CGA's 2017 NCAA Men's Gymnastics Season Preview

By: Logan Bradley

2017 will be defined as a ***chase***. The Oklahoma Sooners will chase their third consecutive national championship, something that hasn't been done since Nebraska won five in a row from 1979-83. Every other team in the NCAA will participate in their own chase to dethrone the Sooners. One thing's for certain, each team faces an extremely uphill battle.

Along with comprehensive team summaries, I've included some insight as to who the top competitors on each event might be come NCAA Championship time.

NOTE: Something important to note for this upcoming season is a change in the code of points which will result in lower scoring. There will be four element groups instead of five, resulting in scores being .5 lower on each event compared to last year. For example, a 15.0 in 2016 will be a 14.5 this year. The only event that will differ is vault where a majority of the vaults performed will be .4 lower than last year.

- All *TOP RETURNING SCORERS'* numbers are based on 2016 season averages from roadtonationals.com. Must have competed a minimum of five routines to qualify.
- All photos were taken by Jess Frankl.

1. Oklahoma Sooners

TOP RETURNING SCORERS
FX - Yul Moldauer (15.164)
PH - Allan Bower (15.085)
SR - Thao Hoang (15.273)
VT - Allan Bower (15.023)
PB - Yul Moldauer (15.604)
HB - Josh Yee (14.736)

LOSSES
- Kanji Oyama
- Sergey Resnick

NEWCOMERS
- Matt Wenske
- Tanner Justus
- Isamu Itu
- Jake Maloley

Summary:

It's the Sooners' world, everybody else is just living in it. Last year, for the second consecutive season, Oklahoma stood atop the podium once all was said and done at the NCAA Championships. Head coach Mark Williams is fully aware of the fact that his team comes into 2017 again as the team to beat. **"We have a big target on our back because everybody wants to beat us,"** said Williams. **"It'll be our job to try and find a way to be as good as we were last year."**

They will begin that challenge with new firepower in the form of 2016 P&G Championships' Senior vault champion, **Matt Wenske**. According to Williams, the vision is for Wenske to fill some of the void left by Kanji Oyama. Oyama was the 2016 runner-up in the all-around at the NCAA Championships.

It also doesn't hurt to return the reigning NCAA all-around champion in **Yul Moldauer** (pictured above). Williams is counting on Moldauer along with senior **Allan Bower** (5x All-American) to

provide consistency for the Sooners. "Bower has been one of the more consistent gymnasts I've ever had as part of the program. He just continues to grind it out at a high level and rarely misses routines," Williams said.

The team dealt with some viral infections and concussions but otherwise kept a clean bill of health through the preseason. For Williams, the obvious keys to success are health and continuing the training methods of the past. "The way we put together our program has been based on success in the past. If we can continue to meet those challenges of the training plan I think we'll be in good shape again this year."

2. Stanford Cardinal

TOP RETURNING SCORERS
FX - Akash Modi (15.195)
PH - Akash Modi (14.800)
SR - Jordan DeClerk (14.686)
VT - Akash Modi (14.856)
PB - Akash Modi (15.055)
HB - Akash Modi (14.740)

LOSSES
- Dennis Zaremski
- Brian Knott
- Jon Deaton

NEWCOMERS
- David Jessen
- Bailey Perez
- Connor Lewis
- Ben Swartout
- Joey Ringer

Summary:

On a year-to-year basis it's impossible to argue that Stanford isn't one of the most consistently impressive teams. Head coach Thom Glielmi has led his squad to four-straight top-3 finishes at NCAAs including consecutive runners-up finishes the last two seasons. Maybe more impressive is the fact that the program has finished top-5 in the NCAA every year since 2006.

From last season to now they've lost two individual NCAA champions (Brian Knott & Dennis Zaremski), yet still project to contend for an NCAA team title. It will take a lot to dethrone two-time defending champion Oklahoma, but Stanford will do all they can to try.

Much of the burden will fall on the shoulders of Rio alternate **Akash Modi** (pictured above). "Coming off the Olympic training group as one of the replacement gymnasts has been very motivating [for him]," said Glielmi. "I have high expectations for him, as he does for himself."

Two other athletes that Glielmi noted as key contributors are sophomore **Grant Breckenridge** and junior **Robert Neff**. Regardless of who's competing, Glielmi realizes that depth will determine how far this team goes. "**When our team members have to compete in practice to make the lineup, it keeps them focused and working hard. It's imperative to our success that they all understand their role and strive to achieve it.**"

When asked about the expectations he has of his team this year, Glielmi made it very clear: "Hit 30 for 30 at NCAAs. The start value does not matter if the routine is missed."

