2014-2015 Panther Men's Basketball

University of Northern Iowa

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CONTENTS

2014-15 ROSTER ........................................ 3
SEASON Recap ........................................ 4-5
BEN JACOBSON BECOMES UNI'S ALL-TIME WINNINGEST COACH/MVC COACH OF THE YEAR .... 8-9
VICTORY AT STEPHEN F. AUSTIN ..................................... 10
CANCUN CHALLENGE CHAMPIONS ..................................... 11
WIN OVER IOWA AT BIG FOUR CLASSIC IN DES MOINES ..................................... 12-13
REGULAR SEASON COME-FROM-BEHIND WIN AT ILLINOIS STATE ..................................... 14
BREAKING INTO THE TOP 25 ..................................... 15
WIN AT HOME OVER WICHITA STATE ..................................... 16-17
INDIVIDUAL HONORS ..................................... 18-21
MVC TOURNAMENT CHAMPIONS IN ST. LOUIS ..................................... 22-23
NCAA TOURNAMENT, SEATTLE, WA ..................................... 24-27
SCHEDULE/RESULTS ..................................... 28
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Deon Mitchell</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>6-1</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>Sr.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>RFr.</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>6-6</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>Jr.</td>
<td>Merrill, Wis. (Virginia) (Merrill)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Matt Bohannon</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>6-4</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>Jr.</td>
<td>Marion, Iowa (Linn-Mar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Seth Tuttle</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>Sr.</td>
<td>Sheffield, Iowa (West Fork)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Wes Washpun</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>6-1</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>Jr.</td>
<td>Cedar Rapids, Washington</td>
</tr>
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<td>Marvin Singleton</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6-6</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>Sr.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Kasey Semler</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>6-1</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Jr.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Nate Buss</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>212</td>
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</tr>
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<td>6-5</td>
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<td>Taylor Olson</td>
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<td>193</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<td>G</td>
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<td>185</td>
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NORTHERN IOWA'S PHENOMENAL SEASON ENDS 1 GAME SHY OF SWEET 16

By Luke Meredith Associated Press Writer

An NCAA Tournament loss just a game shy of the Sweet 16 shouldn't obscure what the University of Northern Iowa accomplished this season.

The Panthers showed they can compete with any program in the country when everything falls into place.

During the season, the Panthers rolled past Iowa and reeled off 16 straight wins — including a thrashing of Wichita State — to put the program back in the national spotlight.

UNI (31-4) set a school record for wins, moved into the top 10 for the first time and won the Missouri Valley conference tournament before losing to Louisville on March 22 in Seattle.

"They raised the bar again. I love them for that. We have had a lot of good things happen at Northern Iowa in our men's basketball program, and these guys raised the bar one more time. That's hard to do with some of the things we have done, but they did it. And it took a lot of sacrifice, and I'm really, really proud of them for that," head coach Ben Jacobson said.

It won't be easy for the Panthers to replicate their success next season. That's mostly because years like this one don't come around too often at any school.

UNI was expected to push Wichita State in the Valley. But few expected the Panthers to play as great as they did from November to March.

The first inkling that 2014-15 could be a special season came way back on Nov. 18, when UNI won at eventual Southland Conference champion Stephen F. Austin, which later fell to Utah as a 12 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

The Panthers then rolled past rival Iowa on a neutral floor in Des Moines, which helped set them up for an historic run through the Valley.

UNI lost its first league game and its last. But in between, the Panthers reeled off 16 straight victories, including a rout of the Shockers in Cedar Falls.

Losing in the regular-season finale at Wichita gave the Shockers the league title. But UNI made up for it with three wins in a row in St. Louis at the league tournament.

The Panthers then beat Wyoming in Seattle, but fell one win short of matching their 2010 team and reaching the regional semifinals.

"Everybody that's been around our program and all the young guys and families we're recruiting right now, they just saw the best entire season," Jacobson said. "We didn't get to the Sweet 16, so that's the only thing we didn't match. But they just saw the best four months of basketball our program has ever had, and that's saying a lot."

