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# Devilishly good, times three

Jack Styczynski

# Special Report

*Every five years since 1997, Basketball Times has evaluated the best of the best NCAA programs – those that have won two-thirds of their games over 10 seasons. And for a third time in a row, the winner is the one located in Durham, N.C.*

## Devilishly good, times three

By Jack Styczynski

It's a three-peat.

For the third straight time, Duke tops the *Basketball Times* semi-decennial analytical ranking of Division I programs that have won two-thirds of their games over the past 10 seasons. A record 33 schools made the cut in 2012, with the nearest misses being Notre Dame and San Diego State. All four times the project has been undertaken since 1997, the “two-thirds criterion” eliminated no national champions from the previous decade.

The last installment in this series five years ago foresaw the possibility of Cincinnati, Oklahoma and Utah dropping from the ranks of the elite, and in fact all three did, leaving Arizona, Connecticut, Duke, Kansas, Kentucky, Murray State, North Carolina, Syracuse and Xavier as the only schools that have qualified every time the project has been done. Xavier coach Chris Mack called it “humbling” to be in such company.

“It’s certainly not easy to have that type of success for such a long period of time,” he said.

In the case of Arizona, the program would not have qualified had the 19 wins nullified by the NCAA in the 2007-08 season been discounted. Memphis also had 38 victories vacated that same season, but the Tigers would qualify even without them, just dropping down a couple of spots in the winning percentage rankings. Regardless, all the wins were counted for both teams as they occurred on the court.

The 2007 edition also hypothesized that Wisconsin, Ohio State, Winthrop, Nevada, VCU and Vermont might be new entries in this year’s version, and all but Winthrop were. They were joined by Belmont, BYU, Davidson, Marquette, Old Dominion and Saint Mary’s as maiden qualifiers. Louisville and UNLV also rejoined the party af-

grow and has never been higher. With that, it’s time to rank 2012’s top programs using six equally weighted criteria.

The first ranking criterion is the 10-year winning percentage used to determine the project qualifiers. Kansas returned to the top spot it held in 2002, winning better than 83 percent of its games, a mark bested only by Duke in the

### Overall ranking (Lowest to highest average rank)

1. Duke	4.5
2. North Carolina	6.8
3. Gonzaga	8.0
4. Davidson	10.0
5. Wisconsin	10.7
6. Butler	11.0
7. Michigan State	11.5
8. Kansas	13.0
9. BYU	15.2
Creighton	15.2
11. Belmont	15.5
12. Utah State	15.7
13. Texas	15.8
14. Ohio State	16.0
15. Florida	16.2
16. Syracuse	16.3
17. Saint Mary’s	16.7
18. VCU	16.8
19. Kentucky	17.0
20. Pittsburgh	17.3
21. Xavier	17.7
22. Illinois	18.2
23. Marquette	19.8
24. Louisville	20.7
25. Arizona	21.7
Nevada	21.7
27. Murray State	22.2
28. Old Dominion	22.5
29. Memphis	22.7
30. Connecticut	22.8
UNLV	22.8
Vermont	22.8
33. Kent State	26.3



Brad Stevens met his two superiors at the 2010 Final Four.

ter having been absent since 1997.

UCLA, which had a run of three straight Final Fours during the decade, did not qualify for the second straight time. The Ivy League is not represented for the first time, although the number of mid-major qualifiers continues to

2007 edition. Kansas has finished either first or second in this category every time the project has been undertaken.

The second ranking criterion is the number of former players in the NBA, as listed on team rosters in mid-October. Not surprisingly, Kentucky was the leader in 2012,

### Head coach ranking

(First place votes in parentheses)

1. Tom Izzo, Michigan State	324 (6)
2. Mike Krzyzewski, Duke	312 (4)
3. Brad Stevens, Butler	300
4. Bo Ryan, Wisconsin	249
5. Bob McKillop, Davidson	239
Roy Williams, North Carolina	239
7. Mark Few, Gonzaga	234
8. Bill Self, Kansas	225
9. Thad Matta, Ohio State	221
10. Billy Donovan, Florida	207
11. Randy Bennett, Saint Mary’s	199
12. Shaka Smart, VCU	198
13. Rick Byrd, Belmont	193
14. Jamie Dixon, Pittsburgh	189
15. Stew Morrill, Utah State	176
16. Dave Rose, BYU	175
17. Rick Pitino, Louisville	167
18. Greg McDermott, Creighton	162
19. Jim Boeheim, Syracuse	152
20. Buzz Williams, Marquette	151
21. Rick Barnes, Texas	147
22. Steve Prohm, Murray State	126
23. John Becker, Vermont	121
24. Blaine Taylor, Old Dominion	120
25. John Calipari, Kentucky	118
26. John Groce, Illinois	114
27. Sean Miller, Arizona	109
David Carter, Nevada	109
29. Dave Rice, UNLV	83
30. Rob Senderoff, Kent State	82
31. Chris Mack, Xavier	68
32. Josh Pastner, Memphis	60
33. Kevin Ollie, Connecticut	41

knocking North Carolina out of the catbird seat it occupied in 2007, 2002 and 1997. This is the one category where it's understood that major programs will normally 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. For all categories, ties are awarded the preferable ranking.

The third ranking criterion is the four-class team graduation rate for incoming freshmen, as listed in the 2012 NCAA Graduation Rates Report. Data are only for the four classes of freshmen on athletic scholarship who entered between 2002 and 2005 and indicate the percentage graduating within six years. Incoming transfers are not included. The numbers ranged from 100 percent (Belmont, Davidson, Utah State) to 0 percent (Connecticut).

The fourth ranking criterion is academic reputation score, as listed in the *U.S. News & World Report* 2013 issue of America's Best Colleges. This criterion complements a school's graduation rate with the (perceived) value of its diploma. A score of 100 is the highest possible, although it should be noted that seven schools (Belmont, Butler, Creighton, Gonzaga, Murray State, Saint Mary's and Xavier) are considered regional universities by *U.S. News* and rated on a 5-point scale used for all schools in previous versions of this project. *BT* converted scores for those seven to a 100-point scale for ranking purposes.

Aside from determining which schools have the 10-year winning percentage necessary to qualify, the final two ranking criteria always comprise the most anticipated part of the project. A panel of 10 writers from *Basketball Times* and the USBWA ranked the head coaches and perceived "cleanliness" of the programs. Coaches were assessed both on their ability to win and their suitability to guide young men.

"Cleanliness" was defined as a program's ability to avoid run-ins with the NCAA (or practices considered risky in that regard) and produce upstanding citizens amongst its players. The criteria are subjective, but discreet polls are designed to reduce individual bias. Points were awarded on a sliding scale, from 33 points for a first-place vote to one point for a last-place vote, with 330 being the highest possible cumulative score.

Special thanks to Rick Bozich, Al Featherston, Blair Kerkhoff, Kevin McNamara, Brendan F. Quinn, George Rodecker, Mike Waters, Dick Weiss, Kirk Wessler and Bud Withers for serving on the 2012 panel. Six of them were first-time participants. Kerkhoff, McNamara and Rodecker each participated twice before, and Bozich once.

Some of the 10 expressed how tough ranking can be, particularly regarding cleanliness. One commented that "it's hard to compare majors with mid-majors when it comes to cheating or even perceived cheating. Major programs receive more notoriety. The media covers them and investigates them more so than mid-majors." Another noted that "some of these schools have histories that stretch over decades and different coaching regimes and are dif-

ficult to purge. I don't envy Josh Pastner's task at Memphis or Dave Rice's at UNLV."