3. Ohio State Buckeyes

TOP RETURNING SCORERS	LOSSES	NEWCOMERS
FX - Sean Melton (14.900)	- Alex Johnson	- Michael Chan
PH - Alec Yoder (15.002)	- Emeric Quade	- Robert Costea
SR - Sean Melton (15.468)	- Andrew Teal	- Coleson Stodghill
VT - Seth Delbridge (15.009)	- Donald Yeager	- Joey Smith
PB - Sean Melton (15.210)	- Cody Teaney	- Andrew Brower
HB - Andrew Rickly (14.555)	- Jake Crnkovich	
	- Evan Eigner	

Summary:

The Buckeyes will be returning a robust 26 of 30 routines that helped them win their first B1G team title since 2007. Even better news? They will be getting back the services of **Jake Martin** (2014 B1G vault champion) who suffered a torn achilles midway through the 2016 campaign. According to head coach Rustam Sharipov, Martin is currently one of the most well-conditioned athletes on the team and is poised to make an impact on almost every event.

Sharipov sees pommel horse as a strong event for the team this year given the returning talent. You have Martin, **Jake Dastrup**, **Sean Melton** (pictured above) and B1G champion/NCAA runner-up, **Alec Yoder**. "I believe that our specialists have enough experience to step up [on PH] as well," said Sharipov. "Guys like **Brandon Jacoby** and **David Szarvas**."

With Melton, Ohio State is one of three schools who will feature an athlete that competed at the 2016 Olympic Trials (Stanford - Modi, Oklahoma - Moldauer).

Although Melton has the potential to anchor almost every event for the Buckeyes, he will be needed most by his team on rings. He continued to show his importance on the event last year by posting a national qualifying average that was .25 higher than the next best competitor in the NCAA. "We have a lot of small injuries to our rings specialists," said Sharipov. "It's tough right now but I'm hoping everything will go fine."

This team is packed with talent and **Sharipov believes they're capable of defending their B1G title and contending for an NCAA title as well**. As to how they'll get there? It will all depend on hit percentage and execution according to Sharipov: "We're not striving for the highest difficulty, but instead trying to strive for better execution."

Given the new code of points, it's safe to say this is an attack plan that many teams across the NCAA are looking to deploy.

4. Minnesota Golden Gophers

TOP RETURNING SCORERS
FX - Zach Liebler (15.225)
PH - Justin Karstadt (14.402)
SR - Tristan Duran (14.277)
VT - Zach Liebler (15.021)
PB - Tristan Duran (14.644)
HB - Jalon Stephens (14.519)

LOSSES
- Paul Montague Jr.
- Danny DiBenedetto

NEWCOMERS
- Timmy Kutyla

Summary:

Anybody who has been an NCAA gymnast will tell you: talent within a team can only take you so far, you have to develop culture. After losing just two seniors and bringing in one freshman, head coach Mike Burns is excited by the opportunity of furthering the culture within the returning core. **"These guys have done a fabulous job of creating a high standard for themselves,"** said Burns. "As a coach, it's good to know that they're pretty much on the same level as the coaching staff."

Returning the vast majority of competitors on a team becomes even more exciting when you factor in that the Gophers are coming off their first NCAA team finals appearance since 2007. They will be led by senior co-captain, **Zach Liebler** who last year posted a 16.15 on FX against UIC which was just .1 shy of the NCAA record.

While Liebler stands out, he's just the headliner of this balanced team. Big things are expected out of juniors **Tristan Duran** (3rd AA at B1G's) and **Joel Gagnon** (2x All-American FX) as well. Burns also noted that sophomores **Vitali Kan** and **Shaun Herzog** are on the verge of possible breakout years for the Gophers. Kan suffered physical setbacks in 2016 that kept him out of the middle part of the season while Herzog was shuffled in-and-out of lineup. While sophomore **Justin Karstadt** capped his freshman season with an All-American accolade on PH, Burns believes he has a chance to break out even more in 2017.

As long as things go according to plan, health-wise, Burns says that his team will do all they can to push higher difficulty as the season moves forward. "If you look at who's on top, it's who has the biggest difficulty," Burns said.

With a similar core as in 2016, the Gophers are poised to make noise not just in the conference, but across the NCAA.

5. Illinois Fighting Illini

TOP RETURNING SCORERS	**LOSSES**	**NEWCOMERS**
FX - Chandler Eggleston (15.000)	- Max Mayr	- Jacob Light
PH - Brandon Ngai (15.333)	- Logan Bradley	- Tommy Mistretta
SR - Alex Diab (14.912)	- Fred Hartville	- Michael Paradise
VT - Bobby Baker (14.861)		- Connor Jones
PB - Bobby Baker (14.614)		- Zach Treadway
HB - Tyson Bull (14.336)		- Danny Graham
		- Sebastian Quiana
		- Andreas Silbermann

Summary:

Here's a very obvious statement: gymnastics is a physically demanding sport. In any physically demanding sport, there are injuries that take you out for a definite period of time. However, there are also injuries that linger and seemingly get better only for you to realize that they haven't.

That's the story for this Illinois team at the moment. "Our team is pretty packed with talent if we can get healthy," said head coach Justin Spring.

An exciting aspect to this season for the Illini will be when they host B1G Championships for the first time since 2011 in a newly renovated State Farm Center. **"I think that's what the guys want to happen,"** said Spring. **"To bring home a conference title at home."**

Spring realizes that while this is a very realistic goal, there's only so much you can do when half your team is on the mend. 2015 B1G freshman & gymnast of the year **Bobby Baker** is dealing with wrist problems that will limit him throughout the season. Along with Baker, **Chandler Eggleston** (2014 B1G floor exercise champion) has also been limited on floor and vault due to a previous ankle surgery.

