

# Why the Delaware Blue Hens Belong in the NCAA Division I Men's Soccer Tournament

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# Introduction

In the program's 100<sup>th</sup> season, the University of Delaware Blue Hens men's soccer team has enjoyed a fantastic 2025 season. The Blue Hens finished the regular season 12-1-3 and earned a spot in the Summit League postseason tournament. This strong season and regular season record begs a natural question: how do the Delaware Blue Hens stack up against the rest of the country when it comes to the 26 at-large selections in the NCAA Division I Men's Soccer Tournament? By analyzing at-large teams from recent seasons and other potential at-large teams for this season, this report argues for the inclusion of the University of Delaware Blue Hens as an at-large team in the NCAA Division I Men's Soccer Tournament.

## Delaware's 2025 Season

### Out-of-Conference Schedule

Delaware played a total of ten out-of-conference games this season, finishing with a record of 9-0-1. Delaware's overall goal differential for out-of-conference games was an impressive 36-3. Delaware's best out-of-conference result was a 3-1 road win against Lehigh University. The Mountain Hawks, who are currently ranked 62<sup>nd</sup> in the country in RPI, earned the 2<sup>nd</sup> overall seed and finished as the runner-up in the Patriot League tournament. The Blue Hens also defeated the American University Eagles with a 2-1 final score. The Eagles, currently ranked 70<sup>th</sup> in the country in RPI, earned the 1<sup>st</sup> overall seed in the Patriot League tournament. Another impressive out-of-conference win for the Blue Hens was a 1-0 shutout against the University of Pennsylvania Quakers, who currently ranked 72<sup>nd</sup> in the country in RPI. The Quakers, who finished 8-5-4 and 3<sup>rd</sup> overall in the Ivy League this regular season, received a first-round bye in last year's NCAA tournament. Other Delaware out-of-conference wins include a 4-0 road win against the Temple University Owls, a 4-0 home win against the Loyola University of Maryland Greyhounds, and a 2-0 home win against the Le Moyne University Dolphins. The lone 'blemish' on Delaware's out-of-conference schedule was a 1-1 draw on the road against the George Washington University Revolutionaries. Although the result was a draw, the Blue Hens outshot their opponent 21 to 6, with 10 of Delaware's shots being on goal compared to 2 for George Washington.

### Summit League Conference Schedule

In the program's first season in the Summit League, the Blue Hens finished with a conference record of 3-1-2. The Blue Hens' overall conference goal differential was 12-6. Delaware's first conference win came against the University of Massachusetts-Amherst Minutemen, a team that finished top 8 in last year's NCAA Men's Soccer Tournament. The other two wins were against the University of Omaha and St. Thomas University. Delaware's lone regular season loss came on the road against the University of Denver Pioneers, who finished with a partial share of the Summit League's regular season championship and eventually won the

Summit League Championship on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025. In last year's NCAA tournament, Denver made the Final Four and lost in penalty kicks to the eventual national champion, the University of Vermont. As of now, the Pioneers are ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> in the country in RPI. Despite the loss, the Blue Hens outshot the Pioneers 19 to 8 and attempted 10 corner kicks compared to 4 for Denver. To close out the regular season, the Blue Hens played to a draw on the road against the University of Missouri-Kansas City Kangaroos, who also earned a partial share of the Summit League's regular season championship. The Roos, who are currently ranked 20<sup>th</sup> in the country in RPI, made it to the third round of last year's NCAA tournament.

## Summit League Tournament

The Blue Hens finished as the #3 seed in the Summit League conference tournament. They returned to the University of Missouri-Kansas City to play the Kangaroos, who finished as the #2 seed in the tournament. The Roos won the match 2-0, but Delaware kept the game very close. The Blue Hens finished with 11 shots compared to the Roos' 12, but Delaware had 7 shots on goal compared to Kansas City's 6. The Roos lost the Summit League Championship on November 15<sup>th</sup> against the top-seeded University of Denver Pioneers, the only other team to defeat the Blue Hens this season.

