

Portal to a New Era: How Villanova Basketball Utilized the Transfer Portal and Its Future Effect on Recruiting



Photo Source: Jim Quinn, [Villanova Basketball](#), Flickr (Feb. 20, 2023)

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Introduction

The Villanova men's basketball team, led by second-year head coach Kyle Neptune, was among the many prominent programs to utilize the NCAA transfer portal and bolster their roster for the upcoming 2023-24 season.¹ Over 1,500 student-athletes entered the transfer portal this past spring, with Neptune able to acquire top talent such as Tyler Burton, Hakim Hart, TJ Bamba, and Lance Ware.² Although it has become more commonplace for student-athletes to enter the transfer portal following the COVID-19 Pandemic, the NCAA Division I Council recently approved changes to shorten the notification-of-transfer windows across all sports, including a reduction from 60 to 45 days for men's and women's basketball.³

¹ See John Fanta, *Villanova, Gonzaga Strike It Rich in College Basketball Transfer Portal*, Fox Sports (May 9, 2023), <https://www.foxsports.com/stories/college-basketball/villanova-gonzaga-strike-it-rich-in-college-basketball-transfer-portal> (discussing the overview of men's college basketball programs who added new players to their rosters through the NCAA Transfer Portal).

² See *id.* (highlighting transfers Hakim Hart and TJ Bamba); See Jeff Borzello, *Tyler Burton Transferring from Richmond to Villanova*, ESPN (May 31, 2023), https://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/story/_/id/37767911/tyler-burton-transferring-richmond-villanova (discussing how former Richmond forward Tyler Burton transferred to Villanova and is set to make an immediate impact as a starter); See Hunter Shelton, *Former Kentucky Forward Lance Ware Transferring to Villanova*, Sports Illustrated (May 20, 2023), <https://www.si.com/college/kentucky/mbb/former-kentucky-forward-lance-ware-transferring-villanova> (discussing how former Kentucky forward Lance Ware transferred to Villanova and his potential role with the team).

³ See Meghan Durham Wright, *DI Council Approves Changes to Notification-of-Transfer Windows*, NCAA (Oct. 4, 2023), <https://www.ncaa.org/news/2023/10/4/media-center-di-council-approves-changes-to-notification-of-transfer->

Villanova's Transferees

Villanova basketball's new starting rotation in November will likely be comprised of three transfers: Tyler Burton, a forward from Richmond University who averaged 19 points and 7.4 rebounds on his way to a second-team All-Atlantic 10 selection last season; TJ Bamba, a guard from Washington State University who averaged 15.8 points per game as a Junior; and Hakim Hart, a forward from the University of Maryland who averaged 11.4 points on 48% shooting from the field as a Senior.⁴ Lance Ware, a former 4-star recruit who was given minimal opportunity in three years at the University of Kentucky, will finally have an opportunity to break into the starting rotation and challenge returning Sophomore Mark Armstrong for minutes.⁵ Burton, Bamba, and Hart were all top-100 transfers in this year's transfer portal, and provide much needed reinforcement to a program that had its worst overall season since 2012 and missed the NCAA Tournament.⁶

Outlook on Villanova's Upcoming Season

Prior to the additions through the transfer portal, Villanova appeared to be heading toward another season of mediocrity, where defending national champion Connecticut would dominate the Big East Conference.⁷ However, Coach Neptune has seemingly brought the program back to the forefront of college basketball discussion, where some experts predict Villanova to be the 13th best team heading into the season, which begins next month.⁸ Adding Burton, Hart, and Bamba alongside Villanova veterans Eric Dixon and Justin Moore make for one of the most experienced starting lineups in the country, and the team's bench rivals the depth that was present during their national championship runs in both 2016 and 2018.⁹

Recent Changes to Transfer Portal Rules

Despite the recent success that some programs have enjoyed via the transfer portal, the NCAA just recently approved changes that will limit the amount of time student-athletes will have to decide on their future school.¹⁰ Formerly, men's and women's basketball student-athletes had a 60 consecutive-day window to enter their name into the transfer portal.¹¹ Now, the transfer portal

[windows.aspx](#). (explaining how the NCAA and student athletes compromised in the middle between a proposed 30-day window and the former 60-day window).

