

EMILY MARQUIS/ CHRONICLE

Avery Bairos’ story of survival

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What would you do after hearing life-changing medical news?

Most people are forced to reckon with that question in the later stages of life. A small portion of people are forced to do it before they hit their 20s, forever changing the course of their lives in their formative years.

Quinnipiac women’s ice hockey junior forward Avery Bairos is one of those people.

At 18 years old, midway through her first year as a Bobcat, Bairos was hit with news that rocked her to her core and put into question her future as a hockey player.

“It made me kind of second-guess and be unsure what the future would look like,” Bairos said.

Fourteen months later, she lifted the ECAC trophy as a champion.

To understand Bairos’ journey of survival and perseverance, you have to go back to the day that it happened. Not with a spectacular performance, but a practice that felt like any other.

In January 2025, Bairos was doing what she does best: putting pucks in the back of the net at M&T Bank Arena. Once she skated off, she realized something was off in her right arm. It wasn’t soreness or exhaustion, but something she couldn’t put her finger on.

It wasn’t until she took off her pads and saw her arm swollen to nearly double its normal size before she realized that something was wrong.

She talked to the team trainer. Then a doctor. Soon, she was in a nearby clinic getting an ultrasound on her arm to figure out what exactly was wrong.

It was there when she heard the news that no 18-year-old expects: she had a blood clot.

“Right then and there, when you hear the word blood clot, it’s pretty scary,” Bairos said.

Upon further examination, the doctors would figure out her rib and collarbone were compressing a vein, something that carried a heavy clotting risk if left untreated. The fix? Two surgeries. One to remove the clot and one to remove two-thirds of her rib causing the pinch.

“I’ve never heard of that surgery happening to someone before,” Bairos said.

Although Bairos was over 2,000 miles away from her family in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, she wasn’t alone that night. Two of her teammates, junior forward Bryn Prier and junior defenseman Aynsley D’Ottavio, were right by her side for the entire experience.

Nearly two years later, Bairos is still grateful for their company during that time.

“They were there with me that whole night, which meant the world to me,” Bairos said. “It’s super special to share the ice with them, but to have that relationship with them and just to know that they have my back in all situations means a lot.”

After a long process involving coaches, medical staff and trainers at Quinnipiac, a plan was reached. Bairos would have both surgeries successfully and start a long road to recovery; one that brought a new set of challenges.

The first came shortly after the second surgery. There, Bairos says, reality had finally started to settle in. This wasn’t going away. By her own account, it was the most challenging part mentally of the entire experience.

“I was still in a lot of pain, and the whole sense of it was kind of real; this just happened,” Bairos said. “This is going to be a big hurdle for me to come back from.”

Bairos spent much of her time away from the ice in the gym, rebuilding her strength while her teammates played the game she loved without her.

“That kind of felt like I was isolated from the team,” she said.

Never has an inch and a quarter of frozen water with painted lines meant more to anyone.

The physical rehab was demanding. But separation from the sport she had played her entire life with the girls who had now become her chosen family? That was even harder.

“That’s a tough part of the game, not being able to be on the ice and play the sport you love,” she said.

Whether it was the mental or physical aspect of getting back to the game she loves, she was supported. Turner and her staff checked in regularly to make sure she was okay, and teammates sent cards. Whenever Bairos walked into the rink, she was met with the same thing: people happy to see her.

“That uplifting presence meant the world to me,” Bairos said.

It’s that exact kindness that Bairos aims to show when the shoe is on the other foot.

“You don’t really know exactly what someone is going through,” she said. “If I can lend some support to someone else on my team who’s going through an injury, that can be a really good thing.”

After months of grinding in the gym and watching from the bench while her teammates soared on the ice, Bairos was finally cleared to return to action. When she stepped onto the ice for the first time since being sidelined, she felt whole.

“I just remember feeling so happy and free,” she said. “Just kind of able to have that piece of myself back again.”

On the other side of the coin, Bairos came back to the ice wanting to prove you could go through hard times, but it’s about coming back stronger. Not only did Bairos come back stronger, but at just the right time.

Despite only recording four goals in her sophomore campaign, three of them came in the Bobcats’ postseason run. None more critical than the rebound heard around the world.

Facing the Princeton Tigers in the ECAC Semifinals, the Bobcats had settled into yet another duel with the co-regular season champions. Four minutes into overtime, Bairos drove down the ice with one Tiger jersey in front of her. Shooting the puck off the pad of Tiger senior goaltender Uma Cornier, Bairos buried the rebound and sent the Bobcats to the championship game.

