Daily Sports

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL:

TOP-RANKED UCONN WOMEN HOST OLD NEMESIS TENNESSEE IN HARTFORD

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Living well is the best revenge, goes George Herbert's old adage.

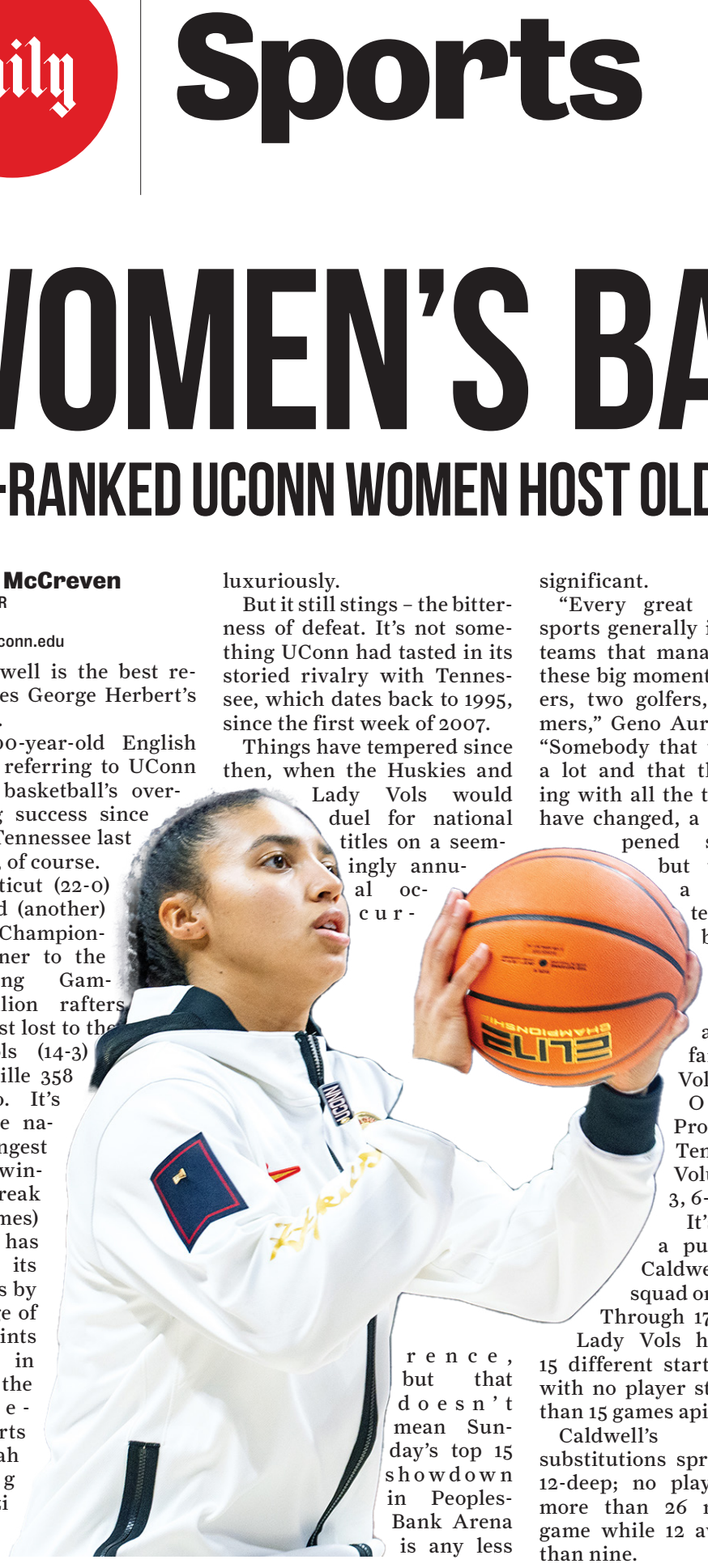
The 400-year-old English poet was referring to UConn women's basketball's overwhelming success since it lost to Tennessee last February, of course.

Connecticut (22-0) has added (another) National Championship banner to the overflowing Gampel Pavilion rafters since it last lost to the Lady Vols (14-3) in Knoxville 358 days ago. It's riding the nation's longest active winning streak (38 games) and has crushed its opponents by an average of 39.7 points thanks in part to the herculean efforts of Sarah Strong and Azzi Fudd.

Living luxuriously.

But it still stings – the bitterness of defeat. It's not something UConn had tasted in its storied rivalry with Tennessee, which dates back to 1995, since the first week of 2007.

Things have tempered since then, when the Huskies and Lady Vols would duel for national titles on a seemingly annual occurrence, but that doesn't mean Sunday's top 15 showdown in PeoplesBank Arena is any less significant.



