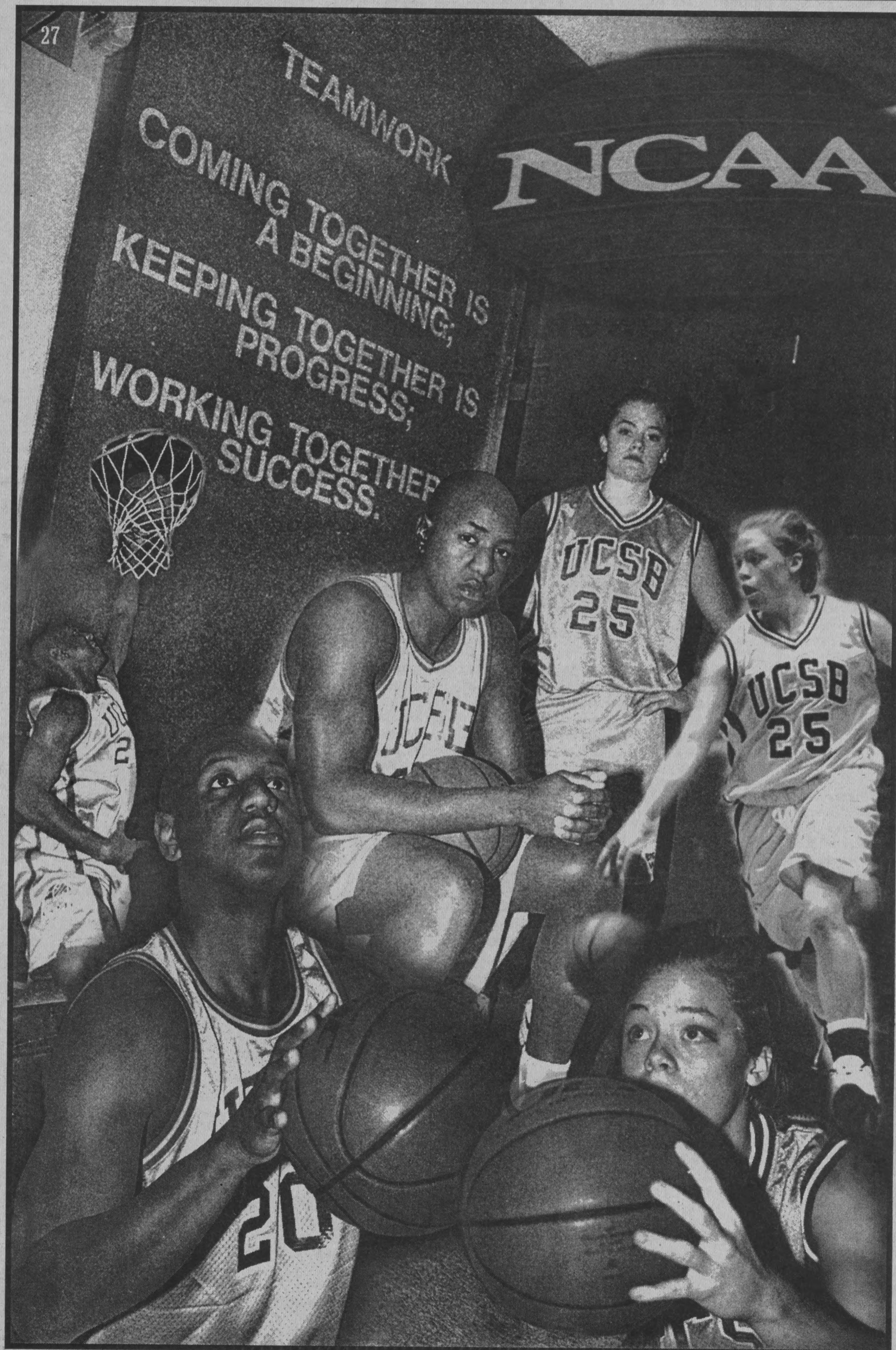


## Guide to the 1997-98

# Big West Conference



Men's and Women's Team-by-Team Analysis Photo Illustration by Alan Jacoby

# Women's Western Division — Projected Order of Finish

## UC Santa Barbara

A team that starts three sophomores and two freshmen doesn't typically enter its season as the runaway favorite to capture the conference title.

The UCSB women's basketball team, however, is anything but typical.

Despite losing 1997 Big West Conference Player of the Year Erin Alexander and league scoring champ-

**Location:**  
Santa Barbara, Calif.

**1996-97 Record:**  
24-6 overall,  
14-1 Big West

**Current Record:**  
11-4, 2-0 Big West

**Leading Scorer:**  
Kristi Rohr,  
15.8 ppg

ion Amy Smith to graduation, the young Gauchos are poised to improve upon a 24-6 season which ended in a heartbreaking three-point loss to Tulane University in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

"Offensively, we should be better than ever," 11th-year Head Coach Mark French said. "We have so many weapons to choose from this year — probably more balanced across the board than ever. We haven't figured out who our

go-to players are yet, but that will come in time."

