

SPORTS

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HOOPS, KC STYLE

Open race on the men's side makes exciting Big 12 Tourney

BY ADAM KLINKER
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It was springtime in the Midwest on Monday — baseball weather, perhaps.

But baseball is still a long time coming as far as March Madness is concerned. Many more things remain to be seen in the universe of college basketball.

Most pointedly — the conference tournaments, which kick off for the Big 12 Conference on March 4 in Kansas City, Mo. Taking a look at the pairings for the tourney, things look about as wide-open as the regular-season league race for most teams.

Or, as Oklahoma Coach Kelvin Sampson waxed poetically, "It's like nirvana for some. Anyone can beat anyone."

Here are the seeds and their first-round games:

No. 1 seed: Texas (18-11 overall, 13-3 in the Big 12) First-round bye. Ranked No. 22 in the nation, the Longhorns won a swift race to the top in stellar, if not surprising, fashion.

However, the Longhorns enter the tourney coming off a 54-47 loss to Missouri on Feb. 27.

"Against Missouri, we didn't do a very good job of taking care of the basketball," UT Coach Rick Barnes said. "We just need to get some rest this week and come into Kansas City ready to play."

No. 2 seed: Missouri (20-7 and 11-5), First-round bye. Tiger Coach Norm Stewart said his team has had some trouble with injuries and sickness as of late, but things are healing up nicely and with the bye, the extra day's rest will be beneficial.

Forward Albert White was suffering from the flu while freshman guard Keyon Dooling is recovering from an ankle injury.

"I think we'll get back to normal," Stewart said, "but there are still some things that aren't 100 percent."

Mizzou will play the winner of the Kansas State-Texas A&M game.

No. 3 seed: Kansas (19-9 and 11-5), First-round bye. The Jayhawks didn't run away with the league this year, as has been their calling card in seasons past, and they're also coming off a loss to Iowa State.

KU will face the winner of the Texas Tech-Nebraska game. KU is 0-3 vs. those teams.

No. 4 seed: Oklahoma (20-9 and 13-3) First-round bye. OU poured it on late, winning seven of nine games, including key games at Texas, 64-63 and at Missouri, 69-57.

The Sooners will play the winner of the Oklahoma State-Baylor game.

No. 5 seed: Oklahoma State (19-9 and 10-6) plays Baylor. The Cowboys aced Nebraska for the No. 5 spot based on the first head-to-head tie-breaker. OSU beat the Huskers 60-48 on Feb. 17.

OSU has won three of its last four going into the tourney game with Baylor, an 0-16 team in league play.

"There's always a danger in playing someone who hasn't won a game in the conference," OSU Coach Eddie Sutton said.

No. 6 seed: Nebraska (18-11 and 10-6) plays Texas Tech. The Cornhuskers faltered late, but going off their performance in the second half in an 87-68 win against Texas A&M on Feb. 27, Coach Danny Nee said things are looking up for his ballclub.

Nee said NU is looking forward to a rematch with No. 11 seed Texas Tech, a team that beat the Huskers earlier in the season.

"We've got to play a solid basketball game," Nee said. "We'll be ready to play. We remember what happened at Texas Tech."

No. 7 seed: Kansas State (18-11 and 7-9) plays Texas A&M. Following an up-and-down year in the conference where they couldn't really string any wins together, the Wildcats are hoping to get together some consistency in the tournament.

In their previous game against the Aggies, the Wildcats lost a close 79-74 game Feb. 10.

No. 8 seed: Colorado (16-13 and 7-9) plays Iowa State. Several Big 12 coaches remarked that the Buffaloes are the conference's hottest team going into the tourney. CU has won four games in a row and five of its last six.

"We've finished strong," CU Coach Ricardo Patton said. "I'm real proud of the effort these kids have given me."

No. 9 seed: Iowa State (15-14 and 6-10) plays Colorado. Cyclone Coach Larry Eustachy is determined not to finish out his season without a fight. With the momentum of a win over KU, Eustachy said things are looking up for ISU.

"It certainly helps," he said. "Our team has worked awfully hard. It was a nice win, but now we've got to move on to Colorado."

No. 10 seed: Texas A&M (12-14, 5-11) plays Kansas State. There's a history with the 10th seed in the Big 12 Tournament. After the No. 1 seed, the No. 10 seed has the highest record at 5-2.

Also on A&M's side is that it's playing an opponent, Kansas State, that it has been successful against in a tight game when the Aggies won 79-74 over the Wildcats on Feb. 10.

No. 11 seed: Texas Tech (13-16, 5-11 conference) plays Nebraska. Texas Tech, coming off back-to-back losses, is rematched with a Nebraska team that it beat 73-68 on Feb. 20.

Injuries have hampered the Red Raiders in the last few games, but Coach James Dickey said everyone should be ready to go for tournament time.

No. 12 seed: Baylor (6-23 and 0-16) plays Oklahoma State. There have been very few positives for the Bears in league play this season as the team lost all of its games.

Texas Tech leads way for women; Nebraska looks to make noise

BY JAY SAUNDERS
Staff writer

It is time to "raise the roof" of Kansas City's Municipal Auditorium.

