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Overall, Duke's No. 1

Jack Styczynski

Special Report

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Five years ago, Jack Styczynski undertook a research project, ranking the top college basketball programs for a web site. He brings it up to date for Basketball Times.

By Jack Styczynski

Is there a perfect formula to determine the best college basketball programs? No.

But if you start by taking all the schools that have won at least two-thirds of their games over the past ten years, you can come very close.

Using this criterion in 1997, the field of 300-plus Division I teams was narrowed to 29, without eliminating a single national champion from the previous decade. In 2002, the field is sliced to 28, with all the champs from the time period again making the cut.

Of course, the criterion is unforgiving.

Five years ago, Temple barely squeezed into the elite group, while a strong Wake Forest program missed out due to some less than stellar seasons before Dave Odom made his mark as head coach.

Now they switch places, with Wake in and Temple out. Florida is another glaring omission in 2002, and a handful of schools that routinely send players to the NBA also aren't included.

It's still fair. None of the truly elite teams are excluded. Furthermore, the best mid-majors have an equitable opportunity to compete.

So once you've got the top 28, it's simply a matter of ranking them.

The study uses six equally weighted criteria to do so, and that's where the fun begins.

Ranking criterion #1: Ten-year winning percentage, as used to determine the final 28 teams.

Although logic suggests mid-majors would have an advantage due to weaker schedules, the facts show that major schools are far more likely to win two-thirds of their games over a decade.

Of the 28 qualifiers in 2002, 18 are repeaters (**in bold**) from 1997, and 10 are new entries. College of Charleston had not yet been in Division I for ten years at the time of the earlier study.



Mike Krzyzewski

1. Kansas	819
2. Kentucky	813
3. College of Charleston	810
4. Cincinnati	790
5. Duke	788
6. Arizona	784
7. Connecticut	772
8. Utah	759
9. North Carolina	738
10. Gonzaga	733
11. UCLA	727
12. Xavier	721
13. Tulsa	716
14. Stanford	712
15. Syracuse	707
16. Murray State	704
17. Michigan State	700
18. Princeton	699
19. Oklahoma State	698
20. Oklahoma	6915
21. Maryland	6880
22. Pennsylvania	6879
23. New Mexico	684
24. Valparaiso	682
25. Indiana	680
26. Purdue	678
27. Arkansas	676
28. Wake Forest	668

Ranking criterion #2: Number of former players in the NBA, as listed on rosters at the end of the 2001-02 season.

This is the one criterion where it's understood that major programs will have a decided advantage over mid-majors, and it's accepted (even valued) since players often choose a school based on its ability to produce professionals.

All schools involved in ties are awarded the preferable ranking.

1. North Carolina	14
2. Arizona	11
3. •Duke	10
Kentucky	10
5. Cincinnati	8
Connecticut	8
Michigan State	8
8. UCLA	7
9. Kansas	6

Maryland	6
11. Indiana	5
Syracuse	5
13. Stanford	4
Utah	4
Xavier	4
16. Oklahoma	3
Purdue	3
Wake Forest	3
19. Arkansas	2
New Mexico	2
Oklahoma State	2
22. College of Charleston	1
Gonzaga	1
Murray State	1
Valparaiso	1
26. Pennsylvania	0
Princeton	0
Tulsa	0

Ranking criterion #3: Four-class team graduation rate for incoming freshmen, as listed in the 2002 NCAA Graduation-Rates Report.

Data are only for the four classes of freshmen on athletic scholarship between 1992-93 and 1995-96, and indicate the percentage that graduated within six years.

Separate rates for incoming transfers are not used, because more than one school is involved in those players' potential graduation.

Although Pennsylvania and Princeton almost certainly would have fared well in this category, neither is included since none of their players receive athletic scholarships.

