**Dream ride ends in championship game**

By Mike Caputo

The men's basketball team did not win the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference (MAAC) Tournament this weekend in Buffalo, N.Y., but managed to win the hearts of many.

For the first time since joining the MAAC in 1997, No. 2 Rider made it past the quarterfinal round of the conference's postseason tournament. It did not stop there though, as the Broncs made it all the way to the MAAC Championship game on Monday.

Guard Robert Taylor expressed his feelings after the team's 76-74 semifinal victory over Fairfield on Saturday night, including comments on playing for the conference championship and an automatic berth in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Tournament.

"Last year, after losing to Saint Peter's, there were a lot of tears," said Taylor. "We worked so hard to get to this point." The Broncs lost to Rider, including two key three-pointers that put the Broncs up 19-18. "These guys have helped me out all year and they all stepped up," said Johnson. "This is not a one-man team by any means." Rider came out on top in the second half, especially Johnson, whose scoring presence was missed in the first half. Johnson finished the game with 20 points, 17 of which came in the second half. The big presence in the second half though was seven-foot center Steve Castleberry. With approximately 15 minutes left on the clock, Rider clung to a 44-39 lead and Castleberry became king of the court. Castleberry started with a slam-dunk over Canisius forward BigBigger Ismael Gai, who also fouled him in the same instance.

Within a span of four minutes, Castleberry scored nine points, two blocks and two rebounds. During Castleberry's reign, Rider stomped out an 18-5 run, which virtually sealed the 75-59 victory for the Broncs. Forward Edwin Muniz finished with 15 points, nine rebounds and five assists, while forward Paul Johnson compiled eight points and six rebounds.

Rider had a much more difficult task getting into the school's first semifinal game in years when it was to take on No. 3 Fairfield. Fairfield featured the nation's leading backcourt, center Deng Gai, who had torched the Broncs in a game at Alumni Gym in January. "[Gai] gave us a good run at home and I learned from him," said forward Jason Thompson. Gai was contained for a major portion of the first half, especially by Thompson. He was held to only one block the entire game and to only three points in the first half. "I tried to attack him," said Thompson. "If you get him into foul trouble, it's hard for the other players to come in and contribute." In a game where Rider led most of the way, Fairfield hung in through the end. At halftime, the Broncs led by a tight 37-36 margin. Thompson had the coherence to foul Gai just 1:10 into the second half though the Broncs had as much as an eight-point lead, the game came down to the closing seconds.

Rider had a 76-73 lead after Gai's free throw, but Mouzon missed the front end of a one-and-one free throw. As a result, the Stags had an opportunity to tie the game in the first half. With just 1:04 left on the clock, the Stags couldn't stifle the Broncs from getting an open shot, as Fairfield guard Terrance Todd (17 points) was scrambling to make something happen. Since Rider was over the team foul limit, Thompson had the coherence to foul Todd with about 2.2 seconds to go, giving him the opportunity to shoot two free throws when the Stags needed three points to tie.

Todd sunk the first free throw attempt and was forced into a situation where he had to miss on purpose in hope of a team miracle miraculously getting the rebound and scoring in a span of two seconds. "I was stunned that [Maxwell] got that clean of a look," said Thompson. "You can't print what was going through my mind. I was a little stunned that [Maxwell] got that clean of a look.""After the semifinal victory, Rider had a championship date with fellow MAAC Regular Season Co-Champion Niagara on Monday night, which stole a vacancy in the semifinal round by a score of 69-66. The Purple Eagles, who received the double-bye, as No. 1 seed, put up over 100 points in the previous two games against Rider, but were out-scored by the Broncs in the second meeting. Harum recognized that fatigue may become a factor in the game, especially if it became a high scoring affair. "I hope we have enough left in the tank for that," said Harum. "We were fortunate at the end of the game," said Harum. "You can't print what was going through my mind. I was a little stunned that [Maxwell] got that clean of a look.""After the semifinal victory, Rider had a championship date with fellow MAAC Regular Season Co-Champion Niagara on Monday night, which stole a vacancy in the semifinal round by a score of 69-66. The Purple Eagles, who received the double-bye, as No. 1 seed, put up over 100 points in the previous two games against Rider, but were out-scored by the Broncs in the second meeting. Harum recognized that fatigue may become a factor in the game, especially if it became a high scoring affair. "I hope we have enough left in the tank for that," said Harum. "We were fortunate at the end of the game," said Harum. "You can't print what was going through my mind. I was a little stunned that [Maxwell] got that clean of a look.""After the semifinal victory, Rider had a championship date with fellow MAAC Regular Season Co-Champion Niagara on Monday night, which stole a vacancy in the semifinal round by a score of 69-66. The Purple Eagles, who received the double-bye, as No. 1 seed, put up over 100 points in the previous two games against Rider, but were out-scored by the Broncs in the second meeting. Harum recognized that fatigue may become a factor in the game, especially if it became a high scoring affair. "I hope we have enough left in the tank for that," said Harum. "We were fortunate at the end of the game," said Harum. "You can't print what was going through my mind. I was a little stunned that [Maxwell] got that clean of a look.""After the semifinal victory, Rider had a championship date with fellow MAAC Regular Season Co-Champion Niagara on Monday night, which stole a vacancy in the semifinal round by a score of 69-66. The Purple Eagles, who received the double-bye, as No. 1 seed, put up over 100 points in the previous two games against Rider, but were out-scored by the Broncs in the second meeting. Harum recognized that fatigue may become a factor in the game, especially if it became a high scoring affair. "I hope we have enough left in the tank for that," said Harum. "We were fortunate at the end of the game," said Harum. "You can't print what was going through my mind. I was a little stunned that [Maxwell] got that clean of a look.""After the semifinal victory, Rider had a championship date with fellow MAAC Regular Season Co-Champion Niagara on Monday night, which stole a vacancy in the semifinal round by a score of 69-66. The Purple Eagles, who received the double-bye, as No. 1 seed, put up over 100 points in the previous two games against Rider, but were out-scored by the Broncs in the second meeting. Harum recognized that fatigue may become a factor in the game, especially if it became a high scoring affair. "I hope we have enough left in the tank for that," said Harum. "We were fortunate at the end of the game," said Harum. "You can't print what was going through my mind. I was a little stunned that [Maxwell] got that clean of a look.""After the semifinal victory, Rider had a championship date with fellow MAAC Regular Season Co-Champion Niagara on Monday night, which stole a vacancy in the semifinal round by a score of 69-66. The Purple Eagles, who received the double-by...