



Sports

Men's Basketball:

NO. 3 UCONN'S 18-GAME WIN STREAK ENDS AT NO. 22 ST. JOHN'S, 81-72

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For the third consecutive time, UConn (22-2, 12-1 Big East), ranked third in the AP Poll, lost to St. John's (18-5, 11-1 Big East), ranked No. 22 in the country. It is the first three-game losing streak for the Huskies in the series since the 1999-2000 season.

The Huskies had not lost since Nov. 19 at home against Arizona, considered the best team in the sport at the time. That loss was without Tarris Reed Jr. and Braylon Mullins, making Friday night's loss the first loss at full strength.

"It's a hard feeling," said Alex Karaban, who finished the night with 17 points on 7-of-10 shooting. "We hate losing here. We work way too hard to play like that and lose. We invest too much time to lose. It's not an easy feeling to sit with right now."

Both teams had momentum coming into Madison Square Garden. Connecticut had won 18 straight, while the Red Storm had won eight in a row. It was hard to argue against UConn having more momentum, finding a rhythm on offense as of late.

It turned out that Rick Pitino and the Johnnies had the blueprint to stop a red-hot offense.

"We've been a cat with nine lives a couple of times, so there was not a feeling on the team and staff that we were indestructible," Dan Hurley said after the game. "We knew this was going to be a hard game to win."

All eyes were on the battle between the Big East's best centers: Reed and St. John's Zubey Ejiofor. Both are in the mix for Big East Player of the Year.

Reed had the advantage early in this contest, scoring eight points in the first half on 3-of-6 shooting. Whenever Dillon Mitchell guarded him in the first half, the "Kodiak Bear" feasted.

However, Ejiofor reminded people why he is the favorite for Big East Player of the Year and has been the favorite since Big East Media Day.

The reigning Big East Most

Improved Player went off in the second half, scoring 14 of his 21 points. He was the best player on the floor by a large margin, finishing the night shooting 6-of-10 from the floor, 8-of-10 from the free-throw line, grabbing 10 rebounds, dishing out seven assists, blocking three shots and recording two steals. That is as dominant a performance as you will see in the Big East this season.

Mitchell would also find his footing after a slow defensive start, putting up 15 points and six rebounds. Bryce Hopkins had 14 points and six rebounds. Overall, the Red Storm's starting frontcourt shot 17-of-26.

"They're grown [expletive] men," Hurley said.

Reed finished the night scoring 12 points on 5-of-10 shooting and grabbed six boards. However, foul trouble limited him, and that was one of the main reasons UConn lost this one.

Connecticut shot 54.7% from the floor, knocking down nine 3-pointers. However, turnovers, foul trouble and free throws decided the game.

Silas Demary Jr. was UConn's best player on Friday night, scoring 18 points on 7-of-11 shooting while recording seven rebounds and five assists. He would also get into foul trouble with three, but the glaring stat was his nine turnovers. That is the second-most in a single game in his career. He had 10 turnovers against St. John's last year as a Georgia Bulldog.

"It was Great Adventure," Hurley said to describe Demary's performance. "It was a roller-coaster ride."

Overall, UConn turned the ball over 15 times. Outside of Demary, no one had more than one turnover.

Connecticut's weakness is free-throw shooting. Even though St. John's went 22-of-31 from the charity stripe, the Huskies did not do themselves any favors by going 5-of-12 from the line. That is 41.7%. UConn made more 3-pointers than free throws. This season, the Huskies are shooting a dismal 69.8% from the free-throw line.

"Officiating is a tough thing to do; that's not why we lost," Hurley said, who was irritated

by two non-calls after the game.

Both teams went back-and-forth for a good portion of the game, but a 10-0 run by the Red Storm gave them a 55-45 lead with 13 minutes remaining.

Demary took over for part of the second half and got the game within one point on a 3-pointer with 5:35 to go but never retook the lead.

Madison Square Garden is known to UConn fans as "Storrs South." However, there was an overwhelming amount of red in the building on Friday night. Connecticut fans did not take over the building as they had in the past.

"I looked around during the [national] anthem and saw a lot of red," Hurley said. "That felt like a real road game."

Pitino thought the split was 90% St. John's fans to 10% UConn fans.

