

BASKETBALL PREVIEW

THE ORACLE - FALL 2020

Jose Fernandez
Women's Coach

Brian Gregory
Men's Coach



INDEX

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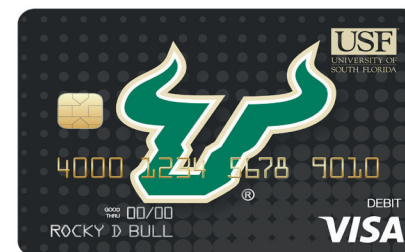


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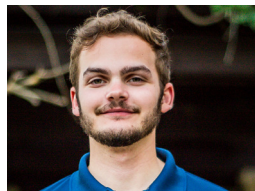
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What to expect at the Yuengling Center



Nolan Brown

SPORTS EDITOR

The Yuengling Center, at many points during both basketball seasons, was electric last year, especially when the Bulls were pulling off last-ditch effort wins or piling on points.

This year will be much different, at least through the first three men's home games and the first four women's games where the attendance will be zero.

It was announced late Friday afternoon that both teams will not have fans through the nonconference schedules due to concerns over COVID-19. There are plans in the works to welcome fans by the start of conference play, however, it's not set in stone yet.

If fans are allowed, the soonest they'll be in the Yuengling Center is Dec. 19 when the women's team plays Houston. For the men's team, it'll be Dec. 22 when the Bulls take on Wichita State.

As for now, capacity is limited to approximately a couple hundred seats for family members of players and coaches. Families of opponents are also welcomed via a pass list.

In an email to The Oracle, USF Athletics said it will provide details on fan attendance limits as the time gets closer. Social distancing requirements and COVID-19 protocols will also be revealed as conference play nears.

The Yuengling Center holds



The Yuengling Center holds just over 10,000, but it won't be anywhere near full for the 2020-21 men's and women's basketball seasons. There will be no fans in attendance through the nonconference schedules but the university will reassess the attendance policy once conference play starts. ORACLE PHOTO/BRIAN HATTAB

just over 10,000 spectators and based on attendance caps across the league, one can speculate how many fans could eventually be allowed at USF home games.

UCF plans to allow 25% capacity — about 2,500 fans — at Addition Financial Arena when its season tips off against Oklahoma on Saturday. Face masks will be required at all times unless eating and drinking. Knights Athletics said more information on student attendance and further arena protocols will be released this week.

Cincinnati Athletics is hopeful for a "limited" fan presence at Fifth Third Arena but will start its season without spectators.

"We will start the season without fans in Fifth Third

Arena," Director of Athletics John Cunningham told The Enquirer. "We will permit fans in the arena later in the season only if we determine it is safe and appropriate to do so. We are not holding to a time frame on such a determination."

FedExForum, home of the Memphis Grizzlies and Memphis Tigers, released COVID-19 protocols ahead of the start of the basketball seasons. Face masks will be required at all times and fans will only be allowed to eat and drink while seated or in designated areas and not walking around the arena.

Ticketed seats have been placed 6 feet apart, and fans will be required to stand at least 6 feet apart when walking or in lines. Refills on sodas and popcorn will

not be allowed. Arena officials estimate there will be a 20% capacity limit.

By that estimate, there could be somewhere between 2,000 and 2,500 fans allowed at the Yuengling Center.

Of course, that's dependent on case numbers in the area and if the university approves having fans in the arena.

Regardless, some USF fans are planning on attending if and when allowed but have mixed feelings about the capacity indoors.

"I personally love the basketball games so I would absolutely go," Brianna Leigh, a senior studying behavioral healthcare, told The Oracle on Facebook. "If we had to wear masks and/or social distance

seating, I would do just that."

Senior industrial engineering student Veronica Diaz said she'd go to games if there was a reasonable capacity.

"I will absolutely be there when they open up as long as there is a realistic attendee capacity," she said. "I have concerns about the closed space and social distancing while seated."

Both basketball teams are set to embark on seasons full of unknowns while also being tabbed for greatness.

