

University of Cincinnati players welcome a brother

Cincinnati Enquirer | June 24, 2011 | By Bill Koch

When 11-year-old Buzz Smith was told by his doctor that he would not be able to play football anymore, he took the sobering news in stride. Football was Buzz's favorite sport, but if he couldn't play, he still wanted to be involved, so he asked his mom, "Can I be their water boy, then?" That's the kind of spirit that has moved Buzz's parents to refer to him as their hero and inspired the University of Cincinnati women's basketball team to adopt him as part of their family as he recovers from a series of operations to have a non-cancerous tumor removed from his spinal cord.

Buzz, who attends Clinton-Massie Elementary School, was officially "adopted" during a ceremony at Fifth Third Arena last month with head coach Jamelle Elliott and the players on hand to welcome him into the fold.

"I equate this to the recruiting process because when you're recruiting new members to your team, you want them to be a certain way, character-wise, and we think that Buzz is everything that I would want in a Cincinnati player," Elliott said. "His mental and physical toughness, his work ethic, being a good student in the classroom, just having unbelievable character with the way that he's handled everything that's going on with his life and his health issues."

Buzz, who was slated to play wide receiver on his football team last fall, started experiencing pain in his neck during conditioning last July. The original diagnosis was that he had a strained neck muscle and that the pain would disappear in a week.

But instead of the pain disappearing, complications arose. He lost movement in his right arm. He was dragging his right leg, which caused him to fall down. At that point, his parents, Lisa and Clayton, took him to Children's Hospital, where a tumor was discovered on his spinal cord. The tumor was removed and found to be benign.

Buzz wasn't out of the woods yet, though.

Ten months after the first surgery, the incision still hadn't healed. On May 1, doctors performed a spinal fusion in a procedure that took nine hours. It was his fourth surgery.

Through it all, Buzz has remained upbeat and focused on getting better. He knows he won't be able to play football but is hopeful that he can play baseball again one day.

"It was kind of hard hearing that I had to have surgery," said Buzz, who has a 10-year-old brother, Zachary. "Some other doctors told me I have cancer, but they were wrong."

Elliott and her players hope to provide emotional support and some financial relief through the adoption by donating money from their annual golf tournament and fall clinic.

They've already made a difference.

"It's really hard to put into words," Buzz's dad said. "The love we felt from UC has been something that we've needed. It's been a really hard road for our family."

Buzz was first brought to the team's attention by Carrie Ellis, a friend of the program. Ellis took him to the Syracuse game last year and the game against Marquette on Senior Day. The Bearcats, who struggled through a 9-20 season and won only two games in the Big East Conference, nearly knocked off Syracuse and beat No. 25 Marquette by three points.

"After that game," Elliott said, "I figured it must be Buzz. He was our good luck charm."

Senior guard Shelly Bellman took to Buzz right away.

"It started on Senior Night when we played Marquette in that last game," Bellman said. "I luckily was chosen to present Buzz with the jersey that we had signed. It all started from there. I just fell in love with Buzz and his little brother, Zach, and the whole family. I just wanted to be

a part of them and their whole journey as much as I could be."

The Bearcats plan to have a Buzz Smith Day at one of their home games next season, and Elliott has extended an open invitation for Buzz to give the pre-game talk. The family also has an open invitation to every home game.

"Like it or not, buddy, you're going to be a part of our team," Elliott said. "The only difference is that our players are on a four-year scholarship and you're on a lifetime scholarship."

Hello to a Forever Friend

Hartford Courant | August 8, 2011 | By John Altavilla

CINCINNATI - Holy Cross was a breeze. Baylor was confrontational. Stanford was disappointing. North Carolina was exhilarating.

But that all paled to what the second-ranked UConn women and their coaching staff were anticipating Saturday.

The Huskies knew their obligation against Cincinnati. But business as usual meant putting a beating on former UConn player and assistant coach Jamelle Elliott and her battered Bearcats.

That's the last thing anyone at UConn wanted to do, especially after the coaching staff took her to dinner on Friday night. Elliott is family.

"It's not easy," coach Geno Auriemma said. "Jamelle and I talked a long time Friday night. It's difficult at times for teams to play against Maya [Moore] and Tiffany [Hayes], let alone asking a bunch of freshmen to do it."

With only seven players to throw at the Huskies, the Bearcats were no match. The Huskies won 80-46 before 3,422 at Fifth Third Arena.

But it could have been much worse. "He backed off on us sooner than he would have against any other team," Elliott said.

The truth is, Elliott will always be one of Auriemma's favorites. And he knows the truth about her: This second season as Cincinnati's coach has been black and blue with a series of injuries that have depleted Elliott's roster and sapped her spirit.

"She taking it really hard," Auriemma said. "It's taking its toll on her right now. And there's not much she can do about it."

UConn's eighth consecutive win was paced by Moore, who scored 19 of her game-high 23 points in the first half. She also had six assists and five rebounds.

"She is what everyone says she is," Cincin-

nati freshman Kayla Cook said.

Hayes had 16 points, five rebounds and five assists, Stefanie Dolson nine points and five rebounds, and Kelly Faris eight points (3-for-4), eight assists and seven rebounds.

Cook led the Bearcats (8-12, 1-7 Big East) with 13 points. Cincinnati has lost six straight.

The Huskies (20-1, 9-0) move ahead to Monday night's game against No. 3 Duke at Gampel Pavilion. Once that's done, UConn will have only one nonconference game remaining, Feb. 14 against Oklahoma at the XL Center.

Auriemma helped Elliott get this job and wants badly for her to succeed. And he was in no mood to make things worse by pouring it on.

"We didn't want to go out and play poorly or in a way that would disrespect their program," Auriemma said. "They compete, play hard. They just don't have enough right now. But they will."

The Huskies took a quick 8-0 lead and never trailed. Moore played all 20 minutes in the first half, shooting 9-for-11 as the Huskies opened a 40-24 lead.

