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UA12/2/1 Sun Belt Tournament Preview

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Sun Belt Tournament Preview

It's here . . .
Old Dominion's Garrick Davis tries to avoid charging into Ray Swogger during the Tops' 94-53 win.

Arnold weary of favorite's title

- Here are the facts working in Western's favor as it heads into the Sun Belt Tournament.
- The Tops finished 12-2 in conference play.
- They've held their Sun Belt opponents to under 40 percent shooting while shooting over 50 percent.
- Tellis Frank and Kamard Johnson are averaging 37 points and 16 rebounds in Sun Belt games.
- The tournament is in Diddle Arena after being held in Birmingham, Ala., three of the last four years.
- The Tops are undefeated at home against Sun Belt opponents, and no Sun Belt opponent has come within 10 points of Western in Diddle.
- Clarence Martin, who has been out with back spasms, is expected to be at full strength for the tournament.
- And even if he isn't, Bryan Asberry has filled in with 34 points and grabbed 26 rebounds in Western's

Western

Kentucky

last three games

But, as is his way, Coach Murray Arnold says not to wager your worldly possessions in the hopes of Tops winning their third championship in Diddle Arena this season.

"In order to win, we're going to have to beat at least two teams for the third time this season," the first-year coach said. "It's very tough to beat someone three times."

Western is paired with Old Dominion, 1-8 and 6-21 overall, in the first round. If the Tops win, they will play the winner of the Virginia Commonwealth-UNCC game.

There are two teams Western hasn't beaten twice already—Jacksonville and Alabama-Birmingham. Western lost to the Dolphins in Jacksonville, 89-71, but the Tops avenged that loss with a 87-74 stinger in Diddle for the Sun Belt regular-season championship.

And the Tops blistered UAB 85-67 in Diddle Arena on Jan. 10, but then lost to the Blazers 86-63 last Saturday night in Birmingham.

"We have to be emotionally ready to play hard," Arnold said. "Old Dominion beat Maryland of the Atlantic Coast Conference and played Alabama-Birmingham to a two-point game.

The Tops' guards come into the tournament hot. Brett McNeal stepped in for the graduated Billy Gordon and scored Gordon's 1985-86 average —14 points.

James McNary set Western's all-time men's record for career assists this season. He has 193 assists.

—Joe Medley
Third Jacksonville-Western battle may decide title

Jacksonville’s NCAA Tournament hopes are on the line and it will take more than a mere win to get the Dolphins to the NIT. The Buffaloes are also in the thick of things and a victory by either team could land them a spot in the NIT.

But that may not be enough.

It could take a third meeting for the Sun Belt Conference Tournament crown to be decided.

And after the last game, an 87-74 win by the Topper Feb. 16, Dolphin coach Bob Wenzel said about it: “I don’t think anybody sees it that way.”

Wenzel said the win “should have” something to do with the game. But he was about to reveal any new strategies.

“Yeah, I don’t think anybody sees it that way,” Wenzel said. “I have something tricky up my sleeve for them.”

When Jacksonville came north to face Sun Belt Conference-leading Western two weeks ago, it had a chance to steal the regular-season title.

With a win, Jacksonville and Western would have both had 11-2 records. But the Dolphins would have taken the crown on the strength of its 36-71 win over the Topps in January.

Western spoiled the upset bid and walked away with the regular-season title.

But Wenzel doesn’t mind returning to the scene of the crime that never happened.

“It will be our second game there in two weeks but that should help us to get there,” he said. “We don’t have a chance to play against WKU’s fans so much unless we get to the championship.”

Two of the chief reasons Jacksonville may get another shot at Western are the Dolphins’ two potential All-American forwards.

Seniors Ronnie Murphy and Danny Pearson combine for almost 40 points and 15 rebounds an outing.

“We are a good team, so it’s versatility is so important because both can play inside and outside whatever the situation may warrant,” Wenzel said.

The 6-4 Murphy leads the conference in scoring with 21 points per game and also pulls off rebounds a contest.

Murphy has as much talent as anyone in this year’s NCAA draft, said Marty Blake, National Basketball Association chief scout.

“Potentially, he can play three positions in the NBA and that makes him very unique,” Blake said.

Murphy is a three-time All-Sun Belt selection and is the only freshman to ever be named first-team All-SBC.

“Murphy is a terrific athlete but much more importantly, a skilled player and a competitor,” Wenzel said. “He always has a crunch time.”

He is third in the conference in three-point shooting percentage and second in steals.

At the other forward spot, Pearson is the Sun Belt’s fourth-leading scorer (15.8) and is third in rebounding (7.8).

“The Blue Collar All-American,” as the Jacksonville press guide puts him, is second in three-point shooting and third in free throw percentage in the conference.

“Danny Pearson is an exceptional shooter and has a very good shot at professional ball,” Blake said. “He’s a hard-nosed, intelligent player who has come along way.”

Teams who have tried to key on him haven’t had any success,” Wenzel said.

We lost some games early on but since Christmas we are 11-4. And two of those losses came when our third leading scorer, Troy Mundine, was out. Mundine was sidelined with a sprained ankle.

Between the high powered for words is 6-7 center Willie McAllister who leads the conference in rebounding with 8.3 boards a game and in field-goal accuracy at 57.6 percent.

Wenzel alternates sophomore Pat Laguerre and freshman Tyron Boykin at point guard. Between them they average 10.5 points and five assists per game.

Wenzel said winning the conference tournament last year will help his team this year.

“I think it would help the conference players that played last year,” Wenzel said. “It helps is that they can win three games in three days in an adverse situation in adverse. I mean playing on a foreign court in a short time period.”

Wenzel said that regardless of his team’s showing in the tournament he still expects to get an NCAA bid again.

I think Western and Jacksonville will get in definitely. I think they will get in the tournament,” Wenzel said.

“I don’t believe that tonight is as strong as we were last year but I do say this without saying whether it is or not,” Wenzel replied. The exception of the Big Ten.

———ERIC WOEHLER

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**SUNDAY**

Sun Belt Brunch
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Kathy Forster/Spain

James McNairy battles Jacksonville’s Tyrone Boykin for a driving shot.
Millings's return means 49ers may be darkhorse

It's not easy for a team to lose its leading scorer and rebounder before going through most of its conference schedule, but ask Coach Jeff Mullins.

North Carolina Charlotte faced 10 Sun Belt Conference opponents with out Michael Millings, the league's top returning scorer and rebounder from last year. "We just weren't that good of a ballclub without Michael," Mullins said.

But with Millings, the 6-7 49ers are considered a darkhorse for the tournament. "UNCC with Milling back could slip up on some people," Jacksonville coach Bob Wenzel said.

"He's such a super talent," Mullins said as he sees the tournament consisting of about two teams who are capable of winning it and six other darkhorses. "It depends on who's playing well," he said.

"We still have to get Mike in sync with the rest of the team," Mullins said. "He wasn't playing well." Millings, a 6-7 forward, transferred to UNCC last year after playing two years at Missouri Area Junior College in Missouri.

In his first year with the 49ers, the senior scored 19.6 points per game and pulled away 7.7 rebounds a contest. The Sun Belt coaches named him junior of the year in the conference. Milling got off to the same start this season — averaging 12.7 points and 6.9 rebounds. But on Dec. 25, he went down with a broken foot and missed the next 13 games.

UNCC lost seven of those games before Milling returned to the lineup against Western on Feb. 8. He came off the bench to score 14 points.

Now with his top rebounder back, Millings is more confident coming into the tournament.

"Rebounding has been the key for our basketball team from the start of the season," Mullins said. "That's where most of Mike's impact will be felt."

"If we hold our own rebounding — not necessarily outrebound our opponent — then we can be a pretty good basketball team."

Helping on the rebounding end is Ronnie Bellamy, a 6-7 junior forward.

Senior Keith Williams fills the point guard spot. He leads the 49ers in both assists and steals.

While Millings is more confident with his players healthy, the second-year coach knows that the success he enjoyed as a player is yet to come for his team.

Mullins was named Kentucky's "Mr. Basketball" in 1966 at Lafayette High School in Lexington. He went to Duke University and played on the gold medal-winning 1964 Olympic squad.

Mullins spent 12 years in professional basketball and reached the pinnacle of his career in 1975, when his Golden State Warriors won the NBA title.

Mullins has been unable to achieve an NCAA title. "The NCAA title is just too elusive, it's unrealistic for a coach to make it his goal," he said. "Most coaches look just to be one of the 64 teams in the tournament."

"I'd be wrong to say I don't think about it. I don't think about it. But that's a long way off for our basketball team."

—ERIC WOEHLER

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Team names make Sun Belt a zoo

Did you ever wonder why a university would call itself the Blazers, Tigers, or Hilltoppers? Well, read on to impress trivia buffs.

Jacksonville Dolphins

Jacksonville picked "Dolphins" about 1947 after a poll of students. "Green Raiders," "Buccaneers," "Jugannauts," and "Green Dragons" were also among the choices.

"Dolphins can be seen swimming up the St. John's River, which runs adjacent to the university," said Joe Lizzo, sports information director.

"You can still see them at particular times during the year.

The official mascot for the Dolphins is JUG, a robot. He has been sidelined for the last two years because of mechanical problems, making only six appearances.

Joe Rhoads of the Dallas Morning News, who traveled all over the country scouting the symbols, voted the "strange looking" Lizzo said. "He calls them 'Bloobs' and I call them 'Fish Out of Water.'

South Alabama Jaguars

South Alabama students took a vote in 1965 — two years after the university was organized — and chose "Jaguars" for their nickname.

"In 1970, we did have a live jaguar for several months, but it was sick and it was difficult to keep its cage clean," said Al Schultz, sports information director.

So in 1978 another student poll was taken and the new mascot was named "South." But "South Paw" may not make an appearance at the Sun Belt Tournament. He has been chosen as a finalist for the National Collegiate Mascot Competition Feb. 27 through March 7 at Sea World in Orlando, Fla.

"He is really exciting when he does his stripes like balloons and the whole bit," Schultz said.

South Florida Bulls

In 1962, students at South Florida voted and chose "Golden Brahma," over "Buccaneers" and "Pirates.

But the name was then shortened to "Brahams." When in the late 1970s, it was shortened again to "Bulls."

All of these are basically in the same family of animals.

Brahams were brought to the Tampa area because they seemed to adapt to the climate better than most cattle did — and for a while were the area's main cattle.

The official name of the team is "Golden Brahmans," but it is usually referred to as "Bulls."

South Florida boosts the only "Brahams" name of any college or university in the country.

North Carolina Charlotte 49ers

"He just does obnoxious chicken stuff.

Old Dominion Monarchs

The early athletic team of the New England Division of the College of William and Mary (Old Dominion was formerly called) was known as "Monarchs," because King William III and Queen Mary II ruled England when William and Mary was founded in 1603.

The mascot is a silver and dark blue crown wearing a golden crown on his head, said Carel Hudson, Jr., sports information director.

Western Kentucky Hilltoppers

"The origin of Virginia Commonwealth's nickname — 'Rams' — is a mystery to university officials. VCU was formerly Richmond Professional Institute, primarily an arts school, but in 1968 the Virginia General Assembly voted to merge the school with the Medical School of Virginia, creating Virginia Commonwealth.

Somewhere along the way, it became known as the 'Rams.' University officials are puzzled by the origin of the name because there are no rams in Richmond or in the mountains.

"So it appears," said Richmond News Leader sports writer Fred Jetter, "that the name 'Rams' was just created out of the air one day, probably because someone liked it."

— ERIC THORNE
One of the first steps you can take on the road to good health is an easy one. It's called walking.

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So why not get started? It's a journey that could bring you good health for a lifetime.
A flower can blossom in the desert

When he was 4 years old, Bryan Ashby was battling leukemia in the midst of his first year of school. Bryan, a star baseball player at the University of Kansas, and his father, John, were told that his disease was terminal and that he would not live long enough to complete high school.

"I had a basket ball tournament," Bryan said. "I don't know how many years ago, but I had to go to the hospital because of my leukemia. I remember it was a very hard time for my family and I."

Bryan's parents, John and Nancy, were determined to give their son the best possible care. They traveled to Chicago to meet with the doctors, who told them that Bryan had a chance to live longer if he could be treated with a new experimental drug.

"It was a very hard time for my family," John said. "We had to make a decision to give him the drug or not."

Bryan received the drug and his leukemia went into remission. He was able to continue his education and to pursue his dream of playing baseball.

"I think it's an incredible story," John said. "Bryan and his mother and father did everything they could to give him the best possible care.

A story about Bryan's journey to the University of Kansas and his fight against leukemia is available on our website.
Q & A
Commissioner Vic Bubas

Six schools met in Atlanta in August of 1976 to form a new conference. North Carolina, Charlotte, Jacksonville, New Orleans, Georgia State, South Alabama and South Florida became the Sun Belt Conference's charter members. Two months later, Vic Bubas was named the league's first commissioner.

Bubas had coached basketball at Duke from 1958-69 where his teams went to the NCAA Final Four three times and won four Atlantic Coast Conference titles. He was an administrator at Duke before becoming Sun Belt commissioner.

The Gary, Ind. native has been a part of the NCAA Division I Basketball Committee for the past six years. He was chairman of that committee during the 1984-85 season.

Bubas was largely responsible for introducing the 45-second shot clock to college basketball. The Sun Belt experimented with the shot clock in 1978-79 years before it was adopted in the NCAA. Last year, he was named to the NCAA Council.

Now on the 10th anniversary the tournament that determined the league's automatic NCAA bid, Bubas can watch the three-day event that league and Western officials hope will be the best ever.

Bubas was interviewed by staff writer Eric Woehler.

Q: Four of the eight teams made the NCAA Tournament last year. Do you see that as a tribute to the conference and do you believe the NCAA is beginning to respect the conference more?
A: Yes, it was a tribute. This was one of the highlights of the conference's history. Four Western teams, Old Dominion, Jacksonville and Alabama-Birmingham made the tournament and then three advanced into the second round. It just proves the Conference has a growing respect for the Sun Belt Conference.

Q: How many do you think are going this year?
A: It's hard to say. I think there are three teams that will get strong consideration. I would think Western is on the Out. Jacksonville's chances are awfully good. And then I think UAB will get a look.

There is so much parity in college basketball today that there are going to be teams with 12 and 10 losses that go on to be very difficult to guess. But I think we'll all be right.

Q: How did the Sun Belt become such a basketball power in such short a time?
A: When we started out we had some very good coaches, and we continued to keep good coaches throughout the years. We also have some teams with very good tradition. Also, we haven't played basketball since the very beginning. That can be either a plus or a minus, but in our case it seems to have been a plus. It has made us known as a basketball conference and now we're going to be a good basketball team almost any other conference.

Q: What future does the Sun Belt Conference have?
A: It all starts with recruiting and I think we're doing a good job. You know, we have a difficult time recruiting because we have to compete with the larger state schools. But we have excellent coaches who know how to recruit well.

Q: What are the prospects for expansion?
A: I don't see anyone joining very soon — we're happy where we are — right now. We're not really looking for anyone. If a team wants in, they must fill out a formal request. In that case, we would review it. But I don't see anyone coming in for a few years at least.
South Alabama's Jeff Hodge drives to the basket as Western's James McNary and Bret McNeal try to defend. The Tops blew out the Jaguars, 85-70, on Feb. 14.

South Alabama leads the conference in scoring, field goal percentage and is second in three-point accuracy.

But its record is a mediocre 14-13 because the Jaguars are last in overall defense and second to last in field-goal defense.

"We shoot the ball well and we have some talented people out front," Coach Mike Hanks said. "But we are young, don't have a lot of size, and we are lacking depth."

The Jaguars average 89 points a game and shoot 49 percent from the field, but they give up 77 points a game and let their opponents hit 50 percent.

Last season none of the Jaguar starters had worn USA uniform.

Guards Jeff Hodge and Junie Lewis hold down the backcourt and Rodney Butts, John Jimmerson and center Terrance Ingram make up the front line.

"For us to do well, we need to shoot the ball very, very well. We have a good shooting percentage and get some big performances from individual players," Hanks said.

Hodge, a 6-3 senior and the Jaguars' playmaker, averages 10 points per game and shoots 43 percent from three-point range. He nails 88 percent of his free throws, notches four assists and 1.7 steals per game. His stats are good enough to rank him eighth in the Sun Belt.

"Hodge is one of the best players in the conference," Hanks said. "And his stats speak for that."

Junie Lewis, 6-3 sophomore, is just ahead of Hodge in scoring with a 19-3 average.

Sharing time with Lewis and Hodge is 6-1 sophomore guard Darrell Faulkner. Faulkner is fourth in the conference in assists, dishing out 4.7 assist per game. For us to do well, we need to shoot, Ingram is filling in for starting center Alan Kortokrax who broke his hand two weeks ago against Alabama-Birmingham. Kortokrax is doubtful for the tournament.

Butts, the 6-7, 225 pound senior, is tenth in the league in rebounding. He grabs 7 boards a game. He is also the second leading scorer in the conference. Heading toward the Sun Belt Tournament, Hanks said he's taking things slowly and doing "business as usual."

"The Jaguars will battle Alabama-Birmingham, who they have lost twice to, in the last two weeks."

—Erics Thorne
Pollio unhappy about tourney site

**Virginia Commonwealth**

a suffering inside game. Feozell burned the Dolphins for nine points and 14 rebounds.

The Rams are led by 6-9 junior Phil Stimmie. He's ranked seventh in the conference in rebounding (7.64) and fourth in shooting percentage (.528).

Stimmie averages about 14 points a game. Stimmie scored 16 points against Western in Diddle Arena on Jan. 17 and at VCU on Jan. 12.

"He's a great all-around ball player," Pollio said. "There are a lot of things he does well, and he means a lot to our team."

Pete Strayhorn, a 6-6 senior, joins Stimmie in the forward position. Guards Bruce Allen, a 5-11 senior, and 6-2 sophomore Derrick McGhee round out the starting lineup.

Allen was named Sun Belt player of the week for the week of Feb. 13. He tallied 20 points in the win over Jacksonville and 17 in a Feb. 14 win over Old Dominion.

The Rams will play UNCC in the first round of the tournament, and the winner of that game plays the winner of Western and Old Dominion.

Pollio said Virginia Commonwealth and the rest of the league are "trying for second place" in the tourney.

"We're just worried about getting past the first round," he said. "We'll have some things we're going to try against Western, but we have to win that first game."

*---JOE MEDLEY---*

Tops seeking first finals appearance

The Sun Belt Tournament has been good to every team except Western.

The host Hilltoppers will be shooting for their first appearance in what will be the 11th championship game. Every other conference team has played in a tournament final.

This will be the first Sun Belt Tournament played in Bowling Green since Western joined the conference in March 1982.

UAB and Virginia Commonwealth have captured three Sun Belt championships. Jacksonville surged to its second conference title with its victory last year.

Tournament hosts have advanced to the championship game six times in the history of the event, including each of the past four years.

The Sun Belt Conference has sent 19 teams to the NCAA playoffs and nine to the National Invitational Tournament. In each of the past four years, four Sun Belt teams have participated in postseason play.

The Sun Belt Conference is one of 36 conferences that receives an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament. The remaining slots in the 64-team field are made up of at-large selections determined by the NCAA Division I Basketball Committee.

The Sun Belt TV Network will broadcast all seven Sun Belt tournament games. ESPN will carry the championship.
Early loss could break NCAA tourney streak

- Nagging injuries and losing four players to graduation forced Alabama-Birmingham to regroup this season.

The 16-10 Blazers had a winning streak of four games and then a losing streak of three. But the regular season ended on a high note as the Blazers upset conference champion Western 86-75 on national television.

Yet the up-and-down season has everyone wondering if UAB will return to the NCAA Tournament for the seventh straight year.

UAB finished at 25-11 last year, but Coach Gene Bartow said with the four players — Jerome Johnson, Anthony Gordon and Steve Mitchell — gone, his returning players are playing a little tougher.