UNI does have a nice core returning, led
Lohaus. But developing some big men to fill in for Seth Tuttle and Marvin Singleton will be crucial to UNI’s hopes for another strong season in the Valley.

Still, the 2014-15 season will be remembered as the one that showed just how high the ceiling can be for the Panthers.

“You know that for the years to come, every time you walk into the gym in Cedar Falls at UNI you’re going to see guys working, whether it’s a red shirt or a senior, they’re going to be in the gym getting their shots up, they’re going to be in the weight room working as hard as they possibly can,” Nate Buss said. “I think that’s a standard that’s going to be continued for years to come.
### UNI’S RISE IN THE TOP 25

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*RV - RECEIVED VOTES*
CEDAR FALLS, Iowa — University of Northern Iowa head coach Ben Jacobson became the school’s all-time wins leader on Nov. 15 when the Panthers recorded a 64-52 victory over the University of North Dakota in the McLeod Center.

The victory was No. 167 in Jacobson’s nine-year coaching career - surpassing O.M. "Hon" Nordly’s total of 166 wins from 1938-43, 1946-54.

The Panthers used a career-high tying 24 points from senior Seth Tuttle and 15 points off the bench from junior Wes Washpun to put away UNO.

UND held a 15-9 lead with 12:02 left in the first half on a bucket from Terrel deRauen. UNI tied the game 15-15 on a 6-0 run. The Panthers trailed 24-21 with 3:16 left in the half, but was able to respond and took a 31-29 advantage into the intermission.

UND knotted it up at 31-31 to begin the second half on a basket by Chad Calcaterra. UNI used a 9-0 run to push the margin to 40-31 with 15:01 left in the second half. The Panther run was capped by a three-pointer from Nate Buss.

UNI’s Deon Mitchell scored with 7:58 left in the game to give the Panthers a 12-point lead at 50-38. UND could only get to within nine points the rest of the way as the Panthers posted the 12-point win at 64-52.

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — University of Northern Iowa ninth-year head coach Ben Jacobson has been named the Missouri Valley Conference Coach of the Year for the third time in his tenure with the Panthers.

Jacobson received 26 of a possible 47 first-place tallies and 115 total points to outdistance all other vote-getters. Voting was conducted by league coaches, media and sports information directors. Wichita State’s Gregg Marshall finished runnerup in the voting after earning the award for the past three seasons.

Jacobson guided the Panthers to a 31-4 mark, a school-record 16-game winning streak and a top-10 national ranking this season. It is the sixth 20-win season for Jacobson, who also became UNI’s all-time winningest coach in the season-opener against North Dakota. This year marks the 12th straight season that UNI has won nine or more league games and finished in the upper half of the MVC standings. It is the fourth straight season that UNI has finished in the top three of the final league standings.

Jacobson is tied with Henry P. Iba (Oklahoma A&M), Ken Hayes (Tulsa, New Mexico State) and Gregg Marshall (Wichita State) for the second-most MVC Coach of the Year Award honors. Only Maury John (Drake) has won more MVC Coach of the Year laurels with four.

The Mayville, N.D., native was also MVC Coach of the Year in 2009 and 2010 when he led UNI to the NCAA Tournament in both seasons.
VICTORY AT STEPHEN F. AUSTIN ON ESPN
Snapped SFA's 34-game home winning streak

NACOGDOCHES, Texas — The University of Northern Iowa men's basketball snapped Stephen F. Austin's 34-game home streak with a 79-77 overtime win on Nov. 18.

UNI (2-0 overall) had six players in double figures with senior Marvin Singleton leading the way with a career-high 15 points.

Senior Deon Mitchell forced the extra session with a bucket and a free throw with 50.8 seconds left in regulation that knotted the game at 70-70.

The overtime session saw seven lead changes with the final one coming on a putback from junior transfer Paul Jesperson with 39.7 seconds remaining. SFA's Thomas Walkup missed a three-pointer and Wes Washpun was fouled with 10.7 seconds left. Washpun made the first but missed the second.

