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### RUGBY from cover

"I came from a university who also cut both their rugby programs and this school, like, promised me more," Dunn said. "Promised me that it wouldn't be like that, and that, like, basically gave me faith in them, just for them to do it all again, not like, literally, a year later, I was sitting in the conference room as they're reading off the paper like just shocked, like I could not believe it was happening again."

All 28 athletes worked their whole lives to get to the pinnacle of college athletics, especially in a sport like rugby. Since rugby is not NCAA-sponsored, for athletes to compete at the Division I level, only a small number of colleges offer programs. As a result, many of Quinnipiac's athletes come from all over the country, making this decision that much harder on these athletes.

"Most of us are from very, very far away, so it's not like we can just go home and be with our families right now, like this is who we have and just like going through this process together," junior prop Grace Hinton said.

For these girls, the Bobcats' family-like community has made all the difference in supporting one another over the past couple of days.

"Just like trying to be there for the ones that, like, have families further away," Thomas said. "I live off campus, so we've opened up our house to like people coming over whenever they want to."

For Thomas, she was fortunate to have four years of a collegiate career. And in the midst of it all, she is spending her final weeks of senior year, being here for her teammates who won't get four years of rugby in Quinnipiac blue and gold.

"I wasn't a starter, like many people on the team," freshman hooker/flanker Marcela Aguilar-Martinez said. "This whole season, I've been working really hard to try to get that spot. And, like, even next year, like, I'm just, like, working really hard, and I just, like, now we just don't get to do that."

Similar to Aguilar-Martinez, freshman lock Carolyn Melody expresses the same frustration, after an injury during the fall sidelined her for most of the season.

"I was out for the rest of this season halfway through, and it opened my eyes to how grateful I am to be here and have that purpose, but also how quickly it can be," Melody said. "It's a matter of a play that can take you out, and in this case, it was a matter of people that decided to take it out."

For these girls, the effects of this decision stem further than rugby, with many accounting that they lack motivation during the final weeks of the academic year.

"I know it's only been three days, but for me, it feels like a lot," sophomore wing/scrum-half Layla Cox said. "I know for the team, it feels like a lot as well. I know I'm kind of not motivated to do any work, and I'm trying to just keep my head strong, but it's kind of really hard for me right now."

Melody recalls the moments after the news broke like a scene from combat.

"I've told people in the days following, it looks like a battle scene," Melody said. "Girls are laying across the field crying and on the phone with their parents."

When the news broke, the athletes received an email calling for a brief meeting, with many girls in class when the announcement was made. As a result, athletes in class received the news via email, telling them their program was being transitioned to club status.

"I was actually in class when I heard the news," Hinton said. "I found out via email while the rest of my teammates were in that meeting, and when I opened that email and read it in class, I immediately walked out, just began sobbing and called my mom to tell her that I was no longer a college athlete. I just couldn't believe it."

Additionally, with the transfer portal closing soon, these athletes are facing immense stress and pressure trying to find a place where they could continue playing rugby at the Division I level.

"The timing of this announcement limits our ability to transfer as roster spots and scholarships are taken up at other schools with portal set lines on July 1 and May 1, for our incoming players,

we must make life altering decisions under extreme duress," Thomas said.

For these girls now, it's all about spreading awareness and having their voices heard, not only to save their program, but the future of women's rugby.

"If Quinnipiac can do this to us, the longest standing women's rugby program, then who's to say that they can't do it to them?" Dunn said.

As rugby has continued to grow over the course of the last decade, these Bobcats hope there continues to be light at the end of the tunnel for their own program and their sport.

"We will get our program back, and this isn't the end for us," Hinton said. "This isn't the end for women's rugby, and it's not the end for women's sports."

### BECKY CARLSON

"(Becky's) the last person who deserves this, and she gives everything she has to this sport and the school represents it so well, and just to be treated like that is just insane," Dunn said.

Carlson, who's been an advocate for women's rugby, started as a player and has coached at Quinnipiac for the past 15 years. In Carlson's first year coaching at Quinnipiac, the team "became the second Division I NCAA rugby program in NCAA history," according to Quinnipiac Athletics.

"This program is coach Carlson's child," Perez said. "She built this from the ground up and she's been here for over a decade."

Prior to coming to Quinnipiac, Carlson conducted research for over 30 NCAA schools looking to add women's rugby.

"Quinnipiac currently remains the only NCAA women's rugby program in the nation to begin without a prior existing club program," according to Quinnipiac Athletics.

### ALUMNI

Along with the petition, alumni are constantly working to spread awareness and push for reinstatement. Former players are calling and emailing several involved parties, including Amodio, Fraser and Hardin.

