

# QCC Wyverns driven to succeed by third-year coach Preziosa

March 1, 2024 | Education/Schools, Sports

*By Mike Vigneux*

Head Coach John Preziosa (photo by Richard Small/QCC)

WORCESTER—John Preziosa drives more than 120 miles every day just to serve as the men’s basketball coach at Quinsigamond Community College (QCC). From Melrose to Worcester, it’s a three-hour round trip across the Commonwealth. That’s quite a daily commitment. But Coach “Prez” doesn’t make the journey alone. He’s often joined by three of his QCC players: sophomores Luka Vljakovic and Chris Paul; and freshman Marino Preziosa, his son—all of Melrose. They pile into Preziosa’s car with a common goal—to work together for the best of the team.

That’s just one small example of the theme of unity and togetherness Preziosa has brought to the program during his three years as head coach of the Wyverns. Whether traveling together daily or earning tough conference victories on the road, every player on the team has been on board for a memorable ride this winter.

Earlier this week, QCC punched its second straight ticket to the semifinals of the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) Division III Region 21 playoffs with a hard-fought, come-from-behind 83-77 victory over the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) on February 28 at home.

After leading by nine points at halftime, the Wyverns let CCRI creep back into the game in the second half. CCRI didn’t go away easily and came all the way back to eventually take the lead. The game remained incredibly tight for the final five minutes.

Clinging to a two-point lead with 18.5 seconds to play, Marino Preziosa stepped to the foul line for two crucial free throws and calmly drained both to give QCC a much-needed four-point advantage they did not relinquish.

Coach “Prez” is quick to acknowledge that it has been both fun and a unique challenge to coach his son this season. Marino has been a solid contributor off the bench, but he struggled a bit in the CCRI game going scoreless on three shots until his heroics at the foul line. As a coach and father, Preziosa was glad to see him succeed in such a pressure situation.

“You want him to do well and you want to stick with him,” said Preziosa.

former South High standout Jeromaine Archibald (photo by Richard Hall/QCC)

Sophomore Daniel “Snoop” Edmonds of Fitchburg led four players in double figures for the Wyverns with 24 points. Paul chipped in with 18 points and seven assists while fellow sophomore Trevor Oliver of Douglas posted a double-double with 14 points, 11 rebounds and three blocks on the defensive interior. Vlajkovic finished with 11 points and nine rebounds before fouling out late in the game.

The teams split two regular season meetings which were decided by a combined three points with each contest going down to the final minute. Preziosa described the quarterfinal game with CCRI as a “heavyweight fight” with neither team wanting to end their season early. But close games have been the norm for the Wyverns, who finished third in the conference standings during the regular season. Nine of their games have been decided by seven points or less.

“It’s a special group because it’s a group that doesn’t quit. We’ve been down and have pulled games out of the fire a lot this year,” said Preziosa after the win. “These guys play with a tremendous amount of heart—a thing that a coach can’t really teach.”

QCC has been led by a host of sophomores that make up the core of Preziosa’s first recruiting class. Vlajkovic ranks among the top 10 overall players in the league, averaging more than 17 points and 11 rebounds per game. The strong supporting cast includes Edmonds (15 ppg), Sean Manning of Grafton (12 ppg), Paul (9.7 ppg) and former South High standout Jeromaine Archibald of Worcester (8.8 ppg).

The Wyverns have compiled a 15-9 overall record while going 15-7 in conference play. Their next test is the semifinals on Saturday, March 2 where QCC squares off against Quincy College at 6:15 p.m. at Northern Essex Community College in Lawrence. The Wyverns lost both games to Quincy during the regular season. The Granite, who finished second in the conference behind Northern Essex, come into the game with a 20-5 overall record.

As March begins and the college basketball postseason takes center stage, the ride continues for Preziosa and his Wyverns. QCC has weathered all the highs and lows of the past four months and now+ stand just two wins away from a trip to the NJCAA Division III national championship tournament at Herkimer College in Herkimer, NY, March 13-16.

“It’s been a great season and we’re not ready for it to end,” said Preziosa. “It’s really a complete team effort for us. We feel like we have a good thing going.”