SFA raced down the floor and Demetrious Floyd's floater in the lane hit the back rim and bounced out left. Jesperson grabbed the rebound and the clock expired on the game — and on SFA's 34-game home-court win streak, the second-longest active streak in the nation.

UNI struggled with 1-of-7 shooting from 3-point land in the first half, but bounced back and drained its first four three-pointers in the second half. SFA made 7-of-16 3-pointers in the first half but made only three triples in the second half.
CANCUN CHALLENGE CHAMPIONS

Wins over Virginia Tech and Northwestern

CANCUN, Mexico — The University of Northern Iowa men’s basketball team captured the 2014 Cancun Challenge championship with a 61-42 win over the Northwestern Wildcats.

The Panthers were led by senior forward Seth Tuttle’s 19-point scoring effort and senior forward Marvin Singleton’s nine-rebound performance. Nate Buss joined Tuttle in double figures with 11 points.

Northwestern led 18-14 following a three-pointer from Alex Olah with 10:08 left in the first half. UNI would play lockdown defense the rest of the half forcing the Wildcats to miss their next 12 shots and commit four turnovers. UNI enjoyed a 17-0 run to open up a 31-18 lead. Seth Tuttle capped the run with a bucket in the lane with 2:45 left in the first half. UNI led 31-20 at the intermission.

The Wildcats pulled to within nine points at 33-24 with 17:53 left in the game. Tuttle made a pair of free throws on the other end on UNI’s ensuing possession and the Panther lead never shrunk below 10 points the rest of the way.

UNI reached the Cancun Challenge title game following a 73-54 win over Virginia Tech in the semifinals.
PANTHERS SECOND HALF DOMINANCE LEADS TO 56-44 WIN OVER IOWA

DES MOINES, Iowa — The University of Northern Iowa Panthers used a strong second-half defensive performance to earn a 56-44 win over the Iowa Hawkeyes in the third annual Hy-Vee Big Four Classic at Wells Fargo Arena in Des Moines on Dec. 20.

UNI held Iowa to 15 points and 3-for-24 shooting (12.5 percent) in the second half. UNI blocked six Iowa shots in the second half and the Hawkeyes turned the ball over 10 times in the final 20 minutes.

Paul Jesperson was one of 10 Panthers to score in the contest as he led the balanced UNI scoring attack with a team-high 10 points.

The Panthers led 20-18 with 6:06 remaining in the first half before Iowa went on a 8-0 run to give Iowa its largest lead of the game, 26-20. The Panthers went scoreless until Jesperson's three-pointer with 1:37 left cut the Hawkeye lead to 26-23.

The Hawkeyes led 29-23 at half paced by Aaron White's seven first half points. Six different Hawkeyes scored in the first-half as the Hawks knocked down three of five three-pointers. The Panthers were paced by Jesperson's six first half points. The Panther bench accounted for 17 of the Panthers 23 first-half points.

The Panthers opened the second half on a 16-3 run to take a 39-32 at the 11:33 mark. The Hawkeyes started the second half 1-11 from the field along with five turnovers. Iowa would get as close as six points at 49-43, but UNI was able to close out the Hawks, 56-44.

UNI moved to 10-1 on the season, while Iowa fell to 8-4 overall.
UNI WINS 7TH STRAIGHT: PANTHERS RALLY PAST REDBIRDS, 54-53

NORMAL, Ill. — The University of Northern Iowa men’s basketball team rallied from a 12-point second-half deficit and scored a 54-53 win at Illinois State on Jan 25.

UNI’s Nate Buss drained a 3-pointer with 5.2 seconds left to give the Panthers a 54-53 lead. UNI’s Marvin Singleton sank his first 3-pointer of the season with 2:55 left to complete a comeback that saw the Panthers trailing 46-34 with 10:48 remaining in the game.

UNI improved to 18-2 overall and 7-1 in Missouri Valley Conference action. Illinois State dropped to 12-8 overall and 4-4 in MVC play.
UNI ENTERS BOTH TOP 25 POLLS AFTER 8-0 START

By Luke Meredith, Associated Press Sports Writer

DES MOINES, IOWA — University of Northern Iowa men's basketball coach Ben Jacobson always knew he had the pieces in place for a strong season.

