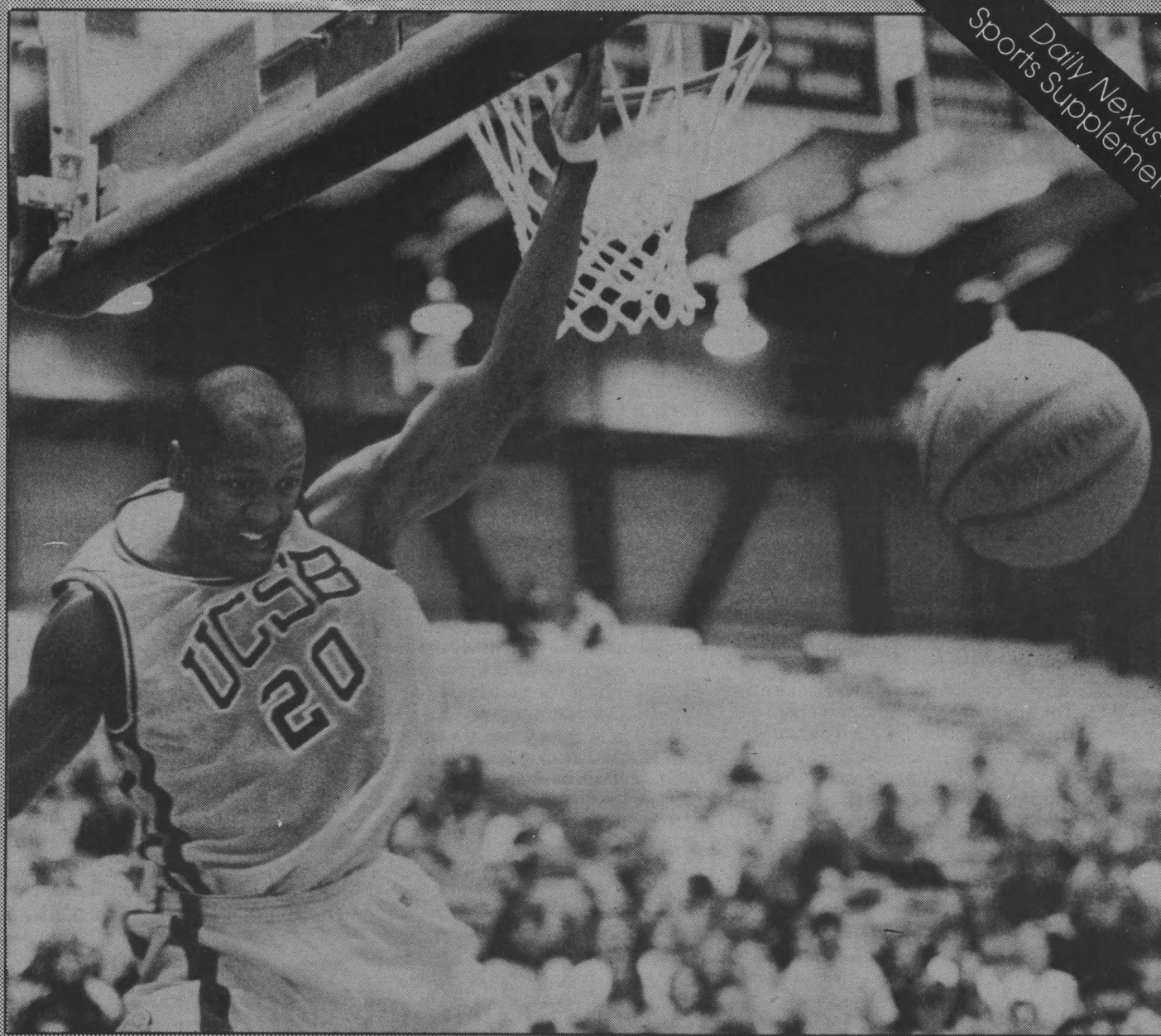


GUIDE



Daily Nexus
Sports Supplement

to the 1996-97



Big West Conference

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1996-97 Big West Men's Basketball Preview

New-Look Big West Undergoes Severe Makeover; Traditional Powers Fall as New Generation Arises

The 1996-97 men's basketball season is a clear example of a changing of the guards in the Big West Conference.

Gone from the league are traditional powerhouse UNLV and last year's Big West Tournament champion San Jose State — both teams moved to the Western Athletic Conference. New are Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, North Texas, University of Idaho and Boise State.

But so far this season, the loss of the Rebels and the Spartans is not the only shift in the balance of power for the Big West.

The remaining old-timers — Long Beach State, New Mexico State and UCSB — have all faded into mediocrity. In their place, upstart University of the Pacific, University of Nevada and Utah State have made their climbs to the top of the Big West.

All of these changes, both for the league and the teams, should make for an interesting transition year as the conference heads toward a new era.

The Big West now features two divisions, each with six teams. During the season each team will face the members of its division twice and play the teams in the opposing division just once.

The four best teams from each division will make a trip to the Big West Tournament in March for a chance to earn the automatic berth into the NCAA Tournament.

In the Western Division — which includes Pacific, Cal State Fullerton, Cal Poly, UCSB, Long Beach and Irvine — the race for the top is clear-cut. UOP has rolled off 13 consecutive wins to distance itself from the pack. The Tigers are on the verge of receiving a national ranking for the first time in school history.

The cellar in the West is also set for the season. UC Ir-

vine started off 0-13 and is winless in the Big West. This could easily be one of the worst teams ever in the conference.

What isn't so clear is how the teams in the middle will fare in the Western Division. Cal State Fullerton has all the ingredients to win, but the team is unpredictable at times.

Cal Poly is brand-new to the conference and is only in its third year of Division I basketball. A new coach and offensive style have prompted an early 3-1 start in conference from the Mustangs.

Both Santa Barbara and LBSU feature a dominant offensive player. Junior Raymond Tutt of UCSB and junior James Cotton of the 49ers will battle for the individual scoring crown.

If Long Beach can work out its off-the-court problems, the talented squad can make some noise in the conference. But if the team continues on its path of self-destruction, fifth place won't be out of the question.

UCSB is also a big question mark. One day, it can look impressive in beating CSUF, but two days later it has trouble handling the lowly Irvine squad.

The Eastern Division provides more stability. Utah State, led by a stingy defense, has opened with an impressive 5-0 Big West record.

Nevada is closely behind and can challenge the Aggies. Led by Faron "Meat" Hand and Jimmy Carroll, the Wolf Pack will once again enjoy home-court advantage if they make the conference tournament.

Boise State and New Mexico State have the greatest chance to qualify for the tournament, while Idaho and North Texas will need to pick up a couple of upsets if they want to move past the regular season.

1996-97 Big West Standings and Individual Leaders

Men

Western Division

	Conference		Overall	
	W	L	W	L
Pacific	4	0	13	1
Cal Poly	3	1	9	7
Cal State Fullerton	2	2	9	5
UCSB	2	2	7	7
Long Beach State	1	3	5	9
UC Irvine	0	4	0	13

Eastern Division

	Conference		Overall	
	W	L	W	L
Utah State	5	0	12	4
Nevada	4	1	10	5
Boise State	3	2	7	6
New Mexico State	2	3	7	6
North Texas	2	3	6	8
Idaho	0	4	7	10

Scoring Leaders

Player, Team	G	PTS	AVG
Raymond Tutt, UCSB	14	319	22.8
James Cotton, LBSU	14	312	22.3
Faron Hand, Nev	14	274	19.6
L. Richardson, NMSU	14	264	18.9
John Williams, CSUF	14	253	18.1

Women

Western Division

	Conference		Overall	
	W	L	W	L
UCSB	3	1	10	5
UC Irvine	3	1	8	7
Long Beach State	3	1	6	9
Pacific	2	2	3	12
Cal Poly	1	3	2	13
Cal State Fullerton	0	4	5	9

Eastern Division

	Conference		Overall	
	W	L	W	L
New Mexico State	3	0	6	9
Boise State	2	1	4	10
Nevada	2	2	6	9
Idaho	1	2	6	9
North Texas	0	3	3	12

Scoring Leaders

Player, Team	G	PTS	AVG
Erin Alexander, UCSB	15	103	21.0
Amy Smith, UCSB	15	99	19.1
Leticia Oseguera, UCI	15	108	18.1
Alli Nieman, UI	15	83	17.0
Kate McAllister, UOP	15	75	15.3

1996-97 Big West Women's Basketball Preview

Santa Barbara Clearly the Cream of the Crop in a Changing Conference Looking for Its Identity

In the new-look Big West, there was only one consensus at the start of the season — UCSB had the best women's basketball team in the league.

