

BEST IN THE MIDWEST

1. Kansas

Is there anyone you'd rather have driving to the basket for a needed shot at the end than Sherron Collins? Xavier Henry's playing better, as is Tyshawn Taylor.

2. Ohio State

Evan Turner (20.3 points, 9.2 rebounds) was probably the best player in the tournament before his 37-footer to beat Michigan in the Big Ten Tournament. Now he's a legend. Junior David Lighty is a scoring threat and junior Jon Diebler is the bomber.

3. Georgetown

Chris Wright (15 points) scored 27 against Georgetown in the Big East tourney, but there are other guard scorers. Junior Austin Freeman (18 points, 51-percent shooter) was second-team All-Big East.

4. Maryland

Senior Greivis Vasquez was the ACC player of the year, averaging 19.6 points and 6.3 assists. Two other Terps guards averaged double figures.

5. Oklahoma State

Big 12 player of the year James Anderson (22.9 points, 6 rebounds) is the headliner, but don't forget senior Obi Muonelo (13.4 points) and three-point threat Keaton Page (10.2).

6. New Mexico State

Jahmar Young (20.5 points) is an All-WAC player who scored 19 against Utah State in the Aggies' tourney championship. Teammate Johnathan Gibson averages 17.5, many from three range.

7. Michigan State

The Spartans have underperformed this season, but junior Kalin Lucas (14.8 points) is a two-time All-Big Ten pick. He had back-to-back game-winners against Minnesota and Michigan this season.

8. Northern Iowa

Big guys get the ink for the Panthers, but reliable defensive guards Ali Farokhmanesh and Kwadzo Ahelegbe get it done, too. Both average around 10 points and Farokhmanesh is the top three threat.

9. Tennessee

Bobby Maze (3.1 assists) is one of the top SEC ballhandlers and a strong defender. Somebody you don't want to put at the line late, either (83.3 percent).

10. Houston

Aubrey Coleman is the top scoring guard in this regional (25.6 points). PG Desmond Wade averages almost five assists against 1.8 turnovers.

11. UNLV

The Runnin' Rebels count a lot on scorer Tre'Von Willis (17.3 points), but Kendall Wallace shoots threes well and Oscar Bellfield averages 4.8 assists.

12. UC Santa Barbara

James Powell was the Big West tourney hero with his game-winning free throws, while Orlando Johnson (17.9 points) is the emerging star.

13. Georgia Tech

Sophomore Iman Shumpert (10.3 points) is the lead guard, but the story is senior D'Andre Bell, who sat out last season after spinal surgery. He's back in the starting lineup and averaging 6.3 points.

14. Lehigh

C.J. McCollum (18.9 points) is a legit big-time scorer and is the Mountain Hawks' three-point king. Marquis Hall averages 5.7 assists.

15. Ohio

Armon Bassett and DJ. Cooper combine for 30 points and almost 10 assists. Bassett set MAC tournament records for points and free throws.

16. San Diego State

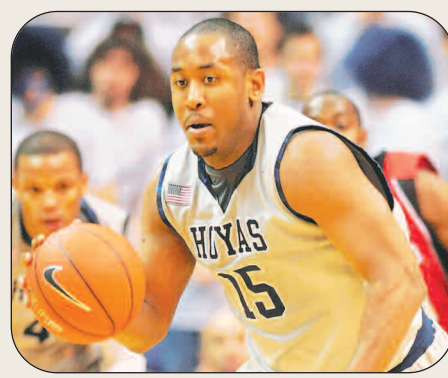
The Aztecs won the MWC automatic bid and have battled through injuries. DJ. Gay (10.3 points) is the top assist man and three-point shooter.



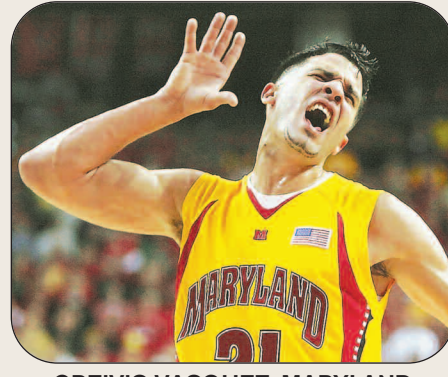
Travis Heying/The Wichita Eagle
Sherron Collins, Kansas



EVAN TURNER, OHIO STATE



AUSTIN FREEMAN, GEORGETOWN



GREIVIS VASQUEZ, MARYLAND



DARINGTON HOBSON, NEW MEXICO



TREVON HUGHES, WISCONSIN



DA'SEAN BUTLER, WEST VIRGINIA



JOHN WALL, KENTUCKY

BEST IN THE EAST

1. Kentucky

John Wall's the best freshman in the country, averaging 16.9 points and 4.2 rebounds. But he also dishes out 6.4 assists.

