

COLLEGE BASKETBALL BETTING GUIDE

VSIN **PRO**



DESTINATION: DETROIT

TIPS & STRATEGIES FOR BETTING COLLEGE BASKETBALL

OUR **PRO GUIDE** INCLUDES

- MATT YOUMANS' PRESEASON TOP 50
- TEAM AND CONFERENCE OVERVIEWS
- BEST BETS ON NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP & AWARDS

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ODDS WITHIN GUIDE COURTESY
OF CIRCA SPORTS AND
ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

VSIN STAFF/CONTRIBUTORS

COVER: Drew Jennison
DATABASE MANAGER: Jason Latus
LAYOUT AND DESIGN: Matt Devine
SENIOR EDITOR: Zachary Cohen
MANAGING EDITOR: Adam Burke
WRITERS: Steve Makinen,
Aaron Moore, Wes Reynolds,
Jonathan Von Tobel and Matt Youmans

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Greetings, everyone!

College basketball season really sneaks up on all of us in the heart of football season and with the NBA and NHL going on. But it is also a sport that has some excellent betting opportunities early in the season for those who are prepared and that's where we come in.

With the transfer portal reshaping rosters and coaching changes creating new opportunities and challenges, college basketball handicapping requires more preparation than ever. That's where this guide comes in. We've put together the information and analysis you need to get a head start on the season, with an overview of every conference and individual team previews for the top 10 conferences: ACC, American, Atlantic 10, Big 12, Big East, Big Ten, Missouri Valley, Mountain West, Pac-12 and SEC.

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

- Matt Youmans: Preseason Top 50 and SEC
- Aaron Moore: Features on the Wooden Award, Ken Pomeroy championship criteria, and the A-10, Big East, CAA, MAAC, NEC, and Patriot
- Jonathan Von Tobel: Mountain West and Pac-12
- Wes Reynolds: Big Ten and Horizon
- Senior Editor Zachary Cohen: NCAA Champion futures markets, ACC, and Big 12
- Adam Burke: American, Missouri Valley, and 17 smaller conferences
- Head of Analytics Steve Makinen: Recruiting rankings, power ratings, and team stats

And, as always, best bets from VSIN hosts and our friends at RotoWire on futures and awards.

Thank you for being a VSIN Pro Subscriber. We're locked into so many different sports right now and provide something for everybody, so please encourage your friends, colleagues, family members, acquaintances, and even people you don't really like to check us out, as we keep pushing to be bigger and better.

Happy reading and happy college basketball season!

Adam Burke
Managing Editor, VSIN.com
aburke@vsin.com
[@SkatingTripods](#) on X



VSIN COLLEGE BASKETBALL

BEST BETS

MATT YOUMANS

DUKE TO WIN ACC REGULAR SEASON (-135)

The haters don't want to hear it, but Duke boasts the nation's most talented roster. While NBA stars Cooper Flagg and Cameron Boozer are long gone, coach Jon Scheyer still has an abundance of high-end players. In addition to returnees Cayden Boozer, Caleb Foster, Patrick Ngongba, and Dame Sarr, Duke will unveil 7-foot-2 Joaquim Boumtje Boumtje and guard Deron Rippey to headline a phenomenal freshman class. Scheyer also snagged Wisconsin senior transfer John Blackwell. The only ACC opponent that comes close to matching Duke's talent is Louisville, and the Devils deserve to be odds-on favorites in a two-horse race.

UCONN TO WIN BIG EAST REGULAR SEASON (+140)

Rick Pitino coached St. John's to the conference championship last season, and Dan Hurley will be out for revenge. Pitino's roster is full of newcomers and unknowns, and he's got to replace low-post horse Zuby Ejiofor. Hurley has to replace team leaders Alex Karaban and Tarris Reed, and that starts with senior guard Silas Demary Jr. and sophomore sharpshooter Braylon Mullins. The Huskies added transfers Nikolas Khamenia (Duke) and Najai Hines (Seton Hall) to boost the frontcourt. Hurley's act can be unbearable, but UConn, which cashed for me in this spot last year at +360 to reach the Final Four, is usually a good bet.

MICHIGAN STATE TO REACH FINAL FOUR (+450)

An experienced point guard can lead a team a long way in March, and Michigan State has the nation's best in junior Jeremy Fears Jr. Spartans coach Tom Izzo is overdue to make it to another Final Four, which happens to be in Detroit in 2027. Fears (15.2 PPG, 9.4 APG) and senior Coen Carr, who's an explosive athlete, are invaluable veteran leaders. Izzo signed a big-time recruiting class highlighted by McDonald's All-American guard Jasiah Jervis.

WES REYNOLDS

WICHITA STATE (+250) TO WIN THE AMERICAN

The Shockers sat at 15-10 on Valentine's Day last year and then won six straight games to finish third in the AAC. They were bounced in the semifinals by South Florida, the clear top team in the league, before winning two games in the NIT and falling just one game short of Hinkle Fieldhouse.

Wichita State returns 10 players from last year, including four with starting experience. Paul Mills' group has the best frontcourt in the American, led by 7-foot-2 Will Berg (8.8 PPG, 8.1 RPG), last year's AAC Sixth Man of the Year who once backed up Zach Edey at Purdue.

In late September, the program received some more good news as Kenyon Giles was ruled eligible for another season. He led the Shockers in scoring at 19.1 points per game and set a program record by making 125 3-pointers last year. Giles also has some transfer support in the backcourt with Jahari Long (George Mason) and Jordan Frison (Chattanooga) coming into the fold.

Mills, who once guided a No. 15-seeded Oral Roberts team to the Sweet 16 in the 2021 NCAA Tournament, has improved this program in each of his three years in Wichita, from 15 wins to 19 and then to 24 last year. With South Florida replacing everyone, including its coach, UAB and Tulsa losing all five starters, and Penny Hardaway trying to transform a disappointing Memphis group, Wichita State has the most experience of any team at the top of the conference.

SAINT LOUIS (+220) TO WIN THE ATLANTIC 10

Josh Schertz is annually one of the coaches mentioned prominently on the coaching carousel, with his success at D-II Lincoln Memorial, Indiana State, and now Saint Louis. The Billikens shared the regular-season title and received an at-large bid to the NCAA Tournament before bowing out against eventual national champion Michigan in the second round.

Saint Louis believed it was going to have three starters back but now has four, with "Cream Abdul-Jabbar" Robbie Avila being ruled eligible. The bespectacled wonder returns along with Amari McCottry, Quentin Jones, Trey Green, Kellen Thames, and Ishan Sharma. So, that is six of the top seven scorers returning, all of whom averaged nine or more points per game.

The Billikens were second in effective field-goal percentage on offense and third in the same category on defense. That is not just in the A-10, but nationally. Only Belmont shot the 3 better than SLU last year (39.9%), and now with Avila back in the fold, the Billikens will be one of the top 2-point shooting teams again with buckets at the rim.

VCU is the slight favorite, and it also beat North Carolina in the first round last year. George Washington, George Mason, and Dayton are to be respected as well, but no team in the conference has the offensive firepower to match Saint Louis.

JONATHAN VON TOBEL

NEW MEXICO TO WIN MOUNTAIN WEST REGULAR-SEASON TITLE (+275)

Grand Canyon is the odds-on favorite to win the Mountain West, but I believe that price is much too high. Yes, the Lopes have a \$12 million payroll and a ton of returning talent, but the gap between them and the Lobos of New Mexico is not that wide. Eric Olen is the best coach in the league, and he might have the best player in Jake Hall (16.4 PPG, 43.8% 3PT). Olen also gets back guard Uriah Tenette (10.6 PPG, 2.9 APG), and Hudson Mayes transfers in from UC San Diego, where the system is akin to what Olen has at New Mexico. The Lobos could be one of the best offensive teams in the league while also boasting one of the most well-coached defensive schemes. I am a believer in Olen, and that is what this play is all about.

COLORADO STATE TO WIN PAC-12 REGULAR-SEASON TITLE (+1750)

Part of me believes the betting market is not accounting for how much better the new Pac-12 is than the West Coast Conference, which Gonzaga used to reside in. The Bulldogs are still being priced as a behemoth, but I think the grind of a regular season with consistent matchups against programs with NCAA Tournament pedigree opens the door for some plays in this market. I landed on the Rams. Three starters and six of the Rams' top nine scorers are back in Fort Collins. CSU boasts a strong frontcourt with Kyle Jorgensen (27 starts, 11.5 PPG, 4.3 RPG) and Carey Booth (29 starts, 10.7 PPG, 5.6 RPG) back after dominating down low together. Ali Farokhmanesh plays an analytically sound style, and as a player development coach, he showed an ability to get his team to improve as the season went along. This is the best value on the board by my measure.

AARON MOORE

MERRIMACK (+205) TO WIN METRO CONFERENCE REGULAR SEASON

In a low-level conference such as the Metro (the former MAAC), with so much roster turnover, Merrimack consistently executing its defensive style and slow-paced offense regardless of who takes the court for Joe Gallo makes the Warriors a somewhat bankable commodity. Merrimack's top two players, Tye Dorset and Todd Brogna, were with the program last season. The Warriors' third option, Denver Anglin, joins the team at the expense of his former school, Iona – one of the Metro's other top contenders.

ILLINOIS TO WIN BIG TEN REGULAR SEASON (+144) AND MAKE THE FINAL FOUR (+300)

Brad Underwood has a number of his top Eastern European weapons back, which not only provides valuable continuity but also gives him a deep roster to deal with the physicality of the Big Ten and NCAA

Tournament. Joining David Mirkovic, Andrej Stojakovic, Tomislav Ivisic, and Zvonimir Ivisic is top high school recruit Quentin Coleman to take over Keaton Wagler's spot. Stefan Vaaks comes over from Providence to replace Kylan Boswell. This team could be just as good as last year's Final Four crew. The bet to win the Big Ten regular season is based on how it should be a battle between Illinois and Michigan State, and the Illini have a more favorable conference schedule with the Spartans coming to Champaign. As for the Final Four wager, it is a way to back Illinois and likely not have to contend with Florida or Duke along the way.

VERMONT (-120) TO WIN AMERICA EAST REGULAR SEASON

Yes, yes, yes, I know the common response to a futures wager with a minus price is: "That is a long time to wait to cash a ticket." My response always is: "Having the opportunity to cash a ticket, no matter when, is why we bet in the first place." There is a tremendous divide between Vermont and the rest of the conference. The Catamounts might not lose an America East game during the regular season.

JENSEN LEWIS

HOUSTON (30-1 AT FANDUEL) TO WIN THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Let me make sure I'm not crazy: No. 3 in KenPom's preseason ratings, No. 1 in adjusted defense in the country, but the market prices the Cougars like they're nowhere near this dominant of a force? It feels like insane value for a club that lost to eventual South Region champion Illinois in last year's tournament. Kelvin Sampson's crew gets a huge boost with LSU transfer guard Dedan Thomas Jr., who returns from a hand injury that limited him to just 16 games. Joseph Tugler enters his fourth season, leading a smothering Cougar defense. Increased responsibilities also arrive for guard Mercy Miller and forward Chase McCarty, stepping up for a roster that went through massive turnover. Houston will need to address its perimeter scoring, but give me healthy stock in an elite team that's massively mispriced in the national title market.

ALABAMA (58-1 AT DRAFTKINGS) TO WIN THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Another quality program that feels completely overlooked at its current price to win it all. Yes, many college basketball rosters deal with transfer portal newcomers, and there are nine fresh faces in Tuscaloosa for head coach Nate Oats. He's dealt with off-the-court issues involving the Tide's second-leading scorer, guard Aden Holloway, who will miss two regular-season games to start the year. But welcoming back all-around dynamo sophomore forward Amari Allen and his frontcourt mate, London Jemison, helps the team's continuity remain intact. More reinforcements arrive in transfer forwards Brandon Garrison (Kentucky) and Drew Fielder (Boise State) to help address the size, defense, and rebounding issues that Bama encountered a season ago. Can the new faces jell enough with the foundational pieces in place through the rigors of an SEC schedule? Rest assured, under Oats, the high-octane pace and shooting identity put this team squarely in the conversation for a deep March run. Getting Alabama in the preseason at a long-shot price is an absolute steal.

IOWA STATE (45-1 AT FANDUEL) TO WIN THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Similar to Big 12 rival Houston, the Cyclones boast a top-six preseason KenPom rating and trail only the Cougars as the No. 2 defense in the country. The biggest storyline in Ames centers around whether star Tamin Lipsey can play, as he and many other Class of 2022 players are among those trying for a fifth year of eligibility under the 5-in-5 rules and pending lawsuits. Head coach T.J. Otzelberger appears confident in Lipsey being part of this year's club, and that's a welcome relief to Iowa State fans, as the veteran point guard looks to lead them beyond their exit in the Sweet 16 this past March. Frenchman and phenom Kilian Toure looks to be recovering nicely from a shoulder injury sustained in August 2026, with his return due around January 2027. That means top returners must step up, including guard Jamarion Batemon and forwards Blake Buchanan and Dominykas Pleta. Look for talented transfers Leon Bond III (Northern Iowa), Jaquan Johnson (Bradley), and Tre Singleton (Northwestern) to also gain significant minutes. This futures bet is risky with Lipsey's eligibility unknown, but I'd rather have this national title number in my pocket, knowing the upside is legit Final Four capability.

MITCH MOSS

BAYLOR (35-1) TO WIN THE PLAYERS ERA 16

The 2026 version of this tournament is as loaded as any field I can remember. Baylor's first matchup is against Alabama, and this bet could be dead two hours after tip. However, this team defeated Florida and Illinois in exhibition games in October. The Gators and Fighting Illini have two of the shortest odds to win the national championship. Baylor's potential game in the second round is Gonzaga. Again, very difficult. BUT, what I'm doing is avoiding the lower half of the bracket, which is where you'll find Tennessee, Iowa State, Texas Tech, Louisville, St. John's, etc., lingering. Talk about a meat grinder! A hedging opportunity will exist should we find the Bears dancing their way to the title game.

ADAM BURKE

PENN TO WIN THE IVY LEAGUE (+235)

Tough to tie your money up for a long time with this low of a return, but that's how confident I am in the Quakers winning the Ivy. Fran McCaffery is the best coach in the conference, bar none, and he's got four returning starters, including a double-double machine in TJ Power. Penn's up-tempo style should work well within the conference, given how a lot of games are played on back-to-back days, and the team's ability to shoot 3s should be a separator.



While Harvard, Brown, and Princeton all return more minutes than the Quakers, all of those teams have deeper flaws than Penn. The Crimson don't take care of the basketball enough and struggled to rebound in conference play last season. Brown has a new head coach, so maybe the offense improves, but the Bears have a long way to go to be anywhere near Penn. And Princeton returns a lot from a 5-9 team in conference play last season with very few guys capable of finishing around the rim.

MERCER TO WIN THE SOCON (+1275)

This conference is really wide-open, and Ryan Ridder is an up-and-coming coach who has proven to the administration that he's worth investing in. Ridder was just one win shy of 20, which would have marked the first time since 2014 that the Bears have hit that mark. They squandered a huge lead against Western Carolina in the SoCon Tournament and wound up 19-13, but a solid 11-7 in conference play.

Wichita State transfer Karon Boyd is back in the SoCon after leaving ETSU for the Shockers. While a flawed player, he did shoot a career-best 34.4% from 3 last season, and Ridder is going to encourage this team to fire from deep. Quinton Perkins II is back, and he was a 42% 3-point guy last season. With Keelan Steele taking over for Armani Mighty in the block, the Bears should have an interior scoring presence once again. The price is worthwhile here on a team that should keep getting better.

TOLEDO TO WIN THE MAC (+870)

Tod Kowalczyk should have a good chance this season to break what has been an extended drought for the Rockets. Kowalczyk has had some strong teams over his 17 seasons and has won nearly 60% of his games, but the program hasn't gone to the NCAA Tournament since 1980.

This season, Miami of Ohio has a pretty big amount of roster turnover. Akron has roster turnover and a new head coach. Toledo has transfers from Marquette and Providence, as well as arguably the best player in the AEC last season in Angel Montas Jr. Those newcomers go around Austin Parks, who shot 61% on 2s after coming over from Ohio State prior to last season. Kowalczyk has more depth, so he can play at a faster pace, something he did from 2021-22 to 2023-24, as the Rockets were 47-9 in conference play over those three seasons when they ranked 82nd, 57th, and 75th in adjusted tempo per Bart Torvik.

TJ Power





Alijah Arenas

ZACHARY COHEN

I already gave out some of my championship futures. Outside of those, I don't have many CBB plays heading into the season. However, I do have this one long shot...

ALIJAH ARENAS TO WIN WOODEN AWARD (151-1)

This play is definitely a bit out there, but Arenas is one of the most talented guards in college basketball. Unfortunately, his freshman season was completely derailed by a freak car accident and a torn meniscus. Those made the season a complete wash for the No. 13 player in the 2025 ESPN 100.



The good news is that Arenas is healthy now, and he'll have a chance to show the world what he's made of in Year 2 at USC. Don't be surprised if he balls out.

Arenas is a 6-foot-7 guard with a complete all-around game. He's highly advanced as a scorer, he has good handles, and his footwork keeps getting better and better. That's why NBA scouts drool over the package he offers as a big guard prospect.

Arenas also happened to play very well in some of USC's exhibition games, including an outing against San Diego State in which he had 22 points, 12 boards, and four assists.

Ultimately, it could be hard for Arenas to unseat some of the players much higher on this list, but you can get creative in how you look to play this. At the right shop (or non-shop), you might be able to profit if Arenas just gets himself near the conversation.

RYAN ANDRADE (ROTOWIRE)

BYU (26-1 AT DRAFTKINGS)

TO WIN THE BIG 12 REGULAR-SEASON TITLE

The Big 12 is without question the most up-in-the-air of all the power conferences. The public is a lot higher on Arizona (+215) this season than I am, despite the fact that the Wildcats are losing two of the most productive freshmen in the country from a season ago in Brayden Burries and Koa Peat, along with one of the best two-way point guards in Jaden Bradley. Kansas (+350) is certainly loaded with talent, but there are also some questions about the availability of those fifth-year players and how they will all fit together. Enter BYU, and while, yes, the Cougars did lose AJ Dybantsa and Richie Saunders, they will bring back a player who, by the end of the season, will be one of the top contenders for the Wooden Award in Robert Wright III (+7400). The dynamic junior is nearly impossible to stay in front of and has taken huge leaps in his shooting and distributing abilities. BYU adds fifth-

year Michigan State transfer Jaxon Kohler, who is a nightly double-double threat and deadly pick-and-pop option, along with five-star freshman Bruce Branch III, who is the best Dybantsa replacement coach Kevin Young could have asked for. Kentucky transfer Collin Chandler is also poised to have a career season in Provo. At 26-1, BYU is hard to pass on for a team this talented in a conference with so many question marks.

AMARI ALLEN (100-1 AT DRAFTKINGS) TO WIN THE WOODEN AWARD

The Wooden Award obviously is partially a team award as well, which could end up hurting Allen's chances, but this Alabama team does have the pieces to be a legit contender in the SEC. Allen had a very strong freshman season for the Tide. Despite only starting 24 games, he averaged 11.4 points, 6.9 rebounds, 3.1 assists, and 1.5 three-pointers per contest. He was able to do all that while playing behind Labaron Philon Jr. (22 PPG, 5 APG). This is really now Allen's team, especially considering the legal issues that Aden Holloway has been dealing with over the last several months. The entire offense is going to run through Allen, who is a true point forward, and anyone who has the keys to a Nate Oats space-and-pace attack is going to put up some serious numbers. It has been evident through the three exhibition games that Allen is the focal point, averaging 20.3 PPG, 5.0 RPG, 4.3 APG, 2.3 3PM, and 1.6 SPG. These weren't just games against anyone, either. Allen helped Alabama take down both Ole Miss and Auburn. The 100-1 odds offer simply insane value for a player who is going to be this productive on a team that opens the season No. 9 on KenPom.

FLORIDA (+600 AT DRAFTKINGS) TO WIN THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

This Florida team is national championship or bust. After a bit of a slow start to its title defense last year, Florida looked virtually untouchable throughout most of SEC play. However, things ended in heartbreaking fashion with a one-point loss in the Round of 32 to No. 9 seed Iowa. Many thought the core would break up, but coach Todd Golden was able to retain 11 players. That is unheard of in today's college basketball. Really, the only loss was Xaivian Lee, whom the Gators will effectively swap out for Denzel Aberdeen, who previously spent three seasons with the Gators before going to Kentucky for a season in which he averaged 13.5 points and 3.4 assists per game. Boogie Fland was inconsistent last season, but I expect him to take a big leap forward in Year 2 with the Gators. Urban Klavzar will be a tremendous sixth-man option to have in that backcourt as well. We all know, however, that it is the frontcourt of Florida that makes this team go. There is not another team in the country apart from maybe Duke or Illinois that can match a Thomas Haugh-Alex Condon-Rueben Chinyelu frontline. I could see this team getting bored and actually dropping a few games during the regular season that it probably shouldn't, but when the lights are the brightest, the Gators will certainly be ready to go and avenge an incredibly disappointing finish to last season.



Julius Thedford

ADAM ZDROIK (ROTOWIRE)

FLORIDA TO WIN SEC REGULAR SEASON (+110)

The Gators have almost the exact same team as last season when they won the SEC by three games. Given their size, guard play, and veterans across the team, it's hard to see them getting worse. They should again be the most consistent team in the conference, something that could lead to another three-game lead in the conference. While most other teams are figuring out their lineups and go-to players, Florida will be honing its craft with the goal of hitting another Final Four. At plus odds, this is an easy bet.

HOUSTON (+750) TO REACH THE FINAL FOUR

Given the turnover for the Cougars, it's not surprising to see them outside the top 10 in terms of odds to reach a Final Four. However, I'd rather bet on Kelvin Sampson than anything else. Even with a bevy of new players, you know this team is going to be elite defensively by the time March comes around, if not already by its first game. Anchored by do-it-all forward JoJo Tugler, the Cougars open the season as the No. 1 KenPom defense and No. 3 team overall. While there are plenty of questions about the players they brought in and a bigger role for Chase McCarty, it's best to believe in the system. After a dominant opening month or two, it wouldn't be surprising if this number dropped closer to +400 or +500, giving them some of the better odds. That's been the norm for almost a decade with this team.

BRAD TAYLOR

CONFERENCE REGULAR-SEASON FUTURES

I'm here in Lexington, Kentucky. It's ALL about college basketball here, even with the Kentucky football team currently having a dream season!

One of my "hobbies" during conference season is playing regular-season futures. Once we get to the first Monday in January, I look to re-up each week depending on results, schedules, odds, and yes, analytics like KenPom.

My plan of attack for conference regular-season futures is simple: look at KenPom projected conference standings, find teams with at least a one-game margin of winning the conference, then look for odds of plus money to win the conference. For example, KenPom has Duke winning the ACC by three games. We also must lay chalk with Duke to win the ACC. I'm disciplined, so I'm out.

How much do the KenPom numbers matter? All the odds I got the first weekend the KenPom ratings were released in mid-October are much better than they are more than two weeks later. For example, Illinois was +225 at Bet365 on October 11. Can't find anything close to that in the week before Halloween. Think people don't pay attention to KenPom? Think again.

What are the Power Five conferences that fit our criteria? The odds used are DraftKings odds, but shop around for better odds where available. Even though the markets have caught up with the analytics, I would still play those that fit the criteria. They are as follows:

- Big East: UConn (+138), KenPom +1-game margin
- SEC: Florida (+112), KenPom +2-game margin
- Big Ten: Illinois (+144), KenPom +1-game margin

And which conference future has the best value?

- AAC: Memphis (+450), KenPom +1-game margin



TheScore had Memphis at +1000 on October 11. This is why college basketball season begins the day KenPom preseason ratings are released, and acting quickly helps. Good luck to all this college basketball season!

A full-page photograph of Duke University basketball player Matt Youmans. He is wearing a white Duke jersey with blue trim, featuring the word "DUKE" and the number "2". He is dribbling an orange Wilson NCAA basketball with his right hand. The background is a blurred crowd of spectators in a basketball arena.

FEELING DEVILISH

DUKE TOPS MATT YOUMANS'
PRESEASON TOP 50

by Matt Youmans

In this chaotic era of college basketball, unrestricted free agency has created more unpredictability than ever. A majority of teams feature few returning stars and several new faces, leading to volatility across the board, especially early in the season. One exception is Florida, which returns seniors Thomas Haugh, Alex Condon, and Rueben Chinyelu, a trio forming the nation's most experienced and successful frontcourt.

With the heart of the 2025 NCAA championship team still going strong, the Gators got the nod as the Associated Press preseason No. 1 team. Continuity counts for a lot, and Florida returns its core and a lot more. But the team topping the VSiN preseason power rankings is Duke.

"I'm super impressed with Duke," said Chris Dortch, publisher of Blue Ribbon College Basketball Yearbook. "I think Duke is better than the two years they had Cooper Flagg and Cameron Boozer. If I had to do it again now, Duke would be my No. 1 team."

Blue Ribbon finalized its rankings in early September and put Florida in the top spot, but Dortch attended a recent Duke-Tennessee scrimmage and said he watched the Blue Devils "annihilate another top 10 team" in a 101-64 victory over the Volunteers.

DraftKings lists Florida as the +570 NCAA title favorite, with Duke a close second choice (+600). No other teams are posted at single-digit odds. Circa Sports has the Gators and Blue Devils as +650 co-favorites, so the separation at the top is razor-thin before there's a significant drop-off to Connecticut and Illinois in the 15-1 range.

With countless transfers, court rulings, and NCAA eligibility questions surrounding many players, the picture is blurry and unpredictable. However, as much as things have changed, something does remain the same — the best programs in recent years are still the best programs, and the power ratings are pretty consistent. Of course, it's somewhat of a guessing game in November, and as more games are played, everything comes into focus. The current level of chaos in college hoops is unprecedented.

"It's a funny era that exists, and I've never seen anything quite like it," Dortch said. "Tennessee spent \$20 million on a (transfer) portal class and they don't have a clue how to play together right now. Coaches are trying to figure things out. It's hard enough for me as a journalist who covers it, so I can only imagine how hard it is for coaches to put a roster together."

For now, Duke and Florida are the teams to beat, which is a blessing and a curse. The last AP preseason No. 1 team to win the NCAA championship was North Carolina in 2008-09. The last VSiN preseason No. 1 team to finish on top was Kansas in 2021-22.

In last year's preseason rankings, I put UConn at No. 4 and Michigan at No. 5, and the Wolverines defeated the Huskies in the title game to stop the Big Ten's championship drought. After Tom Izzo coached Michigan State to the NCAA title in 2000, Big Ten teams were 0-8 in the championship game before Michigan's breakthrough. UConn coach Dan Hurley came up just short of winning his third title in four years. Never count out Hurley or Izzo, who both appear in this preseason's top five.

It's obvious preseason power ratings are an inexact science and not meant to project the national champion, although it's ideal when that happens. Handicapping is always a fluid situation. Before the games begin, my team ratings are subjective and 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 more heavily.

There are 365 teams in the college hoops world, which creates a unique handicapping challenge. It's a tough task to generate my VSiN preseason Top 50 power rankings.



1. DUKE

After suffering stunning losses in the past two NCAA Tournaments — blowing late leads to UConn in last season's Elite Eight and to Houston in the 2025 Final Four — Duke is reloading as usual. The Blue Devils might not have another Cooper Flagg or Cameron Boozer, but coach Jon Scheyer has an abundance of high-end talent. In addition to returnees Cayden Boozer, Caleb Foster, Patrick Ngongba, and Dame Sarr, Duke will unveil 7-foot-2 Joaquim Boumtje Boumtje and guard Deron Rippey to headline a phenomenal freshman class. Scheyer also snagged Wisconsin senior transfer John Blackwell and Belmont's Drew Scharnowski. The AP voters made Florida No. 1, but Duke starts with a rating of 85.5 to the Gators' 84.



freshman Taylen Kinney will handle the point. Kansas signed several transfers, including high-scoring Radford guard Dennis Parker Jr. The frontcourt is experienced and solid with 7-foot-2 Christian Reeves, 6-foot-10 Keanu Dawes, and possibly Purdue transfer Trey Kaufman-Renn, who received a favorable court ruling for a sixth year of eligibility after being a second-round draft pick. Self also recently added Melvin Council Jr. and Tre White to the roster.

7. LOUISVILLE

Cardinals coach Pat Kelsey had lots of cash to throw at transfers and pulled in some big fish — Flory Bidunga (Kansas), Jackson Shelstad (Oregon), Seth Trimble (North Carolina), Alvaro Folgueiras (Iowa), Karter Knox (Arkansas), De'Shayne Montgomery (Dayton), and 7-foot-5 Gabe Dynes (USC). Bidunga is a defensive force, and Shelstad is an all-around point guard. Dynes

and 7-foot-2 freshman Obinna Ekezie will be imposing around the rim. Louisville will definitely improve on last season's 24-11 finish. Kelsey has the backcourt talent, interior size, defensive prowess, and depth to push Duke in the ACC race.

8. TENNESSEE

Junior guard Juke Harris, who averaged 21.4 points at Wake Forest, is viewed as the big-time scorer who can help coach Rick Barnes get over the hump and reach the program's first Final Four. Harris is joined by transfers Tyler Lundblade (Belmont), Terrence Hill (VCU), Jalen Haralson (Notre Dame), and Dai Dai Ames (California). Hill hit seven 3s and scored 34 points in VCU's upset of North Carolina in the NCAA first round. Tennessee ranked first in the SEC in scoring defense (69.6 PPG). The offense will be improved, but that was not evident when the Vols were dominated by Duke in a recent scrimmage, so that's concerning.

9. ARIZONA

North Carolina tried to steal coach Tommy Lloyd after he led the Wildcats (36-3) to the Final Four, but Lloyd stayed in Tucson, where he continues to attract talent. Lloyd has established himself as an elite recruiter and offensive mind. He lost three NBA picks — first-rounders Brayden Burries and Koa Peat and second-rounder Jaden Bradley. North Carolina transfer Derek Dixon could replace Bradley at the point. Lloyd recruited hyped freshman guards Caleb Holt and Cameron Holmes. The interior should be strong with 7-foot-2 Motiejus Krivas, Ivan Kharchenkov, and Clemson transfer RJ Godfrey.

10. TEXAS

Sean Miller's first season in Austin produced a 21-15 record and ended with a buzzer-beating loss to Purdue in the Sweet 16. Texas is ranked No. 7 in the AP preseason poll, putting Miller ahead of schedule. Seven-foot senior Matas Vokietaitis led the SEC in field-goal percentage (61.9) and is the only returning starter. Miller must replace stars Dailyn Swain, Tramon Mark, and Jordan Pope, so the Longhorns brought in guards Isaiah Johnson (Colorado) and Mikey Lewis (Saint Mary's), forward David Punch (TCU), and hyped freshmen Marcus Spears Jr. and Austin Goosby. Spears was the top-ranked player in the 2027 class and reclassified to 2026.

11. ARKANSAS

Jordan Smith Jr. is coach John Calipari's next star guard with an NBA future. Smith is ranked by many as the nation's top incoming freshman and will replace Darius Acuff, who averaged 23.5 points and was the No. 7 overall pick. The Razorbacks ranked second in the nation in scoring (90.2 PPG) last season. Smith, junior transfer Jeremiah Wilkinson (Georgia), and five-star freshman J.J. Andrews will lead another high-scoring backcourt. Aside from small forward Billy Richmond III, the frontcourt has a few question marks. The Hogs must improve defensively after ranking 14th in the SEC. Calipari is 50-23 in two seasons at Arkansas.

2. FLORIDA

Fifth-year senior guard Denzel Aberdean is an example of the roster chaos in college basketball. Aberdean was a member of the Gators' title team that finished 36-4 in 2025. He transferred to Kentucky last season and now returns to Gainesville to again play for coach Todd Golden. Aberdean will run with junior Boogie Fland in the backcourt. The senior frontcourt of Thomas Haugh, Alex Condon, and Rueben Chinyelu helped Florida lead the nation in rebounding margin (+14.7) last season. The three veterans had subpar performances when the Gators were upset 73-72 by Iowa in the NCAA second round, so the disappointing ending was a big reason they returned to school to hunt for redemption.

3. ILLINOIS

Brad Underwood coached the Fighting Illini to their first Final Four since 2005 and brings back most of his key players aside from Keaton Wagler, the NBA's No. 5 overall pick. Illinois' roster still has a distinct European flavor with Andrej Stojakovic, David Mirkovic, and the Ivisic brothers, Tomislav and Zvonimir. Providence transfer Stefan Vaaks is expected to replace Wagler at the point, and five-star freshman Quentin Coleman will contribute in the backcourt. The tallest team in the nation last season is led by veterans. Illinois ranked second nationally in offensive efficiency (131.1 points per 100 possessions) behind Purdue, per KenPom.

4. CONNECTICUT

The Huskies won back-to-back NCAA championships (2023-24) before losses to eventual champ Florida in 2025 and Michigan in the 2026 title game. His constant complaining can be unbearable, but there's no better coach than Dan Hurley. He must replace team leaders Alex Karaban and Tarris Reed, and that starts with senior guard Silas Demary Jr. and sophomore sharpshooter Braylon Mullins. Hurley brought in transfers Nikolas Khamenia (Duke) and Najai Hines (Seton Hall) to strengthen the frontcourt. UConn should benefit from a nonconference schedule that includes Duke, Illinois, Michigan, Arizona, Kansas, Ohio State, and Virginia.

5. MICHIGAN STATE

Tom Izzo's team has a hole in the middle that the veteran coach needs to solve, but the most important pieces to the puzzle are junior Jeremy Fears Jr. and senior Coen Carr, who's a dynamic dunker. Fears (15.2 PPG, 9.4 APG) is the nation's top point guard. Freshman guard Jasiah Jervis was a McDonald's All-American. The Spartans need to see development from junior guard Kur Teng and sophomore forwards Jordan Scott and Cam Ward. The question mark in the middle is 7-foot-2, 270-pound Charlotte transfer Anton Bonke. Michigan State typically overcomes slow starts and hits a higher gear in Big Ten play on the road to March.

6. KANSAS

Tyran Stokes is the Jayhawks' newest freshman star, replacing the mercurial Darryn Peterson, the NBA's No. 2 overall pick. Stokes is a 6-foot-8 guard who can do everything on the court, and five-star



Thijs De Ridder

12. GONZAGA

The Zags are changing leagues, moving to the new Pac-12 from the West Coast Conference, yet not much else will change. Gonzaga finished 31-4 last season, and this team might not be as talented, but it's a close call. The addition of Xaivian Lee, a former Florida point guard who previously played at Princeton, is a boost. Lee was granted a fifth season of eligibility in August and left the Gators as a transfer. Bulldogs coach Mark Few has a new-look frontcourt led by 6-foot-7 Davis Fogle, 6-foot-10 Braden Huff, and 7-foot-1 Massamba Diop, a transfer from Arizona State. Few also added 6-foot-6 Isaiah Harwell, a Houston transfer and former McDonald's All-American.

13. HOUSTON

While it's not easy to put a Kelvin Sampson-coached team outside of the top 10, the Cougars don't appear to feature as much NBA-caliber talent. Sampson always wins more than his share of games with defense. Houston was No. 1 in KenPom's defensive efficiency ratings (87.6) last season, and 6-foot-8 senior Joseph "JoJo" Tugler embodies the toughness of Sampson's teams. LSU transfer Dedan Thomas Jr., who started his career at UNLV, is the new point guard. Sampson is also counting on junior guard Mercy Miller, freshman Tyus Thomas, and transfers Corey Hadnot (Purdue Fort Wayne) and Delrecco Gillespie (Kent State).

14. ST. JOHN'S

Rick Pitino took down UConn to win the Big East, but the Red Storm fizzled in the NCAA Tournament, and Pitino is running out of time to reach another Final Four. St. John's is spending big to continue the winning, and Baylor transfer Tounde Yessoufou is the top addition. Pitino finally has a true point guard in former European pro Quinn Ellis, who will play alongside junior shooting guard Ian Jackson. Pitino's roster is full of newcomers and unknowns, and he's got to replace low-post horse Zubeyr Ejiofor and Syracuse transfer Donnie Freeman, who suffered a season-ending injury during the summer.

15. ALABAMA

Nate Oats is a run-and-gun coach. Alabama is all about offense, ranking No. 1 in the nation at 91.2 PPG last season. Senior guard Aden Holloway returns from suspension in early November after averaging 16.8 points and shooting 44% on 3s last season. Holloway is complemented in the backcourt by Amari Allen, Quayden Samuels, and Jaxon Richardson. Boise State transfer Drew Fielder is a 6-foot-11 senior with 3-point shooting range, and 6-foot-10 Brandon Garrison is a strong defensive and shot-blocking center. Alabama ranked last in the SEC and 347th in the nation in scoring defense (82.7 PPG) last season.

16. VIRGINIA

Thijs De Ridder is one of four starters returning for coach Ryan Odom, who went 30-6 and finished second in the ACC in his first year. De Ridder, a 6-foot-9 sophomore, was the team's top scorer (15.6 PPG), and 6-foot-7 senior Sam Lewis and 5-foot-10 sophomore Chance Mallory return in the backcourt. The Cavaliers need UC Irvine transfer guard Jurian Dixon to be a scorer. Odom has made a smooth transition while replacing longtime coach Tony Bennett.

17. USC

After winning the Maui Invitational in November, the Trojans hit the skids because of injuries, and an 8-0 start turned into an 18-14 finish. Two of the injured guards, Alijah Arenas and Rodney Rice, return and are ready to blossom into stars. USC coach Eric Musselman has a loaded roster full of highly touted freshmen, such as 6-foot-9 Christian Collins, to go with a transfer class led by KJ Lewis (Georgetown), Jalen Cox (Colgate), and Isaac Bruns (South Dakota).

18. KENTUCKY

The Wildcats, with a disappointing 46-26 record under coach Mark Pope, are banking on Iowa State transfer Milan Momcilovic making a major difference. The 6-foot-9 Momcilovic made 136 3-pointers while shooting 48.7% for the Cyclones. Pope also landed Zoom Diallo (Washington), Alex Wilkins (Furman), Jerone Morton (Washington State), and muscular center Franck Kepnang (Washington). Pope needs 7-foot sophomore Malachi Moreno to develop into a star.

