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GO BIG

Lady Bears fight to defend their NCAA title



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Got game?

Sims leads team on, off court

BY PHILLIP ERICKSEN
REPORTER

Compared to her teammates, junior guard Odyssey Sims is small, but that doesn't mean her game is.

Standing at 5 feet 8 inches, the All-American has led the Lady Bears to another successful season. As the top-ranked team in the nation, the Lady Bears charge into the Big 12 and NCAA tournaments. Personal accolades are also on the way for her.

Sims is a finalist for the Nancy Lieberman Award, which is given to the best point guard in the nation. She has averaged 12.2 points and 5.8 assists per game this season.

"It's exciting," Sims said. "I was nominated last year I think, so hopefully I'll just keep playing and maybe I'll win. That's my biggest goal."

A top high school recruit from MacArthur High School in Irving, Sims decided on a college career at Baylor because of its dominant program and proximity to home. The process was stressful for her, but she said she knows she made the right decision when she chose to play for head coach Kim Mulkey.



She plays

on a team featuring one of the greatest women's college basketball players of all time: senior center Brittney Griner. Sims embraces this opportunity of having such a resource at her availability on the court. "From the beginning of the season until now, their chemistry and trust in each other has continued to grow by a game-by-game basis," associate head coach Bill Brock said. "They can read each other without looking at one another. Odyssey knows where Brittney wants the basketball, and Brittney can tell where Odyssey wants the outlet passes every time there's a defensive rebound. They work so well together."

Both players were named to the All-Big 12 First Team and the Big 12 All-Defensive Team.

"It's just a joy to watch those two play together and show their skills on the floor," Brock said.

Sims embraces her unique role on the team as a leader and role model for the other players as well. Freshman guard Alexis Prince said she looks up to Sims and appreciates her guidance both on and off the court.

"She's a good teammate," Prince said. "Being the point guard, she's a good leader. She helps you when you need help with anything."

This translates into the Lady Bears' offense, where distributing the ball through Sims is key to success.

"I take on a big role," Sims said. "To lead the team, be the floor general on the court, and take control when Coach Mulkey can't call plays when it's down to the wire."

The Lady Bears (29-1) seem to be constantly in rhythm while dominating at both ends of the court. The opportunity to complete their ultimate goal of winning another national championship looms as they are projected to be the top overall seed in the NCAA Tournament.

Sims maintains that the team is always trying to improve through drills and working on fundamentals in practice.

"We take it one day at a time," Sims said. "We're not focusing on staying perfect because you can't be perfect."

After a historic, undefeated season last year that ended in a national championship, the Lady Bears have continued their dominance since a two-point loss to Stanford early in the season. They quickly

"We take it one day at a time. We're not focusing on staying perfect because you can't be perfect."

Odyssey Sims | Lady Bears point guard

overcame that loss and continued on a 27-game win streak.

Sims said she has a wide range of emotions before a big game, especially one deep in the NCAA Tournament against a tough opponent such as Stanford or Connecticut.

Though she admits to being nervous before these games, her mindset is always focused, excited and hyped.

Sims said she gains this enthusiasm from a number of different inspirations.

"It's a little bit of everyone I guess," Sims said. "Some days it can be my coaches, some days it can be my momma, some days I can motivate myself."

While Griner's dominant plays make most of the headlines for Lady Bears basketball, Sims' consistency on the court and willingness to accept the team's philosophy of quickly moving the ball down the court is a huge factor in the team's success, according to Brock.

"Odyssey Sims is the quarterback of our basketball team," Brock said. "She is the one who directs traffic in all situations for us, whether it be in the fast break or the half-court set. We are always looking for the opportunity to run more and get more easy baskets in transition."

As the postseason begins, Coach Brock said he realizes teams will be looking to slow the pace of



the game. Fortunately, Sims can also run the Bears' slower half-court offense with ease.

As six seniors leave the team at the conclusion of this season, an even bigger spotlight will be created for her during her senior season.

"With these six seniors leaving you will probably see us being able to run more scoring options for our perimeter players than we have in the past," Brock said.

Moving forward into the postseason, the Lady Bears continue to feed off the energy and leadership of Sims and her chemistry with the rest of the team.

