

[7] WEST VIRGINIA vs. [10] ARIZONA



RADIO: WTNT-570.

RECORDS: Mountaineers (Big East, at-large), 24-10; Wildcats (Pacifc-10, at-large), 19-14.
COACHES: Bob Huggins (614-221 record in 26 seasons), Kevin O'Neill (171-179 in 11 seasons).
WINNER FACES: Duke-Belmont winner on Saturday in Washington.



BACK COURT: West Virginia has to contain Arizona's Jerry Bayless, one of the nation's best freshmen. The dynamic guard is just 19 points shy of becoming the first Arizona freshman to score at least 600 points in a season. Regarded as Arizona's "glue guy," Jawann McClellan averages nearly 35 minutes per game, sixth most in the conference. West Virginia can still strike at teams from beyond the three-point line. Guard Alex Ruoff is third in the Big East in three-pointers and second in three-point percentage. Guard Darris Nichols is the leader of the West Virginia offense and has played in a school-record 138 consecutive games.

FRONT COURT: Few players have played as well recently as West Virginia's Joe Alexander (Linganore), a first-team all-Big East selection who has averaged 26.8 points the last six games, including a career-high 34-point effort against Connecticut in the Big East tournament. That was the most by a West Virginia player in the Big East tournament. Arizona had a minus-1.5 rebound margin in the regular season, the school's worst since 1982-83. It was even worse during Pacific-10 play. The Wildcats were outrebounded in 14 of 18 games, which must make West Virginia Coach Bob Huggins salivate. Arizona forward Jordan Hill led the Pac-10 by shooting 62.2 percent from the field. But Hill attempts only 8.7 shots per game.

BENCH: Neither team has much depth, but Arizona truly has no bench. The Wildcats' starters have accounted for 88.1 percent of scoring. The 282 points contributed by Arizona's reserves is the fewest by percentage in school history, going back to 1931-32. Huggins has cited depth as a major concern all season. Guard Joe Mazzulla is a tough defender who has helped the Mountaineers contain prominent scorers. Wellington Smith leads West Virginia in blocked shots.

COACHES: Huggins left Kansas State and incoming freshman Michael Beasley to take over at his alma mater. Despite coaching players who thrived under a different coaching style, Huggins won at least 20 games for the 22nd time in his career. In Tucson, the venerable Lute Olson took a leave of absence, but that has not stopped the Wildcats from making their 24th consecutive appearance in the NCAA tournament, the nation's longest active streak. Kevin O'Neill, the interim head coach, previously was head coach of the Toronto Raptors and an assistant in the NBA as well. He took Marquette to two NCAA tournaments and also coached at Tennessee and Northwestern.

— Eric Prisbell



West Virginia's Darris Nichols has played in 138 consecutive games.

BY MICHAEL HEIMAN — GETTY IMAGES

WEST VIRGINIA ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Yr.	Ht.	Pts.	Rb.
1	Da'Sean Butler	F	So.	6-7	12.8	6.1
3	Joe Mazzulla	G	So.	6-2	5.6	2.8
4	Jonnie West	G	Fr.	6-3	1.0	0.5
11	Joe Alexander	F	Jr.	6-8	16.8	6.1
14	Darris Nichols	G	Sr.	6-3	10.9	3.4
21	Josh Sowards	F	So.	6-7	2.1	0.3
22	Alex Ruoff	F	Jr.	6-6	13.5	3.3
31	Jarrett Brown	G	Jr.	6-4	1.1	0.7
32	Ted Talkington	G	Jr.	6-2	1.3	0.5
35	Wellington Smith	F	So.	6-7	5.3	3.9
41	John Flowers	F	Fr.	6-7	4.7	2.6
43	Jamie Smalligan	C	Sr.	7-0	2.3	1.9

