

Hodges' game winning basket sends the Drexel Dragons to the CAA Finals defeating the Towson Tigers, 69-68.



Photo by Rafael Suanes

By Keelin Brown

WASHINGTON — Behind a game-winning layup from forward Chloe Hodges with just three seconds to play, the Drexel Dragons defeated the Towson Tigers 69-68 on Saturday at the Entertainment & Sports Arena. It's been three years since the Dragons won their last CAA Championship. Now they are heading back to the CAA finals, as they take on the Seawolves of Stony Brook.

"I heard them call switch," Hodges said. "One of the Towson players was guarding Amaris [Baker], and I was like, 'OK, this was good,' and they did switch. I just held there and tried to

keep my composure and I knew how much time was on the clock. I was just taking my time, knowing that there was a smaller person on me, so I was just trying to finish the basket.”

Hodges finished with 15 points, two rebounds, five assists, and one steal, while Amaris Baker contributed a team-high of 23 points, four rebounds, and two assists.

“This time of the year it’s all about possessions and situations,” Dragons head coach Amy Mallon said. “These are things that we have prepared to do. That’s what this team is about, the toughness they showed. Just over the last three days, for me to be able to coach them, I think it’s pretty special.”

The game began with tight defense, as both teams struggled to find open shots. Through six minutes, both sides had combined for just six points on 19% shooting from the floor. The Dragons resolved the issue first, by forcing the Tigers into seven first-half turnovers and scoring 10 points off the easy transition baskets.

As the first quarter wound down, Dragons guard Erin Sweeney provided a spark off the bench, nailing both of her three-point shots to key an 11-2 Dragons run. Her teammates — Baker, Hodges, and Jasmine Valentine (eight points, eight rebounds) — continued that momentum into the second quarter, accumulating a 9-0 run at the halfway mark of the period to give the Dragons a nine-point lead at the half.

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“My teammates had the utmost confidence in me,” Baker said. “I have the utmost confidence in myself as well and, especially, just having their support. I know that I can do anything and just go with the flow of the game and see what they give me and take it.”

The Tigers gradually clawed their way back throughout the second half, thanks largely to guards Patricia Anumba (20 points, two rebounds, one assist, and one steal) and Kylie Kornegay-Lucas (15 points, three rebounds, three assists, one block, and two steals). The pair registered three of the Tigers’ seven second-half steals, which the team rode to a 9-2 advantage in fast break points.

The Dragons and the Tigers exchanged blows in the fourth quarter, with the margin rarely exceeding by five points. After Tigers guard Alexia Nelson put Towson ahead by one with 18 seconds left, the Dragons committed a costly turnover, which led to Tigers forward Anasia Staton to head to the line. Staton missed both two key free throws, giving the Dragons another shot.

Down to their last possession, and with Brooke Mullin set to inbound from the sideline, Baker set a screen on Tigers forward Quinzia Fulmore, which forced the smaller Anumba to defend Hodges in the paint. Mullin saw the mismatch and found Hodges for the easy game-winning layup with three seconds to play. Towson had one last shot, but Kornegay-Lucas narrowly missed a contested fadeaway jumper as time expired.

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The Dragons will move on to face a tough Stony Brook team on Sunday. Although the Dragons lost to the Seawolves twice in the regular season, Mallon is confident in her team's chances to secure their third CAA title and return to the NCAA Tournament.

“Our team is more than motivated to play the top team coming into the championship game, and I think that's just where you want to be,” Mallon said. “We kind of took our own path here through every team that we wanted to play, and so we are more than excited to face them tomorrow, and I think it's going to be a battle.”