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# Which new coach inherits the most (and least) favorable situation?

## Story Highlights

Twelve major-conference teams changed coaches; ranking those situations, 1-12

At Colorado, Boyle inherits a Big 12 sleeper team at a school with low pressure

Purnell left a stable situation at Clemson for a DePaul program at rock bottom

Twelve major-conference teams changed coaches this offseason, and the situations they stepped into were far from equal. One re-secured his predecessor's entire, loaded recruiting class in a 36-hour tour (Wake Forest's **Jeff Bzdelik**), while another is coping with the exodus over which his predecessor presided (Iowa's **Fran McCaffery**). One inherited the makings of a bubble NCAA tournament team (Seton Hall's **Kevin Willard**), another inherited the possibility of NCAA violations (Oregon's **Dana Altman**). Over the next few years, they all can't be evaluated on the same scale.

This week, when it was reported that junior center **Michael Dunigan** would be leaving the Ducks to sign a pro contract in Israel under shady circumstances, making him the fifth player to depart from Oregon's roster this offseason, I wondered, did Altman walk into the worst situation of the 12 new coaches?

He was aware, at least, of some of what would happen in Eugene; the personnel issues were part of the reason the Ducks' primary candidates had passed on the job. "We knew coming in that there were going to be some defections," Altman said. "[Athletic director] **Pat Kilkenny** was up front about it." Sophomores **Drew Wiley**, **Matthew Humphrey** and **Josh Crittle** already planned to transfer before Altman was hired on April 26 to replace **Ernie Kent**, and freshman **Jamil Wilson** made the decision to leave during the summer.

What Altman couldn't have anticipated was that injuries among the remaining players -- to the point that the Ducks were practicing with just six guys -- would force him to postpone an exhibition tour of Italy until next year. Or that shortly after, Dunigan would head overseas on his own. On Tuesday, Altman addressed the Dunigan situation by saying only, "Some factors came up later in the summer that may have influenced his decision [to go pro]." Oregon would release a statement later that night stating that it had conducted an internal investigation into the eligibility of former players, with Dunigan reportedly being one of those who may have received improper benefits.

This is not the kind of debut offseason Altman wanted, but things aren't all bad: He has a seven-year contract, he has **a new, \$200 million arena to sell to recruits**, and he convinced the best of the wavering players, junior guard **Malcolm Armstead**, to stay on the roster. After a thorough assessment it seems that there are at least a few new coaches starting at lower points than Altman. I figured it would be worthwhile to rank the Debut Dozen from "most favorable situation" to "least favorable situation," with the criteria being a combination of on-court personnel, program momentum and level of expectations -- and here are the results:

## 1. (Most Favorable) Tad Boyle, Colorado Replacing Jeff Bzdelik

Bzdelik said that leaving for Wake Forest was really a "no-brainer." But before he left the Buffs, whom he took over as a seven-win team in 2007, he said, "I thought hard about all the blood, sweat and toil of getting Colorado to where it is now, knowing that they're going to take off." That's why Boyle steps into an extremely favorable situation: The former Northern Colorado coach takes over the only major-conference post that was vacated by someone who upgraded jobs, and gets a roster that already includes a first-round NBA talent in sophomore guard **Alec Burks** and a veteran scorer in senior guard **Cory Higgins**. Boyle inherits a Big 12 sleeper team at a school with

very low pressure on (and limited support for) the basketball program; he'll be lauded if the Buffs reach the postseason, but is unlikely to be vilified if they don't. And he'll soon be moving to the Pac-10, which should enhance his recruiting opportunities on the West Coast.

## 2. Jeff Bzdelik, Wake Forest *Replacing Dino Gaudio*

The only factor that keeps Bzdelik's gig from being No. 1 on this list? The level of expectations, given that he's replacing a guy who had a 61-31 record over the past three seasons and was fired for not winning enough in the NCAA tournament. There won't be any patience for mediocrity at Wake. What makes Bzdelik's situation such a good one is that he's stepping into a very stable program: **He kept Gaudio's entire top-15 recruiting class** (including a quartet of four-star prospects) intact, and retained ace recruiter **Jeff Battle** as an associate head coach. The Deacons may miss the NCAA tournament this season after losing stars **Al-Farouq Aminu** and **Ish Smith**, but they're well-positioned for success in 2011-12 and beyond.