"The bulk of routines will be from **Alex Diab** (pictured above), **Johnny Jacobson** and **Joey Peters**," said Spring. Diab (2016 B1G still rings champion) and Jacobson are both coming off strong freshmen campaigns while Peters returns to action after redshirting the 2016 season due to shoulder surgery.

Spring mentioned that the Illini have been pushing upgrades during preseason but it will be crucial for those upgrades to actually make it into sets come regular season. Not unlike other teams, the level of success Illinois enjoys in 2017 will be much attributed to the overall health of their squad.

6. Nebraska Cornhuskers

TOP RETURNING SCORERS
FX - Austin Epperson (14.900)
PH - Antonio Castro (14.427)
SR - Austin Epperson (14.290)
VT - Kyle King (14.750)
PB - Anton Stephenson (14.488)
HB - Antonio Castro (13.910)

LOSSES
- Ethan Lottman
- Sam Chamberlain
- Ryan Irick

NEWCOMERS
- Evan Hymanson
- Jake Bonnay
- Josh Martin

Summary:

It would be an understatement to say this Nebraska team has a chip on their shoulder entering 2017. Their 2016 season ended with the team finishing just four tenths shy of qualifying to the NCAA team finals for the first time since 1999. The Cornhuskers will return 24 of the 30 routines that brought them so close to a top-six finish. "It left a bad taste in the guys' mouths, not making it," said head coach Chuck Chmelka. "The guys are hungry, they feel like they have a real good shot this year."

One thing standing in the way of this team improving on last season is the health of sophomore All-American **Anton Stephenson** (pictured above). He is dealing with a slight tear in his rotator cuff which is limiting him, according to Chmelka. "He's an outstanding kid, he works hard and he's good on every event."

No doubt, if Stephenson is sidelined for any amount of time, the Cornhuskers' depth will be tested. That would put a bit more pressure on junior **Kyle King**, who is a standout on floor exercise and vault but could potentially be pushed into all-around duty this season.

Chmelka believes his team is capable of knocking out five routines on each event, but the key will be avoiding the big mistake. "We've done great things and then had a miss or two on an event that has killed us," he said. **"They've got to have the mentality that they go out and it's not *if* they're going to hit, but how well they're going to hit."**

This is a team with a solid mix of experience and youthful talent. Both will have to shine through in order to earn that coveted NCAA team finals spot.

7. Penn State Nittany Lions

TOP RETURNING SCORERS
FX - Dominic DiFulvio (14.613)
PH - Leroy Clarke Jr. (14.180)
SR - Leroy Clarke Jr. (14.767)
VT - Dominic DiFulvio (14.533)
PB - Leroy Clarke Jr. (14.755)
HB - Michael Burns (14.339)

LOSSES
- Trevor Howard
- Alexis Torres
- Blake Young

NEWCOMERS
- Isaac Hammett
- Luke Belvedere
- Brayden Borromeo
- Stephen Nedoroscik
- Sam Zakutney
- Favian Valdez

Summary:

Head coach Randy Jepson realizes that nobody is expecting much of this Nittany Lion team. When you lose a former national champion (Trevor Howard) there's bound to be some regression. **"I think we can still do well and we're pretty solid top-to-bottom on every event,"** said Jepson. **"Anything can happen at the end."**

The key to this team's success, according to Jepson, will come down to consistency. The trend of consistency will need to start with redshirt senior and two-time All-American, **Leroy Clarke Jr.** (pictured above). Last season, Clarke Jr. held an average of 14.15+ on three different events: pommel horse, still rings and parallel bars. "Leroy had done an outstanding job," Jepson said. "We're hoping he improves health-wise but he's a very clean and solid guy."

Penn State unfortunately will be without **Quest Hayden** who is sidelined for the year due to a shoulder repair. Hayden competed solely on PH last season but was a key contributor on four events as a freshman in 2015. His absence will leave room for others to step up, and Jepson

believes that could be newcomer **Sam Zakutney**. Zakutney hails from Canada and presents very clean gymnastics which can be a difference maker at the NCAA level.

Something to watch for from the Nittany Lions heading into 2017 is their prowess on pommel horse. "We're very sound there [on PH]," Jepson said. "We have good starts and guys are pretty seasoned there."

