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# The Top Programs in America

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## The Top Programs in America

*A College Hoops Insider special research project - by Jack Styczynski*

The following report was compiled through the use of subjective evaluations, which evaluations were based on the consideration of objective data, including, but not limited to, the winning percentages of the head coaches involved in the study. As with any study relying on subjective evaluations, consideration of empirical data was not necessarily the primary factor underlying the evaluations of the contributors to the study. The coaches and schools evaluated were not chosen from the pool of Division I programs, but rather from a preselected list specified by the coordinators of the study.

The subjective opinions that the study comprises were obtained from a group of eight CHI contributors, whose opinions were assigned equal weight. Accordingly, the results of the study should in no way be interpreted or construed as reflective of the opinions of any one contributor, nor of the opinions of the CHI staff as a whole.

CHI Editor-in-Chief Joe Dwyer did not participate in any phase of this study.

**Summary:** The following research project is designed to determine the top Division I NCAA basketball programs in America. It uses a single determining criterion and six equally weighted ranking criteria.

### The procedure

**Step 1:** In order to narrow the field of 308 Division I teams to a more manageable number for final ranking, a criterion needed to be established that could be equally applied to all. The criterion decided upon for this project was a mandatory two-thirds winning percentage over the past ten seasons. Since strength of schedule was not taken into account, schools in less prestigious conferences were not penalized for having weaker schedules. Even so, the "two-thirds" criterion turned out to be an excellent choice, as it did not eliminate a single national champion from the ten year time frame. Of the 308 Division I schools, 29 made the cut\*. In order of winning percentage, they are:

1. Arizona (.812), 2. Kansas (.799), 3. Kentucky (.775), 4. North Carolina (.772), 5. Arkansas (.766), 6. Duke (.748), 7. Syracuse (.733), 8. UNLV (.732), 9. UCLA (.731), 10. Princeton (.730), 11. Xavier (.7233), 12. Indiana (.7227), 13. Connecticut (.709), 14. Michigan (.707), 15. Utah (.705), 16. Oklahoma (.701), 17. Wisconsin-Green Bay (.6959), 18. Purdue (.6955), 19. Georgetown (.693), 20. New Mexico State (.691), 21. New Orleans (.6872), 22. Montana (.6868) 23. Cincinnati (.6855), 24. Massachusetts (.6851), 25. Louisville (.682), 26. Missouri (.677), 27. Murray State (.675) 28. New Mexico (.674), 29. Temple (.672)

(\*Please note: College of Charleston also met this criterion, but was eliminated from consideration because the school has not yet been NCAA Division I for ten years.)

**Step 2:** Once the determining criterion had narrowed the field, additional criteria needed to be established to rank the remaining schools. This project uses six, all of which are given equal weight. The first of these is the previously established criterion of winning percentage. Second is academic reputation of the school. Third is the number of players from the school on NBA rosters. Fourth is the graduation rate of players. Fifth is coaching. Sixth is program "cleanliness," which will be defined later.

For the academic reputation criterion, this project uses the ratings from U.S. News & World Report's well-respected annual list of "America's Best Colleges." Scores are from the 1998 edition, and are awarded on a 4-point scale. In order of highest score, the 29 schools rank as follows:

1. Princeton (4.0), 2.(tie) Duke, Michigan (3.8), 4. UCLA (3.6), 5. North Carolina (3.5), 6. Indiana (3.3), 7. Georgetown (3.2), 8.(tie) Purdue, Xavier (3.1), 10. Arizona (3.0), 11.(tie) Kansas, Syracuse (2.8), 13.(tie) Massachusetts, Missouri (2.7), 15.(tie) Utah, Wisconsin-Green Bay (2.6), 17.(tie) Connecticut, Kentucky, Murray State, UNLV (2.5), 21. Oklahoma (2.4), 22. New Mexico (2.3), 23.(tie) Cincinnati, Temple (2.2), 25.(tie) Arkansas, Louisville, Montana (2.0), 28. New Mexico State (1.9), 29. New Orleans (1.7)

For the number of players on NBA rosters criterion, totals were taken from 1997-98 opening night (October 31) rosters. Players on the injured list were included. One of the reasons for including this criterion was to provide insurance against schools from lower-level conferences placing too highly in the final rankings. This is the only criterion intended to have that effect. In order of most NBA players from each school, the 29 rank as follows:

