SPORTS

Men's Basketball: SOLO BALL CLEARED FOR FULL-CONTACT PRACTICE

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UConn men's basketball guard Solo Ball has been cleared to return to full-contact practice after undergoing offseason wrist surgery, according to a team release.

"Solo will use the next few weeks as a ramp-up period until he is fully ready to return to game action," UConn Head Coach Dan Hurley said in a release. "We're excited to bring him back into the fold this season."

Ball originally injured his wrist against Butler on Dec. 16, 2025, a game in which he scored a career-high 26 points. Though Ball missed the next game against DePaul, he proceeded to play through the pain the rest of the season. Ball said after the season in April that he had ruptured two ligaments in his left wrist, per The UConn Daily.

The team originally announced back in April that Ball would miss the entirety of the 2026-27 season due to the surgery and take a medical redshirt.

With the NCAA instituting a new age-based eligibility model prior to the 2026-2027 academic year, traditional redshirts became obsolete.

"When the decision was initially made for Solo to take a medical redshirt this season, the 5-in-5 rules weren't yet in place," Hurley said in the release. "After that significant development along with his tremendous progress in his rehab, we made the decision along with Solo and his family to bring him back this season."

Ball has participated in pre-game drills prior to recent contests with a sleeve covering his wrist.

Now in his fourth season at UConn, Ball appeared and started in 39 games for the Huskies last season, averaging 12.8 points per game and shooting 30% from 3-point range.

Ball has twice received Second Team All-Big East honors, including last season.

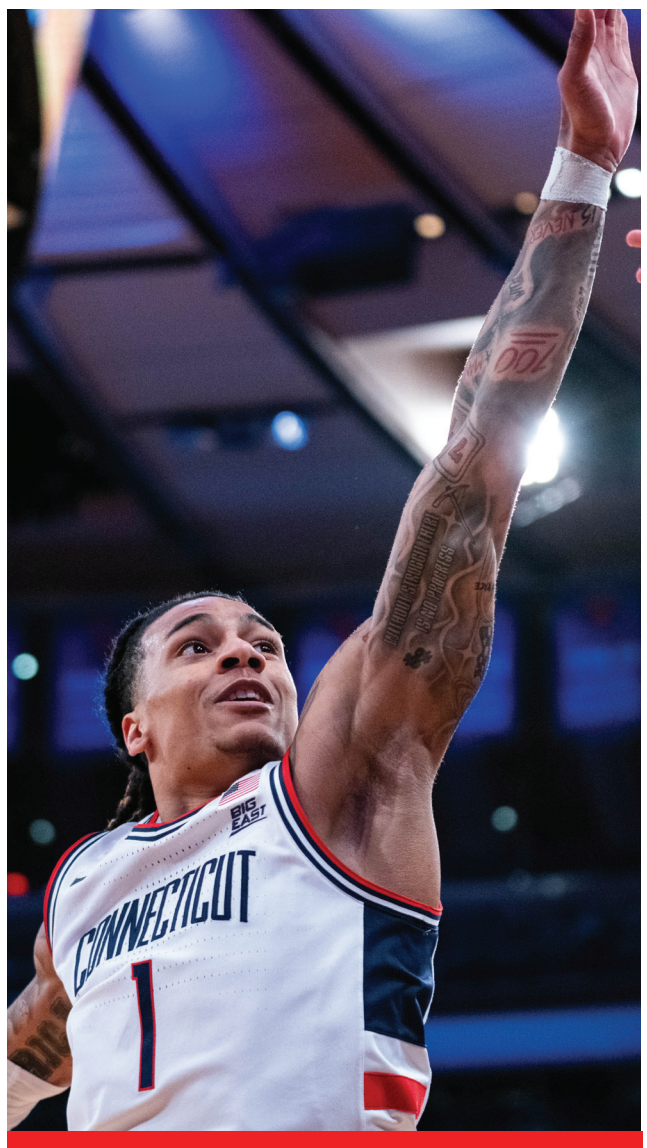
Ball's return would add another option for Hurley to mix-and-match at guard alongside Silas Demary Jr., Braylon Mullins and Junior County, but it would not solve the sudden lack of depth UConn is facing at forward following Nik Khamenia's foot injury sustained against Wagner.

