UCONN FLAG FOOTBALL'S RISE TO PROMINENCE

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Just 10 minutes down the road from the University of Connecticut sits the Mansfield Sports Complex, home to one of the first dedicated turf flag football fields in the country.

The 80-yard synthetic field is the home turf for the Eastern Connecticut State University women's flag football team, the first NCAA Division III team in New England.

On Oct. 10, ECSU played their fall scrimmage, with recruits in the stands as part of Recruit Day. UConn Flag Football took that 10-minute drive to Willimantic and handed ECSU a 13-6 loss.

"It really showed us what we're actually capable of," quarterback and Treasurer Bella Tomaino said. "Going into the game, the message was, 'they have a lot more than us. They've been able to practice a lot more than us. They've had more resources than us, so we'll see what we do.' I'm not saying we didn't expect to win, but we didn't expect to control the game the way that we did."

Flag football was added to the NCAA Emerging Sports for Women program in January, with representatives from all three divisions approving the move, according to the NCAA. The NCAA's release described flag football as one of the fastest-growing sports in the country across the youth, high school and collegiate levels.

The program is intended to help schools provide more athletics opportunities for women and more sport-sponsorship options for institutions, while helping the sport achieve NCAA championship status, according to the NCAA website. Sports such as women's ice hockey and rowing followed this path to becoming NCAA championship sports.

Though the team competes at the club level, the UConn Flag Football team has seen similarly rapid growth since officially coming into existence during the Spring 2025 semester.

Originally a group of about 20 focusing on drills and fundamentals, the team didn't play a game during their first semester.

"We were originally trying to become a club sport," quarterback and President Madison Hendricks said. "Me and the other original founders, we were fighting with UConn Recreation and having meetings with them nonstop and harassing them. They said that you had to be a club for two semesters before you could become a club sport.

So we're like, 'okay, we'll suffer through that.'"

When the team returned to campus in the fall of 2025, the number of participants at the first practice of the semester tripled to almost 60.

Retaining 30-40 players consistently, the club continued to focus on fundamentals before finally playing their first scrimmage against Post University, complete with pregame yoga flows with their opponent.

"They had this lady come in and we were all sharing yoga mats with each other and the Post girls and everything," receiver and Vice President Sophia Doumas said. "That was a long time.

That was at least 20 minutes or so of just like straight yoga before we started moving into the collaborative practice. That was really funky."

Doumas said that, even if it wasn't an official game, the scrimmage was the first step toward jumping from casual practices to competing.

By that time, the NFL's New York Jets had donated flags, footballs and other equipment to the club through a connection the team's former coach, Jesse Marrow, had with the Jets Flag Elite, the official girls flag football club travel team of the New York Jets. The team also received another donation from CT Flag President Brandon Jubrey, who donated 50 sets of uniforms to the team.

The next big jump occurred in the Spring 2026 semester, with the team playing its first ever home game against the University of Vermont at the George J. Sherman Family Sports Complex.

"Throughout the last two years, we'd been constantly getting DMs from other flag programs since everyone was so new," Hendricks said. "We ended up scrimmaging four or five different schools. We had rotating rosters. We had to draft different people for each week to make it even."

With a growing pool of competition and having officially joined the East Conference in the North Atlantic Division of the National Club Football Association, the team held competitive team tryouts this fall. They constructed a roster of 15 players after two days of tryouts.

The team began holding weekly community practices, open to anyone and resembling the original Spring 2025 practices while focusing on fundamentals and competitive team practices.

With an increasing number of participants and two teams, the team's longstanding issue of finding adequate field space has only become a bigger challenge.

The team uses the Great Lawn — the patch of grass between the Philip E. Austin Building and Beach Hall — as its primary practice space, though they are far from the only ones.

"Usually, we're fighting on the Great Lawn with Spikeball, with ultimate frisbee, with Wiffle ball," Hendricks said. "There's people boxing, there's people golfing on there."



The UConn women's flag football team practices Monday, Oct. 26, 2026, on the Great Lawn in Storrs, CT. Players participated in drills and scrimmages as the team continued preparations for their upcoming competition.

PHOTO BY PARKER MEYERS, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Even when the team has the space to themselves, the remanences of other activities remain, creating physical hazards.

"All love to Spikeball — great activity — but they leave a ring," Doumas said. "It's like a physical divot in the ground. A lot of us already have bad ankle stability, so that's something that I'm a little long-term concerned about, too."

