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Meet AJ, Rider's new AI chatbot

By Brannagh Rattigan

With new technological advancements comes new controversy, especially in academic spaces. Rider has just introduced its very own artificial intelligence student support assistant, AJ, intended to guide prospective and current students through navigating college life. The integration of AJ is not without controversy, as feedback shows mixed feelings.

In a universitywide email from student affairs on Oct. 26, the Rider community was informed of the new tool operated through CollegeVine, as it introduced itself as an assistive technology in "registration, financial aid, housing and other student services."

Tatiana Sciancalepore, the senior executive director of university marketing and communications, is currently serving as the point person between CollegeVine and the senior leadership teams working to put together AJ.

"There was a lot of research in the beginning and there's certainly been a learning curve to it all because there are a lot of moving parts. Initially we did a lot of research just on what some of the priorities would be for the two agents," Sciancalepore said.

The two agents are the enrollment agent for admissions and a student affairs agent for current students. To ensure that these agents align with the university's priorities, Sciancalepore has weekly meetings with CollegeVine to go over the basics and make sure everything runs smoothly.

Mary-Alice Ozechoski, the senior vice president and chief of staff for student experience, explained that AJ is already in effect, operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week for currently enrolled students.

"It's interactive, it's on a student clock, not our clock which is 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. It's available and accessible," Ozechoski said. "We know that 30% of college students are working full time, and yet we have a system that is set up on this 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. mentality that doesn't work for students."

Christine Mehlhorn, Rider's dean of students, who was responsible for the student affairs aspect of incorporating AJ into the university, shared how the clock AJ runs on is more beneficial to students than traditional means of reaching out.

"It increases the capacity to answer student questions. We know from the summer, it's hard for financial aid, like OneStop, to manage the volume of people calling with questions, and students were upset that their questions were not getting answered in a timely way or they weren't able to talk to somebody. That is going to eliminate this," Mehlhorn said.

Mehlhorn additionally provided insight into how AJ accesses the information it gives out. In her role, Mehlhorn helped identify staff to help inform AJ's database in order to answer questions properly.

As an example, Mehlhorn said, "It would know how many sororities and fraternities we have on campus, but what it can't do is understand what it's like to be in a Greek letter organization on our campus."

In addition to the information it was fed through interviews with selected individuals, the chatbot also has the capability to pull facts from Rider's website.

Another highlighted feature of AJ is its ability to soft transfer students when questions cannot be answered appropriately.

"If it can't answer a student's question, it's going to take your information and send it to the relevant person who can answer those questions," Mehlhorn said.

On this topic, Ozechoski shared that AJ's ability to redirect a student eliminates the notion that real people are no longer needed.

"Does it replace staff on campus? No. You still need to go interact with people," Ozechoski said.

Mehlhorn stated, "We're not hiring any less people. We're not trying to reduce staff or anything because we have an agent. The goal is to just improve customer service for students."

Ozechoski also narrowed in on how the chatbot will be a great tool for prospective students from all around the world. Knowing 50 languages, AJ is inclusive to many different walks of life and can aid those who may be unable to visit Rider consistently.

"We're trying to recruit students to come to Rider, and they may not come to the high school visit with our admissions counselor. They may not go to a college night. They may be from outside the region. This is a way for them to get information on their time, and then hopefully get them into the process of applying to Rider," Ozechoski said.

With its capabilities highlighted, it is equally important to raise awareness to concerns over the assimilation of AI in an academic atmosphere. In the past, Rider students have shown negative feedback regarding the use of AI on the campus, whether it be in class assignments or posters for events.

Ozechoski, when questioned about how students' responses to AI had been considered in establishing AJ, expressed that students always have the ability to make a choice.

"Students choose to use this. We're not going to impose this on students. So, if you're not in a space where you feel great about AI, I certainly understand that it's complicated," Ozechoski said. "There's always complexity with new technology, but this is a choice to call and get information. If you want to choose the traditional vehicles and make an appointment in the office, that's not going away."

To ease any concerns on whether the AI will become corrupt or feed out incorrect information, Ozechoski shared a plan to oversee the technology.

"We'll evaluate it. We will get metrics every six weeks or so to see how it's doing. We will be able to correct it if it gives out wrong or bad information," Ozechoski said.

Sciancleopre expressed that she hopes to see a positive reaction from students, but realistically, understands that there will likely be more mixed feelings.

"It's important to realize that this isn't taking the place of any sort of creative work, which I know is a huge concern for students," Sciancleopre said. "I'm happy to have conversations further down the line about how it's going and changes that we can implement in order to improve it. I think a big part of it will also be how our Rider community speaks to the tool."



Grace Juarez/The Rider News

AJ, Rider's new AI support assistant, is now availble to current and prospective students.

These mixed reactions are represented by Jonathan Voinski, a sophomore acting major, and Julian Hernandez, a senior cybersecurity major.

Talking about the agent geared toward prospective students, Voinski said, "I feel like, how are they really going to learn about the school if they're talking to an AI who hasn't actually been here? I also just think it's better to talk to a real person."

From an opposite perspective, Hernandez stated, "I feel like the best thing AI offers students, in this case and some others, is convenience. They are able to get answers to their questions and solutions to their problems in seconds."

When asked if there should be an increase or decrease in the presence of AI on Rider's campus as a tool for students, Voinski answered directly.

"Decrease, 100% decrease. Get rid of it," Voinski said.

Hernandez said, "I don't think there are many reasons to have an abundance of AI tools on campus, but if they are small and convenient and don't replace someone's job, then I say go for it."

In the end, AJ is now a fully-functioning operating tool in Rider's belt to aid current and prospective students in their college journey. While it may be controversial, those involved in its creation and integration into the university expressed trust in the foundation the chatbot is built upon, and an intention to correct it as necessary.

"What's important is that AI is always used to boost, not to replace," Mehlhorn said. "This is never going to replace our students or our staff's brain power. It's truly meant to improve customer service."

To those who may be concerned, Sciancleopre wants students to at least walk away with this in mind, saying, "This kind of technology can really propel us forward as a university, it puts us at the cutting edge of innovation and it puts us ahead of the line with emerging technologies and showing that we're really putting the students first."

Sciancleopre shared that feedback is incredibly welcome and important to maintaining AJ. Overall, she wants the Rider community to be heard on this topic.

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Rider volleyball swept both their matches over the Halloween weekend in three sets.

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SECURITY BRIEFS

BY JENNA MUNSWAMI

Information provided by Public Safety Director Matthew Babcock

Found photos

Missing equipment. On Oct. 28 at 8:40 a.m., Public Safety received a report of a student missing photography equipment. The student reported that they had misplaced a bag full of camera equipment in the Bart Luedeke Center. Public Safety began investigating and discovered the whereabouts of the bag and who had it. The bag and equipment were recovered.

Free money

Squid games. On Oct. 29 at 8:06 a.m., Public Safety was dispatched to the Kaplan Plaza outside of Lynch Adler Hall when a student reported someone sitting in the plaza, wearing a mask and holding a sign offering cash prizes. Officers arrived on location and located a male wearing a "Squid Games"-style mask attempting to get community members to play a game. The male was identified, issued a ban from university property and escorted off of campus.