The Gauchos returned eight players from last season's regular-season championship team. Led by seniors Erin Alexander and Amy Smith, Santa Barbara received every first-place vote in both the preseason media and coaches' polls.

While UCSB remains the favorite, a lot has changed in the league. The University of Hawai'i, last season's tournament champion, has departed for the Western Athletic Conference with UNLV and San Jose State. New to the league are Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Boise State, University of Idaho and University of North Texas.

With the addition of the new teams, the conference decided to break the league into two separate divisions. The Western Division, which contains UCSB, holds six teams while the Eastern Division only has five — due to the lack of a women's basketball program at Utah State.

The race for the Western Division crown did not appear to be a challenge for the Gauchos, who had easily handled every opponent until Sunday, when they were upset by UC Irvine. The victory vaults UCI into a first-place tie with Santa Barbara and clouds the future of the season.

Cal State Fullerton, Long Beach State and the University of the Pacific are all packed with young talent but have struggled in the early season. The three schools each have a go-to player and are capable of upsetting any team on a given night. Behind the play of senior center Kate McAllister, Pacific appears to be the most dangerous of the three.

Cal Poly rounds out the Western Division and is by far

the worst team in the league. The Mustangs, coming off a 5-22 season, were winless in conference games until last Sunday when they topped Cal State Fullerton on the road.

Unlike the West, the Eastern Division does not have a clear favorite. New Mexico State will attempt to move into the post-Anita Maxwell era and is the top choice in the division based on preseason polls. The Roadrunners have hired former University of Arkansas Coach John Sutherland to help rebuild the program.

Ada Gee guides the University of Nevada for her fourth-consecutive season and will attempt to slip the Wolf Pack into the Big West Tournament. If Nevada qualifies, it will have home-court advantage throughout the tournament.

Boise State, Idaho and North Texas are all making their first runs through the conference and have suffered growing pains in the new league. Despite poor starts, two of the three teams will advance to the newly expanded postseason tournament.

With the addition of four teams, the Big West announced that this season it will take eight teams into the conference playoffs — opposed to the six-team field used last season. The new format eliminates first-round byes and will host the top four teams from each division.

Once at the tournament — which will take place in Reno, Nev., March 5-8, the top team from the Western Division will play the fourth-seed from the East, and the top team of the East will play the fourth-seed from the West. The tournament remains single-elimination with the winner receiving an automatic berth in the NCAA Tournament.

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Pacific

By Yier Shi

Rebuilt Tigers Are Big West's Best

How times have changed for the University of Pacific basketball program.

After enduring an 0-18 Big West record in 1987-88 — the last winless season by any team in the conference — the Tigers have finally finished their rebuilding process and are clearly the elite of the Big West this season.

The Tigers are off to the best start in school history and are flirting with a top-25 national ranking.

This year UOP (12-1 overall, 4-0 in the Big West) has cruised past Georgetown University, Brigham Young University and Santa Clara University in nonconference games. The team's only blemish came during its first game of the season, when it lost to then #11-ranked Fresno State by two points.

Conference play hasn't been much of a problem for the Tigers either, as they've swept through their schedule so far with a perfect 4-0 record.

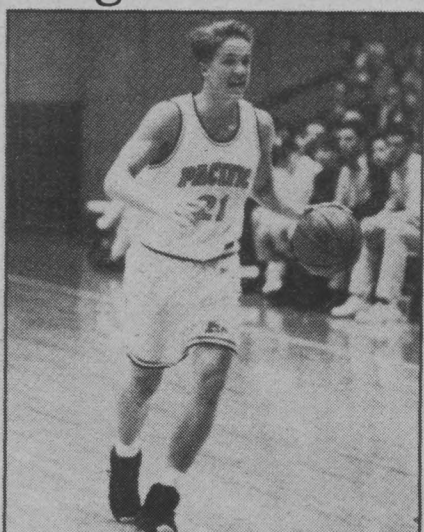
"We have the best players, from one to 16, that I have had in the program," said Head Coach Bob Thomason. "We have improved every area of our program. People are starting to see us in a different light."

Leading the charge to the top is Pacific's great senior class. Although losing its star senior guard Adam Jacobsen for the year, UOP still fields six seniors on the squad, making them one of the more veteran teams in the conference.

Jacobsen, a Second Team All-Big West selection as a junior, had been counted on to provide leadership and scoring this year. But an early season knee injury will force him to miss the rest of the year.

The Tigers, however, have not let up. Sophomore center Michael Olowokandi has stepped up big to become one of the true dominant centers in the league.

The 7'0" Olowokandi is currently first in the conference in blocks (1.9 per game), third in rebounding (7.4 per



Senior Guard Adam Jacobsen

Quick Facts

Location: Stockton, CA

Mascot: Tigers

Head Coach: Bob Thomason

Record: 13-1, 4-0

game) and second in field goal percentage (.573). He also leads Pacific in scoring, averaging 12.6 points per game.

Senior guards Mark Boelter and Tim Bowman have filled in nicely for Jacobsen in his absence. Boelter leads the Big West with 3.2 three-pointers per game.

Senior point guard Monty Owens and junior forward Corey Anders round out the veteran Tigers' roster.

"Our team is stronger, more mature, and their skills have really developed to become a better team," Thomason said. "I think it should be a very exciting and successful season."

With the way things are going, Stockton might actually be a happenin' place this season.

Cal State Fullerton

By Brian Berger

Titans Recover From Bad Season

After a horrible 1995-96 season, nobody knew what to expect of Cal State Fullerton this year. The Titans, however, have answered some early questions and are 2-2 in the Big West.

Led by returning players Chris Dade and John Williams, CSUF is tied for third place in the Western Division with victories over Long Beach State and Cal Poly.

Fullerton returns four starters from last year's 6-20 team — the only starter lost was leading scorer Chuck Overton. This season Williams, a senior, has taken over the scoring role with 16.3 points per game and a .500 shooting percentage. Dade, a junior, is not far behind with 13.9 ppg.

"We were one of the youngest squads in the NCAA last year with two freshmen and two sophomores among our starters," Head Coach Bob Hawking said. "Along the way we had some outstanding wins and matured a great deal in the process. The 1995-96 season was the initial step in the rebuilding of the Titan basketball program."

The Titans' maturity level was apparent this season when the team rallied back from an 18-point second-half deficit before falling by six points to UCSB Friday night. The players were able to put the loss behind them and handed Cal Poly its first conference loss just two nights later.

Junior guard Chris St. Clair handles the point guard duties for CSUF this season, and is joined in the backcourt by Dade and senior Ali Nayab.

Although just 6'5", Williams could be the most dominant player in the paint in the Big West. He has followed up on last season, when he led the team in rebounding and was second in scoring. Entering last weekend, Williams was fourth in the league with 7.4 rebounds per game.

Junior DeVaughn Wright returns for his third season with Fullerton, but has not made the offensive impact many thought he would. The former



Senior Forward John Williams

Quick Facts

Location: Fullerton, CA

Mascot: Titans

Head Coach: Bob Hawking

Record: 9-5, 2-2

Mater Dei High School star has stepped up on defense and is second on the team in both rebounding and blocked shots.

Freshman guard Dane Plock and junior forwards Craig Whitehead and Wyki Tyson round out the rotation used by Hawking. With a large 17-man roster, the coach is not afraid to mix things up.

"We will do a lot of experimenting on paper and eventually on the floor," Hawking said. "We have a lot of flexibility and versatility with a lot of combination players. Some players respond to playing more than one position better than others, and that's the kind of thing we have to determine."

Cal Poly

By Yier Shi

Cal Poly Stuns League With Start

Although the team cannot qualify for the Big West Tournament this season, the Cal Poly San Luis Obispo men's basketball squad hasn't let that fact dampen its enthusiasm.

The Mustangs have jumped to an impressive 3-1 conference start in their inaugural season in the Big West, as the team's amazing story of rags to riches continues.

Cal Poly — a Division I school for only its third season — owned a record of 1-26 just two years ago. But under second-year Head Coach Jeff Schneider, the Mustangs have earned respectability in less than two seasons.

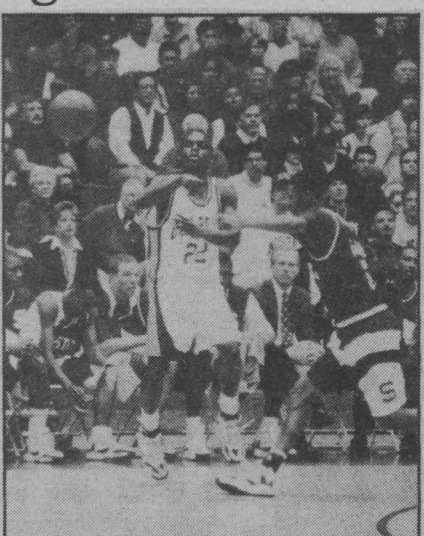
However, an NCAA rule states that a new Division I school cannot qualify for an automatic berth into the NCAA tournament for seven years — it can only get an at-large bid. The Mustangs, who plan to appeal the rule next season, are therefore not allowed to compete in the Big West Tournament this year because the tourney winner is guaranteed a spot in "March Madness."

