

# Out of Bounds

JASON SNYDER

## Duke vs. UConn: One for the ages

The annual activities following the NCAA Tournament are in full swing now, as fans complete filling out their official NCAA brackets, prizes get handed to the fans with the most accurate bracket predictions and the winners and losers of the tournament head home to their fans with differing attitudes. There is even talk of who will be cutting down the nets next year. But above all these March Madness rituals, there stands one; reminiscing of a tournament of surprises, upsets, big-time players, and collegiate athletes that leave their hearts and souls on the basketball court for one thing, the glory of a national championship.

Because of all this, March Madness continues to be one of the greatest spectacles in all of sports. 1999, for sure, couldn't have fallen short of anyone's expectations for the drama and excitement that the tournament provides.

The NCAA Championship game between Duke and Connecticut proved to be the highlight of this year's tournament. The questioning entering the game was,

"what does UConn have to do to have a chance at beating Duke?" The answer for the Huskies was to play perfect basketball. And that they did.

UConn shocked the nation by beating the unbeatable, 77-74. A 32-game winning streak snapped. An unlikely champion crowned.

Any fan that "honestly saw it coming," is lying. What do they have to lose? If Duke wins, it was expected by everyone. If UConn wins, they are the smartest basketball fans on earth. The only Americans that "honestly saw it coming" were UConn coach Jim Calhoun and his Huskies.

For Duke, it happened at the worst possible time. The Blue Devils had no let downs for 32 straight games. Looking somewhat vulnerable the game before against Michigan State, Duke was still able to prove they were clutch. Anytime the Spartans slowly closed the gap, Duke quickly opened it back up.

Because of this ability to dominate at will, the Blue Devils were halfway in the historical spotlight. But with UConn's cutting down of the nets, they also cut down Duke's hopes of a solid place in history.

UConn's Richard Hamilton secured himself a promising basketball future with an incredible performance in both Final Four games. His 27 points in the championship played huge in the Huskies win. In the eyes of all point

guards, "with every great player, comes a great point guard." Khalid El-Amin proved that tall, physically strong and defined athletes aren't the only ones that can play basketball. Rather, short, strong-willed people

can make the unlikeliest of champions.

Short and chubby players aren't supposed to move like El-Amin has throughout the tournament. But he could be considered the poster boy point guard. His ability to see the court and find the open man is above most others. Put him in a lineup and have someone pick out the basketball player, he might be chosen last. Put him on the court and he will pick you a national champion.

UConn, however, wasn't the only surprise this March. Cinderella's slipper seemed to fit for many teams in the early rounds including Gonzaga, Southwest Missouri State, Oklahoma and Weber State. Weber State bowed out in the second round, but not before they eliminated "recruiting powerhouse" North Carolina. Southwest Missouri State and Oklahoma also provided some upsets as they both advanced to the Sweet 16.

The biggest story of the Cinderella teams was about Gonzaga. After scandal hit the Minnesota basketball program, Gonzaga had an easy ride through the first round. They were

then to face #2 Stanford, who was expected to go far. The slipper fit again, 82-74. They would then defeat Florida to go to the Elite Eight and fell five points short, to UConn, from advancing to the Final Four.

The Final Four didn't disappoint, as Ohio State made an unexpected appearance. The Buckeyes went from the worst in the Big Ten only one year ago, with a record of 8-22, to the best team in the South Region. Finally some good news for Buckeye coach Jim O'Brien who has dealt with tragedy and bad luck in recent years.

March Madness '99 lived up to its name. From nailbiters to scandal, from upsets to unlikely champions, these college athletes continue to show up the overpaid professionals. To watch the celebrations and the importance of basketball to these players is beyond words. Those pile-ons are for real. The emotions aren't empty. And you know these players would give up anything to do it again.

Snyder is the sports editor for the Beacon. Out of Bounds appears weekly on this page.



### Down to the Wire...

## UConn Defeats Duke To Win National Title

By John Akers  
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. - As a nation might have noticed Monday, Connecticut had quite a game plan for top-ranked and seemingly invincible Duke.

It should have. The plan that led to UConn's 77-74 victory and a national title that "shocked the world," as CBS announcers put it, was five months in the making.

