

# Ramblin' Warhawks: ULM begins CBI finals at Loyola

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(Photo: Emerald Harris/ULM Photo Services)

It's been quite the four-month stretch for ULM basketball. If you're looking for evidence to indicate as such — there's plenty.

ULM's historic 2015 season has produced an almost never-ending collection of superlatives. There's almost as many to list as there are letters in 'superlative.'

Another one is on the way as the Warhawks (24-12) settle into a best-of-three series against Loyola-Chicago in the CBI finals.

Welcome to April basketball.

March still has a two-day shelf-life, but regardless of what happens in game 1 Monday night, ULM is playing in the fourth month of the year for the first time in the program's 63-year history.

Adding to the unknown of ULM's longest ever postseason run is the opponent. This is first ever meeting between ULM and Loyola-Chicago, who made its way to the CBI finals by dispatching Rider, Oral Roberts and Seattle.

The two coaches on the bench at Gentile Arena do have some familiarity though.

ULM's Keith Richard and Loyola coach Porter Moser coached against each other at previous stops —Richard at Louisiana Tech and Moser at Arkansas-Little Rock — in the Sun Belt. Richard went 2-0 against Moser.

Film sessions in preparation for game 1 came with the occasional flashback or two for Richard.

"From what I've seen defensively it reminded me of his teams way back when," Richard said. "They're very multiple and help-oriented on defense. I've known [Moser] a long time and they're similar to those teams in the past in that respect but offensively they aren't really running the same stuff."

Moser assisted the late Rick Majerus at Saint Louis between later head-coaching stints at Illinois State and Loyola, and Richard said Majerus' fingerprints are all over how the Ramblers (22-13) operate on offense.

Moser's new-look offense at Loyola uses ball-screens liberally and looks to get everyone involved, most notably guard Milton Doyle.

Doyle has been in the lineup from the minute he transferred back to his hometown of Chicago after transferring from the University of Kansas. He led Loyola with 11.5 points and four assists per game while battling a shoulder injury.

"When you play a team like that you have to impress upon the kids that we can't get behind the play," Richard said. "They have to stay with the ball movement and not find a place to rest on possessions."

"Whatever we do in terms of defensive preparation, I'm confident our players will take it and put it into play. That doesn't mean we won't have to adjust but we'll have a general theme of how to guard them."

While much has been made of ULM's persistent scoring droughts this season, the Warhawks have scored exactly 71 points in three CBI games and shot above their season average of 42 percent of the field in two home games.

Tylor Ongwae has been the face of ULM's offensive surge by averaging 25 points per game.

Richard has had plenty of 'go-to' players in his career — current Atlanta Hawk Paul Millsap comes to mind — but the coach called the senior from Kenya a different type of lead option.

"Tylor gets his through the course of a game. In the past I'd have a guy that you called a play for them and went to work," Richard said. "I've had to learn to let him work his way through a game because he's kind of a jack-of-all-trades."

**Two-out-of-three Ain't Bad**

The best-of-three format in the CBI finals creates a few different logistical scenarios for both coaches to ponder.

In ULM's case, a win on the road in game 1 would send the Warhawks back to Fant-Ewing Coliseum with two chances to capture the CBI championship.

A loss and the pressure turns to ULM to win two on its home floor.

So is it better to play on the road first knowing you're going home, or get that first win in your gym and put all the pressure on the team down 0-1?

Richard isn't sure.

"It does make you wonder if you had the choice if one way is better than the other, but then you sit back and realize it is what it is," Richard said. "Another comforting thing is knowing we've been good on the road. We haven't been perfect, but we've won our fair share."

ULM went 7-3 on the road in the Sun Belt and scored a 'W' over an NCAA tournament team at UAB.

### **How About More Superlatives**

ULM's jump from 10 to 24 wins in 2015 is the third largest turnaround in Division I college basketball.

Notre Dame and Temple tied for the biggest turnaround by upping its win totals by 17.

Having already set the mark for the third-winningest season in program history, ULM can tie the mark for the most wins in a season (26) by winning the CBI.

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### **ULM (24-12) at Loyola-Chicago (22-13)**

**Tipoff:** 7 p.m., Gentile Arena

**TV:** CBS Sports Network

**Radio:** KLIP 105.3 FM

**Who/What to watch:** Loyola leading scorer Milton Doyle started his career at Kansas before transferring back to his hometown of Chicago. The Ramblers finished third in the Missouri Valley Conference in scoring defense and second in 3-point defense.

**Get in the game:** ULM has the size advantage in the paint over Loyola forwards Christian Thomas (6-5) and Montel James (6-7). Tylor Ongwae, Jamaal Samuel and Majok Deng go 6-7, 6-9 and 6-10 along the front line.

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