

# 2022 **Tipoff** 2023

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

## BASKETBALL PREVIEW

Coach  
**Bob  
Huggins**

Coach  
**Dawn  
Plitzuweit**

Guard  
**Madisen  
Smith**

Guard  
**Kedrian  
Johnson**

Guard  
**Joe  
Toussaint**

Guard  
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# Matthews' journey through transfer portal opened his eyes



William Wotring/The Dominion Post, AP file photo

Emmitt Matthews Jr. began his career at WVU (left), before transferring to Washington (center) in 2021. He's back at WVU (right) for his final season of eligibility.

**BY JUSTIN JACKSON**

JJackson@DominionPost.com

Gone is the old frizzy Sideshow Bob hairdo once sported by Emmitt Matthews Jr., and the WVU men's basketball forward is now going with a close-shaven look and a goatee.

"It's a better hairstyle," Matthews says

with a smile.

It just may be a better Matthews, too, who made his trek back to Morgantown this summer after transferring out in 2021 to play a season at Washington.

"I had to take a little one year vacation," is how Matthews explains it jokingly.

As to why he left to begin with, Matthews said the COVID-19 season of

2020-21 was very tough on him, in that his family back in Tacoma, Wash. couldn't really come and visit or watch his games inside the Coliseum.

"I was so far away from family," he said. "It was hard for me mentally."

As it turns out, going back home didn't give Matthews exactly what he was searching for, either.

As Matthews tells the story, that much was predicted to him by WVU head coach Bob Huggins when they first parted ways in 2021.

"This was home to me for three years. I wish I would have never left the first time," Matthews said. "Huggs told me in my exit meeting when I left the first time that the grass isn't always greener."

## The trip back to Morgantown

The University of Washington finished 17-15 last season, Matthews' one year at the school.

It ended up being his best season individually, averaging a career-high 11.7 points, while connecting on 40 3-pointers.

Much of that, Matthews said, is cred-

ited to working out with former NBA player Quincy Pondexter, an assistant with the Huskies.

Pondexter helped him change his shot, giving Matthews more of a natural release over his head rather than from the side of his face.

For all of that, Matthews said he is grateful, but his return home didn't always feel like a homecoming.

He told the story of the Huskies' Senior Night, in which Matthews walked out before the game with his family.

He looked around and ...

"You'd think there would be a lot of people showing you love and giving you support," Matthews said. "When I walked out on Senior Night, I blinked my eyes and wondered, 'Man, what if I was in the Coliseum right now?' That was one thing that always stuck with me."

Due to the NCAA's eligibility rules with COVID-19, Matthews had one final season of eligibility remaining.

He didn't want to waste it, so when he made his decision to enter the transfer portal a second time, Matthews simply

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# WEST VIRGINIA MEN 2022-23

## Roster

#	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Yr.	Hometown / Previous School
15	Jimmy Bell Jr.	F	6-10	S	Saginaw, Mich. • Moberly Area CC
12	Josiah Davis	F	6-3	FR	Kitchener, Ontario • Teays Valley Christian School
22	Josiah Harris	F	6-3	FR	Canton, Ohio • Richmond Heights HS
0	Kedrian Johnson	G	6-3	5TH YR/SR	Dallas TX • Temple College
2	Kobe Johnson	G	6-3	SO	Canton, OH • Canton McKinley HS
4	Jamel King	F	6-7	SO	Uniontown, AL • Bella Vista Prep
1	Emmitt Matthews, Jr	F	6-7	5th YR/SR	Tacoma, Wash. • Washington
3	Tre Mitchell	F	6-9	SR	Pittsburgh, Pa. • Texas
32	James Okonkwo	F	6-8	SO	Maidenhead England • Beckley Prep IJN
10	Erik Stevenson	G	6-4	5TH YR/SR	Lacey, Wash., • South Carolina
24	Patrick Suemnick	F	6-8	SO	Green Bay, Wis., • Triton College
5	Joe Toussaint	G	6-0	S	Bronx, N.Y. • Iowa
11	Mohamed Wague	F	6-10	SO	Bronx, N.Y. • Harcum College
45	Wilson, Seth	G	6-1	SO	Lorain OH • Lorain HS

**Head Coach:** Bob Huggins (West Virginia, 1977) 16th season at WVU.  
**Associate Head Coach:** Larry Harrison (Pitt, 1978) 16th season at WVU.  
**Assistant Coach:** Ron Everhart (Virginia Tech, 1985) 11th season at WVU.  
**Assistant Coach:** Josh Eilert (Kansas State, 2004) 15th season at WVU.  
**Sports Administrator:** Steve Uryasz  
**Director of Player Personnel/Recruiting:** Jay Kuntz



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

WVU point guard Kedrian Johnson.

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# TRANSFER

FROM PAGE I-2

made a phone call.

## On the line with Bob Huggins

Over the past two seasons, WVU has seen eight players transfer out to other schools, including Matthews.

From the outside looking in, there would appear to be good reason for a coach to simply move on when a player decides to transfer.

Huggins could have easily sent Matthews' call to voicemail and said, "The heck with him." Yet that's not how Huggins approached the situation.

"Believe it or not, I have communication with most of those guys who transferred," Huggins said. "I transferred. I understand. Because they left doesn't mean we don't communicate."

"I thought the world of Emmitt when he was here. He had a situation where he needed to be closer to home."

While at Washington, Matthews said there were a number of times he would still seek out Huggins for advice or just to talk about things.



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

Emmitt Matthews Jr. averaged 11.7 points at Washington last season.

"Our relationship has always been strong," Matthews said. "Even when I was back home, if I needed anything, I

could just call him. Even if it was something like just a mental lapse. If I needed to talk to him, I could just talk to him. A lot of people paint the narrative that when you transfer from a school, it's always got to be a bad thing. More than half the time, I don't think it's over a bad thing at all. Me and Huggs, our relationship never changed. We always talked."

## One final ride

All that is left for Matthews' college journey, it would seem, is basketball.

"Coming back here, I'm going into it open minded," he said. "I know it's my last year of college basketball. I want to have a good time."

"I'm trying to lead the young guys. It's funny, you leave for a year, come back, and you still know all of the plays. It's been great coming back."

He says that having gone through a social media whirlwind over a 12-month period from when he left WVU to when he announced he was returning.

The feedback he received from people, while mostly positive, also was hateful and spiteful.

Upon his return, suddenly, he had so many on social media looking to be his best friend again.

"There was one high school kid, I don't remember his name, but he we used to play Xbox together," Matthews began. "I had one bad game and he sent me a crazy message and I was like, 'Didn't you just ask me to play Xbox with you?' I left and came back and he messaged me congratulations on coming back."

"I don't hold a grudge. People get upset with what they get upset with. I don't really pay attention to it anymore. I'm getting older. Words are only going to do so much to me. It comes with the game. It depends on how you deal with it. You just have to be resilient."


Matthews hopes his resiliency leads him back to one final NCAA tournament.

"Life is crazy and you never know what's going to happen or who you'll run into," Matthews said. "Obviously life brought me back here, and I'm going to make the most of the opportunity I have."

TWEET @bigjax3211

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# WEST VIRGINIA WOMEN 2022-23

## Roster

#	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Yr.	Hometown / Previous School
3	Sarah Bates	G	5-8	5TH YR/SR	Fresno, CA • Georgia Tech
23	Isis Beh	F	6-3	RS So.	Murray, Utah • Salt Lake City CC
14	Kylee Blacksten	F	6-1	Jr.	Colorado Springs, CO • Colarado
21	Tavy Diggs	F	6-0	Sr.	Plano, TX • TCU
00	Jayla Hemingway	G	5-11	Jr.	Collierville, Tenn. • Mississippi State
13	Messiah Hunter	F	6-2	RS Fr.	Hopewell, VA • TPLS Christian Academy
4	Danni Nichols	G	5-10	5TH YR/SR	Columbia, Mo. • Western Illinois
11	JJ Quinerly	G	5-8	SO	Norfolk, VA • Lake Taylor HS
2	Wynter Rogers	G	5-11	RS FR.	Little Rock, Ark. • Little Rock Christian Academy
5	Imarianah Russell	G	5-10	Fr.	Columbus, OH • Reynoldsburg HS
24	Savannah Samuel	G	6-1	Jr.	Woodstock, Ga. • Oregon State
30	Madisen Smith	G	5-5	5TH YR/SR	Greenville, SC • Greenville Senior HS
32	Kyah Watson	G	5-10	RS So.	Rapid City, SD • South Dakota

**Head Coach:** Dawn Plitzuweit  
**Associate Head Coach:** Jason Jeschke  
**Assistant Coach:** Aaron Horn  
**Assistant Coach:** Ari Braker  
**Director of Basketball Operations:** Meghan Bielich (Cal U, 2011)  
**Director of Recruiting:** Bernadette Devaney  
**Video Coordinator:** Tyler VanWinkle



William Wotring/The Dominion Post  
WVU guard Jayla Hemingway.

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## WVU MEN'S PREVIEW

# Huggins brings in new faces to turn Mountaineers around

## WVU returns just one starter in Kedrian Johnson

BY JUSTIN JACKSON

JJackson@DominionPost.com

Make no mistake, Joe Toussaint knew what he was getting into when he transferred to West Virginia this summer.

The former Iowa guard spent hours watching film of the Mountaineers last season, as they struggled to a 16-17 finish.

"Most of what I saw was just a lack of effort," said Toussaint, who averaged 4.3 points and 3.2 assists with the Hawkeyes last season. "That's something I can definitely bring to the table, effort."

Erik Stevenson, a fifth-year transfer from South Carolina, said he also watched a ton of tape on the Mountaineers.

"I'm very familiar with last year's team," Stevenson said. "I've watched a lot of tape on them."

In trying to rebound from last season's subpar performance, WVU head coach

Bob Huggins went out and added 10 new pieces to the roster, with five coming from the transfer portal and three more from a junior college.

"We're definitely an older team," said forward Emmitt Matthews Jr., who makes his return to the Mountaineers after playing one season at Washington. "We may not have all played together, but we're more mature and experienced."

And when it came to Huggins improving his roster, he didn't put any timeline on it.

His last addition came in the middle of the fall semester, when the Mountaineers added former Manhattan guard Jose Perez, who was named the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference preseason player of the year, but entered the portal after his coach was fired on Oct. 25.

Perez will be a walk-on this season, and isn't expected to become eligible to

SEE FACES, I-10



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

WVU guard Kobe Johnson (right) played in 32 games and started four as a freshman last season.

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## FACES

FROM PAGE I-9

play until the second semester.

He'll join Stevenson, Toussaint, Matthews and Tre Mitchell (Texas), as transfers from the portal.

"They're guys who are going to be a lot more comfortable. They've played in very competitive leagues," Huggins said. "If anybody ought to be ready to go, it ought to be those guys."

Except Mitchell is dealing with a foot injury and has yet to practice with the team and junior-college transfer Pat Suemnick is dealing with a knee issue. Neither are expected to be ready by the start of the season.

That means a collection of new faces will join the five holdovers from last season, with the expectation that what the Mountaineers begin the season with isn't exactly what they'll have come Big 12 play.

"They all knew what they were getting when they came here," Huggins said. "They all knew they would have to be competitive to play. Believe it or not, they're relishing the opportunity to be competitive."

The holdovers include Kedrian Johnson, last year's starter at point guard. He was the team's top defender, but also struggled offensively in shooting and passing.

"I've watched a lot of film with coach (Larry) Harrison," Johnson said. "I'll say I wasn't exactly so much ready for that role or that leadership role as a starting point guard, but experiencing that year and all of the ups and downs have prepared me for this year."

Guards Kobe Johnson and Seth Wilson return for their sophomore season and they are the nucleus of a sophomore group that also includes James Okonkwo and Jamel King.

All four played last season, but sparingly.

**"THEY'RE GUYS WHO ARE GOING TO BE A LOT MORE COMFORTABLE. THEY'VE PLAYED IN VERY COMPETITIVE LEAGUES. IF ANYBODY OUGHT TO BE READY TO GO, IT OUGHT TO BE THOSE GUYS."**

Bob Huggins  
WVU men's basketball coach

The biggest addition is junior-college transfer Jimmy Bell Jr., who began his career at St. Louis, before moving on to junior college.

Bell stands 6-foot-10 and 280 pounds, but that is 70 pounds less than when he first enrolled at WVU this summer.

"At (junior college), the food is not as good as it is here," he said. "I didn't work out as much as I wanted to. 'When I actually weighed in on my visit here and they said I was like 350, I said 'Whoa. I didn't know I was that much.' That woke me up. I had to lock in and get ready."

Bell will be counted on to supply scoring and rebounding around the basket the Mountaineers did not have last season.

And then there is defense and shooting. WVU gave up the most points among Big 12 teams last season and also finished last in the conference in shooting the ball.

All of it describes how the Mountaineers finished last in the league a season ago with the hope that the new faces will provide a change in WVU's fortune.

"I thought going in we'd be a good rebounding team," Huggins said. "We're not they, yet, but I think we can get there. We're not shooting the ball as well as I had hoped we would shoot, but I think that will come, too."

TWEET @bigjax3211



AP file photo

Tre Mitchell averaged 8.7 points and 4.0 rebounds at Texas last season. The forward was one of five transfers brought into the WVU men's hoops team by head coach Bob Huggins this season. The forward is been dealing with a foot injury and is not expected to be ready for the start of the season.



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**Bob Huggins**

**AGE:** 69  
**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Owns a 326-188 record across 15 seasons with the Mountaineers and is 916-399 all-time.  
**CONTRACT:** In 2021, he signed an extension to coach through 2023-24, but there

are options to continually add an additional year for as long as Huggins and athletic director Shane Lyons continue to agree to an extension. He earns \$4.15 annually, plus incentives.  
**NCAA BIDS:** Huggins' teams have reached the NCAA tournament 25 times in 40 seasons.  
**HIGHLIGHTS:** Reached Final Four in 1992 (Cincinnati) and 2010 (WVU).

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**Kedrian Johnson**

Fifth year — Guard — 6-3, 185

**FROM:** Dallas

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Not recruited out of high school; held offers from Buffalo,

New Mexico, New Mexico State, Missouri State and Texas State out of JUCO.  
**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Started 30 games at point guard last season. Averaged 5.3 points per game and led the team with 52 steals. Has played in 58 games over two seasons.



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**Emmitt Matthews Jr.**  
Fifth year — Forward — 6-7, 210  
**FROM:** Tacoma, Wash.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was a 3-star recruit out of Woodrow Wilson High, who also had offers from Connecticut, Georgetown and Boise State.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Played three seasons with the Mountaineers from 2018-21, before transferring to Washington for the 2021-22 season. Transferred back to WVU in the summer of 2022. Has played in 92 career games at WVU and has scored 592 points and grabbed 325 rebounds. Averaged 11.7 points and 4.7 rebounds per game at Washington.



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### Erik Stevenson

Fifth year — Guard — 6-4, 205

**FROM:** Lacey, Wash.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was a 3-star recruit, who originally signed with Wichita State. Also had scholarship offers from Hawaii, LSU and Boise State.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Will play his final season of college eligibility with the Mountaineers this season. After two seasons at Wichita State, he transferred to Washington and then transferred to South Carolina last season. He transferred to WVU this summer. Averaged 11.6 points and 4.7 rebounds per game last season at South Carolina. Has hit 192 career 3-pointers in college.

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**Joe Toussaint**

Senior — Guard — 6-0, 190

**FROM:** Bronx, N.Y.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was a 3-star recruit, who was ranked the No. 45 point guard coming out of high school. Originally signed with Iowa, but also had

scholarship offers from Dayton, Drexel and Fordham.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Transferred to WVU after three seasons at Iowa, and has two seasons of eligibility remaining. Played in 98 games and started 41 for the Hawkeyes. Averaged 4.3 points and 3.2 assists per game last season at Iowa, and also recorded a career-high 51 steals.



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### Tre Mitchell

Senior — Forward — 6-9, 225

**FROM:** Pittsburgh

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was a 4-star recruit, who was ranked No. 82 nationally in the 2019 recruiting class. Signed with UMass out of high school, but also had

scholarship offers from Arkansas and Bucknell.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Was named the Atlantic 10 Rookie of the Year after averaging 17.7 points and 7.2 rebounds per game as a freshman. Scored 792 points in two seasons at UMass, before transferring to Texas last season. Played in 24 games at Texas, before leaving the school for personal reasons, and transferred to WVU this summer.

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**Jimmy Bell Jr.**

Senior — Center — 6-10, 285

**FROM:** Saginaw, Mich.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was a 3-star recruit, who originally signed with Saint Louis out of high school. Also had scholarship offers from Iowa State, Loyola Marymount

and Oakland.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Played in 50 games over two seasons at St. Louis and started 35 times. Averaged 3.1 points and 2.6 rebounds for his career at St. Louis, before enrolling at Moberly Area (Mo.) Community College, where he averaged 9.3 points and 9.1 rebounds per game last season. Transferred to WVU this summer and has two seasons of eligibility remaining.



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### Kobe Johnson

Sophomore — Guard — 6-3, 210

**FROM:** Canton, Ohio

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was a 3-star recruit, who also had scholarship offers from Bowling Green, Akron and Duquesne. Named the Ohio Division I Player of the Year by the Ohio Prep

Sports Writers Association in 2021 and finished as the all-time leading scorer at Canton McKinley with 1,566 points.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Played in 32 games with four starts as a freshman. Scored a career-high five points in a victory against Kansas State. Finished with 13 assists against nine turnovers.



### Seth Wilson

Sophomore — Guard — 6-1, 215

**FROM:** Lorain, Ohio

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was a 3-star recruit, who also had scholarship offers from Akron, Kent State and Ohio University. Began his high school career at Akron's St. Vincent-St. Mary,

the same high school LeBron James attended.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Played in 20 games and scored a career-high seven points against Iowa State. Committed just two turnovers in 150 minutes of action. Had a career-high five rebounds against Kansas State.

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**James Okonkwo**

Sophomore — Forward — 6-8, 240

**FROM:** Maidenhead, England

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was a 4-star recruit, who was ranked No. 87 overall nationally in the 2023 recruiting class, but he bypassed his final two years of high school to enroll at WVU in 2021 at

17-years old. Was able to enroll early due to his test scores in the General Certificate of Secondary Education he took while living in England.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Played in three games as a freshman after injuring his foot in the preseason. Played a total of 10 minutes and had two points.



**Jamel King**

Sophomore — Forward — 6-7, 215

**FROM:** Uniontown, Ala.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was a 3-star recruit coming out of Bella Vista Prep in Scottsdale, Ariz. Also had offers from Alabama State, Arkansas State and East Tennessee State. Averaged 23

points and 6.0 rebounds as a senior.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Played in eight games as a freshman, averaging 3.6 minutes per game. His only points of the season came on a 3-pointer against TCU and he also had a rebound against Oklahoma and Arkansas.



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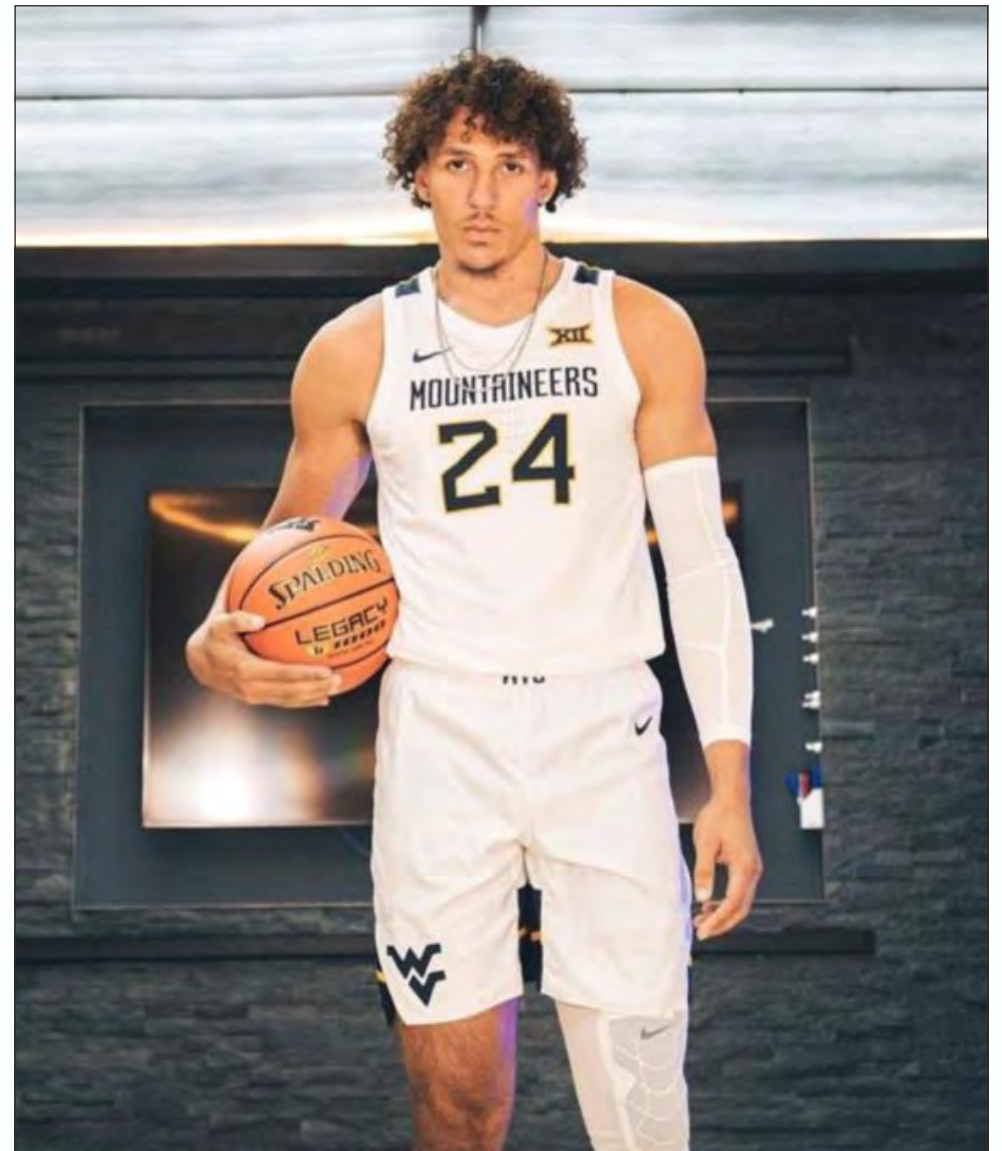
Sophomore — Forward — 6-10, 225

**FROM:** Bronx, N.Y.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Led the junior-college ranks in offensive rebounds and total rebounds last season at Harcum Community College (Bryn Mawr, Pa.). Also had scholarship offers from BYU and Wichita State, but took his

only official visit to WVU and committed to the Mountaineers last April. He averaged 15.1 points and 12.1 rebounds per game at Harcum.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Had six points and nine rebounds in the Mountaineers' exhibition victory against Bowling Green. Has three seasons of eligibility remaining.



### Patrick Suemnick

Sophomore — Forward — 6-8, 230

**FROM:** Green Bay, Wis.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Originally signed with Robert Morris in 2020 coming out of high school. He averaged 2.4 points and 1.6 rebounds over 16 games with the Colonials, before moving on to junior college at Triton (Ill.)

College. Coming out of junior college, he also had offers from Texas A&M and Stephen F. Austin.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Had minor knee surgery before the start of this season and has yet to practice with the team, but is expected to return at some point. Has three seasons of eligibility remaining.

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**Josiah Harris**

Freshman — Forward — 6-7, 200

**FROM:** Canton, Ohio

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** A 3-star recruit who is ranked No. 137 overall nationally coming out of Richmond Heights (Cleveland) High. Also had scholarship offers from Cincinnati, Akron and

Duquesne. Averaged 17.9 points and 11.1 rebounds per game as a junior.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Had six points and 13 minutes of action in the Mountaineers' exhibition victory against Bowling Green. Majoring in communication studies.



**Josiah Davis**

Freshman — Guard — 6-3, 195

**FROM:** Kitchener, Ontario

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** A 3-star recruit who played at Teays Valley Christian in Scott Depot after moving to the United States. Averaged 19 points, 9.4 rebounds and 7.3 assists per game as a senior.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Originally signed with the Mountaineers in November of 2021, but was ruled unable to enroll by the NCAA. He later received a waiver from the NCAA to become eligible and enrolled at WVU in August. He is a walk-on this season, but could earn a scholarship next season.

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## BIG 12 MEN'S PREVIEW

# Big 12 on upswing thanks to power of Texas schools

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Perhaps nobody in the Big 12 more strongly identifies with the Lone Star State than Chris Beard, who grew up in Irving and was a student assistant to Tom Penders at Texas before eventually becoming the Longhorns' head coach.

Beard has been at no fewer than seven different Texas colleges, four of them in the top job.

