Hartford Claims First Academic Cup in 15 Years

When the Hartford Hawks are playing for a conference championship, you need only look in one place to find University of Hartford President Walter Harrison: sitting smack-dab in the middle of the student cheering section, smiling with pride.

There was a similar look of pride on Harrison’s face when word came down in July that Hartford student-athletes as a whole had scored an important victory in the classroom. University of Hartford student-athletes registered the highest grade point average among nine America East schools during the 2011–12 year, thus winning the conference’s Academic Cup for the first time since 1996–97. The winning margin was a razor-thin, one one-hundredth of a decimal point over the University of Vermont, which had won the honor for seven consecutive years.

“Pat Meiser [director of athletics] and I had talked about winning this cup since I arrived [in 1998],” Harrison said. “Last fall, at the all-student-athlete meeting, Pat challenged our athletes to win it in the classroom. And they responded brilliantly. This is a wonderful testament to our students, first and foremost, but also to our faculty and staff who inspire them to succeed.”

The Hawks finished the 2011–12 academic year with a 3.16 GPA, as 16 of Hartford’s 18 America East athletic programs earned a 3.00 GPA or higher and a league-high five teams recorded the highest GPA of their America East peers. The Hawks’ baseball (3.28), men’s lacrosse (3.07), women’s softball (3.38), men’s outdoor track and field (3.12) and women’s volleyball (3.37) programs all led the conference in their respective sports for team grade point average.

Men’s golf and women’s golf, which are in different conferences, also had GPAs above 3.0.

“The America East Conference and its institutions continue to consistently perform at a high level in the classroom, which is a real strength across this league,” according to Commissioner Amy Huchthausen. “I would like to commend the University of Hartford, its student-athletes, faculty, and staff on this year’s Academic Cup, as it is a true testament to the commitment of all of those groups to ensure their student-athletes are students first.”

Other America East conference schools are Boston University, the University of New Hampshire, the University of Maine, Binghamton University, Stony Brook University, the University at Albany, and the University of Maryland–Baltimore County.

It didn’t take long for the University of Hartford women’s basketball program to come together in support of a recent graduate and former player. Within days of learning that Amanda Weaver ’11 had been diagnosed with Stage III colon cancer, the team was in head coach Jennifer Rizzotti’s office laying out plans for a benefit walk to support Weaver and her family. By the time the Sept. 8 Walk for Weaver concluded, the lofty goals set by the women’s basketball program were shattered.

“We put together a chart to show us what our goal was, but we’re just going to rip it up,” Rizzotti told the crowd following the walk, “because we raised over $45,000.”

“Words cannot even begin to express how appreciative my family and I are for the effort that my teammates and everyone involved put in to make today happen and for the generous donations you have all made toward my medical expenses,” an emotional Weaver told the walkers. “Beyond the monetary support, your outpouring of love and encouragement continues to keep me motivated and strong, even on the toughest days.”

Weaver was a key player down the stretch as the 2010–11 Hawks recovered from a 1-9 start to win 11 of their last 12 games. Her three-point field goal midway through the second half of the America East Conference championship game broke a
Rizzotti to Be Inducted into Women's Basketball Hall of Fame

Jennifer Rizzotti is accumulating an impressive women’s basketball coaching résumé. Three America East Coach of the Year awards. Six trips to the NCAA tournament. Three gold medals with USA Basketball.

Rizzotti may well be in the midst of a Hall of Fame coaching career, but it is her accomplishments as a player that have earned the 14-year Hawks’ head coach induction into the Women’s Basketball Hall of Fame in Knoxville, Tenn. The hall’s Class of 2013 was announced this past July. Rizzotti and five others will be inducted in Knoxville on June 8, 2013.

To be inducted as a player, an athlete must be retired at least five years from the highest level of play. Rizzotti, who was an All-American at the University of Connecticut (UConn), concluded her professional career with the Cleveland Rockers in 2003 after playing five seasons in the WNBA. She was first drafted in the WNBA in 1999 by the Houston Comets, with whom she was on a pair of WNBA Championship teams. She also spent three seasons with the New England Blizzard of the American Basketball League, where she was a two-time All-Star.

During her collegiate career, Rizzotti set UConn season and career records in both assists and steals. The point guard was the Associated Press National Player of the Year and Wade Trophy winner as college basketball’s outstanding senior player in 1995–96. That accolade came a season after leading the UConn Huskies to their first national championship and perfect 35-0 record in 1995-96. That accolade came a season after leading the UConn Huskies to their first national championship and perfect 35-0 record in 1995.

Rizzotti was a two-time Kodak All-America First Team selection, a GTE/CoSIDA Women’s Basketball Academic All-American, the Big East Player of the Year, and the Big East Women’s Basketball Scholar-Athlete of the Year. During the Huskies’ memorable run to the 1995 national championship, she was featured on the cover of Sports Illustrated.

“Although I am proud of my accomplishments as a player,” Rizzotti says, “I feel like I was really meant to be a basketball coach. I do hope, when all is said and done, that I will be recognized for my contributions to the sport from a coaching perspective as much as I impacted the sport as a player.”

Jen Rizzotti, head coach of University of Hartford’s women’s basketball

Men’s Golf Wins

From Sept. 24 to Oct. 15, over the span of four tournaments, the University of Hartford (UHart) men’s golf team took home the title in three of four tournaments for the first time since 1996–97. It all began at Bull’s Bridge Golf Club in South Kent, Conn., when the Hawks ran away from the 16-team field in their own Hartford Hawks Invitational.

Leading by nine strokes entering the final day of play, UHart shot a closing-day 291, sending their final margin of victory to 20 strokes. In the Macdonald Cup in New Haven, Conn., hosted by Yale University, the Hawks finished tied for second among 15 teams. Only Yale bettered Hartford’s score, winning by three strokes. The team’s hot streak continued at the Connecticut Cup in Ellington, Conn., where three Hawks shot par on the final day as UHart won the 15-team tournament, beating second-place Rhode Island by four strokes. In the fourth tournament, the team erased a 12-stroke deficit to win the Philadelphia Big Five Invitational at the Philmont Country Club by one stroke.

Women’s Soccer on a Roll

At press time, the women’s soccer team had already locked up one of six spots in the upcoming America East Tournament. Their record of 9-3-3 included an eight-game unbeaten streak that was broken by a 1-0 loss to Boston University on Senior Day. Prior to the loss, the Hawks had consecutive shutout victories over New Hampshire, Maine, and Albany. The team earned its first regional top-10 ranking on Oct. 8, debuting ninth in the Northeast region, and was listed among Top Drawer Soccer’s Top 64 teams nationally projected to make the NCAA Tournament.

Basketball Teams Tip Off

The season tipped off for the men’s and women’s basketball teams earlier this month.

The men’s schedule consists of 29 games, including 14 home contests. The Hawks will play a pair of opponents, Rice and Arizona State, for the first time in the program’s 28-year Division I era.

Women’s basketball will also play a 29-game slate. The Hawks’ schedule includes 15 home contests, including a matchup with national powerhouse UConn on Dec. 22. The away schedule features a first-ever matchup with Vanderbilt and a trip to College Park, Md., to compete in the University of Maryland’s holiday tournament in late December.

Complete schedules and game coverage are available at www.hartfordhawks.com, where fans may also listen to live audio of all men’s and women’s games or pay to subscribe to live video coverage of home games. In the Hartford area, radio station WDRC (1360 AM) airs men’s games, and WWUH (91.3 FM) broadcast women’s matchups.