## Player Statistics, Accomplishments, and Awards

Many student-athletes on the University of Delaware Men's Soccer team had impressive seasons from a statistical perspective. Junior midfielder Rich Monath finished the season with 12 goals and 26 points, including 4 game-winning goals. In all of NCAA Division I Men's Soccer, he finished 9<sup>th</sup> in total goals, 10<sup>th</sup> in goals per game with 0.71, 13<sup>th</sup> in points per game with 1.53, and 14<sup>th</sup> in total points. Sophomore forward Marius Stenner finished with 11 goals, 9 assists, 31 points, and 4 game-winning goals. He finished 6<sup>th</sup> in Division I in total points, 10<sup>th</sup> in total assists, 14<sup>th</sup> in total goals, 12<sup>th</sup> in game-winning goals, and 6<sup>th</sup> in points per game with 1.82. Senior forward Mikey Johnson finished the season with 11 goals and 25 points, good enough for 14<sup>th</sup> in Division I in total goals, 20<sup>th</sup> in total points, 14<sup>th</sup> in goals per game with 0.65, and 19<sup>th</sup> in points per game with 1.47. Freshman midfielder Freddy Jeffreys finished the season with 9 assists and 13 points, good for 10<sup>th</sup> in the country in total assists and 8<sup>th</sup> in assists per game with 0.56. Freshman goalkeeper JoJo Elliott finished 7<sup>th</sup> in Division I in shutouts with 9 and 12<sup>th</sup> in save percentage by saving 82.8% of shots that he faced.

Due to these impressive individual performances, several players on the University of Delaware Men's Soccer team received notable awards this season. Junior midfielder Rich Monath was named the Summit League's Midfielder of the Year. Along with Monath, junior defender Jan Schroeder and sophomore forward Marius Stenner were named to the 2025 All-Summit League First Team. Freshman midfielder Freddy Jeffreys, freshman goalkeeper JoJo Elliott, senior forward Mikey Johnson, and junior defender Luke Chatten were named to the 2025 All-Summit League Second Team. Jeffreys and Elliott were also named to the All-

Newcomer Team. Jeffreys and junior defender Sean Smith also made the 2025 Summit League All-Tournament Team. On top of his All-Summit League First Team selection, sophomore forward Marius Stenner was frequently named to Top Drawer Soccer's Player of the Year leaderboard across the entire NCAA regular season. In Top Drawer Soccer's ranking for best freshmen, Elliott is ranked #5 amongst all freshmen and #1 amongst all freshmen goalies.

## Team Statistics, Program Records, and National Recognition

The Blue Hens had several impressive team accomplishments as well. Delaware achieved a perfect 8-0 record at home, where the Blue Hens conceded just 2 goals in 8 games. Delaware's 7-0 and 9-0-1 starts to the season are the best in the 100-year history of the program. The Blue Hens' 48 goals and 10 shutouts are both the most in program history as well. Against top 100 teams in the NCAA's Division I, the Blue Hens achieved an impressive record of 4-2-1. The only two teams that beat the Delaware Blue Hens this season were the Kansas City Roos and the Denver Pioneers, two teams that will both most likely make the NCAA tournament.

The Blue Hens' performances also stack up well with the rest of the country. Delaware finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in NCAA Division I in points per game with 8.53. The Blue Hens scored 48 goals and allowed just 11 goals to opposing teams. This is good for a goal differential of +37, which is the highest in the nation. Delaware's 145 points, 48 goals, and 2.82 goals per game each rank 1<sup>st</sup> in the country. The Blue Hens' 49 assists and 2.88 assists per game both rank 4<sup>th</sup> in NCAA Division I. Delaware's 10 shutouts and 58.8% shutout percentage rank 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> in the country, respectively. The Blue Hens were given just 18 yellow cards across the entire season, which is the 4<sup>th</sup> fewest in NCAA Division I. These strong national performances suggest that the Blue Hens were one of the most dominant teams in the country in 2025.