The team cannot book the space, with Doumas saying the team often has to just show up and cross its fingers that the space will be open.

"We don't have any pull," Doumas said. "We can't kick people off. We're on the same playing ground as everyone else. We've gotten lucky, and I'm really grateful for that because it could go the other way, and there's nothing we could do about it."

While community practices remain free to participate in, the team charges dues to team members, which has helped pay for referees, the team's league fee and practice space at the Star Hill Family Athletic Center for the colder parts of the semester.

"We're still trying to ball on a budget," Hendricks said. "We're not trying to break anyone's bank account."

Hendricks also said funds raised from participating in UConn Ignite, a student-led fundraising competition through the UConn Foundation, has continued to help sustain the club. Tomaino estimated that the club made around $3,000 from the fundraiser last year.

With club sports losing funding from UConn Recreation, Hendricks said the only benefit from becoming a club sport through the department would be field space. Hendricks added that the Rec, UConn Athletics and local high schools have all said no to letting the team use their fields.

"I think we're as self-sufficient as we could be for what we have," Doumas said. "I think that kind of confidence is so important with a sport as mental as football. When you have to move on every single play, you can't dwell.

We've learned that from the field side and the administrative side. You literally just have to keep pushing."

Hendricks, who is a senior, said that she hopes the integrity of the club will continue with both the competitive and community teams coexisting so that the club can be accessible to everyone.

"I think it's hard to look at the future when we've been getting so many 'no's," Hendricks said. "We can only hope. Hopefully, eventually, UConn will turn it into a division sport. They're kind of behind on the game right now.

There's a bunch of other Division I schools that are starting teams, so hopefully in a couple years, they'll hop on that train and maybe UConn will build more fields for us to become a club sport. That's all we can hope for."

Editor's Note: Madison Hendricks is the Photo Editor at The Daily Campus

Light-years later, we're still spellbound: 'We Chose to Go to the Moon'

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The vibrant and musical living documentary, "We Chose to Go to the Moon," aired on PBS on Nov. 10, 2026. It was "unlike any telling about mankind's journey to the Moon," as described by Ron Howard, the director of the critically acclaimed film "Apollo 13."

On Dec. 7, 1972, NASA launched the Apollo 17 mission and a Saturn V rocket towards the moon. This documentary centers around that very mission. John Monsky, a historian and lecturer, narrated much of the performance, which was recorded live at Carnegie Hall in New York City. He described his personal experience of watching the victorious flames of the rocket launch as a child, a day many viewers of the show remember.

The production's backdrop displayed clips of former President John F. Kennedy delivering a speech in 1962, where he promised America would win the Space Race and land a man on the moon by the end of the decade. Deliberately contrasting simpler objectives, Kennedy declared "We choose to go to the moon!" The live audience in Carnegie Hall bustled with excitement at the sound of this confident assertion, even replayed 64 years later.

We, as Americans, still ogle the remarkable labor that led to Neil Armstrong's footstep and what it meant for national pride. Online magazine The Space Review refers to the show as an "immersive theatrical experience," explaining that although it's difficult after so many years to find new headlines for such a spectacular event, PBS's live recording uses unseen approaches to storytelling that make the program worth watching.

Katherine Johnson, an African American mathematician, received horrifyingly inadequate credit during the 1960s and '70s for her work at NASA. She was a human "computer" who worked on the crucial calculations of the spacecraft's trajectory that would bring the astronauts home safely after the completed moon mission. "We Chose to Go to the Moon" illuminates Johnson's efforts as a Black woman who faced deep systemic discrimination in her workplace. She designed the path of orbital flight the rocketship would take in order to land safely in the Pacific Ocean. Even as the most qualified mind for her position, Johnson represents countless women and people of color silenced by bigotry in NASA as a systematically racist and patriarchal operation at the time. Her name was the first of any woman's signature on her work, making history as the first female co-author of a NASA research report in 1960. Although her name was erased — if ever written at all — from public recognition at the time, we are able to celebrate her now thanks to this show.

The entire performance was brought to life with songs of the era sung in real time. "Fly me to the moon," originally by Kaye Ballard, and "Space Oddity" by David Bowie are just a couple of hard-hitting favorites intentionally incorporated to commemorate an exhilarating time unlike any other. The trajectory of NASA's accomplishments, and all who made them possible, are highlighted in the spectacle "We Chose to Go to the Moon."

Rating: 4.5/5



ARY BY KIRA YOUNG, STAFF ARTIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS