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## 'Nova's Bench Mob seniors cherishing final run

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By Eugene Rapay

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Villanova held a comfortable 14-point lead with just over a minute to go over a pesky Butler squad that just wouldn't go away quietly on Saturday.

With a double-digit lead, the final minute of the game seemed to be a formality. Like many times throughout the season whenever Villanova had the lead, cries for the "Bench Mob" came echoing from the rafters, filling out the cozy Pavilion on a day that had been designed at Senior Day, the last game at the on-campus stadium that wasn't during spring break.

As seconds continued to tick off of the clock, the chants turned into disappointment as the Bench Mob -- which features seniors **Patrick Farrell**, **Henry Lowe** and forward **Kevin Rafferty** -- never checked into the game.

"Sometimes I'm like, 'Oh man, I wish they weren't chanting so much,'" Farrell said, smiling. "I get a vibe of where we are at the end of the game. Everybody outside doesn't realize that a 15-point lead in college basketball isn't that big. You have guys out here that can drill 3-pointers and before you know it, your 1:30-to-go lead can go down to just a six-point lead."

That's okay, though. For this group, anonymity is just fine.

While Villanova seniors **Ryan Arcidiacono** and **Daniel Ochefu** have gotten all-Big East honors and accolades for their play on the court, the team's three other seniors have received a different kind of fanfare in their own right.

During their time on the Main Line, the trio has combined for 172 minutes and each one has only eight career points to his name. As for their classmates, Arcidiacono and Ochefu, the two future pros have thousands more minutes and thousands more points.

Despite the disparity between the senior starters and reserves, ask either Farrell, Lowe or Rafferty, and they'll tell you the same thing.

They wouldn't have it any other way.

"A lot of my friends -- I've heard a lot about their college experiences," Lowe said. "So you hear a lot about frat life and regular student life, and that sounds cool, but it loses a lot of its novelty I guess you could say. I've had four years of a lot of hard work, but at the same time a lot of gratifying relationships and meeting some amazing special people."

Lowe and Farrell both stepped foot on Villanova's campus in the fall of 2012 after enjoying successful high school careers in their native state of New York.

Lowe played three years of varsity basketball at the Dalton School (N.Y.), where he scored more than 1,000 career points and received All-State honors his senior year.

Meanwhile, Farrell lettered in both basketball and lacrosse at Chaminade (N.Y.), playing them for two seasons each. On the basketball court, he averaged 13.2 points per game and 10.0 rebounds per game his senior year, in a season that culminated in All-League honors.

At Villanova, the duo--along with former reserve player **Nick McMahon**--gained a reputation for their flashy and energetic celebrations. It became a spectacle that was almost as entertaining as the 3-pointer or dunk that sparked their dancing, imaginary bow-and-arrow, and telescope routines.

"We kind of came in wide-eyed, didn't know what to expect," Farrell said. "We just didn't really know our role yet and that's when the Bench Mob came about. We were just doing whatever we could to bring energy for the team."

It wasn't until Lowe and Farrell's junior year, in 2014-15, that Rafferty joined them on the bench.



Kevin Rafferty (left), Henry Lowe (middle) and Patrick Farrell (right) along with Daniel Ochefu and Ryan Arcidiacono at Villanova's senior day. (Photo: Josh Verlin/CoBL)

The 6-foot-8 Malvern Prep grad transferred to Villanova to be back in the local area after spending his freshman year playing basketball at Tufts. It was a decision that was also spurred by some illnesses in the family that drove him to be closer to home. He spent one season on the team's practice squad before joining the team full-time.

"Growing up around here, I watched Villanova basketball ever since I was a little kid," Rafferty said. "Seeing guys like **Mike Nardi**, **Curtis Sumpter**, **Jason Fraser** and **Kyle Lowry**, and being blessed enough to have Mike Nardi on the staff-- it's weird for me but it's awesome because I looked up to these guys. Being a part of this now is so special for me, because I've been around it. I've seen it ever since I was a little kid coming to games."

Despite the joyous experiences that these three have had, with the rise from a tumultuous freshman season to a Big East championship last year, and now reaching a No. 1 ranking in both polls this season, there were times of struggle.

After being the featured players in high school, being relegated to a reserve role in the bench provided some doubt for them. At the same time, it also gave them a time to learn some things.

"It wasn't easy. My mom said to me when I was a junior that things don't always turn out as you expect, they turn out better," Lowe said. "I had never heard that before and that is exactly what I think about my situation here. I didn't quite expect to come to college and be a bench player for four years, but because I've done that, it has matured me as a person."

Over time, the celebrations that they had been known for as freshmen were curtailed as they became upperclassmen.

They attribute it to knowing their role on the team and understanding what has brought Villanova success. Of course, they still get excited for made 3-pointers and dunks, but it's also the little things that count such as diving for a loose ball, hustling back after a turnover, taking charges, grabbing offensive rebounds and not getting complacent even when a win seems imminent.

"[The fans] might be chanting our names but if a team is pressing and we feel that this is a great opportunity for our younger players to learn how to beat a press in the game, we're all for them to play the rest of their game out," Rafferty said. "It's not about us getting 30 seconds of playing time. It's about the younger guys getting experience that we can be a better team, and they can have great careers. It's a selfless position where you have to really appreciate those kinds of things."

Aside from the lessons on the court, they have also learned lessons that are applicable to life after basketball like how to conduct yourself with others, how to be a gentleman, and how to be a good person towards their peers.

It's all a part of being within the team, or as they would call it, a family.

"Just because me, Henry and Kev are walk-ons, doesn't mean we get treated differently," Farrell said. "We just have a different role when it comes to game day and practice."

With Senior Day over and done with, it was something that Villanova's seniors acknowledged. They couldn't get too caught up in the hype and emotions surrounding the day.

After all, there are more things at stake and bigger tasks to worry about, such as a run for the Big East title and the NCAA Tournament later in March.

"We don't get involved in the hype and the outside stuff outside of the team and the 14 guys in that locker room," Lowe said. "It's talked about and it's cool, but we know that we have work to do."

However, once it's all said and done, and the final buzzer sounds, the trio seems confident in what the future will bring.

Lowe, Farrell and Rafferty are all working on getting their MBAs.

Farrell plans on pursuing a career in real estate. Meanwhile, Rafferty is currently enrolled in graduate school for business. He finished his undergraduate studies in January.

As for Lowe, he plans on taking a different route while keeping his MBA in his back pocket.

He plans on joining the coaching staff as a graduate assistant next season and remain around the program, as the other two venture out into the field of business. Even though the future path seems set for the fan-favorite trio, and Lowe will still be by the team, it won't compare to being able to put on the jersey and step onto the court as a player.

"I think it's been a privilege to be a part of this program," Lowe said. "I don't necessarily have the basketball talent that a Ryan Arch or **Josh Hart** have, but the way that the guys and the coaching staff have welcomed me and allowed me to form a niche and contribute in my own way by developing and keeping a culture, it's been an incredible experience and one I'll cherish my entire life."

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