

For the first time in a decade, Women's soccer falls to Niagara 3-2

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Contributing Writer

HAMDEN — On Saturday afternoon, Quinnipiac women’s soccer came up short in its Metro Conference opener, falling at home to the Niagara Purple Eagles 3-2. This marked the Bobcats’ first loss to the Purple Eagles since 2016 and first regular-season home loss since 2023.

The first half started very differently from what the result indicated. The Bobcats were the more assertive team, causing pressure in the Purple Eagles’ zone. Oftentimes, Quinnipiac was too aggressive; a yellow card was assessed to junior midfielder Chiara Peiter for a headbutt on Niagara’s senior midfielder Caitlyn Grady.

But then, in the 29th minute, a ticky-tacky foul on Purple Eagles’ senior defender Bailie Colling led to a Bobcat penalty. Graduate student forward Morgan Cupo fired a missile in the bottom-left corner to put Quinnipiac in front. Niagara sophomore goalkeeper Julia Poissant actually guessed right, but the strength of Cupo’s shot was too forceful to save.

The Purple Eagles then started to create their own chance as a defensive turnover forced by the Metro’s top goal scorer, junior forward Caitlyn Gratton, led to a beaming chance at Bobcats’ goalkeeper Olivia Jarvis. Jarvis made a diving save, forcing a Niagara corner.

Then, just as the Purple Eagles started to gain more control, a foul away from the ball by Niagara freshman forward Lucy Trinder set up Quinnipiac’s second penalty of the half. Poissant lined up for another Cupo penalty, this time

guessing wrong as Cupo struck the right side of the net, making it 2-0 Bobcats.

These were Cupo’s fourth and fifth goals on the young season, only five games through. At this point in the game, Cupo tied Gratton atop the Metro Conference with goals at five apiece.

Niagara came back with a couple of minor chances at Quinnipiac, but the Bobcats backline was able to help Jarvis out and limit the danger.

Going into the half up 2-0, Quinnipiac head coach Dave Clarke knew the challenge ahead was to try and hold off one of the Metro’s hottest teams.

“I told the girls, we got them two nil up, and let’s try to settle them down,” Clarke said.

The problem was that the Bobcats did the opposite of that. Only 45 seconds into the half, a cross sent by the Purple Eagles deflected off the leg of freshman midfielder Naiya Johnston and went off the fingertips of Jarvis past her for a Niagara goal and Johnston’s first collegiate goal.

Niagara kept the pressure on the Bobcats in their own half. Quinnipiac was blocking cross after cross, just trying to escape with a victory.

Subsequently, in the 60th minute, Bobcat substitute sophomore forward Isabella Torelli committed a trip in the box. Initially not called, Niagara head coach Donny George used his review to check for a possible penalty. After a long review, the penalty was granted, much to the displeasure of the Quinnipiac fans in attendance. Gratton stepped up to take it, putting it right down Broadway for the goal. The score tied the contest up at two,

with Gratton retaining her conference goal-scoring lead crown.

The Bobcats tried to create dangerous chances in the Purple Eagles’ box, but the Niagara backline fended off those chances, much to the momentum established by its attack.

However, Niagara just would not give in, driving through the Bobcats’ defense. In the 74th minute, the Purple Eagles thought they had taken the lead on senior midfielder Angelina Kristic’s shot, but it was immediately taken away for offside.

The chances kept coming for Niagara, and this time Johnston buried a shot in the top-left corner, scoring her second collegiate goal, giving the Purple Eagles a 3-2 lead with just north of 10 minutes to go, proving to be the difference in this matchup.

The Bobcats almost had their equalizer with five minutes remaining after Cupo weaved through the Purple Eagles’ backline, but her shot went just wide, denying her a hat trick.

Quinnipiac couldn’t create much in the final seconds. Niagara’s backline cleared out the final opportunities, holding off the Bobcats and coming out with a 3-2 victory; its first win against Quinnipiac in more than a decade.

“They didn’t do what they were supposed to do,” Clarke said. “It’s fatigue, bad habits, going in on the wrong foot.”

The Bobcats will look to put this game behind them as they will have a week to recover before heading down to Frederick, Maryland, to take on Mount St. Mary’s on Sept. 12. Kick-off is set for Saturday at 12 p.m.



Quinnipiac golf aims to set the foundation for a Metro three-peat

By EMILY MARQUIS
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What’s the secret to success for a dynasty? Depending on who you ask, a variety of answers may arise. Stellar coaching, a consistent roster chock-full of talent, a leadership group that has the poise to handle the pressure. Each is valuable in its own regard, and each is crucial to building a squad built not only to make championships, but to bring the trophy home when it counts.

