Quinnipiac men's basketball welcomes four new faces to round out 2026-27 staff

By COOPER WOODWARD
Sports Editor

Quinnipiac men's basketball recently announced four new additions to its coaching staff, finalizing the bench for its upcoming 2026-27 season.

Tom Parotta was first named as an assistant coach back in May, coming to Hamden after a stint as an assistant coach for the Hofstra University Pride and reuniting with head coach Tom Pecora. In his second stint as an assistant, Parotta helped lead the Pride to a 24-win season and a Coastal Athletic Association (CAA) championship in 2025-26.

"Coach Pecora is a very special person to me and my family, and I can't thank him enough for extending this opportunity to reunite after all these years," Parrotta said in a press release. "This really feels like things have come full circle for me…I love this conference, and I am incredibly grateful to be back."

Pecora would then announce the return of former guard Matt Blanc '24 as director of player development Oct. 12.

"We couldn't be more excited to welcome Matt back to our program in this new role," Pecora said in a press release. "He knows what it takes to win, he knows our league inside and out, and his passion for Quinnipiac University is contagious. Our guys are going to benefit tremendously from his energy and leadership every single day."

Rounding out the hires are Matt Houde and AJ Morales as graduate assistants. A graduate of Western New England University in 2026, Houde previously spent time as a coach of a 17U youth league.

Morales will come to Hamden with five years of experience as an AAU coach and Director for Lightning Basketball, with coaching stops at Roger Williams University, Mercy College, SUNY Cortland and SUNY Purchase.



NICHOLAS PESTRITTO/CHRONICLE

Elliott Groenewold selected to represent U.S. in Spengler Cup

By EMILY MARQUIS
Associate Sports Editor

Quinnipiac men's ice hockey junior defenseman Elliott Groenewold has been named to the U.S. Collegiate Selects team for the 98th Spengler Cup, in Davos, Switzerland Dec. 26 through 31.

This is the second time in the tournament's history that the NCAA will be represented, following the U.S. Collegiate Selects team introduction to the Spengler Cup in 2025. Groenewold will be the second Bobcat to play in the invitational tournament, as junior forward Chris Pelosi joined the squad in 2025.

Groenewold's stellar 2025-26 season put him on the path for this selection, as he led the country in plus/minus with +39, the highest mark by any player in a decade. The Boston Bruins prospect was named the ECAC's Best Defensive Defenseman and was an All-ECAC First Team selection. In four games this season, the Springfield, Vermont native has scored five assists and maintains a plus/minus of +5.

The U.S. Collegiate Selects are playing in the Cattini Group to start the tournament, made up of Sweden's Frölunda HC and host HC Davos. The U.S. squad will open up play Dec. 26 against Frölunda HC.



EMILY MARQUIS/CHRONICLE

How Sahra and Azra Ozbiltekin defied the odds

By COOPER WOODWARD
Sports Editor

The odds of a college volleyball roster having a pair of biological twins are very small. The odds of a second pair of twins from the same country who have gone through the same program are even smaller. If anyone from Quinnipiac volleyball knows how to defy the odds, it's Turkish twins sophomore outside hitter Sahra Ozbiltekin and sophomore opposite Azra Ozbiltekin.

"We're really happy to be together as twins," Sahra said.

It's the kind of sibling bond that's unlike any other. You go through school, sports and life together.

For the Ozbiltekins, their journey began 5,200 miles away from Hamden in Fethiye, Turkey. It was there that their parents began the twins' athletic journey, not with the sport that they would call their own for over a decade, but with gymnastics.

Both Sahra and Azra knew that their time as gymnasts would be temporary, having a palpable desire for volleyball as early as three years old. Three years later, once they were allowed to start playing volleyball, and with the help of their father, they hit the ground running.

"Our parents always said they planned for us to be athletes," Azra said. "First, it was love, and then it built up to feel like our job."

