SPORTS

Loss in the first round ends historic season

By Dillon Flanigan
Sports Editor

Even though the Women's Basketball team lost in the NE10 Conference Semifinals to Bentley University, they were selected for an at-large bid in the Division II NCAA Tournament.

For the first time since 2018, the program made it to the tournament whereas the fifth seed, they fell to the fourth seed St. Anselm College Hawks 59-41 in the first round on March 14.

"Just have some fun. Have some fun and enjoy the moment, be present. You can't look ahead. Even today, with everybody here, enjoy the moment because there are only 64 teams that are still playing and that includes us and that's a testament to their hard work," Head Coach Kate Lynch said on March 11 during the team's media day.

Lynch who was part of the 2007 National Championship team, still has fond memories of her playing days in March. Even with today's landscape of collegiate eligibility, the roster does not have a single player from the 2017-2018 tournament team except forward Rheyna Steinauer, a junior, who experienced the madness as a fan watching her sister Kiana play in the 2018 bid.

"She kind of just tells me to be in the moment. She knows it's going to be hard, and we have to kick it into another gear. But honestly, just knowing that she's supporting me and that she's gonna be there cheering me on on Friday just means a lot," Steinauer said.



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Owls bench celebrates a three-pointer during a regular season home game.

"When you start the season, it's a big, big opportunity to get ranked early. That was the plan all along. We wanted to get those non-conference games out of the way, and then that's how we got our season ranking. But this season has just been a really fun experience with this special group."

— Guard Jillian Martin, a graduate.

Rheyna, who has been struggling in recent weeks, leaned on her teammates to get through the woes.

Playing the Hawks three weeks earlier and losing back in November of 2024 added to the adjustments needed to be made this time around. As Melanie Hoyt was named the conference player of the year, it forced the Owls to reexamine the way they play defense. Containing Hoyt was a top priority on Senior Night, but with that they needed to contend a plus with a minus as executing a dynamic defensive game plan on Hoyt would open up scoring opportunities for the other four Hawks.

"We could probably match the physicality a bit more. I think if we can match up in those areas, contain Hoyt down low, contain Tatum as well downhill," assistant coach Julianna Bonilla said.

With a different wardrobe for Bonilla this season, she was excited for the team making it to the tournament as in her playing days at Marist College, she knows what it takes to be in the bracket.

"I'm excited to be here. I'm grateful to be here as a coach. It's really awesome to be here again," Bonilla said. "I played an NCAA tournament as a player and it's really, really fun, but I think I kind of just leveled up a little bit as a coach."

After one season with the Owls on the court, Bonilla handed the three-point specialist crown to guard Delaney Haines, a senior, in the offseason whose role shifted from just shooting three's to running the entire offense.

Ending game after game as a leading scorer, Haines was not even supposed to be the next great Owls three-point specialist. With her original school the New York Institute of Technology ceasing its athletic program due fiscal issues during Covid-19 days before she was slated to step on campus, Haines was referred to the university and Lynch who proclaims the now senior as one of best shooters in the country.

"Now we're one and done and so especially me coming into my last year, this potentially could be my last game. Obviously, I hope it isn't but compared to the NE10s, we played hard, but we knew, like there's going to be another chance to keep playing," Haines said. "I don't know if that's the right way to go about it, but now it's kind of more eye opening, like this could be your last game, leave everything you have on the court."

Her only collegiate opportunity turned into the All-NE10 First Team and All-East Region First Team Honors and WBCA NCAA Division II Coaches' All-America Honorable Mention in her senior year.

Haines led the Owls in scoring with 12 points in the first round, scoring two of the teams three points in the fourth quarter. This underwhelming offensive performance on March 14 showed how outmatched they were on the hardwood.

Forward Katie Williamson, a graduate, who is known for her physicality in the paint, finished with one block, two steals, seven rebounds and eight points in her last collegiate game.

"Really just doing what we do best, carrying out what we can do in the situation, if something happens, good, bad or ugly, facing it and moving on with it, moving forward. Just keep pushing and keep trying my best, because that's all we can do at the end of the day," Williamson said heading into the matchup.