1. Stanford	100%
2. Duke	73%
3. Kansas	70%
4. North Carolina	67%
5. Xavier	64%
6. Valparaiso	60%
7. Michigan State	56%
8. Purdue	50%
Tulsa	50%
10. Gonzaga	44%
11. College of Charleston	43%
Oklahoma State	43%
13. Connecticut	42%
14. Wake Forest	38%

15. UCLA	36%
16. Kentucky	33%
17. Indiana	25%
Syracuse	25%
19. Murray State	20%
Utah	20%
21. Cincinnati	17%
22. Arizona	15%
23. Maryland	14%
24. Arkansas	10%
25. New Mexico	0%
Oklahoma	0%

Ranking criterion #4: Academic peer assessment score, as listed in *U.S. News & World Report's* 2003 edition of America's Best Colleges.

This criterion complements a school's graduation rate with the (perceived) value of its diploma, in some instances negating a high or low ranking in either category.

As examples, Maryland's weak graduation rate is offset by its stronger academic score, while Tulsa's respectable graduation rate is negated by its less than stellar academic score.

A peer assessment score of 5.0 is the highest possible.

Again, all schools involved in ties are awarded the preferable ranking.

1. Princeton	4.9
Stanford	4.9
3. Duke	4.6
4. Pennsylvania	4.5
5. UCLA	4.3
6. North Carolina	4.2
7. Valparaiso	4.0
8. Indiana	3.9
9. Gonzaga	3.8
Maryland	3.8
Purdue	3.8
Xavier	3.8
13. Arizona	3.6
College of Charleston	3.6
Michigan State	3.6
16. Kansas	3.4
Syracuse	3.4
Wake Forest	3.4
19. Utah	3.2
20. Connecticut	3.1
Murray State	3.1
22. Kentucky	3.0
Oklahoma	3.0
24. New Mexico	2.9
25. Arkansas	2.8
26. Cincinnati	2.7
Oklahoma State	2.7
28. Tulsa	2.4

Ranking criterion #5: Head-coach ranking, as determined by a panel of 10 writers from *Basketball Times* and *Eastern Basketball*.

Special thanks to Rick Bozich, Ray Floriani, Brett Friedlander, Dick Jerardi, Blair Kerkhoff, Gary McCann, Kevin McNamara, Pete Thamel, Caulton Tudor and Matt Vautour, who were asked to rank the coaches based on their ability to win and their suitability to guide people's sons. This criterion is subjective, but a discreet poll was designed to reduce individual bias.

In general, the writers ranked coaches similarly, awarding six of 10 first place votes to Duke's Mike Krzyzewski, for example. Of course, there were some discrepancies, the most extreme of which allowed Connecticut's Jim Calhoun both a first-place and a last-place vote, but they were largely offset by other votes. Points are awarded on a sliding scale, from 28 points for a first place vote, to 1 point for a last place vote. Coaches are ranked by their cumulative point total, with 280 being the highest possible score.

1. Mike Krzyzewski, Duke	261
2. Tom Izzo, Michigan State	242
3. Roy Williams, Kansas	239
4. Lute Olson, Arizona	234
5. Mike Montgomery, Stanford	214
6. Gary Williams, Maryland	211
7. Rick Majerus, Utah	205
8. Kelvin Sampson, Oklahoma	203
9. Tubby Smith, Kentucky	188
10. Jim Calhoun, Connecticut	177
11. Mike Davis, Indiana	170
12. Mark Few, Gonzaga	165
13. Fran Dunphy, Pennsylvania	164
14. Skip Prosser, Wake Forest	148
15. Stan Heath, Arkansas	131
16. Thad Matta, Xavier	118
17. Jim Boeheim, Syracuse	116
18. Eddie Sutton, Oklahoma State	111
19. John Phillips, Tulsa	108
20. Gene Keady, Purdue	105
21. Matt Doherty, North Carolina	85
John Thompson III, Princeton	85
23. Tom Herrion, Charleston	75
24. Tevester Anderson, Murray St	70
25. Steve Lavin, UCLA	67
26. Bob Huggins, Cincinnati	59
27. Scott Drew, Valparaiso	56
28. Ritchie McKay, New Mexico	53

Ranking criterion #6: Program cleanliness, as determined by the same panel of writers, minus Tudor, who elected not to participate in this poll. Cleanliness is defined as a program's ability to avoid run-ins with the NCAA (or practices considered risky in that regard) and produce up-standing citizens amongst its players. Again the criterion is subjective, but again the writers voted similarly in most cases, giving seven of nine last-place votes to Cincinnati, for example. Points are awarded on the same sliding scale, with 252 being the highest possible cumulative total in this ranking.