Given the inconsistent nature of the event, PH could help separate PSU from their competitors. At the end of the day, this is a team that realizes they won't overpower anybody but as Jepson described, they will be feisty, strong and well-prepared.
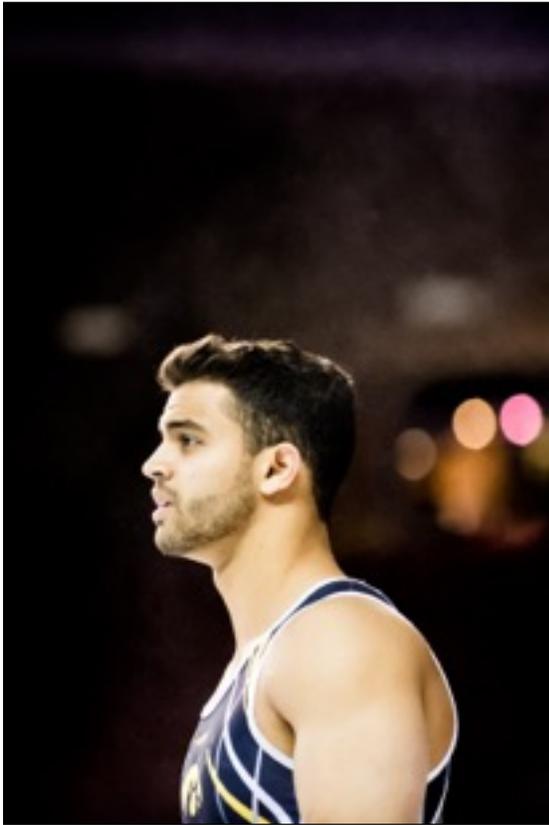
8. Iowa Hawkeyes

TOP RETURNING SCORERS
FX - Mark Springett (14.300)
PH - Austin Hodges (14.125)
SR - Andrew Botto (14.571)
VT - Dylan Ellsworth (14.646)
PB - Dylan Ellsworth (14.200)
HB - Cory Paterson (14.394)

LOSSES	NEWCOMERS
- Matt Loochtan	- Nick Merryman
- Jack Boyle	- Andrew Herrador
- Doug Sullivan	- Mitch Mandozzi
- Cyrus Dobre-Mofid	- Brandon Wong
- DelVecchio Orozco	- Josh Zeal
- Emmanuel Monroy	- Kirill Yefremenko

Summary:

Similar to Cal, Iowa will be dealing with the departure of their top two all-arounders in Jack Boyle and Matt Loochtan. "It's kind of fun, at the same time we're turning over a new leaf and going in a new direction," said head coach JD Reive.

That new direction will be one with an emphasis on good lines and form, according to Reive. **"The difficulty needs to be competitive but finding that rhythm and consistency throughout the lineup, hopefully early in the season, will be key."**

Something this team has going for them is their depth. While Reive doesn't believe there is one event that necessarily stands out, they have plenty of routines to choose from to fill out the final 30 needed at B1Gs and NCAAs.

The freshmen group is headlined by **Nick Merryman** and **Andrew Herrador**. Both are former Junior National Team members who possess the ability to step in and contribute immediately. "He's [Herrador] got a couple of events he'll be in there on," said Reive. "He's a good competitor from what I've seen and once we get him out there in a couple meets he's going to do pretty well with it."

Another key piece for the Hawkeyes will be junior **Dylan Ellsworth**. According to Reive, Ellsworth will be a major dictator of their team score due to his ability to contribute on a variety of events.

"It's always going to come down to consistency in practice," said Reive when asked of the key to this team's success. "If they can get that to occur and bring that into training, they'll have a ton of success."

9. Michigan Wolverines

TOP RETURNING SCORERS
FX - Anthony Stefanelli (14.695)
PH - Dmitri Belanovski (13.667)
SR - Anthony McCallum (14.211)
VT - Anthony McCallum (15.194)
PB - Dmitri Belanovski (14.662)
HB - Dmitri Belanovski (14.186)

LOSSES
- Nolan Novak
- Michael Strathern
- Colin Mahar

NEWCOMERS
- Mitchell Brown
- Parker Chiapuzio
- Socrates Gavallas
- Cole Gibbs
- Mack Lasker
- Justin Murphy
- Thomas Paul
- Connor Welch

Summary:

The youth movement has begun in Ann Arbor. Of the 24 gymnasts currently on the roster, 19 are sophomores or freshmen. This wouldn't be the first Michigan sports team to rely heavily on a group of young athletes. Back in 1991-92, the men's basketball team started five freshmen dubbed "the Fab Five" and eventually made it to the NCAA Championship game, only to lose to Duke.

While head coach Kurt Golder doesn't have quite as high of expectations for this group, he still believes his youngsters have a chance at cracking the top-six at NCAA's. The only thing standing in the Wolverines' way at this point would be the health of some of their top competitors. "We have multiple athletes recovering from recent injuries including **Marty Stretch** (wrist & finger), **Dmitri Belanovski** (torn thumb ligament & wrist) and **Anthony McCallum** (labrum surgery)," said Golder.