After all of the praise and accolades, Sims is confident in her answer of who can win a game of one-on-one between her and Griner. "Me."

Baylor must win

BY GREG DEVRIES
SPORTS EDITOR

SPORTS TAKE

Anyone that has been to a Baylor Lady Bears basketball game has seen the video that plays before player introductions. Head coach Kim Mulkey stands before her players and talks about the expectation that this team will repeat as National Champions.

Those are some pretty lofty expectations, but that's where this team is. If the Lady Bears don't win the National Championship, then this season has been a failure. It may be harsh. It may even be unfair, but it only speaks to how much this team has accomplished and how talented it is. Big 12 regular-season championships and Big 12 Tournament championships are nice, but for Mulkey and the Lady Bears, those trophies may as well be paperweights when the real goal is a National Championship.

The senior class consisting of center Brittney Griner, guard Kimetria Hayden, guard Jordan Madden, forward Brooklyn Pope and forward Destiny Williams has earned this expectation. Back-to-back National Championships will be the best way to end the Griner Era in Lady Bears basketball history.

Over the last three seasons, the Lady Bears are 106-4. This run has included three Big 12 Championships, an Elite Eight appearance, and most importantly, a National Championship.

This recent success has put the Lady Bears in a select group of teams that have gone into seasons with championship-or-bust mentalities.

Going into the Women's NCAA Tournament, there are five 30-win teams in the top 10: Baylor, Notre Dame, Connecticut, Stanford and Duke. While Duke has had seven consecutive 30-win seasons, the Blue Devils have

yet to win it all. Stanford's recent history is

rid-d led with deep tournament runs, but its last National Championship came in the early 1990s. Notre Dame has had a lot of talent come through its program,

but its last National Title was in 2001.

Baylor and UConn are set apart, however.

UConn has won six National Championships since the millennium, including five in a row from 2007-2011. The Huskies' head coach, Geno Auriemma, has a winning percentage north of .860 and will go down as one of the best women's basketball coaches of all time. Of the six women's basketball players to win an NCAA Title, a WNBA title, a World Championship and an Olympic Gold Medal in women's basketball, four are former Connecticut Huskies.

While Baylor doesn't have the reign of dominance that UConn can claim, the Lady Bears do have Griner. Her size and skillset make her a transcendent figure that reaches beyond the realm of women's basketball. UConn players like Sue Bird, Swin Cash, Kara Wolters and Diana Taurasi couldn't reach this. In fact, only the most informed sports fans even know who these accomplished athletes are. If she is able to stay healthy throughout her career, Griner will be women's basketball's Michael Jordan, Wayne Gretzky, Babe Ruth, or Usain Bolt.

Griner is the reason that about 9,100 people show up to Baylor women's basketball games. To put this in perspective, the men's team only averages just more than 7,100 fans per game.

She is also the reason that the bar is set so high this year. Griner and the Lady Bears have pushed this program into elite company that expects National Championships, not tournament appearances.

The road to the Final Four starts with a first-round game against Prairie View, but Baylor fans know that the true obstacles are found in the later rounds. Stanford, the only team to beat the Lady Bears in the last two years, is a possible Final Four opponent for Baylor.

The Lady Bears lost to Stanford 71-69 in the third game of the season. Junior guard Odyssey Sims played just four minutes in the game before leaving with a strained hamstring.

Despite losing the first meeting, Baylor should still expect to win. This team plays on another level, and if the Lady Bears don't hoist the National Championship trophy in New Orleans, then we will all be scratching our heads wondering what happened.

Lady Bears take home third consecutive Big 12 championship

BY PARMIDA SCHAHHOSSEINI
SPORTS WRITER

The No. 1 Lady Bears put on a show on March 9-11, at the Big 12 Tournament as they became the only team in the Big 12 to win the championship for three consecutive years.

The Lady Bears displayed why they are the No. 1 team in the nation, whether it was by blowing a team out, making shots in the clutch or responding every time an opponent tried to come back into the game.

Three Baylor players were named to the Big 12 All-Tournament team: senior post Brittney Griner, senior forward Destiny Williams and junior guard Odyssey Sims. Griner was also named most outstanding player in the tournament.

Baylor defeated Kansas State in an 80-47 blowout in the quarterfinals. Baylor played Kansas State six days prior that match and it was a close game with Kansas State hitting 15 3-point jumpers to keep the game within reach. However, Baylor pulled away in the second half after making defensive adjustments.

The Lady Bears had that game in the back of their minds and it showed. Baylor jumped out to a 31-6 lead as it dominated both ends of the floor. Baylor put pressure on Kansas State by disrupting its offense and forcing it to hold on to the ball. Baylor's defense disrupted Kansas State's 3-point shooting by not allowing the Wildcats to setup any screens. Kansas State didn't reach a double-digit score until the 5:37 mark as Baylor prevented the Wildcats from spreading the floor.

Kansas State did make halftime adjustments to get its offense going, such as taking higher percent-

age shots, but the gap was too much to overcome. Baylor continued to score because the Kansas State defense didn't have any answers for the Lady Bears offense.

"I'm proud of how we competed in the second half," Kansas State head coach Deb Patterson said. "I thought we continued to fight hard, just didn't have enough playmaking today to be able to get the job done."

Kansas State guard Brittany Chambers was the only Kansas State player to score in double figures with 21, but there was a drop-off with the remaining players. Kansas State was held to 29.1 percent shooting.

"I thought we played with a lot of energy," Williams said. "I thought we knocked down the shots that were given to us. I thought we played smart on offense and defense, looked for the open person."

The semifinals were much more dramatic as Oklahoma State was looking to upset Baylor for a chance for the title. However, Baylor defeated Oklahoma State 77-69 after senior guard Jordan Madden hit a clutch 3-point shot after Oklahoma State cut Baylor's lead to three.

"There are no moral victories," head coach Kim Mulkey said. "You either won or you lost. We could have very easily lost today. Compliment Oklahoma State, but they still lost. Jim Littell is not going to come in here and be all excited. Those kids played hard for him today. They could have very easily won and we could have very easily lost."

Baylor had a season-high 24 turnovers, including 18 in the second half. Oklahoma State not only managed a high number of steals, but it forced Baylor into some un-



No. 1 guard Kimetria Hayden, No. 10 forward Destiny Williams and No. 42 post Brittney Griner kiss their new Big 12 Championship trophy on March 11 at the American Airlines Center in Dallas. Baylor defeated Iowa State 75-47 to become the Big 12 Tournament champions.

characteristic passes.

Baylor played well during the first half as it continued to switch players around to confuse the Cowgirls leading to a shot clock violation. Griner followed with back-to-back blocks.

Baylor also went on two runs, responding each time Oklahoma State scored. However, during the second half, Oklahoma State let Baylor feel its presence. The Oklahoma State defense began to play

in a two-three zone, giving Baylor trouble. The Cowgirls took Griner out of the game and the lack of ball movement by Baylor allowed Oklahoma State to cut into the lead. The Cowgirls took advantage of Baylor's lack of defense and began clicking on offense. Three players finished in double figures because of this.

Oklahoma State outscored Baylor in fast break points and it also outscored Baylor in the sec-

ond half, being the second team this season to do so. After Baylor committed four straight turnovers, Oklahoma State cut the lead to three, but Griner got a key steal that allowed Madden to make the clutch 3-point shot with less than two minutes remaining in the game.

The shot showed Baylor's mental toughness as they pulled away with a win in the closing minutes of the game.

MEAGAN DOWNING | ROUND UP PHOTO EDITOR

MULKEY MADNESS

Under head coach Kim Mulkey, the Lady Bears have competed in **13 NCAA TOURNAMENTS** and won **TWO NCAA CHAMPIONSHIPS**. Mulkey's current record is **370-80 OVERALL**, including a record of **160-54 IN CONFERENCE**. In 2012, Mulkey made NCAA history in both men's and women's collegiate basketball by leading the Lady Bears to a **PERFECT 40-WIN SEASON**.



Graphics: By Matt Hellman | Lariat Photo Editor

Lady Bears head coach stresses academics on top of sports



PHOTO BY MATT HELLMAN | LARIAT PHOTO EDITOR

Texas Farm Bureau Insurance and Baylor Athletics gave away 10,000 Kim Mulkey Bobble Heads to fans attending the Baylor-Tennessee game Dec. 14, 2010.

