

Welcome to the first ever kenpom.com conference preview. In a July vote that wouldn't have withstood a court challenge, fans stuffed the ballot box for the Big 12 more than any other conference. Within this document is one page and about 1,000 words devoted to each member of the conference, chock full of the kind of numerical analysis you've become accustomed to on my site. And if you're not accustomed to this, you have some catching up to do. I try to give you enough information to go on, but I assume you have a little prior knowledge about possession-based concepts. If you need more help, there is enough information on my site and other places on the 'net to give you a boost.

Before we get started, let's discuss the state of the conference. In 2006, the Big 12 had more parity than in any of its previous nine seasons. For the first time every league member had at least four wins, and a form of parity should continue in 2007.

The story of the off-season was coaching changes. Six teams will have new coaches this season, and a seventh has a lame-duck coach. All but two of those teams will be dealing with serious changes in 2007. There will be a group of haves and have-nots in the Big 12. And the have-nots should be able to get enough wins off of each other to prevent any of them from going too long without a win.

Transition will be the theme this season in other ways. Kansas State, Texas A&M, and Baylor have historically been the worst teams in the league. It's been 18 seasons since Baylor has had a winning conference record, and 17 seasons for Kansas State. The whole trio should be playing in some kind of postseason tournament come March, and it's not inconceivable that all of them will be in the tournament everyone cares about.

This season will also be affected by the usual north/south scheduling split of the conference. While the conference doesn't acknowledge the divisional split in the official conference standings, it does with respect to scheduling practices. With four of the five transitional teams residing in the north (Missouri, Iowa State, Colorado, and Nebraska), the imaginary south division figures to own the imbalance of power for the fifth time in the last six seasons, and possibly be the strongest any divisions has ever been. With respect to the conference race, this should benefit Kansas and Kansas State the most, since they'll get to play two games each against four of the teams trying to find themselves.

Let's get right to it. The following page contains a reading guide of sorts, mainly to help the folks that are new to this sort of thing. The fun begins after that, with teams presented in alphabetical order. You don't have to read it from front to back, but if you do, you should understand the logic behind my forecast on the right. Enjoy!

Big 12 All time records

1	Kansas	131-29
2	Oklahoma	111-49
	Texas	111-49
4	Oklahoma St.	101-59
5	Missouri	82-78
6	Iowa State	79-81
7	Colorado	74-86
8	Texas Tech	69-91
9	Nebraska	67-93
10	Kansas State	51-109
11	Texas A&M	43-117
12	Baylor	41-119

North vs. South

1997	North	21-15
1998	North	22-14
1999	North	22-14
2000	Tie	18-18
2001	North	20-16
2002	South	20-16
2003	South	22-14
2004	North	20-16
2005	South	21-15
2006	South	20-16

Big 12 Coaching Changes

1997	0
1998	3
1999	2
2000	2
2001	1
2002	0
2003	2
2004	2
2005	0
2006	6

The 2007 Forecast

1	Kansas	14-2
2	Texas	11-5
	Texas A&M	11-5
4	Kansas State	10-6
5	Oklahoma St.	9-7
6	Baylor	8-8
	Texas Tech	8-8
8	Oklahoma	7-9
9	Missouri	6-10
10	Nebraska	5-11
11	Iowa State	4-12
12	Colorado	3-13

The Best of the Big 12*

Julian Wright, Kansas
 Mario Boggan, Okla. St.
 Jarrius Jackson, Texas Tech
 Mario Chalmers, Kansas
 Joseph Jones, Texas A&M

*in no particular order;
 freshmen not considered.

Baylor

2006 Record: 4-13 (Conference: 4-12, 12th)
Adjusted Tempo: 66.5 (188th Overall, 6th in Big 12)
Adjusted Offensive Efficiency: 104.2 (129th, 10th)
Adjusted Defensive Efficiency: 100.5 (155th, 11th)
Pythagorean Winning %: .601 (137th, 11th)

What Baylor did well: *Improve.*

Seriously, this isn't some sort of pity designation for the Bears. By virtue of the NCAA dropping their non-conference schedule, we saw a controlled experiment of how much a team improves from game to game against teams already at their peak.

Baylor suffered for the first five games which they lost by an average of about 20 points, trailing by an average of 13 points at halftime. But after that, they went 4-8 including road losses to Texas and Kansas, which weren't fair fights for any Big 12 team in February. Baylor actually outscored the opposition in the ten other games.

What Baylor didn't do well: *Anything inside the arc offensively.*

We have to take all of Baylor's stats with a grain of salt. They played the toughest schedule on a per-game basis of any team in the nation. So the lack of pre-season cupcakes deflated the Bears' figures to a degree. Witness their ranking of 312th in raw defensive efficiency. Once that figure is adjusted for competition, it turns out their D was above average (155th) compared to the rest of D-I.

But offensively, they lacked the ability to make shots inside the arc (41.4% on 2-point shots, 329th nationally), get to the line (22.3 free-throw rate, 263rd), or grab their own misses (29.3% offensive rebounding percentage, 263rd). The only Bear to make more than half of his 2-point tries was 7-foot project Mamadou Diene. Diene attempted only 8.3% of his team's shots while he was on the floor, fourth lowest in the nation among those with at least 40% playing time. So the degree of difficulty on those shots was probably not all that high.

The lack of an inside presence led to a one-trick offense. 39% of their shots came from beyond the arc, tops in the conference. 37.4% of their points came from that range, again leading the conference and 11th in the nation. It's hard to improve something when your players don't have the skills to succeed in a particular area, and that may be why the D improved more than the O.

What we learned in 2006: *Practice is nice but*

games are better.

Practice certainly has its place in the development of a basketball team. But Baylor's sanctions didn't affect their practice time. They were allowed to start in mid-October like everybody else. Yet clearly they were behind the learning curve by the time their season started because everyone else was playing games while the Bears practiced and practiced and practiced.

Also, *Mamadou Diene doesn't get enough credit.*

In the rare times you hear people talk about Baylor hoops, most of the words are devoted to the starting backcourt of Curtis Jerrells and Aaron Bruce, who will again take on the scoring load on a team without quality frontline options.

But the Bears' defense, while not a thing of beauty, was providing legitimate resistance to the opposition by the end of the season. The strength on D was field goal percentage defense, and Diene was a big contributor to that. Like most projects, he buys playing time for his offense with disruptive defense. He led the Big 12 in block percentage. And among freshman regulars, he was second in the country behind Tyrus Thomas. Considering he didn't get any tune-up games, that's pretty nice.

The bad news is that projects rarely pan out. I'm sure there are some shot-blockers with inept offense that eventually gain some skills with the ball, but I can't think of any. Famous freshmen in 2005 that fit the Diene profile include Kentucky's Shagari Alleyne, Arkansas' Steven Hill, and Boston College's Sean Williams.

In '06, Alleyne rotted on the bench under Tubby Smith's new commitment to offense, and Hill and Williams were essentially the same one-dimensional players. And Diene's offense lags behind those guys which is really saying something. So he will probably find more bench time before his career is over if the upward trend in Scott Drew's recruiting continues. It may even happen this season if 7-1 freshman Josh Lomers is even marginally athletic.

Four Factors (plus two)

	Offense	Defense
Effective FG%	47.0 (261 st /12 th)	49.9 (179 th /11 th)
Turnover %	22.7 (237 th /9 th)	19.1 (282 nd /12 th)
Off. Rebound %	29.3 (263 rd /11 th)	37.4 (321 st /12 th)
Free Throw Rate	22.3 (263 rd /10 th)	39.2 (228 th /10 th)
Luck: -.054 (271 st /9 th)	Consistency: 25.4 (316 th /9 th)	

What's in store for 2007: Baylor is in a unique position where they have a good chance for improvement while most of the rest of the conference slides. Outside of Kansas, Texas, and Texas A&M, there's not a team in the conference I would feel safe picking to beat the Bears in a single game scenario.

I'm normally not one to dismiss certain parts of a season when evaluating a team's past performance, but if there ever was an excuse to, Baylor has it. What if Baylor had 15 games to prepare for the conference opener like everyone else? It's not like they would have been a bubble team, but maybe they get an extra conference win or two from it. There's no doubt that Scott Drew can use his soft non-conference schedule to attempt to develop a little more diversity in his offense.

Baylor is still a team with question marks, though. They lost their only interior offensive threat in Tommy Swanson, and will have to rely on freshmen, though highly regarded, to fill that void. On the other hand, Lomers should combine with Diene to give Baylor a formidable shot-blocker on the floor at all times. This could be a defense that finds itself in the top half of the conference.

Unlike some of their conference mates, at least Baylor has continuity. Even if we consider their entire slate in '06, it would be reasonable to expect a six-win conference season given what the Bears bring back from that squad and what their opponents lose. But Drew found his rotation towards the end of the season, especially when scoring machine Patrick Fields started getting regular time at the wing.

I figure their pre-season slate is worth an extra game, and luck cost them about a game last season. So with a few breaks, a .500 conference record wouldn't be a shock. But in a down year for the conference and with few challenges out of conference, this won't get them dancing.

Barometer Game: Baylor is participating in the NIT Season Tip-Off, with a potential second round game at Gonzaga. But a more revealing test comes on December 9th when they host South Carolina. It's a game they need to win if they plan to be in the middle class of the Big 12.

The Roster

Effective Height=6'-5.55" (4th) Effective Experience=0.93 (12th) Returning Minutes=87.2% (1st)

	%Min	ORtg	%Poss/Shots	eFG%	OR/DR%	FTR	A/TO	Blk/Stl	Inside	FT/2P/3P%	
0 Curtis Jerrell	6-1/G	83	100	24/25	52	2/8	27	25/22	0/3	-15	73/49/37
14 Aaron Bruce	6-3/G	77	98	26/28	48	2/11	18	26/21	0/1	-36	81/33/41
32 Tommy Swanson	6-10/F-C	61	101	16/16	47	8/13	47	5/17	4/2	+21	69/47/30
15 Mamadou Diene	7-0/C	58	80	13/9	52	11/17	39	5/38	10/1	+39	33/52/-
20 Tim Bush	6-6/F	53	82	13/13	33	4/11	31	9/20	0/2	-3	75/33/23
5 Henry Dugat	6-0/G	53	79	21/23	45	1/10	11	13/28	0/2	-46	58/33/37
23 Kevin Rogers	6-9/F	52	87	20/20	39	8/13	41	4/20	3/2	+41	77/39/-
10 Patrick Fields	6-6/G-F	39	105	24/22	59	3/9	63	7/23	0/3	+11	75/49/45

Newcomers in '07: Tweety Carter 5-10/G, Josh Lomers 7-1/C, Penny Thiam 6-8/F, Jari Vanttaja 6-10/F

Colorado

2006 Record: 20-10 (Conference: 9-7, 5th)
Adjusted Tempo: 71.3 (30th Overall, 2nd in Big 12)
Adjusted Offensive Efficiency: 108.3 (69th, 5th)
Adjusted Defensive Efficiency: 97.1 (102nd, 9th)
Pythagorean Winning %: .778 (82nd, 8th)

Four Factors (plus two)

	Offense	Defense
Effective FG%	49.7 (149 th /7 th)	47.9 (92 nd /6 th)
Turnover %	19.4 (62 nd /2 nd)	21.7 (126 th /6 th)
Off. Rebound %	39.0 (14 th /3 rd)	32.0 (156 th /6 th)
Free Throw Rate	20.7 (303 rd /11 th)	36.4 (174 th /8 th)
Luck: +.042 (51 st /2 nd)	Consistency: 28.5 (329 th /10 th)	

What Colorado did well: *Hit the offensive boards.*

It's not that Colorado excelled in offensive rebounding like few other teams in the country. It's that in most other respects, they look like a team that shouldn't have done that, having all the earmarks of a perimeter-dominated team.