Disrupted zen

Reported vandalism. On Nov. 2 at 8:33 a.m., Public Safety was dispatched to the Zen Garden for the report of vandalism. Public Safety arrived on location and met with Counseling Center Staff who reported vandalism to the garden, its plants, lights and fixtures. Public Safety is investigating.

Sarah F. Griffin/ The Rider News



Cal Sutton/The Rider News

Director of the Westminster Chapel Choir **Nicole Aldrich** conducted the choir's opening performance titled "I Am, We Are."

Chapel choir promotes unity while uplifting alumni

By Cal Sutton

Rider's Westminster Chapel Choir hosted their first concert of the year on Oct. 30, called "I Am/We Are." The performance's program was one which considered the diversity in each ensemble as students come and go each year.

The choir performed in Gill Chapel through both large-group choral pieces, as well as solos with piano melodies.

Nicole Aldrich, the director of the Westminster Chapel Choir, started at Rider this fall, with "I Am/We Are," as her first concert with the group. The choir also has a new set of students join to perform, as it is a choir geared toward freshmen and sophomores.

"[Starting at Rider] has been a really easy transition, and a lot of it is due to the graduate assistants that I have," Aldrich said.

Makiah Robinson and Daniel J. Piver are both graduate assistant conductors for the Westminster Chapel Choir.

This performance also highlighted two Westminster Choir College alumni, both of whom composed music that was selected to be performed by the group.

When creating a repertoire of potential pieces to perform for a concert, Aldrich said in an interview with The Rider News that she keeps music in piles to narrow down to the final selections. When she found that two of the pieces were by former Westminster students, she knew she had to use them.

Rosephanye Powell, '87, composed the piece "To Sit and Dream." The song was inspired by the words of Langston Hughes' "To You."

"It is deeply meaningful to know that my alma mater continues to honor my work," Powell said. "Westminster Choir College played a significant role in shaping my identity as a musician, educator and composer, so having my music performed there feels like a full-circle moment and a reminder of the enduring bonds formed through music."

Powell's outlook on the positive impacts of creating and sharing music reflect what "I Am/We Are" aimed to show the audience about unity.

"Choral music teaches far more than musicianship," Powell said. "It cultivates discipline, collaboration, empathy and the ability to listen deeply to others. Through singing together, young people learn to build community and discover the power of their collective voice."

B.E. Boykin, '13, composed "i am," based on Brittny Ray Crowell's poem, "Intermission of Aether and Earthe."

"So much of my own artistry was nurtured during my time there," Boykin said. "I'm grateful that Westminster continues to celebrate the work of its alumni and, in doing so, allows current students to see the many creative paths their own Westminster experience can inspire."

Westminster Chapel Choir highlighted many student voices through solo pieces and solo opportunities within full-group songs.

Each student's voice brought something unique to the performance, still perpetuating the idea of diversity and unity in the group.

Reese Bennett is a sophomore music education major and member of the Westminster Chapel Choir.

"It's really important nowadays to be able to sing about unity and being together," Bennett said. "It's important to keep your loved ones close and really treasure the people you have in your life."

Bennett's favorite piece in the performance was "Part of Me Hurtling Toward."

Sophia Morrone is a sophomore music education major and a soprano in the Westminster Chapel Choir. She sang a solo for the song "An April Day."

"I think a lot of it was really eye-opening, especially because so many of my close friends are in the choir. It was beautiful to be singing songs about close friendship and the hardships of life that we all face, together with them," Morrone said.

Morrone also shared that her favorite piece was "Part of Me Hurtling Toward."

At the end of the Chapel Choir's performance, Aldrich invited all current and former students of Westminster Choir College to come to the front of the chapel to sing a signature piece, "The Lord Bless You and Keep You," by Peter C. Lutkin.

The invitation for all WCC members, current and past, to join together in song resembled the goal of "I Am/We Are:" unity.

WCMPA welcomes five new faculty members

By Samantha Clark

Upon its merge ahead of the fall 2026 semester, the Westminster College of Media and Performing Arts has welcomed five new faculty members across its four departments.

"Whether singing, dancing, or acting; writing news, producing podcasts or broadcasting on the radio; or working in film, design, and production, our students and faculty are storytellers," Jason Vodicka, the WCMPA's inaugural dean, stated in an Oct. 15 collegewide email. "Through their work, they help us make sense of the world, connect with one another, and imagine what is possible. Their stories challenge us, inspire us and call us to be our best selves."

Westminster Choir College

Leading the Westminster Chapel Choir, an ensemble composed of students in their first year of study at Westminster Choir College, is Director Nicole Aldrich.

Prior to joining the university full-time, Aldrich served as a choral director at multiple universities, as well as a collaborative pianist for a few Rider choirs in the 2025-26 academic year.

"This semester, it seems to me that everybody really supports each other in a big way, and at the same time, we're also working toward musical excellence and telling powerful stories and really connecting with our audiences," Aldrich said.

The second addition to the choir college is Nathaniel Gumbs, the new director of the WCC Organ Program. Gumbs, who has performed across the United States and on international stages, brings his many accomplishments and experiences as an organist to Lawrenceville.

Outside of Rider, he serves as the Director of Music at The Riverside Church in New York City, one of New York's most prominent religious landmarks and a platform for civil rights and political activism, with speakers across history including Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama.

Lastly, Lloyd Mallory joins as the conductor of Westminster Jubilee Singers, an ensemble that performs a rich repertoire of African-American spirituals, hymn arrangements and gospel songs.

Over the past three decades, Mallory has immersed himself in the realms of collegiate and professional chorale, and, in addition, is the founding director of the Lloyd Mallory Singers, a Grammy-nominated organization that highlights music composed and arranged by African Americans, directly correlating to the mission of the Jubilee Singers.

Theatre department

In the Department of Performing Arts, Carol Bentley joins the university as a dance instructor for musical theatre courses, as well as the choreographer for the November mainstage production of "The Threepenny Opera."

Bentley is a Broadway veteran and has worked on stage, in films and with creative teams, bringing a well-rounded approach to her coursework and extracurriculars.

"Carol [Bentley]'s professional experience makes for such an amazing teaching environment both in and out of the classroom," junior musical theatre major Lucas Brown said. "She incorporates her personal experiences in the industry into our classes, whether that's through teaching us combinations that she has learned throughout her career, or passing down important life and industry lessons that she has accrued from other professionals she has worked with. … She is such an important asset to Rider's community and we are so happy to have her as a professor."

Film and television

Finally, Alan Macintyre Smith is entering the Department of Media Arts as a cinematography professor after working at Rider as an adjunct for the past several years. First joining the university during the COVID-19 pandemic, Smith worked to rebuild experiential learning for students when the Semester in Los Angeles program was not able to be offered.

"They brought me in to be one of three directors on that film department-wide class we were shooting," Smith said. "That was a fun way to get to know all the students, and we all kind of worked together to make the half-hour short film together."

As the WCMPA continues to establish itself in its first semester and full academic year, the addition of new faculty members brings new perspectives, professional experiences and opportunities both inside and outside the classroom, contributing to Rider's commitment to the student experience.



