

## 1998 PATRIOT LEAGUE CHAMPIONS

In 1998, the Holy Cross softball program reached new heights, winning a conference title and earning a spot as one of the top teams in the Northeast region. After finishing with a 15-21-1 mark in 1997, the team looked to new head coach Bob Neville to guide them. They opened with a spring trip to Florida, going 5-4-1. One thing Neville knew for certain was that he inherited a strong, experienced pitching staff with Sarah Heywood and two-time Patriot League All-Star Genoa Grosch.

The Crusaders made a strong statement as they traveled to Bucknell and took three of four games from the league's preseason favorite, en route to an impressive 7-1 start in league play, along with a 12-9-1 overall mark. The next big challenge for the Crusaders came in mid-April, a four-game set with Lehigh, who was the previous Patriot League champion, four seasons running. The Mountain Hawks came out firing against the Crusaders, winning the opener, 9-1, but a Grosch six-hitter led Holy Cross to a 2-1 victory in the second game. A split of the next two games left the Crusaders at 9-3 in the league and in sole possession of first-place.

After a 3-2 loss to Colgate, Holy Cross went on to win five straight games, including a four-game sweep of Army in West Point, N.Y. With one week to go in the regular-season, the Crusaders had a four-game lead over Colgate, who boasted the second-best batting average in the league and some of the most intimidating pitchers. The one victory the Crusaders needed to clinch the top-spot in the Patriot League Tournament would not come easily.

Colgate pulled out a 3-1 victory in the first game, behind the pitching of Tara McGoff. In the second game, with Grosch in the circle for the Crusaders and the help of the bat and base running by Jamie Olenoski and Alexis Lyon, Holy Cross topped Colgate, 7-1, to collect the win. Grosch pitched a one-hitter on the way to Holy Cross' first-ever regular-season title.

Holy Cross carried a 27-16-1 mark into the Patriot League Tournament. In the first game of the double-elimination tournament, the Crusaders faced McGoff and the Raiders once again. Colgate came out on top, 3-2, in 10 innings, sending the Crusaders to the losers' bracket. Holy Cross then defeated Bucknell, 1-0, followed by a victory over Colgate, 7-1.

The Crusaders needed to sweep a pair from Lehigh, four-time defending champions, in order to win the title. Holy Cross went on to defeat Lehigh, 7-1 and 4-3, leading the team to the tournament crown. Grosch was named Patriot League MVP.

Holy Cross (31-19-1) would drop two games at Harvard in its an NCAA play-in series, and would end the season ranked ninth in the region. The Crusaders' record was the best in more than 10 years. Four players were selected to the All-Patriot League team, with Grosch and Olenoski earning first-team honors and Jenkins and Lyon making the second-team. Neville was voted unanimously the Patriot League Coach of the Year, while Grosch was selected as Co-Pitcher of the Year for the second time in three seasons.