When it came to assessing coaches, Michigan State's Tom Izzo outpointed Duke's Mike Krzyzewski, knocking the latter from his perch atop the poll in 2007 and 2002. The two split all the first-place votes, with Izzo garnering six and Krzyzewski four. Izzo did not receive a single vote below third. One panelist said, "If I were a coach, I would want to be Tom Izzo. He's a great coach. Give me two teams with equal talent in a must-win game, with only 24 hours to prepare, and I'll pick Izzo to coach them. And he's a genuinely good guy. He's grounded. He remembers his roots. He's thoroughly approachable. That's where I give him the nod over K."

Butler's Brad Stevens also deserves recognition for finishing a solid third, far ahead of fourth place Bo Ryan of Wisconsin. Stevens was the only coach besides Izzo and Krzyzewski not to get a double-digit vote. As a relative

it up by saying "it was heartbreaking to see this program win a national title in 2011. From academic failure to rules violations to a long list of players with criminal behavior. The sleaziest major college program in the country."

Mid-majors fared best in terms of cleanliness, with Butler edging Davidson for the top spot, which Stevens called "a source of pride." Duke was tops among the majors, finishing third. Worth noting was Xavier's drop from sixth place in 2007 to 23rd in 2012. An ugly on-court brawl last season undoubtedly didn't help when voters considered the "upstanding citizens" criterion, but Mack defended his program. "We do it the right way," he said. "It was an unfortunate incident, but it's certainly one that's in the rear-view mirror. No program's gonna go without its hiccups." Lastly, for anyone thinking Kentucky's 32nd-place finish was strictly an "anti-Calipari" vote, consider that the program also finished in the bottom five the last two times the poll was conducted, pre-Calipari.

**Winning percentage**

(First-time qualifiers in bold)

1. Kansas	.831
2. Duke	.819
3. Memphis	.790
4. Gonzaga	.789
5. Kentucky	.771
6. North Carolina	.767
7. Pittsburgh	.764
8. Syracuse	.763
9. Utah State	.745
10. <b>Wisconsin</b>	.739
11. Florida	.738
12. Louisville	.734
13. Texas	.728
14. Connecticut	.725
15. <b>Ohio State</b>	.724
16. Xavier	.723
17. Butler	.720
18. <b>BYU</b>	.719
19. <b>VCU</b>	.718
20. Murray State	.711
21. Michigan State	.702
22. <b>Saint Mary's</b>	.698
23. Creighton	.693
24. <b>Davidson</b>	.688
25. Illinois	.6851
26. UNLV	.6848
27. <b>Nevada</b>	.6846
28. <b>Marquette</b>	.6845
29. Kent State	.677
30. Arizona	.676
31. <b>Old Dominion</b>	.675
32. <b>Belmont</b>	.673
33. <b>Vermont</b>	.671

**NBA players**

(2012 preseason)

1. Kentucky	21
2. Duke	19
3. North Carolina	17
4. Kansas	15
5. Connecticut	12
6. Texas	12
7. Florida	10
8. Arizona	9
9. Memphis	9
10. Syracuse	9
11. Marquette	8
12. Gonzaga	7
13. Ohio State	7
14. Louisville	5
15. Michigan State	5
16. Wisconsin	5
17. Illinois	4
18. Nevada	4
19. UNLV	4
20. Pittsburgh	3
21. Xavier	3
22. Butler	2
23. Creighton	2
24. VCU	2
25. BYU	1
26. Davidson	1
27. Old Dominion	1
28. Saint Mary's	1
29. Belmont	0
30. Kent State	0
31. Murray State	0
32. Utah State	0
33. Vermont	0

**Federal Graduation Rate**

(2002-05 entering classes)

1. Belmont	100%
2. Davidson	100%
3. Utah State	100%
4. UNLV	86%
5. Xavier	77%
6. Gonzaga	75%
7. Saint Mary's	75%
8. BYU	71%
9. North Carolina	71%
10. VCU	71%
11. Illinois	69%
12. Nevada	67%
13. Creighton	63%
14. Michigan State	62%
15. Old Dominion	62%
16. Butler	56%
17. Duke	54%
18. Kentucky	54%
19. Marquette	53%
20. Syracuse	50%
21. Arizona	47%
22. Kent State	46%
23. Vermont	46%
24. Kansas	44%
25. Murray State	44%
26. Pittsburgh	36%
27. Louisville	33%
28. Texas	33%
29. Wisconsin	33%
30. Memphis	31%
31. Ohio State	29%
32. Florida	6%
33. Connecticut	0%

