Alcindor Returns UCLA To First

First In A Series
By KEITH DRUM
DTH Sports Writer

Basketball season is here and defending champion Texas Western is strong enough to repeat. But they aren't favored.

The reason is that Ferdinand Lewis Alcindor Jr. has arrived. He has returned UCLA to their No. 1 ranking of '64 and '65.

Alcindor is not the only player Coach John Wooden has. Two starters return from last year's 18-8 team. Both were all-conference. Two more of the Fabulous Frosh join Alcindor. UCLA is the best team since the 1960 Ohio State Championship team of Jerry Lucas, John Havlicek and Larry Siegfried, now pro stars.

UCLA's only senior is 6'7" Mike Lynn, who led the team in scoring (16.8) and rebounding (10.3) last season. Junior Mike Warren, 5'11", was the second highest scoring soph in UCLA history at 16.6. "Luscious" Lucius Allen, 6'2" soph. is quick, slick on the pass, and a brilliant driver. He averaged 22.4 with the frosh. The other starting position was supposed to have been filled by 6'6" senior Edgar Lacey. But his failure to recover from knee surgery has given the position to 6'4" sophomore Lynn Shackelford (20.9).

The big news is the 6'1" Alcindor. He averaged 33.1 with the freshmen plus 21 rebounds a game. Alcindor has lost but one game in his last 101. That was to DeMatha High School of Washington, D. C. during his senior year. Some people think UCLA won't lose for three years. No team has ever won three straight championships. Cincinnati came close with championships in '61 and '62. They lost by one point in overtime to Loyola of Chicago in '63.

UCLA should have no trouble getting to Louisville, where the 1967 NCAA finals will be held. Only two teams appear to be able to challenge UCLA in the West.

The University of Pacific was 22-6 last year and appear to be much stronger this season. Coach Dick Edwards has three starters returning. Keith Swagerty, 6'7" senior, is a preseason All - American. He scored (21.9) and rebounds (18.3. third in the nation). Bob Krulish (17.8) and Dave Fox Fox (13.0) are the returning guards. The other positions are up for grabs, but Edwards has a bevy of lettermen from which to choose.

Defense - minded New Mexico will attempt to dethrone Utah in the Western Athletic Conference. Mel Daniels, 6'9" senior, is a Bill Russell - type on defense and he averaged 21.2 points per game. Joining him are 6'3" Ben Monroe (13.5) and 6'7" Bill Morgan (12.9). Ron Nelson, a junior college transfer, where he averaged 25.6, is the best of the guards. The Lobos of Coach Bob King were 16-8 last year.

The Mid-West produced Texas Western last year. This season the Miners are stronger, but so are Louisville, Nebraska and Houston.

Texas Western surprised everyone, including Kentucky, last year as they went 28-1. Coach Don Haskins lost two starters, but he has more than capable replacements. Bobby Joe Hill, 5'10", stole Kentucky blind in the championship game. He averaged 15 points last season. Dave "Daddy D" Lattin, 6'7" and 240, provides the rebounds plus 14 points a game. He will get help from 6'8" Nevil Shed (10.6) and 6'5" Willie Cager (6.6). Joining Hill in the backcourt will be 5'6 1-2 Willie Worsley (8.0). Sophomore Phil Harris, 6'10" and 23.4 with the frosh, may push one of the starters, if he shows defensive prowess.

Louisville should be king of the nation's strongest conference, the Missouri Valley. All-American Westley Unseld, 6'8" and 240, was the nation's second best rebounder last season at 19.1. He scored at a 19.3 clip. Fred Holden (13.8), Dave Gilbert (11.5) and Joe Liedtke (8.2) are returning starters. But like UCLA, the big news is the sophomores. Butch Beard, 6'3",and Jerry King, 6'5", are definite starters. Coach Peck Hickman expects a much better record than last season's 16-10.

Nebraska returns all starters from last year's 20-5 squad. They are: 6'5" Tom Baack (15.4); 6'3" Stu Lantz (12.2); 6'4" Nate Branch (13.5); 6'5" Willie Campbell (8.8); and Fred Hare and Jim Damm, who divided the fifth slot. Sophomore Roger Leitner, 19.1 as a freshman, will see plenty of action for Coach Joe Cipriano.

Perhaps the top team in the Mid - West will be the Houston Cougars, 23-6 last year under Coach Guy Lewis. Their top attraction is 6'8 1-2" All-American Elvin Hayes. Last season as a sophomore he averaged 27.2 points and 16.9 rebounds. Dolph Schayes, former NBA great, called Hayes "the best big man I saw last season."

Returning with Hayes is 6'6" Leary Lentz, 6'5" Don Chaney and 6'8" Don Kruse. Outstanding sophomores are 6'8" Mel Bell, who broke Hayes's frosh scoring marks, 6'9" Kenny Spain and 6'8" Theodis Lee. The height is there, now Lewis must find a playmaker to replace the graduated Joe Hamood.

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