

2022-23 Men's Basketball Preview

Excitement and anticipation pervades any discussion regarding the 2022-23 Missouri Valley Conference men's basketball campaign.

Three new institutions, a new tournament format, and an expanded 20-game conference regular-season set the stage for a new compelling era of MVC basketball.

The Conference has five league teams that participated in postseason play a year ago: Belmont (NIT); Drake (CBI); Missouri State (NIT); Murray State (NCAA); and UNI (NIT), but the ever-changing landscape of college athletics makes predicting the future a difficult task.

That being said, league coaches, sports information directors and media have made their collective picks for the 2022-23 MVC season.

Five of the league's 12 teams won 20 or more games last year, and each of those five teams finished tied for second or better in their respective leagues. Bradley (17-14, 11-7 MVC) and Southern Illinois (16-15, 9-9 MVC) joins that group as each had a winning record and finished .500 or better in the MVC last season.

The new-look MVC will have some question marks, too, as five league coaches will be a head coach in the MVC for the first time in 2022-23 (Belmont's Casey Alexander; Evans-

ville's David Ragland; UIC's Luke Yaklich; Illinois State's Ryan Pedon; and Murray State's Steve Prohm).

The NCAA transfer portal has provided freedom of movement for student-athletes, which has added yet another wrinkle into the unknown for the MVC in 2022-23. Notably, the league's 12 schools have a combined 22 starters returning (of 60 possible), giving the MVC its lowest percentage of returning starters in at least 20 seasons at 36.7 percent. Only three previous times since 2003-04 has the league returned fewer than 50 percent of its starting lineups from the previous season (44 percent in 2013-14; 46 percent in 2008-09; and 48 percent in 2007-08). Four schools (Bradley, Drake, Indiana State, and Southern Illinois) have more starters returning than those not returning.

Despite all of those variables, the Missouri Valley Conference is poised to remain one of the premier conferences in Division I basketball as the league continues to build on its rich tradition and a history of success.

Notably, the MVC has combined for 20 wins in the NCAA Tournament in the past nine NCAA championships and has earned multiple bids 16 times since 1994. Since 2010, The Valley has had two Final Four appearances.

Additionally, since 1994, an MVC member has beaten the following teams from power conferences in the NCAA Tournament: Alabama, Arizona, Cincinnati, Florida, Georgia, Georgia Tech, Illinois (twice), Indiana, Kansas (three times), K-State, Louisville, Miami (Fla.), Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Pittsburgh (twice), Seton Hall, Tennessee (four times), Texas, Texas Tech, UCLA, Virginia Tech, Vanderbilt, and Wisconsin.

For the second-straight year, Drake has been picked as the preseason favorite in the Missouri Valley Conference men's basketball race by a voting panel consisting of coaches, sports information directors, and media. The Bulldogs finished tied for second in the MVC race last year and reached the State Farm MVC

2022-23 Pre-Season Poll

School (First-Place Votes)	Total
1. Drake (52)	646
2. Bradley (1)	542
3. Southern Illinois (1)	537
4. Missouri State	418
5. UNI	416
6. Belmont	388
7. Indiana State	344
8. Murray State	324
9. Valparaiso	234
10. Illinois State	186
11. UIC	109
12. Evansville	68

Poll determined by panel of league SIDs, media, and coaches.

PRESEASON TEAMS

FIRST TEAM

Tucker DeVries, Drake (MVP)
 Marcus Domask, Southern Illinois
 Ben Krikke, Valparaiso
 Rienk Mast, Bradley
 Roman Penn, Drake
 Ben Sheppard, Belmont

SECOND TEAM

Bowen Born, UNI
 Donovan Clay, Missouri State
 Lance Jones, Southern Illinois
 Cooper Neese, Indiana State
 Garrett Sturtz, Drake

THIRD TEAM

Cameron Henry, Indiana State
 Kobe King, Valparaiso
 Rob Perry, Murray State
 Austin Phyfe, UNI
 D.J. Wilkins, Drake



Drake's Garrett Sturtz enters the 2022-23 season as the league's active career leader in both rebounds (703) and steals (143).

Tournament title game for the second-straight season. Four Drake student-athletes earned preseason honors (among 16 total players selected).

Tucker DeVries of Drake earned preseason Player of the Year honors, and is joined on the First Team by Marcus Domask of Southern Illinois; Ben Krikke of Valparaiso; Rienk Mast of Bradley; Roman Penn of Drake; and Ben Sheppard of Belmont.

Tucker is one of four MVC student-athletes playing for their fathers in men's basketball, joining Hunter Jacobson (UNI), Jaden Schertz (Indiana State), and Griffin Yaklich (UIC).

Pollsters have accurately predicted the league's regular-season champ six of the past 10 years, but only 18 times out of 37 total since 1985-86. Notably, a total of 31 of those 37

2022-23 Men's Basketball Preview

predicted champs have gone on to post-season play, with 21 of those 31 playing in the NAAs.

In March 2023, The Valley will conduct its 33rd St. Louis-based post-season men's basketball championship. With 33-straight years at the same neutral site, Arch Madness is the second-longest neutral site tenured collegiate tourney in the nation (following only the Big East in New York City). Loyola won the 2022 event, defeating second-seeded Drake in the title game for the second-straight year.



BELMONT

Coach: Casey Alexander

2021-22: 25-8

OVC Record: 15-3 (2nd)

Starters Back/Lost: 1/4

Lettermen Back/Lost: 6/7

Belmont is one of three new programs in the Missouri Valley Conference in 2022-23, and the Bruins have a rich history in men's basketball. Notably, Belmont joins just Gonzaga, Kansas and Oregon as DI programs to win 20 or more games in 12 consecutive seasons. The Bruins were 25-8 last year and finished second

STARTERS RETURNING/LOST

Team	Returning	Lost
Belmont	1	4
Bradley	3	2
Drake	3	2
Evansville	1	4
UIC	1	4
Illinois State	1	4
Indiana State	4	1
Missouri State	1	4
Murray State	1	4
Northern Iowa	1	4
Southern Illinois	3	2
Valparaiso	2	3
MVC TOTAL	22	38

in the Ohio Valley Conference with a 15-3 league slate. The Bruins lost a first-round NIT game at Vanderbilt.

Notably, Belmont has finished either first or second in its final regular-season league standings for 17 consecutive seasons. The Bruins' 77 wins over the past three seasons are only bettered by Gonzaga, Kansas, Houston, and Baylor.

Coach Casey Alexander enters his fourth season at Belmont and returns six student-athletes from last year, including starter Ben Sheppard. Sheppard started all 33 games in 2021-22 and averaged 16.2 points, 3.9 rebounds and 1.6 assists. Nine newcomers join the program for this season, including DI transfers Keishawn Davidson (Tennessee Tech) and Drew Friberg (Princeton).



BRADLEY

Coach: Brian Wardle

2021-22: 17-14

MVC: 11-7 (5th)

Starters Back/Lost: 3/2

Lettermen Back/Lost: 9/5

The Braves earned back-to-back MVC Tournament championships in 2019 and 2020 and are looking to move up from their fifth-place finish in the league standings a year ago.

Five Bradley student-athletes started 10 or more games last year, and Rienk Mast leads the way. Mast was just one of two underclassmen to earn all-league honors in 2021-22, taking home Third Team laurels after leading the league in rebounding with 8.4 caroms per game. He became the fourth Brave in 70 seasons as a member of the MVC to lead the Conference in rebounding.

Maley Leons started 29 games



Missouri State's Donovan Clay is poised to join the 1,000-point club in 2022-23 after scoring a combined 896 with both Valpo and MoState.

last year and averaged 9.9 points and 5.9 rebounds for Bradley, which finished fifth with an 11-7 MVC mark. Ja'Shon Henry returns after an injury plagued season, playing just 12 games in 2021-22. Villa Tahvanainen (7.1 ppg) and Connor Hickman (6.8 ppg) were also major contributors for coach Brian Wardle last year. Hickman was a member of the league's All-Freshman Team.



DRAKE

Coach: Darian DeVries

2021-22: 25-11

MVC: 13-5 (t2nd)

Starters Back/Lost: 3/2

Lettermen Back/Lost: 7/4

Drake, which finished tied for second in the league last year, has appeared in three postseason tournaments during the four-year coaching tenure of Darian DeVries, who has guided the Bulldogs to an unprecedented four straight 20-plus-win



**The Valley Runs Deep With a Century-Old Tradition
and Continued Modern-Day Success Stories**

2022-23 Men's Basketball Preview

seasons. He led the Bulldogs to a share of the MVC regular season title in his first year in 2019 as well as consecutive second-place finishes the past two seasons.

The 2022-23 schedule will feature seven games against teams that advanced to postseason play last year. Notably, Drake will start the season with a roster whose average age is 21.5. Garrett Sturtz (132), D.J. Wilkins (127), Darnell Brodie (101) and Roman Penn (87), have combined to appear in 447 games for Drake entering the 2022-23 season. And three have already scored 1,000 or more career points: Wilkins (1,279), Penn (1,221), and Sturtz (1,069).