Samantha Clark/The Rider News

Five new faculty members joined the Westminster College of Media and Performing Arts across four departments.



Tatyanna Beauliere-Jackson/The Rider News

Established in 2024, the Nosh Empanadas location in Lawrenceville continues to be a local favorite among Rider students.

Nosh Empanadas: Baking connections here at Rider

By Jenna Munswami and Delaney Wiggins

Bringing traditional empanadas to their community for over 20 years, owners Santiago Orosco and Eric Richardson continue to share their food with New Jersey residents. They have even made Rider one of their homes.

Nosh Empanadas is a small restaurant in Lawrenceville, only about a 10-minute drive from campus. If the name was not enough of a giveaway, their specialties are empanadas that come in a variety of flavors.

However, Nosh is not where everything started; the location in Lawrenceville opened on Sept. 16, 2024. Their main company, Under the Moon, is located in Bordentown and is still in operation today.

"We were the first Spanish family to live there with my parents' friends," Orosco said. "We opened the restaurant in 2006 and empanadas are everywhere in Argentina … We are the ones who introduced it to the area."

Orosco used to offer empanadas to people for free because they did not know what they were. If they did not like it, they did not have to pay. But for people who did, they could support the cafe. After taking part in different festivals to sell their goods, Under the Moon began to gain traction. Soon enough, the local restaurant was selling thousands of empanadas, and a second location was opened in Lambertville.

Nosh was formed from the popularity of these restaurants. What sets this location apart from Under the Moon is that Nosh's empanadas are oven baked instead of fried, making them a little healthier. They are also a bit lighter, allowing people to try the different variations. Nosh has a full menu, too, in contrast to the other cafe that only offers beef or veggie options.

Being homemade, the quality of the empanadas and their community engagement is what makes Nosh unique, according to Richardson. Community is one of the aspects that helped to land its location. Having lived in Mercer County for years prior, it was the perfect place for their latest business.

"What we have found that we love about Lawrenceville is the community level support. It's immense, which is phenomenal," Richardson said.

Local families even walk from behind their homes to grab empanadas for a snack or dinner, according to Richardson.

This level of acclaim does not come from just anywhere. It is all about the details that the owners put into their establishment, not only with their food, but also with the presentation.

The iconic orange that makes up the logo and packaging was by design, purposefully made to be eye-catching and immediately recognizable as Nosh. Even the way that the boxes are constructed, separating each empanada along with the placement of the sauces, is an intentional choice.

The owners also make sure that each empanada is completely packed, full of whichever filling a customer chooses to ensure they are getting an actual meal out of it. But their focus on their ingredients is not just taste, it is also about caliber.

"We're very specific about how we source our ingredients. Having done the restaurants for 20 years, we have really good purveyors," Richardson said. "We do use some local farms when we reach out to get our produce and things of that nature under our restaurant brand."

A future goal for the owners is to eventually start a nonprofit organization to feed those in need, as said by Orosco.

Depending on the day, Nosh produces hundreds to thousands of empanadas, according to Orosco. They strive to have a consistent change in the variety of flavors, while keeping the classics that people flock to.

These deep connections within the community have led Nosh to start hosting pop-up events here at Rider.

Richardson went on to explain that people who tasted their empanadas at other events led them to connect with food service groups at Rider.

In fact, Rider students were also coming to Nosh suggesting, "Hey, this would be so cool," according to Richardson.

But what goes into preparing a Nosh pop-up event at Rider?

First, food production.

There is a lot to think about: what is the event and what time will it be held at?

They also need to anticipate the quantity of products required for the day, along with the equipment. It requires more than just regular kitchen supplies, to perfect their empanadas, they need specific supplies, like a holding warmer for freshness.

But what makes doing pop-up events at Rider so special to Nosh?

Richardson believes it is Rider students, of course.

He said, "Every single person that comes to that counter for their order, looks us in the eye, says 'Thank you,' responds when we say, 'Hey, how's your day going?,' has a conversation and engages."

If there are any Rider students with suggestions for future empanada flavors, the owners are always open to ideas and trying new things!



Grace Juarez/The Rider News

November Horoscopes

Scorpio
(Oct. 24 - Nov. 21)

Prepare to feel peace, Scorpio. The feelings of uncertainty that may have been clouding your thoughts will finally bubble up to the surface and you will be able to pop them with increased energy and emotional awareness.

Sagittarius
(Nov. 22 - Dec. 21)

Listen to yourself, Sagittarius. Your intuition is strong this month. Your voice deserves to be heard by others and yourself. In collaborative settings, stand up for what you believe in, and you will shine.

Capricorn
(Dec. 22 - Jan. 19)

Get involved, Capricorn! November will bring a curious spirit to your life, so be prepared to have new conversations and be more social. Your current relationships will also come into focus, be sure to set boundaries where you deem necessary.

Aquarius
(Jan. 20 - Feb. 18)

You are at a crossroads, Aquarius. Changes are coming in both your personal and professional life. Some choices you make will feel impactful this month, so pay attention to your day-to-day patterns and conversations to make the most informed decisions.

Pisces
(Feb. 19 - March 20)

Enjoy an energy boost, Pisces. Be prepared for an adventure or the motivation to pursue goals that have been on your to-do list for a while. Embrace the support you receive and celebrate your accomplishments, but remember to keep yourself accountable to your responsibilities.

Aries
(March 21 - April 19)

Get ready for drama, Aries. Honesty will be your best course of action this month while you navigate through busy and sometimes difficult moments. Staying authentic may feel draining, but if you persist, it will feel freeing.

Taurus
(April 20 - May 20)

Focus on those closest to you, Taurus. November will be all about your relationships as you take the time to examine, deepen or sever existing bonds. You will feel compelled to notice details about your connections, so remember to reflect and prioritize the healthiest ones.

Gemini
(May 21 - June 21)

Personal growth is coming, Gemini. With this month bringing increased motivation and expendable energy, if you pay attention to your body's needs and dedicate time to your wellbeing, your confidence will improve greatly. Now is the time to channel that effort into yourself, and you will flourish.

Cancer
(June 22 - July 22)

Spend wisely, Cancer. Chasing your passions and investing in new hobbies will be your calling this month! Budget accordingly and indulge selectively to keep yourself feeling accomplished and your finances secure.

Leo
(July 23 - Aug. 22)

Take some time away, Leo. You will be feeling introspective and nostalgic this month, so slow down and listen to your cravings for alone time. Exerting yourself socially will be tempting, but you may wear yourself thin. After you reflect, enjoy sharing your thoughts with those close to you.

Virgo
(Aug. 23 - Sept. 22)

Do not let disappointment set you back, Virgo. You may feel frustrated and discouraged with progress towards your goals, but remember that while you are often your own biggest critic, you are also your own biggest supporter. Give yourself some grace and keep moving forward.

Libra
(Sept. 23 - Oct. 23)

Let it go, Libra. You have been working hard and may be burnt out. Your efforts will be rewarded, but keep in mind that you are not meant to carry everything all at once. Do not be afraid to embrace an end or a new beginning.

Presented by Sofia Santiago

Graphic by Grace Juarez

AI chatbots: A slap in the face

The use of artificial intelligence is rising. Everywhere. When I open Instagram, usually one of the first posts I see is a flyer for an event or reels where people feed photos of their younger selves into AI.

