

MAC Basketball Preview

Written by MikeSpinelli

Sunday, January 06 2013 12:00 AM - Last Updated Wednesday, January 09 2013 1:24 PM



Welcome to the 2013 MAC Basketball Preview. It's been awhile since I wrote, a career transition and ill parents (and grandkids) did me in the last few weeks. But I'm back and ready for the MAAction of the basketball conference season. This season looks to be as competitive and exciting as we have seen, with several teams in the running for the title. Unlike football, the conference power is tilted to the East, and we have two bitter rivals in our backyard who will challenge for the automatic bid to the Big Dance.

SportsTime Ohio will again televise 20 men's games, 10 women's games, and the MAC Tournament. The first STO game is **Jan. 9** featuring Ohio hosting Buffalo. Michael Reghi and Dave Cecutti bring you the action all through the season and post season. The ESPN family will also televise selected games, keep an eye on my columns and on your team's schedule to catch all the action. And better yet, get out to the games, there is no atmosphere like a college basketball game, and the MAC is no exception.

Ohio in Jim Christian's first year as head coach they won the MAC tournament by beating Akron 64-63. In the first round of the NCAA Tournament, they beat Michigan 65-60 (Cooper had 21 points and 5 assists). In the second round they beat USF 62-56 (Offutt led scoring with 21 points). In the Sweet 16 they lost to North Carolina 73-65 (Offutt again led, with 26 pts). The key to the Cats is their backcourt, including Walter Offutt, DJ Cooper, and Nick Kellogg. They open the season Jan 9th against Buffalo on STO.

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Akron coach Keith Dambrott has led the Zips to five consecutive MAC Championship games, and led the best offensive team in the conference. Seven foot center Zeke Marshall is the center of attention in the MAC (sorry). The seven footer comes into conference play averaging 13.3 points and 6.8 rebounds per game. Alex Abreau plays the point, and can also drive. Other players to watch include swingmen Brian Walsh and Jake Kretzer. Both can shoot inside and from the stripe. Akron opens at home against Western Michigan.

Kent State coach Rob Senderoff leads a program that is always in the running for the MAC Daddy, although he lost four starters from last year's team. Guard Chris Evans leads the charge. Alongside him is Glenville's Randall Holt, Kent's returning starter on the point. Kent opens at home against Toledo.

Bowling Green and head coach Louis Orr return after a run in the CIT last year. Considered a sleeper by many, the Falcons are led underneath by 6'7 A'uston Calhoun. Guard Jordan Crawford is also a player to watch, who can play from either backcourt spot. BGSU opens the season on the road at Central Michigan.

Buffalo coach Reggie Witherspoon returns four starters, including forward Javon McCray. Buffalo plays with a lot of chemistry and is very athletic. Also keep an eye on forward Will Regan and guard Jawon Oldham, two strong scorers from anywhere. The Bulls start the season at Ohio.

Miami has a new leader in former Tennessee State head coach John Cooper. Cooper has brought an up-tempo/full court game that includes a backcourt of Allen Roberts and Reggie Johnson. Miami opens at home against Northern Illinois.

In the West, Tod Kowalczyk leads **Toledo** into a season where they are ineligible for post season play. Last year they got hot late and played in the CIT. Key players include guards Rian Pearson and Julius Brown. Both were on the AI-MAC Freshman team last year. Toledo opens the season at Kent State.

At **Eastern Michigan** Rob Murphy put together a strong Eagles team in his first year there.

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They were one of the strongest defensive teams in the conference. Keep an eye on guard Thompson and forwards Will Bryant and St V St M star Daylon Harrison. EMU starts the season against Ball State.

Western Michigan is led by long-time coach Steve Hawkins. Nate Hutcheson is the key to bringing more offense to the Broncos. He can slash, rebound, and pass. Darius Paul and Brandon Pokley are others to watch. The Broncs start the season in Akron.

Northern Illinois coach Mark Montgomery hopes to go deeper in the MAC tournament this year. This is a very young team, with ten players who are freshmen or sophomores including scorer Abdel Nader. The Huskies start the season at Miami.

Ball State coach Billy Taylor's team got hit hard by graduation. This is another defensive-minded team. Guard Jesse Berry can hit from anywhere, and can play several positions on the floor. The Cardinals start the season at EMU.

Central Michigan also has a new head coach as Keno Davis takes over the Chippewas. And like John Cooper, Keno is bringing a new system to his program. The backcourt features Kyle Randall and John Simons who can play on both ends of the court. The Chipps open at home against Bowling Green.

So, how will they finish?

I have Ohio winning the East Division, closely followed by Akron. Kent State should hold off the Falcons for third.

In the West I have Toledo winning, followed by Eastern Michigan and Western Michigan.

In the tournament, sorry Kent fans but this is again a two horse race, and I can't go against Zeke and Akron beating Ohio in the title game. Although Ohio does garner the Player of the

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Year in DJ Cooper.

Check back here throughout the conference season and during the tournament for all the MACtion.