

COLLEGE FOOTBALL



NO. 13 HOUSTON COUGARS | UCONN

2:30 P.M. SATURDAY, PRATT & WHITNEY STADIUM
TV/RADIO: ESPNU, 950 AM



David J. Phillip/AP file photo

Houston coach Tom Herman watches his team warm up before its game against Memphis on Nov. 14.

Houston focused on avoiding trap against UConn

By **ANTHONY OPPERMANN**
The Daily News

» **HOUSTON**

Head coach Tom Herman calls the University of Houston's football program "open and honest."

Not only did Herman address the elephant in the room before the 13th-ranked Cougars game against the Connecticut Huskies on Saturday, but he practically escorted it into the center of the circus ring.

"Whatever your definition of a trap game is, you can circle Houston versus UConn because that certainly has all of the makings of it," Herman said.

Houston enters the game with UConn undefeated and following the trip to Hartford, Conn., will face No. 19 Navy on a short week for a spot in the American Athletic Conference championship game.

The Huskies, meanwhile, come into the contest 5-5, needing just one more win to become bowl eligible. UConn has had extra time to prepare thanks to its bye week beforehand and also has the benefit of playing the Cougars at home.

Herman was very open and honest when sharing those same feelings with his team earlier this week.

"I told them on Sunday, that's what this is. This is the definition of a trap game," Herman said. "Let's get it out there right now. Let's talk about it. Let's define it, and then let's move on and prepare."

Saturday's game will pit two past Broyles Award winners against one another.

UConn head coach Bob Diaco won the award as the nation's top assistant coach in 2012 while serving as defensive coordinator at Notre Dame. Herman received the honor last season as Ohio State's offensive coordinator.

While not as multiple as Vanderbilt's defense, the Huskies' Diaco-led D has been effective, ranking 23rd nationally while allowing an average of 19.3 points per game.

"The beauty is in his simplicity," Herman said of Diaco.

UConn has been particularly stingy in pass defense, allowing a conference-low 187.5 yards per game. The Huskies are tied with



David J. Phillip/AP file photo

Houston quarterback Greg Ward Jr. suffered an ankle injury during the first half against Memphis.

No. 13 Houston (10-0, 6-0) at UConn (5-5, 3-3)

Line: No line.

Series Record: First meeting.

WHAT'S AT STAKE: Houston hopes to remain undefeated on track for a berth in the conference championship game. UConn is looking to become bowl eligible for the first time since the 2010 season.

KEY MATCHUP: Houston offense vs. UConn defense. UConn's defense has been giving up just over 19 points a game, and scored the team's only points in UConn's 7-3 win over Tulane. Houston has been averaging 43.5 points a game and over 511 yards of offense.

FACTS & FIGURES: Houston comes into the game as one of just five teams in the nation to beat at least six opponents by three touchdowns or more ... Houston leads the nation with a plus-18 turnover margin, UConn is at plus-70, good enough for 18th in the nation ... UConn has just two wins in 25 previous games against ranked opponents. The Huskies lost earlier this season to then-No. 22 Missouri, 9-3.

The Associated Press

Houston and Temple for the AAC lead in interceptions with 15.

"They don't have a lot of sacks on the year, but what they do have is a lot of interceptions because they're usually dropping eight into coverage," Herman said. "It's really, really hard to complete a pass against them."

The Cougars had their poorest

half of offense last Saturday against Memphis, converting only one first down in their first six possessions and gaining just 24 total yards to start the game.

UConn will present another challenge for a Houston offense that may be without starting quarterback Greg Ward Jr., who left last Saturday's game before the end of the first half with an ankle injury and did not return.

While the Cougars struggled offensively during the first half against Memphis, wide receiver Demarcus Ayers said the team will look to what it did in the second half against the Tigers — racking up almost 300 yards of total offense and scoring 28 points — rather than what happened at the start of the game.

"I think that was the unique thing about last game," Ayers said. "We found ways to make plays down the stretch, but we also know, watching the film, we have a lot of areas we need to improve on."

While the Huskies have made it difficult on opposing offenses, especially attempting to throw the ball, Ayers said the key to an improved performance from the Cougars' wide outs will be a basic one.

"Just understanding football, understanding what you need to do to find those spots in those zones to get open," Ayers said. "If you're not open, then creating space for someone else to get open."

Ayers also noted that Houston posted a season-low 371 yards of total offense against Vanderbilt on Oct. 31, but followed that up with a 427-yard output the following week against Cincinnati.

He expected a similar effort and renewed focus while preparing this week to face UConn.

"I think we'll make the same adjustments and try to come out with some power and more energy on offense," Ayers said.

