

## **Making History**

RIT Women Win First National Championship

by Jeff McKinzie

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Revenge is sweet. When the final buzzer sounded at Ritter Arena on March 17, the RIT women's hockey team finally avenged last year's disappointing loss against Norwich University. In this moment, fans in the bleachers triumphantly erupted into roars, players were mobbed by their teammates, and coaches grinned ear-to-ear at the final score for this historical game: 4-1, RIT.

A close game for two whole periods, RIT battled through a 1-1 tie to score three goals in the final period and secure their first NCAA Division III National Championship — the third national championship won by any team at RIT.

Ranked nationally at number one in Division III for most of the season, the Tigers played like the team that started with a 15 game unbeaten streak. The dynamic team guarded the net well throughout the whole game despite a penalty-plagued start, as both teams were penalized seven times combined in the first period. From the second period on, the Tigers played consistent offense, as they took eight shots on goal in the first period and then took 12 in each period. In the second period, the Tigers ruled the ice as they dominated on defense, allowing the Cadets to take only four shots on goal.

Both teams put themselves on the board early, with RIT scoring the first goal 9:06 into the game as third year Health Administration student Kristina Moss slapped her shot off a Norwich player and past the Cadets' goalie Kelly Fisk. The goal, Moss' seventh this season, helped gain momentum for the next few minutes of play.

That momentum, however, slowed drastically when Norwich's Jackie Perez fired in a rebound from a shot by teammate Stephanie Invern at the 14:47 mark. RIT Goalie and second year Business Management student Laura Chamberlain made the save, but Perez was still able to sneak her shot by the Tigers' defense.

RIT struck back 1:23 into the third period, when second year Packaging Science student Kourtney Kunichika made a great pass on a 2-on-1 matchup to first year Environmental Chemistry student Celeste Brown, who slithered a shot past Fisk at the left side of the net. The goal, which was Brown's 12th of the season, energized the Tigers and sparked a dominating offensive effort that led to two more goals in less than 10 minutes.

At the 8:39 mark, Brown forced a turnover, kicking the puck to Kunichika, who was alone in front. Taking advantage of the space she had, Kunichika easily decked Fisk and shot a backhand for her 20th goal of the season.

The final goal of the game, and of RIT's spectacular season, came just minutes later at the 11:59 mark, when fourth year Packaging Science student Ali Hills rebounded and jammed in a shot from the slot for her second goal of the season.

The win put the Tigers at 28-1-1. Twenty-eight wins is a Division III single-season record.

Tiger players Chamberlain and Kunichika were both named to the all-tournament team. Along with the goal she scored, Kunichika also had three assists in the game. According to RIT Athletics, she finished as RIT's scoring leader this season with 45 points on 20 goals, and 25 assists in 30 games. Chamberlain, who stopped 27 shots, was named the Tournament's Most Outstanding Player. She finished the season with her own record of 17-1-1 and led Division III with a .945 save percentage.

Second year Journalism student Melissa Bromley was thrilled at her team's goal of winning a national championship becoming a reality. "Is this real life?" she asked excitedly after the game, and joked that she thought she lost her voice.

After the game, RIT coach Scott McDonald said that the win was "the greatest thing ever," and that it was hard to put what he was feeling into words. But McDonald said his team was prepared for this game. "We practice the same things all the time," he said.

In an email, RIT's Executive Director of Intercollegiate Athletics Louis W. Spiotti, Jr. said that the win was one of his proudest moments ever at RIT. "These student athletes on this team are a very special group," he said, acknowledging the team's talent. "I felt they were destined to do something outstanding, and they did."

Next season, the women's hockey program will be making the move to Division I. When asked about what would be need to improve to ensure a smooth transition to a more intense playing environment, Spiotti stated: "I think they need to continue to do what they're doing. It's a winning formula. They just have to do it at another level."