

NCAA basketball preview

by Brian E. Gregory
Collegian Staff

Can the Razorbacks repeat? Without Eric Montross and Grant Hill, will be the Carolina - Duke match-up still have its usual fiery rivalry? Can Michigan rebound from losing stars Juwan and Jalen? Do the UC Bearcats have what it takes to sweep through the Great Midwest?

To give the correct answers to all of these controversial questions would be impossible so let's just give a couple conferences a good overview:

ACC

Can anyone remember a year in the past decade when North Carolina or Duke was not 1-2 or at least 2-3? Well, if preseason stats stand up straight (they usually don't) it looks to happen this year. Maryland returns two sophomores and three juniors who terrified everyone in the league last year. If center Joe Smith steps up the team may be unbeatable.

Wake returns Randolph Childress, collegiate basketball's most explosive player. As long as he is on the course they'll be tough.

The Tar Heels and the Blue Devils have lost many key players. Duke especially will be hurt by the loss of Grant Hill. Look for Ricky Price, a 6'6" freshman swingman to step up to take a little pressure off the rest of the team.

The Yellow Jackets, Cavaliers and the Wolfpack all have the

same problem: lots of talent and very little consistency. Tech looks to be the brightest hope since James Forest decided not to turn pro. If he gets hot, they could make a run for it. Virginia and NCSU shoot thirty percent on a good night and are in the process of rebuilding.

Big 10

Purdue will be hard pressed to repeat since they lost the Big Dog (Glenn Robinson) to the NBA. Forward Cuonzo Martin will have to step up to keep them in the playoffs.

Despite the fact that Michigan lost to Howard and Rose they will still be a powerhouse. Returning from the Fab 5 are Ray Jackson and Jimmy King. Head Coach Steve Fisher, who has replaced Coach K. as the best recruiter in the nation, brings in Jerod Ward and a top notch class of freshmen. Look for Michigan to get the Big 10 title.

Indiana takes on a new look without Damon Bailey, but they still have Alan Henderson and Brian Evans who are prolific scorers. Although thin in the backfield, the General will find a way to win.

The biggest surprise could be Michigan State. If Shawn Respert averages 30 points a game they will be tough to beat.

Penn State is getting better every year since they have joined the Big 10. Center John Amaechi is the key to their improvement. Coach Bruce Parkhill promises some big upsets this year.

Big East

Syracuse is truly the strongest team here. Back is senior guard Lawrence Moten and junior John Wallace. With these two players Coach Jim Boenheim hopes to be back in the tournament at the end of the year.

One of the biggest surprises this year could be the Villanova Wildcats. With a very young team last year they won the NIT. This year they may have too much talent. Junior guard Kerry Kittles and Chuck Kornegay are very intriguing prospects. Few players anywhere can score like them.

UCONN, St. John's and Georgetown also look to capture the title. All look to have a good frontcourt and a strong backcourt. However, it'll be another year before they can make a strong run at the Final Four.

Watch Providence this year. Led by head coach Pete Gillen, the Friars could be in for a very good year.

SEC

One of the best teams in the nation is once again run by one of the best coaches in the nation. The Arkansas Razorbacks will almost surely improve on their 31-3 record from last year. Led by forward Corliss Williamson as well as shooting sensations Corey Beck, Dwight Stewart, and Lee Wilson, the Hogs are the team to beat this year in both the SEC and the rest of the nation.

Never bet against Rick Pitino. His Kentucky Wildcats

will be every bit as good as last year. The one big person they will have to replace is their point guard Travis Ford. UK hopes that Mark Pope will be able to step up in that role. In addition to Pope, Kentucky has the best guard in the SEC, Tony Delk. Watch them in the NCAA Tournament again this year.

Florida and Alabama will also perform well on the hardwood this year. Both have a high quality frontcourt.

Big 8

Three new coaches arrive in the Big 8 this year. Kelvin Sampson replaces Billy Tubbs at Oklahoma, Tom Asbury replaces Dana Altman at Kansas State, and Tim Floyd replaces a retired Johnny Orr at Iowa State.

However, the Kansas Jayhawks led by Coach Roy Williams are the team to beat in the Big 8 this year. The front line will be dominated by 7'1" Greg Ostertag and 6'11" Scott Pollard. Jacque Vaughn should develop into a great offensive threat in the backcourt.

The big force in the middle for Oklahoma State is Bryant Reeves, last year's Big 8 player of the year. The Cowboys will also be anchored by freshman John Nelson and 6'8" senior Scott Pierce.

Though they won't be able to go undefeated in the conference this year, Mizzou will still be

tough. Despite losing eight seniors, Coach Stewart was able to win the recruiting battle for twin towers Sammie and Simeon Haley. Also, Freshman of the Year Kelly Thames will come out from the shadows to become a team leader this year.

Keep an eye on Oklahoma and Iowa State. Under new coaches with great experience they may be able to make a run for the title.

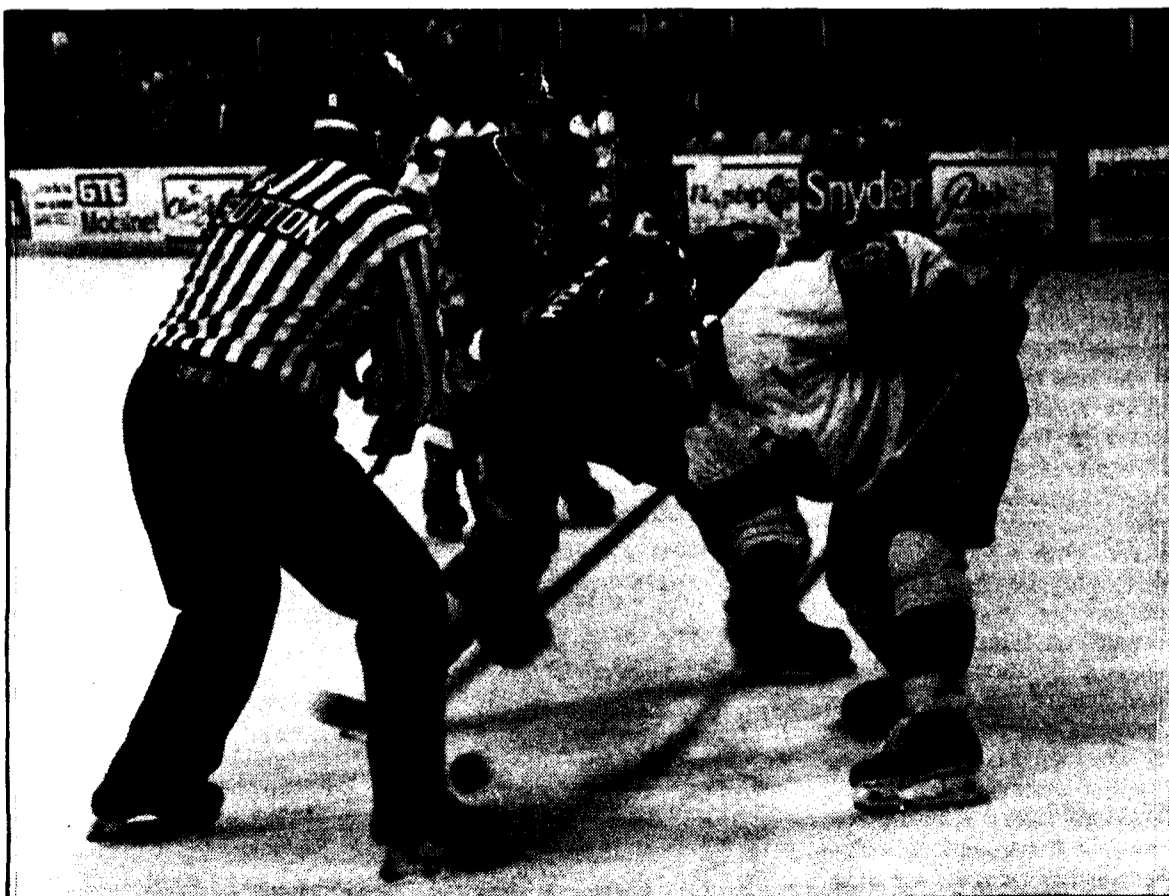
Great Midwest

Cincinnati is the best team in this conference by far. In fact, it may be the best team in the country when all is said and done this year. Led by guards LaZelle Durden, Keith Gregor, and Damon Flint, Cincinnati looks to go far. Coach Bob Huggins has built an incredible program and they are poised to make a run through a very weak schedule to the Final Four.

The Billikens of St. Louis and the Tigers of Memphis both return a great group of starters. David Vaughn will be the on-court leader for Memphis, while Erwin Clagget looks to lead St. Louis. If Lorenzen Wright steps up, the Tigers could challenge UC for the title.

After an impressive last year, UAB looks to have trouble gaining victories this year. Coach Gene Bartow may have to wait a few years and just rebuild this one.

Panthers Hockey



Face-off: Assistant captain Brad Harrison of the Erie Panthers wins the draw against their archrival, the Johnstown Chiefs, this past Friday night. The Panthers prevailed 6-4. They are now 4-6-2 for the season with their next game tomorrow night at 7:30 against the Columbus Chill at the Erie Civic Center.

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Business News and Sports

Thursday

"Lion Hotline" @ 6:05 p.m.

Saturday

Penn State v. Northwestern @ Noon

Sunday NFL

L.A. Rams v. S.F. 49rs @ 7:45 p.m.

Monday NFL

N.Y. Giants v. Houston @ 8:45 p.m.

Tuesday (Special Night)

"Lion Hotline" @ 6:05 p.m.

Wednesday

Julie, Jerry & Brian talk sports
on "The Point After" @ 7:06 p.m.

*** Happy Thanksgiving! ***