Thus far, Santa Barbara (currently 11-4, 2-0) has gone to sophomore forward Kristi Rohr, who ranks fourth in the Big West at 15.8 points per game. Also dependable is sophomore point guard Stacy Clinesmith, who leads the conference in assists at 5.7 per game, and who hit a miraculous 65-foot buzzer-beater to defeat San Diego State on Dec. 15.

"They are our two key returning players, and with that comes a certain amount of responsibility, but they are more than capable of handling it," French said. "They are who they are because they burn with the desire to get better."

Joining the super sophs in the starting lineup are freshmen Erin Buescher and Nicole Greathouse, two of the most highly recruited athletes to don Gaucho blue and gold.

UCSB's primary weakness is its inconsistent defense. While Santa Barbara leads the conference in points scored (81.3 per game), it also ranks last in points allowed (78.8).

— Ben Alkaly

## UC Irvine

First-year UC Irvine Head Coach Mark Adams didn't have to travel far to accept his new position: one seat over on the bench. The former Anteater assistant is now faced with the challenge of improving on last year's 16-13 record and making the team more of a force in the Big West Conference.

"I feel we should be near the top of the conference with the group of returnees we have," Adams said. "For us to have a successful year we need to stay healthy and have some depth off the bench that we haven't had in the past."

Ten out of 14 players from 1996-97 return to UCI this season to help the squad achieve its goal of a 20-win season. The Anteaters will turn to senior forward Leticia Oseguera, who averaged 17.4

**Location:**  
Irvine, Calif.

**1996-97 Record:**  
1-25 overall,  
1-15 Big West

**Current Record:**  
4-8, 1-1 Big West

**Leading Scorer:**  
Leticia Oseguera,  
12.1 ppg

points and 9.9 rebounds a year ago, as their go-to player. However, Adams doesn't want to burden his First Team All-Big West performer with carrying the team as she did in the past.

"We are not going to put the weight of the world on Leticia's shoulders, but she needs to put up the same numbers or better for us to be successful," Adams said. Sophomore point guard Megan Stafford, an All-Conference freshman team selection when she averaged 12.4 points and 5.6 assists a year ago, will be handling some of the burden.

However, senior Sabrina Roberson, along with juniors Princess Hatcher, Char-Pei Chen, Nikole Payton, Yuriko Jung, and sophomores Shannon Anders, Kirsten Cappel and Chelsea Mackey will alleviate the pressure placed on the two team leaders.

Adams likes his team's chances in the much-improved Big West Conference.

"Santa Barbara will be very good again, but there are a lot of teams that had freshmen last year that will be better, and hopefully that is the case for us too."

— Matt Hurst

## Cal State Fullerton

The Cal State Fullerton women's basketball team is making some changes.

With Basketball Hall of Famer and two-time Olympian Denise Curry now at the helm, and seven returning letterwinners, including three starters, Fullerton is looking to improve on last year's disappointing 10-16 record (5-10 in the Big West).

**Location:**  
Fullerton, Calif.

**1996-97 Record:**  
10-16 overall,  
5-10 Big West

**Current Record:**  
5-8, 2-0 Big West

**Leading Scorer:**  
Kris Sigg,  
15.9 ppg

"I'm excited about my first opportunity as a head coach. I'm familiar with this institution and familiar with the Big West, and that makes the situation even better for me, as it helps make the transition from assistant to head coach smoother," Curry said. "My greatest challenge is to bring the program back to the respectability that it had in the recent 1990's."

On the court, the Titans will be led by the triple

threat of junior forward Justine McMahan (10 points per game, 4.9 rebounds per game last season), senior guard Kris Sigg (13.2 ppg, 3.6 rpg) and junior point guard Andrea Thieme (14.8 ppg, 5.2 assists per game). Thieme was an all-conference second team selection in 1996-97.

Although CSUF lost All-Big West performer Dee Braxton, the squad has fared well after a slow start. Fullerton is in a three-way tie for first place in the Western Division at 5-8 overall and 2-0 in conference.

"I'm very pleased with the team's work ethic and their attention. We have a lot to do and a lot to learn in a short time," Curry said. "We have suffered some nagging injuries which have prevented us from having a full roster during practice. But we're improving every day and should continue to improve each week."

The Titans are currently third in the conference in scoring and second in field goal percentage, which may present a problem for opponents not adept at playing pressure defense.

— Damon Damele

## Pacific

Youth and defense are two buzzwords surrounding the University of the Pacific women's basketball team in its 1997-98 campaign.

Tenth-year coach Melissa Taketa hopes to turn around a Tiger squad which finished last year at 9-18 overall and 8-7 in the Big West Conference with a roster featuring only one senior and three juniors.

"In typical Pacific fashion, this year's team will grow up together and play hard for each other," Taketa said. "Fortunately, all of our young players gained a lot of game experience last year. We've added strength and experience, so hopefully our team will continue to make progress."