"We started the game the way we want to start them," Moore said. "We came out aggressively."

But the game was played along the soft edges. There were 16 fouls called and the Huskies took only eight free throws. Most notably, Auriemma went to his bench in a way he hasn't this season.

Freshmen Lauren Engeln (career-high seven points) and Michala Johnson (four points) entered in the first half and played 16 minutes, their most this season.

Engeln took over the point from freshman Bria Hartley, who played 14 minutes, and Lorin Dixon, who played 21.

The Huskies had already done their

damage. They hit 16 of 26 shots in the first half, including 5 of 6 three-point attempts. Many of their points came off well-executed offensive sets featuring crisp passes into the post, where Dolson (seven points) made 3 of 5 shots.

The second half had more of a relaxed pace, even though UConn took every chance it had to run the floor. And the Huskies' defense held Cincinnati without a point the first 7:49 and without a field goal the first 8:33 on the way to a 39-point lead with 6:28 to play.

Heather Buck (four points, six rebounds) made her first appearance with 18 minutes remaining, giving Auriemma a four-minute stretch to watch Buck and Dolson work together on the blocks.

"We got a chance to see people work together in situations we never get to see them in," Auriemma said.

Speedy Dayeesha Hollins sparks UC women*Cincinnati Enquirer | November 9, 2011 | By Shannon Russell*

Cincinnati women's basketball coach Jamelle Elliott has seen plenty of players in her lifetime, and none have been as fast as Dayeesha Hollins.

The point guard is so quick that she has changed the Bearcats' complexion from a half-court team to a fast-tracking, floor-running force.

"She brings a whole new dynamic with pressure defense and scoring in transition that was almost nonexistent last year," Elliott said.

The 5-foot-6 Winton Woods graduate - known by friends as "Day" - is about to embark on her first season with the Bearcats. She arrived at UC by way of Michigan, where she started 34 games and averaged 12 points and 3.4 rebounds and was named to the 2010 Big Ten All-Freshman team.

But the distance from Ann Arbor to Cincinnati was too much, Hollins said.

"I was really homesick. I thought the three hours wasn't going to be bad, but obviously for me (it was)," Hollins said. "Even though my mom came to mostly all the games, it was still kind of different. I think I just needed to be home."

She reopened her search and focused on UC, a program she considered before selecting Michigan. Because Hollins liked Elliott and her future teammates so much, she said the decision was easy.

Hollins practiced with the team last season, learned Elliott's system, and worked on being more vocal. She's naturally a leader by example, so being outspoken has been challenging.

"I'm still learning," Hollins said. "I know it's going to take me a really long time, probably until I graduate, but that's fine with me."

And then there's that speed. Hollins advanced to the state track meet once for a relay and three times for the 400-meter dash. Sometimes people ask if she knows

how fast she's going on the basketball court, and she honestly has no idea.

"I just try to get down the floor quickly," she said.

Elliott said she counted down the days until Hollins could play for the Bearcats, and she hasn't been disappointed in practices or the Nov. 5 exhibition. Hollins scored a team-high 18 points in UC's 72-66 win over Northern Kentucky University at Fifth Third Arena.

Hollins, who now lives 15 minutes from home, is eager for Friday's regular-season opener against IPFW and eager to help the Bearcats rebound from four straight losing seasons.

"I'm excited. I feel like we all have grown, especially the freshmen from last year," Hollins said. "They've learned a lot. They're excited to play with me and I'm extremely excited to play with them."

Reaves has strong start at Cincinnati*The Press-Enterprise | November 23, 2011 | By David Lassen*

Bjonee Reaves' period of adjustment is over. And it shows.

After spending last season getting to know her new coach, teammates and program, the guard from Cajon High has begun her senior season with the University of Cincinnati women's basketball team in notable fashion.

The transfer from Neosho County (Kansas) Community College led the Bearcats in scoring in both their games last week, with 25 points, five rebounds and seven assists in a 75-64 win over Dayton, followed by 18 points, three rebounds, four assists and a steal in a 64-34 thumping of Evansville.

"I know the system now, I know what the coach expects from me, so it makes things a lot easier," Reaves said in a phone conversation earlier this week. "... Now I'm just doing it without any hesitation."

There was a significant learning curve, said Reaves — whose first name, incidentally, is pronounced bee-JUN-eh — because her head coach, Jamelle Elliott, asked her to provide leadership and to play a slightly different role than she had in high school and JC ball. She's certainly not complaining.

"I absolutely love it," Reaves said. "I don't always have to bring the ball up the court all the time. And I think I'm more productive, actually, playing off the ball. So I'm very comfortable now, and I'm really excited, because being able to have other guards who can bring the ball up the court makes it a lot easier for me, and a lot easier for the team to do well."

Reaves averaged 7.6 points and 2.9 rebounds with a team-high 80 assists last season, when the Bearcats were 9-20. They're off to a 3-0 start this year, giving Reaves optimism the team can exceed rather modest expectations in the rugged Big East Conference, which has six teams ranked in this week's Associated Press Top 25.

"The five returners, we worked extremely

hard this summer. Some of us didn't even go home," she said. "For it to start paying off so early in the season has been uplifting for us. ...

"We were picked 15th out of 16 in the Big East, based on our performance last year. But if we keep up what we're doing now, I'm sure we'll finish somewhere in the top 10 in the Big East."

Reaves isn't getting back to Southern California for Thanksgiving, but as consolation, the Bearcats are spending the holiday in Mexico, playing South Dakota State and Chattanooga in the Cancun Challenge.

"It's going to be in the low 80s, mid 80s, so I'm going to feel right at home," said Reaves, who had earlier mentioned her difficulties in getting used to Cincinnati's winter. "Of course I would love to spend the time with my family, but it's a good thing that there's Skype."

And she's clearly in a Thanksgiving mood when she talks about how happy she is with things in Cincinnati.

