

UCLA leads tourney field of 64

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — UCLA, which last won the national championship 20 years ago in coach John Wooden's last game, was made a No. 1 seed Sunday in the NCAA college basketball tournament along with Kentucky, Wake Forest and Kansas.

The 64 teams include the one with the worst record in 34 years, Florida International, as well as the most dominant program in college basketball history, the top-ranked Bruins.

UCLA goes into the tournament as the No. 1 team in The Associated Press poll for the first time since 1975, when Wooden took the last of his 10 championships in 12 years.

In all 10 of those title runs UCLA entered the tournament ranked No. 1.

The Bruins (25-2), the Pac-10 champion and the No. 1 seed in the West regional, play their first game Friday against Florida International, winners of the Trans America Athletic Conference whose 11-18 record is the worst by a tournament team since 1961.

Kentucky (25-4) was made the No. 1 seed in the Southeast after defeating defending national champion Arkansas 95-93 in overtime to win the SEC championship. Kansas (23-5) was the top seed in the Midwest despite losing in the Big Eight conference tournament. And Wake Forest (24-5), which beat North Carolina 82-80 in overtime to win its first ACC title since 1962, headed the East region.

The 1995 bracket is an encouraging one for mid-level conferences which for years have complained that only their automatic entry gets a bid while glamour leagues like the Big Ten and Big East flood the bracket.

But extra bids this year went to the West Coast, the Metro Atlantic and the Mid-America conferences.

"Some of these schools made an attempt to improve their schedule," selection chairman Bob Frederick, athletic director of Kansas, said. "We've tried to encourage them to do this. There are some larger schools in some of the bigger conferences



that don't necessarily do that, and have been hurt by that. But I think some of them got the message."

Kentucky plays Mount St. Mary's of Maryland (17-12), while Kansas takes on Colgate (17-12) and Wake Forest plays North Carolina A&T (15-14), all on Thursday.

The No. 2 seed in the East went to Atlantic 10 champion Massachusetts (26-4). The second seed in the Southeast was North Carolina (24-5), while Arkansas (27-6) got the No. 2 seed in the Midwest. Connecticut (26-4), which lost the Big East title game to Villanova, will travel to the West regional as the No. 2 seed.

Among the teams missing the field were Georgia Tech (18-12) of the ACC, Iowa (19-11) of the Big Ten and Georgia (18-9) of the SEC.

George Washington, which beat Massachusetts twice in Atlantic 10 games and won at Syracuse while finishing 18-13, also was left out of the tournament.

"We took 63 secret ballots among the committee," Frederick said. "We had 60 teams with 20 or more wins and 20 teams with 19."

"All of us feel bad about the teams that were left out," he said. "We know how important the tournament has become, not only to the fans and the coaches but also to the kids themselves."

A deluge of television money has also made it a wildly lucrative venture for schools and conferences.

Three of the four No. 1 seeds went to schools with long histories of success in the NCAA tournament. UCLA has a record 10 national titles, while Kentucky's five titles is tied for second-best

with Indiana. Kansas has won the NCAA championship twice.

Wake Forest is the only one of the four No. 1 seeds without a national championship.

Frederick cited North Carolina and Wake Forest as prime examples of what made seeding the teams "so tough, so very tough."

"You have teams like Wake Forest and North Carolina who are so close to each other all year, and then they are semifinalists and finalists in the ACC tournament," he said. "And it's an overtime game by two points."

The Big Ten led the way among conferences with six teams making the tournament. The SEC, Big Eight and Pac-10 each had five tournament teams while the ACC and Big East got four bids.

Perhaps most shocking among the teams making the tournament was Manhattan, which had a 25-4 record but played none of the top 50 teams. The Jaspers lost the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference title game to St. Peter's but got the MAAC's first at-large bid ever.

"The committee looked very closely at Manhattan College because, obviously, there are a lot of teams in that category," Frederick said. "We looked at their success against teams from 51 to 150," Frederick said. "They were 9-3 against those teams. Teams in conferences like their's play a lot of schools ranked between 51 and 150. Their record was better than the others."

"Another thing that kept sticking out to us was the fact that they've won 25 games, but the 9-3 was the deciding factor," he said.

Play begins Thursday at regional sites and concludes at the Final Four in Seattle with the semifinals on April 1 and the championship game on April 3.

The final AP poll will be released Monday afternoon. Oregon, an at-large selection from the Pac-10, is making its first tournament appearance since 1961. Tournament first-timers include Mount St. Mary's of Maryland, Colgate, Nicholls State, Gonzaga and Florida International.

Committee makes things interesting

(AP)— Once the expected furor died down about who was in and who was out of the NCAA's 64-team field Sunday, a look at the brackets showed the selection committee set up some interesting matchups and made some interesting statements.

The last of the conference championship games made selecting the top four seeds pretty easy and there wasn't any real surprise among where the top teams were placed until you got to Utah as the 4th seed in the West.

The Utes (27-5), the Western Athletic Conference regular-season and tournament champions, didn't crack the Top 25 until last week and were 26th in the RPI, the computer rankings similar to the ones used by the selection committee.

Utah's seeding and that of North Carolina Charlotte, 7th in the East, were surprising but not shocking. That description was saved for the inclusion of at-large teams from the following conferences: Mid-American, Metro Atlantic, Midwestern Collegiate and West Coast. The Mid-American was the highest-rated of those leagues' on the conference RPI at 12th, with the others sitting 13th (WCC), 19th (MCC) and 20th (MAAC).

The power leagues were still well represented with half the field coming from the Big Eight, Atlantic Coast, Metro, Big East, Southeastern, Pac-10 and Big Ten, the top seven leagues in the conference power rankings. The last of those leagues, the Big Ten, had the most teams, six.

Once the brackets are studied it's fair to say the

Midwest — with Kansas, Arkansas, Purdue, Virginia, Arizona and Memphis as the top six seeds — is the strongest. Many feel that may be so because the committee wanted to even things up as Kansas could play the regionals in Kansas City's Kemper Arena, less than an hour from its Lawrence campus.

The first round has become almost a guarantee for an upset by one of the lower-seeded teams and a prime candidate seems to be No. 14 Wisconsin-Green Bay, which faces third-seeded Purdue in the Midwest and there isn't a coach alive who wants to see Dick Bennett's Phoenix on the horizon, even the Big Ten co-champion.

The most intriguing first-round matchup is the 6-11 game in the Midwest with Memphis meeting Louisville. The two used to be the marquee teams for the Metro Conference before Memphis left for the Great Midwest in 1991 and they haven't met since.

UCLA, the top of the West bracket, would get the winner of the 8-9 game between Missouri and Indiana, while Kansas would get the winner of the same matchup between Western Kentucky and Michigan.

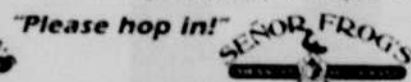
Five schools are making their first NCAA appearance — Colgate, Florida International, Gonzaga, Mount St. Mary's and Nicholls State, — while four others — Drexel, North Carolina A&T, St. Peter's and Texas Southern — are looking for their first tournament victory.

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