One area UOP (currently 4-8, 0-1) has made progress in is the defensive end of the floor. After surrendering 69.9 points per game last season (seventh in the Big West), the

**Location:**  
Stockton, Calif.

**1996-97 Record:**  
9-18 overall,  
8-7 Big West

**Current Record:**  
4-8, 0-1 Big West

**Leading Scorer:**  
Cathy Lauritzen,  
12.3 ppg

squad has improved to third best in the conference in 1997-98 at 62.6.

Offensively, the Tigers are left with big shoes to fill with the graduation of First Team All-Big West performer Kate McAllister, who finished fourth in the league in scoring at 15.8 points per game. The title of "go-to shooter" has been passed on to senior power forward

Cathy Lauritzen, currently second in the conference in three-point field goal percentage. "We're looking forward to an exceptional year from Cathy," Taketa said. "She is, without a doubt, our best standstill shooter. We're counting on her to be a consistent point throughout the season."

Adding depth to the Pacific roster will be Lauritzen's frontcourt mate junior Sarah Yarbrough, second in rebounds amongst Pacific players a year ago at 6.3 per game, and sophomore shooting guard Eden Palacio, the team's #3 scorer in 1996-97 (9.1). Freshman center Amanda Svenson, a Santa Barbara native, is among seven fresh faces who will compete for playing time.

Although UOP may not be an NCAA Tournament participant in 1998, Taketa has quietly stockpiled young talent to make her team a contender in years to come.

— Ben Alkaly

## Long Beach State

The Long Beach State women's basketball team (11-17 overall, 8-8 in the Big West in 1996-97) will turn to team depth and quickness as it looks to improve upon last year's performance.

With eight players returning from last year, and four of its seven new players being transfers, LBSU head coach Dallas Boychuck is confident about the team's playing

**Location:**  
Long Beach, Calif.

**1996-97 Record:**  
11-17 overall,  
7-8 Big West

**Current Record:**  
3-9, 0-1 Big West

**Leading Scorer:**  
Kesha Wade,  
13.8 ppg

experience.

"Our team is not young to college basketball, but they are young to Long Beach State and to our brand of basketball," Boychuck said. "One of the keys to our season will be how fast our team can make the adjustments to our system. Once we get all of our players in place and everyone adjusts to our system, I think we have the potential to be one of the best teams in the Big West."

One of the top returning

players for the 49ers (3-9, 0-1) will be sophomore forward Kesha Wade. Wade averaged 12.1 points and 3.1 steals per game in 1996-97 on her way to earning Big West All-Freshman Team honors. She leads the team in scoring this season with 13.8 points per contest and tops all Big West players with 3.7 takeaways.

Junior Tomika Cantley will fill the other forward position for Long Beach. Cantley is adept at cleaning the boards and currently leads the conference in that category with 9.9 rebounds per game.

The other returning starter for Long Beach is senior guard Michelle Esparza. Esparza averaged 7.1 points per game last season and was second on the team with 76 assists.

Boychuck believes that the 49ers' strength lies in their well-rounded scoring attack.

"Scoring-wise this team should be very balanced. All of our players can put the ball into the basket," Boychuck said. "Any player can lead us in scoring on any given night. Not only will we be a very deep team, but we will also be in the best shape of our lives."

— Shane Culbertson

## Cal Poly SLO

The Cal Poly San Luis Obispo women's basketball team expects good things to happen in the Big West this season under first-year Head Coach Faith Mimnaugh and her up-tempo style.

The Mustangs (4-9 overall, 1-2 in Big West) are led by sophomore Stephanie Osorio. The 5'6" guard was an honorable mention All-Big West selection last season averaging 10.9 points per game. She also set a school record by nailing 66 three-pointers.

Currently, Osorio's scoring is down slightly to 10.2 ppg. Nevertheless, Mimnaugh, an assistant coach last season, is confident in her #1 offensive threat.

"Stephanie trained all summer long to become one of the premier players in the Big West Conference," she said. "There's no doubt in my mind that she'll accomplish her

**Location:**  
San Luis Obispo, Calif.

**1996-97 Record:**  
4-22 overall,  
3-12 Big West

**Current Record:**  
4-9, 1-2 Big West

**Leading Scorer:**  
Stephanie Osorio,  
10.2 ppg

goal."

Mimnaugh is also impressed with senior point guard Jackie Maristela, and is excited about her dynamic duo at guard.

"Jackie Maristela is one of the best guards in the conference," she said. "She is a tremendous point guard. Having Stephanie Osorio and Jackie Maristela in the back-court will be outstanding."

According to Mimnaugh, Poly hopes to run and gun its way to victory in the Big West.

"We plan on running a ton and pressing a ton," she said. "It's going to be very exciting to watch Cal Poly this year."

SLO ranks second in the conference in rebounding, but, ironically, is being out-rebounded by an average of 7.4 rebounds per game. Mimnaugh knows that her offense is keyed by its ability to clean the glass.

