STATEMENT GAMES LOADING:

MUST-WATCH BASKETBALL GAMES ENTERING WEEK 13

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As we dive into another week of college basketball matchups, here is what you should know going into Week 13:

The SEC was known as one of the most dominant college basketball conferences in the country last season, with 14 of their 16 members qualifying to play in March. The SEC has multiple teams on display tonight with Tennessee taking on Georgia. Both squads have shown success, with Tennessee taking down ranked Alabama on the road last week.

Georgia also defeated a ranked opponent, taking down Arkansas two weeks ago. With both teams taking down ranked squads, they look to find other teams to build up their March resume.

Staying in the conference, Texas will take on Auburn. Similarly, these two programs have taken down ranked opponents with Texas defeating No. 13 Alabama, No. 10 Vanderbilt and No. 21. Georgia all within the past two weeks. Auburn has shown their strength defeating No. 15 Arkansas and No. 16 Florida in the past two weeks.

Another notable conference matchup will take place tonight in South Carolina when the Gamecocks take on No. 19 Florida. The defending national champions are still trying to find their missing pieces after notable players declared for the draft following the cutting of the nets last March. The players' time to step up in their roles is running out as we approach February and continue our journey to March.

On Friday in the Big East, Providence will take on Villanova in a key matchup between strong programs. Although the Friars have struggled in conference play, they have shown promise, defeating Creighton along with St. John's who both rank near the top. Villanova has been more successful in their conference play with a 6-3 record, only falling to top programs.

The big game to watch on Friday night will be the battle for the state of Michigan as No. 3 Michigan takes on No. 7 Michigan State. Both teams have dominated programs so far and are looking to add another quad-one victory to the tally. They both have shown that they have what they need to make it far in March; however, their squads will be tested early.

The following day, red-hot No. 4 Duke will travel to Virginia Tech after their explosive second half against No. 20 Louisville, beating them 83-52. Since Duke's only loss this season to No. 19 Texas Tech back in December, the blue blood has gone on to win eight straight, including three against ranked opponents. The question will be if the Hokies have what it takes to stay with the fast-paced offense of Cameron Boozer.

A top 25 matchup is scheduled to take place later in the day with No. 13 BYU traveling to Allen Fieldhouse to take on No. 14 Kansas. The Jayhawks have only dropped a few games so far this season to top programs. They are hoping to add a quad-one win to their resume as they take on BYU following their loss to top-ranked Arizona on Monday.



Morez Johnson Jr. from the University of Michigan's basketball team dunking during a game against Wisconsin. University of Michigan and Michigan State will face each other on Friday.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHIGAN MEN'S BASKETBALL ON FACEBOOK

Following that game also on ESPN, No. 15 Arkansas will host Kentucky in a high ranked SEC matchup. Both teams sit atop the conference, taking down multiple opponents while falling short against others. This battle for the top is sure to come down to the wire as it always does when these successful programs take the court.

The Connecticut Huskies will also continue their successful run taking on Creighton. With the Huskies standing alone on top of the Big East, the Blue Jays will look to slow them down. As a top favorite to make a run in March, the Huskies will hope to continue their scrappy Big East schedule and prepare for the madness.

To end the weekend on Sunday, No. 23 Alabama will travel to No. 19 Florida in yet another SEC clash. Both programs went far in March last year with the Gators cutting down the nets. Both are new programs this year though, not sitting exactly where they want. With Florida dropping more games than expected and Alabama struggling in the final push, both are itching for this win. A victory against a top opponent is just what both teams need to get back on track.

Lastly, a top 10 matchup will take place on Sunday with No. 9 Illinois taking on No. 5 Nebraska. The Big Ten has highlighted some fantastic basketball this year, with five teams ranked in the top 15 currently. Any win is valuable in this conference, often separating the good teams from the best.

With the final week of January basketball upon us, the weeks to March descend.

Many shifts have been made in the rankings so far, with some preseason favorites like Purdue and Houston falling.

