

SAM’S SECTION: BEST IN MEN’S COLLEGE BASKETBALL OVER WINTER BREAK

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Welcome back, students! I hope you all are ready for another semester of Sam’s Section, because we have a lot to cover in this week’s edition. Conference play in college basketball is well underway, while non-conference slates have concluded outside a select few games in February.

So, without further ado, here are the best from winter break in men’s college basketball.

National Player (ACC Player and freshman) of Winter Break: Cameron Boozer, forward, Duke (23.5 ppg, 10 rpg, 4.5 apg, 2 spg, 62.3 FG%, 38.5 3P%, 73 FT% in eight games)

A Duke freshman is running away with the National Player of the Year honor. Where have we heard that before? Boozer is outstanding and looks like the best player in the country in a season that freshmen have dominated. I mean, look at what Kansas’s Darryn Peterson, BYU’s AJ Dybantsa, Arkansas’s Darius Acuff Jr., North Carolina’s Caleb Wilson and Stanford’s Ebuka Okorie are doing. Boozer tops them all, and his best game over winter break was a 30-point, 14-rebound performance at Stanford over the weekend.

Team of Winter Break: Nebraska

Is it time to get on the hype train for Nebraska basketball? It might be, considering the Cornhuskers have the longest active winning streak in the country with 22 wins in a row. They are one of three unbeaten teams in college basketball right now (Arizona, Miami (Ohio)), and their

schedule has not been easy. Over break, Nebraska defeated Michigan State, Ohio State, Indiana, Oregon and Northwestern. All those teams are in the top 100 on KenPom, and the wins over Ohio State, Indiana and Northwestern were on the road. Impressive.

Big Ten Player of Winter Break: Nick Martinelli, forward, Northwestern (27.3 ppg, 7 rpg, 1.3 apg, 53.7 FG%, 42.3 3P%, 78.7 FT% in seven games)

Record-wise, you may go else-

where, but Martinelli is one of the nation’s best scorers and has carried Northwestern this season. Sure, he has not been a great defensive player, and his box plus/minus rating is -1 as of writing, but when you have led the nation in scoring for most of the season (currently Tarleton State’s Dior Johnson), you deserve to be mentioned in this article. He is the only reason Northwestern stays competitive in their games, re-

proven that he can (and will) be the No. 1 overall pick in the 2026 NBA Draft. When he does play, it is amazing to watch him. He is one of the elite scorers in college basketball this season, but it is all up to his health if he wants to remain at that level. His scoring looks effortless, just look at his 26-point performance against Baylor or his 32-point effort against TCU.

SEC Player of Winter Break:

Labaron Philon, guard, Alabama (22.4 ppg, 4.1 apg, 3 rpg, 1.4 spg, 50.9 FG%, 33.3 3P%, 75 FT% in seven games)

The SEC is wide open. It is not as loaded as last season, but the SEC has many teams capable of going deep into the NCAA Tournament. For that to happen, they need big-time players to step up. Over winter break, Philon has done exactly that for Alabama. As of writing, Philon ranks tied for ninth in the country in scoring over the entire

ESPN)

This is a massive game for North Carolina, who did not finish winter break well. Both teams match well, but the one surprise is Virginia’s offense. This is not the back end of the Tony Bennett era anymore when his teams were defensive-minded. This time, the Cavaliers rank in the top 20 (as of writing) in both offensive and defensive efficiency on KenPom. Assuming the Tar Heels win at home against Notre Dame on Wednesday night, North Carolina needs a win like this one to generate some momentum as we wrap up January very soon.

No. 11 Illinois at No. 4 Purdue (Saturday, 3 p.m., FOX)

Purdue boasts the best offense in the country, anchored by All-American point guard Braden Smith. However, Illinois ranks third in offense nationally, so expect two high-level offenses at Mackey Arena on Saturday afternoon. Sad news came on Tuesday for the Fighting Illini as star guard Kylan Boswell is out for a month with a hand injury. Time for his teammates to step up.

