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FILL OUT YOUR BRACKET! Men's bracket, **6AA-7AA**; women's bracket, **11AA**

KU WOMEN RETURN TO TOURNEY

It's their first appearance since 2013. **PAGE 2AA**

NGCAA

tourney preview

Ochai Agbaji's encore

Kansas' star senior has a growing collection of honors and accolades, but friends and family say he's "the same old Och." **PAGE 4AA**

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Kansas is
Midwest's
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could
win it all.
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teams to
watch.
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Look back
at past
tournaments.
PAGE 9AA

KU women in the tourney for first time since 2013

By Zac Boyer



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The Kansas women's basketball team has returned to the NCAA Tournament after nine years.

The Jayhawks (20-9) were selected Sunday night to compete in the 68-team event and will play as the No. 8 seed in the Spokane region.

They will face No. 9 seed Georgia Tech (21-10) on Friday in Palo Alto, California, and should they win that game, they will face the winner of the game between No. 1 seed Stanford, the defending



Courtesy of Kansas Athletics

KANSAS GUARD ZAKIYAH FRANKLIN

blows by a Texas defender on March 2 at Allen Fieldhouse.

the Sweet 16 but lost to Notre Dame. That was the final season of a six-year run in the event, during which it won at least one game each year.

The Jayhawks finished fifth in the Big 12 this season but lost 80-68 to No. 4 seed Oklahoma in the Big 12 quarterfinals in Kansas City, Missouri, on Friday. Their nine losses were all against teams that were selected to play in the tournament, and eight of them were against

opponents who were among the top four seeds in their region.

"Obviously, really excited for our players to be able to be in a room with them and hear their name called," said coach Brandon Schneider, who is in his seventh season. "So many of them have dreamt about moments like this. ... Those are memories that just can't be re-created."

Georgia Tech, which went 11-7 in the ACC to finish sixth in the conference, is making its second consecutive trip to the NCAA Tournament.

> **WOMEN, 11AA**



KU men earn Midwest's top seed

By Matt Tait



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The Kansas men's basketball team got a No. 1 seed in this year's NCAA Tournament on Selection Sunday,

bringing the Jayhawks' total to 15 1 seeds in program history and nine in 18 tournaments under head coach Bill Self.

It's the first time since 2018 that Kansas (28-6) has been seeded on the top line, and the Jayhawks will open this

year's tournament run at 8:57 p.m. Thursday in Fort Worth, Texas, on TruTV against the winner of Tuesday's First Four game between No. 16 seeds Texas Southern and Texas A&M Corpus Christi.

> **NO. 1, 12AA**

NOTEBOOK

Preparation could be a challenge

By Matt Tait



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Kansas will have to wait a couple of days to find out who it will play in Thursday's opening round

— and that has advantages and disadvantages.

The difficult part, KU coach Bill Self said, is that the team will have two full days of prep time without knowing exactly what it needs to work on.

No. 16 seeds Texas Southern (18-12) and Texas A&M

Corpus Christi (23-11) will square off at 5:40 p.m. Tuesday in a First Four game in Dayton, Ohio, with the winner earning the trip to Fort Worth to face the 28-6 Jayhawks.

> **NOTEBOOK, 12AA**



Journal-World File Photo

KANSAS COACH BILL SELF

Get to know Kansas' possible first-round opponents

By Zac Boyer



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The Kansas men's basketball team will face a dilemma before it even begins play in the NCAA Tournament: It doesn't know who its first-round opponent will be.

On Thursday, the Jayhawks, the No. 1 seed in the Midwest region, will face the winner of Tuesday's First Four game

between Texas A&M-Corpus Christi, the Southland champion, and Texas Southern, the SWAC champion.

It's only the third time the Jayhawks don't know who their opponent will be on Selection Sunday, but it wasn't a problem the previous times it happened. In 2007, top-seeded Kansas won 107-67 against Niagara, which beat Florida A&M in the play-in game. Ten years later, Kansas earned a 100-62 victory over UC Davis, which

defeated North Carolina A&T in a First Four game.

Here's a primer on each potential opponent:

Texas Southern Tigers

Located: Houston
Record: 18-12, 13-5 SWAC
Qualification: SWAC champion; as No. 2 seed, beat No. 1 Alcorn State 87-62 in final
Coach: Johnny Jones (Fourth season, 75-51)
Top players: Senior forward John Walker III, 9.9 points per

game; senior forward Joirdon Karl Nicholas, 9.2 ppg, 6 rebounds per game; senior forward Brison Gresham, 7.2 ppg, 6.8 rpg, 2.2 blocks per game; senior guard Bryson Etienne, 8.5 ppg.

NET ranking: 197
KenPom.com ranking: 188
NCAA Tournament appearances: 10th; last in 2021, an 88-62 loss to No. 1 seed Michigan State after a 60-52 win over Mount St. Mary's in a First Four game.

Strengths: Allows 65.5 ppg,

65th in Division I; holds opponents to 39.6% shooting (23rd); holds opponents to 29.1% from 3-point range (18th); grabs 39.5 rebounds per game (19th) and 12.1 offensive rebounds per game (34th); five blocks per game (20th).

Weaknesses: Adjusted offensive efficiency of 98.1, according to KenPom.com, 270th out of 350 teams in Division I; makes 67.1% of its

> **ROUND 1, 10AA**

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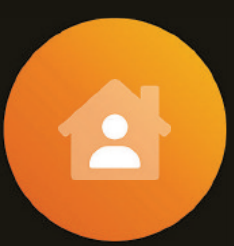


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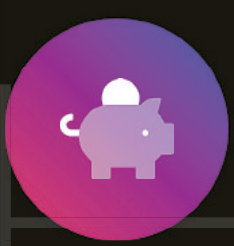
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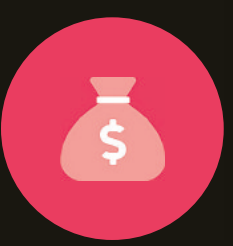
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Despite his honors, Kansas star Agbaji is

'THE SAME OLD OCH'

Journal-World File Photo

**KANSAS GUARD
OCHAI AGBAJI
(30) FLASHES
A SMILE** after
finishing a dunk
on Jan. 24 at
Allen Fieldhouse.

By Matt Tait

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If you look back at Ochai Agbaji's senior season, you'll see a long list of impressive achievements.

Leading KU to a Big 12 championship. Earning two conference player of the year nods and All-America honors. Recording the third-best single-season scoring average in the Bill Self era.

But looking back on those things isn't Agbaji's style. He prefers to look forward.

While it might be nice to get Big 12 player of the week honors and to hear his name come up as a lottery pick in NBA mock drafts, the senior guard has mostly been focused on improving his craft and getting ready for his next game, according to his mother, Erica Agbaji.

"I think he's been excited about (the accolades)," she told the Journal-World. "But it's always been, 'We've got another game to play.' And it's not always about him. He always thinks, 'How did I get where I am without my teammates?'"

Now that the final stage of his Kansas career has arrived,

... it's always been, 'We've got another game to play.' And it's not always about him."

— Erica Agbaji, Ochai Agbaji's mother

Agbaji has one more opportunity to put a bow on his legacy. Self has already revealed that Agbaji's name and No. 30 one day will be hanging in the south rafters at Allen Fieldhouse. But before that happens, there's still business to take care of this season.

Senior Mitch Lightfoot, who has grown close with Agbaji throughout their time at Kansas, said Agbaji never wavered in his approach this season. From the start, it was all about getting better and leading this team as far as it could go.

And on top of that, he did it all with his usual upbeat attitude.

"He's the same old Och," Lightfoot said. "But a killer on the court."

Lightfoot said he's been impressed by how Agbaji handled the spotlight this season. He said he thinks Agbaji isn't ignoring all the praise — but

that Agbaji also wants to work hard to make sure he's worthy of it.

"I think he's aware, but, at the same time, he's doing everything that got him to this position," Lightfoot said. "That's the thing about Och: He's very composed about how he goes about his business. You can be excited about it, but at the same time, there's a reason you got there, so you've got to make sure you continue to do what you're doing."

"He does that extremely well," Lightfoot added. "I don't know if I've seen anybody else do it as well as he has."

For Agbaji's family, it's been exciting to see that hard work pay off.

"We're excited," Erica said. "We feel very blessed that he's had this opportunity to come to KU and play at this level, and he's improved every year. I've seen how much hard work he's put into it, and I give it all to him. He's the one that has done this and wants it and we're just there cheering him on."

And Self said Agbaji knows his hard work isn't finished yet.

"He knows he's had a good year," Self said. "But in order to make good years special you've got to finish strong. That's what he's focused on."

Kansas' past Big 12 Players of the Year

Agbaji's position right now is one that plenty of other Jayhawks have found themselves in during Self's 19 seasons in charge of the program. Here's what KU's past Big 12 Players of the Year did in the NCAA Tournaments that followed their player-of-the-year seasons.

KU's Big 12 Players of the Year in the Self era

(as selected by conference coaches)

● Wayne Simien Jr. - 2004-05.

Simien's encore to his strong senior season lasted just one round. But he was one of third-seeded KU's few bright spots in 2005's first-round loss to Bucknell. He scored 24 points on 9-of-14 shooting and grabbed 10 rebounds. And the ball was in his hands with the game on the line, but his turn-around jumper in the final seconds just missed, allowing the Bison to pull off a 64-63 upset.

● Marcus Morris - 2010-11.

Morris' NCAA Tournament run, which followed a Big 12 tournament MVP honor, lasted four games, and he hit double digits in all of them. That included double-doubles in a second-round win over Illinois and the Elite Eight loss to VCU. In that one, Morris scored 20 points and grabbed 16 rebounds.

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WHY KU CAN WIN IT ALL

By Matt Tait



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After a fight to the finish during the grueling Big 12 regular season — in which KU lost two of its last four games and needed overtime at home in the finale to secure a share of the conference title — Bill Self’s 19th Kansas basketball squad looked much looser and played more freely during its run to the Big 12 tournament title in Kansas City, Missouri.

That certainly gave the team and the fans a confidence boost — and we’ll soon find out whether that leads to a deep tourney run.

Here are five reasons for fans to be optimistic about their chances this year:

1: The players know they have what it takes

Throughout the season, this team has shown its willingness to work hard, and that translated to a successful season. You can see that in the numbers — such as KU’s 28-6 record — but also in the players’ confidence.

“They think they’re really good, and I’m not going to tell them that they’re not,” Self said on the court after the Jayhawks’ Big 12 title game win over Texas Tech on Saturday. “And, you

They think they’re really good, and I’m not going to tell them that they’re not.”

– Kansas coach Bill Self

know what? They are getting really good. They’ve really grown together as a team.”

2: Tons of experience

Fans know this team is full of veteran players. There are seniors Mitch Lightfoot, Jalen Coleman-Lands and Remy Martin, as well as some three- and four-year Jayhawks like Christian Braun, Jalen Wilson, Dajuan Harris Jr., Ochai Agbaji and David McCormack. But do you realize that that group has 29 NCAA Tournament games under its belt, with 16 starts in that time? Eight KU players have played in at least one NCAA Tournament game in the past, so this will not be a new experience for this team. Beyond that, six of those eight are guards or wings, and it’s commonly said that guard play wins in March. Add to that the fact that Self and his staff have logged more time together in big-time NCAA Tournament settings than most coaches, and

you’re looking at a group that should be able to do what every team says it wants to do this time of year — treat this like a business trip.

3: A dominant player

In past years, Self has said that if you’ve got “a guy” — one particularly dominant player — you’ve got a chance, and it certainly seems like the Jayhawks have one. Not only was Agbaji the unanimous Big 12 Player of the Year, he’s also likely to land on several first-team All-American teams. He averaged 19.8 points per game in the regular season and 18.7 points per game in the Big 12 tournament. And beyond the stat sheet, there are moments where he looks much more mature than the rest of the team, playing at a slower speed and with a different style than anyone else on the court. If he can keep that up, the rest of the Jayhawks won’t have to excel; they’ll just have to play their roles.