The unbeaten Panthers have played up to their potential so far.

UNI (8-0) is off to its best start in 50 years after knocking off George Mason 71-65 in overtime on Dec. 6. The Panthers are the last undefeated team left in the Missouri Valley Conference, and on Dec. 8 they entered the Top 25 for the first time since 2010, checking in at No. 23. UNI also entered this week's Coaches poll at No. 24.

UNI is surging behind its defense, which is 18th-best in the country at 55.3 points allowed per game.

"Our defense is much improved over the course of the last six or eight weeks," Jacobson said. "I like what the guys have done at the defensive end."

He's also quite happy with the way center Seth Tuttle has started his senior season. Tuttle is averaging 16.4 points and 6.9 rebounds per game. He is also shooting 65 percent from the field.

But the emergence of senior power forward Marvin Singleton is perhaps the biggest reasons why the Panthers' frontcourt has gotten so much better.

UNI initially had Singleton at small forward, mostly because he's generously listed at just 6-foot-6. The coaching staff shifted him over to power forward toward the end of last season and found success starting him on the blocks with Tuttle.

Singleton, who never averaged more than 12 minutes or 2.5 rebounds per game, now leads the Panthers with 7.3 rebounds a game — and his 26.8 minutes per game ranks behind only Tuttle.

"The biggest change with him is his conditioning," Jacobson said. "He completely changed his body, and that's helped him be much more effective for us."

UNI has played middle-of-the-pack offense so far, averaging 67.8 points. But the Panthers have been efficient, shooting 46.1 percent from the field, and seven players are averaging at least 5 points a game.

Still, Jacobson is looking for a bit more synchronicity. Starting guard Deon Mitchell has struggled from the floor, shooting just 21.3 percent.

"Offensively, we've been OK," Jacobson said. "We're not clicking on all cylinders, if you will, at this point with our offense. Hopefully that will kick into gear for us."

The sooner the better for the Panthers, who are about to face three completely different types of opponents.

Their toughest stretch in non-conference play starts when they play at Denver. UNI then plays at VCU and faces rival Iowa on a neutral floor in Des Moines on Dec. 20.

Denver utilizes concepts from the Princeton offense, which is predicated upon teamwork, constant motion and tricky backdoor cuts. The Rams are famous for their pressure defense — which can overwhelm opponents in a hurry in the Siegel Center — and the Hawkeyes like to push the tempo as much as possible.

"It's good for your players to play against different systems, and play against zone defense, play against a team that's going to press like VCU does," Jacobson said. "There's no question it's good for your team as you're building and working to get yourself ready for conference play."
#18 UNI HANDLES #12 WICHITA STATE, 70-54

By Luke Meredith, Associated Press

CEDAR FALLS, Iowa — Wichita State's long Missouri Valley Conference winning streak is history.

So is the Shockers' stranglehold on first place in the league.

Seth Tuttle scored a career-high 29 points and 18th-ranked Northern Iowa trounced No. 12 Wichita State 70-54 on Jan. 31, snapping the Shockers' 27-game regular season winning streak in conference play.

Reserve Wes Washpun had 16 points for the Panthers (20-2, 9-1 MVC). They pulled into a tie with the Shockers for first in the league after a surprisingly dominant performance.

Northern Iowa seized control with a 21-3 run late in the first half and pushed its lead to as much as 49-30 early in the second half.

"Our energy level and our effort level was as high as it's been with this group," Northern Iowa coach Ben Jacobson said.

Fred VanVleet had 18 points to lead Wichita State (19-3, 9-1), which shot just 5 of 24 from 3-point range. Star Ron Baker was held to 12 points on 4-of-12 shooting.

"The best team won," Wichita State coach Gregg Marshall said. "Tuttle was unstoppable."

This was the first Valley game between ranked opponents in 33 years — and a sign that the league is on solid ground despite losing Creighton before last season.

