

MARCH MANIA BETTING GUIDE

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SHARP WEEK

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- TRENDS FOR EVERY ROUND
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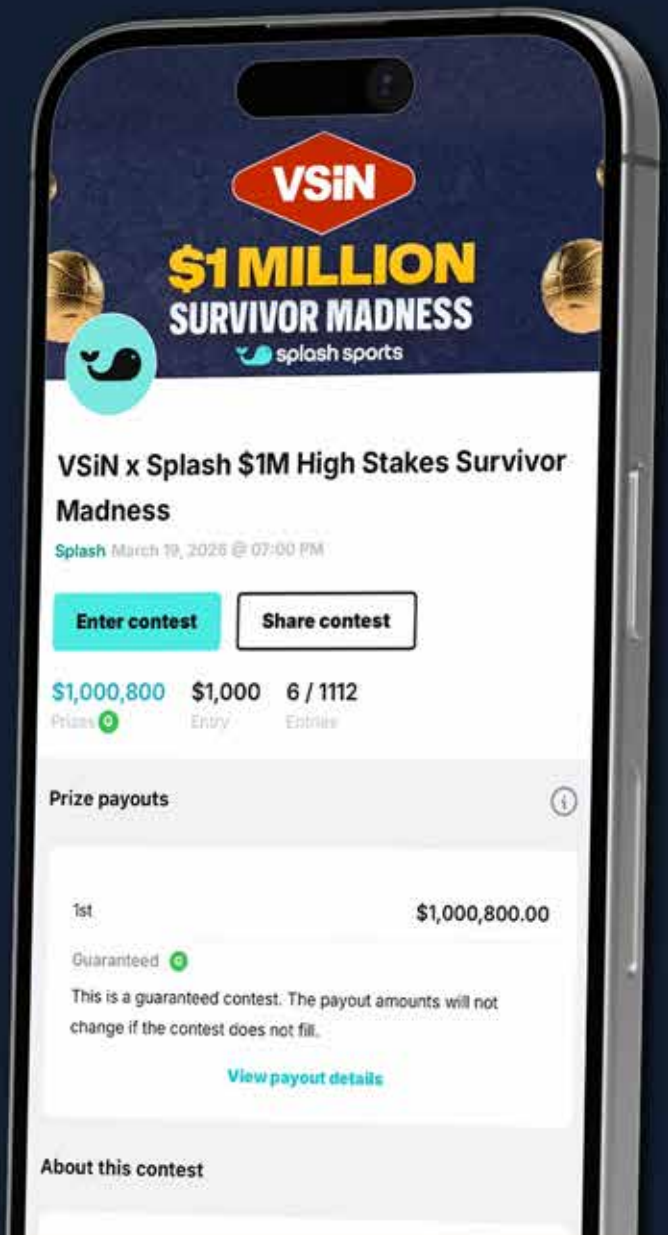
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STEVE MAKINEN'S STRENGTH RATINGS EXPLAINED

Throughout this publication you will find references to four sets of Strength Ratings. Here is an explanation of each.

- The Power Ratings (PR) are my own manually adjusted ratings updated after every game based upon analysis of live action and box scores.
- The Effective Strength Ratings (EffStr) are purely statistical ratings, using the teams' key stats against schedule strength and their previous opponents' averages. These are also adjusted for any key injuries the team had endured or faced against.
- The Bettor's Ratings (BtrRtg) are a quantified interpretation of how bettors perceive teams based upon how lines of recent games have moved and closed. The smaller number reflects a better rating.
- The Momentum Rating takes into account specifically a team's performance over its most recent games.
- The Game Grade Forecasts employ a simple forecasting technique going back and analyzing quantitative grades for every game each team played, and those grades include relevant opponent strength, location, and injury variables. They differ from a few of my other strength ratings in that they look more at recency and trending rather than body of work.

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ODDS WITHIN GUIDE ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

**ALL TEAM PREVIEWS WRITTEN BY
ADAM BURKE**

I'll start this address the same way that I started last year's. I know that Andy Williams sang about the holiday season as the "Most Wonderful Time of the Year", but if you're reading this, you know that right now has a real strong case for being the most wonderful time of the year. The March Mania Betting Guide is out and we're all excited about what the NCAA Tournament has in store.

We may not be able to use March Madness as much as we'd like, since a cease-and-desist would dampen the mood and they're pretty strict about that, but we do have the market cornered on Sharp Week and this Guide, along with our wall-to-wall coverage, is precisely why VSiN should be your home for the NCAA Tournament from the First Four to the Finals.

In this year's March Mania Guide, we've got:

- Capsules for all 68 teams from Adam Burke
- Round, seed, and conference trends, plus stats, ratings, and analysis from Steve Makinen
- Region analysis, picks, and oddsmaker insights from Matt Youmans
- Survivor and Bracket strategies from our friends at TeamRankings and PoolGenius
- Women's NCAA Tournament No. 1 seeds and long shots from Tyler Shoemaker
- Best Bets and Final Four Picks from our VSiN hosts and experts

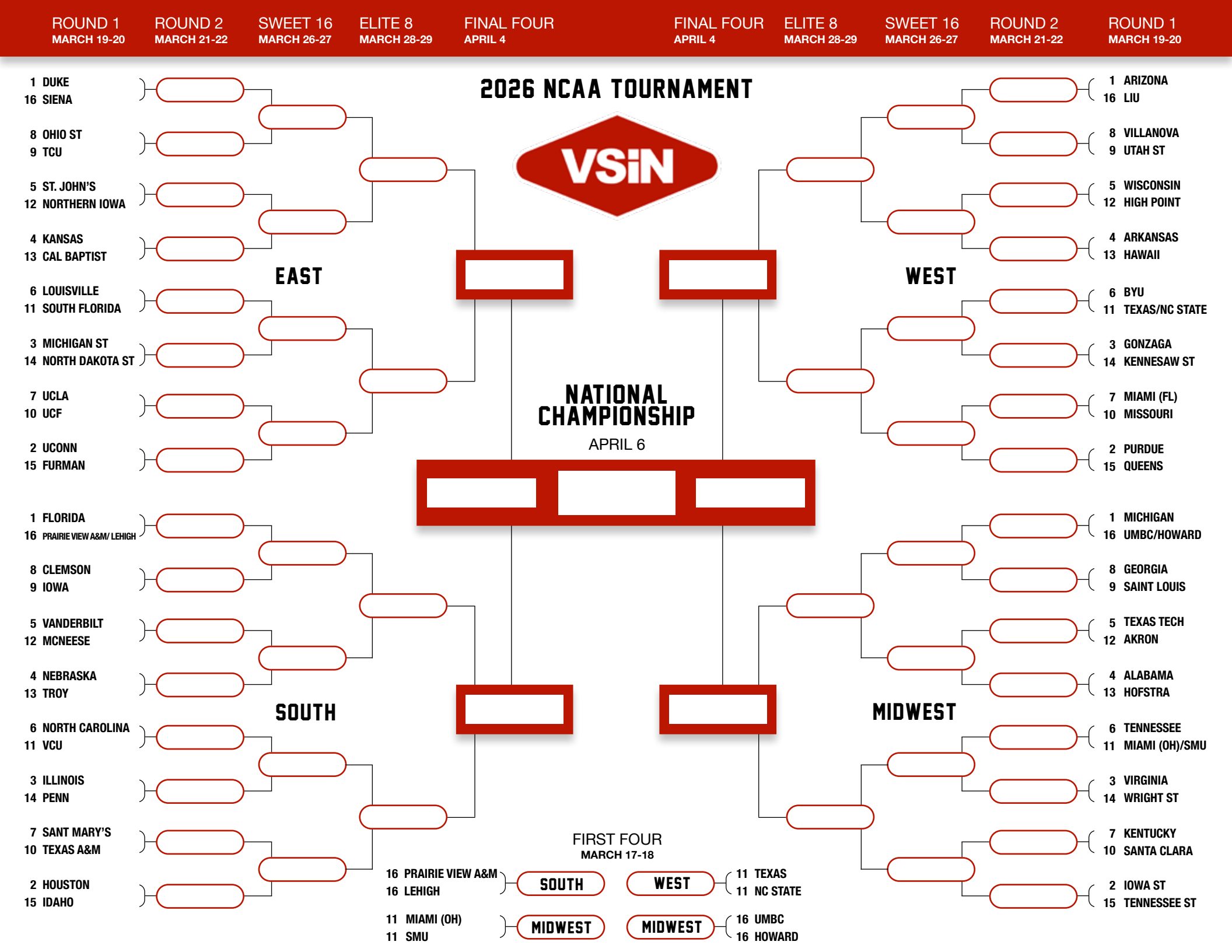
Use this Guide and the entirety of our coverage to take your shot in our FREE [VSiN March Betting Challenge](#) sponsored by EdgeBoost and ProphetX, for a piece of the \$6,000 prize pool, as well as our [\\$1 Million High Stakes Survivor Madness Contest](#) hosted by Splash Sports.

Along with daily VSiN.com content, you can check out our 24/7 broadcast channel on SiriusXM Ch. 158, YouTube TV (Sports+ Package), [YouTube.com stream](#), the [VSiN Watch App](#), [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), or wherever else you get your podcast content, and on more than 400 radio stations across the United States.



Thank you for your continued support of what we do here at VSiN, THE Sports Betting Network and happy March Madness Mania!

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VSIN EXPERT MARCH MANIA

BEST BETS

GREG PETERSON

PRAIRIE VIEW A&M VS. LEHIGH OVER 143.5

Prairie View ranks 20th in the nation in possessions per game and is 350th defensively in free throw attempts allowed per field goal attempt. Second and third chances to score should be plentiful in this matchup as Lehigh ranks 290th in defensive rebound percentage while Prairie View ranks 344th, with 33.6% of opponents' missed shots becoming offensive rebounds.

MIAMI OH +7 VS. SMU

SMU ranks 175th in points per possession allowed and is dealing with an injury to steals leader and third-leading scorer BJ Edwards, who is expected to play but is unlikely to be at 100%. Miami (OH) ranks eighth in points per possession in games played away from home and will get to play this game in their home state of Ohio.

HAWAII VS. ARKANSAS UNDER 160.5

Hawaii ranks ninth in the nation in points per possession allowed on defense. Arkansas has been explosive offensively, ranking third in points per possession overall, but both teams defend the three-point line well. Arkansas ranks 56th in opponent three-point shooting percentage at 31.7% while Hawaii ranks 21st at 30.5%.

PENNSYLVANIA +24.5 VS. ILLINOIS

Pennsylvania leads the country in three-point shooting percentage away from home at 41.8% and should not be under much defensive pressure with Illinois generating the fewest turnovers per possession of any team in the nation. On defense, Pennsylvania ranks 57th in opponent three-point shooting percentage at 31.7%. Illinois ranks 10th in the nation in percentage of field goal attempts that come from three-point range in games played away from home.

TENNESSEE STATE +25 VS. IOWA STATE

Tennessee State has not been to the NCAA Tournament in over 30 years, but they bring tournament experience with head coach Nolan Smith, who played at Duke. Both Tennessee State and Iowa State share a defensive strength in generating turnovers, with Tennessee State ranking 24th in turnovers per possession forced while Iowa State ranks fourth. Iowa State also struggles at the free throw line, ranking 340th in free throw shooting percentage at 67.2%, while Tennessee State ranks 317th in opponent free throw attempts per field goal attempt.

MATT YOUMANS

FLORIDA TO REACH ELITE EIGHT (-160)

A humbling blowout loss to Vanderbilt in an SEC tournament semifinal should motivate the defending NCAA champions. Florida had a 12-game win streak, including a 111-77 victory over Arkansas, before falling to the Commodores. Gators coach Todd Golden has turned into an obnoxious clown, but there's a lot to like about his team, especially junior forwards Alex Condon and Thomas Haugh. It's a team that ranks in the top 10 in offensive and defensive efficiency. Florida should have no problem getting past the Clemson-Iowa winner in the second round and then gets a likely revenge game against Vanderbilt.

ST. JOHN'S TO REACH SWEET 16 (-105)

This is Rick Pitino's time to make a deep March run. Pitino is 4-1 in his last five meetings with UConn coach Danny Hurley, punctuated by the Red Storm's beatdown of the Huskies in the Big East tournament. The Big East might be weak, but UConn is not and Pitino's team is the real deal. St. John's has some offensive shortcomings, yet there is no doubt about its defense and toughness, which is personified by senior big man Zubby Ejiofor. The Red Storm will get a first-round fight from Northern Iowa before taking down a Kansas team that's not so tough away from home. St. John's will prove it deserved better than a 5 seed and a trip to San Diego.

STEVE MAKINEN

VCU +2.5 VS. NORTH CAROLINA

On my Shared Traits article of teams most likely to be upset in the first round, North Carolina lands at the top of the chart, and I'm not sure there is a worse 11 seed the #6 Tar Heels could match up against than VCU. The #6-#11 matchup is always a great spot to find upsets, but in my opinion this one really stands out. My Game Grade Forecasts say that the wrong team is favored here. None of my other ratings suggest this line should get to 2.5 by any means. If UNC had Caleb Wilson, this might be a different story as he would have given them a clear front-court edge. Without that, I'm not sure there are many areas in which UNC has an edge, particularly with as well as VCU shoots.

VANDERBILT -11 VS. MCNEESE

With McNeese's obvious strength being the ability to create havoc defensively and force turnovers, there are very few teams they would probably least rather play than Vanderbilt. The Commodores' strength is in their backcourt. As a team they turned the ball over the eighth-fewest times in the country by percentage. Vandy is also hot right now, seemingly picking it back up at the right time after falling from 16-0 to 22-7 at one point. I think Vanderbilt has a nice chance to make a run in the South Region and it starts here.

IOWA STATE +245 TO REACH FINAL FOUR

I was quite surprised to see Iowa State as the team with the best combined ranks average of the 15 stat/strength measurables I track for my Shared Traits article. The Cyclones are at or near the top for both the Final Four and Champion potential qualification charts. ISU shoots the ball as well as anybody, they play fast through their guards, and they have a tremendous amount of veteran presence. It is this continuity, and recent level of play, that finds me giving them the edge over Michigan, their biggest road block in their route to the Final Four.

PURDUE +105 TO REACH THE ELITE EIGHT

At the outset of the season, Purdue was one of the top threats to eventually be a Final Four qualifying team, and at this point, I wouldn't discount those chances. The Boilermakers are a veteran team that has a ton of tournament experience and has a player in PG Braden Smith that is capable of putting a team on his back. This is another team that started fast (17-1) with some highly impressive huge victories. They lost seven of their next 13 games but then finished strong by winning the Big Ten title. HC Matt Painter seems to be pushing the timing buttons right. Statistically this team is very good, and boasts an incredible 2.195 assist to turnover ratio. They won't get rattled.

WES REYNOLDS

TCU +2.5 VS. OHIO STATE

Bruce Thornton, who became the Buckeyes' all-time leading scorer, finally will get to play in the NCAA Tournament as he and Ohio State won four of the last five games and played their way off the bubble into a comfortable at-large selection.

TCU began February at 13-9 and also played its way off the bubble winning nine of their last 11 games including victories vs. Iowa State and Texas Tech. The Horned Frogs present a tough challenge for Thornton switching on all ball screens and throwing various hedges and traps at him. Only Iowa State and Houston, two top-five national defenses, did a better job at forcing turnovers than TCU did in Big 12 play.

Keep in mind, TCU has non-conference wins over both Florida and Wisconsin plus had Michigan on the ropes back in November immediately before the Wolverines ran through the Players Era Tournament in Las Vegas and became consensus No. 1 at that time.

NORTHERN IOWA +11 VS. ST. JOHN'S

St. John's swept both the Big East regular season and tournament crowns. Of the 68 teams in the NCAA Tournament field, the Red Storm are the team most discussed as being under-seeded at a 5 seed. While Duke is the rightful heavy favorite, St. John's is getting a fair amount of love to potentially come out of the East Region to make the Final Four.

However, St. John's has drawn a difficult matchup in the first round with Northern Iowa, who won the Missouri Valley Tournament as a 6 seed, but might have been the best team in that conference over the last month of the season.

This game presents a contrast in styles as St. John's wants to get up and down and UNI likes to slow it to a crawl ranking No. 363 in tempo. UNI does not give up much in transition or at the rim and will force St. John's (33.2% 3pt, No. 216 nationally) to beat them from the outside.

A double-digit spread looks a bit inflated here (at least partially due to the hype on Pitino and St. John's coming in here) for a game that should have fewer possessions.

HIGH POINT VS. WISCONSIN OVER 164

The Selection Committee seems to like higher-scoring games as they have matched up several high-scoring teams with each other in the first round. Six matchups have totals over 160 and this matchup is one of them.

High Point is back in the NCAA Tournament winning the Big South for the second straight year. They come into the dance with the nation's longest active winning streak (14). The Panthers are the nation's No. 3 scoring offense (90 PPG) only behind Alabama and Miami OH. The competition gets stiffer for them, as this is High Point's first matchup of the season against any team in the KenPom Top 100. However, they should get their fair share of points against a Wisconsin defense that is statistically the worst of the Greg Gard era in Madison. Gard has sacrificed some defense for a potent offense led by Nick Boyd and John Blackwell.

Last year, High Point was grinded to a halt by Purdue in the first round, but Wisconsin is a more willing participant in a higher-tempo game.

PURDUE TO REACH ELITE EIGHT +105

At the beginning of the season, Purdue was the +750 favorite to win it all. Based on the preseason expectations, the Boilermakers, led by senior backcourt mates Braden Smith and Fletcher Loyer, who have now started 140 games together, certainly disappointed as the preseason No. 1 ended up being the No. 7 seed in the Big Ten Tournament. Nevertheless, they won said tournament and took down Michigan in the final. Senior guards also win in the NCAA Tournament.

Purdue ended the regular season losing four of its last six games, but seemed to regroup and find something during those four days in Chicago. Big man Oscar Cluff was the key and has raised his play, averaging 17.3 PPG and 9.5 RPG in the Big Ten Tournament. Cluff did not score over 10 points in any of his last seven games prior to the postseason. If he continues that play, then the Boilermakers will certainly be a factor in the West Region.

The biggest issue for the Boilers is running into a team that lays over them athletically and no one in the bottom half of the draw really does that until potentially an Elite Eight matchup with likely Arizona or Arkansas.

STORMY BUONANTONY

UTAH STATE (-135) ML VS VILLANOVA

Miss me with all the "Mountain West is the worst cover conference in the tournament" trends because I don't care. I like this matchup for the Aggies who got back on track during the MW Conference Tournament & can build on it with a First Round win in the Dance. They are 4-4 in Quad 1 games to Villanova's 2-6. They also have a better NET Ranking, are 28th in CBB in Offensive Efficiency, 11th nationally on 2-point shots, hitting at nearly 60%, and can hit the 3, but don't rely on it. Villanova is a little beat up with starting forward Matt Hodge tearing his ACL and, while their backcourt is strong defensively as a whole, they rank outside of the Top 150 in both 2-point and 3-point percentage allowed. We also just saw them get bounced 78-64 in the Big East QFs to Georgetown and look like a quick out from the eye test. These seeds should probably be flipped.

VCU +2.5 VS UNC

It's no secret UNC is not the same without Top 5 pick Caleb Wilson on the court. In fact, VCU actually has a better adjusted efficiency mark than North Carolina since the Wilson injury & the Tar Heels' lone road win without him came to a bad Syracuse team that lost six straight games to end the season. VCU meanwhile has something to prove after the committee said Selection Sunday the only reason they got in was winning the A10 Tournament. They ended the season on a nice run, winning six straight and 16 of their last 17 games SU. They also covered in three of the last four and seven of the last 11, largely in a favorite role. VCU is a strong 3-point shooting team, which you like for an underdog this time of year, ranking 35th in the country from 3 to UNC's 216th in 3-point shooting allowed. They played a couple ACC teams in the early season non-con as well and were competitive, going toe-to-toe with NC State and beat Virginia Tech by 18 on a neutral.

HOUSTON TO MAKE THE ELITE EIGHT (+110)

It's a no-brainer in my mind based on the bracket that Illinois will be the matchup in the Sweet 16 in which I see Houston favored and they should win. That's not just from a matchup standpoint, but add in home court advantage coming out of the South side of the bracket with the Sweet 16 & Elite Eight site at Toyota Center in Houston. I think they are a true contender to win it all this year, so I'm also on board with a Final Four +250, National Champion 10-1.

JONATHAN VON TOBEL

HIGH POINT +10 VS. WISCONSIN

High Point doesn't fit the exact criteria of a first-round Cinderella, but it's hard not to be attracted to their profile. The Panthers head into the NCAA Tournament on the nation's longest winning streak (14), they are 66th in offensive efficiency, and 49th in tempo (69.9). High Point will be more than willing to match Wisconsin's tempo, and it should have the horses to bother a defense that allowed 113.7 points every 100 possessions to Big Ten opponents.

HOFSTRA +13 VS. ALABAMA

Unlike High Point, Hofstra has everything in its profile that can lead to a first-round upset. The Pride rank 317th in the country in tempo (64.7) and they played slightly slower in conference (64.4). They also take 43.1% of their attempts from beyond the arc while ranking 29th in the country in 3-point percentage (36.8%). In other words, Hofstra will eliminate the possessions a better team like Alabama needs to pull away, and it takes a high-value shot at a high rate. That is exactly what you need when betting an underdog in the NCAA Tournament. Just ask Jack Gohlke!

KANSAS -14.5 VS. CAL BAPTIST

I'm not entirely sure what to make of Kansas in the grand scheme of the NCAA Tournament. But, I do know that I believe this is a matchup nightmare for Cal Baptist. The Lancers are an abysmal offensive team. They are 191st in the country in offensive efficiency (107.9), 302nd in the country in effective field goal percentage (48.6%) and 318th in 2-point percentage (47.7%). Kansas was not the best rebounding team in the country, but can Cal Baptist really successfully run its dump-and-chase offense against a team like KU? I don't believe so.

SUM OF MEN'S FINAL FOUR SEEDS: UNDER 9.5 -130

We're starting to see the effects of NIL on the college basketball landscape. Favorites in the first round are bigger than we have seen before, and the teams at the top are better than even the teams in the second tier. My personal Final Four has a sum of five and I do not believe a seed beyond the twos will burn me here. I think it's a chalky tournament and I'll take the higher number on the market with this prop.

GILL ALEXANDER

SANTA CLARA +4 VS. KENTUCKY

...And the line is getting better than it was upon release. Classic case of "if the jerseys are swapped", how different is this line. Since Christmas, Santa Clara has only lost to Gonzaga (3x) and Saint Mary's (and beat Saint Mary's in the WCC tournament) and possesses one of the great traits of upset-minded teams in the Big Dance, 3-point shooting prowess. I'll take Allen Graves and Christian Hammond's shooting percentage from behind the arc over blue blood Kentucky who isn't exactly elite on either side of the court. Might even sprinkle some on the ML.

NORTHERN IOWA +10.5 VS. ST. JOHN'S

This is obviously going to be a hugely popular play which concerns me greatly, but I'm relying on a complete rock fight to get this one home. Unlike with Santa Clara above, I will stay away from betting anything on an outright win and expect St. John's to advance. But, if 3-point shooting expertise is the single greatest characteristic of a team capable of flirting with an upset during March Madness, playing at a snail's pace is its first cousin. Northern Iowa ranks 362nd in adjusted tempo (out of 365 teams) and allows 61.3 PPG, fewest in D1. Fewer possessions equals fewer opportunities for Rick Pitino's team to pull away. I'll take the points.

MATT BROWN

IOWA STATE MIDWEST REGION WINNER (+245)

No disrespect to Virginia or Tennessee, but the Midwest Region feels like a two-team battle between the Cyclones and Wolverines. Iowa State's combination of elite defense and ability to hit the three at a high rate makes them a team nobody wants to play. They've got three big-time players in Milan Momcilovic, Joshua Jefferson, and Tamin Lipsey who can power this team to beat anybody in the country. Let's just hope they don't need any clutch free throws along the way (342nd at 67.2%).

DUSTIN SWEDELSON

UCLA TO MAKE ELITE EIGHT +650, FINAL FOUR 55-1

Mick Cronin has said the Bruins' top two scorers, Tyler Bilodeau and Donovan Dent, who dealt with injuries during the Big Ten Tournament, will play. That is massive for a UCLA team that is probably built better for the tournament than the regular season. For starters, Cronin has taken worse teams deep into the NCAA Tournament. He has consistently been a good tournament style coach with the defense and intensity his teams bring. Of the teams in the field, UCLA plays at the seventh-slowest tempo but features the 22nd-most efficient offense with the ability to score from 3-point range at a 38.2% clip. That is a recipe for success this time of year.

IOWA VS. CLEMSON UNDER 129.5

Neither of these teams is looking to run and gun if they are going to be successful. Iowa is 359th nationally in average possession length while Clemson is 199th. Both feature Top 30 defenses and offenses more successful from 2-point range than from beyond the arc. Iowa is very Bennett Stirtz-dependent on offense with him averaging 26.6% of their point output, so not sure how many guys will get going for them. Clemson doesn't have the 3-point shooting we have grown accustomed to seeing with Brad Brownell's squads. Everything points to a lower-scoring game to me.

TROY +13 VS NEBRASKA

Troy is a battle-tested Sun Belt team. In November, they beat San Diego State in double overtime then lost at USC in triple overtime in back-to-back games. They also have wins against quality opponents like Kent State, Furman and UAB this season. They are a good rebounding squad, out-boarding USC 63 to 39 in their loss in Los Angeles, which could be big vs. a Nebraska team 169th in total rebounding percentage.

DAVE ROSS

GONZAGA 20-1 TO MAKE THE FINALS

I'm taking some swings on longer shots this year and targeting deeper price points. In the West, that means trusting two coaches I don't usually feel great about backing: Tommy Lloyd and Mark Few. Even so, I think both are good enough to navigate this region and meet in the regional final, setting up a mentor-versus-student matchup with the edge ultimately going to the mentor.

MICHIGAN STATE 48-1 TO WIN THE CHAMPIONSHIP

In the East, Duke got a brutal draw. I'm not exactly sure when they bow out, but with the injuries they're dealing with I have a hard time seeing them make a deep run. That leaves the door open for Tom Izzo to do what he always seems to do in March — pick up the pieces in a chaotic region and guide Michigan State Spartans men's basketball back to yet another Final Four.

ALABAMA 180-1 TO WIN THE CHAMPIONSHIP

In the Midwest, nobody seems to trust Alabama — which honestly makes me feel like they might shock a few people, myself included. That said, I didn't quite have the guts to take them all the way past Michigan. I see Michigan ultimately coming out of the region, knocking off another SEC "longshot" in blue blood Kentucky along the way.

Down South, I think both Jensen and I will get at least a little enjoyment out of watching our alma maters make a run and pick up a few wins. Ultimately, though, I like the chalk to prevail with Houston and Florida meeting in the regional final. In what should be a knock-down, drag-out game, I'll take Houston to survive and advance.

That leaves a Final Four where Houston outslugs Michigan State in what could be a game that sets college basketball back 100 years stylistically, while Gonzaga Bulldogs men's basketball shock the hoops world by taking down No. 1 Michigan. And if Mark Few gets Gonzaga that far, why not finish the job? Give me the Zags over Houston to cut down the nets, but I did also sprinkle a long shot on UCLA at 400-1.

PAULY HOWARD

GEORGIA -2.5 VS. SAINT LOUIS

I'm against Saint Louis here because they started out 24-1 and they come limping into the tourney, getting blown out two times in the last few weeks also.

AKRON +7.5 VS. TEXAS TECH

The Zips can win this game. Last year didn't go well, but I think the experience helps and they rate 30 spots higher than Miami of Ohio on KenPom.

QUEENS +25.5 VS. PURDUE

This team can score and won the Atlantic Sun as a 3 seed. They knocked off two good teams to get here in Austin Peay and Central Arkansas. Purdue is still smelling themselves off the Big Ten tourney wins.

NO BUZZER BEATER +110 (DRAFTKINGS)

This used to be 1.5 and was stealing money. People want it to happen but you can go back 30 years and would be hard pressed to list more than five off the top of your head. Here is the official language from DraftKings: "A buzzer beater is a valid field goal made to give a team the lead as time expires at the end of the game, with no subsequent in bounds play."

JENSEN LEWIS

SOUTH FLORIDA +190 VS. LOUISVILLE

Bullish on the Bulls! South Florida, fresh off winning the American Conference Tournament, are riding the highs and present a real challenge to Louisville. South Florida's stout defense can frustrate the Cardinals, especially if they aren't hitting their 3-pointers early. The Bulls' elite offensive rebounding and ability to generate second-chance points will give them an edge as well. Strap in for a potentially high-scoring affair and one that's got upset written all over it!

PURDUE & GONZAGA TO MAKE THE SWEET 16 PARLAY: -122 ON DRAFTKINGS

The Boilermakers are trending up, winning the Big Ten conference title and looking much more like the title contender they expected to be. Their interior size and athleticism should overwhelm Queens in the Round of 64 and be plenty to outgun either Missouri or Miami. Mark Few's Gonzaga squad is one of the best defensive teams in the country and will handle Kennesaw State with ease in their opener. A potential Round of 32 matchup with BYU is the tougher test, but the Bulldogs will grind out a win to punch their ticket to the Sweet 16.

DUKE & MICHIGAN TO REACH THE CHAMPIONSHIP: +512 ON DK

We saw the potential National Championship preview back in Washington D.C. earlier this year. It feels like we deserve a rematch. Make no mistake: the East region is absolutely brutal for Duke. They've answered every test and are still, overall, arguably the best team in the country. A daunting path, including possible matchups with the likes of St. John's, Kansas and UConn lie ahead. Michigan's path out of the Midwest is no cakewalk either and upset potential lingers if their Round of 32 clash is with Saint Louis. Nevertheless, these two teams are extremely proficient offensively, can lock down on defense, and are coached by two of the brightest minds in Jon Scheyer and Dusty May. The Blue Devils would love nothing more than to add another win over the Wolverines in the biggest game of the year, while Michigan seeks to reach the mountaintop for the first time since 1989.

AARON MOORE

MIAMI OH +7 VS. SMU

This has nothing to do with all the newfound national love surrounding Miami. In fact, it is even less about the RedHawks here and more of the way SMU stumbled down the final stretch of the season, losing five of its last six with the only win being against a poor Syracuse squad. Yes, those losses were against ACC teams, but the Mustangs are in the tournament based on what they did back in December. Miami's general consistency, regardless of opponents, is my main factor taking the points for a team that will have considerable fan support and possible favorable whistles coming its way.

TROY +13.5 VS. NEBRASKA

First bet I made on Selection Sunday (at +14.5). This matchup between the defensive-minded Trojans catching a lot of points against a fast-paced offense with Nebraska fits the profile of a heavy dog finding a way to stay around long enough to cover. The Cornhuskers offense runs on volume and that shouldn't be the case against Troy that tends to keep games at one of the slowest paces in the nation. Also, the length of Troy's front-court of Victor Valdes, Thomas Dowd and Jerrell Bellamy matches up well against Rienk Mast and Pryce Sandfort.

UTAH STATE -135 ML OVER VILLANOVA

The Aggies that lost three of the final five regular season games looked a lot different running through the Mountain West tournament. Utah State's offense behind MJ Collins and Mason Falslev is clicking, while Villanova without Matt Hodge will have issues keeping pace. Utah State also gets a slight boost from playing inside the familiar Viejas Arena.

HOUSTON +110 TO REACH ELITE EIGHT

Before the logic of this play, please don't give me your dissertation on the rollover parlay paying more. I know more people who have chugged beers with the Easter Bunny than actually perform the rollover parlay. There is a convenience fee involved in playing it on the futures board that makes sense when bettors are so deeply involved with all the March Madness action constantly surrounding them. The play here is based on predicting a Houston - Illinois matchup in the Sweet 16 and getting the defensive focused Cougars at a plus price in advance.

SUM OF FINAL FOUR SEEDS UNDER 8.5 (-130)

I thought the number would be lower, as well as the juice. I have a hard time not seeing Michigan and Arizona as No.1s making the Final Four. If Duke or Florida somehow doesn't get to Indianapolis, it seems extremely unlikely that a team on the 4 line or higher will be the ones to knock them off.

DARIUS ACUFF JR. (150-1) TO BE THE 2026 NBA NUMBER 1 OVERALL PICK

Here is a correlated March Madness wager best suited for Mitch and Pauly's Tip Jar. For the first time, the Arkansas freshman is listed on this board available at FanDuel. AJ Dybantsa is now a -105 favorite, with former top choice Daryn Peterson at +140. One of those two should be the top pick regardless of their tournament performances. Acuff Jr. can be a small play here because he has already moved up the odds board based on his spectacular final month of the season. If the Razorbacks make the Sweet 16 and play Arizona like many believe, this could be some more showcase time for the budding superstar. That could create increased betting attention and force FanDuel to lower their odds and offer cashouts to those who played him at 150-1. If that happens, consider this wager like an investment in a penny stock.

WILL HILL

NORTHERN IOWA +10.5 VS. ST. JOHN'S

A tough draw for the Big East champs, as St John's draws MVC winner and past Cinderella Northern Iowa. A lot of boxes get checked here when looking for a live dog. Northern Iowa is third nationally and first in the tourney in opponent 3-point percentage allowed at 28.9%, while also playing at a slow pace (362nd out of 365 teams). A stout defense and a snail's pace are perfect ingredients for a team catching double-digits.

UNDER 9.5 SUM OF SEEDS IN FINAL FOUR (-135) (BETMGM)

Shocked by this number. All year the consensus has been how top-heavy the sport is with the dominance of the teams at the top of college basketball, an opinion I completely agree with. Sure, all it takes is one FAU or NC State-type run to sabotage this bet, but we saw no such run last year and I don't expect one this year either. Over 1.5 No. 1 seeds in the Final Four is a fine alternative.

MIAMI OH +7 VS. SMU

I went on a Twitter Spaces on Sunday post-selection and was shocked this number was 9 at the time I gave it out. Moments later, it was 10. Cooler heads have apparently prevailed with this line dropping to 6.5/7, but I still like getting three possessions with the RedHawks, who will be playing close to home, and will be facing a slumping SMU team who isn't built to expose Miami's inability to defend the rim.

BEN STEVENS

PENN VS. ILLINOIS OVER 149.5

Brad Underwood and Fran McCaffery, a story as old as time. Illinois has the second-best offensive efficiency rating EVER on KenPom (only behind this year's Purdue team) entering the NCAA Tournament. Penn likes to play fast, and push the pace. I think this is a free-flowing opening round game that features a lot of points.

USF VS. LOUISVILLE OVER 165.5

This was the first Round of 64 bet (at 163.5) that I made as the totals started trickling out following the bracket reveal. If you like offense, you've come to the right place. The Cards have the fourth-highest 3P Rate at the D-I level, meaning Louisville takes 52.8% of its shots from beyond the 3-point line. USF is the 16th-fastest team in college basketball, and head coach Bryan Hodgson is a Nate Oats disciple (that means points, folks).

VCU +2.5 (+120 ML) VS NORTH CAROLINA

I love this VCU team coached by Phil Martelli Jr. The champions of the A-10, the Rams play incredibly balanced, efficient basketball on both ends of the floor. And UNC without Caleb Wilson just isn't the same team. Via CBBAnalytics, the Heels have a Net Rating of -0.8 in their last 10 games (eight of those without Wilson). Plus, 11 seeds are 31-29 SU against 6 seeds in the Round of 64 since 2010.

TIM MURRAY

SOUTH FLORIDA +5.5 VS LOUISVILLE

A number of teams are dealing with injuries to significant players in the NCAA Tournament and that includes Louisville. Projected NBA lottery pick Mikel Brown Jr. has missed the last four games due to a lingering back injury. Brown averaged 18 points per game and 4.7 assists per game this season. South Florida enters the NCAA Tournament riding an 11-game winning streak. Both the Cardinals and Bulls will look to push the pace. USF is 15th in adjusted tempo while Louisville is 69th. Normally, I want to look for slower paced teams to pull an upset but I do not think South Florida is that far off athletically from the Cardinals. USF head coach Bryan Hodgson might be "one & done" in Tampa but his team will have a good shot to pull off the upset and I would not be shocked if USF reached the Sweet 16.

NORTHERN IOWA +10.5 VS ST. JOHN'S

Is Northern Iowa going to be a 'trendy' underdog in the First Round? It certainly seems possible. That said, the Panthers profile as an ideal candidate to give St. John's some issues. Northern Iowa is top 25 in defensive efficiency and is the slowest team in the NCAA Tournament (363 out of 365 in adjusted tempo). Now, Northern Iowa could struggle to score against St. John's. The Red Storm are one of the top defensive teams in the country, and Zuby Ejiofor could be an issue inside for the Panthers. The Big East Player of the Year averages 16 points, 7.1 rebounds, 3.5 assists, and 2.1 blocks per game. Still, St. John's does not rely on shooting from beyond the arc but the Red Storm only shot 33% on the season and Northern Iowa is elite at defending the 3. The Panthers have not been to the NCAA Tournament since 2016 but head coach Ben Jacobson has led Northern Iowa to three wins in the First Round. I'm not sure if the Panthers can pull the upset over the Red Storm, but they profile as a team that could muck up a game and get the cover.

RYAN KRAMER

ALL 36 FIRST FOUR & FIRST ROUND 1H UNDERS

**Year by Year record can be found here - 1H Unders*

Since 2011 (First Four expansion), Sean Green and myself have been betting EVERY First Four & First Round first half Under. In those 15 seasons and 14 tournaments (remember they took away the 2020 NCAA tourney from us), first half Unders have been profitable in 10 out of 14 seasons with an overall record of 280-206-18 (57.61%). Four core reasons why.

1. NERVES, For a number of guys on the court, playing in an NCAA tournament game is the biggest moment of their college career, very easy to start cold or come in too jacked up on adrenaline.
2. UNFAMILIAR COURTS, All the games being played on neutral-site courts means a number of players will be playing in arenas where they've never played before. Shooters are creatures of habit and new environments can take a little getting used to.

3. **UNFAMILIAR OPPONENTS**, In the opening round, it's not uncommon for the teams not to have played each other, and can create some opportunities for the defenses to give some unfamiliar looks that may take a little to adjust to.
4. **BODY CLOCK**, Teams are playing at times they don't normally play at. Offense and scoring in basketball is about being comfortable finding a rhythm. Playing at different times can easily make teams start a little slow until their muscle memory fully kicks in.

I'd wish you best of luck this year, but history tells us you won't need it.

MIKE PALM

CLEMSON +2.5 VS. IOWA

The Tigers have taken on the personality of Brad Brownell, the current dean of ACC coaches. They rank 20th nationally in adjusted defensive efficiency. While the Hawkeyes play at a Galapagos tortoise pace (358th nationally in adjusted tempo), Clemson is comfortable playing a half-court game. Add the fact that Iowa has been trending downward. In their final 10 regular season games, Ben McCollum's club ranked a ghastly 359th in effective FG defense - giving up 58% from inside the arc and 41% from beyond it.

TYLER SHOEMAKER

NC STATE/TEXAS OVER 158.5

My T Shoe Index projects this game in the 170s, and whether we're looking at season long, opponent-adjusted metrics or more recent data, I don't have a formula projecting lower than 165 for this matchup. The recent numbers are actually higher than the season-long, with one formula even in the low 180s. These teams average 3.3 points per game (total) more than opponents' games landed on average, so I look for plenty of points here.

BRAD TAYLOR

SOUTH REGION TO WIN THE NCAA TOURNAMENT (+310 AT DRAFTKINGS)

I get Florida and Houston, and won't need the rest. In my world, the winner of this game (if it happens) wins the National Championship. Many are down on Houston this season, but they are still one of only five teams in the Top 20 in KenPom offense and defense. Kelvin Sampson has made the Elite Eight in three of the past five seasons. And before losing in the SEC Tournament, Florida had been the best team in College Basketball for the previous nine weeks. The Power Ratings reflect the strengths of these teams, and the odds reflect they must play each other to make the Final Four while the other #1 seeds don't play a team of this level.

NUMBER OF NO. 1 SEEDS TO MAKE THE FINAL FOUR, UNDER 1.5 (+130 BETMG)

Sometimes, the past can help us predict the future, even in the NCAA Tournament. All the #1 seeds made it to the Final Four in 2025. Same thing happened in 2008, then in 2009 only two #1 seeds made the Final Four. I'm an old guy who's been around the block way too many times than I care to admit. To say that college sports aren't the same is obvious. Keep in mind that Florida was dead to rights twice before reaching the Final Four in 2025. I'll take my chances that this tournament gets Back to Life, and Back to Reality by actually seeing #1 seeds lose before the Final Four. History is definitely on our side in this one.

SEAN GREEN

MIAMI TO REACH FINAL FOUR (50-1)

I liked Miami at 80-1 to win their region before the tournament was drawn and like them even more now that we know their path. I like good teams who get knocked out early in their conference tournaments and expect to see a locked-in Miami team after their 22-point loss to UVA. In addition, the two best teams on the road this year ATS are Florida and Miami. The Gators are 9-1, while the Hurricanes are right there at 8-2. Purdue and Gonzaga will be tough but winnable games for Miami. And if they make it to the Elite Eight, you'll have a great number to work with. Will I hedge out at that point when they face Arizona? No, I'll let it ride. The Canes need to do the right thing and get Michael Irvin and his belt courtside to go on another unlikely run like they did in football.

NICK WHALEN

VIRGINIA TO REACH SWEET 16 (-125)

While the Cavaliers came up just short in the ACC Championship Game, they enter the Tournament having won 14 of their last 16 games - with both losses coming to Duke. One of the most well-rounded teams in the nation, Virginia shouldn't face much of a struggle against Wright State in Round 1 and would then be set to face the winner of Tennessee-SMU/ Miami (OH) in the Round of 32. SMU, in particular, could give Tennessee trouble in that matchup but if we do get a Tennessee-Virginia showdown, I like Virginia's chances to limit the Vols on the glass. Tennessee is a historically great offensive rebounding team, but Virginia has plenty of size up front and ranks as a top-20 rebounding team in the nation.

TROY +13.5 VS. NEBRASKA

I wouldn't go as far as to pick Troy to win outright, but this is one of the 4-13 matchups I'll be keeping a close eye on. Nebraska, of course, got off to a red-hot start to the season but has fallen off, offensively, since late-January, ranking outside the top 100 in offensive efficiency. Meanwhile, Troy tends to run hot and cold, but they shoot enough 3s to keep up with Nebraska and have some intriguing size that could give the Huskers' backcourt problems. One trend to consider: Since 2013, four-seeds in games with a total of 142 or less - the total here is 137.5, as of publication - are just 5-17 ATS.

DAVE TULEY

DUKE TO WIN NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP (+350)

I know I'm the "dog or pass" guy, but that's mostly for individual games. When it comes to futures, I'm not opposed to betting the chalk if I still believe the price is an overlay (and since we're getting a plus-price, I can rationalize in my mind that I'm still betting a dog). This is also similar to last December when I made Indiana my CFB Playoff Best Bet despite being the betting favorite because the Hoosiers were the best team and college sports overall has seen a widening of the gap between the haves and have-nots with the transfer portal and NIL deals. It's a whole new ballgame (look at how chalky last year's March Madness was) and it's even harder for true Cinderella stories in this era. Like Indiana, Duke is overall No. 1 seed despite losing in the ACC Tournament and is also the No. 1 team at KenPom. We also get the Wooden Award favorite in freshman phenom Cameron Boozer. As of Monday morning, Duke was still +350 at Circa Sports while mostly +300 elsewhere. That sure looks like a fair price for this team to win six straight games to cut down the nets, especially as big faves in their early games and never close to pick-'em until the final weekend.

SAINT LOUIS +2.5 VS. GEORGIA

This is an 8-9 matchup with Georgia opening after the Selection Show on Sunday as a short 1.5- to 2-point favorite and the SEC team has been bet up to 2.5 at most books and to -3 at the South Point as of deadline late Monday morning. I'm waiting to fade this move at its peak as the Billikens are being overlooked after losing in the Atlantic 10 semifinals to Dayton and needing an at-large bid. I actually bet George Washington +7 against Saint Louis in the A-10 tourney and saw the Billikens rally from a 14-point halftime deficit by outscoring GW by 21 points in the second half to win by seven. While I was bummed by the "Bad Push," I came away impressed by Saint Louis' performance. The Billikens play better defense than the Bulldogs and work the ball around for good shots. If they play two complete halves, they have a great shot at the minor upset, but we'll take as many points as they'll give us just in case.

MCNEESE +11.5 VS. VANDERBILT

No. 12 seeds aren't the automatic play they used to be vs. No. 5 seeds in the NCAA Tournament, but this looks like one of those old-school 5-12 matchups with McNeese State as a live double-digit underdog with a low seed as Southland Conference champions, just like last year when the Cowboys upset Clemson in a 5-12 matchup. Granted, McNeese State isn't as good (especially on offense) as their tourney teams the last two years under former coach Will Wade, but its pressure defense is tops in the nation in turnover rate and they hit the offensive boards for second chances. That should keep the Cowboys in the game. If this line was closer to a "touchdown" (or as they kids say, "6-7"), I would pass, but gimme the double digits.

ZACHARY COHEN

USF +5.5 VS. LOUISVILLE

South Florida is a strong defensive team, ranking 43rd in the nation in Adjusted Defensive Efficiency (101.4) when looking at Bart Torvik's numbers. If there's anywhere the Bulls struggle, it's that they can occasionally be a little too physical. USF is 277th in the nation in Free Throw Rate Defense (38.8). Well, Louisville probably won't be able to take advantage of that. The Cardinals are a trigger-happy team, ranking fourth in the country in 3-Point Rate (52.8). They take a ton of jumpers at the expense of going to the rim, and they don't shoot a lot of free throws because of that. That said, if Louisville isn't scorching hot from deep, USF should do a decent job defensively. That'll be huge because the Bulls can score on anyone — and bully anyone on the offensive boards. That means this should be a pretty close game — and one the Bulls can win. Add in the uncertainty with Mikel Brown Jr. and the USF side only looks better.