A little over a year since she was sidelined, Bairos had just sent the Bobcats to the ECAC Championship game for the first time in a decade. How did Bairos feel?

“Honestly, just pure joy,” she said. “There were a lot of emotions at that time, so I pretty much just blacked out.”

The next night, Bairos struck again, scoring what would become the game-winning goal and helping the Bobcats defeat their rivals from Whitney Ave., in the Yale Bulldogs 5-1 en route to their first conference title since 2016.

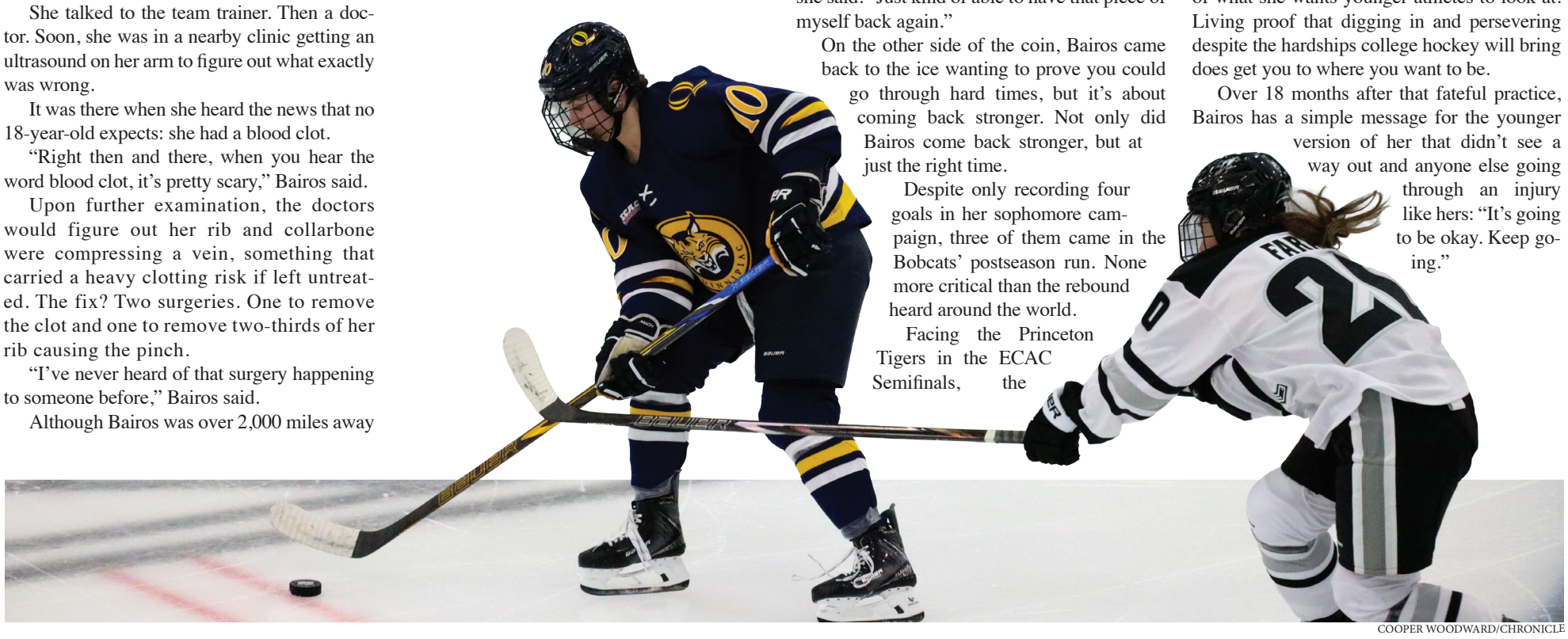
“There’s no better feeling than lifting that trophy and celebrating with that team,” Bairos said. “It was kind of like a relief to be like, ‘wow, we did it, and we finally won.’”

That relief doesn’t come without resilience. It’s something that has defined Bairos ever since her injury and something that is admired by the Bobcats’ head coach Cass Turner.

“Just a commitment to be in the process,” Turner said. “There’s a lot of moments that have come her way that she could have decided to go on the wrong track for a while.”

Turner further described her as the picture of what she wants younger athletes to look at. Living proof that digging in and persevering despite the hardships college hockey will bring does get you to where you want to be.

Over 18 months after that fateful practice, Bairos has a simple message for the younger version of her that didn’t see a way out and anyone else going through an injury like hers: “It’s going to be okay. Keep going.”



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