



BIG WEST MEN'S BASKETBALL

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Media Pick UC Irvine To Win 2018-19 Men's Basketball Title

IRVINE, Calif. – UC Irvine is the media favorite to capture the 2018 Big West men's basketball regular season championship.

The 24-member panel predicted a tightly bunched race with the Anteaters collecting 10 first-place votes and 192 points. Cal State Fullerton gathered four first-place tallies and 183 points for second place. UC Davis was third with 180 points and six first-place votes. Four media members tabbed UC Santa Barbara in the favorite's role, as the Gauchos finished fourth overall in the poll with 149 points. The remainder of the poll included Long Beach State in fifth (116 points), followed by Hawai'i (110), UC Riverside (61), Cal Poly (47) and CSUN (42).

UC Irvine returns all five starters and 12 letterwinners from last year's 18-17 club, which represented the sixth straight winning season for head coach Russell Turner's program. A deep, veteran laden lineup includes All-Big West First Team standout **TOMMY RUTHERFORD** (10.1 ppg, 5.7 rpg) and two-time Big West Defensive Player of the Year **JONATHAN GALLOWAY** (3.6 ppg, 7.5 rpg, 1.3 bpg) on the frontline. The returning backcourt includes second team all-conference returnee **EVAN LEONARD**, the team's top scorer at 13.6 points per game, and **EYASSU WORKU** (11.3 ppg) as the squad's leader in assists (130). The 'Eaters have unfinished business after losing in the 2018 Big West Tournament finals.

Cal State Fullerton won last year's Big West Tournament to advance to the NCAA's for the first time in 10 seasons. The Titans were also the eighth different team in eight years to hoist the tournament championship trophy, compiling their first 20-win season under head coach Dedrique Taylor. CSF returns four starters and 12 letterwinners in hopes of an encore performance. A pair of career 1,000-point scorers in senior guards **KYLE ALLMAN** and **KHALIL AHMAD** lead the charge. Allman earned All-Big West First Team accolades after leading the conference in scoring (19.5 ppg), while Ahmad was fifth at 15.1 points per game and an all-conference second team selection. The tandem has combined to score 2,251 points over three seasons. CSF also welcomes back honorable mention all-league performer **JACKSON ROWE** (12.1 ppg, 6.7 rpg).

UC Davis is another loaded Big West squad with championship aspirations. In fact, the Aggies are the reigning Big West regular season champions after finishing 12-4 in league play and going 22-11 overall – the third 20-win campaign in the last four seasons under head coach Jim Les. Four starters return from a squad which played in the National Invitation Tournament, led by senior guard **TJ SHORTS II**. The conference's first dual recipient of Big West Player of the Year and Newcomer of the Year honors, Shorts II averaged 21.0 points over the final eight games to spearhead the program's run to the title. He hit two game-winning shots during that stretch and also led the circuit in assists and steals during conference play. Fellow senior guard **SILER SCHNEIDER** (13.9 ppg) has scored 1,119 career points and claimed All-Big West Second Team honors last season.

Under first-year coach Joe Pasternack, UC Santa Barbara tied the school's single-season record for wins (23) and engineered the greatest turnaround in Big West history, a 17-win improvement from the previous campaign. Explosive scorer **MAX HEIDEGGER** averaged 19.1 points per game and broke the single-season school record for made three-pointers (95). The junior guard, a returning first team all-league choice and an NABC All-District 9 Second Team selection, is surrounded by an influx of highly touted Division I transfers. Sophomore guard **Ja'QUORI McLAUGHLIN** (Oregon State), sophomore guard **DEVEARL RAMSEY** (Nevada), graduate transfer guard **ARMOND DAVIS** (Alabama) and junior guard **ZACK MOORE** (Seattle) are all expected to make immediate impacts.

Long Beach State returns a pair of All-Big West Honorable Mention recipients in seniors **DEISHAUN BOOKER** and **TEMIDAYO YUSSUF**. Hawai'i welcomes back all key members of its backcourt, including Big West Best Hustle Player **SHERIFF DRAMMEH**. The Rainbow Warriors also are bolstered by the return of Big West Best Sixth Man **JACK PURCHASE** as one of the team's top perimeter threats.

