Sports

Photo of the Day | Have a nice weekend

The UConn Huskies in Madison Square Garden in NYC against the St. John's Red Storm on March 1. The Huskies won with a final score of 85-49. PHOTO BY CONNOR SHARP, PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

SAM'S SECTION: UCONN'S WINNINGEST MANAGER IS BUILDING MORE THAN JUST A RESUMÉ

UConn men's basketball head coach Dan Hurley against Butler at PeoplesBank Arena on Dec. 16 in Hartford, Conn. The Huskies won with a final score of 79-60. PHOTO BY CONNOR SHARP, PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

by Sam Calhoun
STAFF WRITER
HE/HIM/HIS
samuel.calhoun@uconn.edu

After every UConn win, CBS Sports reporter Jon Rothstein tweets out: "Dan Hurley. The Carpenter."

He helped rebuild the program back into a powerhouse, headlined by back-to-back national championships.

Matt Harris has been a part of the program since the 2022-2023 season and had a memorable Senior Day as he became the winningest student manager in program history.

However, he is not your typical student manager. Many go on to become graduate assistants and later pursue their own coaching careers. For Harris, he looks to pursue a career building something else: bridges.

"It's crazy telling it to people in general," Harris said in an interview conducted over the phone Thursday morning. "Most people, when they suspect a student manager, they think 'Oh, it's probably sports management [or] probably a business major of some sort. And then they hear engineering, and they're like, 'What? Are you sure you didn't make a couple of wrong turns back that way?"

Harris never played organized basketball. A big reason he went for this job as a student manager was because of his father.

"My love for basketball comes from my father, who actually worked for the New Jersey/Brooklyn Nets [for] my entire life," Harris, a Staten Island, N.Y. native, said. "Him and I would always bond, like it would always be on TV, and I would always bond over just the game or just talk about players because it was his life. He made it my life, and I appreciate him for doing that."

He got introduced to the role because the son of one of his dad's colleagues worked as a manager from 2008 to 2012.

"He told me about just the experiences that came from it, and he said that it's just a really unique and interesting experience to be a part of, especially if you love basketball," he said.

Harris was sold on the spot and interviewed to be a student manager when he first set foot on campus in 2022.

"He was a little quiet, but he was definitely motivated to do well — you could tell that [about him] right away," said Chris Mastrangelo, who had spent the past seven years with the program before becoming the director of basketball operations at Saint Peter's this season. "When he interviewed, we kind of knew that he would be a good fit for the role...He did a really good job just putting his head down and gaining [the team's] trust and responsibility over the years."

Harris was hired and, despite the job becoming a "safe haven" for him, he had a new challenge: balancing a life as a student manager and as a civil engineering major.

"Over time, you start to understand what you need to balance, like what things you need to do, what sacrifices you need to make," Harris said. "It's a lot of give-and-take. That's what I realized over my four years ... Sometimes there's some weeks where it's like 'I have too much work. I got to focus on that,' because that's a priority. And then there's other weeks where it's more [of a] lighter load. It's all about healthy balance. Honestly, looking back at it over four years, I myself am impressed how I somehow managed to do it and not lose my mind."

The balance helped him grow from the person he was as a freshman to the person he is now, having a few months left before graduating in May. He also learned that while Hurley may seem like an intimidating coach to work for, there are no hard feelings at all.

"Working for Coach Hurley, it is honestly a treat," Harris said. "Just to be there and learn every single day, there's always something new to learn from him every single day. It's a treat for me, especially, and I'm honored to be a part of it."

When the Huskies' plane to Phoenix for the 2024 Final Four was severely delayed, Harris volunteered in every way he could.

"We needed somebody to drive to the airport early and help tag bags for before we leave for the Final Four, because you have the band and cheer team, all these athletic administrators, the team, people's families, and Matt volunteered to do it," Tyler Ruff, the head manager for the Huskies, said in a phone call Tuesday night.

Ruff explained that even after the flight got delayed, Harris kept volunteering to go back and forth from Storrs to the airport.

"He wanted to do whatever he could to just help us operate the best of [our] ability," Ruff said, calling him a "true professional."

All these student manager experiences have helped Harris land a job. Not in sports, but in civil engineering. He told me after the phone call that he will be working for Hardesty & Hanover (H&H) as an Assistant Team Leader in New York City.

"[The] life skills I learned from my time [with UConn men's basketball] definitely helped me in my interview," Harris said in a text after the call Thursday morning.

Student managers are the unsung heroes not only in college basketball but across all sports. Some of them have become incredibly successful. Mark Daigneault was a student manager from 2003 to 2007 and worked his way up to be an NBA champion head coach with the Oklahoma City Thunder.

Hurley knows just how important their contributions are to his program.

"These kids are great kids," he said after Senior Day. "They're a huge part of the team culture and the fabric of the whole group. They do all this behind the scenes -- hustle for us, rebound at midnight or 6 a.m. for these guys. Just seeing those guys leave your program, it's emotional."

The journey for Harris as a student manager is not over just yet. UConn will conclude the regular season with a road trip to Marquette on Saturday, with a chance to have at least a share of the Big East regular season title on the line.

Softball: UConn begins Big East play against St. John's after non-conference struggles

by Matt Dimech
STAFF WRITER
HE/HIM/HIS
rwq24001@uconn.edu

UConn softball will begin its 2026 Big East regular season schedule the same way it ended 2025: with a weekend series against the St. John's Red Storm.

The Huskies (4-15) and the Red Storm (14-5) were tied in the conference standings leading up to the weekend. The final three-game slate of Big East play would determine the regular season champions.

UConn took game one 3-0, before dropping the next two games of the series to the Johnnies. St. John's was crowned as the conference regular season champions and earned the No. 1 seed in the Big East Softball Championship. The Huskies went on to win the tournament championship, after the Red Storm were upset in the first two games of the event by Creighton and Providence.

The programs will meet again nearly 10 months later, with far different implications surrounding the contest.

UConn starts conference play looking to course correct after an abysmal performance during its non-conference schedule. The Huskies have struggled to generate offense through their first 19 games. The team has an overall batting average of .258 while being outscored 84-57.

The slow start comes after the program lost several key players from last year's squad. Grace Jenkins batted .424 last season while belting 21 home runs last season. She departed for Arizona in the offseason. Hope Jenkins, Grace's sister and the team's ace pitcher, transferred to Ole Miss over the summer.

The Huskies also lost their leadoff batter Lexi Hastings, who graduated at the end of last season. She was batting .361 and was one of the team's best defenders. UConn has felt the weight of their absence in the early portion of this season.

Kaitlyn Breslin has stepped into a larger offensive role for the Huskies this season. She has homer'd four times and batted in 14 runs through 19 games. Savannah Ring has also been reliable for UConn. She is batting .345 with a .413 on base percentage.

While UConn tries to find its footing, St. John's has found its stride entering the weekend. The Red Storm boasts the best overall record in the Big East with one of the most consistent offenses, batting .304.

Jess Bianco has been at the forefront of the team's offense. She has already tallied 30 hits while batting .435. She is also a threat on the basepaths, swiping eight bags so far this season. Natasha Limbani is the Red Storm's muscle; she has hit three home runs coming into the weekend.

The start of conference play offers the Huskies a clean slate. UConn finished 18-6 in league play last season.

The first pitch is scheduled for 2 p.m. on Friday.

UConn softball goes up against Boston College. This was their first exhibition game of October. PHOTO BY MORGAN BLANCHARD, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS