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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.

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 ..................................... 6918
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
4. Kentucky ................................................ 10
5. Cincinnati ............................................. 8
6. Connecticut ............................................ 8
7. Michigan State ....................................... 8
8. UCLA ..................................................... 7
9. Kansas .................................................... 6

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%
9. Tulsa ..................................................... 50%
10. Gonzaga ............................................... 44%
11. College of Charleston ................................ 43%
12. Oklahoma State ..................................... 43%
13. Connecticut ......................................... 42%
14. Wake Forest ......................................... 38%

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
2. 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
10. Maryland 3.8
11. Purdue 3.8
12. Xavier 3.8
13. Arizona 3.6
14. College of Charleston 3.6
15. Cincinnati 3.6
16. Syracuse 3.4
17. Wake Forest 3.4
18. Utah 3.2
19. Connecticut 3.1
20. Murray St. 3.1
21. Kentucky 3.0
22. Oklahoma State 3.0
23. New Mexico 2.9
24. Arkansas 2.8
25. Cincinnati 2.7
26. Oklahoma State 2.7
27. 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. Al Park, 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 Thompson III, Princeton 108
20. Gene Keady, Purdue 105
22. John Harrion, Charleston 85
23. Tom Herrion, Charleston 75
24. Mike Lavin, UCLA 67
25. Bob Huggins, Cincinnati 59
26. Scott Drew, Valparaiso 58
27. Ritchie McKay, New Mexico 53

With the six ranking criteria compiled, the overall rankings can be determined. Each school's average rank is computed by dividing 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 9.5
6. Arizona 11.2
7. Xavier 11.8
8. Gonzaga 12.5
9. Utah 12.7
10. Boston College 12.7
11. Connecticut 12.8
12. Indiana 13.2
13. Pennsylvania 13.6
14. Princeton 13.6
15. College of Charleston 14.2
16. Maryland 14.3
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
23. Texas A&M 18.3
24. Texas 18.3
25. Kentucky 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 in America, replacing the 1997 honorees, 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 have long been on the NCAA radar, and have now become the nation's top two teams.

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 179th 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 from the one five years ago.

Any guesses for 2007?

Comments may be directed to Jack Styczynski via e-mail at styczynski@hotmail.com.

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. Tulsa
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