19. VANDERBILT

When the Commodores fell to Nebraska 74-72 in the NCAA second round, Tyler Tanner scored 27 points with four assists and no turnovers in 38 minutes. Tanner (19.5 PPG, 37% 3s) is returning for his junior season. After going 27-9 last season, Vandy coach Mark Byington beefed up his roster around Tanner by adding Washington State transfer Ace Glass, who made 71 3s as a freshman, and 7-foot senior Bangot Dak (Colorado).

20. MICHIGAN

The NCAA champions lost coach Dusty May to the Dallas Mavericks, and three players were NBA lottery picks. Mike Boynton Jr. takes over for May and will lean on the exceptional backcourt duo of Elliot Cadeau and Trey McKenney. The Wolverines are talented — freshman guard Brandon McCoy Jr. should be a key scorer right away — and big with 7-foot-2 junior Moustapha Thiam (Cincinnati) and 6-foot-11 J.P. Estrella (Tennessee).

21. PURDUE

A 30-win season highlighted by a Big Ten Tournament title and an Elite Eight appearance was not a big disappointment, but the Boilermakers had higher hopes as the preseason No. 1 team. Who will replace NCAA all-time assists leader Braden Smith? Redshirt freshman Antione West will be a rising star, and junior C.J. Cox is a strong two-way guard. This team will launch lots of 3s. Purdue coach Matt Painter has an underrated roster that is likely to overachieve.

22. INDIANA

Point guard Markus Burton from Notre Dame is among eight transfers who will make sure the Hoosiers don't miss the NCAA Tournament again in coach Darian DeVries' second season. DeVries was given the resources to hit the portal, and he did in a major way by also acquiring guards Bryce Lindsay (Villanova) and Darren Harris (Duke) and big men Aiden Sherrell (Alabama) and 7-foot-2 Samet Yigitoglu (SMU). Senior forward Sam Alexis is a key returnee.

23. TEXAS TECH

When JT Toppin returns from a February knee injury, the Red Raiders could eventually look like a top-10 team. Toppin (21.8 PPG, 10.8 rebounds) is a top-10 player if he's right. Tech coach Grant McCasland brought back Darrion Williams after one season at N.C. State, and senior guard Donovan Atwell returns. Three guards arrive as transfers — Cruz Davis (Hofstra), Damarion Dennis (Wyoming), and Dra Gibbs-Lawhorn (UNLV).

24. UCLA

Nikola Kusturica, a 6-foot-9 wing from Serbia, signed with the Bruins over the summer, and it was a big deal. Kusturica, one of the highest-paid players in the nation, is projected as a top-five draft pick when he's eligible for the NBA in 2028. UCLA coach Mick Cronin has several new faces on the roster, including Butler transfer guard Stink Robinson, but returnees Eric Dailey Jr., Trent Perry, and Xavier Booker will definitely be major contributors.

28. OHIO STATE

Point guard Bruce Thornton finished as the program's all-time scoring leader, and coach Jake Diebler plans to move junior John Mobley into that playmaking spot. The Buckeyes, who signed five-star freshmen LJ Smith and Anthony Thompson, appear to have a high ceiling.

29. MIAMI (FL)

Jai Lucas coached the Hurricanes to 26 wins and the NCAA second round in his first season. Sophomores Dante Allen and Shelton Henderson return to a roster with nine newcomers, including point guard Acaden Lewis (Villanova) and shooting guard Nick Dorn (Indiana).

30. WISCONSIN

The Badgers were actually running last season, when they ranked third in the Big Ten in scoring (83 PPG), but coach Greg Gard lost his top two scorers. The bad news is that guard John Blackwell transferred to Duke. The good news is that freshman guard Jackson Ball from New Zealand can score at a high level, and 7-foot senior Nolan Winter is back for another winter in Madison.

31. BYU

Junior guard Robert Wright (18.1 PPG) was a supporting actor to superstar AJ Dybantsa, the NBA's top overall pick. Wright is the leader now and one of the Big 12's top players. Cougars coach Kevin Young recruited McDonald's All-American guard Bruce Branch and Kentucky transfer guard Collin Chandler. Senior forward Jaxon Kohler, formerly of Michigan State and the Utah Jazz, is a key addition if he remains eligible.

32. IOWA

Ben McCollum will be his own tough act to follow. In his first season, he coached the Hawkeyes to their first Elite Eight since 1987. He's got to replace team leaders Bennett Stirtz and Tavion Banks, but McCollum will find players to fit his system and keep winning. The addition of 7-foot-3 junior Andrew McKeever from Saint Mary's will help.

33. NEBRASKA

Fred Hoiberg deserved to win Big Ten Coach of the Year, and he did over Michigan's Dusty May and Illinois' Brad Underwood. The Cornhuskers started 20-0 and finished 28-7. Senior forward Pryce Sandfort, who averaged 18.1 points and made 129 3-pointers, is back to lead the way.

34. TEXAS A&M

An aggressive, up-tempo attack is coach Bucky McMillan's style. He went 22-12 in his debut with the Aggies. P.J. Haggerty will be the new star in the second season of "Bucky Ball." Haggerty was the nation's No. 4 scorer (23.4 PPG) last season at Kansas State, which was his fourth college stop after Memphis, Tulsa, and TCU.

35. NORTH CAROLINA

The excitement of a new era — Michael Malone takes over as coach after guiding the Denver Nuggets to the 2023 NBA championship — will dissipate once it becomes obvious the Tar Heels don't have enough talent to hang with ACC favorites Duke and Louisville. Malone's new roster features five-star freshman forward Maximo Adams and transfer guards Matt Able (N.C. State), Neoklis Avdalas (Virginia Tech), and Terrence Brown (Utah).

36. VCU

Rams coach Phil Martelli Jr. has an experienced team that's the Atlantic 10 favorite. Martelli knows he can count on 6-foot-11 senior Lazar Djokovic and sophomore guard Nyk Lewis. VCU went 28-8 and upset North Carolina in the NCAA first round in Martelli's first season.

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25. MISSOURI

A freshman will probably lead the Tigers. Jason Crowe Jr., a 6-foot-3 point guard, is getting the green light from coach Dennis Gates. Crowe has help in the backcourt from transfers Jamier Jones (Providence), Kennard Davis Jr. (BYU), and Jordan Crawford (South Dakota). Missouri also has a strong frontcourt led by 6-foot-9 Mark Mitchell, whose eligibility was recently restored by a Kentucky judge, 6-foot-10 Trent Pierce, 6-foot-9 five-star freshman Toni Bryant, 7-foot-5 giant Trent Burns, 6-foot-8 Jaylen Carey (Tennessee), and 6-foot-11 Bryson Tiller (Kansas). Mitchell (18.3 PPG last season) went undrafted by the NBA.

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26. IOWA STATE

It will be a different Cyclones team without stars Milan Momcilovic and Joshua Jefferson. But another star is surprisingly returning. The expected departure of point guard Tamin Lipsey, who went undrafted by the NBA, was reversed when his eligibility was restored in court. Jaquan Johnson, a tough two-way guard from Bradley, is one of several transfers.

27. BAYLOR

If recent scrimmage results are not deceiving, the Bears could be a surprise team and be ranked too low in this spot. Baylor recently defeated Florida and Illinois behind superb play from junior guard Isaac Williams, Penn State transfer Kayden Mingo, and Liberty transfer Brett Decker.

37. AUBURN

The Tigers won the NIT championship in coach Steven Pearl's first season. The shooting star of that tournament run was Kevin Overton, who averaged 14.1 points and returns as a senior. Overton and junior Tahaad Pettiford (15.4 PPG) lead the backcourt, and Pearl hit the transfer portal to build a strong frontcourt.

39. ARIZONA STATE

Several big jobs were offered to Randy Bennett during his long coaching run at Saint Mary's, but he never jumped until getting the call to return home to the Phoenix area. Bennett brought senior forward Paulius Murauskas (18.4 PPG) from his Gaels team and has three 7-footers on his Sun Devils roster.

38. VILLANOVA

Kevin Willard coached the Wildcats to 24 wins and an NCAA first-round loss to Utah State in his first season. After losing four of his top players, Willard has restocked the roster around returning senior guard Tyler Perkins. He added Big Ten transfers Kwame Evans Jr. (Oregon) and Devin Royal (Ohio State) and 7-foot-3, 290-pound Luigi Suigo from Italy.

40. NEW MEXICO

Jake Hall was the Mountain West's top freshman last season, when he averaged 16.4 points and made 117 3-pointers. Hall and sophomore point guard Uriah Tenette are the main reasons the Lobos are league favorites for coach Eric Olen.

41. UTAH STATE

It's no surprise that Gonzaga will rule the new Pac-12. Utah State should be the league's No. 2 team behind senior guard Mason Falslev, a 25-year-old who reportedly received \$4 million to return this season. Ben Jacobson is the new coach after leaving Northern Iowa.

42. SAINT LOUIS

After going undrafted, 6-foot-10 Billikens star Robbie Avila signed a contract with the Lakers, but the player known as "Cream Abdul-Jabbar" and "Milk Chamberlain" won't be that franchise's next great center. A recent court ruling granted Avila a fifth year to return to Saint Louis, which looks likely. Billikens coach Josh Schertz (29-6 last season) already has an impressive roster headlined by guards Trey Green and Amari McCottry.

44. MARYLAND

Buzz Williams' first team in College Park was a 12-21 disaster. But there is some buzz about the Terrapins now. Top recruit Baba Oladotun is a 6-foot-10 freshman whom some compare to Kevin Durant, though that's probably a stretch. Senior forward Pharrel Payne returns, and Maryland added key transfers Tomislav Buljan (New Mexico) and DJ Wagner (Arkansas).

45. OKLAHOMA STATE

Latrell Allmond, a 6-foot-8 McDonald's All-American, will help the Cowboys compete with the big boys in the Big 12. Oklahoma State returns senior guard Kanye Clary and added senior transfers Jordan Burks (UCF) and Kashie Natt (Sam Houston).

46. OKLAHOMA

It's easy to forget the Sooners lost to West Virginia in the College Basketball Crown tournament title game in Las Vegas. Porter Moser's sixth season as Oklahoma coach could be better with good guard play from seniors Xzayvier Brown, Pop Isaacs (Texas A&M transfer), B.J. Edwards (SMU), and Tyler Hendricks (Utah Valley).

47. WEST VIRGINIA

All of the players who hoisted the College Basketball Crown trophy in April are gone. Mountaineers coach Ross Hodge is rebuilding with Butler transfer Finley Bizjack (17 PPG), five-star freshman guard Miles Sadler, and transfers Joson Sanon (St. John's) and Javan Buchanan (Boise State).

48. CREIGHTON

The Greg McDermott era has ended, and Alan Huss, a former Bluejays assistant and High Point head coach, takes over in Omaha. Huss welcomes back 6-foot-10 junior Jackson McAndrew and 6-foot-8 senior Jasen Green and added transfer guards BJ Davis (San Diego State) and Wes Enis (South Florida). Creighton or Marquette should be the Big East's fourth-best team.

49. MARQUETTE

Nigel James Jr. was named the Big East's top freshman after the 6-foot guard averaged 16.4 points. Golden Eagles coach Shaka Smart made a wise move by adding 6-foot-11 senior Sananda Fru as a Louisville transfer.

50. GEORGIA

The Bulldogs ranked third in the SEC in scoring offense (89.4 PPG) behind Alabama and Arkansas. Georgia coach Mike White is counting on senior guards Blue Cain, Freddie Dilione, and Marcus "Smurf" Millender and junior forward Kanon Catchings. Cain is probably the team's best player, Dilione transferred from Penn State, and "Smurf" is not that small at 5-foot-11.

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43. TCU

Senior forward Xavier Edmonds and junior guard Micah Robinson should help keep the Horned Frogs in the top half of the 16-team Big 12. High-scoring guard Gavin Sykes transferred to TCU after being named the Big West's top freshman at Long Beach State.

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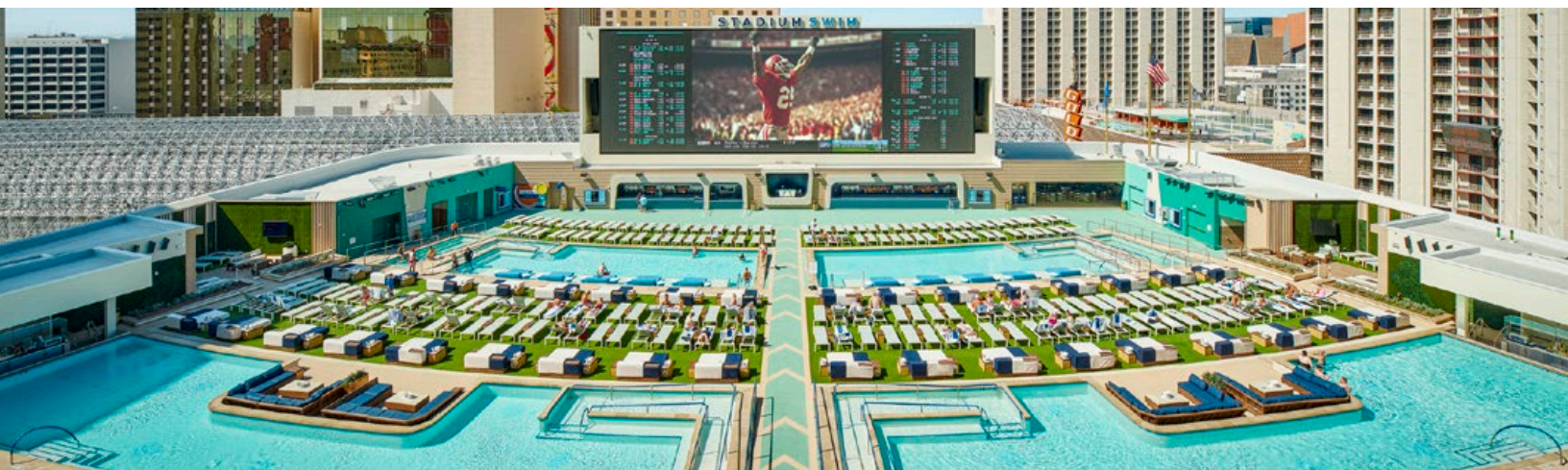


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The championship futures landscape in college hoops is unique. Unlike college football, where you can often map out a powerhouse's path to the College Football Playoff, the NCAA Tournament makes a mess of even the best projections. The single-elimination format, deep field of contenders, and dramatic stylistic contrasts leave plenty of room for chaos every spring. Navigating this market means embracing the madness, not pretending there's a tidy roadmap.

ZACHARY COHEN'S NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP FUTURES

My strategy is usually to sift through different pockets of value. I'll back a top program flying slightly under the radar, target a mid-tier team with legitimate upside, and sprinkle in a sleeper with the talent or system to surprise people. These tickets aren't always about identifying the team that will ultimately cut down the nets. Sometimes, it's about grabbing a strong price on a team capable of making a run and keeping hedging options in play as the tournament unfolds. Let's dive into three early championship futures I'm punching for 2026-27.



TEXAS TECH RED RAIDERS (25-1)

There's some risk in backing Texas Tech to win the title. JT Toppin, who averaged 21.8 points and 10.8 rebounds per game last year, won't be back until late December or early January. But if the Red Raiders can stay afloat until his return, they'll suddenly look a lot more like the teams sitting atop the championship oddsboard.

Toppin should be rounding into form by the time the tournament rolls around, and the rest of this roster is absolutely stacked.

Hofstra transfer Cruz Davis should be one of college basketball's most productive lead guards this season, and he'll have sharpshooter Donovan Atwell (45.8% from 3) as his running mate. Tech is also loaded at forward, with Darrion Williams returning to Lubbock and UCF transfer Jamichael Stillwell set to play alongside him.

The Red Raiders are expecting big things from UNLV transfer Dra Gibbs-Lawhorn, too, while international big man Bassala Bagayoko has plenty of fans.

Beyond Toppin's recovery, the biggest question is whether all of Grant McCasland's transfers will be eligible. If they are, Tech should push for the top 10 in both offensive and defensive efficiency. This team will also have the talent and experience to make a deep March run.



GONZAGA BULLDOGS (35-1)

Is this the year for Mark Few? We might be asking that until the legendary head coach calls it quits. And while he's certainly had more talented rosters, this group doesn't have to be his best to be the one that finally wins a championship.

A dominant frontcourt pairing can be a massive advantage in a tournament setting, and the Bulldogs should have the best 4-5 combination in the country. Braden Huff returns after averaging 17.8 points and 5.6 rebounds per game last season, and there might not be a better back-to-the-basket offensive weapon in the nation. Joining him at center is Arizona State transfer Massamba Diop, a nimble big man who's a real lob threat and has some perimeter skills.

Very few teams have the personnel to handle Huff and Diop, and the Zags have some promising options around them. Davis Fogle, Xaivian Lee, Chauncey Wiggins, and Javon Bennett all have the potential to turn in big years.

Like many programs, Gonzaga will need some favorable eligibility rulings. But this roster has big-time upside, and Few has a knack for getting the most out of his talent.



UCLA BRUINS (70-1)

UCLA has a much lower floor than the other teams on this list, but the Bruins still have a championship ceiling — and 70-1 feels generous given the look of this roster.

Trent Perry took a huge step forward as Mick Cronin's lead guard last season, and he should be even better in his third year in the system. UCLA also has an experienced center in Xavier Booker, giving the Bruins steady hands at two of basketball's most important positions. But what makes this team especially intriguing is what it has at the two through four.

Jaylen Petty played big minutes as a freshman at Texas Tech last season and should be even better as a sophomore. He's an electric offensive player who should pair nicely with Perry. Eric Dailey Jr. returns at power forward, bringing size, toughness, and athleticism alongside Booker. The biggest reason to believe in this team's ceiling, though, is at small forward, where international phenom Nikola Kusturica will start.

Kusturica was given big money to play in Brentwood, and NBA front offices are already salivating over him. He's a massive wing with impressive athleticism and a tremendous motor. He should be an absolute stud on both ends of the floor, with the potential to be the best player on the court just about every time he takes it.

The Bruins also have starter-quality players coming off the bench, so depth shouldn't be a concern. There's enough here for Cronin to make some magic, and Kusturica is at the center of it all.



THE WOODEN TICKET: FINDING VALUE IN COLLEGE BASKETBALL'S PLAYER OF THE YEAR RACE

by Aaron Moore

For college basketball bettors who are currently looking to build their futures portfolios, one key strategy is to find ways to diversify them beyond just national championship plays. Over the past few years, a popular way to do that has been to add Wooden Award tickets into the mix.

National championship and Wooden Award futures have become companion pieces for many.

The major books keep posting the Wooden Award board earlier during the offseason, and a lot of the handicapping work used for national championship wagers also applies to the award, since it overwhelmingly goes to the best player on a team contending for a title.

So for those who have already invested in the national championship market and are looking to add something different to their futures portfolios, let's break down the Wooden Award winner field by placing the top candidates in different tiers based on their potential to take home the honor, along with their accompanying odds.

All odds courtesy of DraftKings

TIER 1 - FAVORITES

- **JEREMY FEARS JR. (+850)**
- **THOMAS HAUGH (10-1)**
- **JOHN BLACKWELL (12-1)**
- **DAVID MIRKOVIC (14-1)**

The population of this year's top tier looks much different than a year ago, when only Braden Smith (+550) was listed here, as the next group of contenders, including winner Cameron Boozer (12-1), were in the 10-1 to 12-1 range.

That means these favorites offer bettors the potential for greater ROI.

Blackwell, formerly of Wisconsin and now at Duke, is the only one of this group to have gone portalling in the offseason.

Fears, the Michigan State guard, has the lowest odds based on his 15 PPG and 9.4 APG from a year ago. The 6-foot-2 junior is in charge of a veteran Tom Izzo team looking to contend for a national championship.

Haugh already has one national championship on his resume, and another one could be on its way. The Florida big man averaged 17.1 points last year as he became the focal point for Todd Golden's offense. That point total should once again rise with even more refinement to his offensive game.

After three highly productive seasons in Madison, Blackwell brings his 19.1 PPG to Duke with the hopes of leading the Blue Devils to the Final Four and more.

Mirkovic, a major force in Illinois' run to the Final Four last year, is back in Champaign as Brad Underwood continues to rely on the Eastern European flair of his roster.

Tier 1 breakdown: All of these candidates currently have the preseason look of a Wooden Award winner. They all should be the top scoring threat for highly ranked teams with the potential to land a No. 1 seed in March.

Last year, Boozer averaged 22.5 PPG for the No. 1-seeded Blue Devils. The season prior, it was Cooper Flagg and his 19.2 PPG that led Duke to a top seed as well.

There has to be concern about backing Fears because the demanding Izzo has never coached a Wooden Award winner. Gary Harris was a finalist in 2014 with 17.7 PPG. In order for Fears to win the award, he would definitely need to put up higher scoring numbers than Harris. However, that might be an issue based on Izzo's team structure and the presence of Coen Carr (12.0 PPG), another award candidate.

Haugh must look something like Flagg 2.0 to win the award. Like Fears, he will be surrounded by a number of veteran Gators, including Alex Condon, who are more than capable of filling up stat sheets.

Mirkovic's case already has some issues, as he is working through a foot injury suffered in August. Reports out of Illinois indicate Mirkovic is confident about playing at the same elite level he did a year ago. Nonetheless, a foot injury for a 6-foot-9 forward tends to linger.

Blackwell could be the best candidate of this group. He has already shown an ability to score, and now with Duke, his star status could reach an even higher level. The Blackwell campaign will benefit from the media coverage speculating whether Duke could produce its third straight Wooden Award winner.

Duke and St. John's (Chris Mullin in 1985 and Walter Berry in 1986) are the only schools to have different back-to-back winners.

For Blackwell to win, he is going to need to put up similar numbers to those of the last group of true guards to win the award — Jalen Brunson (2018), Frank Mason (2017), and Buddy Hield (2016).

The averages for those three award-winning seasons are 21.6 PPG, 4.3 RPG, and 3.9 APG. Reaching similar numbers shouldn't be a problem for Blackwell, who last year averaged 19.1 PPG, 5.1 RPG, and 2.3 APG.

Caleb Foster and Cayden Boozer at the point are going to provide Blackwell plenty of room to operate.

TIER 2 - IN THE CONVERSATION

- **TYRAN STOKES (17-1)**
- **TYLER TANNER (21-1)**
- **JORDAN SMITH JR. (25-1)**
- **TOUNDE YESSOUFOU (26-1)**
- **FLORY BIDUNGA (32-1)**
- **ALEX CONDON (33-1)**
- **STEFAN VAAKS (36-1)**
- **CALEB HOLT (38-1)**
- **DAVID PUNCH (39-1)**

Tier 2 breakdown: Condon (Florida) and Vaaks (Illinois) are in the shadow of teammates with even higher expectations and brand equity.

Bill Self once again will feature an elite high school prospect who should be in Lawrence for just one season in Stokes. Unlike Boozer and Flagg, Stokes won't get the boost of being a hotshot freshman on a top-five team.

Jordan Smith Jr. will be another freshman stud for Arkansas.

Self's former player, Bidunga, will have a bigger offensive role now in Louisville, but likely not enough to post the prerequisite numbers.

The most interesting option of this group is Yessoufou. The former Baylor product is now at St. John's. The 6-foot-5 guard should be able to score more than Connecticut's Silas Demary Jr. and Braylon Mullins, thus making him the best candidate in the Northeast region.

TIER 3 - GOING DEEP

- **SILAS DEMARY JR. (40-1)**
- **MATAS VOKIETAITIS (40-1)**
- **JUKE HARRIS (40-1)**
- **THIJS DE RIDDER (42-1)**
- **TREY MCKENNEY (45-1)**
- **ISAIAH JOHNSON (49-1)**
- **CALEB FOSTER (50-1)**
- **BRAYLON MULLINS (50-1)**
- **JT TOPPIN (50-1)**
- **IVAN KHARCHENKOV (50-1)**
- **MOTIEJUS KRIVAS (50-1)**
- **MILAN MOMCILOVIC (50-1)**

Tier 3 breakdown: This group features a lot of recognizable names with odds that don't necessarily indicate they are currently true contenders for the award.

Toppin is back at Texas Tech after dealing with an ACL injury. Momcilovic made a lot of money in the transfer portal on his way to Kentucky, but being just a shooter, he doesn't profile as a Wooden Award winner.

Of this group, Vokietaitis could find himself on the late-season watch list. The Longhorns should be a top-10 squad all year, and the 7-footer could play at the same pace and battle Haugh as the best big man in the SEC.

EARLY ACTION

Based on recent history, a better building a futures portfolio should add a ticket on at least one candidate in the top tier. Other than Oscar Tshiebwe (40-1 odds to start the season), this is where the winner likely resides.

Consider Blackwell to be that player. Based on the talent around him in the Duke system, he could reach a scoring number close to 24 points per game.

The Izzo factor and Carr may limit Fears from making the necessary jump of about five to six points per game. The same holds true for Haugh playing alongside Condon.

Mirkovic's foot injury means there is no rush to back him.

A smaller play on a long shot could also be valuable as the season progresses.

At 40-1, a Vokietaitis ticket offers plenty of upside.

The Longhorns might be one of college basketball's most talked-about teams this season, and if that happens, the big man could jump up the Wooden Award power rankings like Johni Broome did two seasons ago.

LOOK AROUND

Of all the college basketball futures boards posted by the national books, the Wooden Award is the one that offers proactive shoppers the most variance between odds. For example, other than Fears as the shortest shot, what Fanatics is offering is much different from DraftKings. While Blackwell is 12-1 at DK, Fanatics is listing his Duke teammate Joaquim Boumtje Boumtje as the Blue Devil with the lowest odds (15-1). Blackwell at Fanatics comes in at a very attractive 30-1.

PORTAL TO PROFIT using KenPom to find national championship value

by Aaron Moore

Talk to a college basketball bettor these days, and the conversation ultimately turns to the transfer portal. When it reaches that subject, it won't be pleasant. There will be plenty of complaining and bemoaning how all the roster movement makes it even more difficult to make early-season and futures wagers.

Even the most diehard fans of the sport can't keep track of who is playing for whom.

Still, looking at the transfer portal from a betting perspective, yes, players change squads on a yearly basis, but each game ends with a winner, and all the conferences and tournaments have some team named as the champ.

It's on the bettors, then, to adapt their handicapping process to find new angles.

That is why we are offering a different way of examining KenPom in November with the hopes of cashing a national championship futures ticket in April. We are focusing more on the lesser-talked-about categories in the Personnel section, namely D1 Experience, Minutes Continuity, and Average Height.

We created the averages in these three categories for every national championship winner from 2021 to 2026. The rationale for this time range is that it is post-COVID and provides a look at who excelled the most during the current portal era. Additionally, there is the average KenPom preseason ranking of each of these national champions.

Meeting or surpassing these averages for the current contenders certainly doesn't guarantee March success. It does, however, give handicappers other areas of data to examine at a time when many say "nobody knows anything these days."

D1 EXPERIENCE

Average D1 Experience of National Champions from 2021 to 2026: 2.31

MINUTES CONTINUITY

Average Minutes Continuity of National Champions from 2021 to 2026: 49.8

AVERAGE HEIGHT

Average Height of National Champions from 2021 to 2026: 77.9 inches, or approximately 6-foot-6

AVERAGE PRESEASON RANKING

Average Preseason Ranking of National Champions from 2021 to 2026: 12

TAKEAWAYS

Bettors can now use these averages when contemplating national championship plays, either now or as the season progresses. These numbers make it clear why the books have placed such short national championship odds on Florida (+570) and Duke (+600). Both of these squads feature a number of returners who logged considerable time a year ago.

With Thomas Haugh (6-foot-9), Rueben Chinyelu (6-foot-10), and Alex Condon (7-foot), Florida features a number of tall, veteran starters. For Duke, Caleb Foster, Cayden Boozer, and newcomer John Blackwell bring experience, with Dame Sarr (6-foot-8), Patrick Ngongba II (6-foot-11), and freshman sensation Joaquim Boumtje Boumtje (7-foot-2) providing the height.

The interesting part of this analysis is that recent teams ranked atop the KenPom standings to start the season have failed to follow through with a national title. Duke is this year's No. 1 KenPom team. The last team to take home a championship after starting No. 1 in the KenPom rankings was Villanova in 2018.

Perhaps that makes Illinois (14-1) one of the top contenders offering bettors some value, as the Illini rank close to Florida and Duke in all these categories but with odds priced more than twice as high.

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COLLEGE BASKETBALL RECRUITING AND TRANSFER RANKINGS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER



by Steve Makinen

College sports have changed tremendously in recent years, from conference realignment and NIL to the explosion of the transfer portal. Recruiting is now essentially an equal mix of courting high school stars and experienced transfers, completely changing how programs build their teams.

Weak teams can reload quickly with the right message, while strong programs can be decimated when disgruntled players leave. Multi-year development and patience are no longer as important as they once were. More than ever, recruiting success has a direct impact on immediate on-court results.

To illustrate the roster turnover, here is the breakdown of returning starters for the country's 365 Division I teams.

RETURNING STARTERS	TEAMS	PERCENTAGE
5	3	0.80%
4	12	3.30%
3	30	8.20%
2	87	23.80%
1	131	35.90%
0	102	27.90%

Seven or eight years ago, teams losing multiple starters were typically the ones in rebuilding mode. Now, 87.7% of teams return two starters or fewer. Add 55 programs with new head coaches for 2026-27, and it's clear how much change bettors must navigate.

That brings me to the task at hand: recruiting and transfer rankings.

247Sports tracks incoming recruits and transfers and assigns numerical ratings to each school's class. As usual, I've found that anything numerically rated can become a foundation for useful betting analysis.

Of course, signing talent is only half the battle. Programs still need to develop players and turn them into a team, otherwise known as COACHING. Knowing which programs consistently exceed or fall short of their recruiting expectations should be part of every college basketball bettor's knowledge base.

Using regression analysis, I've developed a formula to project conference standings based SOLELY on 247Sports recruiting rankings. This is a quantitative study. For more on individual players and teams, visit the team and conference pages in the guide.

2026-27 PROJECTED STANDINGS USING THE LAST TWO YEARS OF RECRUITING RANKINGS

After adding the 2026 rankings to my database of recruiting classes dating back to 2019, I compared several time frames against actual records and my end-of-season power ratings.

The strongest correlation with on-court success came from the LAST TWO RECRUITING CLASSES, outperforming one-, three-, and four-year windows and other combinations.

That makes sense in today's transfer environment. Newcomers can contribute immediately, but blending incoming talent with returning players creates valuable continuity.

For my projected standings (see page 24), I've used each team's average recruiting and transfer ranking from the spring 2025 and spring 2026 classes. These projections consider NO OTHER FACTOR beyond 247Sports' assessment of incoming talent.

There aren't many surprises atop the projected Power Five standings, aside from Arkansas potentially taking over the SEC and Arizona edging Kansas in the Big 12. USC is another interesting case, projecting second in the Big Ten after Eric Musselman brought in two outstanding classes.

The mid-major projections feature plenty of familiar names, along with some programs benefiting from conference changes. The chart should offer useful starting points for bettors evaluating each league.

POWER FIVE TEAMS THAT DO THE MOST AND LEAST WITH THEIR RECRUITING CLASSES

Signing talent is one thing. Developing it into a successful team is another.

Some programs consistently turn modest recruiting classes into winners, while others underachieve despite attracting highly rated players.

I compared each team's average national recruiting ranking over the last two years with its average end-of-season ranking on my power-rating scale. The difference helps identify programs that have overachieved or underachieved relative to their incoming talent.

Coaching changes matter here. Historical results under one staff may not translate to a new regime.

TOP 10 TEAMS WHOSE ON-COURT PERFORMANCE HAS EXCEEDED THEIR RECRUITING RANKINGS

TEAM	AVG. 2-YR R/T RANK	AVG. 2-YR SM RANK	DIFF
1. WISCONSIN	59.5	17.5	42.0
2. IOWA STATE	48.5	8.5	40.0
3. PURDUE	51.5	12.0	39.5
4. VANDERBILT	67.0	30.0	37.0
5. TEXAS TECH	51.5	17.5	34.0
6. FLORIDA	36.5	3.0	33.5
7. NEBRASKA	62.5	32.5	30.0
8. NORTHWESTERN	84.0	60.5	23.5
9. IOWA	64.0	42.0	22.0
10. HOUSTON	26.0	4.5	21.5

Many of these programs have enjoyed consistent coaching leadership and established systems that withstand significant roster turnover.

Interestingly, only Florida and Houston are generally expected to contend near the top of their conferences this season. If the others continue outperforming recruiting expectations, that could change by March.

R/T = 247Sports recruiting/transfer class rank. SM = Steve Makinen end-of-season power rank. Positive differences indicate overachievement.

TOP 10 TEAMS WHOSE RECRUITING RANKINGS HAVE EXCEEDED THEIR ON-COURT PERFORMANCE

TEAM	AVG. 2-YR R/T RANK	AVG. 2-YR SM RANK	DIFF
1. GEORGIA TECH	34.5	124.0	-89.5
2. MIAMI	16.5	98.0	-81.5
3. SYRACUSE	22.5	99.0	-76.5
4. BOSTON COLLEGE	93.0	164.5	-71.5
5. NOTRE DAME	37.5	97.5	-60.0
6. RUTGERS	35.5	95.5	-60.0
7. USC	13.0	70.5	-57.5
8. WASHINGTON	22.0	79.5	-57.5
9. NC STATE	27.0	81.5	-54.5
10. SETON HALL	68.5	122.0	-53.5

These programs have consistently fallen short of expectations, with several experiencing coaching changes or disappointing postseason results.

Georgia Tech tops the list and enters 2026-27 with another new head coach. The question is whether the underachievement reflects recruiting evaluations, coaching, or some combination of the two. Probably a little of both.

Negative differences indicate underachievement relative to recruiting rankings.

TEAMS WHOSE RECRUITING RANKINGS ARE TRENDING UP OR DOWN

Improving recruiting classes can signal an approaching breakthrough, while declining rankings may indicate trouble ahead. Coaching changes and unusually strong or weak individual classes can also produce significant swings.

Here are the teams showing the most interesting recruiting trends entering 2026-27.

TEAMS THAT COULD MAKE AN IMMEDIATE JUMP

Butler

(Last two recruiting ranks: 47, 34; previous five-year average: 68.5)

Coaching changes can boost recruiting, especially when the new coach comes from the NBA. Former Atlanta Hawks assistant Ronald Nored takes over after a strong offseason. If he can mold the talent, Butler could surprise in the Big East.

Florida State

(2026 recruiting rank: 15; best since 2021)

Former NBA assistant Luke Loucks enters his second season with a class rated 71 points higher than his first. That kind of improvement can pay immediate dividends.

Kansas

(2026 recruiting rank: No. 3 nationally; best on record)

Bill Self has always attracted talent, but 247Sports considers this his best incoming class in years. Kansas has the pieces for a Big 12 title and deep tournament run after last year's Round of 32 exit.

Maryland

(2026 recruiting rank: 14; best on record)

Buzz Williams' second class at Maryland is the program's highest-rated in a long time. The Terrapins have a chance to make a significant jump from last season's 12-21 record.

Minnesota

(2026 recruiting rank: 38; best since 2019)

Niko Medved's second class jumped 43 spots from his first and is Minnesota's highest-rated since 2019. That's the type of progress this program needs to climb the standings.

Oklahoma State

(2026 recruiting rank: 8; previous two-year average: 74)

Steve Lutz struck gold on the recruiting trail after a 6-12 Big 12 season and two years of struggles attracting talent. Fans in Stillwater should be excited about 2026-27.

Stanford

(Last three recruiting ranks: 85, 60, 24)

Kyle Smith has established a clear upward trend. ACC teams landing top-25 classes typically have a strong chance at success, and Stanford could surprise this winter.

Texas

(2026 recruiting rank: 4; previous year: 41)

Texas jumped from mediocre to elite in recruiting after one season under its current staff. The fourth-ranked incoming class could help Longhorn fans quickly forget last year's 21-15 record.

USC

(Last two recruiting classes average rank: 9)

Eric Musselman has done the work to attract elite talent. With two starters returning and another outstanding class coming in, USC could make a major leap.

Vanderbilt

(2026 recruiting rank: 11; previous two-year average: 67)

Mark Byington has assembled Vanderbilt's best incoming class in recent memory. Considering this program's history of outperforming recruiting expectations, something special could be developing in Nashville.

West Virginia

(2026 recruiting rank: 16; previous seven-year best: 22)

The Mountaineers brought in their highest-rated class on record, improving 35 spots from last season. That should produce an immediate boost in Morgantown.

TEAMS WHOSE RECRUITING RANKINGS ARE TRENDING IN A POSITIVE DIRECTION

Arizona

(Last three-year average: 13.3; previous three-year average: 49.3)

Tommy Lloyd's first class ranked just 84th in 2021, and a few more modest classes followed. Arizona found its footing in 2024 and should remain a Big 12 and national title contender.

Arkansas

(Last three recruiting ranks: 3, 5, 1)

John Calipari has transformed Arkansas into an elite destination for high school stars and transfers. If recruiting rankings are any indication, this could be a memorable season in Fayetteville.

BYU

(Last three-year average: 19.3; previous four-year average: 122)

BYU's recruiting has surged since joining the Big 12 and hiring former NBA assistant Kevin Young. He's also retained multiple starters each season, helping establish continuity.

Illinois

(Last three recruiting ranks: 10, 46, 12)

Brad Underwood's 2025 class wasn't highly regarded, but the Illini still reached the Final Four. With another outstanding class coming in, this could be a special season in Champaign.

Michigan

(Last two recruiting ranks: 11, 5)

Dusty May restored Michigan's recruiting standard, and last year's class proved undervalued after the Wolverines won the national championship. The bar is even higher for successor Mike Boynton Jr.

Missouri

(2026 recruiting rank: 18; improvement of 57 spots)

Dennis Gates had three starters back and a weak recruiting class last season, finishing 20-13. This year, he'll try the opposite approach with one returning starter and a highly regarded class. We'll see which works better.

Ohio State

(2026 recruiting rank: 17; previous two-year average: 42)

Jake Diebler is trying to combine key returnees with a highly rated incoming class. If the pieces mesh, expect an improved Buckeyes team.

Oregon

(2026 recruiting rank: 29; previous two-year average: 64.5)

New coach Tony Stubblefield has a puncher's chance after Dana Altman's abrupt retirement. Oregon's incoming class is considerably stronger than recent years.

