COLLEGE BASKETBALL BETTING GUIDE

VSiN PRO

GATOR HUNTING

TIPS & STRATEGIES FOR BETTING COLLEGE BASKETBALL

OUR **PRO GUIDE** INCLUDES

- MATT YOUMANS' PRESEASON TOP 50
- ALL 31 CONFERENCE PREVIEWS
- BEST BETS AND TEAM BETTING NUGGETS

VSiN

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Greetings, everyone!

It may be a busy time of year, but the start of a new sport brings a lot of good betting opportunities. That is especially true when it comes to college basketball, as the sheer number of teams (365) coupled with the roster turnover and coaching changes make for a very soft, very inefficient market in the early part of the season.

So, while college basketball may not be on the brain yet, it absolutely should be and we're here to help you learn more about this season's outlook and the teams across all 31 conferences. Every conference has an overview, while the top 10 conferences - ACC, American, Atlantic-10, Big 12, Big East, Big Ten, Missouri Valley, Mountain West, SEC, and West Coast - have individual team previews.

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

- Matt Youmans' Preseason Top 50
- Greg "Hoops" Peterson's Betting Nuggets and 14 conference overviews
- Aaron Moore's features on the Wooden Award, a Florida 2026 vs. UConn 2024 comparison, plus the A-10, MAAC, and Patriot
- Jonathan Von Tobel on the Mountain West
- Wes Reynolds on the Big Ten
- Senior Editor Zachary Cohen on the NCAA Champion futures markets, ACC and Big 12
- Adam Burke on the American, Big East, Missouri Valley, SEC, West Coast, and five other conference overviews
- Head of Analytics Steve Makinen's Power Ratings and Statistics

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 and please share the great offers we are running and all of the content we are churning out with your friends, family, co-workers, and acquaintances, as we keep getting bigger and better every single day.

Happy reading and happy college basketball season!

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VSIN COLLEGE HOOPS

MATT YOUMANS

CONNECTICUT TO REACH FINAL FOUR (+360)

This is bad news for the Dan Hurley haters, but the UConn coach has another title contender. After winning back-to-back NCAA championships in 2023 and 2024, while going 12-0 straight up and ATS, the eighth-seeded Huskies pushed eventual champ Florida to the limit in March before falling 77-75 in the second round. UConn's roster has plenty of size and skill plus a combination of veterans and newcomers. Senior forward Alex Karaban, 6-10 senior Tarris Reed and 7-foot German freshman Eric Reibe form a strong front line. The point guard position is in good hands with transfers Silas Demary Jr. (Georgia) and Malachi Smith (Dayton), and Solo Ball returns as one of the nation's top 3-point shooters. Highly-touted freshman Braylon Mullins and junior Jaylin Stewart help in the backcourt. With the Huskies' coaching, talent and track record in the tournament, they are a good bet to reach the Final Four in Indianapolis.

DUKE TO WIN ACC REGULAR SEASON (+160)

Despite losing No. 1 overall pick Cooper Flagg, No. 4 pick Kon Knueppel and three other players to the NBA Draft, the Blue Devils are loaded again. The new star attraction is Cameron Boozer, a 6-9 freshman who could immediately become the top player in the ACC. Four important returnees — senior forward Maliq Brown, junior point guard Caleb Foster, sophomore wing Isaiah Evans and 6-11 sophomore Patrick Ngongba — will be joined by freshmen Cayden Boozer, Nikolas Khamenia, Dame Sarr and Sebastian Wilkins. Duke coach Jon Scheyer definitely has more talent than Louisville, which is the main contender as the consensus No. 2 team in the conference. North Carolina State, North Carolina and Notre Dame will be in the running too, but it's the Blue Devils and Cardinals in a two-horse race for first place.

SAN DIEGO STATE TO WIN MOUNTAIN WEST REGULAR SEASON (+140)

Aztecs coach Brian Dutcher reached the NCAA championship game in 2023 and the team he will put on the floor this season has Sweet 16 potential. San Diego State boasts two of the top five players in the conference in 7-foot Magoon Gwath and junior guard Miles Byrd. Gwath was voted the Mountain West's best freshman and top defensive player. Senior guard Reese Waters also returns, and Dutcher adds transfers Sean Newman (Louisiana Tech) and Latrell Davis (San Jose State) to a deep backcourt. The Aztecs are No. 23 in my preseason power rankings, much higher than league rivals Boise State (44) and Utah State (47).

AARON MOORE

PURDUE TO WIN NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP (+900)

Sure this sounds chalky but the goal of a futures bet is to wager on the team you think will win a title. To me, that's the squad with the experienced core of Braden Smith, Trey Kaufman-Renn and Fletcher Loyer. Any lingering concerns regarding Matt Painter are gone. Too often bettors get ultra-focused on teams with high odds they were able to get in the futures market. However, CLV isn't the end game, a winning ticket is, and that is why I am backing Purdue. There is likely going to be a time around early February when the Boilermakers' national championship odds are around 3/1 and some bettors will regret not acting when they were much higher.

YALE TO WIN IVY LEAGUE REGULAR SEASON (-120)

A futures bet can come in at a minus number and still have value and that is the case here with the Bulldogs, far and away the Ivy League's best team. KenPom has Yale ranked 102 nationally, with Harvard next at 163. The end of the Ivy League regular season also works in Yale's favor as its final four games don't include Harvard or Brown.

DARRYN PETERSON TO WIN WAYMAN TISDALE AWARD (+500)
This board for the top freshman is available at DraftKings. The prevailing wisdom is that one of the top three names — Cameron Boozer (+425), AJ Dybantsa (+450) and Peterson — will win the award. So my handicap is focused entirely on this subset with a wager on Peterson because Kansas needs him from the start to be its focal piece. Bill Self has already called him the most complete freshman he has ever coached. Boozer will have the difficulty of constantly being compared to his father Carlos, and Cooper Flagg. The younger Boozer will likely fall short of Flagg's tremendous numbers and stature from a year ago. Even though those who can drive to Las Vegas in only a couple of hours might not want to hear this, an East Coast bias for voters exists. Many of those voters might not stay up late enough to fully analyze Dybantsa.

TUCKER DEVRIES MADE 3-POINTERS LEADER IN REGULAR SEASON (25/1)
This small lottery ticket wager I made is available at Caesars. This is a numbers play based on a great shooter who missed most of last season. The Indiana senior is playing out his long college career for his father on a team that probably will be trailing for many of its regular-season conference games. DeVries will put up plenty of shot attempts and he's worth a shot at 25/1 odds.

JENSEN LEWIS

UCONN TO WIN NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP (14/1)
After a "disappointing" 2024-25 season by their recent standards, the UConn Huskies are poised for a rebound under Dan Hurley, ranked among the top teams in preseason polls and analytics, signaling a return to national championship contention. As one of the Big East's powerhouses alongside St. John's, UConn's roster addresses last year's weaknesses in point guard play and defense, making them a favorite to win the conference and potentially the NCAA title.

The Huskies return key veterans like senior forward Alex Karaban and guard Solo Ball, providing leadership and continuity. Transfers bolster the lineup, including Silas Demary (Georgia) at point guard. Freshman Braylon Mullins adds elite 3-point shooting to the mix. The projected starting lineup could feature Demary at point, Ball on the wing, Karaban at forward and Tarris Reed in the paint.

Hurley's intense, defense-first system — focusing on physicality, rebounding and efficient half-court offense — has proven championship-caliber, as evidenced by back-to-back titles before last year. This season, expect an emphasis on fixing perimeter defense and ball-handling to avoid the turnovers that plagued them last year. Their path in returning to glory hinges on health and backcourt stability, but they could easily reach the Elite Eight or beyond.

KENTUCKY TO WIN NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP (17/1)
The Kentucky Wildcats enter the 2025-26 season under second-year head coach Mark Pope, who has assembled a deep and versatile roster through a mix of high-profile transfers, returning talent, and five-star freshmen, positioning them as a top contender in the SEC and nationally. With a projected roster value around $22 million under the new revenue-sharing model, Kentucky boasts one of the most expensive and talented groups in college basketball, emphasizing connectivity, offensive firepower and defensive versatility.

Kentucky's backcourt is loaded, including Otega Oweh and transfers Jaland Lowe (Pitt) and Denzel Aberdeen (Florida), forming a dynamic trio capable of high-volume scoring and perimeter defense. In the frontcourt, Mo Dioubate is expected to anchor the starting lineup as a versatile forward, while big man Brandon Garrison provides depth and rim protection off the bench, though he's not projected as a major scorer. Freshmen standouts include five-stars Jasper Johnson (a sharpshooting guard) and Malachi Moreno (a 7-foot center with shot-blocking upside), adding elite recruiting pedigree.

Preseason KenPom ratings rank Kentucky highly, projecting them as a top-10 team overall due to their balance. The Wildcats are potentially a 25+ win regular season team, with a deep NCAA Tournament run as a realistic goal, aiming for the program's ninth national title.

Darryn Peterson

ARKANSAS TO WIN NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP (25/1)

In Year 2 under John Calipari, the Arkansas Razorbacks are building momentum with a star-studded recruiting class and key returners, aiming to return to the Sweet 16 or deeper after a transitional first season. With about 45% of last year's minutes returning and fresh talent, Arkansas is a legitimate SEC contender, blending athleticism and depth.

DJ Wagner, Karter Knox and Trevon Brazile anchor a starting lineup that will receive an influx from the No. 4-ranked 2025 recruiting class, featuring headliner Darius Acuff Jr. The Razorbacks will feature elite athleticism in the frontcourt, strong guard play and depth that could wear down opponents. They're projected as SEC dark horses with upset potential. Weaknesses include integration challenges with new faces and potential inconsistencies in shooting if the freshmen adjust slowly.

Arkansas is a viable 20+ win candidate, with dark horse Final Four upside in the loaded SEC. At 25/1, they're worth a play, banking on Calipari's knack for overachieving.

MICHIGAN STATE TO WIN NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP (50/1)

Coming off a dominant 30-7 season where they won the Big Ten by three games, earning a No. 2 NCAA seed, the Michigan State Spartans face skepticism this year on following up last year's incredible run. However, Tom Izzo's track record makes them a perennial threat.

The focus is on an encore performance with breakout talent. Those candidates include Trey Fort, Jeremy Fears Jr. (point guard recovering from injury) and Coen Carr. The roster features a mix of veterans and youth, with improvements expected in three-point shooting from players like Fort. Better depth in the backcourt and frontcourt rebounding will bolster Izzo's hallmarks of tough, defensive-minded basketball with emphasis on rebounding, physical play, perimeter defense and transition offense.

Questions abound on three-point consistency and handling doubters after last year's success, but Sparty is a top Big Ten team with deep tourney potential. At 50/1, they're a classic Izzo dark horse.

ZACHARY COHEN

In addition to my three championship futures (NC State 60/1, Wisconsin 75/1, Oregon 100/1), I'm also playing the following:

YAXEL LENDEBORG TO WIN WOODEN AWARD (12/1)

Last year, Lendeborg finished tied for third nationally in Bart Torvik's Box Plus-Minus (11.1) rankings. The only players who finished above him were Cooper Flagg and Johni Broome, while Ryan Kalkbrenner and Collin Murray-Boyles matched his mark. That company is as elite as it gets.

Lendeborg averaged 17.7 points, 11.4 rebounds, 4.2 assists, 1.8 blocks, and 1.7 steals per game for UAB last season — stuffing the stat sheet in ways that are hard to comprehend. Now, the 6-foot-9 forward will get to do it on a national stage, playing for Dusty May at Michigan.

Lendeborg is already turning heads with his dominance in practices and scrimmages, and there's little reason to believe his production will slow down — even as he makes the leap from the American to the Big Ten. He's also been expanding his range to make himself more appealing to NBA scouts. All of it points toward a Wooden-worthy season.

LOUISVILLE TO WIN ACC REGULAR SEASON (+230)

Duke has a chance to be special once again, but it might take some time for the guards to settle into expanded roles. Meanwhile, Louisville should hit the ground running. The Cardinals have some excellent wings, with Pat Kelsey bringing back J'Vonne Hadley and Kasean Pryor. Both were productive last season, though Pryor appeared in only seven games before a torn ACL cut his year short — an injury that's nearly fully healed. Still, the real reason to love Louisville is the backcourt.

Kelsey landed an absolute stud in Ryan Conwell, who averaged 16.5 points per game on 45.0/41.2/82.8 shooting splits for Xavier last season. He and freshman Mikel Brown could form the best guard duo in the country. There might not be a cleaner recruit-to-system fit than Brown stepping into Kelsey's three-happy offense. Brown can score in a variety of ways, but he's especially smooth drilling pull-up triples.

The Cardinals also have a pick-and-pop big in Aly Khalifa, which means they'll shoot opponents off the floor more often than not.

Realistically, Louisville's only potential concern is toughness — but that shouldn't become an issue until the postseason.

Coen Carr

Milos Uzan

WES REYNOLDS

HOUSTON TO WIN BIG 12 REGULAR SEASON (+155)
The Cougars had a 12-point lead in the second half over Florida in the National Championship Game and still maintained a lead in the final two minutes. Then, it all came apart with Houston uncharacteristically turning the ball over on four straight possessions and ending up with a heartbreaking defeat. Now the Cougars have the redemption factor from last season, plus the return of three starters — Milos Uzan and Emanuel Sharp (both 40% 3P% shooters), and rebounder/shot blocker extraordinaire Joseph Tugler.

Houston had only landed one five-star commitment in Kelvin Sampson's decade-long tenure, Jarace Walker in 2022. This year he landed two with big man Chris Cenac and wing Isiah Harwell, who are both McDonald's All-Americans. Sampson has always had very good players here, but now they are starting to recruit at a different level.

A program will land elite talent when you win over 30 games each of the last four years and make two Final Fours in the last five. However, Houston has become a 'culture' program that puts defense first (No. 1 in KenPom adjusted DE last year).

BYU has put its NIL to use with elite talent, Texas Tech and Iowa State will also be very good, and you can never forget about Kansas, but Houston is now the program to beat in the Big 12.

PURDUE TO REACH FINAL FOUR (+205)
A chalky pick for sure, but how many Power 4 teams return a starting backcourt of seniors beginning a fourth season together? This just does not happen in the NIL and transfer portal era but it is reality in West Lafayette as reigning Big Ten Player of the Year Braden Smith, who is on pace to break Bobby Hurley's all-time D1 assists record, and Fletcher Loyer are back for one more round.

Trey Kaufman-Renn (20.1 PPG last season) also returns and will be able to play a more prototypical power forward position this year. TKR had to play out of position at center in 2024-25 in replacing Zach Edey largely due to an early-season injury to 7-foot-4 Daniel Jacobsen. Jacobsen will not have to do it alone down low though as Matt Painter, who prefers developing his own recruits as opposed to being a haven for transfers, went into the portal to get 6-foot-11 Oscar Cluff (17.6 PPG, 12.3 RPG) from South Dakota State.

Purdue should certainly be tournament ready with not only its usual Big Ten slate, but arguably the most difficult non-conference schedule in the country that includes Memphis, a potential matchup with Texas Tech in the Bahamas Championship, Alabama, Iowa State, Marquette, and Auburn, plus matchups with good mid-majors Akron and Kent State.

ADAM BURKE

UTSA TO WIN AMERICAN CONFERENCE (75/1)
It would obviously take a monumental amount of improvement for the Roadrunners to be in this mix, but second-year head coach Austin Claunch has a roster that looks a lot more like what he wants. He has depth in the frontcourt to be able to keep up the pace that he wants to run without losing offensive or defensive production. That was a big issue last season, as the Roadrunners shot just 46.1% on 2s and allowed opponents to shoot 53.2% on their 2-pointers.

Claunch also has a pretty similar set of shot-makers, as his team was 60th in the nation in 3P% at 36.1%. Despite big improvements in 3P% and TO%, UTSA went 5-12 in games decided by six or fewer points. He has a bigger, deeper, more talented roster this season when a lot of American teams are dealing with transition and don't have as much positive momentum to build on.

If nothing else, I think this team can take a really big leap for a good, up-and-coming coach who was an assistant at Alabama for two seasons before this job and also was the head coach at Nicholls at just 29 years old in 2018-19.

Labaron Philon

DARIUS ACUFF JR. (ARKANSAS) WAYMAN TISDALE AWARD WINNER (14/1)
This is the award for the nation's best freshman and Acuff is walking into a great situation at Arkansas. As the ESPN and 247Sports highest-rated freshman point guard, the pedigree and the expectations are already there. John Calipari had the winner of this award as the point guard in his first season at Kentucky, a player by the name of John Wall. Reed Sheppard also won this award as a combo guard two seasons ago before Coach Cal went to Arkansas.

Acuff has a lot of veterans to rely on with this team, so he has guys that will convert his passes into points and also should help him get his own clean looks. The Razorbacks play in the best conference in the country and the Wayman Tisdale Award has gone to an SEC player in three of the last four years. Cooper Flagg ended a three-year run last season. Obviously there are a lot of really good freshmen this season, including Darryn Peterson (+400), Cameron Boozer (+425), and AJ Dybantsa (+450), but Acuff's price is worth taking a shot because of the conference (second to Nate Ament (+900) at Tennessee among SEC candidates) and because of how Calipari's teams play.

JAKE LETARSKI, ROTOWIRE

BYU TO WIN BIG 12 (+450)
Kevin Young moved from the NBA to take BYU to the Sweet 16 in his first year at the helm, and now he's used one of the nation's largest NIL budgets to build an even better roster, including projected No. 1 overall NBA pick AJ Dybantsa. The 6-foot-9 forward may be a little raw, but he gets help from leading returning scorer Richie Saunders (16.5 PPG), center Keba Keita (7.9 RPG) and sixth year senior Dawson Baker. Young also worked the portal to bring in Baylor transfer Rob Wright — who would have been a first-round pick had he declared — to run the offense, as well as 3-point sharpshooters Kennard Davis and Nate Pickens. Houston, the odds-on favorite, may be better suited for a postseason run due to its defensive capabilities, but the Cougars may need some time to find their identity after losing leading scorer LJ Cryer (15.7 PPG) and emotional leader J'Wan Roberts (10.6 PPG, 6.5 RPG). Plus, JoJo Tugler managed a foot injury for much of the offseason.

UCONN TO WIN BIG EAST (+125)
Some books have Rick Pitino and St. John's atop the standings, but it would be unwise to count out Danny Hurley. His Huskies are ranked 11 spots higher on KenPom's preseason rankings and bring back their second, third and fourth-leading scorers in Solo Ball (14.4 PPG), Alex Karaban (14.3 PPG) and Tarris Reed (9.6 PPG, 7.3 RPG), respectively. Malachi Smith (10.4 PPG, 5.3 APG) comes in to run the point after four years at Dayton, and Silas Demary also projects for a starting role after putting up 13.5 PPG, 3.9 RPG and 3.1 APG last season with Georgia. Plus, five-star guard Braylon Mullins will have a role as well in what will be one of the top offenses in the country. St. John's will compete, but it will have to do so with an entirely new backcourt following the losses of RJ Luis (18.2 PPG), Kadary Richmond (12.4 PPG) and Deivon Smith (9.3 PPG).

RYAN ANDRADE, ROTOWIRE

ALABAMA TO REACH FINAL FOUR (+650)
Nate Oats has directed the most high-octane offense in college basketball for the Crimson Tide over the last seven seasons. They want to push the pace and get as many shots up as possible. While this year's team will lose an extremely dynamic guard in Mark Sears, there's a case to be made that the next man up could be even better. Labaron Philon averaged 10.6 PPG, 3.8 APG, 3.3 RPG and 1.4 SPG in just 24.6 MPG as a true freshman. He will now get the keys to this super car of an offense and is a dark horse candidate for the Wooden Award. His supporting cast in the backcourt features two other elite shooters in Aden Holloway and Latrell Wrightsell, along with former five-star recruit and Miami transfer Jalil Bethea. The interior has been rebuilt with transfers Taylor Bol Bowen and Noah Williamson, while sophomore Aiden Sherrell is one of the biggest breakout candidates in the SEC. It wouldn't be a surprise to see Alabama struggle a bit early on as they try to get healthy from some nagging offseason injuries and establish chemistry, but this team is perfectly built to succeed in today's college basketball and they are going to be a scary sight for any team come March.

FLORIDA TO WIN NCAA TOURNAMENT (15/1)
Florida is no stranger to going back-to-back in college basketball, just go back to the 2006-07 NCAA Tournaments where Billy Donovan led the Gators to two straight titles. While there are some pieces that will have to be replaced, the frontcourt will be basically exactly the same. Alex Condon, Rueben Chinyelu, Thomas Haugh and Micah Handlogten are all back after being one of the most feared interior groups in recent memory. All four of them could start for pretty much any other team in the country. That depth gives coach Todd Golden such a major weapon on both ends of the court to take advantage of that no other team in college basketball can match up with. The backcourt will be a new cast of characters, but I'm not sure you could have come up with a better replacement for Walter Clayton Jr. than Boogie Fland. The Arkansas transfer is another tough shot maker who has tremendous feel for the game at a young age. He's the perfect player to take the keys to this offense and lead them on another deep run in the NCAA Tournament. Princeton transfer Xaivian Lee was one of the most productive non-power conference players in the country last season and will be a nice piece to complement Fland. The rest of the wings include Ohio transfer AJ Brown who is a terrific shooter, along with a pair of top-50 recruits in CJ Ingram and Alex Lloyd. The makeup of this roster with all these elite returning players along with an influx of extremely high upside talent from the outside makes 15/1 feel like a steal.

ADAM ZDROIK, ROTOWIRE

MEMPHIS TO WIN AAC (+220)
The AAC seems to lose value every season since its best players often get poached in the transfer portal and most have to rebuild to have a shot to compete at the top of the standings. Fortunately for Memphis, Penny Hardaway's name still brings players to the team and once again he brought in a variety of players from the portal. This season, the Tigers are built on a lot of mediocre players from bigger teams. Point guard Dug McDaniel probably saw the most time of any of them coming from Kansas State and Michigan before that. Aaron Bradshaw was supposed to be a high-end recruit, but he didn't really work for Kentucky or Ohio State. Sincere Parker, Zachary Davis and Curtis Givens also fit the bill of somewhat recognizable transfers. Even if it's a mixed bag of players, that's probably enough to win this conference, similar to last season. This Memphis team may not make the Sweet 16, but it should have the talent and depth to win another AAC title, especially if you're getting above +200 odds.

MATT YOUMANS' COLLEGE BASKETBALL TOP 50

In the biggest moment of his coaching career, Kelvin Sampson froze one step from the mountaintop. On the precipice of history, Sampson instead felt the sting of heartbreak, as Houston once again came up short in the NCAA championship game.

Seven months later, on the brink of another college basketball season, Sampson and the Cougars are coming back for more. The team that finished last season at No. 2 has a strong case to start this one at No. 1.

The debates about which team deserves to be No. 1 in the nation will continue for five months through the madness of March and finally conclude in April. The safest bet is Houston, which has reached two Final Fours and averaged 32 wins over the past five seasons under Sampson. But the Cougars have plenty of company at the top — reigning national champion Florida, Big Ten favorite Purdue and Big East powerhouse Connecticut, to name a few contenders — and there is no consensus favorite.

Circa Sports lists Houston and Purdue as +950 co-favorites. The Boilermakers, who boast arguably the nation's top player in senior point guard Braden Smith, are the +900 favorites at DraftKings, where the Cougars are a close second choice.

"I can tell you who they are betting — Purdue and Kentucky have been bet the most," DraftKings sportsbook director John Avello said. "Houston is a funny team, a good team every year, but they just have not figured out how to win it all yet."

Inside the Alamodome in San Antonio, Sampson was so close to figuring it out. A Houston team that won 35 games by playing rugged defense had no offense when it mattered most, failing to get a shot off on the last two possessions of a 65-63 loss to the Gators. A 12-point lead had disappeared. Sampson stood courtside, speechless and stunned, as the ball bounced away from the Cougars and the final seconds ticked away.

Florida must replace its top three guards — Walter Clayton Jr., Alijah Martin and Will Richard – from its title team. Houston returns three starters while Sampson brings in a loaded recruiting class that includes three prospects ranked in the top 25. Still, the betting public is not crazy about the Cougars.

"We have seen very little money on Houston, the team I think is the best," Westgate SuperBook oddsmaker Ed Salmons said.

Sampson will be one of the season's top storylines. At 69, he was attempting to become the oldest coach to win the NCAA title. Instead, the Gators' Todd Golden, 39, was the youngest coach to win it all since North Carolina State's Jim Valvano in 1983. Ironically, Valvano and the Wolfpack upset Houston's star-studded Phi Slama Jama team, which returned to the championship game in 1984 and lost to Georgetown.

Houston knows all about title-game heartbreak. The same goes for Purdue, which fell to UConn in the 2024 championship game, and that leads to more questions and storylines.

Is the Big Ten ready to end its championship drought? Since Tom Izzo coached Michigan State to the NCAA title in 2000, Big Ten teams are 0-8 in the championship game. Purdue, Michigan and UCLA are serious contenders this season.

Is Dan Hurley capable of winning his third title in four years? The Huskies nearly upset Florida in March and appear to have what it takes to contend again. However, it can be argued UConn is the second-best team in the Big East behind St. John's and Hurley's coaching rival, Rick Pitino.

Is the Southeastern Conference headed for a repeat? Florida's title was the first for the SEC since Kentucky in 2012. The conference put a record 14 teams in the NCAA tournament last season. The Gators and Wildcats are legitimate threats to cut down the nets.

Preseason power ratings are an inexact science and not meant to project the national champion, although it's nice when that happens. Kansas was No. 1 in my power ratings for VSiN prior to the 2021-22 season — Gonzaga was the favorite by media and oddsmakers — and the Jayhawks cashed at 15-1 odds by winning the NCAA title.

In last year's preseason rankings, I put Florida at No. 22 and Houston at No. 6. While the Cougars were obvious contenders from the start, it did not become clear until January that the Gators had national title potential.

Handicapping is always a fluid situation. Before any games are played in November, 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 for more emphasis.

Hurley is my top power-rated coach, followed by Sampson. Purdue's Matt Painter has the most complete team that grades out the highest in the other six categories.

The Boilermakers are No. 1 in the Associated Press preseason poll, followed by Houston, Florida, UConn and St. John's. It should be noted the last AP preseason No. 1 team to win the national championship was North Carolina in the 2008-09 season.

I do consider other respected sources when forming preseason ratings, and here's how those sources rank the nation's top five:

- Ken Pomeroy (Kenpom.com) — Houston, Florida, Purdue, Kentucky, UConn.
- Evan Miyakawa (EvanMiya.com) — Houston, Purdue, Duke, Florida, UConn.
- Bart Torvik (Barttorvik.com) — Houston, Duke, Michigan, Purdue, Florida.
- Blue Ribbon Yearbook — Florida, Purdue, Houston, Duke, UConn.

There are 365 teams in the college hoops world, which makes this sport one of a kind and a unique handicapping challenge. The difference in ratings is razor thin among the top six teams in my VSiN preseason Top 50 power rankings.

1. HOUSTON

The NCAA championship game is scheduled for April 6 in Indianapolis, where the Cougars beat Purdue 62-60 on Milos Uzan's last-second layup in a Sweet 16 thriller. Uzan and Emanuel Sharp return as seniors to lead Houston's backcourt, and 6-foot-8 forward Joseph Tugler also comes back as a defensive force. The recruiting class for coach Kelvin Sampson is the Big 12's best and is headlined by McDonald's All-Americans Chris Cenac, who's a 6-foot-10 center, and Isiah Harwell plus point guard Kingston Flemings, who will back up Uzan. Sharp has the appropriate name for a shooter who made 87 3-pointers last season. Despite losing L.J. Cryer and J'Wan Roberts, Sampson could have a more talented team than a year ago when the Cougars ranked No. 1 in scoring defense (58.7 PPG). No opposing coach wants to face Houston, which uses defense and rebounding to impose its will.

2. PURDUE

It all starts with seniors Braden Smith, Trey Kaufman-Renn and Fletcher Loyer, but those three needed more help and coach Matt Painter found the perfect puzzle pieces. The Boilermakers' interior defense was too soft last season, so Painter brought in South Dakota State transfer Oscar Cluff, the nation's No. 2 rebounder (12.3 per game). The 6-foot-11 Cluff and 7-foot-4 Daniel Jacobsen, who returns from a broken lower leg suffered early in the season, will protect the rim and score inside. Smith will get relief from freshman Omer Mayer, a star for Team Israel, and freshman Antione West, a dynamic athlete and shooter. North Florida transfer Liam Murphy is a 42% 3-point shooter. C.J. Cox and Gicarri Harris return in the backcourt while 6-foot-6 Jack Benter and 6-foot-11 Raleigh Burgess add frontcourt depth. Painter has 12 high-level players on the deepest and most well-rounded roster in the nation.

3. FLORIDA

There is no doubt the Gators will miss their three star guards — Walter Clayton Jr., Alijah Martin and Will Richard — but there are also no doubts about their potential to repeat as NCAA champions for the second time (2006 and 2007). Alex Condon, a versatile 6-foot-11 junior who had 12 points and seven rebounds in the title game against Houston, could be the SEC's top player. Arkansas transfer Boogie Fland, a former McDonald's All-American, might be the league's top point guard. Fland will handle the backcourt with Princeton transfer Xaivian Lee and Ohio transfer AJ Brown. Condon and the front line will be big and hard to handle with 6-foot-9 Thomas Haugh, 6-foot-10 Rueben Chinyelu and 7-foot-1 Micah Handlogten. Florida is fun to watch due to coach Todd Golden running an advanced offensive system (84.8 PPG last season, fifth in NCAA).

4. CONNECTICUT

Yes, Dan Hurley is annoying because of his lunatic behavior in front of the bench, but he's also as good as it gets in college coaching. The bad news for the Hurley haters is he's got another remarkably talented team with a mix of veterans and newcomers. Senior forward Alex Karaban has two national titles on his resume and will be flanked by 6-foot-10 senior Tarris Reed and 7-foot German freshman Eric Reibe. Solo Ball returns as one of the nation's top perimeter shooters. Point guard Silas Demary Jr. transferred from Georgia and backup point Malachi Smith is a transfer from Dayton. Hurley hooked hyped guard Braylon Mullins, who was the Indiana prep Mr. Basketball, to play alongside junior Jaylin Stewart in the backcourt. UConn has no weaknesses. Just don't take Hurley to Hawaii, where he went 0-3 in the Maui Invitational.

5. MICHIGAN

Dusty May is not going to step aside and allow Purdue to hit cruise control on the road to the Big Ten title. The Michigan coach has a team with Final Four potential thanks to what some sources rank as the nation's No. 1 transfer class. Yaxel Lendeborg (UAB) is the star and his supporting actors are 6-foot-9 Morez Johnson (Illinois), 7-foot-3 Aday Mara (UCLA) and guard Elliot Cadeau (North Carolina). May took over a Wolverines team that finished 14th in the league and raised it to second place in his first season. May will miss big men Vlad Goldin and Danny Wolf, but he reloaded with the transfers. He also brought in freshmen Trey McKenney and Winters Grady to join backcourt veterans Roddy Gayle Jr., Nimari Burnett and L.J. Cason. Lendeborg is a big-time NBA prospect and Mara is maturing into a strong low-post presence.

6. ST. JOHN'S

At 73, Rick Pitino is as motivated as ever to win a title. The Red Storm finished 31-5 last season and should be even better this season despite saying goodbye to stars RJ Luis and Kadary Richmond. Senior forward Zuby Ejiofor is the Big East's top returning scorer (14.7 PPG) and rebounder (8.1 RPG). Ejiofor anchors the front line with Providence transfer Bryce Hopkins and Cincinnati transfer Dillon Mitchell. Pitino does not have a true point guard, but he says that doesn't matter. The backcourt is deep and talented with Arizona State transfer Joson Sanon, North Carolina transfer Ian Jackson, Stanford transfer Oziyah Sellers and Idaho State transfer Dylan Darling. The Johnnies led the league in scoring offense (78.5 PPG) and scoring defense (65.8 PPG). UConn rates higher now because Pitino is counting on so many transfers.

7. KENTUCKY

Mark Pope was the perfect coaching hire after John Calipari left Lexington for Arkansas. Pope is building a program with a different philosophy. He will not recruit one-and-done NBA prospects and burn out early in March, as Calipari too often did. The Wildcats' strength is a backcourt led by senior Otega Oweh (16.2 PPG), Pittsburgh transfer point guard Jaland Lowe and Tulane transfer Kam Williams, a 41% 3-point shooter. The front line is big and skilled with 7-foot-1 Reece Potter, 6-foot-11 freshman Malachi Moreno, 6-foot-10 Brandon Garrison, 6-foot-9 Jayden Quaintance and 6-foot-7 Mouhamed Dioubate. Kentucky was an elite offensive team last season (84.4 PPG), but the interior defense must dramatically improve. Pope has had time to build a better roster.

8. DUKE

It's still hard to believe Cooper Flagg and the Blue Devils blew a 14-point lead in the final eight minutes of a Final Four loss to Houston. It's not as hard to believe Duke could lose Flagg, the No. 1 pick in the NBA Draft, in addition to Kon Knueppel, Tyrese Proctor, Khaman Maluach and Sion James and still come back with a top 10 team. The Blue Devils' new diaper dandies are 6-foot-9 freshman Cameron Boozer, who could step on campus and instantly be the top player in the ACC, and his 6-foot-4 brother Cayden Boozer. Junior point guard Caleb Foster will run the team, and 6-foot-11 Patrick Ngongba and 6-foot-9 senior Maliq Brown will flank Cameron Boozer down low. Italian freshman Dame Sarr is another player to watch on coach Jon Scheyer's young team.

9. TEXAS TECH

Houston will get tested in the Big 12 by BYU, Iowa State, Arizona, Kansas and Texas Tech, which features JT Toppin, the league's returning Player of the Year. Toppin averaged 18.2 points and 9.4 rebounds in his first season after transferring from New Mexico. His reward for turning down the NBA was a reported $4 million NIL deal. Sophomore point guard Christian Anderson scored 22 points in a victory over Arkansas in the Sweet 16. UNC-Greensboro transfer Donovan Atwell and Santa Clara transfer Tyeree Bryan are prolific 3-point shooters. Washington State transfer forward LeJuan Watts is another important addition for underrated coach Grant McCasland, who's got the Red Raiders on the rise.

10. UCLA

Mick Cronin needed a coach on the floor so he got the top transfer point guard available in Donovan Dent, who averaged 20.4 points last season for New Mexico. Dent can be a combo guard and work in the backcourt with senior Skyy Clark, redshirt freshman Eric Freeny, sophomore Eric Dailey and Kansas City transfer Jamar Brown. Dent is the Bruins' most impactful player, but senior forward Tyler Bilodeau is a close second. Cronin also needed size so he grabbed transfer big men Xavier Booker (Michigan State) and Steven Jamerson (San Diego). UCLA does not have as much depth and talent as Purdue and Michigan, but Dent can help turn the Bruins into the third-best team in the Big Ten.

11. BYU

If A.J. Dybantsa is worthy of the immense hype, this rating could be too low for BYU. Dybantsa is a 6-foot-9 guard who's projected to be the No. 1 pick in next summer's NBA Draft. Senior guard Richie Saunders is the team's top returning scorer (16.5 PPG). Cougars coach Kevin Young replaced Mark Pope in Provo and went 26-10 with a Sweet 16 trip. Young welcomes back 6-foot-9 center Keba Keita and signed several transfers, including guard Rob Wright from Baylor and Kennard Davis from Southern Illinois.

12. LOUISVILLE

In his first year at Louisville, coach Pat Kelsey restored pride to a program that had become an embarrassment. Kelsey went 27-8 (18-2 in the ACC) to turn around a Cardinals team that finished with just eight wins the previous season. His first major recruit is McDonald's All-American point guard Mikel Brown Jr., and he also got 6-foot-11 German freshman Sananda Fru. Kelsey brings back 6-foot-10 senior Kasean Pryor and added transfer guards Ryan Conwell (Xavier) and Isaac McKneely (Virginia).

13. IOWA STATE

The Cyclones boast a big three — Tamin Lipsey, Joshua Jefferson and Milan Momcilovic — that can stack up against almost any other team's top three returning starters. Lipsey is one of the nation's top point guards and the 6-foot-8 Momcilovic is a 3-point threat, so the offense should not be a problem. Iowa State, which finished as a KenPom top 15 team in two of the past three seasons, supplements the veterans by mixing in an outstanding freshman class headlined by guards Jamarion Batemon, Anthony Rise and Xzavion Mitchell.

14. ARIZONA

Wildcats coach Tommy Lloyd is known for his high-scoring offenses and recruiting prowess. The offense should be efficient again with senior Jaden Bradley operating the point. Lloyd recruited five-star talents Koa Peat and Brayden Burries in addition to Bryce James, a three-star recruit and a son of LeBron James. Peat appears to be a one-and-done NBA prospect. Motiejus Krivas, a 7-foot-2 junior, and 6-foot-8 senior Tobe Awaka give Arizona some interior toughness. Lloyd's teams are not known for defense, so will that change at all this season?

15. KANSAS

Darryn Peterson, a 6-foot-5 guard, averaged 30.4 points as a high school senior and is ranked by some analysts as the nation's No. 1 incoming freshman. Jayhawks coach Bill Self brought in transfer guards Melvin Council Jr. (St. Bonaventure) and Tre White (Illinois) to boost a roster that's not all that impressive, aside from Peterson. Big man Hunter Dickinson is finally gone, so 6-foot-10 freshman Bryson Tiller and 6-foot-9 sophomore Flory Bidunga must emerge. This team could be surprisingly good, though it's clear Self is no longer the boss in the Big 12.

16. ARKANSAS

The Fayetteville debut season for coach John Calipari was a success considering he started 0-5 in SEC play yet rebounded to knock out Rick Pitino's favored St. John's team en route to the Sweet 16. Calipari still can recruit NBA prospects, snagging five-star point guard Darius Acuff Jr. and McDonald's All-American guard Meleek Thomas. Perimeter shooting is a question mark for the Razorbacks, who have plenty of talent and will need veterans D.J. Wagner, Karter Knox and Trevon Brazile to step up as leaders.

17. ALABAMA

Analytics lovers have an affection for Nate Oats, a progressive-minded coach who wants his teams to shoot a high volume of 3s and score at the rim while ignoring most looks in between. The Crimson Tide led the nation in scoring (90.7 PPG) while getting exposed as terrible on the defensive end last season. Oats loses stars Mark Sears and Grant Nelson, but he brings back guards Aden Holloway, Labaron Philon and Latrell Wrightsell Jr. Alabama's biggest addition is 7-foot senior Noah Williamson, the Patriot League Player of the Year from Bucknell.

18. ILLINOIS

The Big Ten is loaded with talented big men and the Fighting Illini have two of the best in 7-foot twins Tomislav Ivisic and Zvonimir "Big Z" Ivisic, who played at Arkansas and Kentucky. Illinois coach Brad Underwood has an intriguing roster with a European theme. He recruited Cal transfer guard Andrej Stojakovic, Serbian guard Mika Petrovic and 6-foot-9 freshman guard David Mirkovic. Stojakovic could be one of the top scorers in the conference. Senior guards Kylan Boswell and Ben Humrichous are returning from a 22-win team.

19. TENNESSEE

Senior guard Ja'Kobi Gillespie steps in as a transfer from Maryland and is expected to lead the Volunteers on the offensive end. Gillespie could be the type of scorer that Dalton Knecht was for Tennessee two years ago. Freshman forward Nate Ament is the prized recruit for coach Rick Barnes, who has an outside shot at a Final Four with this team. The Vols will miss longtime defensive menace Zakai Zeigler. Barnes' teams are famous for defensive toughness and 6-foot-11 senior Felix Okpara is the enforcer.

20. MICHIGAN STATE

One year after the Spartans underachieved amid high expectations, coach Tom Izzo redeemed himself by going 30-7, winning the Big Ten by three games and reaching the Elite Eight. Izzo achieved that without an incredibly talented roster, and the same is true of this roster. Point guard Jeremy Fears, senior forward Jaxon Kohler and high-flying wing Coen Carr return. Michigan State's ceiling will depend a lot on the development of freshman guards Jordan Scott and Cam Ward and Samford transfer Trey Fort, a 3-point gunner.

21. GONZAGA

Braeden Smith (not to be confused with Purdue's Braden Smith) is an outstanding point guard who's ready to run coach Mark Few's offense. Smith was a former Patriot League Player of the Year at Colgate. The low post is in good hands with 6-foot-9 senior Graham Ike and 6-foot-10 junior Braden Huff. Few hooked transfer guards Tyon Grant-Foster (Grand Canyon) and Adam Miller (Arizona State) and both will make a major impact, as will 3-point specialist Steele Venters. The Zags lost five key players from last season, yet this team has a higher ceiling.

22. NORTH CAROLINA STATE

It won't take long for new coach Will Wade to turn around a Wolfpack team that won only 12 games last season. Wade's first big move was to add senior forward Darrion Williams from Texas Tech. Williams scored 23 points against Florida in the Elite Eight. NC State's No. 38 ranking by KemPom is too low and doesn't account for everything Wade will do. Wade has remodeled the roster with transfers, including point guard Tre Holloman (Michigan State), 6-foot-6 guard Terrance Arceneaux (Houston) and forward Ven-Allen Lubin (North Carolina).

23. SAN DIEGO STATE

Aztecs coach Brian Dutcher had to be nervous when 7-foot Magoon Gwath put his name in the transfer portal. Gwath, voted the Mountain West's top freshman and top defensive player, eventually returned to San Diego State along with junior guard Miles Byrd. Dutcher added transfer guards Sean Newman, who averaged 7.9 assists at Louisiana Tech, and Latrell Davis (San Jose State) to a deep backcourt. Dutcher, who reached the NCAA title game in 2023, has the most talented roster in the conference.

24. MISSISSIPPI

The transfer portal should most benefit coaches like Chris Beard, who can recruit at a high level and build a winning team overnight. In his second season at Ole Miss, Beard won 24 games and reached the Sweet 16. His top returning player is senior forward Malik Dia, who's an athletic rim defender. Beard is gambling on senior guard AJ Storr, who has played at St. John's, Wisconsin and Kansas, and transfers Koren Johnson (Louisville) and Corey Chest (LSU). McDonald's All-American forward Niko Bundalo will be a big contributor for the Rebels.

25. OREGON

Jackson Shelstad, the Ducks' top guard, suffered a broken hand in early October and is not expected to return until late November. When the season opens, 7-foot senior Nate Bittle will be Oregon's go-to scorer after averaging 14.2 points last season. Ducks coach Dana Altman is putting some transfers around his returning stars and has added senior guard Takai Simpson (Elon), forward Devon Pryor (Texas), forward Sean Stewart (Ohio State) and forward Miles Stewart (Howard). Altman is also counting on 6-foot-9 forward Kwame Evans Jr.

26. BAYLOR

If you remember the Baylor team from last year, forget it. Bears coach Scott Drew enters a mystery season with an entirely new roster. Baylor's best player could be star freshman Tounde Yessoufou, a 6-foot-5 guard who broke the California high school career scoring record and won the dunk contest at the McDonald's All-American Game. Drew is surrounding Yessoufou with several transfers, highlighted by high-scoring guard Obi Agbim (Wyoming).

27. TEXAS

Sean Miller replaced Rodney Terry as Longhorns coach and inherited senior guards Tramon Mark and Jordan Pope. Miller was a winner at Arizona and Xavier and should be successful right away. It's no surprise he's counting on transfers in his first season in Austin. Miller brought forward Dailyn Swain from Xavier and also added Camden Heide (Purdue), Lassina Traore (Long Beach State) and Simeon Wilcher (St. John's).

28. OHIO STATE

The Buckeyes missed the NCAA Tournament last season, but they should make it back in coach Jake Diebler's second full season. Ohio State has three double-figure scorers returning, led by senior guard Bruce Thornton, who averaged 17.7 points and shot 42% on 3s. John Mobley Jr. and Devin Royal also return. The Buckeyes added size and skill inside by getting 7-foot senior transfer Christoph Tilly from Santa Clara.

29. CREIGHTON

While it's clear the Big East is a two-horse race between UConn and St. John's, the Bluejays are a good bet to run third. Jackson McAndrew, a 6-foot-10 sophomore, will try to fill the shoes left by NBA pick Ryan Kalkbrenner. Creighton coach Greg McDermott is counting on Iowa transfers Josh Dix and Owen Freeman, a 6-foot-10 junior who was the Hawkeyes' leading scorer, and Charlotte transfer point guard Nik Graves.

30. NORTH CAROLINA

Ten newcomers are on the Tar Heels' roster, and five-star freshman forward Caleb Wilson is the most important. The 6-foot-9 Wilson scores, rebounds and defends, and North Carolina needs to be much better defensively. Junior guard Seth Trimble is the top returning scorer. Carolina coach Hubert Davis brought in transfers Kyan Evans (Colorado State), 6-foot-11 Jarin Stevenson (Alabama), 7-footer Henri Veesaar (Arizona) and Jaydon Young (Virginia Tech).

31. KANSAS STATE

Money talks and P.J. Haggerty walked. The nation's No. 3 scorer (21.7 PPG) last season, Haggerty transferred from Memphis to Manhattan, Kansas. The junior guard takes the lead role for a team that lost the top 10 scorers from last season, but that's not all bad news considering the Wildcats finished 16-17. Akron transfer guard Nate Johnson is one of many other new faces on coach Jerome Tang's reloaded roster with a high payroll.

32. NOTRE DAME

The Fighting Irish will be much better than their No. 77 ranking by KemPom indicates. Junior guard Markus Burton is the ACC's top returning scorer (21.3 PPG) and the coach's son, Braeden Shrewsberry, also returns after scoring 14 PPG. Micah Shrewsberry signed McDonald's All-American Jalen Haralson and added Northern Arizona transfer Carson Towt, the nation's leading rebounder (12.4). Shrewsberry has his best team in his third season at Notre Dame.

33. AUBURN

The surprise retirement of coach Bruce Pearl in September opened the door for his son, Steven, to take Auburn's top job at age 38. Also gone from last season's Final Four team are Johni Broome, Chad Baker-Mazara, Miles Kelly and Denver Jones. The Tigers will rely heavily on sophomore guard Tahaad Pettiford and transfer forwards Keyshawn Hall (UCF) and 6-foot-10 KeShawn Murphy (Mississippi State). Steven Pearl's coaching inexperience is a concern.