"We need to concentrate on rebounding and taking care of the ball. If we can't rebound, we can't run," she said. "Last year, we had great speed and that speed got us into trouble sometimes. We need to be able to think the game and not turn the ball over so we can use our speed to our advantage."

— Steve Wendt

# Men's Western Division — Projected Order of Finish

## Pacific

The defending Big West champion University of the Pacific Tigers enter conference play being named an early favorite in the Western Division. UOP returns four starters and eight players overall from last season's team.

Pacific returns two all-conference selections from last year in senior guard Corey Anders (2nd Team) and senior forward Rayne Mahaffey (Honorable Mention). Senior Adam Jacobsen returns to take over the point guard position after redshirting last year with a knee injury. But the biggest and possibly best returner from last year is senior center Michael Olowokandi. The 7'1", 265-pound native of London, England is currently first in the Big West in scoring (19.6 points per game) and rebounding (10.1 per

**Location:**  
Stockton, Calif.

**1996-97 Record:**  
24-6 overall,  
12-4 Big West

**Current Record:**  
7-8, 0-2 Big West

**Leading Scorer:**  
Michael Olowokandi,  
19.6 ppg

game).

"The focus of the offense is going to get the ball inside to Mike," Tiger Head Coach Bob Thomason said. "Taking the ball inside will create a lot of open shots. I think we will also fast break a lot more than we did in the past."

Pacific hasn't been running all that much this year, averaging only 69.9 points per game — third lowest in

the league. The Tigers are winning games with defense, allowing a league-low 64.1 points per game.

Pacific got off to a quick start this year, winning eight of its first 11, but has struggled lately, losing its last five contests, all of which were on the road. Included in that stretch was a 61-67 loss to #7 Stanford, a game in which the Tigers nearly upset the Cardinal in Maples Pavilion.

"We have the depth, size, quickness and the ability to beat anyone at any position," Thomason said. "If this team stays healthy, they have a chance to go out on the court and play with any team in the country and have a chance to win. No matter who we play, I'm hoping this team is a team that controls its own destiny."

Pacific is currently 7-8 overall and 0-2 in the Big West, losing its opening two conference games to Utah State and Nevada on the road.

— Scott Hennessee

## Cal Poly SLO

The Cal Poly San Luis Obispo Mustangs and Head Coach Jeff Schneider look to improve on last season's 14-16 mark with a returning outside threat and a new inside power.

The Mustangs' returning threat is last season's Big West Conference Freshman of the Year, Mike Wozniak. The so-

**Location:**  
San Luis Obispo,  
Calif.

**1996-97 Record:**  
14-16 overall,  
6-10 Big West

**Current Record:**  
7-7, 0-2 Big West

**Leading Scorer:**  
Mike Wozniak,  
19.6 ppg

phomore guard is currently averaging 19.6 points per game, including a 31-point performance against Southern University on Dec. 17.

Schneider is very confident in his star player.

"Mike is one of the best scorers in the league and one of the best shooters," he said. "He has the ability to score in many ways with the jump shot and off the dribble. He is one of the better guards in the Big West."

Although Poly's #3 scorer last season, Mitch Ohnstad, transferred to Minnesota, Schneider is not too concerned.

"It's a loss we'll have to overcome," he said. "But we are still very deep and talented at the guard spot."

That depth at guard will come in the form of junior Ben Larson (11.0 ppg in 1996-97), red-shirt freshman Watende Favors and freshman Jabbar Washington.

The Mustangs' inside threat is freshman Chris Bjorklund. The 6'9", 230-pound Bjorklund is averaging 17.2 ppg and six rebounds in SLO's 14 games.

Schneider is relieved to have some big bodies, a weakness last season.

"We are going to be a much better rebounding team with our height and our depth in the post position," he said. "We have gone from having one of the smallest lineups in the conference to one of the biggest."

Cal Poly's ace in the hole is its home court, 3,500-seat Mott Gymnasium. The Mustangs are an impressive 6-0 in San Luis Obispo but only 1-7 away from Mott.

— By Steve Wendt

## Cal State Fullerton

The Cal State Fullerton Titans are a team on a mission.

After improving by seven wins last season to post a 13-14 record (6-10 in the Big West), the CSF men are anxious to take a spot among the conference elite. Head Coach Bob Hawking is excited about the team's prospects.

"It's certainly as experienced a roster as I've seen here," said the fourth-year head coach. "We return nine-lettermen and the equivalent of five starters. And the best thing is that we have a lot of multiple-position players. It was born out of necessity in the past, but now we have great flexibility."

The Titans have the experience to play with any team in the conference. They are led by three-year letterman Chris St. Clair, who leads the team in assists and is third in the

**Location:**  
Fullerton, Calif.

**1996-97 Record:**  
13-14 overall,  
6-10 Big West

**Current Record:**  
6-6, 1-1 Big West

**Leading Scorer:**  
Chris Dade,  
17.1 ppg

conference in three-point percentage, and Chris Dade, who leads the conference in steals. Fullerton is off to a 6-6 start (1-1 in the Big West) and has shown that it can play with anyone, beating North Texas and losing by only two in double overtime to New Mexico State.

