

Blanca Quinonez #4 of the UConn Huskies against the Syracuse Orange at Gampel Pavilion in STORRS, Conn. The Huskies won with a final score of 98-45. FILE PHOTO/THE DAILY CAMPUS

A FRESHMAN'S GUIDE TO THE HISTORY OF UCONN BASKETBALL

by Seth Wallen
CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT
HE/HIM/HIS
savannah.wallen@uconn.edu

Welcome Class of 2030 to the basketball capital of the world!

As the cultural heartbeat of the university, stepping into Gampel Pavilion may mean looking up at an array of retired numbers, banners and legends you might not recognize yet. While modern dominance has kept Storrs on top, understanding the lore starts by looking back at the magic that built it.

The program took off in the mid-to-late 1980s, with the arrival of former men's coach Jim Calhoun and current women's head coach Geno Auriemma. Between Calhoun's 1988 National Invitation Tournament title at Madison Square Garden and Auriemma's first Big East championship in 1989, the mid-80s transformed Storrs from a regional afterthought into an emerging powerhouse.

To understand March Madness in Storrs before the 2020s, start with junior guard Kemba Walker in 2011. After an inconsistent regular season, Walker led UConn to five wins in five days at Madison Square Garden to capture the Big East Tournament crown. The defining moment of that run came against the top-seeded Pittsburgh Panthers, where Walker shook his defender on an iconic step-back buzzer-beater, birthing the moniker "Cardiac Kemba."

The magic didn't stop at Madison Square Garden, though. The Huskies rode that wave all the way to Houston, cutting down the nets to secure the national title against a squad coached by Walker's future Celtics coach and current Celtics president of basketball operations, Brad Stevens.

Walker went on to play for several NBA teams, being nominated as an NBA All-Star four times and leading Charlotte Hornets franchise history in points scored, 3-pointers, field goals and minutes played.

Two years later, Breanna Stewart entered the chat. Before ever playing a college game, Stewart boldly stated her goal to win four national championships in four years. This goal turned to reality as the Huskies went 151–5 across her four-year tenure, capping it off with a 75-game win streak. Stewart won the NCAA Tournament Most Outstanding Player award in all four seasons—an unprecedented feat.

Alongside her were her teammates, forward Morgan Tuck and point guard Moriah Jefferson, the program's all-time assists leader. Stewart turned an unthinkable four-peat into routine, completing the greatest four-year run in the history of college sports. The trio of Stewart, Jefferson and Tuck were drafted in the top three of the 2016 WNBA Draft, the first and only time in North American professional basketball history three players from the same college were drafted immediately after one another.

From Walker's magic to Stewart's dominance and beyond, you're now a part of Husky Nation. As history continues to write itself in Storrs, take all of it in and chant with the crowd!



Breanna Stewart during the 2013 NCAA Women's National Championship Game against the Louisville Cardinals on April 9, 2013 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Stewart led UConn to a 93-60 victory. PHOTO COURTESY OF @WFINALFOUR ON INSTAGRAM