Volleyball ready to compete, despite "growing pains"

By JAMES NOLAN
Staff Writer

Following their loss to Rider in the semifinals of the conference tournament, Quinnipiac volleyball saw nine players leave between graduation and the transfer portal.

Head coach Kyle Robinson is tasked with a tough rebuild, as the last remaining pillars of his 2022 MAAC Championship team have now departed the program. Their resumes are littered with All-MAAC selections, yearly awards and program records.

Those remaining accounted for under a fifth of the team's points during last year's campaign. Despite the volume of the losses, the head coaches of the freshly renamed Metro Conference voted the Bobcats as the preseason No. 2 team, even garnering a first-place vote.

The lack of returning production could explain the poor start. Through the initial two weeks of the season, the Bobcats are 1-4.

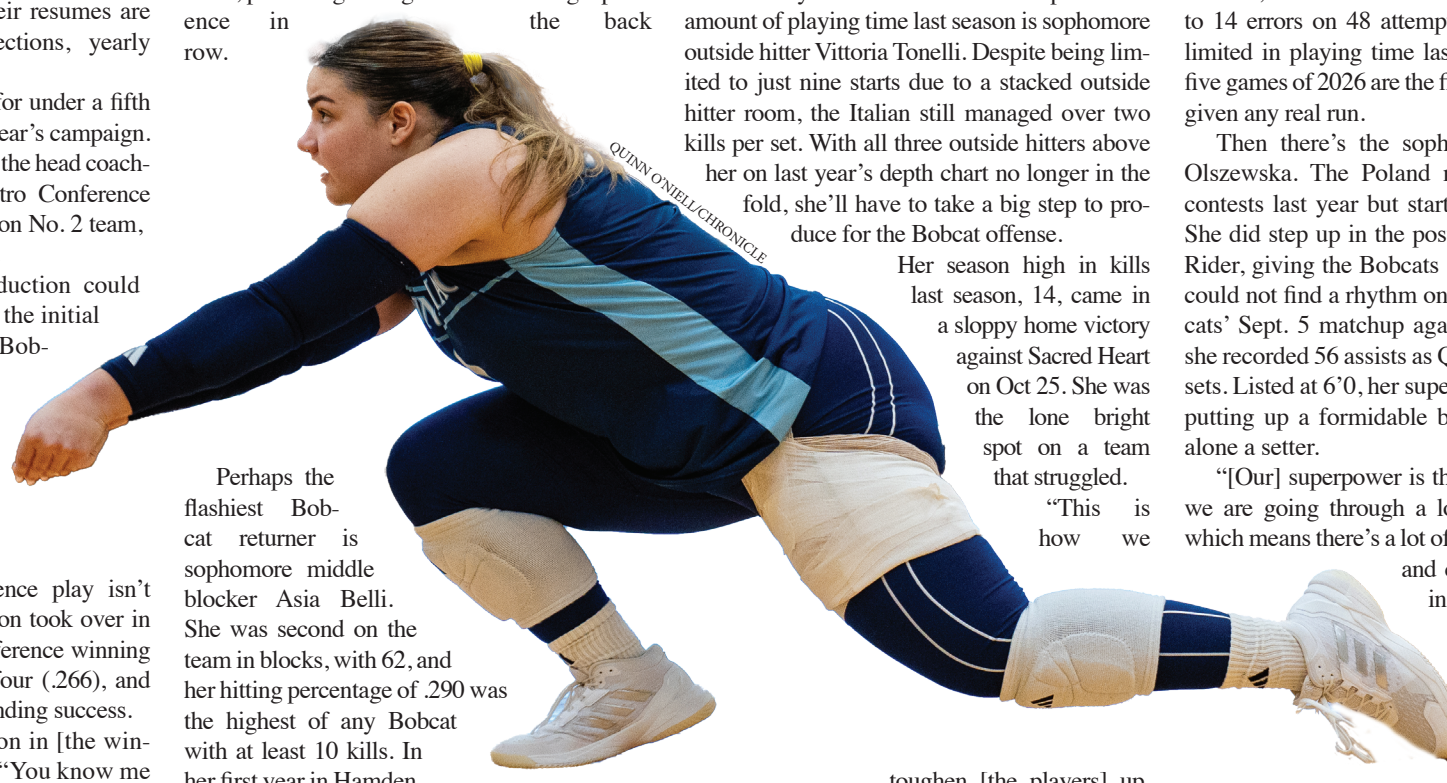
"At this point in the season, I'm almost expecting it," Robinson said. "Especially with such a young team… I'm expecting there to be a lot of growing pains."

