



SPORTS NEWS

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UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY NAMES 1997-98 ATHLETES OF THE YEAR Joe Savino and Rafaela Nikas Are Chosen

ALBANY, N.Y. -- **Joe Savino**, an All-America quarterback in football, and **Rafaela Nikas**, a two-sport standout in lacrosse and volleyball, have been named as the University at Albany's 1997-98 Male and Female Athletes of the Year. The selections were made in voting by the head coaches of Albany's 19-sport intercollegiate athletics program.

Savino, a senior from Norwood, N.J., was a first-team *Football Gazette* Division II non-scholarship All-America choice, and led the Great Danes to the 1997 Eastern Football Conference championship and a school-record 11-1 campaign. He was voted the ECAC-North Player of the Year and was the EFC's Most Valuable Player by setting Albany single-season marks with 2,377 passing yards and 22 touchdowns. Savino, who also rushed for 10 TDs, threw for a single-game record 398 yards in the conference's Atlantic Division title game against Southern Connecticut State, and was the EFC championship MVP with 314 passing yards in a 27-20 victory over American International on Nov. 22.

Savino, who ranked nationally among the Division II leaders in passing efficiency (156.4 rating) and total offense (229.3 yards per game), was both an ECAC-North and EFC first-team selection. He received the ECAC-North and EFC offensive player of the week award three times, and made the ECAC Honor Roll on four occasions. The 5-foot-9 signal-caller established 25 school records during his career, including most passing yards (7,015), touchdown passes (56), and most yards gained in total offense (7,660).

Nikas, a senior from Bay Shore, N.Y., was named to two All-America teams in lacrosse and made her third consecutive appearance on the All-New England Collegiate Conference volleyball team. Nikas was selected first-team All-American by both Brine/IWLCA and the U.S. Women's Lacrosse Association (USWLA). The senior midfielder established a school single-season record with 52 goals and added 10 assists to tie another UA standard for points (62). She ranked among the nation's leaders in goals (3.47/game) and points (4.13/game), and led the Great Danes to the ECAC Division II championship final for the second time in three years with an 11-4 record. Nikas finished her career second on UA's all-time lists in points (132) and goals (97), and tied for first in assists (35).

An outside hitter in volleyball, Nikas was a member of the 1997 All-NECC second team. A three-time all-conference choice, she averaged 3.70 kills per game and was second nationally in digs (5.55/game). Nikas, the school's career leader in digs with 1,607, captained Albany to a 20-11 record and an ECAC tournament appearance.

Past University at Albany Athletes of the Year

1997 Male: Anthony Vitti (Football), Jomo Forrester (Soccer/Track)

Female: Tonya Dodge (Cross Country/Track)

1996 Male: Dennis King (Cross Country/Track)

Female: Debbie August (Lacrosse)

1995 Male: Geoffrey York (Track)

Female: Melinda Cook-Carpenter (Softball)