The Mid-American Conference 2010-11 schedule is winding down with about 10 games remaining for each team, so it is a good time to look at how the teams stack up.

Here are my MAC power rankings, and if you would have told me before the season started that they would look as they do this late in the season I would have probably told you to lay off the heavy medication.

It has been an exciting season thus far, and Akron coach Keith Dambrot was 100% correct when he recently said the teams in the conference, from top to bottom, are very similar. There really aren't any easy wins on the MAC schedule this season, and no one has really gotten hot and put themselves in position to take command of either division. The East, in particular, is brutal and any one of the six teams could end up with the division crown. There is little doubt the East crown will be decided in the final weekend of the regular season.

Here are the rankings as of 1/29:

1. Buffalo Bulls (13-6 overall, 5-2 MAC) – In the preseason no one expected Buffalo to be a factor in the race for the MAC East crown, but Reggie Witherspoon has his Bulls playing as hard as anyone in the conference. The reason Buffalo has been so successful this season is discipline. UB runs its offensive sets patiently and works for a good look virtually every time down the floor, and as a result leads the conference in field goal percentage at 48.4%. The Bulls also lead in 3-point percentage at 38.5%. Meanwhile, Buffalo plays a stingy, attacking defense that forces opponents to play virtually mistake-free basketball if it wants to have a chance to win. The backcourt tandem of Zach Filzen and Byron Mulkey has been the best in the conference this season, with Mulkey ninth in scoring at 14.5, third in assists at 4.89 and first in

steals at 2.84. Filzen is eighth in scoring at 15.1 and leads the MAC in 3-pointers made with 67. Down low junior center Mitchell Watt has been dominant at times. He is third in the conference in blocked shots (2.26 per contest) and blocked six in the first half in Buffalo's blowout home victory over Kent. After a pair of losses to open its MAC slate, at home against Bowling Green and at Miami, Buffalo has reeled off five straight conference wins, including road wins at Ohio and Western Michigan. Buffalo will find out a lot about itself in February, where its schedule gets difficult. In Feb. the Bulls will have to travel to Muncie to take on Ball State Feb. 5, and will face both Kent State and Akron on the road Feb. 24 (Kent) and Feb. 26 (Akron).

2. Kent State Golden Flashes (13-7, 4-2) – In the world of sports there are very few things of which you can be absolutely certain year after year. For instance, we know LeBron James will hear the boos for the rest of his career when his team plays in Cleveland. We know the Pittsburgh Steelers will get the benefit of every bad call because, for some reason, the NFL feels like it owes the Rooney Family something. We also know, without a doubt, the New York Yankees, Boston Red Sox and Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim will have the top payrolls in the Major Leagues from here to eternity. One thing we also know is that, year after year, Kent State will be in the hunt for the MAC East title. The Golden Flashes are at it again. A win at home today against Toledo in the MAC Center will put Kent into a three-way tie for first place in the division, tied with Buffalo and Bowling Green. One huge factor working in Kent's favor is its schedule. The Golden Flashes have 10 games remaining, six at home and four on the road, against teams with a combined record of 85-115 (42.5 winning percentage). Kent also has Buffalo, the team that embarrassed them 79-54 a couple of weeks ago, at the MAC Center Feb. 24. The battle-tested Flashes have won a couple in a row after that loss, both by double digits against quality opponents, and appear to be peaking at the right time.

3. Ball State Cardinals (13-7, 5-2) – The Cardinals were 5-0 in the conference before the crossover games began, but have lost two in a row to MAC East opponents, both at home. First Kent dominated Ball State in a 66-53 win, then Ohio knocked off the Cardinals, 61-60, on their home floor. Junior forward Jarrod Jones has been among the top players in the conference this season, averaging 15.4 points and 8.5 rebounds per game while shooting 52.4% from the floor. Sophomore Jauwan Scaife has chipped in 11 points and 2.8 rebounds per game, junior Randy Davis 10.3 points and 5.5 assists per game and Malik Perry, a senior, 7.2 points and 5.6 rebounds per contest, but the Cardinals need more help from their bench. Ball State should win the West, but will have to pick it up a bit if they hope to win the MAC Championship Game and advance to the NCAA Tournament.

4. Akron Zips (11-9, 2-4) – Akron is a sleeper and, in the end, could end up in very familiar territory…the MAC Championship Game. Sophomore center Zeke Marshall is getting better and better as the year goes on, but for the Zips to become one of the elite teams in the MAC Marshall has to be more aggressive on the offensive end of the floor. The Zips regular season

finale will come on March 5 against Kent at the MAC Center. This game could be for all the marbles in the East. Kent State and Akron hate each other anyway, it would be a lot of fun to see them do battle with everything on the line.

5. Bowling Green Falcons (10-11, 5-2) – The Falcons have been a difficult team to figure out. They knocked off Buffalo, in Buffalo, on Jan. 8. Then, three days later they were blown out by Kent State…losing by 17 points. They lost eight of their first nine games, but have now won eight of their last 10. The Falcons struggle to put points on the board, averaging 63.1 per contest, but play solid defense and hold their opponents around 65 points per game. Bowling Green's final three games will decide it all. They travel to Miami Feb. 26 before hosting Kent (March 1) and Buffalo (March 5).

6. Western Michigan Broncos (11-9, 4-3) – Western Michigan will have to take care of business in its next four games…home to Kent, at Bowling Green, at Akron and at home against Ohio if its home game against Ball State March 2 is going to mean anything. The Broncos have won seven of their last 10 games to pull within one game of the division-leading Cardinals, but will have to play its best basketball of the season over the next two weeks to stay in the hunt for the West crown.

7. Ohio University (10-11, 3-4) – The Bobcats have four very winnable games before their showdown with Buffalo, in New York, on Feb. 15. However, Ohio can't afford any slip-ups.

8. Northern Illinois Huskies (7-12, 3-4) – Xavier Silas, the second-leading scorer in the nation, is worth the price of admission. The Huskies, however, haven't given him much help.

9. Miami RedHawks (9-12, 4-3) – Injuries have depleted the RedHawks, but Julian Muvenga is back for the stretch run. Miami could go on a tear, but it doesn't seem likely.

10. Central Michigan Chippewas (5-14, 2-4) – With freshman Trey Zeigler turning into the player everyone expected him to be the Chippewas are a year or two away from becoming a force in the MAC. But not this year.

11. Eastern Michigan Eagles (5-15, 2-5) – It has been a long season in Ypsilanti.

12. Toledo Rockets (4-16, 1-5) – It's been an even longer season in the Glass City.