Alexander Hansen's leap across the Atlantic lands men's soccer its starting goalkeeper

By EMILY MARQUIS
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This time last season, Quinnipiac men's soccer was struggling.

While the Bobcats can attribute that recent success to a multitude of factors, one player from Copenhagen, Denmark, has shored up a position that no single player could nail down in the 2025 season: goalkeeper.

After sporting three different goalkeepers on the road to the 2025 conference playoffs, just one man has taken the mantle for the 2026 squad: freshman goalkeeper Alexander Hansen.

"He's been a big reason why we are where we are right now," head coach Eric Da Costa said.

For a player whose impact has been undeniable, even so early in his collegiate career, it would be easy to believe that his talent was visible from the beginning, when the Bobcats were first looking at Hansen. In reality, at the beginning, he was one of hundreds of names floated out by agents and players, both domestic and international, that crossed Da Costa's desk.

With a strong Scandinavian pipeline during Da Costa's tenure, the Bobcats' head coach took the flight to Denmark to see what the goalkeeping prospect was all about.

His initial verdict?

"He wasn't great," Da Costa said. "He was sick, he didn't train well, didn't play well."

It would've been so simple to throw Hansen's name back in with the hundreds of other players Quinnipiac never offered a spot to. Yet, according to Da Costa, he wasn't a guy on the Bobcats' radar after that first showcase.

According to Da Costa, Hansen's name kept coming up in conversation. Those trusted scouts in Denmark continued to harp on the idea that Hansen was the real deal.

"They were able to provide us with more film and updated games, and the more we saw him, the more we rated him higher than when I first saw him," Da Costa said. "But what put it over the line was the conversations."

Those conversations with the Quinnipiac coaching staff put the university on the map for Hansen.

"When my agent told me Quinnipiac was interested, I spoke with (assistant coach Matt Jones) and Da Costa, and we had some great talks," Hansen said.

It was a mutual feeling on the Bobcats' side.

"We developed a relationship with myself and he, with (Jones) and himself, with (George Kostelis) our goalkeeper coach, and as those relationships grew, you just really started to understand what he was about," Da Costa said.

But even with Da Costa doubling back on his first impression and offering the spot, Hansen still had a host of hurdles to overcome before becoming the Bobcats' full-time shot stopper — starting with relocating to an entirely different country. Although he found support from his family — with his father in particular pressing the importance of getting an education — it was still a huge change.

"It was hard at the start getting used to being away from family, away from friends," Hansen said.

Another adjustment to add on to an entirely new continent? The style differences within the sport.

"Soccer-wise, it's a different game," Hansen said. "More counterattacks, that kind of physical play."

But despite these changes, Hansen began to settle in as early as the preseason. Before Da Costa had decided anything on the pitch, Hansen found his first taste of success — not in a drill, but as the "Bobcat of the Day."

"We do a thing in preseason where at the end of the day, we always have dinner together, and a player nominates another player as the 'Bobcat of the Day,'" Da Costa said. "That's for a lot of different reasons: how they trained, how they played, maybe they did something for their teammate, whatever it was. I think the very first one was Alexander. So from that moment, it confirmed what we thought about him as a leader and a person."

With the coaching staff on board with his mentality and heart, winning the job was about bringing the talent to the open position.

The freshman was heading into a goalkeeping room in the midst of a lot of change — two of the three starters from the 2025 season, goalkeepers Matthew Pisani '26 and Nicholas Cardona '26, had left the program. The departures left just one man with collegiate experience in the position: junior goalkeeper Emilio Balderrama.

But with an injury sidelining Balderrama during preseason training, Hansen took that step forward.

"Alex was able to get more of the reps, get more of the games, and because he played more, he just started to grow more in confidence," Da Costa said.

That allowed Hansen to show out right during the Bobcats' home opener against the Providence Friars, securing 10 saves in a 3-2 win, Quinnipiac's first win against Providence since 2014.

A huge part of being a successful goalkeeper is securing that trust and understanding with the backline, something that, according to Da Costa, Hansen has with his teammates. It has shown in the record column. Through the start of the season, the Bobcats tallied impressive wins against Providence and Yale, before a 1-0 win against Rider started off their Metro slate strong.

But even with those early season successes, Hansen couldn't quite slow down.

"He's had to go through a little bit of adversity in terms of, he's been fighting some injuries and he can't ever really take a step back, because for about six weeks (at the start of the season) we didn't have a backup goalkeeper," Da Costa said. "He was the only guy."

That amount of pressure on a young talent could've proved too much. So could the competition following Balderrama's return from injury. However, through the support of the team, Hansen has handled the huge changes well, crediting his teammates with helping him through it all.

"It's just a good team in general, supporting me coming in as a freshman, so it's honestly not been too hard," Hansen said. "We don't feel that we're really under pressure."

Since then, Hansen has continued to shine, securing the second most saves amongst Metro goalkeepers with 63, as well as posting a 1.59 GAA, a .744 save percentage and three shutouts on the season. His season matches an upswing for the Bobcats as a whole.

"We're hoping, and I think, that this is not his ceiling," Da Costa said. "I think this is, you know, somewhere in the middle of where he can get."

2026 marks the best season for the Bobcats since 2022, with Hansen helping the Hamden side secure its spot in the Metro playoff with a chance to host for the entirety of the tournament by securing the No. 2 seed.

It has been a pretty successful freshman campaign for the newcomer from Copenhagen. Despite the distance, coming to the U.S. to play soccer is a decision he sticks by every day.

"It's definitely the best decision I've ever taken in my life," Hansen said.

As for the future, the focus for Hansen is right here in Hamden.

"To be honest, I'm only focused on performance right now," he said. "The championship is the most important, and playing for the guys out there."



