

COLLEGE BASKETBALL BROADCAST RESEARCH PACKET

CONN@MICH

UConn Huskies at Michigan Wolverines

Monday, April 6, 2026
Venue: Lucas Oil Stadium
PST
Sample broadcast research packet

OPENING WATCH LIST – READ THIS FIRST

Game Thesis

Connecticut Huskies (CONN, AP #2) at Michigan Wolverines (MICH, AP #1) – Monday, April 6, 2026 at Lucas Oil Stadium – Indianapolis, IN.
Records: CONN 34-6 (17-3 conf) vs MICH 37-3 (19-1 conf).

Core Broadcast Question

Which side imposes its efficiency identity first – CONN or MICH?

All Things to Watch

- **CONN efficiency:** SRS ##10/365, Adj ORtg 123.2 (##26/365), Adj DRtg 89.9 (**##8/365**), NRtg 33.2
- **MICH efficiency:** SRS ##1/365, Adj ORtg 130.0 (**##3/365**), Adj DRtg 85.3 (**##1/365**), NRtg 44.6

How Tonight Unfolds

- Tip: CONN vs MICH set early tempo from the efficiency boards.
- **First media timeout:** foul/ATO boards (if present) start shaping rotation length.
- **Halftime:** shot-diet and paint/rim edges decide whether the underdog can hang.
- **Late clock:** closing units and free-throw/foul volume decide the margin.

Game Keys

Key	Why It Matters
CONN efficiency	SRS ##10/365, Adj ORtg 123.2 (##26/365), Adj DRtg 89.9 (##8/365), NRtg 33.2
MICH efficiency	SRS ##1/365, Adj ORtg 130.0 (##3/365), Adj DRtg 85.3 (##1/365), NRtg 44.6

Broadcast line: CONN at MICH – watch the printed efficiency and shot-diet edges on the clubhouse sheets.

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1. CONN Program Identity

CONN Identity Tonight

This is a club that wins by subtraction – the 89.9 adjusted defensive rating (**#8 in D1**) suffocates rather than gambles, holding opponents to 65.2 PPG (**#10**), 40.3% shooting, and 30.2% from three while protecting the rim with 5.0 blocks per game (**#15**). The offense is the deliberate counterweight: 76.6 PPG (**#155**) on a paint-first, ball-moving diet (18.1 APG, **#11**; five double-figure scorers) where Tarris Reed (60.7 FG%) and Eric Reibe (65.8%) carry the interior load. Put together, it is a 33.2 net rating and 23.4 SRS – a top-10 profile that wins ugly, low-possession games.

The identity sharpens exactly where tonight's matchup gets tight. UConn closes at 1.00 points per possession in the clutch window (43.8% shooting) against Michigan's 0.82 – a ~0.18 PPP late-clock edge – and Hurley's after-timeout packages are the separator, generating 1.13 PPP with 45.5% three-point shooting on first shots post-TO. On paper Michigan owns the offense and defense units (130.0 Adj ORtg, **#3**; 85.3 Adj DRtg, **#1**), but UConn owns the clutch and coaching units. That is the whole story of this club: keep it close, let the **#8** defense force misses, and out-script the final five minutes.

What's Working / What's Not

- Working – Halfcourt Suffocation:** 89.9 Adj DRtg (**#8**), holding opponents to 65.2 PPG (**#10**), 40.3% FG, and 30.2% from three – a stay-in-front scheme that forces tough jumpers instead of hunting turnovers.
- Working – Rim Protection:** 5.0 BPG (**#15**) behind Tarris Reed (9.0 RPG, 60.7 FG%) and Eric Reibe's second wall (65.8 FG% off the bench) – the paint is never unguarded when the starter sits.
- Working – Clutch Halfcourt:** 1.00 PPP and 43.8% FG in the final-five, within-five window – the sharper closing script against Michigan's 0.82.
- Working – After-Timeout Threes:** 1.13 PPP with a 45.5% three-point clip on first shot post-TO, funneled to Braylon Mullins (61.1% on 18 ATO looks) and Solo Ball – the huddle perimeter is a genuine edge.
- Working – Balanced Ball Movement:** 18.1 APG (**#11**) with five double-figure scorers – no single engine to take away.
- Not Working – Perimeter Value:** 34.4% from three (**#157/365**) – the 3-point line is a support piece, not a weapon, against Michigan's **#1** defense.
- Not Working – Free-Throw Line:** 72.4% FT (**#191/365**) – a shaky stripe in a one-possession title game where opponents shoot 72.7%.
- Not Working – Foul Exposure in the Finishing Five:** Tarris Reed and Silas Demary each carry 87 season fouls (2.9 and 2.6 PF/G) – both closing fixtures must stay clean or the anchor and primary creator thin out.
- Not Working – Steal Generation:** 6.8 SPG (**#160**) means Michigan gets real possessions – CONN's bet is entirely on those possessions ending in contested misses.
- Not Working – Sideline Discipline:** five technicals on the season (Malachi Smith two, Demary one) – the combustible bench is a known variable in a high-leverage final.

Stakes & Recent Form

UConn enters at 34-6 (17-3 Big East), AP #2, as the defending back-to-back national champion chasing a third title in four seasons – a program identity built on winning the biggest stage. The 2026 tournament run is a separate 5-game body of work and has been a masterclass in winning close: four of five decided by single digits, including a 73-72 escape at Duke and a 67-63 semifinal win over Michigan State, before the 71-62 Final Four win over Illinois.

Date	Opp	Res	Score	Margin	Type
2026-04-04	vs Illinois	W	71-62	+9	PST
2026-03-29	@ Duke	W	73-72	+1	PST
2026-03-27	vs Michigan State	W	67-63	+4	PST
2026-03-22	vs UCLA	W	73-57	+16	PST
2026-03-20	vs Furman	W	82-71	+11	PST
2026-03-14	@ St. John's	L	52-72	-20	REG

The St. John's 20-point loss (March 14) is the lone blemish on a 9-1 closing regular-season-and-postseason run, and it bookends the identity: when the **#8** defense travels, UConn wins every close game; when it doesn't, the methodical offense (76.6 PPG) has no escape valve. That is the entire bet on Monday night.

Conditions

- Neutral site:** Lucas Oil Stadium – Indianapolis, IN – a true neutral floor with no home-crowd lean for either bench.
- Even rest:** both clubs last played April 4 (UConn 71-62 over Illinois; Michigan 91-73 over Arizona) – no rest or travel edge to exploit.
- Pace lean:** a 76.6 PPG (**#155**) half-court club wants the game slowed against the 87.3 PPG (**#9**) Michigan machine – every possession matters.

Broadcast line: UConn wins by suffocating the game into a low-possession grind, then out-scripting the final five minutes – the **#8** defense, the 1.00 clutch PPP, and the 1.13 PPP ATO packages are the identity, and they all travel to Indianapolis.

Standings & Polls

Team	Record	Conference	AP Rank
CONN	34-6 (17-3 conf)	Big East	#2
MICH	37-3 (19-1 conf)	Big Ten	#1

2. MICH Program Identity

Michigan wins by being the most complete team in college basketball – the No. 1 overall SRS (32.9) and No. 1 adjusted net rating (44.6) in the 2026 regular season, built on the country's best defense (85.3 Adj DRtg) feeding the country's most efficient offense (130.0 Adj ORtg, #3). The offense chapter found a 50.7% field-goal clip (#6) and 87.3 PPG (#9) that run through a three-big frontcourt – Yaxel Lendeborg (15.1 PPG), Morez Johnson (62.3 FG%) and Aday Mara (66.8 FG%) – all finishing above 60% inside behind Elliot Cadeau's 5.8 APG, the fifth-best assist rate in D1 (18.6 APG). The defense chapter showed a rim wall that blocks 6.0 shots per game (#2) and holds opponents to 38.2% shooting and 30.4% from three without gambling (5.6 SPG, #302): Michigan makes you take the least efficient shots in the country, possession after possession.

The coaching chapter framed how that identity travels: Dusty May's huddle art funnels to the paint, not the arc – 50.7% on first post-timeout looks at 1.08 PPP, but just 18.5% from three on those same sets, with Johnson (88.9% on ATO attempts), Mara (70.0%) and Lendeborg (53.3%) as the set-piece finishers. The one crack in the armor is the clutch chapter's finding: in the final-five, within-five window Michigan's efficiency collapses to 0.82 PPP on 34.7% shooting – a season-long late-clock fragility that sits at odds with its 40-minute dominance, and the clearest opening CONN's #8 defense can exploit.

The identity, then, is a 40-minute heavyweight whose only vulnerability is the closing seconds and the perimeter. Michigan doesn't need a perfect game – it needs its paint gravity to win the interior war, its No. 1 defense to keep the game at a pace it controls, and its seniors to find just one late-clock bucket better than the 34.7% clutch clip they posted all winter. That is the entire national-title equation in Indianapolis.

What's Working / What's Not

- Working – Paint Gravity:** Three bigs (Lendeborg 51.5 FG%, Johnson 62.3%, Mara 66.8%) power the No. 3 offense in D1 (130.0 Adj ORtg) and No. 6 field-goal shooting (50.7%) – the interior is the engine, and it's the matchup CONN's #8 defense hasn't seen all season.
- Working – Postseason Surge:** Michigan has topped 90 points in five straight tournament games – 101-80 over Howard, 95-72 over Saint Louis, 90-77 over Alabama, 95-62 over Tennessee, 91-73 over Arizona – the highest-scoring run of any team left standing.
- Working – No. 1 Defense:** 85.3 Adj DRtg (best in D1) with a 6.0 BPG rim wall (#2) holding opponents to 38.2% shooting – the anchor May can lean on when the offense grinds.
- Working – Huddle Art:** 50.7% on first post-timeout looks at 1.08 PPP, with Johnson (88.9%), Mara (70.0%) and Lendeborg (53.3%) as reliable set-piece finishers.
- Working – Ball Movement:** 18.6 APG (#5 in D1) keeps the three-big attack fed and forces defenses to guard the full floor.
- Not Working – Clutch Halfcourt:** Michigan's clutch window (2nd half, ≤5:00, within 5) produced just 0.82 PPP on 34.7% shooting and 32.1% from three all regular season – the single biggest red flag in a one-possession title game.
- Not Working – ATO Perimeter:** The first shot out of a timeout falls at 18.5% from three, meaning late-clock huddles that need a perimeter answer have no reliable deep option.
- Not Working – Foul Trouble Up Front:** Aday Mara (79 PF, team-high 3 techs, 24 early-first-half fouls) and Morez Johnson (2.4 PF/G) make the big-heavy lineup a whistle risk in a game where the interior is everything.
- Not Working – Ball Security:** 11.7 TO/G (#203) concedes extra half-court possessions to a CONN defense ranked #8 in efficiency – the cost of the conservative, position-based scheme.
- Not Working – Live-Ball Theft:** 5.6 SPG (#302) means Michigan rarely turns defense into offense, so every scoring possession has to be manufactured in the half court.

Stakes & Recent Form

Michigan enters as the No. 1 team in the AP poll at 37-3, the Big Ten champion at 19-1 in conference play, with the No. 1 overall SRS (32.9) and No. 1 adjusted net rating (44.6) – the national-title favorite playing for the program's second championship in Indianapolis. The regular-season body of work (35 G) earned the berth; the five-game postseason run is a separate, even more explosive body of work.

Date	Opp	Res	Score	Margin	Type
2026-04-04	@ Arizona	W	91-73	+18	PST
2026-03-29	vs Tennessee	W	95-62	+33	PST
2026-03-27	vs Alabama	W	90-77	+13	PST
2026-03-21	vs Saint Louis	W	95-72	+23	PST
2026-03-19	vs Howard	W	101-80	+21	PST
2026-03-15	vs Purdue	L	72-80	-8	REG
2026-03-14	vs Wisconsin	W	68-65	+3	REG
2026-03-13	vs Ohio State	W	71-67	+4	REG

The form is unmistakable: five straight tournament wins, four by double digits, and a +18 national semifinal over Arizona that was never in doubt. The lone blemish since mid-March is an 80-72 regular-season loss to Purdue just before the tournament – the last time Michigan was held under 90 points, and the last time its 40-minute dominance didn't carry the day.

Conditions

- Neutral-site national championship at Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis – no home-court edge for either side, with the bigs' paint gravity playing identically on a full-size pro floor.
- Even rest:** both clubs played their semifinals on April 4, giving Michigan two full days before the title game.
- Michigan has been a machine away from home in the postseason, winning all five tournament games (four at neutral or road venues) by an average margin that the 91-73 semifinal only underscored.

The most complete team in the country – No. 1 offense and No. 1 defense, feeding a three-big paint game that owns the interior – facing its only known weakness in a one-possession finish: the final-five-minute clutch where the rim tightens. – [Broadcast line](#)

3. CONN Defense

Defensive Identity

- **Elite, disciplined half-court unit:** CONN finished the 2026 regular season with a 89.9 adjusted defensive rating – **#8 in D1** – the engine of a 33.2 net rating and 23.4 SRS (both top-10 marks).
- **They suffocate, they don't gamble:** opponents shot just 40.3% from the field and 30.2% from three while scoring 65.2 PPG (**#10 in D1**). Only 6.8 steals per game (**#160**) – this is a stay-in-front, force-tough-shots defense, not a turnover-hunting one.
- **The payoff is at the rim:** 5.0 blocks per game ranks **#15 in D1**, the byproduct of funneling drivers into a protected paint instead of reaching for steals.

