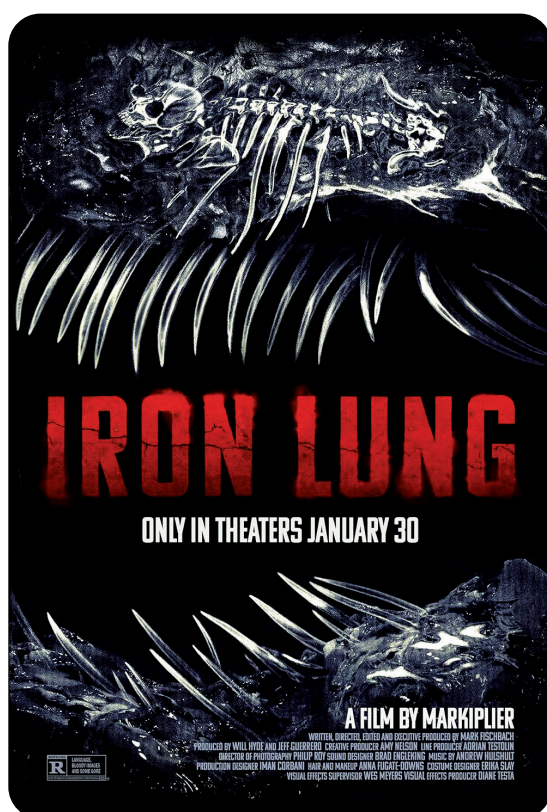
Spock tells Kirk, "Don't grieve, Admiral. It is logical. The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, or the one." Fighting back tears, Kirk later says Spock's was "the most human" soul he had ever encountered in his travels.

Before entering the chamber, Spock performs a Vulcan mind meld on Dr. Leonard McCoy, telling him to "remember." Through the mind meld, Spock transfers his consciousness to McCoy.

The scene sets the stage for *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock*, directed by Nimoy. Kirk later learns from Spock's father, Sarek, that Spock's body has regenerated on the Genesis Planet and that his consciousness resides within McCoy.

When Starfleet forbids a return to Genesis, Kirk and his crew risk court-martial by stealing the Enterprise to return Spock's body to Vulcan so his consciousness can be restored. At the end of that film, Spock asks Kirk why he chose to act, and Kirk replies that the needs of the one outweighed the needs of the many, underscoring the void Spock's absence left in their lives.

Fans who saw the film in 1982 recall leaving theaters in stunned silence, many in tears over Spock's sacrifice. That enduring emotional impact helps explain why *The Wrath of Khan* has remained popular for decades.



Iron Lung is Mark Fischbach's [Markiplier] debut movie-adaptation and is currently rated a 6.5 on IMDB; Markiplier

Markiplier Makes His Mark

By Jayden Klaus
Contributor

I'm not usually a big fan of horror. It can make it difficult for me to sleep, and I get more enjoyment from media in other genres. But I do make exceptions on occasion if it's something that captures my attention for some reason.

"Iron Lung," written, directed by and starring YouTuber Mark Fischbach (Markiplier), is an interesting, horrific cinematic experience. Based on the 2022 video game of the same name, the film follows Simon, a convict who is forced into the titular submarine to explore an ocean of blood on a moon. I've been following this project for some time, as I like Fischbach's online content and was excited to see what this movie would entail.

The universe has gone through the "Quiet Rapture," in which all stars and planets disappeared, leaving humanity struggling to survive. Simon reluctantly complies with his task of taking pictures of strange anomalies, if only so that he can come back alive. But as he navigates the depths, Simon slowly unravels as he learns the truth about the expedition and the danger he's in.

As adaptations naturally do, additional plot points were added that were not present in the original game. This adds more to the world, giving it a sense that there is a lot going on that the characters are trying to grapple with in their efforts to save humanity after the “Quiet Rapture.” Simon isn’t just contending with mindless monsters looking to eat him. He’s facing a force with an agenda all its own that will do anything to achieve it.

The set design was impressive not just in its accuracy to the original game, but in its atmosphere. The tight, claustrophobic space is unsettling and adds to the horror of the situation Simon is in. He is stuck miles deep, and there’s nowhere to run if his life is in danger.

The best aspect of the film is the growing dread. You know that Simon is not going to make it, even if you haven’t played the game. He is doomed, but the suspense of what exactly will happen — and how — keeps you on edge the entire time.

There are so many ways everything could go wrong, and it is enrapturing to watch in the state of anticipation and dread this movie creates.

Fischbach’s acting was very good, though that wasn’t too surprising given his track record of strong work in other projects and appearances.

Simon is remarkably relatable and sympathetic throughout the entire movie, even after the horrible details and acts in his backstory are revealed. He did awful things, but he just wants to get out alive. And considering what he goes through, it’s no surprise that he’s so desperate.

