As the 2010-11 Mid-American Conference schedule winds down, the division championship races are heating up as a plethora of teams remain in contention to grab either a share of or an outright division title.

Most teams have six conference games remaining, plus an ESPN BracketBuster contest, and some have a much easier road home than others. With the East sweeping the West in five cross-division games last night things remain on par for a wild final few weeks.

Kent State, fresh off its 80-70 win over Eastern Michigan, sits atop the MAC East standings at 7-2 in the conference, but its remaining schedule has the Flashes hitting the road often and having to hold serve against their toughest conference foes at home. Buffalo, Miami and Bowling Green, all chasing the Flashes in the East standings one single game behind, have easier schedules remaining but have to make up that game (or half-game in Buffalo's case) in the standings and can't afford to lose a game they should win.

The West has settled into a two-team race as Ball State and Western Michigan will fight it out down to the wire. Those teams square off March 3 in Kalamazoo in what could be a

winner-take-all contest.

Here is a look at the contenders:

EAST DIVISON

Kent State (7-2 MAC, 16-7 Overall) – Remaining schedule: 2/12 @ NIU, 2/16 @ Mia, 2/18 @ Drexel, 2/21 @ WMU, 2/24 Buffalo, 2/26 Ohio, 3/1 @ BG, 3/5 Akron.

Since its humiliating 79-54 loss in Buffalo Jan. 19 the Golden Flashes have reeled off five consecutive wins…all by double-figures. Kent was bolstered by the return of sharpshooter Carlton Guyton, who missed five games. His return gave Kent coach Geno Ford some much-needed scoring punch off the bench and also opened up the inside for power forward Justin Greene. Since Guyton's return Greene is averaging 15.2 points per game while Randal Holt, another sharp-shooting Kent guard, has flourished with Guyton back on the floor spreading out the defense. Holt has scored 13.8 points per game since the Buffalo game while Guyton has tossed in 10.4 points per contest.

This is the good news for the Flashes. The bad news? A murderous schedule down the stretch.

The Golden Flashes will hit the road for their next four games, including an always-tough trip to Oxford to challenge the RedHawks. After the four-game road trip the Flashes will have to contend with Buffalo at home, the team that handed it its last loss in blowout fashion. This will be followed by a trap game at home against Ohio before a trip to Bowling Green and a home game against rival Akron.

Kent State is in the East driver's seat, but must take care of business on the road, where they are just 2-6 this season, to remain on top of the heap.

Buffalo (7-3, 15-7) – Remaining schedule: 2/12 @ EMU, 2/15 Ohio, 2/19 Wisconsin-Milwaukee,

2/24 @ Kent, 2/26 @ Akron, 3/2 Miami, 3/5 @ Bowling Green.

The Bulls have proven they can win at home, but are just 5-5 on the road. The Bulls were the hottest team in the MAC, winning six in a row, before a 72-71 loss to Ball State in Muncie Saturday put the skids on their streak. Buffalo rebounded with a blowout home win against Central Michigan, but the loss to the Cardinals let Kent slip in front of them in the standings. The Bulls have one of the most consistent starting fives in the league, and freshman Javon McCrea off the bench is among the top freshmen in the nation, but Buffalo's season will probably come down to a two-game stretch on the road…2/24 at Kent and at Akron in James A. Rhodes Arena two nights later. They must then host Miami before ending the regular season at Bowling Green. Buffalo can control its own destiny, but it has to get on another roll.

Bowling Green (7-3, 12-12) – Remaining schedule: 2/12 @ CMU, 2/15 Akron, 2/19 @ YSU, 2/23 @ Ohio, 2/26 @ Miami, 3/1 Kent, 3/5 Buffalo.

Since starting the season by losing eight of its first nine games, Bowling Green has been one of the best teams in the conference, winning 10 of its last 14. The Falcons have just three conference losses, two on the road (at Kent and at Akron) and, the one that really hurts, at home against Western Michigan. The team the Falcons are chasing in the standings, Kent, has not lost a cross-division game in head coach Geno Ford's tenure, running the table again thus far this season, and that loss to Western could cost the Falcons dearly. One thing working in Bowling Green's favor, it has all the contenders, with the exception of Miami, coming to Anderson Arena (also known as The House that Roars). The two-game home-stand to end the season…Kent State on March 1 and Akron on March 5, could be huge for the Falcons.

Miami (7-3, 12-12) – Remaining schedule: 2/12 @ Toledo, 2/16 Kent, 2/19 @ James Madison, 2/23 @ Akron, 2/26 Bowling Green, 3/2 @ Buffalo, 3/5 Ohio.

The RedHawks leading scorer and spiritual leader, senior forward Antonio Ballard, suffered a season-ending wrist injury Jan. 27 at Central Michigan, but his team has adjusted, winning three of four since the injury. It seems like the RedHawks have had a different hero each night, but Julian Mavunga especially has turned up his game since Ballard went down. Against Ball State, in a game Miami absolutely had to have, Mavunga threw the team on his back…scoring 27 points and pulling down 11 rebounds in an 89-75 RedHawks win. Miami misses Ballard, but has been rallying around his absence. Those emotions will have to carry on because the RedHawks have road games against Akron and Buffalo down the stretch, as well as hosting East-leading

Kent Feb. 16.

WEST DIVISION

Ball State (6-4, 14-9) – Remaining schedule: 2/12 @ Akron, 2/15 Toledo, 2/19 @ Wofford, 2/23 EMU, 2/26 @ CMU, 3/2 @ WMU, 3/5 NIU.

The Cardinals were sailing along, sporting a 13-4 overall record and a perfect 5-0 slate in the MAC. They were being hailed as one of the surprise mid-major teams in the country and actually got some votes in the Associated Press poll. That's when Ball State's schedule against teams in the MAC East came along and knocked them silly, right after Morehead State started the slide with a 50-48 non-conference win over the Cardinals. First came a blowout home loss to Kent State. This was followed by another home loss, this one a one-point setback at the hands of Ohio. Then came another loss, an 89-75 thumping by Miami. The Cardinals were able to snap the four-game skid against Buffalo at home with a 72-71 win, but the four straight setbacks allowed Western Michigan, winners of three-of-four during that same stretch, back into the hunt. Ball State has a tough game at Akron coming up before closing out play against the East at home against Toledo. Then, after an ESPN BracketBuster game at Wofford, the Cardinals host Eastern Michigan before traveling to Central Michigan 2/26, followed by a big showdown on the road against the Broncos March 2.

Western Michigan (5-4, 12-10) – Remaining schedule: 2/12 Ohio, 2/15 @ NIU, 2/19 Ill. St., 2/21 Kent, 2/23 Toledo, 2/27 @ EMU, 3/2 Ball State, 3/5 @ CMU.

The Broncos are a game behind Ball State, but have the Cardinals coming to town March 2 for a showdown. Western Michigan has a favorable schedule the rest of the way, with five of its last eight games coming at home. Their three remaining road games, against Northern Illinois, Eastern Michigan and Central Michigan, are very winnable games. Western Michigan can't afford to look past its home game against Kent Feb. 21.