Since 64 teams will be involved in the NCAA tourney, Bartow said he thinks his team might still make the field.

"I'm sure a lot of teams with 10 or 11 losses will make it," he said. "We're not out of the picture yet."

"But if we get beat in the first round (of the Sun Belt Tournament), the odds go down greatly," he said.

"Whatever happens, I think we'll be in a position for the NIT (National Invitational Tournament)."

Alabama-Birmingham, 10-4 in the conference, has had a bumpy season. The Blazers lost three games from Feb. 9 to Feb. 14 to DePauw, North Carolina Charlotte and South Florida.

In those losses, UAB shot less than 40 percent from the field. Six of the Blazers' 10 setbacks have been games in which they shot less than 60 percent.

"DePaul is very good," NC Charlotte may be playing as good as anybody and South Florida came in and beat us," Bartow said. "That can happen. We hope we can regroup and be ready to play well."

"Even if we play well, we still might not win any games in the tournament," he said. "But we feel ready."

UAB is fourth in the league in scoring at 75.5 percent. Tracy Foster, a 6-4 senior, is fifth in individual scoring at 17.3 points a game.

Besides Foster, the Blazers are led by James Ponder, a 6-1 senior. Ponder is averaging about 16 points a game in conference outings and 15.1 overall.

The guards — Foster and Ponder — "have also had great years," Bartow said.

Bartow said the frontcourt strength of Eddie Collins (6-8 junior), Reginald Turner (6-8 sophomore) and Garry Herbst (6-7 freshman) "is playing pretty well now."

"We're excited about this stage of the season," Bartow said. "We haven't been healthy all this year, but I think we'll make a good showing in some games." —LYNN HOPENES

Young rebuilding again; Monarchs can't rebound

-Eleven years ago, Tom Young directed Rutgers to a 31-2 record and NCAA Final Four appearance.

A year later, he went through a rebuilding season with the Scarlet Knights and settled with an 18-12 mark and National Invitational Tournament appearance.

Last year, in his first season at Old Dominion, Young was named co-Sun Belt Conference Coach of the Year, along with former Western coach Clem Haskins, after leading the Monarchs to the league's regular season crown, an NCAA appearance and a 23-8 record.

But this year, in another rebuilding season, Young will settle with much less than he did a decade ago.

After five seniors graduated a year ago, Old Dominion has suffered its first losing season in 20 years. The team, which last year lived in the penthouse of a conference that boasted four NCAA tourney participants, now resides in the basement — last place with a 6-15 overall record and 1-12 in the conference.

While the 51-year-old coach won't be getting any postseason laurels this year, he said brighter days are ahead for the Monarchs.

"I think it's probably a two-year process," Young said. "Once those players get older, we'll begin to turn it around."

One player that boosts Young's optimism is freshman Anthony Carver, a 6-foot-7 forward.

Carver leads the Monarchs in scoring with 13.3 points per game and in rebounding with 7.1. He had a personal best of 12 rebounds against

Alabama-Birmingham guard Tracy Foster glides to the basket for a layup as Western's James McNary tries to defend. Western won the game, 85-67, but dropped its 6-7 record at UAB Saturday.

Young rebuilding again; Monarchs can't rebound

Old Dominion

Virginia Commonwealth Feb. 14
Carver came out of Northeastern High School in Elizabeth City, N.C., after being nominated to the McDonald's All-American team and named All-State.

He chose Old Dominion over North Carolina State, Wake Forest, North Carolina Charlotte, Davidson and Hartford.

"Old Dominion is only an hour away from home and it gives my family and friends a chance to follow my career," Carver said.

"He's only scratching the surface on what he can do," Young said. "How far he can go depends on how hard he will work. But I think he'll work hard. He's got a lot better."

Co-captain Frank Smith, a 6-0 junior guard, became the Sun Belt's all-time assist leader this season, passing former Alabama-Birmingham guard Steve Mitchell to date.

Young said the rebuilding season hasn't been easy for him to swallow, but he said he thinks he's handled it better than many would suspect.

"In 27 years, I've never had a season like this," Young said. "But I'm not as bothered by it as much because I take it one game at a time. It hasn't been quite as frustrating as many would think."

