

TODAY | National Men

TOMORROW | Big East

WEDNESDAY | ACC

THURSDAY | Local Men

FRIDAY | Women's Preview

## Most Intriguing Story Lines

**1. City of Angels — and Stars**  
Forget New York City. Los Angeles can make a case as the college basketball capital this season. The Bruins are a national title contender once again, and Southern California will showcase O.J. Mayo, this season's most celebrated high school recruit, for one season.

**2. One-Man Gang**  
Memphis will attempt to become the first school outside a power conference to win the national title since UNLV in 1990. Coach John Calipari's team should not be challenged in Conference USA, which looks like a one-bid league, so he has assembled an arduous nonconference schedule.

**3. Oden and Durant: The Sequel**  
Don't bet on it. There are a half-dozen superb freshmen in the country, including some who likely will be NBA draft lottery picks in June. None will have a transcendent Kevin Durant-esque season. None is a once-a-generation player like Greg Oden.

**4. New Sheriff at Kentucky**  
Kentucky hired the right man for a tough job. Coach Billy Gillispie is a workaholic who exceeded expectations at both Texas-El Paso and Texas A&M. Billy the Kid is the only man in history to coach the nation's most improved team in consecutive seasons. Just meeting expectations will be hard enough in Lexington.

**5. Square One in Gainesville**  
No team lost as much as the two-time defending national champions. Florida lost its top six players, including three NBA lottery picks in Joakim Noah, Al Horford and Corey Brewer. At least the Gators kept their coach, but even that was not easy. Billy Donovan accepted the Orlando Magic job before deciding to stay at Florida.



**Coach Billy Gillispie takes over at Kentucky, which has the most wins in Division I basketball.**

BY ED REINKE — ASSOCIATED PRESS

## One and Done?

Catch a glimpse of these celebrated freshmen while you can.

**1. Eric Gordon, 6-4, G, Indiana:** Dwyane Wade-like guard put on epic show in Las Vegas AAU tourney.

**2. Derrick Rose, 6-3, G, Memphis:** Gordon's former AAU teammate is ideal fit for Memphis at point.

**2. O.J. Mayo, 6-5, G, Southern Cal:** Blessed with silky outside shot, Mayo reached a plateau in high school.

**3. Michael Beasley, 6-10, F, Kansas State:** When this D.C. product wants to play hard, there is no better player around.

**4. Kevin Love, 6-10, F, UCLA:** Fundamentally sound big man who can throw outlet passes like former Bruin Bill Walton.

**5. Kyle Singler, 6-8, F, Duke:** Versatile sharp-shooting Oregon native should contribute early and often.

**6. DeAndre Jordan, 7-0, C, Texas A&M:** Needs to refine offensive game before a leap to the pros.



BY CHIRS HOWELL — ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Indiana guard Eric Gordon will display his vertical abilities in college — at least for this season.**

## Most Underrated

**1. Atlantic 10:** This is a multi-bid league that returns a large number of standouts from last season. Xavier remains the class of the A-10, but schools such as Saint Joseph's, Rhode Island and Fordham will challenge for the title. Add first-year Saint Louis coach Rick Majerus to the mix as well.

**2. Nonconference schedules:** Syracuse Coach Jim Boeheim believed his Orange belonged in the NCAA tournament last season. The selection committee disagreed. The message is clear: Play a difficult game before New Year's Day. Play a road game before New Year's Day.

**3. West Coast basketball:** The spotlight usually shines on the state of North Carolina, but the most competitive basketball will be played in the Pacific-10, the nation's strongest conference. Also watch out for Gonzaga, which has standout Josh Heytvelt back after last season's arrest.

## Most Overrated

**1. The ACC's depth:** ACC coaches have repeatedly talked about parity this month. Don't buy it. The ACC has one national power — North Carolina — and a handful of teams that will be scraping for tournament berths. The bottom features two teams — Virginia Tech and Wake Forest — in clear rebuilding modes.

**2. Bench decorum crackdown:** Don't expect coaches to dramatically alter their behavior after the NCAA made bench decorum a point of emphasis. Cursing could result in a quick technical foul, but Maryland's Gary Williams said the game is played in a basketball arena, "not a church." He questions why the crackdown is warranted.

**3. Missouri Valley Conference:** Two years ago, the MVC used the Ratings Percentage Index to its advantage and earned as many tournament berths (four) as the ACC. The shine is off the Valley this season. The league returns only 24 of last season's 50 starters. The Valley is rebuilding.