VCU +2.5 VS. NORTH CAROLINA

This almost feels like a game in which the wrong team is favored. Caleb Wilson, North Carolina's best player, is out for the year after having broken his right thumb in practice on March 5. All of a sudden, the Tar Heels are without a guy that was averaging 19.8 points and 9.4 rebounds per game, while also being a huge part of the reason they're 52nd in the nation in EFG% (54.6) and 37th in 2PT% (56.7). Now, this North Carolina team really doesn't have much of a gameplan offensively, which could be problematic against a solid VCU defense. I also don't have much faith in the Heels getting consistent stops against the Rams. VCU doesn't turn the ball over much, ranking 73rd in the nation in Turnover Rate (15.2). Meanwhile, North Carolina doesn't turn teams over, ranking 344th in Turnover Rate Defense (13.6). The Rams are also a very good shooting team, knocking down 36.7% of their 3s. They take — and make — triples at a higher clip than the Heels, and they should have a good amount of possessions. That should mean VCU is primed to pull off an upset.

AKRON +7.5 VS. TEXAS TECH

This is another game in which we'll see a team that doesn't resemble the one we saw all year, as Texas Tech lost star big man JT Toppin to a torn ACL in February. Toppin, who averaged 21.8 points and 10.8 rebounds per game, was one of the most dominant players in the Big 12, and his ability to impact games was a big part of the reason that the Red Raiders finished 10th in the nation in Adjusted Offensive Efficiency (126.3). Well, without him, the Zips, who are outside the top 100 in Adjusted Defensive Efficiency (105.4), should have a clear gameplan. If Akron can apply pressure on Christian Anderson and Donovan Atwell, forcing them into tough shots and situations in which they need to give up the rock, the team should be good enough defensively to keep this game close. We know the Zips are going to score, as they're 64th in the country in Adjusted Offensive Efficiency (117.2), 14th in 3PT% (38.5), and 64th in 3PT Rate (45.1). Texas Tech could be going down early.

PARLAY: GONZAGA/PURDUE TO REACH SWEET 16 (+103)

When looking at the bracket, it stood out to me that Gonzaga and Purdue have pretty straightforward paths to the Sweet 16. The Zags are going to be playing their first two games pretty damn close to home, and they'll be taking on Kennesaw State and then BYU, Texas, or NC State. I expect Gonzaga, a top-10 defensive team in the nation, to handle those opponents with ease. Meanwhile, Purdue is fresh off a Big Ten Tournament title, so the Boilermakers are hot at the right time. They also happen to have a very easy draw, as they'll take on Queens before facing the winner of Miami-Missouri. Purdue should roll in that first game, and the second one could also get ugly. The Tigers probably don't even belong in the field, and the Hurricanes aren't as strong as their record.

GONZAGA TO REACH FINAL FOUR (14-1) & WIN NCAA TOURNAMENT (60-1)

If Gonzaga wins its first two games, things suddenly get very interesting. It sounds like Braden Huff, who is averaging 17.8 points and 5.6 rebounds per game and is one of the best paint scorers in the country, is targeting a second weekend return. If that's true, the Zags will have the best frontcourt in the country, a highly talented two-way wing in Tyon Grant-Foster, and a crowded backcourt that has Mark Few covered with basically every skill he can possibly be looking for. The Zags remained a top-10 defensive team in Huff's absence, and this is a team that played top-15 offense before his injury. If they're really a top-15 group on both ends of the floor, that's a statistical profile that gives you a shot.

I also don't subscribe to the "Few can't win the big one" stuff. You know who else couldn't win the big one? Jay Wright, Scott Drew, and Tony Bennett. Then they did.

ADAM BURKE

NORTH DAKOTA STATE +16.5 VS. MICHIGAN STATE

The Summit League champs are getting a big head start in this game against a Michigan State team that has faltered on defense late in the season. This is also going to be a jump-shooting contest with a couple of teams that had low shot shares at the rim. Only 33.1% of Michigan State's shot attempts came at the rim this season and they only allowed a shot share of 27.7%.

That's fine for NDSU, as 63% of their shots were jumpers per Bart Torvik. They like to embrace the variance of a 3-point competition and I can't fault them for that as a team that wins the turnover battle more often than not. We'll see if Michigan State can improve upon their 302nd-ranked TO% stepping outside the Big Ten, where virtually nobody plays pressure defense or even tries to force takeaways.

Free throws could be in short supply in this game with a lot of jumpers as well. Both teams play at similar tempos, so that's likely to cut the scoring down a little bit and that will cause Michigan State to be really efficient on both ends of the floor to win by 17+.

VANDERBILT TO REACH THE SWEET 16 (-110)

McNeese will probably be a trendy pick in the dreaded 12 vs. 5 matchup, but the Commodores are a double-digit favorite for a reason and this version of McNeese doesn't shoot the ball nearly as well as last year's did. Vandy would then be favored over either Nebraska or Troy. We'll assume Nebraska given the spread and the fact that Troy has to get to the rim to be successful and the Cornhuskers had the third-lowest shot share against at the rim in the nation at just 24.6%.

Vanderbilt shoots over teams. They only had a 35.8% shot share on Close Twos that ranked 266th, so Nebraska packing in around the rim shouldn't impact the Commodores too much on offense. Drawing a SEC opponent could probably continue some defensive regression for Nebraska as well, given that they held opponents under 30% from 3 for the season, but four of their last five opponents have made 10+ 3-pointers against them. I think the Commodores, as an under-seeded team, are really dangerous.

VSIN EXPERT FINAL FOUR

BEST
BETS

GILL ALEXANDER

East: Duke
South: Florida
West: Arizona
Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: FLORIDA

MATT BROWN

East: Duke
South: Florida
West: Arizona
Midwest: Iowa State
CHAMPION: DUKE

STORMY BUONANTONY

East: Duke
South: Houston
West: Purdue
Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: DUKE

ADAM BURKE

East: Duke
South: Illinois
West: Arkansas
Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: DUKE

KELLEY BYDLON

East: Kansas
South: Houston
West: Arizona
Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: MICHIGAN

ZACHARY COHEN

East: UConn
South: Houston
West: Gonzaga
Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: GONZAGA

SEAN GREEN

East: Michigan State
South: Florida
West: Miami
Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: MICHIGAN STATE

ANDY GRESH

East: Duke
South: Florida
West: Arizona
Midwest: Iowa State
CHAMPION: DUKE

WILL HILL

East: UConn
South: Florida
West: Arizona
Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: ARIZONA

PAUL HOWARD

East: Duke
 South: Florida
 West: Gonzaga
 Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: DUKE

RYAN KRAMER

East: St. John's
 South: Houston
 West: Arizona
 Midwest: Iowa State
CHAMPION: HOUSTON

JENSEN LEWIS

East: Duke
 South: Illinois
 West: Arizona
 Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: MICHIGAN

STEVE MAKINEN

East: Duke
 South: Vanderbilt
 West: Purdue
 Midwest: Iowa State
CHAMPION: DUKE

AARON MOORE

East: Duke
 South: Houston
 West: Arizona
 Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: ARIZONA

MITCH MOSS

East: St. John's
 South: Florida
 West: Arizona
 Midwest: Iowa State
CHAMPION: ARIZONA

TIM MURRAY

East: Kansas
 South: Florida
 West: Arkansas
 Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: FLORIDA

GREG PETERSON

East: Duke
 South: Vanderbilt
 West: Purdue
 Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: PURDUE

WES REYNOLDS

East: Duke
 South: Houston
 West: Arkansas
 Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: DUKE

DAVE ROSS

East: Michigan State
 South: Houston
 West: Gonzaga
 Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: GONZAGA

SCOTT SEIDENBERG

East: Duke
 South: Houston
 West: Arizona
 Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: DUKE

TYLER SHOEMAKER

East: UConn
 South: Illinois
 West: Arizona
 Midwest: Iowa State
CHAMPION: ARIZONA

BEN STEVENS

East: Duke
 South: Houston
 West: Arizona
 Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: ARIZONA

DUSTIN SWEDELSON

East: Duke
 South: Illinois
 West: Arizona
 Midwest: Iowa State
CHAMPION: ARIZONA

BRAD TAYLOR

East: UConn
 South: Florida
 West: Purdue
 Midwest: Iowa State
CHAMPION: FLORIDA

DAVE TULEY

East: Duke
 South: Illinois
 West: Arizona
 Midwest: Alabama
CHAMPION: DUKE

JONATHAN VON TOBEL

East: Michigan State
 South: Florida
 West: Arizona
 Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: ARIZONA

NICK WHALEN

East: UConn
 South: Houston
 West: Arizona
 Midwest: Iowa State
CHAMPION: ARIZONA

MATT YOUNG

East: St. John's
 South: Houston
 West: Arizona
 Midwest: Michigan
CHAMPION: MICHIGAN

CHAMPIONSHIP SUMMARY



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MICHIGAN GETS THROUGH MARCH,
**MAY DANCES
IN APRIL**

BY MATT YOUMANS



It begins with Duke, the No.1 overall seed with a 32-2 record and freshman phenom Cameron Boozer leading the way. Three weeks from now, after several bracket-busting upsets and dramatic moments, will the NCAA tournament end with the Blue Devils still on top?

The road to the Final Four in Indianapolis is sure to be a wild ride. It should be more unpredictable than it was a year ago, when all four No. 1 seeds — Auburn, Duke, Florida and Houston — won their regions for just the second time in tournament history and first time since 2008. While it's comfortable and safe to pick chalk to advance in your bracket pool, playing the favorites is no fun, and that approach is unlikely to get the job done.

The top seeds in this tournament are Duke (East), Arizona (West), Michigan (Midwest) and Florida (South). The Gators, the defending NCAA champions, were just blown out by Vanderbilt in an SEC tournament semifinal a day before the Wolverines were upset by Purdue in the Big Ten tournament title game. The Blue Devils had to sweat out their ACC championship, and the Wildcats survived two scares en route to winning the Big 12.

"I don't think all four No. 1 seeds get there this time," DraftKings sportsbook director John Avello said. "You watched what happened to Michigan (on Sunday). I think two of the four should probably get there."

How many of the 68 teams have a realistic shot to cut down the nets on April 6? "I have 12 teams who can win it," said Nick Bogdanovich, a veteran Las Vegas oddsmaker and the Boomer's sportsbook director. "Am I crazy? When I hear people say five or six teams can win it, I don't believe that. Duke has got injuries. Michigan is not beating teams by 40 anymore. Florida just got whacked."

Bogdanovich's dynamic dozen includes the No. 1 seeds, No. 2 seeds (Houston, Iowa State, Purdue, UConn), three No. 3 seeds (Illinois, Michigan State, Virginia) and one No. 4 seed (Arkansas).

"I might add St. John's in there," Bogdanovich said of the Red Storm, the Big East champions who are seeded fifth in the East.

A year ago in this column, Duke was my pick to win it all. The Blue Devils were absolutely loaded with NBA talent — No. 1 pick Cooper Flagg, No. 4 pick Kon Knueppel and three other draft picks — yet blew a 14-point lead in the final eight minutes of a stunning national semifinal defeat to Houston. Two nights later, the Cougars squandered a 12-point lead in the title game as Florida completed its fourth comeback win in six tournament games.

The message in that history lesson is this tournament is always bizarre, and your bracket is likely to be turned upside down and tossed into the trash can sooner or later. Betting the games and filling out the bracket are completely different challenges, but I'll take a shot at both goals.

EAST

Duke's second-round opponent will be either No. 8 Ohio State or No. 9 TCU. DraftKings posted lines moments after the matchups were unveiled on Selection Sunday, and the Buckeyes opened as 3.5-point favorites against the Horned Frogs. The number was quickly bet to 2.5. "When you put up these virgin numbers, they move fast, and it's not unusual for these games to move two points," Avello said. "We had some underdogs the bettors definitely took, like TCU against Ohio State, and I can see that."

As high as I am on St. John's, the first bet I made was on double-digit dog Northern Iowa against the Red Storm. St. John's coach Rick Pitino was neither thrilled with his team's No. 5 seed nor its ticket to San Diego this weekend, but Pitino should survive and advance.

As for fast-moving numbers, fourth-seeded Kansas opened as a 12.5-point favorite over WAC champ Cal Baptist and the line moved to 14.5 within two hours. No. 3 Michigan State opened -14.5 against North Dakota State and the line moved to 16.5. No. 2 UConn opened -18.5 against Furman before the line was bet to 20.5.

The Huskies and coach Danny Hurley, who won back-to-back NCAA titles in 2023-24, need to regroup after getting body slammed by St. John's in the Big East title game. In tournament settings, when there are immediate turnarounds and little prep time for unfamiliar opponents, it's wise to bet on the best coaches. This region is full of coaching wizards — Hurley, Pitino, Tom Izzo, Bill Self and rising star Jon Scheyer.

BEST BET

Northern Iowa +11 over St. John's. The Panthers, the Missouri Valley champs, are tough and play at a slow pace (ranking 24th in defensive efficiency and No. 363 in tempo, per kenpom.com), so they can turn this matchup into a grinder by reducing possessions to shorten the game.

BOLD PREDICTION

A Big East team, either St. John's or UConn, will upset Duke to win the region. The Blue Devils will miss injured point guard Caleb Foster and don't possess enough scoring depth to survive an off game by Boozer.

WINNER

St. John's. A year after getting eliminated early by John Calipari and Arkansas, Pitino finds redemption behind a suffocating defense and big man Zuby Ejiofor.

SOUTH

If the seeds hold, Florida and Houston would meet in a rematch of last year's championship game. There is a chance No. 5 Vanderbilt, which humbled the Gators 91-74 on Saturday, could run into Florida again in the Sweet 16.

The bottom half of the bracket includes an interesting matchup between No. 3 Illinois and No. 14 Pennsylvania, the Ivy League champ. The Fighting Illini rank second in offensive efficiency, but do they have enough defense and toughness to go deep? DraftKings opened Illinois -20.5 and the line has ballooned to 24.5. Penn forward TJ Power made seven 3s and scored 44 points in the Quakers' upset of Yale on Sunday.

BEST BET

Troy +13.5 over Nebraska. The Sun Belt champion Trojans, who earned a crazy 108-107 double-overtime win at San Diego State in November, have a crafty coach in Scott Cross. The Cornhuskers are fading, going 6-6 in their last 12 games after a 20-0 start.

BOLD PREDICTION

No. 11 VCU will pull a first-round upset of sixth-seeded North Carolina, which is without injured leading scorer Caleb Wilson.

WINNER

Houston. Cougars coach Kelvin Sampson gets revenge against the Gators due to the superior backcourt trio of Kingston Flemings, Emanuel Sharp and Milos Uzan.

MIDWEST

At the end of November, after Michigan mauled San Diego State (94-54), Auburn (102-72) and Gonzaga (101-61) on consecutive days in Las Vegas, the Wolverines appeared unbeatable. However, the Wolverines stumble into this tournament on a 0-5 ATS skid, capped by the loss to Purdue, and a season-ending injury to backup point guard L.J. Cason has weakened coach Dusty May's team.

Michigan will meet the winner of the 8-9 duel between Georgia and Saint Louis in a game with the highest total (170) on the board. The Billikens feature 6-foot-10 Robbie Avila, a 3-point bomber with the nickname "Cream Abdul-Jabbar."

Miami (Ohio) barely got into the bracket after an early exit in the Mid-American Conference tournament. The RedHawks, 31-0 in the regular season, face SMU on Wednesday in Dayton. I'm siding with Miami, which opened as an 8.5-point underdog and drew support to move the line to 7.5.

BEST BET

Georgia -2.5 over St. Louis. While it's tempting to go with a big dog, the Bulldogs get the nod. Georgia has too many athletes for the Billikens, who went 4-4 in their last eight games.

BOLD PREDICTION

At least one double-digit seed will win in the first round. The candidates are No. 10 Santa Clara (against Kentucky), No. 12 Akron (against Texas Tech), No. 13 Hofstra (against Alabama) and No. 14 Wright State (against Virginia).

WINNER

Michigan. Either No. 2 Iowa State or No. 3 Virginia will emerge from the bottom of the bracket, but neither team has enough to take down the Wolverines and their dominant front line of 7-foot-3 Aday Mara, Yaxel Lendeberg and Morez Johnson.

WEST

In his fifth season at Arizona, coach Tommy Lloyd is attempting to advance past the Sweet 16 for the first time. These Wildcats are different due to their third-ranked defense. Smooth guards Brayden Burries and Jaden Bradley are backed by a big front line headlined by Koa Peat.

Arizona will have to get by either No. 4 Arkansas or No. 5 Wisconsin to reach the Elite Eight. The Razorbacks are dangerous and led by freshman Darius Acuff, the hottest point guard in the country. Acuff totaled 30 points and 11 assists in a victory over Vanderbilt in the SEC Tournament title game.

No. 2 Purdue is the favorite in the bottom half of the bracket. The Boilermakers flipped a switch and played much-improved defense to win four games in four days in Chicago. It's a team with three senior starters, including point guard Braden Smith, who played in the 2024 NCAA championship game.

No. 6 Brigham Young has the nation's leading scorer in freshman AJ Dybantsa (25.3 ppg), the new favorite to be the NBA's No. 1 draft pick. However, the Cougars are without injured senior guard Richie Saunders, and, on the subject of costly injuries, No. 3 Gonzaga has not been the same force without 6-foot-10 forward Braden Huff.

"Arizona has a great path in the West," Bogdanovich said. "I don't think Gonzaga and Wisconsin can win it, and that leaves Purdue and Arkansas."

BEST BET

Missouri +2 over Miami (Florida). The Tigers, playing close to home in St. Louis, are led by senior guard Mark Mitchell, who scored 32 points in each of the last two games against Arkansas and Kentucky.

BOLD PREDICTION

Purdue, which ranks No. 1 in offensive efficiency, is a better bet than Arizona to reach the West final. The Boilermakers actually have an easier path to get there. The Wildcats will get a major test from either the Razorbacks or Badgers.

WINNER

Arizona. The best defensive team in this bracket will prevail, but it will be a sweat. The Wildcats fit the formula for a title contender by ranking third in defensive efficiency and fifth in offensive efficiency, plus they have elite guards and NBA-level talent across the board.

FINAL ANALYSIS

My Final Four consists of a No. 5 seed (St. John's), a No. 2 (Houston) and two top seeds (Arizona and Michigan). I started playing NCAA championship futures in May and hold some good ones — UConn (15-1), Michigan (20-1), Florida (25-1), St. John's (90-1) and Wisconsin (100-1). My biggest regret is never betting Arizona.

VSIN analyst Greg "Hoops" Peterson, my co-host on the "Betting the Bracket" show Sunday night, is forecasting a Duke-Purdue title game, with the Boilermakers finishing on top. Peterson was on the money a year ago when he predicted all of the No. 1 seeds would reach the Final Four and Florida would win it. I suspect Peterson will be wrong this time. But if he's right, I'll buy the kid dinner at Barry's Downtown Prime at the Circa Resort & Casino.

The Big Ten is 0-8 in NCAA basketball championship games since Michigan State conquered the field in 2000. This is finally the year, and this time it will be Michigan closing the deal. Bet on the team that ranks No. 1 in defensive efficiency and has a top-10 offense.

The Wolverines are not necessarily peaking, but they went 19-1 in regular-season league play for a reason, and their conference tournament loss to Purdue should prove to be a positive. Michigan will get through March, and I'm expecting (Dusty) May to win it in April.



HANDICAPPING THE TOURNAMENT WITH **ROUND BY ROUND** AND **SEED BY SEED** TRENDS

By Steve Makinen

The NCAA Tournament is a three-week event unlike any other, and there is so much extra emotion and energy that comes with it. Opening round(s) should be treated a bit differently than the others. The later rounds, where teams seem to better settle in, can be handicapped with their own strategies. The short rests between certain rounds can be handicapped differently than the 4+ day rest periods. Essentially, the unique tournament format has to be considered. Any messing with that by decision-makers can waste years of strategy building and success.

Some very reliable patterns have formed in recent NCAA Tournament action. The past two years have been banner ones for those who chased the chalk, a complete turn from 2023's craziness. In fact, favorites over the course of the last two tournaments are 100-34 SU and 77-57 ATS (57.5%). On top of that, we are currently in a pattern of a lot of early-round Unders, 66-41-1 (61.7%) over the last three tournaments.

Trends and systems can turn at any time, but they can also prove to be the foundation for successful wagering, especially if they form off of a bettor's misconceptions, or are the result of physical mismatches that can arise and only the oddsmaking experts understand them. With all of that said, gauge carefully for yourself whether you find there to be enough of a "foundation" to the info to make it bet-worthy.

Note that the data used to derive these trends was pulled mostly from tournament games dating back to 2001. In almost all cases, I've listed a date or numbers of games spanned for which each trend has stood. I didn't choose the year 2001 randomly, as that was the first year that the tournament was expanded beyond 64 teams.

PRIOR TOURNAMENT GAME SYSTEMS

For those of you who have gotten used to reading this particular piece, I try to add something solid of value each year. Last year, I dug in looking for some systematic data regarding performance in the prior tournament game while advancing. I was able to find five different "prior game reactionary systems" of 60% or better that I shared with readers for the first time. These angles focus on how a team did in one particular NCAA tournament game and how it affects their next performance. Look for these and give them consideration as the tournament moves along. For what it's worth, I will be pointing these systems out for VSin readers in my pre-round updated pieces over the next few weeks.

NCAA TOURNAMENT PRIOR GAME SYSTEM #1

Teams that win in the NCAA's by scoring less than 60 points have gone 46-44 SU and 56-34 ATS (62.2%) in the follow-up game since '06

STEVE'S THOUGHTS: This is an interesting angle in that it could be assumed that this team "survived" a below-average offensive performance in a game and has a second life. In these days of higher scoring and less defensive contact allowed, instances for qualifiers are rare.

NCAA TOURNAMENT PRIOR GAME SYSTEM #2

Teams that win in the NCAA's by scoring 88 or more points have gone 61-10 SU and 44-27 ATS (62%) in the follow-up game since '00 when favored by 6-points or more.

STEVE'S THOUGHTS: A big offensive performance can dramatically lift the confidence of a team in a tournament setting. I would think this system would be enhanced in short turnaround games.

NCAA TOURNAMENT PRIOR GAME SYSTEM #3

Teams that win in upset fashion in the NCAA's by allowing 56 or fewer points have gone 28-28 SU and 38-18 ATS (67.9%) in the follow-up game since 2010.

STEVE'S THOUGHTS: Just as a big offensive outing can lift a team, so can a huge defensive effort that helped spring an upset. A 50% outright record for a team coming off an outright upset win is tremendous if you think about the chances that they would be an underdog again. These are clearly dangerous and galvanized teams.

NCAA TOURNAMENT PRIOR GAME SYSTEM #4

Teams that win in the NCAA's but are beaten by 7+ points on the point spread have rebounded nicely in the next game, 33-9 SU and 28-13-1 ATS (68.3%) since 2010.

STEVE'S THOUGHTS: Judging by the fact that these teams were able to survive underperforming efforts, they are obviously among the stronger teams in the field. There is a reason the term "survive and advance" has accompanied this tournament for many years. Don't expect a second straight flat effort. This system went 3-1 SU and ATS in 2025.

NCAA TOURNAMENT PRIOR GAME SYSTEM #5

Teams that win in the NCAA's by scoring less than 60 points have gone 49-30 Under the total (62%) in the follow-up game since 2017.

STEVE'S THOUGHTS: This is similar to #1 above, and it could be argued that since the team won with a lower scoring effort in the prior game, they are probably trying to set a similar pace in the follow-up outing.

NAVIGATING THE TOURNAMENT ROUND BY ROUND

As you'll see from some of the analysis below, the tournament can change from round to round, and certain systematic patterns have formed in the ways you can profit from this transition.

FIRST FOUR GAMES

- Over the last 13 NCAA tournaments, underdogs own a 28-23 ATS (54.9%) edge in the First Four round.
- Since 2001, there have only been eight First Four games with lines of 5 points or higher. Favorites are 7-2 SU and 6-3 ATS (66.7%) in those contests.
- More on point spread benchmarks, in that same span since 2001, favorites of less than 5 points are 31-24 SU but just 23-31-1 ATS (42.6%).
- Outright winners have gone 42-4 ATS (91.3%) in the First Four round since 2013, although most recently, Alabama State (-3.5) was able to survive St Francis 70-68 in a 2025 contest.
- Higher totaled First Four games, or those higher than 139, have also trended 15-9 Under (60%). However, consider that all First Four games went Over last year, the first time ever, including two with totals above 139.
- Formerly, all First Four games used to match #16 seeds. Recently, First Four games featuring seeds 12 or better have trended 17-9 Under (65.4%)
- There has also been a noticeable differentiation in performance levels of favorites/underdogs in the seed # matchups of the First Four round lately. In the games pitting #16 seeds, underdogs are on a 16-9 ATS (64%) run. In the games featuring #10-#12 seeds, favorites hold a recent 12-6 ATS (66.7%) edge.

FIRST ROUND GAMES

OVERALL TRENDS

- Teams that didn't make their conference tournament championship game are on a first-round slide of just 44-64-2 ATS (40.7%) versus conference champions, historically good go-against teams. However, they have put together back-to-back winning years, including 7-6 ATS in 2024, so we could be witnessing a shift as teams place less importance on advancing in their league title game as opposed to being ready for the NCAA's. The difference between Power 5 teams and mid-major conference champs is also growing thanks to NIL money. If this angle doesn't perform well in 2026, I will put it to pasture.
- Power conference schools that lost SU and ATS in their conference championship game are 67-18 SU and 48-35-2 ATS (57.8%) in the first round over the last 17 seasons, a sign that the tournament experience they gained was valuable despite the conference championship loss.
- Oddsmakers have done bettors a favor by signaling first-round upsets, as small first-round favorites of -1 to -3 are just 62-64 SU and 51-71-4 ATS (41.8%) since 2009. However, this is another trend that has also swung the other way in the last three years of chalky first rounds, going 13-6 SU and ATS.
- Of late, mid-level favorites of -3.5 to -7.5 have also struggled, going 49-32 SU but 35-46 ATS (43.2%) since '16 in the first round.
- Since 2016, first-round double-digit favorites have been very successful, going 107-9 SU and 65-51 ATS (56%). This goes entirely against the Cinderella narrative that the media and fans seem to crave and is another angle that could be increasingly successful as NIL money impacts the haves and have-nots.
- On totals in the first round recently, games posted with totals of 149 or higher have trended decisively Under in the last six tournaments, going 31-13 (70.5%), including 10-3 last year.
- First Four teams not seeded 16th that survived their opening opponent have gone 19-7 Under the total (73.1%) in their last 26 first round games.

BY SEEDS

- There are some sweet spots when it comes to betting #1 seeds. As huge favorites of -25.5 or more, they are 39-0 SU and 23-16 ATS (59%) since 2001. As favorites of -19 to -25 points, they are just 14-24 ATS (36.8%) since 2009. When favored by 18.5 or less, they are on an 8-1 ATS run.
- #1 seeds have flexed their muscles defensively over the last seven tournaments, going 16-8 Under the total (66.7%) while holding opponents to 58.4 PPG.
- Be wary of laying big numbers with #2 seeds, as they are just 16-26-1 ATS (38.1%) since 2005 when favored by 17-points or more. Those #2s favored by less than 17 points are on an impressive 22-8-2 ATS (73.3%) run since 2007.
- The last 31 #3 seeds to play in first round games are on an impressive 29-2 SU and 20-11 ATS (64.5%) surge. Of course, one of those outright losses came just two years ago when Oakland upended Kentucky.
- #3 seeds playing to lower than average totals (<140), and perhaps expected to win with defense, have been solid wagers, 42-6 SU and 34-18 ATS (65.4%) in their last 52.
- #3 seeds playing as single-digit favorites are on a massive Under the total run, 20-7 (74.1%) since 2003, with games producing almost 6.9 PPG below their posted numbers on average.
- #4 seeds have turned around what was a terrible 8-tournament skid of 11-20-1 ATS by going 11-0 SU and 9-3 ATS (75%) over the last three years in the first round.
- Quite the opposite of the #3 seeds, the #4s have really struggled in lower totaled games of less than 142, going 15-7 SU but 5-17 ATS (22.7%) since 2013.
- #5 seeds broke a lengthy skid versus the #12s in 2023 by going 4-0 SU and ATS. They have fallen back to previous norms over the last two years by going 4-4 SU and 3-5 ATS. In all, they are 25-36-3 ATS (40.9%) over the last 16 tournaments. These #5s remain extremely vulnerable when playing as 6-point favorites or more lately, 21-10 SU but 10-19-2 ATS (34.5%) since '09.
- Power Conference Schools are 26-20 SU and 15-29-2 ATS (34.1%) as #5 seeds in the first round since 2008, including Clemson's

outright loss in 2025. As #12 seeds, they are on a 13-4-1 ATS (76.5%) surge.

- #5s have also struggled in expectedly lower scoring games with totals of 141 or less recently, 14-28-2 ATS (33.3%) since 2009.
- #6 seeds are 31-33 SU and 25-38-1 ATS (39.7%) in their last 64 first round games versus #11s (also 42-20-2 Under – 67.7%). Last year's 3-1 SU and ATS mark was their first winning season since 2013.
- In #6-#11 games set with the #6 playing as an underdog or pick 'em, the #6s are just 6-12 SU and ATS (33.3%) since 2001. This is a classic trap set by oddsmakers, although Ole Miss (+1.5) did edge North Carolina in 2025.
- Mid-major schools playing as #6 seeds have floundered against power conference #11s, 3-10 SU and ATS (23.1%) in the last 13 tries.
- Be aware of a total opportunity when #6 seeds are favored by 4 points or more, as Unders are 22-5-1 (81.5%) in such games since 2009, with games producing just 130.7 PPG on average, with totals of about 139.4.
- Mid-major schools playing as #7 seeds have been a sound wagering choice, 22-10-1 ATS (68.8%) since 2004. In the 2025 bracket, #7 St Mary's (-4.5) failed to cover vs. Vanderbilt, 59-56.
- #7 seeds playing in the +3 to -3 line range have proven to be quite profitable over the long haul, 42-21 SU and 39-23-1 ATS (62.9%) since 2003, including 4-0 SU and ATS in 2024.
- The last four NCAA tournaments have seen #7 seeds go 12-4 Under the total (75%) in their first round games.
- #8 seeds went 2-2 SU and ATS in 2025, running their seven-year mark to just 10-18 SU and ATS (35.7%).
- As small favorites of 3.5-points or less over #9s, #8 seeds are on a brutal skid of 9-17 SU and 6-19-1 ATS (24%)!
- Of the last 33 #8-#9 matchups, 21 have gone Over the total (63.6%).
- Combined, mid-major conference programs playing in the #4-#6 seeds over the last 23 years have gone 31-25 SU but 22-33-1 ATS (40%). They have been far more successful against the spread in the lesser pressure #7 and #8 seeds, 35-25-4 ATS (58.3%) in that same time range.
- Power conference programs have been very dangerous in the #11-#14 seed range, going 30-21 SU and 31-19-1 ATS (62%) since 2008. In the 2025 tournament, two qualifiers lost outright and ATS, however, nearly negating the 3-0 SU and ATS performance of 2024.

SECOND ROUND GAMES

GENERAL TRENDS

- Bettors have not enjoyed a winning second round since 2017, going 29-53-1 ATS (35.4%) in moving opening lines since then. This is a change from the first round, explained perhaps in the shorter prep period for the second round. They were 2-8 ATS in 2025. The strategy: watch the consensus line sentiment and go against it.
- Second round Top 4 seeds that won but didn't cover the spread in the first round are 48-17 SU and 36-28-1 ATS (56.3%) since 2013. They are also 35-27-3 Under (56.5%) the total.
- Second round double-digit favorites are 53-2 SU and 35-20 ATS (63.6%) since 2001. Sixteen of the last 26 such games went Under (61.5%) the total with the favorites allowing just 61.2 PPG.
- Second round worse-seeded teams playing as favorites have been wildly successful, 15-7 SU and ATS (68.2%) since 2002.
- There has been a crazy trend that has developed in the second round lately with favorites in the tight -5.5 to -6.5 line range, as they boast a 55-13 SU and 46-22 ATS (67.6%) record since 1998.
- The highest-totaled second round games haven't necessarily seen the most scoring, and in fact, these games with totals of 156 or more are on a 13-6 Under the total (68.4%) run.
- In second round games between mid-major teams, underdogs of more than 7 points are on a 6-5 SU and 9-2 ATS run (81.8%). Favorites of 7 points or less in these games are on a 12-1 SU and 11-2 ATS surge (84.6%). There were no such games last year.
- In second-round games featuring a mid-major team playing as a worse seed to a power conference team, the power conference teams are on a 63-11 SU and 46-27-1 ATS (63%) surge since 2013. In the opposite scenario, when the mid-major is the better-seeded team, they are on a 16-3 SU and 11-8 ATS (57.9%) run.

TRENDS BY SEED

- Over the last 25 years, there has been a clear benchmark for when heavily favored #1 seeds struggle to win ATS, and it comes at the 12-point line. In fact, in that span, #1 seeds favored by 12 or more are 25-1 SU but 11-15 ATS (42.3%).
- #1 seeds are currently on a 5-14 ATS (26.3%) skid versus #8s in the second round, but are 13-8 ATS (61.9%) versus #9s in that same 11-year window.
- Second round #2 seeds have felt the upset pressure, going just 19-26-2 ATS (42.2%) in their last 47 games. Those favored by 5 points or less are just 14-19 SU and 10-21-2 ATS (32.3%) since 2002.
- Second round #2 seeds are on a 15-6 Under the total (71.4%) surge.
- #3 seeds haven't been great overall for bettors, but they have been at their best in expectedly higher scoring games (totals >=144), going 15-5 SU and 13-7 ATS (65%) since 2005.
- Nine of the last 11 second-round games featuring #3 seeds have gone Over the total (81.8%).
- Seeds #4-#6 have been stellar lately in the second round, with these spread runs entering 2024: #4s 21-15 ATS (58.3%), #5s 23-9 ATS (71.9%), #6s 22-11 ATS (66.7%). Surviving the first-round upset attempt has seemingly propelled these teams to solid round two performances. Furthermore, collectively, when not playing against another seed of that range, they are 22-3 SU and 20-5 ATS (80%) since 2014!
- Second round #10 seeds are on a 5-15 SU but 12-6-2 ATS (66.7%) run since '11.
- In second round games between two double-digit seeds, the better seed is 13-2 SU and 12-3 ATS (80%) since 2001, playing each time as the favorite. Alternatively, when facing seeds in the 5-7 range, double-digit seeds are just 5-22 SU and 8-16-3 ATS (33.3%) in that same timeframe. Amazingly, neither of these trends even saw a qualifier in 2025.
- #14 seeds that pulled off upsets in the first round are 0-11 SU and 1-10 ATS (9.1%) in the second round since 1998, losing by an average of 14 PPG.
- Better-seeded teams are just 11-17 SU and ATS (39.3%) when playing as underdogs to worse-seeded teams in the second round since 2001, although Kentucky (+2.5) did upend Illinois last season.

SWEET 16 GAMES

- Laying big points seems to be getting more and more risky in the Sweet 16 in recent years, as favorites of 5-points or more are 20-11 SU but just 11-20 ATS (35.5%) since 2017.
- Sweet 16 favorites of 8 points or more are on a 29-9-3 Under (76.3%) the total run, allowing 63.4 PPG.
- Sweet 16 #1 and #2 seeds are on a 45-17 SU and 35-26-1 ATS (57.4%) run over the last 11 seasons.
- Sweet 16 round is usually the end of the line for double-digit seeds; however, they have been very competitive as underdogs, going 17-7-1 ATS (70.8%) in that role since 2011.
- The popular #1-#4 matchup has seen #1s win most often lately, 15-4 SU in the last 19, but they are just 1-6 ATS (14.3%) in the last seven.
- In Sweet 16 games between teams "both not supposed to be there," or both seeded 5 or worse, the worse-seeded team is 11-7 SU and ATS (61.1%) since '01.
- Better-seeded teams playing as underdogs or pick 'ems in Sweet 16 games are on a 6-2 SU and ATS (75%) surge.
- In recent Sweet 16 games featuring a better-seeded mid-major team taking on a lesser-seeded Power 6 conference team, the latter are on a current 7-5 SU and 7-4-1 ATS (63.6%) run. Last year, not a single mid-major team made the Sweet 16.
- Since 2010, in Sweet 16 games involving at least one mid-major conference program, Under the total is 26-14 (65%).
- Over the last 11 years, there have been 26 Sweet 16 games with totals of less than 138, and Under the total is 19-7 (73.1%).
- Teams seeded in the #5-#9 range and a "surprise Sweet 16 team" are dangerous small underdogs vs. better-seeded teams in this round, 24-33 SU and 31-22-4 ATS (58.5%) since 2000.
- I mentioned earlier that bettors have not enjoyed a winning second round since 2017, and I referenced the short prep window as the potential reason. In the Sweet 16, they have bounced back, going 42-30-1 ATS (58.3%) in moving opening lines since 2012.

ELITE EIGHT GAMES

- The Elite Eight round has long been a dangerous spot for better-seeded teams, as they are just 54-46 SU and 39-57-4 ATS (40.6%) since 2000.
- Elite Eight favorites of 4.5 points or fewer have gone just 26-34 SU and 22-37-1 ATS (37.3%) since 1999. However, they are on a three-game outright and ATS winning streak.
- Elite Eight games have been decisive, with outright winners owning a stellar record of 68-6-2 ATS (91.9%) since 2006.
- Cinderella teams, or those not from power conferences, have been good bets when they reach the Elite Eight round, 14-12 SU and 15-10-1 ATS (60%) since 2003, including 9-2-1 ATS as underdogs of 3 points or more.
- The Elite Eight round is clearly a “survival round” for #1 seeds, as they are just 38-25 SU but 28-31-4 ATS (47.5%) in this round since 2001. However, they are 9-1 SU and 8-2 ATS (80%) in their last 10, so this trend seems to have turned.
- Elite Eight #1-#3 seeds have struggled mightily against teams seeded #4 or worse, going 17-14 SU and 8-21-2 ATS (27.6%) since 2001.
- The Elite Eight round has easily been the best round to play Overs on totals, 89-69-2 (56.3%) since 2001. In games with lower totals of 143 or less, it has been 59 Overs and 31 Unders, for 65.6%.
- In Elite Eight games between teams “both not supposed to be there”, or both seeded 3 or worse, the worse-seeded team has gone 8-4 SU and 9-3 ATS (75%) since 2013.
- In Elite Eight games matching #1 and #3 seeds, the #1 has been stellar, going 13-3 SU and 11-5 ATS since 2007 (68.8%).
- In Elite Eight games featuring a #2, #3, or #4 seed “expected to win” against a lower seed, these better seeds have gone just 8-17 SU and 4-21 ATS (16%) since 2005!

FINAL FOUR GAMES

- In the Final Four Round, outright winning teams own a record of 39-7-2 ATS (84.8%) since 2001, although most recently, San Diego State did beat Florida Atlantic in a 2023 clash without covering.
- Final Four #1 seeds are 19-5 SU and 14-9-1 ATS (60.9%) since 2001 when not matched against another #1 seed. This was 2-0 SU and ATS in 2024, with UConn and Purdue each winning by double digits.
- Final Four favorites of 5 points or more are on a solid surge of 21-3 SU and 15-8-1 ATS (65.2%) over the last 25 years.
- The last seven Final Four games that didn’t feature a #1 or #2 seed have all gone to the better-seeded team, with that team going 6-1 ATS (85.7%).
- The last seven mid-major conference teams to reach the Final Four and face a power conference team have gone 4-3 SU and 3-4 ATS (42.9%).
- ACC teams have gone cold in Final 4 round play, just 3-5 SU and 1-7 ATS (12.5%) in their last eight tries, with the only ATS win coming in head-to-head play.
- Big 12, Big East, and Big Ten teams have combined to go 8-2 SU and ATS (80%) in their last 10 Final Four round games since 2018.
- On totals, the last seven Final Four games that had posted numbers of 130 or less went Under, producing just 112.2 combined PPG on average. In all other games, totals are 24-19-2 Over (55.8%) in the Finals Four since 1999. The last four games have gone Under the total, however.
- Bettors have been sharp in moving lines for the Final Four games since 2015, going 13-1 SU and 9-5 ATS (64.3%) in games that have seen the point spread shift off the opener.
- Eight of the last 11 Final Four games that have seen an opening total moved downward through the week until tip-off have ended up going Over the total (72.7%).

CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES

- Championship game favorites of 3 points or more are on a 15-3 SU and 13-5 ATS (72.2%) run, while those favored by 2.5 or less are just 5-4 SU and ATS since 1998. Last year, UConn (-1) edged Houston, 65-63.
- Only twice in the last 25 years did the championship-winning team not cover the spread (Duke against Butler in 2010, Kansas versus North Carolina in 2022).
- In the last 15 championship games matching non-equal seeds, the better seed is on a 13-3 SU and 11-5 ATS (68.8%) run.
- The last 15 championship games have trended on the lower scoring side, with Under the total going 11-4 (73.3%), with games producing 135.2 PPG on totals averaging 140.2.
- Over the last 24 years of championship games, excluding the improbable 2014 matchup of #7 vs. #8, and the 2023 #4 vs. #9, teams seeded #3 or worse are just 2-9 SU and 4-7 ATS (36.4%).
- Big East schools own a perfect 8-0 SU and ATS record in championship games since 2001, while Big Ten teams are winless at 0-8 SU and ATS. These trends “collided” in the 2024 title game win by UConn over Purdue.
- ACC teams (8-3 ATS in the last 11) and SEC teams (4-1 ATS in the last five) are also on good runs in championship game play.
- The last eight mid-major conference teams to reach the championship game are just 2-6 SU and ATS (25%). All but one of the seven of those games that had totals went Under (85.7%).
- There have been eight championship games since 2001 that closed with totals of 150 or higher, and those contests were 6-2 Under the total (75%).
- Bettors have gone just 8-10 ATS (44.4%) in their last 18 championship games when moving opening lines towards one team or the other. They are on a three-game ATS winning streak, though. This same group is on a 14-7 (66.7%) run when moving totals one way or the other. Last year’s game didn’t see any total movement.

NCAA BRACKET PICKS

**WIN YOUR BRACKET
POOL 3X AS OFTEN**

HOW TO MAKE NCAA BRACKET PICKS THAT ACTUALLY WIN YOUR POOL

Editor's Note: This guest post is from [PoolGenius](#), a provider of data-driven NCAA bracket picks and tools that have helped pool players win \$2.8 million and three times the expected rate since 2017.

Every March, everyone suddenly has an opinion about the bracket.

The coworker who hasn't watched a game all season has a sleeper pick. Your group chat is debating which No. 12 seed is "definitely" beating a 5. Bracket conversations are everywhere.

And while some of those hot takes are part of what makes this time of year fun and entertaining, even well-known bracket prognosticators are often giving advice that doesn't translate well to winning a pool. The problem is that most of those conversations focus on predicting games, not maximizing your chances of finishing first.

Those are two different things.

DO YOU ACTUALLY WANT TO WIN YOUR BRACKET POOL?

This is an honest question.

Most bracket players say they want to win their pool, but many approach their picks in a way that makes that outcome unlikely.

They want to be the person who called the No. 13 seed over the No. 4. That pick becomes the highlight of their group chat on day one.

But that 13 seed often loses in the next round, and one correct upset is not what wins a bracket pool. The problem is that players chasing that moment usually don't stop at one upset. They add the trendy No. 12 over No. 5. They might add in a No. 11 seed advancing as well.

Before long, the bracket is filled with unnecessary risk. The

champion goes out early, too many underdogs advance too far, and the overall probability of scoring points late in the tournament drops quickly.

If winning the pool is the goal, every pick needs to serve that objective.

VALUE PLAYS WIN POOLS, NOT BOLD UPSET CALLS

This is the part most bracket advice never gets to.

In 2025, Purdue was a No. 4 seed with a 51% chance to reach the Sweet 16. Only 38% of public brackets had them advancing.

That's what we call a value play, even though Purdue was technically chalk to make the Sweet 16. It's not a bold call or flashy upset, just value between what the rest of your pool is picking and what the market odds project will happen.

If you stack enough of these value plays without taking on more risk than your pool warrants, then you'll build a +EV bracket with a real chance at winning.

The obvious question then becomes: how do you find these value plays and the public pick data needed to identify them?

GET PUBLIC PICK DATA TO MAKE SMARTER NCAA BRACKET PICKS

To find value plays like the Purdue example above, you need two things:

- Accurate odds on each team advancing.
- Public pick data showing how often people are actually selecting them.

The gap between those two numbers is where the edge lives.

When a team's actual odds of advancing are noticeably higher than its public pick rate, that's a value play. When a popular team is being picked far more often than its odds justify, that's a potential fade.

Do that across every round, first round through the championship, and you're building a bracket the right way.

WHERE DO YOU FIND PUBLIC PICK DATA?

PoolGenius aggregates public pick data from major bracket-hosting sites and combines it with market odds and team ratings to surface gaps at every stage of the tournament.

The value plays are right there. You just need the data to see them.

[Get Pick Data at PoolGenius](#)

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HOW TO KNOW WHEN VALUE PLAYS MAKE SENSE

Finding a value play is step one. Knowing whether to act on it is step two.

For example, in 2025 Drake was an 11 seed facing Missouri, which had roughly a 60% chance of winning.

- In a standard 1-2-4-8-16-32 scoring format, leaning Missouri made sense.
- In an upset bonus or seed differential pool, Drake became worth considering because a correct upset pick is worth dramatically more.

Same game, same odds, completely different "right answer" depending on your pool.

That calculation changes across every matchup, every round, and every scoring format. Most of the time, it's not something you can work out on the fly in your head.

POOLGENIUS RUNS THIS MATH, SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO

PoolGenius takes your pool size and scoring rules (even the complicated ones), factors in public pick rates and accurate advancement odds, and calculates who you should pick, where to take risk, and where to play it safe across all 67 games.

No assumptions. No bias. Just data and math.

It's how subscribers have reported over \$2.8 million in bracket winnings since 2017 (\$10 million across all sports pools) and have won bracket pools at 3x the expected rate.