EVANSVILLE

Coach: David Ragland

2021-22: 6-24

MVC: 2-16 (10th)

Starters Back/Lost: 1/4

Lettermen Back/Lost: 4/7

Evansville's David Ragland was named the ninth DI coach in school history on May 24 and quickly assembled a staff and roster. The Aces return one starter and four total letterwinners from last year's squad, and Ragland welcomes 10 newcomers to the fold.

Three returning student-athletes started nine or more contests for last year's squad, including Blaise Beauchamp, Antoine Smith Jr., and Preston Phillips. Beauchamp averaged 8.0 points per game in 10 starts and is the team's top returning scorer. Smith registered 4.8 points and 1.9 rebounds per game, and Phillips had 15 starts while averaging 4.0 rebounds per contest.

One of the most versatile newcomers for UE is Marvin Coleman II, who played four seasons at UNLV. He had UNLV's first triple-double in more than 20 seasons when he had 11 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists against New Mexico on Jan. 18, 2020.



UIC

Coach: Luke Yaklich

2021-22: 14-16

Horizon Record: 9-10 (8th)

Starters Back/Lost: 1/4

Lettermen Back/Lost: 3/10

One of three new programs to join the MVC for the 2022-23 campaign, UIC competed as a member of the Horizon League last year. Head coach Luke Yaklich, who is entering his third year at UIC, is no stranger to the MVC, however. Yaklich began his collegiate coaching career at his alma mater, Illinois State. From 2013-17, he helped the Redbirds win 86 games and earn three postseason bids (2 NIT; 1 CBI).

The Flames will have a new-look roster in their first season in the Conference as only one starter and three total lettermen return from last year. Jace Carter is the top returning scorer for Yaklich's club as he averaged 8.1 points and 5.4 rebounds per game while starting 17 of 21 games played last year. Filip Skobalj started 22 games last year for UIC, and he averaged 6.2 points and 3.4 boards.



Marcus Domask of SIU is among the league's active leaders in a host of statistical categories and enters the year with 111 career three-

MVC ACTIVE LEADERS

SCORING

1,279 - D.J. Wilkins, Drake; 2018-22
1,069 - Garrett Sturtz, Drake; 2018-22
1,065 - Marcus Domask, S. Illinois; 2019-22
1,061 - Lance Jones, S. Illinois; 2019-22
1,035 - Cooper Neese, Indiana St.; 2018-22
998 - Roman Penn, Drake; 2019-22
974 - Ben Krikke, Valparaiso; 2019-22
923 - Austin Phyfe, UNI; 2017-22
896 - Donovan Clay, Valpo/MoST; 2019-22
828 - Jawaun Newton, UE/SIU; 2018-22

REBOUNDS

703 - Garrett Sturtz, Drake; 2018-22
560 - Austin Phyfe, UNI; 2017-22
526 - Donovan Clay, Valpo/MoST; 2019-22
424 - Rienk Mast, Bradley; 2020-22
419 - Ja'Shon Henry, Bradley; 2018-22
389 - Darnell Brodie, Drake; 2020-22
374 - Marcus Domask, S. Illinois; 2019-22
366 - Jawaun Newton, UE/SIU; 2018-22
343 - Ben Krikke, Valparaiso; 2019-22
342 - Cooper Neese, Indiana St.; 2018-22

STEALS

143 - Garrett Sturtz, Drake; 2018-22
122 - Lance Jones, S. Illinois; 2019-22
104 - Roman Penn, Drake; 2019-22
99 - D.J. Wilkins, Drake; 2018-22
78 - Cooper Neese, Indiana St.; 2018-22
68 - Trent Brown, Southern Illinois; 2019-22
64 - Julian Larry, Indiana State; 2020-22
64 - Nate Heise, UNI; 2020-22
63 - Donovan Clay, Valpo/MoST; 2019-22

ASSISTS

435 - Roman Penn, Drake; 2019-22
284 - D.J. Wilkins, Drake; 2018-22
231 - Marcus Domask, S. Illinois; 2019-22
208 - Lance Jones, S. Illinois; 2019-22
182 - Donovan Clay, Valpo/MoST; 2019-22
173 - Austin Phyfe, UNI; 2017-22
156 - Garrett Sturtz, Drake; 2018-22