The Wolverines will yet again rely on vault to be the backbone of their team. Last year, they ranked second nationally on the event and return the NCAA and B1G vault champion, Anthony McCallum. **McCallum's tsuk double pike is one of the most electrifying pieces of gymnastics you will see at the NCAA level.**

Another year of developing young talent will have the Wolverines' future looking bright.
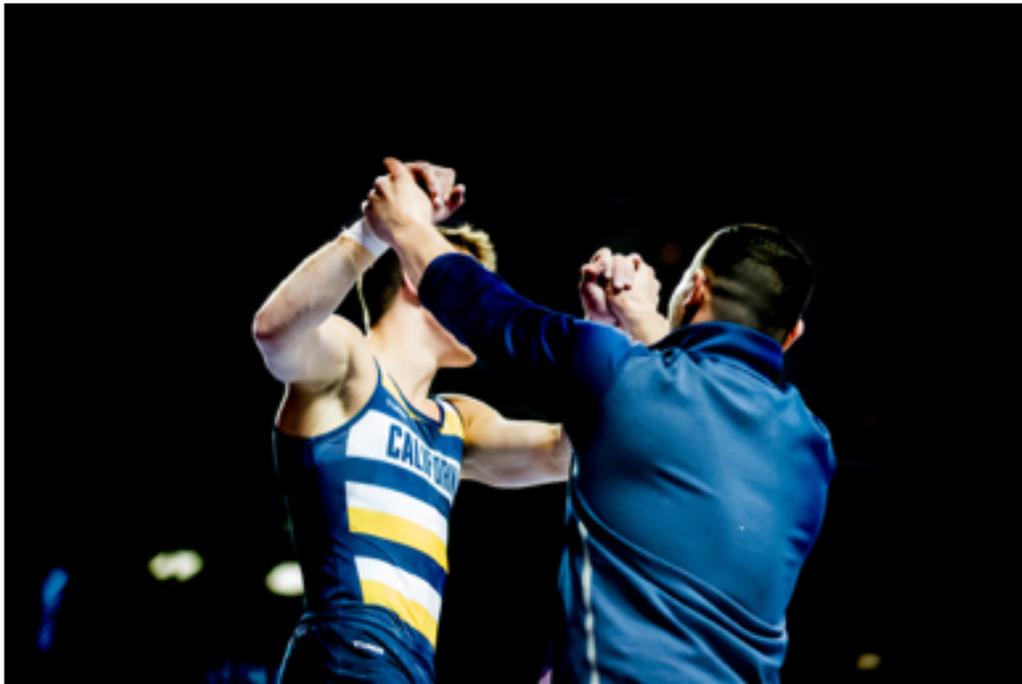
10. California Golden Bears

TOP RETURNING SCORERS
FX - Aaron Mah (14.625)
PH - Adam Young (13.261)
SR - Yordan Aleksandrov (14.014)
VT - Michael Rauchwerger (14.608)
PB - Yordan Aleksandrov (14.695)
HB - Yordan Aleksandrov (14.827)

LOSSES
- Kevin Wolting
- Ryan Patterson
- Kyle Zemeir
- Taka Kawada
- Kevin Tran

NEWCOMERS
- Jonathan Wang
- Anton Vorona
- Kyte Crigger

Summary:

When you lose a group of seniors like Cal did this year, things are bound to get tough. In total, the Golden Bears will return only half of their routines from the 2016 NCAA Championships. "My expectation for this team is to gain as much experience as possible from each week," said head coach Brett McClure. **"This is a young team that has been led by a strong group that recently graduated, so stepping into those shoes will be difficult."**

Two gymnasts who McClure says he will be counting on are junior **Yordan Aleksandrov** and sophomore **Aaron Mah**. Both have international experience representing their respective countries (Aleksandrov - Bulgaria, Mah - Canada) giving Cal a duo to rely on.

"Consistency will be the key for this team," mentioned McClure. "We do not have the start values that other teams may have, but we have always shown tremendous execution." Aleksandrov is a great example of that tremendous execution as it led him to a third-place high bar finish at last year's NCAA Championships. You'd be hard pressed to find another gymnast in the NCAA who competes with a cleaner body line.

It's impossible to replace gymnasts like Kevin Wolting and Kyle Zemeir, but with a few breakthrough performances from younger team members, Cal could begin to rebuild its core.

11. Air Force Falcons

TOP RETURNING SCORERS
FX - Aaron Nubine (14.615)
PH - Tim Wang (14.917)
SR - Fletcher Braunton (14.410)
VT - Tim Wang (14.619)
PB - Tim Wang (14.135)
HB - Chase Cannon (14.875)

LOSSES
- Josh Pyne
- Denis Aurelius
- Arinn Wade

NEWCOMERS
- Hayden Sasser

Summary:

The good news for Air Force entering 2017 is that over half their team is made up of sophomores. It's a class that according to head coach Jeff Robinson made up approximately 50% of their scores from last year. Unfortunately, the team will be without Arinn Wade (PH All-American from 2016) as he decided not to continue his commitment at the Air Force Academy.

Along with the sophomores, much of the load will be carried by senior all-arounder, **Tim Wang**. "Tim is positioned to be our key player and also potentially qualify to the Senior National Team at Winter Cup if we can get him healthy," said Robinson.

Another key for the Falcons will be the performance of senior **Chase Cannon**. Cannon, who was ranked first nationally on high bar at times last year, has the potential to shoot for a national title this year on the event.