But despite the prospect of no post-season play in the near future, Schneider is still happy with the building process.

"This is exciting for our program," he said. "Our admittance into the Big West has been a tremendous help to us in recruiting, because we have been able to put together two-straight outstanding classes."

A major part of Cal Poly's turnaround has been the instillation of a Kentucky-like run-and-shoot offense by Schneider. The Mustangs' full-court press and three-point bombs have caused all sorts of havoc for opponents.

Currently, the team is first in the conference in steals, turnover margin and three-point field goals. Cal Poly is also second in the Big West in scoring, averaging 83.6 points per game.



Senior Guard Shanta Cotright

Quick Facts

Location: San Luis Obispo, CA

Mascot: Mustangs

Head Coach: Jeff Schneider

Record: 9-7, 3-1

Benefiting from the Schneider offense are senior guard Shanta Cotright and sophomore point guard Ben Larson.

Cotright is eighth in the Big West with an average of 16.6 ppg while shooting .511 percent. Larson is fifth in the conference with 4.3 assists per game.

With Cal Poly off to a good start at home, its true test will come this week, when it travels for four tough road games. If the Mustangs can survive Pacific, Long Beach State, Utah State and UCSB, it will truly signal the beginning of a new era in the Big West Conference.

UC Santa Barbara

By Yier Shi

UCSB Falls to Middle of the Pack

UCSB men's basketball is certainly not what it used to be.

After an exciting stretch in the late '80s and early '90s, mediocrity has hit the Gauchos in full force, with Santa Barbara going 11-15 last season and 7-7 so far this year.

The 1996-97 squad features six new members, including three junior college transfers and three transfers from four-year schools.

Certainly the most impressive of the bunch is junior guard Raymond Tutt. Tutt, who redshirted last season after transferring from Azusa Pacific, looks to be the most prolific offensive player to come through the UCSB program since current NBA star Brian Shaw.

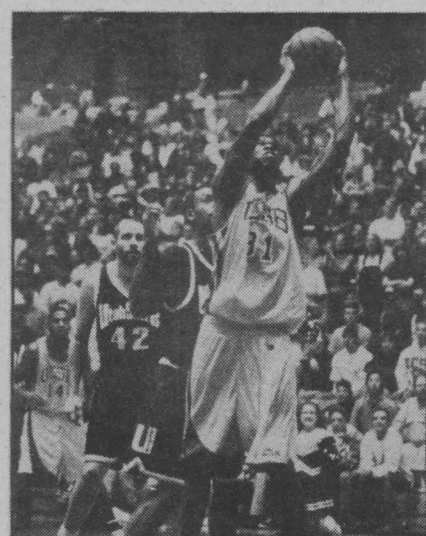
This season Tutt has broken into the top-10 single-game scoring list three different times, a feat Shaw never achieved. He has also led the team in points-scored in 12 consecutive games, three shy of York Gross' school-record 15-game streak.

Tutt took over the Big West scoring lead on Thursday with a 36-point performance against Cal State Fullerton. He is currently averaging 22.8 points per game and is first on the team with 7.1 rebounds per game.

"Raymond is a very strong athlete who has good skills on the perimeter and an ability to score," said UCSB Head Coach Jerry Pimm. "He is a very important player for us."

Complementing Tutt in the Gaucha offense is junior Kealon Wallace. The forward, who is one of the three returnees from last year's team that saw significant playing time, provides a very sound post game for Santa Barbara. He is averaging 10.4 ppg and is second on the team with 6.6 rpg despite missing the first five games due to a hand injury.

"Kealon has worked real hard to learn the game of basketball — he cares about his game," Pimm said. "As a junior he will be one of the best play-



Junior Forward Kealon Wallace

Quick Facts

Location: Santa Barbara, CA

Mascot: Gauchos

Head Coach: Jerry Pimm

Record: 7-7, 2-2

ers in the Big West Conference."

Senior Bakir Allen, sophomore B.J. Bunton and junior transfer Les Bean round out the roster for UCSB. Allen is widely considered to be one of the best defensive players in the league. Bunton has developed into an amazing shooter, leading the team by sinking 58 percent of his shots from the field and 92 percent from the free throw line.

With a respectable 2-2 start in conference play, the Gauchos are sure to make the conference tournament. But just how far they get will depend on how well they gel as a team.

Long Beach State

By Brian Berger

Niners Hurt by Off-Court Drama

The four new teams in conference aren't the only squads undergoing transformations, as the Long Beach State men's basketball team endured great changes in both the off-season and the current season.

Since longtime Head Coach Seth Greenberg left for the bigger vaults of the University of South Florida at the end of last season, the 49ers have experienced a new coach, a fight in practice that sent one player to the hospital, and the expulsion of a key player off the team in midseason.

LBSU was predicted to finish second in the Western Division by the league's coaches before the season. But that has quickly changed after the recent developments and poor start of the Niners.

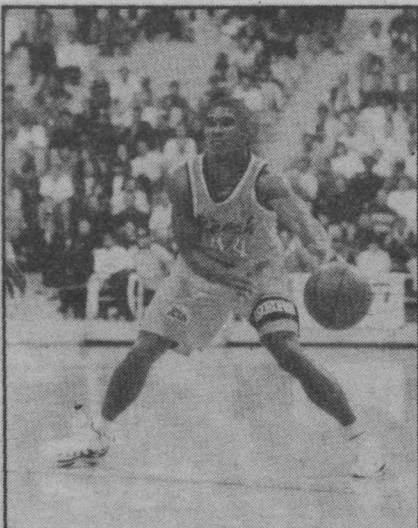
The troubles for Beach began after last season's upset loss to Utah State in the Big West Tournament. After the team was eliminated, it was passed over by the NCAA for a berth in the NCAA tournament, leaving the regular-season Big West champs out of the postseason.

Greenberg resigned shortly after to take the USF job, and former Syracuse University assistant Wayne Morgan was hired as the team's new head coach.

Morgan arrived with the cornerstones of last year's program still in place, but the foundation quickly began to crumble in a preseason practice when junior Marcus Johnson blind-sided teammate Corey Saffold with a right hook that sent Saffold to the hospital on a stretcher.

Despite a slow start, things began to settle down for Long Beach until last week, when starting forward Akeli Jackson was kicked off the team for undisclosed disciplinary reasons. Last season Jackson averaged 10.9 points and 7.9 rebounds.

Without Jackson, all the pressure now rests on the shoulders of junior James Cotton. The 6'5" guard is currently second in the Big West in scor-



Junior Guard James Cotton

Quick Facts

Location: Long Beach, CA

Mascot: 49ers

Head Coach: Wayne Morgan

Record: 5-9, 1-3

ing with 21.3 points per game, behind UCSB's Raymond Tutt. Cotton also ranks in five of the conference's nine statistical categories.

Senior guard Brandon Titus' 15.0 ppg makes him the only other LBSU player to average more than 10 points a game. Sophomore point guard Tommie Davis leads the team in assists, as he has dished out 54 in just 11 games.

The Niners' frontline is anchored by Brian Yankelevitz and Ike Nwankwo. Yankelevitz leads the team in rebounding with 6.3 a game and is fourth in scoring with 7.6 ppg.

If the 49ers want to regain last year's form they must stop their off-the-court problems and take care of business on the hardwood. This team has the talent to give Pacific a run for the money, but it also has a good chance of finishing fifth in the division.

UC Irvine

By Brian Berger

Key Losses Drop UCI Into Cellar

There are many excuses you can offer to explain why the UC Irvine men's basketball team has not won a game this season, but the fact is that this could be one of the worst teams to appear in the Big West in years.

Last season Head Coach Rod Baker led the Anteaters to the Big West Tournament and earned himself Big West Coach of the Year honors. However, things took a turn for the worse after the season when three players transferred from the program, leaving Baker with nothing to build on.