That is because the roof-raising fad has been selected as the theme of this year's Big 12 Conference women's basketball tournament, which starts this afternoon.

Just when everyone thought the tournament seeds were relatively set, Saturday night came along.

The top four teams (No. 1 Texas Tech, No. 2 Iowa State, No. 3 Kansas and No. 4 Texas) had already been determined, but two upsets and a Nebraska win on the road shook things up in the middle of the Big 12 pack.

Baylor beat No. 2-seeded Iowa State, which appeared to give the Bears the No. 5 seed regardless if Nebraska beat Oklahoma State or not.

What Baylor, or many other people for that matter, didn't expect was Missouri beating Oklahoma in Norman.

Because of a series of tiebreakers, the Cornhuskers will have the No. 5 seed, followed by Oklahoma and Baylor.

No. 11 Oklahoma State, who figured to be playing Nebraska again in the first round, now has to play the No. 6 Sooners. The Cowgirls have lost to OU twice already this season. "I thought it would be Nebraska no matter what," OSU Coach Dick Halterman said. "But if there is a team that we can get up for, it should be OU."

Now that the seeds are set, the tournament can begin. In a year full of parity throughout the conference, most coaches think the tournament will be no different.

The most interesting first-round game may be No. 8 Kansas State and No. 9 Colorado. These two teams split their regular-season games and have the exact same records.

After losing four straight games, KSU closed the regular season with an upset loss to Kansas.

Most coaches say the parity of this year's conference season should continue in the Big 12 tournament.

But Nebraska Coach Paul Sanderford said there is one team that may be called the favorite — the regular season champion Texas Tech Red Raiders.

"You never know what is going to happen," Sanderford said. "But Tech is the league champions and they have played like it."

Here's a seed-by-seed look at the Big 12 women's tournament:
No. 1 seed: Texas Tech (25-3 overall and 14-2 in the Big 12) First round bye.

The Red Raiders are the prohibitive favorite here, as they were the entire season. The Big 12 player of the year, Angie Braziel, anchors the center for Tech, averaging 20.7 points and 8.7 rebounds per game this season.

The rest of the team is balanced in its scoring with Rene Hanebut able to hit the 3-pointer as well as any player in the conference. Texas Tech won the tournament last year. Tech lost to Texas and Kansas during the conference season.

No. 2 seed: Iowa State (20-6 and 12-4) First round bye.

The Cyclones get balanced scoring from all over, but have an inside-outside combination with Stacy Frese and Megan Taylor. Scoring isn't a problem, as ISU averaged 75.7 points per game this season. Their opponents averaged 62.5 points. The Clones can be a dangerous team.

No. 3 seed: Kansas (21-8 and 11-5) First round bye.

It starts with Lynn Pride, who averages 18.0 points and 7.4 rebounds per game. Frustrate her and you go a long way to stopping the Jayhawks. But if she gets hot, KU's dangerous. KU's defense is among the best in the conference, holding opponents to 58.7 points per game. Beat both OU and OSU earlier in the season.

No. 4 seed: Texas (16-10 and 10-6) First round bye.

UT ended the season hot, winning five of its last six. It puts them at a fourth seed with a likely game against Nebraska awaiting them. Edwina Brown leads the Longhorns at 15.7 points and 7.6 rebounds.

No. 5 seed: Nebraska (19-10 and 8-8) plays Texas A&M.

Barring complete collapse, NU should beat the Aggies. Nicole Kubik looked refreshed after a move to two-guard and the Huskers have the speed to beat and challenge Texas Tech. Brooke Schwartz will be a key here.

No. 6 seed: Oklahoma (14-12 and 8-8) plays Oklahoma State.

The Sooners need a lot of help to get into the NCAA Tournament. Phylesha Whaley is the leading scorer and rebounder. OU's defense gives up 72 points per game.

No. 7 seed: Baylor (16-12 and 8-8) plays Missouri. BU pounded Missouri earlier in the season 78-54. The Bears' guards are among the best in the conference. Not a team easily pressed.

No. 8 seed: Kansas State (14-12 and 7-9) plays Colorado. Not afraid to shoot the 3-pointer. Nicky Ramage a strong leader. Really, though, just fodder for Texas Tech.

No. 9 seed: Colorado (14-12 and 7-9) plays Kansas State. Again, fodder for Texas Tech. The Buffaloes average 69.2 points per game and give up 68.1 points.

No. 10 seed: Missouri (12-14 and 5-11) plays Baylor. Julie Helm and Kesha Bonds form solid 1-2 attack. MU turns the ball over on frequent occasions.

No. 11 seed: Oklahoma State (12-14 and 4-12) plays Oklahoma. A low-scoring team. Jennifer Crow averages 17.1 points per game, but no one else is in double figures.

No. 12 seed: Texas A&M (7-19 and 2-14) plays Nebraska. The Aggies are the worst team in the conference. Prissy Sharpe and Kera Alexander score but also turn the ball over. Should bow out to NU.

Texas's Kris Clack and Texas Tech's Angie Braziel lead the No. 1 seeds into the Big 12 Tournament.