3-POINT FIELD GOALS MADE

237 - D.J. Wilkins, Drake; 2018-22
175 - Cooper Neese, Indiana St.; 2018-22
137 - Ville Tahvanainen, Bradley; 2019-22
135 - Lance Jones, S. Illinois; 2019-22
111 - Marcus Domask, S. Illinois; 2019-22

FREE THROWS MADE

240 - Garrett Sturtz, Drake; 2018-22
212 - Marcus Domask, S. Illinois; 2019-22
187 - Ja'Shon Henry, Bradley; 2018-22
187 - Roman Penn, Drake; 2019-22
182 - D.J. Wilkins, Drake; 2018-22
180 - Lance Jones, S. Illinois; 2019-22
178 - Cooper Neese, Indiana St.; 2018-22

Career stats only include numbers achieved while student-athlete at an MVC institution.

2022-23 Men's Basketball Preview

UIC's roster is young with just four upperclassmen on this year's squad, including transfers Tre Anderson (Idaho), Shaun Williams (CSU Bakersfield), and Toby Okani (Duquesne).



ILLINOIS STATE

Coach: Ryan Pedon

2021-22: 13-20

MVC: 5-13 (8th)

Starters Back/Lost: 1/4

Lettermen Back/Lost: 8/7

Illinois State welcomes first-year head coach Ryan Pedon for the upcoming season. The Redbirds finished 13-20 last year, but ISU does return eight letterwinners from last year, and it welcomes six newcomers for the 2022-23 campaign.

Kendall Lewis is the lone returning starter for Illinois State. He averaged 9.3 points and 5.7 rebounds a year ago while starting all 33 contests. Other Redbirds returning from last year who have starting experience include Liam McChesney (5.9 ppg and 3.1 rpg) with eight starting assignments in 32 contests. Ryan Schmitt also played 32 games for the Redbirds last season, and in five starts he averaged 3.1 points and 2.5 rebounds.

Of ISU's six newcomers, all six have Division I experience, including Darius Burford (Elon); Luke Kasubke (Kan-



DJ Burns of Murray State started every game for the Racers last year, averaging 5.8 points and 6.3 rebounds for a team that won 31 games.

sas State); Seneca Knight (San Jose State and BYU); Joe Petrakis (Kansas State and Western Carolina); Malachi Poindexter (Virginia); and Colton Sandage (Western Illinois).



INDIANA STATE

Coach: Josh Schertz

2021-22: 11-20

MVC: 4-14 (9th)

Starters Back/Lost: 4/1

Lettermen Back/Lost: 7/7

Despite losing seven letterwinners to the transfer portal, Indiana State finds itself in a favorable position as the Sycamores return four starters from last year's squad – the only institution among the league's 12 members to do so.

Seniors Cooper Neese and Cameron Henry are expected to lead the charge for second-year head coach Josh Schertz, as Neese Averaged 15.0 points and 4.3 rebounds; while Henry poured in 14.3 points per game and ranked second on the team with 5.5 caroms per contest.

Kailex Stephens (9.8 ppg and 5.5 rpg) started 18 of 29 games last year, and Julian Larry started 27 of 30 contests. The Sycamores also return their top assist leaders in Xavier Bledson (97) and Henry (80).

ISU welcomes nine newcomers to this year's roster, including four with NCAA experience – Masen Miller and Cade McKnight from Truman State; Jayson Kent from Bradley; Courvoisier McCauley from DePaul; and Trenton Gibson from Tusculum.



MISSOURI STATE

Coach: Dana Ford

2021-22: 23-11

MVC: 13-5 (t2nd)

Starters Back/Lost: 1/4

Lettermen Back/Lost: 2/6

After winning 23 games and finishing tied for second in the MVC, coach Dana Ford will be re-tooling the lineup for 2022-23 as only one starter (Donovan Clay) and three total roster players return from a year ago.

Clay averaged 8.4 points, 6.1 rebounds, was a member of the league's All-Defense Team, and added 59 assists. Dawson Carper was the only other Bear to see action last year, as he played in 27 games, averaging 1.6 points and 1.5 rebounds off the bench.

This year's Missouri State roster features 14 new squad members, which includes seven DI transfers. Three of those seven transfers started 20 or more games last year. Matthew Lee averaged 6.8 points per game while starting 25 of 30 games for Saint Peters. Kendle Moore started all 29 games at Colorado State and contributed 6.5 points per game; and Bryan Trimble Jr. started 22 of 23 games for Akron, and he averaged 10.4 points and 2.1 rebounds while connecting on 61 treys.



