

VSIN PRO

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

BETTING GUIDE

PRO EDITION



POISED FOR TITLE RUN?

UConn faces stiff competition for three-peat

OUR PRO GUIDE INCLUDES

- MATT YOUMANS PRESEASON TOP 50
- PREVIEWS FOR EVERY CONFERENCE
- FUTURES AND WOODEN AWARD BEST BETS

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**ODDS WITHIN GUIDE
ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE**

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Greetings, all.

College basketball is the hardest sport to track in the preseason because of the transfer portal craziness and all of the coaching changes. That's why I'm happy to announce that we've done a lot of that work for you in our 2024-25 VSiN College Basketball Betting Guide.

Every conference has an overview and 10 conferences - ACC, AAC, Atlantic-10, Big 12, Big East, Big Ten, Missouri Valley, Mountain West, SEC, and West Coast - also have team previews for each of the member schools.

Here's what each contributor was responsible for in this year's CBB Guide:

- Matt Youmans' Preseason Top 50
- Greg "Hoops" Peterson's Betting Nuggets and 15 conference overviews
- Aaron Moore's features on the Wooden Award and ACC/Big Ten travel, plus the A-10 and MAAC
- Jonathan Von Tobel on the Mountain West and West Coast
- Wes Reynolds on the Big Ten and SEC
- Senior Editor Zachary Cohen on the ACC and Big 12
- Adam Burke on the AAC, Big East, Missouri Valley, and five other small conferences
- Head of Analytics Steve Makinen's Power Ratings, Team Up/Downs, and stats

And, as always, we've got best bets from the Guide contributors on futures, awards, and more!

Now is the time to tell your friends and family to become a VSiN Pro Subscriber, as we are running a lot of great offers now and throughout the upcoming holiday season to join us and get unfiltered access to everything we do, including our college basketball in-season content.

Happy reading and happy college basketball season!

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VSIN EXPERT COLLEGE HOOPS

BEST BETS

MATT YOUMANS

DUKE TO WIN ACC REGULAR SEASON (+140)

North Carolina appears to be the only serious threat to Duke in a two-horse conference race. The Blue Devils are loaded in coach Jon Scheyer's third season. Scheyer has had back-to-back 27-9 seasons and this is his most talented team, starting with Cooper Flagg, who had his way with a USA basketball team full of NBA stars over the summer in Las Vegas. A 6-foot-9 forward who can do everything on the floor, Flagg arrives as the nation's top-ranked freshman and favorite to be the No. 1 pick in the NBA Draft. Khaman Maluach, a 7-foot-2 freshman from South Sudan, is another NBA prospect with a high ceiling. The Blue Devils have several veterans surrounding their young stars. Junior point guard Tyrese Proctor returns and is joined by transfers Maliq Brown (Syracuse), Mason Gillis (Purdue) and Sion James (Tulane).

GONZAGA TO WIN WCC REGULAR SEASON (-225) & NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP (18-1)

The talent gap between the Bulldogs and Saint Mary's, the consensus No. 2 team in the West Coast Conference, is huge. It's so big that the DraftKings price on Gonzaga to win the conference probably should be double what it is and closer to -500. The Zags found their groove in the second half of last season and played better than every other team in the nation but UConn and Purdue, which knocked out Gonzaga in the Sweet 16.

Four starters return for coach Mark Few, who can count on senior guards Nolan Hickman and Ryan Nembhard, 6-foot-10 senior Ben Gregg and 6-foot-9 center Graham Ike, who's as rugged as it gets around the basket. The Bulldogs' top six players are seniors, which is rare for any elite team. Few boosted the talent level by adding transfers Khalif Battle (Arkansas) and 6-foot-7 forward Michael Ajayi, a Pepperdine star who made 47 percent of his 3-pointers and led the WCC in scoring. Steele Venters, a 3-point marksman and former Eastern Washington transfer, is ready to go after missing last season with an injury. Few's team definitely has Final Four potential.

MARK SEARS TO WIN WOODEN AWARD (+900)

Alabama power rates as the No. 2 team in the nation, thanks to its senior point guard backing out of the NBA Draft before the June deadline. Sears was projected to be a second-round pick, so it was a wise decision. Sears, who averaged 21.5 points and shot 44 percent from 3-point range for the season, was the catalyst to the Crimson Tide's run to the Final Four. He scored 24 points in the national semifinal loss to UConn and thrives in big games.

AARON MOORE

MARK SEARS (+900) & JOHN BROOME (20-1) TO WIN WOODEN AWARD

I am putting one unit on Sears, who should be equally priced with North Carolina's RJ Davis (+700) and Kansas' Hunter Dickinson (+750). Sears' ability to create social-media worthy highlights will help during the campaign season. I am adding a half-unit on Broome because Auburn has a chance to compete for an SEC title and, if that happens, it will propel the Tigers big man and his attractive odds onto the national stage.

UCONN TO WIN BIG EAST REGULAR SEASON (+150)

This futures play isn't with an emphasis on financial ROI, more for the psychological side of betting. Even with odds barely over even money and months away from being decided, this might be the only time to get UConn at plus money to win the Big East. Dan Hurley has shown a unique Saban-like quality to keep his program hungry. The mix of Alex Karaban, returners and newcomers should once again make this the most talented team in the conference. Even with these low odds, I want to be part of what has become college basketball's most valuable commodity.

SAINT LOUIS TO WIN ATLANTIC 10 REGULAR SEASON (+450)

The Billikens now have the most dynamic player in the league with Robbie Avila. Saint Louis also has his former Indiana State coach Josh Schertz's offense that the other A-10 coaches are not accustomed to facing in-conference. The Billikens offer more value - and possibly talent - than the favorite VCU.

INDIANA TO WIN BIG TEN REGULAR SEASON (+750)

I am not overly pleased coach Mike Woodson is part of this investment, but +750 for this newly loaded team needed a place in my futures portfolio. There is every indication the Hoosiers behind Myles Rice and Oumar Ballo can win the conference title over the Zach Edey-less Boilermakers and UCLA's frequent flyers from Westwood. A ticket like this can be monetized towards the end of the season when the schedule appears to favor Indiana over Purdue.

QUINNIPIAC (+350) TO WIN MAAC

Iona (+260) is currently the favorite but the preseason No.1 team in the conference according to the coaches comes with a much better price.

MISSISSIPPI TO WIN NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP (100-1)

Here is the long shot I'm adding to my futures portfolio. It's a minimal investment to put away and remember around the end of February with the plan of monetizing it. Most shops have Ole Miss in the 80-1 range. This number at publication is 100-1 at bet365. Chris Beard has a good squad in a loaded conference. The Rebels will get enough SEC wins to get into the NCAA tournament and use that regular-season experience to make a deep run. Essentially it's a 100-1 ticket with the hopes that Beard can coach Ole Miss to the Sweet 16.

ZACHARY COHEN

FLORIDA TO WIN SEC REGULAR SEASON (25-1)

The Gators went 16-17 overall and 9-9 in SEC play in Todd Golden's first year with the program. However, things looked a heck of a lot better in Year 2, as Florida went 24-12 overall and 11-7 in conference play. The Gators were also 12th in the nation in offensive rating, according to KenPom.

I generally like the way Golden's team competed, as Bart Torvik had the group ranked eighth in the nation in offensive rebound rate (37.3%). The Gators also did a good job of keeping opponents from shooting 3s, finishing 36th in the country in 3PT rate defense (32.4%).

Realistically, Florida can be an elite team if it shoots the ball better and defends a little better. And there are reasons to believe both of those things will happen this year. The Gators return some of their best players from a year ago, with Walter Clayton Jr., Will Richard and Alex Condon all back and ready to go. But Golden also made some nice moves in the transfer portal, adding Florida Atlantic shooter Alijah Martin and Washington State big man Rueben Chinyelu. Martin's 3P% dipped from 37.2% in 2022-23 to 33.8% in 2023-24, but he's a legitimate floor spacer and should thrive in this system. And Chinyelu has the ability to be the starting center that Florida needs to improve on its 94th-ranked defensive rating. He's a big body that can really clean the glass, which could be big for a Gators team that rebounded just 28.8% of misses last year. And if Chinyelu isn't the guy, perhaps Thomas Haugh can be. He did some nice things last season.

I just love the firepower that Clayton possesses as a lead guard, and I think the team is built really well around him. Even Chattanooga transfer Sam Alexis can be a useful contributor right away, giving the team several guys that can play their roles to perfection.

With Golden's elite coaching and a roster that has talent and experience, the Gators are a little more live than their odds suggest in a somewhat open SEC.

SAINT LOUIS TO WIN ATLANTIC 10 REGULAR SEASON (+750)

I have a lot of respect for VCU and Dayton, but I just wouldn't be surprised if Josh Schertz wins the league in his first season with Saint Louis. Last year, Indiana State was a 32-win team, and KenPom had the group at 13th in the nation in offensive rating — and 38th overall. Well, the two top players from that team, Robbie Avila and Isaiah Swope, both followed Schertz.

Avila, who averaged 17.4 points, 6.6 rebounds and 4.1 assists per game, was one of the best players in all of college basketball last year. And Swope is a guard that can really shoot the basketball, as he averaged 15.9 points per game and shot 36.2% from 3 a year ago. Those two alone make the Billikens a dangerous group in this conference, but Schertz added some other impressive transfers. One that stands out is Brown forward Kalu Anya, who averaged 9.6 points, 7.4 rebounds, 1.2 steals and 1.0 blocks per game last year. He's a stat-sheet stuffer that contributes on both ends of the floor. I'm also interested in seeing how Miami's AJ Casey and USC's Kobe Johnson look against worse competition. Johnson was a double-digit scorer in the Pac-12.

Saint Louis also has two solid returners in Larry Hughes and Gibson Jimerson. The latter is an absolute sniper from deep, and he could feast with the types of looks he'll get off Avila.

This should be a pretty special group offensively, and A-10 teams might not know what's about to hit them. Last year, the Sycamores were fifth in the nation in 3P rate (49.5%) and 11th in 3P% (38.1%). They were also first in 2P% (62.4%), meaning they could spread you out or let Avila work you in the post. This year's Billikens team should look just like that. Let's just see if they can defend.

ADAM BURKE

MEMPHIS TO WIN THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP (120-1)

Memphis is clearly the top dog in the AAC this season. Head coach Penny Hardaway opened the NIL wallet to get proven commodities once again, but this time, he changed the types of players he was looking for, focusing on toughness and shot-making rather than finesse. P.J. Haggerty is probably the most notable name, as he had 21.2 points per game last season for Tulsa, but the starting five and the post depth stand out.

The rest of the roster is filled out with upperclassmen, mostly from other programs. Colby Rogers is at his fourth school and is a 38.7% 3-point shooter. Tyreek Smith is the big, physical body that Hardaway wanted this season to be a menace on both ends of the floor. He's shot over 60% on 2s every season and spent three of those years in the Big 12 before being at rival SMU last season. Tyrese Hunter joins Haggerty as another great ball handler with scoring punch and he's stepping down in class with the move from Texas. Nick Jourdain stayed, but Dain Dainja came in from Illinois, giving Hardaway two players that shot 66% on 2s. Add in 7-footer Moussa Cisse from Ole Miss and you've got tons of interior depth to go with guards that can play all night if you ask them.

In terms of Bart Torvik's Projected Production from Transfers, Memphis ranks fourth behind Vanderbilt, Louisville, and DePaul. His projections have them favored in every AAC game and only a one-possession dog to UConn in the November 25 spotlight game. They're also slight dogs at Clemson and Virginia in mid-December.

This is a team that should be able to bank a lot of wins for a high seed and has a chance at a signature win or two over those three games. The experience, top-end talent, and long, athletic depth make the Tigers a very dangerous squad.

If nothing else, I should get them into the Dance as a high seed and then I'm holding a big number that I can play with.

MATT YOUMANS PRESENTS

TOP 50 PRESEASON POLL

KANSAS #1





Only fools believed Dan Hurley would leave college basketball coaching and jump to the NBA. At the top of his profession after winning back-to-back NCAA championships, Hurley considered an offer to lead the Los Angeles Lakers. Although some would say it was an unserious courtship all along, Hurley's acting job was worthy of an Oscar. He turned down the offer in June, citing unfinished business at Connecticut.

Hurley got the first thing he wanted — a new six-year, \$50 million contract. The Hollywood ending he's seeking — a third straight national title — will be the hard part. The four star players the Huskies lost to the NBA Draft will be tough to replace.

So there's a new No. 1, at least for now. UConn is being replaced. Kansas sits atop the Associated Press preseason poll, Alabama is ranked the top team by the Blue Ribbon Yearbook, and Houston has the top spot in the Pomeroy Ratings (KenPom.com).

"We have quite a bit of money on UConn," Circa Sports oddsmaker Nick Bogdanovich said. "People think Hurley can three-peat. I think it's a stretch, but I thought last year was a stretch as well."

The Huskies open the season at No. 3 in the VSiN preseason Top 50, where my power ratings show Kansas No. 1 and Alabama No. 2. Hurley and the Huskies are followed by No. 4 Duke and No. 5 Gonzaga.

Circa lists UConn as the national title favorite at +900, after heavy action showed at 14-1. Duke and Kansas are each at 10-1, followed by Alabama at 11-1.

"It's still wide open," Bogdanovich said. "I don't think any team should be less than 10-1 odds. There are so many new pieces in every spot. I can tell you they bet Duke really strong."

The Blue Devils boast the nation's top newcomer, 6-foot-9 forward Cooper Flagg. The Crimson Tide will be led again by Mark Sears, arguably the nation's best point guard. Aside from Hurley, who brings back only one starter, almost everything about the Huskies will look new.

Kansas is old and new. Hunter Dickinson, a 7-foot-2 center, returns for his fifth year and turns 24 in November. Dickinson, who spent his first three seasons at Michigan, has 122 career starts. He plays inside and out and has the passing ability of a point guard. The Jayhawks bring back their true starting point guard, Dajuan Harris, along with forward KJ Adams.

After a humbling 23-11 season that included a fifth-place finish in the Big 12 and ended with an 89-68 loss to Gonzaga in the second round of the NCAA tournament, coach Bill Self hit the transfer portal in search of talented veterans. The Jayhawks needed depth and shooting, and Self found what he wanted in transfers Rylan Griffen (Alabama), Zeke Mayo (South Dakota State) and AJ Storr (Wisconsin).

Griffen, Mayo and Storr are big-time scorers who will help Kansas overcome the losses of Kevin McCullar and Johnny Furphy. It's sometimes easy to overlook freshmen in this era of free agency, but Self's top recruits — center Flory Bidunga and guard Rakease Passmore — also will contribute to a team that's much deeper than last season.

Preseason power ratings are an inexact science. Before we see any games in November, my team ratings are based mostly on opinion. I rate teams in seven categories — coaching, backcourt, big men, experience, 3-point shooting, defense/rebounding, and depth — and the first three categories listed are weighted for more emphasis. Hurley has become the top power-rated coach.

Kansas was No. 1 in my power ratings for VSiN prior to the 2021-22 season — Gonzaga was the favorite by media and oddsmakers — and the Jayhawks cashed at 15-1 odds by beating North Carolina for the NCAA championship.

For the record, my preseason No. 1 last year was a swing and miss as Michigan State finished 20-15 and lost in the second round of the NCAA tournament. Another Big Ten team, Purdue, fell to UConn in the national title game — the Boilermakers were No. 3 and Huskies No. 6 in my preseason ratings.

In April, when confetti falls and the trophy is raised, Hurley could have his third shining moment, but I'm not betting on it. In the beginning, when it's a guessing game, Kansas is No. 1 by a narrow margin. The Jayhawks will get early strength tests by playing Duke and North Carolina in November.



2. ALABAMA

Before the NBA Draft deadline in June, I bet Alabama at 20-1 odds, predicting that point guard Mark Sears would return to the Crimson Tide. The catalyst to the Tide's run to the Final Four was not projected to be a first-round pick. Sears, who scored 24 points in the national semifinal loss to UConn, did pull out of the draft and will lead a team with title potential. Alabama coach Nate Oats always has his teams shooting 3-pointers in waves, and he's got shooters and size on a loaded roster, thanks to Sears and 6-11 sophomore Jarin Stevenson withdrawing from the draft. Oats, who also welcomes back 6-11 senior Grant Nelson and Latrell Wrightsell Jr., brought in transfers Cliff Omoruyi (Rutgers), Aden Holloway (Auburn) and Chris Youngblood (South Florida). The 6-foot-11 Omoruyi, who has a 7-foot-6 wingspan, is a tough defender and rim protector.



3. CONNECTICUT

In Dan Hurley's first four years at UConn, he won zero conference titles and went 0-2 in the NCAA tournament. In the past two years, he went 68-11, including 12-0 in the tournament. But the Huskies lost four starters from last season's 37-3 title team — guard Stephon Castle and center Donovan Clingan were top-10 picks before guards Tristen Newton and Cam Spencer went in the second round. Alex Karaban is the lone returning starter, but 6-foot-10 Samson Johnson and point guard Hassan Diarra also return to fill larger roles. Hurley signed 6-foot-7 forward Liam McNeeley, a McDonald's All-American, and hooked transfer shooting guard Aidan Mahaney (Saint Mary's) and 6-foot-10 Tarris Reed (Michigan). The talent level has dropped off, but don't doubt Hurley's ability to coach up this team.



4. DUKE

Cooper Flagg, a 6-foot-9 forward who can do everything on the floor, arrives as the nation's top-ranked freshman. Khaman Maluach, a 7-foot-2 freshman from South Sudan, is another NBA prospect with a high ceiling. The Blue Devils have several veterans surrounding their young stars. Junior point guard Tyrese Proctor returns and is joined by transfers Maliq Brown (Syracuse), Mason Gillis (Purdue) and Sion James (Tulane). The Devils lost a lot, including 7-footer Kyle Filipowski, but Jon Scheyer has had back-to-back 27-9 seasons, and this is his most talented team. Flagg lit up a USA basketball team full of NBA stars over the summer in Las Vegas and will be fun to watch.



5. GONZAGA

The Zags got hot in the second half of last season and played better than probably every other team but UConn and Purdue, which knocked out Gonzaga in the Sweet 16. Anton Watson, a fifth-year senior forward and a second-round pick by the Celtics, is the only starter not returning. Zags coach Mark Few can count on senior guards Nolan Hickman and Ryan Nembhard, 6-foot-10 senior Ben Gregg and 6-foot-9 center Graham Ike, who's as tough as it gets around the basket. The Bulldogs' top six players are seniors, which is rare for any elite team. Few boosted the talent level by adding transfers Khalif Battle (Arkansas) and 6-7 forward Michael Ajayi, a Pepperdine star who made 47 percent of his 3-pointers and led the West Coast Conference in scoring.



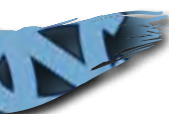
6. HOUSTON

A jump from the American Athletic Conference to the Big 12 was no problem for the Cougars, who won the regular-season title in their new conference and finished 32-5. Kelvin Sampson-coached teams will be elite defensively and win at a high level, and this team will be no different. Sampson averaged 31.3 wins over the past four seasons. Point guard Jamal Shead, a relentless defender who scored off the dribble, is a huge loss. Still, Sampson is reloading with Oklahoma transfer Milos Uzan at the point. Veteran guards LJ Cryer and Emanuel Sharp return and should lead the team in scoring. The frontcourt starters, 6-foot-7 J'Wan Roberts and 6-foot-8 Ja'Vier Francis, are not tall, yet they are athletic.



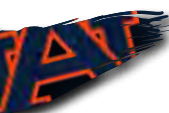
7. BAYLOR

Four starters, including two NBA first-round picks, are out the door. Bears coach Scott Drew tried to offset the departures by adding two veteran transfers — point guard Jeremy Roach from Duke and power forward Norchad Omier from Miami — who will make a major impact. Shooting guard VJ Edgecombe is one of the nation's top freshmen, a five-star recruit who could be a top-five pick in next summer's draft. Junior guard Langston Love and 6-foot-10 Joshua Ojiamwuna are the top returnees. Baylor won the NCAA title in 2021 and remains a strong contender, especially if Edgecombe is as great as advertised. The Bears will pick a fight and find out how tough they are in a road game against UConn on Dec. 4.



8. NORTH CAROLINA

The coaching transition from a legend to one of his former players has been successful at Duke, and the same is true at North Carolina. Hubert Davis went 29-8 last season, losing to Alabama in the Sweet 16. The biggest loss was Armando Bacot, a dominant big man who spent five seasons in Chapel Hill. The Tar Heels are loaded with talent, but how soon will the puzzle pieces fit? Senior guard RJ Davis led the ACC in scoring (21.2 ppg), and sophomore Elliot Cadeau runs the point. Jalen Washington, a 6-foot-10 junior, steps into Bacot's spot. Junior guard Seth Trimble looks like an emerging star, as do freshmen Ian Jackson and Drake Powell. The Heels never shy away from challenges and will play Kansas on Nov. 8 at Allen Fieldhouse.



9. AUBURN

After winning the SEC tournament, the Tigers were upset by Yale in the NCAA first round to put a black eye on a 27-win season. Bruce Pearl is a resilient coach, and Auburn will bounce back with an experienced team. The Tigers will have a matchup edge in the paint in most games with senior center Johni Broome, who ranked in the conference's top 10 in scoring, rebounding, field-goal percentage and blocked shots. Senior shooting guard Denver Jones and senior forward Chad Baker-Mazara also return. Point guard JP Pegues (Furman) and shooting guard Miles Kelly (Georgia Tech) were added as senior transfers. Pearl stacked the nonconference schedule with Houston, Iowa State, Duke, Ohio State and Purdue.



10. PURDUE

Every preview of Purdue's season will begin with the obvious: Zach Edey, the 7-foot-4, 300-pound back-to-back national Player of the Year, is gone to the NBA. In Edey's final game, a loss to UConn in the title game, he totaled 37 points and 10 rebounds. The Boilermakers' supporting cast faded against the Huskies, but those players must carry the team now, and it starts with junior point guard Braden Smith. Two other junior starters, Fletcher Loyer and Trey Kaufman-Renn, also return. Purdue coach Matt Painter has plenty of talented players ready to step up, including Camden Heide and Myles Colvin. The freshman class of Gicarri Harris, Jack Benter, CJ Cox, 6-foot-11 Raleigh Burgess and 7-foot-4 Daniel Jacobsen (the next Edey?) is loaded.



11. ARIZONA

While Tommy Lloyd has coached Arizona to 88 wins in three years, his teams have fizzled in the NCAA tournament. Life in the Big 12 will be tougher on the Wildcats than it was in the Pac-12. Lloyd lost a lot of talent from last season's 27-win team, but he was a recruiting ace as a Gonzaga assistant and remains so in Tucson. Senior guard Caleb Love will be one of the nation's top scorers, and he'll be playing alongside junior point guard Jaden Bradley. Motiejus Krivas is developing into a reliable 7-foot-2 center, and Lloyd made two major transfer additions by getting 6-foot-9 Tobe Awaka (Tennessee) and 6-foot-7 Trey Townsend (Oakland), the Horizon League Player of the Year.



12. INDIANA

Purdue is the Big Ten preseason favorite, but Indiana could be just as good or better. How long will it take coach Mike Woodson to put the puzzle together? The Hoosiers spent big to bring in transfers Oumar Ballo (Arizona), Myles Rice (Washington State), Kanaan Carlyle (Stanford) and Luke Goode (Illinois). The four returning starters are forwards Malik Reneau and Mackenzie Mgbako and guards Trey Galloway and Gabe Cupps. And don't forget freshmen Bryson Tucker, a McDonald's All-American, and Jakai Newton. The Hoosiers, who tied for sixth in the conference and did not play in a postseason tournament, can challenge for the league title and have the talent to make a run in March.



13. IOWA STATE

Junior point guard Tamin Lipsey plays both ends of the floor and is a strong defender, making him the typical Iowa State player. The Cyclones ranked No. 2 nationally in defensive efficiency last season, behind Houston. Iowa State finished second to the Cougars in the Big 12 regular season before winning the conference tournament. Lipsey and former UNLV transfer Keshon Gilbert, the team's leading scorer last season, form a talented backcourt. Cyclones coach T.J. Otzelberger brought in transfers Dishon Jackson, a 6-foot-11, 280-pound center from Charlotte, and Joshua Jefferson, a 6-8 forward from Saint Mary's. Iowa State is No. 5 in the AP preseason poll, but that ranking appears too high.



14. CREIGHTON

Three starters return for the Bluejays, but the two who departed — guard Trey Alexander and forward Baylor Scheierman — will be sorely missed. Scheierman was a first-round pick by the Celtics. Ryan Kalkbrenner, a 7-foot-1 senior, will lead the way after averaging 17.3 points, 7.6 rebounds and 3.1 blocks. Point guard Steven Ashworth is back to run the offense, and coach Greg McDermott snagged guard Pop Isaacs (Texas Tech) as a transfer. Ashworth scored 20 points in a blowout victory over UConn in February. Mason Miller, a 6-foot-9 junior, is a 3-point sharpshooter who's ready for a breakout season. McDermott is rock solid as a coach, averaging 23.6 wins the past five years.



15. ARKANSAS

Eric Musselman's stay in Fayetteville was a blast for a while, but his act eventually wore thin and the vagabond coach bolted for USC after a disastrous 16-17 season. John Calipari's stunning decision to leave Kentucky after 15 years will keep the Razorbacks relevant on a national level. Arkansas has a new look, which is a good thing, and junior forward Trevon Brazile is the only returning player. Calipari brought along Kentucky transfers DJ Wagner, Adou Thiero and Zvonimir Ivisic, plus former Wildcats commits Boogie Fland, Karter Knox and Billy Richmond III. Senior guard Johnell Davis (Florida Atlantic) and senior center Jonas Aidoo (Tennessee) are transfers who will make a major impact.



16. TENNESSEE

Not only did Dalton Knecht depart for the NBA, but the Volunteers said goodbye to Santiago Vescovi, Josiah-Jordan James, Jonas Aidoo and Tobe Awaka from their Elite Eight team. Knecht was the second-best player in the nation and best in the SEC. So who's left and who's new? Point guard Zakai Zeigler is still around to run the offense and be a defensive menace. Other players to watch will be guards Chaz Lanier, a high-scoring transfer from North Florida, and Jahmai Mashack. Junior center Felix Okpara transferred from Ohio State and fits in with this team as a defensive force. Tennessee is deep and talented, but there are so many new pieces that coach Rick Barnes will have a lot of work to do.



17. KENTUCKY

Bigger names were tossed around as coaching candidates, but Mark Pope is looking like a smart hire by Kentucky, where he played for Rick Pitino on the 1996 national championship team. John Calipari took several Wildcats players and recruits after he left for Arkansas, leaving Pope to rebuild. Pope's roster includes seven seniors and three freshmen. The top transfer additions are point guard Lamont Butler (San Diego State), guard Jaxson Robinson (BYU), guard Kobe Brea (Dayton), guard Kerr Kriisa (West Virginia), guard Otega Oweh (Oklahoma), 6-foot-11 Andrew Carr (Wake Forest) and 7-footer Amari Williams (Drexel). Pope is an innovative offensive coach who has put together an impressive roster.



18. MARQUETTE

Shaka Smart averaged 28 wins the past two years, when the Golden Eagles were a No. 2 seed in the NCAA tournament each year. It's unlikely Smart can coach this team to that level after losing point guard Tyler Kolek and power forward Oso Ighodaro, a pair of NBA second-round picks. Senior point guard Kam Jones is ready to run the show after averaging 17.2 points and shooting 40 percent on 3s. Jones is joined in the backcourt by senior Stevie Mitchell, and senior forward David Joplin is another 3-point threat who started all 37 games for a 27-win team. Jones is a star who can carry the Golden Eagles in a lot of games, but Smart's challenge will be developing co-stars and depth. UConn and Creighton are clearly better in the Big East.



19. OLE MISS

Chris Beard is an elite coach who's attempting to repair his reputation after off-court issues led to the loss of his dream job at Texas. His first year at Ole Miss (20-12) was a positive start. Beard can make more out of less, and he's got more talent to work with in his second year. Senior guard Matthew Murrell (16.2 ppg, 46.4 percent on 3s) flirted with the NBA before returning to Oxford. Murrell will get scoring support from seniors Jaemyn Brakefield and JuJu Murray. Beard has recruited well, which is no surprise, and has a mix of freshmen and transfers. Virginia Tech transfer Sean Pedulla, Seton Hall transfer Dre Davis, 6-foot-9 Malik Dia and 7-foot-2 John Bol should help the Rebels climb the SEC ladder and get to the NCAA tournament.



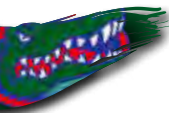
20. UCLA

Bet on the Bruins bouncing back after a rare losing season (16-17) for coach Mick Cronin. Junior guard Dylan Andrews was the team's leading scorer and may be again, but he's got a lot more talent around him now. Cronin is rebuilding with transfers Skyy Clark (Louisville), Dominick Harris (Loyola Marymount), Kobe Johnson (USC), Tyler Bilodeau (Oregon State) and others. Senior wing Lazar Stefanovic, who transferred from Utah before last season, also fills an important role. Cronin will make UCLA competitive in the top half of the Big Ten. The Bruins, who could get travel-weary in a new coast-to-coast conference, are keeping their former Pac-12 rivalry with Arizona alive by playing in Tucson on Dec. 14.



21. ST. JOHN'S

Rick Pitino was one of the few coaches who figured out how to push UConn to the limit last season when the Red Storm took a 95-90 loss to the Huskies in the Big East tournament. Pitino, who's touting junior wing RJ Luis as an emerging star, landed two of the top transfer guards on the market — Kadary Richmond (Seton Hall) and Deivon Smith (Utah). USC transfer Vincent Iwuchukwu and 6-foot-9 Zuby Ejiolor beef up the front line. St. John's was my first long-shot bet at 80-1 odds in May after Richmond committed to the Red Storm.



22. FLORIDA

A veteran backcourt led by Walter Clayton Jr. and Alijah Martin, a Florida Atlantic transfer, will be the Gators' strength. Clayton (17.6 ppg) will run the point. Martin scored 26 points for the Owls against San Diego State in a Final Four game in 2023. Florida coach Todd Golden will count on shooting guard Will Richard and big men Alex Condon and Rueben Chinyelu, a transfer from Washington State. What also stands out about Golden's roster is the presence of 7-foot-9 Olivier Rioux, an incoming freshman from Canada.



23. RUTGERS

If the young guns live up to the hype, the Scarlet Knights have a high upside. Ace Bailey and Dylan Harper are ranked as the nation's No. 2 and No. 3 incoming freshmen, respectively. Harper, the brother of former Rutgers star Ron Harper Jr., is a 6-foot-6 point guard and was MVP of the McDonald's All-American game. Bailey is 6-foot-10 and can play everywhere on the floor. Rutgers coach Steve Pikiell has enough talent surrounding Bailey and Harper to contend in the Big Ten and energize the atmosphere inside Jersey Mike's Arena.



24. TEXAS A&M

The return of senior Wade Taylor IV gives the Aggies one of the nation's top point guards and a legit go-to scorer. Taylor totaled seven 30-point games last season. Junior center Pharrel Payne, a Minnesota transfer, provides inside strength. Texas A&M was one of the nation's worst 3-point shooting teams last season at 29.3 percent (345th nationally), but transfer guard CJ Wilcher (Nebraska) should be a boost in that area. Aggies coach Buzz Williams has a great player (Taylor) and a good team that seems overrated at No. 13 in the AP preseason poll.



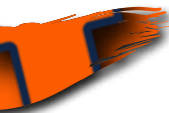
25. TEXAS

Longhorns coach Rodney Terry has no returning starters and needed to find ways to replace guards Max Abmas and Tyrese Hunter and forward Dylan Disu. Terry landed point guard Jordan Pope (Oregon State), forward Tramon Mark (Arkansas), forward Arthur Kaluma (Kansas State) and 6-foot-11 center Kadin Shedrick (Virginia) as transfers. The player with the most potential is probably shooting guard Tre Johnson, a hyped freshman who seems headed for the NBA after this season. The eyes of Texas are focused on the football team for now, however.



26. CINCINNATI

Jizzle James has a game to go along with a great first name. The son of former NFL running back Edgerrin James is a sophomore point guard who showed promise last season. James and senior Day Day Thomas give the Bearcats two strong backcourt scorers. Junior forward Dillon Mitchell is a big addition as a Texas transfer, and he'll be flanked in the frontcourt by Butler transfer Simas Lukosius and 7-footer Aziz Bandaogo, a Utah Valley transfer. Cincinnati coach Wes Miller should be able to avoid a return trip to the NIT.



27. ILLINOIS

It's a total rebuild in Champaign, where coach Brad Underwood has 10 new scholarship players. Underwood is reloading and starting with point guard Kylan Boswell, a transfer from Arizona. The lone returning starter is junior guard Ty Rodgers. The Fighting Illini must replace Terrence Shannon, Marcus Domask, Coleman Hawkins, Luke Goode and Quincy Guerrier, among others, from a 29-9 team that finished second in the Big Ten before getting crushed by UConn in March. Underwood has enough talent on his roster to make it work.



28. TEXAS TECH

Shooting the 3 is the Red Raiders' speciality, especially with riflemen Darrion Williams and Kerwin Walton returning. Walton and Williams each shot better than 45 percent from long range last season, and Chance McMillian is another hot perimeter shooter. JT Toppin, a 6-foot-9 forward who looked like a rising star as a New Mexico freshman, is a major transfer acquisition. Grant McCasland is an outstanding coach who won 23 games and tied for third in the Big 12 last season, although Tech was ousted in the first round of the NCAA tournament.



29. XAVIER

Musketeers coach Sean Miller did a complete makeover of his roster after finishing the season 16-18. Ten players from that team are out the door. One big returnee is 6-foot-9 forward Zach Freemantle, who suffered a broken foot during the 2022-23 season and sat out all of last season. The coach on the floor is senior point guard Dayvion McKnight. Miller added backcourt help by getting transfers Ryan Conwell (Indiana State) and Dante Maddox (Toledo). The mystery man is another well-traveled transfer, 6-foot-10, 275-pound John Hugley IV.



30. KANSAS STATE

The transfer portal helped coach Jerome Tang recover from losing four starters. Kansas State pulled in 6-foot-10 Coleman Hawkins (Illinois) and 7-footer Ugonna Onyenso (Kentucky), along with guards Dug McDaniel (Michigan), Max Jones (Cal State Fullerton) and CJ Jones (Illinois-Chicago). Hawkins is one of the most versatile players in the nation, which is why he reportedly grabbed \$2 million to transfer. Tang has the talent to compete in the Big 12, but this is a new team that needs time to develop chemistry.

31. SAINT LOUIS

Indiana State was a great story last season as coach Josh Schertz and 6-foot-10 Robbie Avila (also known as Cream Abdul-Jabbar) led a 32-win team to the NIT championship game. Schertz and Avila have relocated and plan to transform the Billikens, a 20-loss team, into winners. Schertz also brought along former Sycamores point guard Isaiah Swope, who will play in a backcourt with Larry Hughes II, son of the former Saint Louis and NBA star.

32. OHIO STATE

After the firing of coach Chris Holtmann in mid-February, Jake Diebler took over a slumping Buckeyes team and won six of his first eight games. Now the full-time coach at age 38, he's thankful to have junior point guard Bruce Thornton (15.7 ppg) back to run the show. Diebler snagged four transfers, including center Aaron Bradshaw (Kentucky), guard Meechie Johnson (South Carolina) and forward Micah Parrish (San Diego State).

33. CLEMSON

Brad Brownell is a widely respected coach, but he too seldom won big games in March — until he did last season. The Tigers made a surprising run to the NCAA Elite Eight and finished with 24 wins. Senior guard Chase Hunter and junior forward Ian Schieffelin, two of the players who powered Clemson's rise, return for another run at it. The Tigers will miss two other key players, PJ Hall and Joe Girard, but they should fight for third place in the ACC.

34. MICHIGAN STATE

Entering his 30th year as Michigan State coach, Tom Izzo owns 707 career wins. Last season, he lost too many games (15) and was knocked out in the second round of the NCAA tournament. Izzo is against the transfer portal and paying players. The Spartans have some talent returning, led by 6-foot-11 Xavier Booker and freshman point guard Jeremy Fears, but there are several roster riddles Izzo must solve to get this team into the Big Ten's top five.

35. SAINT MARY'S

It was the Gaels, not Gonzaga, who won the West Coast Conference regular-season title with a 15-1 record. Randy Bennett, who has 533 wins in 23 years as Saint Mary's coach, is not going to finish ahead of the Zags this time. The Gaels lost veteran point guard Aidan Mahaney as a transfer to UConn, and that was a big blow, but they still boast two of the league's top players in guard Augustas Marciulionis and 6-foot-10 Mitchell Saxen.

36. BOISE STATE

No, the Mountain West is not getting six teams into the NCAA field again this year. The conference could get three, and the Broncos are the favorites. Senior forward Tyson Degenhart and senior center O'Mar Stanley are among the top 10 players in the league.

37. OREGON

Sophomore guard Jackson Shelstad is expected to be the Ducks' top scorer, and he's one of three starters coming back from a 24-12 team. Oregon coach Dana Altman is relying on transfers Brandon Angel (Stanford) and T.J. Bamba (Villanova) to step up.

38. VILLANOVA

Only one starter returns for Wildcats coach Kyle Neptune, but that player is 6-foot-8 Eric Dixon, one of the best the Big East has to offer. Neptune has a two-year record of 35-33 since following the retired Jay Wright. Neptune needs Miami (Fla.) transfer Wooga Poplar to be a major scorer.

39. WAKE FOREST

Senior guard Hunter Sallis, who averaged 18 points and shot 40 percent from 3-point range, turned down the NBA Draft to return to the Demon Deacons. Sallis' decision gives coach Steve Forbes a shot to crack the ACC's top three.

40. MICHIGAN

With the Wolverines finishing 8-24, Juwan Howard was at the end of the road. Dusty May, who coached Florida Atlantic to the Final Four in 2023, lured Vlad Goldin, a 7-foot-1 force for the Owls, and Ohio State transfer guard Roddy Gayle Jr. May will make this a quick turnaround.

41. MISSISSIPPI STATE

The Bulldogs might be the 10th-best team in the SEC, but that's still pretty good. Sophomore guard Josh Hubbard (17.1 ppg) is back to trigger the offense for coach Chris Jans, who's also counting on senior guard Claudell Harris and Penn State transfer Kanye Clary.

42. NEVADA

It appears San Diego State's declining talent level is opening the door for Nevada to climb higher in the Mountain West. Steve Alford is an underrated coach who finds players, and he'll win with 6-foot-10 Nick Davidson, 6-foot-10 Brandon Love, 6-foot-9 Kobe Sanders and guard Xavier DuSell.

43. UAB

Yaxel Lendeborg, a 6-foot-9 senior, averaged a double-double (13.8 points, 10.6 rebounds) last season for a 23-win Blazers team. He's arguably the best player in the American Athletic Conference, and UAB coach Andy Kennedy has the league's team to beat.

44. DAYTON

Saint Louis is the clear frontrunner in the Atlantic 10, with Dayton and VCU in the rear-view mirror. Flyers coach Anthony Grant finished 25-8 last season and welcomes back three starters, highlighted by 6-foot-7 senior Nate Santos and senior guard Posh Alexander.

45. GRAND CANYON

The Western Athletic Conference earned some respect when Bryce Drew coached the 12th-seeded Lopes to a first-round victory over Saint Mary's in the NCAA tournament. Senior guards Tyon Grant-Foster (20.1 ppg) and Ray Harrison return from a 30-5 team.

46. WASHINGTON

After taking Utah State to the NCAA tournament, Danny Sprinkle took off for the Washington job and brought 6-foot-8 senior Great Osobor along for the ride. No starters are coming back for the Huskies, but that's not terrible news. Sprinkle is rebuilding with several transfers.

47. BYU

Kevin Young, who was an NBA assistant for Phoenix, got the job to replace Mark Pope. The Cougars won 23 games, tied for fifth in the Big 12 and made the NCAA tournament before Pope left for Kentucky. BYU will bank on 6-foot-6 senior Fousseyni Traore and several prospects.

48. UNLV

Slowly but surely, fourth-year coach Kevin Kruger is making progress in Vegas. He's off a 21-win season and fourth-place finish in the Mountain West. Dedan Thomas Jr. is the top point guard in the conference, and Kruger has quietly compiled his most talented roster.

49. PITTSBURGH

On paper, the Panthers are not incredibly impressive, but coach Jeff Capel averaged 23 wins the past two seasons, and he's probably got a top-six team in the 18-team ACC. Pitt will be led by guards Jaland Lowe, Ishmael Leggett and Houston transfer Damian Dunn.

50. NOTRE DAME

If there's a sleeper team in the ACC, it's the Fighting Irish. Micah Shrewsberry is a shrewd coach who's recruiting well and rebuilding. Sophomore guard Markus Burton (17.5 ppg) is one of four starters returning, along with the coach's son, sophomore guard Braeden Shrewsberry.

SCHEDULE BREAKDOWN AND ANALYSIS OF ACC AND BIG TEN TRAVEL

By Aaron Moore

The new look ACC and Big Ten conferences are going to raise a lot of questions this college basketball season.

Can Stanford and Cal reinvigorate their programs in the ACC?

Is SMU ready to be a power conference program?

Will the former Pac-12 teams make an immediate impact in a loaded Big Ten?

There is another question bettors are already asking about these two gargantuan conferences.

Will all the daunting travel these teams face impact their on-the-court performance?

To get ahead of this question before it becomes a popular media narrative, we asked a number of college basketball bettors their thoughts and how it will be incorporated into their handicapping.

We also broke down the schedule for each ACC and Big Ten team to identify the stretch of games most impacted by travel.

CHANGE OF SEASON

Before college basketball bettors consider if the added mileage about to take place in these conferences will affect game performance (and the spread), they first can look towards the ongoing football season.

The results as of mid-October have already caught the attention of Circa's VP of Operations and college basketball betting guru Mike Palm.

"The 'Coast to Coast Big 10' has staged nine games where teams traveled at least two time zones" said Palm. "The visitors are 1-8 SU and 3-6 ATS in those games."

Even Penn State's James Franklin intimated how the thousands of miles it takes to reach the West Coast altered his football team's established routine. In order to make it to Los Angeles for the USC game, the Nittany Lions left a day earlier than normal because a two-hour bus ride was needed to get to Harrisburg. There they could charter a larger plane that didn't need to be refueled.

Bettors then took note of Franklin's comments and the line dropped from Penn State -5.5 to -3.5. Perhaps the journey did play a role as the more talented Nittany Lions came out sluggish and trailed 20-6 in the first half. Eventually they made an impressive comeback and won 33-30.

Add that to the ATS loss total Palm previously mentioned. This same trend of Big Ten football teams struggling with travel across multiple time zones already has VSIN's Mitch Moss thinking about the implications for basketball.

"Looking at the records of Big Ten teams traveling at least two time zones, sure it's a pretty small sample size overall, but could this trickle into college hoops and be a thing for the foreseeable future? Absolutely. Letdown & lookahead spots have existed for years at the college level. Adding in extended travel to your handicap needs to be part of the equation for these conferences."

While the football games are once a week with teams coming right back home afterwards, the ACC and Big Ten basketball teams will head out on road trips to play sets of games. The 12-game football season also creates more urgency than the 30+ games in basketball.

These schools are about to set out on the road like they do in the professional ranks. That means college bettors must be ready to identify occasions when colleges might slip into the bad habits made in the NBA according to professional sports bettor Chris Macero.

"We have to watch early on if colleges deal with the travel and schedule spots like those in the NBA call an 'off night' where they mail in a game after tough travel," said the California-based Macero. "You have to at least consider that it will become more of a thing in the ACC and Big Ten."

Macero recommends bettors keep their eye on these schedule points early on this season.

"Yeah, the travel is going to be tough for teams and players, but it creates more opportunities for the bettor to find favorable spots due to rough travel conditions."

The new ACC and Big Ten is putting more games like this on his radar.

"I guess you would have to call the road games in these two conferences Super Situational Spots."

TRAVEL PLANS

Even though Palm is still focused on fall action, he expects to include coast-to-coast road trips in his college basketball handicapping since he has seen travel play a large role in other sports.

"The exaggerated travel has to be a point of emphasis in handicapping these ACC and Big Ten games," said Palm.

Now that schedules are available, VSIN's Matt Youmans can determine when there will be upcoming travel issues, especially in a conference he focuses on like the Big Ten. The host of Circa's College Hoops Challenges plans to handicap with them in mind.

"I will be looking to bet against travel-weary teams on extended trips. Obviously, the oddsmakers are aware of that angle and the betting

market won't sleep on it, but some of those teams will fall into really bad spots where the numbers are not adjusted enough.

"We make a big deal about the football road trips, but there are far more travel miles involved in the basketball schedules."

Youmans already highlighted a 10-day stretch for UCLA in January that includes a game at Rutgers.

The winner of Youmans' Circa contest, David Dineen, a former player at Cal Poly, feels travel is a factor to consider but warns handicappers from over-generalizing it in their analysis.

"It should be in your handicap but don't make it too much," said Dineen, who hyperfocuses his betting on college basketball.

"Don't forget how good your body can bounce back when you're 19-23 years old. These players have been playing AAU since 11 years old, traveling around the country playing games, sometimes three a day."

Dineen feels there is just too much money at stake for these teams not to make elite-level accommodations. That includes the best hotels, restaurants and ways to rest between games.

He believes the ACC and Big Ten coaches spent much of the offseason planning on the best ways to earmark off days during trips.

That is also a reason why veteran handicapper Brue Marshall initially feels that the travel angle may be a "tad overrated."

Marshall contends that yes, a trip for a team like UCLA to the Eastern time zone comes with an added level of difficulty. However when those same Bruins travel to the Midwest, other than a new time zone, it won't be much different than when they flew up to the Northwest for Pac-12 games.