4: An impressive offense.

KU’s defense got better during the Big 12 tournament, but it’s the team’s offense that has carried it all season long. Rather than wrestle with that, the Jayhawks have leaned into it for much of the season. It goes without saying that Self always wants more on defense.

But even if the players are a little shaky defensively, they understand that when they rebound well and get out in transition and move the ball, they’re one of the nation’s toughest teams to guard. The numbers show that. KU, which spent the entire season ranked in the Associated Press top 10, has consistently been among the top five or six teams in the country in KenPom.com’s offensive efficiency rankings. Kansas enters the tourney ranked sixth in that category, which measures points scored per 100 possessions. Even more impressive is that Kansas managed to put up those numbers in the defensive-minded Big 12.

5: KU is battle tested

Speaking of the Big 12, KenPom ranks KU’s strength of schedule as the third-toughest in the country. A lot of that is due to the talent in the Big 12, but don’t forget that KU normally looks for strong opponents when building its non-conference schedule. According to KenPom, the Jayhawks have played the hardest schedule in the country when it comes to opposing defenses and the 31st-hardest schedule in terms of opponents’ offenses. This team is no stranger to close games and grind-it-out wins, and it’s likely to see more of the same in March Madness.



Nick Krug/Journal-World Photo

THE JAYHAWKS HOIST THE BIG 12 TOURNAMENT CHAMPIONSHIP TROPHY following their 74-65 win over Texas Tech on Saturday at T-Mobile Center in Kansas City.



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By Matt Tait

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A year ago, Baylor and Gonzaga entered the NCAA Tournament as the heavy favorites to win it all. And those two teams wound up facing each other for the national championship, which Baylor won in convincing fashion.

This year, however, the field is wide open, and you can make a strong case for as many as 20 or 25 teams to make a run to the title.

Here's a look at 10 of them other than Kansas.

Baylor

Scott Drew's current team isn't as talented as the team that won it all, but this group is still good. Really good. And it showed that down the stretch with big wins over Kansas and Texas to claim a piece of the Big 12 regular-season title. Depth is a concern, and injuries have taken their toll. But this team's top six or seven are arguably as good as any out there. It also features enough players who were there last season — most notably Matthew Mayer and Adam Flagler — to understand what it takes to win six straight in March.

Duke

North Carolina already crashed the Mike Krzyzewski farewell party by winning the legendary Blue Devils leader's final home game at Cameron Indoor Stadium. But that could make a Duke run in the Big Dance even more realistic.

Gonzaga

The Zags have been so close a handful of times now, and it seems like it's only a matter of time before they break through and win it all. They finished the regular season ranked No. 1 in the polls and in the top six in both offensive and defensive efficiency according to KenPom.com. Their roster from last year's runner-up team is still pretty talented, and they've got freshman star Chet Holmgren, who is a match-up nightmare.

Kentucky

Kansas fans saw everything they needed to know about the Wildcats at Allen Fieldhouse in late January. When healthy, John Calipari's team might be the most talented in the country and one of the toughest to match up with. The backcourt is loaded with talent, experience and 3-point shooting, and the frontcourt features a good blend of athletic bigs and player-of-the-year candidate Oscar Tshiebwe.

Tennessee

Rick Barnes' club beat two No. 1-ranked teams this season — Kentucky and Auburn. It lost seven games, but all of them were against teams that KenPom ranked No. 22 or higher. Add to that a regular-season strength of schedule that ranked No. 7 and a tough win over Arizona in December, and you're looking at a team that might be underestimated but shouldn't be. When you've got a team that is battle-tested and leads with defense (No. 3 in KenPom's defensive efficiency rankings), you've really got something. The Vols are a good sleeper pick and will be a tough out for anybody they face.

Texas Tech

The Red Raiders have had issues offensively, and they were defeated eight times in the regular season, including losses to Kansas State, Oklahoma State and TCU. But their nonconference schedule was solid, and they swept Baylor and split with Kansas. And, perhaps most importantly, they have the nation's best defense and enough offensive versatility and depth to support it.

