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Bristol native Donovan Clingan's desire to be great helping **UConn get back to the top** By Cameron Beall @_beall_ Jan 28, 2023 🔍



STORRS — The Jonathan Husky logo lies centered on UConn's two-toned court and stares up at a constant reminder of why the University of Connecticut was once known as the basketball capital of

the world. Fifteen Championship banners — 11 for the women and four for the men — hang from the rafters of Gampel Pavilion and the XL Center.

Donovan Clingan. In his freshman season with the Huskies, the 7-foot-2 Bristol native finds himself

Not far from the center-court logo — usually occupying the very first seat on the bench — sits

as a key player in UConn's quest to regaining the pedigree that was once nationally recognized.

Through his first 22 games as a Husky, Clingan has already begun to drum up serious discussion as Freshman of the Year candidate. As of late, he's also been fielding comparisons to the National Player of the Year frontrunner, 7-foot-4 junior Zach Edey of Purdue. Clingan's production to this point is about on par with the numbers Edey posted his freshman season.

Clingan's 71.2% field goal percentage ranks second in the Big East and highlights his averages thus

far. He's averaging 8.5 points, 6.2 rebounds and 2.0 blocks across 13.8 minutes per game. When

expanded across a full game, Clingan's numbers improve to 24.5 points, 17.9 rebounds and 5.8

The freshman's player efficiency rating (38.31) is also tops in the Big East and second only to Edey nationally according to ESPN's John Hollinger's metrics. Clingan has begun elbowing his way into the conversation of college basketball's most productive

players. He's also a part of a much more crowded camp who want to win at all costs, but most don't

have Clingan's resume. The UConn freshman took 43-straight high school victories with him to

Storrs before the Huskies tacked on 14 more to start this season.

"I hate losing. I cannot do this," Clingan typed.

more athletic, and the results followed suit.

want to do. I want to win everything."

ordained from the start.

player every day.

when Barrette made the first decision about Clingan's future.

and said, 'welp, he'll never play a game for you, so get used to it now."

Clingan's stature and win-loss record made it easy to project the former Bristol Central Ram as a great prospect, but measurables don't always tell the whole story in sports. For Clingan, though, his track record parallels the desire to be great that remains inside of him and the UConn Huskies.

Xavier on Dec. 31. Four days later, UConn dropped their second-straight in a 12-point loss at Providence.

It had been nearly three years — 1,036 days — since Clingan's last loss when the Huskies fell 83-73 to

Barrette, that reassured everything the Rams' head coach already knew about his former star.

At about 7:30 the following morning, Clingan sent a text to his former high school coach, Tim

to instill the center's desire to be great. From when Barrette first saw him play the day after eighth grade graduation, his work ethic was what set him apart from your average student-athlete.

Clingan, a 6-foot-9 middle school graduate, showed up to the varsity summer league in New Britain

Barrette was Clingan's coach each of the last four years in Bristol and explained that he never had

"We had this baby giraffe out there who was trying to learn how to use his body," said Barrette. "But he went out there and had like 14 points and 12 rebounds, and I looked over at my freshmen coach

averaging 22.2 points and 17.4 rebounds per game. He did this all while still struggling to dunk the basketball according to Barrette.

Comparative to the three years that were to follow, Clingan had a subdued freshman campaign,

Everything changed for Clingan ahead of his sophomore year. He returned to the court stronger,

"[His improved play] wasn't because of his growth, it was actually because of how hard he had worked in the weight room," Barrette explained. "Once he started to grow into his body a little bit

and started to fill out physically, we knew that he was about to embark on a crazy journey."

Donovan's numbers improved each season which culminated in a 28-0 state championship run as a senior, averaging 30.3 points, 18.4 rebounds and 6.0 blocks per game. He racked up 2,268 points and 1,518 rebounds during his time in Bristol.