In UConn's first contest without Khamenia, an 84-68 victory over Ohio State last Friday, Jayden Ross played 37 minutes and Colben Landrew played 33 in his first career start. No other forward played more than five.

Hurley said that he didn't want Ball to feel his timeline had to be accelerated due to Khamenia's injury.

"We want him to be feeling at his peak before he gets out there and not feel pressured because of Nik's situation," Hurley said Monday during media availability. "It's certainly a major shot in the arm to get a player of his caliber potentially out there, but it does not address the positional issue of Nik's injury."

While Ball's return may not restore the roster's depth at forward, it may aid in replacing some of Khamenia's now-absent perimeter shooting. The senior's return will also offer the Huskies a veteran option who has played more games than any other player on UConn's roster outside of Demary Jr. (both guards are currently tied for 113 games played).



UConn men's basketball player Solo Ball is cleared to return to full-contact practice. Ball had wrist surgery during the offseason.
FILE PHOTO/THE DAILY CAMPUS



St. John's men's basketball wins against Syracuse 79-62. So far, the team has played at a high level this year and can be expected to continue on that track.
PHOTO COURTESY OF @STJOHNSBBALL ON INSTAGRAM

Big East Baller Update No. 1: GEORGETOWN AND DEPAUL ARE BACK, NIGEL JAMES IN A SLUMP

FILE LOGO/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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The Big East featured six NCAA Tournament teams in the 2021-22 season and followed with five tournament bids in 2022-23 — three of which were top four seeds. Then, Dan Hurley won his first national championship at UConn, Rick Pitino was hired by St. John's, Ed Cooley left Providence for Georgetown and the conference flipped entirely upside down.

Now, correlation does not imply causation, and perhaps Shaka Smart's inability to dip his feet in the transfer portal cost Marquette last year, and Shaheen Holloway just hasn't been given enough funds to put together an NCAA Tournament-level team at Seton Hall.

Essentially, as UConn and St. John's have only gotten stronger, the remaining nine programs in the league have seemingly taken a self-inflicted hit. The good news, however, is that the tournament field is expanding from 68 to 76 teams this year, and the conference is off to a combined 36-8 start this year.

Xavier, Georgetown and DePaul are all 4-0 to start the season, as the programs look to breakthrough for the first time with their respective coaches. Richard Pitino currently has Xavier sitting at 27th in KenPom following an 81-63 win over Mississippi State, with a balanced team-scoring approach to start the year. DePaul picked up its first win at Northwestern since 2017 in dominating 67-47 fashion. Meanwhile, Georgetown is forming a formidable big three in Jaland Lowe, Vince Iwuchuckwu and Elmarko Jackson, each scoring in high double figures in their 85-78 win at Clemson.

Early on, there appears to be a higher quantity of competitive teams in the Big East this year, yet UConn and St. John's have been a tier above the rest of the league for the past couple seasons, and with Marquette's early struggles that looks to remain true.

Nigel James Jr., Preseason All-Big East First Team selection, is in a major rut to start the year. James shot 0-for-11 and did not score against Michigan with 4 turnovers to 1 assist. Marquette was minus-26 with James on the floor, and Smart was forced to sit him down the stretch in the second half. While he posted an 11- point, 11-rebound double-double against Missouri on Sunday, he was inefficient from the field shooting 5-for-18 and turned the ball over six times. James is currently averaging 6 points, 2.5 rebounds and 5.8 assists a night, well down from his season averages a year ago (15.3 ppg, 3.3 rpg, 5 apg). The Golden Eagles lost both of their games this past week, falling to 2-2.

Nonetheless, most of the conference has started out on the right footing, and Big East Baller Updates are back!

