

# The Basketball Capital of the World

*A four-year run of dominance has solidified Connecticut as America's most premier college basketball program— where can the Huskies go from here?*

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On the first Monday of April 2026, the Connecticut Huskies men's basketball program reached another national championship game.

For the first time in program history, UConn lost.

It was a different feeling for the Huskies this time around. This group had been there before. They won back-to-back national titles in 2023 and 2024. Alex Karaban, the most decorated UConn men's player in history, had gone to the title game in three out of his four seasons in Storrs. Solo Ball, Jayden Ross, and Jaylin Stewart had all been on that loaded 2024 roster. The coaching staff, led by Dan Hurley, had mastered yet another season and led the Huskies to the doorstep of history.

This time, for the first time, they were not the favorites. Michigan had been a behemoth all year long, demolishing teams in their path en route to the title game. UConn had a tough task ahead of them, and it took plenty of thinking, scouting, and planning to determine how to approach the game.

Michigan won in a muddy, rough game, 69-63. The Huskies had planned perfectly, but executed imperfectly. Michigan was good enough to play imperfectly and still win the game. They were the superior team all season long, and things were no different on Monday night. For the first time in program history, the Huskies were second best in the biggest game of the season.

Dan Hurley is authentically himself, and that often means he has a no filter, brutally honest approach to the media. He will call out referees, people who doubted him, or a guy on the sidewalk who looks at him the wrong way. Michigan shot 28 free throws, compared to UConn's 16. UConn had one player foul out and two more in danger of it midway through the second half. While this is largely due to UConn's

inability to keep their contact legal (they consistently rank in the bottom quarter of the country in fouls per game), it is something that a hotter, fiercer Hurley might point out in press conferences.

He took a different route this time. He credited the victors, citing Michigan as “clearly the best team in the country this year.” When asked about the officiating, he did not take the bait. The growing sentiment in his postgame presser was that of gratefulness: for the team, for the players, the experience, and the success.

UConn lost a national title game on Monday, and despite the ending Hurley did not want, it put a cap on the most successful four year run of any program in decades.

Connecticut's historical success as a program since the mid to late 1990s is something to marvel at, but the program Hurley inherited when he took over the head coaching job in 2019 did not resemble the glory days of the past. In the years leading up to Hurley's hiring, the program had endured reputation hits, a postseason ban, early tournament exits, and a messy, public divorce with their previous coach, Kevin Ollie.

Hurley's aim was to get the program back to its prior form, a form of dominance, consistency, and toughness. It took a while for it to get there. Hurley lost in the first round of the NCAA tournament in his first two appearances, and was the higher seed on both occasions. He had developed his sideline demeanor, his passionate antics, and his overall identity of the maniacal coach with just the right amount of fire (in the eyes of many, perhaps *too much* fire).

It all came together in 2023, and up until Monday night's loss to Michigan, it seemed like it might never end. The chapter has now ended, but the highlights have been historic:

- **4 straight NCAA tournament appearances, with an 18-2 record in tournament games.** UConn's only two tournament losses in these four tournaments came to the eventual NCAA champion (Florida in 2025, Michigan in 2026).
- **12 straight NCAA tournament games won by double digits.** The Huskies ran through their competition with ease in their back-to-back run of 2023 and 2024. The two highest average point differentials in a singular NCAA tournament all time belong to these squads (2024 UConn won each game by an average of 23.3 points, with the 2023 team coming in at a measly 20 point average).

- **3 national championship game appearances, including 2 national titles.** The 2023 team had a historic run to the program's fifth title, securing their Blue Blood status. 2024 was even better, perhaps the greatest college basketball team in modern history.
- **11-1 record in the Sweet Sixteen or later.** Hurley's record in March's nut cutting time is remarkable. Their only loss in the late rounds of the NCAA tournament came on Monday night.
- **1 Big East regular season championship and 1 Big East tournament championship.** The Big East has somehow been the program's weakness. St. John's has won the double league title the past two seasons.
- **57-5 record in non conference play, including tournament games.** This is just astounding. Three of them came in their fateful Maui trip, and the other two came in NCAA tournament play.
- **7 NBA Draft picks.** Jordan Hawkins (14th pick), Andre Jackson (36th pick), Stephon Castle (4th pick, 2025 Rookie of the Year), Donovan Clingan (7th pick), Tristen Newton (49th pick), Cam Spencer (29th pick), Liam McNeeley (29th pick). After June of this year, we may be adding Alex Karaban, Braylon Mullins, and Tarris Reed Jr. to this list

Looking at all of these accomplishments, it is remarkable to realize that this all came in four years. Had UConn managed to win against Michigan (they were damn close), it would have been Dan Hurley's third national title in four years. That would have skyrocketed him into the galaxy of Wooden and Coach K. UConn is the first team to make three Final Fours within four seasons since Kentucky from 2011-2014. That team won a title in 2012 and lost the title game in 2014 (who did they lose to, you ask?).

Coach K's Duke Blue Devils are the last true dynasty of the sport: they made four consecutive Final Fours from 1989-1992, winning back-to-back titles in 1991 and 1992. In 1990, they lost in the title game to UNLV. That is the last run that even remotely resembles the success that Connecticut has had in the past four seasons.

When you add in UConn's history since the new millennium (six titles since 1999, with nobody else having more than three in that span), there is no questioning their stature. Connecticut is the premier college basketball program of the moment. This four-year stint in the big time has cemented their status. The real question is: where do the Huskies go from here?

Alex Karaban was a freshman in 2023, and his final college game was Monday night's title game. He is no longer a Husky, and his departure plays as a symbol for this four-year dominant run. It will be impossible to truly replace Karaban, but there are plenty of avenues for UConn to travel in their quest to remain at the top.

They have two highly ranked freshman recruits coming in next year. Colben Landrew (#22 recruit) and Junior County (#36 recruit) highlight UConn's upcoming class. Expected returners include Solo Ball, Silas Demary Jr. Eric Reibe, Jaylin Stewart, and Eric Reibe. Braylon Mullins is the big question mark, with some NBA mock drafts having him as high as #9 and as low as #20. It remains to be seen whether or not Mullins tests the draft waters or comes back to Storrs for his sophomore season.

The transfer portal, which is the biggest elephant in any room at the moment, will also play a huge role. Nobody from UConn has entered the portal as of this writing, and Dan Hurley has done a masterful job of rewarding loyalty and retaining strong rotational pieces in this wild west era of college hoops. This can all change, but for now, the Huskies are steady in this department (the only portal departure so far has actually been assistant coach Luke Murray, who will be head coach at Boston College beginning next season).

As for acquisitions through the portal, that will have to build up over the next few weeks. Players and programs will make financial and basketball decisions, so there is a large to-be-determined element to this current roster.

Although they surrendered in the title game against Michigan, this year's UConn team proved something perhaps all of the country already knew. UConn has the premier program, the best coach, and one of the brightest futures in men's college basketball. Two titles in four years is not too shabby, and the Huskies are primed to be back in this spot for many years to come.

For all of the Blue Blood talk and chatter of dominance across the NCAA landscape, one thing is for certain. College basketball runs through Storrs, Connecticut.