"I'm just truly blessed and thankful for the opportunity I have," she said, "and I want to make the best out of my senior year. ... Our motto as a team is family first, and that's exactly what it's like. And that makes it easier for me, because I'm the farthest one away from home."

UC transfer Hollins has experience vexing Xavier*Cincinnati Enquirer | December 4, 2011 | By Kevin Kelly*

Fans of Xavier women's basketball might remember Dayeesha Hollins from a shot she made a couple of years ago for another team.

As a freshman at Michigan, Hollins' lay-up in the closing seconds gave the Wolverines the lead in their upset over the then eighth-ranked Musketeers at Cintas Center.

"I really don't remember making the winning basket," she said. "But it was really great to win at home. I was really excited about that."

The former two-sport star at Winton Woods High School returns to Cintas Center at 2 p.m. today, only this time it's with the University of Cincinnati.

Hollins sat out last season after transferring to UC, and the 5-foot-6 point guard is a big reason the Bearcats roll into the Skyline Chili Women's Crosstown Shoot-out against Xavier with a perfect record.

"She's all over the place - getting loose balls, getting steals, driving to the basket, making the right plays," third-year UC head coach Jamelle Elliott said. "She gives us that added dimension of being able to push the ball.

"Last year we were kind of a walk the ball up the floor, make a pass, pass, pass, pass type of time. This year we're able to score in transition, create some points in the paint ... with her dribble penetration.

"She's just really elevated our team to another level. I'm glad that she left Michigan and decided to join our family."

Picked to finish 15th out of the 16 teams in Big East Conference before the season, the Bearcats are off to their best start under Elliott and are 6-0 for the first time in a decade.

"I think we're moving in the right direction," Elliott said. "We've got a long way to go but I really feel comfortable and confident that we're getting there."

Bringing the Kendle Cup back to Clifton would be a first for Elliott and her players. Not one player on UC's roster was part of the Bearcats' last victory against Xavier in 2008.

"It would really mean a great deal to us," said Hollins, who's averaging 13 points and a team-leading 4.2 assists per game. "I know we haven't beaten Xavier in a very long time. Just to be able to do that would be awesome."

Xavier beat UC by eight points last season, but first-year head coach Amy Waugh knows from scouting the Bearcats that they're an improved team.

"They play extremely hard and they're going to come in here ready," she said.

The Musketeers, who return one starter in senior guard Tyeasha Moss, find themselves in unfamiliar territory.

A loss against South Carolina on Wednesday extended the team's losing streak to four games, the program's longest since 2004. Worth noting is the fact the losses have come against Mississippi State, No. 10 Louisville, No. 5 Stanford and South Carolina. Those teams sport a combined 24-4 record this season.

"South Carolina did a very good job of coming out and being the aggressor from the tip, and we need to do a better job of handling that and being ready to play," Waugh said after Wednesday's game. "We need to be a better basketball team. And our focus for the next few days is going to be on us and making us a better team going into Sunday."

Xavier's roster includes three players from the Cincinnati area - junior forwards Amber Gray (Lakota West) and Jessica Pachko (Oak Hills) and sophomore guard Ashley Wanninger (Colerain).

"We have to regroup and refocus," said Gray, who enters today averaging 7.4 points and 6.6 rebounds per game. "We're just kind of worried about us. Whether it's a lot of fans in the stands or just us,

we're going to go out there and take care of business."

Hollins is the only local player on UC's roster but she's not the only playmaker. Senior guard Bjonee Reaves leads the team in scoring (15.2 points per game). In a victory against Morgan State on Thursday at Fifth Third Arena, sophomore guard Kayla Cook made six three-pointers and lead all scorers with a career-high 20 points. Sophomore forward Tiffany Turner finished with career-high 17 points and 12 rebounds.

"I'm excited. I'm really excited," Reaves said. "I would love to beat them my senior year.

"I expect a Big East Championship-type atmosphere. I expect some trash talking. I expect some rowdy fans. I expect a grind-it-out game. I expect a real defensive game. I expect a very emotional game. I expect all of those things."

UC's Cook ready to shine against Marshall*Portsmouth Daily Times | December 8, 2011 | By Bob Strickley*

It was only a couple seasons ago when Kayla Cook was dominating every court in Southeastern Ohio as the four-time Southeast District Player of the Year. Now she is tearing up the hardwood of the Big East in her sophomore season with the University of Cincinnati women's basketball team.

In Cook's first season with the Bearcats she started all 27 games, was named to the Big East All-Freshman team and averaged 8.1 points a game using the skills she honed while under South Webster coach Kristie Johnson.

Through seven games this season Cook has helped lead her team to a 6-1 record and bumped her average points per game to 9.9. She had a career day against Morgan State on Dec. 1 with six 3-pointers and 20 points in the 64-60 win.

"The season has gone really well so far," Cook said. "We got off to a great start and had tough loss against Xavier but we are ready to bounce back."

The opportunity to bounce back comes when the Bearcats visit Marshall on Saturday in what has the potential to be a Bearcat-friendly crowd due to Huntington's proximity to South Webster.

"I'm really excited about it and so are my teammates despite not knowing any of the people from home," Cook said. "It will be a great opportunity for the fans from home to experience a college game and for me to feel like I'm back playing in high school."

Local fans making the trek will only have to pay a \$1 as Cook gets an opportunity to showcase how far she has come since becoming South Webster's all-time scoring leader.

"I've gotten more confident in myself and my role with the team," Cook said. "Last season was a learning process for the pace and style of the college game and now I'm more adjusted to it."

Cook said the jump from high school to

college basketball was a huge obstacle but being the second leading scorer on a Big East conference team as a freshman would suggest she was not intimidated by the change.

"The game is much more physical," Cook said. "Girls are so much stronger and the pace of the game is much faster, especially in the Big East. I'm just grateful to have an opportunity to play in a great conference."

Although Cook has gone on to the highest level of women's collegiate basketball, her heart still remains in South Webster with her former team.

