

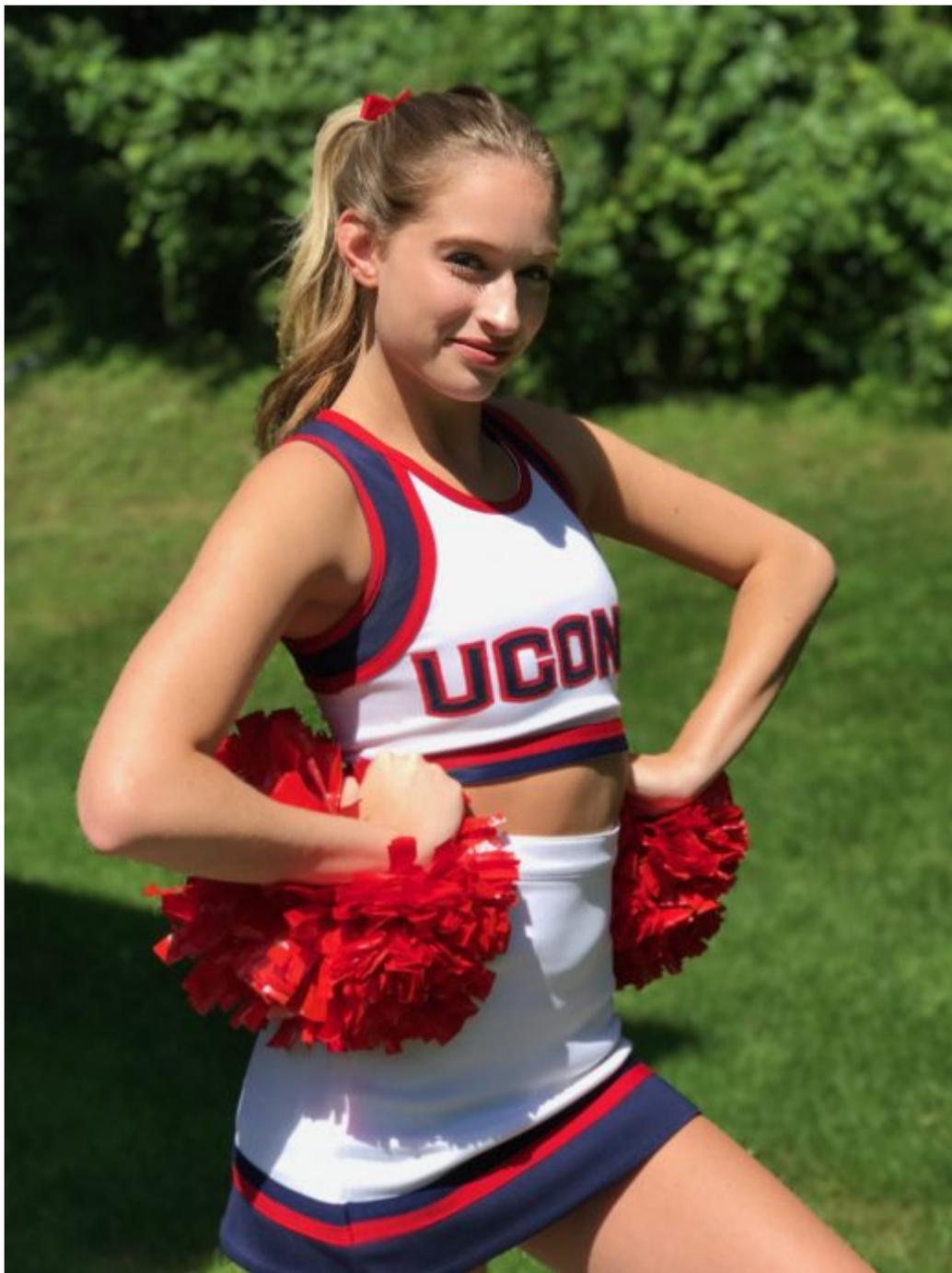
# After 3-Year Layoff, Danbury's Shook To Spend Senior Year As UConn Cheerleader

**BY: DAVE RUDEN** AUGUST 15, 2017

She has sustained five concussions, broken both ankles a total of five times, as well as her right wrist and elbow.

So of course when she heard the University of Connecticut was holding cheerleading tryouts this past spring, Kennedy Shook figured it was time to come out of retirement after three years.

“I was like, maybe I can just go there, what’s the worst that’s going to happen, I won’t make the team,” said Shook, a senior, who last participated when she was the captain of Danbury High School’s state championship team in 2014. “I should just go there and see if I can still do what I was able to do. I went in there not knowing if I had the skills I used to have. I was kind of nervous, but I had nothing to lose.”



After taking three years off, Kennedy Shook is going to return to cheerleading, for UConn.

Despite doing nothing related to the sport in the interim, and with no special preparation, Shook made the team. When the Huskies open the season in two weeks against Holy Cross, Shook will be on the field rather than in the stands watching with her father.

“It is going to be weird seeing it from a different perspective,” Shook said. “After tryouts they sent out e-mails a week later, so it was kind of a long week waiting to see if I made it, but I was really, really excited and I got closer to the team when I was at tryouts. I just felt that I fit in and the coach welcomed me so much, so it felt like it was going to work out. When I got the news it was so exciting and the girls on the team thought it was so exciting.”

Shook’s father, Ricky, is the renowned coach of Danbury’s wrestling team. She said she fell in love with cheerleading in the 2nd grade and, despite her athletic talent, never considered any other sports. But after graduating high school, Shook said she was ready for new challenges.

“I was thinking about doing it in college, but I did it for 10 years, I was like I should focus on school and what I am going to do,” Shook said.

She attended Central Florida for a year before transferring to UConn. Outside of working out on her own, the closest she had come to tapping her old dexterity came teaching gymnastics.