"Our staff and student-athletes are working very hard to make our program respectable," Hawking said. "We are committed to making it work."

The Gauchos split last year's games with Fullerton, winning the first 83-76 behind Raymond Tutt's 36 points before losing in Titan Gym 74-60. Although Fullerton's strength is its transition game, led by the outstanding shooting of Dane and St. Clair, the Titans will be looking to use its big men, 6'11" centers Corey Sanders and Jerome Archie, to its advantage against UCSB.

Adding flames to CSF's fire this year is the 20th anniversary of the school's only appearance in the Final Four. This fact, combined with the Titans' excellent home winning percentage (.675 all-time in Titan Gym) makes Fullerton a team that cannot be overlooked in this year's battle to make the playoffs.

— Damon Damele

## UC Santa Barbara

The UCSB men's basketball team has had its share of problems to start the season: from a rash of preseason injuries and a dismal nonconference record, to a player revolt against the coach. But they are still alive.

The conference season is still young and no team has distinguished itself as a clear favorite to run away with the championship. Pacific was picked to win

**Location:**  
Santa Barbara,  
Calif.

**1996-97 Record:**  
12-15 overall,  
7-9 Big West

**Current Record:**  
3-9, 0-2 Big West

**Leading Scorer:**  
Raymond Tutt,  
16.6 ppg

tively even."

Senior guard Raymond Tutt is easily the team's leading scorer at 16.6 points per game, but his production is down from a year ago when Tutt was the nation's fourth leading scorer with 24.1 ppg. Junior forward B.J. Bunton is the team's second leading scorer at 10.4 ppg, and leading rebounder with 6.6 rebounds per game.

Many of UCSB's struggles can be attributed to shaky defense — the team is giving up an average of 79.2 points per game.

"Defense is mostly emotion, intensity and aggression," Pimm said. "That's what we need to have."

Even after getting off to such a slow start, Tutt feels that his team is still in contention for the conference title.

"I feel we haven't lost any ground," Tutt said. "We are going to compete for first and second place."

The Gauchos' main problem has been picking up wins on the road. The team won only one conference game away from home last year, and has yet to win on the road this season.

— Scott Hennessee

## UC Irvine

A big challenge is in store for new Head Coach Pat Douglass and his UC Irvine men's basketball team. In his 24 years of coaching — 16 at the collegiate level — Douglass has never had a losing season. He is also one of only five coaches to lead a college team to an undefeated season. Trying to rebuild last year's 1-25 Anteaters will surely be tough on Douglass and his untarnished record.

"I can't really dwell on last year," Douglass said. "From the first day of conditioning, this is a new program."

However, something positive did come out of last year to help the Anteaters move into the future. Sophomores Juma Jackson and Andrew Carlson came to the fore and were named to the Big West Conference All-Freshman Team. Jackson averaged 9.8 points and 3.6 rebounds per game, while Carlson averaged 5.5 points and 5.0 rebounds.

**Location:**  
Irvine, Calif.

**1996-97 Record:**  
12-16 overall,  
7-11 Big West

**Current Record:**  
4-8, 2-0 Big West

**Leading Scorer:**  
Ben Jones,  
11.4 ppg

Along with Jackson and Carlson, sophomore Anthony Delacruz, junior Lamarr Parker and senior Puneet Sahi are the only returning players from last year. Sahi, who led the team with 13.4 points and 4.0 assists per game, is the team's only senior.

With such a small returning group, Douglass was left to fill a lot of voids in the Anteaters' lineup. Guards Junior Bond, Erick Joshua and Brian Scroggin join forwards Matt Willard and Adam Stetson as the new transfers to UCI this year. As for the incoming class of freshmen, Malachi Edmond, Jason Flowers and Akindeji Wesley head up the guard positions while Ben Jones is the only freshman on the front line.

Douglass sees both good and bad in having such a small team.

"I think we will be a better ball-handling team and a better shooting team and I know we will improve defensively. The rebounding ability and having a legitimate offensive threat by the basket is of some concern. You have to be able to rebound to win."

The Anteaters have already shown vast improvement over last season, beating New Mexico State on the road. The Gauchos travel to Irvine on January 31.

— Matt Hurst

## Long Beach State

The Long Beach State men's basketball team (13-14 overall, 9-7 in the Big West in 1996-97) looks toward a rebuilding season with only two players returning from last year's squad — junior forward D'Cean Bryant and senior guard Quincy Nuckles.

Long Beach Head Coach Wayne Morgan will look to the pair to help manage this year's young

**Location:**  
Long Beach, Calif.

**1996-97 Record:**  
13-14 overall,  
9-7 Big West

**Current Record:**  
5-9, 0-2 Big West

**Leading Scorer:**  
Andrew Betts,  
17.1 ppg

team.

