Asia Belli named the next captain of Quinnipiac volleyball

By JAMES NOLAN
Staff Writer

Quinnipiac volleyball has a new captain for the first time in two years: sophomore middle blocker Asia Belli.

Head coach Kyle Robinson made his decision public Oct. 9, following a 3-1 loss to the Siena Saints.

"I think she's the quintessential type of captain," Robinson said after an Oct. 24 victory over the Saint Peter's Peacocks. "Someone you can rely on, someone who communicates well. Someone who's putting the team before her own personal needs."


ANTHONY ANGELILLO/CHRONICLE

Belli is one of the most dynamic players currently on the Bobcats' young roster. Her .362 hitting percentage leads the team and is good for third in the Metro conference. She has started in 52 of the team's 53 games in her two seasons with Quinnipiac.

Still, her dominance on the court wasn't the only factor in Robinson's decision to name her captain.

"She doesn't walk around with a lot of bravado. But she's astute to chiming in at the right time and being honest and speaking her mind, which to me is very important," Robinson said.

That is what contributed to the decision to make their captain a sophomore, who is not even halfway through her career as a Bobcat.

Yet Belli never saw it coming.

"It was never in my mind," Belli said. "Last year was a little crazy for me as a freshman," having to juggle school, athletics and adjusting to a new country.

Belli is from a town in Milan, Italy. Which in most circumstances would make her a fish out of water on a volleyball team in Hamden, Connecticut. But Robinson recruits primarily international athletes, with Belli being one of four Italians on the roster.

"As an Italian, I love being able to be here and celebrate with my other Italian people," Belli said.

"I love it because I'm able to be more relaxed sometimes on the court because I know they're there."

Robinson notices the connection too. "You can notice it in warmups with (Belli) and the other Italians. They're just popping off with each other."

Before being named captain, she was "focusing more on how to help the team get better and getting better for (the sake of) the team." Now, as the one in charge of the ship, she's had to recharter the course ever so slightly.

"(I have) really tried to push myself out of my comfort zone and push my other teammates to do better as well," Belli said.

And those teammates have seemingly responded positively to their newly appointed captain.

"I would say she's a great communicator," freshman setter Sophia Gisslen said. "In the huddles and timeouts and stuff, she's very honest. She sees the game very well."

Robinson shared a similar sentiment to those of Belli's teammates.

"She definitely leads by example," Robinson said.

For this young Bobcat team, Belli's leadership is exactly what they need. On the Bobcats roster this season, there are no seniors, and one of the two rostered juniors, middle Sila Yildiz, is a transfer from Laramie County Community College this season.

Belli's ability to anchor this team, whether it's at practice, in the locker room or in a crucial part of a set, is the direction needed to stay competitive for the remainder of the schedule.

The Bobcats' captain the past two years had been setter Damla Gunes '26. Gunes was part of the core that won the program's first conference championship in 2022, is a three-time MAAC Setter of the Year and holds the program record for assists at the Division I level.

Belli credits Gunes for the way she helped her grow into the captaincy.

"She taught me a lot… now looking back at how she was behaving with us on the court, off the court. Now I can see what she was talking about about being captain, and I can see it from my perspective," Belli said.

The only issue Robinson has with Belli is that he's unable to give her any time off.

"It's just a shame we can't get her and Sila some rest," he said.

Freshman middle blocker Veronica Patti has been sidelined all season, the only other middle blocker on the roster. Still, Belli's level of play has not diminished. She plays every set with the same ferocity, whether it's her first or fifth of the day.

"She's still been grinding, so I couldn't be more proud," Robinson added.

Since the public announcement, Robinson, Belli and the Bobcats have rattled off five consecutive wins. They currently sit at 8-3 in the Metro, tied for second place with Siena.

The team returns to action this weekend, hosting the Rider Broncs Oct. 23 and the Saint Peter's Peacocks Oct. 24 as they look to keep climbing the Metro leaderboard, thanks to the leadership of their new captain.


