With the 20010-11 college basketball season at or just past the quarter pole it is a good time to take a look at some of the Mid-American Conference Player of the Year candidates to see how things are shaking out.

There are no David Kools this season…players clearly dominating the conference statistically…and with conference play right around the corner the numbers could slide a touch as teams are more familiar with their competition, but a couple of players have put up huge numbers thus far. Here is how I have my player of the year candidates ranked, from fifth to the player I think would win the award were it handed out today.

5. Trey Zeigler, 6-foot-5 freshman guard, Central Michigan: Zeigler has been as advertised thus far. He came into the conference as one of the highest-rated recruits in conference history and has delivered on those expectations. Zeigler is averaging 15.9 points per game, second on the team behind senior Jalin Thomas. Zeigler has done a little bit of everything, pulling down 5.6 rebounds per game, shooting 89.1 percent from the free throw line, 47.4 percent from 3-point range and blocking one shot per contest. Zeigler is one of the better defensive rebounding guards in the conference, grabbing 4.3 defensive rebounds per game. He also has played big minutes for the Chips, averaging 32.6 minutes per contest. Zeigler's Chippewas, however, have

a disappointing 2-6 record this season.

4. Justin Greene, 6-8 junior forward, Kent State: Greene is a big reason the Golden Flashes sit atop the MAC East standings with conference play set to begin soon. He is fourth in the conference in scoring at 18.1 points per game, sixth in rebounding at 7.0 per contest and fourth in field goal percentage at 59.5. As a big man who plays the low post quite a bit, Greene is a good enough free throw shooter at 79.6 percent that he punishes teams for fouling him in the paint. Greene is also a strong defender, blocking 1.5 shots per game and rebounding the ball well on the defensive side, pulling down 5.0 defensive rebounds per contest.

The Golden Flashes have just one senior on their roster, Rodriguez Sherman, so Greene will have to play even better if Kent hopes to be in the MAC East title hunt.

3. Brandon Bowdry, 6-6 senior forward, Eastern Michigan: Despite his team winning just one game so far this season, Bowdry has come out of the gate strong. He is second in the conference in scoring at 21.7 points per game and leads the MAC in rebounding at 10.1 pulls per contest (the only player in the league to average a double-double). He also plays big minutes for the 5-3 Bobcats, averaging 33.4 per contest.

Bowdry, at 6-6, is undersized for a power forward in Division I basketball but is a hard worker and instinctive rebounder. He is also the kind of player an offense does not have to run a lot of plays for, getting a lot of his scoring from put-backs and when the Eagles toss it down low to him and get out of his way. Bowdry is a banger that plays much bigger than he actually is, but time will tell if he can keep it up for an entire season.

2. Xavier Silas, 6-5 senior guard, Northern Illinois: Silas is a pure scorer that can fill it up from anywhere on the floor. He is quick enough to take his defender off the dribble and also is the top perimeter shooter in the conference. He leads the MAC in scoring at a gaudy 26.3 points per game and has a very strong shooting percentage for a guard at 58.8 percent (fifth in the MAC). Silas is a sharpshooter from beyond the 3-point arc, connecting on 16 of 31 attempts for a league-leading 51.6 percent. He also is good from the free throw line, shooting 89.4 percent from the charity stripe…good enough for second in the conference. Silas is an above-average defender as well, pilfering 1.5 steals per contest.

The Huskies currently sit at 2 wins and four losses. The big reason for this is that Silas has virtually no offensive help. He is the only NIU player to average double figures in points. Nate Rucker, second on the team in scoring, averages just 8.3 points per contest. Silas cannot do it alone and will need more help than he has been getting for NIU to finish over .500 in the conference.

Player of the Year: D.J. Cooper, 5-11 sophomore guard, Ohio University: Cooper is proving that his dominance in the MAC Tournament last season was no fluke. In fact, if you were in a fantasy basketball league that used just Mid-American Conference players, Cooper would be the top pick in the draft, hands down. He does a little bit of everything and does it all very well. He is third in the conference in scoring at 19.8 points per game. He has also snares 5.9 rebounds per contest (second on the team) and leads the MAC in assists at 6.8 per game. Cooper sits second in the conference with 3.0 steals per game and, at 5-11, is second on the Bobcats with four blocked shots.

Cooper has led Ohio in scoring in five of its eight contests this season as the team is 5-3. If Nick Kellogg or DeVaughn Washington can pick up the pace a bit the Bobcats could, yet again, be a team to be reckoned with in March when tournament time rolls around.