

# PATRIOTS RULE ECAC MEET

By **Donna Niewiaroski**

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Trailing Penn State by an imposing 31.5 points coming into yesterday's finals of the ECAC women's track and field championships, but performing on its home turf, George Mason needed a jump-start - and got it. And took off.

The Patriots got it in the form of a tiny sprinter named Tamara Cuffee. Seeded third in the 100-meter dash, Cuffee, runner-up in the long jump the day before, shot out of the blocks and won in a photo finish in 11.93 seconds. Her teammates followed suit, scoring in 10 of yesterday's events. George Mason won its second title, with 89 points to the defending champion Nittany Lions' 79.5.

Patriots sprinters carried the bulk and the team passed Penn State, 58-53.5, after the 100, not to be caught. Seton Hall finished third with 53 points.

Cuffee's favorite event is the long jump, but it nearly got lost in the shuffle. For the 100 and 200, Cuffee ran five times, and twice more for the 4x100 relay. She finished fourth in the 200 and the Patriots won the relay in 46.16.

"I'm pretty tired," said the 5-foot-4 Cuffee. "I just sit down and talk to myself and pray, and my teammates help, telling me I can when I think I can't."

For others, this meet offered an opportunity to sharpen strategies for the upcoming national championships.

Jennifer Lanctot of Boston University, injured for most of her college career, won the 800 over Michelle Bennett of Villanova. Thwarting Bennett's usual style of breaking from the field early, Lanctot hung with her and then sped past her, rounding the final turn to win in a meet record 2:03.37. Bennett, who glanced over her shoulder to see Lanctot's charge, was second in 2:03.60.

"These meets are leading up to the NCAAs and TACs and I wanted a 2:03," Lanctot said. "As soon as Michelle turned around and looked, I knew I had her."

Villanova sophomore miler Nnenna Lynch took the lead in the 1,500 shortly after 800 meters and turned in a winning 4:17.91, under the NCAA qualifying standard by a tenth of a second.

"This week is different" from last weekend's Big East championships, Lynch said. "This one you had to focus, you're here for one specific purpose. I had to finish strong -- that's where the fractions of a second lie."

A fraction kept Keisha Demas of Pittsburgh from a meet record but not a national berth. Leading the 400 field by a large margin, she won in 52.27, missing the mark by .03, but easily qualifying for the NCAAs.