Their field goals attempts were 3's more often than most (36.5%). An offshoot of this was two signatures that mark teams that depend on the 3. First, they had trouble getting to the free-throw line, ranking in the bottom 40 teams in the nation at that skill. And second, not forcing the ball inside as much meant that they didn't commit many turnovers, ranking 66th nationally there.

Based on that *and* that CU wasn't a good defensive rebounding team, one would reasonably assume that the Buffs didn't have much representation in the paint on the offensive end. But they did, grabbing 39% of available offensive boards, good for the 14th best mark in the nation. And that wasn't padded by the pre-conference slate - they posted the same figure during Big 12 play.

That was part of the story in 2006. Based on appearances, CU looked like a solid team. They had enough height and athleticism to compete with anyone. What they didn't have was much basketball skill. They could hit the offensive glass, block shots, and do things that athletes do. But they couldn't do things that basketball players do - like put the ball in the basket with any regularity.

What Colorado didn't do well: *Shoot the 3-pointer.*

Which was a problem, because as mentioned above, Colorado's offense tended to be perimeter-dependent, more so as the quality of their opponent increased. Against their very weak non-conference schedule, 32.8% of CU's field goal attempts were from 3. In their 19 games encompassing conference and postseason play, 38.8% of their shots came

from beyond the arc.

But of the Buffs four high-volume shooters, none connected on at least 36% of his 3-point attempts. That goes a long way to explain why Colorado was among the ten most inconsistent teams in the nation.

What we learned in 2006: *Slow down Richard Roby and you shut down Colorado.*

Richard Roby can dominate at your local playground. That much he proved during Colorado's 10-1 romp through the pathetic non-conference docket. During that time, Roby registered a 61.2 true shooting percentage.

TS% is the best measure of shooting efficiency, accounting for effective field goal percentage and trips to the free throw line. 61.2% is a nice figure. How nice? Last season there were 1,103 players that took at least 200 shots. Roby's pre-conference TS% would have placed Roby 79th among that group.

Once conference play began, Roby had to go against taller and quicker defenders and against opposing coaches that realized that CU didn't have another offensive option like him. It's no surprise that Roby's production took a hit, but the degree to which it did was amazing. His TS% fell to 50.5. In our group mentioned above, this would rank him 875th.

Every superstar's numbers are affected somewhat by the competition. But Roby's were affected so much it's not fair to place the superstar label on him. Roby's drop in efficiency was taking place as he took a much higher percentage of the Buffaloes' shots while he was on the court - 25.9% before conference play began vs. 29.6% after.

Roby would be a nice second scoring option on a top 25 team. But in '06, he was forced to be number one on a team that didn't have anyone willing to step up as a viable second or even third option. And that took its toll on Roby's efficiency against better competition.

What's in store for 2007: In some respects, a

lot went right during the 2006 campaign. Colorado had more experience than nearly every team in the nation, played on the weaker side of the conference, didn't have to deal with any serious injuries, *and* they benefited by a about one win from luck.

That luck figure only considers offensive and defensive efficiency from game to game. Think about this: Colorado's great offensive rebounding in '06 ranked just 153rd in '05 with nearly the exact same roster. I wonder how much of their offensive efficiency was boosted by more than a few fortunate rebounding bounces.

But even with all of the good karma, the Buffaloes weren't expecting their name to be called when Selection Sunday came around.

Now, with an athletic department burned by a recent expensive buyout of a football coach, CU elected to let Ricardo Patton coach out the final year of his contract rather than fire him. This in an off-season when Patton needed to replace all but four scholarship players.

You can guess what kind of recruiting class that resulted in. Patton managed to find takers to fill all of the vacancies, but nobody of note. Barring any surprises from the new guys, the Buffs will take a downgrade in the frontcourt. They also have likely lost a solid point guard in Marcus Hall due to grades. They do return Roby on one of the wings. But CU will be battling with Iowa State and Missouri to avoid the very bottom spot in the conference.

However, those two schools are starting the rebuilding process with a new coach this season. Colorado has decided to wait another year to do that.

Barometer Game: Colorado plays five of its first ten games against the Mountain West Conference. A December 9th game hosting Colorado State will be a matchup of coaches on the hot seat. If Colorado can't defeat a lower level MWC team at home, you have to question how they will avoid the Big 12 cellar.

The Roster

Effective Height=6'-5.49" (5th) Effective Experience=2.35 (1st) Returning Minutes=28.8% (11th)

	%Min	ORtg	%Poss/Shots	eFG%	OR/DR%	FTR	A/TO	Blk/Stl	Inside	FT/2P/3P%	
23 Richard Roby	6-6/G	75	110	26/28	50	5/14	34	16/15	3/4	-9	74/47/36
21 Marcus Hall(?)	6-1/G	66	105	19/20	48	2/8	13	28/21	1/3	-29	69/46/34
15 Chris Copeland	6-8/F	61	112	23/24	53	7/15	33	12/16	5/2	-17	69/52/36
4 Andy Osborn	6-9/F	48	115	17/21	53	6/14	12	8/13	5/1	-65	75/53/35
5 Jayson Obazuaye	6-2/G	46	99	21/20	51	9/12	37	15/20	1/2	+29	43/53/21
12 Martane Freeman	6-7/F	42	116	22/20	55	11/8	50	13/17	3/3	+24	69/58/31
11 Dominique Coleman	6-3/G	33	90	21/18	45	6/11	29	23/27	2/4	+2	49/49/23
33 Julius Ashby	6-9/F-C	33	93	17/15	43	9/15	37	7/24	7/1	+37	69/43/-
32 M. King-Stockton	6-9/F	28	93	13/11	42	12/18	28	8/23	5/1	+28	31/42/-
1 Glean Eddy	6-6/F	25	106	20/16	52	11/19	61	11/26	1/1	+28	76/50/38
42 Antoine McGee	5-10/G	15	81	9/5	20	2/2	27	23/35	1/3	0	50/27/-
Newcomers in '07: Jermyl Jackson-Wilson 6-5/F (Ohio State), Kalvin Bay 6-1/G, Daniel Brown 6-6/G, Sean Kowal 6-10/C, Xavier Silas 6-4/G, Dwight Thorne 6-2/G, Dale Vanwright 6-6-F, Jeremy Williams 6-7/F											

Iowa State

2006 Record: 16-14 (Conference: 6-10, T-7th)
Adjusted Tempo: 71.9 (21st Overall, 1st in Big 12)
Adjusted Offensive Efficiency: 111.3 (44th, 4th)
Adjusted Defensive Efficiency: 98.7 (125th, 10th)
Pythagorean Winning %: .801 (71st, 6th)

Four Factors (plus two)

	Offense	Defense
Effective FG%	50.4 (119 th /6 th)	53.1 (300 th /12 th)
Turnover %	18.2 (21 st /1 st)	25.8 (11 th /2 nd)
Off. Rebound %	31.6 (186 th /9 th)	36.2 (298 th /11 th)
Free Throw Rate	20.0 (320 th /12 th)	45.6 (310 th /11 th)
Luck: -.063 (285 th /10 th)	Consistency: 17.7 (85 th /2 nd)	

What Iowa State did well: Take care of the ball.

This was an easy call, since there wasn't much else that the Cyclones excelled at. You would have to expect a team with a quality backcourt like ISU to fare well in this category, especially when the ball is in the possession of said backcourt the vast majority of the time.

What Iowa State didn't do well: Everything defensively except force turnovers.

Iowa State ranked 11th nationally in forcing turnovers. The problem was that the Cyclones had a feast-or-famine defense. When they weren't creating turnovers, opposing offenses were gorging themselves at the points buffet all too often, as illustrated by the Cyclones ranking in the bottom 40 in three of the other four defensive factors.

At this point, I'd like to take a digression down Stats Lane.

There are some useful concepts that reveal themselves when we separate turnovers by steals from other turnovers. For instance, when we look at all 334 teams, there's virtually no correlation between steals forced and the non-steal turnovers (NST) forced. That is to say if you tell me what a team's steal rate is, I can draw no conclusions about what their rate of forcing NST's is.

Of course, we don't have to draw any conclusions, because we can just calculate the rate at which teams force NST's. And Iowa State was one of the few teams that excelled in forcing steals and NST's, ranking 24th in the former and 34th in the latter. They were one of only eight squads to rank in the top 50 of both steals and NST's.

By the way, serious props go out to Temple. John Chaney may have been a lunatic in some respects, but the Owls' defense was second in steal rate and the offense led the nation in fewest steals allowed. But much like Chaney is a complex individual, the steal stats don't tell the whole story.

While the Owls were 2nd in steal rate, they were

329th in forcing NST's! That got me to thinking of a potential "junk" stat - something called Gambling Rate. Relax compliance officers, this has nothing to do with Vegas.

Teams that use gambling strategies on defense will tend to force a lot of steals, but will also give up more easy hoops than most teams, which should suppress the NST rate. So Gambling Rate is simply the ratio of defensive steal rate and NST rate.

The top five in Gambling Rate...

1	Temple	1.96
2	Houston	1.52
3	La Salle	1.43
4	Kansas	1.42
5	Texas	1.41

In what may just be a coincidence, Texas and Temple rated as the two most inconsistent teams in basketball last season. The fact that more than any other team, Temple allows opponents to utilize the 3-pointer had something to do with that, too. By the way, Iowa State is ranked a conservative 100th.

What we learned in 2006: Ross Marsden avoids the box score like no other D-I player.

The box score only reports certain events for us. And those box scores didn't say much about Marsden. He used 6.7% of the Cyclone possessions, which was the fewest of any Division I player with at least 40% playing time.

He took just 62 shots in 613 minutes. That's 4 shots per 40 minutes. And this was on a team that played at a faster than average pace.

Marsden didn't stand out defensively nor was he a particularly good rebounder. One can only assume he was amazing at screening players defending Stinson and Blalock on their way to penetration.

While Ross Marsden wasn't terribly useful for Iowa State last season, he enlightened those interested in statistical measures of the game. We learned just how little a player can be involved in an offense at the major college

level.

What's in store for 2007: Big changes. I mean, could you find two coaches with styles that conflict as much as Wayne Morgan and Greg McDermott? Well, probably, but there aren't many.

Iowa State will go from a team that ran at every opportunity - and made its opponent run, also - to a team that will prevent fast breaks at all costs and isn't terribly interested in pushing the ball up the court themselves.

The good thing for McDermott is that there doesn't have to be any delay to make the change. The starting backcourt from last season would have been a bad fit for McDermott's system, but now they are gone.

It would have been interesting to see how he would have adapted things to suit Blalock and Stinson. But both knew that their college careers were over with the new coach on board. So much so that they stayed in the draft with potential of not getting picked. In the end, Blalock was taken with the final pick of the draft and Stinson didn't get his name called.