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CONFERENCE TRENDS TO CARRY YOU THROUGH THE TOURNEY

By Steve Makinen

ACC TEAMS

CLEMSON (South #8) vs. IOWA-Big Ten
DUKE (East #1) vs. SIENA-Metro Atlantic
LOUISVILLE (East #6) vs. S FLORIDA-American Athletic
MIAMI (West #7) vs. MISSOURI-SEC
N CAROLINA (South #6) vs. VA COMMONWEALTH-Atlantic 10
NC STATE (West #11) vs. TEXAS-SEC
SMU (Midwest #11) vs. MIAMI OHIO-Mid-American
VIRGINIA (Midwest #3) vs. WRIGHT ST-Horizon

TRENDS

- Over the last four NCAA tournaments, the ACC boasts a record of 37-20 SU and ATS (64.9%).
- By round, ACC teams have demonstrated some recent definitive runs or skids. In second-round games, ACC teams are on an incredible 20-4 SU and 18-6 ATS (75%) run. In Sweet 16 games, they are 22-12 ATS (64.7%) since 2014. In the Final Four round, ACC teams are just 4-5 SU and 2-7 ATS (22.2%) in their last nine. In title games, the teams are on an 8-3 SU and ATS (72.7%) surge.
- In the role of pick 'em or small underdog (up to 4.5-points), ACC teams are currently on a 19-5 ATS (79.2%) surge.
- ACC teams are just 33-52-1 ATS (38.8%) as favorites of 5 points or less in the NCAA's since 1998.
- ACC teams are 36-3 SU but 14-25 ATS (35.9%) in their last 39 as double-digit tourney favorites.
- ACC teams playing as double-digit seeds are 20-12-1 ATS (62.5%) since 2012.
- #2 ACC seeds are on a brutal 11-28-1 ATS (28.2%) slide since 2001.
- ACC teams are 16-4 SU but 1-19 ATS (5%) combined versus Atlantic Sun, Coastal Athletic, and Ohio Valley teams since 2001.
- ACC teams are on a current surge of 13-5 SU and 14-4 ATS (77.8%) in the NCAA's versus Big 12 foes. In addition, underdogs are on an impressive 10-11 SU and 15-6 ATS (71.4%) surge in the matchup.
- In the 21 most recent NCAA tourney matchups between the ACC and Big East, Over the total is 14-7 (66.7%).
- Nineteen of the last 26 NCAA tourney matchups between the ACC and SEC have gone Under the total (73.1%). Both went Under last year by over 20 points.
- In that same ACC-SEC conference NCAA matchup, underdogs are on a 14-4-1 ATS (77.8%) surge since 2017.
- There have been nine tourney matchups since 2001 pitting ACC foes against one another...All but one went Over the total (88.9%), producing 148.9 PPG on totals averaging 142. That one Under was in the 2024 game between Duke and NC State. Underdogs have won the last four SU and ATS as well.

AMERICA EAST TEAM

MD-BALT COUNTY (Midwest #16) vs. HOWARD-Mid-Eastern

TRENDS

- Bryant's loss to Michigan State in 2025 dropped the America East record in the NCAA's to 11-6 ATS (64.7%) since 2011.
- America East teams are 17-8-1 Under (68%) the total in NCAA's since 2003.

AMERICAN TEAM

S FLORIDA (East #11) vs. LOUISVILLE-ACC

TRENDS

- American Athletic teams are 13-5 Under the total (72.2%) in their last 18 tourney games as underdogs.
- In their last 25 tourney games versus power conference foes, American Athletic teams are 18-10 Under the total (64.3%).
- AAC teams boast a recent NCAA tourney record versus fellow mid-major conference teams of 8-3 ATS (72.7%).
- As seeds #7-#10, AAC teams have been dangerous lately, going 11-10 SU and 14-7 ATS (66.7%) in their last 21 tourney tries.

ATLANTIC 10 TEAMS

SAINT LOUIS (Midwest #9) vs. GEORGIA-SEC
VA COMMONWEALTH (South #11) vs. N CAROLINA-ACC

TRENDS

- Atlantic 10 teams have won just four of their last 16 NCAA tourney games, both SU and ATS (25%).
- A-10 teams are also on a 3-9 SU and ATS (25%) skid in the NCAA's against fellow mid-major conference foes.
- Underdogs are 10-3 ATS (76.9%) in the last 13 NCAA tourney games between Atlantic 10 and Big East.
- Favorites are on a 21-6 SU and 18-9 ATS (66.7%) surge in Atlantic 10 NCAA tourney games since 2015.
- Atlantic 10 teams are 19-6 SU and 14-7-4 ATS (66.7%) in their last 25 games as tournament favorites.

ATLANTIC SUN TEAM

QUEENS NC (West #15) vs. PURDUE-Big Ten

TRENDS

- Atlantic Sun teams are on an 11-6 ATS (64.7%) run in NCAA tourney games since 2013, including 9-5 ATS (64.3%) vs. Power 5 conferences.
- Atlantic Sun teams are on 5-1 Under (83.3%) the total run in NCAA's overall and 6-2 Under the total (75%) in their last eight vs. power conference teams.

BIG 12 TEAMS

ARIZONA (West #1) vs. LONG ISLAND-Northeast
BYU (West #6) vs. NC STATE-ACC/TEXAS-SEC-Missouri Valley
HOUSTON (South #2) vs. IDAHO-Big Sky
IOWA ST (Midwest #2) vs. TENNESSEE ST-Ohio Valley
KANSAS (East #4) vs. CAL BAPTIST-WAC
TCU (East #9) vs. OHIO ST-Big Ten
TEXAS TECH (Midwest #5) vs. AKRON-Mid-American
UCF (East #10) vs. UCLA-Big Ten

TRENDS

- Big 12 teams have been dominant in the First Four/first round games of the tournament since 2017, going 41-14 SU and 35-20 ATS (63.6%).
- Big 12 teams in the #4-#8 seed ranges are on a slide of 29-38 SU and 26-40 ATS (39.4%) since 2010, popular upset victims.
- Against mid-major teams in the NCAA's, Big 12 teams are on a 27-12 ATS (69.2%) surge.
- Underdogs are on a 10-3-1 ATS (76.9%) run in NCAA tournament games between the Big 12 and Big Ten conferences.
- Big 12 teams are just 11-13 SU and 8-16 ATS (33.3%) in their last 24 NCAA tourney games vs the Big East.
- Big 12 teams have struggled vs. Missouri Valley teams in NCAA tourney play, going just 4-7 SU and 2-9 ATS (18.2%) since 2001, although Texas Tech did beat Drake handily in 2025.
- Big 12 teams have lost 63 of their 79 NCAA tourney games since 2000 as underdogs of 2.5 points or more and are 33-45-1 ATS (42.3%) in those games.
- As favorites of 7 points or more in the NCAA's, Big 12 teams are on a current run of 37-2 SU and 26-13 ATS (66.7%).
- In expectedly high-scoring NCAA tournament games, or those with totals >155, Big 12 teams are on a 19-8 ATS (70.3%) run.

BIG EAST TEAMS

CONNECTICUT (East #2) vs. FURMAN-Southern
ST JOHNS (East #5) vs. N IOWA-Missouri Valley
VILLANOVA (West #8) vs. UTAH ST-Mountain West

TRENDS

- Big East schools own a perfect 8-0 SU and ATS record in championship games since 2001, including Connecticut's recent back-to-back wins.
- Big East teams have also thrived in the tournament's second round of late, going 16-7 ATS (69.6%) since 2017.
- The top two seeded (#1's and #2's) teams from the Big East have validated their positions by going 29-7 SU and 26-10 ATS (72.2%) in the NCAA's since 2016.
- The last 46 Big East teams to play as seeds of #7 or worse in the NCAA tourney are just 15-38 SU and 20-33 ATS (37.7%).
- Big East teams have gone 24-8 Under the total (75%) when matched up vs. the Big Ten in the NCAA's since 2003.
- NCAA games between the Big East and SEC have trended heavily towards favorites recently, 11-2 SU and ATS (84.6%) in the last 13.
- Teams from the Big East Conference have been highly reliable double-digit favorites in the NCAA's since 2007, going 45-3 SU and 33-15 ATS (68.8%).
- Teams from the Big East in the #8-#9 First Round matchup are just 6-13 SU and 5-14 ATS (26.3%) in the NCAA's since 2005. However, both UConn and Creighton won in this scenario last year.
- Big East teams are on a 10-3 SU and ATS (76.9%) run against Mountain West teams in the tournament.
- Favorites are 56-23 ATS (70.9%) in the last 79 Big East NCAA tourney games, including 28-9 ATS (75.7%) the last three years.
- In NCAA tourney games between Big East programs and non-major conferences since 2015, favorites are on a 34-12 SU and 33-11 ATS (75%) run.
- Big East teams have struggled in the NCAA in the +3 to -3 line range, going 39-56 ATS (41.1%) since 2004.

BIG SKY TEAM

IDAHO (South #15) vs. HOUSTON-Big 12

TRENDS

- Big Sky teams are just 1-24 SU and 6-19 ATS (24%) in the tournament since 2001, including 3-17 ATS (15%) as an underdog of less than 20 points.
- Big Sky teams have lost 22 straight NCAA tournament games against major conference teams, going 5-17 ATS (22.7%).
- Big Sky teams are on a 5-1 Over the total (83.3%) surge in the NCAA's, but Montana did go Under in 2025.

BIG SOUTH TEAM

HIGH POINT (West #12) vs. WISCONSIN-Big Ten

TRENDS

- Big South teams are 8-4-1 ATS (66.7%) as #16 seeds in the tournament since 2003, 3-9 ATS (25%) in all other seeds.
- Big South teams are on a 16-6 Under the total (72.7%) tourney surge vs. major conference teams, scoring just 56.9 PPG.
- Big South teams have gone Under the total in all 11 (100%) previous NCAA tourney games with totals of 140 or higher.

BIG TEN TEAMS

ILLINOIS (South #3) vs. PENNSYLVANIA-Ivy League
IOWA (South #9) vs. CLEMSON-ACC
MICHIGAN (Midwest #1) vs. HOWARD-MEAC/MD-BALT COUNTY-America East-
MICHIGAN ST (East #3) vs. N DAKOTA ST-Summit
NEBRASKA (South #4) vs. TROY-Sun Belt
OHIO ST (East #8) vs. TCU-Big 12
PURDUE (West #2) vs. QUEENS NC-Atlantic Sun
UCLA (East #7) vs. UCF-Big 12
WISCONSIN (West #5) vs. HIGH POINT-Big South

TRENDS

- Big Ten teams are on an insane 48-21 Under the total (69.6%) run in the last four NCAA tournaments.
- Big Ten teams are winless at 0-8 SU and ATS in the championship game since 2001.
- Big Ten teams have been vulnerable in the #4 seed of late, 8-15-1 ATS (34.8%) in their last 24 tourney tries.
- Big Ten teams have been relatively strong in the double-digit chalk role in the tournament, 56-5 SU and 36-21-4 ATS (63.2%) since 1998, including 7-0 SU and ATS the last two years.
- Big Ten teams are on a 15-13 SU and 17-10-1 ATS (62.9%) run vs. SEC foes in the NCAA tourney; however were 2-5 SU and ATS last year.
- Big Ten teams have gone just 16-23 SU and 17-21-1 ATS (44.7%) since 2015 in the NCAA tournament vs. Big 12 foes.
- For as good as Big Ten teams have been in the big favorite role, they have been brutal as underdogs of 5.5 points or more in the tournament, 6-58 SU and 22-42 ATS (34.4%) since 1998. They were 0-5 SU and 1-4 ATS in this role a year ago.
- In tourney games versus mid-major conference foes over the last three seasons in the NCAA's, Big Ten teams are on an 18-2 SU and 17-3 ATS (85%) run. They are also 26-7 Under the total (78.8%) in their last 33 such games.
- Going back to 2017, Big Ten teams boast a 45-12 SU and 36-20-1 ATS (64.3%) record in the NCAA first round.
- In tourney games of the second round and later, Big Ten teams are just 27-42 SU and 28-39-2 ATS (41.8%) since 2017.
- The Big Ten's worst round overall lately has been the Sweet 16, 18-26 SU and 15-27-2 ATS (35.7%) since 2007.

BIG WEST

TEAM

HAWAII (West #13) vs. ARKANSAS-SEC

TRENDS

- Big West teams are just 4-21 SU and 9-15-1 ATS (37.5%) in their last 25 NCAA tournament games.
- Big West teams have trended Under on totals in five straight NCAA tourney games.
- Big West teams have struggled in the role of large underdog, 1-20 SU and 8-14-1 ATS (36.4%) when catching 6.5 points or more in the tourney since 1998.
- All five Big West teams that reached the second round since 2001 lost SU and ATS by an average of 18 PPG.

CAA

TEAM

HOFSTRA (Midwest #13) vs. ALABAMA-SEC

TRENDS

- Coastal Athletic teams used to be among the country's best in terms of NCAA tournament spread performance. However, they have lost their last 12 games outright and are 1-5 ATS (16.7%) in their last six.
- Coastal Athletic teams are on a 24-9-2 ATS (72.7%) run as NCAA tourney dogs to major conference teams, including UNCW (+15.5) 82-72 loss to Texas Tech last year.
- Under the total is 8-2 (80%) in the last 10 Coastal Athletic NCAA tournament games versus other mid-major conference teams. Over is 7-4 (63.6%) in the last 11 vs. power conference foes.
- CAA teams have covered the spread in all nine NCAA tourney games (9-0 ATS 100%) vs. ACC teams since 2001.

CONFERENCE USA

TEAM

KENNESAW ST (West #14) vs. GONZAGA-West Coast

- Take away Florida Atlantic's 4-1 SU and ATS run in 2023, and it's a 6-18 SU and 7-17 ATS (29.2%) NCAA tourney slide for Conference USA teams since 2009.
- Versus power conference schools in the NCAA tournament, Conference USA teams are just 24-40 SU and ATS (37.5%) since 1998, including 9-23 ATS (28.1%) as dogs of 4.5 points or more.
- Favorites have won the last six NCAA tourney games SU and ATS between Conference USA and the ACC.
- Favorites are on an 11-2 SU and ATS (84.6%) run in NCAA tournament games between Conference USA and Big Ten, including Liberty's loss to Oregon last year.
- Conference USA teams are on a brutal slide of 4-23 SU and 6-21 ATS (22.2%) as an underdog of +2 to +9.5 in the NCAA tournament.
- Double-digit seeded Conference USA teams are on a 6-18 SU and 7-17 ATS (29.2%) slide in the NCAA's.

HORIZON

TEAM

WRIGHT ST (Midwest #14) vs. VIRGINIA-ACC

TRENDS

- Horizon League teams have lost 14 of their last 16 NCAA tourney games while going 8-8 ATS (50%). However, they are currently on a six-game ATS win streak.
- Horizon League teams are on a 17-9 Under the total (65.4%) NCAA run.
- Line placement has been key in Horizon League NCAA tourney games. As dogs of 8 points or more, they are 1-17 SU and 7-9 ATS (43.8%) since 2002. In all other games, they are 20-11 SU and 23-8 ATS (74.2%).
- In their last 15 NCAA tourney games versus power conference foes, Horizon League teams are 2-16 SU and 8-10 ATS (44.4%) since 2002. Versus other mid-majors, Horizon League teams are on an 8-2 SU and ATS tourney surge.

IVY

TEAM

PENNSYLVANIA (South #14) vs. ILLINOIS-Big Ten

TRENDS

- Ivy League teams have gone 8-14 SU and 13-9 ATS (59.1%) in their last 22 NCAA tourney games.
- Ivy League teams are on a 20-13 Under the total (60.6%) NCAA run, but they have gone Over in each of their last four tries.
- As underdogs of 5 points or more in the NCAA's, Ivy League teams are just 5-24 SU and 11-18 ATS (37.9%) since 2000. They are also 19-10 Under the total (65.5%) in those games, scoring just 62.4 PPG.

MAAC

TEAM

SIENA (East #16) vs. DUKE-ACC

TRENDS

- Metro Atlantic Athletic teams are now 2-6 SU and ATS (25%) in their last eight NCAA tourney tries as a non-double-digit underdog. They are 4-2 ATS (66.7%) in their last six as a double-digit dog.
- MAAC teams are 3-2 SU and 1-4 ATS (20%) historically in First Four games.
- Metro Atlantic teams have produced a record of 3-4 SU and 5-2 ATS versus SEC teams since 2001 in the NCAA's.
- Metro Atlantic teams are on a 12-6 Over the total (66.7%) surge in the NCAA's vs. power conference foes.

MAC

TEAMS

AKRON (Midwest #12) vs. TEXAS TECH-Big 12

MIAMI OHIO (Midwest #11) vs. SMU-ACC

TRENDS

- Mid-American Conference teams are 14-8 ATS (63.6%) in their last 22 NCAA tourney games as a #13 seed or worse, but 9-11 ATS (45%) in other seeds during that stretch.
- Mid-American Conference teams are on a run of 11-5 ATS (68.8%) in their last 16 tries as dogs of 6.5 points or more in the NCAA tourney.
- MAC teams have gone Under the total in their last seven NCAA tourney games (100%).

MEAC

TEAM

HOWARD (Midwest #16) vs. MD-BALT COUNTY-America East

TRENDS

- MEAC teams are on a 4-17 SU and 6-15 ATS (28.6%) slide in the NCAA's, including 1-11 SU and 3-9 ATS (25%) in first-round games.
- NCAA Tourney games featuring MEAC teams have trended heavily Under on totals, 18-11 (62.1%) in L29. However, the last three have gone Over.

MISSOURI VALLEY

TEAM

N IOWA (East #12) vs. ST JOHNS-Big East

TRENDS

- Missouri Valley Conference teams have gone 21-16 SU and 21-15-1 ATS (60.8%) in the NCAA tournament since 2013.
- MVC teams are on a 19-11-1 ATS (63.3%) NCAA tourney run against power conference schools.
- Missouri Valley schools are 7-4 SU and 8-1-2 ATS (88.9%) in their last 11 NCAA tourney contests vs. the SEC.
- MVC teams are 16-7-1 ATS (69.6%) since 2006 as an NCAA tournament underdog of 3 points or more.
- Underdogs are 21-8-1 ATS (72.4%) since 2013 in MVC NCAA tourney games.
- Under the total is 16-7 (69.6%) in the last 23 Missouri Valley NCAA tourney games, including 11-3 Under in games with totals >=144.

MOUNTAIN WEST

TEAM

UTAH ST (West #9) vs. VILLANOVA-Big East

TRENDS

- I have shared Mountain West teams' struggles annually in the NCAA's in recent years, as collectively they are just 32-67 SU and 32-64-3 ATS (33.3%) since 2001.
- As tournament underdogs, Mountain West teams are just 12-48 SU and 16-41-3 ATS (28.1%) since 2001.
- Mountain West Conference teams have been totally overmatched against major conference programs in the NCAA's since 2000, 14-55 SU and 18-49-2 ATS (26.9%).
- As seeds of 8 or worse in the NCAA's, MWC teams are on a brutal 7-41 SU and 10-36-2 ATS (21.7%) since 2003!
- It's a stretch to find any NCAA tourney trends in which MWC teams are successful, but they do boast a 15-14-1 ATS (51.7%) mark versus fellow mid-major schools since 2002, including Colorado State's 78-70 win over Memphis in 2025.

NORTHEAST

TEAM

LONG ISLAND (West #16) vs. ARIZONA-Big 12

TRENDS

- Northeast teams are 5-1 ATS over the last three NCAA tourneys, snapping a slide of 4-9-1 ATS in the prior 14 games.
- Northeast Conference teams are on a 9-3 Over the total (75%) surge as a double-digit NCAA tourney underdog.

OHIO VALLEY

TEAM

TENNESSEE ST (Midwest #15) vs. IOWA ST-Big 12

TRENDS

- Ohio Valley Conference teams have gone 1-6 SU and ATS (14.3%) in their last seven NCAA tournament games after a 15-6 ATS run prior.
- OVC teams are 8-4 ATS (66.7%) in their last 12 NCAA tourney games when playing as dogs of 9 points or more.
- Ohio Valley teams are 6-12 ATS (33.3%) in their last 18 NCAA tourney games with totals >=141.
- Over the total is 10-4 (71.4%) in the last 13 Ohio Valley NCAA tourney games.

PATRIOT

TEAM

LEHIGH (South #16) vs. PRAIRIE VIEW A&M-SWAC

TRENDS

- Patriot League teams are 10-9 ATS (52.6%) in the First Round of the NCAA tournament since 2004, but are 1-5 ATS (16.7%) in all other games.
- Patriot League teams are 10-6 (62.5%) ATS as double-digit underdogs in the NCAA's since 2000.
- Patriot League teams are 12-8 (60%) ATS vs. power conference foes in the NCAA's since 2000, but 1-8 SU and 2-7 ATS (22.2%) against fellow mid-major teams.

SEC

TEAMS

ALABAMA (Midwest #4) vs. HOFSTRA-Coastal Athletic
ARKANSAS (West #4) vs. HAWAII-Big West
FLORIDA (South #1) vs. LEHIGH-Patriot/PRAIRIE VIEW A&M-SWAC-
GEORGIA (Midwest #8) vs. SAINT LOUIS-Atlantic 10
KENTUCKY (Midwest #7) vs. SANTA CLARA-West Coast
MISSOURI (West #10) vs. MIAMI-ACC
TENNESSEE (Midwest #6) vs. SMU-ACC/Miami OHIO-MAC-
TEXAS (West #11) vs. NC STATE-ACC
TEXAS A&M (South #10) vs. ST MARYS-CA-West Coast
VANDERBILT (South #5) vs. MCNEESE ST-Southland

TRENDS

- As NCAA favorites of more than 20 points, SEC teams are 13-1 Over the total (92.9%) since 2001, scoring 87.1 PPG.
- SEC teams are on a 22-11 ATS (66.7%) run vs. ACC teams since 2003.
- As pick 'ems or small favorites of 5 points or less, SEC teams are an ugly 48-53 SU and 40-57-4 ATS (41.2%) in the NCAA's since 1999.
- SEC teams have been a solid wager in the Sweet 16 round, 29-15-2 ATS (65.9%) since 2003.
- SEC teams are on an 18-11 Over the total (62.1%) run in Elite Eight games.
- Seeded in the bottom half of the field (#9-#14), SEC teams have struggled to a 12-30 SU and 17-23-2 ATS (42.5%) record since 2007.
- The #4 seed and the SEC haven't meshed well of late, as they are 19-26 ATS (42.2%) in that spot since 2000 and have gone Under the total at a 30-14-1 (68.2%) rate.
- SEC teams are on a 7-14 ATS (33.3%) skid versus mid-major teams in the NCAA's and are 11-20 ATS (35.5%) in the last 31.
- In lower totaled NCAAT games featuring the SEC, they are just 21-37 ATS (36.2%) since 2014.

SOUTHERN

TEAM

FURMAN (East #15) vs. CONNECTICUT-Big East

TRENDS

- Southern Conference teams have been very competitive in the NCAA's when playing as an underdog of less than 15 points, 17-6 ATS (73.9%) in the last 23.
- SoCon teams have trended Under the total in recent NCAA's, 12-5 (70.6%) in the last 17.
- Teams from the SoCon have covered seven straight NCAA first-round games (100% ATS)!

SOUTHLAND

TEAM

MCNEESE ST (South #12) vs. VANDERBILT-SEC

TRENDS

- As underdogs of 8.5-points or less (or favored), Southland Conference teams are 9-7-1 ATS (56.3%) in their last 17 NCAA tournament tries, but when a larger underdog than that, they are 0-15 SU and 5-9-1 ATS (35.7%) since 2000.
- Southland Conference teams are 13-5 Under the total (72.2%) in their last 18 NCAA tournament first-round games.
- Southland Conference teams are on an amazing 17-3 Under the total (85%) surge in their last 20 NCAA tournament games vs. power conference opponents.

SUMMIT

TEAM

N DAKOTA ST (East #14) vs. MICHIGAN ST-Big Ten

TRENDS

- Overall, Summit League teams are on an 0-4 SU and ATS (0%) skid in the NCAA tournament, after going 7-1-1 ATS in the prior nine tries.
- Summit League teams have gone just 2-7 SU and 1-7-1 ATS when not an underdog of 9 points or more in the NCAA's.
- Recognized as a high-scoring, up-tempo league, six of the last eight NCAA tourney games featuring a Summit League team went Under the total (75%)..

SUN BELT

TEAM

TROY (South #13) vs. NEBRASKA-Big Ten

TRENDS

- Sun Belt teams have gone UNDER the total in nine of their L10 (90%) NCAA tourney games.
- As #14-#16 seeds in the NCAA's, SBC teams are on a 6-12-1 ATS (33.3%) slide since '99, but as #13 or better they've gone 11-5 ATS (68.8%) in that same span.
- As underdogs of 7.5-points or less, Sun Belt teams are on a 3-10 SU and 4-8-1 ATS (33%) slide in the NCAA's, but when +8 or higher, they are 13-6 ATS (68.4%) since '00.
- Sun Belt teams seem to take some motivation from playing major conference teams, as they are on an NCAA tourney run of 8-5 ATS (61.5%) versus those foes since 2008.

SWAC

TEAM

PRAIRIE VIEW A&M (South #16) vs. LEHIGH-Patriot

TRENDS

- SWAC teams are on a 7-5 ATS (58.3%) run currently in NCAA tourney games.
- As NCAA tourney dogs of +26 or more, SWAC teams are 0-8 SU and 2-6 ATS (25%) since 2000.

WAC

TEAM

CAL BAPTIST (East #13) vs. KANSAS-Big 12

TRENDS

- WAC teams have won just three of their last 26 games in the NCAA's since 2006, going 11-15 ATS; however, they are 6-2 ATS (75%) in their last eight.
- Against power conference opponents in the NCAA's, WAC teams are on a 1-18 SU and 7-12 ATS (36.8%) skid, while against fellow mid-majors, they are on a 12-6 ATS (66.7%) surge.
- Six of the last nine WAC first-round NCAA tourney games have gone Over the total (66.7%).

WEST COAST

TEAMS

GONZAGA (West #3) vs. KENNESAW ST-Conference USA

SANTA CLARA (Midwest #10) vs. KENTUCKY-SEC

ST MARYS-CA (South #7) vs. TEXAS A&M-SEC

TRENDS

- Going into the 2026 NCAA's, West Coast Conference teams are on a 7-15 ATS (31.8%) tourney skid.
- West Coast Conference teams are just 2-14 SU and 4-12 ATS (25%) in their last 16 NCAA tournament games against top 3 seeds.
- West Coast Conference teams haven't been as good as suspected as NCAA tournament underdogs, 7-25 SU and 9-23 ATS (28.1%) since 2007, including 13 straight outright losses.
- WCC teams have struggled against other non-major conference teams in NCAA tourney play, 20-9 SU but 9-20 ATS (31%) since 2004.
- WCC teams are just 5-14 ATS (26.3%) in their last 19 NCAA tourney games as favorites of 9.5 points or more.
- Favorites have won the L7 tourney games SU and ATS (100%) between West Coast and Big East conferences in the NCAA's.
- The last 11 NCAA tourney games between the West Coast and ACC/Big East conferences have gone Under the total (100%).

NCAA BRACKET & SURVIVOR POOL PICKS

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HOW TO WIN YOUR NCAA TOURNAMENT SURVIVOR POOL (2026 STRATEGY)

*Editor's Note:
This guest post is from [PoolGenius](#), whose tools and analysis have helped subscribers win over \$10 million in sports pools since 2017.*

NCAA Tournament Survivor pools are simple on the surface. Pick a team to win, usually without worrying about the spread. If they win, you advance. You also can't reuse that team later in the tournament. One loss and your entry is eliminated.

The strategy behind surviving long enough to win is more complicated. You need to think about which teams to use early, which ones to save for later rounds, how popular your picks are relative to the rest of the field, and whether you still have viable options as the tournament moves deeper.

For anyone who has played NFL Survivor contests, it's common to make a pick early in the season that you later regret. Over the course of a long season, you can typically recover from those regrettable decisions. Future value shifts, injuries happen, and unexpected results can open up paths you didn't plan for.

That flexibility doesn't exist in NCAA Survivor pools.

Because the tournament is structured through a fixed bracket, using the wrong team early can leave you without a viable pick in later rounds. If you don't plan ahead, you can find yourself in a spot where you simply don't have an option left when the tournament reaches the Elite Eight or Final Four.

Planning ahead before your pool begins puts you in a much better position to manage those decisions once the games start.

HOW NCAA TOURNAMENT SURVIVOR POOLS WORK

The format is straightforward. Pick one team to win per day. If they win, you advance. If they lose, you're out. You can never reuse a team you've already picked.

VSIN is sponsoring a high-stakes version of this called [VSIN Survivor Madness](#), with a \$1,000 entry fee, over a thousand total entries, and a \$1 million guaranteed prize.

Here's how the pick schedule works:

- One pick per day through the first and second rounds
- One pick per day through the Sweet 16

- Double picks (no matter the day) during the Elite Eight
- One pick for the Final Four
- One pick for the Championship

If no entries survive a given round, the prize is split among the last remaining entries. Entry fees and formats vary across contests, so always check the specific rules.

The core challenge of NCAA Survivor pools is the same everywhere: you have to keep winning, and you can never go back to a team you've already used.

That constraint is what makes planning so important.

TWO BIGGEST MISTAKES MOST NCAA SURVIVOR PLAYERS MAKE

Most NCAA Survivor players think one round at a time. That's how they run out of options by the Elite Eight.

1. Picking the Strongest Teams First

The teams most likely to advance deep into the tournament are the most valuable picks you have. Use one too early, and it's gone. The goal in the first two rounds is to find teams with solid win odds now but a lower probability of reaching the Final Four. Good early matchup, tough region, or a power rating that doesn't quite match their seed. Those are the teams worth burning first.

Save your title contenders. You'll likely need them as options later.

2. Not Considering the Schedule

The tournament schedule adds another layer that many Survivor players overlook.

Teams don't play on the same days throughout the tournament. A team that plays Thursday in the first round and Saturday in the second round might then land on Friday in the Sweet 16 the following weekend.

The NCAA pod system adds another wrinkle. Teams playing at the same site in the opening rounds are not always in the same region, which means their paths through the bracket and their later-round game days can diverge quickly.

If you're not thinking about those mechanics when planning your picks, it's easy to create a problem for yourself later in the tournament. You may still have strong teams available on paper, but none of them might be playing on the day you need to make a pick. At that point, you're forced into a much weaker option or eliminated without even having a viable choice.

Keeping track of the bracket structure, regional paths, and scheduling windows across multiple rounds is enough to make anyone's brain scramble.

PoolGenius has the tool that takes all of these variables into account at once.

The NCAA Survivor Picks Tool tracks your available teams, public pick percentages, advancement odds, and the tournament schedule across every round, helping you see where scheduling conflicts and leverage opportunities may appear before you make a pick.

[Plan Your NCAA Survivor Strategy](#)

[Pool Picks Discounts Courtesy of VSIN](#)

HOW TO GAIN WINNING LEVERAGE IN NCAA SURVIVOR POOLS

Leverage in survivor pools is about taking a different path than most of the field without taking on too much risk. When things break your way, you jump a large percentage of the pool at once and put yourself in a position to win.

DUKE'S FINAL FOUR EXAMPLE LAST YEAR

In the 2025 Final Four, Duke was the popular pick. A large percentage of surviving entries were either picking Duke to advance to the championship or saving them for that round. Houston ended up beating the Blue Devils in that game.

That one pick reshuffled everything. Here's what happened across the remaining entries:

- Entries that picked Houston survived. Some won their pool outright because everyone else had Duke.
- Entries that picked Duke were eliminated.
- Entries that were holding Duke for the championship (and already used Houston) had no viable pick left.
- Entries that picked Houston and still had Florida left for the championship scooped the prize pool.

That one pick is exactly why planning ahead and understanding leverage matters. When you have options and know where the public is, you can pick your spots.

Finding those spots before they happen is how serious survivor players think.

NOT ALL ENTRIES ARE CREATED EQUAL

Another factor that changes survivor strategy is how many entries you have in the pool.

If you're playing a single high-stakes entry, like the [\\$1,000 VSIN Survivor Madness](#) contest, the margin for error is extremely small. Every pick needs to maximize the probability that your entry

survives and still has viable options later in the tournament. Planning your path through the bracket becomes critical, because one mistake can leave you without a playable option in later rounds.

The strategy can look very different when you're entering multiple lower-fee contests.

In those situations, many players approach their entries more like a portfolio. Some entries may follow the safest path forward, while others can take calculated shots on potential bracket busters early in the tournament. If those upset paths break correctly, they can eliminate large portions of the field while leaving your entry with strong teams still available in other regions.

The challenge is identifying which teams might actually be worth taking those chances on.

Evaluating those opportunities requires seeing advancement odds, public pick percentages, and the tournament schedule at the same time. When that information is organized in a single grid, it becomes much easier to visualize where different survivor paths might open up and how multiple entries can be structured to cover different scenarios.

That type of portfolio approach is exactly what tools like PoolGenius are designed to support.

THE POOLGENIUS NCAA SURVIVOR PICKS TOOL

Want to put all of this strategy into action without spending hours coordinating win odds, spreads, schedules, and pick popularity on your own? That's exactly what PoolGenius does for you.

Import your entry (up to 150 of them), track which teams you've used, and let the tool map out the best path forward before you make a single pick. Pick grades every round, updated advancement odds daily, leverage signals, and scheduling logic. All in one place.

Most survivor players are guessing their path. PoolGenius shows it to you before you pick.

GET THE NCAA SURVIVOR TOOL

[Plan Your NCAA Survivor Strategy](#)

[Pool Picks Discounts Courtesy of VSIN](#)

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**NCAA BRACKET
& SURVIVOR
POOL PICKS**

**WIN YOUR BRACKET
POOL 3X AS OFTEN**



ANALYZING WOMEN'S TOURNAMENT

#1 SEEDS

By Tyler Shoemaker

March Madness is upon us, and the women's tournament features four absolute powerhouses as the No. 1 seeds, so I thought I'd take a look at each of those teams and provide a quick glimpse of what got them here and what we can expect from them en route to crowning a national champion. Further, I wanted to use my T Shoe Index to point out some potential non-No. 1 seeds who can make a push for a Final Four, or at the very least, a deep postseason run. The No. 1 seeds are UConn, UCLA, Texas, and South Carolina with the National Championship odds in parentheses.



UConn (-265)

Unsurprisingly, the projected top overall seed after going 34-0 and thrashing virtually everyone in their path. They're No. 1 in the NET rankings, going 9-0 in Quad 1 games

and 5-0 in Quad 2 games, while boasting the No. 4 offensive rating in the country to pair with the top defensive rating in the country, per Her Hoop Stats. TSI also has the Huskies as the top-rated defense, holding opponents to 18 points below their season averages, while scoring 24 points above opponents' defensive averages, good for second in TSI offensive ratings.

UConn is led by forward Sarah Strong, averaging 18.5 points per game to go along with 7.6 rebounds and 4.1 assists; not to mention her backcourt help in Azzi Fudd, a sniper shooting 44% from 3 this season while averaging 17.7 points per game. Basically, this team is a juggernaut, and it's going to take an A+ game from an opponent to take down Geno Auriemma's squad.



UCLA (+550)

Perhaps the least heralded of the No. 1 seeds is UCLA, but this Bruins team can play. UCLA is No. 2 in NET rankings, going 18-1 in Quad 1 games and 2-0 in Quad 2 games this season, while having the highest-rated offensive rating in the country and the No. 4 defense, per HHS. TSI is a little lower than those metrics, though, formulating UCLA with the No. 7 offense and No. 2 defense while playing the most difficult schedule of all of the No. 1 seeds.

UCLA is bolstered by its dominant big inside, Lauren Betts, who averages 16.4 points per game to go along with 8.6 rebounds and 3.2 assists. The Bruins have three other players averaging double figures this season, so while Betts is the premier name, this is a balanced attack that can shoot the lights out, as all three of those players shoot 38% or better from 3, including Gianna Kneepkens, who shoots 44% from behind the arc. Play man-to-man and get beat inside. Play zone and get shot out of the gym. Tough call for opposing coaches against this team.



TEXAS (+700)

Perhaps the team with the biggest

sigh of relief upon bracket reveal is the Texas Longhorns, who, thanks to their dominant win vs. South Carolina in the SEC championship game, will avoid UConn until the championship. Texas ranks No. 4 in the NET, going 14-3 in Quad 1 and 5-0 in Quad 2 games. Her Hoops Stats ranks Texas as the No. 5 offense and the No. 2 defense, while TSI has them No. 6 and No. 3, respectively, as they score 19.4 points per game above opponents' defensive averages and hold opponents to 14.8 points per game below their season averages.

The Longhorns are led again by former SEC player of the year, Madison Booker, who averages just under 19 points per game. They only have two other scorers who average double figures, in Jordan Lee and Kyla Oldacre, and no one who averages more than Booker's 6.5 rebounds per game, so a matchup against UCLA and Lauren Betts in the semifinals could be an interesting challenge for Texas inside.



SOUTH CAROLINA (+800)

I was at the SEC tournament in Greenville, SC, last weekend, so I saw first hand both the

ceiling and deficiencies of this Gamecocks team. They rank No. 3 in the NET rankings, going 12-3 in Quad 1 games and 7-0 in Quad 2 games. HHS ranks them No. 2 on offense (tied with LSU) and No. 3 on defense, while TSI ranks them No. 5 on offense and No. 4 on defense. Those numbers are a little surprising to me based on what I saw in person from

Dawn Staley's squad, as they don't have a ton of shooting (Raven Johnson's 3-point improvement year-over-year is incredible), and their bigs are tall and mobile but not particularly skilled compared to the all-world bigs they've had in the past with A'ja Wilson and Aaliyah Boston.

I thought Maddy McDaniel provided a great spark off the bench at the point guard position. Joyce Edwards leads the team in scoring at 19.6 points per game, but to me, she's a very good athlete who runs the floor well and scores opportunistically but is not a primary creator of her own points. Them losing in the SEC championship to Texas sets them up for a potential semifinal vs.. UConn, and I don't think they have the firepower to contend with that team.

WHO COULD MAKE A RUN?

Women's basketball is much more top-heavy than men's, realistically, so there's just not going to be a huge "sleeper" team that comes out of nowhere. So, who outside the top four can realistically push one of the big dogs and maybe sneak into the Final Four?

Two teams jump out to me as feasibly capable: LSU (+1600) and Michigan (+8000). These teams are No. 5 and No. 6, respectively, in the NET rankings, while both having winning records vs. Quad 1 teams and undefeated vs. Quad 2.

HHS also ranks them both No. 5 and No. 6, while TSI has LSU as the second-best team in the country this season, while Michigan is TSI No. 6. The reason LSU is so high in TSI is their explosive offense. The Tigers score a ridiculous 27.3 points per game more than their opponents allow on average, yet are still top 10 in TSI defensive rating. They also have 1. a coach with championship pedigree in Kim Mulkey and 2. What I call "the hooper factor". They have three players – MiLaysia Fulwiley, Flau'jae Johnson and Mikaylah Williams – who can just flat out hoop. Their footwork, their imagination and creativity, and they just "have that dog in them." Watch out for the Tigers.

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STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS BRACKET

EAST REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29	
1	DUKE 97.2						
16	SIENA 69.9	DUKE 97.2					
8	OHIO STATE 85.5	OHIO STATE 85.5		DUKE 97.2			
9	TCU 83.3						
5	ST JOHN'S 89.2	ST JOHN'S 89.2		ST JOHN'S 89.2		DUKE 97.2	
12	NORTHERN IOWA 78.2						
4	KANSAS 88	KANSAS 88					
13	CA BAPTIST 74.8						
6	LOUISVILLE 88.6	LOUISVILLE 88.6					
11	SOUTH FLORIDA 83.4			MICHIGAN ST 89.1			
3	MICHIGAN ST 89.1	MICHIGAN ST 89.1					
14	N DAKOTA ST 74.7					MICHIGAN ST 89.1	
7	UCLA 85.7	UCLA 85.7					
10	UCF 80.7			CONNECTICUT 88.7			
2	CONNECTICUT 88.7	CONNECTICUT 88.7					
15	FURMAN 70						



SOUTH REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29		First Four Games March 17 & 18	
1	FLORIDA 95.5	FLORIDA 95.5						16	LEHIGH 64
16	LEHIGH/PVAM 64			FLORIDA 95.5				16	PRAIRIE VIEW A&M 63.3
8	CLEMSON 83.5	IOWA 85.4							
9	IOWA 85.4								
5	VANDERBILT 90.8	VANDERBILT 90.8		VANDERBILT 90.8		FLORIDA 95.5			
12	MCNEESE 80.5								
4	NEBRASKA 88.4	NEBRASKA 88.4							
13	TROY 72.3								
6	N CAROLINA 84.6	N CAROLINA 84.6							
11	VCU 83			ILLINOIS 92.3					
3	ILLINOIS 92.3	ILLINOIS 92.3							
14	PENN 71.2								
7	SAINT MARY'S CA 86.5	SAINT MARY'S CA 86.5							
10	TEXAS A&M 84.6			HOUSTON 93.7					
2	HOUSTON 93.7	HOUSTON 93.7				HOUSTON 93.7			
15	IDAHO 72.3								



STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS BRACKET

WEST REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29		First Four Games March 17 & 18
1	ARIZONA	96.2						11 NC STATE 84.7
16	LONG ISLAND	67.5	ARIZONA	96.2				11 TEXAS 84.1
8	VILLANOVA	83.9	UTAH STATE	84.6	ARIZONA	96.2		
9	UTAH STATE	84.6						
5	WISCONSIN	87.5	WISCONSIN	87.5	ARKANSAS	89.3	ARIZONA	96.2
12	HIGH POINT	77.2						
4	ARKANSAS	89.3	ARKANSAS	89.3				
13	HAWAII	75.7						
6	BYU	85.6	BYU	85.6	GONZAGA	90.4		
11	NC STATE/TEXAS	84.7						
3	GONZAGA	90.4	GONZAGA	90.4				
14	KENNESAW ST	71.9						
7	MIAMI FL	85.6	MIAMI FL	85.6	PURDUE	91.7	PURDUE	91.7
10	MISSOURI	81.8						
2	PURDUE	91.7	PURDUE	91.7				
15	QUEENS	69.8						



MIDWEST REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29		First Four Games March 17 & 18
1	MICHIGAN	97.8	MICHIGAN	97.8				11 SMU 83.3
16	HOWARD/UMBC	69.3			MICHIGAN	97.8		11 MIAMI OH 77.7
8	GEORGIA	85.7	GEORGIA	85.7				
9	SAINT LOUIS	84.3						
5	TEXAS TECH	85.1	TEXAS TECH	85.1	ALABAMA	-16.1	MICHIGAN	97.8
12	AKRON	80.2						
4	ALABAMA	89.6	ALABAMA	89.6				
13	HOFSTRA	77.4						
6	TENNESSEE	87.8	TENNESSEE	87.8	VIRGINIA	88.5		
11	SMU/MIAMI OH	83.3						
3	VIRGINIA	88.5	VIRGINIA	88.5				
14	WRIGHT ST	72.6						
7	KENTUCKY	86	KENTUCKY	86	IOWA ST	92.3	IOWA ST	92.3
10	SANTA CLARA	85						
2	IOWA ST	92.3	IOWA ST	92.3				
15	TENNESSEE ST	69.5						



16	HOWARD	68.7
16	UMBC	69.3

STEVE MAKINEN'S EFFECTIVE STRENGTH BRACKET

EAST REGION

	1st Round March 19 & 20	2nd Round March 21 & 22	Sweet 16 March 26 & 27	Elite Eight March 28 & 29
1	DUKE 28.1	DUKE 28.1	DUKE 28.1	DUKE 28.1
16	SIENA -1.3	OHIO STATE 15.6	ST JOHN'S 19.1	LOUISVILLE 21.1
8	OHIO STATE 15.6	ST JOHN'S 19.1	LOUISVILLE 21.1	
9	TCU 12.1	KANSAS 18.5	CONNECTICUT 20	
5	ST JOHN'S 19.1	LOUISVILLE 21.1		
12	NORTHERN IOWA 7.9	MICHIGAN ST 18.9		
4	KANSAS 18.5	UCLA 15.4		
13	CA BAPTIST 3.9	CONNECTICUT 20		
6	LOUISVILLE 21.1			
11	SOUTH FLORIDA 12.6			
3	MICHIGAN ST 18.9			
14	N DAKOTA ST 4.2			
7	UCLA 15.4			
10	UCF 9.7			
2	CONNECTICUT 20			
15	FURMAN -1.2			



SOUTH REGION

	1st Round March 19 & 20	2nd Round March 21 & 22	Sweet 16 March 26 & 27	Elite Eight March 28 & 29	First Four Games March 17 & 18
1	FLORIDA 24.7	FLORIDA 24.7	FLORIDA 24.7	FLORIDA 24.7	16 LEHIGH -6.9
16	LEHIGH/PVAM -6.9	IOWA 16.2	VANDERBILT 21.2	ILLINOIS 24.1	16 PRAIRIE VIEW A&M -8.7
8	CLEMSON 13.8	VANDERBILT 21.2	ILLINOIS 24.1		
9	IOWA 16.2	NEBRASKA 17.7	HOUSTON 22.7		
5	VANDERBILT 21.2	N CAROLINA 16.6			
12	MCNEESE 9.7	ILLINOIS 24.1			
4	NEBRASKA 17.7	SAINT MARY'S CA 16			
13	TROY 1.1	HOUSTON 22.7			
6	N CAROLINA 16.6				
11	VCU 12.3				
3	ILLINOIS 24.1				
14	PENN 1				
7	SAINT MARY'S CA 16				
10	TEXAS A&M 14.8				
2	HOUSTON 22.7				
15	IDAHO 1.2				



STEVE MAKINEN'S EFFECTIVE STRENGTH BRACKET

WEST REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20			2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29		First Four Games March 17 & 18		
1	ARIZONA	26.3	ARIZONA	26.3					11	NC STATE	14.7
16	LONG ISLAND	-3.1			ARIZONA	26.3			11	TEXAS	12.7
8	VILLANOVA	13.7	UTAH STATE	15.5							
9	UTAH STATE	15.5									
5	WISCONSIN	16.1	WISCONSIN	16.1			ARIZONA	26.3			
12	HIGH POINT	7.6			ARKANSAS	19.7					
4	ARKANSAS	19.7	ARKANSAS	19.7							
13	HAWAII	5.4									
6	BYU	16.8	BYU	16.8							
11	NC STATE/TEXAS	14.7			GONZAGA	23.4					
3	GONZAGA	23.4	GONZAGA	23.4							
14	KENNESAW ST	1.5					GONZAGA	23.4			
7	MIAMI FL	15.4	MIAMI FL	15.4							
10	MISSOURI	11.2			PURDUE	21.7					
2	PURDUE	21.7	PURDUE	21.7							
15	QUEENS	-1.9									