"Bottom line is the travel might be a factor, but not as important as the teams they face and the matchups," said Marshall, who handicaps college games for Vegas Insider and CBS Sportsline.

He gives this nugget of college hoops betting advice in advance.

"As always monitor the season as it goes. Home and road always figures into the handicap and sometimes really factors in, but to assume it will be more pronounced this season may be jumping the gun a bit. Let's wait to see how much difference there is before making any line adjustments."

SCHEDULE BREAKDOWN

Here are the schedule segments identified as being most impacted by travel for every ACC and Big Ten squad.

ACC

BOSTON COLLEGE

Sat 2/22 home Georgia Tech

Wed 2/26 AT Stanford

Sat 3/1 AT California

Wed 3/5 home Clemson

LOOK AHEAD

The games in Northern California occur later in the season after most of the ACC grind. If BC is out of contention for a tournament bid - something that last happened in 2009 - motivation and travel could likely come into play during this segment of games.

CALIFORNIA

Wed 3/5 AT Louisville

Sat 3/8 AT Notre Dame

LOOK AHEAD

It is hard to pinpoint the segment of Cal's conference schedule most impacted by travel because the entire season will be. That is what happens when the Golden Bears leave Berkeley to go south, then east and in a different time zone. The games mentioned above are just how they will end a long regular season. In total, Cal will make four significant ACC road trips. Can bookmakers correctly bake the travel into Cal's final games?

CLEMSON

Sat 2/15 AT FSU

Sat 2/22 AT SMU

LOOK AHEAD

Should not be an overtly difficult schedule for Brad Brownell to navigate. They get the California teams at home after they already played at Wake Forest. When it comes time to trek to Dallas, the Tigers have a week to prepare after playing in Tallahassee.

DUKE

Wed 2/12 home California

Sat 2/15 home Stanford

Mon 2/17 AT Virginia

LOOK AHEAD

The Blue Devils got an assist from ACC schedule makers. Just a standalone trip to SMU (1/4) and the California schools come to Durham when all the Cameron Crazies will be back from winter break. Seems to lessen the load right before the short trip to Charlottesville.

FLORIDA STATE

Wed 1/22 AT California

Sat 1/25 AT Stanford

Wed 1/29 home Virginia Tech

LOOK AHEAD

The home game against Va. Tech might be the one most affected by travel. FSU returns from the other coast and plays a physical Hokies team first game back.

GEORGIA TECH

Tue 1/7 AT Syracuse

Sat 1/11 AT SMU

LOOK AHEAD

After its business trip from Atlanta to Upstate New York, Georgia Tech will either have a short turnaround at home or stay longer on the road. The amount of court time Damon Stoudamire has to practice in-between should be limited due to the travel.

LOUISVILLE

Sat 1/11 AT Pittsburgh

Tue 1/14 AT Syracuse

Sat 1/18 home Virginia

Tue 1/21 AT SMU

LOOK AHEAD

Pat Kelsey must deal with these 10 specific days to get wins and rest in order to push for a tournament bid. He will benefit from the final three games of the season at home with two against the California squads ending their long seasons.

MIAMI

Wed 1/22 AT Stanford

Sat 1/25 AT California

Wed 1/29 home Virginia

LOOK AHEAD

Nothing epitomizes the current state of college basketball than a team from South Florida jet setting to Northern California for conference matchups. The Hurricanes better get rid of any residual travel issues prior to the arrival of Virginia's defense.

NORTH CAROLINA

Tue 1/7 home SMU
Sat 1/11 AT NC State
Wed 1/15 home California
Sat 1/18 home Stanford
Tue 1/21 AT Wake Forest

LOOK AHEAD

UNC should challenge for both a conference and national championship. A lot of that has to do with an almost unbelievably accommodating schedule in the new look ACC. During that segment noted above, the Tar Heels don't leave the state and get to play teams based in Texas and California.

NORTH CAROLINA STATE

Wed 2/5 AT California
Sat 2/8 AT Stanford
...
Wed 2/26 AT Syracuse
Sat 3/1 AT Georgia Tech
Wed 3/5 home Pittsburgh
Sat 3/8 AT Miami

LOOK AHEAD

While UNC got a favorable version, its little brother down the road in Raleigh got the worst part of it. The Wolfpack have a trip to California in early February then go up and down the eastern part of the country to end the season. They are likely going to be dogs crawling to the finish line in all those final contests.

NOTRE DAME

Wed 3/5 home Stanford
Sat 3/8 home California

LOOK AHEAD

The Midwesterners really don't deal with any added abnormal travel. SMU, Cal and Stanford all play at the Purcell Pavilion.

PITTSBURGH

Sat 2/8 AT North Carolina
Tue 2/11 AT SMU

LOOK AHEAD

The Panthers have a rather smooth ACC road schedule as of now. The California teams come to the Petersen Events Center at the start of the New Year. The trip from Chapel Hill to Dallas requires a relatively quick turnaround.

SMU

Wed 2/26 AT California
Sat 3/1 AT Stanford
Tue 3/4 home Syracuse
Sat 3/8 AT Florida State

LOOK AHEAD

Not an advantageous way for this Texas program to end the season. There are games on the West Coast leading to one at home then a Florida trip.

SYRACUSE

Sat 1/25 home Pittsburgh
Wed 1/29 AT Stanford
Sat 2/1 AT California
Wed 2/5 home Duke

LOOK AHEAD

The time in wine country for the Orange has the look of trap games. The contests before and right after clearly have more meaning to them.

STANFORD

Wed 1/15 AT Wake Forest
Sat 1/18 AT North Carolina

LOOK AHEAD

Like with Cal, the entire schedule for Stanford should be difficult so each segment has its own implications. The one mentioned above comes after the Cardinal makes its first trip east (1/1 Clemson, 1/4 Pittsburgh) then home for two games (1/8 Virginia Tech, 1/11 Virginia) and then onto Tobacco Road.

VIRGINIA

Sat 1/4 home Louisville
Wed 1/8 AT California
Sat 1/11 AT Stanford
Wed 1/15 home SMU
Sat 1/18 AT Louisville

LOOK AHEAD

The Cavaliers might be on upset alert when Louisville gets its return game.

VIRGINIA TECH

Tue 2/25 home Louisville
Sat 3/1 home Syracuse
Tue 3/4 home North Carolina
Sat 3/8 AT Clemson

LOOK AHEAD

Going under the premise that there should be some travel weary teams, Va. Tech might be getting a number of them coming to Blacksburg to end the season.

WAKE FOREST

Wed 2/5 AT Stanford
Sat 2/8 AT California
Wed 2/12 home FSU
Sat 2/15 AT SMU
Sat 2/22 AT NC State

LOOK AHEAD

This February stretch for Wake Forest might be an opportune time for bettors to situationally play against the Demon Deacons. The amount of road games - even to nearby NC State - are bunched in the last portion of the season. This could be the hardest travel segment an ACC team faces in conference play during 2025.

BIG TEN

ILLINOIS

Sun 12/29 home Chicago State
Thu 1/2 At Oregon
Sun 1/5 AT Washington
Wed 1/8 home Penn State

LOOK AHEAD

Appears to be the standard Big Ten schedule with an early January trip to the Pacific Northwest. Conveniently, that comes after a December filled mostly with home games and a contest against Chicago State before its flight to Eugene.

INDIANA

Sat 3/1 AT Washington
Tue 3/4 AT Oregon
Sat 3/8 home Ohio State

LOOK AHEAD

Winter time trips in the Big Ten are already laborious. Indiana now adds a West Coast flight to it to round out the season. Perhaps the residual effects will be seen more during the Big Ten tournament that starts a week after its return home.

IOWA

Tue 1/4 AT USC
Fri 1/17 AT UCLA
Tue 1/21 home Minnesota

LOOK AHEAD

Iowa shouldn't have many concerns during conference play. The Hawkeyes play their first eight games at home and then travel to USC and UCLA in mid-January.

MARYLAND

Thu 1/2 AT Washington
Sun 1/5 AT Oregon
Fri 1/10 home UCLA

LOOK AHEAD

Great schedule for a team dealing with a coast-to-coast itinerary. The Terrapins play a tune-up game against Maryland-Eastern Shore then go to Washington and Oregon. After a five-day break, in comes UCLA making the opposite trip.

MICHIGAN

Sat 1/4 AT USC
Tue 1/7 AT UCLA
Sun 1/12 home Washington

LOOK AHEAD

Similar scenario for Michigan as Maryland.

MICHIGAN STATE

Sat 1/25 AT Rutgers
Tue 1/28 home Minnesota
Sat 2/1 AT USC
Tue 2/4 AT UCLA
Sat 2/8 home Oregon

LOOK AHEAD

This is a hard stretch where a physical team like MSU might show signs of slowing down from going to New Jersey, back home, then on to Southern California in just over a week.

MINNESOTA

Tue 2/4 AT Penn State
Sat 2/8 home Illinois
Sat 2/15 AT USC
Tue 2/18 AT UCLA

LOOK AHEAD

This could be a road-weary Big Ten team that Youmans alluded to earlier.

NEBRASKA

Sun 1/26 AT Wisconsin
Thu 1/30 home Illinois
Sun 2/2 AT Oregon
Wed 2/5 AT Washington

LOOK AHEAD

Another team to possibly bet against based on situational handicapping. The Cornhuskers have extensive travel from the start of January until early February.

NORTHWESTERN

Sat 2/8 AT Washington
Tue 2/11 AT Oregon
Sun 2/16 home Nebraska
Thu 2/20 AT Ohio State
Tue 2/25 AT Minnesota

LOOK AHEAD

This stretch could create issues. There might be chances to go against the Wildcats because they have a reputation for being competitive dogs (9-6 ATS in 2024).

OHIO STATE

Sun 2/23 AT UCLA
Wed 2/26 AT USC
Tue 3/4 home Nebraska
Sat 3/8 AT Indiana

LOOK AHEAD

Very difficult way for OSU to end a season.

OREGON

Sat 1/25 AT Minnesota
Thu 1/30 AT UCLA
Sun 2/2 home Nebraska
Wed 2/5 AT Michigan
Sat 2/8 AT Michigan State

LOOK AHEAD

This is the honey-hole for situational bettors to go against the Ducks.

PENN STATE

Sat 2/8 AT UCLA
Tue 2/11 AT USC

LOOK AHEAD

Remember, the basketball team will have the same issues Franklin identified. Based on their entire schedule, Penn State will spend a lot of time in hotels during 2025.

PURDUE

Thu 1/9 AT Rutgers
Sun 1/12 home Nebraska
Thu 1/16 AT Washington
Sat 1/18 AT Oregon

LOOK AHEAD

Futures bettors are going to want to look ahead at the Purdue schedule since the Boilermakers are favored to win the Big Ten regular season title. How well they navigate this stretch will play a large part in if they can make it three championships in a row.

RUTGERS

Sun 2/16 AT Oregon
Thu 2/20 AT Washington
Sun 2/23 home USC
Thu 2/27 AT Michigan
Tue 3/4 AT Purdue

LOOK AHEAD

As would be expected, this could be the team most impacted by all the travel. The Scarlet Knights also have a Las Vegas getaway scheduled for a tournament at the end of November. It seems like a reasonable expectation that star freshmen Dylan Harper and Ace Bailey could hit the wall by late February.

UCLA

Fri 1/4 AT Nebraska
Tue 1/7 home Michigan
Fri 1/10 AT Maryland
Mon 1/13 AT Rutgers

LOOK AHEAD

The bookmakers believe UCLA can handle all this travel by making them one of the regular season favorites. As Marshall said, this is a program already versed in dealing with the road. Still, there is a cumulative effect of all those miles from Westwood to these games. Consequently, I believe a more centralized favorite like Purdue or Indiana would be a better bet or more value on Illinois than UCLA.

USC

Thu 2/20 AT Maryland
Sun 2/23 AT Rutgers
Wed 2/26 home Ohio State
Sat 3/1 AT Oregon

LOOK AHEAD

Some have called Eric Musselman's team a wildcard that could finish surprisingly high in the Big Ten standings. That claim may be done by just looking at talent and not the travel implications of finishing a long season this way.

WASHINGTON

Wed 2/12 AT Ohio State
Sat 2/15 AT Penn State
Thu 2/20 home Rutgers
Sat 2/22 AT Iowa
Tue 2/25 AT Wisconsin

LOOK AHEAD

Other than Great Osobor, the Huskies don't appear to have a roster built for the Big Ten to begin with. They are likely going to be dogs in all these games. As of now, I am not sure the books can make a line high enough to scare me away from taking the favorites.

WISCONSIN

Sat 1/18 AT USC
Tue AT UCLA
Sun 1/26 home Nebraska
Wed 1/29 AT Maryland
Sat 2/1 AT Northwestern

LOOK AHEAD

Seems like travel should be part of the daily handicap when Wisconsin enters this stretch.

HUNTING HOOPS VALUE

By Zachary Cohen

The championship futures market can be tricky in college basketball. The fact that a national champion has to win a 68-team tournament makes it very difficult to look ahead. In college football, a Georgia backer will think about how the Bulldogs match up with a handful of teams — Alabama, Texas, Ohio State, Oregon, etc. — in potential College Football Playoff showdowns. That's not doable here. There's far more parity in college basketball, and stylistic differences can mean everything in a single-elimination tournament. That means that there's a lot more to think about. But that doesn't mean you can't get involved at all.

I like attacking this market by hunting value in a few different categories. I'm looking for a top-tier team that might be slept on compared to other contenders, a mid-tier team with the potential to break into that top group and then a sleeper with high upside. For some of these, winning the championship shouldn't be the ultimate goal. Sometimes you should be trying to get a favorable price to set up some hedging opportunities down the road.

With that out of the way, here are a few tickets I'm adding before the year:

IOWA STATE (30-1)

I think it's going to be very clear early in the season that this is a top-five team in the country. That means you won't be able to get these odds by the time the Big Dance rolls around.

Last year, Iowa State was first in KenPom's defensive rating and second in Bart Torvik's adjusted defensive efficiency. This year, head coach T.J. Otzelberger has the core of that team back. So, this is a group that should be very difficult to score on, but I also think we can expect some growth offensively.

Iowa State was just 52nd in the nation in offensive rating last year, but this team has its three best guards back. Tamin Lipsey, Keshon Gilbert and Curtis Jones should all be awesome this year. The Cyclones also added Northern Iowa transfer Nate Heise, a versatile player with good size and great instincts. There might not be a team in the nation with guard play this good, and the frontcourt has potential also. Milan Momcilovic made the conference's All-Freshman team last year, and he's only going to get better in Year 2. And Charlotte transfer Dishon Jackson could give the team a much-needed inside presence.

Having reliable guards is crucial in the NCAA Tournament, and the Cyclones have three that can be the best player on the floor on any given night. Then you have Momcilovic, who is a legitimate NBA talent on the wing. Combining that with good coaching and real continuity should give Iowa State a chance of being a special team.

RUTGERS (55-1)

Steve Pikiell has taken Rutgers to the NCAA Tournament three times in the last five years, and most of those teams lacked talent. Pikiell is just incredible at getting his teams to defend. Even last year's 15-17 Scarlet

Knights group was fifth in the nation in defensive rating, according to KenPom. It was the second year in a row that Rutgers was a top-10 defensive team, and the fourth time in the last five years that the Scarlet Knights were top 20 in defensive rating. If Pikiell can get this year's group to defend, Rutgers could be one of the best teams in college basketball. That's because talent isn't an issue anymore.

Rutgers actually landed the second-best 2024 recruiting class in the nation, according to ESPN. The group is headlined by Ace Bailey, a 6-foot-10 wing with outrageous size, athleticism and shot-making ability. Bailey was the second-ranked recruit in the class, putting him right behind Duke phenom Cooper Flagg. Pikiell also secured the fourth-ranked recruit in the class in Dylan Harper, whose brother Ron Harper Jr. played for Rutgers a few years ago. Harper is an incredible on-ball player, as he can work magic as a pick-and-roll ball handler and is a true three-level scorer.

For as good as Pikiell's teams can be defensively, they can be pretty miserable offensively. But it's going to be hard for him to mess things up on that end of the floor with Bailey and Harper. Rutgers also has some solid returners in Jeremiah Williams, Jamichael Davis and Emmanuel Ogbole.

Honestly, the only thing to really worry about with this group is 3-point shooting. Pikiell needs to find some time for his designated floor-spacers. Luckily he has a few of them. PJ Hayes, a San Diego transfer, shot 39.7% from deep last year, so he could be a big factor right away. The same goes for Princeton transfer Zach Martini, who is 6-foot-8 and shot 38.5% from 3 last year. Even Tyson Acuff, who averaged 21.7 points per game for Eastern Michigan last year, is a much better shooter than his 29.2% 3P% last year suggests. And he'll get cleaner looks as a smaller part of this offense.

There's going to be a lot for Pikiell to figure out on the fly, but his teams generally outperform their talent. So, if that trend continues with this type of roster, you're looking at a potential contender.

ARIZONA STATE (500-1)

After going 42-20 in two years at Buffalo, Bobby Hurley's Arizona State tenure has been plagued by inconsistency. In nine years, Hurley has had four seasons with at least 20 wins. However, he has also had five with 15 or fewer. But for the most part, Hurley's teams have overachieved, and he has proven that he is a good defensive coach. Now, Hurley will try to build a team that is great on both ends of the floor, and he'll be doing it with the best roster he has ever had.

Thanks to John Calipari's Kentucky exit, Hurley was able to flip five-star Jayden Quaintance, a 6-foot-9 big man with all-world explosiveness, a high motor and some unique skills. Then, when Caleb Love announced he was returning to Arizona, Hurley swooped in and convinced the 22nd-ranked prospect in the class, Joson Sanon, to ditch Tucson for Tempe. Sanon is viewed as a potential one-and-done player because of his ability to make shots. With four-star wing Amier Ali already in the mix, Hurley got himself ESPN's seventh-ranked 2024 recruiting class.

Hurley also happened to bring in some remarkable transfers. Alston Mason, who could start at point, averaged 17.5 points and 3.6 assists per game for Missouri State last year. Wing BJ Freeman, who averaged 21.6 points, 6.6 rebounds and 4.1 assists per game on solid shooting splits for Milwaukee, has the potential to be one of the best players in the Big 12. And forward Basheer Jihad was an All-MAC player last year, averaging 18.6 points, 8.0 rebounds, 1.1 blocks and 1.1 steals per game.

Those experienced newcomers join productive returners Adam Miller, a guard that averaged 12.0 points per game last year, and center Shawn Phillips Jr., a center that does some of the dirty work.

Like Pikiell and Rutgers, there will be a lot that Hurley will have to piece together this year. And the 53-year-old isn't going to have a lot of time to do it. But having talented young players that can play with anyone immediately, along with older guys that have proven themselves already, is not a bad problem to have. In terms of pure talent, this Sun Devils team will never be overmatched. So, at 500-1, it's worth some pizza money to hope it all comes together.



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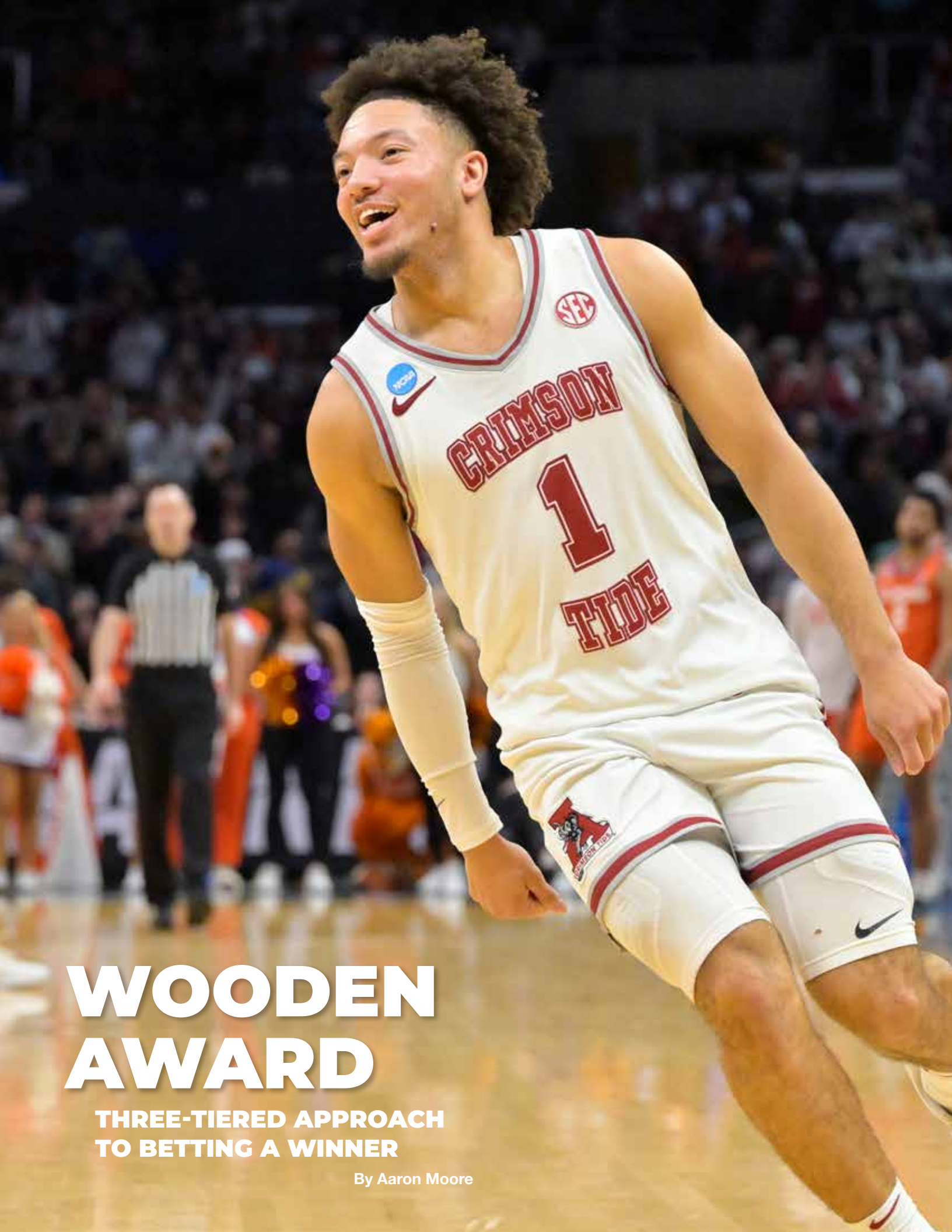
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WOODEN AWARD

**THREE-TIERED APPROACH
TO BETTING A WINNER**

By Aaron Moore

Let's take a look at the Wooden Award which tends to be one of the most popular futures markets for college bettors.

This year, someone will fill the void left by Zach Edey who was the first back-to-back winner since Ralph Sampson (1982 and 1983). Edey's two impressive seasons came after Oscar Tshiebwe won in 2022 and Luka Garza in 2021.

That makes four straight seasons the Wooden Award went to someone listed as a center.

One of the favorites this year, Hunter Dickinson (+750, DraftKings) from Kansas could make it five in a row for that position. Unlike Edey who lived on the blocks and scored mostly with his back to the basket, Dickinson plays center more in-tune with today's style of stretching the court from behind the arc.

Joining Dickinson as one of this year's favorites is RJ Davis (+700). The North Carolina guard returns to Chapel Hill after leading the ACC in scoring (21.2 PPG) a year ago.

Not far behind these two is Alabama's offensive machine Mark Sears (+900) who looks to roll over his NCAA tournament success into the Crimson Tide's regular season.

The wildcard here is 17-year old Duke freshman Cooper Flagg who is not listed at some books because of his age. DraftKings has a Yes/No option for Flagg (Yes +700/ No -1400).

There are certain preseason characteristics needed to win the award and this group possesses the right combination. All come into the season with plenty of media hype, their teams are pushing for a national championship, and they can score.

Sure, big men like Edey, Tshiebwe and Garza all rebounded and blocked shots, but just like the other guards and forwards who recently won the award, scoring is what gets the most attention.

Taking a look back at the winners since Frank Kaminsky in 2015, the average scoring number for this group is 21.4 PPG. The lowest points per game was Tshiebwe's 16.5. Also, every winner in this time frame, except Tshiebwe and freshman Zion Williamson, increased their scoring totals from the previous season.

To put into perspective, this year's winner needs to be featured on a contending team, score around 21 points a game and demonstrate an increase in production from 2024.

TIER 1 FAVORITES

RJ Davis (+700)
Cooper Flagg (+700)
Hunter Dickinson (+750)
Mark Sears (+900)

BREAKDOWN

Any of these four are a good addition to a futures portfolio. The odds are high enough at this point to have room for another ticket or two as the season reaches the halfway point.

If a freshman can somehow pull off the win, it would likely be a Blue Devil as Williamson did in 2019. The 6-foot-9 Flagg enters the season with a Zion-level of hype, can excel anywhere on the court and is already being billed as the No.1 pick in the next NBA draft.

Flagg's persona is so large he plays at a Nike school but has an individual endorsement deal with New Balance.

All four of these players - IF they stay healthy - are expected to fill up the stat sheet in a number of ways. Three of them demonstrated that last season (Davis - 21.2 PPG, 3.5 APG, 3.6 RPG; Dickinson - 17.9 PPG, 10.9 RPG, 2.3 APG; Sears - 21.5 PPG, 4.2 APG, 4.2 RPG).

The best option here looks to be Sears. He comes with higher odds than the other competitors and plays the most dominant role on his team. Grant Nelson is also back for the Crimson Tide, but Sears is the face of the Alabama program on the national stage. There are probably going to be more times that Davis and Dickinson get overshadowed by teammates than Sears.

As for Flagg, he's a freshman going against three other players praised by the media as "veterans" with fifth year status.

TIER 2 FAVORITES

LJ Cryer (+2000)
Johni Broome (+2000)
AJ Storr (+2000)
Johnell Davis (+3000)
Khalif Battle (+3500)
Tamin Lipsey (+3500)
VJ Edgecombe (+3500)

BREAKDOWN

Cryer (Houston), Broome (Auburn) and Lipsey (Iowa State) are favorably positioned in the media as returning stars who can carry their squads to a conference championship.

Storr (Kansas), Davis (Arkansas) and Battle (Gonzaga) are going to be billed somewhat differently. They will be referred to as familiar names offering their new programs a key veteran addition to an already strong lineup. Storr's gun-for-hire reputation, and playing alongside Dickinson, could hinder his campaign. Davis will be on the media radar with stories of how he left Florida Atlantic to move up and help John Calipari's immediate rebuild in Fayetteville.

Baylor's Edgecomb will be one of the names challenging Flagg as the nation's top freshman.

Broome is a good option for bettors looking for more value. He is the featured player in Bruce Pearl's system and has demonstrated a continual offensive improvement (16.5 PPG, 35.4% 3-PT). Also, as a big man most noted for his rebounding (8.5 RPG) and shot blocking (2.2 BPG), Broome offers a more unique candidacy than the top favorites.

The 2025 Torvik projections for Broome have him increasing his scoring (19.2 PPG) and rebounding (9.2 RPG).

TIER 3 AND BEYOND

Ace Bailey (+4000)
Dylan Harper (+4000)
Liam McNeeley (+4000)
Caleb Love (+4000)
Ryan Nembhard (+4000)
Ryan Kalkbrenner (+4000)
Zeke Mayo (+4000)
Tyrese Proctor (+4000)
Grant Nelson (+4500)

BREAKDOWN

Everyone on this list and deeper is either a heralded freshman (Bailey & Harper at Rutgers, McNeeley at UConn), a second option behind a star player, or a great player on a team not expected to be near the top of the rankings. All those factors make it very difficult in the preseason to envision them winning the Wooden Award.

Instead of investing in someone here, look at the conference or national championship futures board. It is easier to monetize a longshot there rather than an award based on a media narrative.

PREDICTING IMPROVEMENT AND DECLINE

By Steve Makinen

For those of you familiar with my preseason college football work, some of the key pieces surround what I call “transitional systems.” These systems project whether or not teams will improve or decline based upon a variety of factors, ranging from key statistics, number of returning starters, coaching changes, and several other variables. I even have a popular system I employ yearly to quantify my theories, called Stability Scores.

I do this every summer to prep for a new season, as one of the most difficult things about handicapping college sports is the process of evaluating teams from one season to the next. So many things can affect a team’s strength and/or how different they might be. Adding to the difficulty is the thought that many programs are taking players out of their most recent recruiting class and/or the transfer portal and plugging them into early starting spots. For the 2024-25 season, 39 teams across the country bring back 10% or less of their player minutes from last season. Essentially, these teams are starting from scratch.

I have a similar set of ideals in predicting potential teams that might improve or decline in the coming season for college basketball. They’re based upon shared characteristics of past teams fitting that bill. Identifying those teams accurately can help build bankrolls. In 2022-23, the list of teams to watch for performed amazingly, as all 21 of the teams I projected to decline last year did so, and 20 of the 23 teams I projected to get better that season saw their records improve year-over-year.

Last year, 23 of the 26 teams that made the likely decline list did exactly that, winning 5.5 fewer games on average. On the opposite side, 11 of the 14 likely improved teams followed through. I share the details of those projections from last year below, which are highlighted in gray. It was the third straight season in which I saw noteworthy returns on this strategy, so I have decided to employ it again.

Any of you who have become regular readers of my work know that I rely heavily on systematic approaches that exhibit a solid foundation for year-after-year repeated success. I strongly believe that returning experience or lack thereof, and the relationship of that with how a team fared in the prior season in various analytics, is a huge foundational cornerstone on which bettors should analyze teams going into a college basketball season. What I have put together below is based wholly on that logic.

SHARED CHARACTERISTICS OF TEAMS THAT DECLINE YEAR-TO-YEAR

There have been 120 teams over the last nine seasons that have declined by 30% or more (approximately 15 wins) from one year to the next in terms of outright won-lost percentage. Do these teams share personnel or statistical characteristics that might help us project the potential depreciating teams for this season? Let’s take a look, using a similar process I employ in projecting the title favorites and potential Cinderella teams for the NCAA Tournament each March.

Of the 120 teams I described above, to narrow down the list of this year’s qualifying teams:

- About 2/3 of them won 60% or more of their games in the prior season (125 teams did this in 2023-24)

- 83, or about 69.2%, had two or fewer returning starters (84 of the 125 teams for this season have this)
- About 2/3 of them had less than 50% RPM (returning player minutes) back for that season (73 of the 84 teams for this season share this trait)

Note: I have made a big adjustment to the qualifiers for bullet point #3 after going back and reassessing the numbers. The RPM benchmark used to be 30% or less. It is now less than 50%. This has expanded our list of teams greatly, thus giving bettors more teams to go against. With a list of 73 potential teams destined to fall off in 2024-25, I then analyzed seven different statistical angles from the prior season, matching the 120 teams from past years that experienced 30%-plus declines in win percentage:

- About 2/3 of them had a point differential of less than +6.5 PPG in the prior season
- About 2/3 of them won 50% or more of their games ATS in the prior season
- About 2/3 of them had at least five close wins in the prior season (<=5 PTS)
- About 2/3 of them had at most four close losses in the prior season (<=5 PTS)
- About 2/3 of them had five or fewer blowout wins in the prior season (>=20 PTS)
- About 2/3 of them had at least one blowout loss in the prior season (>=20 PTS)
- About 2/3 of them won seven or fewer of their last 10 games in the prior season

Here is the list of the 73 teams with the number of traits they match from above (out of seven). It could be assumed that the more shared traits, the greater chance that the team declines significantly in 2024-25, although, as you’ll see just below this year’s list, there was a consistent decline from all the teams last year. Note that the teams marked with a “*” have new head coaches this season:

* DUQUESNE (7)	PROVIDENCE (5)
OAKLAND (7)	RICHMOND (5)
BELMONT (6)	SOUTH DAKOTA STATE (5)
COLGATE (6)	SETON HALL (5)
LIPSCOMB (6)	ST BONAVENTURE (5)
MONTANA (6)	SYRACUSE (5)
SOUTH CAROLINA (6)	TOLEDO (5)
SOUTH FLORIDA (6)	UNC-ASHEVILLE (5)
STETSON (6)	* VIRGINIA (5)
TARLETON STATE (6)	* WASHINGTON STATE (5)
* TENNESSEE-MARTIN (6)	APPALACHIAN STATE (4)
UNLV (6)	COLORADO (4)
ARK-LITTLE ROCK (5)	FAIRFIELD (4)
BRYANT (5)	GEORGE MASON (4)
CHARLOTTE (5)	* INDIANA STATE (4)
* DRAKE (5)	LONGWOOD (4)
HOFSTRA (5)	OHIO STATE (4)
ILLINOIS (5)	SAMFORD (4)
* JAMES MADISON (5)	UNC-GREENSBORO (4)
MEMPHIS (5)	UT-CHATTANOOGA (4)
NC STATE (5)	WESTERN ILLINOIS (4)

WISCONSIN (4)	UNC-WILMINGTON (3)
AKRON (3)	* WESTERN CAROLINA (3)
ARIZONA (3)	* YOUNGSTOWN STATE (3)
BAYLOR (3)	* BYU (2)
BOISE STATE (3)	* FLORIDA ATLANTIC (2)
CAL SAN DIEGO (3)	* KENTUCKY (2)
* COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON (3)	OKLAHOMA (2)
CONNECTICUT (3)	SAN DIEGO STATE (2)
DREXEL (3)	TCU (2)
MISSISSIPPI STATE (3)	DUKE (1)
* MOREHEAD STATE (3)	LOUISIANA TECH (1)
NEW MEXICO (3)	MASSACHUSETTS (1)
SEATTLE (3)	ST JOHN'S (1)
TENNESSEE (3)	ST THOMAS-MN (1)
TEXAS TECH (3)	TEXAS (1)

Here is a look back at the 2022-23 to 2023-24 results. Overall, 23 of the 26 teams declined, by an average of 6.1 wins on the season or a little over 20% on winning percentage. The eight teams that dropped after bringing in new head coaches dropped by an average of 7.9 wins:

*NORTHWESTERN STATE (7) – fell from 22-11 to 9-23
 SANTA CLARA (7) – fell from 23-10 to 20-13
 *GEORGE MASON (6) – went from 20-13 to 20-12
 INDIANA (6) – fell from 23-12 to 19-14
 KANSAS STATE (6) – fell from 28-8 to 23-11
 *PENN STATE (6) – fell from 23-14 to 16-17
 ARIZONA STATE (5) – fell from 23-13 to 14-18
 BALL STATE (5) – fell from 20-12 to 15-16
 MONTANA STATE (5) – fell from 25-10 to 17-18
 *SOUTHERN UTAH (5) – fell from 24-13 to 10-21
 TOWSON STATE (5) – fell from 21-12 to 20-14
 ALABAMA (4) – fell from 31-6 to 25-12
 CINCINNATI (4) – fell from 23-13 to 22-15
 *VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH (4) – fell from 27-8 to 24-14
 VIRGINIA (4) – fell from 25-8 to 23-11
 GONZAGA (3) – fell from 31-6 to 27-8
 *IONA (3) – fell from 27-8 to 16-17
 KENTUCKY (3) – went from 22-12 to 23-10
 MEMPHIS (3) – fell from 26-9 to 22-10
 *TEXAS A&M CC (3) – fell from 24-11 to 21-12
 *UTAH STATE (3) – went from 26-9 to 28-7
 *UTAH VALLEY STATE (3) – fell from 28-9 to 16-16
 XAVIER (3) – fell from 27-10 to 16-18
 YOUNGSTOWN STATE (3) – fell from 24-10 to 22-10
 NC CENTRAL (2) – fell from 18-12 to 18-13
 UCLA (2) – fell from 31-6 to 16-17

In addition, a noteworthy 29 of the 120 (24.2%) teams had a new head coach, a lofty number considering the normal percentage of new coaches is 13%. The average SU win percentage drop for this group has been 36.9%! For 2024-25, as denoted above, nine teams find themselves in that dangerous predicament: BYU, College Of Charleston, Drake, Duquesne, Florida Atlantic, Indiana State, James Madison, Kentucky, Morehead State, Tennessee-Martin, Virginia, Western Carolina, Washington State, Youngstown State.

SHARED CHARACTERISTICS OF TEAMS THAT IMPROVE YEAR-TO-YEAR

There have been 126 teams over the last nine seasons that have improved by 28% or more (approximately 10 wins) from one year to the next in terms of outright won-lost percentage. Do these teams share personnel or statistical characteristics that might help us project the potentially upgraded teams for this season? Let's take a look. Of the 126 teams I described above, to narrow down the list of this year's qualifying teams:

- About 2/3 of them won less than 37% of their games in the prior season (68 teams did this in 2023-24)
- 90 of them, or 71%, had three or more returning starters (15 of the 68 teams for 2024-25 have this)

- About 2/3 of them had 50% RPM or more (11 of the 15 teams have this)
- Automatically eliminate any teams with new head coaches (this eliminates one team for 2024-25, William & Mary)

With a trimmed-down list of 10 potential teams destined to improve in 2024-25, I again analyzed seven more statistical angles from the prior season, matching the 126 teams from past years that experienced 28%-plus gains in win percentage:

- About 2/3 of them had a point differential of better than -6.0 PPG in the prior season
- About 2/3 of them won 50% or less of their games ATS in the prior season
- About 2/3 of them had four or fewer close wins in the prior season (<=5 PTS)
- About 2/3 of them had at least five close losses in the prior season (<=5 PTS)
- About 2/3 of them had at least two blowout wins in the prior season (>=20 PTS)
- About 2/3 of them had four or fewer blowout losses in the prior season (>=20 PTS)
- About 2/3 of them won three or more of their last 10 games in the prior season

Here is the list of the 10 teams with the number of traits they match from above (out of 7). Again, it could be projected that the more shared traits, the greater the chance that the team will improve significantly in 2024-25:

ARMY (6)
 LAFAYETTE (6)
 AIR FORCE (4)
 CHARLESTON SO (4)
 MD-BALT COUNTY (4)
 MORGAN STATE (4)
 DARTMOUTH (2)
 HOLY CROSS (2)
 N CAROLINA A&T (2)
 ST FRANCIS-PA (2)

The big takeaway from the "likely improvement" list is that it is shrinking more and more every year, as, unfortunately, the growing transfer portal is making it impossible for teams to improve by retaining talent. In fact, for the first time since I started doing this, not a single power conference team appeared. I imagine this could be the last year I can even use this methodology before reinventing a strategy. In the same way, the likely decline list continues to expand annually.

Here is a look back at the 2022-23 to 2023-24 results from this same study. Overall, 11 of the 14 teams improved, after 20 of 23 did the prior season. The average win bump for those that did get better was 6.5 on the season or a little over 17% on winning percentage. The outliers are in italics:

CENTRAL CONN STATE (5) – climbed from 10-22 to 20-11
 ILLINOIS STATE (5) – climbed from 11-21 to 15-17
 LAMAR (5) – climbed from 9-22 to 19-14
 LOYOLA (IL) (5) – climbed from 10-21 to 23-10
 LOYOLA (MD) (5) – fell from 13-20 to 7-25
 NEW ORLEANS (5) – fell from 12-20 to 10-23
 COLUMBIA (4) – climbed from 7-22 to 13-14
 DARTMOUTH (4) – fell from 10-18 to 6-21
 CHICAGO STATE (3) – climbed from 11-20 to 13-19
 MARIST (3) – climbed from 13-20 to 18-13
 NORTH DAKOTA (3) – climbed from 13-20 to 18-14
 DELAWARE STATE (2) – climbed from 6-24 to 15-19
 NEBRASKA-OMAHA (2) – climbed from 9-23 to 15-18
 OREGON STATE (2) – climbed from 11-21 to 13-19

Use this information in conjunction with the analysis of VSiN's college hoops experts to build your own list of play on and/or against teams for 2024-25.

STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK
HOUSTON	96.0	MARYLAND	85.5	LOUISVILLE	81.0
DUKE	95.5	MEMPHIS	85.5	MINNESOTA	81.0
CONNECTICUT	95.0	OLE MISS	85.5	SAN FRANCISCO	81.0
KANSAS	94.5	USC	85.5	UAB	81.0
ALABAMA	93.5	WAKE FOREST	85.5	BUTLER	80.5
AUBURN	93.5	WISCONSIN	85.5	COLORADO ST	80.5
GONZAGA	93.5	DAYTON	85.0	LOYOLA-IL	80.5
IOWA ST	93.5	MIAMI	85.0	S CAROLINA	80.5
ARIZONA	92.5	MICHIGAN	85.0	SETON HALL	80.5
BAYLOR	92.0	PITTSBURGH	85.0	UTAH	80.5
PURDUE	92.0	KANSAS ST	84.5	GEORGIA TECH	80.0
N CAROLINA	91.5	NC STATE	84.5	VIRGINIA TECH	80.0
TENNESSEE	91.5	OKLAHOMA	84.5	W VIRGINIA	80.0
CREIGHTON	91.0	VA COMMONWEALTH	84.5	BRADLEY	79.5
TEXAS A&M	91.0	BOISE ST	84.0	COLORADO	79.5
TEXAS	90.0	NORTHWESTERN	84.0	ST JOSEPHS	79.5
TEXAS TECH	89.5	TCU	84.0	UNLV	79.5
ILLINOIS	89.0	GRAND CANYON	83.5	GEORGE MASON	79.0
UCLA	89.0	NEBRASKA	83.5	N TEXAS	79.0
CINCINNATI	88.5	RUTGERS	83.5	OKLAHOMA ST	79.0
MARQUETTE	88.5	LSU	83.0	PRINCETON	79.0
BYU	88.0	PROVIDENCE	83.0	SANTA CLARA	79.0
ST JOHNS	88.0	SAN DIEGO ST	83.0	VANDERBILT	79.0
CLEMSON	87.5	MISSOURI	82.5	FLORIDA ST	78.5
MICHIGAN ST	87.5	NEVADA	82.5	STANFORD	78.0
VILLANOVA	87.5	NEW MEXICO	82.5	GEORGETOWN	77.5
FLORIDA	87.0	PENN ST	82.5	MCNEESE ST	77.5
INDIANA	87.0	SYRACUSE	82.5	SAINT LOUIS	77.5
KENTUCKY	87.0	UCF	82.5	UC-IRVINE	77.5
MISSISSIPPI ST	87.0	GEORGIA	82.0	VERMONT	77.5
OHIO ST	87.0	NOTRE DAME	82.0	WASHINGTON ST	77.5
OREGON	87.0	SMU	82.0	WICHITA ST	77.5
ARKANSAS	86.5	UTAH ST	82.0	S FLORIDA	77.0
ST MARYS-CA	86.5	VIRGINIA	82.0	FLA ATLANTIC	76.5
IOWA	86.0	WASHINGTON	82.0	HIGH POINT	76.5
XAVIER	86.0	ARIZONA ST	81.0	ARKANSAS ST	76.0

STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK
LOUISIANA TECH	76.0	GEORGE WASHINGTON	72.0	TEXAS ST	70.0
N IOWA	75.5	LA-LAFAYETTE	72.0	UC-RIVERSIDE	70.0
OHIO U	75.5	OREGON ST	72.0	ABILENE CHRISTIAN	69.5
SAM HOUSTON ST	75.5	PURDUE FT WAYNE	72.0	MARSHALL	69.5
LIBERTY	75.0	TULSA	72.0	UNC-ASHEVILLE	69.5
MASSACHUSETTS	75.0	BELMONT	71.5	WRIGHT ST	69.5
MURRAY ST	75.0	CAL SAN DIEGO	71.5	COLGATE	69.0
W KENTUCKY	75.0	DEPAUL	71.5	MISSOURI-KC	69.0
YALE	75.0	E TENN ST	71.5	NICHOLLS ST	69.0
BOSTON COLLEGE	74.5	FURMAN	71.5	HAWAII	68.5
DRAKE	74.5	TOLEDO	71.5	IL-CHICAGO	68.5
DUQUESNE	74.5	TX-ARLINGTON	71.5	LONGWOOD	68.5
TOWSON ST	74.5	BRYANT	71.0	MONTANA ST	68.5
TROY	74.5	CAL BAPTIST	71.0	PENNSYLVANIA	68.5
CALIFORNIA	74.0	FORDHAM	71.0	ST THOMAS-MN	68.5
E CAROLINA	74.0	INDIANA ST	71.0	WYOMING	68.5
RICHMOND	74.0	S DAKOTA ST	71.0	YOUNGSTOWN ST	68.5
SEATTLE	74.0	SF AUSTIN ST	71.0	GA SOUTHERN	68.0
AKRON	73.5	TULANE	71.0	GEORGIA ST	68.0
CHARLOTTE	73.5	UNC-WILMINGTON	71.0	QUINNIPIAC	68.0
COLL OF CHARLESTON	73.5	UTAH VALLEY ST	71.0	TEXAS A&M CC	68.0
SAMFORD	73.5	UTEP	71.0	BROWN	67.5
ST BONAVENTURE	73.5	WI-MILWAUKEE	71.0	CLEVELAND ST	67.5
TEMPLE	73.5	CAL DAVIS	70.5	FLA GULF COAST	67.5
UMASS-LOWELL	73.5	CORNELL	70.5	IONA	67.5
WOFFORD	73.5	MIDDLE TENN ST	70.5	JACKSONVILLE ST	67.5
APPALACHIAN ST	73.0	MONTANA	70.5	MERCER	67.5
DAVIDSON	73.0	N KENTUCKY	70.5	N COLORADO	67.5
JAMES MADISON	73.0	UNC-GREENSBORO	70.5	SAN JOSE ST	67.5
KENT ST	73.0	WEBER ST	70.5	DREXEL	67.0
LIPSCOMB	73.0	WINTHROP	70.5	JACKSONVILLE	67.0
LOYOLA-MARYMOUNT	73.0	HOFSTRA	70.0	MISSOURI ST	67.0
UC-SANTA BARBARA	73.0	ILLINOIS ST	70.0	MONMOUTH	67.0
UT-CHATTANOOGA	73.0	LASALLE	70.0	N DAKOTA ST	67.0
RHODE ISLAND	72.5	NEW MEXICO ST	70.0	NORTHEASTERN	67.0
S ILLINOIS	72.5	OAKLAND	70.0	AIR FORCE	66.5

STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK
BALL ST	66.5	CHARLESTON SO	64.5	E MICHIGAN	62.0
DELAWARE	66.5	GARDNER WEBB	64.5	LA-MONROE	62.0
FAIRFIELD	66.5	MAINE	64.5	PRESBYTERIAN	62.0
HOWARD	66.5	N DAKOTA	64.5	S CAROLINA ST	62.0
MARIST	66.5	PORTLAND ST	64.5	ELON	61.5
MIAMI OHIO	66.5	SOUTHERN U	64.5	SE LOUISIANA	61.5
N ALABAMA	66.5	TEXAS SOUTHERN	64.5	W ILLINOIS	61.5
OLD DOMINION	66.5	ALBANY	64.0	BELLARMINE	61.0
RICE	66.5	CS-FULLERTON	64.0	BETHUNE-COOKMAN	61.0
S ALABAMA	66.5	E KENTUCKY	64.0	BINGHAMTON	61.0
ST PETERS	66.5	LONG BEACH ST	64.0	CAMPBELL	61.0
TX-SAN ANTONIO	66.5	MOUNT ST MARYS	64.0	CANISIUS	61.0
AMERICAN	66.0	N ARIZONA	64.0	E WASHINGTON	61.0
BOSTON U	66.0	N FLORIDA	64.0	N CAROLINA A&T	61.0
COLUMBIA	66.0	NC CENTRAL	64.0	ROBERT MORRIS	61.0
EVANSVILLE	66.0	W CAROLINA	64.0	TX-RIO GRANDE	61.0
MERRIMACK	66.0	WAGNER	64.0	ARMY	60.5
MOREHEAD ST	66.0	C MICHIGAN	63.5	NIAGARA	60.5
SOUTHERN MISS	66.0	COASTAL CAROLINA	63.5	PACIFIC	60.5
SOUTHERN UTAH	66.0	CS-BAKERSFIELD	63.5	SACRAMENTO ST	60.5
TARLETON ST	66.0	FLA INTERNATIONAL	63.5	STETSON	60.5
VALPARAISO	66.0	GRAMBLING	63.5	TENNESSEE ST	60.5
WM & MARY	66.0	MD-BALT COUNTY	63.5	DENVER	60.0
ARK-LITTLE ROCK	65.5	FRESNO ST	63.0	N ILLINOIS	60.0
BUCKNELL	65.5	IDAHO	63.0	NEBRASKA-OMAHA	60.0
HARVARD	65.5	LAFAYETTE	63.0	DARTMOUTH	59.5
NORFOLK ST	65.5	RADFORD	63.0	IDAHO ST	59.5
RIDER	65.5	S DAKOTA	63.0	INCARNATE WORD	59.5
CS-NORTHRIDGE	65.0	STONY BROOK	63.0	JACKSON ST	59.5
KENNESAW ST	65.0	AUSTIN PEAY	62.5	MANHATTAN	59.5
LEHIGH	65.0	LAMAR	62.5	MORGAN ST	59.5
NAVY	65.0	QUEENS COLL	62.5	NEW HAMPSHIRE	59.5
ORAL ROBERTS	65.0	SAN DIEGO	62.5	SIU EDWARDSVL	59.5
PEPPERDINE	65.0	UTAH TECH	62.5	W MICHIGAN	59.5
PORTLAND	65.0	ALABAMA ST	62.0	WI-GREEN BAY	59.5
BOWLING GREEN	64.5	C CONN ST	62.0	ALCORN ST	59.0

STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK
S INDIANA	59.0	CAL POLY-SLO	56.5	ST FRANCIS-PA	54.0
SE MISSOURI ST	59.0	FARLEIGH DICKINSON	56.5	STONEHILL	53.5
HAMPTON	58.5	HOLY CROSS	56.5	HOUSTON CHRISTIAN	53.0
LEMOYNE	58.5	TENNESSEE TECH	56.5	FLORIDA A&M	52.5
E ILLINOIS	58.0	DETROIT	56.0	MERCYHURST	52.5
SACRED HEART	58.0	LINDENWOOD	56.0	TEXAS A&M-COMM	52.5
WEST GEORGIA	58.0	LOYOLA-MD	56.0	ARK-PINE BLUFF	52.0
DELAWARE ST	57.5	NEW JERSEY TECH	56.0	MD-EAST SHORE	51.5
SIENA	57.5	NEW ORLEANS	56.0	IUPUI	51.0
C ARKANSAS	57.0	TENN-MARTIN	56.0	VMI	50.5
CHICAGO ST	57.0	BUFFALO	55.5	COPPIN ST	49.0
NORTHWESTERN ST	57.0	PRAIRIE VIEW A&M	55.5	MISS VALLEY ST	45.5
THE CITADEL	57.0	USC UPSTATE	55.5		
ALABAMA A&M	56.5	LONG ISLAND	55.0		



RETURNING PLAYING MINUTES %

(RETURNING STARTERS)

TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES
NAVY	92% (4)	UCLA	64% (4)	MARIST	55% (3)
WOFFORD	87% (4)	MARQUETTE	64% (3)	N DAKOTA ST	55% (3)
NOTRE DAME	86% (4)	VA COMMONWEALTH	63% (3)	ST FRANCIS-PA	55% (3)
GONZAGA	80% (4)	ORAL ROBERTS	63% (2)	WICHITA ST	55% (3)
TOWSON ST	79% (4)	SE MISSOURI ST	63% (2)	LA-MONROE	55% (2)
COLUMBIA	79% (3)	ARKANSAS ST	62% (3)	SAM HOUSTON ST	55% (2)
N CAROLINA A&T	78% (5)	FORDHAM	62% (3)	ELON	54% (3)
BOSTON U	77% (5)	NICHOLLS ST	62% (3)	HOLY CROSS	54% (3)
AMERICAN	77% (4)	BRADLEY	62% (2)	NORTHEASTERN	54% (3)
HIGH POINT	76% (4)	MISSOURI-KC	61% (5)	ST JOSEPHS	54% (3)
UC-RIVERSIDE	75% (4)	OLE MISS	61% (3)	NC CENTRAL	54% (1)
E TENN ST	75% (3)	UAB	60% (4)	QUINNIPIAC	53% (3)
BUCKNELL	74% (4)	UC-IRVINE	60% (4)	S DAKOTA	53% (3)
CHARLESTON SO	73% (4)	DARTMOUTH	60% (3)	LIBERTY	52% (3)
PRINCETON	72% (3)	MONTANA ST	60% (3)	MCNEESE ST	52% (3)
SANTA CLARA	72% (3)	OHIO U	60% (3)	MIDDLE TENN ST	52% (3)
VERMONT	71% (4)	PENN ST	60% (3)	ALABAMA	52% (2)
CINCINNATI	71% (3)	VALPARAISO	60% (2)	C CONN ST	52% (2)
LAFAYETTE	71% (3)	INDIANA	59% (4)	LOYOLA-MD	52% (2)
N ARIZONA	71% (3)	PENNSYLVANIA	59% (3)	MERRIMACK	52% (2)
MORGAN ST	70% (4)	WM & MARY	59% (3)	FLORIDA	51% (3)
MERCYHURST	70% (3)	DAVIDSON	57% (4)	ILLINOIS ST	51% (3)
HOUSTON	69% (4)	S CAROLINA ST	57% (4)	IOWA	51% (3)
WINTHROP	69% (4)	AUBURN	57% (3)	MD-BALT COUNTY	51% (3)
TEXAS A&M	69% (3)	LAMAR	57% (3)	HOWARD	51% (2)
UMASS-LOWELL	69% (3)	N KENTUCKY	57% (3)	RHODE ISLAND	51% (2)
AIR FORCE	68% (3)	SAN FRANCISCO	57% (3)	ST MARYS-CA	51% (2)
LEHIGH	68% (3)	WAKE FOREST	57% (3)	PURDUE	50% (3)
IOWA ST	67% (3)	MAINE	57% (2)	N CAROLINA	50% (2)
W KENTUCKY	66% (4)	ALABAMA ST	56% (4)	PITTSBURGH	50% (2)
ARMY	66% (3)	NORTHWESTERN	56% (3)	WI-MILWAUKEE	49% (4)
BROWN	66% (3)	BUTLER	56% (2)	N IOWA	49% (3)
TROY	66% (3)	CAL DAVIS	56% (2)	UTEP	49% (3)
GRAND CANYON	65% (4)	CORNELL	56% (2)	NEW MEXICO	49% (2)
PURDUE FT WAYNE	64% (4)	YALE	56% (2)	IDAHO	48% (3)
TEXAS A&M CC	64% (4)	KANSAS	55% (3)	BYU	48% (2)

RETURNING PLAYING MINUTES %

(RETURNING STARTERS)

TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES
MASSACHUSETTS	48% (2)	UTAH TECH	42% (2)	ST PETERS	37% (2)
MURRAY ST	48% (2)	WRIGHT ST	42% (2)	CS-FULLERTON	37% (1)
NEVADA	47% (3)	GEORGIA TECH	41% (3)	STONEHILL	37% (1)
CAL SAN DIEGO	47% (2)	MANHATTAN	41% (3)	FARLEIGH DICKINSON	36% (2)
CREIGHTON	46% (3)	MARYLAND	41% (3)	PORTLAND	36% (2)
LOYOLA-IL	46% (3)	S CAROLINA	41% (2)	PROVIDENCE	36% (2)
NEBRASKA-OMAHA	46% (3)	SACRAMENTO ST	41% (2)	CONNECTICUT	36% (1)
HARVARD	46% (2)	SOUTHERN U	41% (2)	TENNESSEE	36% (1)
TEXAS SOUTHERN	46% (2)	TOLEDO	41% (2)	LEMOYNE	35% (4)
WAGNER	46% (2)	UNLV	41% (2)	CLEMSON	35% (3)
WISCONSIN	46% (2)	VIRGINIA	41% (2)	ABILENE CHRISTIAN	35% (2)
DAYTON	45% (3)	DELAWARE ST	40% (3)	BINGHAMTON	35% (2)
GA SOUTHERN	45% (3)	E ILLINOIS	40% (3)	CHARLOTTE	35% (2)
COLGATE	45% (2)	FLA GULF COAST	40% (3)	GEORGE MASON	35% (2)
JACKSONVILLE	45% (2)	FURMAN	40% (3)	JACKSONVILLE ST	35% (2)
LA-LAFAYETTE	45% (2)	CAL BAPTIST	40% (2)	PRESBYTERIAN	35% (2)
MISSISSIPPI ST	45% (2)	GEORGE WASHINGTON	40% (2)	SYRACUSE	35% (2)
NEW JERSEY TECH	45% (2)	MINNESOTA	40% (2)	UC-SANTA BARBARA	35% (2)
SF AUSTIN ST	45% (2)	SEATTLE	40% (2)	E CAROLINA	34% (3)
CS-BAKERSFIELD	44% (4)	TENNESSEE TECH	40% (2)	NEBRASKA	34% (3)
N FLORIDA	44% (3)	COPPIN ST	39% (2)	BRYANT	34% (2)
TEXAS ST	44% (3)	S INDIANA	39% (2)	DUQUESNE	34% (2)
LIPSCOMB	44% (2)	TEMPLE	39% (2)	LONGWOOD	34% (2)
N ALABAMA	44% (2)	UNC-GREENSBORO	39% (2)	MOUNT ST MARYS	34% (2)
ST THOMAS-MN	44% (2)	UT-CHATTANOOGA	39% (2)	OHIO ST	34% (2)
OREGON	43% (3)	MICHIGAN ST	39% (1)	S FLORIDA	34% (2)
WEBER ST	43% (3)	CAMPBELL	38% (3)	UNC-ASHEVILLE	34% (2)
FLA INTERNATIONAL	43% (2)	GRAMBLING	38% (2)	MONTANA	34% (1)
LOUISIANA TECH	43% (2)	LSU	38% (2)	INCARNATE WORD	33% (3)
TULSA	43% (2)	TEXAS TECH	38% (2)	LASALLE	33% (2)
UCF	43% (2)	NC STATE	38% (1)	LINDENWOOD	33% (2)
ARIZONA	43% (1)	SAINT LOUIS	38% (0)	OLD DOMINION	33% (2)
BOISE ST	42% (2)	MIAMI OHIO	37% (3)	SOUTHERN UTAH	33% (2)
MARSHALL	42% (2)	NEW MEXICO ST	37% (3)	BELLARMINE	33% (1)
MONMOUTH	42% (2)	UTAH ST	37% (3)	ALBANY	32% (2)
N DAKOTA	42% (2)	LOYOLA-MARYMOUNT	37% (2)	C ARKANSAS	32% (2)

RETURNING PLAYING MINUTES %

(RETURNING STARTERS)

TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES
E MICHIGAN	32% (2)	MISS VALLEY ST	26% (2)	SACRED HEART	19% (2)
KENT ST	32% (2)	OKLAHOMA	26% (2)	BETHUNE-COOKMAN	19% (1)
MIAMI	32% (2)	BAYLOR	26% (1)	OKLAHOMA ST	19% (1)
MISSOURI	32% (2)	BOWLING GREEN	26% (1)	TEXAS	19% (0)
DELAWARE	32% (1)	E KENTUCKY	26% (1)	S ALABAMA	18% (2)
PORTLAND ST	32% (1)	GARDNER WEBB	26% (1)	RUTGERS	18% (1)
SMU	31% (3)	RICHMOND	26% (1)	SE LOUISIANA	18% (1)
C MICHIGAN	31% (2)	STANFORD	26% (1)	ARIZONA ST	17% (2)
KENNESAW ST	31% (2)	SOUTHERN MISS	26% (0)	DETROIT	17% (2)
RIDER	31% (2)	NORFOLK ST	25% (4)	IL-CHICAGO	17% (2)
COLORADO ST	31% (1)	BUFFALO	25% (2)	HAMPTON	17% (1)
GEORGETOWN	31% (1)	COLL OF CHARLESTON	25% (1)	IDAHO ST	17% (1)
ROBERT MORRIS	31% (1)	W ILLINOIS	25% (1)	TEXAS A&M-COMM	17% (0)
SAMFORD	31% (1)	CS-NORTHRIDGE	24% (2)	NEW HAMPSHIRE	16% (2)
SAN DIEGO	31% (1)	TX-RIO GRANDE	24% (1)	GEORGIA ST	16% (1)
SIU EDWARDSVL	31% (1)	DREXEL	24% (0)	SAN JOSE ST	16% (1)
VILLANOVA	31% (1)	OAKLAND	23% (2)	HOFSTRA	15% (1)
WI-GREEN BAY	31% (1)	MICHIGAN	23% (1)	RICE	15% (1)
ALABAMA A&M	30% (2)	STONY BROOK	23% (1)	THE CITADEL	15% (1)
ARK-LITTLE ROCK	30% (2)	UNC-WILMINGTON	23% (1)	AUSTIN PEAY	14% (1)
BALL ST	30% (2)	APPALACHIAN ST	23% (0)	STETSON	14% (1)
FLORIDA ST	30% (1)	ST JOHNS	23% (0)	BOSTON COLLEGE	14% (0)
UTAH VALLEY ST	30% (1)	MERCER	22% (2)	COLORADO	14% (0)
W MICHIGAN	30% (1)	FLORIDA A&M	22% (1)	HOUSTON CHRISTIAN	14% (0)
WEST GEORGIA	30% (1)	SAN DIEGO ST	22% (1)	PRAIRIE VIEW A&M	14% (0)
FAIRFIELD	29% (2)	CAL POLY-SLO	21% (2)	RADFORD	14% (0)
QUEENS COLL	29% (2)	AKRON	21% (1)	S ILLINOIS	14% (0)
CLEVELAND ST	29% (1)	HAWAII	21% (1)	VIRGINIA TECH	14% (0)
XAVIER	29% (1)	OREGON ST	21% (1)	YOUNGSTOWN ST	14% (0)
N COLORADO	28% (3)	SETON HALL	21% (1)	KANSAS ST	13% (1)
DENVER	28% (2)	S DAKOTA ST	21% (0)	N TEXAS	13% (1)
EVANSVILLE	28% (1)	DUKE	20% (1)	VMI	13% (0)
NEW ORLEANS	28% (1)	LONG ISLAND	20% (1)	ILLINOIS	12% (1)
GEORGIA	27% (3)	ALCORN ST	20% (0)	FRESNO ST	12% (0)
CHICAGO ST	27% (2)	BELMONT	20% (0)	JACKSON ST	12% (0)
UTAH	27% (2)	SIENA	20% (0)	CANISIUS	11% (3)

RETURNING PLAYING MINUTES %

(RETURNING STARTERS)

TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES
TX-ARLINGTON	11% (0)	MOREHEAD ST	7% (1)	FLA ATLANTIC	3% (0)
JAMES MADISON	10% (1)	VANDERBILT	7% (0)	TENN-MARTIN	2% (0)
N ILLINOIS	10% (0)	COASTAL CAROLINA	6% (1)	MISSOURI ST	1% (0)
ARKANSAS	9% (1)	TCU	5% (1)	TX-SAN ANTONIO	1% (0)
NORTHWESTERN ST	9% (0)	DRAKE	5% (0)	DEPAUL	0% (0)
TENNESSEE ST	9% (0)	PACIFIC	5% (0)	IONA	0% (0)
WASHINGTON	9% (0)	PEPPERDINE	5% (0)	IUPUI	0% (0)
MEMPHIS	8% (1)	INDIANA ST	4% (0)	KENTUCKY	0% (0)
ARK-PINE BLUFF	8% (0)	LONG BEACH ST	4% (0)	LOUISVILLE	0% (0)
ST BONAVENTURE	8% (0)	TARLETON ST	4% (0)	MD-EAST SHORE	0% (0)
TULANE	8% (0)	USC	4% (0)	NIAGARA	0% (0)
W CAROLINA	8% (0)	W VIRGINIA	4% (0)	USC UPSTATE	0% (0)
WYOMING	8% (0)	WASHINGTON ST	4% (0)		
E WASHINGTON	7% (3)	CALIFORNIA	3% (0)		





Tyrese Proctor

ATLANTIC COAST

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The ACC is hanging on for dear life in college football, but Duke and North Carolina keep the conference relevant on the hardwood.

There will be a ton of eyeballs on Duke this year, as Jon Scheyer landed Cooper Flagg, the top prospect in the 2025 NBA Draft. The Blue Devils also have several other high-end youngsters, and junior Tyrese Proctor is a superb lead guard.

North Carolina, last year's ACC regular season champion, also has serious young talent, but the Tar Heels will be led by RJ Davis. The fifth-year guard averaged 21.2 points per game last year, and he'll be joined by some excellent players in the backcourt.

The teams that have the best shot at spoiling the party are Wake Forest and Miami.

Steve Forbes was able to convince Hunter Sallis to stick around for one more year. Sallis averaged 18.0 points per game last season, and his presence should mean Wake will be great offensively again.

Miami returns Nijel Pack and Matthew Cleveland. Jim Larranaga also hit the transfer portal hard, bringing in Virginia Tech's Lynn Kidd, Samford's A.J. Staton-McCray, Stetson's Jalen Blackmon, East Carolina's Brandon Johnson and Idaho State's Kiree Huie. The Hurricanes are also expecting big things out of five-star guard Jalil Bethea.

Louisville, Clemson, Virginia and NC State could also make noise.

The Cardinals hired Pat Kelsey as their new head coach. He's fresh off a very successful stint with College of Charleston and has stockpiled talent quickly in Kentucky.

Clemson returns a decent amount of contributors from last year's Elite Eight team, and Brad Brownell added through the portal.

Virginia is in a weird spot. Tony Bennett's pack line defense and swing offense always gave the Cavaliers a high floor. But the team's lack of firepower has been a real problem recently, and Bennett retired just before the start of the season. What will this team look like without him?

NC State has a good coach in Kevin Keatts, who won the ACC tournament with an average roster last year. Unfortunately, the Wolfpack won't have DJ Burns back, but they should be alright without him.

What happens with the rest of the conference is anyone's guess. Syracuse, Pittsburgh, Virginia Tech and Notre Dame can't be written off, nor can newcomer SMU — especially with Andy Enfield in charge. But things could be ugly for Boston College, Georgia Tech, Florida State, Stanford and California. The last two are also new to the conference.

**PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS
BY ZACHARY COHEN**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

74.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#17 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#122 OF 364)

BOSTON COLLEGE EAGLES

2023-24 RECORD: 20-16 SU, 16-20 ATS, 21-15 O-U-P

Boston College finished with 20 wins last season, which is something the Eagles hadn't done since 2010-11. However, the oddsmakers have Boston College as the worst team in the conference this year. Earl Grant deserves a lot of credit for what he has done with this program, but things change quickly in college sports these days. The Eagles lost four of their five starters to the transfer portal. One of the losses had to sting more than others, as Jaeden Zackery stayed in the conference. Boston College also has to replace center Quinten Post, who averaged 17.0 points, 8.1 rebounds and 1.7 blocks per game. Post was one of the best bigs in the ACC, but he was drafted by the Golden State Warriors in June.

The Eagles will be hoping that returners Donald Hand and Chas Kelley can thrive with increased workloads, and transfers Dion Brown, Josh Beadle and Chad Venning will also be important pieces. Brown averaged 19.0 points per game for UMBC last season and can really score. However, Boston College doesn't have the talent or depth required to compete in this conference. Grant will be limited to focusing on long-term development.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

150-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 7-13 against the spread as an underdog last season and has the sixth-highest Over percentage in conference play since the 2017-18 season. The Over is 87-54-2 in Eagles conference games since then.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0 RETURNING MINUTES: 14%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

74.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#18 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#123 OF 364)

CALIFORNIA GOLDEN BEARS

2023-24 RECORD: 13-19 SU, 15-16-1 ATS, 19-13 O-U-P

After going 28-9 in his final year at Utah Valley, Mark Madsen went 13-19 in his first season with Cal. Madsen should be able to turn this program around, but it's not going to happen overnight. The oddsmakers only give the Golden Bears a 0.99% chance of winning the ACC this season. One thing Cal will do is compete defensively. In Madsen's final season at Utah Valley, his team was 29th in the nation in defensive rating. Madsen also got the Golden Bears from 195th in defensive rating in 2023 to 139th in 2024. It was a small but noteworthy improvement. However, Cal only has two players back from last year's team, and neither of them contributed a lick.

Madsen is hoping some high profile transfers exceed expectations this year. Mady Sissoko comes over from Michigan State, while Andrej Stojakovic left Stanford for Berkeley. But don't be surprised if Christian Tucker is the best of all the transfers. He averaged 11.3 points and 5.4 assists per game for UTSA last year. However, even with a great coach and some exciting transfers, Cal won't win a lot of games this year. But I wouldn't be surprised if this is a solid ATS team.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

100-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 3-13-1 against the spread as a favorite over the past two seasons, giving the program the third-worst cover rate as a favorite among teams that have been favored in at least 10 games in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0 RETURNING MINUTES: 3%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

87.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#3 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#26 OF 364)

CLEMSON TIGERS

2023-24 RECORD: 24-12 SU, 20-15-1 ATS, 18-18 O-U-P

Clemson is looking for a fourth straight year with a winning ATS record. Losing P.J. Hall, who averaged 18.3 points, 6.4 rebounds and 1.4 blocks per game, is going to make that tough on Brad Brownell. But Ian Schieffelin, who almost averaged a double-double last year, and Cincinnati transfer Viktor Lahkin make up a great frontcourt. In the backcourt, the Tigers brought back Chase Hunter, one of the steadier point guards in the ACC. They also added some firepower in BC transfer Jaeden Zackery and Air Force transfer Jake Heidbreder. Both are absolute flamethrowers from 3, so don't be surprised if Clemson significantly improves upon last year's 35.1% shooting from deep.

The question will be whether or not the Tigers can continue to be a good defensive team. Clemson was 35th in the country in defensive rating last year, but this year's roster isn't quite as athletic. Brownell's team also lacks a true off-the-dribble creator that can be trusted in isolation late in games. Hunter is probably the best bet, as he can really get to the basket. But Clemson can use a little something from somebody else.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

15-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

150-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Under was 10-4 in the team's final 14 games last season, and the Tigers are 18-7 against the spread as underdogs of at least 4 during the regular season since February of 2019.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3

RETURNING MINUTES: 35%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

95.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#1 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#2 OF 364)

DUKE BLUE DEVILS

2023-24 RECORD: 27-9 SU, 21-14-1 ATS, 14-22 O-U-P

Jon Scheyer's first two seasons on the sidelines ended with Duke at 27-9, and the Blue Devils made it to the Elite Eight in last year's NCAA Tournament. Scheyer hasn't done anything spectacular just yet, but he hasn't come under fire either. That could change if he doesn't do something special with this year's team.

Duke, which was seventh in KenPom's efficiency rankings last season, brought in ESPN's top-ranked recruiting class, headlined by Cooper Flagg. The 6-foot-9 forward is viewed as a generational NBA prospect. He's an elite defender across multiple positions and has all sorts of game offensively. Freshmen Kon Knueppel, Isaiah Evans and Khaman Maluach are also supposed to make immediate impacts. The Blue Devils also brought back Tyrese Proctor and Caleb Foster, who are both awesome backcourt players. Tulane transfer Sion James will also help at guard. And Syracuse transfer Maliq Brown is a 6-foot-9 forward that should thrive in his new situation.

It's rare to see a team with this much talent whose players complement one another so well. So, while Scheyer is absolutely winning when it comes to the recruiting trail, it's time for him to make his first Final Four as Duke's head coach.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

+140

NCAA TOURNAMENT

10-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Under coach Jon Scheyer, the Under is 45-26-1, the seventh-highest Under percentage in the country over the past two seasons. Also, the Blue Devils went 11-4 against the spread in their final 15 games last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1

RETURNING MINUTES: 20%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

78.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#15 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#96 OF 364)

FLORIDA STATE SEMINOLES

2023-24 RECORD: 17-16 SU, 16-16-1 ATS, 22-11 O-U-P

Leonard Hamilton has won at least 20 games in 12 of his 22 seasons with Florida State, but the Seminoles are trending in the wrong direction. Florida State has missed the NCAA Tournament in each of the last three seasons, and it's starting to feel like Hamilton's running out of time in Tallahassee – whether that's his decision or the university's. Last year's Florida State team couldn't shoot the 3 whatsoever. The Seminoles were 288th in the country in 3-point shooting percentage (31.7%) and that's why they barely cracked the top 100 in offensive rating. Let's see if this year's team shoots it better.

Florida State's best player will once again be Jamir Watkins, who averaged 15.6 points, 6.0 rebounds and 1.9 steals per game last year. The former VCU wing can be trusted to show up on a nightly basis. But will Watkins get consistent help from anywhere else? Perhaps Chandler Jackson and Hampton transfer Jerry Deng can provide that. The 'Noles are also high on freshman point guard Daquan Davis.

It feels like Hamilton is facing an uphill battle here. This program could once be relied on to be elite defensively, but that identity is gone.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

100-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

200-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Among teams with at least 25 home games with listed totals since the 2016-17 season, Florida State has the third-highest Over percentage in the country. The Over is 79-41-4 in this span.

RETURNING STARTERS: **1**

RETURNING MINUTES: **30%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

80.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#13 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#83 OF 364)

GEORGIA TECH YELLOW JACKETS

2023-24 RECORD: 14-18 SU, 15-17 ATS, 16-16 O-U-P

The Yellow Jackets went 14-18 overall and 7-13 in conference play in Damon Stoudamire's first year with the program. It wasn't a great season overall, but Georgia Tech did score impressive wins over Clemson, Duke and North Carolina. That's something to build on. The Yellow Jackets have some key pieces back, including big man Baye Ndongo. Last season, Ndongo averaged 12.4 points, 8.2 rebounds and 1.1 blocks per game. Naitha George also feels like he's due for a pretty big leap after averaging 9.8 points and 4.7 dimes per game last year. Stoudamire also added a pair of useful transfers in Javian McCollum, who played great for Oklahoma last season, and Luke O'Brien, a nice role player for a Colorado team that made the NCAA Tournament last season.

Georgia Tech probably can't be counted on for a massive leap in Stoudamire's second year in Atlanta, but the Yellow Jackets are probably the most talented of all the ACC bottom-dwellers. This could be a team that ends up doing pretty well against the spread, and there's some real hope for the future if Stoudamire can avoid losing guys to the portal.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

80-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

200-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 1-5 against the spread as a favorite last season and has the eighth-best cover percentage on the road since the 2018-19 season began. The Yellow Jackets are 43-27 against the spread on the road since then.

RETURNING STARTERS: **3**

RETURNING MINUTES: **41%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

81.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#12 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#74 OF 364)

LOUISVILLE CARDINALS

2023-24 RECORD: 8-24 SU, 12-17-3 ATS, 17-14-1 O-U-P

Since the start of the 2021-22 season, Louisville is just 25-71 overall and 11-49 in the ACC. This program has really fallen off, and Kenny Payne's 12-52 record in two years didn't help. But the Cardinals hired a proven winner in Pat Kelsey, who went 75-27 in three years with Charleston and is coming off back-to-back trips to the NCAA Tournament. Before that, Kelsey amassed a 186-95 record at Winthrop, and his time there included another three trips to the Big Dance.

Kelsey's teams put up a lot of 3s offensively and defend the 3-point line on the other end of the floor. They also play with some real tempo on offense, while also having some nasty to them on defense. It'll be interesting to see how quickly he can work his magic on Louisville, but it might not take all that long. Players have always wanted to play for this program. Kelsey did well to scoop Wisconsin's Chucky Hepburn, Colorado's J'Vonne Hadley, James Madison's Terrence Edwards Jr., South Florida's Kasean Pryor and BYU's Noah Waterman in the portal. That's a potential starting five of players that started for other teams last season.

If things click a little sooner than expected, the Cardinals could be the third-best team in the ACC.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
15-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
75-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team's 46-68-2 ATS record the past four seasons is the third-worst among teams that spent each of the past four seasons at the Division I level.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0 RETURNING MINUTES: 0%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

85.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#5 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#44 OF 364)

MIAMI HURRICANES

2023-24 RECORD: 15-17 SU, 13-16-3 ATS, 14-18 O-U-P

After making the Final Four in 2022-23, the Hurricanes went 15-17 last year. However, it's probably best to throw that out completely, as Miami had terrible injury luck. But this is still a team with an elite head coach, and there's some real talent in Coral Gables this year. Nijel Pack, one of the first players to get a massive NIL deal, is back after averaging 13.3 points and 3.6 assists per game last year. He should be able to build on that, as you only have to go back to 2021-22 for a season in which he averaged 17.4 points per game — and did so on very efficient shooting. The Hurricanes also return Matthew Cleveland, who averaged 13.7 points and 6.1 rebounds per game last year. And transfers Lynn Kidd and A.J. Staton-McCray are proven starters at this level.

If five-star freshman point guard Jalil Bethea is ready to go right out the gate, this Miami team will be dangerous. Just two years ago, the Hurricanes were sixth in the nation in offensive rating. Larranaga has been great as an offensive coach in recent years, and he has had good defensive teams in the past.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
12-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
70-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 4-13 against the spread as a favorite of at least 20 since November 12, 2016. But the Hurricanes are also 23-10-1 against the spread in road games the past three seasons, giving them the third-best road cover rate in America in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2 RETURNING MINUTES: 32%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

91.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#2 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#13 OF 364)

NORTH CAROLINA

TAR HEELS

2023-24 RECORD: 29-8 SU, 21-16 ATS, 20-16-1 O-U-P

The Tar Heels suffered a disappointing Sweet 16 exit in last year's NCAA Tournament, but they did finish the year 29-8 and were the regular season ACC champions. And while some key pieces like Armando Bacot are gone, R.J. Davis is back after averaging 21.2 points per game. He was the ACC Player of the Year and an AP All-American, and he'll be joined in the backcourt by returners Elliot Cadeau and Seth Trimble.

North Carolina also has two five-star freshmen coming in, as Ian Jackson and Drake Powell are expected to do big things on the wing. Hubert Davis also added an instant-impact transfer in Belmont forward Cade Tyson, who shot 46.5% from 3 on 5.5 attempts per game last year. And the Heels are also expecting a huge year from big man Jalen Washington. However, if Washington doesn't take the next step, Vanderbilt transfer Ven-Allen Lubin can be a small-ball big. He averaged 12.3 points and 6.3 rebounds per game last year.

North Carolina was a top-20 team in both offensive and defensive rating last season. This year's team should be the same, and there might be more upside with this group.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+350

NCAA TOURNAMENT
18-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Since November 23, 2023, the team is 10-5 against the spread as a favorite of fewer than 8, and the Over is 15-4 in its neutral-court games the past two seasons

RETURNING STARTERS: **2**

RETURNING MINUTES: **50%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

84.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#7 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#50 OF 364)

NC STATE

WOLFPACK

2023-24 RECORD: 26-15 SU, 19-20-2 ATS, 21-17-3 O-U-P

NC State was America's team last year, as DJ Burns won fans over with his feathery touch and infectious smile. But Burns is now playing professional basketball in Korea, and the Wolfpack also lost leading scorer DJ Horne and his 16.9 points per game. The good news is that Kevin Keatts is a great head coach, and he should be able to put out a decent product this year.

Back from last year's team are Michael O'Connell, Jayden Taylor and Ben Middlebrooks. New to the rotation are Louisville transfers Brandon Huntley-Hatfield and Mike James. Huntley-Hatfield averaged 12.9 points and 8.4 rebounds per game last season, and he could be the best player on NC State this year. Meanwhile, James is a talented player that could look a lot better in a more stable situation. Dontrez Styles is another transfer that NC State will be counting on. The former North Carolina guard played good ball for Georgetown last year, averaging 12.8 points per game and shooting the 3 at a good clip.

The talent probably isn't there for NC State to contend, but another year above .500 is well within reason. And the Wolfpack will be a hard out in any tournament.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
20-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
130-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 8-1 against the spread as an underdog of at least 7 last season. The Wolfpack were also 0-6 against the spread as favorites of at least 6 after December 21 last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: **1**

RETURNING MINUTES: **38%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

82.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#9 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#70 OF 364)

NOTRE DAME

FIGHTING IRISH

2023-24 RECORD: 13-20 SU, 18-15 ATS, 12-21 O-U-P

The Fighting Irish went 13-20 in Micah Shrewsberry's first year as head coach, but there's hope that things will turn around fast. Shrewsberry went 14-17 in his first year with Penn State and then went 23-14 and made the Round of 32 in the NCAA Tournament in Year 2. Also, Notre Dame just landed a five-star recruit in the 2025 class, as guard Jalen Haralson decided that he wants to play for the Irish. That doesn't happen without real belief in a head coach.

As far as this year's team goes, Shrewsberry has some continuity. Markus Burton, Braeden Shrewsberry, Tae Davis and J.R. Konieczny are all back after starting last year. Burton averaged 17.5 points per game and should be one of the best guards in the ACC this year.

One thing that's certain is that this team will be solid defensively. Notre Dame was 39th in defensive rating last year, and there's no reason to expect a drop-off. The team just needs more offensively, as the Irish were 234th in the nation in offensive rating. That's not going to cut it. Perhaps Princeton transfer Matt Allocco can help. He shot 42.7% from 3 last year and should see minutes at both guard spots.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
50-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
180-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

In games with a total above 136, the Under went 9-0 last year. And in non-conference play the past three seasons, the Under is 23-13.

RETURNING STARTERS: 4 RETURNING MINUTES: 86%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

85.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#6 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#46 OF 364)

PITTSBURGH

PANTHERS

2023-24 RECORD: 22-11 SU, 21-9-3 ATS, 19-13-1 O-U-P

The Panthers were 22-11 last year and finished 33rd in KenPom's efficiency rankings last year. However, Blake Hinson and Bub Carrington are gone. Hinson, who averaged 18.5 points per game, is currently trying to latch on with an NBA team, while Carrington was drafted by the Washington Wizards with the 14th pick in the 2024 NBA Draft. Those two were huge parts of what the Panthers did last year.

Pittsburgh will now hope that Ishmael Leggett and Jaland Lowe can step up and be the go-to guards. Both players managed to pop last year, despite playing with two guards that were higher in the pecking order. The Panthers will also be hoping for a leap from forward Zack Austin, who was solid in a smaller role for the team last season. The Panthers also have some important transfers coming in, as big man Cam Corhen comes from Florida State and Damian Dunn is over from Houston. Both will have chances to play big minutes. Pitt will also be hoping for some development from Jorge Diaz Graham and Guillermo Diaz Graham.

It's not entirely clear what this will look like, but Jeff Capel has settled in nicely as the team's coach and Leggett should be able to show out as the new star.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
40-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
180-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Only Connecticut has a better ATS record than Pittsburgh the past two seasons, as the Panthers are 45-20-4 against the spread.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2 RETURNING MINUTES: 50%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

82.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#10 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#66 OF 364)

SMU MUSTANGS

2023-24 RECORD: 20-13 SU, 13-17-2 ATS, 14-18 O-U-P

After going 15-18 at USC last season, Andy Enfield decided to take the SMU job. Enfield went 220-147 in 11 seasons with the Trojans, and that was directly after going 41-28 in two years with Florida Gulf Coast. Enfield has turned programs around before, and he even took USC to the Elite Eight in 2020-21. So, he could do some big things with the resources he'll have in Dallas. Lower expectations won't hurt either. SMU went 20-13 last season, but the Mustangs were in the American Athletic Conference. This will be a step up in competition. A winning record isn't out of the question, nor is a solid ATS mark. But SMU probably won't be as good as last year.

Getting Chuck Harris and his 13.4 points per game back helps. Harris can really score and is a great shooter. Enfield also had some big wins on the transfer portal, landing Wake Forest's Kevin Harris (15.6 PPG) and UMass's Matt Cross (15.3 PPG, 8.3 RPG). Both will contribute instantly. He's also taking some swings on Oregon's Yohan Traore and UC Santa Barbara's Kario Oquendo.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
35-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
350-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team closed the 2023-24 season by going 0-7 against the spread in its final seven games. And the Over is 17-8 in Mustangs road games the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3 RETURNING MINUTES: 31%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

78.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#16 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#97 OF 364)

STANFORD CARDINAL

2023-24 RECORD: 14-18 SU, 16-16 ATS, 17-14-1 O-U-P

Stanford made one of the best coaching moves of the summer, replacing Jerod Haase with Kyle Smith. Haase did a good job of getting talent to Palo Alto, but consistency on the court evaded him. That shouldn't be a problem with Smith, who had two 20-win seasons with Columbia, three in three seasons with San Francisco, and two in the last three seasons he spent with Washington State. Smith won't say it like Indiana football coach Curt Cignetti did, but he wins. Google him.

This year's Cardinal group has a great center in Maxime Raynaud, who averaged 15.5 points and 9.6 rebounds per game last year. Raynaud will be one of the best centers in the nation this season. He just might not have much help. In returner Benny Gealer and UC Irvine transfer Derin Saran, the Cardinal have one of the worst starting backcourts in the ACC. Smith could, however, have something interesting in USC transfer Ozyiah Sellers and Harvard transfer Chisom Okpara. Sellers has some tools, so he's an upside swing. And Okpara averaged 16.5 points per game for the Crimson last year.

This team isn't good enough to do much damage this year, but it won't take long for Smith to get this thing going.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
80-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
400-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Over was 13-3 at home last season and the Cardinal are 10-5 against the spread as favorites of at least 6 since November 9, 2022.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1 RETURNING MINUTES: 26%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

82.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#8 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#65 OF 364)

SYRACUSE

ORANGE

2023-24 RECORD: 20-12 SU, 12-18-1 ATS, 17-14 O-U-P

Adrian Autry didn't make the NCAA Tournament in his first year as Syracuse's head coach, but the Orange went 20-12 overall and 11-9 in conference. He'll be hoping to build on that in Year 2, but it's not going to be easy. Maliq Brown, an impressive forward, left for Duke in the offseason. The Orange also lost guard Judah Mintz, who averaged 18.8 points per game and was one of the best drivers in the nation.

Syracuse does bring back forward Chris Bell, who is one of the best shooters in the country. JJ Starling is also a meaningful returner, as he averaged 13.3 points per game last year. Outside of that, Autry will be hoping that Hofstra's Jaquan Carlos, Delaware's Jyare Davis and Colorado's Eddie Lampkin can be useful portal additions. While Lampkin is the biggest name in that group, it's Davis that is most intriguing. He averaged 17.1 points and 7.5 rebounds per game last year. And if he doesn't live up to expectations, maybe Donnie Freeman will. The five-star recruit has a lot of potential.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
35-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
120-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Since January 1, 2023, the team is 1-9 against the spread as a favorite of more than 5. The Orange are also 9-16-2 against the spread as underdogs the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2 RETURNING MINUTES: 35%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

82.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#11 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#69 OF 364)

VIRGINIA

CAVALIERS

2023-24 RECORD: 23-11 SU, 17-15-2 ATS, 15-19 O-U-P

This program, which won a national title in 2019, had the best regular-season record six times from 2014 to 2023, and has finished with two or fewer conference losses in four of the last 11 seasons. The Cavaliers can generally be counted on to be elite defensively and boring-but-efficient offensively. However, that turned into boring and bad offensively in 2024. The Cavaliers were 200th in the nation in offensive rating, and that's just not good enough to do anything meaningful. Tony Bennett, one of the best coaches in college basketball, also retired right before the season. Was what he saw in practice so bad that he couldn't stomach another year?

This team does have some solid offensive players, as Isaac McKneely and Andrew Rohde are both willing and able to knock down shots. However, it's unsettling that the Cavaliers are prepared to start a non-shooter at point guard, with Florida State transfer Jalen Warley likely getting the nod. And while Duke transfer TJ Power and returning big Blake Buchanan have potential in the frontcourt, they haven't proven much of anything. There are now real question marks surrounding this program, which should be in the bottom half of the conference this season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
25-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
150-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Since January 1, 2021, the team is 9-20 against the spread as a favorite of at least 11, and the Under was 10-2 in conference games last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2 RETURNING MINUTES: 41%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

80.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#14 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#85 OF 364)

VIRGINIA TECH HOKIES

2023-24 RECORD: 19-15 SU, 15-19 ATS, 18-15-1 O-U-P

Mike Young is a good coach, but the Hokies haven't been very reliable in conference since he took the job. Sure, the overall record of 92-66 over the last five years is decent, but they're just 45-48 in conference. And this year's team is fighting an uphill battle when it comes to being respectable. Virginia Tech doesn't have a single starter back from last season. I wouldn't be surprised if Young rights the ship eventually, but I'd be stunned if he does anything with this roster.

Young was hoping that Temple transfer Hysier Miller would be a star this year. Miller averaged 15.9 points, 4.0 assists and 1.8 steals per game last season. However, it was announced that the guard was released from the team on October 23. Honestly, Ben Burnham, who averaged 11.9 points and 4.5 rebounds per game for College of Charleston last year, might be the prize of the transfer group. He's a stretch four and his game should translate nicely. Young will also be hoping that swings on Virginia guard Jaydon Young, Cal forward Rodney Brown Jr. and Pitt big man Mylyjael Poteat will work out.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

50-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

200-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Since the 2018-19 season began, the Hokies have the worst road cover percentage in the country at 17-45-1 against the spread.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0

RETURNING MINUTES: 14%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

85.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#4 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#37 OF 364)

WAKE FOREST DEMON DEACONS

2023-24 RECORD: 21-14 SU, 17-16-2 ATS, 21-13-1 O-U-P

Steve Forbes went 6-16 in his first year with the Demon Deacons. Since then, Wake Forest is 65-38 overall and 34-26 in ACC play. And while Forbes hasn't yet made the NCAA Tournament, this should be the year. Last season, Wake Forest was 25th in the nation in offensive rating and 59th in defensive rating. This year's group should be great on offense again, as Hunter Sallis is back after averaging 18.0 points per game on nasty shooting splits. The Deacons also bring back Cameron Hildreth, another guy that can really shoot it, and Efton Reid, a seven-footer that played well for Wake in his first year after transferring from Gonzaga.

Forbes is now hoping that Ty-Laur Johnson, a Louisville transfer, or Omaha Biliew, a five-star forward that went to Iowa State, can be his next big transfer portal success. Johnson has the potential to be the point guard Wake desperately needs, while Biliew has the star potential that Sallis once had. Tre'Von Spillers is another intriguing transfer, as he averaged 12.8 points, 8.9 rebounds and 1.3 blocks per game for Appalachian State last season.

All in all, this team is talented and well coached. Wake is as good a bet to win the ACC as anybody outside of Duke or Carolina.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

10-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

130-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Over is 98-61-4 in Wake Forest games since the 2016-17 season began. And the Demon Deacons were 13-5-1 against the spread at home last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3

RETURNING MINUTES: 57%

AMERICAN ATHLETIC

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The amount of change in the AAC last season was a big point of emphasis when I wrote up this conference in last year's College Basketball Betting Guide. Cincinnati, Houston, and UCF all moved to the Big 12, while Charlotte, Florida Atlantic, North Texas, Rice, UAB, and UTSA all moved in from Conference USA.

We don't have any changes for this season, as Army is a football-only member, but we do have another departure with SMU leaving for the ACC, leaving 13 teams in the conference.

