



The goaltending dilemma of Quinnipiac ice hockey

By COOPER WOODWARD
Sports Editor

Quinnipiac men's and women's ice hockey have a goaltender problem, but not in the way you may think.

While programs across the country would fight tooth and nail to have one talented and high caliber netminder, each Quinnipiac program has a pair of goaltenders who have shown great prowess in the early stages of the season.

For the men, it's two newcomers: freshman Christian Kirsch and junior Rorke Applebee.

For the women, it's a pair of athletes who have yet to play collegiate hockey prior to this season, needing to step up and fill the void of one of the country's best goaltenders: freshman Natalia Dilbone and sophomore Casey Clausen.

With the first two weekends of the season in the books, let's look at their performances:

KIRSCH VS APPLEBEE

Having two high caliber goaltenders isn't a new thing for the men's ice hockey program. In its 2025-26 campaign, it was former netminders Matej Marinov and Dylan Silverstein who split time anchoring the Bobcat net.

Last season, head coach Rand Pecknold platooned Marinov and Silverstein for nearly all of the regular season. With a team that had experienced consistent improvements across the board, goaltending remained the one major question mark.

With Marinov departing Hamden for professional hockey in Slovakia and Silverstein heading to the University of Vermont, Quinnipiac has brought in two solid contenders to bring a permanent end to the debate of starting goaltender with Kirsch and Applebee.

"They're both really good," Pecknold said during preseason media.

Kirsch comes to Hamden with a litany of experience in Canadian junior hockey winning the Memorial Cup for the Kitchener Rangers of the Ontario Hockey League. Applebee on the other hand comes to Hamden having spent two seasons at Lake Superior State. Despite the variety in backgrounds, both have adjusted to the Bobcat culture well.

"They're both so willing to learn," senior forward and captain Mason Marcellus said in a preseason interview. "They do all the extra work so it's really exciting to see them come in and strive."

In the Bobcats season opening weekend against New Hampshire and Merrimack, Pecknold opted to once again send out a platoon. Kirsch would start Friday, Oct. 2. Against New Hampshire and Applebee would start Saturday, Oct. 10 against Merrimack.

In the contest against the Wildcats, Kirsch held his own with a 21 save performance successfully backstopping the Bobcats to a 10-2 win.

The next night, Applebee faced a higher caliber offense in Merrimack but kept out 25 shots en route to the Bobcats 6-3 win over the Warriors.

On Oct. 9 and Oct. 10, Quinnipiac would travel up to Orono, Maine to battle against another Hockey East opponent in the Maine Black Bears. Traveling to Alfond Arena is no easy task, as it has given the Bobcats trouble in nearly every matchup.

"This environment's really hard to win in," senior forward Mason Marcellus said after the first contest. "(The student section) is pretty loud for obvious reasons."

Pecknold repeated the pattern from the weekend before, starting Kirsch in game one. During that game, he faced adversity early on but came back and dominated the next 57 minutes of play. By the time the final buzzer rang, Kirsch had recorded his second career win and tallied 33 saves in the process.

"Shoutout (Kirsch) for having our back for the entire 60 (minutes)," Marcellus said postgame.

Applebee started Oct. 11, however it was a different story.

If you look past the 5-3 Quinnipiac loss, you'll see a performance from Applebee that should keep him in the running for that starting position as most of the goals let through were simply out of his hands.

In Maine's third goal of the contest it was a defensive blunder that allowed junior Black Bear defenseman Isa Parekhh to have nothing but open ice in front of him to bury the puck past Applebee. In their ensuing fourth goal, another defensive blunder allowed for more Maine jerseys than Bobcat jerseys in front of Applebee's crease and the first Black Bear goal for junior forward Lee Parks.

Pecknold didn't place the blame for the loss solely on Applebee, but rather an issue with the effort of the entire roster.

"We didn't have great buy-in," Pecknold said after the loss Oct. 10.

Looking ahead, the Bobcats have another trio of tough opponents to round out their nonconference schedule, traveling to Happy Valley, Pennsylvania to play the Penn State Nittany Lions before traveling back to Hamden to face Army Oct. 23 and the Providence Friars Oct. 31.

If finality is to come to who will be the starting goaltender, it will come against these final three non-conference opponents.

CLAUSEN VS DILBONE

With last season's starting netminder, sophomore Felicia Frank, out with an injury for the first part of the season, the starting position became open. After an offseason full of long deliberations, head coach Cass Turner started the Bobcats 2026-27 campaign with Clausen anchoring the cage.

Despite being the redshirt fourth-string goaltender to Frank, Calli Hogarth '26 and Tatum Blacker '26, Clausen kept grinding and improving when the spotlight wasn't on her. It was those strides she made between year one and two that gave Turner the confidence to start the Queensboro, N.Y, native.

"I think we have a great goaltending team which I'm really excited about, when you have depth at that position," Turner said after the Bobcats 10-0 win versus Post Oct. 6.

In her first career start against the Maine University Black Bears, Clausen held her own. Despite facing adversity in the first period, she stood firm and finished the night with 34 saves and her first collegiate win.

She would follow that performance up with another 20-save night, backstopping the Bobcats en route to a 4-1 win and a weekend sweep of the Black Bears.

"She had an unreal game," Turner said after the win. "She was really solid, poised and very impressive."

She would make another start in the first half of the home-and-home series against the Providence Friars Oct. 2. It was a more relaxing night at the office this time around, making only six saves en route to a 3-1 Bobcat win.

In the second half of that series, Turner decided to give Dilbone an opportunity in net. She took it and ran with it, corralling 14 of the 15 Friar shots en route to a 6-1 Bobcat victory and her first collegiate win.

Three days later, Dilbone got the start once again against Post, recording a clean sheet in the Bobcats 10-0 win.

"Natalia's a great goaltender," Turner said after the game. "She's always been a competitor…It was nice for her to get another win today."

Yet another scenario where two goalies have proven themselves against high quality competition, making the decision for Turner on who will anchor the net much more difficult.

When asked about how she feels playing in front of two different goaltenders for the first five games of the 2026 campaign, junior defensemen Aynsley D'Ottavio kept it simple.

"100% trust," she said.

Both teams have high aspirations when it comes to postseason success, as the women's team aims to make the Frozen Four for the first time in its history, while the men's team looks to get back to the Frozen Four for the first time since its national championship season in 2023.

Trust will take both of the ice hockey programs to the promised land. Trust that their netminder will get back up after being knocked down. Trust that even if they do make a mistake, their teammate will be there to back them up. Most importantly, trust that they will do everything in their power to give them as much success as possible heading into the bulk of their respective seasons.