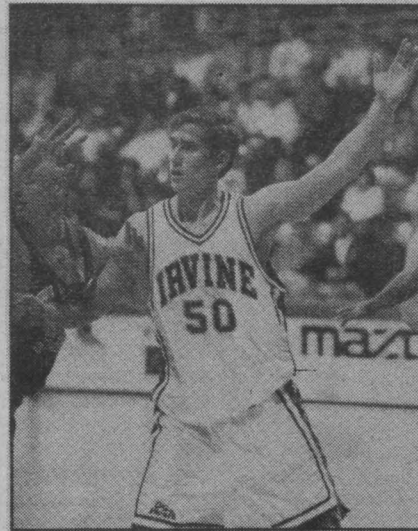
Guards Brian Keefe and Clay McKnight joined former Big West Freshman of the Year Kevin Simmons in leaving Irvine. Keefe originally transferred to Boston College but has recently transferred again to UNLV. In Vegas, Keefe will be reunited with Simmons, who became a Runnin' Rebel this off-season.

If you combine the three transfers with the loss of last year's Big West Player of the Year Raimonds Miglineks to graduation, it is understandable why UCI can't win. Last season Keefe, Simmons and Miglineks combined to score 60 percent of the Anteaters' points.

"The fact that we have new players in the program is not a bad thing," Baker said before the season. "Two years ago, Kevin Simmons and Brian Keefe were new players, and they panned out to be good players."

Taking over in the absence of the four players is sophomore guard Lamarr Parker, who leads the team with 11.7 points per game and 20 steals. Newcomers Brian Johnson and Wendell Robinson have also been thrown into the fire and survived.

Johnson is just a freshman, but he has started 10 games for Irvine. In those games he has averaged 11.6 points and 4.3 boards. Robinson comes to UCI after spending two seasons at Santa Monica College. This season the junior 6'8" forward is third



Senior Forward Paul Foster

Quick Facts

Location: Irvine, CA

Mascot: Anteaters

Head Coach: Rod Baker

Record: 0-13, 0-4

on the team with a 9.8 ppg scoring average.

Senior center Paul Foster is one of the few returning players to contribute anything this season. Foster has started every game, leads the Anteaters with 6.0 rebounds a game and is fourth in scoring with 9.2 ppg.

"If [Foster] can stay healthy and can stay fit, he will be one of the best inside players in the conference," Baker said.

The odds are that Irvine will be able to upset at least one team this season, but if it fails to do so, it will become the first school to go winless since Pacific went 0-18 in league play in 1988.

No matter how many upsets UCI pulls off, it probably won't be enough to save Baker's job. The coach, who had turned the program around, will see his contract expire at the end of the season.

Utah State

By Ben Alkaly

Defense Leads Aggies to Victories

After losing 65 percent of last year's total offensive output and returning only three players, many people would consider this a rebuilding year for the Utah State men's basketball team.

However, an influx of talented junior college transfers make Head Coach Larry Eustachy's Aggies a force to be reckoned with again in the Big West Conference.

The squad has started conference play on a tear with four straight victories, improving its overall record to 11-4.

The good start can be attributed to a ferocious defense. Although fielding one of the smallest squads in the Big West with a three-guard set, Utah State is currently ranked second in scoring defense and third in rebounding in the conference.

"It's the same old thing. It is awful early to tell," Eustachy said. "There is a lot of newness. We have a very good perimeter team, the best that we have had here. I don't know what's going to transpire."

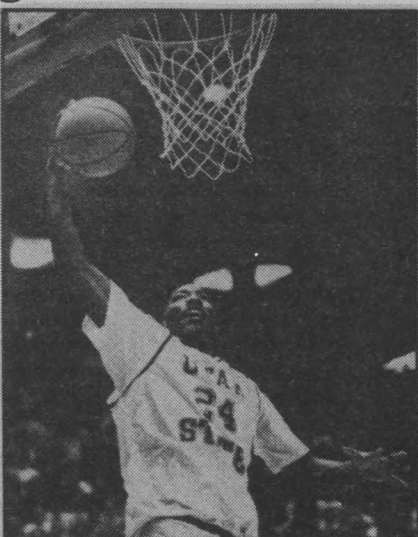
Gone are former Big West Player of the Year Eric Franson and his front-court mate Silas Mills, but in their place are high-scoring point guard Marcus Saxon and forward Michael Jones.

Saxon, a junior, earned junior college All-American honors in 1994-95 by averaging 23.4 points and 7.2 assists at Chipola Junior College in Florida.

After taking two years off for his Mormon mission, sophomore Jones returns to basketball and looks to be a force in the paint.

Utah State's top returning player is junior shooting guard Justin Jones, who will be counted on to sink three-pointers — something he did 77 times in 1995-96.

Also returning are senior forwards Antwan Smith and Maurice Spillers. The two will be relied on to control the



Senior Maurice Spillers

Quick Facts

Location: Logan, UT

Mascot: Aggies

Head Coach: Larry Eustachy

Record: 12-4, 5-0

boards for the squad.

Perhaps the Aggies' biggest obstacle this season will be a lack of cohesiveness, considering that the team will be competing with eight new players.

"I think this group is as receptive as any I have ever coached," Eustachy said. "We will run through some hard times, but I do know that we will be much better in February than we were in November."

A year ago Utah State made it to the Big West Tournament championship game, where the team was upset by San Jose State by one point. Returning to Reno won't be much of a challenge for Eustachy's squad, but repeating or exceeding 1996's performance will.

Nevada

By Brian Berger

Nevada Feeds "Meat" to League

After a late-season collapse left it short of the Big West Tournament, the University of Nevada men's basketball program must find a way to squeak into the home-town tournament this year.

And after a strong recruiting year, Head Coach Pat Foster once again has the Wolf Pack back on track and challenging for the top spot in Big West's Eastern Division.

The biggest changes to Nevada this season are the additions of Faron "Meat" Hand and Jimmy Carroll. Both players were a part of the team last season, but could not compete in games.

Hand was given another year of eligibility by the NCAA after reinjuring his knee in the fifth game of last season. In the first 12 games this year, Hand leads the team with 19.1 ppg and is second in rebounding with 7.0 boards per contest. "Meat" also leads the Big West in field goal percentage with a .588 mark.

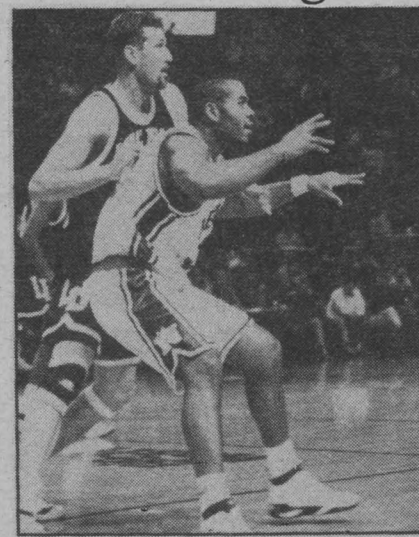
With Hand back in the lineup, Foster will turn to the senior for leadership. "We will be depending on Meat to really take charge of the new and younger players," he said.

After transferring from the University of Utah in 1995, Carroll was forced to redshirt last season in accordance with NCAA rules. The 6'8" junior will see time as the Wolf Pack's shooting guard and small forward this year. Carroll has lived up to his expectations and leads the league in both three-point (.486) and free throw percentage (.894).

"Jimmy Carroll should start for us in the number-two position," Foster said. "He has the complete package for an all-around game."

Joining Carroll in the backcourt is senior point guard Richard "Tu Tu" Brown, who leads the squad with 3.9 assists per game.

Senior David Morgan and junior Marvin Wilson round out the starting



Senior Forward Faron Hand

Quick Facts

Location: Reno, NV

Mascot: Wolf Pack

Head Coach: Pat Foster

Record: 10-5, 4-1

lineup. Morgan has surprised many this year by leading the conference in rebounding with 8.5 rebounds a game.

One advantage that Nevada has over its competition is its depth. The Wolf Pack will return four bench players led by senior guard Tim Barnett, who scored 6.7 ppg and dished out 1.3 assists per game last season.

Point guard Robin Kennedy comes to Reno from Chaffey College and looks to make an immediate impact. As a sophomore he produced 16.7 points and 11.3 assists. Kennedy, however, did not play last season so that he could concentrate on completing his AA degree.

New Mexico State

By Ben Alkaly

NMSU Prepares to Regain Power

After a brief fall from glory, the New Mexico State men's basketball team is once again a contender in the Big West Conference this season.

The Aggies, who are the 14th-winningest collegiate program in the '90s, suffered an 11-15 season last year, including an 8-10 Big West record that tied them for seventh place.

This season NMSU looks to regain the form that guided the school to five appearances in the NCAA Tournament. Led by senior Enoch Davis and sophomore Charles Gosa, the Aggies were preseason favorites in the Eastern Division.

Davis, an All-Big West Honorable Mention selection, led NMSU in 1995-96 with 15.8 points per game. This season the 6'7" forward is third on the team with 14.1 ppg and second in rebounding with 5.7 per contest.

