



Sports

Men's Basketball:

No. 2 seed UConn dismantles No. 10 seed Xavier, 93-68

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

The University of Connecticut men's basketball team wore all black on their way to the bus on Tuesday evening: a sign that they meant business.

That was certainly the case when No. 2 seed Connecticut (28-4, 17-3 Big East) took down No. 10 seed Xavier (15-18, 6-14 Big East), 91-6, to advance to Friday's semifinal round. This was the Huskies' first test on the road to a potential ninth Big East Tournament title, which would break a record (tied at eight with Georgetown).

The Huskies had a significantly better night on the offensive end, especially compared to their last game at Marquette. UConn shot 56.7% from the field, with the Huskies knocking down 12 3-pointers. The Huskies' shooting performance was similar to the first meeting between the two teams this season, a 90-67 rout at the Cintas Center in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Remember that 87-60 throttling UConn put down in 2024 against Xavier, the last time these two teams met in the Big East Tournament? That was powered by excellent center play from Donovan Clingan and Samson Johnson.

On Thursday night, it was the center tandem of Tarris Reed Jr. and Eric Reibe's turn to feast in the paint. From the opening tip,



Tarris Reed Jr. #5 against Xavier at Madison Square Garden in New York City, N.Y. on March 12, 2024. The Huskies won with a final score of 93-68 against Xavier in the Big East Tournament Quarter Finals. PHOTO BY CONNOR SHARP, PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

that was prominent. Reed finished the game with 17 points and 14 rebounds, recording a double-double by the end of the first half. At halftime, Reed had as many rebounds as Xavier did. Reibe was efficient off the bench, shooting a perfect 2-for-2 from the field and finishing the game with 7 points.

When Silas Demary Jr. committed his second foul early in the first half, Malachi Smith came in and had his best game since a 12-point, 7-assist performance against Providence on Jan. 24. The Bronx, N.Y. native

was back in his home city, and he proved to be a crucial part of the Huskies' success off the bench.

When asked about the turnovers prior to the regular-season finale at Marquette, Dan Hurley buried his face into his hands and emphasized that the coaching staff was doing everything they could to limit the turnovers. UConn lost that game with 16 turnovers.

Alex Karaban followed a career performance against Seton Hall with one of his worst performances at Marquette. He did

not make a shot, which seemed to be an anomaly for the two-time NCAA champion.

It was. Karaban quickly got into double figures in the scoring column and looked more like himself out on the court. He knocked down three 3-pointers in the first half. For the first time since UConn's rout over St. John's in the Hartford finale, Karaban got some rest on the bench. He ended up playing 29 minutes, getting into foul trouble early in the second half, which limited his playing time in the second half.

Karaban was one of four starters to commit at least three fouls, along with Reed, Braylon Mullins and Silas Demary Jr. Xavier was in the double bonus just over midway into the second half, but that did not matter in the end, especially when the Musketeers shot a dismal 15-for-23 from the charity stripe in the second half.

Even with the foul trouble, the Huskies' bench came to play; it was not just Smith and Reibe. Connecticut finished with 24 bench points in a game where the bench needed to step up to keep Xavier at an arm's length.

Solo Ball, who also got into double figures in the first half with 10 points. The 2024 NCAA champion finished the game with a team-high 19 points on 5-of-12 shooting, including four 3-pointers.

UConn is now 44-30 all-time at the Big East Tournament, with an 8-4 mark under Dan Hurley. Since returning to the Big East in the 2020-21 season, Connecticut has not failed to reach the semifinal round of the tournament. The last time UConn lost in the quarterfinal round of the Big East Tournament was in 2009. Sound familiar? The six-overtime game against Syracuse.

One game down, two more to go. The Huskies' next test will be on Friday at 8 p.m. on FS1, with hopes of avenging last year's loss in the semifinal round to Creighton.

The Big Apple: Breaking down the Giants and Jets free agency moves

by James Badeau
CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT
HE/HIM/HIS
james.badeau@uconn.edu

NFL free agency kicked off on Monday, allowing players to negotiate contracts with new teams. The New York Giants and Jets were active early on.