Struggling in out-of-conference play isn't exactly abnormal. Since Robinson took over in 2019, his teams have a non-conference winning percentage barely over one in four (.266), and that's never stopped him from finding success.

"Stock? I'm not putting a ton in [the win-loss column]," Robinson said. "You know me enough… I don't put a lot of stock into it, almost ever."

The Bobcats don't have a single senior on the team. The two juniors from last year's team, outside hitter Leilani-kai Giusta and opposite Cynthia Skenderi, both entered the transfer portal. Giusta will play her senior season at Georgia State, and Skenderi, seemingly, will not play college volleyball in 2026.

Junior libero Carola Negron Diaz has the most experience of any returning Bobcat. In a year and a half as the starting libero, she has averaged 3.18 digs per set, totaling 525. She played in all but one of the Bobcats' matches in 2025, providing a great stabilizing presence in the back row.


QUINN O'NEILL/CHRONICLE

Perhaps the flashiest Bobcat returner is sophomore middle blocker Asia Belli. She was second on the team in blocks, with 62, and her hitting percentage of .290 was the highest of any Bobcat with at least 10 kills. In her first year in Hamden, she brought a dynamic new approach to the middle blocker position, combining speed, agility and varying attack routes.

"She's just a really good volleyball player," Robinson said about Belli. "When you have a middle that can come in and score on both sides, offense and defense, score from the service line, that's really big in our sport."

Belli's impact goes beyond her on court presence, as Robinson explained. "She's a great attitude on the court. She's very mature. [She] displays a lot of leadership qualities that has been stabilizing for our team."

The only other returner with a prominent amount of playing time last season is sophomore outside hitter Vittoria Tonelli. Despite being limited to just nine starts due to a stacked outside hitter room, the Italian still managed over two kills per set. With all three outside hitters above her on last year's depth chart no longer in the fold, she'll have to take a big step to produce for the Bobcat offense.

Her season high in kills last season, 14, came in a sloppy home victory against Sacred Heart on Oct 25. She was the lone bright spot on a team that struggled.

"This is how we toughen [the players] up, right? We throw you in the deep end and teach you how to swim," Robinson said after the game.

Last year, he had the luxury of choosing when to toss a player with less experience into the "deep end." That's not quite the case this year.

Tonellis' counterparts at outside hitter look to be freshman Giulia Ragusa and sophomore Sahra Ozbiltekin. Ragusa leads the team in kills and attempts through the first two weekends of play. Ozbiltekin has struggled in the early going, tallying 28 hitting errors to just 36 kills for a rather inefficient hitting percentage of .075.

Her twin, sophomore opposite Azra Ozbiltekin, has faced a similar issue, with 17 kills to 14 errors on 48 attempts. Both sisters were limited in playing time last season, so the first five games of 2026 are the first time they've been given any real run.

Then there's the sophomore setter, Klara Olszewska. The Poland native played in 18 contests last year but started in none of them. She did step up in the postseason game versus Rider, giving the Bobcats 15 assists when they could not find a rhythm on offense. In the Bobcats' Sept. 5 matchup against Delaware State, she recorded 56 assists as Quinnipiac fell in five sets. Listed at 6'0, her superpower is her height, putting up a formidable block for anyone, let alone a setter.

"[Our] superpower is that we are young and we are going through a lot of growing pains, which means there's a lot of really good dialogue and conversations," Robinson said. "I think, like anything, you need the pressure, you need the adversity, to get better.'

The Bobcats return to action against the University of Pennsylvania at the Lafayette Invitational on Sept. 12 at 6:00 p.m. They'll open conference play two weeks after, traveling to take on the Iona Gaels on Sept. 25.

Field hockey handed frustrating 2-1 loss against Bucknell

By NOAH KIM
Staff Writer

Off the heels of an up-and-down opening weekend for Quinnipiac field hockey, winning 2-1 against the Bryant Bulldogs, then losing 3-0 to the Vermont Catamounts, the Bobcats turned their attention to the undefeated Bucknell Bison. After a hard fought, defense heavy game, the Bison came out on top with a 2-1 win.

