

UMaine

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topped the squad as did her 35.1 minutes-per-game played.

UMaine's versatile group of seniors made up the rest of the rotation.

Wood was a presence at both ends, leading the team in rebounding (7.4 rpg) while averaging 9.4 points, 2.8 assists and a team-high 2.5 steals. She was an All-AE Second Team and All-Defensive choice.

She finished her career among the best players ever at UMaine, ranking first in games played (127), sixth in rebounding (902), seventh in scoring (1,462) and eighth in assists (363). She is believed to be in the top five with 282 steals.

Wood posted 23 career double-doubles and the first known triple-double in program history.



Gustafsson

Mikaela Gustafsson continued her development as a post player, averaging 8.5 points, 4.2 rebounds and two assists, and athletic transfer Bella Swan registered 7.9 points on 47 percent shooting and averaged 5.3 rebounds.



Weckstrom

Combination guard Sophie Weckstrom (5.6 ppg, 2.2 apg), 3-point specialist Lauren Bodine (4.5 ppg) and

wing Chantel Charles (3.7 ppg, 1.6 apg) also were part of the regular rotation. Fellow seniors Anna Heise (1.6 ppg) and Milica Mitrovic (1.1 ppg) chipped in coming off the bench.

UMaine was only occasionally dynamic with its offensive play, save for some occasional runs sparked by transition play and 3-point shooting. With Koizar as the only player able to consistently attack off the dribble, the team relied instead on perimeter passing to get the ball inside and chose instead to wear down opposing defenses.



BDN FILE

The University of Maine's Liz Wood (right) drives past Albany's Zakiya Saunders during their game on Feb. 14 at the Cross Insurance Center in Bangor. The senior forward finished her career at UMaine ranking first in games played (127), sixth in rebounding (902), seventh in scoring (1,462) and eighth in assists (363).

Moving forward, the Black Bears are going to be significantly lacking in quality game experience. Koizar is the only proven commodity, despite the fact UMaine will return two other seniors in post players Sheraton Jones and Kirsten Johnson, along with junior guards Christiana Gerostergiou and Parise Rossignol of Van Buren.

Redshirt sophomore guard Tanesha Sutton, a 5-foot-10 transfer from Duquesne, is expected to step into a prominent role. Also returning is Maddy McVicar of Calais, a walk-on

who will be a redshirt freshman next season.

Barron is likely to call upon some of his six incoming freshmen to make immediate contributions. That group includes 6-3 forward Anita Kelava from Croatia and 5-8 guard Julie Brosseau of Repentigny, Quebec, along with 6-2 Croatian forward Tihana Stojkovic, 6-1 Swedish guard Fanny Wadling and Bar Harbor's Sierra Tapley, a 5-8 guard.

Tapley, who played at Mount Desert Island, suffered a season-ending knee injury in January.

There appears to be a lot of

potential for next season's ballclub, but Barron and his staff will need to find roles for the lesser-used returning players as they try to fast-forward another large freshman class to the Division I game.

It seems unrealistic to expect that UMaine would be able to replace such a veteran nucleus quickly enough to remain a title contender in America East. Even so, the returnees who have had a hand in rebuilding the winning culture and now have an opportunity to exert their influence on the court.

Bess

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his best basketball down the stretch, admits having to work through some issues during the first semester.

"I'm still trying to learn all the ins and outs of college and be able to balance time for school work, social life and basketball," Bess said. "I was struggling a little bit with most of that at the beginning of the season, then I had some personal issues that were going on, so I was kind of up and down."

He credited his parents, David and Mary, along with his family and his former coaches, for helping him get back on track.

"I'm really happy where I am right now," said Bess.

Bess became a starter after a foot injury to senior guard Dan Brix. He has started the last five games, averaging 13.4 points and 5.6 rebounds while shooting 57 percent overall and 42 percent from the 3-point arc during that span.

Bess scored 14 points and grabbed five rebounds in Stonehill's NCAA regional championship win over Northeast-10 Conference rival Saint Anselm.

"I think building off all the time I've been here, learning from the other players before me, has helped me quite a lot in my transition to be a starter," Bess said.

He has continued to work on all aspects of his game. As a freshman, he averaged 3.4 points and 1.1 rebounds in 24 games, averaging 13.6 minutes.

He said having to earn playing time after his dominating play at Penquis and his strong contributions at Hampden was not as difficult as one might imagine.