BY GREG DEVRIES
AND LARISSA CAMPOS
SPORTS EDITOR AND REPORTER

Compete is a word very familiar to head women's basketball head coach Kim Mulkey. In high school, she led her Hammond High School basketball team to four consecutive state championships. She then went on to play point guard at Louisiana Tech University and won two National Championships, the AIAW title in 1981 and the inaugural NCAA title in 1982. When it came to sports, Mulkey knew how to compete.

But her competitive nature began off the basketball courts and ball fields. She discovered her intense desire to win and be the best in the classroom.

"Every test you take you want to make an A," Mulkey said. "I knew that I wasn't the smartest kid in the school or even in the classroom but I knew I could out study them."

Mulkey's will to compete in the classroom earned her a perfect 4.0 GPA and the honor to represent her class as valedictorian at Hammond High School.

Mulkey didn't grow up in a home where she was pushed to succeed in academics. Her parents were high school graduates and worked hard to support their family. The will and determination to do well in school came completely from her desire to win and beat out her classmates.

"I graduated valedictorian and certainly was not the smartest kid in the school," Mulkey said. "I probably had the worst ACT score

out of anybody in the top ten but my competitiveness allowed me to surpass them when it came to taking tests."

After high school, Mulkey continued these study habits in college at Louisiana Tech University while playing for the Lady Techsters.

As a player, Mulkey was an All-American point guard that helped her team earn two National Championships, one AIAW Championship in 1981 and one NCAA Championship in 1982. Two years later, Mulkey competed on the USA Women's basketball team in the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles and helped the Americans win a gold medal.

As a student, she graduated Summa Cum Laude with a business degree and was on her way to conquering the corporate world after college.

Being a basketball coach wasn't even a passing thought for Mulkey as she finished school. She always had plans to graduate and get into the business world right away. However, after participating in the Olympics she was given the opportunity to further her education at Louisiana Tech with a Masters in business degree.

"Back then the NCAA gave five female and five male basketball players a check to go work on their

post graduate studies and I was one of those who was fortunate enough to get it," said Mulkey.

Mulkey has used her competitiveness not only to win games and championships but also to make sure all her players get a college education.

"As a coach, she places a great importance on academics and makes it her personal goal to make sure all of her players graduate,"

sophomore Mackenzie Robertson said. "She really wants us to become better people in life, not just basketball."

Her future plans in the business world took a major turn one day when she was sitting in class. A group of police officers entered the classroom and asked the professor to have Kim Mulkey meet them outside after class was over.

"I was nervous because you start thinking there was a death in the family or there's been a horrible accident, but what it was, the president of the university sent them," Mulkey said. "The head women's coach at the time was Sonja Hogg had retired and the president wanted me to be on the women's basketball staff under the new head coach, Leon Barmore. I went up to his office and he convinced me to give it a shot."

The decision to take this coach-

ing position was one that would alter her life forever as she would go on to make history as a coach in women's basketball throughout her career.

During her tenure as an assistant coach, Mulkey had head coaching offers from schools like Missouri, South Carolina and Texas A&M, but she wanted to stay loyal to Louisiana Tech.

After achieving the highest winning percentage in the history of women's basketball, Barmore retired and left the program to Mulkey.

During contract negotiations, Mulkey had her heart set on a five-year deal. Louisiana Tech, however, had a shorter agreement in mind. Despite Mulkey's begging and pleading, Tech would not budge, and Mulkey accepted Baylor's five-year offer and moved to Waco.

Since then, Mulkey has coached her teams to five Big 12 Championships, including three in a row from 2009-2013, and two National Championships. She has been named the Big 12 Coach of the Year four times and has earned USBWA National Coach of the Year honors in both 2011 and 2012.

Mulkey is already a member of the National High School Hall of Fame, the Louisiana High School Hall of Fame, the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame and the Louisiana Tech Athletics Hall of Fame.

Another national championship this year would add to the numerous successes and achievements that have helped cement her as one of the game's all-time greats.

"I knew that I wasn't the smartest kid in the school or even in the classroom, but I knew I could out-study them."