UCLA

No one expected UCLA to make a run from the First Four to the Final Four last season, but they pulled it off — and a bunch of those players

are back for another try this year. Johnny Juzang is capable of carrying this team to the final night of the season, and although the Pac-12 schedule doesn't make UCLA the most battle-tested team in the country, it still finished in the top 15 in both offensive and defensive efficiency.

Alabama

This would have to be one of those scenarios where the offense gets red-hot and outscores everyone, but don't put that past Nate Oats' team, which ended the regular season ranked 12th in KenPom's offensive efficiency rankings. Here are 'Bama's four best wins: Gonzaga, Houston, Tennessee and Baylor. They won't have four teams that tough on their path through the bracket.

Memphis

Penny Hardaway's team has a ton of talent — so much that it was ranked No. 12 to open the season. And Memphis has been hot lately. It's a good 3-point shooting team with elite 2-point and 3-point defensive numbers.

Michigan State

The Spartans played the nation's 11th-toughest schedule and got better throughout the season. Beyond that, Tom Izzo knows how to coach in March.

Players

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4AA

● **Thomas Robinson - 2011-12.** No one on this list had a better postseason run than Robinson. Not only did the future No. 5 pick in the NBA draft lead the Jayhawks to the national championship game, but he also put up impressive numbers. In six postseason games, Robinson recorded 75 rebounds and four double-doubles and averaged 17 points per game.

● **Frank Mason III - 2016-17.** The end of Mason's career came in the Elite Eight in Kansas City, but the sting was lessened a few weeks later when he swept all of the major national player of the year awards. He topped 20 points in all four tournament games and shot 51% from the floor, 37.5% from 3-point range and 90% at the free throw line. He also averaged six assists per game in the tourney.

● **Devonte' Graham - 2017-18.** Graham and Robinson are the

only players on this list to follow up a Big 12 Player of the Year nod by leading the Jayhawks to the Final Four. Graham was clutch in a tough first-round win over Penn, scoring 29 points in Wichita. And he played the role of set-up man, with nine assists and just eight points, in helping KU survive Seton Hall in the second round. He scored double digits in wins over Clemson and Duke but also added 11 rebounds and 10 assists in those two games, playing all 45 minutes of KU's overtime victory over Duke in the Elite Eight. His postseason numbers weren't quite as eye-popping as some of the other players on this list, but his impact went beyond the stat sheet, and he was the face of KU's most recent Final Four team.

● **Udoka Azubuike - 2019-20.** There's no telling what Azubuike would've done in the postseason, because the 2020 NCAA Tournament was canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. KU finished the season with a 28-3 record (17-1 in Big 12 play). In 31 games, Azubuike averaged 13.7 points, 10.5 rebounds and 2.6 blocks.

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Women

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It notably defeated UConn 57-44 on Dec. 9 to snap the Huskies’ 240-game winning streak against unranked opponents, and it also lost 50-48 on Jan. 2 to Louisville. Both teams were ranked No. 3 at the time of the games; Louisville earned a No. 1 seed and UConn is a No. 2 seed.

It has been expected for weeks that the Jayhawks would qualify for the NCAA Tournament, but that they were selected as a No. 8 seed was a surprise. They won two games against ranked teams all season — at then-No. 13 Texas on Jan. 12 and at then-No. 19 Oklahoma on March 5 — and will face an opponent in Georgia Tech that was ranked as high as No. 11 on Feb. 7.

Kansas’ tournament run will begin at Maples Pavilion, one of the more historic venues in college basketball, in front of the national championship banner that Stanford hung earlier this season.

Schneider called the opportunity to play on the court “special,” and his players may find that to be the case as well.

Only one of them — sixth-year senior guard Julie Brosseau, a transfer from Maine and Utah — has ever appeared in an NCAA Tournament game. She was a sophomore in 2018 when Maine, as a No. 15 seed, lost 83-54 to No. 2 seed Texas.

Making annual appearances in the NCAA Tournament is a goal for Schneider, who last week signed a four-year contract that will keep him with the university through the 2025-26 season.