34. IOWA

Ben McCollum takes over an Iowa program in need of change after former coach Fran McCaffery flamed out with a tie for 12th in the Big Ten. McCollum's team at Drake finished last season last in the nation in tempo, according to KenPom. McCollum is promising a faster-tempo Hawkeyes offense with Drake transfer point guard Bennett Stirtz running the show.

35. WISCONSIN

If Greg Gard can change, anyone can change. A coach known for a slow tempo hit the gas last season, when Wisconsin averaged 80.1 PPG, the fourth-highest mark in the Big Ten. Junior guard John Blackwell (15.8 PPG) returns along with 6-foot-11 center Nolan Winter. Most of the other faces are changing as Gard lured five transfers, including senior Nick Boyd (San Diego State).

36. SAINT MARY'S

Never underestimate Gaels coach Randy Bennett, who has won back-to-back outright West Coast Conference regular-season titles and is 4-2 in his past six games against Gonzaga. Bennett lost his top two players from last season's 29-win team, but he's reloading. Sophomore guard Mikey Lewis and San Diego transfer Tony Duckett lead the way for Saint Mary's.

37. CINCINNATI

The Bearcats have the talent to finish in the top half of the 16-team Big 12. McDonald's All-American Shon Abaev, a 6-foot-8 wing, will make an early impact. Senior guard Day Day Thomas returns, and coach Wes Miller added transfers Jalen Haynes (George Mason), Sencire Harris (West Virginia), Kerr Kriisa (Kentucky) and 7-foot-2 Moustapha Thiam (UCF).

38. WASHINGTON

This much is certain: Washington will not repeat last season's 18th-place finish in the Big Ten. Second-year coach Danny Sprinkle welcomes back guard Zoom Diallo while bringing in an impressive recruiting class headlined by 6-foot-11 German Hannes Steinbach and a talented transfer group that includes former USC guards Desmond Claude and Wesley Yates III.

39. MISSISSIPPI STATE

Junior guard Josh Hubbard is small at 5-foot-10, but he's a big-time playmaker and the top returning scorer (18.9 PPG) in the SEC. Georgetown transfer Jayden Epps and UAB transfer Ja'Borri McGhee join Hubbard in the Bulldogs' explosive backcourt. Quincy Ballard, a 6-foot-11 senior transfer, led the nation in effective field-goal percentage (75.0) at Wichita State.

40. MISSOURI

Mark Mitchell, a former Duke transfer, emerged as a reliable scorer last season in coach Dennis Gates' small-ball offense. Gates added UCLA transfer guard Sebastian Mack to play in the backcourt with defensive stopper Anthony Robinson. The Tigers are now bigger with 7-footer Shawn Phillips Jr., 6-foot-11 transfer Jevon Porter (Loyola Marymount) and 6-foot-10 Trent Pierce.

41. OKLAHOMA

The fifth year of the Porter Moser era will likely mean more mediocrity for the Sooners in the SEC. Moser went to the NCAA Tournament last season — and probably saved his job — thanks to guard Jeremiah Fears, who left for the NBA. Oklahoma will need major production from Miami transfer guard Nijel Pack and Notre Dame transfer forward Tae Davis.

42. INDIANA

A rebuilding job for new coach Darian DeVries starts with his son, 6-foot-7 senior Tucker DeVries, who blossomed into a star at Drake and should be one of the top scorers in the Big Ten. The Hoosiers need to improve their 3-point shooting after ranking last in the league in made 3s the past two seasons. Freshman forward Trent Sisley can score and is a prospect to watch.

43. MARYLAND

When disgruntled coach Kevin Willard exited for Villanova, the door opened for Buzz Williams, who brought senior forward Pharrel Payne and three other players with him from Texas A&M. Maryland's roster has potential. Williams signed McDonald's All-American guard Darius Adams, but the Terrapins recently lost Kansas transfer Rakease Passmore to a season-ending injury.

44. BOISE STATE

The Broncos will have a new look without Tyson Degenhart, the program's all-time scoring leader. Boise State coach Leon Rice still will have a top-three team in the Mountain West. Rice will rely on returnees Javan Buchanan, Pearson Carmichael and Andrew Meadow, who should fill Degenhart's void. UCLA transfer point guard Dylan Andrews provides a big boost.

45. MEMPHIS

The Tigers lost their top scorer, P.J. Haggerty, who transferred to Kansas State, but coach Penny Hardaway's team still is the AAC favorite. Memphis will be led by Kansas State transfer point guard Dug McDaniel, McNeese transfer Sincere Parker and 7-foot-1 journeyman Aaron Bradshaw, who has played at Kentucky and Ohio State.

46. UC SANTA BARBARA

The Gauchos are favored to the Big West mostly due to junior guard Jason Fontenet, who's the top player in the league. UCSB also benefits from the arrival of point guard Aidan Mahaney, who started his career at Saint Mary's before transferring to UConn. Mahaney could not cut it in the physical Big East and is back in a league where he can thrive as a playmaker.

47. UTAH STATE

In his first season as Aggies coach, Jerrod Calhoun went 26-8 and made the NCAA Tournament. Junior guard Mason Falslev is one of the Mountain West's best scorers, and Calhoun is putting an impressive group of transfers and freshmen around Falslev.

48. VCU

New coach Phil Martelli Jr. led Bryant to the NCAA Tournament last season. Following a common theme, he immediately hit the portal and brought in seven transfers, led by guards Tyrell Ward (LSU) and Ahmad Nowell (UConn). The Rams are the Atlantic 10 favorites.

49. MARQUETTE

Kam Jones was a rock as the Golden Eagles' leading scorer the past three seasons, but he's gone and coach Shaka Smart is searching for production from new faces. Senior guard Chase Ross will lead a Marquette team that ranks no better than fourth in the Big East.

50. SYRACUSE

Senior guard J.J. Starling should be the go-to scorer for the Orange while Georgia Tech transfer Naithan George runs the point. Donnie Freeman, a 6-foot-9 forward, provides strength inside. Syracuse's newcomers include Kiyan Anthony (Carmelo's son) and Sadiq White Jr.

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TITLE SHOT

THREE TEAMS DOWN THE BOARD WORTHY OF A BET TODAY

By Zachary Cohen

The championship futures landscape in college hoops is a wild ride. Unlike college football, where you can practically sketch out Ohio State's path to the College Football Playoff, the NCAA tournament throws 68 teams into a blender, serving up chaos every spring. The sheer volume of contenders, the single-elimination format, and the huge stylistic contrasts make forecasting a champion far more unpredictable than in any other sport. Navigating this market means embracing the madness, not pretending there's a tidy roadmap.

My strategy is to sift through different pockets of value at several levels. I'll normally back a top program that's flying slightly under the radar, angle for a mid-tier team with legit upside, and sprinkle in a sleeper with the talent or system to shock the public. This year, I'm completely passing on the top-tier squads and opting to take three shots further down the board. Sometimes, these tickets aren't really about finding teams that'll actually end up cutting down the nets, it's about snatching a solid price and keeping hedging options in play as the tournament unfolds.

Let's dive into some early futures I'm punching for 2025-26:

NC STATE WOLFPACK (60/1)

Will Wade is a proven winner, and he's earned a reputation as a master of talent acquisition. While his earlier methods raised some eyebrows, there's nobody better equipped to thrive in the NIL era. Now back at a high-major program, with substantial support from NC State's boosters, Wade is positioned to make a big impact.

Wade is expected to turn NC State into a powerhouse, but just how quickly he'll get there is a fair question. It could happen immediately.

Tre Holloman is slated to start at point guard. The senior arrives after averaging 9.1 points and 3.7 assists per game for Michigan State last season, bringing smart playmaking and hard-nosed defense to the Wolfpack. At shooting guard, NC State has two strong choices in Matt Able (the 24th-ranked player in the ESPN 100) and Paul McNeil. Able offers three-level scoring, while McNeil's floor spacing could get him the nod; he has the potential to be one of the ACC's best shooters.

The forward spots will be filled with high-level transfers: Terrance Arceneaux from Houston and Darrion Williams from Texas Tech. Arceneaux's defense on the wing should be elite, and he's got the tools to contribute offensively. Though his career was interrupted by a torn ACL, a bigger opportunity awaits in Raleigh. Williams, Texas Tech's best offensive player last year, posted 15.1 points, 5.5 rebounds, and 3.6 assists. He's dangerous from beyond the arc and strong enough to excel as a small-ball four.

In the middle, Ven-Allen Lubin transfers in after a controversial move from UNC. He averaged 8.7 points and 5.5 rebounds per game last season. Lengthy, capable off the dribble, and solid in the post, Lubin's two-way ability should make him a strong starter.

Following Wade from McNeese State, Quadir Copeland also projects as a key contributor. He's athletic, brings energy on defense, and manages to make things happen offensively even without a reliable jumper.

Defense could be this team's calling card, which makes sense given Wade's history: in his final season at LSU, his team ranked sixth in KenPom's adjusted defensive efficiency.

The lone question is whether NC State will be strong enough offensively. Williams helps in that department, and with several breakout candidates on the roster, it's likely the Wolfpack challenge for top ACC status right away.

At 60/1, these odds could look generous by March.

WISCONSIN BADGERS (75/1)

Wisconsin ranked 12th in KenPom's adjusted efficiency margin last season and was top 25 nationally in both adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency. John Tonje's departure is a major loss after putting up 19.6 points and 5.3 rebounds per game on elite shooting splits — he had one of the most statistically impressive campaigns in school history. The departure of assistant coach Kirk Penney, who helped modernize Wisconsin's offense, is another key storyline.

Penney's impact was clear, with Wisconsin jumping from 226th to 16th in threes attempted nationally. Greg Gard says that the offensive changes will remain even after Penney returns to New Zealand. If Gard sticks with the system, the Badgers should be able to fill the void left by Tonje — and possibly do more damage in March.

Stars John Blackwell and Nolan Winter are back after standout sophomore seasons. Blackwell averaged 15.8 points, 5.1 rebounds, and 2.2 assists per game and looks primed to be the main scorer. He's a skilled shooter and an intelligent scorer. Winter brings 9.4 points and 5.8 rebounds per game as a stretch five with touch inside.

Gard reloaded via the transfer portal: Nick Boyd (San Diego State), Andrew Rohde (Virginia), and Austin Rapp (Portland) fill out the starting five. Boyd is a tenacious competitor at point and brings Final Four experience from his days at Florida Atlantic. Rohde, who shot 41.3% from 3 last year, offers solid playmaking and improved defense. Rapp, who averaged 13.8 points, 6.5 rebounds, 2.5 assists, and 1.5 blocks, projects as a strong frontcourt fit next to Winter; his shooting gives Wisconsin five legitimate 3-point options at all times along with help protecting the rim.

Few college lineups can match the Badgers' range and versatility, and Gard's teams consistently play smart, fundamentally sound basketball. At 75/1, there's value here — especially if rotation players can provide steady minutes, giving Wisconsin a higher ceiling than most expect.

OREGON DUCKS (100/1)

It's a bit strange that Oregon is available at 100/1 despite welcoming back Jackson Shelstad and Nate Bittle to Eugene. Shelstad averaged 13.7 points per game last season, posting efficient shooting splits of 45.1% from the field, 37.9% from 3, and 83.5% from the line, which earned him All-Big Ten Third Team honors. Bittle joined Shelstad on that same team, averaging 14.2 points, 7.6 rebounds, and leading the conference with 2.1 blocks per game. Shelstad is an impressive shotmaker who's becoming more polished as a floor general. Bittle, meanwhile, is an excellent finisher around the rim, dangerous as a pick-and-pop option, and a true anchor defensively.

Oregon's greatest strength comes at two of the most critical spots: point guard and center. Pairing that foundation with head coach Dana Altman — who has won 20+ games in each of his 15 seasons at Oregon — sets the Ducks up with a remarkably high floor. Last season, they finished 27th in KenPom's adjusted efficiency rankings.

Don't overlook the team's upside, either, since Chinese flamethrower Wei Lin and transfer Takai Simpkins will add to Oregon's backcourt arsenal. Lin put up 21.6 points per game in the CBA, so he's proven himself against pro competition. Simpkins averaged 16.4 points and shot 36.7% from deep for Elon, and that kind of scoring should translate well to Big Ten play.

Transfers Devon Pryor and Sean Stewart — both athletic and skilled — could thrive with Oregon after limited roles at Texas and Ohio State, respectively. Altman's history of maximizing transfers is well documented.

One big wild card: Is this the season Kwame Evans breaks out? Evans was a top-15 recruit, but has yet to fully emerge for the Ducks. At the very least, he should be able to take pressure off Bittle when it comes to doing some dirty work. Though Altman will be expecting a little more than that.

Oregon could also get a boost from Dezdrick Lindsay, who didn't play last year after transferring from Florida Southwestern, but was one of the top JUCO players in the nation. There's a real chance Altman takes advantage of his scoring punch this season.

With a mix of proven stars and intriguing newcomers, Oregon offers a compelling blend of reliability and upside. Shelstad and Bittle will keep the Ducks competitive, but if Altman gets the most out of his athletic wings, their potential far exceeds public perception.

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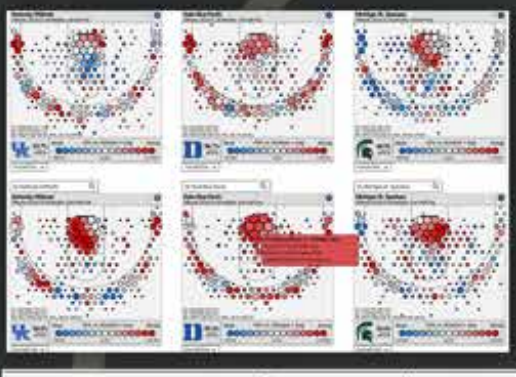
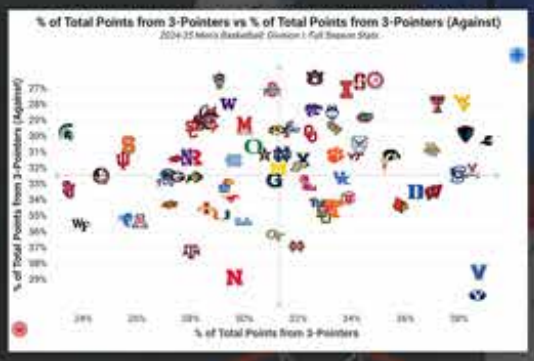
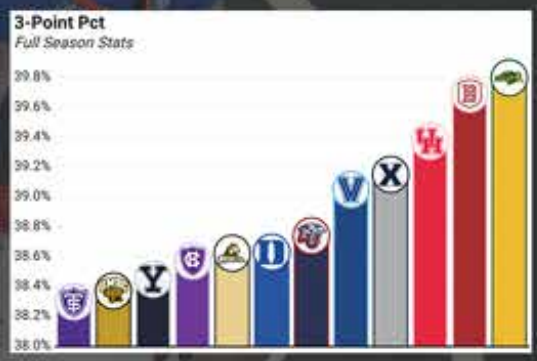
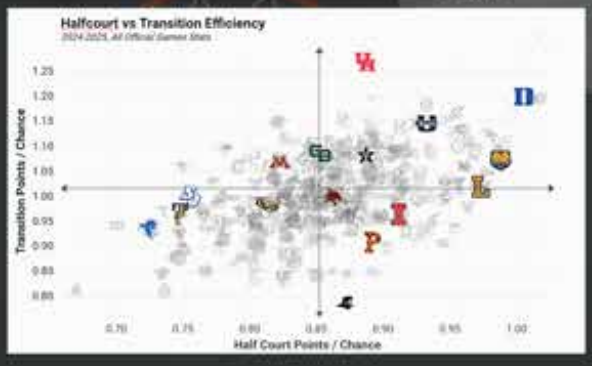
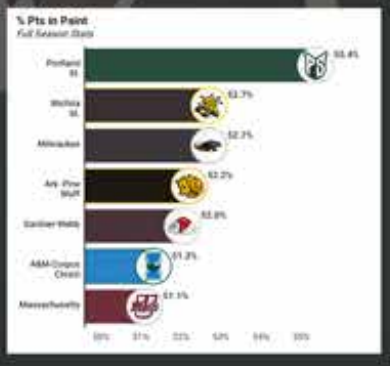






	Team Name	Away MP	Away PTS/G		Home MP	Home PTS/G		Change Δ PTS/G	
	Georgia	400	65.8	17	720	82.2	86	+16.6	100
	Utah	400	64.4	12	765	80.6	80	+16.2	99
	Pittsburgh	485	67.7	31	685	83.1	89	+15.5	99
	Purdue	440	70.7	55	640	85.1	95	+14.4	98
	Oklahoma	360	69.4	46	680	83.2	90	+13.8	97
	Kansas	480	67.6	30	690	81.0	81	+13.4	97
	Georgia Tech	455	65.3	15	805	78.5	71	+13.3	96
	Tennessee	440	67.1	26	680	79.6	76	+12.7	96
	Ohio St.	450	72.2	66	700	84.7	94	+12.5	95
	Stanford	440	65.7	18	800	78.3	69	+12.5	95





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COMPARING '24 HUSKIES TO THE '26 GATORS

BY AARON MOORE

The Florida vs. UConn matchup is going to be one of college basketball's most interesting storylines this season.

No, not just the December 9 contest between the two at Madison Square Garden as part of the Jimmy V Classic. This pair of 21st century bluebloods are competing against each other in a larger sense this season.

The Gators are looking to go back-to-back as national champions just like the Huskies did in 2023 and 2024. The first school to repeat with a title since 2007 when it was…Florida.

So now as the 2025-26 season begins, the Gators will look to wrestle back that honor.

Prior to Danny Hurley and friends winning their second straight crown, going back-to-back in today's environment seemed improbable with players and coaches jumping around so much on a yearly basis.

Todd Golden enters the season in Gainesville with another elite roster and high expectations. Perhaps it could be Hurley in Indianapolis as the one who prevents Florida from winning it all again. Clearly the bookmakers over at DraftKings think there is a chance of that happening as both are priced near the top of the Make Final Four futures board (Purdue +205, Houston +235, Duke +300, UConn +360, Michigan +390, Florida +425).

As a way of gauging Florida's chances of a second straight title, let's analyze the Gators to see how they compare with the 2024 UConn squad that pulled off an accomplishment many experts doubted could happen in the transfer portal era.

PRESEASON RANKINGS

Even though UConn's 2023-24 roster underwent plenty of change, Bart Torvik still ranked them in the preseason as No. 3 behind only Purdue and Kansas. The AP Poll had Connecticut as its No. 4 team.

According to SportsOddsHistory.com, UConn's national championship odds on December 1st, 2023 were 15-1, exactly where DraftKings has Florida currently listed.

Torvik places this year's Gators as his No. 5 team in the country. New-look Florida won't have the services of Walter Clayton Jr., Alijah Martin, Will Richard and Denzel Aberdeen.

KenPom has them even higher at No. 2 behind only Houston - and ahead of Purdue (+900), the betting favorite to win a national championship. Evan Miyakawa has Florida at No. 4 with Haslametrics placing the Gators at No. 6.

Bookmakers and the analytic crowd are all in tune about Florida grading out as one of the best teams in the country.

RETURNING MINUTES

According to KenPom's Minutes Continuity variable, the 2024 Huskies were 42.5%, just slightly better than the D1 average. That wasn't a hindrance in the national championship game against the Boilermakers with their 69.2% number, which was 11th-best in the country.

The overall minutes returning might not be as vital to repeat (for any type of title) as some handicappers may believe. The importance could be more on having a couple of players previously in the system ready to take on a larger role. For the 2024 Huskies, Tristen Newton, Donovan Clingan and Alex Karaban filled the offensive and rebounding voids following the departure of Adama Sanogo, Andre Jackson and Jordan Hawkins.

During the first UConn national championship season, this group as a collective averaged 23.6 minutes, 8.7 points, 4.8 rebounds and 2.3 assists per game.

Then the following season, their averages jumped to 29.0 minutes, 13.8 points, 6.3 rebounds and 3.0 assists per game.

In 2024, UConn brought in Cam Spencer, an established transfer, and freshman Stephon Castle, who helped keep the Huskies in the top tier of teams (around 10-12 of them) with a legitimate chance of winning a national championship.

Here is why there seems to be a strong connection between UConn and Florida - the Gators also have a key trio coming back.

Florida's primary returning pieces of Thomas Haugh, Rueben Chinyelu and Alex Condon will help lessen the losses of Clayton Jr., Martin, Richard and Aberdeen.

Last season these three Gators averaged 22.7 minutes, 8.8 points, 6.7 rebounds, and 1.7 assists per game.

These numbers are almost identical to those UConn returners who then emerged. It appears feasible that these Gators will be even better in 2026 with averages that should be around 15 points and 10 rebounds per game.

NEW GATORS

In a comparative sense, the newcomers Florida is bringing in to help the returners is significantly better than UConn's group. The Gators are welcoming 6-foot-3 Boogie Fland (Arkansas) and 6-foot-4 Xaivian Lee (Princeton) in the backcourt.

Florida also landed Alex Lloyd and CJ Ingram, both Top 40 recruits.

Golden had a great roster last year; he has an even better one for 2026.

GOING PRO

Another criteria handicapping national championship futures is quantifying the amount of future NBA players on the roster.

UConn 2023 team: 5 NBA players
UConn 2024 team: 4 NBA players

Florida 2025 team: 3 (at least) NBA players
Florida 2026 team: Condon, Chinyelu, Haugh, Fland, Lee, Lloyd, and Ingram are all considered NBA prospects

PREVAILING STYLE

A powerful indicator of a team's national championship potential is whether it resides within KenPom's Top 20 for both offense and defense.

Here is an interesting aspect of this combination of elite offense and defense, for the past 11 seasons, every national championship team ranked slightly higher on offense than defense.

The last champ to rank higher on defense than offense? Well, that was UConn's out of nowhere 2014 team.

From a futures handicapping perspective, a team's superior ability to score (while playing great defense) is a determining factor. That is why trying to predict a back-to-back winner is focused on Florida not Houston.

Based on this, the Gators must score like they did last season. With the addition of Fland and his comparable skills to Clayton Jr., along with Lee's ability to shoot from behind the arc (36.6 3P% in 2025), that should not be an issue.

COACHING

Hurley was in his fourth season as the Huskies coach when they won their second straight title in 2024. Golden is entering his fourth season in Gainesville.

Both coaches showed considerable jumps in win totals in Year 2 and 3. Hurley's 2024 team ended the season with a 37-3 record, last season Florida went 36-4.

In Hurley's first three seasons with the Huskies, his resume didn't include a regular season conference title. Then came UConn's 2024 Big East title.

Golden has yet to win an SEC regular season title. This season the Gators are perched atop the SEC regular season odds board at +230, joined closely by Kentucky +340 and Arkansas +475.

As for assistant coaches, UConn's core of Kimani Young, Tom Moore and Luke Murray all returned to Hurley's staff after the first national championship.

Golden enters this season with both of his associate head coaches, Carlin Hartman and Korey McCray, back on the bench. Kevin Hovde did leave his assistant position for the head coaching job at Columbia. He is replaced by Dave Klatsky.

EARLY-SEASON TRAVEL

The defending national champion is always a valuable commodity for tournament promoters.

Those events can generate plenty of revenue and recognition for a team, however early season miles far away from campus can be a determinant later in the year. The 2024 Huskies advantageously played some early season tournament games at nearby Madison Square Garden. Their biggest travel came with a trip to Allen Fieldhouse in Lawrence, Kansas followed by a mid-December game against Gonzaga in Seattle.

Florida will be putting some miles on its chartered flights. The Gators open the season on November 3 in Las Vegas against Arizona and later that month a pair of games in San Diego. December will also be time away from home with games at Duke, at MSG against UConn, then back south to Miami for the Orange Bowl Classic.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Here might be the best way a bettor can use this comparison between UConn's 2024 team and the current Florida Gators. Don't immediately fade the Gators because they won it last year and teams traditionally don't repeat come the Final Four. The loss of Clayton Jr. and others has been more than accounted for.

Based on this analysis, the 2026 Florida team appears better than the Huskies group that repeated. This year's Gators team is also - on paper - better than last season's winner.

So if bettors want to back the Gators because they believe they are better than Purdue or Houston, then make that wager.

If bettors want to immediately put a line through the Gators since they won it all last year, think twice about that logic.

Thomas Haugh

WOODEN AWARD **FUTURES BOARD**

BY AARON MOORE

Let's take a shot at handicapping this year's Wooden Award futures board.

Shot is the operable word here since this year's favorite is going to need to make a lot of them, many from behind the arc, to ultimately take home the award.

Purdue's Braden Smith (+550) starts the season atop the odds board, due in large part to the lack of a prominent big man fitting the profile of recent winners Cooper Flagg and Zach Edey.

So before any Wooden Award wagers are made, the prevailing mindset of voters must first be identified as a key variable.

Sure, Smith can score, as he averaged 15.8 PPG a season ago and should do even more in 2026, but as a point guard, he conducts his offensive work much differently than the past seven winners.

The last group of winners was a combination of power forwards and centers.

The 6-footer Smith's game is more reminiscent of the trio of winners from 2016-2018 (Buddy Hield, Frank Mason III and Jalen Brunson).

MEASURING UP

One way to handicap Smith's chances of winning the award is to first get an idea of what type of statistical performance is needed to be in line with the accomplishments of Hield, Mason III and Brunson during their Wooden Award winning campaigns.

The past seven winners are excluded from a comparative analysis because voters scrutinize guards differently than forwards.

Below are the offensive averages for those guards during their Wooden Award seasons. Also included is how high their clubs ranked in the AP Poll during the last quarter of the season as an indication of the team success that is needed to win the award.

PLAYER	POINTS	ASSISTS	REBOUNDS	HIGHEST AP RANK FEB-MAR
Brunson (2018)	18.9	4.6	3.1	No. 1
Mason III (2017)	20.9	5.2	4.2	No. 1
Hield (2016)	25.0	2.0	5.7	No. 1

That makes the averages for the past three guards to win the Wooden Award as 21.6 PPG, 3.9 APG and 4.3 RPG. Compare that with Smith's line from a year ago: 15.8 PPG, 8.7 APG and 4.5 RPG.

With his assists and rebounds easily surpassing those averages, raising his point total would dramatically increase his chances of winning since his team already comes with a No.1 ranking.

For Smith to jump from 15.8 points to 21.6 points, it would require a 36% increase in scoring during his senior year. Take into account that Smith had a 24% increase in scoring from his freshman to sophomore year and another 24% increase from sophomore to junior season. So if Smith continues the trend of increasing his scoring output at 24% each year, he would end this season at 19.6 PPG. Even if he doesn't get to that 21.6 PPG, Smith's numbers should be comparable to, or even better than, those Wooden Award winners.

TIER 1 FAVORITES

BRADEN SMITH (+550)

Breakdown
Last year in the VSiN College Basketball Betting Guide, we placed the Wooden candidates into different tiers, with the top one filled with a number of high-profile names including Flagg, RJ Davis, Hunter Dickinson and Mark Sears.

This year it is a group of one with Smith's odds coming in close to half of the next name on the board JT Toppin (+950).

Smith rightfully begins the season way ahead of the pack since he serves as the floor general for the favorite to win a national championship (Purdue +900).

Under a national spotlight, Smith has the green light to score from Matt Painter. With senior teammates Fletcher Loyer on the perimeter and Trey Kaufman-Renn down low, Smith's already impressive assists number should keep on rising. Averaging a double-double would place him in the same double-double conversation with recent winners Edey, Oscar Tshiebwe and, a little further back, Anthony Davis, who also accomplished that feat - albeit with rebounds instead of assists.

There is every reason to believe Smith will finish with a better average stat line than other point guards who have also won the award - Trey Burke (18.6 PPG, 3.2 RPG and 6.7 APG in 2013), Jameer Nelson (20.6 PPG, 4.7 RPG, and 5.3 APG in 2004) and T.J. Ford (15.0 PPG, 3.9 RPG, and 7.7 APG in 2003).

Perhaps just as importantly, all three PGs were running the show for a team ranked in the Top 3 of the AP Poll late in the season when voters were deep in decision-making mode.

In essence, a Wooden Award bet on Smith is correlated with Purdue (+200) winning the Big Ten regular season title. Because if Purdue stumbles, it will likely be Michigan taking that crown and that would place Yaxel Lendeborg (10/1) in an optimal position to be the Wooden Award winner.

TIER 2 FAVORITES

JT TOPPIN (+950)
YAXEL LENDEBORG (10/1)
DARRYN PETERSON (11/1)
CAMERON BOOZER (12/1)
AJ DYBANTSA (12/1)

Breakdown
Much more crowded real estate down here.

Toppin offers the most brand-name recognition after his sensational season a year ago for a Texas Tech squad that lost a heartbreaker to Florida in the Elite Eight. Now Toppin will lead the Red Raiders without Darrion Williams, who moved on to NC State. That absence could help Toppin raise his scoring numbers (18.2 PPG & 9.4 RPG), while also hurting since one less star player is around to help Texas Tech get more marquee victories.

Just like Smith, Toppin's production last year jumped significantly from the season prior, making an average of 20 points and 10 rebounds in 2026 a likely occurrence.

Much of the handicapping process for this award is determining if a current player fits a profile voters valued in the past. There is a lot of Tshiebwe in Toppin's game. The problem, though, is Texas Tech, with a stacked Houston team in its way, might not get a Top 5 ranking like Kentucky had in 2022.

> "Much of the handicapping process for this award is determining if a current player fits a profile voters valued in the past."

Call Lendeborg the poster child of Wooden Award candidates in the transfer portal era. He spent parts of three seasons at Arizona Western then left the JUCO level for two solid campaigns at UAB. Now, at 23 years old, he has experience and a leading role for a power conference squad hunting for a national championship. He can be this season's Dalton Knecht.

The others in this group are the prototypical Freshman Sensations.

Peterson is making a pit stop in Lawrence before being the likely No.1 pick in next season's NBA Draft. Bill Self is planning on the 6-foot-6 guard being the key to his Kansas squad turning around what has been three straight underwhelming seasons.

With a similar amount of hype comes Boozer at Duke to play where his father once did, and Dybantsa is generating some Danny Ainge-like anticipation at BYU.

Narratives play a role for these two. Boozer can be the second straight Duke freshman to win the award. Dybantsa will get a lot of ink regarding BYU's ascension from semi-pretender to legitimate national contender.

Within this group, Toppin offers bettors significantly more security and equity.

Freshmen winning the award certainly isn't common and is yet to happen in consecutive seasons (Flagg 2025, Zion Williamson 2019, Anthony Davis 2012, Kevin Durant 2007).

TIER 3 AND BEYOND

DARRION WILLIAMS (20/1)
TREY KAUFMAN-RENN (22/1)
OTEGA OWEH (25/1)
DONOVAN DENT (25/1)
BOOGIE FLAND (25/1)
JA'KOBI GILLESPIE (30/1)
BRYCE HOPKINS (30/1)
TAHAAD PETTIFORD (35/1)
RICHIE SAUNDERS (35/1)
ALEX KARABAN (35/1)

Breakdown
Before a bettor dismisses this group because they aren't near the top of the odds board, consider the current names contending for the Heisman Award. Two of those names are not Arch Manning and Cade Klubnik, the preseason favorites.

Perhaps there is Dante Moore, John Mateer or Fernando Mendoza in this talent pool.

The name I want to jump on here is Oweh since there is so much upside to what Mark Pope can do in Kentucky during his second season. The problem however is that Oweh suffered a turf toe injury during summer workouts. Reports indicate he says that he is healthy and ready to go, however, in the name of Brock Purdy, that is an injury that can linger.

Dent is another possibility because of all that scoring he did last year in New Mexico. The problem, though, is this offensive-minded guard is now in the Mick Cronin grind-it-out defense system at UCLA.

Dent should bring the Bruins more scoring punch and help them in the Big Ten standings, but he is likely in a situation that won't allow his offensive production to reach Wooden Award levels.

The versatile 6-foot-6 Williams is now with Will Wade at NC State. He showed plenty of flashes at Nevada and Texas Tech, but has never been a true No.1 option. Wade will provide that chance.

Here is one major longshot to contemplate for a small sized wager: Tucker DeVries (150/1). This is my addition to Mitch and Pauly's tip jar. The sixth-year senior is healthy after playing only eight games for his father at West Virginia last year. During that time, the former Drake star shot 47.3% from 3-point territory. Now father, Darian, and son are in Indiana and that type of storyline can create some much needed media attention in the younger DeVries' favor.

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATINGS

TEAM	POWER RATING	TEAM	POWER RATING	TEAM	POWER RATING
HOUSTON	96.0	MISSISSIPPI ST	86.5	MIAMI	82.0
CONNECTICUT	94.5	MISSOURI	86.5	PITTSBURGH	82.0
PURDUE	94.5	OREGON	86.5	SAINT LOUIS	82.0
DUKE	94.0	TEXAS	86.5	W VIRGINIA	82.0
FLORIDA	94.0	CLEMSON	86.0	XAVIER	82.0
KENTUCKY	93.0	MARYLAND	86.0	OKLAHOMA ST	81.5
GONZAGA	92.5	NC STATE	86.0	NOTRE DAME	81.0
ILLINOIS	92.5	INDIANA	85.5	SYRACUSE	81.0
MICHIGAN	92.0	IOWA	85.5	VIRGINIA TECH	81.0
BYU	91.5	OLE MISS	85.5	ARIZONA ST	80.5
TENNESSEE	91.5	MARQUETTE	85.0	GEORGE WASHINGTON	80.5
UCLA	91.5	GEORGIA	84.5	SAN FRANCISCO	80.5
ARIZONA	91.0	SMU	84.5	BUTLER	80.0
IOWA ST	91.0	TEXAS A&M	84.5	UCF	80.0
ST JOHNS	90.5	UTAH ST	84.5	COLORADO	79.5
TEXAS TECH	90.0	WASHINGTON	84.5	COLORADO ST	79.5
ALABAMA	89.5	MEMPHIS	84.0	GEORGIA TECH	79.5
LOUISVILLE	89.5	NEBRASKA	84.0	GRAND CANYON	79.5
KANSAS	89.0	PROVIDENCE	84.0	MINNESOTA	79.5
WISCONSIN	89.0	VILLANOVA	84.0	UTAH	79.5
ARKANSAS	88.5	BOISE ST	83.5	DEPAUL	79.0
AUBURN	88.5	ST MARYS-CA	83.5	GEORGETOWN	79.0
BAYLOR	88.5	WAKE FOREST	83.5	RUTGERS	79.0
MICHIGAN ST	88.0	VCU	83.0	S FLORIDA	79.0
N CAROLINA	88.0	VIRGINIA	83.0	GEORGE MASON	78.5
CREIGHTON	87.5	KANSAS ST	82.5	AKRON	78.0
OHIO ST	87.5	NORTHWESTERN	82.5	CALIFORNIA	78.0
USC	87.5	OKLAHOMA	82.5	FLORIDA ST	78.0
VANDERBILT	87.5	TCU	82.5	LIBERTY	77.5
SAN DIEGO ST	87.0	DAYTON	82.0	LOYOLA-IL	77.5
CINCINNATI	86.5	LSU	82.0	NEW MEXICO	77.5

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATINGS

TEAM	POWER RATING	TEAM	POWER RATING	TEAM	POWER RATING
PENN ST	77.5	JAMES MADISON	73.5	HARVARD	70.5
N TEXAS	77.0	KENNESAW ST	73.5	LOUISIANA TECH	70.5
NEVADA	77.0	MURRAY ST	73.5	MASSACHUSETTS	70.5
SETON HALL	77.0	RICHMOND	73.5	S DAKOTA ST	70.5
STANFORD	77.0	TROY	73.5	CORNELL	70.0
UAB	77.0	UT-CHATTANOOGA	73.5	SAN DIEGO	70.0
UNLV	77.0	ARKANSAS ST	73.0	VERMONT	70.0
BOSTON COLLEGE	76.5	COLL OF CHARLESTON	73.0	WYOMING	70.0
BRADLEY	76.5	DRAKE	73.0	YOUNGSTOWN ST	70.0
ILLINOIS ST	76.5	NEW MEXICO ST	73.0	MONTANA	69.5
N IOWA	76.5	RHODE ISLAND	73.0	OLD DOMINION	69.5
S CAROLINA	76.5	S ILLINOIS	73.0	RICE	69.5
SANTA CLARA	76.5	UTAH VALLEY ST	73.0	S ALABAMA	69.5
TULANE	76.5	FURMAN	72.5	SAMFORD	69.5
BELMONT	76.0	TEMPLE	72.5	TOLEDO	69.5
ST JOSEPHS	76.0	FLA ATLANTIC	72.0	TX-SAN ANTONIO	69.5
UC-IRVINE	76.0	LOYOLA-MARYMOUNT	72.0	UTEP	69.5
YALE	76.0	OHIO U	72.0	WINTHROP	69.5
MCNEESE ST	75.5	TOWSON ST	72.0	ABILENE CHRISTIAN	69.0
HIGH POINT	75.0	CAL SAN DIEGO	71.5	BROWN	69.0
DUQUESNE	74.5	E TENN ST	71.5	CAL BAPTIST	69.0
OREGON ST	74.5	IL-CHICAGO	71.5	CS-NORTHRIDGE	69.0
UNC-WILMINGTON	74.5	ARK-LITTLE ROCK	71.0	E KENTUCKY	69.0
WASHINGTON ST	74.5	DAVIDSON	71.0	FORDHAM	69.0
WICHITA ST	74.5	E CAROLINA	71.0	NAVY	69.0
HAWAII	74.0	JACKSONVILLE ST	71.0	PACIFIC	69.0
KENT ST	74.0	MIDDLE TENN ST	71.0	W KENTUCKY	69.0
MIAMI OHIO	74.0	NEBRASKA-OMAHA	71.0	BOWLING GREEN	68.5
SEATTLE	74.0	RADFORD	71.0	CAMPBELL	68.5
ST BONAVENTURE	74.0	ST THOMAS-MN	71.0	FLA GULF COAST	68.5
UC-SANTA BARBARA	74.0	TULSA	71.0	LASALLE	68.5

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATINGS

TEAM	POWER RATING	TEAM	POWER RATING	TEAM	POWER RATING
MARSHALL	68.5	MARIST	67.0	PORTLAND	65.0
MISSOURI ST	68.5	MONMOUTH	67.0	VMI	65.0
PORTLAND ST	68.5	BETHUNE-COOKMAN	66.5	WOFFORD	65.0
QUEENS COLL	68.5	FRESNO ST	66.5	BRYANT	64.5
SAN JOSE ST	68.5	JACKSON ST	66.5	CLEVELAND ST	64.5
TEXAS ST	68.5	LAMAR	66.5	E MICHIGAN	64.5
WI-MILWAUKEE	68.5	LIPSCOMB	66.5	ELON	64.5
APPALACHIAN ST	68.0	LONGWOOD	66.5	LONG BEACH ST	64.5
FLA INTERNATIONAL	68.0	PRINCETON	66.5	LONG ISLAND	64.5
INDIANA ST	68.0	UNC-GREENSBORO	66.5	MERRIMACK	64.5
LA-LAFAYETTE	68.0	BOSTON U	66.0	MONTANA ST	64.5
N ALABAMA	68.0	DARTMOUTH	66.0	MOUNT ST MARYS	64.5
OAKLAND	68.0	EVANSVILLE	66.0	NORTHWESTERN ST	64.5
QUINNIPIAC	68.0	GA SOUTHERN	66.0	SF AUSTIN ST	64.5
SAM HOUSTON ST	68.0	MANHATTAN	66.0	TARLETON ST	64.5
SIENA	68.0	NORTHEASTERN	66.0	TENNESSEE ST	64.5
SOUTHERN U	68.0	SACRED HEART	66.0	BUCKNELL	64.0
UNC-ASHEVILLE	68.0	SE MISSOURI ST	66.0	CAL POLY-SLO	64.0
WRIGHT ST	68.0	WM & MARY	66.0	COASTAL CAROLINA	64.0
INCARNATE WORD	67.5	DELAWARE	65.5	COLUMBIA	64.0
IONA	67.5	DREXEL	65.5	IDAHO ST	64.0
N COLORADO	67.5	E WASHINGTON	65.5	N KENTUCKY	64.0
N DAKOTA ST	67.5	SIU EDWARDSVL	65.5	SE LOUISIANA	64.0
PURDUE FT WAYNE	67.5	W CAROLINA	65.5	SOUTHERN MISS	64.0
ROBERT MORRIS	67.5	BALL ST	65.0	TEXAS A&M CC	64.0
TX-ARLINGTON	67.5	CAL DAVIS	65.0	AUSTIN PEAY	63.5
CHARLOTTE	67.0	CS-BAKERSFIELD	65.0	MAINE	63.5
COLGATE	67.0	JACKSONVILLE	65.0	PRESBYTERIAN	63.5
HAMPTON	67.0	MERCER	65.0	UC-RIVERSIDE	63.5
HOFSTRA	67.0	NICHOLLS ST	65.0	VALPARAISO	63.5
IDAHO	67.0	NORFOLK ST	65.0	ALBANY	63.0

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATINGS

TEAM	POWER RATING	TEAM	POWER RATING	TEAM	POWER RATING
GEORGIA ST	63.0	N DAKOTA	61.0	TENNESSEE TECH	57.5
PENNSYLVANIA	63.0	BINGHAMTON	60.5	THE CITADEL	57.5
PEPPERDINE	63.0	C MICHIGAN	60.5	ALCORN ST	57.0
SACRAMENTO ST	63.0	MISSOURI-KC	60.5	ARMY	57.0
SOUTHERN UTAH	63.0	ORAL ROBERTS	60.5	FLORIDA A&M	57.0
ST PETERS	63.0	S CAROLINA ST	60.5	LA-MONROE	57.0
UTAH TECH	63.0	STONEHILL	60.5	LEMOYNE	57.0
WEBER ST	63.0	BELLARMINE	60.0	N CAROLINA A&T	57.0
ALABAMA ST	62.5	E ILLINOIS	60.0	NEW HAMPSHIRE	57.0
LOYOLA-MD	62.5	HOWARD	60.0	NEW JERSEY TECH	57.0
STONY BROOK	62.5	N ILLINOIS	60.0	WAGNER	57.0
TEXAS SOUTHERN	62.5	NEW ORLEANS	60.0	DELAWARE ST	56.5
TX-RIO GRANDE	62.5	ALABAMA A&M	59.5	C ARKANSAS	56.0
W MICHIGAN	62.5	BUFFALO	59.5	CHICAGO ST	56.0
AIR FORCE	62.0	GARDNER WEBB	59.5	FARLEIGH DICKINSON	56.0
AMERICAN	62.0	WI-GREEN BAY	59.5	MERCYHURST	56.0
DETROIT	62.0	CANISIUS	59.0	MORGAN ST	55.0
HOUSTON CHRISTIAN	62.0	LINDENWOOD	59.0	IU INDY	54.5
LAFAYETTE	62.0	NIAGARA	59.0	ST FRANCIS-PA	54.5
LEHIGH	62.0	TENN-MARTIN	59.0	MD-EAST SHORE	52.0
MD-BALT COUNTY	62.0	CS-FULLERTON	58.5	NEW HAVEN	52.0
MOREHEAD ST	62.0	NC CENTRAL	58.5	COPPIN ST	51.0
N ARIZONA	62.0	WEST GEORGIA	58.5	ARK-PINE BLUFF	50.5
RIDER	62.0	DENVER	58.0	MISS VALLEY ST	43.0
S DAKOTA	62.0	EAST TEXAS A&M	58.0		
C CONN ST	61.5	HOLY CROSS	58.0		
CHARLESTON SO	61.5	USC UPSTATE	58.0		
FAIRFIELD	61.5	W ILLINOIS	58.0		
GRAMBLING	61.5	N FLORIDA	57.5		
S INDIANA	61.5	PRAIRIE VIEW A&M	57.5		
UMASS-LOWELL	61.5	STETSON	57.5		

RETURNING PLAYING MINUTES % (RETURNING STARTERS)

TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES
NAVY	86% (5)	PRINCETON	57% (1)	ARK-LITTLE ROCK	48% (2)
VMI	86% (4)	CONNECTICUT	56% (3)	BELMONT	48% (2)
HARVARD	77% (3)	FURMAN	56% (3)	SAINT LOUIS	48% (2)
BOSTON U	75% (3)	SIU EDWARDSVL	56% (2)	AUSTIN PEAY	47% (3)
N IOWA	72% (3)	SEATTLE	55% (3)	MONMOUTH	47% (3)
SIENA	72% (3)	CORNELL	55% (2)	VIRGINIA TECH	47% (3)
COLUMBIA	71% (4)	MANHATTAN	55% (2)	BELLARMINE	47% (2)
DETROIT	70% (4)	NOTRE DAME	54% (3)	BOISE ST	47% (2)
PURDUE	70% (4)	ABILENE CHRISTIAN	54% (2)	NORTHEASTERN	47% (2)
MIAMI OHIO	67% (3)	MARQUETTE	54% (2)	THE CITADEL	47% (2)
MARIST	66% (4)	RICHMOND	54% (2)	LIBERTY	46% (3)
USC UPSTATE	65% (2)	STANFORD	54% (2)	OHIO U	46% (2)
LAFAYETTE	64% (3)	W CAROLINA	53% (4)	ILLINOIS	45% (3)
IDAHO	63% (3)	IOWA ST	53% (3)	OLD DOMINION	45% (3)
LOYOLA-MD	63% (3)	NORTHWESTERN ST	53% (3)	E ILLINOIS	44% (2)
JACKSON ST	62% (3)	WI-GREEN BAY	53% (3)	CAL POLY-SLO	44% (1)
SAN DIEGO ST	62% (3)	KENNESAW ST	52% (3)	FLA GULF COAST	44% (1)
SE MISSOURI ST	62% (3)	GEORGE WASHINGTON	51% (3)	HOUSTON	43% (3)
YALE	62% (3)	MD-BALT COUNTY	51% (2)	UCLA	43% (3)
COLGATE	61% (3)	SOUTHERN U	51% (1)	S ILLINOIS	43% (2)
PENNSYLVANIA	60% (2)	OHIO ST	50% (3)	MISSOURI	42% (3)
NEBRASKA-OMAHA	59% (3)	SAN FRANCISCO	50% (2)	STONEHILL	42% (3)
HOLY CROSS	59% (2)	NORTHWESTERN	50% (1)	MICHIGAN ST	42% (2)
BROWN	58% (3)	BUCKNELL	49% (2)	ST THOMAS-MN	42% (2)
S DAKOTA ST	58% (3)	DUQUESNE	49% (2)	TOWSON ST	42% (2)
TULANE	58% (2)	LEMOYNE	49% (2)	ARIZONA	41% (3)
ILLINOIS ST	57% (4)	N ARIZONA	49% (2)	INDIANA ST	41% (3)
DARTMOUTH	57% (3)	ST JOSEPHS	49% (2)	LAMAR	41% (3)
NEW JERSEY TECH	57% (3)	AMERICAN	49% (1)	PROVIDENCE	41% (1)
SACRED HEART	57% (3)	UTAH ST	49% (1)	ST PETERS	41% (1)
LEHIGH	57% (2)	ARKANSAS	48% (3)	ELON	41% (0)

RETURNING PLAYING MINUTES % (RETURNING STARTERS)

TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES
WEBER ST	40% (4)	BOSTON COLLEGE	36% (1)	UTAH TECH	31% (1)
FLORIDA	40% (2)	INCARNATE WORD	35% (4)	WASHINGTON ST	31% (0)
VERMONT	40% (2)	LOYOLA-IL	35% (3)	E WASHINGTON	30% (2)
AKRON	40% (1)	TENN-MARTIN	35% (3)	LIPSCOMB	30% (1)
SMU	39% (3)	GEORGIA ST	35% (2)	MORGAN ST	30% (1)
BUFFALO	39% (2)	TEXAS	35% (2)	UC-SANTA BARBARA	30% (1)
FAIRFIELD	39% (2)	TEXAS SOUTHERN	35% (2)	SANTA CLARA	30% (0)
MICHIGAN	39% (2)	FRESNO ST	35% (1)	NICHOLLS ST	29% (3)
OREGON	39% (2)	UNC-WILMINGTON	35% (1)	LINDENWOOD	29% (2)
S DAKOTA	39% (2)	QUINNIPIAC	34% (2)	MERCYHURST	29% (1)
COASTAL CAROLINA	39% (1)	PRESBYTERIAN	33% (3)	MISSISSIPPI ST	29% (1)
DREXEL	39% (1)	EVANSVILLE	33% (2)	BRADLEY	28% (1)
N ALABAMA	39% (1)	MISSOURI ST	33% (2)	DELAWARE	28% (1)
S ALABAMA	39% (1)	MONTANA	33% (1)	NEW HAMPSHIRE	28% (1)
TROY	39% (1)	WM & MARY	33% (1)	TCU	28% (1)
UC-IRVINE	39% (1)	JACKSONVILLE	33% (0)	TEXAS TECH	28% (1)
BYU	38% (2)	LOUISVILLE	32% (4)	WAKE FOREST	28% (1)
CREIGHTON	37% (2)	BETHUNE-COOKMAN	32% (3)	E KENTUCKY	27% (2)
LONGWOOD	37% (2)	CAL BAPTIST	32% (2)	HOFSTRA	27% (2)
ALABAMA	37% (1)	CALIFORNIA	32% (2)	SYRACUSE	27% (2)
N CAROLINA A&T	37% (1)	DAYTON	32% (2)	BOWLING GREEN	27% (1)
TENNESSEE ST	36% (3)	SF AUSTIN ST	32% (2)	GONZAGA	27% (1)
AIR FORCE	36% (2)	WISCONSIN	32% (2)	N DAKOTA	27% (1)
CAL DAVIS	36% (2)	ST MARYS-CA	32% (1)	UTAH VALLEY ST	27% (1)
DEPAUL	36% (2)	HOUSTON CHRISTIAN	31% (3)	BALL ST	27% (0)
HAMPTON	36% (2)	GEORGIA	31% (2)	EAST TEXAS A&M	26% (3)
KENT ST	36% (2)	S CAROLINA ST	31% (2)	MASSACHUSETTS	26% (2)
NEBRASKA	36% (2)	DAVIDSON	31% (1)	RIDER	26% (2)
QUEENS COLL	36% (2)	GEORGETOWN	31% (1)	TARLETON ST	26% (2)
SE LOUISIANA	36% (2)	KENTUCKY	31% (1)	WRIGHT ST	26% (2)
VANDERBILT	36% (2)	MIDDLE TENN ST	31% (1)	CAMPBELL	26% (1)

RETURNING PLAYING MINUTES % (RETURNING STARTERS)

TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES
CINCINNATI	26% (1)	COPPIN ST	22% (2)	LOYOLA-MARYMOUNT	18% (1)
GEORGIA TECH	26% (1)	CS-BAKERSFIELD	22% (1)	LSU	18% (1)
LOUISIANA TECH	26% (1)	FLORIDA A&M	22% (1)	NEW ORLEANS	18% (1)
SOUTHERN UTAH	26% (1)	MAINE	22% (1)	S FLORIDA	18% (1)
STETSON	26% (1)	MD-EAST SHORE	22% (1)	UNC-ASHEVILLE	18% (1)
TEXAS ST	26% (1)	MOREHEAD ST	22% (1)	S CAROLINA	18% (0)
ALCORN ST	26% (0)	WASHINGTON	22% (1)	WOFFORD	18% (0)
DUKE	26% (0)	WI-MILWAUKEE	22% (1)	N COLORADO	17% (2)
E TENN ST	25% (1)	UT-CHATTANOOGA	21% (1)	CHARLESTON SO	17% (1)
MISS VALLEY ST	25% (1)	MONTANA ST	21% (0)	JAMES MADISON	17% (1)
PITTSBURGH	25% (1)	GRAND CANYON	20% (1)	KANSAS ST	17% (1)
PURDUE FT WAYNE	25% (1)	N DAKOTA ST	20% (1)	PEPPERDINE	17% (1)
RUTGERS	25% (1)	N KENTUCKY	20% (1)	ST BONAVENTURE	17% (1)
E CAROLINA	24% (2)	NEW HAVEN	20% (1)	TENNESSEE TECH	17% (1)
ALABAMA ST	24% (1)	NIAGARA	20% (1)	NEVADA	17% (0)
APPALACHIAN ST	24% (1)	W MICHIGAN	20% (1)	ARMY	16% (1)
C ARKANSAS	24% (1)	SAN DIEGO	20% (0)	MOUNT ST MARYS	16% (1)
ST JOHNS	24% (1)	TEMPLE	19% (2)	PENN ST	16% (1)
TEXAS A&M CC	24% (1)	WYOMING	19% (1)	PRAIRIE VIEW A&M	16% (1)
YOUNGSTOWN ST	24% (1)	CHICAGO ST	19% (0)	C CONN ST	16% (0)
OREGON ST	24% (0)	JACKSONVILLE ST	19% (0)	S INDIANA	16% (0)
VA COMMONWEALTH	24% (0)	SAN JOSE ST	19% (0)	SAM HOUSTON ST	16% (0)
CANISIUS	23% (1)	WEST GEORGIA	18% (3)	BINGHAMTON	15% (1)
COLORADO	23% (1)	HAWAII	18% (2)	BUTLER	15% (1)
MISSOURI-KC	23% (1)	IDAHO ST	18% (2)	GEORGE MASON	15% (1)
STONY BROOK	23% (1)	MCNEESE ST	18% (2)	MERCER	15% (1)
TENNESSEE	23% (1)	PORTLAND ST	18% (2)	OLE MISS	15% (1)
TOLEDO	23% (1)	RICE	18% (2)	FLA ATLANTIC	15% (0)
TX-RIO GRANDE	23% (1)	ALBANY	18% (1)	HOWARD	15% (0)
GRAMBLING	23% (0)	COLORADO ST	18% (1)	N FLORIDA	15% (0)
LONG ISLAND	22% (3)	LONG BEACH ST	18% (1)	PORTLAND	15% (0)

RETURNING PLAYING MINUTES % (RETURNING STARTERS)

TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES	TEAM	MINUTES
SETON HALL	15% (0)	GARDNER WEBB	11% (0)	DRAKE	1% (0)
LA-LAFAYETTE	14% (2)	OKLAHOMA	11% (0)	IU INDY	1% (0)
N CAROLINA	14% (1)	FLORIDA ST	10% (0)	TEXAS A&M	1% (0)
NC CENTRAL	14% (1)	SAMFORD	10% (0)	UNC-GREENSBORO	1% (0)
TX-ARLINGTON	14% (1)	OKLAHOMA ST	9% (1)	WICHITA ST	1% (0)
FLA INTERNATIONAL	14% (0)	CAL SAN DIEGO	9% (0)	ARKANSAS ST	0% (0)
GA SOUTHERN	14% (0)	KANSAS	9% (0)	BAYLOR	0% (0)
ORAL ROBERTS	14% (0)	NEW MEXICO ST	9% (0)	CLEVELAND ST	0% (0)
TX-SAN ANTONIO	14% (0)	UTAH	9% (0)	INDIANA	0% (0)
UAB	14% (0)	CS-NORTHRIDGE	8% (1)	MARYLAND	0% (0)
USC	14% (0)	IONA	8% (1)	MEMPHIS	0% (0)
UTEP	14% (0)	OAKLAND	8% (1)	MIAMI	0% (0)
MARSHALL	13% (1)	LASALLE	8% (0)	MURRAY ST	0% (0)
WINTHROP	13% (1)	MERRIMACK	8% (0)	N ILLINOIS	0% (0)
ARK-PINE BLUFF	13% (0)	SACRAMENTO ST	8% (0)	N TEXAS	0% (0)
BRYANT	13% (0)	IOWA	7% (0)	NEW MEXICO	0% (0)
COLL OF CHARLESTON	13% (0)	VALPARAISO	6% (0)	RHODE ISLAND	0% (0)
VILLANOVA	13% (0)	LA-MONROE	5% (0)	UC-RIVERSIDE	0% (0)
CS-FULLERTON	12% (1)	NORFOLK ST	5% (0)	UCF	0% (0)
DENVER	12% (1)	SOUTHERN MISS	5% (0)	UMASS-LOWELL	0% (0)
IL-CHICAGO	12% (1)	CHARLOTTE	4% (1)	VIRGINIA	0% (0)
ST FRANCIS-PA	12% (1)	HIGH POINT	4% (1)	W ILLINOIS	0% (0)
W KENTUCKY	12% (1)	RADFORD	4% (0)	W VIRGINIA	0% (0)
WAGNER	12% (1)	PACIFIC	3% (1)	XAVIER	0% (0)
ALABAMA A&M	12% (0)	E MICHIGAN	3% (0)		
AUBURN	12% (0)	FARLEIGH DICKINSON	3% (0)		
MINNESOTA	12% (0)	FORDHAM	3% (0)		
ROBERT MORRIS	12% (0)	NC STATE	3% (0)		
CLEMSON	11% (1)	ARIZONA ST	2% (0)		
TULSA	11% (1)	UNLV	2% (0)		
DELAWARE ST	11% (0)	C MICHIGAN	1% (0)		

Robbie Avila

ATLANTIC 10
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The Atlantic 10 conference kicks off the season much like it did a year ago. Virginia Commonwealth is expected to capture the regular season title with the same group of usual suspects challenging the conference's preeminent program.

Still, as a mid-major a few bounces away from the power conferences, very little stays the same from year to year. Instead of Ryan Odom leading the Rams, Phil Martelli Jr. is now in charge. Odom is off to Virginia, while the 44-year-old son of the former Saint Joseph's legendary coach comes to VCU after two successful seasons at Bryant.

Last year, George Mason kept pace with VCU, both finishing 15-3 in conference play. It appears GMU will take a step back, while Saint Louis, with the bespectacled wonderboy Robbie Avila, looks like the Rams' top contender. Dayton, like usual, is also a threat.

Then there is George Washington, just two seasons removed from a 4-14 conference record, now with a chance to finish near the top. Much of that optimism centers around the 6-foot-11 Rafael Castro, arguably the A-10's best defender.

The last time a team won at least a share of back-to-back regular season titles was in 2016-17, when it was Anthony Grant's Dayton squad.

Ultimately, this conference is judged by the number of NCAA Tournament bids it receives. This year, multiple ones could be handed out to the A-10, which last happened two seasons ago.

The A-10 has cultivated a following among the betting community since it consistently offers a unique style of play. That comes from a collection of talented players, usually with power conference skills, just not the size, and varying coaching styles ranging from fast pace to a slow-it-down grind.

Avila is now the big gun here after VCU's Max Shulga has moved on to the Boston Celtics organization. Another year operating in Josh Schertz's pingpong offense should lead to even more production than Larry Nerd had last season (17.3 PPG, 6.9 RPG, 4.0 APG).

PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS BY

AARON MOORE

DAVIDSON
WILDCATS

ATLANTIC 10
2024-25 RECORDS: 17-16 SU, 15-17 ATS, 17-15 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 71.0
NATIONAL RANK: #151 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #12 OF 14

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 1-8 ATS IN ITS FINAL NINE GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE UNDER IS 37-22 IN CONFERENCE GAMES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

The McKillop name carries plenty of weight on campus, but the program under the younger Matt during the past three seasons has drifted away from what his father Bob previously accomplished. Matt's record at Davidson is 48-49.

Due to transfers and graduation, it looks like another .500 level squad will see action this year on McKillop Court.

Guard Roberts Blums (4.3 PPG) is the top returning starter. He will be joined by those Davidson landed on the comeback in the portal. They include a pair of players moving up, Sam Brown (Penn) and Josh Scovens (Army). Parker Friedrichsen (Wake Forest) and JaQualon "JQ" Roberts (Vanderbilt) are a duo moving down in search of more minutes.

McKillops's top high school recruit is Devin Brown, a 6-foot-6 guard who was Ohio's Division I Player of the Year.

Of this bunch, Sam Brown should make the biggest impact. The 6-foot-3 guard scored close to 14 points a game for the Quakers last year.

Davidson should get a boost when 6-foot-10 forward Sean Logan is soon cleared to play. The big man missed a bulk of time last year due to an ACL injury.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	31%
CONFERENCE ODDS	70/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	2000/1

DAYTON
FLYERS

ATLANTIC 10
2024-25 RECORDS: 23-11 SU, 16-17 ATS, 23-10 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 82.0
NATIONAL RANK: #67 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #3 OF 14

OVERVIEW

The Flyers nabbed three first-place votes in the preseason poll.

In order for Anthony Grant to win his first regular season title since 2020, they must cut down on last year's uncharacteristic defensive lapses. A season ago, the Flyers' KenPom defensive metrics were the worst since 2018 when Grant was coaching Archie Miller's recruits.

Javon Bennett, an All-Conference First Teamer, will play a much larger role this year due to the departure of Malachi Smith (UConn). The 5-foot-11 guard (11.6 PPG last year) will be the focal point of Dayton's defense.

The Flyers were also represented on the preseason All-Conference second team (Amaël L'Etang) and the third team (Keonte Jones, a CSUN transfer).

Bennett's backcourt mate will be Jordan Derkack, who scored 5.7 points last year for Rutgers.

Prior to Derkack's time at Rutgers, he played at Merrimack, where he was the NEC Player of the Year. Before Bennett was a Flyer, he too played for Merrimack. Another transfer, Adam Njie from Iona (12.4 PPG, 4.2 APG), fits nicely into this guard-centric system.

RETURNING STARTERS 2

RETURNING MINUTES % 32%

CONFERENCE ODDS +450

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 500/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WAS 9-2 IN THE TEAM'S FINAL 11 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND DAYTON IS 19-10-1 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS.

DUQUESNE
DUKES

ATLANTIC 10
2024-25 RECORDS: 13-19 SU, 16-15 ATS, 13-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 74.5
NATIONAL RANK: #116 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #8 OF 14

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 7-1 ATS AS A HOME UNDERDOG LAST SEASON, AND THE UNDER IS 22-9 AT HOME OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS, THE SIXTH-HIGHEST HOME UNDER PERCENTAGE IN THE NATION.

OVERVIEW

Dru Joyce III enters his second season as coach with 10 of his players, including two starters, coming back. That doesn't mean the coach didn't go portaling, as he certainly did by bringing in eight new players as well.

The Dukes rely on tweeners in the 6-foot-5 range to create mismatches on both ends of the court. Senior guard Cameron Crawford (8.6 PPG) will be the No.1 option on offense, as last year he shot 43.1% from 3-point range.

David Dixon (5.7 PPG, 5.1 RPG) and Maximus Edwards (8.3 PPG) will also have expanded roles as Tre Dinkins III (12.9 PPG) bolted for George Washington.

From the power forward position, the 6-foot-8 Jakub Necas will be back in the starting lineup. His numbers (6.0 PPG, 4.4 RPG) should rise more this year as the plan is for him to play more than the 23.9 minutes he logged last season.

Of all those new names, the biggest one is Tarence Guinyard, who earned Ohio Valley Conference first team honors last year for UT Martin after scoring 16.3 points and 2.3 assists per game.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	49%
CONFERENCE ODDS	35/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	2000/1

FORDHAM
RAMS

ATLANTIC 10
2024-25 RECORDS: 12-21 SU, 13-19 ATS, 20-12 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 69.0
NATIONAL RANK: #180 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #13 OF 14

OVERVIEW

Some team had to come in on the bottom of the A-10's preseason standings and that designation fell to Mike Magpayo's Rams. Last year, Fordham won just three conference games in Magpayo's inaugural year in the Bronx.

He is looking to get out of the A-10 cellar by taking a global approach to recruiting, as in, looking all around the world for new players.

From the state of Michigan comes Christian Henry (Eastern Michigan) and Jace Howard (Michigan), the son of Juwan. Coming in from Hawaii is Akira Jacobs, who started eight games a year ago for the Rainbow Warriors.

The Rams now have two Australian players. Roor Akhuar, a 6-foot-7 forward, joins the 6-foot-11 Jack Whitbourn, who previously played for Magpayo at UC Riverside.

Graduate student Louis Lesmond, originally from France, played at Harvard and is a 6-foot-6 guard who can add some scoring.

The biggest addition to the roster is Dejour Reaves, who comes from nearby Iona, where he averaged 17.3 points per game and made the All-MAAC first team.

RETURNING STARTERS 0

RETURNING MINUTES % 3%

CONFERENCE ODDS 150/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 2000/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 2-8 ATS IN ITS FINAL 10 GAMES LAST SEASON AND IS 10-22 ATS AT HOME OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

GEORGE MASON
PATRIOTS

ATLANTIC 10
2024-25 RECORDS: 27-9 SU, 17-18 ATS, 18-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 78.5
NATIONAL RANK: #87 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #5 OF 14

GMU ATHLETICS

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 5-1 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST 15 POINTS LAST SEASON, AND THE UNDER IS 23-13 ON THE ROAD OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

With 47 victories in just two years, the Patriots have found plenty of success during the Tony Skinn era. Last season, after earning a share of the conference title, the Patriots generated their most media attention since the Jim Larranaga days.

GMU's conference title game appearance and 27 wins weren't enough for an at-large bid, but they did get a spot in the NIT.

Skinn had to replace four starters, so he went out and compiled one of the best portal classes in the mid-major ranks.

The top returner is Brayden O'Connor, a 6-foot-5 point guard who averaged just shy of 10 points and three assists per game last season.

As much as Skinn would like all the new Patriots to score, the priority will be on defense for a program that gave up just over 63 points a game last year.

Dola Adebayo, a 6-foot-8 PF who played last year for Mount St. Mary's, another defensive-minded team, is a great addition.

The other transfers — Nick Ellington (Murray State), Masai Troutman (Northeastern), Riley Allenspach (Samford), Kory Mincy (Presbyterian), Jahari Long (Maryland) and Jermahri Hill (Ball State) — are basically combo guards who provide versatility and defense.

RETURNING STARTERS	**1**
RETURNING MINUTES %	**15%**
CONFERENCE ODDS	**15/1**
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	**750/1**

GEORGE WASHINGTON
REVOLUTIONARIES

ATLANTIC 10
2024-25 RECORDS: 21-13 SU, 17-16 ATS, 15-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 80.5
NATIONAL RANK: #74 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #4 OF 14

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WAS 7-3-1 IN ROAD GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM IS 11-3 ATS IN NEUTRAL-COURT GAMES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

It has been a long time, specifically 10 years, since GW started a season with such lofty expectations. The school's fourth-place spot on the A-10 preseason poll is its best since 2016.

Four players Rafael Castro, Tre Dinkins III, Trey Autry and Christian Jones were named to preseason All-Conference teams. VCU was the only other team to earn that many.

Now in his fourth season, Chris Caputo must deliver even better results than last year's 21 wins and an invitation to the College Basketball Crown.

Being around the NCAA Tournament bubble is an attainable goal for a team featuring such an interior presence as Castro, who in his first A-10 season led GW in scoring (14.0 PPG), rebounding (8.9 RPG) and blocks (1.4 BPG). In particular, he is an elite offensive rebounder (3.2 ORB).

Dinkins III should help GW get to the 12 conference wins needed to stay within the top five spots of the league's standings.

Let's welcome back GW into the A-10 conversation.

RETURNING STARTERS	**3**
RETURNING MINUTES %	**51%**
CONFERENCE ODDS	**+300**
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	**250/1**

LA SALLE
EXPLORERS

ATLANTIC 10
2024-25 RECORDS: 14-19 SU, 14-18 ATS, 16-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 68.5
NATIONAL RANK: #190 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #14 OF 14

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE EXPLORERS WERE 3-9 ATS ON THE ROAD LAST SEASON, AND THE UNDER IS 26-15 IN CONFERENCE GAMES OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

After three years trying to revive interest in La Salle basketball, Fran Dunphy retired.

While he was unable to find a postseason berth, the coach brought some legitimacy and fans back to the Explorers' revamped home arena.

Dunphy even landed Deuce Jones II, a prized local recruit who made an immediate impact.

Like Dunphy, Jones, the Trenton, NJ product, is also gone. To make matters worse, he went across town to Saint Joseph's where there was some more NIL money available.

It is a cliché, but in the case of La Salle with new coach Darris Nichols, an appropriate one — this program is starting over.

Nichols has a roster of 15 new faces and only one Explorer from a year ago (Eric Acker 5.2 PPG). The former Radford headman valued experience in the portal, grabbing six graduate transfers and two seniors.

A new name for La Salle fans but one Nichols is familiar with is 6-foot-9 forward Josiah Harris, who averaged 8.3 points and 7.2 rebounds per game last year with Radford.

The Explorers tapped the Trenton talent pool once again, bringing in 6-foot-10 high school recruit Nas Hart.

RETURNING STARTERS	**0**
RETURNING MINUTES %	**8%**
CONFERENCE ODDS	**200/1**
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	**2000/1**

LOYOLA CHICAGO
RAMBLERS

ATLANTIC 10
2024-25 RECORDS: 25-12 SU, 19-17 ATS, 19-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 77.5
NATIONAL RANK: #94 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #6 OF 14

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 14-4 ATS IN ITS FINAL 18 GAMES LAST SEASON DESPITE GOING 5-11 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE PLAY.

OVERVIEW

That Ramblers experience a year ago in the NIT semifinals might be what gets Drew Valentine's club back to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2022. Three starters are back: 6-foot-10 center Miles Rubin (9.6 PPG, 5.5 RPG, 2.3 BPG), 6-7 guard Kymany Houinsou (5.8 PPG, 4.6 RPG) and guard Justin Moore, who missed a bulk of the season due to a knee injury.

Valentine reported that Moore is back to 100%; he's the best point guard in the league.

Their transfer class brings the ability to spread the court. They are 6-foot-1 Kayde Dotson (2.3 PPG) with tournament experience after playing for New Mexico last year, Joshua Ola-Joseph (7.2 PPG) is a 6-foot-7 senior from California, and Deywilk Tavarez (12.9 PPG), a 3-point specialist from the College of Charleston.

Loyola's key to winning the A-10 will be finding just one or two more conference road wins. The Midwestern portion of the A-10 schedule can be tough for the East Coast schools who don't have the luxury of chartered travel. That helped Loyola last year go 17-1 at home while covering 16 times.

RETURNING STARTERS	3
RETURNING MINUTES %	35%
CONFERENCE ODDS	10/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	2000/1

RHODE ISLAND
RAMS

ATLANTIC 10
2024-25 RECORDS: 18-13 SU, 12-18 ATS, 19-11 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 73.0
NATIONAL RANK: #131 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #11 OF 14

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 34-60 ATS IN CONFERENCE GAMES OVER THE PAST FIVE SEASONS AND 1-7 ATS ON A NEUTRAL COURT OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

Not one Rams' starter from a year ago is coming back to Kingston.

Is it really that bad for a team that went 7-11 in conference play and finished in the bottom portion of the standings?

Unfortunately for URI, that is where the team has resided during Archie Miller's previous three seasons. The positive from last year was an overall winning record (18-13) for the first time.

Even with all the new blood, it is hard to see this team not finishing near the basement once again.

Forwards Drissa Traore (2.8 PPG, 2.5 RPG) and 7-foot-1 German product Moek Icke, who redshirted last year, aren't new to the program but will now have expanded roles.

Miller's new backcourt comes in with plenty of experience as Myles Corey (South Alabama), RJ Johnson (Charleston Southern) and Tyler Cochran (Minnesota) are grad transfers.

The foundation of the team's interior will also be transfers, with Mouhamed Sow (Saint Peter's), Jonah Hinton (St. Bonaventure), Jahmere Tripp (Fordham), Alex Crawford (Fresno State) and Keeyan Itejere (Northern Kentucky) all contending for minutes.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	0%
CONFERENCE ODDS	80/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	2000/1

RICHMOND
SPIDERS

ATLANTIC 10
2024-25 RECORDS: 10-22 SU, 12-18 ATS, 16-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 73.5
NATIONAL RANK: #127 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #10 OF 14

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 1-6 ATS AS A FAVORITE LAST SEASON AND 2-10 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES, TIED FOR THE SECOND-WORST NON-CONFERENCE COVER PERCENTAGE IN THE COUNTRY.

OVERVIEW

This is going to be a very important season for the Spiders. Not necessarily because they will challenge for a league title, but more so about the future of Chris Mooney.

A 10-22 record last year and three straight seasons without an NCAA Tournament bid raise questions about whether a Princeton-style offense, so dependent on players moving in unison, can still work in the transfer portal era.

Mooney is going to rely heavily on 6-foot-11 center Mike Walz, the team's assist leader a year ago. That type of production is mandatory from a big man in this offense, but so is scoring. More is needed than his 7.4 points per game last year.

The other center-forward types include holdovers Jonathan Beagle (6.8 PPG) and Apostolos Roumoglou (5.4 PPG), along with newcomers Jaden Daughtry (Indiana State) and 6-11 high school recruit Dylan Homenick.

In the backcourt, Mikkel Tyne (9.2 PPG) and Collin Tanner (3.6 PPG) will handle the bulk of the work.

The Spiders (66.8 in 2025) have to get back to scoring close to 70 points a game to remain competitive.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	54%
CONFERENCE ODDS	50/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	2000/1

SAINT LOUIS
BILLIKENS

ATLANTIC 10
2024-25 RECORDS: 19-15 SU, 12-20 ATS, 10-22 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 82.0
NATIONAL RANK: #64 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #2 OF 14

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 2-10 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES, TIED FOR THE SECOND-WORST NON-CONFERENCE COVER PERCENTAGE IN THE COUNTRY.

OVERVIEW

Since the Billikens joined the conference for the 2005-06 season, they have yet to capture a regular season title.

The hopes were that goal could be achieved last year with Robbie Avila playing for his former Indiana State coach Josh Schertz. At times, the Schertz offense clicked, but it ended with an 11-7 conference record and one NIT game.

The 6-foot-10 Avila, who scored 17.3 points per game while dealing with an ankle injury, is back healthy to give it another shot. Avila will look to hit the 20 points per game mark. Schertz knows how to scheme that up in a number of ways.

Joining Avila and Kalu Anya in the starting rotation is 6-9 forward Paul Otieno, a first-team All-MAAC player last year at Quinnipiac. Kellen Thames (6.2 PPG) should be there as well after missing time last year with injuries.

Other than an early December jaunt to California, Saint Louis' non-conference schedule keeps them close to home. That should help prepare them for the January 7 trip to VCU. Whoever wins that game, which the Rams should be favored in, will have the inside track for the conference title.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	48%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+300
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	300/1

ST. BONAVENTURE
BONNIES

ATLANTIC 10
2024-25 RECORDS: 22-12 SU, 19-14 ATS, 15-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 74.0
NATIONAL RANK: #119 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #9 OF 14

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 11-2 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES, TIED FOR THE FOURTH-BEST NON-CONFERENCE COVER PERCENTAGE IN THE NATION.

OVERVIEW

The Bonnies hope to improve last season by a foot. It's not like they were just 12 inches from a title; instead, the foot was the one guard Dasonte Bowen (11.1 PPG, 4.2 APG) broke early on last year. Prior to his injury, St. Bonaventure was 9-1, their best start since 1970.

Even after losing Bowen, Mark Schmidt worked another solid season as usual, leading his team to 22 wins and a berth in the NIT.

At the A-10's recent media day, Bowen reported his foot to be completely healthy after his surgery.

From the portal, Schmidt grabbed guards Amar'e Marshall (14.0 PPG at Albany) and Brayden Jackson from nearby Buffalo (4.2 PPG).

The guard-centric Bonnies also welcome new perimeter players Darryl Simmons II (17.4 PPG at Gardner-Webb) and Cayden Charles out of Division II North Georgia.

The Bonnies might have the best chance to prove the preseason poll rankings wrong. This team can finish inside the Top 5, higher than the eighth-seeded projections.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	17%
CONFERENCE ODDS	40/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	2000/1

SAINT JOSEPH'S
HAWKS

ATLANTIC 10
2024-25 RECORDS: 22-13 SU, 17-17-1 ATS, 20-15 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 76.0
NATIONAL RANK: #110 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #7 OF 14

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WAS 8-2 IN THE TEAM'S FINAL 10 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER IS 15-8 IN ROAD GAMES OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

Following one of the most newsworthy coaching moves made late in the offseason, Steve Donahue is running the show for the Hawks.

In early September, Billy Lange bolted from Hawk Hill for a spot on Mike Brown's coaching staff with the New York Knicks. That left Saint Joe's in need of a coach, so they quickly promoted Donahue, the former Penn coach, whom Lange had previously hired as an assistant.

Donahue inherits a roster that no longer features Erik Reynolds II, who graduated as the school's all-time leading scorer, and Rasheer Fleming, who will see his former coach during the NBA season. The Hawks also won't have the services of Xzayvier Brown, who turned a sensational sophomore season into a wagonload of Oklahoma NIL cash.

Donahue does have a new player to serve as the foundation of his first Hawks' team. That is Deuce Jones II, who comes to Saint Joe's at the expense of city rival La Salle. Jones, who scored 12 points a game as a freshman with the Explorers, was named to the preseason All-Conference second team.

The one-time Rutgers product Derek Simpson (8.7 PPG) is the top returning scorer.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	49%
CONFERENCE ODDS	16/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	750/1

VCU
RAMS

ATLANTIC 10
2024-25 RECORDS: 28-7 SU, 20-14 ATS, 20-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 83.0
NATIONAL RANK: #56 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #1 OF 14

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 14-3 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST 10 POINTS LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER WAS 7-2 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL OF 135 OR LESS.

OVERVIEW

Since 2000, VCU has made the NCAA Tournament 14 times. Even more impressive is how the string of coaches starting from Anthony Grant to Shaka Smart to Will Wade to Mike Rhoades to Ryan Odom have all carried on the winning tradition.

Phil Martelli Jr. now joins the rotation, and he is well-positioned for an NCAA Tournament bid in his first year.

The Rams will look different than last season's squad that won a share of the A-10 regular season title. Gone by graduation is the outstanding backcourt of Max Shulga and Joe Bamisile (a combined 30 points a game). Luke Bamgboye is now with Texas Tech.

Guard Brandon Jennings does return.

Martelli Jr. brought forward Barry Evans along from Bryant. The 6-foot-8 forward scored 13.3 points a season ago. The 6-foot-11 Keyshawn Mitchell (8.5 PPG, 6.8 RPG) also comes over from Bryant.

Then there is the transfer quartet of Ahmad Nowell (Connecticut), Jadrian Tracey (Oregon), Tyrell Ward (LSU), Jordann Dumont (Villanova), who all come from programs that play a similar VCU style.

That lack of continuity might be the only reason the Rams don't repeat atop the standings.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	24%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+310
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	250/1

AMERICAN
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The American Conference has undergone a name change and a lot of turnover over the last few years. The "Athletic" was dropped from the conference's moniker prior to the college football season and we've seen some schools shipped to the Big 12 and others brought in from Conference USA. Ironically, despite the additions of some strong programs, the American only ranked 11th in Bart Torvik's conference ratings last season.

Along those same lines, after boasting five teams in the top 90 of Torvik's rankings for the 2023-24 season, the American only had two teams last season. Memphis was the only team to make the NCAA Tournament and the Tigers were bounced from the Big Dance in the first round in the dreaded 12 over 5 upset. UAB and North Texas went on to have nice runs in the NIT, with the Blazers losing in the quarterfinals and Mean Green in the semifinals.

This season, there are two new head coaches, as South Florida has a more stable situation with Arkansas State head coach Bryan Hodgson after Ben Fletcher took over following the devastating passing of Amir Abdur-Rahim right before the start of last season. The other new head coach is Daniyal Robinson at North Texas, as he moves from Cleveland State to the Lone Star State.

Robinson is a good hire, but you have to wonder where this leaves UNT after Grant McCasland took the Texas Tech job in 2023 and now Ross Hodge is at West Virginia. As a stalwart in both Conference USA and now the American, a drop-off from North Texas opens the door for an improving program like Tulane or East Carolina to rise up and threaten Penny Hardaway's Tigers or Andy Kennedy's Blazers.

The American is littered with teams that excel on one side of the floor. Memphis was the most balanced team on both ends and the conference champ. UAB, Florida Atlantic, and Temple were decidedly better on offense than defense, while North Texas, South Florida, and Wichita State were clearly better on defense.

The team that bridges the gap could go dancing.

PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS BY

ADAM BURKE

Rowan Brumbaugh

CHARLOTTE
49ERS

AMERICAN ATHLETIC
2024-25 RECORDS: 11-22 SU, 16-16 ATS, 18-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 67.0
NATIONAL RANK: #215 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #13 OF 13

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 0-7 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST TWO POINTS LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER IN ROAD GAMES IS 45-28-2 SINCE THE 2019–20 SEASON BEGAN.

OVERVIEW

There are a lot of flawed teams in the American Conference, but one of the areas in which this conference succeeds is on the offensive glass. Charlotte absolutely did not, leading head coach Aaron Fearne down the path of trying to make his team bigger and stronger through the transfer portal and the offseason training programs. Charlotte’s 25.4% ORB% was 312th in the nation per Bart Torvik and 40 spots lower than anybody else in the conference.

Also, with a lack of size, rim protection was an issue, as opponents shot 56.4% on 2s and the team was 323rd in eFG% defense. Fearne brought in five collegiate players that stand 6-foot-7 or higher and also brought over 6-foot-9 Jarne Eyenga from Belgium. Kuluel Mading from Norfolk State stands 6-foot-11 and was an all-conference defender. Scoring points will still be an issue for Charlotte, as leading scorer Nik Graves (17.5 PPG) transferred to Creighton, and the team’s other top two scorers ran out of eligibility. With their plodding style, expect Charlotte to be better defensively, but also offensively challenged.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	4%
CONFERENCE ODDS	100/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	3000/1

EAST CAROLINA
PIRATES

AMERICAN ATHLETIC
2024-25 RECORDS: 19-14 SU, 13-16-2 ATS, 18-13 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 71.0
NATIONAL RANK: #149 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #9 OF 13

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM FINISHED THE SEASON 1-6 ATS IN ITS FINAL SEVEN GAMES AND 1-6 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST EIGHT POINTS.

OVERVIEW

Determining how much momentum is worth in college hoops is difficult to do. With all of the turnover thanks to the transfer portal, players come and go with the wind. But, it really does feel like Mike Schwartz is building something special in Greenville, NC. The Pirates joined the American Conference in 2015 and never had a winning record in league play until last season. They also won the conference tournament opener for the third straight season under Schwartz, though a follow-up victory has evaded them.

Leading scorers RJ Felton (18.8 PPG) and C.J. Walker (16.7) are both gone, a major blow to a team that shot just 31.2% from 3 and just over 49% on 2s. By taking care of the basketball and hitting the offensive glass, the Pirates overcame some of their shooting woes. In-house reserves will have to step up to help top returnee Jordan Riley, but even with some perimeter concerns on offense, better perimeter defense would go a long way. Opponents shot 38.4% from 3 against ECU, ranking 358th in the nation out of 364 teams.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	24%
CONFERENCE ODDS	75/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	3000/1

FLORIDA ATLANTIC
OWLS

AMERICAN ATHLETIC
2024-25 RECORDS: 18-16 SU, 11-20-2 ATS, 17-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 72.0
NATIONAL RANK: #140 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #8 OF 13

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 12-20-1 ATS LAST SEASON AND 1-8 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG.

OVERVIEW

Sustaining success as a mid-major has never been harder. Between the transfer portal and the quick trigger finger from athletic directors who don't want to get pink-slipped alongside the head coach, it is so hard to keep everything together for more than a season or two. Florida Atlantic was a perfect example. Dusty May's spectacular two-year run in Boca Raton led to a job at Michigan. After 60 wins over two seasons, FAU struggled to finish north of .500 at 18-16 and 10-8 in American play.

After riding their best horses very hard through the middle of the season, the Owls' lack of depth was on display with six losses in their final nine games, including a loss to Tulane in the conference tournament with 1.281 points per possession allowed. Now FAU has a completely rebuilt roster with zero returning starters and John Jakus has a tough job ahead of him, even with some power-program transfers. Time is of the essence, as this team is very talented, but very raw all over the floor. Jakus bumped up the tempo last season and I think we see another increase this season.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	15%
CONFERENCE ODDS	30/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	2000/1

MEMPHIS
TIGERS

AMERICAN ATHLETIC
2024-25 RECORDS: 29-6 SU, 16-19 ATS, 19-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 84.0
NATIONAL RANK: #50 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #1 OF 13

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 7-14 ATS IN ITS FINAL 21 GAMES LAST SEASON BUT IS 21-7 ATS VERSUS RANKED TEAMS SINCE THE 2019–20 SEASON BEGAN.

OVERVIEW

Even 29 regular season wins and a 16-2 conference record couldn't help Memphis through the first weekend in the NCAA Tournament. In fact, the Tigers have two first-round losses and a second-round loss during Penny Hardway's tenure, which started with the 2018-19 season. This is a Memphis program that hasn't made it out of the first weekend since John Calipari was there in 2009.

The song remains the same for this season. Memphis is uber-talented, but with all kinds of new faces. They have a new set of starters and a pricey portal class. 247Sports has the Tigers down for five four-star transfers. The rest of the conference has two four-star transfers combined and zero five-star guys. Curtis Givens (LSU), Sincere Parker (McNeese State), Dug McDaniel (Kansas State), Aaron Bradshaw (Ohio State), and Zachary Davis (South Carolina) make up the brightest of the star-studded class. If Penny gets a point guard willing to take better care of the basketball and some bigs as active on the defensive glass as they are on the other end, it has the chance to all come together. Expect defense to be secondary, though, as Hardaway wants to play at a breakneck pace.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	0%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+200
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	200/1

NORTH TEXAS
MEAN GREEN

AMERICAN ATHLETIC
2024-25 RECORDS: 27-9 SU, 18-14-2 ATS, 16-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 77.0
NATIONAL RANK: #98 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #3 OF 13

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WAS 10-2 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL ABOVE 133 LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM IS 6-2-2 ATS AS A ROAD FAVORITE OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

The Mean Green are one of two teams with a new bench boss, as Daniyal Robinson goes from one shade of green to another, moving from Cleveland State to North Texas. Robinson worked under Porter Moser, Greg McDermott, Steve Prohm, and T.J. Otzelberger before getting his first crack as a head coach and the Vikings were 65-42 under his watch. Over three seasons in "The Land", Robinson's Vikings were among the top 62 in TO% on defense per Bart Torvik and even 11th last season. They were also relentless on the offensive glass.

Where Robinson's teams fell short was on the defensive glass. But, his teams played slowly and were in-your-face on defense. That sounds like, well, North Texas over the last few years. The difference for the Mean Green is that they've been 35.7% or better from 3 in six straight seasons. Robinson brought several contributors from Cleveland State, a team that shot just 32.6% from 3. With a transfer-laden roster and an inherent bias towards his Cleveland State kids, I worry that this will be a transitional year for the dudes from Denton in a much more talented conference than the Horizon League.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	0%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+500
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	1000/1

RICE
OWLS

AMERICAN ATHLETIC
2024-25 RECORDS: 13-19 SU, 16-15 ATS, 16-15 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 69.5
NATIONAL RANK: #167 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #12 OF 13

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 3-7-2 ATS AS A HOME UNDERDOG OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS AND WAS 11-6-1 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG LAST SEASON.

OVERVIEW

Wins and losses are the most popular way to evaluate a season, but not always the best way. The bar was pretty low at Rice and they were fortunate to get a pretty good head coach in Rob Lanier, as SMU felt like a 10-win improvement year-over-year in 2023 and 2024 wasn't good enough. So, Lanier found a home with the Owls, who have not put on dancing shoes since 1970. Lanier inherited a pretty bare cupboard from Scott Pera, but took what was leftover and what he could scrounge from the portal to improve by a couple wins.

But, where Rice really improved was on defense. The Owls were 51st in eFG% defense, a jump of more than 240 spots in Bart Torvik's rankings for that stat. It did come at the expense of the offense a bit, as Rice fell backwards in most categories there, but the Owls went from a 37.5% shot share allowed on Close Twos to a 33.7% mark. Unfortunately, they didn't have the slashing guards or the bigs to post up on the other end. Three portal picks at guard who averaged double-digits per game should make for a much improved team.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	18%
CONFERENCE ODDS	90/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	3000/1

SOUTH FLORIDA
BULLS

AMERICAN ATHLETIC
2024-25 RECORDS: 13-19 SU, 8-22-1 ATS, 10-21 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 79.0
NATIONAL RANK: #86 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #2 OF 13

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM HAD THE FOURTH-WORST COVER PERCENTAGE IN THE NATION LAST SEASON AT 9-23 ATS AND WAS 3-13 ATS IN ITS FINAL 16 GAMES.

OVERVIEW

A rewrite was required of last year's team capsule for South Florida when head coach Amir Abdur-Rahim tragically and unexpectedly died on Oct. 24 following complications from a surgical procedure. South Florida was one of the best stories in college basketball during the 2023-24 season, as they won 25 games to set a new program record. Abdur-Rahim's devastating death sent the team into a very tough situation.

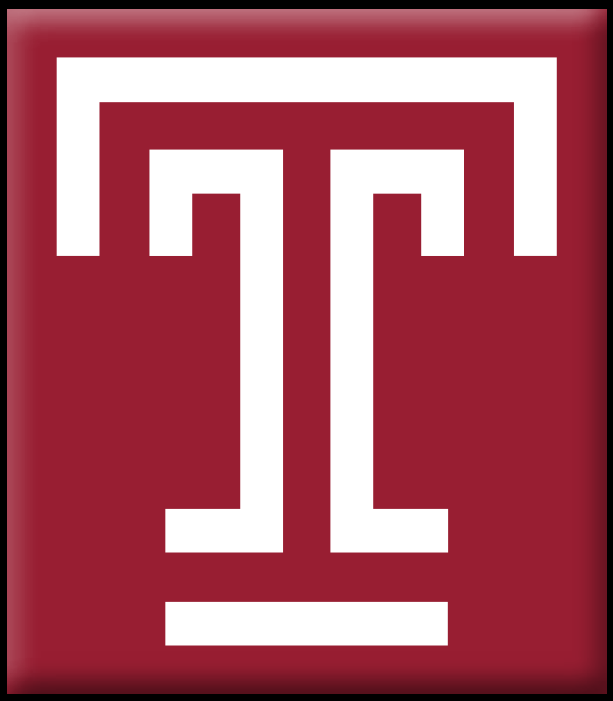
New beginnings are the story in Tampa now, as former Arkansas State head coach Bryan Hodgson brings a lot of changes. The Red Wolves had one of the highest Rim & 3 Rates in the nation and Hodgson will have this team playing at a much quicker pace. The Red Wolves were also much more aggressive on defense than the Bulls, forcing teams into a lot of bad shots. Arkansas State was top 20 in 3P% defense and just outside the top 20 in 2P% defense. With a hodgepodge of transfers, holdovers, and incoming freshmen, this could be organized chaos. It could also be disorganized chaos. The speed with which this all comes together will determine how much of a factor USF is in a conference ripe for somebody to move up the rankings.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	18%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+300
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	200/1

TEMPLE
OWLS

AMERICAN ATHLETIC
2024-25 RECORDS: 17-15 SU, 15-16 ATS, 23-8 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 72.5
NATIONAL RANK: #139 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #7 OF 13



‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM HAD THE SECOND-HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF GAMES GO OVER THE TOTAL LAST SEASON, WITH THE OVER GOING 23-8.

OVERVIEW

The third and final set of Owls in the American Conference are from Philly, as Temple looks ahead to Year 3 of the Adam Fisher tenure. Fisher’s first season was a dud until the AAC Tournament, where the Owls won four games in four days before running out of steam on Day 5 in the championship game against UAB. That team was the subject of a gambling investigation and seemed to flip the switch in late February in hopes of getting the bloodhounds off the scent.

While the Owls lost some big names in Jamal Mashburn Jr., Steve Settle, Zion Stanford, and Quante Berry, they were better without Mashburn’s high-usage, low-efficiency profile on the floor, save for his team-leading 41.9% 3P%. Settle really stretched the floor at 6-foot-10 with a 41.3% rate from deep, but those two and Stanford were not good finishers inside the arc. Temple finished 338th in the nation in eFG% offense in Fisher’s first year and below 50% in his second year. This is probably the most gifted offensive team he has and mild improvement is expected again after a one-win improvement overall and a four-win improvement in league action.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	19%
CONFERENCE ODDS	15/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	1500/1

TULANE
GREEN WAVE

AMERICAN ATHLETIC
2024-25 RECORDS: 19-15 SU, 15-16-1 ATS, 15-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 76.5
NATIONAL RANK: #107 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #5 OF 13

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 2-8 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG OF MORE THAN FOUR POINTS, AND THE OVER IS 36-21-2 IN CONFERENCE GAMES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

Tulane was a lite version of Memphis last season. The Green Wave were 123rd in eFG% offense and 88th in eFG% defense, the smallest gap between the two stats in the conference aside from Memphis, who was 68th in both. Tulane didn't have the shooters, defenders, or talent, but they were about as balanced as a second-tier American Conference team could get. Not surprisingly, they finished fourth in conference record and didn't lose consecutive conference games.

In fact, after losing five in a row from Nov. 22-Dec. 7, Tulane didn't lose consecutive games again until falling to Memphis by a point in the conference tourney and then getting waxed by USC in the inaugural College Basketball Crown in Vegas.

The tragic loss of forward Gregg Glenn III in July left a large void physically and emotionally on the roster. Tulane has two starters back - guards Rowan Brumbaugh and Asher Woods - and will rely on transfers for depth. Expect a lot of jump shots from a team that is mostly devoid of interior scoring, which could crank the team's tempo back up after being one of the fastest in the previous two seasons.

RETURNING STARTERS	**2**
RETURNING MINUTES %	**58%**
CONFERENCE ODDS	**+600**
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	**1500/1**

TULSA
GOLDEN HURRICANE

AMERICAN ATHLETIC
2024-25 RECORDS: 13-20 SU, 14-17 ATS, 15-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 71.0
NATIONAL RANK: #150 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #10 OF 13

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM HAS THE WORST COVER PERCENTAGE IN TRUE ROAD GAMES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS AT 9-24-1.

OVERVIEW

One year removed from an 11-win improvement overall and a six-win improvement in conference games, Eric Konkol and the Golden Hurricane actually won three fewer games and posted a worse conference record last season. This will mark the third time in three years that Konkol goes into a new season without the previous year's leading scorer. It will actually be the second time in as many years that the top two scorers are gone. It's a common thing around the country, but with Tulsa's small enrollment and meager athletic budget compared to other programs, the era of free agency is unkind to this type of program.

Eleven of the 12 roster players are new, though, by design, many of them played significant minutes for their previous institutions. While that will lead to another cycle of turnover again next offseason, Tulsa needs instant offense and defense, as they were poor in both areas last season. Konkol really needs to find some shooters, as his teams haven't finished higher than 271st in 3P% in his three years. To make matters worse, they had a TO% under 15% on defense last season. Empty possessions get magnified by not having enough chances to score.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	11%
CONFERENCE ODDS	25/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	1500/1

UAB
BLAZERS

AMERICAN ATHLETIC
2024-25 RECORDS: 24-13 SU, 18-17-1 ATS, 19-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 77.0
NATIONAL RANK: #99 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #4 OF 13

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 8-2 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF MORE THAN EIGHT POINTS LAST SEASON AND IS 21-9-1 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG OVER THE PAST FOUR SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

Andy Kennedy has had the offense booming in Birmingham, but he had to spend a lot of time looking at film of players on other teams over the spring and summer. As he enters his sixth season at the helm, Kennedy has not won fewer than 22 games overall and 12 games in conference play, including two NCAA Tournament appearances. But, UAB can't keep up with million-dollar NIL packages, so he's got to figure things out without Yaxel Lendeborg.

Kennedy doesn't discriminate in the portal, welcoming deep bench players from major programs or stars for JUCO squads. He's just a good coach and his teams are typically detail-oriented, winning the nightly battle on the offensive glass and in the turnover department. That said, UAB's TO% on defense has dropped in all five seasons under Kennedy, bottoming out at 15.2% last season. That needs to change this season, as the Blazers have less margin for error without a guy like Lendeborg, even if they brought in some exciting and talented transfers. UAB's early-season tempo will tell us what Kennedy thinks of his team, as they played around average in 2024 and much faster in 2025.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	14%
CONFERENCE ODDS	12/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	2000/1

UTSA
ROADRUNNERS

AMERICAN ATHLETIC
2024-25 RECORDS: 12-19 SU, 15-13-1 ATS, 17-12 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 69.5
NATIONAL RANK: #166 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #11 OF 13

OVERVIEW

The problems that plagued Steve Henson were also part of the growing pains for Austin Claunch last season. The first-year UTSA head coach kept up the pace and found some much better perimeter shooters, but his Roadrunners were awful on the glass on both ends and couldn't make 2-point shots. One area where Claunch was successful, though, was in forcing more turnovers. But, even with a spike to 36.1% from 3, which ranked 60th in the nation, and a defensive TO% increase of 7.5% that took the team from 352nd to 28th, UTSA only won one more game.

Are the Roadrunners a positive regression candidate? They went 5-12 in Close Games, which are games decided by six or fewer points. This is a team that took Saint Mary's to overtime early in the season. And a team that lost nine conference games, including their lone conference tourney tilt, by five or fewer points and another by seven in OT. Stanley Borden and Mo Njie are two viable centers that can split time and good perimeter shooters have me onboard with a big leap in Claunch's second year. This roster is more "him" than last year's.

RETURNING STARTERS 0

RETURNING MINUTES % 14%

CONFERENCE ODDS 75/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 1500/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 0-6 AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST TWO POINTS LAST SEASON AND 12-6-2 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG.

WICHITA STATE
SHOCKERS

AMERICAN ATHLETIC
2024-25 RECORDS: 19-15 SU, 15-16-2 ATS, 13-20 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 74.5
NATIONAL RANK: #117 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #6 OF 13

OVERVIEW

This might be the American Conference program most impacted by college basketball free agency, both in a good way and a bad way. Quincy Ballard averaged 10 PPG, 9.2 RPG, and 1.9 BPG, but the big two-way presence is gone, along with second-leading scorer and rebounder Corey Washington, who both transferred to Power Four programs with much deeper pockets. But, Wichita State did the same to programs beneath them, adding some good guard and wing players, including UNC Greensboro's Kenyon Giles.

So, Wichita State is more of a guard-oriented team, likely to have an uptick in pace for Paul Mills. For a team that shot 30.2% from 3 and finished 286th in eFG% offense, the upgrades with the shooters and ball handlers can only help. On the other hand, 247Sports gave Wichita State the lowest grade in their transfer portal rankings and the Shockers didn't find many ways to address post scoring or rim protection. As it is, Wichita State took too many mid-range jumpers for my liking and I bet we see more this season. I'm low on this group relative to other teams in that tier of the conference.

RETURNING STARTERS 0

RETURNING MINUTES % 1%

CONFERENCE ODDS 18/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 2000/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WAS 12-6 IN THE TEAM'S FINAL 18 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM IS 20-12-2 ATS ON THE ROAD OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS.

Mikel Brown

ACC
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

This ACC season promises to be a good one, with Duke and Louisville starting atop the oddsboard. Duke sits at +165 to win the regular season, bringing in a top recruiting class, including the Boozer twins and Dame Sarr, as Jon Scheyer rebuilds after last year's Final Four run. Louisville, just behind at +200, relies on a few major contributors from last year's 18-2 ACC squad and supplementing the core with key guard additions via the transfer portal, along with the addition of star freshman Mikel Brown.

North Carolina (+700) and NC State (+750) sit on the next line. The Tar Heels underwent another roster overhaul under Hubert Davis, aiming for more perimeter shooting and steady defense to cure last year's inconsistency. NC State is a potential disruptor; Will Wade's first full season comes loaded with upside, including deep-pocketed booster support and a roster built for athletic, defensive play. If Wade's new pieces come together quickly, the Wolfpack's odds could look generous by midseason.

Looking for value? Virginia (15/1) is intriguing under Ryan Odom, fresh off a 28-7 campaign at VCU, while Clemson (25/1) is always dangerous under Brad Brownell. Miami (28/1) is quietly on the rise behind new coach Jai Lucas, an elite recruiter with impact newcomers already drawing attention. Don't count out SMU (30/1) either: They're deep, athletic, and capable of shooting their way to relevance if things fall right.

While Duke and Louisville headline the conference odds, there's volatility across the rest of the ACC. Duke's raw youth presents road challenges, Louisville's stability hinges on its new additions, and North Carolina's offensive recalibration could produce big swings either way. NC State is the wildcard, sporting enough ceiling to bust open the market.

With several talented coaches working at programs near the basement, don't be surprised if a few perceived bottom-feeders overperform — this league can shift quickly, and sharp bettors should keep an eye on developments through the winter.

PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS BY

ZACHARY COHEN

BOSTON COLLEGE
EAGLES

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 12-19 SU, 13-18 ATS, 18-13 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 76.5
NATIONAL RANK: #106 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #18 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 29-45 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE PLAY SINCE THE 2018–19 SEASON BEGAN, AND THE OVER IN ROAD GAMES SINCE THE 2019–20 SEASON BEGAN IS 42-22, THE THIRD-HIGHEST ROAD OVER PERCENTAGE IN AMERICA DURING THAT SPAN.

OVERVIEW

After winning 20 games in 2023-24, Boston College came crashing back to earth last season. The Eagles went 12-19 overall and 4-16 in ACC play, and they finished 181st in the nation in KenPom's adjusted efficiency margin.

The Eagles were a mess on both ends of the floor. Offensively, they turned the ball over a ton, they shot the three poorly, and they were even worse when it came to 2P% (47.5%). Defensively, BC got lit up from deep, they fouled a lot, and the team couldn't rebound.

This year, it's hard to be optimistic. Earl Grant did a decent job of improving his depth, but this group lacks high-level scorers, they're small compared to other ACC programs, and they're working in a ton of newcomers.

A lot will fall on the shoulders of Donald Hand Jr., who averaged 15.7 points and 6.1 rebounds per game last year. He has proven to be a stud for this Eagles team. But who can help him when BC takes on high-quality opponents?

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	36%
CONFERENCE ODDS	250/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

CALIFORNIA
GOLDEN BEARS

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 14-19 SU, 19-13-1 ATS, 17-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 78.0
NATIONAL RANK: #90 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #16 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 7-2 ATS IN ITS LAST NINE GAMES LAST SEASON AND IS 16-8 ATS IN ROAD GAMES OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

Mark Madsen can really coach. He built Utah Valley into a winner, and though Cal went just 14-19 in their first ACC season, the Golden Bears were 19-13-1 against the spread.

This year, Madsen faces a tougher test. Andrej Stojakovic, who averaged 17.9 points, transferred to Illinois, and Jeremiah Wilkinson (15.1 PPG) left for Georgia — both major scoring losses. Madsen might need to channel his inner Coach Carter: "I guess we'll have new leading scorers this season, huh?"

Still, there's promise. Virginia transfer Dai Dai Ames should run the offense and shoot it well, while Delaware's John Camden is a lethal stretch big. Chris Bell arrives from Syracuse as another reliable floor spacer. Madsen will hope Justin Pippen (Michigan), Rytis Petraitis, Lee Dort, and Milos Ilic (Loyola Maryland) can form a capable supporting cast.

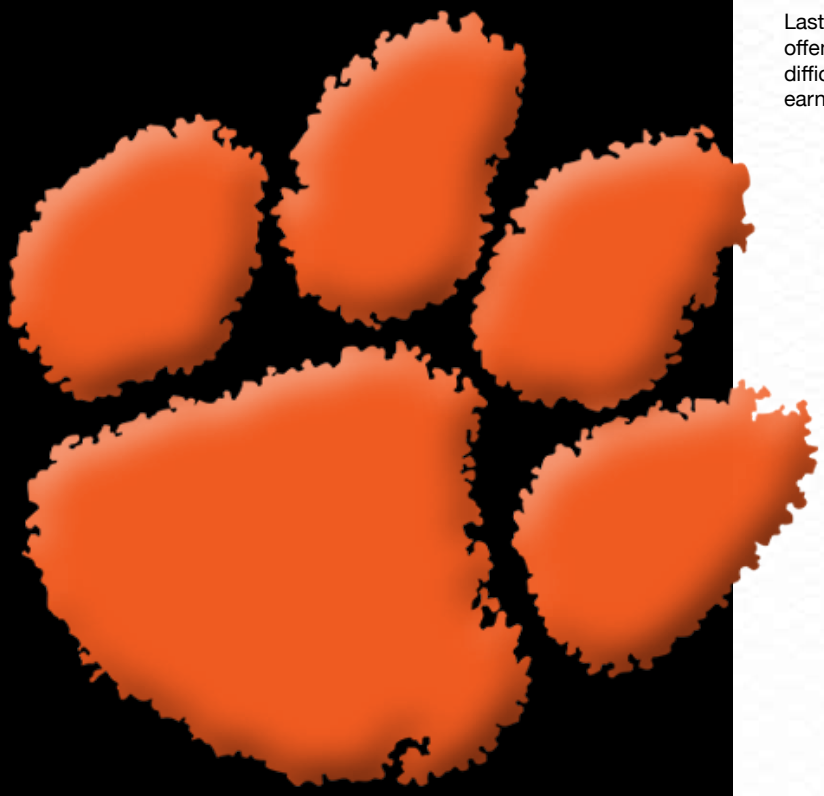
Expect this team to play disciplined ball — crashing the glass, defending the arc, and valuing smart shots. Whether that's enough for a surprise run remains to be seen.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	32%
CONFERENCE ODDS	130/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

CLEMSON
TIGERS

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 27-7 SU, 20-14 ATS, 17-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 86.0
NATIONAL RANK: #38 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #5 OF 18



‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TIGERS ARE 16-8 ATS IN ROAD GAMES OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS AND 16-8-2 ATS VERSUS RANKED TEAMS SINCE THE 2019–20 SEASON BEGAN.

OVERVIEW

Brad Brownell has won at least 20 games in five of the last eight seasons, and Clemson’s Elite Eight run in 2023-24 showed how far this program has come. The Tigers have become a steady top-half team in the ACC, even finishing tied for second with an 18-2 conference mark last year. Still, this season could go either way.

Clemson loses Chase Hunter, Ian Schieffelin, Jaeden Zackery, and Viktor Lahkin from last year’s roster, putting pressure on Dillon Hunter to deliver as a full-time starter. Nevada transfer Nick Davidson should also play a major role after averaging 15.8 points, 6.5 rebounds, and 2.8 assists per game. His inside-out scoring touch could make him the centerpiece of Brownell’s offense, and the staff will be counting on new transfers and touted recruits to fill key spots.

Last year’s team ranked top-30 nationally in KenPom’s adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency metrics, a balance that may be difficult to replicate with so much turnover — even with Brownell earning the benefit of the doubt.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	11%
CONFERENCE ODDS	22/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	150/1

DUKE
BLUE DEVILS

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 35-4 SU, 25-14 ATS, 20-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 94.0
NATIONAL RANK: #4 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #1 OF 18

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 17-7 ATS LAST SEASON AS A FAVORITE OF MORE THAN 12 POINTS AND 9-2 ATS IN TRUE ROAD GAMES.

OVERVIEW

For much of last season, Duke looked like the best team in college basketball, led by Naismith Player of the Year and future No. 1 NBA pick Cooper Flagg. Jon Scheyer’s first Final Four run as head coach ended in a loss to Houston, but the Blue Devils were No. 1 in KenPom’s adjusted efficiency margin and boasted a near-flawless statistical profile.

With Flagg gone, Scheyer turns to Cameron Boozer, son of Carlos, as his new centerpiece. Boozer — ranked No. 3 in the 2025 ESPN 100 — is a sharp, three-level scorer who reads the game beautifully. His brother Cayden should also make an impact, likely coming off the bench behind Caleb Foster and Isaiah Evans, but always making the right plays and strengthening an already solid backcourt.

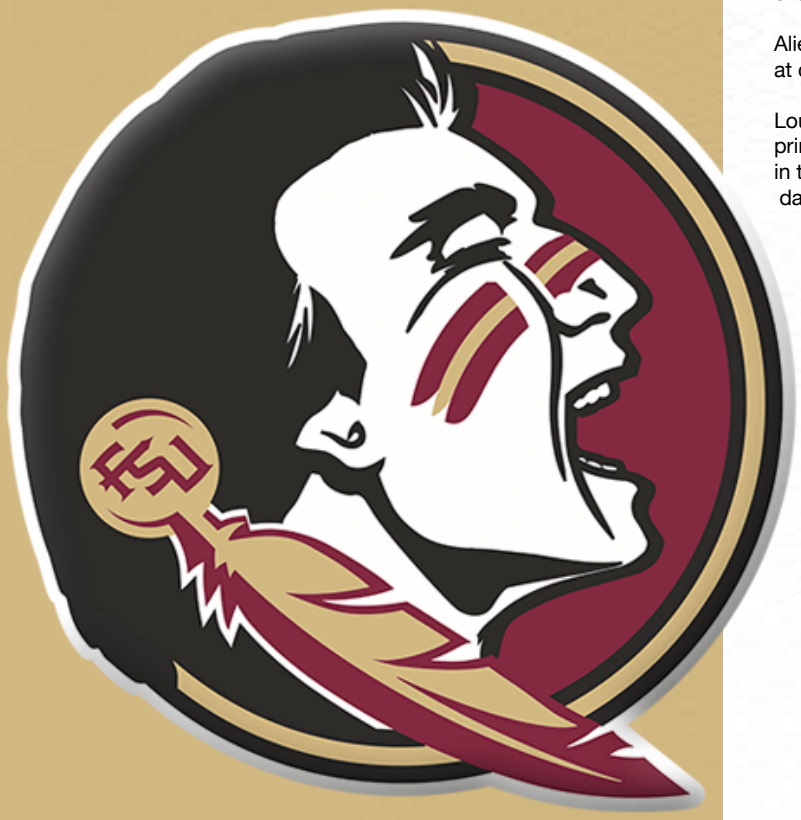
Dame Sarr adds another dimension as an athletic wing with elite defensive chops and an evolving offensive game. Duke brings enough depth to survive growing pains, and it might take time to fully click, but come March, few will want to face a Boozer-led squad. The Cameron Crazies have another contender to watch.

RETURNING STARTERS	**0**
RETURNING MINUTES %	**26%**
CONFERENCE ODDS	**+160**
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	**13/1**

FLORIDA STATE
SEMINOLES

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 17-15 SU, 17-15 ATS, 13-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 78.0
NATIONAL RANK: #88 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #15 OF 18



'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 3-8 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG OF MORE THAN THREE POINTS LAST SEASON.

OVERVIEW

Florida State is kicking off a new era with Luke Loucks at the helm. The former FSU player and NBA assistant brings fresh energy and a modern approach.

Robert McCray looks ready to take control at point guard after averaging 16.2 points, 4.8 rebounds, and 4.5 assists per game for Jacksonville last year, while Drexel transfer Kobe MaGee and UMass Lowell transfer Martin Somerville give Loucks some snipers.

On the wings, transfers Lajae Jones (St. Bonaventure) and Chauncey Wiggins (Clemson) bring size and switchability, along with an ability to knock down triples. There's also Alex Steen, who was a big-time performer at Florida Southern and looks up to the challenge of producing at this level.

Alier Maluk and Egor Ryzhov figure to handle most of the minutes at center, adding rim protection and paint presence to the group.

Loucks' system should lead to more pace, and the roster looks primed to gun up threes. So even with some growing pains early in the year, the Seminoles could settle in and be one of the more dangerous sleeper teams in the ACC.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	10%
CONFERENCE ODDS	150/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	300/1

GEORGIA TECH
YELLOW JACKETS

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 17-17 SU, 16-18 ATS, 15-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 79.5
NATIONAL RANK: #81 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #14 OF 18

OVERVIEW

Last year marked real progress for Georgia Tech, going from 14-18 overall and 7-13 in the ACC to a 17-17 finish and 10-10 conference mark in Damon Stoudamire's second season. The Yellow Jackets earned a first-round ACC tournament bye and made an NIT appearance, putting the focus this year on breaking the 20-win barrier and climbing higher in league play.

Baye Ndongo headlines the roster again after averaging 13.4 points, 8.9 rebounds, and 1.1 blocks per game — a dominant interior force who gives Tech a fighting chance against anyone in the ACC. Pairing him with four-star Mouhamed Sylla in the frontcourt sets this group up for success, and Sylla's decision to pick Tech over programs like Kansas shows Stoudamire is doing something right.

Kam Craft, a sharp-shooting transfer who hit 43% from 3 at Miami Ohio, adds vital spacing to an offense that needed a boost on the perimeter. Beyond those three, consistent production is still a question, but count on Georgia Tech for top-100 defense and a real chance to be a thorn in the side for the rest of the ACC.

RETURNING STARTERS 1

RETURNING MINUTES % 26%

CONFERENCE ODDS 180/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 500/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 3-9 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES LAST SEASON BUT IS 6-2 ATS VERSUS RANKED TEAMS OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

LOUISVILLE
CARDINALS

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 27-8 SU, 20-15 ATS, 13-22 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 89.5
NATIONAL RANK: #17 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #2 OF 18

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WENT 17-6 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL OF 147.5 OR HIGHER, AND THE TEAM WENT 6-2 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG LAST SEASON, WITH BOTH NON-COVERS COMING AGAINST DUKE.

OVERVIEW

Louisville was in a tailspin under Kenny Payne, but Pat Kelsey wasted no time flipping the script. In his first year, the Cardinals jumped to 27-8 and tied for second in the ACC with an 18-2 mark, riding a top-30 offense and defense in Bart Torvik’s metrics and leaning hard into Kelsey’s three-heavy attack.

The next challenge is clear — can this team turn into a real title threat? Chucky Hepburn and Terrence Edwards Jr. are gone, but J’Vonne Hadley and Kasean Pryor are back as proven starters at the forward spots. Five-star freshman Mikel Brown brings instant juice to the backcourt, capable of creating offense in a blur. He teams up with Xavier transfer Ryan Conwell, who averaged 16.5 points on elite efficiency, to headline what might be the most dangerous perimeter group in the country.

Shots will fly, and if the 3s are falling, Louisville will be near impossible to keep up with. The question is interior grit — BYU transfer Aly Khalifa is more of a pick-and-pop center than bruiser, so we’ll see if this group is tough enough inside to take the final leap.

RETURNING STARTERS	4
RETURNING MINUTES %	32%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+200
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	20/1

MIAMI
HURRICANES

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 7-24 SU, 11-20 ATS, 19-12 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 82.0
NATIONAL RANK: #66 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #10 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 11-20 ATS OVERALL LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER WENT 7-0 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL OF 144.5 OR LOWER.

OVERVIEW

Jim Larranaga leaves Miami as a legend, but even he knew it was time for new blood — and the Hurricanes landed a potential star in Jai Lucas. Lucas, once a top assistant at Duke, arrives with the reputation as an elite recruiter and player developer, backed by some serious NIL resources that should let Miami take real swings in the talent market.

Lucas wasted zero time making his mark, flipping five-star wing Shelton Henderson from Duke and reeling in Michigan transfer Tre Donaldson, who put up 11.3 points and 4.1 assists per game while shooting 37.5% from 3 last season. Expect Henderson to be an impact guy right away, with Donaldson running the show as a reliable lead guard who can also fill it up. Tru Washington, a physical guard from New Mexico, is in the mix for a starting role, and freshmen Dante Allen and Jordyn Kee bring more upside to a revamped backcourt rotation.

The frontcourt has the bigger question marks. Ernest Udeh is a big-body transfer from TCU, but Indiana transfer Malik Reneau may be a better option playing as a small-ball five.

Lucas has a plan in place, and the talent will come. This year is about building, but it won't be long before Miami's aiming higher than a first-weekend March cameo.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	0%
CONFERENCE ODDS	35/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	180/1

NORTH CAROLINA
TAR HEELS

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 23-14 SU, 16-21 ATS, 19-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 88.0
NATIONAL RANK: #25 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #3 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM CLOSED THE SEASON 9-2 ATS IN ITS FINAL 11 GAMES, AND THE OVER WAS 10-4 IN NON-CONFERENCE PLAY.

OVERVIEW

North Carolina enters the season under plenty of pressure after another letdown under Hubert Davis. The Tar Heels finished around No. 20 in adjusted offensive efficiency at KenPom and Bart Torvik, but defensive struggles sank them to fourth in the ACC and an early NCAA exit. Twenty-three wins would be solid for most teams, but not in Chapel Hill — this program expects championships, and Davis must deliver a March run.

The backcourt is where UNC could shine. Kyan Evans looks like one of the best off-the-dribble shooters in college hoops after posting 10.6 points and 3.1 assists on elite shooting splits at Colorado State. Seth Trimble, fresh off an 11.6-point, 5.0-rebound year, should take a leap. Derek Dixon, a touted freshman, brings more perimeter juice.

At forward, Luka Bogavac offers perimeter versatility and freshman phenom Caleb Wilson is explosive and skilled. Henri Veesaar, from Arizona, provides a steady presence in the paint, while Jarin Stevenson (Alabama) is an interesting big.

UNC should figure things out defensively this year, and there's no reason the Heels can't thrive offensively. The big question: can Davis get it all clicking when it matters?

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	14%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+800
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	60/1

NC STATE
WOLFPACK

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 12-19 SU, 10-20-1 ATS, 12-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 86.0
NATIONAL RANK: #37 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #4 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 1-6 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF FEWER THAN 10 POINTS LAST SEASON, AND THE UNDER WAS 8-3 IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES.

OVERVIEW

Will Wade's arrival in Raleigh brings sky-high expectations, with NC State's boosters fully behind him and a retooled roster ready to compete. Wade's talent evaluation and aggressive roster building make the Wolfpack one of the most intriguing teams in the ACC.

Wade's handing the keys to senior point guard Tre Holloman, who comes over from Michigan State with a steady hand and defensive grit. At shooting guard, Wade can start either Matt Able, a highly-touted freshman with three-level scoring, or sharpshooter Paul McNeil, one of the league's purest shooters. Transfer additions Terrance Arceneaux (Houston) and Darrion Williams (Texas Tech) give NC State an elite forward duo — Arceneaux brings versatility and defense, while Williams was Tech's best offensive player and offers floor spacing and toughness at the four. Down low, Ven-Allen Lubin's (UNC) length and two-way impact anchor the frontcourt. And Quadir Copeland (McNeese State) provides energy and athletic upside as a multi-positional contributor off the bench.

This group's upside starts on defense — Wade's last LSU team ranked top-10 nationally in adjusted defensive rating, and this Wolfpack roster could similarly suffocate opponents. If the offense comes along, this could be an elite ACC team.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	3%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+750
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	60/1

NOTRE DAME
FIGHTING IRISH

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 15-18 SU, 15-17-1 ATS, 16-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 81.0
NATIONAL RANK: #69 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #11 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WAS 7-2 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL OF 145 OR HIGHER LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM WAS 3-11 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST FOUR POINTS.

OVERVIEW

Notre Dame's backcourt is pretty freaking good. Markus Burton returns after averaging 21.3 points per game on 44.2/37.5/84.8 shooting, giving the Irish a lead guard who can score from anywhere. Braeden Shrewsberry, son of head coach Micah Shrewsberry, chipped in 14.0 points and shot 36.9% on 7.5 threes per game. These two can get hot fast.

On the wing, Sir Mohammed hopes for a Year 2 jump, but the real buzz is about five-star Jalen Haralson — strong, versatile, and nearly hole-free in his game. He can start at the three or four, easing pressure if Mohammed stalls. Carson Towt, a Northern Arizona transfer who led the Big Sky in rebounds (12.4) and is a sharp passer, should be a big-minute connective piece. Freshmen Ryder Frost, Tommy Ahneman, and Brady Koehler could carve out roles, with Ahneman possibly cracking a thin center rotation after Kebba Njie's defensive struggles last year.

This backcourt should guarantee at least a middle-of-the-pack ACC finish. But to contend, the defense must flirt with top-60 production — a big "if" given the youthful roster.

RETURNING STARTERS	3
RETURNING MINUTES %	54%
CONFERENCE ODDS	120/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	250/1

PITTSBURGH
PANTHERS

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 17-15 SU, 13-19 ATS, 15-15 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 82.0
NATIONAL RANK: #62 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #9 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 1-8 ATS IN ITS FINAL NINE GAMES LAST SEASON AND 1-7 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF SEVEN POINTS OR FEWER.

OVERVIEW

Pitt's frontcourt should be tough. Dishon Jackson, a 6-foot-11 transfer from Iowa State, is an upgrade at center and brings some real rim protection. Alongside him is Cam Corhen, who averaged 11.0 points and 5.2 boards per game in a productive 2024-25 season. Barry Dunning Jr., a springy senior from South Alabama, slides in at the three with defensive playmaking and improving offense.

Oregon State transfer Damarco Minor is steady at point guard. But Pitt will be counting on Nojus Indrusaitis, a sophomore transfer from Iowa State with a scorer's mentality, and Omari Witherspoon, a freshman shooter, to add some much-needed offense. Brandin Cummings and Macari Moore will provide productive backcourt minutes off the bench.

Henry Lau and Roman Siulepa bring depth on the wing, while Papa Amadou Kante, Amdy Ndiaye, and Kieran Mullen make up a physically imposing group of bench bigs.

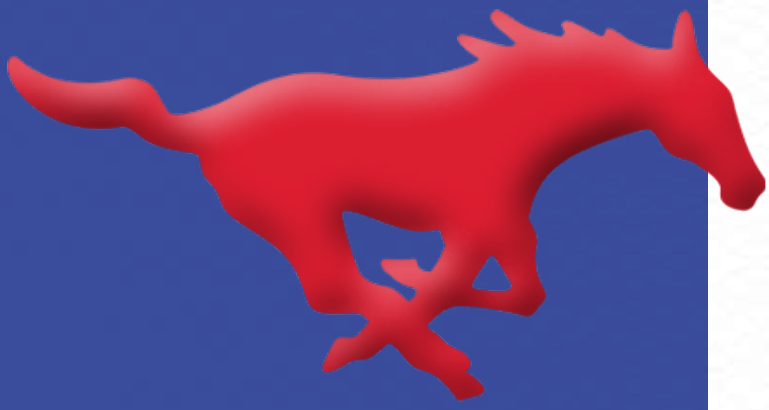
Defense and rebounding should be Pitt's calling cards, but outside shooting could hold the Panthers back. There will be scoring droughts. They were 53rd in adjusted offensive efficiency last year, and matching that could be a challenge in 2025-26.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	25%
CONFERENCE ODDS	75/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

SMU
MUSTANGS

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 24-11 SU, 17-17-1 ATS, 18-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 84.5
NATIONAL RANK: #43 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #6 OF 18



'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

SIX OF THE TEAM'S FINAL SEVEN GAMES WENT UNDER THE TOTAL, AND THE TEAM IS 17-9-1 ATS AS A ROAD FAVORITE OVER THE PAST FIVE SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

SMU finished 48th in KenPom's adjusted offensive efficiency last season, and Andy Enfield's group quietly built a strong statistical profile. The Mustangs shot 37.8% from 3, protected the paint, and attacked the offensive glass with purpose. Their biggest shortcomings came in defending the arc and cleaning up the defensive boards. Things should be better in 2025-26.

This backcourt should be outstanding. Boopie Miller and B.J. Edwards return from last year's rotation, now joined by Jacksonville State transfer Jaron Pierre Jr., who averaged 21.6 points, 5.5 rebounds, and 3.8 assists while hitting nearly three triples per game. Pierre gives SMU a dynamic shot creator and could push the offense into top-25 territory.

Inside, center Samet Yigitoglu provides a high-level finisher to balance the guard-heavy attack. Enfield also added Michigan transfer Sam Walters, a reliable shooter, and Wichita State's Corey Washington, a versatile two-way piece. Four-star freshman Billy White III could emerge as an elite sixth man — if he doesn't push for a starting job sooner.

Talent-wise, SMU belongs in the same tier as many ACC contenders. The team just needs to play the right way.

RETURNING STARTERS	3
RETURNING MINUTES %	39%
CONFERENCE ODDS	25/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	130/1

STANFORD
CARDINAL

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 21-14 SU, 16-19 ATS, 16-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 77.0
NATIONAL RANK: #95 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #17 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 4-11 ATS IN ITS FINAL 15 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE UNDER WAS 12-4 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL OF 146 OR HIGHER.

OVERVIEW

In Kyle Smith's first year at Stanford, the Cardinal went 21-14 and won an NIT game, a welcome rebound after back-to-back losing seasons under Jerod Haase. Now the goal is an NCAA Tournament return, though high academic standards limit transfer portal options — a challenge with Maxime Raynaud, Jaylen Blakes, and Oziyah Sellers gone.

Chisom Okpara and Ryan Agarwal will have to lead the way. Okpara starred at Harvard two years ago (16.5 points, 5.0 rebounds) but struggled in his first Stanford season, posting just 6.5 points in limited minutes. Regaining his Crimson form is crucial. Agarwal, a big, versatile guard, is poised for a breakout.

Jeremy Dent-Smith, who put up big numbers at Cal State Dominguez Hills, should run the offense, while Benny Gealer, Donavin Young, and Aidan Cammann must take steps forward.

Smith's teams are disciplined, tough, and hard to beat, so this could be a strong ATS team. But a talent deficiency could mean another year near the bottom of the ACC standings.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	54%
CONFERENCE ODDS	250/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

SYRACUSE
ORANGE

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 14-19 SU, 17-13-3 ATS, 16-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 81.0
NATIONAL RANK: #70 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #12 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WAS 8-2 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL OF 146 OR LESS LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM WAS 14-7-1 ATS AGAINST ACC COMPETITION.

OVERVIEW

Syracuse went 14-19 last season and finished outside the KenPom top-150 in defensive efficiency — a far cry from the stingy defenses of Jim Boeheim's tenure. Offense wasn't the answer either, with the Orange ranking outside the top-100. Adrian Autry enters Year 3 under pressure to deliver.

On paper, the roster looks dangerous. Autry landed Naithan George, the ACC's top passer a year ago, from Georgia Tech. Pairing George with J.J. Starling, who averaged 17.8 points, gives Syracuse a strong backcourt. Oregon State transfer Nate Kingz — who hit 44.6% of his 3s — adds critical spacing.

The frontcourt should intimidate, led by sophomore Donnie Freeman, who posted 13.4 points and 7.9 boards as a freshman. William Kyle (UCLA) and Ibrahim Souare (Georgia Tech) provide rim protection and physicality at the five. Talented freshmen Sadiq White, Luke Fennell, and Kiyan Anthony — son of program legend Carmelo Anthony — add intrigue. Anthony will be treated like royalty on Marshall Street.

With this mix of talent, Syracuse has the pieces to make noise in the ACC and earn a March Madness bid. The question is whether Autry can make it all click.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	27%
CONFERENCE ODDS	40/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	200/1

VIRGINIA
CAVALIERS

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 15-17 SU, 13-19 ATS, 19-13 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 83.0
NATIONAL RANK: #55 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #8 OF 18

OVERVIEW

If there's an "outsider" that can crash the Duke-Louisville party, it's Ryan Odom and Virginia. The Cavaliers were in a tough spot last season after Tony Bennett's retirement left longtime assistant Ron Sanchez as interim coach. Virginia still ran the same stale offense — but with a shaky roster and players who weren't fully bought in. The program clearly needed a reset, and Odom brings exactly that, with a modern approach that should transform how the Hoos play.

Expect a faster pace, sharper shot selection, and more creativity across the board. The backcourt could be special, led by San Francisco transfer Malik Thomas, who averaged 19.9 points per game. He's joined by deadly shooters Jacari White (North Dakota State), Dallin Hall (BYU), and Sam Lewis (Toledo). UC Irvine's Devin Tillis brings versatility at the four, while Spanish forward Thijs de Ridder offers shooting and skill.

The only concern is at center — where Odom will rely on former Kentucky five-star Ugonna Onyenso or German big man Johann Grunloh. If either hits, Virginia becomes a real threat.

RETURNING STARTERS 0

RETURNING MINUTES % 0%

CONFERENCE ODDS 18/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 130/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WAS 14-6 IN THE TEAM'S FINAL 20 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM IS 10-20 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

VIRGINIA TECH
HOKIES

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 13-19 SU, 13-18-1 ATS, 16-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 81.0
NATIONAL RANK: #71 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #13 OF 18

OVERVIEW

Toibu Lawal returns after averaging 12.4 points and 7.0 rebounds last season, and Mike Young added West Virginia's Amani Hansberry to pair with him up front. The Hokies may be a bit undersized inside, but their collective motor and toughness should make the frontcourt a real strength.

The perimeter is where things look murky. Ben Hammond needs to take a major step forward after showing flashes in his limited role last year, and transfer Jailen Bedford brings shooting after productive stints at Oral Roberts and UNLV. Jaden Schutt should log big minutes at the three; he was steady for Virginia Tech last season, but will now be asked to scale up as a more featured piece.

The swing factor for this team is Neoklis Avdalas, a versatile wing with a point guard's skill set. If he's comfortable handling some primary creation duties early, he could reshape Virginia Tech's offense and raise both its floor and ceiling. His development might be what determines the Hokies' competitiveness in the ACC.

RETURNING STARTERS 3

RETURNING MINUTES % 47%

CONFERENCE ODDS 100/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 500/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 2-9 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES, TIED FOR THE FIFTH-WORST NON-CONFERENCE COVER PERCENTAGE IN THE COUNTRY, AND IS 10-24 ATS IN ROAD GAMES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS — THE THIRD-WORST ROAD COVER PERCENTAGE IN THE NATION DURING THAT SPAN.

WAKE FOREST
DEMON DEACONS

ACC
2024-25 RECORDS: 21-11 SU, 14-18 ATS, 13-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 83.5
NATIONAL RANK: #54 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #7 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 0-7 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST NINE POINTS LAST SEASON, AND THE UNDER WAS 9-2 IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES.

OVERVIEW

Steve Forbes has done an excellent job with Wake Forest, but replacing Hunter Sallis won't be easy. Sallis averaged 18.3 points, 5.1 rebounds, and 2.8 assists last year, emerging as one of the ACC's top players during his two seasons in Winston-Salem. The Deacs also lost Cameron Hildreth, whose efficiency wasn't there but could heat up in a hurry.

This group will look very different, but the ceiling's intriguing if the new pieces fit. Up front, Tre'Von Spillers, Omaha Biliew, and Valparaiso transfer Cooper Schweiger (15.8 PPG, 7.8 RPG) give Forbes options. Biliew and Spillers are high-energy wrecking balls, while Schweiger is a stretch big that'll be searching for his stroke after shooting just 29.9% from deep last year.

The perimeter mix has upside too. Nate Calmese flamed out at Washington but was productive at Lamar and Washington State. Purdue transfer Myles Colvin can slash and finish, and Juke Harris is a breakout candidate on the wing. Forbes' teams rarely struggle to score, but with this much turnover, Wake could swing either way.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	28%
CONFERENCE ODDS	80/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	400/1

BIG 12
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Houston (+155) comes off a fantastic 2024-25 season, going 35-5 and finishing as NCAA Tournament runner-up after a heartbreaker against Florida. Kelvin Sampson's group carries some emotional scars into the new year, but with a loaded roster, the Cougars look ready to turn pain into payback. They're the rightful Big 12 favorite — and a legitimate national title threat.

That said, the Big 12 is again absolutely stacked. BYU (+450), Texas Tech (+500), Kansas (+750), Iowa State (+800), Arizona (+850), and Baylor (20/1) all have the firepower to challenge Houston's grip on the league.

BYU, with Kevin Young's three-happy system and No. 1 recruit A.J. Dybantsa, has some buzz thanks to booster money flowing like Swig soda in Provo. Texas Tech lost Darrion Williams and Chance McMillian from last year's Elite Eight run, but Grant McCasland reloaded well. Kansas hasn't met expectations since cutting down the nets in 2022, but No. 2 recruit Darryn Peterson could flip the Jayhawks' ceiling. Iowa State again features one of the country's best starting fives, and a leap from Milan Momcilovic could push the Cyclones into title territory. Arizona blends stud freshmen, proven returners, and international talent, while Baylor still can't be dismissed with Scott Drew on the bench.

The league's lower tier looks shakier. Cincinnati (50/1) and Kansas State (75/1) appear a notch above the rest, and Jamie Dixon's TCU (90/1) group hopes to rebound after a rare .500 year. Still, the Frogs might find themselves closer to the conference cellar, where UCF (150/1), Oklahoma State (150/1), Utah (180/1), Arizona State (200/1), and Colorado (250/1) all reside. West Virginia's (100/1) future also looks uncertain after Darian DeVries' departure for Indiana.

Even with a few weak links, the Big 12 remains as deep and entertaining as any conference in the country — and this league should again provide plenty of value for bettors as the season unfolds.

PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS BY

ZACHARY COHEN

Emanuel Sharp

ARIZONA
WILDCATS

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 24-13 SU, 19-17-1 ATS, 21-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 91.0
NATIONAL RANK: #13 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #3 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 20-11 ATS AS A HOME FAVORITE OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS, AND THE UNDER WENT 4-0 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL UNDER 146 LAST SEASON.

OVERVIEW

Arizona finished last season 13th in KenPom's adjusted efficiency rankings, ending the year 11th on offense and 38th on defense. Still, the season was mildly disappointing. The Wildcats lost 13 games — their most under Tommy Lloyd — and fell in the Sweet 16, keeping Lloyd from taking the next step with the program or matching Sean Miller's postseason success.

This year's roster offers a legitimate chance to change that. While others sit higher on the futures board, Arizona's ceiling is high. Jaden Bradley, a poised floor general and relentless defender, pairs nicely in the backcourt with McDonald's All-American Brayden Burries, one of the most dangerous freshman scorers in the country. Lloyd's likely forwards are senior sharpshooter Anthony Dell'Orso and star freshman Koa Peat, a rugged yet skilled four who should thrive right away. At center, Tobe Awaka is undersized but rebounds and protects the rim as well as anyone.

Behind them, Arizona's bench brings depth and international flair — plus Bryce James, whose presence may occasionally draw LeBron to the McKale Center. This team is feisty, talented, and deep, so all goals should be achievable.

RETURNING STARTERS	3
RETURNING MINUTES %	41%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+850
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	30/1

ARIZONA STATE
SUN DEVILS

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 13-20 SU, 16-16-1 ATS, 17-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 80.5
NATIONAL RANK: #72 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #13 OF 16

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 6-2 ATS IN NEUTRAL-COURT GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER WENT 10-3 IN THE TEAM’S FINAL 13 GAMES.

OVERVIEW

There’s real pressure on Bobby Hurley this season, as the Sun Devils are coming off back-to-back losing years and Arizona State AD Graham Rossini might not tolerate another. The football program has soared under Kenny Dillingham, and Rossini made a splashy move by hiring former GCU coach Molly Miller to lead the women’s basketball team. He’s clearly intent on making ASU a destination — which means Hurley has to deliver.

Moe Odum was an important pickup at point guard. The Pepperdine transfer averaged 13.1 points and 7.5 assists last season and brings poise and strong decision-making to a key position. Marcus Adams Jr. (Cal State Northridge) gives the Sun Devils a versatile scoring wing, while the rest of the rotation features a mix of JuCo transfers and international talent.

Having a steady point guard helps, and Odum should keep everyone organized while helping the newcomers settle in. Still, this roster remains unproven, and Hurley may not have added enough 3-point shooting to change ASU’s fortunes.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	2%
CONFERENCE ODDS	200/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	250/1

BAYLOR
BEARS

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 20-15 SU, 14-17-3 ATS, 18-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 88.5
NATIONAL RANK: #22 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #7 OF 16

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 10-18-2 ATS IN ITS LAST 30 GAMES LAST SEASON AND 1-9-2 ATS IN ROAD GAMES, THE SECOND-WORST ROAD COVER PERCENTAGE IN THE COUNTRY.

OVERVIEW

Baylor’s entire rotation from last season is gone, but Scott Drew reloaded quickly. Tounde Yessoufou, ranked No. 9 in the 2025 ESPN 100, should be one of the best two-way players in the Big 12 from day one. The explosive wing has a relentless motor and thrives attacking the rim. Drew also surrounded him with proven veterans from the transfer portal.

Obi Agbim, a senior guard from Wyoming, and Michael Rataj, a stretch four from Oregon State, headline the newcomers. Agbim averaged 17.6 points and 3.4 assists last year while shooting 46.9% from the field and 43.7% from 3. Rataj put up 16.9 points and 7.2 rebounds on 48.4% shooting and 35.1% from deep. Both can stretch the floor — critical given Yessoufou and center Juslin Bodo Bodo (High Point) aren’t perimeter threats. It’ll be interesting to see if Cincinnati transfer Dan Skillings has refined his jumper, or if sharpshooter JJ White (44.2% from 3 at Omaha) pushes for his spot.

Either way, Drew has built a long, athletic group that can run, defend, and cause problems for anyone. There’s potential here.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	0%
CONFERENCE ODDS	20/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	50/1

BYU
COUGARS

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 26-10 SU, 22-14 ATS, 22-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 91.5
NATIONAL RANK: #11 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #2 OF 16

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WAS 12-3 IN BYU’S LAST 15 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM WENT 13-4 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST FIVE POINTS.

OVERVIEW

Kevin Young delivered exactly what he promised in his first season — an NBA-style attack. The Cougars finished fifth in Bart Torvik’s adjusted offensive efficiency, shot 36.8% from 3, and ranked fifth nationally in two-point percentage. Young’s Moreyball-inspired scheme emphasized open 3s and rim looks, and BYU executed it beautifully.

This season’s roster could elevate that formula even further. Freshman phenom A.J. Dybantsa, the nation’s top recruit, gives BYU a 6-foot-9 scorer who can create in isolation and get tough buckets when possessions stall. His choice to spurn bigger brands for Provo speaks volumes about the program’s trajectory.

Richie Saunders, who averaged 16.5 points on elite shooting splits (51.8/43.2/83.5), will thrive off Dybantsa’s scoring gravity. Young also infused the backcourt with talent, adding Baylor transfer Robert Wright III and Southern Illinois’ Kennard Davis — both dynamic creators who fit BYU’s pace-and-space vision. If big man Keba Keita anchors the interior and cleans the glass, the Cougars’ offensive ceiling could be among the nation’s highest, despite some size concerns.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	38%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+450
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	17/1

CINCINNATI
BEARCATS

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 19-16 SU, 16-19 ATS, 13-22 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 86.5
NATIONAL RANK: #32 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #8 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WENT 23-12 LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM IS 17-32 ATS VERSUS RANKED TEAMS SINCE THE 2016–17 SEASON BEGAN.

OVERVIEW

Wes Miller is still chasing his first NCAA Tournament berth at Cincinnati. The former UNC Greensboro coach has had some 20-win seasons with the Bearcats, but the breakthrough moment has yet to arrive. Could this be the year?

Cincinnati finished as a top-20 defensive team last season — the second time under Miller they've reached that level. His defensive chops are well established, and this group should stay in that range again. Miller brought in long, switchable wings and added UCF transfer Moustapha Thiam, a 6-foot-11 defensive anchor who averaged 10.4 points, 6.4 rebounds, and 2.6 blocks last season. He looks every bit like an NBA prospect.

At guard, Kerr Kriisa (Kentucky) brings playmaking and fearlessness, while Jordi Rodriguez, a skilled Spanish shooter, and five-star wing Shon Abaev add firepower on the perimeter. Another key piece is 6-foot-11 forward Baba Miller, who averaged 11.3 points and 7.0 rebounds at FAU and could be a difference-maker.

It's hard to say Cincinnati is a sleeper to win the Big 12 at 50/1, as doing that is unrealistic. However, this Bearcats team is a candidate to massively exceed expectations.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	26%
CONFERENCE ODDS	50/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	200/1

COLORADO
BUFFALOES

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 14-21 SU, 18-16-1 ATS, 15-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 79.5
NATIONAL RANK: #79 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #16 OF 16

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 45-80-2 ATS ON THE ROAD SINCE THE 2014–15 SEASON BEGAN, THE WORST MARK AMONG ALL TEAMS THAT HAVE SPENT THE PAST FIVE YEARS OR MORE AT THE DIVISION I LEVEL.

OVERVIEW

The 2024-25 season was the roughest of Tad Boyle’s tenure in Boulder. Colorado stumbled to a 14-20 record and just 3-17 in conference play — an unexpected fall after posting five 20-win seasons in the previous six years.

The 2025-26 campaign could bring more growing pains. Boyle has two dependable pieces in Sebastian Rancik and Bangot Dak, both expected to start in the frontcourt. Rancik, a skilled 6-foot-11 forward, stretches defenses with his perimeter touch, while Dak brings energy as a rim protector and lob threat. The Buffaloes also landed UC Riverside transfer Barrington Hargress, a scoring guard who averaged 20.2 points and 4.0 assists last season.

Beyond that trio, proven production is scarce. Depth and experience remain major question marks, and those issues tend to get exposed in a conference this competitive. The bright side is that Elijah Malone is the only senior projected to start. That means this team might take some lumps this season, but the potential for a big 2026-27 is there.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	23%
CONFERENCE ODDS	250/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

HOUSTON
COUGARS

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 35-5 SU, 21-19 ATS, 14-25 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 96.0
NATIONAL RANK: #1 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #1 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WENT 8-2-1 IN THE TEAM'S FINAL 11 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND HOUSTON COVERED ALL THREE GAMES LAST YEAR AS A FAVORITE OF 30 POINTS OR MORE.

OVERVIEW

Houston came within minutes of a national championship last April and returns much of the core that fueled that run. The Cougars finished second in KenPom's adjusted efficiency last season behind their trademark defense and blue-collar intensity, and Kelvin Sampson's group looks built to contend again — especially with him growing as an offensive coach.

Milos Uzan returns to run the point. The steady upperclassman defends, distributes, and dictates Houston's pace. He's joined in the backcourt by five-star freshman Isiah Harwell, an ultra-talented scorer expected to make an immediate impact. Emanuel Sharp provides shot-making on the wing, while Joseph Tugler — the reigning Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year — and five-star big Chris Cenac Jr. form one of the nation's scariest frontcourts.

Off the bench, Mercy Miller adds offensive burst, Kingston Flemings offers playmaking, and transfer Kalifa Sakho (Sam Houston State) supplies size and rim protection.

The culture Sampson has set means Houston will be elite defensively and relentless on the glass. Adding top-end talent and unmatchable depth to that equation means another deep NCAA Tournament is an expectation — and possibly destiny.

RETURNING STARTERS	3
RETURNING MINUTES %	43%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+155
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	+950

IOWA STATE
CYCLONES

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 25-10 SU, 20-15 ATS, 15-20 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 91.0
NATIONAL RANK: #14 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #4 OF 16

OVERVIEW

T.J. Otzelberger has a loaded group in Ames this season. While Keshon Gilbert and Curtis Jones are gone, Tamin Lipsey returns to steer the ship after averaging 10.6 points and 3.1 assists per game. He's a savvy playmaker who can attack the rim and should shoot better than last year's 33.1% from deep. Freshman Jamarion Batemon could be an instant fit next to him, though Nate Heise offers versatility and reliable shooting if Otzelberger prefers experience early.

Milan Momcilovic gives Iowa State one of the nation's most complete small forwards. The 6-foot-8 sharpshooter stretches defenses and continues to evolve as a creator. If he makes another leap, the Cyclones could easily push into Final Four contention, especially with Joshua Jefferson and Blake Buchanan (Virginia) forming a strong frontcourt pairing.

Iowa State finished last year top-25 in both offensive and defensive efficiency, and this roster feels balanced enough to hit those marks again — or maybe even raise them.

RETURNING STARTERS 3

RETURNING MINUTES % 53%

CONFERENCE ODDS +800

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 50/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WENT 5-0 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL BELOW 139 LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM WENT 8-3 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF FEWER THAN NINE POINTS.

KANSAS
JAYHAWKS

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 21-13 SU, 13-20-1 ATS, 13-21 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 89.0
NATIONAL RANK: #19 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #6 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WENT 10-2 IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES LAST SEASON, WITH THE TEAM GOING 2-10 ATS IN THOSE 12 GAMES.

OVERVIEW

It's only been three years since Kansas lifted the trophy, but the pressure is mounting after three straight early tournament exits. Bill Self enters 2025-26 with a roster that could change everything.

It all starts with freshman Darryn Peterson, who is a near-lock for No. 1 in next year's NBA Draft. Peterson's blend of athleticism, advanced ball skills, and polished scoring makes him the clear offensive centerpiece even with Elmarko Jackson returning at point guard after missing last year with injury. Self is counting on Peterson's two-way prowess to drive the Jayhawks.

Up front, Flory Bidunga steps into the void left by Hunter Dickinson. Bidunga's rim protection and energy give Kansas a defensive anchor with real upside. Around them, Loyola Chicago transfer Jayden Dawson adds shooting and reliability on the wing, while Tre White (Illinois) and Bryson Tiller offer athleticism and versatility at the four.

Kansas projects to defend at an elite level, leveraging their length and flexibility, and should lean heavily on Peterson's shot creation in high-leverage moments. If the 3-point shooting exceeds expectations, the Jayhawks have the talent to chase a third national title under Self.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	9%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+750
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	25/1

KANSAS STATE
WILDCATS

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 16-17 SU, 17-16 ATS, 12-20 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 82.5
NATIONAL RANK: #60 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #10 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WENT 9-1 IN THE TEAM'S FINAL 10 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND KANSAS STATE WENT 6-16 ATS AGAINST BIG 12 TEAMS.

OVERVIEW

Jerome Tang and Kansas State are looking to rebound after a 16-17 season, missing the NCAA Tournament for the first time since he took over. This year's roster has been retooled, blending proven transfers with international talent in hopes of regaining Big 12 relevance.

Memphis transfer P.J. Haggerty, one of the nation's top scorers, pairs with sophomore David Castillo to form one of the league's most explosive backcourts. Abdi Bashir Jr., one of college basketball's best shooters last season at Monmouth, and Akron transfer Nate Johnson bring perimeter spacing and defensive toughness. Up front, newcomers Dorin Buca and 7-foot freshman Andrej Kostic provide interior versatility, while returners Taj Manning and Mobi Ikegwuruka add experience in Tang's aggressive defensive system.

Kansas State's identity will hinge on pace, pressure, and switching. The Wildcats can defend multiple positions and run a tempo built to wear opponents down — but they'll need to shoot better than last year's 32.5% from 3 and execute late in close games. If the offense becomes more efficient and the defense meshes early, this version of K-State has a shot at returning to the NCAA Tournament.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	17%
CONFERENCE ODDS	75/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	150/1

OKLAHOMA STATE
COWBOYS

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 17-18 SU, 16-19 ATS, 20-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 81.5
NATIONAL RANK: #68 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #12 OF 16

OVERVIEW

Steve Lutz made clear progress in his first year at Oklahoma State. The Cowboys had gone 12-20 the season prior, finishing outside the KenPom top 125 in both offensive and defensive efficiency. In Lutz's first year in Stillwater, they improved to 17-18, ranked 72nd in adjusted defense, and reached the NIT quarterfinals. He's injected a stronger identity built on ball pressure and an uptempo style that stresses easy transition buckets. Oklahoma State forced tons of turnovers last season and played at the 13th-fastest tempo nationally.

Defensively, though, there's still plenty to fix. The Cowboys struggled mightily guarding the arc, protecting the rim, and rebounding — issues that could linger after failing to land a proven center.

Lutz has reloaded the backcourt with transfers Kanye Clary (Mississippi State), Isaiah Coleman (Seton Hall), Christian Coleman (UAB), Anthony Roy (Green Bay), Jaylen Curry (UMass), and Vyctorius Miller (LSU). The plan is to continue pushing tempo while improving on last year's lousy 33.1% shooting from 3.

The direction is there, and Lutz's track record inspires confidence — but talent remains thin, making another sub-.500 season likely.

RETURNING STARTERS 1

RETURNING MINUTES % 9%

CONFERENCE ODDS 150/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 500/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 25-43-1 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG OVER THE PAST FOUR SEASONS, AND THE OVER IS 21-14 IN HOME GAMES OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

TCU
HORNED FROGS

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 16-16 SU, 12-20 ATS, 11-21 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 82.5
NATIONAL RANK: #58 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #9 OF 16

OVERVIEW

Jamie Dixon was clearly bothered by last year's woeful shooting (30.0% 3P%), and it shaped everything about TCU's offseason approach. He loaded up on proven shooters — Brock Harding (Iowa), Jayden Pierre (Providence), and Tanner Toolson (BYU) headline a revamped backcourt, all capable of burying open triples. JUCO All-American Xavier Edmonds adds skill up front, while David Punch injects athleticism and versatility at forward.

Rebounding and interior defense should remain calling cards for the Horned Frogs, but lingering concerns remain. Perimeter quickness, reliable shot creation, and high-major scoring pedigree all look questionable. This team will shoot it better, but who can break down defenses and consistently create in isolation?

Dixon believes improved spacing and a 3-heavy shot diet will be the keys to an NCAA Tournament return. But TCU's backcourt now lacks size, which could be an issue defensively. The half-court offense could also be a problem with nobody that can truly create their own shot. It should be another trying year in Fort Worth as the Horned Frogs scrap to finish above .500.

RETURNING STARTERS 1

RETURNING MINUTES % 28%

CONFERENCE ODDS 90/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 300/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 3-8 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST FOUR POINTS LAST SEASON, AND THE UNDER WAS 13-4 IN HOME GAMES.

TEXAS TECH
RED RAIDERS

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 28-9 SU, 19-18 ATS, 23-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 90.0
NATIONAL RANK: #16 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #5 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WAS 8-1 IN THE TEAM'S FINAL NINE GAMES LAST SEASON, BUT THE TEAM IS 13-26 ATS IN NEUTRAL-COURT GAMES OVER THE PAST SIX SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

Losing Darrion Williams and Chance McMillian stings, but Grant McCasland did a good job reloading around JT Toppin coming off last year's Elite Eight run.

Christian Anderson slides into the lead guard spot, flanked by transfer shooters Donovan Atwell (UNC Greensboro) and Tyeree Bryan (Santa Clara) — both 40% 3-point threats who'll stretch defenses to their limits. Washington State's LeJuan Watts and VCU's Luke Bamgboye should log heavy minutes and add much-needed physicality. Bamgboye, especially, brings rim protection after averaging 2.1 blocks per game last season.

Defensively and on the glass, this group should hold its own, and there's a lot of offensive upside if Anderson pops. Still, three starters are gone and working in so many new faces could take time. Also, if Toppin's 3-ball doesn't improve, too many lineups could feature two non-shooters. So a lot hinges on him being more than just an athletic play-finisher. Tech shot 36.7% from deep last year and might struggle to live up to that.

Even with some uncertainty, Tech has the talent, coaching, and toughness to contend in the Big 12 — and make real noise in March again.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	28%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+500
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	25/1

UCF
KNIGHTS

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 20-17 SU, 18-19 ATS, 21-15 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 80.0
NATIONAL RANK: #76 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #14 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 8-3 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG OF AT LEAST SIX POINTS, AND THE OVER WAS 15-4 IN ROAD AND NEUTRAL-COURT GAMES LAST SEASON.

OVERVIEW

If there's a Big 12 team capable of escaping the aforementioned cellar, it might be Johnny Dawkins' UCF Knights. After last year's 20-win season, this roster was stripped down to the studs, but Dawkins has rebuilt it with a fascinating mix from the portal.

Riley Kugel, once projected as a potential first-round pick, arrives in Orlando after productive stops at Florida and Mississippi State. He's a bouncy, unpredictable wing who impacts games even if it never looks pretty. Joining him is BJ Freeman, who averaged 13.7 points at Arizona State after dropping 21.1 per game at Milwaukee. Freeman's a proven three-level scorer who could thrive in this new environment. At point guard, Milwaukee transfer Themus Fulks averaged 14.6 points and 5.9 assists last year — an aggressive, creative playmaker who keeps defenses honest.

Up front, Jamichael Stillwell adds muscle and scoring punch after averaging a double-double, while 7-foot-2 John Bol provides size and rim protection. Expect this team to defend and run with energy, but shooting will determine its ceiling — Dawkins needs a few true floor-spacers to emerge. He also needs some reliable bench pieces.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	0%
CONFERENCE ODDS	150/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

UTAH
UTES

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 16-17 SU, 15-18 ATS, 15-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 79.5
NATIONAL RANK: #78 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #15 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UTES ARE 9-24 ATS IN ROAD GAMES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS, THE SECOND-WORST ROAD COVER PERCENTAGE IN THE NATION DURING THAT SPAN.

OVERVIEW

Alex Jensen's first year running Utah could be rough. With only a few returners and double-digit newcomers, this is a full teardown — and there's no real headliner on the roster.

Keanu Dawes is the only notable holdover, but he shouldn't be the best player in a Big 12 frontcourt. Jensen will need meaningful production from Ibi Traore. Transfers like Jahki Howard (Auburn), Terrence Brown (Fairleigh Dickinson), and Elijah Moore (Syracuse) bring some intrigue, but none has proved himself at a high-major level. The Utes should scrap defensively and attack the offensive glass, but shot creation, perimeter shooting, and chemistry remain major question marks.

Jensen's NBA background is intriguing, but he's never led a college program before, and integrating so many new faces in the Big 12 is a monumental task. Utah may have a higher ceiling in the future, but for now, the lack of continuity and star power makes this team a likely candidate to finish near the bottom of the league. This team might not match last year's top-75 production in both adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	9%
CONFERENCE ODDS	180/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

WEST VIRGINIA
MOUNTAINEERS

BIG 12
2024-25 RECORDS: 19-13 SU, 16-16 ATS, 9-22 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 82.0
NATIONAL RANK: #61 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #11 OF 16

OVERVIEW

Losing Darian DeVries to Indiana was a gut punch, erasing the brief sense of optimism he brought to Morgantown. New coach Ross Hodge inherits a shell of a roster and a long rebuild ahead. Only one scholarship holdover remains from last season, and most of the roster comes from mid-major programs. The defensive-minded Hodge will attempt to install the deliberate, grind-it-out style that worked at North Texas — the Mean Green were top-50 in adjusted defensive efficiency and 362nd in adjusted tempo last year — but Big 12 firepower is a different animal.

Jasper Floyd and Brenen Lorient followed Hodge, while transfers Honor Huff (Chattanooga) and Treysen Eaglestaff (North Dakota) are expected to shoulder the scoring load. Seven-footer Harlan Obioha (UNC Wilmington) brings a physical presence but limited offensive polish. Freshmen like Amir Jenkins and DJ Thomas may be pressed into early roles.

West Virginia should compete hard and be a decent ATS team — and possibly a good Under team — but the lack of Big 12-ready talent and offensive creation looms large. Hodge's disciplined approach might yield a few gritty wins, but it's hard to imagine this group being too far from the bottom of the league.

RETURNING STARTERS 0

RETURNING MINUTES % 0%

CONFERENCE ODDS 100/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 250/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE MOUNTAINEERS HAD THE SECOND-HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF GAMES GO UNDER THE TOTAL LAST SEASON, WITH THE UNDER GOING 22-9-1.

Zuby Ejiofor

BIG EAST
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Relatively small, but very, very mighty, the 11-team Big East Conference looks impressive again. But, it is a conference featuring a lot of parity. Five teams made the NCAA Tournament last season, with St. John's as a No. 2 seed and the rest of the teams seeded No. 7 through No. 11. None of them made it out of the first weekend, as everybody beating everybody in the Big East hurt the seed lines for most of them.

As dazzling as a lot of the metrics were for the teams in Bart Torvik's fourth-ranked conference, none of the teams ultimately stacked up as well as some thought. UConn's run of NCAA Tournament destruction ended in a 77-75 loss to Florida in a game that absolutely could have gone either way and been a springboard for the Huskies to have a shot at running it back for the third straight year.

Two new head coaches are part of the conference this year, as Kevin Willard returns to the Big East, but he'll be in Philadelphia with Villanova and is now a rival of his former employer, Seton Hall. Richard Pitino is now in the same conference as his father, as he took over at Xavier for Sean Miller. Those should be some spirited games, given that Dad's St. John's team is a top-10 caliber group going into the season with one of the strongest transfer portal classes in the nation.

St. John's, UConn, and Creighton seem to stand out over the rest, as Villanova and Xavier are in a transitional year and Marquette and Providence are dealing with heavy losses. Seton Hall's dramatic fall last season with just two wins in 20 conference games flew under the radar a bit because of DePaul's competitiveness. Maybe Georgetown is a team on the rise after doubling their win total from Year 1 to Year 2 of the Ed Cooley era.

What we know for sure is that this conference will have a lot of big non-conference games early and some pivotal conference games late.

PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS BY

ADAM BURKE

BUTLER
BULLDOGS

BIG EAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 15-20 SU, 17-17-1 ATS, 21-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 80.0
NATIONAL RANK: #75 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #8 OF 11

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WENT 15-4-1 IN THE TEAM’S LAST 20 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND BUTLER IS 23-38-1 ATS IN CONFERENCE GAMES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

Thad Matta had two objectives in the transfer portal - get bigger and get a facilitator. Without a true point guard last season, the Bulldogs were forced to make a lot of tough shots. Without reliable rim protection, they suffered defensively, allowing at least 1.1 points per possession in the majority of their Big East games and especially during a 2-9 start in conference play.

Matta secured Yohan Traore, Michael Ajayi, and Drayton Jones from SMU, Gonzaga, and SC State, respectively. He also got Fort Wayne PG Jalen Jackson. Putting those guys around Finley Bizjack, who shot 43% from 3 last season, should give the Bulldogs the opportunity to play an inside-out game and also continue to have scoring from the wing like they did last season. Jackson averaged 19 PPG and Jones 13 PPG, plus incoming freshman Jack McCaffrey, who had over 20 PPG as a senior.

But, none of that matters if they don’t get better defensively. There were 364 Division I teams last season and Butler was 362nd in TO%. Matta’s Ohio State teams often had a 21%+ TO%, so expect more aggression on that end of the floor.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	15%
CONFERENCE ODDS	70/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	250/1

CONNECTICUT
HUSKIES

BIG EAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 24-11 SU, 16-18-1 ATS, 16-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 94.5
NATIONAL RANK: #3 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #1 OF 11

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM HAS THE BEST NON-CONFERENCE AGAINST-THE-SPREAD RECORD IN THE COUNTRY OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS AT 37-8-2.

OVERVIEW

Dan Hurley nearly yelled and screamed and whined his way to another deep NCAA Tournament run, but the Huskies fell a bucket short against Florida, who would go on to win it all. At least there had to be a little solace in that. To knock off the two-time champs, the Gators actually had to win the head-to-head battle in the Month of Madness.

A collection of issues led to UConn's downfall. For the second straight season, they really struggled to force turnovers. For the second time in three seasons, they ranked in the 300s in Free Throw Rate Against. They were 121st in 3P%, so they weren't able to outshoot their mistakes like the previous two iterations of the team. Unlike a lot of teams around the nation, though, Hurley didn't have to rebuild from the ground up. Holdovers from last season's team like Alex Karaban (14.3 PPG, 1.5 BPG), Solo Ball (14.4 PPG), and Tarris Reed JR. (9.6 PPG, 7.3 RPG, 1.6 BPG) gave Hurley the chance to develop within instead of spending big money portal shopping. That said, new combo guard Silas Demary Jr. and PG Malachi Smith are impactful adds.

RETURNING STARTERS	3
RETURNING MINUTES %	56%
CONFERENCE ODDS	/105
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	13/1

CREIGHTON
BLUEJAYS

BIG EAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 25-11 SU, 20-14-2 ATS, 18-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 87.5
NATIONAL RANK: #29 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #3 OF 11

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 2-6 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF MORE THAN 11 POINTS LAST SEASON AND IS 17-7 ATS IN ROAD GAMES OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

All good things must come to an end, including NCAA eligibility. It feels like an eternity for some players in school, but Greg McDermott probably wishes he had another year with Ryan Kalkbrenner, Steven Ashworth, and Jamiya Neal. Pop Isaacs still has another year left, but he'll do it at Texas A&M. In terms of returning production, the Bluejays only return 36.7% of last season's minutes per Bart Torvik and the aforementioned quartet accounted for 63.9 of the team's 75.5 points per game. They also accounted for 23.7 rebounds per game, nearly all of the team's assists, and Kalkbrenner himself had nearly 60% of the team's blocks.

Despite those immense absences, expectations remain high. High Point's Alan Huss is now on the staff as the head coach-in-waiting and helped secure some key transfers, including Josh Dix (14.4 PPG) and Owen Freeman (16.7 PPG) from Iowa and PG Nik Graves (17.5 PPG) from Charlotte. Year over year, Creighton went from 36.8% on 3s to 34.5%. With the loss of Kalkbrenner, these newcomers need to shoot really well to pick up the slack.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	37%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+675
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	55/1

DEPAUL
BLUE DEMONS

BIG EAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 14-20 SU, 17-17 ATS, 20-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 79.0
NATIONAL RANK: #84 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #10 OF 11

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 6-22-2 ATS AS A HOME FAVORITE OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS, AND THE OVER IS 42-28 AT HOME DURING THAT SPAN.

OVERVIEW

Referring to a 14-20 season with a 4-16 conference record as a "good year" is tough to do. For DePaul, that was a good year. First-year head coach Chris Holtmann topped the team's win totals overall and in conference play over the last two seasons combined. He injected some new life into a dormant program that hasn't made the NCAA Tournament since 2004 and only has three winning seasons since, with the last in 2018-19.

It goes without saying that this is a tough job, but there will be some continuity on the roster for Year 2 under Holtmann. Leading scorer CJ Gunn (12.9 PPG) is back and third-leading scorer Layden Blocker (9.5 PPG). The 6-foot-7 Gunn had a 24.9% usage rate to lead the team, but also led the team in 3-point attempts with 175. The hope is that guys like Kaleb Banks (Tulane) and RJ Smith (Colorado) can give Gunn more opportunities inside the arc, where he was far more efficient.

Like others in the conference, DePaul didn't take the basketball away enough and had a below average offensive rebounding percentage, so they didn't pick up extra possessions to increase the margin for error. That is a 2025-26 focus.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	36%
CONFERENCE ODDS	100/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

GEORGETOWN
HOYAS

BIG EAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 18-16 SU, 18-15-1 ATS, 15-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 79.0
NATIONAL RANK: #83 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #9 OF 11

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 6-2 ATS AS A ROAD UNDERDOG LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER IS 23-13 IN ITS ROAD GAMES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

College basketball needs rivalries. It thrives on rivalries. Just ask Ed Cooley about the games when he returns to Providence. The Hoyas have lost both trips to Cooley's previous employer, but aside from those setbacks, this is a team moving forward. Cooley and the team went from 9-23 to 18-16 and won six more Big East games in the process. It was actually the Hoyas' first ranking inside Bart Torvik's top 100 since 2020-21 when they were a tournament team during the shortened season at 13-13.

Injuries ultimately derailed Georgetown and the replacement underclassmen got some on-the-job training. The Hoyas are sixth in the 11-team conference in percentage of returning minutes per Torvik, but Cooley was able to go shopping this offseason with his team back on the map. 247Sports has the Hoyas ranked third among Big East teams in transfer points and Torvik has them fourth. Last year's team struggled with shot-making, ranking ninth among conference members in 3P%.

Per 247, Cooley's four four-star transfer recruits are tied for the third-most in the conference, but none of them were prolific scorers at their previous spots. Defensively, they're probably better. Offensively, probably not.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	31%
CONFERENCE ODDS	80/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	300/1

MARQUETTE
GOLDEN EAGLES

BIG EAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 23-11 SU, 13-19-2 ATS, 14-20 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 85.0
NATIONAL RANK: #42 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #4 OF 11

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE GOLDEN EAGLES WENT 3-10 ATS IN THEIR FINAL 13 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE UNDER WENT 9-2 WHEN THE TOTAL WAS 149 OR HIGHER.

OVERVIEW

This year is a pivotal one for Marquette. Head coach Shaka Smart prioritizes the roster within instead of the external possibilities. The Golden Eagles were a Sweet Sixteen team two seasons ago and a No. 2 seed in back-to-back NCAA Tournaments. This past season, they were a No. 7 seed and got bounced immediately by New Mexico.

Once again, Marquette had one of the best turnover margins in the nation, but this time, they didn’t shoot well enough to take advantage of it. Smart’s teams have dropped from 58.2% to 56.6% to 54.7% on 2s and from 35.3% to 35.2% to 32.6% on 3s. By not utilizing the portal to fill holes and address questions, it remains to be seen who will replace stat sheet filler Kam Jones, who led the team in points and assists by a large margin, or David Joplin, who was second in points and tops in rebounds.

Chase Ross and Ben Gold were fourth and fifth, respectively, in points, and Sean Jones, who played in 16 games two seasons ago with just 5.8 PPG and a 25.7% 3P%, is back from a torn ACL.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	54%
CONFERENCE ODDS	22/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	180/1

PROVIDENCE
FRIARS

BIG EAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 12-20 SU, 14-18 ATS, 16-15 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 84.0
NATIONAL RANK: #48 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #5 OF 11

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 2-8 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST THREE POINTS LAST SEASON, AND THE UNDER IS 16-6-1 IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

Sometimes breaking up is a good thing. The Friars were unable to keep Bryce Hopkins around, but the cloud of his availability and the way in which he seemed to dictate the personality of the team simply might be addition by subtraction. He also moved on to St. John's, adding a little more fuel to the fire when Kim English's team takes on the Johnnies.

Moving on from Hopkins should help because it allowed the team to address the offensive needs of the roster in the portal. Grad transfer Jason Edwards has been a proven scorer at multiple schools. A healthy Jaylin Sellers coming off of a season-ending back injury also provides instant offense. Based on the composition of the roster, the Friars are likely to play a lot of small lineups, but that might not be a bad thing in the Big East, where Seton Hall was the only team with greater than a 42% shot share on Close Twos per Bart Torvik.

We know that English's teams will play defense. In his stint as George Mason's head coach and as an assistant at Tennessee with Rick Barnes, defense was a priority. Providence missed that memo last season.

RETURNING STARTERS	**1**
RETURNING MINUTES %	**41%**
CONFERENCE ODDS	**35/1**
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	**300/1**

SETON HALL
PIRATES

BIG EAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 7-25 SU, 13-19 ATS, 15-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 77.0
NATIONAL RANK: #100 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #11 OF 11

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 2-5 ATS AS A FAVORITE LAST SEASON AND IS 8-14 ATS ON THE ROAD OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

What a rough year it was for Shaheen Holloway, as the Pirates didn’t make enough shots from anywhere on the floor. Despite the highest shot share on Close Twos of any Big East team at 42.5%, the Pirates were 357th in FG% on those types of shots. They also couldn’t make enough 3s, finishing 308th in the nation in 3P%. After his miracle run to the Elite Eight with Saint Peter’s, Holloway took the Seton Hall job and went 42-28 in two seasons before a 7-25 effort last season with a 2-18 Big East record.

The team battled a litany of injuries, but Holloway and his coaching staff jumped at the opportunity to turn a bad season into a positive by completely overhauling the offense. This is almost an entirely brand new roster, with two returnees who combined for 6.3 PPG. Things couldn’t get much worse, if we’re being honest, as the Pirates were 358th in 2P%.

The Pirates have a bunch of lower-level transfers that put up numbers. Adam Clark had nearly 20 PPG at Merrimack. Elijah Foster was just shy of 16 PPG at Merrimack. TJ Simpkins had 15 PPG. Will it be enough?

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	15%
CONFERENCE ODDS	100/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

ST. JOHN'S
RED STORM

BIG EAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 31-5 SU, 22-13-1 ATS, 15-21 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 90.5
NATIONAL RANK: #15 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #2 OF 11

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WENT 11-5 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL OF 145 OR LESS LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM WAS 14-7-2 ATS VERSUS BIG EAST OPPONENTS.

OVERVIEW

After making the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2019, Rick Pitino wasn't satisfied. The Red Storm even won their conference tournament for the first time since 2000. But, they didn't make it to the Sweet 16 or better and haven't done that any year that begins with 20. Looking to capitalize on the success of a 30-win regular season, the Johnnies went to the NCAA Tournament with high hopes as a No. 2 seed. They didn't make it out of the first weekend, going 2-of-22 from 3 against No. 10 Arkansas.

So Pitino went portal shopping with a newfound influx of capital after winning the Big East Tournament in New York City. The one returning starter is a stud in Zuby Ejiofor, but the rest of the roster went in separate directions. And Pitino and his staff went in separate directions recruiting Oziyah Sellers out of California, Vermont native Joson Sanon out of Arizona State, Florida native Dillon Mitchell from Cincinnati, and one-time Kentucky recruit Bryce Hopkins.

Shooters, size, ball handlers, and experience around Ejiofor have St. John's, who ranked second in adjusted defensive efficiency per Bart Torvik, as a preseason top-10 team.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	24%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+170
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	17/1

VILLANOVA
WILDCATS

BIG EAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 21-15 SU, 18-18 ATS, 21-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 84.0
NATIONAL RANK: #49 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #6 OF 11

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 11-6 ATS AT HOME LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER WAS 10-3-1 IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES.

OVERVIEW

The two coaching changes in the Big East are with the last two teams alphabetically in the conference. In Villanova's case, the Wildcats moved on from Kyle Neptune and brought Kevin Willard back to the Big East, where he was the head coach of Seton Hall from 2011-22. Willard left a Maryland program that got to the Sweet 16 last season, but bid adieu to a lot of that talent. Villanova said goodbye to all five of their starters, but not before a run to the College Basketball Crown final in Las Vegas with an interim head coach.

Neptune's teams had shooters, finishers, and some of the best free-throw makers in the nation. But, what separated Neptune's teams from Jay Wright's is that the Wildcats lost themselves defensively. Dating back to 2016, eight of Willard's 10 teams finished 51st or better in adjusted defensive efficiency per Bart Torvik's metrics. Last year's Terrapins finished fifth. Three of Willard's last four teams have finished in the top 25 in eFG% defense. Villanova's transfer portal haul included four double-digit scorers, so he'll be looking for instant offense while hammering home his defensive principles.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	13%
CONFERENCE ODDS	28/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	100/1

XAVIER
MUSKETEERS

BIG EAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 22-12 SU, 19-15 ATS, 16-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 82.0
NATIONAL RANK: #65 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #7 OF 11

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WAS 11-4 IN THE TEAM'S FINAL 15 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM WAS 10-0 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF EIGHT POINTS OR FEWER.

OVERVIEW

Coaching is a family business in the Pitino household and Richard has now joined Rick in the Big East. Ironically, the 43-year-old Pitino attended Providence, but after stops as a head coach at FIU, Minnesota, and New Mexico, he's now a Cincinnati resident at Xavier. The Lobos won 53 games and had two NCAA Tournament berths over the last two seasons, but the Xavier job opened when Sean Miller took the same role at Texas.

This is a program where winning is expected. Since 2001, the Musketeers have only missed the NCAA Tournament seven times. They have eight Sweet 16 appearances and three Elite Eight appearances. Most schools have undergone a roster overhaul, but Xavier has 0.1% returning minutes per Bart Torvik. So this is a teardown and rebuild in the span of a few months. Pitino will hope to mesh a lot of different skill sets with an up-tempo offensive approach. His New Mexico teams were all top 20 in Adjusted Tempo per Torvik. With 11 transfers from different parts of the country that played with a wide array of tempos, this could be the conference's highest-variance team early and often.

RETURNING STARTERS	**0**
RETURNING MINUTES %	**0%**
CONFERENCE ODDS	**40/1**
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	**110/1**

BIG TEN
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Collectively, the Big Ten posted an 18-9 record in postseason play. Four teams reached the Sweet 16 and Michigan State, the regular season conference champion, reached the Elite Eight. However, the conference's National Championship drought has now reached the quarter-century mark, as the 2000 Spartans were the last team to win it all.

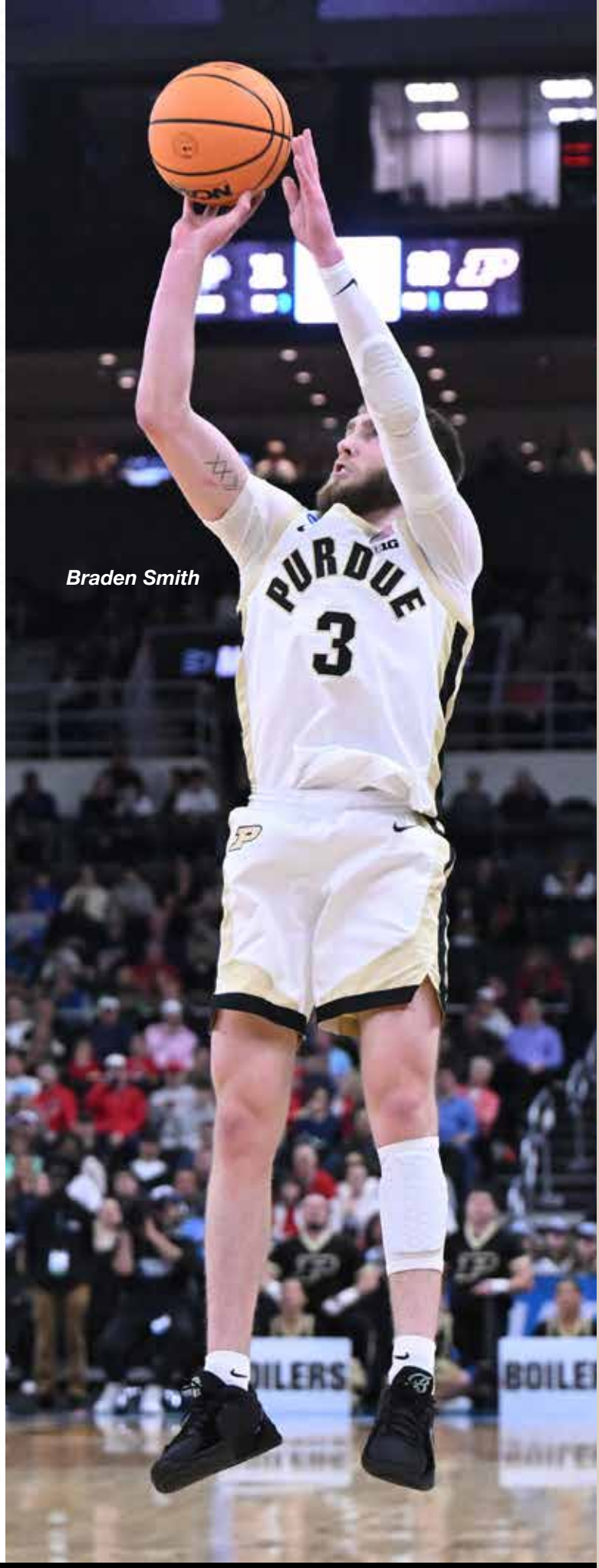
Purdue was picked to win the league last year and did make the Sweet 16 after being national runner-up the year prior, but the 24-12 season was a disappointment by recent standards. This year, the Boilers are Preseason No. 1, not just in the Big Ten, but also nationally. Not many teams in college basketball return a backcourt - reigning Big Ten POY Braden Smith and Fletcher Loyer - that will begin its fourth season starting together.

Michigan was picked ninth in Dusty May's first season and ended up sharing second, won the Big Ten Tournament and now expectations are higher with the nation's No. 2 portal class per 247Sports.

Michigan State, UCLA, Illinois, and Wisconsin will also begin the season ranked in the Top 25 nationally.

Four new coaches arrived in the Big Ten. Indiana now has its fourth coach in the last decade with Darian DeVries (West Virginia) replacing Mike Woodson. Fran McCaffery was fired at Iowa after 15 seasons, but the Hawkeyes only had to go from Iowa City to Des Moines for his replacement, as Ben McCollum came in from Drake. Kevin Willard left Maryland to take the Villanova job and Buzz Williams (Texas A&M) now takes over. Ben Johnson never had much of a chance in Minnesota, so the Gophers turned to another alum and former assistant Niko Medved, who left Colorado State to return to Minneapolis where he was born and raised.

As with every other conference, the roster turnover is extreme in the Big Ten. It is so extreme that you even have a returning starting backcourt that can transfer within the conference like Desmond Claude and Wesley Yates are doing by going from USC to Washington.



Braden Smith

PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS BY

WES REYNOLDS

ILLINOIS
FIGHTING ILLINI

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 22-13 SU, 17-18 ATS, 20-15 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 92.5
NATIONAL RANK: #7 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #2 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 5-1 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST 13 POINTS AND 2-6 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG.

OVERVIEW

The Fighting Illini had a high ceiling last year from a talent standpoint including two eventual one-and-done NBA first-round draft picks, but the youth (61% of minutes played by freshmen/sophomores) often proved to be too much to overcome for a 22-13 team that was eliminated in the NCAA Tournament Second Round.

Illinois' offensive efficiency was third in the Big Ten, largely from running the fastest tempo in the conference, but the offense never reached its peak because the Illini shot just 31.3% from 3 (17th in Big Ten). The five-out offense should be better from the perimeter especially amongst the big guys, including Tomislav Ivisic (55 3s), now joined by twin brother Zvonimir (Arkansas), who shot 37.6% from 3 last year.

Brad Underwood wanted this roster to get older, and it certainly is with sixth-year senior Ben Humrichous (62 3s), returning senior guard Kylan Boswell (12.3 PPG, 3.4 APG), junior wing Ty Rodgers, 22-year-old Serbian point guard Mika Petrovic and junior transfer Andrej Stojakovic (17.9 PPG at Cal). Illinois brings back 45% of its minutes (third-most in conference) and the older group should hold its own against a difficult non-conference schedule. Expect at least a top-four finish from this group.

RETURNING STARTERS	3
RETURNING MINUTES %	45%
CONFERENCE ODDS	12/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	35/1

INDIANA
HOOSIERS

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 19-13 SU, 17-15 ATS, 13-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 85.5
NATIONAL RANK: #41 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #12 OF 18

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WENT 9-1 IN THE TEAM’S FINAL 10 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND NEW COACH DARIAN DEVRIES COMES OVER FROM WEST VIRGINIA, WHOSE TEAM HAD THE SECOND-HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF GAMES GO UNDER THE TOTAL LAST SEASON (UNDER 22-9-1).

OVERVIEW

Indiana Basketball will take a radical departure from its last eight years under the tenures of Archie Miller and Mike Woodson. For one, new coach Darian DeVries seems to understand that 3s are worth more than 2s. During their August Puerto Rico trip, the Hoosiers averaged 29 3-point attempts per game.

IU has an entirely new roster, including two-time Missouri Valley POY Tucker DeVries, who played eight games at West Virginia before shoulder surgery, point guard Tayton Conerway (Sun Belt POY at Troy) and two-time All-CUSA selection Lamar Wilkerson (20.5 PPG. 44.5% 3P%). Before playing at DePaul, Conor Enright spent three seasons with DeVries at Drake. Three other guards averaged double-digit points at their previous stops – Jasai Miles (North Florida), Nick Dorn (Elon), and Jason Drake (Drexel).

Indiana certainly will not have the size they had in the Woodson years, but Reed Bailey averaged a PRA line of nearly 19/6/4 winning the A-10 MIP award at Davidson last year. Sam Alexis averaged 12 minutes for Florida’s title team last season and Josh Harris averaged 13 and 7 at North Florida.

The Hoosiers have not been dancing for the last two years but could get on the right side of the bubble this year.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	0%
CONFERENCE ODDS	40/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	75/1

IOWA
HAWKEYES

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 17-16 SU, 12-20-1 ATS, 17-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 85.5
NATIONAL RANK: #39 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #11 OF 18

OVERVIEW

Two years ago, Ben McCollum was concluding a six-year run at Northwest Missouri State that included four D-II national titles. A bulk of his final team followed him to Drake last season, where the Bulldogs won 31 games. Now seven of those players travel 114 miles west with him to Iowa City, including Missouri Valley POY PG Bennett Stirtz, who played 39.4 MPG (highest in nation).

Stirtz's teammates Cam Manyawu, a strong rebounder, Tavian Banks, Isaia Howard, and Kael Combs will be called upon to be major contributors. Kansas State transfer Brendan Hausen shot 38.8% from 3 and Robert Morris transfer Alvaro Folgueiras (14/9/3 PRA) was last year's POY in the Horizon League. Cooper Koch is the lone returning scholarship player for the Hawkeyes.

Iowa's offense was typically efficient under McCaffery, and it will be under McCollum as well, but at a much slower tempo. Drake was last in tempo in 2024-25 per KenPom. However, Iowa was a sieve defensively often under the previous staff, and the defense should be better here with the slower pace. This is not an overwhelmingly athletic roster, but continuity and coaching should squeak Iowa into the NCAA Tournament after a two-year absence.

RETURNING STARTERS 0

RETURNING MINUTES % 7%

CONFERENCE ODDS 35/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 80/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

DRAKE COACH BEN MCCOLLUM TAKES OVER THE PROGRAM AFTER HIS DRAKE TEAM WENT 7-1 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG LAST SEASON, AND IOWA WAS 10-5 TO THE UNDER IN ITS LAST 15 GAMES.

MARYLAND
TERRAPINS

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 27-9 SU, 18-17-1 ATS, 20-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 86.0
NATIONAL RANK: #36 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #10 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 10-4 AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST 10 POINTS LAST SEASON AND IS 30-19-1 ATS AS A HOME FAVORITE OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

After Maryland made its first Sweet 16 appearance in nine years, Kevin Willard left for Villanova after spilling the tea on internal politics within the athletic department. Enter the nomadic Buzz Williams, who seems to change locales about every five or six years. After six years at Texas A&M, Williams has an entirely new roster, but some familiarity with four Aggies – including Pharrel Payne and Solomon Washington down low. Most of Buzz's teams at Texas A&M could not shoot a lick, but dominated the glass and led the nation in ORB% the last two seasons.

Elijah Sanders (Virginia) and Collin Metcalf (Northeastern) should provide additional rebounding and shot blocking. PG Myles Rice could not duplicate the success at Indiana that he had at Washington State. Five-star freshman Darius Adams decommitted from UConn. Also transferring in are Rice's former Washington State teammate Isaiah Watts, and 3-point marksman David Coit and wing Rakease Passmore from Kansas.

How will this Terps team fare? They should look highly comparable to Eric Musselman's first USC team last season. There is talent, and they will knock off a couple of good teams, but they'll be up and down and likely around .500.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	0%
CONFERENCE ODDS	50/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	120/1

MICHIGAN
WOLVERINES

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 27-10 SU, 18-19 ATS, 19-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 92.0
NATIONAL RANK: #9 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #3 OF 18

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 26-43 ATS OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS, THE 10TH-WORST COVER PERCENTAGE IN THE NATION DURING THAT SPAN.

OVERVIEW

Dusty May’s hire at Michigan came highly touted, but he exceeded expectations with the biggest turnaround in program history by taking a program that finished 14th in the Big Ten to a tie for second and a Big Ten Tournament Championship in his first season. May’s group was highly skilled and solid defensively, but also struggled with physicality and turnovers (last in conference).

To improve the physicality, UAB power forward Yaxel Lendeborg (19.2 PPG 7.5 RPG, 4.2 APG, 1.4 SPG, 1.4 BPG), Illinois power forward Morez Johnson Jr, and 7-foot-3 Aday Mara (UCLA), along with Elliot Cadeau (8.3 PPG, 5.1 APG at North Carolina last season), comprise a large part of one of the nation’s best portal classes.

Will Tschetter returns as a stretch-four to hit 3s off the bench. Michigan’s backcourt will be deep with Cadeau, plus returners Nimari Burnett (9.4 PPG, 40% 3P%), Roddy Gayle Jr (9.8 PPG, 3.4 RPG), and LJ Cason, along with McDonald’s All-American Trey McKenney and freshman Winters Grady.

The Wolverines look to be Purdue’s top challenger in the Big Ten and have the talent and depth to be a legitimate threat to reach the Final Four.

RETURNING STARTERS	**2**
RETURNING MINUTES %	**39%**
CONFERENCE ODDS	**+325**
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	**16/1**

MICHIGAN STATE
SPARTANS

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 30-7 SU, 24-12-1 ATS, 11-26 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 88.0
NATIONAL RANK: #24 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #6 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 16-5-1 ATS VERSUS BIG TEN TEAMS LAST SEASON AND, ON A REST DISADVANTAGE, IS 26-4-2 ATS OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

Picked to finish fifth in the Big Ten, the Spartans went ahead and won the conference outright by three games and were the last Big Ten team standing before bowing out in the Elite Eight. That team had a 10-deep rotation last season and Tom Izzo, who broke Bob Knight's record for most all-time Big Ten victories in 2025, must replace six of those 10.

Jeremy Fears (7.2 PPG, 5.4 APG) had to share point guard responsibilities last year but now it is his show to run after working through the effects of a December 2023 gunshot wound last offseason. He will be surrounded by shooters like Samford transfer Trey Fort (14.6 PPG, 37.9% 3P%), 2024 Top 50 recruit Kur Teng, freshman Jordan Scott, and Miami transfer Divine Ugochukwu (5.3 PPG). The key to repeating as conference champions will be huge leaper Coen Carr (8.1 PPG) adding some more ball skills to his freakish athleticism.

Down low, Jaxon Kohler (7.8 PPG, 7.5 RPG), strong post defender Carson Cooper (5 PPG, 5 RPG), RS freshman Jesse McCulloch, and freshman Cam Ward give the Spartans some depth. While not as talented and deep as last year, this Spartans group should provide Izzo with his 28th consecutive NCAA Tournament appearance.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	42%
CONFERENCE ODDS	15/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	50/1

MINNESOTA
GOLDEN GOPHERS

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 15-17 SU, 10-20-2 ATS, 14-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 79.5
NATIONAL RANK: #77 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #16 OF 18

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE GOPHERS WERE 4-14-1 ATS AT HOME LAST SEASON, THE FIFTH-WORST HOME COVER PERCENTAGE IN THE COUNTRY.