Kim Mulkey | Lady Bears
Head Coach

Destination: New Orleans Arena featuring Tourney Town

BY PARMIDA SCHAHHOSSEINI
SPORTS WRITER

With March Madness upon us and spring break over, it is the time of year where everyone gets serious. Students make that final push academically for the perfect GPA before the semester ends, and basketball teams compete for the opportunity to play for a National Championship. This competition is reality for the No. 1 Lady Bears as they try to meet high expectations and advance to the Final Four round in New Orleans for a chance to win consecutive national titles.

The Final Four is April 7-9, in New Orleans Arena. New Orleans is a great location because it is a lively city with much to do. Starting April 6, there will be an event called Tourney Town™, which is a free fan festival celebrating the best of the Final Four, located in downtown New Orleans (adjacent to New Orleans Arena). There will be a stage in the center with continuous events such as concerts by national recording artists, a talent show featuring local acts and celebrity judges, the AT&T Mascot challenge, fan contests for prizes, appearance and autograph sessions with sports celebrities, sponsor based entertainment and giveaways.

Some of the events in Tourney Town™ include the Capital One Cup Fan Zone, the AT&T Fan Zone, the Coke Zero Refreshment Court and the Allstate Good Hands Fan Zone. The Capital One Cup Fan Zone allows fans to compete in sports. The opportunity to win prizes increases the more one plays the games. On April 7, fans will also have a chance to meet Lisa Leslie, a former WNBA player and four-time Olympic gold medalist, for autographs. The AT&T Fan Zone allows people to pose for a photo with the Naismith Trophy, which is given to the best male and female players in the country. The Coke Zero Refreshment Court has sampling stations, the Coke Zero 3-point competition, temporary tattoos and the opportunity to pick up some Coke Zero mardi gras beads. The Allstate Good Hands Fan Zone has other activities including a competition to see who has the fastest 40-yard dash.

A visit to New Orleans doesn't need to be limited to Tourney Town. New Orleans is a city with scenic charm. An obvious place to visit is the French Quarter, which is the cultural center of New Orleans. People can sight see, shop and dine. Jackson Square is also located inside the French Quarter

as it is filled with the arts. Jugglers, musicians and artists fill the streets for constant entertainment as one explores the scenery around them. The St. Louis Cathedral is another major landmark that people can visit. The art and design is something that is worth seeing because it's like no other. Bourbon Street has a great nightlife with jazz and country western songs that fill the air. People can shop and enjoy some Cajun food as well.

"New Orleans has cultural benefits to offer interested visitors that they will find nowhere else," says Mark Romig, President and CEO of New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation. "In addition to some five dozen museums and house museums, you will find our culture in music clubs on Bourbon and Frenchman streets; in our artful and unique cuisine at both fine dining and neighborhood restaurants; and by riding through our city to look at the beautiful historic architecture."

While it is not as well known, Frenchmen Street is for people who want to try something new. Frenchmen Street has colorful buildings and great jazz music, but it is less crowded than Bourbon Street. The great music is what Frenchmen Street is known for,

but people come to enjoy great food and listen to the music in the moonlight.

While spending time in New Orleans it's hard not to develop a sweet tooth. La Boulangerie is a French bakery, which offers authentic pastries and other treats. The place has character, making it memorable not just for the food, but for the environment as well.

"First and foremost I recommend the croissants and the French bread," Kylee Countrymen a worker from La Boulangerie said. "Honestly everything is good including the pastries."

However, people must be willing to deal with the long lines and limited parking before enjoying the pastry.