**USNWR academic reputation**

(On a 100-point scale)

1. Duke	91
2. North Carolina	85
3. Davidson	83
4. Texas	83
5. Wisconsin	83
6. Creighton	82
7. Butler	80
8. Illinois	79
9. Gonzaga	78
10. Ohio State	77
11. Xavier	74
12. Florida	73
13. Michigan State	73
14. Belmont	72
15. Syracuse	72
16. Pittsburgh	71
17. Arizona	70
18. Kansas	70
19. BYU	67
20. Connecticut	67
21. Marquette	66
22. Kentucky	64
23. Murray State	64
24. Vermont	64
25. Saint Mary's	62
26. Louisville	60
27. VCU	59
28. Old Dominion	57
29. Utah State	57
30. Kent State	55
31. UNLV	52
32. Memphis	51
33. Nevada	51

**Program cleanliness**

(First place votes in parentheses)

1. Butler	307 (3)
2. Davidson	305 (2)
3. Duke	282 (1)
4. Belmont	273 (1)
5. BYU	271 (1)
6. Wisconsin	261 (1)
7. Michigan State	259
8. Vermont	257 (1)
9. Creighton	237
10. Gonzaga	224
11. Saint Mary's	214
12. Utah State	211
13. Old Dominion	187
14. VCU	187
15. Nevada	180
16. Murray State	178
17. North Carolina	172
18. Kent State	152
19. Ohio State	149
20. Marquette	137
21. Pittsburgh	134
22. Illinois	128
23. Xavier	121
24. Kansas	119
25. Florida	115
26. Texas	110
27. Arizona	108
28. Louisville	88
29. Syracuse	75
30. UNLV	72
31. Memphis	48
32. Kentucky	35
33. Connecticut	14

unknown five years ago before leading Butler to two national championship games, he placed 26th. When told of his leap to third, he joked that it was "bad voting," but then said it "really means a lot" to be mentioned with a pair of highly respected coaches.

"Those two are light years ahead of me, and there's a bunch more that are, too," he insisted. "To even be in the same breath as those guys is flattering."

At the other end of the spectrum was new Connecticut coach Kevin Ollie, which is to be expected given that he's yet to coach a game. However, the poll was originally conducted before his predecessor Jim Calhoun's retirement, and the three-time national championship winning coach also finished last before panelists were given a chance to adjust their votes for Ollie. When one learned both finished last, he responded, "Calhoun earned his low ranking. Ollie has a chance to dig out." Obviously, voters didn't much care for Calhoun's suitability to guide young men.

Just as clearly, the same sentiment extended to the cleanliness poll, where Connecticut also landed at the bottom. Every vote for the team banned from 2013 postseason play was either last or next to last. One panelist summed

up the six ranking criteria compiled, the overall rankings were determined. Each school's average rank was computed by adding together its rankings in the various categories and dividing by six. The 33 programs are ranked in order of lowest to highest average rank, and the Duke dynasty delivers again.

So as we conclude the 2012 edition and look ahead to 2017, many questions come to mind.

Will Connecticut remain among the top programs without Jim Calhoun at the helm? What about Arizona as the Lute Olson years fade from view?

Can UCLA and Indiana win enough to overcome some poor seasons and retake their places among the elite?

Will Tommy Amaker stay at Harvard long enough to get the Ivy League back in the picture?

How much effect will the recent conference shakeups have on college basketball's power structure? Will teams fare better or worse in their new or reconstituted leagues?

And once again, can anyone overtake Duke?

Back in 60 months.

To access previous versions of the "Top Programs" project, go to [http://works.bepress.com/jack\\_styczynski/](http://works.bepress.com/jack_styczynski/).