

Daily

Sports

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

UConn downs Villanova 90-51, win 24th Big East Tournament title

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UNCASVILLE – For the last 11 months, the top-ranked and undefeated UConn women's basketball team has looked more like a boulder rolling downhill than a group of collegiate athletes.

It's squished everybody in its repeat-seeking path, flattening its previous 33 opponents by an average of 38 points per game and cruising to a sterling, never-before-seen 20-0 record in Big East play.

The momentum it amassed from its 31-0 regular season has carried into postseason play as well: after exploding Georgetown and Creighton by a combined 96 points in the quarter and semi-final rounds of the Big East Tournament, No. 1 UConn (34-0) steamrolled Villanova

(25-7) 90-51 to capture its 13th consecutive conference title and sixth straight since rejoining the Big East ahead of the 2020-21 season.

It was the Huskies' 50th straight win – all of which, for the most part, have come in dominant fashion. Unbeaten. Undaunted. Unopposed. Queens of the Big East yet again.

And it started exactly like the previous 49. Sarah Strong grabbed a rebound on the opening possession, hit a transition 3-pointer on the second and picked up, along with KK Arnold, Villanova's inbound at the baseline right after.

Arnold picked Jasmine Bascoe's pocket on the second Wildcat possession and ran it to the rim for another basket. Strong hit a long jumper from the top of the key on the next. Azzi Fudd rebounded her own miss and hit from midrange after that. Serah Williams rolled in a look from

Strong seconds later.

It was too much for second-place Villanova to handle. The Huskies' vaunted full-court press and debilitatingly quick pace of play worked in conjunction to give Connecticut a 17-5 lead with three minutes remaining in the first quarter.

And after Blanca Quiñonez came off the bench and added seven points in less than five minutes, that lead had ballooned to 20 by the second quarter media timeout.

Much of the Wildcats' first-half exhaustion can be credited to Arnold, who slashed through lanes in transition for open looks at the net and smothered Bascoe, an All-Big East selection, with shrink-wrapped on-ball defense from baseline to baseline.

Arnold finished with in double-figures for the third straight game, capping arguably her best 48 hours in a Connecticut

uniform with an all-tournament nod. The junior point guard also dished a game-high seven assists and grabbed three steals in 19 minutes.

Fudd continued the defensive onslaught sparked by Arnold, walling up and stripping Kennedy Henry at halfcourt (Villanova's 12th turnover of the first half) for an easy lay-in at the rim in the final seconds of the second period. The Huskies took a 49-23 lead into the half, spurred on by a 20-of-34 (58.8%) mark from the field and a 28-4 advantage in the paint.

Strong started the second half with a jumper that was supplemented by two Fudd 3-pointers and an Arnold lay-in within the next 90 seconds. UConn stretched and pried its lead to as large as 31 by the end of the third and began emptying its bench before the end of the period.

Fudd and Strong, who played their last game together at Mo-

hegan Sun Arena, combined for 37 points on 15 made field goals, spearheading UConn's seventh consecutive and 29th overall 80-point game of the season. Fudd also picked three Wildcat pockets while Strong notched eight rebounds.

The two superstars watched from the bench in the fourth quarter as Allie Ziebell and Kayleigh Heckel carved Villanova's demoralized defense apart. Seven Huskies scored at least six points in the 39-dribbling, contributing to UConn's 33 bench points.

Connecticut finished with 18 points off 15 Wildcat turnovers and led for over 39 minutes in the championship game bludgeoning.

The Huskies will now wait until Sunday for the March Madness Selection Show to see who they'll play in their presumed first and second round games in Storrs.



UConn women's basketball winning the big east championship at Mohegan Sun Arena. The team went 34-0 this season, breaking multiple records.
PHOTO BY CONNOR SHARP, PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS.

