

# Pam Webber

## UConn's consummate leader, team player, student-athlete

By NEIL RUDEL  
*Altoona Mirror*

Pam (Webber) Mitchell's contributions to Connecticut's first national championship are often remembered as those of a quiet, dignified senior leader who was an extension of the coaching staff on the floor.

Her career didn't begin quite that way. Webber's first recollection of competition came in the Hollidaysburg elementary program.

She and former Hollidaysburg coach Joe Hurd enjoy the memory.

"I don't know if he thought I was going to be any good because I screamed every time I hit the floor, which was all the time," she said. "He and Sonny Consiglio would laugh at me."

"The ball would be loose and we'd hear this scream," Hurd said. "We thought maybe she was allergic to the wood on the gym floor, but she had a certain intensity even then."

That intensity combined with intelligence and self-motivation required of an honor student combined to make Webber the centerpiece of a golden era in Hollidaysburg Lady Tiger basketball, one not duplicated before or since.

Hollidaysburg won the District 6 championship during Webber's sophomore and senior seasons and also captured the Rotary Tournament her senior year. The Lady Tigers went to the western semi-finals in 1989, her sophomore year ("I think that was the best team I ever coached," Hurd said), and the western final her senior year.

Webber, a four-year starter and 1,000-point scorer, "was the catalyst for everything," Hurd said.

She was one of five players to earn Division I scholarships from that era, joining Krissy Heinbaugh (James Madison), Jill

Colabrese (Pitt), Erin McCoy (Bucknell) and Jeri Dorezas (American). "We had a lot of ingredients, but Pam brought everything together," Hurd said.

Connecticut coach Geno Auriemma was then building the dynasty his program has since become, the latest feather coming this year with the Lady Huskies' second national title. Auriemma saw the kind of shooter and ballhandler Webber was, but he also saw more. He saw the poise and the charisma and the intangibles that great programs need.

While close friend Rebecca Lobo was becoming the national player of the year in leading the Huskies to a 35-0 record, Webber was drawing raves for epitomizing an unselfish role player.

She started 121 of 122 games at UConn, did not miss a single game, averaged 6.1 points and left as the school's all-time assist leader.

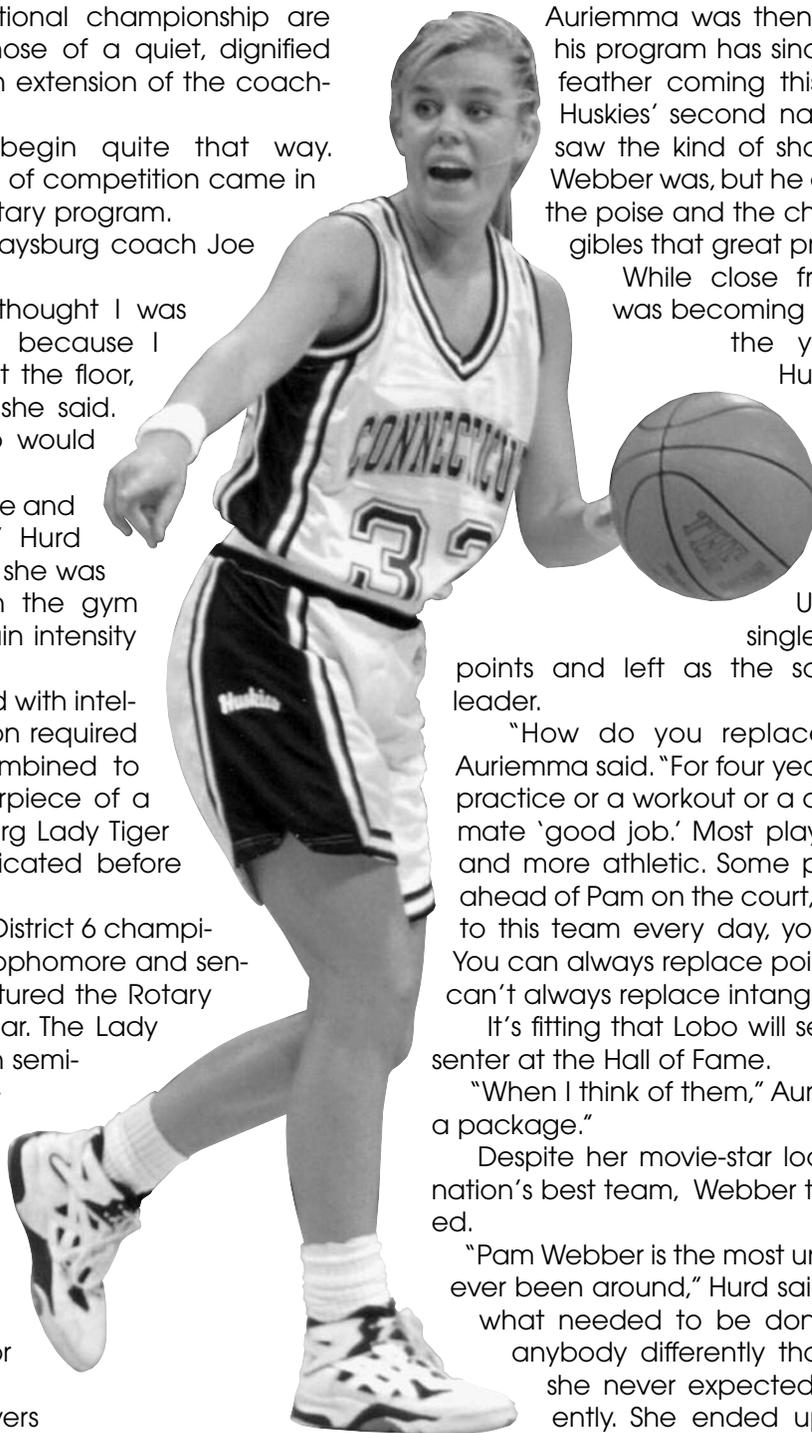
"How do you replace a Pam Webber?" Auriemma said. "For four years, she never missed a practice or a workout or a chance to tell a teammate 'good job.' Most players are bigger, faster and more athletic. Some players are light years ahead of Pam on the court, but what she brought to this team every day, you can never replace. You can always replace points and rebounds. You can't always replace intangibles."

