



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

August 9, 2022

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Cara Consuegra, Head Coach, Charlotte 49ers Women's Basketball

by **Bill Bartee**

Coach Cara Consuegra of the Charlotte 49ers says she'll show up anytime **Dale Halton** asks her to speak. Charlotte Rotary is fortunate that Dale asked her because we were able to learn about her love of her team, the university, and their success.

Consuegra is beginning her 12th season as coach of the Lady 49ers. During that time, she has become the winningest coach in team history. She has compiled 197 wins and this past season was named the 2021-22 Conference USA Coach of the Year. That team won the conference's regular season and tournament championships and qualified for the NCAA Women's Tournament.

Her players' individual success is notable too. She has developed 25 all-conference selections, 21 conference players of the week, 18 freshmen of the week, eight 1,000-point scorers, two conference selections for the sixth player of the year, and two out-right conference players of the year. Eight 49ers have signed professional contracts.

She credits her team's hard work and truly epitomizes the HEART core values: heart, effort, accountability, respect, and toughness. Focusing on building a young person for what's next in life helped the team with its determination.

Octavia Jet-Wilson and Kee Kee McKinney helped lead the team 15-3 in the league in tight, competitive games. During the conference championship game, Consuegra felt that the team was nervous and the 1st quarter and early second quarter showed it. That's when Coach Consuegra wanted to have a "Hoosiers" moment during a timeout until she realized they wouldn't know the movie. "Gritty and tough, along with...wanting to win" is what pulled them through that game.

The championship win brings an expectation of continued success. Three starters have moved on but several players from last year along with added transfers will help the 2022-2023 team.

Plus, a lot of change has happened with conference re-alignment. UNC-Charlotte will play one more year in Conference USA before moving over to the American Athletic Conference bringing more exposure, money, and competitiveness to the athletic program. Although it is constantly changing and could be even more different in future years.

Name, Image, Likeness (NIL) is a part of the changing dynamic of college athletics over the past year. It is still a bit of the "wild west" but Consuegra supports players being able to have some income from its utilization.

The transfer portal for women's basketball had over 1200 players entering it this past year. This has changed recruiting including a lack of freshmen entering the program. This is because you can bring in experienced players instead of players without experience. The flip side is that players can leave the UNCC program. Fortunately, this has not occurred with the Charlotte program.

Last year's Charlotte team had over a 3.0 GPA and historically her student-athletes graduate with a degree.

Questions from the Charlotte Rotary audience found:

- Coach Consuegra would advise high school players to research their opportunities and be prepared to take offers earlier because those offers may not be there later.
- Her players would describe her as fiery and tough but loving.
- Her major influences are her high school coach, the late Brian Matthews and her University of Iowa coach, Lisa Bluder.

*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/738032318>
The speaker's presentation begins at 27:00 minutes.