MEN'S BASKETBALL:

UConn welcomes Syracuse for preseason opener at Mohegan Sun

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

Following a long offseason marked by 10 departures and 10 arrivals, the UConn men's basketball team is back in action on Tuesday against Syracuse.

The Huskies and the Orange renew their rivalry in the third annual Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame Exhibition Game at Mohegan Sun Arena in Uncasville, CT.

Tuesday's matchup against Syracuse is the first of UConn's three preseason games — the Huskies play at Michigan State on Oct. 20 and will host Purdue at PeoplesBank Arena on Oct. 27.

These two former Big East rivals last went head-to-head during Dan Hurley's first season in 2018, as the Huskies topped the Orange by a score of 83-76 at Madison Square Garden.

Last season, the Huskies tipped off their exhibition slate at Mohegan Sun Arena against Boston College, the new home of former UConn Assistant Coach Luke Murray, who accepted a job as the new head coach of the Eagles.

The Huskies will be without sophomore guard Braylon Mullins on Tuesday night. Mullins was not a participant during UConn's first official practice on Sept. 22. The sharpshooter has "been dealing with something minor," according to Head Coach Dan Hurley. Mullins did practice with the team on Monday but is still getting up to game speed.

After falling short in the national championship, the new-look Huskies are determined to get back to the top of the college basketball totem pole.

This season's roster features a vital returning core led by Mullins, Silas Demary Jr. and Jayden Ross — whose brother, Jacob Ross, is also returning for his second season. Solo Ball is also back with the team; however, he will not play this season due to a wrist injury.

Seven of the 10 new players on the roster are underclassmen, which means the veteran upperclassmen players like Demary and Ross will be stepping into leadership roles as they prepare the team for the season.

"I told them it's going to be a grueling season. Nothing is easy," said Demary. "There are no light days. Everything we do in [practice] is going to prepare us for the game. Just being able to embrace it and attack every day and know that we are going in the right direction."

Two transfer sophomores are expected to be slated for the starting lineup.

Na'jai Hines is a 6-foot-11-inch center from Seton Hall. Hines has big shoes to fill, as he is replacing Tarris Reed Jr., who was a crucial piece to the Huskies' success last season. Hines locked down the rim last season, averaging a Big East-best 2.2 blocks per game. The big man also contributed 6.5 points and 5.5 rebounds in 31 of 33 games off the bench. Now, with a potential starting role, the sophomore is going to blossom in his role in Storrs.

The second sophomore expected to crack the starting five is sophomore Nikolas Khamenia. The Duke transfer appeared in all 38 games, averaging 5.7 points in 19.8 minutes per game, shooting 34% from beyond the arc. Khamenia now joins the Huskies alongside Mullins — his new roommate and the very player who ended Duke's season in the Elite Eight last season on a last-second shot to send UConn to the Final Four.

Syracuse features a similarly built roster to the Huskies, as seven of its players come from the transfer portal this offseason. The Orange lost last season's leading scorer of 16.5 points in Donnie Freeman, who transferred to St. John's. There were rumblings of Freeman joining the Huskies, but the power forward canceled his visit and decided to join Rick Pitino and the Red Storm. Unfortunately for St. John's, Freeman will miss the entire season due to a torn Achilles during an offseason workout.

Syracuse also features sophomore guard Kiyan Anthony, the son of Hall of Fame forward Carmelo Anthony, who averaged eight points per game last season. Anthony started in only two of 29 games last season but is expected to have a more important role this season.

Another fresh face for the Orange is Head Coach Gerry McNamara, who played for Syracuse from 2002-2006 alongside Carmelo Anthony as they won the national championship in 2003. McNamara then served as an assistant coach for the team from 2011-2023. He later became the head coach for Siena from 2024-2026, winning the 2026 MAAC Title and earning an automatic bid for the NCAA Tournament.

Junior Gavin Doty followed his head coach from Siena to Syracuse. The 6-foot-5-inch guard averaged 18 points last season, scoring 21 points in the 71-65 first round loss to Duke in the NCAA Tournament. Doty was named First Team All-MAAC and was named the MAAC Tournament's most valuable player where he averaged 21.7 points and 6.7 rebounds over three games.

Tipoff is set for 7 p.m. and can be watched on NBC Sports Boston and UConn+.



Braylon Mullins scoring the game winning three pointer with only three seconds left in the March Madness game against Duke University. The Huskies won the game 73-72, which allowed them to advance the the Final Four.
PHOTO BY EMMA MEIDINGER, PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS



UConn Men's Basketball takes on Georgetown in Gampel Pavilion on Feb. 14, 2026. The Huskies won 79-75 against the Hoyas, and celebrated Alex Karaban's program record of 116 wins.
FILE PHOTO/THE DAILY CAMPUS