The UConn women's basketball team defeated Florida State University in a 99-67 bout. The Huskies started off the evening by unveiling their 2025 NCAA Championship banner PHOTO BY CONNOR SHARP, PHOTO EDIT/THE DAILY CAMPUS

"Every great scenario in sports generally involves two teams that manage to create these big moments: two fighters, two golfers, two swimmers," Geno Auriemma said. "Somebody that they respect a lot and that they're fighting with all the time... things have changed, a lot has happened since then, but they're still a really good team and they beat us last year at their place."

So, who are these infamous Lady Volunteers?

Opponent Profile: No. 15 Tennessee Lady Volunteers (14-3, 6-0 SEC)

It's hard to get a pulse on Kim Caldwell's second squad on Rocky Top. Through 17 games, the Lady Vols have sported 15 different starting lineups, with no player starting more than 15 games apiece.

Caldwell's hockey-style substitutions spread minutes 12-deep; no player averages more than 26 minutes per game while 12 average more than nine.

Spearheading the Lady Vols' rotation-by-committee is the scoring quartet of Talaysia Cooper, Janiah Barker, Mia Pauldo and Lazaria Spearman, who combine to average 65% of the team's 79.4 points per game. Cooper, the former South Carolina transfer, is the head of the snake offensively, averaging a team-leading 14.4 points and 4.1 assists.

The Vols play fast (28th in adjusted tempo nationally) and are fantastic in transition, ranking 15th in the country in fast break points per game (15.2). They score off turnovers (9th nationally) and force tough shots on the defensive end. They get 3-pointers, and they get them in earnest; Tennessee ranks third in the nation in 3-point attempts per game (31.9).

What to Watch For:

The Injuries (and/or sickness): Six Huskies missed Wednesday's game against Xavier with a wide array of injuries and illnesses. Blanca Quiñonez (shoulder) and Serah Williams (ankle), two vital rotational fixtures and stalwart defenders, are both expected to be back.

"It's not long term for sure," Auriemma said of Quiñonez's shoulder – the same one she tweaked before the season opener. "Serah just drove in the lane. She had this Giannis moment, she thought 'I'm going to go in there and do this and that' and just tweaked her ankle a little bit. I know she really wants to play on Sunday, so I'm planning on that."

Gandy Malou-Mamel (illness) and Caroline Ducharme (migraine) also missed Wednesday. Fudd, who exited early in the second quarter before returning, "wasn't all there," either.

"I don't know that she's 100% all there right now," Auriemma said of Fudd. "Stuff runs through your team throughout the season. She didn't look like she was all there."

It's certainly something to keep an eye on for a team overfamiliar with thin rotations, especially when Tennessee's hockey-style substitutions aim to whittle at opponents' depth.

Transition Play: It's never been more vital. On one end, Tennessee ranks top 15 in the nation, scoring nearly 20% of its points in transition. On the other, the Vols have shown to be susceptible to breakneck styles, allowing nearly six baskets a game in transition. Connecticut's backcourt, headed by the bouncy KK Arnold, must take advantage of Tennessee's miscues and execute off the defensive glass.

Seeing more small-ball lineups, much like the ones Auriemma utilized Wednesday against Xavier, could be the solution. Four guard sets with Strong as the post player spaces the court offensively and gives Connecticut the requisite speed to run with the Vols defensively.

The Honor Roll: Arizona, Michigan clearly the best teams

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The Honor Roll for college football may have ended, but that means our attention turns to men's college basketball from now until April. Arizona and Michigan are clearly the best teams in the country, but who follows those two juggernauts? Find out below.

Arizona (21-0, 8-0 Big 12) comes in at No. 1 following a big win at BYU on Monday night, despite the Cougars' late surge to cut the game to one possession. The Wildcats visit Arizona State on Saturday at 2 p.m. on TNT.

Michigan (19-1, 9-1 Big Ten) comes in at No. 2 after a thrilling 75-72 win against then-unbeaten Nebraska. The Wolverines visit No. 7 Michigan State at 8 p.m. on FOX.

Duke (19-1, 8-0 ACC) comes in at No. 3 after a dominant 83-52 win over Louisville at home. The Blue Devils visit Virginia Tech on Saturday at noon on ESPN.

UConn (20-1, 10-0 Big East) comes in at No. 4 after an 87-81 win over Providence on Tuesday. The Huskies ride a 16-game winning streak at Creighton on Saturday at 8 p.m. on FOX.

Illinois (18-3, 9-1 Big Ten) comes in at No. 5 after extending its win streak to 10 games on Thursday night against Washington. The Fighting Illini visit No. 6 Nebraska on Sunday at 4 p.m. on FS1.

