

Devlettes Won't Sneak Up On Anybody This Season in SWAC ; Southern, JSU Also Figures To Be In Race

▲Women's conference receives automatic NCAA bid to provide an extra incentive for teams

There is big excitement this year in woman hoops around the Southwestern Athletic Conference. For the first time in the league history the SWAC will get an automatic bid in the NCAA tournament. The tournament has been expanded from 48 teams to 64 for the upcoming year.

"This is really great for the conference," Alcorn coach Shirley Walker said. "It has been a long time coming." With the extra incentive, SWAC basketball should be very exciting heading into the month of March.

MISSISSIPPI VALLEY (11-17 overall in 1992-93, 6-8 in SWAC), prediction: First

The Devlettes came from a sixth place finish last year to upset Southern in the tournament finals for the league championship. This year Valley won't have the opportunity to be the surprise team in the league.

With the entire starting lineup and eight of nine letters winners returning, Valley has been picked to claim to championship.

But coach Jessie Harris isn't feeling any added pressure. "We fell pretty good about this team," Harris said. "We know it's not going to be easy. We are working to prepare ourselves. I fell we'll be able at the top of the conference race."

The star player for the Devlettes this season will be center Donna White. Last year the six-foot senior was voted the tournament's most valuable player after leading Valley to the championship. White averaged 16 points and 10.1 rebounds last year.

Valley's other returning starters are 5-10 senior forward Vanessa Harris (12.5 ppg, 8.3 rpg), 5-9 forward/guard Stephanie Garden (6.6 ppg, 4.0 rpg), 5-9 sophomore guard Erica Scott (7.2 ppg, 6.0 rpg, 4.1 apg) and 5-8 sophomore guard Demetriss Brown (11.1 ppg, 4.0 rpg).

SOUTHERN (20-7, 12-2), prediction: Second

What will Southern coach Herman Hartmen do for an encore?

Jaguar fans would love a repeat of last season. In his first year of coaching women's basketball, Hartmen led the Lady Jaguars to its first regular season title championship. Southern lost to Mississippi Valley in the championship game of the tournament.

Southern lost leading scorer Thelma Wilhite to graduation, but the Lady Jaguars return several capable scorers.

Senior Jessica Davis returns this season after averaging 16.6 points and 11.0 rebounds. Donna Washington, who missed most of last year with an injury, averaged 17.4 points and 10.6 rebounds two years ago.

"We have two talented and experienced inside players in Jessica and Donna," Hartmen said. "However, let us keep in mind that talent alone will not be enough to put a winner on the basketball court. We will have several other ingredients." Southern will be aided by the return of point guard Lakeba Hibbler, who dished out 121 assist last year.

JACKSON STATE (10-18, 7-7) prediction: Third

The Lady Tigers are expected to be much improved with the inside duo of Tera Sheriff and Kim Linson, a transfer from Ole Miss, had some good numbers her first year at JSU. The 6-1 junior averaged 16.1 points and 10.3 rebounds to lead the Lady Tigers. Linson, a 6-2 junior, averaged 12 points and 6.1 rebounds.

JSU should be much better at the guard spot with the return of Gwen Spann. Last year Spann averaged 6.8 points, 3.6 rebounds and three assist per game. Evelyn Wilson broke into the starting lineup as a freshmen last year. The 5-8 sophomore averaged 4.3 points and four rebounds.

Sylvia Lovind and Yolando Brown are also expected to be big contributors for the Lady Tigers.

GRAMBLING STATE (12-14, 8-6), prediction: Fourth

It's been four years since the Lady Tigers of Grambling's reign as champion.

Over the last two year Pat Bibbs have suffered consecutive losing season. But Grambling is expected to be much improved this season.

"We were playing with a lot of injuries last season," Bibbs said. "We didn't have much expected to much better. Grambling's returning starters are 5-8 junior forward Angela Hall (13.1 ppg, 5.1 rpg) and 5-6 sophomore guard Lisa Bruins (8.7 ppg, 4.1 rpg).

Freshmen likely to play and have an impact on the team include forwards Tamke Lands (5-11), Joy Bowie (6-3) and Melinda Polk (6-0).

Bibbs believes that this year's team should surpass last year's performance. "It must have the heart and desire of last year's team that was a surprise third in SWAC despite a lack of height," Bibbs said. "We should have the height this season to complete on the boards."

ALCORN STATE (16-8, 12-2), prediction: Fifth

Lady Braves coach Shirley Walker admits that last year was a big surprise. Alcorn went 16-8 overall and won its third straight SWAC championship after sharing the title with Southern.

Getting its fourth title would be a big stretch this year for Alcorn.

"I didn't think we would go as far," Walker said. "All the girls worked hard and gave 100 percent." Walker will need another effort like that this season.

The Lady Braves hopes rest with the leadership of returning starters Nikki Tatum, JoAnn Simpson, and Ira Fuquay.

Last year Tatum averaged 12.2 points and 9.3 rebounds while Simpson averaged

5.5 points and 4.1 rebounds. Fuquay, who lead the conference with a 9.2 assist average, was second on the team in scoring with a 14.2 average.

ALABAMA STATE (8-16, 6-8), prediction: Sixth

The Lady Hornets return eight lettermen including three-starters for this season. Alabama State is hoping for a big year from guard Latricia McDole.

McDole, a 5-9 senior, was fourth in the conference with a 17.4 average. She grabbed 4.2 rebounds and made 2.8 assist per game.

The loss of Sherri Harris is a major concern for coach Ron Mitchell, but he is still optimistic about the season.

"Experience in the backcourt will be one weakness," Mitchell said. "But overall, the 1993-94 Lady Hornets will have more speed and better shooting in the backcourt."

TEXAS SOUTHERN (11-16, 5-9) prediction: Seventh

It could be a tough year for first-year coach Star Williams. Williams, a former assistant at Louisville, replaced Robert Gatlin who resigned following the season.

If William is to turn the TSU program around, she'll have to it with a team that lost seven seniors and four starters from a year ago. The only returning starter is Kimberly Jeffery, who was voted conference Freshmen of the Year. She averaged 11.7 points and 9.7 rebounds.

PRAIRIE VIEW (2-25, 0-14), prediction: Eighth

With four of nine letterwinners and three starters returning, the Lady Panthers are hoping to crack into the win column in the conference. For the second straight year Prairie View failed to win a game within the league.

Out of Control

You've spent at least \$170 in one night.

At "cheap" Indiana? Four tickets at \$21 each and you're still over \$100. Maybe it's better to save all that money, but a big screen T.V., some Orville Redenbacher and watch this stuff at home. Then again, the way things are going, you're gonna have to order any game you want to see on pay-per-view.

But as long as we continue to come out to cheer LJ and Shaq and Barry Bonds and Barry Sanders, and as long as these guys can keep getting these unimaginable-to-you-and-me salaries, tickets will continue to go up.

What's it gonna cost in five years to go to the game with your family? Two hundred? Three hundred?

Me, I think fans are gonna stop show-

ing up. Soon.

But I've got a solution.

Rookies in all sports should not be allowed to make more than the top veterans.

In fact, let's set a cap on rookie salaries. Take hoops for instance. No rook should make more than \$500,00.

I can live off a half-million. Couldn't you?

from page 3

The highest paid player on the team shouldn't make any more than \$5 million a year. I mean, ain't that enough to get buy and pay the electric bill on the 30th?

These are two simple rules that could help save sports as we know them. Laugh if you want. Call me stupid.

But someone better listen soon.

— By Langston Wertz Jr.