At 12, the sport began to claim more than just time on the court. Chasing better teams, Azra and Sahra traveled north along the Mediterranean coast to Izmir, Turkey. However, that move didn't come without sacrifice, as their mother came with them, leaving their father behind to work.

Yet, despite the distance, he still made the trip to see as many games as he could.

"They sacrificed so much," Azra said. "But in the end, we were successful and came here. It was the whole point of the sacrifice."

The moving didn't stop with Izimir. At 16, Sahra and Azra moved to Istanbul by themselves in pursuit of a higher level of competition. By 18, they had changed schools seven times, played for eight teams and lived in three different cities.

That count soon included a second country.

The idea of playing in the United States had been there since eighth grade, when they watched seniors from their school commit to American colleges across the country. However, it didn't seem to become a reality until a text from Quinnipiac head coach Kyle Robinson came through.

A text, a video call and 48 hours later, the duo had officially committed to Quinnipiac.

"Our commitment was really quick," Azra said. "It all happened in two days."

When it finally came time for Sahra and Azra to step on campus as students, a whole new set of challenges had come. They were the furthest away from home they've ever been, and balancing school and sport, all while learning a new language on the fly.

"I needed to think before speaking," Sahra said. "I think that was the hardest part."

Yet, luckily enough, they weren't the only Turkish players, nor Turkish twins, on that roster. Setter Damla Gunes '25 and outside hitter Yagmur Gunes '25 were entering their senior season, giving advice, mentoring and just being a friend to them.

"When you're from the same country, you build another closer relationship," Sahra said. "They were also twins, so we were just like four of us always together."

Year one slowly became a struggle for playing time. With a very senior-heavy roster, the twins struggled to garner attention from Robinson. Sahra appeared in 11 matches with two starts and recorded 10 kills. Azra played in eight matches and recorded four kills.

But now, on a roster that isn't fielding a single senior, the opportunities that they were seeking slowly began to show. Sahra has become one of the Bobcats' main attackers, with 24 kills against Manhattan, eight in the home opener against Merrimack and 16 against Canisius.



BELLA KAMINSKY/CHRONICLE

In tandem with opportunity, she credits the jump to an offseason of technical work until her connection with Robinson became second nature.

"When it turned into an automatic process, I think it changed so much," Sahra said.

Azra credits her development to finally feeling like she has her feet under her.

"Now I feel like I have more control in my hands," Azra said.

Part of that comfort comes with looking across the court and seeing a teammate that knows her like only a sister would.

"When someone other than Azra gives me something bad, I kind of get more upset because I can talk back to her, and I know she's not going to get offended," Sahra said.

It's part of sharing the court with your twin sister; they know each other's strengths and weaknesses like the back of their hand, unlike any teammate or any coach ever could.

One thing they can't share with their teammates is a seat in the stands with their parents, as visa denials have stopped any chance of a visit. Despite being one of the only international athletes without a parental visit, they still feel their family's support. How, you may ask? In the form of texts at two in the morning local time after a match offering them words of support.

"They're texting us when we lost, that's okay, you'll do better, or congratulations, you won," Sahra said. "It really helps."

When they don't have their parents to look to, they look to each other. Whether it's a "good job," a thumbs up, a smile, or tough love that the other needs to hear, the support is always palpable.

"We're always supporting each other," Sahra said.

The next chapter is still taking shape. Once their time as Bobcats is done, each would like to stay involved with sports in different capacities, Sahra becoming a strength and conditioning coach, and Azra with sports management. Neither ruled out the option of playing professionally.

What they do know, however, is how they want to be remembered.

"I don't want to be remembered just as a good player," Azra said. "I want people to remember me as a good person."

The odds said a roster like this shouldn't exist. Sahra and Azra Ozbiltekin have spent their whole lives beating crazier ones. Seven schools, eight teams, two countries and 5,200 miles.

Through it all, they've had the same person in their corner: each other.