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Theme
Lady Bears receive sparse coverage

NATHAN KEIL
Sports Writer

Seemingly every night from the end of November through March, if you want to watch some college hoops, all you have to do is turn on ESPN or any other station within its family of networks to get your basketball itch scratched.

However, if you are looking for women’s college basketball, you might just have to look a little harder. Why is that?

According to Michael Gruber, a sports cinematographer, the way that TV networks decide on which games to air ultimately comes down to money.

“In sports TV, the bigger the game, the more money gets generated,” Gruber said in an interview with The Baylor Lariat.

The way Gruber explains it, imagine you are running a business. What do you want to maximize? Sales.

And what maximizes sales? The volume of money coming in from your business. And what do you want to minimize? Expenses.

Now, the same can be said for TV networks, except instead of volume of money, it’s the number of viewers. And instead of minimizing expenses, it’s the cost of producing the game.

So, what do you do if you have a low-volume, high-cost team? You don’t air it.

And that’s why we see so many women’s basketball games.

The number of women’s games on TV compared to the number of men’s games on TV is staggering.

Head coach Kim Mulkey and the Lady Bears are 26-4 overall, 13-1 in Big 12 play, and sit one game behind the conference leader. They have been ranked in the top 10 the entire season and have an average attendance of 8,388 at the Ferrell Center. The men average about 980 more people per contest, but more people showed up to watch the Lady Bears.

Texas, which saw both teams enter with a combined 37-game winning streak, made it 40-on-Fox Sports Networks.

This unbalanced distribution of games did not sit well with Mulkey after her team had just knocked off No. 1 UCLA via the Watch ESPN app for ESPN.

“I think that it’s really sad that ESPN did not pick up this game [UCLA], and for the same part it was good for us,” Mulkey said. “Thursday’s game was going to be on a New York station. We are playing two good teams in top 10, and neither game was picked up by ESPN.”

It wasn’t just the Baylor games that weren’t being picked up that upset Mulkey. It was other high-quality women’s college basketball games as well.

“Ohio State just played South Carolina, and that game wasn’t picked up either,” Mulkey said. “But they did get Texas and Basketball on ESPN.”

Even the University of Connecticut, which just won its 100th consecutive game on Monday by beating No. 6 South Carolina 65-55, has only had eight games this season nationally broadcast on ESPN.

Even though many of its games have been available to stream via the Watch ESPN app for smartphone, tablet and computer.

When the season is all said and done, Baylor will have had five women’s basketball games on ESPN this season. Comparatively, the men’s team, which has also risen in the rankings and sits at No. 6 right now, will have had 25 games, including all but one conference game, air on ESPN. The one conference game not airing will be the Baylor showdown with Kansas, as it will air at noon Saturday on CBS.

This does not take into account the Phillips 66 Big 12 championship for the men. The conference tournament for the women will air on the Fox Sports networks, but ESPN does own the rights to the Women’s NCAA tournament.

“The Lady Bears return to action in 5 p.m. Saturday against Oklahoma State in the Semifinals for the Elite Eight game at the Ferrell Center,” according to a press release from the Baylor Athletics Department.

Baylor will have its last ESPN televised game at 9 p.m. Monday when the Lady Bears travel to Austin for a rematch against Texas.
Charging in, Baylor sophomore pitcher King McClure drives the ball in a game against the TCU Horned Frogs on Feb. 21 in Waco. McClure won the game 7-5.

The Bears have another chance to make their mark at the Big 12 Championship from March 9-11 in Kansas City. Then the final and most important test comes when the field of 68 teams is set to battle for the national championship. This team has the potential to not only be the best that coach Scott Drew has coached, but the best that the school has ever had. We’ll see if they can rise to the occasion, or if they’ll just be another footnote in Baylor baseball history.

The Astros new complex in Kissimmee was nice for the players, because those corridors they may not be familiar with the area will be complete when the season starts. When complete, the complex will allow the Astros to operate more efficiently. Hinch hopes, thereby helping them win up to the lofty expectations for this season.

“We’re going to embrace them,” Hinch said. “It’s not being arrogant or cocky or not respecting the rules. It’s just an admittance that we have a pretty good pitching staff and we’ve played some pretty good baseball.”

Dallas Keuchel and Lance McCullers, both of whom missed time last season, led a talented pitching staff that under-performed last season. Both proclaimed their arms healthy.

“We want to be the first manager to the opening day starter — I’m very disappointed,” Hinch joked. “I want to see them on the mound and I want to see them healthy. I think right now distinctions like that are very premature on our particular team.”