MIDWEST REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29		First Four Games March 17 & 18		
1	MICHIGAN	28.7	MICHIGAN	28.7	MICHIGAN	28.7	MICHIGAN	28.7	11 SMU	13.9
16	HOWARD/UMBC	-2							11 MIAMI OH	8.1
8	GEORGIA	17.2	GEORGIA	17.2						
9	SAINT LOUIS	15.9								
5	TEXAS TECH	18.2	TEXAS TECH	18.2						
12	AKRON	10.2								
4	ALABAMA	20.3	ALABAMA	20.3						
13	HOFSTRA	6.5								
6	TENNESSEE	19.3	TENNESSEE	19.3						
11	SMU/MIAMI OH	13.9								
3	VIRGINIA	18.9	VIRGINIA	18.9						
14	WRIGHT ST	1.8								
7	KENTUCKY	16.6	KENTUCKY	16.6						
10	SANTA CLARA	14.7								
2	IOWA ST	24	IOWA ST	24						
15	TENNESSEE ST	-1.5								



16	HOWARD	-2
16	UMBC	-2.1



STEVE MAKINEN'S BETTORS RATING BRACKET

EAST REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29	
1	DUKE -25.4						
16	SIENA 1.8	DUKE -25.4					
8	OHIO STATE -13.4	OHIO STATE -13.4		DUKE -25.4			
9	TCU -11.8						
5	ST JOHN'S -16.9	ST JOHN'S -16.9				DUKE -25.4	
12	NORTHERN IOWA -5.9			KANSAS -17.8			
4	KANSAS -17.8	KANSAS -17.8					
13	CA BAPTIST -3.2						
6	LOUISVILLE -18.7	LOUISVILLE -18.7					
11	SOUTH FLORIDA -12.1			MICHIGAN ST -19.1			
3	MICHIGAN ST -19.1	MICHIGAN ST -19.1					
14	N DAKOTA ST -2.5					CONNECTICUT -20.7	
7	UCLA -12.2	UCLA -12.2					
10	UCF -8.3			CONNECTICUT -20.7			
2	CONNECTICUT -20.7	CONNECTICUT -20.7					
15	FURMAN 1.3						



SOUTH REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29		First Four Games March 17 & 18	
1	FLORIDA -24.6	FLORIDA -24.6						16	LEHIGH 8.3
16	LEHIGH/PVAM 8.3			FLORIDA -24.6				16	PRAIRIE VIEW A&M 9.7
8	CLEMSON -13.6	IOWA -15.2							
9	IOWA -15.2								
5	VANDERBILT -17.8	VANDERBILT -17.8				FLORIDA -24.6			
12	MCNEESE -10.7			VANDERBILT -17.8					
4	NEBRASKA -16.2	NEBRASKA -16.2							
13	TROY -1.9								
6	N CAROLINA -12.4	N CAROLINA -12.4							
11	VCU -9.8			ILLINOIS -21.2					
3	ILLINOIS -21.2	ILLINOIS -21.2							
14	PENN 2.4								
7	SAINT MARY'S CA -15.8	SAINT MARY'S CA -15.8							
10	TEXAS A&M -14.6			HOUSTON -23					
2	HOUSTON -23	HOUSTON -23							
15	IDAHO -0.5								



STEVE MAKINEN'S BETTORS RATING BRACKET

WEST REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20			2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29		First Four Games March 17 & 18			
1	ARIZONA	-24.3	ARIZONA	-24.1	ARIZONA	-24.3	ARIZONA	-24.3	11	NC STATE	-13.8	
16	LONG ISLAND	4.1							11	TEXAS	-14.8	
8	VILLANOVA	-12	UTAH STATE	-14.5								
9	UTAH STATE	-14.5										
5	WISCONSIN	-15.2	WISCONSIN	-15.2	ARKANSAS	-17.2	PURDUE	-22.2				
12	HIGH POINT	-7.4										
4	ARKANSAS	-17.2	ARKANSAS	-17.2	GONZAGA	-21.7						
13	HAWAII	-4.9										
6	BYU	-15	BYU	-15	PURDUE	-22.2						
11	NC STATE/TEXAS	-14.8										
3	GONZAGA	-21.7	GONZAGA	-21.7	PURDUE	-22.2						
14	KENNESAW ST	-1.1										
7	MIAMI FL	-14.5	MIAMI FL	-14.5	PURDUE	-22.2						
10	MISSOURI	-12.6										
2	PURDUE	-22.2	PURDUE	-22.2								
15	QUEENS	1										



MIDWEST REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29		First Four Games March 17 & 18		
1	MICHIGAN	-26.6	MICHIGAN	-26.6	MICHIGAN	-26.6	MICHIGAN	-26.6	11 SMU	-12.8
16	HOWARD/UMBC	3.3							11 MIAMI OH	-7.8
8	GEORGIA	-13.9	GEORGIA	-13.9						
9	SAINT LOUIS	-13.4								
5	TEXAS TECH	-16.5	TEXAS TECH	-16.5						
12	AKRON	-8.8			ALABAMA	-18.3				
4	ALABAMA	-18.3	ALABAMA	-18.3						
13	HOFSTRA	-4								
6	TENNESSEE	-19.2	TENNESSEE	-19.2						
11	SMU/MIAMI OH	-12.8			TENNESSEE	-19.2				
3	VIRGINIA	-18.7	VIRGINIA	-18.7						
14	WRIGHT ST	0.2					IOWA ST	-21.7		
7	KENTUCKY	-15.5	KENTUCKY	-15.5						
10	SANTA CLARA	-12.4			IOWA ST	-21.7			16 HOWARD	3.3
2	IOWA ST	-21.7	IOWA ST	-21.7					16 UMBC	5.6
15	TENNESSEE ST	3.6								



STEVE MAKINEN'S MOMENTUM RATING BRACKET

EAST REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29	
1	DUKE 31.6						
16	SIENA 0.1	DUKE 31.6					
8	OHIO STATE 21.3	OHIO STATE 21.3		DUKE 31.6			
9	TCU 16.9						
5	ST JOHN'S 18.7	ST JOHN'S 18.7		ST JOHN'S 18.7		DUKE 31.6	
12	NORTHERN IOWA 10.3						
4	KANSAS 10.3	KANSAS 10.3					
13	CA BAPTIST 9.2						
6	LOUISVILLE 15.2	SOUTH FLORIDA 19.3					
11	SOUTH FLORIDA 19.3			MICHIGAN ST 19.6			
3	MICHIGAN ST 19.6	MICHIGAN ST 19.6					
14	N DAKOTA ST 7.7					CONNECTICUT 20	
7	UCLA 19.9	UCLA 19.9					
10	UCF 8.1			CONNECTICUT 20			
2	CONNECTICUT 20	CONNECTICUT 20					
15	FURMAN -0.5						



SOUTH REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29		First Four Games March 17 & 18	
1	FLORIDA 27.9	FLORIDA 27.9						16	LEHIGH -3.7
16	LEHIGH/PVAM 1.1			FLORIDA 27.9				16	PRAIRIE VIEW A&M 1.1
8	CLEMSON 10.8	IOWA 13.3							
9	IOWA 13.3								
5	VANDERBILT 19.1	VANDERBILT 19.1		VANDERBILT 19.1		FLORIDA 27.9			
12	MCNEESE 9.8								
4	NEBRASKA 13.6	NEBRASKA 13.6							
13	TROY -1.3								
6	N CAROLINA 14.2	N CAROLINA 14.2							
11	VCU 11.8			ILLINOIS 22.4					
3	ILLINOIS 22.4	ILLINOIS 22.4							
14	PENN 6					HOUSTON 24.4			
7	SAINT MARY'S CA 19	SAINT MARY'S CA 19							
10	TEXAS A&M 9.8			HOUSTON 24.4					
2	HOUSTON 24.4	HOUSTON 24.4							
15	IDAHO 6.7								



STEVE MAKINEN'S MOMENTUM RATING BRACKET

WEST REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20			2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29		First Four Games March 17 & 18		
1	ARIZONA	28.5	ARIZONA	28.5	ARIZONA 28.5	WISCONSIN 21.7	ARIZONA 28.5	PURDUE 20.4	11	NC STATE	6.8
16	LONG ISLAND	-5.5	UTAH STATE	9.6					11	TEXAS	7.3
8	VILLANOVA	6.8	WISCONSIN	21.7							
9	UTAH STATE	9.6	ARKANSAS	18.4							
5	WISCONSIN	21.7	BYU	10.3							
12	HIGH POINT	5.9	GONZAGA	19.9							
4	ARKANSAS	18.4	MIAMI FL	16.1							
13	HAWAII	4.9	PURDUE	20.4							
6	BYU	10.3									
11	NC STATE/TEXAS	7.3									
3	GONZAGA	19.9									
14	KENNESAW ST	4.5									
7	MIAMI FL	16.1									
10	MISSOURI	13.9									
2	PURDUE	20.4									
15	QUEENS	2									

MIDWEST REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29		First Four Games March 17 & 18		
1	MICHIGAN	21.2	MICHIGAN	21.2				11	SMU	9
16	HOWARD/UMBC	6.3			MICHIGAN	21.2		11	MIAMI OH	5
8	GEORGIA	18.4	GEORGIA	18.4						
9	SAINT LOUIS	4.8					MICHIGAN	21.2		
5	TEXAS TECH	15.4	TEXAS TECH	15.4						
12	AKRON	11.7			ALABAMA	18				
4	ALABAMA	18	ALABAMA	18						
13	HOFSTRA	12.6								
6	TENNESSEE	17.7	TENNESSEE	17.7						
11	SMU/MIAMI OH	9			VIRGINIA	20.2				
3	VIRGINIA	20.2	VIRGINIA	20.2						
14	WRIGHT ST	2.3					IOWA ST	25.6		
7	KENTUCKY	16.3	KENTUCKY	16.3						
10	SANTA CLARA	13.7			IOWA ST	25.6				
2	IOWA ST	25.6	IOWA ST	25.6						
15	TENNESSEE ST	9.4								



16	HOWARD	4.8
16	UMBC	6.3

STEVE MAKINEN'S GAME GRADE FORECAST BRACKET

EAST REGION

	1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29
1	DUKE 33.1		DUKE 33.1		DUKE 33.1		DUKE 33.1
16	SIENA -0.3		OHIO STATE 22.2		ST JOHN'S 22		SOUTH FLORIDA 19.3
8	OHIO STATE 22.2		ST JOHN'S 22		SOUTH FLORIDA 19.3		
9	TCU 15.4		CA BAPTIST 11.6		UCLA 18.8		
5	ST JOHN'S 22						
12	NORTHERN IOWA 14.3						
4	KANSAS 11.3						
13	CA BAPTIST 11.6						
6	LOUISVILLE 16.3						
11	SOUTH FLORIDA 19.3						
3	MICHIGAN ST 17.1						
14	N DAKOTA ST 8.1						
7	UCLA 18.8						
10	UCF 6.1						
2	CONNECTICUT 15.2						
15	FURMAN -1.9						



SOUTH REGION

	1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29		First Four Games March 17 & 18
1	FLORIDA 30.5		FLORIDA 30.5		FLORIDA 30.5		FLORIDA 30.5		16 LEHIGH -1.4
16	LEHIGH/PVAM 0.4		CLEMSON 12.1		VANDERBILT 18.7		HOUSTON 23.2		16 PRAIRIE VIEW A&M 0.4
8	CLEMSON 12.1		VANDERBILT 18.7		ILLINOIS 22.2				
9	IOWA 8.2		NEBRASKA 14.2		HOUSTON 23.2				
5	VANDERBILT 18.7								
12	MCNEESE 9.7								
4	NEBRASKA 14.2								
13	TROY -0.3								
6	N CAROLINA 13.6								
11	VCU 14.2								
3	ILLINOIS 22.2								
14	PENN 5.9								
7	SAINT MARY'S CA 21.6								
10	TEXAS A&M 6.9								
2	HOUSTON 23.2								
15	IDAHO 8.3								



STEVE MAKINEN'S GAME GRADE FORECAST BRACKET

WEST REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29		First Four Games March 17 & 18	
1	ARIZONA 27.2							11	NC STATE 4.2
16	LONG ISLAND -4.9	ARIZONA 27.2						11	TEXAS 11.2
8	VILLANOVA 6.3	UTAH STATE 10.7		ARIZONA 27.2					
9	UTAH STATE 10.7								
5	WISCONSIN 26.5	WISCONSIN 26.5				ARIZONA 27.2			
12	HIGH POINT 7			WISCONSIN 26.5					
4	ARKANSAS 19.9	ARKANSAS 19.9							
13	HAWAII -0.1								
6	BYU 9.3	TEXAS 11.2							
11	NC STATE/TEXAS 11.2			GONZAGA 14.8					
3	GONZAGA 14.8	GONZAGA 14.8							
14	KENNESAW ST 3.7					PURDUE 19.9			
7	MIAMI FL 14.1	MISSOURI 14.2							
10	MISSOURI 14.2			PURDUE 19.9					
2	PURDUE 19.9	PURDUE 19.9							
15	QUEENS 3.2								



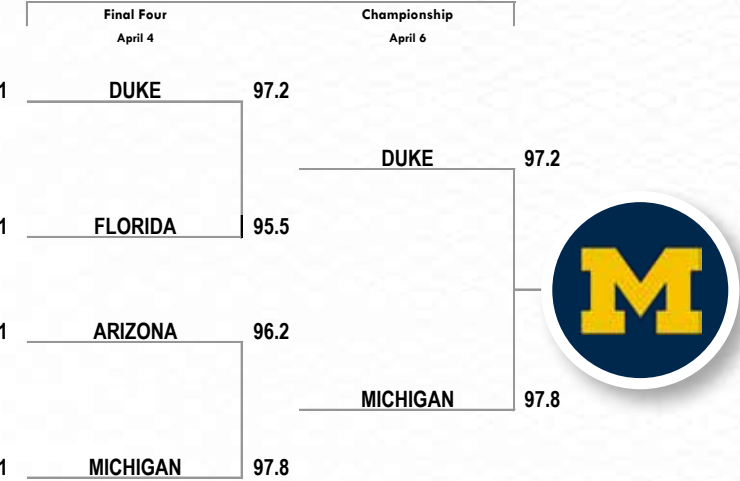
MIDWEST REGION

1st Round March 19 & 20		2nd Round March 21 & 22		Sweet 16 March 26 & 27		Elite Eight March 28 & 29		First Four Games March 17 & 18	
1	MICHIGAN 22.4	MICHIGAN 22.4						11	SMU 9.5
16	HOWARD/UMBC 9.6			MICHIGAN 22.4				11	MIAMI OH 5.9
8	GEORGIA 9.6	GEORGIA 9.6							
9	SAINT LOUIS 2.9								
5	TEXAS TECH 17.6	TEXAS TECH 17.6				MICHIGAN 22.4			
12	AKRON 10.9			ALABAMA 18.9					
4	ALABAMA 18.9	ALABAMA 18.9							
13	HOFSTRA 11.7								
6	TENNESSEE 19	TENNESSEE 19							
11	SMU/MIAMI OH 9.5			VIRGINIA 20.4					
3	VIRGINIA 20.4	VIRGINIA 20.4							
14	WRIGHT ST 0.8								
7	KENTUCKY 15.3	SANTA CLARA 18.7							
10	SANTA CLARA 18.7			IOWA ST 27.4				16	HOWARD 5.2
2	IOWA ST 27.4	IOWA ST 27.4						16	UMBC 9.6
15	TENNESSEE ST 9.8								

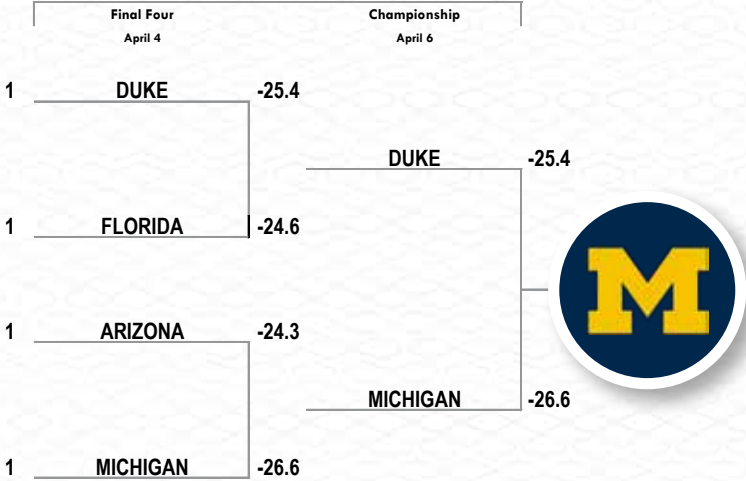


STEVE MAKINEN'S FINAL FOUR RATINGS BRACKET

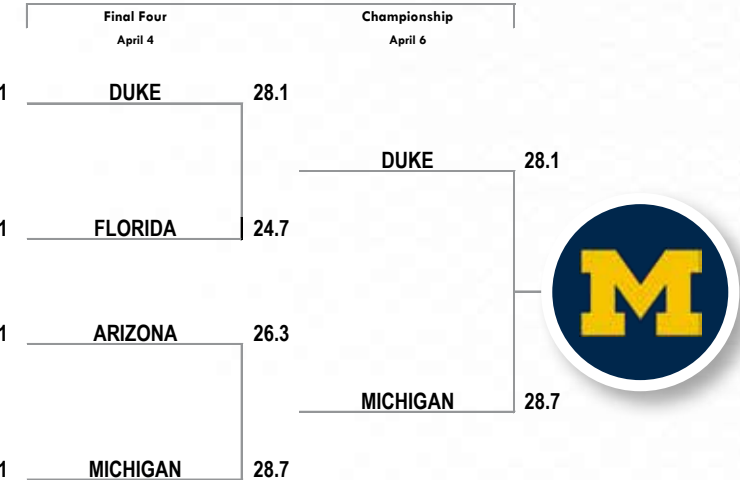
POWER RATINGS



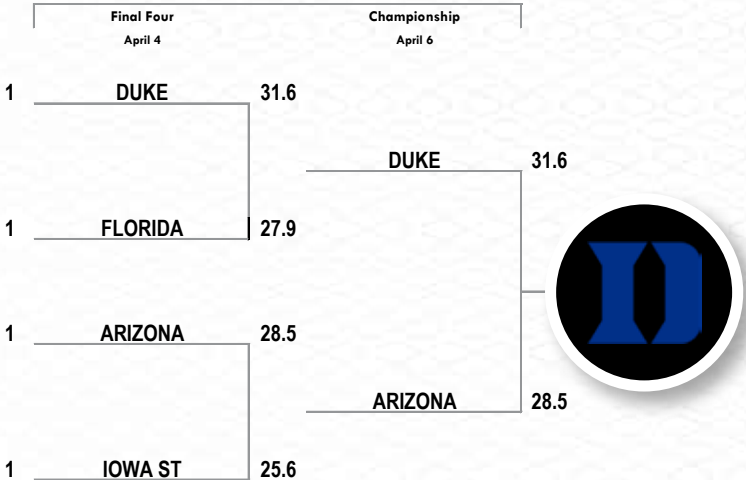
BETTORS RATINGS



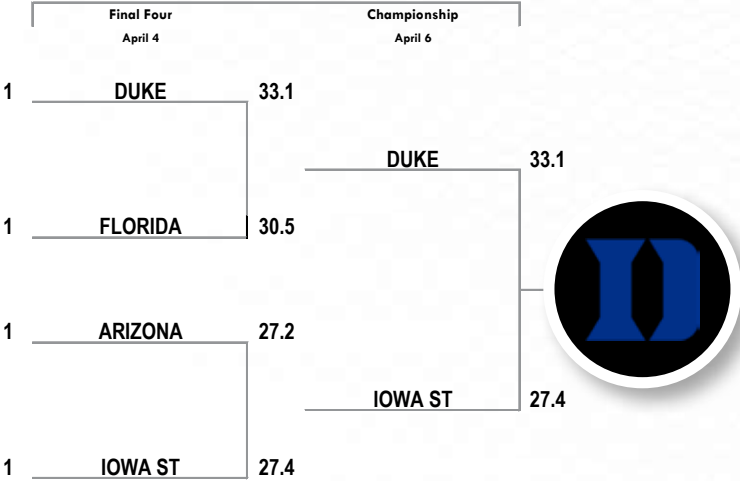
EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATINGS



MOMENTUM RATINGS



GAME GRADE FORECAST



STEVE MAKINEN'S EAST REGION

POWER RATINGS GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 DUKE	#2 CONNECTICUT	#3 MICHIGAN ST	#4 KANSAS	#5 ST JOHN'S	#6 LOUISVILLE	#7 UCLA	#8 OHIO ST	#9 TCU	#10 UCF	#11 S FLORIDA	#12 N IOWA	#13 CAL BAPTIST	#14 N DAKOTA ST	#15 FURMAN	#16 SIENA
TEAM/SEED	RATING	97.2	88.7	89.1	88.0	89.2	88.6	85.7	85.5	83.3	80.7	83.4	78.2	74.8	74.7	70.0	69.9
#1 DUKE	97.2		8.5	8.1	9.2	8.0	8.6	11.5	11.7	13.9	16.5	13.8	19.0	22.4	22.5	27.2	27.3
#2 CONNECTICUT	88.7	-8.5		-0.4	0.7	-0.5	0.1	3.0	3.2	5.4	8.0	5.3	10.5	13.9	14.0	18.7	18.8
#3 MICHIGAN ST	89.1	-8.1	0.4		1.1	-0.1	0.5	3.4	3.6	5.8	8.4	5.7	10.9	14.3	14.4	19.1	19.2
#4 KANSAS	88.0	-9.2	-0.7	-1.1		-1.2	-0.6	2.3	2.5	4.7	7.3	4.6	9.8	13.2	13.3	18.0	18.1
#5 ST JOHN'S	89.2	-8.0	0.5	0.1	1.2		0.6	3.5	3.7	5.9	8.5	5.8	11.0	14.4	14.5	19.2	19.3
#6 LOUISVILLE	88.6	-8.6	-0.1	-0.5	0.6	-0.6		2.9	3.1	5.3	7.9	5.2	10.4	13.8	13.9	18.6	18.7
#7 UCLA	85.7	-11.5	-3.0	-3.4	-2.3	-3.5	-2.9		0.2	2.4	5.0	2.3	7.5	10.9	11.0	15.7	15.8
#8 OHIO ST	85.5	-11.7	-3.2	-3.6	-2.5	-3.7	-3.1	-0.2		2.2	4.8	2.1	7.3	10.7	10.8	15.5	15.6
#9 TCU	83.3	-13.9	-5.4	-5.8	-4.7	-5.9	-5.3	-2.4	-2.2		2.6	-0.1	5.1	8.5	8.6	13.3	13.4
#10 UCF	80.7	-16.5	-8.0	-8.4	-7.3	-8.5	-7.9	-5.0	-4.8	-2.6		-2.7	2.5	5.9	6.0	10.7	10.8
#11 S FLORIDA	83.4	-13.8	-5.3	-5.7	-4.6	-5.8	-5.2	-2.3	-2.1	0.1	2.7		5.2	8.6	8.7	13.4	13.5
#12 N IOWA	78.2	-19.0	-10.5	-10.9	-9.8	-11.0	-10.4	-7.5	-7.3	-5.1	-2.5	-5.2		3.4	3.5	8.2	8.3
#13 CAL BAPTIST	74.8	-22.4	-13.9	-14.3	-13.2	-14.4	-13.8	-10.9	-10.7	-8.5	-5.9	-8.6	-3.4		0.1	4.8	4.9
#14 N DAKOTA ST	74.7	-22.5	-14.0	-14.4	-13.3	-14.5	-13.9	-11.0	-10.8	-8.6	-6.0	-8.7	-3.5	-0.1		4.7	4.8
#15 FURMAN	70.0	-27.2	-18.7	-19.1	-18.0	-19.2	-18.6	-15.7	-15.5	-13.3	-10.7	-13.4	-8.2	-4.8	-4.7		0.1
#16 SIENA	69.9	-27.3	-18.8	-19.2	-18.1	-19.3	-18.7	-15.8	-15.6	-13.4	-10.8	-13.5	-8.3	-4.9	-4.8	-0.1	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

The grid above outlines how each team in the region matches up against the other teams in the region, creating a hypothetical betting line should the teams meet in the tournament. The values in the grid display how many points the team on the top would be favored (-), or an underdog (positive number), by when facing the teams listed down the left side of the grid by taking the team on the tops rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #1 seed Duke would hypothetically be listed as a 8-point favorite (-8) against #5 seed St. John's, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S EAST REGION

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 DUKE	#2 CONNECTICUT	#3 MICHIGAN ST	#4 KANSAS	#5 ST JOHN'S	#6 LOUISVILLE	#7 UCLA	#8 OHIO ST	#9 TCU	#10 UCF	#11 S FLORIDA	#12 N IOWA	#13 CAL BAPTIST	#14 N DAKOTA ST	#15 FURMAN	#16 SIENA
TEAM/SEED	RATING	28.1	20.0	18.9	18.5	19.1	21.1	15.4	15.6	12.1	9.7	12.6	7.9	3.9	4.2	-1.2	-1.3
#1 DUKE	28.1		8.1	9.2	9.6	9.0	7.0	12.7	12.5	16.0	18.4	15.5	20.2	24.2	23.9	29.3	29.4
#2 CONNECTICUT	20.0	-8.1		1.1	1.5	0.9	-1.1	4.6	4.4	7.9	10.3	7.4	12.1	16.1	15.8	21.2	21.3
#3 MICHIGAN ST	18.9	-9.2	-1.1		0.4	-0.2	-2.2	3.5	3.3	6.8	9.2	6.3	11.0	15.0	14.7	20.1	20.2
#4 KANSAS	18.5	-9.6	-1.5	-0.4		-0.6	-2.6	3.1	2.9	6.4	8.8	5.9	10.6	14.6	14.3	19.7	19.8
#5 ST JOHN'S	19.1	-9.0	-0.9	0.2	0.6		-2.0	3.7	3.5	7.0	9.4	6.5	11.2	15.2	14.9	20.3	20.4
#6 LOUISVILLE	21.1	-7.0	1.1	2.2	2.6	2.0		5.7	5.5	9.0	11.4	8.5	13.2	17.2	16.9	22.3	22.4
#7 UCLA	15.4	-12.7	-4.6	-3.5	-3.1	-3.7	-5.7		-0.2	3.3	5.7	2.8	7.5	11.5	11.2	16.6	16.7
#8 OHIO ST	15.6	-12.5	-4.4	-3.3	-2.9	-3.5	-5.5	0.2		3.5	5.9	3.0	7.7	11.7	11.4	16.8	16.9
#9 TCU	12.1	-16.0	-7.9	-6.8	-6.4	-7.0	-9.0	-3.3	-3.5		2.4	-0.5	4.2	8.2	7.9	13.3	13.4
#10 UCF	9.7	-18.4	-10.3	-9.2	-8.8	-9.4	-11.4	-5.7	-5.9	-2.4		-2.9	1.8	5.8	5.5	10.9	11.0
#11 S FLORIDA	12.6	-15.5	-7.4	-6.3	-5.9	-6.5	-8.5	-2.8	-3.0	0.5	2.9		4.7	8.7	8.4	13.8	13.9
#12 N IOWA	7.9	-20.2	-12.1	-11.0	-10.6	-11.2	-13.2	-7.5	-7.7	-4.2	-1.8	-4.7		4.0	3.7	9.1	9.2
#13 CAL BAPTIST	3.9	-24.2	-16.1	-15.0	-14.6	-15.2	-17.2	-11.5	-11.7	-8.2	-5.8	-8.7	-4.0		-0.3	5.1	5.2
#14 N DAKOTA ST	4.2	-23.9	-15.8	-14.7	-14.3	-14.9	-16.9	-11.2	-11.4	-7.9	-5.5	-8.4	-3.7	0.3		5.4	5.5
#15 FURMAN	-1.2	-29.3	-21.2	-20.1	-19.7	-20.3	-22.3	-16.6	-16.8	-13.3	-10.9	-13.8	-9.1	-5.1	-5.4		0.1
#16 SIENA	-1.3	-29.4	-21.3	-20.2	-19.8	-20.4	-22.4	-16.7	-16.9	-13.4	-11.0	-13.9	-9.2	-5.2	-5.5	-0.1	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

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STEVE MAKINEN'S EAST REGION

BETTORS RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 DUKE	#2 CONNECTICUT	#3 MICHIGAN ST	#4 KANSAS	#5 ST JOHN'S	#6 LOUISVILLE	#7 UCLA	#8 OHIO ST	#9 TCU	#10 UCF	#11 S FLORIDA	#12 N IOWA	#13 CAL BAPTIST	#14 N DAKOTA ST	#15 FURMAN	#16 SIENA
TEAM/SEED	RATING	-25.4	20.6	20.7	21.4	10.6	19.7	12.2	14.6	12.2	14.2	8	21.3	5.9	5.3	4.6	-2.4
#1 DUKE	-25.4		4.7	6.3	7.6	8.5	6.7	13.2	12.0	13.6	17.1	13.3	19.5	22.2	22.9	26.7	27.2
#2 CONNECTICUT	-20.7	-4.7		1.6	2.9	3.8	2.0	8.5	7.3	8.9	12.4	8.6	14.8	17.5	18.2	22.0	22.5
#3 MICHIGAN ST	-19.1	-6.3	-1.6		1.3	2.2	0.4	6.9	5.7	7.3	10.8	7.0	13.2	15.9	16.6	20.4	20.9
#4 KANSAS	-17.8	-7.6	-2.9	-1.3		0.9	-0.9	5.6	4.4	6.0	9.5	5.7	11.9	14.6	15.3	19.1	19.6
#5 ST JOHN'S	-16.9	-8.5	-3.8	-2.2	-0.9		-1.8	4.7	3.5	5.1	8.6	4.8	11.0	13.7	14.4	18.2	18.7
#6 LOUISVILLE	-18.7	-6.7	-2.0	-0.4	0.9	1.8		6.5	5.3	6.9	10.4	6.6	12.8	15.5	16.2	20.0	20.5
#7 UCLA	-12.2	-13.2	-8.5	-6.9	-5.6	-4.7	-6.5		-1.2	0.4	3.9	0.1	6.3	9.0	9.7	13.5	14.0
#8 OHIO ST	-13.4	-12.0	-7.3	-5.7	-4.4	-3.5	-5.3	1.2		1.6	5.1	1.3	7.5	10.2	10.9	14.7	15.2
#9 TCU	-11.8	-13.6	-8.9	-7.3	-6.0	-5.1	-6.9	-0.4	-1.6		3.5	-0.3	5.9	8.6	9.3	13.1	13.6
#10 UCF	-8.3	-17.1	-12.4	-10.8	-9.5	-8.6	-10.4	-3.9	-5.1	-3.5		-3.8	2.4	5.1	5.8	9.6	10.1
#11 S FLORIDA	-12.1	-13.3	-8.6	-7.0	-5.7	-4.8	-6.6	-0.1	-1.3	0.3	3.8		6.2	8.9	9.6	13.4	13.9
#12 N IOWA	-5.9	-19.5	-14.8	-13.2	-11.9	-11.0	-12.8	-6.3	-7.5	-5.9	-2.4	-6.2		2.7	3.4	7.2	7.7
#13 CAL BAPTIST	-3.2	-22.2	-17.5	-15.9	-14.6	-13.7	-15.5	-9.0	-10.2	-8.6	-5.1	-8.9	-2.7		0.7	4.5	5.0
#14 N DAKOTA ST	-2.5	-22.9	-18.2	-16.6	-15.3	-14.4	-16.2	-9.7	-10.9	-9.3	-5.8	-9.6	-3.4	-0.7		3.8	4.3
#15 FURMAN	1.3	-26.7	-22.0	-20.4	-19.1	-18.2	-20.0	-13.5	-14.7	-13.1	-9.6	-13.4	-7.2	-4.5	-3.8		0.5
#16 SIENA	1.8	-27.2	-22.5	-20.9	-19.6	-18.7	-20.5	-14.0	-15.2	-13.6	-10.1	-13.9	-7.7	-5.0	-4.3	-0.5	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

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STEVE MAKINEN'S EAST REGION

MOMENTUM RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 DUKE	#2 CONNECTICUT	#3 MICHIGAN ST	#4 KANSAS	#5 ST JOHN'S	#6 LOUISVILLE	#7 UCLA	#8 OHIO ST	#9 TCU	#10 UCF	#11 S FLORIDA	#12 N IOWA	#13 CAL BAPTIST	#14 N DAKOTA ST	#15 FURMAN	#16 SIENA
TEAM/SEED	RATING	31.6	20.0	19.6	10.3	18.7	15.2	19.9	21.3	16.9	8.1	19.3	10.3	9.2	7.7	-0.5	0.1
#1 DUKE	31.6		11.6	12.0	21.3	12.9	16.4	11.7	10.3	14.7	23.5	12.3	21.3	22.4	23.9	32.1	31.5
#2 CONNECTICUT	20.0	-11.6		0.4	9.7	1.3	4.8	0.1	-1.3	3.1	11.9	0.7	9.7	10.8	12.3	20.5	19.9
#3 MICHIGAN ST	19.6	-12.0	-0.4		9.3	0.9	4.4	-0.3	-1.7	2.7	11.5	0.3	9.3	10.4	11.9	20.1	19.5
#4 KANSAS	10.3	-21.3	-9.7	-9.3		-8.4	-4.9	-9.6	-11.0	-6.6	2.2	-9.0	0.0	1.1	2.6	10.8	10.2
#5 ST JOHN'S	18.7	-12.9	-1.3	-0.9	8.4		3.5	-1.2	-2.6	1.8	10.6	-0.6	8.4	9.5	11.0	19.2	18.6
#6 LOUISVILLE	15.2	-16.4	-4.8	-4.4	4.9	-3.5		-4.7	-6.1	-1.7	7.1	-4.1	4.9	6.0	7.5	15.7	15.1
#7 UCLA	19.9	-11.7	-0.1	0.3	9.6	1.2	4.7		-1.4	3.0	11.8	0.6	9.6	10.7	12.2	20.4	19.8
#8 OHIO ST	21.3	-10.3	1.3	1.7	11.0	2.6	6.1	1.4		4.4	13.2	2.0	11.0	12.1	13.6	21.8	21.2
#9 TCU	16.9	-14.7	-3.1	-2.7	6.6	-1.8	1.7	-3.0	-4.4		8.8	-2.4	6.6	7.7	9.2	17.4	16.8
#10 UCF	8.1	-23.5	-11.9	-11.5	-2.2	-10.6	-7.1	-11.8	-13.2	-8.8		-11.2	-2.2	-1.1	0.4	8.6	8.0
#11 S FLORIDA	19.3	-12.3	-0.7	-0.3	9.0	0.6	4.1	-0.6	-2.0	2.4	11.2		9.0	10.1	11.6	19.8	19.2
#12 N IOWA	10.3	-21.3	-9.7	-9.3	0.0	-8.4	-4.9	-9.6	-11.0	-6.6	2.2	-9.0		1.1	2.6	10.8	10.2
#13 CAL BAPTIST	9.2	-22.4	-10.8	-10.4	-1.1	-9.5	-6.0	-10.7	-12.1	-7.7	1.1	-10.1	-1.1		1.5	9.7	9.1
#14 N DAKOTA ST	7.7	-23.9	-12.3	-11.9	-2.6	-11.0	-7.5	-12.2	-13.6	-9.2	-0.4	-11.6	-2.6	-1.5		8.2	7.6
#15 FURMAN	-0.5	-32.1	-20.5	-20.1	-10.8	-19.2	-15.7	-20.4	-21.8	-17.4	-8.6	-19.8	-10.8	-9.7	-8.2		-0.6
#16 SIENA	0.1	-31.5	-19.9	-19.5	-10.2	-18.6	-15.1	-19.8	-21.2	-16.8	-8.0	-19.2	-10.2	-9.1	-7.6	0.6	

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STEVE MAKINEN'S EAST REGION

GAME GRADE FORECAST GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 DUKE	#2 CONNECTICUT	#3 MICHIGAN ST	#4 KANSAS	#5 ST JOHN'S	#6 LOUISVILLE	#7 UCLA	#8 OHIO ST	#9 TCU	#10 UCF	#11 S FLORIDA	#12 N IOWA	#13 CAL BAPTIST	#14 N DAKOTA ST	#15 FURMAN	#16 SIENA
TEAM/SEED	RATING	33.1	15.2	17.1	11.3	22.0	16.3	18.8	22.2	15.4	6.1	19.3	14.3	11.6	8.1	-1.9	-0.3
#1 DUKE	33.1		17.9	16.0	21.8	11.1	16.8	14.3	10.9	17.7	27.0	13.8	18.8	21.5	25.0	35.0	33.4
#2 CONNECTICUT	15.2	-17.9		-1.9	3.9	-6.8	-1.1	-3.6	-7.0	-0.2	9.1	-4.1	0.9	3.6	7.1	17.1	15.5
#3 MICHIGAN ST	17.1	-16.0	1.9		5.8	-4.9	0.8	-1.7	-5.1	1.7	11.0	-2.2	2.8	5.5	9.0	19.0	17.4
#4 KANSAS	11.3	-21.8	-3.9	-5.8		-10.7	-5.0	-7.5	-10.9	-4.1	5.2	-8.0	-3.0	-0.3	3.2	13.2	11.6
#5 ST JOHN'S	22.0	-11.1	6.8	4.9	10.7		5.7	3.2	-0.2	6.6	15.9	2.7	7.7	10.4	13.9	23.9	22.3
#6 LOUISVILLE	16.3	-16.8	1.1	-0.8	5.0	-5.7		-2.5	-5.9	0.9	10.2	-3.0	2.0	4.7	8.2	18.2	16.6
#7 UCLA	18.8	-14.3	3.6	1.7	7.5	-3.2	2.5		-3.4	3.4	12.7	-0.5	4.5	7.2	10.7	20.7	19.1
#8 OHIO ST	22.2	-10.9	7.0	5.1	10.9	0.2	5.9	3.4		6.8	16.1	2.9	7.9	10.6	14.1	24.1	22.5
#9 TCU	15.4	-17.7	0.2	-1.7	4.1	-6.6	-0.9	-3.4	-6.8		9.3	-3.9	1.1	3.8	7.3	17.3	15.7
#10 UCF	6.1	-27.0	-9.1	-11.0	-5.2	-15.9	-10.2	-12.7	-16.1	-9.3		-13.2	-8.2	-5.5	-2.0	8.0	6.4
#11 S FLORIDA	19.3	-13.8	4.1	2.2	8.0	-2.7	3.0	0.5	-2.9	3.9	13.2		5.0	7.7	11.2	21.2	19.6
#12 N IOWA	14.3	-18.8	-0.9	-2.8	3.0	-7.7	-2.0	-4.5	-7.9	-1.1	8.2	-5.0		2.7	6.2	16.2	14.6
#13 CAL BAPTIST	11.6	-21.5	-3.6	-5.5	0.3	-10.4	-4.7	-7.2	-10.6	-3.8	5.5	-7.7	-2.7		3.5	13.5	11.9
#14 N DAKOTA ST	8.1	-25.0	-7.1	-9.0	-3.2	-13.9	-8.2	-10.7	-14.1	-7.3	2.0	-11.2	-6.2	-3.5		10.0	8.4
#15 FURMAN	-1.9	-35.0	-17.1	-19.0	-13.2	-23.9	-18.2	-20.7	-24.1	-17.3	-8.0	-21.2	-16.2	-13.5	-10.0		-1.6
#16 SIENA	-0.3	-33.4	-15.5	-17.4	-11.6	-22.3	-16.6	-19.1	-22.5	-15.7	-6.4	-19.6	-14.6	-11.9	-8.4	1.6	

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DUKE

BLUE DEVILS

HEAD COACH
Jon Scheyer

CONFERENCE
ACC

2025-26 RECORD
32-2 SU, 20-14 ATS, 12-22 O-U

EAST REGION

#1 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
97.2 (2)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
28.1 (2)

BETTOR RATING
-25.4 (2)

MOMENTUM RATING
31.6 (1)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
33.1 (1)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
82.3 (33)

DEFENSIVE PPG
63.1 (3)

POSSESSIONS
63.9 (285)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.338 (3)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.904 (1)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.49 (19)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.392 (6)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.351 (110)

FREE THROW %
0.724 (190)

REBOUNDING %
0.578 (5)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.601 (28)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.132 (81)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.16 (80)



It seems that head coach Jon Scheyer learned from his early NCAA Tournament exit in Year 1. Duke was also only a No. 5 seed during that 2023 tourney, as the Blue Devils bowed out in the second round. In Year 2, Scheyer took the Blue Devils as a No. 4 seed to the Elite Eight. Last season, Duke made the Final Four as a No. 1 seed. Scheyer gets to run it back as a No. 1 seed this year and we'll see if he can keep the pattern going of making deeper tourney runs with each passing year.

He certainly has the team for it. Duke has been among the nation's highest-ranked teams all season long and on both ends of the floor. The Blue Devils have been at or near the top in adjusted defensive efficiency throughout and have been comfortably in the top 10 in adjusted offensive efficiency, led by double-double machine Cameron Boozer. Boozer's supporting cast has been solid as well, though 6-foot-11 monster in the middle Patrick Ngongba was rocking a walking boot late in the season and missed the ACC Tournament. Caleb Foster, a 40% 3-point shooter, also has a fractured foot. They won the ACC Tourney anyway.

Even though Duke doubled their number of regular season losses (from 1 to 2!) year over year, the resume was much stronger this season based on the number of Quadrant 1 and Quadrant 1-A wins. Not to mention, the two losses, both in Q1-A games, were just by four combined points. If there is a potential Achilles heel against elite foes for the Blue Devils, it's that they spent a good chunk of the season outside the top 100 in 3P%, but they're a top-20 team in 2P% and 3P% defense and one of the most efficient offensive teams inside the arc.

Also, this version of Scheyer's team has the highest TO% on defense that he's had in four years at the helm. Extra possessions are how Duke can cover in the early rounds against inferior teams and also give themselves a better chance deep in the tournament against comparable competition. It goes without saying as a No. 1 seed that this is a true title contender, but the list of triumphs, including two of the other No. 1 seeds in Michigan and Florida, stands out.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

-600

**REACH
FINAL 4**

-135

**REACH
ELITE 8**

-255

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

+300

% CHANCE TO REACH...

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

2ND ROUND
98.6%

SWEET 16
81.7%

ELITE 8
67.2%

FINAL FOUR
53.5%

CONNECTICUT

HUSKIES

HEAD COACH
Dan Hurley

CONFERENCE
Big East

2025-26 RECORD
29-5 SU, 12-22 ATS, 17-17 O-U

EAST REGION

#2 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
88.7 (15)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
20 (13)

BETTOR RATING
-20.7 (10)

MOMENTUM RATING
20 (13)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
15.2 (30)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
77.5 (109)

DEFENSIVE PPG
65.1 (8)

POSSESSIONS
62.9 (323)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.278 (25)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.959 (10)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.482 (30)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.402 (14)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.352 (105)

FREE THROW %
0.716 (218)

REBOUNDING %
0.542 (23)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.649 (20)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.142 (164)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.158 (89)



It took a No. 1 seed and the eventual National Champion to dethrone the Huskies last season, as Florida beat UConn in the second round to stop one of the most impressive reigns of terror we've ever seen in the NCAA Tournament. UConn won 12 games in a row in the 2023 and 2024 tournaments by 260 combined points. Their smallest margin of victory over those 12 games was 13 in the Final Four against Miami in 2023.

Roster turnover and a little bit of bad luck in conference games left the '24 Huskies on the 8 line, where they handled Oklahoma before losing 77-75 to Florida in the Round of 32. It should be noted that per Bart Torvik's rankings, UConn entered the NCAA Tournament ranked fifth in 2023 and second in 2024. The 2026 version isn't that high, but Dan Hurley has another top-10 team to take into the tourney. Yet, he still has had a lot to yell and scream about this season, as evidenced by his ejection in the regular season finale against Marquette.

Incredibly, Hurley had back-to-back first-round exits in 2021 and 2022 before the Huskies mauled everybody in sight for two solid years in the Big Dance. This team does fall somewhere in between those others, but has more similarities to the 2023 team than last year's squad. This is not an infallible team, as the Huskies grade well below average in FT Rate on offense and defense, plus they're well below the national average at the free throw line, but this is a strong group on both ends of the floor overall and they stepped up when they had to.

UConn actually suffered a Quadrant 2 and a Quadrant 3 loss in conference play, but they played very well in Quadrant 1 games, including wins in the fall over BYU, Illinois, and Kansas in road/neutral settings. The Huskies also check the tournament boxes with a really good guard in Silas Demary Jr., an inside-out wing in Alex Karaban, a monster on the glass in Tarris Reed Jr., and a coach who has orchestrated not one, but two, deep runs.

It should be noted that UConn went 10-2 in games decided by six or fewer points in the regular season. Regression candidate or team that has the poise to close out close games? Your call.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

-200

REACH
FINAL 4

+600

REACH
ELITE 8

+170

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

25-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
93.1%

SWEET 16
58.8%

ELITE 8
31.7%

FINAL FOUR
10.7%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

MICHIGAN STATE

SPARTANS

HEAD COACH
Tom Izzo

CONFERENCE
Big Ten

2025-26 RECORD
25-7 SU, 16-16 ATS, 15-17 O-U

EAST REGION

#3 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
89.1 (14)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
18.9 (17)

BETTOR RATING
-19.1 (12)

MOMENTUM RATING
19.6 (16)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
17.1 (25)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
78.9 (83)

DEFENSIVE PPG
68.4 (40)

POSSESSIONS
64.4 (251)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.265 (31)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.967 (13)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.471 (54)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.41 (28)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.359 (66)

FREE THROW %
0.763 (48)

REBOUNDING %
0.585 (3)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.606 (27)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.144 (175)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.132 (272)



Did we get too excited too soon about Michigan State? An 8-0 start to the season included Quadrant 1 wins over Arkansas, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Iowa before the Spartans suffered their first loss of the season at the hands of Duke. Those four early Quadrant 1 wins accounted for nearly half of what Michigan State had over the course of the regular season. That being said, late in the regular season, they beat Illinois, Ohio State, Purdue, and Indiana in Q1 or higher games.

It is hard to say that a team with this record was inconsistent, but it sure feels that way. Over that 8-0 start, the Spartans never allowed more than .997 points per possession. They had a similar stretch in January, allowing no more than .984 PPP over a seven-game span. But once February started, the defense went by the wayside, especially in the two losses to Michigan and the road loss to Wisconsin.

