A young, but promising volleyball team is holding its own in early Metro slate

By JAMES NOLAN
Staff Writer

It's not much of a secret that 2026 is a rebuilding year for Quinnipiac women's volleyball. The team features zero seniors and only two returning starters. It has three newcomers who have started at least 11 games already.

Yet, the lack of experience has not translated to a lack of success. Through the first five games of conference play, the Bobcats have managed a winning record of 3-2, which puts them tied for fifth in the Metro alongside Sacred Heart and Iona.

It's oddly reminiscent of the 2022 team that wound up winning the conference championship with a roster that was, at the time, very young in their own right. Even that team didn't get out of the gate this hot, as they started 1-6.

They've also been primarily without the help of their longest-tenured player, junior libero Carola Negron Diaz. An injury has kept her out for the entirety of conference play thus far, last appearing in the Bobcats Sept. 20 contest against Binghamton.

Negron Diaz stepped into the role of starting libero during her 2024 freshman campaign, appearing in all but four contests in 2025. She led the team with 344 digs and 3.41 digs per set.

In her absence, freshman libero Didar Bulbul has played every Metro game so far as the defensive specialist. She's been great defensively, according to Robinson.

"Didar is this young, kind of wild (player)," Robinson said following the Bobcats 3-2 comeback victory over Merrimack on Sept. 29. "What's the cartoon?... The Tasmanian Devil."

Now, "wild" in this context is actually praise. By comparing her to the Looney Tunes character, Robinson is saying that she is inexplicably everywhere on the court, always ready to "go in for a quick dig."

Her defensive work has greatly helped the offensive unit, particularly the Bobcat middle blockers: sophomore Asia Belli and junior transfer Sila Yildiz. Both have been extremely efficient hitters and integral to the Bobcats' plan when it comes to scoring points.

Belli dazzled last season, starting as a first-year, but has really come into her own as the focal point of this team. Yildiz is a transfer from Laramie County Community College, where she was named first-team National Junior College.



AMBER EDWARDS/CHRONICLE

Quinnipiac volleyball huddles up before a set against Merrimack Sept. 29.

Both rank top ten in the conference in hitting percentage with Belli in third place with a .366 clip and Yildiz at ninth, hitting .291. Robinson had nothing but praise for the duo that has started every set this season.

"To get our middles involved the way we are now is what we've been begging for the past few years. I mean, look at Asia," he said. With a smile, he continued. "Sila, right? (She's a) danger."

Volleyball can be difficult because of how greatly each facet of the game impacts another. To get a good hit, you need a good set, which comes from a good pass. The middle set in particular requires a borderline perfect pass to run a good ball.

"I think it's pretty obvious: when we set our middles we're a much better team," Robinson said.

The defense of Bulbul has played a major part in getting the middle involved in the way Robinson wants. And the one bridging the gap between pass and swing has been sophomore setter Klara Olszewska.

After serving as the backup her first year, Olszewska has started against all five Metro opponents. She's averaged 9.32 assists per set in those conference games, the third best mark amongst all Metro setters.

"Klara is a dream setter," Robinson said. "She's got the height, she's got the hands."

Despite her early season success, Robinson still believes there's room for her to develop even further.

"She'll have these moments where her set intent isn't as clear as it maybe was a set before," he said. "That's partly youth."

That's just the nature of the beast in college athletics. The Bobcats lost a really impactful crop of players after last season, but the new look Bobcats seem up to the task of picking up the momentum of this program.

"We're fighting these wars of getting better, but still being so young," Robinson said.

The next test will be a homestand on Oct. 9 and 10, hosting the Siena Saints and Marist Red Foxes, who are both tied for second place in the Metro at 4-1.

If the Bobcats make a statement this weekend, they can cement themselves as contenders to reach the conference tournament for the eleventh consecutive year.

Not in spite of their youth, but because it allows them the opportunity to grow, learn and improve.