2026 REG defense	CONN
Opp PPG	65.2 (#10)
Opp FG%	40.3
Opp 3P%	30.2
Blocks/G	5.0 (#15)
Steals/G	6.8(#160)

Anchors

- **Tarris Reed (SR) is the rim anchor:** the 5-spot senior patrols the paint with 9.0 RPG and anchors a front line that holds opponents to 40.3% shooting; his 60.7% field-goal accuracy matters mostly as the lob/dump-off target that keeps defenses honest.
- **Eric Reibe (FR) brings a second rim wall off the bench:** 13.8 MPG of length behind Reed, shooting 65.8% himself – CONN never drops its interior protection when the starter sits.
- **Silas Demary (JR) is the point-of-attack piece:** the 5.9 APG floor general applies ball pressure at the top that steers MICH's guards into the Reed/Reibe wall rather than around it.

What They Allow

- **Clean looks – they just force misses:** the 6.8 SPG (#160) and 11.8 opponent turnovers per game mean MICH will get real possessions; CONN's bet is that those possessions end in contested jumpers, and the 40.3% opponent mark backs it up.
- **The interior is the stress point tonight:** MICH's front line of Yaxel Lendeborg (15.1 PPG), Morez Johnson (62.3 FG%), and Aday Mara (66.8 FG%) all finish above 60% inside – this is the biggest paint workload CONN's #8 defense has faced.
- **Foul discipline is the swing stat:** opponents shoot 72.7% from the line, so keeping MICH off the stripe is the only way the low-efficiency bet holds against a 87.3 PPG (#9) offense.

Broadcast line: CONN's top-10 defense – a stay-in-front scheme anchored by Reed and Reibe at the rim – is built exactly for a MICH front line that shoots 60%+ inside, but the free-throw line is where this wall gets tested. – Broadcast

4. CONN Clutch & Late Clock

Clutch Profile

- Clutch efficiency (2026 REG, 2nd half ≤5:00, score within five):CONN shoots 43.8% from the floor, 33.3% from three, and 1.00 PPP on 48 clutch FGA – efficient halfcourt execution in the closing window that earned the berth (the tournament run is a separate 5-game body of work).
- Late-clock edge vs tonight's opponent:Michigan's printed clutch board sits at 34.7% FG / 0.82 PPP, leaving CONN with the sharper closing profile – a ~0.18 PPP edge in the same window.
- Ball ownership:out-of-timeout shot volume funnels to Braylon Mullins (18 ATO looks, 61.1%), Solo Ball (17, 41.2%) and Silas Demary (13, 46.2%) – the set-play closers.

Window (2026 REG)	FG%	3P%	PPP
Clutch (2H, ≤5:00, within 5)	43.8%	33.3%	1.00
First shot after timeout (ATO)	47.7%	45.5%	1.13

Closing Habits

- Foul exposure in the finishing five:Tarris Reed and Silas Demary each carry 87 season fouls (2.9 and 2.6 PF/G respectively) – both closing-unit fixtures who must stay clean in the last five, or the interior anchor and the primary creator thin out.
- Early-foul rotation risk:Solo Ball (29) and Demary (22) lead CONN in early first-half fouls, so the night's finishing unit is not guaranteed to match the opening lineup if foul trouble compresses the rotation.
- Timeout lean:CONN's printed coach-timeout volume is blank, but the after-timeout beat is a real edge – 47.7% FG and 1.13 PPP on first shot post-TO, with a 45.5% three-point clip that outruns the club's clutch 3P% (33.3%).
- Printed 2H pop is a note, not a trend:CONN's +11.0 second-half scoring swing rests on just a 2-game sample – flag it, don't bank on it.

Live Watch

- Watch CONN's clutch PPP against Michigan's:CONN enters at 1.00 PPP in the closing window vs MICH's 0.82. If CONN's ATO execution (1.13 PPP) surfaces on late possessions while MICH's halfcourt stalls, the late-clock edge is breaking UConn's way – and if the deficit forces CONN off its set plays, the edge flips.

Broadcast line: The late-game edge is UConn's on paper – 1.00 clutch PPP and a 1.13 PPP ATO lean – provided Reed and Demary avoid foul trouble in the finishing five. – Speaker

5. CONN Coaching & ATO

Sideline Identity

- - **Head coach:** Dan Hurley, in his eighth season at the helm in Storrs and a 2026 Naismith Coach of the Year semifinalist – the reigning owner of the sport's biggest stage, having led UConn to back-to-back titles in 2023-24 and now a third championship-game appearance in four seasons. He has twice been named Naismith (2024) and Big East (2024) Coach of the Year.
 - **Run-it-through-the-coach model:** Hurley calls every offensive and defensive possession and subs every player himself – a coach-led operation that leaned on a rebuilt defense this season, turning a group ranked 75th nationally in Ken Pom defensive efficiency a year ago into a top-10 outfit, with Silas Demary Jr. and Tarris Reed Jr. both on the Naismith Defensive Player of the Year Watch list.

- Rotation lean from the ATO board:** his half-court execution funnels through a young wing and a veteran core – freshman Braylon Mullins, juniors Solo Ball and Silas Demary, and seniors Alex Karaban and Tarris Reed all lead UConn's first-shot-after-timeout volume.

Timeout & Foul Timing

- ATO execution is the separator:** UConn generates a first shot after timeout at a 47.7% clip (86 attempts) with 45.5% 3-point shooting and 1.13 points per possession – an elite settled half-court number that matters in a tight title game.
 - Early-foul caution:** Solo Ball (29), Silas Demary (22), and Alex Karaban, Tarris Reed and Jaylin Stewart (17 each) are the Huskies' most frequent first-half foulers – Reed and Demary both carry the team lead at 87 season fouls, with Reed's 2.9 and Mullins' 2.8 fouls per game the highest on the roster.
 - Discipline question:** UConn took five technical fouls on the season, with Malachi Smith drawing two and Demary one – Hurley's combustible sideline is a known variable, but the group mostly keeps the emotion channeled.

Adjustment Edge

- Clutch half-court edge:** In the 2026 regular season's clutch window (final five minutes, score within five), UConn shot 43.8% with 1.00 points per possession – comfortably ahead of Michigan's 34.7% / 0.82. When this game tightens, Hurley's ATO packages (45.5% 3-point on first shots after timeout) give the Huskies the sharper late-game script.

ATO Volume Leaders (CONN)

Player	ATO FGA	FG%
Braylon Mullins (FR)	18	61.1%
Solo Ball (JR)	17	41.2%
Silas Demary (JR)	13	46.2%
Alex Karaban (SR)	9	44.4%
Eric Reibe (FR)	8	50.0%
Tarris Reed (SR)	8	50.0%

Broadcast line: Hurley has the sharper late-game script – best-in-field ATO execution and a clutch offense that out-shoots Michigan when the margin is five or fewer. – [Broadcast line](#)

Foul Tendency

- Early 1 H fouls (≥12:00 left), season foul volume, PF/G, and technicals from 2026 REG.*

Early 1 H foulers

Team	Player	Fouls
CONN	Solo Ball	29
CONN	Silas Demary	22
CONN	Alex Karaban	17
CONN	Tarris Reed	17
CONN	Jaylin Stewart	17
MICH	Aday Mara	24
MICH	Elliot Cadeau	22
MICH	Morez Johnson	18
MICH	Yaxel Lendeborg	14
MICH	Roddy Gayle	13

Season foul volume

Team	Player	Fouls
CONN	Silas Demary	87
CONN	Tarris Reed	87
CONN	Braylon Mullins	76
CONN	Eric Reibe	75
CONN	Alex Karaban	70
CONN	Solo Ball	59
MICH	Aday Mara	79
MICH	Morez Johnson	77
MICH	Elliot Cadeau	72
MICH	Yaxel Lendeborg	56
MICH	Nimari Burnett	51
MICH	Roddy Gayle	50

Season PF / G

Team	Player	PF	PF/G
CONN	Tarris Reed	103	2.9
CONN	Silas Demary	101	2.6
CONN	Braylon Mullins	93	2.8
CONN	Eric Reibe	85	2.1
CONN	Alex Karaban	81	2.0
MICH	Morez Johnson	94	2.4
MICH	Aday Mara	88	2.2

Team	Player	PF	PF/G
MICH	Elliot Cadeau	87	2.2
MICH	Yaxel Lendeborg	68	1.7
MICH	Roddy Gayle	62	1.6

Technical fouls

Team	Player	Techs
CONN	UConn	5
MICH	Aday Mara	3
MICH	Trey McKenney	2
CONN	Malachi Smith	2
MICH	Winters Grady	1
CONN	Silas Demary	1
MICH	Michigan	1
MICH	Morez Johnson	1

Timeouts & After-Timeout Offense

- Coach timeouts (excludes official/media) and first FG after timeout – 2026 REG.*

Timeout volume by half / clock window

Team	1 H TOs	2 H TOs	Early	Mid	Late
CONN	0	0	0	0	0
MICH	0	0	0	0	0

First shot after timeout (ATO)

Team	ATO FGA	FG%	3P%	PPP
CONN	86	47.7%	45.5%	1.13
MICH	75	50.7%	18.5%	1.08

ATO shot volume leaders

Team	Player	ATO FGA	FG%
CONN	Braylon Mullins	18	61.1%
CONN	Solo Ball	17	41.2%
MICH	Yaxel Lendeborg	15	53.3%
CONN	Silas Demary	13	46.2%
MICH	Aday Mara	10	70.0%
MICH	Morez Johnson	9	88.9%
CONN	Alex Karaban	9	44.4%
MICH	L.J. Cason	8	75.0%
CONN	Eric Reibe	8	50.0%
CONN	Tarris Reed	8	50.0%
MICH	Elliot Cadeau	7	42.9%
MICH	Trey McKenney	7	28.6%

6. MICH Offense

Michigan wins games with sheer offensive volume and efficiency – a 130.0 adjusted offensive rating (No. 3 in D1) and No. 1 overall SRS in the 2026 regular season (35 G). The Wolverines put up **87.3 PPG (No. 9/365)** on a 50.7 FG% (No. 6/365) and 36.8% from three (No. 32/365), and they play fast, generating 40.1 RPG (No. 18/365) and a +7.3 turnover-margin style that feeds their transition game.

- The shot diet runs through the paint:** the three bigs – Yaxel Lendeborg (SR, 51.5 FG%), Morez Johnson (SO, 62.3 FG%) and Aday Mara (JR, 66.8 FG%) – all convert at elite interior rates, while L.J. Cason (SO, 40.2 3P%), Trey McKenney (FR, 39.1%) and Nimari Burnett (SR, 37.5%) space the floor from deep.
- In the 2026 postseason (5 G) Michigan has been even more explosive, topping 90 points in five straight tournament games – including **101-80** over Howard and **95-62** over Tennessee – with a 16-point first-half cushion and a +18 margin over Arizona in the national semifinal.

Creation & Spacing

Elliot Cadeau (JR) is the engine – 5.8 APG (team high) at 10.5 PPG, the point guard who pushes tempo and feeds the three-big attack. **Yaxel Lendeborg (SR)** is the secondary creator, a 6-9 point-forward at **3.2 APG** who runs the offense and spaces the floor at **37.2% from three** while leading the team at **15.1 PPG**.

- Cadeau's spacing has opened up under Dusty May, with the point guard shooting a career-high **37.6% from deep** while setting up the lob-and-rim game for Mara and Johnson.
- Michigan ranks No. 5/365 in assists (18.6 APG) – the Wolverines assisted on 22 of 33 made field goals in the Final Four win over Arizona.

Pressure Points

Against a CONN defense that ranks No. 8 in adjusted DRtg (89.9) and No. 2 in blocks (6.0 BPG), Michigan's edge is efficiency in the half court plus the transition push:

- No. 3 offensive rating (130.0) and No. 6 FG% give the Wolverines the interior punch to attack a Huskies rim-protection unit – Mara and Johnson combine for **25.2 PPG** on high-percentage looks.
- No. 5 in assists (18.6 APG) – ball movement that forces CONN's **No. 8 DRtg** to guard the full floor, creating the open threes for McKenney, Burnett and Cason.

Personal Beat

The biggest focus is playing team basketball. We thrive off of that. – Yaxel Lendeborg · AP · Mar 29, 2026

Broadcast line: The Wolverines' No. 3-rated offense, powered by Cadeau's creation and a three-big paint attack, is the most efficient unit CONN's top-10 defense has faced all postseason – the matchup of strength against strength in the paint decides the title.

7. MICH Defense

Defensive Identity

Michigan finished the 2025-26 regular season as the top defensive team in the country by efficiency – a #1 D1 Adj DRtg of 85.3 and the nation's best net rating (44.6) on the strength of a #3-ranked offense feeding a wall at the rim.

- **Scheme-free stop rate:** The Wolverines held opponents to 38.2 FG% and 30.4 3P% across the 35-game regular season, bottling up both the paint and the arc without heavy pressure.
- **No gambling:** MICH ranks near the bottom of D1 in steals (5.6 SPG, #302/365) – they don't chase runouts or reach; they contest shots and clean the glass (40.1 RPG, #18/365).
- **Transition posture:** With the lowest steal rate in the top tier, the Wolverines rarely leak transition runouts from turnovers; their transition defense is positional, anchored by a frontcourt that gets back and walls the rim rather than pressing for live-ball thefts.

Anchors

The rim protection is the identity, and it's driven by a twin-tower frontcourt that ranks #2 in D1 in blocked shots (6.0 BPG).

- **Aday Mara (JR, C):** The 7-foot-plus anchor contests everything at the rim while shooting a team-best 66.8 FG% and pulling 6.8 RPG in 23.4 MPG.
- **Morez Johnson (SO, F):** The rim-running complement shot 62.3 FG% with 7.3 RPG (team high), giving MICH a second shot-blocking presence that lets the guards play up without help-doubt.
- **Yaxel Lendeborg (SR, F):** The #3 ORtg offensive engine (130.0, #3/365) also chips 6.8 RPG and anchors the back line when Mara or Johnson rests, so the protection never rotates out.