Prior to the season NMSU Head Coach Neil McCarthy expected Gosa to be a major factor in the Aggie offense.

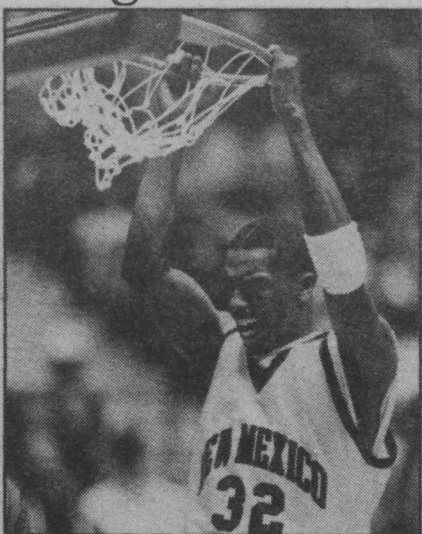
"We're counting on big things from [Gosa] this year," McCarthy said. "I think that year of experience will be advantageous. I'm anxious to see the improvement he makes this year because he was so good last year."

After capturing the Big West Freshman of the Year award last season, many counted on Gosa for a large offensive output this year. However, Gosa has struggled from the field, averaging just 6.4 ppg and pulling down only 4.5 rebounds.

The surprises of the season have been juniors Louis Richardson and Antoine Hubbard. The pair, which teamed together at Jones County Junior College in Ellisville, Miss., has exploded in recent games.

Richardson is the team's leading scorer with 19.5 ppg and the top rebounder with 6.6 boards a game. Last season he led Jones County with 23.9 points and 14.9 rebounds per game.

Hubbard has taken over the starting



Senior Forward Enoch Davis

Quick Facts

Location: Las Cruces, NM

Mascot: Aggies

Head Coach: Neil McCarthy

Record: 7-7, 1-3

point guard position for the Aggies and has made a definite impact. In the team's 12 games he has dished out 60 assists, which is tops in the Big West. Hubbard is the team's second-leading scorer with 16.4 ppg.

Fellow newcomer Denmark Reid has been a pleasant surprise for McCarthy. The junior guard took a year off from basketball in an effort to complete his AA degree at Arizona Western JC. This season Reid is contributing 11.6 ppg and 6.2 rpg.

The Aggies have the talent and the coaching to be a strong force in the Eastern Division, but need to come together as a team if they wish to challenge Utah State and the University of Nevada for the regular-season title.

Boise State

By Ben Alkaly

Broncos Look to Stifle Offenses

Boise State enters its first season of Big West play after posting a 15-13 mark last year in the Big Sky Conference.

Under second-year Head Coach Rod Jensen, the Broncos exceeded all expectations a year ago and will face an even greater challenge in 1997 as they take on the stiffer competition of the Big West. So far the team has had a respectable start, going 6-7 overall and 1-2 in conference play.

In order for it to succeed, Jensen's squad will need to rely on its defensive prowess to compensate for a lack of scoring threats. Boise State has finished first in the Big Sky in scoring defense for the past two seasons, holding opponents to a mere 65.3 points per game average in 1995-96.

This year, the squad is even better with 63.1 ppg allowed, which ranks third in the conference.

"We will always hang our hat on the defensive end of the court," Jensen said. "We will look to push the ball off of turnovers and rebounds."

Offensively, the Broncos will count on senior guard Joe Wyatt from the perimeter and senior center J.D. Huleen inside the paint.

Wyatt, the Big Sky's Newcomer of the Year last season, averaged 11.6 points and sunk an impressive 57 three-point shots. This year he is averaging 17.0 ppg — eighth best in the conference.

For the Broncos to become more competitive inside, Huleen needs to improve upon his 9.5 ppg and 4.9 rebounds per game averages.

Among Boise State's six new players, sophomore transfer Tony Norman looks to be the biggest force. Starting at the power forward position, he will be counted on to put up big scoring and rebounding numbers.

Despite lacking a dominant rebounder and a big-time scorer, Jensen still likes his team's chances in the newly aligned Big West.

"On paper, I do like our athletic-



Senior Guard Joe Wyatt

Quick Facts

Location: Boise, ID

Mascot: Broncos

Head Coach: Rod Jensen

Record: 7-7, 2-2

ism," he said. "But it's not only athleticism, it's a bunch of guys who know how to play the game of basketball, and that's why I'm excited. On paper, it looks like we're going to have some solid depth and good experience, two important ingredients in a good basketball team."

The Broncos have the luxury of returning four out of five starters, making them the most experienced of the three additions to the conference's Eastern Division. This alone should help ease Boise State's transition this season, and the Broncos could possibly earn themselves a berth in the Big West Tournament come March.

North Texas

By Ben Alkaly

North Texas Searches for Respect

The University of North Texas looks to shake things up in the Eastern Division of the Big West after competing last year in the Southland Conference.

The squad posted a 15-13 record under Head Coach Tim Jankovich and was one game away from representing the Southland Conference in the NCAA Tournament. It was the third-straight year that the Eagles fell one game short of the tournament.

Returning to that level will be much more difficult for UNT in the Big West Conference, following a slow start of 6-7 overall and 1-2 in conference. But the team's potential became obvious in its first Big West game of the year, when the Eagles beat UCSB 80-74.

North Texas returns four out of five starters from its 1995-96 campaign, losing only center and leading scorer Chris Smith (13.3 points per game, 4.8 rebounds per game). Sophomore Sean Riley and his 7-foot frame will be counted on to fill the void in the middle.

The bulk of rebounding duties will be shared by Riley and junior forward David Miller, who is currently averaging 7.8 boards per game — good for second in the conference.

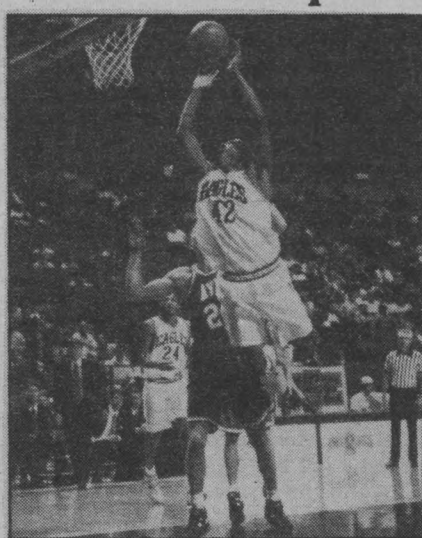
But what will carry the Eagles' destiny will be the play of star guard Chad Elstun. The senior has already made 38 shots from behind the arc, good for .432 percent efficiency.

Elstun scored 17 points against the Gauchos behind 5-8 shooting from the three-point line.

Rounding out the starting roster are freshman forward Charles Washington and junior guard T.J. Atkins.

Jankovich is excited about his team and the new conference, which will give the Eagles more media exposure and a chance to play against tougher opponents.

"There are several goals [for this season]," he said. "Number one, we want



Junior Forward David Miller

Quick Facts

Location: Denton, TX

Mascot: Eagles

Head Coach: Tim Jankovich

Record: 6-8, 1-3

to establish ourselves as a legitimate contender in the Big West. Secondly, we want to continue establishing our style of play, which is up-tempo and fast paced. Thirdly, our objective is always to advance to postseason competition."

Two things will make this North Texas squad a contender for a Big West Tournament berth come March. The big front line of North Texas will certainly be an asset in a mostly undersized conference. Also, the Eagles have a tendency to turn their play up a notch toward the end of the season, much like they did the past three years.

If it can make another late-season charge, North Texas will have as good a chance as anyone in making the Big West Tournament.

Idaho

By Yier Shi

Rebuilding Idaho Enters New Era

A lot has changed for the Idaho Vandals since the end of last season — a new coach, a new conference and seven new players. But with all the changes also comes one single common denominator — growing pains.

The Vandals have jumped out to an uninspiring 0-3 start in Big West action in their first season in the conference. They own a 7-9 record overall.

"We are in a three-to-four-year rebuilding phase," said Head Coach Kermit Davis. "We are very excited about moving the program into the Big West, but we also understand a solid foundation has to be laid."

Despite their many young players, the leaders of the Vandals' rebuilding phase are still the veterans Jason Jackman, Reggie Rose and Kris Baumann.

Jackman, a senior forward, is currently fifth in the conference averaging 18.0 points per game. The smooth shooter is also third in the Big West in both field goal percentage (.566) and free throw percentage (.841).