Starting with the Giants: their best signing was tight end Isaiah Likely for a three-year deal. The former Baltimore Raven solves so many problems for Big Blue. The Giants were never able to retain a solid, reliable, tight end. They have had bright moments from Daniel Bellinger and Theo Johnson, but both have also had their fair share of negatives. Likely will reunite with Head Coach John Harbaugh in The Big Apple. The tight end had 307 yards and a touchdown last season on 27 receptions.

Speaking of reuniting with their head coach, the Giants picked up fullback Patrick Ricard on a two-year deal. This is an amazing move for New York, adding a dominant blocker for the running back room, as well as allowing for some trick plays to include the three-time All-Pro.

The Giants inked linebacker Tremaine Edmunds for a three-year deal. The former Chicago Bear had 112 total tackles and picked up four interceptions last season. He was a huge factor in the Bears' run to the playoffs. Edmunds is a crucial pick-up for the horrendous defense the Giants have.

Big Blue brought back two offensive linemen, Jermaine Eluemunor and Evan Neal. Eluemunor had a great season on the right side of the line with All-Pro Andrew Thomas to his right. His pass protection for Jaxson Dart is a key reason

why he was retained by New York. On the other hand, Evan Neal has been an issue for the Giants. Neal didn't see the field last season due to injury. The season prior saw him rank last place with a pass block win rate of 82.9%. The seventh pick in the 2022 draft had high expectations, and it is safe to say he did not live up to them. With the addition of Harbaugh at the helm, we can only hope that he can develop Neal into an above-average guard.

The last notable signing for the Giants is cornerback Greg Newsome II on a one-year deal. This signing fills Cor'Dale Flott's spot, as Flott signed with Tennessee. This is a low-risk, high-reward move. He was a first rounder in 2022 and had a great first two seasons, but the last two have been down seasons to say the least. Newsome was traded from Cleveland to Jacksonville last season, and now the Giants will place a bet on Newsome to have a comeback year.

Flott is not the only Giant that the Titans picked up. Wide receiver Wan'Dale Robinson signed a four-year, \$70 million deal for the Music City. Tight end Daniel Bellinger also signed for Tennessee. The Titans are getting great talent and already have chemistry with one another.

Shifting gears to the Jets: They completed a trade with Las Vegas, sending a sixth-round pick for Geno Smith. Smith started his career with New York back in 2013 and will have a second shot in the state next season. Smith won the 2022 Comeback Player of the Year award with Seattle, throwing for over 4,200 yards and 30 touchdowns. The next two seasons with the Seahawks were



Tremaine Edmunds signing with the New York Giants. He used to play for the Chicago Bears. PHOTO COURTESY OF @NYGIANTS ON INSTAGRAM

similar, and then he signed with the Raiders. Last season was one to forget, as he threw 19 touchdowns and 17 interceptions. The team finished with a 3-14 record, earning themselves the No. 1 pick in April's draft. It seems as if the Jets have missed their quarterback every season. After an anticlimactic few seasons with Aaron Rodgers to a disappointing Justin Fields to an aging veteran, I just don't see how this reunion will work out.

The Jets made another trade, landing safety Minkah Fitzpatrick from Miami. The 29-year-old then agreed to sign a three-year, \$40 million contract with New York. Last season in Miami, he recorded 82 total tack-

les, six pass breakups, four tackles for loss, two fumble recoveries and one interception.

Edge rusher Joseph Ossai signed a three-year, \$34.5 million deal. New York recorded the fewest sacks in the NFL (26), so it's no surprise they need edge rushers in the worst way possible. Ossai had a career year with Cincinnati last season in terms of pass rush win rate and quarterback pressure percentage. This addition is even larger if you consider the fact that the Jets' best rusher, Jermaine Johnson, was traded to Tennessee.

Veteran linebacker Demario Davis was brought in on a two-year, \$22 million deal. Head

Coach Aaron Glenn couldn't praise Davis enough, calling him "one of the best leaders I've ever been around." We can expect him to mentor younger defenders and be a key building block for the defense moving forward.

Cornerback Nahshon Wright was signed on a one-year \$3.5 million deal. Why not? The Jets made history, well, history you don't want to be known for, as they did not record a single interception last season. Wright is coming off a 5-interception season, which was tied for the most among cornerbacks. Maybe this is the (W)right move for the Jets if they want to get back into the interception category again.