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# HUNTING HOOPS VALUE

By Zachary Cohen

The championship futures market can be tricky in college basketball. The fact that a national champion has to win a 68-team tournament makes it very difficult to look ahead. In college football, a Georgia backer will think about how the Bulldogs match up with a handful of teams — Alabama, Texas, Ohio State, Oregon, etc. — in potential College Football Playoff showdowns. That's not doable here. There's far more parity in college basketball, and stylistic differences can mean everything in a single-elimination tournament. That means that there's a lot more to think about. But that doesn't mean you can't get involved at all.

I like attacking this market by hunting value in a few different categories. I'm looking for a top-tier team that might be slept on compared to other contenders, a mid-tier team with the potential to break into that top group and then a sleeper with high upside. For some of these, winning the championship shouldn't be the ultimate goal. Sometimes you should be trying to get a favorable price to set up some hedging opportunities down the road.

With that out of the way, here are a few tickets I'm adding before the year:

## IOWA STATE (30-1)

I think it's going to be very clear early in the season that this is a top-five team in the country. That means you won't be able to get these odds by the time the Big Dance rolls around.

Last year, Iowa State was first in KenPom's defensive rating and second in Bart Torvik's adjusted defensive efficiency. This year, head coach T.J. Otzelberger has the core of that team back. So, this is a group that should be very difficult to score on, but I also think we can expect some growth offensively.

Iowa State was just 52nd in the nation in offensive rating last year, but this team has its three best guards back. Tamin Lipsey, Keshon Gilbert and Curtis Jones should all be awesome this year. The Cyclones also added Northern Iowa transfer Nate Heise, a versatile player with good size and great instincts. There might not be a team in the nation with guard play this good, and the frontcourt has potential also. Milan Momcilovic made the conference's All-Freshman team last year, and he's only going to get better in Year 2. And Charlotte transfer Dishon Jackson could give the team a much-needed inside presence.

Having reliable guards is crucial in the NCAA Tournament, and the Cyclones have three that can be the best player on the floor on any given night. Then you have Momcilovic, who is a legitimate NBA talent on the wing. Combining that with good coaching and real continuity should give Iowa State a chance of being a special team.

## RUTGERS (55-1)

Steve Pikiell has taken Rutgers to the NCAA Tournament three times in the last five years, and most of those teams lacked talent. Pikiell is just incredible at getting his teams to defend. Even last year's 15-17 Scarlet

Knights group was fifth in the nation in defensive rating, according to KenPom. It was the second year in a row that Rutgers was a top-10 defensive team, and the fourth time in the last five years that the Scarlet Knights were top 20 in defensive rating. If Pikiell can get this year's group to defend, Rutgers could be one of the best teams in college basketball. That's because talent isn't an issue anymore.

Rutgers actually landed the second-best 2024 recruiting class in the nation, according to ESPN. The group is headlined by Ace Bailey, a 6-foot-10 wing with outrageous size, athleticism and shot-making ability. Bailey was the second-ranked recruit in the class, putting him right behind Duke phenom Cooper Flagg. Pikiell also secured the fourth-ranked recruit in the class in Dylan Harper, whose brother Ron Harper Jr. played for Rutgers a few years ago. Harper is an incredible on-ball player, as he can work magic as a pick-and-roll ball handler and is a true three-level scorer.

For as good as Pikiell's teams can be defensively, they can be pretty miserable offensively. But it's going to be hard for him to mess things up on that end of the floor with Bailey and Harper. Rutgers also has some solid returners in Jeremiah Williams, Jamichael Davis and Emmanuel Ogbole.

Honestly, the only thing to really worry about with this group is 3-point shooting. Pikiell needs to find some time for his designated floor-spacers. Luckily he has a few of them. PJ Hayes, a San Diego transfer, shot 39.7% from deep last year, so he could be a big factor right away. The same goes for Princeton transfer Zach Martini, who is 6-foot-8 and shot 38.5% from 3 last year. Even Tyson Acuff, who averaged 21.7 points per game for Eastern Michigan last year, is a much better shooter than his 29.2% 3P% last year suggests. And he'll get cleaner looks as a smaller part of this offense.

There's going to be a lot for Pikiell to figure out on the fly, but his teams generally outperform their talent. So, if that trend continues with this type of roster, you're looking at a potential contender.

