

SIUE's Pruitt, Taylor, Named to Preseason All-OVC Team

by Joe Pott

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EVANSVILLE, Ind. – SIUE sophomores [Ray'Sean Taylor](#) and [DeeJuan Pruitt](#) have each been named to the 13-member preseason All-Ohio Valley Conference men's basketball team announced Tuesday at the league's annual media day.

"It is good to see players on our team recognized for the hard work they have put in," SIUE Head Coach [Brian Barone](#) said. "Ray'sean and DeeJuan have both been productive in the OVC."

Taylor was limited to just 21 games last year as a freshman after tearing his ACL Jan. 29 at Southeast Missouri. The Collinsville, Illinois, native still earned selection to the OVC All-Newcomer Team after averaging 17.6 points per game. Taylor's average would have been second in the OVC had he played in enough games and also would have been first in the NCAA among first-year players. He also averaged 5.0 rebounds, 3.1 assists and 1.7 steals per game.

Pruitt led the Cougars at 6.8 rebounds per game to finish fourth in the OVC. Pruitt turned in two of the best single rebounding performances in the OVC last season, hauling in 16 at Tennessee Tech to tie SIUE's Division I record and 15 at Eastern Illinois. The native of Sacramento, California finished third on the team in scoring at 10.2 points per game, which ranked 21st in the league. Pruitt was fifth in the OVC in free throw percentage at .767 and connected on 89 free throws to lead SIUE.

"DeeJuan showed he could impact games with his versatility and rebounding ability," Barone said. "While Ray impacted the game on both ends of the floor especially offensively which is evident by the fact he led the nation in scoring by first year players last season."

With Taylor and Pruitt both representing SIUE on the All-Conference team it marks the first time in SIUE's tenure in the OVC that it has had two members on the preseason team.

"When I took over this program it was important to do things that have not been done before," Barone said. "We have accomplished having the best academics and most nonconference wins ever at SIUE. This is another thing we have done that hasn't been done at SIUE-having two players be on the preseason All OVC team."

Also announced Tuesday, the predicted order of finish as voted on by the league's head coaches and sports information directors. The Cougars received two first-place votes and were tabbed for a fifth-place finish. Morehead State was picked as the preseason favorite and grabbed seven first-place votes. Tennessee State, UT Martin and Southeast Missouri round out the top four. All of the top five picks received at least two first place votes.

"Preseason ranking are something that catches peoples' attention," Barone added. "Having been picked first by a few people and fifth overall is something to be aware of, and even appreciate. However, what ultimately matters is how we grow as a team in nonconference play in order to have success when OVC play begins."

The Cougars will face Eureka in exhibition play Nov. 2 at First Community Arena before opening the regular season Nov. 7 at home against Harris-Stowe.

Preseason All-OVC Team

Mark Freeman, Morehead State

Chris Harris, Southeast Missouri

Phillip Russell, Southeast Missouri

[Ray'Sean Taylor](#), SIUE

[DeeJuan Pruitt](#), SIUE

Jelani Simmons, Southern Indiana
Jr. Clay, Tennessee State
Marcus Fitzgerald, Tennessee State
Zion Griffin, Tennessee State
Dedric Boyd, Tennessee State
Ty Perry, Tennessee Tech
KJ Simon, UT Martin (Preseason Player of the Year)
Parker Stewart, UT Martin

Preseason Poll

Place	School	Points
1.	Morehead State (7 first-place votes)	138
2.	Tennessee State (2)	130
3.	UT Martin (7)	120
4.	Southeast Missouri (2)	115
5.	SIUE (2)	111
6.	Little Rock	102
7.	Southern Indiana	68
8.	Tennessee Tech	62
9.	Eastern Illinois	31
10.	Lindenwood	23