Having the players convene to watch the selection show on ESPN was also something of a palate-cleanser, given they had only recently emerged from a film session that broke down the mistakes in the quarterfinal loss on Friday.

“It was important for us to be able to move on from that game and be really excited about the opportunities and celebrate the season as a whole,” Schneider said. “I don’t think you can dwell on maybe a poor performance Friday morning. We wanted to celebrate the entire season and make the most out of, again, the memory that was created for our players today.”

Women’s NCAA Tournament bracket



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No. 1

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Kansas is 39-13 all-time as a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament and 14-0 all-time against No. 16 seeds.

Self has said before that in the Big Dance, seeds don't matter nearly as much as how a team plays. But he did say on Sunday that the program's run of success leading up to the NCAA Tournament each year impressed him.

"I listened to (Gonzaga coach Mark) Few the other day and he was talking about how proud he was of his program for getting a 1 seed for like the fifth time in seven years or whatnot, which he should be," Self said following the release of this year's bracket. "And then someone told me this would be our 10th in 16.

That's pretty good. That's pretty strong.

"Although seeds don't matter once you get them," he added. "You've got to go play. I'm happy that we can say that, but I'd be much happier playing well in the tournament."

Self referenced the number 10 because it was expected that the Jayhawks would have been the overall No. 1 seed in 2020 before the tournament was canceled at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jumping back on the 1 line this year after a forgettable second-round exit in Indianapolis a season ago has the Jayhawks poised for a deeper run this time around.

"Being a 1 seed comes with the good and the bad," sophomore wing Jalen Wilson said Sunday. "Because now you've got everybody gunning for you. We're used to getting everybody's best shot anyway, but now

it's a big target on our back. We've just got to represent it well and show why we are a 1 seed."

The strength of KU's resume certainly had something to do with that. In addition to winning a share of the Big 12's regular-season title and the Big 12 tournament trophy, the Jayhawks finished the pre-NCAA Tournament portion of their season with 12 Quadrant 1 wins, the most in NCAA Division I. Of the other 1 seeds, Gonzaga and Baylor had 10 Quadrant 1 wins each and Arizona had six.

While those numbers were particularly important for the committee and KU's case for the 1 line, the Jayhawks think the entirety of their season has prepared them for the pressure that comes with being one of the favorites to reach the Final Four.

"I think we've had the games that we needed to

show us what we're going to have to go through in March Madness," Wilson said Sunday. "1 seeds, 2 seeds, 3 seeds, it doesn't matter in the tournament. It's just whoever plays best that game."

Self said he was happy with the draw the Jayhawks got, but more from the standpoint of being in the Midwest region and starting in Fort Worth, near a big alumni base like Dallas, than anything else.

"I never love our draw," he said. "And I probably don't this year either. But I don't hate it. It's going to be hard regardless."

As always, Self said his team would approach the NCAA Tournament like a series of two-game tournaments. He admitted that it is human nature to look at the bracket as a whole and see who landed where. But after that first glance, he said he wouldn't look at it again.

"I'm looking at three teams," Self said. "The winner of the game Tuesday (between Texas Southern and Texas A&M Corpus Christi) and (the 8-9 game between) San Diego State and Creighton. And then next week we'll go on to another two-game tournament. That's how I'll look at it. You're going to be playing somebody good no matter what."

"I'm not even going to get into how we match up the second weekend until we take care of business the first weekend. And there's still a lot of work to do before that occurs."

While this year's Kansas roster features several new faces, there are a handful of players who were a part of the 2019-20 team that appeared to be in position to make a real run at a national title. Ochai Agbaji, Christian Braun and David McCormack were just role players on that team, but

they were there nonetheless. And when the tourney was canceled, it hurt them just the same as it hurt that team's stars such as Udoka Azubuike, Devon Dotson and Marcus Garrett.

Last year brought the tournament back, but the Jayhawks were still in a bubble setting and COVID was still a big part of the experience. This year, Self said, feels more like a normal year and he's looking forward to seeing what his team can do with it.