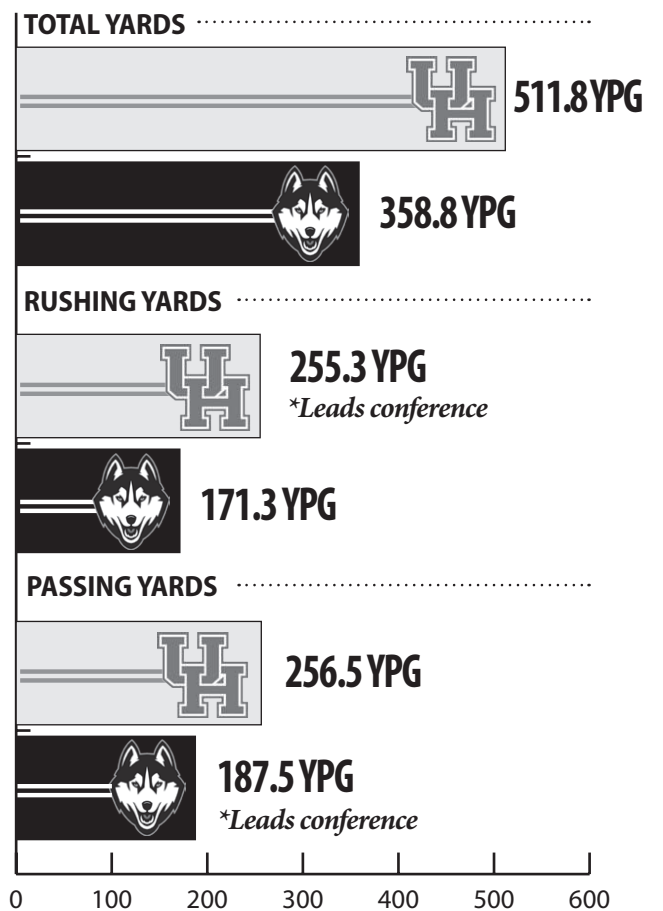
And with the game against UConn clearly defined, Herman expects that same energy from the rest of the team as well.

"This is the part of the season where you don't take your foot off of the gas," Herman said. "You put it down even harder."

STRENGTH VS. STRENGTH

Saturday's matchup will feature a pair of past Broyles Award winners, given to the nation's top assistant coach. UConn head coach Bob Diaco won the award while Notre Dame's defensive coordinator in 2012, and Houston's Tom Herman won the honor as Ohio State's offensive coordinator last season.

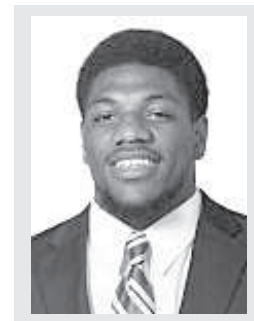
Diaco's Huskies lead the American Athletic Conference in passing defense, allowing an average of 187.5 yards per game while Herman's Cougars pace the conference in rushing offense at an average of 255.3 yards per game.



SCOUTING UCONN



OFFENSIVE PLAYER TO WATCH



Arkeel Newsome
RB | #22

Leads the team with 645 net rushing yards and is averaging 5.0 yards per carry ... Ranks second on the team with 36 receptions for 417 yards ... Averaging 24.4 yards per kickoff return ... Had a 71-yard return Oct. 10 at UCF.

DEFENSIVE PLAYER TO WATCH



Jamar Summers
CB | #21

Tied for third in the FBS with six interceptions ... Had a 67-yard pick-6 Nov. 7 against Tulane scoring the lone TD of the game ... Named AAC defensive player of the week Nov. 9 ... Intercepted two passes Oct. 30 against East Carolina.

AMERICAN ATHLETIC CONFERENCE

	AMERICAN EAST		OVERALL EAST	
	W	L	W	L
Temple	5	1	8	2
USF	4	2	6	4
Cincinnati	3	3	6	4
UConn	3	3	5	5
East Carolina	3	4	5	6
UCF	0	7	0	11

	AMERICAN WEST		OVERALL WEST	
	W	L	W	L
Houston	6	0	10	0
Navy	6	0	8	1
Memphis	4	2	8	2
Tulsa	2	4	5	5
Tulane	1	5	3	7
SMU	0	6	1	9

THURSDAY'S GAME

» East Carolina 44, UCF 7

TODAY'S GAME

» Cincinnati at USF, 7 p.m. (CBS Sports Network)

SATURDAY'S GAMES

- » Memphis at Temple, 11 a.m. (ESPNU)
- » Houston at UConn, 2:30 p.m. (ESPNU)
- » Navy at Tulsa, 6 p.m. (CBS Sports Network)
- » Tulane at SMU, 7 p.m. (ESPNews)

Editor's Pick: Game to Watch

No. 12 North Carolina at Virginia Tech
11 a.m. Saturday
TV: ESPN

Virginia Tech's **Frank Beamer** announced earlier this month that he'll be retiring after 29 seasons. The Hokies will try to win his final home game at Lane Stadium and end the Tar Heels' nine-game winning streak.



Michael Dwyer
AP photo

Heisman Watch

» Alabama running back **Derrick Henry** is second in the nation with 1,458 yards rushing and is fourth with an average of 145.8 rush yards per game.

» Oklahoma quarterback **Baker Mayfield** is second in the nation with a 183.9 passing efficiency rating, trailing only injured Baylor QB Seth Russell's rating of 189.7.

Rogelio V. Solis
AP photo



Trending Up



Oklahoma

The Sooners handed Baylor its first loss and climbed five spots to No. 7 in both the AP and playoff rankings.

Trending Down



Stanford

The Cardinal's loss against Oregon most likely shot it and the Pac-12 a shot at the College Football Playoff.