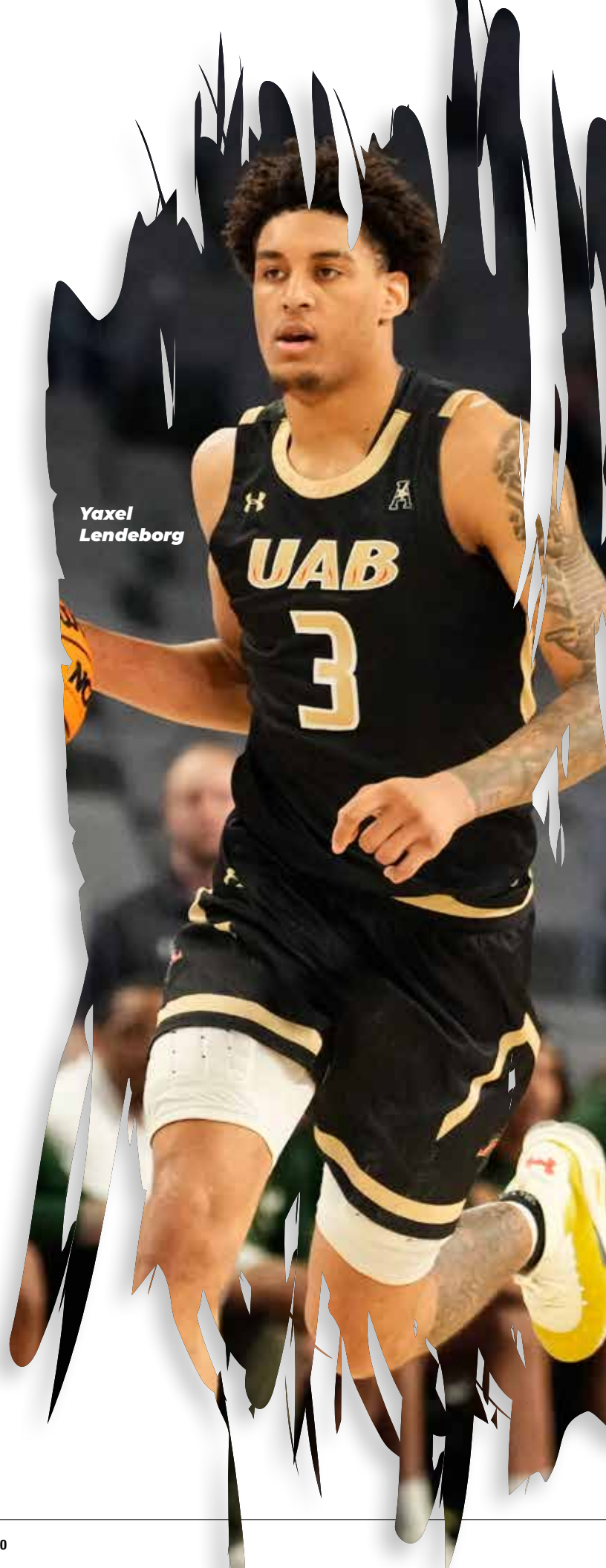
Interestingly, newcomers to the conference finished second, third, and fourth in 2024, as South Florida won the league at 16-2, but FAU, Charlotte, and UAB were the next three by the standings. Bart Torvik ranked the AAC as the eighth-best conference for the 2022-23 season and it dropped to 10th for the 2023-24 campaign, but it wasn't because of the new programs.

Last year, there were five top-90 teams, so the conference wasn't as top-heavy with a top-five Houston squad and a top-20 Memphis team, but it was deeper all around and more balanced. That looks to be the case again this season, as heavy losses at FAU are sure to set that program back, but other teams have a great chance to be on the rise.

This is a great conference to analyze and handicap because there are so many different styles of play and so many different tempos. USF won the regular season, but UAB beat the Bulls en route to the conference's automatic bid into the NCAA Tournament. Will the Blazers run it back? Will Memphis figure things out and put together a record representative of their talent level? How about North Texas after a transitional year under first-year HC Ross Hodge?

The AAC is wide open in my opinion and we should get a lot of close, competitive games during the regular season.

**PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS
BY ADAM BURKE**





STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

73.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#8 OF 13)
NATIONAL RANK: (#129 OF 364)

CHARLOTTE 49ERS

2023-24 RECORD: 19-12 SU, 15-14-1 ATS, 14-16 O-U-P

Aaron Fearne begins his second season as the bench boss for the 49ers with a lack of familiar faces. Top player Igor Milicic Jr. (13 PPG, 8.4 RPG) transferred to Tennessee. Lu'Cye Patterson led the team with 14.6 PPG and he's now at Minnesota. Big man Dishon Jackson and wing Jackson Threadgill also transferred out. The 49ers only return one player that averaged more than 20 minutes for the squad.

Most of last year's scoring punch is gone, as only Nik Graves had over 10 PPG and he was third on the team in minutes with nearly 30 per game. It could be a rough year for the 49ers, who had to go to the transfer portal for depth and starting-level talent on a team that ranked 356th in adjusted tempo per Torvik last season. That likely means a lot of empty trips on offense and a lot of low-scoring games.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
20-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 20-9 against the spread at home the past two seasons, and the Under was 11-4 last season in games with a total above 133.5.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2**

RETURNING MINUTES: **35%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

74.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#7 OF 13)
NATIONAL RANK: (#125 OF 364)

EAST CAROLINA PIRATES

2023-24 RECORD: 15-18 SU, 14-17-1 ATS, 13-19 O-U-P

East Carolina may have gotten a little bit more athletic through the transfer portal, but the Pirates have to replace Brandon Johnson (14 PPG, 8.6 RPG) and Ezra Ausar (11.4 PPG, 4.7 RPG), who ranked second and third in points and first and third in rebounds. Leading scorer RJ Felton (17.3 PPG) is back and he'll be able to play with his younger brother, Ladontae. They'll likely spend ample time on the floor with a couple of double-double machines from the JUCO ranks in Trevion LaBeaux and Jayshayne Woodard.

With the new conference members, ECU regressed on defense and continued to be poor on offense, finishing 231st in eFG% defense and 289th in eFG% offense. They were outside the top 270 in 3P%, 2P%, and FT%, improving slightly from beyond the arc and inside of it. ECU was 14th and 13th, respectively, in 3P% and 2P% in conference games, so unless the new faces help instantly, expect more of the same.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
20-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Under was 10-2 in games with a total higher than 142 last season. The Pirates are also 5-11 against the spread as underdogs of less than 12 since March 2, 2023.

RETURNING STARTERS: **3**

RETURNING MINUTES: **34%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

76.5
CONFERENCE RANK: (#6 OF 13)
NATIONAL RANK: (#106 OF 364)

FLORIDA ATLANTIC OWLS

2023-24 RECORD: 25-9 SU, 15-18-1 ATS, 18-16 O-U-P

The magnificent, and improbable, two-year run for FAU basketball will live on forever in college basketball history. Things will look a LOT different in Boca Raton this year. John Jakus takes over for Dusty May, who is now the head coach at Michigan. The Owls have zero returning starters, so that means guys like Johnell Davis, Vladislav Goldin, Alijah Martin, and Nick Boyd are all gone.

Jakus has been under Scott Drew at Baylor since 2017 and worked under Mark Few from 2014-17 as the Director of Basketball Operations, so he's learned from some of the game's best head coaches. I don't think FAU will bottom out. In fact, I think they have a great shot to win the conference. They've added some premier scoring punch in KyKy Tandy (18.2 PPG at Jacksonville State), Ken Evans (18.8 PPG at Jackson State), Leland Walker (15.4 PP, 4.1 APG at Eastern Kentucky) and two giant bigs from Lithuania. How quickly everybody comes together will be the key, but this team could have scorers everywhere, lots of length, and tons of athleticism.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE **13-1** NCAA TOURNAMENT **400-1**

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team has the third-best non-conference ATS cover rate at 21-7 against the spread, but the Owls went 2-10 against the spread as favorites of at least 8 after Christmas.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0 RETURNING MINUTES: 3%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

85.5
CONFERENCE RANK: (#1 OF 13)
NATIONAL RANK: (#41 OF 364)

MEMPHIS TIGERS

2023-24 RECORD: 22-10 SU, 12-20 ATS, 18-13-1 O-U-P

Overhauls are nothing new for Memphis, given that the program deals with one-and-done players on an annual basis. But, this overhaul is by design. Memphis head coach Penny Hardaway wants his team to play the hard-a-way, in that he wants them to not be as flashy and floating free. The Tigers were 339th in the nation in defensive rebounding percentage per Torvik and didn't show nearly as much effort to get other team's misses as they did their own.

The Tigers were a solid offensive crew, but lacked a little panache on the defensive side. The ironic thing is that Memphis actually didn't really have one-and-dones last season. They had a bunch of tenured transfers, including Nae'Qwan Tomlin, Jaykwon Walton, Jahvon Quinerly, and David Jones. This year's roster is also loaded with transfers, headlined by PJ Haggerty from Tulsa, who averaged over 21 PPG. Big rim protectors were imported like Tyreek Smith and Moussa Cisse. Expect a much more physical Memphis team that also projects to shoot better from the outside.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE **+120** NCAA TOURNAMENT **120-1**

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 10-20 against the spread at home the past two seasons, and it was 9-3-1 to the Over in road games last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1 RETURNING MINUTES: 8%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

79.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#3 OF 13)
NATIONAL RANK: (#90 OF 364)

NORTH TEXAS

MEAN GREEN

2023-24 RECORD: 19-15 SU, 18-13-1 ATS, 18-14 O-U-P

The Dudes of Denton were strong on the defensive end and had a top-15 3P% for first-year head coach Ross Hodge. The transition from Grant McCasland to Hodge was an easy one because he was an assistant under the now Texas Tech bench boss. Speaking of transition, the Mean Green had their fastest season by adjusted tempo since 2021...and still ranked 360th in the nation per Torvik. Like every team in the AAC, the roster turnover is extreme with one returning starter.

To fill out a lineup, Hodge went to Drake for Atin Wright, who shot almost 50% on 2s and over 81% at the stripe. North Texas was 298th in the nation in 2P%, so Wright is a very welcomed addition, but other top transfers like Latrell Joseph, Jasper Floyd, and Jonathan Massie were all below average in that department. UNT should still have some good shooters on the outside and a monster on the glass in holdover Moulaye Sissoko, but the ceiling for the season looks lower than in past years.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+600

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Since the 2019-20 season began, North Texas has the nation's top ATS cover percentage in conference play. The Mean Green are 61-36-2 against the spread in conference games in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1

RETURNING MINUTES: 13%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

66.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#12 OF 13)
NATIONAL RANK: (#220 OF 364)

RICE

OWLS

2023-24 RECORD: 11-21 SU, 11-19-1 ATS, 15-16 O-U-P

Most of the C-USA squads looked pretty good in Year 1 in the AAC. Rice was not one of them. The Owls were plenty competent on the offensive side, but they were atrocious on defense. The rough season got Scott Pera fired and now it will be Rob Lanier's team, as he goes from Dallas to Houston following his dismissal from SMU. Lanier actually put together a 10-win improvement for the Mustangs from 2022-23 to 2023-24, but that was apparently not good enough.

The shocking pink slip could be Rice's gain. The Owls haven't had a coach finish his tenure with a winning record since Don Suman from 1949-59. Mike Rhoades was the closest from 2014-17, going 47-52. Unfortunately, the cupboard is really bare for Lanier, as Mekhi Mason transferred to Washington and Max Fielder and Travis Eevee ran out of eligibility. That trio combined for 40 PPG, 16.7 RPG, and 10.2 APG. Emory Lanier and Jalen Smith followed Lanier from SMU, but most of the rest of the roster is made up of small-conference transfers for what could be a very long year.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
200-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 22-36-3 against the spread in conference games the past three seasons, and the Over is 70-48 in home games since the 2015-16 season began.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1

RETURNING MINUTES: 15%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

77.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#5 OF 13)
NATIONAL RANK: (#105 of 364)

SOUTH FLORIDA BULLS

2023-24 RECORD: 25-8 SU, 22-10-1 ATS, 13-20 O-U-P

Tragedy struck the USF basketball program on Oct. 24 when head coach Amir Abdur-Rahim died unexpectedly due to complications from surgery. He was heading into his second season leading the Bulls and had a phenomenal first year with 25 wins, including a win in the NIT over UCF. The 25 wins were a program record and the team had enjoyed their first postseason appearance since winning the CBI during the 2018-19 season. Time will tell how the program moves forward from the devastating and heartbreaking loss.

Unlike a lot of AAC teams, the Bulls did have some holdovers, including top 3-point shooter Jayden Reid and also Kobe Knox, who were third and fifth in percentage of minutes played. Brandon Stroud, Quincy Ademokoya, and Kasen Jennings were also with Abdur-Rahim at Kennesaw State. So he had a lot of continuity on the roster to go along with transfers from Cincinnati and Florida State, but now the team goes into the season with heavy hearts and without one of the game's most promising young coaches.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

12-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

300-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Bulls had the country's highest cover rate in conference games last season, as they went 14-3-3 against the spread in AAC play.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2**

RETURNING MINUTES: **34%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

73.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#9 OF 13)
NATIONAL RANK: (#131 of 364)

TEMPLE OWLS

2023-24 RECORD: 16-20 SU, 17-17-1 ATS, 18-17 O-U-P

The third and final Owls in this conference play out of Philadelphia. After starting 1-11 in conference play and 8-17 overall, the Owls won four of their final six regular season games and four games in four games to make the AAC Championship Game. They lost to UAB, but first-year head coach Adam Fisher, who coached under Jim Larranga at Miami and Mike Rhoades at Penn State, finally started pressing the right buttons.

The first step this offseason was replacing the production and high usage rates of Hysier Miller and Jahlil White. Pulling Jamal Mashburn Jr. out of New Mexico surely looks to be a good start and Saint Joseph's transfer Lynn Greer, who started his career at Dayton, could also help. Greer was a good shooter in the A-10. Mashburn was not in the Mountain West, firing away at 38% on 2s. Given that Temple was 345th in 2P% and 289th in 3P% (338th in eFG%), you wonder if this team has enough scoring punch.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

50-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team covered in 10 of its final 14 games last season, and the Owls are 12-4-3 against the spread as road underdogs over the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2**

RETURNING MINUTES: **39%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

71.0
CONFERENCE RANK: (#11 OF 13)
NATIONAL RANK: (#159 OF 364)

TULANE

GREEN WAVE

2023-24 RECORD: 14-17 SU, 13-17 ATS, 19-11 O-U-P

I wrote in last year's CBB Guide that I felt like the infusion of talent from the Conference USA teams would be a problem for a team like Tulane. It turns out that was true. The Green Wave were knocked out of the conference tourney by one of them (North Texas) and didn't beat any of them in the regular season. That was not the way that Ron Hunter wanted to follow up the first 20-win season in a very long time.

But, Tulane struggled badly on defense, got wrecked on the glass, and squandered a pretty good offense as a top-10 team in adjusted tempo. Hunter is back with a warmer seat and a brand-new lineup, as all five starters departed. Hunter spent the offseason looking for players familiar to him. He heavily recruited areas where he had previously coached and grabbed Michael Eley from Siena and Kam Williams from Louisiana. That said, this team still lacks depth and proven scoring talent, which seems problematic for an iffy defense wanting to play at a breakneck pace.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE **80-1** NCAA TOURNAMENT **1000-1**

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Over is 28-14-2 in home games the past three seasons. Also, the Green Wave are 6-16 against the spread as underdogs the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: **0** RETURNING MINUTES: **8%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

72.0
CONFERENCE RANK: (#10 OF 13)
NATIONAL RANK: (#147 OF 364)

TULSA

GOLDEN HURRICANE

2023-24 RECORD: 16-15 SU, 13-14-3 ATS, 15-13-2 O-U-P

Eric Konkol is a solid coach and he made the best of what he had with Tulsa last season. The Golden Hurricane lost Keaston Willis just two games into his season after he missed the first five. Freshman PJ Haggerty and Cobe Williams, who came with Konkol from Louisiana Tech, carried the team to a 16-15 record. Unfortunately, Haggerty moved on to conference rival Memphis and Williams is out of eligibility. At least Willis will return, along with several players from last season, including Isaiah Barnes, who shot 62% on 2s.

The silver lining of Haggerty's departure is that he was a bad 3-point shooter and that was the one primary area where Tulsa lagged behind everybody else. Willis and the holdovers getting a greater shot share should help and Dwon Odom from Georgia State can step right into Haggerty's role. Of all the transfer classes in this conference, Tulsa's is one of the most intriguing to me, as Konkol has a good eye for talent and led an 11-win improvement from Year 1 to Year 2.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE **30-1** NCAA TOURNAMENT **1000-1**

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team's 18-38-4 ATS record over the past two seasons is the worst mark in the nation in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **43%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

66.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#13 OF 13)
NATIONAL RANK: (#228 OF 364)

UTSA ROADRUNNERS

2023-24 RECORD: 11-21 SU, 15-16 ATS, 19-11-1 O-U-P

As I said, most of the C-USA squads found success. UTSA was one that did not. Steve Henson is out and Austin Claunch is in, as the Roadrunners look to the 34-year-old to turn things around. Claunch was named the head coach at Nicholls at just 26 years old and was there for six seasons before joining Nate Oats as an assistant at Alabama last season. Claunch's Colonels were 90-61 on his watch.

In terms of style of play, UTSA will continue to move up and down the floor. They were in the top 100 in tempo in all but one of Henson's seasons and the Roadrunners won't slow down under Claunch. Nicholls and Alabama both played fast while he was there. But this team badly needs shot-makers and shot-stoppers. UTSA was 271st in eFG% offense and 257th in eFG% defense. They were also among the worst in the nation at forcing turnovers and defending 3s. Claunch does have a clean slate here with no returning starters and we'll just have to wait and see how the team gels.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
200-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
2000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Roadrunners are 40-21 to the Over the past two seasons, and that's the fourth-highest Over rate in America. The Over is also 14-4 in games with a total higher than 150 since then.

RETURNING STARTERS: **0** RETURNING MINUTES: **1%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

81.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#2 OF 13)
NATIONAL RANK: (#76 OF 364)

UAB BLAZERS

2023-24 RECORD: 23-12 SU, 21-12-1 ATS, 19-15 O-U-P

Surely I sound like a broken record to this point, as the AAC just had an incredible amount of turnover. One team bucked the trend and will be able to boast a strong sense of continuity this season and it just so happens to be the reigning champions. UAB returns four starters, including top scorer Yaxel Lendeborg. Eric Gaines entered the draft and went unpicked, but he is the only noteworthy loss for the Blazers.

To replace him, Andy Kennedy hit the portal to get Georgia Southern's Tyren Moore, who was a 41% 3-point shooter, and Iona wing Greg Gordon, who shot over 58% on 2s. Kennedy also got an efficient big in Bradley Ezewiro from Saint Louis, who averaged 12 PPG and 6.2 RPG while averaging just 22 minutes per game. UAB is the rightful favorite to win this conference and pretty clearly the strongest team in my mind.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+400

NCAA TOURNAMENT
350-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 16-4 against the spread in its final 20 games last season, and the Over is 65-39-1 the past three seasons — which is good for the fifth-highest Over rate in the country.

RETURNING STARTERS: **4** RETURNING MINUTES: **60%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

77.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#4 OF 13)
NATIONAL RANK: (#101 of 364)

WICHITA STATE SHOCKERS

2023-24 RECORD: 15-19 SU, 14-19 ATS, 15-18 O-U-P

The metrics looked better than the record for Wichita State last season, as they were a borderline top-100 team by adjusted defensive efficiency and roughly in line with the national average on offense. First-year coach Paul Mills went 5-13 in league play, though, and the team was just 6-17 after a cupcake start to the season that saw them begin 7-1. That said, Wichita State was 4-5 vs. Quadrant 2 opponents, which was better than most of the teams in the bottom half of the AAC standings.

Mills just didn't have the right makeup for his team, as they were 320th in Assist Rate and 311th in 3P Rate. The last three Oral Roberts teams were all top 20 in 3P Rate. So, Mills had to find some shooters in the portal and AJ McGinnis could be one after shooting 40% from 3 for Lipscomb. Zane Meeks is a career 34.4% 3-point shooter, but a very efficient scorer inside. So is Saint Peter's transfer Corey Washington. It was a transitional year and this roster looks better equipped for Mills' wishes on both ends of the floor.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

10-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

700-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 22-13-2 against the spread in road games since the 2020-21 season began. The Shockers are also 11-5-2 against the spread as road underdogs the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: **3**

RETURNING MINUTES: **55%**



Max Shulga

ATLANTIC 10

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The Atlantic 10 enters the season looking to continue the momentum from last year when multiple teams - Duquesne and Dayton - made the NCAA tournament. Then both the Dukes and Flyers earned a first-round tournament win.

Key parts from those squads are gone, namely Dae Dae Grant for Duquesne and DaRon Holmes II, the conference's co-Player of the Year for Dayton, so Virginia Commonwealth gets the nod as the A-10's top preseason team according to the coaches' poll.

The Rams are led by 6-foot-5 guard Max Shulga. The fact that Shulga (13.7 PPG) could lift VCU to a championship is not a surprise. Him still wearing a Rams' jersey, is. In May, the Ukraine native announced he was transferring to Villanova. Less than a month later, he withdrew that commitment and returned to VCU.

Perhaps Shulga had some regrets leaving Ryan Odom, who also previously coached him at Utah State; but not coincidentally, the Rams found some extra NIL money for him right before his change of heart. Whatever it takes to keep a star, especially in the A-10, where one player like Shulga makes a major difference.

Since the A-10 lives somewhere between the Big East and Conference USA, navigating the transfer portal and finding the best way to construct a roster are major yearly decisions these coaches now must make. Some teams will look to rely mostly on continuity (VCU and Loyola Chicago), others are supplementing their roster with key additions for an instant boost (Saint Joseph's and Dayton) to those basically forming a new squad with a mass influx of transfers (St. Bonaventure and LaSalle).

The most recognizable name, make that goggles, to enter this year is Robbie Avila. The former Indiana State folk hero now calls Saint Louis home along with his coach Josh Schertz and former teammate Isaiah Swope.

Another big name to enter the conference this year will provide zero contributions on the court. It's juice he will bring to the program. Saint Bonaventure welcomed former ESPN NBA insider Adrian Wojnarowski in the newly formed role of basketball general manager at his alma mater. Even in a mid-major like this, NIL money can shift the balance of power, and schools now have GMs. Welcome to the current state of college basketball.

**PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS
BY AARON MOORE**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

73.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#11 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#135 OF 364)

DAVIDSON WILDCATS

2023-24 RECORD: 15-17 SU, 14-16 ATS, 11-19 O-U-P

In Matt McKillop's three campaigns leading the program since his father, Bob, retired, the Wildcats have just a 13-23 record in conference play. Four of its five starters return, namely Connor Kochera and his 13.2 PPG. Reed Bailey and Bobby Durkin will also be back down low again.

In order for Davidson to avoid the bottom portion of the A-10 standings the returners have to provide more offensive production than just their "continuity." Also, their two main newcomers who arrived on campus via divergent paths. must immediately contribute. The hope is the 6-11 former high school hotshot Joe Hurlburt can break into the starting lineup and be a force after logging just 26 minutes last year for Colorado. In the backcourt, Zach Laput will look to score in the same way he did over his four years at D2 Bentley where he poured in 600 points in back-to-back seasons.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

50-1

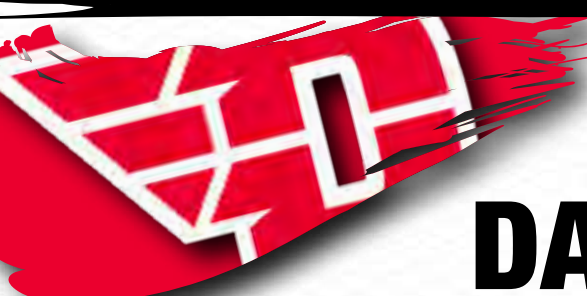
NCAA TOURNAMENT

1000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 0-6 against the spread in the calendar year 2024 as a pick'em or a favorite of less than 6. The Wildcats also have the sixth-highest conference Under percentage since the 2020-21 season began. They're 45-28 to the Under.

RETURNING STARTERS: 4 RETURNING MINUTES: 57%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

85.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#1 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#45 OF 364)

DAYTON FLYERS

2023-24 RECORD: 25-8 SU, 16-15-2 ATS, 18-14-1 O-U-P

DaRon Holmes II is now a Denver Nugget and that means someone else must play the role of leading man for the Flyers.

Anthony Grant will look towards returner Matt Santos or Posh Alexander, now on school number three, to fill that need. Most likely, though, it will be a combination of the two along with the defensive contributions from the 6-foot-3 Enoch Cheeks that will keep the Flyers in contention for a regular season title. Alexander went from St. John's to Butler where last year once again he led the Big East in steals (71) for the fourth straight season. The point guard position belongs to the talented Malachi Smith, a redshirt junior who has dealt with significant ankle and knee injuries over the past two seasons. The other starting big man position next to Santos, who was named to the A-10's Preseason First Team, goes to grad transfer Zed Key. Last year, the 6-foot-8 Key averaged 7.4 PPG after returning from a shoulder injury that derailed a strong junior season at Ohio State.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

+350

NCAA TOURNAMENT

200-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 8-18 against the spread since February of 2020 as a favorite of more than 13. However, the Flyers are 20-13-1 against the spread as underdogs over the past four seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3 RETURNING MINUTES: 45%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

74.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#8 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#120 OF 364)

DUQUESNE DUKES

2023-24 RECORD: 25-12 SU, 19-17 ATS, 10-25-1 O-U-P

Keith Dambrot and a bulk of seniors, including guards Dae Dae Grant and Jimmy Clark, who combined for over 30 points per game for the Dukes, are gone from a team that made a late run for the conference tournament title and won a first-round NCAA Tournament game.

Now it's former assistant Dru Joyce's job to lead a revamped roster that has a preseason look of a middle of the pack team. The Dambrot style was to use a lot of bodies so that should help the returning trio of Kareem Rozier (G), Jake DiMichele (G) and David Dixon (F) settle into their starting roles. Look for Tre Dinkins (15.4 PPG), an All-MAAC performer at Canisius, to quickly find a scoring role. Maximus Edwards (12.4 PPG, 6.6 RPG) shouldn't have a hard time transitioning into conference play as he was a former A-10 Rookie of the Year at George Washington. Offense, or at least offensive potential, is what will drive the Dukes towards another postseason berth.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

22-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

750-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 19-31 against the spread at home the past three seasons. The group also had the third-highest Under percentage last season, as the Under was 25-10-1 in Duquesne's games.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2

RETURNING MINUTES: 34%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

71.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#14 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#166 OF 364)

FORDHAM RAMS

2023-24 RECORD: 13-20 SU, 15-18 ATS, 17-16 O-U-P

Sustaining the success Keith Urgo immediately brought to the Bronx in 2023 by winning 25 games has proven to be difficult. Fordham still used its deliberate style and defense last year, but lost 20 games. This year, the Rams are slated for the bottom of the conference standings.

Their main trio of Elijah Gray (now at Temple), Kyle Rose (led the team in scoring 10.8 PPG) and Antrell Charlton (106 assists) are gone. Returnees Japhet Medor, Will Richardson and Abdou Tsimbila must do more than a year ago to even surpass last season's 10th place finish. Medor, who scored close to 10 points a game last year, will be the primary offensive option and the 6-foot-9 Tsimbila will be one of the A-10's top shot blockers. Urgo needs his two main transfers who spent time at larger programs - Jackie Johnson (UNLV) and Matt Zona (Notre Dame) - to flourish in a starting role.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

75-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

1000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team played 11 of its final 16 games last season Under the total. The Under is also 35-23-1 in Fordham road games since the 2018-19 season began.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3

RETURNING MINUTES: 62%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

79.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#5 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#92 OF 364)

GEORGE MASON

PATRIOTS

2023-24 RECORD: 20-12 SU, 17-14 ATS, 15-16 O-U-P

Last season, the Patriots were somewhat of a surprise in reaching 20 wins, due in large part to an Adjusted Tempo of 63.8, one of the slowest in the country according to KenPom.

Unfortunately for Tony Skinn, that didn't lead to a postseason appearance after GMU lost its opening conference tournament game. Reaching that goal this year starts with replacing Keyshawn Hall (16.6 PPG, 8.1 RPG) who moved onto UCF and point guard Baraka Okojie, who parlayed his All-Rookie team honors into a new home with Memphis. Shinn will lean on his main outside threat, Darius Maddox (14.0 PPG., 414 3PT), to help GMU's portal additions adjust to the methodical style that worked so well last season. GMU's return haul from the portal was a good one. It includes KD Johnson (Auburn), Zach Anderson (Florida Gulf Coast) and Jeremiah Quigley (Iona). This is a good mix of new talent. Johnson (7.8 PPG) has power-conference experience. Anderson (.459 3P%) brings outside shooting while Quigley's hustle earned him all MAAC Rookie honors. The Patriots look to be in the tier of teams right below the A-10 favorites.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+700

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 11-6 against the spread as a favorite of at least 3 since December 7, 2022. The Patriots are also 20-10 against the spread as underdogs the past three seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **35%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

72.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#13 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#145 OF 364)

GEORGE WASHINGTON

REVOLUTIONARIES

2023-24 RECORD: 15-17 SU, 13-17-1 ATS, 15-16 O-U-P

This team ended last season in a miserable manner, losing 14 of its last 15 games. It's difficult to envision a different scenario occurring this season. Garrett Johnson, who missed time last year because of a hip tumor and resulting therapy, tore his ACL over the summer and is out for the year. The inside-outside forward scored over 13 points per game last season. GW will look to rebuild from within by showcasing the 6-foot-7 Darren Buchanan, Jr. (15.6 PPG, 6.6 RPG) and expecting more of an interior presence from the London-born 6-foot-8 sophomore Zamoku Weluche-Ume. He will play alongside two other big men new to the program. The 6-foot-11 Rafael Castro (2.9 PPG) comes over from Providence to team up with the 6-foot-9 Sean Hansen (8.8 PPG) formerly of Cornell. Still without Johnson, the Revolutionaries should finish below .500 in conference play.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
40-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
2000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 15-5 against the spread as an underdog of at least 8 during the regular season since January 20, 2022. However, the Revolutionaries are 21-34 against the spread as favorites since the 2018-19 season began.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **40%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

70.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#15 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#182 of 364)

LA SALLE

EXPLORERS

2023-24 RECORD: 16-17 SU, 14-17-1 ATS, 13-19 O-U-P

The A-10 coaches predict the Explorers will finish 15th out of 15 teams. The only reason that may not happen is Fran Dunphy is once again back on the sidelines. For nearly five decades, he has been one of the best coaches in the sport. Over the past two seasons at his alma mater, with limited resources and a turnstile roster, the Explorers have remained competitive (31-36) with three A-10 tournament victories. Last season's top two players left La Salle to move up the college basketball ladder. Khalil Brantley is now at Oklahoma State and Jhamir Brickus traveled across town to Villanova. Helping to ease this loss is the arrival of the 6-foot-7 Jahlil White (10.1 PPG, 5.5 RPG) from Temple, who is also jumping from one Philly school to another. A pair of other transfers: forward Demetrius Lilly (Penn State) and wing Erick Acker (LIU) should get plenty of time in the starting lineup. Perhaps the best part of this upcoming year for La Salle will be the offseason improvements to the Tom Gola Arena, which previously was one of the worst home courts in the nation.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
150-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 7-17 against the spread as a favorite of at least 8 since January 5, 2017, and the Under went 14-6 in the Explorers' Atlantic 10 games last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2**

RETURNING MINUTES: **33%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

80.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#3 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#82 of 364)

LOYOLA

RAMBLERS

2023-24 RECORD: 23-10 SU, 17-15 ATS, 14-18 O-U-P

The Ramblers are experienced, with five major contributors back, and will challenge for a conference title. Drew Valentine needs to keep the progress going that his team showed last year with 23 wins and a share of the regular season title with Richmond. Now that's the way to bounce back from winning just 10 games prior in the Ramblers' inaugural A-10 season. Loyola's guard-heavy lineup welcomes back Des Watson (12.6 PPG, 4.6 RPG), Jayden Dawson (7.9 PPG), Sheldon Edwards (6.0 PPG), Jalen Quinn (4.5 PPG) and 6-foot-10 big man Miles Rubin (2.3 BPG). New to the team and expected to contribute are Justin Moore (12.4 PPG at Drexel), Kymany Houinsou (4.3 ppg with 10 starts at Washington State) and 6-foot-6 freshman Daniil Glaskov from IMG Academy. This gives Loyola some of the best depth in the conference. Also working in Valentine's favor is Loyola's location, which can be difficult during A-10 travel season, as the Ramblers lost just one conference home game a year ago.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+800

NCAA TOURNAMENT
300-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Under is 31-48-1 in road games the past six seasons. The team is also just 7-18 against the spread in non-conference games the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: **3**

RETURNING MINUTES: **46%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

75.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#7 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#113 OF 364)

MASSACHUSETTS MINUTEMEN

2023-24 RECORD: 20-11 SU, 18-13 ATS, 15-16 O-U-P

The Minutemen have been one of the A-10's most recognizable programs since the conference began playing basketball in 1976. This year, though, will be its last as a member because the football team is driving the bus to the MAC beginning next season. That means A-10 fans have one last opportunity to see Frank Martin's intensity on the bench and his team's physical nature on the court. Before Martin deals with the MAC, he needs to navigate the A-10 after losing his top two backcourt scorers in Matt Cross (SMU) and Josh Cohen (USC) - those two gave the offense over 30 points a game last year. That means holdovers Rahsool Diggins (12.9 PPG), Jaylen Curry (7.4 PPG) and Jayden Ndjigie (5.5 PPG) will man the backcourt. The other two rounding out the starting five should be Daniel Rivera, who averaged over 13 points and eight rebounds at Bryant, and Daniel Hankins-Sanford (5.3 RPG) in the middle. Without Cross and Cohen, it is going to be a lot harder for Martin and crew to once again reach the 20-win mark.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
20-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 6-2 against the spread as an underdog last season. The Minutemen are also 18-9 against the spread as favorites of at least 7 since the 2018-19 season began.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **48%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

72.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#12 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#143 OF 364)

RHODE ISLAND RAMS

2023-24 RECORD: 12-20 SU, 11-19-1 ATS, 18-13 O-U-P

Archie Miller's rebuilding project enters Year 3. Two years ago, the Rams struggled to get nine wins. Last year, they bumped it up to 12. In order for that number to make another positive, incremental move in 2025, Miller must do it without former starters Luis Kortright and Zek Montgomery, now at Washington and Bradley, respectively. In total, the Rams program lost seven players. URI's defense last season was dreadful, finishing 261st in KenPom's Defensive Adjusted Efficiency. Miller needs his top returning players Jaden House (14.1 PPG) and a healthy David Green (14.3 PPG) to do most of the work on both ends of the court. If the Rams can get to 15 wins, it may quell the growing concerns some in Kingston have that Miller has not turned this program around quick enough.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
60-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
750-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is only 27-48 against the spread in conference games the past four seasons, and that's good for the second-worst non-conference cover percentage nationally in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **51%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

74.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#9 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#124 OF 364)

RICHMOND SPIDERS

2023-24 RECORD: 23-10 SU, 21-11-1 ATS, 15-18 O-U-P

Just when there were some rumblings the Chris Mooney era in Richmond might be coming to an end, the Spiders won 23 games and earned a share of the 2024 regular season title. Tremendously better than the 15-18 record a year before. That type of variance is going to happen in a conference where roster volatility has become the norm. This year, Mooney seemingly starts with a lot less talent. Jordan King, who came to Richmond from ETSU and was the A-10 co-Player of the year, graduated. The same for Neil Quinn. Dji Bailey bolted for LSU.

So here comes a much different starting group for the Spiders. Of course it features transfers. George Washington III (Michigan), Jonathan Beagle (Albany) and Dusan Neskovic (Dartmouth) all must quickly learn from veteran DeLonnie Hunt (9.3 PPG) Mooney's passing and picking offense.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
60-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
750-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 3-8-1 against the spread as an underdog of at least 6 since November 26, 2019. However, the Spiders went 7-1 against the spread last season as favorites of 7 or more last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1 RETURNING MINUTES: 26%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

77.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#6 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#104 OF 364)

SAINT LOUIS BILLIKENS

2023-24 RECORD: 13-20 SU, 13-17-2 ATS, 19-13 O-U-P

After the Billikens struggled through a 13-20 record last year, Travis Ford was let go after eight mostly productive seasons. The position directing the Saint Louis program now belongs to Josh Schertz, who turned his Indiana State resurgence into being of the hottest commodities in the job market. The creative NBA offensive philosophies he incorporates immediately make Saint Louis a unique squad in a conference known mostly for grind it out games played in the low 70s.

Schertz is bringing along Robbie Avila who prospered reading and reacting within his offensive sets. The "Larry Blurred" nickname probably goes away but he will still score (17.4 PPG), rebound (6.6 RPG), dish it out (4.1 APG) and stretch the court (39% behind the arc). Also making the move from Terre Haute is guard Isaiah Swope (15.9 PPG). They join Gibson Jimerson (15.8 PPG), already one of the A-10's best scorers. Returners Kellen Thames and Larry Hughes II, along with transfers such as Kobe Johnson (West Virginia), Kalu Anya (Brown) and AJ Casey (Miami) are all in the position to either start or be key rotational pieces for what should be a Top 25 squad. I have a Saint Louis +450 ticket to win the A-10 already in my portfolio.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+750

NCAA TOURNAMENT
300-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 1-6 against the spread as a home favorite last season, tied with Sacramento State for the worst cover rate for any team that covered at least one game as a home favorite last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0 RETURNING MINUTES: 38%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

73.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#10 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#127 OF 364)

SAINT BONAVENTURE BONNIES

2023-24 RECORD: 20-13 SU, 16-15-2 ATS, 19-14 O-U-P

Regardless of what the Bonnies accomplish this season, all the talk surrounding the program begins and ends with Adrian Wojnarowski serving as their GM. He will see firsthand the seismic movements the portal causes, as the rebuilding Bonnies now have Melvin Council (Wagner), Dasonte Bowen (Iowa) and Chance Moore (Missouri State) among others to replace Chad Venning, Moses Flowers, and Daryl Banks. Mark Schmidt has a reputation of finding ways to fit new players immediately into his defensive schemes. If the Bonnies can claw their way up to a 8-9 seed for the conference tournament at Capital One Arena, it will be a good way to kick off the Woj era in Olean.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

25-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

1500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 56-36-1 against the spread at home since the 2017-18 season began, and the Over is 21-9 in its home games the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0

RETURNING MINUTES: 8%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

79.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#4 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#87 OF 364)

SAINT JOSEPH'S HAWKS

2023-24 RECORD: 21-14 SU, 19-16 ATS, 18-17 O-U-P

Sticking with the theme of the transfer portal impacting this conference in a major way, the Hawks lost some key names. Gone are starting point guard Lynn Greer, who ventured to crosstown rival Temple and 7-foot center Christ Essandoko, whose continued development will now take place in Providence. This doesn't mean the Hawks are taking a step back; in fact, their returning star power makes them one of the favorites (+425) to win the conference. Erik Reynolds (17.3 PPG) returns for a fifth year and should challenge for Player of the Year honors. He will pair nicely again with last year's A-10 Rookie of the Year, Xzayvier Brown (12.7 PPG and 3.3 APG). The A-10 coaches also expect a lot from forward Rasheer Fleming (10.7 PPG, RPG 7.4) naming him to the preseason All-Conference 3rd Team. Lange acquired Derek Simpson (Rutgers) for his defense and Justice Ajogbor (Harvard) to block shots. The last regular season A-10 title for the Hawks came back in 2005. Their last NCAA tournament appearance was in 2016.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

+650

NCAA TOURNAMENT

300-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 11-3 against the spread in non-conference games last season. Since February 1, 2021, the Hawks are also 15-6-1 against the spread as underdogs of at least 7.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3

RETURNING MINUTES: 54%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

84.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#2 OF 15)
NATIONAL RANK: (#48 OF 364)

VCU RAMS

2023-24 RECORD: 24-14 SU, 23-14-1 ATS, 14-24 O-U-P

The Rams are the favorite to win the A-10 regular season title according to both bookmakers (+350) and the coaches' preseason poll. Ryan Odom is looking to prove them right by leveraging an experienced roster that features a star scorer in Max Shulga (.439 3P%). Even though the Rams missed the NCAA Tournament last year, they gained some late season momentum with two NIT victories. Both guards, Zeb Jackson (3.3 APG) and Joe Bamisile (13.1 PPG), are graduate students with the wisdom to know when to score and the time to feed Shulga. All three make up the best backcourt in the conference.

Down low, VCU has the 6-foot-10 long armed Christian Fermin and the well traveled Jack Clark (La Salle, NC State, Clemson) to work the boards. This is a team that at its best provides intense defensive pressure. Because of the expected development of Fermin and sophomore Michael Belle, VCU's top 40 KenPom defense from a year ago should statistically be even better.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+250

NCAA TOURNAMENT
500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Under was 14-5 in VCU's final 19 games. The Rams are also 29-14 against the spread in conference games the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3

RETURNING MINUTES: 63%

BIG 12

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The Big 12 will look different this season, as Oklahoma and Texas are out while Arizona, Arizona State, Colorado and Utah are in.

Houston claimed the regular season title last year, while Iowa State won the conference tournament. Both are expected to be great again, and Kansas will be a contender. Bill Self's team has boasted the best record in the conference for two of the last three seasons, and has won at least a share of the regular season conference crown eight times since 2014. However, some of the new blood in the conference will threaten at the top, and that especially applies to Arizona. The Wildcats were the regular season champs in the Pac-12 six times since the start of the 2013-14 season.

This year, the cream of the crop will be Kansas, Houston, Iowa State, Arizona and Baylor.

Injuries ravaged Kansas last year, but the Jayhawks should get back to being a top-10 team. Dajuan Harris, one of the best floor generals in basketball, is back, and so are studs KJ Adams and Hunter Dickinson. Self also landed two huge transfers as South Dakota State's Zeke Mayo and Wisconsin's AJ Storr are heading to Lawrence.

Houston has won at least 27 games in six of the last seven seasons. The Cougars were KenPom's second-ranked team in net rating last year, and they'll be a powerhouse as long as Kelvin Sampson is on the sidelines. Iowa State, led by T.J. Otzelberger, returns four of the best players from last year's team, which was first in the nation in defensive rating. The Cyclones also added Charlotte's Dishon Jackson after the big man averaged 11.4 points and 6.1 rebounds per game a year ago.

Arizona has won at least 27 games in all three years under Tommy Lloyd, and this year's team is loaded. Caleb Love was the Pac-12 Player of the Year last year, and he's back and ready to rock. The Wildcats could also have a breakout star in Motiejus Krivas. Lloyd added two awesome transfers in Campbell's Anthony Dell'Orso and Oakland's Trey Townsend. Baylor will also be tough this year, with Scott Drew returning after flirting with the Kentucky gig. Drew added two stars in the portal as he landed Duke's Jeremy Roach and Miami's Norchad Omier. However, the go-to guy will be five-star wing VJ Edgecombe, who looks like a top-10 pick in the 2025 NBA Draft.

The other teams with potential are Arizona State, Texas Tech, BYU, Kansas State and Cincinnati. Less should be expected of West Virginia, TCU, Utah, UCF, Colorado and Oklahoma State.

Dajuan Harris





STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

92.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#4 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#9 OF 364)

ARIZONA WILDCATS

2023-24 RECORD: 27-9 SU, 22-14 ATS, 15-20-1 O-U-P

Lloyd has done a decent job at Arizona, but fans are desperate for postseason success. Will this be the year the Wildcats make a run in the NCAA Tournament? Last year, Arizona was 11th in offensive rating and 10th in defensive rating. The group was excellent on both ends of the floor, and there's no reason this team can't be similar. Caleb Love, who averaged 18.0 points per game last season, should be one of the best players in the country. He'll be joined in the backcourt by Jaden Bradley, who is ready for a bigger role.

At the forward spots, transfers Anthony Dell'Orso, a microwave scorer, and Trey Townsend, a do-it-all power forward that led Oakland to a win over Kentucky, should be instant-impact players. KJ Lewis could also have a breakout season. And center Motiejus Krivasis is a mountain of a man with real skills. People have wanted Umar Ballo to transfer so that Krivasis can play more. The Wildcats also have some highly-touted recruits, with Carter Bryant being the most exciting this year.

This is a very talented group that has what it takes to disrupt in the Big 12, and there's no reason Arizona can't be a Final Four team. But people need to see it to believe it.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+800

NCAA TOURNAMENT
25-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 9-0-1 against the spread in its last 10 games as a favorite of more than 18. The Wildcats were also 9-2 against the spread in regular season non-conference games last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: **1** RETURNING MINUTES: **43%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

81.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#12 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#75 OF 364)

ARIZONA STATE SUN DEVILS

2023-24 RECORD: 14-18 SU, 14-17-1 ATS, 17-15 O-U-P

If you're looking for a long shot to win the conference, Arizona State could be the play. The Sun Devils are going to be young, but they're also extremely talented. Bobby Hurley has highly regarded freshmen on this roster, as he grabbed five-star center Jayden Quaintance from Kentucky and also stole guard Joson Sanon from Arizona. Both players have a world of potential, and it also sounds like four-star wing Amier Ali will be a player this season.

On top of having all the kids, Hurley also added some good transfers in Missouri State's Alston Mason, UW Milwaukee's BJ Freeman and Ball State's Basheer Jihad. All of them were insanely productive at their previous spots. In fact, Freeman averaged 21.1 points per game for the Panther and could have a pro future. Arizona State is also expecting a good season out of Adam Miller, who averaged 12.0 points per game last year.

Realistically, this team is as talented as any in the conference. Hurley just needs to piece it all together. However, his job is probably riding on doing so, as he has had an up-and-down run in Tempe.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
150-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
250-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 26-46-1 against the spread as a favorite since the 2019-20 season began. The Sun Devils were also just 3-8 against the spread in non-conference games last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **17%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

92.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#5 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#10 OF 364)

BAYLOR BEARS

2023-24 RECORD: 24-11 SU, 20-12-2 ATS, 18-16 O-U-P

Little stands in the way of Baylor being an elite team again. Baylor has been in the top 20 in KenPom's efficiency rankings in five straight years. Scott Drew is one of the best coaches on the planet, so it was huge that he turned down the Kentucky job and stayed at Baylor. Drew also reloaded his team, adding Duke's Jeremy Roach and Miami's Norchad Omier through the portal. Roach is one of the best point guards in the nation, and Omier is a double-double machine. Roach, Omier and five-star freshman VJ Edgecombe could make up the best trio in the conference. Edgecombe balled out against professionals for the Bahamian national team in Olympic qualifying. He's a lottery-level talent and will be a stud from Day 1.

