



# NCAA BASKETBALL

FROM ONE OF THE NATIONS TOP SPORTS HANDICAPPER

**Thursday, March 16, 2023**

## **ROUND 1**

### **DUKE vs. ORAL ROBERTS**

**Game Time: 7:10 PM EST**

**Broadcast: CBS**

**Game Pick: ORAL ROBERTS +7**

#### **GAME ANALYSIS**

# 5 seed Duke will open NCAA play in Orlando Florida against the # 12 seed Oral Roberts. The Golden Eagles had a great run in the 2021-22 NCAA Tournament. They pulled off a first-round upset of No. 2 Ohio State as a 15-seed. The run didn't end there, either. They went on to beat No. 7 Florida to advance to the Sweet 16, where they fell to Arkansas. Max Abmas, Oral Robert's star stud is still there and he's going to pose a real problem for the Blue Demons. Their very good coach Paul Mills is still there even though he could have easily moved on. That means that Oral Roberts has a consistent culture and a quality experienced team which is rare in NCAAB nowadays.

This season Abmas is still leading the way for an Oral Roberts squad that went undefeated in conference play. The senior guard is averaging 22.2 points per game. His help comes from senior big man Connor Vanover, who, at 7-3, is one of the biggest players competing in the NCAA Tournament.

Abmas is an incredible scorer and Vanover is a monster to match up against, but the Blue Devils have the size and length to disrupt both players. Junior guard Jeremy Roach has proved he can elevate his game in March, and he and freshman guard Tyrese Proctor will be able to contain Abmas.

While Duke is largely known for its defense, the Golden Eagles are the opposite, whose strength is their offense. Oral Roberts ranked fourth in the country last season in scoring and this year has been more of the same as the team averages more than 84 points per game while shooting 48 percent from the field, 78 percent from the line, and 36 percent from the outside.

The offense isn't just productive, it's also efficient, ranking seventh in the country in effective field goal percentage and first overall in turnover percentage. The Golden Eagles rank eighth in the country in two-point field goal shooting, hitting 56.6 percent of the shots they take inside the arc. On the other side of the ball the team has improved from last season, but still ranks outside the Top 100 in adjusted defensive efficiency.

The Blue Devils are riding one of the nation's longest winning streaks with nine straight including six to finish off the regular season as well as winning their last 3, leading to an ACC championship in Greensboro last weekend. Freshman Kyle Filipowski was named the tournament MVP after averaging a near double-double, with Jeremy Roach landing First Team honors and teammate Dereck Lively landing on the Second Team.

Duke will look to build on last year's Final Four run, despite replacing eleven players from the 2022 roster not to mention their Hall of Fame Head Coach. First year head coach John Scheyer has had success in the tournament both as a player (championship in 2010) and an assistant (championship in 2015, Final Four in 2022), and will look to repeat that success with a team of his own. He and his staff have engineered a dramatic turnaround from early February, when the team lost in blowout fashion to Miami and then dropped a heartbreaker on the road in overtime to Virginia.

There is no doubt Oral Roberts will be facing their stiffest test this season. But as I wrote about in the beginning, they had a similar situation in 2021-2022. The only difference this year is that they are more experienced, and they know what it's like to be successful on the big stage. They should have played a more difficult non-conference schedule this season, but I wouldn't hold that against them. Oral Roberts still took care of business.

Duke will be a tough out, but with 4 talented freshmen in their lineup and their leader Jeremy Roach their oldest player, a junior and a first year coach, the Blue Devils inexperience in this kind of pressure cooker situation could make this game a lot tighter than the 7 points we will be grabbing with an Oral Roberts who is hungry to continue their recent success in the NCCA Tournament.

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