I did not anticipate the blood sequence at the end being so disgusting, but it was still great film-making. The action and drama ramp up as Simon scrambles to survive just long enough to complete his final task. The production could not have been easy, and it is impressive what was accomplished to make it look so realistic and horrifying.

The movie has a long runtime at 127 minutes. There were a few moments in the first third that probably could have been trimmed to quicken the pace, but ultimately that is the point.

Time passes achingly slowly for Simon, as he doesn’t know how long his mission will take or how much time he might have left. He and the audience are left to sit in the dread of the uncertain time limit and worry about what might happen next.

“Iron Lung” is a unique film and an impressive display of Fischbach’s acting and film-making skills. Ever since it was announced, I was curious to see it.

With the success of this movie, Fischbach has broken through and shown traditional media what he and other creators like him are capable of. I’m hopeful this will herald a new wave of inventive, groundbreaking movies.



YouTube; Markiplier

Senior Day continued from front

Despite the Cougars’ best efforts to foul Central players to prevent higher scoring, the damage control was for naught, as the Blue Devils finally took their long-awaited first victory of the season by 11 points.

The victory was one of Central’s most effective games on the offensive side of the ball all season, with Lewis and Noin dropping 25 points each. Pearson and Patrick also contributed double-digit point totals, with Pearson being just a steal away from a double-double.

Both Lewis and Noin were pleased with the effort of each other and of the rest of the team in the victory. Lewis talked about her progression from the first to the second half and what that meant for the win.

“I just knew I had to be more aggressive and be more in the play, and I feel like once I did that, it was really beneficial for my team,” Lewis said.

Noin, who was one of four players to be honored pregame for her achievements with the team, agreed with Lewis about the team’s performance and mentioned that she didn’t feel any new specific pressure in her penultimate home appearance.

“I think every game we have pressure because of the win we wanted to get. We lost to them by four, so we really wanted to get this win,” Noin said. “There was pressure, but once we stepped on the court, it was gone.”

Noin also expanded on the general physicality of the game, as both sides pushed themselves to over 70 points each.

“There were many fouls, but we also ran a lot, so even if the game stopped, we didn’t feel it because we were both running up and down,” she said. “Both teams were getting points in transition, so I didn’t think it was a slow game or anything.”

Caruso, who took the coaching job last January, was relieved at the day’s outcome and emphasized that the team’s record wasn’t indicative of its talent level, noting how much turnover there was between rosters and how hard it had been for the new team to gel together.

“It takes some time, you just don’t get chemistry that way. It’s been tough, there were games we didn’t necessarily play together, but every game now we’re playing as a team,” she said.

“We had 14 assists tonight, and when we do that, we do well. That’s been our focus all year. It’s just taken some time.”

Caruso also had high praise for Cierra Pearson in her performance.

“[Cierra] was defensive player of the year. I’m telling you right now, No. 11 is a good player,” she said. “She did a great job. Her teammates helped her and stepped up. I’m very excited for all my kids.”

Caruso was also surprised that Chicago State outshot them from the field but noted that it didn’t affect how the game was played.

“No, usually we’re on the high end. We have some really good players, but it was just a process. We have guys stepping up now and having confidence in our game,” she said. “It’s a good time to start playing well. March is here!”

The Blue Devil’s final home game of the regular season will take place Thursday, March 5, against the New Haven Chargers.

CCSU Back to Winning Ways in Penultimate Game Against Mercyhurst

By **Lorenzo Gagliotta and Andrew O'Sullivan**
Staff Writers

The Central Connecticut State Blue Devils clinched the No. 2 seed in the Northeast Conference tournament with a win against the Mercyhurst Lakers, 80-78.

Central is coming off a difficult defeat at Chicago State, who snapped the Blue Devils' five-game winning streak.

Mercyhurst managed to get the better of Central last time they faced off in a 79-61 win at the Mercyhurst Athletic Center.

Head coach Patrick Sellers and his team rallied together to come through with an all-important win in a close game between both sides.

The game started with the Blue Devils attacking the paint, using the dynamism between Jay Rodgers, Darin Smith Jr. and Max Frazier to get important points on the board early on.

The game plan for Sellers and his men was to close out Mercyhurst's Bernie Blunt III, Jake Lemelman and Qadir Martin, with Lemelman and Martin combining for 45 points in their victory against the LIU Sharks.

Both teams played some dogged defense, with a low volume of perimeter shooting from the Blue Devils and the Lakers.

Mercyhurst found its stride in the middle of the first half. However, guard Melo Sanchez came up with some big buckets from 3-point range to close down Mercyhurst's lead.

As the first half came to a close,

it was a defensive stalemate for both teams in a low-scoring half, with the majority of points coming in and around the paint. The halftime score was merely 34-30, with the Blue Devils in a slim lead.

