



2003 Guardians Classic Tournament Preview

Princeton, NJ (November 12, 2003) – The 2003 Guardians Classic, a twelve-team exempt college basketball tournament, is set to tip off next week at three campus sites across the country. Richmond, South Carolina, and Southwest Missouri State will host the Opening Rounds of the third annual Guardians Classic on November 17th and 18th with New Hampshire, Mount St. Mary's, Mississippi Valley State, Western Illinois, San Francisco, Tennessee-Martin, Gardner-Webb, Elon, and Idaho rounding out the field (Click [here](#) for Printable Bracket). The Championship Rounds of this year's Event are set for November 24th and 25th at historic Municipal Auditorium in Kansas City, Missouri. The winning teams from each regional site plus one "wild card" team will advance to Kansas City to compete for the Guardians Classic title.

The wild card team will be selected immediately following the final game of the Opening Rounds based on the following criteria: 1) Relative margin of victory or defeat in the first round, 2) RPI of first round opponent, 3) Relative margin of victory or defeat in the second round, 4) RPI of second round opponent. No weight will be given to any victory or defeat greater than 15 points, and once the "wild card" team is announced, the four remaining teams will be re-seeded prior to advancing to Kansas City.

Detailed below is a brief review of the outstanding players and programs that will be a part of this year's Event:

University of Richmond - Head Coach Jerry Wainwright

Led by seniors Reggie Brown and Mike Skrocki, the 2003-2004 Spiders will be looking to improve upon last year's postseason berth to the National Invitation Tournament. Brown (1,138 career points) is returning from a back injury that sidelined him for most of last season. He is poised for a successful return to the hardwood in the Guardians Classic and his 14.4 ppg average from the 2002-2003 season will be a welcome boost to Richmond's offense. Skrocki, a 6'6" guard/forward, was the Spiders' leading scorer last season, and his combination of size and ball-handling skills will create a difficult match-up for many of Richmond's Atlantic-10 opponents.

Mount St. Mary's - Head Coach Milan Brown

While new head coach Milan Brown certainly has some big shoes to fill following the retirement of hoops legend Jim Phelan, his task will be made a bit easier as the 2003-2004 Mount squad returns all five starters and 95 percent of its scoring from a year ago. At the top of that list is Northeast Conference all-rookie team honoree, Landy Thompson. His freshman season was highlighted by 63 three-pointers, 69 assists, and 42 steals, and in 2003, Thompson will look to lead a strong sophomore class back to the NEC tournament for the first time in three seasons.

Mississippi Valley State University - Head Coach Lafayette Stribling

After a 2002 season filled with off-court adversity and heartbreaking losses, the Delta Devils are ready to rebound in 2003 with a strong showing in the Guardians Classic. Led by Southwestern Athletic Conference pre-season player of the year, Attarius Norwood (16.9 ppg, 5.2 rpg), MVSU is looking to win its first SWAC title in Coach Lafayette Stribling's storied 21-year career. With a strong crop of upperclassmen leading this year's squad, it may very well be the Delta Devil's time to climb atop their league.

University of New Hampshire - Head Coach Phil Rowe

Coach Rowe and his retooled crew of assistants have a lot to look forward to during the 2003-2004 season. Bolstered by one of the strongest recruiting classes in school history, the Wildcats nine returning letterwinners enter this year with a good chance of living up to New Hampshire's reputation as one of the fastest-rising teams in the America East Conference. Leading those upperclassmen is senior guard Marcus Bullock, whose poise at the guard

position and accuracy from beyond the three-point stripe will anchor the UNH offense this season.

Southwest Missouri State University - Head Coach Barry Hinson

The 2003 season looks to hold the best of both worlds for the SMS Bears. With four returning starters and one of the best recruiting classes in recent memory, Coach Hinson's squad will be able to rely on veteran experience and youthful enthusiasm as they tackle a tough Missouri Valley Conference schedule. Anchored by all-defensive guard Merrill Andrews (10.1 ppg), the SMS backcourt may be the catalyst that drives the Bears to their first ever MVC title.

Western Illinois - Head Coach Derek Thomas

More so than for any other team in this year's field, the Guardians Classic will be a proving ground for the Leathernecks of Western Illinois. With a new head coach and a difficult early season road schedule, WIU will need to prove they are up to the challenge of the 2003 season with a strong showing in this year's Event. Coach Derek Thomas, however, has every reason to believe that his squad will rise to the occasion. The main source of that confidence is the experience and talent that senior guard/forward J.D. Summers (12.6 ppg, 4.7 rpg) brings to the table. An all-Mid-Continent Conference honorable mention selection last year, Summers must be prepared to lead on and off the floor if the Leathernecks are to realize their post-season hopes in 2003-2004.