The accolades led to Clingan being a four-star recruit and ranked the 56th best player in his class

class and second-best player in Connecticut behind Ugonna Onyenso out of Putnam Science Academy who committed to Kentucky.

on the 2022 ESPN 100 as well as 247Sports.com. The latter had him ranked the 13th best center in his

explained. "Whenever I stepped on campus it just felt like home. "The coaches care, and the coaches want to win more than anything which is just like me and what I

eventual commitment to UConn. He explained how Huskies head coach Dan Hurley was running around during practice like he was one of the players.

Clingan recalled a practice he watched during his recruitment that left a lasting impact on his

to see the coach on the court running around like he's a Division I athlete still." Despite ranking seventh in points all-time in Connecticut, being named a two-time Gatorade and

"[Hurley] just cares so much and wants to get everyone better," said Clingan. "It just caught my eye

Gone were the days of lining up opposite a 6-foot-3 center for tip-off in a high school game. Clingan's first proverbial wake-up call came in practice before the season when he was suddenly

Clingan knew he was no longer a big fish in a small pond and worked on his strength and stamina ahead of his freshman season noting, "The pace of play in college is a hundred times of what high school was." He mentioned that going up against a player of Sanogo's pedigree makes him a better

Following five solid outings to start the season, the Huskies traveled to Oregon for the Phil Knight Invitational which served as the freshman's true coming out party. Over three games against

tournament final against Iowa State, Clingan shot 5-for-6 from the field for 15 points with 10 boards

Oregon, Alabama and Iowa State Clingan averaged 9.3 points and 7.7 rebounds per game. In the

to his credit en route to being named tournament MVP.

to occasionally switch up the rotation to make sure Clingan was seeing enough minutes. Usually working as the team's backup to Sanogo, Hurley has —sparsely — paired the center-tandem together to get sufficient playing time for both bigs. "He's far exceeded [expectations]," said Hurley following their loss to St. John's. "Donovan has had

flipped to 2023. This is a situation Clingan has not been in since his freshman season at Bristol Central and

Clingan helped the Huskies rise as high as No. 2 in the nation by the end of 2022 amid a 14-0 start.

The new year has not treated the team as kindly, however, as the team is just 2-6 since the calendar

"It's just something inside of me that I hate losing," said Clingan. "I didn't lose much in my high school career and that carried along with me through the first half of this season.

fun." Even as a freshman, Clingan is exhibiting the behavior Barrette saw in Bristol that made him such a

When he's not in the game, Clingan can be found in the first seat on the bench, is the first player to

feet when the Huskies need a boost. "It's such a proud moment to watch as a coach every time he checks in and runs onto the floor,"

Barrette said. "I move to the edge of my seat in my living room. I'm just so proud to say that I was able to be part of that young man's life."

