

'Us vs Everybody': #12 Stony Brook Women's Lacrosse Eyes Fight for NCAA Title

By **Kenneth Fermin** - February 10, 2020



(Senior Midfielder Ally Kennedy with the ball in a 2019 home contest. Kennedy was ranked the sixth-best women's lacrosse athlete by Inside Lacrosse and will be a dominant factor in Stony Brook's offense. Photo Credit: Jim Harrison/Stony Brook Athletics)

Stony Brook Women's Lacrosse head coach **Joe Spallina** stood in front of his team, his eyes passing along every player as he spoke in a sharp tone. It was a chilly mid-January morning, but Spallina heated up the locker room by setting the season mantra for his team.

"It's going to be us versus everybody," **Spallina said**.

Stony Brook has accomplished plenty since Spallina started his head coaching tenure at the school in 2012. After commanding the **NCAA's** best turnaround in his first season, the Seawolves have been perennial **NCAA Tournament** contenders and winners of seven-straight **America East Conference** titles. The program has produced 18 **IWLCA All-Americans** and a crew of **Tewaaraton** nominees including attacker **Kylie Ohlmiller**, **the NCAA's all-time points and assists leader**. Even with all of the accolades and hype surrounding the team, one prize has evaded the program so far- the **NCAA Championship**.

The Seawolves set an unprecedented standard of success for the program as the **NCAA's** top ranked and only undefeated program through 20 contests in 2018. Stony Brook was still slotted in the fifth seed and forced to play in a road contest against #4-ranked **Boston College**, despite leading the nation in six-major categories including points per game (29.2). Stony Brook fell 12-11 in overtime and wrapped up the season without the championship.

Stony Brook struggled to match that same level of success last season, despite putting up a pretty good one on paper. The Seawolves fell out of the **NCAA Top 25 rankings** at one point in the season and surrendered five losses, matching the most given up in Spallina's tenure. Still, the program won 16 contests and swept its America East rivals en route to another conference championship and a 10-9 overtime upset-victory over the **#9-ranked James Madison Dukes** in round one of the 2019 **NCAA Postseason**. The Seawolves concluded the season ranked 14th in the nation while four players

earned IWLCA All-region honors– goalkeeper **Anna Tesoriero**, defender **Mackenzie Burns**, midfielder **Ally Kennedy** and attacker **Taryn Ohmiller**.

There was a good mixture of returning veterans and fresh faces that stood out after looking around the Seawolves' locker. Among the returnees are seniors Kennedy and Ohmiller, who dominated the team's scoring with a combined average of 9.2 points per contest. Junior defender **Hailey Dillon**, a component of the team's 'hard-striking' defense and classmate midfielder **Rayna Sabella**, who dished the game-winning assist to upset the Dukes, will return for more Stony Brook action.

But, the team will also be without several assets that got it to the second round of the 2019 NCAA Tournament. Tesoriero, who allowed the third-least amount of goals per game in the nation, attacker **Nicole Barretta**, who sent the team to round two with the game-winning goal off Sabella's pass, midfielder **Keri McCarthy** and Burns are among the eight seniors that graduated last summer. Junior **Siobhan Rafferty**, the second highest-scorer in the conference with 50 goals, will miss the entire season after tearing her ACL over the fall. Junior defender **Rachel Williams** and sophomore attacker **Shonly Wallace** transferred to the **Oregon Ducks**, joining attacker **Marlee Moon Gaddy** as the second and third ex-Seawolves to join the Ducks in two seasons.

Stony Brook stayed active throughout the off-season by picking up transfers and freshmen to boost its depth and fill gaps. Junior **Julia Markey** will look to provide the defense with aggressive ground-ball scooping ability while sophomore **Lluna Katz** is aiming to protect the midfield and add the offense with another weapon. Katz commanded the offense in Kent State's inaugural lacrosse season, scoring 34 goals while also forcing 15 turnovers.

With its goalkeeper graduated, the team will have a new starter at the position for the first time in four seasons. One option will be sophomore goalkeeper **Gabrielle Cacciola**— a **Wading River**-native who was a team captain at **Shoreham-Wading River High School** and appeared in six games last season. But, signs indicate redshirt-sophomore **Kameron Halsall**— the starting goalkeeper in the **Canadian National U-19** team and a **Rutgers** transfer who saved 117 shots as a freshman, will get the starting job.

"There are certain dates when you map your year out that you circle," Spallina said. "The opportunity to get the team together for the first time when we are headed into our season is a specialty."

Regardless of who will be on the field starting the game, there is no denying the program is eager to defend its top-level reputation with the talent.

"You hit one of us, you hit all of us," Spallina said. "There are going to be great days– there are going to be tough days. There are going to be days where you come in here celebrating– there are days when you are dragging in here after a tough practice. Understand [that] everyday has a purpose."

Stony Brook was the 12th-highest goal-scoring team in the NCAA last season (310 goals) and the 16th-highest per game (14.7). The team dominated possessing the ball by winning 56 percent of its draw controls. It even had the sixth-best goal-margin by tallying an average of six more goals than its opponents per game.

Stony Brook boasts an RPI-heavy schedule once again that will feature an array of potential NCAA Tournament talent. The Seawolves will face eight teams that are either in or receiving votes in the **Inside Lacrosse Top 25 Poll**— including #4-ranked Syracuse, #6-ranked **Princeton**, and receiving-votes intrastate rival, **Hofstra**. Kennedy was voted as the sixth best player in women's lacrosse by Inside Lacrosse. Stony Brook is the unanimous favorite to win the America East title for the eighth consecutive season.

"You can look through our schedule and it is set up as a murderer's row," Spallina said. "You can go through 'this game' or 'that game' or any conference game really. . . but it isn't about one specific team in our schedule. It's about us."

If you asked Coach Spallina and the Stony Brook athletes to sum up what the 2020 season is about, they wouldn't say it is about the roster changes, increased competition, or even achieving the same success from two seasons ago.

"It's about us versus everybody... If we have that mentality, then this team is unbeatable everyday."

#12-ranked Stony Brook begins the 2020 season against the #4-ranked Syracuse Orange in Syracuse, N.Y. on Monday Feb. 10 at 5 p.m.

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