"I'm still a Lady Jeep and I'm always interested in how they are doing," Cook said. "I talk to coach Johnson once or twice a week and she keeps me up to date on how they are doing and she always checks to see how I'm doing."

Hesitant to admit she has become something of a trailblazer and role model for local players wishing to continue their careers, Cook offered some advice from her experience.

"Don't ever stop dreaming," Cook said. "Coming from such a small school my mindset was to work extremely hard and never sell yourself short. Get involved in the sport anyway you can and play as often as possible. You have got to have the work ethic and your heart has to be in it."

Cincinnati (6-1) travels to Marshall (5-2) on Saturday. The game is scheduled for a 7 p.m. start and admission is \$1.

Hollins playing well back in front of friends, family*Cincinnati Enquirer* | January 5, 2012 | By Tom Skeen

FOREST PARK — After transferring to the University of Cincinnati from the University of Michigan and sitting out a year, red-shirt sophomore and Winton Woods graduate Dayeesha Hollins feels more at home than ever.

A number of reasons contributed to her transfer.

“The style of play (at Michigan) wasn’t what I expected,” Hollins said. “I missed being home and I missed my friends and family. Being up there I was kind of lost. My time here has been really awesome, actually better than I expected and I love my team.”

At Michigan Hollins was a freshmen standout playing in 35 games averaging 12 points and 3.4 rebounds per game. She became the first women’s basketball player in Big Ten history to be named Player and Freshmen of the week and the first Wolverine to receive a Big Ten weekly award multiple times in one season since the 1986-87 season.

Some struggle after transferring and sitting out a year, but that hasn’t been the case for Hollins. In her debut against Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne Hollins went 8-of-12 from the field and scored 17 points while dishing out four assists and recording three steals. In her first five games as a Bearcat, Hollins scored in double digits all five games and averaged 14.2 points per game.

In what many call the most important game of the year, Hollins played her best game of the season to this point. Against Xavier University, the red shirt sophomore recorded a double-double with 19 points and 10 rebounds in a nine-point loss. This wasn’t the first time Hollins played well against the Musketeers. During the 2009-10 season while playing with the Wolverines, she led her team to a 72-71 upset of the then No. 8 Xavier and scored 22 points, including the game-winning layup with 17 seconds remaining, while pulling down nine rebounds and recording four steals.

“(Playing in the Crosstown Shootout) was cool and I really enjoyed it,” the 2009 Winton Woods grad said. “I was really excited to play them again. There is something about Xavier that makes me play a bit more aggressive.”

Hollins scored her career-high as a Bearcat with 20 points against the University of Tennessee Chattanooga on Nov. 25.

In 10 games this season through Dec. 27, Hollins is averaging 13.3 points, 4.6 rebounds, 4.1 assists and 2.6 steals per game. She is shooting 48.6 percent from the field and 35.3 percent from the 3-point line.

While Hollins is getting it done on the court, the fact that she can do it all in front of her friends and family is the most important factor for her.

“Playing in front of (friends and family) is a big deal to me. I always dreamed that someday I would play in front of them. Now I have and it is great to see how proud and happy they are for me. I feel really good about that.”

A Special Visit For Cincinnati Coach Jamelle Elliott

The Hartford Courant | January 18, 2012 | By John Altavilla

STORRS — It never took much to bring a tear to the eye of Jamelle Elliott during her 16 years as a UConn player and assistant coach, despite her always rugged and intense play on the court.

Truth be told, Elliott is much different from her on-court persona. And now in her third season as Cincinnati's coach, she has begun to reconcile how her core personality must adapt to her professional responsibilities.

"My first two years [at Cincinnati], I was on an emotional high when we'd make a big basket and then on a low when we'd make a turnover," Elliott said. "I knew I needed to find some emotional consistency during games because one thing I've learned coaching players is, when you are high, they are high. And when you are low, they are low.

"I needed to find the middle ground for myself to help them begin to play consistent basketball. In that way, it's a win-win situation for us both.

"But then again, that's my personality. I have always worn my heart on my sleeve, whether I am on or off the court. You pretty much know how I feel based on how I act, what I say. I am very emotional, very passionate. But I've also tried to temper that in myself because I've come to understand that it can be a negative as far as dealing with game situations."

On Thursday night, the emotion is certain to well up inside her again when she brings her team to Gampel Pavilion again to play No. 3 UConn.

The Huskies (15-2, 4-1) are coming off a 51-point win against No. 24 North Carolina Monday at Gampel.

"I'm thinking maybe the Bearcats can do a little better than that," she laughed. "If we get blown out, well, then maybe the fans will understand that they also did it to the No. 24 team in the country. Maybe that takes a little more pressure off us.

"We're in the middle of a really tough

stretch, having already played [and lost to] Rutgers and Notre Dame. I told my players — and I feel the same way — that if we can just get through these three games all of our hard work will pay off and we will get ourselves a few wins."

The Bearcats won their first six games but are 9-8 overall, 0-4 in the Big East. During the winning streak they were at their best, pressuring opponents and scoring in transition. But injuries hit and the Bearcats lost their next five, but only by an average of seven points.

"You grow a little bit more as a coach every year," Elliott said. "You handle things differently. I believe we will continue to get better. We have defeated some teams we probably had no business beating, lost to teams we likely shouldn't have lost to."

The Bearcats came off Christmas break by going to Virginia Tech and winning by 11 points.

"We had just one day of practice [after Christmas] and a morning shoot-around and then we won by 11 by playing aggressive offense, which I love [33 free throws]," Elliott said.

Guard Dayeesha Hollins had 26 points, shooting 10 of 11 from the line that night.

Hollins has been out for a few games after dislocating her shoulder Dec. 14, and sophomore Jeanise Randolph, who made the Big East's all-freshman team last season, returned to the lineup Dec. 22 after dealing with a stress fracture in her back.