The two losses to Michigan were a figurative kick in the fellas, though star guard Jeremy Fears Jr. seemed to use a literal kick in the fellas as his go-to move when he got frustrated. He's going to have to keep his composure better in the NCAA Tournament because he does everything for this team, including over nine assists per game. The Spartans are really good at scoring from all areas on the floor and Fears is a huge part of that.

This was a fairly average offense in Big Ten play, which is a bad barometer for the NCAA Tournament because this was such a good offensive conference, but the strong defensive numbers certainly have the chance to carry over as a result. Sparty was also probably the best rebounding team in the conference, though Illinois would also have a dog in that fight. This is a team that could be quite dangerous, but one that also was nearly -4% in TO% differential and had the fourth-highest TO% on offense in conference.

To me, these are the worst teams to try and figure out in the field. We know they're talented. We know they have a high ceiling and a high floor. But, we also know that long stretches of terrific defensive play have been interrupted with some lackluster efforts and that a lot of Big Ten teams just aren't very good on defense, so the offensive numbers might need a grain of salt or two.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

-130

REACH
FINAL 4

+700

REACH
ELITE 8

+200

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

40-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
84.2%

SWEET 16
47.2%

ELITE 8
25.9%

FINAL FOUR
8.4%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

KANSAS

JAYHAWKS

HEAD COACH
Bill Self

CONFERENCE
Big 12

2025-26 RECORD
23-10 SU, 20-13 ATS, 11-22 O-U

EAST REGION

#4 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
88 (19)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
18.5 (19)

BETTOR RATING
-17.8 (17)

MOMENTUM RATING
10.3 (50)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
11.3 (45)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
75.6 (153)

DEFENSIVE PPG
69.4 (54)

POSSESSIONS
65.5 (181)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.228 (53)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.96 (12)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.453 (141)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.388 (3)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.35 (123)

FREE THROW %
0.767 (39)

REBOUNDING %
0.515 (108)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.338 (95)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.134 (103)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.119 (341)

Kansas has had better teams and better records, but this might be Bill Self's best coaching job yet. He's managed to keep the Jayhawks together despite the ongoing soap opera with freshman standout Darryn Peterson, who will become an NBA team's problem next season. It couldn't have been easy for Self to navigate this situation, both privately and publicly, as Peterson played under 45% of the available minutes during the regular season.

Credit should also go to Flory Bidunga, Tre White, and Melvin Council Jr., who have all contributed at a high level and also kept the team intact on the floor with or without Peterson. As great of a player as Peterson is, Kansas actually had a better Net Rating, Offensive Rating, and Defensive Rating without him on the floor during the regular season per CBB Analytics' On/Off data. However, if we add the filter of conference play, the Defensive Rating drops dramatically, though KU was still better on offense without him.

Either way, you would think that this is a time for Peterson, who shot nearly 39% from 3, to give it his all. The rest of the guys will and have throughout the course of the season. Kansas could use Peterson's offense because their shooting numbers don't align with the other top-25 caliber teams in the field. They ranked outside the top 150 in 2P% and were narrowly inside the top 100 in 3P% while not doing anything extraordinary on the glass.

Defensively, Kansas did a masterful job challenging shots. They had to because they had one of the lowest TO% of the nation's blue bloods, but opponents were held to extremely low percentages on both 2s and 3s. Bidunga and Bryson Tiller had a lot to do with that on the interior and the Jayhawks have a lot of long-limbed, athletic guards defending on the perimeter.

The results against Quadrant 1 opponents were kind of pedestrian and the relatively poor shooting numbers are likely to sour some people on the Jayhawks, but a motivated Peterson paired with what was an elite defense gives Kansas the chance to make some noise.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

+125

**REACH
FINAL 4**

15-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

+650

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

60-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
73.6%

SWEET 16
33.1%

ELITE 8
6.9%

FINAL FOUR
2.9%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



ST. JOHN'S

RED STORM

HEAD COACH
Rick Pitino

CONFERENCE
Big East

2025-26 RECORD
28-6 SU, 20-14 ATS, 13-21 O-U

EAST REGION

#5 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
89.2 (13)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
19.1 (16)

BETTOR RATING
-16.9 (19)

MOMENTUM RATING
18.7 (20)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
22 (10)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
81.6 (42)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70 (60)

POSSESSIONS
67.5 (66)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.245 (44)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.968 (14)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.454 (136)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.421 (49)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.332 (216)

FREE THROW %
0.727 (178)

REBOUNDING %
0.529 (42)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.549 (34)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.124 (34)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.168 (39)

A little history this year for the Red Storm, as Rick Pitino has the program dancing in consecutive seasons for the first time since 1998-2000. Not only that, but St. John's was the regular season champ in the Big East in consecutive seasons for the first time since 1985-86 and just the second time in program history, plus the first Big East team to be regular season outright champs and conference tourney champs in back-to-back years.

Winning the Big East and going 18-2 in conference play is going to be an accomplishment no matter what, but it was a down year in the conference. Bart Torvik's Conference Ratings had the Big East fifth, tied for their lowest finish since 2021. While that isn't necessarily the Red Storm's fault, they entered the conference tournament with just four Quadrant 1-A data points. In other words, it is a little bit tough to gauge just how good this team is.

The talent and the big names are there. Zuby Ejiofor, Bryce Hopkins, Dillon Mitchell, and Oziyah Sellers all played great over the course of the season, especially on the defensive end of the floor. St. John's was a top-40 team in eFG% and TO% and just outside of that category in 2P% defense. However, this was not a very good offensive team, aside from a low TO% and a very strong ORB%.

St. John's actually sat below the national average in 2P% and 3P% on the offensive end of the floor and that's not what you want to see for a team that played in a conference that wasn't as strong as usual. That's not to say that St. John's will fall victim to a first-round upset, though it is possible. After getting bounced in the second round as a No. 2 seed last season, a wide range of outcomes feels possible.

That said, St. John's played one game against a team ranked outside the Torvik top 100 in conference play (DePaul) and did post a lot of wins playing a lot of above average teams. We just haven't seen them against many teams on or above their level.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

-105

**REACH
FINAL 4**

+900

**REACH
ELITE 8**

+475

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

60-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
77.1%

SWEET 16
51.8%

ELITE 8
15.2%

FINAL FOUR
8.2%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



LOUISVILLE

CARDINALS

HEAD COACH
Pat Kelsey

CONFERENCE
ACC

2025-26 RECORD
23-10 SU, 15-18 ATS, 13-20 O-U

EAST REGION

#6 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
88.6 (16)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
21.1 (11)

BETTOR RATING
-18.7 (13)

MOMENTUM RATING
15.2 (31)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
16.3 (26)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
84.8 (18)

DEFENSIVE PPG
72.2 (113)

POSSESSIONS
67.3 (71)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.301 (11)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.996 (17)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.47 (57)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.424 (60)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.357 (78)

FREE THROW %
0.769 (34)

REBOUNDING %
0.537 (26)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.469 (52)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.141 (156)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.147 (161)

For the fifth time in six seasons, Pat Kelsey is in the NCAA Tournament. He's also done that at three different schools, first at Winthrop, then Charleston, and now at Louisville, where he's led the Cardinals to back-to-back appearances. Unfortunately, last year was just a cameo, as the Cardinals lost right away to Creighton as an under-seeded No. 8. For a team that was a top-20 program per Bart Torvik, getting seeded in the high 20s/low 30s was mostly a commentary on the ACC and how the conference played out.

This season, Louisville went from 18-2 to 11-7 in conference play. Despite the decline in win percentage, there are a lot of ways in which the Cardinals are better this time around. This is a better offensive team overall and a lot of that has to do with Kelsey's ability to find shooters in the transfer portal. Last year's team was in the 220s in 3P%. This year's team is right around the top 50. Even with the 2024-25 shooting struggles, the Cardinals kept firing from 3 to the tune of a 47.8% 3P Rate, which meant a lot of empty possessions.

But this season, the Cardinals are really maximizing one of the highest 3P Rates in the nation, as well over 50% of their field goal attempts are triple tries. Shooting better than 36% as opposed to just 32.8% makes a monumental difference with that kind of 3P Rate and it actually surprises me to see how much worse the team's record wound up being. Of course, nearly all of the team's losses have come in Quadrant 1-A games, so they just haven't been able to get through elite teams or win against very good teams on the road.

Teams dependent on long jumpers can have that problem in road and neutral settings and that has to be a big concern going into a neutral venue every game from here on out. Not surprisingly, Louisville was a bottom-10 team in Haslametrics' Away From Home rating, so that could be what holds them back from a long NCAA Tournament run, even though there are a lot of things to like about what they've done this season. That said, they've done most of them with Mikel Brown Jr., who missed the end of the regular season and ACC Tournament and is questionable for the NCAAT.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

+150

REACH
FINAL 4

13-1

REACH
ELITE 8

+360

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

110-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
57.4%

SWEET 16
30.2%

ELITE 8
15.7%

FINAL FOUR
4.9%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



UCLA

BRUINS

HEAD COACH
Mick Cronin

CONFERENCE
Big Ten

2025-26 RECORD
23-11 SU, 17-17 ATS, 17-17 O-U

EAST REGION

#7 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85.7 (25)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
15.4 (32)

BETTOR RATING
-12.2 (44)

MOMENTUM RATING
19.9 (15)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
18.8 (20)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
77.7 (102)

DEFENSIVE PPG
71 (80)

POSSESSIONS
63.1 (319)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.265 (32)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.042 (42)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.471 (53)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.433 (98)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.382 (16)

FREE THROW %
0.767 (41)

REBOUNDING %
0.496 (203)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.838 (7)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.116 (12)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.156 (101)

If you're like me, the lasting impression of this UCLA season isn't a resume good enough to get into the NCAA Tournament. It's head coach Mick Cronin complaining every time the team played a conference road game. Despite all of the miserable challenges of modern-day travel for a school with a lot of cash in the athletic department coffers, the Bruins are 2-for-2 in making the Big Dance as a member of the Big Ten.

Maybe Cronin's sour grapes had some legitimacy to them, as the team only lost once at Pauley Pavilion, but dropped neutral-site games to Arizona, Cal, and Gonzaga before dropping six road games in conference play. The Bruins are in the field for more than two reasons, but in a simplified way of looking at things, they had the second-lowest TO% in Big Ten play and the greatest 3P% differential, shooting 37.7% while opponents only shot 31.6%. It doesn't matter what conference you reside in, that formula will win games.

UCLA finished the regular season 12-0 in Quadrant 3 and 4 games and just 9-10 in Quadrant 2 or higher games and that is something that we need to chew on. Like I said above, Cronin chalked it up to the grueling travel in the Big Ten, as the Bruins lost both games of a road trip twice and a standalone roadie at Minnesota. The other reasons are that outside of TO% and 3P% offense and defense, nothing else really stood out statistically. This was not the same great defensive team that we are used to seeing. A low 3P Rate around 35% exposed the team's 52% 2P% and opponents shot north of 53% on 2s.

Collectively, UCLA was subpar on the glass. Only Steven Jamerson II and Xavier Booker had strong ORB%, but neither guy played a lot. Donovan Dent took a lot of bad shots and cut into the strong 3-point performances from Tyler Bilodeau, Trent Perry, and Skyy Clark. The Bruins were much better off when Dent was the facilitator with nearly eight assists per game. Unfortunately, he shot under 46% on over 300 2-point attempts.

UCLA's plodding, in-your-face style of play can cause problems for opponents in the NCAA Tournament, but it's hard to see enough of them to overshadow the problems UCLA has of their own.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

+200

**REACH
FINAL 4**

22-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

+550

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

150-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
72.4%

SWEET 16
33.3%

ELITE 8
15.5%

FINAL FOUR
4.3%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



OHIO STATE

BUCKEYES

HEAD COACH
Jake Diebler

CONFERENCE
Big Ten

2025-26 RECORD
21-12 SU, 18-15 ATS, 16-17 O-U

EAST REGION

#8 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85.5 (28)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
15.6 (30)

BETTOR RATING
-13.4 (36)

MOMENTUM RATING
21.3 (9)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
22.2 (9)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
79.8 (72)

DEFENSIVE PPG
72.8 (130)

POSSESSIONS
64.8 (227)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.287 (17)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.047 (50)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.493 (16)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.439 (128)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.36 (58)

FREE THROW %
0.775 (21)

REBOUNDING %
0.515 (105)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.376 (81)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.136 (120)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.136 (239)

As most of the college basketball teams on the NCAA Tournament chopping block ran around like a bunch of 4-year-olds with Fun Dip sugar highs trying to pop bubbles, the Buckeyes took themselves from the bubble to firmly in the field. Ohio State seemed to have a resume built on quality losses before they racked up a few nice wins late in the season, including one over Purdue on March 1 that seemed to push the team from a "maybe" to a "definitely".

It really helped that John Mobley Jr.'s absence was short-lived as the Robin to Bruce Thornton as Batman. The supporting cast has been hit or miss, but as freshman Amare Bynum became a more consistent contributor and jump shots started falling with greater frequency, the Buckeyes turned into one of the stronger teams in the field over the last several weeks. They actually moved up into the top 25 for Bart Torvik, a place that they hadn't been since around Thanksgiving.

The entirety of Ohio State's body of work feels a bit underwhelming, especially finishing 11th in Big Ten play in adjusted defensive efficiency and 12th in TO% in a conference where takeaways are viewed as more of a crime than a basketball strategy. Still, this is a team that has always been able to score and that's what stands out the most. This is a team that posted a top-20 2P% and eFG% while also shooting better than 36% from 3. And offensively, there are the pieces you'd like to see from a tourney team - great guard play from Thornton and Mobley, athletic wings in Devin Royal and Bynum, and a 7-foot rim protector and deterrent in Christoph Tilly.

While Ohio State's non-conference schedule left something to be desired, playing in the Big Ten creates enough opportunities for Quadrant 1 wins and those aforementioned "good" losses. Those good wins felt elusive for a while, but how the Buckeyes finished the season could carry over into the Big Dance and that does make them a dangerous team, capable of putting a scare into just about anybody.

And that's good because landing on the seed line that they did means a date with one of the nation's heavyweights in the second round. That may lead to an unfortunate early exit, but still a promising ending to Diebler's second year.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

+550

REACH
FINAL 4

25-1

REACH
ELITE 8

11-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

250-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
60.3%

SWEET 16
12.5%

ELITE 8
6.7%

FINAL FOUR
3.3%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



TCU

HORNED FROGS

HEAD COACH
Jamie Dixon

CONFERENCE
Big 12

2025-26 RECORD
22-11 SU, 18-15 ATS, 15-18 O-U

EAST REGION

#9 SEED

TCU

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
83.3 (44)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
12.1 (48)

BETTOR RATING
-11.8 (47)

MOMENTUM RATING
16.9 (26)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
15.4 (28)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
78.3 (92)

DEFENSIVE PPG
72.1 (108)

POSSESSIONS
65.6 (174)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.196 (76)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.018 (31)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.448 (177)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.446 (173)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.331 (224)

FREE THROW %
0.708 (243)

REBOUNDING %
0.519 (83)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.429 (64)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.132 (83)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.172 (25)

This will be TCU's fifth NCAA Tournament appearance on Jamie Dixon's watch and fourth in five years after falling short last season. Obviously being a No. 6 seed twice and a No. 9 seed doesn't lend itself to an easy second-round matchup, but Dixon has failed to make it past the first weekend in all four NCAA appearances with TCU and nine consecutive times overall since his 2009 Pitt team made it to the Elite Eight.

Nobody at TCU should complain with the quick hooks off the stage, as the program hadn't made the NCAA Tournament since 1998 before Dixon came on the scene. They've been competitive for the most part, losing to No. 1 Arizona in 2022 by five points in overtime and to No. 3 Gonzaga in 2023 by just three points. But, last season's blowout loss at the hands of No. 8 Utah State is what people remember and what Dixon needs to make amends for this season.

Personally, I'm not sure that will happen. It would be hyperbolic to say that TCU is here by virtue of getting an A on the group project as a member of the Big 12, since they did have six Quadrant 1 wins and three Quadrant 1-A wins during the regular season. This just isn't a team that stands out in many meaningful ways. Defensively, the Horned Frogs did a great job forcing turnovers. Offensively, they did well on the glass. That's really about it.

The prospects for a deep run dwindle when you rank outside the top 200 in 3P% and outside the top 190 in 2P% on offense. They dwindle even more when you rank outside the top 150 in 2P% and 3P% defense. It should be noted that TCU did start just 3-6 in conference play and won eight of the last nine games, including wins over Iowa State and Texas Tech, but that was the softer portion of the schedule to be sure.

Still, the Horned Frogs have enough nice data points to make the Round of 32. Getting past that given their seed line and pedestrian statistical profile would be quite an upset.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

16-1

REACH
FINAL 4

130-1

REACH
ELITE 8

45-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

400-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
39.8%

SWEET 16
5.7%

ELITE 8
2.4%

FINAL FOUR
0.9%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

TCU

UCF

KNIGHTS

HEAD COACH
Johnny Dawkins

CONFERENCE
Big 12

2025-26 RECORD
21-11 SU, 15-17 ATS, 13-19 O-U

EAST REGION

#10 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
80.7 (54)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
9.7 (58)

BETTOR RATING
-8.3 (67)

MOMENTUM RATING
8.1 (70)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
6.1 (97)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
81 (49)

DEFENSIVE PPG
78.5 (278)

POSSESSIONS
67.1 (88)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.239 (49)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.092 (105)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.466 (73)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.456 (237)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.362 (49)

FREE THROW %
0.74 (138)

REBOUNDING %
0.526 (55)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.408 (70)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.134 (99)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.138 (229)



Leveling up in a football conference doesn't always work out, but there are definitely advantages in basketball. This year's UCF team isn't really any better than last year's statistically. You could argue that the 2024 team was better, especially with how good they are on defense. But in Year 3 in the Big 12, the Knights secured enough nice wins and a .500 conference play record and now they're in the field for just the second time in the Johnny Dawkins era.

As a member of the American Conference, outside of an outlier season, the only way in is to win the conference tournament. As a member of the Big 12, it's easier to get elevated by the strength of the conference and then find enough wins over the course of a grueling schedule to get in. To be fair, the non-conference win at Texas A&M was a really good opener to the season and so was the win over Kansas to start Big 12 play. Those two wins left the Knights mostly controlling their own destiny for an NCAA Tournament berth at 12-1.

Scraping together enough good wins to not lose their place in the field was the task at hand and beating Texas Tech and BYU on the road was certainly enough to do just that. This is another mid-tier major-conference team that doesn't stand out in a lot of metrics. The Knights did shoot 36.3% from 3 in conference action and that was a huge help because they were not great in a lot of other areas, finishing 10th in 2P% offense and 15th out of 16 teams in 2P% defense.

As a top-50 offense from 3, the Knights could be a feisty tournament team, but they also don't really maximize that skill by having a 3P Rate that ranks in the 280s. Instead, they take a lot of 2s and rely on offensive rebounds to get second-chance opportunities after taking way too many mid-range jumpers. For a team that ranked in the 240s in 2P% defense and right around the national average in 3P% defense, better shot selection on offense would offset those numbers.

For a team that went 11-11 in Quadrant 1 and 2 games, a deep run is unlikely and a quick exit may be the most likely outcome.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

14-1

REACH
FINAL 4

450-1

REACH
ELITE 8

50-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

400-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
27.6%

SWEET 16
7.0%

ELITE 8
1.8%

FINAL FOUR
0.2%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

SOUTH FLORIDA

BULLS

HEAD COACH
Bryan Hodgson

CONFERENCE
American

2025-26 RECORD
25-8 SU, 18-14 ATS, 14-18 O-U

EAST REGION

#11 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
83.4 (42)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
12.6 (43)

BETTOR RATING
-12.1 (45)

MOMENTUM RATING
19.3 (17)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
19.3 (16)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
87.5 (5)

DEFENSIVE PPG
77 (238)

POSSESSIONS
69.5 (15)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.226 (55)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.055 (56)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.438 (232)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.419 (42)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.333 (213)

FREE THROW %
0.742 (115)

REBOUNDING %
0.531 (35)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.497 (47)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.126 (42)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.16 (75)

When South Florida won the American Conference regular season for the second time in three years, head coach Bryan Hodgson stood on the stage and shouted out Amir Abdur-Rahim. During the 2023-24 season, the Bulls went 25-8 and 16-2 in conference play, winning the regular season for the first time ever. Sadly, a loss to UAB kept the Bulls from the NCAA Tournament, as they went to the NIT instead. Abdur-Rahim died from complications during surgery just before the next season when excitement about the program was at its highest.

After a very difficult year under interim head coach Ben Fletcher, USF hired Hodgson and now the Bulls are in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2012 after rolling through the American Tournament with wins by 22 and 15. This is an extremely good mid-major team and one that deserved consideration for an at-large berth prior to securing the auto bid.

The shooting numbers were lacking for the Bulls on the whole, but not really in conference play, as they were fourth in 2P% and 3P%. They played a really good non-conference schedule and I think that might lead to some betting value and maybe some bracket value on them, playing George Washington, Oklahoma State (when they were 75th per Torvik), VCU, Colorado State, Utah State, and Alabama.

Even with that non-conference slate, this is a top-50 defense in a lot of areas - adjusted defensive efficiency, eFG%, 2P%, and TO%. Their 3-point defense is going to be under the spotlight, though. USF has a negative 3P% differential on the whole and that typically doesn't bode well, especially because it's so rare. That'll be something that they need to try and fix, as they take good care of the ball, take the ball away, and rank in the top 10 in ORB%.

This is a team that has won 11 in a row and 17 of 20, with the three losses by 1, 1, and 3 points, two of them in overtime. Make of that what you will.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

12-1

REACH
FINAL 4

190-1

REACH
ELITE 8

40-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

1000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
42.7%

SWEET 16
19.5%

ELITE 8
8.7%

FINAL FOUR
2.2%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



NORTHERN IOWA

PANTHERS

HEAD COACH
Ben Jacobson

CONFERENCE
Missouri Valley

2025-26 RECORD
23-12 SU, 19-15 ATS, 14-20 O-U

EAST REGION

#12 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
78.2 (78)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
7.9 (79)

BETTOR RATING
-5.9 (95)

MOMENTUM RATING
10.3 (52)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
14.3 (32)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
69.1 (299)

DEFENSIVE PPG
62.1 (1)

POSSESSIONS
60.7 (365)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.141 (151)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.016 (28)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.473 (46)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.412 (31)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.349 (128)

FREE THROW %
0.697 (278)

REBOUNDING %
0.488 (248)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.589 (29)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.131 (71)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.16 (81)

I've done research my whole life and there are always things that come up in that process that surprise you. Northern Iowa not being in the NCAA Tournament since 2016 was one of those things. This is a team that made it seven times from 2004-16 and even won two games in 2010, as we all remember that Ali Farokmanesh team. The Panthers also won games in 2015 and 2016, but it's been a long drought since then.

Northern Iowa emerged from Arch Madness by winning four games in four days. An underwhelming regular season with an 11-9 record put the Panthers in a tough situation, having to play in the Opening Round as a No 6 seed, just missing out on the free bye to the quarterfinals. It didn't matter, as the Panthers beat No. 3, No. 2, and No. 5 to get back to the NCAA Tourney. In those games, they allowed 59, 52, 69, and 69 points and that's an important thing to keep in mind.

Head coach Ben Jacobson does what he does and does it very well. This is an even slower version of UNI than we've seen in the past. This is always a good defensive rebounding team and one that really values the basketball by not turning it over. But, this year's team also finished in the top five in 3P% against. They do everything that they can to close out on the perimeter and contest shots, a byproduct of the height of the starting lineup. The six guys that play the most for the Panthers are all 6-foot-4 or taller.

There are flaws. The Panthers are really bad on the offensive glass and have struggled at the free throw line. But, the strengths seem to outweigh the weaknesses with a top-25 eFG% defense and an offense that more than held its own taking shots, finishing well above the national average in 2P% and a full percent above the mean in 3P%.

Whether or not UNI advances past the first round is certainly up for debate, but it should be stated that eight of their 12 losses this season have been by six or fewer points, so that could have some ATS value.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

12-1

REACH
FINAL 4

250-1

REACH
ELITE 8

65-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
22.9%

SWEET 16
9.1%

ELITE 8
1.1%

FINAL FOUR
0.3%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



CAL BAPTIST

LANCERS

HEAD COACH
Rick Croy

CONFERENCE
WAC

2025-26 RECORD
25-8 SU, 20-13 ATS, 12-21 O-U

EAST REGION

#13 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
74.8 (110)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
3.9 (111)

BETTOR RATING
-3.2 (117)

MOMENTUM RATING
9.2 (66)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
11.6 (44)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
73 (224)

DEFENSIVE PPG
67.6 (28)

POSSESSIONS
63.7 (291)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.127 (168)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.064 (65)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.432 (267)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.417 (39)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.337 (190)

FREE THROW %
0.719 (213)

REBOUNDING %
0.551 (15)

ASST/TO RATIO
0.836 (347)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.151 (235)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.15 (141)

One team's gut-wrenching heartbreak is another team's jubilant celebration. We'll never know what would have happened in overtime if Utah Valley converted the dunk at the end of regulation and took Cal Baptist to an extra period in the WAC Tournament final. We'll also never know if Cal Baptist can repeat as WAC champs because the conference will be no more after the Lancers leave the NCAA Tournament.

Rick Croy has had some solid teams in Riverside since the program moved into Division I in the summer of 2018. He just hadn't had one capable of getting over the hump. This team did and did so in a big way with 25 wins, a 13-5 record in conference play, and the auto bid from the WAC tourney. Cal Baptist won 21 games in 2020 and had a 10-6 conference record, which were both program highs until this season.

This is a tough, physical, team that does not shoot the ball particularly well, but neither do their opponents. In fact, the Lancers enter the Big Dance as a top-10 defense in 3P% and a top-40 defense in 2P%. They bring a top-20 eFG% against with them into the first round, but they also bring an eFG% on offense that ranks in the 300s. It's actually incredible how poor this team is on offense because they boasted one of the best ORB% in the nation and had a top-15 shot share on Close Twos, meaning that they had a lot of shot attempts at the rim. Unfortunately, they finished the season 356th in FG% on those shots.

For a team that ranked in the 320s in 3P Rate, missing more bunnies than Elmer Fudd became a really big problem against better competition. Against Quadrant 3 or better opponents, the Lancers were just 7-8. They were 8-3 in games decided by six or fewer points, including that nail-biter against the Wolverines last Saturday. They've had some abysmal offensive performances, but have mostly been very good on defense, so that's what we should look for in their first-round game.

Expect a slower tempo, a lot of defense, a lot of offensive frustration, and a lot of shots from Dominique Daniels Jr., whose 31% Usage Rate ranked among the top 40 in the nation.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

22-1

REACH
FINAL 4

500-1

REACH
ELITE 8

250-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
26.4%

SWEET 16
6.1%

ELITE 8
0.5%

FINAL FOUR
0.1%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



NORTH DAKOTA STATE

BISON

HEAD COACH
David Richman

CONFERENCE
Summit

2025-26 RECORD
27-7 SU, 18-13 ATS, 14-17 O-U

EAST REGION

#14 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
74.7 (111)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
4.2 (109)

BETTOR RATING
-2.5 (128)

MOMENTUM RATING
7.7 (78)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
8.1 (76)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
79.1 (81)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.8 (76)

POSSESSIONS
64.3 (260)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.158 (115)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.097 (111)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.457 (115)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.441 (137)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.357 (74)

FREE THROW %
0.716 (217)

REBOUNDING %
0.532 (33)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.383 (78)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.133 (91)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.167 (43)

Jealousy is a normal human emotion and you have to think that the North Dakota State basketball team looked at the football team and what they've been able to accomplish and longed for something similar. Obviously Division I basketball and Division I-AA football are a little bit different, but North Dakota State hadn't made the NCAA Tournament since 2019 while losing in the Summit League finals in 2021, 2022, and 2023 after their 2020 automatic berth was derailed by COVID.

Maybe it's been for the best, as David Richman has his best team in a while, if not his best team ever heading into this year's Big Dance. The Bison turned up the heat on defense this season, finishing in the top 60 in TO% after ranking 344th or worse every year from 2018-25. Even though last season's team was tops in the nation in 3P% and second in eFG%, the defense just wasn't good enough and the team didn't maximize their offensive ability by generating extra possessions.

Not only did this year's team improve tremendously in terms of TO% and turnover differential, this is also far and away the best offensive rebounding team that Richman has had in a dozen seasons in Fargo. It is probably a little bit unfair to lump the Bison in with the rest of the Summit League, which was undoubtedly down this season, ranking 21st in Bart Torvik's conference rankings after finishing 12th last season. This was the regular season champion and had three dominant performances in the Summit Tournament.

Five guys on the Bison roster shot at least 37.1% from 3 in Division I games during the regular season. Sure, it might be concerning that the Bison took 812 3-pointers and only had 701 shots classified as Close Twos by Torvik, but these mid-major and low-major teams that focus on inside play are a lot less likely to get the ball in there and have success against the first and second-round opponents that they're going to face after coming out of whatever conference they played in.

For NDSU, it's time to embrace the variance. Over 62% of their shots are jumpers. They aren't worried about getting out in transition, so they're responsible on the defensive glass, a big deal when opponents took a 3 over 44% of the time. This team won't be an easy out.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

50-1

REACH
FINAL 4

500-1

REACH
ELITE 8

250-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
15.8%

SWEET 16
3.1%

ELITE 8
0.6%

FINAL FOUR
0.1%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



FURMAN

PALADINS

HEAD COACH
Bob Richey

CONFERENCE
Southern

2025-26 RECORD
22-12 SU, 15-16 ATS, 15-16 O-U

EAST REGION

#15 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
70 (182)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-1.2 (183)

BETTOR RATING
1.3 (189)

MOMENTUM RATING
-0.5 (185)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
-1.9 (203)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
75.1 (166)

DEFENSIVE PPG
72.2 (111)

POSSESSIONS
64 (279)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.099 (217)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.127 (158)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.471 (52)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.433 (93)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.333 (211)

FREE THROW %
0.698 (276)

REBOUNDING %
0.528 (46)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.245 (139)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.155 (268)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.119 (342)

The transfer portal hurts some conferences a lot more than others and the Southern Conference is one of them. Lovingly known as the SoCon, this is a conference that typically has a bunch of really good shooters and the conference's proximity to the SEC and ACC means that poachers are always out there hunting. Bart Torvik's conference rankings had the SoCon 24th out of 31. The SoCon was 18th last year and 15th in 2023-24. Those numbers aren't meant to diminish what Furman did in winning the conference tourney and the auto bid, but only three SoCon teams were in KenPom's top 200 and only two in Bart Torvik's by the end.

Timing is everything and Furman had three of their five best offensive performances in the SoCon Tournament, scoring 1.246, 1.234, and 1.229 points per possession in three games over three days. The team was missing both Cooper Bowser and Asa Thomas for a good chunk of January and that was a contributing factor in finishing conference play just 10-8 and drawing a No. 6 seed for the conference tourney.

Some may remember the Paladins from their 2023 upset of Virginia in the first round before getting pummeled by the eventual tournament runner-up San Diego State in the second round. That was the program's first NCAA Tournament win since 1974 in their first NCAA Tournament berth since 1980. More often than not, Bob Richey has had some extremely good teams. In fact, this is pretty clearly the worst offensive team and one of the lesser defensive teams that he's had in nearly a decade in Greenville.

It's the first one to finish the regular season outside the top 110 in Torvik's adjusted offensive efficiency rankings. Defensively, the Paladins ranked in the 340s in TO% and have one of the highest negative TO% differentials of any tourney team at -4.1%. Like most of Richey's teams, Furman excels inside the arc, shooting 59% on 2s. Unfortunately, as a team that took only 130 more 2-point shots than 3-point shots, it is going to take some shots to fall to have a repeat of 2023 or come even close.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

120-1

REACH
FINAL 4

800-1

REACH
ELITE 8

250-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
6.9%

SWEET 16
0.9%

ELITE 8
0.1%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



SIENA

SAINTS

HEAD COACH
Gerry McNamara

CONFERENCE
MAAC

2025-26 RECORD
23-11 SU, 20-14 ATS, 11-23 O-U

EAST REGION

#16 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
69.9 (183)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-1.3 (186)

BETTOR RATING
1.8 (198)

MOMENTUM RATING
0.1 (176)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
-0.3 (186)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
70.5 (273)

DEFENSIVE PPG
65.7 (12)

POSSESSIONS
63.7 (295)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.114 (191)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.138 (185)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.457 (118)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.422 (54)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.304 (334)

FREE THROW %
0.769 (35)

REBOUNDING %
0.521 (77)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.299 (118)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.138 (138)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.148 (150)

Gerry McNamara has some business to tend to before he can consider taking the reins at his alma mater, Syracuse, if he is among the final candidates. His Saints went marching into the NCAA Tournament by virtue of winning the MAAC Tournament, as Siena is dancing for the first time since 2010 when Fran McCaffery was the head coach. Technically speaking, the program earned an NCAA Tournament berth in 2020 for winning the regular season before COVID wiped out the conference tournament. But, they'll play their first tourney game in over 15 years.

This will absolutely shock you with a player that played under Jim Boeheim, but the Saints play at a glacial pace and are really good at defending 2-point shots. Even with increased free throw opportunities given the magnitude of the games in the MAAC Tournament, Siena's three games were played to 60, 64, and 64 possessions. Their 64-54 win against Merrimack was actually played at a breakneck pace compared to their two regular season games, which were played to 54 and 63 possessions, with the second game going to overtime.

In other words, expect Siena to play slowly here and to make every 2-point shot a challenge. I would also expect the Saints to struggle on offense. This is a team that played a schedule that ranked in the 330s for Bart Torvik and 340s for KenPom and still couldn't crack the top 200 in eFG%. This is one of the worst 3-point shooting teams in the Field of 68.

That's not very McNamarian, as he was a 35.4% 3-point shooter over his four years at Syracuse. It's also a pretty significant downgrade from last season's team, one of the few areas where the Saints regressed. This is not a very modern offense with a Rim & 3 Rate a couple ticks above 70%. They take a lot of tough shots in the mid-range and have had to take even more with Antonio Chandler ineligible, as he led the team in dunks with 22.

The pace and the poor 3-point shooting are the most important things to keep in mind with Siena in the first round.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

200-1

REACH
FINAL 4

800-1

REACH
ELITE 8

300-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
1.5%

SWEET 16
0.2%

ELITE 8
0.0%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



STEVE MAKINEN'S SOUTH REGION

POWER RATINGS GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 FLORIDA	#2 HOUSTON	#3 ILLINOIS	#4 NEBRASKA	#5 VANDERBILT	#6 N CAROLINA	#7 ST MARYS-CA	#8 CLEMSON	#9 IOWA	#10 TEXAS A&M	#11 VCU	#12 MCNEESE ST	#13 TROY	#14 PENN	#15 IDAHO	#16 LEHIGH	#16 PRAIRIE VIEW A&M
TEAM/SEED	RATING	95.5	93.7	92.3	88.4	90.8	84.6	86.5	83.5	85.4	84.6	83.0	80.5	72.3	71.2	72.3	64.0	63.3
#1 FLORIDA	95.5		1.8	3.2	7.1	4.7	10.9	9.0	12.0	10.1	10.9	12.5	15.0	23.2	24.3	23.2	31.5	32.2
#2 HOUSTON	93.7	-1.8		1.4	5.3	2.9	9.1	7.2	10.2	8.3	9.1	10.7	13.2	21.4	22.5	21.4	29.7	30.4
#3 ILLINOIS	92.3	-3.2	-1.4		3.9	1.5	7.7	5.8	8.8	6.9	7.7	9.3	11.8	20.0	21.1	20.0	28.3	29.0
#4 NEBRASKA	88.4	-7.1	-5.3	-3.9		-2.4	3.8	1.9	4.9	3.0	3.8	5.4	7.9	16.1	17.2	16.1	24.4	25.1
#5 VANDERBILT	90.8	-4.7	-2.9	-1.5	2.4		6.2	4.3	7.3	5.4	6.2	7.8	10.3	18.5	19.6	18.5	26.8	27.5
#6 N CAROLINA	84.6	-10.9	-9.1	-7.7	-3.8	-6.2		-1.9	1.1	-0.8	0.0	1.6	4.1	12.3	13.4	12.3	20.6	21.3
#7 ST MARYS-CA	86.5	-9.0	-7.2	-5.8	-1.9	-4.3	1.9		3.0	1.1	1.9	3.5	6.0	14.2	15.3	14.2	22.5	23.2
#8 CLEMSON	83.5	-12.0	-10.2	-8.8	-4.9	-7.3	-1.1	-3.0		-1.9	-1.1	0.5	3.0	11.2	12.3	11.2	19.5	20.2
#9 IOWA	85.4	-10.1	-8.3	-6.9	-3.0	-5.4	0.8	-1.1	1.9		0.8	2.4	4.9	13.1	14.2	13.1	21.4	22.1
#10 TEXAS A&M	84.6	-10.9	-9.1	-7.7	-3.8	-6.2	0.0	-1.9	1.1	-0.8		1.6	4.1	12.3	13.4	12.3	20.6	21.3
#11 VCU	83.0	-12.5	-10.7	-9.3	-5.4	-7.8	-1.6	-3.5	-0.5	-2.4	-1.6		2.5	10.7	11.8	10.7	19.0	19.7
#12 MCNEESE ST	80.5	-15.0	-13.2	-11.8	-7.9	-10.3	-4.1	-6.0	-3.0	-4.9	-4.1	-2.5		8.2	9.3	8.2	16.5	17.2
#13 TROY	72.3	-23.2	-21.4	-20.0	-16.1	-18.5	-12.3	-14.2	-11.2	-13.1	-12.3	-10.7	-8.2		1.1	0.0	8.3	9.0
#14 PENN	71.2	-24.3	-22.5	-21.1	-17.2	-19.6	-13.4	-15.3	-12.3	-14.2	-13.4	-11.8	-9.3	-1.1		-1.1	7.2	7.9
#15 IDAHO	72.3	-23.2	-21.4	-20.0	-16.1	-18.5	-12.3	-14.2	-11.2	-13.1	-12.3	-10.7	-8.2	0.0	1.1		8.3	9.0
#16 LEHIGH	64.0	-31.5	-29.7	-28.3	-24.4	-26.8	-20.6	-22.5	-19.5	-21.4	-20.6	-19.0	-16.5	-8.3	-7.2	-8.3		0.7
#16 PRAIRIE VIEW A&M	63.3	-32.2	-30.4	-29.0	-25.1	-27.5	-21.3	-23.2	-20.2	-22.1	-21.3	-19.7	-17.2	-9.0	-7.9	-9.0	-0.7	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

The grid above outlines how each team in the region matches up against the other teams in the region, creating a hypothetical betting line should the teams meet in the tournament. The values in the grid display how many points the team on the top would be favored (-), or an underdog (positive number), by when facing the teams listed down the left side of the grid by taking the team on the top rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #1 seed Florida would hypothetically be listed as a 12-point favorite (-12) against #8 seed Clemson, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S SOUTH REGION

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 FLORIDA	#2 HOUSTON	#3 ILLINOIS	#4 NEBRASKA	#5 VANDERBILT	#6 N CAROLINA	#7 ST MARYS-CA	#8 CLEMSON	#9 IOWA	#10 TEXAS A&M	#11 VCU	#12 MCNEESE ST	#13 TROY	#14 PENN	#15 IDAHO	#16 LEHIGH	#16 PRAIRIE VIEW A&M
TEAM/SEED	RATING	24.7	22.7	24.1	17.7	21.2	16.6	16.0	13.8	16.2	14.8	12.3	9.7	1.1	1.0	1.2	-6.9	-8.7
#1 FLORIDA	24.7		2.0	0.6	7.0	3.5	8.1	8.7	10.9	8.5	9.9	12.4	15.0	23.6	23.7	23.5	31.6	33.4
#2 HOUSTON	22.7	-2.0		-1.4	5.0	1.5	6.1	6.7	8.9	6.5	7.9	10.4	13.0	21.6	21.7	21.5	29.6	31.4
#3 ILLINOIS	24.1	-0.6	1.4		6.4	2.9	7.5	8.1	10.3	7.9	9.3	11.8	14.4	23.0	23.1	22.9	31.0	32.8
#4 NEBRASKA	17.7	-7.0	-5.0	-6.4		-3.5	1.1	1.7	3.9	1.5	2.9	5.4	8.0	16.6	16.7	16.5	24.6	26.4
#5 VANDERBILT	21.2	-3.5	-1.5	-2.9	3.5		4.6	5.2	7.4	5.0	6.4	8.9	11.5	20.1	20.2	20.0	28.1	29.9
#6 N CAROLINA	16.6	-8.1	-6.1	-7.5	-1.1	-4.6		0.6	2.8	0.4	1.8	4.3	6.9	15.5	15.6	15.4	23.5	25.3
#7 ST MARYS-CA	16.0	-8.7	-6.7	-8.1	-1.7	-5.2	-0.6		2.2	-0.2	1.2	3.7	6.3	14.9	15.0	14.8	22.9	24.7
#8 CLEMSON	13.8	-10.9	-8.9	-10.3	-3.9	-7.4	-2.8	-2.2		-2.4	-1.0	1.5	4.1	12.7	12.8	12.6	20.7	22.5
#9 IOWA	16.2	-8.5	-6.5	-7.9	-1.5	-5.0	-0.4	0.2	2.4		1.4	3.9	6.5	15.1	15.2	15.0	23.1	24.9
#10 TEXAS A&M	14.8	-9.9	-7.9	-9.3	-2.9	-6.4	-1.8	-1.2	1.0	-1.4		2.5	5.1	13.7	13.8	13.6	21.7	23.5
#11 VCU	12.3	-12.4	-10.4	-11.8	-5.4	-8.9	-4.3	-3.7	-1.5	-3.9	-2.5		2.6	11.2	11.3	11.1	19.2	21.0
#12 MCNEESE ST	9.7	-15.0	-13.0	-14.4	-8.0	-11.5	-6.9	-6.3	-4.1	-6.5	-5.1	-2.6		8.6	8.7	8.5	16.6	18.4
#13 TROY	1.1	-23.6	-21.6	-23.0	-16.6	-20.1	-15.5	-14.9	-12.7	-15.1	-13.7	-11.2	-8.6		0.1	-0.1	8.0	9.8
#14 PENN	1.0	-23.7	-21.7	-23.1	-16.7	-20.2	-15.6	-15.0	-12.8	-15.2	-13.8	-11.3	-8.7	-0.1		-0.2	7.9	9.7
#15 IDAHO	1.2	-23.5	-21.5	-22.9	-16.5	-20.0	-15.4	-14.8	-12.6	-15.0	-13.6	-11.1	-8.5	0.1	0.2		8.1	9.9
#16 LEHIGH	-6.9	-31.6	-29.6	-31.0	-24.6	-28.1	-23.5	-22.9	-20.7	-23.1	-21.7	-19.2	-16.6	-8.0	-7.9	-8.1		1.8
#16 PRAIRIE VIEW A&M	-8.7	-33.4	-31.4	-32.8	-26.4	-29.9	-25.3	-24.7	-22.5	-24.9	-23.5	-21.0	-18.4	-9.8	-9.7	-9.9	-1.8	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

The grid above outlines how each team in the region matches up against the other teams in the region, creating a hypothetical betting line should the teams meet in the tournament. The values in the grid display how many points the team on the top would be favored (-), or an underdog (positive number), by when facing the teams listed down the left side of the grid by taking the team on the tops rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #2 seed Houston would hypothetically be listed as a 5-point favorite (-5) against #4 seed Nebraska, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S SOUTH REGION

BETTORS RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 FLORIDA	#2 HOUSTON	#3 ILLINOIS	#4 NEBRASKA	#5 VANDERBILT	#6 N CAROLINA	#7 ST MARYS-CA	#8 CLEMSON	#9 IOWA	#10 TEXAS A&M	#11 VCU	#12 MCNEESE ST	#13 TROY	#14 PENN	#15 IDAHO	#16 LEHIGH	#16 PRAIRIE VIEW A&M
TEAM/SEED	RATING	-24.6	23.0	21.2	16.2	17.8	12.4	15.8	13.6	15.2	14.6	9.8	10.7	1.9	-2.4	0.5	-8.3	-9.7
#1 FLORIDA	-24.6		1.6	3.4	8.4	6.8	12.2	8.8	11.0	9.4	10.0	14.8	13.9	22.7	27.0	24.1	32.9	34.3
#2 HOUSTON	-23.0	-1.6		1.8	6.8	5.2	10.6	7.2	9.4	7.8	8.4	13.2	12.3	21.1	25.4	22.5	31.3	32.7
#3 ILLINOIS	-21.2	-3.4	-1.8		5.0	3.4	8.8	5.4	7.6	6.0	6.6	11.4	10.5	19.3	23.6	20.7	29.5	30.9
#4 NEBRASKA	-16.2	-8.4	-6.8	-5.0		-1.6	3.8	0.4	2.6	1.0	1.6	6.4	5.5	14.3	18.6	15.7	24.5	25.9
#5 VANDERBILT	-17.8	-6.8	-5.2	-3.4	1.6		5.4	2.0	4.2	2.6	3.2	8.0	7.1	15.9	20.2	17.3	26.1	27.5
#6 N CAROLINA	-12.4	-12.2	-10.6	-8.8	-3.8	-5.4		-3.4	-1.2	-2.8	-2.2	2.6	1.7	10.5	14.8	11.9	20.7	22.1
#7 ST MARYS-CA	-15.8	-8.8	-7.2	-5.4	-0.4	-2.0	3.4		2.2	0.6	1.2	6.0	5.1	13.9	18.2	15.3	24.1	25.5
#8 CLEMSON	-13.6	-11.0	-9.4	-7.6	-2.6	-4.2	1.2	-2.2		-1.6	-1.0	3.8	2.9	11.7	16.0	13.1	21.9	23.3
#9 IOWA	-15.2	-9.4	-7.8	-6.0	-1.0	-2.6	2.8	-0.6	1.6		0.6	5.4	4.5	13.3	17.6	14.7	23.5	24.9
#10 TEXAS A&M	-14.6	-10.0	-8.4	-6.6	-1.6	-3.2	2.2	-1.2	1.0	-0.6		4.8	3.9	12.7	17.0	14.1	22.9	24.3
#11 VCU	-9.8	-14.8	-13.2	-11.4	-6.4	-8.0	-2.6	-6.0	-3.8	-5.4	-4.8		-0.9	7.9	12.2	9.3	18.1	19.5
#12 MCNEESE ST	-10.7	-13.9	-12.3	-10.5	-5.5	-7.1	-1.7	-5.1	-2.9	-4.5	-3.9	0.9		8.8	13.1	10.2	19.0	20.4
#13 TROY	-1.9	-22.7	-21.1	-19.3	-14.3	-15.9	-10.5	-13.9	-11.7	-13.3	-12.7	-7.9	-8.8		4.3	1.4	10.2	11.6
#14 PENN	2.4	-27.0	-25.4	-23.6	-18.6	-20.2	-14.8	-18.2	-16.0	-17.6	-17.0	-12.2	-13.1	-4.3		-2.9	5.9	7.3
#15 IDAHO	-0.5	-24.1	-22.5	-20.7	-15.7	-17.3	-11.9	-15.3	-13.1	-14.7	-14.1	-9.3	-10.2	-1.4	2.9		8.8	10.2
#16 LEHIGH	8.3	-32.9	-31.3	-29.5	-24.5	-26.1	-20.7	-24.1	-21.9	-23.5	-22.9	-18.1	-19.0	-10.2	-5.9	-8.8		1.4
#16 PRAIRIE VIEW A&M	9.7	-34.3	-32.7	-30.9	-25.9	-27.5	-22.1	-25.5	-23.3	-24.9	-24.3	-19.5	-20.4	-11.6	-7.3	-10.2	-1.4	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