Delaware's strong 2025 season gained national attention, especially amongst coaches. In the November 11<sup>th</sup> poll from United Soccer Coaches, the Blue Hens received votes for consideration as a top 25 Division I team in the entire country. This was Delaware's third time receiving votes this season. Top Drawer Soccer also ranked the Blue Hens as the 24<sup>th</sup> best team in the country in Week 8 of the season. In just the West Region poll, Delaware has been ranked in the top 10 for 12 weeks in a row and counting. As of right now, the Blue Hens are considered by coaches as the 7<sup>th</sup> best team in the West Region. Ludwig Men's Division I Soccer Ratings currently have the Blue Hens rated as the 26<sup>th</sup> best team in the country.

## Delaware vs. Other 2025 At-Large Teams

### Gardner-Webb University Runnin' Bulldogs

The Gardner-Webb University Runnin' Bulldogs are a realistic team to compare to the Delaware Blue Hens. According to Ludwig's Ratings for strength of schedule, the Runnin' Bulldogs played the 121<sup>st</sup>-toughest schedule in the country compared to 154<sup>th</sup> for Delaware. Gardner-Webb is currently ranked 35<sup>th</sup> in the country in RPI, in large part because they finished

with a 13-3-2 record on the season. However, they played to just a 2-3-1 record against top 100 teams compared to Delaware's mark of 4-2-1. Gardner-Webb's 3 losses, all by 3 goals, were against Furman University and High Point University twice. Gardner-Webb finished with a final goal differential of +22, which is 15 goals worse than the Blue Hens. The Runnin' Bulldogs ranked just 36<sup>th</sup> in total points with 102 and 27<sup>th</sup> as a scoring offense with 2 goals per game.

### Georgia Southern University Eagles

The Georgia Southern University Eagles are currently ranked 34<sup>th</sup> in the country in RPI, which is a few spots above the Delaware Blue Hens. The Eagles' record against top 100 teams was 4-4, which is also worse than that of the Delaware Blue Hens. Georgia Southern lost twice to UCF and once each to the University of Kentucky and West Virginia University. The Kentucky Wildcats and UCF Knights are both very close in RPI to the Blue Hens. The Eagles finished 84<sup>th</sup> in scoring offense, 59<sup>th</sup> in goal differential at +11, and 88<sup>th</sup> in points per game with 4.33. These marks are all considerably worse than those of the Blue Hens.

### Virginia Commonwealth University Rams

The VCU Rams finished with just a 6-6-5 record, which comes out to a 50% won-lost-tied percentage. Against top 100 teams in particular, the Rams finished with a losing record at 5-6-2. The Rams' losses came against High Point University, Fordham University, the University of Dayton, Saint Louis University, the University of Akron, and UNC Greensboro. In particular, the Rams lost 5-1 against Fordham, who are just 92<sup>nd</sup> in Division I in RPI. Additionally, the University of Dayton is currently 88<sup>th</sup>. The Rams finished 123<sup>rd</sup> in scoring offense, 140<sup>th</sup> in goal differential at -6, 134<sup>th</sup> in points per game with 3.71, and 132<sup>nd</sup> in shutout percentage at 23.5%. Like that of Georgia Southern, these statistics are all far behind those of the Blue Hens. Additionally, the Rams finished with 6 red cards, the most in the country.

### Rutgers University Scarlet Knights

Finally, the Rutgers Scarlet Knights are another team that is close to Delaware in the RPI rankings. Rutgers finished 8-6-3 with a won-lost-tied percentage of 55.9%. Against top 100 teams, the Scarlet Knights went just 3-6-3, with losses to Northwestern University (2-1), Princeton University (3-1), the University of Washington (2-0), the University of Maryland (2-0), UCLA (5-2), and Indiana University (5-0). The Scarlet Knights finished with a neutral goal differential of 28-28, ranking 107<sup>th</sup> in Division I. Rutgers ended the season 75<sup>th</sup> in points per game, 63<sup>rd</sup> in scoring offense, and 93<sup>rd</sup> in shutout percentage.

