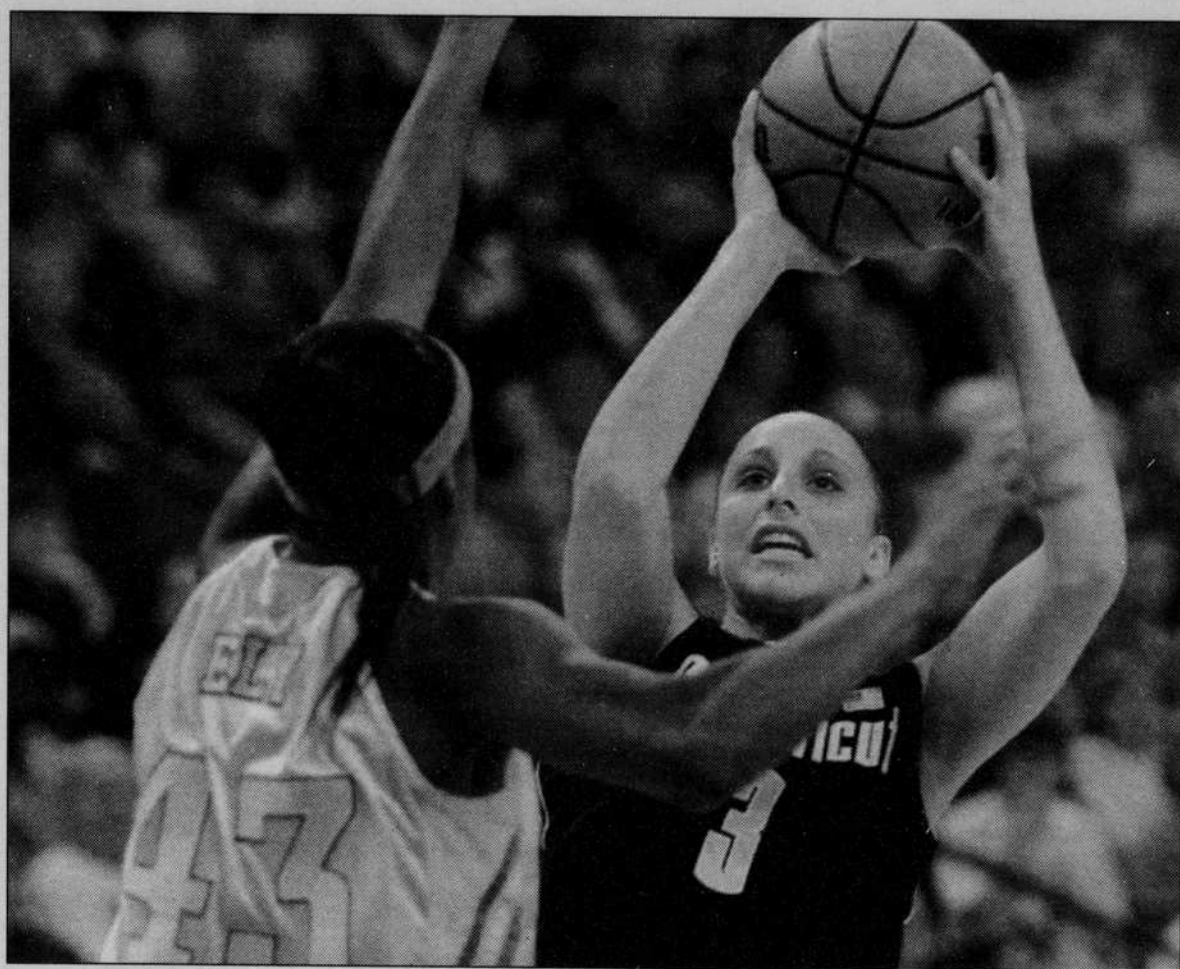




Bob Macdonnell/Hartford Courant

Diana Taurasi (3) goes up for a shot over Tennessee's Shyra Ely in UConn's 70-61 victory in New Orleans on Tuesday.

UConn proves its domination

Diana Taurasi won her third national championship in her final game as a Husky

By Bill Jauss
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

NEW ORLEANS — As far as Connecticut fans are concerned, as well as millions of other basketball fans, "dynasty" is spelled "T-A-U-R-A-S-I."

Diana Taurasi, the Huskies' peerless scorer, playmaker and leader was tough when necessary Tuesday night when she led UConn to its third straight NCAA women's championship with a 70-61 victory over Tennessee.

