

## SPORTS



/MICHAEL MCANDREWS / HARTFORD COURANT

Former UConn women's basketball player Maria Conlon talks to her players before practice at Notre Dame High School in Fairfield on Wednesday.

## Riley

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The players didn't really know her background when she became their head coach this season, that she played for the UConn team that went to four Final Fours and won three straight national championships and was the starting point guard for two of those titles in 2003 and 2004.

"It doesn't matter," she said. "As long as I can transfer knowledge to them, they shouldn't care who the heck I am."

Notre Dame has only lost once, to Hudson Catholic, a top New Jersey team, 61-48 on Jan. 25. The Lancers are 14-1, top ranked in Class L. In the last 10 years, they have been to the Class M state championship game twice (in 2013 and 2016) and lost both times to Cromwell. But they have never won a title.

Their top player is 5-8 sophomore guard Aizhanique Mayo, who's averaging 19 points per game.

"My teammates are really good," Mayo said. "We get along well. We move the ball well. Our chemistry is good."

Their offense was clicking this week, scoring 88 points against Masuk, 85 vs. Joel Barlow. Things are going well. But before this season, Conlon, who lives in Shelton, wasn't really sure if she was interested in coaching anymore. She had been an assistant at Southern Connecticut for coach Joe Frager when the Owls won the Division II national championship in 2007. She had been an assistant at Notre Dame for two years for her former Seymour High coach Eric DeMarco before she decided not to coach last year. She had just opened her CrossFit gym. She was working full time as the managing partner for the Maffe Financial Group in Glastonbury. At that point, she just wasn't feeling the coaching thing anymore.

"I hit a crossroads where I thought I don't know if coaching is for me," she said. "Kids are different now, very different than I was. I'm used to being that blue collar girl from the Valley, I work hard, I play through injuries, I don't complain, I don't talk back to coaches."

But when DeMarco retired, she was asked about taking over the job. And she realized she missed it. So here she is.

When she hit a three Wednesday, Burwell yelled out, "All day."

"I like it because from a coaching perspective when I'm out there playing, I can see stuff live that you don't notice sometimes when you're standing on the side," she said. "And when your coach is making shots or running up and down with you, sometimes when you're pointing stuff out, they're more inclined to listen because they're watching you do it all the time. You're in the trenches with them a little bit."

Conlon is also a proponent of a more free-flowing offense.



Diana Taurasi and Maria Conlon hoist one of the three NCAA championship trophies they won with UConn.

"I'll tell them, 'Here's the template. Kind of draw around it and add to it as you see fit when you're reacting in the game,' rather than, 'Here's the template and here's exactly where you have to draw on this template,'" she said. "What it's doing for them is increasing their basketball IQ."

"If you look at the AAU circuit, it's all one-on-one play. How can I break you down and score on you, one on one? How many times do you watch UConn — or Oregon the other night — how many times are they breaking somebody down one on one to score? They're not. They're all scoring in the flow of their offense."

She is a student of the game. Her team has been to UConn practices. She still talks to Frager. She's listening to podcasts of Jim Boeheim breaking down a 2-3 zone while she's on the road for work, driving to Rhode Island.

"I kind of geek out a little about stuff like that," she said.

And she's always talking to her former UConn teammates — Diana Taurasi, Ashley Battle, Jessica Moore, Morgan Valley and Sue Bird chimes in occasionally — via group chat. Valley is in her first year coaching at the University of Hartford, so Conlon went to see one of her games last week.

"[Taurasi] gave me crap [when I took the job]," she said, laughing. "Why do you want to coach high school? Are you crazy? Now they are [excited]. 'Oh, you're No. 1!'"

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## STATE COLLEGE BASKETBALL

## St. Joseph's rolls to 18th straight victory; Hartford, CCSU stumble

Staff and wire reports

Delshawn Jackson Jr. scored a game-high 27 points, and the University of Saint Joseph men's basketball team won its 18th straight game with a 113-73 win over visiting Saint Joseph College of Maine in a Great Northeast Athletic Conference game on Saturday in West Hartford.