## ARIZONA STATE (500-1)

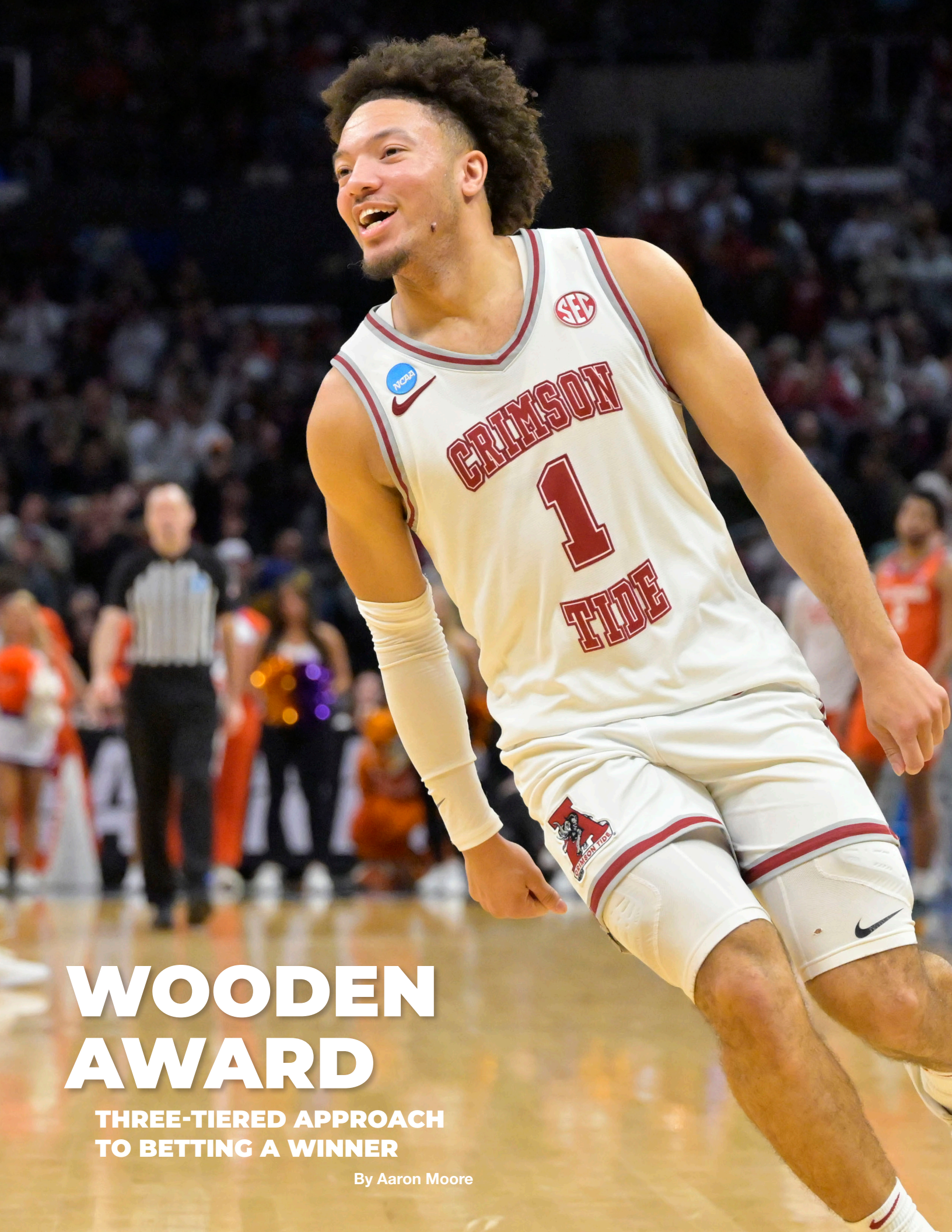
After going 42-20 in two years at Buffalo, Bobby Hurley's Arizona State tenure has been plagued by inconsistency. In nine years, Hurley has had four seasons with at least 20 wins. However, he has also had five with 15 or fewer. But for the most part, Hurley's teams have overachieved, and he has proven that he is a good defensive coach. Now, Hurley will try to build a team that is great on both ends of the floor, and he'll be doing it with the best roster he has ever had.

Thanks to John Calipari's Kentucky exit, Hurley was able to flip five-star Jayden Quaintance, a 6-foot-9 big man with all-world explosiveness, a high motor and some unique skills. Then, when Caleb Love announced he was returning to Arizona, Hurley swooped in and convinced the 22nd-ranked prospect in the class, Joson Sanon, to ditch Tucson for Tempe. Sanon is viewed as a potential one-and-done player because of his ability to make shots. With four-star wing Amier Ali already in the mix, Hurley got himself ESPN's seventh-ranked 2024 recruiting class.