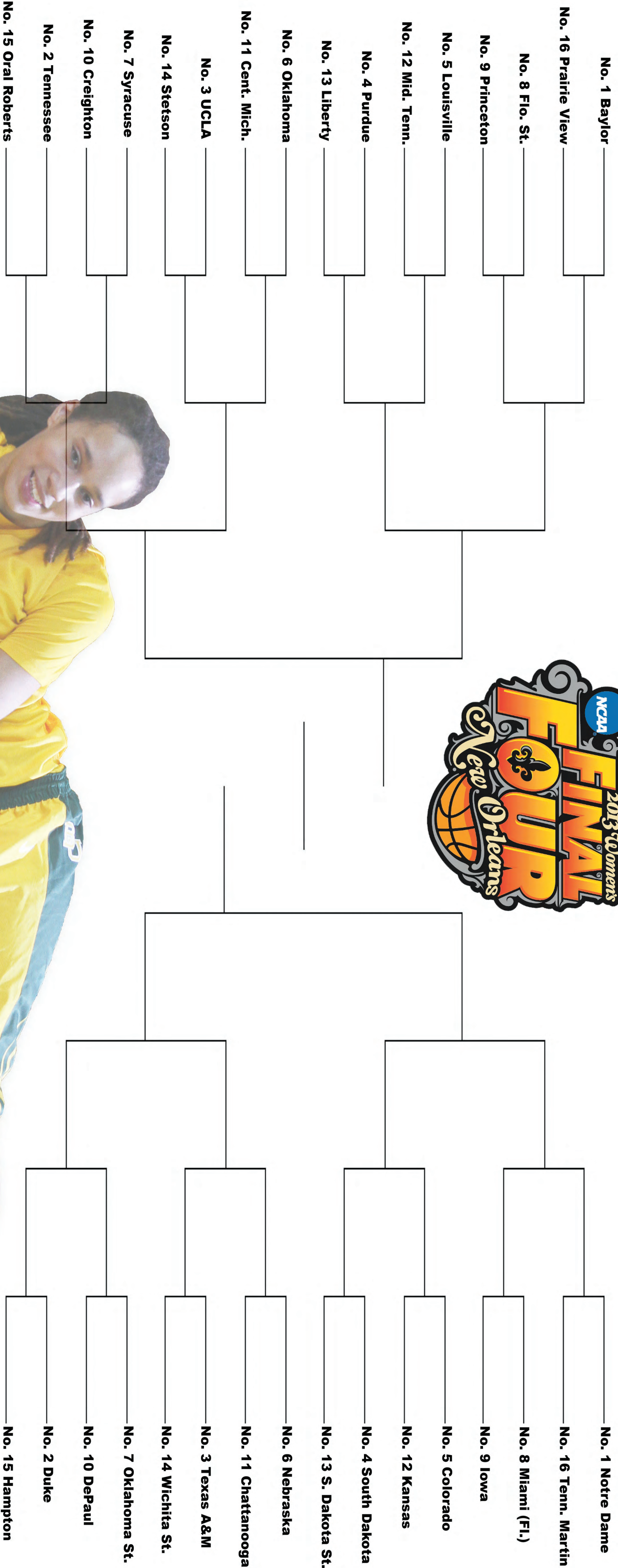
Other highly rated restaurants according to consumers on TripAdvisor include Zea Rotisserie & Grill, Verti Marte, The Joint and Louisiana Pizza Kitchen. Louisiana is known for its Cajun food, so here are some highly rated restaurants: Mr. B's Bistro, Liuzza's by the Track and Louisiana Bistro. Prices do vary depending on where one goes to eat.

While the most important event may be the Final Four, there is time for people to enjoy other aspects of New Orleans along the way.



COURTESY PHOTO

The New Orleans Arena sits adjacent to the Superdome. The New Orleans Arena will house the Women's Basketball Final Four round April 7-9.



Bears power through tough season, lean on one another for support

By RYAN DAUGHERTY
REPORTER

The 2012-13 season for the Baylor men's basketball team was a rather rocky one. Baylor was able to win some highly impressive games this season but its inconsistency led it to lose some easier games on the schedule.

The Bears handed Kentucky its first home loss in 55 games, which was John Calipari's first home loss as head coach of the Wildcats.

At the same time, the Bears had ugly home losses against College of Charleston and Northwestern.

To cap off a disappointing season, the Bears found out Sunday they did not make the NCAA Tournament. They lost nine out of their final 13 games and finished with an 18-14 record. Head coach Scott Drew said although they have lost many of these games, they had multiple opportunities to win them.

"I think, first of all, we played the tougher half of our schedule," he said. "I think that's indicative of the record and I think we lost some close games that could have gone either way. It's a situation where we've got to close games. Give the other teams credit for making plays."

Most of Baylor's losses came in conference play, where they held a 9-9 record. These include an overtime loss to Oklahoma State, three-point and five-point losses to Oklahoma and Iowa State respectively, and a heartbreaking loss at the buzzer to Kansas State.

Senior guard Pierre Jackson, who had been the Bears' leader and arguably their best player this season, said the team wasn't ready to throw in the towel before they found out about their exclusion from the tournament.