It wound up being a romp, because the Panthers had the Shockers flummoxed from the opening tip.

Northern Iowa shot 60 percent, and the Shockers were so out of sorts that they began applying full-court pressure in a rare sign of desperation. But Tuttle opened the second half with a 3-point play and the rout was on.

"We didn't expect to come in here and beat them the way we did, I guess," Tuttle said. "They are a great team. But we really didn't talk about beating them by one or two. We talked about coming in here and beating them by 15. That was our mindset.

Tuttle also had seven rebounds for Northern Iowa, which will travel to Wichita in the regular-season finale on Feb. 28.

By winning the first one, the Panthers have a much better chance at ensuring that the rematch will have title implications.

"It definitely gives us confidence," Washpun said. "But we know how tough the Valley is."
TUTTLE NAMED LARRY BIRD MVC PLAYER OF YEAR; WASHPUN EARN 6TH-MAN HONOR

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — The 2015 MVC Larry Bird Player of the Year is senior Seth Tuttle of the University of Northern Iowa. Tuttle is the MVC’s active leader in both scoring and rebounding.

Tuttle (Sheffield, Iowa/West Fork HS) is the third Panther to earn the league’s top honor following Jason Daisy (1997) and Adam Koch (2010). Tuttle leads the Panthers in scoring (15.3 ppg), rebounding (6.9 rpg), assists (3.3 apg) and blocks (0.6 bpg). Tuttle shot 60.4 percent from the field, which ranks No. 9 in the nation.

Tuttle has been named as a finalist on a host of national award lists, including the 2015 Oscar Robertson Trophy list, the 2015 Karl Malone Power Forward of the Year Award list and the Naismith Trophy Midseason List. Tuttle is the only active player in the nation with more than 1,700 career points (1,747), 900 career rebounds (917) and 250 career assists (282).

He is the fifth UNI Panther to earn first-team All-MVC accolades in back-to-back seasons. Tuttle posted seven 20-point scoring games to go along with four double-doubles this season. He poured in a career-high 29 points and was 9-of-13 from the field in a 70-54 win over No. 12 Wichita State on Jan. 31. Tuttle was named the MVC Player of the Week.
four times as a senior (seven times in his career).

The MVC also selects a "Sixth Man Award" recipient, and this season's honor goes to UNI junior guard Wes Washpun (Cedar Rapids, Iowa/C.R. Washington HS). The honor is presented to the league's top reserve player (one who has started fewer than 25 percent of his team's games). Washpun has played in all 35 of UNI's games, coming off the bench in all of them. Nonetheless, he ranks third in scoring for the team with his 7.6 points-per-game average. He also ranks second for the Panthers in assists (91) and third in blocks (17) and steals (34). Washpun is the second UNI player to earn the Sixth Man Award, which was first chosen in 1997. Lucas O'Rear won it previously for UNI, in 2009 and in 2010.

Washpun and senior guard Deon Mitchell (Pflugerville, Texas/Pflugerville HS) were also named to the honorable mention All-MVC squad. Mitchell led the league in three-point field goal percentage (57.5 percent) in MVC games only. He started all 35 games for the Panthers and averaged 7.5 ppg. He ranked second on the team with 35 steals.

Junior Paul Jesperson (Merrill, Wis./Merrill HS/Univ. of Virginia) tallied a spot on the MVC's All-Newcomer Team. Jesperson saw action in all 35 games, while averaging 9.9 ppg. Jesperson has drilled 43.3 percent of his field goal attempts and has also made 42.9 percent of his 3-point shots. Jesperson ranks second on the squad with 48 made 3-pointers.
NATE BUSS NAMED MVC SCHOLAR-ATHLETE OF YEAR

ST. LOUIS - Nate Buss of UNI highlights a list of 14 student-athletes honored as part of the 2015 MVC Scholar-Athlete Teams, announced today by the league office. The senior from Charles City, Iowa, is the league's Scholar-Athlete of the Year, marking the second time in the 15-year history of the award that a UNI student-athlete has been so honored (Adam Koch of UNI was honored as the recipient in 2010). Voting for the 2015 MVC Scholar-Athlete Team was conducted by league's sports information directors.

