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Sacrifice and team-first mentality geared women's soccer to becoming Metro Champions

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In head coach Dave Clarke's 28 years at the helm of Quinnipiac women's soccer, he has made sure his teams are physically tough and committed to achieving team goals. This year's squad perfectly exemplifies what the result of total team buy-in could look like.

Sunday, Nov. 15, the Bobcats were crowned Metro Conference Champions after a thrilling penalty shootout win against the Fairfield Stags in a marathon of a match. The contest saw the Bobcats grow stronger as the match wore on, often tiring out the Stags and controlling the tempo.

This wasn't just a one-time occurrence. The Bobcats have been building up for this moment long before the championship contest.

"We go to the weight room three to four days a week; it's unheard of, but it helps our team grow as the season goes on," Clarke said after the Bobcats' 2-1 win over Marist Sept. 19.

Many squads across the nation don't see the benefit of overworking the weight room due to the fatigue it may cause. However, Clarke saw it as a way for the team to be at its strongest when it mattered the most.

"There may be some games early where our legs can be tired," Clarke said following a 1-0 win against Sacred Heart. "But the work we put in now can be rewarded later in the season."

But building a culture doesn't just take motivation from your head coach; it requires buy-in from the players, and Quinnipiac's star captain has led by example. Junior forward Addyson Earl feels she has the best leader of all in graduate student forward Morgan Cupo.

"She's always serious when it comes to soccer," Earl said following the Marist victory Sept. 19. "She works really hard for herself and others."

It doesn't just stop with Cupo; Clarke also mentioned the team's veteran leaders and their experience in these situations.

"You look at (senior defender) Anna (Bean), Addyson (Earl), (senior defender) Bianca (D'Onofrio). They've grown stronger with the program, so that's something we are trying to establish with the players who don't have that experience quite yet," Clarke said Oct. 29.



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Now that the Bobcats have built the culture of playing for one another, personal goals become team goals. Quinnipiac junior goalkeeper Olivia Jarvis mentioned some of the goals inside the Bobcat locker room during the course of the season.

"Our goal as a team is to win every chance we get," Jarvis said following a scoreless draw against Siena Oct. 31. "Everything I do is for my teammates, and everything they do is for our team as a whole."

The team-first mentality proved stronger as the regular season went on. Quinnipiac went 9-1-1 to end the regular season and held the No. 1 seed going into the Metro Conference Tournament.

The Bobcats knew that the final two games were going to be the hardest of the season. To be successful, Clarke emphasized to his players that there were certain things they needed to sacrifice if they wanted to become champions.

"I don't want the players going out on Halloween," Clarke said Oct. 31. "We were going to have training at 10 (a.m.) the next day; I was thinking of bumping it up to 8 (a.m.)."

Therefore, the lone focus going through the heads of Quinnipiac was working toward becoming champions.

Although setbacks came firing right at the Bobcats. In their semifinal matchup against Siena, the game consisted of not-ideal weather, with conditions making it hard for any sort of offense to be generated.

Cupo discussed how, in order to win these games, it was about sticking to Quinnipiac's identity.

"We had to go back to our principles," Cupo said following her game-winning goal against Siena Nov. 12. "The ways we found success, the way we have worked all year, make these wins possible."

Going into the championship game, Clarke went the extra mile to make himself prepared for one of the most important games in his tenure with the Bobcats.

"My job didn't finish until 3 a.m. this morning," Clarke said Nov. 15. "I can sleep next week; I can't leave any stone unturned."

Well, the extra preparation paid off. Quinnipiac won a grueling penalty shootout against Fairfield that punched its ticket to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2023. When talking to Clarke following the match, he could not be more proud of his team and all the sacrifices they made leading up to this moment.

"They didn't go out the night prior; the focus was on this game," Clarke said. "The girls should enjoy this moment; they've worked so hard for it, and I could not be more proud of them."

Well, this team identity has the Bobcats now set to gear up for the NCAA Tournament. Their first-round matchup will be all the way in "The City of Angels" to take on the UCLA Bruins on Saturday Nov. 21, with kick-off slated for 10 p.m.

Quinnipiac may have a daunting task ahead to try and beat some of the more high-profile teams in the country, but if there's one thing we've learned from this season, the Bobcats can trust themselves to make anything possible.