SARAH MASCIA/CHRONICLE

Freshman goalkeeper Alexander Hansen surveys the field against Stony Brook Sept. 9

The importance of strong goaltending for men's ice hockey

By COOPER WOODWARD
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Of a team's six skaters on the sheet of ice at any given time, no position carries more responsibility than the one anchoring the crease. Goaltenders sole responsibility is stopping a puck 3 inches in diameter being launched 75-90 miles an hour at them.

Good goaltenders can make an average team a playoff team. Great goaltenders can bring even greater success to their squad, oftentimes being a reason why a team makes it as far as they do. No team knows that better than Quinnipiac men's ice hockey.

Success at the goaltending position has been a characteristic of every successful Bobcat team. In their first Frozen Four appearance in 2013, it was goaltender Michael Hartzell '13 who's 920 saves, .933 save percentage and five shutouts backstopped the Bobcats to their first national championship appearance in program history.

Three years later, in 2016, it was goaltender Michael Gartieg '16 who recorded a 1.91 goals-against average and eight shutouts, helping lift the Bobcats to another national title appearance.

But it wasn't until 2023 that the 1.49 goals-against average, .931 save percentage and 10-shutout stat line of goaltender Yaniv Perets '25 helped Quinnipiac finally get over the hump and claim its first national championship in program history. A performance so good, it earned him a contract with the Carolina Hurricanes.

Since hoisting the national championship trophy in Tampa three seasons ago, three goaltenders have taken the net for Quinnipiac. Goaltenders Vinny Duplessis '24, Matej Marinov and Dylan Silverstein.

A transfer from Boston University, Duplessis struggled in Bobcat blue and gold, recording a 2.02 GAA while having a .914 save percentage. As a result of the dip in performance, the Bobcats struggled, falling to Boston College 5-4 in in the Regional Final.

That pattern continued with the tandem of Marinov and Silverstein in the following two seasons.

The 2024 campaign saw Marinov appear in 17 contests and Silverstein 24. Combined, the duo recorded a 2.17 GAA with a .905 save percentage. Once again, poor goaltending cost Quinnipiac postseason success, as it exited the NCAA Tournament in the first round against UConn.

After another season of the Marinov-Silverstein tandem and more postseason disappointment, change was coming. After their junior seasons, Marinov signed with a club in his home country of Slovakia, while Silverstein transferred to the University of Vermont.

In the first year since their departures, a new netminder has slowly begun to make noise within Bobcat Nation: freshman Christian Kirsch.

If you look at the surface-level stats, Kirsch has allowed an ugly eight goals in five starts. But if you look deeper, you see he recorded 20 or more saves in all but one start, recording 30 saves in three of those games.

Those kinds of performances have caught the eye of Quinnipiac head coach Rand Pecknold, as he has held the starting job for three straight contests dating back to Oct. 16.

"(Kirsch) bailed us out when we needed him to," Pecknold said after the Bobcats 5-1 win over Providence.

Kirsch has held his own against some of the best competition that the NCAA has to offer, recording 33 saves in his start against UMaine and 30 saves against Penn State. That UMaine roster Kirsch faced? Eight 15-plus point scorers from the year prior. Penn State? 10 15-plus point scorers.

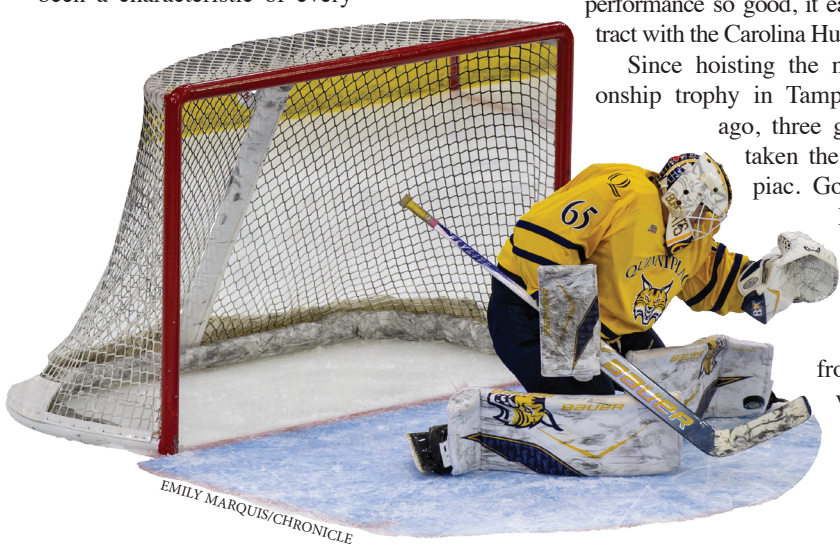
In his last outing against Providence Oct. 31, his athleticism was on full display. Facing several offensive blitzes, including on the penalty kill, the 6'4, 204 lb netminder made several diving saves to keep his team in it and the Friars out of it.

Kirsch is also no stranger to success when it matters the most, as he recorded a 1.50 goals-against average and .952 save percentage in four playoff games en route to a Memorial Cup with the Kitchener Rangers of the Ontario Hockey League during the 2025-26 season.

"He's played in big games like that before," sophomore forward Ethan Wyttenbach said after Quinnipiac's 2-1 win over Maine Oct. 9. "It was great to have him in net, and just hoping he can carry it on."

Carrying on that success could be the difference between a Bobcat team continuing to be stuck in proverbial playoff limbo and a team that finally breaks through to the Frozen Four for the first time in four seasons.

With ECAC play kicking off Nov. 6, Quinnipiac will not have to worry about the floor for its new starting goaltender, but rather how high his ceiling can be.



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