Hurley also happened to bring in some remarkable transfers. Alston Mason, who could start at point, averaged 17.5 points and 3.6 assists per game for Missouri State last year. Wing BJ Freeman, who averaged 21.6 points, 6.6 rebounds and 4.1 assists per game on solid shooting splits for Milwaukee, has the potential to be one of the best players in the Big 12. And forward Basheer Jihad was an All-MAC player last year, averaging 18.6 points, 8.0 rebounds, 1.1 blocks and 1.1 steals per game.

Those experienced newcomers join productive returners Adam Miller, a guard that averaged 12.0 points per game last year, and center Shawn Phillips Jr., a center that does some of the dirty work.

Like Pikiell and Rutgers, there will be a lot that Hurley will have to piece together this year. And the 53-year-old isn't going to have a lot of time to do it. But having talented young players that can play with anyone immediately, along with older guys that have proven themselves already, is not a bad problem to have. In terms of pure talent, this Sun Devils team will never be overmatched. So, at 500-1, it's worth some pizza money to hope it all comes together.



# WOODEN AWARD

**THREE-TIERED APPROACH  
TO BETTING A WINNER**

By Aaron Moore

Let's take a look at the Wooden Award which tends to be one of the most popular futures markets for college bettors.

This year, someone will fill the void left by Zach Edey who was the first back-to-back winner since Ralph Sampson (1982 and 1983). Edey's two impressive seasons came after Oscar Tshiebwe won in 2022 and Luka Garza in 2021.

That makes four straight seasons the Wooden Award went to someone listed as a center.

One of the favorites this year, Hunter Dickinson (+750, DraftKings) from Kansas could make it five in a row for that position. Unlike Edey who lived on the blocks and scored mostly with his back to the basket, Dickinson plays center more in-tune with today's style of stretching the court from behind the arc.

Joining Dickinson as one of this year's favorites is RJ Davis (+700). The North Carolina guard returns to Chapel Hill after leading the ACC in scoring (21.2 PPG) a year ago.

Not far behind these two is Alabama's offensive machine Mark Sears (+900) who looks to roll over his NCAA tournament success into the Crimson Tide's regular season.

The wildcard here is 17-year old Duke freshman Cooper Flagg who is not listed at some books because of his age. DraftKings has a Yes/No option for Flagg (Yes +700/ No -1400).

There are certain preseason characteristics needed to win the award and this group possesses the right combination. All come into the season with plenty of media hype, their teams are pushing for a national championship, and they can score.

Sure, big men like Edey, Tshiebwe and Garza all rebounded and blocked shots, but just like the other guards and forwards who recently won the award, scoring is what gets the most attention.

Taking a look back at the winners since Frank Kaminsky in 2015, the average scoring number for this group is 21.4 PPG. The lowest points per game was Tshiebwe's 16.5. Also, every winner in this time frame, except Tshiebwe and freshman Zion Williamson, increased their scoring totals from the previous season.

To put into perspective, this year's winner needs to be featured on a contending team, score around 21 points a game and demonstrate an increase in production from 2024.

## TIER 1 FAVORITES

RJ Davis (+700)  
Cooper Flagg (+700)  
Hunter Dickinson (+750)  
Mark Sears (+900)

### BREAKDOWN

Any of these four are a good addition to a futures portfolio. The odds are high enough at this point to have room for another ticket or two as the season reaches the halfway point.

If a freshman can somehow pull off the win, it would likely be a Blue Devil as Williamson did in 2019. The 6-foot-9 Flagg enters the season with a Zion-level of hype, can excel anywhere on the court and is already being billed as the No.1 pick in the next NBA draft.

Flagg's persona is so large he plays at a Nike school but has an individual endorsement deal with New Balance.

All four of these players - IF they stay healthy - are expected to fill up the stat sheet in a number of ways. Three of them demonstrated that last season (Davis - 21.2 PPG, 3.5 APG, 3.6 RPG; Dickinson - 17.9 PPG, 10.9 RPG, 2.3 APG; Sears - 21.5 PPG, 4.2 APG, 4.2 RPG).