The women's team is set to take the conference by storm after being selected to win it all in the preseason, and the men's team is tabbed to be a formidable contender after being selected fifth in the AAC preseason poll.



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MEN'S TEAM



DAVID COLLINS, #0
GUARD, 6'4", 220 LBS
SENIOR



MICHAEL DURR, #4
CENTER, 7'0", 250 LBS
JUNIOR



JUSTIN BROWN, #13
GUARD/FORWARD
6'6", 208 LBS
SENIOR



LUKE ANDERSON, #44
GUARD/FORWARD
6'8", 202 LBS
REDSHIRT FRESHMAN



XAVIER CASTANEDA, #1
GUARD, 6'1", 195 LBS
JUNIOR



RASHUN WILLIAMS, #5
GUARD, 6'6", 225 LBS
JUNIOR



MADUT AKEC, #22
FORWARD, 6'7", 205 LBS
REDSHIRT SOPHOMORE



RUSSEL TCHEWA, #54
CENTER, 7'0", 260 LBS
SOPHOMORE



EZACURAS DAWSON III, #2
GUARD, 6'3", 200 LBS
REDSHIRT JUNIOR



ALEXIS YETNA, #10
FORWARD, 6'8", 234 LBS
REDSHIRT JUNIOR



CALEB MURPHY, #23
GUARD, 6'4", 185 LBS
FRESHMAN



PRINCE ODURO, #3
FORWARD, 6'8", 255 LBS
REDSHIRT JUNIOR



MARK CALLEJA, #11
GUARD, 6'2", 185 LBS
JUNIOR



JAMIR CHAPLIN, #24
GUARD, 6'5", 196 LBS
SOPHOMORE

WOMEN'S TEAM



TEREZA VITULOVA, #0
CENTER, 6'2"
REDSHIRT JUNIOR



ELISA PINZAN, #4
POINT GUARD, 5'8"
JUNIOR



SARA GUERREIRO, #13
GUARD, 5'8"
FRESHMAN



ANGELEE RODRIGUEZ, #24
FORWARD/CENTER, 6'2"
FRESHMAN



MARIA ALVAREZ, #1
GUARD, 5'7"
SOPHOMORE



ELENA TSINEKE, #5
GUARD, 5'7"
SOPHOMORE



BETHY MUNUNGA, #20
FORWARD, 6'0"
SENIOR



BEATRIZ JORDAO, #31
CENTER, 6'3"
JUNIOR



MIHAELA LAZIC, #2
GUARD, 5'6"
REDSHIRT FRESHMAN



JADE BLAGROVE, #11
FORWARD, 6'2"
FRESHMAN



SHAE LEVERETT, #21
CENTER, 6'2"
SENIOR



SILVIA SERRAT, #34
FORWARD, 6'1"
SENIOR



SYDNI HARVEY, #3
POINT GUARD, 5'10"
JUNIOR



CRISTINA BERMEJO, #12
WING, 6'1"
SOPHOMORE



KRISTYNA BRABENCOVA, #22
WING, 6'0"
SOPHOMORE

Skill level, expectations high for USF women



Francisco Rosa

CORRESPONDENT

The 2020-21 USF women's basketball season is finally set to begin, and the Bulls will now embark on the most unprecedented college basketball season ever.

While there will be a lot of focus on the logistics of playing a full schedule while keeping all those involved healthy and safe, the on-court product will still attract most of the attention and excitement this season.

Here are just a few things that Bulls' fans should look forward to this season.

Conference favorites at last

Since his arrival at USF in 2000, coach Jose Fernandez has been among the best college basketball coaches in the country.

Fernandez has turned USF into consistent top team with the Bulls winning at least 19 games going back to the 2011-12 season.

Now entering his 21st season with USF, Fernandez has led his team to 15 postseason appearances. A top-three conference finish and postseason tournament play were once a far-off dream for the Bulls. Now, it has become the expectation.

