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Volleyball wins NE10 Championship

By Valentina Toro
Managing Editor



PHOTO | SCSU ATHLETICS

Women's volleyball team celebrating winning the NE10 Championship on Saturday, Nov. 14 at American Interntational College in Springfield, Massachusetts.

The university women's volleyball team captured their second NE10 Conference volleyball championship in program history on Saturday, Nov. 14, defeating American International College 3–1 and securing their first conference title since 2018.

The fourth-seeded Owls entered the tournament without a conference championship in eight years but completed their postseason run with three consecutive victories, including an upset over top-seeded Bentley and a championship win against second-seeded AIC.

The victory also earned the university an automatic bid to the NCAA Division II Tournament, marking its fourth national tournament appearance and first since 2021. The Owls improved to 20–7 overall, while AIC finished its conference tournament with a 26–3 record.

Head Coach Lisa Barbaro, now in her 23rd season leading the program, previously guided the Owls to their first NE10 championship in 2018. That year, the university also defeated AIC in the championship match, making Saturday's victory another milestone under Barbaro's leadership.

The Owls entered the postseason as the No. 4 seed after finishing conference play with a 6–3 record. Their championship run began with a three-set victory over fifth-seeded Saint Anselm College on Nov. 10 at Pelz Gymnasium.

The university then faced defending champion Bentley University in the semifinals on Nov. 13. After losing the opening two sets, the Owls completed a five-set comeback, ending Bentley's 20-match winning streak and advancing to the championship match for the first time since 2018.

Saturday's championship also provided an opportunity for the Owls to reverse their regular-season results against AIC. The Yellow Jackets had defeated the university twice earlier in the season, winning 3–2 on Sept. 29 and 3–1 on Oct. 20.

Middle blocker Sydney Bennett, a graduate, played a leading role in the championship victory, recording 12 kills and seven block assists while hitting .346. Her performance earned her the tournament's Most Outstanding Player award.

Setter Kimi Mitchell, a sophomore, also received All-Championship Team honors after finishing with 37 assists, 16 digs and seven block assists. Outside hitter Kerrigan Habing, a junior, contributed 12 kills, while middle blocker Mianna Brown, a freshman, recorded seven kills and seven total blocks.

The Owls' defense remained a major factor throughout the tournament. The university entered postseason play leading the conference in blocks per set and opponent hitting percentage. Against AIC, the Owls recorded 15 team blocks compared with the Yellow Jackets' three.

Outside hitter Marisabelle Sias, a freshman, also contributed to the championship victory, recording six kills and two service aces. Her final ace secured the fourth set, 27–25, giving the Owls their second conference title.

The championship adds to a season in which five Owls earned All-NE10 recognition. Bennett received first-team honors, while Habing and Mitchell earned second-team selections. Brown and Sias were named to the All-Rookie Team.

The Owls became the first fourth-seeded team to win the NE10 championship since their own title run in 2018, completing a postseason that included victories over the tournament's top two seeds.

With the conference championship secured, the Owls will advance to the NCAA Division II Tournament, continuing their postseason after capturing their first NE10 title in eight years.

Veterans Center renamed

By Valentina Toro
Managing Editor

The university officially named its Veterans Center after the former coordinator of the Office of Veterans and Military Affairs Giacomo "Jack" Mordente on Nov. 11, honoring his 47 years of service that helped shape the university's support for military-connected students.

University officials, elected representatives, former student veterans, colleagues and family members gathered for the "Celebration of Jack's Legacy" ceremony on Veterans Day. The event featured personal tributes, congressional recognition and the dedication of the center in Mordente's honor.

"For more than 50 years, Southern has provided dedicated support to veterans and military-connected families. And from the very beginning, Jack Mordente was a passionate visionary who drove, designed and sustained those efforts," Interim President Sandra Bulmer said.

Mordente helped establish what became Connecticut's first university Veterans Center, which assists military-connected students with educational benefits, academic resources and their transition into higher education.