As a liberal arts institution, Rider is known for its students who do real work and make real art. We have phenomenal game designers, animators, graphic designers, writers and more.

While I am sure some of these students use AI — there are always some — in my opinion, the majority of the arts students at Rider have integrity in their work and genuinely hate AI.

As I click through Instagram stories, I often see these art students actively calling out those who use AI publicly. Rider students have no shame in that aspect, and I support it wholeheartedly. I do the same thing!

When students saw that organizations across campus were advertising their events using AI and that the university's events were being pushed with AI-generated flyers, lividity spread across most of the student body.

I personally feel incredibly frustrated and angry that the decision was made to launch an AI chatbot, especially while the university is actively facing backlash from both current students and alumni about its AI use.

Receiving the universitywide email on Oct. 24 with the introduction to AJ, a new "AI student support assistant," felt like a slap in the face.

First, why are we turning our pretty awesome mascot into an AI bot? Also, why are we making a robot answer questions that students can get answers to by actually communicating with a human being?

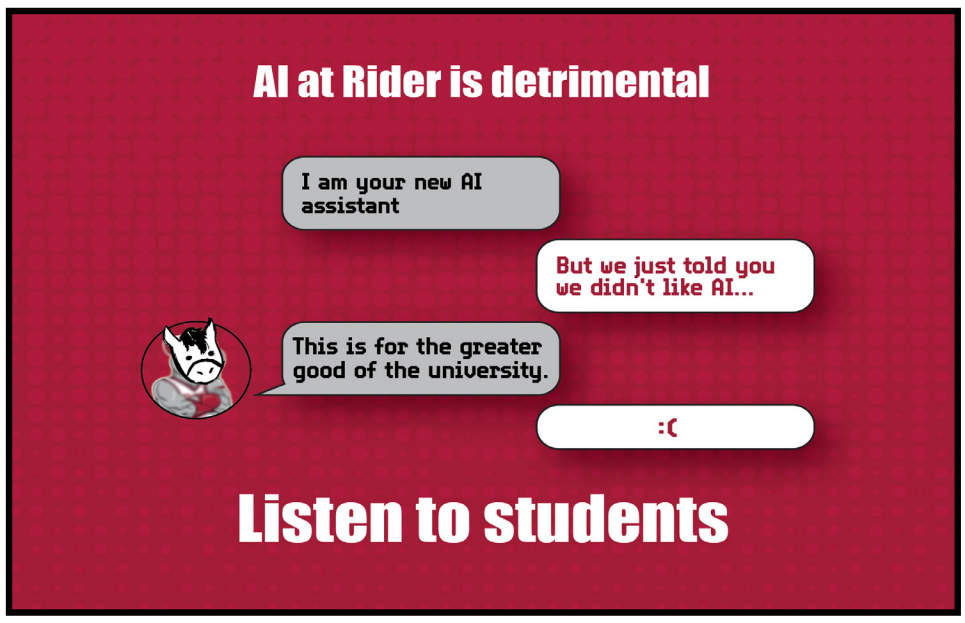
What is the use of a chatbot when we have the ability to engage in cherished human interactions? If you do not know which office to visit if you have a question or concern, ask your professor! Rider's website has department information with contact details!

It is of utmost importance that we, as students, do not take too much advantage of AI chatbots when we can be strengthening our human connections, conversation skills and building trust between students and administration.

The new AI chatbot feels like a blatant disrespect to students on campus. I find it troubling that this new chatbot has been launched at Rider. Keep speaking out against this.

I urge everyone to continue to reject AI. I urge Rider students to ask intelligent questions to other humans, attempt to build connections and make efforts to connect with Rider's offices if concerns arise.

Cal Sutton
junior journalism major



Cal Sutton/The Rider News

Rider has doubled down, introducing their own AI chatbot, "AJ," for students to use.

Bedlam for Brewers: The Fall Classic has concluded

On Oct. 28, the Major League Baseball season came to a close, crowning the Milwaukee Brewers as World Series champions; their first title in franchise history.

The 2026 playoffs were some of the most entertaining with how much parity there was. Unexpected runs with the Chicago White Sox and Cleveland Guardians made the American League race very interesting, as well as the maligned Los Angeles Dodgers getting swept by the eventual winners in the Brewers.

The AL pennant-winning Tampa Bay Rays got knocked out in a gentleman's sweep, but that is not to say their run was weak. They cruised through the New York Yankees' and aforementioned Guardians' squads with ease, and created a much needed battle between two small-market teams.

Over the last two seasons, fans witnessed the Dodgers, with their towering payroll, win back-to-back championships. A three-peat would almost certainly lead to a 2027 lockout. To then see two teams with some of the smallest payrolls and no real "superstar" players make it to the World Series was refreshing, and possibly season saving for 2027. Both Milwaukee and Tampa Bay specialize in small-ball — bunting runners over to second, stealing bags with intelligent baserunning, working pitch counts and playing stellar defense. The entire series was indicative of this, with no "big" moments like grand slams or walk-off dingers. While there was an extra-inning walk-off courtesy of Tampa Bay, it was through grinding out long at-bats and being pesky on the base paths.

To some, this was a boring series to watch. Those people, in my humble opinion, are not true fans of the game, for this was evocative of baseball's roots. It felt like a good and proper showcase of how this game should truly be played. Add on the fact that neither team had ever won a championship, and I cannot fathom how anyone was not enjoying every second. I myself am a die-hard Boston Red Sox fan, yet was cheering for the Brew-Crew like I lived there my whole life.

Seeing a gritty, young and likeable team finally have their moment was more rewarding than seeing Yankees v. Dodgers for the umpteenth time. Even watching the Rays and their shining moments throughout was enjoyable. Their pitching depth and ability to will any minor-leaguer into an MLB-caliber player is fascinating and makes them ever the more likeable. A big congratulations to them for making it as far as they did; I am sure we will see them back on this stage soon enough with how young their roster is.

As for the winningest team in baseball, barring the freakishly talented Jacob Misiorowski, the Brewers pitching rotation is far from the best; it is their bullpen that eats away innings and crushes teams. Watching Abner Uribe, Trevor Megill and, especially, Aaron Ashby — who had specifically gone a record-breaking 18 innings pitched with only five hits allowed to the tune of a 0.00 ERA — dominate the second half of games instead of one starter stealing the show was incredible. This bullpen really added to the team's overall identity of not putting yourself above the team.

I feel as though MLB will be a phoenix from the ashes after this playoff run. I truly hope that players and owners take away the lesson that, in this game, any team with any budget can win, thus avoiding a lockout. Diversity is strong in baseball, and small-market teams proved this year that they can go toe-to-toe with the big guys. The Milwaukee Brewers not only won the World Series, but have the chance of saving baseball's future.

Alfie Eville
sophomore history and secondary education major



N.D. Medal/The Rider News

The MLB season comes to a close with the Milwaukee Brewers on top for the first time in franchise history.

Students should not need a car to find care

Imagine waking up sick in a residence hall, calling the campus health center and learning that the help you expected is somewhere off-campus. Your next question is not about university contracts. It is how to get there without a car.