McDermott will start an all-juco backcourt to replace Stinson and Blalock. Clearly that puts the Cyclones are in a rebuilding year if there was any doubt. McDermott didn't build Northern Iowa up overnight, and the same should be true at Iowa State. Give him two or three solid recruiting classes and this team will be back in the top half of the Big 12.

This is the kind of year where the thought of post-season play takes a back seat to creating optimism for the future. Six conference wins would do that, but in a season where "roster turnover" takes the place of "turnover rate" in the ISU vernacular, a spot in the cellar wouldn't be a surprise either.

Barometer Game: It will be on December 16th at something called the Mediacom Cyclone Capital Classic. The opponent is Bradley and the site is Des Moines. McDermott will at least have the advantage of being more familiar with the opponent than it is with the Cyclones.

The Roster

Effective Height=6'-5.55" (3rd) Effective Experience=1.44 (8th) Returning Minutes=38.2% (10th)

		%Min	ORtg	%Poss/Shots	eFG%	OR/DR%	FTR	A/TO	Blk/Stl	Inside	FT/2P/3P%
11 Will Blalock	6-0/G	88	105	24/23	50.6	2/9	23	31/19	0/3	-7	66/47/40
1 Curtis Stinson	6-3/G	88	105	30/29	49.8	6/11	29	31/18	0/4	+3	66/50/34
13 Rahshon Clark	6-6/F	68	118	21/22	57.4	9/15	30	9/14	4/3	-12	77/59/37
40 Ross Marsden	6-10/F-C	51	110	7/6	53.2	4/10	21	5/18	1/1	+21	54/53/-
33 Jiri Hubalek	6-11/C	50	112	20/21	54.2	10/13	27	6/14	2/2	+4	73/60/24
0 Shawn Taggart	6-10/F	44	94	19/17	45.1	11/12	42	3/22	2/2	+40	70/46/0
10 Tasheed Carr	6-4/G	30	83	20/18	36.2	4/12	43	10/24	0/3	+7	73/43/16
3 John Neal	6-4/G	29	126	10/14	62.5	1/7	3	5/11	0/2	-91	100/40/43
24 Anthony Davis	6-5/G-F	28	78	18/16	33.1	5/15	38	8/22	2/2	-3	61/36/19
25 Jessan Gray	6-10/F	21	119	13/16	55.6	5/12	23	3/12	5/1	-13	86/45/50

Newcomers in '07: Dodie Dunson 6-3/G, Cory Johnson 6-7/F, Wesley Johnson 6-7/F, Corey McIntosh 5-11/G (JC), Mike Smith 6-8/F (JC), Michael Taylor 6-2/G (JC)

Kansas

2006 Record: 25-8 (Conference: 13-3, T-1st)
Adjusted Tempo: 69.1 (85th overall, 3rd in Big 12)
Adjusted Offensive Efficiency: 112.4 (35th, 3rd)
Adjusted Defensive Efficiency: 84.3 (2nd, 1st)
Pythagorean Winning %: .965 (5th, 2nd)

Four Factors (plus two)

	Offense	Defense
Effective FG%	52.5 (53 rd /2 nd)	42.9 (2 nd /1 st)
Turnover %	22.2 (220 th /9 th)	23.8 (42 nd /3 rd)
Off. Rebound %	37.3 (31 st /6 th)	31.3 (128 th /4 th)
Free Throw Rate	23.6 (209 th /9 th)	31.8 (75 th /5 th)
Luck: -.050 (261 st /8 th)	Consistency: 21.9 (244 th /5 th)	

What Kansas did well: *Play defense.*

If we were handicapping the race for defensive efficiency supremacy in '07, Kansas would be the favorite. In a season where they were one of the least experienced teams around, and not very tall to boot, they managed to be one of the most well-rounded defensive squads, finishing second to Iowa in adjusted defensive efficiency.

They were well-rounded both in the respect that they didn't have a weakness in team categories, and that there weren't many weak spots individually, either.

There are weak spots though. The weakest Jayhawk defender is a toss-up between Brandon Rush and Darnell Jackson. The honor can probably go to Jackson, if only because his impressive offensive stats have no business being on the bench for two-thirds of each game. But considering he's 6-9 and his block rate was exceeded by every non-point guard on the team, I think Jackson locks up this honor.

But don't overestimate what Rush brings or doesn't bring to the table. He may be KU's most versatile offensive player, but defensively, he appears to benefit from reputation over production. The stats can tell a few things about a player's athleticism. I like to look at offensive rebounding, block rate, and steals to get an idea of this.

These things apply more to frontcourt players of course, as height tends to corrupt two of the three metrics. We should consider that Rush played a significant amount of minutes at the 2 before drawing any conclusions based on the stats.

But even so, the numbers reflect someone who is not very athletic. His OR% of 5.3 is significantly lower than the national average for his height (7.3) or even those an inch shorter (6.0). And his steal rate looks out of place on a team where the starting backcourt was better than any other in thievery.

What Kansas didn't do well: *Get offense from*

the perimeter.

Kansas' point distribution was kind of odd – they didn't get much from 3 but they also didn't get much from the line. They shot the 3 well, ranking 44th in the nation in 3-point %. And most importantly, the guys that shot it best, shot it most, and the players that couldn't shoot it, didn't.

But only three players *could* shoot it for the Jayhawks. Between Brandon Rush, Mario Chalmers, and Jeff Hawkins, 63% of the team's 3-pointers were taken. They were accurate at an outstanding rate of 41.5%.

What we learned: *Don't judge a team by its record.*

It's not that simple because a team's record does have *some* value. But after Kansas' overtime loss at Missouri on January 16th, the Jayhawks' record of 10-6 wasn't an accurate indicator of how they were playing. If KU was a stock, they would have been a nice investment, because public opinion was too low on them. So low, that many expected them to struggle to get an at-large bid.

Kansas had been in six close games to that point and lost them all. And close losses to Kansas State and Missouri couldn't be considered moral victories. But possession stats, or even raw point differential, painted a rosy picture for Kansas' future.

At that point, season-ending-today projections rightly had them missing the field, but season-ending-in-March projections had to see that the W's would start coming. Maybe not in the abundance they did – the increased playing time of Chalmers and Julian Wright caused Kansas to improve on their early play. They went on to win 15 of its next 16, 13 of those by double digits. But it would have taken a regression in their play to miss the field.

A first round loss to Bradley justified the critics somewhat, and may keep Kansas' pre-season ranking a little lower than it should be. Once again, Kansas will be a buy in the stock market of public opinion.

What's in store for 2007: A national championship should be the goal, even though that's an unusual goal for a team that hasn't won a tournament game the last two years.

Darnell Jackson's numbers have breakout season written all over them, in the way that Joakim Noah and Aaron Gray did last season. Unfortunately for Jackson, there's not the obvious playing-time void that existed for those other two guys, although the recent departure of CJ Giles will give him a chance at increasing his role.

The addition of Darrell Arthur on the frontline will be an upgrade over the graduated Christian Moody, and he may give Giles and Sasha Kaun more bench time than they had in '06.

It's hard to believe Wright and Chalmers were role players for the first half of last season. Even though both are known as great defenders, their increased playing time gave KU a better offense.

Up to the January 14 loss to Kansas State, the Jayhawks' offensive efficiency was 104.7, after that it was 108.4, and against better competition. There won't need to be a two-month experiment to figure out who deserves playing time, except for solving how to work Arthur and Sherron Collins into the rotation.

There are a lot of reasons for optimism. But it's also still a team that will have trouble matching up against opponents with size. It's a top-five team, but even with the sick defense, they are going to need more consistency on the perimeter to grease a path to the Final Four.

Barometer Game: We don't need to wait to see if this team is ready to compete for a national title. On November 25th, Kansas meets Florida in Las Vegas. If Kansas keeps the Gators under a point per possession, this defense will have picked up where it left off in 2006. This will be the one game you have to watch in November, even if it is being played at a casino.

The Roster

Effective Height=6'-5.11" (8th) Effective Experience=0.97 (11th) Returning Minutes=81.0% (4th)

		%Min	ORtg	%Poss/Shots	eFG%	OR/DR%	FTR	A/TO	Blk/Stl	Inside	FT/2P/3P%
25 Brandon Rush	6-6/G-F	79	104	21/24	54	5/14	20	12/22	2/2	-10	76/47/47
3 Russell Robinson	6-1/G	71	105	21/18	43	5/7	49	28/21	2/5	+15	74/40/32
15 Mario Chalmers	6-1/G	65	105	24/22	53	1/8	42	27/26	1/6	-6	78/51/38
30 Julian Wright	6-8/F	50	102	23/23	56	9/15	28	18/24	7/3	+27	55/57/0
24 Sasha Kaun	6-11/C	48	113	19/20	56	12/18	62	4/11	6/2	+62	54/56/-
1 Jeff Hawkins	5-11/G	47	104	16/16	58	2/9	9	21/29	0/3	-66	69/50/41
33 CJ Giles(?)	6-10/C	42	100	20/21	51	13/18	30	4/20	9/1	+30	59/51/-
34 Christian Moody	6-8/F	29	100	16/13	60	12/13	58	6/27	2/1	+45	51/61/33
32 Darnell Jackson	6-9/F	27	106	21/20	51	13/21	51	4/20	1/2	+50	77/51/-
20 Stephen Vinson	6-2/G	14	105	13/10	45	1/9	36	26/26	0/2	-50	70/50/29

Newcomers in '07: Darrell Arthur 6-9/F, Sherron Collins 5-11/G, Brady Morningstar 6-3/G

Kansas State

2006 Record: 15-13 (Conference: 6-10, T-7th)
Adjusted Tempo: 64.8 (255th Overall, 10th in Big 12)
Adjusted Offensive Efficiency: 105.8 (101st, 8th)
Adjusted Defensive Efficiency: 94.4 (65th, 5th)
Pythagorean Winning %: .788 (77th, 7th)

Four Factors (plus two)

	Offense	Defense
Effective FG%	48.4 (214 th /9 th)	45.7 (33 rd /3 rd)
Turnover %	22.1 (210 th /7 th)	21.3 (158 th /9 th)
Off. Rebound %	37.4 (28 th /5 th)	33.3 (209 th /7 th)
Free Throw Rate	27.5 (81 st /3 rd)	33.1 (96 th /6 th)
Luck: -.108 (321 st /12 th)	Consistency: 17.5 (73 rd /1 st)	

What Kansas State did well: *Give Cartier Martin the ball.*

I don't know that K State did this *well enough*, because Martin provided one of the best combinations of production and efficiency in the conference. And he did it in his first season as the go-to guy for the Wildcats. The fact that Martin lost out on all-Big 12 first team honors to Richard Roby is startling, unless voters were putting unusual value on Roby's defense. Like Roby, Martin padded his figures against lesser non-conference foes, but he didn't wilt as much as Roby did during conference games.

Martin was better than Roby in just about every tempo-free category. He also possessed the rare combination of shooting the three well and often and getting to the free throw line in large quantities. Only one college player shot at least 100 3's and had his free throw rate, 3-point accuracy, and offensive rating exceed Martin's. His name was Adam Morrison. Martin had just one game where he didn't get to the line, and he shot 84% in 157 attempts.