The best option here looks to be Sears. He comes with higher odds than the other competitors and plays the most dominant role on his team. Grant Nelson is also back for the Crimson Tide, but Sears is the face of the Alabama program on the national stage. There are probably going to be more times that Davis and Dickinson get overshadowed by teammates than Sears.

As for Flagg, he's a freshman going against three other players praised by the media as "veterans" with fifth year status.

## TIER 2 FAVORITES

LJ Cryer (+2000)  
Johni Broome (+2000)  
AJ Storr (+2000)  
Johnell Davis (+3000)  
Khalif Battle (+3500)  
Tamin Lipsey (+3500)  
VJ Edgecombe (+3500)

### BREAKDOWN

Cryer (Houston), Broome (Auburn) and Lipsey (Iowa State) are favorably positioned in the media as returning stars who can carry their squads to a conference championship.

Storr (Kansas), Davis (Arkansas) and Battle (Gonzaga) are going to be billed somewhat differently. They will be referred to as familiar names offering their new programs a key veteran addition to an already strong lineup. Storr's gun-for-hire reputation, and playing alongside Dickinson, could hinder his campaign. Davis will be on the media radar with stories of how he left Florida Atlantic to move up and help John Calipari's immediate rebuild in Fayetteville.

Baylor's Edgecomb will be one of the names challenging Flagg as the nation's top freshman.

Broome is a good option for bettors looking for more value. He is the featured player in Bruce Pearl's system and has demonstrated a continual offensive improvement (16.5 PPG, 35.4% 3-PT). Also, as a big man most noted for his rebounding (8.5 RPG) and shot blocking (2.2 BPG), Broome offers a more unique candidacy than the top favorites.

The 2025 Torvik projections for Broome have him increasing his scoring (19.2 PPG) and rebounding (9.2 RPG).

## TIER 3 AND BEYOND

Ace Bailey (+4000)  
Dylan Harper (+4000)  
Liam McNeeley (+4000)  
Caleb Love (+4000)  
Ryan Nembhard (+4000)  
Ryan Kalkbrenner (+4000)  
Zeke Mayo (+4000)  
Tyrese Proctor (+4000)  
Grant Nelson (+4500)

### BREAKDOWN

Everyone on this list and deeper is either a heralded freshman (Bailey & Harper at Rutgers, McNeeley at UConn), a second option behind a star player, or a great player on a team not expected to be near the top of the rankings. All those factors make it very difficult in the preseason to envision them winning the Wooden Award.

Instead of investing in someone here, look at the conference or national championship futures board. It is easier to monetize a longshot there rather than an award based on a media narrative.

# STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK
HOUSTON	96.0	MARYLAND	85.5	LOUISVILLE	81.0
DUKE	95.5	MEMPHIS	85.5	MINNESOTA	81.0
CONNECTICUT	95.0	OLE MISS	85.5	SAN FRANCISCO	81.0
KANSAS	94.5	USC	85.5	UAB	81.0
ALABAMA	93.5	WAKE FOREST	85.5	BUTLER	80.5
AUBURN	93.5	WISCONSIN	85.5	COLORADO ST	80.5
GONZAGA	93.5	DAYTON	85.0	LOYOLA-IL	80.5
IOWA ST	93.5	MIAMI	85.0	S CAROLINA	80.5
ARIZONA	92.5	MICHIGAN	85.0	SETON HALL	80.5
BAYLOR	92.0	PITTSBURGH	85.0	UTAH	80.5
PURDUE	92.0	KANSAS ST	84.5	GEORGIA TECH	80.0
N CAROLINA	91.5	NC STATE	84.5	VIRGINIA TECH	80.0
TENNESSEE	91.5	OKLAHOMA	84.5	W VIRGINIA	80.0
CREIGHTON	91.0	VA COMMONWEALTH	84.5	BRADLEY	79.5
TEXAS A&M	91.0	BOISE ST	84.0	COLORADO	79.5
TEXAS	90.0	NORTHWESTERN	84.0	ST JOSEPHS	79.5
TEXAS TECH	89.5	TCU	84.0	UNLV	79.5
ILLINOIS	89.0	GRAND CANYON	83.5	GEORGE MASON	79.0
UCLA	89.0	NEBRASKA	83.5	N TEXAS	79.0
CINCINNATI	88.5	RUTGERS	83.5	OKLAHOMA ST	79.0
MARQUETTE	88.5	LSU	83.0	PRINCETON	79.0
BYU	88.0	PROVIDENCE	83.0	SANTA CLARA	79.0
ST JOHNS	88.0	SAN DIEGO ST	83.0	VANDERBILT	79.0
CLEMSON	87.5	MISSOURI	82.5	FLORIDA ST	78.5
MICHIGAN ST	87.5	NEVADA	82.5	STANFORD	78.0
VILLANOVA	87.5	NEW MEXICO	82.5	GEORGETOWN	77.5
FLORIDA	87.0	PENN ST	82.5	MCNEESE ST	77.5
INDIANA	87.0	SYRACUSE	82.5	SAINT LOUIS	77.5
KENTUCKY	87.0	UCF	82.5	UC-IRVINE	77.5
MISSISSIPPI ST	87.0	GEORGIA	82.0	VERMONT	77.5
OHIO ST	87.0	NOTRE DAME	82.0	WASHINGTON ST	77.5
OREGON	87.0	SMU	82.0	WICHITA ST	77.5
ARKANSAS	86.5	UTAH ST	82.0	S FLORIDA	77.0
ST MARYS-CA	86.5	VIRGINIA	82.0	FLA ATLANTIC	76.5
IOWA	86.0	WASHINGTON	82.0	HIGH POINT	76.5
XAVIER	86.0	ARIZONA ST	81.0	ARKANSAS ST	76.0

# STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK
LOUISIANA TECH	76.0	GEORGE WASHINGTON	72.0	TEXAS ST	70.0
N IOWA	75.5	LA-LAFAYETTE	72.0	UC-RIVERSIDE	70.0
OHIO U	75.5	OREGON ST	72.0	ABILENE CHRISTIAN	69.5
SAM HOUSTON ST	75.5	PURDUE FT WAYNE	72.0	MARSHALL	69.5
LIBERTY	75.0	TULSA	72.0	UNC-ASHEVILLE	69.5
MASSACHUSETTS	75.0	BELMONT	71.5	WRIGHT ST	69.5
MURRAY ST	75.0	CAL SAN DIEGO	71.5	COLGATE	69.0
W KENTUCKY	75.0	DEPAUL	71.5	MISSOURI-KC	69.0
YALE	75.0	E TENN ST	71.5	NICHOLLS ST	69.0
BOSTON COLLEGE	74.5	FURMAN	71.5	HAWAII	68.5
DRAKE	74.5	TOLEDO	71.5	IL-CHICAGO	68.5
DUQUESNE	74.5	TX-ARLINGTON	71.5	LONGWOOD	68.5
TOWSON ST	74.5	BRYANT	71.0	MONTANA ST	68.5
TROY	74.5	CAL BAPTIST	71.0	PENNSYLVANIA	68.5
CALIFORNIA	74.0	FORDHAM	71.0	ST THOMAS-MN	68.5
E CAROLINA	74.0	INDIANA ST	71.0	WYOMING	68.5
RICHMOND	74.0	S DAKOTA ST	71.0	YOUNGSTOWN ST	68.5
SEATTLE	74.0	SF AUSTIN ST	71.0	GA SOUTHERN	68.0
AKRON	73.5	TULANE	71.0	GEORGIA ST	68.0
CHARLOTTE	73.5	UNC-WILMINGTON	71.0	QUINNIPIAC	68.0
COLL OF CHARLESTON	73.5	UTAH VALLEY ST	71.0	TEXAS A&M CC	68.0
SAMFORD	73.5	UTEP	71.0	BROWN	67.5
ST BONAVENTURE	73.5	WI-MILWAUKEE	71.0	CLEVELAND ST	67.5
TEMPLE	73.5	CAL DAVIS	70.5	FLA GULF COAST	67.5
UMASS-LOWELL	73.5	CORNELL	70.5	IONA	67.5
WOFFORD	73.5	MIDDLE TENN ST	70.5	JACKSONVILLE ST	67.5
APPALACHIAN ST	73.0	MONTANA	70.5	MERCER	67.5
DAVIDSON	73.0	N KENTUCKY	70.5	N COLORADO	67.5
JAMES MADISON	73.0	UNC-GREENSBORO	70.5	SAN JOSE ST	67.5
KENT ST	73.0	WEBER ST	70.5	DREXEL	67.0
LIPSCOMB	73.0	WINTHROP	70.5	JACKSONVILLE	67.0
LOYOLA-MARYMOUNT	73.0	HOFSTRA	70.0	MISSOURI ST	67.0
UC-SANTA BARBARA	73.0	ILLINOIS ST	70.0	MONMOUTH	67.0
UT-CHATTANOOGA	73.0	LASALLE	70.0	N DAKOTA ST	67.0
RHODE ISLAND	72.5	NEW MEXICO ST	70.0	NORTHEASTERN	67.0
S ILLINOIS	72.5	OAKLAND	70.0	AIR FORCE	66.5

# STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

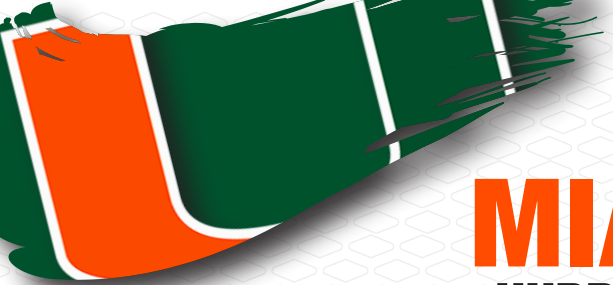
TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK
BALL ST	66.5	CHARLESTON SO	64.5	E MICHIGAN	62.0
DELAWARE	66.5	GARDNER WEBB	64.5	LA-MONROE	62.0
FAIRFIELD	66.5	MAINE	64.5	PRESBYTERIAN	62.0
HOWARD	66.5	N DAKOTA	64.5	S CAROLINA ST	62.0
MARIST	66.5	PORTLAND ST	64.5	ELON	61.5
MIAMI OHIO	66.5	SOUTHERN U	64.5	SE LOUISIANA	61.5
N ALABAMA	66.5	TEXAS SOUTHERN	64.5	W ILLINOIS	61.5
OLD DOMINION	66.5	ALBANY	64.0	BELLARMINE	61.0
RICE	66.5	CS-FULLERTON	64.0	BETHUNE-COOKMAN	61.0
S ALABAMA	66.5	E KENTUCKY	64.0	BINGHAMTON	61.0
ST PETERS	66.5	LONG BEACH ST	64.0	CAMPBELL	61.0
TX-SAN ANTONIO	66.5	MOUNT ST MARYS	64.0	CANISIUS	61.0
AMERICAN	66.0	N ARIZONA	64.0	E WASHINGTON	61.0
BOSTON U	66.0	N FLORIDA	64.0	N CAROLINA A&T	61.0
COLUMBIA	66.0	NC CENTRAL	64.0	ROBERT MORRIS	61.0
EVANSVILLE	66.0	W CAROLINA	64.0	TX-RIO GRANDE	61.0
MERRIMACK	66.0	WAGNER	64.0	ARMY	60.5
MOREHEAD ST	66.0	C MICHIGAN	63.5	NIAGARA	60.5
SOUTHERN MISS	66.0	COASTAL CAROLINA	63.5	PACIFIC	60.5
SOUTHERN UTAH	66.0	CS-BAKERSFIELD	63.5	SACRAMENTO ST	60.5
TARLETON ST	66.0	FLA INTERNATIONAL	63.5	STETSON	60.5
VALPARAISO	66.0	GRAMBLING	63.5	TENNESSEE ST	60.5
WM & MARY	66.0	MD-BALT COUNTY	63.5	DENVER	60.0
ARK-LITTLE ROCK	65.5	FRESNO ST	63.0	N ILLINOIS	60.0
BUCKNELL	65.5	IDAHO	63.0	NEBRASKA-OMAHA	60.0
HARVARD	65.5	LAFAYETTE	63.0	DARTMOUTH	59.5
NORFOLK ST	65.5	RADFORD	63.0	IDAHO ST	59.5
RIDER	65.5	S DAKOTA	63.0	INCARNATE WORD	59.5
CS-NORTHRIDGE	65.0	STONY BROOK	63.0	JACKSON ST	59.5
KENNESAW ST	65.0	AUSTIN PEAY	62.5	MANHATTAN	59.5
LEHIGH	65.0	LAMAR	62.5	MORGAN ST	59.5
NAVY	65.0	QUEENS COLL	62.5	NEW HAMPSHIRE	59.5
ORAL ROBERTS	65.0	SAN DIEGO	62.5	SIU EDWARDSVL	59.5
PEPPERDINE	65.0	UTAH TECH	62.5	W MICHIGAN	59.5
PORTLAND	65.0	ALABAMA ST	62.0	WI-GREEN BAY	59.5
BOWLING GREEN	64.5	C CONN ST	62.0	ALCORN ST	59.0



# STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK	TEAM	RANK
S INDIANA	59.0	CAL POLY-SLO	56.5	ST FRANCIS-PA	54.0
SE MISSOURI ST	59.0	FARLEIGH DICKINSON	56.5	STONEHILL	53.5
HAMPTON	58.5	HOLY CROSS	56.5	HOUSTON CHRISTIAN	53.0
LEMOYNE	58.5	TENNESSEE TECH	56.5	FLORIDA A&M	52.5
E ILLINOIS	58.0	DETROIT	56.0	MERCYHURST	52.5
SACRED HEART	58.0	LINDENWOOD	56.0	TEXAS A&M-COMM	52.5
WEST GEORGIA	58.0	LOYOLA-MD	56.0	ARK-PINE BLUFF	52.0
DELAWARE ST	57.5	NEW JERSEY TECH	56.0	MD-EAST SHORE	51.5
SIENA	57.5	NEW ORLEANS	56.0	IUPUI	51.0
C ARKANSAS	57.0	TENN-MARTIN	56.0	VMI	50.5
CHICAGO ST	57.0	BUFFALO	55.5	COPPIN ST	49.0
NORTHWESTERN ST	57.0	PRAIRIE VIEW A&M	55.5	MISS VALLEY ST	45.5
THE CITADEL	57.0	USC UPSTATE	55.5		
ALABAMA A&M	56.5	LONG ISLAND	55.0		





STEVE MAKINEN'S  
POWER RATING

**85.0**

CONFERENCE RANK: (#5 OF 18)  
NATIONAL RANK: (#44 OF 364)

# MIAMI HURRICANES

2023-24 RECORD: 15-17 SU, 13-16-3 ATS, 14-18 O-U-P

After making the Final Four in 2022-23, the Hurricanes went 15-17 last year. However, it's probably best to throw that out completely, as Miami had terrible injury luck. But this is still a team with an elite head coach, and there's some real talent in Coral Gables this year. Nijel Pack, one of the first players to get a massive NIL deal, is back after averaging 13.3 points and 3.6 assists per game last year. He should be able to build on that, as you only have to go back to 2021-22 for a season in which he averaged 17.4 points per game — and did so on very efficient shooting. The Hurricanes also return Matthew Cleveland, who averaged 13.7 points and 6.1 rebounds per game last year. And transfers Lynn Kidd and A.J. Staton-McCray are proven starters at this level.

If five-star freshman point guard Jalil Bethea is ready to go right out the gate, this Miami team will be dangerous. Just two years ago, the Hurricanes were sixth in the nation in offensive rating. Larranaga has been great as an offensive coach in recent years, and he has had good defensive teams in the past.

## THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

**12-1**

NCAA TOURNAMENT

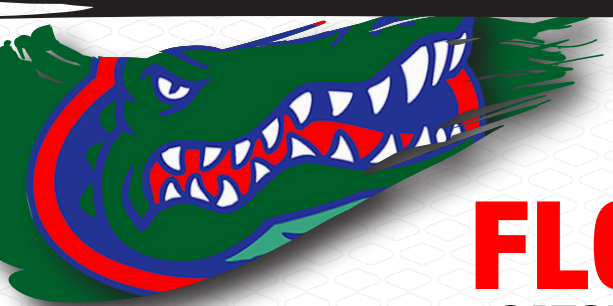
**70-1**

## 'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team is 4-13 against the spread as a favorite of at least 20 since November 12, 2016. But the Hurricanes are also 23-10-1 against the spread in road games the past three seasons, giving them the third-best road cover rate in America in that span.

RETURNING STARTERS: 2

RETURNING MINUTES: 32%



STEVE MAKINEN'S  
POWER RATING

**87.0**

CONFERENCE RANK: (#6 OF 16)  
NATIONAL RANK: (#29 OF 364)

# FLORIDA GATORS

2023-24 RECORD: 24-12 SU, 16-19-1 ATS, 24-12 O-U-P

The Gators returned to the NCAA Tournament last year after a two-year absence, only to bow out in the First Round with a wild 102-100 loss to Colorado. Perhaps they would have advanced further with the services of 7-foot-1 Micah Handlogten, but he broke his leg in the SEC Tournament and will miss this season.

Florida will not lack size, though, with 6-foot-11 Australian Alex Condon (7.7 PPG, 6.4 RPG) and 6-foot-11 Rueben Chinyelu of the NBA Academy Africa via Washington State. The Gators also have a freshman preferred walk-on in 7-foot-9 Olivier Rioux, who becomes the tallest man in the history of D-1 basketball.

