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Illinois-Chicago - Kansas Preview

By Associated Press

March 18, 2004

GAME: No. 13 Illinois-Chicago (24-7) vs. No. 4 Kansas (21-8).

REGIONAL: St. Louis, First round.

TIME: Friday, 10 p.m. EST.

SITE: Kemper Arena; Kansas City, MO.

Kansas looks to add to its already impressive postseason resume when it faces Illinois-Chicago, which is seeking its first-ever NCAA tournament victory.

The Jayhawks are making their school-record 15th straight and 33rd overall appearance in the NCAA tournament, and have advanced to the Final Four in each of the previous two years.

Boasting a sparkling 9-2 record in the last two tournaments, Kansas has an experienced lineup to lean on.

Freshman point guard J.R. Giddens says he'll be listening intently to juniors, Keith Langford, Aaron Miles and Wayne Simien, hoping their familiarity with postseason play can rub off on him.

"They said to just play like it's any other game," Giddens said. "Go to bed, or at least lay down and relax and think about the game."

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Giddens picked the right teammates to take advice from.

Langford has been named to the NCAA All-tournament teams in each of the last two years, Miles is among the nation's assist leaders and Simien is an All-America candidate, averaging a team-high 21.1 points per game over his last 10 contests.

The Jayhawks haven't lost in the first round since 1978, but that doesn't mean they'll take the Flames lightly, even if Illinois-Chicago in its previous two trips to the NCAAs.

"We don't know too much about them," Simien admitted, "but the coaches do a good job of getting us prepared. In previous years, Utah State, Holy Cross and Cal State Northridge all gave us a run for the money, so we'll have to be ready and not look past UIC."

Illinois-Chicago enters the tournament on a 12-game winning streak, and insists it won't be intimidated by the prospect of playing Kansas at Kemper Arena, which is virtually a home arena for the Jayhawks.

The Flames captured the Horizon Conference tournament championship by winning at Butler and Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

"It helps a lot," Flames coach [Jimmy Collins](#) of his team's tenacity away from home. "Our kids just feed off people whether they are for them or against them. They just want to see bodies in the stands."

Illinois-Chicago has three senior starters in [Cedrick Banks](#), [Martell Bailey](#) and [Armond Williams](#), each of whom went to the tournament two years ago.

"We've got experience now," Collins said. "I think this time we'll go into the game a little more confident."

PROBABLE STARTERS: Illinois-Chicago - F [Justin Bowen](#) (4.1 ppg, 3.0 rpg), F Williams (11.8 ppg, 5.9 rpg), C [Joe Scott](#) (6.6 ppg, 4.5 rpg), G Bailey (7.7 ppg, 7.9 apg), G Banks (18.5 ppg, 3.4 rpg). Kansas - F Langford (15.8 ppg, 5.0 rpg), F Simien (17.8 ppg, 9.1 rpg), C David Padgett (6.5 rpg, 4.5 rpg), G Miles (9.2 ppg, 7.2 apg), G Giddens (10.7 ppg, 3.7 rpg).

HOW THEY GOT HERE: Illinois-Chicago - Automatic bid, Horizon Conference champion. Kansas - At-large berth.

ALL-TIME TOURNAMENT RECORD: Illinois-Chicago - 0-2, 2 years. Kansas - 69-32, 32 years.

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