

Stony Brook Men's Lacrosse Ready to Dominate Under Gilardi

By **Kenneth Fermin** - February 12, 2020



Senior attacker Tom Haun taking a shot against UMBC on March 23, 2019. Haun is commanding Stony Brook offensively under head coach Anthony Gilardi's new system. PHOTO CREDIT: JIM HARRISON- STONY BROOK ATHLETICS

There was a feeling of anxiousness and excitement filling **Kenneth P. LaValle Stadium** as **Stony Brook Men's Lacrosse** stepped on the field for its 2020 season opener, on Tuesday, Feb. 11. **The Seawolves** looked pretty similar since the last time they took the field, with 37 returnees. But, the goals, system, and playstyle was anything but similar.

The biggest change from the off-season did not take place on the field- but along the sidelines. Stony Brook welcomed **Anthony Gilardi** to the head coaching spot, giving the team arguably the biggest play calling boost in the NCAA. Gilardi commanded the **Towson Tigers** to the top rank in the nation with a powerhouse offense, eventually finishing as the sixth-ranked team in 2019.

Gilardi wasted little time implementing a new system upon entering Stony Brook. The offense was now always going to be active on the attack, instead of remaining idle and burning much of the shot clock. Everyone on the field was now considered a threat to score which eliminated the idea of just turning to attackers for points.

"We are a lot faster of a team," senior attacker **Chris Pickel, Jr.** said. "We are moving a lot faster around the perimeter. We are moving around the cage faster. We are playing fluid offense together."

The seniors bought into the system in a heartbeat. Soon, the rest of the team followed suit. It didn't take long for the team to see its effects.

"Everything has been about buying into what we are doing," Gilardi said. "Those guys have done a good job buying into what we want to do on offense, defense, how we want to ride and faceoff. That has really been the most impressive part, that the guys have bought into the system"

The system boosts an offense that led the America East Conference with 75 goals against conference foes, last year. The tandem of **Tom Haun** and Chris Pickel, Jr. cracked the top 15 in scoring among the conference with 34 and 23 goals scored, respectively. The top seven scorers from 2019 will return for the Seawolves, this season.

While the team is retaining many of its key scorers, it is also transitioning several defenders towards a greater attacking role. Midfielders **Caleb Pearson** and **Matt Anderson** will be getting more time on the offensive area, while **Wayne White** will provide extra speed and agility after recovering from a right foot injury.

Defensively, the team is relying on its midfielders as much as its defenders for halting opposing drives. **CJ Trenkle** will captain the Seawolves backfield alongside **Danny Cassidy**, a 2019 America East All-Conference Second Team honoree, and **Devin O'Leary**. Stony Brook is supplied with a mixture of mids and long-stick midfielders to patrol the restraining lines including **Tristian Dowd**, **David Estrella**, and freshman long-stick **Michael Sabella**, the brother of junior Stony Brook Women's Lacrosse athlete- **Rayna**.

Stony Brook has kept the bitter end of last postseason in the back of its mind. The team clinched the #1-seed and home-field advantage after a thrilling 12-10 win over **UAlbany**, wrapping up the regular season in a drench-filled slugfest. It was arguably the Seawolves' best chance at hoisting the championship trophy for the first time since 2012- with America East Coach of the Year **Jim Nagle** calling the plays and long-stick midfielder **Ryland Rees**, the reigning Defensive Player of the Year, patrolling the field.

The Seawolves failed to get out of the starting gate against the #4-seeded **UMBC Retrievers** and fell 3-1 after ten minutes in the America East Semifinals. The Retrievers lit up the Seawolves defense in the second quarter and took an 8-1 lead into the locker room, never looking back. UMBC went on to win the game 14-8, the conference title 14-13 over the **Vermont Catamounts**, and the First Round contest over the **Marist Red Foxes**, 14-8, in classic "Retrievers-upset" fashion.

Rees finished his Seawolves' career without winning a championship. Nagle and Stony Brook "parted ways" less than two weeks after the upset-loss.

"We are playing with a chip on our shoulder," senior attacker Tom Haun said. "It was a very disappointing end to the season last year. We were the one-seed and had tons of senior leadership from Ryland and **Justin Pugal**. Now we are ranked the fourth-seed [in the America East Preseason Coaches' Poll] so people seem to be forgetting about us, but we will be back."

Stony Brook may be ranked fourth in the conference preseason poll but there is little voting separation between the top four teams. Vermont earned the top rank for the first time in program history with 31 points, but second-ranked UMBC earned the most head coach votes with 3, along with 30 overall points. UAlbany trails by two points with a head coach pick, while Stony Brook caps the top four with 24 votes, including one from a head coach.

The St John's Red Storm provided Stony Brook with its first challenge under Gilardi. The Seawolves looked like they were going to repeat the Quarterfinals failure after falling 3-1 after the first period, once again. But, the team rallied back by scoring six second-period goals and later tying the game at 7. Stony Brook claimed the 12-9 lead after scoring four-straight third period goals, eventually winning 13-12 in overtime.

The Seawolves showcased the refinements that they worked on over the off-season, in the win. Haun led the team with a hat trick while six other players added to the scoring tally. Pearson clinched the game winner with less than eight seconds to go in the overtime period.

The victory kicks off another Stony Brook season where it looks to prove that the team can earn an America East title.

"Our goal is to win the America East Championship," Gilardi said. "We talk about that everyday and that does not change. We know what it takes- [myself and

the coaching staff] have had a lot of success in the past. It is about educating these guys and doing what it takes.”

Stony Brook will travel to Conway, C.T. to battle the **Fairfield Stags** on Saturday, February 15 at 1 p.m. The game will be broadcast on the Lacrosse Sports Network as the **CAA Game of the Week**.

Kenneth Fermin

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Kenneth is a junior Journalism major at Stony Brook University in Long Island, NY. Kenneth is currently a broadcast commentator for Stony Brook Athletics and WUSB 90.1 FM, covering the Football, Basketball, Baseball, Volleyball, Soccer, Swimming and Diving, Track and Field and nationally-ranked Lacrosse programs. Kenneth also has experience working behind the camera, as an audio engineer, and over three years of newspaper reporting. Kenneth loves covering breaking news and writing captivating articles with his compelling storytelling.

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