1. Stanford	206
2. Princeton	202
3. Pennsylvania	199
Duke	199
5. Kansas	192
6. Michigan State	183
7. Indiana	176
8. Gonzaga	168
9. Utah	165
10. Arizona	160
11. North Carolina	152
12. Xavier	145
13. College of Charleston	143
14. Valparaiso	141
15. Wake Forest	136
16. Tulsa	132
17. Maryland	119
18. Purdue	107
19. Oklahoma	106
20. Oklahoma State	105
21. Murray State	102
22. Connecticut	99
23. Arkansas	75
24. Kentucky	73
25. UCLA	55
26. Syracuse	53
27. New Mexico	45
28. Cincinnati	16

With the six ranking criteria compiled, the overall rankings can be determined. Each school's average rank is computed by adding together its rankings in the various categories and dividing by six.

Since Penn and Princeton have no graduation-rate ranking, their totals are divided by five. Finally, the 28 programs are ranked in order of lowest to highest average rank.

1. Duke	2.8
2. Stanford	5.8
3. Kansas	6.2
4. Michigan State	8.3
5. North Carolina	8.7
6. Arizona	9.5
7. Xavier	11.2
8. Gonzaga	11.8
9. Utah	12.5
10. Kentucky	12.7
11. Connecticut	12.8
12. Indiana	13.2
13. Pennsylvania	13.6
Princeton	13.6
15. College of Charleston	14.2
Maryland	14.2
17. UCLA	14.8
18. Purdue	16.2
19. Valparaiso	16.7
20. Syracuse	17.0
21. Wake Forest	17.2
22. Cincinnati	18.3
Oklahoma	18.3
Tulsa	18.3
25. Oklahoma State	18.8
26. Murray State	20.3
27. Arkansas	22.2
28. New Mexico	24.3

So Duke gets this project's billing as the top college basketball program in America, replacing the 1997 honoree, North Carolina. Perhaps equally as interesting as the changes, additions, and subtractions to the overall rankings from five years ago are some of the changes in the various categories.

Arkansas had the nation's fifth best 10-year winning percentage in 1997, but has slipped to No. 27, with the Razorbacks now just barely winning more than two-thirds of their games.

Duke and Cincinnati, once considered relatively weak at producing NBA players, have doubled their 1997 totals. Furthermore, the 2002 totals do not include NBA draft picks from this summer, when Duke had three and Cincinnati had one.

Indiana's graduation rate for incoming freshmen plummeted from 79 percent to 25 percent over the past five years, going from the top-ranked school in the 1997 study to 17th in 2002. This development cannot be attributed to Bob Knight's departure, either, as the most recent freshman class evaluated by the NCAA was the 1995-96 group, and Knight wasn't fired until Sept. 2000.

In the coaching poll, Gene Keady of Purdue fell from the fourth-ranked coach in 1997 to No. 20 in 2002. Over the same period, Connecticut and New Mexico both dropped a dozen spots in the cleanliness poll. However, it should be noted that this year's voting panel was entirely different than the one five years ago.

Any guesses for 2007?

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Top Programs, '97

1. North Carolina
2. Duke
3. Kansas
4. Indiana
5. Xavier
6. Arizona
7. Kentucky
8. UCLA
9. Princeton
10. Purdue
11. Utah
12. Georgetown
13. Michigan
14. Connecticut
15. Syracuse
16. Wis-Green Bay
17. UNLV
18. Arkansas
19. Temple
20. Massachusetts
21. Oklahoma
22. Missouri
23. New Mexico
24. Louisville
25. New Orleans
26. Murray State
27. Montana
28. New Mexico State
29. Cincinnati