

BIG EAST BALLER UPDATE NO. 9: ST. JOHN'S WINS BACK-TO-BACK OUTRIGHT REGULAR SEASON TITLES

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A stunner over the weekend: with UConn losing at Marquette, St. John's has now won back-to-back outright Big East regular season titles.

The bracket is set, you can take a look at it here. It all starts on Wednesday with Providence taking on Butler. This week's Big East Baller Update will feature my picks for the awards this year.

Player and Defensive Player of the Year: Zuby Ejiofor, forward, St. John's (16 ppg, 7.1 rpg, 3.5 apg, 2 bpg, 1.2 spg, 54.6 FG%, 31.7 3P%, 70.6 FT%)

Unlike last year, this one was obvious. Ejiofor dominated the Big East for most of the season, with only two games held under 10 points. His defensive presence was tremendous this season, and the Big East awarded him the Defensive Player of the Year award on Monday. He became the fifth St. John's player to win the honor, joining Mark Jackson (1986-87), Sir'Dominic Pointer (2014-15), Justin Simon (2018-19) and Posh Alexander (2020-21). He helped anchor the 14th-best defensive team in the country, per KenPom, and

ranked fourth in the Big East in blocks per game. His presence on the glass earned him Defensive Player of the Year honors, but he is more than just a defensive beast. His offensive game has significantly improved from last season, when he earned my pick for Most Improved Player.

Coach of the Year: Shaheen Holloway, Seton Hall

Last year's Seton Hall team was one of the worst in program history. While the Pirates are on the outside looking in for the NCAA Tournament, Holloway took his team from being picked to finish dead-last in the preseason coaches' poll to finish fourth and avoiding the first round in this week's Big East Tournament. Holloway gets his players to play hard, and Seton Hall is one of the best defensive teams in the country. While DePaul's Chris Holtmann and Villanova's Kevin Willard certainly make compelling cases, it should be an easy decision that Holloway has earned this award.

Freshman of the Year: Nigel James Jr., guard, Marquette (16.4 ppg, 4.8 apg, 3.5 rpg, 1.9 spg, 47.5 FG%, 35.7 3P%, 68.8 FT%)

If James stays another year at Marquette, he will have my pick for preseason Big East Player of the Year next season. Marquette

has looked so much better with James being the clear No. 1 option, and he played a huge role in the Golden Eagles' crazy upset over UConn on Saturday. While Villanova's Acaden Lewis and Connecticut's Braylon Mullins made compelling cases and were named unanimous picks to the Big East All-Freshman team, James carried his team out of dead last in the standings. Marquette has improved significantly, but the team does not have the wins to show for it. They look like a dark horse team in this week's Big East Tournament as of late, with wins in three of the last four games.

Most Improved Player: Tyler Perkins, guard, Villanova (13.7 ppg, 5.5 rpg, 1.6 apg, 1.2 spg, 44.2 FG%, 37 3P%, 74.4 FT%)

There were not as many candidates for this award, but Perkins stood out after averaging just 6.3 points per game last season. He was one of the few players from Kyle Neptune's final year that Willard retained, and it has paid off with him becoming one of the key reasons why Villanova will make the NCAA Tournament regardless of what happens in New York City this week. He has come up clutch against some of the best teams in the country, including a 19-point performance in an overtime win

over Wisconsin.

Sixth Man of the Year: Devin Askew, guard, Villanova (10.1 ppg, 2.5 rpg, 2.1 apg, 1.1 spg, 41 FG%, 42.6 3P%, 87.2 FT%)

Askew started just two games of the 31 he played for Villanova this season, and his efforts earn him the Sixth Man of the Year award. Askew is with his fifth team in six years of college, and despite starting all 32 games for Long Beach State this year, he unselfishly took a lesser role for a chance to compete for a Big East title. He is one of the key reasons the Wildcats are a contender for the Big East Tournament this week. With stops at Kentucky, Texas, California, as well as Long Beach State, Askew brought tons of experience off the bench. He helped the Wildcats finish strong to end the regular season, notching double-figure scoring numbers in the last four games.

Transfer of the Year: Silas Demary Jr., guard, UConn (11.1 ppg, 6.5 apg, 4.5 rpg, 1.6 spg, 46.8 FG%, 42 3P%, 80 FT%)

After concerns last season at the point guard position, Dan Hurley and his coaching staff wasted no time bringing Demary to Storrs, Conn., from Georgia. And boy, has it paid off for both parties. Demary, who

will be a candidate for Big East Player of the Year next season (if he stays), has been arguably the best point guard in the Big East and, honestly, no other transfer came close to the production Demary has this season.

All-Big East First Team
G - Silas Demary Jr., UConn
G - Jaylin Sellers, Providence
F - Tre Carroll, Xavier
F - Alex Karaban, UConn
F - Zuby Ejiofor, St. John's

All-Big East Second Team
G - Budd Clark, Seton Hall
G - Nigel James Jr., Marquette
F - Michael Ajayi, Butler
F - Bryce Hopkins, St. John's
C - Tarris Reed Jr., UConn

All-Big East Third Team
G - Finley Bizjack, Butler
G - Acaden Lewis, Villanova
G - Solo Ball, UConn
F - Dillon Mitchell, St. John's
F - Duke Brennan, Villanova

Big East All-Freshman Team
G - Acaden Lewis, Villanova
G - Nigel James Jr., Marquette
G - Braylon Mullins, UConn
G - Stefan Vaaks, Providence
F - Jamier Jones, Providence

Big East All-Defensive Team
G - Budd Clark, Seton Hall
G - Silas Demary Jr., UConn
G - Chase Ross, Marquette
F - Dillon Mitchell, St. John's
F - Zuby Ejiofor, St. John's

UConn Men's Basketball celebrates their seniors in Storrs, Conn. on Feb. 28, 2026. The Huskies defeated the Pirates as they played their last game in Gampel of the 2025-2026 season. PHOTO BY SYDNEY CHANDLER, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS.