Todd Golden, an excellent coach who got San Francisco in the NCAA Tournament as an at-large in 2022, installed an up-tempo (17th adjusted tempo) offense when he came to Gainesville and Walter Clayton Jr. (17.6 PPG, 3.6 RPG) is the man that makes it go. Will Richard (11.4 PPG, 3.9 RPG) is a steady running mate. Alijah Martin was part of FAU's Final Four team in 2023 and averaged 13 PPG and 5.9 RPG for the Owls last season. Florida should be just on the right side of the bubble to make a return appearance.

## THE ODDS

CONFERENCE

**25-1**

NCAA TOURNAMENT

**60-1**

## 'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

All five of Florida's games with a closing total above 166 went Over the total. The Gators were 23-12-1 to the Over overall. They also went 2-8-1 against the spread as favorites of at least 9 last season.

RETURNING STARTERS: 3

RETURNING MINUTES: 51%



STEVE MAKINEN'S  
POWER RATING

**78.5**

CONFERENCE RANK: (#15 OF 18)  
NATIONAL RANK: (#96 of 364)

# FLORIDA STATE SEMINOLES

2023-24 RECORD: 17-16 SU, 16-16-1 ATS, 22-11 O-U-P

Leonard Hamilton has won at least 20 games in 12 of his 22 seasons with Florida State, but the Seminoles are trending in the wrong direction. Florida State has missed the NCAA Tournament in each of the last three seasons, and it's starting to feel like Hamilton's running out of time in Tallahassee – whether that's his decision or the university's. Last year's Florida State team couldn't shoot the 3 whatsoever. The Seminoles were 288th in the country in 3-point shooting percentage (31.7%) and that's why they barely cracked the top 100 in offensive rating. Let's see if this year's team shoots it better.

Florida State's best player will once again be Jamir Watkins, who averaged 15.6 points, 6.0 rebounds and 1.9 steals per game last year. The former VCU wing can be trusted to show up on a nightly basis. But will Watkins get consistent help from anywhere else? Perhaps Chandler Jackson and Hampton transfer Jerry Deng can provide that. The 'Noles are also high on freshman point guard Daquan Davis.

It feels like Hamilton is facing an uphill battle here. This program could once be relied on to be elite defensively, but that identity is gone.

## THE ODDS

CONFERENCE  
**100-1**

NCAA TOURNAMENT  
**200-1**

## 'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

Among teams with at least 25 home games with listed totals since the 2016-17 season, Florida State has the third-highest Over percentage in the country. The Over is 79-41-4 in this span.

RETURNING STARTERS: **1**

RETURNING MINUTES: **30%**



STEVE MAKINEN'S  
POWER RATING

**76.5**

CONFERENCE RANK: (#6 OF 13)  
NATIONAL RANK: (#106 of 364)

# FLORIDA ATLANTIC OWLS

2023-24 RECORD: 25-9 SU, 15-18-1 ATS, 18-16 O-U-P

The magnificent, and improbable, two-year run for FAU basketball will live on forever in college basketball history. Things will look a LOT different in Boca Raton this year. John Jakus takes over for Dusty May, who is now the head coach at Michigan. The Owls have zero returning starters, so that means guys like Johnell Davis, Vladislav Goldin, Alijah Martin, and Nick Boyd are all gone.

Jakus has been under Scott Drew at Baylor since 2017 and worked under Mark Few from 2014-17 as the Director of Basketball Operations, so he's learned from some of the game's best head coaches. I don't think FAU will bottom out. In fact, I think they have a great shot to win the conference. They've added some premier scoring punch in KyKy Tandy (18.2 PPG at Jacksonville State), Ken Evans (18.8 PPG at Jackson State), Leland Walker (15.4 PP, 4.1 APG at Eastern Kentucky) and two giant bigs from Lithuania. How quickly everybody comes together will be the key, but this team could have scorers everywhere, lots of length, and tons of athleticism.

## THE ODDS

CONFERENCE  
**13-1**

NCAA TOURNAMENT  
**400-1**

## 'HOOPS' BETTING NUGGET

The team has the third-best non-conference ATS cover rate at 21-7 against the spread, but the Owls went 2-10 against the spread as favorites of at least 8 after Christmas.

RETURNING STARTERS: **0**

RETURNING MINUTES: **3%**

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