Purdue

(2026 recruiting rank: 9; best on record)

Matt Painter has made winners out of modestly rated recruiting classes for years. Now he has the ninth-ranked class in the country. It will be interesting to see what he does with this group.

TEAMS WHOSE RECRUITING RANKINGS ARE TRENDING IN A NEGATIVE DIRECTION

Arizona State

(Last two-year average: 100.5; previous five-year average: 30)

Bobby Hurley attracted highly rated talent but struggled with consistency on the court. New coach Randy Bennett inherits the school's lowest-rated class on record. Bennett has a reputation for developing players, but he'll need to work quickly to avoid a rough debut in Tempe.

Baylor

(Last two recruiting ranks: 25, 35; previous two: 4, 4)

Houston's arrival in the Big 12 seems to have affected Scott Drew's recruiting efforts. Despite Baylor's tremendous tournament success earlier in the decade, maintaining its previous standard has become more difficult.

Boston College

(2026 recruiting rank: 150; worst on record)

New coach Luke Murray inherits a difficult situation with the program's lowest-rated class on record. Previous teams often underperformed their recruiting rankings. If that continues, look out below.

Cincinnati

(2026 recruiting rank: 90; previous three-year average: 20.7)

Recruiting took a major hit under new coach Jerrod Calhoun. A class ranked 90th might have been respectable at his previous stop, Utah State, but that won't cut it in the Big 12.

DePaul

(2026 recruiting rank: 113; previous six-year average: 59.9)

Someone dropped the ball in DePaul's recruiting department. The Blue Demons brought in their weakest class in years, which won't help their ambitions of climbing the Big East standings.

Florida

(Last two recruiting ranks: 12, 75)

Todd Golden landed an outstanding class after winning the national championship, but this spring's ranking dropped sharply. The reason is largely positive: Florida returns four starters. The Gators should be very good this season, though future departures will create recruiting needs.

Georgetown

(2024 recruiting rank: 17; last two: 70, 121)

Ed Cooley's recruiting started strong in 2023 and 2024, but the last two classes have fallen well below Big East standards. Don't expect much from the Hoyas this season.

Iowa

(2026 recruiting rank: 65; previous year: 33)

Like Florida, Iowa's recruiting slipped partly because Ben McCollum retained three starters from an impressive NCAA Tournament team. The Hawkeyes should still be very good this season.

Kansas State

(2026 recruiting rank: 74; previous three: 23, 28, 35)

New coach, lower recruiting standard. Stop me if you've heard this before. Jerome Tang had his problems, but he attracted highly rated players. Casey Alexander's first class doesn't quite measure up.

Kentucky

(2026 recruiting rank: 62; worst on record)

John Calipari's classes averaged an incredible No. 1.8 national ranking from 2019-23. Recruiting has fallen dramatically under Mark Pope, whose latest class ranks 62nd. With only one starter returning, don't assume this will be a typical Kentucky team.

LSU

(2026 recruiting rank: 117; worst on record)

Will Wade has worked to attract players to LSU, ethically or otherwise, but the recruiting experts aren't impressed with the eligible talent. This will be a fascinating team to follow, assuming the Tigers have enough able bodies to compete in the SEC.

NC State

(2026 recruiting rank: 77; decline of 63 spots)

NC State was already among the programs underperforming their recruiting rankings. After Will Wade left following one season, new coach Justin Gainey brought in a considerably weaker class. If the underachievement continues, Raleigh could be in for a rough season.

Penn State

(2026 recruiting rank: 91; worst on record)

There isn't much momentum around Penn State basketball. Following a 12-20 season, Mike Rhoades brings in his lowest-rated class in four years.

Rutgers

(Last three recruiting ranks: 9, 62, 151)

Three returning starters should prevent a complete collapse, but the downward recruiting trend is a serious concern for the Scarlet Knights' future.

Seton Hall

(2026 recruiting rank: 120; previous four years between 60 and 75)

Uh-oh. After four years of consistent recruiting and modest results, Shaheen Holloway's fifth class tanked. Making matters worse, only one starter returns.

SMU

(2026 recruiting rank: 118; previous year: 15)

Wow, SMU really dropped the ball. One year after a huge recruiting haul, the Mustangs brought in a much weaker class and have no returning starters. Whatever your expectations are, lower them.

St. John's

(2026 recruiting rank: 105; previous three-year average: 23)

What in the heck happened after Rick Pitino's tournament run? Did recruits expect more players to return? Whatever the case, St. John's missed on top talent and returns only one starter. A significant decline could be coming.

UCF

(2026 recruiting rank: 138; previous four-year average: 67)

With minimal returning starting experience over the last two seasons and another recruiting class well below Big 12 standards, things could get ugly for UCF during conference play.

Villanova

(Last two recruiting ranks: 50, 97; previous four-year average: 29.3)

Kevin Willard's first Villanova team went 24-9, but recruiting hasn't followed that success. Can two returning starters keep the momentum going? It's a big question.

Virginia

(2026 recruiting rank: 111; decline of 69 spots)

Even with three starters returning, a recruiting class ranked 111th is disappointing for Virginia and Ryan Odom. It might not derail this season, but it certainly isn't positive news.

Virginia Tech

(2026 recruiting rank: 113; previous four-year average: 56.8)

Like in-state rival Virginia, Virginia Tech suffered a significant recruiting decline. Fortunately, the Hokies have returned three starters in consecutive seasons.

Washington

(2026 recruiting rank: 139; previous two-year average: 22)

Another massive drop-off. A recruiting class ranked 139th doesn't offer much hope of improvement in the Big Ten. Even with two starters returning, Danny Sprinkle will have to work some magic.

RECRUITING STANDINGS

ACC

CONF		2-YEAR	NATL
RK	TEAM	AVG	RK
1	DUKE	1.5	1
2	N CAROLINA	13.0	8
3	LOUISVILLE	17.5	11
4	GEORGIA TECH	34.5	27
5	SYRACUSE	36.0	30
6	MIAMI	36.5	32
7	NOTRE DAME	40.5	37
8	STANFORD	42.0	42
9	CLEMSON	43.0	44
10	NC STATE	45.5	46
11	FLORIDA ST	50.5	50
12	WAKE FOREST	58.5	59
13	PITTSBURGH	59.5	61
14	CALIFORNIA	64.0	66
15	SMU	66.5	67
16	VIRGINIA	76.5	75
17	VIRGINIA TECH	81.0	79
18	BOSTON COLLEGE	122.5	110

BIG 12

CONF		2-YEAR	NATL
RK	TEAM	AVG	RK
1	ARIZONA	7.5	3
2	KANSAS	9.5	6
3	HOUSTON	14.5	9
4	BYU	20.5	13
5	BAYLOR	30.0	21
6	OKLAHOMA ST	33.5	24
7	W VIRGINIA	33.5	25
8	IOWA ST	36.0	31
9	CINCINNATI	53.5	52
10	KANSAS ST	54.5	53
11	TEXAS TECH	56.0	54
12	TCU	59.0	60
13	COLORADO	62.0	64
14	UTAH	80.5	78
15	ARIZONA ST	100.5	90
16	UCF	108.0	93

BIG EAST

CONF		2-YEAR	NATL
RK	TEAM	AVG	RK
1	CONNECTICUT	16.0	10
2	PROVIDENCE	40.0	36
3	BUTLER	40.5	38
4	CREIGHTON	40.5	39
5	MARQUETTE	41.0	41
6	ST JOHNS	63.5	65
7	XAVIER	68.5	69
8	VILLANOVA	73.5	72
9	DEPAUL	91.0	84
10	GEORGETOWN	95.5	87
11	SETON HALL	96.0	88

BIG TEN

CONF		2-YEAR	NATL
RK	TEAM	AVG	RK
1	MICHIGAN	8.0	4
2	USC	9.0	5
3	MICHIGAN ST	20.5	14
4	MARYLAND	21.0	15
5	INDIANA	28.5	17
6	ILLINOIS	29.0	18
7	PURDUE	32.5	23
8	OHIO ST	34.5	28
9	UCLA	40.5	40
10	WISCONSIN	44.5	45
11	IOWA	49.0	48
12	NEBRASKA	52.5	51
13	NORTHWESTERN	58.0	57
14	OREGON	58.0	58
15	MINNESOTA	59.5	62
16	PENN ST	67.0	68
17	WASHINGTON	81.5	80
18	RUTGERS	96.5	89

SEC

CONF		2-YEAR	NATL
RK	TEAM	AVG	RK
1	ARKANSAS	3.0	2
2	ALABAMA	12.0	7
3	TENNESSEE	17.5	12
4	TEXAS	22.5	16
5	MISSISSIPPI ST	29.0	19
6	AUBURN	29.5	20
7	GEORGIA	31.5	22
8	KENTUCKY	34.0	26
9	OKLAHOMA	34.5	29
10	OLE MISS	38.0	34
11	VANDERBILT	38.0	35
12	FLORIDA	42.5	43
13	MISSOURI	46.5	47
14	TEXAS A&M	49.5	49
15	S CAROLINA	57.0	56
16	LSU	74.5	73

NOTEWORTHY MID-MAJORS

CONF		2-YEAR	NATL
RK	TEAM	AVG	RK
1	GONZAGA (P12)	38.0	33
2	VCU (A10)	57.0	55
3	DAYTON (A10)	60.0	63
4	UNLV (MWC)	68.5	70
5	MEMPHIS (AAC)	69.0	71
6	COLORADO ST (P12)	75.5	74
7	SAINT LOUIS (A10)	77.5	76
8	FLA ATLANTIC (AAC)	79.5	77
9	LOYOLA-IL (A10)	82.5	81
10	SAN FRANCISCO (WCC)	84.0	82
11	GEORGE MASON (A10)	86.0	83
12	LA-LAFAYETTE (SBC)	92.5	85
13	TX-SAN ANTONIO (AAC)	93.0	86
14	S FLORIDA (AAC)	102.5	91
15	AUSTIN PEAY (UAC)	104.0	92
16	BOISE ST (P12)	108.0	94
17	ST MARYS-CA (WCC)	108.0	95
18	TEXAS ST (P12)	108.5	96

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20-22

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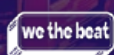
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ATLANTIC 10 CONFERENCE

OUTLOOK *by Aaron Moore*

Last season was an important one for the A-10. By landing multiple NCAA Tournament bids at a time when the selection committee is seemingly looking past the mid-majors, the conference showed it still has some cachet.

The postseason got even better for the A-10 when VCU ousted North Carolina in overtime and Saint Louis blew out Georgia.

For the Rams, the win solidified their claim as the conference's top team no matter who is on the sidelines. Last year's version had Phil Martelli Jr. in his first campaign leading his team to a conference championship. He follows an impressive list of coaches, including Ryan Odom, Mike Rhoades, Will Wade, and Shaka Smart. The Billikens' win over Georgia showed a national audience just how funky and effective Josh Schertz's offense can be.

In order for the A-10 to continue the momentum VCU and Saint Louis provided last season, it is going to need...VCU and Saint Louis to once again lead the way.

KenPom and Bart Torvik both see these two teams as being in the upper tier of those outside the power conferences, ranking them in the mid-50s to 60s range next to the likes of Grand Canyon and Utah State. The conference itself is ranked seventh in the nation by KenPom, just behind the new-look Pac-12.

As always, Dayton will be in the mix, and George Mason's defense and methodical offense will lead to a number of wins. Fordham, the A-10's traditional cellar-dweller, might move up into the conference's upper half during Mike Magpayo's second season in the Bronx.

Mike MacDonald is the only new coach this season, replacing Mark Schmidt, who presided over St. Bonaventure for 19 seasons. Some coaches, including Archie Miller (Rhode Island), Matt McKillop (Davidson), and Chris Mooney (Richmond), will need a handful of additional wins this season to silence their restless fan bases.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONF RECORDS		ODDS TO WIN	
	SM PR	RANK			SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS	NCAA	CONF
VA COMMONWEALTH	84.0	49	3	58%	29-8	19-18	16-21	80.5	71.5	19-3	11-11	500-1	+175
SAINT LOUIS	83.5	51	3	59%	28-6	20-14	17-17	86.4	71.6	16-4	12-8	200-1	+188
DAYTON	81.0	67	2	27%	25-13	17-21	13-25	73.8	69.3	14-8	9-13	1000-1	+460
GEORGE MASON	77.0	94	1	13%	22-10	16-16	15-17	72.9	68.0	11-8	10-9	1000-1	16-1
GEORGE WASHINGTON	76.0	102	1	12%	18-16	15-19	16-18	80.9	75.2	9-11	8-12	1000-1	15-1
ST JOSEPHS	74.5	116	2	37%	22-12	20-14	11-23	71.9	70.7	14-6	15-5	1000-1	48-1
FORDHAM	74.0	120	3	44%	14-15	16-13	7-22	67.6	66.3	8-11	10-9	1000-1	28-1
RICHMOND	73.5	121	1	22%	14-17	16-15	14-17	76.5	74.5	5-14	10-9	1000-1	50-1
DAVIDSON	73.5	124	1	47%	18-14	14-18	14-18	69.9	68.5	11-9	8-12	1000-1	44-1
DUQUESNE	73.0	128	1	29%	16-15	14-17	16-15	76.9	75.9	10-10	10-10	1000-1	54-1
RHODE ISLAND	72.5	130	2	35%	16-16	13-19	13-19	69.9	68.2	7-12	7-12	1000-1	53-1
LOYOLA-IL	71.0	150	1	15%	9-24	13-20	15-18	66.8	75.8	5-15	11-9	2000-1	100-1
ST BONAVENTURE	69.5	165	1	9%	16-17	13-20	19-14	76.2	75.4	6-15	9-12	1000-1	64-1
LASALLE	69.0	174	2	36%	8-23	15-16	14-17	66.9	75.0	5-14	10-9	2000-1	240-1

TEAM OVERVIEWS



DAVIDSON WILDCATS

Last season's NIT appearance was a welcome boost to a program that hadn't seen the postseason since 2022. Matt McKillop hopes to do even more this season with four key players returning. His core includes the 6-foot-6 Josh Scovens (11.1 PPG and 4.3 RPG), Sam Brown (8.0 PPG and 2.2 APG), Nick Coval (.370 3PT), and big man Ian Platteeuw. As is to be expected in a McKillop offense, the 7-foot Platteeuw moves around the court and can trigger the offense with passes from the high post. This offense could have been even better, but the Wildcats lost their leading scorer, Roberts Blums, to Penn State, while Parker Friedrichsen took his 10 points per game to Washington. Coming into the program is 27-year-old John Carter Jr., a former All-Patriot League player at Navy. After serving four years with the Marines, Carter is back in college for one more season to regain his year lost to COVID-19.



DAYTON FLYERS

Rivals VCU and Saint Louis got all the love last season, so the Flyers are primed to show they are still on the same level as those two. In Amaël L'Etang, Dayton has the best big man in the conference and possibly the A-10's Player of the Year. Last season, the 7-foot-1 center averaged just shy of 12 points and 6 boards a game. Those numbers should see a big jump this season. Finding support for L'Etang is one of Anthony Grant's top early-season priorities. He has a number of transfers to call upon with 6-foot-1 Travis Perry (Mississippi), 6-foot-2 Landen Joseph (Marshall), and 6-foot-5 Zaide Lowery (Marquette). These veterans will be joined by New Jersey high school stud Aiden Derkack. One of the keys to Dayton's season is its nonconference games against Cincinnati, USF, Florida State, and Liberty. Grant scheduled with the possibility of landing an at-large berth for the Flyers.



DUQUESNE DUKES

Dru Joyce is in reboot mode after last year's 18-win season. Only one starter returns in Brandon Hall, a guard who averaged just 3.3 points per game. Gone are major pieces Tarence Guinyard and Jimmie Williams. The new faces include 6-foot-10, 275-pound center Ege Demir, who played last year at Oregon and, prior to that, spent

time in the Turkish Basketball Super League. Izaiah Pasha, formerly of Virginia Tech and Delaware, should get plenty of minutes in the backcourt. The 6-foot-6 Yoav Berman comes over from Queens, where he appeared in the NCAA Tournament a year ago. Stephen Olowoniyi is another transfer familiar with bouncing around to different schools (VMI, Southern Indiana, and Oregon State). Joyce will have his hands full trying to work with so many new Dukes.



FORDHAM RAMS

For the first time in a while, the Rams enter a season with the expectation of winning games and possibly earning a coveted double-bye in the conference tournament. Such is the case after Mike Magpayo went 17-15 in his first season at the helm. He relied heavily on defense, as the Rams gave up just 65.5 points per game. The defense and rebounding were fueled by an international group coming back this season. Roor Akhuar, Abass Bodija, and Jack Whitbourn are a trio of tall Australians who can create mismatches and block shots. Akira Jacobs is a stretch big man out of Japan. Rikus Schulte from Germany was second in the league in rebounding last season with nearly 10 per game. Fordham's guard play will get some New York City assistance with Kelvin Odih, a St. John's transfer, and Hassan Koureissi, a top recruit out of Archbishop Stepinac. These additions will help offset the loss of last year's starting backcourt of Christian Henry and Dejour Reaves.



GEORGE MASON PATRIOTS

Under Tony Skinn, the Patriots have become a defense-first, 20-win team. In Skinn's three seasons, the Patriots are 70-31 with two NIT appearances. In order to get an NCAA Tournament appearance, George Mason must make the big move past VCU, Saint Louis, and Dayton. To do so, Skinn will need All-League play from George Mason's prodigal son. Baraka Okojie, who scored nearly 20 points per game last year at Mercer and was a member of the Memphis squad a year earlier, is back with the program. In 2024, the 6-foot-3 guard made the A-10 All-Freshman Team playing for GMU. Okojie teaming with a healthy Brayden O'Connor gives the Patriots one of the conference's top backcourts.



GEORGE WASHINGTON REVOLUTIONARIES

Another A-10 squad that turned a solid season into an NIT appearance last year. After losing its top player, Rafael Castro, to graduation and a number of starters to the portal, another NIT bid would be seen as a positive result. The main holdover is senior guard Jean Aranguren, who does most of his damage from behind the arc. Chris Caputo will need a lot of production from Andrew Phillips (Lafayette) and Omari Witherspoon (Pittsburgh), his top two transfers joining the program. GW, along with George Mason, Fordham, and Saint Joseph's, will battle it out for the second tier of the conference standings.



LA SALLE EXPLORERS

The Explorers have undergone a facility upgrade and handed the coaching duties off to the energetic Darris Nichols in an effort to bring them back to a competitive level. It has yet to pay dividends, indicating that the only real way to turn a program around is by building up the NIL collective. With just 9 wins a year ago, clearly La Salle hasn't gotten there yet. The good news is that 6-foot-6 guard Rob Dockery (12.5 PPG) and starter Jaden Johnson (6.3 PPG) are back. The bad news is Nichols must find a way to create a cohesive team with 11 new players on his roster. Success for this new-look La Salle team will be not finishing in the A-10 basement.



LOYOLA CHICAGO RAMBLERS

It looks like the Ramblers are on a crash course to duplicate last season's disastrous 9-24 record. All of the preseason analytics have this team slotted for last place. Last year was the worst of Drew Valentine's tenure due to injuries that ravaged his roster. This season, there is plenty of uncertainty. Holdovers Xavier Amos (11.1 PPG) and 6-foot-5 guard Nic Anderson (5.1 PPG) will have larger roles. Valentine must sift through all his transfers to fill the other spots. His options now include Malick Diallo (6-foot-9 center who dealt with knee issues at TCU), Jason Schofield (6-foot-10 center from Marist), Elias Rapieque (6-foot-9 forward from Kansas State), and Chris Jeffrey (Villanova). Adding to the height Valentine has compiled is a 6-foot-10 Minnesota prepster, Ryan Kreager.

TEAM OVERVIEWS



RHODE ISLAND RAMS

The Archie Miller experiment just hasn't produced enough positive results in Kingston. How long it continues will depend significantly on this season's record. The coaches' poll, KenPom, and Bart Torvik aren't overly optimistic, placing URI in the same range as La Salle and Loyola Chicago. Gone due to graduation is the A-10's Co-Defensive Player of the Year, Tyler Cochran. On a positive note, Miller can again call upon a pair of veteran guards to be his centerpieces in Jahmere Tripp (12.6 PPG) and Jonah Hinton (12.0 PPG and 4.3 RPG). The transfer class includes players who did find success at their previous schools: Dylan Williamson (All-Conference at Towson), Matas Deniusas (OVC Freshman of the Year at UT Martin), and Jason Fontenet II (UC Santa Barbara). Clearly, Miller is aware of his standing, as the November schedule looks like it offers plenty of opportunities for wins.



RICHMOND SPIDERS

When all the Spiders are humming on the same page, running Chris Mooney's ballet-like offense, Richmond is at its finest. When rosters turn over so much and a new crop has to learn all the passing and backcuts, that offense and Richmond tend to struggle. Mooney is banking on guard Aiden Argabright (10.8 PPG) to be his eyes and voice on the court even more this season. Collin Tanner (5.9 PPG and 3.2 RPG) will be a regular starter. Mooney is planning on Sam Simmons Jr. (Gatorade Player of the Year in Kansas) to be a quick learner of his quasi-Princeton offense. Derin Saran, a 6-foot-5 senior, should fit in after playing in a pass-heavy offense at UC Irvine a year ago. The best-case scenario for Richmond is finishing in the 5-7 range of the regular-season standings.



ST. BONAVENTURE BONNIES

It will take some time to get over not seeing Mark Schmidt's imposing presence on the Bonnies' bench. After nearly two decades and three NCAA Tournament appearances, Schmidt has turned over the program to Mike MacDonald. How that came about is up for debate, as plenty of speculation revolves around the former coach and the highly visible GM, Adrian Wojnarowski, not getting along, leading to Schmidt's departure. Wojnarowski brought name-brand recognition to the program

but hasn't made too many friends or moved the Bonnies up the A-10's pecking order. MacDonald, formerly of Canisius, has a unique resume as the only coach to earn 100 wins at D-I, D-II, and D-III schools. MacDonald is following the Ben McCollum method of bringing some of his former D-II players at Daemen (Zach Philipkoski and Ben Bill) with him to Olean. Unfortunately, he likely won't have the same immediate impact McCollum had at Iowa.



SAINT JOSEPH'S HAWKS

The reigning A-10 Coach of the Year, Steve Donahue, is officially the leader of the program after taking it over when Billy Lange bolted from Hawk Hill for Madison Square Garden. This year, Saint Joe's could once again be the conference's biggest surprise. The return of 6-foot-6 guard Jaiden Glover-Toscano (15.7 PPG and 4.8 RPG) gives the Hawks a legitimate Player of the Year candidate. He pairs nicely with Austin Williford (9.1 PPG in conference play), who had a strong freshman season under Donahue. Khaafiq Myers and Mekai Johnson are other returners who should play starting roles. The top transfer is 6-foot-10 graduate Sean Logan, who made contributions in the A-10 with Davidson. The Hawks' continuity will be one of their strong points.



SAINT LOUIS BILLIKENS

It was assumed that Robbie Avila, aka Larry Nerd, aka Cream Abdul-Jabbar, aka Milk Chamberlain would be done with college basketball, but that may not be the case. One of many ongoing court battles regarding eligibility includes the Billikens big man, who is practicing with the team, but has not been added to the roster yet. However, if a judge rules that he can't play, there are plenty of quality candidates. Two Billikens, Kellen Thames and Trey Green, earned preseason First-Team honors, while Amari McCottry was named to the Second Team and Ishan Sharma to the Third Team. Clearly, this group is deep and talented, with the plan of once again finishing atop the regular-season standings. Last year, both Saint Louis and VCU went 15-3. The 6-foot-6 swingman Thames might be the one who would most benefit from Avila's potential departure. Look for Thames' stats to make a noticeable jump from last year's 9.7 PPG and 4.7 RPG. With Thames, Green, McCottry, and Sharma, the Billikens should have a quartet of double-digit scorers who also prioritize defense.

Josh Schertz's fast-moving offense gets most of the attention, but Saint Louis had a defense ranked nationally in the top 50 a year ago. By getting Missouri, High Point, Saint Mary's, and DePaul on the schedule, Schertz is looking for some at-large protection if he fails to secure the A-10's automatic berth.



VCU RAMS

The Rams enter the season as the team to beat according to the preseason coaches' poll and the major analytics providers. A talented roster is led by 6-foot-11 senior Lazar Djokovic, who averaged 13.2 PPG and 5.2 RPG last year. In Phil Martelli Jr.'s impressive backcourt, there are sophomore Nyk Lewis (8.7 PPG and 4.5 RPG) and 6-foot-4 Brandon Jennings (8.5 PPG). As good as these three are, the loss of Terrence Hill Jr. is going to be an issue in making sure the Rams' scoring keeps up with their hectic team defense. Hoping to fill this void is Blake Harper, who started 14 games last season at Creighton. Harper's long 6-foot-7 frame and ability to defend anywhere on the court give him the profile of the players who have made this program so strong. Then there is VCU's depth, highlighted by Tyrell Ward, Ahmad Nowell, and Jordan Tillery. Playing close to 10 players a game allows Martelli Jr. to keep up pressure from start to finish. VCU facing Memphis, Santa Clara, Providence, Florida Atlantic, and Mississippi State will prepare the Rams well for their A-10 opponents. Either with an automatic berth or via the at-large route, this team should once again play in the NCAA Tournament.

AMERICAN CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

Duke, fresh off another disappointing NCAA Tournament, is once again favored to win the ACC. Cameron Boozer might be playing for the Memphis Grizzlies now, but Jon Scheyer kept Caleb Foster, Dame Sarr, Patrick Ngongba II, and Cayden Boozer around. He also added stud Wisconsin transfer John Blackwell, while freshman big man Joaquim Boumtje-Boumtje should be one of the best players in college basketball. The Blue Devils even have Deron Rippey Jr., who looks like one of the most electric guards to suit up in Cameron in years, coming off the bench.

The league was pretty top-heavy last season, as South Florida won the regular season and conference tournament, giving Louisville all that it could handle in an 83-79 loss in the opening round of the NCAA Tournament. Tulsa, which finished second in the conference, ultimately won 30 games by finishing as the runner-up to Auburn in the NIT. Wichita State got back on the map after a couple of lackluster seasons, including a trip to the quarterfinals of the NIT, and UAB, despite going 8-9 at home, won 20 games.

But, much like life on the football side of things for the American, coach and roster turnover in the transfer portal and NIL eras have stripped this conference of some of last season's biggest achievers. USF lost head coach Bryan Hodgson to Providence, though former Xavier, Louisville, and College of Charleston head coach Chris Mack could keep up the program's standards, which began under the late Amir Abdur-Rahim.

The other new head coach is Wes Miller at Charlotte, as the 49ers moved quickly to hire the fired bench boss at Cincinnati, and Miller is now back in his home state.

Speaking of coaches, how hot is Penny Hardaway's seat at Memphis? After a 13-19 campaign with some of the best resources in the conference, the Tigers will play faster and look for more offense as arguably the conference's most talented team and second favorite to win the American behind Wichita State.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONF RECORDS		ODDS TO WIN	
	SM PR	RANK			SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS	NCAA	CONF
WICHITA ST	78.5	85	2	45%	23-13	23-13	15-21	76.9	70.7	14-8	14-8	1000-1	+250
MEMPHIS	78.5	87	1	10%	13-19	14-18	16-16	75.2	76.7	8-11	5-14	1000-1	+450
S FLORIDA	77.0	96	0	0%	25-9	19-15	15-19	86.1	75.8	18-3	13-8	1000-1	+520
TULSA	76.5	98	0	15%	28-8	19-17	24-12	83.9	74.5	15-6	9-12	1000-1	+580
N TEXAS	75.0	110	3	45%	17-14	17-14	14-17	69.2	68.2	10-10	11-9	1000-1	+900
FLA ATLANTIC	74.5	113	1	17%	16-15	17-14	17-14	77.2	75.3	10-10	9-11	1000-1	11-1
UAB	74.5	114	0	18%	19-12	15-16	14-17	78.2	74.4	11-8	7-12	1000-1	15-1
TEMPLE	74.0	119	1	36%	15-16	14-17	17-14	73.0	71.2	8-11	10-9	2000-1	14-1
CHARLOTTE	72.5	135	1	8%	16-17	18-15	19-14	73.0	74.3	11-10	12-9	1000-1	22-1
TULANE	70.5	156	1	26%	17-15	15-17	13-19	72.0	75.7	9-11	11-9	1000-1	45-1
E CAROLINA	68.5	189	0	6%	10-20	12-18	16-14	71.5	77.7	6-12	9-9	2000-1	58-1
RICE	66.5	219	2	33%	11-18	16-13	17-12	72.0	76.8	7-11	11-7	2000-1	500-1
TX-SAN ANTONIO	65.0	252	1	11%	3-25	10-18	13-15	67.3	82.9	1-17	7-11	2000-1	500-1

TEAM OVERVIEWS



CHARLOTTE 49ERS

It will be a much different team in the Queen City.

Cincinnati was a top-50 team for Bart Torvik in four straight seasons under Wes Miller, and its loss may very well be the 49ers' gain. After finishing 351st in adjusted tempo last season, expect something closer to the national average, if not slightly above it, as Miller reeled in the second-ranked transfer class in the conference per 247Sports, including four former Bearcats. Jizzle James (10.9 PPG) shot 44.2% from 3 and is the headliner of that group, while Rutgers wing Dylan Grant, who scored in double figures in 16 of 34 games, and 6-foot-6 Chaze Harris (19.9 PPG) from South Alabama should play big minutes.



EAST CAROLINA PIRATES

Injuries and awful shooting numbers pulled the Pirates down to their worst season

since 2020. The 11 wins were the fewest in the Mike Schwartz era, but he'll get a shot at redemption here with some returnees and some transfers that should help the cause. The Pirates shot under 32% from 3 in each of the first three seasons under Schwartz, but really bottomed out at 29% last season. Pair that with a roster that shot just 47.5% on 2s and you've got the recipe for a bad team. The addition of another inefficient, high-usage player in Cian Medley (Kent State) might not work out, but Brycen Blaine (17.7 PPG) and Kaseem Watson (12.5 PPG) are scoring upgrades for a team that also needs to make significant strides on defense.



FLORIDA ATLANTIC OWLS

Boca Raton isn't the most happenin' Florida town, but FAU is a long-ish walk and a

short drive to the beach, and that's the type of thing that sells itself to recruits and potential transfers. John Jakus has a stronger and deeper roster this season, which includes three 7-footers that could work into the rotation down low and more scoring options to put around leading returnee Kanaan Carlyle (14.3 PPG). Former Iowa State recruit Jelani Hamilton (17.8 PPG) was a walking bucket at Georgia State, and Braeden Speed (15.3 PPG) shined at Loyola-MD. Jakus had a good team until the swarm of injury bugs descended on the Owls. He's got the makings of a very good team again, but one that should improve from 3, fixing last season's biggest weakness.



MEMPHIS TIGERS

The American is a good enough conference to punish teams that don't play well

on both ends of the floor. Memphis was arguably the best defensive team in the league, but it was soft on the glass, despite Penny Hardaway's best efforts to bring in more physical players. Because of his roster construction, the team suffered on offense, falling to 296th per Torvik in eFG%, 301st in 3P%, and 271st in 2P%. So, Penny has moved his personal goalposts once again and gone scoring-heavy in the portal in hopes that he can motivate them to play defense. Six transfers averaged double figures at their old schools, led by Tylik Weeks, who had 19.7 PPG for Southern Miss. If nothing else, Memphis is almost a lock to score more points than last season.



NORTH TEXAS MEAN GREEN

The Dudes of Denton won 19 games in a transitional year last season, as Daniyal

Robinson brought a few of his Cleveland State Vikings down south when he took over for Ross Hodge. The Mean Green were mean on defense, as they fouled a ton, but also forced a lot of bad shots and turnovers. UNT was 47th in eFG% defense per Torvik and seventh in TO%. However, all that effort on defense hurt on the other end, as the team really struggled to make shots and was among the 10 worst teams in 3P%. Only Rice brought in less projected production from transfers per Torvik among conference teams, so Robinson is banking on growth from returning players in Year 2.



RICE OWLS

No coaching job is easy, but some are harder than others.

Rice is a hard job. Rob Lanier enters Year 3 having gone 26-37, but the Owls did win three more games in conference play in his second season. This is a program that hasn't been to the NCAA Tournament since 1970 and will extend that drought this season, even with 76 teams in the field for the first time. Between low enrollment, a small NIL budget, and restrictive academic requirements, it is a brutal gig. Under Lanier, Rice has done well on the offensive glass, but that's the only area of consistency, as the defense fell over 100 spots in eFG% year over year. Two starters are back, and USC Upstate transfer Carmelo Adkins leads a small portal haul, but the player to watch is three-star freshman Jaxson Thompson.



SOUTH FLORIDA BULLS

Amir Abdur-Rahim may have already leveled up from South Florida, but it is sad to note

that Chris Mack is the fourth head coach in four seasons for the Bulls, as Abdur-Rahim passed away just before the start of the 2024-25 season. After a year of heartache and heartbreak, Bryan Hodgson took over and won 25 games, culminating in the team's first NCAA Tournament berth since 2012. From a resource standpoint, Mack inherits a full pantry, but from a roster standpoint, he has an empty cupboard. Every player on the roster is new to the program, as USF brought in 11 transfers and three freshmen. The portal haul includes several four-stars per 247 coming out of high school, including Toledo PG Sonny Wilson (17 PPG) and players from Virginia, UNC, and Syracuse. The success of Mack's teams has been dependent on 3-point shooting, so watch that stat early on.



TEMPLE OWLS

The third and final Owls of the American Conference, Temple has one starter back in Gavin

Griffiths, who averaged 10 and 5 for a team that finished .500. Protecting the basketball is big for every coach, but Adam Fisher's team took that to heart, finishing with a TO% under 14% that ranked in the top 20 per Torvik. With 11 newbies, Fisher had to scour the portal for guards, eventually pulling in Dez White, Jordan Marsh, and Dallis Dillard. White and Marsh each shot 36% from 3, and Dillard had over 20 PPG at the Division II level. Marsh was a little careless with the ball at USC, but he's scaling back the quality of competition again with his fourth school in four years. I worry about Temple's ability to get the ball inside and score. This looks like a jump shot-heavy squad.



TULANE GREEN WAVE

The Green Wave played with heavy hearts all season and wound up being very streaky

during conference play. The tragic death of Gregg Glenn III prior to the season not only meant the loss of a teammate, but also one of the team's toughest interior presences and rebounders. They were one of the worst teams on the offensive and defensive glass, so they had an uphill climb in the possession battle every night. They didn't make 3s to offset that, shooting just 32% with a top-70 3P Rate. A few members from last year's team are back, including 6-foot-8 Tyler Ringgold,

TEAM OVERVIEWS

but expect most of the scoring to come from ULM transfer Krystian Lewis (18.4 PPG), Detroit Mercy transfer TJ Nadeau (13.8 PPG, 46.7% from 3), and Queens sharpshooter Carson Schwieger. Hunter has found better shooters, but still lacks rebounders.



TULSA GOLDEN HURRICANE

It is the reality of the job, but it has to be irksome to coaches that every season at the mid-major level is a rebuilding year. Eric Konkol came over from Louisiana Tech and won 34 games in his first three seasons. He won 30 last season alone, as he finally had shooters and guys capable of playing at the tempo that he wanted. Tulsa's best effort on his watch over the first three seasons was 32.1% from 3. Last year's team shot 38.5%. It was also easily his best defensive squad. All of those starters are gone, though sophomore Jaylen Lawal and junior Myles Rigsby played decent minutes last season. Tulsa's success is now dependent on guys from lesser conferences elevating their games to play in a conference that was 10th in NET Rating.



UAB BLAZERS

Another team loaded with question marks in this conference is UAB, as the Blazers may have two players back from last year's team if the NCAA rules in favor

of KyeRon Lindsay-Martin for another season of eligibility. If not, Andy Kennedy's only returnee is lightly used Salim London, who averaged just 4.9 PPG. The roster is a hodgepodge of JUCOs, low-major conference transfers, and a few noteworthy names, including Justyn Fernandez (16.6 PPG) from Delaware and Elijah Duval (15.3 PPG) from Southern Utah. This kind of roster construction isn't new for Kennedy or anybody else coaching a mid-major. Last season's team was constructed the same way and won 20 games, despite being among the nation's worst in 3P%. The last two Kennedy teams were second and 12th in TO% on offense per Torvik. Let's see if this one takes similar care of the rock.



UTSA ROADRUNNERS

There wasn't much "meep meep" in the Roadrunners last season. A complete lack of offense and a team devoid of shot-makers slowed down considerably in the tempo department and went from 12-19 to 5-25. Third-year head coach Austin Claunch, who is only 36, was the head coach at Nicholls before spending two years under Nate Oats at Alabama. Speeding up the pace and carrying a high Rim & 3 Rate makes sense, but it only works if you have the personnel, and the Roadrunners were 351st in 3P% at 29.2% and 353rd in 2P% at 45.5% per Torvik. To make matters worse, they were awful on

defense. Claunch enticed a lot of rotation players with the promise of more playing time. A couple might pop, but this still looks like a low-floor basketball team.



WICHITA STATE SHOCKERS

The preseason conference favorites are looking to start this season the way that they finished last season. After falling to 9-7 with an embarrassing home loss to Rice, the Shockers went 12-3 the rest of the way and were selected for the NIT, where they lost to eventual runner-up Tulsa thanks to a 2-of-19 effort from 3. Where Paul Mills' team excelled was on defense, finishing 24th in eFG% per Torvik and 43rd in 3P%. They also won the possession battle most nights by having a TO% under 15% and a top-10 offensive rebounding rate. Perhaps 7-foot-2 Will Berg has a NIL deal from Windex, as he was the premier glass cleaner and he's back for more. The keys to the season are Chattanooga transfer Jordan Frison (16.4 PPG) and George Mason get Jahari Long (12.2 PPG), as those will be the primary ball-handlers on a team that lost a lot of experience and production at guard.



Will Berg

ATLANTIC COAST CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Zachary Cohen*

Duke, fresh off another disappointing NCAA Tournament, is once again favored to win the ACC. Cameron Boozer might be playing for the Memphis Grizzlies now, but Jon Scheyer kept Caleb Foster, Dame Sarr, Patrick Ngongba II, and Cayden Boozer around. He also added stud Wisconsin transfer John Blackwell, while freshman big man Joaquim Boumtje-Boumtje should be one of the best players in college basketball. The Blue Devils even have Deron Rippey Jr., who looks like one of the most electric guards to suit up in Cameron in years, coming off the bench.

