Three game-changers look to pave their own way

By Dillon Flanigan
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Keith Ridley, left, E'Lijah Gray, center and Joe DiGello, right, pose for media day.

Although the NFL Draft buzz centers around a few big-name athletes, the Owls also have three prospects making noise: Joe DiGello, E'Lijah Gray and Keith Ridley. All three recently attended Pro Days ahead of the 2025 NFL Draft, aiming to raise their profiles.

"That small 1% that make it out of college to the professional level. If you're good enough, they're going to find you. With the temperament that those three have and have the chance to go put themselves in front of these scouts that they did and the pro days like, that's all they can ask," Interim Head Coach and Defensive Coordinator Rob Eggerling said.

To gain more exposure, they participated in Pro Days hosted by larger schools. In the New England region, smaller programs like the university often get overlooked when it comes to NFL prospects. Bigger schools like the University of Connecticut offer more visibility and that is exactly the opportunity quarterback Ridley seized after Yale University did not hold theirs.

Ridley attended UConn's Pro Day, continuing a football journey that has seen its fair share of highs and lows.

"If I was at Boston College, they would have their own Pro Day," Ridley said. "Being at Southern Connecticut State and a DII school, we don't have our own Pro Day. That's just how it is—there aren't many eyes on our conference or on that level of football."

Ridley's football story began like many others—just playing with friends. But over time, the game grew on him and he emerged as a top prospect in high school. He originally committed to Boston College as a tight end but saw limited playing time. Seeking a fresh start, Ridley transferred to Bryant University and made a pivotal change: switching back to quarterback.

That move paid off.

At Bryant, Ridley was the backup for three seasons. His performance at quarterback was limited, however he drew serious attention—especially from scouts keeping an eye on the Southern Connecticut region.

As an Owl, Ridley picked up right where he left off, leading the NE10 in completions, passing yards and yards per game. In a quarterback class that is stacked with talent, his path to the next level is uncertain—but far from closed. While he may not hear his name called during the draft, Ridley has all the tools to earn a spot as a priority undrafted free agent and prove himself at the next level.

"Coach did an amazing job reaching out to UConn and giving me and Joe DiGello, the linebacker for Southern, an opportunity to go in and compete," Ridley said. "And it was an awesome, awesome experience."

From the backfield, Gray brings game-breaking speed and explosiveness to the field—traits that have helped him emerge as one of the universities' most dynamic playmakers.

A versatile athlete, Gray lined up all over the field during his college career—wide receiver, return specialist and mainly in the backfield. His ability to impact the game in multiple ways did not go unnoticed and like his teammates, Gray made sure to capitalize on the opportunity to showcase his talent at a larger school's Pro Day.

After three seasons at Merrimack College and dominating, the running back transferred to university and cemented his legacy as an Owl. In 2023, Gray led the NE10 in rushing yards and carries, giving him an all-conference first team nod and a year later, rushed for over one thousand yards.

While his NFL journey remains unwritten, Gray's speed, work ethic and playmaking ability give him a real shot, whether that is through the draft or as a highly coveted undrafted signing.

"If you ever get to know the kid, he lights up a room, yeah, his personality is infectious," Offensive Coordinator and Offensive Line Coach John Wiess said.

Just like Gray, DiGello is a very impactful player on and off the field. From pass coverage to stopping the run, he can do it all.

Joe DiGello is the kind of player who does not need to say much—his play speaks for itself. A leader on and off the field, the Amity native has built a reputation as one of the most reliable and hard-nosed defenders in the NE10.

"He kind of just went back to being who he was, obviously the players respected him as a player and obviously his work ethic off the field. I saw him trying to do a lot and then he realized that he just had to be himself," Eggerling said about the linebacker's growth over the last five seasons.

DiGello's blue-collar approach and relentless motor have made him a favorite among coaches and a name that is starting to circulate in NFL scouting circles. With no Pro Day at the university, DiGello took his talents to UConn's Pro Day along with Ridley, attending a regional Pro Day at a bigger program to get in front of scouts.

For the universities' big three, the road to the NFL hasn't been paved with national attention or primetime matchups. It has been built through grit, growth and a relentless belief in their abilities. Coming from a Division II program like the university, they have had to fight for every rep, every look and every ounce of respect.

Each of them has found their own way to stand out—whether it is Ridley commanding the offense with poise and power like a general, DiGello leading a defense with heart and hustle or Gray making electric plays in space.

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Seniors take three of four

By Dillon Flanigan
Sports Editor



PHOTO | CARLY RUSSELL

Freshman Jace Alvino, celebrates after getting out of an early jam in game one

For the first time since March 29, the Owls baseball team returned home to face the American International College Yellow Jackets, splitting two on Friday, April 18 and taking two on Saturday, April 19.

"We were very thin on the mound with injuries, and we gave up a ton of runs yesterday. We really just had freshmen to throw today. Jace Alvino did a great job," Head Coach Tim Shea said.

After using eight different pitchers in a 15-13 win and a 24-7 loss on Good Friday, the Owls had a short list of remaining available arms.