"Ideally, you'd like to have six, seven, eight, nine guys back who are teaching two or three guys. What we've got are two or three guys teaching eight or nine," Morgan said. "But I am definitely pleased with the approach by D'Cean and Quincy, they're leading by example."

Morgan believes that the success of this season will largely be dictated by the ability of the incoming freshmen to learn their

new roles at Long Beach.

"We need a contribution from [freshmen]," he said. "They are working hard, trying to pick up the things we're putting in, and they have the concepts down well. But it will be a while before they have the details down like they're second nature."

The 49ers will also be welcoming a number of transfers to round out this year's team, most notably 7'0" center Andrew Betts from New York, the tallest player ever to don a Long Beach State uniform. Antrone Lee, a versatile sophomore from the University of Florida, will join Betts in the starting lineup.

"They are among our very best players and we expect a big contribution from both guys," Morgan said of the newcomers. "Antrone is our most versatile player, and will help us in many ways."

The 49ers have gotten off to a respectable start this season (5-9 overall, 0-2 in the Big West) considering the number of new players on the team. Betts is currently leading the team in scoring, averaging 17.5 points per game.

— Shane Culbertson

the Western Division before the season started, but has struggled to a 7-8 record and has dropped its first two Big West games. Not one team in the Gauchos' division has a record above .500.

"There is no real dominant team in the Big West," 15th year Santa Barbara Head Coach Jerry Pimm said. "Pacific was supposed to be and they've lost five in a row. It's a good conference, no question, with good players and good teams, but it's still rela-

# Big West Men's Eastern Division Preview

By SCOTT HENNESSEE  
and STEVE WENDT  
Staff Writers

Here is a look at how the other half lives. The *Daily Nexus* gives its rundown of the men's Eastern Division of the Big West Conference in their predicted order of finish.

**1. New Mexico State**  
**Strengths:** After guiding the Illinois Fighting Illini to 424 victories over 21 years, Lou Henson has returned for his second stint as the Roadrunners' head coach, taking a slight cut in pay (he's coaching for \$1 a month). Henson has picked up right where he left off, leading New Mexico State to an 11-5 record (1-1 in the Big West). Henson has a strong crop of returnees to work with, most notably senior forward Louis Richardson who is fourth in the conference with 18.5 points per game.

The Roadrunners score 74.4 points per contest while attempting 22.1 three-pointers per game. Their strengths lie in an experienced lineup with six seniors and three returning starters, and a tenacious defense which allows opponents to make only 38 percent of its shots.

**Weaknesses:** There aren't too many weak points on this Roadrunner team. If there is one, it would be a lack of depth. New Mexico State has only eight scholarship

players on their roster, so injuries could play a key role down the stretch.

**Player to Watch:** Along with Richardson, senior guard Denmark Reid is the Roadrunners' other big scoring threat, averaging 17.6 pg. **Coach Lou Henson says:** "I think our success largely depends on our seniors. We have good leadership from our seniors, and we need that to continue."

## 2. Utah State

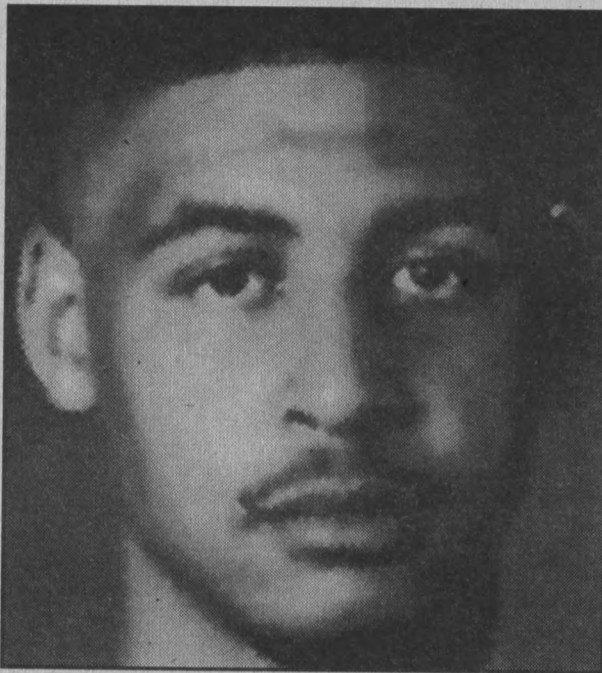
**Strengths:** The Aggies (11-4 overall, 2-0 in the Big West) are an experienced team that sports six seniors and seven juniors. Their backcourt is especially strong with the return of seniors Marcus Saxon, Justin Jones and Kevin Rice. All three averaged over eight points per game last year. Utah State is also tough on the boards, out-rebounding its opponents by a league-high 8.4 caroms a game.

**Weaknesses:** Utah State has been susceptible to turning the ball over at times this year. The Aggies have committed 212 turnovers while forcing only 192. Utah State's big men are all new to the program — three of them are junior college transfers — so how they react to the physical play of the Big West remains to be seen.

