

## UConn routs Notre Dame 79-58, wins 9th title

Written by Administrator  
Wednesday, 09 April 2014 11:11

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Geno Auriemma and UConn reached the top of women's college basketball in unprecedented fashion. After winning a record ninth national championship — they stand alone.

The Huskies reached the pinnacle in style, routing Notre Dame in the first NCAA basketball championship game featuring undefeated teams. Auriemma and his Huskies now have one more title than Pat Summitt and Tennessee for most all-time, and they did it in the Hall of Famer's backyard.

The Huskies had struggled recently against the Irish, but not Tuesday night, cruising to a 79-58 win.

"It means we've done something no one else has ever done," Auriemma said. "Flattered and grateful and all the things that come with this kind of accomplishment. ... I'm more proud of the legacy that exists and what Connecticut basketball is as opposed to the number of championships."

Breanna Stewart, who was The Associated Press Player of the Year, scored 21 points to lead the Huskies (40-0) while Stefanie Dolson added 17 points, 16 rebounds and seven assists. Auriemma took out his senior center with a minute left and the game well in hand with the pair embracing in a long hug.

"We beat a great, great team," Auriemma said. "Notre Dame is a great team. For them to have the season they had and lose their starting center and to do what they did, I can't say enough about their players, coaching staff and it took everything we have. I knew if we played great we'd have a chance to win."

The victory also meant that UConn is now the center of the college basketball world with both the men's and women's teams winning the championship in the same year again. The men's team beat Kentucky in the title game Monday night. This pair of victories came a decade after the Huskies became the only Division I school to accomplish the feat.

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"I couldn't be prouder of what the men did last night," Auriemma said.

Notre Dame coach Muffet McGraw congratulated the UConn coach when they shook hands after the game.

"I said something like, 'I thought we were playing the Miami Heat for a while you guys are just that good.' What a great season, you know things like that," McGraw said. "I thought ... LeBron was the only thing they were missing."

While the names change at UConn, from Rebecca Lobo to Diana Taurasi, Maya Moore and now Stewart, Auriemma has been the constant, winning nine titles in only 20 seasons — including the last two. He's never lost in a national championship game.

"Congratulations to the UConn Huskies for winning the 2014 NCAA National Championship!," Summitt said in a statement emailed to The Associated Press. "My compliments also to coach Geno Auriemma for winning his ninth national title. He has accomplished this feat in record time."

It was the fifth unbeaten season for Auriemma and UConn and the first time the Huskies went 40-0 — matching Baylor as the only schools to accomplish that feat. The victory was also Connecticut's 46th straight dating back to last season's NCAA tournament title run. It's the third longest streak in school history — well short of the NCAA record 90 straight they won.

The loss was Notre Dame's third in the title game in the past four years. Kayla McBride finished off her stellar career with 21 points to lead the Irish, who were looking for their first championship since 2001.

"Obviously we wanted to finish this season with a championship," said Irish freshman Taya Reimer, who replaced Achonwa in the starting lineup. "Right now, it is hard to think about. It hurts a lot."

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After proving to be no challenge for the Huskies during the first 15 years of the rivalry which began in 1995, Notre Dame had owned the series lately, winning seven of the previous nine meetings. UConn though has won the last two, eliminating Notre Dame in the Final Four last season before topping them in the championship game this year.

The former Big East rivals played an entertaining first half in the highly anticipated matchup that women's basketball hoped could transcend the sport. The programs don't care for each other and the coaches added to the drama of the game with their verbal sparring on Monday.

But it was Auriemma who got the last word again.

Even with the loss, it was a record-setting season for the Irish. Notre Dame lost Skylar Diggins to graduation and changed conferences to the ACC. Neither mattered as they ran through their opponents, winning by an average of 25.6 points while taking both the conference regular season and tournament championships.

The Irish lost senior Natalie Achonwa to a torn ACL in the regional final win over Baylor. Notre Dame wore warmup shirts with Achonwa's nickname "Ace" below her No. 11.

The team played inspired basketball in the Final Four win over Maryland where Notre Dame outrebounded the Terps by a record margin. The Irish couldn't muster a similar effort against UConn. The Huskies outrebounded the Irish 54-31 and held them to a season-low in points.

"They got comfortable," McBride said. "They got into a rhythm, and it just went downhill from there."

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