"I think the transition from my junior year of high school to Hampden helped me with that, because I went to a team where everybody was a lot more talented," Bess said. "I didn't have to do as much."

With the Skyhawks, Bess plays a shooting guard/small forward spot that helps him take advantage of his shooting and his ability

to slash to the basket off the dribble.

"We tell him to make sure you shoot it when you're open or catch it aggressively and have the ability to go by your defender, take advantage of that," said Kraus, who continues to stress defense to Bess.

It's a dynamic that was preached by Bess' former coaches, including Jason Mills and Tony Hamlin at Penquis and AAU coach Mike Woodbury.

"When he plays aggressively defensively and he's giving everything he has on the defensive side of things, he's a really talented defender," Kraus said.

Bess continues to strive for improvement. As his role grows, so does his confidence, which should help him take the next step in his career.

"Personally, I always knew I could do this. It would just be a matter of time when the moment kind of presented itself and hopefully I'd be ready to step up to that," Bess said.

"The big thing is better understanding his role and his strengths as a player," Kraus said.

"He's got a lot more room for growth, and we're excited to help him get to that point to reach his full potential," he added.

Bess is more concerned with team goals, rather than his own play.

"We've come here to the Elite Eight, and hopefully I can do as much as I can to help our team win," Bess said.

He will have family members in the crowd when Stonehill plays on Wednesday. His parents are staying with one of his aunts, who lives nearby.

"I'm glad they're going to be down here to support me. That's going to make it a lot easier," Bess said.

"I hope I can represent Maine as long as I can," he said.

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JONATHAN ERNST | REUTERS

First lady Michelle Obama reacts as she, her daughters Malia and Sacha, her husband, President Barack Obama, and Cuban President Raul Castro, watch an exhibition baseball game between the Cuban National Team and Major League Baseball's Tampa Bay Rays at Estadio Latinoamericano in Havana on Tuesday.

Cuba

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Obama arrived at Havana's Estadio Latinoamericano with first lady Michelle Obama, their two daughters and his mother-in-law, and waved at the crowd to loud applause.

It was dwarfed only by the shouts for Castro, who arrived at the same time, amid shouts of "Cuba! Cuba!"

The game began with a moment of silence for the victims of the Brussels' terrorist attacks on Tuesday. Obama and Castro stood side by side, Obama bowing his head.

That Obama kept to his schedule after the Brussels attack and didn't scrap the game and return home drew scathing criticism in Washington, including from Republican presidential candidates.

"I wouldn't be going to any baseball game today, that's for darn sure," Ohio Gov. John Kasich told Fox News, saying Obama should return to Washington and work the phones and "arrange some conferences with the heads of state."

Samantha Rojas, a 25-year-old dentist said Obama's visit was encouraging.

"There's a lot of emotion in the stadium," she said. "The fact that he's sitting here in a baseball game shows that things are going to change."

A major focus of Obama's trip to Cuba this week was encouraging its government to embrace more private enterprise and Major League Baseball and Cuba's government are in talks on a deal that would allow Cuban players to play ball in the United States without having to defect or risk dangerous sea passages and sometimes treacherous human traffickers.

Rays players said the Cuban fans excitement was unlike anything they've ever experienced.

"We ran out onto the field for a stretch and they started giving a standing ovation — awesome," said Logan Morrison, a first baseman. "For me, as a player, this experience is second-to-none."

During batting practice, Rays players signed autographs and threw baseballs to fans, more than players usually interact with fans in the bleachers. Rays star pitcher Chris Archer ran around the field with Diego Jesus Lopez Gonzales, a nine-year-old who plays baseball in Havana.

"It's beautiful," his father,

Geovani Lopez Pelaez, said. "It makes the kids so happy."

Pelaez likes the Rays, but said his favorite MLB team is the Chicago White Sox, also President Obama's team. He said he remembers watching on television as Obama threw out the first pitch at an MLB game wearing a White Sox cap.

The two presidents, who chatted during the game with what appeared to be an interpreter, were as much of a draw as the players, past and present. The Cuban team stopped by the area where the two were sitting. And Obama, Castro and first lady Michelle Obama reached through the stadium netting to shake hands with a contingent of Rays players who brought along their phones to snap pictures of the presidents.

Obama stood and cheered as the Rays scored a run in the second inning; Castro stayed seated.

The game took place at the 45,000-seat stadium, which also hosted the 1999 exhibition game between the Baltimore Orioles and Cuba's national team. It has been undergoing improvements, including installation of a new infield, under MLB supervision.

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