That is the human problem at the center of The Rider News' reporting on students' difficulty obtaining on-campus medical care this fall. Some were referred to outside providers without consistently being told about transportation assistance. The university later explained that its previous healthcare partnership had ended and that interim arrangements were being made, with in-office care resuming Oct. 19.

Those details matter. So does the gap between an available service and a student who knows how to use it.

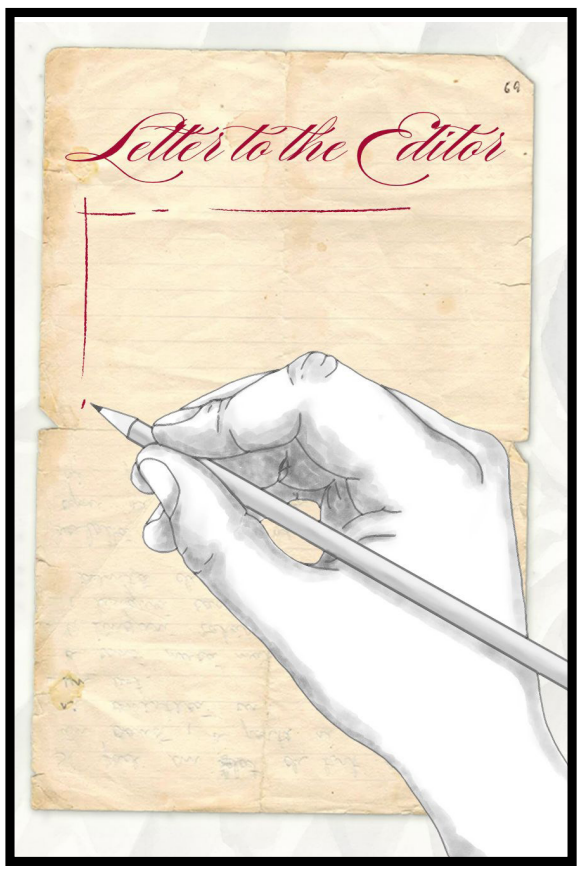
Rider students deserve a single, plainly written explanation of what care is currently available, when it is available and how someone without transportation can reach it. The answer should be easy to find before a student becomes ill, not after several phone calls. If an arrangement changes, students should hear it directly and promptly.

I think of the Gospel story in which Jesus notices a person that others have learned to walk past. The lesson is wonderfully practical: noticing another person's need matters only when it changes how we respond. For a campus, that may mean a clearly staffed phone line, a dependable ride or an explanation that does not send a sick student from office to office.

Classmates have a role, too. When a friend is unwell, share class notes or help them find official guidance instead of assuming the problem will work itself out. Compassion is often ordinary and specific.

The question for Rider is not whether every healthcare challenge can be prevented. It is whether students can count on clear information and meaningful assistance when a challenge arrives. A health service should be measured not only by the care it intends to provide, but by whether the student who needs it can actually get through the door.

Douglas Vandergraph
Independent outside contributor who does not claim a Rider affiliation.



Samantha Clark/The Rider News
Students without cars still need Rider's care.

"Wildwood" is a beacon of hope for animation

Being completely honest, "Wildwood" was not on my radar for film releases this year. While the film looked good enough to go and see, I was not anticipating that much. That changed, however, when the film debuted with a 100% on Rotten Tomatoes and a staggering 4.4 out of five average on Letterboxd; that is when the film piqued my interest. I saw the film the weekend it came out, and it completely blew me away. Since I saw it, I have not been able to stop thinking about how absolutely incredible this film was, and how underappreciated it has been at the box office.

"Wildwood" is the latest film from stop-motion company Laika, the studio that made "Coraline," "Corpse Bride" and "Paranorman." This is the first of Laika's films that was given a PG-13 rating, and it kind of pushes that rating. This is in no way a kids' movie; it is bloody and violent, but is also incredibly beautiful. Since this film is stop-motion, every single part of every frame is intentional, and that is so apparent throughout the entire runtime. This is one of the most visually appealing films I have ever seen, and that is no doubt thanks to how hard and intricate it is to animate anything, let alone anything in stop-motion.

The film follows Prue McKeel, a teenager from Portland, Oregon, as she and her classmate, Curtis, journey into a mystical forest to find her baby brother after he is kidnapped by a murder of crows. Her brother, Mac, has been brought to the Dowager Governess Alexandra as part of a plan to bring her son back from the dead. Prue and Curtis join forces with the people of the forest to fight Alexandra's army and save Mac.

What should not be understated about this film is how absolutely drop-dead gorgeous it is. Every single frame could belong in a museum. From the sets and lighting to the attention to detail on the puppets is marvelous and breathtaking. The script and score is incredibly written as well. Everything about this film works in tandem with everything else so flawlessly, and it is a testament to the mastery of human-made art. In a time where many videos and images are generated by artificial intelligence, something like this is such a breath of fresh air. "Wildwood" director and Laika CEO, Travis Knight, said that AI will never be used at Laika and has no place in art, and I commend him profusely for that.


Still photo courtesy of Laika Studios
Laika Studios releases "Wildwood" with towering reviews from critics and audiences alike.

Speaking of Knight, some folks online have been denouncing the film, due to Knight's father and co-founder of Laika, Phil Knight, being the CEO and co-founder of Nike. While I recognize the nepotism-bathed elephant in the room, if I am being completely honest, I do not care. Laika has lost money on all of its films, but every single one I have seen has been absolutely gorgeous. If Nike wants to continue funding pieces of art like this, I am completely fine with that. It is clear that Travis Knight is incredibly passionate about making films that transcend so much of what modern animation has to offer, and I just want to thank him for that. "Wildwood" is the love child of 16 years of hard work from Laika, and it is unabashedly beautiful.

In times like these, where generative AI is so prominent, "Wildwood" is a beacon of hope in a sea of slop. It is possibly the best modern-day case of how putting in the time and work will inevitably lead to something breathtaking. This film is a demonstration of why human-made art will always be beautiful, and it is criminal that this film is underperforming at the box office. So far, the film has only made $35 million globally, and it deserves tenfold. I am never going to shut up about this film and how gorgeous it is. I have rated a lot of movies 5 out of 5 stars, but this is by far the easiest film to receive that rating.