STARTERS ARE SHADED

ARIZONA ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Yr.	Ht.	Pts.	Rb.
0	Jerry Bayless	G	Fr.	6-3	20.0	2.7
2	Zane Johnson	F	Fr.	6-5	0.9	0.6
5	Jawann McClellan	G	Sr.	6-4	8.6	3.7
12	Daniel Dillon	G	Sr.	6-3	2.1	1.1
13	Nic Wise	G	So.	5-10	9.1	2.3
14	Mohamed Tangara	F	Jr.	6-9	0.0	0.2
24	Fendi Onobun	F	Jr.	6-6	1.7	1.4
34	Chase Budinger	F	So.	6-7	17.0	5.4
42	Jamelle Horne	F	Fr.	6-6	3.1	2.8
43	Jordan Hill	F	So.	6-10	13.2	7.8
44	Bret Brielmaier	F	Sr.	6-7	2.7	2.9
54	Kirk Walters	C	Sr.	6-11	0.8	1.3

STARTERS ARE SHADED

RESULTS

NOVEMBER

Ark.-Monticello	W, 81-53	vs. New Mexico St.	W, 75-61
Prairie View A&M	W, 106-41	Md. Eastern Shore	W, 110-44
vs. Tennessee	L, 74-72		

DECEMBER

Winthrop	W, 70-53	at Radford	W, 90-60
vs. Auburn	W, 88-59	at Canisius	W, 77-54
Duquesne	W, 92-68	vs. Oklahoma	L, 88-82
UMBC	W, 86-62		

JANUARY

at Notre Dame	L, 69-56	at South Florida	W, 69-52
Marquette	W, 79-64	vs. Marshall	W, 66-64
at Louisville	L, 63-54	Georgetown	L, 58-57
Syracuse	W, 81-61	Cincinnati	L, 62-39
St. John's	W, 73-64		

FEBRUARY

at Providence	W, 77-65	at Villanova	L, 78-56
at Pittsburgh	L, 55-54	Providence	W, 80-53
Rutgers	W, 81-63	at DePaul	W, 85-73
Seton Hall	W, 89-68		

MARCH

at Connecticut	L, 79-71	Providence*	W, 58-53
Pittsburgh	W, 76-62	Connecticut*	W, 78-72
at St. John's	W, 83-74	Georgetown*	L, 72-55

*BIG EAST TOURNAMENT

RESULTS

NOVEMBER

Northern Arizona	W, 76-69	Adams State	W, 88-64
Virginia	L, 75-72	at Kansas	L, 76-72
Missouri-KC	W, 81-62	Cal State Fullerton	W, 91-65

DECEMBER

Texas A&M	W, 78-67	at UNLV	W, 52-49
Illinois	W, 78-72	San Diego State	W, 74-58
Fresno State	W, 69-50	at Memphis	L, 76-63

JANUARY

Oregon State	W, 76-63	at California	W, 79-75
Oregon	L, 84-74	at Washington State	W, 76-64
at Arizona State	L, 64-59	Washington	W, 84-69
at Houston	W, 85-71	at Southern Cal	W, 80-69
at Stanford	L, 56-52		

FEBRUARY

at UCLA	L, 82-60	at Washington	L, 75-66
Arizona State	L, 59-54	at Washington St.	W, 65-55
California	W, 83-73	Southern Cal	L, 70-58
Stanford	L, 67-66		

MARCH

UCLA	L, 68-66	Oregon State*	W, 86-57
at Oregon State	W, 81-45	Stanford*	L, 75-64
at Oregon	L, 78-69		

*PACIFIC-10 TOURNAMENT

DIFFERENCE MAKER

Arizona is a far more dangerous team with diminutive guard **Nic Wise** on the court. The sophomore underwent left knee surgery on Feb. 5 and missed four weeks. The Wildcats are 16-6 with Wise and Bayless in the lineup. Missing Wise nearly cost Arizona an NCAA tournament berth. Despite missing seven games, Wise ranks second in the Pacific-10 in steals; third in three-point shooting percentage and fourth in assist-to-turnover ratio. In his last 19 games, Wise has 100 assists and 47 steals. He tied a Pac-10 tournament record by making five steals, all in the first half, of Arizona's victory over Oregon State. He returned from surgery on March 6, playing 34 minutes in an Arizona victory at Oregon State. The return of Wise gives Arizona another offensive option and does not allow defenses to merely home in on Bayless and Budinger. Without a strong bench, the absence of Wise was difficult to overcome.