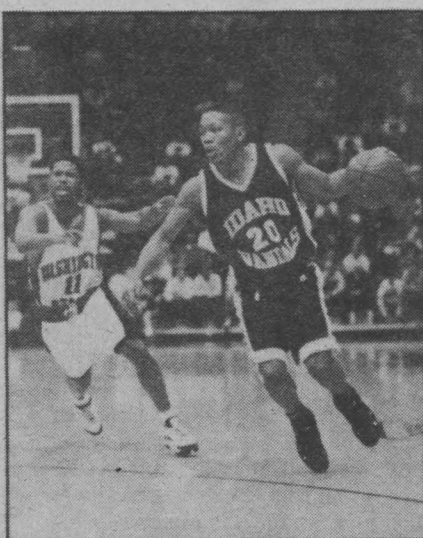
Baumann is the only Idaho player to have been in Moscow for more than a year. The junior guard is currently eighth in the league with 2.3 treys a game.

Rose, a senior guard, is second on the team with 11.5 ppg and seventh in the conference with 1.9 steals per game.

"Your strength has to be in your returning players who have competed at this level before," Davis said. "I have been really pleased with the returning players' attitude on and off the floor. We will try to blend all the new faces to our system, therefore it will take us time to gain a continuity."

Of the seven newcomers to the program, five are from junior colleges. Of the five, junior forward Troy Thompson seems to have made the biggest impact.

Turner is averaging 10.7 ppg and 4.9



Senior Guard Reggie Rose

Quick Facts

Location: Moscow, ID

Mascot: Vandals

Head Coach: Kermit Davis

Record: 7-10, 0-4

rpg, good for second on the team with its early struggles.

But in defense of Idaho is the fact that it has played one of the toughest nonconference schedules in the Big West. Already this season the Vandals have traveled to Purdue University, University of Hawai'i, University of Washington and Washington State University.

Although the squad was only able to come up with one victory — against the Rainbows — the experience it gained will assist the team in future matches.

But for right now, the rebuilding process continues in Moscow, and the Vandals are almost assured not to make the playoffs for the seventh-straight season.

UC Santa Barbara

By Brian Berger

Gauchos Become Big West Power

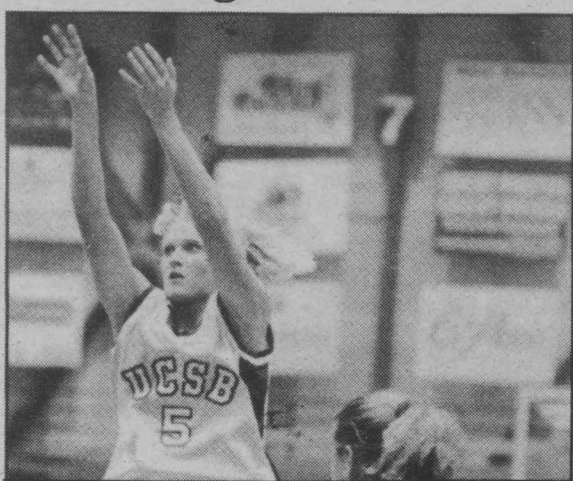
It's not very often that a league has one team that is head and shoulders above the rest. But this season in the Big West Conference, the University of Pacific is dominating the men's side while UCSB has taken over women's hoops.

The Gauchos were enjoying their best conference start in history until they were shocked by UC Irvine on Sunday. The loss ended a streak of 14 consecutive regular-season Big West wins and ties the team with Irvine for the Western Division's top spot.

Last season UCSB went 17-1 in conference games, with its only loss coming at the hands of the University of Hawai'i. The Gauchos later avenged the loss and captured the regular-season Big West title before being upended by Pacific in the semifinals of the Big West Tournament.

Despite having only two starters return from last year's team, Santa Barbara was the preseason favorite to win the league again this season. Leading the way are senior guard Erin Alexander and senior post player Amy Smith. Alexander is ranked first and Smith fourth in the Big West with scoring averages of 22.0 and 17.0 points per game.

The biggest question entering the season was



Senior Guard Erin Alexander

Quick Facts

Location: Santa Barbara, CA **Head Coach:** Mark French
Mascot: Gauchos

Record: 10-5, 3-1

the ability of the five freshmen, who have answered by making an immediate impact. Point guard Stacy Clinesmith has started every game this season and is the team's third-leading scorer (13.8 ppg) and top assist giver (4.5 apg). Like Clinesmith, forward Kristi Rohr was quickly thrust into a starting role and is chipping in 9.0 points a game.

Although Alexander and Smith are the most dangerous duo since Barbara Beainy and Cori Close, the pair has not reached the NCAA Tournament in the previous three seasons. If UCSB can stay at its cur-

rent pace, that fact will change this season, when the team can clinch the automatic tournament berth by winning the Big West Tournament in March.

While that sounds easy, the Gauchos have struggled the past two seasons in the tournament. Santa Barbara has not advanced past its first game in the tournament since 1993, when the team won the Big West title. However, with its current depth and experience, another tournament loss this year would be one of the greatest upsets in conference history.

UC Irvine

By Steven Large

Oseguera Controls Anteaters' Fate

The youth movement is in effect at Irvine — two juniors and no seniors round out a team dominated by nine underclassmen.

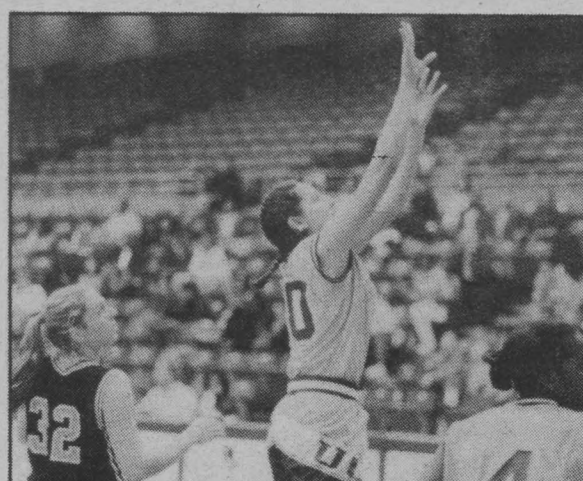
On a team scorched with inexperience, the Anteaters are counting on one of their juniors — forward Leticia Oseguera — to lead the team to contention.

The junior is UCI's returning scoring leader (averaging 15.5 points per game last season) and rebounding leader (averaging 10.3 boards a game).

"It will be important for Leticia to be a leader on and off the court this season," said Head Coach Colleen Matsuhara. "Last year the emergence of Leticia gave us a formidable tandem [with Allah-mi Basheer] in the post, and we expect her to continue at an even higher level this season."

Irvine finished in sixth place in the Big West last year, with a 7-11 conference record and a 12-16 overall record. But the loss of All-American honorable mention center Basheer to graduation will hinder any chances of improvement.

"Our primary preseason objective is to find a combination that can fill the void left by [Basheer]," Matsuhara said. "We need to find people to score points,



Junior Forward Leticia Oseguera

Quick Facts

Location: Irvine, CA
Mascot: Anteaters
Head Coach: Colleen Matsuhara
Record: 8-7, 3-1

grab rebounds and provide a defensive presence in the paint."

Oseguera will provide part of that combination, and the Anteaters are high on sophomore guard Princess Hatcher to add a strong perimeter force to their game.

A Big West All-Freshman choice last year, Hatcher started 22 games and led the team with 68 assists. Her 5.5 ppg last year will have to be improved upon if the Anteaters hope to fill Basheer's shoes.

"Princess did an outstanding job last year

stepping into the starting lineup as a freshman," Matsuhara said. "Even though she is only a sophomore, she should provide us with court leadership at a crucial position."

Hatcher teams up with junior defensive specialist Sabrina Roberson in the backcourt.

After Sunday's defeat of UCSB, Irvine proved that it is a strong contender in the Western Division. And with its youth, the Anteaters will only get stronger as the season progresses.

Long Beach State

By Steven Large

LBSU Longs for Past Glory Days

For the fifth consecutive season, Long Beach State will attempt to regain the glory that the program once held. Beginning in 1981, the 49ers strung together an impressive streak of 11-straight NCAA Tournament berths before failing to qualify in 1993.