## Programs on the Rise

(Last season's record)

**1. Purdue (22-12):** Recruiting will make the Boilermakers a contender — next season.

**2. North Carolina State (20-16):** Rekindling magic of 1983, Sidney Lowe has a chance for breakout year.

**3. Arizona State (8-22):** Signing James Harden was a coup for Coach Herb Sendek.

## Programs on the Decline

(Last season's record)

**1. Air Force (26-9):** The Falcons lost four starters and coach from last season.

**2. Louisiana State (17-15):** Final Four appearance two years ago is a distant memory.

**3. Nevada (29-5):** Nick Fazekas is absent this time around.

## Coaches Under Pressure

(Last season's record)

**1. Jay John, Oregon State (11-21):** John is 28-62 in Pac-10 games. Ouch.

**2. Leonard Hamilton, Florida State (22-13):** Failed to make NCAAs even with Al Thornton.

**3. Barry Hinson, Missouri State (22-11):** Smooth-talking MVC coach needs to back up bark.

## Best Hires

(Former school)

**1. Michigan:** John Beilein (West Virginia) Wolverines signed one of the best coaches in nation.

**2. West Virginia:** Bob Huggins (Kansas State) Was not hard to pry Huggs away from Manhattan, Kan.

**3. Saint Louis:** Rick Majerus (none last season) The Billikens instantly become relevant in A-10.

## Best Mid-Majors

(Last season's record)

**1. Davidson (29-5):** The Wildcats return the same cast, including star Stephen Curry, who gave Maryland fits in the NCAAs.

**2. Southern Illinois (29-7):** The Salukis will reach at least 20 victories for seventh straight season.

**3. Butler (29-7):** Guard A.J. Graves has memorized the movie "Hoosiers." He'll try to write the sequel this season.

## Now or Never

Those who can't afford to squander opportunity

**1. J.R. Giddens, 6-5, Sr., G, New Mexico:** Most thought Giddens would be in NBA by now.

**2. Derrick Caracter, 6-9, So., F, Louisville:** Conditioning is an issue for former child prodigy.

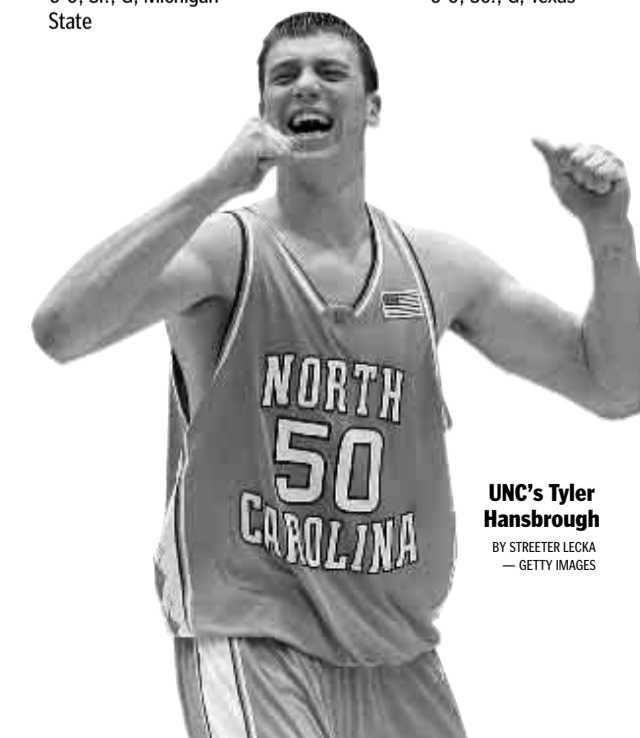
**3. Herb Pope, 6-8, Fr., F, New Mexico State:** High-profile freshman needs to avoid trouble.

## Top 10 Players

Regardless of position

- 1. Tyler Hansbrough**  
6-9, Jr., F, North Carolina
- 2. Eric Gordon**  
6-4, Fr., G, Indiana
- 3. Chris Lofton**  
6-2, Sr., G, Tennessee
- 4. Michael Beasley**  
6-10, Fr., F, Kansas St.
- 5. Drew Neitzel**  
6-0, Sr., G, Michigan State

- 6. Derrick Rose**  
6-3, Fr., G, Memphis
- 7. Chase Budinger**  
6-7, So., F, Arizona
- 8. Roy Hibbert**  
7-2, Sr., C, Georgetown
- 9. Brandon Rush**  
6-6, Jr., G, Kansas
- 10. D.J. Augustin**  
6-0, So., G, Texas State



**UNC's Tyler Hansbrough**

BY STREETEER LECKA — GETTY IMAGES