Nebraska (20-1, 9-1 Big Ten) comes in at No. 6 after seeing its undefeated season end at Michigan. The Cornhuskers host No. 5 Illinois on Sunday at 4 p.m. on FS1.

Michigan State (19-2, 9-1 Big Ten) comes in at No. 7 following an overtime win at Rutgers in comeback fashion. The Spartans host No. 2 Michigan at 8 p.m. on FOX.

Iowa State (19-2, 6-2 Big 12) comes in at No. 8 after beating Colorado on Thursday night. The Cyclones visit Kansas State on Sunday at 2 p.m. on FOX.

Gonzaga (21-1, 9-0 WCC) comes in at No. 9 after surviving at home against San Francisco on Saturday. One week later, the Bulldogs will host Saint Mary's on Saturday at 10:30 p.m. on ESPN.

Houston (18-2, 6-1 Big 12) comes in at No. 10 after a 79-70 win at TCU on Wednesday. The Cougars return home to host Cincinnati on Saturday at noon on FOX.

Texas Tech (16-4, 6-1 Big 12) comes in at No. 11 after getting revenge on Houston on Saturday. The Red Raiders travel to UCF this Saturday at noon on ESPN2.

Vanderbilt (18-3, 5-3 SEC) comes in at No. 12 after back-to-back wins over Mississippi State and Kentucky to bounce back from a three-game losing streak. The Commodores visit Ole Miss on Saturday at 8:30 p.m. on SEC Network.

Kansas (15-5, 5-2 Big 12) comes in at No. 13 and has momentum after a thrilling win over Iowa State sparked a four-game winning streak. College GameDay comes to the Phog as the Jayhawks host No. 14 BYU on Saturday at 4:30 p.m. on ESPN.

BYU (17-3, 5-2 Big 12) comes in at No. 14 after a marvelous comeback fell short against top-ranked Arizona on Monday night. The Cougars will look for their best win of the year at No. 13 Kansas on Saturday at 4:30 p.m. on ESPN.

Purdue (17-4, 7-3 Big Ten) comes in at No. 15 after a loss at Indiana has the Boilermakers on a three-game losing streak. They look to bounce back on Sunday at Maryland at 1 p.m. on CBS.

Arkansas (16-5, 6-2 SEC) comes in at No. 16 and is riding a three-game winning streak into a Saturday night battle against Kentucky at 6:30 p.m. on ESPN.

Virginia (17-3, 6-2 ACC) comes in at No. 17 after surviving a double-overtime thriller at Notre Dame on Tuesday. The Cavaliers look to build off that win with a meeting at Boston College on Saturday at 1:30 p.m. on The CW.

Florida (15-6, 6-2 SEC) comes in at No. 18 after a blowout road win against South Carolina, bouncing back from a home loss to Auburn. The Gators return home to host No. 20 Alabama on Sunday at 1 p.m. on ABC.

North Carolina (16-4, 4-3 ACC) comes in at No. 19 after an impressive come-from-behind win at Virginia on Saturday. The Tar Heels look to build more momentum with a visit to Georgia Tech on Saturday at 2 p.m. on ACC Network.

Alabama (14-6, 4-3 SEC) comes in at No. 20 following an easy win against Missouri. We will see what happens with Charles Bediako. Not a fan of that being allowed. The Crimson Tide visit No. 18 Florida on Sunday at 1 p.m. on ABC.

Clemson (17-4, 7-1 ACC) comes in at No. 21 after defeating Georgia Tech on the road by 14. With a week off, the Tigers host Pittsburgh at noon on ACC Network.

Louisville (14-6, 4-4 ACC) comes in at No. 22 after a poor offensive showing at Duke on Monday night. The Cardinals need to pick up the slack, and they can do that as they host SMU on Saturday at 2 p.m. on ESPN.

St. John's (16-5, 9-1 Big East) comes in at No. 23 and are red-hot with a seven-game winning streak. The Red Storm, with the top offense in the league, visit DePaul on Tuesday at 8 p.m. on Peacock.

Tennessee (14-6, 4-3 SEC) comes in at No. 24 after back-to-back thrilling road wins over Alabama and Georgia. The Volunteers return home to host Auburn on Saturday at 8:30 p.m. on ESPN.

Miami (Ohio) (21-0, 9-0 MAC) wraps the ranking up at No. 25 as one of the two remaining undefeated teams. The RedHawks put the nation's longest winning streak on the line on Saturday against Northern Illinois at 3:30 p.m. on ESPN+.



The Dallas Blue Devils win against the Louisville Cardinals 83-52 on Monday, Jan. 26, 2026 PHOTO COURTESY OF @DUKEMBB ON INSTAGRAM