Returning starter Jayden Nunn is also a rock-solid player, and Langston Love will start this year after averaging 11.0 points and 2.9 rebounds per game last year. Also, look for Cal transfer Jalen Celestine to make an impact off the bench after shooting 44.0% from 3 last season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+750

NCAA TOURNAMENT
25-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 11-2 against the spread as a favorite of at least 7 last season. The Bears are also 10th in ATS cover rate in non-conference games since the 2019-20 season began. They're 43-25-2 against the spread in those games.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1

RETURNING MINUTES: 26%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

88.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#8 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#22 OF 364)

BYU COUGARS

2023-24 RECORD: 23-11 SU, 20-14 ATS, 16-18 O-U-P

BYU hired Phoenix Suns assistant Kevin Young as the program's new head coach. Young was viewed as one of the best offensive assistants in the NBA, and it sounds like BYU is going to give him a lot of money to go after high-level recruits. So, this is a program to keep an eye on. This year, Young has a decent team. Two of last year's top three scorers, Fousseyni Traore and Trevin Knell, are back. Knell is an elite shooter. The Cougars also get back starter Dallin Hall, who is a good player at point. Richie Saunders also returns after averaging 9.6 points per game last year. And Mawot Mag, who averaged 9.1 points, 3.8 rebounds and 1.2 steals per game for Rutgers last year, should be a starter.

Young also has a potential lottery pick in freshman Egor Demin, a 6-foot-9 wing that can do everything out there. There's also some other young talents like Elijah Crawford, Kanon Catchings, Khadim Mboup and Brody Kozlowski. Last year, BYU ranked 14th in the nation in offensive rating and 60th in defensive rating. This year's team should have a good statistical profile, and the group will be less reliant on the 3. That could mean a higher floor.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
30-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
80-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 11-3 against the spread in non-conference play and is 11-1 against the spread as a favorite of more than 13 since December of 2022.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2

RETURNING MINUTES: 48%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

88.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#7 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#20 OF 364)

CINCINNATI BEARCATS

2023-24 RECORD: 22-15 SU, 18-18-1 ATS, 19-18 O-U-P

Wes Miller is 63-43 in three years with Cincinnati, but the Bearcats went 7-11 in conference play in their first year in the Big 12. And while Miller is undoubtedly a solid coach, this feels like a program that could struggle with so many talented new teams in the conference.

Cincinnati will be hoping that Dan Skillings Jr., last year's leading scorer at 12.9 points per game, can build on an awesome second half of last season. The Bearcats also have other key contributors back from last year, including Simas Lukosius, Day Day Thomas and Aziz Bandaogo. Miller also added a proven two-way player in Texas transfer Dillon Mitchell, who averaged 9.6 points, 7.5 rebounds, 1.0 steals and 0.9 blocks per game last year. It'll also be interesting to see what CJ Fredrick Jr., a sniper from deep, can do now that he's healthy. And shooter Connor Hickman, who played for Bradley last year, should also be a rotation piece.

The Bearcats were 19th in the country in defensive rating last year, and this year's group could be even better. But Miller needs more from his team offensively. Maybe the transfers can help.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
20-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
90-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 8-2 against the spread as a road underdog last season and is 20-6 against the spread coming off a straight-up loss the past two seasons. The latter is good for the second-best cover rate in the nation.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3 RETURNING MINUTES: 71%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

79.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#15 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#86 OF 364)

COLORADO BUFFALOES

2023-24 RECORD: 26-11 SU, 19-17-1 ATS, 22-15 O-U-P

Colorado went 26-11 last season and was 24th in KenPom's efficiency rankings. Tad Boyle's team also made it to the NCAA Tournament, beating Boise State in the First Four and Florida in the first round. The Buffaloes also played a good game against second-seeded Marquette in the Round of 32. The problem is that Colorado lost Tristan da Silva, KJ Simpson and Cody Williams to the NBA Draft. And J'Vonne Hadley, Eddie Lampkin and Luke O'Brien all transferred. That's a lot of talent out the door, so this could be a trying year.

The only returning starter from last year's team is Julian Hammond III, who averaged 7.4 points per game last season. New faces will make up the rest of the rotation. Freshman Andrew Crawford, a four-star recruit, will see big minutes immediately. Then, it'll likely be Washington State transfer Andrej Jakimovski, DII Colorado Mesa transfer Trevor Baskin and Grace College transfer Elijah Malone rounding out the starting five. The team has high hopes for Baskin and Malone, who dominated at lower levels.

THE ODDS

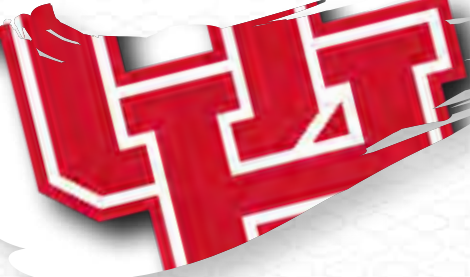
CONFERENCE
150-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
200-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 41-74-2 against the spread in road games since the 2014-15 season began. The Buffaloes have the worst road cover percentage in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0 RETURNING MINUTES: 14%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

96.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#1 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#1 OF 364)

HOUSTON COUGARS

2023-24 RECORD: 32-5 SU, 18-18-1 ATS, 16-21 O-U-P

Houston plays a pretty old-school brand of basketball on offense, but the team defends the 3-point line like there's no tomorrow. Opponents shot just 30.1% from 3 against the Cougars last year, and they also had the 11th-best 2PT% defense in the nation. Kelvin Sampson has built a defensive juggernaut in Houston, and this year's team should be a bit better than last year's offensively.

L.J. Cryer, Emanuel Sharp and J'Wan Roberts, three of the four best scorers from last year's team, are back. Cryer averaged 15.5 points per game and should be an All-American candidate. Sampson is also hoping that Oklahoma transfer Milos Uzan can fill in for Jamal Shead, who was the heart and soul of last year's team. Terrance Arceneaux also feels like a player that is due for a big leap, as he's a very talented wing. And there should be some growth from within from several other players.

All in all, Sampson has eight of the 10 players that averaged double digits in minutes back from last year. So, this should be an elite team with a championship ceiling.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+280

NCAA TOURNAMENT
15-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 138-99-5 against the spread since the 2017-18 season began. That's the second-best cover percentage for any team that has been at the Division I level for at least three seasons in that time.

RETURNING STARTERS: 4 RETURNING MINUTES: 69%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

93.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#3 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#7 OF 364)

IOWA STATE CYCLONES

2023-24 RECORD: 29-8 SU, 26-11 ATS, 17-20 O-U-P

Four of last year's most important pieces are back for Iowa State, as Keshon Gilbert, Tamin Lipsey, Curtis Jones and Milan Momcilovic all return. Gilbert, Lipsey and Jones are all capable of being the best guard on the floor on any given night, and another year in T.J. Otzelberger's system should help the Cyclones break into the top 25 in offensive rating. When considering that this team was first in defensive rating last season, this is going to be a scary group.

It'll just be interesting to see what some of the other Iowa State rotation players are able to provide. Dishon Jackson, a transfer from Charlotte, has a massive body and a good feel for the game. He should end up being the starting center for the Cyclones, who can use a legit inside presence. Northern Iowa transfer Nate Heise could also help the rotation, as he has proven to be a productive player. Iowa State also has an intriguing young guy in Nojus Indrusaitis, a four-star guard.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+350

NCAA TOURNAMENT
22-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 23-11 against the spread in home games the past two seasons and went 15-7 against the spread in its final 22 games last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3 RETURNING MINUTES: 67%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

94.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#2 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#4 OF 364)

KANSAS

JAYHAWKS

2023-24 RECORD: 23-11 SU, 13-19-1 ATS, 16-16-1 O-U-P

Last year didn't go as planned for Kansas. The Jayhawks lost some games they normally never lose, and they got crushed by the injury bug. By the time the NCAA Tournament rolled around, the team's depth was decimated. But this year's team has the goods, making another Big 12 championship and extended March run possible for Bill Self. Little stands in the way of Baylor being an elite team again. Baylor has been in the top 20 in KenPom's efficiency rankings in five straight years.

The Jayhawks have a bunch of great returners, as Dajuan Harris Jr., the Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year in 2023 and an awesome floor general on offense, is joined by KJ Adams Jr. and Dickinson. That's an elite point guard and two players that should make up one of the best frontcourts in the nation. Self also added Zeke Mayo, who averaged 18.8 points per game for South Dakota State last year, and AJ Storr, who averaged 16.8 points per game for Wisconsin. Those were two of the best players in the portal. Alabama's Rylan Griffin is another transfer addition that will contribute right away. The Jayhawks also happen to have some exciting youngsters to develop, with Rakease Passmore and Flory Bidunga being prized recruits.

THE ODDS

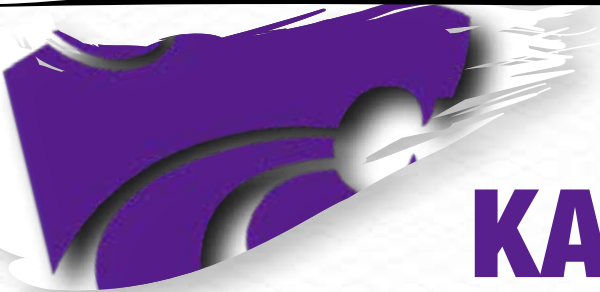
CONFERENCE
+220

NCAA TOURNAMENT
10-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team went 3-9 against the spread in its final 12 games last year. The Jayhawks are also 7-14-1 against the spread as underdogs since the 2020-21 season began. That's the fifth-worst underdog cover percentage in the country.

RETURNING STARTERS: **3** RETURNING MINUTES: **55%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

84.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#9 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#49 OF 364)

KANSAS STATE

WILDCATS

2023-24 RECORD: 19-15 SU, 17-17 ATS, 17-16-1 O-U-P

In Jerome Tang's first season in Manhattan, the Wildcats went 26-10 overall and 11-7 in conference. They were also 21st in KenPom's efficiency rankings, finishing 37th in offensive rating and 27th in defensive rating. Last year, things fell apart. Kansas State went 19-15 overall and 8-10 in conference. The Wildcats were just 70th in KenPom's efficiency rankings, and a 139th-ranked offense was the reason. Things should get a little better in Year 3.

Tang was able to convince Michigan point guard Dug McDaniel to join the squad. McDaniel should instantly be one of the best guards in the conference, and having a player that good at an important position can mean the world. Another massive portal addition for the Wildcats was Illinois big man Coleman Hawkins. The 6-foot-10 forward has had an up-and-down college career, but he can space the floor and has always had an intriguing skill set. The rest of the starting five is also made of transfers, with Cal State Fullerton's Max Jones, Illinois Chicago's C.J. Jones and Samford's Achor Achor all likely to start. It's not clear how some of those players will handle the jump in competition, but McDaniel and Hawkins can play anywhere, so Tang should be able to make this work.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
40-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
75-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Over was 5-1 in games with a total of 151 or higher last season. The Wildcats are also 2-7 against the spread as a favorite of at least 9 since December 12, 2022.

RETURNING STARTERS: **1** RETURNING MINUTES: **13%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

79.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#16 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#94 OF 364)

OKLAHOMA STATE COWBOYS

2023-24 RECORD: 12-20 SU, 10-19-3 ATS, 19-13 O-U-P

There isn't a team with longer odds to win the conference than this one. New head coach Steve Lutz has been to the NCAA Tournament in each of the last three years, getting there twice with Texas A&M-Corpus Christi and then taking Western Kentucky there in his lone season with the team. So, Lutz is a coach that has gotten the job done and expects to win games. But this is going to be a bit of a project. Maybe the Pokes will be a good ATS team this season, as Lutz is genuinely a good coach. But he needs time to stockpile talent and put his system in place.

Bryce Thompson, who started his career at Kansas, has been a double-digit scorer for Oklahoma State in each of the last three years. He'll be expected to lead this group, and La Salle transfer Khalil Brantley and Arkansas transfer Devo Davis will help. Brantley averaged 15.0 points per game last season, and Davis averaged 10.9 points per game two years ago. So, there is some firepower on the perimeter. However, this Cowboys team lacks size and toughness in the frontcourt and that significantly limits this group's upside.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
200-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
300-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 2-8 against the spread as a home underdog since the 2022-23 season began. The Cowboys also went 0-6 against the spread in their final six games last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1

RETURNING MINUTES: 19%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

84.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#10 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#51 OF 364)

TCU HORNED FROGS

2023-24 RECORD: 21-13 SU, 19-15 ATS, 19-15 O-U-P

TCU went 21-13 and 9-9 in Big 12 play last season. The Horned Frogs were also a top-45 team in both offensive and defensive rating. Jamie Dixon has now won at least 21 games in each of the last three seasons, and he has also done so in six of his eight years with TCU. One thing to like about this year's squad is the backcourt. Arizona State transfer Frankie Collins averaged 13.8 points, 4.4 rebounds, 3.2 assists and 2.6 steals per game last year. He's a good scorer and a feisty competitor. Joining him is Green Bay transfer Noah Reynolds, who averaged 20.0 points and 4.5 assists per game last year. Reynolds has good size, is highly skilled and knows how to play the game.

Dixon will also be counting on Wyoming transfer Brendan Wenzel, a very good 3-point shooter, UNC Wilmington transfer Trazarien White, who averaged 19.8 points and 6.8 rebounds last year, and Ernest Udeh, a big man that started his career at Kansas and showed promise with TCU last year. This is a team that is more talented than it looks on paper. There's probably not much upside, but this could be a tournament team.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
100-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
150-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 9-3 against the spread as a favorite of at least 14 since November 15, 2022, and the Over was 8-3 in Horned Frogs road games last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1

RETURNING MINUTES: 5%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

89.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#6 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#17 OF 364)

TEXAS TECH

RED RAIDERS

2023-24 RECORD: 23-11 SU, 15-18-1 ATS, 19-14-1 O-U-P

Grant McCasland is trying to change the perception of this Texas Tech program. Once known as a defensive-minded team, the Red Raiders were 27th in offensive rating in McCasland's first year with the school. He significantly upped the team's 3-point rate, and he has the Red Raiders playing some modern basketball. Now, McCasland is going to try and turn this program into a Big 12 contender. The betting odds suggest Tech isn't close to really competing, but it'd be a mistake to count this group out. Realistically, this team can beat anybody in the conference, and it's the type of roster that can get hot in the NCAA Tournament.

The best returning player on the team is forward Darrion Williams, who averaged 11.4 points, 7.5 rebounds and 1.2 steals per game last season. He also shot 45.8% from deep. Guard Chance McMillian, who averaged 10.8 points per game, is also back. McCasland is looking to Minnesota transfer Elijah Hawkins, New Mexico transfer JT Toppin and Pittsburgh transfer Federiko Federiko (yup) to round out the starting five. Hawkins is one of the best passers in the nation, and Toppin is a strong, athletic forward with a high motor.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
25-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
70-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 7-2 against the spread as a favorite of at least 14 points since December 15, 2022, and the Over is 12-6-1 in Red Raiders road games the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **38%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

82.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#11 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#60 OF 364)

UCF

KNIGHTS

2023-24 RECORD: 17-16 SU, 19-14 ATS, 18-14-1 O-U-P

UCF was 21st in the nation in defensive rating last year, but the Knights were just 148th in offensive rating. The season ended with UCF at 17-16 overall and 7-11 in conference play. Johnny Dawkins is now hoping to figure out the offense, as doing so could mean an appearance in the NCAA Tournament.

Getting Jaylin Sellers, last year's leading scorer, back is a good start. Sellers will be joined by Darius Johnson in the backcourt. Johnson was right behind Sellers in scoring, but the point guard led the team in assists too. This is going to be a very strong group of guards, especially with UTSA transfer Jordan Ivy-Curry coming over after averaging 17.1 points per game last year. And George Mason transfer Keyshawn Hall should add firepower on the wing after averaging 16.6 points and 8.1 rebounds per game last season. In the frontcourt, Dawkins is hoping that a new situation can bring the best out of Syracuse transfer Benny Williams, a former high-level recruit with loads of talent. And Moustapha Thiam, a 7-foot-2 center that was 30th in the 2024 ESPN 100, could start at center. If Thiam can be productive right away, the Knights are going to be tough this season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
150-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
300-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 13-3 against the spread as a favorite of at least 8 since February 1, 2022. The Knights also went 13-7 against the spread in conference play last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **43%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

80.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#13 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#78 OF 364)

UTAH UTES

2023-24 RECORD: 22-15 SU, 19-18 ATS, 19-15-3 O-U-P

This team was top 50 in offensive and defensive rating last year. Let's see if that's sustainable. Losing Branden Carlson, one of the best centers in the country, is going to hurt. But the team is hoping that Lawson Lovering is up for the challenge of replacing him. Lovering is 7-foot-1 and did some good things in his 18.4 minutes per game last year. Head coach Craig Smith has praised him for his growth in the offseason. Ezra Ausar, a 6-foot-9 forward that averaged 11.4 points and 4.7 rebounds per game for ECU last year, will join him in the frontcourt.

In the backcourt, Utah will be counting on the Madsen twins. Gabe Madsen, who averaged 13.6 points and shot 38.6% from 3 last year, is back to start at point guard. But his brother Mason transferred in from Boston College after averaging 8.1 points on 37.7% shooting from deep. With those two and San Francisco transfer Mike Sharavjams in the mix, Smith's team has an intriguing group on the perimeter.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

150-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

300-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Since the 2019-20 season began, the team has the second-worst road cover percentage in the nation at 28.9%.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **27%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

80.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#14 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#84 OF 364)

WEST VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEERS

2023-24 RECORD: 9-23 SU, 13-18-1 ATS, 17-15 O-U-P

Head coach Darian DeVries and his son Tucker DeVries did great things at Drake, but how will it look in the big leagues? And can Darian get it done without a single returning rotation player from last year's Mountaineers roster? Tucker should immediately be one of the best players in the conference. He averaged 21.6 points, 6.7 rebounds, 3.7 assists and 1.6 steals per game last year, and he's a two-time Missouri Valley Player of the Year. There's no reason his game can't translate, as he's 6-foot-7, can shoot the cover off the ball and has great feel for the game.

The other starters will seemingly be Oklahoma State's Javon Small, Detroit Mercy's Jayden Stone, Illinois Chicago's Toby Okani and Fresno State's Eduardo Andre. Darian has also talked up Illinois transfer Amani Hansberry. Small was highly productive for the Cowboys, so we know he can play at this level. The others have more question marks, but Stone is going to be a fun one to watch. He averaged 20.8 points per game last year.

It's hard to expect much from a team that was pieced together like this, but there's talent here and Darian can coach.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

100-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

130-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 19-36 against the spread as an underdog the past three seasons, and the Over is 27-13 in Mountaineers road games the past three seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: **0** RETURNING MINUTES: **4%**



Ryan
Kalkbrenner

BIG EAST

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The Big East Conference is a true college basketball powerhouse. It also just so happens to contain the reigning two-time National Champions. The UConn Huskies will attempt to run it back for a third straight season, as they've gone 68-11 overall and 31-9 in conference play over the last two seasons. As good as the 2023 title team was, they were better in 2024, going 37-3 and 18-2 in league play.

So, that's the standard that everybody else in the conference will attempt to emulate. For all of the good teams in the conference, only three made the NCAA Tournament last season and the other two, Creighton and Marquette, bowed out in the Sweet 16. St. John's, at least from metric sites like Bart Torvik and KenPom, was one of the biggest tourney snubs. But, the problem with this conference is that they all grade strongly, but spend time cannibalizing each other during conference play.

UConn was the only team with fewer than six losses. The aforementioned Red Storm went 20-13 overall and 11-9 in conference, but ranked in the top 20 per Torvik and 21st for KenPom. The only other top-36 team for KenPom to miss the tournament was Wake Forest.

Torvik and Pomeroy both had nine of the 11 teams in their top 61 last season. UConn's personnel losses may level the playing field a little bit, but every game will be a grind night in and night out and the members of this league often have big showcase games in the non-conference, especially with the Big East-Big 12 Battle.

The depth of this conference is a reflection of the talent and also the coaching, as there are a lot of strong bench bosses in the Big East. What will be interesting to see is if the second-year guys Rick Pitino (St. John's), Kim English (Providence), and Ed Cooley (Georgetown), and third-year guys Shaheen Holloway (Seton Hall), Kyle Neptune (Villanova), Sean Miller (Xavier), and Thad Matta (Butler) can take their teams to the next level. Doormat DePaul has a new coach in Chris Holtmann, formerly at Ohio State.

**PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS
BY ADAM BURKE**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

80.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#8 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#77 OF 364)

BUTLER BULLDOGS

2023-24 RECORD: 18-15 SU, 14-18 ATS, 13-17-2 O-U-P

Butler's location in the hotbed of basketball has produced a lot of underwhelming results. The Bulldogs would have made the NCAA Tournament in 2020 if not for COVID, but they haven't made the dance since 2018 in the first year under LaVall Jordan, who built off of Chris Holtmann's success, but then largely squandered it. Getting true game-changers to Indianapolis has been a challenge and one that Thad Matta has decided to embrace for the second time after playing there from 1987-90 and coaching there from 1997-2001.

The Bulldogs, like so many teams around the country, have major losses and additions, but they were able to keep leading scorers Pierre Brooks II (14.8 PPG) and Jahmyl Telfort (13.9 PPG). Kolby King from Tulane and Patrick McCaffery could be impact transfers, as Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery's son went to Butler for a clean slate. It seems like Butler didn't fully address their issues on the offensive glass or with interior defense, though, so we'll see if they can outscore teams to win.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
100-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
200-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 2-8 against the spread in its last 10 games of the 2023-24 season. The Bulldogs also didn't play a game that went Over the total after February 2. The Under was 10-0-1 in their final 11 games.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **56%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

95.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#1 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#3 OF 364)

CONNECTICUT HUSKIES

2023-24 RECORD: 37-3 SU, 28-12 ATS, 17-23 O-U-P

Last season's Huskies had to replace Adama Sanogo and Jordan Hawkins. No problem. This year's Huskies have to replace Cam Spencer, Tristen Newton, Donovan Clingan, and Stephon Castle. Potential problem? I would say so. Dan Hurley remains one of the nation's top coaches and turned down a chance to coach the Lakers in order to remain with UConn. He still has Alex Karaban to build around, but four of the five UConn players that averaged double figures are gone, including the irreplaceable big man Clingan, who is 7-foot-2.

The nice thing about free agency in college sports is that players want to win. That's why the Huskies got Aidan Mahaney from Saint Mary's and Tarris Reed Jr. from Michigan. This was the top offense in the nation by adjusted efficiency per Torvik and the fourth-best defense. This was a team that outshot opponents by nearly 16% on 2s and owned the offensive glass. Are all of those things possible again with Karaban, Hassan Diarra, and a much larger role for Samson Johnson? This will be another great team. But elite? Maybe not, unless projected top-10 pick Liam McNeeley is the real deal as the year goes along.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+130

NCAA TOURNAMENT
+900

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 29-4-1 against the spread in non-conference games and 55-23-1 against the spread overall the past two seasons. Both are the best cover rates in the country.

RETURNING STARTERS: **1** RETURNING MINUTES: **36%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

91.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#2 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#14 OF 364)

CREIGHTON BLUEJAYS

2023-24 RECORD: 25-10 SU, 18-16-1 ATS, 18-17 O-U-P

The Big Three is now a Big One in Omaha, as Ryan Kalkbrenner is the only holdover from the trio of him, Baylor Scheierman, and Trey Alexander. We'll see if Steven Ashworth, the other Bluejay who averaged double figures, can take a major step forward, but the Bluejays need to replace 36.1 points, 14.7 rebounds, and 8.6 assists per game from Scheierman and Alexander.

Greg McDermott's offensive system will create open looks. This team was third in eFG% last season and third in 2P%. They were also 30th in 3P% and ranked in the top 10 in FT%. They just make shots and always have, finishing in the top 10 for Torvik in adjusted offensive efficiency five times in the McDermott era. The only "bad" offense came in 2022 and that team still went 23-12. What separates Creighton from other good offenses is that they haven't finished outside the top 35 in adjusted defensive efficiency since 2020. Expect another Top 25 team with Kalkbrenner and some high-upside transfers.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+300

NCAA TOURNAMENT
45-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team ended the 2023-24 season going 8-1 against the spread in the final nine games it played as a favorite of 14 or more. The Under is also 44-22-2 in Bluejays road games since the 2018-19 season, the highest road Under percentage for any team that has been at the Division I level the past six seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: **3** RETURNING MINUTES: **46%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

71.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#11 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#151 OF 364)

DEPAUL BLUE DEMONS

2023-24 RECORD: 3-29 SU, 11-20-1 ATS, 17-15 O-U-P

The Tony Stubblefield era has mercifully come to an end in Chicago, as former Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann inherits a major rebuild. The Blue Demons were winless in conference play and 9-51 on Stubblefield's watch. This is a program that has one winning season in league play since joining the Big East for the 2005-06 season. They have two winning seasons total in that span and last made the NCAA Tournament in 2004 as a member of Conference USA.

On the plus side for Holtmann, nobody wanted to stick around. So, he had a clean slate and a commitment from the athletic department to build what he wanted. That included pure scorer David Skogman from Davidson, a player who shot nearly 60% on 2s and 46% on 3s last season. It included UIC and Colorado state guard Isaiah Rivera, who shot better than 40% from 3. N.J. Benson shot 63% on 2s for Missouri State. David Thomas from Mercer shot 39% from 3. Troy D'Amico was a 36% 3-point shooter. DePaul has added scorers. Now we'll see if they can defend.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
250-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
300-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 9-22-1 against the spread as either a favorite or an underdog of fewer than 16 since January 19, 2023. The Blue Demons are also 4-16-2 against the spread as home underdogs the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: **0** RETURNING MINUTES: **0%**

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

77.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#10 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#99 OF 364)

GEORGETOWN

HOYAS

2023-24 RECORD: 9-23 SU, 13-19 ATS, 18-14 O-U-P

Playing poor defense in a conference where virtually every team can score turned out to be a major issue for Georgetown. The Hoyas won two of their 20 Big East games and allowed conference foes to shoot 62% on 2s and 38% on 3s. When you consider that the Hoyas were also last in the league in 2P% at 44.5%, you can see why they struggled a lot. Eight of Georgetown's nine wins came against Quadrant 4 competition and DePaul was the only team they beat in conference.

This will be a perimeter-led team with top scorer Jayden Epps (18.5 PPG) and Harvard transfer Malik Mack, who led the Crimson with 17.5 PPG. Drew Fielder is a nice homegrown piece to build around at 6-foot-10 with Supreme Cook out of the picture and Cooley brought in a good player in Micah Peavy from TCU. Depth will be a major issue for the Hoyas, but they have more scoring punch to try and offset what will be another rough season on defense.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
200-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
300-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 65-103-3 against the spread at home since the 2014-15 season started, and the Over is 69-47-1 in Georgetown road games since the 2013-14 season began.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1

RETURNING MINUTES: 31%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

88.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#3 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#21 OF 364)

MARQUETTE

GOLDEN EAGLES

2023-24 RECORD: 27-10 SU, 21-15-1 ATS, 15-22 O-U-P

Has the ceiling been lowered for Marquette this season? Tyler Kolek and Oso Ighodaro are gone, leaving one star behind in Kam Jones. Kolek was one of the top facilitators in the nation and also a gifted scorer in his own right. Jones is a pure scorer, but the Golden Eagles will need to find somebody to run the offense and find them quickly. Jones may run point out of necessity, but only one Golden Eagle averaged more than three assists per game last season and it was Kolek.

In fact, Jones only had 2.4 assists per game. While he led the team with 17.2 PPG and can create his own shots, it remains to be seen if he can create them for others. This is still going to be an elite defensive team, as Stevie Mitchell and Chase Ross are both excellent on-ball defenders. But, Marquette also needs a big to emerge with Ighodaro gone. David Joplin and Ben Gold shot 36% each from 3, and Marquette will stretch the floor a lot on offense as a result, but they are going to be very dependent on outside shooting.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+800

NCAA TOURNAMENT
75-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 14-7 against the spread in its final 21 games last season. The Golden Eagles are also 20-4 against the spread as favorites of at least 8 since November 8, 2023.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3

RETURNING MINUTES: 64%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

83.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#7 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#57 OF 364)

PROVIDENCE

FRIARS

2023-24 RECORD: 21-14 SU, 20-15 ATS, 15-19-1 O-U-P

The fast ascent of Kim English was a big story last season when he took over at Providence after two years as the head coach at George Mason. Top 2024 recruit Garvey Dual transferred to rival Seton Hall. Top scorers and all-around players Devin Carter and Josh Oduro are gone. But, a season, a full recruiting cycle, and a chance to go shopping at the Portal Mart have a lot of people excited about Providence's prospects this season.

It starts with senior Bryce Hopkins, who was dynamic in the non-conference before going down with a torn ACL in the first game of 2024. How everybody around Hopkins comes together will determine how the season goes. Wesley Cardet Jr., Jabri Abdur-Rahim, Bensley Joseph, and 7-footer Christ Essandoko project to play big minutes for a team that badly needed 3-point help on both ends of the floor. For a team that shot a lot of them, Providence was 251st in 3P% and that was an offseason target for English.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

40-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

120-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Under was 10-2 in Providence non-conference games last season, and the Friars have the best road cover percentage in the country the past three seasons at 22-9 against the spread.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2**

RETURNING MINUTES: **36%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

80.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#9 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#80 OF 364)

SETON HALL

PIRATES

2023-24 RECORD: 25-12 SU, 17-19-1 ATS, 18-19 O-U-P

The Pirates won 20 regular season games and went 13-7 in a very tough conference. Eight of their losses were to Quadrant 1 opponents and they were a top-40 team for both Torvik and KenPom. Here's the thing, though. Seton Hall didn't really excel in many areas. They were a top-25 offensive rebounding team, but ranked in the 190s and 170s in 3P% and 2P%, respectively, and outside the top 100 in defending both 3s and 2s. Ironically, after the NCAA Tournament snub, they rolled through the NIT and won that title.

The losses from last season are exceptionally heavy. Kadary Richmond, Al-Amir Dawes, and Dre Davis all had at least 15 PPG. Jaden Bediako did not, but he shot 61% from the floor and ran out of eligibility. Richmond is at St. John's. Davis is at Ole Miss. Shaheen Holloway brought in guards Chaunce Jenkins (Old Dominion) and Zion Harmon (Bethune-Cookman) and 6-foot-10 forward Yacine Toumi (Evansville), but the talent level of this team is not close to last season's. Plus, they've gotten much worse on the offensive glass and have a lot of below average shooters.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

40-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

150-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 1-6 against the spread as an underdog of at least 11 since the 2016-17 season began. At 55-32 against the spread, the Pirates also have the third-best road underdog cover percentage since the 2013-14 season began.

RETURNING STARTERS: **1**

RETURNING MINUTES: **21%**

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

88.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#4 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#23 OF 364)

ST. JOHN'S

RED STORM

2023-24 RECORD: 20-13 SU, 17-16 ATS, 18-15 O-U-P

Many felt like St. John's got screwed last season. They were a top-20 team per Bart Torvik and 21st per KenPom, but they were kept out of the NCAA Tournament. A 95-90 loss to UConn in the Big East Tournament ended the season. The Johnnies only went 1-7 in Quadrant 1-A games, though, and didn't have the big wins that the committee was looking for, even though they didn't have any bad losses either.

Not everybody was committed to sticking around for revenge, as St. John's actually returns zero starters. But, they did get Kadary Richmond to transfer from rival Seton Hall and four-time transfer Deivon Smith, who was terrific last season at Utah. Aaron Scott from North Texas is a career 54% shooter on 2s and 38% from 3s as a stretch four. RJ Luis was a great sixth man and he'll get more run. It is Year 2 under Rick Pitino and this likely looks more like the team he wants after inheriting most of last season's roster. The numbers should go up across the board here.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+500

NCAA TOURNAMENT
50-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Over is 26-13-1 in St. John's non-conference games the past four seasons, tied for the fifth-highest non-conference Over rate in the country. The Red Storm are also 20-30-1 against the spread at home the past three seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: **0** RETURNING MINUTES: **23%**

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

87.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#5 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#25 OF 364)

VILLANOVA

WILDCATS

2023-24 RECORD: 18-16 SU, 16-16-2 ATS, 11-23 O-U-P

Villanova often played slow under Jay Wright and Wright's protege, Kyle Neptune, kept that tradition going in Philadelphia. The problem is that the Wildcats haven't had the shooters to play that slowly on offense. The defense was outstanding last year for Neptune's crew, finishing 10th in adjusted defensive efficiency per Torvik and 13th per KenPom. Unfortunately, the team went from 200th in 3P% to 185th from Year 1 to Year 2 for Neptune.

Villanova gave up at least a point per possession in 11 of 20 conference games. Those accounted for nine of their 10 losses. The margin for error just wasn't great enough. Leading scorer Eric Dixon still believed enough to stick around and Neptune hit the portal hard for Jhamir Brickus, who shot almost 40% on 3s for LaSalle. Wooga Poplar shot nearly 39% from 3 for Miami. Tyler Perkins was a 35% distance shooter for Penn. I think this is the year Villanova turns it around, as Neptune's system will produce a good defense and they now have the shooters on offense.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
25-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
110-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

All of the team's final 10 games went Under the total, and the Under is 18-8 in Villanova road games the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: **1** RETURNING MINUTES: **31%**

XAVIER MUSKETEERS

2023-24 RECORD: 16-18 SU, 16-17-1 ATS, 17-17 O-U-P

The most improved team in the conference is the one from Cincinnati. Xavier head coach Sean Miller was able to bring back PG Dayvion McKnight and big man Zach Freemantle, who missed the final 15 games of the season. He also snagged transfer Ryan Conwell, a 61% shooter on 2s and 40% on 3s, from Indiana State. Conwell shot 260 3-pointers last season, so he fills a need for a Xavier team that was 302nd in 3P Rate. So, too, does Toledo's Dante Maddox Jr., a 41% 3-point shooter for his career with nine more made 3s (423) than 2s over his four seasons.

Xavier badly needed scorers, as they were 248th in eFG%. They didn't shine on defense either, but played at a high tempo, so their offensive inefficiency really took a toll. They were under 48% on 2s. Miller, who almost always had terrific 3-point shooting teams at Arizona, now has a roster in Year 3 that better fits what he wants. The Sweet 16 team from 2023 shot 39% on 3s and almost 54% on 2s. This year's team will be a lot closer to that.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

10-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

70-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Over is 22-12-1 in Xavier home games the past two seasons, and the Musketeers are 29-19-1 against the spread in non-conference games the past four seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1

RETURNING MINUTES: 29%

BIG TEN

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Despite losing literally the biggest player in the conference, with the two-time consensus National Player of the Year 7-foot-4 Zach Edey now gone from Purdue and into the NBA, the "B1G" only gets bigger with 18 teams as Oregon, UCLA, USC, and Washington enter the fray.

Perhaps with four new programs in the league, the Big Ten can win a National Championship for the first time since Michigan State did it in 2000 (Maryland won in 2002 as a member of the ACC). Purdue (first Final Four since 1980) reached the National Championship game and was the first program in the conference to make Monday night since Michigan in 2018. Alas, the Boilermakers fell short to UConn and the title drought continues for the conference.

Of the four newbies, only UCLA, off a rare losing season (16-17), is expected to challenge atop the league. Oregon (15/1 to win Big Ten), loses its top two scorers, but is loaded with veteran transfers.

At Washington (100/1), Danny Sprinkle has made the NCAA Tournament three straight seasons - twice at Montana State and last year at Utah State - takes over. Eric Musselman brings the Muss Bus to USC (40/1) after a tumultuous final season at Arkansas.

Aside from Sprinkle and Musselman, there are two other first-year head coaches in the conference as Jake Diebler became the interim coach replacing a fired Chris Holtmann on Valentine's Day last season and went 8-3 to earn the full-time gig at Ohio State (10/1). After leading FAU to a Final Four two years ago, Dusty May finally moves to a high-major job but not to his alma mater at Indiana, as he takes over at Michigan (12/1).

Unlike last season, when Matt Painter and Purdue returned five starters from a No. 1 seed team, this season there is no clear-cut favorite in the B1G. The Boilers (4/1) are favorites once again and return their starting backcourt but will have to play differently without Edey. The fans in Bloomington are getting a bit restless, but Mike Woodson may have his best team in four years at Indiana (6/1).

Just below the two Hoosier state teams, Michigan State (6/1), UCLA (7/1), and Illinois (9/1) also have odds in single-digits to win the conference.



**Braden
Smith**

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

89.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#2 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#18 OF 364)

ILLINOIS

FIGHTING ILLINI

2023-24 RECORD: 29-9 SU, 22-15-1 ATS, 26-12 O-U-P

Behind the nation's No. 3 adjusted offensive efficiency per KenPom, Illinois made it to the Elite Eight before being one the six victims of UConn. This year, the Illini only returns 9.7% of their scoring, which led the conference last season (83.4 PPG).

The scoring will be down for Brad Underwood's bunch, but there is still talent here and likely to be even more in the future with certified 'dude-getter' Orlando Antigua (multiple stints with Calipari at Kentucky) back as associate head coach. Ty Rodgers (6.2 PPG, 5.3 RPG) is the lone returning starter on the wing, but he has company with 10 new players on the roster including point guard and Champaign native Kylan Boswell (9.6 PPG, 3.6 APG, Arizona) along with Tre White (Louisville), Jake Davis (Mercer), and the returning Dra-Gibbs Lawhorn.

Antigua has already paid dividends luring five-star freshman forward Will Riley and 7-2 Croatian big Tomislav Ivusic, the twin brother of Arkansas' Zvonimir Ivusic, and Lithuanian lead guard Kasparas Jakucionis, a projected first-round pick next year. Evansville grad transfer Ben Humricious averaged 15 a game last season and is a sharp-shooter. Scoring will be down for this group, but there is quality depth that should get better as the season progresses.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+700

NCAA TOURNAMENT
75-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Over was 22-6 in the team's final 28 games, and the Illini are 11-3-1 against the spread as road underdogs the past four seasons. That's the best cover percentage for any team that has been a road underdog in at least two games in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1 RETURNING MINUTES: 12%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

87.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#5 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#30 OF 364)

INDIANA

HOOSIERS

2023-24 RECORD: 19-14 SU, 15-15-3 ATS, 18-15 O-U-P

The Hoosiers missed the NCAA Tournament last year for the first time in Mike Woodson's three years and there is more than just some chatter regarding Woodson's job status. This is a potential make or break year and Indiana took its robust NIL and went heavy into the portal.

Three starters come to Bloomington from the Pac-12, including two first-team all-conference players in Arizona C Oumar Ballo and Washington State PG Myles Rice, who finally gives Indiana a legitimate point guard they lacked last season. Kanaan Carlyle (Stanford) is Rice's backcourt running mate, so Indiana is deeper with these two, plus Trey Galloway (10.6 PPG, 4.4 APG) who played out of position at the point. With Ballo manning the paint, Malik Reneau (15.4 PPG, 6 RPG) and Mackenzie Mgbako (12.2 PPG, 4.1 RPG) will be asked to stretch the floor.

Rumors are out there that Indiana will finally quicken the tempo offensively and play a more modern-style of basketball. Last year, the Hoosiers ranked 350th out of 362 D-1 teams with just 5.03 made 3s per game (dead last among major conference teams). Indiana has not made a second weekend in the NCAA Tournament nor won the Big Ten since 2016 and that is the expectation this season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+650

NCAA TOURNAMENT
45-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Since December 8, 2022, Indiana is 1-7 against the spread as a favorite of at least 11 points. The Hoosiers are also 34-58-4 against the spread in road games since the 2015-16 season began, the country's worst road cover percentage in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 4 RETURNING MINUTES: 59%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

86.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#8 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#36 OF 364)

IOWA HAWKEYES

2023-24 RECORD: 19-15 SU, 13-20-1 ATS, 23-11 O-U-P

The Hawkeyes streak of six consecutive NCAA Tournament bids ended last season. The streak of Fran McCaffery having one of his sons play for him is also over, as Patrick transferred to finish up his career at Butler and his youngest son, Jack, also committed there for next season.

Nevertheless, McCaffery claims this year's Iowa team is one of his deepest in his 15th season in Iowa City. It all starts with Payton Sandfort (16.4 PPG, 6.6 RPG), who passed on the NBA Draft over the summer after leading the Big Ten with 94 made 3s. Josh Dix (8.9 PPG, 42.1% 3P%) and Brock Harding return, while Drew Thelwell (Morehead State) comes in. Big man Owen Freeman (10.6 PPG, 6.6 RPG, 3.1 blocks per 40 minutes) shared Big Ten Freshman of the Year honors and Iowa added some depth, including Manhattan transfer Seydou Traore (11.8 PPG, 8.2 RPG).

Iowa will always be able to shoot and score the ball (2nd in conference - 83.1 PPG) but they reverted back to poor defense last season (105.4 points/100 possessions - worst since 2017-18). McCaffery just turned 65 and appears to be done coaching his sons, so there is a possibility that this is his swan song in Iowa City.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
30-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
150-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Over was 10-3 in Iowa games with a total of 161 or less last season. The Hawkeyes are also 51-28-2 against the spread as home favorites since the 2019-20 season began.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3 RETURNING MINUTES: 51%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

85.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#9 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#39 OF 364)

MARYLAND TERRAPINS

2023-24 RECORD: 16-17 SU, 13-20 ATS, 13-20 O-U-P

Kevin Willard's bunch was an excellent defensive team last season, leading the league in scoring defense (65.9 PPG) but they could not throw a pea in the Atlantic Ocean as they rated 320th nationally in shooting percentage (41.3%) and even worse from the 3 (28.9% - 340th).

To solve the Terps shooting woes, Willard hit the portal to bring in Selton Miguel (39% 3P%, South Florida), Rodney Rice, who played locally at DeMatha, but was injured for the better part of the last two seasons at Virginia Tech, and Ja'Kobi Gillespie (39% 3P% at Belmont). Loyola Marymount transfer Chance Stephens shot 37% from 3 two seasons ago. McDonald's All-American Derik Queen, originally from Baltimore, picked Maryland over Indiana and will see immediate minutes down low and should provide a good 1-2 punch with Julian Reese (13.7 PPG, 9.5 RPG, 60 blocks).

Maryland will still be one of the best defensive teams in the conference, but will be in a lot of grinders and close games (9 losses last year by five points or less vs. just one win) and the backcourt is not yet good enough.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
20-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
75-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 13-7 against the spread as a favorite of at least 9.5 since December 29, 2021, and the Under is 43-25 in Maryland games the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3 RETURNING MINUTES: 41%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

85.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#12 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#43 OF 364)

MICHIGAN WOLVERINES

2023-24 RECORD: 8-24 SU, 8-23-1 ATS, 18-14 O-U-P

Juwan Howard is a Michigan basketball legend, but the Wolverines went 8-24 and he was rightfully dismissed. Enter Dusty May, who was arguably one of college basketball's hottest young coaches just two seasons removed from taking FAU to the Final Four.

May did not waste any time adding nine scholarship players - six transfers and three freshmen. Vladislav Goldin (15.7 PPG, 6.9 RPG at FAU) came with May from Boca Raton and Yale transfer Danny Wolf are a couple of seven-footers added to the lineup and Alabama stretch forward Sam Walters joins up front.

The primary question for May is who will be his PG. Great passer Tre Donaldson (Auburn) and defensive stopper Rubin Jones (North Texas) may split duties. Freshmen Justin Pippen, son of Scottie, and L.J. Cason, a May signee at FAU, will also see time. Michigan was dead last in the conference and 336th nationally in turnover margin, so they should improve in that regard. Roddy Gayle Jr. (Ohio State) joins returnees Nimari Burnett and Michigan Mr. Basketball Durrall Brooks for more depth.

After posting their worst record since 1960-61, the Wolverines will likely be the most improved team in the conference and will at least be on the NCAA Tournament bubble in May's first season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

10-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

55-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team's 8-24 ATS record was the third-worst in the nation last year. The Wolverines were 3-19 against the spread in their final 22 games.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1

RETURNING MINUTES: 23%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

87.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#4 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#24 OF 364)

MICHIGAN STATE SPARTANS

2023-24 RECORD: 20-15 SU, 20-15 ATS, 15-20 O-U-P

After losing four starters from a second-round NCAA Tournament team, Michigan State took a trip to Spain this summer to acclimate three new freshmen and two rare transfer portal additions to the roster.

Jaden Akins (10.4 PPG, 3.9 RPG) returns on the wing as the only remaining starter from last year's group. Tre Holloman (5.7 PPG, 2.4 APG, 42.5% 3P%) also returns to play both guard spots, but Jeremy Fears Jr. (3.5 PPG, 3.3 APG), who missed most of last season, inherits the PG spot. Freshmen Kur Teng and Jase Richardson, son of former Spartans star Jason Richardson, will also see time for a club that needs to shoot the 3 more often (30.4% 3P Rate, 324th).

When you have been the head coach of a program for 30 years like Tom Izzo, you tend to get set in your ways when it comes to things like transfer portal. Frankie Fidler (20.1 PPG, 6.3 RPG, Omaha) and he arrived in East Lansing with 7-footer Szymon Zapata (9.8 PPG, 5.6 RPG, Longwood).