"Obviously, I'm not ready to say, 'I hate coaching,'" Young said.

-ERIK WOHLER
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Western's Clarence Martin tries to shoot over South Alabama's Rodney Butts during Western's 65-70 win on Feb. 14. Martin has missed Western's last three games because of back spasms, but he has been practicing this week and is expected to be ready for Western's first-round bout with Old Dominion on 8 p.m. Thursday.

Streaking

Winning or losing, Bulls are consistent

The University of South Florida may need to change its name to "streakers" after the season they've had. The Bulls have had a losing streak of eight games and winning streaks of two and three games.

A difficult schedule, which includes losses to Florida, Marquette and DePaul, can be partly blamed.

The Bulls, 8-18 enter tournament play with two straight losses — to Alabama and Birmingham, 67-56, and to South Alabama last Saturday night, 63-60.

South Florida will take on Jacksonville, a team it has had little success against this year. The Bulls lost 65-56 at Jacksonville and 94-85 in Tampa.

Coach Bobby Paschal said the Bulls haven't been able to win close games and put a complete game together.

"It's a combination of playing a lot of people who may be just a little better than we are," he said. "We've been inconsistent on offense and hit these cold spells where we just can't score."

The Bulls are ranked last in the conference in scoring, 60 points a game; field-goal shooting, 43 percent; and three-point shooting, 26 percent.

"We are a pretty good defensive team, but our offense isn't too good," Paschal said.

Paschal likes to press and run the man-to-man defense.

"The kids are used to the slower pace," said USF's first-year coach. "But I think they have learned when to and when not to take that shot on the breakaway."

The break-aways are usually led by the Bulls' main offensive cog, guard Arthur Caldwell, a 6-3 junior.

He ranks second in the conference in free-throw percentage, 85.7 and assists 7.9 a game against UAB he broke USF's single-season assist record and now has 189 assists this season.

He averages 8.4 points and four rebounds a game.

At the other guard spot is 6-5 senior Vince Sanford.147 points, 24 rebounds.

The Bulls center Doug Wallace, a 6-8 senior, is the top scorer and rebounder with 13 points and 7.5 rebounds a game (fifth in the conference). He is fourth in the conference in free throws with 17 blocks, 9 blocks a game.

He has really come along since we asked him to be more physical and put up more. Paschal said.

The Bulls second-leading scorer comes off the bench. Senior 6-6 forward Randy Brantley puts in 10 points and has four rebounds a game.

"He is a very good shooter who plays very aggressively and has improved defensively," Paschal said.

Forward Darrell Coleman, 6-7, adds 6.6 points and 5.4 rebounds a game.

The other forward is 6-6 junior Keith Jordan, who gets 11 points and 4.9 rebounds a game.

And 6-2 guard Greg Hollingsworth chimps in 7 points a game.

Paschal admitted that his team is an underdog, "but we are not that bad that we can't beat somebody. We are not consistently bad, but inconsistent and let a few games get away from us."

"We just can't let (Ronnie) Murphy and (Danny) Pearson take us apart like they did before," Paschal said.

—ERIC THORNE

Tournament pairings

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RESTAURANT & BAR

Patrick's wishes to congratulate Western's Hilltoppers on their first ever Sunbelt Conference Championship!

Appetizers

- Caesar salad: $2.50
- Chowder royale: $3.50
- Pizza du jour: $3.95
- Appetizer salad bar: $3.95
- House salad: $1.50

Sandwiches

- Prime rib sandwich: $5.95
- Monterey chicken: $4.95
- Crab melt: $5.95
- Hot brown: $4.95
- Patrick's burger: $5.95

Entrees

- Prime rib: $11.95
- Patrick's filet: $15.95
- Ribeye steak: $11.60
- Tempura shrimp: $9.50
- Seafood du jour: $11.95
- Pasta du jour: $11.95
- Three salad plate: $9.35
- Marinated chicken: $10.95

Wine

- Inglenook chablis
- Robert Mondavi table white
- Robert Mondavi table red
- Keller-Geister liebfraumilch

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