No. 6 Houston at No. 12 Texas Tech (Saturday, 6:30 p.m., ESPN)

There is no doubt that Houston is one of the best teams in the country. However, the Cougars’ only ranked wins are Arkansas and Texas Tech. It is hard to beat a team twice, but Houston can do exactly that if they can pull off a signature road win against Texas Tech. Houston has not lost since its lone loss in the Players Era Festival on Nov. 25 to Tennessee. Meanwhile, Texas Tech has shown vulnerability in its depth, but its starting lineup is one of the best in college basketball.



LOGO BY SAMANTHA HASS, ARTIST EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

THE FANTASY FORECAST: NFL’S 2026 LOOKOUT

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With the arrival of the spring semester comes the end of the NFL season and Fantasy Football. No matter the outcome of your season, it’s never too early for fantasy users to begin looking ahead.

Knowing which players to scout and which teams to keep tabs on will allow you to be ready for draft day. So, whether you’re basking in glory or slouching in regret, this Fantasy Forecast finale will have you prepped for next season.

The Player

Over 300 players were placed on the injured reserve list this season, which derailed several teams’ chances at supremacy and diminished many players’ hopes for success. Unfortunately for the New York Giants, their fourth-round pick fell into this statistic.

Running back, Cam Skattebo quickly became a rookie of the year candidate in his NFL debut. Prior to his season-ending injury in Week 8, Skattebo rushed for 410 yards and gained another 207 in receiving. The 225-pound rookie led his class in touchdowns (7) and was destined for a record-breaking season before a dislocated ankle sidelined him.

In 2026, Skattebo can expect to see lots of action as the Giants’ new head coach, John Harbaugh, favors a run-heavy offense. With a healthy ankle, a favorable playstyle, and a seasoned quarterback, Skattebo will be the player to keep in mind.

The Team

Millions of Instagram users have coined a new phrase claiming that 2026 is the new 2016. The posts are usually accompanied by a photo of themselves from the previous decade. In efforts to encapsulate the year’s vibe and thrills, society is obsessed with all things 2016. The NFL is no

exception to this takeover as one team is buying into this trend and looks to bring it into next season.

Following Sunday’s win that advanced them to the AFC

Championship, the New England Patriots are continuing to dominate the league. In the regular season, quarterback Drake Maye recorded the highest QBR aver-

age in the league at 77.2 and carried the Pats to a 13-4 record.

It’s fair to argue that the MVP candidate is something similar to that of Tom Brady, who in the

2016 season led his Patriots to a Superbowl victory. Maye’s chances of playing in Super Bowl LX are strong, as the Denver Broncos will be without quarterback Bo Nix. He certainly has his sights on hoisting the Lombardi Trophy as Brady did a decade ago.

Whether Foxborough gets its seventh Super Bowl victory or not, the Patriots are the team to look out for in 2026. With few players entering free agency for New England, they can look to continue their dominance next season with the team intact and freshly motivated off a successful season.

The Division

The division with the most speculation belongs to the AFC North. In just eight days, all but one head coach would remain with a job heading into next season. On Jan. 5, the Cleveland Browns fired Kevin Stefanski after six seasons with an overall record of 45-56.

Then, 24 hours later, John Harbaugh was released by Baltimore after failing to secure a spot in the playoffs. Through 18 seasons, Harbaugh became the Raven’s winningest coach at 180, causing confusion from fans following the decision to let him go.

The following Tuesday, Mike Tomlin stepped down from his position with the Pittsburgh Steelers after a disappointing 30-6 loss to the Houston Texans in the AFC Wild Card game. Tomlin is known for never coaching a losing season in his 19-year run with the Steelers and had 13 playoff appearances.

That leaves the Cincinnati Bengals, who retained head coach Zac Taylor after etching a 6-11 season. With new personnel soon to flood the division, the Bengals’ outlook is debatable. All this uncertainty means one thing: the AFC North will certainly be the division to watch.

Best of luck, Huskies.



Candidate for rookie of the year, Cam Skattebo of the New York Giants. Despite his 2025 season ending injury, a lot can be expected out of Skattebo’s game play next season.
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