**Player to Watch:** Saxon is the team's leading scorer at 17.7

points per game. Rice is the team's most versatile player, averaging 14.7 ppg, while pulling down a team-high 6.4 rebounds per game.

**Coach Larry Eustachy says:** "We have several new guys so we don't know what to expect from them. I like our returning players. I feel good about our perimeter play."



B.J. Bunton

## 3. Boise State

**Strengths:** The Broncos (10-5, 2-0 Big West) are an explosive team that can put points on the board in a hurry. BSU is second in the conference in scoring, pouring in 76.9 per contest. Boise State is tops in the Big West in field goal percentage (49 percent), and sec-

ond in three-point percentage (41 percent). This high-octane motion offense succeeds in getting the guards, and small forward quality looks at the hoop. **Weaknesses:** The glaring hole in Boise's game is rebounding. The Broncos rank dead last in the Big West and are out-boarded by 5.7 rebounds per game.

Boise State's big men will get good picks and are a release valve on the offense, but will not pose any serious scoring threat.

**Player to Watch:** Boise State is led by the Big West's leading scorer — senior Roberto Bergersen. The 6'6" small forward/shooting guard averages 19.9 ppg and is

shooting a blistering 57 percent from the field. In addition, he shoots 41 percent from three-point land and is an 81 percent foul shooter. **Coach Rod Jensen says:** "We have got a roster with some energetic basketball players, and that will be a key both defensively and offensively. We need to make sure that energy level is at a frenzy all season."

## 4. Nevada

**Strengths:** The Wolf Pack sports three of the better outside threats in the conference in seniors Paul Culbertson, Jimmy Carroll and Robin Kennedy. Any one of them is capable of making the three-point shot at any time. Their half-court offense can be dangerous, but has sputtered at times due to a lack of ball movement.

**Weaknesses:** Nevada is susceptible to turnovers, averaging 1.8 more giveaways than takeaways per game, and floor general Kennedy has shown to be easily rattled in the face of adverse circumstances.

**Player to watch:** Culbertson has been the team's most consistent offensive weapon, averaging 18.5 points per game on 49 percent shooting.

**Coach Foster's quote:** "With nine players returning from last year, they certainly have a pattern of success to follow. That kind of experience

can serve a team well if they take advantage of it."

The University of Idaho and the University of North Texas will most likely finish at the bottom of the Eastern Division heap. Here's a quick synopsis of what the projected cellar dwellers will look like.

The Idaho Vandals (8-4, 2-0 in the Big West) are a defensively-oriented team. The Moscow, Idaho, school ranks third in the Big West, allowing just 66.2 points per game. They also cause 2.8 more turnovers per game than they give up.

The team's most versatile player is senior guard Avery Curry. The 6'0" transfer from Florida St, leads the Vandals in scoring (17.9 ppg), field goal percentage (46 percent), free throw percentage (70 percent) and steals (2.3 pg).

The University of North Texas (2-10, 1-1 in the Big West) plays far and away the worst defense in the conference. The Eagles give up 91.6 points per game, eight more points than the next worst team.

UNT also has the lowest shooting percentage (34 percent), while surrendering a league-worst 53 percent from the field.

In addition, North Texas is out-rebounded by an average of 6.4 boards a night and outscored by 18.3 points per game.

# Big West Women's Eastern Division Preview

By BEN ALKALY  
Staff Writer

Here is the *Daily Nexus* predicted order of finish in 1997-98 for the Big West Conference's Eastern Division teams. Utah State University does not have a women's program.

## 1. University of Nevada

**Strengths:** The Wolf Pack (currently 10-4 overall, 2-0 in the Big West) have become the Big West's most tenacious defensive squad, leading the league in fewest points allowed at 56.5 per game. Opponents are only shooting 37 percent against Nevada, also tops in the conference.

**Weaknesses:** What UNR possesses on the defensive end of the floor, it loses on offense. Thus far, Nevada has only scored 63.3 points per game, nearly 20 behind top-ranked UCSB. Surprisingly, for a team that surrenders so few points, the Wolf Pack steals a league-worst 7.4 balls per contest.

**Player to Watch:** After a rather quiet 1996-97 season, senior forward Ieesha Donadelle has emerged to lead UNR in scoring at 12.8 points per game.

**Coach Ada Gee says:** "This year's team has the potential to achieve more goals than any other team in the history of our program. I definitely

think we will be extremely competitive."

## 2. Boise State University

**Strengths:** After a rocky start to the 1997-98 season, Boise State rebounded to capture six in a row, including a victory over USC. The Broncos have been winning with a combination of pressure defense (second in the Big West in steals at 11.4 per game) and solid rebounding (39.9 boards per game).

**Weaknesses:** Aside from towering 6'4" center Stephanie Block, no member of BSU's starting five stands above six feet. The squad is not entirely adept at defending in the interior, with Santa Barbara scoring numerous easy layups in their Jan. 11 match up.

