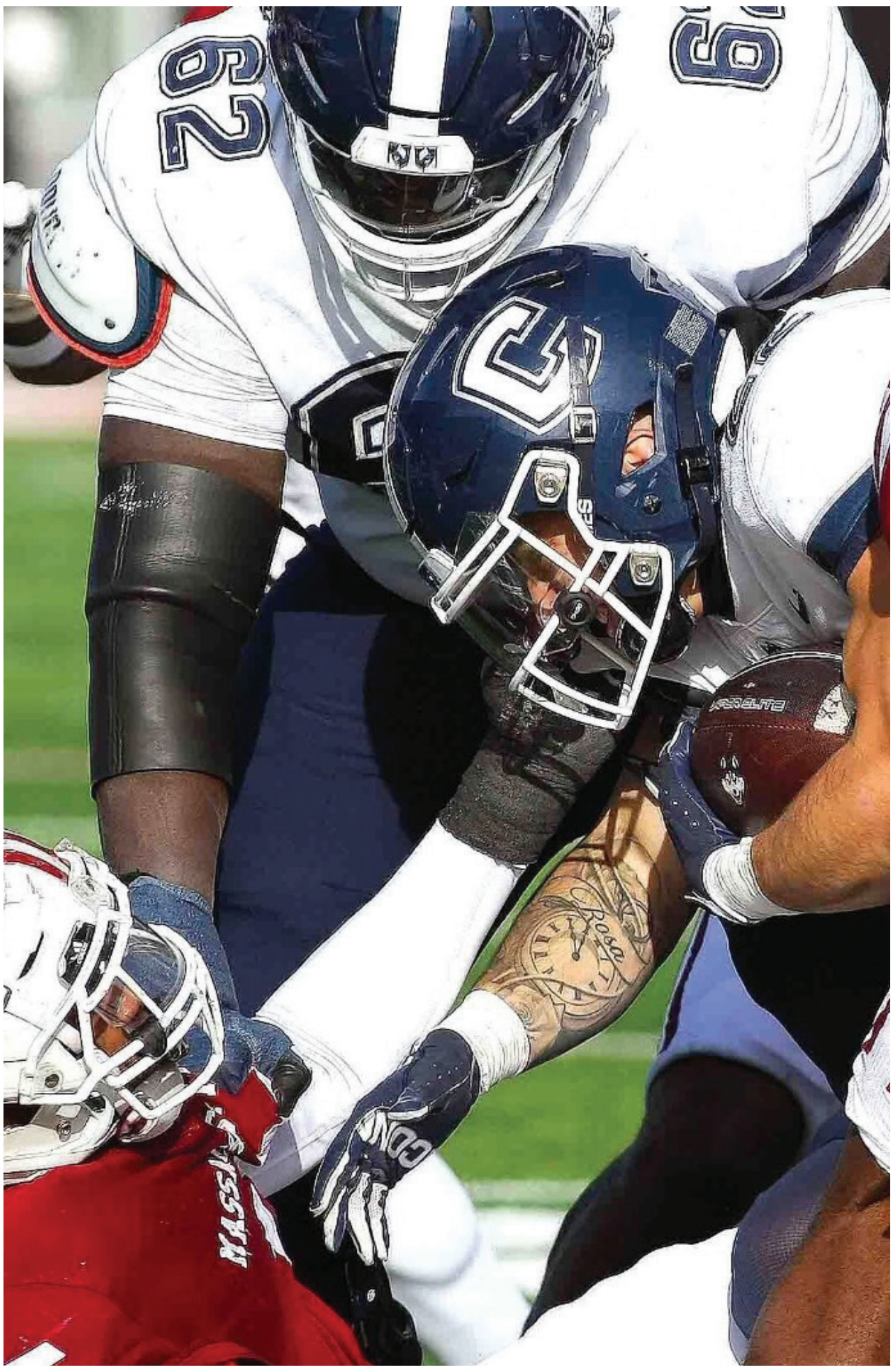
SPORTS

FOOTBALL:

UCONN HOSTS UMASS AMHERST IN HISTORIC RIVALRY MATCHUP AT THE RENT

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A scene from UConn and UMass Amherst's Nov. 25, 2023 match. The Huskies won the game 31-18 over the Minutemen.
PHOTO COURTESY OF AP

The UMass Amherst Minutemen will march into Rentschler Field on Friday night for a high-stakes game under the lights against the UConn Huskies.

