Daily Sports

MENS BASKETBALL: NO.4 UCONN VISITS MARQUETTE WITH BIG EAST REGULAR SEASON TITLE IN SIGHT

by Sam Calhoun
STAFF WRITER
HE/HIM/HIS
samuel.calhoun@uconn.edu

The magic number is one. One win and the No. 4 UConn men's basketball team (27-3, 17-2 Big East) will win its 12th Big East regular-season title.

Standing in the way is a struggling Marquette team (11-19, 6-13 Big East), in danger of its first 20-loss season since the 1963-1964 season.

The Golden Eagles are coming off their second consecutive road win, routing Providence in a stunner on Wednesday night. Adrien Stevens and Nigel James Jr. combined for 41 of Marquette's 78 points in the win, including a 21-point effort from Stevens on 5-of-8 shooting from deep.

"We know that we're going to get their best shot," Alex Karaban said after practice Thursday. "What they did [on Wednesday] was impressive — to go into Providence and win by 20."

Because of the All-Big East-level play of James, a candidate for Big East Freshman of the Year, the Golden Eagles went from being a near-lock for last-place in the conference to a chance to finish as high as seventh. Marquette was ranked as low as 124th on KenPom on Jan. 27 before an 86-62 win over Creighton. Now, they are inside the top 100.

"They're going to be a scary team for people in New York [next week] because they're just so much better than they were when we saw them the first time," Dan Hurley said.

Over the last five games, the Golden Eagles have the third-highest net rating in the conference and have been the best fast-break and interior team over that stretch. James, the reigning Big East Freshman of the Week, is critical to the team's success, averaging 21.8 points in the last five games. He has become one of the elite scorers in the conference and will be a contender for Big East Player of the Year next season, if he stays. James is tied for the highest usage percentage in the league with Providence's Jason Edwards at 29.5%.

"[He's] obviously an explosive player," Hurley said. "[He'll] steal your ball on defense, just constantly attacking on offense." He said that Marquette head coach Shaka Smart "is really invested in a lot of these young players."

UConn will already know what seed it will be in next week's Big East Tournament when the team takes the floor on Saturday afternoon. St. John's visits Seton Hall on Friday night. With a win, the Red Storm would win a share of the regular season title and clinch the No. 1 seed in the Big East Tournament. With a loss, the Huskies are Big East regular-season champions and clinch the No. 1 seed. A win at Marquette has no impact on the seeding after the Golden Eagles beat Providence, and Creighton won at Butler, giving the Red Storm the tiebreaker.

The Huskies, coming off an emotional Senior Day win over Seton Hall, will look to spoil Marquette's Senior Day. The Golden Eagles will honor Ben Gold (8.2 ppg), Jonah Lucas, Casey O'Malley and Chase Ross (14.2 ppg), the latter of whom leads the league in steals per game (2.3). With the Huskies' turnover issues, Marquette's success in stealing the ball is something to keep an eye on.

When asked about the turnover issues versus Marquette's turnover-forcing defense, Hurley buried his face in his hands for about 15 seconds.

"A lot of the turnovers that we've made were not forced by great defense," Hurley emphasized. "Championship teams don't do that. In the end, if we don't end up with any championships and any run in March, it's gonna be because we turn the ball over.

"This staff is doing everything we can to not turn the ball over, because literally, if we rebound the ball and we don't turn the ball over, we've got a chance to win a lot of games here. We just do those things: rebound the ball, guard and not turn the ball over, we've got a very high ceiling."

Karaban, recently inducted into the Huskies of Honor, made the Big East Weekly Honor Roll after one of his best games — 23 points, three rebounds, two assists, two blocks and two steals, capping a stellar four-year career at Harry A. Gampel Pavilion, and now ends with a 90.9% winning percentage at home. In Hartford, Conn., he added 14 points, five rebounds and two assists in a blowout over St. John's. It will be the two-time NCAA champion's last regular-season game in his decorated career.

"I try not to think like [every game is a last]," Karaban said. "It's also the last game we have to try to win a [Big East] regular season championship. So that's kind of the main thing in our mind right now, is really just controlling our destiny, doing everything in our power to win that regular season championship."

Tarris Reed Jr., also named to the conference's weekly honor roll, will play his final regular-season college game. He averaged a double-double last week and enjoyed his best three-game stretch since beating Villanova. Against St. John's, he outperformed Zuby Ejiofor with 20 points, 11 boards, six blocks, three assists, and two steals. He is peaking as the NCAA Tournament bracket is revealed in nine days.

In the last meeting between the two programs, Solo Ball led the way with 17 points and eight rebounds in a 73-57 win over the Golden Eagles in the team's first game of 2026. The Huskies lead the all-time series, 14-6.

"You've just gotta go in with the same approach, just go in and win," Ball said. "I think I need to just make sure I'm always in the flow of the game."

Hurley did not give a status on Jaylin Stewart's availability for the game.

"I guess we'll just see where it goes with J-Stew, who's probably the only one who's got any medical going on," Hurley said. "We'll see where that [goes] the next two days."

Connecticut's regular-season finale against Marquette is set for a 12:30 p.m. tip-off on Saturday from the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, Wis. It will be televised on FOX.



UConn men's basketball plays Creighton University at Gampel Pavilion in Storrs, Conn. on Feb 18, 2026. The crowd hyped up the team throughout the entire game. PHOTO BBY SYDNEY CHANDLER, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS