



The MAC regular season will reach its conclusion on Saturday night as the buzzer sounds signaling the end of the Miami of Ohio-Ohio game. Sixteen conference games will have been completed by each team and then the focus will shift to next week's MAC Tournament to see who will represent the conference in the field of 68.

With one game to go, the standings look like this: Akron holds the first overall seed, followed by Ohio, Western Michigan and Kent State. The Zips and Bobcats will get a bye to the semifinal round, while the Broncos and Golden Flashes are guaranteed a bye to the quarterfinal round in Cleveland. There is a three-way tie for the fifth seed between Eastern Michigan, Buffalo, and Ball State. Eastern Michigan currently holds the tiebreaker with a 2-1 head-to-head record. Buffalo is 1-1 and Ball State is 1-2 in head-to-head matchups. The team who secures fifth place will get a bye into the second round.

The sixth, seventh, and eighth seeds will host first round games, which will be played on Monday. Bowling Green is currently in eighth place, one game behind those tied for fifth. Central Michigan holds sole possession of ninth place, with Northern Illinois and Miami of Ohio rounding out the bottom.

Once the dust settles in the standings, there will be a preview posted on Monday of the first round games.

The focus in Akron was supposed to be on Friday night's clash with rival Kent State, but an

off-the-court issue has overshadowed the game and the #1 seed in the tournament. Starting point guard Alex Abreu was arrested on Thursday for marijuana possession and drug trafficking. Abreu has been suspended indefinitely. Abreu averaged 10 points and six assists per game and was the team's second-best free throw shooter. It's a huge loss for the team, especially with their chances for an at-large berth looking slim.

Nevertheless, the game must go on and it is one of two MAC matchups that will tip off on Friday night. The Zips obviously want to beat their rival and complete a perfect 16-0 home record, but the game is of little consequence otherwise. The Zips have already locked up the #1 seed and a bye to the semifinals. Instead, the Zips will likely focus on developing chemistry between whoever Abreu's replacement is and the rest of the team. With a week until their next game, there should be plenty of practice team to get things situated.

Like the Zips, the Flashes have nothing to play for but pride. They have already locked up the fourth seed and a bye to the quarterfinals because they hold the necessary tiebreakers over the teams below them. The Flashes do want to break their losing streak in this series. They have lost five straight and all of them have been by single digits. Winners of six of their last seven and taking on an Akron team in a little bit of a transitional phase, the Flashes could go into Rhodes Arena and pull the upset.

Friday's other game has tournament seeding implications as the Buffalo Bulls head to Bowling Green to take on the Falcons. With a win, the Falcons would tie with Buffalo at 7-9 in conference and 1-1 in head-to-head matchups. The Falcons hold the tiebreaker over both Eastern Michigan and Ball State with a 1-0 record against each team. If Eastern Michigan and Ball State lose, the winner of the Buffalo-Bowling Green game would finish fifth and receive a bye to the second round. If either of Eastern Michigan or Ball State win, or both win, tiebreaking procedures will be invoked to determine the fifth and sixth seeds.

Buffalo has won three straight over Bowling Green, including a 68-65 win earlier this season in western New York. The Bulls nearly slayed Goliath twice in one week, taking Ohio to the brink in a 72-69 loss just days after upsetting Akron and ending their 19-game winning streak. The Falcons, meanwhile, are struggling, having lost three of their last four.

Saturday will begin with a couple of noon tip-offs, one in Kalamazoo and one in Toledo. The Western Michigan Broncos will look to get back in the win column when they entertain the Central Michigan Chippewas. The Broncos need a win to secure their second MAC West

Division title in three years. They hold the tiebreaker over Toledo if both teams finish with an identical conference record. By virtue of Toledo's postseason ineligibility, the Broncos have already clinched the #3 seed for the tournament.

As for the Chippewas, they appear to be destined to finish ninth in the MAC standings and will head on the road for their first round game. They have won two straight, beating Northern Illinois and Eastern Michigan after losing 10 straight. The Chips haven't won in Kalamazoo since February 27, 2010.

The other noon tip means a lot for seeding as Eastern Michigan hosts the Toledo Rockets. The Eagles control their own destiny for the fifth seed. A win means they get a bye to the second round and a loss means that they'll have to rely on the tiebreakers to determine seeding. The Eagles are 12-4 at the Ypsilanti Convocation Center this season. The Eagles have won six of the last eight meetings, but have lost the last two, including a 60-52 defeat back on February 9.

The Rockets will hold out hope that Central Michigan somehow upsets Western Michigan and they beat the Eagles. The Rockets can still win the MAC West Division championship and salvage something from a lost season.

Another game with seeding implications tips at 2 p.m. in Muncie when Ball State hosts Northern Illinois. Ball State is one of three teams tied for the fifth seed and the first round bye. The Cardinals have found their stride offensively of late, scoring 85 or more points in each of their last four games. The uptempo style has been to their advantage, as all four games are victories.

The Huskies are mired in another lengthy losing streak, threatening to finish the season with 11 straight defeats, assuming they lose this one and their tournament game. Ball State has won six straight over NIU and should make it seven. By the time the game tips off, Ball State should know whether or not they can secure the fifth seed, so it'll be interesting to see if that dictates how they play.

Finally, the last MAC regular season game of the season has very few implications. Ohio hosts Miami of Ohio in a game that won't have much of an effect on the postseason tournament. The Bobcats are locked into the #2 seed while Miami of Ohio will likely finish 11th if Ohio takes care of business on their home court and on senior day.

The Redhawks have lost eight in a row and haven't won on the road since February 2. It will be an emotional day in Athens as the great D.J. Cooper will play his final game in the Convocation Center. On Tuesday in Buffalo, Cooper became the first Division I player to accumulate 2,000 points, 900 assists, 600 steals, and 300 rebounds in his career. Will he add another chapter to his story with a second straight trip to March Madness?

That'll do it for the MAC regular season. Thanks for reading throughout the season and look for previews of the MAC Tournament games beginning on Monday.