Perhaps Michigan State has reached its peak under Izzo, as they have not been better than a 7 seed over the last four years in the NCAA Tournament. However, it is still tough to discount a coach that has reached eight Final Fours.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

+600

NCAA TOURNAMENT

55-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 15-1-1 against the spread with a rest disadvantage last season. The Spartans are also 86-53-1 against the spread at home since the 2015-16 season began, the third-best home cover percentage among teams that have been at the DI level each of the past nine seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1

RETURNING MINUTES: 39%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

81.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#18 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#72 OF 364)

MINNESOTA GOLDEN GOPHERS

2023-24 RECORD: 19-15 SU, 23-9-2 ATS, 18-16 O-U-P

The Golden Gophers played postseason basketball (NIT) for the first time since 2019 and had some positive momentum going forward, but now Ben Johnson is rebuilding again as six players left the program.

Dawson Garcia (17.5 PPG, 6.7 RPG) is the top returning scorer in the Big Ten and can play the 4 or the 5. Johnson would like him to play more inside-outside with him and may be able to do that with the addition of Canisius transfer Frank Mitchell (12.1 PPG, 11.6 RPG) who posted 15 double-doubles last season and ranked Top 10 nationally for both offensive and defensive rebounding rate per KenPom.

Mike Mitchell Jr. (10.2 PPG, 2.8 APG) shot over 40% from 3 last year, but may have to play out of position a bit and share PG duties. Well-traveled Femi Odukale can play multiple positions. Tyler Cochran was the co-MAC Defensive Player of the Year at Toledo. Lu'Cye Patterson (Charlotte), Brennan Rigsby (Oregon), and Caleb Williams (D3) also come in to provide depth.

Minnesota is older but are they necessarily better? They finally got out of the Big Ten cellar last year after residing there in Johnson's first two seasons, but they likely find themselves in that all too familiar position once again.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

200-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

350-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team's 25-9 ATS record was the second-best in the country last season, and the Under is 16-7 in Minnesota non-conference games the past two seasons. That's the sixth-highest non-conference Under percentage in the country.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **40%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

83.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#14 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#55 OF 364)

NEBRASKA CORNHUSKERS

2023-24 RECORD: 23-11 SU, 21-12-1 ATS, 22-11-1 O-U-P

It was a triumphant year for 'Nebraskatball', as the Huskers returned to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in a decade and had its best record (23-11) in well over three decades. Fred Hoiberg has finally found players to fit his system and has adjusted to a more half-court, physical game in the Big Ten.

Unfortunately, he will have to do it this year without big man Rienk Mast, who is redshirting due to knee surgery. North Dakota State transfer Andrew Morgan (12.9 PPG, 5 RPG) will look to replace the lost offensive production and Washington transfer Braxton Meah (77 blocks L2Y) will look to do the same defensively. Double-figure scorers Brice Williams (13.4 PPG, 5.5 RPG) and Juwan Gary (11.6 PPG, 6.1 RPG) are returning veteran leaders for a mostly new team.

Nebraska has been searching for a true PG and may have found one with Rollie Worster. Utah was an NCAA Tournament team with Worster, as they were 12-4 with him, but only 10-11 without him when he was out for the season with a leg injury.

Hoiberg was able to figure out his rotations last year but this team could struggle early and then get better late in the season to make its way toward the NCAA Tournament bubble.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

50-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

150-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 1-8 against the spread as an underdog of 7 or less in the calendar year 2024, and the Cornhuskers were 12-3 against the spread as home favorites last season. The latter is the fifth-best in cover rate among teams that were a home favorite at least four times last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: **3** RETURNING MINUTES: **34%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

84.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#13 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#53 OF 364)

NORTHWESTERN WILDCATS

2023-24 RECORD: 22-12 SU, 19-14-1 ATS, 17-15-2 O-U-P

The Wildcats once again reached the NCAA Tournament and did so in consecutive seasons for the first time in program history. Now they must try to three-peat without Boo Buie, the program's all-time leading scorer. Despite the loss of arguably the greatest player in Northwestern basketball history, the 'Cats bring back the most minutes production (62.4%) and the fourth-most offensive production (55.4%) in the league.

Northwestern shot 39% as a team from 3. They should come close to that again with Brooks Barnhizer (14.6 PPG, 7.5 RPG, 35% 3P%) and Ty Berry (11.8 PPG, 43.3% 3P%). Berry and Matthew Nicholson (5.3 PPG, 4.3 RPG) suffered late-season injuries. Both are back and Nicholson will get help down low from Nick Martinelli (8.8 PPG, 4.3 RPG), who could be the breakout player for Northwestern this season. Jalen Leach (16.2 PPG, 4.1 RPG, 3 APG, Fairfield) will attempt to take Buie's place running the offense.

Aside from Buie's scoring and ball handling, Northwestern returned to the NCAA Tournament largely due to its defense which led the conference in turnover margin (+3.59). They will be a tough out night after night in the Big Ten, but the loss of Buie may be too much to ask for the Wildcats to make a third straight NCAA Tournament appearance.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
50-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
200-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 7-2 against the spread as a home underdog the past two seasons, and it's also 1-6 against the spread as a favorite of more than 14 since November 10, 2022.

RETURNING STARTERS: **3** RETURNING MINUTES: **56%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

87.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#6 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#31 OF 364)

OHIO STATE BUCKEYES

2023-24 RECORD: 22-14 SU, 17-18-1 ATS, 22-14 O-U-P

Jake Diebler took over as interim coach on Valentine's Day after Chris Holtmann was fired. He made a great first impression knocking off No. 2 Purdue and finished the season 8-3, which was good enough to have the interim tag removed.

PG Bruce Thornton (15.7 PPG, 4.8 APG) was second in the nation for assist-to-turnover ratio (4.0). He has some much-needed company in the backcourt with Meechie Johnson (14.1 PPG, 2.9 APG), a Cleveland native who was with the Buckeyes program in 2022 before playing at South Carolina the last two years, and Micah Parrish (San Diego State). Devin Royal (4.7 PPG, 2.4 RPG) is the lone returner in the frontcourt where Diebler hit the portal to find 7-foot-1 Aaron Bradshaw from Kentucky and Sean Stewart from Duke. Both were McDonald's All-Americans two years ago.

The Buckeyes have failed to make the NCAA Tournament in each of the last two seasons, but should find their way back into the field of 68. Thornton is a big-time leader and clutch player that will win a couple games on his own, but Ohio State will be a legitimate Big Ten dark horse if Bradshaw and Stewart can live up to their prep accolades.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+900

NCAA TOURNAMENT
60-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 8-3 against the spread after the coaching change from Chris Holtmann to Jake Diebler. That move was made after a 9-15-1 ATS start. Seven of the team's final eight games went Over the total.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **34%**

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

87.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#7 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#32 OF 364)

OREGON DUCKS

2023-24 RECORD: 24-12 SU, 16-19-1 ATS, 21-14-1 O-U-P

The Ducks were arguably on the bubble last year and won the Pac-12 Tournament. In the NCAA Tournament, they upset South Carolina before falling to Creighton in double overtime. Jermaine Couisnard and N'Faly Dante combined for 123 of the Ducks 160 points in the tourney. Both are gone, but a strong core returns for Dana Altman.

Jackson Shelstad (12.8 PPG, 2.8 RPG) ended up being the standout of last year's freshmen group. Jadrian Tracey (7.6 PPG, 3.6 RPG) began starting in January, replacing the injured Keeshawn Barthelemy (7.9 PPG, 2.3 APG). Newcomers to the backcourt include Ra'Heim Moss (Toledo), T. J. Bamba (Villanova), and four-star freshman Jamari Phillips.

Oregon was denied an NCAA waiver for Dante, so 7-footer Nate Bittle (10 PPG, 4.4 RPG) is the primary post presence after playing just five games last year. Sophomore Kwame Evans Jr. (7.3 PPG, 4.9 RPG) was a five-star McDonald's All-American. Brandon Angel (13 PPG, 4.7 RPG, 44.7%, Stanford) and Supreme Cook (8 RPG, Georgetown) transferred in.

Altman's program is older and that is needed to survive the physical rigors of the conference. Oregon is likely not a Big Ten title contender in the first year, but should likely earn an NCAA Tournament bid in its first season in new surroundings.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
15-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
100-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Despite Oregon's 2024 NCAA Tournament run, the team was 4-11 against the spread in its final 15 games last season. But the Ducks are 35-17 against the spread against ranked opponents since the 2015-16 season began, and that's the best cover percentage for any team to cover at least eight games against a ranked team in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3 RETURNING MINUTES: 43%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

82.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#16 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#62 OF 364)

PENN STATE NITTANY LIONS

2023-24 RECORD: 16-17 SU, 17-13-3 ATS, 20-13 O-U-P

The Nittany Lions went one game under .500 in Mike Rhoades first season in State College, which is respectable considering it was almost a complete roster makeover and because this is the toughest job in the conference. Three starters and two other contributors return for 61 percent of the total minutes.

Ace Baldwin Jr. (14.2 PPG, 6 APG, 2.7 RPG) came with Rhoades from VCU last year and is the key cog in the "Havoc" pressure defense that forced opponents to turn the ball on 20.3% of their possessions (23rd nationally). However, Penn State needs better than 32.9% from 3. The team's other biggest deficiency is rebounding, as they ranked dead last in the conference and 324th nationally in rebounding margin (-4.6), so Rhoades brings in some size with 7-footer Yanic Konan Niederhauser (Northern Illinois), 6-foot-11 freshman Miles Goodman, and Kachi Nzeh (Xavier).

The Nittany Lions should be improved in Rhoades' second year and he has been through the battles with his guys Baldwin and Nick Kern. However, there are too many teams to leap for this group to make the NCAA Tournament.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
75-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
250-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Among teams that have been at the Division I level each of the past three seasons, Penn State is seventh in cover percentage the past three seasons at 58-39-4 against the spread.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3 RETURNING MINUTES: 60%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

92.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#1 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#11 OF 364)

PURDUE BOILERMAKERS

2023-24 RECORD: 34-5 SU, 20-16-3 ATS, 23-16 O-U-P

Matt Painter was finally able to get Purdue to the biggest stage. The Boilermakers reached the Final Four for the first time since 1980 before losing to UConn in the National Championship Game. Purdue is a rarity in college basketball, as they recruit to their system out of the high/prep schools and develop those players without relying much, if at all, on the portal. In fact, all 13 scholarship players have never played anywhere in college except Purdue.

Two-time National Player of the Year Zach Edey is gone, but Purdue still returns three starters, including a backcourt beginning its third season together. Braden Smith (12 PPG, 7.5 APG, 43.1% 3P%) is the lone returning Big Ten First Team player in the conference and Fletcher Loyer (10.3 PPG, 44.4% 3pt) were a major part of Purdue ranking second in 3P% (40.4%).

Purdue still has plenty of size with Trey Kaufman-Renn (6.4 PPG, 4 RPG) and Caleb Furst (2.2 PPG, 2.4 RPG) who will both see minutes at both the 4 and 5. The Boilermakers also have a couple raw bigs, 7-foot-2 Will Berg and 7-foot-3 freshman Daniel Jacobsen.

No Edey, but Purdue ranks second in the conference in points and minutes returning. They are always disciplined and well-coached. The Boilermakers deserve to be the favorite in the Big Ten, but it is not as clear-cut as last year.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+500

NCAA TOURNAMENT
40-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 12-3-2 against the spread in non-conference games last season, but the Boilermakers have the eighth-worst road cover percentage since the 2016-17 season with an ATS record of 31-49-5.

RETURNING STARTERS: **3** RETURNING MINUTES: **50%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

83.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#15 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#56 OF 364)

RUTGERS SCARLET KNIGHTS

2023-24 RECORD: 15-17 SU, 13-19 ATS, 10-21-1 O-U-P

Rutgers brings in the nation's No. 2 recruiting class per Rivals headlined by Dylan Harper, son of Ron Harper Sr. and brother of former Rutgers star Ron Harper Jr., and Airious "Ace" Bailey - both five-star McDonald's All-Americans - who are consensus Top 5 prospects in next year's NBA Draft.

Harper had knee surgery this summer, but will be ready to start the season and the 6-foot-7 freshman can score everywhere on the court. PG Jamichael Davis will be able to distribute to him and other wings like Tyson Acuff (Eastern Michigan), who led the MAC in scoring. Bailey is a 6-foot-10 high-level athlete who will affect both ends and may challenge Duke's Cooper Flagg for the No. 1 overall pick spot next summer. Zach Martini (Princeton) is a pick-and-pop four who shot 37.3% from 3. PJ Hayes IV (San Diego) shot nearly 40% from 3 at San Diego.

Rutgers only brings back one starter in Jeremiah Williams (12.2 PPG), but there has not been this much excitement around this program since they went to the Final Four in 1976. The Scarlet Knights ranked last in scoring and shooting (2P%, 3P%, and FT%) but that can only improve with Harper and Bailey. If they play the typical elite defense that Pikiell demands, Rutgers will go dancing.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
10-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
50-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team closed last season by going 1-8 against the spread in its final nine games, and the Under was 16-6 in games with a total of 142.5 or higher.

RETURNING STARTERS: **1** RETURNING MINUTES: **18%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

89.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#3 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#19 OF 364)

UCLA BRUINS

2023-24 RECORD: 16-17 SU, 15-16-1 ATS, 14-18 O-U-P

The Pac-12's most successful program ended its run in the conference by finishing below .500 and missing the NCAA Tournament for the first time in Mick Cronin's five-year tenure. However, a move to the Big Ten might be what the doctor ordered for the Bruins, as Cronin has always had physical and tough defensive teams (led the P12 in scoring defense last year) and that should fit right in the Big Ten.

Dylan Andrews (12.9 PPG, 3.7 APG) made the leap from role player to the star of the team last season. His new running mate in the backcourt comes from crosstown rival USC as Kobe Johnson (10.9 PPG, 4.6 RPG, 3.3 APG) comes in to be part of a likely three-guard lineup with Lazar Stefanovic (11.5 PPG, 6.1 RPG), who was UCLA's best three-point shooter at 38.9%. Tyler Bilodeau (14.3 PPG, 5.7 RPG, Oregon State) will be the primary offense in the paint.

With the departure of Adem Bona, UCLA could go small ball and play a bit faster. Cronin has a veteran group for his first season in the Big Ten and likely has a faster transition to the new league than his other fellow Pac-12 defectors. UCLA should be back in the NCAA Tournament again.

THE ODDS

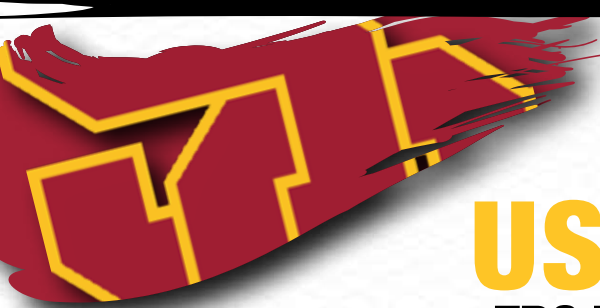
CONFERENCE
+600

NCAA TOURNAMENT
60-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 2-10 against the spread as a home favorite last season, and the Bruins went 8-3 to the Under in non-conference games last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: **4** RETURNING MINUTES: **64%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

85.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#10 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#42 OF 364)

USC TROJANS

2023-24 RECORD: 15-18 SU, 16-17 ATS, 20-12-1 O-U-P

Rob Lanier was fired at SMU and Andy Enfield elected to take a fresh start in Dallas, so the Muss Bus found a destination to Los Angeles. Eric Musselman had taken Arkansas to two Elite Eights and three Sweet Sixteens in four seasons before it all came apart last year with plenty of turmoil in Fayetteville. Now Musselman gets his own fresh start at USC with what is an entirely new roster for the Trojans.

In the backcourt, the Trojans have all-conference team transfers from the Big East, Big West, Mountain West, and Ivy League. In the frontcourt, they have all-conference team transfers from the Big Sky, MAC, and Atlantic-10. So, Desmond Claude, Bryce Pope, Chibuzo Agbo, Clark Slajchert, Saint Thomas, Rashaun Agee, and Josh Cohen will all play a vital role.

Musselman was all about the transfer portal before the transfer portal was cool as he achieved success primarily with transfers at both Nevada and Arkansas. The Trojans are a high-variance team. There is talent here, but most of which are proven performers only at the mid or low-major level. USC looks like a midpack team at best for Musselman's first season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
40-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
120-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Over went 21-12 in USC games last season. The Trojans are also 20-11 against the spread as road underdogs since the 2019-20 season.

RETURNING STARTERS: **0** RETURNING MINUTES: **4%**

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

82.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#17 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#88 OF 364)

WASHINGTON HUSKIES

2023-24 RECORD: 17-15 SU, 17-15 ATS, 18-14 O-U-P

Everything is new in Seattle with a new conference and a new coach. Danny Sprinkle takes over a program that has made the NCAA Tournament once in seven seasons. He has not had a problem getting into the Big Dance with three straight appearances for two different programs.

The first order of business for Sprinkle is to replace 57 points from the Huskies' depleted backcourt. All of the incoming transfers were double-figure scorers at their previous destinations including Luis Kortright (Rhode Island), D.J. Davis (Butler, UC Irvine), Mekhi Mason (Rice), Tyree Ihenacho (North Dakota), and Tyler Harris (Portland). The most talented player in the backcourt is Zoom Diallo, who was a McDonald's All-American. Great Osobor was the Mountain West Player of the Year at Utah State and followed Sprinkle to Seattle. K.C. Ibekwe was in the Top 50 nationally in blocked-shot percentage last year at Oregon State.

Sprinkle will run a great deal of four and five-out looks offensively and that leads to a lot of shots inside the arc, especially at the rim (56.7% 2-point FG - 10th nationally at Utah State in 2024). It also helps to have Osobor down low. If the Huskies can find some 3-point shooting, they could be a surprise and earn an NCAA Tournament bid.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
100-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
150-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Since February 1, 2023, the team is 10-1 against the spread as an underdog of more than 4 points.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0 RETURNING MINUTES: 9%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

85.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#11 OF 18)
NATIONAL RANK: (#40 OF 364)

WISCONSIN BADGERS

2023-24 RECORD: 22-14 SU, 16-19-1 ATS, 22-13-1 O-U-P

The Badgers were 16-4 entering February, but the wheels came off with a 6-10 finish and a first-round exit in the NCAA Tournament. Then, Wisconsin lost three transfers who helped the Badgers to their most efficient offense (17th) in the Greg Gard era. Gard is typically more of an old-school coach but he has had to adapt in this new era of college basketball and embrace the portal.

Nevertheless, Wisconsin starts with two returners on the wing with Max Klesmit (9.9 PPG, 40% 3P%) and John Blackwell (8 PPG, 3.2 RPG). The primary question is who will replace three-year starting PG Chucky Hepburn? Camren Hunter (16.9 PPG, 5 RPG, 3 APG, Central Arkansas) could be first in line. 7-footer Steven Crowl (11.2 PPG, 7.3 RPG) has been a steady performer at Wisconsin, but the Badgers need more. Xavier Amos (13.8 PPG, 5.8 RPG, Northern Illinois) has only played 32 games the last two seasons.

It seems like every time you count Wisconsin out, they find a way to surprise and prove everyone wrong. However, this is a mass portal exodus to overcome. Gard is a solid coach with a high floor, but has not matched Bo Ryan's postseason success. A potential change could be made if Wisconsin does not find it this season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
25-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
130-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Over went 9-2 in the final 11 Wisconsin games last season. Also, the Badgers went 3-9 against the spread on the road last year.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2 RETURNING MINUTES: 46%



Duke Deen

MISSOURI VALLEY

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Life as a mid-major has never been easy in college basketball, but it has gotten so much more difficult in recent years. The ease of transferring and the NIL mean players are being poached at a higher rate and the sharks are circling almost endlessly. Accomplished coaches are also on the move frequently and it isn't always easy to get a comparable replacement.

Those themes are very much present in the Missouri Valley this season. Former Indiana State head coach Josh Schertz is now at Saint Louis and took star Robbie Avila with him. Former Drake head coach Darian DeVries is now at West Virginia and took his son, Tucker, with him. Senior guard Atin Wright took his free transfer opportunity with the coach leaving and went to North Texas. Belmont's trio of sophomore standouts - Ja'Kobi Gillespie (Maryland), Cade Tyson (North Carolina), and Malik Dia (Ole Miss) - all moved to major programs. Bradley standout Connor Hickman transferred to Cincinnati.

There are a lot of good offensive teams on an annual basis. Per Torvik, this was the top conference in Effective Field Goal Percentage offense at 52.1%, narrowly edging out the Ivy League. This was also a good defensive conference last season, due in large part to how the league is called. Fouls are not called often. Teams take a ton of 3s (39.7% 3P Rate ranked sixth) and mid-range jumpers. They don't get to the rim and typically don't have great size, so there aren't a lot of offensive rebounds or free throw attempts.

Sadly, the storylines for this conference are about who is no longer there as opposed to who stuck around or transferred in. As a result, the ceiling for the Missouri Valley has been dramatically lowered. A team or two will undoubtedly emerge, but Indiana State, Drake, and Bradley were all top-60 teams per Bart Torvik and top-65 teams by KenPom at season's end. Bradley is the only preseason top-100 team for Torvik and KenPom entering the season.

**PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS
BY ADAM BURKE**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

71.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#6 OF 12)
NATIONAL RANK: (#156 OF 364)

BELMONT BRUINS

2023-24 RECORD: 20-13 SU, 16-16 ATS, 12-18-2 O-U-P

As mentioned in the conference overview, Belmont's losses are substantial. Malik Dia led the nation in Usage Rate, while Ja'Kobi Gillespie was a 66% 2-point shooter and a 39% 3-point shooter. Gillespie was also fifth in the conference in assists per game. Cade Tyson was a 47% 3-point shooter. Furthermore, Keishawn Davidson and Jayce Willingham are no longer on the team, so each of Belmont's five most productive scorers are not on the roster.

Casey Alexander is a good head coach, but his string of eight straight 20-win seasons is in jeopardy. His teams have also won at least 10 games in league play every one of those years. He did bring some good transfers to Nashville and some good 2-point shooters, but last year's team shot 37.2% from 3 and he doesn't have those kinds of shooters this season. The offense will have to change for a team that took a 3-pointer 42% of the time last season, unless Alexander feels confident in his offense getting the newcomers open looks and knocking them down.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

12-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

1000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 8-16-1 against the spread as a road underdog since the start of the 2019-20 season, which is the ninth-worst mark in the country. The team's 7-15-1 record as a road 'dog over the last three seasons is also good for the 10th-worst in cover rate in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: **0**

RETURNING MINUTES: **20%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

79.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#1 OF 12)
NATIONAL RANK: (#88 OF 364)

BRADLEY BRAVES

2023-24 RECORD: 23-12 SU, 17-15-2 ATS, 19-15 O-U-P

The Braves enter this season as the conference favorite, simply because they did better with the war of attrition than most everybody else did. Head coach Brian Wardle is back for his 10th season. He had arguably his best team last season, even though the 2022-23 team had a better record. Wardle's crew was in the top 30 in 2P% and 3P% offense. They were also 28th in 2P% defense.

I'm not sure I'd bet on similar offensive metrics this season. The Braves took 568 Close Twos as defined by Bart Torvik and 560 Far Twos, so basically mid-range jumpers. Those are typically lower-percentage attempts. They also took 802 3-pointers, but lost a 41% shooter in Connor Hickman. Duke Deen is back and he was a 39% shooter and also the facilitator of the offense. The loss of leader Malevy Leons is big, as he led the team in rebounding and blocks, but more playing time is coming for 7-foot-1 center Ahmet Jonovic.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

+180

NCAA TOURNAMENT

2000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 41-20-2 against the spread as a home favorite since the start of the 2019-20 season, the second-best cover percentage for teams that have been home favorites in at least 15 games in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2**

RETURNING MINUTES: **62%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

74.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#4 OF 12)
NATIONAL RANK: (#118 OF 364)

DRAKE

BULLDOGS

2023-24 RECORD: 28-7 SU, 18-16 ATS, 17-17 O-U-P

Drake will look a lot different this season, as Darian DeVries has taken his talents, and his son, to Morgantown. DeVries led the Bulldogs to four straight top-100 seasons and back-to-back NCAA Tournament appearances. He won at least 20 games in every season. He should thrive at West Virginia, but what about the team he left behind?

Ben McCollum inherits a blank canvas after 15 seasons at Northwest Missouri State, where he won four Division II National Championships and was a 12-time MIAA regular season champion. With a record of 394-91, it is hard to believe that it took so long for him to make the leap to Division I. McCollum brought four players from NW Missouri State with him to help fill out the roster and also hit the portal hard. Last year's Bulldogs went 4-1 in Quadrant 1 games and ranked in the top 40 in 3P%, top 30 in 2P%, and top 50 in FT%. Those are some big shoes to fill.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+550

NCAA TOURNAMENT
500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 11-23-1 against the spread in non-conference games the past three seasons. However, the Bulldogs went 15-8 against the spread in conference play last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: **0** RETURNING MINUTES: **5%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

66.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#11 OF 12)
NATIONAL RANK: (#232 OF 364)

EVANSVILLE

PURPLE ACES

2023-24 RECORD: 17-18 SU, 19-14-1 ATS, 11-23 O-U-P

One of the wildly underappreciated coaching jobs in the country last season came from David Ragland. Evansville went 5-27 in his first season and just 1-19 in league play, but the Aces improved by 12 wins last season. The Aces won 24 games total in Todd Lickliter's three seasons before Ragland took over. The same problem areas Evansville always contends with were there, as this wasn't a very good offensive team, but the team was light years better on defense.

Evansville was 342nd per Bart Torvik in adjusted offensive efficiency during the 2021-22 season under Lickliter and 359th in Ragland's first year. They improved by over 100 spots, but the defense really stood out. Also, by accepting an invitation to play in the CBI, the Aces, who went 16 days between games, got a lot of valuable practice time. Unfortunately, leading scorer and best player Ben Humrichous transferred to Illinois and big man Yacine Toumi went to Seton Hall, so it's tough to see another year of improvement.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
22-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
2000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 23-37-1 against the spread in conference play the past three seasons. The group also played 21 of its last 28 games Under the total last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: **1** RETURNING MINUTES: **28%**



UIC FLAMES

2023-24 RECORD: 12-21 SU, 15-15-2 ATS, 13-19 O-U-P

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

68.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#9 OF 12)
NATIONAL RANK: (#190 OF 364)

Life in the Missouri Valley has not gone well for UIC. They've had two seasons in the conference and have gone 4-16 in league play both years, posting a 24-41 overall record. Luke Yaklich did not work out, so we have a coaching change here with Rob Ehsan taking over. Ehsan was the head coach at UAB before Billy Kennedy and had a couple of 20-win seasons, but didn't have the Blazers at their current level of expectations. He's spent the last four seasons as an assistant at Stanford.

This, like so many teams, will be a roster made up of transfers. Filip Skobalj is the top returnee after scoring 8.2 points per game. Modestas Kancleris was a good scorer at Cal State Bakersfield and Tyem Freeman shot 47% on 3s at Toledo in limited minutes. Ehsan has been attached to Jerod Haase a lot and Haase, who was fired from Stanford, typically has teams that shoot well from 3, but struggle to take care of the ball.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

18-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

2000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 7-15 against the spread in its final 22 games last season. It's also 1-9-1 against the spread as a favorite of at least 8 since the 2019-20 season began.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2

RETURNING MINUTES: 17%



ILLINOIS STATE REDBIRDS

2023-24 RECORD: 15-17 SU, 14-17 ATS, 14-17 O-U-P

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

70.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#8 OF 12)
NATIONAL RANK: (#180 OF 364)

Ryan Pedon paid his dues as an assistant at Miami (OH), Toledo, Illinois, Butler, and Ohio State before getting a crack at Illinois State. In Year 1, Pedon had more conference wins than the team had in the previous three seasons. In Year 2, he led the Redbirds to a four-win improvement overall and a three-win improvement in conference. The team improved in all facets of the game except for 3-point shooting, but that is precisely what Pedon went after in the portal.

He pulled a really good player from the Summit League in Boden Skunberg, who was a pretty average 3-point shooter last season, but a guy who might benefit from more of a supporting cast. He shot 39% from 3 the previous season. Landon Wolf shot 43% from 3 in limited minutes for rival Northern Iowa. Sophomore Johnny Kinzinger is a year older and wiser and shot 40% from 3 last season as his playing time increased late in the year. This is my MVC dark horse.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

10-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

5000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team has the second-worst ATS record (75-102-3) since the 2018-19 season among teams that have been at the Division I level for all six seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3

RETURNING MINUTES: 51%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

71.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#7 OF 12)
NATIONAL RANK: (#162 OF 364)

INDIANA STATE SYCAMORES

2023-24 RECORD: 32-7 SU, 22-15-1 ATS, 22-16 O-U-P

What a story Indiana State was last season. The Sycamores deserved a better NCAA Tournament fate, but didn't let the snub get to them. After winning 32 games and losing to Drake in the MVC Tournament final, the Sycamores went to the NIT and made the finals, beating SMU, Minnesota, Cincinnati, and Utah before losing by a bucket to Seton Hall. The story will not be as compelling this season.

Head coach Josh Schertz is now at Saint Louis and Robbie Avila went with him. The entire starting five left, so new head coach Matthew Graves is starting from scratch. Graves was promoted internally and will have a team full of transfers. Double-digit scorers Samage Teel and Markus Harding come in from Presbyterian and Central Michigan, respectively, and Jahni Summers is a JUCO transfer, so this is a step up in class conference-wise for them. Not much will change with how Indiana State plays, but the talent disparity from last season is the largest in the league.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
20-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Over was 20-9 in games with a total of 159 or less last season. The Sycamores are also 40-21-3 against the spread at home the past five seasons, the third-best cover percentage for a team with more than 10 home games on the betting board in that time.

RETURNING STARTERS: **0** RETURNING MINUTES: **4%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

67.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#10 OF 12)
NATIONAL RANK: (#211 OF 364)

MISSOURI STATE BEARS

2023-24 RECORD: 17-16 SU, 17-15-1 ATS, 17-16 O-U-P

After a couple-year hiatus, Cuonzo Martin is back in the coaching ranks as he takes over at Missouri State. This is his second stint with the Bears, as he was there from 2008-11. Dana Ford only had a losing record once in six seasons, but that wasn't enough and he was let go. All five starters from last season are gone and the program is in a state of flux with a move to Conference USA on the horizon.

Martin has been a very good recruiter throughout his career, securing all kinds of good freshmen to Cal, Missouri, and Tennessee, but he doesn't have the resources or the brand now. His chief transfers in the portal are from Morgan State, IU Indianapolis, Austin Peay, and Delaware State. Some decent players, especially Wesley Oba, but it looks like a rebuilding year where the primary focus will be playing defense.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
35-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
2000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 7-3-1 against the spread in non-conference games last season and is 10-4 against the spread as a favorite of at least 4 since February 20, 2023.

RETURNING STARTERS: **0** RETURNING MINUTES: **1%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

75.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#3 OF 12)
NATIONAL RANK: (#115 OF 364)

MURRAY STATE RACERS

2023-24 RECORD: 12-20 SU, 13-18 ATS, 14-17 O-U-P

This was a better team than the 9-20 record would indicate last season. The Racers were 2-10 in games decided by six or fewer points. Murray State only shot 56.3% on Close Twos as defined by Bart Torvik, meaning shots at the rim like layups, dunks, and anything inside a few feet. JaCobi Wood (51.3%) and Quincy Anderson (49%) were the biggest culprits given their usage. Anderson is gone, but Wood is back. The tough part is that Anderson was the team's best 3-point shooter at 39% and there were only two guys better than 33%.

The other was Wood, so he'll be the leader here. To fix the problem at the rim, Kylen Milton from Austin Peay (54%) and AJ Ferguson (58.3%) from Southern Illinois are now on the roster. Murray State was 62nd in shot share on Close Twos and ranked 293rd in 3P%, so some improvements in those two areas could make this team a contender. A lot of positive regression seems to be on their side if the newcomers live up to their potential.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+500

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Among teams that were favored in more than eight games last season, Murray State had the second-worst cover percentage as a favorite in the country last season. The Racers were 3-12 against the spread as favorites last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2

RETURNING MINUTES: 48%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

75.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#2 OF 12)
NATIONAL RANK: (#110 OF 364)

NORTHERN IOWA PANTHERS

2023-24 RECORD: 19-14 SU, 15-16-1 ATS, 15-17 O-U-P

Come hell or high water, Ben Jacobsen is going to have a solid basketball team. The records aren't always there for Northern Iowa, as their slower style of play often condenses games and tightens them up, although the Panthers have played a bit faster in recent seasons. We'll see what they have in store for this season, as they really need to get better on defense.

Over the last four seasons, the Panthers have been 273rd or worse in eFG% defense. It's the Missouri Valley. Teams make shots. But, still. They haven't had elite offenses in three of those four seasons to close the gap. No matter what, you're going to get one of the best defensive rebounding teams in the nation, but also one of the worst offensive rebounding teams out of UNI. In terms of continuity, the Panthers did keep a trio of solid players that started, but depth will be a huge worry this season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+400

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Under was 14-7 in the final 21 Northern Iowa games last season. Also, the team is 8-2 against the spread on neutral courts over the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3

RETURNING MINUTES: 49%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

72.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#5 OF 12)
NATIONAL RANK: (#144 OF 364)

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS SALUKIS

2023-24 RECORD: 19-13 SU, 18-12-1 ATS, 20-11 O-U-P

One of the more interesting coaching moves in the Missouri Valley involved Southern Illinois. They fired former standout player Bryan Mullins and brought in Scott Nagy, who was willing to leave Wright State after eight seasons. Wright State was perennially solid under his watch, including a couple of NCAA Tournament appearances. They were often terrific on the offensive glass and also played at a heightened pace. If Nagy wants to run here in Carbondale, it will be a tremendous departure from the team under Mullins.

The Salukis were 335th per Bart Torvik in adjusted tempo last season and never higher than 273rd during Mullins' tenure. Wright State was 293rd back in 2019, but has been in the top 25 twice, top 35 three times, top 50 four times, and top 100 in every season since. So, this is a team that is likely to push the pace more. Nagy's Raiders were fifth in the nation in 2P% last season. The roster is full of transfers and, surprisingly, none from Wright State. But Kennard Davis, the second highest-ranked recruit under Mullins did stick around, so we'll see how Nagy uses him.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
10-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
2000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team went 8-1-1 against the spread in non-conference games last season, the second-best non-conference percentage in the nation. The Over was 7-3 in those games.

RETURNING STARTERS: **0** RETURNING MINUTES: **14%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

66.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#12 OF 12)
NATIONAL RANK: (#233 OF 364)

VALPARAISO BEACONS

2023-24 RECORD: 7-25 SU, 17-13-1 ATS, 16-15 O-U-P

Valpo has fallen on really hard times and the program seemed to bottom out in Year 1 under Roger Powell Jr. The team went 7-25 last season and just 3-17 in MVC play. Since joining the Mo Valley, Valpo has not had a winning season in conference play and one winning season overall. Last year's team was 331st in eFG% offense and 348th in eFG% defense, so they were awful on both ends of the floor. They also had one of the lowest free throw rates in the nation, so they didn't get to the rim enough.

Surprisingly, Cooper Schwieger, who thrived as a freshman, stuck around. So did leading scorer Isaiah Stafford, who had 16.9 PPG, but that was a byproduct of volume and not efficiency. Those two combined for over 44% of the team's nightly offensive output. Leading passer Darius DeAveiro stayed, too. Credit to Valpo for getting kids that have bought into the program. Maybe that will lead to some improvement.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
40-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
2000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Valpo's 12-2 ATS road record the past two seasons is the second-best mark in the country. The Over is also 26-13 in the team's road games the past three seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **60%**

MOUNTAIN WEST

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Last year, the Mountain West sent a record six teams to the NCAA Tournament. A seventh program – UNLV – won 21 games and made a run to the NIT quarterfinals. This conference has always been deep, and the 2024-2025 season is no different.

KenPom has the Mountain West as the sixth-strongest conference in the country as we enter the season. Six is a longshot, but this could be a multi-bid league in the NCAA Tournament once more.

The shortest shot to win the conference as of now is New Mexico (+350). The Lobos lost a tremendous amount of talent, but Donovan Dent leads the way for a team primed to compete for a regular season title once again.

Boise State and San Diego State have the same odds to win the conference (+380). The Broncos have the favorite to win Mountain West Player of the Year in Tyson Degenhart and a massive amount of size. The Aztecs lost four starters from last season, but Brian Dutcher brought in a strong transfer class to offset the losses. Nevada (+390) could actually be the best team in the conference. The Wolf Pack boast a frontcourt rife with 6-foot-10 monsters that will make it a challenge for any team to score. They are also one of the oldest in the conference.

There is a dramatic dropoff in odds to win the Mountain West after that, but the talent is still deep. UNLV has the best guard in the conference in DJ Thomas. The Runnin' Rebels finished conference play on a 10-2 run last season and bring back some key pieces of that squad. Colorado State has a true NBA prospect in Nique Clifford and one of the best head coaches in Niko Medved.

The Mountain West has quietly been one of the most competitive and deepest conferences in the country. Over the last two seasons, 10 teams from the conference have made the NCAA Tournament. The depth is now on full display, and it means opportunities for bettors in a conference in which any one of five teams could win it.

Tyson Degenhart





STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

66.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#10 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#221 of 364)

AIR FORCE FALCONS

2023-24 RECORD: 9-22 SU, 10-21 ATS, 20-10-1 O-U-P

Joe Scott's second stint as head coach of Air Force is not going well. The Falcons have not won more than five conference games in a season in his time at the helm, and the team has won fewer than 10 games twice in four years. This season, Air Force has three starters back and five seniors on the roster. It is Scott's most experienced group, but what that means in an extremely deep conference remains to be seen.

Ethan Taylor (13.5 PPG, 4.0 RPG) is the most experienced player on the team. He is a high-volume shooter who hit 35.7% of his 7.6 attempts per game. Jeffrey Mills (9.1 PPG, 38.8% 3P%) and Byron Brown (5.1 PPG) are back as well. Brown put up double-digit scores in three of his last six games last season. Luke Kearney (3.9 PPG) is the sophomore wing to keep an eye on after scoring 27 points in his final three games. At 6-foot-9 he will play a big role in this frontcourt and is one of a few intriguing pieces on this roster. The Falcons will play at a slow tempo and they'll be a solid shooting team. But, this still figures to be one of the cellar dwellers in the Mountain West, even if the youngsters develop.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
200-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team's 10-21 ATS record was the ninth-worst in DI basketball last season. The Falcons were also 4-17 against the spread as either favorites or underdogs of less than 10 points.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3

RETURNING MINUTES: 68%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

84.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#1 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#52 of 364)

BOISE STATE BRONCOS

2023-24 RECORD: 22-11 SU, 16-13-2 ATS, 16-15 O-U-P

The Broncos bring back the core of last season's NCAA Tournament team. Tyson Degenhart – the favorite to win Mountain West Player of the Year – is a 6-foot-8 wing who averaged 16.7 PPG and 6.2 RPG. O'Mar Stanley – also 6-foot-8 – averaged 12.7 PPG and 6.6 RPG. They are the only returning starters for Leon Rice this season, but they are arguably the best returning duo in the conference. This team has size across the board. Emmanuel Ugbo is a 6-foot-8 forward, Javan Buchanan from Indiana Wesleyan is 6-foot-7 and redshirt freshman Dylan Anderson is a 7-footer.

Where this team seems weakest is in the backcourt. Senior transfer Alvaro Cardenas from San José State was a fantastic piece to land in the transfer portal. The 6-foot-1 guard averaged 13.1 PPG and shot 38.5% from deep. He fits perfectly with Rice's system. Outside of that, redshirt freshman Chris Lockett Jr. and true freshman Julian Bowie could have big roles for the Broncos this season. Boise State is a big team at the wing and up front. It was the third-best shooting team in the Mountain West, and will likely be one of the best again this season. But, a lack of experience at guard could derail a promising season if that depth is tested.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+475

NCAA TOURNAMENT
250-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 50-31 to the Over in conference games since the 2020-21 season. The Broncos also went 15-7 against the spread in their last 22 regular season games.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2

RETURNING MINUTES: 42%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

80.5
CONFERENCE RANK: (#6 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#79 OF 364)

COLORADO STATE RAMS

2023-24 RECORD: 25-11 SU, 17-17 ATS, 13-21 O-U-P

Colorado State enters a new era after the departure of star guard Isaiah Stevens, who terrorized the Mountain West for five seasons. Niko Medved enters his seventh with four starters from last year gone. The remaining pieces are great ones to have though, and that starts with Nique Clifford (12.2 PPG, 52.2%, 37.6% 3P%, 7.6 RPG, 1.6 SPG). A true NBA prospect, Clifford could be in contention for Player of the Year in the Mountain West. Senior guard Jalen Lake (6.0 PPG, 1.6 RPG) missed time due to injury. These two will be integral pieces to the Rams' chances this season, but there are plenty of impactful new faces as well.

Keshawn Williams (17.9 PPG, 4.7 RPG) last played in the 2022-23 season, but he was great for Northern Illinois. Bowen Born (13.3 PPG; 17.9 PPG in 2022-23 at Northern Iowa) took 47.7% of his shots from deep last season and figures to fill the same role for CSU this year. Medved also landed 6-foot-8 sophomore Jaylen Crocker-Johnson (9.1 PPG, 5.3 RPG, Little Rock) as an extremely important piece for a team looking for someone to fill the holes in the frontcourt. The Rams have won at least 20 games in four of Medved's six seasons. It wouldn't be a shock to see them fail to reach that mark this season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE **+650** NCAA TOURNAMENT **400-1**

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 24-37 against the spread in conference games the past three seasons. The Rams also went 1-9 against the spread as a favorite of at least 7 after Thanksgiving of 2023.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1 RETURNING MINUTES: 31%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

63.0
CONFERENCE RANK: (#11 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#279 OF 364)

FRESNO STATE BULLDOGS

2023-24 RECORD: 12-21 SU, 15-17 ATS, 19-13 O-U-P

After six underwhelming seasons Fresno State parted ways with head coach Justin Hutson. In his place is 67-year-old Vance Walberg, who last coached at the Division I level in 2008 at Pepperdine. He sports a 14-35 record as a Division I coach and had been coaching Clovis West High prior to being hired by Fresno State. This is a complete rebuild and the Bulldogs look like the worst program in the Mountain West at this point, without question.

Jalen Weaver (7.4 PPG, 2.4 RPG) is the lone returning guard. Weaver was an inefficient shooter, but word out of Fresno is that he fits nicely in Walberg's dribble-drive offense. Junior college Player of the Year Amar Augillard (22.7 PPG, 4.5 RPG, 1.8 SPG) joins the program. They also brought in David Douglas Jr. (37.1% 3P%) from Green Bay after he won Freshman of the Year in the Horizon League. The Bulldogs also got some size in the portal with 7-foot-1 Mor Seck, who is recovering from a torn ACL, but he is athletic and can run the floor, which is what Walberg is looking for from his centers. What bettors will be looking for from Fresno State is unclear, but rim pressure and play in transition figure to be a staple of what looks to be a bottom-dweller.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE **200-1** NCAA TOURNAMENT **750-1**

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 7-16 against the spread in non-conference games the past two seasons, and the Over is 39-24 in Fresno State road games the past five seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0 RETURNING MINUTES: 12%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

82.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#3 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#64 OF 364)

NEVADA

WOLF PACK

2023-24 RECORD: 26-8 SU, 21-12 ATS, 15-18 O-U-P

Nevada is big and old this season. The frontcourt is this team's biggest strength, and that starts with forward Nick Davidson. Davidson – a 6-foot-10 redshirt junior – averaged 12.2 PPG and 7.3 RPG on 54.5% from the floor. Alongside him up front will be center K.J. Hymes, a seventh-year senior who averaged 5.7 PPG and 3.0 RPG. At SF, Tre Coleman is a legit 3-and-D wing (37% 3P%) and is a two-time MWC All-Defense team member. The Wolf Pack finished 42nd in defensive efficiency last season (98.6) and will likely be strong on that end of the floor again.

Steve Alford has a ton of size on this roster outside of those three as well. But, the backcourt will be the position to watch closely after the losses of Jarod Lucas, Kenan Blackshear and Hunter McIntosh. Tyler Rolison only averaged 3.8 PPG last season, but he and Amire Robinson will be asked to do more. Alford landed transfer – and Mountain West stalwart – Xavier DuSell who has played at both Wyoming and Fresno State. He is a knockdown shooter (39.5%) who fills a great need. Rolison projects to be a great facilitator and Robinson a great shooter. If both pan out, this team is extremely dangerous and has a claim to be the favorite to win the Mountain West.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+360

NCAA TOURNAMENT
400-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Since the 2015-16 season began, Nevada is 166-121-16 against the spread. That's the best mark for any team to have at least 10 games on the betting board in each season in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3

RETURNING MINUTES: 47%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

82.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#4 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#61 OF 364)

NEW MEXICO

LOBOS

2023-24 RECORD: 26-10 SU, 23-12 ATS, 17-18 O-U-P

There are not many teams that lost as much production in the offseason as New Mexico did. Guard Jamal Mashburn (14.1 PPG) and forward JT Toppin (12.4 PPG) transferred, and Jaelen House (15.9 PPG) graduated. Still, an extremely talented trio remains, giving Richard Pitino a foundation to build on. At the center of it is guard Donovan Dent, who averaged 14.1 PPG (52%, 37.5% 3P%) and 5.4 APG last season. Dent is extremely talented and plays at the speed his predecessors Mashburn and House played. Center Nelly Junior Joseph (8.9 PPG, 8.2 RPG) returns after a strong first season and co-Sixth Man of the Year Mustapha Amzil is back after scoring 162 points off the bench.