The hard-fought victory enabled Connecticut to become the first school to win both the men's and women's NCAA basketball tournaments in the same season. The Husky men beat Georgia Tech for their championship Monday.

Taurasi led the Huskies with 17 points. She hit 6 of 11 shots, 3 of 7 from three-point range. Several of her

baskets came when the Vols were cutting into UConn's lead.

But this was neither a one-woman show nor an easy victory. Ann Strother and Jessica Moore each scored 14 for UConn. Barbara Turner and Moore had nine rebounds apiece. And Tennessee, down 30-13 after 14 minutes fought back with an 11-0 run to close to 30-24 at the half and battled to the end.

"These guys are amazing," Taurasi said of her teammates. "Anything you ask them to do, they'll do it. When people think of Connecticut basketball, they think domination."

Taurasi, named MVP of the Final Four, then celebrated by booting a basketball soccer-style into the capacity crowd of 18,211.

"If Diana did not play the game the way she does, there is no way her teammates would have been able to do what they did tonight," UConn coach Gino Auriemma said.

Coach Pat Summitt's Lady Vols didn't give up and used their rebounding edge to keep the game close. Shanna Zolman, who led all scorers with 19

points, led a rally that cut the lead to 50-48 after Brittany Jackson hit a three-pointer with 10 minutes left.

Moore, Strother and Taurasi then slowly built back the lead.

The victory produced some staggering statistics that back up Taurasi's contention about Husky domination.

UConn improved to 5-0 in NCAA championship games, 4-0 against Tennessee. Only Tennessee has more titles with six, and it also is the only other school with three straight—1996, '97 and '98.

UConn won its 18th straight NCAA playoff game and improved to 13-6 all-time vs. Tennessee.

UConn has a 98-5 record in its last 103 games and a 176-9 record since the start of the 1999-2000 season.

"It wasn't easy, but it showed we have character," Taurasi said. "It's amazing. This isn't just for us. It's for everyone associated with our program and our families and fans."

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Beckett, Choi pace Marlins

Offseason acquisition Hee Seop Choi drove in the go-ahead run in the eighth for Florida's 4-3 win Tuesday

By Clark Spencer
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

MIAMI — Jeffrey Loria was so full of nervous energy that when he unveiled the new World Series banner he thought for a moment he would "pull down the wall" to which it is affixed. The Florida Marlins' owner was giddy still after his team put the exclamation point on opening day, downing the Montreal Expos in front of a record crowd at Pro Player Stadium.

"I'm jumping for Choi," Loria said, crafting an appropriate pun to express his joy.

Hee Seop Choi quickly ingratiated himself to his new Marlins teammates — not to mention Tuesday's crowd of 55,315 — in a 4-3 victory over the Expos. The first baseman accounted for three of the runs with a towering

home run and a ground ball that was hit just hard enough to drive in the go-ahead run in the eighth.

World Series MVP Josh Beckett didn't do too badly himself, pitching in April as he did in October when last the Marlins baseball story left off. Beckett set down 16 of the first 18 batters he faced Tuesday before giving up a run in the sixth. Going into that frame, Beckett had given up two runs in his previous 30 innings dating to last year's postseason.

Every Marlins starter, including Beckett but excluding Luis Castillo, had at least one hit.

And even though the bullpen was shaky, with the Expos tying the score off reliever Chad Fox and Jose Vidro belting a two-out homer off closer Armando Benitez in the ninth, there were minor successes, such as Matt Perisho retiring the only hitter he faced to end the eighth and Benitez getting Orlando Cabrera to foul out weakly for the final out.

"All these guys are going to give you

a scare once in awhile," said manager Jack McKeon, who didn't take long to light up his first victory cigar. "But getting the results is what is important."

With a World Series title to celebrate and glorify, the Marlins had no trouble filling up the vast majority of seats. The crowd was the largest for a regular-season game at Pro Player Stadium, and it was treated to the same peck-and-grind style of baseball that produced so many wins last season.

Beckett did his part.

Though he gave up a run in the sixth, he avoided further damage when he struck out Cabrera and Brad Wilkerson with two men on and one out. And he struck out Peter Bergeron to end the seventh, stranding two runners.

"He's a big-time pitcher now," McKeon said. "There were a couple of situations when he had to get tough, and he did."

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