

Intro

Finishing at exactly .500 last year was somewhat of an anomaly for the Loyola Marymount Lions as they haven't finished at or below .500 since the 2002-03 season, when they finished just under even at 14-15. In fact, the team has finished in the top three in the conference four out of the last five years. After finishing in fourth place last season at 15-15 overall and 7-7 in the WCC, this year's squad has been selected to place second in the conference by the head coaches within the league.

The Lions return Head Coach Julie Wilhoit, who enters her 14th season with the team and is the winningest coach in program history, with 182 wins under her belt while at LMU. Wilhoit also ranks third among active WCC coaches in conference victories with 87 and led the Lions to their first ever WCC regular and tournament title in 2003-04, earning the WBCA Region VIII Coach of the Year that season. Under Wilhoit, the Lions have boasted an impressive 82-35 record at the confines of Gersten Pavilion.

Loyola Marymount faces heightened expectations this year, but has the squad to meet them as it returns three starters and eight letterwinners, along with 70.5 percent of its scoring from last year's team. Highlighting the list of returners is sophomore guard Renahy Young, who is fresh off an all-WCC honorable mention selection as well as a spot on the WCC all-freshman team.

Loyola Marymount Backcourt

The Lions return a veteran backcourt led by 5-8 Young, who led the team in scoring last year as a freshman, with 10.9 ppg and was second in the league among active freshmen. Joining Young in the backcourt is a group of experienced upperclassmen in junior Kavita Goss, junior Lisa Helmers, and senior Cassady Moore. Helmers, 5-9, started all but one game for the Lions last season and led the team in three-point shooting with 59 treys on the year, which was third best in the conference. She was very impressive in the exhibition game against Point Loma, scoring a game-high 24 points on an efficient 8-13 shooting. Goss, 5-9, saw action in 29 games, with one start and averaged 5.0 ppg in only 15.5 minutes per contest. She was also third on the team from behind the arc, with 28 three-pointers. Moore, 5-7, saw plenty of action last year starting in 12 of 25 games. In the Lions' exhibition win over Point Loma Nazarene, Moore scored 12 points on 5-9 shooting and had a team-high four assists and four steals.

The Lions will also receive contributions from several underclassmen, adding several players to the backcourt. After redshirting her freshman year, sophomore Taylor Shead looks to compete for playing time and had an efficient shooting night against Point Loma going 2-3 in just seven minutes of play. Also coming off a redshirt year is sophomore Jessica Vargas, who averaged 8.0 ppg on 51.8% shooting and 4.0 rpg, before ending her season with a knee injury. Before her injury, Vargas played in nine games, starting six.

Newcomers at the guard position this year are Candice Nichols and Monica DeAngelis. Nichols, 5-10, comes in as a transfer from the University of Washington and had to sit out last year due to transfer rules. She played for powerhouse Long Beach Poly HS and earned All-America Honorable Mention her junior and senior years as well as All-CIF DI-AA all four years. DeAngelis, 5-7, played for Windward HS in Los Angeles, CA and was a McDonald's Honorable Mention her senior year as well as All-State team selection her junior and senior years. She ended her career as the leading scorer in school history with 2,154 points scored.

Loyola Marymount Frontcourt

Senior Jenna Sybesma, a 6-2 forward, leads the Lions frontcourt, and was third on the team in scoring (10.0 ppg) and rebounding (4.2 rpg) last season. Sybesma was a model of efficiency last year, leading the team in field goal percentage at 49.0, sixth in the conference. She also had an LMU season-high 29 points to go along with 14 rebounds in a game against Cal State Bakersfield last season. The Lions also return two other players who had extensive playing time last year in sophomores Melanie Ysaguirre and Aleyse Evans. Ysaguirre, 6-0, played in all 30 games, with four starts, while Evans, 6-1, played in 27 games, with 15 starts. Both players started the team's first exhibition game and combined for 13 of the team's 44 rebounds, with each registering a block.

Also looking to receive minutes in the frontcourt this year is freshman Alex Cowling, who earned 20 minutes of action against Point Loma, fourth most on the team. In that game, she definitely caught the coach's eye, scoring 14 points on 6-11 shooting and adding nine rebounds, almost registering a double-double in just her first game as a Lion.

Also playing in their first year in a Lions' uniform will be freshmen Lauren Wilkins and Mikah Maly-Karros. Wilkins, 5-11, is coming off a redshirt year and is a native of Portland, OR. Playing for Jesuit HS, she was a First Team All-State selection and All-Tournament Team selection as a senior, and averaged 12 ppg, 10 rpg, and 4 apg as a senior. Karros, 6-1, is a native of Manhattan Beach, CA, and was the Daily Breeze Player of the Year her senior year, when she averaged 18 ppg and 15 rpg. She also broke Lisa Leslie's CIF Southern Section HS Rebounding Record and is the all-time leading scorer (2,256) and rebounder (1,817) for Mira Costa HS.