Shook said she was surprised her desire to perform returned as tryouts with the Huskies grew closer.

“I went in totally raw,” she said. “I went to the Danbury High School practices a couple times and just watched them and did some conditioning with them but I didn’t stunt with them. I didn’t do very much at all.”

Shook said her summer plans changed dramatically because of what will be a major addition to her schedule.

“I have been working out a lot,” Shook said. “I have a group I have been working with and stunting with and all that kind of stuff. We had camp this past week and it was really a taste of what it is going to be like. They basically put you in a stunt group and it is most likely going to be your stunt group the rest of the year. I love my stunt group. It is amazing and I learned so much at camp. I am a flyer, that’s what I’ve always been known for.”

Shook said her return to the sport will present new challenges.

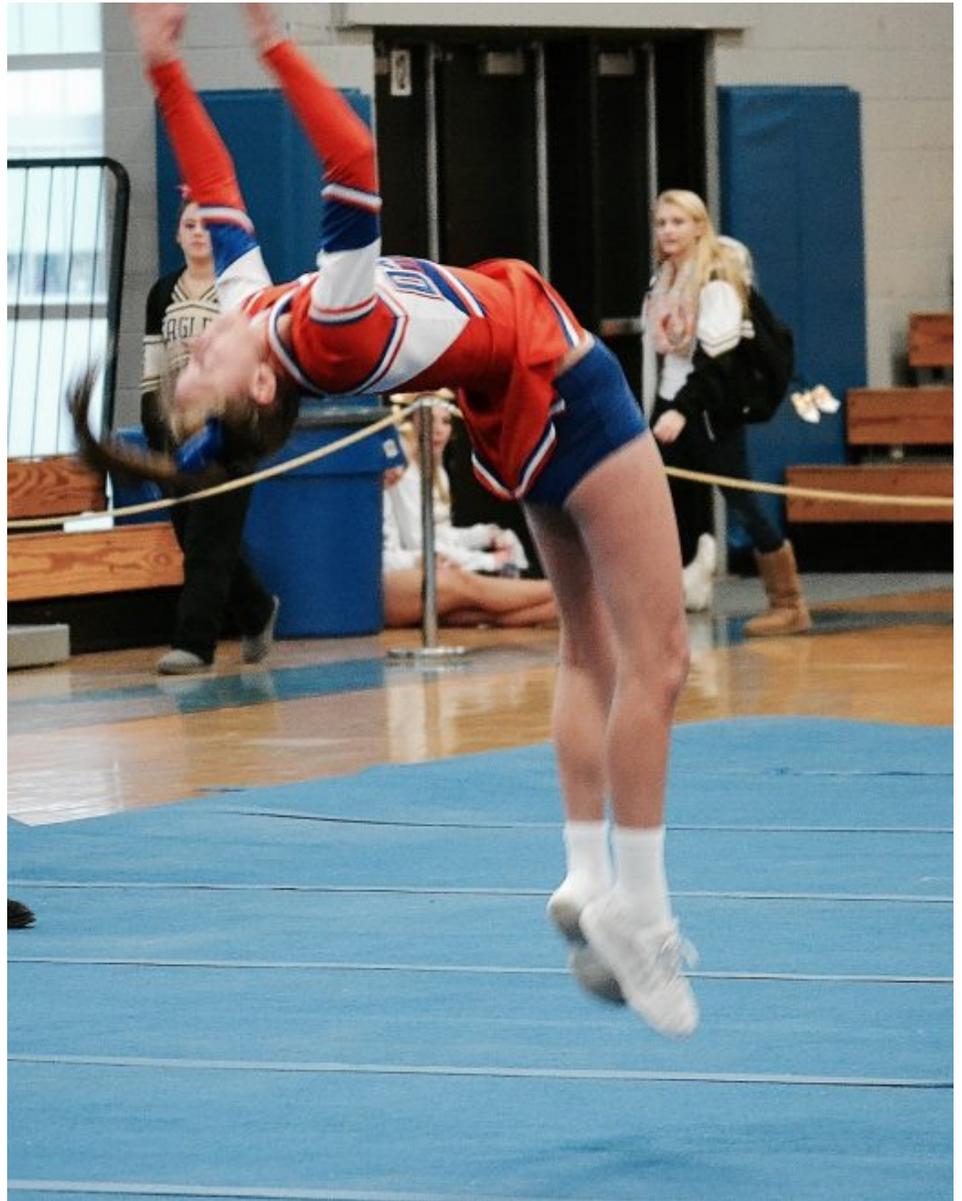
“When you are on a cheerleading team it is not like a single-person sport, like wrestling for example,” Shook said. “You do it for yourself. When you are in cheerleading you are really a team and it becomes a family and I miss that aspect of it. Stunting is my favorite thing. Learning all these new skills. I never co-ed stunted, and we have five guys on the team. It’s a little scary but...”

Shook said making sacrifices as a senior to her discretionary time is not a concern.

“Thinking about high school, I was literally at the school from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. every single day,” Shook said. “I was so busy and always doing things, and when I got to college all I found myself was laying in bed and doing homework all the time. I will finally have more things to do and a busier schedule, and I need something more. I think I’ve experienced enough the last three years with my social life, now I think it is time to settle down. I am getting down to business and it is time to graduate next year. I think it’s just time to focus just on me, focus on cheerleading. When I’m cheerleading I feel I am more productive. When I am busier I get things done quicker.”

Shook said she has been energized about returning to the field, and is counting down the days to the Huskies’ opener.

“It will be a big change for me and it is something I am really looking forward to,” Shook said. “The stadium is huge and it’s going to be so different. It’s exciting.”



Kennedy Shook was one of the state’s top cheerleaders when competing for Danbury High School.