2. New Mexico

MWC player of the year Darington Hobson (16.2 points, 9.2 rebounds) is the guy to watch as a wing guard. Daiese Gary is averaging 21 points in March, too.

3. Wisconsin

Tre'von Hughes (15.4 points) is a good playmaker and Jason Bohannon averages 12 points. Jordan Taylor led the Big Ten in assist-turnover ratio (3.03), but struggles with his shot.

4. West Virginia

Da'Sean Butler moves the Mountaineers up this list after game-winning shots against Cincinnati and Georgetown in the Big East Tournament.

5. Wake Forest

Senior Ishmael Smith (6-foot) averages 13.3 points and was second-team All-ACC, finishing top five in league assists and steals. Senior L.D. Williams is two-time All-ACC defensive team.

6. Missouri

The Tiger guards typify the team. Good players but can disappear. Senior J.T. Tiller is a two-time All-Big 12 defender, and when the MU defense is rolling...

7. Washington

Isaiah Thomas (17.1 points, best three-point threat) was named after NBA's Isaiah Thomas after the Husky's dad lost a bet over a Lakers-Pistons game in '89. Mom liked it, anyway.

8. Cornell

Anyone who saw the Big Red in Allen Fieldhouse knows Cornell can give a good team a test. Louis Dale averages 4.8 assists and 11.9 points.

9. Texas

Positives are hard to find with the Longhorns lately, and the guards are no different. The assist-turnover ratio is almost 1 to 1.

10. Temple

Ryan Brooks (14.3 points) and Juan Fernandez (12.6) are the only Owls who shoot threes well. Each is at 42 percent. Brooks, a senior, is an A-10 second teamer.

11. Marquette

Jimmy Butler averages 15 points and the inexperienced Golden Eagles have four guards who shoot three-pointers well.

12. Montana

Anthony Johnson averages almost 30 percent of the Grizzlies' points. He had 42 in the Big Sky title game - including the team's last 21.

13. Clemson

Not a guard-dominated team. Doesn't shoot threes much, or well, and has more turnovers than assists. Demontez Stitt averages 11.2 points and 3.3 assists.

14. Morgan State

Reggie Holmes (21.8) was the MEAC player of the year and has 99 three-pointers. But it's a team that turns it over too much.

15. Wofford

Tim Johnson is a guard who leads the Terriers in rebounding (7.9). Wofford doesn't shoot the three well (34.9 percent) but has still won 13 straight.

16. East Tennessee State

Big guard Tommy Hubbard averages 14.1 points and 8.3 boards, but it's a team that averages more turnovers than assists.

ON GUARD

Guards are so cool. They do all the dribbling and long-range shooting. Then they drive to the basket with disregard for their bodies, dish off to a 6-foot-9 teammate for a dunk and backpedal as if to say, "He couldn't do that without me."

Here we rank the 64 teams' guard combinations. See how they compare to the way the bracket plays out.

BEST IN THE WEST

1. Kansas State

If Jacob Pullen (18.9 points) doesn't get you, Denis Clemente (16.2) will. And most nights, both of them do enough damage to get K-State the victory.

2. Xavier

Sophomore Jordan Crawford (19.7) leads the A-10 in scoring and is a 40-percent three-point shooter. Fellow sophomore Terrell Holloway averages 14.4 points and 4 assists.

3. Butler

Sophomore Gordon Hayward (15.4 points, 8.5 rebounds) plays the wing and was the Horizon League's player of the year. Sophomore Ronald Nored is the defensive stopper, and third sophomore Shelvin Mack was All-Horizon.

4. Gonzaga

WCC player of the year Matt Bouldin (15.8) isn't the only Bulldog backcourt guy with credentials. Junior Steven Gray (13.6 points) was All-WCC, as well.

5. Syracuse

Brandon Triche is a Big East all-rounder pick and teams with Andy Rautins to form a formidable three-point combination.

6. BYU

Jimmer Fredette (21.7 points, 4.7 assists) is a great tourney name and a better player. Fredette says he models his game after John Stockton - but Fredette's a better shooter.

7. Minnesota

Blake Hoffarber (10.5 points) is No. 2 nationally in three-point percentage. Lawrence Westbrook is a to-the-basket threat.

8. Pittsburgh

Sophomore Ashton Gibbs (16.2 points) has emerged to help make up for the loss of DeJuan Blair from last season. Junior Brad Wanamaker averages 12 points, 5 assists.