"I don't think anybody on our team has experienced what the NCAA Tournament can potentially be like, even if they've participated in it," Self said Sunday. "We haven't really given it a great run in the tournament since '18. In order to experience what it's really like to play here, you need to do well in the tournament. I'm looking forward (to that) and hopeful that happens."

Notebook

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KU will spend some of the time working on both teams, and the coaching staff also will watch and scout that game on Tuesday night.

But having to prepare for two teams is a tougher task than having to lock in on just one.

The setup does have its advantages, too, though.

"If there is a positive about it, it forces you to look at the second game first," Self said. "So, if you're fortunate enough to win the first one, maybe we can get an extra day in right now (for a potential second opponent)."

That game, which would be played in Fort Worth on Saturday, would come against the winner of the

8-9 matchup between San Diego State and Creighton.

So while the Jayhawks wait to see which of the 16 seeds they will face on Thursday, they'll be able to take a quick peek at their potential second-round foes during the next two days. At this point, Self said Sunday, it's basically a one-day prep for both games.

Regardless of which team they face, KU sophomore Jalen Wilson said the Jayhawks would be keeping one thing in mind: "Just respecting our opponents."

"I think we learned, playing in the Big 12, that the bottom team can still beat the top team any night," he said. "... We feel great. Coming off two championships, a great weekend, playing great teams, we're looking forward to playing in this."

The latest on Lightfoot

Self said super-senior forward Mitch Lightfoot

was "day to day" heading into the first week of the NCAA Tournament and that he was dealing with a sprained left knee.

The injury occurred during Saturday's Big 12 championship game, when Lightfoot had his legs taken out from under him under the basket. He left the game and went to the locker room, emerging a few minutes later in warm-up pants and sandals. On Sunday, Self suggested that Lightfoot wasn't necessarily gone for good.

"Mitch is playing the best ball maybe of his career right now," Self said. "And I know he'll do everything humanly possible to put himself in a position to be out there on Thursday."

Self said Sunday he was confident that freshmen forwards KJ Adams and Zach Clemence would step up while Lightfoot recovered.

Big 12 gets six bids

The Big 12, ranked by some outlets as the nation's toughest conference all season, will have six programs in the tournament this year.

Three of the six were among the tourney's top seeds. Baylor joins Kansas on the 1 line in the East, and Texas Tech earned a No. 3 seed in the West.

Texas received a No. 6 seed in the East, and TCU earned a 9 seed in the South. Iowa State, as an 11, joins KU in the Midwest.

Kansas State and West Virginia were not expected to receive bids. Oklahoma State, which is serving a one-year postseason ban, was ineligible. And Oklahoma, which missed out on reaching the Big 12 tournament title game by a single point, was considered a bubble team.

"To me, OU deserved to be in the field," Self said

Sunday. "But there were more teams this year that you could make a case for being in the field, that were legitimate bubble teams, than maybe some other years. So I feel bad for their team."

Familiar faces make the field

A handful of teams that feature players of local interest made their way into the bracket on Sunday.

Former Lawrence High standout Zeke Mayo and the South Dakota State Jackrabbits are in as a No. 13 seed in the Midwest region. Mayo's club will take on No. 4 Providence in the first round on Thursday at 11:40 a.m. in Buffalo, New York.

Former Kansas forward Silvio De Sousa, now in his final season of college basketball at Chattanooga, also is in the NCAA Tournament field.

Chattanooga, which won the Southern Conference tournament title, is also a No. 13 seed. It will play in the South region against No. 4 seed Illinois on Friday at 5:50 p.m. in Pittsburgh.

De Sousa is back in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since his freshman season in 2018.

"It's so good to see him end on a high note and have a good taste in his mouth leaving college basketball," Self said Sunday. "So, yeah, I'm very happy for Silvio. I'm also happy for Charlie (Moore) and Tristan (Enaruna), too. That's a big bonus right there."

Moore made the field with the 10th-seeded Miami Hurricanes and will play USC on Friday afternoon. Enaruna and Iowa State will play sixth-seeded LSU on Friday evening.

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