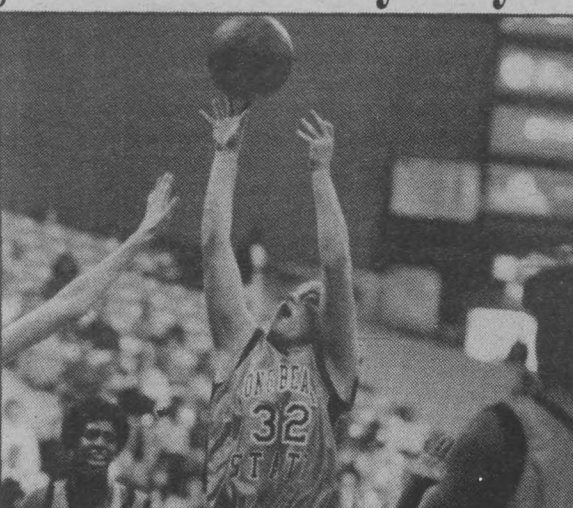
LBSU lost three of its starters from last year to graduation. Gone are forward Kim Barfield (15.4 ppg), center Ja'net Davis (13.9 ppg) and guard Akia Hardy (17.2 ppg). But in her second season with the 49ers, Head Coach Dallas Boychuk is not so sure that the losses will have as great an effect on the team as some are wagering.

"I don't think [the losses hurt] because Adara Newidouski, Toby Metoyer and Michelle Esparza all had starting spots last year and Ember Brown was a key reserve," Boychuk said.

Still, the combination of those four players only added up to about 24 points per game for the Niners last year.

Last season Long Beach finished with a 15-13 overall record and tied for fifth place in the Big West Conference at 10-8. It was the team's first finish above .500 since 1992.

In order to improve on that record, Boychuk



Senior Forward Adara Newidouski

Quick Facts

Location: Long Beach, CA **Head Coach:** Dallas Boychuk
Mascot: 49ers

Record: 6-9, 3-1

says that perimeter play will need to carry the team. Newidouski, a 5'10" forward, led the team in three-point shooting at 38 percent beyond the arc.

In the backcourt, senior Aimee Periolat and sophomores Ember Brown, Sarah Davis and Daneille Petty will all see action. Davis was the starting point guard as a true freshman for the 1994-95 season, but she was redshirted last year to gain an extra year of experience.

The paint will be filled

with 6'2" senior center Toby Metoyer, who suffered a knee injury in mid-January last year and had to sit out the remainder of the season.

One advantage for Long Beach is its home-court arena, The Pyramid, which is always a tough court for visiting teams because of the crowds it attracts and their excessive noise.

"We want to win all our home games," Boychuk said. "We did very well last year at home; The Pyramid is a great advantage."

Pacific

By Steven Large

Pacific Turns to Freshmen in '97

Gaucha fans still have a bitter taste in their mouths from the shot they took last year in the Big West Tournament semifinals. Pacific pulled out a double-overtime 88-87 win over UCSB to advance to the finals, where it was defeated 68-64 by the University of Hawai'i.

While the Tigers lost four of their starters from that team to graduation, ninth-year Head Coach Melissa Taketa says that she will rely heavily on her inexperienced returning squad and incoming players to reach last season's heights again.

"Each year I expect to be better than the year before," Taketa said. "I am quite aware that we are young, but I also think by coaching and educating our players to compete at the level we are accustomed to, they can learn to play up to their potential."

Taketa does have one returning starter to help guide the team back to last season's success — senior center Kate McAllister. Taketa could not ask for a better returning starter.

Last year McAllister was named First Team All-Big West and Big West Tournament MVP. She set a Pacific record last season by averaging 18.8 points per game (in-



Senior Center Kate McAllister

Quick Facts

Location: Stockton, CA **Head Coach:** Melissa Taketa
Mascot: Tigers

Record: 3-12, 2-2

cluding a school-record 46 points against Long Beach State) and also pulled down an average of 8.1 rebounds each game.

"Hopefully, Kate will have a great end to her career at Pacific this year," Taketa said. "Obviously she is going to be the focal point of many teams, especially early on with the team being young. She's going to have to handle that and not get frustrated. She has all the tools."

Freshmen centers Chante Guggia and Amanda Svensson will

challenge for time inside the paint. Both came from the tri-county area — Guggia from Rio Mesa High School and Svensson from Santa Barbara High School.

The other seven freshmen will battle for time in the backcourt.

"Obviously with a lot of new players, there are going to be a lot of peaks and valleys in their individual play," Taketa said. "It is our job to help them through the tough times and keep them focused on the matter at hand."

Cal State Fullerton

By Steven Large

Experienced Youth Key for CSUF

Last year was not a good one for Cal State Fullerton. Injuries and desertion forced the Titans to play with an inexperienced Division I team. But last year's force-feeding may pay off for CSUF this season.

With a young squad dominated by sophomores — who cannot be described as inexperienced after being thrown into the fire last season — Fullerton will undoubtedly fare better than last year's 4-14 team.

"Our freshmen were able to gain valuable playing experience last season and I'm hoping that it pays off for us," said Head Coach Deborah Ayres. "Down the stretch we lost seven games by five points or less. As frustrating as that was, I'm hoping this year's squad will put those hard-learned lessons to use."

Leading the way for the Titans this season will be sophomore forward/center Dee Braxton. An All-Big West Honorable Mention pick last season, she averaged 13.4 points per game (16.9 in Big West matches) and led the team in rebounding with 6.6 boards per game. Conventional wisdom says those numbers will be inflated this season.

"Dee put in time and effort since last season working on her overall



Sophomore Guard Andrea Thieme

Quick Facts

Location: Fullerton, CA
Mascot: Titans

Head Coach:
Deborah Ayres

Record: 5-9, 0-4

game and you can see the improvement," Ayres said. "She has developed a much better understanding of the game and of what's expected of her in her position."

From the perimeter, the Titans' main threat will be a new one this season. Junior transfer guard Kristin Sigg joins the team this year after being selected a Division II All-American from Glendale College, where she averaged 22 points per game.

Sophomore Andrea Thieme will hold onto the starting point guard position that she held in

24 of last season's 27 games. Another sophomore, Justine McMahan, will take on the small forward position that she inherited last February.

The center position will likely be run by committee.

"We don't have a big dominant center at this point, but I'm really excited about the talented rotation we have at the three and four spots," Ayres said. "We have more depth between the 5'11" and 6'1" than I've had since I've been here."

Cal Poly

By Steven Large

Mustangs Realistic in First Season

"Keep in mind that traditions and history aren't exactly built overnight ... [but] a foundation can be set for good things to come down the road."

Cal Poly San Luis Obispo's media guide simply tells it like it is. In its first year in the Big West, the Mustangs are not expecting a conference championship.

Fresh from the American West Conference, where Cal Poly finished last season at 2-4 (6-22 overall), the Mustangs have reloaded with nine newcomers after losing their starting point guard Christina Carrillo (who dropped out) and leading scorer Kellie Hoffman (who graduated). The team is confident, yet cautious, in its outlook for the '97 season.

"This year we will be competitive," said Head Coach Karen Booker. "On paper we have nine new players, but we will be very athletic and quick. I think we will surprise a few people."

Cal Poly did not surprise UCSB on Jan. 13, when the Gauchos introduced the Mustangs to the Big West with a 102-60 slam in the face. The loss was nothing new to SLO, who is off to a 1-13 start and is 0-3 in Big West play.

Freshman guard Stephanie Osorio and sophomore forward Rona Bevien have been the



Junior Forward Rona Bevien

Quick Facts

Location: San Luis Obispo, CA

Mascot: Mustangs

Head Coach: Karen Booker

Record: 2-13, 1-3

leaders of this team that, so far this season, has seen 10 of its 12 players make at least one start. Osorio is averaging 12.1 points per game while Bevien is throwing down an average of 10.2.

"We needed a sharp shooter right away that could fill the void created by the loss of Kellie Hoffman and Christina Carrillo," Booker said. "[Osorio] is an excellent three-point shooter, feisty on defense, and is a good all-around player."

"Experience-wise, Rona Bevien is a player who can lead, and we will need her to do that this year. She has the heart and work ethic to become a leader on this team."

Junior guard Kristie Barnes, a transfer from De Anza College, has also made her presence felt on the Cal Poly squad. Barnes leads the team in minutes played and has put up an average of 7.5 points per game so far this season.

New Mexico State

By Brian Berger

Roadrunners Rebuild Without Star

Much to the pleasure of the other teams in the Big West, New Mexico State will begin to rebuild its program this season after the departure of Anita Maxwell.

Maxwell, who became the first player in NCAA history to score 2,500 career points, grab 1,000 rebounds and record 300 steals, departed from Las Cruces as the Big West's all-time leading scorer.

With Maxwell out of the picture, the Roadrunners will look for a new start under first-season Head Coach John Sutherland. After nine seasons of guiding Arkansas, Sutherland took a three-year hiatus before returning to the sidelines this season.

"This is a great opportunity for me," Sutherland said. "I'm very excited about the prospects for the next several years."

If Sutherland is to be successful, NMSU will have to rely on juniors Rebecca Fresquez and Wendy Ray. Fresquez captured the Big West's Player of the Week honors on Dec. 9 and currently leads the team in assists, with 3.4 per game, and steals, with 3.3 per match.