"I'm excited where we're at, this program continues to be a shining star at this university and athletic department and I think across the country," Fernandez said during a press conference Oct. 20. "I think we've been



Last year's AAC Freshman of the Year guard Elena Tsineke is poised to be a key player for the Bulls once more after being named to the AAC Preseason All-Conference Second Team. USF is tabbed to win the conference for the first time in program history. ORACLE PHOTO/BRIAN HATTAB

consistent the last nine years, we won at least 19 games. I think six of those years 20-win seasons and three of them 19-win seasons, so we're definitely going to have

some high expectations in my opinion."

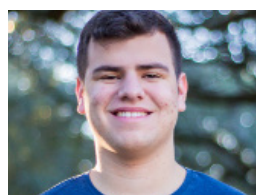
As bright as the Bulls' star has become over the last several years, they've never been able

to outshine the darling of the AAC, and of women's college basketball in general, UConn.

Some of Fernandez's best

See WOMEN on PAGE 10

USF men look to contend in AAC with veteran team



Richard Silva

CORRESPONDENT

After a long and stressful offseason littered with uncertainty and doubt, USF men's basketball is returning to the court as their first game quickly approaches.

There are still plenty of unknowns, but for now, USF plans to tip off its season against Florida College on Wednesday.

Here are some storylines to follow as the season begins.

Players to watch this season

One of the big names to watch this season is forward Alexis Yetna, who had his 2019-20 season end before it began, as he suffered an ACL injury that sidelined him for the entire year.

In the season prior, Yetna led the AAC with 9.6 rebounds per game. He also added 12.3 points per game to go along with his proficient rebounding.

The AAC coaches poll selected Yetna as a member of the Preseason All-Conference Second Team for this season. Such an honor shows that coaches around the conference expect him to pick up right where he left off.



Forward Alexis Yetna missed all of last season with an ACL injury. He's expected to be a key player for USF and was named to the AAC Preseason All-Conference Second Team. ORACLE PHOTO/BRIAN HATTAB

Somewhat of a wild card to watch this season is a newcomer to the team, freshman Caleb Murphy.

He's a four-star guard from Georgia, where he was ranked as the eighth-best recruit in the state by 247Sports. When asked about the growth he's seen from Murphy, coach Brian Gregory gave his praise to the freshman in a mid-October press conference.

"He's got a chance to be a special player," Gregory said. "The best thing for Caleb Murphy is he's surrounded on the perimeter with veteran players, so although we need him to make an impact for us, it's not like he's doing that on his own.

"He can play all three

See MEN on PAGE 10



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WOMEN

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MEN

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teams weren't able to capture an AAC title because of the stranglehold that the Huskies and Geno Auriemma had over the conference. In their seven years in the AAC together, USF has finished second place to UConn three times, more than any other team in the conference.

As UConn left the AAC to return to the Big East, this season is bound to be different. With the top dogs out of the way, the Bulls are now primed to take over the conference. In the AAC Preseason Poll, USF was picked to finish atop the conference for the first time in the program's history.

If, and this is a big "if," USF is able to stay healthy for a full season, it would be no surprise that by the end of the season the AAC championship trophy resides in Tampa.

Another strong nonconference schedule

This season USF is set to face a tough slate of nonconference games. The Bulls will face a pair of teams in the top 10 of the AP Top 25, defending national champs No. 4 Baylor and perennial powerhouse No. 6 Mississippi State, in the first week of December.

Although there aren't as many nonconference games compared to previous seasons because of the pandemic, USF is no stranger to playing a tough schedule early on in the season.

The 2019-20 season presented an even tougher gauntlet for the Bulls. USF took on four teams that were in the Coaches Poll Top 25, three of which were in the top 15. Among those teams were the reigning national champions, Baylor Bears.

USF took a trip to Waco and gave the champs, who were

ranked No. 3 in the country at the time, a scare in a 58-46 defeat.

Before taking on Baylor last year, Fernandez acknowledged how important it was for his team to play a difficult nonconference schedule. By scheduling to play the best teams that the country has to offer, the Bulls set themselves up to be successful later on in the season.