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STEVE MAKINEN'S SOUTH REGION

MOMENTUM RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 FLORIDA	#2 HOUSTON	#3 ILLINOIS	#4 NEBRASKA	#5 VANDERBILT	#6 N CAROLINA	#7 ST MARYS-CA	#8 CLEMSON	#9 IOWA	#10 TEXAS A&M	#11 VCU	#12 MCNEESE ST	#13 TROY	#14 PENN	#15 IDAHO	#16 LEHIGH	#16 PRAIRIE VIEW A&M
TEAM/SEED	RATING	27.9	92.6	88.5	87.7	84.3	85.1	85.5	84.1	84.1	82.3	85	79.2	75.7	71.7	72.9	66.8	66.9
#1 FLORIDA	27.9		3.5	5.5	14.3	8.8	13.7	8.9	17.1	14.6	18.1	16.1	18.1	29.2	21.9	21.2	31.6	26.8
#2 HOUSTON	24.4	-3.5		2.0	10.8	5.3	10.2	5.4	13.6	11.1	14.6	12.6	14.6	25.7	18.4	17.7	28.1	23.3
#3 ILLINOIS	22.4	-5.5	-2.0		8.8	3.3	8.2	3.4	11.6	9.1	12.6	10.6	12.6	23.7	16.4	15.7	26.1	21.3
#4 NEBRASKA	13.6	-14.3	-10.8	-8.8		-5.5	-0.6	-5.4	2.8	0.3	3.8	1.8	3.8	14.9	7.6	6.9	17.3	12.5
#5 VANDERBILT	19.1	-8.8	-5.3	-3.3	5.5		4.9	0.1	8.3	5.8	9.3	7.3	9.3	20.4	13.1	12.4	22.8	18.0
#6 N CAROLINA	14.2	-13.7	-10.2	-8.2	0.6	-4.9		-4.8	3.4	0.9	4.4	2.4	4.4	15.5	8.2	7.5	17.9	13.1
#7 ST MARYS-CA	19.0	-8.9	-5.4	-3.4	5.4	-0.1	4.8		8.2	5.7	9.2	7.2	9.2	20.3	13.0	12.3	22.7	17.9
#8 CLEMSON	10.8	-17.1	-13.6	-11.6	-2.8	-8.3	-3.4	-8.2		-2.5	1.0	-1.0	1.0	12.1	4.8	4.1	14.5	9.7
#9 IOWA	13.3	-14.6	-11.1	-9.1	-0.3	-5.8	-0.9	-5.7	2.5		3.5	1.5	3.5	14.6	7.3	6.6	17.0	12.2
#10 TEXAS A&M	9.8	-18.1	-14.6	-12.6	-3.8	-9.3	-4.4	-9.2	-1.0	-3.5		-2.0	0.0	11.1	3.8	3.1	13.5	8.7
#11 VCU	11.8	-16.1	-12.6	-10.6	-1.8	-7.3	-2.4	-7.2	1.0	-1.5	2.0		2.0	13.1	5.8	5.1	15.5	10.7
#12 MCNEESE ST	9.8	-18.1	-14.6	-12.6	-3.8	-9.3	-4.4	-9.2	-1.0	-3.5	0.0	-2.0		11.1	3.8	3.1	13.5	8.7
#13 TROY	-1.3	-29.2	-25.7	-23.7	-14.9	-20.4	-15.5	-20.3	-12.1	-14.6	-11.1	-13.1	-11.1		-7.3	-8.0	2.4	-2.4
#14 PENN	6.0	-21.9	-18.4	-16.4	-7.6	-13.1	-8.2	-13.0	-4.8	-7.3	-3.8	-5.8	-3.8	7.3		-0.7	9.7	4.9
#15 IDAHO	6.7	-21.2	-17.7	-15.7	-6.9	-12.4	-7.5	-12.3	-4.1	-6.6	-3.1	-5.1	-3.1	8.0	0.7		10.4	5.6
#16 LEHIGH	-3.7	-31.6	-28.1	-26.1	-17.3	-22.8	-17.9	-22.7	-14.5	-17.0	-13.5	-15.5	-13.5	-2.4	-9.7	-10.4		-4.8
#16 PRAIRIE VIEW A&M	1.1	-26.8	-23.3	-21.3	-12.5	-18.0	-13.1	-17.9	-9.7	-12.2	-8.7	-10.7	-8.7	2.4	-4.9	-5.6	4.8	

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STEVE MAKINEN'S SOUTH REGION

GAME GRADE FORECAST GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 FLORIDA	#2 HOUSTON	#3 ILLINOIS	#4 NEBRASKA	#5 VANDERBILT	#6 N CAROLINA	#7 ST MARYS-CA	#8 CLEMSON	#9 IOWA	#10 TEXAS A&M	#11 VCU	#12 MCNEESE ST	#13 TROY	#14 PENN	#15 IDAHO	#16 LEHIGH	#16 PRAIRIE VIEW A&M
TEAM/SEED	RATING	30.5	92.6	88.5	87.7	84.3	85.1	85.5	84.1	84.1	82.3	85	79.2	75.7	71.7	72.9	66.8	66.9
#1 FLORIDA	30.5		7.3	8.3	16.3	11.8	16.9	8.9	18.4	22.3	23.6	16.3	20.8	30.8	24.6	22.2	31.9	30.1
#2 HOUSTON	23.2	-7.3		1.0	9.0	4.5	9.6	1.6	11.1	15.0	16.3	9.0	13.5	23.5	17.3	14.9	24.6	22.8
#3 ILLINOIS	22.2	-8.3	-1.0		8.0	3.5	8.6	0.6	10.1	14.0	15.3	8.0	12.5	22.5	16.3	13.9	23.6	21.8
#4 NEBRASKA	14.2	-16.3	-9.0	-8.0		-4.5	0.6	-7.4	2.1	6.0	7.3	0.0	4.5	14.5	8.3	5.9	15.6	13.8
#5 VANDERBILT	18.7	-11.8	-4.5	-3.5	4.5		5.1	-2.9	6.6	10.5	11.8	4.5	9.0	19.0	12.8	10.4	20.1	18.3
#6 N CAROLINA	13.6	-16.9	-9.6	-8.6	-0.6	-5.1		-8.0	1.5	5.4	6.7	-0.6	3.9	13.9	7.7	5.3	15.0	13.2
#7 ST MARYS-CA	21.6	-8.9	-1.6	-0.6	7.4	2.9	8.0		9.5	13.4	14.7	7.4	11.9	21.9	15.7	13.3	23.0	21.2
#8 CLEMSON	12.1	-18.4	-11.1	-10.1	-2.1	-6.6	-1.5	-9.5		3.9	5.2	-2.1	2.4	12.4	6.2	3.8	13.5	11.7
#9 IOWA	8.2	-22.3	-15.0	-14.0	-6.0	-10.5	-5.4	-13.4	-3.9		1.3	-6.0	-1.5	8.5	2.3	-0.1	9.6	7.8
#10 TEXAS A&M	6.9	-23.6	-16.3	-15.3	-7.3	-11.8	-6.7	-14.7	-5.2	-1.3		-7.3	-2.8	7.2	1.0	-1.4	8.3	6.5
#11 VCU	14.2	-16.3	-9.0	-8.0	0.0	-4.5	0.6	-7.4	2.1	6.0	7.3		4.5	14.5	8.3	5.9	15.6	13.8
#12 MCNEESE ST	9.7	-20.8	-13.5	-12.5	-4.5	-9.0	-3.9	-11.9	-2.4	1.5	2.8	-4.5		10.0	3.8	1.4	11.1	9.3
#13 TROY	-0.3	-30.8	-23.5	-22.5	-14.5	-19.0	-13.9	-21.9	-12.4	-8.5	-7.2	-14.5	-10.0		-6.2	-8.6	1.1	-0.7
#14 PENN	5.9	-24.6	-17.3	-16.3	-8.3	-12.8	-7.7	-15.7	-6.2	-2.3	-1.0	-8.3	-3.8	6.2		-2.4	7.3	5.5
#15 IDAHO	8.3	-22.2	-14.9	-13.9	-5.9	-10.4	-5.3	-13.3	-3.8	0.1	1.4	-5.9	-1.4	8.6	2.4		9.7	7.9
#16 LEHIGH	-1.4	-31.9	-24.6	-23.6	-15.6	-20.1	-15.0	-23.0	-13.5	-9.6	-8.3	-15.6	-11.1	-1.1	-7.3	-9.7		-1.8
#16 PRAIRIE VIEW A&M	0.4	-30.1	-22.8	-21.8	-13.8	-18.3	-13.2	-21.2	-11.7	-7.8	-6.5	-13.8	-9.3	0.7	-5.5	-7.9	1.8	

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FLORIDA

GATORS

HEAD COACH
Todd Golden

CONFERENCE
SEC

2025-26 RECORD
26-7 SU, 18-15 ATS, 14-19 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#1 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
95.5 (4)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
24.7 (4)

BETTOR RATING
-24.6 (3)

MOMENTUM RATING
27.9 (3)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
30.5 (2)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
86.8 (9)

DEFENSIVE PPG
72 (107)

POSSESSIONS
67.5 (63)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.302 (10)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.93 (5)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.478 (36)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.408 (21)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.308 (324)

FREE THROW %
0.71 (236)

REBOUNDING %
0.595 (1)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.393 (76)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.135 (108)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.136 (246)

The reigning National Champs are looking to run it back and give us a second straight repeat winner after UConn cut down the nets in consecutive tourneys. Concerns are present with this Gators group, as they are the only elite team with a negative 3P% differential. They've sat in the 300s in 3P% offense just about all season and even though they've held teams to around 32% from beyond the arc, they have not shot the ball well. The last National Champion with a negative 3P% differential was the 1988 Kansas Jayhawks.

Of course, in a six-game sample size, anything can happen and it's entirely possible that Florida's shooters find more success at just the right time. If that's the case and the team can eliminate one of the only flaws, then another deep run is coming for Todd Golden's crew. The Gators, even with their poor perimeter shooting, have been among the nation's leaders in adjusted offensive efficiency. It also helps that if you're going to miss shots, you attack the offensive glass with reckless abandon and that's precisely what they've done.

The biggest culprit has been Princeton transfer Xaivian Lee, who shot under 28% for the season just one year removed from jarring 37% of his triple tries with the Tigers. Fortunately, when the team's best players are 6-foot-9 and 6-foot-11 (x2), reliance on the 3-point shot isn't as significant as it is for some of the nation's other top teams who are more guard-oriented.

What has also helped Florida offset the 3-point shortcomings is playing ferocious defense in the best offensive conference in the country. We saw the Gators struggle early on with losses to Arizona, TCU, Duke, UConn, and even Missouri - all of them by six or fewer points and four of them by four or fewer points - but what would those games look like now? Perhaps we get that answer as the Gators carve a path through their region. They certainly improved by the time conference play rolled around and led an excellent SEC in both adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency in those league games.

As the old adage goes, "it's not about how you start, it's about how you finish". Florida started 5-4. Let's see how they finish.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

-450

**REACH
FINAL 4**

+155

**REACH
ELITE 8**

-160

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

+750

% CHANCE TO REACH...

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

2ND ROUND
99.0%

SWEET 16
83.3%

ELITE 8
62.8%

FINAL FOUR
41.0%



HOUSTON

COUGARS

HEAD COACH
Kelvin Sampson

CONFERENCE
Big 12

2025-26 RECORD
28-6 SU, 17-17 ATS, 14-20 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#2 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
93.7 (5)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
22.7 (8)

BETTOR RATING
-23 (5)

MOMENTUM RATING
24.4 (5)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
23.2 (6)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
77.1 (118)

DEFENSIVE PPG
62.9 (2)

POSSESSIONS
61.6 (354)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.293 (14)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.929 (4)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.45 (157)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.4 (13)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.349 (127)

FREE THROW %
0.772 (30)

REBOUNDING %
0.522 (70)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.727 (13)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.109 (3)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.181 (14)



It would be somewhat hyperbolic to refer to winning a title as “elusive” for Houston, as they just made it to the championship game for the first time under Kelvin Sampson last season. This has been a top-20 team for Bart Torvik every season since 2018 and a top-three team each of the previous five seasons. This year’s version grades slightly lower than that, but this is yet another formidable Cougars crew heading into the Big Dance.

What we have seen this season, though, is how the leap to the Big 12 can impact this team. Over the last two seasons, the Cougars have been seemingly impervious to the upgrade from the American Conference to one of the sport’s premier conferences. The Cougars led the nation in adjusted defensive efficiency both years and were in the top five in 2P% defense. This year’s team still grades very well, but not quite as well, as the defense dropped back a few spots in the efficiency metrics.

On the other hand, this is maybe the best offensive unit that Sampson has had in the field. This is the best free throw shooting team he’s had, along with the lowest TO% on offense and best 2P% since 2022-23, the last season in the American. However, while there are areas that are improved, last year’s team finished third in the nation in 3P%. This version spent most of the season around 150th.

For a team that lives and dies with jump shots, three Sweet 16 exits, an Elite Eight exit, and a Final Four departure in six NCAA Tournament appearances as one of the nation’s premier teams makes sense. The better teams have more length and athleticism to challenge those shots and Houston perennially has one of the lowest shot shares on field goal attempts at the rim. Add in the team’s glacial pace and there are only so many opportunities to score. Houston was also a bottom-15 team per Haslametrics’ Away From Home rating, which is a measure of road/neutral performance relative to overall performance, until the Big 12 Tournament.

Last year’s team nearly cracked the code, but also shot better than 39% from 3 in the regular season and over 40% in the first five NCAA Tournament games before going 6-of-25 against Florida in the title game. There are a lot of reasons to believe in UH, but also a lot of similarities to the past.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

-280

**REACH
FINAL 4**

+250

**REACH
ELITE 8**

+110

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

10-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

**based on average of Steve Makinen’s five ratings.*

2ND ROUND
92.6%

SWEET 16
65.2%

ELITE 8
39.5%

FINAL FOUR
19.9%

ILLINOIS

FIGHTING ILLINI

HEAD COACH
Brad Underwood

CONFERENCE
Big Ten

2025-26 RECORD
24-8 SU, 18-14 ATS, 14-18 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#3 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
92.3 (6)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
24.1 (5)

BETTOR RATING
-21.2 (9)

MOMENTUM RATING
22.4 (7)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
22.2 (8)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
84.4 (19)

DEFENSIVE PPG
69.8 (57)

POSSESSIONS
64 (282)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.358 (2)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.998 (19)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.463 (87)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.41 (27)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.347 (140)

FREE THROW %
0.789 (6)

REBOUNDING %
0.567 (7)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.649 (19)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.111 (4)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.101 (365)



How Illinois will be evaluated by pundits, prognosticators, and gamblers will be very interesting to see. High seeds are rarely polarizing, as we all tend to agree that they had a strong body of work and don't give it a second thought, but the way that the season played out for the Illini deserves a few additional looks. For starters, of their seven regular season losses, five of them were by four or fewer points and three of them were overtime losses. All of those OT games happened to be in conference play.

Illinois also fits the "quality losses" debate perfectly. All seven regular season losses were in Quadrant 1 games and six were in Quadrant 1-A games, leaving Illinois with a .500 record in those matchups. So, as we look at the body of work, you can make a strong case that they're a toss-up team against opponents the deeper that this tournament goes. However, you can also look at their stats and wonder how deep of a run they can actually make.

The Illini shot just a hair below 35% from 3, which is hardly bad, but when nearly 51% of your shot attempts are 3s, it does bring about a few red flags. Couple that with the lowest TO% on defense in the nation per Bart Torvik and you really start to worry. There were two saving graces during the regular season. The first is that Illinois was among the nation's leaders in ORB%, so a lot of those misses from deep did turn into second-chance points. The other is that the Illini ranked among the nation's leaders in taking care of the basketball with a top-15 TO% on offense.

Frankly, the .500 record against high-quality opponents makes sense in that context. A big night from 3 and Illinois can beat anybody in the nation. A normal night from 3 and very few forced turnovers and Illinois is at the mercy of how the other team shoots.

More than anything on the stat sheet, more than anything on the 2025-26 resume, head coach Brad Underwood must be discussed. Illinois has been good before and has five straight NCAA Tournament appearances. Underwood has lost in the first weekend four times, including as a No. 1 seed back in 2021. Is this his best team? Maybe. Is that enough to get to a Final Four? Maybe.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

-400

REACH
FINAL 4

+400

REACH
ELITE 8

+150

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

20-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
93.1%

SWEET 16
69.3%

ELITE 8
37.6%

FINAL FOUR
18.2%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

NEBRASKA

CORNHUSKERS

HEAD COACH
Fred Hoiberg

CONFERENCE
Big Ten

2025-26 RECORD
26-6 SU, 17-15 ATS, 10-22 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#4 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
88.4 (18)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
17.7 (21)

BETTOR RATING
-16.2 (21)

MOMENTUM RATING
13.6 (36)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
14.2 (33)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
77.3 (115)

DEFENSIVE PPG
66.2 (17)

POSSESSIONS
65 (213)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.219 (59)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.956 (8)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.465 (79)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.404 (19)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.353 (103)

FREE THROW %
0.75 (83)

REBOUNDING %
0.502 (169)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.843 (6)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.127 (45)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.168 (41)



The Cornhuskers made the NCAA Tournament in four straight seasons from 1991-94. The 2026 season marks their fourth NCAA Tournament appearance since that streak ended. This is the second time in three years that Nebraska has gone to the tourney and this may very well be the best team that they've sent. In fact, Nebrasketball, as some call it, is 0-8 in the NCAA Tournament and the ONLY power conference school without a win in the Big Dance.

It should be mentioned that Nebraska's seed lines in their previous tourney appearances have been 8, 14, 9, 7, 11, 6, 6, and 9, so this year's team is well above that. It's been a magical season in so many ways in Lincoln. The team started 20-0. Last year's team won 21 games total and that includes a win in the inaugural College Basketball Crown after not qualifying for the Big Ten Conference Tournament. Nebraska beat Arizona State, Georgetown, Boise State, and UCF, but what's crazy is that most of that roster isn't even on this year's team.

Nebraska gets buckets. This has been a top-25 team in 2P% and a top-35 team in eFG% throughout the season, plus they have one of the better TO% on offense. The Cornhuskers could be a very dangerous team in this tournament with their shot-making prowess inside the arc paired with a 3P Rate north of 50%. They were sixth in the Big Ten in 3P% at 36.7%, which doesn't sound impressive, but when you consider that ranks 66th in the nation in conference games, it speaks to how well the Big Ten shoots, but also how well Nebraska shot the ball.

Pair that with one of the best 3-point defenses in the country and a team that finished the regular season +5% in TO% differential and all of the sudden you have the recipe for at least one NCAA Tournament win for the record books, but possibly a few more than that. Even though Nebraska wasn't tested that much during the non-conference portion of the season, they held their own in Quadrant 1 and Quadrant 1-A games in Big Ten play. With scorers up and down the lineup and guys who can score from anywhere, plus a stout defense, this might be an overlooked team in brackets, but they shouldn't be.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

-105

**REACH
FINAL 4**

11-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

+400

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

100-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
87.5%

SWEET 16
40.5%

ELITE 8
11.4%

FINAL FOUR
4.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

VANDERBILT

COMMODORES

HEAD COACH
Mark Byington

CONFERENCE
SEC

2025-26 RECORD
26-8 SU, 18-16 ATS, 17-17 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#5 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
90.8 (9)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
21.2 (10)

BETTOR RATING
-17.8 (16)

MOMENTUM RATING
19.1 (18)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
18.7 (21)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
86.4 (12)

DEFENSIVE PPG
75.2 (197)

POSSESSIONS
66.1 (142)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.31 (8)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.001 (22)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.477 (37)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.426 (69)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.358 (71)

FREE THROW %
0.79 (4)

REBOUNDING %
0.504 (160)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.728 (12)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.114 (8)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.153 (122)

It's quite a time for Vanderbilt athletics, as the football team rewrote the record books and reset all the narratives this past season and the basketball team has back-to-back NCAA Tournament appearances for the first time since 2016-17. The baseball team is almost always reliable, but Clark Lea on the football side and Mark Byington on the basketball side have done a fabulous job.

That being said, the barometer for success isn't just getting into the Field of 68, even though the university went nearly a decade between appearances before Byington arrived. This is a team that hasn't won a NCAA Tournament game since 2012 and hasn't won two games in the NCAA Tournament since 2007. The program's lone Elite Eight appearance came back in 1965 when there were 23 teams in the field. Byington shouldn't be content getting into the field and neither should his players with the chance to do something that hasn't been done in a while.

After a 16-0 start to the regular season, including wins over VCU, Saint Mary's, SMU, Wake Forest, and Alabama, things got real in a hurry for the 'Dores, who were just 8-7 over the final 15 regular season games. Leading facilitator and double-digit scoring machine Duke Miles did miss six games in the heart of conference play. Vandy also suffered two one-point losses and two other defeats by four points. Life in the SEC is not particularly easy.

Statistically, this is a formidable team in the field. The strength of schedule does contribute to the top-15 adjusted offensive efficiency and top-30 adjusted defensive efficiency, but this is a group that finished the regular season in the top 50 in eFG% offense and defense and ranked easily in the top 100 in 2P% offense and defense, plus the top 100 in 3P% offense and defense. For good measure, this is also one of the best free throw shooting teams in the field.

There aren't many bad losses on the ledger for the 'Dores and their worst loss came without Miles in the lineup. Of all the SEC teams that qualified for the tourney, this is the one to me that feels like a darkhorse capable of making a bit of a run as a gifted offensive team that can make shots from anywhere and a well above average defensive squad.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

+105

**REACH
FINAL 4**

11-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

+450

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

75-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
76.0%

SWEET 16
48.8%

ELITE 8
17.9%

FINAL FOUR
8.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



NORTH CAROLINA

TAR HEELS

HEAD COACH
Hubert Davis

CONFERENCE
ACC

2025-26 RECORD
24-8 SU, 19-13 ATS, 15-17 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#6 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
84.6 (33)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
16.6 (25)

BETTOR RATING
-12.4 (43)

MOMENTUM RATING
14.2 (32)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
13.6 (37)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
79.8 (73)

DEFENSIVE PPG
71.3 (89)

POSSESSIONS
66 (148)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.255 (37)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.022 (32)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.473 (45)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.418 (41)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.345 (153)

FREE THROW %
0.684 (316)

REBOUNDING %
0.526 (52)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.654 (18)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.121 (21)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.118 (344)

Injuries are always unfair and never come at a good time, but the loss of diaper dandy Caleb Wilson is a devastating blow for not only North Carolina, but for the college basketball world as a whole. As one of two teams to beat Duke during the season, we saw what the ceiling could be for the Tar Heels, but they're probably not tall enough to reach it now without the 6-foot-10 Wilson, who broke his thumb on what looked like an innocent dunk during practice.

It'll take a village to replace the 19.8 PPG and 9.4 RPG from Wilson and the Tar Heels are used to playing without him, as he missed the final seven games of the regular season and, of course, the conference tournament. In that span, UNC went 5-3, so it's not impossible. It does put more on the shoulders of 7-footer Henri Veesaar and guys like Luka Bogavac and Derek Dixon, who led the team in 3-point attempts.

It's tough to put too much stock in the season-long numbers for the Tar Heels without Wilson. He led the team by a wide margin in Usage Rate, shot 72% at the rim, 61% overall on 2s, and shined on the glass. Fortunately, or unfortunately given the circumstances, we can look at UNC with and without Wilson thanks to the On/Off Data from CBB Analytics. The Tar Heels were +16.5 in Net Rating with him on the floor and +7.5 without him, falling off noticeably on both offense and defense.

In conference play, the Tar Heels were +5.8 in Net Rating with him and +0.7 in Net Rating without him, including the last seven regular season games and the times he was on the bench getting a breather. They scored 9.3 fewer points per 40 minutes and turned the ball over 2.6% more often. Obviously they won't be facing all ACC opponents in the NCAA Tournament, but an 11.3-point drop in Offensive Rating doesn't bode well as they go deeper into the field...assuming that they do.

Even with Wilson for the majority of the season, the Tar Heels were bad at forcing turnovers and making free throws, which are important details in March.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

+600

REACH
FINAL 4

60-1

REACH
ELITE 8

20-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

250-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
55.9%

SWEET 16
17.5%

ELITE 8
5.6%

FINAL FOUR
1.5%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



SAINT MARY'S (CA)

GAELS

HEAD COACH
Randy Bennett

CONFERENCE
West Coast

2025-26 RECORD
27-5 SU, 19-12 ATS, 13-18 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#7 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
86.5 (22)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
16 (28)

BETTOR RATING
-15.8 (22)

MOMENTUM RATING
19 (19)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
21.6 (11)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
77.6 (107)

DEFENSIVE PPG
65.3 (10)

POSSESSIONS
63.4 (306)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.246 (43)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.005 (23)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.46 (102)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.409 (23)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.386 (13)

FREE THROW %
0.811 (1)

REBOUNDING %
0.579 (4)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.408 (69)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.138 (134)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.134 (258)

Despite a one-and-done appearance in Las Vegas during the WCC Tournament, Saint Mary's is dancing yet again, as they make their fifth straight appearance in the Field of 68. There have been a lot of postseason games during Randy Bennett's tenure, but only one of them has happened in the Sweet 16. The Gaels have won a game in three of their last four NCAA tourney trips, but have only made it past the first weekend once.

That team, led by Matthew Dellavedova, had to go out to Providence and win two early games against Richmond and Villanova to set up a second-weekend date with Baylor in Houston, which did not go well. We'll have to see how well this appearance goes for the Gaels, who lost almost exclusively to tournament teams, with two losses to Santa Clara and two to Gonzaga, plus one to Vanderbilt and one to Boise State by just a point.

This Gaels team has plenty of similarities to teams of the past, but this is the best 3-point shooting squad that Bennett has had since the 2020 NCAA Tournament was cancelled due to COVID. Few teams improved more year over year than Saint Mary's, who shot just 32.2% from 3 last season and shot 38.6% this season heading into the Big Dance. This is also the best free throw shooting team Bennett has ever had. They don't get to the line a lot because of all the jump shots, but if they have to finish a game with a lead late, they should have confidence in an 81.1% success rate at the stripe.

Defensively, this isn't quite the same team, due in large part to a lower TO% coupled with playing at a faster pace. This is the highest ranking in adjusted tempo for the Gaels per Bart Torvik since 2015. With a diverse roster, a good set of statistics, and something higher than the glacial pace that we're used to seeing, it would not be shocking to see SMC sneak up on their opponents, maybe even to the point where a second Sweet 16 appearance is in the cards.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

+360

**REACH
FINAL 4**

35-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

11-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

300-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
65.9%

SWEET 16
25.0%

ELITE 8
11.3%

FINAL FOUR
3.9%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



CLEMSON

TIGERS

HEAD COACH
Brad Brownell

CONFERENCE
ACC

2025-26 RECORD
24-10 SU, 17-17 ATS, 14-20 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#8 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
83.5 (41)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
13.8 (39)

BETTOR RATING
-13.6 (34)

MOMENTUM RATING
10.8 (47)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
12.1 (41)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
74.1 (193)

DEFENSIVE PPG
66.7 (21)

POSSESSIONS
62.6 (333)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.215 (62)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.997 (18)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.453 (140)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.419 (45)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.341 (169)

FREE THROW %
0.726 (182)

REBOUNDING %
0.514 (112)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.361 (89)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.125 (36)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.154 (109)



Brad Brownell answered the doubters and gave the finger to the haters in 2024 when he took the No. 6-seeded Tigers to the Elite Eight. He's had some very good Clemson teams, and made the Sweet 16 in 2018, but this year marks just his sixth NCAA Tournament appearance with the team. Last season represented the first time that the Tigers danced in consecutive years and now they've made it three in a row.

But, as great as that Elite Eight run was, Clemson went down in the dreaded 12 vs. 5 game last year, so Brownell has something to prove this year. Unfortunately, he and his team will have to prove it without Carter Welling, as the team's second-leading scorer, leading rebounder, and top shot blocker tore his ACL in the ACC Tournament. Those team rankings are all relative, as Welling averaged 10.2 PPG, 5.4 RPG, and 0.8 BPG, and Clemson really split the playing time up.

In fact, using CBB Analytics' On/Off Tool, Clemson's performance without Welling on the floor wasn't really that much different. That's not to say that they won't miss his presence, especially as a 57% shooter on 2s, but scoring isn't really a problem and his decision to shoot 3s actively hurt the team on offense. His injury does leave a gaping hole on the defensive glass, which was the best attribute of this Tigers defense.

This is a Clemson team that played 16 games decided by six or fewer points, so they're used to close games. Playing at a bottom-50 tempo will do that sometimes and the solid defensive numbers helped tighten up games. This was an above average offense, especially from a TO% standpoint, and a team that made a lot of 2-point shots. Welling's absence may impact that, but the team's 3P% may go up as well and they take one of those with about 43% of their field goal attempts.

Even though Clemson games are about as low-variance as it gets with the tempo, their record distribution is pretty on-brand. They were 11-0 against Quadrant 3 or lower opponents, but also had four losses to Quadrant 2 foes, while still winning more Quadrant 1 games than they lost. To me, they're one of the hardest teams to forecast over the first weekend, as nothing would surprise me.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

+750

**REACH
FINAL 4**

90-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

19-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

250-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
47.0%

SWEET 16
7.4%

ELITE 8
2.8%

FINAL FOUR
0.8%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

IOWA

HAWKEYES

HEAD COACH
Ben McCollum

CONFERENCE
Big Ten

2025-26 RECORD
21-12 SU, 18-15 ATS, 20-13 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#9 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85.4 (29)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
16.2 (26)

BETTOR RATING
-15.2 (26)

MOMENTUM RATING
13.3 (37)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
8.2 (72)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
75.2 (161)

DEFENSIVE PPG
66 (15)

POSSESSIONS
61.5 (356)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.276 (27)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.014 (27)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.491 (17)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.461 (261)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.357 (75)

FREE THROW %
0.77 (33)

REBOUNDING %
0.508 (136)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.581 (32)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.134 (97)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.186 (7)

It didn't take long for Ben McCollum to parlay his tremendous success at Drake into a major-conference gig and he's certainly validated the hire by taking Iowa to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2023. Ironically, Iowa finished the regular season with the same 10-10 conference record that they had in 2024, which seemed to be the start of Fran McCaffery's exit from the program. McCaffery is now at Penn and this is the first time since 2006 with Steve Alford that somebody other than McCaffery is leading Iowa in the Field of 68.

The Hawkeyes are really here for one reason and one reason only, their defense. This has always been a good offensive program and this year's team fits that mold, ranking in the top 20 in eFG% and 2P% during the regular season and conference tournament. But, what held McCaffery's last two teams back is that they ranked 152nd and 174th in adjusted defensive efficiency per Bart Torvik. This team under McCollum ranks in the top 40 with one of the highest TO% among tournament teams.

Slowing the tempo also helped. Certainly some personnel changes and a different philosophy helped, too, but Iowa went from a borderline top-50 team in tempo to one of the slowest teams in the country. The slow pace and the improved defensive numbers gave Iowa the chance for more "good" losses. Between the regular season and two-game conference tournament cameo, Iowa was just 3-9 in Quadrant 1 games and 1-8 in Quadrant 1-A games. Signature wins are few and far between, but rarely getting blown out has some statistical value in the metrics.

His stats aren't the best in the nation, but if there was an MVP award for college basketball, Bennett Stirtz would have to be in the running. The Wooden Award is loosely that, but in terms of value to his team, the Drake transfer is a top-10 player per Torvik's "PORPATAGUI!" metric, which is Points Over Replacement Player Per Adjusted Game At That Usage. The next highest guy for Iowa, Tavion Banks, ranks 366th and is the only other Hawkeye in the top 500.

Stirtz has taken over 450 shots for the Hawkeyes. Nobody else has taken more than 220 and only one other player has taken more than 200. He'll have to be superhuman to give Iowa a chance at playing for a second week.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

+700

**REACH
FINAL 4**

45-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

16-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

300-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
53.0%

SWEET 16
9.3%

ELITE 8
3.7%

FINAL FOUR
1.1%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



TEXAS A&M

AGGIES

HEAD COACH
Bucky McMillan

CONFERENCE
SEC

2025-26 RECORD
21-11 SU, 18-14 ATS, 18-14 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#10 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
84.6 (35)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
14.8 (34)

BETTOR RATING
-14.6 (29)

MOMENTUM RATING
9.8 (58)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
6.9 (88)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
87.7 (4)

DEFENSIVE PPG
79.6 (309)

POSSESSIONS
68 (44)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.25 (40)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.044 (46)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.458 (111)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.442 (144)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.362 (48)

FREE THROW %
0.737 (148)

REBOUNDING %
0.499 (185)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.671 (17)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.126 (40)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.156 (97)

It took a couple of seasons for Buzz Williams to find his footing in College Station, but he doesn't like to be in the same place for more than five or six years and decided to leave his home state for the Maryland gig. As a result, the Aggies went from "Buzz Ball" to "Bucky Ball", as Bucky McMillan took over following a successful tenure with four straight 20+ win seasons and one NCAA Tournament appearance at Samford.

Many wondered, and rightly so, if this would be a square peg/round hole situation in Year 1, as Bucky Ball means taking a lot of 3s, avoiding mid-range jumpers as much as possible, and playing fast. His Bulldogs had a 46.9% 3P Rate in 2024-25, which ranked 31st in the nation. Texas A&M had a 37.7% 3P Rate that ranked 201st and they also shot just 30.7% from 3, which ranked 328th. Here's the thing, though. In the transfer portal era, it doesn't really matter what happened the year prior.

Ten Aggies played at least 26% of the minutes for Williams last season. Not a single one of them returned. To call this a rebuild is an understatement, but it's one that got done as fast as an Amish barn-raising. Nine Aggies played at least 32% of the minutes for McMillan and they came from USC, Kansas, NC State, Creighton, North Alabama, Southern Illinois, Samford, plus a JUCO transfer. Basically, McMillan wanted guys that could either finish at the rim, shoot 3s, or do both.

There are four guys on the roster firing away at 39.6% or better from 3. Three guys had at least 100 shot attempts at the rim. All of the regulars shoot 71% or better at the free throw line. This team has a lot to like on offense. They take care of the ball, take shots like a modern-day offense, and really share the basketball effectively. The Aggies were a top-25 team in Assist Rate.

Two things held this team back. The first was a weak non-conference schedule that definitely impacted their seed line. The other is 2-point defense as the Aggies ranked in the 240s nationally. This is not a particularly tall team and opponents scored at a 62% clip at the rim. Something to consider for the first round and potentially beyond.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

+900

REACH
FINAL 4

140-1

REACH
ELITE 8

30-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

350-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
34.2%

SWEET 16
8.4%

ELITE 8
2.5%

FINAL FOUR
0.6%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



VCU

RAMS

HEAD COACH
Phil Martelli Jr

CONFERENCE
Atlantic 10

2025-26 RECORD
27-7 SU, 17-17 ATS, 15-19 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#11 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
83 (45)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
12.3 (46)

BETTOR RATING
-9.8 (56)

MOMENTUM RATING
11.8 (42)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
14.2 (34)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
81.6 (42)

DEFENSIVE PPG
71.5 (94)

POSSESSIONS
67.1 (89)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.243 (46)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.069 (71)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.462 (91)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.431 (87)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.364 (41)

FREE THROW %
0.741 (128)

REBOUNDING %
0.518 (91)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.323 (103)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.132 (77)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.149 (142)



Either VCU didn't get the memo from the A-10 or simply didn't care, as we were potentially looking at a three-bid conference if the Rams fell to the Dayton Flyers on Selection Sunday. That said, many felt like VCU was a team pretty firmly on the bubble and so Phil Martelli Jr.'s squad went ahead and removed all doubt by conquering the field for the third time in four years.

This is a solid, well-rounded team with no glaring flaws. Going 0-3 in Quadrant 1 games in November against Utah State, NC State, and Vanderbilt are data points people can hold against the Rams. They also lost to Saint Louis twice in conference play. It was that lack of signature wins that had a team with a good record and good metrics positioned on the bubble for a while, but now that the Rams are in, it's all about looking ahead.

This was a top-70 team in both eFG% offense and defense during the regular season plus the conference tournament and also a team that had a really big shot volume edge from 3-point land over teams. The Rams fired away nearly 44% of the time, while their defensive scheme limited opponents to just below 35%. Add in a TO% advantage and also an above average rate of offensive rebounds and you can see why VCU was so successful. It's going to be tougher to have all of those edges over the tourney teams, but the A-10 was a pretty good conference top to bottom and VCU did go 14-2 against Quadrant 2 and Quadrant 3 opponents.

A Rim & 3 Rate around 84% showcases how the Rams not only take smart shots, but how they can score in a variety of different ways. Personnel-wise, this team also checks a lot of boxes. They have good guard play and Terrence Hill Jr. takes great care of the basketball. Lazar Djokovic was a handful down low and shot over 200 free throws as a 6-foot-10 big who also shot 35.6% from 3. They also have athletic wings who can slash to the basket or shoot from outside.

Seven players played at least 55% of the minutes and all but one of them shot better than 35% from 3. Of the Cinderella candidates, this is one with a real chance.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

+750

**REACH
FINAL 4**

150-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

45-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

500-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

2ND ROUND
44.1%

SWEET 16
11.7%

ELITE 8
3.2%

FINAL FOUR
0.7%

MCNEESE STATE

COWBOYS

HEAD COACH
Bill Armstrong

CONFERENCE
Southland

2025-26 RECORD
28-5 SU, 15-16 ATS, 15-16 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#12 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
80.5 (56)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
9.7 (59)

BETTOR RATING
-10.7 (49)

MOMENTUM RATING
9.8 (59)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
9.7 (60)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
76.8 (123)

DEFENSIVE PPG
67 (22)

POSSESSIONS
65.2 (203)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.198 (73)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.06 (61)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.454 (134)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.413 (33)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.316 (299)

FREE THROW %
0.74 (130)

REBOUNDING %
0.497 (196)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.369 (86)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.121 (19)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.21 (1)

McNeese has been viewed as an upset special candidate and a very dangerous team on the 12 line in the last two NCAA Tournaments, beating Clemson in last year's event before losing to Purdue. Those were both under Will Wade, who will lead NC State into the Big Dance. This one is under Bill Armstrong, whose team shook off a triple-overtime win over UT Rio Grande Valley to crush a very formidable Stephen F. Austin squad in the Southland Conference title game.

This McNeese team has similarities and differences to the tourney teams of the last two years. What is similar is that they forced a ton of turnovers and this year's team actually led the nation in TO% on defense, something that the previous two did not. They also took very good care of the basketball and picked up even more possessions via offensive rebounds.

Unfortunately, the differences are noteworthy. The team ranked well into the 300s in FT Rate on defense and DRB%. Foul trouble is a kiss of death for Cinderella hopefuls in the NCAA Tournament because the drop-off from the starters to the reserves is often much greater than it is for the power-conference teams. Also, it can limit defensive effectiveness by having to play softer in hopes of staying in the game. This year's McNeese team also took a huge step back shooting the basketball.

The Cowboys were a top-100 team by 3P% last season and a top-10 team by 3P% two seasons ago. The 2025-26 version nearly finished in the 300s in 3P% during the season. Fortunately, it isn't a huge part of the Cowboys' offensive gameplan, but the gameplan changes going from playing Southland opponents to the teams that are on the NCAA Tournament docket.

In Quadrant 2 or better games, McNeese was just 2-4 straight up, with the second win coming against SFA in the game that sent the Cowboys to the Big Dance. The two previous versions were all-around stronger and better fit the mold of a Cinderella because of their 3-point shooting prowess, but this is still a physical team that plays a very aggressive defensive style that puts pressure on opposing guards from conferences where that doesn't happen all that often.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

17-1

**REACH
FINAL 4**

400-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

75-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

1000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
24.0%

SWEET 16
9.2%

ELITE 8
1.5%

FINAL FOUR
0.3%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



TROY

TROJANS

HEAD COACH
Scott Cross

CONFERENCE
Sun Belt

2025-26 RECORD
22-11 SU, 18-13 ATS, 14-17 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#13 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
72.3 (142)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
1.1 (148)

BETTOR RATING
-1.9 (137)

MOMENTUM RATING
-1.3 (193)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
-0.3 (185)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
78.3 (93)

DEFENSIVE PPG
74.5 (175)

POSSESSIONS
64.7 (233)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.146 (141)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.135 (178)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.443 (197)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.441 (130)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.332 (220)

FREE THROW %
0.738 (145)

REBOUNDING %
0.518 (96)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.277 (125)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.144 (180)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.145 (177)



It was not a good couple of weeks for No. 1 seeds in conference tournaments, but one team that did follow up a regular season title with a conference tourney title is Troy. Say what you will about Troy beating a Georgia Southern team playing a sixth game in six days to secure the automatic bid, but sometimes you catch a break when you finish with the best regular season record. After all, six teams tied at 11-7 in the Sun Belt for the second-best record and not a single one of them won a conference tournament game.

This is back-to-back NCAA Tournament berths for Scott Cross's Men of Troy, who hung around with Kentucky for about 15 minutes before ultimately losing by 19 in last year's appearance. That was a better team than this year's version, at least on paper. And, frankly, Troy's style of play going up against better and more talented teams is probably not conducive to wearing a glass slipper.

Troy took a lot of 3s, but didn't make many of them, shooting below the national average at 33.2%. Their 45.6% 3P Rate was nearly among the top 50 in the nation, while the team ranked in the 300s in adjusted tempo. Along with a high 3-point rate, the Trojans were among the top 50 in shot share on Close Twos per Bart Torvik. A high Rim & 3 Rate is a hallmark of a modern-day offense and that has helped Troy win a lot of games.

However, Kentucky was one of the worst power-conference teams by 2P% defense last season and Troy mustered just 57 points and .833 points per possession. This year's team is better than last year's team from beyond the arc, as the Trojans shot just 30.1% from deep last season, but they're still not very good and they're unlikely to have success getting the ball inside or winning the offensive rebounding battle against top-tier teams from power conferences. We saw it last year and we're likely to see it again this year.

While the Trojans did win their lone Quadrant 1 game, a 2OT win at San Diego State, and also beat Akron and UAB, they're going to need an outlier performance from deep to get their first Division I postseason win of any kind in program history.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

55-1

**REACH
FINAL 4**

500-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

350-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
12.5%

SWEET 16
1.5%

ELITE 8
0.1%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

PENNSYLVANIA

QUAKERS

HEAD COACH
Fran McCaffery

CONFERENCE
Ivy League

2025-26 RECORD
18-11 SU, 19-9 ATS, 8-20 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#14 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
71.2 (162)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
1 (150)

BETTOR RATING
2.4 (208)

MOMENTUM RATING
6 (98)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
5.9 (103)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
74.6 (177)

DEFENSIVE PPG
73.4 (141)

POSSESSIONS
67.6 (60)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.114 (190)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.102 (122)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.436 (250)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.455 (229)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.387 (10)

FREE THROW %
0.695 (284)

REBOUNDING %
0.495 (211)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.277 (126)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.133 (88)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.154 (112)

After parting ways with Iowa, Fran McCaffery went to coach at his alma mater. And now he's taken five different teams to the NCAA Tournament in his coaching career. Some of you may remember the Snap! song "The Power". It was Track 13 on Jock Jams Vol. 1. It should also probably be the theme song, or at least blared in the locker room, after every Quakers game.

That's because of TJ Power, who had 44 points and the game-tying 3-pointer at the end of regulation against Yale, is a beast for this Penn squad. He also had 16 and 12 in the semifinal win over Harvard the day prior. McCaffery didn't come in and overhaul the roster. It's tough to do that in the Ivy League, where most of the school's money goes to academic pursuits and acceptance requirements are quite strict. But, Power transferred in from Virginia and he's been one of the most astute pickups by any coach in the country for this season from the portal.

Penn, who picked up a really nice non-conference win over Saint Joseph's in the Philadelphia Big 5 series and had close losses to Rutgers and George Mason, was an inconsistent team early on. That's hardly surprising with a coaching change. After a 9-10 start overall and a 2-4 start to conference play, something clicked and the Quakers won seven of their final eight regular season games and then both games in the Ivy Tournament, getting revenge for a Feb. 21 loss to Yale that ended what was then a four-game winning streak.

Defense can be optional in the Ivy League, but Penn ranked second behind Harvard in adjusted defensive efficiency and had the best TO% differential in conference play. They also shot better than 37% from 3 and that has been a huge key all season long for the Quakers, who were also one of the better rebounding teams on both ends of the floor. The biggest issue in conference play was 2-point defense, as opponents shot 54.5%.

