

Women's hockey seizes ECAC title and advances to nationals

By Mike Hartt & Margaret Aycok
Staff Writers

For the fifth year in a row, the Middlebury College women's hockey team has claimed the ECAC Women's Division III championship title in front of a home crowd. For the first year ever, the **Women's Hockey**

Saturday, March 4th

RPI	0
Middlebury	6

Sunday, March 5th

Colgate	1
Middlebury	5

Panthers' season will not end with that win - this year heralds the beginning of a Division III National Championship, sponsored by USA Hockey and American Women's College Hockey Alliance. To win the ECAC title, the Panthers took out RPI and Colgate this past weekend, playing smart hockey to defeat two strong opponents.

In the few days preceding the games, the ECAC DIII league announced its all-conference selections, with the Panthers dominating the first-team choices. Sylvia Ryan '00, Catherine Pullins '00, Michelle Labbe '01 and Catherine Elkins '02 were all first-team All-Conference selections, taking four of the six slots. Ryan also earned

the ECAC Division III Player of the Year award for a season that saw her become the college's leading goal scorer and notch her 200th career point.

In the first ECAC semifinal, Middlebury faced an RPI squad that had given them a tight 1-0 win in early February. The Engineers clearly had visions of pulling the upset this time, and ending Middlebury's reign as the Division III women's hockey powerhouse. Four minutes into the game however, Ryan put Middlebury on the board on a pass from Labbe (assist also to Elkins) while on a power play. Late in the first period, Christa McDougall '00 put Middlebury up 2-0, deflecting a Pullins shot into the back of the net (assist also by Erin Neil '03). RPI played well in the first period, hitting Middlebury goalie Megan Hutchinson '02 with seven shots, but Hutchinson stonewalled the Engineers to preserve the Middlebury lead. In the second period, Middlebury was held off the board until 1:30 were left in the period. Pullins put the puck past RPI goalie Laura DeNuccio (assist by Nina Kieves '02 and Angela Kapus '03), giving the Panthers a 3-0 lead going into the third. Ten minutes into the final period, Pullins scored again, this time on

an amazing end-to-end rush in which she burned an RPI defender and was able to poke the puck past DeNuccio. Four minutes later, Erin Neil '03 scored (assist by Christa McDougall); two minutes later, Labbe scored on a power play to make the final margin 6-0 (assist by Elkins and Laurie Richmond '02). In the game, Hutchinson made a total of 14 saves for Middlebury. DeNuccio of RPI saved 40 shots, and playing in her last collegiate game, RPI captain Nina Lynch made four saves in the final minutes of the game.

According to Ryan, "Going into the RPI game, we were confident in ourselves. The last game we played against them, we did not have a very good game, and this was our chance to show people that we really are the number one team."

Said Labbe, "It felt great to be able to prove ourselves once again to RPI. After the 1-0 score the last time we played them, many people thought that RPI could play with us, but we definitely set the record straight on Saturday."

With the win, the Panthers knew their place in the ECAC Championship was reserved, but their opponent was still to be determined. In the second semifinal at Kenyon Arena, the number two (see *Women's hockey*, page 19)



Andrew Corrigan

Laurie Richmond '02 rushes up ice during Middlebury's ECAC finals win.