Assuming Huggins ends Martin's off-season suspension - and indications are that he will - Martin will be arguably the most dynamic offensive player in the league this season. Actually, it might not be that arguable. Given that he will have more talent surrounding him, Martin may see his efficiency improve some more, while his per game stats may stagnate. Regardless, the ability of the Wildcats to enter the national picture in 2007 will have as much to do with Martin, a senior, as any of Huggins' recruits.

What Kansas State didn't do well: *Get after it defensively.*

Fans will accept just about any style as long as their team wins. But when the wins don't come easily, style matters. Whether it was the preferred slower than average tempo during the Jim Wooldridge era, or the man defense with zone principles, there wasn't much to excite the fan base in the absence of a winning conference season.

The Wildcat D was about as passive as you'll

see. And that's not to say it was ineffective. It had its moments, and even last season was solid enough.

But the stats show the story of a defense that was, well, just there. Few turnovers forced, few blocked shots, a large percentage of opponents' shots from the perimeter, and a high assist percentage allowed. This contributed to a slow pace, and an unappealing product. The intersection of boring and mediocrity is fan-base apathy.

What we learned: *KSU will sell its soul to win.*

Not that it's fair to single out the athletic administration in the Little Apple on this one. Many schools have to compromise principles for the sake of winning. But K State was on course to be an at-large candidate this season provided a qualified individual was in charge of the program. Even with Huggins, a Tournament bid is not a lock, but this sure is a favorable situation for him. Ultimately Huggins will win. He knows all the tricks to bring in blue chippers, and even his most bitter critics have to admit he is a winner.

What's in store for 2007: A new coach plus experienced players can often mean a surprising season ahead. It worked out well for Tennessee in '06 and Georgetown in '05. Both Bruce Pearl and John Thompson inherited some talent and used a new system to create great improvement in their teams. Since the new coach in this case is Bob Huggins, the bar has naturally been raised and an at-large bid wouldn't be a surprise.

We can expect K State to begin the transition to embody the characteristics of Huggins' Cincinnati teams. Expect lots of missed shots on both ends, but eventually the will of the Wildcat defense will win its share of ugly games. We don't know exactly why Martin was suspended, but the team rule he violated may well have been a lack of commitment to the defensive end.

This group of Wildcats won't need to make a major adjustment to the Huggins system. To some extent, Kansas State looked a like a

second-rate version of recent Cincinnati teams. In 2006, they shot the ball worse than other teams with similar offensive efficiency, making up the difference by hitting the offensive boards.

But the staple of the Huggins offense was stellar ball security, a category that the Wildcats ranked poorly in last season. Clent Stewart has been a turnover machine in his first two seasons at the point. Can Huggins turn him into a trustworthy point guard or will juco transfer Blake Young take over the reins?

While Stewart has the distinction of starting just about every game he was able to during his young career, his lack of production means that the first stamp Huggins puts on his program may be working Young into the starting role by mid-season.

There will be a breaking-in period for the defense, where the ultra-aggressive man employed by Huggins will replace the passive strategies ingrained in Manhattan. So it may take a while to see the true Wildcats.

With that in mind, this is a team that could finish 5th or 6th in the league, but really be the 3rd or 4th best Big 12 team in March. Which would be big news for a team that hasn't had a winning conference record since 1989.

And while we're here, Bob Huggins has a great shot at winning coach of the year. He inherits an experienced, but unlucky team, and has a proven ability to improve a key weakness (offensive turnover percentage).

Barometer Game: January 3rd, Kansas State heads to Huggins old stomping grounds to take on Xavier. They have a few tests before that, but given the transition, the Wildcats may just be getting accustomed to their new style by this time. If K State fancies itself as more than just an at-large candidate, they'll need to win this one against a club that also has a vision of a national ranking this season.

Who knows? Maybe this will be a hotter ticket than the Crosstown Shootout played three weeks earlier.

The Roster

Effective Height=6'-5.74" (2nd) Effective Experience=1.85 (3rd) Returning Minutes=71.5% (6th)

		%Min	ORtg	%Poss/Shots	eFG%	OR/DR%	FTR	A/TO	Blk/Stl	Inside	FT/2P/3P%
20 Cartier Martin(?)	6-7/G-F	81	118	25/27	55	8/15	46	13/15	1/2	+12	84/50/43
34 Akeem Wright	6-6/G	71	85	18/18	37	6/16	27	18/23	1/1	+23	62/37/14
15 David Hoskins	6-5/G-F	66	105	28/24	51	11/9	71	18/21	1/2	+66	70/52/18
3 Lance Harris	6-5/G	64	97	23/29	46	1/10	18	16/17	1/1	-18	76/50/27
21 Dramane Diarra	6-8/F	63	98	14/13	45	14/11	34	4/22	7/2	+33	71/45/0
5 Clent Stewart	6-4/G	54	90	16/11	53	1/10	41	26/36	0/2	+2	62/40/49
22 Mario Taybron	6-2/G	45	96	18/17	50	1/9	19	29/29	1/2	-21	68/46/37
55 Tyler Hughes	6-11/C	16	104	15/12	62	9/23	66	13/23	7/2	+66	42/62/-
4 Curtis Allen	6-4/G	14	54	25/25	38	11/17	22	17/27	1/6	+13	83/36/40
14 Serge Afeli	6-9/F	11	69	13/7	36	14/25	55	7/45	4/3	+55	50/36/-

Newcomers in '07: Jason Bennett 7-3/C, Luis Colon 6-10/F, Blake Young 6-2/G (JC), Bill Walker 6-6/F (possibly 2nd semester)

Missouri

2006 Record: 12-16 (Conference: 5-11, 11th)
Adjusted Tempo: 66.2 (205th Overall, 6th in Big 12)
Adjusted Offensive Efficiency: 102.0 (158th, 12th)
Adjusted Defensive Efficiency: 100.9 (157th, 12th)
Pythagorean Winning %: .530 (153rd, 12th)

Four Factors (plus two)

	Offense	Defense
Effective FG%	48.3 (216 th /10 th)	51.5 (249 th /11 ^h)
Turnover %	23.2 (263 rd /11 th)	21.4 (149 th /8 th)
Off. Rebound %	35.4 (65 th /7 th)	35.8 (291 st /9 th)
Free Throw Rate	23.6 (207 th /8 th)	31.2 (67 th /4 th)
Luck: +.024 (79 th /4 th)	Consistency: 22.2 (257 th /6 th)	

What Missouri did well: Win close games.

There really aren't many nice things to say about the 2006 Missouri Tigers. A consistent decline in recruiting reached the point of no return in Columbia last season. Relative to their conference brethren, The Tigers were bad at just about everything. But the season labeled a disaster would have been tagged as a historic disaster of epic proportions had the Tigers not been so successful in the games they had a chance to win in the final possessions.

Missouri went 5-4 in games decided by 3 or less, and 4-2 in conference play. It's not like they were terribly lucky (or clutch if you prefer), but for a team that had to depend on close wins for their victories in conference play, they fared a little better than one would expect. However, the close wins only served to obscure the fact from some folks that this was the worst team in the conference.

What Missouri didn't do well: Space prevents me from listing them all.

I don't want to pile on, but Missouri was just so consistently poor across the board, there's nothing to single out. If I had to pick one aspect, it would be interior defense. Nothing creates a lack of respectability like the inability to defend the middle. If we limit our sample to the BCS conferences, only Penn State, Tennessee, and Iowa State had a worse eFG% allowed. And two of those teams play a pressing style that tends to yield a higher opponents' shooting percentage.

The source of Missouri's woes was the 2-point percentage allowed of 51.3. Throw in a defensive rebounding percentage that ranked 291st and you get the idea that opponents were having their way in the paint. In the 90-64 loss to Baylor that was the final straw for Quin Snyder's tenure, Baylor grabbed nine of a possible 13 offensive rebounds and made 16 out of 19 2-point shots in the second half. I hate to say a team quit based only on the numbers, but there's a lot of circumstantial evidence here to say the Tigers weren't giving

their best effort on that fateful night in Waco.

With that in mind, I wouldn't take Missouri's 2006 stats too literally. While Snyder's recruiting slipped in recent years, there was still enough talent on this team to produce better outcomes. The stats are influenced somewhat by ineffective coaching, lack of effort, and a whirlwind of distractions.

What we learned: If you hire a coach lacking experience, you better have a really good reason.

Since 1990, the current Big 12 schools have made 24 coaching hires, and six had no previous head coaching experience at the D-I level. The list of the green hires is mixed.

In 1991, James Dickey took over at Texas Tech as a heralded assistant at Kentucky. He had a nice run in Lubbock, but after three bad seasons was fired in 2001.

In 1992, Baylor hired Darrel Johnson after winning two championships at the NAIA level. Two years later, the Bears wound up on serious probation. Johnson was succeeded by Harry Miller on an interim basis for the 1994 season. Having to deal with the probation, Miller struggled in Waco before resigning in 1999.

In 1996, Colorado took the interim tag off of Ricardo Patton. The Buffs were rewarded with a surprising NCAA Tournament berth in his first permanent season. It's been a solid career for Patton working in a location that has little interest in hoops. He's working his last season in Boulder this season, but any time you've lasted 10 or more seasons at one location, you've done something right.

Snyder was hired in 1999 and racked up some minor NCAA infractions before leaving in the middle of last season.

Wayne Morgan, hired at Iowa State in 2004, also caught the NCAA's attention with a scheduling controversy that sent him packing after last season.

Sean Sutton at Oklahoma State is the only one

of this year's crop without previous head coaching experience, but he has been groomed for the Cowboys job for a while. And many have said that he was more involved in the day-to-day operations than his dad over the last couple of seasons.

It's a mixed batch, and this list doesn't include Roy Williams who was hired as a UNC assistant by Kansas in 1988. There's no special stigma to a lack of experience, but you can bet that Mizzou won't get burned that way for a while.

What's in store for 2007: This won't be the Tennessee-style instant turnaround - Missouri loses a lot of experience in Thomas Gardner, Jimmy McKinney, and Kevin Young - but nor should it be a total throw-away season either. Jason Horton is similar to Squeaky Johnson, Anderson's point guard last season.

The big difference between the two is in turnover rate. Both players rarely shoot the ball, and usually that equals a very high turnover rate, because the stats a point guard records are mainly relegated to shots, turnovers, and assists. So turnover rate has a strong inverse relationship for point guards. Horton follows true to form with an astronomical TO Rate of 34.8. Johnson on the other hand had a stellar 23.1 considering he only took 13.2% of his teams shots and played in an up-tempo offense.

Playing in the much weaker north side of the Big 12, Missouri will have a chance to better its five conference wins from last season. If Anderson can convert Horton into a more capable floor general, six wins is certainly attainable.

Barometer Game: November 30th, Missouri will be hosting Arkansas, where Anderson spent his formative coaching years. Arkansas is not exactly a running team any more, but they may be willing to cater to Anderson's style. This will be the first true look at what the Tigers can do this season, and a win would get folks thinking that this season will be better than last year's nightmare.