The Blue Jays are now 19-2 overall and 7-0 in the GNAC and finished just outside of the most recent Division III national poll. St. Joe's never trailed, running out to a 13-5 lead that was extended to 55-34 at the half.

"The biggest thing we had to do was take away their threes," St. Joe's coach Jim Calhoun said. "They did make some but at a cost, because the long rebounds set up our fast break, we were able to get the ball inside early, and then we came out in the second half pretty well focused."

Ryan O'Neill added 16 points and seven rebounds and Jaecee Martin and Jordan Powell had 12 each for the Blue Jays.

**Vermont 69, Hartford 68:** At West Hartford, Everett Duncan had 18 points and Ryan Davis scored the winning layup with 2.2 seconds left as Vermont extended its winning streak to nine games, narrowly beating Hartford in an

America East game.

Davis added 16 points for the Catamounts, while Stef Smith chipped in 15. Davis also had seven rebounds.

Ben Shungu had 11 points and six rebounds for Vermont (19-6, 9-1 America East Conference).

Anthony Lamb, the Catamounts' leading scorer entering the contest at 17 points per game, shot only 20% for the game (1 of 5).

Traci Carter scored a career-high 26 points plus six assists and five steals for the Hawks (13-12, 6-4). Malik Ellison added 23 points and 12 rebounds.

The Catamounts improve to 2-0 against the Hawks on the season. Vermont defeated Hartford 74-57 on Jan. 18.

**Bryant 64, Central Connecticut State 60:** At Smithfield, R.I., Benson Lin had 13 points as Bryant narrowly beat Central Connecticut in a Northeast Conference game.

Hall Elisias had 12 points for Bryant (12-12, 4-7 NEC). Juan Cardenas added 10 rebounds. Ikenna Ndugba had six rebounds.

Adam Grant, who led the Bulldogs in scoring coming into the contest with 17 points per game, had only 6 points (2 of 14).

Ian Krishnan had 16 points for the Blue Devils (2-23, 1-11). Jamir

Coleman added 11 points. Jamir Reed had 10 points and six rebounds. Xavier Wilson had 4 points and five blocks.

**Yale 75, Dartmouth 57:** At New Haven, Azar Swain scored a game-high 21 points to lead the Bulldogs to the Ivy League win.

Yale (17-5, 5-1) moved back into first place in the league a day after suffering its first home loss of the season on Friday in a one-point loss to Harvard.

Leading the Big Green (7-14, 0-6) by only four at the half, Yale outscored Dartmouth 35-21 in the second to secure the win.

Paul Atkinson had 17 points and a team-leading eight rebounds for the Bulldogs and Wyatt Yess added 11.

## Women's basketball

**Bryant 59, Central Connecticut State 47:** At Smithfield, R.I., Bruna Vila Arisgues led the Blue Devils in the NEC road loss. Central is now 2-21 overall and 1-11 in the conference.

Brooke Bjelko led Bryant (6-15, 4-6) with 15 points.

**Vermont 62, Hartford 51:** At Burlington, Vt., Jada Lucas led the winless Hawks with 15 points in the America East Conference loss. Jordan McLemore added 13 points for Hartford (0-24, 0-11) and Sierra Smith had 10 rebounds.

## COLLEGE BASKETBALL

## Baylor gets top seed in initial NCAA rankings

BY JOHN MARSHALL  
The Associated Press

San Diego State has rolled through its schedule, charging into February as the only Division I team still undefeated.

But if teams were selected for the NCAA Tournament today, the Aztecs would travel across the country to play in New York.

The NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Committee gave San Diego State a No. 1 seed in its preliminary rankings released Saturday but stuck the Aztecs in the East Region.

Based on games through Friday, Baylor was No. 1 overall, with Kansas and Gonzaga getting the other two top seeds. The Zags were No. 1 in the West Region, so the committee opted to ship the Aztecs out East — for now.

"If someone is legitimately a top-four team, they must be a 1 seed and then you work your way down," said Kentucky athletic director Mitch Barnhart, vice chairman of the NCAA basketball committee. "You don't artificially break up the bracket."