1. North Carolina (14), 2.(tie) Arizona, Michigan (11), 4.(tie) Georgetown, UCLA (10), 6. Kentucky (8), 7. Louisville (7), 8.(tie) Arkansas, Connecticut, Syracuse (6), 11.(tie) Duke, Indiana, Kansas, Temple, UNLV (5), 16.(tie) Cincinnati, Xavier (4), 18.(tie) Oklahoma, Purdue (3), 20.(tie) Massachusetts, Missouri, Murray State, New Mexico, New Mexico State, New Orleans, Utah (2), 27. Wisconsin-Green Bay (1), 28.(tie) Montana, Princeton (0)

For the graduation rate criterion, percentages were taken from the most recent NCAA Division I Graduation-Rates Report (1997). Data are only for the four classes of incoming freshman basketball players on athletic scholarship from 1987-88 to 1990-91. It was decided not to use data for transfer players, since more than one school is involved in their potential graduation. It should be noted that Princeton is not included in this list since none of its players receive athletic scholarships. In order of best graduation rate for incoming freshmen, the remaining 28 schools rank as follows:

1.(tie) Indiana, Xavier (79%), 3. Duke (77%), 4. Massachusetts (75%), 5. North Carolina (71%), 6. Wisconsin-Green Bay (69%), 7.(tie) Kansas, Michigan, UNLV (50%), 10.(tie) Georgetown, Purdue (47%), 12. UCLA (42%), 13. Utah (40%), 14. Montana (38.4%), 15.(tie) Missouri, New Orleans (37.5%), 17. New Mexico (33%), 18. Syracuse (30%), 19. New Mexico State (29%), 20. Kentucky (27%), 21.(tie) Arizona, Arkansas (25%), 23. Oklahoma (22%), 24. Connecticut (21%), 25.(tie) Murray State, Temple (17%), 27. Louisville (15%), 28. Cincinnati (0%)

For the coaching criterion, the only way to rank was on a subjective basis. In an attempt to reduce individual biases, eight College Hoops Insider writers were polled. Each was asked to take two things into account when ranking the head coaches of the 29 schools. First, the coach's ability to win, and second, whether or not you would want your son to play for that coach. Points were awarded to the coaches on a sliding scale-29 points for a first place vote, down to 1 point for a 29th place vote. Thus, with 8 voters, the highest possible score would be 232. In order of most points, the 29 coaches rank as follows:

1. Roy Williams-Kansas (213), 2. Mike Krzyzewski-Duke (209), 3. Rick Majerus-Utah (186), 4.(tie) Gene Keady-Purdue, Tubby Smith-Kentucky (174), 6. Lute Olson-Arizona (163), 7.(tie) John Chaney-Temple, Bill Guthridge-North Carolina (148), 9. Jim Calhoun-Connecticut (147), 10. Bobby Knight-Indiana (131), 11. Skip Prosser-Xavier (130), 12. Kelvin Sampson-Oklahoma (125), 13. Bill Carmody-Princeton (124), 14. John Thompson-Georgetown (117), 15. Steve Lavin-UCLA (116), 16. Norm Stewart-Missouri (114), 17.(tie) Denny Crum-Louisville, Nolan Richardson-Arkansas (113), 19. Jim Boeheim-Syracuse (112), 20. Bruiser Flint-Massachusetts (97), 21. Dave Bliss-New Mexico (94), 22. Lou Henson-New Mexico State (93), 23. Mike Heideman-Wisconsin-Green Bay (84), 24. Bob Huggins-Cincinnati (79), 25. Brian Ellerbe-Michigan (69), 26. Mark Gottfried-Murray State (67), 27. Bill Bayno-UNLV (53), 28. Blaine Taylor-Montana (47), 29. Joey Stiebing-New Orleans (40)

For the "program cleanliness" criterion, schools were ranked in the same subjective polling manner as the coaches were. "Program cleanliness" was defined to the eight writers as the ability of a school's basketball program to avoid run-ins with the NCAA, and to produce upstanding citizens amongst its players. Again, points were awarded to the 29 schools on a sliding scale-29 for a first place vote, down to 1 for a 29th place vote. Highest possible score was again 232. In order of most points, the 29 schools rank as follows:

