Bowling Green State University (14-19 overall, 14-19 in MAC, 6th in MAC East last season)

Bowling Green coach Louis Orr has a new playground this season. Now he hopes his team can take over that playground and bully some people around.

BG opens the new Stroh Center this season and will have one of the deeper teams in the MAC to hopefully fill the new digs. Senior forward Scott Thomas is one of the most versatile players in the conference, stuffing the stat sheet night after night, and if he can get some help from the other three returning starters the Falcons could surprise a lot of people this season.

Some people might forget that at one point last season, Bowling Green was 6-2 in MAC play and stood alone in first place in the East. They ended up dropping six of their last eight games to finish in the East cellar, but a win here or there and things could have been quite different for Orr's Falcons.

BG lost only guard Joe Jakubowski to graduation, a player that was much more important to Orr than the statistics might have indicated. Jakubowski averaged only 3.4 points and 2.0 assists per game last season, but he was a solidifying presence on the floor for BG, a system player that operated like another coach on the floor.

"We've got pretty much a veteran team. Losing Joe Jakubowski, who started for pretty much his entire four years and knew what we were doing, that's a big loss for us even though he didn't play as much as the years went on. He still knew the system and what we were doing better than anyone else," Orr said.

"We have some experienced guys that need to step up in every aspect of the game, but they do have valuable experience. We went 8-8 in the MAC last year, and in one half were 6-2 and in first place, so they know what it takes to take it to new heights."

Thomas, at 6-7, 201 pounds, is listed as a forward. However, he fills a lot of different roles for Orr's Falcons. He can put the ball on the floor and bring it up against pressure, get to the rim when he has to, knock down the 3-pointer with consistency and defend anyone on the floor.

"I think he's one of the most underrated players in our league," Orr said of Thomas. "If you look at his contributions to our team over his sophomore and junior years, he's been first or second in just about every statistical category on our team. He does a lot for our team, and I think that doesn't get as much appreciation from around the league. I think he's one of the most versatile players in our league.

"I think a big part of his game, and what he's worked at every day in practice, is shooting...his 3-point shooting. He's also worked really hard in the weight room to get stronger."

Thomas scored 11.2 points and grabbed 6.7 rebounds per game last season. He also averaged 3.5 assists and 2.0 steals in 33.6 minutes per contest.

Junior A'ustin Calhoun, a 6-7, 232-pound junior forward, will be counted on to improve on his impressive sophomore numbers. Calhoun led the team in scoring last season at 12.5 points per game and will join other returning starters Dee Brown (10.4 ppg) and Torian Oglesby, an undersized 6-7 center, in trying to pull the Falcons out of the East basement.

"The heart and soul of our team will be our veteran guys," Orr said. "We just want our young guys to progress. That's the main thing...to get better. But for us to be the type of team that

realizes its potential our veteran guys will be the ones that carry the load."

Orr became the second MAC coach to have a son on his team when his 6-4 offspring Chauncey Orr committed to Bowling Green. The other is Ernie Ziegler at Central Michigan, who signed his son Trey before last season.

"He's a hard worker, a talented basketball player that knows how to play and has a good understanding of the game," Orr said of his son. "He's young, but he's been around basketball all his life. (Coaching him) has been a positive, has been a unique experience and I'm thankful for that opportunity. Chauncey is a hard worker and he's a willing student. He has a good relationship with the other players, he likes the school and he's doing well academically. It's been a positive."

Orr is also looking forward to lifting the lid on the new Stroh Center.

"It's definitely created a buzz and our guys are excited about playing in it," he said of the new arena. "Our campus is excited about it, the students and the community. It's definitely been a great asset. At the end of the day anything that will excite your guys is a positive, but what you do on the court, whether it's Edison Arena or the new Stroh Center, is up to us."