The NCAA created the sneak peek into the selection process to generate buzz before the 68 teams that make the NCAA Tournament are officially revealed on Selection Sunday, which is March 15. The Final Four is March 27-29 in Atlanta.

Baylor was an obvious choice for the No. 1 overall seed. In a season of parity — a record-tying seven different No. 1 teams — the Bears have provided stability at the top, spending the past three weeks at No. 1 in the AP Top 25.

The committee made Baylor the top seed in the South Region in Houston with Louisville, Seton Hall and Auburn. Houston is

about a three-hour drive from Waco, so the Bears would have plenty of fan support if they made it that far.

Third-ranked Kansas was the No. 2 overall seed and placed in the Midwest Region in Indianapolis with Dayton, Florida State and Michigan State.

No. 2 Gonzaga was the third overall seed and topped a West Region in Los Angeles with West Virginia, Villanova and Oregon.

With Gonzaga edging out San Diego State in the overall rankings, the Aztecs were No. 1 in the East Region in New York with Duke, Maryland and Butler.

"There was no question that San Diego State was a No. 1 seed," Barnhart said. "Gonzaga had a couple of wins just slightly better than San Diego State's with a win over Oregon and Arizona, and that was just the razor's edge difference between the two."

That fine line, if it holds up, would send the Aztecs cross-country instead of on a bus ride to Los Angeles. If both teams won their first three games in the East Region, San Diego State also would have to face Duke, which has historically played well and has a big following in New York.

"At the end of the day, there's also the geography piece and the way we place our teams to stay within the next available place for them to play, closest place, unless it throws off the balance of the brackets, and we want to make sure that we get that right," Barnhart said. "And we want to make sure that we stay true to the seed list in all of that. That's how we drive to the bracket decisions that we get to."

Of course, much can change between now and Selection Sunday. There's still about 1,500 games left to play.

## SETON HALL 70, VILLANOVA 64

## Powell, Pirates nip 'Cats in notable meeting of schools

For first time in 118 matchups, both teams were ranked in Top 25

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Myles Powell had 19 points, Sandro Mamukelashvili scored 12 of his 17 points in the second half and No. 12 Seton Hall snapped a 17-game road losing streak to Villanova with a 70-64 victory over the No. 10 Wildcats on Saturday.

Quincy McKnight added 14 points for the Big East-leading Pirates (18-5, 10-1), who last won at Villanova on Feb. 26, 1994.

Saddiq Bey scored 22 points and Collin Gillespie added 12 for Villanova (17-6, 7-4), which has lost three in a row.

The teams were meeting for the 118th time, but it was the first matchup when both were ranked in the AP Top 25.

Powell knocked down a 3 from the top of the key to make it 46-42 with 10:18 left, but the Seton Hall star went to the bench after picking up his fourth foul with 9:31 to play. Powell re-entered with 4:54 left and Seton Hall still ahead by four, 55-51, when Mamukelashvili

twice followed his own miss before finishing off the glass for a 57-51 advantage.

The 6-foot-11 native of Tbilisi, Georgia, flexed his muscles heading back downcourt after a key basket in the contest.

The Pirates' lead was still six when Bey drained a 3 from the right wing to cut it in half, 61-58, with 1:39 left. Powell then air-balled a 3 just before the shot clock went off and Bey missed on a drive before McKnight's two free throws made it 63-58 with 49.1 seconds left. After a Gillespie miss, Shavar Reynolds Jr. clinched it with two free throws with 36.5 remaining.

Villanova trailed by as many as 10 points in the first half when Powell's 3 from the top of the key put the Pirates ahead 20-10 with 10:36 remaining. But the Wildcats' offense took over from that point. They pulled even at 25 on Gillespie's two free throws with 2:23 left before a Bey jumper made it 27-25.

Then, the sold-out crowd of 20,706 erupted at the Wells Fargo Center when Jermaine Samuels stripped Powell, leading to a fast-break dunk by Bey that made it 29-25. The half ended with the Wildcats up 31-27.



MATT SLOCUM/AP

Seton Hall's Myles Powell reacts to a play against Villanova in Philadelphia. The Pirates won 70-64.