Men's Basketball:
HUSKIES FACE FIRST REAL TEST IN MICHIGAN STATE EXHIBITION

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When the UConn men's basketball team took down Michigan State in the Sweet Sixteen last March, Alex Karaban and Tarris Reed Jr. led the Huskies with 37 and 33 minutes, respectively.

Reed Jr. posted a team-high 20 points in the 67-63 win, while Karaban finished second in scoring and led the Huskies with seven assists.

Less than three months later, both players heard their names called in the first round of the 2026 NBA Draft.

While the duo's departure will certainly be felt when the No. 4 Huskies travel to East Lansing to take on the No. 6 Spartans on Tuesday in an exhibition contest, their replacements held up just fine during last Tuesday's season-opening exhibition against Syracuse.

Duke transfer forward Nik Khamenia, who drew comparisons to Karaban from UConn Head Coach Dan Hurley last week, tied for the team lead in rebounds, assists and steals. Adding 12 points, the sophomore contributed multiple clutch three-pointers in the Huskies' 72-52 victory.

Khamenia, who, like Karaban is listed at 6-foot-8, said that he picked the UConn legend's brain for tips on how to succeed for the Huskies over the summer.

"I know he went to three national championships, played here four years, so those are extremely big shoes to fill," Khamenia said after the Syracuse exhibition.

Fellow transfer Na'jai Hines had to wait his turn to come off the bench, as Oskar Giltay got the start at center. Once Hines made it into the contest, he looked like the impact player that had been nearly universally penciled into projected starting lineups.

Notching a team-high 17 points, Hines blocked two shots and pulled in eight rebounds, also showcasing his dominance at the rim on the offensive end with multiple loud dunks.

Tuesday's contest will be another opportunity for the 6-foot-11 sophomore to prove he can showcase that talent consistently enough to earn a spot in the starting five.

"He was the most impressive player on the court," Hurley said after the Syracuse exhibition. "I just think for us, the time he spent at Seton Hall with [Pirates Head Coach] Shaheen [Holloway] was very helpful. We've got to get him where he's doing it like you just saw it, and like he did three practices ago, every single day he steps on the court. Same focus, same intentions.

We want him to really earn it."

Freshmen Junior County and Colben Landrew also flashed in their first collegiate action, with County connecting on a trio of three-pointers and Landrew playing the second most minutes on the team and going 3-for-6 from the field. Both will again see big minutes should Braylon Mullins miss another contest with the undisclosed injury that kept him out of the Syracuse exhibition.

While Preseason Big East Player of the Year Silas Demary Jr. suffered from a slow start and overall poor shooting night against Syracuse, the second-year Husky still finished with 13 points after going 6-for-8 from the foul line. The point guard's defensive contributions against Michigan State could end up being more important than any offensive offerings, as he will likely be tasked with defending Jeremy Fears Jr.

Fears Jr. was named National Preseason Player of the Year by multiple outlets, including CBS, but was limited to 13 points on 5-of-15 shooting in last year's Sweet Sixteen. That was partially thanks to Demary Jr., who scored just two points in 23 minutes while being severely limited by a high ankle sprain.

Now healthy, Demary Jr. will likely get first cracks at guarding Fears Jr. when both are in the game.

The Spartans also have returning team captain and forward Coen Carr, who started all 35 games in 2026 and averaged 12 points per game.

Beyond Carr, the Spartans will be looking to reconstruct their frontcourt rotation after the departures of Jaxon Kohler (BYU) and Carson Cooper (NBA). Charlotte transfer center Anton Bonke, who UConn knows well from his time at Providence, started in Michigan State's first preseason game against Incarnate Word, an 89-59 victory at the beginning of the month. The same is true of Jesse McCulloch, who led the Spartans in that contest with 20 points.

Talented freshmen Ethan Taylor and Julius Avent, both four-star recruits, should also factor in, as should 2025 role player Cameron Ward.

Tipoff at the Breslin Center is scheduled for 7 p.m. The contest will stream live on B1G+.