9. Vanderbilt

Senior Jermaine Beal (14.7 points) runs the offense and was a coaches unanimous All-SEC pick. There's depth with second-team All-SEC Jeffery Taylor and SEC sixth man John Jenkins.

10. Florida

Freshman Kenny Boynton (13.6 points, 2.7 assists) gives the Gators hopes for the future. Erving Walker (12.6 points, 4.9 assists) is the team's No. 2 scorer.

11. UTEP

Shooter Randy Culpepper (18 points) was C-USA player of the year, joining Tim Hardaway as UTEP's only players of the year.

12. Florida State

The Seminoles are frontcourt driven, but Deividis Dulkyis is a good three-point shooter. The Noles turn it over more than they have assists, a bad first-round combination.

13. Murray State

BJ. Jenkins (10.5 points) is a transfer from Liberty who has provided leadership and scoring from the backcourt.

14. Vermont

Maurice Joseph (14.1 points) leads the teams in threes and is part a senior class that has won 90 games. Joey Accaoui is another long-range guy.

15. North Texas

Josh White (14.9 points, 3.5 assists) is a Mean Green hero after making the free throw to win the Sun Belt title game.

16. Oakland

Johnathon Jones holds the Summit League record for assists (6.4 average), and he's also the Golden Grizzlies' No. 2 scorer (12.4).



Travis Heying/The Wichita Eagle
JACOB PULLEN, KANSAS STATE



JORDAN CRAWFORD, XAVIER



GORDON HAYWARD, BUTLER



MATT BOULDIN, GONZAGA



LACEDARIUS DUNN, BAYLOR



KEVIN ANDERSON, RICHMOND



DONALD SLOAN, TEXAS A&M



SCOTTIE REYNOLDS, VILLANOVA

BEST IN THE SOUTH

1. Villanova

Scottie Reynolds is one of the tournament's premier guards. He's a 2,000-point scorer and averaged 20 in Big East games. If he's stopped, Corey Fisher (13.6) is a good second option.

2. Baylor

The high-scoring Bears are led by shooters Lacedarius Dunn (19.2 points, 105 threes) and Tweety Carter (15.7 points, 6.1 assists), two guys who could get on a Final Four-type roll.

3. Richmond

A-10 player of the year Kevin Anderson (17.8 points) is one of the best mid-major guards around. Senior David Gonzalez was an A-10 second-teamer, too.

4. Texas A&M

Mark Turgeon will probably get PG Dash Harris back from a bruised bone injury that kept him out of the Big 12 tourney. All-Big 12 guard Donald Sloan is a playmaker, and junior B.J. Holmes is another good outside scoring option.

5. California

The Golden Bears rely heavily on scoring from guards Jerome Randle (18.7) and Patrick Christopher (16.0). Randle's the three-point threat.

6. Duke

Senior Jon Scheyer was All-ACC, averages 18.7 points and is good for three threes a game. Junior Nolan Smith is a 1,000-point scorer.

7. Purdue

The Robbie Hummel-less Bolleymakers seem vulnerable against Siena because guards such as E'Twan Moore (16.7 points) and Chris Kramer have to pick up the slack. Moore will be a defensive focus.

8. Utah State

Scoring guard Jared Quayle leads a good three-point shooting bunch (41.9 percent). The guards don't make fundamental mistakes, always a good thing.

9. St. Mary's (Calif.)

Gael guards know their role - get it inside to 6-11 Omar Samhan (20.9). Mickey McConnell and Matthew Dellavedova combine for 9.8 assists, so they find Samhan a lot.

10. Notre Dame

The Irish don't commit many turnovers and the guards don't try to do too much with scoring coming elsewhere. PG Tory Jackson (9.8 points, 5.3 assists) is a reliable senior.

11. Siena

Guard Clarence Jackson (13.6) is the team's No. 4 scorer, so points come from everywhere. He's Siena's best three-point threat in a good first-round matchup against hobbling Purdue.

12. Louisville

Edgar Sosa (4.5 assists, 13.3 points) leads a Cardinal team that is only 6-4 in its last 10 games.

13. Sam Houston State

A high-scoring Southland champion is led by Ashton Mitchell (12.6 points, 5 assists), who along with Corey Almond make a good outside shooting combo.

14. Old Dominion

Guards don't lead this team. The Monarchs don't shoot many threes and play a half-court pace.

15. Robert Morris

A team that averages more turnovers than assists won't get far in the tournament, and that's why Robert Morris is a 15 seed.

16. Arkansas-Pine Bluff

Terrance Calvin leads in scoring (10.6) and assists (4.1), but it's a bad three-point shooting team that started 0-11 with a horrendous non-conference schedule.