"I want the seniors to go out with a good season. I want them to finish strong, I want to win the Big East, and I want to make it to the NCAA Tournament," Randolph said on the Bearcats website. "I want the seniors to leave Cincinnati and say, 'I'm proud of my team and excited to see it play next year.' I want to leave the conference and people to say, 'I didn't know Cincinnati was that good' and 'Cincinnati is going to do something in the Big East.' I want people to know that we're someone to play with."

When Elliott is introduced before the game, she knows she will get a warm reception. Elliott still considers herself a part of the UConn family and will for as long as she lives.

"I am always connected to the program," Elliott said. "I trade Twitter messages with Geno [Auriemma]. And even though I didn't recruit most of his younger kids [Elliott did recruit sophomore Stefanie Dolson], and they don't know me, I know pretty much everything there is to know about them. Of course, they may not realize that."

And, of course, there will be the pregame hug with Auriemma and assistants Chris Dailey and Shea Ralph.

Bria Hartley, Chanel Chisholm were high school teammates*Register Citizen | January 18, 2012 | By Jim Fuller*

Years before displaying the moxie to earn the "Big Game Bria" moniker with the third-ranked UConn women's basketball program, she was just another wide-eyed teenaged prodigy eager for her chance to play some high school poll.

Hartley had been a teen for just a couple of months seven years ago when the opportunity presented itself for Hartley to suit up for the North Babylon in 2005.

Cincinnati senior guard/forward Chanel Chisholm, who will square off against Hartley's Huskies in tonight's Big East clash at Gampel Pavilion (7:30 p.m., CPTV) was one of the leaders of that North Babylon squad and had vivid memories of the precocious eighth grader making an immediate impact.

"She had a really big role, actually, even though she was in middle school," Chisholm said. "She was playing up on the varsity team and played a really big role competing and getting us to the state finals (in 2007 when Hartley was a freshman and Chisholm a senior). I thought Bria was really good, especially when she was younger. She had a good understanding of the game and had a really good basketball IQ, she was very fundamentally sound as well as she has a lot of skill and is talented. I knew she was going to be really good the older she got."

Hartley finished with 1,978 in her five seasons playing for North Babylon. Heading to UConn, she drew comparisons to another Sue Bird, another sweet-shooting guard who grew up in nearby Syosset, N.Y. It didn't take long for Hartley to make an impact. The 472 points she scored during the 2010-11 season were the third most for a Connecticut freshmen. With the graduation of Maya Moore, UConn's all-time leading scorer, Hartley has emerged into a go-to offensive player. Hartley had led the Huskies in scoring seven times in the first 17 games and saved some of her best efforts for the biggest stages with 25 points in losses at Baylor and Notre Dame.

Tonight will be special to Hartley as she shares the court with Chisholm, perhaps for the final time.

"She was always giving me pointers even though I was one of the younger ones," Hartley said. "Then when I was in eighth grade, I finally got to play with her. Playing with somebody like that and being around the older girls, it helped me.

"She was a lot older than me but we were still pretty close and pretty good friends so anytime you are playing against somebody that you knew for a long time growing up, you see that you are both doing well and both playing Division I basketball, you just smile and have fun while you are playing."

Chisholm, one of three Cincinnati players to start every game this season, is one of the Bearcats most versatile players as she ranks in the top three on her squad in scoring (9.4), rebounding (6.1) as well as in assists, steals and blocks.

"She was always one of those players that can do a lot for her team," Hartley said. "She is extremely fast and has a great first step, can get to the basket really well and has a nice little jump shot. Every time she is on the court, she impacts the game and she does something to help her team."

Chisholm played at Vanderbilt for her first two seasons and was a member of a Commodores' team which reached the Sweet 16 in the 2008 NCAA tournament. Chisholm, who was recruited by Cincinnati while at North Babylon, opted to transfer after the 2008-09 season.

"When I got there it just wasn't a good fit for me," Chisholm said. "Leaving Vanderbilt, Cincinnati was one of the schools that actually looked at me when I was looking to transfer and came on the visit. I loved the campus and really liked what Coach (Janelle Elliott) had to say to me about trying to build this program so that is one of the reasons that I came to Cincinnati."

Chisholm likes the direction that the Cincinnati program is going with Elliott, a former star player and longtime assistant coach at UConn, at the helm.

"She knows how to win and that is kind of obvious," Chisholm said. "That is one of the reasons I came here, coming from UConn she was going to know what it took to win and what it (takes) to be a great team. She is very competitive."

Jamelle Elliott Works to Build her Own Program

UConn Today | January 19, 2012 | By Kenneth Best

During her playing days at UConn, Jamelle Elliott '96 (ED), '97 MA was the kind of student-athlete women's head basketball coach Geno Auriemma wanted to help build his emerging program. She worked hard in practice, was determined to win, and relished a challenge.

"Jamelle was a 5-10 post player that won a national championship and outplayed kids bigger than her every night for four years," Auriemma says. "She never, ever has looked at something and said, 'I can't do that.' She thrives on the process of trying to do something people think can't be done."

Elliott was a key member of the Huskies' undefeated 1995 championship team and became only the second player in UConn history to surpass both the 1,000 career points and 1,000 career rebounding milestones. She then spent 12 years as an assistant coach in Storrs, helping the Huskies to win five more national championships.

Now in her third season as head coach of Cincinnati, Elliott returns Jan. 19 to Harry A. Gampel Pavilion with a young Bearcats team that ran off six consecutive wins to start the season and won the Hilton Garden Inn Hokie Classic at Virginia Tech in late December. As is the case with most teams, especially young squads, the Big East schedule will be a challenge, with six nationally ranked teams in the conference, including the No. 3 Huskies (15-2, 3-1 Big East), who are coming off a nationally televised 86-35 win over No. 24 North Carolina.

Elliott's team (9-8, 0-4 Big East) has become more competitive over the past two seasons, ranking in the conference's Top 10 defensive categories while trying to improve its offensive output. Cincinnati is narrowing its point differential, scoring an average of 60.1 points per game and giving up 53.1 points.