While guys like Wang and Cannon do some exciting gymnastics, Robinson hopes to de-emphasize start value for his team in order to focus on hitting clean sets. **"We're not in a position right now to throw in a lot of fancy difficulty," Robinson said. "We're going to have to be squeaky clean."**

The Falcons depth will also be tested due to a couple of injuries to key players like **Michael Graft** (ACL tear - out for season), **Jonah Urlaub** (ACL tear - limited events) and **Eric Klein** (ankle sprain/bone spurs - currently limited).

12. Navy Midshipmen

TOP RETURNING SCORERS

FX - Jonathan Tang (14.542)
PH - Noah Beeman (13.159)
SR - Christian Correale (13.868)
VT - Andy Jones (14.498)
PB - Jonathan Tang (13.992)
HB - Jonathan Tang (14.242)

LOSSES

- Zac Ceroli
- Connor Westrick
- Connor Gonzales
- Mitchell Larios
- Eric Poletti
- David Frick
- Michael Dorsey
- Josh Gong
- Jacob Moses

NEWCOMERS

- Tanner West
- Ben Provost
- Cian McConnell
- Ryan Orce
- Trevor North
- Will Longwe
- Frank Bradley
- Lucas Beltran

Summary:

No roster in the NCAA looks more different from last year to now than Navy. It will be the first year of NCAA competition for over half the roster which brings both excitement and a fair share of questions. "We're green," described second-year head coach Kip Simons. "We're very inexperienced so we've got our hands full."

When you have such a young group, leadership becomes even more important. Simons couldn't say enough about the leadership that senior **Wyatt LaPointe** brings to the table. "He's a team captain and his leadership is the best that I've seen in the 16 years I've been coaching NCAA gymnastics."

That is no doubt high praise coming from as decorated of a coach as Simons who was head coach at the Air Force Academy for ten years. LaPointe, who got picked up as a Navy SEAL select, will contribute heavily on rings, floor exercise and vault.

The other senior Midshipman is **Jonny Tang** who Simons describes as a quiet workhorse. **Tang and LaPointe might best be described as the "Yin and Yang" of this Navy team.** "You've got the leadership from Wyatt and the big numbers from Jonny," Simons said.

For a team with so little experience on their roster to be successful, they will have to lean heavily on their two seniors.

13. Army Black Knights

TOP RETURNING SCORERS
FX - Elliott Herman (14.161)
PH - Andre Hufnagel (13.858)
SR - Cole Casanova (13.888)
VT - Cole Casanova (14.242)
PB - Nathan Goff (13.644)
HB - Leo Genders (14.322)

LOSSES
- Jesse Glenn

NEWCOMERS
- Darrel Yamamura
- Grant Cullen
- Rex Scott
- Erik Del Cid
- Liam O'Hara
- Alejandro Tombrink

Summary:

The storyline for the Army Black Knights this year will be replacing 2016 Nissen-Emery Award winner, Jesse Glenn. Glenn, who goes down as the most decorated gymnast in Army history, leaves a gaping hole that will look to be filled by a strong class of six incoming freshman.

According to Associate Head Coach Carmine Giglio, a gymnast to watch for is junior **Nathan Goff**. "He's added more difficulty and is a lot stronger," said Giglio. "He could be an All-American in the all-around."

Similar to many other teams, Army is hoping to peak at the right time while maintaining a healthy roster. **If everything goes according to plan, the Black Knights are aiming for an ECAC conference title and a trip to NCAA Championships (which will be hosted at West Point) as a team.**

There very well may be some extra motivation at the conference meet this year for Army after last year's meet ended in a first-place tie with Navy. Navy was awarded an automatic bid to NCAAs as a team due to a tie-breaker. We'll see whether narrowly missing out in 2016 lights a fire under the Black Knights.

14. William & Mary Tribe

TOP RETURNING SCORERS
FX - Juan Palma (14.164)
PH - Griffin Antle (14.188)
SR - Nick Van Dyke (13.842)
VT - Juan Palma (14.300)
PB - Rob Meyer (13.848)
HB - Aria Sabbagh (13.733)

LOSSES
- Keaton Ackerman
- Simon Casey
- Adam Avant

NEWCOMERS
- Tomas Palma
- Nate Winneg
- Tim O'Neill

Summary:

Even without competing a single routine it's already been a significant year for William & Mary. Cliff Gauthier, who has been the head coach for 43 years, announced his retirement, effective Jan. 1, 2017. Mike Powell, who will now take over the head coaching duties, inherits a veteran-heavy roster with eleven upperclassmen. **"We have five seniors who are going to be graduating at the end of this year,"** said Powell. **"With that experience, combined with incoming talent we have, we're hoping for a standout year."**

The Tribe will hope to build off a year which saw them finish third at ECAC Championships and send nine gymnasts to NCAAs. One of those gymnasts, **Aria Sabbagh**, enters his senior season after finishing as the team's leading point scorer for the second straight year. "It wouldn't surprise me if he [Sabbagh] continues that," added Powell.

While the team is primarily made up of veterans, Powell sees incoming freshman **Tomas Palma** as a big piece to the Tribe's puzzle. "He's got tremendous talent and if we can get him healthy and hitting routines, he's going to come out as a standout gymnast."