OVERVIEW

Former Gophers student manager and assistant Niko Medved grew up just a few miles away from Williams Arena and now has the task of restoring his alma mater’s program to prominence, as Minnesota has just one winning record in Big Ten play over the last two decades.

Medved led Colorado State to the NCAA Tournament in three of the last four years. Jaylen Crocker-Johnson (9 PPG, 4.4 RPG) came with Medved from Fort Collins along with other frontcourt transfers Robert Vaihola (7.5 RPG) and Nehemiah Turner from Central Arkansas. Isaac Asuma (5.6 PPG, 2.1 APG) is the lone returner from last year’s Gophers roster and he will pair with Chansey Willis Jr, second-team All-MAC at Central Michigan, in the backcourt.

Both will have plenty of wing options to find including Cade Tyson, who got little time at North Carolina, but drilled 128 3s in two seasons at Belmont, along with Bobby Durkin, who made 150 triples in two seasons at Davidson. Langston Reynolds (59.3% FG%) was first-team All-Big Sky at Northern Colorado and lives at the rim.

This is not a quick fix for Medved in his homecoming to Minneapolis, but he has engineered turnarounds everywhere he has been and will likely do so here down the line.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	12%
CONFERENCE ODDS	200/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

NEBRASKA
CORNHUSKERS

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 21-14 SU, 20-15 ATS, 16-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 84.0
NATIONAL RANK: #51 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #14 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS A PERFECT 7-0 ATS IN NEUTRAL-COURT GAMES LAST SEASON AND 11-4 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES.

OVERVIEW

The 2024-25 season was a disappointment for the Cornhuskers as they failed to make the NCAA or even Big Ten Tournaments. Fred Hoiberg's group did end on a positive note by winning the inaugural College Basketball Crown.

Nebraska is an older team with seven seniors in the rotation, including the return of big man Rienk Mast, who missed last season with a knee injury, and PG Jamarques Lawrence, who transfers back to Lincoln after one year at Rhode Island. Other seniors returning or arriving are point guard Sam Hoiberg, leading returning scorer Connor Essegian (10.7 PPG), St. Thomas transfer guard Kendall Blue (41.7% 3P%), and transfer bigs Ugnius Jarusevicius (Central Michigan) and Jared Garcia (Tulsa).

Berke Buyuktuncel (6 PPG, 5.5 RPG) returns as a stretch four. Iowa transfer Pryce Sandfort (38.6% career 3P%) and Air Force transfer Will Cooper (38% 3P%) could help provide more outside shooting. Former walk-on Cale Jacobsen was forced to start the last three games in the CBC and opened eyes for more minutes.

Hoiberg must figure out his rotations early because there will not be enough minutes for everyone in Big Ten play.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	36%
CONFERENCE ODDS	100/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	400/1

NORTHWESTERN
WILDCATS

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 17-16 SU, 17-15-1 ATS, 22-11 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 82.5
NATIONAL RANK: #57 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #15 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 20-12-1 ATS IN TRUE ROAD GAMES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS, AND THE OVER WAS 9-2 ON THE ROAD LAST SEASON.

OVERVIEW

Injuries derailed a potential return to the NCAA Tournament for Northwestern over the final six weeks of the season when Brooks Barnhizer and Jalen Leach were lost for the duration. Chris Collins is hoping that the experience that his returners gained because of that will pay off.

Sophomores KJ Windham and Angelo Ciaravino return in the backcourt, but South Florida transfer Jayden Reid (12.6 PPG, 3.6 APG, 1.8 SPG, 35.8% 3P%) will be the lead guard. Max Green was the Patriot League Freshman of the Year at Holy Cross.

The Wildcats will be undersized and inexperienced up front. Arrinten Page was a Top 100 recruit, but saw little time both at USC and Cincinnati. Freshman forwards KJ Singleton and Tyler Kropp will be called on to make differences immediately. The one constant from last year's club is Nick Martinelli (20.5 PPG, 6.2 RPG), who led the Big Ten in scoring.

Martinelli, along with Northwestern's mentality for hard work and grit, will keep them competitive on many nights. While they could have more versatility position wise, the experience and the overall talent is not there for a return NCAA Tournament appearance that they had two years ago.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	50%
CONFERENCE ODDS	300/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

OHIO STATE
BUCKEYES

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 17-15 SU, 16-16 ATS, 15-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 87.5
NATIONAL RANK: #26 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #7 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 1-6 ATS IN ITS FINAL SEVEN GAMES LAST SEASON AND IS 10-22 ATS ON THE ROAD OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

The Buckeyes had the highest KenPom and NET rankings of any team that was not selected for last year's NCAA Tournament. Nevertheless, Ohio State had plenty of chances to avoid being on the wrong side of the bubble.

This year, they are off to a good start with the retention of three double-figure scorers, including senior PG Bruce Thornton (17.7 PPG, 4.6 APG, 42.4% 3P%), Devin Royal (13.7 PPG, 6.9 RPG), and John Mobley (13 PPG, 38.5% 3P%).

Next, they wanted to bring in big guys that can play a five-out offense and they start with 7-footer Christoph Tilly, who averaged 12.5 PPG, 5 APG at Santa Clara last year, and Brandon Noel, a two-time all-Horizon League selection at Wright State, who will play more of a typical four in Columbus. Baylor transfer Josh Ojianwuna may not be ready until early 2026 due to an ACL injury. He and 7-footer Ivan Njegovan will need to be defensive reinforcements in the paint.

Taison Chatman missed last year with a torn ACL. Gabe Cupps transfers in from Indiana and Mathieu Grujicic (FC Barcelona) will all be looked at for backcourt depth Ohio State is a more veteran bunch this season and should be on the right side of the bubble this time around.

RETURNING STARTERS	3
RETURNING MINUTES %	50%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+850
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	100/1

OREGON
DUCKS

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 25-10 SU, 18-17 ATS, 17-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 86.5
NATIONAL RANK: #35 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #9 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WENT 8-2 IN THE FINAL 10 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM WENT 7-1 ATS IN NEUTRAL-SITE GAMES.

OVERVIEW

Last year can only be considered a successful season for the Ducks winning 25 games and reaching the NCAA Tournament Second Round in their inaugural Big Ten season. Expectations for high for Dana Altman's club to return to the NCAA Tournament since PG Jackson Shelstad (13.7 PPG, 2.9 RPG, 2.7 APG, 1 SPG, 37.9% 3P%) and C Nate Bittle (14.2 PPG, 7.6 RPG, 2.1 BPG) elected to forego the NBA Draft.

Forward Kwame Evans Jr (6.1 PPG, 4.6 RPG) came off the bench last season after starting 29 games the year prior. Ohio State transfer Sean Stewart (5.7 PPG, 5.8 RPG) joins brother Miles (Howard transfer) to help support Bittle up front. Texas transfer wing Devon Pryor appeared in 23 games for the Longhorns last year. Elon transfer Takai Simpkins (16.4 PPG, 3.1 RPG) will be Shelstad's running mate in the backcourt.

Shelstad, Bittle, and Evans should carry the Ducks back into the NCAA Tournament and Oregon played its best defense at the end of last season. However, depth is still a bit of a concern. Nevertheless, Altman has developed role players into something more before and will need to do so again with this group.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	39%
CONFERENCE ODDS	22/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	100/1

PENN STATE
NITTANY LIONS

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 16-15 SU, 16-15 ATS, 12-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 77.5
NATIONAL RANK: #91 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #18 OF 18

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 21-11-2 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS AND 8-2 ATS AGAINST RANKED TEAMS.

OVERVIEW

At the beginning of January, Penn State was 12-2 and Mike Rhoades’ club was in good shape for the NCAA Tournament. Then, they fell into a tailspin and went 1-11 in their next 12 games and any chance for postseason play was eliminated.

They broke a program record for points (79.1 PPG) in a season, but the defense was poor, as the Nittany Lions were 214th in scoring defense, 255th in field goal percentage defense, and 288th in 3-point percentage defense. Now they must replace four starters and went the international route to do so with Sasa Ciani (Slovenia – UIC), 7-footer Ivan Juric (Croatia), Melih Tunca (Turkey), and Tibor Mirtic (Slovenia).

Freddie Dilione V (9.4 PPG, 2.8 RPG) is the lone returning starter and will be joined in the backcourt by Top 50 recruit Kayden Mingo. Freshmen Mason Blackwood and Justin Houser and the internationals along with Cincinnati transfer Josh Reed will man the frontcourt. The Lions have more size down low, but substantially less experience.

Penn State is arguably the toughest job in the Big Ten and it will certainly be this year with Rhoades having so much youth to replace good experience from a subpar team.

RETURNING STARTERS	**1**
RETURNING MINUTES %	**16%**
CONFERENCE ODDS	**200/1**
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	**500/1**

PURDUE
BOILERMAKERS

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 24-12 SU, 20-16 ATS, 19-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 94.5
NATIONAL RANK: #2 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #1 OF 18

OVERVIEW

Purdue's season ended last year in the Sweet 16 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indy. This year, there is a good chance it ends in the same place, but only in the Final Four or even one game further.

Big Ten POY Braden Smith (15.8 PPG, 8.7 APG) and Fletcher Loyer (13.8 PPG,44.4% 3P%) have started 110 games together in three years and are the best backcourt in the country. Trey Kaufman-Renn (20.1 PPG, 6.5 RPG) led the nation in field goals and now can move back to his natural PF spot with the return of 7-foot-4 Daniel Jacobsen (fractured tibia) and the addition of 6-foot-11 South Dakota State transfer Oscar Cluff (17.6 PPG, 12.3 RPG) to improve the rim protection the Boilermakers lacked last year.

North Florida transfer Liam Murphy made 104 3s last year (42.3%) and can be a stretch four while TKR works on the block and finishes off pick-and-rolls from Smith.

With the most returning minutes of any team in the conference, Painter will test this team with arguably the country's most difficult non-conference schedule. Like two years ago, the Boilers are a surefire national title contender again.

RETURNING STARTERS 4

RETURNING MINUTES % 70%

CONFERENCE ODDS +150

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS +900

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER IS 29-15 IN CONFERENCE GAMES OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS, THE 12TH-HIGHEST CONFERENCE OVER PERCENTAGE IN THE NATION.

RUTGERS
SCARLET KNIGHTS

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 15-17 SU, 15-16-1 ATS, 18-13 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 79.0
NATIONAL RANK: #85 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #17 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 2-7 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST 5.5 POINTS AND IS 17-28-2 ATS ON THE ROAD OVER THE PAST FOUR SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

The Scarlet Knights were one of the more intriguing teams coming into last year with five-star commits in Dylan Harper and Ace Bailey, who ended up going Nos. 2 and 5 overall in the NBA Draft, but injuries, poor shooting, and atypically poor defense (17th points allowed in the Big Ten) led Rutgers to a 15-17 record.

Jamichael Davis (4.6 PPG) returns in the backcourt, but the player who will have to shoulder the scoring load is NJIT transfer Tariq Francis (19.2 PPG), who led the America East in scoring.

Bulky forward Darren Buchanan Jr. (10.6 PPG, 5.8 RPG at George Washington) will be who Pikiell uses to defend multiple positions. Dylan Grant (5.9 PPG, 3.4 RPG) is the lone returning starter and should take a leap this season. While limited offensively, Emmanuel Ogbole (3.1 PPG, 3.7 RPG) and Kansas State transfer Baye Fall provide rim protection.

Pikiell's bunch will be a lunch pail team devoid of stars. The defense will be substantially better, but this team will struggle to score on a nightly basis in the Big Ten and will play a lot of grinders.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	25%
CONFERENCE ODDS	200/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

UCLA
BRUINS

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 23-11 SU, 19-14-1 ATS, 16-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 91.5
NATIONAL RANK: #10 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #4 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 6-1 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF MORE THAN 12 POINTS LAST SEASON, AND THE UNDER WAS 10-3 IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES.

OVERVIEW

Of the four Pac-12 expatriates, UCLA had the best result in its first year of league play in the Big Ten finishing T-4 with a 13-7 record and advanced to the NCAA Tournament Second Round. A large part of the Bruins' improvement from a 16-17 season in 2023-24 was taking care of the basketball, as they were seventh nationally in turnover margin (+4.8).

While they lose two starters, the Bruins backcourt should be even better with the addition of one of the portal's best players. Donovan Dent (20.4 PPG, 6.4 APG) came from New Mexico to join Skyy Clark (8.5 PPG, 2.7 APG). Eric Dailey (11.4 PPG, 4 RPG) and Brandon Williams (RS last season) also provide scoring punch on the wing. Jamar Brown was two-time all-Summit League at UMKC. Tyler Bilodeau (13.5 PPG, 4.6 RPG) will be joined by transfers Xavier Booker, who never found a consistent role in two seasons at Michigan State, and Steven Jamerson II (10 PPG, 7.8 RPG) from San Diego.

Mick Cronin believes this is his best team in several years at Westwood. While Purdue and Michigan will get the rightful buzz, UCLA could be the dark horse to win the Big Ten.

RETURNING STARTERS	3
RETURNING MINUTES %	43%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+800
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	35/1

USC
TROJANS

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 17-18 SU, 16-19 ATS, 24-11 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 87.5
NATIONAL RANK: #27 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #8 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM HAD THE NINTH-HIGHEST OVER PERCENTAGE IN THE NATION LAST SEASON, WITH THE OVER GOING 24-11, AND NINE OF ITS 10 TRUE ROAD GAMES WENT OVER THE TOTAL.

OVERVIEW

Eric Musselman is used to roster overhauls and he has another one this year at USC. Six starters and contributors, including last year's starting backcourt, are gone from a 17-18 team. In their places are a plethora of transfers including Rodney Rice (Maryland) and two tall, versatile perimeter wings in Chad Baker-Mazara, part of Auburn's Final Four team last year, and Amarion Dickerson, an all-Horizon League performer at Robert Morris.

Small PG Jordan Marsh was all-Big South and a big scorer at UNC Asheville while Ryan Cornish was all-Ivy at Dartmouth and a good 3-point (37.2%) shooter.

Last year, the Trojans were undersized on the interior and Musselman attempted to address that with 7-foot-5 Gabe Dynes, who was second nationally in blocks per game (3.1) at Youngstown State. Ezra Ausar (Utah), Jacob Cofie (Virginia), and Jaden Brownell, a stretch four who shot nearly 40% from 3 at Samford, also add size.

The Trojans should shoot the 3 better and improve their defense in the paint, but this looks like a mid-pack group at best who may be around the bubble for the NCAA Tournament.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	14%
CONFERENCE ODDS	30/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	100/1

WASHINGTON
HUSKIES

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 13-18 SU, 15-15 ATS, 18-12 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 84.5
NATIONAL RANK: #47 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #13 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER IS 33-17-1 AT HOME OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS, AND THE TEAM IS 17-9-1 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG IN TRUE ROAD GAMES OVER THAT SPAN.

OVERVIEW

Danny Sprinkle had made the NCAA Tournament three consecutive seasons – twice at Montana State and then at Utah State. Reality set in though in his first year at Washington as the Huskies went just 13-18. Undaunted, Sprinkle brings in one of the nation's better portal classes grabbing both Desmond Claude and Wesley Yates (43.9% 3P%) from USC, plus two conference POYs – East Tennessee State's Quimari Peterson (SoCon) and Lipscomb's Jacob Ognacevic (ASUN).

The transfers, plus former McDonald's All-American Zoom Diallo (11.1 PPG, 2.7 APG), Indiana transfer wing Bryson Tucker (5.4 PPG, 2.9 RPG). and freshman JJ Mandaquit give Washington plenty of depth in the backcourt.

Despite the now-departed Great Osobor's efforts, Washington had little else in the paint. The additions of Ognacevic, the physical Lathan Somerville (Rutgers), the return of Franck Kepnang (medical RS), the additions of well-traveled Mady Traore, Christian Nitu (Florida State), and freshman Hannes Steinbach provide plenty of size.

Washington finished dead last in its first Big Ten season, but this could be the team that jumps from the bottom half to the top half. The program spent a lot in the portal and Sprinkle is a proven winner. Expect improvement from this group.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	22%
CONFERENCE ODDS	55/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	180/1

WISCONSIN
BADGERS

BIG TEN
2024-25 RECORDS: 27-10 SU, 23-14 ATS, 21-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 89.0
NATIONAL RANK: #20 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #5 OF 18

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 10-4 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF EIGHT POINTS OR FEWER, AND THE OVER WAS 11-5 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL OF 148 OR LESS.

OVERVIEW

The conference's biggest surprise might have been the transformation of the Wisconsin offense. After years of being one of the more deliberate teams in the country, the Badgers cranked up the tempo, spaced the shooters, and averaged 80.1 PPG (highest since 1971).

Six of the top eight scorers are gone, but the Badgers are not going back to playing Bo Ryan or early Greg Gard ball. This year, Wisconsin has a true PG in Nick Boyd (San Diego State), a starter on FAU's 2023 Final Four club. He will team with John Blackwell (15.8 PPG, 5.1 RPG), Virginia transfer and Wisconsin native Andrew Rohde (41.3% 3P%) and wing Braeden Carrington (Tulsa, Minnesota) is familiar with the Big Ten.

Center Nolan Winter (9.4 PPG, 5.8 RPG) is also able to step out and shoot the 3 (35.8%) but will be asked to do more inside. Austin Rapp was the Freshman of the Year at Portland last year.

The chemistry could be off a bit early with nine newcomers, but Gard has a deep group with good size that will continue to be one of the Big Ten's better offenses and should return to the NCAA Tournament.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	32%
CONFERENCE ODDS	22/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	70/1

Trey Campbell

MISSOURI VALLEY
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

We may be reaching the point of extinction for the term “mid-major” in college basketball. In the financially-imbalanced NIL world, there are majors and there are non-majors. On October 14, college basketball analyst Evan Miyakawa posted his conference strength ratings on X. The SEC, Big Ten, Big 12, ACC and Big East ranged from 15.7 to 11. The A-10, Mountain West, West Coast, and American ranged from 3.5 to 1.9. The Missouri Valley was 10th at 0.4, the last of the teams with a positive number.

The saddest part of it all is that the MVC has a lot of solid basketball teams. There may not be a Drake this season, as the Bulldogs finished 52nd in both Ken Pomeroy and Bart Torvik’s rankings, but this is a highly-competitive conference. Unfortunately, that means it will also cannibalize itself and remain a one-bid league like it has been for a decade.

Programs in conferences like this have to open their wallets and untie their purse strings in an effort to keep around their existing players, not go out and recruit free agents. And then they have to recruit free agents when their players sign as free agents with the aforementioned power conferences. The life cycle of coaching at one of the last remaining mid-major schools has to be exhausting.

Not only do players have to be given a comma or two in their bank accounts, but the MVC is the type of conference that becomes a springboard to better coaching gigs. Fortunately, there are only two new head coaches in this conference, as Eric Henderson went from South Dakota State to Drake to replace Ben McCollum and Ryan Miller went from being an assistant at Creighton to taking over for Steve Prohm at Murray State.

Holdovers like Ryan Pedon (Illinois State), Ben Jacobson (Northern Iowa), Brian Wardle (Bradley), and Casey Alexander (Belmont) all have solid rosters and more returning production than their colleagues for the most part. Seven MVC schools rank from 99 to 139 for Torvik and eight from 106 to 135 for KenPom.

PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS BY

ADAM BURKE

BELMONT
BRUINS

MISSOURI VALLEY
2024-25 RECORDS: 22-11 SU, 15-15-2 ATS, 19-13 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 76.0
NATIONAL RANK: #111 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #4 OF 11

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WENT 18-8 IN GAMES WITH A CLOSING TOTAL UNDER 159 LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER WAS 8-2 IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES.

OVERVIEW

It is time for Casey Alexander's Bruins to take a step forward in the Missouri Valley Conference. This will be Year 4 after moving over from the Ohio Valley Conference following the 2021-22 season. Even though Belmont and Murray State typically went toe-to-toe in the OVC, Alexander has had seven previous seasons at Belmont and zero have resulted in an NCAA Tournament bid. In that span, the Bruins have ranked as high as eighth and as low as 38th in eFG% per Bart Torvik and have even been fifth, 21st, and 17th in 3P% the last three seasons.

As good as Alexander's teams are in the halfcourt when they have the basketball, they haven't found enough defensive success to reach the goals that they have on an annual basis. Last year's team was 306th in eFG% and 316th in 2P% defense per Torvik and that negated so much good work on the offensive end. Belmont was even 10-4 in games decided by six or fewer points, so imagine what they could have done with a few more stops or missed shots against. Once again, the offense looks fine, but the defense looks iffy.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	48%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+500
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	2000/1

BRADLEY
BRAVES

MISSOURI VALLEY
2024-25 RECORDS: 28-9 SU, 17-18-1 ATS, 18-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 76.5
NATIONAL RANK: #103 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #2 OF 11

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 7-16 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS, THE FIFTH-WORST COVER PERCENTAGE IN THE NATION, AND THE UNDER WAS 15-8 IN ITS FINAL 23 GAMES LAST SEASON.

OVERVIEW

Brian Wardle's Braves went 17-47 in his first two seasons, which were back in 2016-18. Since then, outside of the shortened '20-21 season, Bradley has won at least 17 games in each one of them. Last year's team set a new benchmark with 28 wins, as the Braves were the nation's second-best team from beyond the arc. Unfortunately, they lost the rubber match to Drake in the MVC Tournament and went to the NIT instead.

Of the top teams in the conference from last season, Bradley returns the least production. The Braves had four double-digit scorers last season and they're all gone. All of them shot at least 36% from 3, so Wardle, who also has a new set of assistant coaches, will have to find some shooters out of the bench guys that stayed and the portal players that came in. Replacing talent is nothing new for Wardle, as he lost leading scorer Connor Hickman and third-leading scorer and leading rebounder Malevy Irons prior to last season. It is noteworthy that he did look for transfers that have played a lot and can lead on the floor, so they're new to Bradley, but not to college basketball.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	28%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+450
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

DRAKE
BULLDOGS

MISSOURI VALLEY
2024-25 RECORDS: 31-4 SU, 18-14-1 ATS, 14-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 73.0
NATIONAL RANK: #137 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #7 OF 11

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 7-1 STRAIGHT UP ON THE MONEYLINE AS AN UNDERDOG LAST SEASON, THE BEST WIN PERCENTAGE AMONG TEAMS THAT WERE UNDERDOGS IN AT LEAST TWO GAMES.

OVERVIEW

Eric Henderson has some big shoes to fill at Drake. Niko Medved's one-year stop led him to the Colorado State job in 2018 and subsequently Minnesota for this season. Darian DeVries had six years at Drake before taking the head coaching job at West Virginia and now Indiana. And now Ben McCollum, who went 31-4 in his lone season, is at Iowa. DeVries won at least 20 games every season. This is a program and a fan base accustomed to success and Henderson, who had plenty of it at South Dakota State, looks to be a good hire.

Filling in for a big name is nothing new to Henderson, as he replaced T.J. Otzelberger when he took over at UNLV and has now found a lot of success at Iowa State. Henderson didn't have a losing season at SDSU and has no intention of starting now, but he is turning over the entire roster. Drake's stifling defense led them to the NCAA Tournament, and leading scorer Bennett Stirtz was one of the best all-around players in the nation. Drake was dead last in tempo. They won't be under Henderson, whose offense is quicker and very jump shot-heavy.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	1%
CONFERENCE ODDS	10/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	2000/1

EVANSVILLE
PURPLE ACES

MISSOURI VALLEY
2024-25 RECORDS: 11-21 SU, 15-16 ATS, 13-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 66.0
NATIONAL RANK: #234 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #10 OF 11

OVERVIEW

One of the more disappointing performances in the MVC last season came from Evansville. The Aces went from five wins in David Ragland's first season to 17 the next, but they only went 11-21 last season. For the ninth year in a row, this was one of the nation's worst offensive rebounding teams and they shot just 29.9% from 3 to make things even worse. There were a ton of one-and-done possessions.

Connor Turnbull, who had 37 of the team's 86 dunks and shot 61.4% on 2s, will have to provide more than the 9.2 PPG he averaged last season because the three leading scorers are all gone. At least Turnbull is one of the better rim protectors in the conference and that will be something Evansville will rely on again, as they couldn't make shots, but altered a lot of them on the defensive end. Without shooters, Ragland wants to run the offense through his bigs, Turnbull and Joshua Hughes, so I'd expect them to slow down considerably in pace.

RETURNING STARTERS 2

RETURNING MINUTES % 33%

CONFERENCE ODDS 50/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 3000/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM COVERED EACH OF ITS LAST SIX GAMES AS AN UNDERDOG OF AT LEAST SIX POINTS LAST SEASON, AND THE UNDER IS 16-6 IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

ILLINOIS STATE
REDBIRDS

MISSOURI VALLEY
2024-25 RECORDS: 22-14 SU, 21-14 ATS, 23-12 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 76.5
NATIONAL RANK: #104 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #3 OF 11

OVERVIEW

The goal for every college basketball team is to win the last game of the season. Illinois State did that in the CBI. The Redbirds fell short of the NCAA Tournament once again, but the players obviously believe in what they've started because four starters are back, including leading scorers Chase Walker and Johnny Kinziger. Walker averaged 15.2 PPG in just 24.3 minutes per contest and shot 59.3% on 2s for a team that shot 57% on 2s overall. Kinziger shot 38% from 3 and nearly 90% from the free throw line. An enhanced role for Ty Pence will be nice as well.

Pedon also secured Boden Skunberg from North Dakota State in the transfer portal, a player who has averaged double figures each of the last two seasons. As good as the Redbirds look offensively, they have a lot to figure out on defense. This is a team that was 15th in eFG% offense per Bart Torvik, but 284th in eFG% defense. As a jump shot-oriented team when Walker isn't on the floor, repeating last season's defensive performance would cause the team to regress.

RETURNING STARTERS 4

RETURNING MINUTES % 57%

CONFERENCE ODDS +350

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 3000/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WENT 15-5 IN THE TEAM'S FINAL 20 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND ILLINOIS STATE WENT 8-0 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG IN TRUE ROAD GAMES.

INDIANA STATE
SYCAMORES

MISSOURI VALLEY
2024-25 RECORDS: 14-18 SU, 15-14-1 ATS, 22-8 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 68.0
NATIONAL RANK: #203 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #9 OF 11

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WAS 7-1 IN THE TEAM'S FINAL EIGHT GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM IS 27-13-2 ATS AT HOME OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

Assistant coach Matthew Graves, who hadn't been a head coach since 2018 at South Alabama, took over as the head coach when Josh Schertz and his transitional year was a rough one. The team went from 32-7 to 14-18 and dropped significantly in a lot of key areas, especially on defense. Graves will miss the start of the season after undergoing triple bypass surgery just two weeks before the start of the season, so top assistant Mike Slessinger will take over on an interim basis.

This was still the highest-scoring team in the conference with over 80 PPG, but last season's three leading scorers are gone. More importantly, given that Graves, as an extension of Schertz, has his teams play fast and find ways to score, Samage Teel and Jaden Daughtry were the team's leaders in steals and Aaron Gray was the best defensive rebounder. While portal shopping, Graves seemed to replace the offense that was lost, but this looks like a "defense optional" team again and that is a tough sell with a 3P Rate over 50% on offense.

RETURNING STARTERS	3
RETURNING MINUTES %	41%
CONFERENCE ODDS	65/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	3000/1

MURRAY STATE
RACERS

MISSOURI VALLEY
2024-25 RECORDS: 16-17 SU, 14-17-1 ATS, 17-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 73.5
NATIONAL RANK: #125 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #5 OF 11

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE RACERS ARE 8-18 ATS AT HOME OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS, AND THE OVER IS 25-14-1 IN ROAD GAMES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

The second coming of Steve Prohm did not work at Murray State. Prohm was 104-29 from 2011-15 and 54-10 in OVC play before taking the Iowa State job. In his return to Murray, Kentucky, he posted a losing record over three seasons. Enter Ryan Miller, who left Creighton before St. Patrick's Day. This will be the 50-year-old's first head coaching job, as he's been a Division I NCAA assistant since 2004.

Among Miller's tasks in Omaha were to install and oversee the offensive sets. Creighton is a jump shot-oriented team, but they are tremendously efficient at doing it because of how they space the floor, move the ball, and stay patient looking for the right shot selection. Those are all things that the Racers really didn't do last season. They were 313th in tempo, but 254th in Assist Rate. It is worth noting that JaCobi Wood was 43-of-112 on Close Twos as defined by Bart Torvik, which are layups, tip-ins, dunks, and short jumpers. Many guys struggled in that area, so the fact that this is a brand new roster probably helps Miller's decent chance of instant success.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	0%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+600
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	1500/1

NORTHERN IOWA
PANTHERS

MISSOURI VALLEY
2024-25 RECORDS: 20-13 SU, 19-13 ATS, 11-21 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 76.5
NATIONAL RANK: #101 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #1 OF 11

OVERVIEW

In an era of college athletics where nothing stays the same and loyalty is a lost art, Ben Jacobson begins his 19th season as the head coach at Northern Iowa. It would be a stretch to say that the pressure is mounting with no NCAA Tournament appearances since 2016, but this has a great chance to be the year that it happens. While most teams in the Missouri Valley are replacing lost talent, the Panthers are bringing back 72.1% of last season's minutes per Bart Torvik. Unfortunately, among that 27.9% of the minutes are leading scorers Tytan Anderson (15.5 PPG) and Jacob Hutson (11.7 PPG).

UNI decided to stay in the shallow end of the transfer portal pool, as they had a low-key class, but hopes are high for NAIA Concordia transfer Tristan Smith, who averaged 20.5 PPG and 8.6 RPG last season. On a team where nine players averaged at least 14 minutes per game, depth is huge and Jacobson can simply elevate some of last season's reserves while also incorporating a few newcomers. They'll shoot well again, but better perimeter defense is the focus.

RETURNING STARTERS 3

RETURNING MINUTES % 72%

CONFERENCE ODDS +450

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 1500/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WAS 12-4 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL OF 141 OR HIGHER LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM WAS 7-0 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST NINE POINTS.

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS
SALUKIS

MISSOURI VALLEY
2024-25 RECORDS: 14-19 SU, 13-17-1 ATS, 15-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 73.0
NATIONAL RANK: #135 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #6 OF 11

OVERVIEW

Salukis are a breed of dog known for being tough to train. Patience is often required and even that sometimes isn't enough. In the results-driven world of college basketball, patience can be hard to come by, especially since a lot of teams start anew with each recruiting cycle in the transfer portal era. First-year head coach Scott Nagy had a team that didn't pay attention to the details. They were 308th in TO% on defense per Bart Torvik, 256th in TO% on offense, and a bottom-50 team at the free throw line.

There is optimism in Carbondale with this year's squad. Nagy has a better set of ball handlers to play at the tempo he wants. Two starters are back, though they only combined for 11.8 points per game. Nagy went to the portal to find his point scorers and also some more size to help the team on the offensive glass. With a better feel for the MVC and his roster, this could be one of the more improved teams in the conference, as Nagy hadn't had a losing season since 2009-10.

RETURNING STARTERS 2

RETURNING MINUTES % 43%

CONFERENCE ODDS 16/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 3000/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 4-11 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG OF TWO POINTS OR MORE BUT IS 12-6-2 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

UIC
FLAMES

MISSOURI VALLEY
2024-25 RECORDS: 18-14 SU, 14-15 ATS, 16-13 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 71.5
NATIONAL RANK: #145 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #8 OF 11

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM FAILED TO COVER ANY OF ITS FINAL 10 GAMES LAST SEASON BUT IS 21-7 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS, THE SECOND-BEST NON-CONFERENCE MARK IN THE NATION DURING THAT SPAN.

OVERVIEW

Head coach Rob Ehsan didn’t waste his second crack at being a bench boss. The former UAB head man was an assistant at Stanford under Jerod Haase for four seasons and then UIC came calling. The bar is not terribly high at UIC, as the Flames haven’t made the NCAA Tournament since 2004 and last won 20 games in 2018, finishing runner-up in the CIT. In fact, that was the last postseason appearance for the program.

Ehsan didn’t get the team to 20 wins last season, but they had 17 and won 10 games in conference play for the first time since 2020, a major accomplishment given that the Flames were 8-32 in their first two seasons as a member of the MVC when facing league opponents. Ahmad Henderson is the lone starter back for the Flames and he had 11.5 PPG and shot nearly 90% at the stripe. The rest of the roster is a collection of low-major transfers and the team could sacrifice offense for defense after playing at a higher tempo than Ehsan’s UAB teams.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	12%
CONFERENCE ODDS	25/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	2000/1

VALPARAISO
BEACONS

MISSOURI VALLEY
2024-25 RECORDS: 15-19 SU, 16-15-1 ATS, 17-15 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 63.5
NATIONAL RANK: #275 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #11 OF 11

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 18-8-1 ATS IN TRUE ROAD GAMES OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS, AND THE OVER IS 34-18 ON THE ROAD OVER THE PAST FOUR SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

An eight-win improvement for the Beacons should be cause for optimism going into Year 3 for Roger Powell Jr., but I see the opposite. This is a brand new roster, as all five starters left, so whatever momentum they started to gather is gone. But, more importantly, this is still a team that ranked in the 310s in eFG% offense and defense. In other words, they didn't make enough shots and they didn't stop the other team from making shots. They were 1.5% better in eFG% offense and 0.8% better in eFG% defense. That doesn't strike me as grounds for improving by eight wins.

To add to that, two of the guys who made a lot of the shots - Cooper Schwieger and All Wright - transferred to Wake Forest and Xavier, respectively. Schwieger was far and away the team's top rebounder, too. Based on the transfers brought in by Powell, this is going to be a plodding, methodical team that wants to bang down low and find rebounding advantages in a conference where ORebs are few and far between.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	6%
CONFERENCE ODDS	70/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	3000/1

MOUNTAIN WEST
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

That sorrowful melody you hear emanating from the west coast is the swan song of the Mountain West Conference.

The 2025-2026 season will be the last for the conference with its current members. Boise State, Colorado State, Fresno State, San Diego State and Utah State will all join the Pac-12 in 2026.

It is fitting, then, that in the final season of the conference's construction as we know it that there is so much change.

Three programs — New Mexico, Colorado State and UNLV — all have new head coaches. There is also a new member in Grand Canyon, which makes its debut this basketball season.

The addition of Grand Canyon makes a deep conference even deeper, as it looks to continue its stellar run of representation in the NCAA Tournament.

The Mountain West has had multiple bids in March Madness for seven straight seasons. It has sent four or more teams the last four seasons. While the league might not reach those numbers again in 2026, it does seem likely that the Mountain West will send at least two teams to the tournament.

San Diego State is a machine as always under Brian Dutcher, and it returns six rotation players from last season.

Boise State has replacements ready for the departure of long-time star Tyson Degenhart, and Leon Rice hit the portal hard to supplement his backcourt.

Utah State — no matter who the head coach is — has won at least 26 games each of the last three seasons and is looking for a fourth consecutive bid in the NCAA Tournament.

The Aztecs are clearly the class of the Mountain West, and the betting odds reflect that. But this has consistently been one of the best basketball conferences in the country the last three seasons. It will be just that once again in its final season.

Mason Falslev

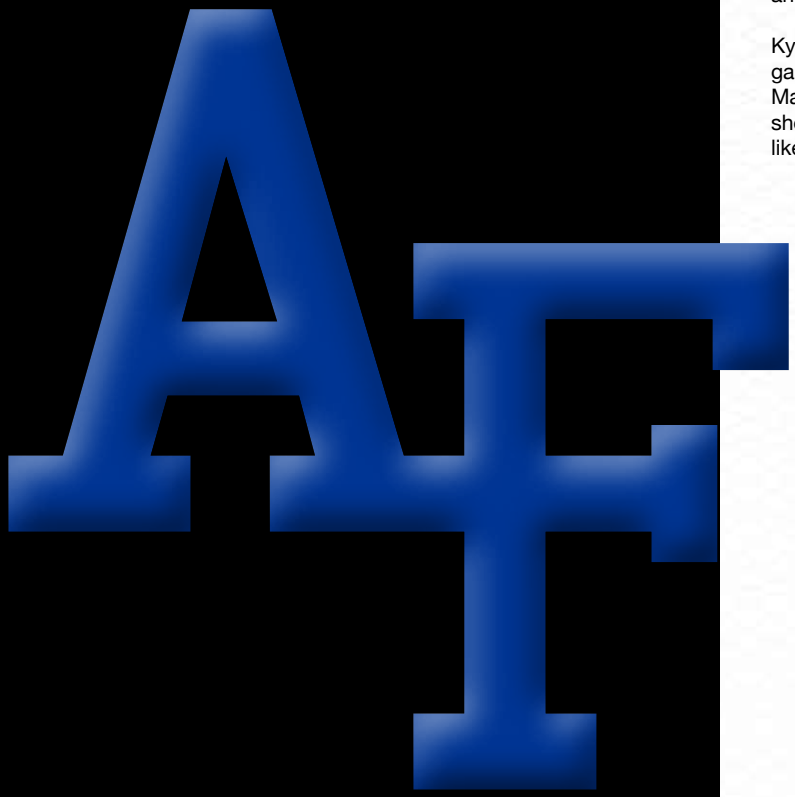
PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS BY

JONATHAN VON TOBEL

AIR FORCE
FALCONS

MOUNTAIN WEST
2024-25 RECORDS: 4-28 SU, 11-21 ATS, 17-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 62.0
NATIONAL RANK: #299 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #12 OF 12



'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 6-26 ATS AT HOME OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS, THE WORST HOME COVER PERCENTAGE IN THE NATION.

OVERVIEW

It is hard to envision a scenario that does not end in Air Force finishing last in the Mountain West standings in 2025-2026. The Falcons are an extremely inexperienced team. Two starters return, but head coach Joe Scott has just three players with at least 100 minutes of college basketball experience.

Air Force will rely on its frontcourt this season. Wesley Celichowski — a 7-foot center — was an efficient scorer and rebounder last season who finished 21st in the conference in shot-share (22.9%) and 25th in offensive rebounding rate (4.9%). He also blocked 4.3% of shots when he was on the floor and shot 59.5% in conference play inside the arc. Celichowski will likely be paired with last year's sixth man, Caleb Walker. Walker is 6-foot-9 and shares some qualities with Celichowski in regards to rebounding and shot-blocking.

Kyle Marshall is Scott's most experienced guard. He played in 30 games last season as a true freshman and started 17 of them. Marshall averaged 6.9 points and 4.1 rebounds per game. He also shot 35.3% from beyond the arc, but only on 34 attempts. He'll likely get the nod in the backcourt to lead the offense.

There isn't much to expect from the Falcons this season.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	36%
CONFERENCE ODDS	250/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	3000/1

BOISE STATE
BRONCOS

MOUNTAIN WEST
2024-25 RECORDS: 26-11 SU, 19-17 ATS, 17-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 83.5
NATIONAL RANK: #53 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #3 OF 12

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER IS 18-7 IN BOISE STATE NEUTRAL-COURT GAMES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS, AND THE TEAM IS 19-9 ATS AT HOME THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

Boise lost a ton of talent in the offseason, but Leon Rice — who has led this program to 20+ wins in four straight seasons — will likely have his team ready to handle the departures.

Javan Buchanan and Pearson Carmichael will be relied on to make up for the loss of Tyson Degenhart. Buchanan won Sixth Man of the Year with 9.6 points and 3.8 rebounds per game on 53.4% shooting from the floor. Carmichael — a sophomore — started the final 12 games of the season for the Broncos. He shot 60% inside the arc and showed some range, shooting 31.6% on 79 3-point attempts. Andrew Meadow led the team in 3-point makes (58) and was second on the team in scoring (12.6).

Rice hit the portal as well and brought in senior guard Dylan Andrews from UCLA. Andrews is a former four-star prospect who has not lived up to expectations. Former Lehigh forward Dominic Parolin — who averaged 11.5 and 6.4 rebounds in 2023-2024 — is recovered from a knee injury and expected to contribute as well.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	47%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+500
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

COLORADO STATE
RAMS

MOUNTAIN WEST
2024-25 RECORDS: 26-10 SU, 23-13 ATS, 20-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 79.5
NATIONAL RANK: #82 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #5 OF 12

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM COVERED THE SPREAD IN EACH OF ITS FINAL 12 GAMES, AND ITS 18-5 RECORD ATS IN CONFERENCE GAMES LAST SEASON RANKED THIRD-BEST IN THE NATION.

OVERVIEW

CSU was a stalwart at the top of the standings in the seven seasons under Niko Medved. However, Medved left for the Minnesota job in the offseason, and the Rams are now rebuilding under new head coach Ali Farokhmanesh. The former UNI star has been with Medved since his time at Drake, so bettors can expect a similar style with a different twist in Fort Collins.

Rashaan Mbemba is the lone returning starter for the Rams. Mbemba was CSU's fifth-leading scorer last season (7.0 PPG) but third-best rebounder (3.6 RPG). He finished with the fourth-best offensive rebounding rate in the conference (10.6%) and 15th in offensive rating (115.5). Kyle Jorgensen (4.1 PPG) and Nikola Djapa (2.5 PPG) are the other key returners for the Rams.

The big get in the transfer portal was VMI forward Augustinas Kiudulas. Kiudulas is 6-foot-8 and led the Keydets in shot-share and both rebounds (6.3 RPG) and blocks per game (0.5 BPG). He was their second-leading scorer (15.2).

CSU is 20/1 to win the Mountain West in Farokhmanesh's first season. He is a great developer of talent. It wouldn't be a shock to see the Rams play above their head at times. But given the strength at the top of the conference, it doesn't make much sense to buy CSU in its first season under their new coach.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	18%
CONFERENCE ODDS	14/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

FRESNO STATE
BULLDOGS

MOUNTAIN WEST
2024-25 RECORDS: 6-26 SU, 17-13-2 ATS, 19-13 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 66.5
NATIONAL RANK: #224 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #11 OF 12

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 9-3-2 ATS AT HOME LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER WAS 11-4 IN ITS ROAD GAMES.

OVERVIEW

Only one starter is back for Vance Walberg this season, but that might be a good thing after a year in which the Bulldogs lost a program record 26 games.

The lone returning starter is a big one. Zaon Collins was Fresno State's third-leading scorer (12.4 PPG) but only trailed Jalen Weaver by 0.1 points per game. Collins also led the team in assists (4.6 APG) and minutes (35.4 MPG). He is a potential All-MWC player on a team devoid of talent.

David Douglas returns to play alongside Collins as well. He played in just six games last season, but showed his talent in his final game with 16 points on five made 3-pointers in a loss to Nevada. Jake Heidbreder returns to the conference after a season at Clemson in which he averaged only 4.1 points per game. Heidbreder is a career 38.8% shooter on 4.1 attempts per game. Cameron Faas transfers in from Kansas City after averaging 9.8 points over two seasons with the Roos.

Walberg has a sturdy base of talent. If the players on this roster live up to expectation, this could be a group that improves quite a bit from last season.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	35%
CONFERENCE ODDS	200/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	2000/1

GRAND CANYON
ANTELOPES

MOUNTAIN WEST
2024-25 RECORDS: 26-8 SU, 13-20 ATS, 17-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 79.5
NATIONAL RANK: #80 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #4 OF 12

GCU

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 3-11 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES LAST SEASON AND 1-7 ATS AS A ROAD FAVORITE.

OVERVIEW

It's a new conference and a new team for head coach Bryce Drew. Only one starter — guard Makaih Williams — and two others return. Still, Drew is a good coach and his program is still in the top-half of the league in terms of preseason odds to win it. That is in large part due to Drew making a killing in the transfer portal.

Norfolk State transfer Brian Moore Jr. averaged 18.1 points, 3.7 rebounds and 3.0 assists per game on 54.5% shooting. Jaden Henley comes in from UNLV after averaging 12.5 points and 4.3 rebounds per game for the Rebels. Kaleb Smith — a 6-foot-10 center from UC Riverside — put up 11.0 points and 4.5 rebounds per game. It's a talented core that could immediately thrust Grand Canyon into contention in the Mountain West.

Drew has won at least 23 games in his last four seasons as head coach of Grand Canyon. He enters his first season in the Mountain West as one of the best coaches in the league. Given the talented transfer class he brought in, it is hard to look past the Lopes as the play worth making to win the conference outside of San Diego State.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	20%
CONFERENCE ODDS	11/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

NEVADA
WOLF PACK

MOUNTAIN WEST
2024-25 RECORDS: 17-16 SU, 15-18 ATS, 16-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 77.0
NATIONAL RANK: #96 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #7 OF 12

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WAS 7-1 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL HIGHER THAN 145 LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM WAS 1-6 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG.

OVERVIEW

After a wildly disappointing 2024-2025 season, Nevada finds itself in a rebuild. Eight of the Wolf Pack's top nine scorers are gone. The returner is guard Tyler Rolison, who averaged 7.4 points, 2.9 rebounds and 2.0 assists per game.

The word is that Steve Alford wants to play faster this season. In order to make that happen he landed a couple guard transfers in Vaughn Weems (North Idaho College) and Corey Camper Jr. (UTEP). Weems was a high-volume scorer who averaged 26.7 points and 8.1 rebounds per game. Camper earned all-defensive team honors in Conference USA last season. Elijah Price transfers in from Fresno State as well after putting up 10.5 points, 8.3 rebounds and 2.6 steals and blocks per contest. This group should help the team improve on its 31.1% 3-point shooting in conference play a year ago.

In the first three seasons under Alford, the Wolf Pack finished 50th or higher twice in adjusted tempo. They were 235th and lower the last three seasons. Improved shooting and higher tempo could equate to some early Overs. It probably won't lead to a conference title, but Alford is a good enough coach to make this group competitive.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	17%
CONFERENCE ODDS	40/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	1500/1

NEW MEXICO
LOBOS

MOUNTAIN WEST
2024-25 RECORDS: 27-8 SU, 16-18 ATS, 14-20 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 77.5
NATIONAL RANK: #93 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #6 OF 12

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 15-5 TO THE UNDER IN ITS FINAL 20 GAMES LAST SEASON AND IS 30-18-4 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES OVER THE PAST FOUR SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

Eric Olen comes to Albuquerque after an enormously successful stint at UC San Diego which culminated in 30 wins and a berth in the NCAA Tournament. He inherits a New Mexico program without a returning starter and next to no returning pieces.

