

# FINAL FOUR

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UConn's Paige Bueckers let out an elated yell Friday night after the Huskies defeated defending champion Stanford 63-58 in the NCAA women's Final Four. The former Hopkins star scored 14 points.

## Two for the show

SOUTH CAROLINA 72, LOUISVILLE 59

### Victory is resounding after '21 semifinal loss

By RACHEL BLOUNT • rblount@startribune.com

South Carolina coach Dawn Staley views every season as a series of tests. Most of the time, her team passes. Once in a while, the Gamecocks falter, as they did in last year's NCAA semifinals.

The good thing, Staley said, is that basketball allows multiple opportunities to try again. Friday night, the top-ranked Gamecocks earned an A-plus, defeating Louisville 72-59 at Target Center to advance to Sunday's NCAA championship game against Connecticut. South Carolina (34-2) is pursuing a second national title after winning the crown in 2017.

National player of the year Aliyah Boston made the most of her do-over in the semifinals. She finished with a game-high 23 points and 18 rebounds, shooting 67% from the field and making six of seven free throws.

Brea Beal contributed 12 points and led a Gamecocks defensive effort that held Louisville's Hailey Van Lith to nine points, ending Van Lith's streak of four NCAA tournament games with 20 or more points.

The Gamecocks ended last season with a 66-65 semifinal loss to Stanford, as Beal and Boston both missed chances to score in the final seconds. Given an opportunity to write a different outcome, they didn't let it get away.

See **CAROLINA** on C4 ▶

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South Carolina's Destanni Henderson drove against Louisville's Olivia Cochran during the first semifinal game Friday night at Target Center. Henderson scored 11 points.

#### National championship

7 p.m. Sunday • Target Center

South Carolina (34-2) vs. Connecticut (30-5)  
7 p.m. Sunday (ESPN)

#### Expanded coverage inside

**Scoggins:** Aliyah Boston dominates on biggest stage. **C5**  
**Reusse:** Reporter Holly Rowe at the top of her game. **C6**  
**Souhan:** Paige Bueckers has the nation's attention. **C9**

UCONN 63, STANFORD 58

### Even less than perfect, UConn topples champs

By KENT YOUNGBLOOD • kyounghblood@startribune.com

This didn't go according to plan, necessarily. To chalk.

But for thousands of fans among the announced sellout of 18,268 who cheered Paige Bueckers' every move, it went like a Hollywood script.

Scoring just enough and playing what at times was bone-rattling defense, Connecticut advanced to Sunday's NCAA women's basketball championship with a 63-58 victory over Stanford, which saw its 24-game winning streak — and quest for consecutive titles — ended in a flurry of missed shots.

Instead it will be Connecticut (30-5) that will play South Carolina on Sunday night looking for its 12th title overall and first since 2016.

"We said the other day that points are hard to come by in this tournament," UConn coach Geno Auriemma said. "And today was certainly no different."

Nobody on this Connecticut team has played in a title game; the Huskies had fallen short in the semifinals every year since winning their 11th title back in 2016.

Not this time. "This is a really hard game to win," Auriemma said. "Stanford is the defending champion. We didn't play our 'A' game on the offensive end. But the things we needed to do, when we had to do 'em, we came up big."

Plot twists?

See **UCONN** on C8 ▶