As always, Duke will be a threat to run through the regular season. But Scheyer is under pressure to deliver when it matters most: March.

The other ACC contenders look to be Louisville, Virginia, and Miami. Cardinals head coach Pat Kelsey was shopping the transfer portal like the kid in "Blank Check," so Louisville should be as talented as anyone in the nation. Virginia brings back a bunch of key pieces, and Ryan Odom went out and added reinforcements. Meanwhile, Jai Lucas went 26-9 in his first year with the Hurricanes, meaning this program has not only unlimited funds but also some momentum.

The next tier includes Clemson and North Carolina, with the latter being more interesting. The Tar Heels shocked the world by hiring former Denver Nuggets head coach Mike Malone as Hubert Davis' replacement. Malone had to build his entire roster through the portal, but it'll be fascinating to see how quickly he can find success in Chapel Hill.

Another fascinating story is Gerry McNamara's return to Syracuse, where he'll look to revive his alma mater and recapture some of the magic from the Orange's 2003 national championship run.

The ACC holds up well against the other power conferences at the top, but things seem to tail off quite a bit after that. Will any of the perceived bottom-feeders step up? We'll have to see, but betting this conference in the preseason likely means backing the big guns.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONF RECORDS		ODDS TO WIN	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS	NCAA	CONF
DUKE	97.5	1	3	40%	35-3	21-17	14-24	81.6	63.6	20-1	12-9	+600	+130
LOUISVILLE	90.5	13	0	11%	24-11	16-19	14-21	84.3	72.5	12-8	6-14	20-1	+425
VIRGINIA	90.5	14	3	54%	30-6	18-18	17-19	80.4	68.8	17-4	11-10	30-1	+900
MIAMI	89.5	20	2	48%	26-9	19-16	22-13	81.5	71.3	14-6	10-10	50-1	+770
N CAROLINA	86.0	36	1	13%	24-9	19-14	16-17	79.7	71.6	12-7	11-8	50-1	35-1
CLEMSON	85.0	44	1	33%	24-11	17-18	14-21	73.8	66.7	14-7	11-10	250-1	30-1
NC STATE	83.5	52	1	27%	20-14	15-19	21-13	83.2	76.3	11-9	8-12	300-1	58-1
VIRGINIA TECH	83.5	53	3	39%	19-13	19-13	17-15	78.8	74.9	8-11	12-7	350-1	26-1
SMU	82.0	59	0	13%	20-14	15-19	20-14	84.1	77.9	9-11	9-11	200-1	64-1
FLORIDA ST	81.0	68	1	4%	18-15	20-13	17-16	80.4	77.9	11-9	13-7	250-1	200-1
PITTSBURGH	80.5	69	0	2%	13-20	16-17	19-14	70.5	71.8	6-14	10-10	500-1	450-1
STANFORD	80.5	71	1	13%	20-13	17-16	15-18	76.0	73.0	9-10	10-9	250-1	230-1
SYRACUSE	79.5	77	0	18%	15-17	14-18	17-15	75.0	74.3	6-13	8-11	250-1	140-1
WAKE FOREST	79.5	79	0	3%	18-17	16-19	20-15	78.8	76.9	8-12	9-11	500-1	230-1
NOTRE DAME	78.5	84	2	30%	13-18	15-16	22-9	74.5	75.3	4-14	7-11	500-1	320-1
CALIFORNIA	77.5	90	1	11%	21-12	17-16	15-18	77.7	73.4	9-10	9-10	500-1	500-1
GEORGIA TECH	76.5	101	0	10%	11-20	13-18	18-13	73.8	77.4	2-16	8-10	500-1	500-1
BOSTON COLLEGE	75.5	105	0	0%	11-20	15-16	12-19	67.4	70.7	4-14	12-6	750-1	500-1

TEAM OVERVIEWS



BOSTON COLLEGE EAGLES

Boston College fans should be pretty excited about Luke Murray taking over as head coach. Not only will his father, Bill Murray, be at a ton of games, but many viewed him as the architect of a lethal UConn offense. The Huskies ran more advanced half-court stuff than just about anyone, and they generally prioritized the right shots. The Eagles should now look much more organized offensively, which could make them a problem once the right pieces are in place. Unfortunately, even with Money Williams, Ernest Shelton, Jacob Furphy, and Brandon Benjamin coming in, this year's squad looks extremely light on talent. The Eagles can run as many good actions as they want, but they still have to knock down shots at a decent clip. They might not be able to do that. They're also a little undersized and short on athleticism, meaning Boston College could remain a punching bag a little longer.



CALIFORNIA GOLDEN BEARS

Mike Madsen did an incredible job with Cal last year, leading the Golden Bears to 22 wins. Unfortunately, he has to start almost completely over, with Lee Dort really the only returning contributor. Madsen brought in plenty of experienced players, with Michael Cooper, Nojus Indrusaitis, Jordan Ross, and Jordan Wilkins headlining the group. Cooper could be the cream of the crop. He averaged 13.4 points per game as a freshman at Wright State last season, and he can really put the ball in the hole. The question is how his game translates to this level of competition. Madsen desperately needs a go-to scorer, and Cooper might have to be that guy. Still, even if he exceeds expectations, this team doesn't look particularly good on either end of the floor. It's hard to keep winning in the portal when you're balling on a budget.



CLEMSON TIGERS

A preseason bet on Clemson is a preseason bet on Brad Brownell. The 57-year-old enters this season having led the Tigers to at least 23 wins in four consecutive years. His teams are consistently well-coached, and his players buy in on both ends of the floor. The problem is that Clemson is already super banged up. Zac Foster tore his ACL in October, Carter Welling is recovering from a torn ACL of his own, and we're not even sure Dillon Hunter will be eligible. Brownell brought in a bunch of productive players from other programs, so it's not like

the wheels are going to fall off. It'll just be tough for Clemson to find its top gear until everyone is ready to go. Defensively, the Tigers should be fine. The offense is where you need to worry. There's no clear show-runner right now, making it hard to buy Clemson as a true ACC contender.



DUKE BLUE DEVILS

Last year, Duke was a top-six team in both adjusted offensive (128.2) and defensive (92.6) efficiency, according to Bart Torvik. The Blue Devils hit the glass hard, took excellent shots, and had tremendous balance. This year's team will feature some new faces, but Jon Scheyer's group is always going to play good basketball — and it'll never be short on talent. Joaquim Boumtje-Boumtje is already being discussed as the No. 1 overall pick in the 2028 NBA Draft. He's a 7-foot-2 big with serious basketball skill and tools you can't teach. There's a chance he ends up being the National Player of the Year, and Duke is stacked around him. Scheyer has a bunch of last season's key pieces back, while Wisconsin transfer John Blackwell should be one of the best two-guards in the nation. Given everything Scheyer is working with, this is a championship-or-bust season.



FLORIDA STATE SEMINOLES

Freshman center Marcis Ponder went viral in the preseason for doing his best Shaquille O'Neal impression in his first game donning Florida State colors. The Seminoles seem to have a real monster inside, and pairing him with 6-foot-11 Colorado transfer Sebastian Rancik gives them a promising ACC frontcourt. We're just going to need to see what the backcourt looks like. Kameron Taylor, Shon Abaev, and Anthony Robinson II all offer a little something, but will this team shoot well enough from three after hitting only 33.1% last year? And can Florida State move closer to the top 50 after finishing 84th nationally in adjusted defensive efficiency? The Noles have some sleeper appeal, as Luke Loucks seems like a good coach and his roster is interesting. But they're far from a sure thing.



GEORGIA TECH YELLOW JACKETS

Georgia Tech landed one of the most underrated coaches in college basketball, bringing Scott Cross over after two consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances at Troy. Cross should produce decent results right away. He has been a winner pretty much everywhere,

and he did a nice job reloading this roster. The Yellow Jackets could have a big-time backcourt with transfers Colby Garland and Nasir Whitlock coming in. Both averaged more than 20 points per game last year and could be a handful, even with the jump in competition. Cross also got Victor Valdes to follow him from Troy. Valdes averaged 14.8 points, 4.5 assists, and 4.0 rebounds per game last season, proving to be a stat-sheet stuffer whose production translates to winning. The concerns are depth and rim protection, but there's plenty to like about the pieces Cross assembled.



LOUISVILLE CARDINALS

It's hard to understand how Pat Kelsey was able to spend what he spent after last season, but what happened, happened. Louisville now has one of the best guard-center combinations in college basketball in Jackson Shelstad and Flory Bidunga. Kelsey also brought in Karter Knox, Alvaro Folguelas, and De'Shayne Montgomery to join returner Adrian Wooley. The Cardinals even have some studs waiting on eligibility rulings, including Seth Trimble. There's a good chance Kelsey can build a strong defensive team, which would round out a group already positioned to thrive in his space-and-pace offense. Louisville doesn't have Duke's continuity — or its year-over-year consistency — but the Cardinals have championship upside. This was a top-25 team on both ends of the floor last season, and massive talent upgrades should allow Louisville to keep climbing.



MIAMI HURRICANES

Jai Lucas was consistently praised for his work as an assistant at Duke, so it wasn't surprising to see him immediately turn Miami into a 26-win team. The next step is making the Hurricanes a national contender, and that could happen this year. Shelton Henderson is back after averaging 13.8 points and 4.9 rebounds per game as a freshman. He looks poised for a leap that could put him in the All-ACC territory fellow returner Malik Reneau reached last year. Miami also has five-star forward Caleb Gaskins arriving as an instant-impact frontcourt piece, and the team has high hopes for Georgia transfer Somto Cyril. The center adds much-needed rim protection and should be a solid pick-and-roll finisher for Villanova transfer Acaden Lewis. A good argument can be made that Lewis was one of the best players in the portal. He averaged 12.2 points and 5.3 assists per game and has three years of eligibility left — plus whatever else he can add through the legal process. He gives Lucas a legitimate floor

TEAM OVERVIEWS

general who can fit all of Miami's pieces together and potentially lead the Canes to the promised land.



NORTH CAROLINA TAR HEELS

With Bill Belichick already coaching the football team, North Carolina added

former Denver Nuggets head coach — and NBA champion — Mike Malone to run the basketball program. At this point, let's see the Tar Heels commit to the bit and hire John Tortorella to coach the hockey team. Jokes aside, this is a fun hire. Malone seemingly rubbed some people the wrong way toward the end of his tenure in Denver, but nobody questions his leadership or X's-and-O's acumen. Once he gets some five-star talent in the door, it shouldn't surprise anyone if the Tar Heels get back to their winning ways. This year, it'd take one hell of a coaching job for UNC to be in the mix, but maybe we shouldn't count it out. Neoklis Avdalas is the type of jumbo ball-handler Malone will love, while Terrence Brown and Matt Able give the Tar Heels some dangerous scoring options. The biggest questions are on the defensive end, but Malone won't put up with poor effort there.



NC STATE WOLFPACK

NC State is going to be an interesting team to watch. Justin Gainey, an NC State

alum who most recently served as Rick Barnes' associate head coach, will look to bring some of Tennessee's defensive nastiness to Raleigh. If he can, the Wolfpack will win a ton of games. There are already some good offensive pieces here. Sniper Paul McNeil is back at the two-guard spot, and he'll be joined by some exciting portal additions. The most intriguing is Christian Hammond, who averaged 15.6 points on 48.4/39.3/78.7 shooting splits at Santa Clara last season. He's an efficient scoring guard who can also run the offense. The Wolfpack added a serious shot-blocker, too, bringing in Kyle Evans after he swatted 3.3 shots per game at UC Irvine. This is not a team to take lightly.



NOTRE DAME FIGHTING IRISH

Notre Dame was absolutely abysmal last season, going 13-18 and finishing 149th

nationally in adjusted defensive efficiency (107.9). Making matters worse, the Fighting Irish weren't particularly good offensively, either. Micah Shrewsberry is still on the sideline, and he'll have his son Braeden

Shrewsberry back. But this roster is light on game-changing talent, with most of the incoming transfers looking like role-player types. The exception could be Winthrop transfer Logan Duncomb, who averaged 18.3 points and 8.9 rebounds per game last year. However, Duncomb struggled mightily against high-major competition, leaving real questions about how his game will translate. Notre Dame looks like as good a bet as any to finish at the bottom of the ACC standings, even with four teams sitting lower on the oddsboard.



PITTSBURGH PANTHERS

It's difficult to understand how Jeff Capel is still around, but his seat must be scorching

hot. Capel has produced only three winning seasons in eight years at Pittsburgh, making it fair to wonder whether he's better suited to life as a high-major assistant. To his credit, if Capel is going down, he's going down swinging. The Panthers overhauled the roster, bringing in an entirely new crop of players through the portal. Their success will largely come down to Jalil Bethea and A'lahn Sumler. Bethea is a former five-star recruit who will have the ultimate green light to make something of himself. Sumler, meanwhile, averaged 18.9 points per game while shooting 48.0% from the floor and 39.6% from three at Charleston Southern. If this backcourt is legit, Pittsburgh might avoid the ACC's basement. But this does feel like a team that leads the conference in "ifs."



SMU MUSTANGS

SMU finished in the top 30 nationally in adjusted offensive efficiency (122.7)

last season, helped by its 37.1% shooting from three. This year, the Mustangs will want to increase their three-point volume after ranking just 251st in three-point rate (35.9). They'll be doing it with a very different roster. Jaden Toombs, who averaged 8.3 points and 4.6 rebounds per game last season, is back to man the paint, but he'll have an entirely new group of guards around him. That could be a good thing. Tulane transfer Rowan Brumbaugh is a great pick-and-roll player who should thrive with a bigger spotlight. This could also be a great landing spot for UConn transfer Jaylin Stewart. The wing never carved out a consistent role in the Huskies' rotation, but he'll have every opportunity to do so for Andy Enfield. A small step back offensively wouldn't be surprising, but a sizable defensive improvement could keep the Mustangs flirting with 20 wins.



STANFORD CARDINAL

While seemingly every team in the country is looking for quick fixes, Stanford head

coach Kyle Smith has little choice but to develop youngsters. He struck gold last year with Ebuka Okorie, who emerged as a freshman star and went to the Pistons at No. 17 in the draft. Unfortunately, expecting to hit like that every year isn't realistic. Smith will now look to coach up Aziz Olajuwon — yup, son of that other Olajuwon fella — Julius Price, Elias Obenyah, and Isaiah Rogers, then hope they don't jump into the portal in the offseason. While those guys play through mistakes, Delaware transfer Christian Bliss and Yale transfer Nick Townsend should have sky-high usage rates. The Cardinal will also need Aidan Cammann to take a step forward inside. This should be a fun team to follow, and it wouldn't shock me if Stanford is a good ATS group. But Smith is probably a year or two away from contending in the ACC, and that's assuming he keeps his roster together.



SYRACUSE ORANGE

Gerry McNamara, a national champion with Syracuse in 2003, is now running the

Orange. And while he won't be bringing back Jim Boeheim's 2-3 zone, there are positive vibes on Marshall Street again. McNamara will coach Kiyan Anthony, the son of his former teammate Carmelo Anthony. He's one of this team's key pieces, along with fellow returner Sadiq White. McNamara also hit the portal hard, bringing Gavin Doty with him from Siena and adding Aiden Tobiason and Garwey Dual. This looks like a big, switchable team with athleticism and high motors all over the floor. The question is whether Syracuse has enough shooting to make real waves in the conference. It doesn't seem like McNamara added enough there, but this group should still make fans proud. It shouldn't be long before the Orange are back in the tournament.



VIRGINIA CAVALIERS

Virginia won 30 games and finished 17th in KenPom's efficiency rankings last

season. Now Ryan Odom has the gang back together for Year 2. Thijs De Ridder was one of the best bigs in the country, and another year of seasoning should only make him tougher to stop. The Cavaliers also bring back Chance Mallory, Johann Grunloh, and Sam Lewis. Mallory is one of the best decision-making guards in college basketball, and he should once again have Virginia looking like a well-oiled machine. Odom didn't sit still,

TEAM OVERVIEWS

either. He added transfers who can help right away, making the Cavaliers a sneaky title contender. This team has a modern shot diet, crashes the boards, and features players who know their roles. An older group running it back feels like a bit of a throwback these days, but there's nothing wrong with that.



VIRGINIA TECH HOKIES

Virginia Tech probably doesn't have a ton of upside, but the Hokies should make the

NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2022. Amani Hansberry and Ben Hammond are both back after averaging double figures last season, giving Mike Young a solid foundation. Young also scored a big portal

win by adding San Diego State forward Mile Heide, who is relentless on the glass and could thrive in an expanded role. Additional backcourt pickups will help replace some of what Virginia Tech lost when Neoklis Avdalas left for North Carolina. All in all, this team should shoot well, take care of the basketball, and make opponents earn their wins. That should be enough for a solid season.



WAKE FOREST DEMON DEACONS

Can Merrimack transfer Kevair Kennedy replicate the season he just had in

the MAAC? The 6-foot-2 guard averaged 18.4 points, 4.6 rebounds, and 4.2 assists per game, earning conference Player of the

Year and Rookie of the Year honors. He's electric attacking the rim, and his skill set could unlock everyone else on this roster. The problem is that there isn't much talent around him, and we've seen better players than Kennedy struggle with this kind of jump in competition. Steve Forbes' team is also coming off a season in which it finished outside the top 100 in adjusted defensive efficiency (106.5), and it feels like he's losing his grip on the program. This team might have more question marks than any other group in the ACC. And you have to think Jake Dickert's instant success with the football team has athletic director John Currie looking at Forbes a little differently.



Shelton Henderson

BIG 12 CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Zachary Cohen*

The Big 12 was once Bill Self's conference to lose, but that's no longer the case. Houston won the regular-season title in 2024 and swept the regular-season and tournament titles in 2025, before Arizona pulled off the same sweep in 2026. Kansas is almost playing catch-up, which makes the 2026-27 season all the more interesting.

The Jayhawks made a controversial addition just before the start of the regular season, bringing in Purdue transfer Trey Kaufman-Renn. A 2025 All-Big Ten performer, Kaufman-Renn was drafted by the Timberwolves in the second round of the 2026 NBA Draft but now looks set to join the country's top-ranked freshman, Tyran Stokes, in Lawrence. That would give Kansas an elite inside-outside combination and put the Jayhawks firmly in the conversation at the top of the conference.

Arizona, fresh off a breakthrough season under Tommy Lloyd, enters as the Big 12 betting favorite. Star freshman Caleb Holt joins returners Motiejus Krivas and Ivan Kharchenkov, and there's plenty of talent around that trio.

Houston should also be fantastic again, with Joseph Tugler back to anchor a defense that has been consistently difficult to score against under Kelvin Sampson. The question is whether the Cougars will have enough perimeter firepower to complement that defense and finally win a national championship.

Arizona, Kansas, and Houston might be the top dogs, but the list of dangerous teams doesn't end there. Iowa State and Texas Tech enter the season feeling like they can beat anybody, while BYU, Cincinnati, Baylor, and TCU are all intriguing. West Virginia and Oklahoma State won't be pushovers, either.

The bottom of the conference looks a little ugly right now, but in this era of college basketball, it's hard to count anybody out. It doesn't take long to turn a program around.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONF RECORDS		ODDS TO WIN	
	SM PR	RANK			SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS	NCAA	CONF
HOUSTON	95.0	3	1	22%	30-7	19-18	15-22	76.9	62.3	16-5	11-10	25-1	+350
ARIZONA	94.5	4	2	25%	36-3	23-16	20-19	86.2	69.4	19-2	12-9	20-1	+215
IOWA ST	92.5	6	2	53%	29-8	22-15	15-22	82.0	65.6	14-7	13-8	40-1	+450
KANSAS	92.5	7	0	42%	24-11	21-14	11-24	75.1	69.1	13-7	11-9	30-1	+350
TEXAS TECH	90.0	15	2	35%	23-11	17-17	15-19	80.3	73.1	12-7	11-8	25-1	+840
BYU	87.5	28	2	28%	23-12	16-19	17-18	83.5	75.4	11-10	9-12	60-1	26-1
CINCINNATI	86.5	32	0	0%	18-15	14-19	12-21	73.1	67.6	10-10	9-11	125-1	20-1
BAYLOR	85.5	41	2	21%	16-17	14-19	17-16	80.4	76.9	6-13	7-12	100-1	31-1
W VIRGINIA	85.5	42	0	22%	21-14	18-17	13-22	70.6	65.7	9-10	8-11	250-1	62-1
OKLAHOMA ST	84.5	46	1	33%	20-15	16-19	20-15	83.9	83.2	7-13	10-10	200-1	70-1
TCU	83.5	54	3	53%	23-12	19-16	15-20	77.4	72.1	12-8	11-9	150-1	48-1
UCF	81.5	62	1	12%	21-12	16-17	13-20	80.7	78.4	10-10	9-11	500-1	175-1
ARIZONA ST	81.5	63	0	7%	17-16	20-13	16-17	76.3	78.3	8-12	12-8	250-1	290-1
COLORADO	78.5	88	2	35%	17-16	17-16	17-16	80.2	79.8	7-12	10-9	500-1	500-1
KANSAS ST	77.5	91	0	5%	12-20	12-20	16-16	79.6	81.8	3-16	6-13	500-1	500-1
UTAH	77.0	92	0	7%	10-22	14-18	18-14	74.3	79.1	2-17	10-9	500-1	500-1

TEAM OVERVIEWS



ARIZONA WILDCATS

Arizona finally broke through with a trip to the Final Four last season. With that hurdle cleared, expectations for Tommy Lloyd get a little higher. This program is desperate for a national championship, and this group has a shot at delivering. Lloyd brought back Motiejus Krivas, who could be the best big man in college basketball this year, along with Ivan Kharchenkov, who looked like one of the country's most complete wings as a freshman. Joining that duo is five-star freshman Caleb Holt, who should bring a lot of what Brayden Burries provided last season. He's mature, competes on both ends, and will find ways to fit in. If North Carolina transfer Derek Dixon takes a step forward at the point, the sky is the limit in Tucson. The Wildcats have as strong a starting five as anyone in the country, real depth, and a commitment to being great on both ends of the floor.



ARIZONA STATE SUN DEVILS

The Sun Devils might be near the bottom of the Big 12 oddsboard, but nobody in the conference will want to see Randy Bennett's team. Last season snapped a five-year streak of Bennett's Saint Mary's teams finishing in the top 15 of KenPom's adjusted defensive efficiency rankings. Arizona State probably won't be much fun to watch, as Bennett's teams generally play slowly, value the basketball, and look to out-grit opponents. But there could be immediate results, especially with the transfers Bennett brought in. Paulius Murauskas is the one to watch after following Bennett to Tempe after a season in which he averaged 18.4 points and 7.6 rebounds per game. With Murauskas joined by intriguing perimeter additions Joel Foxwell and Emmanuel Innocenti, the Sun Devils could be a sneaky-good ATS team and a sleeper to finish in the top half of the standings. Dillan Shaw is another name to remember, as the talented wing should develop nicely under Bennett.



BAYLOR BEARS

Baylor kept Scott Drew from taking the Kentucky job a couple of years ago, and retaining a championship-winning coach felt like a win for the program. However, the Bears are just 37-32 over the last two seasons, and last year they missed the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2018. The expectation is that the program will bounce

back, as Drew landed Penn State guard Kayden Mingo to join his brother, five-star recruit Dylan Mingo, in the backcourt. That duo should be dangerous, as both can really attack downhill. Drew also has talent on the wing, including versatile Yale transfer Isaac Celiscar. The Bears are a little thin inside, though, and their depth leaves some cause for concern.



BYU COUGARS

While the Cougars lost AJ Dybantsa, the No. 1 overall pick in the NBA Draft, there's a chance this year's team is even better. Kevin Young has done great things since arriving in Provo, and he has put together another impressive roster. Robert Wright III returns after averaging 18.1 points and 4.6 assists per game, and five-star recruit Bruce Branch III joins him on the perimeter. The Cougars also have good depth at guard, so those two won't have to do it alone. In the frontcourt, BYU picked up Michigan State transfer Jaxon Kohler, giving the team an experienced big man who has won a ton of games. Young should again have a high-end offense: Wright lives in the paint, has shooters to kick out to, and now has more toughness around him inside. Don't sleep on this team as a Big 12 contender.



CINCINNATI BEARCATS

Cincinnati had a talented roster last season, but the Bearcats struggled to make shots — and didn't always take the right ones. That should change with Jerrod Calhoun coming over from Utah State, where his Aggies were exceptionally well coached. Calhoun has earned praise for his offensive X's and O's, and it'll be fun to see what he can do with the Bearcats. Cincinnati will have an entirely new-look rotation, with several productive transfers coming in. Tulsa guard Tylen Riley should be the one stirring the drink, but MJ Collins Jr., who averaged 17.5 points for Calhoun at Utah State, could be the team's most important player if his eligibility holds up. If Collins is available and his scoring translates, Cincinnati should have the goods. Calhoun feels like a Bob Chesney type: a coach who could turn things around very quickly.



COLORADO BUFFALOES

Colorado feels as likely as anyone to finish at the bottom of the conference standings. The Buffaloes do have a solid table-setting point guard in Barrington Hargress, who

averaged 14.7 points and 4.5 assists last season while committing only 1.2 turnovers per game. The issue is that Colorado lacks consistent shot-making around him, stunk defensively last season — finishing No. 128 in adjusted defensive efficiency — and again skews young. Tad Boyle has led Colorado to 10 seasons with at least 20 wins, but he's coming off back-to-back years in which the Buffs' postseason destination was the College Basketball Crown. We're likely looking at another season in that neighborhood.



HOUSTON COUGARS

It shouldn't come as a surprise that Houston has some absolute dogs this season. Joseph Tugler, arguably the best defender in college basketball, is back to disrupt opponents at multiple positions, and Kelvin Sampson added Kent State transfer Delrecco Gillespie, who averaged 17.7 points and 11.3 rebounds last season. Nobody is going to out-hustle Houston, and the Cougars will likely be a top-five defensive team again. We just need to see whether they can take a step forward offensively. The addition of point guard Dedan Thomas Jr. should be huge after he averaged 15.3 points and 6.5 assists while committing only 1.6 turnovers per game last season. A reliable floor general and an elite defense give Houston an extremely high floor, but can somebody provide the consistent perimeter scoring this team needs? All eyes are on freshman Ikenna Alozie and Purdue Fort Wayne transfer Corey Hadnot II.



IOWA STATE CYCLONES

It won't be easy for Iowa State to replace Milan Momcilovic and Joshua Jefferson. Momcilovic was a weapon with his shooting at 6-foot-9, while Jefferson was a jack-of-all-trades forward who played hard every night. However, T.J. Otzelberger has won at least 25 games in three consecutive seasons, and he worked hard to put together another tough roster. Tamin Lipsey is back after averaging 13.5 points and 5.1 assists last season, giving the Cyclones a reliable lead guard. Iowa State added Bradley transfer Jaquan Johnson alongside him, while Killian Toure is expected back around the turn of the calendar to provide pesky point-of-attack defense. Northwestern transfer Tre Singleton and Northern Iowa transfer Leon Bond III are intriguing additions at the forward spots. This should be another great defensive team, with big-time upside if the offense comes along faster than expected.

TEAM OVERVIEWS



KANSAS JAYHAWKS

There will be Big 12 teams that enter the season with more continuity than Kansas, but

there might not be any with more talent. Trey Kaufman-Renn was one of the biggest portal additions of the offseason after averaging 14.2 points, 8.3 rebounds, and 2.5 assists as a key cog on a good Purdue team. He really understands how to play. Pairing him with five-star newcomers Taylen Kinney and Tyran Stokes, along with returning scorer Tre White, gives the Jayhawks a special foundation. Melvin Council Jr., the team's starting point guard in 2025-26, is also back to provide some stability. Kansas should be able to beat teams inside and out, and this group has legitimate title hopes if Stokes — a big athlete who can really attack the basket — lives up to his billing as a potential No. 1 draft pick.



KANSAS STATE WILDCATS

Kansas State is hoping former Belmont coach Casey Alexander can orchestrate

a major turnaround. Including his time at Lipscomb, Alexander has won at least 20 games in 10 consecutive seasons. It's highly unlikely the Wildcats reach that mark in 2026-27, but we should see a much better-looking offense. Last season, Belmont led the country in EFG% and 3PT% while finishing fourth in 2PT%. Alexander's system should help Kansas State generate quality looks and take some real steps forward. We just don't know whether he has the right players yet. He brought in shooters through the portal, but this team might lack a go-to scorer. He's also asking unproven mid-major players to make the jump against high-major competition, and that's a lot to put on them.



OKLAHOMA STATE COWBOYS

Oklahoma State went 17-18 in Year 1 under Steve Lutz, then took a step forward in Year

2. Last season, the Cowboys finished 20-15 and ranked 50th in Bart Torvik's adjusted offensive efficiency at 118.5 points per 100 possessions. Building on that success will be a little easier with point guard Kanye Clary back. Lutz added North Carolina shooter Luka Bogavac to the backcourt and brought in more size through the portal. UCF transfer Jordan Burks and Georgetown big man Julius Halaifonua should make their marks, while top-50 freshman Latrell Allmond adds another intriguing piece at power forward. The Cowboys lost plenty of offensive production, but there's a good chance they'll

remain rock-solid on that end. Can Lutz fix the defense? If the answer is yes, Oklahoma State should go dancing.



TCU HORNED FROGS

TCU was a strange team last season. The Horned Frogs were miserable offensively

and didn't embrace the three-ball, yet still found a way to win 23 games. That's what being a borderline top-25 defensive team can do for you. Jamie Dixon brings back a good chunk of that group and will be hoping for much more reliable offense. Losing David Punch won't make that easier, but Long Beach State transfer Gavin Sykes averaged 19.4 points last season and is a legitimate shot-maker. People also speak highly of JUCO transfer Trent Lincoln, who was a high-level scorer before making the jump. Eight teams sit above TCU on the Big 12 oddsboard, but the Horned Frogs can compete if the transfers hold up their end of the bargain.



TEXAS TECH RED RAIDERS

There's a real chance Texas Tech swims with the big boys in the Big 12 this season. It

just could come down to JT Toppin's health. Toppin averaged 21.8 points, 10.8 rebounds, 1.7 blocks, and 1.4 steals last season before tearing his ACL. If he returns to form, the Red Raiders will be miserable to play against. He brings athleticism and force to a Grant McCasland team that should again have plenty of perimeter firepower. Last season, Tech ranked 11th nationally in adjusted offensive efficiency at 126.0 points per 100 possessions and launched a ton of threes. This group shouldn't look much different, and Hofstra transfer Cruz Davis could be the guy who takes the Red Raiders to another level. Davis was one of the country's most productive guards last season, and adding him to Donovan Atwell, Darrion Williams, UNLV transfer Dra Gibbs-Lawhorn, and Toppin should be something to see. International big man Bassala Bagayoko should also be a factor.



UCF KNIGHTS

UCF rebounded well and shot the three-ball effectively last season, but the Knights were

lousy defensively — a troubling combination for a team that wasn't exactly trying to slow games down. Riley Kugel returns, but Themus Fulks, a sharp decision-maker at the point, is gone. Johnny Dawkins will be

hoping his portal additions can make up for Fulks' absence after the guard played such a big role in making the offense hum. Tarleton State transfer Dior Johnson headlines the newcomers after averaging 24.0 points and scoring at all three levels last season. Johnson shot 53.8% from deep, though he attempted only 2.6 threes per game. It'll be interesting to see whether Dawkins can get him to increase that volume without sacrificing too much efficiency. Either way, Johnson and the other guards will have to carry a lot of weight. This team feels undersized and vulnerable defensively, so the offense better be great.



UTAH UTES

Alex Jensen was an interesting, outside-the-box hire for Utah, but his first

season didn't go as planned. The former NBA assistant went 10-22 at his alma mater, and things need to be much crisper in Year 2 if he wants to avoid early questions about his future. Unfortunately, it's hard to expect much improvement. The Utes were counting on Noam Yaacov to run the offense, but the NCAA ruled him ineligible. That leaves the backcourt short on proven talent, and playing hard will only go so far against Big 12 competition. Two positives from last season: Utah didn't foul much and did a good job of running opponents off the three-point line. Perhaps this group will develop some good habits, too. Without more talent, though, those habits will only take the Utes so far.



WEST VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEERS

Ross Hodge did an amazing job succeeding Grant McCasland at North Texas,

and his work with the Mean Green earned him a Big 12 gig. He proved up to the task in Year 1 at West Virginia, leading the Mountaineers to a 21-14 record and a College Basketball Crown title. Hey, it's something. West Virginia was excellent defensively, and Hodge will make sure his guys lock in again. But the Mountaineers need to be much better offensively, even if they don't play any faster after ranking 361st in tempo last season. Fortunately, help is coming. Five-star point guard Miles Sadler will run the show as a freshman, while Butler transfer Finley Bizjack, St. John's transfer Joson Sanon, and Georgia Tech transfer Mouhamed Sylla provide a nice influx of high-major talent. Brenen Lorient, last season's second-leading scorer, is also back. There's something real in Morgantown.

BIG EAST CONFERENCE

OUTLOOK *by Aaron Moore*

Back in the Big East's heyday during the 1980s and '90s, coaching rivalries up and down the schedule helped fuel all that national interest in the conference.

Big Monday highlighted the coaching battles between Jim Boeheim, Lou Carnesecca, Rollie Massimino, Jim Calhoun, and John Thompson, who all had professional respect for one another but often let their tempers and discontent show on the sidelines.

After a number of different schools have come and gone from the conference over the past few decades, a coaching rivalry is back to being one of the Big East's biggest draws. Even though this current edition has fewer names involved, the heat between Danny Hurley and Rick Pitino is real and should increase even more this year.

Not only are Connecticut and St. John's battling for Big East supremacy, but both also have the realistic goal of winning a national championship. Each coach has two national titles to his credit. However, this current rivalry sways toward Hurley, who won back-to-back titles in 2023 and 2024, while Pitino's came in prior decades.

The media spotlight on these two and the overall success both have had of late have turned Big East coverage into UConn versus St. John's, and then comes everyone else. So again this year, with both the Huskies and Red Storm expected to sit atop the Big East standings all season, the race is on between a number of clubs to be the best of everyone else.

Last season, the conference's only other NCAA Tournament bid went to Villanova. After getting back to the tournament for the first time since 2022, Villanova enters this season looking to duplicate that feat. Marquette also has the makings of a tournament team after having an uncharacteristic losing record in 2026. After these four, there is a drop-off with the rest of the Big East pack.

Perhaps Xavier and Richard Pitino will be this year's surprise club. The Musketeers went on an NIL spending spree and brought in some talent that should make an immediate impact.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONF RECORDS		ODDS TO WIN	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS	NCAA	CONF
CONNECTICUT	91.5	9	3	33%	34-6	17-23	19-21	76.6	65.2	19-4	9-14	11-1	+138
ST JOHNS	89.0	23	1	20%	30-7	22-15	14-23	80.9	69.6	21-2	15-8	30-1	+270
VILLANOVA	86.5	31	2	25%	24-9	19-14	20-13	77.1	71.2	15-6	11-10	100-1	+690
MARQUETTE	86.5	34	3	61%	12-20	13-19	15-17	75.2	75.8	7-14	10-11	150-1	+640
CREIGHTON	86.0	39	3	38%	16-18	11-23	15-19	75.2	75.2	9-12	6-15	200-1	13-1
PROVIDENCE	85.0	45	1	12%	15-18	19-14	22-11	85.3	84.0	8-14	13-9	90-1	18-1
XAVIER	83.0	56	1	30%	15-18	16-17	26-7	78.4	80.6	7-15	11-11	300-1	35-1
DEPAUL	81.0	65	2	33%	16-16	19-13	11-21	70.3	69.6	8-13	13-8	500-1	51-1
SETON HALL	80.5	72	1	16%	21-12	19-14	13-20	70.3	65.3	11-11	12-10	500-1	100-1
GEORGETOWN	80.0	76	1	28%	16-18	14-20	18-16	73.6	72.9	8-15	12-11	500-1	110-1
BUTLER	77.5	89	1	11%	16-16	16-16	18-14	79.4	77.5	7-14	8-13	500-1	280-1

TEAM OVERVIEWS



BUTLER BULLDOGS

Ronald Nored, a starter for the Butler teams that made consecutive NCAA Final

Fours in 2010 and 2011, returns to campus in an effort to turn the program around. Besides being an alum of the school, Nored comes back to the college ranks after serving time as an NBA assistant, a popular hiring trait these days. His first year with the Bulldogs will be a total rebuild with very little hope of finishing in the Big East's top half. Guard Jalen Jackson and center Drayton Jones, neither of whom averaged double-digit points per game last year, are the main holdovers from Thad Matta's team that sputtered to a 16-16 record in 2026. With so many open spots, Serbian freshman Asim Djulovic will have the chance to grow within the program immediately. At 6-foot-8 and 220 pounds, Djulovic has the girth to boost Butler's interior defense.



CONNECTICUT HUSKIES

Clearly, the other Big East coaches feel UConn will bring the momentum from last

year's appearance in the tournament's final game into this season. The Huskies were voted first over St. John's in the preseason coaches' poll and have Silas Demary Jr. as the preseason Player of the Year, Colben Landrew (6-foot-6 from McComb, Miss.) as preseason Freshman of the Year, Braylon Mullins on the preseason First Team, and Na'jai Hines (6-foot-11 transfer from Seton Hall) on the preseason Second Team. Then don't forget about the experienced Jayden Ross, who made a number of contributions during last season's tournament run. Helping to fill the voids left by Alex Karaban's graduation and Solo Ball's wrist injury is Duke transfer Nik Khamenia, who will have a much larger role with the Huskies. Interestingly, from a national standpoint, the Huskies are the clear conference favorite, but KenPom and Bart Torvik both rank UConn outside the top 10 to start the season.



CREIGHTON BLUEJAYS

Another Big East squad starting over with a new coach. Former assistant

Alan Huss moves down the bench to take Greg McDermott's longtime post. Huss is no stranger to being a head coach, as he served in that position while taking High Point to the NCAA Tournament just two seasons ago. A pair of Bluejays who scored over 10 points

a game last year, Austin Swartz and Jasen Green, return, but the biggest beneficiary of the new Huss offensive style should be Wes Enis, a South Florida transfer. Last season for the Bulls, the senior guard scored over 16 points and pulled down nearly four rebounds per game. The 6-foot-10 Jackson McAndrew is returning from a foot injury that limited him to just four games last year. Due to Creighton's home-court advantage, the Bluejays should pull off some upsets and possibly position themselves for the fourth or fifth seed come Big East Tournament time.