So when the AP Top 25 was released this week, and all four Big 12 schools in Texas were in the rankings, you can bet that Beard felt a certain amount of pride. Baylor was the headliner, tied for fifth with Kansas, while the Longhorns were No. 12, TCU two spots behind them and Texas Tech squeezing into the final spot in the poll.

"Those things are always personal to me," Beard said. "I'm a Texan, period. And thinking back to where basketball was in high school, the Dallas area and Houston area — basketball has grown so much.

"I give a lot of credit to the high school coaches, the grassroots coaches. Undeniably, the best AAU basketball in the country is in Texas. It starts with the coaching and the grassroots and the high school basketball and it goes from there."

It's turned football-mad Texas into a fertile recruiting ground for hoops, and the colleges in the state have without doubt been the biggest beneficiary. Beard had Texas Tech playing Virginia for the national championship three years ago, and two seasons ago, Scott Drew led Baylor past then-unbeaten Gonzaga for its first men's basketball title.

The Bears figure to be in the Final Four mix again this season. The Longhorns think they could make a run. Texas Tech



AP photo

Mike Miles averaged 15.4 points and 3.8 assists per game last season for TCU.

is coming off a Sweet 16 appearance and TCU has its highest preseason ranking in school history.

"When it was the Southwest Conference, they were pretty good back in the day," said Horned Frogs coach Jamie Dixon, who played for TCU during that era. "But I'm not surprised by it. I think there's just better players in Texas now."

If the Big 12 wants to get greedy, it could

claim Houston a bit early. The third-ranked Cougars, who will join the league next season, followed a Final Four trip with an Elite Eight appearance last spring.

"I couldn't be more proud of how far the state has come in the last 20 years," Baylor coach Scott Drew said. "You could have multiple teams in the Final Four from the state. It's a great time to play basketball in the state of Texas, for sure."

## Preseason Player of the Year

Mike Miles, TCU

## Preseason Newcomer of the Year

Grant Sherfield, Oklahoma

## Preseason Freshman of the Year

Keyonte George, Baylor

## Preseason All-Big 12 Team

- Adam Flagler, Baylor
- Jalen Wilson, Kansas
- Avery Anderson III, Oklahoma State
- Mike Miles, TCU
- Timmy Allen, Texas
- Marcus Carr, Texas

## Talent search

For all its strength, the Big 12 doesn't necessarily have any locks to be NBA lottery picks next summer. The closest could be a pair of freshmen: Texas swingman Dillon Mitchell and Baylor shooting guard Keyonte George.

## Old hands

The preseason all-Big 12 team, voted on by the league's coaches, shows just how experienced its teams are this season. There were six players because of a tie: graduate student Marcus Carr and senior Timmy Allen from Texas, redshirt senior Adam Flagler of Baylor, senior Avery Anderson III from Oklahoma State, redshirt junior Jalen Wilson of Kansas and TCU junior Mike Miles.

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## WVU WOMEN'S PREVIEW

## WVU a work in progress as Dawn Plitzuweit takes over

## New coach teaching system to '13 freshmen'

BY JUSTIN JACKSON

JJackson@DominionPost.com

There have been steps taken, although Dawn Plitzuweit knows she is still in the beginning stages of turning the WVU women's basketball team into the program she has pictured in her mind.

Plitzuweit was hired last March to take over for longtime coach Mike Carey, who retired after 21 seasons, 14 of which finished with 20 or more victories.

"We basically have 13 freshmen," Plitzuweit begins. "Some of them are older than others, but they're all new to me and our system. That's where we had to begin as far as getting everyone on the same page and then our goal is to get better each day from there."

After six successful seasons at South Dakota, Plitzuweit takes the reins of a program that was already in some transition before her arrival.

The Mountaineers finished 15-15 last season and decided to skip out on the NIT knowing Carey was about to retire and several players were heading for the transfer portal.

WVU had played in the NCAA tournament just once over Carey's final five seasons.

In all, five players transferred out, while three more had used all of their eligibility, meaning Plitzuweit had to hit the recruiting trail hard upon her arrival.

She signed five players from the transfer portal, including guard Kyah Watson, who played for Plitzuweit at South Dakota.

The recruiting class also included freshman Imarianah Russell from Colum-

bus, Ohio, the state's Division I Player of the Year and a four-star recruit, according to ESPN.

They will mix with seven returners, including guards Madisen Smith, Jayla Hemingway and J.J. Quinerly to form Plitzuweit's first team.

Smith and Hemingway are returning starters, while Quinerly was one of the first players off the bench and was a unanimous selection to the all-Big 12 freshman team last season after averaging 8.8 points and leading the team with 68 steals.

"We walked into a situation where we have some young ladies who were in the program at West Virginia who fit our style of play really well," Plitzuweit said. "Two of them are Maddie Smith and JJ Quinerly. Their ability to make plays on both ends of the court is something that'll really translate well to what we do. What they have to learn is how to use their speed a little bit slower than they do if that makes sense. Slow down and then their speed becomes even faster, because they both have very special speed."

How has the chemistry building gone so far?

"Everything is going pretty well," said WVU guard Savannah Samuel, who returns after scoring 4.2 points per game last season. "Obviously at first, with new coaches, new players and a new system, it was tough. We've been working hard every day. Everyone is adjusting and getting acclimated to the new plays and new style. The sky is the limit for us."

It is a different offensive style that Plitzuweit brings to WVU, in that she's



Benamin Powell/The Dominion Post

Savannah Samuel (left) averaged 4.2 points and 1.5 rebounds last season at WVU.

looking for versatility from her players.

That is seen the most in 6-foot-3 forward Kylee Blacksten, a transfer from Colorado.

Blacksten's size would have many thinking about playing near the rim, except she was the team's top 3-point shooter in the Mountaineers' exhibition game against Fairmont State.

"For us, establishing ourselves inside and getting the ball in the lane is something we have to do," Plitzuweit said. "But, Kylee certainly feels comfortable out on the perimeter. She has the ability to do both. She can also drive to the basket. In our offense, she's playing the hardest position. We have to understand what her strengths are and play to those strengths."

WVU will be undersized against most

Big 12 teams. Plitzuweit's first roster is filled with nine guards, but that's where the versatility will come into play.


Some of those guards will be asked to post up inside to create mismatches, while some will be setting screens and rebounding.

It's all part of Plitzuweit's philosophy that helped her guide South Dakota to the Sweet 16 last season and upsetting Baylor in the second round.

At WVU, getting to that level is still a work in progress.

"They really want to be good and they are really trying to do things they way we want them done," Plitzuweit said. "It's not natural for them. They're willing to be coached and make adjustments, but it's not just natural at this point."

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**Dawn Plitzuweit**

**AGE:** 50

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Enters her first season at WVU with a career record of 346-128 at South Dakota, Northern Kentucky and Grand Valley State.

**CONTRACT:** Signed a five-year contract last March worth a total of \$3 million. She

will earn \$550,000 in her first season, plus incentives. Her annual pay increases by \$25,000 per year.

**NCAA BIDS:** Plitzuweit led South Dakota to three NCAA tournaments, including a trip to the Sweet 16 last season after beating Baylor in the second round.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** In 2020, when COVID-19 canceled the NCAA tournament, Plitzuweit led South Dakota to a 30-2 record.



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**Madisen Smith**

Fifth year — Guard — 5-5

**FROM:** Greenville, S.C.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was a 3-star recruit ranked as the No. 27 point guard

nationally coming out of Greenville High.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Has played in 112 games and needs 71 assists to become the fifth women’s player in school history to reach 500 for a career. Has 885 points and 125 steals over her career.

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### Danni Nichols

Fifth year — Guard — 5-10

**FROM:** Columbia, Mo.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was not ranked coming out of David H. Hickman (Mo.) High

School and originally signed with Western Illinois, where she scored 1,344 points and connected on 83 3-pointers over four seasons.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** With one season of eligibility remaining, Nichols transferred to WVU in the summer and is set to become a key contributor off the bench.



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**Sarah Bates**

Fifth year — Guard — 5-8

**FROM:** Fresno, Calif.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was not ranked coming out of Clovis West (Fresno) High and originally signed with UC Santa Barbara. She earned all-state honors as a

senior, leading her team to a 34-2 record.  
**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Bates has made her way around the country through the transfer portal. After her freshman season at UC Santa Barbara, she transferred to Kansas State, but had to sit out a season. She then transferred to Georgia Tech, where she scored 268 points over 59 games in three seasons. She is in her final season of eligibility.



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**Jayla Hemingway**

Senior — Guard — 5-11

**FROM:** Collierville, Tenn.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Ranked as a 4-star recruit and No. 89 overall nationally coming out of Houston (Tenn.) High School, which went 31-3 and finished as the

state's runner-up her senior year. Was named the 2019 Gatorade Player of the Year in Tennessee.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Began her career at Mississippi State, before transferring to WVU in 2020. In two seasons with the Mountaineers, Hemingway has played in 53 games and scored 253 points. Her career-high at WVU is 16 points against Oklahoma last season.



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**JJ Quinerly**

Sophomore — Guard — 5-8

**FROM:** Norfolk, Va.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Ranked as a 3-star recruit and the No. 20 overall point guard nationally in the 2021 recruiting class coming out of Lake Taylor High, which

won the Class AAAA state title during the 2018-19 season. She averaged 17.4 points and 9.0 assists for her prep career.  
**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Was a key contributor for the Mountaineers as a freshman and played in 30 games, while starting 12. She averaged 8.8 points and 2.7 assists per game and was a unanimous selection to the all-Big 12 Freshman Team.



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# The Dominion Post





### Savannah Samuel

Junior — Guard — 6-1

**FROM:** Woodstock, Ga.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** A 3-star recruit and No. 29 shooting guard nationally in the 2020 recruiting class coming out of St. Francis (Ga.) High. Was named the Georgia

6A regional player of the year as a sophomore when she averaged 20.1 points and 5.4 rebounds per game. Originally signed with Oregon State.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Transferred to WVU in 2021 and played in 30 games last season. She averaged 4.2 points and 1.5 rebounds per game, while also recording 19 steals. Averages 18 minutes per game.

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**Kyah Watson**

Sophomore — Guard — 5-10

**FROM:** Rapid City, S.D.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was not ranked coming out of Rapid City Stevens High, where she was a three-sport standout and also ran track and played volleyball. Set

the school record with 240 career assists and scored 956 points in her prep career. Originally signed with South Dakota.  
**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Transferred to WVU after the school signed her head coach Dawn Plitzuweit. Averaged 5.7 points and 4.2 rebounds per game last season, helping South Dakota reach the Sweet 16 of the NCAA tournament. Is expected to move into the starting lineup in her first season with the Mountaineers.



*Look for the* **2023**  
**The Dominion Post CALENDAR**  
*inside the paper on*  
**Sunday, December 25<sup>th</sup>!**



**Tavy Diggs**

Senior — Forward — 6-1

**FROM:** Plano, Texas

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was a 3-star recruit and ranked the No. 18 wing player nationally in the 2019 recruiting class coming out of Plano East. Averaged 14.8

points and 7.9 rebounds per game as a senior. Originally signed with TCU.  
**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Played in 63 games over three seasons with the Horned Frogs and averaged 6.0 points, 3.2 rebounds and 1.2 assists per game last season. Expected to be a key contributor off the bench this season and she has two seasons of eligibility remaining.





**Kylee Blacksten**

Junior — Forward — 6-3

**FROM:** Colorado Springs, Colo.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was not ranked coming out of Air Academy High, which is located on the campus of the Air Force Academy. Was an all-conference player in

each of her four seasons and averaged 16.0 points and 5.3 rebounds as a senior. Originally signed with Colorado.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Played in 44 games over two seasons at Colorado before transferring to West Virginia this summer. Was in the starting lineup and scored eight points in the team’s exhibition win against Fairmont State.





### Wynter Rogers

Freshman — Guard — 5-11

**FROM:** Little Rock, Ark.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was ranked a 3-star prospect and No. 14 wing player nationally in the 2021 recruiting class coming out of Little Rock Christian Academy. Averaged 19 points, 10.5

rebounds and 4.0 assists per game during her prep career. Led her school to a Class 5A state title as a sophomore.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Redshirted her first season at WVU, but is expected to become a contributor off the bench this season.



### Messiah Hunter

Freshman — Forward — 6-2

**FROM:** Hopewell, Va.

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was ranked a 3-star prospect and No. 81 nationally overall in the 2021 recruiting class coming out of TPLS Christian Academy

(Woodlake, Va.). Averaged 17.7 points, 8.4 rebounds and 2.4 blocks per game as a senior.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Redshirted her first season at WVU, but is expected to become a contributor off the bench this season.





