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MELROSE, ROXBURY

Roxbury natives eye 'home-court' lift in Atlantic-10 hoop title run

Posted by Matt Rocheleau March 4, 2011 11:00 AM

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(Courtesy: Temple University)

Temple University coach Tonya Cardoza (left) and start point guard Shey Peddy will play their conference tournament in Lowell this weekend about 45 minutes northwest of Roxbury, where each grew up and still call home. In 29 previous runs, the A-10 Tournament has only been held in New England twice before.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

For only the second time in Atlantic-10 Women's hoop history, the conference

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tournament will be played at a "neutral site." But journeying to Lowell this weekend will feel a bit more like a homecoming for two Roxbury natives, who lead the second seed [Temple University squad](#).

Third-year head coach Tonya Cardoza and star junior point guard Shey Peddy are eyeing a shot at their first conference championship title with Temple as the duo prepares to coach and play the closest they've been to Boston, to home, since joining the Philadelphia-based university's team.

"We get to have a lot of friends and family, Shey and I, in the stands." This weekend they will include former high school classmates and others that have either rarely or never had a chance to see them in person on a college-level court, the coach said.

"This is special for us," added Cardoza, who on Wednesday became the second coach in school history to earn conference A-10 Coach of the Year honors. It'll definitely give us energy, and I think our players thrive off that."

The odds of playing at such high stakes close to Boston were slim. The A-10 women's tournament in Greater Boston is unprecedented. In 28 prior seasons, it has been hosted in Massachusetts just once – 1998 at the state's flagship campus in Amherst. Its only other New England visit was eight years ago at the University of Rhode Island.

"The Merrimack Valley Region and Tsongas Center had all the amenities necessary to host the tournament so we were chosen as the site," marketing director for the Lowell venue Mike Soriano wrote in an e-mail. "It is a great event for the region."



(Courtesy: Temple University)

Star point guard Shey Peddy.

on the defensive end.

"She leads us in every major statistical category," said Cardoza. "I don't think there are many kids at big schools in the country that can do that. It's been amazing."

"Shey leads by example, she's not that vocal [on the court]. But off the court, you can't shut her up," the coach added, laughing.

"I'm excited to come back home," said Peddy, who, like her coach, was interviewed Thursday via phone on the team's bus as it headed north to Lowell.

"[Being close to home] will definitely be a big motivator for us," added the 22-year-old [Melrose High alumna](#) and WNBA hopeful, who also earned recognition this week when she was named to the A-10 First Team and the conference's All-Defensive Team.

In her first season since transferring from Wright State University in Ohio, the five-foot-seven guard leads the Owls in total points, points per game, assists, minutes, free throws, steals and overall boards, most of which are

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The Owls are vying for what would be the fifth conference championship in school history and the first since Temple won three straight ending in 2006. After earning a first-round bye, the team will begin the four-day tournament at the Tsongas Center at UMass Lowell Saturday evening in a game live-cast on atlantic10.com. The Owls will tip-off at 5 p.m. against the winner of Friday's St. Bonaventure (#7), Fordham (#10) match-up.

A win Saturday would move Temple to the semifinals Sunday at 2:30 p.m., which will be broadcast on by CBS College Sports. The finals will be Monday at 5 p.m. and aired on ESPN 2.

The conference champion receives an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament.

"Hopefully, we'll be able to get that far," said Peddy, when asked what it would be like to possibly claim the A-10 title 45 minutes from her Mission Hill projects home in an arena that she expects more than 100 friends and family will journey to this weekend to cheer her on.

"I'm excited to see [friends and family], and hopefully I'll be able to catch up with some people I haven't seen in a while after the game," she said, adding that she plans to relax in Boston for a couple of days after the A-10 tournament.



(Courtesy: Temple University)

Coach Tonya Cardoza.

Visits back home can be limited to holidays and the offseason, but Cardoza and Peddy each still call Roxbury home. The pair live around two miles, or a 10-minute, drive from one another, the coach said.

"She's mom and I played basketball together," said Cardoza, who would practice at the neighborhood's YMCA and Shelburne Community Center growing up. "I've watched her grow up, so she's like a daughter to me."

While both the player and coach said their larger-than-usual hometown backing in the stands will be a motivator, they were cautious not to characterize the personal support base as an advantage.

"You would always hope to think that, but that's not always the case," said Cardoza, a 1991 graduate of the University of Virginia, where she was a star basketball player before. "I don't really think it's an advantage. I don't look at it that way ... I think the reason we've been successful the past couple of months is because we haven't looked ahead. We've taken it one game at a time."

Prior to becoming a head coach and leading Temple to a 68-26 record the past three seasons, Cardoza spent 14 years as an assistant coach at University of Connecticut. Under Hall of Fame Coach Geno Auriemma, she helped the Huskies win five National Championships. Prior to joining UConn, she played professionally in Spain.

Temple, unranked nationally, is expected to earn its eighth-straight NCAA

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tourney bid regardless of how the team plays in the A-10 playoffs. However, its current seven-seed projection in that tournament could fluctuate depending on how the team performs in Lowell this weekend.

The squad is 22-7 overall, with just two home losses, and 13-1 in conference play. Its only A-10 loss came Sunday at home to first seed Xavier, which is 25-2 overall, ranked sixth nationally and undefeated in conference play. Temple lost by seven, falling just shy of winning the school's first regular season title outright.

The A-10, one of 31 NCAA Division I-level conferences, is considered to be among the strongest in college women's basketball. Last season, four of the conference's 14 teams earned spots in the 64-team NCAA Tournament.

For A-10 Tournament ticket and additional information visit, www.atlantic10.com and www.tsongascenter.com.

E-mail Matt Rocheleau at mjrochele@gmail.com.



(Courtesy: Temple University)

Shey Peddy (left) and Coach Tonya Cardoza expect their large local fan base in the stands this weekend to give them added motivation.

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