Field hockey needs to keep the ball rolling to thrive in NEC play

By REX NAYLOR
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After starting the 2026 season with one win and three losses, Quinnipiac field hockey has flipped the script, going on a four-game win streak before its contest against the Wagner Seahawks on Friday Oct. 2. The Bobcats' performance in 2025 conference play was inconsistent, yet the tune has changed around field hockey this season at Quinnipiac.

The Bobcats were predicted to finish second behind Wagner in the NEC, as they currently sit fourth just three games in. As the leaves begin to turn and the fall air gets crisper, the Bobcats find themselves in a crucial point in their season.

Before their blowout win against Rider Sunday, Sept. 27, Quinnipiac won three straight games 2-1, including overtime thrillers against Hofstra and Sacred Heart.

"They're doing things I usually don't see until October with their possession and off ball movement…grit is one of our core values," head coach Nina Klein said.

What Quinnipiac is doing this early in the season has set a standard that hasn't been lowered yet and will only continue to rise with the hunt for the NEC championship.

The off-ball movement has allowed Quinnipiac to play more freely without relying on long-ball aerials to generate offensive momentum, and in turn, scoring chances. This season Quinnipiac has maintained control through the midfield and generated opportunities methodically rather than sporadically using counter attacks.

Quinnipiac's offensive depth has been a key contributor to the Bobcats having scored 17 goals in their nine games so far. Although Quinnipiac got off to a slow start, the offensive depth erupted in late September.

Senior forward Martina Calveira and sophomore forward Rozsemarijn Vvan Keulen both registered multi-goal games against Rider and Columbia respectively, keeping the win streak alive.

The 17 goals have come from eight different sticks and four Bobcats have with multiple goals in their account. Two Bobcats already have double-digit point totals as there is no one outlet for the Bobcats' success, rather a well oiled machine that relies on balance.

Senior forward Ava Bleier is one of the leaders on the team, recording while she has the second most goals in the NEC, including the overtime winner against Hofstra.

"I honestly kind of blacked out," Bleier said. "We've been knocking on the door, and I knew one would fall eventually."

Bleier is just one piece of the three-pronged attack as Van Keulen leads the team with 11 points and Calveira boasts 10 points as the attack's top shot generators.

Van Keulen and Calveira are first and third in points respectively in the NEC this season with Bleier sitting in the top 10 as well. The offensive firepower is a big boost to the Bobcats as any one of them can have an immediate impact on any contest no matter the opponent.

Compared to opening stretches of prior seasons, this Quinnipiac team has been able to secure several wins in close games. A big part of that success has been freshman goalkeeper Meike van Schoot.

The Amsterdam native has stepped into the starting role seamlessly with a .789 save percentage which ranks first among all NEC goalkeepers. Van Schoot breeds confidence into the rest of the team as they are comfortable with a brick wall behind them.



EMILY MARQUIS/CHRONICLE

Around the same time last season, Quinnipiac had a .720 save percentage from their netminders and had yet to win a conference game.

When asked about van Schoot, Klein said, "She's so mature and poised in there…our center back and our goalkeeper, I think they're just really a stronghold for us. They're so poised."

The Dutch connection spreads to the defense and midfield, as sophomore defender Maaike van Wensen has become a large part of Quinnipiac's success along with sophomore midfielder Charlie Caunter and freshman midfielder Julia Lutz.

The Dutch connection works off each other in transitions and acts as the team's stronghold on the defensive side of the game proving invaluable to one another.

Along with her conference leading save percentage, van Schoot has earned the NEC Defensive Player of the Week honor twice, highlighted by her 18-save performance against Brown — the most saves by a Quinnipiac goalkeeper in a single match since 2011.

As the Bobcats navigate the rest of the season they need to continue utilizing their offensive power as well as continuing their strong defensive record. The ball needs to keep rolling as the four straight wins prove why this team can go the distance come postseason action.

Quinnipiac will make the trip to Brookville, New York in a contest against Long Island University on Friday, Oct. 9. The game is scheduled for 1 p.m.