Sands took to TikTok to spread awareness, posting videos about the situation and calling on others to sign the petition.

But Sands notes that this isn't the only responsibility for alumni.

"We are trying to do everything that we can to help support the current students because I cannot imagine the position they are in to have to speak and do all these other things on top trying to make a decision if they stay or not," Sands said. "So as an alum, I think we especially need to take more of the burden of taking as much off their plate as possible."

When Sands found out the team was being demoted, she was in 'disbelief' yet 'in a way not shocking.'

Sands isn't the only alumna using her platform to spread awareness regarding the situation, with former Bobcat center Ilona Maher '17 speaking out against the decision.

Mahe, who led Quinnipiac to three consecutive titles between 2015 and 2017, took to her Instagram shortly after the decision was announced, posting a screenshot of the press release, writing, "Shame on you @quathletics @quinnipiac."

### 'I FELT WE WERE LIKE THE UGLY STEP SISTERS'

Even with several national championships under their belt, several current and former rugby athletes have not felt support from the university, even before the recent news.

"I felt we were like the ugly stepsisters when it came to anything Quinnipiac Athletics, we were always just the thorn in their ass," Sands said. "Even when we'd win it'd be like 'fine you won cool.'"

During Sands' sophomore fall semester, the rugby team was left without their own field, with theirs being given to field hockey.

"We just won a national championship, the school's first ever national championship and we didn't have a field," Sands said. "And then we went on to win another one and we didn't have sufficient bleachers."

Carlson has always been an advocate for

women's rugby and for women's sports at Quinnipiac — but some wonder if that outspokenness is a cause of the demotion.

"Coach Carlson is very outspoken and always would fight for us and because of that there was always this fear at least in us athletes of retaliation," Sands said. "It is still very shocking don't get me wrong, but out of all the sports, it doesn't shock me that they did this to women's rugby because of how outspoken Coach Carlson is for women's sports and how outspoken she is for women's rugby."

Since the news broke, the athletes still haven't felt support from athletics.

"(Fraser) does not answer my calls nor does Greg, which also goes to show his only involvement in women's rugby was to tell us our program was cut and has no further answers for us," Hartman said.

### PETITION AND GOFUNDME

Just hours after the news broke, former assistant coach Colleen Doherty created the petition "Reinstate Women's Rugby at Quinnipiac University" which has reached over 23,700 signatures at the time of publication.

"Quinnipiac University's recent announcement of athletics realignment cites long-term financial sustainability, competitive success, and Title IX compliance as guiding priorities," Doherty wrote. "However, the decision to eliminate the women's rugby program directly contradicts these stated goals and undermines a program that has been central to Quinnipiac's national identity, athletic success, and leadership in women's sports."

The petition quickly circulated across social media platforms and reached 10,000 signatures in just 24 hours.

A GoFundMe to reinstate the team was also created by Lamborn.

She highlights that "women's rugby at Quinnipiac is one of the least financially burdensome programs at \$128,000 per year."

At the time of publication, there are 107 donations for a total of over \$11,300 raised.

### OUTSIDE SUPPORTERS

On Saturday morning, Sacred Heart University women's rugby head coach Michelle Reed took to Instagram to share her heartbreak, sadness and support for Quinnipiac rugby.

For Reed, Quinnipiac rugby has a special place in her heart as her and Carlson's friendship goes back to playing college rugby together.

"(She's) one of my closer friends who I played with in college and we coached together at Quinnipiac and helped build that program," Reed said. "It was a whole circle moment that I really enjoyed and two days later it was torn down when Quinnipiac decided to demote its varsity program to club."

Reed goes on to express her sadness that Quinnipiac would tear down a program that not only brought three national champions to Hamden but also an Olympian.

"We need to sign the petition," Reed said. "We need to sign the petition that Colleen Doherty put together to save and reinstate Quinnipiac rugby. Please do whatever you can, repost, sign, talk on social media about how this is wrong. We need Quinnipiac rugby back."

In addition to nearby coaches, Quinnipiac has received immense support from programs across the nation.

"I've reached out to teams in California, and they're giving us support," Hartman said.

April 12th, Quinnipiac hosted its Quinnipiac 7s Tournament, with the Bobcats facing off against teams from Sacred Heart, West Point and Navy.

"I was in Hamden, playing in the Quinnipiac 7s Tournament on Sunday (April 12)," Navy head coach Murph McCarthy said.

That tournament took place only three days before Quinnipiac announced it would demote the program's status to club, evoking confusion from coaches like McCarthy, who found the atmosphere at Quinnipiac to be lively around rugby.

"Everybody's confused because rugby's growing, women's rugby even more specifically, is growing quickly," McCarthy said.