Quinnipiac golf is the epitome of that ideal. The Bobcats have taken home the then-MAAC Championship trophy five times in the last six years, serving as top dog in the conference for the better part of half a decade. Since joining the conference ahead of the 2013-14 season, Quinnipiac has secured the most conference championships of any Metro team during that time.

Let’s explore the Bobcats’ secret to sustained success:

STELLAR COACHING

No championship team is complete without the work of a stellar coaching staff, especially at the college level, and Bobcat head coach John O’Connor fits the bill exactly. At the helm of the program since the inception of the program in the 2010-11 season, O’Connor has had the tall task of building a powerhouse program from scratch.

Seventeen seasons and seven titles since then, O’Connor has cemented the history of women’s golf at Quinnipiac through his success on the course. His accolades include five conference coach of the year awards, including honors in 2025 and 2026.

Despite his familiarity with big moments in the MAAC Tournament, according to his players, O’Connor still feels that same excitement for each and every opportunity.

“He’s just trying to enjoy every year and every moment,” senior captain Saman-

tha Galantini said. “I definitely think winning conference last year was probably his highlight of the three years I’ve been here, because we’re really just establishing that we’re really just a ... Metro powerhouse.”

Even with extended success as a coach, O’Connor is right there with his squad in its pressure-filled moments.

“(Last year) it was the best version of him that I’ve seen,” senior captain Natalie Spiska said. “I think just seeing that he was also nervous — I think we were all nervous especially since it was super close going into the final round — but being able to see him see that we actually won and just kind of calm down a little bit afterwards and enjoy that feeling of winning ... I’m definitely glad that as a team we were able to give that to him.”

Aside from his leadership in-season, O’Connor has also built this team through stellar recruiting. Even though Quinnipiac lost just two players in the offseason — Sandhya Vaikuntam ‘26 and transfer Mason Egdahl, with just one freshman, Zoie Chan, coming in to replace them — O’Connor has recruited two MAAC Rookie of the Year award recipients who remain on the squad: Galantini and two-time reigning MAAC Player of the Year junior Sophia Fujita.

TALENTED ROSTER

Quinnipiac golf is no stranger to talented rosters, and the 2026-27 season is no exception. With nine returners, including all five MAAC Tournament starters, the Bobcats are poised to return to the top of the conference once again.

“It kind of feels like we still have all of that

momentum here with us,” Spiska said. “It’ll probably be our best team we’ve ever had.”

The talent is evident for the Bobcats. Along with the personal accolades from Fujita and Galantini, junior Marisa Flores secured All-MAAC First Team honors in the 2026 season. Junior Vaidehi Shah and Spiska have both competed in two MAAC Tournaments coming into the season. The talent and experience necessary to take home a championship are built in.

That stacked roster of golfers means that every tournament is a tryout — despite rostering 10 athletes, only six — five starters and an alternate — will make the trip to the Metro Tournament come April.

“I think everyone is a contender on this team, and everyone can put up a great score and go low,” Spiska said. “I think at the end of the day, it’s more of who is able to rise to that occasion at the right time.”

According to Galantini, that intersquad competition doesn’t stand in the way of the chemistry built over three years of very similar lineups.

“We’re all really comfortable together, so I definitely think just our team environment really just makes it work,” she said. “We’re definitely a lot more competitive with each other, and there’s a lot less of that closeness because we all want to play and it’s very competitive. But then once we finally

go to tournaments, we’re all rooting for each other.”

It’s that individual competition that helps push Quinnipiac golf ahead, even as teams like Fairfield and UAlbany put pressure on the Bobcats in last season’s tournament.

STRONG LEADERSHIP

Even with an established championship culture built on proven, recent success, having strong leadership is key to making sure that all the pieces come together to secure a third-straight trip to the NCAA Tournament.

“My freshman year, we viewed it as, ‘oh, we’re gonna win no matter what,’” Galantini said. “Then we didn’t win. It kind of brought us back to reality that there [are] other people who want to win and other people who can win ... we know we should win, but we know nothing’s going to be handed to us.”

Galantini and Spiska spearhead a leadership group that will continue that message as the season progresses.

“I definitely more lead by example,” Galantini said. “I definitely think just making sure that everyone’s doing what they’re supposed to be doing and just making sure that everyone knows that they have support on the team.”

Spiska shared that mentality, putting the support of the team above all else.

It’s important, but golf is not the end all be all,” she said. “It’s okay if things don’t go alright.”

Spiska and Galantini both spoke of using past leaders, such as former captains Vaikuntam and Leeyan Peralta ‘24, as role models for their own style.

The Bobcats began the 2026 season with the Nittany Lion Invitational Sept. 7 and Sept. 8 in University Park, Pennsylvania, before returning to New England for the Red Bandana Invitational in Canton, Massachusetts Sept. 21 and Sept. 22.



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