MICH Defense (2026 REG, 35 G)	Value	D1 Rank
Adj DRtg	85.3	#1/365
Opp FG%	38.2	–
Opp 3P%	30.4	–
Blocks/G	6.0	#2/365

What They Allow

The numbers show a defense that gives up the least efficient shots in the country – but it does concede free throws and doesn't force many turnovers, so possessions are long and must be defended cleanly.

- **The printed leak:** MICH allows 74.1 FT% at the line and ranks #203 in its own turnover rate (11.7 TO/G) – the cost of playing conservative, position-based D is that opponents get more half-court possessions, not easy ones.
- **Opponent 3P% 30.4:** This is the matchup trap for CONN, which shot just 34.4 3P% (#157/365) in the regular season – the Huskies' perimeter doesn't profile as the unit to beat this defense from deep.
- **Paint battle:** CONN's offense runs through Tarris Reed (SR, 60.7 FG%, 9.0 RPG) and Eric Reibe (FR, 65.8 FG%) inside – exactly the area where MICH's #1 DRtg and #2 block rate are strongest. CONN's interior strength collides with Michigan's best attribute.

Broadcast line: The best defense in the country – #1 Adj DRtg, 85.3 – sends CONN's paint-first attack straight into its own strength, a rim wall led by Mara and Johnson that blocks more shots than anyone in Division I. – Broadcast

8. MICH Clutch & Late Clock

Michigan is a dominant 40-minute team but a fragile one in the decisive five minutes – the gap between the two is the night's biggest late-clock storyline.

- **Clutch scoring is the weak spot:** in 2026 regular-season clutch windows (2nd half, ≤5:00 left, score within 5), Michigan shot just 34.7% on 72 field-goal attempts and 32.1% from three, posting 0.82 PPP.
- **That efficiency disconnect is stark:** Michigan owns the #1 adjusted efficiency margin in the country (44.6 net) with the #3 offense (130.0 ORtg) and #1 defense (85.3 DRtg), yet its clutch PPP is well below its season-long rate – the ball slows and the rim tightens late.
- **The ball goes to the seniors late:** Yaxel Lendeborg (SR) and Aday Mara (JR) are the printed late-clock anchors, with Lendeborg drawing the most high-leverage touches among Wolverines.

Closing Habits

The ATO game is the one place Michigan's late-clock execution actually matches its season profile.

- **ATO first-shot efficiency is elite:** after coach timeouts, Michigan converts 50.7% of first looks at 1.08 PPP – but the 18.5% mark from three on those sets is the glaring red flag against a CONN defense ranked #8 nationally.
- **The printed go-to set pieces:** Morez Johnson (SO) is the reliable finisher at 88.9% on ATO attempts, L.J. Cason (SO) 75.0%, and Aday Mara 70.0% – the interior is where Michigan wants its post-timeout looks, not the perimeter.
- **Foul-trouble risk shapes the finish:** Aday Mara (JR) is Michigan's early-foul leader (24 first-half fouls) and its most foul-prone rotation regular (88 PF, 2.2/G) with a team-high 3 technicals – the margin for error with him on the floor in crunch time is thin. Morez Johnson (SO) is close behind at 2.4 PF/G.

Live Watch

Watch Michigan's clutch field-goal percentage – it's been the single most reliable tell for whether this offense is clicking or stalling late.

- Michigan shot 34.7% from the field in clutch windows all regular season against a top-10 defense; if that number stays south of 40% midway through the second half, CONN's rim protection is winning the closing minutes.

- Conversely, the tell for a Michigan late surge is post-timeout execution – 1.08 PPP on ATO first shots means a made set play out of a timeout usually signals the offense found its gear.

The No. 1 team in the country is a sub-1.00 clutch offense – how Michigan's late-clock ball movement survives CONN's top-10 defense decides the finish. – Broadcast line

9. MICH Coaching & ATO

Sideline Identity

- Head coach: Dusty May runs the sideline for this club – verified as Michigan's head coach for the 2025-26 national championship season (Sports-Reference 2025-26 roster page lists "Coach: Dusty May"). He left for the NBA's Dallas Mavericks the following June; defensive coordinator Mike Boynton Jr. was later promoted to succeed him, so the scheme on the floor in Indianapolis is May's.
- Scheme lean:** The frontcourt is the identity. Morez Johnson Jr. (No. 9), Yaxel Lendeborg (No. 11) and Aday Mara (No. 12) all went in the 2026 lottery – a trio of bigs that anchors both ends, with Boynton's defense ranking No. 1 nationally in Ken Pom adjusted defensive efficiency for 2025-26.
- Rotation feel:** May leans on that big rotation plus guards Elliot Cadeau and L.J. Cason to steer possessions; Mara (79 fouls, 3 techs on the season) is the emotional barometer up front.

Timeout & Foul Timing

- ATO efficiency is a strength: Michigan's first shot after a coach timeout converts at 50.7% FG for 1.08 PPP on 75 ATO looks in the 2026 regular season – a productive out-of-huddle offense.
- Early-half whistle risk is real:** Mara (24) and Cadeau (22) are the club's most frequent early first-half foulers, meaning May's big-heavy lineups can flirt with foul trouble in the opening minutes.

MICH early-1H foulers (2026 REG)	Fouls
Aday Mara	24
Elliot Cadeau	22
Morez Johnson	18
Yaxel Lendeborg	14
Roddy Gayle	13

- Season foul volume: Mara (79), Johnson (77) and Cadeau (72) lead the team in total fouls; Mara also carries a team-high 3 technicals, so his temperament is a live subplot in a one-game setting.

Adjustment Edge

- ATO design funnels to the paint, not the arc: Michigan shoots just 18.5% from three on its first post-timeout shot but 50.7% overall – the huddle art is getting the ball to the bigs, and the efficiency backs it up: Lendeborg 53.3% on 15 ATO looks, Mara 70.0% on 10, Johnson 88.9% on 9.
- Defense travels:** the No. 1 national adjusted defensive efficiency that Boynton engineered is the anchor May can lean on when the game tightens, even if the offense grinds.

May's staff wins the huddle – the ATO offense runs through Lendeborg, Mara and Johnson at 50%+ efficiency while the No. 1-rated defense keeps a whistle-prone frontcourt from bleeding the game away. – Broadcast line

10. Unit-by-Unit Comparison & Takeaways

Unit Edges At A Glance

Unit	CONN	MICH	Edge
Offense	76.6 PPG (#155), 18.1 APG (#11)	87.3 PPG (#9), 50.7 FG% (#6), 130.0 Adj ORtg (#3)	MICH
Defense	65.2 opp PPG (#10), 89.9 Adj DRtg (#8)	85.3 Adj DRtg (#1), 38.2 opp FG%, 6.0 BPG (#2)	MICH
Clutch	1.00 PPP, 43.8 FG% (clutch window)	0.82 PPP, 34.7 FG% (clutch window)	CONN
Coaching	ATO 1.13 PPP, 45.5% 3P on first shot	ATO 1.08 PPP, 50.7 FG% (paint-fed)	CONN

Where CONN Wins

- Clutch halfcourt: UConn closes at 1.00 PPP with 43.8% shooting in the final-five, within-five window – a ~0.18 PPP edge over Michigan's 0.82, and the sharper script in a one-possession title game.
- After-timeout threes:** CONN's first shot out of a timeout falls at 1.13 PPP with a 45.5% three-point clip, versus MICH's 18.5% from deep on ATO sets – the huddle perimeter is the Huskies' edge.
- Discipline on defense:** CONN's stay-in-front scheme (89.9 Adj DRtg, #8) holds opponents to 30.2% from three, blunting the exact perimeter looks Michigan's ATO game struggles to hit.

Where MICH Wins

- Sheer scoring volume: 87.3 PPG (#9) on 50.7% from the field (#6) with a 130.0 Adj ORtg (#3) – the most efficient offense in the country feeding a 40-minute game that CONN's 76.6 PPG attack cannot match possession-for-possession.
- Interior force:** Lendeborg, Johnson (62.3 FG%) and Mara (66.8 FG%) all finish above 60% inside with a 6.0 BPG (#2) rim wall – the biggest paint workload UConn's #8 defense has faced all year.
- 1-rated defense: 85.3 Adj DRtg and 38.2% opponent shooting mean CONN's methodical, paint-first offense (34.4 3P%, #157) faces the toughest half-court wall in D1.

Swing Units

- Paint vs paint wall: MICH's three-big interior (Lendeborg 15.1 PPG, Mara 66.8 FG%) against CONN's Reed-Reibe rim protection (5.0 BPG, #15). If UConn holds the bigs under their season clips, the 87.3 PPG machine stalls; if MICH converts inside at 60%+, CONN's low-volume offense can't keep pace.
- Clutch execution in the final five:** CONN's 1.00 clutch PPP vs MICH's 0.82. Watch whether Michigan's offense (34.7% clutch FG all regular season) finds its gear or whether UConn's ATO packages (1.13 PPP) salt away a tight finish.

Takeaways

- Best-two-defenses collision: MICH's #1 and CONN's #8 adjusted defenses meet – neither offense will get clean half-court looks, and free-throw volume (MICH allows 74.1 FT%, CONN's Reed/Demary foul at 2.9/2.6 per game) could decide the margin.
- MICH dominates 40 minutes, CONN owns the last five: the Wolverines' 0.82 clutch PPP is the single most fragile number on a 37-3 club.
- Foul trouble is live on both sides:** Mara (24 early-1H fouls, 3 techs) and Reed/Demary (87 season fouls each) are the whistle risks that reshape both finishing units.
- MICH's ATO leans paint, CONN's leans perimeter:** May's sets funnel to Johnson (88.9% ATO), Mara (70.0%) and Cason (75.0%); Hurley's to Mullins (61.1%) and Ball (41.2%) from the arc.
- CONN's 2H pop is a sample-size note, not a trend:** a +11.0 second-half swing printed on just two games – flag it, don't bank on it.
- Neutral-site stakes:** Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis – the #1 seed vs the #2 seed, 37-3 against 34-6, the two best defenses in America playing for the title. **Broadcast line:** Michigan is the best team in the country for 40 minutes, but UConn is the sharper one in the final five – the title comes down to whether MICH's 0.82 clutch PPP or UConn's 1.00 closing script shows up in Indianapolis.

Efficiency Ratings (SRS)

- Sports-Reference-style efficiency ratings (not Ken Pom).*

Team	SRS Rank	Adj ORtg	ORtg Rk	Adj DRtg	DRtg Rk	Adj NRtg	SRS
CONN	#10/365	123.2	#26/365	89.9	#8/365	33.2	23.4
MICH	#1/365	130.0	#3/365	85.3	#1/365	44.6	32.9

11. Alex Karaban / Braylon Mullins / Silas Demary (CONN Starters)

Alex Karaban – veteran three-level scorer

The senior forward is UConn's most experienced and versatile offensive piece – the 34.2-minute anchor who carried the Huskies through the early rounds before the volume tailed off. His season line (2026 REG):

Season Line & Ranks (2026 REG)

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%
40	34.2	13.2	5.3	2.4	46.4	37.4

The heaviest minutes load on the roster belongs to the senior wing – nobody else on UConn plays more than 28.4 a night. He's the one starter who stretches the floor at 37.4% from three while also handling 5.3 RPG, which is why his scoring swings matter more than anyone's against a No. 1-rated defense.

Form & Streaks

- Tournament surge, then a cold snap: over the first two postseason games Karaban exploded for 22 vs Furman (9-16 FG, 4-9 from three) and 27 vs UCLA (9-16, 4-8) – then went 5 points vs Duke and 9 vs Illinois, combining to shoot 3-for-18 from the floor and 2-for-13 from deep across the Elite Eight and Final Four.
- Season-long volume was steady but spiky:** he hit 23 points twice in league play (8-11 FG with 5-6 from three at Seton Hall on 2/28; 8-18, 5-9 at Providence on 1/07) and bottomed out at 2 points twice – 0-for-6 with 0-for-5 from three at Marquette (3/07) and 1-for-6 at Creighton (2/18).
- The middle window tells the story:** between the two 23-point nights and the two 2-point duds, the senior's ceiling and floor sit farther apart than any starter's – 16.0 PPG over the five tourney games, but nearly half of that (27) came in a single game.

Role & Shot

- The designated stretch wing: at 37.4% from three on the season he's the primary floor-spacer of the starting five, and his volume runs heavy from beyond the arc – 5 or more three-point attempts in 10 of his last 16 games.
- A secondary ATO set piece:** 9 first-shot-after-timeout looks at 44.4% puts him in UConn's four-man huddle rotation (behind Mullins' 18 and Ball's 17, tied with Reed's 8-9 range), but he's the shooting-oriented option among them.
- Three-level, not just deep:** the 46.4% field-goal clip and 5.3 RPG show he works inside the arc and on the glass, not just spotting up – the versatility that justifies 34.2 MPG.

Defense & Matchup

- Cleanest of the core rotation: Karaban's 2.0 PF/G is the lowest among UConn's regulars (Demary 2.6, Mullins 2.8, Reed 2.9) – the veteran who can stay on the floor through foul trouble that compresses the rest of the closing unit.
- Not an early whistle risk:** 17 early first-half fouls is mid-pack on his own team (Ball 29, Demary 22 lead), so Hurley doesn't have to protect him in the opening minutes.
- The cover collision:** as the nominal wing, he'll spend stretches matched against Michigan's perimeter shooters while UConn's bigs handle the Mara/Johnson/Lendeborg front line – a clean-floor assignment that leans on his discipline rather than rim protection.

