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# Basketball's Back

After a historic 2022-23 season, A&M men's basketball is back with a team ready to compete with the nation's best

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It's time for heels on the hardwood to return to College Station.

Texas A&M men's basketball returns to action on Monday, Nov. 6, just one season removed from finishing second in the SEC and making the NCAA tournament for the first time since 2018.

The Aggies begin the season with the loftiest expectations they've had in Buzz Williams' tenure, coming in at No. 15 in the preseason AP poll with preseason SEC Player of the Year, junior guard Wade Taylor IV leading the charge. A&M also returns the second-most production of any power-five school, 88.4%, and brought in three transfers in the offseason to help fill the gaps.

Joining Taylor in the backcourt is graduate guard Tyrece Radford, who returned to A&M for his final year of eligibility. The Baton Rouge, Louisiana native averaged 13.3 points per game last season and earned an All-SEC second-team selection.

Also returning is junior guard Manny Obaseki. Obaseki missed 15 games of SEC play last season with a broken hand but will play a larger role this season.

The Aggies also added freshman Bryce Lindsay, a 3-star recruit from Bradenton, Florida, who will serve as Taylor's backup.

Potentially filling Dexter Dennis' spot are two transfers in junior UIC transfer Jace Carter and graduate Middle Tennessee State transfer Eli Lawrence. Carter, an All-MVC second-team selection, averaged 16.6 points last season and led the Flames with 53 steals.

Lawrence was an All-Conference USA second-team selection last season and led the Blue Raiders in PPG with 12.2 while producing career highs in assist, 3-point percentage and free-throw percentage.

Shaping up the backcourt is senior Henry Coleman III. The Richmond, Virginia native started in 31 of the Aggies' 35 games last season, averaging 9 points and 5.7 rebounds.

Senior Julius Marble was expected to be a key returner for A&M, but his availability has been called into question after he missed A&M's scrimmage against Baylor due to "an undisclosed university process," according to coach Buzz Williams.

The Dallas native averaged 9.1 PPG and 4.1 RPG and was a SEC Player of the Week last season.

Potentially soaking up some of Marble's minutes — however long his absence may be — is UMass transfer Wildens Leveque. While the senior may not have explosive numbers, only 5.5 PPG and 4.6 RPG, he has SEC experience, playing for the South Carolina team that beat the Maroon and White in Reed Arena two seasons ago.

Rounding out the bench are forwards sophomore Solomon Washington and senior Andersson Garcia, both of whom bring energy off the bench despite their relatively low stats.

Like prior seasons, the Aggies open their season with a warm-up game, this time against Texas A&M-Commerce, but quickly face their first test on the road against Ohio State.

The Buckeyes went 16-19 last year and lost key pieces in the offseason like Brice Sensabough and Justice Sueing to the NBA Draft. However, Ohio State was picked seventh in the Big Ten preseason poll and is projected to make the NCAA tournament.

Returning for the Buckeyes is sophomore point guard Bruce Thornton, who averaged 10.6 points per game last season. Ohio State also landed Minnesota transfer Jamison Battle and Baylor transfer Dale Bonner this offseason.

After one final tune-up against Oral Roberts, the Maroon and White then head to one of the strongest non-conference tournaments in the entire country, the ESPN Events Invitational.

With six of the eight teams in the event making the NCAA tournament last season, the Aggies will be squaring off against quality competition no matter who they're pitted against in the bracket. One guarantee about the invitational is that A&M will get their chance at revenge against Penn State in the first round.

While making the tournament may have felt good to many Aggie fans, the 76-59 clubbing the Nittany Lions put on the Maroon and White last season surely did not. Despite the shot at redemption, it may not feel as sweet as hoped, as key players Jalen Pickett, Andrew Funk and Seth Lundy have all left the program, as well as coach Micah Shrewsbury.

Former VCU coach Mike Rhodes took over the program in the offseason and has assembled a crew composed almost entirely of transfers, including multiple VCU players in Ace Baldwin Jr. and Kick Kern Jr.

The key player in the ESPN Events Invitational is the FAU Owls. After a magical Final Four run last year, FAU also only lost one player and returns more production in junior guards Johnell Davis and Alijah Martin. The Owls are ranked No. 10 and could face the Aggies in the second round of the invitational if the Aggies beat the Nittany Lions and FAU beats Butler.

There is no reprieve after the ESPN Events Invitational, as A&M heads to Charlottesville, Virginia to take on the Virginia Cavaliers in the first iteration of the ACC-SEC Challenge.

Virginia is coming off of a heartbreaking first-round exit in the tournament last year, falling to 13-seed Furman in an upset on a last-second 3-pointer. Unfortunately for the Cavaliers, they lost five of their top seven players this offseason and will be an unknown going into the season.

After a nearly two-week road stint, the Aggies then return home to face Depaul and Memphis. The Memphis Tigers managed to pull ahead of A&M in last year's matchup, and lost players like Kendrick Davis and Keonte Kennedy, but filled the void with a whopping eight transfers, including Alabama transfer Jahvon Quinnerly.

In possibly the biggest game of the Maroon and White's season to this point, the Aggies then go to the Toyota Center in Houston to face the Houston Cougars.

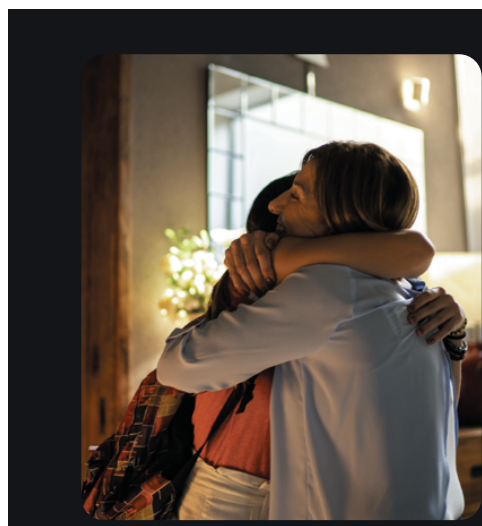
No. 7 Houston transitions to the Big 12 this season and has the capacity to immediately compete for the top spot in the conference. Making an impact will be Baylor transfer LJ Cryer, who averaged 15 PPG for the Bears last season.

In conference play, the Aggies open with another pair of Tigers in LSU and Auburn and then welcome the Kentucky Wildcats to town.

In what has been par for the course, Kentucky lost almost all of its production from last season but replaced it with the best recruiting class in college basketball, which includes the potential No. 1 NBA Draft pick, Justin Edwards.

PREVIEW ON PG. A2

Graphic by Praay Dhoopar/The Battalion



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