

# Worcester State softball out to prove to MASCAC foes that Lancers are above-average foe

Jennifer Toland

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In 2022, Worcester State led the MASCAC in team ERA and strikeouts and advanced to the conference semifinals, but coach **Keri Bianchini** knew the Lancers would have to improve their offense and run production to take the next step this season.

“That’s what we have been working on since the fall,” Bianchini said after Tuesday’s practice.

With a major infusion from freshman **Bella Gasbarro** of Leominster, the Lancers have the highest team batting average (.338) in the MASCAC this spring, and they are averaging 5.35 runs a game, up from 4.35 last season.

At 24-16 (9-5), Worcester State has its most wins in a season since 2016 as it heads into this week’s MASCAC Tournament. The third-seeded Lancers host sixth-seeded Mass. Maritime in a first-round game at 4 p.m. Wednesday.

WSU wrapped up the regular season with a doubleheader sweep of Mass. Maritime last weekend.

“We feel pretty good going into the tournament,” Gasbarro said. “We have a great group.”

Gasbarro has played in every game and she is batting .411 to rank fifth in the conference. She leads the team in hits, home runs, doubles and RBIs.

“She’s amazing,” Bianchini said. “As a freshman, she has come in and done a fantastic job. You wouldn’t know she’s a freshman. She comes in and does her job and crushes the ball.”

Gasbarro, who is a candidate for MASCAC Rookie of the Year honors, has had 18 multi-hit games this season.

“I get encouragement from my teammates,” she said. “Whatever I do, they’re behind my back. They give me their support.”

Among the leaders of the pitching staff is senior **Jen Thorburn** of Groton.

Thorburn, who was a captain at Groton-Dunstable, is 9-6 with a 2.33 ERA, which ranks second in the MASCAC. She has struck out 70 batters and walked 30.

This semester, Thorburn has balanced softball with full-time student teaching – ninth- and 10<sup>th</sup>-grade honors biology – at Shrewsbury High.

“It’s been really complicated,” Thorburn said, “but Coach has been very good with allowing me to come to practice late and still be part of the team while managing my crazy, crazy schedule.”

Bianchini said Thorburn has done an admirable job balancing her commitment to the team and preparation for her future career.

“When she’s not able to be with us,” Bianchini said, “she puts in the work on her own. She’s doing a lot of individual work as well as teamwork just so she’s able to be at the level she wants to be at. Loving both teaching and softball is helpful for her.”

Thorburn eventually would like to teach and coach high school varsity softball.

“Coaching is teaching, teaching the game I love,” she said. “We’ll see where that takes me.”

## Locals lead Quinsigamond baseball into NJCAA Tournament

The Quinsigamond Community College baseball team made the NJCAA Region 21 tournament for the seventh straight season under coach **John McLaughlin**, and, like last season, the Wyverns persevered to get there.

QCC has just 12 players on its 2023 roster, but that's two more than the Wyverns had last season.

"There are challenges," McLaughlin said, "like not having enough pitching. Most of our kids are playing the field and pitching. We're asking a lot out of them, but they've accepted the challenge."

At 12-9, Quinsigamond is the No. 4 seed in the Region 21 tourney, and will play at top seed Northern Essex CC in the first round at 7 p.m. Thursday.

Sophomore captain **Jose Curet**, who played at Worcester Tech, is among the players who has done a great job in his double-duty role, playing the infield and pitching, for QCC.

"He's one of our top pitchers," McLaughlin said.

Freshman infielder **Matt Beuka**, who is from Rhode Island and was a late transfer to QCC, is batting .500 to rank fifth in NJCAA Division 3.

Sophomore catcher **Steve Thomas** of Worcester and West Boylston High, and freshmen **Jayden Larson** and **Matt Johnson**, both of Worcester and South High, have also been key contributors.

McLaughlin, a former QCC batboy and star player in the early 2000s, guided the Wyverns to three straight Region 21 tournament finals from 2017-18.

## Holy Cross men's hoops adds pair of NLIs

**DeAndre Williams** and **Kahlil Singleton**, who are both 6-foot-3, 180-pound guards, recently signed their national letters of intent to join the Holy Cross men's basketball team for the upcoming season.

Williams averaged 12 points and three assists last season for St. Benedict's Prep in Newark, N.J., and helped St. Benedict's to the New Jersey state Prep A championship.

"DeAndre has excelled in both high school and AAU basketball for two of the top programs in the nation," first-year Holy Cross coach **Dave Paulsen** said. "He is a versatile offensive and defensive player, with the ability to guard multiple positions and use his athleticism to score and create for his teammates."

Last season, Singleton was a first-team All-Elite Prep League honoree at Scotland Campus in Scotland, Pa. Singleton previously attended Fort Vancouver High School in his hometown of Vancouver, Wash., and in 2019 broke a 64-year-old school single-game scoring record by pouring in 55 points against Corvallis (Ore.).

"Kahlil has distinguished himself as a tremendous student and will be a phenomenal ambassador for our school and program," Paulsen said. "On the court, Kahlil is a natural scorer with a competitive streak who has the opportunity to make an immediate impact for our team."

Williams and Singleton join **Joe Nugent**, a 6-foot-6, 220-pound guard/forward from Berkley, Mass., and Tabor Academy, in HC's incoming class.

## Head of the Class

- Former Wachusett Regional star **Anna Gagliastro** of Worcester and former AMSA ace **Piper Kinney** of Marlborough helped lead Simmons to its first GNAC Tournament championship and an automatic NCAA

Division 3 Tournament berth. Gagliastro batted .556 in three GNAC tourney games and Kinney earned the save in Game 1. On the season, Gagliastro is batting .282 while Kinney is 7-4 with a 1.58 ERA, 85 strikeouts and 19 walks.

- Boston College junior right-hander **John West** of Shrewsbury pitched four scoreless innings of relief to earn the win in the Eagles' 11-9 victory against Wake Forest, which moved up to No. 1 in this week's national rankings. West did not allow a hit, struck out four and walked one batter.
- Dayton sophomore infielder **David Pedanou**, a former Doherty High star from Worcester, went 3 for 4 and drove in a run in the Flyers' win over St. Joseph's.
- Former Wachusett star **Francis Ferguson** of Jefferson, a junior at Eastern Nazarene, earned NECC Pitcher of the Year honors after leading the conference with a 1.55 ERA and 82 strikeouts.
- Fitchburg State freshman **Liam Bourassa** of Shirley placed second in the javelin at the Division 3 New England Championships. Bourassa's mark of 61.40 meters was a personal best and qualified him for the All-New England Championships.