Olen landed guard Deyton Albury and wing Kevin Patton Jr. in the transfer portal to kick-start the rebuild. Albury (Utah State) averaged 7.8 points and shot 43.3% for the Aggies last season. Patton only averaged 3.1 points at USC last season, but he has more to his game. His freshman season at San Diego he averaged 9.8 points, 4.4 rebounds and 2.5 steals and blocks. With him comes his brother, Kallai, who is a 6-foot-4 freshman guard. Olen also brought 6-foot-7 forward Luke Haupt with him from UC San Diego. Haupt did not play last season for the Tritons, but he is familiar with Olen's system and should help the new pieces acclimate.

It does seem that youth will be key for the Lobos this season. The younger Patton, along with guards Jake Hall and Marius Jones, as well as Timéo Pons from France, are all freshmen who expect to have some sort of role for New Mexico this season.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	0%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+950
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	300/1

SAN DIEGO STATE
AZTECS

MOUNTAIN WEST
2024-25 RECORDS: 21-10 SU, 12-18 ATS, 16-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 87.0
NATIONAL RANK: #30 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #1 OF 12

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 11-23 ATS ON THE ROAD OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS, AND THE OVER WAS 7-3 ON THE ROAD LAST SEASON.

OVERVIEW

Brian Dutcher enters his ninth season as head coach of SDSU looking for a sixth straight berth in the NCAA Tournament and he has the team to do it. Six key rotation players are back for the Aztecs this season, three of which — Miles Byrd, BJ Davis and Magoon Gwath — are starters. Reese Dixon-Waters — a preseason first-team All-Conference player last season — returns as well after missing last season due to a foot injury.

San Diego State finished 16th in the country in KenPom's adjusted defensive rating (94.6) and it should push for a top 20 finish in that metric once again with the return of Byrd and Gwath. Dixon-Waters should help the team improve an offense which finished sixth in conference play in offensive efficiency (105.1). So too should a pair of transfer guards: Sean Newman Jr. (Louisiana Tech) and Latrell Davis (San Jose State).

The Aztecs are the favorites to win the Mountain West this season, with the best price in the market at +140. Given Dutcher's ability to develop talent and his history with guard transfers, it would be surprising to see SDSU fail to win either the regular season title or tournament, something it hasn't done since 2023.

RETURNING STARTERS	3
RETURNING MINUTES %	62%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+140
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	120/1

SAN JOSE STATE
SPARTANS

MOUNTAIN WEST
2024-25 RECORDS: 15-20 SU, 23-9-1 ATS, 20-13 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 68.5
NATIONAL RANK: #191 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #10 OF 12

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM HAD THE SIXTH-BEST COVER PERCENTAGE IN THE COUNTRY LAST SEASON AT 23-9-1, AND THE OVER WAS 9-3 IN ROAD GAMES.

OVERVIEW

Tim Miles is fighting the good fight in San Jose and he continues that battle with a new roster for the 2025-2026 season.

The leading returner for Miles is Sadraque NgaNga who averaged 6.8 points and 3.3 rebounds last season. Guard Jermaine Washington averaged 4.4 points per game and had four double-digit scoring efforts as a freshman. Pasha Goodarzi is also back after a quiet season in which he averaged 2.3 points per game.

Miles did land some diamonds in the transfer portal which could help the Spartans exceed expectations this season.

Colby Garland is a junior guard who averaged 12.1 points and 4.4 assists at Longwood. JaVaughn Hannah won Sixth Man of the Year in the MAC last season and finished 19th in the conference in steal rate (2.4%). Adrian Myers — a 6-foot-7 forward — is a former three-star who transfers in from Mississippi State.

Miles has won 15+ games in two of three seasons at SJSU. He's a great coach that will likely exceed expectations with a roster that has some talent. The Spartans won't contend for a conference title but under Miles they are 35-28-1 ATS, which is the third-best cover rate over that span.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	19%
CONFERENCE ODDS	130/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	2000/1

UNLV
RUNNIN' REBELS

MOUNTAIN WEST
2024-25 RECORDS: 18-15 SU, 14-19 ATS, 12-20 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 77.0
NATIONAL RANK: #97 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #8 OF 12

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WAS 9-2 IN THE TEAM'S LAST 11 GAMES, AND THE TEAM WAS 2-7 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST NINE POINTS.

OVERVIEW

Josh Pastner takes over the gig in Sin City with the task of freeing UNLV from the mediocrity that has plagued the program for over a decade. He must do so with an entirely new roster that is already facing injury concerns.

Myles Che — a UC Irvine transfer — is set to play point guard for the Runnin' Rebels, but a foot injury has sidelined him this offseason. Che is not only a potential double-digit scorer, he is also the lone true point guard on the roster. Center Emmanuel Stephen, who transferred in from Arizona, is injured, and so is forward Ladji Dembele.

Should health improve, UNLV does have a somewhat talented roster. Kimani Hamilton averaged 13.1 points and 4.6 rebounds for High Point. Naas Cunningham is a former four-star prospect who comes in from Alabama. Al Green was a 10.2-point-per-game-scorer for Louisiana Tech and he shot 42.1% from deep.

True ball-handling might be a short-coming of this roster, but the Rebels have no shortage of off-ball guards and wings with some strong upside. Pastner has been out of the game the last two seasons, but this group has the potential to be a pain to many in the conference.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	2%
CONFERENCE ODDS	18/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	300/1

UTAH STATE
AGGIES

MOUNTAIN WEST
2024-25 RECORDS: 26-8 SU, 16-17 ATS, 15-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 84.5
NATIONAL RANK: #44 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #2 OF 12

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 7-3 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST 14 POINTS LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER IS 23-11-1 IN ROAD GAMES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

Utah State returns just one starter this season: Mason Falslev (15.0 PPG, 6.3 RPG), a second-team All-Conference player. However, Jerrod Calhoun hit the transfer portal hard to reinvigorate this roster. Paired with Calhoun’s analytical approach that emphasizes 3-point attempts, shots at the rim and free throws, this should be one of the best offensive teams in the Mountain West once again.

Falslev is the lone returning starter, but there is returning production elsewhere. Drake Allen (7.0 PPG, 3.8 APG) appeared in 31 games last season, was second in the conference in assist rate (34.5%) and 16th in offensive rating (114.2). MJ Collins Jr. (Vanderbilt) and Kolby King (Tulane) transferred in as well, giving the Aggies some great depth in the backcourt. The wing is probably the weakest position group for Utah State. Tucker Anderson is a 6-foot-9 junior who appeared in 33 games last season. He averaged less than six points and shot under 30% from deep.

The Aggies are shooting for a sixth NCAA Tournament berth in seven years this season. It’s a strong program which continues to achieve despite a revolving door at head coach. Calhoun will likely have this team playing above its level, but there is a reality Utah State slips from its perch this year.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	49%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+330
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	300/1

WYOMING
COWBOYS

MOUNTAIN WEST
2024-25 RECORDS: 12-20 SU, 14-15-2 ATS, 15-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 70.0
NATIONAL RANK: #163 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #9 OF 12

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER IS 18-7-1 AT HOME OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS, AND THE TEAM WAS 6-3-1 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES LAST SEASON.

OVERVIEW

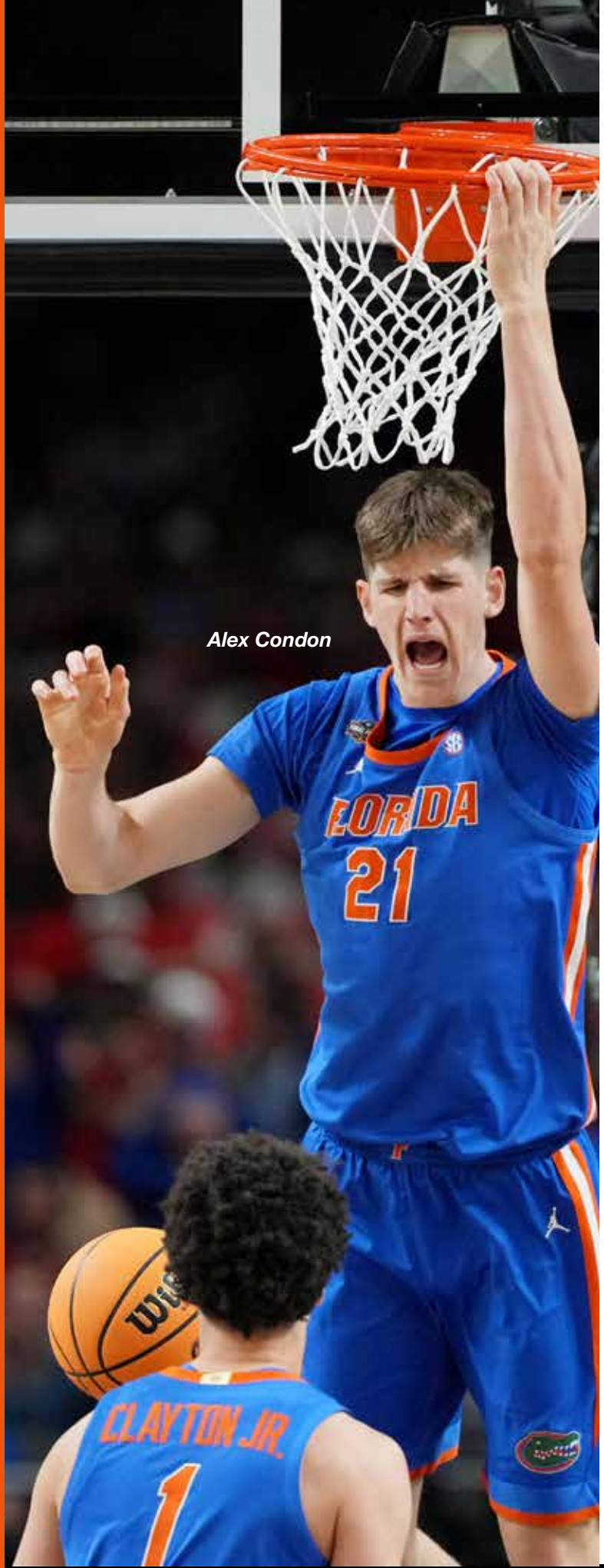
Wyoming is once again replacing its roster as it heads into a new season. Every starter, save for one, is gone. The expected starting lineup is made up entirely of transfers. Perhaps that is a good thing for head coach Sundance Wicks, who won just 12 games last season.

The Cowboys do boast two talented transfers in the backcourt: junior Khaden Bennett and senior Leland Walker. Bennett averaged 10.3 points and 4.3 rebounds for Quinnipiac last season. Walker has averaged 11.1 points and 3.7 assists per game in his career across stops at Eastern Kentucky and FAU. Junior college transfer Uriyah Rojas is a high-volume shooter who averaged 25.5 points for Chaffey College last season.

Wyoming does have some returning players. Senior Matija Belic averaged 5.6 points and 3.1 rebounds in 22 games last year. Sophomore Abou Magassa put up 3.2 points and 3.7 rebounds. However, both are dealing with foot injuries prior to the season.

Like many coaches do, Wicks is preaching more tempo for a team that finished 318th in the country in that category. With better, more experienced, guard play that could come to fruition. So too could more than just five wins in conference play.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	19%
CONFERENCE ODDS	150/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	3000/1



Alex Condon

SEC
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Realignment certainly helped strengthen the overall profile of the SEC, but this is a conference that as recently as 2022 only had six teams in the NCAA Tournament and only one of them (Arkansas) made it out of the first weekend. This past season, all but two teams (South Carolina, LSU) made the Big Dance and the conference had seven of the Sweet 16 teams. Oh, and they had two of the Final Four teams and the eventual champion.

It was the conference's first basketball title since 2012 when John Calipari won at Kentucky. It was the conference's first title game appearance since 2014 (also Kentucky). As we head into this season, Bart Torvik and Ken Pomeroy have six SEC teams in their top 25 and six more in their top 40. As has been the case on the football side for a much longer period of time, these teams are in a position where they don't rebuild. They simply reload.

There is a trio of new coaches in the conference, leading to a little bit of uncertainty. No program has more of it than Auburn, as Bruce Pearl abruptly retired in September and his son, Steven, was named the successor. Texas seemingly has upgraded from Rodney Terry to Sean Miller. Buzz Williams moved on to Maryland and the Aggies went the mid-major route to get Bucky McMillan from Samford.

According to 247Sports' college basketball transfer rankings, three SEC teams are in the top 10 and four in the top 11. Kentucky, Florida, and Auburn are fifth, sixth, and ninth, respectively, and Oklahoma sits 11th. LSU (16th), Texas A&M (20th), Alabama (24th), Texas (25th) are in the top 25. Mississippi is actually 26th, so an "honorable mention" spot for them. With big athletic department bankrolls and booster bucks to go around, SEC teams can pay top freshmen and also pull top transfers. The economics of college sports at work.

Expect a lot of tourney teams again here and a lot of cannibalization within the conference, but the adjusted efficiency metrics will help these teams shine.

PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS BY

ADAM BURKE

ALABAMA
CRIMSON TIDE

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 28-9 SU, 21-16 ATS, 19-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 89.5
NATIONAL RANK: #18 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #4 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM RANKS 15TH IN CONFERENCE COVER PERCENTAGE SINCE THE 2022–23 SEASON, GOING 37-23 ATS IN SEC PLAY.

OVERVIEW

Making shots is important, but so is having the right facilitator to run the offense and help create open looks. That was Mark Sears last season for the Crimson Tide, as he had over five assists per game and also led the team with 18.6 PPG. This season, the role falls on Labaron Philon Jr., who was going to enter the NBA Draft, but had a change of heart. Seems to be a thing for him, as he decommitted from Kansas to go to Alabama.

But, Philon's return is big. The 'P' words for Alabama this season are "Promise" and "Potential". "Proven" is not one, as Philon, Latrell Wrightsell and Aden Holloway are the only guys back who got consistent, meaningful playing time. This is a remarkably talented team, both with guys in-house and players pulled in from the portal. For a team that has made the Elite Eight and Final Four over the last two seasons, the bar is very high. Modest improvement in TO% on defense and 3P% on offense and they'll get where they want to go.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	37%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+900
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	30/1

ARKANSAS
RAZORBACKS

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 22-14 SU, 17-18-1 ATS, 17-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 88.5
NATIONAL RANK: #23 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #6 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WAS 8-2 IN THE TEAM'S FINAL 10 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND ARKANSAS WENT 9-2 ATS IN ITS FINAL 11 GAMES AS AN UNDERDOG.

OVERVIEW

It was incredibly strange to see John Calipari manning the sideline for a SEC team without blue uniforms. After a down year for Eric Musselman's crew two seasons ago, Calipari took the Razorbacks dancing again, as they also won a couple of games before bowing out against Texas Tech 85-83 in an OT thriller. Not bad for a No. 10 seed. Much improved defensive play from Arkansas went a long way in their return to the NCAA Tournament.

But, they needed more efficiency on offense. This was a group that was only 230th in the nation in 3P% per Bart Torvik. They were 105th in eFG% offense and struggled for the second straight season on the offensive glass. Per Torvik, Arkansas has the highest percentage of returning minutes in the SEC, so Calipari doesn't have to put a ton on Darius Acuff Jr., 247Sports' highest-rated freshman PG, or Meleek Thomas, the No. 3-rated SG. Those guys will provide the ceiling around capable veteran holdovers like Karter Knox and Trevon Brazile, while South Carolina transfer Nick Pringle is a great big man to acquire.

RETURNING STARTERS	3
RETURNING MINUTES %	48%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+600
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	25/1

AUBURN
TIGERS

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 32-6 SU, 20-17-1 ATS, 21-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 88.5
NATIONAL RANK: #21 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #5 OF 16

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 78-51-3 ATS AS A HOME FAVORITE SINCE THE 2015–16 SEASON, 13TH-BEST AMONG TEAMS THAT HAVE BEEN A HOME FAVORITE IN AT LEAST FOUR GAMES DURING THAT SPAN, AND WENT 12-4-1 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES LAST SEASON.

OVERVIEW

Bruce Pearl decided in September that he had had enough. Coming off of a Final Four appearance after three straight first-weekend exits in the NCAA Tournament, Bruce handed the reins to his son Steven, who worked as a medical sales rep out of college before joining the Auburn program. The 38-year-old played at Tennessee under his father, but has zero head coaching experience. He was the associate head coach from 2023-25.

It’s a tough time to take over as well. All five starters are gone and only 11.9% of the team’s minutes return from last season per Bart Torvik. With the revolving door of college hoops, players exit and players enter. In Auburn’s case, Keyshawn Hall and KeShawn Murphy are big Division I names from the portal and Abdur Bashir dropped 27.2 PPG at Casper College to lead the NJCAA Division I scoring race. Tahaad Pettiford will have a ton of responsibilities before bolting to the NBA to uphold last season’s offensive standards because the defense is very likely to decline.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	12%
CONFERENCE ODDS	20/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	50/1

FLORIDA
GATORS

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 36-4 SU, 29-11 ATS, 21-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 94.0
NATIONAL RANK: #5 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #1 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM RANKED FOURTH IN OVERALL COVER PERCENTAGE LAST SEASON AT 29-11 ATS AND PLAYED 11 OF ITS FINAL 13 GAMES OVER THE TOTAL.

OVERVIEW

The season could have been very rocky for Florida. Head coach Todd Golden was under investigation in September for a Title IX violation that included allegations of sexual harassment and stalking. While the university was continuing to dig in, Golden kept the focus on basketball as best he could. Florida was 13-0 before losing on January 4 in the conference opener to Kentucky. By the end of the month, the university cleared him of any wrongdoing and the Gators would go on to win 17 of their final 18 games, including a 77-75 win over two-time reigning champion UConn in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

So the Gators won it all and, as luck would have it, went through the previous champs to do it. Running it back may not be a stretch. Per Bart Torvik, Florida returns over 40% of last season's minutes. Alex Condon and Thomas Haugh were fourth and fifth in points per game, so more will be expected of them as transfers try to make up the rest of the scoring. On the perimeter, Boogie Fland from Arkansas and Xaivian Lee from Princeton are high-upside transfers.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	40%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+240
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	15/1

GEORGIA
BULLDOGS

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 20-13 SU, 17-16 ATS, 14-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 84.5
NATIONAL RANK: #45 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #12 OF 16

OVERVIEW

In a season where Florida won the National Championship, it was nice to see former Gators head coach Michael White get UGA into the Field of 68 for the first time since 2015. White's Bulldogs went 20-13 after going 20-17 the year prior and still had a losing conference record, but they graded so much better in so many metrics. They went from being in the 240s in ORB% to being in the top 20. They were much better offensively inside the arc. They got to the free throw line more. They challenged shots well on the interior and outside.

They were just 4-11 in Quadrant 1 games, but 16-1 against lesser opponents. White intends to hold onto those statistical gains, but he'll need to do it without last season's only double-digit scorers, Asa Newell and Silas Demary Jr. Both guys were flawed, though. Demary shot 37.4% from 3, but under 40% overall. Newell was a 29% 3-point shooter who did all his damage on the interior. Expect more 3s and more perimeter ball movement from the Bulldogs, as they were 285th in Assist Rate last season per Bart Torvik.

RETURNING STARTERS 2

RETURNING MINUTES % 31%

CONFERENCE ODDS 75/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 300/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WENT 16-6 IN THE TEAM'S FIRST 22 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND OVERALL IN HOME GAMES, GEORGIA WAS 12-6 ATS.

KENTUCKY
WILDCATS

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 24-12 SU, 18-18 ATS, 19-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 93.0
NATIONAL RANK: #6 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #2 OF 16

OVERVIEW

The Sweet 16 drought for Kentucky ended, as the Wildcats made it to the second weekend of the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2019. That team was hardly a polished product for first-year head coach Mark Pope, as they were poor defensively. Their metrics were propped up by an incredible strength of schedule, as the 'Cats were 338th in the nation in TO% per Bart Torvik and 295th in 2P% defense. Kentucky had a single-digit TO% in five SEC games and nearly had two others that landed on 10.8% and 10.7%. Tennessee had 1.272 points per possession and was 24-of-38 on 2s in the game that ended Kentucky's season.

Transfer Jayden Quaintance, a projected top-10 pick, won't be available at the start of the season, but could factor greatly in conference play alongside returnee Otega Oweh, who led the team in points per game with 16.2. While he's the only starter back, PG Jaland Lowe started at Pitt and Kam Williams started at Tulane. Pope also pulled in quality transfers from conference rivals Florida and Alabama, as well as three 247Sports' top-33 incoming freshmen.

RETURNING STARTERS 1

RETURNING MINUTES % 31%

CONFERENCE ODDS +300

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 16/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 8-3 ATS AS A ROAD UNDERDOG OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS, AND THE OVER IS 26-11 IN HOME GAMES DURING THAT SPAN.

LSU
TIGERS

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 14-18 SU, 13-18-1 ATS, 16-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 82.0
NATIONAL RANK: #63 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #15 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 2-8 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG OF AT LEAST 9.5 POINTS LAST SEASON AND IS 17-39-2 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

A lot of the recent hires in the SEC have worked out really well. LSU's hire of Matt McMahon has not and this is probably a make-or-break year for the former Murray State coach. Conference records of 2-16 and 3-15 over his first three years are not going to get it done and his seven-year, $20.3 million contract is getting easier and easier to consider a sunken cost. In fairness to McMahon, he had to deal with the mess Will Wade made of the program, but the scholarship reductions and recruiting restrictions are now over.

Dedan Thomas Jr.'s exit from UNLV was discussed a lot out here in Las Vegas, but he's now in Baton Rouge, where he'll attempt to run McMahon's offense. Omaha scoring machine Marquel Sutton (18.9 PPG) is one of many tall players brought in to play off the wing or bang down low. Among the many issues for LSU last season, taking care of the ball, making 3s, and rebounding on defense were the main three. McMahon's unrestricted portal haul should help in all of them.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	18%
CONFERENCE ODDS	100/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	150/1

MISSISSIPPI
REBELS

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 24-12 SU, 19-17 ATS, 18-18 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 85.5
NATIONAL RANK: #40 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #11 OF 16

Ole Miss®

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WENT 10-5 IN THE TEAM'S FINAL 15 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND OLE MISS WAS 8-1 ATS IN NEUTRAL-SITE GAMES.

OVERVIEW

There were some questionable looks thrown in the direction of Oxford after Chris Beard was hired. Beard was fired from Texas on January 5, 2023 after being charged with a third-degree felony against a family member for strangulation. Ultimately, the charge was dismissed and Mississippi hired him just over two months later. The 52-year-old has been successful at nearly every stop and the Rebels' athletic department were willing to take on the potential PR hit for a proven winner on the sidelines.

On the court, their decision has been justified. Beard needed one transitional season before taking the Rebels to the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2001 and just the second time in program history. To return, Beard has to find instant offense to replace last season's top-three scorers. He did seem to go back to his Texas and Texas Tech roots, looking to get relentless defenders with the size to alter shots. And also use that size for second chances on offense. The Rebels were 311th in ORB% per Bart Torvik. With a questionable group of shooters, the margin for error will be sorely needed.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	15%
CONFERENCE ODDS	35/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	90/1

MISSISSIPPI STATE
BULLDOGS

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 21-13 SU, 15-19 ATS, 19-15 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 86.5
NATIONAL RANK: #34 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #10 OF 16

OVERVIEW

Chris Jans has been a good hire for the Bulldogs. After making the NCAA Tournament once from 2010-22 when Jans was hired, Mississippi State has made three straight appearances. Unfortunately, they've lost the first game every time. Jans has won exactly 21 games in each of his three seasons. That 22nd win would be a huge one, if he can get it. This is one of the best offensive rebounding teams in the SEC and also one of the best interior offenses, but they've been 363rd, 262nd, and 296th in 3P% per Bart Torvik.

It is almost an embarrassment of riches nowadays to return the leading scorer from the previous season and Jans was able to do that with Josh Hubbard (18.9 PPG). Hubbard was one of two Bulldogs in double figures on a nightly basis, as nine players played at least 15 minutes per night. Jayden Epps (Georgetown) and Ja'Borri McGhee (UAB) bring instant offense on the outside and Achor Achor and Quincy Ballard bring upside at both ends. Jans had a strong portal haul, perhaps a sign of a changing of the guard in Starkville with the football program struggling a bit.

RETURNING STARTERS 1

RETURNING MINUTES % 29%

CONFERENCE ODDS 18/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 110/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 10-17-1 ATS AS A HOME FAVORITE OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS AND 3-9 ATS AS A ROAD UNDERDOG DURING THAT SPAN.

MISSOURI
TIGERS

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 22-12 SU, 18-16 ATS, 19-15 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 86.5
NATIONAL RANK: #31 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #8 OF 16

OVERVIEW

Per Bart Torvik, Missouri returns the second-highest percentage of minutes in the SEC this season. That made things a little bit easier for Dennis Gates to put his roster together for a run at the program's first Sweet 16 appearance since 2009. In six seasons, Gates has two NCAA Tournament appearances at Missouri and one at Cleveland State, with only one win to show for it. Three returning starters is an anomaly to say the least and Gates was able to spend the summer refining his team instead of going through daily introductions.

Leading scorer Mark Mitchell is among the returnees, but his supporting cast with Caleb Grill and Tamar Bates is now a one-man band. So, Gates will need to find some scoring and replace a couple guys approaching 40% from 3. Highly-touted Class of 2025 wing Annor Boateng might be the player to watch the closest, but it will be hard to take your eyes off of all the size down low for the Tigers. Rim protection helps, but in a conference with a lot of very good shooters, those guys need to score, too.

RETURNING STARTERS 3

RETURNING MINUTES % 42%

CONFERENCE ODDS 30/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 150/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WENT 6-1 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL OF 146.5 OR LESS LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM IS 9-18 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

OKLAHOMA
SOONERS

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 20-14 SU, 18-16 ATS, 20-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 82.5
NATIONAL RANK: #59 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #14 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 7-1 ATS IN ITS FINAL EIGHT GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER WAS 12-5 IN HOME GAMES.

OVERVIEW

We all remember those days in high school and college when we didn't really do anything for the group project, but rode everybody else to an A. Well, the Sooners sort of did that last season, as they didn't make the NCAA Tournament at 20-12 two seasons ago in the Big 12, but made it last season at 20-14 with a worse conference record in the SEC. Not only that, but the strength of the conference and the quality of their seven Quadrant 1 wins got them a No. 9 seed. They proceeded to shoot 17-of-53 against UConn for a one-and-done departure.

With the help of some deep-pocketed boosters, the Sooners brought in 247Sports' 11th-ranked transfer portal class and some bona fide scorers from big programs. Athleticism and size were the focal points, as this was the 323rd-ranked team in 2P% defense and the worst rebounding team in the conference. Porter Moser had to elevate the talent level to keep pace in the SEC and he did, but the ceiling still looks lower than most of the mid-tier teams.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	11%
CONFERENCE ODDS	40/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	200/1

SOUTH CAROLINA
GAMECOCKS

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 12-20 SU, 16-16 ATS, 15-17 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 76.5
NATIONAL RANK: #105 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #16 OF 16

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 2-5 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST 7.5 POINTS LAST SEASON AND 2-8 ATS AS AN UNDERDOG ON THE ROAD.

OVERVIEW

No power conference school has had a three-year run like South Carolina. Lamont Paris took over for the 2022-23 season from Frank Martin and went 11-21. Then the Gamecocks went 26-8 and made the NCAA Tournament as a No. 6 seed, though they did lose right away. Last season, the Gamecocks went 12-20 and 2-16 in SEC play. Hilariously, Paris is 49-49 in Columbia. In some respects, the Gamecocks are a positive regression candidate, as they were 1-8 in games decided by six or fewer points. On the other hand, they were 0-9 in Quadrant 1-A games, 1-16 in Quadrant 1 games, and 2-3 in Quadrant 2 games and the schedule won’t be any easier.

With Collin Murray-Boyles off to the NBA, a bad team lost its best player. There are some holdovers, but they combined for 9.7 PPG. Meechie Johnson is back after a wasted year at Ohio State and he and Kobe Knox lead 247Sports’ lowest-rated transfer class in the conference. This is an experienced roster, but nowhere near as talented as their SEC counterparts.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	18%
CONFERENCE ODDS	200/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	250/1

TENNESSEE
VOLUNTEERS

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 30-8 SU, 20-18 ATS, 16-22 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 91.5
NATIONAL RANK: #12 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #3 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 30-18-1 ATS AT HOME OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS, AND THE UNDER IS 19-10 IN NEUTRAL-COURT GAMES DURING THAT SPAN.

OVERVIEW

Rick Barnes has been a college basketball head coach since 1987. He has 61 NCAA Tournament games to his name, especially during his almost 20 years at Texas and now more than a decade at Tennessee. He's made the Final Four one time and it wasn't even one of his Texas teams with Kevin Durant. The Volunteers have been bounced in the Elite Eight each of the last two seasons.

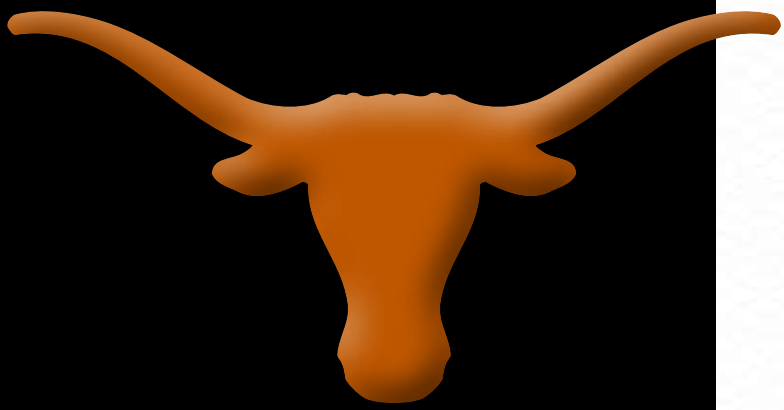
While UT didn't lose anybody of consequence to the portal, they did lose a lot to graduation. Per Bart Torvik, the Vols are only bringing back 22.5% of last season's minutes. Furthermore, while Tennessee got a top-five freshman recruit per 247Sports in Nate Ament, they had a light transfer class based on volume, but all of them are likely to start or play huge minutes. Barnes has a different portal approach than most because a lot of coaches are looking for scoring. Barnes is looking for that, but also relentless defenders. The Vols have been in the top five in adjusted defensive efficiency per Torfvik in four straight seasons and top five in eFG% defense in three straight. Expect the same again.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	23%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+800
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	35/1

TEXAS
LONGHORNS

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 19-16 SU, 16-18-1 ATS, 22-12 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 86.5
NATIONAL RANK: #33 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #9 OF 16



'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WAS 22-11-2 IN ALL GAMES LAST SEASON, AND 15 OF TEXAS' 21 GAMES AGAINST SEC TEAMS WENT OVER.

OVERVIEW

The Texas athletic department got a firsthand look at Sean Miller when his Xavier squad knocked off the Longhorns in Dayton during the First Four of last year's NCAA Tournament. Apparently they were impressed because they hired him and fired Rodney Terry, who was just two seasons removed from going to the Elite Eight after Chris Beard was fired midseason. Say what you will about how they treated Terry, but Miller has a big pedigree and a lot of wins to his name.

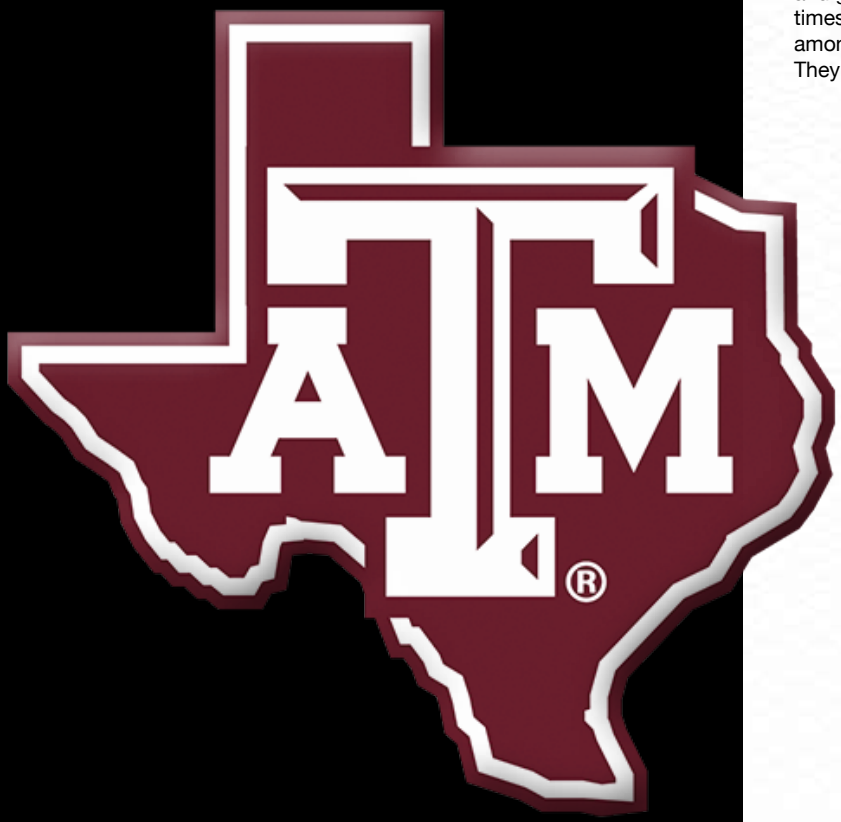
While Texas lost a lot in Tre Johnson (19.9 PPG), Arthur Kaluma (12.3 PPG, 7.5 RPG), and Kadin Shedrick (8.8 PPG, 6.1 RPG), Miller did have the luxury of building the roster around Jordan Pope and Tramon Mack. The transfer class includes a couple Xavier players and depth will be important, as Miller intends to ramp up the tempo and try to force more turnovers by speeding up the game on defense. Not a bad idea, as Texas was 221st in the nation in TO% last season and gave up over a point per possession in 18 of 21 SEC games.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	35%
CONFERENCE ODDS	50/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	120/1

TEXAS A&M
AGGIES

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 23-11 SU, 18-14-2 ATS, 15-19 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 84.5
NATIONAL RANK: #46 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #13 OF 16



‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WENT 7-1 IN THE TEAM’S FINAL EIGHT GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM WAS 1-6-1 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF SIX POINTS OR FEWER.

OVERVIEW

It has been a rapid rise for Bucky McMillan, who was a high school head coach at Mountain Brook HS in Alabama from 2008-20 before taking over at Samford. After five seasons with the Bulldogs, he’s coaching the Aggies in arguably the best conference in the country. Whether it is to prevent boredom or just the way things work, Buzz Williams left Texas A&M after six seasons. He’s never stayed with a program longer than six seasons and he’s now at Maryland. McMillan’s relatively late start in the transfer portal didn’t keep him from bringing in a great group.

It is a fun system to be a part of and that was probably a selling point. Samford was a top-20 team in TO% on defense each of the last two seasons and they look to use transition to move the ball and get up shots quickly. Samford was in the top 25 in pace three times on McMillan’s watch per Bart Torvik and they were also among the nation’s best 3P% teams over the last three seasons. They also shot 52.6% or better on 2s. This is a dangerous team.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	1%
CONFERENCE ODDS	28/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	100/1

VANDERBILT
COMMODORES

SEC
2024-25 RECORDS: 20-13 SU, 19-14 ATS, 17-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 87.5
NATIONAL RANK: #28 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #7 OF 16

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 5-2 ATS LAST SEASON AS A DOUBLE-DIGIT FAVORITE, AND THE UNDER WAS 8-2 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL OF 156 OR HIGHER.

OVERVIEW

After moving on from Jerry Stackhouse, Vanderbilt was in an interesting spot. The team was decent, but hadn't made the NCAA Tournament since 2017. Heightened academic requirements at the university make it hard to bring in highly-touted freshmen and even harder to bring in talented transfers that meet the necessary benchmarks. Undeterred, Mark Byington took over after a phenomenal season at James Madison and embraced the challenges of the gig in Nashville.

Leading scorer Jason Edwards (17 PPG) moved on, but other than that, Tyler Nickel and Devin McGlockton, the team's other two double-digit scorers, stayed and the transfer portal class is a lot bigger with a lot more potential than what was previously on the Commodores roster. Cornell transfer AK Okereke (13.9 PPG) is a name to remember, as James Madison had a 43% shot share on Close Twos per Bart Torvik in 2023-24 to rank 38th in the nation. Vandy didn't quite get that high last season, but will attempt to this season. That's why Byington focused on height and ball movement as opposed to perimeter shooting in the portal.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	36%
CONFERENCE ODDS	25/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	250/1

WEST COAST
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The West Coast Conference, like so many other conferences, including the Mountain West, Atlantic Sun, and WAC, will look different after this season. Perennial NCAA Tournament team Gonzaga will leave the WCC and join the new-look Pac-12. Oregon State and Washington State, who are playing in the conference as "affiliate members" while orphaned, will go back to the Pac-12. Seattle University has joined the WCC, as the WAC is disintegrating little by little. Some programs may join the Redhawks next year and beyond.

But, for now, the WCC is the same scrappy mid-major we're accustomed to, as Gonzaga and Saint Mary's have maintained a firm grasp on the conference for the most part, but San Francisco, Santa Clara, and others have been providing a little more resistance. When all was said and done, Gonzaga and Saint Mary's had the only NCAA Tournament bids last season, but Gonzaga's four conference losses were the most that they've had in the Mark Few era, dating back to 1999-2000.

As you would expect, Gonzaga is a big favorite to win the conference and Saint Mary's, who went 17-1 in regular season conference play prior to losing to Gonzaga in the WCC Tournament, is the second favorite. Gonzaga was heavily under-seeded in the NCAA Tournament and lost to No. 1 Houston in the second round, while Saint Mary's was a No. 7 seed that ran into No. 2 Alabama and had no hope of keeping pace offensively.

Most of the offseason for Few and Randy Bennett is trying to convince players to stay because these are not programs with big NIL collectives and they aren't pulling money in from another revenue sport like, say, football. The Bulldogs had much more success in the portal than Saint Mary's, so they will be tough to beat.

It is possible that the top challenger to the 'Zags is from San Francisco and not Moraga, as the Dons kept a lot of their roster intact and had one of the better portal hauls in the conference. With contrasting styles and tempos, I love handicapping this conference.

Graham Ike

PREVIEW AND TEAM OVERVIEWS BY

ADAM BURKE

GONZAGA
BULLDOGS

WEST COAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 26-9 SU, 16-19 ATS, 21-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 92.5
NATIONAL RANK: #8 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #1 OF 12

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 5-11 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF MORE THAN 15 POINTS LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER WAS 14-3 IN GAMES WITH A TOTAL OF 155 OR HIGHER.

OVERVIEW

It would seem that falling short of the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2014 rubbed a couple of Gonzaga's best players the wrong way. Leading scorer Graham Ike (17.3 PPG) and third-leading scorer Braeden Huff (11 PPG) opted to stick around. Former Cornell guard Braeden Smith (12.5 PPG, 5.5 RPG, 5.6 APG) actually redshirted last season because backcourt minutes were hard to find. Add him to a lineup with Grant Tyon-Foster (if Gonzaga wins the appeal on his eligibility waiver) from Grand Canyon (14.8 PPG, 5.9 RPG) and now four-time transfer Adam Miller, who plays at his first non-major conference school, and you've got a fast, talented, efficient scoring machine.

Gonzaga wants to run and they always have. Maybe they'll run even faster this season. They've managed to be very solid defensively, too, despite not forcing a lot of turnovers at any point. Last year's team fell to 35.4% from 3, the first time they've been that low since shooting 35.5% in 2009-10 per Bart Torvik. To make up for it, the Bulldogs had their lowest TO% in at least the last 20 years. They remain the team to beat.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	27%
CONFERENCE ODDS	/160
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	40/1

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT
LIONS

WEST COAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 17-15 SU, 14-15-2 ATS, 15-15 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 72.0
NATIONAL RANK: #142 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #8 OF 12

OVERVIEW

Longtime assistant Stan Johnson is 72-73 in his five seasons at Loyola Marymount, posting a winning record in a non-COVID season just one time in WCC play. Late-season losses to Pacific at home and Portland on the road really made it tough to do so last season, as the Lions lost all six games to Gonzaga, Saint Mary's, and San Francisco. The majority of last season's scoring is gone, as Myron Amey is the leading returnee with 8.6 PPG. By conference standards, though, this wasn't a very good offense anyway.

The team shot 31.3% from 3, which ranked ninth in conference play, and their only offensive claim to fame was taking terrific care of the ball. This was a team that won with defense, ranking second in WCC play in eFG% defense. Gifted scorers from Sacred Heart and Eastern Illinois are transfers stepping up a ton in class now. The ceiling for LMU is based on how well they play defense and that ceiling is still a .500 record overall and something respectable in conference play.

RETURNING STARTERS 1

RETURNING MINUTES % 18%

CONFERENCE ODDS 100/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 3000/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE UNDER WENT 8-3 IN ROAD GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM WENT 1-4 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF AT LEAST 10 POINTS.

OREGON STATE
BEAVERS

WEST COAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 20-13 SU, 20-12 ATS, 22-10 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 74.5
NATIONAL RANK: #114 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #5 OF 12

OVERVIEW

The Beavers beat Gonzaga in overtime last season, but lost both games to Saint Mary's and San Francisco. An inexplicable loss to Pepperdine in their first WCC Tournament game appeared to be the end of the season, but the Beavers were then invited to the first College Basketball Crown, a NIL-driven tournament in Las Vegas. Michael Rataj (16.9 PPG), Parsa Fallah (12.8 PPG), and Nate Kingz (11.8 PPG) didn't play in that game against UCF, as they had already accepted bags of Benjamins elsewhere.

So for Oregon State, the effort against UCF with a deeply-depleted roster was fairly encouraging. Unfortunately, even the top scorers from that game left. The Beavers brought back zero starters and head coach Wayne Tinkle isn't getting much investment in his roster while hanging in limbo in the WCC. The drop from the Pac-12 to the WCC helped OSU improve in a lot of stats, but the drop in talent for this season could give them major problems in trying to repeat a 20-win season.

RETURNING STARTERS 0

RETURNING MINUTES % 24%

CONFERENCE ODDS 11/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 500/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WENT 17-2 IN CONFERENCE GAMES LAST SEASON, THE HIGHEST CONFERENCE OVER PERCENTAGE IN THE COUNTRY.

PACIFIC
TIGERS

WEST COAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 9-24 SU, 14-17 ATS, 15-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 69.0
NATIONAL RANK: #182 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #10 OF 12

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM IS 20-41 ATS OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS, THE SECOND-WORST COVER PERCENTAGE IN THE COUNTRY DURING THAT SPAN.

OVERVIEW

It is hard to win games in the WCC if you don’t shoot at an elite level. If you can’t do that, you need to play elite defense. Pacific did neither of those things last season, finishing eighth in eFG% offense and defense per Bart Torvik in conference games. First-year head coach Dave Smart did at least help the team to three more wins and they didn’t go winless in conference play. But, it was still another underwhelming year for a school that has a lot of inherent challenges.

For starters, Smart was an assistant at Texas Tech under Grant McCasland. McCasland’s style of basketball is extremely difficult to play in the WCC because the other teams are far more efficient on both ends of the floor, so playing slower-paced games really limits any hope of variance. Even Pacific’s four conference wins were by 1, 2, 2, and a random 25-point blowout. Smart scoured California and his native Canada for as much help as he could find for a team that shot just 29.7% from 3, while opponents shot 35.8%. Hard to play slow like that.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	3%
CONFERENCE ODDS	110/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	3000/1

PEPPERDINE
WAVES

WEST COAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 13-22 SU, 16-17-1 ATS, 18-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 63.0
NATIONAL RANK: #284 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #12 OF 12

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM COVERED ALL FIVE OF ITS GAMES AS A FAVORITE OF SIX POINTS OR FEWER LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER IS 15-8-1 IN ROAD GAMES OVER THE PAST TWO SEASONS.

OVERVIEW

Malibu seems like a very nice place to go to school, especially when most of the country is cold in the winter. The Waves haven't made many in the college basketball world, but they did bring in basketball lifer and most recently Grand Canyon assistant Ed Schilling prior to last season to replace Lorenzo Romar. At the end of the season, hope for this season came in the form of three wins in three days in the WCC Tournament. Pepperdine ran out of fuel against Saint Mary's, but the wins over Oregon State and Santa Clara were the best of the season.

Schilling's first season was anything but smooth. The Palisades Fire in California forced cancellations, limited practices, and condensed games throughout January and February. Maybe it was no surprise that with five days off before the WCC Tournament began, the team caught a second wind. The roster, which only returns 17.3% of last season's minutes per Bart Torvik, is a collection of international players and random reserves from D-I teams around the nation. It's likely to be a long year.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	17%
CONFERENCE ODDS	200/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	3000/1

PORTLAND
PILOTS

WEST COAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 12-20 SU, 15-15 ATS, 19-11 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 65.0
NATIONAL RANK: #251 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #11 OF 12

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE OVER WAS 13-3 IN THE TEAM’S FINAL 16 GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE TEAM WAS 8-4 ATS ON THE ROAD.

OVERVIEW

There are no new head coaches this season in the WCC, but there could be some next season and Shantay Legans is one of them on the hot seat. Expectations are hardly high at Portland, but after a 19-15 season to begin his tenure, the Pilots have won 14, 12, and 12 games. They’ve been one of the worst defensive teams in the nation each of the last three seasons, ranking 336th, 355th, and 334th in eFG% defense per Bart Torvik. The last two seasons, they’ve been in the bottom 10 in TO%.

With that sort of defensive effort, there is nowhere near enough offense to go around to compete in a conference like this. Legans dug into the JUCO ranks after losing all five of his starters, including four guys who averaged double figures and accounted for nearly all of the team’s assists. Given San Diego’s impressive portal haul, it looks like Pacific and Portland will be playing for last place in the WCC.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	15%
CONFERENCE ODDS	200/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	1500/1

SAINT MARY'S
GAELS

WEST COAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 29-6 SU, 14-20 ATS, 12-21 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 83.5
NATIONAL RANK: #52 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #2 OF 12

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 3-11 ATS IN NON-CONFERENCE GAMES LAST SEASON, AND THE UNDER WAS 12-2 IN ITS FINAL 14 GAMES.

OVERVIEW

Saint Mary's is one of college basketball's true marvels. The tiny private college with fewer than 3,000 students has 11 NCAA Tournament appearances in the last 20 years. We talk about the Caliparis and Pitinos and Izzos of the world, but what Randy Bennett has done is probably more impressive than any of those coaches who have recruiting riches and talent pipelines unlike what the Gaels have. Certainly international players, particularly Australians and Lithuanians, have been huge for Bennett.