**Player to Watch:** Senior forward Kim Brydges has followed up her all-conference honorable mention selection in 1996-97 by averaging 8.8 rebounds, second-best in the league. Her 14.2 ppg rank second on the team to senior guard Kellie Lewis, also an All-Big West performer.

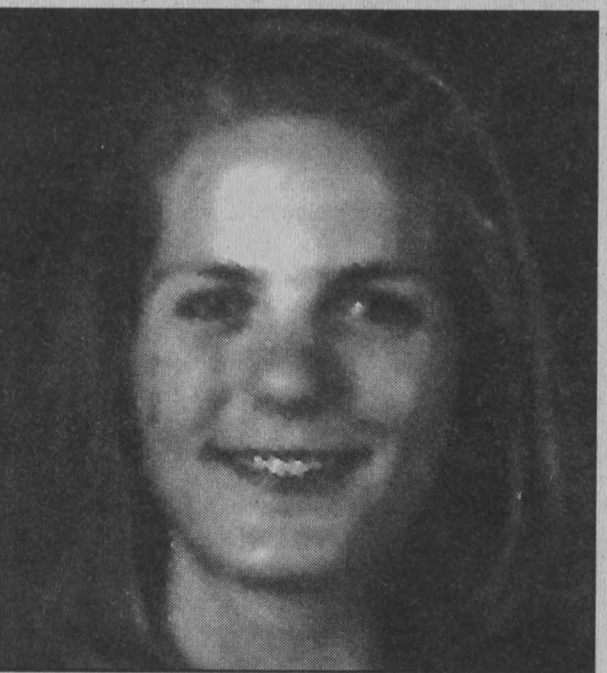
**Coach Trisha Stevens says:** "We're going to look to run the ball every time we can. If we don't have a break then we will get into our offense, but we want our players to push the ball."

## 3. University of Idaho

**Strengths:** Fourth-year Head Coach Julie Holt has her Vandals (5-10, 1-1) playing solid, but unspectacular, basketball. Idaho ranks no higher than third but no lower than eighth in any team statistical category. UI is a solid three-point shooting team, burying 4.6 shots from behind the arc

spin, dropping three straight.

**Player to Watch:** The definitive floor leader for Idaho is sophomore sensation Alli Nieman. A First Team All-Big West pick in her rookie campaign, the 6'1" power forward ranks second in the conference in scoring (16.1 per game) and leads the Vandals in rebounds, field



Kristi Rohr

per game. **Weaknesses:** The Vandals have not played consistently throughout the young 1997-98 season. After gaining some momentum with an 11-point win over Pac-10 member Washington State, the squad went into a tail-

goal percentage and blocks. **Coach Julie Holt says:** "We're improving ... We're not doing the fundamental things yet as effectively as we need to be. I don't want to be really poor at a lot of things. I would like to be really good at a couple of things."

## 4. University of North Texas

**Strengths:** After finishing 5-21 a year ago, there are few places to go but up. North Texas has done just that, winning six games thus far while filling up opponents' baskets. The Eagles rank second to UCSB in points scored at 69.1 per contest. UNT (6-8, 0-2) loves shooting three pointers and does so successfully, a conference-leading 4.9 times a game.

**Weaknesses:** When North Texas outmatches an opponent it often does so by a wide margin, as evident by a 116-39 mauling of poor Texas Southern. However, SEC power Vanderbilt handed the Eagles a 40-point loss, suggesting they aren't ready to swim with the big fish.

**Player to Watch:** If the season were to end today, the Big West scoring title would belong to North Texas' Ashley Norris. The junior guard has followed up her modest 12 points per game a year ago by pouring in 16.4 a night this season. The Mesquite, Tx., native also tops the conference in free-throw percentage at a stellar 88 percent.

**Coach Tina Slinker says:** "The Big West is a tough, physical conference. Its players are extremely skilled and have great basketball savvy. Now that we know

what to expect in conference play, we can better prepare our players in order to succeed."

## 5. New Mexico State University

**Strengths:** Second-year coach John Sutherland believes the best way for his Roadrunners to rebound from their first losing season in six years is to play great defense. The squad has done so reasonably well, surrendering 66.9 points per contest. One of the ways New Mexico State (5-10, 0-3) prevents its opponents from scoring is by stealing the ball 10.9 times a game, good enough for third-best in the Big West.

**Weaknesses:** NMSU does not score an exceptional amount of points (60.3), perhaps due in part to its atrocious free-throw shooting. The Roadrunners bury only 62 percent of their attempts from the charity stripe, worst in the league. Rebounding has been another early-season Achilles' heel, as New Mexico State trails all conference foes by grabbing only 32.4 boards each time out.

**Player to Watch:** Can anybody say Wendy Ray? The 5'11" senior guard leads NMSU in points scored (14.7 per game), field goal percentage (.536), and, surprisingly, rebounding (5.4).