Ryan Denkovic
sophomore English major

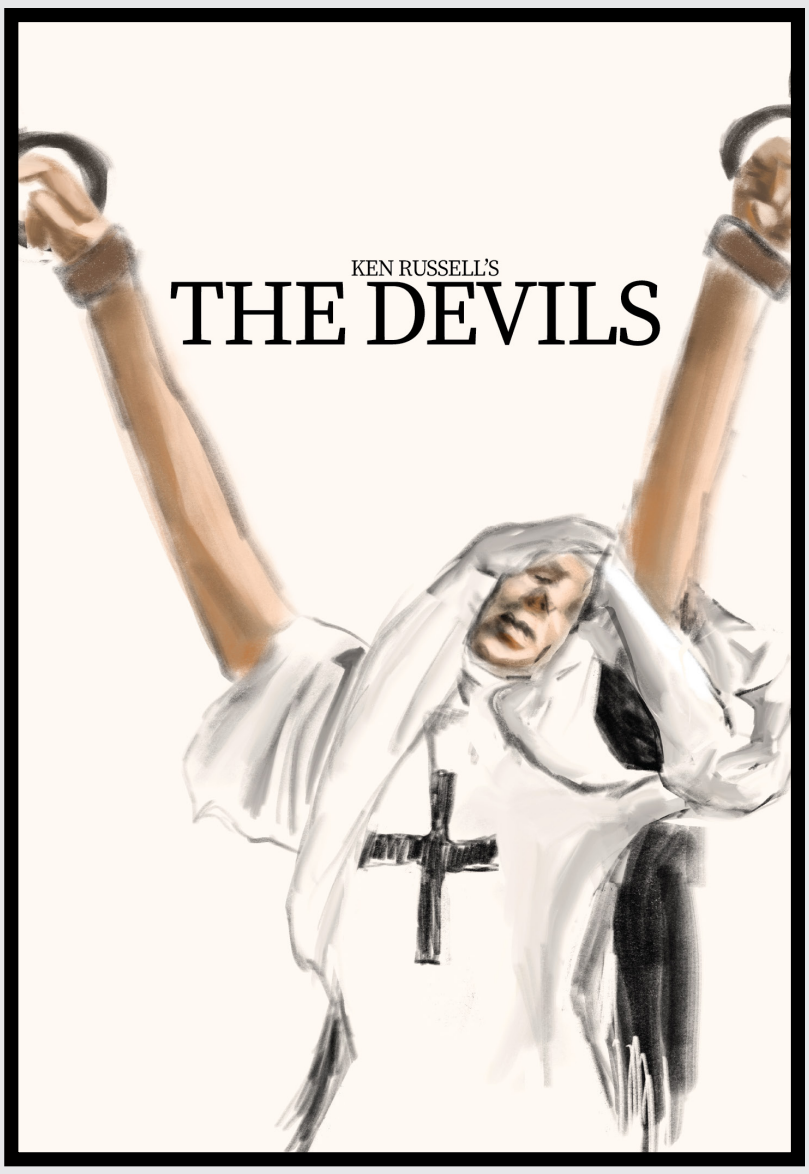


Sin and cinema: A review on "The Devils"

Back in 1971, British filmmaker Ken Russell released one of the most controversial movies ever made. "The Devils" follows Sister Jeanne, a physically deformed and religiously devout woman, shelled in by her coventry with little exposure to the outside world. That little exposure is through a gated window tucked away in her quarters. Through it, she sees Father Urbain Grandier, a strong and sexually appealing man. A man so captivating, she becomes obsessed. These obsessions haunt her, devolving into the sin of lust.

The two lead characters each have their sins, despite their religious devotion. Grandier, played expertly by Oliver Reed, so easily gives in to his sinful ways, even justifying it to a lover of his. Sister Jeanne is on the opposite side of the spectrum, as she perseverates over these lustful visions, struggling to repress them. Russell shows this dichotomy visually through Grandier being a proud and handsome man, while Sister Jeanne struggles with a humpback, destroying her posture and making her both literally and figuratively "crooked."

The film is based on a book by Aldous Huxley, "The Devils of Loudun," as well as a stage play by John Whiten that shares the same name as the film. But more importantly, the nuns of Loudun were real people, as well as Grandier. The "possession" of them did occur, but Russell chooses not to frame it in a religious manner, as it is instead much more grounded. The film chalks the events up to mass hysteria.



Grace Juarez/The Rider News

Ken Russell's "The Devils" has finally gotten its uncensored rerelease 55 years later.

Watching the film and its characters slowly devolve into irrationality and absurdism is poetic and horrific. Sister Jeanne, going from personal fits, sexual frustration and visions of Grandier, devolves into publicly declaring herself to be possessed and the fault be put on Father Grandier. And, unbeknownst to all of this, is Grandier himself, who is newly married and has worked to move past his adultery and sin.

This is one of my favorite aspects of the entire movie, as the character who began so openly immoral with his sexual habits is able to easily move past it and confront it. He is able to confront it because he is aware of it and accepts it. Sister Jeanne, once again, opposes this viewpoint, as she begins the film pure, but her sexual celibacy consumes and corrupts her; not dissimilar to the ways of the devil. The themes of "The Devils" are riveting. As a person who is not religious, I am still able to appreciate every biblical aspect, as well as grounded hysterical points. Calling the movie poignant would be a deeply offensive understatement, as after seeing it for the first time one week ago, I have not once stopped thinking about it.

Additionally, while I am not Catholic — so perhaps I am not the best messenger for this — I do not find this movie inherently blasphemous or heretical. The actions in the film absolutely fall under that category, but the message does not promote devil-worshipping or anything of the sort. It is important to remember that inclusion does not equal endorsement. This film is a cautionary tale of authority lording over the weak, taking advantage of women and the spreading of rumors and tall tales for the sake of personal profit. The abuse that Sister Jeanne undergoes is horrific, and her fall from grace is painfully disturbing. The way her vulnerability is taken advantage of is vile; the devil corrupts the ones that say they work in the name of God in this film.

I will strongly attest to the fact that this is a perfect film. I was captivated from the moment the film started to its end. My mouth was agape for much of the runtime. It is a technical marvel, as the set pieces are astonishing; the lifeless brick walls, the tall castles. The Ursuline sisters' coventry is perfect with its white walls and floors, which perfectly match their eggshell-white habits with that iconic cross down the middle of their chests. On top of that, the acting is some of the best ever, especially Reed. He dominates every frame he is in and is the only actor worthy of playing Father Grandier. Redgrave in the role of Sister Jeanne is harrowing and will be a performance that lives with me for the rest of my life.

The way the director is able to so effortlessly weave between these two separate lives impresses me and should be noted by any aspiring writer or director.

It must be noted, however, that there are two distinct versions of this film: the theatrical cut and the director's. The theatrical cut has always been extremely difficult to come by, as it is not on any streaming services, and few DVDs are made of it. But for decades, the director's cut was impossible to watch, as the cut footage was so challenging to find. Luckily for audiences, Clockwork, a sister company of Warner Bros., restored the film and uncensored those additional six minutes. This is how Russell wanted his vision to be seen, and this restoration makes the film flow so much better. This story should never have been censored, as it barred audiences for many years from seeing such an improved version.

That being said, I do fully understand why the ban was put on "The Devils." There are graphic depictions of devil worship, grotesque and drawn-out scenes of nuns engaging in sexual acts, as well defiling the cross and much more. Audiences back in 1971 were expectedly not ready for content this obscene, which is why the film was so quickly given an NC-17 rating before having to be trimmed down. Even to audiences today, some scenes are especially hard to swallow: depictions of nuns engaging in an orgy at church could be extremely upsetting for Catholics, as well as non-Christians. This scene, along with others, still to this day push boundaries. It makes sense back then to have censored these absurd scenes, but we live in a time now where this film should and finally is being shown off in full, finished form.

In regards to these heavy censorship and bans, I dislike it. While it may be controversial, there is nothing illegal about the film; banning art should never be the solution. And while I can understand the censorship for the time, I think modern audiences have evolved to be able to stomach content like this. I truly hope that this film's rerelease in 2026 will invite a new generation of fans for this film, the genre of exploitation — specifically nunsploitation — as well as new fans for controversial media in general.

