

COLLEEN DIETHER/CHRONICLE

Women's ice hockey holds annual 'Do It For Daron' game against Cornell

By EMILY MARQUIS
Associate Sports Editor

Quinnipiac women's ice hockey hosted its annual Do It For Daron (DIFD) Mental Health Awareness night Friday, Nov. 6 against the Cornell Big Red, continuing the teams' tradition in raising money to support mental health education and advocacy.

DIFD is an organization created by Luke and Stephanie Richardson in 2010 following the passing of their 14-year-old daughter Daron by suicide. The program helps raise awareness surrounding teen mental health. The organization, which partners with The Royal Ottawa Foundation for Mental Health to raise money for youth mental health research and education.

For both of these programs, the significance of the ceremonies goes beyond the important message. There is a personal connection, stemming back to Daron's older sister Morgan, who was committed to play women's ice hockey for Cornell at the time of her sister's passing.

Assistant coach Amanda Alessi is at the forefront of that connection. Prior to her coaching career at Quinnipiac, Alessi began her time in the ECAC as a player, taking the net for the Big Red from 2008 to 2012.

It was here that Alessi first met Morgan, and learned of Daron's story.

"I was a junior at Cornell … and her older sister, Morgan, was committed to Cornell at the time," Alessi said. "She wasn't on our team yet, but she was good friends with a lot of the first year players on our team at the time, so there was definitely a connection when I was a player."

But even before Alessi joined the Quinnipiac coaching staff, the Bobcats had their own link to DIFD with defender Cydney Roesler '16.

"Cyd was — is still — best friends with Morgan Richardson's older sister Morgan," Alessi said. "So they grew up playing together so that was how the connection between Cornell and Quinnipiac started."

The Bobcats began the tradition of raising money and spreading awareness for DIFD during the 2014-15 season, with Quinnipiac women's ice hockey selling purple rubber bracelets and accepting other donations during a series of three home games, including a matchup against Cornell.

Since then, Quinnipiac and Cornell have each continued the tradition.

"Whenever it works out schedule wise for us to have it be against Cornell, it's definitely a little extra meaningful because they're a program that has continued it all these years later," Alessi said.

That message for mental health, particularly in athletes, continues to ring true even 15 years after Do It For Daron began. Both Alessi and head coach Cass Turner discussed the "open door policy" that the coaching staff has built in Hamden.

"If something's on your mind, we want to be able to talk through it," Turner said.

It isn't just rhetoric either. Senior forward Alex Law discussed her own experience with mental health, and how important the available resources proved to be when she needed it.

"I mean just going through the injuries and stuff, like, mental health is so important, so we have so many resources here that help us with that," Law said. "I just encourage everyone to use it, which I've been using and it definitely gives me a better, like, positive outlook coming to the rink every day."

Alessi, along with the rest of the Bobcats, hope this continued support for DITD promotes others to seek help. According to Alessi, the sports world showing open support can only lessen the stigma surrounding mental health support, including for athletes.

"The more exposure it can get, the better," she said. "I think, you know, especially as athletes, we're always sure to get help physically when something's wrong. It's really easy to identify a physical injury and get the appropriate help for that. But I think mental health, you know, just doesn't have that same you know easy reaction to, yes like let's get help for that. It's not clear cut."

Turner and Alessi also highlighted how within the team, this isn't a role exclusive to the coaches. The culture that begins with the Bobcats' staff trickles down to the players, who are there for each other no matter the situation.

"I think just always being that person that anyone can kind of go to if they, you know, always need anything," senior forward Kahlen Lamarche said.

Whether it is the upperclassman providing that stable voice for squads' newcomers or newer players anchoring the old, the Bobcats practice what they preach in regards to promoting positive mental health services.

"The culture is so strong and they're always looking out for each other and not passing judgement if someone needs a day, you know, to take care of themselves," Alessi said.

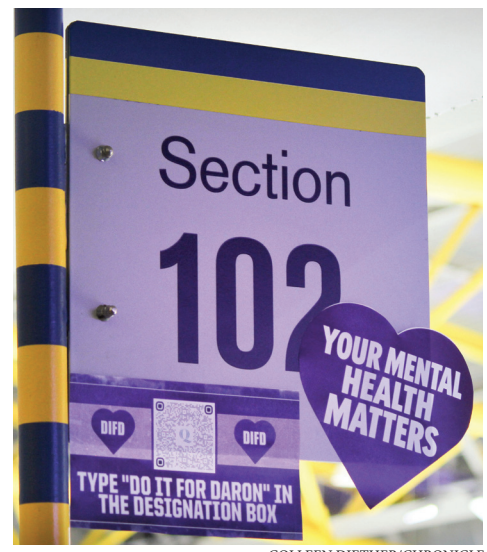
Advocating for Do It For Daron in particular remains a point of pride not only for the team, but for the Quinnipiac community rallying around the movement. Quinnipiac President Marie Hardin, who was in attendance for the contest, echoed that belief.

"It raises awareness of an issue that touches many more lives than we can imagine," Hardin said. "So to create a venue for people to recognize that is so incredibly important and I'm proud to be a part of a university that does."



COLLEEN DIETHER/CHRONICLE

Members of Quinnipiac women's ice hockey staff wore purple in support of Do It For Daron Nov. 6.



COLLEEN DIETHER/CHRONICLE

Signs and stickers adorn various signs around M&T Bank Arena supporting mental health Nov. 6.

"DIFD is something that's so special to us,"

– Cass Turner
WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY HEAD COACH



COLLEEN DIETHER/CHRONICLE

Freshman goaltender Natalia Dilbone wears a Do It For Daron patch while making a glove save against Cornell Nov. 6.