# SPORTS





PHOTO | WADE BARILLARO

Guard Christian McClease, a sophomore, shoots.

## Local star stays home

**By Matt Cain**
**Contributor**

Christian McClease has continued to prove himself at the collegiate level. The New Haven native chose to stay close to home after his high school career, committing to the Owls to take the next step in his basketball journey.

McClease averaged around seven points and three assists per game this season. While those numbers may not jump off the stat sheet, they do not fully capture his impact.

"I know my role: just a high-energy guy, and just do the little things," McClease said.

McClease has come up big in key moments, helping to pull the university out of tight games with timely baskets, steady decision-making and relentless energy. His intensity level and willingness to do the little things provide a spark that his team relies on.

McClease approaches each game with ease, staying poised under pressure. Whether it is knocking down an open shot or setting up a teammate, his steady presence gives the Owls confidence when games tighten up.

Coming from a basketball family, expectations followed him from the moment he stepped onto the floor at Wilbur Cross High School, where the pressure was on to live up to his name and perform at a high level.

Christian is the grandson of Gerald McClease, a legendary figure in Wilbur Cross basketball history. Gerald was a standout player for Wilbur Cross in 1987 and later became a long-time assistant coach, leaving a lasting impact on the program.

Both Gerald and Christian scored over 1,000 points in their high school careers.

During his junior year of high school, McClease averaged 21 points per game and was the Southern Connecticut Conference Player of the Year. He carried that same dominance into the SCC and state tournaments.

Despite his standout performances, the postseason runs ultimately fell short of a championship, a setback that fueled his decision to take the prep school route.

Seeking further growth and a higher level of competition, McClease enrolled at Choate Rosemary Hall, where he played both basketball and track.

He finished with 1,665 career points, was MVP of the Choate team in 2024 and made almost every all-star team in the state.

With his impressive resume, McClease could have picked anywhere to continue his journey, but he chose to stay home and play for the Owls.

"They made me feel like it was a family," McClease said. "Playing in front of home is good too. Family can come to every home game and some away games too. It just feels like I'm home."

For McClease, individual accolades and personal success take a backseat to team achievement. Bringing a conference title to the university would mean validating the journey, honoring his family's basketball legacy and giving back to the community that has supported him since day one.

"My main goal is to win a conference championship," McClease said.

That decision has paid dividends. Playing in front of family, friends and a community that knows his story has allowed McClease to compete with confidence and comfort.

There is a sense of responsibility that comes with representing your city, and McClease has embraced that role fully.

Every time he steps on the floor for the Owls, he is not just playing for himself or the name on the back of his jersey but for New Haven.

That hunger to win has influenced his approach both on and off the court. In practice, he leads by example, setting the tone with effort and focus.

McClease's path has not been linear, but it has been intentional. From falling short in high school tournaments to refining his game at prep school, each experience has prepared him for this moment.

Now, he is focused on turning lessons into results. The Owls' pursuit of a conference championship aligns perfectly with his personal mission: creating a shared sense of urgency and belief within the locker room.

Looking ahead, McClease knows the work is far from finished. While his statistics may not always jump off the page, McClease's impact goes far beyond numbers. His ability to stay composed in tight situations has been invaluable for the team.

For New Haven, Christian McClease represents more than just a hometown player staying local. He represents resilience and a vision bigger than himself. And as his college career continues to unfold, one goal remains at the forefront: winning a conference title for the Owls.

## Historic season ends



PHOTO | JULIAN MARKESE

Guard Jillian Martin, a graduate, drives into the paint.

**By Julian Markese**
**Sports Editor**

The women's basketball team's stellar season came to a halt on March 14. They lost to Holy Family University, 61-51, in the NCAA Tournament East Region Semifinal at James Moore Field House.

The Owls tallied 25 wins this season and won the NE10 Tournament, the most wins and the first conference title since their 2006 championship-winning campaign. They lost only two conference games all year.

"I'm really proud of them. During the difficult times, they stuck together and kept pushing," Head Coach Kate Lynch said.

The team beat familiar foe Saint Michael's College 56-49 in the quarterfinal before losing to Holy Family.

Because the Owls were the No. 1 seed in the east, the entire tournament took place at the university. The eight best teams from the east coast all came to New Haven to play.

"It's been a great environment. We're very thankful to all the fans for coming out and supporting us. It's a great place to play, and it's fun. That's what basketball is all about," guard Hope Fox, a senior, said.

Fox elevated her game in the postseason. She was the MVP of the NE10 Tournament and the main attraction for the NCAAs.

Against Saint Michael's, she was relentless. She truly sacrificed her body for the team.

"It's March. We've been playing since November. You get used to the falls and the bumps and bruises. It's part of the game," Fox said.

Fox finished her senior season averaging 10 points, three assists and five boards.

"She doesn't know how good she is," Lynch said.

The only player who averaged more minutes than Fox this season was guard Jillian Martin, a graduate. Martin was the leader on the court. She led the team in assists, dishing out 4.5 per game.

