



2017-18 BIG WEST MEN'S BASKETBALL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2017

UC Irvine Named Favorite To Win 2017-18 Men's Basketball Title

IRVINE, Calif. – Postseason qualifier and 20-game winner for five straight seasons, UC Irvine is the media's preseason pick to capture the 2017-18 Big West men's basketball championship.

The Anteaters claimed 14 first-place votes and 216 points to lead all schools in the media poll. UC Davis finished second with seven first-place votes and 189 points. Cal State Fullerton was third with 158 points and one first-place vote, while Long Beach State was fourth with 153 and a first-place nod. Hawai'i received two first-place votes and was fifth with 146 points. UC Santa Barbara received a first place vote and was sixth with 94 points. Rounding out the poll was CSUN (73), UC Riverside (71) and Cal Poly (70).

UCI, which earned last year's regular season crown with a 12-4 Big West record, does not have a senior on the 2017-18 roster. But six of the 10 returning letterwinners averaged at least 12 minutes of playing time last season. The Big West's top defensive unit returns junior Jonathan Galloway, the 2016-17 conference Defensive Player of the Year. The Anteaters also return a trio of sophomores vital to last year's title-clinching club in **Eyassu Worku**, **Max Hazzard** and **Tommy Rutherford**.

UC Davis won their first Big West Tournament title and NCAA Tournament game in 2016-17. The Aggies are once again a contender this season with the likes of **Chima Moneke** and **Siler Schneider** on the roster. Moneke received recognition as the 2016-17 Big West Newcomer of the Year and a first-team all-conference selection after averaging 14.6 points and 9.5 rebounds. He led the league in nine different categories, including double-doubles (14) and blocks (51). Schneider corralled Big West "Best Sixth Player" plaudits as one of the league's top three-point shooters (47 threes) and a solid scoring contributor (10.3 ppg).

Earning its highest finish in a preseason poll since the 2012-13 season, Cal State Fullerton has reached contender status. The Titans reached the CollegelInsider.com Tournament, finishing 17-15 last year with three core members returning – **Jackson Rowe**, **Khalil Ahmad** and **Kyle Allman, Jr.** Rowe and Ahmad are the last two Big West Freshmen of the Year recipients.

Accustomed to upper echelon finishes, Long Beach State has posted a .500 or better conference record for nine straight seasons. The Beach appear poised to do so again with a solid returning frontcourt in **Gabe Levin** and **Temidayo Yussuf**. Yussuf was an All-Big West Second Team selection last season. The duo combined to average nearly 22 points and 11 rebounds last year.

Hawai'i is one of the more veteran clubs with four returning starters, including two all-conference honorable mention forwards in **Jack Purchase** and **Gibson Johnson**. The Rainbow Warriors also benefit from the return of **Mike Thomas**, a starter on the 2015-16 NCAA Tournament squad. Thomas missed all of last season with an injury.

For the first time in 20 years, UC Santa Barbara has a new head coach at the helm. **Joe Pasternack**, a top assistant at the University of Arizona for four years, takes over a Gaucho program that went 6-22 last year but struggled with injuries and ineligibility issues. The program is actually well stocked with four returning starters and 12 letterwinners, including Player of the Year candidate **Gabe Vincent**. The Gauchos also were bolstered by the arrival of Rice transfer **Marcus Jackson**, a three-year starter who averaged 12.2 points per game last year.

The 26-member media panel also selected a six-player preseason all-conference team. The breakdown includes four seniors, one junior and one sophomore. Named to the squad for the second straight year are UCSB's **Gabe Vincent** and LBSU's **Gabe Levin**. LBSU has a second representative in **Temidayo Yussuf**. CSUN's Tavrion Dawson, Chima Moneke of UC Davis, and Cal State Fullerton's **Jackson Rowe** also made the list.

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MEDIA POLL RESULTS

1.	UC Irvine (14)	216
2.	UC Davis (7)	189
3.	Cal State Fullerton (1)	158
4.	Long Beach State (1)	153
5.	Hawai'i (2)	146
6.	UC Santa Barbara (1)	94
7.	CSUN	73
8.	UC Riverside	71
9.	Cal Poly	70

() First-place votes

MEDIA PRESEASON ALL-CONFERENCE TEAM

Name	School	Pos.	Yr.	Hometown
Tavrion Dawson	CSUN	F	Sr.	Long Beach, Calif.
Gabe Levin	Long Beach State	F	Sr.	Oak Park, Ill.
Chima Moneke	UC Davis	F	Sr.	Canberra, Australia
Jackson Rowe	Cal State Fullerton	F	So.	Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Gabe Vincent	UC Santa Barbara	G	Sr.	Stockton, Calif.
Temidayo Yussuf	Long Beach State	F	Jr.	Oakland, Calif.