Storylines

- The senior pillar of a title-stage program: Karaban is the veteran anchor of a UConn club playing in its third national championship game in four years – the returning core piece on the biggest stage in the sport.
- The 27-point UCLA night was his tournament signature: the second-round explosion (9-16 FG) is the ceiling this offense is chasing when its methodical half-court attack stalls against elite defenses.

What Matters Tonight

Karaban's postseason split is stark – 27 and 22 points in the first two wins, then 5 and 9 as the defense tightened – and tonight's opponent is the No. 1-rated defense in the country (85.3 Adj DRtg).

- His 37.4% three-point clip faces a Michigan team that held opponents to 30.4% from deep – the league-worst-shooting matchup on the board for the Huskies' best spacer.
- His clean 2.0 PF/G is a real edge in a game where three other starters (Reed, Mullins, Demary) all sit above 2.6 – he's the closing unit's most dependable presence.
- The 2-for-13 deep stretch over the last two games is the counterweight to a 10-of-17 run in the first two – which version appears vs the rim-wall frontcourt is the night's biggest individual variable.

Broadcast line: UConn's veteran scorer at 13.2 PPG with a 27-point tournament ceiling – which Karaban shows up against the No. 1 defense in the country is the single biggest individual swing of the night. – Broadcast line

Braylon Mullins – freshman closer

The first-year wing is UConn's designated set-play shooter and the team's top out-of-timeout target – a freshman carrying 28 minutes a night on the championship stage. His season line (2026 REG):

Season Line & Ranks (2026 REG)

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%
33	28.2	12.0	3.5	1.4	42.1	33.5

A freshman averaging double figures as a starter is the quiet headline of this lineup – Mullins pairs that scoring with the team's most-used huddle role. When UConn calls a set after a timeout, he's the first name on the whiteboard.

Form & Streaks

- Tournament steady, not spectacular: 12.4 PPG across the five postseason games, but the three-point line has been volatile – he opened 0-for-8 from deep vs Furman, then hit 4-of-7 vs Illinois in the Final Four semifinal.
- The semifinal was his best night:** 15 points on 5-14 shooting with 4-7 from three and 0 turnovers in 30 minutes against Illinois – the young wing rising as the stakes rose.
- Big regular-season spikes:** 24 points at Providence (1/07) on 8-14 FG with 6-10 from three, plus 17-point games vs Kansas and Xavier – the ceiling is there even if the base rate is 12.0.

Role & Shot

- UConn's ATO closer: a team-leading 18 first-shot-after-timeout looks at 61.1% – no one else on the roster has more than 17, and the freshman converts them at a rate that outruns every rotation regular.
- Perimeter volume is the diet:** 33.5% from three on the season with heavy volume – his 3-point attempts regularly reach 7-10 per game, making him the highest-variance shooter in the starting five.
- The usage is real for a rookie:** 28.2 MPG as a first-year starter is a rare trust level, and he's the youngest piece of a veteran-laden closing lineup.

Defense & Matchup

- Foul exposure is his flaw: 93 personal fouls at 2.8 PF/G – the second-highest rate on the roster (behind Reed's 2.9) – and 76 season fouls, so his 28 minutes come with real whistle risk.
- Not an early-first-half problem:** unlike Ball (29) and Demary (22), Mullins stays off the early-foul leaderboard, so Hurley gets a full first-half runway from him before the accumulation sets in.
- The perimeter cover:** as the young wing he draws Michigan's guard/wing assignments, where his length on the ball is more valuable than his foul-prone closeouts.

Storylines

- A freshman on the biggest stage: Mullins is one of the youngest starters in a national title game, averaging double figures (12.0 PPG) while playing 28 minutes a night – the trust UConn's staff places in him is the story of the rotation.
- The huddle shooter:** leading the team in ATO volume (18) as a first-year player signals he's already the coaching staff's go-to in scripted late-clock situations – the kind of role that typically belongs to a senior.

What Matters Tonight

- Mullins is the X-factor on the mismatch axis:** UConn's ATO game converts at 1.13 PPP with 45.5% from three, and he's the primary trigger – Michigan's post-timeout three-point mark is just 18.5%.
- His 3-point variance is the night's volatility bet: 0-for-8 vs Furman and 4-of-7 vs Illinois are the two bookends of a freshman's tournament.
- The 2.8 PF/G is a real late-game constraint – if he picks up early whistles, the Huskies lose their best huddle scorer at exactly the moment they need him.
- Against a No. 1 defense (38.2% opponent FG%), Mullins' floor-spacing is one of the few ways UConn's paint-first attack creates clean looks.

Broadcast line: The freshman closer – UConn's top ATO target at 61.1% is the huddle answer when the offense stalls against the No. 1-rated defense in the country. – Broadcast line

Silas Demary – floor general

The junior point guard is UConn's point-of-attack engine and lead distributor – the playmaker who steers the #11-assist offense and applies the ball pressure that funnels Michigan's guards into UConn's rim wall. His season line (2026 REG):

Season Line & Ranks (2026 REG)

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%
39	28.4	10.1	4.5	5.9	44.6	38.5

Demary is UConn's best three-point shooter among the starting five (38.5%) and its clear lead distributor (5.9 APG) – the rare point guard who spaces the floor at an elite clip while running the offense. His postseason has been a pure facilitator turn.

Form & Streaks

- Scoring dipped, playmaking spiked in the tournament: across the four postseason games he's played (starting with UCLA), Demary scored 2, 2, 11 and 7 points – but handed out 4, 3, 2 and then 7 assists with 9 rebounds vs Illinois in the Final Four semifinal.
- The semifinal was his best all-around night:** 7 assists and 9 boards in 31 minutes against Illinois – his most complete game of the run even though the scoring wasn't there.
- Minutes tell the arc:** he opened the tournament at 22-23 minutes (UCLA, Michigan State), then jumped to 31 in the semifinal as Hurley leaned on him late.

Role & Shot

- The lead creator: 5.9 APG is the team's clear high mark, and UConn finished in the top tier nationally in assists – the offense is built around his distribution, not his scoring.
- Elite spacing from the point:** 38.5% from three is the best mark of the three starters and a real weapon – a point guard defenses can't sag off, which opens the interior for Reed and Reibe.
- The ATO distributor:** 13 first-shot-after-timeout looks at 46.2% puts him second among the huddle rotation – Mullins gets the volume, Demary gets the second look.

Defense & Matchup

- The point-of-attack piece: per the defensive identity, Demary applies ball pressure at the top that steers opposing guards into the Reed/Reibe rim wall rather than around it – and he’s a Naismith Defensive Player of the Year Watch-list name (with Reed).
- Foul trouble is the real risk:** a team-high 87 season fouls (tied with Reed), 101 personal fouls at 2.6 PF/G, and 22 early first-half fouls (second on the team) – he’s a closing-unit fixture who must stay clean in the last five.
- The temperament variable:** one technical on the season, the emotional barometer of a young floor general in a one-game title setting.

Storylines

- The junior engine of a title-stage backcourt: Demary is the point guard steering a UConn club into its third national championship game in four years, and his facilitator turn this March has redefined his role on the biggest stage.
- The DPOY-watch guard:** being listed alongside Reed on the Naismith Defensive Player of the Year watch list marks him as a two-way guard, not just a distributor.

What Matters Tonight

Demary's playmaking is trending up even as his scoring dips – 7 assists and 9 rebounds vs Illinois – which sets up the central question of whether his distribution can crack Michigan's No. 1-rated defense (85.3 Adj DRtg).

- His 38.5% three-point clip is the best of the starters and one of the few perimeter threats against a defense holding opponents to 30.4% from deep.
- The foul board is the closing-unit concern:** 87 season fouls and 22 early first-half fouls mean the Huskies' primary creator is also their most likely to sit – a direct threat to the late-game execution that's UConn's printed edge (1.00 clutch PPP vs MICH's 0.82).
- The head-to-head at the point is the night's engine matchup: Demary (5.9 APG) vs Elliot Cadeau (5.8 APG) – two primary creators, and the one who stays on the floor likely dictates the half-court tempo.

Broadcast line: The point-of-attack engine and lead distributor (5.9 APG) whose playmaking is climbing as his scoring dips – he sets the pace that decides how much pressure UConn's half-court attack can absorb against the No. 1 defense in the country. –

Broadcast line

12. Solomon Ball / Tarris Reed (CONN Starters)

Solomon Ball – Volume wing

Whose three-ball is peaking as the stakes rise

The junior guard is UConn's most prolific deep shooter by volume, and after a quiet opening to the tournament his perimeter shot has surged in the two games leading into the title game – a heater that lands on Michigan's perimeter defense at the worst possible time.

Season Line & Ranks (2026 REG)

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%	FT%	eFG%
39	28.4	12.8	3.0	1.5	39.2	30.0	85.2	48.4

The free-throw stroke (85.2%, 98-of-115) is the best on the roster and the cleanest number on his card, while his 30.0% deep mark on heavy volume leaves room – but the trendline of the last two tournament games is where the broadcast story lives.

Form & Streaks

- Ball scored in double figures in three of UConn's five 2026 postseason games entering the final – but the arc matters more than the count: after a 0-point, 13-minute dud vs UCLA (0-of-5), he put up 12 vs Michigan State and 13 vs Illinois.
- His three-pointer is the driver of the late surge – 2-of-5 from deep vs Michigan State, then 3-of-7 vs Illinois in the Final Four, after an 0-of-5 night from beyond the arc in the Elite Eight win over Duke.
- The regular-season base:** 12.8 PPG on 39.2% shooting, a volume wing (6.6 threes a game on 257 attempts) who also gets to the stripe – 98 free throws in 39 games.

Role & Shot

- Ball is UConn's highest-volume three-point shooter, launching 257 deep attempts – and his 85.2% free-throw clip (98-of-115) marks him as the club's most reliable scorer at the stripe when drives draw contact.
- He's a set-play closer in the half court:** second on the team in first-shot-after-timeout volume (17 ATO looks), an outlet for Dan Hurley's packages behind Braylon Mullins.
- The shot diet is perimeter-forward – moderate 48.4% eFG% reflecting a mark built on threes and free throws rather than interior finishing.

Defense & Matchup

- The swing risk is at the front end: Ball leads UConn in early first-half fouls (29) and carries 59 season fouls – a guard whose rotation minutes can compress fast if he picks up a quick pair.
- Tonight he's the point-of-attack counter to Michigan's Elliot Cadeau-led creation (5.8 APG), the guard expected to steer Michigan's drives into UConn's rim-protection wall rather than beat it at the source.

Storylines

- The junior guard has been UConn's most volatile tournament scorer – two quiet shooting nights (vs UCLA, vs Duke) bookended by two double-figure spikes – and enters the title game with the deeper shot cooking.

What Matters Tonight

Ball's three-ball is 5-of-12 from deep across his last two tournament games – the exact volume shooter Michigan's perimeter defense has to respect early.

- His foul profile (29 early first-half fouls, team lead) makes the opening minutes the tell: stay clean and the stroke stays in rhythm.
- The 85.2% free-throw clip is the mismatch – if Michigan has to foul a guard late, Ball is the least-favorable target on the roster.
- Set-play usage (17 ATO looks) keeps him in the closing script even when the shot isn't falling.

Broadcast line: Ball's three-ball is trending up at the perfect time, and his elite 85.2% free-throw stroke makes him UConn's safest late-game scorer – the whole night turns on whether he stays out of early foul trouble.

Tarris Reed – Senior rim anchor mid-monster tournament

The senior 5-man is UConn's defensive anchor and its interior finishing hub, and he's delivered three double-doubles in five 2026 postseason games – a run that makes him the single biggest frontcourt problem Michigan's high-efficiency interior has faced all season.

Season Line & Ranks (2026 REG)

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%	FT%	eFG%
35	27.3	14.7	9.0	2.3	60.7	0.0	61.7	60.7

Reed is a pure paint player – 60.7% from the floor, zero makes from three – whose value shows up on both ends: the team-leading 9.0 RPG and the rim protection that anchors UConn's #8 adjusted defense.

Form & Streaks

- Reed has been the best player in the tournament: 31 points and 27 rebounds vs Furman, 26 points and 9 boards with 4 blocks in the Elite Eight over Duke, and 17 and 11 in the Final Four vs Illinois – three double-doubles in five 2026 postseason games entering the title game.
- **He's the reason UConn's run has been paint-driven:** 20 vs Michigan State, 10 with 3 blocks vs UCLA – every game a frontcourt statement.
- **The regular-season base is elite too:** 14.7 PPG and 9.0 RPG on 60.7% shooting, a 5-spot who finishes around the rim and cleans the glass.

Role & Shot

- Reed is the lob and dump-off target that keeps UConn's half-court honest – 60.7% FG with essentially zero threes (0-of-4), a shot diet built entirely inside.
- He's a passing big at 2.3 APG, and his 8 first-shot-after-timeout looks (50.0%) make him a second-half outlet in Hurley's set plays.
- The free-throw line is the soft spot – 61.7% (95-of-154) – a number Michigan's frontcourt can attack when he catches inside.

Defense & Matchup

- Reed is on the Naismith Defensive Player of the Year Watch list, the interior anchor of UConn's top-10 defense (89.9 Adj DRtg, #8 in D1), and he's tallied 69 blocks on the season.
- **Tonight's collision is the game's core matchup:** Michigan's front line of Yaxel Lendeborg (15.1 PPG), Morez Johnson (62.3 FG%) and Aday Mara (66.8 FG%) all finish above 60% inside – the heaviest paint workload UConn's wall has faced.
- **The liability is fouls:** Reed's 2.9 PF/G is a team-high and he carries 17 early first-half fouls – staying on the floor in the closing unit is the swing stat.

