

MIAA

# 'For Dave': Methuen/Tewksbury honors late coach with MIAA title



By Patrick Donnelly  
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Methuen/Tewksbury celebrates winning the MIAA Division 1 girls state title. (Brian Kelly/NEHJ)

goals at once, bringing home the program's second title and, most importantly, honoring their late coach, Dave O'Hearn.

BOSTON — When senior captain Ella Duffy scored on an empty net to put Methuen/Tewksbury up, 2-0, on Archbishop Williams, it was an emotional release.

"That final push to get that final goal, it was a huge relief," Duffy said. "The rush of feelings that you get ... I already was crying as soon as that went in the net."

The final 57 seconds ticked off the TD Garden scoreboard, and the undefeated Red Rangers (23-0-2) sent their helmets, sticks and gloves sailing into the air.

The postgame celebration was rife with emotions as the newly-crowned MIAA Division 1 girls champions accomplished two

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O'Hearn, last season's Merrimack Valley/Dual County Coach of the Year, led Methuen/Tewksbury to a 19-2-3 record and a semifinal appearance last season, all while battling pancreatic cancer. He died in July at age 47.

The Red Rangers last won it all in 2019. O'Hearn was an assistant coach with that squad before taking over the helm in 2023.

## CHAMPIONS: How Methuen/Tewksbury took down Archbishop Williams for MIAA D1 girls crown

"My whole family, Dave's whole family, like everyone out there watching us, we had a huge group of supporters," Duffy said. "Being able to do it for them and for Dave's family, getting to see that and the impact he had on us as players, it just means everything to me."

No. 6 Methuen/Tewksbury executed a strong defensive, tight-checking game plan to snuff out an Archies attack that had outscored opponents 17-0 through its first four postseason games. The Red Rangers got pucks deep and made life difficult on the No. 5 Bishops as they tried to exit the zone.

"The game plan was, obviously, gain the red line, dump it in, go back to work, hem them in the zone, forecheck hard and keep them down there," Sheehy said. "If they can't get down to our end of the ice, we'll be all right."



Methuen/Tewksbury celebrates winning the MIAA Division 1 girls state title. (Brian Kelly/NEHJ)

It was a blueprint that would have made O'Hearn proud. The late coach took pride in a stout style of play.

"We played for him every day. That one was definitely for him today. The whole year has been for him," said interim coach **Ryan Sheehy**. "Making sure we have a good, solid defense shows his influence on the team and that sometimes even though someone's gone doesn't necessarily mean that you forget what they taught you."

Junior captain **Sammy Ryan**'s opening goal in the second period was a result of that forechecking pressure after keeping a play alive out high. Duffy's late insurance tally came after the Red Rangers forced a turnover inside the defensive blue line, and she hustled to win the race to the puck.

#### CHAMPS: **Milton outlasts King Philip for first MIAA D2 girls title**

At the other end, Methuen/Tewksbury limited Archies' ability to sustain pressure, and senior captain **Lydia Barnes** did the rest in net. She surpassed 1,000 career saves in the first period en route to an 18-save shutout, her 13th of the season.

Such a defensive effort was hardly a one-off performance for Methuen/Tewksbury, again owing to O'Hearn's influence on their style.

Barnes, a UMass Boston commit, posted a sub-0.50 goals-against average. The Red Rangers allowed just 12 goals all season, the fewest of any MIAA boys or girls hockey program.

"How much we've grown as a team and as a family this season is incredible. We all played for something bigger than just ourselves," Barnes said. "Today, we played for Dave. Everyone has a 'why,' and we are always reminding each other of that."

Sheehy coached with O'Hearn as an assistant over the previous four seasons. He entered the season with "mixed feelings" over succeeding his boss and friend, under the circumstances. But the continuity that carried over with Sheehy at the helm was critical throughout the season, especially for a Red Rangers lineup that featured 17 underclassmen, including 10 eighth-graders.

"Just coming in and knowing he wouldn't be here, it sucked," Sheehy said. "It was hard. I tried to pay a lot of attention last year because, unfortunately, I knew it was coming. ... I came in one game (this year), and I was sick and didn't even know if I could go. But I knew what Dave went through last year, and I said, 'Nope, I gotta go. I gotta be there. I'm the guy, and I have to make sure my team is ready to play.'"



Lydia Barnes makes a save on Archbishop Williams' McKenzie Lima-Tower. (Brian Kelly/NEHJ)

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Throughout the season, Methuen/Tewksbury's jerseys sported patches with a purple ribbon and O'Hearn's initials in his honor. Their skates featured one set of purple laces and another set of white. The team's social media consistently featured the hashtag "#4Dave" in its posts.

It's safe to say the Red Rangers accomplished their mission.

"Obviously, senior year is super emotional. I knew either way there'd be tears, for Dave, for everything we've done," Duffy said. "Amazing, amazing season. I'm so proud of everybody on this team. Everyone contributed, really, from our little eighth-graders all the way to our big seniors. We all played a part. We all did amazing. I just can't say enough about this team. It's been the funnest experience I've ever had."

**Tags:** [Dave O'Hearn](#), [Ella Duffy](#), [Girls high school hockey](#), [high school hockey](#), [Lydia Barnes](#), [Massachusetts](#), [Methuen/Tewksbury](#), [MIAA](#), [MIAA Division 1](#), [MIAA girls hockey](#), [Ryan Sheehy](#), [Sammy Ryan](#)