1. Duke (216), 2. North Carolina (212), 3. Princeton (204), 4. Kansas (201), 5. Xavier (176), 6. Utah (175), 7. Wisconsin-Green Bay (164), 8. Temple (161), 9. Indiana (154), 10. Connecticut (148), 11. Kentucky (147), 12. Purdue (138), 13. Arizona (134), 14. New Orleans (130), 15. New Mexico (114), 16. Oklahoma (112), 17. Montana (111), 18. Murray State (110), 19. Georgetown (98), 20. Missouri (90), 21.(tie) Syracuse, UCLA (80), 23. Arkansas (72), 24. Massachusetts (66), 25. Louisville (58), 26. New Mexico State (44), 27. UNLV (34), 28. Michigan (28), 29. Cincinnati (23)

**Step 3:** The last step was to give each of the 29 schools its final ranking. To do this, the rank of each school in all six criteria were added together and divided by six. Since Princeton had no ranking for the graduation rate criterion, its total was divided by five. The lowest average rank would be the best. Below are the final rankings of the 29 schools:

School	Win % rank	Academic rank	NBA players rank	Grad rate rank	Head Coach rank	Cleanliness rank	Avg.
1. N. Carolina	4	5	1	5	7	2	4.0
2. Duke	6	2	11	3	2	1	4.2
3. Kansas	2	11	11	7	1	4	6.0
4. Indiana	12	6	11	1	10	9	8.2
5. Xavier	11	8	16	1	11	5	8.7
6. Arizona	1	10	2	21	6	13	8.8
7. Kentucky	3	17	6	20	4	11	10.2
8. UCLA	9	4	4	12	15	21	10.8
9. Princeton	10	1	28	--	13	3	11.0
10. Purdue	18	8	18	10	4	12	11.7
11. Utah	15	15	20	13	3	6	12.0
12. Georgetown	19	7	4	10	14	19	12.2
13. Michigan	14	2	2	7	25	28	13.0
14. UConn	13	17	8	24	9	10	13.5
15. Syracuse	7	11	8	18	19	21	14.0
16. Wisconsin-GB	17	15	27	6	23	7	15.8
17. UNLV	8	17	11	7	27	27	16.2
18. Arkansas	5	25	8	21	17	23	16.5
19. Temple	29	23	11	25	7	8	17.2
20. UMass	24	13	20	4	20	24	17.5
21. Oklahoma	16	21	18	23	12	16	17.7
22. Missouri	26	13	20	15	16	20	18.3
23. New Mexico	28	22	20	17	21	15	20.5
24. Louisville	25	25	7	27	17	25	21.0
25. New Orleans	21	29	20	15	29	14	21.3
26. Murray State	27	17	20	25	26	18	22.2
27. Montana	22	25	28	14	28	17	22.3
28. NMSU	20	28	20	19	22	26	22.5
29. Cincinnati	23	23	16	28	24	29	23.8

Credits for data used in this project go to U.S. News & World Report, the NCAA, the NBA, and College Hoops Insider writers Michael Ashley, Michael Degulis, Tom Dowd, Matt Norris, George Rodecker, Chris Russo, Dave Sampsell, and John Stansberry.

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## Jack Styczynski

Jack has worked at various media outlets for 10 years. Previously, he was host of "College Basketball Weekend," named best radio sports show in Massachusetts three straight years. Currently, he maintains [The Sports Hot Sheet](#) - a directory of official sports web sites. Jack is also a member of the United States Basketball Writers Association.

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## Notes from "The Project"

12/2/97

### [Check out Jack's Project](#)

First, I would like to thank Louis Ginocchio III for inspiring the "Top programs in America" research project which appears on the CHI website this week. Louis was the one who originally e-mailed us with the idea. I must say, this may have been the most enjoyable research I have ever done. Thanks, Louis! See how powerful e-mail can be?

Second, I want to point out to everyone that there is no absolutely scientific way to determine the top college basketball programs in America. For this project, a two-thirds winning percentage over the last ten years was needed to make the list. Of course, no one can say whether or not that is a completely fair criterion. I'm not going to sit here and definitively tell you that Murray State (which plays in the Ohio Valley Conference and just barely made the "final 29" with a winning percentage of .675) has a better basketball program than Texas (which plays in the Big 12 and just missed making the list with a winning percentage of .665). Don't be too quick to discount the small schools, though (see "small school success" below). All things considered, I don't think you'll ever find a more objective attempt to determine the top programs.

