A revamped defense leads the way for women's soccer

By PETER BOCHIARO
Staff Writer

After a decade of Metro dominance, Quinnipiac women's soccer ran into a challenge at the beginning of this season. Known for their stingy defense in the past, the Bobcats weren't exactly closing out games effectively. The team gave up three unanswered goals in a gut-wrenching loss to Niagara. Then, after a humiliating 2-0 loss against Manhattan, head coach Dave Clarke knew his team had to flip the script.

"Anytime you give up goals like that, you have to analyze them," Clarke said. "This couldn't become a pattern for us; we have to react better."

And since then, the team has completely flipped the script. The Bobcats finished October without allowing a single goal. On top of that, Quinnipiac won five of those matches, with the contest against Siena finishing in a scoreless draw Oct. 31.



This stretch has been one of the more impressive defensive performances by any Quinnipiac women's soccer team over the past decade. Taking out the team's 10 straight clean sheets during the 2024 campaign, this is the only other time the Bobcats have gone six matches or more holding their opposition scoreless since 2020.

Bobcats starting goalkeeper junior Olivia Jarvis has been a workhorse between the posts. Over the past month, the junior has stopped all 34 shots that have come her way. Jarvis, however, gives most of the credit to her Bobcat defense.

"Our defenders have worked really hard to keep this streak going," Jarvis said. "We put everything on the line for one another."

Over the course of this streak, Quinnipiac has adapted to different systems across the conference. From playing high-powered offenses like Fairfield, to playing more methodical squads such as Sacred Heart and Rider, accurate adjustments have kept this squad unscathed.

"I want the team to get upset when they practice," Clarke said. "If you score five goals, you take a ton of pride in it. But when you don't give up any goals, you should take more pride in that facet of the game."

Jarvis also mentioned the team's composure and working together throughout this run.

"We watch all the film, do the work behind the scenes, and seeing the work pay off, it only improves our team chemistry," Jarvis said.

Quinnipiac's recent success could also be a testament to how they work in the weight room. The team spends the majority of days getting a lift in at the gym after practice. Despite it seeming like an exhausting experience, Clarke said it has been a testament to the team's growth over the course of the season.

"They're definitely stronger," Clarke said. "The fitter they are, the better they should be. And that's where you see the difference over the course of the season."

Clarke also mentioned the impressive work ethic of the team's veteran leaders. Graduate student forward Morgan Cupo, along with senior defenders Bianca D'Onofrio and Anna Bean, have all impressed Clarke with their progression during their time in Hamden.

"When you have a team with a lot of seniors, they're going to be stronger," Clarke said. "The work ethic that our experienced players have put in pays off day after day."

This midseason turnaround has dramatically shifted the outlook of this season. After the team's loss against Manhattan Sept. 28, the Bobcats sat in the middle of the Metro conference unsure of whether the team would even qualify for the postseason after securing at least a top two seed in the last eight seasons. But since then, Quinnipiac has a record of 5-0-1 and has put themselves one win away from clinching the regular season championship.

"That's our entire goal," said Jarvis. "We want to be atop the Metro, get a bye, win the regular season, and ultimately win the conference and play in the big tournament. That's just our mindset as a team."

However, there is still a long way to go before considering a trip to the NCAA Tournament. With the Bobcats needing to win at least two games in the Metro tournament to qualify, Clarke is only focused on the method it will take to get the team to the promised land.

"We're going to have to adapt no matter what our path is," Clarke said. "Whatever pathway is open to us is the one we are going to take. If we play three games, so be it; if we play on the road, so be it, we'll be ready for the challenge that lies ahead."

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With the Metro tournament kicking off this upcoming weekend, this revamped Quinnipiac defense will be leading the charge with its strong attack coming right with it.

"You know, offense wins games and defense wins championships. We're trying to have that mentality; we're not losing games currently, and that's how I want to keep it."