The Huskies enjoyed their bye week after a road win against Temple and sit at a record of 3-3. UMass are losers of three straight games, including back-to-back overtime losses following a historic 4-0 start. The Minutemen have never made a bowl game in program history and are two wins away after a 0-12 campaign in 2025.

"They are good on both sides of the football, and they've made some serious plays in the kicking game to aid them in tough moments during the course of the season," UConn head coach Jason Candle said.

Coach Joe Harasymiak has completely retooled UMass in his second year of command. He recruited locally, and it paid off. Quarterback William "Pop" Watson transferred in from Virginia Tech and was unstoppable to start the season. The Springfield, Mass., native threw three touchdowns in UMass's opening week upset against Rutgers.

Unfortunately for Watson and the UMass faithful, the quarterback has not played since Oct. 3 because of an ankle injury — a serious blow to their Cinderella story.

"I'm sure he's (Watson) going to play, we have to think that way," Candle said. "I don't know that, but we have to prepare like that, and the rest falls into place."

If Watson cannot play, Logan Inagawa is expected to start for the Minutemen. The Drake transfer came in late against Miami University and led the team down the field for a touchdown with zero seconds on the clock to make it a 20-19 game. UMass was unable to score the two-point conversion for the win, but the skill of Inagawa was present.

Inagawa threw for almost 1,400 yards at Drake last season, leading the team to an 8-4 record and an FCS Playoff appearance.

The top receiver for UMass is also an in-state talent. T.Y. Harding of Cambridge has been a force in 2026. The fifth-year Minuteman has accounted for four touchdowns, including a rushing and punt return touchdown.

The injury bug has also hit the speedster unfortunately as he missed last week, and Harding's status for Friday night is up in the air.

The Minutemen also have Max Warner as offensive coordinator. He was an offensive assistant at Toledo under Candle last season.

The UMass defense will be a test for quarterback Kalieb Osborne. The Minutemen have seven interceptions, four forced fumbles and 15 sacks on the year. Jahmad Harmon has three of those picks, including taking one back for a touchdown.

Osborne has thrown just two interceptions in the year and has 16 total touchdowns.

"It's been fun to go through this with him," Candle said. "It's been fun to watch his growth."

He had his most accurate game of the season against Temple, completing 17 of 23 passes for 257 yards. The Toledo transfer made timely passes, including a fourth down heave to Shamar Porter at the end of the first half.

Porter, Ryder Treadway and Ky "Flash" Wilson will try to produce for the offense as Javon Brown continues to recover from his injury.

The UConn running game continues to improve. The Huskies rushed for 248 yards and four touchdowns against Temple. Trey Cornist eclipsed 100 yards rushing in a game for the first time as a Husky, going for 114 and a score versus the Owls.

Cyncir Bowers continues his steady play as he went for 84 yards and a touchdown while also making a huge third down reception in the fourth quarter. He will be the main running back for UConn with Kenji Christian's status still unclear.

"I feel like we have one of the best running back rooms in the country, so I think they are going to get it," Osborne said.

The defense really stepped up in the second half for Connecticut last game, and they will look to continue that against UMass.

Renick Dorilas got his second turnover in as many weeks by forcing a fumble which turned the tide of the game late in the first half. The Huskies also had four sacks against Temple, including a strip sack by Shamar Riser-Pressley.

"We changed up a little bit of what we were doing in the second half, just as far as staying on top of routes and eliminating the big plays," UConn cornerback Braedyn Moore said.

UConn has a 14-6 record all-time against UMass Amherst with the last game coming in 2024. The Huskies won a 47-42 shootout in Amherst against a pesky UMass team. This rivalry dates back to the days of both programs being Division-1AA (FCS). The two flagship universities battled every year from 1987-1999 before renewing their rivalry in 2012.

As head coach of Toledo, Candle was 4-0 against UMass with the Rockets winning all four games by double figures.

This is the biggest matchup between the two squads since both transitioned to FBS and The Rent should be rocking under the lights like it was against Duke last November.

Kickoff is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Friday. Fans can catch the Huskies play on CBS Sports Network or listen on Fox Sports 97-9.



UConn quarterback Kalieb Osborne during UConn Sept. 5th 56-7 win against Lafayette. Osborne has thrown just one interception in this season and has amounted 16 total touchdowns.
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