



2015-16 Big West Men's Basketball

Big West Conference - 2 Corporate Park, Suite 206, Irvine, CA 92606

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UC Irvine Tabbed Men's Basketball Favorite

IRVINE, Calif. – For the third straight year, UC Irvine is the media favorite to claim the Big West men's basketball title as the 2015-16 preseason poll was announced today. The Anteaters return three starters and 10 total players who saw game action from last season's squad that won the Big West Tournament and advanced to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in program history.

Coach **Russell Turner's** Anteaters garnered 198 total points and 19 of the 23-first-place votes. UC Santa Barbara finished second in the poll with 161 points and two first-place nods, while Hawai'i was picked third (133). Long Beach State came in fourth (128) and UC Riverside fifth (120), while Cal Poly collected the other two first-place votes and placed sixth with 117 points. CSUN and UC Davis tied for seventh with 70 points, and Cal State Fullerton rounded out the poll (37).

UC Irvine finished the 2014-15 campaign 21-13 overall and in second place in Big West games at 11-5. The Anteaters knocked off UC Riverside, UC Santa Barbara and Hawai'i in the conference tournament to earn an automatic bid to the NCAA's. Making their first appearance on that stage, the 'Eaters narrowly fell to three-time national champion Louisville, 57-55, in the NCAA Second Round at Seattle. **Mamadou Ndiaye**, a 7-6 junior center, anchors the middle after averaging 10.5 points, 5.1 rebounds and 1.7 blocks per game. He is one of 20 candidates for the 2016 Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Center of the Year Award, recognizing the top centers in men's college basketball. UCI also returns backcourt mates **Luke Nelson** and **Alex Young**, who each earned All-Big West Honorable Mention recognition. Nelson averaged 10.5 points per game, while Young was fourth in the conference in assists (3.6 apg). Young is No. 3 in UCI history with 414 assists, and on pace to become the school's career leader.

UC Santa Barbara is led by 18th-year head coach **Bob Williams**, who is 288-224 (.563) all-time at the school and bidding to become just the third coach to achieve 300 wins in conference history. The Gauchos bring back three starters from last year's 19-14 squad, including first team all-conference selection **Michael Bryson**. The senior guard ranked No. 9 in the Big West in scoring (13.9 ppg) and his 1,043 career points is tops among active players. He is joined in the backcourt by 2014-15 Big West Freshman of the Year **Gabe Vincent**, who had 57 three-point baskets, second-most all-time by a UCSB freshman. Overcoming a myriad of injuries that sidelined him for most of the previous three seasons, senior **John Green** played in 33 games (19 starts) in 2014-15, and finished as the team's third-leading scorer (11.3 ppg) en route to all-conference honorable mention kudos.

Hawai'i is under the direction of first-year head coach **Eran Ganot**. The former Saint Mary's associate head coach inherits a squad that finished 22-13 overall and reached the championship game of the Big West Tournament. Four returning starters and nine letterwinners give Ganot a solid starting point. Senior guard **Roderick Bobbitt**, a second team all-conference pick, became just the fourth player in Big West history to rack up 100 steals in a season and finished as the national leader in the category. The Rainbow Warriors also are bolstered by the return of all-conference honorable mention selections **Stefan Jankovic** and **Aaron Valdes**. Valdes, a 6-5 guard, ranked No. 10 in the Big West in scoring at 13.7 points per game.

Long Beach State seeks a return to the pinnacle of the Big West. Despite the loss of all five starters, the 49ers have three solid Division I transfer players in **Nick Faust** (Maryland), **Roschon Prince** (USC) and **Gabe Levin** (Loyola Marymount). **UC Riverside** is looking to finish in the upper echelon of the conference behind senior standouts **Taylor Johns** and **Jaylen Bland**. Johns was named All-Big West First Team after finishing in the conference's top three in scoring and rebounding, while Bland was tabbed the 2014-15 Big West Newcomer of the Year as he led the circuit with 95 three-pointers. **Cal Poly** benefits from a solid returning core of seniors in **Joel Awich**, **Brian Bennett** and **David Nwaba**.

The media panel also selected a six-player preseason all-conference team comprised of three seniors and three juniors from four institutions – UC Irvine teammates **Luke Nelson** and **Mamadou Ndiaye**, the UC Riverside duo of **Jaylen Bland** and **Taylor Johns**, UC Santa Barbara's **Michael Bryson** and **Aaron Valdes** of Hawai'i. This is the second straight year that Ndiaye has been selected to the preseason squad.

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Media Poll Results

1.	UC Irvine (19)	198
2.	UC Santa Barbara (2)	161
3.	Hawai'i	133
4.	Long Beach State	128
5.	UC Riverside	120
6.	Cal Poly (2)	117
7.	CSUN	70
	UC Davis	70
9.	Cal State Fullerton	38

() First-place votes

Media Preseason All-Conference Team

Name	School	Pos.	Yr.	Hometown
Jaylen Bland	UC Riverside	G	Sr.	Saginaw, Mich.
Michael Bryson	UC Santa Barbara	G	Sr.	Sacramento, Calif.
Taylor Johns	UC Riverside	F	Sr.	San Francisco, Calif.
Mamadou Ndiaye	UC Irvine	C	Jr.	Dakar, Senegal
Luke Nelson	UC Irvine	G	Jr.	Worthing, England
Aaron Valdes	Hawai'i	G	Jr.	Whittier, Calif.