Art, especially when it is of this high quality, should never be tampered with. Clouding and cutting the director's vision in any way only ruins the final project, as is evident with this film in specific. Let art be free and on full display. Ken Russell's "The Devils" was released in 1971, and after 55 years, it is finally being appreciated. It is the best film to come out in 2026 and 1971. A landmark that has stood the test of time, and is thus rewarded five holy stars out of five.

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The Rider News

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MEN'S BASKETBALL

Broncs fall hard in season opener against Atlantic Coast competition

By Samantha Clark

Rider men's basketball officially opened their 2026-27 campaign with an Atlantic Coast Conference competition, where they fell 95-57 on the road to the University of Pittsburgh.

Scoring struggles

The Nov. 2 matchup opened with big defensive moves from junior guard Ty Bevins, and after an opening 3-pointer from graduate student guard Bryce Baker, the Broncs were up 3-2.

Less than 30 seconds later, Baker repeated this, but the Panthers followed with the same to cut the deficit to just one.

The Broncs followed with a two-minute scoreless streak, until it was broken up by another 3-pointer, this time from sophomore forward Rich Brisco.

In attempts to close the gap, senior guard Mark Butler splashed a layup and senior guard Khalil Farmer put up the Broncs' fourth 3-pointer in six minutes of play, but another two-minute drought followed to set Rider back, 26-14.

Junior forward Horace Simmons Jr. hit a jumpshot in the paint, and after sophomore forward Kam Wylie cashed in another 3-pointer to pick up his first collegiate points, the Broncs' deficit was squashed to single digits.

A four-minute drought, however, then set Rider further back, allowing the Panthers to go on a 7-0 run. Junior center Stephen Avegah Semey broke the spurt with four shots at the free throw line, but Pitt followed with another 8-0, run.

Freshman guard Richie Rosa drove to the net for a jumpshot, and after another free throw from Semey, the Broncs trailed 50-26 at halftime.

"I thought Steph [Semey] did well and the freshmen competed," Head Coach Kevin Baggett told Rider Athletics. "I thought we could have done a better job competing at the start of the game. We came out in the second half and tried to compete."

Battle after break

Farmer opened the second half of play with a shot just beyond the arc to add three more onto the Broncs' tally

Bevins and Butler combined for five points in two minutes, followed by solo run for four more.

After two minutes of unsuccessful play, Baker splashed a jumpshot, and after drawing the foul, picked up three for Rider.

Freshman guard JJ Washington went on a run of his own, draining a 3-pointer and a layup in 30 seconds, adding five more for the Broncs and his first as a collegiate basketball player.

The Panthers held a 9-0 run on the Broncs across the next three minutes, a streak that was snapped by a Brisco jumpshot.

Following that shot, it was Baker quickly following him up with one of his own.

Another three minutes went by, allowing Pitt to widen the margin to over 30 points.

An and-1 jumpshot from Farmer broke the Broncs' scoreless run, and after free throws from Wylie and sophomore forward Segun Ezekiel Obe, the buzzer called the score with Rider down, 95-57.

The Broncs shot 42% from three-point range and 83% from the free throw line in the first half.



Liliana R. Basile/The Rider News

Sophomore forward **Rich Brisco** taking a free throw.

Baker led the Broncs with 11 points on the night and Farmer followed just behind him with nine and Semey with nine points, seven from the charity stripe.

"Facing Pitt early gives us a chance to see where we stand against strong competition," Baker said. "It pushes us to compete harder and helps us get ready for the opponents ahead."

The Broncs will ring in their home opener when they host the University of New Hampshire on Nov. 5 at 7 p.m. for the American East-Metro Challenge. Rider will continue this competition on the road, where they will face Binghamton University on Nov. 8 at 4 p.m.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Season opener remains tight battle, Broncs fall just short on the road

By Joshua Yuhas

Taking a trip up the state, Rider women's basketball narrowly fell 50-45 to the New Jersey Institute of Technology in their season opener.

Battling early

The Broncs got on the board first on Nov. 2 with senior guard Aliya McIver maneuvering under the basket for the layup.

After a score for the Highlanders, sophomore guard Aina Perez Mesquida broke through on the fastbreak for an open layup to give Rider a 4-2 advantage.

The pace of play slowed down until six minutes were left, when McIver knocked down a pair of free throws and junior forward Gabby Sweeney knocked down a jump shot.

The Highlanders would score a layup on the fastbreak to enter the first media timeout with an 8-6 lead for the Broncs.

The end of the first quarter was all in favor of NJIT with a 12-3 run that set the Broncs behind, 18-11.

"There were multiple points in the game when we went down and we kept battling back. I thought we showed a lot of resiliency," Head Coach Jackie Hartzell said.

Turnovers took control of the early parts of the second quarter with just a tip-in shot from the Highlanders, until Rider started to show their first signs of that resiliency, holding NJIT scoreless for five minutes.

In that time, the transfer from Mount St. Mary's in graduate student guard Giana Hoddinott knocked down a 3-pointer from the top of the key, then a layup was made by Perez Mesquida in the first wave.



Photo courtesy of NJIT Athletics

Senior guard **Aliya McIver** going up for the layup.

Hoddinott made a free throw and layup before Sweeney drilled a jump shot for a 21-20 lead.

"We understand each other and what each person on our team wants to do," Hoddinott said. "We read and go off of each other which makes us hard to guard, so I thought our chemistry was spot on."

Despite their strength, the Highlanders started to exchange baskets until a 3-pointer near the end of the half gave them a 28-23 advantage into halftime.

'Strong starting point'

It was a slow start in the third quarter for the Broncs, falling behind by as much as 13 points with just under eight minutes left in the quarter.

Missed layups by McIver and Sweeney along with turnovers by NJIT led a scoreless two-minute period.

Rider started to reawaken with an 8-2 run at the end of the quarter, started by a layup and jump shot from sophomore guard Alena Cofield.

Heading into the final quarter, the Broncs trailed by seven, as both sides going cold in the final two minutes.

An early 3-pointer by McIver brought Rider within four, then a layup from Cofield and a free throw from Hoddinott cut the deficit in half.

After a trade of scores, with a layup by the Highlanders and a score in the paint by Cofield, the Broncs trailed 43-40.

Scoring from the field was silent until the final minutes, when NJIT went strong from the charity stripe to seal the 50-45 defeat for Rider.

Leading the way for the Broncs was Hoddinott with her 16 points on the night on 6-11 shooting alongside McIver's nine points and Cofield's eight.

"We did a good job of adjusting to the changes of our defense on the fly and executing out of time outs," Hoddinott said. "As a fairly young team, we learned how a close college basketball game truly works, so this was a great game for our younger players."

Shooting from the field was the major discrepancy, with the Highlanders shooting 32% from the field to the Broncs' 25% in that category.

"We have a lot to work on and improve, but this game was a strong starting point," Hartzell said. "I am looking forward to continuing to work with this group and get better over the next 10 days."

The Broncs will have a bit of a cooldown period to learn from their season opener before their next game on the road against Central Connecticut State University on Nov. 12 at 7 p.m.