Hinch plans to push Keuchel and McCullers onto the mound early in camp. “We’re not going to kill them, but we’re going to get them healthy,” Hinch said. “We’ve got to get them tired. Their legs are going to be heavy. Same way we’re going to not only be the best that coach Scott Drew has coached, but the best that the school has ever had. We’ll see if they can rise to the occasion, or if they’ll just be another footnote in Baylor baseball history.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — Getting to the Houston Astros clubhouse at the new training complex for the future of baseball will be somewhere other than Osceola County Stadium for the first time in person until Saturday. The ballpark will host its first game when dozen tenants take the field on Feb. 26.

Upon arrival, those unfamiliar with the area will have a tough time distinguishing that before hosting a spring training complex, the site was once a blackbird.

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Charles Oakley doesn’t owe the New York Knicks a thing, owner James Dolan to ever see him again. "Some things can’t be undone," he said.

But the former Knicks forward may have started a reconciliation with the club by saying Wednesday that Dolan’s friends with Oakley and with Knicks general manager Jon Daniels, that has been part of some big moments for the Rangers over the past six seasons.

Manager Jeff Banister plans for Napoli to be the primary first baseman, with some games at designated hitter. Mitch Moreland won a Gold Glove at first base in his first baseman last season. He became a free agent and agreed to a $5.3 million, one-year deal with the Rangers.

Despite only being around for a long time," Oakley said of Dolan. "I ain’t heard nothing good about him. He also called Dolan ‘a control freak.’

Oakley also continued on the offensive against Dolan, who, in a radio interview two days after the altercation, raised the possibility that Oakley has a drinking problem.

Oakley compared Dolan to disgraced former Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling, who was banned for life from the league and forced to sell the team in 2014 after the revelation of the past racist comments.

This past has been around for a long time," Oakley said of Dolan. "I ain’t heard nothing good about him. He also called Dolan ‘a control freak.’

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BEN EVERETT

Sports Writer

No. 4-ranked Baylor men's basketball hosts No. 3 Kansas Saturday at the Ferrell Center in a matchup that is arguably the most important game in head coach Scott Drew's tenure in Waco.

When Drew arrived in 2003, the men's basketball program was mired in scandal. Nevertheless, he has taken the team to heights never before seen by Baylor basketball fans.

Since 2009-10, around the time the Bears rose to national prominence, Drew has had just two wins over the Jayhawks in 17 tries. Additionally, Baylor has yet to win a Big 12 Championship, with Kansas winning the league every year since 2005.

This season started off promising for Baylor in terms of obtaining the Big 12 title. In the nonconference games, the Bears looked strong, knocking off multiple ranked teams and garnering media attention. To start conference play, they were able to remain undefeated and reach the No. 1 ranking before falling to West Virginia.

However, since then, the race has started to heat up. Baylor is 22-4 this season and is currently sitting at No. 3 in the Big 12 standings. The Bears have a chance to prove they are the best team in the conference by beating the current best team in the conference.

The best team, record-wise, in Baylor history went 30-8, knocked off the No. 3-ranked Kansas Jayhawks and made it all the way to the Elite Eight. That was 2012. Let's see what this team can do.

Saturday's showdown is such an important one. The Bears won in Kansas City, Mo., in 2012 and picked up a home win in 2013. Since then, there have been no numbers in the win column against Kansas.

The best team, record-wise, in Baylor history went 30-8, knocked off the No. 3-ranked Kansas Jayhawks and made it all the way to the Elite Eight. That was five years ago. Let's see what this team can do.

Despite a history of losing by a large margin at Kansas, the Bears hung in and almost stole a win, losing by only five points. The loss dropped Baylor back one spot in the Big 12 standings, and subsequent losses to Kansas State and Texas Tech have the Bears now two games back from the Jayhawks.

The only reasonable way for Baylor to fight its way back into the conversation for best team in the conference is by beating the current best team in the conference.

Earlier this season, a five-point loss. In the 2016 season, the Bears fell by eight at the Ferrell Center. In 2015, that margin was just one.

That's why Saturday's showdown is so important.

The Bears won in Kansas City, Mo., in 2012 and picked up a home win in 2013, despite being an inferior team. Since then, there have been no numbers in the win column against Kansas.

Currently sitting at 12-2, this might be Baylor men's basketball's best team ever, and they have a chance to prove it Saturday on the hardwood.

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