"Nobody is hanging their heads," he said. "We know we still got a lot of fight in us. We're a really good team, we can compete with anybody. We all have to be focused."

Jackson has been one of the most electrifying players in the nation ever since he transferred to Baylor last year. Jackson led the Big 12 in scoring and assists with averages of 19.8 and 6.5.

Jackson is the first player to lead a power-6 conference in both scoring and assists since Jason Terry did it in 1998-1999 for Arizona. Although these are highly impressive numbers, Jackson said he would sacrifice them if it meant putting the team in a better position in the conference.

"If I could trade all of that to be top two in the conference, I would do it in a heartbeat," he said. "It's a cool accomplishment but it's not doing enough to help us win games. I've got to do more."

Jackson is one of 12 finalists for the Bob Cousy Collegiate Point Guard of the Year award. Drew said his value to the team is priceless.

"We all realize just how valuable Pierre is," he said. "I think Baylor Nation wouldn't trade him for any other guard in the country, and neither would we."

March 9 was senior night for Baylor, where three seniors played their last game in the Ferrell Center. Along with Jackson, guard A.J. Walton and forward Jacob Neubert played. The Bears hosted the Kansas Jayhawks, who were ranked fourth in the nation.

Before the game, Walton said he was excited and hoped to end his career at the Ferrell Center on top.

"I'm excited and ready for a big day," he said. "It's been a great journey, everybody who's come here from freshman year through now. I love each and every one of them like brothers. We haven't beaten

Kansas here in conference since I've been here so that'll be great for us and Baylor."

Drew said he had a lot of respect for the Jayhawks, and although the Bears struggled to score, they played exceptional on the defensive end in their last meeting.

"Kansas has been a team that has played as well as anybody in the nation," he said. "Last time we played them, defensively, we weren't as efficient as we would have liked to have been."

The Bears played the Jayhawks in Lawrence, Kan. earlier this year, where they lost by 17 and scored a season-low 44 points.

This meeting was different for Baylor. The Bears were fired up from the tip and never took their foot off the pedal.

Jackson led the way with 28 points, 10 rebounds and six assists as the Bears handed the Jayhawks their fifth loss of the season. It was Baylor's first win in the series since March of last year.

One of the primary issues with the Bears this season was closing out games. Jackson said, offensively, the Bears are fine, but it's on the other end of the court where they need to improve.

"Defensively, we've got to get stops and communicate on defense," he said. "That's how you close games, on defense."

The Bears still have some obstacles to overcome in the offseason. Jackson and Walton, who make up the starting backcourt, will both be gone next season.

It is unknown if freshman center Isaiah Austin will declare for the 2013-14 NBA Draft as well. Regardless, Baylor has a lot to work on for next season.

"Defensively, we've got to get stops and communicate on defense. That's how you close games, on defense."

Pierre Jackson | Point Guard



PHOTOS BY MATT HELLMAN | LARIAT PHOTO EDITOR

OSU head coach Travis Ford acknowledges No. 55 point guard Pierre Jackson as he is escorted off the court by No. 2 forward Rico Gathers after the Bears suffered a devastating 74-72 loss to the Cowboys, ending their run in the Big 12 Tournament March 14 at the Sprint Center in Kansas City, Mo.

Bears miss out on NCAA tournament, to play in NIT

By DANIEL HILL
SPORTS WRITER

The Baylor Bears started the season ranked No. 19 in the preseason AP Top 25 poll.

The Bears went into the Big 12 Tournament as the No. 6 seed setting up a rematch with Oklahoma State. The Bears lost a heartbreaker to the Cowboys 74-72 in Kansas City at the Sprint Center. The Bears were down 42-24 at half and battled back in the second half to give Oklahoma State a run for their money. Senior point guard Pierre Jackson had a chance to win the game with a three at the buzzer but the shot deflected off the rim.

After a season that fell short of expectations, the Baylor Bears were denied a bid into the NCAA Tournament.

Rather than competing for a third Elite Eight appearance in four years, the Bears will be playing in the National Invitational Tournament this postseason.

"Nobody wants to finish playing," Baylor head coach Scott Drew said. "To have an opportunity to play postseason means the seniors get a chance to put on that uniform one last time. And I know at the end of the year, there are only two happy teams — the one that wins the national championship in the NCAA and whoever wins the championship in the NIT. So the goal is to be one of those teams that win the last game."