As I worked on this project, I learned a lot of things. Here are some of the most interesting tidbits:

**Arizona heat.** Although I knew Arizona has had a good basketball program over the past ten seasons, I definitely was surprised to learn the Wildcats have the highest winning percentage of any school during that period. Winning at a clip of .812 is truly amazing. Did you know that Arizona's record of 25-9 during the 1996-97 championship season was their WORST mark in the last ten years?

**Xavier is solid.** When Joe Dwyer picked Xavier as his second-ranked team in the College Hoops Insider preseason top 40, I wondered what he was smoking. Not any more. I still don't see the Musketeers getting to the championship game this season (that's what being ranked number two equates to, correct?), but I do have a whole new respect for the program (and Joe). Xavier stacked up well in all six criteria this project used to rank the schools, and ended up fifth overall.

**Princeton's not far behind.** After Xavier's high ranking, Princeton checking in at ninth overall is the next biggest surprise. Aside from the players in the NBA criterion, the Tigers also do well in every category. In fact, the school might possibly have been ranked as high as seventh overall (leapfrogging UCLA and Kentucky) if its graduation rates were reported to the NCAA. A ranking anywhere in the top five of that criterion (almost a certainty) would have accomplished that.

**Carolina cleanliness.** The perception of North Carolina as a clean program is overwhelming. Five of the eight writers voted Carolina the cleanest in the nation. Two others put UNC second. So how did Duke manage the top spot in that criterion? Inexplicably, one writer rated the Tar Heels 19th cleanest of the 29 teams... Ironically, Mike Krzyzewski suffered a similar fate in the coaches poll. He too received five of the eight first place votes, but a single 17th place vote allowed Roy Williams to vault into the top spot. Incidentally, these two "low votes" were not cast by the same writer.

**Respect for Guthridge.** Before his first game as head coach at UNC, the writers voted Bill Guthridge tied for 7th best among the 29 coaches, ahead of greats like Bobby Knight, Denny Crum, Nolan Richardson, John Thompson, Jim Boeheim, Jim Calhoun, and Norm

Stewart. Guthridge actually received a first place vote and two third place votes. Other voters confessed to wanting to place Guthridge higher than they did, but felt they couldn't do so before he had some games under his belt.

**Coming and going.** A coaching change is the one thing that can really throw a monkey wrench into the validity of using a two-thirds winning percentage over ten years as the qualifying criterion. For example, Drexel and Wake Forest really deserve to be rated among the top programs, but Bill Herrion and Dave Odom haven't been at those schools quite long enough to erase some of the bad seasons of their predecessors. Conversely, UNLV made the cut only because of the monster seasons former coach Jerry Tarkanian had early in the decade.

**Ginocchio's a genius.** When Louis Ginocchio originally e-mailed us with the idea for this project, he listed Duke, Indiana, Xavier, Georgetown, and Providence as the schools that came to mind for him when he thought of the top programs. Well, Providence didn't make the cut, but the others ranked second, fourth, fifth, and 12th respectively. Maybe you should be writing for us, Louis.

**Small school success.** Anyone who contends it's easier for a school in a lower-level conference to win at a two-thirds clip over ten years than it is for a school in a power conference is **WRONG**. I think just about everyone will agree that there are nine "elite" conferences in America at this moment—ACC, Atlantic 10, Big East, Big Ten, Big 12, Conference USA, Pac-10, SEC, and WAC. These nine conferences include 107 of the 308 Division I schools. Yet 23 of the 29 schools which won two-thirds of their games over the last ten years came from these same conferences. Meanwhile, only 6 of the remaining 201 lower-level conference schools made the cut\*. The interlopers are Montana, Murray State, New Mexico State, New Orleans, Princeton, and Wisconsin-Green Bay. They should be congratulated, not discounted. Apparently, it's **HARDER** to maintain a long-term winning tradition when you don't have a power conference behind you.

I hope everyone enjoyed reading the project as much as I enjoyed compiling it.

*(\*As noted in the project itself, College of Charleston also met the criterion, but was eliminated from consideration because the school has not yet been NCAA Division I for ten years.)*

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