### Isis Beh

Sophomore — Forward — 6-3

**FROM:** Murray, Utah

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Was not ranked coming out of Murray High School, where she averaged 15.6 points, 10 rebounds, 2.6 assists and 2.2 blocks as a senior. Originally signed with UNLV.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Was named to the

Mountain West Conference freshman team in 2020 after averaging 3.6 points and 4.0 rebounds per game. Beh then transferred to Salt Lake City Community College, which did not compete in the 2020-21 season due to COVID-19. Was recruited to WVU last season by former coach Mike Carey and was redshirted. Has three seasons of eligibility remaining.



### Imarianah Russell

Freshman — Guard — 5-10

**FROM:** Columbus, Ohio

**RECRUITING PROFILE:** Rated a 4-star prospect and No. 83 overall in the 2022 recruiting class out of Reynoldsburg (Ohio) High. She was an all-state player all four years of high school and was named the Ohio Division I Player of

the Year as a senior.

**AT WEST VIRGINIA:** Originally signed with WVU under former head coach Mike Carey, but was granted a release after Carey retired. She resigned with the Mountaineers after Dawn Plitzuweit's staff came in. Is the younger sister of WVU defensive tackle Hammond Russell IV.



# Smith's run through adversity leaves her in rare company

WVU point guard looks to go out with a bang in final season

BY JUSTIN JACKSON

JJackson@DominionPost.com

A glance at the numbers would have you think Madisen's Smith's college basketball career has been smooth sailing.

In truth, it's been anything but.

Still, as the point guard heads into her final season of eligibility, Smith is entering rare air among her WVU peers.

With a typical healthy season, Smith will likely have started more basketball games than any other WVU player in school history, men or women.

She's on pace to become the 39th 1,000 point scorer and just the fifth to reach 500 career assists.

"You can see how much Madisen's work ethic has carried her," said first-year WVU head coach Dawn Plitzuweit. "Her passion for the game and this school is tough to match."

Smith proved that back in April when Plitzuweit first arrived on campus, taking over for the retired Mike Carey.

Carey was the one who recruited Smith and developed her into one of the Big 12's top point guards, and the two had a bond that went beyond the court.

"It was time for him to retire," Smith joked during Big 12 media day in Kansas City. "He was getting old and wanted to do something different. I understood that."

So many of her teammates were exiting Morgantown after Carey made his announcement.

Kari Niblack went to Georgia. Esmery Martinez ended up at Arizona, Jeanna Cunningham transferred to Alabama and K.K. Deans went to Florida.

That was the bulk of what would have been the returning talent with WVU's roster.

And then there was Smith.

"When everything was going on, I mean, I talked about it with my family," Smith said. "I knew there would have been other options available. In the end, I thought my best option was to stay right here. It was a no-brainer. Why wouldn't I want to continue my career here?"

The coaching change is the only adversity Smith has faced.

Late in her junior season, she suffered a leg injury while battling for a loose ball with an opposing player landing awkwardly on top of her.

That cost her eight games, including



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

WVU guard Madisen Smith (left) is 117 points shy of scoring 1,000 for her career and needs 71 assists to reach 500.

the Big 12 tournament that season.

Smith came back to play in just four minutes against Georgia Tech in the second round of the NCAA tournament that season. It was basically four minutes of action just to say she played in a NCAA tournament game.

Over her first four seasons, it's the only time WVU reached the NCAA tournament.

She'd like that to change in her final season in college.

"We need time just to get sharper and understand our plays and our reads," Smith said. "I don't want to put a ceiling on where we could be by the end of the Big 12 (season), but we're on the right path."

"As we continue to learn and soak in everything the coaches are telling us, the sky is the limit for us."

It's a different system Smith is learning in her final season.

She's still handling the ball and running the offense, but it's now an offense where 6-foot-3 teammate Kylee Blacksten is shooting 3-pointers, while guards Jayla Hemingway and J.J. Quinerly are posting up inside on some possessions.

"It's going to take a little bit of time, not just for Madisen, but for everyone else, too," Plitzuweit said. "So far, there seems to be a lot of excitement. Our players want to be successful and they want to be good. They're putting in the work to do that, but

they still have to slow down and learn all the steps before they can go out and play fast."

Plitzuweit admits that change is hard, something she's been mindful of in dealing with her 13 players this season.

For Smith, it's just one more hurdle to overcome. It's a matter of staying focused, she said, a philosophy that has carried her through so much already.

"It's been an adjustment," Smith said. "We brought in a lot of new players and new transfers. Like a lot of stuff, you have to kind of take that and be able to run with it. You can't just lay down, because everything is not going to be perfect all the time. You have to roll with the punches."

TWEET @bigjax3211



## BIG 12 WOMEN'S PREVIEW

## Iowa State is the new darlings of the Big 12

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Bill Fennelly took Iowa State to the top of the Big 12 within his first five seasons in Ames, leading the Cyclones to the second weekend of the women's NCAA Tournament three straight years and even reaching a regional final.

There has been plenty of success over two-plus decades since then, too, including another Elite Eight trip. But for all those wins — Fennelly has 568 and counting with the Cyclones — they have yet to win at least a share of another Big 12 title.

That could change this season.

They return almost their entire lineup from a team that won 28 games, finished a game behind Baylor in the league race and advanced to the Sweet 16. That includes Ashley Joens, the school's career scoring leader, who would have been one of the top picks in the WNBA draft but chose to use her COVID-19 waiver for a fifth season in Ames.

"For me personally, it takes me back to one of the great times that I had as Iowa State coach, back around 2000. This group is very similar to that," Fennelly said this week. "They show up every day. They wear the jersey with a great amount of pride. They are obviously extremely talented. They love to compete. They love to play. And I think our fanbase has really connected with them in a way we haven't seen in a long time."

Part of the reason is they've stuck together, even in an age when the transfer portal makes it easier than ever for players to move among programs. Lexi Donarski, the Big 12's defensive player of the year, and Emily Ryan, who led the conference in assists, are both juniors. Nyamer Diew is also a junior and Morgan Kane is a senior.

Then there's Joens, who averaged 20.3 points and 9.5 rebounds last season and is a national player-of-the-year candidate.

No wonder the Cyclones were picked by the league's coaches to win the Big 12 this season. They edged Texas, which won last year's conference tournament, by a single point with Oklahoma, Baylor and Kansas behind them.

