

Final Four Profile: Connecticut Huskies

UConn is looking for their third national championship in four years. A win on Monday night wouldn't just be a title clincher— it would be a dynasty stamper

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The word dynasty comes up often in professional sports, but it is much more difficult to do in college. With roster turnover, it is difficult to keep a team together long enough to build anything worthy of being called a “dynasty,” and with today’s transfer rules and NIL landscape, the difficulty level increased by a factor of 100.

Despite all of this, Connecticut has broken through the mold. The women’s team has been there for decades, but it is now the men’s team who has a real chance at history. They already have six titles (4th all time), which all have come since 1999 (the most during that span). However, this seventh title would be a biggie. It would be the third title in four years for Dan Hurley and the Huskies. Their back-to-back titles in 2023 and 2024 may have already driven them far down the dynastic path, but this year’s title would cement it all. Two wins in Indianapolis would give this glorious sport of college basketball a run of dominance they have not seen since the 1960s and 1970s UCLA teams coached by John Wooden.

This year’s team is not nearly as dominant as either of the last two title winning teams. However, that championship DNA is clearly shining through late in March. We can take the incredible, momentous, mind-blowing end sequence of their Elite Eight winner against Duke as an example: this team just has something in the tank that will help them in nut cutting time. Alex Karaban (13.2 ppg, 5.2 rpg, 38.6% 3PT) is the leader and captain in that locker room, but he is the only real substantial remaining piece from the past championship teams. Solo Ball and Jaylin Stewart both deputized when needed in the 2024 season, but it is largely a different team than the most recent one to lift the trophy.

The season for Connecticut started hot, with their out of conference slate impressing all over the map. They had neutral court wins over Florida (#1 seed) and BYU (#7 seed). They won at home to Texas (#11 seed) and scored a big win at Allen Fieldhouse over Kansas (#4 seed). Their only non-conference blemish came against Arizona at

home, a matchup that we very well may see again in the National Championship game. There was also a neutral court win at MSG over Illinois in November, which will be on top of our minds when the ball tips on Saturday against the Fighting Illini.

The Big East proved to be treacherous, and they could not shake the St. John's bugaboo. Two losses against the Red Storm, including a Big East title game romp, ensured that the Huskies would finish second best to St. John's for the second straight year. They did not let this waver them in March, and they were able to take down a few major teams (UCLA, Michigan State, and Duke) en route to this Final Four.

UConn's March identity has largely been built through senior big man Tarris Reed Jr. (14.7 ppg, 8.8 rpg, 2.3 apg, 2.1 bpg). The Michigan transfer has taken the lead for UConn's offense as their three-point shooting has depleted heavily. Reed's patience in the post and relentless work ethic has paid dividends against some powerful big men, including perennial favorite for National Player of the Year, Duke's Cameron Boozer.

Where does UConn go from here? They are two wins away from immortality. Any of the four teams in Indianapolis can win it all, but if you ask the betting odds, the Huskies are the least likely. Perhaps that is how they like it. Michigan and Arizona are absolute juggernauts, with historical metric rankings and monstrous potential. Illinois has the best offense in America, and their defense has actually risen to its highest efficiency ranking to date, just at the right time.

For the first time in their last three Final Four runs, they are not the favorite to win it all. They are by no means a Cinderella or a heartfelt, underdog story, but this team is not expected to win the NCAA title. Ironically, they are also the only team in Indianapolis who have any players that have done it before. Alex Karaban is the focal point of UConn's on-court winning pedigree, and they have the best coach in America strutting the sidelines. The only people that will be surprised to see UConn lose this weekend will be the UConn players themselves. They expect to win when they come to this program, and no betting odds or analysis from talking heads will do anything to change that lofty expectation.

This team knows how to win in tough spots, and they showed it against Duke. This team knows how to win in a dogfight, and they showed it against Michigan State. This UConn team has a winning DNA and an experienced roster who has played together, lost together, and learned together. The UConn Huskies are two wins away from cementing a dynasty. If you have questions about how they handle this pressure, then you don't know the program well enough. Hurley and the Huskies are ready for history.