Weekly Awards

Player of the Week: Vince Iwuchukwu, center, Georgetown (24 ppg, 11.5 rpg, 0.5 apg, 1 spg, 1.5 bpg, 81 FG%, 93.3 FT% in two games)

Iwuchukwu's play this week was reminiscent of legendary Georgetown big men of the past, posting two double-doubles to lead the Hoyas to narrow wins over Delaware St. and Clemson. The fifth-year center scored a game-high 28 points while hauling in 13 rebounds in a buy-game victory of Delaware St. where the Hoyas had to overcome a 10-point halftime deficit. It was Iwuchukwu's 17 second-half points on 6-of-7 shooting that propelled Georgetown to avoid the scare. In the weekend win at Clemson, Iwuchukwu shot a perfect 7-for-7 from the field in the first half, on his way to finishing with 20 points and 10 rebounds.

Freshman of the Week: Ilay Dolinski, forward, Seton Hall (vs. Alabama: 15 pts, 5 reb, 1 ast, 1 stl, 1 blk, 6-7 FG, 1-1 3PT, 2-2 FT)

This award will likely be a competition between UConn's Colben Landrew and Villanova's Luigi Suigo throughout the year, and while both had notable performances this week, Dolinski's story is hard not to highlight. The Israeli big man accomplished the above stat line in 16 minutes off the bench in a true road game at Alabama, and the Pirates were plus-11 when he was on the floor. Dolinski played just seven minutes combined in The Hall's first two games against Saint Peter's and Long Island and did not play at all versus Charlotte. Seton Hall forward Terry Copeland Jr. was out with illness in the game against the Crimson Tide, allowing Dolinski to step up and have the signature performance of his young career.

Best Games of the Week

Villanova at Pittsburgh (Tuesday, 7 p.m., ACC Network)

Suigo has exceeded expectations for Kevin Willard's Wildcats, notching double-doubles in his last two games. The 7-foot-3 Italian freshman tallied 16 points, 15 rebounds and five assists while shooting 8-for-9 from the field in a win over Holy Cross. He followed with 19 points, 12 rebounds and five assists on 8-for-12 shooting against La Salle. The catch: Suigo was sidelined against Rider with right knee soreness and is questionable for tonight's game at Pittsburgh. Villanova needs him to return for this old-school Big East matchup to counter Pitt's size, a team that is 4-0 in large part due to its big-man tandem of Baye Ndongo (15.3 ppg, 10.5 rpg) and Chase Foster (16 ppg, 6.8 rpg), both 6-foot-9.

UConn at Arizona (Wednesday, 9 p.m., FS1)

The Huskies will travel to Tucson for Arizona's return game of the home-and-home series, following a 71-67 UConn win in Gampel Pavilion last year. A year ago, Hurley and his staff were plotting a way to get by the Wildcats without their dominant center Tarris Reed Jr. Now, UConn big man Na'jai Hines is coming off his best game in a Husky uniform, where he scored a season-high 20 points in as many minutes. He will immediately be thrusted into a heavyweight matchup with Associated Press Preseason All-American Motiejus Krivas (17.5 ppg, 9.0 rpg, 2.8 bpg) in the post, while Ivan Kharchenkov (23.3 ppg, 8.8 rpg, 4.3 apg) should draw plenty of attention on the perimeter.

Seton Hall vs Wisconsin (Thursday, 8:30 p.m., CBS Sports Network)

Seton Hall will be the first Big East team to take part in a multi-team event as Feast Week approaches, before St. John's and Creighton head to Las Vegas next week for the Players Era Festival. The Pirates will fly to the Bahamas to play classic November ballroom basketball in the Baha Mar Hoops Baha Mar Championship. Both Seton Hall and Wisconsin fell victim to plenty of roster turnover this offseason and are still searching to find theirits identities in 2026-27. NC State and Murray State will play on the other side of the bracket, with the championship and consolation games at 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., respectively, on Friday.

Michigan at Villanova (Saturday, 7 p.m., FOX)

Villanova is in for quite the test this week as Fox Primetime Hoops returns for the 2026-27 season. A week removed from handling Marquette 84-70 on its home floor, Michigan will travel to Philadelphia to play a true road game against the Wildcats. Mike Boynton Jr., who served as the unofficial defensive coordinator for Michigan's title team last season, has stepped up as head coach, and the defense has been stifling. As touched on earlier, the Wolverines completely took James out of the game against Marquette. Villanova has a much larger backcourt, however, and the Devin Royal-Trey McKenney scoring matchup on the wing will be fascinating.