Storylines

- The senior 5-man is UConn's defensive identity – a first-team-level rim protector (69 blocks) whose postseason (three double-doubles, a 31-27 game) has been the backbone of the run to the final.

What Matters Tonight

Reed's 60.7% interior finishing vs a Michigan front line that shoots 60%+ inside – whoever wins the paint wins the possession battle.

- **His 2.9 PF/G foul rate is the trap:** against a frontcourt that gets to the line, one cheap early pair could pull UConn's anchor off the floor.
- The 31-27 game vs Furman shows the ceiling – if Reed plays 30+ clean minutes, Michigan has no interior answer for him or for his rim protection.
- His 61.7% free-throw mark is the counter Michigan can exploit late if the game tightens and the whistle goes against him.

Broadcast line: Reed is UConn's anchor and its best tournament player – the title game hinges on whether he can dominate the paint against Michigan's 60%-plus interior finishers without fouling his way out of the closing five.

13. Aday Mara / Elliot Cadeau / Nimari Burnett (MICH Starters)

Three starters carry Michigan's interior-first identity into the title game: a 7-foot post anchor, the assist engine feeding him, and the senior spacer keeping CONN's rim wall honest. All regular-season rates below are 2026 regular season (35 G); postseason numbers are labeled separately.

Aday Mara – The 7-foot paint anchor on a hot hand

The junior center is Michigan's most efficient scorer and its biggest swing variable: a 66.8 FG% interior force whose fouling decides how much of the paint Michigan gets to keep against a CONN defense ranked #8 in adjusted DRtg.

Season Line & Ranks (2026 REG)

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%
40	23.4	12.1	6.8	2.4	66.8	30.0

Mara's numbers are a pure paint profile – elite field-goal efficiency, modest assist count, low three-point usage. The matchup for tonight: his 66.8 FG% is the most efficient individual scorer's rate on a floor where CONN owns the #8 adjusted DRtg.

Form & Streaks

- Postseason heater: 19, 16, 8, 11 and 26 points across the five tournament wins, the 26 coming in the Arizona semifinal on 11-of-16 shooting.
- The run peaked against elite frontcourts – after a quiet 8-point Alabama outing (4-of-8), he answered with 11 vs Tennessee and the semifinal explosion.
- 13 blocks in the 5 postseason games (2.6 BPG) while shooting 65.4% from the field over the run.

Role & Shot

- The post is the shot diet: team-best 66.8 FG% on 12.1 PPG with essentially all his damage at the rim – he took zero threes in four of five tournament games.
- **ATO finisher:** converts 70.0% of his first-shot looks after coach timeouts, the interior anchor of a Michigan set-play offense that shoots 50.7% overall out of huddles.

Defense & Matchup

- Rim-protection anchor in a frontcourt that ranks #2 in D1 in blocks (6.0 BPG); he's posted 13 blocks across the 5 postseason games.
- The collision is CONN's paint duo – Tarris Reed (14.7 PPG, 60.7 FG%) and Eric Reibe (65.8 FG%) – an efficient-big head-to-head where early whistles decide floor time.
- **Foul-trouble risk is the printed edge:** team-high 24 early first-half fouls and 88 PF (2.2/G) with a team-high 3 technicals – his temperament is a live subplot against the #8-rated defense.

Storylines

- A lottery-grade 7-footer (No. 12 in the 2026 draft class) whose ceiling is exactly the kind of championship-stage interior performance he just put up in the semifinal.

What Matters Tonight

Mara's 66.8 FG% vs a CONN defense ranked #8 in adjusted DRtg and #2 in blocks – the most efficient scorer on the floor meets the best rim protection he's seen.

- **First-half foul count:** 24 early-1H fouls all season means early whistles could bench him against Reed and Reibe.
- **ATO edge:** 70.0% first-shot conversion post-timeout makes him Michigan's best interior set-play finisher.
- **Broadcast line:** Michigan's title hopes ride the paint, and that starts with keeping Mara on the floor – his 66.8 FG% is the counterpunch to a CONN defense built to wall the rim.

Elliot Cadeau – The table-setting engine heating up from deep

The junior point guard is Michigan's assist engine – 5.8 APG – whose postseason assist spike and career-best 3-point shooting have unlocked the three-big attack.

Season Line & Ranks (2026 REG)

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%
40	27.3	10.5	2.7	5.8	41.1	37.6

Cadeau's value is creation, not volume: a team-leading assist rate paired with a career-best 37.6% from deep. For tonight, his ball movement is what feeds Mara and Morez Johnson against CONN's #8-rated defense.

Form & Streaks

- Assist surge in the tournament: 9, 7, 7, 10 and 10 dimes (8.6 APG) across the five postseason wins – up from 5.8 in the regular season, with double-digit assists in the Elite Eight and the Arizona semifinal.
- **Deep-ball uptick:** 11-of-27 (40.7%) from three in the postseason after a career-high 37.6% regular-season clip.
- **Scoring arc:** 5 points vs Howard to 17 vs Alabama, bookended by a 13-point, 4-steal semifinal.

Role & Shot

- The primary creator in a #5-ranked assist offense (18.6 APG): his 5.8 APG leads the team and feeds the lob-and-rim game for Mara and Johnson.
- Three-point volume is real – 40.7% in the postseason on 5.4 attempts/game – giving Michigan's bigs more room to operate inside.

Defense & Matchup

- The point-guard collision is CONN's Silas Demary (5.9 APG, 38.5 3P%) – both teams' floor generals rank among the nation's best distributors.
- **Early-whistle risk:** 22 early first-half fouls (team's second-most) and 72 season fouls (2.2/G) mean his on-ball aggression can put him in trouble early against a CONN defense ranked #10 in points allowed.
- Not a printed late-clock anchor – clutch touches go to Lendeborg and Mara – so his value in tight minutes is spacing and entry passes in a Michigan clutch offense that shot just 34.7% in 2026 REG.

Storylines

- The junior has emerged as the offensive engine of a national-title team, pairing the top assist rate with the best 3-point shooting of his career – the exact skill set that makes a big-heavy offense hard to load up on.

What Matters Tonight

Cadeau's 8.6 APG postseason pace vs a CONN defense ranked #8 in adjusted DRtg and #10 in points allowed – the assist output is the tell for whether the bigs eat.

- 40.7% postseason 3P% stretches a defense that ranks #8 in adjusted DRtg – sagging off Cadeau is getting punished.
- **Foul management:** 22 early-1H fouls all season – early whistles could pull the engine off the floor.
- **Broadcast line:** When Cadeau is on the ball and hitting from deep, Michigan's bigs get clean looks – his assist pace is the key to the #3-ranked offense humming.

Nimari Burnett – The senior floor-spacer

The fifth-year senior wing is Michigan's quiet perimeter stabilizer – a 37.5% shooter from three whose spacing matters more than his volume against a rim-walling defense.

Season Line & Ranks (2026 REG)

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%
40	19.8	8.2	2.8	1.2	45.3	37.5

Burnett is the efficiency wing of the rotation – modest minutes, clean shooting, low usage. For tonight, his perimeter gravity is what keeps CONN's #8-rated defense honest so Michigan's bigs can work the paint.

Form & Streaks

- Postseason consistency from deep: 8-of-20 (40.0%) from three across five tournament wins, opening with a 15-point game vs Howard (3-of-4 from three).
- **Volume is the limiter:** scoring spiked to 15 and 11 in the first two rounds but fell to 2 vs Alabama and 6 vs Arizona when attempts dried up (1-of-5 and 2-of-5 FG).

Role & Shot

- The spacer in a big-heavy rotation: 37.5% 3P% on 19.8 MPG keeps the floor open for Mara, Johnson and Lendeborg to work the paint.
- **Efficient secondary scorer:** 45.3 FG% alongside the 3-point mark – he picks his spots rather than hunting volume.

Defense & Matchup

- Part of the #1-rated adjusted defensive unit (85.3 DRtg), giving Michigan a reliable perimeter presence when the bigs rotate.
- The wing matchup is CONN's scoring trio – Alex Karaban (13.2 PPG), Solomon Ball (12.8) and Braylon Mullins (12.0) – the most balanced perimeter group Michigan has faced in the bracket.

Storylines

- One of the oldest rotation pieces (SR) on a young guard corps, a steadying veteran presence alongside freshmen Trey McKenney and Winters Grady.

What Matters Tonight

Burnett's 37.5% 3P% is the spacer that keeps CONN's #8-rated defense from collapsing on the bigs – his perimeter gravity is the quiet key.

- 40.0% postseason 3P% on low volume means each open look carries weight against a defense ranked #8 in adjusted DRtg.
- His efficiency (45.3 FG%) vs CONN's rim protection – the senior takes what the defense gives rather than forcing.
- **Broadcast line:** Michigan doesn't need Burnett to score big – it needs his 37.5% three-point gravity to keep CONN's rim wall honest.

14. Yaxel Lendeborg / Morez Johnson (MICH Starters)

The senior 6-9 point-forward is Michigan's leading scorer and secondary creator, and he just delivered the most explosive tournament run of any Wolverine – a stretch shooter who bends defenses built to stop the paint.

Season Line & Ranks:

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%
40	30.1	15.1	6.8	3.2	51.5	37.2

Lendeborg pairs a 51.5% field-goal clip with a 37.2% three-point mark – the one Michigan big who can drag a rim protector out of the paint – plus the 3.2 APG that make him the offense's primary initiator. That versatility is the single biggest individual stress on a UConn defense that ranks #8 in D1 in adjusted defensive rating (89.9).

Form & Streaks

- Averaged 19.0 points across the 2026 postseason's five games while shooting 56.0% from three on 25 attempts – well above his 37.2% season clip.
- Erupted for a tournament-best 27 points (10-19 FG, 3-9 from three) with 7 rebounds and 4 assists in the Elite Eight win over Tennessee.
- **Flirted with a triple-double in the Sweet 16:** 23 points, 12 rebounds, 7 assists against Alabama.
- The national semifinal was a minutes note, not a slump: 11 points in just 14 minutes vs Arizona on 3-4 shooting (3-3 from three) – efficient, but a light-touch night for the engine.

Role & Shot

- The leading scorer (15.1 PPG) and offense's secondary creator (3.2 APG) – he initiates from the high post rather than rim-running, giving Michigan a second playmaker alongside Elliot Cadeau.
- **The stretch dimension is the separator:** at 37.2% from three as a 6-9 forward, he's the Wolverine who pulls UConn's shot-blockers (5.0 BPG, #15 D1) off the rim.
- Carries the heaviest workload on the roster at 30.1 MPG – the offense keeps flowing through him even when the box score is quiet.

Defense & Matchup

- Anchors the back line of the nation's #1 adjusted defense (85.3 DRtg) and #2 blocks unit (6.0 BPG), chipping 6.8 RPG.
- **Foul discipline is his edge up front:** 1.7 PF/G (68 season fouls) is the cleanest rate among Michigan's bigs despite his 30.1 MPG, and his 14 early-first-half fouls are the fewest of any MICH starter on the board.
- Tonight's cover is the paint collision with Tarris Reed (60.7 FG%, 9.0 RPG) and the Eric Reibe (65.8 FG%) second wall – his stretch game is the counter that pulls Reed away from the rim UConn protects.

Storylines

- Draft profile: The senior is part of a lottery-grade frontcourt – with Morez Johnson and Aday Mara – projected to put multiple Michigan bigs in the 2026 NBA draft's first round.
- **Tournament heater:** His 56.0% postseason three-point clip on 25 attempts is the loudest single-shooter story on the title-game floor.

What Matters Tonight

His 37.2% season / 56.0% tournament three-point shooting vs a UConn defense that holds opponents to 30.2% from three – the cleanest-shot duel of the night.

- As Michigan's top scorer (15.1 PPG), he draws the toughest assignment from the #8 defense in D1.
- The 14-minute semifinal workload is the lone caveat in an otherwise dominant run.
- With Mara (3 techs) and Johnson (2.4 PF/G) carrying foul risk, Lendeborg's 1.7 PF/G is the reliability the front line leans on late.

Broadcast line: If Lendeborg's three-ball travels to Indianapolis, UConn's rim wall has no answer for the point-forward's full bag.

– Speaker

Morez Johnson – the rim-running finisher

The sophomore forward is Michigan's most efficient interior scorer and its rebounding leader – a lob-and-dump-off finisher who turns the twin-tower attack into easy points while anchoring the second rim wall.

Season Line & Ranks:

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%
40	25.1	13.1	7.3	1.2	62.3	34.3

Johnson scores almost entirely inside at a 62.3% field-goal clip while grabbing a team-high 7.3 RPG – the high-efficiency finisher whose production lets Dusty May play his big-heavy rotation without a scoring dip. That interior efficiency is the exact thing UConn's #8 adjusted defense (89.9) is built to eliminate.

Form & Streaks

- Put up 13.0 points and 7.6 rebounds per game across the 2026 postseason's five games on 56.8% shooting (21-37).
- **Opened the tournament with a perfect night:** 8-8 from the floor for 21 points and 10 rebounds in the first-round win over Howard.
- The volume dipped mid-run – 7 points on 3-10 shooting against Alabama – before stabilizing at 12 vs Tennessee and 10 with 7 boards and 4 assists vs Arizona.

Role & Shot

- The team's rebounding leader (7.3 RPG) and most efficient finisher – a rim-running forward who scores on lobs, dump-offs and putbacks rather than creating for himself.
- **The printed go-to set-piece finisher:** 88.9% on his first-shot-after-timeout looks (9 ATO attempts) – when Dusty May draws up post-timeout looks, the ball is headed to Johnson at the rim.
- **Efficient even in limited runway:** 25.1 MPG still produces 13.1 PPG, keeping the two-big look potent when Aday Mara rests.

