

All in the Chemistry

It was a record-setting season for the America East champs women's basketball team

Tuesday, April 4, 2017



PHOTO: JOEY WALKER

Talk about a change of seasons. Just a year after finishing the 2105-16 season at 12-8, the [women's basketball](#) team set a new program high-mark with a 26-5 record and earned its first solo America East league title in 32 years. Head coach Maureen Magarity says the secret's in the team chemistry.

"Last year, we struggled a lot. We had a really long losing streak," says guard Kristen Anderson '17. "But it's a lot different going out

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on the court this year. Even when we're down 15 points or so, it never feels like we're out of the game."

It's been a historic season for the Wildcats. The team's 26-5 overall season record broke the previous record of 23 victories set in 1982-1983, and the America East championship was the Wildcats' first since the 1984-85 squad shared the honor with Northeastern University. The regular season ended in early March, when the number one-seeded Wildcats lost to the University of Maine in the NCAA American East Conference tournament semifinals, but the team went on to a first-round game in the Women's National Invitational Tournament against Harvard University. It was the Wildcats' second appearance in the WNIT.

"I'm really proud of the girls this year—it's a huge accomplishment to win the regular season," says Magarity, now in her 7th year as the team's head coach. Recently named a finalist for the NCAA Division I Coach of the Year award, Magarity says the secret to the team's success this year is a careful mix of talent, perseverance and determination.

"After last year, we really stuck together and got closer as a group. We've handled adversity pretty well, and we continued to work hard," she says. Coaching is in Magarity's blood; her father, Dave, is the coach at West Point and was a finalist for the Coach of the Year award in 2016.

"Our team chemistry this year has been awesome. As a coach, you really can't control that. It depends on the different personalities of the individual players, and so much credit goes to the girls. They're such a wonderful group of young women," she says. "It's been a lot of fun this year."

Anderson had a particularly strong season, according to Magarity. "She had one of those senior years you always hope for; she's handled a lot of different injuries throughout her career, and she's always bounced back. She's developed into such a great player."

The team also received an infusion of new talent with three transfer students who were eligible to play this season. Among them was guard Brittnei Lai '18. "When I came in, the girls on the team and the coaches were all so welcoming. They all wanted to make sure everything was okay with me, on and off the court. It was just really easy."

For Lai, the season was all about working harder, even as the wins piled up. "Everyone's taken a step up on what they felt like they needed to improve. We take everything one game at a time—we're focused and determined, and that's what's incredible about the team."

Meanwhile, Magarity is already looking ahead to next season.

"I think we're headed in the right direction. Winning the regular season title was a huge goal of ours, and we did that. And then obviously, playing in a national tournament postseason is what it's all about. We should be playing every year during spring break. I joked to the girls about that," she says. "This is how it should be every year. We should be practicing and preparing during spring break."

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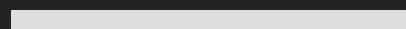
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