# Comparable At-Large Teams in Recent Years

## 2024 Cornell University Big Red

Last year's Cornell Big Red are a very comparable team to the 2025 Delaware Blue Hens. Like this year's Blue Hens, Cornell's strength of schedule was not ranked very high nationally. After the NCAA tournament concluded, the 2024 Big Red finished the season with the 111<sup>th</sup>-toughest strength of schedule according to Ludwig's Ratings. This occurred after they played two games in the national tournament, so their regular season strength of schedule was most likely ranked even lower nationally. Cornell's 2024 team finished with a 12-3-2 record before the NCAA Division I tournament started, which is a similar record to Delaware in 2025. At the time of selection, the 2024 Cornell Big Red ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in goal differential at +23, 7<sup>th</sup> in scoring offense, and 10<sup>th</sup> in total points with 122. These marks are actually lower than those of the Delaware Blue Hens in 2025. Despite their easy regular season schedule, the 2024 Big Red defeated Fordham University 4-2 in the first round of the NCAA Division I tournament. Although they suffered a close 1-0 loss to the University of Pittsburgh in the second round, last year's Cornell Big Red proved that a team with a weaker regular season strength of schedule can still be successful in the national tournament.

## 2023 University of Denver Pioneers

The University of Denver Pioneers in 2023 are another team that had a similar regular season to the 2025 Delaware Blue Hens. At the time of selection, the Pioneers had a record of 11-2-5, and their record against top 100 teams was 3-2-4. Like this year's Blue Hens, the 2023 Pioneers lost in the semifinals of the Summit League's conference tournament to the Kansas City Roos. At the conclusion of the 2023 NCAA tournament, the Pioneers' strength of schedule ranked 110<sup>th</sup> in the country according to Ludwig's Ratings. Like the 2024 Big Red, their strength of schedule at the time of selection was most likely even lower when one considers that they played two games in the 2023 NCAA tournament. Although their regular season strength of schedule ranked low nationally, the 2023 Pioneers defeated Long Island University 2-1 in the first round of the 2023 NCAA tournament. Although they lost a close 2-1 match to Southern Methodist University, the 2023 Denver Pioneers proved that an at-large team from the Summit League can find success in the NCAA Division I Men's Soccer Tournament.

## Conclusion

The Delaware Blue Hens enjoyed one of the best seasons in program history in 2025. Delaware finished 12-2-3, including 9-0-1 out-of-conference and 8-0 at home. Delaware's only 2 losses on the year were close matches against two teams that will both most likely make the national tournament. Nationally, the 2025 Blue Hens finished 1<sup>st</sup> in scoring offense, 1<sup>st</sup> in goal differential, 2<sup>nd</sup> in points per game, 1<sup>st</sup> in total points, 1<sup>st</sup> in goals per game, 6<sup>th</sup> in shutouts, 5<sup>th</sup> in

shutout percentage, and 4th-best in yellow cards. These outstanding national statistics imply that the Blue Hens were one of the most dominant teams in the country this season.

Several student-athletes earned individual awards, including Rich Monath's Summit League Midfielder of the Year award, JoJo Elliott's ranking as the 5<sup>th</sup> best freshman in the country from Top Drawer Soccer, and Marius Stenner being named to Top Drawer Soccer's Player of the Year leaderboard multiple times throughout the season. Twice this season, the Blue Hens received votes amongst coaches for consideration as a Top 25 Division I team in the country. They have been consistently ranked as a Top 10 team in the West Region all season, including #7 as of the most recent poll.

When looking at other teams close to Delaware in RPI, it is clear that the Blue Hens stack up very well with the competition. The Blue Hens rank better than several 2025 teams when it comes to metrics such as record against top 100 teams, goal differential, scoring offense, shutout percentage, and points per game. Although Delaware's strength of schedule may raise concerns, there have been teams in recent NCAA tournaments that have found success despite a weak strength of schedule.

With Delaware's national dominance, strong individual performances, and the past success of similar teams in mind, it is clear that the 2025 Delaware Blue Hens deserve consideration for an at-large spot in the 2025 NCAA Division I Men's Soccer Tournament.

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