What can we learn from women's ice hockey's first weekend of ECAC play?

By EMILY MARQUIS
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No. 5/6 Quinnipiac women's ice hockey opened up its 2026-27 conference slate with a pair of wins against the Union Garnet Chargers and the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Engineers. Following back-to-back victories in New York's Capital District, let's take a look at the game's key takeaways that point to the Bobcats' early season strengths and shortcomings.

STRENGTHS

Quinnipiac women's ice hockey has entered the 2026-27 season with one of the premier penalty killing units in the country. The Bobcats remain perfect in defending the man-advantage, stifling 25 opponent attempts on the man advantage. The only other team that has a perfect mark is their rival Yale, who have faced just six opponent power plays.

Turner credits this success to assistant coach Amanda Alessi, who has been a stalwart on the Bobcats coaching staff and helped elevate the 2025-26 penalty killing unit to fourth in the nation.

"(Alessi) does an amazing job with our (penalty kill)," Turner said Oct. 16. "She does a nice job of looking at what does the other team do that we really want to take away."

That success was on full display against Union and RPI this weekend. In Union's one chance on the power play, the Bobcats allowed just two shots and nearly scored on a shorthanded chance the other way. Against a Union team that is sixth in the country with a .296 conversion percentage on the man-advantage, that mark is solid.

Against RPI, Quinnipiac did even better, completely neutralizing the Engineers two power plays and allowing zero shots. Even against a team that has only scored three goals on 26 chances, holding the Engineers' shots completely off frame is a testament to the Bobcats' penalty-killers.

Another key Bobcat strength has been its depth. Just nine games into the season, 18 different Bobcats have scored at least a point, including 14 different goal scorers. Against Union and RPI, six different Bobcats found the back of the net, including goals from bottom-line forwards sophomore Regan Berglund and freshman Annabelle Kruzich during game one against the Garnet Chargers.

"Everytime they got out there, they gave us some energy," Turner said Oct. 23. "They're all great offensive players."

Last season, the Bobcats struggled to find offense from its bottom-line, with much of the scoring concentrated to the top-six forwards and top pairs during the regular season. However, it was depth scoring that powered the Bobcats to the ECAC Championship.

Another key factor in that title win on full display during the Bobcats' opening weekend was defensive scoring. Freshman defender Rosalie Breton has fit right into that scoring identity for Quinnipiac. She begins the season with nine points in as many games, partially powered by a four assist night against the Garnet Chargers.


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"She has such a high IQ for the game," Turner said. "She's doing such good things for us."

Junior defender and captain Makayla Watson also contributes to that scoring from the backline, earning a pair of assists to push her point total to eight. Breton and junior defender Ella Sennick also tallied assists in the following day's contest against RPI.

SHORTCOMINGS

The most glaring issue Quinnipiac faces to start the season is its consistency from period to period, which was on full display this weekend. In both contests, one period powered the Bobcats to the eventual win.

Against Union, a three-goal second frame gave the Bobcats a 4-1 lead through 40 minutes of play, with Quinnipiac controlling the majority of possession and peppering sophomore Union goaltender Emma Rhéaume with shots.

Despite the dominance through two periods, the Garnet Chargers stormed back in the third, outshooting the Bobcats seven to five and scoring the lone goal of the frame.

Against RPI, Quinnipiac faced the opposite problem. Against an Engineers' side with a 1-9 record heading into the contest, the Bobcats just couldn't seem to capitalize. Despite outshooting RPI in every period, the Bobcats only really turned it up in the third, outshooting the home side 14-2 and scoring two goals in the process.

"We need to be a little better at playing the full 60 minutes," Turner said Oct. 23. "I thought we were in and out of it today, and we need to be a little bit more committed to playing together."

It's a problem that could plague the Bobcats as the opponents get tougher. Even with a pair of positive results, this is just the beginning. With RPI selected last and Union selected second to last in the ECAC Preseason Coaches Poll, it's tough to tell how much of a litmus test these matchups will prove to be.

Although not necessarily a shortcoming, the Bobcats' goaltending situation remains a question as conference games begin. With junior goaltender Felicia Frank remaining out of the lineup with injury, Quinnipiac has continued to give starts to both goaltenderssophomore Casey Clausen and freshman Natalia Dilbone.

During Quinnipiac's ECAC opening weekend, each goaltender made a start. Dilbone started in game one against Union, finishing the contest with a 0.913 save percentage and allowing two goals on 21 shots in the Bobcats victory. Clausen started the second contest against RPI, posting a 0.916 save percentage and allowing one goal on 12 shots while also securing the win.

As for selecting a single goaltender, Turner didn't suggest anything following the win at Union.

"We have such a great goaltending team that no matter who we put in the net, we know they're going to put us in a good position to win," Turner said. "I think for us its just about finding opportunities for each of them."