So, despite making more shots overall and from downtown, St. John's used defense and free throws to beat the Huskies. It was the first top-three win at the World's Most Famous Arena since 2011, when the Red Storm took down then-No. 3 Duke.

Mark your calendars for the second time these two teams meet: Feb. 25 in Hartford, Conn. That could certainly decide the Big East regular-season title.

Next up for UConn is another road game at Butler on Wednesday night.

Women's Basketball:

UConn SHELLACKS BUTLER 80-48, WITHOUT SARAH STRONG



The UConn women's basketball team in action. The team held their No. 1 this past Saturday in their match against Butler University, despite being down five players. PHOTO BY CONNOR SHARP, PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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When a basketball program is without their star player, the question arises of who will fill that void come game time.

The top-ranked UConn women's basketball team was down five players Saturday afternoon for their matchup against Butler, including their leading scorer, Sarah Strong.

"Just trying to make sure whatever tightness she feels doesn't go any further. If she had to play today, she would've played," head coach Geno Auriemma said when asked about the decision to rest Strong. "I mean, that's not a problem. But we've got a long way ahead of us."

Despite being without one of their most integral roster members, UConn took care of business, defeating Butler 80-48.

In addition to Strong, UConn was without freshman Blanca Quiñonez (shoulder), Caroline Ducharme (migraine), Morgan Cheli and Ice Brady, who have been sitting out for most of the season due to an ankle injury and knee inflammation, respectively.

Even with five players out, the entire roster took it upon themselves to fill those voids.

Senior Azzi Fudd led her squad, scoring 17 points and dishing four assists. In addition, Allie Ziebell and Jana El Alfy achieved new career highs with four steals and 11 rebounds, respectively.

"I think sometimes less is more if you stick to 'I need to be a better defender,' 'I need to be a better rebounder,' 'I need to be a better screener,' 'ball handler.' Then, you know, whatever points are there, you're going to be able to take advantage of those." Auriemma said when asked about El Alfy, who has been working on her confidence as a contributor off the bench as of late.

Every starter including Fudd, KK Arnold, Ashlynn Shade, Serah Williams and Ziebell, who started in place of Strong, finished with points in the double digits.

As the game kicked

off, the Huskies' offense was stagnant, making the absence of Strong and Quiñonez transparent.

"Especially the first half, I felt her absence when just I felt like we weren't attacking enough," Fudd said postgame when asked about when her squad felt Strong's absence the most. "But I thought all of us just know it's hard to pick up when someone like Sarah Strong's out. But I saw all of us just trying to do a little bit more."

In the second quarter, the Huskies started to get more comfortable on the offensive end, forcing the Bulldogs to only put up six points.

At the end of the first half, the Huskies led 44-19.

With such a sizeable lead, Auriemma utilized the depth of his bench to his advantage, including players like Kelis Fisher to wreak havoc on the defensive end.

"The great thing about Kelis [Fisher] is that she's so explosive and she can just single-handedly change a game and we have to weigh all the time, 'What percentage of the time is she helping our team,' and 'What percentage of the time is she helping the other team?'" Auriemma said postgame, "Every day she's getting better, every day, every day she's learning more, every day she's communicating better."

Fisher finished the afternoon with a total of six points and three rebounds, leading UConn's defensive charge in the second half.

Throughout the game, UConn capitalized, contributing 37 points to their final score off the 23 turnovers they forced on Butler. In addition, the Huskies racked up 42 total points in the paint.

With this win, Connecticut will extend their winning streak to 41 games and in addition to it just being a regular season game, the Huskies played for more than just basketball.

The Huskies held their annual Play4Kay game, honoring those who have been affected by cancer.

"I imagine everyone has someone their life that's been affected by cancer," Fudd said postgame, "I know I have, so to play in this game, to play for them — I mean, we play every game for the name on our chest, but then today, to play for all those other people, it's an honor."

UConn will pivot their focus to the second game of their conference homestand. The Huskies will gear up to take on the Creighton Bluejays at Gampel Pavilion on Wednesday evening.

Tip-off is scheduled for 7 p.m. Fans can tune in to the game on Peacock.

The UConn Huskies take on the St John's Red Storm at Madison Square Garden in New York City on Feb. 6, 2026. Despite a close game, the Huskies lost 72-81. PHOTO BY EMMA MEIDINGER, ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

