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WOMEN'S BASKETBALL:

FIVE TAKEAWAYS FROM NO. 2 UCONN'S 77–66 LOSS AT NO. 5 MICHIGAN

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UConn women's basketball faces Syracuse in an exhibition game Monday, Oct. 12, 2026, at Mohegan Sun Arena in Uncasville. The Huskies squashed the Orange 88-60 in their first action of the season as part of the Hall of Fame Series Exhibition.

PHOTO BY PARKER MEYERS, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Sarah Strong was called for her third personal foul in the first quarter of No. 2 UConn's top five matchup against No. 5 Michigan on Thursday as she jogged to the bench, hissing between her teeth and curling her lips.

UConn, less than 72 hours removed from a 65-point thrashing of Cornell, was struggling to penetrate the Wolverines' salty 2-3 zone, and now without its best player on the floor, the Huskies needed an offensive engine to keep up with Michigan's breakneck tempo.

Freshman guard Jovana Popovic shouldered most of the scoring in Strong's wake, but her 25-point, seven-rebound performance wasn't enough to buoy UConn (1-1), which fell to Michigan (1-0), 77-66.

Below are five takeaways from UConn's first test of the 2026-27 season, which featured Strong fouling out and a ghastly 19 turnovers.

UConn (barely) survived without Strong on the court

Strong exited after eight minutes having scored zero points on just one field goal attempt. Three personal fouls — two used to stop Olivia Olson in transition — sent the reigning National Player of the Year to the bench for the entire second quarter, forcing other Huskies like Popovic and Olivia Vukosa to step up on both ends of the floor.

UConn sputtered offensively, shooting 4-for-12 from the field and 0-for-6 from 3 in a second quarter where it put up just eight points, but held firm defensively — particularly down low — without Strong on the court, allowing only six field goals.

Connecticut slipped from up four at the end of the first quarter to down six at the half, but kept the game within arm's reach for Strong's return in the third quarter.

It's a promising sign for UConn, even if its offense belly flopped, that it could fight without the do-it-all Strong on the floor — something Geno Auriemma said repeatedly this off season won't be a common reality.

UConn is learning — albeit slowly and painfully — to combat size and physicality

Popovic, at 5-foot-9, was tabbed with guarding 5-foot-6 Dallas Loughridge in man-to-man coverage, but when Michigan forced a switch by screening, Popovic was stuck on one of four players standing between 6-foot-0 and 6-foot-3. The same went for KK Arnold and Ashlynn Shade, who were glued on one of the Wolverines' giant starters for most of the possession.

UConn struggled to combat the size of South Carolina in the Final Four and made an evident push to upgrade the overall size of the lineup this off season. Michigan's big lineup certainly gave Connecticut issues, particularly on offense, but it wasn't all bad.

UConn won on the glass, 40-38, and pulled down more offensive rebounds (13) than the Wolverines did (12). Additionally, Connecticut tied Michigan in the paint at 36 points apiece while only playing one post player for most of the second and third quarters.

3-point remedy desperately needed

Each time UConn rallied to tie the game or take the lead, Michigan responded with runs of 7-0 and 8-0, respectively, thanks in part to the 3-point shooting of Te'Yala Delfosse (4-for-6 from 3, 22 points) and Syla Swords (3-for-8 from 3, 10 points).

UConn, meanwhile, shot a woeful 8-for-31 (26%) from 3 and struggled to keep pace with the Wolverines from deep. Michigan distanced itself in the fourth after Swords and Delfosse hit 3's on back-to-back possessions, giving the Wolverines a lead they wouldn't surrender.

If its prior three exhibitions and opening-night game against Cornell were any indication, Connecticut is still finding its footing from 3. Only four players — Strong, Popovic, Shade and Arnold — made a 3, while only Strong and Popovic connected on multiple.

Connecticut's lack of 3-point shooting allowed Michigan to convert to a zone and swallow up the paint; finding consistency from 3, especially without All-American sharpshooter Azzi Fudd on the perimeter, will be paramount ahead of Sunday's game against No. 10 Iowa in Storrs.

Four quarters of competitive basketball a welcomed test

Seldom did UConn, which rattled off 38 consecutive wins to begin last season, play four quarters of contested basketball last year; its closest game was, ironically, against Michigan at Mohegan Sun Arena in November.

Yes, UConn lost — in ugly fashion. But no, the season is not over.

Such a grueling non-conference schedule was designed for UConn to be tested early. An 11-point loss in the opening week of the season does not spell out Connecticut's doom, especially considering the wins it will likely pile up in Big East play.

The small things added up

Outside of the disparity in 3-point shooting — the most obvious difference on the stat sheet — UConn didn't do itself many favors Thursday.

It gave the ball away 19 times to Michigan's 14, lost in points off turnovers (10-14), lost in second-chance points (12-13), lost on fast breaks (4-10) and dished fewer assists (16-17).

Michigan found itself on top of every loose ball. UConn committed multiple transition fouls that put the Wolverines at the line without having to put a shot up. The Huskies were one step too late on most 3-point close outs. Little things add up, just ask Auriemma. UConn, of course, has time to fix those things with three more ranked games coming in a row over the next two weeks.



UConn women's basketball player Jovana Popovic goes for a layup during warmups in Ann Arbor, Mich. The No. 2 Huskies go up against the No. 5 Wolverines on Thursday, Nov. 5, 2026.

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