Following Frank appearing in every game for the Bobcats last season, it will be interesting to see how Turner continues to split the starts as the season progresses. At the time of publication, Clausen holds the edge over Dilbone in starts six to three through the Bobcats first nine games.

Now with the ECAC opener out of the way, Quinnipiac returns home for two critical conference matchups against teams it defeated on the road to the 2025-26 ECAC Championship: the Yale Bulldogs and Brown Bears.

"There's always a lot on the line, but I think when you're playing in the ECAC, just knowing we're competing for that ECAC regular season championship I think just gives that little bit of extra intensity," Turner said.

The Bobcats will kick off the weekend with their first conference game underneath its ECAC Championship banner against the team it bested in the title game. Puck drop in Hamden for the latest rendition of the Battle of Whitney Avenue is set for Oct. 30 at 6 p.m.

Early season mistakes make men's ice hockey falter against Army

By EMILY MARQUIS
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Once again, Quinnipiac men's ice hockey has started its season with an unexpected home loss to a lesser opponent in a game that went beyond regulation. After an unexpected home tie and unofficial shootout loss to the University of Alaska Fairbanks Nanooks last November, the No. 7/8 Bobcats have done it again this season, falling 4-3 Oct. 23 against the Army Black Knights.

In both contests, the Bobcats massively outshot their opponents — against independent Alaska-Fairbanks, the Bobcats maintained a shot discrepancy of 42 to 16 to the visitors, whereas against Atlantic Hockey America (AHA) member Army, the Bobcats finished with a slightly smaller 39 to 23 differential. The Bobcats also dominated the faceoff dot, securing 59% of draws against Alaska Fairbanks and a whopping 70% against Army.

From those stats alone, it appears that the Bobcats put on a solid performance in both contests. They played their brand of hockey, outshooting the lower- ranked side.

So for the Hamden faithful, is it time to panic? Probably not. Last season's team found itself just one win away from its first Frozen Four appearance since 2023, despite the unofficial unranked loss in the shootout. If history repeats itself, fans shouldn't be too fearful about the future of the 2026-27 Bobcats.


COLLEEN DIETHER/CHRONICLE

Freshman goaltender Christian Kirsch stares ahead after Army scores in overtime.

However, there are a few weaknesses this season that are already presenting themselves, that were exacerbated against the Black Knights, and may come back to bite the Bobcats against stronger opponents in conference play.

First and foremost, Quinnipiac has a penalty-killing problem. Last season, one of the Bobcats' strongest areas was its special teams, with the squad boasting a top 10 penalty kill. Even though head coach Rand Pecknold's squad remained in the bottom half of the country in penalties taken, the Bobcats' ability to stifle the rare opposing chances on the man-advantage was critical to the squad's success.

But this season, that penalty-killing prowess just hasn't clicked. Out of the 57 college hockey teams that have dropped the puck on the 2026-27 season, the Bobcats are tied for the sixth-worst penalty kill, allowing seven goals on 22 opponent attempts for a 68.2% success rate. The Bobcats are also averaging 14.2 penalties per game, the highest mark among their opponents.

In the past, Pecknold has had his gripes with the officiating, with that feeling on full display following the game against Army.

"As for my opening statement, I can't really make it," Pecknold said. "Per NCAA rules, I'm not allowed to comment on the officiating, so I'm not going to comment.

No matter the frustrations, officiating isn't going to change. It's up to the Bobcats to play in a way that mitigates power play chances for the opposition. Especially with one of its top penalty killers, sophomore defender Braden Blace, out of the lineup due to injury, Quinnipiac needs to clean up its act on the ice as conference competition nears.

Another key area the Bobcats have struggled with to start the season that was exacerbated against Army is playing a complete game. In each of its last four contests, Quinnipiac has started slow, letting the opponent build up a lead before coming back. Those early game struggles became a problem against the Maine Black Bears; although the Bobcats secured the comeback in game one of their two-game series at Alfond Arena, they could not hold on to their lead in the final period in game two.

Another road contest against the Penn State Nittany Lions proved the same, as the Bobcats conceded two early goals. The Bobcats silenced Pegula Ice Arena later in the game, scoring six straight goals to secure a 6-3 victory.

Although it's worked against some of the unranked opponents Quinnipiac has faced, the performance against Army — the Bobcats allowed the Black Knights to secure a 1-0 lead to begin the game and a 3-2 lead halfway through the second — not closing out games against the top teams in the ECAC is a quick recipe for falling down the rankings.

For the Bobcats, the biggest test yet will come in a 12 p.m. matinee matchup against the No. 7/9 Providence College Friars Saturday, Oct. 31. Last season's Hockey East regular season champions currently sit a perfect 5-0 on the sea and will be the first ranked opponent the Bobcats are slated to face. Last season, Quinnipiac fell 2-1 in an exhibition matchup versus Providence in October, but got the better of the Friars 5-2 in the the NCAA Tournament Regional Semifinals.