The Bearcats are led by two guards, junior Dayeesha Hollins (14.6 points per game, 4.2 rebounds, 3.9 assists) and senior Bjonee Reaves (13.2, 4.3, 3.4), with solid support from sophomore forward Tiffany Turner (8.7 points, 7.5 rebounds).

"This is a tough conference, a defensive-oriented conference. I think we're a much more rounded team than last year, when we depended on one player to put up points," Elliott says. "This year we've got three of our guys capable of putting up 14, 15, or 16 points a game. I'm hoping that's going to help us in conference play, because we don't need to have

one guy to depend on to score points."

Against Big East teams, Elliott's team has improved its performance this season, playing No. 10 Rutgers to within 11 points, No. 16 Louisville within five, and South Florida within three.

"Even though you don't want to talk about moral victories, we've been in every single game," Elliott says. "We're competing for 40 minutes a game. I just hope we can turn the corner. My kids are working hard and they deserve it. I'm hoping we'll re-energize for the back end of the conference play and hopefully get a couple of W's toward the end of the Big East season."

Going through a losing season was a new experience for Elliott, just as it was for her teammate on the Huskies' 1995 Championship team Jennifer Rizzotti '96 (CLAS), who has established her University of Hartford team as a nationally recognized program in the America East Conference. The Hawks have won regular season titles, tournament championships, and have made six trips to the NCAA Tournament. Last year, the two former Huskies spent time together at a seminar for Division I coaches conducted by the Center for Coaching Excellence.

"One of the things we talked about is letting go of losses and tough times and being able to move on quicker," Rizzotti says. "Jamelle knows as much as I do that you learn from losses, and you've got to have the right kids [in your program]. It doesn't matter how hard you work, you need the right kids. At the end of the day, you know you've given them everything you could and they value their experience. When you're starting a program, worrying about wins and losses you sometimes lose sight of that."

Auriemma says the Big East is so competitive that it takes time for even established teams to become a regular contender against the leading programs in the conference, and it is even more challenging to rebuild a struggling program.

"The biggest thing is Jamelle has created a culture where I think the kids are doing the things she wants them to do," he says. "Are they doing those things as well as she wants them to? Probably not, but she has started the process. It's just going to take a little bit longer, probably another couple of recruiting classes. A little bit makes a big difference in our league. I would hope they get a couple of

breaks here and there and knock off a couple of people. That's usually what it takes. "

Elliott agrees that she is adjusting to life as a head coach, where she has all the responsibility for her program, has to make every decision, and is expected to have all the answers.

"I chose to be a head coach in the best conference in the country, so I knew what I had to expect, playing against quality teams in the country night in and night out," she says. "Coming from the program I came from, it's been a little bit of an adjustment to lose the number of ball games I've lost, but that's allowing me to be a better coach and continue to study the game and get the most out of my players. My job is to make sure I build a solid foundation, trying to do things the right way, work hard, and have that carry over to everybody that's involved in my program."

When she walked out on the floor of Gampel Pavilion for the first time as a head coach in 2010, Elliott was greeted warmly with applause from the fans who cheered her as both a Husky player and coach. She will likely receive the same reception on Thursday, even as she focuses on preparing her own team for playing in Storrs. Owing to alternating home games in the conference, along with previous injuries, no member of the current Bearcat team has ever experienced the challenge of playing at Gampel.

"One of the things teams do when they come to Storrs, and I've witnessed that as a coach, is they get so caught up in the accolades [of UConn], a lot of times they lose the game before the ball actually is tipped," Elliott says. "I want them to admire it, look at all the history and tradition that UConn has brought to women's basketball, but once they do that, I want them to actually compete and not get caught up in it."

For Elliott the game is a homecoming, one that she will enjoy even as she tries to win a basketball game against her mentor.

"It's always good to come home," she says. "I'm looking forward to coming back, seeing friends and family, and hopefully giving them a competitive game for as long as we can."

Game, but no contest*Journal Inquirer* | January 20, 2012 | By Carl Adamec

STORRS — Geno Auriemma could only smile.

His University of Connecticut women's basketball team had already doubled the score on Cincinnati with 10:50 left Thursday night when Heather Buck got a piece of a shot by the Bearcats' Dayeesha Hollins. The ball went out of bounds and referee Janice Aliberti gave UConn possession.

Cincinnati coach Jamelle Elliott jumped to her feet calling out to the officials that the ball had been tipped. Referee Joanne Aldrich came in to talk with Aliberti and the call was changed to the correct one.

Auriemma stood and looked down the sideline smiling as Elliott returned to her seat. Elliott never gave up in her 16 years as a player/assistant coach here and she wasn't starting now.

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"Jamelle knows she has them on the right track and I just wanted to remind her of that," Auriemma said. "They came in here and played us better than a lot of teams have. So I'm hopeful for her, I really am."

But as hard as the Bearcats tried, they were simply overmatched. Tiffany Hayes scored 17 points as No. 3 UConn topped Cincinnati 80-37 in Big East action before a crowd announced at 6,317 at Gampel Pavilion.

"It's always nice to come back here and see family and friends," Elliott said. "You spend time with Geno, (his wife) Kathy, and everyone the night before then you come out for the game and play and be as competitive as you can."

The Bearcats hung around for 12 minutes, trailing by just five. But the Huskies (16-2 overall, 5-1 Big East) closed the half on a 21-3 run to take a 42-19 lead at the break.

Cincinnati (9-9, 0-5) got no closer the rest of the way as Auriemma improved to 13-0 against head coaches who were his players or former assistants.

"I don't think we came out really ready for the game, which is disappointing to say at this point of the season," UConn center Stefanie Dolson said. "We are still getting better at our focus of coming out and playing each team like it's the championship game. We did a better job of it in the second half."

