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by Jeff Millar & Bill Hinds

Big East

Hoyas, Orangemen to vie for title

Associated Press

The Big East Conference threw a once-in-a-lifetime party last April in Lexington, Ky.

Now, with two consecutive national championships, the Big East has some big shoes to fill — six sneakers to be exact.

Gone are Georgetown's Patrick Ewing, Chris Mullin of St. John's and Ed Pinckney of Villanova, three of the hosts for last spring's NCAA get-together in Kentucky.

But there are plenty of candidates to replace the three four-year starters, and plenty of teams ready to vie for the top spots in the East.

Georgetown and Syracuse still are considered Top 10 teams, and the rest of the conference has a solid nucleus that spells another season of success for the 7-year-old league.

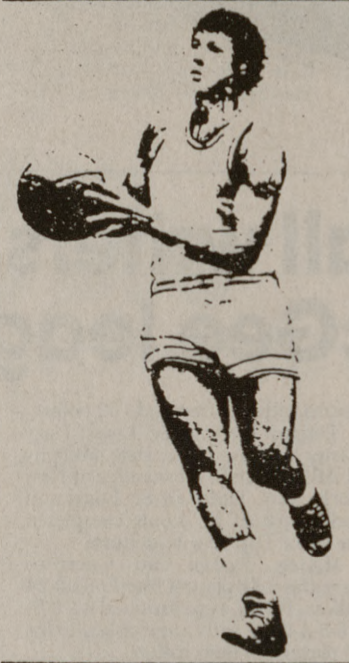
Syracuse returns four starters, including two All-Big East selections from last season — Rafael Addison, who averaged 18.4 points per game, and Dwayne "Pearl" Washington, the exciting 6-foot-2 guard.

The Orangemen also have 6-4 sophomore Michael Brown, who averaged 8.4 points per game last season, and 6-10 Rony Seikaly.

Georgetown Coach John Thompson is looking at a season with another well-stocked bench. Three Hoyas starters return from the team that reached the championship game of the NCAA tournament the past two years.

David Wingate, who averaged 12.4 points, Reggie Williams (11.9) and Michael Jackson (7.3) will be the core of the team. In Thompson's style of coaching, everyone saw plenty of playing time, so the limelight shouldn't be anything new for past reserves Horace Broadnax, Perry McDouald and Ralph Dalton, Ewing's 6-11 backup, who decided to return for a fifth season of eligibility.

Coaches Lou Carnesecca at St. Joseph's and its outstanding guard, Maurice Martin (16.5), should lead the way in the Atlantic 10 over Temple, last year's champion, which will be led by Nate Blackwell (11.8) and Ed Cox (10.0).



College Basketball Preview

John's and Rollie Massimino at Villanova should have tough times repeating last year's success with the Redmen's graduation losses of Mullin and 7-0 Bill Wennington and the Wildcats' departed trio of Pinckney, Dwayne McClain and Gary McLain. Even two representative recruiting years won't bring these two teams to the Big East's upper level.

Again, the middle of the Big East is solid with Boston College, Pittsburgh and this year's newcomer to the conference's high-rent district — Seton Hall.

The Atlantic 10 Conference and Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference will have a lot more in common this year than trying to get out of the Big East's shadow.

Each conference's title game will be part of a double-header at The Meadowslands Arena.

West Virginia could also contend for the title, led by senior guard Dale Blaney (12.3), and freshman Darryl Prue, a 6-7 forward.

Things might finally change in the MAAC. Iona and Fordham, who have met in the last three championship games, should be challenged by La Salle and Holy Cross, which features the league's leading returning scorer, Jim McCaffrey (21.7).

Penn again should take the Ivy League's NCAA berth. Coach Tom Schneider will rely heavily on guard Perry Bromwell (15.3). Cornell returns four starters including 6-1 John Bajusz (15.4).

In the ECAC Metro, Marist should lead the way. It's a team with five foreign-born starters including 7-3 Rick Smits from The Netherlands, who had a freshman average of 11.2 points, 5.6 rebounds and 7.5 blocked shots.

Northeastern and its ECAC Player of the Year, 6-7 Reggie Lewis (24.1 and 7.8) should rule the ECAC North Atlantic.

Lehigh has four starters returning from the team that faced Georgetown last March, but the Engineers should face some stiff competition in the East Coast Conference from Drexel, which returns all five starters from the team that finished second in the ECC last year.

The two Eastern independents, Brooklyn College and Utica, face the same task as in previous years — cracking the elite of eastern basketball without a conference affiliation.

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