Where the rest of the production comes from is a question for the Lobos. Sophomore guard Tru Washington had some great performances last season, including a 14-point outburst in 21 minutes against Air Force in the Mountain West tournament. Pitino also addressed the backcourt losses with CJ Noland (10.9 PPG, 38.4% 3P%, North Texas). New Mexico is still a great team despite the production losses, but some shops have this team favored to win the Mountain West. They will compete, but that is a bit too strong for a team looking to re-tool this season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+320

NCAA TOURNAMENT
250-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 26-12-2 against the spread in non-conference games the past four seasons and is 19-8 against the spread as a favorite of more than 8 since November 13, 2022.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2

RETURNING MINUTES: 49%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

83.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#2 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#59 OF 364)

SAN DIEGO STATE

AZTECS

2023-24 RECORD: 26-11 SU, 14-21 ATS, 17-18 O-U-P

Brian Dutcher has done incredible work in his time at San Diego State. There is no reason to believe this season will be any different, but the eight-year head coach has his work cut out for him, as four starters from last year's NCAA Tournament team are gone. Reese Waters (9.6 PPG, 40.1%, 3.7 RPG) is back and is a good free throw shooter with the ability to hit from distance at a higher rate than his numbers suggest. Redshirt sophomore Miles Byrd (4.0 PPG) and sophomore BJ Davis (1.2 PPG) are also back and expected to take on larger roles this season.

Still, this season will go as the transfers do, and Dutcher has a tremendous track record of hitting on the new faces he brings in. Wayne McKinney (13.5 PPG, 3.6 RPG, 2.9 APG, San Diego) and Nick Boyd (9.3 PPG, 2.7 RPG, FAU) add shooting to a backcourt that desperately needs it. Up front, Dutcher landed a big piece in 6-foot-10 forward Jared Coleman-Jones (11 PPG, 7.6 RPG, 44.2% 3P%, 1.1 BPG, Middle Tennessee). A season built on transfers is the new norm in college hoops, and there are few who do as well as Dutcher. Look out for the Aztecs to be near the top of the conference once more this season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+450

NCAA TOURNAMENT
120-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 8-16 against the spread on the road the past two seasons, and the Under is 37-25 in San Diego State conference games the past three seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: **1** RETURNING MINUTES: **22%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

67.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#9 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#205 OF 364)

SAN JOSE STATE

SPARTANS

2023-24 RECORD: 9-23 SU, 12-19 ATS, 19-12 O-U-P

Tim Miles got a breakout season from Omari Moore two seasons ago and it led to the most wins for the program ever. But, the other two seasons under Miles have seen a combined 17 victories with only three total wins in conference play. The Spartans lost four starters from last season, and Miles is rebuilding once again at what is arguably one of the most difficult spots to win in college hoops.

The most established player on this roster is transfer Donovan Yap Jr. He averaged 9.0 points last season for Fresno State and gives Miles a potential double-digit scorer in the backcourt. Will McClendon (4.1 PPG, 35.4% 3P%, 3.3 RPG, UCLA) and should be the primary knockdown shooter. Sadaidrien Hall (10.7 PPG, Stephen F. Austin) could be the team's best scorer and was a second team All-WAC member two years ago. Josh Uduje (8.7 PPG) won co-Sixth Man of the Year honors in the Mountain West last season at Utah State. Miles has an eclectic group of transfers this season, but not a group that profiles as great on offense. SJSU might not be the worst team in the Mountain West, but it won't be far from the 11th seed in the conference tournament when the time comes.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
200-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 3-12 against the spread in its final 15 games last season. And among teams that have had at least 40 conference games listed on the betting board since the 2007-08 season, the Spartans have the fourth-worst cover percentage at 132-176-3 against the spread.

RETURNING STARTERS: **1** RETURNING MINUTES: **16%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

79.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#7 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#89 OF 364)

UNLV

RUNNIN' REBELS

2023-24 RECORD: 21-13 SU, 21-11 ATS, 19-13 O-U-P

Only two regular starters return from a 21-win team last season, but they are two massive pieces. Point guard D.J. Thomas (13.6 PPG, 44.9%, 5.1 APG) is one of the best players in the conference already despite being a true sophomore. Rob Whaley (9.8 PPG, 4.2 RPG, 63.8% vs. MWC) is the other. Kruger brought in transfers such as Oral Roberts guard Jailen Bedford (14.8 PPG), DePaul forward Jaden Henley (8.6 PPG) and Boise State guard Jace Whiting (3.3 PPG) to fill in some of the holes on this roster. A name to watch is 6-foot-6 wing Jalen Hill, who averaged 10.7 PPG and 6.1 RPG before a season-ending injury and returns for his sixth season.

Thomas was a revelation for UNLV last season. The Rebels played at a slower pace – 294th in tempo – but they finished with their highest ranking in offensive efficiency (113.0, 71st) since 2018. Thomas raises the floor of this offense exponentially. With Whaley back and Hill returning from injury, this could once again be the best offense Kruger has had in his time with the program. UNLV has been projected to finish around fifth in the Mountain West, but the Runnin' Rebels could surprise some folks once again this season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+900

NCAA TOURNAMENT
500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 19-6 against the spread in its final 25 games last season, and the Over is 40-23 in all UNLV games the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2

RETURNING MINUTES: 41%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

82.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#5 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#67 OF 364)

UTAH STATE

AGGIES

2023-24 RECORD: 28-7 SU, 16-16-1 ATS, 21-12 O-U-P

For the fourth time in five seasons, Utah State enters the regular season with a new head coach. That turnover is not due to a poorly run program, but instead, immense success. The Aggies have won 26 or more games in four of the last six seasons. In comes Jerrod Calhoun after a successful seven seasons with Youngstown State, including a 2023 NCAA Tournament berth. Offense will be the name of the game for Utah State under Calhoun. YSU finished third or better in offensive efficiency in Horizon League play each of the last three seasons. The aim for the Aggies will be to do just that this season, and Calhoun has the returning production to pull it off.

Ian Martinez is back after averaging 13.3 PPG and 3.6 RPG on 38.1% from deep. In the backcourt with him is Mason Falslev who put up 11.3 PPG and 4.4 RPG while shooting 56.2% from the floor. Transfers Dexter Akanno (10.9 PPG, 2.9 RPG, Oregon State), Drake Allen (11.9 PPG, 4.3 APG, Utah Valley), and Braden Housley (10.8 PPG, 3.5 RPG, 3.6 APG, Southern Utah) and Tucker Anderson (Central Arkansas) are among the newcomers. The turnover is extreme once more in Logan, but the expectations should be high as well.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+600

NCAA TOURNAMENT
400-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 58-37-2 against the spread as a favorite since the 2020-21 seasons began. The Aggies are also 18-10 against the spread at home the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3

RETURNING MINUTES: 37%

WYOMING

COWBOYS

2023-24 RECORD: 15-17 SU, 12-17-1 ATS, 17-12-1 O-U-P

The rebuild is on in Laramie. Former head coach Jeff Linder decided to leave the program in early May for a job as an assistant at Texas Tech. Wyoming's athletic department landed on Green Bay's Sundance Wicks as his replacement. Wicks had just one season at Green Bay after three seasons as an assistant here at Wyoming. In his first season in Green Bay, the Phoenix were 345th in tempo and one of the better defensive teams in the Horizon League. Bettors can expect that similar approach in Laramie this season.

Wicks did not get much time to put his roster together, but he did land some solid pieces. Jordan Nesbitt (10.2 PPG, 4.9 RPG, 4.3 APG, Hampton), Obi Agbim (15.5 PPG, 4.0 RPG, D-2), and Matija Belic (3.9 PPG, 2.4 RPG), a 6-foot-7 junior from UC Santa Barbara ready for a massive leap, are the notable transfers. Then there is 6-foot-9 Touko Tainamo (15.2 PPG, 34.9% 3P%, 7.7 RPG, Denver). His ability to rebound and stretch the floor mean he could be Wyoming's best player. Wicks clearly went for size and length with his roster, and the Cowboys have it. The projections aren't friendly for Wyoming, but this team could surprise some teams in conference play given its makeup.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

100-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

1000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 2-9 against the spread as an underdog of at least 9 since March 1, 2023, and the Over went 10-2-1 in Wyoming games with a total of 144 or less.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0

RETURNING MINUTES: 8%



Mark Sears

SOUTHEASTERN CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The SEC tied its previous high from 2018 and 2023 with eight NCAA Tournament bids last season and had one of its teams reach the Final Four for the first time since 2019 (Auburn) as Alabama (2/1 to win SEC) advanced there for the first time in the history of the program. This year the Crimson Tide, a No. 4 seed last year, is expected to be at the Final Four, as Nate Oats' club is ranked No. 2 overall in the AP Preseason Poll. They brought back three starters, including the SEC's leading scorer Mark Sears, added impact transfer big man Clifford Omoruyi (Rutgers), and had the nation's No. 2 recruiting class, including two McDonald's All-Americans, per 247 Sports.

Perhaps, the Tide's biggest competition to win the SEC is right there with them in the Yellowhammer State, as SEC Tournament champion Auburn (+350) returns four starters from a team that led the nation in effective FG% defense (43.7%), but was bounced in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. Bruce Pearl is seemingly always rumored for other jobs, but he's still there.

Of course the biggest story of the offseason in the SEC was John Calipari being lured to Arkansas (15/1). Both parties had seemingly grown tired of each other at Kentucky, as Cal had a strained relationship with the administration and Big Blue Nation had grown restless not making a Final Four since 2015, despite NBA Draft lottery picks coming in and out of Lexington seemingly every year.

Kentucky (30/1) now turns to one of its own as Mark Pope, the captain of the Wildcats 1996 National Championship team, takes over a completely new roster as zero scholarship players return (three from last year's team followed Calipari to Arkansas).

Tennessee (4/1) won the regular season SEC crown in 2024 and made just its second Elite Eight trip in program history, but the Final Four still eludes the Vols.

Texas A&M (18/1) could be the dark horse this season.

The two new SEC members are Texas (15/1), who fights Alabama for honors as arguably the most talented and experienced team in the league, and Oklahoma (75/1), who has failed to make the NCAA Tournament in Porter Moser's first three seasons.

**PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS
BY WES REYNOLDS**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

93.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#1 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#5 OF 364)

ALABAMA

CRIMSON TIDE

2023-24 RECORD: 25-12 SU, 21-15-1 ATS, 27-10 O-U-P

Alabama - Basketball School? Nate Oats would say the answer is yes as the Crimson Tide, who led the NCAA in scoring (90.1 PPG), returns three starters and welcomes aboard one of the nation's best recruiting classes.

SEC Preseason Player of the Year Mark Sears led the SEC in scoring (21.5 PPG) and also hit 44 percent of his 3s. He returns with two other starters - Latrell Wrightsell (8.9 PPG, 3 RPG, 44.7% 3pt), who is back healthy after late-season injuries, and Grant Nelson, who led the SEC at the rim offensively last season (69% FG). Rutgers transfer Clifford Omoruyi gives Alabama the rim presence they lacked last year and should help the Tide give up less offensive rebounds (31% - 277th nationally), which often led to easy baskets at the rim and too many fouls.

Alabama has it all from a roster standpoint and they play a high-octane style. The only question is if they can overcome bad shooting variance that can happen any night in the NCAA Tournament? If that answer is yes, there is no reason this team cannot cut down the nets in San Antonio.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+200

NCAA TOURNAMENT
10-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team had 27 of its 37 games last season go Over the total, the third-highest Over percentage in the nation. But the Crimson Tide were just 2-7 against the spread as underdogs of more than 1 and 13-6 against the spread as favorites of 7 or more.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2 RETURNING MINUTES: 52%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

86.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#9 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#34 OF 364)

ARKANSAS

RAZORBACKS

2023-24 RECORD: 16-17 SU, 12-20-1 ATS, 25-8 O-U-P

After 15 years, John Calipari seemingly had enough of Kentucky and many in the Big Blue Nation had enough of him, so now he goes to another program with fertile ground steeped in tradition at Arkansas.

Trevon Brazile (8.6 PPG, 5.9 RPG) missed eight games with an ankle injury and is the lone returner for the Hogs. Cal did not come from Lexington by himself, though, as D.J. Wagner (9.9 PPG, 3.3 APG), Adou Thiero, and Zvonimir Ivisic (5.5 PPG, 3.3 RPG, 37.5% 3P%), joined three other signees originally committed to Kentucky. Arkansas also hit the portal to land Johnell Davis, the AAC Player of the Year and a member of FAU's Final Four team, and Tennessee's Jonas Aidoo (1.8 BPG).

As usual, Calipari had a top-end recruiting class, rated No. 3 per 247 Sports. Cal's last team in Lexington led the SEC in overall shooting and 3-point percentage, but that team had two lottery picks in the backcourt with Reed Sheppard and Rob Dillingham. This group may be a little more old-school Calipari offense with more drivers than pure shooters. The Sweet 16, which Calipari has not reached since 2019, could be this group's ceiling.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
10-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
28-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Razorbacks had the second-highest Over percentage in the country last season at 24-8-1. And new coach John Calipari's Kentucky team had a 23-10 record to the Over last year.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1 RETURNING MINUTES: 9%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

93.5
CONFERENCE RANK: (#2 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#6 OF 364)

AUBURN TIGERS

2023-24 RECORD: 27-8 SU, 21-14 ATS, 15-20 O-U-P

The Tigers won the SEC Tournament Championship and 27 games last season, but were bounced in the first round by Yale. Bruce Pearl's Tigers haven't made the second weekend since 2019 when they were National Runner-Up.

Auburn should be a SEC title contender again with the return of two-way big man Johni Broome (16.5 PPG, 8.5 RPG). Auburn has arguably the deepest post rotation in the country for a team that led the nation in 2-point defense (42.9%), so they will gamble for steals because they can funnel to the rim with elite shot blockers down low.

Depth is always a major part of Pearl's teams, as they love to run a variety of full-court pressures and you need plenty of bodies with the foul trouble that comes with it. The backcourt is relatively new with the addition of McDonald's All-American point guard Tahaad Pettiford as well as Furman transfer JP Pegues and Georgia Tech transfer Miles Kelly, who both led their teams in scoring last season, along with the returning Denver Jones (9.1 PPG). Expect Auburn to contend for the SEC crown, but expectations will also be for a deeper run in March.

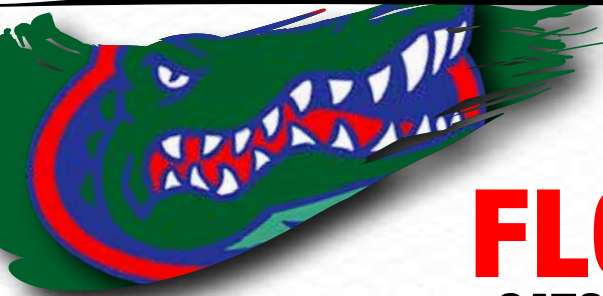
THE ODDS

CONFERENCE **+300** NCAA TOURNAMENT **28-1**

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 19-5 against the spread as a home favorite of 12 points or fewer since March of 2021. The Tigers also went 21-12 against the spread as favorites last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3 RETURNING MINUTES: 57%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

87.0
CONFERENCE RANK: (#6 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#29 OF 364)

FLORIDA GATORS

2023-24 RECORD: 24-12 SU, 16-19-1 ATS, 24-12 O-U-P

The Gators returned to the NCAA Tournament last year after a two-year absence, only to bow out in the First Round with a wild 102-100 loss to Colorado. Perhaps they would have advanced further with the services of 7-foot-1 Micah Handlogten, but he broke his leg in the SEC Tournament and will miss this season.

Florida will not lack size, though, with 6-foot-11 Australian Alex Condon (7.7 PPG, 6.4 RPG) and 6-foot-11 Rueben Chinyelu of the NBA Academy Africa via Washington State. The Gators also have a freshman preferred walk-on in 7-foot-9 Olivier Rioux, who becomes the tallest man in the history of D-1 basketball.

Todd Golden, an excellent coach who got San Francisco in the NCAA Tournament as an at-large in 2022, installed an up-tempo (17th adjusted tempo) offense when he came to Gainesville and Walter Clayton Jr. (17.6 PPG, 3.6 RPG) is the man that makes it go. Will Richard (11.4 PPG, 3.9 RPG) is a steady running mate. Alijah Martin was part of FAU's Final Four team in 2023 and averaged 13 PPG and 5.9 RPG for the Owls last season. Florida should be just on the right side of the bubble to make a return appearance.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE **25-1** NCAA TOURNAMENT **60-1**

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

All five of Florida's games with a closing total above 166 went Over the total. The Gators were 23-12-1 to the Over overall. They also went 2-8-1 against the spread as favorites of at least 9 last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3 RETURNING MINUTES: 51%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

82.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#14 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#71 OF 364)

GEORGIA BULLDOGS

2023-24 RECORD: 20-17 SU, 21-15-1 ATS, 17-20 O-U-P

The Bulldogs finished just 11th in the SEC for Mike White's second season in Athens but played its best basketball towards the end of the season with a run to the NIT semifinals.

Asa Newell, who is the third-highest rated recruit in the history of the Georgia program (behind Anthony Edwards and Lou Williams), was the second-highest rated PF in the 2024 class and the five-star joins his brother Jaden.

To take that next step and return to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in over a decade, the Bulldogs have to shoot the basketball better, as they ranked 12th in the conference and 279th nationally (43%). Silas Demary Jr. (9.7 PPG, 3.8 RPG) should take a big leap in his sophomore season. A pair of Mount St. Mary's transfers, Dakota Leffew (36.5% 3pt) and De'Shayne Montgomery (41% 3pt), will be counted on despite the step up in competition. Tyrin Lawrence (13.8 PPG at Vanderbilt) and Blue Cain (7.4 PPG, 2.5 RPG) will also see significant backcourt minutes.

Georgia is moving in the right direction and is adding talent to better compete in the SEC, but still may be a year away from returning to the NCAA Tournament.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
100-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
180-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Bulldogs closed the 2023-24 season on a 7-1 ATS run in the final eight games. The Bulldogs' 11-1 ATS record in road games last season was the best in the country.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3

RETURNING MINUTES: 27%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

87.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#7 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#28 OF 364)

KENTUCKY WILDCATS

2023-24 RECORD: 23-10 SU, 17-15-1 ATS, 23-10 O-U-P

After a National Championship (2012), four Final Fours, 400+ wins, and 48 NBA Draft picks including 10 NBA All-Stars, John Calipari is done in Lexington after 15 seasons. Big Blue Nation now turns their lonely eyes to an alum as Mark Pope, captain of the 1996 NCAA Championship team, returns to Lexington to reverse the 'Cats NCAA Tournament fortunes, as they have exited early each of the last three years. Pope was successful at Utah Valley and BYU and has a totally revamped roster that returns a "Blutarsky" (0.0) in terms of scoring.

The backcourt features veterans Kerr Kriisa and Lamont Butler, a terrific defender up top. Replacing the lost 3-point shooting punch of Reed Sheppard, Rob Dillingham, and Antonio Reeves are transfers Koby Brea (50% 3P%, Dayton), Otega Oweh (11.4 PPG, 38% 3P%, Oklahoma) Oklahoma, and wing Jaxson Robinson (14 PPG, BYU).

Kentucky does not have any first-round talent on this roster, but they do have a good veteran group that should defend better, as the Wildcats had their worst defensive efficiency ranking since 1997 last year. This roster is full of players that dreamed of playing at Kentucky, but were overlooked. They will be discounted, but do so at your peril because they will surprise this season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
30-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
35-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 7-15 against the spread as a favorite of at least 9 since Thanksgiving of 2022. The Wildcats also had the sixth-highest Over rate last season, as the Over was 23-10 in Kentucky games in 2023-24.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0

RETURNING MINUTES: 0%



LSU TIGERS

2023-24 RECORD: 17-16 SU, 13-20 ATS, 17-15-1 O-U-P

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

83.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#12 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#58 OF 364)

The Tigers probably overachieved last season finishing a game over .500. Perhaps they can do it again, but Matt McMahon must squeeze everything he can out of this roster to do so.

Tyrell Ward (9.1 PPG, 2.3 RPG) and Mike Williams III (7.2 PPG, 2.2 RPG) return and are joined by Cam Carter (14.6 PPG), who started all 70 games at Kansas State the last two seasons, but returns home to Louisiana. Jordan Sears led the Ohio Valley in scoring (21.6 PPG) at UT-Martin last year. Freshman Curtis Givens III and Richmond transfer Dji Bailey, who was voted the Most Improved Player in the A-10 last season, will add depth.

LSU made 256 threes last season and will likely need to make and take more. They should have plenty of opportunity to do so in McMahon's motion offense. McMahon took Murray State to three NCAA Tournaments and is a good coach, but it will take more time in Baton Rouge for him to get LSU back to where Will Wade had it before recruiting violations led to his termination in 2022.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
150-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
130-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team's 23-42-1 ATS record the past two seasons is the fifth-worst nationally. The Tigers' 10-26 home ATS record gives them the third-worst in home cover percentage at 10-26 the past two seasons against the spread at home in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2 RETURNING MINUTES: 38%



MISSISSIPPI STATE BULLDOGS

2023-24 RECORD: 21-14 SU, 17-17-1 ATS, 16-18-1 O-U-P

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

87.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#8 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#27 OF 364)

Chris Jans and the Bulldogs have made the NCAA Tournament in each of his first two seasons in Starkville largely on the back of excellent defense and rebounding. Mississippi State ranked just outside the Top 20 nationally for adjusted defensive efficiency and were eighth in defending 3s (29.8%). The offense has to improve with shooting and taking care of the basketball (18.9% TO%, 298th) if they are going to take the next step.

Josh Hubbard (17.1 PPG) had a marvelous freshman campaign and was one of the nation's highest-usage players. He needs some help in the backcourt and may have it with transfers Kanye Clary (38% 3P%), Riley Kugel and Claudell Harris to provide much needed outside shooting for a team that improved, but still only shot 32% last year. Cameron Matthews (9.4 PPG, 6.8 RPG) led the SEC in eFG% by shooting 69 percent on 2s and he is an excellent defender all over the floor.

Jans took New Mexico State to the NCAA Tournament in four of five years and is doing the same at Mississippi State. His team's defense is good enough to get them on the NCAA Tournament bubble, but this team has to prove it can make shots to make a return appearance.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
30-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
120-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Under is 20-8 in non conference games the past two seasons, the third-highest non-conference Under percentage in the nation. The Bulldogs were also 2-8 against the spread on the road last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2 RETURNING MINUTES: 45%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

82.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#13 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#63 OF 364)

MISSOURI TIGERS

2023-24 RECORD: 8-24 SU, 9-22-1 ATS, 17-15 O-U-P

No team in the power conferences took a bigger dive last year than Missouri, a 25-10 NCAA Tournament team that reached the second round in 2023. Last year, the Tigers were 8-24 and 0-18 in the SEC. This year, Dennis Gates bolstered the roster with transfers and the nation's No. 5 recruiting class per 247 Sports.

PG Tony Perkins (14.4 PPG, 4.4 RPG, 4.6 APG) had nearly 1,200 points at Iowa. Tamar Bates (13.5 PPG) had seemingly lost his confidence shooting the ball at Indiana, but regained it last year at Mizzou (54% 2P%, 39% 3P%, 93% FT%). Marques Warrick was Northern Kentucky's leading scorer last season at 19.9 PPG. The star of the recruiting class is wing Annor Boateng, Mizzou's highest-rated recruit since Michael Porter Jr in 2017. The star of the portal class is former McDonald's All-American Mark Mitchell, who started 67 games the last two years at Duke and is likely a better fit in a more up-tempo offense.

Missouri should undoubtedly be the most improved SEC team, but the frontcourt behind Mitchell lacks proven production. The Tigers will likely fall short of an NCAA Tournament bid, but Gates has a fun offense that will continue to attract talent to Columbia.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
75-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
130-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 10-21 against the spread as a favorite of at least 5 points since December 21, 2020. However, the Tigers are 64-49-2 to the Over in conference play since the 2018-19 season began.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **32%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

84.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#11 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#47 OF 364)

OKLAHOMA SOONERS

2023-24 RECORD: 20-12 SU, 15-17 ATS, 16-16 O-U-P

Oklahoma is about to find out that making the NCAA Tournament out of the SEC is just as difficult as the Big 12 has been in Porter Moser's first three seasons in Norman. Five players transferred out and six newcomers are in this season for the Sooners.

Duke Miles (17.5 PPG, 3.6 APG) led High Point to a Big South regular season title last season and will run the point for Oklahoma. Transfers are the story here, with Kobe Elvis (37% 3P%), Brycen Goodline (47% 3P%), and Jadon Jones (38% 3P%) all on the roster as part of Moser's effort to shoot better from outside. Jalon Moore (11.2 PPG, 6.7 RPG) and Sam Godwin (6.7 PPG, 5.2 RPG) are the lone major returning players on this roster.

Porter Moser led Loyola Chicago to a Final Four in 2018 and to an Elite Eight in 2021, but he will need Sister Jean and any other divine intervention to get this group to the NCAA Tournament as there is just not enough talent here.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
75-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
180-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 10-19 against the spread as a favorite of at least 7 since February 1, 2021, and the group went 7-15 against the spread in the final 22 games of last season after an 8-2 ATS start.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **26%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

85.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#10 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#38 OF 364)

OLE MISS REBELS

2023-24 RECORD: 20-12 SU, 13-18-1 ATS, 18-13-1 O-U-P

It was only natural that Year 1 of Chris Beard was going to involve a transition. The Rebels won 20 games, yet their defense and rebounding, trademarks of Beard's teams at all his stops (Texas, Texas Tech, and Little Rock), was poor. Ole Miss ranked 359 out of 362 teams in terms of opponents' ORB%.

Four starters return, including point guard Jaylen Murray (13.8 PPG, 4 APG, 37% 3P%) and Matthew Murrell (16.2 PPG, 3.6 RPG, 40% 3P%). Transfer Dre Davis (15 PPG, 5.9 RPG) will provide the additional defensive toughness needed on the wing. Davon Barnes (39% 3P%) and Sean Pedulla (154 career 3s) should add some offensive firepower as TJ Caldwell serves as the backcourt's best defender. Additionally, transfers Malik Dia and Mikael Brown-Jones should be potent scorers in the post.

Ole Miss has plenty of punch, but Beard will not be satisfied trying to outscore opponents. Before last season, Beard's teams were rated in the Top 20 of KenPom Defensive Efficiency in six straight seasons. While it is likely unreasonable for this group to reach that standard, it should be dramatically improved enough to get Ole Miss back into the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2019.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
40-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
80-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team went 1-8 against the spread in its final nine games last season. The Rebels are also 9-22 against the spread as underdogs the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3 RETURNING MINUTES: 61%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

80.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#15 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#61 OF 364)

SOUTH CAROLINA GAMECOCKS

2023-24 RECORD: 26-8 SU, 22-10-2 ATS, 17-17 O-U-P

Lamont Paris took over the South Carolina program in 2023 and the Gamecocks went 11-21. One year later, they finished 26-8 and went to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2017. Paris won SEC Coach of the Year and was a finalist for all the national awards. The Bo Ryan disciple brought some Wisconsin basketball to the SEC with a slower tempo (351st), tough defense (4th in defensive efficiency in the SEC), and team play (16th in Assists/FGM).

Jamarii Thomas starred at Norfolk State and was masterful at drawing fouls (230 FTA). Jacobi Wright and Myles Stute contribute more on defense than on offense. Cam Scott, who flipped from Texas to stay home, is the most talented player on the backcourt and may have to contribute immediately. The backcourt is still highly unproven, but the frontcourt features Collin Murray-Boyles (10.4 PPG, 5.7 RPG), who made the SEC All-Freshman Team and is a potential lottery pick next summer.

The Gamecocks will stay competitive in most games solely based on tempo and defense, but they will miss Meechie Johnson's ability to get buckets. Plus, they were on the fortunate side in a lot of close games (8-3 in games decided by five points or less). South Carolina likely regresses this season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
75-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
180-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 18-5 against the spread on the road the past two seasons, the second-best road cover percentage in America in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2 RETURNING MINUTES: 41%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

91.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#3 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#12 OF 364)

TENNESSEE

VOLUNTEERS

2023-24 RECORD: 27-9 SU, 18-17-1 ATS, 17-18-1 O-U-P

The Vols reached the Elite Eight for the first time since 2010 thanks to a familiar recipe, as Tennessee had the No. 3 adjusted defensive efficiency and was No. 6 in eFG% defense. Rick Barnes also loosened up the offense with the quickest tempo (80th) of his tenure. Now is that a philosophical change or was it because they had a first-round draft pick in Dalton Knecht?

Sometimes initiating offense is just having Zakai Zeigler (11.8 PPG, 6.1 APG, 1.7 SPG, 37% 3P%) play his pitbull-like defense and just take the ball away to go for a layup or set up a teammate. Barnes and the Vols are hoping that lightning can strike twice by landing a 3-point marksman in Chaz Lanier (44% 3P%, North Florida) after they got that with Knecht from Northern Colorado. Darlinstone Dubar is an inside-outside threat who averaged 17.8 PPG and 6.8 RPG at Hofstra. Igor Millicic Jr from Charlotte is a bruiser type who averaged 12.8 PPG and 8.5 RPG last season and shot 63 percent on 2s plus shot 38% on 3s.

Tennessee will once again be in the NCAA Tournament. However, it is tough to replace Knecht's production. Another disappointing early first or second-round exit looks likely for Rocky Top.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+350

NCAA TOURNAMENT
50-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 17-8 against the spread as a favorite of at least 12 points since November 15, 2022. The Vols are also 21-10-1 against the spread at home the past two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1

RETURNING MINUTES: 36%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

90.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#5 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#16 OF 364)

TEXAS

LONGHORNS

2023-24 RECORD: 21-13 SU, 14-20 ATS, 20-14 O-U-P

The Longhorns reached the NCAA Tournament again last year, but were bounced in the second round by former Texas head coach Rick Barnes and Tennessee. Texas went 0-8 against Top 30 opponents in the Big 12 last season. Rodney Terry will have to produce with mostly newcomers as all five starters are gone.

Big man Kadin Shedrick (7.7 PPG, 3 RPG) is the main returning contributor as he elevates to a starting role. Arthur Kaluma (14.4 PPG, 7 RPG) is an inside/outside threat that will be given freedom to attack the rim as Terry also brought in two players from Indiana State's NIT runner-up team with Jayson Kent (13.5 PPG, 8.1 RPG) and Julian Larry (11 PPG, 4.8 APG, 46.2% 3P%) who is a pesky defender. Jordan Pope (17.6 PPG, 37.1% 3P%, Oregon State) and Tramon Mark (16.2 PPG, 4.3 RPG, Arkansas) are also in. Five-star McDonald's All-American wing Tre Johnson is a likely one-and-done and borderline lottery pick in 2025.

Outside of Alabama, Texas could very well be the most talented team in the SEC. They were very unlucky last year and could see some positive regression on that end. There are six seniors on this roster, so they have the experience, but do they have the grit to win these close games?

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
15-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
60-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team went 1-7 against the spread as a favorite of at least 17 points last season. The Longhorns are also 11-20 against the spread as underdogs the past three seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0

RETURNING MINUTES: 19%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

91.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#4 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#15 OF 364)

TEXAS A&M

AGGIES

2023-24 RECORD: 21-15 SU, 18-18 ATS, 23-13 O-U-P

The Aggies have made back-to-back NCAA Tournaments for the first time since 2011 and advanced a round for the first time since 2018 before losing to Houston in overtime. Buzz Williams' group ranked 341st in eFG% (45.7) and shot just 29.3% from 3 (342nd). However, they guard and they rebound, as they were No. 1 in ORB% (42.3%).

Wade Taylor IV (19.1 PPG, 4 APG) is the big shot-maker and shot-taker for this team. The Aggies put the foot on the gas tempo wise to get off the bubble. A&M had the nation's fourth-best offensive efficiency after March 1. Zhuric Phelps (SMU), a slasher, and C.J. Wilcher (Nebraska), a three-point bomber, gives the Aggies even more weapons in an up-tempo style.

A&M is also deep in the frontcourt with the returns of Henry Coleman III, Solomon Washington, Andersson Garcia, and Jace Carter, who can all score and rebound. Plus, Pharrel Payne comes in to give the Aggies the rim protection they have lacked. This team has all the pieces and the depth to be a second weekend team in the NCAA Tournament. The scoring went up late in the season playing at a faster tempo, but the shooting percentages must improve for a longer run to become a reality.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
18-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
75-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Over went 9-0 in the Aggies neutral-court games last season. Texas A&M is also 35-22-1 against the spread on the road since the 2018-19 season, and the team was 23-7-1 against the spread as an underdog last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3 RETURNING MINUTES: 69%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

79.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#16 OF 16)
NATIONAL RANK: (#95 OF 364)

VANDERBILT

COMMODORES

2023-24 RECORD: 9-23 SU, 15-16-1 ATS, 12-19-1 O-U-P

The Jerry Stackhouse era came to an end with a 9-23 season last year. Vanderbilt now turns to Mark Byington, who led James Madison to its best season in school history with 32 victories and an NCAA Tournament upset of Wisconsin. JMU was Top 40 in adjusted tempo per KenPom in two of Byington's four seasons there so it is likely that the new coach brings the same to Nashville.

Byington had to hit the portal heavily, but especially in the backcourt. A.J. Hoggard (10.7 PPG, 5.2 APG, 34.7% 3P%, Michigan State), high-volume shooter Jason Edwards (19.1 PPG, 35% 3P%, North Texas), MJ Collins and Tyler Nickel (40% 3P%) (Virginia Tech), Alex Hemenway (42.9% 3P%, Clemson), Grant Huffman, who led the Atlantic 10 in assist rate (35.1), Chris Manon (Cornell), Devin McGlockton (10.2 PPG, 6.3 RPG, 39% 3P%, Boston College), and Byington recruit Jaylen Carey headline the roster overhaul.

Vandy will play a lot of five-out offense. While the Commodores are likely a year away from being more competitive in a daunting SEC, they have the guards to pull a couple of upsets along the way.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
200-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
300-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Commodores are 22-10-2 against the spread in road games over the past three seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0 RETURNING MINUTES: 7%

WEST COAST

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Gonzaga and Saint Mary's are the two programs that garner the most respect from the West Coast Conference. The Bulldogs are NCAA Tournament regulars who find themselves in the Sweet 16 and beyond year after year under Mark Few. Randy Bennett almost always fields a competitive team, and he has won at least 20 games each season but one since 2008.

But do not be fooled; the West Coast Conference is deep.

San Francisco has won at least 20 games in seven of the last eight seasons, and it most recently made the NCAA Tournament in 2022. Santa Clara has quietly become an NBA hub, producing first round selections in two of the last three drafts. The Broncos were also a bettor's best friend last season, finishing with a league-best 18-12-2 ATS (60%) record.

This conference also got deeper in the offseason. Due to the chaos of conference realignment, the two Pac-12 castoffs – Washington State and Oregon State – are now honorary members of the WCC. They can win the regular season title, and are listed on oddsboards to do so. Their presence only makes a sneaky deep league even deeper.

Having said that, there are some very poor programs here.

Pacific was the worst cover team in the country last season at 6-24 ATS (20%). It failed to cover on average by 8.3 points per game; also the worst mark in the country. Pepperdine has not won more than 15 games in the last four seasons. Portland is well-coached with Shantay Legans, but it is rebuilding once more.

Speaking of, there are quite a few great coaches in this league outside of Few and Bennett. Herb Sendek (Santa Clara), Chris Gerlufsen (San Francisco) and Wayne Tinkle (Oregon State) to name a few.

At the end of the day, this conference runs through the Bulldogs, and Gonzaga looks like a national title contender once again. But, Gonzaga has some stiff competition this season, and this could be a multi-bid league once again.



**Augustas
Marciulionis**

**PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS
BY JONATHAN VON TOBEL**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

93.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#1 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#8 OF 364)

GONZAGA

BULLDOGS

2023-24 RECORD: 27-8 SU, 17-17 ATS, 17-17 O-U-P

Four starters are back from the team that made a Sweet 16 run last season. Gonzaga was the fifth-best offensive team in the country by efficiency standards (122.6). With three double-digit scorers from last season – Ryan Nembhard, Nolan Hickman and Graham Ike – back in the fold this team should be one of the most prolific offenses in the country again. If Gonzaga were to improve in any one facet it, it would be on defense. The Bulldogs ranked 51st in defensive efficiency (99.4) and 201st in opponent 3-point shooting. Still, they were the second-best defense in the WCC and are strong enough to deserve the status of odds-on favorite (-225) to win the conference.

The new face in the fold is Arkansas transfer Khalif Battle (14.8 PPG). He's a sixth-year senior with good size that should fit well next to Nembhard (12.6 PPG) and Hickman (41.3% 3P%). Those two form one of the best backcourts in the country. Nembhard (12.6 PPG) was 65th in the country in assist rate last season. Up front, Ike might be one of the best low post players in the game. Last season, this program was supposed to be down. Instead they made a tournament run. This season, there are warranted expectations for the Bulldogs.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
-250

NCAA TOURNAMENT
18-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 15-9 against the spread as a favorite of 14 points or less since January 13, 2023, and the Over is 67-47 in Gonzaga's non-conference games since the 2017-18 season began.

RETURNING STARTERS: **4** RETURNING MINUTES: **80%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

73.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#6 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#137 OF 364)

LOYOLA-MARYMOUNT

LIONS

2023-24 RECORD: 12-19 SU, 12-17-1 ATS, 16-14 O-U-P

Loyola Marymount was an extremely poor team last season. It went 12-19 SU/12-18-1 ATS for the season and just 5-11 SU in conference play. Injuries did play a role, but so, too, did poor play. This season, the Lions are set up to improve. Two of five double-digit scorers are back. Head coach Stan Johnson dipped into the transfer portal and landed some really solid pieces as well. The Lions are stronger up front and along the wing this season. They could be a plucky team early before the market catches up to the improvements this team has made.

The biggest name Johnson landed is former Pepperdine forward Jevon Porter (16.2 PPG, 5.9 RPG), who is an electric scorer. Alex Merkviladze is one of the two returning double-digit scorers for the Lions. He is 6-foot-8 and a 35.2% shooter. Porter and Merkviladze give LMU two solid wing players that will be a handful for opponents to defend. Will Johnston (11.1 PPG) was a 37.5% shooter. Those three should help the Lions maintain their strong shooting from last season. Rick Issanza is a massive 7-foot-1 center which gives LMU a legit rim protector. There is also plenty of depth to this roster with the additions in the portal.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
75-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team was 2-8 against the spread in its final 10 games last season, and each of the program's games with a total lower than 143 went Over last year.

RETURNING STARTERS: **2** RETURNING MINUTES: **37%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

72.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#7 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#148 OF 364)

OREGON STATE BEAVERS

2023-24 RECORD: 13-19 SU, 16-13-2 ATS, 20-11 O-U-P

Oregon State's roster was demolished in the offseason. Two of the program's best players – Jordan Pope and Tyler Bilodeau – transferred to other programs. Five others – including a third double-digit scorer in Dexter Akanno – left as well. Wayne Tinkle was forced to rebuild through the transfer portal. Despite that, the Beavers should be at least on par with the group that finished 13-19 SU/16-14 ATS.

The key piece for Tinkle and Oregon State will be Michael Rataj. The 6-foot-9 forward averaged 8.3 points and 5.8 rebounds. He is a strong rebounder who grabbed 18.1% of defensive rebounds. Rataj also has the ability to space the floor despite shooting just 28.8% from deep. Where the production comes from around Rataj is a question. Parsa Fallah (13.2 PPG, 6.0 RPG) is a 6-foot-9 forward from Southern Utah and Matthew Marsh – a 7-foot-1 transfer from Wake Forest – will round out the frontcourt for Tinkle. Demarco Minor (15.5 PPG, 8.5 RPG) comes in from SIUE to run the show after a strong season. Those four form a strong core for Oregon State to build on. Tinkle loves to play at a slow pace with an emphasis on rebounding and this group should allow him to do just that.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
50-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Over is 40-24-1 in Oregon State home games the past four seasons. Also, the Beavers are 5-17 against the spread as favorites the past three seasons, third-worst for any team that has been a favorite in at least 12 games in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1

RETURNING MINUTES: 21%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

60.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#11 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#308 OF 364)

PACIFIC TIGERS

2023-24 RECORD: 6-26 SU, 6-24 ATS, 13-17 O-U-P

Pacific was one of the worst teams in the country last season. The Tigers finished 6-26 SU/6-24-2 ATS with a -8.3 spread differential. They lost on average by 15.1 points per game and dropped the last 17 games of the season. Usually there is nowhere to go but up for such a moribund program, but that is not likely the case for Pacific this season. All five starters from last season are gone. Transfers from Division I, Division II and JUCOs around the country round out this roster. Dave Smart – a former Texas Tech assistant – has his work cut out for him without a doubt.

Smart brings 6-foot-4 guard Lamar Washington (2.1 PPG, 1.5 RPG) with him from Lubbock. He played in 30 games last season for the Red Raiders, so his experience at such a high level should work wonders as he leads a program at a lower level. Jefferson Koulibaly (SMU) and Elijah Fisher (DePaul) are another pair of transfers. Of the two, Fisher is the big get, as he averaged 10.2 points on 52.0% shooting from the floor. The Tigers will likely not be the pure bet-against team they were last season, but this team still figures to be one of the lowest-rated teams in the country this season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
500-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
2000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team had the nation's worst ATS record in both the 2021-22 and 2023-24 seasons, with its 25-62-2 ATS record the past three seasons being the worst in America. The next-worst cover rate belongs to Tulsa at 32-55-4 against the spread.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0

RETURNING MINUTES: 5%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

65.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#8 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#248 OF 364)

PEPPERDINE

WAVES

2023-24 RECORD: 13-20 SU, 13-18 ATS, 15-13-3 O-U-P

Ed Schilling takes over a Pepperdine program which saw two of its best players – Michael Ajayi and Houston Mallette – depart for greener pastures. Overall, the entire starting five from last season is gone. But, thanks to a strong transfer class the Waves might hit the ground running in Schilling's first season at the helm.

Aaron Clark is the most intriguing transfer. From Wake Forest, Clark is a former four-star recruit that played in just seven games last season. Grad transfer Alonso Faure – who stands at 6-foot-10 – projects to be a starting option at center. Marist transfer Javon Cooley is a 38.3% shooter. Moe Odum played in the WCC for Pacific and knows the conference well. He ranked 17th in the country in assist rate (35.5%). Schilling also has some really intriguing freshmen who could play big roles this season. A name to monitor will be Jaxon Olvera (19 PPG, 6 RPG, 5 APG) for Golden State Prep in Oakland. The other youngster is Taj Au-Duke who averaged a whopping 24.8 points for CALI Prep in Canada. KenPom projects six WCC wins for Pepperdine, but this team could push for a few more if the freshmen get off to strong starts.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
250-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 11-24 against the spread in road games the past three seasons. The program is also 18-37 against the spread as an underdog in all games in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0

RETURNING MINUTES: 5%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

65.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#9 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#251 OF 364)

PORTLAND

PILOTS

2023-24 RECORD: 12-21 SU, 15-16 ATS, 12-18-1 O-U-P

Portland is a young team this season. Seven of the scholarship players for Shantay Legans are either redshirt freshmen or true freshmen. There are some old heads on the roster, but everything out of Portland is that this season is about growth and improvement. That will likely lead to some ugly results, in hopes that the bumps taken lead to good results in the future.

Vukasin Masic (12.5 PPG, 4.2 RPG, 2.9 APG) is one of the seniors on this roster and shot 40.3% from deep. Chris Austin – the other senior – averaged 6.8 points and shot 36.5% from beyond the arc. Max Mackinnon (12.1 PPG, 4.8 RPG) transferred in from Elon. Of the youngsters bettors should track, Bol Dengdit is one of the most important. Dengdit is a 6-foot-10 center who ranked 14th in defensive rebounding rate and ninth in offensive rebounding rate in the WCC last season. Vincent Delano and Kelson Gebbers – a pair of redshirt freshmen – figure to play large roles at point guard and along the wing. Portland has usually been a somewhat quick team with a poor defense under Legans. With so many young pieces, that is exactly what this version of Portland projects to be this season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
250-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1500-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team's 7-18 ATS record on the road the past two seasons is the fifth-worst mark in the country. The Pilots are 4-15 as an underdog on the road in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2

RETURNING MINUTES: 36%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

62.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#10 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#282 OF 364)

SAN DIEGO

TOREROS

2023-24 RECORD: 18-15 SU, 14-17 ATS, 18-13 O-U-P

San Diego improved its record from the first to the second season under Steve Lavin. However, Lavin lost four of his starting five from last season. Lavin must now work with a group built on talented sophomores like Dragos Lungu and Keyon Kensie. There are a few key transfers brought in as well, but the Toreros season will go as the youth does this season.

Lungu (5.1 PPG, 2.6 RPG) assisted on 19.2% of baskets when he was on the floor, and showed some improvement in international play over the summer. Kensie showed some flashes last season, including a 16-point and six-rebound outburst in the final game of the season against Santa Clara in the WCC Tournament. Don't forget about leading returning scorer Steven Jamerson (8.3 PPG, 8.1 RPG). There are also quite a few freshmen that figure to play massive roles. Jackson Gaffey is a 6-foot-6 wing that gives the Toreros length along the perimeter. Chas Lewless, if healthy (back), projects to get time at guard. One transfer to monitor: Division II transfer Kody Clouet averaged 17.6 points and 5.1 rebounds at Southeastern Oklahoma State. Lavin has some talent to work with and has a good track record of developing young players. This team shouldn't take a massive step back this season.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
250-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 14-26 against the spread in non-conference games the past four seasons, and its 27-8 record to the Over in road games the past three seasons is the highest Over percentage in the country.

RETURNING STARTERS: 1

RETURNING MINUTES: 31%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

81.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#3 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#73 OF 364)

SAN FRANCISCO

DONS

2023-24 RECORD: 23-11 SU, 19-14 ATS, 18-15 O-U-P

Chris Gerlufsen has done a tremendous job in two seasons at San Francisco. He has won 43 games in two seasons, and the Dons finished third in the WCC and went 12-6 SU/8-10 ATS against conference foes. San Francisco has three starters back and a team primed to push the powers at the top of the WCC for a spot at the table.