In a game one walk-off 9-8 win on Saturday, freshman Jace Alvino provided a suitable outing giving up one walk, nine hits and five runs in five and two-thirds innings while sitting down six.

Though the stat line for Alvino is not appealing to the naked eye, the damage was limited, stranding the Yellow Jackets by much needed strikeouts.

In the top of the fifth, as the Yellow Jackets were slowly mounting a comeback, Leandro Guevara singled to the center fielder Isaiah Walker, a graduate, who started the relay home throwing out Josh Frometta at the plate keeping the narrow lead at 5-2.

Following the first three batters in the top of the sixth reaching base, Alvino buckled down to get the next two Yellow Jackets.

Though as seen on Friday, no lead is safe as each team gave up a seven-plus lead in a single inning. AIC's Cole Patters would chase Alvino out of the game with an RBI single tying the score at five apiece.

"Alvino has been great for us. He's been going deep in the game," Shea said. "He stepped up big today, kept it close. Obviously, we had the lead, we relinquished it but still did a good job and then Harry did a great job."

Fellow freshman Harry Roy entered the game for the Owls tossing the final four and one third innings.

The Owls took a 6-5 lead in the bottom of the eighth, only to hand it back after an intentional walk to Guevara and a three-run homer by Nick Serce in the top of the ninth, knocking the wind out of the Owls sail.

"He was four for four on the day he was having a great weekend. I didn't want him to beat us quite honestly, so I would rather pitch to the to the lefty. We just left the fastball away. You see how the winds blowing, that's what happens sometimes, that's baseball," Shea said. "A lot of other teams would have just folded the tents at that point with that momentum swing."

Primarily hitting in the bottom third of the lineup, Shea moved catcher Brennan Staubley, a redshirt sophomore, to the two hole; which paid off as he hit a two-run game tying homer keeping the hope alive at 8-8.

In the tenth, first basemen and slugger Jack Drewry, a graduate, who was playing his last regular season home game, beat out a dribbler off the end of the bat to shortstop to win game one.

"I've had a little rough stretch just staying true to it, the work I put in, trust in it, just trying to catch barrels, see the ball, catch it out front and then go from there. Guys stepped up. We did our job. We had a rough day yesterday. It's huge to bounce back like that," Drewry said about his productive day at the plate.

As most of the Owls rested in the latter game, Spencer Chard, a sophomore, Walker and Drewry, who went three for five with a double, a three-run homer and five RBIs in game one, started game two.

"It wasn't a conference game, but anytime we go out in the field, take a feel as a competitor you want to win the game. So, all these guys are cheering us on, so we got to be there cheering them on," Drewry said.

Originally scheduled as a single conference game, Trace Morales, a freshman, took the bump for the Owls in game two of the non-conference game where he tossed a complete game. With a taxed pitching staff in-season, no pun intended, Shea was happy he did not need to rely on Drewry and other position players to throw an inning or two.

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Women's Club Soccer grows

By Avery Martin
Contributor

Women's club soccer played just one game last semester, but their biggest accomplishments are not on the field. Running a team with limited resources is what makes the group stand out.

Emily Sousa, a junior sociology major, is the club president. She first joined the club in the 2023 fall semester. With less than 10 members and no scheduled games, she felt the need to help the club become more competitive. Since then, she has recruited double their starting amount of players.

"I was starting from bottom up. I went to two recruitment events over the summer before the first week of school started. I did the Involvement Fair for the fall and this spring. Now we basically have a group that can play games. We have like 20 girls," Sousa said.

In a much less formal and competitive environment than the official collegiate sports teams, club sports offer students a chance to play the sport they enjoy while focusing less on results and more on the friendships made. Sousa says that is the best part of the club for her.

"I honestly really enjoyed being back in an atmosphere where all the girls genuinely liked hanging out with each other and I wanted to make sure that atmosphere stayed as I was running it. I think the most important part of soccer, or any sport, really, is that you like the people you're playing with," Sousa said.

Hannah McGuire, a junior sport management major, is the vice president of the club. She only joined last semester, but the supportive and welcoming environment has made an impact in her life.

"I love meeting people from different types of backgrounds, ethnicities, nationalities, but also the personalities. I love being friends with people that have no experience whatsoever because I was in the same boat. I love having friends that know a lot about the sport, so I can learn from them," McGuire said.

Lauren Nadeau, a junior healthcare studies major, also believes the most important part of the club sport atmosphere is not found in results but in the bonds.

"It's very open and welcoming of everyone. Everyone's very open with each other and we always want more girls to join," Nadeau said.

However, the team does face issues that traditional collegiate sports do not. The responsibility of finding a coach has fallen on Sousa and McGuire. Ashley Wright, a former DI player, now holds the position but hiring her was a difficult process. She is the third coach in the past three semesters.

"We started off with a female coach, she was doing great, and she had to leave. Then we had a male coach, and he's working on graduate school, so he's very busy and we couldn't have him. We actually ended up with one of the former players. She used to be on the Central soccer team, and she switched over to club, and now she's our coach officially for this season," Nadeau said.

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