He's been able to keep his teams intact, giving him a lot of experience and leadership on the floor, especially with the style of play he employs. The Gaels play slow, defend the whole shot clock, and take great care to find the right shots on offense. This season, outside of Paulius Murauskas (12.1 PPG, 7.7 RPG) and Harry Wessels (5.3 PPG), the Gaels don't look like the team they usually seem to be. Betting against Bennett isn't wise, as he's won at least 26 games each of the last four seasons, but this team is not on par with previous versions.

RETURNING STARTERS	1
RETURNING MINUTES %	32%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+425
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	250/1

SAN DIEGO
TOREROS

WEST COAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 6-27 SU, 17-15 ATS, 18-14 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 70.0
NATIONAL RANK: #162 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #9 OF 12

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

SEVEN OF THE TEAM'S FINAL EIGHT GAMES WENT OVER THE TOTAL LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER IS 37-18 IN CONFERENCE GAMES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS — THE THIRD-HIGHEST CONFERENCE OVER PERCENTAGE IN THE NATION.

OVERVIEW

Present-day college basketball consists of a lot of players going out the exit door and in the entrance door. It was more of a one-way door that locked from the outside for San Diego last season. Steve Lavin's four best players left prior to last season and laid the groundwork for what would be a miserable transitional year. It lived up to the billing, as San Diego went 6-27 overall and 2-16 in conference play. They played fast, as Lavin likes to do, but they couldn't shoot the 3 or stop the 3, ranking 347th in 3P% offense and 359th in 3P% defense per Bart Torvik. Of the team's 27 losses, only seven were by six or fewer points.

They were even worse against conference opponents, sitting nearly -10% in 3P% differential and nearly -8% in 2P% differential. This season could be a bit different, as 247Sports actually has San Diego with one four-star recruit and two three-star recruits as they look to rebuild the program. Not for nothing, of the 150 teams with at least a three-star recruit for 247Sports, San Diego's class ranks 77th. Only Gonzaga's was higher among WCC teams and only three were graded.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	20%
CONFERENCE ODDS	120/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	3000/1

SAN FRANCISCO
DONS

WEST COAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 25-10 SU, 18-15-1 ATS, 18-15 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 80.5
NATIONAL RANK: #73 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #3 OF 12

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE DONS WENT 9-3 ATS IN THEIR FINAL 12 GAMES AND WERE 11-3 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF FEWER THAN 13 POINTS.

OVERVIEW

It is extremely unfortunate that San Francisco only has one NCAA Tournament appearance during what has been an impressive nine-year run in what appears to be a cradle of coaches. Kyle Smith parlayed his San Francisco success into the Washington State job and then Stanford. Todd Golden just won a National Championship at Florida. Now Chris Gerlufsen begins Year 4 having won 20, 23, and 25 games. But, it's all about beating Gonzaga and Saint Mary's to have any hopes of an NCAA Tournament bid.

Modest year-over-year improvement on defense didn't do enough to offset a drop in eFG% offense, so the Dons were very good, but not in that top tier of the WCC good. However, they return nearly half of last season's minutes per Bart Torvik, though leading scorers Malik Thomas (19.9 PPG) and Marcus Williams (15.1 PPG) are not among them. At least the next two guys, Tyrone Riley and Ryan Beasley are, though they shot just 32.2% and 29.9% from 3, respectively. Thomas was 39.4% and Williams 41.4%. With this style of offense, Gerlufsen needs to find shooters fast.

RETURNING STARTERS	2
RETURNING MINUTES %	50%
CONFERENCE ODDS	+650
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	500/1

SANTA CLARA
BRONCOS

WEST COAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 21-13 SU, 18-16 ATS, 18-16 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 76.5
NATIONAL RANK: #102 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #4 OF 12

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WENT 8-2 ATS IN ITS FINAL 10 GAMES LAST SEASON.

OVERVIEW

The Broncos are a prime example of why college basketball's "have-nots" simply cannot squander an opportunity. Santa Clara had a phenomenal starting cast, including Christoph Tilly, Adama Bal, and Tyeree Bryan. Bal is out of eligibility and Tilly and Bryan are now at Ohio State and Texas Tech. The talent level of the Broncos has dropped so much, but Herb Sendek has been around the block a lot of times, so he's worked his way out of jams before.

That being said, this is a team that shot 40% from 3 in conference games and held opponents to 28.8%. They were first in eFG% in a conference with Gonzaga, which is wild. They were also third in adjusted defensive efficiency. And, yet, they inexplicably lost to Pepperdine in the WCC Tournament to end the season. The transfer portal pulls are underwhelming and the incoming freshmen may be relied on to provide the sparks. This could be the team with the biggest drop-off in the conference this season.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	30%
CONFERENCE ODDS	16/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	750/1

SEATTLE
REDHAWKS

WEST COAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 14-18 SU, 11-19 ATS, 10-20 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 74.0
NATIONAL RANK: #124 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #7 OF 12

OVERVIEW

The lone newcomer in the conference is Seattle, a WAC transplant that often plays very, very strong defense. At least that's been the plan since Chris Victor took over for the 2021-22 season. Last year, Seattle dropped off so much offensive that their defense wasn't able to overcome it and the team finished with fewer than 20 wins for the first time in Victor's tenure. The Redhawks were 334th in the nation in eFG% offense and 325th in 2P% offense. With a move to the WCC, their defense could be a strength, but their offense will be a sizable weakness.

At least Victor does bring back three starters, though double-double machine Matthew Alexander-Moncriffe is not one of them. Maleek Arrington is the most noteworthy returnee and he shot 39.4% on 2s and 21.7% on 3s. John Christofilis is another and he shot 37.8% on 2s and 29.1% on 3s while leading the team with 165 attempts. Unless the JUCO transfers provide offense, leveling up in competition is coming at a bad time for the Redhawks.

RETURNING STARTERS 3

RETURNING MINUTES % 55%

CONFERENCE ODDS 40/1

NCAA TOURNEY ODDS 1000/1

'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

EACH OF THE TEAM'S FINAL SEVEN GAMES LAST SEASON WENT UNDER THE TOTAL, AND THE TEAM WAS 0-9 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF SIX POINTS OR FEWER.

WASHINGTON STATE
COUGARS

WEST COAST
2024-25 RECORDS: 19-15 SU, 16-18 ATS, 19-15 O-U

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATING 74.5
NATIONAL RANK: #115 OF 365
CONFERENCE RANK: #6 OF 12

‘HOOPS’ BETTING NUGGET

THE TEAM WAS 6-1 ATS AS A FAVORITE OF NINE POINTS OR FEWER LAST SEASON, AND THE OVER WAS 11-3 IN HOME GAMES.

OVERVIEW

One of the reasons why there are no new head coaches in the WCC this season is because there were a lot of hires a year or two ago. One of them is David Riley, who was hired from Eastern Washington when Kyle Smith went from Washington State to Stanford. Riley brought a lot of his Eagles roster with him to Pullman and the team shined offensively, ranking sixth in the nation in 2P% and 55th in 3P%. But, they also did a terrible job taking care of the ball and rebounding on the defensive end.

With those two things cancelling out the offense, the Cougars finished 19-15 and now those former Eagles are gone in Cedric Coward, Lejuan Watts, Isaiah Watts, and Nate Calmese, Riley has had to completely retool his roster. Depth was an issue last season, so there aren’t a lot of players to elevate from the bench to the starting lineup. The transfer portal didn’t seem to yield much, as funds aren’t going to be used a year before returning to the Pac-12. With the shooting numbers set to decline, the team better improve in other ways.

RETURNING STARTERS	0
RETURNING MINUTES %	31%
CONFERENCE ODDS	60/1
NCAA TOURNEY ODDS	1000/1

MID-MAJOR CONFERENCE PREVIEWS

AMERICA EAST
ATLANTIC SUN
BIG SKY
BIG SOUTH
BIG WEST
CAA
CONFERENCE USA
HORIZON LEAGUE
IVY LEAGUE
MAAC
MAC
MEAC
NORTHEAST
OHIO VALLEY
PATRIOT
SOUTHERN
SOUTHLAND
SUN BELT
SWAC
SUMMIT
WAC

AMERICA EAST
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

After representing the conference in the NCAA Tournament last season, Bryant looks to repeat under new leadership with former Mount St. Mary's and George Washington coach Jamion Christian taking over the program. While much of the roster has a new look, the team retained part-time starter Jakai Robinson from last season. Albany will aim to dethrone Bryant with the addition of Fordham guard Will Richardson, who was limited to eight games last season after averaging 9.8 points and 1.3 steals per game as a starter in the Atlantic 10 two seasons ago.

Vermont maintains its signature style, ranking 278th or slower in total possessions per game over each of the past nine seasons, and aims to return to the NCAA Tournament behind TJ Hurley and TJ Long, who combined for 26.9 points per game, though Long was limited to just eight games last season.

Binghamton, UMass Lowell, and Maine will turn over much of their rosters from a season ago, which will be toughest for Maine after their first 20-win season since 2003-04.

After scoring the second-fewest points per possession at home of any team in the nation last season, NJIT looks to capitalize with a fully healthy Quentin Duncan, who averaged 6.3 points per game on 42.5% 3-point shooting in 12 games.

UMBC returns last season's leader in assists, Ace Valentine, who should pair well with Old Dominion transfer Devin Ceaser, who averaged 11.5 points per game in a 12-game sample last season. Hofstra transfer KiJan Robinson looks to elevate a New Hampshire team that ranked 353rd nationally in points per possession and dealt with significant injuries last season.

The conference as a whole struggled against the spread last season, with only one team finishing above .500: Binghamton at 19-11. Several programs return key contributors and are capable of shaking up the standings to a degree, but the race to the top of the conference goes through Bryant and Vermont.

PREVIEW BY

GREG PETERSON

ATLANTIC SUN
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The final season for the Atlantic Sun Conference as we know it will be this one, as the A-Sun will partially merge with the WAC to form the United Athletic Conference as of July 1. Not all of the A-Sun teams will join the new conference, and the A-Sun will live on, but it will be another chapter in the realignment of college athletics.

Lipscomb won the conference's lone NCAA Tournament bid last season with a very impressive set of metrics and was a pretty popular pick against Iowa State, who pummeled them by 27 in the 14 vs. 3 game. This has become a cradle of coaches of sorts, as Casey Alexander was there for six years before going to Belmont and now Lennie Acuff left after six seasons to go to Samford. Former Acuff assistant and Division II Trevecca Nazarene head coach Kevin Carroll takes over, so not much should change schematically. The roster, however, has changed a ton with only one returning starter.

North Florida has a new coach, as Matthew Driscoll is an assistant at Kansas State and his former assistant Bobby Kennen was promoted. The Ospreys are referred to as the "Birds of Trey" because they shoot a ton of 3s. They also sell out to prevent them on defense, making for a very high-variance team. Bellarmine also has a new head coach, but one with the same last name, as Scott Davenport left his son Doug in charge.

A lot of these teams play very different styles of basketball, but they also play at pretty similar paces, aside from North Florida. Offensive efficiency produces more results than defensive efficiency, as most of these teams end up with low turnover percentages, so it's about scoring points. Teams like North Alabama, Queens, and Florida Gulf Coast have high Rim & 3 rates, while others will take a lot of long-distance jumpers, like North Florida, Eastern Kentucky, and Central Arkansas.

Most of last year's accomplished players are gone, adding a major degree of uncertainty for this season.

PREVIEW BY

ADAM BURKE

BIG SKY
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The Big Sky season begins with just one new head coach, but it is a big name and he brought in some big names in hopes of taking a perennial doormat to new heights. That coach is Mike Bibby and that program is Sacramento State, as the Hornets moved on from David Patrick assistant Michael Czepil after one season, even though they made the decision to promote him when they sent Patrick on his way a year prior.

Speaking of big names, Shaquille O'Neal is the GM of Sacramento State basketball now and his son, Shaqir, is now a member of the team, along with the Big Sky's top incoming transfers via the portal. Those developments are far and away the biggest offseason news items in this conference. Well, that and realignment, which has impacted conferences all across the country over the last few seasons.

The Big Sky will lose Sac State to the Big West, while Southern Utah and Utah Tech will be joining the league next season. Neither team seems likely to shift the balance of power all that quickly, as a consistent program like Montana is usually the team to beat, but schools like Northern Colorado, Weber State, Eastern Washington, and Montana State have had their moments as well. Idaho, who has the highest percentage of returning minutes in the conference, might be the one to slide into that group this season.

Portland State was another program knocking on that door last season, though they ultimately didn't have enough on offense for Jase Coburn to lead their first 20-win season since 2018. However, the top two scorers are back from the conference's top defensive team by a large margin. In other words, it looks like there could be a lot of parity in the Big Sky this season, as Weber State welcomed back a notable alum in Damian Lillard as their GM. Even Northern Arizona had the most wins (18) that they've had since 2015.

With very different styles, tempos, shot selections, coaches, and some tough travel, this conference looks wide open.

PREVIEW BY

ADAM BURKE

BIG SOUTH
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The 2025 season in the Big South looks to be a three-horse race once again. High Point will look to remain the top dog, while Winthrop and Radford will attempt to keep pace and maybe get a big push in the final stretch to cross the line first.

The Panthers will not look the same this season, as High Point promoted assistant Flynn Clayman to take over for Alan Huss, who parlayed his two very fine seasons with the program into an assistant role at Creighton, where he will take over for Greg McDermott when he retires. With Huss gone, Jordan Marsh, Kezza Giffa, and Kimani Hamilton all took the chance to grab a bag from the transfer portal, but a promising package of transfers joined the Panthers in hopes of keeping them atop the conference.

Radford hired a new coach as well, going the analytics route with Zach Chu, who worked in the NBA and most recently at SMU. Former Highlanders bench boss Darris Nichols is now at La Salle after winning 20 games for the second time. Winthrop's coaching turnover actually happened a while ago when Pat Kelsey used the gig to springboard into a spot with Charleston before orchestrating a thoroughly impressive one-year 180 at Louisville. Mark Prosser has done well in Rock Hill since.

Nearly all of the conference's top players are gone, either via the portal or because they ran out of eligibility. The Big South is not really known for playing good defense, as the league ranked fourth in 2P% and also had the highest FT Rate in the nation. It was a conference that was eighth in eFG% offense and 27th in eFG% defense.

If we look specifically at conference games, the teams shot 53.5% from 2 against each other, but only 36.5% from 3. High Point was the best 3-point shooting team and it obviously helped a ton, though they also led the conference in most defensive metrics. With so many new faces, though, Radford and Winthrop at least can see through a crack in the door.

PREVIEW BY

ADAM BURKE

BIG WEST
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The conference features several teams undergoing coaching changes. UC San Diego and UC Riverside both made early moves in the offseason, while Cal State Bakersfield saw longtime coach Rod Barnes step down following a massive off-court trafficking scandal involving one of his assistants. UC San Diego opted for continuity, promoting associate coach Clint Allard to head coach to maintain a team that ranked fourth nationally in turnovers forced per possession and third in points per possession allowed.

UC Irvine, fresh off a run to the NIT Final, must replace much of its roster but retains a clear defensive identity. The team ranked fourth in fewest points per possession allowed in road games last season and has finished in the top two of the conference standings in 11 of the past 12 seasons.

UC Davis and Cal State Fullerton remain works in progress on offense, as both programs ranked in the bottom 26 nationally in points per possession. Meanwhile, CS Northridge, ninth in the nation in rebound percentage last season, must replace its top five scorers from a team that played at one of the fastest paces in the country, ranking 11th in total possessions per game.

Long Beach State struggled last season, finishing 3-17 in conference play—the second-worst win percentage in the 57-year history of the program—and lost each of last season's top six scorers from a team that ranked 353rd in turnovers per possession. In contrast, Cal Poly ascended with a new, breakneck tempo, ranking second nationally in total possessions per game. The team went 16-19 last season, marking its most wins since the 2012-13 campaign.

With coaching transitions, roster turnover, and contrasting team styles, the conference is shaping up for a season filled with inconsistency and slow starters. UC Irvine is a major constant in this conference and we'll see if UC San Diego or somebody else can challenge the Anteaters for conference dominance, much like the Tritons did last season.

PREVIEW BY

GREG PETERSON

CAA
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

After making the NCAA Tournament last season, UNC Wilmington turned to the transfer portal, adding four starters from other conference teams to reload its roster. Monmouth returns five of its top eight scorers, including leading rebounder Jack Collins, and adds Jason Rivera-Torres, who averaged 6.4 points per game at Vanderbilt two seasons ago. Hofstra, which led the nation in 2-point shooting defense, brings back 7-foot center Silas Sunday to anchor the post.

Charleston looks to build on its third-place finish in conference play last season, with Connor Hickman aiming to regain the form he displayed at Bradley two seasons ago, when he averaged 14.5 points and 2.9 assists per game on 40.2% 3-point shooting. Drexel and Elon, both traditionally strong rebounding teams, must replace much of last season's production. Campbell, ranked 37th nationally in 3-point shooting defense at 31.1%, returns defensive anchor Cam Gregory to lead a roster loaded with transfers. Hampton, above .500 for the first time in six seasons, looks to improve a 2-point shooting percentage that ranked 318th last season.

William & Mary relied heavily on the three-point shot last season, taking 51.5% of its field goal attempts from deep—the third-highest rate in the country—and returns two of its top four scorers. Towson brings back its top two scorers from a team that won the CAA regular season crown at 16-2, aided by a squad that converted 34.2% of missed shots into offensive rebounds, ranking 20th nationally.

Stony Brook and North Carolina A&T aim to revamp their rosters through the transfer portal after finishing at the bottom of the conference last season. Northeastern, which had won 12 games or fewer in each of the past four seasons, rebounded to a 17-15 record last year and ranked 26th nationally in blocked shot percentage.

Transfers, transfers, and more transfers, much like a lot of the low and mid-major schools. What will be interesting is that outside of Towson, the teams that brought back some of last season's production weren't very good. Can they take a step forward this season and be more of a factor?

PREVIEW BY

GREG PETERSON

CONFERENCE USA
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The conference welcomes Delaware, who lost 20 games last season, but reached the CAA Tournament final. The team must replace six of its top seven scorers after ranking 21st nationally in 3-point shooting at 37.7%. Liberty, which represented the conference in the NCAA Tournament last season, returns 6-foot-7 Zach Cleveland, who led the team in rebounds and assists while averaging 10.4 points, 6.3 rebounds, 5.1 assists, and a block per game. Liberty ranked 21st in points per possession on the road and sixth in 3-point shooting at 38.7%.

Louisiana Tech must replace its top four scorers but brings back rebound leader Kaden Cooper from a defense that ranked 28th nationally in opponent 3-point shooting percentage at 30.8%. Middle Tennessee also lost its top four scorers and will turn to 6-foot-8 returnees Kamari Lands and Torey Alston, who combined for 14.3 points per game last season. Sam Houston looks to improve a defense that ranked 306th in points per possession allowed, which contributed to a 6-12 conference record, despite ranking 13th in 3-point shooting at 38.3%.

UTEP ranked 15th nationally in turnovers forced per possession but must replace its top seven scorers, while Western Kentucky played at one of the fastest paces in the country, ranking 13th in total possessions per game, yet will need to replace most of last season's production. Kennesaw State returns leading scorer Simeon Cottle, who averaged 18 points per game, and adds Wake Forest transfer Davin Cosby, who averaged 5.6 points per game in 17 appearances last season. New Mexico State ranked sixth nationally in opponent 3-point shooting percentage at 29.5%.

Jacksonville State won 23 games for its second-highest total in program history but lost seven of its top eight scorers. Florida International, which has finished under .500 in 10 of the past 12 seasons, adds New Mexico State transfer Zawdie Jackson, who averaged 10.5 points per game last season.

This is a much better basketball conference than football conference, as Liberty and New Mexico State have been consistently solid, while others are improving with some good coaching hires and better transfer portal opportunities based on their successes.

PREVIEW BY

GREG PETERSON

HORIZON LEAGUE
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Robert Morris looks to return to the NCAA Tournament after ranking 35th in rebound percentage last season and returns Ryan Pratherm, who averaged 8.3 points per game on 44.5% 3-point shooting, to help elevate the offense.

UW Green Bay struggled last season, winning four games or fewer for the second time in three years, and will rely on Marcus Hall, who posted 13.9 points, 4.3 rebounds, and 2.3 assists per game on 36.7% 3-point shooting. In-state rival UW Milwaukee ranked fourth nationally in rebound percentage but must replace six of its top seven rebounders.

Youngstown State, after ranking 67th in opponent 2-point shooting percentage, 13th in blocked shots, and 32nd in points per possession allowed on the road, faces a challenge with no player taller than 6-foot-7 with prior Division I experience.

Fort Wayne ranked 29th nationally in 3-point shooting last season, including a 38.7% rate on the road that ranked 11th, and also excelled defensively, ranking 35th in turnovers forced per possession and 15th in fewest turnovers committed on offense.

Cleveland State replaced coach Daniyal Robinson, who left for North Texas, with Rob Summers, a former assistant under Dennis Gates at Missouri. To the northwest, Detroit returns top scorer Orlando Lovejoy, who averaged 16.4 points, 4.6 rebounds, and 3.8 assists last season, on a team that ranked 41st in points per possession but 357th in 2-point shooting.

IU Indianapolis surprisingly fired Paul Corsaro after one season and hired Ben Howlett, who led West Liberty to a 217-37 record and a 110.2 points-per-game average last season. Oakland is relying on junior college talent, bringing in three of JUCORecruiting.com's top 25 prospects, while Northern Kentucky, which has won at least 11 conference games in each of the past nine seasons, must replace much of last season's production.

Teams like Robert Morris, Detroit, and Fort Wayne carry the potential to push back into contention, while programs such as Youngstown State and Northern Kentucky will need strong contributions from new or developing talent to challenge for the top spots. This is often a pretty wide-open conference and features a conference tournament that has been prone to some chaos.

PREVIEW BY

GREG PETERSON

IVY LEAGUE
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The conference sees two programs with coaching changes, starting with Columbia, which hired Florida assistant Kevin Hovde to lead a team that opened last season 11-1, including a win over Villanova, but then went 1-13 in conference play and lost 14 of their final 15 games. Penn moved on from Steve Donahue, bringing in former Iowa coach Fran McCaffery, who guided the Hawkeyes to top-33 marks in points per possession in each of the past eight seasons. Penn retains top scorer Ethan Roberts, who averaged 16.8 points, 5.6 rebounds, and 2.1 assists per game on 37.1% 3-point shooting.

Princeton attempted 48.7% of its field goals from 3 last season, ranking 12th nationally, and returns leading scorer Dalen Davis, who averaged 9.1 points per game on 35% 3-point shooting. Yale ranked 14th in the country in points per possession and will rely on Nick Townsend to lead the offense, after he averaged 15.4 points, 7.1 rebounds, and 3.6 assists per game on 48.2% 3-point shooting.

Harvard returns all three of its top scorers, including Robert Hinton, who averaged 14.6 points and 4.1 rebounds per game on 35.6% 3-point shooting as a freshman. Dartmouth, which posted its first season at or above .500 since 1998-99, brings back Brandon Mitchell-Day, who averaged 13.6 points, 7.6 rebounds, and 2.8 assists for a unit that ranked fifth nationally in defensive rebounds.

Cornell aims to improve a defense that ranked 264th in points per possession allowed while returning two of last season's top four scorers; the team also led the nation in 2-point shooting for the second straight season. Brown brings back two double-figure scorers, Landon Lewis and AJ Lesburt, after ranking 15th nationally in blocked shots, but just 360th in free-throw percentage at 63.2%.

Penn, Princeton, and Yale have established offensive leaders to build around, while teams like Columbia and Cornell look to new coaches for more consistency and some new ideas. Remember, only four of the eight teams make the conference tournament, which will be held on Cornell's campus in March.

PREVIEW BY

GREG PETERSON

MAAC
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Quinnipiac enters this season with the Preseason Player of the Year in Amarri Monroe, who is part of the reason they're the favorite to win the MAAC title.

That sounds familiar. The Bobcats had those same preseason expectations last year and paid them off with a MAAC best 15-5 record with Monroe being named Conference Player of the Year.

Ultimately Tom Pecora's program failed to land the biggest prize in a one-bid league: a coveted spot in the NCAA tournament. Quinnipiac fell in the conference tournament semifinals helping to lead the way for sixth-seeded Mount St. Mary's to win an improbable tournament title.

Monroe's (18 PPG, 9 RPG) return is somewhat surprising since he could have turned those numbers into a power conference payday. Danny Hurley, located a few miles away, offered Monroe a lucrative NIL deal. Nonetheless, the burly forward remains in Hamden with the goal of leading the Bobcats to their third straight regular season championship.

In order for Quinnipiac to make its first ever NCAA tournament appearance, it must fend off the other leading contenders in Siena and Sacred Heart.

Gerry McNamara, in his second season after jumpstarting the Saints, will lean on senior guard Justice Shoats, who averaged 16.1 points per game a year ago. Joining Shoats on the preseason All-MAAC first team is senior forward Anquan Hill, SHU's second leading scorer a year ago (12.8 PPG).

A pair of Jaspers, Will Sydnor and Devin Dinkins, also earned a spot on the preseason All-MAAC first team. This inside-outside combo should keep Manhattan in a position to challenge for a title.

While Marist didn't receive any votes in the preseason coach's poll, the Red Foxes always are a factor with their deliberate offense and John Dunne's defensive schemes.

Iona, with first year head coach Dan Geriot, along with the others (Merrimack and Mount St. Mary's) slated to finish in the middle of the pack, will be viable wildcards come tournament time in Atlantic City. Historically, the MAAC's consolidated schedule has worn down the offensive teams and rewarded the physical ones in March.

PREVIEW BY

AARON MOORE

MAC
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Akron has won 52 games over the past two seasons, including two NCAA Tournament appearances, and returns guard Tavari Johnson, who averaged 13 points and a team-best 3.8 assists per game on 39% 3-point shooting on a team that ranked 36th in points per possession. Usual contender Toledo looks to improve a defense that ranked 350th in points per possession allowed and returns only one of last season's top seven scorers, Sonny Wilson, who averaged 15.3 points per game

Newcomer UMass finished 12-20 in the Atlantic 10 last season and has lost 15 or more games in nine of the past 10 seasons, excluding an 8-7 campaign in 2020-21, and looks to improve on its 362nd-ranked 3-point shooting at 28%. Kent State brings back point guard Cian Medley for a team that won 24 games last season and has recorded 20 or more wins in five of the past six seasons, excluding 2020-21.

Miami (OH) ranked 15th nationally in 3-point shooting at 38.2% and returns two of last season's top three scorers. Peter Suder led the way with 13.7 points, 4.9 rebounds, and 3.8 assists, while Eian Elmer added 11 points, 4.9 rebounds, and shot 40% from 3. Western Michigan struggled defensively, ranking 296th in points per possession allowed and last in home 3-point percentage at 25.7%, and will rely on Justice Williams, who missed all of 2024-25 after averaging 12.3 points, three rebounds, and 2.5 assists at Robert Morris two seasons ago.

Ohio returns point guard Jackson Paveletzke, who averaged 13.8 points, 4.1 rebounds, and 4.8 assists per game, while Ball State adds UTEP transfer Devon Barnes, who averaged 10 points, two assists, and 1.6 steals per game, to bolster a team that was sixth nationally in free throw attempts per field goal attempt. Buffalo, which went 13-49 over the past two seasons, will build around guard Ryan Sabol, who averaged 14.4 points and two assists per game, and Bowling Green coach Todd Simon is counting on junior college transfers to lift the program.

Teams like Akron, Kent State, and Miami (OH) can rely on some continuity, while programs such as Bowling Green, Buffalo, and Toledo will lean on new talent and transfers. Keep an eye on UMass, as the move from the A-10 to MAC is a step down in class, but there will be some more miles on teams going to Amherst and also on the Minutemen.

PREVIEW BY

GREG PETERSON

MEAC
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Delaware State faces a major rebuild, losing its top five scorers from a team that finished above .500 for the first time in 10 seasons. NC Central, which ranked 21st in turnovers forced per possession but 356th in opponent 2-point shooting percentage, will rely on West Georgia transfer Kyric Davis to lead the charge after he averaged 9.9 points per game in the Atlantic Sun last season.

Howard looks to a healthy Bryce Harris to revitalize the team after he was limited to just seven games last season. Harris, who averaged 16.6 points and 7.5 rebounds per game on 37.5% 3-point shooting two seasons ago, will also be central to improving a defense that ranked 337th in points per possession allowed.

South Carolina State must replace its top four scorers from a team that ranked 359th in opponent 2-point shooting and 363rd in points per possession while returning only one of its top six scorers, Khali Horton, who averaged 7.9 points per game as a starter. Maryland Eastern Shore also hopes to tighten its interior defense after ranking 361st in opponent 2-point shooting percentage, while Morgan State will look to Rob Lawson to elevate a defense that ranked 336th in opponent 3-point shooting percentage. Lawson averaged 7.4 points and 2.4 assists per game on 37.5% 3-point shooting last season.

Norfolk State, which has made three of the past five NCAA Tournaments, will turn to Elijah Jamison to orchestrate the offense. Jamison was limited to just four games last season, but two years ago he averaged 8.9 points and 2.7 assists per game at UW Milwaukee—a crucial addition for a team that loses nearly 95% of its scoring from last season.

Several teams must replace significant scoring and rebounding production. Health and the ability to work with new contributors could be deciding factors. Teams like Norfolk State and NC Central have been more consistent, while SC State was an upstart a year ago with more wins (20) than the previous two seasons combined. Delaware State and Howard face the challenge of integrating fresh talent quickly to remain competitive in a league that rewards defense, since most of the teams don't play much of it.

PREVIEW BY

GREG PETERSON

NORTHEAST
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

New Haven is the newest Division I program and comes off a 12-17 record at the Division II level, losing four of its top five scorers from last season. Mercyhurst went 9-7 in conference play during its first season at the Division I level, but must replace its top four scorers, with few Division I transfers available to fill the gaps. Le Moyne, new to Division I two seasons ago, returns point guard Zek Tekin, who averaged seven points and 3.4 assists per game as a starter.

Central Connecticut loses its top four scorers from a 25-7 squad but has steadily improved its win total in four consecutive seasons under coach Patrick Sellers and they will try to overthrow St. Francis, who comes off its first NCAA Tournament appearance since 1991, will rely on Sky Wicks to step up after he averaged 13.7 points and 6.6 rebounds two seasons ago at Incarnate Word, following a limited role last season at UT San Antonio. St. Francis also has a new head coach in Luke McConnell after Rob Krimmel resigned because the program is going to Division III after this season.

Fairleigh Dickinson must replace its top nine scorers from a team that ranked 18th in opponent 3-point shooting percentage and 324th in rebound rate, turning to Taeshaud Jackson to replicate the 10.6 points and 10.4 rebounds per game he posted at VMI two seasons ago. Meanwhile, Stonehill returns two of its top four scorers, including point guard Chas Stinson, who averaged 8.3 points, five rebounds, and 2.4 assists per game.

Chicago State has a new coach in Landon Bussie, who went 39-15 in SWAC play over the past three seasons, and brings guard Marcus Tankersley from Alcorn State, where he averaged 10.6 points per game. Wagner struggled last season, ranking 357th in points per possession and 362nd in total possessions, while Long Island returns top scorer Malachi Davis, who averaged 17.7 points and 3.2 assists per game for a team that ranked 45th in points per possession allowed and 79th in rebound rate.

Several programs have significant roster turnover in a conference full of teams that will be poorly ranked in the national landscape and many of them will be interchangeable, meaning that we are likely to see a lot of parity during conference play.

PREVIEW BY

GREG PETERSON

OHIO VALLEY
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Drama may be lacking in the OVC this season, as we have two clear-cut candidates for the automatic bid and a lot of teams that will be jockeying for position behind them. Little Rock and Southeast Missouri State stand out among the crowd, though SIU Edwardsville was projected as a bottom-50 team in the nation before rising up and snagging the conference tournament title last season. They lost by 38 to Houston in the first round, but crushed SEMO State by 21 in the OVC Championship Game.

On the whole, this conference features a lot of turnovers and a lot of bad shooters. The teams that excel from 3 and are responsible with the basketball have a clear leg up on the rest.

Unlike a lot of low-major conferences, the roster turnover here isn't quite as significant and we only have one new head coach, as Nolan Smith is now the head man at Tennessee State after Brian Collins left for the NBA. You may remember Smith, who starred at Duke and went 21st overall in the 2011 NBA Draft. The Louisville native was an assistant at Duke, Louisville, and Memphis before getting the Tigers gig, so he's been coaching for a while, despite only turning 37 over the summer.

Smith didn't get much time to dabble in the portal, as he got the job in mid-July, but that's okay because a lot of returning production is on the roster. Elsewhere, SEMO State has their third-leading scorer back in Brendan Terry (11.2 PPG), while SIUE has the same with Ring Malith (11.1 PPG). Both teams will also rely on internal depth with some 2024-25 reserves taking on starting roles.

But, Little Rock brings back leading scorer Johnathan Lawson (15.4 PPG) and has three Robinson brothers now, as 2023-24 leading scorer KK (15.8 PPG) has been joined by JUCO transfer Khasen and freshman Kellen, who averaged 26.1 PPG as a HS senior. All-name-team member Tuongthach Gatkek is a defensive monster and this is absolutely the best roster on paper in the conference and the team to beat.

PREVIEW BY

ADAM BURKE

PATRIOT LEAGUE
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Any talk about Patriot League basketball usually started and then ended with the Colgate Raiders. Matt Langel's team scored their way to four straight NCAA Tournament appearances. Then came last season when American ended that impressive Colgate run.

It appears the American story is going to be short lived as the bulk of that Eagles roster is gone with only one starter (Greg Jones) remaining.

Navy is generating the early season conversation about who will be this year's champ. There is an interesting mix in Annapolis as the Midshipmen return all five starters, including point guard Austin Benigni (18.8 PPG, 4.3 APG), who led the league in scoring, along with his backcourt mate Jordan Pennick (10.7 PPG) and forward Donovan Draper (8.4 PPG, 8.2 RPG). Though it won't be longtime coach Ed DeChellis leading the squad. His retirement led to Jon Perry, a DeChellis assistant the past 12 seasons, getting the orders to take over. Perry will continue his mentor's philosophy of keeping the game in the low 70s.

If it's not Navy then it very well could be Boston University. The Terriers will once again call upon the services of returning starters Kyrone Alexander (12.9 PPG) and Michael McNair (10.1 PPG). One of the conference's top freshmen last year, Azmar Abdullah (37.6% 3P%) will have a bigger role this season for Joe Jones.

From a betting standpoint, keep an eye on the Terriers' totals. Last season KenPom had them with a 63.3 Adjusted Tempo, ranking 354 out of 364 teams.

Bucknell, who tied with American for a share of the regular season title, lost its top player, conference Player of the Year Noah Williamson (17.6 PPG, 7.6 RPG), a 7-footer who will now be racing down the court for Nate Oats in Alabama.

Colgate's chances of climbing back on top will be contingent on junior guard Jalen Cox (11.9 PPG), a member of the All-Patriot third team a year ago playing like a member of the First team in 2026.

PREVIEW BY

AARON MOORE

SOUTHERN
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Wofford became the most curious team in the conference this offseason after controversially firing coach Dwight Perry for alleged improper benefits in the form of housing and food. Former Terrier and Virginia Tech assistant Kevin Giltner was hired in mid-September. The Terriers will look to Central Michigan transfer Cayden Vasko, who averaged 7.4 points per game on 39% 3-point shooting last season, to provide scoring punch.

Furman returns four of its top seven scorers from a team that ranked 25th nationally in points per possession in road games and attempted 51.5% of its field goals from 3-point range, fourth-best in the country. Western Carolina brings back two of its three players who averaged double figures last season, looking to improve on a team that ranked 359th in points per possession.

Samford replaced Bucky McMillan, who left for Mississippi State, with Lennie Acuff, fresh off a 25-win season at Lipscomb. Acuff brings Dylan Faulkner, who averaged 10.5 points and 5.3 rebounds per game, to bolster the Bulldogs. UNC Greensboro faces the daunting task of replacing its top nine scorers after winning an NIT title and maintaining a team that ranked among the top 58 in 3-point shooting percentage the past two seasons. Chattanooga lost its top four scorers from a team that ranked 23rd in points per possession and 10th in 2-point shooting percentage, bringing in SE Missouri State transfer Tedrick Washington, who averaged 13.9 points and 2.5 assists per game last season.

East Tennessee State looks to Brian Taylor, who averaged 11.9 points on 44.9% 3-point shooting at SIU Edwardsville, to improve a team that ranked 337th in free-throw shooting but 36th in offensive rebound percentage. The Citadel returns much of its frontcourt from a team that went winless in conference play, while VMI retains four of its top five scorers after improving from 1-17 to 7-11 in conference play over the last two seasons. Mercer, under second-year coach Ryan Ridder, will rely on Wagner transfer Zaire Williams, who averaged 12.1 points per game on a defense-first team last season, to replace lost production.

Perry's dismissal came as a shock across college basketball and had to be challenging for the Wofford players, so we'll see how the reigning conference tournament champs look. This is a very good offensive conference where teams take and make a lot of 3s. Usually the most balanced teams on offense and defense are the ones that find the most success, while being good on one side and not the other isn't enough.

PREVIEW BY

GREG PETERSON

SOUTHLAND
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

After making the NCAA Tournament in each of the past two seasons, McNeese enters a new era after replacing coach Will Wade with Baylor assistant Bill Armstrong. The team will rely on returning starter DJ Richards, who averaged 9.6 points per game on 42.5% 3-point shooting, alongside Seton Hall transfer and former top-50 recruit Garwey Dual to stabilize the backcourt.

New Orleans has enlisted Master P as their President of Basketball Operations and brings back top rebounder MJ Thomas, who contributed 11.2 points and 7.8 boards per game. Lamar aims to build on its 14-6 conference finish last season, the program's best mark in 17 years, returning starters Andrew Holifield and Cody Pennebaker.

Houston Christian slowed the pace drastically last season, ranking 350th in possessions per game under first-year coach Craig Doty, though their 9-11 conference record marked their best showing since 2016-17. Incarnate Word was 317th in possessions per game but posted a 19-17 record, the second-best in program history, with leading rebounder Jordan Pyke back (10.6 points, 5.3 rebounds per game).

Stephen F. Austin ranked 60th nationally in points per possession allowed and 41st in turnovers forced per possession on defense but struggled offensively, ranking 354th in points per possession. Southeastern Louisiana tied for its second-best Southland record in 20 seasons at 12-8.

Northwestern State loses three of its top four scorers but retains rebounding leader Willie Williams for a team that ranked 30th in opponent 2-point shooting percentage. Nicholls must replace its top four scorers after winning 20 games last season, while Rio Grande Valley hopes to regain footing with Always Wright, a Rhode Island guard from two seasons ago, stepping into a major role. Texas A&M-Corpus Christi looks to emphasize interior play after ranking 354th in 3-point attempt percentage last season.

Like SWAC teams, Southland teams can also have poor non-conference records and metrics by playing blue bloods and major-conference opponents to get some money into the program. Keep that in mind as conference play begins.

PREVIEW BY

GREG PETERSON

SUN BELT
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

The Sun Belt is such a great conference because of all of the differences between the teams. There is always a good competition at the top of the conference for the one NCAA Tournament bid. There are teams that excel on offense, but can't stop a cold like Texas State and Georgia State. There are teams that couldn't hit water if they fell off of a boat on offense, but are impenetrable by conference standards on defense like South Alabama and App State. The ones that do both well usually lead the conference.

Then you also have to determine if the good offensive or defensive numbers are a byproduct of the competition that they've faced or if the teams are actually for real. It is quite the handicapper's puzzle and a conference that can absolutely fall through the cracks on a busy college basketball Saturday.

Probably the biggest story entering the season is the mass exodus from Arkansas State after Bryan Hodgson was hired at South Florida. The Red Wolves return zero minutes from last season, a harsh welcome for new bench boss Ryan Pannone, who was previously an assistant at Alabama. The departures at Arkansas State were a theme throughout the conference, though. Deep-pocketed SEC, Big Ten, Big 12, and ACC schools were able to use their NIL funds to entice many of the league's best players to transfer.

Pannone isn't the only new head coach, as Louisiana let Bob Marlin go and hired Houston assistant Quannas White, so you know that the Ragin' Cajuns will have a very different style of play. Louisiana-Monroe also has a new head coach, but Phil Cunningham was just promoted from within.

Arkansas State won the transfer portal battle handily per 247Sports, but Old Dominion has the highest percentage of returning minutes per Bart Torvik, who also likes the transfer hauls at Southern Miss and James Madison more. A few teams will eventually stand out, but this is a conference to follow for betting opportunities all season long.

PREVIEW BY

ADAM BURKE

SWAC
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Alabama A&M struggled last season, ranking 351st in points per possession and 360th in turnovers per possession committed on offense, and looks to former Grambling coach Donte Jackson to turn the program around. Jackson brings guard Kintavious Dozier, who averaged 12.4 points per game last season, to provide scoring stability.

Grambling, in turn, replaced Jackson with former Florida A&M coach Patrick Crarey, who led the team to a 14-17 overall record and 10-8 in conference play last season, their best overall win percentage since 2007-08. Florida A&M hired Florida State legend Charlie Ward as their new coach, who brings guard Anquan Boldin Jr. from Buffalo. Yes, that Anquan Boldin.

Bethune-Cookman adds Doctor Bradley, who averaged 19.6 points and 9.5 rebounds per game, while Zion Harmon and Jakobi Heady return after transferring elsewhere for the 2024-25 season, combining for 30 points and 3.1 steals per game as starters two seasons ago. Jackson State retains three of its top four scorers, including point leader Daeshun Ruffin, who posted 15.7 points, 3.5 rebounds, 4.2 assists, and 1.5 steals per game last season.

Mississippi Valley State turns over a roster that finished last nationally in points per possession, while Arkansas-Pine Bluff returns very little from a team that ranked near the bottom nationally in offensive efficiency, defensive rebounds, and points allowed per possession.

Alcorn State hands the reins to former Florida State assistant Jake Morton after Landon Bussie departed for Chicago State, while Alabama State turns to Micah Simpson in the backcourt after losing the team's top three scorers from a unit that ranked fourth nationally in turnovers per possession. Texas Southern boasts a 66.6% win rate in conference play in 14 of the past 15 seasons and returns two of its top three rebounders. Prairie View has been in the top nine nationally in turnovers forced per possession in five of the past nine seasons, while Southern has won at least 10 conference games in 13 of the past 14 seasons.

These teams often have horrible non-conference records and stats because of all the paycheck games they play to fund athletic endeavors, so keep that in mind as conference play starts.

PREVIEW BY

GREG PETERSON

SUMMIT LEAGUE
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

South Dakota State enters a new era after coach Eric Henderson departed for Drake, turning to Bryan Petersen, who spent six seasons as an assistant with the program. The Jackrabbits retain three of last season's top five scorers, providing a foundation for continuity under new leadership.

In terms of other new head coaches, Denver tapped former Division II coach Tim Bergstraser, who went 75-22 over the past three seasons at Minnesota State Moorhead, where his team shot 37.7% from 3-point range last season. Oral Roberts brought in West Virginia assistant Kory Barnett to replace Russell Springmann, who went 19-42 over the past two seasons.

St. Thomas enters with an efficient offense, ranking 10th in points per possession and 13th in fewest turnovers per possession, though they struggled on the boards, ranking 355th in offensive rebound percentage. South Dakota ranked third nationally in total possessions per game and 63rd in points per possession last season, and will rely on Isaac Burns, who averaged 14.6 points and 4.3 rebounds per game for a team that committed the fewest turnovers per possession in the nation.

Omaha returns five of its top seven scorers from a historic season in which the Mavericks made their first NCAA Tournament appearance, ranking 67th in points per possession and 75th in 3-point shooting. North Dakota faces a major rebuild, losing five of its top six scorers from a defense that ranked 355th nationally in points per possession allowed. North Dakota State led the country in 3-point shooting at 39.8%, which increased to 41.9% in road games last season. UMKC boasted the highest Under percentage in America last season at 21-8, as the team ranked 322nd in total possessions per game and 252nd in points per possession on offense.

South Dakota State's 11-5 record in conference play was their worst since 2016-17. Other programs in the Summit may be catching up to the Jackrabbits now, making this offense-first, defense-optional conference far more interesting.

PREVIEW BY

GREG PETERSON

WAC
CONFERENCE PREVIEW

Abilene Christian struggled on the boards last season, ranking 308th in defensive rebound percentage, but made up for it by forcing turnovers on 23.5% of opponents' possessions—the best rate in the nation. The Wildcats will be without top scorer Quion Williams due to an offseason arrest, but if he returns, he could provide a significant boost after he averaged 13.7 points, 5.1 rebounds, and 2.5 assists per game.

Utah Valley struggled from beyond the arc on the road, hitting just 28.5% of their 3-point attempts (346th nationally), but ranked 28th in points per possession allowed. They return point guard Trevan Leonhardt from a team that went 15-1 in conference play. Cal Baptist hopes to improve its 3-point shooting, which ranked 278th nationally at 31.7%, and bring back top scorer Dominique Daniels, who averaged 19.6 points and 3.1 assists per game.

Southern Utah allowed opponents the lowest percentage of 3-point attempts in the nation last season at 27.7%, and adds 6-foot-8 Holy Cross transfer Jaiden Feroah, who averaged 6.8 points and 5.9 rebounds per game on 39.1% shooting from deep, to bolster a team that ranked 334th nationally in 3-point percentage at 30.5%.

Tarleton State reinstates coach Billy Gillespie after a brief leave in October and brings in former top-50 recruit Dior Johnson to revitalize an offense that struggled with turnovers, though the team excelled defensively, ranking second nationally in turnovers forced per possession.

Utah Tech ranked 305th in points per possession allowed and 316th in points per possession on offense last season and turns to Ethan Potter, who averaged seven points and 4.1 rebounds per game on 33.3% 3-point shooting at Utah Valley, to lift the team. UT Arlington returns just one of its top 10 scorers and hopes Northern Colorado transfer Marcell McCreary, who averaged 7.9 points and 3.4 rebounds per game on 41.5% 3-point shooting, can become a primary offensive option.

This is the final season for the WAC. It will rebrand as the United Athletic Conference (UAC) on July 1 and consist of a variety of teams, including a merger with the Atlantic Sun Conference.

PREVIEW BY

GREG PETERSON