The UConn men's basketball team takes on Syracuse on Oct. 13 at Mohegan Sun Arena. The Huskies claimed a decisive victory in the preseason clash 72-52.
PHOTO BY ALEXANDER RENZULLI, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

UConn men's basketball takes on Syracuse in a decisive preseason victory of 72-52. The Huskies are scheduled to play the Spartans tonight at 7 p.m.
PHOTO BY ALEXANDER RENZULLI, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/ THE DAILY CAMPUS



Sports Spectrum:
NBA OPENING DAY

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The NBA season returns.

This year's opening games will air entirely on NBC/Peacock. The season begins in Detroit, where last season's conference leaders meet in a matchup that will test their continuity and ability to sustain success. This game offers an early look at how offseason changes and team strengths could shape another playoff run.

At Madison Square Garden, the Knicks begin their first title defense in 53 years against a retooled Philadelphia team.

In San Antonio, two of the league's most talented young teams meet in a rematch. One team is coming off a championship, while the other reached the Finals last season. Both squads are defined by young talent and recent playoff experience.

Boston Celtics @ Detroit Pistons — 3 p.m. EST

The Boston Celtics enter the 2026–27 season looking to return to the top of the Eastern Conference. They have finished in the top three each of the last two years but were eliminated by lower seeds, often due to limited interior scoring. In their 2025 loss to New York, Boston's interior shooting percentage was below the league average. The following year against Philadelphia, they made just 28% of their three-pointers over the final three games.

To address these issues, Boston traded Jaylen Brown to Philadelphia for Paul George, added veteran guard Mike Conley and signed center Mitchell Robinson. With Jayson Tatum leading the roster, the Celtics look to convert regular-season offensive efficiency into postseason results.

Detroit offers a different profile, generating 56% of their scoring inside and ranking second in paint points with a +14.2 point differential in the paint. However, they were outscored by five points per game from beyond the arc, highlighting perimeter struggles.

Detroit improved from 14 wins in 2023–24 to 60 last season before falling to Cleveland in a seven-game semifinal series. To maintain momentum, the team extended Jalen Duren ($200M) and Ausar Thompson ($155M). The challenge will be replacing Tobias Harris and Isaiah Stewart, who were the team's third-leading scorer and block leader.

Philadelphia 76ers @ New York Knicks — 7 p.m. EST

The New York Knicks completed one of the most dominant title runs in NBA history, losing only three games: Games 2 and 3 of their first-round series against Atlanta and Game 3 of the NBA Finals against San Antonio.

New York was one of the few teams to post a higher offensive efficiency in the postseason (120.4 points per 100 possessions) than in the regular season (119.8). Their best 10-game stretch came just before the Finals, averaging 127 points per 100 possessions.

As mentioned, they lost Robinson to a division rival but gained UConn alum Andre Drummond, who previously played for the Philadelphia 76ers.

No team has repeated an NBA champion in the last nine years. The Knicks begin their title defense against a Philadelphia roster that looks significantly different from previous matchups.

Philadelphia added Brown and LeBron James, the NBA's longest-active player. The team features a young backcourt with VJ Edgecombe and Tyrese Maxey and faces a strengthened Eastern Conference in pursuit of a Finals return.

This is one of the most talented rosters Philadelphia has assembled around Joel Embiid in recent years.

Health remains the primary concern, particularly for Embiid, who has played in just 96 of 246 regular-season games over the last three years. With James aging, Philadelphia will depend on its younger players and roster depth in critical moments.

Oklahoma City Thunder @ San Antonio Spurs — 9 p.m. EST

The Thunder began last season as defending NBA champions. The roster looks different now following the departures of Luguentz Dort, Aaron Wiggins and Isaiah Joe.

Oklahoma City allowed 8.3 fewer points per 100 possessions than the league average (114.8) last season, the second-best defensive differential in the play-by-play era. Only the 2003–04 Spurs posted a better mark over that span.