The Lakers came flying out of the traps in the second half, stamping their authority on the second half early.

A big four-point play from Sanchez set the rhythm for Central to hone back into the game.

A game played in transition, hustling each possession, going back and forth with endless lead changes, both defenses were up against it.

As the second half wore on, Rodgers put on a show in the closing stretch with some crucial plays and points to push the Blue Devils toward the finish.

The game drew to a close with the Blue Devils shutting down Mercyhurst's momentum to close out strong in the final stages of the game.

Postgame, Smith, who posted his 15th 20-point game this season, talked about whether he planned to play differently because of the Blue Devils' previous loss at Mercyhurst this year.

"We just play the same way every game, but it was definitely on our mind heading into the game," he said. "We had our game plan and executed."

Smith said the coaching staff helped the team cohesion in the latter stretch of the calendar.



Senior guard Jay Rodgers (1) brings the ball up for the Blue Devils; Steve McLaughlin

"They run a really tight offense. A lot of screens, it's hard to guard," he said. "They all get involved in offense. [...] After the game we lost, the coaches stayed positive."

Rodgers and Frazier spoke about how they bounced back from their 'frustrating' loss on the road, following their good run of form.

"We tried to take away their main two guys, and that led to more of an opening for the other guys. It's definitely tiring guarding them, but when we needed to get stops we got stops," Frazier said.

Rodgers agreed with Frazier's points and also mentioned how the coaching staff was a huge help with the team and how each player connected with each other.

"The biggest thing is that we have 10 new guys. We're jelling at the right time, and we're starting to know guys' roles and stuff like that. We're just figuring it out," Rodgers said. Sellers was positive about the win and had good things to say about his "high-level" opponent, on a game day he described as "Lock-Down Thursday."

"We knew it was gonna be a tough game. We knew they were gonna bring everything they had," he said.

Sellers explained the differences in gameplay between the first and second meeting, noting that the team "didn't have a lot of energy the first time we played," specifically noting the road trip from a game at Saint Francis right before, coupled with a broken-down bus on the way there.

He emphasized "offensive intelligence" and what the team can do to prevent scoring on the other side of the ball, in particular describing a concept he called "the kill."

"Trading baskets, it drives me nuts. We talk a lot about three stops in a row, and we call that a kill. They run a ton of really good offense, they just run full speed and you can't relax," he said. "If you relax for one second in that possession, they're gonna beat you with some kind of drive to the hoop or open shot."

Although LIU still remains top of the conference, three games clear of the now second-place Blue Devils, it's a dogfight in the middle of the standings, which Sellers talked about.

"Last year was so special. Everybody in the league thinks the league is so even, anything could happen in this next go-around," he said. "It's gonna be a really even tournament."

Central's final home game of the year will be on Saturday, Feb. 28, against Saint Francis.

By Marcus Saunders
Co-Editor-In-Chief

The CCSU Blue Devils defeated the Saint Francis Red Flash in a down-to-the-wire 69-64 matchup on Feb. 28 to close out the 2025-26 Northeast Conference regular season. This was a rematch of the 2025 NEC championship, where the Red Flash upset the Blue Devils and earned a spot in the NCAA Tournament.

Before the game, seniors Nico Ashley, Melo Sanchez, Ja'kobe Williams and Jay Rodgers were all recognized for their contributions to Central. Unfortunately, Williams was unable to play, as he is still dealing with a back injury that has held him out since December.

Sophomore forward Darin Smith Jr. led the Blue Devils, scoring 22 points and seven rebounds. Sanchez couldn't find his 3-point shot but still scored 13 points and contributed in other ways, pulling in three rebounds and stealing the ball three times. Junior forward Max Frazier added 10 points, five rebounds and two blocks.

In honor of Senior Day, Ashley got his first start of the season. He helped Central set the tone, scoring four of the first eight points in the first five minutes of the game. He was a mainstay in the rotation to start the year, but as the season dwindled down, his minutes decreased. He also dealt with a high ankle sprain that caused him to miss a couple of weeks.

After the game, Central head coach Pat Sellers said that he had a message for Ashley.

"I just said to Nico in the locker room in front of the guys [that] I'm apologizing because he should be playing," he said.

Sellers said that Smith has been such a high-level player at the four position that it was hard to find minutes for him, and then once he suffered his injury, it really set him back.

Even though he hasn't played much recently, Sellers still praised Ashley.

"Nico's a super athletic guy. He can make 3s. He can drive the ball," he said. "I think he can have a career in Europe playing professionally."

