FOOTBALL: UCONN TOPPLES UMASS IN RIVALRY MATCHUP 35-16

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For the fourth straight meeting, the University of Connecticut Huskies defeated their New England rival, the University of Massachusetts.

It was the Huskies' one-and-only home game of the season under the lights, bringing in a crowd of 32,106 people. The lights shined bright with chirps between the two sides even before kickoff.

"They definitely chirping a little bit pregame, and we took it a little personal. We didn't overdo it or anything. We just let them do their chirping. We knew our game was going to reflect how we are as a team," said wide receiver Shamar Porter after the game.

Porter contributed to the win with two touchdowns, including one as a blocked punt recovered for a touchdown. He became the first UConn player in program history to record a receiving touchdown along with a blocked punt recovered for a touchdown.

"I might be the first one in history to ever get a touchdown in two different jersey numbers," Porter said.

UConn utilizes switching jerseys during special teams to avoid duplicate numbers.

The Minutemen struck first, marching down the field draining almost eight minutes off the clock. Quarterback Pop Watson was back in as the starter after missing the previous two games due to an ankle injury. Watson contributed on the opening drive extending the play before kicker Derek Morris drained a 24-yard field goal to open scoring.

The Huskies responded the other way with their own 13-play drive when Kalieb Osborne connected with Porter for a 5-yard score. Each team only got one full possession in the first quarter, a first for UConn this season.

The two went back and forth trading possessions in the second quarter before UMass was backed up deep in their own territory and forced to punt out of their end zone. This gave UConn possession starting in the Minutemen's territory allowing a quick score. After a pair of rushes from running back, Cyncir Bowers Jr., Osborne connected with JD Willoughby for a 20-yard score.

The Huskies' defense stood strong for a second straight possession, forcing a three-and-out resulting in another punt from Edward Phillipson.

UConn's next drive only needed one play after Bowers went right, sliding past the UMass defense and delivering his second house call of the year from 70 yards. Bowers ended the night with 132 yards rushing, averaging 8.7 yards per carry.

"[Run game] has definitely gotten better. I have to literally just lock in watching film, even when we're not at home. Watching film a lot like what I did wrong," said Bowers. "Trusting your keys, and when you do get it, hit it."

The Huskies went into the half up 21-3.

The second half was more of the same, but each team needed multiple possessions before a score.

The first three possessions for both sides limited scoring, partially due to the number of penalties drawn from the two teams. The game ended with 21 total penalties, accounting for 200 total yards — a stat no coach wants to see.

The defense was a key feature for UConn, limiting UMass to only 58 rushing yards, a team that normally averages 160.

"We really challenged them to throw the ball, and we were able to get our hands on a lot of passes today," Coach Candle said.

The intensity was there for UConn even after having the week off, especially at the front line.

"[The front line] looked great out there just coming off a bye week, not taking days off last week and hammering down coming in with the same intentions this week," said defensive lineman Anas Luqman.

It was through Porter's incredible blocked punt that the Huskies were able to score the only points of the third quarter and extend their lead to 25. The last time UConn scored off a blocked punt was in 2012 against none other than UMass.

The Minutemen responded early in the fourth when Watson found Curtis Kimmons IV for a seven-yard touchdown. They attempted a two-point conversion, but tight end Reece Adkins couldn't make the grab.



The University of Connecticut Huskies faced the University of Massachusetts Minutemen at Rentschler Field in East Hartford on Friday. The Huskies took a decisive 35-16 victory in the historic New England Rivalry. PHOTO BY ALEXANDER RENZULLI, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

The two sides exchanged more back-and-forth possessions with flags either extending the drive or setting them back.

Running back Kenji Christian assisted the Huskies in draining time taking multiple rushes late in the game getting back to his flow following a hamstring injury. Christian only had one rushing attempt two weeks ago against Temple but gathered 12 against UMass. With both him and Bowers in the backfield, the UConn running game looks powerful.

The two running backs, combined with Osborne's legs, will give opposing defenses a challenge. Osborne rushed for 81 yards Friday night, including the final score of the game for the Huskies after a 13-yard rushing touchdown.

Osborne has accounted for 19 touchdowns so far this season and only thrown two interceptions.

UMass punched in a final score within the remaining two minutes, courtesy of Justin Williams-Thomas rushing in for the touchdown.

UConn stopped UMass twice on fourth down, helping the offense end with 438 yards. The front line of the Huskies' defense will be challenged next week, as they face a strong run game against Air Force.