Buss ranks second for UNI in scoring at 7.7 points per game and ranks third on the team with 40 3-pointers made, while connecting on 40.8 percent from long range. Earlier this year, he became the 97th player in school history to score 500 or more points (657 career points). He has scored in double figures on 14 occasions off the bench this season, and Buss has been the Panthers' top bench scorer 12 times this season.

Buss is joined on the first-team unit by Indiana State's Justin Gant and Jake Kitchell, Missouri State's Austin Ruder, and Evansville's Blake Simmons. The second-team unit consists of Joe Crisman of Loyola, Tyler McCullough of Missouri State, Karl Madison of Drake, Xzavier Taylor of Bradley, and Evan Wessel of Wichita State. Four honorable-mention selections include Ka'Darryl Bell and Nate Wells of Bradley, and Max Martino and Jeremy Morgan of UNI.

The criteria for the Missouri Valley Conference's Scholar-Athlete Team voting parallels the CoSIDA (College Sports Information Directors of America) standards for Academic All-America voting. Nominees must be starters or important reserves with at least a 3.20 cumulative grade-point average (4.0 scale). Student-athletes must have reached sophomore athletic and academic standing at their institution (true freshmen and redshirt freshmen were not eligible) and must have completed at least one full academic year at their institution. He must have played in 75 percent of his team's games.
Nate Buss, UNI, Sr.,
Charles City, Iowa, 3.50,
General Studies

Buss ranks second on the team in scoring at 7.7 points per game ... ranks third on the team with 40 3-pointers made ... shooting 40.8 percent from three-point range ... 97th player in school history to score 500 or more points (657 career points) ... has scored in double figures on 14 occasions off the bench this season ... has been the Panthers top bench scorer 12 times this season.

Jeremy Morgan, UNI, So.,
Coralville, Iowa, 3.33,
Undecided

Averaging 6.3 ppg in MVC play, nearly a point more per game than his overall season average of 5.6 ppg ... led the team with 40 steals ... has registered eight double-figure scoring games ... scored a career-high 18 points in a 67-58 win over Loyola (Jan. 4).

Max Martino, UNI, Sr.,
Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 3.82,
Economics & Psychology

Martino saw action in 16 games this season ... drained both free throws attempts in his senior night finale vs. Evansville (Feb. 25) ... a second team MVC Scholar-Athlete selection last season ... nominated for the Allstate Good Works Team.
ST. LOUIS, Mo. — The University of Northern Iowa men's basketball team captured the 2015 Missouri Valley Conference Tournament championship with a 69-60 victory over the Illinois State Redbirds at Scottrade Center March 8.

Illinois State (21-12 overall) jumped out quickly on the Panthers and built a 33-15 lead. UNI struggled from the floor early and went through a 2-for-20 shooting slump at one point. UNI shot 23.3 percent in the first half and trailed 36-22 at the half.

UNI (30-3 overall) used a 32-7 run to turn an 18-point deficit into a seven-point lead at 47-40. The Redbirds tied it again at 47-47 on a 3-pointer from Deontae Hawkins with 8:07 left in the game. But the Panthers responded again and ran off eight straight points to take a 55-47 lead. The 8-0 run featured two buckets from Nate Buss and another from Matt Bohannon. The Redbirds would get no closer than five points in the final seven minutes of action.

UNI shot 54.2 percent in the second half and outscored Illinois State, 47-24.

The Panthers were led in scoring by Seth Tuttle and Nate Buss, who each tallied 15 points. Tuttle also added nine rebounds and three assists.
PANTHERS EARN HIGHEST SEED IN SCHOOL HISTORY

UNI earned its highest seed ever in the NCAA Tournament with a No. 5 seed. UNI's previous high was No. 9 in the 2010 NCAA Tournament.