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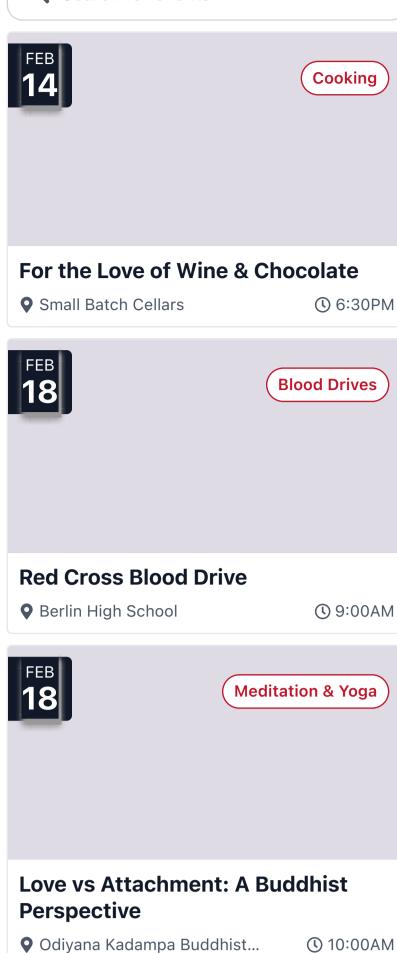
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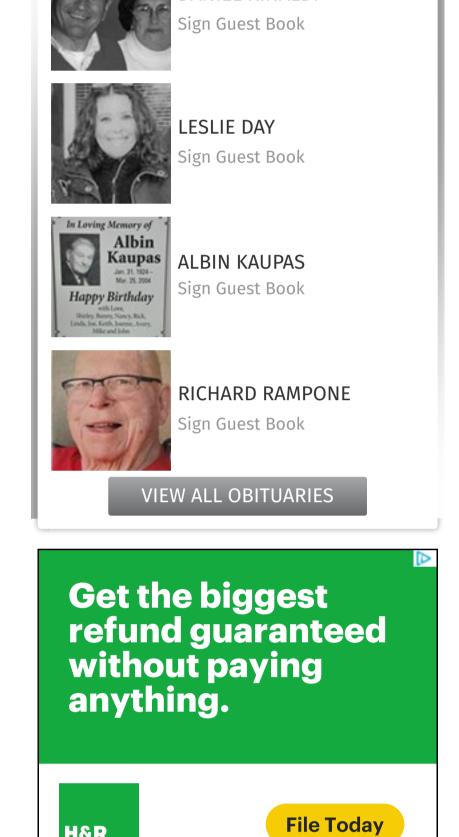
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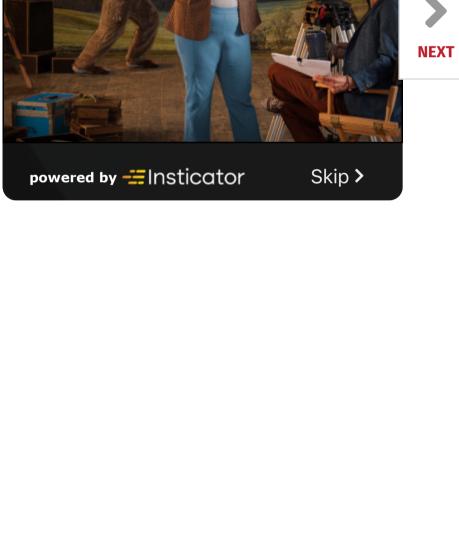
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According to ESPN, Clingan received 18 offers to schools including Michigan, Ohio State, Rutgers, Michigan State, Virginia Tech, Iowa and Providence. While there is a seemingly-obvious connection

between UConn and Clingan given that Storrs is less than 50 miles from his high school gym, the

freshman explained that geography didn't play as much of a factor as some may assume.

"Just the family atmosphere that's inside of this program and the connection you feel between everyone whether it's the manager or the head coach; you just feel connected to everyone," Clingan

Hurley was a former Big East point guard at Seton Hall in the 90s, and his continued passion for the

game certainly played a hand in landing one of the nation's top centers.

Max Preps Connecticut Player of the Year and holding the Bristol Central single-game records for

points and rebounds — 51 and 31 respectively — Clingan's success with the Huskies was not

marking the 6-foot-9 Big East Preseason Player of the Year, National Player of the Year candidate and 2022 Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Center of the Year Finalist, junior Adama Sanogo.

The production Clingan has seen thus far wasn't in the script he and Hurley wrote-up prior to the season, however. Clingan explained that his original role was simply to give Sanogo a break at points throughout a game and to rebound the basketball — but things change.

The newcomer was so productive in UConn's non-conference slate, that it forced the hand of Hurley

an unbelievable year... Donovan is a special player and he's got a bright future."

explained that the team's fall from grace did not sit right with anyone.

"When we started losing it just hit me a little bit. It hit all of us. None of us like losing. Losing is not

reliable centerpiece. Barrette explained that he never had to worry about Donovan being a leader and still doesn't for the Huskies.

take off his warmup shirt and is often the first waving his arms in the air to get the crowd to their

While Barrette inches closer to his television when his former center checks into the game, Clingan makes his way across the Jonathan Husky logo and the shadows of 15 banners which he hopes to

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