The Roster

Effective Height=6'-5.45" (6th) Effective Experience=1.66 (5th) Returning Minutes=45.5% (8th)

	%Min	ORtg	%Poss/Shots	eFG%	OR/DR%	FTR	A/TO	Blk/Stl	Inside	FT/2P/3P%
3 Thomas Gardner	6-5/G	85	104	29/33	54	4/7	27	12/20	0/2	-27 72/47/40
1 Jimmy McKinney	6-3/G	79	100	23/25	45	3/11	33	17/19	1/2	+8 78/42/36
12 Jason Horton	6-2/G	74	85	15/11	44	2/9	28	27/35	0/3	-30 50/40/31
15 Marshall Brown	6-6/F	68	97	21/21	47	6/15	46	12/22	1/2	+28 69/52/16
14 Kevin Young	6-9/F-C	66	111	18/18	51	16/16	46	4/15	3/1	+46 66/51/-
23 Marcus Watkins	6-4/G	31	90	13/12	41	6/7	42	10/22	1/2	+21 54/49/8
44 Kalen Grimes	6-9/C	29	94	15/12	49	13/14	76	1/24	5/1	+75 55/49/-
5 Leo Lyons	6-9/F	21	71	23/18	46	9/21	62	4/33	4/1	+48 36/50/13
25 Glen Dandridge	6-6/G-F	19	82	20/21	47	8/11	10	8/30	1/1	-56 33/59/27
33 Matt Lawrence	6-7/F	15	95	14/14	47	6/6	24	6/26	0/2	-45 75/20/39
2 James Douglas	6-9/C	14	64	13/7	40	3/12	47	16/48	1/2	+40 43/43/0

Newcomers in '07: Keon Lawrence 6-2/G, Vaidatos Volkus 6-8/G (JC), Daryl Butterfield 6-7/F (JC), Steffon Hannah 6-1/G (JC), JT Tiller 6-8/F

Nebraska

2006 Record: 19-14 (Conference: 7-9, 6th)
Adjusted Tempo: 66.0 (213th Overall, 6th in Big 12)
Adjusted Offensive Efficiency: 103.3 (140th, 11th)
Adjusted Defensive Efficiency: 95.3 (77th, 6th)
Pythagorean Winning %: .717 (101st, 10th)

Four Factors (plus two)

	Offense	Defense
Effective FG%	47.2 (257 th /11 th)	47.7 (83 rd /5 th)
Turnover %	22.8 (241 st /10 th)	20.7 (196 th /10 th)
Off. Rebound %	35.3 (66 th /8 th)	30.9 (104 th /3 rd)
Free Throw Rate	28.3 (60 th /2 nd)	27.0 (18 th /2 nd)
Luck: +.048 (46 th /1 st)	Consistency: 23.7 (296 th /8 th)	

What Nebraska did well: Get production from the front line.

By far, the strength of this team was up front. Both 6-11 Aleks Maric and 6-9 Wes Wilkinson were much more effective than any of their teammates. An inability of the guards to get these guys the ball more often kept the Cornhusker offense shackled for most of the season. Wilkinson is gone and Maric nearly left for a pro career. But new coach Doc Sadler made a worthwhile and successful trip to Australia to re-recruit Maric.

With the exception of the 37 point, 16 rebound, and 4 block effort against Iowa State, Maric was quietly efficient, primarily due to a lack of minutes. But he improved his stats during Big 12 play, including his ability to get to the line frequently. Maric's 175 FTA's amazingly didn't even lead his own team (Jason Dourisseau had 187, though in about 28% more minutes), but his free throw rate of 71.1 would have led the conference had he not fallen just short of my arbitrary 60% of possible minutes cutoff.

The down side is that Maric only made 61% of his free throw attempts. Still, having the ball in Maric's hands resulted in positive outcomes more often than with any other Nebraska player, partly because of the quantity of free throws, but also because he has great hands for a big and rarely committed turnovers.

Throw in the fact that Maric is a monster on the boards (ranking 15th nationally in offensive rebounding percentage) and the case can be made that he is the most underappreciated pro prospect in the conference.

What Nebraska didn't do well: Make shots.

The Huskers featured an unfortunate combination of having the second-worst effective field goal percentage in the league and the third-worst turnover percentage. They didn't take as many shots as most teams, and when they did, they were lacked accuracy. We can break down stats all sorts of different ways, but if you can't make shots, your offense will stink. So it's no surprise that Nebraska's

offensive efficiency ranked dead last in the Big 12 during regular-season conference play.

What we learned: Nebraska is a difficult place to coach.

Good luck to Doc Sadler because he is going to need it to be successful. Nebraska hasn't been totally anemic over the ten years of the Big 12. They actually rank 9th in conference wins with a 16 win cushion over 10th place Kansas State. But the Huskers haven't had a .500 conference record since 1999, and still have yet to win an NCAA Tournament game in their history.

And Barry Collier's mid-summer resignation only serves to reinforce the notion that Lincoln is not friendly to coaches. The good news for Sadler is that the athletic department has a history of being patient, and should continue to be, especially if Bill Callahan can resurrect the football program.

To turn this program into one that wins 20 consistently would be nothing short of miraculous. But inspiration is provided by what Sadler's old boss, Billy Gillispie, has done at Texas A&M.

What's in store for 2007: With Maric coming back, it's not going to be nearly as bad as it could have been. Remember that Nebraska will have six games against Colorado, Iowa State, and Missouri, so there are some wins to be had in this lower-level mini-division of the Big 12.

With that note of minor optimism, it needs to be said that there may be more uncertainty surrounding the Huskers than all but Colorado among the other rebuilding northern teams. The backcourt is a mess, and there's nobody to replace Wes Wilkinson. I mean, really, nobody. Seven foot Croat Toni Soda was ruled ineligible and it may be up to freshman Kris Douse to pick up the bulk of the minutes. Nebraska will struggle to avoid the basement, but they may be able to get 4 or 5 wins in the process.

There's an interesting quote from Doc Sadler at his introductory press conference:

"If we've got to draw up a bunch of plays, then we're in trouble because we're going to go as fast

as we can and if we get a good shot, then we're going to shoot it quick."

Before you buy into this as the absolute truth, Doc Sadler has a record to stand on. Last season, UTEP's adjusted tempo was 63.9 possessions per 40 minutes, ranking 43rd slowest among the 334 Division I teams. In 2005, Sadler's first season, the Miners were right around average at 68.7. In 2004, UTEP ran at a pace of 71.0. So Sadler took a fairly fast club and brought them to a crawl in two seasons.

True, some of this was due to personnel, but Nebraska doesn't have the personnel to run, either. And let's face it, every coach with the exception of Joe Scott is going to offer an exciting brand of fast-break basketball in his first interaction with the boosters. Only a few come through on their promises, so these claims should be met with a healthy dose of skepticism, especially for a coach with the track record of Sadler.

One thing Nebraska fans can look forward to is the final season of Aleks Maric. I don't know where else the offense or rebounding on this team will come from, so it figures to be a chance for Maric to rack up some impressive numbers. If he can maintain his level of play facing double teams more frequently, he could be a sleeper in the NBA Draft. But fans outside of the Big 12 footprint will have to work hard to see what he's up to.

Barometer Game: If you want to find out whether a team is willing to run or not, watch what happens against a running team. November 29th, Nebraska hosts North Texas. The Mean Green have been one of the fastest paced teams in the land under head coach Johnny Jones. It's a game that Nebraska should win, but it's not a gimme by any stretch, especially for a team in transition.

The possession count will be just as interesting as the result. If it's somewhere in the 60s, then expect a lot of low scoring games involving the Big Red this season.

The Roster

Effective Height=6'-5.02" (9th) Effective Experience=1.69 (4th) Returning Minutes=43.9% (9th)

	%Min	ORtg	%Poss/Shots	eFG%	OR/DR%	FTR	A/TO	Blk/Stl	Inside	FT/2P/3P%
1 Jason Dourisseau	6-5/G	76	97	23/20	49	12/14	70	12/23	1/2	+60 59/50/25
11 Wes Wilkinson	6-9/F	71	108	20/24	54	6/17	21	12/19	7/2	-28 83/45/42
31 Jamel White	6-3/G	64	100	19/21	45	2/11	36	17/20	0/2	-16 80/37/36
21 Aleks Maric	6-11/C	60	103	25/23	47	15/19	71	12/16	5/2	+71 61/47/-
3 Charles Richardson	5-9/G	59	100	13/9	44	1/10	67	25/32	0/3	+22 84/38/34
10 Marcus Walker	6-2/G	44	85	23/21	46	1/5	30	28/32	0/1	-28 65/47/30
2 Joe McCray	6-5/G	35	83	24/27	46	3/13	20	10/28	1/3	-51 71/44/31
00 BJ Walker	6-9/F	32	88	21/24	40	10/14	28	11/19	1/1	+27 60/40/0
4 Marcus Perry	6-2/G	29	104	18/24	47	3/6	19	10/12	1/2	-51 74/32/36
15 Bronsen Schliep	6-7/F	13	80	12/8	39	6/12	139	4/23	1/3	+133 44/41/0

Newcomers in '07: Ryan Anderson 6-4/G, Chris Balham 6-8/F, Kris Douse 6-7/F, Sek Henry 6-3/G

Oklahoma

2006 Record: 20-9 (Conference: 11-5, 3rd)
Adjusted Tempo: 64.1 (273rd Overall, 12th in Big 12)
Adjusted Offensive Efficiency: 113.6 (25th, 2nd)
Adjusted Defensive Efficiency: 96.7 (96th, 8th)
Pythagorean Winning %: .863 (49th, 4th)

Four Factors (plus two)

	Offense	Defense
Effective FG%	50.6 (110 th /5 th)	49.7 (166 th /9 th)
Turnover %	22.0 (201 st /6 th)	21.5 (145 th /7 th)
Off. Rebound %	42.8 (1 st /1 st)	26.5 (9 th /2 nd)
Free Throw Rate	24.5 (175 th /7 th)	35.8 (165 th /7 th)
Luck: +.041 (54 th /3 rd)	Consistency: 21.7 (238 th /3 rd)	

What Oklahoma did well: Rebound.

And the Sooners did this better than any team in the country. OU and Texas were the only teams to finish the season in the top ten in both offensive and defensive rebounding percentage. It was a total team effort, with only one regular (reserve shooting guard Michael Neal) failing to register 10% on the defensive boards, and five players reaching the same, but more elusive, mark on the offensive end.

The rebounding allowed OU to have an ugly offense that was surprisingly effective. It was even more offensive when you consider that their turnover percentage ranked in the bottom half of the country. Even with that and a mundane 50.6 eFG%, Oklahoma's adjusted offensive efficiency ranked 28th in the country. But low eFG's aren't as relevant when a team is rebounding 43% of its own misses.

Another way to think about it is that OU was continuing its possessions on 43% of its missed shots. Let's just consider a simple model where our universe only consists of two point field goal attempts, rebounds, and turnovers. A team making 50% of its shots, and having Oklahoma's turnover and offensive rebounding percentages would make shots on 60% of its possessions.

The point being that an offense primarily supported by rebounding may be ugly, but it's a legitimate way to consistently score. And it was the method used during nearly every season of Sampson's tenure in Norman.

What Oklahoma didn't do well: Play defense.

I couldn't get through this production without a brief course in Possession Theory 101. Folks that already grasp this concept, bear with me.