Can these programs rebuild and get red-hot when you need them to?

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL:

CONNECTICUT TO INDUCT AALIYAH EDWARDS IN HUSKIES OF HONOR, GEAR UP TO TAKE ON XAVIER

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Picture this...it's Spring 2024.

It's your senior year for the UConn women's basketball program, and you just led your team to the Final Four, with only eight players healthy/available.

What you're picturing was Aaliyah Edwards' reality, who led her team to the Final Four against the Iowa Hawkeyes, alongside her teammates Paige Bueckers and Nika Mühl.

"That group that came, Paige [Bueckers], Nika [Mühl], Aaliyah [Edwards], obviously, they had a huge impact as a group, and they all kinda did it, together sometimes, individually sometimes," Head coach Geno Auriemma stated to the media Tuesday afternoon, "I thought that NCAA tournament in the bubble, I thought Aaliyah [Edwards] may have been one of the top five players in the entire tournament."

Now, just two years later, Edwards is being inducted into the Huskies of Honor. A plaque alongside the best in the program, to etch her name in the walls of history at Gampel Pavilion.

In her time as a UConn Husky, the Kingston, Ontario native totaled 1,861 points and 1,020 rebounds, ranking No. 16 in the program for total career points and No. 8 for total career rebounds.

"Sometimes careers go smoothly; sometimes it's rocky, she [Edwards] managed to make the best out of a very difficult situation," Auriemma said.

Edwards was drafted No. 6 overall in the 2024 WNBA draft by the Washington Mystics and currently plays for the Connecticut Sun. In addition, Edwards participates in Breanna Stewart and Napheesa Collier's Unrivaled League, playing for the Lunar Owls.

Ahead of the current top-ranked UConn's (21-0, 11-0) conference matchup versus Xavier (10-10, 3-8), Edwards will be honored in a pre-game ceremony that will occur 30 minutes before tip-off. The ceremony will be streamed on the UConn women's basketball X and Facebook accounts, as well as the UConn Huskies' YouTube channel.

The Huskies are coming off a 92-52 win over the Seton Hall Pirates Saturday afternoon, where multiple players racked up double-digit performances, including Sarah Strong and Blanca Quiñonez.

The Big East announced this week that both Strong and Quiñonez were the Big East Player and Freshman of the Week, respectively.

This week marks the seventh time Quiñonez has been awarded Freshman of the Week and was integral in the Huskies' win over Seton Hall.

"Having someone like her on the floor who can score at any time and then makes great passes as well, it makes it so hard on the defense and really opens it up for everyone else." Graduate guard Azzi Fudd said to the media after the Seton Hall game.



Former Husky Aaliyah Edwards on the court in her graduation regalia. Edwards is set to be inducted into the Huskies of Honor.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UCONN'S WOMEN'S BASKETBALL ON FACEBOOK

As the Huskies make their way towards February and eventually, March, Strong and Quiñonez will be a force to be reckoned with against opponents. Both forwards have proven this season that they can change the tide of any game, should their squad struggle at any point.

After South Carolina defeated the Vanderbilt Commodores on Sunday, UConn remains the only undefeated team in women's college basketball, with a 21-0 record. The last time the Huskies achieved an undefeated season was in 2015-2016, when the Huskies won their fourth consecutive National Championship.

In terms of the Xavier Musketeers, the Huskies should keep an eye on guard Mariyah Noel, who has been averaging 16.1 points per game in her junior year campaign.

Noel is coming off a 20-point performance over the Georgetown Hoyas, where the Musketeers lost 65-52.

The Musketeers and UConn have faced once so far this season, in Ohio on Nov. 30. The Huskies took the win 104-39, and Strong and junior Ashlynn Shade led the team with a matching points total of 14.

Tip-off is scheduled for 8 p.m. If Husky fans are unable to attend in person at Gampel Pavilion, they can tune in to this conference matchup on Peacock.