

Basketball Weekly – BY MATTHEW HATFIELD

College Hoops – Friday, December 31st, 2004

This is the last College Basketball Weekly I will do for the year. Of course, that's for the calendar year of 2004 as we approach January 1st, 2005. There's been some good games and things that have caught my eye in past weeks in college basketball. Conference play is right around the corner and that's when it really starts heating up.....

Games that intrigued me:

St. Joseph's @ Old Dominion --- The ODU Monarchs coached by Blaine Taylor are one of the best kept secrets in the nation. They ran their season record to 11-1 by surviving a scare from last year's mid-major power St. Joe's. Gone from the Hawks are sensational guards Delonte West and Jameer Nelson, who accounted for a large amount of the team's scoring. ODU is good on defense and play at a very intense, aggressive level. Players such as Valdas Vasylius (CAA best 42FTM), Isaiah Hunter, Drew Williamson and Arnaud Dahi (13 1st half points) have made great strides over the last 12 months. **What most impressed me was that their top player, Preseason Colonial Player of the Year Alex Loughton, finished with just 2Pts., yet the Monarchs won 66-62 thanks to a 16-2 steals edge.** St. Joe's has a promising junior center in Dwayne Jones and he was able to keep Loughton in check. Old Dominion's ability to turn steals into transition points proved pivotal and was the deciding factor. They were more patient down the stretch, making the game more finesse oriented rather than a dominating, physical grudge match. If they can work on sustaining patience on offense and not force things they will be one of those bracket busters in March!



Old Dominion Head Coach Blaine Taylor went 42-43 in his first three seasons with the Monarchs. In season #4 his team is 11-1 heading to De Paul for a big game on Sunday (January 2nd).

George Washington @ West Virginia --- GW is another bracket buster type team in an Atlantic-10 conference that's down from 2003-04. Despite losing their opener in the Preseason NIT to then #2 ranked Wake Forest, the Colonials have shown they can play with the big boys. Example: back-to-back wins over ranked teams Michigan State and Maryland in the BB&T Classic by a combined total of 22 points. GW's eight-game winning streak came to an end on Wednesday when the Mountaineers beat them by six to remain unbeaten. D'or Fischer has answered questions about his strength by averaging 9.7PPG and 3BPG in just over 20 minutes a night. Fischer had 14 and has been a key piece to go with Tyrone Sally and transfer sharp shooter Mike Gansey. John Beilein's

zone defense has shut practically everyone down so far, holding foes to 57.2PPG. Very stunning following the team's of scoring machine Drew Schifino (20+PPG in 2002-03). Pops Mensah-Bonsu and T.J. Thompson are two very, very solid players the Colonial fans will love watching through January, February and into March. It would not surprise me at all to see one, if not both of these schools make it to the round of 32 in the NCAA tourney.



Sean Marshall and Boston College are one of three teams that are undefeated in the Big East.

Statement of the Week: The Big East is the best conference in all of college basketball from top to bottom. Of the six major conferences, it may be the worst for football, though has plenty of strong basketball schools. The last two National Championship - Syracuse and UCONN - came from this conference. Discounting them you've still got Pittsburgh, Boston College and West Virginia with a combined mark of 33-0 on the eve of New Year's Eve. Don't forget about Notre Dame either - they are 7-2 and have one of the best backcourts in Chris Thomas and Chris Quinn to help double-double caliber center Torin Francis. Just imagine how good it will be next season when Louisville and other join to make the conference even fiercer!

Gonzaga V. Oklahoma State --- John Stockton's alma mater has traditionally been a mid-major success. Last season the Zags under Mark Few earned a #2 seed in the NCAA Tournament. In round two it was Nevada from the Western Athletic Conference that ousted them. Gonzaga has usually been the one pulling the upsets like they nearly did two years ago against #1 seed Arizona in an overtime affair. The Zags foe on Tuesday night in Oklahoma City was Oklahoma State, who reached the Final Four this past season. Ronny Turiaf exemplifies toughness, playing through an injury as the team beat the Cowboys 78-75. Adam Morrison also chipped in 19 for the Bulldogs. Oklahoma State is well coached by Eddie Sutton and his son Sean, though the team saw a really determined team constantly challenge them from a physicality standpoint. Team wise Gonzaga shot 57.4% from the field, got to the foul line 18 times and forced their opposition to take poor long range jumpers. OSU went 9-31 from beyond the arc and that did not allow post players like Joey Graham and Ivan McFarlin to operate on the low

block. John Lucas is young and really had a rough time vs. Errol Knight. He'll bounce back, and so will his team.

Playing as close to Flawless as you can: Gonzaga --- lone loss came vs. Illinois back in late November. Hopefully for Mark Few and company, the Zags can re-load in the new year after having faced two Big 12 teams like Okla. St. and Missouri.



The West Virginia Mountaineers are 9-0 for the first time in 44 years..... when a man by the name of Jerry West (shown here driving to the basket as a member of the Lakers) led them.

Five Alive:

1. Illinois - Trust me, this team can win it all and has very few weakness. Having that said, a loss vs. someone like Michigan State, Wisconsin or Purdue is eminent, just one.
2. Kansas - Jayhawks can play anybody in America and have no matter who coaches them be it Larry Brown, Roy Williams or Bill Self. Keep watching J.R. Giddens evolve.
3. North Carolina - Sometimes a team can have so much talent that it becomes a minute problem for them. UNC is in that boat and adjustments need to be made for a Natl. title.
4. Pittsburgh - Yes, Pittsburgh. I almost picked them over Syracuse to win the Big East since Connecticut is kind of down. Krauser, Troutman and Taft are super players.
5. Kentucky - Impressed with their win over Louisville awhile back. Tubby Smith's team in 2004-05 is not as experienced as the one the last few years, but is not short on skills.