One positive aspect of being in the NIT is that Baylor will have the opportunity to host one game and possibly a second at the Ferrell Center.

At 8 p.m. Wednesday, the Bears will host Long Beach State at the Ferrell Center. The contest will be televised nationally on ESPN2.

The Bears were 18-14 overall this season and had a 9-9 record within the Big 12 Conference. The Bears' season was filled with ups and downs.

The Bears started off the regular season with a 5-1 record before losing two of their next three in what would eventually end up being their two weakest losses of the season. The Bears lost to the College of Charleston 63-59 at home in the Ferrell Center. After the loss to Charleston, the Bears had one of their most notable wins of the season when they went into Rupp Arena and defeated the Kentucky Wildcats 64-55. Following the thrill of the Kentucky victory, the Bears lost again

at the Ferrell Center when Northwestern topped them 74-70.

Those two home losses would come back to haunt the Bears. If the Bears had won those two games, there's a strong chance that their résumé would have qualified them for the NCAA Tournament.

Aside from the Kentucky win, the Bears' other two wins were at home against Oklahoma State early in the Big 12 schedule and then at home again in the regular season finale against Kansas.

The highlight of the Bears' season was beating No. 3 Kansas in the Ferrell Center by an astounding 23 points. After the Bears crushed Kansas, it seemed as if momentum was on their side and that they would make some noise in the Big 12 Conference.

Jackson, Big 12 Preseason Player of the Year, did not disappoint in his senior season for Baylor. The electrifying senior guard led the Big 12 in scoring and assists. Jackson is the first player to accomplish the feat since Jason Terry was at Arizona nearly two decades ago. Jackson is only the fifth player to ever lead a power conference in both scoring and assists.

Jackson was slighted in the opinion of many basketball fans in postseason awards. Jackson was named to the All-Big 12 second team by the coaches, and Jackson did earn First-Team All-Big 12 from the Associated Press.

Freshman center Isaiah Austin was named to the Big 12 All-Rookie team by the coaches. Austin was also named second team All-Big 12 by the media and third

8.3 rebounds per game. Jefferson was named All-Big 12 honorable mention by both the media and the coaches.

Junior guard Gary Franklin knew that the Bears season fell



Pierre Jackson

short of preseason expectations, but still felt that the Bears were good enough to make the NCAA Tournament.

"Absolutely, I mean I thought we did enough," Franklin said. "Obviously, we didn't have the season we wanted to have or expected to have but we thought we deserved to play in the NCAA Tournament so I think the only way to prove that is to win the whole thing [NIT]."

Despite the obvious disappointment of not being selected to the NCAA Tournament field of 68 teams, the Bears are relishing the opportunity to play in the NIT.

"The disappointment of not making the NCAA is always hard on everybody that's playing in the NIT," Drew said. "At the same time, now that you know who you're playing and you know you do have postseason, the excitement kicks in. And everyone knows, you lose, it's the last time you put on the jersey, so, there's plenty of motivation and intensity, and everyone knows what's going on."

The NIT presents the Bears with a chance to play postseason basketball and have more home games at the Ferrell Center.

The NIT can also serve as a foundation to build toward next season's success for Baylor and gives the squad a chance to play at the Mecca of basketball, Madison Square Garden in New York City.

"We've got a lot to prove still," Jackson said. "We've still got five games to play and that's a lot of basketball to show everybody that we're good. I feel like we still belong in the big dance but it's not about ifs and buts. I've never gotten a chance to play at Madison Square Garden in New York so that would be a good goal for the team."

team All-Big 12 by the coaches. Austin averaged 13.2 points and 8.6 rebounds per game.

Junior forward Cory Jefferson had a breakout season for the Bears as he averaged 12.1 points and

A.J. Walton

CHECK THIS OUT:

Take a look at what head coach Scott Drew brings to the table

OVERALL RECORD:
173-133

Conference Record:
63-95

NCAA Tournaments:
3

NIT Tournaments:
2

Scott Drew Era
(2003 - Current)

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BAYLOR LADY BEARS

**No. 32
Forward
Brooklyn
Pope**