RYLEY LEE/CHRONICLE

Nina Klein's success puts Quinnipiac field hockey on the brink of an NEC Championship

By GAVIN MCNEAL
Staff Writer

Two years ago, Quinnipiac field hockey only won two games; now it is one win away from the conference championship.

Quinnipiac field hockey has had two coaches in the existence of the program, with current head coach Nina Klein entering her fourth year at the helm at the start of the 2026 season.

In her first year in 2023, her team finished their campaign with a 6-11 record, only recording two wins in Big East conference play. Her second year in charge proved to be more difficult, with only having two wins in total, with neither of them coming against in-conference opponents.

"I really think sometimes you have to go through the most difficult times to come out on the other side," Klein said.

Then a new trend appeared. In the 2025 season, the Bobcats finished with a record of 10-8, but only earned two wins in conference play throughout an arduous Big East schedule.

The biggest change to this point during Klein's tenure occurred after the 2025 season, with the Bobcats leaving the Big East and joining the Northeast Conference.

A new conference presented Klein's team with new opponents and a new challenge. A challenge that the Bobcats have risen to, ending the regular season with an 11-5 record overall and 7-1 in conference heading into the NEC tournament, where they will face the Sacred Heart Pioneers in the semifinals at Wagner College in Staten Island, New York Nov. 5.

A team does not magically go from 2-16 to 11-5 with a legitimate shot at conference glory in just two seasons.

"I think it's a testament to just trusting the process and the athletes really buying into our culture," Klein said.



CAMERON LEVASSAUR/CHRONICLE

Quinnipiac field hockey head coach Nina Klein talks to her team Oct. 13, 2023.

Creating a team that is resilient requires buy-in from everyone. That happens when everyone is pulling for each other, something only a united team displays.

"I think we made a lot of efforts to do things outside of field hockey that put us in a good place on the field," senior forward Ava Bleier said.

Team culture is an integral part of how the Bobcats got to where they are today.

Klein noted that it's the players who come to her with the ideas for team bonding, saying she does not like to "force fun" onto her squad.

That is one part of creating a successful group, while another comes from the person in charge.

Senior defender Katie Shanahan pointed out that Klein has had an immense impact on her.

"She taught me a lot about being confident on the field, having gratitude and how to lead others as well," Shanahan said.

Klein certainly does not lack experience. Being a five-time Big East champion and a three-time NCAA champion at UConn during her playing career, then coaching with USA field hockey and being an assistant at Boston College, Klein has used those stops to her advantage, while orchestrating this turnaround in Hamden.

She credits coaches like Nancy Stevens, whom she played under at UConn, as people who have led her to be the coach she is.

"I'm extremely grateful from a tactical and technical level of just knowledge of the game," Klein said.

A different coach might have overreacted and thought a massive change was needed following such a difficult stretch; however, with all her experience, Klein knew going into this season a base was already there.

"I think it was just trying to focus on some of the small details like our penalty corners," Klein said.

She expressed that the foundation was already in place; fine-tuning the small things heading into their 2026 campaign made the biggest difference.

That preparation could have started in August when preseason began, but for this Bobcat team they started thinking about the 2026 season before this batch of freshmen were on campus.

"We said the season started in the spring, and it didn't start in August when we came in preseason," junior midfielder Emma Nelson said.

That mindset set this team up to put a run together that would make the players remember this team for a long time.

"These are truly my best friends," Bleier said. "I will talk to them forever, and I think it's showing on the field very well."

Culture, hard work and belief have defined this era of Quinnipiac field hockey. They rebounded in just two years from the depths of the Big East to possibly winning the NEC championship. An automatic bid to the NCAA tournament is waiting for the winner of the conference.

As Klein and her players prepare to take on the Pioneers Nov. 5, they will do so having already completed something to be proud of.

However, they are competitors and competitors want to win.

"I want to be competing for a championship every year," Klein said.

And in 2026, the Quinnipiac Bobcats have started to do just that.