## 3. Kevin Willard, Seton Hall *Replacing Bobby Gonzalez*

Willard will earn goodwill at the Hall for simply not being Gonzalez, who was fired for a "pattern of behavior" and then proceeded to behave even more absurdly after getting axed -- by allegedly **shoplifting** a \$1,395 "men's satchel" from a mall. Gonzalez did, however, leave behind a core players from an NCAA tournament bubble team that should be capable of finishing over .500 in the Big East.

Senior shooting guard **Jeremy Hazell** is an unconscious scorer, senior **Herb Pope** (pending recovery from an offseason collapse) is a monster on the glass, junior **Jeff Robinson** is a strong finisher on the interior, and **Jordan Theodore** is a capable point guard. The Pirates, one imagines, picked up a number of bad habits from extended exposure to Gonzalez, but they were one of the country's better offensive teams (ranking 39th in efficiency). Their problem was defense (ranking 122nd), which makes Willard a good fit. He turned Iona into the country's 43rd-best defensive club last season.

## 4. Brad Brownell, Clemson *Replacing Oliver Purnell*

The Tigers lost their best player, **Trevor Booker**, to graduation and the NBA draft, and their top recruit, **Marcus Thornton**, to Georgia after Purnell bolted for DePaul. But things could be a lot worse for Brownell, a strong tactician who earned his first major-conference gig after successful stints at Wright State and UNC-Wilmington. The ACC is relatively wide open after Duke and Virginia Tech, and Clemson still has a quality senior guard in **Demontez Stitt** and two solid, 6-8 forwards in senior **Jerai Grant** and sophomore **Devin Booker** (Trevor's little brother). The Tigers also rebounded from the loss of Thornton by **getting a commitment** from Rivals' No. 9 power forward in the Class of 2011, **Bernard Sullivan**, so they have some much-needed recruiting momentum heading into the fall.

## 5. Steve Lavin, St. John's *Replacing Norm Roberts*

I'm skeptical that St. John's can ever be a power again, for many of the same reasons **Seth Davis** outlined in a story in 2008. Life in the 16-team Big East will never be easy for the Johnnies, and the New York media is tough on underperforming coaches. But Lavin does have the roster in Year 1 to make a run at the school's first NCAA tournament bid since 2002, a feat that would make him a hero in Queens and open doors to some of the metro-area talent that's been poached by Big East powers over the past decade. (Louisville's **Rick Pitino**, for one, thinks it can happen: He voted the Red Storm No. 1 in his **preseason league ballot**.)

## 6. Steve Donahue, Boston College *Replacing Al Skinner*

The Cornell squad that Donahue took to the Sweet 16 was far superior to the one he inherits at BC, but its roster is far from barren. The transfer of senior **Rakim Sanders** may actually be a blessing; he ate up too many possessions (a 24.3 percent share, second-highest on the team) than someone with a 94.0 **offensive rating** should've been allowed. The Eagles still have a nice tandem of efficient senior forwards in **Joe Trapani** (112.6 rating) and **Corey Raji** (117.2), and junior guard **Reggie Jackson** could be a star if he shoots a reasonable percentage from long-range (he was just 29.1 percent last season). There's pressure on Donahue, though; Skinner's success was tailing off, but he did take the Eagles to the NCAA tournament in seven of the past 10 years. Twenty-win campaigns and postseason victories will soon be expected.

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# Which new coach inherits most (and least)

## favorable situation? (cont.)

### 7. Fred Hoiberg, Iowa State *Replacing Greg McDermott*

Hoiberg's status as an Iowa State legend will earn him more patience with his fan base than, say, new Iowa boss **Fran McCaffery**, who steps into a similarly difficult situation but has no previous ties to the program. That's a good thing for Hoiberg, because the Cyclones are a mess. Their two stars from last season's 15-17 team, **Craig Brackins** and **Marquis Gilstrap**, have moved on to the pros. Their top recruit from 2009, guard **Chris Colvin**, transferred, as did their most promising young player, 6-11 sophomore **Justin Hamilton**, and potential starting forward **LaRon Dendy**. Senior guard **Charles Boozer** had to leave the team in May after an arrest for assault. Northern Illinois transfer **Darion "Jake" Anderson** is eligible immediately, which should help, but ISU will still be among the worst teams in the Big 12 in '10-11. Hoiberg must be credited, though, for the cadre of high-profile transfers he lined up for '11-12: Guards **Chris Allen** (Michigan State) and **Chris Babb** (Penn State), and forwards **Anthony Booker** (Southern Illinois) and **Royce White** (Minnesota). White, a former five-star recruit, has requested a waiver from the NCAA in order to play this season.