Marcus Williams is the Dons' lead man. Williams averaged 14.0 points, 3.3 rebounds and 3.9 assists on his way toward a first team all-conference selection. A great lead guard, Williams ranked sixth in the WCC in assist rate (23.7%) and eighth in steal rate (2.5%). Malik Thomas is a 6-foot-5 wing player who averaged 12.4 points and shot 40.0% from deep. Ndewedo Newbury averaged 9.4 points and 3.7 rebounds. He finished 36th in the country in true shooting percentage. Then there is sophomore Ryan Beasley who won WCC Freshman of the Year after averaging 7.8 points per game. Despite the losses there is an argument to make that this group is better than last season, and at +1200 there is real value in this team winning the regular season WCC title.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
12-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Over was 16-6 in San Francisco's last 22 games last season, and the team is 11-4 against the spread as an underdog of more than 6 since February 14, 2021.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3

RETURNING MINUTES: 57%

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

79.0

CONFERENCE RANK: (#4 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#93 OF 364)

SANTA CLARA BRONCOS

2023-24 RECORD: 20-13 SU, 18-13-1 ATS, 14-16-2 O-U-P

Santa Clara was the best WCC team to bet on last season. The Broncos went 20-13 SU/18-12-2 ATS, and they finished 13-4-1 ATS against WCC opponents. Herb Sendek had this team playing some of the best defense in the league, and it finished with the best perimeter defense in the WCC. Three starters and a good chunk of their production return this season, meaning the Broncos are ready to build on an extremely strong year.

The lead returner for Santa Clara is former Arizona transfer Adama-Alpha Bal. Bal (14.4 PPG, 3.2 RPG, 3.1 APG) was 14th in the WCC in usage rate and will be the focal point of this offense once again. Johnny O'Neil averaged 11.0 points and 5.5 rebounds and returns to play up front for the Broncos. He was ninth in the WCC in blocks with 25 total. Tyeree Bryan will likely have a larger role after averaging 8.2 points and 3.8 rebounds in 32 games last season as well. Sendek also has depth at center with Christoph Tilly returning after a strong season in which he put up 9.4 points and 4.6 rebounds per game.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
18-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT
1000-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Broncos are 35-15-2 against the spread in their last 52 conference games, giving them the best in-conference cover rate of any team in the nation in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3 RETURNING MINUTES: 72%



STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATING

86.5

CONFERENCE RANK: (#2 OF 11)
NATIONAL RANK: (#33 OF 364)

SAINT MARY'S GAELS

2023-24 RECORD: 26-8 SU, 18-15 ATS, 18-15 O-U-P

Death, taxes and an underrated Saint Mary's basketball team. That seems to be the case once again, as Randy Bennett enters the regular season as the second choice to win the West Coast Conference. Bennett brings back two starters from a team that won the WCC Tournament but lost to Grand Canyon in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. The Gaels went 17-1 SU/12-6 ATS against WCC opponents. Would it really shock anyone if St. Mary's dominated the conference once again this season?

Augustas Marciulionis (12.4 PPG, 3.3 RPG, 5.3 APG) is back after a breakout season in which he won WCC Player of the Year. Returning with Marciulionis is the WCC Defensive Player of the Year, Mitchell Saxen. Saxen (11.8 PPG, 7.6 RPG, 1.3 BPG) is a 6-foot-10 center who was also the conference's third-best offensive rebounder (13.2%). Harry Wessels is a 7-foot-1 center who could play with Saxen and give the Gaels a nearly impenetrable front line. The backcourt is the biggest issue with this roster. Jordan Ross (1.3 PPG) and Luke Barrett (5.5 PPG) figure to take on more, but are largely untested. Regardless, given the strength up front and the track record of Bennett, this team is going to be a formidable foe for Gonzaga once again.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE
+320

NCAA TOURNAMENT
100-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 77-49-3 to the Under in road games since the 2011-12 season began. Also, the Gaels were 7-2 against the spread on the road last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2 RETURNING MINUTES: 51%

WASHINGTON STATE

COUGARS

2023-24 RECORD: 25-10 SU, 18-16-1 ATS, 14-20-1 O-U-P

Washington State is rebuilding. All five starters from last season are gone, and only one scholarship player from that team remains. David Riley comes in after three seasons with Eastern Washington with a tall task. Riley won 31 conference games over the last two seasons with the Eagles. To speed up the process in Pullman, he brought the core of that team with him.

Cedric Crawford (15.4 PPG) is a 6-foot-6 senior who averaged 15.4 points per game. Dane Erikstrup is a 6-foot-11 big man who averaged 10.8 points and 3.3 rebounds. Ethan Price is 6-foot-10 and can stretch the floor. LeJuan Watts (9.4 PPG, 4.9 RPG) averaged 9.4 points and 4.9 rebounds for Riley as well. That quartet brings size, length and experience for Washington State. Riley's teams were some of the fastest in the country, and his offensive approach will be easily implemented with a group of players who have been in it the last few years. The Cougars might replicate the 25 wins from last season, but they won't be as poor as teams that are in similar situations usually are.

THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

10-1

NCAA TOURNAMENT

400-1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The Under was 6-1-1 in Washington State neutral-court games last season. The Cougars also went 6-5 as an underdog on the moneyline last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 0

RETURNING MINUTES: 4%



**Shamir
Bogues**

AMERICA EAST

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

This conference has a perennial boogeyman in Vermont, which has earned at least a share of the regular season crown each of the past eight seasons and has made four of the past five NCAA Tournaments. But the Catamounts are searching for their first NCAA Tournament win since 2005.

Vermont is 45-2 straight-up in home games the past three seasons, which is the best mark in the country in terms of home winning percentage. The team also brings back its top two scorers from last season: Shamir Bogues and TJ Long.

The conference as a whole has been speeding up around Vermont. The Catamounts ranked 278th or lower in total possessions per game in each of the past eight seasons, while UMBC and Bryant both ranked in the top four nationally in possessions per game. Four other teams were in the top 31 in possessions per game.

UMass Lowell is in search of its first NCAA Tournament appearance and looks to build off of having the best road 3-point shooting defense (26.5%) in America last season. The team also returns its top 3-point shooter Cam Morris, who logged 11.3 points and 6.3 rebounds per game for a unit that was 22nd in the country in rebound rate and have four of last season's top six scorers back.

Bryant entered last season in turmoil with coach Jared Grasso dealing with off-court issues and now the team has had a full offseason without headaches under coach Phil Martelli Jr., who looks to improve the team's rebounding. Bryant had an offensive rebound rate of 19.9% last season, which ranked 348th in the country. The team also had a road free throw shooting percentage that was 347th at 63.7%, which offset a defense that ranked fourth in the nation in percentage of opponents field goal attempts that were blocked at 9.7%.

Maine's 15 wins last season were the most since the 2010-11 season. Chris Markwood brings back four of last season's top five scorers, and last year's defense was 50th in America in points allowed on a per possession basis and 48th in turnovers forced per defensive play.

New Hampshire ranked 11th in opponents 3-point shooting percentage on the road last season at 29.7%, but the Wildcats turn over much of last season's roster with Trey Woodyard, who averaged 7.7 points per game, being the only of their top six scorers that returns.

**PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON**

ATLANTIC SUN

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The A-Sun is one of the more enjoyable low-major conferences to bet and follow. The teams in this league play wildly different styles and tempos. It is a conference where two teams ranked in the top 10 in tempo, three teams ranked in the bottom 50, and nobody really plays defense. According to Bart Torvik, one team in the conference ranked higher than 239th in Effective Field Goal Percentage defense.

Very few teams force turnovers, so it is an offense-driven conference with a whole lot of 3-point shooting. The national average 3P Rate was 37.3%. Five teams shot above that, with North Florida first in the nation at 54.7%. Two more teams were right on the national average and four were under it. So, this conference can be chaotic on a nightly basis, but that often makes for good betting opportunities, especially in a league not followed closely at all by the oddsmakers.

This season, the conference loses Kennesaw State to Conference USA, but adds a Division I newcomer in West Georgia. The Wolves made the Division II tournament in three of the last four seasons and won both the regular season and their conference tournament in the Gulf South Conference last season.

Lipscomb projects to be the top dog in this league, as the Bisons were able to hold on to the league's best player, Jacob Ognacevic, who shot over 70% on 2s in 2022-23 before missing all of last season. They also kept Will Pruitt and Joe Anderson, so Lennie Acuff's squad comes into the campaign as the clear favorite.

The fight for second place could be a jumbled mess. Florida Gulf Coast, North Alabama, and Eastern Kentucky are among the top contenders. All three teams return some measure of production from last season. FGCU was the best defensive team of the group and they look to be the chief contender to Lipscomb, but the Bisons should roll to the regular season title and it would be a surprise if they don't get the conference's lone NCAA Tournament bid.



PREVIEW
BY ADAM BURKE



Brandon Whitney

BIG SKY

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

This is my favorite conference to bet on in college basketball. There are so many actionable travel spots and differences between the teams that wagering opportunities are present all of the time.

Two teams have new head coaches, as Sacramento State goes with Michael Czepil and Eastern Washington rolls with former Long Beach State bench boss Dan Monson. Czepil was the associate head coach under Patrick and a move that probably won't move the needle much. At least not as much as the Monson hire, as he led the 49ers to the NCAA Tournament after it was announced he and the program would part ways.

Eastern Washington already played fast anyway, but expect them to ramp it up under Monson, as LBSU was in the top 30 in adjusted tempo in six of the last seven seasons per Bart Torvik. That adds another wrinkle to this conference, where usual suspects Montana and Weber State are expected to be the best teams.

In an era where keeping top talent is hard, Eric Duft was able to keep Blaise Threatt, Dyson Koehler, and Alex Tew at Weber State. He lost top scorer Dillon Jones and right-hand man Steven Verplancken, but Idaho State transfer Miguel Tomley will ease the blow. Expect a balanced scoring attack from the Wildcats again.

As far as Montana goes, Travis DeCuire lost two of his top four scorers, but the Grizzlies have a lot of efficient 2-point shooters. What they'll have to find are some guys that can make outside shots. Northern Colorado is another team in this range, but I see them as a big regression candidate after winning 10 games by six or fewer points and shooting 56.4% on 2s to finish 15th in the nation.

To me, the team to watch in this conference is Idaho. Alex Pribble enters his second season after serving as an assistant at Seattle under a great defensive head coach in Chris Victor. Injuries hurt in Year 1, but this is a better roster for Year 2.

**PREVIEW
BY ADAM BURKE**

BIG SOUTH

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

College basketball can be such a cruel sport. High Point was far and away the class of the Big South Conference last season, but the Panthers lost when it mattered most, as Longwood won 80-79 in overtime in the conference tournament and went on to get the automatic bid. High Point was so good offensively that they ranked 43rd in adjusted offensive efficiency for Bart Torvik and 36th in Offensive Rating for Ken Pomeroy.

That was a team that no high-major wanted to see in the first round, but the Panthers found themselves in the CBI Tournament instead. They did make it to the championship game there before falling short to Seattle. Leading scorer Duke Miles transferred to Oklahoma, but second-leading scorer Kezza Giffa stayed and so did third-leading scorer and top rebounder Kimani Hamilton, making the Panthers the clear-cut favorite to win the Big South.

Longwood's top two scorers and 7-footer Szymon Zapala are both gone, but Colby Garland is a good scorer from Drake and Michael Christmas (11.3 PPG, 6.1 RPG) is back. Remember that the Lancers were just 6-10 in conference play before their highly improbable tourney run.

Mike Morrell's UNC Asheville teams are always solid on both ends of the floor, but the loss of Drew Pember is a huge deal. He led the team in 2-point and 3-point shots and was second in assists at 6-foot-11. Everything went through Pember, who had 20.6 PPG, 8.2 RPG, and 3.5 APG. His 32.2% Usage Rate was the 13th-highest in the nation. There is no Pember on the roster, so this will be more of a guard-oriented team.

Winthrop is actually the challenger I like the most, as Mark Prosser brings back four starters. The Eagles get to the free throw line at one of the highest rates in the nation and improved dramatically on defense from the 2022-23 season. If they can make more 3s this season, they are very dangerous.

Gardner-Webb promoted associate head coach Jeremy Luther and USC Upstate is now led by former Drake assistant Marty Richter.



Michael Christmas

**PREVIEW
BY ADAM BURKE**

BIG WEST

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The conference's .515 straight-up win percentage last season was its best since the 2006-07 season. Interestingly enough, the conference's NCAA Tournament representative, Long Beach State, had a fired head coach lead a remarkable run to the Big West tournament title.

San Diego State assistant coach Chris Acker replaces Long Beach State's Dan Monson and brings with him a former top-40 recruit in Devin Askew. Askew was limited to 19 games at California the past two seasons, but he should be the main cog for a team that figures to be rebuilding.

The regular season champion in the conference last season was UC Irvine, which went 17-3 for an 11th straight season with five losses of fewer in Big West play. The Anteaters ranked sixth in the nation last season in points allowed on a per possession basis, and they return three of their top four scorers.

UC Davis had finished .500 or better in conference play in seven of the past eight seasons and was 20th in the country in turnovers forced per play on defense last season. But the Aggies were 340th in turnovers per possession on offense in home games last season, and they have to replace two of the three players that averaged more than 5.8 points per game last season.

Many thought UC Santa Barbara would finish first or second in the conference last season, but the team finished a disappointing 9-11 in Big West play. The group also finished with a losing record in conference play for just the third time in the past 18 seasons. The Gauchos were also 348th in turnovers per possession on offense in home games last season.

All teams except for Hawaii are based in California, allowing for teams' production on the road to fall off less than in most conferences. Six teams from the Big West ranked in the top 92 in points allowed on a per possession basis. As a conference, teams were 89-73 against the spread in true road games last season.

While CS Northridge and Long Beach State both ranked in the top 24 in possessions per game, the Big West had a lot of slow tempo teams. Five different teams ranked 244th in possessions per game or worse. And with Long Beach State's coaching change, the Beach figure to also play at a slower tempo.

**Barrington
Hargress**

**PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON**

COASTAL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

This conference is made up of primarily slower teams with Charleston having ranked 96th in total possessions per game and no other team in the conference ranking higher than 188th in this category last season.

Charleston will likely run a bit of a different offense with Pat Kelsey accepting the Louisville job after leading the Cougars to each of the past two NCAA Tournaments. But in return, former Louisville coach Chris Mack takes over the program.

Mack is not the only new coach in the conference, as Cornell coach Dan Earl enters the CAA to coach William & Mary. Earl had Cornell 64th or faster in possessions per game in each of the past three seasons. He could look to speed up a team that was 353rd in possessions per game last season.

Excluding the 2020-21 season when Towson played just 18 games due to COVID, the Tigers have four straight seasons of at least 19 wins and return five of their top six scorers from a core that rebounded 38.8% of their missed shots as an offensive rebound, the second-highest percentage in the nation last season.

While North Carolina A&T has had just four of its past 27 seasons result in a record above .500, the team returns its top three scorers from last season, including Landon Glasper, who was 21st among qualifying Division I players in scoring last season with 20.9 points, 3.6 rebounds, 2.2 assists and 1.4 steals per game. But the team was 340th in assists per possession last season.

Stony Brook had the best ATS record in the country last season at 25-8-1, but the team lost all five of its top scorers from last season. Forward Andre Snoddy is the lone returning starter after averaging 5.0 points and 7.2 rebounds per game.

Many teams have a lot of moving parts in the conference, including UNC Wilmington, which had perhaps the biggest win for the conference last season. The Seahawks defeated Kentucky on the road, but they lost all of last season's top six scorers from a team that was second in America in fewest turnovers per possession on offense.

Ante
Brzovic



PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON



**Tyrone
Marshall Jr.**

CONFERENCE USA

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Only two teams finished with a record better than 8-8 in conference play last season. This was a conference in which home-court advantage was critical, as teams went 64-50-1 against the spread in true home games.

The range of teams in the conference is vast as Florida International ranked second in America in turnovers forced on a per possession basis in road games last season, but the team finished last in the conference thanks to being the worst team in the country in opponent 3-point shooting percentage (40.3%). The Panthers were also 361st in rebound rate.

Liberty was a powerhouse in the Atlantic Sun with a 65-14 record in conference play in five seasons before a 7-9 record in Conference USA play last season. The Flames have a tried-and-true style, ranking 302nd or slower in possessions per game in nine straight seasons.

The conference's NCAA Tournament representative from last season, Western Kentucky, saw coach Steve Lutz leave for the Oklahoma State job. Assistant Hank Plona now takes over a program that ranked third in possessions per game, but he brings back the leader in points and assists in Dom McHenry. He also added a slew of transfers to team up with a bench of players that were on a team that was third in the nation in possessions per game last season.

Every team in the conference was outside the top 80 in 3-point shooting percentage with only two teams ranking outside the top 300 in points scored on a per possession basis. Sam Houston State, which finished first in the regular season with a mark of 13-3 in Conference USA play, brings back four of last season's top five scorers and has won at least 10 conference games and 18 games overall in each of the past 11 seasons.

UTEP loses its top two scorers from a program that led the country in turnovers forced per possession last season, generating a turnover on 25.4% of defensive possessions. The team looks to Tarleton State transfer Devin Barnes to elevate the team's 3-point shooting after he notched 13.0 points, 2.2 assists, and 1.3 steals per game on 39.7% 3-point shooting while playing in a similar system last season.

**PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON**

HORIZON LEAGUE

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

This conference has a bunch of new coaches with Detroit, UW Green Bay, IU Indy (formerly IUPUI), Wright State, and Youngstown State all making offseason changes.

Detroit's 1-31 record was the worst in college basketball last season. Michigan State assistant coach Mark Montgomery will look to turn things around. Five of last season's top six scorers are gone from a team that was 327th in points scored on a per possession basis and 359th in points allowed on a per possession basis.

Oakland defeated Kentucky in the NCAA Tournament last season, but the team's top four scorers from a season ago are gone.

IU-Indy, which is 14-79 over the past three seasons, looks to Division II University of Indianapolis coach Paul Corsaro to turn around a team that returns zero minutes from last year's team.

For the first time since the 2004-05 and 05-06 seasons, the UW Milwaukee Panthers have back-to-back 20-plus win seasons. Bart Lundy has the team playing fast, ranking in the top 45 in possessions per game each of the past two seasons in a conference that had four of the top 68 teams in total possessions per game last season.

Fort Wayne was 13th in the country in turnovers forced on a per possession basis and brings back its top two scorers from last season. The team ranked second in the conference in total possessions per game.

Wright State was the fastest team in the conference, but the program replaced coach Scott Nagy with Clint Sargent, who has been with the program since 2016. Wright State was 341st in points allowed on a per possession basis and 352nd in opponent field goal shooting percentage. But the team was third in the nation in points scored on a per possession basis in games played away from home, with its 52.1% road field goal shooting percentage leading the country.

Youngstown State promoted assistant Ethan Faulkner after Jerrod Calhoun bolted to Utah State. The Penguins have had at least a .545 winning percentage in each of the past five seasons, despite having a winning percentage below that mark each of the previous 18 seasons.

UW Green Bay becomes the first program in college basketball history to have a head coach that also hosts a daily radio show at the same time, as the team hired Doug Gottlieb. It was a puzzling move, but he did add Isaiah Miranda, a consensus top-150 recruit in the 2022 freshman class.

**Brandon
Noel**



**PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON**



Caden Pierce

IVY LEAGUE

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Due to the academic standards of the schools in the conference, the Ivy League has the fewest incoming transfers of any conference in college basketball.

After a 6-17 start to the season, Brown ended the season winning seven straight games before falling in the Ivy League tournament final by one point to Yale. But rebounding leader Nana Owsu-Anane, who at 6-foot-8 averaged 14.7 points, 8.8 rebounds, 2.1 assists, 1.2 steals, and 1.0 blocks per game, suffered an injury in early October that might be season-ending.

Brown's injury troubles open the door for Columbia, which returns five of its top seven scorers from a team that was 18th in the nation in 3-point shooting (37.4%). The team has gone .500 or worse in conference play in 29 of the past 31 seasons, but things are looking up for the program.

Yale has been 7-7 or better in conference play in every year since the 1999-2000 season and looks to build off a victory over Auburn in the NCAA Tournament. But the Bulldogs have to replace last season's top two rebounders from a core that was 17th in the country in defensive rebound rate.

Princeton has won 23 or more games in each of the past three seasons after having done so in just seven of its first 120 seasons of basketball. The program returns its top two scorers from a season ago: Xavian Lee and Caden Pierce.

Cornell was the only team that was faster than 143rd in the conference in possessions per game, but coach Dan Earl left to take the William & Mary job. Former Cornell player Jon Jacques was hired as the new head coach after spending the past decade in an assistant role with the program. He'll likely keep things the same.

Additionally, Cornell was 93rd in turnovers forced per possession last season, making this the lone team in the conference to rank better than 177th in this category.

Pennsylvania looks to improve on defense after ranking 325th in points allowed on a per possession basis last season.

**PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON**

METRO ATLANTIC ATHLETIC

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Saint Peter's looks to defend its MAAC tournament title by being even uglier this season. That's a compliment of the Peacocks' style that relies on defense and physicality, not smooth offensive production. Bashir Mason's squad must replace the production of last year's top player Corey Washington (transfer to Wichita State).

Since the MAAC lacks offensively-gifted squads, defense-first teams like Marist, Rider and newcomer Merrimack are also in contention, but Quinnipiac is No. 1 in the coaches preseason poll based on its inside-outside trio of Savion Lewis (7.3 APG) at guard and Paul Otieno (league best 63.8% FG%) next to the Preseason Player of the Year Amarri Monroe (12.9 PPG, 6.9 RPG) down low.

John Dunne's Marist squad will rely on a pair of sophomores Jadin Collins-Roberts (started all 31 games last year) and Josh Pascarelli (10.7 PPG) to run his deliberate offense geared to keep the game in the low 60s.

Rider needs holdovers Tariq Ingraham and T.J Weeks Jr. to replace all the work Mervin James did on the offensive end last season for the Broncs.

Tobin Anderson went portalling to get Iona back to the top of the standings, a regular occurrence under his predecessors Rick Pitino and Tim Cluess. The Gaels starting five could be the best in the MAAC because whoever it ends up being, is experienced and likely was playing in a higher conference a year ago.

From an overall handicapping standpoint, here is what to expect from the MAAC. These squads will beat the hell out of each other during the regular season with many low scoring affairs during their Friday-Sunday games. Come tournament time in Atlantic City, where now only the top 10 schools get an invite, the winner will be the team that essentially outlasts its opponents during physical games, not necessarily by just outsourcing them.



Savion
Lewis

PREVIEW
BY AARON MOORE



Anthony Pritchard

MID-AMERICAN

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The conference was down for its standards last season with a 62-77-1 ATS record in non-conference games. Akron was the only team in the conference that ranked in the top 113 in points allowed on a per possession basis last season.

Akron has made two of the past three NCAA Tournaments despite ranking 294th in 3-point shooting percentage last season. But the Zips are tasked with replacing their top four scorers from last season. They'll also try to keep their defensive intensity up. Akron ranked 21st in opponent 3-point shooting percentage and 53rd in points allowed on a per possession basis last season.

After spending last season at Indiana, Peyton Sparks is back with Ball State. He was the team's top rebounder in the 2022-23 season, but he wanted to test his game at a higher level. Unfortunately, Sparks was glued to the bench in the Big Ten last season, which is why he decided to head back to the MAC. He'll look to lead the Cardinals to a big season in 2024-25.

Toledo has gotten at least a share of the conference regular season title in each of the past four seasons, but the team has zero NCAA Tournament appearances to show for it. The Rockets have a high powered offense that has ranked in the top 35 in points scored on a per possession basis in each of these past four seasons. But in each of the past two seasons, they have been 247th or worse in points allowed on a per possession basis.

Despite ranking just 324th in points scored on a per possession basis, Central Michigan went 10-6 in conference play. The team benefitted from the conference being down offensively. Buffalo, Eastern Michigan, Western Michigan, Miami OH, and Northern Illinois all joined the Chippewas as teams that were 256th or worse last season in points scored on a per possession basis.

After making the 2023 NCAA Tournament, Kent State's 17-17 record last season was tied for its worst win percentage since the 1997-98 season. The Golden Flashes are also tasked with replacing six of last season's top eight scorers.

Ohio is the only team in the conference that returns at least 50% of its minutes played. The team has also had a winning record in all five seasons under coach Jeff Bowles. Additionally, the Bobcats were 18th in fewest turnovers per possession last season. They'll look to Jackson Paveletzke to put up the type of numbers he did at Wofford two seasons ago, when he had 15.1 points and 3.7 assists per game on 39.3% 3-point shooting before spending last season on Iowa State's bench.

PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON

MID-EASTERN ATHLETIC

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Home underdogs went 24-14-2 against the spread last season in a conference that has been a 14 seed or worse in every year since the NCAA Tournament expanded to 64 teams for the 1985 tournament.

With coach Cleo Hill being hired in June, Maryland-Eastern Shore has to replace every player that logged a point last season in a conference in which every team was 157th or worse in points scored on a per possession basis, but all but one team was 233rd or better in points allowed on a per possession basis.

Morgan State brings back all of its top four scorers from last season after being the worst team in the conference in points allowed on a per possession basis, but the team has gone .500 or better in conference play each of the past five seasons.

In 26 seasons playing MEAC conference play, Norfolk State has never been below .500 in conference play and has been .500 or better in 11 of the past 12 seasons. The Spartans' 36-2 straight-up record in home games the past three seasons is the second-best in the country in terms of home winning percentage.

The conference has been represented by Howard in each of the past two NCAA Tournaments and the Bison return their top two players in total points scored from last season

After eight straight seasons of 10 wins or fewer, Delaware State broke out for a 15-18 record last season and top scorer Martez Robinson is back.

South Carolina State went 9-5 in MEAC action last season, just its second time in the past 14 seasons having a record above .500 in conference play.

After ranking 361st out of 362 Division I teams in points scored on a per possession basis, Coppin State loses last season's top three rebounders from a team that was 359th in rebound rate last season.

Bryce Harris



PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON



Zaire Williams

NORTHEAST CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The conference loses two of their stronger members from last season with Merrimack and Sacred Heart going to the MAAC with Division I independent Chicago State and Division II Mercyhurst taking their spots.

Mercyhurst had a record of only 15-16 at the Division II level last season, allowing only 66.2 points per game, but also allowing opponents to make 37% of their 3-point shots — while blocking only 1.8 shots per game, which would have been 350th in the country at the Division I level last season.

Central Connecticut was the best team in the conference in points scored on a per possession basis last season among teams that return, ranking 214th in points scored on a per possession basis and their win total has increased in each of the past five seasons but have to replace three of last year's top four scorers from a 20 win team.

Coach Gerald Gillion got Chicago State to 24 wins as an independent that past two seasons, which was more than the 23 total wins the program had the past seven seasons combined. But he left in the offseason to become the associate head coach within the conference for a Long Island team that has posted a 10-48 record the past two seasons.

The in-conference coaching change has Chicago State needing to replace last season's top three scorers under new coach Scott Spinelli, who was an assistant last season, while Long Island brings in two Chicago State guards in a transfer haul that includes Malachi Davis, who was a former top JUCO transfer that spent last season on Arizona State's bench.

Last season's top three scorers are gone from a Wagner team that made the NCAA Tournament and was 67th in points allowed on a per possession basis and 16th in opponent 3-point shooting. The team also ranked in the top 67 in points allowed on a per possession basis each of the past three seasons.

The conference's bottom two teams are St. Francis PA and Stonehill, which have big rebuilds ahead of them. St. Francis lost its top three scorers from a team that ranked 338th among Division I teams in points scored on a per possession basis and 303rd in points allowed on a per possession basis. Meanwhile, Stonehill ranked 316th in points allowed on a per possession basis and 357th in points scored on a per possession basis.

**PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON**

OHIO VALLEY

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

If you like bad offense, the Ohio Valley Conference is for you. Six of the 11 teams in his conference ranked in the 300s in Effective Field Goal Percentage offense last season. As a result, you did have some decent defensive metrics in the league, as teams simply didn't make enough shots. Morehead State was the best team on both ends of the floor and held up in the conference tournament to get the automatic bid.

The Eagles hung around as long as they could with Illinois, which was about 25 minutes, but eventually lost by 16. Running it back may be tough, as Morehead State bid adieu to head coach Preston Spradlin, as he leveled up to James Madison. Four starters are gone and new head coach Jonathan Mattox's top returning scorer had 4.6 points per game. The 35-year-old Mattox was on the Morehead State staff from 2013-22 before joining Murray State as an assistant under Steve Prohm.

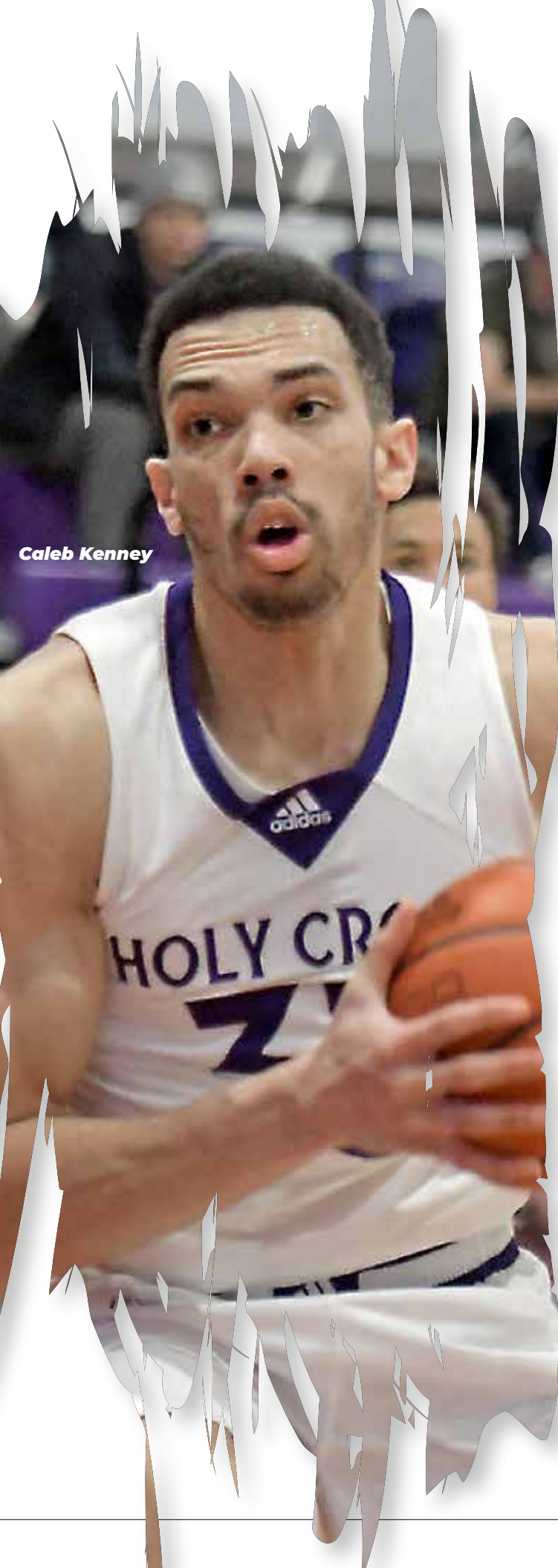
With that in mind, the OVC is wide open for this season. Little Rock will be led by super senior KK Robinson, but most of last year's supporting cast is gone. UT Martin rose up and had a big season last year, but head coach Ryan Ridder is now at Mercer. Top players Jacob Crews and Jordan Sears both transferred to SEC programs and seniors Issa Muhammad and KK Curry are also gone.

Western Illinois was second to Morehead State in adjusted defensive efficiency and a top-20 team in eFG% defense, so maybe the Leathernecks are the team to watch. They had major scoring issues last year, but some exciting transfers have come in and this is a team with great length, as seven players are listed at 6-foot-6 or taller.

Tennessee State strikes me as a dark horse, as they played good defense last season and brought in some more efficient scorers via the portal. Brian Collins has had back-to-back 18-win seasons with 10-8 marks in league play. With no Morehead State this season, improving that by a couple games might be enough.

PREVIEW
BY ADAM BURKE





Caleb Kenney

PATRIOT LEAGUE

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The league has been dominated by Colgate, which has finished either first or second in the conference standings each of the past seven seasons and made five straight NCAA Tournaments. Colgate's 72-6 straight-up record against Patriot League teams is the best record against conference foes in the country in that span, but the program does need to replace each of last season's top three scorers to stay on top.

The Patriot League is a make-it-and-take-it conference with Loyola MD losing 25 games last season, the second-most in program history, despite allowing opponents to rebound just 17.1% of their missed shots as an offensive rebound in home games. That was good for the nation's best home defensive rebound percentage.

The conference was also by far the slowest as a collective in the country with nine of the 10 teams in the conference ranking 302nd or lower in total possessions per game. Lehigh bucked that trend, ranking 75th in possessions per game. The Mountain Hawks bring back their top two leaders in points per game from last season.

Navy returns eight of last season's top nine scorers and each of the top four, including Austin Benigni, who averaged 17.0 points and 3.8 assists per game last season.

Before Colgate's dominance in the conference, Bucknell had a stretch of six NCAA Tournament appearances in 14 seasons (2005-2018) and second-year coach John Griffin, a player from the team that defeated Kansas in the 2005 tournament, returns four of his top five scorers from a season ago.

After missing the whole 2023-24 season, Jalen Rucker returns for Army to aid an offense that was 347th in points scored on a per possession basis last season and posted a 10-22 record after going 17-16 the previous season.

American lives and dies by the 3-point shot, ranking 27th in percentage of shots from 3-point range on offense and 29th in highest percentage of opponents points coming from made 3-pointers.

**PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON**

SOUTHERN

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

All but two teams in the conference finished with a record of 16-17 or better last season, but the conference saw a drop in defense with Samford being the only team that ranked in the country's top 120 in points allowed on a per possession basis.

Samford's 29 wins last season were a program record, having never won more than 24 games at the Division I level en route to the NCAA Tournament. And though point guard and assists leader Rylan Jones is back, five of last season's top six scorers are gone.

Western Carolina's 22 wins last season tied a program record, but the team lost coach Justin Gray in the offseason, replacing him with Gardner-Webb coach Tim Craft. The new lead man will be tasked with replacing each of last season's top four scorers and over 90% of the minutes from last season.

Wofford and East Tennessee have the most returning production from last season. Wofford brings back all eight of the team's top scorers from last season, while East Tennessee ranked 21st in offensive rebound percentage last season and has four of its top five scorers back.

Chattanooga is looking for its backcourt to do big things, as the group returns its top two scorers from a squad that attempted 50.5% of its field goals from 3-point range, the third-highest rate in the country while its 37.8% 3-point shooting on the road was 12th in America.

UNC Greensboro tied with Chattanooga for second in the conference behind Samford, and has won at least 20 games in seven of the past eight seasons with its win total improving in all three seasons under coach Mike Jones. But the Spartans lost their top two scorers from last season.

After coaching last season at UT-Martin, Ryan Ridder takes over as Mercer's new coach and is tasked with replacing all of the top five scorers from last season.

Donovan Atwell



PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON

SOUTHLAND

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The Southland was run by McNeese State last season, as Will Wade's team posted a record of 30-4 in his first year with the program. The Cowboys had never won more than 22 games in any season prior.

McNeese had the highest win percentage against teams within the conference among all Division I teams last season, going 19-1 between conference play and the Southland tournament. The Cowboys bring back much of last season's core while adding four transfers from the power conference level to further improve an offense that was 13th in points scored on a per possession basis last season.

The conference brings in two new members with Stephen F Austin and UT Rio Grande Valley entering from the WAC. This is a reunion for Stephen F Austin, which was a Southland member from 1987-88 through the 2020-21 seasons.

The step down in competition should help a Stephen F Austin team that had its second-worst win percentage in 18 seasons last year, finishing 18-15. The Lumberjacks will look to improve a defense that ranked 345th in opponent 3-point shooting percentage last season (37.1%) and ranked 357th in turnovers per possession on offense.

The conference as a whole is made up of teams that force a ton of turnovers, with Stephen F Austin and UT Rio Grande Valley included. Seven of the top 94 teams in the country in this category are in the Southland, with McNeese sixth and Stephen F Austin seventh nationally.

Texas A&M Corpus Christi had their two losses to McNeese come by a combined eight points and have made two of the past three NCAA Tournaments. The Islanders bring back much of a core that was 21st in points allowed on a per possession basis and 31st in opponent 3-point shooting percentage at 31.1% last season.

The lone loss within the conference for McNeese last season came at the hands of Southeast Louisiana, which has point guard Carlos Paez back for a sixth season after being limited to eight games last season. He'll bolster a team that had an assist on 60.3% of its made field goals, ranking 18th in the country.

**Christian
Shumate**

**PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON**

SOUTHWESTERN ATHLETIC

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The SWAC tournament winner has received a 16-seed in all but one NCAA Tournament since 1998, with the lone exception being when Texas Southern got a 15 in the 2015 dance.

Texas Southern missed the NCAA Tournament after making seven of the previous nine NCAA Tournaments — and three straight — but returns its top two rebounders from last season and was 96th in points allowed on a per possession basis last season.

Despite making just two of the past 17 NCAA Tournaments, Southern was won at least 10 conference games in 12 of the past 13 seasons and while Southern was just 315th in rebound rate, they bring back their point guard from a team that was ninth in turnovers forced per possession on defense and fourth in points allowed on a per possession basis last season.

Only two teams in the conference ranked in the top 260 in points scored on a per possession basis with Prairie View taking advantage on defense, ranking eighth in turnovers forced on a per possession basis last season — and finishing top nine in this category for the fifth time in the past seven seasons.

Perennial punching bag Mississippi Valley State has won nine games or fewer in 12 straight seasons and ranked last in the nation in points scored on a per possession basis and 358th in points allowed on a per possession basis.

Grambling has finished first in SWAC play each of the past two seasons and brings back both last season's leader in points and rebounds. The team made its first ever NCAA Tournament last season.

This is an uptempo conference with 10 of the 12 teams finishing 142nd or faster in total possessions per game with most of these teams having to replace teams ravaged by transfers, including Alcorn State, which finished in the top two in the SWAC standings each of the past three seasons but must replace last season's top six scorers.



**Kintavious
Dozier**

**PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON**



Issac McBride

SUMMIT LEAGUE

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The conference has been controlled by South Dakota State, which has made seven of the past 12 NCAA Tournaments. The Jackrabbits also went dancing last year, but they have to replace their top four scorers and will look to improve their perimeter defense after ranking 286th in opponent 3-point shooting percentage at 35.5% — while 46.9% of opponents field goal attempts were 3-pointers, which was the second-highest percentage in America.

Since moving from the Division III level to Division I for the 2021-22 season, St. Thomas' overall and conference records have improved in every season, and the team went 20-13 overall and 9-7 in conference play last season. Rebounding is the strength here. Opponents grabbed just 20.8% of their missed shots as an offensive rebound, allowing St. Thomas to rank 27th in defensive rebound rate.

All but two teams in the conference — Denver and South Dakota — ranked 194th or slower in total possessions per game last season, with every team ranking 153rd or worse in points allowed on a per possession basis.

After having the fewest points allowed per possession and finishing second in conference play last season, UMKC brings back the most points or minutes of any team in the Summit League.

Since rejoining the Division I ranks prior to the 2009-10 season, North Dakota's 18-14 record was their second-best win percentage. The team returns Amar Kuljuhovic, who led the squad in rebounds with 8.7 points and 8.6 rebounds per game on 45.5% 3-point shooting last season.

Omaha allowed fewer than 75 points per game last season for the first time since joining Division I prior to the 2012-13 season, while Denver has to replace all three of last season's top scorers. That includes guard Tommy Bruner, who was second in Division I in scoring (24.0 PPG) last season.

PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON

SUN BELT

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The Sun Belt had a big moment in college basketball last season. James Madison became a prominent team on the national landscape, including a win in the NCAA Tournament over Wisconsin. Appalachian State actually won the regular season title with two wins over the Dukes and a 16-2 record overall, as they finished their season with a loss in the NIT.

It is unlikely that we have a James Madison this season in the conference, but it is a conference that has improved across the board. The Dukes are also unlikely to repeat last season's run, as head coach Mark Byington is now at Vanderbilt. JMU does have a strong replacement in Preston Spradlin, but there is virtually no returning production on the roster.

Old Dominion has a new bench boss in Mike K. Jones and Marshall could look a little different under promoted assistant Cornelius Jackson. That's it for the coaching changes, as several Sun Belt programs made a change last season or within the last couple. It is a huge conference with 14 teams, so you get some big talent disparities and a wide range of styles.

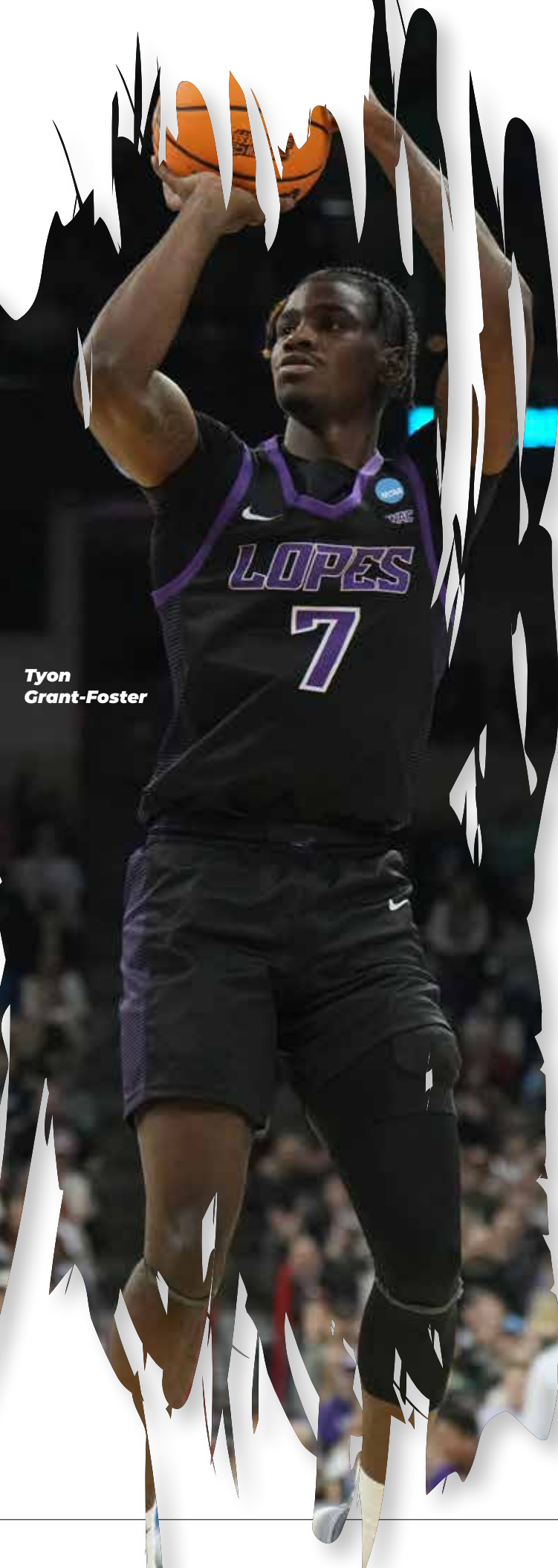
This was the third-fastest conference on average by adjusted tempo per Bart Torvik, trailing America East and the SEC, but teams don't chuck as many 3s as you would expect. The Sun Belt was 22nd in 3P Rate, so it's not run and gun, but there is a lot of slashing to the basket and also a conference that gets a possession bump by having a lot of offensive rebounds.

The most exciting transfer group to me is at Georgia State, where third-year head coach Jonas Hayes had a four-win improvement from Year 1 to Year 2 and brought in some good scorers in Justin Archer, Zarique Nutter, Nick McMullen, and Cesare Edwards. Southern Miss also added an impact player in DeAntoni Gordon from Little Rock. Those are my dark horses in a league where Arkansas State and Troy will be highly rated and James Madison and App State will live early on reputation.

PREVIEW
BY ADAM BURKE



Nate
Martin



**Tyon
Grant-Foster**

WESTERN ATHLETIC

CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The conference was controlled by Grand Canyon last season, which won a franchise record 30 games. The Antelopes' 79.1 points per game was 3.2 points per game more than in any of their other 10 seasons at the Division I level. They also return Tyon Grant-Foster, who led the way with 20.1 points, 6.1 rebounds, 1.7 steals, and 1.5 blocks per game last season.

The WAC is down to nine members with UT Rio Grande Valley and Stephen F Austin both leaving for the Southland. The remaining teams in the conference are poor when it comes to 3-point shooting, with UT Arlington, which was 96th in 3-point shooting percentage, being the lone team in the conference that was in the top 146 in 3-point shooting percentage last season.

A clean bill of health might be all Cal Baptist needs to ascend, as its had an 11-8 record with Dominique Daniels in the lineup. He led the team with 19.2 points and 2.9 assists per game on 36.3% 3-point shooting, but the team was 5-9 without him.

Most teams in the conference look to generate a bunch of turnovers with Abilene Christian chief among that, as the team was 31st in turnovers forced per possession on defense — which was actually the program's worst mark since the 2015-16 season.

Free throw shooting is magnified in this conference, as every team in the WAC ranked 199th or worse in fouls committed on a per play basis on defense. Utah Tech will desperately look to improve on ranking 354th in free throw shooting percentage at 63.7%

After ranking 360th in home 3-point shooting percentage and 352nd in overall 3-point shooting percentage, Utah Valley looks to a turned over roster with three of last season's top four scorers gone. The offense will look to take better advantage of the fact that its defense has been in the top 37 in points allowed on a per possession basis each of the past three seasons.

**PREVIEW
BY GREG PETERSON**