DEPAUL BLUE DEMONS

Chris Holtmann going 8-12 in Big East play last season was a tremendous

accomplishment in Year Two of his effort to resurrect the conference's most downtrodden program. Remember, in his first year, the Blue Demons went 0-20. Now the issue for Holtmann becomes whether a record in the range of 8-12 is this program's ceiling. With so many other Big East teams building up facilities and spending on players in order to improve their national standing, how much better DePaul can be is just a reality for a school that last went to the NCAA Tournament 23 seasons ago. Some bright news is that Holtmann brought in Magoon Gwath from San Diego State. The 7-footer should immediately mesh well with DePaul's defensive philosophies. In order for him to make an impact, though, he must stay healthy, which was his issue with the Aztecs.



GEORGETOWN HOYAS

To put it bluntly, the Ed Cooley hiring has been a disaster. His Georgetown

record after three years is 43-57. There is very little reason to believe this season will be anything different from the previous underwhelming ones. Former Kentucky and Pittsburgh guard Jaland Lowe brings some name recognition to the team. For Lowe to make a difference this season, he will need to play like he did with the Panthers during his sophomore campaign. Vyctorius Miller is another solid addition who should help bring more 3-point production, a problem for the Hoyas last year. The 7-foot-1 Vince Iwuchukwu is one of the better rim protectors in the league. Now, it's up to the rest of the Hoyas to play the type of defense that Cooley featured at Providence.



MARQUETTE GOLDEN EAGLES

The Golden Eagles are one of the prime candidates to push both UConn and

St. John's this season. After missing the tournament last year, Shaka Smart quickly got over his dislike of the transfer portal and brought in Sananda Fru from Louisville and Nolan Minessale, who scored nearly 20 points a game for St. Thomas. Those are good pieces to play alongside guard Nigel James Jr., who averaged 16.4 points, 4.9 assists, and 3.4 boards as a freshman last year. Another key returning piece is Royce Parham (12.5 PPG and 4.9 RPG). James being one year older and having a number of options surrounding him, including Adrien Stephens, should help Marquette regain the consistency that wasn't there a year ago. Marquette dealt with a six-game losing streak in late December, followed by two more three-game losing streaks. KenPom and Bart Torvik have the Golden Eagles starting the season in the top 35 of their rankings. A return to the NCAA Tournament is an expectation in Milwaukee.



PROVIDENCE FRIARS

There are going to be plenty of new Friars this season, but one of them won't be

Dink Pate. Even the Friars got caught up in the nonsense of trying to make G League players eligible. In the case of the 6-foot-8 Pate, he would have been a difference-maker in the Big East standings. With Pate returning to the G League, Bryan Hodgson moves on and must create cohesion with a starting five that includes just one player (Ryan Mela, 9.9 PPG and 5.3 RPG) from last year's 15-18 club. Hodgson, in his first year after coming over from South Florida, went to the portal to find players who can thrive in his fast-paced offensive system. His guard-centric group of Malik Mack (Georgetown), Devin Vanterpool (FAU), and Miles Byrd (San Diego State) averaged close to 40 points per game last season. Byrd was also the Mountain West Defensive Player of the Year. Coming over from Northwestern to play down low is Arrintene Page (10.2 PPG and 4.5 RPG). The Friars are likely more of an NIT team than an NCAA squad, but they are going to be much stronger than last year and pull off a couple of conference upsets.

TEAM OVERVIEWS



SETON HALL PIRATES

Over his four previous seasons at Seton Hall, Shaheen Holloway's teams have tended to show promise one year and then take a step back the following one. Well, last year the Pirates ripped off a surprising 21 wins, so recent history says they will have fewer victories in 2027. Not only does history say that, but so does this year's roster. Such is the case for the Pirates, who often lose the financial race to secure their best players. Gone are the team's top three scorers, including Budd Clark (12.7 PPG), now at Mississippi, and Tajuan Simpkins (9.7 PPG), now at Mississippi State. AJ Staton-McCray (11.8 PPG) used all his eligibility. Fitting with the Holloway style, his new players will be high on energy and toughness. The new starting five in West Orange should be Del Jones (Radford), Simeon Wilcher (Texas), Rodney Brown (Loyola Marymount), Mayar Wol (Bowling Green), and Devin Williams (FAU). This club won't put the Pirates on the bubble like they were a year ago.



ST. JOHN'S RED STORM

Rick Pitino is once again executing his master plan of using older transfers as the best way to bring St. John's back to the Final Four for the first time since 1985. During this late stage of his career, Pitino has zeroed in

on eligibility loopholes to combat UConn in the Big East's arms race. Quinn Ellis, a 23-year-old from England who last played for Olimpia Milano in Italy, will have an immediate impact in the backcourt. As of now, the Johnnies are expecting Keyshawn Hall (Auburn) and Babacar Sane (G League) to be eligible after temporary restraining orders worked in their favor. Reed Bailey (Davidson and Indiana) is also eligible for another season after a court order. There is no courtroom drama surrounding this year's No. 1 option in Tounde Yessoufou, a Baylor transfer who scored 17.8 PPG last year. Yessoufou will be on the Wooden Award radar. Once St. John's focus moves away from the courtroom to the hard court, this older Pitino-esque team will be looking to shorten the small gap between it and UConn throughout the regular season, the Big East Tournament, and possibly all the way to the Final Four.



VILLANOVA WILDCATS

With all the ballyhoo surrounding UConn and St. John's, it is easy to look past Villanova. However, this once again looks like an NCAA Tournament group. Even before the Big East season starts, Pope Leo's alma mater will make national news in Rome, taking on Notre Dame in the Eternal City Tip-Off. Whether overseas or in the U.S., Kevin Willard's postseason fortunes will revolve around the performance of Tyler Perkins, last

year's Most Improved Player award winner. The 13.7 points per game from a year ago should rise as Perkins' overall stock does as well. Willard's already physical defensive style will get some Big Ten grit with transfers Kwame Evans Jr. (Oregon) and Devin Royal (Ohio State). The 6-foot-10 Evans and the 6-foot-6 Royal will once again give Villanova a key attribute that worked so well during the Jay Wright era — longer big men who can play anywhere on the court. The Wildcats are putting themselves through plenty of early tests with games against Pittsburgh, Michigan, Kansas, and Wisconsin.



XAVIER MUSKETEERS

Just like his old man is so fond of doing, Richard Pitino is revamping his roster via the portal. New talent was certainly needed for a program that struggled to a 15-18 record a year ago. Ending the year by losing 8 of their last 11 games led many Musketeers' backers to open up their checkbooks with the hopes of a Pitino portal turnaround. This year's new-look Xavier will feature a plethora of transfers, including Chance Westry (UAB), Ruben Dominguez (Texas A&M), Tru Washington (Miami), Michael Nwoko (LSU), Gabriel Pozzato (Evansville), and Nikos Chitikoudis (Robert Morris). Jovan Milicevic and Filip Borovicanin from last year's team are also back, giving Xavier a rather deep roster. The Musketeers are going to be this year's Big East sleeper surprise.

Jovan Milicevic



BIG TEN CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Wes Reynolds*

The quarter-century drought finally ended for the Big Ten as Michigan became the first conference member to win the national championship since Michigan State did it in 2000. However, the Wolverines, while still talented, lost three lottery picks and their head coach, Dusty May, to the NBA. Mike Boynton takes over the head coaching job on a two-year deal.

The Big Ten not only had the national champions but also two teams in the Final Four, with Illinois joining Michigan. The Illini are the preseason favorites in large part due to three double-digit scorers – Andrej Stojakovic, David Mirkovic, and Tomislav Ivisic – and the addition of Providence transfer Stefan Vaaks (15.8 PPG).

Michigan State, Purdue, Nebraska, and Iowa also combined with the two Final Four participants to give the conference six Sweet 16 teams last year. Michigan State looks to have its best opportunity to reach the Final Four since 2019, with Wooden Award favorite point guard Jeremy Fears Jr. withdrawing from the NBA Draft and returning to East Lansing. Purdue loses its winningest senior class in program history but has seven returning scholarship players for a group that will not be picked at the top, unlike the last several seasons. Iowa will continue to be one of the slower-paced teams but now has size with 7-foot-2 transfer Andrew McKeever, who is used to a deliberate offense at Saint Mary's. Nebraska, picked 14th last season, won a school-record 28 games and finished second in the conference.

UCLA returns three starters and brings in four Power Five transfers, while crosstown rival USC is ranked in the preseason polls for the first time as a member of the Big Ten. Ohio State kept five-star freshman Anthony Thompson, the Buckeyes' highest-rated commitment in 16 years, home despite losing nine players.

Indiana, Maryland, and Minnesota are all led by coaches in their second seasons leading their programs, and all have more high-major talent than last season. Dana Altman abruptly retired in October, and his longtime assistant Tony Stubblefield takes over at Oregon, which will be at the back end of the conference along with Wisconsin, Washington, Northwestern, Rutgers, and Penn State.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONF RECORDS		ODDS TO WIN	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS	NCAA	CONF
ILLINOIS	94.0	5	3	56%	28-9	22-15	15-22	83.2	68.8	16-6	12-10	12-1	+114
MICHIGAN ST	92.0	8	3	62%	27-8	18-17	16-19	78.8	68.3	15-6	12-9	18-1	+465
MICHIGAN	89.5	19	1	36%	37-4	19-22	18-23	87.0	69.8	21-3	8-16	30-1	+870
OHIO ST	89.0	22	2	33%	21-13	18-16	16-18	79.3	72.6	13-9	13-9	125-1	13-1
NEBRASKA	89.0	24	1	39%	28-7	19-16	11-24	77.0	66.1	15-7	12-10	100-1	+730
PURDUE	88.5	26	1	33%	31-9	18-22	21-19	81.6	70.6	18-7	10-15	60-1	15-1
UCLA	88.0	27	3	45%	24-12	17-19	17-19	77.1	71.1	15-8	12-11	50-1	12-1
INDIANA	86.5	30	1	16%	18-14	14-18	14-18	78.2	72.2	9-12	9-12	60-1	27-1
USC	86.0	35	2	27%	17-14	13-18	17-14	77.8	78.4	7-14	8-13	50-1	26-1
WISCONSIN	86.0	40	1	38%	24-11	21-14	22-13	83.0	76.1	16-7	15-8	150-1	48-1
IOWA	85.0	43	3	47%	24-13	21-16	21-16	74.5	66.3	12-12	10-14	80-1	60-1
MARYLAND	84.0	50	1	27%	12-21	16-17	18-15	69.7	76.6	5-17	11-11	100-1	45-1
MINNESOTA	83.0	55	3	54%	15-18	14-19	13-20	69.4	68.5	8-13	10-11	350-1	92-1
OREGON	81.5	61	1	14%	12-20	12-20	14-18	70.8	73.9	5-16	8-13	350-1	98-1
WASHINGTON	80.0	73	2	25%	16-17	20-13	15-18	77.1	73.6	8-14	15-7	500-1	270-1
RUTGERS	79.0	83	3	60%	14-20	17-17	19-15	70.5	75.3	7-15	14-8	500-1	320-1
NORTHWESTERN	78.5	86	2	17%	15-19	18-16	15-19	73.1	72.0	7-16	12-11	500-1	500-1
PENN ST	77.0	97	2	26%	12-20	12-20	18-14	73.7	79.3	3-18	9-12	500-1	500-1

TEAM OVERVIEWS



ILLINOIS FIGHTING ILLINI

The Illini had the nation's No. 2 ranking for Adjusted Offensive Efficiency per

KenPom and have a great chance to match or even exceed those numbers, with five of six rotation players eligible to return staying with the program. Illinois ranks third among Big Ten teams in points returning (57.0%) and minutes returning (57.3%). Andrej Stojakovic, David Mirkovic, and Tomislav Ivisic are all returning double-digit scorers. Zvonimir Ivisic teams with his brother to give Illinois two 7-foot Croatian twin towers, and Jake Davis could end up in the starting lineup. Providence transfer Stefan Vaaks, along with freshmen Quentin Coleman and Lucas Morillo, provides length and size on the wing, where Illinois should force more turnovers (365th out of 365 last year in Opponent Turnover % and Steal %). However, the Illini will still funnel opponents into the lane to face the Ivisic brothers. Brad Underwood's group has a great chance of returning to the Final Four.



INDIANA HOOSIERS

Darian DeVries was hired late in the portal cycle when he took over the Indiana job, and

it showed with an 18-14 campaign led by mid-major players who played hard but lacked the size, athleticism, and overall talent to compete in the Big Ten. The Hoosiers certainly played a more modern style of basketball by shooting over half their shots from three-point range (14th nationally). They will still stick to that with the additions of Bryce Lindsay (78 3s at Villanova) and Duke transfer Darren Harris. However, Indiana now has shot creators and drivers with Notre Dame transfer Markus Burton and Georgia Tech's Jaeden Mustaf. Plus, there is actual size now with 6-foot-11 Aiden Sherrell (Alabama) and 7-foot-2 Samet Yigitoglu (SMU). The Hoosiers have missed the NCAA Tournament in seven of the last nine years, but this is the year they return with more talent and better roster balance. Indiana could be a top-four sleeper in the conference.



IOWA HAWKEYES

Ben McCollum has won at every level throughout his coaching career. The question

was whether he could do it at the top level of college basketball. Well, all he did was take what had become a stale Iowa program to its first Elite Eight since 1987. Year two of the McCollum era will present a different

challenge, though, without do-everything guard Bennett Stirtz, who was with the coach at NW Missouri State, Drake, and Iowa. The Hawkeyes return key cogs like 6-foot-7 guard Tate Sage (6.1 PPG), 6-foot-8 forward Cooper Koch (7.8 PPG), and 6-foot-9 Cam Manyawu (6.6 PPG, 4.6 RPG). They also may run more action through the post with 7-foot-2 Saint Mary's transfer Andrew McKeever (8.2 PPG, 9.2 RPG). Replacing Stirtz will be a big challenge, and Iowa will be picked as a mid-pack team, but its size plus its slow pace (362nd out of 365) will keep it in most games, even against more talented groups in the league.



MARYLAND TERRAPINS

Maryland finished 17th out of 18 in Buzz Williams' first season, and the Terps clearly

did not have the size, physicality, and speed to compete in the Big Ten. Buzz's offenses can typically be a bit of a slog, but last year was extreme as Maryland ranked last in the conference in offensive efficiency and turnovers. The Terps believe they found their solution at point guard with Arkansas transfer DJ Wagner to play alongside Tennessee transfer Bishop Boswell, the returning Andre Mills (12.2 PPG, 4.1 RPG), and three-point specialist Mike McNair (44.4% at Boston U). Buzz's best teams have always lived off offensive boards and second-chance opportunities. Pharrel Payne was lost in mid-December last year but gets help down low with 6-foot-9 New Mexico transfer Tomislav Buljan and 6-foot-10 five-star freshman Bala Oladorun. The Terps should be one of the more improved teams in the conference.



MICHIGAN WOLVERINES

The eventual national champion is not always the best team, but it was last year,

as Michigan was elite on both sides of the ball, ranked in the top four nationally in both offensive and defensive efficiency, and won its first national title since 1989. Success often has a price, and the Wolverines will pay a heavy one with the loss of head coach Dusty May (Dallas Mavericks), three lottery picks – Big Ten POY Yaxel Lendeborg, Aday Mara, and Morez Johnson Jr. – plus three other veteran contributors. Mike Boynton will attempt to create the same transfer portal magic as May with the additions of 7-foot-2 big man Moustapha Thiam (Cincinnati), 6-foot-10 JP Estrella (Tennessee), and 6-foot-10 Jalen Reed (LSU) to go along with a returning backcourt of Elliott Cadeau

(10.5 PPG, 5.9 APG) and Trey McKenney (9.9 PPG). Michigan did not just live in the portal, either, with the addition of a top-five recruiting class headlined by five-star guard Brandon McCoy Jr. and 6-foot-10 big Quinn Costello. Credit Boynton for keeping the roster largely intact, as the Wolverines will still be a factor atop the Big Ten.



MICHIGAN STATE SPARTANS

The Spartans have reached the Elite Eight and Sweet 16, respectively, in the last two

seasons, but this is the year many expect Michigan State to return to its first Final Four since 2019, which would mark Tom Izzo's ninth appearance there. It starts with Jeremy Fears Jr. (15.2 PPG, 9.4 APG – national leader) coming back to lead a group that returns 60.4% of its minutes and 60.2% of its scoring, the most of any of last year's Sweet 16 teams. The Spartans should go about 10 deep with Fears, pogo-stick Coen Carr (12 PPG, 5.4 RPG), wing Jordan Scott (5.8 PPG), power forward Cam Ward (5.1 PPG, 4.2 RPG), 3-point sharpshooter Kur Teng (38.1% 3PT), and a group of redshirts, plus 7-foot-2 Charlotte transfer Anton Bonke. The nonconference slate is the typical gauntlet, but this group could peak before Izzo's teams typically do in February. If that is the case, then Sparty will be making the drive east on I-96 to Detroit for the Final Four.



MINNESOTA GOLDEN GOPHERS

The Golden Gophers won the same number of games in Niko Medved's first

season as they did the previous year at 15. Nevertheless, the program appears to be heading in a better direction. Minnesota pulled several upsets at home and made "The Barn" a tougher place to play. The Gophers return 60.5% of their minutes, the most in the league, with Jaylen Crocker Johnson (13.4 PPG, 6.8 RPG), Isaac Asuma (10.9 PPG, 4.0 RPG, 3.7 APG), Bobby Durkin (10.2 PPG, 39.2% 3PT), Grayson Grove (59.4% FG), and Kai Shinholster back. The team was down to just seven scholarship players after Christmas. The Gophers should be deeper this season with high-major transfers – Winters Grady and Malick Kordel (Michigan), Kyan Evans (North Carolina), Malachi Palmer (Villanova), and Nolan Groves (Texas Tech) – to go along with two of Minnesota's top three freshmen – Nolen Anderson and Cedric Tomez. Medved is the right guy for this job, but improvements will continue to be incremental.

TEAM OVERVIEWS



NEBRASKA CORNHUSKERS

It was a historic season for Nebraska last year. The Huskers started the year 20-0, reached No. 5 in the AP Poll, won a school-record 28 games, earned a protected No. 4 seed in the NCAA Tournament, and reached the Sweet 16. These accomplishments also earned Fred Hoiberg the AP National Coach of the Year Award. Nebraska does lose four starters, but there are pieces remaining to help the Huskers maintain that success, namely one of the nation's best shooters, Pryce Sandfort (18.1 PPG, 41.6% 3PT), and last year's sixth man, Braden Frager (11.8 PPG). Connor Essegian (5.4 PPG) is another sharpshooter who was lost after seven games, and stretch four Sam Orme (12.7 PPG) transfers in from Belmont. Utah Valley transfer Trevon Leonhardt and San Diego State's Taj DeGourville will man the point. The 6-foot-11 Damon Wilkinson (South Dakota State) and 7-foot Boden Kapke (Boston College) will attempt to replace Rienk Mast. Everything did go right for this team last season, so a projected mid-pack finish seems appropriate.



NORTHWESTERN WILDCATS

Perhaps no team in the conference was hit harder by defections, as eight players transferred from last year's Wildcats roster. Point guard Jake West (5.3 PPG, 2.8 APG) and wing Angelo Ciaravino (6.3 PPG, 3.9 RPG) return, but the rest of the squad is new, with transfers who all averaged double-digit points at the mid-to-low-major level – LA Pratt (Northeastern), Jack Karasinski (Bellarmine), Collin Smith (UC Santa Barbara), and Luke McEldon (Mount St. Mary's). Northwestern was one of the smaller teams in the Big Ten last season but now has four players over 6-foot-9. The Wildcats led the nation last season in longest average defensive possession (19.2 seconds) and will need to be there again to be even somewhat competitive in the Big Ten with an almost entirely new roster of lower-level talent.



OHIO STATE BUCKEYES

The Buckeyes have been mired in the middle of the pack for the last few seasons and lose the program's all-time leading scorer in Bruce Thornton. However, Jon Diebler believes this to be his deepest and most talented club to date. Homegrown wing Anthony Thompson is the Buckeyes' first McDonald's All-American since D'Angelo

Russell in 2014. Another five-star, LJ Smith, elected to reclassify a year early for Ohio State. The Buckeyes will still be led by a veteran point guard, with John Mobley Jr. (15.7 PPG, 41.1% 3PT) returning along with Amare Bynum (9.7 PPG, 4.9 RPG) down low. Along with the talented freshmen, transfers Justin Pippen (Cal), Josh Ojianwuna (Baylor), Curtis Givens (Memphis), and Jimmie Williams (Duquesne), plus Croatian bigs Andrija Jelavic (Kentucky) and 7-foot-2 Ivan Njegovan, give them size. The talent is better for the Buckeyes to climb into the top tier of the conference, but who will be the go-to guy to get a late bucket in place of Thornton?



OREGON DUCKS

After a 12-20 season, Dana Altman ended his 16-year tenure with the Ducks in October, and his longtime assistant Tony Stubblefield takes over on an interim basis. Altman is far from the lone departure, as 13 players (four to graduation and nine to the portal) departed Oregon. Forward Sean Stewart (6.5 PPG, 5.2 RPG) is the lone returning starter. The former Ohio State transfer is joined by a litany of transfers, including guards Fred Payne (Boston College), Jerry Easter II (USC), and Jasper Johnson (Kentucky), along with forwards Tyrone Riley (San Francisco), Pharoah Compton (San Diego State), Andrew Meadow (Boise State), Taylor Bol Bowen (Alabama), Dwayne Aristode (Arizona), and Malique Ewin (Arizona). There is experience and talent among these transfers, but Stubblefield is going to have his work cut out for him in blending all of them together.



PENN STATE NITTANY LIONS

Penn State was last in the conference with a 3-17 mark, and the Nittany Lions lost eight players to the portal, as arguably the lowest NIL budget in the conference makes Mike Rhoades's job even more difficult than it already is. Forward Josh Reed (11.5 PPG, 4.1 RPG) received a fifth year of eligibility, and he returns along with 7-footer Ivan Juric (10.3 PPG, 5.3 RPG), but everyone else is new. Dasonte Bowen (St. Bonaventure) and Jay Rodgers (Central Connecticut State) are older point guards to go along with swingman Brant Byers (Miami OH), off-guard Roberts Blums (Davidson), and 6-foot-11 big man Tim Oboh (Buffalo). The Nittany Lions are a more veteran group but still way down on talent and likely competing just to stay out of the conference cellar.



PURDUE BOILERMAKERS

In this era, or any era for that matter, it is rare to graduate a starting backcourt that started all four years together, but that's what has happened at Purdue, as Braden Smith and Fletcher Loyer have now graduated after starting 149 games together. That duo, along with Trey Kaufman-Renn, won 112 games, finished as national runner-up, and won two Big Ten regular-season titles and two Big Ten Tournaments. Matt Painter returns one starter in junior guard CJ Cox (8.3 PPG). The 7-foot-4 Daniel Jacobsen (5.5 PPG, 3 RPG, 1.2 BPG), Jack Benter (4.4 PPG), Gicarri Harris (4.6 PPG), and Omer Mayer (5.5 PPG) were all reserve contributors last year who will be asked for more. Princeton transfer Caden Pierce won the Ivy League POY in 2023-24. Luke Ertel, an Indiana Mr. Basketball like Smith, looks to be the long-term heir apparent at point guard. Purdue will be down from the conference elite, but Painter believes in developing his own players and rarely looks to the portal for the quick fix.



RUTGERS SCARLET KNIGHTS

In early September, Rutgers head coach Steve Pikiell announced that he had cancer and would be stepping away from day-to-day program operations to focus on treatment. Associate head coach Brandin Knight will take over in his absence. Rutgers was able to retain five of its top seven scorers, with point guard Tariq Francis (17 PPG), Darren Buchanan Jr. (8.1 PPG), Jamichael Davis (7.5 PPG), Kaden Powers (6.1 PPG), and Lino Mack (5.9 PPG) all back. Darin Smith also comes in with a scoring mentality, as he averaged over 20 PPG at Central Connecticut State. The Scarlet Knights also add some size to help defensively with Coastal Carolina transfer RaSheed Jones, Will Sydnor (Manhattan), 6-foot-10 Christian Gurdak (Virginia Tech), and 7-foot-2 Dorin Buca (Kansas State). Rutgers beat the teams it finished ahead of (6-0) and went 0-14 against the top 13 teams. Perhaps the Scarlet Knights pick off one or two more conference wins, but that is the ceiling.



UCLA BRUINS

The Bruins have been the most consistent program of the Pac-12 expatriates since moving to the Big Ten three years ago. UCLA has advanced to the NCAA Tournament second round in each of the last two years but certainly has higher aspirations. Three

TEAM OVERVIEWS

starters return, including guard Trent Perry (12.6 PPG, 39.2% 3PT), wing Eric Dailey (11.6 PPG, 5.8 RPG), and 6-foot-11 center Xavier Booker (7.3 PPG, 43.3% 3PT). Texas Tech transfer guard Jaylen Petty and Serbian freshman Nikola Kusturica are expected to round out the starting lineup. Mick Cronin has a Serbian assistant coach, so that pipeline continues to bring talent with Filip Jovic transferring from Auburn, along with Sergej Macura from Mississippi State. UCLA relies on defense and a slowish tempo, and there is no reason to foresee any change in that. For the Bruins to reach an NCAA Tournament weekend, Booker must be tougher and more physical down low.



USC TROJANS

USC was 18-6 going into the second week of February and then lost its final eight games of the season. This year's team chemistry should be better without Chad Baker-Mazara, who was dismissed from the club late in the season. Rodney Rice was averaging over 20 PPG but was done for the season with a shoulder injury after just seven games. Alijah Arenas (14.1 PPG) did not make his season debut until Game 19 of the season after recovering from a car accident. The 6-foot-10 forward Jacob Cofie (9.9 PPG, 6.8 RPG, 1.8 BPG) flirted with the NBA Draft but comes back to give the Trojans even more

size, along with 7-foot freshmen Adonis and Darius Ratliff, the twin sons of former NBAer Theo Ratliff who were both McDonald's All-Americans. Eric Musselman is used to bringing together a lot of transfers, and he has good returning production, but many of those players are coming off injuries. If this group maintains good health, it could challenge for a top-four spot in the conference.



WASHINGTON HUSKIES

Washington is coming off an injury-riddled 16-17 campaign, with losses to the NBA Draft (Hannes Steinbach) and several starters and key contributors like Zoom Diallo and Francis Kepnang chasing bigger NIL dollars elsewhere. Wesley Yates III (12.7 PPG, 3.3 RPG) saw his shooting and efficiency numbers drop across the board last season. Sophomore Jasir Rencher (3 PPG) missed time last year due to an irregular heartbeat. The 6-foot-10 junior Lathan Sommerville (4.3 PPG, 2.6 RPG), 6-foot-10 sophomore Nikola Dzepina (2.6 PPG, 1.3 RPG), and 6-foot-11 redshirt senior Mady Traore provide a lot of size down low. Texas Tech transfer LeJuan Watts, Gonzaga transfer Steele Venters, and Davidson three-point specialist Parker Friedrichsen will be counted on for an immediate scoring punch. San Francisco transfer Ryan Beasley will man the point.

Danny Sprinkle is an excellent coach who has won everywhere he has been, but it will be difficult for this group to climb into the top half of the conference.



WISCONSIN BADGERS

The Badgers were one of three teams (Duke and Purdue being the others) to beat national champion Michigan, and they also beat Illinois twice. Nevertheless, it was an inconsistent season that ended with a first-round upset by High Point. Wisconsin had its highest-scoring squad (83.0 PPG) since 1970-71. It ranked 100th nationally in tempo and only turned it over 12.4% of the time (fourth-best nationally), but the Badgers sacrificed some defense to make their offense more explosive. Seven-footer Nolan Winter (13.1 PPG, 8.5 RPG) is the lone returning starter but did miss some time in the summer. So did 6-foot-10 Austin Rapp (9.7 PPG, 4 RPG), one of five Oceanian players on the roster, which includes new starting point guard, 23-year-old Owen Foxwell. Eian Elmer (Miami OH) and Trey Autry (George Washington) were both double-figure scorers at previous stops. The Badgers have been to the NCAA Tournament in 27 of the last 29 years but will have to exceed expectations to return this year.

Rodney Rice





OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

“Arch Madness” will look a lot different this season, adding much more emphasis to the regular season in the Missouri Valley Conference. With a cut-down field and byes to the semifinals for the top two teams, the goal is to avoid what happened last season – a 5 vs. 6 matchup for the automatic bid into the NCAA Tournament.

The reality is that a lot of these teams in the Missouri Valley are not separated by much. In fact, Bart Torvik’s preseason T-Rank Projections had five MVC teams ranked from 100 to 120 and seven of the 11 teams ranked from 100 to 150. Seven teams had winning conference records, as Drake, Indiana State, and Evansville combined to go 13-47, serving as punching bags for the rest of the league.

It was quite the fall for the Bulldogs, who experienced heavy personnel losses in Tucker DeVries and Bennett Stirtz in back-to-back seasons, plus the coaching change from Darian DeVries to Ben McCollum and then to Eric Henderson, as McCollum only spent one season in Des Moines.

Could we see a similar tailspin for Northern Iowa with the departure of Ben Jacobson? After 20 seasons with the Panthers, he’s now at Utah State. Belmont also bid adieu to a tenured head coach in Casey Alexander, who took the same role at Kansas State. The Bruins replaced Alexander with Duke assistant and former Belmont star Evan Bradds. The Panthers opted for Kyle Green, a three-time UNI assistant who was at Iowa State the past five seasons.

I also wrote up the American Conference for this year’s Guide, where only four teams returned 30% or more of their minutes from last season. Seven teams do in the MVC, so there is a little bit more roster continuity, and maybe a little bit more projectability early in the season. What we know for sure is that this conference will be light on turnovers, heavy on jump shots, and competitive against the big boys in early-season non-conference play.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT’L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONF RECORDS		ODDS TO WIN	
	SM PR	RANK			SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS	NCAA	CONF
IL-CHICAGO	76.5	99	5	61%	17-16	17-16	16-17	73.9	71.2	14-9	15-8	1000-1	+250
MURRAY ST	75.5	104	1	28%	20-13	14-19	19-14	83.1	80.2	12-9	7-14	1000-1	+225
ILLINOIS ST	75.0	108	3	41%	22-13	19-16	15-20	74.1	69.1	12-9	10-11	1000-1	+475
BELMONT	73.0	126	2	38%	25-6	17-14	19-12	83.5	74.1	16-5	11-10	1000-1	+830
DRAKE	72.0	138	3	35%	12-20	12-20	18-14	73.9	76.3	8-15	8-15	2000-1	+950
N IOWA	71.5	141	0	6%	22-13	19-16	14-21	68.6	62.5	15-9	13-11	1000-1	13-1
VALPARAISO	71.5	145	2	53%	17-15	19-13	17-15	71.2	71.9	12-10	13-9	1000-1	14-1
BRADLEY	69.5	164	1	12%	20-13	14-19	19-14	77.0	74.2	14-8	10-12	1000-1	32-1
S ILLINOIS	69.0	178	1	27%	15-16	16-15	9-22	72.7	70.5	10-11	11-10	1000-1	70-1
INDIANA ST	67.0	210	0	0%	9-21	18-12	13-17	71.7	75.1	4-17	12-9	2000-1	66-1
EVANSVILLE	65.0	251	2	37%	5-25	14-16	15-15	65.8	78.3	3-18	10-11	2000-1	325-1

TEAM OVERVIEWS



BELMONT BRUINS

It is incredible that Casey Alexander hasn't made the NCAA Tournament since

2018. Over his seven seasons with Belmont, his teams were in the top 20 in eFG% offense six times. His lowest-ranked team was 39th. Over each of the last four seasons, Belmont was 21st or better in 3P%, including a nation's best 41% success rate last season. Alexander won at least 20 games every season, but couldn't get over the hump. Perhaps Evan Bradds can. He kept Alexander's right-hand man, Brian Ayers, who was also there when Bradds played from 2013-17. While Alexander got a big bag from Kansas State, many of his top players got bags from power schools, so the 32-year-old Bradds will have a very young roster. Some underclassmen stayed, and the freshman class might even get some run.



BRADLEY BRAVES

Life in the Missouri Valley is tough. Brian Wardle's Bradley teams have won at least 11

games in conference play every season since 2022, including a 16-4 effort in 2023 and a 15-5 effort in 2025. He's made the NCAA Tournament once in 11 seasons with the program, ironically, a year in which his team went 9-9 in conference play. Unfortunately for him, this looks like one of his toughest seasons in a long time. Last year's team overcame the loss of multiple tenured players. It's the same thing this season, but also with the losses of promising freshmen and sophomores. Wardle has an eye for talent and experience in the portal, but he's looking for his rotation players to take a big step. For a team that was near the top 50 in 3P% and among the best in the nation in TO% differential, this season looks like a rebuild on the fly.



DRAKE BULLDOGS

Three returning starters seems almost unheard of for a mid-major, but the

transitional season that Eric Henderson endured last year might all be worth it this year. Henderson is a winner, as he filled the big shoes of T.J. Otzelberger at South Dakota State, but he didn't have enough horses in the stable last season. Drake was 12-10 (6-5) through 22 games and lost nine straight to end the regular season before winning a couple of games in the conference tourney, including a 21-point throttling of top seed Belmont. With returnees, talented freshmen, and productive transfers, Drake has the

potential to start slow, but Henderson might have a dark horse contender by conference play. In a pretty open league, their price around +900 or +1000 isn't a bad look. This year's team should be longer and deeper to challenge more 3s, which was last season's glaring weakness.



EVANSVILLE PURPLE ACES

A reboot can't hurt in Evansville, where the Aces won just seven games last

season and only five of them were against Division I competition. But head coach David Ragland is going to need guys who can make jump shots or create an open look on their own. Leading scorer AJ Casey is back, but 6-foot-10 Joshua Hughes and Connor Turnbull are both gone, as Hughes shot 37% from 3 as a stretch 4. With promising freshman and 37% 3-point shooter Leif Moeller now at UTEP, Ragland needs to find shooters, bigs, and rebounders. For a team that was in the 290s in adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency, 350th in 3P% defense, and 355th in ORB%, the notion of potentially being worse is stunning. But it's a possibility.



ILLINOIS STATE REDBIRDS

In these pages last year, I loudly sang praises about the Redbirds. In some respects,

I was right. They were a top-100 defense and were just outside the top 80 in eFG%, as they made a lot of shots. They were also frustratingly inconsistent. In the NIT, we saw what this group was capable of, as they beat Kent State, Wake Forest, and Dayton before losing to the eventual champion Auburn. Head coach Ryan Pedon has Chase Walker and Johnny Kinziger back, so he has a big wing and a ball-handler. In the portal, he got size and length. Opponents shot 61% on Close Twos against Illinois State, so Pedon got deeper and bigger to combat that weakness. We'll see if they're more consistent this season, but they do look more talented at every level.



INDIANA STATE SYCAMORES

A reboot can't hurt in Terre Haute, where the Sycamores won just 11 games last season

and only nine of them were against Division I competition. Moreover, Indiana State only won four games in conference play. I wrote the same opening line about the team due south of them in Evansville, but I have more trust in Matthew Graves and this program

than I do in Ragland and the Aces. The Sycamores took a 3 on 45.2% of their shots last season and only made 31.5% of those attempts. However, they were 25th in 2P%. With a chance to rebuild the roster basically every year, distance shooting is subject to variance, but Graves prioritized scoring with all of his portal additions. Nearly all of the guys contributed double figures at their previous stops. With one of the faster-paced teams in this conference, this should be a more potent, more aggressive roster.



MURRAY STATE RACERS

Longtime assistant Ryan Miller got his first head coaching opportunity at

Murray State and found success immediately with 20 wins and an invitation to the NIT. The Racers started 16-3 and 8-0 in conference last season before finishing 20-12 and 12-8 in MVC play. Year 2 is going to be a fascinating one. In my opinion, the Racers have the widest range of outcomes of any team in this conference. Star Roman Domon (14.2 PPG) is back, but he's the only starter to return. Highly touted Kaden Magwood transferred in from Auburn to get his shot, as did Shon Tupuola from Valpo and Brigham Rogers from Belmont. But Murray State will be reliant on the development of multiple Europeans, including four freshmen. This is one of the younger teams in the conference in that regard, but many of the Euros have been playing against adults or at least older competition. The Racers are the slight preseason favorite to win the MVC based on that optimism.



NORTHERN IOWA PANTHERS

Kyle Green is plenty familiar with how things get done in Cedar Falls. He was an

assistant there from 2001-03, 2006-11, and 2012-21, and is now the head coach after five seasons as an assistant at Iowa State. He walks into a familiar building, but an unfamiliar situation, as this is his first crack as a D-I head coach. All five starters and several rotation players either left with Ben Jacobson, transferred, or graduated. Greyson Uelman (16.8 PPG) from North Dakota and Tate McCubbin (9.7 PPG) from Austin Peay are the most accomplished transfers and the guys who have to shine for everything else to fall into place. Isaiah Johnson-Arigo shot 67.4% on 2s at St. Thomas in a very good offensive system. What I'm most curious to see is the pace of play, as UNI was the slowest team in the country last year. Iowa State has been around average the last three seasons.

TEAM OVERVIEWS



SOUTHERN ILLINOIS SALUKIS

The amount of flexibility required for mid- and low-major coaches has never

been higher. SIU head coach Scott Nagy had some excellent teams at Wright State and some strong South Dakota State teams prior to that. In Year 3, he's waiting for the Salukis to meet their goals. Nagy's offense has long been focused on making a high rate of 3s. His 2024-25 team did, shooting 35.1%. His 2025-26 team was one of the worst in the nation, though arguably his best defensive team ever. Now, it's about finding the proper balance. As you would expect, Nagy hit the portal looking for scoring and found almost all of it in the JUCO ranks. Holdovers Damien Mayo Jr. and Jalen Haynes could take steps forward and were two of the team's better defenders, but the success of the Salukis will be all about whether or not the JUCO additions can score and if they're willing to put forth the same effort on defense.



