

Big Ten play as the best bet to finish on top in March. But it will take more consistent play in big games, beginning this week when a visit from Penn State is followed by a home game with Indiana.

Last week: 1. Gregory Shamus, Getty Images # 2. Michigan State (11-2, 2-0) -- The Spartans finished off non-conference play by cruising to a victory over Northern Illinois in just their third game in 21 days. Junior guard Cassius Winston has been playing his best over the past few weeks and will be vital to MSU's success as it resumes Big Ten play this week with Northwestern at home and a trip to Ohio State. A minor ankle injury to junior guard Joshua Langford is worth watching.

Last week: 2. Dale G. Young, Detroit News # 3. Ohio State (12-1, 2-0) -- The Buckeyes roll back into Big Ten play winners of six straight and have the added luxury of playing only once this week, giving them plenty of time to prepare for an early conference showdown at home against Michigan State. The Buckeyes will work to avoid slow starts that have been an issue while looking to make an early statement in the race for the conference title.

Last week: 3. Jay LaPrete, Associated Press # 4. Indiana (11-2, 2-0) -- The Hoosiers had an extended break, not playing at all this week but preparing to resume Big Ten play on a six-game winning streak. Senior Juwan Morgan has arguably been the Hoosiers' most valuable player, scoring 35 in a win over Butler then recording a triple-double against Jacksonville. After hosting Illinois on Thursday, the Hoosiers face a huge early test with a