

# Wins and snubs of the MAAC Volleyball Awards

By **ALEXANDRA MARTINAKOVA**  
Editor-in-Chief

It is that time of the year again, for the All-MAAC Volleyball awards, with them being announced on Nov. 20.

In the 2025 season, Quinnipiac played a 19-12 record, 16-2 in the conference. Its season ultimately ended at the hands of Rider University in the MAAC Semi-finals, its earliest exit from the Tournament since the 2022 Cinderella run.

Despite that, the Bobcats posted a great season and the accolades speak for themselves.

Let's take a look at this year's wins and snubs of the All-MAAC Awards.

## COACH OF THE YEAR

Head coach Kyle Robinson was crowned Coach of the Year for the first time in his seven years at Quinnipiac.

In the 2025 season, Robinson led the Bobcats to 19 wins, 16 in conference with a 13-game win streak, and his team has consistently achieved 19 wins for the past three seasons.

Before his tenure at Quinnipiac, Robinson served as assistant coach at Ohio State University.

## SETTER OF THE YEAR

Senior Damla Gunes was named MAAC Setter of the Year for the third time in a row.

The Bursa, Turkey native made history two years ago as the program's first ever Setter of the Year and has only continued to break the ceiling since then.

She was named the MAAC Setter of the Week three times this season and broke Quinnipiac's Division I record in total assists, breaking 4,000 with just 1,081 this year.

## PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Player of the Year went to Rider University's senior opposite Kiannisha Santiago, though many would argue that Quinnipiac's graduate opposite Elena Giacomini (the Pre-season Player of the Year) should've gotten her back-to-back after earning that title as the first Quinnipiac player last season.

The two dominated the competition this year. Giacomini led the MAAC with total points (573) and 502 kills. Santiago was right behind her with 515 points and 435 kills. While it could be argued that Giacomini is clearly in the lead, to put into perspective of just how much of a difference was between these two players and the rest of the conference, the No. 3 player in kills was Iona University's freshman outside Julia Leonardo with 380 and 429.5 points.

So there is no doubt that it was only one of these two in contention for that title. What most likely split the vote was errors.

Giacomini has a weapon of an arm, any bystander can see that. However, that led her to commit 249 errors with a .178 hitting percentage, while Santiago might have had less kills on the season but only 142 errors with a .271 hitting percentage.

A great example of this is the semifinal match between the two teams. Santiago was a weapon that Quinnipiac could not stop, with her 20 kills on the night. Even though the Bobcats fell 3-1 on sets, Giacomini matched her in kills but committed 10 attack errors while Santiago only had two.

The Bronco set out to prove that she earned the title of Player of the Year and Quinnipiac felt the price of it.

## ALL-MAAC FIRST TEAM

Three Bobcats were named to the All-MAAC First Team: Giacomini, Damala Gunes and senior outside hitter Yagmur Gunes.

While Giacomini and Damla Gunes proved their spots with flashy stats, Yagmur Gunes definitely earned hers by being one of the most consistent players.

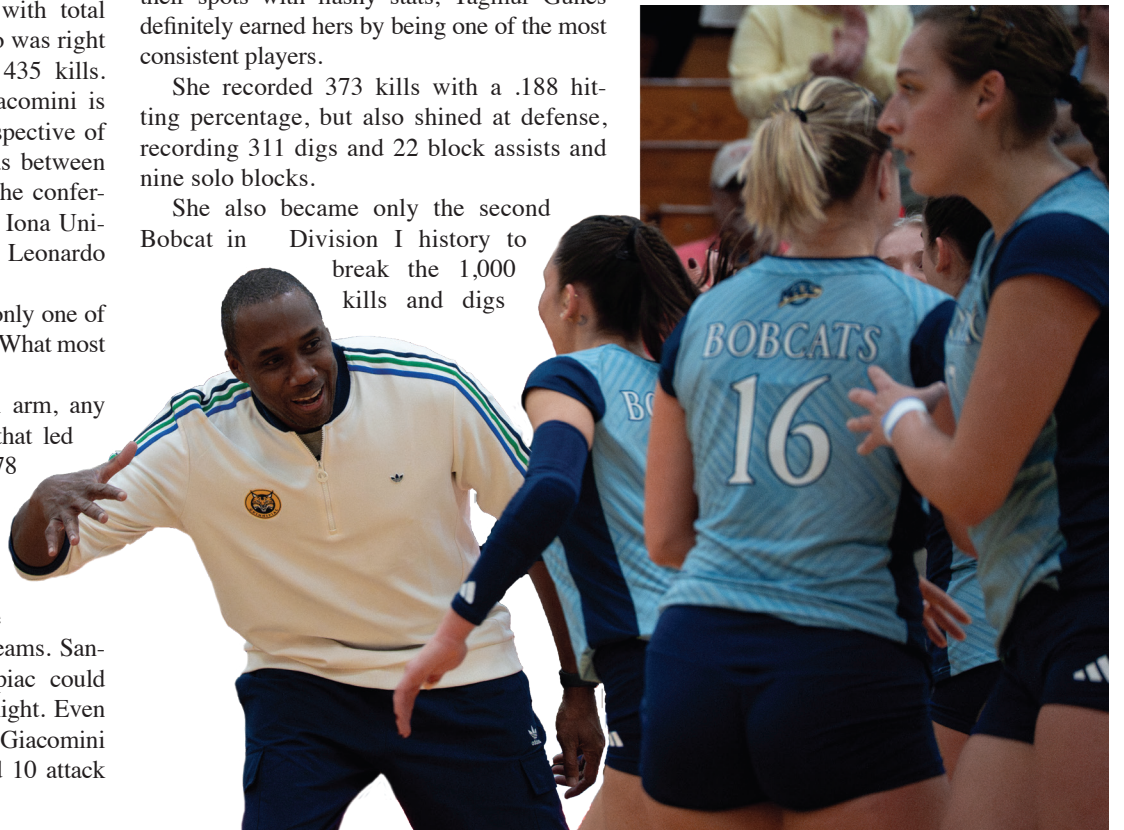
She recorded 373 kills with a .188 hitting percentage, but also shined at defense, recording 311 digs and 22 block assists and nine solo blocks.