"It's always a hard decision whether to come back or go play professionally," Joens said, "but looking at the team we had last season, and what we accomplished, and knowing we were returning almost everybody, it was an opportunity I



AP photo

Ashley Joens averaged 20.3 points and 9.5 rebounds at Iowa State last season.

didn't want to miss out on. We have a great team coming back."

### Speaking of Baylor

Don't expect the Bears to go away, even if their women don't have quite the same target on their backs this season.

Yes, they lost first-round draft picks NaLyssa Smith and Queen Egbo, but Baylor coach Nicki Collen shored up her roster with a bunch of transfers: Erika Porter from Illinois, Dre'Una Edwards from Kentucky, Jana Van Gytenebeek from Stanford, Aijha Blackwell from Missouri and junior college transfer Catarina Ferreira from Eastern Arizona.

In other words, the Bears should still be in the mix for at least a share of a 13th consecutive regular-season title.

"I don't think you put on a Baylor uniform and not feel pressure," Collen said. "I know I didn't take this job and expect to not feel pressure. Nobody wants to be a part of the team that breaks the streak of conference championships."

### Staying in Kansas City

The Big 12 signed a deal to keep its men's and women's tournaments in Kansas City through 2027 before Brett Yormark replaced retiring commissioner Bob Bowlsby in June. But despite Yor-

### Preseason Player of the Year

Ashley Joens, Iowa State

### Preseason Newcomer of the Year

Aijha Blackwell, Baylor

### Preseason Freshman of the Year

Darianna Littlepage-Buggs, Baylor

### Preseason All-Big 12 Team

- Sarah Andrews, Baylor
- Aijha Blackwell, Baylor
- Lexi Donarski, Iowa State
- Ashley Joens, Iowa State
- Emily Ryan, Iowa State
- Holly Kersgieter, Kansas
- Serena Sundell, Kansas State
- Taylor Robertson, Oklahoma
- Madi Williams, Oklahoma
- Rori Harmon, Texas
- Aaliyah Moore, Texas

mark's desire to extend the Big 12 footprint, he said the league is committed to holding its tournament in a city that has drawn record crowds.

Yormark said other changes to the tournament will be coming, though, including an increase in ticket prices.

The women's tournament will be played one last time at historic Memorial Auditorium in March before moving down the street to T-Mobile Center, the site of the men's tournament, beginning with the 2023-24 season.

### No flopping

One of the emphases among college basketball officials this season will be flops, and not just those by defenders heading off a drive to the basket. It also pertains to an offensive player that may bob their head at the slightest bit of contact, or a shooter who is barely grazed but ends up on their backside in the hopes of drawing a foul.

In the past, players were usually given a warning. Now, it will be a technical foul and a free throw for the other team.

"This is going to be highly controversial," said Curtis Shaw, the Big 12's longtime coordinator of men's basketball officiating. "You're going to see a lot of it early."



# WEST VIRGINIA MEN'S BASKETBALL 2022-23 SCHEDULE



NOV. 7	MOUNT ST. MARY'S
NOV. 11	at PITT
NOV. 15	MOREHEAD STATE
NOV. 18	PENN
NOV. 24	vs. PURDUE <sup>1</sup>
NOV. 25	vs. GONZAGA OR PORTLAND STATE <sup>1</sup>
NOV. 27	vs. DUKE, FLORIDA, OREGON STATE or XAVIER <sup>1</sup>
DEC. 3	at XAVIER <sup>2</sup>
DEC. 7	NAVY
DEC. 10	UAB
DEC. 18	BUFFALO
DEC. 22	STONY BROOK
DEC. 31	at KANSAS STATE
JAN. 2	at OKLAHOMA STATE
JAN. 7	KANSAS
JAN. 11	BAYLOR
JAN. 14	at OKLAHOMA
JAN. 18	TCU
JAN. 21	TEXAS
JAN. 25	at TEXAS TECH
JAN. 28	AUBURN <sup>3</sup>
JAN. 31	at TCU
FEB. 4	OKLAHOMA
FEB. 8	IOWA STATE
FEB. 11	at TEXAS
FEB. 13	at BAYLOR
FEB. 18	TEXAS TECH
FEB. 20	OKLAHOMA STATE
FEB. 25	at KANSAS
FEB. 27	at IOWA STATE
MAR. 4	KANSAS STATE
MAR. 8-11	BIG 12 CHAMPIONSHIP <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PHIL KNIGHT LEGACY — PORTLAND, OR <sup>2</sup>BIG 12/BIG EAST CHALLENGE <sup>3</sup>BIG 12/SEC CHALLENGE <sup>4</sup>T-MOBILE CENTER — KANSAS CITY, MO

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# WEST VIRGINIA WOMEN'S BASKETBALL 2022-23 SCHEDULE



NOV. 10	USC UPSTATE
NOV. 17	WINTHROP
NOV. 20	APPALACHIAN STATE
NOV. 24	vs. CENTRAL MICHIGAN <sup>1</sup>
NOV. 25	vs. NC STATE <sup>1</sup>
NOV. 30	NC CENTRAL
DEC. 3	DELAWARE STATE
DEC. 8	ROBERT MORRIS
DEC. 11	at PENN STATE
DEC. 20	vs. GEORGIA <sup>2</sup>
DEC. 21	vs. MIAMI (OH) <sup>2</sup>
DEC. 31	OKLAHOMA
JAN. 4	at IOWA STATE
JAN. 7	at KANSAS STATE
JAN. 10	TCU
JAN. 15	BAYLOR
JAN. 18	at KANSAS
JAN. 21	TEXAS TECH
JAN. 28	at TCU
FEB. 1	TEXAS
FEB. 4	at OKLAHOMA
FEB. 7	at OKLAHOMA STATE
FEB. 11	IOWA STATE
FEB. 15	KANSAS
FEB. 19	at TEXAS
FEB. 22	at TEXAS TECH
FEB. 25	KANSAS STATE
MAR. 1	OKLAHOMA STATE
MAR. 4	at BAYLOR
MAR. 9-12	BIG 12 CHAMPIONSHIP <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>PHIL KNIGHT LEGACY — PORTLAND, OR <sup>2</sup>BIG 12/BIG EAST CHALLENGE <sup>3</sup>BIG 12/SEC CHALLENGE <sup>4</sup>T-MOBILE CENTER — KANSAS CITY, MO

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