During the dedication, Bulmer recognized Mordente's contributions to the university and the generations of students who have benefited from the center's services.

"By dedicating the Veterans Center in your honor, we are ensuring that future generations will know the story of the person who helped build and sustain this important resource," Bulmer said.

U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal presented Mordente with a certificate of special recognition. His remarks addressed the challenges veterans face when returning from military service and entering college, including the importance of having resources available during that transition.

"He was a pioneer. He was a champion. He was an innovator," Blumenthal said. "Jack knew that the country had an obligation, that schools had an obligation, that we have an obligation, to try to make that transition easier and more productive for them."

U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro participated through a prerecorded message, recognizing Mordente's advocacy for veterans and his work connecting students with educational benefits. She also recalled collaborating with him on veterans issues, including a 2009 forum addressing expanded GI Bill benefits.

Former student veterans also addressed attendees, sharing personal accounts of how Mordente supported them through challenges that extended beyond their academic responsibilities. Their remarks reflected the relationships he maintained with students, including those who continued to recognize his influence years after leaving the university.



PHOTO | WILLIAM GAGNÉ

U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, former coordinator of Office of Veterans and Military Affairs Giacomo "Jack" Mordente, Coordinator of Veteran, Military and Adult Learning Support Britt Conroy, and Interim President Sandra Bulmer standing in front of the newly dedicated Veterans Center on Nov. 11.

Mordente's daughter offered a family perspective, recalling her childhood visits to the Veterans Center and how her own children later spent time there with their grandfather.

Mordente also addressed the audience and reflected on the center's beginnings in 1975. He spoke about the importance of providing student veterans with a place where they could connect with others who understood their experiences.

"This is why our Veterans Center is not just an office, it's an anchor," Mordente said. "It is a place where a student veteran can walk through the door, drop their guard and instantly feel that familiar sense of community. It is a space where veterans don't have to explain themselves because the person sitting across from them already understands."

Mordente concluded by calling on university leadership to preserve the center's mission and providing resources for future generations of student veterans.

"My charge to Southern, and to everyone here today, is to ensure that the center remains a dynamic, living sanctuary," Mordente said. "Let it continue to be a beacon in the state of Connecticut for how higher education can honor its debt to our military service members."

Childcare center recieves $2 million

By Noah Nunez
General Reporter

The university's COMPASS childcare center recently received a nearly $2 million grant to continue its program after it had recently shut down following the original grant given had run out.

Interim Dean of the College of Health and Human Services Michele Vancour wanted to restart the program sooner, but a lack of funding and staff created challenges that delayed its reopening.

"We did not have adequate funding to start this year off, but then we were able to get funding, but we didn't have a head teacher. So, the hiring process of trying to find a head teacher, brought us all the way to the fourth week of October."

The COMPASS childcare center had been operating off of the original grant it had been given four years ago, totaling about $530,000 with additional pools of money being granted yearly as the budget became clearer.

This original grant was supposed to last until Fall 2025, when universities could apply for new grants; however, they were not offered during that year, leading to the program using what they had available to get them through the spring semester.

"On September 20th, 2025, our grant ended," Vancour said. "In years prior, in summer there would be a brand new call for proposals; that year there wasn't one. We had enough funding to take us all the way through the spring semester, so no one knew any different."

However, following the proposal the university submitted this year, the current grant was increased to a total sum of $1,999,324 to be used for the next 4 years, quite the jump from the half a million given out before.

The grant itself comes from the Child Care Access Means Parents in School program, which is a federal grant given out by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Due to the inconsistency in when this grant is offered and the amount given to the COMPASS childcare center, the reaction to the speedy turnaround and amount given left the organization shocked to say the least.

"Never in my wildest dreams would I have imagined they were gonna open it with as big of a threshold as $2 million," Vancour said.

This amount, however, has meant that other schools that would have been given this grant in the past have been denied any money.

The total number of schools given this grant in comparison to 2021 has shrunk from 327 to just 40.

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