She also became only the second Bobcat in Division I history to break the 1,000 kills and digs

mark in her tenure at Quinnipiac.

## ALL-MAAC ACADEMIC TEAM

Six Bobcats were named into the All-MAAC Academic Team: Giacomini, Damla Gunes, Yagmur Gunes and senior middle blockers Milena Silva, Tuana Turhan and outside hitter Ginevra Giovagnoni.



TYLER MIGNAULT/CHRONICLE

# Quinnipiac volleyball's win streak ends at Rider's hands in MAAC Semifinals

By **ALEXANDRA MARTINAKOVA**  
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FAIRFIELD — For the first time in four years, Quinnipiac volleyball will not be making an appearance in the MAAC Championship game. Rider University blocked the Bobcats from said game, winning its Saturday afternoon semifinals match-up 3-1.

"Some days you're the bug, some days you're the windshield," head coach Kyle Robinson said.

It was almost a done deal that Quinnipiac was going to face off with Fairfield in the MAAC Finals once again.

Both teams entered the tournament as the No. 1 and No. 2 seeds, with the best conference records. Fairfield had beaten Canisius for that finals spot earlier in the day, and Quinnipiac was coming off a 13-game win streak. All that stood between the same MAAC Finals pair for four years in a row was the No. 3, Rider.

And Rider simply wanted the win more.

## THE SET UP

Last year, it was the same MAAC Semi-finals game. Except that Quinnipiac was the one who came away victorious.

The last time these teams faced off at Quinnipiac's senior day in Burt Khan two weeks ago, the Bobcats swept the Broncos and kept them at a maximum 16 points per set.

Even without that match-up, on paper, Quinnipiac was the front runner. The Bobcats had a 16-2 conference record and were on a 13-game win streak. Rider's record was 12-6.

Senior setter Damla Gunes was named the MAAC Setter of the Year for the third time in a row — only one of her program history-setting accolades this year. She ends her career with 4,212 as-

ists — 781 more than the previous Division I record holder.

Alongside Damla, her twin senior outside hitter Yagmur Gunes and graduate student opposite Elena Giacomini were all named to the All-MAAC First Team. Robinson was named MAAC Coach of the Year for the first time. Yagmur Gunes became only the second Bobcat to break the 1,000 kills and digs milestone.

Robinson has called this class "historic" on multiple occasions. And by their accolades, they truly are, not just based on this season.

But Rider had the MAAC Player of the Year senior opposite Kiannisha Santiago, who would prove to be Quinnipiac's kryptonite.

## THE GAME

Quinnipiac was outperformed in a way that it most likely didn't expect.

It didn't start out that way, though. The Bobcats won the first set 25-17, out-serving the Broncos and playing a consistent game while Rider fell under the weight of its own errors.

Errors are fixable though. And once Rider changed its tune, Quinnipiac struggled to keep up.

The clear MVP of the game was Rider's Santiago. She recorded 20 kills at Quinnipiac's expense and only two attack errors. Quinnipiac's blockers were no match for her swing.

