

# Blackhawk grad Chassidy Omogrosso, Duquesne getting closer to first NCAA Tournament berth

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PITTSBURGH — Dan Burt stood on the baseline of Duquesne's basketball court after practice and looked up to the rafters, pointing to a banner on the ceiling that lists all the years the Dukes have appeared in the NCAA Tournament.

It's been 39 years since the men's basketball team has earned a berth. The women have never been there, although they've been close. In each of the past seven seasons, the Duquesne women's basketball team has played in the WNIT. And, in many of those years, the Dukes have been right on the edge, waiting anxiously on Selection Sunday to see if their name would be called.

So far, that hasn't happened. But this season they're looking to finally break through.

There are plenty of reasons to believe it will happen. Duquesne is 17-2 and 5-2 in the Atlantic 10 heading into Thursday night's game at Richmond. It has an RPI of 24 with a 4-1 record against top 50 teams and a 4-2 record against top 100 teams. There isn't a bad loss on its resume.

"We have five weeks, and anything can happen," said Burt, who served as assistant for six years before taking over as head coach in 2013. "We have a razor-thin margin of error."

It's a lesson he's learned the hard way, and one the veteran players are painfully aware of, too. But this season seems different, partially because of a talented freshmen class that includes Blackhawk graduate Chassidy Omogrosso, who is fifth on the team in scoring at 10.4 points per game.

Although it's her first season with Duquesne, it's not lost on Omogrosso what it would mean to the program to reach the NCAA Tournament for the first time, and she can't help but smile when she thinks of being a part of it.

"That would be awesome," she said. "I'm a freshman, but we have experienced seniors and that is their main goal, and obviously we want to do it for them. That would be mean everything to make it to that tournament."

While Duquesne has veterans on its roster, including senior guard April Robinson, who leads the Dukes in scoring (14.1 ppg) and assists (7.5 apg), Burt said the team wouldn't be where it is without the consistent play of two key freshmen: Omogrosso and Kadri-Ann Lass, who averages 10.8 points and 6.5 rebounds per game.

"It's a situation where both of them are playing a lot of minutes, critical minutes," Burt said. "Chassidy gives you instant offense. She shoots the ball so well. She spaces the floor so well because she shoots it deep behind the line with a quick release. It's hard to double our post players because of that."

Omogrosso — fourth in the Atlantic 10 in 3-point field goal percentage at .392 — and Lass are part of a seven-person freshman class that was expected to make a substantial impact this season. The group has lived up to its promise, with six of the seven newcomers seeing consistent playing time.

Early on, though, Omogrosso admitted the Dukes hit some rough patches. With so many additions trying to settle in, that wasn't a surprise.

What has been a bit of a surprise to Omogrosso is how successful Duquesne has been. While the Dukes certainly had these kind of standards, she doesn't know if anyone could've predicted Duquesne's 17-2 start and a 14-game win streak that stretched from the non-conference schedule and into Atlantic 10 play.

She knew, though, that her learning curve would have to be a quick one. That was true for all the freshmen. And seeing what a big impact this class has been able to make not only has her excited for the rest of this year, but the program's future.

"Just thinking in four years when I'm a senior how good we could be from playing together for so long," Omogrosso said. "Carrying it over year after year for four years will really take us far."

"We've seen a level of consistency that you don't normally see with freshmen," Burt said. "(Omogrosso has) not really had a bad game overall. ... She's still shooting it as well as just about anyone. She's scoring the ball and shooting the ball at a high percentage and a high average."

And she's been a key factor in the Dukes getting closer and closer to checking off their goals for the season. They don't talk about them a lot. In fact, the team recently told Burt they no longer want to know the RPI of their opponents or how the game could affect their NCAA Tournament resume.

The dreams, though, are still there. The NCAA Tournament is the big one. Atlantic 10 regular season and conference championships are also on the list. For now, though, it's just about finishing the season strong.

"We've had high standards since we started preseason," Omogrosso said. "We knew coming in, we just had to keep working hard. I think it's showing for the most part in the first half of the season."