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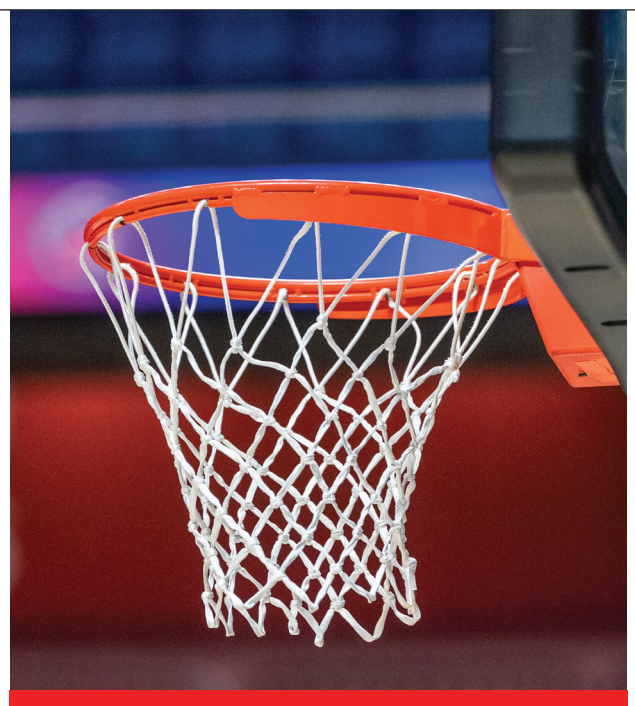

UConn women's basketball faces Syracuse in an exhibition game Monday, Oct. 12, 2026, at Mohegan Sun Arena in Uncasville. The Huskies squished the Orange 88-60 in their first action of the season as part of the Hall of Fame Series Exhibition.
PHOTO BY PARKER MEYERS, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/ THE DAILY CAMPUS



UConn women's basketball faces Syracuse in an exhibition game Monday, Oct. 12, 2026, at Mohegan Sun Arena. The Huskies squished the Orange 88-60 in their first action of the season as part of the Hall of Fame Series Exhibition.
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Women's Basketball:
UCONN CRACKS THE CODE IN EXHIBITION MATCHUP VS. TEXAS

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HARTFORD -- Some say Sarah Strong or Paige Bueckers are cheat codes to make it to the National Championship.

Others may deduce that a cheat code for UConn women's basketball is an exhibition game against high-caliber opponents like Madison Booker and the Texas Longhorns.

Programs have exhibition games for numerous reasons.

The common denominator though on why?

They give programs, like UConn, an opportunity to discover those cheat codes on what assets in their game they need to specifically harp on before they enter regular season matchups.

With both the Huskies and Longhorns expected to be in the top 25 in the preseason rankings, Connecticut had a chance to crack the code on what it takes to defeating Texas, a team they've been in the same Final Four as the past two years.

"With the teams we have coming up in two weeks, it's going to be the same thing," Head Coach Geno Auriemma said postgame. "So, getting a taste of that is way better than watching on film and talking about it at practice, and so I'm glad that we're able to do it."

On Monday evening, in their second game of their three-game exhibition series, Connecticut took the win 83-61 over the Longhorns.

It took a few hurdles for the Huskies to get to that point, though.

Right off the bat, Texas's size compared to the Huskies was immediately noticeable on the hardwood. Their dominance and skill down low, proved to be a tall task to defend in the front court for players like junior Sarah Strong.

With the Huskies' various attempts to shut down Booker, the Longhorns' leading scorer, it came with a few fouls and errors on Connecticut's side.

As the game commenced, Connecticut worked tirelessly to get comfortable matching up against a team of such size.

For Booker, though, she met her match against freshman Jovana Popovic.

Popovic showed how she was at ease defending 6-foot-1 Booker, almost immediately. Popovic cut through the Longhorns' defense on multiple opportunities in the first half, driving to the basket.

The Serbian native finished the game racking up 22 points, seven rebounds and five assists.

"She responded the way she responds to everything. You know, just like this icy stare," Auriemma said when he was asked about Popovic. "She has a kind of steely personality, you know, and doesn't really bend or break most of the time."

In the second quarter, Texas got more comfortable slicing through UConn's defenders as they racked up point after point to keep a consistent, steady lead over Connecticut. That was, until Strong took matters into her own hands.

With eight straight points from Strong, finished with a triple, she tied things towards the midway point of the second frame.

After the under-five timeout in the second quarter, though, is where the wheels started to fall off for Connecticut. UConn finished the first half turning the ball over 11 times only made three of their 10 shot attempts.

Heading into halftime, with a pull-up jumper, Popovic knotted things up, though, the score 37-37.

When the Huskies returned from the locker room for the second half of the matchup, it was like there was a fire lit underneath them.

Freshman Olivia Vukosa showed confidence matching up against Texas' 6-foot-4 Breya Cunningham. Vukosa, in the third quarter, forced Cunningham to rack up three personal fouls putting her in foul trouble for the duration of the matchup.

Three defensive rebounds in the third frame from Vukosa, was crucial in setting her teammates up to keep their lead over the Longhorns.

The Huskies maintained their consistent pressure on Texas into the final frame of the game, forcing Texas to only rack up 16 points, six of those from the paint, compared to the Huskies' 27 points.

"They spent a lot of their possession running Madison Booker off every kind of screen imaginable," Auriemma said postgame on defending Booker. "So, it's a really difficult assignment, you know. The their size and their length was a little bit of an issue in the first half, and took us a while. But once I think we started to get better movement, things kind of opened up for us."

