

Intro

The Zags had a tremendous season last year, winning the WCC regular season title, and that has carried over into this season, as they were selected to repeat as conference champions in this year's preseason poll, as voted on by the head coaches in the conference. As an added bonus to finishing the season in first place, Gonzaga ran away with the end of the year awards. The Zags took home the Player of the Year, Defender of the Year, Newcomer of the Year, and Coach of the year honors. The scary thing is they return all four this year and look to redeem themselves after losing to San Diego in last year's WCC tournament championship game, 70-66.

Defending Coach of the Year Kelly Graves enters his ninth year with the program and his 12th in the WCC after a previous coaching stint at Saint Mary's. Before Graves took over the program, Gonzaga had finished in the bottom two of the league for six years straight. Since taking over, the program has gone 145-102 and have not finished below second place for the past seven consecutive seasons. The Zags have won or tied for first place in the conference the last five years running.

Primed for another run at the title, Gonzaga returns an impressive four starters from last year's squad that finished 25-9, as well as 10 letterwinners. Gonzaga should be able to pick up right where it left off as the Zags will return 79.4 percent of their scoring from a team that was fifth in the country in scoring offense at 77.4 points per game. That mark is the highest returning percentage in the league, to go along with 73.6 percent of the rebounding coming back.

Gonzaga Backcourt

Last year Newcomer of the Year Courtney Vandersloot was a freshman in name only, as she led the team in assists at a clip of 5.6 apg, the most of any freshman in the country last year. She was also only one of two freshmen to be ranked in the top 75, finishing at the No. 17 spot. Vandersloot was also second in the team in scoring at 10.6 points per game, extending it to 13.1 in conference play. The 5-8 guard not only won the Newcomer of the Year, but also was placed on the All-WCC first team, the only freshman in the conference to do so. Her 191 assists rank third on the Zag's single-season top 10 list. Adding experience to the backcourt will be 5-11 senior guard Jami Schaefer, last season's Defender of the Year. Schaefer was third on the team in scoring at 9.2 ppg and started 33 out of 34 games en route to an All-WCC honorable mention.

Adding to the rotation in the backcourt will be 6-0 sophomore Janelle Bekkering, who played in all 34 games, starting in 11. In only 17.3 minutes per game, Bekkering averaged 6.4 points per game, with a career-high 20 against the University of Washington. In the exhibition game against Concordia, she scored 11 points on five of eight shooting. Completing the rotation is 5-10 junior Tiffany Shives, who played in 33 games with three starts. Shives enters the year as the team's leader in three-point shooting, netting in 50 treys last year.

Gonzaga added several players over the summer at the guard spot in sophomore Katelan Redmon, a transfer from the University of Washington, and freshmen Carter Schick and Ariam TecleMariam. Redmon, 6-1, had an impressive first year at Washington, starting all 31 games and leading the team in scoring at 11.8 ppg en route to Pac-10 All-Freshman team honors. However, she will have to sit out this year due to transfer rules.

Gonzaga Frontcourt

Junior 6-2 forward Heather Bowman is easily the top returner for the Zags after a stellar sophomore campaign, in which she led the league in scoring (20.6 ppg), No. 13 in the country last year. She was also third in the league in rebounding at 8.7 rpg on her way to being named the WCC Player of the Year. This season has not even started yet, but Bowman has already received national attention by being placed on the Preseason Wooden Award List, which consists of only 30 players from across the country. Currently, Bowman is the 13th player in school history to score 1,000 points in a career (1,025) and is the only player in women's basketball history to do so in just two seasons.

Gonzaga will have an experienced frontcourt as 6-0 junior forward Vivian Frieson joins Bowman in the paint. Frieson started 24 out of 27 games last year and averaged 8.9 ppg and was second on the team in rebounding at 5.9 rpg. Frieson is off to a fast start already as she averaged 18.5 ppg in the Zags' first two exhibition games, including a game-high 21 points against Whitman.

A number of freshmen have been added to the roster to increase depth in the frontcourt. Kelly Bowen, a 6-0 forward, hails from Victoria, Australia and already has Division I experience under her belt as she played for the Melbourne Roos All-Star High School team in a nine-game tour against various colleges in the country. One of her better games came against conference rival San Diego, when she had a double-double with 13 points and 10 boards. With her experience, she should see plenty of action this season. Shannon Reader, 6-2, is a native of Lake Oswego, OR, where she averaged 12.7 ppg and 13.2 rpg as a senior. She averaged a double-double every season in her four-year career for Lake Oswego HS. Rounding out an impressive group of freshmen is Kayla Standish, 6-2, from Ellensburg, WA. She finished with 2,076 career points leading Ellensburg HS to four State appearances and three championships.