MURRAY STATE

Coach: Steve Prohm

2021-22: 31-3

OVC Record: 18-0 (1st)

Starters Back/Lost: 1/4

Lettermen Back/Lost: 1/10

Murray State enters a new era in the 2022-23 season with entry into the MVC after 74 seasons in the Ohio Valley Conference. Head coach Steve Prohm is in a rare group of coaches in NCAA DI who are rejoining a team they coached once already.

Prohm was introduced as the Racers' 17th head coach on March 28, and his staff re-recruited three freshmen that had already signed and found nine new players from the transfer portal. One major contributor, DJ Burns, started every game from last season for the Racers.

This year's lineup features seven transfers, five freshmen, and two returnees. Four of the Racers' DI transfers include guard Rob Perry (Stetson) who was the A-SUN Freshman of the Year after averaging 15.1 points per game in 2019-20. And former Belmont Bruin JaCobi Wood helped the Bruins to 25 wins last year while averaging 6.3 points with 70 assists.

2022-23 Men's Basketball Preview

The Racers return only 1 percent of last year's scoring, fueled by Burns, who averaged 5.8 points per game.



UNI

Coach: Ben Jacobson

2021-22: 20-12

MVC: 14-4 (1st)

Starters Back/Lost: 1/4

Lettermen Back/Lost: 4/11

UNI enters the 2022-23 season as reigning MVC regular-season champion. The Panthers have won three outright league titles (2010, 2020, 2022) and one shared crown in 2009 with Creighton.

After starting the season 4-7, the Panthers won 16 of their next 21 games to finish the year with a 20-12 record, representing the ninth 20-win season under coach Ben Jacobson.



Nate Heise was the only Panther to start all 32 UNI games last year. He averaged 8.6 points and 4.6 rebounds per game for the MVC champs.

The Panthers did lose four starters from last year, including two-time MVC Larry Bird Trophy recipient AJ Green, second-team all-league pick Noah Carter, Trae Berhow (10.3 ppg) and Tywhon Pickford.

Nate Heise started every game for the Panthers and averaged 8.6 points and 4.6 rebounds for Jacobson, who returns for his 17th season at the

helm. Bowen Born also is back after being named the league's Sixth Man of the Year.

Jacobson is the winningest coach in UNI basketball history with 320 career wins. He also ranks 3rd in MVC history in conference only wins (174).



SOUTHERN ILLINOIS

Coach: Bryan Mullins

2021-22: 16-15

MVC: 9-9 (6th)

Starters Back/Lost: 3/2

Lettermen Back/Lost: 7/6

The Salukis are looking to build off last year's sixth-place finish in the Missouri Valley Conference as SIU returns three starters, seven letterwinners and adds four transfers, including guards Xavier Johnson (George Mason), Jawaun Newton (Evansville) and AJ Ferguson (East Central Univ.), and forward Clarence Rupert (Saint Peter's).

Four players with starting experience are back for coach Bryan Mullins, including SIU's top two scorers from a year ago in Marcus Domask (15.1 ppg) and Lance Jones (14.7). Domask also led the team with 120 assists and a 5.2 rebound average. Jones, meanwhile, was tops for the Salukis with 61 made three-point baskets and 56 steals. Forward J.D. Muila started 24 games for SIU last year and averaged 3.1 points and 4.1 rebounds, and Dalton Banks (14 starts in 30 games) also is back. Trent Brown missed 12 games last year with an injury but he's back for the 2022-23 campaign after starting all 26 games as a sophomore.



VALPARAISO

Coach: Matt Lottich

2021-22: 14-18

MVC: 6-12 (7th)

Starters Back/Lost: 2/3

Lettermen Back/Lost: 8/8

The Beacons are looking to return to postseason play for the first time since reaching the NIT in 2017. Eight returning letterwinners, including two returning starters highlight the roster.



Valpo's Ben Krikke (14.2) and fellow starter Kobe King (14.0) combined to average nearly 30 points a game for the Beacons in 2022-23.

Valpo returns its top two scorers as Ben Krikke (14.2) and Kobe King (14.0) are both back. Notably, however, the team will have several key contributors to replace as three student-athletes (Kevion Taylor, Eron Gordon, and Trevor Anderson) were lost to graduation, Thomas Kithier incurred a career-ending back injury, and Sheldon Edwards left via the transfer portal.

The program brought in a mixture of true freshmen and transfers to fill the spots vacated by departures, including transfers Nick Edwards (Glenville State), Quinton Green (Cedarville), and Jerome Palm (Hillsborough Community College).

In terms of milestones, Krikke enters the season just 26 points shy of 1,000 for his career, while coach Matt Lottich is three wins away from 100 as a head coach.