



Sports

MEN'S BASKETBALL: No. 3 UCONN STARTS "PITINO WEEK" WITH XAVIER

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It is Pitino Week! Hat-tip to CT Insider's Dave Borges for coining the games this week.

The UConn men's basketball team (21-1, 11-0 Big East) dropped in Monday's AP Poll to No. 3, but that was because Michigan beat two top-10 teams. The Huskies seem to have found a groove, blowing out the Creighton Bluejays on Saturday night. They have also received a significant boost in production from their bench, with 46 points from the reserves in the past two games combined.

That momentum is hoped to continue as Connecticut hosts the Xavier Musketeers (12-10, 4-7 Big East). Xavier has struggled lately in year one of the Richard Pitino era, losing three of its last four games and only three wins since Christmas.

It will take time for the Musketeers to rise back to the top of the Big East. Sean Miller, head coach of the team last season, bolted for Texas right after the team's season ended in the NCAA Tournament. The current college basketball landscape makes it hard for coaches to build teams, and that is no different for Pitino's squad. No one on Xavier's rotation was on the team last season, though some of Pitino's players from New Mexico followed him to Cincinnati.

Silas Demary Jr. is coming off a week that earned him a spot on the Big East Weekly Honor Roll. Against Providence last week, the former Georgia Bulldog finished the game with 15 points, six assists, four rebounds and a steal. At Creighton on Saturday night, he was a sharp 6-of-11 from the floor and knocked down three 3-pointers for 15 points to go with six boards and five assists.

However, his absence from the Bob Cousy Award midseason watch list could spark a flame in him, as the voters have put 10 other point guards over him in consideration.

He serves as an anchor of UConn's defense, who is top five in the country coming into the matchup with Xavier. His offensive performances have helped the Huskies move up in the rankings in terms of efficiency. After the blowout in Omaha, the Huskies are now a fringe top-30 team on offense instead of fringe top-40. That is a huge difference and can improve even more as Connecticut gets closer to March.

For the Musketeers, all odds are against them. They have not beaten UConn on the road since the 2022-23 season; UConn is on a 17-game winning streak and unbeaten in conference play.

Their offense, led by Tre Carroll (18.3 ppg), is just outside the top-100 on KenPom. Their defense is around the same mark.

Things did not go according to Xavier's plan the last time the two teams met. On New Year's Eve, the Huskies ran the Musketeers out of their own gym, winning 90-67. Connecticut did a great job limiting Carroll to 9 points in that game. Malik Messina-Moore led Xavier in scoring with 16 points, with Roddie Anderson (15) and Filip Borovicanin (14) also hitting the double-figure mark.

Until Saturday night, that was the last time UConn had a dominant performance for 40 minutes. Yes, they blew Marquette out by 20 on Jan. 4, but the 3-point shooting was dismal.

To have a team ready for the madness next month, the Huskies have to build off the momentum of a full 40-minute game.

For Xavier, the Musketeers need to translate some of the strong offensive statistics into wins. In the last five games, Xavier ranks atop the Big East in true shooting percentage at 59.5%. This season, there is no team sharing the ball better in the Big East than Xavier (18.5 apg).

"Pitino Week" starts with Xavier, with tip-off from the PeoplesBank Arena in Hartford scheduled for 7 p.m. and will be televised on Peacock and NBC Sports Network.



(TOP) UConn Mens Basketball plays Providence College in Storrs, Conn. on Jan 27, 2026. Despite the snow day, students still showed up to cheer on their team, and the Huskies ultimately beat the Friars 87-81. PHOTO BY SYDNEY CHANDLER, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

(BOT) UConn men's basketball faces Bryant University at PeoplesBank Arena on Nov. 23, 2025. The Huskies secured a 72-49 victory. PHOTO BY NORA MARIANO, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