While Fox and Martin led the backcourt, forward Rheyna Steinauer, a senior, took charge in the paint, playing the best season of her career.

R. Steinauer led the team in scoring, averaging 15 points a game while shooting over 40% from the field. She made the NCAA East Region All-Tournament Team.

She scored 25 points against Holy Family. It was made even more special because she did so alongside her sister, guard Taeya Steinauer, a sophomore.

"It's awesome for our family to watch us," T. Steinauer said. "We have great chemistry on the court."

R. Steinauer's confidence and ability to hit big shots was vital to the team's success this season.

Another clutch shooter was guard Ally Sentance, a senior. Coming off the bench as the sixth man, she was lethal from the three point line, making 41% for eight points a game.

The Owls exceeded outside expectations this season but ultimately fell short of their own. The loss against Holy Family marked the final collegiate game for the core of the team.

"I'm upset, but just so proud of my teammates," Martin said.

As the team looks forward to next season, the burden of success no doubt now falls on the shoulders of breakout star forward Tish Blackwood, a freshman.

Blackwood was the NE10 Rookie of the Year. She was a tenacious rebounder and the glue that held the unit together.

Blackwood led the team in field goal percentage, averaging just about a double-double with 11 points and nine boards a game.

Blackwood will be a cornerstone for Lynch as she looks to reload the program for next year. The team has the coach and the culture to continue their success for the future.

"None of this is because of me. All the credit goes to the players and the work they put in," Lynch said.

## Lacrosse off to stellar start

**By Julian Markese**
**Sports Editor**

The lacrosse team is off to their best ever start. They are 7-1.

They beat Saint Michael's College and Southern New Hampshire University to kick off their NE10 schedule. Their only loss was by one goal to Mercy University.

The team has seen an uptick in success in recent years, with last year being their best ever. The team failed to reach seven wins any season prior to 2023.

They traveled to Spartansburg, South Carolina during spring break, winning both of their games. When they returned to the east coast, they beat Molloy University 12-6. Attackman Macy Vail, a senior, scored three goals against Molloy.

Vail is leading the way so far. She has 21 goals and nine assists. Midfielder Allie Welder, a junior, leads the team in ground balls, with 13. Goalkeeper Caelan Connors, a senior, has made 62 saves at 48%.

The Owls are on track to achieve their highest win total ever. They have 8 regular season games remaining. They played Caldwell University in New Jersey on Tuesday, March 24. Next up will be Franklin Pierce University, away from home, on March 31.



PHOTOS | WADE BARILLARO

Midfielder Rebecca Sibley, a sophomore, shields the ball from a defender.



Attackman Maddox Burton, a junior, battles with two defenders.

## Madness is here



**By Draven Dabrowski**
**Sports Writer**

When it comes to sports, the month of March is pretty loaded.

The NFL's free agency period is underway, and MLB teams are back on the field for preseason games, but the best event of them all is in full swing: the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament, better known as March Madness.

March Madness is undoubtedly the best when it comes to basketball. With countless games happening back-to-bac in the first few rounds, it is hard to find another event in sports that packs this much excitement into such a short period of time.

It is one of the few times in sports where you can turn on the TV at almost any point during the day and catch great basketball being played.

That is what makes the opening rounds of March Madness so great.

Upsets start happening almost immediately, and the bracket that looked perfect just hours earlier suddenly falls apart.

Back in 2023, No. 16 seeded Fairleigh Dickinson University stunned the country by beating No. 1 seeded Purdue University in the first round 63-5.

A year before that in 2022, the Saint Peter's University Peacocks completed one of the most improbable runs in NCAA Tournament history, becoming the first No. 15 seed ever to reach the Elite Eight, beating No. 2 seeded University of Kentucky as well as No. 3 seeded Purdue.

This season, High Point University managed to take down the much higher-seeded Wisconsin University. Virginia Commonwealth University took down the University of North Carolina. Duke University almost fell to Sienna College.

Every year, there seems to be a team that comes out of nowhere and captures the attention of the entire country.

Schools that most casual fans most likely have never seen play during the regular season suddenly become the story of the tournament.

It also shows how unpredictable the tournament really is.

Teams that dominated their conference all season can suddenly be sent home in the first weekend, while underdogs continue to build momentum with each game they win.

Once the tournament starts, rankings and expectations do not always mean much.

Every year, millions of fans try to predict how the tournament will play out, filling out brackets with hopes of getting every game right. But almost every year, those hopes disappear quickly.

One upset can ruin an entire bracket, and by the end of the first weekend, most fans realize their predictions did not stand a chance.

Could the University of Connecticut Huskies bring another trophy home to Storrs? Could a team like the Duke University Blue Devils or University of Arkansas get a chance to be crowned champions.

Whether it is a buzzer-beater or a Cinderella team making a deep run, the tournament always delivers moments people remember for years.