"I don't know if we expected them to be that good," Robinson said. "But either way, you still gotta play. She's Player of the Year for a reason. I don't know if she really killed us as much as we killed ourselves."

Giacomini was the only player able to even attempt to go head-to-head with her. She matched Santiago's 20 kills, but the 10 errors only added to the 28 that the Bobcats amassed in the game.

Ten different Bobcats saw action as Robinson subbed in junior outside hitter Leilani-kai Giusta and freshmen setter Klara Olszewska and outside hitter Vittoria Tonelli into the game.

"The athletes on the court just weren't getting it done," Robinson said. "We gotta try to find a spark and someone to bring some consistency to our game."

Damla Gunes has been the "quarterback" of the team since her freshman season. Nobody expected to see her on the sidelines for half of the game, yet that is exactly what happened.

Yagmur Gunes had the second highest number of kills on the night for the Bobcats (11) and matched sophomore libero Carola Negron Diaz's digs at 12. But not even she could break through Rider's block for the majority of the time.

The surprise was in the form of senior outside hitter Ginevra Giovagnoni. Despite sitting out the entire last season due to injury, she was still named to the All-MAAC Preseason Team and led the team in kills in Quinnipiac's first program sweep over Fairfield.

She recorded six kills and attack errors, often getting blocked before her hits could count in any way.

Quinnipiac's key players who shined the entire season just did not come through in this game.

On the other hand, senior middle blocker Milena Silva not only opened up the scoring with a kill, but also recorded four on the night.

Giusta, who only saw action in two sets tonight, earned eight kills and the highest hitting percentage on the team.

Freshman middle blocker Asia Belli led the pack with four service aces and recorded five

block assists.

Two weeks ago, Rider had a singular block assist against Quinnipiac. Thus game it blocked Quinnipiac 15 times, with a solo block and 28 block assists.

No matter what Quinnipiac tried, Rider was always there to match it with more vigor, more power and as Robinson put it, more "hunger."

"Rider played a really good match," Robinson said. "We didn't play our game plan and execute well. That's just how it goes."

The only upper hand that Quinnipiac held was its serve. The Bobcats added four more to Belli's service aces, while Rider committed 12 service errors, many coming from Santiago herself, as her very powerful serve found outside of the court more than it did inside of it.

Rider just had the drive and the grit to not let the ball touch its side of the court and it was no match for what Quinnipiac could come up with.

## THE FUTURE

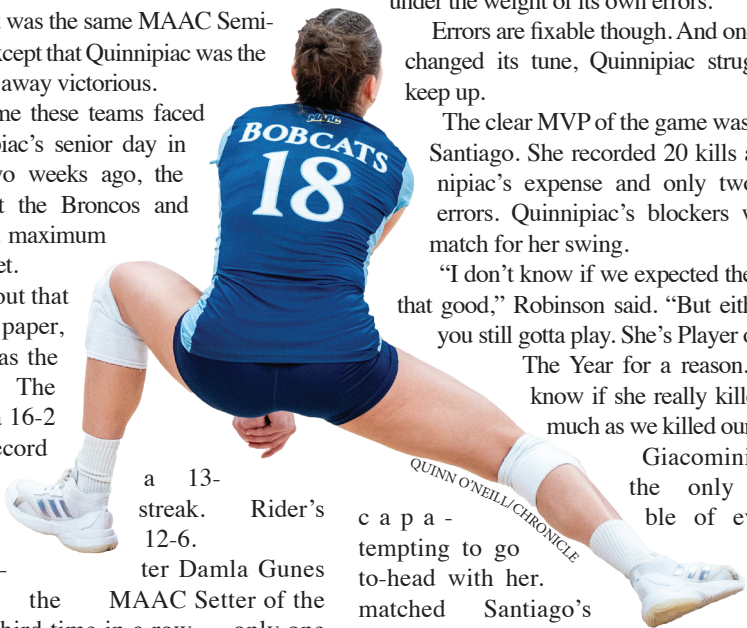
It was not a pretty final game for Quinnipiac. And it was not a pretty final game for the six graduating Bobcats.

With this loss, Quinnipiac now bids farewell to the final players from the roster that completed the Cinderella story and beat Fairfield for the program's first ever MAAC Title. It also loses the majority of its starting line-up.

"Their play is program changing," Robinson said. "Their level of commitment to the program has changed the identity of Quinnipiac volleyball."

The only ray of hope for the Bobcats is the performance of the next generation shown on the court tonight. If the team builds on the foundation that the returning roster provides, there are still many MAAC Championship games in its future.

And with that, the 2025 season comes to an end.



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