Kelvin Sampson coached teams have a well-deserved reputation of playing tough defense. And that continued on paper in 2006, except it didn't. It depended on the paper you were looking at. In the mainstream world, OU's defensive excellence was justified by ranking a respectable 52nd in points allowed per game. In reality, their defensive reputation was only extended because their pace was 45th slowest

in the nation. The Sooners were never speedy under Sampson, but that pace was easily the slowest this millennium in Norman.

Once you crunch all the numbers, their adjusted defensive efficiency ranked an unimpressive 96th, and kept Sampson from putting together a team that was capable of a deep postseason run.

That weakness was plain for even our old-timey devotees of per-game stats to see in their first round 82-74 loss to Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In a 73 possession game, the offense did a decent job, but it was the defense that forced the Sooners to play catch-up by the midpoint of the second half.

What we learned: Terrell Everett wasn't meant to be a star.

Compare senior point guard Terrell Everett's numbers from 2005 to 2006 and the difference is striking. His usage increased, and everything else (except his assist rate) went in the wrong direction.

	%Poss	ORtg	eFG%	TORate
2005	21.9	109.2	49.4	22.2
2006	27.4	99.4	44.9	26.9

What's in store for 2007: Hey, did you just read the Nebraska page? Remember that stuff I said about coaches promising to play fast but having a history of playing slow? Would you feel cheated if I just cut and pasted that section here, and replaced 'Doc Sadler' and 'UTEP' with 'Jeff Capel' and 'VCU'? I hope so, because it's true. Here's what Capel said at his introductory press conference:

"My four years at VCU, we've run a lot. We liked to get the easy transition baskets as much as possible. I like to run, but you also have to be smart. We want to run. We want to be smart. We want to pick and choose our spots when we run and when we want to slow the ball down and run good offense. But the primary thing is defense."

I guess in a strict interpretation, Oklahoma will run. A team that walks or crawls for the entire game won't be competitive at any level. But

VCU ranked 290th in adjusted pace last season, 210th in 2005, and 208th in 2004. There will be a few fast breaks - every team has those - but don't expect the Sooners to break often. And Capel's statement on defense doesn't jive with the data either. The Rams' offense was what carried them the last two seasons.

The Sooner offense should be a little different. We probably won't see the eight perimeter passes + a brick + a tip-in equation that characterized successful possessions last season.

Capel prefers a more perimeter-oriented attack, which will suit this group of players well. Taylor Griffin and Longar Longar can replace the rebounding and defense of Bookout and Gray, but they won't replace their ability to score. And none of the returning players has anything close to the penetrating ability of Everett to help set up the bigs. Bobby Maze may eventually pan out in that area, but that's a little much to expect of a freshman.

This team will probably rely more on the longball and less on rebounding to get its point. As you would expect from a team that loses three of its top four scorers, the offense will suffer in Year One of the Capel Era.

Like so many teams in this conference, 2006 is a rebuilding year for Oklahoma. Unlike the other rebuilders, OU has the benefit of welcoming a solid recruiting class. It doesn't contain the impact players of the Texas or Kansas classes, but it gives them some hope for a season that fans can feel good about building on. If the Sooners could somehow switch schedules with Kansas State, they would look good for a .500 conference record. As it is, that goal will be a struggle, but not impossible.

Barometer Game: On December 6th, Villanova visits Lloyd Noble Arena in a game that will have a little extra emotion with OU de-commit Scottie Reynolds visiting. Villanova has quite a bit of rebuilding to do also, providing a chance for Jeff Capel to show off his version of OU in a positive way on national television.

The Roster

Effective Height=6'-5.79" (1st) Effective Experience=2.08 (2nd) Returning Minutes=51.8% (7th)

		%Min	ORtg	%Poss/Shots	eFG%	OR/DR%	FTR	A/TO	Blk/Stl	Inside	FT/2P/3P%
3 Terrell Everett	6-4/G	85	99	27/25	45	3/11	23	43/27	1/3	-7	79/45/30
34 Kevin Bookout	6-8/F	79	119	17/18	56	12/15	46	1/12	2/1	+45	63/57/0
21 Taj Gray	6-9/F	76	110	24/22	57	12/19	62	7/22	6/2	+62	71/57/-
2 Michael Neal	6-3/G	71	125	18/23	56	3/7	18	13/14	0/2	-61	85/30/42
15 David Godbold	6-5/G	58	103	15/17	48	6/11	11	12/22	1/2	-50	67/42/35
24 Nate Carter	6-6/G-F	39	114	19/19	50	12/14	47	7/17	1/1	+34	80/49/38
20 Austin Johnson	6-3/G	37	77	18/16	33	4/11	20	19/32	2/3	-38	58/27/26
32 Taylor Griffin	6-7/F	27	109	16/13	52	11/19	61	8/25	3/3	+57	79/54/0
30 Longar Longar	6-11/C	14	99	17/15	59	12/21	59	2/22	8/1	+59	40/59/-
1 Chris Walker	6-3/G	12	64	19/12	33	1/11	38	25/48	1/2	+14	63/25/40

Newcomers in '07: Keith Clark 6-8/F, Tony Crocker 6-5/G, Beau Gerber 6-7/F, Bobby Maze 6-2/G

Oklahoma State

2006 Record: 17-16 (Conference: 6-10, T-7th)
Adjusted Tempo: 66.7 (169th Overall, 6th in Big 12)
Adjusted Offensive Efficiency: 106.7 (86th, 7th)
Adjusted Defensive Efficiency: 91.7 (31st, 4th)
Pythagorean Winning %: .850 (52nd, 5th)

Four Factors (plus two)

	Offense	Defense
Effective FG%	52.4 (54 th /3 rd)	48.3 (110 th /8 th)
Turnover %	25.0 (313 th /12 th)	23.6 (54 th /4 th)
Off. Rebound %	37.8 (26 th /4 th)	33.7 (226 th /2 nd)
Free Throw Rate	27.3 (85 th /4 th)	38.8 (223 rd /7 th)
Luck: -.104 (318 th /11 th)	Consistency: 23.5 (285 th /9 th)	

What Oklahoma State did well: *Introduce opponents to Mario Boggan.*

When you look at what the individual players produced, it's hard to believe that the Cowboys were as good as they were, ranking 52nd nationally in my derivation of Pythagorean winning percentage.

But then you get to Mario Boggan's line. The 6-7 junior ranked 17th in offensive rating among players using at least 24% of their team's possessions. His efficiency bracket puts him in nice company - sandwiched between Yemi Nicholson and Shelden Williams.

And Boggan did this in a smallish lineup where opposing clubs could frequently put taller defenders on him. But Mario is so versatile, that often wasn't prudent. He's a guy with decent range, some slashing ability, and a knack for finishing.

In statistical terms, that means a guy with that posted nearly 60% from the field to go with an above average free throw rate (45) and free throw percentage (82). All that adds up to a true shooting percentage of 64.3%, ranking him 27th nationally among players with at least 200 FGA's.

Eddie Sutton's recruiting strategy of targeting castoffs has always had mixed results, but the case of the junior college product Boggan was a smashing success. He finally started getting the minutes he deserved down the stretch, and his per game averages should get more people's attention in 2007. He's not an outstanding rebounder overall, but he crashes the offensive boards pretty well.

Boggan is a guy to watch this season. He deserves a bigger role in the offense considering how ineffective his teammates are. I'll be surprised if there are five other guys in the conference that can keep him from being on the all-Big 12 first team.

What Oklahoma State didn't do well: *Take care of the ball.*

It was obvious where the OSU offense broke

down last season. They had guys that could score and handle the ball well enough. The problem was that the guys that couldn't score were the ones that owned the rock most of the time. And those guys couldn't take care of the ball or distribute it in an effective manner.

The Cowboys ranked dead last in turnover percentage, and you can put the blame entirely on the backcourt of JamesOn Curry, Jamaal Brown, and Byron Eaton. Curry has his moments where one can see why Roy Williams was originally willing to let Curry run the UNC offense, but those moments don't come frequently enough.

What we learned: *The apple may far farther from the tree than people think.*

I don't have much of an idea of how Sean Sutton likes to play. As you've gathered by now, I don't trust the coaches to tell us how they like to play. I need to see data.

We got to see Sean Sutton coach ten games last season, and since he didn't really have time to prepare for his head coaching debut, I don't know that the younger Sutton's coaching philosophy was truly exhibited. Folks seem to have the impression that OSU dramatically improved after Sean took over the club. Perhaps it's because he beat Texas by 21, a team that the Pokes lost to by 34 in January when Eddie was coaching.

So hey, let's check the data!

	Pace	OE	DE
Eddie	66.2	99.8	105.6
Sean	68.1	94.9	93.8

Eddie's data is only based on the nine conference games he coached. The most significant difference is the improvement on defense under Sean, which is odd since he has been described as an offensive specialist as an assistant.

What's in store for 2007: I can only think of what could have been if Torre Johnson had stayed out of the Sutton doghouse. He had put up the kind of possession-based numbers in

limited play that resembled what guys like Joakim Noah, Aaron Gray, and Patrick O'Bryant did in similar roles two seasons ago.

But Torre was dismissed from the team early in the summer. Johnson had some obvious differences from the other three guys mentioned - he wasn't a center and was a juco recruit, so he may not have been scheduled for liftoff in '07. But he is a guy to file in the back of your mind for 2008 when he plays out his eligibility at UW-Milwaukee as the centerpiece of another Panther team that will be planning on an NCAA Tournament win or two.

As it is, the Cowboys bring back everybody else, and even though they will have a new head coach, he has experience running the program. Sean Sutton coached the last ten games of 2006 after his father took a leave of absence. OSU won only four, but among them was the 21-point win over Texas, and four losses by three points or less - all of them on the road.

If the Cowboys could just replicate their 2006 performance with a middle-of-the-pack turnover percentage, they would be comfortably in the field in the March. The offense needs to improve in some way to do that, but I'm not exactly sure how that's going to happen.

Can a couple of consistent shooters develop? Can another scorer develop on the wing to replace Johnson? Even with all the returnees, this is the team I feel the least certain about. In a way, it seemed like there were some mirrors involved in last season's performance. They could well fulfill their potential, but I wouldn't be surprised if 2007 turns out similar to 2006, either.

Barometer Game: The Cowboys have quite a diverse schedule with a number of pre-conference tests. December 21st they take on Pitt in a pseudo-home game at Oklahoma City. It's a chance for JamesOn Curry to prove that he can make his teammates better, and for the Cowboys to prove that they're the best team in the murky middle of the Big 12.