### 8. Dana Altman, Oregon *Replacing Ernie Kent*

We discussed the bulk of the Ducks' issues above, but there a few things worth adding: Altman will face pressure to put a quality product in the Ducks' new arena in a relatively short time-frame, and therefore his biggest task is quickly re-focusing Oregon's recruiting. Kent had leveraged his connections in Chicago and Detroit to load the roster with Midwesterners, who mostly bolted during the regime change. "Our core needs to come from the West Coast," Altman said this week, recalling that Oregon's last great team, in 2002, was comprised of stars from the region. "We're going to make a concerted effort to recruit in the Northwest, as well as California, Arizona and Nevada." Currently the Ducks only have three scholarship players from those states: **E.J. Singler** (Oregon), **Garrett Sim** (Oregon) and **Johnathan Loyd** (Nevada).

### 9. Tony Barbee, Auburn *Replacing Jeff Lebo*

The Tigers, like Oregon, are excited about opening a nice, new arena ... but they'll have even less to showcase in it this season than the Ducks will. Four of Auburn's five starters from last season were seniors. Their best returning player, junior guard **Frankie Sullivan**, tore an ACL in July, and then sophomore forward **Ty Armstrong**, a likely starter, suffered the same injury in August. A local paper's [headline on that story](#) was, "Auburn basketball takes another punch to the gut." Things actually managed to get worse for Barbee, as his two top 2010 recruits, four-star power forward **Luke Cothron** and four-star center **Shawn Kemp**, failed to qualify academically. Getting talented Texas transfer **Varez Ward** a waiver for immediate eligibility (due to a family illness) has to be a priority for Barbee; otherwise he doesn't have much to look forward to in Year 1.

### 10. Mike Rice, Rutgers *Replacing Fred Hill*

Rutgers would've been a very attractive team to take over had sophomore stars **Mike Rosario** (now at Florida) and **Greg Echenique** (Creighton) not transferred.

Rice, whose Robert Morris team nearly upset second-seeded Villanova in this past NCAA tournament, doesn't have the pieces to avoid finishing in or near the Big East cellar. The reason his situation isn't the most unfavorable of any new coach, though, is because he has one decent building block (sophomore forward **Dane Miller**, a member of the Big East's all-rookie team), and some recruiting momentum, having signed locals **Kadeem Jack** (a four-star power forward), **Myles Mack** (a three-star point guard) and **Derrick Randall** (a three-star center) for the Class of 2011.

### 11. Fran McCaffery, Iowa *Replacing Todd Lickliter*

Lickliter didn't have any NCAA scandals during his Iowa tenure, but it was a disaster in all other respects, with 5-13 and 4-14 Big Ten records the past two seasons, lackluster recruiting and a mass exodus of players. **Aaron Fuller** (to USC), **Anthony Tucker** (to Winona State) and **Brennan Cougill** (to academic ineligibility and Kirkwood Community College) were the latest departures this offseason, leaving junior guard **Matt Gatens** as the go-to-guy-by-default, and leaving McCaffery with no chance of having a pleasant first season in the Big Ten, which may be the nation's strongest conference in '10-11. He'll need some serious recruiting success with the next two classes to get the right pieces for his up-tempo attack to thrive and make Iowa relevant once again. The Hawkeyes are currently second-fiddle to Northern Iowa on the state hoops scene, and have watched local, high-major talent go elsewhere in the Big Ten -- such as Cedar Rapids' **Jarrod Uthoff**, a top-150 forward who committed to Wisconsin's 2011 class this summer.

### 12. (Least Favorable) Oliver Purnell, DePaul *Replacing Jerry Wainwright*

Purnell left a stable situation at Clemson for a DePaul program that went 1-35 in the Big East over the past two seasons, and is at rock-bottom. He said the school is "very committed to restoring a tradition" -- and it's paying him a reported \$15 million over seven years to do so. But can DePaul, with its depleted roster (its top two players from '09-10, **Will Walker** and **Mac Koshwal**, are gone), unfavorable arena

situation (at the far-off-campus Allstate Arena in Rosemont) and severed ties with local talent-brokers, really be saved in the era of the expanded Big East?

It could take 4-5 years before Blue Demons fans see any real progress, and given the amount of money they're shelling out for Purnell, how much patience will he be afforded? He likes rebuilding efforts, having pulled them off at Old Dominion, Dayton and Clemson, but the only thing that's enviable about this one is the paycheck.

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