UIC FLAMES

If reurning production is your thing, Rob Ehsan's Flames are the team for you.

The MVC runner-up to Northern Iowa also played in the NIT, so Ehsan's team has big expectations for this season. The Flames haven't had a 20-win season since 2018 and haven't made the NCAA Tournament since 2004. Abdul Momoh is a big loss, as he shot 60% on 2s for a Flames team that rarely took 3s. That was good because they only shot 31.6% from beyond the arc, but Ehsan, who has an economics degree and an MBA, doesn't seem to have a modern offensive philosophy. In fact, opponents had a 3P Rate nearly 14% higher than UIC's. It seems more than coincidence that the loss that knocked them out of the MVC Tournament came to Northern Iowa, which shot 12-of-23 from 3, and the season ended in the NIT against a Cal team that was 15-of-28 from deep.



VALPARAISO BEACONS

With all of the success at the collegiate and high school levels in the I states – Indiana,

Illinois, and Iowa – it is crazy that Valparaiso hasn't experienced much of it. The Beacons haven't made the NCAA Tournament since 2015 and just had a winning conference record for the first time in the Missouri Valley since joining the league for the 2017-18 season. It does seem like Gonzaga assistant Roger Powell Jr. truly has the program going in the right direction. The 43-year-old Illinois product got his start coaching under Bryce Drew at Valpo, and his career came full circle quickly. Sophomores JT Pettigrew (12.6 PPG) and Rakim Chaney (10.6 PPG) accumulated numbers through usage. Chaney did shoot 36% from 3, but those two collectively shot 41.9% on 2s. Valpo was 348th in the nation in 2P%. If those two can be more efficient, the Beacons can contend.



JT Pettigrew

MOUNTAIN WEST CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Jonathan Von Tobel*

Just like in football, the Mountain West as we knew it has been scarred in the wake of conference chaos. Gone are Boise State, Colorado State, Fresno State, San Diego State, and Utah State. In their place, the conference brought in UTEP, Hawaii, and UC Davis. While Hawaii made an appearance in the NCAA Tournament a season ago, not much is expected of the three newcomers in their inaugural season.

There is much expected of Grand Canyon, though, which enters its second season in the Mountain West, and it does so as the odds-on favorite to win the regular-season title. The Lopes reportedly have \$12 million invested in their roster this season. They also have a rich history of success, and it seems that has transferred over into this new era.

Behind them on the oddsboard is a familiar face: New Mexico. The Lobos made some noise in the NIT a season ago, and they bring back one of the best players in the conference: Jake Hall. Head coach Eric Olen is one of the best strategists in the league, and he has a team more than capable of upending Grand Canyon.

Meanwhile, there are plenty of competent competitors that will make the top teams in the league sweat. Nevada brings an All-Conference player in Elijah Price. Wyoming, too, has Naz Meyer and an improving group that made some noise at the tail end of the regular season last year. UNLV has a roster loaded with potential that could be even better if the program can score a big win in the courts.

The Mountain West has always been a quality league, and the departure of those five programs does hurt the conference. But make no mistake about it, the league still boasts some potential NCAA Tournament teams, and it still could end up sending a couple of teams to the Big Dance in March.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONF RECORDS		ODDS TO WIN	
	SM PR	RANK			SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS	NCAA	CONF
GRAND CANYON	84.0	48	3	57%	20-12	17-15	13-19	75.6	68.7	13-8	13-8	1000-1	+115
NEVADA	81.0	66	2	36%	24-13	22-15	20-17	76.0	71.5	14-9	14-9	1000-1	+450
NEW MEXICO	80.0	75	1	32%	25-11	20-16	23-13	80.8	71.6	14-8	12-10	1000-1	+270
UNLV	79.0	82	1	24%	17-17	17-17	20-14	78.6	79.3	12-10	12-10	1000-1	+810
WYOMING	74.0	117	2	44%	17-15	15-17	15-17	76.2	72.9	9-12	8-13	1000-1	26-1
HAWAII	72.5	133	0	8%	22-9	13-18	14-17	78.7	71.2	16-6	9-13	1000-1	60-1
SAN JOSE ST	69.5	163	0	7%	8-24	16-16	21-11	70.8	79.2	4-18	10-12	2000-1	210-1
CAL DAVIS	69.5	168	2	50%	17-14	18-13	17-14	76.1	76.0	12-10	13-9	1000-1	300-1
UTEP	69.0	180	0	0%	8-20	13-15	13-15	66.4	72.7	7-13	10-10	2000-1	210-1
AIR FORCE	64.0	273	5	99%	3-29	11-21	18-14	61.5	79.9	0-21	6-15	2000-1	500-1

TEAM OVERVIEWS



AIR FORCE FALCONS

Air Force is the lone team with a new head coach in the conference, but the hire could be significant. Joe Crispin – a former Penn State player and assistant – takes over the role as head man, and with him comes change for the Falcons. For years, Air Force has been known for its Princeton-style offense, which has led to the Falcons consistently finishing in the bottom third of the country in pace. Crispin has promised to speed things up in Colorado Springs with an offense that is predicated on pace and shooting. All five starters from last year's three-win team return, and so, too, does 98.9% of its scoring. Whether they will acclimate to Crispin's system remains to be seen, but Air Force could spring some surprises early with its new offensive style. Bettors could profit from playing the Falcons' games over the total if the market is slow to catch up to the new style of play.



GRAND CANYON LOPES

Grand Canyon is the odds-on favorite to win the Mountain West for good reason. Three starters are back for the Lopes in the team's second season in the conference. Among them is First-Team All-Mountain West guard Jaden Henley, who averaged 17.7 points and 5.7 rebounds last year. He is one of four Grand Canyon players named to the Preseason Mountain West All-Conference Team. Seniors Makaih Williams (14.0 PPG) and Caleb Shaw (7.8 PPG, 3.8 RPG), as well as center Efe Demirel (8.5 PPG, 5.3 RPG), also made the team. A new name to mention for the Lopes is former five-star prospect and Wake Forest transfer Omaha Biliew. Grand Canyon has an experienced – and expensive – roster. KenPom rates the Lopes as the 44th-best team in the country heading into the season. Frankly, anything less than a Mountain West title and an NCAA Tournament appearance would be a failure for Bryce Drew.



HAWAII RAINBOW WARRIORS

Hawaii was a tremendous story last season. The Rainbow Warriors won 24 games, finished second in the Big West, and won the conference tournament and an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament. This season, head coach Eran Ganot is starting from scratch. All five starters from last season's tournament team are gone. Tanner Cuff, a senior guard coming off a torn ACL,

is one of the biggest pieces on the roster. So, too, is Isaiah Kerr, who appeared in 30 games for Hawaii last season and averaged 6.4 points and 2.4 rebounds. Last season, Ganot had this team playing at a very high pace. Hawaii's tempo (69.8 possessions per game) was the highest since Ganot's first season at the helm. Perhaps this team slows back down, as Ganot tries to coach up a team that will be relying on new faces and freshmen to keep the winning ways in Honolulu alive.



NEVADA WOLF PACK

This will be the final season of the Steve Alford era in Reno, as the longtime head coach announced that he would be retiring at the conclusion of the Wolf Pack's campaign. Alford has won 20-plus games in three of the last four seasons with Nevada but has not been back to the NCAA Tournament since 2024. He has the team to make it back this year. Two starters are back, led by preseason All-Conference forward Elijah Price, who averaged 12.8 points and 8.5 rebounds while shooting 35.5% from deep last season. Vaughn Weems (10.1 PPG, 4.2 RPG) returns as well, but this team will rely on a ton of new faces in order to get back to the Big Dance. Styles Phipps – a 13.4-point-per-game scorer from Pepperdine – as well as Keyon Kensie – 10.9 points per game at Portland State – will be key figures on this team. Alford has done well with transfers in his time in Reno, and with one of the best players in the league leading the way, the Wolf Pack are a threat to win the conference yet again.



NEW MEXICO LOBOS

Without a doubt, the title of best head coach in the Mountain West should belong to Eric Olen. The former UC San Diego coach led the Lobos to 26 wins and a berth in the NIT semifinals in his first season in Albuquerque. Only one true starter returns from that squad, but the overall production returning from that team makes New Mexico dangerous. Jake Hall (16.4 PPG, 43.8% 3PT) is the crown jewel for Olen. The Lobos were able to keep multiple power-conference schools from pilfering Hall from the roster, and it was a massive win. Olen also gets back guard Uriah Tenette (10.6 PPG, 2.9 APG), and Hudson Mayes transfers in from UC San Diego, where the system is akin to what Olen has at New Mexico. Olen's teams are balanced, as bettors saw last season when the Lobos finished 67th in offense and 37th in defense. They can expect more of the same from what is clearly the second-best team in the Mountain West.



SAN JOSE STATE SPARTANS

There are not many seasons that were worse than what San Jose State endured in the 2025-26 campaign. The Spartans won just nine games, and injuries decimated Tim Miles' squad. Every starter is gone from last season, but what good are returning starters for a team that used 15 different starting lineups? Two returning names to know for bettors are Pasha Goodarzi and JaVaughn Hannah. Goodarzi averaged 8.2 points and shot 40.7% from deep last season. Hannah only played in two games due to injury, but he's a former MAC Sixth Man of the Year who averaged 12 points and 4.1 rebounds in his last full season of work. They are two sturdy cornerstones for this team to rely on. Mookie Cook is a former four-star prospect who transferred in from San Francisco. The potential for Cook is clearly there, and if Miles can tap into it, he's got a great trio to work with in San Jose.



UC DAVIS AGGIES

Despite two returning starters and some decent overall returning production, not much is expected of UC Davis in its first season in the Mountain West. KenPom ranks the Aggies 180th in the country in his preseason ratings, and DraftKings lists them as a 300-1 long shot to win the conference. Jim Les – who enters his 16th year at the school – generally has a team that finishes in the top half of the country in defense, but offense has been a challenge for UC Davis under his leadership, and that will likely be the case again this season. Connor Sevilla (13.3 PPG), the leading scorer from last season, is back, but the backcourt is thin. Multiple key pieces on this roster ended up averaging fewer than five points per game last season, other than Brayden Fagbemi (7.0 PPG, 4.2 APG), who is coming off a wrist injury that limited him last season. The Aggies were a slow-paced team that took a lot of 3-point attempts last season. It led to upsets over teams like Nevada early in the season. That could steal a win or two in the Mountain West, but that is all that seems likely for this group.



UNLV RUNNIN' REBELS

UNLV is a great example of returning production being somewhat misleading. Yes, the Runnin' Rebels return only one starter in Josh Pastner's second season, but that starter – Tyrin Jones – is a massive

TEAM OVERVIEWS

piece, and the returning production off the bench is very impactful. First, Jones is on the verge of a sophomore breakout. The 6-foot-9 forward averaged 11.9 points and 5.0 rebounds last season. He got better as the season went along and comes into this season as UNLV's best player. Fellow sophomore Isaac Williamson made 43 3-pointers – second-most on the team last season – and averaged 8.6 points per game. Pastner brought in a litany of transfers as well, most at the guard spot, in order to shore up a position group that got very thin by the end of the season. But looming over all of this is transfer AJ Storr. Storr averaged 15.5 points at Ole Miss last season. Legal issues have tied up his availability, but if Storr can get his eligibility, he pushes UNLV into the upper stratosphere of the Mountain West.



UTEP MINERS

It's a new conference for UTEP and essentially a brand-new team, from top to bottom.

Head coach Joe Golding brought in 14 new players this season, and obviously none of the starters from last year's 11-win team are back. It makes it difficult to project what the Miners will be as we head into the new season. Transfers litter the roster, and four freshmen give UTEP some intriguing building blocks for the future. Among them are a four-star prospect in 6-foot-5 guard Donovan Criss and a three-star forward, Isaiah Ward. The roles of those two are a mystery as of now, but it is likely Golding will be relying on transfer Leif Moeller, who averaged 10.8 points and 3.8 rebounds at Evansville as a freshman. Golding has not cracked the 20-win mark since his first season in El Paso, and his record has worsened the last two seasons. This is a huge season for UTEP, and it's not only because of the new conference. Its head coach is likely fighting for his job as well.



WYOMING COWBOYS

While Eric Olen might be the best coach in the Mountain West, the most underrated

might just be Sundance Wicks in Laramie. Wicks won 18 games in his second season with Wyoming and ended conference play with a 5-1 SU and ATS run before the Mountain West Tournament. Two starters are back from that group, including 6-foot-7 sophomore Naz Meyer. Meyer averaged 12.9 points and 4.9 rebounds last season and was named to the All-Conference Preseason Team. Back with him is guard Khaden Bennett (10.2 PPG, 4.9 RPG), which gives Wicks two phenomenal pieces to lean on. Under Wicks, the Cowboys have been a meticulous team, playing at a slow pace while taking over 40% of their attempts from deep in Mountain West play. It is a formula that works to spring upsets, and there might be quite a few from this team once the season begins.



PAC-12 CONFERENCE

OUTLOOK *by Jonathan Von Tobel*

The Pac-12 certainly nailed it in the conference shuffling when it pilfered five programs from the Mountain West to rebuild its once proud conference. Boise State, Colorado State, Fresno State, San Diego State and Utah State will all play in the conference for the first time this season. Four of the five are consistently on the bubble for the NCAA Tournament, and San Diego State was competing on the final Monday of the season just a few years ago. The presence of these programs has certainly driven the stock of the price up, but so too has the presence of Gonzaga.

The Bulldogs are the massive prize for the conference. Favored to win the league – to the surprise of no one – Gonzaga now has a conference that can push it throughout the regular season and improve its resume for the NCAA Tournament. Oregon State – one of two holdovers from the original Pac-12 – also has a roster which can challenge some of the newcomers on any given night.

On the surface, this is a league which will be well represented in the NCAA Tournament this season. San Diego State always finds itself in the conversation, Colorado State is loaded with returning personnel from a 21-win team, and both Utah State and Boise State are inside KenPom's top 60 teams in his preseason rankings.

Don't be fooled, there are some cellar dwellers here, but someone has to take the losses. Washington State is in an eternal rebuild, and Texas State has some pieces but will be bringing up the rear in conference play. Only nine teams are in the new iteration of the conference, but there are worse ways to rebuild a league. This is the sixth-best conference via KenPom rankings, and there is a gap between it and the Atlantic 10, which is seventh in those rankings.

Bettors who love west coast hoops will be highly entertained by what looks to be a quality conference entering the first season of its current build.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONF RECORDS		ODDS TO WIN	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS	NCAA	CONF
GONZAGA	89.5	18	0	9%	31-4	18-17	11-24	84.3	66.2	18-2	10-10	35-1	+290
UTAH ST	82.0	58	1	30%	28-7	16-19	19-16	81.4	71.2	18-5	9-14	500-1	+495
SAN DIEGO ST	80.0	74	1	14%	21-11	15-17	15-17	76.8	71.3	16-7	11-12	500-1	13-1
COLORADO ST	79.5	78	3	57%	20-13	18-15	17-16	74.8	71.6	12-10	10-12	1000-1	18-1
BOISE ST	79.5	80	0	26%	19-11	17-13	17-13	77.4	73.2	12-9	11-10	1000-1	15-1
OREGON ST	75.5	106	1	18%	17-16	16-17	19-14	71.1	74.2	10-10	11-9	1000-1	30-1
TEXAS ST	74.5	115	2	49%	17-13	14-16	16-14	71.9	72.5	11-8	8-11	1000-1	125-1
WASHINGTON ST	73.5	123	0	0%	11-20	15-16	16-15	75.6	77.3	7-12	10-9	1000-1	240-1
FRESNO ST	68.5	182	0	4%	12-19	21-10	12-19	72.4	73.5	7-14	15-6	1000-1	410-1

TEAM OVERVIEWS



BOISE STATE BRONCOS

It's a new conference and a new team for Boise State and Leon Rice. All five starters

from last year's group are gone, and only 22 starts are on this roster – 16 of which belong to Pearson Carmichael, who appeared in 31 games last season for Boise State. Still, Rice has brought in some intriguing talent, and his ability to get his teams to improve will make the Broncos dangerous. Dovydas Butka is one of the big names – both figuratively and literally – to watch. Butka is a 6-foot-9 transfer from Campbell, where he averaged 13.9 points and 8.5 rebounds on 50.3% shooting. Jerquarius Stanback – 8.8 points and 5.8 rebounds at Alabama State – comes in as well. Carmichael, Butka, and Stanback are emblematic of Rice teams: big wings who can rebound and score with efficiency. Boise State famously began last season with a loss to Division II Hawaii Pacific, but eventually ripped off eight nonconference wins and finished Mountain West play on an 11-3 run. Rice's teams will always be competent, and there is no question this group will be better by the end of the season.



COLORADO STATE RAMS

Colorado State head coach Ali Farokhmanesh enters his second season with

the program with an immense amount of returning production from a 21-win team. Three starters and six of the Rams' top nine scorers are back in Fort Collins. Up front is where Colorado State is the strongest. Kyle Jorgensen (27 starts, 11.5 PPG, 4.3 RPG) and Carey Booth (29 starts, 10.7 PPG, 5.6 RPG) are back after dominating down low together. Standing 6-foot-9 and 6-foot-10, respectively, both shot over 40% from beyond the arc, giving the Rams both size and versatility. That is the name of the game under Farokhmanesh. Colorado State finished last season 357th in tempo (63.1 possessions per game), but 19th in 3-point rate (49.1%) and ninth in 3-point shooting (38.6%). The Rams will have four shooters on the floor at any one time, and their ability to move the ball and spread the floor was a big reason why they ended the regular season on an 8-1 SU/7-2 ATS run. Farokhmanesh proved he has the ability to coach a team last season. With the returning production, it's time to prove he can win a conference, something that is certainly possible.



FRESNO STATE BULLDOGS

Vance Walberg improved Fresno State's record in his second season at the helm,

but heading into his third year, the former Pepperdine head coach has some work to do. All five starters are gone from last year. The Bulldogs' two best players were lost to the portal. Injuries are also impacting the current roster yet again. But Walberg has constructed an interesting roster of former high-end prospects who failed to work out at previous stops. If he can reclaim their talent, there is some interesting upside in Fresno. The most intriguing is former McDonald's All-American and four-star prospect Baye Fall from Rutgers. Fall has averaged just 1.0 points and 1.5 rebounds across three seasons but has connections to the staff in Fresno and could be unlocked. Quentin Rhymes is a former three-star prospect who is coming off a redshirt season with Nebraska. Ross Candelino originally began his career at Wisconsin and is coming off a season in which he averaged 11.2 points and 5.2 rebounds while shooting 42.6% from deep at Lipscomb. Walberg's teams tend to be fast-paced while taking a high volume of 3-point attempts. There is little reason to expect anything less this season, but the potential of the talent could lead to the Bulldogs putting forth some surprising efforts throughout the season.



GONZAGA BULLDOGS

It's a new conference for Gonzaga, but the role remains the same: prohibitive favorite.

The Bulldogs are -290 to win the regular-season conference title, and while some can quibble with the price, the role of favorite is deserved. Head coach Mark Few does not have a starter from last year back on the floor, but he has good returning production and a transfer class that will keep the Bulldogs at the top of the new-look Pac-12. In the portal, Few landed guards Xaivian Lee (Florida) – who is expected to be eligible after a big court win in the final week of October – and Isaiah Harwell (Houston), as well as center Massamba Diop. The latter two were huge wins, considering their youth. Braden Huff remains with the program, projected to start at the four, and Davis Fogle is expected to ascend to a starting role along the wing. The bench is deep with talent as well, so Few has everything he needs to win and make it to the NCAA Tournament. But the West Coast Conference this is not. The new conference foes are deeper, with a richer history of winning and making it to the NCAA Tournament. Is the betting market

still rating this team as the same old Gonzaga group and not factoring in the improved level of competition in the conference?



OREGON STATE BEAVERS

After 12 seasons with Wayne Tinkle calling the shots, the Oregon State athletic

department decided it was time for a change. In steps Justin Joyner, whose last two jobs were as an assistant to Randy Bennett at Saint Mary's and Dusty May at Michigan. It's an intriguing hire, and Joyner's job in the offseason of constructing a roster that had just one returning player is a promising start. That one returner – Josiah Lake – is a great piece to have, too. Lake averaged 13.1 points, 4.1 rebounds, and 4.1 assists on the way to All-Conference honors last season. To supplement the position, Joyner brought in Daniel Freitag – 19.8 points, 4.3 rebounds, and 3.8 assists at Buffalo – and DeShawn Gory – 13.7 points and 6.2 rebounds at Fresno State. Freitag is coming off a season in which he earned a spot on the All-MAC First Team for the Bulls. The Beavers seem to be a guard-oriented team. Lake, Freitag, and Gory all play the position and stand 6-foot-2 or taller. It should be a skilled group that can move the ball around the floor with ease. Up front, Xavion Staton – a former four-star prospect from BYU and a four-star transfer – stands 7-foot-1 and provides some solid rim protection. Joyner is an unknown as a head coach, but the talent is there for Oregon State to compete in the new-look Pac-12.



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS

Five of the last six seasons have ended with San Diego State competing in the NCAA

Tournament, but last year was not one of those seasons. The Aztecs are looking to start a new run this year, but Brian Dutcher will have to do so with just four guys returning from last year's team, only one of whom was a regular starter. Elzie Harrington – 22 appearances, 16 starts – is back after averaging 8.0 points and 2.3 steals while shooting 43.6% from deep. He will likely play alongside Latrell Davis, who averaged 11.1 points and 3.1 rebounds at San Jose State two seasons ago. Dutcher has a track record of success bringing in guards from the portal and getting the most out of them. That is why Chance Gladden from Boston University might be the most intriguing player on the roster. Gladden averaged 14.4 points, 3.2 rebounds, and 4.5 assists last season and made the All-Patriot Third Team. Dutcher also pilfered a body from Oregon State –

TEAM OVERVIEWS

6-foot-7 shooter Isaiah Sy. His presence is huge due to injuries and the Aztecs' penchant for struggling from the perimeter at times last season. Where SDSU has the most questions seems to be up front, with some freshmen potentially competing for legitimate roles at center. Still, Dutcher has never won fewer than 21 games in a season, and it seems likely he will be able to achieve that mark at the very least once again.



TEXAS STATE BOBCATS

Not much is expected of Texas State this season. The Bobcats are 125-1 to win the Pac-12

at DraftKings, and KenPom has them as the third-lowest-ranked team in its preseason rankings. However, the Bobcats do have the pieces to finish higher in the standings than most expect, and it starts with sophomore forward DJ Hall. Hall averaged 15.6 points and 7.7 rebounds on 54.2% shooting. He set a program record as a freshman with 500 points. Alongside Hall up front is a trio of 6-foot-9 forwards, the most impactful of whom will be Ronald Jessamy. Jessamy averaged 13.5 points and 6.6 rebounds at Cal State Bakersfield last season. In the backcourt, Texas State has a solid option at

point guard in Kaden Gumbs (8.7 PPG, 2.8 RPG). Under Terrence Johnson, the Bobcats have been a slow-paced team that relies on its offensive rebounding to generate second-chance opportunities and scoring. Given the personnel the team has this season, there is no reason to believe the Bobcats will not have the same qualities this season.



UTAH STATE AGGIES

Nothing is guaranteed in life, but Utah State hiring a head coach who will be successful seems to be as close to it as possible. Ben Jacobson is next in line to keep that streak alive, as he comes in to take over the program after a 20-year stint at Northern Iowa. Jacobson led the Panthers to the NCAA Tournament five times, most recently last season when they fell to St. John's in the first round. Winning is the name of the game in Logan, and Jacobson did just that in the offseason when he retained the services of seniors Mason Falslev – the Mountain West Player of the Year – and Karson Templin. Jacobson also brought over Will Hornseth, an 11.1-point-per-game scorer for Northern Iowa last season. Jacobson has always had a defense-oriented, slow-paced team in Cedar

Falls. It stands to reason that his style will carry over to Utah State. No matter what the style, Jacobson and the Aggies will be expected to keep the winning ways going in Logan.



WASHINGTON STATE COUGARS

Washington State achieved only 12 wins last season, but that didn't stop the members

of that roster from departing and earning money across the country. Head coach David Riley was forced to rebuild the roster once again this season as a result. Riley found some talent, but the betting odds – 240-1 to win the conference – and the KenPom rankings – the Cougars are 102nd in the preseason rankings – show us not to expect much. The biggest piece Riley landed in the offseason is senior forward Ronnie Harrison, who averaged 14.7 points and 6.1 rebounds for East Texas A&M. Other than Harrison, this is a team lacking established talent. Riley had to hit the portal hard, and with that came a litany of players who have little experience. The biggest scoring threat the Cougars landed is Lazereck Harrison, who averaged 20.8 points at Division II Central Missouri.



Mason Falslev

SOUTHEASTERN CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Matt Youmans*

It was inevitable, but the sad demise of SEC basketball still hit hard in March, when only 10 teams made the NCAA Tournament field and none reached the Final Four. That is sarcasm, of course. The conference had to slip some from 2025, when a record 14 teams reached the tournament and Florida won the national championship. In their bid to repeat, the Gators failed to get out of the first weekend, but they reloaded and should have a good shot to win two out of three, as coach Todd Golden's team is almost everyone's preseason No. 1. The league is loaded again and features other top 10-caliber teams in Tennessee, Texas, and Arkansas.

Senior forward Thomas Haugh enters the season as arguably the nation's top player, headlining a Florida frontcourt that ranks second to none and includes seniors Alex Condon and Rueben Chinyelu. The Gators, stunned 73-72 by Iowa in the NCAA second round, won the SEC regular season. John Calipari, who coached Arkansas to the conference tournament championship, worked his recruiting magic by signing two of the six McDonald's All-Americans who will arrive in the SEC. Calipari beat out Duke to snag a commitment from point guard Jordan Smith Jr., who will wear No. 23 and draw some unrealistic comparisons to Michael Jordan. Smith has been ranked by some analysts as the nation's top incoming freshman.

Arkansas, Alabama, and Texas reached the Sweet 16, and Tennessee was eliminated in the Elite Eight. Vols coach Rick Barnes continues his pursuit of a Final Four, and transfer guards Juke Harris (Wake Forest) and Jalen Haralson (Notre Dame) will help his cause. The Longhorns are rising fast in coach Sean Miller's second season in Austin.

Kentucky, Vanderbilt, and LSU are teams to watch for different reasons. The Wildcats could have a higher ceiling after adding Iowa State transfer Milan Momcilovic, who's an elite shooter. The Commodores will be led by dynamic playmaker Tyler Tanner. The Tigers welcome back Will Wade as the only new coach in the conference, and his mysterious roster is a motley crew.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONF RECORDS		ODDS TO WIN	
	SM PR	RANK			SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS	NCAA	CONF
FLORIDA	96.5	2	4	80%	27-8	19-16	15-20	87.1	71.5	17-3	14-6	+600	+112
TENNESSEE	91.0	10	0	11%	25-12	17-20	18-19	78.8	69.6	12-8	9-11	25-1	+930
ALABAMA	91.0	11	2	34%	25-10	16-19	19-16	91.2	82.7	13-6	8-11	50-1	+630
TEXAS	91.0	12	1	19%	20-15	20-15	20-15	81.7	76.1	9-10	9-10	18-1	+850
ARKANSAS	90.0	16	1	13%	29-9	24-14	22-16	90.1	80.9	17-5	14-8	25-1	13-1
VANDERBILT	90.0	17	1	28%	27-10	18-19	17-20	85.4	75.3	13-9	10-12	60-1	15-1
KENTUCKY	89.0	21	1	18%	22-14	18-18	18-18	80.5	74.3	12-9	11-10	35-1	20-1
TEXAS A&M	88.5	25	1	26%	22-12	19-15	19-15	86.1	78.9	11-8	11-8	80-1	31-1
AUBURN	87.5	29	2	36%	22-16	16-22	22-16	83.0	78.8	8-12	6-14	100-1	25-1
MISSOURI	86.5	33	1	15%	20-13	14-19	16-17	79.2	75.5	10-9	9-10	60-1	65-1
GEORGIA	86.0	37	4	46%	22-11	16-17	18-15	89.4	79.8	10-9	10-9	200-1	33-1
OKLAHOMA	86.0	38	2	39%	21-16	17-20	18-19	82.9	77.4	9-12	12-9	200-1	29-1
OLE MISS	84.5	47	2	28%	15-20	15-20	20-15	75.9	76.1	7-15	12-10	200-1	76-1
LSU	82.0	57	0	0%	15-17	18-14	16-16	81.4	78.5	3-16	11-8	40-1	50-1
MISSISSIPPI ST	81.5	64	1	30%	13-19	10-22	16-16	77.6	81.8	5-14	6-13	500-1	325-1
S CAROLINA	77.0	93	0	7%	13-19	14-18	16-16	74.9	76.5	4-15	8-11	500-1	500-1

TEAM OVERVIEWS



ALABAMA CRIMSON TIDE

Never doubt the Tide's identity as long as Nate Oats is the coach. Alabama is all about offense — No. 1 in the nation at 91.2 PPG last season — and soft on defense. Senior guard Aden Holloway will return from suspension in early November after averaging 16.8 points and shooting 44% on 3s last season. Holloway is complemented in the backcourt by Amari Allen, Qayden Samuels, and Jaxon Richardson, an explosive athlete who's the son of longtime NBA player Jason Richardson. Oats raves about the scoring ability of Samuels, a 6-foot-6 freshman. Boise State transfer Drew Fielder is a 6-foot-11 senior with 3-point shooting range, and 6-foot-10 Brandon Garrison is a strong defensive and shot-blocking center. Alabama ranked last in the SEC and 347th in the nation in scoring defense (82.7 PPG) last season.



ARKANSAS RAZORBACKS

Jordan Smith Jr. will be coach John Calipari's new star guard with an NBA future. Smith is ranked by many as the nation's top incoming freshman and will replace Darius Acuff, who averaged 23.5 points and was drafted seventh overall by the Sacramento Kings. The Razorbacks ranked second in the nation in scoring (90.2 PPG) last season. Smith, junior transfer Jeremiah Wilkinson (Georgia), and five-star freshman J.J. Andrews will lead a high-scoring backcourt. Aside from small forward Billy Richmond III, the frontcourt has a few question marks. The Hogs must improve defensively after ranking 14th in the conference. Calipari is 50-23 in two seasons at Arkansas. This team could take him a step or two past the Sweet 16 if a strong supporting cast develops around Smith, Wilkinson, and Richmond.



AUBURN TIGERS

One year after taking over the head-coaching job suddenly vacated by his dad, Steven Pearl should be much more comfortable in the big chair. And he can raise a banner — Auburn won the NIT championship in April. The shooting star of that tournament run was Kevin Overton, who averaged 14.1 points and returns as a senior. Overton and junior Tahaad Pettiford (15.4 PPG) lead a backcourt with some depth concerns. Thomas Dowd, a 6-foot-8 senior, joins the Tigers after starring for a Troy team that reached the NCAA Tournament. Dowd (14.4

PPG, 10.1 rebounds), 6-foot-8 senior Adam Olsen (South Alabama transfer), 6-foot-10 senior Owen Freeman (Creighton), and 7-foot-1 senior Bukky Oboye (Santa Clara) give Auburn an experienced frontcourt. Pearl could top the 22-win mark he reached in his debut.



FLORIDA GATORS

Even the strongest teams have a weakness, and Florida is the preseason AP No. 1 and VSiN No. 2 team due mostly to its frontcourt of seniors Thomas Haugh, Alex Condon, and Rueben Chinyelu. The Gators led the nation in rebounding margin (+14.7), with Chinyelu grabbing 11.2 per game. But when top-seeded Florida was upset 73-72 by Iowa in the NCAA second round, Chinyelu went scoreless with one rebound, and Haugh shot 3-for-11 from the floor. The Gators' weakness could be in the backcourt, though Boogie Fland, Denzel Aberdeen, Urban Klavzar, and Isaiah Brown appear good enough. Aberdeen was on the 2025 national title team and transferred back to Gainesville after spending a season at Kentucky. Continuity and experience matter, and 11 players return from coach Todd Golden's 27-8 team that won the SEC regular season.



GEORGIA BULLDOGS

Mike White is not missed at Florida, where he coached the Gators from 2015 to 2022, but he's getting the job done at Georgia. He has not finished with a losing record in four years in Athens and peaked last season at 22-11 with an NCAA appearance. After tying for seventh in the SEC at 10-8, the Bulldogs must replace leading scorer Jeremiah Wilkinson, who transferred to Arkansas. White is counting on senior guards Blue Cain, Freddie Dilione, and Marcus "Smurf" Millender and junior forward Kanon Catchings to lead the way. Cain is probably the team's best player, Dilione transferred from Penn State, and "Smurf" is not that small at 5-foot-11. White likes to run, and Georgia ranked third in the SEC in scoring offense (89.4 PPG) behind Alabama and Arkansas.



KENTUCKY WILDCATS

Money can't fix all problems, but Kentucky is putting a lot of cash into coach Mark Pope's third team in Lexington. The Wildcats, with a disappointing 46-26 record under Pope, are banking on

Iowa State transfer Milan Momcilovic making a major difference. Momcilovic withdrew from the NBA Draft to sign an NIL deal worth more than \$6 million. The 6-foot-9 Momcilovic made 136 3-pointers while shooting 48.7% for the Cyclones, and Kentucky ranked 147th in the nation in made 3s last season. In an attempt to replace leading scorer Otega Oweh and Denzel Aberdeen, who transferred back to Florida for his fifth season, Pope landed Zoom Diallo (Washington), Alex Wilkins (Furman), Jerone Morton (Washington State), and muscular center Franck Kepnang (Washington). Pope also needs 7-foot sophomore Malachi Moreno to develop into a star.



LSU TIGERS

Will Wade is a known rule-bender and one of the most polarizing figures in coaching. Now that there are few rules in college sports, "Slick Willy" can throw money at players and be comfortable in this element. Wade's roster was a skeleton crew until Oct. 20, when court rulings were announced that made four players, including former UCLA guards Skyy Clark and Donovan Dent, eligible to play for LSU this season. Another important guard, RJ Luis, will not join the Tigers because of an SEC rule created this year barring players from rejoining college teams after previously declaring for the NBA or NFL drafts and not withdrawing. Luis was the 2025 Big East Player of the Year for St. John's before signing with two NBA teams. Clark and Dent are big-time additions.



MISSISSIPPI REBELS

In 2019, Chris Beard coached Texas Tech to the NCAA championship game — the Red Raiders were posted at around 200-1 odds to win the title prior to the season — and lost to Virginia in overtime. His stock is sinking. In his third year at Ole Miss, Beard finished 15-20, and his fourth year doesn't appear promising. Beard is an outstanding coach and the type who seems he could pull five guys off the street and reach the Sweet 16, which he accomplished with Ole Miss in 2025. But he does need talent, and this team has blue-collar players, not NBA talent. Beard will try to coach up 5-foot-10 senior Budd Clark (Seton Hall transfer), 6-foot-11 senior Santiago Trouet (Arizona State), junior Dasear Haskins (Saint Joseph's), sophomores Patton Pinkins and Roman Siulepa, and a no-name cast.

TEAM OVERVIEWS



MISSISSIPPI STATE BULLDOGS

Senior guard Josh Hubbard will be one of the SEC's top scorers, but he was the

Bulldogs' lone star last year, averaging 22 points for a 13-win team. Hubbard, who's closing in on the 2,000-point mark in his Starkville career, has a new backcourt partner in Kennesaw State transfer RJ Johnson, a 6-foot-4 junior. Johnson (14.5 PPG, 42.3% 3s) was the MVP of the Conference USA Tournament. That's a good starting point for coach Chris Jans, who also added senior Tajuan Simpkins to a skilled group of guards. Kendyl Sanders (Utah transfer) and Thomas Bassong are a pair of 6-foot-8 forwards who can rebound and shoot, and 6-foot-9 ND Okafor (Washington State) will be a physical force around the rim. Hubbard is sensational, and Mississippi State should be improved.



MISSOURI TIGERS

It's typically risky to count on a youngster to be a team leader, but Missouri coach

Dennis Gates is handing the keys to Jason Crowe Jr., a 6-foot-3 point guard from the Los Angeles area who ranks among the nation's top 15 incoming freshmen. Crowe will have help in the backcourt from transfers Jamier Jones (Providence), Kennard Davis Jr. (BYU), and Jordan Crawford (South Dakota). Gates is also putting together a good-looking frontcourt led by 6-foot-10 Trent Pierce, 6-foot-9 five-star freshman Toni Bryant, 7-foot-5 giant Trent Burns, 6-foot-8 Jaylen Carey (Tennessee transfer), and 6-foot-11 Bryson Tiller, who started 31 games at Kansas last season. If Crowe quickly matures into an NBA prospect as expected, Gates is a good bet to guide the Tigers to 20-plus wins and another NCAA appearance.



OKLAHOMA SOONERS

After coming up just short of a championship in April, Oklahoma is looking

to go a step further this season. Which championship was that, you might say? The Sooners lost to West Virginia in the College Basketball Crown tournament title game in Las Vegas. It's easy to forget that. Porter Moser's sixth season as Sooners coach could be his last if things don't improve. It will have to start with good guard play from seniors Xzayvier Brown, Pop Isaacs (Texas A&M transfer), B.J. Edwards (SMU), and Tyler Hendricks (Utah Valley), along with freshman Quincy Wadley. While the backcourt will be

the strength, the frontcourt has potential with junior Derrion Reid and transfers Duke Brennan (Villanova) and Khani Rooths (Louisville). Moser has a new team, but it could be the same middle-of-the-pack finish.



SOUTH CAROLINA GAMECOCKS

This is probably coach Lamont Paris' last chance to put a winner on the floor,

and the odds are stacked against him. The Gamecocks finished 4-14 in SEC play last season after going 2-16 in 2025. South Carolina ranked last in the league in scoring (75 PPG) and 3-point percentage (31.1) a year ago. Drexel transfer Shane Blakeney (14.2 PPG) is a 6-foot-5 senior guard who gives the Gamecocks a fighting chance. Paris is also hoping transfer guards Davion Hannah (Alabama), Camden Heide (Texas), and Kory Mincy (George Mason) emerge as major contributors. South Carolina won't be bad, but it's tough to climb the ladder in a powerful league full of elite talent, so the Gamecocks are in the same (sinking) boat with teams like Ole Miss and Mississippi State.



