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WKU MEN'S BASKETBALL

## Bassey nominated for Conference USA Player of the Year

Hilltopper center has averaged 15.1 ppg, 10.6 rpg in league play

BRAD STEPHENS [bstephens@bgdailynews.com](mailto:bstephens@bgdailynews.com) 18 hrs ago

Western Kentucky center Charles Bassey (left) shoots against Alabama-Birmingham forward Lewis Sullivan Saturday, February 16, 2019, during Alabama-Birmingham's 68-60 win at E.A. Diddle Arena. (Bac Totrong/photo@bgdailynews.com)

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The Conference USA office on Tuesday distributed its ballot for postseason awards to media and coaches.

Western Kentucky center Charles Bassey earned nominations for C-USA Player of the Year, Freshman of the Year and Defensive Player of the Year.

Joining Bassey as conference Player of the Year nominees are Anthony Adger (Florida Atlantic), Brian Beard Jr. (Florida International), Zack Bryant (Alabama-Birmingham), Ahmad Caver (Old Dominion), Jon Davis (Charlotte), Cortez Edwards (Southern Mississippi), Jon Elmore (Marshall), Jhivvan Jackson (Texas-San Antonio), B.J. Stith (Old Dominion), Keaton Wallace (UTSA) and Ryan Woolridge (North Texas).

In conference play, Bassey has averaged 15.1 points and 10.6 rebounds while blocking 34 shots and shooting 62.8 percent from the field.

Bassey is aiming to become WKU's first C-USA Player of the Year since the program joined the league before the 2014-15 season.

Guard Orlando Mendez-Valdez was the last Topper to claim a league's top honor. He earned Sun Belt Conference Player of the Year in 2008-09.

WKU coach Rick Stansbury pegged Stith as the 2018-19 award's likely winner.

Stith leads first-place ODU in points (18.1 ppg) and rebounds (7.5 rpg). Earlier this season, the Monarchs guard became only the second player in conference history to be named C-USA Player of the Week three straight weeks.

“Whoever wins, and Old Dominion seems to be the team that's really in the driver's seat with it, it's hard to go against the best player being on the best team,” Stansbury said Wednesday. “But it's really obvious Charles has had a really good year for us.”

Bassey is the leading candidate for C-USA Freshman of the Year. He ranks second nationally among freshmen in total rebounds (277), third in total blocks (65) and third in field-goal percentage (63.1 percent), and has been named C-USA Freshman of the Week eight times.

As for Defensive Player of the Year, Bassey's 2.3 blocks per game in league play rank third behind fellow nominees Osasumwen Osaghae of FIU (3.2) and Jannson Williams of Marshall (2.6). FIU's Beard, who averages a league-best 2.8 steals during C-USA games, is also a strong candidate.

The Hilltoppers' only other nominee for an individual award is guard/forward Jared Savage, who's up for Newcomer of the Year. Savage is eligible for that honor because 2018-19 has been his first year playing for WKU after transferring from Austin Peay.

Savage has averaged 12.6 ppg and 4.8 rpg this season. He's made a team-best 66 3-pointers and shot 82.1 percent from the free-throw line.

Middle Tennessee's Antonio Green (18.4 ppg) and Southern Miss' Leonard Harper-Baker (10 ppg, 8.2 rpg) are among Savage's six rivals for Newcomer of the Year.

Bassey, Savage and guards Josh Anderson and Taveion Hollingsworth are all candidates for selection to one of the three, five-man All-C-USA teams.

Four Hilltoppers have combined to earn five All-C-USA recognitions: T.J. Price (First Team, 2014-15), George Fant (Second Team, 2014-15), Justin Johnson (Second Team, 2016-17 and First Team, 2017-18) and Darius Thompson (Second Team, 2017-18).

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