The effective double-teams on national player of the year Elton Brand, the pressure on Trajan Langdon and the continuous drives by the Huskies' Richard Hamilton and others were all notes scribbled on small blue cards by Coach Jim Calhoun.

"Starting in November, I started watching games and taking notes," Calhoun said. "I

took notes on Cincinnati when I thought they were the best team, and then on Duke."

Calhoun gave his Huskies - ranked No. 1 for more weeks than the Blue Devils - more of a chance than most of the country had given them. A blowout seemed more in order to many observers, though this was the first pairing of two

of the nation's top three teams in a championship game since the Michigan State-Indiana State final in 1979. Duke and UConn were tied 14 times and never separated by more than seven points.

Connecticut's game plan primarily called for three things:

- Make Langdon bring the ball up court rather than allow point guard William Avery to do so.
- Double-team Brand with another big man and always rotate with the same players, to avoid confusion.
- Try to lure Duke's big defenders away from the basket and then drive

them to the basket.

Calhoun, who said he thought his players were faster and that they had a greater depth of good defenders than did Duke, also pulled off a surprise by relaying the information Sunday in a shoot-around rather than a tough practice.

"The only thing we needed was to tell them what to do," Calhoun said. "We wanted to give them a couple of things to hold onto."

The Huskies retained the information well. Nearly every UConn basket came off drives. Richard Hamilton, the All-American forward, earned most of his 27 points that way. Langdon, hounded by defensive specialist Ricky Moore, had to work extremely hard for his 25 points, and Brand, always surrounded by Jake Voskuhl and a UConn forward, had to work harder for his 15 points and 13 rebounds. The Blue Devils rarely found the three-point shooter who was open on the

perimeter because of the double-teams.

"It really should have opened up more for us," Duke Coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "I don't know if we made enough good reads initially."

All that said, the Blue Devils still had several chances to win their 33rd game in a row and their third NCAA title in the 1990s.

The Blue Devils, trailing 75-74, had about 25 seconds remaining when they regained the ball after Brand blocked Khalid El-Amin's shot. In the first crucial decision, Krzyzewski elected not to call a timeout.

"We have the whole momentum of the game," Krzyzewski said. "We had just done a positive thing in stopping them. To me, we have the advantage now. If we call timeout, we give them the advantage."

The ball never left the hands of Langdon, though that meant it would always be challenged by the

defensive skills of Moore. The Blue Devils might have looked for another avenue, perhaps Brand against a double-team, but they didn't.

"Absolutely, positively, absolutely I want Trajan Langdon to take that shot," Krzyzewski said. "I'll win or lose with Trajan Langdon."

"I'll walk down any road with Trajan Langdon. It's a set play we've run many times. Most times it's successful. Tonight, it wasn't. I'm fine with that. It's the way it should be."

Langdon tried to free himself from Moore with the dribble but couldn't. Finally, he dipped his left shoulder to try to create some room.

Instead, he was called for traveling.

"It was him against me," Moore said. "I stayed solid and stayed down. I didn't go for any spin moves or head fakes. I got the travel, and

we got the ball back."

Langdon: "I might have traveled, I might not. That's not the game. There's a million plays that affected the outcome. I'm not going to hang my head on that play."

When Duke tied the score 66-66 with 4:50 remaining, UConn's Khalid El-Amin hit a runner to regain the lead. After Langdon hit a 23-footer to pull the Blue Devils to within 73-72 with 1:42 remaining, El-Amin hit a floater with three seconds left on the shot clock and 1:03 on the game clock. El-Amin also hit the Huskies' final free throws.

"You have to give them an immense amount of credit for making big plays, because we made big plays," Krzyzewski said. "It was a possession-for-possession game."

It was an absolutely, positively, entertaining national title game.

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## INTRAMURAL ROUNDUP

### Intramurals

SPRING 1999

#### Modified Softball

M, W, Coed

Registration Deadline: April 2

Play starts on April 5

Season will last four weeks

#### Badminton

Singles (M, W)

Doubles (M, W, Coed)

Registration Deadline: April 9

Play starts on April 12

Season will last two weeks

Spring semester Intramural schedules are available in the IM office and on the Reed and Erie Hall IM boards.