Cal Poly is led by an all-conference candidate in senior guard **DONOVAN FIELDS**, who posted the second-best single-season free throw shooting mark in Big West history last year. Fields hit 75 of 81 free throw attempts for 92.6 percent efficiency. UC Riverside and CSUN are guided by new leadership as head coaches David Patrick and Mark Gottfried begin tenures with their programs. Patrick comes to the Inland Empire via TCU, inheriting a top caliber guard in junior **DIKYMBE MARTIN**. Having served high profile head coaching stints at Murray State, Alabama and NC State, Gottfried looks to turnaround the Matador program with 2017-18 Big West Freshman of the Year **TERRELL GOMEZ** as a key returning piece.

The media panel also voted for a six-player preseason all-conference team.

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MEDIA POLL RESULTS

1.	UC Irvine (10)	192
2.	Cal State Fullerton (4)	183
3.	UC Davis (6)	180
4.	UC Santa Barbara (4)	149
5.	Long Beach State	116
6.	Hawai'i	110
7.	UC Riverside	61
8.	Cal Poly	47
9.	CSUN	42

() First-place votes

Meet The 2018-19 Big West Men's Basketball Preseason All-Conference Team

KHALIL AHMAD, CAL STATE FULLERTON

Senior • Guard • Corona, Calif.

2017-18

- Notched All-Big West Second Team accolades
- Big West returning career leader in points with 1,149
- Ranks No. 17 all-time at Cal State Fullerton in scoring
- Team went 9-1 when he scored 20 or more points, including career-high 34 points in win versus Utah Valley
- Finished No. 6 in Big West scoring at 15.1 points per game

KYLE ALLMAN, CAL STATE FULLERTON

Senior • Guard • Brooklyn, N.Y.

2017-18

- Earned All-Big West First Team recognition
- Named to National Association of Basketball Coaches (NABC) All-District 9 Second Team
- Most Valuable Player of Big West Tournament
- Led league in scoring average (19.5 ppg), total points scored (623), 30-point games (4) and 20-point games (17)
- Scored career-high 40 points on 16 of 19 shooting in win at Hawai'i
- Took 244 free throw attempts, the No. 10 mark in Big West single-season history
- Has scored 1,102 career points

MAX HEIDEGGER, UC SANTA BARBARA

Junior • Guard • Malibu, Calif.

2017-18

- Selected First Team All-Big West, Second Team NABC All-District and Lou Henson Mid-Major All-American
- Ranked No. 2 in both Big West scoring at 19.1 points per game and number of 20-point games (13)
- Scored 612 points – most by a sophomore in Gaucho history and fifth-most all-time in a single-season
- Established UCSB single-season record with 95 made three-point baskets
- Posted eighth-best three-point field goal percentage (.404) among Big West players
- Tallied career-high 33 points, making eight three-pointers in season-opening win versus North Dakota State

EVAN LEONARD, UC IRVINE

Junior • Guard • Cerritos, Calif.

2017-18

- Second Team All-Big West recipient
- Averaged team-best 13.6 points per game, No. 10 overall in the conference
- Ranked No. 9 in Big West in both free throw percentage (.793) and three-point field goal percentage (.396)
- Made conference second-most 67 three-pointers
- Scored 20 or more points nine times in final 21 games, including career-high 30 in victory at Long Beach State

TOMMY RUTHERFORD, UC IRVINE

Junior • Forward • El Cajon, Calif.

2017-18

- Named to All-Big West First Team
- Averaged 10.1 points and 5.7 rebounds per game
- Finished No. 2 in Big West with .583 field goal percentage
- Recorded three double-doubles and five games with 10 or more rebounds
- Scored career-high 20 points in win versus Cal Poly

TJ SHORTS II, UC DAVIS

Senior • Guard • Tustin, Calif.

2017-18

- Big West Player of the Year and Newcomer of the Year – first dual recipient in league history
- Averaged 17.8 points in 16 conference games – third-most among all players
- Led Big West in assists (4.9 apg) and steals (2.0 spg) during conference play
- Posted first Aggie triple-double since 2008 with 10 points, and career-bests of 10 rebounds and 10 assists versus Cal Poly
- Hit game-winning shots against Long Beach State (running three-pointer) and UC Riverside (coast-to-coast layup)
- Averaged 21.0 points over final eight conference games, led team to 6-2 mark in that stretch and regular season title