

## COLLEGE SPORTS BRIEFS »

# USU finalizes its men's basketball coaching staff

THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

Aggies men's basketball coach Jerrod Calhoun is rounding out his staff.

This week, USU announced the hiring of associate head coach Eric Haut, whose resume includes time as the associate head coach at Northern Kentucky and an assistant at Kent State.

"We know Eric for over 20 years and played against him in college," Calhoun said in a news release. "He was a key member of Kent State's Elite Eight basketball team and has worked with some excellent coaches during his professional career. He will do a tremendous job for us here at Utah State in all aspects, including recruiting and coaching on the defensive end of the floor."

The Aggies have also added assistant coaches Ben Asher, Mantoris Robinson and Eric Daniels.

Asher spent the last three seasons with Calhoun at Youngstown State, while Robinson was part of that same staff for the last two seasons.

"Mantis was part of my original staff at Fairmont State as a graduate assistant and has worked with some excellent coaches along his journey," Calhoun said in a news release. "He did a tremendous job for us at Youngstown State, and he will be one of our lead catalysts for our defense working with Eric Haut."

Daniels, meanwhile, will head north from Weber State.

When we arrived in Logan, we wanted to make sure we had the state of Utah in recruiting and Eric will help lead that charge," Calhoun said in a news release. "He has worked with some great coaches at Weber State and Utah Valley and has been tremendous thus far here. He is a great addition to our staff and will work on the offensive side of the floor."

Daniels spent the past five seasons as an

assistant at Weber.

"I could not be more excited to be joining Coach Calhoun and the men's basketball program at Utah State," Daniels said. "Being from the state of Utah, I know the transition here at Utah State is very rich, and I am humbled and honored to be part of it."

## Utah punch NCAA ticket

Utah freshman Gabriel Palacios shot a 3-under 68 to lead the Utes back to the men's golf NCAA Championships.

With the Utes on the outside looking in Wednesday in Austin, Texas, Palacios' back-nine surge helped lift his squad past Wahe Forest and BYU to secure a coveted spot in next week's championships.

"I'm so impressed by our freshmen," Utah coach Garrett Clegg said. "They were amazing today and our entire team, one-through-five, was incredible this week. I love these guys and for their hard work to be rewarded like this is so incredible. I'm extremely excited for nationals and look forward to getting these boys ready to go."

Utah freshman Sergio Jimenez shot 1-under and junior Braxton Watts finished even par to help lead the deal for the Utes.

The NCAA men's golf championships begin May 22 in Carlsbad, Calif.

## Utes get a Big 12 transfer

Former Baylor guard Miro Little is headed to Salt Lake City.

Little joins Runnin' Utes transfers Keam Daves, Maesen Madsen, and Zach Keller.

"Miro's commitment to the University of Utah men's basketball program is a big addition to the Runnin' Utes," Utah coach Craig Smith said. "His skills, leadership and knowledge of the game will make everyone around him better and will help us compete at the highest level. Miro is a winner with a relentless competitive spirit. We're excited about his future in Salt Lake City."

The 6-4 guard appeared in 34 games last season, averaging 1.7 points and 1.2 rebounds.



Arizona Coyotes goaltender Connor Ingram, right, stops a shot by the Tampa Bay Lightning's Nik Perbix during a game on Nov. 28, 2023, in Tampa, Fla. Ingram is the recipient of the NHL's 2023-24 Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy.

ROSS & FRANKLIN  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

# Utah goalkeeper receives NHL award for character

By ANDY LARSEN | The Salt Lake Tribune

Utah's newest professional sports team has one of professional sports' best stories.

On Wednesday, Utah hockey team starting goalkeeper Connor Ingram was given the 2023-24 Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy, the NHL annual award that chooses one player from the league whose story "best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship, and dedication to hockey."

Ingram has battled obsessive-compulsive disorder and become an advocate for mental health.

"Connor's journey through adversity and his unwavering commitment to the game of hockey truly embodies the essence of the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy," Bill Armstrong, Utah's general manager, said in a statement. "Since his return, Connor has not only excelled on the ice, but has emerged as an inspiration to hockey players across the globe as he continues to tell his story and emphasize the importance of seeking support during life's darkest moments. We are immensely proud of Connor and honored to have him represent our team as this year's winner."

Three years ago, Ingram was on his way up hockey's minor leagues, looking to become a goaltender at the highest level. He was on the Nashville Predators' "taxi squad" during the pandemic, essentially a reserve in case players were missing due to COVID-19. But Ingram wasn't in a good place. He was dealing with undiagnosed

obsessive-compulsive disorder. He said he fought related alcoholism and depression, the need to complete every task, and the crippling fear of catching disease. His career — and his life — were on the ropes.