William & Mary will attempt to qualify to the NCAA Championships as a team after missing out the past two seasons.

15. Springfield Pride

TOP RETURNING SCORERS
FX - Nick Jama (13.900)
PH - Chris Graff (13.375)
SR - Joshua Dieker (13.683)
VT - Joshua Dieker (13.875)
PB - Jannik Haas (13.355)
HB - Jannik Haas (13.390)

LOSSES
- Conor Galvin
- Tim Lebbossiere
- Tucker McClure
- Derek Taranto
- Jon Zirna

NEWCOMERS
- Ethan Campion
- Nick Cramer
- Matthew DeGrandpre
- Matthew Koy
- Giancarlo Lawrence
- Stephen Lewis
- Corey Matthews
- Kieran Serrata
- Jeremy Vera
- Luke Wilcox

Summary:

Similar to a few other teams, Springfield will rely on a large group of freshmen to carry a big load in 2017. Of the nine that were brought in, head coach Stephen Posner pointed out that surprises could come from **Corey Matthews** on floor exercise and **Kieran Serrata** on vault.

The bulk of the scoring for the Pride will come from juniors **Chris Graff** and **Josh Dieker**. Graff posted averages of 13+ on five different events last year (FX, PH, R, VT, PB) while Dieker did the same on four (FX, R, VT, PB).

"The key to team success this season will be in the leadership ability of our returning team as a positive influence for our freshmen in and out of the gym," said Posner.

Last season the Pride finished fourth at ECAC Championships and qualified six gymnasts as individuals to the NCAA Championships. With a solid incoming group, Posner hopes to see continued improvement throughout the season with an eventual peak during the postseason.

16. UIC Flames

TOP RETURNING SCORERS
FX - Alex Dumstorf (14.167)
PH - Christopher Patton (13.209)
SR - Keith Kohn (13.739)
VT - Wes Diveney (13.527)
PB - Alex Dumstorf (13.288)
HB - Steen Haugsted (12.578)

LOSSES
- Travis Burke
- Japheth Grimes
- Trent Jarrett
- Scott Poort

NEWCOMERS
- Tyler Ball
- Victor Bello
- Satchel Hudson
- Asad Jooma
- James Marden
- Storm Mills
- Michael Peluso
- Basil Szechinski
- Keawe Winstead
- Dalai Jamiyankhuu

Summary:

Things have been up-and-down over the past few years for this UIC team. The Flames have not finished top-3 at their conference meet, ECAC Championships, since 2013. If everything goes according to plan, that streak will end in 2017.

Head coach Charley Nelson has given the Flames a great shot at a turnaround by assembling a roster mixed with senior leadership and freshmen talent. Nelson is especially excited about freshman **Basil Szechinski** who he projects to be the anchor on floor exercise by midseason. "When you mention his name you smile because he'll be in pretty good shape on five events," said Nelson.

As is the case with any freshmen-heavy group, a level of maturity will need to be reached quickly for this team to improve, as Nelson noted. "We have a good core of seniors who are mature and will have to take on the leadership to make sure the freshmen can follow the lead."

A pair of seniors who Nelson really expects to take that lead are **Chris Root** and **Keith Kohn**. Thanks to some added depth on FX and vault, Root will be competing in just four events this year while Kohn has the ability to chip in on on all six.

"We're hosting ECAC's so to do it [win] in front of our home crowd would be big," Nelson said.

The maturation process will need to be expedited for the Flames to pick up their first ECAC title since 2011.

Individual Event Predictions for NCAAs

Floor Exercise (Last year's champion: Colin Van Wicklen, *OU*)
1. Zach Liebler (*MIN)*
2. Colin Van Wicklen *(OU)*
3. Akash Modi *(STAN)*
4. Yul Moldauer *(OU)*
5. Hunter Justus *(OU)*

Other contenders: Joel Gagnon *(MIN)*, Sean Melton (*OSU)*, Gabe Flores *(STAN)*, Kyle King *(NEB)*, Alex Wittenberg *(MIN),* Matt Wenske *(OU)*, Dmitri Belanovski *(MICH)*, Austin Epperson *(NEB)*, Alex Diab *(ILL)*

Analysis: Floor exercise will be an interesting event in 2017. There is no clearly defined standout, although there is also no shortage of power and flash. Liebler was my choice as the event winner given his abilities as both a twister and flipper. He will be challenged by a host of Sooners along with Rio alternate, Akash Modi.

Pommel Horse (Last year's champion: Brandon Ngai, *ILL*)
1. Brandon Ngai *(ILL)*
2. Alec Yoder *(OSU)*
3. Stephen Nedoroscik *(PSU)*
4. Allan Bower *(OU)*
5. Matt Foster *(ILL)*

Other contenders: Tim Wang *(AF)*, Akash Modi *(STAN)*, Genki Suzuki *(OU)*, Justin Karstadt *(MIN)*, Antonio Castro *(NEB)*, Drew Willoughby *(STAN)*

Analysis: We are in for a treat these next two years given what we saw last year from Ngai and Yoder. They swapped first and second place finishes at B1G Championships and NCAAs (Yoder - B1G champ, Ngai - NCAA champ) setting the table for quite the battle again in 2017. Although it can be hard to project freshmen, Nedoroscik of Penn State looks to have the skills that could push for a top-three finish. Bower and Foster have proven themselves to be two of the most consistent PH workers in the country and will push for a title as well.