Dolson added 14 points and eight rebounds for the Huskies. Kaleena Mosqueda-Lewis chipped in 10 points. Kelly Faris had eight points, seven rebounds, and four assists.

All 11 Huskies hit the scoring column.

Hayes' output put her over the 1,500-point plateau for her career. She is now 17th on UConn's all-time scoring list (1,507) having passed Asjha Jones Thursday night.

"I'm grateful to be on that list with all those great players, but I definitely have to continue to focus on the season," Hayes said.

UConn forced 25 turnovers and Cincinnati had just three assists. North Carolina had 26 turnovers and four assists against the Huskies Monday night.

Hollins finished with 18 points for the Bearcats, 15 in the first half.

Cincinnati has dropped four straight, with the last three coming at then-No. 10 Rutgers on Jan. 7, No. 2 Notre Dame last Saturday, and UConn Thursday night.

On deck is St. John's at home Saturday.

"We needed to get through these games with our confidence intact," Elliott said. "We needed to go out and compete hard and execute. For those three games I think we did that. Now I expect us to be in games and expect us to win a lot of them."

That, too, would make Auriemma smile. Family is forever.

Lady Cats get first Big East win

The News Record | January 29, 2012 | By Joshua Miller

The Lady Bearcats played their best game of the season Saturday afternoon, walking away from the Carrier Dome in Syracuse, N.Y., with their first Big East win of the season following an impressive 55-54 victory against The Lady Orange.

Senior guard Bjonee Reaves knocked down a tough jumper with five seconds remaining in the game to seal the deal for the University of Cincinnati women's basketball team.

The Cats were finally able to find scoring threats to contribute alongside Dayeesha Hollins and also received a major contribution off the bench — both of which were issues that have plagued the Cats since the beginning of Big East play.

For the first time since prior to conference play, four different Bearcats poured in double-figure performances.

Kayla Cook paced the Cats with 14 points on 5-of-9 shooting, including 4-of-8 shooting from 3-point range.

Hollins and Reaves followed up their stellar performances earlier this week at Villanova, chipping in with 11 and 10 points, respectively.

Coming off the bench, Jeanise Randolph recorded a double-double with 11 points and 13 rebounds and was UC's only answer in the battle of the boards, filling the void that was left when Hollins fouled out late in the game.

The Bearcats led by as many as 10 points — 36-26 — three minutes in to the second half, but Syracuse refused to go away and tied the game 43-43 with 8:12 to go.

With 3:50 remaining, Hollins fouled out; and UC was forced to finish out the game without its team leader.

Iasia Hemingway tied the game once again for the Orange, making the score 50-50, with under three minutes remaining; and at the 2:24 mark, she hit another shot to put Syracuse ahead by a basket.

Cook took the ball back down the court for the Cats and sunk a 3-pointer from downtown, but Elashier Hall's jumper gave the Orange a one-point advantage, 54-53, with 1:13 remaining in the game, setting the stage for Reaves' game-winning buzzer beater.

Hemingway led Syracuse with 12 points, while Kayla Alexander netted 11 points.

"I can't say enough about my team," said Bearcats' head Coach Jamelle Elliott. "I just told them in the locker room, there are a lot of teams in the country who get on a losing streak; and their attitude changes, and they feel sorry for themselves."

Elliott said she never felt that way with the Cats, however.

"I knew that one of these games, we were going to come out on top if we stayed together, and today it was a prime example of that," Elliott said. "Everyone stepped up and gave us a chance to win."

The Bearcats finish up their road trip at Marquette on Wednesday. Tip Off is set for 8 p.m.

Cats make history in RI

The News Record | February 8, 2012 | By Sam Weinberg

For the first time in program history, the University of Cincinnati women's basketball team pulled a Big East hat trick away from Fifth Third Arena.

With their 60-56 win against the Providence Friars Tuesday night in Providence, R.I., the Bearcats notched their third-straight Big East road win, while also recording their 12th win of the season — tying last season's record for most wins under third-year head coach Jamelle Elliott.

Cincinnati's streak started with its narrow 55-54 win against Syracuse Jan. 28 and continued with a big 64-52 win against Marquette Feb. 1.

Entering Tuesday's game, the Bearcats were coming off a close 65-54 loss to No. 17/15 Georgetown at Fifth Third Arena.

"We talked a little before the game about our efforts the last three or four games," Elliott said. "Winning at Syracuse and at Marquette and giving a top-15 team a run for their money on our home court; the common denominator is that we've been playing as a team."

The Bearcats' team effort that has catapulted them to new levels in their past four games once again proved to be the deciding factor against Providence, as Cincinnati had four players net double-digit points.

Cincinnati senior guard Chanel Chisholm led the Bearcats with a game-high 17 points and nine rebounds.

Senior guard Bjonee Reaves contributed 13 points, while freshman guard Dayeesha Hollins and sophomore forward Tiffany Turner added 11 each.

"The person I'm most happy for is Chanel Chisholm," Elliott said. "For a senior who works as hard as she does to come in here and have 17 points, nine rebounds— I couldn't be happier for her."

Both teams started the game slow offensively, scoring just four points each, five minutes into the game. By the first half's six minute mark, however, the Friars had jumped to a 19-13 advantage.

The Bearcats responded by going on a 12-7 run to enter halftime trailing by just one point, and with an 11-4 run to open the second half, Cincinnati claimed the lead from Providence.

Cincinnati wouldn't relinquish its lead for the rest of the game, but with 45 seconds remaining in the game, the Friars closed within two points of the Bearcats; however, four buckets from the charity stripe by Reaves and one from Turner was enough to seal the deal for Cincinnati.

The Bearcats return to action at 2 p.m. Saturday against Pittsburgh at Fifth Third Arena.

Four-straight Big East road wins

The News Record | February 19, 2012 | By Joshua Miller

The University of Cincinnati women's basketball team (14-12, Big East 5-8) traveled to South Orange, N.J. Saturday to take on the Seton Hall Lady Pirates (7-20, Big East 0-13), and escaped a late rally to earn the 54-48 win.