TENNESSEE VOLUNTEERS

Rick Barnes has built a great program that wins lots of games with defense. The

Vols, searching for their first Final Four in program history, have lacked the offensive firepower to get over the hump and met their demise in the Elite Eight three years in a row. Barnes aimed to change that by hitting the transfer portal for scorers, snagging one of the best in junior guard Juke Harris, who averaged 21.4 points at Wake Forest. Harris is joined by junior Terrence Hill (VCU), sophomore Jalen Haralson (Notre Dame), and senior Dai Dai Ames (California). Hill hit seven 3s and scored 34 points in VCU's upset of North Carolina in the NCAA first round. Tennessee ranked first in the conference in scoring defense (69.6 PPG) last season, and now the offense should be much improved.



TEXAS A&M AGGIES

Boring basketball is not Bucky McMillan's style.

His aggressive, up-tempo attacks at Samford in the Southern Conference earned him a promotion to the SEC last season, where he went 22-12 (11-7 in conference play) with the Aggies. P.J. Haggerty should be the new star in the second season of "Bucky Ball." Haggerty

was the nation's No. 4 scorer (23.4 PPG) last season at Kansas State, which was his fourth college stop after Memphis, Tulsa, and TCU. Haggerty is the main man outside, and 6-foot-9 junior Mackenzie Mgbako should be the inside force if healthy after a knee injury. McMillan worked a roster makeover in the offseason and gambled on transfers, including Tyshawn Archie (McNeese) and Jordan Pope (Texas). Aside from Haggerty, McMillan has a mystery team, but it won't be a boring team.



TEXAS LONGHORNS

The good news in Austin, where Arch Manning and the Longhorns have been a

football flop, is that basketball season is here. Texas is ranked No. 7 in the AP preseason poll, putting coach Sean Miller ahead of schedule in his second season. Miller's first team finished 21-15 and fell to Purdue on a buzzer-beater in the Sweet 16. Seven-foot senior Matas Vokietaitis led the SEC in field-goal percentage (61.9) and is the only returning starter. How will Miller replace stars Dailyn Swain, Tramon Mark, and Jordan Pope? The Longhorns brought in guards Isaiah Johnson (Colorado) and Mikey Lewis (Saint Mary's), forward David Punch (TCU), and hyped freshmen Marcus Spears Jr. and Austin Goosby. Spears was the top-ranked player in the 2027 class and reclassified to 2026. Chemistry takes time, but Miller has the talent.



VANDERBILT COMMODORES

In Vanderbilt's 74-72 loss to Nebraska in the NCAA second round, guard Tyler

Tanner scored 27 points with four assists and no turnovers in 38 minutes. Tanner (19.5 PPG, 37% 3s) is returning for his junior season, and that alone gives coach Mark Byington a reason to be optimistic. After going 27-9 last season, Byington beefed up his roster around Tanner. Washington State transfer Ace Glass made 71 3s as a freshman and dropped 40 points on Arizona State in the Maui Invitational. The frontcourt looks much stronger with the additions of 7-foot senior Bangot Dak (Colorado), 6-foot-8 Sebastian Williams-Adams (Auburn), and 6-foot-9 freshman Jackson Sheffield, among others. Byington beat Alabama, Florida, and Tennessee last season, and he's one of the SEC's sharpest coaches, so don't underestimate the Commodores.

AMERICA EAST CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

Twenty-seven of the 31 conferences have at least one new head coach this season. The America East Conference is not one of them, as all nine bench bosses have been given the opportunity to continue with their programs. The majority of the teams in this league wind up being punching bags for Vermont and one other program that has a big season. Last year, that was UMBC, which won the regular season and the conference tournament, and that made head coach Jim Ferry a pretty wealthy man.

But his Retrievers had to spend the offseason playing fetch in the transfer portal. Success is great, but the downside in a one-bid league like this is that your productive players get seen by other teams. UMBC has the least amount of returning minutes in the conference, partially due to graduation and partially due to other programs being able to present a bigger check.

With a rebuilding year for UMBC, Vermont easily looks like the class of the conference, as longtime head coach John Becker brought back centerpiece Gus Yalden. Yalden (16.1 PPG) was banged up late in the season and only scored 29 points over the final three games, including the 15-point loss to the Retrievers that ended the season. However, the Catamounts badly need deep shooters with TJ Hurley (39%) and Ben Johnson (40.6%) out of eligibility. With a lack of shooters, Vermont may try to leverage its physicality more, so we could see a bit of a different style of play.

With Vermont an odds-on favorite in the AEC, the goal becomes finding a dark horse candidate. UMBC is the clear second favorite, and everybody else is 10/1 or higher. Bryant could be that team, but sophomore Ty Tabales, who led the team in Usage Rate and only shot 37.7% on 2s and 25.3% on 3s, has to take a huge leap for second-year head coach Jamion Christian. He brought in a lot of size in the portal to put around his ball-hog guard to maybe ease some of the pressure.

UMass Lowell could be that team, and the River Hawks are the third favorite to win the AEC, but Pat Duquette has a lot of production to replace, including two high-efficiency scorers in Angel Montas Jr. and Austin Green, plus 36% 3-point shooter Darrel Yepdo, who actually transferred to Vermont. If a scorer emerges, especially down low, the River Hawks may meet some of the hype, as they had the highest shot share on Close Two field goal attempts in the conference, but only made 54.2% of them.

My favorite longshot is Albany. Dwyane Killings has the most diverse roster in the conference with players from all corners of the world, but it looks like a talented group. The Great Danes need to figure out which bigs can score, but the guard play should be very good for a team with major turnover issues last season.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
VERMONT	68.0	196	2	24%	20-12	14-18	16-16	72.1	68.8	14-5	8-11
MD-BALT COUNTY	62.5	294	1	8%	22-9	19-12	14-17	75.7	68.5	17-2	14-5
BRYANT	61.0	310	2	33%	7-22	11-18	13-16	63.0	73.3	5-12	5-12
UMASS-LOWELL	60.5	321	0	8%	12-18	16-14	14-16	71.7	77.4	10-8	10-8
NEW JERSEY TECH	59.5	331	1	37%	15-17	19-13	14-18	66.2	73.7	11-7	12-6
ALBANY	59.5	332	1	30%	8-21	11-18	14-15	68.7	74.5	7-10	7-10
MAINE	59.0	335	0	16%	7-24	14-17	12-19	61.2	68.5	6-11	9-8
BINGHAMTON	59.0	339	1	40%	5-23	13-15	16-12	66.8	76.7	4-12	9-7
NEW HAMPSHIRE	58.5	343	3	32%	7-21	12-16	15-13	66.6	76.4	5-12	5-12

ATLANTIC SUN CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

The Atlantic Sun looks a lot different this season. Austin Peay, Central Arkansas, Eastern Kentucky, North Alabama, and West Georgia left for the United Athletic Conference (UAC). West Florida was the only new addition to the league.

Per Bart Torvik, Central Arkansas and Austin Peay were the two highest-rated teams in the conference last season, even though Queens won the ASun Tournament and lost 104-71 to Purdue in the first round of the NCAA Tournament. With some conference exiles, Queens is favored to run it back and win this conference again, with perennial contender Lipscomb next and then a surprise team in Jacksonville, which probably had the best transfer portal haul of any ASun squad.

Jordan Mincy has been the head coach of the Dolphins since the 2021-22 season and has had a couple of decent campaigns with a 21-10 record in Year 1 and a 19-14 effort two seasons ago, but his team was awful last season. Mincy recognized that, as his 2024-25 team was around the national average in adjusted tempo, but last year's team slowed down considerably. They were very poor on the defensive end and struggled to make 3s, shooting over 5% worse than the previous season from beyond the arc. Mincy has a couple of returning starters, plus some noteworthy transfers, headlined by Minnesota big man Nehemiah Turner, Lafayette bucket-getter Caleb Williams (15.6 PPG), and former rival Jamie Phillips Jr. (16.0 PPG) from Stetson.

The hype surrounding the transfer portal class for Jacksonville has closed the gap in the eyes of oddsmakers between them and the top two dogs. Queens brings back Jordan Watford (11.8 PPG) and Avantae Parker (11.1 PPG), so two of their top contributors from last year's tourney team will lead the way for a hodgepodge of transfers, including some productive JUCOs. Corbin Pack shot 45% from 3 at Wingate, and that's a big deal for a Royals team that ranked 40th in the nation in 3P Rate.

Before looking at Lipscomb, it should be noted that Queens was a top-40 team in percentage of shots as 3-pointers, and that was only fifth in this conference, though EKU and Central Arkansas were two of the teams above them. Another one was indeed the Bisons, who seemed to miss head coach Lennie Acuff last season. Acuff was a phenomenal hire after Casey Alexander went to Belmont, and Acuff then left Lipscomb for Samford after six seasons. Former assistant Kevin Carroll took over after three seasons at Trevecca Nazarene right there in Nashville. Under Carroll, the Bisons made a lot of shots, but they played poorly on defense and didn't get back many of their missed shots on offense, so teams were able to run out against them. Acuff had a top-100 defense by eFG% in his final season. Lipscomb ranked in the 270s in the first season without him and heads into this season without last year's four top scorers.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
LIPSCOMB	68.0	193	3	39%	17-13	14-16	15-15	77.6	77.0	12-7	7-12
QUEENS COLL	67.5	202	2	47%	20-14	15-19	22-12	84.4	83.8	16-5	10-11
JACKSONVILLE	66.0	230	2	25%	10-20	12-18	12-18	69.5	75.2	7-12	9-10
FLA GULF COAST	63.5	274	0	15%	14-18	9-23	15-17	76.6	78.0	10-11	6-15
STETSON	62.5	296	2	39%	10-21	18-13	14-17	71.9	79.9	8-12	14-6
BELLARMINE	62.0	302	3	40%	11-19	19-11	20-10	78.9	83.3	8-12	11-9
N FLORIDA	60.5	319	3	40%	5-25	18-12	16-14	77.1	89.6	5-14	11-8
W FLORIDA	56.5	353	1	20%	25-9	0-0	0-0	85.0	74.8	18-7	0-0

BIG SKY CONFERENCE

OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

The winds of change blew through the Big Sky, as realignment remains all the rage in college sports. Sacramento State, a MAC member in college football, joined the Big West for college hoops. But the Big Sky has 11 teams this season instead of nine, as Utah Tech and Southern Utah both migrated to the conference when the WAC dissolved. Some WAC teams are part of the new United Athletic Conference, but not those two, as they will play an easier travel schedule now in this league.

Portland State won the Big Sky regular season, but Idaho won the conference tournament last season. This season, they are joined by Northern Colorado, Idaho State, and Weber State as the other Big Sky members without a returning starter. There are a lot of notable personnel nuggets in this conference, including several fifth-year seniors, but the lone new head coach is Kaleb Canales at Weber State, as the Wildcats look to get back to where they once were. Weber State GM Damian Lillard was part of the move to let Eric Duft go and hire Canales, who was on the Trail Blazers staff when Lillard was drafted by Portland.

The usual suspects are expected to factor heavily in the fight for the conference's lone NCAA Tournament bid. Montana State is the favorite, while Northern Colorado is the third favorite and Dan Monson's Eastern Washington Eagles are in between. It took Monson a while to get things on track in Cheney, as the Eagles started 2-13 and were 5-17 before finishing 14-19 with an 11-7 conference mark. Year 3 for Monson could be one to watch. At Long Beach State, the 49ers/Beach regularly ranked in the top 30 in tempo. So far at EWU, Monson hasn't looked to run, but with double-digit scorers from the portal at guard and a lot of last season's roster back, he might be ready to let it rip.

Like Monson, Montana State head coach Matt Logie didn't have to learn many new names or faces. There is production to replace due to graduation, but fifth-year senior Jed Miller, who shot nearly 40% from 3, is among those back. If JUCO transfer Isaiah Crane (19.6 PPG) can replicate something close to that with Christian King (12.6 PPG) and other returnees, Logie probably has his best team in Bozeman.

Teams like Montana (Kenyon Aguino, Tyler Thompson), Northern Colorado (fifth-year senior Langston Reynolds), Utah Tech (Ethan Potter), Southern Utah (Jaiden Feroah), and Idaho (Kristian Gonzalez) have building blocks, but a couple of strikes of lightning or claps of thunder in a bottle from the portal would make the outlook much stronger. On the whole, this is a jump shot-heavy conference without a lot of offensive rebounds or fast-paced teams, and that looks unlikely to change.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
MONTANA ST	73.0	127	2	64%	15-14	17-12	16-13	75.7	73.5	12-7	10-9
N COLORADO	69.5	167	0	21%	17-12	15-14	16-13	80.8	78.1	10-9	8-11
E WASHINGTON	69.5	169	2	28%	13-19	19-13	19-13	77.7	79.2	12-8	13-7
MONTANA	66.5	215	2	25%	15-15	16-14	13-17	75.7	77.6	12-9	13-8
PORTLAND ST	66.5	221	0	1%	17-11	19-9	11-17	73.9	71.2	14-6	12-8
IDAHO	65.5	236	0	10%	18-15	16-17	14-19	75.8	74.1	13-9	11-11
UTAH TECH	65.0	245	1	5%	16-15	19-12	17-14	74.7	77.0	12-8	13-7
SOUTHERN UTAH	64.5	260	1	24%	7-22	15-14	17-12	72.3	81.3	6-13	11-8
WEBER ST	62.5	292	0	7%	14-16	16-14	16-14	78.8	79.1	10-9	10-9
N ARIZONA	61.5	306	2	32%	7-22	14-15	11-18	68.1	77.6	4-15	8-11
IDAHO ST	61.0	311	0	2%	10-20	14-16	17-13	73.6	77.6	6-14	6-14

BIG SOUTH CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

It's High Point's world, and everybody else is just living in it as far as the Big South goes. The Panthers have won the regular season three straight times and have gone to the NCAA Tournament in back-to-back seasons, including an upset of Wisconsin in this past season's Big Dance. The conference will run through High Point again, as the Panthers pulled in a four-star freshman per 247Sports and three of the four three-star transfers as graded by that outlet in this year's portal class.

The Panthers have two returning starters, including fifth-year senior Cam'Ron Fletcher (13.2 PPG), and six transfers who averaged double figures at their previous spots, headlined by South Florida guard CJ Brown, who also had nearly five dimes per game. Not only is High Point the clear-cut favorite to win this conference at an astonishing price of -1300, but this is another Panthers team capable of winning an NCAA Tournament game if they stay healthy.

Per the odds, Winthrop is the leader in the race for second place, as Mark Prosser's team went 13-3 in conference play last season and 23-11 overall. Unfortunately, the team from Rock Hill, SC has to replace all five starters, including Logan Duncomb, who used his fifth year to transfer to Notre Dame. This was a senior-laden team last year, as many guys just ran out of eligibility. The Eagles have a collection of rotation players and low-output starters from other teams and very little proven, homegrown talent.

Behind High Point, there could be a changing of the guard in the Big South. Presbyterian has the most returning production in the conference with Carl Parrish (14.7 PPG), Triston Wilson (11.6 PPG), and Jaylen Peterson (11.0 PPG), and only lost its two games to High Point by nine combined points last season.

The longshot I have my eye on is Charleston Southern. At 120/1 to win the Big South, long shot is underselling it, but the Buccaneers are going to challenge a lot of shots and rebound well, as they have three 7-footers on the roster, plus another big at 6-foot-11. If JUCO guards Jackson Crawford (15.3 PPG) and Anthony Ruffolo (16.6 PPG) can score and facilitate, the team's first winning season since 2019 is well within reach. Under Saah Nimley, the Bucs play at the quickest tempo in the conference and also boast the highest Rim & 3 Rate, which is how this roster is built to play.

Radford, under second-year head coach Zach Chu, who is just 33 years old and has an extensive background in basketball analytics, lost players to Kansas, Seton Hall, and Texas A&M, so Chu clearly has an eye for talent. We'll see how this roster compares to last year's, which underachieved, going 16-16.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
HIGH POINT	82.0	60	2	30%	28-5	17-16	22-11	86.4	72.8	18-1	9-10
WINTHROP	66.5	213	0	10%	20-11	12-19	16-15	81.5	77.7	15-4	5-14
LONGWOOD	66.5	218	2	22%	13-16	13-16	17-12	75.9	76.2	8-9	11-6
PRESBYTERIAN	66.5	220	3	68%	12-18	17-13	16-14	70.0	73.1	8-10	11-7
RADFORD	63.5	275	0	7%	13-16	14-15	17-12	79.9	80.8	9-8	10-7
UNC-ASHEVILLE	63.5	276	2	14%	12-17	15-14	15-14	71.9	74.2	9-9	10-8
CHARLESTON SO	60.5	318	1	14%	12-17	14-15	19-10	80.9	81.0	6-11	6-11
USC UPSTATE	59.0	338	1	3%	10-19	13-16	14-15	71.0	75.7	5-12	5-12
GARDNER WEBB	56.0	356	3	34%	2-28	16-14	16-14	66.2	86.7	2-16	13-5

BIG WEST CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

The Big West got bigger this offseason, despite losing reigning conference tournament champion Hawaii to the Mountain West. Utah Valley is now the proverbial stepchild in the conference as the only school located outside of California. Sacramento State also moved from the Big Sky to the Big West, along with Cal Baptist from the WAC, so we have 11 teams in Cali and one in Utah. The other departure is UC Davis, which also joined the Mountain West. Next season, we'll be having a similar conversation, as UC San Diego and UC Santa Barbara head to the West Coast Conference.

But this is about the 12 teams that will play in the conference this season. There are two new head coaches, as Rick Croy at Cal Baptist has been replaced by Kyle Getter and Mike Scott at Cal Bakersfield has been replaced by Todd Lee. Getter has been a Division I assistant for the better part of 25 years, including two stints at Liberty, one at Radford, one at Virginia, and most recently at Notre Dame. Lee was the head coach at South Dakota from 2018-22 and gets a second kick at the can after stops at Arkansas and USC with Eric Musselman.

While there has been quite a bit of change in the conference, there is one constant. UC Irvine looks good. Russ Turner has done a remarkable job with the Anteaters and hit the portal for the team's customary enormous human being in Olivier Rioux, the 7-foot-9 center who was at Florida. While Rioux is the biggest addition in a literal sense, the biggest in a figurative sense might be four-star freshman Josiah Johnson, who averaged nearly 21 PPG in high school. The Anteaters need scorers, and he may very well be one, as their top four point-getters from last season moved on.

Even with that, Turner's team is not the favorite, as UC Santa Barbara and UC San Diego are jockeying for that position. The Tritons bring back four starters and four transfers who averaged double figures at their previous stops. The Gauchos get the top billing because Miro Little (11.9 PPG) and CJ Shaw (12.2 PPG) are proven players in the Big West, whereas UCSD's starters do not include Hudson Mayes, who had at least 12 points in each of the last 10 games, or 6-foot-11 Bol Dengdit (10.8 PPG), one of the team's few offensive rebounders.

A lot of other teams are mostly starting from scratch, but a team poised for a leap is Cal Poly, with four starters back in Year 3 for Mike DeGeorge. The Mustangs took a 3-pointer nearly 53% of the time, led by Hamad Mousa (20.4 PPG). DeGeorge spoke about having 6-foot-10 Jess Esso Essis run point for the fastest team in the conference by tempo and the fastest in the nation. If nothing else, they'll be fun.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK			SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
CAL SAN DIEGO	77.0	95	4	59%	21-11	16-16	12-20	74.5	70.5	13-9	8-14
UC-IRVINE	75.5	107	2	37%	21-12	17-16	12-21	74.2	69.4	16-6	13-9
UC-SANTA BARBARA	75.0	112	2	35%	16-14	12-18	16-14	76.7	73.7	11-10	9-12
UTAH VALLEY ST	72.5	132	2	36%	22-9	13-18	17-14	77.7	70.8	15-5	7-13
CAL POLY-SLO	71.0	148	4	81%	12-19	17-14	18-13	81.4	85.3	10-11	13-8
CS-NORTHRIDGE	69.0	176	1	26%	18-14	14-18	19-13	80.6	81.3	13-9	9-13
SACRAMENTO ST	68.5	181	1	34%	7-21	12-16	15-13	75.9	83.6	6-13	8-11
CAL BAPTIST	66.5	217	0	10%	25-9	21-13	12-22	72.6	67.6	15-5	13-7
CS-FULLERTON	66.5	225	2	32%	16-16	20-12	13-19	80.3	82.2	13-9	14-8
UC-RIVERSIDE	65.5	239	1	12%	8-22	15-15	16-14	71.6	79.1	5-15	10-10
LONG BEACH ST	64.0	271	0	5%	8-22	16-14	20-10	73.2	79.0	6-14	11-9
CS-BAKERSFIELD	63.5	277	0	7%	6-24	12-18	17-13	72.0	83.4	2-18	8-12

COASTAL ATHLETIC CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Aaron Moore*

This year's Coastal Athletic Association regular-season title should come down to a three-horse race, with one squad outside that group also looking to contend.

Of the top three, UNC Wilmington is seen as the top choice according to the CAA preseason coaches' poll. That's far from a surprise, as Patrick Wessler and CJ Luster II are returning to a team that went 15-3 in league play last year.

The 7-foot Wessler, who averaged a double-double in CAA play, has been named the conference's preseason Player of the Year. Luster, like Wessler, is an older graduate student who missed last season due to injury. The last time Luster played was in 2025 as a member of Stony Brook, when he made the All-CAA Third Team.

Wessler's size could provide a matchup issue for a higher-seeded team if the Seahawks do earn the CAA's automatic berth.

Charleston has a new coach but the same outlook as one of the CAA's top teams. John Groce is now in Charleston after nine years leading the University of Akron. He will rely on a pair of transfers — Eli Ellis (South Carolina) and Xavier Abreu (Northeastern) — to lead the Cougars.

After hitting the portal hard, defending CAA champ Hofstra is still in the mix for a title. New to the Pride backcourt, but not the conference, are transfers Justin Moore, formerly of Drexel, and Deywilk Tavarez, who has previous experience with Charleston.

If there is another contender, it should be Towson. Like those teams already slated above the Tigers, if it happens, a transfer will play a major role. Towson welcomes in 6-foot-6 Zion Stanford, who had success at Temple. Pat Skerry will also look to get more production from Jaquan Womack, who put up 7.1 PPG and 4.1 APG as a freshman.

Sticking to the theme of transfers playing such a large role in the CAA, Northeastern is banking on one to make the Huskies much more competitive this year. Rashad King is back on campus after spending last year at LSU. From 2022 to 2025, King averaged over 10 points and two assists per game playing for these same Huskies.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
UNC-WILMINGTON	75.0	111	1	27%	25-7	16-16	18-14	74.6	68.1	15-4	10-9
COLL OF CHARLESTON	72.5	131	1	13%	20-11	18-13	13-18	75.3	73.9	14-5	12-7
HOFSTRA	72.0	139	1	9%	22-11	21-12	18-15	74.4	68.2	15-6	11-10
TOWSON ST	68.5	188	1	21%	17-15	15-17	12-20	67.1	66.4	11-10	9-12
MONMOUTH	68.0	194	1	16%	18-15	17-16	16-17	72.0	70.9	13-8	12-9
STONY BROOK	67.0	207	1	25%	15-15	18-12	15-15	70.7	72.5	9-10	10-9
WM & MARY	67.0	208	0	0%	18-12	16-14	13-17	81.5	78.9	11-9	7-13
ELON	66.5	224	2	29%	12-18	11-19	16-14	76.8	79.3	6-13	5-14
DREXEL	66.0	228	1	23%	16-16	19-13	15-17	67.3	67.6	11-9	14-6
NORTHEASTERN	65.0	246	2	29%	7-24	11-20	20-11	74.9	81.0	3-17	4-16
HAMPTON	65.0	250	1	13%	11-19	16-14	14-16	68.0	72.1	7-12	11-8
CAMPBELL	64.0	266	0	0%	14-18	18-14	17-15	76.1	78.8	10-11	13-8
N CAROLINA A&T	62.5	293	0	12%	9-19	16-12	16-12	73.9	78.5	4-15	11-8

CONFERENCE USA

OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

Realignment really, really hurt Conference USA. The losses of teams like North Texas, UAB, and FAU hurt right away on the basketball side, and the loss of UNT on the football side wound up being quite significant. This is a conference that ranked 11th per Bart Torvik, despite those losses, as it was a league that had good offensive rebounding numbers across the board, but pretty average shooting numbers.

Kennesaw State was not the best regular-season team, but the Owls won the conference tournament and gave Gonzaga a game in a nine-point loss. Sam Houston and Liberty ranked higher per Torvik, but they were unable to secure CUSA's one NCAA Tourney bid. Louisiana Tech (Sun Belt) and UTEP (Mountain West) are out, so we'll see if that impacts the path for anybody, as UTEP was just 7-13 in league play and LA Tech was 11-9.

The other big change is that FIU hired Joey Cantens from Daytona State College to take over for Jeremy Ballard. The Panthers won 39 games over Ballard's first two seasons, but haven't had a winning season since, so a change was probably overdue. Cantens is a Miami native who played at FIU, so he's a hire that should energize the program. Plus, Daytona State was 11-19 in his first season and won at least 27 games in each of his four seasons after that.

Western Kentucky's Teagan Moore had 18.7 PPG, and that's a big reason why the Hilltoppers are favored, especially with some of the supporting cast back. But Liberty, even with zero returning starters, should never be counted out under Ritchie McKay. The Flames play slow, but are stunningly efficient on offense. McKay had a very experienced team last season that ranked in the top 10 in 2P% and 3P%, finishing in the top five in eFG%. He'll have to find all new scorers this season, as he prioritized 3-point prowess in the portal.

With only one returning starter at Kennesaw State and Sam Houston, the conference turning upside down is not a far-fetched thought. Even FIU, with increased tempo and a high-variance style of play, could factor into the equation with some of Cantens' former Falcons following him to South Beach. The success of all the teams in this conference will depend on transfers, as returning starters are few and far between and those who are back were not prolific scorers.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
W KENTUCKY	74.0	118	2	48%	16-14	15-15	15-15	77.9	77.0	11-10	9-12
LIBERTY	72.5	134	0	7%	23-8	13-18	18-13	75.8	72.2	17-4	8-13
NEW MEXICO ST	72.0	140	2	17%	13-16	14-15	16-13	73.9	73.8	9-13	10-12
KENNESAW ST	71.5	142	1	26%	18-14	16-16	15-17	80.0	78.3	13-10	10-13
MIDDLE TENN ST	70.5	152	1	22%	14-15	13-16	15-14	73.5	74.6	11-10	8-13
SAM HOUSTON ST	69.0	170	1	23%	19-12	20-11	18-13	80.0	76.9	14-8	12-10
FLA INTERNATIONAL	69.0	179	0	0%	12-17	16-13	14-15	77.7	79.1	8-13	10-11
JACKSONVILLE ST	67.5	201	0	0%	12-17	13-16	17-12	69.9	70.6	10-11	12-9
MISSOURI ST	65.5	234	1	17%	13-18	18-13	19-12	73.1	74.3	10-13	15-8
DELAWARE	64.5	257	1	14%	10-20	15-15	16-14	67.9	74.1	6-14	11-9



OUTLOOK *by Wes Reynolds*

Unlike many mid-major conferences, the Horizon League largely remains the same from its previous season, with one notable exception. Northern Illinois departs the MAC and joins the league for all its primary sports outside of football (Mountain West). The Huskies have the only new head coach in the league, with 36-year-old Matt Majkrzak coming in after winning 136 games in seven seasons at D-II Northern Michigan.

Historically, the Horizon League Tournament has been a bit of a graveyard for regular-season champions since Butler's departure in 2011. The regular-season champion and No. 1 seed had failed to win the automatic bid in nine of 12 years. However, the No. 1 seed has won that bid in each of the last three years, including Wright State winning both titles last season.

Wright State, led by last season's Freshman of the Year and this season's Preseason Player of the Year Kellen Pickett (8.5 PPG, 5.4 RPG, 46 blocks) and CJ O'Hara (14.1 PPG, 4.4 RPG), who transfers in from conference rival Green Bay, is picked to repeat this season.

After a 4-28 record in Doug Gottlieb's first season as head coach, Green Bay improved to 18-15 last season and returns Marcus Hall (13.9 PPG, 5.2 RPG) to go along with eight transfers (six transferring up to D-I). Green Bay is looking to make the leap toward becoming a league title contender, like Robert Morris has over the last two seasons. The Colonials won 48 games over the last two seasons, including an NCAA Tournament bid two years ago. An experienced backcourt with UMBC three-year starter Ace Valentine and returner Darius Livingston (9.6 PPG, 3 APG) will look to lead them back again.

Greg Kampe is not only the longest-tenured coach in the Horizon League but also in the country, as he enters his 43rd season leading an almost entirely new roster at Oakland. Northern Kentucky, led by point guard Ethan Elliott (5.1 PPG, 4.6 APG), one of three Australians on the Norse roster; Detroit, with six returners but banned from postseason play due to APR violations; and Milwaukee, ravaged by six season-ending injuries last season, make up the league's mid-tier.

DeAndre Craig, the conference's leading returning scorer (14 PPG), is the lone starter back for Purdue Fort Wayne. Both Youngstown State and Cleveland State lost all five starters from last season, and IU Indy, last year's top offense (83.5 PPG) and dead-last defense (88.3 PPG), will continue to play one of the nation's quickest tempos with a mostly new roster.

Wright State is the rightful favorite to repeat, but the sleeper could be Milwaukee, which won 20 or more games in the three seasons prior to a 12-20 injury-riddled campaign last year and returns seven players plus three transfers from high-major programs.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
WRIGHT ST	70.5	153	2	28%	21-12	21-12	16-17	79.8	75.6	18-5	15-8
ROBERT MORRIS	69.0	177	0	23%	20-11	20-11	16-15	76.8	73.4	14-8	15-7
OAKLAND	67.0	204	0	7%	15-16	17-14	18-13	81.6	82.7	12-9	12-9
WI-GREEN BAY	67.0	212	1	24%	16-15	19-12	16-15	73.9	75.9	13-9	14-8
N KENTUCKY	66.5	222	1	15%	17-14	13-18	21-10	80.9	78.7	12-11	9-14
YOUNGSTOWN ST	64.5	258	0	5%	12-17	10-19	15-14	75.1	74.9	8-13	5-16
WI-MILWAUKEE	64.5	259	2	27%	11-20	11-20	14-17	74.7	79.9	8-13	8-13
PURDUE FT WAYNE	63.5	279	1	27%	14-15	13-16	16-13	74.2	78.8	11-10	9-12
N ILLINOIS	63.5	280	0	5%	7-21	13-15	8-20	66.3	78.9	4-14	7-11
DETROIT	63.0	284	1	38%	15-15	21-9	14-16	76.3	78.7	14-9	17-6
CLEVELAND ST	62.5	295	0	0%	8-22	12-18	18-12	78.5	88.6	7-15	8-14
IU INDY	61.5	304	0	11%	5-25	12-18	13-17	80.9	89.2	3-18	8-13



OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

The Ivy League installed a four-team conference tournament in 2017 to decide which team would represent the conference in the NCAA Tournament. Due to COVID, the 2020 and 2021 versions were skipped, so we've had eight installments of the two-day tourney. Only three Ivy League teams have won – Princeton (2), Penn (2), and Yale (4). Furthermore, the No. 1 seed, so the regular-season champion, has only won twice: Princeton in the inaugural version and Yale in 2025.

With the academic requirements for these colleges and universities, the transfer portal isn't leveraged anywhere near as much as it is in other conferences, but that's not to say it has no impact at all. Players do transfer out, and some do transfer in. Unlike other conferences, the Ivy has been unaffected by realignment.

There are a couple of coaching changes in the conference, as David McLaughlin was not retained at Dartmouth and longtime Princeton assistant Brett MacConnell was hired. Former Brown head coach Mike Martin joined the staff at Michigan, so Eric Reveno, most recently Stanford's associate head coach and GM, took that job. He was the head coach at Portland from 2006-16 and went 140-178 with four CIT one-and-done appearances. While Reveno is new, the Bears have four starters back and most of their assistant coaches. Interestingly, MacConnell was also most recently on the Stanford staff, but he faces a complete overhaul with the Big Green.

Neither Brown nor Dartmouth looks like a factor this season, as the usual top four look like the top four in some order. Penn has four starters back for Fran McCaffery in his second season after an 18-12 effort for the Quaker from the Class of 1982. McCaffery had a very good team from a metrics standpoint, and leading scorer TJ Power (16.4 PPG) is back in hopes of running it back as the conference tourney champs. The Quakers won both of those games in overtime, including the title game, 88-84 over Yale. They were 9-1 over their last 10 games against conference foes before losing by 35 to Illinois in the Big Dance.

Princeton has all five starters back for 15-year veteran coach Mitch Henderson. After having one of the youngest teams in the Ivy last season, the transitional year is in the past and the Tigers look like a formidable contender. Yale is that young team this season with only one returning starter. Meanwhile, Harvard has four starters back and is the conference favorite as a result, led by Robert Hinton (16.8 PPG). Because of the low turnover in this conference in terms of the coaches and the types of players they recruit, the styles of play are consistent year after year.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
PENNSYLVANIA	73.5	122	4	74%	18-12	20-10	10-20	74.9	74.8	12-5	14-3
HARVARD	73.5	125	4	80%	16-12	14-14	10-18	69.8	67.3	10-5	8-7
YALE	71.5	144	1	36%	22-8	12-18	16-14	80.3	72.4	12-5	7-10
PRINCETON	71.0	147	5	100%	8-20	16-12	13-15	67.5	72.4	5-9	6-8
CORNELL	68.5	186	2	35%	13-13	11-15	14-12	85.8	84.6	8-7	7-8
COLUMBIA	68.0	191	2	53%	14-12	13-13	14-12	74.9	73.5	5-9	6-8
BROWN	65.5	241	4	83%	7-18	13-12	13-12	67.2	72.4	3-11	6-8
DARTMOUTH	63.0	282	0	24%	9-16	11-14	12-13	73.1	78.4	5-9	6-8

METRO ATLANTIC ATHLETIC CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Aaron Moore*

After decades of being referred to as “the other MAC,” the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference is now called just the Metro Conference. For college hoops fans of a certain age, this change also has some issues to it. That was also the name of the conference Louisville, Memphis State, and Cincinnati played in back in the 1980s.

Regardless of the name, this Metro should once again be similar to what we have seen in the past. A low-major with every school basically trotting out a new roster from the year before, as the better players have moved up the college basketball pay ladder. In the case of Siena, there is even more of a transformation, as Gerry McNamara, who almost led the Saints to an upset win over top-seeded Duke in last year’s tournament, returned to his Syracuse roots with the goal of jump-starting that program.

Fairfield is expected to finish first behind preseason Player of the Year swingman Declan Wucherpfennig, who started every game a year ago for the Stags (12.1 PPG and 8.4 RPG). Sophomore Tony Williams (6.5 PPG) should take a big leap in year two and become one of the conference’s top guards.

The preseason coaches’ poll has Merrimack right behind the Stags. In a conference known for so many crazy roster changes, Joe Gallo’s defensive style for the slow-paced Warriors, no matter who is playing, is one of the Metro’s more bankable commodities. As an indication of the conference’s makeup, Merrimack will be led by guard Denver Anglin, who previously suited up for Metro rival Iona and, before that, Georgetown, SMU, and Rice.

Siena, behind new coach Nevada Smith, will keep the Saints in contention for a regular-season title even without Gavin Doty, Francis Folefac, and Tasman Goodrick, who followed McNamara to Syracuse.

Quinnipiac, a team that didn’t live up to preseason expectations for the past two seasons, now looks like a middle-of-the-pack Metro squad. The Bobcats do have sophomore Keith McKnight returning to lead the offense.

When tournament time in Atlantic City comes around, that tends to be when Saint Peter’s and its physical style work best. This year, the Peacocks will lean heavily upon guard Bryce Eaton, back for his third season in Jersey City.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK			SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
MERRIMACK	68.0	198	1	30%	23-11	20-14	12-22	68.5	66.5	19-4	15-8
FAIRFIELD	65.5	233	2	45%	20-13	15-18	14-19	72.9	71.9	13-10	10-13
QUINNIPIAC	65.5	237	0	23%	18-13	12-19	12-19	74.2	72.6	12-9	7-14
IONA	65.0	244	2	25%	18-14	19-13	12-20	73.8	73.1	10-11	12-9
MARIST	64.5	254	1	25%	18-12	15-15	11-19	68.9	63.9	13-9	10-12
SIENA	63.5	278	1	18%	23-12	21-14	11-24	70.4	65.8	16-7	14-9
ST PETERS	62.5	288	3	27%	16-12	16-12	10-18	69.2	69.1	14-7	13-8
MOUNT ST MARYS	62.0	303	1	29%	14-17	18-13	10-21	67.9	71.0	11-10	12-9
SACRED HEART	61.0	315	1	15%	13-19	15-17	14-18	74.3	77.6	10-12	10-12
NIAGARA	60.0	326	0	13%	7-22	13-16	13-16	63.3	71.7	5-15	10-10
MANHATTAN	59.5	334	0	6%	11-20	12-19	13-18	72.4	79.6	8-13	9-12
CANISIUS	57.5	349	0	0%	9-21	15-15	9-21	62.2	71.4	5-15	10-10
RIDER	56.0	354	0	5%	3-25	9-19	9-19	62.6	76.8	3-17	7-13

MID-AMERICAN CONFERENCE

OUTLOOK by Adam Burke

Success is a blessing and a curse for mid-majors. The MAC got two teams in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since the Y2K scare, as Akron won the conference tournament and Miami of Ohio went 31-0 before falling to UMass in MAC Madness in Cleveland. But the RedHawks beat SMU in the play-in round with a home-court advantage in Dayton before losing to Tennessee in the first round of the Big Dance.

The Zips lost head coach John Groce to Charleston, but continuity ruled the day, as assistant Dustin Ford got a promotion. Evan Mahaffey (10.2 PPG) is back, but virtually every other premier performer moved on. Tahj Staveskie, who blossomed last season at Incarnate Word after being an inefficient player up I-77 at Cleveland State, is the leading transfer, coming in after 17.3 PPG for the Cardinals last season. But this is a mostly new roster, and Ford will probably slow the Zips down. They were 15th in 3P% and 2P% last season and took a ton of 3s, so they were an offensive force. Time will tell if we see that this season, but there isn't a strong case to be made on paper for that.