As the Connecticut started to find their way again for the rest of the game, they managed to officially shut Texas down, with Strong and Popovic trading baskets back and forth.

Strong finished the matchup with 27 points, three rebounds and three assists.

As the Huskies look to the regular season, they will look to take this experience against physical teams, like Texas, into games this year against opponents like South Carolina.

"I think we definitely asserted a dominance that game that we're definitely trying to emphasize this season because Texas is a physical team," Ashlynn Shade said postgame. "They run a lot of screen actions. You're getting hit a lot, so we really buckled down. So, we just really tried to emphasize that pressure and being physical right back with them."

Connecticut will now pivot to the final game of their exhibition series this Sunday. They will take on Army at Gampel Pavilion in Storrs, Conn. Tip-off is scheduled for 4 p.m. and Husky fans can tune in to the game on UConn+.

Women's Basketball:
UCONN MEASURED UP TO TEXAS' PHYSICALITY IN SECOND HALF IN 83–61 WIN

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HARTFORD — It was evident ahead of the opening tip-off when 5-foot-9 Jovana Popovic had to move her hand above her head to high-five 6-foot-2 Addison Bjorn that the UConn women's basketball team was at a noticeable size disadvantage versus Texas.

Around the Husky logo embossed at midcourt, four Longhorns stood 6-foot-1 or taller, including the always-imposing Madison Booker and 6-foot-4 Breya Cunningham, against the three 5-foot-9 guards of Connecticut, flanked by Sarah Strong and Jana El Alfy.

It was also obvious after the first possession that Texas was trying — rather stubbornly — to exploit its size advantage, feeding the ball to Cunnigham on the block in isolation and engineering open looks for Booker on the elbow throughout the first quarter.

But the Huskies, undeterred, would adapt to the low-post onslaught, switching everything and caving in along the lane with help defense en route to an 83-61 win.

"I thought that would be a big challenge this year: Can we be tough enough to handle a bad shooting night or things that don't go our way?" Geno Auriemma said postgame. "I liked the way we approached it tonight; I liked the way our big guys were able to rebound."

UConn won on the defensive glass, 25-23, and shored up a minus-eight rebounding mark in the first half to minus-two in the second. They also outscored Texas in the paint, 34-26, while limiting the Longhorns to just five second-chance points.

But how? Well, it wasn't always easy.

Twelve of Texas' 17 first quarter points came in the paint as the Longhorns put an early stranglehold on the glass, grabbing three offensive rebounds for four second-chance points in the first 10 minutes. El Alfy and Strong struggled to fight around box outs while Booker's elbow jumpers caromed off the front rim and into the arms of Cunningham for open lay-ins.

"Their style of play is very unique, very different than what you normally see," Geno Auriemma said. "They spend a lot of their possession running Madison Booker off every kind of screen imaginable. You've got to fight through all those and you have to work really, really hard and then she scores over you anyway. So, it's a really difficult assignment."

Texas was imposing its will down low, but UConn never switched to a three-big lineup to counter, instead opting to switch one-through-five and allowing one of Strong, El Alfy or Vukosa to rotate onto Cunningham and the other to switch onto Booker on pick-and-rolls.

The results were tangible: UConn cut Texas' paint points in half from 12 to six in the second quarter and didn't surrender an offensive rebound. Connecticut rallied from down five to tie the game at the half, scoring 10 paint points in the process.

"Their size and their length was a little bit of an issue in the first half," Auriemma said. "It took us a while, but once I think we started to get better movement, things kind of opened up for us."

With the guards freed up from the war in the paint, UConn began to stretch its lead from behind the arc in the third, hitting on 3-of-7 attempts from 3 and winning on the glass while building a nine-point lead.

"We picked up our pressure," Strong said of what changed defensively in the second half. "We were talking and focusing on who was guarding Madison Booker and do our best, as a team, to shut her down. She still did what she did, but I think we were able to pull through."

And it only ballooned from there. Strong poured in 12 in a row in between the third and fourth quarters while Vukosa matched Cunningham on the glass.

Strong finished with a game-high 27 points on 12-of-21 shooting, 11 of which came in the paint; Vukosa, meanwhile, grabbed four rebounds in 18 minutes and added all three of her points from the free throw line.

"I thought Connecticut was really tough tonight," Texas head coach Vic Schaefer said. "I thought we got out-toughed. We couldn't make a contested shot; we couldn't make a contested layup."

Auriemma never reverted to having all three healthy bigs — Blanca Quiñonez, a presumed starter, was out again, remember — on the court together to chip away at Texas' edge down low. It was a defensive stick-to-itiveness and willingness to match the Longhorns' physicality in one-on-one situations that propelled Connecticut to a marquee preseason victory.

"I think we definitely asserted a dominance that we're definitely trying to emphasize this season," Ashlynn Shade said. "Texas is a physical team, they run a lot of screen actions and you're getting hit a lot. We really buckled down and got those rebounds, we were physical with them bringing the ball up the court, so we really tried to emphasize that pressure and be physical right back at them."

"When we were playing with four guards out there and we were massively undersized, we had to be a certain way in order to compete," Auriemma said.



UConn's Sarah Strong preparing to shoot a basketball in a game against the Texas Longhorns. The game marked the Huskies' second exhibition game of the season.
PHOTO BY MORGAN BLANCHARD, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/ THE DAILY CAMPUS