VOLLEYBALL

Halloween weekend sweep continues the Broncs' strong run

By Lindsay Scarola and Emma Geremia-Hartigan

The late-season momentum has continued for Rider volleyball with a clean sweep in their road matches, defeating Niagara University, 3-0, and then Canisius University, 3-0.

Staying hot

The first set on Oct. 30 started with a service ace from freshman middle blocker Olivia DeSaro, but then Niagara had four straight points to lead 4-1.

Senior right-side hitter Anja Kelly recorded two successive kills, and when senior libero Simone Langford served an ace, the set was tied at 4-4.

When the score was tied at five, junior outside hitter Aubrey Baker and freshman middle blocker Tori Bonacci hit back-to-back kills to give the Broncs a 7-5 advantage.

With a 12–11 score in favor of the Broncs, who extended their lead with a three-point run.

With the score of 19-16 in favor of Rider, the Broncs took five points in a row, and then, with an ace from freshman middle blocker Tori Bonacci, they went to 24-16.

After the Purple Eagles scored three consecutive points, a service error gave the first set to Rider, 25-19.

The second set started with a pair of points for each side before Bonacci made a kill to start a 6-0 run that included Baker adding three kills and senior setter Katie Cook getting an ace.

A string of kills by senior middle blocker Molly Rohde, Kelly and Baker pushed the score to 18-8 in favor of the Broncs.

At 23-12, Robinson finished a kill, and a sophomore libero Carly Allen ace led to Rider winning, 25-12.

With 17 kills and no attacking errors, the Broncs finished the second set with a .607 hitting percentage.

Rider entered the third set looking to complete the sweep, but sat even at 3-3 until two unanswered points for the Broncs emerged for a 5-3 advantage.

The Broncs kept advancing, this time with a single block by Rohde and three kills by Robinson, to lead an 8-2 run for a 14-7 advantage.

At 23-15, a Baker kill and a Bonacci solo block won the set, 25-15, completing the sweep.

Robinson led the way for the Broncs with 13 kills and a .550 hitting average that was paired with Bonacci's 10 kills, senior setter Makenna Mason's 34 assists and Langford's 11 digs.

Sweeping for Halloween

In the opening set on Oct. 31, the Broncs and Golden Griffins were tied at 3-3 until Canisius won three straight points and added another four-point run to lead, 10-5.

Trailing 14-8, the Broncs responded with a 5-0 run, propelled by a pair of Cook aces and Baker kills.

Still behind the Golden Griffins, 21-18, Kelly had two kills and a block during the Broncs' 7-1 run to win the set, 25-22.

Rider's momentum carried into the second set, opening it on a huge 7-1 run with two kills each from Bonacci and Baker.

Leading 13-7, kills from Kelly and Rohde started the Broncs' pull away from the Golden Griffins, taking set two, 25-15.

The Broncs maintained full control of the match, starting the third set with a 6-1 run that included a couple of blocks from Bonacci.

Leading 9-6, Rider completed another 3-0 run to maintain its lead, having a combo block from Kelly and Rohde.

Canisius went on a 4-2 run cutting its deficit from six to four, making it the closest the Golden Griffins would get in that set.

The Broncs' offense continued to find its rhythm,



Liliana R. Basile/The Rider News

Freshman libero **Olivia DeSaro** starting her serve.

closing out the third set, 25-19, to secure the sweep.

Head Coach Jeff Rotondo credited the team's improved confidence and competitiveness for its recent success at the end of the season.

"Obviously winning does a lot to boost confidence and morale. The beginning of the year, we dealt with a lot of adversity, injuries, figuring out lineups, etc., but the players really went to work in practice and I am really proud of everyone as to how competitive the practice gym had been to help us make this run," Rotondo said.

The Broncs will head home to defend Canastra Hammer Arena on Nov. 6 against Fairfield University at 6 p.m. and Nov. 7 against Sacred Heart University at 2 p.m. for Senior Day. The Nov. 6 match will be streamed on SNY and ESPN+. The match on Nov. 7 will be streamed on ESPN+.

WOMEN'S SOCCER

Rider celebrates Senior Day, draws top Metro opponent to end season

By Joey Poto

On Oct. 31, Rider women's soccer played their last match of the season, drawing 1-1 against Niagara University, as the seniors played the final game of their college careers.

Right there with the best

The game started off slow, as not a lot of action happened for the first five minutes of the game, but after this, the game would get busted open.

Niagara started the game with the first shot, and a minute later was awarded a penalty kick after a Rider foul in the box.

Despite this chance to take an early lead, sophomore goalkeeper Ashley Moore stepped into the goal and made a crucial save to kill off the early momentum Niagara was building.

The Purple Eagles would get a few more shots off before the Broncs' offense started to click, as junior forward Tess Ferrie would fire off four consecutive shots.

Tess would finally be rewarded on that fourth shot, when she found the back of the net to give Rider a 1-0 lead with 15 minutes left in the half. However, this would end up being the calm before the storm, as Niagara would gain possession and fire a shot to the back of the net, tying the game before halftime.

After one more shot by Niagara, the first ended with both sides lockstepped at 1-1, and Head Coach Drayson Hounsome proud of how his team was playing against a top Metro Conference team.

"We have been right there with the top teams in the conference and we weren't doing that at the start of the year, so it's a credit to the work they have put in," said Hounsome.

'The girls really make the team'

When the second half kicked off, Rider immediately took control of the game with the first three shots of the half, one from each Ferrie sister.

Even after Niagara took its first shot of the half that hit the crossbar, Rider held the momentum as they recorded two more shots trying to take the lead.

However, it would be Moore on the other end who stepped up once again to stop two quality chances with a pair of saves.



Liliana R. Basile/The Rider News

Rider women's soccer seniors after their final game of the year.

Rider would respond with a shot on goal of their own, then on the other end, Moore recorded another save in the exchange.

For the next 10 minutes, the action would slow down quite a bit as both teams would make substitutions and have a player record a yellow card, but no shots were taken.

Rider would break that trend with six minutes remaining as sophomore defender Ella Baumgardt took two shots, one of them saved by the Purple Eagles' goalkeeper.

The final two minutes of this game gave both teams a chance to win, as Niagara took a shot on goal that was saved by Moore, her ninth of the day, before Tess gave Rider one last chance at a victory that was saved with just seconds left.

The clock would strike zero for a 1-1 draw against a Metro opponent fighting for the top seed, as Rider finished their season 4-9-2 overall and 3-8-1 in the conference play.

After the game, senior forward Ava Ferrie described her experience playing at Rider with her sister as her collegiate career comes to a close.

"The girls really make the team and I wouldn't be anywhere without them," Ava said while getting emotional. "The girls just really pushed me and I have to thank Coach Drayson for believing in me, the girls for believing in me … it's the last time … with my sister so just really leaving everything out on the field."

Along with Ava, senior defender Bethie Morgan, senior forward Taylor Mays, senior midfielder Isis Ovares, senior defender Courtney Carter and senior forward Noa Menzing have left Ben Cohen Field one final time.

As the season concludes, Hounsome and his team look toward next season to see where they can improve to hopefully advance beyond this point next year.