We know that Penn will play smart and that they're going to make some 3s. But, after going just 33-of-81 on 2s in the two Ivy Tournament games, it could be tough to hang in for 40 against a high seed.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

110-1

**REACH
FINAL 4**

1000-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

400-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

1500-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
6.9%

SWEET 16
1.4%

ELITE 8
0.1%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



IDAHO

VANDALS

HEAD COACH
Alex Pribble

CONFERENCE
Big Sky

2025-26 RECORD
21-14 SU, 16-16 ATS, 14-18 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#15 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
72.3 (141)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
1.2 (145)

BETTOR RATING
-0.5 (160)

MOMENTUM RATING
6.7 (88)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
8.3 (71)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
76.7 (130)

DEFENSIVE PPG
74 (160)

POSSESSIONS
65.3 (193)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.124 (172)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.112 (135)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.438 (233)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.441 (134)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.345 (148)

FREE THROW %
0.729 (173)

REBOUNDING %
0.518 (93)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.108 (229)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.131 (73)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.135 (250)



One of the best stories in the NCAA Tournament is Idaho. The Vandals won 25 games combined over Alex Pribble's first two seasons at the helm, but enter the Big Dance with 21 wins, the first 20-win season for the program since 2015-16. In fact, here's how attentive people are to Vandals basketball. At time of writing, the yearly results section on their Wikipedia page hadn't been updated since somebody put in the 2018-19 season.

I guess I actually buried the lede here. This is Idaho's first NCAA Tournament appearance since a spry 31-year-old Kermit Davis took the Vandals dancing in consecutive seasons in 1989 and 1990. The ascent under Pribble has been truly incredible. After Don Verlin was fired for cause in June 2019, assistant coach Zac Claus took over. Idaho had 28 total wins over those four seasons, including a 1-21 record in 2020-21. Pribble inherited basically nothing and within three years, the Vandals, who lost one of their stars in Kristian Gonzalez in the first game of the season, won four games in five days to emerge victorious in the Big Sky Tournament.

How much runway does this great story have in the NCAA Tournament? Well, you know that they're going to fight hard. Very few of their metrics stand out and they were even fifth in adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency in Big Sky play. In fact, among all the key categories, the Vandals were third in eFG%, second in 2P% defense, and not third or better in anything else.

Idaho did a good job of protecting the basketball and wound up around the national average in both 2P% and 3P% shooting. They also committed heavily to rebounding on the defensive end with a true by-committee approach. Per Torvik, nobody had a DRB% higher than 17.8% of the guys who played regularly. It's a five-man approach for Pribble on both ends of the floor and you never want to underestimate a team with that sort of mentality.

Also, while winning the Big Sky, Idaho was just 23-of-91 (25.3%) from 3 and never really took it to the other end of the floor with them. An outright win is a big ask, but that sounds like a team I'd take to cover the spread.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

90-1

REACH
FINAL 4

1000-1

REACH
ELITE 8

400-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
7.4%

SWEET 16
1.4%

ELITE 8
0.2%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

LEHIGH

MOUNTAIN HAWKS

HEAD COACH
Brett Reed

CONFERENCE
Patriot

2025-26 RECORD
18-16 SU, 19-13 ATS, 18-14 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#16 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
64 (280)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-6.9 (272)

BETTOR RATING
8.3 (300)

MOMENTUM RATING
-3.7 (227)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
-1.4 (199)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
72.4 (233)

DEFENSIVE PPG
74.7 (182)

POSSESSIONS
65.6 (172)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.057 (297)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.172 (246)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.463 (85)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.453 (221)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.365 (38)

FREE THROW %
0.729 (171)

REBOUNDING %
0.462 (331)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.164 (189)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.158 (277)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.14 (208)



Sometimes you experience a high that you chase for a very long time afterwards. For Brett Reed, who took over as head coach in 2007, his high is one that we all remember fondly - the 2012 Lehigh team that knocked off No. 2 Duke led by C.J. McCollum, who had 30 points and six assists in the 75-70 upset victory. Coincidentally, that's the last time Lehigh was in the NCAA Tournament.

There's been a lot of mediocrity in between for Reed and the program. Even this season, the Mountain Hawks only went 11-9 in conference play. They were 1-8 in games outside of Quadrant 4, including an 18-point loss at Houston and a 22-point loss at West Virginia. But, the team turned it around when they needed to, winning five of the last six in the regular season and all three games at home in the Patriot League Tournament.

From 2016-19, this was one of the best 3-point shooting programs in the country, finishing in the top 20 all four years and actually No. 1 in the nation in 2019. The 2022 team was eighth nationally, but that was one of Reed's worst defensive teams. This isn't a standout on defense by any means, but they can make 3s and defend them.

The efficiency metrics for Lehigh reflect the really poor strength of schedule. All told, they were a top-100 team by eFG%, a top-40 team by 3P%, and graded around the national average or better in a lot of other areas. They did post a negative TO% differential and are among the worst offensive rebounding teams in the field, but they play a really interesting style of defense. Lehigh had one of the 15 lowest 3P Rates against and also ranked in the top 30 in Assist Rate against. They challenge passing lanes and close out very quickly, leaving them susceptible to shot attempts at the rim, where opponents ran into Hank Alvey and only shot 55.9% on those.

It should also be noted that a lot of Lehigh's bad losses came in November and December without Edouard Benoit, who missed nine games where the Mountain Hawks went 2-7. They were a much better team with him.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

500-1

**REACH
FINAL 4**

1000-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

400-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
0.5%

SWEET 16
0.0%

ELITE 8
0.0%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

PRAIRIE VIEW A&M

PANTHERS

HEAD COACH
Byron Smith

CONFERENCE
SWAC

2025-26 RECORD
18-17 SU, 22-9 ATS, 12-19 O-U

SOUTH REGION

#16 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
63.3 (290)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-8.7 (301)

BETTOR RATING
9.7 (317)

MOMENTUM RATING
1.1 (161)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
0.4 (172)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
75.7 (148)

DEFENSIVE PPG
78.5 (282)

POSSESSIONS
68.1 (38)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.047 (306)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.181 (267)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.428 (289)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.447 (179)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.332 (221)

FREE THROW %
0.752 (76)

REBOUNDING %
0.459 (336)

ASST/TO RATIO
0.956 (305)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.142 (160)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.163 (56)

There aren't any prairies to view in Dayton, OH, but Prairie View A&M is definitely happy to be there. The Panthers last made the NCAA Tournament in 2019 and lost to Fairleigh Dickinson in the First Four. That was not the Fairleigh Dickinson team that beat Purdue. It was the one that lost by 38 to Gonzaga in the first round. It would have made for a better story if the Panthers had lost to that version of FDU, but they're out to make amends in Dayton here and go to the first round for the first time since 1998 and second time in program history.

Just to have that opportunity is special. This was a PVAMU team that was 5-22 last season and ranked as one of the 10 worst teams in the country. Even for a school like Prairie View, the transfer portal era has its benefits and Byron Smith was able to retool and reimagine the roster in a big way. Nobody from last season's team had anything to do with this season's team and Smith found a groove with his team in mid-February.

At the time, the Panthers were 9-16 and 4-8 in conference play. Not everybody in the SWAC qualifies for the conference tournament, so the regular season matters a lot. The team won five of the final six regular season games to finish .500 and followed that up with four wins in five days, including a quarterfinal triumph over clear-cut No. 1 seed Bethune-Cookman. The prize for that victory was not only a semifinal game, but also a day off, and the Panthers came back refreshed.

Full-season stats are really tough to analyze for teams like this. In order to fund the travel and the other sports, schools like PVAMU have to schedule "paycheck games" in non-conference action, where they are basically just sacrificial lambs out on the road for long periods of time. The Panthers didn't play a Division I opponent at home until Jan. 5., but they took lumps on the road with double-digit losses to Wichita State, Oklahoma State, Missouri, LSU, and Texas A&M.

Whether or not the late-season uptick helps them advance past Dayton remains to be seen, but this is a team that has a chance of getting totally waxed in the first round if they do.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

500-1

**REACH
FINAL 4**

1000-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

400-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
1.0%

SWEET 16
0.1%

ELITE 8
0.0%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



STEVE MAKINEN'S WEST REGION

POWER RATINGS GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 ARIZONA	#2 PURDUE	#3 GONZAGA	#4 ARKANSAS	#5 WISCONSIN	#6 BYU	#7 MIAMI	#8 VILLANOVA	#9 UTAH ST	#10 MISSOURI	#11 NC STATE	#11 TEXAS	#12 HIGH POINT	#13 HAWAII	#14 KENNESAW ST	#15 QUEENS NC	#16 LONG ISLAND
TEAM/SEED	RATING	96.2	91.7	90.4	89.3	87.5	85.6	85.6	83.9	84.6	81.8	84.7	84.1	77.2	75.7	71.9	69.8	67.5
#1 ARIZONA	96.2		4.5	5.8	6.9	8.7	10.6	10.6	12.3	11.6	14.4	11.5	12.1	19.0	20.5	24.3	26.4	28.7
#2 PURDUE	91.7	-4.5		1.3	2.4	4.2	6.1	6.1	7.8	7.1	9.9	7.0	7.6	14.5	16.0	19.8	21.9	24.2
#3 GONZAGA	90.4	-5.8	-1.3		1.1	2.9	4.8	4.8	6.5	5.8	8.6	5.7	6.3	13.2	14.7	18.5	20.6	22.9
#4 ARKANSAS	89.3	-6.9	-2.4	-1.1		1.8	3.7	3.7	5.4	4.7	7.5	4.6	5.2	12.1	13.6	17.4	19.5	21.8
#5 WISCONSIN	87.5	-8.7	-4.2	-2.9	-1.8		1.9	1.9	3.6	2.9	5.7	2.8	3.4	10.3	11.8	15.6	17.7	20.0
#6 BYU	85.6	-10.6	-6.1	-4.8	-3.7	-1.9		0.0	1.7	1.0	3.8	0.9	1.5	8.4	9.9	13.7	15.8	18.1
#7 MIAMI	85.6	-10.6	-6.1	-4.8	-3.7	-1.9	0.0		1.7	1.0	3.8	0.9	1.5	8.4	9.9	13.7	15.8	18.1
#8 VILLANOVA	83.9	-12.3	-7.8	-6.5	-5.4	-3.6	-1.7	-1.7		-0.7	2.1	-0.8	-0.2	6.7	8.2	12.0	14.1	16.4
#9 UTAH ST	84.6	-11.6	-7.1	-5.8	-4.7	-2.9	-1.0	-1.0	0.7		2.8	-0.1	0.5	7.4	8.9	12.7	14.8	17.1
#10 MISSOURI	81.8	-14.4	-9.9	-8.6	-7.5	-5.7	-3.8	-3.8	-2.1	-2.8		-2.9	-2.3	4.6	6.1	9.9	12.0	14.3
#11 NC STATE	84.7	-11.5	-7.0	-5.7	-4.6	-2.8	-0.9	-0.9	0.8	0.1	2.9		0.6	7.5	9.0	12.8	14.9	17.2
#11 TEXAS	84.1	-12.1	-7.6	-6.3	-5.2	-3.4	-1.5	-1.5	0.2	-0.5	2.3	-0.6		6.9	8.4	12.2	14.3	16.6
#12 HIGH POINT	77.2	-19.0	-14.5	-13.2	-12.1	-10.3	-8.4	-8.4	-6.7	-7.4	-4.6	-7.5	-6.9		1.5	5.3	7.4	9.7
#13 HAWAII	75.7	-20.5	-16.0	-14.7	-13.6	-11.8	-9.9	-9.9	-8.2	-8.9	-6.1	-9.0	-8.4	-1.5		3.8	5.9	8.2
#14 KENNESAW ST	71.9	-24.3	-19.8	-18.5	-17.4	-15.6	-13.7	-13.7	-12.0	-12.7	-9.9	-12.8	-12.2	-5.3	-3.8		2.1	4.4
#15 QUEENS NC	69.8	-26.4	-21.9	-20.6	-19.5	-17.7	-15.8	-15.8	-14.1	-14.8	-12.0	-14.9	-14.3	-7.4	-5.9	-2.1		2.3
#16 LONG ISLAND	67.5	-28.7	-24.2	-22.9	-21.8	-20.0	-18.1	-18.1	-16.4	-17.1	-14.3	-17.2	-16.6	-9.7	-8.2	-4.4	-2.3	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

The grid above outlines how each team in the region matches up against the other teams in the region, creating a hypothetical betting line should the teams meet in the tournament. The values in the grid display how many points the team on the top would be favored (-), or an underdog (positive number), by when facing the teams listed down the left side of the grid by taking the team on the top rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #2 seed Purdue would hypothetically be listed as a 7-point favorite (-7) against #11 seed NC State, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S WEST REGION

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 ARIZONA	#2 PURDUE	#3 GONZAGA	#4 ARKANSAS	#5 WISCONSIN	#6 BYU	#7 MIAMI	#8 VILLANOVA	#9 UTAH ST	#10 MISSOURI	#11 NC STATE	#11 TEXAS	#12 HIGH POINT	#13 HAWAII	#14 KENNESAW ST	#15 QUEENS NC	#16 LONG ISLAND
TEAM/SEED	RATING	26.3	21.7	23.4	19.7	16.1	16.8	15.4	13.7	15.5	11.2	14.7	12.7	7.6	5.4	1.5	-1.9	-3.1
#1 ARIZONA	26.3		4.6	2.9	6.6	10.2	9.5	10.9	12.6	10.8	15.1	11.6	13.6	18.7	20.9	24.8	28.2	29.4
#2 PURDUE	21.7	-4.6		-1.7	2.0	5.6	4.9	6.3	8.0	6.2	10.5	7.0	9.0	14.1	16.3	20.2	23.6	24.8
#3 GONZAGA	23.4	-2.9	1.7		3.7	7.3	6.6	8.0	9.7	7.9	12.2	8.7	10.7	15.8	18.0	21.9	25.3	26.5
#4 ARKANSAS	19.7	-6.6	-2.0	-3.7		3.6	2.9	4.3	6.0	4.2	8.5	5.0	7.0	12.1	14.3	18.2	21.6	22.8
#5 WISCONSIN	16.1	-10.2	-5.6	-7.3	-3.6		-0.7	0.7	2.4	0.6	4.9	1.4	3.4	8.5	10.7	14.6	18.0	19.2
#6 BYU	16.8	-9.5	-4.9	-6.6	-2.9	0.7		1.4	3.1	1.3	5.6	2.1	4.1	9.2	11.4	15.3	18.7	19.9
#7 MIAMI	15.4	-10.9	-6.3	-8.0	-4.3	-0.7	-1.4		1.7	-0.1	4.2	0.7	2.7	7.8	10.0	13.9	17.3	18.5
#8 VILLANOVA	13.7	-12.6	-8.0	-9.7	-6.0	-2.4	-3.1	-1.7		-1.8	2.5	-1.0	1.0	6.1	8.3	12.2	15.6	16.8
#9 UTAH ST	15.5	-10.8	-6.2	-7.9	-4.2	-0.6	-1.3	0.1	1.8		4.3	0.8	2.8	7.9	10.1	14.0	17.4	18.6
#10 MISSOURI	11.2	-15.1	-10.5	-12.2	-8.5	-4.9	-5.6	-4.2	-2.5	-4.3		-3.5	-1.5	3.6	5.8	9.7	13.1	14.3
#11 NC STATE	14.7	-11.6	-7.0	-8.7	-5.0	-1.4	-2.1	-0.7	1.0	-0.8	3.5		2.0	7.1	9.3	13.2	16.6	17.8
#11 TEXAS	12.7	-13.6	-9.0	-10.7	-7.0	-3.4	-4.1	-2.7	-1.0	-2.8	1.5	-2.0		5.1	7.3	11.2	14.6	15.8
#12 HIGH POINT	7.6	-18.7	-14.1	-15.8	-12.1	-8.5	-9.2	-7.8	-6.1	-7.9	-3.6	-7.1	-5.1		2.2	6.1	9.5	10.7
#13 HAWAII	5.4	-20.9	-16.3	-18.0	-14.3	-10.7	-11.4	-10.0	-8.3	-10.1	-5.8	-9.3	-7.3	-2.2		3.9	7.3	8.5
#14 KENNESAW ST	1.5	-24.8	-20.2	-21.9	-18.2	-14.6	-15.3	-13.9	-12.2	-14.0	-9.7	-13.2	-11.2	-6.1	-3.9		3.4	4.6
#15 QUEENS NC	-1.9	-28.2	-23.6	-25.3	-21.6	-18.0	-18.7	-17.3	-15.6	-17.4	-13.1	-16.6	-14.6	-9.5	-7.3	-3.4		1.2
#16 LONG ISLAND	-3.1	-29.4	-24.8	-26.5	-22.8	-19.2	-19.9	-18.5	-16.8	-18.6	-14.3	-17.8	-15.8	-10.7	-8.5	-4.6	-1.2	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

The grid above outlines how each team in the region matches up against the other teams in the region, creating a hypothetical betting line should the teams meet in the tournament. The values in the grid display how many points the team on the top would be favored (-), or an underdog (positive number), by when facing the teams listed down the left side of the grid by taking the team on the tops rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #2 seed Purdue would hypothetically be listed as a 2-point favorite (-2) against #4 seed Arkansas, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S WEST REGION

BETTORS RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 ARIZONA	#2 PURDUE	#3 GONZAGA	#4 ARKANSAS	#5 WISCONSIN	#6 BYU	#7 MIAMI	#8 VILLANOVA	#9 UTAH ST	#10 MISSOURI	#11 NC STATE	#11 TEXAS	#12 HIGH POINT	#13 HAWAII	#14 KENNESAW ST	#15 QUEENS NC	#16 LONG ISLAND
TEAM/SEED	RATING	-24.3	-22.2	-21.7	-17.2	-15.2	-15.0	-14.5	-12.0	-14.5	-12.6	-13.8	-14.8	-7.4	-4.9	-1.1	1.0	4.1
#1 ARIZONA	-24.3		2.1	2.6	7.1	9.1	9.3	9.8	12.3	9.8	11.7	10.5	9.5	16.9	19.4	23.2	25.3	28.4
#2 PURDUE	-22.2	-21.7		0.5	5.0	7.0	7.2	7.7	10.2	7.7	9.6	8.4	7.4	14.8	17.3	21.1	23.2	26.3
#3 GONZAGA	-21.7	-17.2	-0.5		4.5	6.5	6.7	7.2	9.7	7.2	9.1	7.9	6.9	14.3	16.8	20.6	22.7	25.8
#4 ARKANSAS	-17.2	-15.2	-5.0	-4.5		2.0	2.2	2.7	5.2	2.7	4.6	3.4	2.4	9.8	12.3	16.1	18.2	21.3
#5 WISCONSIN	-15.2	-15.0	-7.0	-6.5	-2.0		0.2	0.7	3.2	0.7	2.6	1.4	0.4	7.8	10.3	14.1	16.2	19.3
#6 BYU	-15.0	-14.5	-7.2	-6.7	-2.2	-0.2		0.5	3.0	0.5	2.4	1.2	0.2	7.6	10.1	13.9	16.0	19.1
#7 MIAMI	-14.5	-12.0	-7.7	-7.2	-2.7	-0.7	-0.5		2.5	0.0	1.9	0.7	-0.3	7.1	9.6	13.4	15.5	18.6
#8 VILLANOVA	-12.0	-14.5	-10.2	-9.7	-5.2	-3.2	-3.0	-2.5		-2.5	-0.6	-1.8	-2.8	4.6	7.1	10.9	13.0	16.1
#9 UTAH ST	-14.5	-12.6	-7.7	-7.2	-2.7	-0.7	-0.5	0.0	2.5		1.9	0.7	-0.3	7.1	9.6	13.4	15.5	18.6
#10 MISSOURI	-12.6	-13.8	-9.6	-9.1	-4.6	-2.6	-2.4	-1.9	0.6	-1.9		-1.2	-2.2	5.2	7.7	11.5	13.6	16.7
#11 NC STATE	-13.8	-14.8	-8.4	-7.9	-3.4	-1.4	-1.2	-0.7	1.8	-0.7	1.2		-1.0	6.4	8.9	12.7	14.8	17.9
#11 TEXAS	-14.8	-7.4	-7.4	-6.9	-2.4	-0.4	-0.2	0.3	2.8	0.3	2.2	1.0		7.4	9.9	13.7	15.8	18.9
#12 HIGH POINT	-7.4	-4.9	-14.8	-14.3	-9.8	-7.8	-7.6	-7.1	-4.6	-7.1	-5.2	-6.4	-7.4		2.5	6.3	8.4	11.5
#13 HAWAII	-4.9	-1.1	-17.3	-16.8	-12.3	-10.3	-10.1	-9.6	-7.1	-9.6	-7.7	-8.9	-9.9	-2.5		3.8	5.9	9.0
#14 KENNESAW ST	-1.1	1.0	-21.1	-20.6	-16.1	-14.1	-13.9	-13.4	-10.9	-13.4	-11.5	-12.7	-13.7	-6.3	-3.8		2.1	5.2
#15 QUEENS NC	1.0	4.1	-23.2	-22.7	-18.2	-16.2	-16.0	-15.5	-13.0	-15.5	-13.6	-14.8	-15.8	-8.4	-5.9	-2.1		3.1
#16 LONG ISLAND	4.1	-28.4	-26.3	-25.8	-21.3	-19.3	-19.1	-18.6	-16.1	-18.6	-16.7	-17.9	-18.9	-11.5	-9.0	-5.2	-3.1	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

The grid above outlines how each team in the region matches up against the other teams in the region, creating a hypothetical betting line should the teams meet in the tournament. The values in the grid display how many points the team on the top would be favored (-), or an underdog (positive number), by when facing the teams listed down the left side of the grid by taking the team on the tops rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #6 seed BYU would hypothetically be listed as a 3-point favorite (-3) against #8 seed Villanova, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN’S WEST REGION

MOMENTUM RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 ARIZONA	#2 PURDUE	#3 GONZAGA	#4 ARKANSAS	#5 WISCONSIN	#6 BYU	#7 MIAMI	#8 VILLANOVA	#9 UTAH ST	#10 MISSOURI	#11 NC STATE	#11 TEXAS	#12 HIGH POINT	#13 HAWAII	#14 KENNESAW ST	#15 QUEENS NC	#16 LONG ISLAND
TEAM/SEED	RATING	28.5	20.4	19.9	18.4	21.7	10.3	16.1	6.8	9.6	13.9	6.8	7.3	5.9	4.9	4.5	2.0	-5.5
#1 ARIZONA	28.5		8.1	8.6	10.1	6.8	18.2	12.4	21.7	18.9	14.6	21.7	21.2	22.6	23.6	24.0	26.5	34.0
#2 PURDUE	20.4	-8.1		0.5	2.0	-1.3	10.1	4.3	13.6	10.8	6.5	13.6	13.1	14.5	15.5	15.9	18.4	25.9
#3 GONZAGA	19.9	-8.6	-0.5		1.5	-1.8	9.6	3.8	13.1	10.3	6.0	13.1	12.6	14.0	15.0	15.4	17.9	25.4
#4 ARKANSAS	18.4	-10.1	-2.0	-1.5		-3.3	8.1	2.3	11.6	8.8	4.5	11.6	11.1	12.5	13.5	13.9	16.4	23.9
#5 WISCONSIN	21.7	-6.8	1.3	1.8	3.3		11.4	5.6	14.9	12.1	7.8	14.9	14.4	15.8	16.8	17.2	19.7	27.2
#6 BYU	10.3	-18.2	-10.1	-9.6	-8.1	-11.4		-5.8	3.5	0.7	-3.6	3.5	3.0	4.4	5.4	5.8	8.3	15.8
#7 MIAMI	16.1	-12.4	-4.3	-3.8	-2.3	-5.6	5.8		9.3	6.5	2.2	9.3	8.8	10.2	11.2	11.6	14.1	21.6
#8 VILLANOVA	6.8	-21.7	-13.6	-13.1	-11.6	-14.9	-3.5	-9.3		-2.8	-7.1	0.0	-0.5	0.9	1.9	2.3	4.8	12.3
#9 UTAH ST	9.6	-18.9	-10.8	-10.3	-8.8	-12.1	-0.7	-6.5	2.8		-4.3	2.8	2.3	3.7	4.7	5.1	7.6	15.1
#10 MISSOURI	13.9	-14.6	-6.5	-6.0	-4.5	-7.8	3.6	-2.2	7.1	4.3		7.1	6.6	8.0	9.0	9.4	11.9	19.4
#11 NC STATE	6.8	-21.7	-13.6	-13.1	-11.6	-14.9	-3.5	-9.3	0.0	-2.8	-7.1		-0.5	0.9	1.9	2.3	4.8	12.3
#11 TEXAS	7.3	-21.2	-13.1	-12.6	-11.1	-14.4	-3.0	-8.8	0.5	-2.3	-6.6	0.5		1.4	2.4	2.8	5.3	12.8
#12 HIGH POINT	5.9	-22.6	-14.5	-14.0	-12.5	-15.8	-4.4	-10.2	-0.9	-3.7	-8.0	-0.9	-1.4		1.0	1.4	3.9	11.4
#13 HAWAII	4.9	-23.6	-15.5	-15.0	-13.5	-16.8	-5.4	-11.2	-1.9	-4.7	-9.0	-1.9	-2.4	-1.0		0.4	2.9	10.4
#14 KENNESAW ST	4.5	-24.0	-15.9	-15.4	-13.9	-17.2	-5.8	-11.6	-2.3	-5.1	-9.4	-2.3	-2.8	-1.4	-0.4		2.5	10.0
#15 QUEENS NC	2.0	-26.5	-18.4	-17.9	-16.4	-19.7	-8.3	-14.1	-4.8	-7.6	-11.9	-4.8	-5.3	-3.9	-2.9	-2.5		7.5
#16 LONG ISLAND	-5.5	-34.0	-25.9	-25.4	-23.9	-27.2	-15.8	-21.6	-12.3	-15.1	-19.4	-12.3	-12.8	-11.4	-10.4	-10.0	-7.5	

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STEVE MAKINEN'S WEST REGION

GAME GRADE FORECAST GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 ARIZONA	#2 PURDUE	#3 GONZAGA	#4 ARKANSAS	#5 WISCONSIN	#6 BYU	#7 MIAMI	#8 VILLANOVA	#9 UTAH ST	#10 MISSOURI	#11 NC STATE	#11 TEXAS	#12 HIGH POINT	#13 HAWAII	#14 KENNESAW ST	#15 QUEENS NC	#16 LONG ISLAND
TEAM/SEED	RATING	27.2	19.9	14.8	19.9	26.5	9.3	14.1	6.3	10.7	14.2	4.2	11.2	7.0	-0.1	3.7	3.2	-4.9
#1 ARIZONA	27.2		7.3	12.4	7.3	0.7	17.9	13.1	20.9	16.5	13.0	23.0	16.0	20.2	27.3	23.5	24.0	32.1
#2 PURDUE	19.9	-7.3		5.1	0.0	-6.6	10.6	5.8	13.6	9.2	5.7	15.7	8.7	12.9	20.0	16.2	16.7	24.8
#3 GONZAGA	14.8	-12.4	-5.1		-5.1	-11.7	5.5	0.7	8.5	4.1	0.6	10.6	3.6	7.8	14.9	11.1	11.6	19.7
#4 ARKANSAS	19.9	-7.3	0.0	5.1		-6.6	10.6	5.8	13.6	9.2	5.7	15.7	8.7	12.9	20.0	16.2	16.7	24.8
#5 WISCONSIN	26.5	-0.7	6.6	11.7	6.6		17.2	12.4	20.2	15.8	12.3	22.3	15.3	19.5	26.6	22.8	23.3	31.4
#6 BYU	9.3	-17.9	-10.6	-5.5	-10.6	-17.2		-4.8	3.0	-1.4	-4.9	5.1	-1.9	2.3	9.4	5.6	6.1	14.2
#7 MIAMI	14.1	-13.1	-5.8	-0.7	-5.8	-12.4	4.8		7.8	3.4	-0.1	9.9	2.9	7.1	14.2	10.4	10.9	19.0
#8 VILLANOVA	6.3	-20.9	-13.6	-8.5	-13.6	-20.2	-3.0	-7.8		-4.4	-7.9	2.1	-4.9	-0.7	6.4	2.6	3.1	11.2
#9 UTAH ST	10.7	-16.5	-9.2	-4.1	-9.2	-15.8	1.4	-3.4	4.4		-3.5	6.5	-0.5	3.7	10.8	7.0	7.5	15.6
#10 MISSOURI	14.2	-13.0	-5.7	-0.6	-5.7	-12.3	4.9	0.1	7.9	3.5		10.0	3.0	7.2	14.3	10.5	11.0	19.1
#11 NC STATE	4.2	-23.0	-15.7	-10.6	-15.7	-22.3	-5.1	-9.9	-2.1	-6.5	-10.0		-7.0	-2.8	4.3	0.5	1.0	9.1
#11 TEXAS	11.2	-16.0	-8.7	-3.6	-8.7	-15.3	1.9	-2.9	4.9	0.5	-3.0	7.0		4.2	11.3	7.5	8.0	16.1
#12 HIGH POINT	7.0	-20.2	-12.9	-7.8	-12.9	-19.5	-2.3	-7.1	0.7	-3.7	-7.2	2.8	-4.2		7.1	3.3	3.8	11.9
#13 HAWAII	-0.1	-27.3	-20.0	-14.9	-20.0	-26.6	-9.4	-14.2	-6.4	-10.8	-14.3	-4.3	-11.3	-7.1		-3.8	-3.3	4.8
#14 KENNESAW ST	3.7	-23.5	-16.2	-11.1	-16.2	-22.8	-5.6	-10.4	-2.6	-7.0	-10.5	-0.5	-7.5	-3.3	3.8		0.5	8.6
#15 QUEENS NC	3.2	-24.0	-16.7	-11.6	-16.7	-23.3	-6.1	-10.9	-3.1	-7.5	-11.0	-1.0	-8.0	-3.8	3.3	-0.5		8.1
#16 LONG ISLAND	-4.9	-32.1	-24.8	-19.7	-24.8	-31.4	-14.2	-19.0	-11.2	-15.6	-19.1	-9.1	-16.1	-11.9	-4.8	-8.6	-8.1	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

The grid above outlines how each team in the region matches up against the other teams in the region, creating a hypothetical betting line should the teams meet in the tournament. The values in the grid display how many points the team on the top would be favored (-), or an underdog (positive number), by when facing the teams listed down the left side of the grid by taking the team on the tops rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #6 seed BYU would hypothetically be listed as a 3-point favorite (-3) against #8 seed Villanova, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

ARIZONA

WILDCATS

HEAD COACH
Tommy Lloyd

CONFERENCE
Big 12

2025-26 RECORD
32-2 SU, 19-15 ATS, 17-17 O-U

WEST REGION

#1 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
96.2 (3)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
26.3 (3)

BETTOR RATING
-24.3 (4)

MOMENTUM RATING
28.5 (2)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
27.2 (4)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
86.1 (13)

DEFENSIVE PPG
68.8 (47)

POSSESSIONS
67.5 (61)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.313 (7)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.924 (3)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.502 (9)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.392 (5)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.36 (57)

FREE THROW %
0.734 (156)

REBOUNDING %
0.573 (6)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.561 (33)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.128 (53)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.146 (169)



College basketball coaches get put under the microscope for a variety of reasons. In Tommy Lloyd's case, a microscope is an understatement. He's in an interrogation room with over 70,000 lumens shining right in his face. There are a lot of reasons why Sean Miller was let go, but the NCAA Tournament sickness that permeated his office seemed to be passed on to his successor.

Miller never made it past the Elite Eight, despite having some very good teams in Tucson. Lloyd enters his fifth NCAA Tournament with a top-10 team per Bart Torvik's rankings. In the previous four seasons, the Wildcats have exited stage right in the Sweet 16 three times and in the first round once. Lloyd squandered a No. 1 seed in his first year and hasn't had one since, but he's got one this time around and the elephant in the room keeps putting on weight.

A 23-0 start that included wins over Florida, UCLA, UConn, Alabama, and San Diego State turned what we all figured would be a good team into one of the nation's elite, as they climbed quickly into the top five at the prominent rankings sites. Quality opponents were very easy to find in the Big 12 and Arizona, save for a Valentine's Week slip-up, answered the bell almost every time, including in Kansas City. Now it's about answering the bell when the lights are the brightest.

Lloyd undoubtedly has a good team, but does he have the right team? Arizona's 3P Rate was one of the five lowest in the nation, as the team prioritized getting the ball inside. That certainly wasn't a bad idea with 7-foot-2 Motiejus Krivas and 6-foot-8 star freshman Koa Peat, but the way that the game has evolved could put Arizona at a disadvantage against elite competition that relies more on the 3. The Big 12 was 24th in 3P Rate during the regular season per Torvik. What happens if Arizona runs into a SEC or Big Ten team that loves to fire from anywhere on the floor?

The Wildcats are elite on defense and are very adept at getting offensive rebounds, which replaces some of the margin for error other teams create by scoring in 3s instead of 2s. This is the best defensive team that Lloyd has taken dancing and perhaps that will be the difference maker.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

-700

REACH
FINAL 4

-120

REACH
ELITE 8

-275

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

+390

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
98.9%

SWEET 16
84.9%

ELITE 8
61.2%

FINAL FOUR
43.6%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

PURDUE

BOILERMAKERS

HEAD COACH
Matt Painter

CONFERENCE
Big Ten

2025-26 RECORD
27-8 SU, 15-20 ATS, 17-18 O-U

WEST REGION

#2 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
91.7 (8)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
21.7 (9)

BETTOR RATING
-22.2 (6)

MOMENTUM RATING
20.4 (11)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
19.9 (14)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
81.7 (38)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.1 (61)

POSSESSIONS
62.8 (328)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.362 (1)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.016 (29)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.498 (12)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.445 (168)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.381 (18)

FREE THROW %
0.744 (109)

REBOUNDING %
0.557 (10)

ASST/TO RATIO
2.195 (1)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.118 (15)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.139 (220)

Another year, another NCAA Tournament appearance for Matt Painter. We'll never know if the 2020 Boilermakers would have made the field, but since that year's Big Dance was cancelled, Painter's streak moves to 11 straight. One thing Painter has not done during that run is win the National Championship. His 2024 team went to the finals and ran into the buzzsaw that was UConn. Otherwise, Painter only has one Elite Eight appearance and has been knocked out in the Sweet 16 four times. Also, Purdue is one of two No. 1 seeds all-time to lose in the first round, to go along with three other first-round exits.

This year's version of the Boilermakers is hard to evaluate. After a 17-1 start, Purdue finished the regular season going 6-7, and not the cool version of 6-7 that all the kids use nowadays. That stretch included a three-game losing streak and losses in four of six to end the regular season, including some ghastly defensive performances down the stretch. The team that beat Alabama and crushed Texas Tech back in November isn't what we think of when looking at the current team.

That said, this is one of the country's best offensive teams in just about every key category. They shoot 3s very well. They make a very high rate of 2s. They take great care of the basketball. They rebound a lot of their missed shots. They have all the hallmarks of a good tournament team - a star point guard in Braden Smith, two physical bigs who finish at a high rate in Oscar Cluff and Trey Kaufman-Renn, and a sharpshooter from 3 in Fletcher Loyer.

When Purdue has lost, the defense has failed them and this is a bad defensive team. The adjusted metrics look favorably upon the team because of the strength of schedule, but Purdue is outside the top 200 in eFG% defense and 2P% defense. The only major-conference teams that rank similarly in those stat columns in this field are teams like Iowa, UCF, and NC State.

Offensively, Purdue can compete with almost anyone. Defensively, there is a lot to be desired there. The defensive profile is sort of similar to last season's Purdue squad, which made the Sweet 16 and then lost 62-60 to Houston. That team was Painter's lowest by eFG% defense and 2P% defense, and while this one is similar, this offense is better.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

-330

**REACH
FINAL 4**

+360

**REACH
ELITE 8**

+105

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

25-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
93.6%

SWEET 16
65.5%

ELITE 8
39.8%

FINAL FOUR
17.5%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



GONZAGA

BULLDOGS

HEAD COACH
Mark Few

CONFERENCE
West Coast

2025-26 RECORD
30-3 SU, 18-15 ATS, 11-22 O-U

WEST REGION

#3 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
90.4 (10)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
23.4 (7)

BETTOR RATING
-21.7 (8)

MOMENTUM RATING
19.9 (14)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
14.8 (31)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
85.1 (16)

DEFENSIVE PPG
66 (16)

POSSESSIONS
67.1 (83)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.278 (26)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.939 (6)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.51 (3)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.395 (9)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.34 (176)

FREE THROW %
0.699 (274)

REBOUNDING %
0.554 (13)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.897 (3)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.117 (13)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.181 (15)

Following their worst NCAA Tournament appearance since 2014, the Bulldogs are back in the Big Dance looking to make amends. Last year's second-round exit marked the first time in over a decade that the Bulldogs fell short of the Sweet 16. In that span, Mark Few's team made it to the finals twice and the Elite Eight three times. The Selection Committee shafted Gonzaga last season, putting the WCC champs on the 8 line, where they ran into Houston on Saturday and lost by five.

Given that Gonzaga entered the tournament as a top-10 caliber team, being placed where they did was an abomination by the Committee, but they go out of their way on an annual basis to screw over dangerous mid-majors, so it shouldn't have come as a surprise. Even when they were getting No. 1 seeds, it felt like they still had the hardest region and toughest path. But, they've never complained and have simply gone about their business, as Few brings a 44-25 record in the Big Dance to this year's event.

Few has another good team. It isn't exactly a battle-tested team, with just three games decided by six or fewer points, but the Zags were a top-25 team by eFG% offense and defense, top 20 in TO% on offense and defense, and top 20 in 2P% offense and defense. Poke holes in the schedule if you want, but the non-conference included Arizona State (when they were a top-60 team), Alabama, Michigan, Kentucky, and UCLA (when they were a top-30 team). Conference tourney runner-up Santa Clara and Saint Mary's rated very highly in the WCC.

Given that Gonzaga played without Braden Huff from Jan. 15 on and Jalen Warley was banged up late in the year and did return for the conference tourney, there is some optimism surrounding this team heading into the NCAA tourney. Huff only played 18 games, but averaged 17.8 PPG before leaving the team for a while. Warley is a glue guy who fills the stat sheet in numerous ways. If Graham Ike and Tyon Grant-Foster can get some help from the returnees, Huff specifically, this is a team that could go on a heater.

From a narrative standpoint, this feels like the least talked about Gonzaga team in a very long time for whatever that's worth. Perhaps that's a good thing for them.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

-250

**REACH
FINAL 4**

+500

**REACH
ELITE 8**

+145

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

40-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
90.3%

SWEET 16
63.5%

ELITE 8
34.4%

FINAL FOUR
14.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



ARKANSAS

RAZORBACKS

HEAD COACH
John Calipari

CONFERENCE
SEC

2025-26 RECORD
26-8 SU, 22-12 ATS, 19-15 O-U

WEST REGION

#4 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
89.3 (12)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
19.7 (14)

BETTOR RATING
-17.2 (18)

MOMENTUM RATING
18.4 (21)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
19.9 (15)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
89.9 (2)

DEFENSIVE PPG
80.1 (323)

POSSESSIONS
68 (39)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.32 (5)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.03 (33)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.5 (11)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.455 (226)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.387 (11)

FREE THROW %
0.748 (91)

REBOUNDING %
0.51 (125)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.882 (4)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.104 (1)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.135 (253)

It's only Year 2, so maybe we'll get more accustomed to seeing John Calipari on the Arkansas sideline, but it still feels weird, especially at this time of year. The Razorbacks were second in 2P% and 3P% in the SEC during conference play, trailing Florida on 2s and Oklahoma on 3s. They also had the conference's lowest TO% on offense.

That's the good. The bad is that the Razorbacks were 12th in eFG% defense and 15th in 2P% defense. The SEC is an excellent conference and a tremendous offensive conference. That context is really important in this setting, where not all of the teams that Arkansas runs into will be able to score at will like most of the Razorbacks' conference brethren. Arkansas is a team that can score at will, but it is interesting that they shot better than 38% from 3 during the regular season, but also ranked in the 300s in 3P Rate. Both Darius Acuff Jr. and Meleek Thomas had no problem firing from deep, but others seemed a little hesitant.

Everybody who plays regularly for Arkansas shot the ball efficiently and took good care of the rock. While Acuff, Thomas, and Trevon Brazile shouldered most of the load, Calipari's substitution rotations were very effective and allowed his team to play with tempo. That led to a lot of creativity on offense and a lot of chances for the two freshmen in Acuff and Thomas to go off.

But, there were some downright awful defensive showings from the Razorbacks. In their eight regular season losses, they allowed 69, 80, 94, 95, 90, 85, 117 (2OT), and 111 points. Only Georgia allowed a higher rate of Close Two shot attempts as defined by Bart Torvik in the SEC this season. We know that this team will score in the NCAA Tournament. But how will they defend? Can Brazile and fellow 6-foot-10 big Malique Ewin and Nick Pringle successfully push teams away from the rim? We'll see how the path shakes out for Arkansas, but they appear to maybe be more of a matchup-dependent team than the more flexible teams ranked and seeded similarly to them.

On the other hand, those defensive numbers in SEC play didn't keep the Razorbacks from winning the conference tournament and maybe Calipari's team is peaking at the right time.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

-120

REACH
FINAL 4

11-1

REACH
ELITE 8

+450

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

60-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

2ND ROUND
85.9%

SWEET 16
46.6%

ELITE 8
16.3%

FINAL FOUR
8.2%



WISCONSIN

BADGERS

HEAD COACH
Greg Gard

CONFERENCE
Big Ten

2025-26 RECORD
24-10 SU, 21-13 ATS, 21-13 O-U

WEST REGION

#5 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
87.5 (21)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
16.1 (27)

BETTOR RATING
-15.2 (25)

MOMENTUM RATING
21.7 (8)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
26.5 (5)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
83 (28)

DEFENSIVE PPG
75.9 (217)

POSSESSIONS
66.8 (107)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.288 (15)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.051 (55)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.45 (159)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.447 (177)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.361 (54)

FREE THROW %
0.786 (12)

REBOUNDING %
0.505 (149)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.786 (8)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.112 (5)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.127 (312)



Greg Gard took the Badgers to the Sweet 16 in his first two seasons. He hasn't done it since. Five straight first-weekend exits and one season without a bid outside of when the tournament was cancelled in 2020 can't sit well with the fan base or the administration. Add in the football team's struggles and this feels like a really big NCAA Tournament for Gard.

The Badgers have been bounced in the first weekend as a No. 3, No. 5, No. 3, No. 9, and No. 5 seed, so he hasn't really discriminated with the early exits. As has been the case each of the last two years, the offense is outpacing the defense. It was the other way around for the first part of Gard's tenure. But, it is fair to wonder just how good the offense is. The Big Ten doesn't have a lot of standout defensive teams and virtually nobody forces turnovers. The Badgers' low TO% on offense has had some heavy influence all season long on their adjusted offensive efficiency ranking. That's not to say that Wisconsin can't make shots. They're a top-60ish offense in both 2P% and 3P% heading into the Big Dance...

But what does that mean when the defensive numbers are poor and the Badgers have to leave the comfort zone of the Big Ten? This was a pedestrian defense in terms of shooting numbers against and paired that with one of the 50 lowest TO% in the nation. Their games can be high-variance because of a high 3P Rate on offense and over a 40% 3P Rate on defense. It's a tough way to live, but the Badgers also have five of the best wins of any team in the nation.

The expected availability of 7-footer Nolan Winter is huge, especially because this is not a great defensive rebounding team behind what he has to offer. Winter was hurt late in the regular season and had 31 of Wisconsin's 46 dunks over those first 31 games and was second in Close Two shot attempts to slashing guard Nick Boyd. Without Winter, the likelihood not making the Sweet 16 for a sixth straight time would've been quite high.

Even with him, a team that took 70 more 3s than 2s during the regular season has to run on the right side of variance to make a run, but they absolutely can.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

+110

REACH
FINAL 4

15-1

REACH
ELITE 8

+550

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

80-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

2ND ROUND
82.4%

SWEET 16
46.5%

ELITE 8
16.9%

FINAL FOUR
8.7%

BYU

COUGARS

HEAD COACH
Kevin Young

CONFERENCE
Big 12

2025-26 RECORD
23-11 SU, 16-18 ATS, 17-17 O-U

WEST REGION
#6 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85.6 (26)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
16.8 (23)

BETTOR RATING
-15 (27)

MOMENTUM RATING
10.3 (51)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
9.3 (67)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
83.9 (23)

DEFENSIVE PPG
75.3 (200)

POSSESSIONS
67.5 (62)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.298 (12)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.048 (52)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.477 (38)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.443 (150)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.349 (129)

FREE THROW %
0.746 (100)

REBOUNDING %
0.528 (45)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.237 (143)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.131 (72)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.143 (185)

All eyes will be on AJ Dybantsa for however long BYU is in the NCAA Tournament. The stellar freshman and probable No. 1 pick has come as advertised for the Cougars, as he's been among the best players in the nation and one of the purest scorers in the country. With plenty of help from Robert Wright III and Richie Saunders, at least before his torn ACL, the nation's leader bucket-getter is must-see TV in the tourney.

How much of Dybantsa will we get to see? That's the question here, as he has been awesome for the boys from Provo, but the rest of the team has left a lot to be desired. Kevin Young's team was able to right the ship a little bit in Kansas City during the Big 12 Tournament, but the Cougars started the season 16-1 and 4-0 in conference play, only to finish the regular season with a 21-10 record and just a 9-9 mark in conference.

It turns out that playing well on both ends of the floor matters. The Cougars are a strong offensive team in most facets. They could stand to make a few more 3s and that will be up to Dybantsa and Kennard Davis Jr., but they could really stand to do a better job of keeping opponents from making them. BYU enters the tourney with a negative 3P% differential. Really the only other prominent teams with that dubious distinction are Florida and Miami (FL). In this format, 3-point performance is subject to a ton of variance, given the quality of opponent and the fact that all games are played at neutral sites. But, it has to be a major concern.

It was certainly an issue in the regular season against Big 12 foes, as BYU was 12th in 3P% at 33.2% and 15th in 3P% against at 37.9%. No matter how efficient you are inside the arc, or how good you are on the glass, getting outscored from deep serves as an equalizer. Between the poor perimeter defense and 14th-ranked TO%, the Cougars were 15th in adjusted defensive efficiency in the 16-team conference.