⁴ See *supra* note 2 (highlighting previous statistics of transfer student athletes in their prior seasons).

⁵ See *supra* note 2 (detailing how transfer Lance Ware is set to fit in on Villanova's newly constructed roster).

⁶ See *supra* note 2 (describing how the departure of longtime coach Jay Wright led to the worst season for Villanova basketball since 2012).

⁷ See *supra* note 1 (highlighting that the University of Connecticut, a main competitor to Villanova in the Big East Conference, had recently won the 2023 NCAA Championship).

⁸ See Jeff Borzello, *Way-Too-Early Top 25: Who, finally, is the No. 1 team for 2023-24?*, ESPN (Oct. 9, 2023), https://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/story/_/id/36058691/2023-24-way-too-early-top-25-men-college-basketball-rankings (laying out a preseason projection on the top-25 best men's basketball programs heading into the season).

⁹ See *supra* note 8 (predicting that Villanova's experience will have them competing for a Big East championship this upcoming season).

¹⁰ See *supra* note 3 (announcing the newly approved changes of the notification-of-transfer windows for all Division I sports).

¹¹ See *id.*

window will open the Monday following Selection Sunday in March, and remain open for 45 days.¹² The NCAA justified its rationale for the change, stating that “a 45-day window that concludes on or before May 1 best enables coaches to understand their current rosters, provides stability for student athletes remaining at the school as they prepare for summer basketball, and encourages student-athletes who intend to transfers to do so before final exams and summer application deadlines at most campuses.”¹³ The Council also approved a notification-of-transfer deadline of May 1 for graduate transfers of fall and winter sports, which includes basketball.¹⁴

Implications of Transfer Rule Changes

While data shows that 61% of student-athletes who transfer are entered into the NCAA Transfer Portal within the first 30 days of the notification-of-transfer window, the new rule changes will ultimately limit the time for student-athletes to make informed decisions about their athletic and academic careers.¹⁵ For example, the Kentucky Wildcats lost in the second-round of last year’s NCAA Tournament on March 19, 2023, a game which saw Villanova transfer Lance Ware contribute with a basket in nine minutes off the bench.¹⁶ Under the newly accepted rule changes, Ware would have had just 6 weeks to process his emotions after the team’s loss, hold difficult conversations with family, friends, coaches, and staff to decide whether he wanted to return to Kentucky for another season, and enter his name into the portal. Although it may seem like a lot of time, each student-athlete processes their emotions at varying speeds. Further, coaches may not be as receptive to hearing a player’s intent to transfer immediately following an NCAA Tournament loss. For players who compete in the National Championship, which is held in early April every season, this timeline would be reduced to less than a month. While the NCAA’s attempts to corral the transfer portal are understandable, it is yet to be seen whether the accepted rule changes will negatively affect student-athletes.

¹² See Trent Wood, *NCAA Transfer Portal is Going to Look Different Going Forward Thanks to Some Rule Changes*, Deseret News (Oct. 4, 2023), <https://www.deseret.com/2023/10/4/23903924/ncaa-transfer-portal-is-going-to-look-different-going-forward-thanks-to-some-rule-changes>.

¹³ See *supra* note 3 (justifying the reduction to a 45-day window).

¹⁴ See *supra* note 3 (noting the update to the graduate transfer window).

¹⁵ See *supra* note 3 (justifying the reduction to a 45-day window).

¹⁶ See Box Score, *Kentucky Wildcats v. Kansas State Wildcats*, ESPN (Mar. 19, 2023), https://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/boxscore/_/gameId/401522180 (listing Lance Ware’s contribution in Kentucky’s NCAA Tournament loss).