One January day, he walked into the team's practice rink and told them he needed help. That day, he was put on a flight to California.

There, he committed to spending 40 days in an inpatient treatment center for his OCD.

"I did a lot of work in there with different exposure therapies," Ingram explained. "You're doing things that you don't want to. You've got to get comfortable with the uncomfortable, it's kind of how to deal with OCD," he continued. "So there was a lot of work and a lot of days that I didn't enjoy, but it obviously helped me through it."

Nine months from the day he stepped into the inpatient facility, he started his first game with the Nashville Predators.

Ingram spent the rest of that season with the Predators before moving to the Arizona Coyotes beginning in the 2022-23 season. Expected to be a backup or even further down the depth chart, Ingram instead worked his way up with impressive performances, especially as the calendar turned to 2024. He finished the season with a .907 save percentage and a 2.91 goals-against average, tying a league-best six shutout mark.

Ingram will receive the award on stage in six weeks on June 27, when the 2024 NHL Awards will be televised on ESPN.

## Gilgeous-Alexander

Continued from C6

As a rookie, Gilgeous-Alexander shared a locker room with Patrick Beverley, Lou Williams, Montrezl Harrell and Avery Bradley. They snuck into the first round and pushed the Kevin Durant-era Warriors to six games. Gilgeous-Alexander averaged 28.8 minutes that season. In the bubble, the Thunder finished as the fifth seed and lost to the Rockets in a seven-game, first-round series. Gilgeous-Alexander said, besides Game 4 in Dallas on Tuesday night, that Game 7 was probably the biggest prior game of his career.

"I've just grown through experiences," he said. "That first (Thunder) year, there was a lot of personalities and leaders on that team. Chris Paul, Dennis Schröder, a lot of guys that lead in their own way, do it at a high level. To be able to sit back my second year in the NBA and watch that, and learn from it and then ultimately do it my way."

### The path was cleared for him'

The Thunder hit the acceleration button on their rebuild that offseason. They traded Paul, Schröder, Steven Adams and Gallinari, making Gilgeous-Alexander the lead ballhandler, lead scorer and unquestioned leader of their next era, providing a lower-stakes environment to develop without contending pressure. Daigneault stepped into the head coaching seat.

"The path was cleared for him," Daigneault said. "When those guys go away, it's just you. Circumstance, if ripens. Then to his credit, he grabbed the wheel."

Dort was an undrafted two-way player during the bubble season, playing himself into a four-year, \$5.4 million contract entering that next season. But he used his initial financial boost to buy his family a home back in Montreal.

"I still had enough money to get me a decent house out here," Dort said. "But everything was shut down and we couldn't really do anything. Restaurants were shuttered. Areas were empty. Life was lonely. Players had to test for COVID-19 on the regular. Space and friendship held increased value."

Gilgeous-Alexander, living in an Edmond, Okla., mansion, told Dort to move into his house. He had plenty of room. It was his first act as a franchise face, it was a pretty substantial one. Dort accepted.

"He offered for me to stay there the whole season," Dort said.

Kenneth Williams joined the Thunder that season. Besides Dort, he's Gilgeous-Alexander's longest-tenured teammate. He's not like him. "I want to be him." It's an "I admire him." It speaks to everything he's accomplished and where he's at in his career.



OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER

Oklahoma City Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, bottom, competes for a loose ball with Utah Jazz center Walker Kessler during a game on Feb. 6 at the Delta Center.

Gilgeous-Alexander invited Jean Williams to work out with him in Toronto right after the Thunder drafted Williams and again between Williams' first and second level of focus and intention in Gilgeous-Alexander's summer workouts, leading to that extra MVP-level bump this season.

Kenneth Williams has seen Gilgeous-Alexander take the film room and the scouting and game plan focus to an extra level, looking in on assignments and tendencies, which has a trickle-down to the rest of the roster.

Dort was with Gilgeous-Alexander when the Donovan Mitchell-to-the-Cleveland Cavaliers trade was announced two summers ago. Gilgeous-Alexander told him when it happened. "Good. Another All-Star out of the West." He made the All-Star team the next February.

"When he said that, I was like: 'Whoa. That's his goal now,'" Dort said. "That's where his mentality is at now."

The Thunder won 22 and 24 games his first two seasons as the lead guard, even as his talent and league status spiked. Some questioned how long Gilgeous-Alexander would remain happy in Oklahoma City. He maintained his belief in the franchise and the rebuild the entire time, signing a five-year extension without a player option. He still has three years left on his deal.