As far as Miami, Travis Steele is still the head coach, but a lot of last season's points went out the door. Luke Skaljac (10.3 PPG) and Antwone Woolfork (9.8 PPG) will have to shoulder more of the load. It was a by-committee approach for the RedHawks with five players in double figures. Four of them are gone, and all four shot 39.2% or better from 3. Concerning for a team that took a 3 on 45.6% of shot attempts to lead the conference.

In other words, the door should open up for other teams. For the first time since the 2015-17 seasons, Toledo has failed to win 20 games in back-to-back seasons under Tod Kowalczyk, as it was 18-15 two seasons ago and 19-15 this past season. As good as the Rockets have been in some regular seasons, including four straight regular-season titles from 2021-24, they have not made the NCAA Tournament since 1980. Kowalczyk is banking on some oft-injured P4 transfers in Sean Jones (Marquette) and Rich Barron (Providence) to be stars at this level alongside two returning starters.

Ohio has a brand-new roster, including several Europeans, as Jeff Boals has torn the house down to the studs in Athens, with the exception of returnee Javan Simmons (15.1 PPG). UMass has the likely assist leader in Danny Carbuccia and more familiarity with the conference this season. Eastern Michigan has some returnees, but a new head coach in Billy Donlon, previously at Clemson. Buffalo, Kent State, and Bowling Green all have extensive rebuilds in progress. Ball State and Western Michigan also have new coaches. The favorites are the favorites for a reason, but it could be a high-variance year for the MAC.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
AKRON	75.5	103	2	20%	27-6	17-16	15-18	86.4	75.0	20-1	10-11
MIAMI OHIO	75.0	109	2	36%	29-2	20-11	20-11	86.3	76.5	18-1	11-8
KENT ST	72.5	136	0	13%	22-10	12-20	17-15	82.3	80.6	15-5	7-13
TOLEDO	72.0	137	2	32%	17-15	19-13	13-19	79.8	77.4	13-8	14-7
OHIO U	70.0	159	1	25%	13-17	12-18	15-15	76.7	80.0	9-10	7-12
E MICHIGAN	69.0	172	3	37%	9-21	20-10	9-21	70.2	74.4	4-14	11-7
MASSACHUSETTS	69.0	173	2	33%	16-16	13-19	20-12	79.9	78.8	8-12	7-13
W MICHIGAN	68.5	187	0	0%	9-20	16-13	18-11	73.9	80.1	4-14	10-8
BOWLING GREEN	68.0	190	1	21%	15-14	14-15	11-18	76.8	72.7	9-10	9-10
BUFFALO	68.0	192	0	2%	15-15	17-13	16-14	77.5	77.0	7-12	10-9
BALL ST	67.0	211	1	9%	10-19	14-15	9-20	66.1	71.4	7-11	9-9
C MICHIGAN	64.0	267	2	43%	8-21	16-13	13-16	71.7	77.7	6-12	12-6



OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

Only three teams have won the MEAC Tournament since 2017, as NC Central won three in a row before COVID wiped out the 2020 version. Since then, Norfolk State has three, and Howard, the reigning champ, has three. Interestingly, while those two schools have won all six over the last six installments, they have only faced off once, as six different teams have played in the title game and lost.

The smart money is on either Howard or Norfolk State to get the conference's lone bid to the Big Dance, something Howard got last season as the winner of both the regular season and the conference tourney. The Bison even went to Dayton and beat UMBC in an absolute thriller before getting beaten by 21 against Michigan in a game where Howard was 14-of-29 from 3. Maybe it's because of that or because of the return of Cedric Taylor III (17.2 PPG) and Cam Gillus (10.8 PPG) that the Bison are a very heavy odds-on favorite to run it back.

Taylor and Gillus are two of four returning starters for Kenny Blakeney, but Bryce Harris, the MEAC Player of the Year, is the one he lost. Nevertheless, most conference games last season weren't even close for Howard, so a strong regular-season record and a high seed in Norfolk are pretty much givens for the D.C. dwellers. Howard also brought in North Carolina transfer James Brown, who will start the season late while recovering from surgery, but he could be an impact guy.

Norfolk State had a really down year with just 15 wins. Robert Jones has been there for 14 seasons, and that was only his second season with a losing record. The quest back to the top begins with Anthony McComb III (17.1 PPG) and Elijah Jamison (14.6 PPG). The Spartans will have a trial by fire in the non-conference, but this is a big, physical team that looks more like what Jones usually puts out.

Morgan State leads the rest of the conference, whose teams are all 20/1 or higher to win the MEAC. The Bears return no starters, but have a JUCO-heavy roster of strong scorers at the lower levels. Perennial contender NC Central has a very tall but raw team.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK			SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
HOWARD	69.0	175	4	63%	20-11	22-9	15-16	75.5	69.4	13-3	12-4
NORFOLK ST	62.0	297	2	6%	11-17	13-15	17-11	71.6	74.7	8-7	7-8
MORGAN ST	56.0	355	0	26%	11-16	15-12	16-11	71.7	80.1	10-5	10-5
NC CENTRAL	55.5	358	0	4%	10-18	15-13	14-14	67.6	77.3	10-7	9-8
S CAROLINA ST	55.0	359	1	27%	8-23	13-18	15-16	67.3	80.7	8-8	8-8
DELAWARE ST	54.0	362	1	34%	5-22	9-18	8-19	59.7	71.4	3-13	4-12
COPPIN ST	53.5	363	2	51%	6-24	13-17	19-11	64.3	81.0	5-9	7-7
MD-EAST SHORE	52.0	364	1	4%	7-23	15-15	13-17	62.4	71.5	5-10	5-10

NORTHEAST CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Aaron Moore*

While many college basketball aficionados dismiss the Northeast Conference because it literally resides in the sport's basement, die-hards and bettors are aware that this odd mixture of clubs and styles produces some interesting play over the course of the season. During the nonconference portion of the schedule, the schools serve as sacrificial lambs being trotted out for buy games at bigger schools. Come NEC play, it becomes much more competitive.

Still, conference play will look different this year, as the changing economics of college athletics have hit the NEC hard. There will only be seven teams eligible for the NCAA Tournament. Saint Francis dropped down to D-III, while Mercyhurst and New Haven are still in their transitional stages. Le Moyne, though, is now eligible.

When it comes to the NEC, the conversation usually starts and ends with Long Island. First comes the talk about former NBA star Rod Strickland being the coach, then come the words about how his Sharks are the conference's top program. Last year's NEC Coach of the Year led LIU to its eighth NCAA Tournament appearance. This season, he will need to do even more coaching, as the Sharks are without their top 11 scorers. Perhaps it is the Strickland cachet, as he is now bringing in some former top conference talent looking to get major minutes in Daquan Davis (Florida State), Vasean Allette (ODU, TCU, and UTSA), and Jahki Howard (Utah). LIU might not go 15-3 in the conference like a year ago, but the Sharks should be the favorites entering this season.

The Lakers might be in the same situation as last year, as one of the NEC's top programs that can make a run to the tournament finals only to know an NCAA bid isn't an option. Mercyhurst will feature two of the NEC's best in Jake Lemelman (13.9 PPG and .396 3PT) and Tennessee Rainwater (formerly of Le Moyne). Under bettors, keep your eye on Mercyhurst, as coach Gary Manchel runs one of the slowest offenses (19.7 average possession length) in the entire country.

Strickland isn't the only NBA name connected to the NEC. This year, Tracy McGrady will be Wagner's strategic advisor for new head coach Dwan McMillan. Laymen McGrady, Tracy's son, is on the roster of a team that relies on New York City-area talent.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
LONG ISLAND	64.0	263	0	1%	24-11	17-18	15-20	73.6	71.7	18-3	9-12
MERCYHURST	61.5	308	1	26%	15-17	21-11	16-16	68.3	68.7	12-9	14-7
LEMOYNE	61.0	313	1	3%	14-17	16-15	13-18	72.3	73.9	10-9	8-11
WAGNER	59.5	329	1	0%	11-17	16-12	15-13	69.6	72.7	9-11	10-10
C CONN ST	59.5	330	2	28%	16-12	14-14	16-12	70.6	72.0	12-7	9-10
FARLEIGH DICKINSON	59.0	340	1	20%	8-21	10-19	10-19	65.1	72.7	8-11	8-11
CHICAGO ST	58.5	345	1	10%	7-25	16-16	15-17	65.8	76.1	5-14	9-10
STONEHILL	58.0	347	1	10%	10-21	16-15	11-20	64.2	69.5	9-11	10-10
NEW HAVEN	57.5	350	1	21%	11-17	15-13	8-20	61.5	67.4	9-9	10-8

OHIO VALLEY CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

The OVC is lighter this season, as Little Rock moved to the United Athletic Conference and Tennessee Tech shifted over to the SoCon. Neither one of those teams was a big factor last season, so it shouldn't shift the conference's power dynamics all that much. There are also no new coaches in the conference this season, though I would not expect that to be the case next season if Nolan Smith has another strong campaign at Tennessee State.

The conference standings were fascinating last season because Western Illinois was a punching bag at 1-19 and Southern Indiana also stunk at 4-16. Every other team had at least eight conference wins, and five teams had 12+ wins over the 20 league tilts. Tennessee State and Morehead State each had 15, but it was the Tigers who beat the Eagles when it mattered most. And they did so by 26 points to head to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1994.

As I've said with other conferences, success at this level is a blessing and a curse. The results are awesome in the moment, and going to the NCAA Tournament or winning a regular-season title gets more attention from potential recruits. It also means that you're likely to lose a lot of your talent to schools with deeper pockets or because you had experienced seniors who can no longer play. Case in point, when else would Tennessee State get a 7-foot-1 former Kentucky Wildcat/Ohio State Buckeye/Memphis Tiger like Aaron Bradshaw? Similarly, how else would you get Ty-Laur Johnson (14.6 PPG) to transfer from San Diego to Nashville to play for an OVC team? Smith had a phenomenal season even though he didn't get the head coaching gig until mid-July, long after most portal players figured out where they were going. Even with zero returning starters, his Tigers are the team to beat.

Morehead State is down last season's three top scorers. Southeast Missouri State is missing four double-digit scorers from last season. The most interesting team in the OVC continues to be UT Martin, with players from 11 different countries and a very, very aggressive style of defense that led to the 22nd-ranked TO% in the country and eighth-best 3P%, but the Skyhawks also missed a ton of 3s and turned the ball over a lot. There are a lot of new faces and even some new countries represented on the roster.

Conferences like the OVC are heavily reliant on JUCO transfers. Most of these athletic departments simply don't have the money to even get rotation players from power schools, so they have to hope that JUCOs assimilate quickly. I don't think it's a coincidence that we've had four different conference champs since Belmont and Murray State left, given the current landscape of college basketball.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
TENNESSEE ST	67.5	200	0	5%	20-10	18-12	14-16	77.9	75.1	17-5	13-9
SIU EDWARDSVL	63.0	281	2	32%	16-13	15-14	11-18	67.7	65.9	12-9	10-11
SE MISSOURI ST	63.0	283	1	22%	17-13	14-16	13-17	73.2	72.3	15-7	11-11
TENN-MARTIN	61.0	312	1	5%	19-11	15-15	9-21	67.9	64.7	14-8	10-12
LINDENWOOD	61.0	314	0	0%	15-15	13-17	17-13	74.4	75.0	12-10	9-13
MOREHEAD ST	60.5	320	2	20%	17-13	18-12	16-14	72.0	75.5	16-6	16-6
S INDIANA	59.0	337	1	12%	5-23	12-16	11-17	67.1	74.4	4-16	9-11
E ILLINOIS	55.5	357	0	8%	10-20	17-13	14-16	64.6	72.2	9-13	13-9
W ILLINOIS	54.5	361	2	15%	2-26	11-17	13-15	63.2	78.5	1-19	7-13

OUTLOOK *by Aaron Moore*

Lehigh, last year's Patriot League representative in the NCAA Tournament, enters this season with a legitimate chance of repeating. In order to do so, though, the Mountain Hawks must fend off American. The Eagles have what appears to be the best tandem in the conference with this year's favorite for preseason Defensive Player of the Year, Greg Jones (12.5 PPG), and Madden Collins (13.4 PPG).

American head coach Duane Simpkins, like many of his Patriot League cohorts, looks to run a slow, deliberate offense that works in conjunction with a physical defensive style.

Collins is looking to move up from the Patriot League All-Rookie Team to Conference Player of the Year. However, he must beat out the favorite, Lehigh big man Hank Alvey. In 35 games last year, the junior put up an impressive stat line of 15.2 PPG, 7.1 RPG, 2.1 APG, and 1.8 BPG. Alvey's increased production is paramount to Lehigh's chances of March success, as last year's leading scorer, Nasir Whitlock, has moved on to Georgia Tech. Still, the Mountain Hawks return the bulk of their overall scoring.

After two seasons of not winning the conference, which seems like forever in Patriot League years, Colgate is once again in position to challenge for a regular-season title. Matt Langel's in-and-out offense will run through forward Andrew Alekseyenko (14.8 PPG, 6.7 RPG, and .383 3PT), who was last year's Patriot League Rookie of the Year. Kingston McKoy, a guard out of Reading, PA, has his sights on that same award this season for the Raiders. Last year, Colgate's offense behind the arc wasn't the issue (35.6%); it was its defense there (34.8%).

Navy will have a much different look this season. The Midshipmen, who won 26 games last year and were close to an NCAA Tournament bid if not for a last-second heartbreak, lost Austin Benigni, the Patriot League's Player of the Year, along with top rebounding big man Aidan Kehoe to graduation.

Senior guard Kyrone Alexander is back for the BU Terriers and is the main reason they could be an outside contender for both the regular-season and conference tournament titles.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
AMERICAN	68.0	197	4	88%	14-16	16-14	15-15	72.0	72.7	9-10	10-9
COLGATE	66.5	214	3	52%	16-15	12-19	17-14	75.6	76.2	12-8	5-15
LEHIGH	65.0	248	4	73%	16-17	19-14	18-15	71.8	74.4	14-7	14-7
NAVY	63.0	286	2	34%	24-8	21-11	15-17	74.1	65.6	18-2	16-4
BOSTON U	62.0	300	2	33%	16-17	18-15	18-15	74.6	74.5	12-9	12-9
BUCKNELL	60.0	325	2	28%	10-23	14-19	13-20	67.4	76.3	7-13	8-12
LAFAYETTE	59.0	336	1	25%	10-21	14-17	18-13	69.1	75.4	8-11	8-11
ARMY	58.0	346	4	35%	9-21	12-18	17-13	70.8	79.0	5-14	5-14
LOYOLA-MD	58.0	348	1	25%	10-20	16-14	16-14	73.7	78.5	8-11	11-8
HOLY CROSS	56.5	352	2	34%	9-22	16-15	15-16	67.9	74.8	6-14	10-10

SOUTHERN CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

The states of the teams in the SoCon are as diverse as their styles of play. Some teams in the SoCon run. Some play at a snail's pace. Some try to get the ball inside. Some live and die by the 3. Some play rabid defense. Some play defense like the other offense has rabies. And some teams will be better positioned to play the styles that they want after this transfer portal cycle. It is a fun league and one that has some solid betting opportunities on a nightly and weekly basis.

The conference is one team bigger this season with Tennessee Tech joining the ranks, mostly for football purposes, as the basketball team has only made the NCAA Tournament once (1967) and hasn't even won a regular-season title since 2005. In terms of other fundamental changes, the Golden Eagles have a new head coach in Tobin Anderson, of course, of Fairleigh Dickinson fame for beating Purdue, and UNC Greensboro picked up a big bench name in Jerod Haase.

Anderson will probably speed up Tennessee Tech in hopes of getting the program its first winning season since 2017-18. Haase will definitely speed up UNC Greensboro, as the Spartans were in the 340s in adjusted tempo twice under Mike Jones per Bart Torvik's rankings. Last season, UNCG was one of the worst defensive teams in the nation. Historically, Haase's teams have been better on offense.

The reality is that those two teams won't contend in all likelihood, and neither will several others, as squads like The Citadel, VMI, and Western Carolina just don't project like the others do. Samford took a nice leap forward last season under longtime Lipscomb head coach Lennie Acuff. Mercer also showed flashes under now third-year head coach Ryan Ridder. East Tennessee State was the regular-season champ under now fourth-year head coach Brooks Savage. But it was Furman under Bob Richey, the longest-tenured coach in the conference, that went dancing.

Surprisingly, for a conference located in ACC and SEC country, there is a lot of loyalty, so most teams have at least one or two returning starters who were key contributors last season. Furman, though, is not one of them, as making the NCAA Tournament makes the number on that check a little bit bigger, so Richey has no returning starters and very limited returning production. Despite that, his team is still the favorite, even though the Paladins were 19-12 at the end of the regular season. In other words, a price might come in here, especially in a conference with a lot of 3-point variance.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK			SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
FURMAN	70.5	154	0	26%	19-13	16-16	16-16	74.9	72.5	13-8	11-10
E TENN ST	70.0	158	1	19%	21-11	14-18	17-15	76.8	70.1	15-6	8-13
SAMFORD	67.5	203	2	27%	16-14	18-12	19-11	77.8	77.0	11-8	13-6
W CAROLINA	66.0	229	1	10%	13-16	14-15	15-14	76.3	79.0	11-9	12-8
MERCER	65.5	232	2	21%	16-13	19-10	14-15	80.1	77.8	11-8	11-8
TENNESSEE TECH	65.5	243	1	17%	10-18	14-14	14-14	70.3	75.6	8-12	9-11
UT-CHATTANOOGA	64.0	264	1	19%	10-19	12-17	16-13	74.1	78.1	7-12	8-11
WOFFORD	64.0	269	2	26%	17-13	15-15	15-15	78.4	78.6	11-8	9-10
UNC-GREENSBORO	62.5	290	0	2%	13-19	13-19	22-10	76.6	81.9	11-10	10-11
VMI	60.0	324	2	43%	3-26	9-20	13-16	68.5	83.2	1-18	5-14
THE CITADEL	59.5	333	0	26%	8-22	15-15	15-15	68.3	78.9	8-12	12-8



OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

If my Southland preview just read “McNeese,” would anybody object? What if it said “McNeese and Stephen F. Austin?” After taking a ton of lumps in non-conference play to pay the bills, Southland teams play a 22-game conference schedule. Stephen F. Austin and McNeese were 39-5 combined in those matchups. Despite that dominance, both teams had to scratch and claw to advance in the conference tourney semifinals, as the Lumberjacks beat Texas A&M Corpus Christi 60-58 and McNeese needed three overtimes to beat UT Rio Grande Valley 84-80.

So, let’s start with those responsible for the close calls, as UTRGV has a new head coach with Kahil Fennell off to Western Michigan. Suffice it to say that Edinburg, TX and Kalamazoo, MI, are about as different as it gets for a coach settling into new surroundings. Raleigh, NC, to Edinburg is a pretty big change as well, but one that Brandon Chambers is excited about because this is his first chance to be a head coach at any level. He was actually an assistant under Will Wade at McNeese and NC State, so ‘if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em’ was the thought process for the Vaqueros athletic department.

Chambers cut his teeth under Shaka Smart at VCU and then had multiple stints under Wade, so he’s had some sharp mentors. He was also the Director of Basketball Operations under Eric Musselman at Nevada. This looks as promising a hire as you can get, and Chambers seems to want to play the havoc defense with a blank slate of a roster. Chambers may be the only first-year head coach to experience success, with full rebuilding jobs at Nicholls for 31-year-old Darion Brown and Lamar for 38-year-old Jordan Fee.

Back to the big boys, as McNeese has another promising roster for Bill Armstrong. Larry Johnson (17.4 PPG) is a good starting point, though most of the supplemental production is gone, as only some rotation players remain. The Cowboys do look big and physical again, so even if they aren’t as polished shooting the basketball, they’re liable to once again be a team that owns the possession battle with offensive boards and defensive takeaways.

Matt Braeuer’s first year in Nacogdoches was quite the success, as he was 28-6 and received an NIT berth for those efforts. Of course, it’s not where SFA wanted to be, but his team won twice as many games as the previous version. While no starters are back, a lot of guys who saw time in Braeuer’s first season are. The Lumberjacks hit a lot of 3s, but what really took them where they went was how they played on defense, including finishing 11th in 3P% against. A former Grant McCasland assistant having a great defense seems like something you can bet on every season.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
MCNEESE ST	76.5	100	2	26%	26-6	16-16	15-17	76.6	67.4	21-3	10-14
SF AUSTIN ST	71.0	149	0	21%	26-6	23-9	14-18	74.9	66.7	21-3	17-7
TEXAS A&M CC	68.0	195	1	12%	14-15	16-13	14-15	68.5	69.4	14-10	14-10
LAMAR	65.5	231	0	1%	10-19	12-17	14-15	68.4	70.5	7-15	9-13
TX-RIO GRANDE	65.0	247	1	7%	17-14	18-13	13-18	73.7	70.6	15-9	14-10
NEW ORLEANS	64.5	256	0	17%	15-18	19-14	19-14	74.5	77.7	13-11	16-8
SE LOUISIANA	64.0	268	0	2%	8-22	14-16	13-17	64.8	71.3	6-16	9-13
HOUSTON CHRISTIAN	64.0	270	1	22%	10-20	14-16	14-16	66.3	72.4	8-15	10-13
INCARNATE WORD	62.5	289	0	0%	9-19	10-18	14-14	70.4	75.0	7-15	6-16
NORTHWESTERN ST	62.5	291	2	26%	8-22	17-13	15-15	66.1	72.9	8-15	13-10
NICHOLLS ST	62.0	299	1	11%	13-19	15-17	17-15	71.0	75.7	13-11	13-11
EAST TEXAS A&M	59.0	342	0	2%	9-21	14-16	15-15	67.1	76.0	6-16	8-14



OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

One fewer team will attempt to get to the summit of the Summit this season, as Denver has moved over to the West Coast Conference. Even though North Dakota State is part of the Mountain West for football, the basketball team has decided to stay put in the Summit League and will likely be the team to beat this season, although St. Thomas has a strong case as well, sitting as the preseason favorite to win.

The Tommies were the class of the Summit last season and one of the nation's top offensive teams. In fact, they were the top team from a 2P% standpoint and were fifth overall in eFG%. They also took outstanding care of the basketball, though most teams do in this league, where turnovers are in relatively short supply. As a result, most of these teams grade poorly in the defensive efficiency metrics, though the high number of made shots against doesn't help either.

North Dakota State and North Dakota excelled at turning teams over, and that's a big reason why the Bison were able to win the regular season and also the conference tournament. North Dakota took the ball away, but when they didn't, teams made it rain on them, as they were 345th in 2P% and 3P% defense. This is a jump shot-oriented conference, so you better defend the 3 and you better defend the mid-range. The Fighting Hawks did neither, and they weren't the only ones.

As we look ahead to this season, UMKC could improve with new head coach Mark Turgeon, who hasn't coached since 2021 when he was fired after more than a decade with Maryland. The Roos are taking a chance on a guy who has been out of the game for a while and also doesn't have much experience in the present day, with the transfer portal and NIL factoring in so heavily. He will have the youngest team in the conference.

St. Thomas and North Dakota State each have one starter back, while South Dakota State has two, with Kalen Garry (10.7 PPG) and Joe Saylor (14.5 PPG). Bryan Petersen was just 14-18 in his first season, the first losing effort for the Jackrabbits since 2009-10. The pressure is on to improve. Another team under pressure is South Dakota, where Eric Peterson got some investment from the athletic department to bring in a good transfer class. It looked like the Coyotes were on an upswing after a 19-14 campaign two seasons ago, but they fell to 16-16 last season. Despite sweeping SDSU during the regular season, South Dakota went one-and-done in the conference tournament, and that wasn't enough.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
N DAKOTA ST	70.0	157	1	18%	24-8	18-14	15-17	78.7	71.4	17-2	11-8
ST THOMAS-MN	69.5	162	1	21%	21-10	15-16	15-16	80.9	73.1	13-5	10-8
S DAKOTA ST	67.0	206	2	43%	11-18	12-17	14-15	74.4	74.5	7-10	6-11
S DAKOTA	64.0	261	0	15%	13-16	16-13	12-17	78.0	81.7	8-9	10-7
NEBRASKA-OMAHA	64.0	262	1	17%	12-17	14-15	14-15	73.9	77.7	9-9	11-7
ORAL ROBERTS	64.0	272	2	41%	7-23	14-16	12-18	71.8	79.7	5-13	7-11
MISSOURI-KC	61.5	305	0	0%	1-27	5-23	16-12	67.0	84.8	1-16	1-16
N DAKOTA	61.0	316	2	13%	15-17	21-11	15-17	74.2	79.6	12-7	14-5

SUN BELT CONFERENCE

OUTLOOK by Adam Burke

The Sun Belt wasn't able to reach the same heights in 2026 as it did in 2025. Arkansas State and Troy finished the season as top-100 teams per Torvik that year, but no team ranked higher than 147th this past season. The Trojans did repeat as conference champs and moved up a seed line from 14 to 13, but head coach Scott Cross is now at Georgia Tech. They brought back former assistant Adam Howard for his first opportunity as a head coach.

Troy wasn't the only team to get a new bench boss, as Georgia State let Jonas Hayes go and hired Jon Cremins from Vanderbilt. Louisiana-Monroe also made a change, as Phil Cunningham was 4-28 over one season, and that was enough, as Ryan Cross, who was at UAB for seven seasons with Andy Kennedy, has taken over. Louisiana Tech has also joined the conference, replacing Texas State, which went to the new Pac-12.

Appalachian State, Arkansas State, Coastal Carolina, Georgia Southern, Georgia State, James Madison, LA Monroe, Marshall, Old Dominion, South Alabama, and Troy all have very limited production coming back, if any. That means most of this season will be centered on how quickly everybody comes together and who can actually make the leap from JUCO and NAIA to this conference.

Therefore, this conference looks wide-open among the usual contenders. Arkansas State has zero returning starters, but that might be a good thing for former Alabama assistant Ryan Pannone, as his team played fast and scored a lot, but also didn't value the basketball. He got a lot of bigs in the portal, but easily the most important player is Tameron Ferguson, who had 20 PPG, but more importantly, 6.5 APG at Augustana in South Dakota. Jordan Pyke (12.6 PPG) from Incarnate Word and Layne Taylor (8.0 PPG) from Murray State are also good fits and maybe better fits than what Pannone had last season.

Troy had one of the highest Rim & 3 Rates in the country last season, so we'll see if Howard can keep finding slashers to get to the tin. He definitely focused on wings who can shoot the 3 in the portal, but didn't really entice a lot of traditional bigs or post players. South Alabama is starting from scratch, and it's a tough system, as head coach Richie Riley sells out to defend the paint. Opponents were forced into a 3 on 64.6% of their shots against the Jaguars last season. They made 33.1% of them.

The team that could take a huge leap is James Madison, as success on the football field has created more financial opportunities on the court, and head coach Preston Spradlin got some power-conference guys from Illinois, Northwestern, and Mississippi State.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
JAMES MADISON	70.5	155	0	12%	17-15	13-19	15-17	74.7	74.4	10-10	9-11
TROY	69.5	166	0	8%	20-12	18-14	14-18	77.3	74.5	14-6	12-8
ARKANSAS ST	69.0	171	0	5%	18-12	15-15	15-15	81.8	78.0	11-8	7-12
LA-LAFAYETTE	67.0	209	2	29%	11-22	15-18	15-18	63.7	70.7	8-12	9-11
GEORGIA ST	66.5	223	2	3%	8-22	13-17	14-16	68.4	75.4	7-12	10-9
SOUTHERN MISS	66.0	226	1	19%	17-16	17-16	20-13	73.9	74.8	12-10	12-10
MARSHALL	66.0	227	0	27%	18-13	10-21	19-12	80.5	78.9	11-8	5-14
OLD DOMINION	65.5	235	0	20%	11-21	15-17	21-11	75.7	78.7	8-12	10-10
S ALABAMA	65.5	238	0	11%	19-12	17-14	16-15	73.2	71.3	11-8	11-8
APPALACHIAN ST	65.0	249	0	16%	17-13	17-13	12-18	69.3	67.4	11-8	11-8
COASTAL CAROLINA	64.5	255	0	15%	18-13	19-12	17-14	71.8	73.5	11-8	12-7
LOUISIANA TECH	64.0	265	1	8%	17-14	17-14	16-15	67.8	67.8	13-10	14-9
GA SOUTHERN	62.0	298	0	9%	19-16	16-19	19-16	79.9	80.3	13-11	10-14
LA-MONROE	58.5	344	0	2%	2-28	18-12	20-10	71.7	85.4	1-18	13-6



OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

From 2014-23, Texas Southern won the SWAC Conference Tournament seven times, including three in a row from 2021-23. In the three years since, the automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament has been spread around a bit, as Grambling State, Alabama State, and Prairie View A&M have all had a turn. That type of pattern in these low-major conferences might continue, given that every team seems to be in rebuilding mode in the offseason on an annual basis.

Some programs in this conference are also starting fresh on the sidelines. There are four new head coaches in the conference, with three former head coaches moving on to become assistants at power-conference schools. The most notable name is Mo Williams, who left Jackson State to be an assistant at Kentucky. But Jackson State simply elevated right-hand man Trey Johnson to be the head coach, so there's a level of continuity there.

The same was kind of true at Texas Southern, where Johnny Jones joined the LSU staff. His right-hand man, Shyrone Chatman, served as the interim over the summer, but the AD decided to hire Corey Lowery from Seton Hall instead. After that, Chatman left the program to join the staff at UMass. Another team with a new head coach is Mississippi Valley State, as George Ivory was relieved of his duties and probably relieved to no longer have those duties, as he had a 12-118 record with the Delta Devils. Former Detroit Mercy head coach Mike Davis has that job now.

The other team with a new head coach is Alabama State, which went dancing just two seasons ago. Tony Madlock is now on the Memphis staff, so Chris Wright was hired from the NAIA ranks. Even though there is only one starter back, Michael James (21.4 PPG) from MVSU knows this conference and might as well be a returnee. Paul McMillan IV (20.0 PPG) was with Grambling last season, but didn't play due to a family situation. Now, he's ready to go, so that's another returning-starter-type player.

As of now, Alabama A&M has a postseason ban due to low APR scores, and an appeal ongoing, which seems only fair given that punishing the current roster for the transgressions of the old one in today's game is wrong. Reigning regular-season champ Bethune-Cookman is looking for instant offense via the transfer portal after losing most of what it had last season. Frankly, that's the case for just about all of these teams, and many of them will lose in ugly fashion while participating in paycheck games to pay the bills early in the year.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
BETHUNE-COOKMAN	67.5	199	1	13%	16-15	15-16	18-13	74.5	77.5	14-5	10-9
ALABAMA ST	63.0	287	1	5%	9-22	13-18	14-17	71.5	77.6	7-12	8-11
SOUTHERN U	62.0	301	0	1%	14-17	12-19	20-11	76.2	80.2	13-8	8-13
PRAIRIE VIEW A&M	61.5	309	0	2%	15-18	23-10	13-20	74.8	78.9	13-9	16-6
ALABAMA A&M	61.0	317	1	38%	15-15	16-14	15-15	71.4	73.9	11-9	10-10
FLORIDA A&M	60.5	322	1	30%	13-16	16-13	11-18	70.0	75.1	12-8	12-8
GRAMBLING	60.0	323	0	4%	12-19	15-16	10-21	69.0	71.3	8-12	7-13
JACKSON ST	60.0	327	1	34%	12-21	14-19	16-17	70.2	83.8	11-9	10-10
TEXAS SOUTHERN	59.0	341	1	11%	10-18	9-19	14-14	73.9	80.0	10-9	8-11
ALCORN ST	57.0	351	0	5%	9-23	18-14	15-17	66.9	80.2	8-12	13-7
ARK-PINE BLUFF	54.5	360	0	2%	11-19	13-17	14-16	74.0	81.9	10-9	8-11
MISS VALLEY ST	49.5	365	0	8%	2-30	16-16	14-18	63.2	83.7	2-17	9-10



OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

The WAC is no more, so we have the UAC instead. This conference is a mash-up of teams from the WAC, Ohio Valley, and Atlantic Sun, as there are nine programs participating in this new endeavor. The travel schedule should be rather interesting here, as there are three teams in Texas, one in Kentucky, two in Arkansas, one in Tennessee, one in Georgia, and one in Alabama. Outside of Little Rock and Arlington, none of these places are particularly easy to get to, so there will be some bus rides.

Along with the unfamiliar travel, there will be a feeling-out process once conference play gets going. Not only that, but two of these teams have new head coaches. Little Rock bid adieu to Darrell Walker and hired Travis Ford, who is a veteran of nearly 800 games as a head coach. Fellow vet Billy Gillispie stepped away due to medical issues, so Tarleton State's new head coach is Eric Haut, who played his college ball at Kent State and has been an assistant coach since 2006.

Haut was an assistant at Northern Kentucky under Darrin Horn when they played at a snail's pace. He was also at Utah State with Jerrod Calhoun, whose teams played at an average tempo but were outstanding offensively in his two seasons in Logan. Tarleton State sold out to try and force turnovers under Gillispie, which worked, but the team also turned the ball over a ton and virtually never took a 3-point shot. That will absolutely change under Haut.

Ford has a plethora of transfers on the roster, though former Pepperdine product Aaron Clark (15.3 PPG) may be one of the best players in the conference. So does A.W. Hamilton at Eastern Kentucky, where he plans to bring back his full-court pressure defense. Arguably the most dangerous team in the conference is Austin Peay, where Corey Gipson, who had a 15-3 record in the ASun last season, returns two starters who averaged better than 30 PPG combined.

But the odds and the returning production numbers, suggest that everybody will be chasing Central Arkansas. The Bears have four starters back for third-year head coach John Shulman and a lot of local products. In fact, Shulman held a press conference before the season in which he encouraged in-state players not offered by Arkansas to give Central Arkansas a look. In a transitional season for everybody, the Bears do look most likely to gel early, but conference play is a long time away.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK			SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
AUSTIN PEAY	68.5	183	2	37%	20-9	14-15	14-15	79.0	74.6	16-4	9-11
C ARKANSAS	68.5	184	4	54%	20-12	20-12	16-16	79.3	76.0	17-4	15-6
TARLETON ST	67.0	205	1	14%	10-18	14-14	15-13	72.5	75.8	5-14	6-13
TX-ARLINGTON	66.5	216	1	11%	16-14	17-13	7-23	67.7	67.8	10-10	11-9
ARK-LITTLE ROCK	65.5	242	0	1%	10-20	12-18	15-15	68.9	74.2	9-12	10-11
ABILENE CHRISTIAN	65.0	253	2	20%	11-19	14-16	16-14	67.9	73.9	6-14	8-12
E KENTUCKY	63.0	285	1	23%	9-21	11-19	19-11	77.5	83.1	7-12	8-11
N ALABAMA	61.5	307	0	15%	7-21	10-18	12-16	67.9	78.0	4-15	6-13
WEST GEORGIA	59.5	328	1	15%	13-17	20-10	16-14	75.3	80.5	9-11	13-7

WEST COAST CONFERENCE



OUTLOOK *by Adam Burke*

Three new head coaches in a conference would normally be the lead story, but it isn't. That's because Gonzaga is no longer a member of the WCC. The Bulldogs are a basketball-only member of the Pac-12, so this conference lost its meal ticket and best team on an annual basis. Even with his chief adversary gone, Saint Mary's head coach Randy Bennett took the leap and went to Arizona State. Assistant Mickey McConnell now has the task of getting the Gaels to the Big Dance.

Pepperdine made what looks like a very savvy hire with Griff Aldrich, who had some strong seasons at Longwood and always had fundamentally sound squads. Another replacement is JR Blount, who took over in San Diego with Steve Lavin out the door. It is the 39-year-old Blount's first head coaching job after serving under T.J. Otzelberger and Niko Medved, who are pretty good mentors. Speaking of newcomers, the Denver Pioneers moved from the Summit League to the WCC, making them the only team that is not adjacent to the Pacific Coast.

There are a handful of impact players speckled throughout the conference who are back for another go with their respective teams, but a lot of these rosters are going to have to come together sooner rather than later to achieve success. A lot of these coaches have scoured the international ranks and the large number of JUCOs in California and other parts of the West for players.

On name value, Saint Mary's and Santa Clara are the favorites, even though both programs are mostly starting from scratch with their respective rosters. Broncos head coach Herb Sendek is worthy of the benefit of the doubt for having put together a string of consistent seasons. It's fair to wonder about the Gaels without Bennett, even though his legacy will live on in Moraga through McConnell.

There are a lot of well-coached teams in this league, so it could be more open than the odds suggest, since a lot of teams are on a level playing field from a talent standpoint. Loyola Marymount and San Diego were far and away the top two programs per 247Sports from a transfer standpoint, while San Francisco had the top freshman class, though Pepperdine and Saint Mary's had the only players graded as four-stars. For teams like Santa Clara and San Francisco, if not now, when? With Gonzaga out of the picture, the time to be really aggressive has arrived.

RATINGS, STATS & RECORDS

TEAM	26-27	NAT'L	RET	RPM	2025-26 RESULTS LINED GAMES					CONFERENCE	
	SM PR	RANK	STR	%	SU	ATS	O-U	PF	PA	SU	ATS
ST MARYS-CA	80.5	70	1	23%	26-6	19-13	13-19	76.8	65.2	16-3	13-6
SANTA CLARA	79.0	81	1	34%	25-9	18-16	20-14	82.9	73.5	17-4	12-9
SEATTLE	73.0	129	2	20%	19-14	15-18	13-20	70.1	68.2	9-11	9-11
PACIFIC	71.5	143	0	5%	16-15	17-14	10-21	71.4	69.8	9-11	9-11
LOYOLA-MARYMOUNT	71.0	146	1	18%	14-17	14-17	15-16	72.2	72.6	6-13	7-12
SAN FRANCISCO	71.0	151	0	1%	16-16	14-18	17-15	73.9	73.8	9-11	7-13
SAN DIEGO	70.0	160	0	3%	10-21	16-15	13-18	72.8	78.8	6-14	11-9
PEPPERDINE	70.0	161	0	5%	7-23	14-16	15-15	70.4	79.7	4-15	9-10
PORTLAND	68.5	185	1	22%	13-19	15-17	14-18	72.1	78.1	8-13	11-10
DENVER	65.5	240	1	29%	12-17	18-11	20-9	80.3	84.0	8-9	10-7

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