UNI'S SEEDS IN THE NCAA TOURNAMENT

1990 - #14 vs. #3 Missouri
2004 - #14 vs. #3 Georgia Tech
2005 - #11 vs. #6 Wisconsin
2006 - #10 vs. #7 Georgetown
2009 - #12 vs. #5 Purdue
2010 - #9 vs. #8 UNLV
2014 - #5 vs. #12 Wyoming

MVC'S NCAA APPEARANCES SINCE 2004

• Indiana State (1) - 2011
• Drake (1) - 2008
• Bradley (1) - 2006

UNI earned the MVC’s automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament after capturing the tournament title with wins over Bradley (71-46), Loyola (63-49) and Illinois State (69-60). It's the fifth time in seven appearances that UNI will use an automatic bid into the NCAA Tournament. UNI used automatic bids to reach the NCAA Tournament in 1990 (Mid-Continent Tournament Champions), 2004 (MVC Tournament Champions), 2009 (MVC Tournament Champions), 2010 (MVC Tournament Champions) and 2015 (MVC Tournament Champions). The Panthers were an at-large selection in both the 2005 and 2006 NCAA Tournaments.

6TH NCAA APPEARANCE SINCE 2004

The Panthers are making their sixth NCAA appearance since the 2004 season. The six appearances since 2004 is the most of any member of the Missouri Valley Conference in that time frame. Wichita State has appeared in five NCAA Tournaments since 2004, to rank second in the MVC behind the Panthers.

AUTOMATIC

UNI earned the MVC's automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament after capturing the tournament title with wins over Bradley (71-46), Loyola (63-49) and Illinois State (69-60). It's the fifth time in seven appearances that UNI will use an automatic bid into the NCAA Tournament. UNI used automatic bids to reach the NCAA Tournament in 1990 (Mid-Continent Tournament Champions), 2004 (MVC Tournament Champions), 2009 (MVC Tournament Champions), 2010 (MVC Tournament Champions) and 2015 (MVC Tournament Champions). The Panthers were an at-large selection in both the 2005 and 2006 NCAA Tournaments.
The public was invited to celebrate with the University of Northern Iowa men's basketball team as the field for the 2015 NCAA Tournament was revealed. The event took place at the Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center on the UNI campus.
UNI KNOCKS OFF WYOMING IN NCAA TOURNAMENT, 71-54

SEATTLE, Wash. — The University of Northern Iowa men's basketball team scored its largest NCAA Tournament victory in school history with a 71-54 triumph over the Wyoming Cowboys at KeyArena on March 20.

UNI (31-3 overall) had five players reach double-figure scoring and the Panthers enjoyed a 41-2 bench scoring advantage over Wyoming. UNI was led in scoring by Paul Jesperson (16), Seth Tuttle (14), Nate Buss (13), Wes Washpun (10) and Deon Mitchell (10). Tuttle also added nine rebounds, three assists and three steals.

The Cowboys (25-10) were led in scoring by Larry Nance Jr. with 16 points.

UNI came out blazing by draining 10 of its first 10 shots from the field. The Panthers used a 10-0 run to take an 18-9 lead with 13:05 left in the first half. UNI then went ice-cold from the field and made only one of its next 12 shots. But the Panthers ended the half with Deon Mitchell draining a 3-pointer at the shot clock buzzer.

The Panthers started the second half on an 11-1 run to take a 46-25 lead with 15:28 left in the game. Wyoming's Nance Jr. then took over and scored 12 straight points to pull the Cowboys to within 50-37 with 12:25 remaining.

The Cowboys continued to whittle away the lead and trimmed it to seven at 50-43 with 10:34 left. However, UNI's Paul Jesperson answered with a 3-point and Wes Washpun drained a jumper to push the lead back to 12.

Washpun would later add two free throws with 5:50 left to push the lead back to double-figures at 59-48. The lead remained in double figures for the rest of the contest.
SEATTLE (Associated Press) — Early exit or Final Four — Louisville coach Rick Pitino said he wouldn’t be surprised by either this season.

Well, how ’bout another Sweet 16 for the Cardinals, a team the coach doesn’t compare with his best, but refuses to give up on, either.