TYLER MIGNAULT/CHRONICLE

Audrey Everett changing the narrative behind athlete mental health

By COOPER WOODWARD
Sports Editor

For college athletes who have given their all to their sport for four years, senior day means a lot of different things. For Quinnipiac field hockey senior goaltender Audrey Everett, it meant everything.

"The feeling all throughout senior day was just being grateful and just playing with my best friends because you do meet your best friends here," Everett said.

In the stands of Quinnipiac's field hockey stadium, watching, celebrating and cheering her on were the people who have always been there for her: her family. Everett credits her family for a lot in her life, including getting her start in the sport she loves so much.

"My sister played field hockey, and she was like, why don't you just try it?" Everett said. "There's no harm in trying something new."

That push from her sister to get Everett off the track and onto the pitch made all the difference. Suddenly, learning a brand new sport became a lot less intimidating with her sister by her side.

"It was comforting to be there with one of my siblings," Everett said. "Everything was so new, so I think I just took every opportunity as it came. That's just how my love grew."

That love snowballed into an opportunity all young athletes dream of: playing their sport at the Division I level. When it came time to choose what school to compete at, it took one visit for Quinnipiac to become a no-brainer.

Since her arrival, she's made one objective the center of her academic and athletic life: help people.

Academically, Everett intends to earn her degree in criminal justice to pursue a career in the armed forces or in law enforcement. Both paths are appealing to her for the same reason.

"Its always stemmed from helping people who feel like there's no help in the world," Everett said.

On campus, she does so through her work as Quinnipiac's campus captain for the non-profit organization The Hidden Opponent. Started by former Division I volleyball player Victoria Garrick, the organization aims to change the narrative around mental health in student-athletes.

Despite already being a part of another organization with similar objectives, that being Morgan's Message, she wanted to become a campus captain for two reasons.

"I knew that I wanted to become a part of something bigger than myself," Everett said.

Her other reason was more personal.

"Not only do I struggle with my own mental health, but unfortunately I lost my friend to their mental health battle," Everett said. "It happened when I was very young and I really didn't know how to handle it."

Losing someone to a battle with mental illness changed the way Everett approached her day-to-day interactions with the people around her. Instead of being quick to speak and risking saying the wrong thing to someone in crisis, she became slow to react and wants to be a person that others can rely on.

"I believe it takes one person to make a difference," Everett said. "There were one or two people who made a difference in my life, and I always felt I wanted to be that person for somebody."

As mental health has come more and more into the spotlight over the last decade, the culture has begun to shift. In the microcosm of Quinnipiac field hockey, Everett credited head coach Nina Klein with creating a culture that made it easier for her athletes to ask for help.


RYLEY LEE/CHRONICLE

Senior goaltender Audrey Everett celebrates senior day with family Oct. 11.

"I can give credit to (Klein) because she is very open and understands that it's an issue as well," Everett said. "She's always looking to give people resources and support."

After the team's mental health awareness game against Hofstra Sept. 11, Klein emphasized the fact that her athletes are more than just who they are on the field.

"For me, I treat our athletes with the utmost respect for them as human beings before being an athlete," Klein said. "I know the pressure, the intensity and all things that come with being a Division I athlete, and I think to have a game where we can focus in and make that at the forefront is really important."

Despite the strides that have been made to change the narrative, Everett knows that there is still work to be done. For Everett, she has a simple, four-word phrase for anyone who is struggling in their battle with mental illness.

"You are not alone," she said. "The most important thing to realize is that you have to take care of yourself and there are so many people who will support you."

Everett knows how her story at Quinnipiac ends. She will soon walk off the field for the final time as a student-athlete, and it will feel like senior day all over again. When that day does come, she won't be thinking about the final score, but rather the people she's exiting the field with.

"By the end of the day, I feel passionate about this sport, but it is just a sport," Everett said. "I'll take the friendships and the relationships I built with the coaching staff with me for the rest of my life."

Yet, what she hopes stays behind is simpler.

"I just hope people remember to never give up on their goals and to embrace every moment, even the hard ones," Everett said.