"You're going to be judged at the end of the year on how your team played, how successful you were — wins and losses, how you did in your league — but also on how you scheduled. And there's never a question on how we approach that," Fernandez said.

Super sophomores

Over the last few years, USF has done a good job recruiting players who can contribute immediately, and in last year's freshman class, they found a few gems that could help the team reach new heights in the next couple of years.

Sophomore guard Elena Tsineke had a slow start to her first season — she missed the first five games after being ruled ineligible to play by the NCAA. But, once reinstated, she hit the ground sprinting. Tsineke led the team in scoring with 12.4 points per game, good for 16th in the conference.

Tsineke went on to win the AAC Freshman of the Year award and also made the All-American AAC Third Team in 2019-20.

Maria Alvarez was another one of USF's "diaper dandies." Although she only played 15 games before a season-ending knee injury, Alvarez was one of the Bulls' most exciting offensive players while on the floor.

If Alvarez is able to return from her injury and return to form, Fernandez can have a reliable microwave scorer that he can bring off the bench or plug into the starting lineup.

Along with fellow second-year players Cristina Bermejo, Kristyna Brabencova and Mihaela Lazic, they have the opportunity to put USF over the top this season.

Several Bulls tabbed for individual awards

On top of all the team goals that Fernandez and his team have for the impending season, several players on the team also have their eyes on individual accolade nominations.

After being one of the top post players in the country last season, senior forward Bethy Mununga has been nominated for the Katrina McClain Preseason Watch List. The award is given annually to the best power forward in the nation.

During her first year at USF last year, Mununga was a monster on the glass, ranking second in the AAC in rebounds per game (10.1) and total rebounds (292). A double-double machine with nine on the season, she was quickly able to establish herself as one of the stars on the team in just a short time with the Bulls.

Other players up for individual awards are Tsineke and junior guard Elisa Pinzan, both named to the AAC Preseason All-Conference Second Team last season.

Pinzan finished as the conference leader in assists per game at 5.2 and made the AAC Third Team. She will look to lead the Bulls' offense from the point guard position once again.

While the individual awards will certainly have a place in the players' minds throughout the season, their ultimate goal will surely be to meet and exceed the lofty expectations that have been placed upon them by Fernandez, Bulls Nation and most importantly, themselves.

perimeter positions, which he will."

On top of Yetna and Murphy, redshirt junior forward Prince Oduro, a transfer from Mississippi State, could have a big role with the team in terms of scoring the basketball.

Gregory discussed Oduro's innate ability of putting the ball in the bucket.

"I do like [that] Prince has a knack for putting the ball in the basket in a variety of ways," Gregory said. "The best part about him and Russel [Tchewa] right now is they're big, strong, and play hard and finish around the basket."

Possible AAC contenders

The AAC released its preseason coaches poll in late October, and USF was ranked fifth out of 11 programs.

The Bulls are sandwiched in between the Cincinnati Bearcats at fourth and the Tulsa Golden Hurricane at sixth.

After finishing this past year 14-17, good for ninth in the conference, seeing USF ranked as high as No. 5 is something that's bound to get Bulls fans excited.

The AAC consistently produces quality teams that appear poised to make waves in the college basketball landscape and this year is no different.

The four teams ranked above USF in the coaches poll are Houston, Memphis, SMU and Cincinnati.

Houston was selected to win the conference, receiving nine first-place votes, followed by Memphis which received the final two.

The first AP Poll, which came out Nov. 9, has the Cougars ranked 17th in the country, clearly a formidable foe that the Bulls will have to deal with.

If the Bulls want a chance at the conference title, they'll likely have to go through one or more of

those top teams.

Fourth time around for Gregory

Gregory is set to start his fourth season as the Bulls head coach, and through his first three seasons as coach, the Bulls are 48-53. That record includes a rocky 10-22 start in his first season.

His best season at the helm came in his second year when USF went 24-14 and eventually became College Basketball Invitational (CBI) champions.

