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## News Release

### **Emeka Okafor Announces Gift to Benefit Students at Hartford's Clark Elementary School**

*University of Connecticut Initiative to Receive \$250,000 to Support Programs in Hartford*

(September 27, 2007) – Today, 2003-04 National Player of the Year Emeka Okafor, former player of the NCAA champion University of Connecticut Basketball Team, announced he will contribute \$250,000 to the University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education to support the Husky Sport Program in Hartford.

Husky Sport provides UConn student mentors in the areas of nutrition education and physical education. The program also supports enriching field trips whereby Hartford youth have the opportunity to visit and learn about the University of Connecticut. Operating at three locations in Hartford's North End, the Clark Elementary School, the Kelvin D. Anderson Recreation Center, and the Hartford Catholic Worker House, Husky Sport offers in-school, after-school and summer activities sessions.

The UConn program was developed by Jennifer Bruening, an assistant professor in the Kinesiology Department of the Neag School of Education.

"Every child should have a mentor. I am blessed to be able to help the Husky Sport program continue to enrich young people's lives and make sure that the children in this program not only have a mentor but are getting the tools needed to succeed in life," says Okafor. "Nutrition and physical activity are the cornerstone of my life and I feel strongly that young people should not only be educated on healthy living but that they have the access required to lead healthy lives."

"Emeka Okafor represented UConn at its best throughout his years here, as an outstanding student, a spectacular athlete, and an engaged member and leader of the University community," says University of Connecticut President Michael J. Hogan. "It is gratifying but not at all surprising that he would step up to support this program. We're tremendously proud of Emeka, and proud of the contribution that the Neag School of Education is making through the Husky Sport Program."

Clark School Principal Beryl Irene Bailey said the program has changed lives. "The students at Clark now benefit from college mentors who provide life skills and lessons in nutrition and physical fitness. The UConn students have gone above and beyond and also offer tutoring in the academic subjects," Bailey said. "Additionally, Clark students are exposed to positive examples of people they can emulate. In a neighborhood plagued by unemployment and illiteracy, this program serves as a metaphorical opportunity knocking on a door that will hopefully lead to our students' enrollment in college and their enlistment in the metamorphosis of their community."

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Jennifer Bruening, who began the program four years ago, said the funds contributed by Okafor will be used to expand the program by increasing the number of opportunities offered to the Hartford students and the quality and quantity of the time they spend with their UConn mentors. In addition to the program at Clark School, Husky Sport has programs at the Anderson Center (with a focus on pre-adolescent girls) and the Catholic Worker House Saturday program.

One of the highlights of the program each semester, Bruening said, is a field trip planned by the UConn students for children at all three sites. Past trips have included tours of the UConn Library and the College Cultural Center, an opportunity to attend a professional tennis tournament, and exposure to crew, lacrosse, ice skating, and other sports. Bruening's research examines the factors, including race, gender, access, economics, and exposure that limit the sport and physical activity opportunities of African American girls and women. In addition, a new research initiative examines the effects of Husky Sport on the UConn mentors.

"The program benefits the children in Hartford," she said. "But it also benefits the UConn students. It focuses them on what's really important and what they believe about society."

The gift, to be paid over five years to the University of Connecticut Foundation, is Okafor's first significant domestic donation. He is also the spokesperson for the One Million African Lives initiative, which has pledged to save one million lives over the next five years in Africa by cleaning up the blood supply by preventing people from receiving tainted blood in transfusions. Okafor has partnered with the Safe Blood for Africa Foundation, which is active in 35 Sub-Saharan countries, and he spent two weeks this summer in Africa delivering test kits that ensure the blood is clean before there is a blood transfusion.

"When you have an academic and athletic role model like Emeka Okafor helping to provide all this, it just means that much more," said Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez. The Mayor thanked Mr. Okafor for his contribution and for being a positive role model to Hartford students.

A two-time Academic All-American, Okafor was graduated from UConn in 2004 with a finance degree and a 3.8 grade point average after attending college for only three years. He was the 2004 Academic All-American of the Year and was the Big East Men's Basketball Scholar-Athlete in 2004-05 and 2005-06. He was named the 2003-04 NABC and *Sports Illustrated* National Player of the Year and holds UConn's career record for blocked shots with 441. He finished his career seventh in NCAA history in both average blocked shots per game and total blocked shots, despite playing only three seasons.

Okafor was the number two selection in the 2004 NBA draft by the Charlotte Bobcats and was the 2004-05 NBA Rookie of the Year. He was also a member of the 2004 United States Olympic team.

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