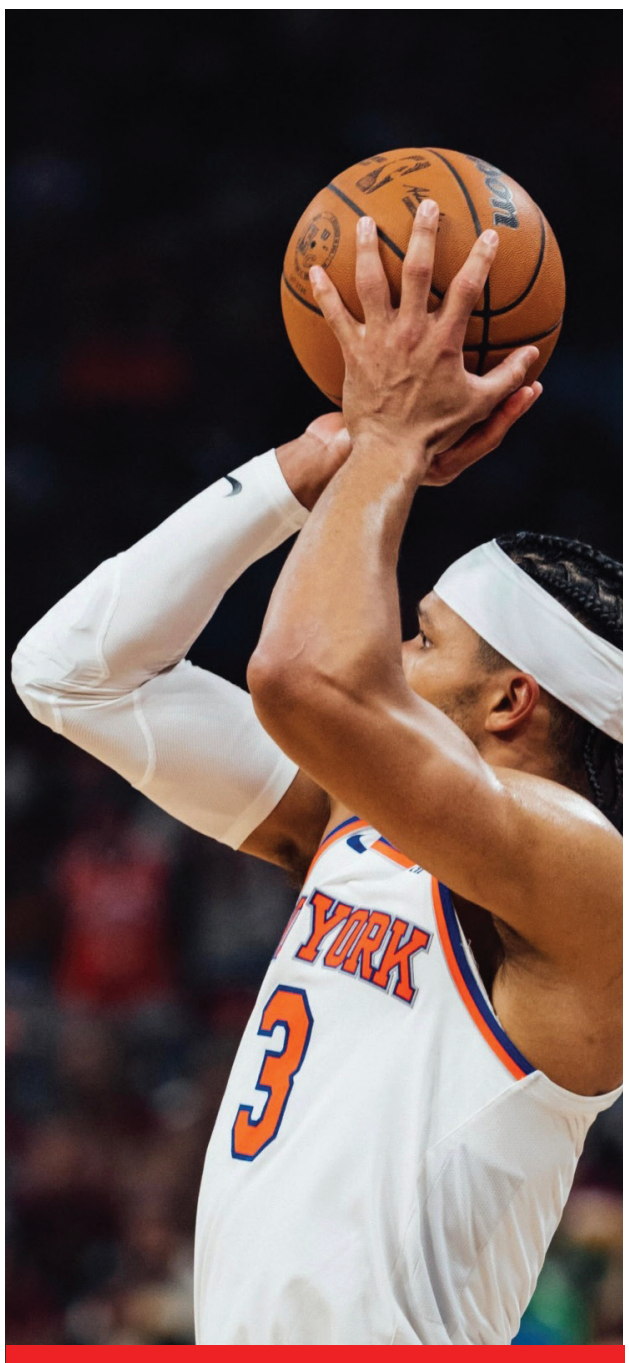
Jalen Williams missed much of the season and the playoffs and Oklahoma City's offense declined as a result. The team averaged just 95.8 points per 100 possessions in its four Western Conference Finals losses.

Key questions for Oklahoma City include whether Shai Gilgeous-Alexander can sustain MVP-level play, if Chet Holmgren will improve offensively and whether Jalen Williams can stay healthy this season.

San Antonio, like Oklahoma City, features a roster full of young talent. The Spurs reached the Finals but lost in large part due to execution, surrendering double-digit leads in every game, including the largest blown lead in NBA Finals history.

The Spurs' core, including Victor Wembanyama, Dylan Harper, Julian Champaigne, alongside UConn alums Stephon Castle and Tarris Reed Jr. are all under 25. The group has room to develop and last season's Finals loss will serve as a learning experience for a team eager to return.

A key question is how many minutes Dylan Harper will play. The likely answer is a three-guard starting lineup with De'Aaron Fox, Castle and Harper. This approach could limit opportunities for Reed Jr. and Bryant, but with sufficient depth, the rotation can remain effective.



New York Knicks shooting guard, Josh Hart during the third game of the Eastern Conference Finals. The Knicks have begun looking to defend their championship title from last season.
PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW YORK KNICKS ON FACEBOOK



The starting five for the Philadelphia 76ers, Tyrese Maxey, VJ Edgecombe, Jaylen Brown, LeBron James and Joel Embiid. The team is scheduled to open their season against the New York Knicks on Oct. 20.
PHOTO COURTESY OF NBA ON FACEBOOK