

## **Basketball Weekly – BY MATTHEW HATFIELD**

### **College Hoops – Friday, December 3rd, 2004**

The big winner this week in College Basketball had to have been Illinois, who knocked off the #1 team in the nation in Wake Forest. The Demon Deacons are known for their excellent backcourt – Chris Paul (Preseason All-American candidate) and Justin Gray (17PPG last season). Just about everybody said that was going to be the best guard duo in America and compare favorably to Delonte West and Jameer Nelson of St. Joe's from last year. Well, St. Joe's defeated Wake in the Sweet Sixteen last season and the Deacons have now lost to Illinois, too. Bruce Weber's Fighting Illini have more than just two guards. Dee Brown and Deron Williams are the two most recognizable players on their team. However, Luther Head has stole the show through five games averaging a team best 17.2PPG and also dishing out nearly seven assists each night. Roger Powell Jr. was a difference maker vs. Wake as he made 8 of 10 shots for 19 points and grabbed seven boards. Rich McBride added nine off the bench and James Augustine blocked three shots compared to his opponent's total of zero. Defensively they did the job shutting down Paul and Gray if that's conceivable. Paul and Gray were held to 21 points and 7-23 shooting.

Wake may play in the best basketball conference in the country, that being the ACC of course, which had seven teams ranked in the top 25 entering this week. But it appears they're not the best team in the land. Right now if you asked me who I thought that honor belongs to I'd have to go with the guys who play in Champaign. Could Champaign be the celebration symbol on Monday, April 4th, 2005? Possibly.



**Illinois guard Luther Head (#4) and Deron Williams (#5) together combined for 24 points, ten rebounds and 16 assists.**

What about North Carolina as the top team in the country? From a talent perspective they might very well be head of the list. UNC's loss to Santa Clara to open the season showed some vulnerability there. Carolina has to play smarter basketball. Someone asked me what do I consider smart basketball and thankfully I did not pull a Dick Vitale - "Are you serious?" These three things translate into smart basketball:

1. Play unselfishly - with and without the basketball. Set screens, pass up difficult outside shots for the closer and higher percentage FGA's.
2. Defensively play smarter - you can do that by not leaving guys with open looks and helping each other out.
3. Turnovers - don't commit silly turnovers so use the noggin.

**Intelligence over Confidence is the key.** Part of the problem has to rest with Roy Williams and his coaching staff. Believe me, I'm not saying Williams is not a good coach because we all know he is, and above all a master recruiter. He's got to hammer the intelligence over confidence point to his young kids at UNC. Don't get me wrong, North Carolina is an outstanding basketball team and my pick to win the Atlantic Coast Conference. All I'm saying is that this team played a grueling Maui invitational, has a date with Kentucky on Saturday, are at Connecticut in February and play in the tough ACC. By tournament team, North Carolina could be tired/maxed out. It's important they save up energy and brain power.

If you visit the message board - [www.matthewatfield.com/forum.html](http://www.matthewatfield.com/forum.html) you will see some of the surprise teams that I have listed for the College Basketball season. One not mentioned is Texas A&M Corpus Christi. Who? Texas A&M Corpus Christi. They are 5-1 as of right now and do have some tougher games ahead against Oklahoma State, a Final Four team from a year ago, and Alabama, an Elite Eight team from last season. Their lone loss came against Kent State, though they did defeat a strong Florida State and the CAA favorite Old Dominion (also 5-1). They are a team to watch and one hoping to sneak into the NCAA Tournament. It fluctuates every year as far as which are the elite conferences. Aside from the ACC, the Big East and Conference USA are probably right there with the Big 12 and SEC following. The Big Ten is somewhat improved and do have two of the ten best teams in Michigan State and Illinois. My sleeper conference is the Western Athletic Conference. Hawaii is 5-0 even though they have not been really tested yet. Also undefeated is Fresno State at 2-0. Both UTEP and Nevada have proven to be scary teams in the past. Texas El-Paso has four double-digit scorers from a year ago and back and play a monumental game vs. Texas Tech on Saturday. Look out for UTEP and some of the C-USA schools like Memphis, Charlotte and UAB. Louisville and Memphis are the two most talented and deepest teams there. It might come down to the play of point guards and Memphis might have the advantage with sensation freshman Darius Washington Jr.



**It's not been a pleasant year for Missouri sports. Their basketball team was supposed to reach either the Elite Eight or the Final Four last season and did not make the tournament. Their football team was predicted to win the Big 12 North and will not go bowling. Right now Quin Snyder is 3-3 and really struggling.**