

## Buffalo, The Most Overlooked Team in the MAC

Written by {ga=mikeperry}

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The University of Buffalo is two games and 26 days away from the start of its Mid-American Conference schedule, a Jan. 8 home game against Bowling Green. And, of all the teams in the MAC, the Bulls have been the most overlooked thus far.

Buffalo was picked to finish last in the East Division in the preseason MAC Basketball Poll, but has charged out of the gate to a 6-3 record. The Bulls are a perfect 4-0 at home and, actually, are just 17 points away from an undefeated record. Their biggest loss of the season came at Youngstown State, a 64-53 decision in Buffalo's second game of the season. Its other losses came on the road at St. Bonaventure (76-74) and at Indiana State (58-54).

It was fairly easy to write the Bulls off before the season started with no one on the preseason all-conference team and not much returning in terms of experience (Mitchell Watt, a 6-foot-10 junior forward, had the most career starts under his belt with 54 heading into this season). However, Buffalo head coach Reggie Witherspoon has been in charge of the program for a long time, this is his 12<sup>th</sup> season at the helm of the Bulls, and his system is very familiar to his returnees. Buffalo's 78-64 victory over Wisconsin-Green Bay this weekend was his 150<sup>th</sup>

career win at the school and he does not surprise anyone with radical defenses or crazy offensive sets, something that makes learning his system fairly simple provided the player puts in the work during training camp and practice.

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Buffalo has been solid on both ends of the floor this season, as the MAC statistical team leaders verify. The Bulls are second in the MAC in team offense at 72.6 points per game, first in team defense allowing 62.9 points per game (a MAC-leading 9.7 point differential), first in field goal percentage at 46.9% and first in defense, allowing its opponents to shoot just 37.2%. Buffalo also tops the conference in 3-point shooting (37.2%) and blocks per game (6.11). The Bulls are also near the top of the MAC in rebounding (fourth at 37.2 per contest), turnover margin (third at +2.7), steals (second at 9.56 per game) and defensive rebounding (third at 25 per contest).

Buffalo has seen balanced scoring as well. Two Bulls are in the top 10 in the MAC in scoring, 6-3 junior guard Zach Filzen at 15.8 points per game is seventh and Byron Mulkey, a 6-0 senior point guard, is eighth at 15.6 points per contest. Four additional Bulls average over seven points per game: 6-5 junior wing Dave Barnett at 8.9, 6-10 junior forward Mitchell Watt at 8.3, 6-6 freshman forward Javon McCrea at 8.0 and the first player off the bench for Buffalo, 6-8 senior forward Jawaan Alston at 7.0.

(A side note, McCrea just might be the least popular college basketball players in the nation as far as Clevelanders are concerned. In the Buffalo basketball media guide he listed LeBron James as his favorite athlete and, when asked what three people he would most like to have dinner with, instead of listing people like Ghandi, Mother Theresa and Jesus McCrea answered "LeBron James, Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh." Stay out of C-Town, Mr. McCrea).

Filzen leads the MAC in 3-pointers made with 31 in nine games while Mulkey leads the conference in steals with 3.8 per contest. McCrea leads the MAC in defensive rebounding, pulling down 3.2 per contest and is third overall in the league in rebounding at 7.6 per contest.

Barnett, by the way, has the best favorite athlete in the conference...Tom Chambers. How great is that? And the guy isn't even from Seattle or Phoenix...he hails from East Aurora, N.Y.

With finals on the horizon at the University of Buffalo, the Bulls have a relatively light schedule the rest of the calendar year. They have just two games remaining in 2010, a home game against Houghton on the 18<sup>th</sup> and another home contest against BYU on the 30<sup>th</sup>. They will then travel to Cornell Jan. 3, so the Bulls could very likely go into their MAC opener against Bowling Green with a solid 9-3 record. STO fans will soon have an opportunity to check out the Bulls twice. Buffalo's home games against Zeke Marshall and Akron, Jan. 16 at 2 p.m. as well as

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their contest against Justin Greene and Kent State Jan. 19<sup>th</sup>

at 7:30 will be televised by SportsTime Ohio.