"Just like everything else he does, he's just very steadily, marginally improved as a leader over time," Daigneault said of Gilgeous-Alexander. "He's learning. He's still learning at 25. This is his first playoffs in this position."

"Everybody says you lead by example, you lead through your actions. Well, when we draft a new player, when Casson Wallace comes in the door, they go first to him. He's an All-Star, All-NBA player. Max contract. And he's in the gym early, in the gym

late, in the weight room. Major focus. The diet's amazing. Everything about his life revolves around him becoming the best player you can be."

Daigneault, a voracious New England Patriots fan from Massachusetts, consumes a ton of content about the dynasty years. He referenced a Peter King interview with Tom Brady — "about avocado ice cream or something" — as it relates to Gilgeous-Alexander.

"Brady says, 'You know, the thing I love as much as football... Something like this. I'm paraphrasing... I'm preparing to play football.' Daigneault said. "That's what this guy's like. He loves the process of becoming a great basketball player as much as being a great basketball player. When everybody walks in and that's your guy, that's the guy that has all the things that everybody wants, you see the work behind it. It's just such a tone-setter for everything."

And it allows Gilgeous-Alexander to get on a teammate in the heat of the battle because there's substance behind the fire.

"He's about the solutions," Daigneault said. "Let's get this thing fixed. Let's get this right. And he's willing to work towards that. That's the best thing about him. You have all these ups and downs in a game and in a season and it's not a catastrophe with him. He's just focused on getting that right the next possession, the next day, the next game."

The Thunder played the Raptors in Toronto way back in December 2021, the second season of the rebuild. They had a 7-16 record. Josh Gidley remembers that particular night because it was the first time, as a core, they had to deal with a defense blitzing Gilgeous-Alexander with two bodies. Gidley recalled how vocal Gilgeous-Alexander was in helping them solve the coverage.

"I'm surprised Josh remembers that," Daigneault said with a pleased smile. To him, it's an important growth point in

their climb to relevance.

Daigneault said. "We're on the road. They go bonkers. It was a Nick Nurse team. They were doubling all over the place. It was chaotic. We weren't ready for it. We were frantic."

Daigneault remembers most for their final offensive possession that night. Down two with 10 seconds left, he drew up an out-of-bounds call to get Gilgeous-Alexander an attack to the rim. Gilgeous-Alexander blew past Scottie Barnes, stopped about eight feet from the rim, drew another defender in the air with a pump fake and had a semi-open look to tie it from about eight feet out.

"We're a rebuilding team," Daigneault said. "He's trying to make his point. He hadn't been an All-Star at that point. We're in his hometown. We run a side out-of-bounds play designed for him. He gets into the lane, draws a crowd and..."

"Kicks the ball to Mike Muscala," Daigneault says with a laugh. "Muscala hits a 3. We win. And it's like, I don't know how many guys you see in the middle of the offense to take it. We're in the middle of a rebuild. It can be his moment. It'd be very easy to take that approach. But he sprays the ball to a teammate. It was like, yeah, there's something there."

Fast forward to May 2024. Gilgeous-Alexander has the Mavericks on the ropes in Game 4, having made 10 midrange jumpers en route to 34 points. He's particularly hot in the fourth quarter, drawing crowds but still sending in rainbow jumpers. He hits his 14th shot of the night with just under four minutes left.

But in closing time, he instead gets three assists, including this spray to a center, similar to the Muskala scenario. Gilgeous-Alexander gets past Washington, draws Mikea Dončić and finds Holmgren for a crucial 3.

Gilgeous-Alexander, when asked about the threat he shows in his teammates, quickly points out a late fourth-quarter possession from two days prior where he failed.

"Game 3, I shot a pull-up and missed," he said. "Probably shouldn't have shot it. It's a make or miss thing. If it goes in, I'm a hero. So I have (bad) moments. You just work through it. I just try to find myself trying to find the right balance. There's a balance that you have to find, when to attack, when to pass, when to make the right play, when to not make the right play and trust your skill. It's something that I battle with a lot and try to be really good at."

"But ultimately, this comes down to taking what the defense gives you and trusting your teammates. You need them to win at a high level, and that's clear as day. I want to win at that high level, so there is no option." Gilgeous-Alexander's next lead assist against the Mavericks after Dončić and company went into Oklahoma City late Wednesday and ripped back homecourt.

"Our mood won't change," said Gilgeous-Alexander. "Our mentality won't change."