Defense & Matchup

- The second shot-blocking presence in a #2 blocks unit (6.0 BPG) that anchors the nation's #1 adjusted defense (85.3 DRtg).
- The whistle is his biggest opponent:** 2.4 PF/G (94 season fouls, 18 early-first-half) with one technical – the rim-runner's minutes hinge on staying clean, especially early.
- Tonight's head-to-head is the interior duel with Tarris Reed (60.7 FG%, 9.0 RPG) – Johnson's 62.3% finishing against UConn's protected paint (5.0 BPG, #15 D1).

Storylines

- Draft profile: The sophomore joins Lendeborg and Mara in a lottery-grade Michigan frontcourt projected to send multiple bigs to the 2026 NBA draft.
- Efficiency identity:** His 62.3 FG% is the backbone of a Michigan offense that ranks #3 in D1 adjusted offensive rating (130.0).

What Matters Tonight

His 62.3% interior finishing vs UConn's #8 defense (89.9 Adj DRtg) that holds opponents to 40.3% from the floor – the paint-efficiency collision of the game.

- Foul risk (2.4 PF/G, 18 early-1H fouls) means the rim-runner's availability rides on a clean opening whistle.
- As the ATO finisher (88.9%), he's the primary target of Michigan's post-timeout sets.
- His 13.0 PPG / 7.6 RPG postseason run keeps the twin-tower attack humming into the title game.

Broadcast line: If Johnson converts inside, Michigan's protected-paint answer stays intact – if the whistle turns, the second rim wall thins out fast. – Speaker

15. CONN Bench / Second Unit

Jayden Ross – the postseason's floor-spacing riser

Junior wing who turned March into a breakout: his tournament minutes jumped past his regular-season run, and the 39.1% three-point clip is what keeps the second unit spaced against the best defense in the country.

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%	FT%	eFG%
38	17.4	4.6	2.5	0.8	50.4	39.1	69.2	60.7

His value is spacing: the 50.4% field-goal clip and 60.7% effective FG% make him an efficient, low-usage spacer whose open looks punish a Michigan defense that holds opponents to 30.4% from three.

Form & Streaks

- Postseason minutes spike:** Ross played 19-22 minutes in the tournament vs a 17.4 season average, with 11 points vs UCLA (2-3 from three) and 7 vs Illinois (2-2) in the semifinal.
- Not constant, but real:** he went scoreless on zero attempts in 21 minutes vs Duke, so the elevation is role-driven more than volume-driven.
- Late-regular-season pop:** 9 points (4-6 FG) vs Xavier and 8 vs Georgetown showed the scoring ceiling before the tournament run.

Role & Shot

- Pure spot-up wing:** 39.1% from three on a 50.4% overall clip – a catch-and-shoot specialist who rarely hunts his own offense.
- Active in limited run:** 30 steals and 15 blocks across 38 games – defensive activity is a real second-unit asset, not just shooting.

Defense & Matchup

- Active hands off the bench:** the 30 steals give CONN a deflection threat in a unit that otherwise ranks No. 160 nationally in steals (6.8 SPG).
- Matchup collision:** Michigan's No. 1-rated defense (85.3 Adj DRtg) suppresses exactly the open threes Ross is paid to hit – his gravity, not his volume, is the point tonight.

What Matters Tonight

His 39.1% deep threat vs Michigan's 30.4% opponent 3-point defense – the bench's best spacing weapon against the arc's toughest wall.

- Elevated 19-22-minute tournament run suggests he's a closing-rotation fixture, not just a sub.
- Neutral floor at Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis, where the bench unit's shooting edge could decide the gaps.

Broadcast line: Ross is the bench's quiet engine – the spacer whose gravity and March minutes spike make the second unit play bigger than its names.

Malachi Smith – the distributor

With the deep ball

Senior backup floor general who runs the second unit: 3.0 assists in under 16 minutes and an elite 44.7% from three make him both the playmaker and the bench's best outside threat.

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%	FT%	eFG%
40	15.9	3.6	1.5	3.0	38.0	44.7	53.2	46.1

The numbers say it plainly: 118 assists against 144 points – a distributor-first guard whose 44.7% three-point clip gives the bench a creator and a spacer in one.

Form & Streaks

- Postseason minutes spiked:** 32-33 minutes vs Furman and UCLA, then 17-20 vs Michigan State, Duke and Illinois – well above his 15.9 season average as the tournament rotation tightened.
- Tournament high:** 9 points (4-7 FG) in the Elite Eight win at Duke showed the scoring pop behind the passing.
- Discipline flag:** 2 technicals on the season, tied for the team lead – the second unit's emotional barometer in a one-game setting.

Role & Shot

- Distributor-first:** 3.0 APG in 15.9 MPG with 118 total assists – the backup point who steers possessions when Silas Demary sits.
- Elite deep threat:** 44.7% from three is the bench's best mark; the counterweight is a 53.2% free-throw clip if he gets to the line.

Defense & Matchup

- Passing-lane activity:** 30 steals in 40 games, active without gambling – fits CONN's stay-in-front scheme.

- **Matchup:** his backup-PG minutes run against Michigan's Elliot Cadeau-led backcourt, where ball security matters more than pressure given MICH's low-steal defense (5.6 SPG, No. 302).

What Matters Tonight

His 44.7% deep threat is the bench's sharpest answer to Michigan's No. 1-rated defense.

- Distributor role means ball security vs a Michigan defense that rarely forces turnovers – the Huskies keep control.
- Two technicals put discipline on the board for a senior in a tight title game.

Broadcast line: Smith is the bench's floor general – the passer whose 44.7% deep ball makes the second unit both organized and dangerous.

Eric Reibe – the freshman rim wall

Freshman center who gives CONN a second interior protector behind Tarris Reed: a 65.8% finisher and 29-block rim presence whose tournament minutes have thinned as the stakes rose.

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%	FT%	eFG%
40	13.8	5.9	3.3	0.5	65.8	30.8	52.1	67.1

His value is interior: 65.8% finishing and a 67.1% effective FG% are pure paint production – but 85 fouls (2.1 per game) cap how long the freshman can stay on the floor against Michigan's three-big attack.

Form & Streaks

- **Late-regular-season pop:** 9 points (3-3 FG) vs Xavier, 8 (4-5) vs Georgetown and 6 vs St. John's – scoring at his best clip entering the tournament.
- **Postseason minutes thinned:** 5-11 minutes (from 13.8) with quiet scoring (2, 0, 4, 0 through the semifinals) – the rotation tightened with the stakes.
- **Tournament high:** 4 points in 11 minutes vs UCLA was his best postseason output.

Role & Shot

- **Pure rim finisher:** 65.8 FG%, 67.1 eFG%, just 30.8% from three – the offense comes exclusively at the rim.
- **Reserve protector:** 29 blocks in 40 games keeps CONN's interior wall up when Reed sits.
- **Foul-prone:** 75 season fouls and 85 personal fouls (2.1/G) – a real cap on a big in a big role.

Defense & Matchup

- **Biggest test of his season:** Michigan's Yaxel Lendeborg (15.1 PPG), Morez Johnson (62.3 FG%) and Aday Mara (66.8 FG%) all finish above 60% inside – the paint collision that defines this game.
- **ATO target:** converts 50% of his 8 first-shot-after-timeout looks, a reliable huddle finisher.

What Matters Tonight

Rim protection vs Michigan's three-big attack – the reserve wall behind Reed against the deepest paint in D1.

- Foul risk (2.1 PF/G) vs Michigan's interior volume could shorten his already-thin tournament run.
- His 65.8% finishing matters mostly as the lob/dump-off target that keeps the defense honest.

Broadcast line: Reibe is the second rim wall – a 65.8% finisher whose foul count is the only thing between him and a longer title-game shift.

Jaylin Stewart – junior wing, tightened rotation

Junior forward who earned starter-level reserve minutes in the regular season (16.2 MPG) but saw his run shrink once the tournament tightened, with an early-foul tendency shaping his usage.

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%	FT%	eFG%
32	16.2	4.2	2.6	1.1	43.0	34.5	59.3	51.3

Stewart is the depth wing whose foul exposure and shrinking postseason minutes make him a situational piece rather than a rotation fixture.

Form & Streaks

- **Postseason minutes dropped:** 3-9 minutes per game (from a 16.2 season average) as the tournament rotation shortened.
- **Quiet March:** scoreless vs Duke, 4 vs Michigan State and 3 vs Illinois – the run mostly evaporated with the minutes.
- **Foul spike:** 17 early first-half fouls, tied for third-most on the team, shaped how and when he was used.

Role & Shot

- **Moderate spacer:** 34.5% from three on a 43.0% clip – capable, not featured, shooting.
- **Most-used reserve forward:** 16.2 MPG across 32 games made him the regular-season workhorse of the second-unit frontcourt.

Defense & Matchup

- **Whistle risk:** 17 early first-half fouls, tied with Karaban and Reed – a liability that shortens him against Michigan's interior volume.
- **Matchup:** his wing defense is depth insurance against Yaxel Lendeborg's point-forward touches.

What Matters Tonight

Foul discipline vs Michigan's paint attack – one bad early half ends an already-thin reserve role.

- His 34.5% three-point clip offers spacing against the No. 1 defense when he does play.
- Minutes likely hinge on foul trouble and matchups rather than a set rotation spot.

Broadcast line: Stewart is the depth wing – the junior whose 34.5% spacing and foul tendency make him a matchup piece, not a fixture, in the title game.

Dwayne Koroma – deep-bench senior frontcourt depth

Senior forward whose 2026 season has been cameo minutes behind the Reed-Reibe frontcourt – emergency depth who only factors if foul trouble or injury forces UConn's hand up front.

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	FT%	eFG%
17	5.5	1.4	0.9	0.2	56.3	54.5	56.3

Koroma's sample is small (17 games, 5.5 MPG) but efficient: a 56.3% rim-finisher whose offensive game stays entirely at the basket.

Form & Streaks

- **Cameo season:** 5.5 MPG across 17 games, with 1-minute stints vs Georgetown and UCLA in March.
- **Active in short bursts:** 7 steals across his 17 appearances – energy in limited windows.

Role & Shot

- **Rim-only finisher:** 56.3 FG% on a small sample, no threes attempted – the offense is exclusively at the rim.
- **Minimal volume:** 1.4 PPG on 5.5 MPG is the tail of the rotation, not a rotation piece.

Defense & Matchup

- **Third-string big:** the piece behind Reed and Reibe on the frontcourt depth chart.
- **Tonight's role:** would only enter against Michigan's twin towers in a foul-trouble or injury emergency.

What Matters Tonight

Frontcourt depth insurance if Reed or Reibe hits foul trouble against Michigan's three-big attack.

- A senior with 17 games of experience – depth, not a featured role.
- Minimal expected run in a one-game title setting.

Broadcast line: Koroma is the emergency big – efficient in cameos, and only on the floor tonight if the Huskies' frontcourt runs into trouble.

Alec Millender – end-of-bench senior guard

Senior guard at the back of the rotation who has logged spot cameos all season – emergency backcourt depth in a mop-up or foul-driven role.

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%	FT%	eFG%
18	3.4	0.6	0.3	0.4	36.4	14.3	66.7	40.9

Millender's numbers sit on a tiny sample – 14.3% from three across 18 games at 3.4 MPG is a note, not a trend – and he factors only in blowout or foul-driven situations.

Form & Streaks

- **Spot cameos:** 7 minutes vs Furman (2 points, 1-1 FG) was his tournament high; otherwise 1-2 minute stints.
- **Tail-of-rotation usage:** 18 games at 3.4 MPG defines the role.

Role & Shot

- **Small-sample deep ball:** 14.3% from three on minimal attempts – not a meaningful rate at this volume.
- **Low-usage guard:** 36.4 FG% overall and 0.4 APG reflect a ball-moving, mop-up role behind Demary and Smith.

Defense & Matchup

- **Emergency guard depth:** the piece behind Silas Demary and Malachi Smith in the backcourt.
- **Tonight's role:** unlikely to see meaningful run against Michigan's Cadeau-led backcourt.

What Matters Tonight

Backcourt insurance if Demary or Smith faces foul trouble or a blowout shifts the rotation.

- A senior guard in the final game of his collegiate season.
- Minimal expected run in a tight one-game title setting.

Broadcast line: Millender is the mop-up guard – emergency backcourt depth whose night hinges entirely on the game script.

16. MICH Bench / Second Unit

Trey McKenney – Freshman flamethrower off the bench

Michigan's sixth-man spark is a freshman who spaces the floor at **39.1% from three** and has caught fire as the tournament has progressed, leading this bench unit in scoring.

Season Line & Ranks (2026 REG)

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%
40	22.1	9.9	2.8	0.9	46.2	39.1

The freshman's deep efficiency is the bench's perimeter engine, and his postseason numbers suggest the stage isn't too big – he's the reserve most likely to crack double figures against a CONN defense ranked #8 nationally in adjusted DRTg.

Form & Streaks

- **Postseason surge:** 63 points across the five tournament games (12.6 ppg), reaching double figures in 4 of 5 – including a 17-point Sweet 16 and a 16-point Final Four.
- **Hot from deep in the run:** 11-for-21 (52.4%) on threes in the postseason, a sharp climb from his 39.1% regular-season mark – volume and efficiency rising together.
- **Biggest outputs at the biggest stakes:** 17 vs Alabama, then 16 vs Arizona, bookending his two largest tournament totals in the Sweet 16 and national semifinal.

Role & Shot

- **Top scorer of this unit:** 9.9 PPG in 22.1 MPG makes the freshman the highest-scoring reserve in Michigan's second-unit group.
- **Floor-spacing identity:** his 39.1% from three is one of Michigan's best marks among rotation regulars, keeping the paint open for the Lendeborg-Mara-Johnson interior trio.
- **ATO outlier:** just 28.6% FG on his 7 post-timeout first looks – the lowest printed ATO conversion among Michigan's volume huddle pieces, so the sets don't always find him.