The Roster

Effective Height=6'-4.57" (12th) Effective Experience=1.15 (9th) Returning Minutes=83.6% (2nd)

	%Min	ORtg	%Poss/Shots	eFG%	OR/DR%	FTR	A/TO	Blk/Stl	Inside	FT/2P/3P%
24 JamesOn Curry	6-3/G	85	97	24/27	48	2/8	23	24/24	1/2	-20 70/41/38
4 Mario Boggan	6-7/F-C	68	117	24/26	60	12/14	45	8/19	3/2	+36 82/61/32
10 Jamaal Brown	5-10/G	59	96	17/16	45	3/5	27	23/28	0/2	-38 76/37/32
00 Byron Eaton	5-11/G	59	89	24/18	53	2/9	46	25/38	0/5	+11 73/49/40
32 David Monds	6-8/F	51	104	19/21	52	10/21	38	4/21	2/1	+36 75/53/25
55 Torre Johnson	6-6/F	46	116	22/28	56	11/15	35	4/12	3/1	+35 68/56/0
5 Marcus Dove	6-9/G-F	41	124	9/6	65	9/12	86	13/25	4/3	+84 76/67/0
1 Terrel Harris	6-5/G	32	96	20/19	54	8/11	35	12/31	1/2	+3 76/48/44
12 Roderick Flemings	6-7/G-F	24	104	17/15	52	11/12	55	10/25	1/2	+26 71/59/22
40 Kenny Cooper	6-10/C	23	94	13/13	48	7/16	40	5/26	3/2	+40 67/48/-
50 Aaron Petway	6-10/F	12	68	14/8	47	7/16	71	7/45	7/1	+71 50/47/-

Newcomers in '07: Gary Flowers 6-8/F, Tyler Hatch 6-6/F (JC), Obi Muonelo 6-5/G, Andy Shaw 6-1/G, Scott Warner 6-11/C

Texas

2006 Record: 30-7 (Conference: 13-3, T-1st)
Adjusted Tempo: 65.1 (246th Overall, 9th in Big 12)
Adjusted Offensive Efficiency: 119.4 (4th, 1st)
Adjusted Defensive Efficiency: 88.3 (10th, 3rd)
Pythagorean Winning %: .970 (2nd, 1st)

Four Factors (plus two)

	Offense	Defense
Effective FG%	52.5 (52 nd /1 st)	44.3 (8 th /2 nd)
Turnover %	20.0 (94 th /3 rd)	20.6 (201 st /11 th)
Off. Rebound %	41.1 (5 th /2 nd)	26.2 (4 th /1 st)
Free Throw Rate	25.6 (139 th /6 th)	25.1 (10 th /1 st)
Luck: +.033 (65 th /4 th)	Consistency: 29.3 (333 rd /12 th)	

What Texas did well: Score.

No need to get cute in describing the Longhorns' strength. Texas provided a good lesson that a team doesn't have to be great at everything to be great offensively.

Much like Oklahoma, Texas' success was built by brutalizing the opposition on the boards, even while being the conference's 2nd smallest team on average. Rebounding really was the only thing they were great at. Although, they were above average at every other meaningful offensive statistic.

What Texas didn't do well: Play to the level of the competition.

Conventional wisdom associates negative things with "playing to the level of the competition." But when you have the potential to win national championships, it can be a good thing. Especially if you play just above the level of the competition.

Most teams play slightly better against good teams and slightly worse against bad ones. But the Longhorns performance was actually negatively correlated to the quality of their opponent. Meaning, Texas tended to play great against the patsies and fold against their better opponents.

Another way to put this is that you didn't know which Texas team would show up. Except that by the end of the season, there was a clear pattern. They had put-away power against the Texas-Arlingtons and even the Colorados of the hoops world, but against teams better than that it was usually either a close game or a lopsided defeat.

What we learned: Inconsistent teams aren't built to win the NCAA Tournament.

We already knew this, but it's nice to have a team take things to the extreme. This is one of those cases of a team looking dominant on paper, but not being so great in real life.

It also didn't help that Texas played on the slow side of the college mean. This allowed them to be easily drawn into even slower

contests in their tournament games against Penn and West Virginia, allowing those games to be closer than their talent advantage would have suggested.

Texas was a team capable of hanging double digit losses on quality teams. But they were just as prone to being on the receiving end of beat-downs.

There were a couple obvious sources of inconsistency. Offensively, it was shooting, where the offense, especially the frontline, would regularly put up ugly numbers against above-average defenses. The other factor was the passive defense on a bench-less team that would allow opposing shooters to fill it up from the perimeter.

Texas was able to put up some gaudy stats on a per-possession basis, but the possibility of laying an egg on any given night made them a long-shot to navigate a six-game minefield at the end of the season. And after close calls with Penn and West Virginia, LSU took Texas down in the national semifinals.

Talented teams like Texas that lack consistency will always lose more games than their statistics would suggest.

Also, *Brad Buckman could rebound and block shots as well as LaMarcus Aldridge.*

I just thought I would throw this out there because I never heard anybody bring it up. There are times where I know I can get carried away with making conclusions simply from the numbers, but Buckman was one of the most underrated players in college last season. Had his outside shooting not crashed last season (eFG of 56.7% in '05, 48.5 in '06), maybe he would have received more attention.

Buckman was a better shot-blocker than he was given credit for, and Aldridge was not as good as one would expect for a much-hyped big man.

What's in store for 2007: I get the feeling Texas 2007 could be a lot like Kansas 2006. In a way, it has to be refreshing for Rick Barnes to get a clean slate. And we know that the group

taking the floor will not lack talent. Everybody loves Kevin Durant, and the group surrounding him is solid according to the recruiting experts.

Yes, it's a little crazy to predict a group of freshmen to have a lot of success, but to discount this team merely because they are young is also a mistake. It is becoming more frequent to see freshman dominated teams compete at a high level. It may not be the way to play deep in the Tournament, but neither was the method of last season's highly touted Longhorn team.

Strictly speaking, this team won't be as good as last year's. They'll lose a few more games. But by March, it wouldn't surprise me if they won as many Big 12 and NCAA Tournament games as the Aldridge-led crew.

How much will Texas' offense suffer in the transition? Barnes system relies on offensive rebounding, and Texas has exceeded the lofty 41% threshold in that department four of the last five seasons. Their lone failure was two seasons ago when Aldridge and Tucker missed the second half of the season, and the team dipped to a pedestrian 38%.

By all accounts, Durant, Matt Hill, and Dexter Pittman will be able to fill most of the rebounding void left by those two guys and Buckman. If they do it well enough, Texas will be a force by March, and although very young, they can't help a more consistent team than the 2006 version.

Barometer Game: Texas plays in the 2K Sports College Hoops Classic in mid-November, with one of the worst fields you'll see in a 16-team tournament. Even if the Horns win that, it may not tell us too much about this young team. And if they don't win it, there's no reason to panic.

The game I'll be more interested in is a neutral site tilt against LSU on December 10th. With LaMarcus Aldridge's two-for-15 performance in the Regional Finals a fading memory by that point, it will be interesting to see how Barnes' two rookies in the post, Hill and Pittman, match up against a slimmer Big Baby.

The Roster

Effective Height=6'-4.82" (11th) Effective Experience=1.57 (7th) Returning Minutes=16.1% (12th)

	%Min	ORtg	%Poss/Shots	eFG%	OR/DR%	FTR	A/TO	Blk/Stl	Inside	FT/2P/3P%
2 PJ Tucker	6-5/F	86	109	26/24	52	10/22	44	17/21	1/3	+43 75/51/67
23 LaMarcus Aldridge	6-10/C	84	118	21/22	57	13/18	47	3/14	7/2	+47 65/57/0
1 Daniel Gibson	6-2/G	83	116	20/23	53	4/8	24	18/17	1/2	-43 73/46/38
12 Kenton Paulino	6-1/G	69	115	18/19	55	2/8	23	20/21	1/2	-40 78/47/40
22 Brad Buckman	6-8/F	60	108	20/19	49	12/18	45	10/21	7/2	+13 77/50/30
3 AJ Abrams	5-10/G	53	112	18/16	53	2/6	57	25/26	0/2	-38 88/42/39
40 Mike Williams	6-7/F	29	107	11/10	46	11/15	46	4/21	1/1	+46 70/46/0
32 Connor Atchley	6-9/C	15	90	19/19	44	8/13	33	3/27	7/2	-10 70/43/31
4 JD Lewis	6-1/G	11	101	19/19	56	5/8	17	13/30	0/2	-67 71/57/37

Newcomers in '07: DJ Augustin 5-11/G, Kevin Durant 6-9/G-F, Matt Hill 6-9/F-C, Damion James 6-7/F, Ian Mooney 6-3/F (St. Louis), Justin Mason 6-2/G, Dexter Pittman 6-10/C, Harrison Smith 6-2/F

Texas A&M

2006 Record: 22-9 (Conference: 10-6, 4th)
Adjusted Tempo: 64.5 (262nd Overall, 11th in Big 12)
Adjusted Offensive Efficiency: 107.8 (77th, 6th)
Adjusted Defensive Efficiency: 87.6 (8th, 2nd)
Pythagorean Winning %: .916 (23rd, 3rd)

Four Factors (plus two)

	Offense	Defense
Effective FG%	50.8 (104 th /4 th)	46.5 (52 nd /4 th)
Turnover %	20.2 (108 th /5 th)	27.3 (4 th /1 st)
Off. Rebound %	29.8 (247 th /10 th)	31.6 (140 th /5 th)
Free Throw Rate	29.3 (40 th /1 st)	48.5 (323 rd /12 th)
Luck: -.016 (184 th /6 th)	Consistency: 21.8 (241 st /5 th)	

What Texas A&M did well: Force turnovers.

This is a team that rarely presses, making their #4 national ranking in defensive turnover percentage all the more impressive. (Notable pressers Houston and UAB hold the top two spots in this category.) Their TO% was inflated a little by the schedule, but only a little - they still led the Big 12 when only conference games are considered.

The guards are active, but 6-9 Joseph Jones led the regulars in steal rate from his spot in the post.

What Texas A&M didn't do well: Stay out of foul trouble.

All of those forced turnovers came with a price. Three starters finished 2006 with personal foul rates of over 4 per 40 minutes. The top big man off the bench, Antanas Kavaliauskas, committed 6.6 fouls per 40. And remember that the Aggies faced fewer possessions per 40 by virtue of their slow pace, so there should have been fewer chances for their players to commit fouls.

The hacking quartet of Jones, Kavaliauskas, Marlon Pompey, and Dominique Kirk racked up 20 disqualifications during the season. Special credit goes to Pompey, who erupted for four straight foul-outs during Big 12 action. They also had another 24 games between them where they finished with 4 fouls.

This is a reasonably deep team, so the foul trouble isn't a killer, but any more time that Joseph Jones has to spend on the bench hurts the team. The good news is that the three guys that played for A&M in 2005 reduced their foul rate in 2006, so this is an issue that should improve.

What we learned: Billy Gillispie is one of the best coaches in the country.

It's premature to say where he stands in the national landscape, because I'd like to see him do this for 5-10 more years in one place. But in turning around two down-and-out programs almost instantly in this decade, you can't deny

that this guy is not only a program builder, but also an effective teacher of the game. Just consider the recent history of the program - when Gillispie was named coach two seasons ago, A&M was dead last in Big 12 wins, a full 13 games behind 11th place Baylor! True, a relatively new arena and inheriting Antoine Wright from previous coach Melvin Watkins gave Gillispie something to work with. But this was a program that ranked 245th in adjusted defensive efficiency in 2004. It's been a remarkable change.

Gillispie may turn out to be more like Larry Brown than Mike Krzyzewski, with a wandering eye for every high profile job that comes open, but you have to be impressed with what he has done so far.

Also, Aggie basketball is boring.