The game marked the season debut for Quinnipiac's top returning scorer, sophomore forward Rozemarijn Van Keulen, who notched eight goals and four assists in her freshman campaign. The Bobcats also entered with reigning NEC Offensive Player of the Week and Rookie of the Week, freshman forward Evelyn Henderson, who recorded an assist and the game-winning goal against Bryant. Though for most of the game, Van Keulen, Henderson, and the rest of the Bobcats were held out of the offensive zone completely as Bucknell controlled play.

EMILY MARQUIS/CHRONICLE

Quinnipiac appeared to get the fast start and establish pressure, but could not find opportunities to test senior goalkeeper Sarah Althouse. After spending roughly the first six and a half minutes on defense, the Bison broke free and stayed on the attack for most of the first quarter.

Bucknell put the most pressure on the Bobcats through penalty corners, in which they drew four in the first quarter. Two big kick saves by Quinnipiac freshman goalkeeper Meike van Schoot and a shot off the post by Bucknell senior defender Julia Corropolese saw the Bison fail to convert on all four chances.

Quinnipiac's best chance of the first came off sophomore midfielder Charlie Caunter elevating the ball onto her stick and maneuvering around her defender, though she could not find a way past Althouse.

With just under three minutes left in the first, Quinnipiac freshman defender Senne Fassbender was called for a green card, sending her off for two minutes. Despite being down a player, the Bobcats' defense held to the end of the quarter, the score still 0-0.

Quinnipiac once again opened the second quarter with some pressure on Bucknell, but a chance for Henderson was blocked by the Bison. A quick Bucknell breakaway for junior forward Bella Notaro quickly put Quinnipiac back on defense, with senior defender Katie Shanahan able to break up the chance for Notaro. With just under six minutes gone, the Bison were awarded their fifth penalty corner. Van Schoot was able to make another kick save on the initial shot, but junior midfielder Sally Hunter found the ball and chipped it past Van Schoot to make it 1-0 Bucknell.

The Bobcats were able to hold off Bucknell for the rest of the quarter, and with nine minutes elapsed, Quinnipiac was awarded their first penalty corner of the game. A hard shot by freshman midfielder Julia Lutz missed the net, and Quinnipiac remained off the board. Junior midfielder Jule Hoefer, senior forward Ava Bleier and Van Keulen combined for another chance later in the period with a few solid passes to get up the field, but the Bison defense broke it up.

With just over a minute and a half to go in the quarter, a yellow card on Fassbender forced her to sit for five minutes, but the Bobcats again rose to the defensive task, denying two quick Bucknell penalty corners.

The third quarter finally saw momentum swing in favor of Quinnipiac. Senior forward Martina Calveira found Van Keulen and she ripped a shot past Althouse to tie the game at 1-1 just about 30 seconds into the quarter. After that, Bucknell dug in again and continued to challenge the Quinnipiac defense with chance after chance. It culminated with a pass from senior forward Ryane Fisahn evading a Bobcat defender and finding Notaro, who beat van Schoot to give Bucknell the lead back.

The fourth quarter saw desperation creep in for the Bobcats, and with it some of their best offensive chances of the day. Despite Bucknell opening the quarter with Fisahn just missing a potential tip-in goal in front of van Schoot, Quinnipiac seemed to be the one able to mount more pressure throughout the final frame.

Just over four minutes in, the Bobcats missed a great chance as the Bison won a scramble in front of Althouse's net and cleared the ball away. A few minutes later, graduate midfielder Lauren Keyte took the ball in with Hofer and Van Keulen and challenged the Bison, but came up empty handed. With just over six minutes left, Quinnipiac went to an extra attacker to try to put more pressure on Bucknell and find the equalizer as they pulled van Schoot.

After more back-and-forth action, the Bobcats nearly broke through as Caunter found Calveira on a breakaway after stickhandling away from her defender, but a golden opportunity for Bleier in front of the net came up empty.

With just over a minute and a half to go, Lutz drew Quinnipiac's second penalty corner of the game, giving the Bobcats another chance to tie. Henderson took the shot and it trickled past Althouse and found Caunter, but a heads-up block by Corropolese denied the tying goal, and with it secured the win for Bucknell.

Some of the Bobcats' frustration from the tight game was apparent as the final buzzer sounded. Lutz quickly took up discussion with the referee, which led to her being issued a red card postgame.

With the loss, Quinnipiac drops to 1-2 on the season and will look to bounce back against the Brown Bears in Providence, Rhode Island, Sunday, Oct. 6. The game will start at 2 p.m.