What Matters Tonight

- **The perimeter threat:** a 52.4% postseason three-point mark makes McKenney the bench's biggest spacing weapon against a CONN defense built around top-10 rim protection.
- **Scoring pop off the pine:** the highest-scoring reserve (9.9 PPG) is the bench's most probable source of a double-digit night.
- **Temperament watch:** 2 regular-season technicals, tied for second-most on the team – an emotional freshman in a one-game title setting.
- **Broadcast line:** Michigan's perimeter punch off the bench runs through a freshman shooting 52.4% from three in the tournament – if McKenney's threes are falling, CONN can't sag off the reserves.

Roddy Gayle – Senior stabilizer taking a playoff leap

The veteran senior swingman has seen both his tournament minutes and his deep shooting jump – a trusted, foul-clean two-way wing off the bench.

Season Line & Ranks (2026 REG)

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%
39	21.1	7.3	3.3	1.3	46.3	31.8

The senior's value isn't a gaudy line – it's playoff growth: his minutes are climbing and he's shot the ball far better in the tournament than during the regular season, giving the second unit a steady hand.

Form & Streaks

- **Minutes climbing:** 23, 20, 27, 22, then a tournament-high 30 in the Arizona semifinal – the senior's runway keeps expanding as the stakes rise.
- **Deep-shooting jump:** 8-for-15 (53.3%) from three in the postseason vs 31.8% in the regular season – the biggest single form leap on the bench.
- **Production in spurts:** 14 and 16 points vs Howard and Alabama bookend a steadier 3, 8 and 9 through the middle rounds.

Role & Shot

- **Two-way reserve:** 21.1 MPG at 7.3 PPG, a 46.3% shooter who defends more than he hunts shots.
- **Cleanest foul rate on the bench:** 1.6 PF/G (62 fouls in 39 games) is the lowest printed mark among Michigan's rotation regulars, even though he ranks on the early first-half foul list (13).

Defense & Matchup

- **Foul-disciplined defender:** a 1.6 PF/G rate that keeps him on the floor while the frontcourt – Mara (2.2 PF/G, 3 techs) and Johnson (2.4) – flirts with whistle trouble.
- **No-gamble fit:** the senior slots into a scheme that ranks near the bottom of D1 in steals (5.6 SPG, #302/365) – he contests without reaching, matching the positional identity.

What Matters Tonight

- **Playoff efficiency:** 53.3% from three in the postseason makes him a live release valve against a top-8 defense.
- **Tournament trust:** 30 minutes in the Final Four shows the staff is comfortable with the senior on the floor in the biggest game.
- **Foul-clean floor time:** the lowest PF/G among bench regulars is valuable insurance in a game where Michigan's bigs carry whistle risk.
- **Broadcast line:** A senior who's taken a playoff leap in both minutes and shooting – Gayle gives the second unit a steady, foul-clean hand against CONN's pressure.

Will Tschetter – Senior stretch-four spacer

The senior frontcourt reserve earns his 13.7 minutes with floor-spacing work that doesn't show up in the box score, stretching defenses to clear the paint for Michigan's bigs.

Season Line & Ranks (2026 REG)

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%
40	13.7	3.5	1.9	0.6	37.6	34.5

Tschetter's job is occupying the corner at 34.5% from three on a low-usage role – the quietest offensive line among the printed bench regulars, but a spacer who keeps rim protectors honest.

Role & Shot

- **Stretch-four spacer:** 34.5% from three on a 13.7 MPG role – his minutes exist to pull a defender away from the Mara-Johnson-Lendeborg interior.
- **Limited scoring punch:** 3.5 PPG on a 37.6 FG% – the least productive offensive line among Michigan's bench regulars, by design rather than usage.

Form & Streaks

- **Postseason fade after the opener:** 6 points and 20 minutes vs Howard, then 2 combined points over the next four games as his minutes slid to 7-16.
- **Rebounding uptick mid-run:** 5 boards vs Tennessee and 3 vs Arizona in 16-minute turns – his activity is steadier than his scoring.

What Matters Tonight

- **Spacing over scoring:** the 34.5% deep mark is the floor-stretch that keeps CONN's rim protectors from fully collapsing, even when he doesn't fill the box score.
- **Minutes volatility:** a 6-minute night vs Alabama shows the staff can shorten the bench; the Arizona semifinal returned him to 16.
- **Broadcast line:** A senior whose value is the space he creates – Tschetter won't stuff the stat sheet but stretches a CONN defense built to protect the rim.

L.J. Cason – Sophomore sniper waiting on minutes

Michigan's most efficient bench scorer owns the unit's best shooting marks – but the sophomore hasn't logged tournament minutes, making him the bench's best-kept weapon if his number is called.

Season Line & Ranks (2026 REG)

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%
28	18.6	8.4	1.9	2.4	50.3	40.2

Cason's 40.2% from three is the best printed perimeter mark among Michigan's regulars, and his 50.3 FG% makes him the most efficient scorer in this bench unit – a spacing threat with no tournament tape this run.

Role & Shot

- **Elite-efficiency reserve:** 8.4 PPG on 50.3 FG% and a team-best **40.2%** from three – the cleanest shooting profile on the bench.
- **ATO weapon:** 75.0% FG on his 8 post-timeout first looks, Michigan's No. 2 printed huddle finisher behind Johnson's 88.9% – a set-piece option.
- **Playmaking touch:** 2.4 APG in 18.6 MPG, the best assist rate of the bench guards.

Form & Streaks

- **No postseason minutes:** Cason played 28 regular-season games but doesn't appear in the box-score record for the five tournament games through the semifinal – a bench scorer who has been watching this run rather than contributing to it.

What Matters Tonight

- **The efficiency he'd add:** 40.2% from three and 50.3 FG% are the bench's best printed marks – if he sees the floor, he's a spacing threat CONN must respect.
- **The ATO trust:** a 75.0% mark on post-timeout first looks is Michigan's printed No. 2 huddle finisher – a set-piece weapon unused through this tournament.
- **Broadcast line:** A sophomore sniper who hasn't logged tournament minutes – Cason's 40.2% three-point efficiency is the bench's best kept secret if his number gets called.

Oscar Goodman – Freshman depth forward

A deep-bench freshman whose 5.3 minutes per game have come almost entirely in blowout windows – production that's a rounding error on a title-game scout.

Season Line & Ranks (2026 REG)

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%
16	5.3	1.4	1.2	0.4	41.7	0.0

Goodman's 41.7 FG% is entirely inside work – a 0.0% printed mark from three – on a sample too small to carry trend weight.

Role & Shot

- **Emergency minutes only:** 5.3 MPG across 16 appearances and 1.4 PPG – a deep-bench freshman whose production is minimal on this roster.
- **No perimeter game:** 0.0% from three on the regular-season line, with all of his scoring inside.

Form & Streaks

- **Postseason cameos:** 1–3 minutes in four of the five tournament games (3 points vs Saint Louis, 2 vs Tennessee) – spot duty in margin-heavy wins only.

What Matters Tonight

- **Blowout-only runway:** his tournament minutes (1–3 MPG) have all come in Michigan's lopsided wins – a mop-up piece rather than a rotation factor.
- **Broadcast line:** A freshman depth forward whose 5.3 MPG is emergency-only – Goodman's cameos have been 1–3-minute blowout stints, minimal in a one-possession title game.

Malick Kordel – Freshman rim-depth insurance

The freshman big is the fourth frontcourt option behind a lottery-caliber wall – efficient in rare minutes, but strictly insurance rather than a rotation factor.

Season Line & Ranks (2026 REG)

GP	MPG	PTS	REB	AST	FG%	3P%
14	4.1	1.2	1.5	0.1	57.1	0.0

Kordel converts at 57.1% FG on a tiny sample, but his 4.1 MPG and 0.0% from three define a pure paint depth piece behind Lendeborg, Johnson and Mara.

Role & Shot

- **Efficient-if-rare interior depth:** 57.1% FG on a 1.2 PPG, 4.1 MPG sample – a freshman big behind Michigan's three-lottery frontcourt wall.
- **Pure paint profile:** 0.0% from three with all of his scoring inside – a fourth big, not a spacer.

Form & Streaks

- **Postseason spot duty:** 1–2 minutes in three tournament games (2 points vs Howard) – mop-up minutes in the margins of blowouts.

What Matters Tonight

- **Frontcourt insurance:** at 4.1 MPG he's the emergency size behind a trio of lottery-caliber bigs – a depth answer if foul trouble (Mara 79, Johnson 77 on the season) hits the wall.
- **Broadcast line:** A freshman big logging mop-up minutes behind three lottery frontcourt talents – Kordel is insurance, not a factor, unless foul trouble strikes the wall.

17. Matchup Collisions

Tempo & Efficiency Collision

- The efficiency gap is the whole game: Michigan closes the regular season as the #1 adjusted net-rating team in D1 (44.6) – a #1 defense (85.3 Adj DRtg) and #3 offense (130.0 Adj ORtg) – while CONN sits at #10 (33.2 net) on a #8 defense (89.9) and a #26 offense (123.2). The Wolverines out-efficiency the Huskies on both ends of the floor by the printed margins.

- **MICH wants a track meet, CONN wants a slugfest:** Michigan's 87.3 PPG (#9/365) and #5 assist rate (18.6 APG) feed a transition game that's topped 90 points in five straight postseason games; CONN's deliberate 76.6 PPG (#155) and stay-in-front scheme are built to shrink possessions and win at the rim.
- **The collision is pace vs paint control:** the #8 CONN defense (89.9) has faced few front lines like this – MICH's three bigs all finish above 60% inside – so the deciding number is whether UConn's wall holds long enough to drag the tempo down.

Half Splits

- Both clubs are second-half teams, on wildly different samples: CONN's printed +11.0 second-half scoring swing (32.0 → 43.0) rests on just 2 games – a note, not a trend – while Michigan's +1.8 swing (41.2 → 43.0) spans 25 games and holds steady.
- **The first-half edge belongs to MICH:** the Wolverines open at 41.2 first-half PPG and hold opponents to 34.3 before the break, meaning CONN is likely chasing from behind against a team that builds early cushions (16-point semifinal halftime lead).
- CONN's 2H pop is the risk flag, not a bankable trend: the printed swing is real but the sample is tiny; the only first-half certainty is that MICH typically has the lead entering the break.

Clutch Window

- The printed late-clock edge is UConn's: in 2026 regular-season clutch windows (2nd half, ≤5:00, within 5), CONN converts 43.8% FG / 1.00 PPP on 48 FGA, while Michigan shoots just 34.7% FG / 0.82 PPP on 72 FGA – a roughly 0.18 PPP edge for the Huskies in the decisive five minutes.
- Michigan's clutch-regular season disconnect is the night's biggest late storyline: the #1 net-rating team in America stalls to 0.82 PPP when the rim tightens – the ball slows and the senior-led halfcourt (Lendeborg, Mara) can't match its 40-minute production.
- **CONN's set-play closers match its profile:** out-of-timeout first shots go at 47.7% FG / 1.13 PPP with a 45.5% three-point clip, funneling late touches to Braylon Mullins (18 ATO looks, 61.1%) and Solo Ball (17, 41.2%).

Shot Diet vs Defense

- Perimeter collision favors MICH's floor-spacers but CONN's wall: Michigan shoots 36.8% from three (#32) – McKenney (39.1%), Cason (40.2%), Burnett (37.5%) – against a CONN defense holding opponents to 30.2% from deep.
- **The interior is where both defenses live:** CONN allows 40.3% FG overall with a #15 block rate (5.0/G); Michigan counters with a 50.7% FG (#6/365) attack and the nation's #2 block rate (6.0/G) – the paint is contested on every possession at both ends.
- **MICH's offense out-shoots CONN's across the board:** 50.7% vs 47.2% FG and 36.8% vs 34.4% 3P, so CONN's margin for error comes from the defensive end, not from matching firepower.

Rebounding & Possession

- The glass is Michigan's: the Wolverines pull 40.1 RPG (#18/365) against CONN's 36.6 (#111) – a clear possession edge that feeds the transition attack and limits UConn's second-chance looks.
- **Turnover edge is small and CONN's:** CONN turns it over 10.9 times/game (#123) to MICH's 11.7 (#203) – a modest advantage that keeps the Huskies in a game where they'll be out-possessed elsewhere.
- Neither team gambles for steals, and that helps CONN's game plan: MICH's 5.6 SPG (#302) and CONN's 6.8 (#160) are both bottom-half marks – few live-ball turnovers, long half-court possessions, and a defensive chess match rather than a runout war.

Live Watch Indicators

- Watch MICH's clutch FG%: if it stays south of 40% midway through the second half, CONN's rim protection is winning the closing minutes – if it climbs past it, the Wolverines found their gear.
- **Watch the ATO three-point line:** CONN converts post-timeout first shots at 45.5% from three vs Michigan's 18.5% – a made UConn set play late usually signals its offense is humming.
- **Watch Aday Mara's foul count:** the Michigan center leads his team in early first-half fouls (24) and owns a team-high 3 technicals – his thin margin for error in crunch time shapes the closing five.
- **Watch Tarris Reed and Silas Demary's whistles:** both CONN closers carry 87 season fouls (2.9 and 2.6 PF/G); if either sits in the last five, the interior anchor and primary creator thin out.
- **Watch the offensive glass:** MICH's 40.1 RPG edge (#18 vs #111) is the tell for whether CONN can survive possessions or gets buried by second chances and transition runouts. **Broadcast line:** The tempo and efficiency collision is the whole night – Michigan's #1 net-rating, pace-pushing, 90-point attack against a #8 defense built to slow it – and if the game reaches the final five minutes close, the printed clutch edge (1.00 vs 0.82 PPP) belongs to UConn.

