MEN'S BASKETBALL: NO. 2 UCONN BRINGS 14-GAME WIN STREAK BACK TO PEOPLESBANK ARENA VS. VILLANOVA

by Matt Dimech
STAFF WRITER
HE/HIM/HIS
rwq24001@uconn.edu

The spring semester has tipped off in Storrs. Classrooms are full of students again, and on Saturday, so will PeoplesBank Arena.

Basketball will be back in the heart of student life on Saturday, Jan. 24, when UConn returns home to face Villanova.

The Huskies have won six of its last seven meetings with the Wildcats. The two split the regular season series last year, but UConn came out on top in the rubber-match during the Big East Tournament.

The Huskies enter the game at their highest ranking in the AP Poll in over a year. UConn has not been ranked in the top two since November 2024. The team is riding a 14-game win streak which includes an 8-0 start to conference play.

Saturday is considered a Quad 2 game for the Huskies, who have not lost in a Quad 2 or lower contest this season. Saturday will be the Wildcat's third game against a top 10 ranked opponent. They are currently 0-2 with losses to then-No. 8 BYU and then-No. 2 Michigan. Villanova is 2-3 against foes ranked inside the top 50 of KenPom Net Rating.

UConn traded in a week on the road for a week off. The team's bye week came after two disastrous near losses against Seton Hall and Georgetown. The Huskies almost blew an 18-point lead over the Pirates on Jan. 13, before missing two of their eight free throws down the stretch in a two-point over the Hoyas, who are 1-6 in conference play.

"At the end of the day we walked away with the win and that's the blessing of it, definitely gonna learn from this," Tarris Reed Jr. said.

Villanova's most recent contest also came against Georgetown. The Wildcats earned a far more decisive victory, going on a 10-0 run out of halftime. The kill shot secured a 15-point home win, improving to 6-2 in conference play.

The Wildcat's Head Coach Kevin Willard has flipped the program around in his first season with the team. Villanova hasn't made it to March since 2022. Willard now has his unit poised at 15-4 and No. 24 in KenPom Net Rating.

Acaden Lewis has emerged as the straw that stirs the drink for Villanova. The freshman was the No. 35 recruit in the country, according to On3 Sports. He is averaging 12.3 points per game with the fourth highest assist rate in the Big East. Lewis is a ball hawk on the defensive end; his 1.9 steals per game also ranks No. 4 in the conference, one place ahead of UConn's Silas Demary Jr.

The game will feature two of the nation's top big men. Manning the middle for Villanova is Duke Brennan. The 6-foot-10 senior is one of two double digit rebounders in the Big East and is top ten in the country, averaging just over 10 per game. He posted a 10-point double-double in the win over the Hoyas.

Reed was named to the Preseason All-Big East First Team in the fall. He is scoring a team-leading 14.5 points per game while pulling down nearly eight boards. Reed has only scored less than 10 points once through eight conference games. He was dominant during the Huskies' road trip, averaging 18 points, 10 rebounds and three blocks over the two-game span.

With students back on campus, and the spotlight back over Hartford, the UConn will look to continue its dominance over the Big East. Villanova has a chance to catapult itself into the national conversation by knocking off the Huskies.

Fans might have a chance to beat the storm on the way home as the game tips off at 12:30 p.m., streaming on Fox.



The UConn Huskies take on East Texas A&M on Dec. 5.2025 at Gampel Pavilion in Storrs, Conn.

PHOTO BY EMMA MEIDINGER, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

THE WEEKLY POWER PLAY:

CHARA'S NO. 33 RAISED TO RAFTERS AT TD GARDEN

by Nicole Caruso
CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT
SHE/HER/HERS
nicole.caruso@uconn.edu

The Boston Bruins retired the 13th jersey number in their organization on Thursday, Jan. 15 when they sent former Captain Zdeno Chara's No. 33 to the rafters.

Chara served as the Bruins' captain from 2006-2020. Despite his long tenure with the team, he did not start out with the organization.

The 6-foot-9 defenseman was drafted by the New York Islanders in 1996 and stayed with the team until 2001 when he was traded to the Ottawa Senators, where he remained for four seasons.

Chara's career did not take off until he joined the Bruins in 2006 and most notably helped lead the team to their 2011 Stanley Cup victory.

Across his career in Boston, Chara played in the NHL All Star Game six times and won the Norris trophy as the best defenseman in the NHL in 2009.

Hosted by former teammate Andrew Ference, Bruins fans took a trip down memory lane with their former captain at Chara's jersey number retirement ceremony.

The ceremony began with a video montage of moments from Chara's career, and the TD Garden crowd got the loudest when a clip was shown of Chara returning to Game 5 of the 2019 Stanley Cup Final wearing a full-face shield.



Zdeno Chara and Patrice Bergerson of the Boston Bruins pose together. Chara joined the Bruins in 2006. PHOTO COURTESY OF @ZEECHARA ON INSTAGRAM

In Game 4, Chara broke his jaw, leaving everyone to believe he would no longer be able to play, yet he returned the next game ready to play.

In attendance at the ceremony were members of the 2011 team with whom he won the Stanley Cup. Players included Tuukka Rask, Mark Recchi, Patrice Bergeron, David Krejci and Dennis Seidenberg, who presented the banner to Chara and his family.

Also present for the ceremony were seven players whose numbers were previously retired by the organization: Ray Bourque, Terry O'Reilly, Willie O'Ree, Ricky Middleton, Johnny Bucyk, Cam Neely and Bobby Orr.

Chara was given the chance to speak. He began by saying that upon entering the NHL, he had wanted to wear No. 3. Once he learned that the number had been retired for Lionel Hitchman, he settled for 33. Little did Chara know about the deep meaning of that number in Boston, as it was worn by Larry Bird during his time with the Boston Celtics.

He reflected on signing with the Bruins within minutes, given the fast pace of free agency during the offseason. It was a decision that impacted the rest of his life.

"You have to take a risk ... but I also was not reckless with that decision," Chara said. "I knew that that's where I wanted to go because there were these opportunities of possibly leading the team, there was desperation to get better, the history, and obviously the living [in Boston]. I saw that would be a good fit. And it ended up being the best decision I ever made."

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Chara's wife Tatiana and their children Elliz, Zack and Ben raised No. 33 to the rafters, officially making it the 13th number in the organization to be retired.

The celebration did not stop once the ceremony concluded as Chara was honored countless times throughout the night. The current Bruins team all wore No. 33 during warmups ahead of their game against the Seattle Kraken.

When the buzzer sounded and the Bruins' 4-2 win was secure, goaltender Jeremy Swayman pointed towards Chara's banner, indicating that this win was for him.

"It's bigger than us," Swayman said in a post-game interview with NESN. "He's the one who paved the way for us... He's the reason we have the culture here with the fans."