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12 good things from the Gophers men's basketball team



By Heather Rule (<https://web.archive.org/web/20170713052332/http://www.1500espn.com/author/heather-rule/>) | [@hlrule](https://twitter.com/hlrule)
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The holidays are quickly approaching, and so begins the 12 Days of Christmas. The Gophers men's basketball team (11-1) is also in search of its 12th win this season as they wrap up the non-conference schedule with a game against Arkansas State on Friday night at The Barn.

In the spirit of the season, here are 12 good things from the Gophers so far in their 2016-17 basketball campaign:

1. One of the best starts ever for the program.

Yes, it's the non-conference part of the schedule, but the Gophers 11-1 start still ranks as one of the best season starts for Gopher basketball. Not many of its teams have started this well, with just one loss in 12 games. Only eight Gophers squads have hit the 11-1 mark since 1972-73. Just 16 teams have done it in more than 100 years, since 1895. It's already a pretty decent turnaround from last season's 8-23 effort.

2. Nate Mason (No. 2).

Coach Richard Pitino has said junior Nate Mason is one of the best guards in the conference. He's certainly shown off his skills already this season. He's the Gophers leading scorer with 13.3 points per game and sunk his season-best 19 points against Brooklyn, a game in which he also hit four treys for the third time in four games. He also leads the team with 5.4 assists per game. Keep your eye on him as one of the leaders of this team.

3. Fill up on Coffey.

Freshman and Minnesota boy Amir Coffey went from last year's Mr. Basketball to fitting right in with the Gophers this year. He's averaging 12.4 points per game and is shooting 79 percent from the foul line. He had a 30-point game versus St. John's (N.Y.). He's not afraid to drive the hoop or make smart passes to his teammates. Coffey started the first 11 games before missing the last one with an injured toe. Fans should probably

cross all their fingers and toes hoping he's OK.

4. Solid defense.

The Gophers lead the Big Ten in defense, allowing opponents a 36.2 shooting percentage. They're just behind Indiana (27.3 percent) in 3-point field goal percentage for opponents, at 28.1 percent.

5. Five Golden Gophers.

The most consistent starting lineup put out there from Pitino has been Mason, Dupree McBrayer, Jordan Murphy, Reggie Lynch and Coffey. Everyone except Lynch ranks 1-4 on the Gophers in average minutes played and average points. It's been a strong rotation for the Gophers to start games, even if it takes a little while to get going.

6. Atta way, Dupree. Sophomore guard McBrayer looks like a much better player this season. He averages just 5.9 points per game last season. So far in 12 games this year, he's more than doubled that mark to 12.1 points per game. It's a smaller sample size this early (12 games to last year's 27), but his numbers across the board are much improved. The native of Queens, N.Y., scored a career-high 21 points last week against LIU Brooklyn. He's also hit double-digits in the points column nine times.

7. Depth on the bench. Besides the main starting five, the Gophers have some support on the bench, too. Bakary Konate is one of those guys. He's second on the team in blocks with 13 and has four steals. He has 28 points and 44 rebounds in his average of nine minutes a game.

8. Springs-board. Akeem Springs might surprise opponents sometimes because it seems he doesn't have a problem taking a shot from anywhere on the court. He's shooting just 37.4 percent from the field but leads the team with 25 3-pointers and shoots 82.4 percent from the foul line. He's been a little up and down this season, either scoring just a couple points or hitting double digits.

9. Second-half team. A few times, the Gophers have been a bit slow out of the gate but still managed a halftime lead. Then by the second half, they've found another gear. Their points are slightly better overall in the second half 438-482. This tale of two halves was definitely the case in the 77-57 victory over Northern Illinois. The Gophers had just a six-point edge at the half before putting up 48 points in the final 20 minutes.

10. Lynch a-Leaping. The 6-foot-10 center, redshirt junior Lynch transferred from Illinois State and has been a huge addition to the Gophers. His defense with rebounds and blocks are the most positively-glaring marks for Lynch on the stats sheet. He leads the Big Ten and ranks sixth nationally in blocks with 40 on the season and an average of 3.6 per game. He's helped bring the Gophers to near the top of the conference in the team category for blocks as well, with 6.7 per game. He's missed just one game with an ankle injury but has started all 11 he's played.

11. Eleven Gophers victories. It started with six wins in a row to begin the season before the only hiccup, a 75-67 loss at Florida State. Their largest margin of victory was 37 points in a 86-49 win over Georgia Southern. They're outscoring opponents on average 76.7 to 63.8. They're undefeated at home and as it stands right now, they're tied for second with Rutgers in the Big Ten with that 11-1 record. Maryland is 12-1.

12. Murph on the boards. Jordan Murphy leads the team in rebounding (7.7 per game), defensive boards (5.3 per game) and offensive boards (2.3 per game). He's had four double-doubles this season as well.

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- *Topgunn*

I think Eric Curry is a tremendous guy off the bench. He can score, shoots free-throws well, rebound and block a shot or two and at 6:9 provides good size off the bench with Konate. Gopher Basketball is fun again.