Clutch Profile (Last 5:00, within 5)

- **Clutch window:** 2 H, ≤5:00 left, score within 5 – 2026 REG.*

Team	FGA	FG%	3P%	PPP
CONN	48	43.8%	33.3%	1.00
MICH	72	34.7%	32.1%	0.82

18. Lineups & Rotations

CONN Rotation Map

- Projected five: Silas Demary (JR) and Solomon Ball (JR) in the backcourt, freshman Braylon Mullins on the wing, with seniors Alex Karaban (34.2 MPG, team high) and Tarris Reed (14.7 PPG, 9.0 RPG) up front – a 4-guard-around-one-big alignment that leans on Reed as the lone true interior starter.
- **Point-of-attack engine:** Demary runs the show at 5.9 APG while Ball (28.4 MPG) and Mullins (28.2 MPG) form the perimeter scoring trio around him; all three are closing-unit fixtures and ATO volume leaders.
- **Frontcourt depth behind Reed:** freshman Eric Reibe (13.8 MPG, 65.8 FG%) is the first big off the bench and never lets the rim protection drop, while senior Malachi Smith (15.9 MPG, 44.7 3P%) and junior Jayden Ross (17.4 MPG, 39.1 3P%) are the rotation's shooting specialists.
- **Minutes windows the GS support:** Karaban plays the full game; Demary and Ball hover around 28-30 MPG; Mullins is a 28-minute starter who sits in short early stretches; Reibe, Ross, Smith and Jaylin Stewart (16.2 MPG) split the balance behind the six-man core.

MICH Rotation Map

- Projected five: Elliot Cadeau (JR) at the point with freshman Trey McKenney and senior Nimari Burnett on the wings, and the twin-tower frontcourt of Yaxel Lendeborg (SR, 15.1 PPG, 30.1 MPG) and Morez Johnson (SO, 62.3 FG%, 25.1 MPG) – with Aday Mara (JR, 12.1 PPG) as the de facto sixth starter.
- **Three-big rotation:** Lendeborg, Johnson and Mara combine for the paint identity (all three finish above 60% inside); May staggers them so at least two are on the floor at all times, with Johnson's 25.1 MPG and Mara's 23.4 MPG creating a near-starter workload.

- **Backcourt depth behind the starters:** senior Roddy Gayle (21.1 MPG) and sophomore L.J. Cason (18.6 MPG, team-best 40.2 3P%) are the first guards off the bench, with senior Will Tschetter (13.7 MPG) providing frontcourt relief.
- **Minutes windows the GS support:** Lendeborg plays the full game; Cadeau (27.3 MPG) is the only other 27-minute player; McKenney (22.1 MPG) and Burnett (19.8 MPG) slot in as the wing rotation; Mara and Johnson are the high-minute bigs who keep the front line stocked.

Foul Trouble & Bench Leverage

- CONN's riskiest early foulers: Solo Ball leads the club with 29 early first-half fouls, followed by Demary (22) – both opening backcourt starters who can pick up two quick whistles and force the Huskies into Smith/Mullins backcourt looks earlier than planned.
- **Reed is the interior-foul swing:** the senior 5 carries 87 season fouls at a team-high 2.9 PF/G; when he sits, Reibe (13.8 MPG, 75 season fouls of his own) inherits the paint – UConn's rim wall holds but its offensive lob target thins.
- **MICH's front line is the whistle magnet:** Mara leads Michigan with 24 early first-half fouls (79 season, 2.2 PF/G, a team-high 3 technicals), with Johnson (18 early, 77 season) and Cadeau (22 early, 72 season) close behind – the big-heavy unit can bleed fouls in the opening minutes.
- **Whose minutes get inherited:** if Mara or Johnson hits trouble, Tschetter (13.7 MPG) slides into the frontcourt and freshman Malick Kordel (14 G, 1.5 RPG in 4.1 MPG) is the emergency rim option; if Cadeau sits, L.J. Cason (2.4 APG, 40.2 3P%) takes over primary ball-handling.

Closing Group Watch

- CONN's finishing five by the Clutch board: Demary, Ball and Mullins are the ATO closers (18, 17 and 13 first-shot-after-timeout looks respectively) alongside Karaban and Reed – but Reed (2.9 PF/G) and Demary (2.6 PF/G) must both stay clean, or the interior anchor and primary creator thin out in the last five.
- **UConn's clutch edge:** CONN posts 1.00 PPP at 43.8% FG in the closing window versus Michigan's 0.82 PPP – and their ATO lean (47.7% FG, 1.13 PPP, 45.5% 3P) is the sharpest set-play script on the floor.
- **MICH's late anchors:** Lendeborg and Mara draw the high-leverage touches, with the ATO finishers being Johnson (88.9% on 9 looks), Cason (75.0% on 8) and Mara (70.0% on 10) – the huddle art funnels to the paint, not the arc (18.5% 3P on ATO).
- **Mara's thin margin in crunch time:** the 7-foot junior is Michigan's most foul-prone rotation regular with 3 technicals – his emotional barometer is a live variable in a one-game, neutral-site setting at Lucas Oil Stadium.

UConn's closing five – Demary, Ball, Mullins, Karaban, Reed – carry the sharper clutch script (1.00 PPP) with an ATO lean that outruns Michigan's 0.82 PPP, provided Reed and Demary dodge the foul trouble that plagued both teams' front lines all season.

– Broadcast line

19. Polls, Ken Pom & Advanced Ratings

The top two seeds in this bracket are also the top two teams in the country on paper, and the poll board matches the records almost exactly.

- **Michigan (AP #1, 37-3, 19-1 Big Ten):** owns the No. 1 overall seed and the conference's best regular season; the poll reward tracks a body of work that led the Big Ten wire to wire.
- **Connecticut (AP #2, 34-6, 17-3 Big East):** the defending national champions closed 17-3 in league play and sit a clear No. 2 in the AP poll entering the title game.
- **What the ranking measures:** the AP poll is a weekly human vote over the full season – record, résumé, and late-season form – so #1 vs #2 here is a straight read of who the voters believe is the best team in the country, not a single-game projection.

The Ratings Case

Both the Ken Pom efficiency models and the Sports-Reference-style SRS board prefer Michigan – decisively. The Wolverines are the only team in the country ranked No. 1 in adjusted efficiency margin, and they grade No. 1 nationally on the defensive end in both systems.

Team	Ken Pom Rk	AdjEM	AdjOE (Rk)	AdjDE (Rk)	SRS (Rk)
Michigan	#1	39.70	128.2 (#4)	88.5 (#1)	32.9 (#1)
Connecticut	#9	29.78	122.6 (#29)	92.8 (#7)	23.4 (#10)

- Michigan's profile is elite on both ends: Ken Pom's No. 4 offense (128.2 adjusted efficiency) plus the No. 1 defense (88.5) – the only team grading top-five on both sides in the country.
- **Connecticut is a defense-first juggernaut:** the Huskies check in as the No. 7 defense in Ken Pom (92.8) and No. 8 by SRS adjusted defensive rating (89.9), but their offense grades far lower (No. 29 Ken Pom, No. 26 SRS) – the gap that separates the two models' bottom lines.
- **The efficiency margin tells the story:** Michigan's +39.7 adjusted net ranks No. 1 with a cushion; Connecticut's +29.78 sits ninth. By SRS the gap is wider still – 32.9 to 23.4.
- **Tempo, not a tactical clash:** Michigan plays at the 22nd-fastest adjusted tempo (71.0); Connecticut is deliberate (64.6, 322nd). The Wolverines want the game moving; the Huskies want it half-court.

Where the Models Disagree with the Record

The poll and the models agree on the favorite, but they see the two teams very differently.

- **Michigan is the rare poll-MVP + model-MVP:** AP #1, Ken Pom #1, SRS #1 – there is no efficiency-vs-résumé gap to bridge; the numbers fully endorse the record.
- **Connecticut is over-ranked relative to the models:** the Huskies are AP #2 but only #9 in Ken Pom and #10 in SRS. That is the classic "résumé vs process" gap – the poll rewards a championship pedigree and a 34-6 record, while the efficiency ratings see a top-10 team, not a clear No. 2.
- The models read the title game as a step up in class for the Huskies: Michigan grades as a No. 1 in both systems while UConn grades No. 9-10, the widest top-two gap in the entire bracket.

What It Means for TV

- The favorite is the No. 1 overall seed, and the models back it: Michigan is #1 in AP, Ken Pom, and SRS – the rare complete sweep – with the No. 1 defense in the country to anchor a title-game case.
- **The efficiency gap is the storyline:** the two best records in college basketball, but the models separate them by roughly 10 points of adjusted net rating – and it's all on the offensive end, where Michigan is top-four and UConn is outside the top 25.
- **UConn's path is defense and half-court control:** the Huskies grade top-8 defensively in both systems and play the 322nd-fastest tempo, so the on-court battle is Michigan's transition and pace against UConn's half-court grind.
- **The poll vs process angle is real:** AP #1 vs AP #2 on the floor, but the efficiency boards see a clearer favorite – worth raising on air when setting the stage.

Michigan is the rare complete package – AP No. 1, Ken Pom No. 1, and the nation's No. 1 defense – while Connecticut arrives as the poll's No. 2 but the models' No. 9, a defense-first champion trying to slow the most efficient team in the country.

– Broadcast line

20. Transfer Portal, NIL & Roster Composition

Broadcast line: No printed transfer-portal arrivals, commitments, or On 3 NIL valuations are available for either UConn or Michigan in tonight's title-game packet, so there is no sourced basis to break down how either rotation was built or what its NIL footprint looks like – the roster-composition angle for this one is unrecorded, not a storyline we can chase on air.

Men's college basketball transfer portal live: Tracking news, updates" – ESPN – Portal tracking hub (no UConn or Michigan entries surfaced for the 2026-27 cycle) – Speaker

CONN Roster Build

MICH Roster Build

NIL Picture

Continuity vs Turnover

21. Series History & Program Facts

Connecticut leads the all-time series 2-1, but the two programs have never met in the postseason – all three prior games were regular-season matchups, making this the first NCAA Tournament and first championship-game collision between them.

Date	Season	Site	Result
Nov 25, 2015	2015-16	at Michigan	Connecticut 74, Michigan 60
Jan 17, 2010	2009-10	at Michigan	Connecticut 63, Michigan 68
Feb 7, 2009	2008-09	at Connecticut	Connecticut 69, Michigan 61

- Last meeting: Connecticut won 74-60 on the road on Nov. 25, 2015 – the largest margin of the series.
- **Split in Ann Arbor:** The Huskies are 1-1 at Michigan, losing 68-63 in January 2010 before the 14-point win in 2015.
- **Storrs edge:** The lone game on Connecticut's floor went the Huskies' way, 69-61, in February 2009.
- **Postseason first:** Every prior meeting came in the regular season, so this neutral-site title game is the first-ever March meeting between the schools.

Program Milestones

- Six banners, all since 1999: UConn's national titles – 1999, 2004, 2011, 2014, 2023 and 2024 – tie the program with North Carolina for third all-time, behind UCLA (11) and Kentucky (8) (Sporting News).
- **Three coaches, six titles:** Jim Calhoun (1999, 2004, 2011), Kevin Ollie (2014) and Dan Hurley (2023, 2024) have each won it in Storrs (Sporting News).
- **First repeat in program history:** Hurley's back-to-back titles in 2023-24 made UConn the first repeat national champion since Florida in 2006-07 (Sporting News).
- **Hurley's tournament résumé:** Entering this game, Hurley owned a .800 all-time March Madness record (20-5) – best among active coaches and third-highest in Division I history (min. 15 games) behind Phil Woolpert (13-2) and John Wooden (47-10) (The Bulletin).
- **Michigan's lone flag:** The Wolverines' single title came in 1989, an 80-79 overtime win over Seton Hall, with runner-up finishes in 1965, 1976, 1992, 1993, 2013 and 2018 (Wikipedia).
- **Glen Rice's record:** Rice's 184 points across six games in the 1989 tournament remain an NCAA single-tournament record (MGo Blue).
- **May's two-year rebuild:** Dusty May took over an 8-24 Michigan program in 2024 and has gone 64-13 in two seasons – the 2025-26 squad posting a program-record 37 wins and a 19-1 Big Ten mark (247 Sports, MGo Blue).

Rare Facts

- First-ever tournament meeting: All three prior games came in the regular season, so this title game is the first NCAA Tournament matchup in series history.
- 37-year gap: Michigan's lone title came in 1989 – 37 seasons before this game – while UConn's six banners all arrived since 1999 (MGo Blue).
- **UConn's only semifinal slip:** The Huskies' lone Final Four semifinal loss came against a Big Ten team, Michigan State, in Detroit in 2009, 82-73 (Sporting News).
- **Perfect Big Ten road slate:** Michigan went 10-0 in Big Ten road games in 2025-26, the first conference team in 50 years to sweep its league road schedule (MGo Blue).
- **Transfers built the juggernaut:** Michigan's top four scorers were all first-year transfers – Yaxel Lendeborg (UAB), Morez Johnson Jr. (Illinois), Elliot Cadeau (North Carolina) and Aday Mara (UCLA) (Sports Illustrated).

We want to win at a high, high level. I want to be at this press conference on Sunday next year. But we also want our guys to feel like when they leave here that we poured into them." – Dusty May · 247 Sports Broadcast line: Connecticut owns the 2-1 series edge and six banners to Michigan's one, yet this is the first postseason meeting between them – the Huskies chasing a third title in four years against a Wolverines program after its first since 1989.