SPORTS SPECTRUM:
FAREWELL, CONNECTICUT SUN



Connecticut Suns players and staff pose on the court. The Suns called Connecticut home from 2003-2026.
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Thursday, Sept. 24. That was the last day of professional-level basketball in Connecticut.

It's been common knowledge statewide for a while now: The Connecticut Sun, the state's only major-league professional sports team, is relocating to Houston, PaperCity magazine first reported.

The sale closed at $300 million, a record price for a WNBA team, and did not include a relocation fee, ESPN reported. The Sun will rebrand as the Houston Comets, a franchise that won the league's first four championships in a row and operated from 1997 to 2008.

Ownership will transfer to a group led by Tilman Fertitta, owner of the NBA's Houston Rockets and the U.S. ambassador to Italy. The sale fell short of two $325 million offers: one made last August by Boston Celtics minority owner Steve Pagliuca, and the other by an investment group led by former Milwaukee Bucks co-owner Marc Lasry, who hoped to move the team to Hartford.

"I love this for Houston; I hate this for Connecticut," a fan said outside of Dickies Arena in Fort Worth, Texas, when interviewed by NBC Connecticut. "That fanbase... [they're] beautiful people who now won't have an option [to watch a WNBA team]."

The NBA owns the WNBA and is shaped by NBA-affiliated owners. They have consistently wanted NBA owners to own WNBA teams. Even so, the Mohegan Tribe, separate from the larger conglomerate, turned the Connecticut Sun into the first profitable WNBA franchise in 2010.

The WNBA maintained that both Boston and Hartford needed to submit formal expansion bids, which confused many. The Sun's games were being broadcast locally on NBC Sports Boston, a regional sports network whose broadcast area covers eastern and central Connecticut (excluding Fairfield County).

With a move to Hartford, the team would travel only 47 miles to the recently renovated PeoplesBank Arena, where UConn's men's hockey team, alongside the men's and women's basketball teams, play some of their home games.

The relocation to Houston without an expansion fee has raised questions among local officials, particularly after the league proposed relocation fees for a move within the state.

Gov. Ned Lamont supported the deal by Lasry's group, which included the potential use of state pension funds to purchase a minority stake in the team. Lamont's push was backed by several state officials, including Hartford Mayor Arunan Arulampalam and Attorney General William Tong, who sent a letter to the league about possible antitrust violations. U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal raised similar concerns about potential violations of the law, but because the WNBA is a private entity, little could be done legally.

Connecticut is no stranger to teams leaving and changing identities. The Hartford Whalers relocated in 1997 and are now known as the Carolina Hurricanes. The city remains a perpetual memorial to the team, from murals near the PeoplesBank Arena (visible on the side of 181 Ann Uccello St) to tribute nights at the 10-year-old ballpark where the Hartford Yard Goats play.

During UConn hockey and Hartford Wolfpack games at the arena, every goal is met with "Brass Bonanza," the Whalers' signature theme song. While the city still misses its NHL team, the relative success of UConn bBasketball makes this move feel like a more definitive end to major-leaguemajor league sports in the state.

Traditionally, Connecticut has been split between the Boston and New York broadcasting markets, with varying levels of league-mandated media blackouts. NBA League Pass generally makes New York Knicks and Nets games unviewable west of Bristol, while the Boston Celtics are blacked out east of the Connecticut River; these blackout areas overlap in parts of Central Connecticut. Meanwhile, for New York Yankees, Mets and Boston Red Sox games on MLB.tv, the entire state of Connecticut cannot watch games.

While online fan communities maintain hope for a future expansion slot, local sports analysts like Sara Gamelli point to deeper regional economic challenges, noting a broader trend of corporate departures from the state.

"In the last 30 years," a born-and-raised Connecticut sports fan wrote on X, "[Connecticut] has lost two professional sports teams due to relocation. This year, on top of the Sun, [Connecticut's] losing the AHL [affiliate of the New York] Islanders to relocation as well."

The Sun's departure leaves a void in a market that has long struggled to assert its own professional identity between two of the nation's largest sports hubs. Originally purchased as the Orlando Miracle, the Mohegan Tribe took a financial gamble on an unproven league in 2003. In doing so, Connecticut became the first of many things, including the first professional franchise owned by a Native American tribe, whose culture remained ingrained in the team's identity.

The depth of that footprint was clear in the words of UConn alumna Aaliyah Edwards, who addressed the departure in the team's newsletter: "I was a college kid sitting in the stands at Sun games, watching this team compete, watching those playoff runs, and feeling inspired by what was happening right in front of me... Connecticut has been there for so many versions of me."

Fans stayed long after the final buzzer Thursday, as team president Jen Rizzotti held back tears while addressing the crowd. After the game, players signed autographs at tables set up along the court, a final gesture of gratitude to a state that supported them for 24 seasons.

The relocation marks the end of an era for a region that consistently proved its passion for the game long before the WNBA gained widespread corporate traction. The league's business model may have outgrown the independent framework that saved it. Still, for the fans left behind on Connecticut soil, the Sun's legacy will stand alongside the Whalers, not to be easily forgotten.



Connecticut Sun fans hold up farewell sign in the crowd. The Suns are relocating to Houston, TX for the 2027 season and on.
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