After a somewhat disappointing 14-17 record last year, Gregory and his squad look to bounce back and return to being above the .500 mark.

Season expectations

This season is sure to bring challenges that no other basketball season has ever brought before due to the novel coronavirus.

Every team is going to be operating under the same circumstances, but USF has the benefit of having a team full of veterans.

Out of the 13 players currently on the roster, nine are returning from last season.

That type of continuity may prove to be helpful as this season will require a lot of mental and physical fortitude.

"You got to go back to your core goals, your No. 1 goal," Gregory said. "Our No. 1 goal is to be better today than we were yesterday, no outside situation can change that."

With the veteran presence USF has accompanied by the return of Yetna and the arrival of newcomers Murphy, Oduro and Tchewa there is no reason why the Bulls can't make a run.



WOMEN'S BASKETBALL SCHEDULE



NOVEMBER

28

VS JACKSONVILLE,
4 P.M. YUENGLING CENTER

JANUARY

2

VS EAST CAROLINA
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

FEBRUARY

3

AT SMU
TIME TBA, DALLAS

DECEMBER

1

VS BAYLOR
7 P.M. YUENGLING CENTER

6

VS WICHITA STATE
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

7

AT UCF
TIME TBA, ORLANDO

13

AT TULANE
TIME TBA, NEW ORLEANS

13

VS TULSA
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

5

VS MISSISSIPPI STATE
7 P.M. YUENGLING CENTER

17

VS MEMPHIS
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

17

VS SMU
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

13

VS STETSON
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

20

AT WICHITA STATE
TIME TBA

20

VS TULANE
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

16

AT MEMPHIS
TIME TBA

23

AT EAST CAROLINA
TIME TBA

24

AT TEMPLE,
TIME TBA, PHILADELPHIA

19

VS HOUSTON
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

27

VS TEMPLE
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

27

AT HOUSTON
TIME TBA

22

AT CINCINNATI
TIME TBA

30

VS CINCINNATI
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

MARCH

30

AT TULSA
TIME TBA

2

VS UCF
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

MEN'S BASKETBALL

SCHEDULE

NOVEMBER

25 VS FLORIDA COLLEGE
11:30 A.M. YUENGLING CENTER

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28** VS RHODE ISLAND
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**NOV
29** VS VIRGINIA TECH
8 P.M. UNCASVILLE, CT

DECEMBER

4 VS FLORIDA A&M
5 P.M., YUENGLING CENTER

8 VS STETSON
5 P.M., YUENGLING CENTER

**HOLIDAY
HOOPSGIVING**

**DEC
12** VS LSU
2:30 P.M., ATLANTA

DECEMBER

16 AT CINCINNATI
TIME TBA

22 VS WICHITA STATE
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

29 AT MEMPHIS,
TIME TBA

JANUARY

2 VS UCF
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

6 VS TULSA,
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

9 AT EAST CAROLINA,
TIME TBA, GREENVILLE, NC

14 VS HOUSTON
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

20 VS EAST CAROLINA
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

24 AT WICHITA STATE
TIME TBA

27 VS TEMPLE
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

30 VS CINCINNATI
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

FEBRUARY

3 AT TULSA
TIME TBA

6 AT SMU
TIME TBA, DALLAS

13 VS TULANE
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

FEBRUARY

17 AT UCF
TIME TBA, ORLANDO

20 VS SMU
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

24 AT TEMPLE,
TIME TBA, PHILADELPHIA

28 AT HOUSTON
TIME TBA

MARCH

3 VS MEMPHIS
TIME TBA, YUENGLING CENTER

6 AT TULANE
TIME TBA, NEW ORLEANS

AAC CHAMPIONSHIP

11 AAC FIRST ROUND
TIME TBA, FORT WORTH, TX

12 AAC QUARTERFINALS
TIME TBA, FORT WORTH, TX

13 AAC SEMIFINALS
TIME TBA, FORT WORTH, TX

14 AAC FINALS
TIME TBA, FORT WORTH, TX