

2024-2025 Big East Preview

Predictions, Analysis, and Discussion

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The 2024-2025 Big East men's basketball season will end in March at the world's most famous arena, with one team rising above the rest, but there is a long way to go before we sort all of that out. One of the most historic basketball conferences will write another chapter this season, and there are plenty of storylines, predictions and discussions to keep us going all season.

Last year, three teams (Connecticut, Creighton, Marquette) made the NCAA tournament. UConn won their second consecutive national title, and are on the hunt for a third. Creighton and Marquette both bowed out in the Sweet 16, and now enter new eras after the NBA draft poached last year's most vital pieces. St. John's, Villanova, Providence, Xavier, Butler and Seton Hall all missed qualifying by a hair, and had to settle for NIT invitations: St. John's declined, Providence, Xavier, Butler, and Villanova all lost in the 1st round, and Seton Hall won the whole thing. DePaul and Georgetown hope to right the ship this year, after just two conference wins between them (both by Georgetown, defeating DePaul).

It will be an incredibly difficult conference to predict, but that will not stop the conjecture about champions, breakout stars, and storylines.

Pre-Season Conference Standings

1. Connecticut
2. Creighton
3. St. John's
4. Marquette
5. Xavier
6. Providence
7. Butler
8. Seton Hall
9. Villanova
10. Georgetown
11. DePaul

1. Connecticut Huskies (*Last Season: 18-2 in Big East*)

Until someone proves themselves, it will be difficult to envision Connecticut forfeiting the Big East crown this year. After losing a plethora of talent to the NBA, Dan Hurley's Huskies reloaded with #10 ranked recruit Liam McNeeley, who will stretch the floor for UConn as an athletic hybrid guard/forward. They return junior Alex Karaban (13.3 ppg, 37.9% 3PT), who will be the unquestioned leader of this year's squad. Hassan Diarra looks to make a jump to concrete starter this year after winning last season's Sixth Man of the Year award. Hurley also dipped into the portal, bringing in big man Tarris Reed Jr. (Michigan) and promising guard Aidan Mahaney (Saint Mary's).

UConn's questions come from what they are missing from last year. Namely, the absence of Donovan Clingan will hurt defensively. Samson Johnson looks to play a more pivotal role down low, but it remains to be seen how Johnson will fare as a more prominent presence over 40 minutes. UConn is looking to be the first team since John Wooden's UCLA to win three straight national championships, but with a target remaining on their back, it won't get any easier for the Huskies.

2. Creighton Bluejays (*Last Season: 14-6 in Big East*)

Creighton, like UConn, lost a good chunk of their talent to the NBA. With Trey Alexander and Baylor Schierman gone, Creighton's offense will need some shaking up on the perimeter. However, it's clear that Ryan Kalkbrenner (17.3 ppg, 7.6 rpg, 3.1 bpg) will be the centerpiece of this Bluejay team. Kalkbrenner is the favorite to win his fourth straight (!) Big East Defensive Player of the Year award, and his dominant presence in the paint will be a problem for any opponent.

Creighton also kept Steven Ashworth (11.1 ppg, 34.9% 3PT) and will look for a jump from junior forward Mason Miller (5.6 ppg, 3.3 rpg). They also bring in junior guard Pop Isaacs (15.8 ppg, 3.5 apg, 3.2 rpg) from Texas Tech, who should give Greg McDermott's squad a huge boost to fill in for what they have lost. Creighton will once again challenge at the top of the conference, and likely give UConn fits in their quest for a second straight Big East title.

3. St. John's Red Storm (*Last season: 11-9 in Big East*)

One of the most intriguing stories from last year's Big East play was Rick Pitino's St. John's team, who got hot in late February and March. They won their last five conference games of the season, and took UConn to the brink in the Big East semifinals. They lose Daniss Jenkins and Joel Soriano to the draft, as well as Jordan Dingle and Nahiem Alleyne, who have no more years of eligibility left.

They return RJ Luis (10.9 ppg, 4.6 rpg), but their big get was luring Kadary Richmond from conference foe Seton Hall. Richmond (15.7 ppg, 7 rpg, 5 apg) will be the guy with the ball in his hands for the Johnnies in crunch time, which will take pressure off of Pitino's support pieces, two of which he picked up in the portal. Deivon Smith, formerly of Utah, is good for 13.3 ppg/6.3 rpg/7.1 apg, and seven-footer Vince Iwuchukwu looks for a new start after transferring from USC.

After last year's momentous end to the season (which ended in missing the tournament and declining an NIT invitation), St. John's looks to capitalize in the Big Apple. Pitino will look to bring St. John's back to the forefront of Big East basketball, as well as guide them to their first NCAA tournament since 2019.

4. Marquette Golden Eagles (*Last season: 14-6 in Big East*)

Shaka Smart's tenure at Marquette has turned the program back into a national powerhouse. Always a consistent tournament team, the Golden Eagles have now taken that next step, and look to take one even further this year. For Marquette in the Big East, it's going to be all about Kam Jones (17.2 ppg, 2.9 rpg, 40.6% 3PT). He may be the best returning player in the league and is definitely on track to be one of the conference's top Player of the Year Candidates. They lost Tyler Kolek and Oso Ighodaro to the NBA, but will look for big years from seniors David Joplin (10.8 ppg) and Stevie Mitchell (8.8 ppg).

Smart has continued to not dip into the transfer portal for this upcoming season, and it has shown in their development as a program that it may be benefiting them. The only two players to leave the program this year did so for the NBA, and no transfers out signals what kind of program and culture Shaka Smart has instilled. Marquette will once again set national goals this season, and with Kam Jones leading the way, they are as good as anybody in the Big East.

5. Xavier Musketeers (*Last Season: 9-11 in Big East*)

The conference's most premier turnaround season will belong to Sean Miller's Xavier. Two seasons ago, Xavier made the Sweet 16, but last season, they dipped under .500. Last year's record probably didn't do enough justice to show how talented the team truly is. This season, it will be led by Zack Freemantle (15.2 ppg, 8.1 rpg, 2.9 apg), who sat out all of last year with a foot injury. His return will also support Dayvion McKnight, whose 12.4 ppg will solidify Xavier's backcourt.

Xavier also brings in two high-profile transfers from mid-majors. Tyler Conwell (16.6 ppg, 5.8 rpg, 2.5 apg) and Dante Maddox Jr. (15.6 ppg, 4.3 rpg, 2.8 apg) will bring in some depth from Indiana State and Toledo, respectively. After losing two prominent players— Quincy Olivari to the Lakers and Desmond Claude to USC— Xavier will look to capitalize this season after falling short of expectations last year. The Big East may not be as deep as years past, but a team as talented as Xavier finishing fifth should be a sign of things to come for the conference's output.

6. Providence Friars (*Last Season: 10-10 in Big East*)

The big loss for Providence this season will be last year's conference Player of the Year Devin Carter, who is now a Sacramento King. The big plus will be the return of Bryce Hopkins (15.5 ppg, 8.6 rpg, 42.9%FG), who returns for his senior season after missing the last half of his junior year with a torn ACL. Hopkins' control and athleticism will be a huge kicker for the Friars, who narrowly missed out on the NCAA tournament in 2024 like several of their Big East brethren.

For Kim English in his second season, it's all about bettering last year. Even without Hopkins, the Friars totaled 21 wins. It's yet to be seen how Hopkins will return after such a serious surgery, but he should get some support from two senior transfers. Bensley Joseph (Miami) and scoring threat Wesley Cardet Jr. (Chicago State) will sure up Providence's backcourt. With a more balanced conference this year, players like Hopkins can go out and win games in the important moments. With more support after a debilitating injury, Providence could be dangerous once league play begins.

7. Butler Bulldogs (*Last Season: 9-11 in Big East*)

Last year's disappointment for Butler punctuates the fact that they haven't seen the NCAA tournament since 2018, a trend that Thad Matta hopes to rewrite in his third season with the Bulldogs. They take a hit losing both DJ Davis (Washington) and Posh Alexander (Dayton) to the transfer portal, but look to regroup with senior frontcourt partners Pierre Brooks II (14.8 ppg, 4 rpg) and Jahmyl Telfort (13.9 ppg, 4.9 rpg).

They also bring in Tulane transfer Kolby King (10.4 ppg, 3.6 rpg), hoping to help fill in the hole that Posh Alexander left. Matta's Butler team definitely has the opportunity to make some noise in an always chaotic Big East, but they are not as deep as the teams that will finish above them. It will be slow to get back to the March glory of the early 2010s for Butler, and they will likely rest on the bubble this season—hopefully, on the right side of it this time.