Still Rings (Last year's champion: Dennis Zaremski, *STAN*)
1. Sean Melton *(OSU)*
2. Thao Hoang *(OU)*
3. Hunter Justus *(OU)*
4. Alex Diab *(ILL)*
5. Yul Moldauer *(OU)*

Other contenders: Leroy Clarke Jr. *(PSU)*, Alec Yoder *(OSU),* Bobby Baker *(ILL)*, Reese Rickett *(OU)*, Jordan DeClerk *(STAN)*, Josiah Eng *(STAN)*, Joey Peters *(ILL)*

Analysis: Many top NCAA still rings workers graduated this past year (Zaremski, Aurelius, Mahar, Howard, Loochtan) opening things up in 2017. When all is said and done, I believe it will come down to Melton and Hoang battling it out for the title. After those two the second-tier

seems to be guys like Justus, Diab and Moldauer. We may very well see a couple of competitors grab All-American honors on rings that we didn't expect.

Vault (Last year's champion: Anthony McCallum, *MICH*)
1. Anthony McCallum *(MICH)*
2. Matt Wenske *(OU)*
3. Colin Van Wicklen *(OU)*
4. Taylor Seaton *(STAN)*
5. Yaroslav Pochinka *(MIN)*

Other contenders: Seth Delbridge *(OSU)*, Zach Liebler *(MIN)*, Emyre Cole *(MICH)*, Allan Bower *(OU)*, Yul Moldauer *(OU)*, Anthony Stefanelli *(MICH)*, Akash Modi *(STAN)*, Chandler Eggleston *(ILL)*

Analysis: The arrival of freshman Matt Wenske makes things a whole lot more interesting on vault this year. I believe McCallum will be able to hold off Wenske to defend his title, but it's hard to see the P&G Senior vault champion not making a strong push. Following these two you will see plenty of other huge vaults from guys like Van Wicklen (handspring double front with a half), Seaton (yurchenko 2.5) and Pochinka (working piked handspring double front).

Parallel Bars (Last year's champion: Akash Modi, *STAN*)
1. Yul Moldauer *(OU)*
2. Sean Melton *(OSU)*
3. Akash Modi *(STAN)*
4. Yordan Aleksandrov *(CAL)*
5. Tristan Duran *(MIN)*

Other contenders: Allan Bower *(OU)*, Daniel Leal *(NEB)*, Johnny Jacobson *(ILL)*, Leroy Clarke Jr. *(PSU)*, Anton Stephenson *(NEB)*, Justin Karstadt *(MIN)*, Grant Breckenridge *(STAN)*, Hunter Justus *(OU)*

Analysis: You could pick any of the three M's (Moldauer, Melton, Modi) as your parallel bars national champion this year. All three posted scores of 16+ at some point last season making them the clearly defined first-tier of PB workers. Following those two you have guys like Aleksandrov who has beautiful lines on the event and Duran who scored 14.5+ nine times last year.

High Bar (Last year's champion: Akash Modi, *STAN*/Alex Johnson, *OSU*)
1. Chase Cannon *(AF)*
2. Yordan Aleksandrov *(CAL)*
3. Colin Van Wicklen *(OU)*
4. Akash Modi *(STAN)*
5. David Jessen *(STAN)*

Other contenders: Levi Anderson *(OU)*, Jalon Stephens *(MIN)*, Sean Melton *(OSU)*, Taylor Seaton *(STAN)*, Tyson Bull *(ILL)*, Alex Diab *(ILL)*, Josh Yee *(OU)*, Yul Moldauer *(OU)*, Grant Breckenridge *(STAN)*

Analysis: If you don't know who Chase Cannon is then go and look at last year's high bar scores. In Air Force's 2017 promotional video Cannon performs a layed-out tkatchev with 1.5 twists. His big-skill potential along with his proven track record make him my pick to be high bar champion. Similar to other events, HB is very open. There are numerous others who could contend for the title including the defending champion, Modi.

All-Around
1. Akash Modi *(STAN)*
2. Sean Melton *(OSU)*
3. Yul Moldauer *(OU)*
4. Allan Bower *(OU)*
5. Alec Yoder *(OSU)*

Other contenders: Tim Wang *(AF)*, Tristan Duran *(MIN)*, Anton Stephenson *(NEB)*, Dmitri Belanovski *(MICH)*, Alex Diab *(ILL)*, Bobby Baker *(ILL)*, Justin Karstadt *(MIN)*

Analysis: Similar to PB, the all-around competition will most likely come down to the three who competed at Olympic Trials. Past those three you have strong competitors like Bower and Yoder who have shown the ability to score in the 90 range (an old 90 will roughly be an 87 with new code). It's also possible that we see guys like Wang and Duran push for a top-five spot as well.