“Trailblazers: The Dean’s Distinguished Speaker Series” headlines Rand Pecknold at latest installment

By CAYDEN STEWART
Copy Editor

Quinnipiac University’s School of Business and Dean Holly Raider featured Quinnipiac men’s ice hockey head coach Rand Pecknold as the most recent speaker in the “Trailblazers: The Dean’s Distinguished Speaker Series,” Oct. 28.

The event was held in room 270 in the School of Business, perfectly in the shadow of the Sleeping Giant. A very much intentional location according to Raider, whose “Trailblazer” title was inspired by the mountain.

Covering a wide variety of subjects under the headline “Play to Win; Purpose, People and Performance,” Pecknold described his journey from Division III athletics to national champion head coach with the Quinnipiac men’s ice hockey program.

Student-athletes, faculty members and even 10 chicken and banana costume-donning students attended the event, with the women’s lacrosse team coming out in full force.

“(Pecknold) reached out to us via Instagram…Apparently he really enjoys our presence, and us just being there,” banana-shaped graduate sports journalism student Owen McDermott said in an interview with The Chronicle. “I figured for all of us, this would be a really good idea to, one, meet the guy, and two, see how he thinks. It was very eye opening for me, I quite enjoyed it. It’s always fun to pick somebody’s brain.”

The event opened with a statement from Pecknold, where he dove into the intricacies of coaching as a whole, and his mentality when presented with the day-to-day aspects, including some challenges, that come with the job.

“When I go to these things, what do I want to get out of it?” Pecknold said. “I come up with two things. One is I want it to be interesting…And two, I want to leave here today with some nuggets. Meaning, something that is actionable that can make me a better person, or better in life, or better at my job.”

Pecknold’s opening remarks also took on an analytical feel. Pecknold presented how he drew up then-sophomore forward Jacob Quillan’s game-winning goal in the 2023 national championship game, and his rationale behind pulling then-sophomore goalie Yaniv Perets with nearly four minutes left in the third period in an unorthodox move.

“The one thing that we talked about all year long was ‘play to win,’” Pecknold said. “We’re always playing to win. What Minnesota started to do was playing to not lose. There’s a big difference.”



GABI BOURDON/CHRONICLE

Quinnipiac University men’s ice hockey head coach Rand Pecknold speaks at “Trailblazers: The Dean’s Distinguished Speaker Series” event hosted by the School of Business Oct. 28.



GABI BOURDON/CHRONICLE

Left to right: graduate producing for film and television Zachary Reagan, senior film, television and media arts major Oliver Lee, senior health science major Jessica DeRosa, men’s ice hockey Head Coach Rand Pecknold, graduate sports journalism student Owen McDermott and graduate digital content creation student Ryan Lopano.

Beyond the analytics, Pecknold also provided advice to students soon heading out into the professional world, speaking on his mindset regarding clear and concise phrases which resonate more with his players. Pecknold emphasized the importance of marginal gains, emphasizing how everyone can make small improvements over time and wind up exponentially better for it.

Pecknold also touched on the recruitment process and the current landscape of college athletics with the rise of lucrative name, image and likeness (NIL) deals among student-athletes.

“The number one thing to me is recruit high-character kids or elite-character kids,” Pecknold said. “Those great kids are going to be selfless, not selfish, and selfless players are going to help you win games.”

Staying on that same notion, Pecknold noted the strength of the athletic programs at Quinnipiac, and all great programs for that matter, comes from within.

“On good teams, coaches hold players accountable,” Pecknold said. “On great teams, players hold players accountable. You need great player accountability if you’re going to be great.”

This leadership advice especially stood out to some of the faculty members in attendance.

“I appreciate Rand’s forward-thinking approach. I really enjoyed his marginal gains discussion about how we can all get a little bit better. That’s something I always strive to do,” Instructor of Entrepreneurship Whitney “Trip” Sanders said in an interview with The Chronicle.

The series is focused on “visionary leaders who break new paths,” according to Raider.

“To know the story of men’s ice hockey under Rand; starting from midnight practice, no real rink and Rand on a part-time contract, to a national championship kind of franchise that we have at men’s ice hockey is the epitome of ‘trailblazer,’” Raider said in an interview with The Chronicle.

Since its inaugural event in the fall 2025 semester, the speaker series has continued to grow, and Raider is continuing to look toward the future.

“I love this series,” Raider said. “I’m currently planning for the spring of this series…Taking inspiration from the land, but also the very entrepreneurial and action-oriented Quinnipiac culture.”

Raider and Pecknold’s banter also teased at what could be in the future for the legendary head coach.

“I think there’s a book. There’s a book,” Raider said.

MBA from cover

changes to its graduate business education, the future of accelerated pathways in the School of Business remains under discussion.

Raider and the rest of the staff are currently looking for students to get involved and voice opinions about how they can make these tracks stronger.

“As we think about our programs here at Quinnipiac, whether it’s the MBA program that we have, whether you take it as a 3+1, a 4+1 or you just come to Quinnipiac as a new student in our MBA, the evolution will have elements of all of that,” Raider said.

As more tools with AI develop in this broad field, the university is in search of the best way to work with the tools rather than work against them.

The process comes as business schools face changing expectations from employers and the integration of fast-paced AI tools. This is putting an emphasis on how the traditional practical workplace is working and encourages students to come out with different tools because of it.

Student perspectives, particularly from those already enrolled in the pathways, may impact the university’s decision making process as they go about making changes.

Students are encouraged to speak up and reach out to Raider if they have strong beliefs or ideas to contribute to this new model. One of the most important considerations is which experiences students feel best prepare them for their careers post-graduation.

“One of the most important factors is our understanding of how students want to learn and what kinds of learning methods are most meaningful to them,” Raider said.

Experiential learning is already heavily incorporated into Quinnipiac’s accelerated MBA pathway with internships serving as a part of the degree requirement. More than anything, staff and faculty want students to have a hands-on learning opportunity to have an idea for where they want to work in their field.

The changing workforce is another factor influencing the conversation. As AI becomes increasingly integrated into professional environments, faculty are trying to bridge the gap of how it will be used in the future.

“One of the things that I think has been surprising to people about the AI archetype that we talk about in the report is the heavy emphasis on ethics, integrity, communication skills and that part of what AI makes clear is the need to have distinctly human skills,” Raider said. “You need to know how to use AI and be the human in the lead.”

Rather than replacing traditional business knowledge, AI is creating a greater need for graduates who understand how to evaluate and apply the technology. That expectation requires students to understand the information that they received from AI and determine whether it is accurate.

“It means knowing how things work,” Raider said. “It means knowing whether or not the output you’re getting from AI is reliable output.”

There is an opportunity for students and faculty to get involved to help shape what the future of the MBA 3+1 track will look like in the future.