SPORTS

Football:

HUSKIES HURDLE PAST LAFAYETTE 56–7 IN FIRST GAME UNDER JASON CANDLE

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EAST HARTFORD — UConn football took the field on a sunny Saturday at Rentschler Field in front of over 30,000 fans to usher in a new era of Huskies football.

Connecticut defeated Lafayette 56-7 to improve to 1-0 in the 2026 season.

The Jason Candle Era was off and running on the first drive of the season. After Lafayette won the coin toss and deferred to the second half, the Huskies got to work.

On Kalieb Osborne's first pass attempt as a Husky, he found Javon Brown on the sidelines for a 29-yard gain. Osborne and Brown hooked up again on third-and-9 when Brown caught a pass at the 10-yard line, broke a tackle and ran in for a 24-yard touchdown.

"Javon's a guy that's an up and comer — he's obviously a physical specimen," Candle said. "He hasn't played a lot of football, he was a basketball player in high school and kind of late to the game so there is a lot more left in the tank for that young man."

UConn's defense took the field with a 7-0 lead and forced their first of many three-and-outs.

Osborne started to show his legs on the second drive of the game when he kept a read option and juked a defender on his way to a 30-yard rush. The Huskies worked their way into the redzone but found themselves in a fourth down situation after Osborne's pass to Cam Abshire in the back of the endzone was ruled incomplete.

Coach Candle left his team on the field, and the move paid off. Osborne checked it down to running back Kenji Christian a few yards in front of the first down marker. Christian broke two tackles near the marker and ran up the sideline and into the endzone for the second UConn touchdown of the day.

The second straight three-and-out for Lafayette stung even worse when Christian Bush's punt only went 25-yards.

Osborne continued to be unphased by the defensive pressure and connected with JD Willoughby for a 19-yard gain near the sideline. The offense got inside the 10 before facing a third-and-goal. On the ensuing play, Osborne did not see any open receivers but saw an open path to the endzone. The Toledo transfer scrambled nine yards into the endzone for a 21-0 Connecticut lead before Lafayette could convert a first down.

The first quarter ended with a 21-0 UConn advantage and a 209-13 yardage advantage for the Huskies.

A few UConn possessions later, a holding penalty on Xavier Watson sent the Huskies to a third-and-18. Osborne hit Brown for 17 yards, bringing up fourth down. The offense stayed on the field and Christian once again converted on fourth down by dragging his defender past the marker. Willoughby made a contested 20-yard catch, and the Huskies were back in the redzone. Two plays later, Cyncir Bowers broke multiple tackles on his way to a 16-yard rushing touchdown. The fourth Husky score made it a 28-0 game.

Lafayette finally got a first down and had some momentum after a few UConn penalties, but the defensive captains had something to say.

The Leopards had the ball at their own 30 when defensive coordinator Ryan Manalac dialed up back-to-back blitzes. John Lista and K'Von Sherman notched their first career sacks as Huskies on ensuing plays. Suddenly, Lafayette was out of scoring range and punted once again.

"That really fired me up, I even told him (Lista) like 'Let's just keep going back-to-back'," Sherman said postgame.

The pressure finally got to Osborne as he got hit throwing a pass over the middle which was intercepted by Beckham Dee.

Osborne's team picked him up as a three-and-out saw Bush punting towards returner Julian Allen. Allen cut down the sideline before being stopped by the punter for a gain of 49.

On the second play of the drive, Christian took a handoff and found a hole. The speedster went 19 yards untouched into the endzone for his second score of the day.

UConn jogged off to the locker room at halftime with thunderous applause from The Rent up 35-0.

A quick three-and-out gave Osborne and the Huskies the ball back. He hooked up with Wheeling transfer Alex Godavitarne for 37 yards. Osborne then connected with Brown for the final time for a 14-yard gain. With the ball 11 yards from the endzone, Osborne elected to do it himself again. He took it up the middle and decided to go airborne, twisting midair and landing in the endzone for his second rushing touchdown of the day.

After praising the young quarterback's performance, coach Candle discussed the play.

"I would prefer he doesn't try to hurdle everybody from the five-yard line," Candle said.

Osborne's final stat line in his UConn debut was 19-26 for 265 yards, 2 passing touchdowns and 1 interception. He ran 8 times for 90 yards and 2 touchdowns.

"I was having a lot of fun out there being away from the game for so long," Osborne said. "It was instincts — I just jumped. I don't know why."

Tucker McDonald took over at quarterback for the Huskies with Tennessee transfer Jake Merklinger inactive.

His first drive under center was capped off by Trey Cornist's 55-yard touchdown, bringing the score to 49-0 in favor of Connecticut.

McDonald threw an interception in the fourth, but he would quickly shake that off and answer with a 60-yard touchdown pass to Raymond Liggins III where the true freshman made multiple men miss.

The extra point made it 56-0 before Lafayette scored in the final minute of play to make it 56-7.

The whistle blew and Coach Candle was officially 1-0 as the head man of the Huskies.

UConn plays at The Rent again on Saturday against Maryland. The game is set to kickoff at 3:30 p.m.



Football athlete, Alex Godavitarne, on the field pointing in excitement. UConn defeated the Lafayette Leopards 56-7 on September 5, 2026. PHOTO COURTESY OF @UCONNFOOTBALL ON INSTAGRAM.



Athletes from the UConn Football team celebrating together on the field. The UConn Huskies defeated the Lafayette Leopards 56-7 at Rentschler Field on September 5, 2026

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