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[O'Rourke finds the fun in diving](#)

By Nate Beutel [Niagara Gazette](#)

NIAGARA FALLS — Ian O'Rourke found stardom early in his diving career. But it wasn't until last month's Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference Championships that the Niagara University senior truly relished that success.

"It was the last day on the one-meter at MAACs when I just told him to go out there and perform," NU diving coach Brooke Nigro explained. "He looked at me with these big eyes and said 'what?' I didn't tell him to win or be competitive, I just told him to perform. So, he went out there and said 'this is my stage, this is my arena.' He got the crowd involved and had an amazing event."

O'Rourke won both the one- and three-meter MAAC titles and followed that up with an ECAC crown in the one-meter. He will compete in this weekend's NCAA Zone A Diving Meet in Annapolis, Md. in an effort to qualify for the National Championships.

"It was such a cool moment to be able to share with my coaches, parents and the whole team supporting me," O'Rourke said of the MAAC championships. "This has been such a storybook year."

Indeed it has for the former high school phenom at Grand Island. O'Rourke, who got into diving through his gymnastics background, finished sixth in New York state as a seventh grader. He went on to win a pair of state championships and finish as runner-up on two other occasions.

But for all the success O'Rourke had endured, something was missing.

"The fun just wasn't there," he said.

By his senior year of high school, O'Rourke was burned out. He wilted even more when visiting big-time Division I schools throughout the country.

"The expectations were too much and I was so worried that I wouldn't be able to meet them that it freaked me out even more," O'Rourke admitted.

Nigro, who was wrapping up her first year at NU, heard through the rumor mill that perhaps O'Rourke might pass on the bigger offers and be willing to stay close to home. She made a few calls and before she knew it, O'Rourke had found his way to Montegale Ridge.

When he arrived in Lewiston, O'Rourke's talent was undeniable. His ability to let loose was lacking, making him a great addition to a team that at the time had only female divers.

"He was here among a bunch of girls that didn't have the talent that he did, but they had the fun," Nigro said. "They showed him the fun of this sport. That was big for him."

With more simplicity, O'Rourke experienced success early, finishing in the top four at MAACs as a freshman and then winning MAAC and ECAC titles as a sophomore. But then last year, he suffered a setback, tearing his achilles. In truth, though, it was a blessing.

"I think that when diving was taken away from him like that, he realized how much fun he has with it," Nigro said as O'Rourke nodded in agreement.

Of course, O'Rourke doesn't experience success by accident. He has a tremendous work ethic and is a student of the sport, spending plenty of time in and out of the pool, according to Nigro. It's her hope that all of that work pays off this weekend with another show-stopping performance.

"He's larger than life out there," she said. "He's brought the fun back into diving and that's all we ever wanted to do with Ian."

A smiling O'Rourke added, "I have a great opportunity to go down there and have some fun. I'm excited whatever the outcome may be. In the past I had everything to lose, now I've got everything to gain. I can't wait."

O'Rourke will do the one-meter on Friday, the two-meter on Saturday and make his debut in the platform event on Sunday.