8. Seton Hall Pirates (*Last Season: 13-7 in Big East*)

Shaheen Holloway is one of the league's most capable coaches, but he may find it tough this year to regroup after last year's NIT championship. The big loss is Kadary Richmond, an almost 16-points-per-game scorer. An even bigger loss? He transferred to conference rival St. John's. Whatever the case, Seton Hall will try to regroup via some senior leadership from guard Dylan Addae-Wusu (8.6 ppg, 5.3 rpg), who will be poised to make a jump to a more prominent role this year.

Seton Hall lost eight total players from last year (six of them to other schools), but they swung back with a get from Providence. Garwey Dual (3.3 ppg) did not have much of a line at Providence, but he will look to start fresh for Holloway at a new Big East school. For Seton Hall, Kadary Richmond's departure will hurt, and there will be a slight step back this season as a result. They will still compete, but they will fall short of any postseason glory this season.

9. Villanova Wildcats (*Last Season: 10-10 in Big East*)

The elephant in the room in the Big East revolves around Kyle Neptune and Villanova. Ever since Jay Wright's shocking departure, Nova has yet to really make their mark in a new era. With high expectations as a program, the leash will likely be short for Coach Neptune, who is entering his third season as head coach.

He lost veteran leader Justin Moore to graduation, but scored a big win keeping forward Eric Dixon (16.6 ppg, 6.5 rpg) for some on-court production, as well as senior

locker room leadership. Fellow senior Jordan Longino (6.6 ppg, 2.5 rpg) will be the next man up in the Villanova backcourt.

After lots of roster turnover, Villanova scouted Wooga Poplar, a senior guard from Miami (FL), to make their team deeper this season. His 13.1 points per game line should add a spark, but without much depth compared to other teams, this season is rather weary for Villanova. Neptune's job is likely in jeopardy and that should add some more weight on their shoulders. It is most definitely transition time at Villanova.

10. Georgetown Hoyas (*Last Season: 2-18 in Big East*)

Ed Cooley's first season at Georgetown earned him two conference wins— both against league bottomfeeder DePaul. However, with the state the program was in when he took over, it can only go up. Cooley returns junior guard Jayden Epps (18.5 ppg, 2.6 rpg, 4.2 apg) as a bright spot. Drew Fielder (5.2 ppg, 40.7% 3PT) is hopeful to make a jump as well after a modest freshman year.

From the portal, the Hoyas bring in former Harvard guard Malik Mack, a 17.2 point-per-game scorer in the Ivy League. Senior forward Micah Peavy (10.9 ppg, 4.9 rpg) arrives this season from TCU, hoping to bolster a Georgetown team that ranked 10th in the conference for total rebounds per game last season.

Georgetown's historical dominance is just that— historical. Presently, the Hoyas have 11 conference wins since the 2020-2021 season, and went winless in the league just two seasons ago. This time around, with the help of leading guard Epps and leadership from Cooley, a few wins from the Hoyas is a possibility. It will be a very slow climb back to dominance of years past, but Georgetown will not always be the easy out they have been recently.

11. DePaul Blue Demons (*Last Season: 0-20 in Big East*)

There's no getting around it: DePaul's Big East record has been abysmal. Dating back to the 2020-2021 season, DePaul has an 11-64 record in conference play, a mark hoping to be slowly improved in the years to come by first year head coach Chris Holtmann.

The former Ohio State coach will be dealing with quite some roster turnover this season. 12 members of last year's team are gone (11 of them transfers), and he has to rebuild this season essentially from scratch. He notably brings in senior forward David Skogman (13.3 ppg, 4.9 rpg, 47.1% 3PT) from Buffalo, as well as sophomore guard Jacob Meyer (15.7 ppg, 5.1 rpg, 40.2% 3PT) from Coastal Carolina.

With Holtmann at the helm, DePaul expects to slowly right the ship over the next few years, and a goal this year will be a few conference wins. While they won't be competing for a title, it wouldn't be outrageous to expect a one or two conference wins from this year's Blue Demons.

INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

Big East Player of the Year

Kam Jones, Marquette

Big East Freshman of the Year

Liam McNeeley, Connecticut

Big East Defensive Player of the Year

Ryan Kalkbrenner, Creighton

All Big East First Team

Kadary Richmond, St. John's

Kam Jones, Marquette

Eric Dixon, Villanova

Alex Karaban, Connecticut

Ryan Kalkbrenner, Creighton

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