No offense, because it's a winning formula, but A&M games feature a slow pace, poor shooting, and lots of fouls on both ends. If people thought UCLA was boring during its 2006 Tournament run, you need to see this team to put things in perspective.

A&M actually sent the opposition to the line more often than they did in '05 when they ranked 314th in the nation in opposing free-throw rate. The only other teams in the bottom 50 of free-throw rate to be deemed at-large worthy (seeded 12 or better) were Memphis and Southern Illinois.

By contrast, the top 50 in this category featured 18 teams seeded as deserving of an at-large, including every team in the top 5. Looking back at 2005, no team in the bottom 80 of free-throw rate was at-large worthy.

But the ultra-aggressive half court defense works rather well for Gillispie. It generally held up against the most potent offenses, and even though LSU got to the line 23 times in the Aggies Sweet 16 loss, it certainly wasn't the best reason they were eliminated in a 58-57, 66-possession game.

A high foul rate shouldn't be a trademark of future A&M teams. Gillispie's last two seasons

at UTEP featured much lower opposing free-throw rates of 29.4 and 34.0. And if A&M is going to challenge Kansas for defensive supremacy in the Big 12, or even the nation, they'll need to keep opponents off the line a little better.

What's in store for 2007: No doubt good things. This team got some overdue attention with its play in March, and with everyone back, there shouldn't be any question about the Aggies making the Dance. It's not an impossible dream to win the conference title. Few expected Texas to share a title with anyone last season, much less Kansas. The problem is it's easier to find blemishes in A&M than Kansas, and Texas may eventually have something to say about the race.

But conference championships don't extend coaching contracts, tourney wins do. The obstacle to a deep tournament run is the same as last season. They will need better offense to avoid getting involved in so many close games.

I'm not confident about the offense getting much better. Both Dominique Kirk and Josh Carter made 40% of their 3's while making less than 70% of their free throws, which is rare in the college game. It's almost a given that they'll be less accurate on 3's, and they figure to shoot it more often than last season.

Considering where this program was two years, being able to spend most of the season in the top 25 and not having to worry about their postseason status is a nice luxury. Getting to the next level and joining the nation's elite will take another year or two of miracle working by Gillispie.

Barometer Game: Hey, actual challenges are on the A&M schedule in November and December! Granted, not as many as one would like to see with a team potentially this strong. A December 9 contest in the Wooden Classic against UCLA will be the type of game that John Wooden detests - the first to 50 wins. But a competitive performance by the Aggies will give a Big 12 title run some credibility.

The Roster

Effective Height=6'-5.44" (6th) Effective Experience=1.57 (6th) Returning Minutes=80.0% (5th)

	%Min	ORtg	%Poss/Shots	eFG%	OR/DR%	FTR	A/TO	Blk/Stl	Inside	FT/2P/3P%	
1 Acie Law	6-3/G	84	105	26/29	50	2/10	33	28/17	0/3	+4	76/50/33
22 Dominique Kirk	6-3/G	75	106	13/14	56	1/14	25	18/22	1/3	-52	64/41/40
30 Joseph Jones	6-9/F-C	70	110	27/27	51	9/19	66	13/15	2/3	+59	74/54/11
42 Marlon Pompey	6-8/F	57	96	17/13	47	9/10	73	13/26	5/3	+73	65/47/-
10 Chris Walker	6-5/G	54	88	14/11	47	5/9	42	12/29	0/2	-27	57/36/35
23 Josh Carter	6-5/G	51	107	21/24	57	5/11	23	18/20	2/1	-49	69/50/40
44 A. Kavaliauskas	6-10/C	41	105	20/20	60	10/15	41	13/22	3/2	+34	56/59/56
12 Eddie Smith	6-2/G	27	94	21/19	42	2/11	48	30/22	1/4	+30	62/40/36
5 Kenneth White	6-1/G	17	103	20/24	47	2/6	24	17/16	0/1	-58	88/33/33
2 Martellus Bennett	6-7/F	13	79	29/22	26	14/17	89	15/22	5/4	+78	61/29/0
Newcomers in '07: Bryan Beasley 6-0/G, Bryan Davis, 6-9/F, Chinemelu Elonu 6-10/C, Jerrod Johnson 6-6/G-F, Logan Lee 6-2/G (Hawaii), Derrick Roland 6-4/G-F, Donald Sloan 6-2/G											

Texas Tech

2006 Record: 15-17 (Conference: 6-10, T-7th)
Adjusted Tempo: 67.9 (117th Overall, 4th in Big 12)
Adjusted Offensive Efficiency: 105.0 (116th, 9th)
Adjusted Defensive Efficiency: 96.6 (93rd, 7th)
Pythagorean Winning %: .722 (97th, 9th)

Four Factors (plus two)

	Offense	Defense
Effective FG%	48.8 (191 st /8 th)	48.0 (94 th /7 th)
Turnover %	20.2 (107 th /4 th)	21.8 (118 th /5 th)
Off. Rebound %	26.1 (309 th /12 th)	36.2 (297 th /10 th)
Free Throw Rate	26.4 (119 th /5 th)	27.1 (19 th /3 rd)
Luck: -.019 (192 nd /7 th)	Consistency: 28.5 (330 th /11 th)	

What Texas Tech did well: Give everybody a chance to play

You wouldn't associate Bobby Knight with endorsing youth league type rules where everyone on the roster must play. But he did give all 13 players on the roster at least one start. However, don't get the impression that this was a very deep team.

And when you have to pick a nonsensical thing as the one thing a team did well, you know it wasn't a very good team, either. It wasn't that Texas Tech was particularly bad at everything, but they didn't demonstrate the excellence in areas normally associated with a Knight-coached team.

One compliment I can give is that Texas Tech was accurate from 3-point range. But it rings hollow, because it didn't impact the Red Raider offense a whole lot.

Bobby Knight has always preferred the old-fashioned 3-point play and preventing the opposition from getting them. So even though the Red Raiders ranked 16th in 3-point percentage, they were 21st from the bottom in terms of how often they shot it from there.

What Texas Tech didn't do well: Rebounding, of course. But more surprisingly, protecting the basketball.

In a conference that had two of the best rebounding teams in the nation, Texas Tech provided a contrast by being the worst rebounding team in a major conference this side of Durham. Of course, that team in Durham is run by Knight's most famous disciple.

But Knight teams typically don't rebound well. The signature of a Knight offense is jamming the ball down the opposition's throat, getting to the line often, and most of all taking great care of the ball.

But the problem for Tech was that their rebounding was especially awful in '06, while their turnover rate went from the typically great to merely being good, but the worst of

the five seasons Bob Knight has spent in Lubbock. And that was while having one of the more sure-handed point guards on the floor nearly every minute of the season.

What we learned: Jarrius Jackson is very, very important to this team's success.

You don't see too many teams with the offensive distribution of Texas Tech. Jarrius Jackson was far away Tech's go-to guy, and even with that burden, he was easily their most efficient player, also. As point guards go, Jackson was one of the more selfish in the country.

Assist rate for point guards typically reside in the mid-20s. Jackson assisted on just 18% of his teammates baskets, the lowest of any starting point guard in the conference. But since his supporting cast lacks scoring punch, the case could be made that if Jackson got even a little more selfish, it wouldn't hurt the team's offense.

Also, Bob Knight's impact on this program may not be what we thought.

I'm not stupid enough to suggest the Texas Tech program would be in better shape if James Dickey had been given a lifetime contract in the off-season of 2001. They had a total of 11 conference wins in the three seasons before Knight arrived.

But RMK's reputation aside, he is getting a lot of mileage out of the terrific turnaround he (along with some help from Dickey holdovers Andre Emmitt and Andy Ellis) engineered in 2002, and the surprising Elite Eight run in 2005.

Knight's first team in Lubbock was his best, and the 2006 version was his worst.

What's in store for 2007: While the Red Raiders weren't inspiring in 2006, they benefit from favorable circumstances in 2007. They return just about everybody in a year where a few conference teams are heading south.

Jarrius Jackson is one of the better point guards in the country. It's pretty clear that he's

the most important player to his team of any player in the conference, and possibly the country. Any predictions of glory for the upcoming season are contingent on Jackson remaining healthy. Take him off this team and Tech would have trouble scraping together enough wins to get to the NIT.

Even with him, I don't feel real good about their chances of getting an at-large bid unless the incoming recruits provide efficient production on the front line. Knight's bringing in a trio of large jucos to try to grab some playing time, which certainly is available to capable applicants.

The thing is, Texas Tech was thin at all positions last season. With Jackson and Martin Zeno, they had each member of their starting backcourt ranked in the top 100 in percentage of minutes played. Jackson should get as many minutes as he wants, but Zeno is a guy that wouldn't be getting nearly as much playing time for the other Big 12 at-large candidates.

With more and more conferences getting into the multiple-bid business, finishing in the top half of the Big 12 is hardly a guarantee of playing on neutral courts in mid-March. There are just too many holes on this team to get very excited about a Tournament berth. If they are to sneak into the field, it will depend on the bigs making a much bigger contribution than they did last season.

Barometer Game: The 16-team "College Basketball Experience" tournament is designed to get Texas Tech to the semi-finals in New York. The Red Raiders are hosting a sub-regional with a likely second round game against Akron on November 14th.

Are you experienced? Akron most definitely is, with point guard Dru Joyce able to distribute more effectively as Jackson. It's naturally a game Tech expects to win, but it's a good measuring stick as to whether this team can make this season about more than just Bob Knight becoming the career king in victories.

The Roster

Effective Height=6'-5.0" (9th) Effective Experience=1.14 (10th) Returning Minutes=81.6% (3rd)

	%Min	ORtg	%Poss/Shots	eFG%	OR/DR%	FTR	A/TO	Blk/Stl	Inside	FT/2P/3P%	
22 Jarrius Jackson	6-1/G	95	109	26/30	51	2/10	38	18/12	0/3	+5	81/43/45
3 Martin Zeno	6-5/G	87	100	23/22	48	5/12	45	18/18	1/2	+40	73/48/29
44 Darryl Dora	6-9/F	66	98	17/17	48	5/13	21	21/23	2/1	-8	85/49/32
21 Dior Lowhorn	6-7/F	50	91	21/21	51	7/15	50	3/19	4/1	+50	51/51/-
32 Jonathan Plefka	6-8/F	45	94	18/18	44	9/12	39	6/20	2/1	+31	76/44/27
30 Michael Prince	6-7/F	40	82	15/11	42	8/8	33	17/31	0/1	+29	46/44/0
20 Alan Voskuil	6-3/G	33	94	17/17	49	2/11	27	14/23	0/1	-40	81/25/41
13 Terry Martin	6-5/G	27	79	22/20	47	3/13	26	16/30	1/2	-18	56/40/38
33 LucQuente White	6-0/G	19	74	15/9	40	2/9	39	20/42	0/2	-19	75/39/28
31 Tanner Ogden	6-7/F	13	102	18/19	57	4/10	12	22/25	1/2	-72	80/71/36
5 Drew Coffman	6-1/G	13	122	15/15	63	0/6	12	34/21	0/1	-76	100/50/43

Newcomers in '07: Rogdrick Craig 6-6/F (JC), Jay Mitchell 6-8/F (JC), Esmir Rizvic 7-0/C (JC), Decensae White 6-6/G-F