Terry Rozier had 25 points and seven assists, and Pitino directed the undermanned, fourth-seeded Cards to a 66-53 victory Sunday night over Northern Iowa in the NCAA Tournament.

The fifth-seeded Panthers (31-4) were a popular pick in this one, trying to recreate their 2010 victory over a different blue blood (Kansas) and make another trip to the second weekend. But Pitino’s harassing, 2/3 defense made life rough on their best player, Seth Tuttle, holding him to seven shots and 14 hard-earned points.

Now, the Cardinals (26-8) find themselves in the Sweet 16 for a program-record fourth straight year, and in the free-for-all that is now the East Region, it’s silly to count them out for a third trip to the Final Four since 2012. Louisville will play eighth-seeded North Carolina State on Friday in Syracuse. A win in that one, and it could be Pitino vs. Tom Izzo, whose Michigan State team is on the other side of that bracket.

This was the grinding affair pretty much everyone expected between two teams ranked in the nation’s top 20 in defense.

Except in Rozier’s case. He darted his way around the floor, finding open spots for jumpers, floaters and creating enough contact to get to the line nine times. His final numbers: 8 for 13 from the floor, 8 for 9 from the line, five rebounds and the seven assists, including two sweet alley-oop passes to Montrezl Harrell that put game away.

But Louisville really won this one with defense. The Cards forced 10 turnovers and held Northern’s efficient offense to 39 percent shooting. Pitino’s decision to start 6-foot-10 center Mangok Mathiang set the tone against Tuttle, who found little room in the post.

Northern Iowa’s last, best run started when Nate Buss made back-to-back shots to trim a 10-point deficit to six with 4:26 left. The Panthers got the ball on a breakaway and looked to have an easy bucket when Jeremy Morgan dropped a pass to Wes Washpun, who went unhindered to the basket. But Wayne Blackshear came from nowhere to disrupt the shot, then Louisville went down and Rozier threw a lob to Harrell (14 points) for his first alley-oop.

About a minute later, they connected again for a jam and three-point play that ended it.

The Cardinals, challenged on offense all season, picked a great day to have an above-average shooting night: 45.8 percent from the floor.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>OPPONENT</th>
<th>UNI RANK</th>
<th>OPP RANK</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>RESULTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thu, Oct 30</td>
<td>Upper Iowa (Exhib.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cedar Falls, Iowa</td>
<td>83 - 66 (W)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun, Nov 09</td>
<td>Bemidji State (Exhib.)</td>
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<td>Cedar Falls, Iowa</td>
<td>64 - 45 (W)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sat, Nov 15</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Cedar Falls, Iowa</td>
<td>64 - 52 (W)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ESPN'S COLLEGE HOOPS TIP-OFF MARATHON</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nacogdoches, Texas</td>
<td>79 - 77 (W) OT</td>
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<td>Tue, Nov 18</td>
<td>Stephen F. Austin</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thu, Nov 20</td>
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<td>73 - 53 (W)</td>
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<td>Virginia Tech</td>
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<td>55 - 50 (W)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sat, Dec 06</td>
<td>George Mason</td>
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<td>Cedar Falls, Iowa</td>
<td>71 - 65 (W) OT</td>
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<td>Denver</td>
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<td>Denver, Colo.</td>
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<td>VCU</td>
<td>23 (AP)/24 (Coaches)</td>
<td>RV/RV</td>
<td>Richmond, Va.</td>
<td>87 - 93 (L) 2OT</td>
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<td>Sat, Dec 20</td>
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<td>Wed, Jan 07</td>
<td>Southern Illinois *</td>
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<td>Wed, Jan 21</td>
<td>Indiana State *</td>
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<td>12 (AP)/12 (Coaches)</td>
<td>Cedar Falls, Iowa</td>
<td>70 - 54 (W)</td>
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<td>Fri, Mar 20</td>
<td>Wyoming</td>
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<td>11 (AP)/9 (Coaches)</td>
<td>17 (AP)/16 (Coaches)</td>
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