It's fitting that Lobo will serve as Webber's presenter at the Hall of Fame.

"When I think of them," Auriemma said, "I think of a package."

Despite her movie-star looks and status on the nation's best team, Webber took nothing for granted.

"Pam Webber is the most unassuming athlete I've ever been around," Hurd said. "She just always did what needed to be done. She never treated anybody differently than anybody else and she never expected to be treated differently. She ended up more in the background at UConn, which is where she wanted to be."



"Pam is a throw-back to the old days, when team came first and doing what the coach says was the way you played the game," Auriemma said.

"She's an inspiration to every girl who wants to be a good college player but wonders if she's big, fast, quick or strong enough."

At 5-foot-6, Webber didn't feel she had to compensate for her height at Hollidaysburg, but "once you get into Division I, at 5-6 you become short. I was fortunate to be on a team where I could be a role player and I wasn't asked to do things far beyond the scope of my physical abilities. I was fortunate that if I stayed out on the perimeter, and hit open shots, I could get the ball to some of our great inside players."

Webber, who has since married Scott Mitchell and now works as a physical therapist in State College, remains proud to be part of the UConn tradition.

"When I was in PT (physical therapy) school there, some of the players now were freshmen so I don't feel that far removed," she said.

Webber said while growing up in Blair County, the success of Altoona in the state playoffs helped "other local programs rise to the challenge. Those are girls I played with and against through the elementary and junior high ranks and by the time high school came along, we felt if we could put five players out there to compete against them."

She considers Suzie McConnell one of her inspirations, but behind her dad, Larry, a former player at Westminster who years ago installed a half court alongside their home. Pam and her brother



**Pam was one of three Hollidaysburg seniors to earn Division I scholarships in 1991 joining Erin McCoy (left) and Krissy Heinbaugh (right) along with Lady Tiger Coach Joe Hurd.**

## *Pam (Webber) Mitchell*



**Sport:** Basketball

**High school:** Hollidaysburg Area, 1991

**College:** University of Connecticut

**Hall of Fame achievement:**  
Four year starter, co-captain and assist leader of UConn's 1995 national championship team

**Current occupation:**  
Physical therapist

**Current residence:**  
State College

Brad (they have a younger sister, Ali) would often shoot into the night.

"My first memories are of a nerf hoop and we went through about eight of them, between me and my brother," she said. "It's always kind of been an important sport in our family and I've always loved the game but my dad was a big influence in the start."

Webber not only made her mark on the court but in the classroom. She won the Hall of Fame scholarship in 1991 and was named UConn's scholar-athlete as a senior, sharing the award with Lobo.

"I definitely was blessed that things came easy to me but academics are a challenge, especially at the collegiate level and you have to make sure your priorities are in the right places and you budget your time so I'm proud of that," she said.

She's also proud to be going into the Hall of Fame.

"I feel really honored," she said. "I don't think of myself in that way. It's humbling but it's a really nice honor and I hope it's inspiring to other young girls, that you can be a regular girl from a small town and through hard work and support, good things can happen to them, too."