UConn is set to take on the Falcons this Saturday in a Halloween showdown. Kickoff is set for 3 p.m. and can be streamed on MW+.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL: UCONN WEATHERS SLOW FIRST QUARTER, BLASTS ARMY 86-50



University of Connecticut's Sarah Strong looks for a shot under the hoop against the Army Black Knights at M&T Bank Center at Gampel Pavilion on Sunday. The Huskies won 86-50 during the preseason exhibition game. PHOTO BY MADISON HENDRICKS, PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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STORRS — Regann Reardon had just drained her second 3-pointer of the first quarter, giving Army an early 18-10 lead, when Sarah Strong motioned — rather aggressively — for a team huddle under the basket.

UConn was shooting 2-for-11 from the field over six minutes into the first quarter; Army, meanwhile, had hit on five early field goals and was nearly doubling the Huskies on the scoreboard. Usually unflappable Connecticut was rattled — and desperately needed to reset.

Geno Auriemma, who sat palming his face between scoffs on the bench, wasn't the one to initiate it, though. That was by design. He watched on as Strong, the Huskies' entrusted on-court leader, commanded the huddle and galvanized her teammates.

Auriemma's preached accountability to his team this preseason. The need to be independent on the court and solve its own problems. To find its voice.

UConn, thanks in large part to Strong, did just that throughout the final three quarters on Sunday, using a 43-7 run over 12 minutes of game time to smush Army 86-50 in its preseason finale.

"KK (Arnold) even said it: when Sarah decides to say something, when she does say something, no matter what it is, everybody is just quiet and they listen," Auriemma said post-game. "The more she takes advantage of that, I think the better for us."

Strong, who finished with a game-high 19 points, started the blue and white avalanche with a catch-and-shoot 3-pointer from the left wing. Steely freshman guard Jovana Popovic followed with a 3 of her own. Strong blocked Reardon seconds later before Arnold tied the game with a twirling layup. Always-fiery Ashlynn Shade added three points from the charity stripe as the first quarter expired to give UConn the lead.

"It's kind of been a pattern, the first three games that we played," Auriemma said. "Where we kind of waited around for somebody to get us going offensively. The thing that makes us good is when everybody touches the ball, and we give ourselves opportunities. We are not very good when the ball gets stagnant, and two people are playing a two-man game."

It was emphatically lopsided, particularly defensively, in the second quarter: UConn forced 10 turnovers, held Army to a 3-of-11 mark from the field (1-for-8 from 3) and allowed just a single basket in the paint while pouring on 14 points down on the other end.

"I think we have to be better at — and we were in the second quarter — at pushing out there and contesting more," Auriemma said. "We did a much better job of that (later on), obviously. And when you score, you can get into your pressure more. So, yeah, I wasn't ready to call a couple of timeouts in the first quarter."

Connecticut ballooned its lead from five to 17 points in less than five minutes in the second period before adding 11 more in the final four minutes to stretch its lead to 28 at the break.

A litany of 3-pointers from Popovic, who finished with 10 points on 4-of-9 shooting, and sharpshooting Allie Ziebell, as well as an end-of-half blitz from Shade, who added six points in less than 20 seconds as the clock expired, lifted UConn to an 8-of-17 (47.1%) mark from 3. The Huskies hit only one 3-pointer in the second half, finishing 9-of-25 overall.

The onslaught only continued in the second half. After adding 17 points on eight field goals in the third, Connecticut opened up a 31-point lead by the mid-point of the fourth quarter while forcing 22 total turnovers, scoring 42 points in the paint and 36 off the bench.

"I thought, when we had a certain lineup out there, the pressure was really good," Auriemma said. "We kept them away from the free throw line, too."

Strong (19), Ziebell (13) and Popovic (10) were the only Huskies to reach double figures, but nine of the 10 players who checked in the game hit multiple field goals, including back-up point guard Kayleigh Heckel, who scored just six points but grabbed seven rebounds and dished four assists while not turning the ball over once.

"I thought there were a lot of really good moments," Auriemma said. "Heckel had a great day. It shows you that it doesn't have to be just scoring the ball. She rebounded the ball, she made plays for other people, she got in the lane — a lot."

Sunday concluded UConn's three-game preseason, with the Nov. 2 regular-season opener against Cornell in Hartford marking the start of "the next phase" in Connecticut's chase for a 13th championship.

"We're not there yet," Auriemma quipped. "But we're not supposed to be there yet. It's still early in the season."