

Tennessee, Connecticut bring rivalry to WNCAA

BY GWENN MILLER
DAILY COLLEGIAN

(U-WIRE) UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. — It's been compared to the 49ers and the Cowboys, Michigan and Ohio State and the Yankees and the Dodgers.

And the rivalry between the Connecticut and Tennessee women's basketball teams is just as big as the older grudge matches, but it's a little different. Quite possibly, a women's sports rivalry has never generated as much excitement, hype and bad blood as these two schools.

Off the court, players and coaches are calm and polite. On court, the contention is thicker than a swarm of flies on hot summer day. And like flies, the two teams refuse to leave give one another peace until one gets what they want.

"I view this rivalry as a class act," Connecticut forward Swin Cash said. "Off the court, you can have a conversation. But once you lace up the shoestrings and you're on the court, it's just strictly business."

The latest chapter in the continuing clash between the Lady Volunteers and the Huskies ended Sunday when Connecticut won the national championship, 71-52. It marked the end of a season that saw two battles between the two powerhouses.

In the first meeting, Tennessee won 72-71 on Connecticut's home turf. In the second, the Huskies stole a 74-

67 victory at the home of the Lady Vols. The split built the rivalry's excitement.

"Coach was saying we have a million tapes of them and they have a million tapes of us," Connecticut forward Shea Ralph said. "You can scout all you want, but it comes down to who's more prepared."

Since 1995, the record between the two teams is 6-5. Huskies coach Geno Auriemma has won two NCAA titles — both against Pat Summitt's Lady Vols. The first was the 70-64 win April 2, 1995.

But Summitt has won more titles than Auriemma — four more to be exact. She's compiled a 758-150 career record, while Auriemma sports a 357-94 career mark.

Their relationship is one of mutual respect and admiration, but not always friendship. The two have been known to exchange jibes via the media, and the Final Four was no exception.

Perhaps their relationship, as well as the two programs, could be summed up while comparing cheesesteak establishments in Philadelphia. In downtown Philadelphia, facing one another, are two stores named Pat's and Geno's.

"Pat's is old and beat up and dilapidated," Auriemma said with a grin. "Geno's is bigger. Not that it means anything, don't get me wrong. You know, it's just things that come up. It's just one of those things."

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