Both teams were tied at 15 halfway into the first half. In the next six minutes, CCSU went on a 13-4 run. Saint Francis went on its own run to cut the deficit and got the score to 32-29 by the end of the half, down only by three. Smith and Sanchez led the Blue Devils with six points each. Smith also added three rebounds. James Jones and Ashley also contributed, as they combined for nine points and five rebounds.

Sellers' focus during halftime was all about defense. His No. 1 key for his guys was transition defense, and in their half-court defense, they have to switch because of how quick Saint Francis' guards are. He also mentioned that they needed to stay down on shot fakes.

"They're probably the best shot-faking team in the league," he said. "Max went for a couple shot fakes, Jay, James, they all went for a couple shot fakes." Central came out guns blazing, going on an 8-0 run to start the second half, but just like in the first half, Saint Francis answered with a 24-6 run to take a 53-46 lead with 9:30 remaining.

With the Blue Devils down 56-50 with 7:38 remaining, Darin Smith took over, scoring the next nine points for Central to

Blue Devils Make Late Comeback in NEC Championship Rematch

help them only trail by one. CCSU retook the lead off a Sanchez one-dribble pull-up midrange jumper. It was Central's first lead since the 13:38 mark of the second half. After the shot, the crowd was the loudest it had been all day, with every Blue Devil fan chanting "Defense."

No one scored until Smith stepped up to the free throw line and knocked down two free throws to give CCSU a 67-64 lead with 55 seconds remaining.

On the next possession, Central forced Saint Francis to turn the ball over out of bounds. The Red Flash were able to set up their full-court press and forced Central to turn the ball right back over with 28 seconds left. Saint Francis called a timeout to set up a play, but it did not matter because Central played lockdown defense for 20 seconds and forced a shot-clock violation.

The Red Flash had no choice but to foul, and Smith knocked down two free throws to put the game out of reach. From the 7:22 mark of the second half, Smith scored 13 of the last 19 points for CCSU. He attributes his takeover to the belief that the people around him have in him.

"My coach and my teammates believe in me to make the right plays on offense," he said. "We ran a new play today and got it done."

On Feb. 26, Rodgers became the all-time Division I assist leader



Senior guard Jay Rodgers analyses the Saint Francis defense in an eight-assist performance / Damar Glover

in a season in Blue Devil history, but in this game he became only the second player in CCSU history to have at least 200. He talked about what it was like to reach those milestones after all he has been through.

"This year was big after sitting out the last two years," he said. "It's big to see how far I've come getting that record." Both Rodgers and Sanchez were glad to play in front of their family on senior day. Rodgers' parents came from Ohio, so even though he thought he didn't have a great game, he was just glad to get a win in front of them.

Smith, Rodgers and Sanchez are all ready for the playoffs and can't wait to play in the atmospheres. They don't care about the stats. They just want to win an NEC championship.

Smith and Frazier were both recognized on March 2 for their efforts against Mercyhurst on

Feb. 26 and Saint Francis. Smith was named NEC Player of the Week after averaging 23 points and 5.5 rebounds while shooting 52% from the field and 50% from 3-point range. Frazier was named a Prime Performer for the conference, averaging 13.5 points, nine rebounds and 1.5 blocks while shooting 77% from the field.

The Blue Devils clinched the No. 2 seed on Feb. 26 with an 80-78 win against the Mercyhurst Lakers and will host the No. 7 seed Wagner Seahawks on March 4 in the quarterfinals of the NEC Tournament.

Central swept Wagner 2-0 in the regular season, winning 62-55 on the road and 84-67 at home. If the Blue Devils defeat the Seahawks, they will also have home-court advantage for the semifinals and potentially have a chance to host the NEC championship for the second year in a row if they are the highest seed remaining.

CCSU's ATHLETIC SCHEDULE

Men's Basketball

MAR 7 NEC Tournament Semifinal: TBA
MAR 10 NEC Tournament Championship: TBA

Women's Basketball

MAR 5 vs. New Haven @ 7 PM

Men's & Women's Track

MAR 6 at New England Championships
MAR 7 at New England Championships

Softball

MAR 6 at Towson Tiger Invite @ 10 AM
MAR 6 at Towson Tiger Invite @ 3 PM
MAR 7 at Towson Tiger Invite @ 12:30 PM
MAR 7 at Towson Tiger Invite @ 3 PM
MAR 8 at Towson Tiger Invite @ 10 AM



Baseball

MAR 7 vs. UMES @ 12 PM
MAR 8 vs. UMES @ 12 PM
MAR 9 vs. UMES @ 12 PM
MAR 11 vs. Northeastern @ 2 PM

Women's Lacrosse

MAR 7 vs. Manhattan @ 1 PM
MAR 10 vs. Austin Peay @ 12 PM

Women's Swimming & Diving

MAR 9 at NCAA Diving Zone A: TBA
MAR 10 at NCAA Diving Zone A: TBA