Ray, who has become the team's top scorer, averages 12.2 points per game. The 5'11" forward is also second in the league in field goal per-



Junior Guard Rebecca Fresquez

Quick Facts

Location: Las Cruces, NM

Mascot: Roadrunners

Head Coach: John Sutherland

Record: 6-9, 3-0

centage with .542 (64-118).

"Wendy is the type of player that coaches like to coach," Sutherland said. "Wendy can score when needed, rebound and play low post. She, along with Rebecca Fresquez, are the main cogs of the team."

Senior Annette Robinson is stuck with the responsibility of filling Maxwell's shoes. The 6'3" center has not come near Maxwell's scoring power, but she is third in the league in shooting

percentage (.532). Robinson also leads New Mexico State in rebounds (6.9 rpg) and the Big West in blocked shots (2.8 per game).

With the additions of freshmen centers Christina Allred and Amy Wells, NMSU has become one of the deepest teams in the conference across the frontline. The depth, however, was not apparent in the early season as the team dropped six of its first seven games before improving its record to 5-9 overall.

Nevada

By Scott Hennessee

Experienced Players Key in Reno

The University of Nevada returns this season as the veteran of the Big West. The Wolf Pack returns nine players from last year, including their top seven scorers.

Although Nevada is coming off a 9-17 season, it was still predicted to win the Eastern Division in the preseason coaches' poll. Currently, the 'Pack has struggled — owning a 5-8 overall record and a 1-1 Big West mark.

Nevada is led by 1996 All-Big West Honorable Mention pick KaTrina Crenshaw. The 6'0" senior forward was the team's leading scorer in 16 of the 26 games last year, averaging 15.9 points while pulling down 8.6 rebounds.

"She is a gifted player with outstanding talent who can dominate the boards and the inside game," said Head Coach Ada Gee.

Junior center Iesha Donadelle's game may have finally begun to blossom. After averaging just 3.6 points and 1.8 rebounds through the first eight games this year, she has caught fire lately. Donadelle was named to the All-Tournament team of the State Farm Classic and averaged 18.3 points and 9.7 rebounds over the team's last three non-conference games.



Junior Guard Shawna Franceschini

Quick Facts

Location: Reno, NV

Mascot: Wolf Pack

Head Coach:

Ada Gee

Record: 6-9, 2-2

While Donadelle and Crenshaw are expected to carry the load on the inside, juniors Shawna Franceschini and Noelle Fable are back to provide a threat from the perimeter. Fable led the Wolf Pack in three-point field goal percentage last season with an average of .355 from downtown. Franceschini was the team's second-leading scorer at 17.8 points per game.

"Our post game could potentially be the strongest in the conference," Gee said. "Our perimeter game will be

equally solid and we have excellent balance inside and out, which will be a tremendous asset."

With 92 percent of last year's offense returning for the Wolf Pack, any newcomers might have trouble getting looks. Nevada only has one, but she is a prized recruit. Freshman Jasmine Huntington arrives in Reno as USA Today's Player of the Year from Vermont, where she averaged 31.9 points per game for Oxbow High School.

Boise State By Scott Hennessee

BSU Brings Athletic Squad to New-Look Conference

After eight seasons in the Big Sky Conference, Boise State brings its run-and-gun attack to the Big West this season. And along with a new league, the Broncos will debut a new coach.

Head Coach Trisha Stevens takes over BSU this season after serving as an assistant for the past three years. Stevens will have her hands full this year as she attempts to guide a team led by seven freshmen to the Big West Tournament.

"We are young and athletic," Stevens said. "We are eager to learn. The coaching staff and the players want to play an up-tempo game with pressure defense."

The freshman players have proven themselves at the prep level. Four were *USA Today* Honorable Mention All-Americans, and two were state players of the year. Forward Stephanie Block is perhaps the most talented of the group. The 6'4" freshman averaged 16 points, seven rebounds and three blocks per game her senior season, and is the first player in Oregon State Tournament history to record a triple-double.

Sophomore Alycia Sumlin is one of the elder statesmen on a squad



Alycia Sumlin

Quick Facts

Location: Boise, ID

Mascot: Broncos

Head Coach: Trisha Stevens

Record: 4-10, 2-1

that has no seniors and only three juniors. Of the returning players, she was tops in scoring last year, averaging 9.2 ppg, 4.9 rebounds per game and leading the Big Sky in steals with 68.

Last season's Big Sky Newcomer of the Year, Kim Brydges, looks to add inside strength to the Bronco squad. She averaged 7.5 ppg and led the team in rebounding with 6.3 per contest.

"This is the most athletic group of recruits we have brought to Boise State in my four years here," Stevens said. "We are looking to our freshman class to step up and contribute a lot this year."

Idaho By Scott Hennessee

Vandals Count On Nieman for Their Inaugural Season

Despite being new to the Big West, the University of Idaho looks to make an immediate impact in the conference's Eastern Division this season.

Led by freshman forward Alli Nieman, the Vandals have the firepower to surprise any team in the league. Nieman currently ranks fourth in the Big West in scoring and third in rebounding, with 17.3 points and 8.7 rebounds per game.

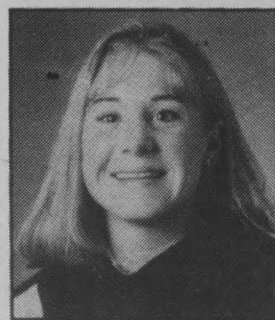
"Her versatility is going to be her greatest asset for us," said Head Coach Julie Holt.

Teaming with the youth of Nieman is the veteran leadership of juniors Kathryn Gussett and Kelli Johnson, and senior Ari Skorpik.

Although a forward, the 5'11" Gussett leads the team in assists with 3.5 per game. Johnson is Idaho's biggest long-range threat, connecting on 22 of her 69 three-point attempts. Skorpik ranked in the top-10 of the Big Sky Conference in six different categories the last two seasons.

Michelle Greenwood will complement the solid inside play of Nieman. Last season Greenwood averaged 8.2 ppg and 4.1 rpg.

"What we need her to



Ari Skorpik

Quick Facts

Location: Moscow, ID

Mascot: Vandals

Head Coach: Julie Holt

Record: 6-9, 1-2

do this year is rebound and score inside," said Holt. "We need her to be a positive role model."

Overall, five of Idaho's top eight scorers, including three starters, return this year. "This year we'll be able to give players some rest," Holt said. "We'll be able to press more and get a good rotation going. It's going to be fun."

If the Vandals wish to make the Big West Tournament they will need someone other than Nieman to score. If that doesn't happen, it could be a long winter in Moscow.

North Texas By Brian Berger

Transition Won't Be Easy for Eagles in the Big West

The University of North Texas made the transition from the Southland Conference to the Big West this season. And based on its first league game against UCSB, the Eagles discovered there is quite a difference as they were downed 92-64.

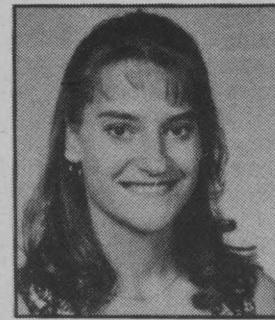
Despite a slow start that saw UNT go 1-9, the team has shown the potential to challenge in the Eastern Division.

After leading the team in scoring last season, sophomore guard Ashley Norris once again is spearheading the Eagle attack. Going into this past weekend, Norris led all UNT scorers with 14.1 points per game.

"Ashley is the best shooter I have ever coached," said Head Coach Tina Slinker.

Senior guard Christi Washington and senior forward Valerie Gilbert also return to the starting lineup as the team's only seniors. Last season the duo combined to average 15.4 points and 6.9 rebounds per game.

"The leadership of seniors is crucial to the total success of any team," Slinker said. "I know Christi and Valerie are committed to the qualities an individual must possess in order to be a winner."



Ashley Norris

Quick Facts

Location: Denton, TX

Mascot: Eagles

Head Coach: Tina Slinker

Record: 3-12, 0-3

Since junior center LaFreda Deckard was forced to medically red-shirt this season to rehab an injured knee, junior forward An'Dionne Smith has stepped in to become a force on the boards, averaging 7.2 rebounds per game.

The top newcomer on the team is freshman forward Empress Drane. The former Texas high school star was one of the few bright spots in the conference opener against the Gauchos, scoring 19 points and pulling down 13 rebounds.

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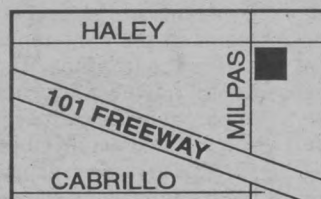


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