It is still early in the process, but the coaching staff will be looking to fill major roles for the 2025-26 season. The roles include another three-point specialist in for Haines, a spark plug for guard Lyzi Litwinko, a graduate and multiple interior players to take the reins from Williamson and the lack of depth at times on the bench.

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Baseball loses opener

By Draven Dabrowski
Contributor

The baseball team lost their fourth game of the season, 9-4, after a struggling finish to Mercy University on March 12.

In the first home game of the year, the Owls came into the game scoring early but as the game progressed, they struggled as Mercy scored nine unanswered runs through the first six innings.

"We played half a game today," Head Coach Tim Shea said. "We had a base running mistake in the fifth inning and like the air went out of the balloon."

From the fifth inning to the end of the game, Mercy never took their foot off the gas pedal keeping the university to just four runs throughout and taking advantage of the countless errors on pickoff attempts.

"We have to be able to keep runners close if we want to give our catcher a shot. They got to get better at it," Shea said

The Owls came into this game winning their last three games by double digit runs, while also beating Mercy on the road.

After starting the game strong, pitcher Spencer Fox, a graduate, had a rough stretch in the fifth and sixth inning.

"Coming off three days' rest was a little tough, but I knew I had to mentally battle for this game and give the guys everything I had," Fox said.

Before being relieved by pitcher Harry Roy, a freshman, Fox had six strikeouts, gave up just three hits and had a stretch where he retired seven straight batters.

"Getting through that fifth inning, I was really hoping I could give our guys the best shot to win," Fox said. "But things happened and it ended up just being that way."

Even though they struggled there was still some upsides from the start of the game.

Third baseman Derrick Jagello, a junior, stepped up to the plate in the second inning with all bases loaded and ended up hitting a grand slam that soared over the leftfield scoreboard.

"It was just really good bat on the ball. Ended up getting a better piece than I thought," Jagello said. "Jack Drewery came up to me after the fielder's choice to home, told me sit on the curve. So kudos to him for giving me pointers before going up there."

Through the first 13 games, Jagello has a .257 batting average and is one of the few on the team to have started every game of the season.

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PHOTO | WADE BARILLARO

Third baseman Derrick Jagello, a junior, celebrates his grand slam.

Softball splits twin bill

By Matt Cain
Contributor

Spring has finally kicked off and the Owls took to the field for their much-anticipated home opener, facing off against the University of Bridgeport in a doubleheader.

Entering this matchup, the Owls carried an impressive 4-0 record from their first four games, hoping to maintain their undefeated streak. The team had built early momentum in the season and aimed to keep that energy going in front of their home crowd.

The Owls started strong, displaying confidence and determination. However, Bridgeport proved to be a formidable opponent, bringing a tough challenge right from the beginning. In the first game of the doubleheader, the Owls struggled to generate offense and were ultimately shut out 5-0.

On the mound for game one was pitcher Ashley Lewis, a junior, who held her own in the early innings. She delivered a strong performance in the first two frames, keeping Bridgeport scoreless and demonstrating excellent command. However, in the third inning, Bridgeport broke the 0-0 tie, managing to push across a run. This breakthrough shifted the momentum and Bridgeport continued to capitalize on their opportunities throughout the game.

"In game one, we needed to make some adjustments at the plate," Head Coach Kate Bowen said. "Making those adjustments sooner than later."

Lewis remained on the mound for the next two innings, but Bridgeport broke the game open in the fifth inning with a five-run surge. Following this, Lewis was replaced by graduate student Rachel Miller, who stepped in as both an outfielder and pitcher. Despite the team's struggles, Miller recorded the Owls' only hit of game one.

"We made some adjustments, but we need to be more consistent going into game two," Miller said.

While it was a tough loss, the Owls remained determined to bounce back in game two. With plenty of games left in the season, they will look to make adjustments and return to their winning ways.

"We had high energy and all were really excited to get some home games," Miller said.

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PHOTO | LILY RAND

Owls doubled up a Purple Knight in the fourth inning of game one.