After a tumultuous 0-8 start to conference play that saw the Cats embark on one of the toughest schedules in the country, UC has won five of its last six games, including four-straight games on the road.

Still, with three games left to play, the marks of 14 overall wins and four road conference victories both represent the highest totals reached during the Jamelle Elliott era.

The Bearcats got on the board quickly with a Dayeesha Hollins layup within the first minute of play.

Seton Hall struggled terribly from the field in the first half and started the game with a six-minute drought, finally scoring its first basket at the 13:58 mark on a Brittany Morris jumper.

Unfortunately for UC, the Cats could not capitalize on the early Pirate woes, as they also encountered a five-minute scoreless stretch that left the score at just 2-2 after nearly seven minutes of play.

Sparked by two Bjonee Reaves 3-pointers, the Cats went on a 12-2 run that ended inside of the seven-minute mark to give Cincinnati a 14-4 lead.

After trading baskets for the final six minutes of the half, the Bearcats headed to the locker room with a 26-16 lead.

UC didn't miss a beat to start the second stanza.

Chanel Chisolm — who played every second of the 40-minute contest — scored four quick points to spark an early 8-2 run that gave the Cats their biggest lead of the night, 34-18.

Behind the play of Chisolm and Hollins, UC maintained a double-digit lead for the majority of the second half, and were up 42-28 at the 7:35 mark.

With just over seven minutes remaining, Seton Hall senior Jasmine Crew put the Pirates on her back and led an inspired comeback, scoring or assisting 16 of the Pirates' final 20 points.

Despite the impressive play from Crew that sparked a 14-3 Seton Hall run — which cut UC's lead to just three points at the 2:24 minute mark — the Pirates couldn't quite catch the Bearcats.

With Seton Hall within three points and the shot clock winding down, Reaves drained her fourth 3-point shot of the night to push the UC lead to six points.

Although the Bearcats struggled to make their free throws in the final two minutes, the Pirates would not get any closer than five points.

Crew led Seton Hall and all scorers with 19 points, and Hollins paced UC with 16.

The Bearcats will return home to take on Marquette at Fifth Third Arena at 7 p.m. Tuesday.

Elliott leading Bearcats resurgence

GoBEARCATS.com | February 21, 2012 | By Chris Gundrum

CINCINNATI -- There have been nights when Jamelle Elliott left Fifth Third Arena frustrated. Many of them.

No longer was she coaching a team with unwavering expectations to win a national championship every year.

She knew upon her arrival as the head coach of the women's basketball team at Cincinnati the culture would be vastly different from what she left behind as an assistant under Geno Auriemma at Connecticut. She didn't need much time to realize exactly she inherited.

"Obviously it's a huge difference going from a place that you not only expect to win every game but you do win every game to a place that's totally opposite of that where you're on a losing streak, you're lucky to win one or two games in the conference every year," said Elliott, who went 21-38 overall and 6-26 in conference her first two seasons. "Obviously, it was an adjustment, but I knew what I was getting myself into."

If there's one thing Elliott knows how to do, it's win basketball games.

She spent 12 seasons as an assistant at Connecticut where she helped lead the Huskies to six national championships including an undefeated season in 2009. When Elliott was hired as the head coach at Cincinnati, the expectation was that she would bring a piece of that winning culture along with her.

Although they haven't gone undefeated or won a national championship, Elliott has seen her team improve and believes they are on the path to success. With a victory tonight UC (14-12, 5-8) will own its most Big East victories since the 2006-07 season, when it won six.

"I think that's what good coaches strive to do is exceed, not only other people's expectations but your own," said Elliott. "Obviously it was a struggle for us and it's still sometimes a struggle for us to win games, but I think we're moving in the right direction."

The Bearcats took a step in the right direction when they defeated Pittsburgh on February 11.

Not only did that gave the Bearcats 13 wins on the year, but that was most wins for Elliott since she's arriving at Cincinnati.

"That's your goal as a coach, you want to continue to improve game to game, year to year," said Elliott. "And I'm just glad for my players because of the effort they put in, how hard they work in practice, how hard they work in preseason that their hard work is starting to pay off."

Evidence of that hard work can be found in recent games where the Bearcats have won four out of their last five including a three-game win streak on the road.

Previous to this stretch, the Bearcats had lost six in a row and were ecstatic to finally defeat a conference rival in Syracuse on January 28. Little did they know the momentum which would follow.

"I think because we had such a long stretch of losses that we really did celebrate the Syracuse win because it was a while before we had won a game before that," said Chanel Chisholm. "But now that we're starting to win games we can expect it and we get really upset when we lose now."

One reason for their success against Syracuse is the fact that multiple players contributed. Earlier in the year, the Bearcats relied on one or two players to carry the load. That day four players finished in double figures.

"We got away from one player possibly two players going into double figures to three or four guys not only scoring in double figures but doing other things to fill up the stat sheet that would allow us to win games," Elliott said.

Defeating a conference opponent on the road would have been a major accomplishment and maybe even a surprise before Elliott arrived. For her, that's a mentality that needs to change.

"I don't want us, every time we win a game, to act like we've won the Big East Championship," said Elliott. "We need to start to expect that. And that just goes with me trying to change the culture of this program."

Since the win at Syracuse, it appears as though the Bearcats are starting to react to winning a little differently.

Rather than be surprised, they're starting to expect it.

"Before we won at Syracuse we hadn't tasted victory since the last year," said Elliott. "So, once we won those two games then all of a sudden it's like, OK, if we do some things

on the basketball court, individually and as a team there's no reason why we can stay in games, if not stay in games for 40 minutes, definitely win them."

As long as they continue to build on the success of this year, they will be in good position to make even more improvements next year.

"There are still a lot of building blocks that need to be put in place," said Elliott. "I feel confident that the foundation in there now it's time to continue to build and get better."