University of Tennessee-Martin - Head Coach Bret Campbell

"Baptism by fire" may be the best way to describe the start of the season for UT-Martin newcomers Tyler George and Justin Smith. Both junior college transfers to the Skyhawk program, George and Smith will have to quickly adjust to the rigors of Division I Basketball and the competition of the Ohio Valley Conference. Aiding them in their transition will be senior guard Earl Bullock (16.0 ppg and 2.9 rpg) who proved to be a quick learner himself in earning the OVC's Newcomer of the Year Award last season. Coach Bret Campbell will be relying on Bullock to solidify a backcourt that could prove to be one of the most potent offensive weapons in this year's Guardians Classic.

University of San Francisco - Head Coach Phil Mathews

There is much to be optimistic about as the 2003 college basketball campaign gets under way in the Bay Area. With four players who started at least 20 games last season on his roster, Coach Phil Mathews' squad is poised to improve upon their 15-14 record from 2002. To do that, however, the Dons will have to rely largely on the play of All-West Coast Conference honoree, John Cox, a 6' 4" guard whose 15.3 ppg will provide the consistent scoring threat that San Francisco will need to carry them to the WCC crown.

University of South Carolina - Head Coach Dave Odom

Constant improvement has seemed to be the focus of this year's South Carolina Gamecock squad ever since the buzzer sounded on their final game of the 2002-2003 season. Finishing with a lackluster 12-16 record, the team worked tirelessly during the off-season, and the Guardians Classic will be the first time that Coach Odom's squad will be able to display the new face of South Carolina basketball. Leading the way will be junior power forward Carlos Powell, the Gamecocks' leading scorer last year and a versatile presence in the post who will present a difficult defensive match-up for many of USC's Southeastern Conference opponents.

Gardner-Webb University - Head Coach Rick Scruggs

Things are looking up for Coach Rick Scruggs and his Bulldogs. After a disappointing five-win season in 2002-2003, GWU is returning a solid nucleus of players who come into the Guardians Classic stronger, more experienced, and hungry to return to their winning ways. Much of the burden of achieving this success will fall on the shoulders of 6' 5" guard, Chris Wiggins. His 8.0 ppg and 3.4 rpg gave the Bulldogs a consistent scoring option in 2002, but he will have to assume a much greater offensive role if GWU is to climb the ranks of the Atlantic Sun Conference.

Elon University - Head Coach Ernie Nestor

The 2003-2004 campaign marks a season of change for the Elon University Phoenix. With a new coaching staff and new conference to adjust to, the maturity and experience of the program's 10 returning lettermen will be the key to Elon's success this year. At the top of that list of veteran players is returning Big South All-Freshman Team honoree Scottie Rice. Rice, a 6'4" guard, uses his size to overpower smaller opponents and his shooting touch to overwhelm the larger ones - a dangerous combination that could spell success for Elon in 2003.

University of Idaho - Head Coach Leonard Perry

Idaho Head Coach Leonard Perry speaks from experience. Having made it to the NCAA tournament with the Vandals as a player in 1990, Perry knows what it takes to capture a conference title and earn your way into the Big Dance. During the 2002-2003 campaign, Perry will try to impart that wisdom to an impressive crop of upperclassmen, including senior forward Tyrone Hayes. Hayes (13.1 ppg, 6.6 rpg) was a force on both ends of the floor in 2002, leading the Vandals in points and rebounds while racking up 40 blocked shots during the season. Certainly Hayes' numbers are impressive at any level, but as Coach Perry knows, it will take a similar kind of output to bring the Vandals back to post-season glory.

The Guardians Classic was created to promote the NABC's Guardians of the Game program, which emphasizes four core values: advocacy, leadership, service, and education. Through its mission, the Guardians of the Game program looks to focus on the positive role that coaches can play both in their communities and in the lives of their student-athletes.

Championship round tickets are now available and can be purchased by calling Ticketmaster at (816) 931-3330 or by visiting www.ticketmaster.com.

Tickets to the Opening Round games can be purchased through each host school's box office:

University of Richmond: (877) SPIDER-1 or visit www.richmondspiders.com.

University of South Carolina: (800) 4SC-FANS. www.uscsports.com

Southwest Missouri State University: (888) 4SMS-TIX or visit www.smstix.com.

The Guardians Classic is produced by the Gazelle Group. For more information about the Guardians Classic, visit www.guardiansclassic.com or contact Bill Dunigan at (609)921-1300 or wdunigan@gazellegroup.com.



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