



UConn Basketball To Final Four

70 - 52
WOMEN'S



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FORT WORTH, TEXAS — Sarah Strong was destined to do it, according to Geno Auriemma. Not to score at will or rebound over three defenders, or to anchor the defense while also being the sure-handed, stable presence on the floor at all times. She was expected to do that all — and she has — from her first day on campus. She was destined to step up and lead — especially in the harrowing late-game environments of the NCAA Tournament. “As you can tell,” Auriemma admitted with a smile. “That’s not her natural disposition. But she knows that when it’s time to win games, that she has a huge responsibility. Some players shy away from it, and she likes it.” As No. 1-seed, UConn struggled to escape arch-nemesis and No.6-seed Notre Dame in the Elite Eight Sunday. It was

Strong who took command of the on-court huddles. It was Strong’s voice that reverberated over the pep band’s deafening tune. It was Strong that directed the Huskies in transition as the fiery Hannah Hidalgo came barreling down the floor at full speed. And it wasn’t the sophomore’s top-shelf scoring ability that eventually propelled Connecticut (38-0) to the Final Four for the 25th time in program history with a 70-52 win over the Irish (25-11), but her leadership and poise; qualities Auriemma attributes to being one of the “great ones.” “Watching Sarah in practice every day and in the games that we’ve played find the level of leadership that sometimes shows itself in how many points she’s scored or how many rebounds she’s gotten,” Auriemma said. “But in other ways — in huddles, during timeouts — what she has to say [is valuable]. So, because I’ve seen it all year long, I would expect to see it in a game like today.” While Strong’s three blocked shots, seven rebounds, five steals and 21 points certainly helped UConn in its fourth quarter separation, it was her composure that steadied Connecticut’s destabilized first-half ship. That composure was vital as the Huskies dealt with the chaos-inducing Hidalgo teleporting around the court and wreaking havoc on whatever Auriemma had drawn up in the huddle. But early on, it wasn’t just Hidalgo. With KK Arnold and a contingent of other Huskies prioritizing the slithery junior point guard in the lane, both Cassandre Prosper and Malaya Cowles got open looks at the rim courtesy of the Irish backcourt, keeping the game within one possession for the majority of the first quarter.

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The UConn Huskies against the Notre Dame Fighting Irish at Dickies Arena in Fort Worth Texas. The Huskies won with a final score of 70-52. PHOTOS BY CONNOR SHARP, PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

73 - 72
MEN'S

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Step aside, Christian Laettner. UConn missed 11 straight 3-pointers but shot 4-for-5 from deep in the final seven minutes. Braylon Mullins’ game-winning 3-pointer sent Connecticut (33-5) to its third Final Four in four years, beating Duke (35-3), 73-72. “It’s single-handedly the greatest moment in my life,” Mullins said after the game. Mullins, known as a sharpshooter, was 0-for-4 from deep before hitting the game-winning 3-pointer from 35 feet away, but not before stealing the ball on the other end. Not only was it one of the greatest shots in program history, but in NCAA Tournament history. “One of the most brilliant shooters that you’ll ever see shoot a basketball made an incredible, legendary March shot,” Dan Hurley said. “The Indiana kid is sending us to Indianapolis,” Alex Karaban added. The Huskies were down 19 points after the Boozer brothers, Cameron and Cayden, led the way for Duke with 27 and 15 points, respectively. “It takes a strong team,” Hur-



The Boozer brothers alone nearly matched the Huskies’ point total (27) in the opening frame. “At halftime, Coach [Hurley] said, ‘We’ve got to swing for the fences. We’ve got to give it all we’ve got,’” Reed said. The win ties the sixth-largest comeback in NCAA Tournament



ley said. “It takes a tough team. It takes strong men. It takes a bunch of players that let us coach them, let us coach them hard.” Tarris Reed Jr., named the East Region’s Most Outstanding Player, put on another stellar performance. The “Kodiak Bear” has solidified himself as another UConn great at center. He carried the Huskies with 26 points, nine rebounds, three assists and four blocks on 10-of-16 shooting. “[He is] just elevating his game for this tournament,” Hurley said. “Changing his legacy, changing his trajectory...He’s playing himself into the first round [of the NBA Draft].” Connecticut was down 44-29 at halftime and seemed dead in the water. Duke dominated the first half. UConn was lucky to be down 15 heading into the locker room.

history and was the first time a No. 1 seed lost after leading by at least 15 points at halftime. The record coming into the game? 134-0. Karaban struggled for the most part, going 0-for-6 from the field, and did not even score until the second half. The two-time national champion hit a clutch 3-pointer to cut the Duke lead to one point with 50.5 seconds in the game. “I knew that one was going in,” he said. “I knew one of them had to go in eventually. I’m glad that one went in. I’m never going to fall short of confidence. Cameron Boozer, who will be the National Player of the Year next week, scored on a spinning layup on the following possession.

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The UConn Huskies against Duke at the Capital One Arena in Washington D.C. The Huskies won with a final score of 73-72. PHOTOS BY EMMA MEIDINGER, ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS