Sports

Photo of the Day |



Members of UConn football team huddle in the field. UConn won its Sept. 5 game against Lafayette 7-56 PHOTO BY PARKER MEYERS, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER / THE DAILY CAMPUS

UConn Women's Basketball Mailbag: Is Sarah Strong back and healthy? Who will start at center?

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Jana El Alfy, Kayleigh Heckel, and Allie Ziebell cheer on the sidelines in Fort Worth, Texas. This game was UConn's appearance in the Sweet 16 versus North Carolina. FILE PHOTO/ THE DAILY CAMPUS

It's been a while.

One hundred fifty-nine days, to be exact, since The Daily Campus last issued a University of Connecticut women's basketball article — when the Huskies imploded on national television in Phoenix against bitter rival South Carolina.

That's a lot of time for you all to stir and spit out questions at us.

So, with less than five weeks until UConn's scrimmage against Syracuse at Mohegan Sun Arena on October 13, we've decided to answer them all.

Below is half of the first batch of questions The Daily Campus received for its UConn women's basketball mailbag series, which will run each Thursday until the regular season starts.

Hey Jake, first time long time. Is Sarah Strong back practicing?

The last time the media heard from Strong, UConn's infamously taciturn superstar, she was just beginning individual work with the coaching staff after two months of rehab on her Achilles. That was in July.

The injury, sustained last summer, hobbled Strong for most of UConn's NCAA Tournament run and kept her out of practice in between games.

Strong is back practicing -- though to what degree remains unknown. Strong spent the summer alongside forward Blanca Quiñonez, who underwent shoulder surgery in May to repair a torn labrum, on the sideline between rehab sessions and limited 1-on-1 work.

Quiñonez is UConn's only injured player — as of now — and is slated to return before the season starts in November.

What are you looking forward to most this season?

Selfishly, I can't wait to go to the non-conference games. Avery and I will be traveling to a handful of games first semester, which is something we haven't been able to do the past two seasons. I'll be apt to expand my ever-growing pin collection for every new campus I visit.

As an objective reporter, I'm fascinated by how Geno Auriemma plans to allocate time between the point guards. All four — KK Arnold, Kayleigh Heckel, Kelis Fisher and Jovana Popovic — are starting caliber players and Heckel, now a junior, only got better as last season went on.



Sarah Strong celebrates on the court in Fort Worth, Texas. Strong was an essential player at the NCAA Tournament Sweet 16 game. FILE PHOTO/ THE DAILY CAMPUS.

It'll also be worth monitoring how Morgan Cheli acclimates to being back on the floor after almost two years, presumably as UConn's swing backup forward.

What do you think of the current state of Big East women's basketball? Are there any teams that can give UConn a run for its money this season?

To put it charitably, no.

UConn is 126-3 since rejoining the Big East ahead of the 2020-21 season and hasn't lost a conference game in over three years. That type of unbridled dominance doesn't happen by chance.

It's plowed through the conference each March, winning 18 straight Big East Tournament games at Mohegan Sun Arena. In the past two seasons it has curb stomped the conference's clear second-best team in Creighton and Villanova, respectively, by an average of 31.5 points.

Things likely won't change in 2026-27 either; while Villanova, behind the play of spunky guard Jasmie Bascoe, and Creighton, which returns most of its young core, should be NCAA Tournament teams, UConn has proven to be head-and-shoulders (quite literally) above the rest of the conference.

How will NCAA Tournament expansion affect UConn, if at all?

The NCAA Tournament expanding from 68 to 76 teams this summer was designed for more high-major teams to crawl into Big Dance as play-ins. The reason was abhorrently obvious: More high-major teams equals more money for the NCAA.

Instead of the best mid-majors in the sport — think South Dakota St. from 2024-25 — getting No. 10-seeds and visiting Storrs for a subregional, expect the Big 10 and SEC's bottom tier, which would've normally been eliminated on Selection Sunday, to fly in.

That being said, tournament expansion leaves more room for Big East teams like Seton Hall, Marquette and Creighton to qualify, which ultimately brings more money to the conference each off season.

What did you think of the UConn women's basketball Apple TV documentary?

For the brevity that it clearly strived to accomplish, I thought it was enjoyable.

Sure, the three-episode, 180-minute documentary could've been longer and more detailed, especially on the Maya Moore and Breanna Stewart eras, but covering every aspect of a 41-year, 12-championship tenure is quite the undertaking.

As someone who started covering the team in 2024-25, I thoroughly enjoyed the third episode, which detailed Paige Bueckers' emotional struggle for a national title and her fiery relationship with Auriemma.

Any updates on First Night?

As of publishing, there are no official updates regarding UConn's acclaimed First Night event usually held in October.

From a brief inventory, the $100 million worth of renovations to Gampel Pavilion don't appear anywhere close to done — Fairfield Way is dotted with large metal fences that block all cars from getting through and a blue wrap remains plastered on all surrounding building windows to prevent paint from the dome staining the glass.

If Gampel is not ready, as its current black dome top indicates, the UConn Volleyball Center could serve as an appropriate — albeit significantly smaller — substitute.