Those issues were painfully evident on the road in Big 12 play. While these aren't road games, they aren't home games and that could keep us from seeing a lot of Dybantsa.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

+425

**REACH
FINAL 4**

60-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

14-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

250-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
54.4%

SWEET 16
19.7%

ELITE 8
6.8%

FINAL FOUR
1.7%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



MIAMI (FL)

HURRICANES

HEAD COACH
Jai Lucas

CONFERENCE
ACC

2025-26 RECORD
25-8 SU, 18-15 ATS, 20-13 O-U

WEST REGION

#7 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85.6 (27)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
15.4 (33)

BETTOR RATING
-14.5 (30)

MOMENTUM RATING
16.1 (29)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
14.1 (36)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
81.9 (34)

DEFENSIVE PPG
71.2 (84)

POSSESSIONS
65.9 (155)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.256 (35)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.033 (35)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.501 (10)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.445 (165)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.347 (137)

FREE THROW %
0.685 (311)

REBOUNDING %
0.556 (11)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.435 (62)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.138 (132)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.162 (66)

It's hard to believe that Miami's surprise Final Four run was just back in 2023, but that was also the last time the Hurricanes were in the NCAA Tournament and they'll make their first appearance without Jim Larranaga on the sideline since 2008. First-year head coach Jai Lucas didn't inherit much, as the Hurricanes were just 7-24 last season and 3-17 in conference play. With some help from the transfer portal and a standout freshman in Shelton Henderson, Miami is back at the dance.

Tre Donaldson, Malik Reneau, and Ernest Udeh Jr. were all perfect transfer acquisitions for Lucas, coming over from Michigan, Indiana, and TCU, respectively. The 37-year-old Lucas surely knows how to identify talent after serving as an assistant with Texas, Kentucky, and Duke before getting his own program. What undoubtedly helped Miami was a soft non-conference schedule. While it didn't produce any signature wins, it gave the team time to come together in a low-risk setting.

However, the weak non-conference schedule and a lack of standout wins may shape how bettors and pundits feel about this team now that the bracket has been drawn. What the Hurricanes do well, they do very well. They have one of the lowest 3P Rates in the field, but converted at a high rate at the rim and Donaldson and Henderson shot very well from the mid-range. Reneau and Udeh are menaces on the glass on both ends of the floor. Miami will not get outworked in this tournament.

They may get outshot, though. While the 3-ball wasn't a huge part of the Hurricanes' offense, it was for opponents, as Miami ranked in the 270s in 3P% defense and opponents took a 3-pointer about 9% more often. It's tough to keep up with that pace and that perimeter defense without being elite in other areas, which Miami is. However, the wrong team at the wrong time and you can see why Miami lost to teams like Florida, BYU, Clemson, Virginia, and Louisville.

Finishing 16th in 3P% defense in the regular season in ACC play and 17th in eFG% seems like a lot to overcome in this field, but winning on the glass, taking high-percentage shots, and controlling the turnover battle has upside potential as well.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

+400

REACH
FINAL 4

50-1

REACH
ELITE 8

11-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

400-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
57.4%

SWEET 16
20.8%

ELITE 8
9.1%

FINAL FOUR
2.6%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



VILLANOVA

WILDCATS

HEAD COACH
Kevin Willard

CONFERENCE
Big East

2025-26 RECORD
24-8 SU, 19-13 ATS, 19-13 O-U

WEST REGION

#8 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
83.9 (38)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
13.7 (40)

BETTOR RATING
-12 (46)

MOMENTUM RATING
6.8 (87)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
6.3 (95)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
77.2 (117)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.8 (77)

POSSESSIONS
63.2 (315)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.25 (41)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.039 (40)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.457 (122)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.45 (202)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.353 (100)

FREE THROW %
0.694 (290)

REBOUNDING %
0.498 (193)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.526 (40)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.129 (59)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.161 (70)



Kevin Willard is no stranger to the NCAA Tournament, but he is with Villanova, as the former Maryland and Seton Hall head coach has taken his second different Big East team to the Big Dance. Jay Wright's departure after the 2022 Final Four run came as a shock to the program and they went back to a familiar face in Kyle Neptune, who led three extremely pedestrian seasons without an NCAA Tournament berth before Willard came on the scene.

Ironically, in a lot of ways, this team isn't a whole lot better than last year's 21-15 squad that fired Neptune prior to participating in the first College Basketball Crown. The Neptune version was better on offense, including the fifth-ranked 3P% in the nation, and also was among the national leaders at the free throw line. But, this version of the Wildcats is a good bit better on the defensive end and that's made the difference.

Villanova has won the possession battle a lot more often with their highest TO% since 2017. They've been better on the glass thanks in large part to Grand Canyon transfer Duke Brennan. They've been better about closing out close games. They've been a more balanced offense. But, while all of those things are great and are important attributes, one thing we haven't seen is the Wildcats stack up to comparable or better competition.

At the end of the regular season, Villanova only had two Quadrant 1 wins in 13 tries, beating Wisconsin in overtime in December and Willard's old Seton Hall team on the road a few days later. The Wildcats lost both meetings with UConn and St. John's in conference play. While there aren't any objectively egregious losses on the ledger, there aren't many wins that make it seem like a second-weekend run is a possibility and the seed line adds longer odds to the mix.

Villanova shouldn't be an easy out, but should be an out, as the Big East was down a bit this season from its usual standing and the Wildcats' deliberate pace coupled with a defense that finished outside the top 150 in 2P% and 3P% feels like a lot to overcome.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

+950

**REACH
FINAL 4**

75-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

25-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

250-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
42.7%

SWEET 16
5.4%

ELITE 8
1.5%

FINAL FOUR
0.4%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

UTAH STATE

AGGIES

HEAD COACH
Jerrold Calhoun

CONFERENCE
Mountain West

2025-26 RECORD
28-6 SU, 15-18 ATS, 18-15 O-U

WEST REGION

#9 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
84.6 (34)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
15.5 (31)

BETTOR RATING
-14.5 (31)

MOMENTUM RATING
9.6 (61)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
10.7 (50)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
81.7 (39)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.8 (78)

POSSESSIONS
65.8 (164)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.275 (29)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.043 (43)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.495 (15)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.427 (75)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.351 (109)

FREE THROW %
0.706 (250)

REBOUNDING %
0.509 (131)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.625 (25)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.133 (87)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.177 (18)

Logan, UT has been a real cradle of coaches over the years and it seems like they've gotten another good one in former Youngstown State bench boss Jerrod Calhoun. While the Aggies lost their 7/10 game last season, they did make it into the field and Calhoun takes a better one into the field this year. The 2020 NCAA Tournament was cancelled due to COVID, but had it not been, Utah State would have probably been in that one, too, which would make this their seventh invitation to the Big Dance in eight years.

Calhoun has followed one year of Danny Sprinkle (Washington), two years of Ryan Odom (Virginia), and three years of Craig Smith (fired from Utah), so he walked into some big expectations and has met them. That being said, Utah State hasn't made it to the Sweet 16 since 1970 and there were 25 teams in that field.

Utah State was never really in the bubble discussion, but like another mid-major in Saint Louis, the end of the regular season was a bit of a downer. The Aggies lost three of their final five games, including a blowout at the hands of a pretty mediocre UNLV team. They took that loss to heart and beat the Rebels by 20 in their own barn in the MWC Tournament to right that wrong and ultimately won the whole thing. Utah State didn't play any Quadrant 1-A games and went 4-4 in Quadrant 1 games, but it's how the Aggies beat teams that had them in bracketologists' minds all season long.

This was one of the most efficient offenses in the nation and a team that really built off of that success by turning opponents over more than 20% of the time. With those extra possessions, a Rim & 3 Rate over 85% sure is a good way to maximize shot volume and that's precisely what happened. It helped that the Aggies were stout defensively on the inside, despite being a little bit undersized.

In terms of the outlook for this team, they were right around the national average in 3P% defense and most of their losses, especially the bad ones, happened when opponents made it rain from deep, so keep that in mind.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

10-1

REACH
FINAL 4

90-1

REACH
ELITE 8

25-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

400-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
57.4%

SWEET 16
9.5%

ELITE 8
3.3%

FINAL FOUR
1.1%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



MISSOURI

TIGERS

HEAD COACH
Dennis Gates

CONFERENCE
SEC

2025-26 RECORD
20-12 SU, 14-18 ATS, 15-17 O-U

WEST REGION

#10 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
81.8 (51)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
11.2 (52)

BETTOR RATING
-12.6 (41)

MOMENTUM RATING
13.9 (34)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
14.2 (35)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
79.7 (75)

DEFENSIVE PPG
75.3 (201)

POSSESSIONS
63.9 (287)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.232 (52)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.065 (67)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.491 (18)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.436 (110)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.35 (118)

FREE THROW %
0.686 (309)

REBOUNDING %
0.526 (53)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.141 (204)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.154 (257)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.143 (186)

Dennis Gates has had four 20-win seasons and another season with 19 wins over his stops at Missouri and Cleveland State. Last year's team actually graded significantly better and was viewed as one of the biggest snubs in the field. As a result, maybe that's why the Selection Committee put them on the No. 10 line instead of No. 11, which is where most projections had them.

Either that or the fact that Missouri resides in the SEC and so they had plenty of chances to secure quality wins and accumulate those "good losses". In terms of the body of work, Missouri was 11-0 against Quadrant 3 and 4 opponents. The offensive numbers stand out, finishing as a top-40 offense in adjusted offensive efficiency, eFG%, ORB%, FT Rate, and 2P%, but, as the great Lee Corso liked to say, "Not so fast, my friend".

Missouri was 12th in adjusted offensive efficiency in SEC play and just seventh in eFG%. IT was a conference full of quality offensive teams, but Missouri's non-conference numbers were off the charts good, so those who are looking at the entirety of their profile should keep that in mind. The SEC is obviously tough, but against a non-conference slate ranked in the 210s per Torvik and 344th per KenPom, Missouri was 13th in eFG%, 19th in ORB%, 65th in 3P%, and 17th in 2P% per Torvik. That also includes a 20-point loss to Kansas and a 43-point loss to Illinois.

In other words, that gives you some sort of idea how Missouri padded numbers against much lesser opponents. It should be noted that Missouri did beat Florida, Texas A&M, Vanderbilt, and Tennessee at home, plus Kentucky on the road, so they did bank some really nice wins and that's probably what moved them from being a No. 11, and maybe playing in Dayton, to being a No. 10.

But, this is a team that probably won't be a very popular pick and shooting under 69% at the free throw line probably isn't going to help.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

+950

REACH
FINAL 4

130-1

REACH
ELITE 8

30-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

500-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

2ND ROUND
42.7%

SWEET 16
12.8%

ELITE 8
4.7%

FINAL FOUR
1.1%



NC STATE

WOLFPACK

HEAD COACH
Will Wade

CONFERENCE
ACC

2025-26 RECORD
20-13 SU, 15-18 ATS, 21-12 O-U

WEST REGION

#11 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
84.7 (32)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
14.7 (36)

BETTOR RATING
-13.8 (33)

MOMENTUM RATING
6.8 (86)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
4.2 (117)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
83.7 (24)

DEFENSIVE PPG
76.5 (229)

POSSESSIONS
66.7 (109)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.285 (18)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.07 (72)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.468 (65)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.45 (200)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.388 (9)

FREE THROW %
0.768 (37)

REBOUNDING %
0.493 (220)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.689 (15)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.115 (10)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.158 (87)



His departure from LSU was messy, but Will Wade can coach. The Tigers would have made the 2020 NCAA Tournament if not for COVID, so we're effectively talking about a guy who has made nine tourney trips in 10 seasons with four different teams. After two Southland Conference titles, and a win over Clemson last year, Wade took his talents to Raleigh and the Wolfpack were able to buy dancing shoes once again after missing out last season.

It's still a little bit hard to believe that Kevin Keatts was canned just a season removed from taking a No. 11 seed to the Final Four, but NC State pulled the trigger quickly and isolated Wade right away. It seems as though that strategy has worked. The Wolfpack are among the best teams in the country at shooting 3s and limiting turnovers. There are some disappointing metrics on the defensive side, but if you can shoot and you can win the shot volume battle, you can win a lot of games.

The ACC put a lot of teams into the tourney, but it feels like it was a down year in some respects. That's why I'd be really worried about NC State finishing 15th in 3P% defense, 11th in 2P% defense, and 14th in eFG% defense in conference play. Also, the Wolfpack were the worst defensive rebounding team in the conference and maybe the worst rebounding team overall.

But, again, they can shoot. And they did just enough getting extra possessions to win, finishing conference play nearly +5% in TO% differential with the lowest TO% on offense and third-highest on defense. Like so many of the mid-tier major-conference programs, NC State was roughly .500 in Quadrant 1 and 2 games, finishing the regular season 11-12 in those and just 2-6 in Quadrant 1-A games. Plus, they lost a Quadrant 4 game at home to Georgia Tech. They also lost six of seven to end the regular season and gave up 1.336 points per possession to Pitt in the ACC Tournament.

Those are a lot more negatives than positives for this team. Wade is a good coach, but NC State's 41.3% 3P% in road and neutral settings will have to carry them to overcome the obvious shortcomings.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

12-1

REACH
FINAL 4

120-1

REACH
ELITE 8

30-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

300-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
21.4%

SWEET 16
6.9%

ELITE 8
2.2%

FINAL FOUR
0.5%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

TEXAS

LONGHORNS

HEAD COACH
Sean Miller

CONFERENCE
SEC

2025-26 RECORD
18-14 SU, 16-15 ATS, 19-12 O-U

WEST REGION

#11 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
84.1 (37)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
12.7 (42)

BETTOR RATING
-14.8 (28)

MOMENTUM RATING
7.3 (80)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
11.2 (46)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
82.6 (32)

DEFENSIVE PPG
76.8 (235)

POSSESSIONS
64.5 (249)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.281 (24)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.079 (83)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.479 (35)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.452 (210)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.349 (126)

FREE THROW %
0.753 (71)

REBOUNDING %
0.547 (17)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.125 (220)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.13 (70)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.118 (345)

A series of awful defensive performances left the Longhorns holding their collective breaths on Selection Sunday, as the team perched on pins and needles wondering if five losses in their last six games, including a surprise loss to Ole Miss in the SEC Tournament, would be enough to leave them with an invitation to the NIT. As it turns out, it was not and the Selection Committee gave Texas a chance to prove themselves in Dayton.

To some degree, it feels like the Committee has a little bit of a sense of humor. When Miller was with Xavier last season, the Musketeers were sent to Dayton. Guess who they played? Texas. So, it's a venue, atmosphere, and environment that Miller is accustomed to, even if his team isn't. Kind of cheeky from the decision-makers, or so it would seem.

Obviously you can debate the merits of any team on the No. 11 line, any First Four team, and even some of the No. 10 seeds. In the case of Texas, six Quadrant 1 wins in a conference like the SEC is pretty good. Of course, the 1-4 record against Quadrant 2 wins is not. But, this is a big brand name and the statistical profile looks fairly compelling. The Longhorns were terrible at forcing turnovers and bad at defending the 3-point line, which explains their .500 record in conference play.

But, they're also a pretty good offense in their own right with a top-25 mark in adjusted offensive efficiency, a lot of offensive rebounds, a lot of free throws, and enough made shots from deep to be dangerous. The Longhorns ranked in the 340s in Assist Rate, so they didn't share the basketball effectively, but still had some pretty solid shooting metrics.

This is probably the worst defensive team that Miller has even taken to the NCAA Tournament and he's been there a lot, so we'll see if the team's season ends in Dayton or shortly thereafter.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

12-1

**REACH
FINAL 4**

130-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

35-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

500-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
45.6%

SWEET 16
14.7%

ELITE 8
4.7%

FINAL FOUR
1.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



HIGH POINT

PANTHERS

HEAD COACH
Flynn Clayman

CONFERENCE
Big South

2025-26 RECORD
30-4 SU, 15-16 ATS, 20-11 O-U

WEST REGION

#12 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
77.2 (87)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
7.6 (84)

BETTOR RATING
-7.4 (81)

MOMENTUM RATING
5.9 (99)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
7 (86)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
86.5 (10)

DEFENSIVE PPG
71.8 (100)

POSSESSIONS
67.4 (68)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.222 (57)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.106 (126)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.473 (43)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.434 (103)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.344 (156)

FREE THROW %
0.742 (116)

REBOUNDING %
0.501 (174)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.637 (22)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.112 (7)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.19 (5)

With a head coach who sounds more like a character in a Michael Connelly novel than a college basketball coach, High Point has reached the highest point in the Big South, locking up the auto bid for the second straight season. Under second-year head coach Alan Huss last season, the Panthers went 29-6 en route to a first-round exit in the 4 vs. 13 game against Purdue. It was a tough assignment for a very popular mid-major and they were dominated on the glass in a 75-63 defeat.

Huss left for an assistant coach role with Creighton, where he is the head coach-in-waiting until Greg McDermott retires. But, Huss wasn't the only loss. Most of the team's production left with him, as winning 29 games and making it to the NCAA Tournament makes players on low-major teams extremely attractive in the transfer portal. Clayman, simply elevated from his associate HC role, went shopping at SEMO State, Xavier, Arizona, Cal State Northridge, Liberty, and got the best out of holdovers Terry Anderson, Chase Johnston, and Braden Hausen to win 30 games, one more than his predecessor.

The same knock on High Point last season is an obvious knock this season. The Panthers played zero Quadrant 1 games, lost both Quadrant 2 games, and played one of the worst schedules of any tourney team. There isn't much that they can do about it because they're in the conference that they're in and there is limited upside for a major-conference team to schedule them in November or December. All the Panthers can do is focus on flexing their muscles against inferior foes.

Well, that's what they did. Of High Point's 30 regular season wins, only five were by six or fewer points. They finished in the top 10 in TO% on offense and defense, using the extra possessions to blow out opponents. They also played at a quicker pace than they did under Huss and that aided the cause.

However, this High Point team finished below last year's in 2P% and 3P% and took a step back on the offensive glass and at the free throw line. This version hasn't been talked about as much as last year's version yet, but with the matchups set and the history of the 12 vs. 5 / 13 vs. 4 first-round game, they'll get some pub, but last year's team was a little bit better.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

40-1

REACH
FINAL 4

400-1

REACH
ELITE 8

200-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
17.7%

SWEET 16
4.3%

ELITE 8
0.5%

FINAL FOUR
0.1%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



HAWAII

RAINBOW WARRIORS

HEAD COACH
Eran Ganot

CONFERENCE
Big West

2025-26 RECORD
24-8 SU, 13-17 ATS, 13-17 O-U

WEST REGION

#13 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
75.7 (97)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
5.4 (97)

BETTOR RATING
-4.9 (99)

MOMENTUM RATING
4.9 (111)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
-0.1 (179)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
78.7 (88)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.3 (63)

POSSESSIONS
66.6 (116)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.122 (177)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.045 (47)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.457 (117)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.414 (35)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.316 (300)

FREE THROW %
0.738 (141)

REBOUNDING %
0.541 (24)

ASST/TO RATIO
0.961 (300)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.165 (318)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.15 (133)



It is quite a time right now for Hawaii athletics. Timmy Chang has the football team on an upswing. The baseball team is faring well in the very deep, very talented Big West. And now the basketball team is in the Big Dance for the first time since 2016. That was head coach Eran Ganot's first year with the program and, while he's had a couple of 20-win seasons, it's been a long time coming.

Let's start with the bad and finish with the good. Hawaii turns the ball over a lot and doesn't make a lot of 3s, ranking in the 300s in both categories. Normally that isn't a very good set of traits for a team looking to make an NCAA Tournament run that requires beating major-conference opponents. However, if we look at the glass as half-full instead, Hawaii is going to present a lot of challenges for their opponent(s).

This is a very tall team. Not surprisingly, with the length that the Rainbow Warriors possess, they didn't give up many clean looks and contested a lot of shots. This is a team that grades as one of the best in the field on the defensive glass and also when it comes to 2P% and 3P% against. Also, Hawaii was a top-five defense in Assist Rate. Usually you see these kinds of defensive metrics from a team that plays at a slow pace and really wants to muck up the game. That's not the case for Hawaii, a top-65 squad in adjusted tempo for the first time since that 2016 tourney team.

It's a bit surprising because a lot of their offense runs through 7-footer Isaac Johnson, but Johnson, who didn't miss any games, only played about 53% of the minutes. When he's out there, he has a 29.3% Usage Rate, but he's averaging 22-25 minutes per game. This is still a tall team without him with four other regulars at 6-foot-6 or bigger. But Johnson is a huge part of the team's 85% Rim & 3 Rate and how they survive when he needs a break will be a focal point in this tourney.

The final note on Hawaii to know is that they only allowed a 32.4% 3P Rate, which was a top-15 mark. They aggressively try to run teams off the 3-point line and will try to do that here.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

60-1

**REACH
FINAL 4**

400-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

350-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
14.1%

SWEET 16
2.6%

ELITE 8
0.2%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

KENNESAW STATE

OWLS

HEAD COACH
Antoine Pettway

CONFERENCE
Conference USA

2025-26 RECORD
21-13 SU, 15-16 ATS, 15-16 O-U

WEST REGION

#14 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
71.9 (149)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
1.5 (139)

BETTOR RATING
-1.1 (147)

MOMENTUM RATING
4.5 (122)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
3.7 (124)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
80.5 (58)

DEFENSIVE PPG
78.4 (275)

POSSESSIONS
69.6 (13)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.143 (144)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.145 (200)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.435 (255)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.42 (46)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.337 (188)

FREE THROW %
0.7 (270)

REBOUNDING %
0.519 (86)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.114 (226)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.141 (153)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.139 (216)



Antoine Pettway had the unenviable task of replacing Amir Abdur-Rahim, who took a 1-28 Kennesaw State team in his first season back in 2020 to the NCAA Tournament with a 26-9 record in 2022-23. Abdur-Rahim would go on to have a spectacular first season at South Florida before tragically losing his life due to complications from a surgical procedure prior to the 2024-25 season. It's a sad story all around, made even sadder this March by the fact that both programs he built up are in the NCAA Tournament and he isn't there to see it.

Pettway did not have it easy this season. Star player Simeon Cottle was caught up in the NCAA basketball gambling scandal and kicked off the team in mid-January while averaging better than 20 PPG. The Owls were only 10-10 in conference play and even had four losses to Quadrant 4 opponents, to go along with five against Quadrant 3 opponents. But, March is all about timing and winning three games in three days in the conference tournament is all it takes to erase any bad memories from the regular season.

Without Cottle, who was a 45% shooter on 2s and a 34.5% shooter on 3s, the Owls had to adopt a by-committee approach to score points. It wasn't a terribly effective option in conference play, as they shot 34.4% from 3, which ranked eighth, and 48.3% on 2s, which ranked ninth. The conference numbers are all relative, as 34.4% from 3 is still better than the national average, but the Owls still had a negative 3P% differential.

This was one of CUSA's better rebounding teams and also the second-best team by 2P% defense, so there were some strengths mixed in amongst the weaknesses. Prior to the conference tournament in Huntsville, AL, the Owls were just 5-10 in road and neutral settings and 2-8 in conference games away from home. They were 11th in the conference out of 12 teams in the conference in 3P%, 2P%, and eFG%.

While Pettway and his players deserve praise for rallying and winning the conference tournament, this is one of the least likely Cinderella candidates among the mid-major or low-major automatic bid holders.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

120-1

REACH
FINAL 4

400-1

REACH
ELITE 8

400-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
9.7%

SWEET 16
2.2%

ELITE 8
0.3%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

QUEENS NC

ROYALS

HEAD COACH
Grant Leonard

CONFERENCE
Atlantic Sun

2025-26 RECORD
21-13 SU, 15-18 ATS, 21-12 O-U

WEST REGION

#15 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
69.8 (185)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-1.9 (196)

BETTOR RATING
1 (180)

MOMENTUM RATING
2 (147)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
3.2 (132)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
84.8 (17)

DEFENSIVE PPG
83.2 (348)

POSSESSIONS
67.3 (72)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.182 (89)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.209 (307)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.482 (31)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.469 (292)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.359 (68)

FREE THROW %
0.749 (90)

REBOUNDING %
0.49 (234)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.501 (44)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.129 (60)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.13 (292)

Due to the NCAA's archaic rules and regulations, Queens wasn't eligible for the NCAA Tournament until this season, as they were in their "transitional" period from Division II. But, they did get some postseason experience by playing in the CBI, where they beat Northern Arizona before losing to Cleveland State. That win over NAU was the 20th of the season for the Royals. Their win over Central Arkansas to punch a ticket to the Big Dance was their 21st, setting a new program record at the Division I level.

We'll see what the future holds for the ASun, since five of the member schools are heading to the new United Athletic Conference, a mash-up of the ASun and WAC. For now, Queens hits the Field of 68 as the ASun champs and they did it with a dramatic 98-93 win over No. 1 seed Central Arkansas following a mild upset of Austin Peay in the semifinals. For those who haven't paid attention to the Royals or haven't seen them play, this is a very, very fun team under the guidance of Grant Leonard.

This is a team that can shoot the hell out of the basketball. Valparaiso transfer Carson Schwieger had 217 3-point attempts against 41 2-point attempts during the regular season plus conference tournament, while there were four players with at least 167 2-point attempts. Chris Ashby took 41 2-pointers and 282 3-pointers. This is a creative and dynamic offensive team that actually ranked in the top 25 in eFG% and top 20 in 2P% offense.

Unfortunately, as good as they are with the basketball, they're about as bad without it. Most of the key defensive rankings landed somewhere in the 260s to the 310s with this team. Defense is kind of optional in the ASun, but it's always tough when a team shoots 35.9% from 3 and allows 35.8% from 3. This is a poor rebounding team and a team that went 0-6 in Quadrant 1 and 2 games, but they're fun to watch and likely to be entertaining for their brief stay in the NCAA Tournament.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

200-1

REACH
FINAL 4

400-1

REACH
ELITE 8

400-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
6.4%

SWEET 16
1.0%

ELITE 8
0.1%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



LONG ISLAND

SHARKS

HEAD COACH
Rod Strickland

CONFERENCE
Northeast

2025-26 RECORD
24-10 SU, 17-17 ATS, 14-20 O-U

WEST REGION

#16 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
67.5 (222)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-3.1 (219)

BETTOR RATING
4.1 (239)

MOMENTUM RATING
-5.5 (253)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
-4.9 (247)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
74.1 (196)

DEFENSIVE PPG
71.1 (83)

POSSESSIONS
66.6 (117)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.1 (215)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.14 (186)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.481 (34)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.445 (166)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.361 (52)

FREE THROW %
0.668 (344)

REBOUNDING %
0.513 (113)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.05 (261)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.162 (307)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.163 (55)



Sharp Week here at VSIN. Shark Week in the NCAA Tournament. LIU - Long Island University - was the first program to secure an automatic berth into the Big Dance when Mercyhurst secured a spot in the NEC Tournament Championship Game. Because the Lakers are still transitioning to Division I, the conference rules stipulated that their opponent would get the automatic NCAA Tournament berth. So, the Sharks, who were last in the tourney as the LIU-Brooklyn Blackbirds back in 2018, had their ticket punched.

The Sharks were the regular season and conference tourney champs and easily the highest-rated team in the conference throughout. It should be noted, though, that 22 of LIU's 23 wins were against Quadrant 4 opponents, as their lone Quadrant 3 win was on the road at Missouri State in non-conference action. Punching up several weight classes will be a different beast for a team that shot just 67% at the free throw line and ranked in the 320s in TO% on offense.

Where LIU did very well was on the offensive glass and on the perimeter, finishing in the top 60 in 3P% offense and defense for the regular season. The Sharks did score over a point per possession in nine of their 13 non-conference games, with three of the four where they did not coming against Notre Dame, Illinois, and Georgia, so three power-conference teams.

Whether the Sharks hang with Arizona at all or not, they grew a lot this season. Strickland's squad was 363rd, 349th, and 350th in adjusted offensive efficiency the last three seasons per Torvik and they made a huge leap this season. In the era of the transfer portal, there's no telling if those gains stay or can even be improved upon, but it was a great season and a good bounce back year for the program, regardless of how this event plays out.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

400-1

**REACH
FINAL 4**

400-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

350-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
1.2%

SWEET 16
0.1%

ELITE 8
0.0%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

STEVE MAKINEN'S MIDWEST REGION

POWER RATINGS GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 MICHIGAN	#2 IOWA ST	#3 VIRGINIA	#4 ALABAMA	#5 TEXAS TECH	#6 TENNESSEE	#7 KENTUCKY	#8 GEORGIA	#9 SAINT LOUIS	#10 SANTA CLARA	#11 MIAMI OHIO	#11 SMU	#12 AKRON	#13 HOFSTRA	#14 WRIGHT ST	#15 TENNESSEE ST	#16 HOWARD	#16 UMBC
TEAM/SEED	RATING	97.8	92.3	88.5	89.6	85.1	87.8	86.0	85.7	84.3	85.0	77.7	83.3	80.2	77.4	72.6	69.5	68.7	69.3
#1 MICHIGAN	97.8		5.5	9.3	8.2	12.7	10.0	11.8	12.1	13.5	12.8	20.1	14.5	17.6	20.4	25.2	28.3	29.1	28.5
#2 IOWA ST	92.3	-5.5		3.8	2.7	7.2	4.5	6.3	6.6	8.0	7.3	14.6	9.0	12.1	14.9	19.7	22.8	23.6	23.0
#3 VIRGINIA	88.5	-9.3	-3.8		-1.1	3.4	0.7	2.5	2.8	4.2	3.5	10.8	5.2	8.3	11.1	15.9	19.0	19.8	19.2
#4 ALABAMA	89.6	-8.2	-2.7	1.1		4.5	1.8	3.6	3.9	5.3	4.6	11.9	6.3	9.4	12.2	17.0	20.1	20.9	20.3
#5 TEXAS TECH	85.1	-12.7	-7.2	-3.4	-4.5		-2.7	-0.9	-0.6	0.8	0.1	7.4	1.8	4.9	7.7	12.5	15.6	16.4	15.8
#6 TENNESSEE	87.8	-10.0	-4.5	-0.7	-1.8	2.7		1.8	2.1	3.5	2.8	10.1	4.5	7.6	10.4	15.2	18.3	19.1	18.5
#7 KENTUCKY	86.0	-11.8	-6.3	-2.5	-3.6	0.9	-1.8		0.3	1.7	1.0	8.3	2.7	5.8	8.6	13.4	16.5	17.3	16.7
#8 GEORGIA	85.7	-12.1	-6.6	-2.8	-3.9	0.6	-2.1	-0.3		1.4	0.7	8.0	2.4	5.5	8.3	13.1	16.2	17.0	16.4
#9 SAINT LOUIS	84.3	-13.5	-8.0	-4.2	-5.3	-0.8	-3.5	-1.7	-1.4		-0.7	6.6	1.0	4.1	6.9	11.7	14.8	15.6	15.0
#10 SANTA CLARA	85.0	-12.8	-7.3	-3.5	-4.6	-0.1	-2.8	-1.0	-0.7	0.7		7.3	1.7	4.8	7.6	12.4	15.5	16.3	15.7
#11 MIAMI OHIO	77.7	-20.1	-14.6	-10.8	-11.9	-7.4	-10.1	-8.3	-8.0	-6.6	-7.3		-5.6	-2.5	0.3	5.1	8.2	9.0	8.4
#11 SMU	83.3	-14.5	-9.0	-5.2	-6.3	-1.8	-4.5	-2.7	-2.4	-1.0	-1.7	5.6		3.1	5.9	10.7	13.8	14.6	14.0
#12 AKRON	80.2	-17.6	-12.1	-8.3	-9.4	-4.9	-7.6	-5.8	-5.5	-4.1	-4.8	2.5	-3.1		2.8	7.6	10.7	11.5	10.9
#13 HOFSTRA	77.4	-20.4	-14.9	-11.1	-12.2	-7.7	-10.4	-8.6	-8.3	-6.9	-7.6	-0.3	-5.9	-2.8		4.8	7.9	8.7	8.1
#14 WRIGHT ST	72.6	-25.2	-19.7	-15.9	-17.0	-12.5	-15.2	-13.4	-13.1	-11.7	-12.4	-5.1	-10.7	-7.6	-4.8		3.1	3.9	3.3
#15 TENNESSEE ST	69.5	-28.3	-22.8	-19.0	-20.1	-15.6	-18.3	-16.5	-16.2	-14.8	-15.5	-8.2	-13.8	-10.7	-7.9	-3.1		0.8	0.2
#16 HOWARD	68.7	-29.1	-23.6	-19.8	-20.9	-16.4	-19.1	-17.3	-17.0	-15.6	-16.3	-9.0	-14.6	-11.5	-8.7	-3.9	-0.8		-0.6
#16 UMBC	69.3	-28.5	-23.0	-19.2	-20.3	-15.8	-18.5	-16.7	-16.4	-15.0	-15.7	-8.4	-14.0	-10.9	-8.1	-3.3	-0.2	0.6	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

The grid above outlines how each team in the region matches up against the other teams in the region, creating a hypothetical betting line should the teams meet in the tournament. The values in the grid display how many points the team on the top would be favored (-), or an underdog (positive number), by when facing the teams listed down the left side of the grid by taking the team on the tops rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #1 seed Michigan would hypothetically be listed as a 10-point favorite (-10) against #6 seed Tennessee, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S MIDWEST REGION

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 MICHIGAN	#2 IOWA ST	#3 VIRGINIA	#4 ALABAMA	#5 TEXAS TECH	#6 TENNESSEE	#7 KENTUCKY	#8 GEORGIA	#9 SAINT LOUIS	#10 SANTA CLARA	#11 MIAMI OHIO	#11 SMU	#12 AKRON	#13 HOFSTRA	#14 WRIGHT ST	#15 TENNESSEE ST	#16 HOWARD	#16 UMBC
TEAM/SEED	RATING	28.7	24.0	18.9	20.3	18.2	19.3	16.6	17.2	15.9	14.7	8.1	13.9	10.2	6.5	1.8	-1.5	-2.0	-2.1
#1 MICHIGAN	28.7		4.7	9.8	8.4	10.5	9.4	12.1	11.5	12.8	14.0	20.6	14.8	18.5	22.2	26.9	30.2	30.7	30.8
#2 IOWA ST	24.0	-4.7		5.1	3.7	5.8	4.7	7.4	6.8	8.1	9.3	15.9	10.1	13.8	17.5	22.2	25.5	26.0	26.1
#3 VIRGINIA	18.9	-9.8	-5.1		-1.4	0.7	-0.4	2.3	1.7	3.0	4.2	10.8	5.0	8.7	12.4	17.1	20.4	20.9	21.0
#4 ALABAMA	20.3	-8.4	-3.7	1.4		2.1	1.0	3.7	3.1	4.4	5.6	12.2	6.4	10.1	13.8	18.5	21.8	22.3	22.4
#5 TEXAS TECH	18.2	-10.5	-5.8	-0.7	-2.1		-1.1	1.6	1.0	2.3	3.5	10.1	4.3	8.0	11.7	16.4	19.7	20.2	20.3
#6 TENNESSEE	19.3	-9.4	-4.7	0.4	-1.0	1.1		2.7	2.1	3.4	4.6	11.2	5.4	9.1	12.8	17.5	20.8	21.3	21.4
#7 KENTUCKY	16.6	-12.1	-7.4	-2.3	-3.7	-1.6	-2.7		-0.6	0.7	1.9	8.5	2.7	6.4	10.1	14.8	18.1	18.6	18.7
#8 GEORGIA	17.2	-11.5	-6.8	-1.7	-3.1	-1.0	-2.1	0.6		1.3	2.5	9.1	3.3	7.0	10.7	15.4	18.7	19.2	19.3
#9 SAINT LOUIS	15.9	-12.8	-8.1	-3.0	-4.4	-2.3	-3.4	-0.7	-1.3		1.2	7.8	2.0	5.7	9.4	14.1	17.4	17.9	18.0
#10 SANTA CLARA	14.7	-14.0	-9.3	-4.2	-5.6	-3.5	-4.6	-1.9	-2.5	-1.2		6.6	0.8	4.5	8.2	12.9	16.2	16.7	16.8
#11 MIAMI OHIO	8.1	-20.6	-15.9	-10.8	-12.2	-10.1	-11.2	-8.5	-9.1	-7.8	-6.6		-5.8	-2.1	1.6	6.3	9.6	10.1	10.2
#11 SMU	13.9	-14.8	-10.1	-5.0	-6.4	-4.3	-5.4	-2.7	-3.3	-2.0	-0.8	5.8		3.7	7.4	12.1	15.4	15.9	16.0
#12 AKRON	10.2	-18.5	-13.8	-8.7	-10.1	-8.0	-9.1	-6.4	-7.0	-5.7	-4.5	2.1	-3.7		3.7	8.4	11.7	12.2	12.3
#13 HOFSTRA	6.5	-22.2	-17.5	-12.4	-13.8	-11.7	-12.8	-10.1	-10.7	-9.4	-8.2	-1.6	-7.4	-3.7		4.7	8.0	8.5	8.6
#14 WRIGHT ST	1.8	-26.9	-22.2	-17.1	-18.5	-16.4	-17.5	-14.8	-15.4	-14.1	-12.9	-6.3	-12.1	-8.4	-4.7		3.3	3.8	3.9
#15 TENNESSEE ST	-1.5	-30.2	-25.5	-20.4	-21.8	-19.7	-20.8	-18.1	-18.7	-17.4	-16.2	-9.6	-15.4	-11.7	-8.0	-3.3		0.5	0.6
#16 HOWARD	-2.0	-30.7	-26.0	-20.9	-22.3	-20.2	-21.3	-18.6	-19.2	-17.9	-16.7	-10.1	-15.9	-12.2	-8.5	-3.8	-0.5		0.1
#16 UMBC	-2.1	-30.8	-26.1	-21.0	-22.4	-20.3	-21.4	-18.7	-19.3	-18.0	-16.8	-10.2	-16.0	-12.3	-8.6	-3.9	-0.6	-0.1	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

The grid above outlines how each team in the region matches up against the other teams in the region, creating a hypothetical betting line should the teams meet in the tournament. The values in the grid display how many points the team on the top would be favored (-), or an underdog (positive number), by when facing the teams listed down the left side of the grid by taking the team on the top rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #4 seed Alabama would hypothetically be listed as a 1-point favorite (-1) against #6 seed Tennessee, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S MIDWEST REGION

BETTORS RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 MICHIGAN	#2 IOWA ST	#3 VIRGINIA	#4 ALABAMA	#5 TEXAS TECH	#6 TENNESSEE	#7 KENTUCKY	#8 GEORGIA	#9 SAINT LOUIS	#10 SANTA CLARA	#11 MIAMI OHIO	#11 SMU	#12 AKRON	#13 HOFSTRA	#14 WRIGHT ST	#15 TENNESSEE ST	#16 HOWARD	#16 UMBC
TEAM/SEED	RATING	-26.6	22.5	18.8	15.4	12.9	10.9	13.2	16.5	10.9	11.4	18.7	11	17.5	6.9	9	3.1	-1.2	-6.9
#1 MICHIGAN	-26.6		4.9	7.9	8.3	10.1	7.4	11.1	12.7	13.2	14.2	19.3	13.8	17.8	22.6	26.8	30.2	29.9	32.2
#2 IOWA ST	-21.7	-4.9		3.0	3.4	5.2	2.5	6.2	7.8	8.3	9.3	14.4	8.9	12.9	17.7	21.9	25.3	25.0	27.3
#3 VIRGINIA	-18.7	-7.9	-3.0		0.4	2.2	-0.5	3.2	4.8	5.3	6.3	11.4	5.9	9.9	14.7	18.9	22.3	22.0	24.3
#4 ALABAMA	-18.3	-8.3	-3.4	-0.4		1.8	-0.9	2.8	4.4	4.9	5.9	11.0	5.5	9.5	14.3	18.5	21.9	21.6	23.9
#5 TEXAS TECH	-16.5	-10.1	-5.2	-2.2	-1.8		-2.7	1.0	2.6	3.1	4.1	9.2	3.7	7.7	12.5	16.7	20.1	19.8	22.1
#6 TENNESSEE	-19.2	-7.4	-2.5	0.5	0.9	2.7		3.7	5.3	5.8	6.8	11.9	6.4	10.4	15.2	19.4	22.8	22.5	24.8
#7 KENTUCKY	-15.5	-11.1	-6.2	-3.2	-2.8	-1.0	-3.7		1.6	2.1	3.1	8.2	2.7	6.7	11.5	15.7	19.1	18.8	21.1
#8 GEORGIA	-13.9	-12.7	-7.8	-4.8	-4.4	-2.6	-5.3	-1.6		0.5	1.5	6.6	1.1	5.1	9.9	14.1	17.5	17.2	19.5
#9 SAINT LOUIS	-13.4	-13.2	-8.3	-5.3	-4.9	-3.1	-5.8	-2.1	-0.5		1.0	6.1	0.6	4.6	9.4	13.6	17.0	16.7	19.0
#10 SANTA CLARA	-12.4	-14.2	-9.3	-6.3	-5.9	-4.1	-6.8	-3.1	-1.5	-1.0		5.1	-0.4	3.6	8.4	12.6	16.0	15.7	18.0
#11 MIAMI OHIO	-7.3	-19.3	-14.4	-11.4	-11.0	-9.2	-11.9	-8.2	-6.6	-6.1	-5.1		-5.5	-1.5	3.3	7.5	10.9	10.6	12.9
#11 SMU	-12.8	-13.8	-8.9	-5.9	-5.5	-3.7	-6.4	-2.7	-1.1	-0.6	0.4	5.5		4.0	8.8	13.0	16.4	16.1	18.4
#12 AKRON	-8.8	-17.8	-12.9	-9.9	-9.5	-7.7	-10.4	-6.7	-5.1	-4.6	-3.6	1.5	-4.0		4.8	9.0	12.4	12.1	14.4
#13 HOFSTRA	-4.0	-22.6	-17.7	-14.7	-14.3	-12.5	-15.2	-11.5	-9.9	-9.4	-8.4	-3.3	-8.8	-4.8		4.2	7.6	7.3	9.6
#14 WRIGHT ST	0.2	-26.8	-21.9	-18.9	-18.5	-16.7	-19.4	-15.7	-14.1	-13.6	-12.6	-7.5	-13.0	-9.0	-4.2		3.4	3.1	5.4
#15 TENNESSEE ST	3.6	-30.2	-25.3	-22.3	-21.9	-20.1	-22.8	-19.1	-17.5	-17.0	-16.0	-10.9	-16.4	-12.4	-7.6	-3.4		-0.3	2.0
#16 HOWARD	3.3	-29.9	-25.0	-22.0	-21.6	-19.8	-22.5	-18.8	-17.2	-16.7	-15.7	-10.6	-16.1	-12.1	-7.3	-3.1	0.3		2.3
#16 UMBC	5.6	-32.2	-27.3	-24.3	-23.9	-22.1	-24.8	-21.1	-19.5	-19.0	-18.0	-12.9	-18.4	-14.4	-9.6	-5.4	-2.0	-2.3	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

The grid above outlines how each team in the region matches up against the other teams in the region, creating a hypothetical betting line should the teams meet in the tournament. The values in the grid display how many points the team on the top would be favored (-), or an underdog (positive number), by when facing the teams listed down the left side of the grid by taking the team on the tops rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #2 seed Iowa State would hypothetically be listed as a 3-point favorite (-3) against #3 seed Virginia, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S MIDWEST REGION

MOMENTUM RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 MICHIGAN	#2 IOWA ST	#3 VIRGINIA	#4 ALABAMA	#5 TEXAS TECH	#6 TENNESSEE	#7 KENTUCKY	#8 GEORGIA	#9 SAINT LOUIS	#10 SANTA CLARA	#11 MIAMI OHIO	#11 SMU	#12 AKRON	#13 HOFSTRA	#14 WRIGHT ST	#15 TENNESSEE ST	#16 HOWARD	#16 UMBC
TEAM/SEED	RATING	22.4	27.4	20.4	18.9	17.6	19.0	15.3	9.6	2.9	18.7	5.9	9.5	10.9	11.7	0.8	9.8	5.2	9.6
#1 MICHIGAN	22.4		-5.0	2.0	3.5	4.8	3.4	7.1	12.8	19.5	3.7	16.5	12.9	11.5	10.7	21.6	12.6	17.2	12.8
#2 IOWA ST	27.4	5.0		7.0	8.5	9.8	8.4	12.1	17.8	24.5	8.7	21.5	17.9	16.5	15.7	26.6	17.6	22.2	17.8
#3 VIRGINIA	20.4	-2.0	-7.0		1.5	2.8	1.4	5.1	10.8	17.5	1.7	14.5	10.9	9.5	8.7	19.6	10.6	15.2	10.8
#4 ALABAMA	18.9	-3.5	-8.5	-1.5		1.3	-0.1	3.6	9.3	16.0	0.2	13.0	9.4	8.0	7.2	18.1	9.1	13.7	9.3
#5 TEXAS TECH	17.6	-4.8	-9.8	-2.8	-1.3		-1.4	2.3	8.0	14.7	-1.1	11.7	8.1	6.7	5.9	16.8	7.8	12.4	8.0
#6 TENNESSEE	19.0	-3.4	-8.4	-1.4	0.1	1.4		3.7	9.4	16.1	0.3	13.1	9.5	8.1	7.3	18.2	9.2	13.8	9.4
#7 KENTUCKY	15.3	-7.1	-12.1	-5.1	-3.6	-2.3	-3.7		5.7	12.4	-3.4	9.4	5.8	4.4	3.6	14.5	5.5	10.1	5.7
#8 GEORGIA	9.6	-12.8	-17.8	-10.8	-9.3	-8.0	-9.4	-5.7		6.7	-9.1	3.7	0.1	-1.3	-2.1	8.8	-0.2	4.4	0.0
#9 SAINT LOUIS	2.9	-19.5	-24.5	-17.5	-16.0	-14.7	-16.1	-12.4	-6.7		-15.8	-3.0	-6.6	-8.0	-8.8	2.1	-6.9	-2.3	-6.7
#10 SANTA CLARA	18.7	-3.7	-8.7	-1.7	-0.2	1.1	-0.3	3.4	9.1	15.8		12.8	9.2	7.8	7.0	17.9	8.9	13.5	9.1
#11 MIAMI OHIO	5.9	-16.5	-21.5	-14.5	-13.0	-11.7	-13.1	-9.4	-3.7	3.0	-12.8		-3.6	-5.0	-5.8	5.1	-3.9	0.7	-3.7
#11 SMU	9.5	-12.9	-17.9	-10.9	-9.4	-8.1	-9.5	-5.8	-0.1	6.6	-9.2	3.6		-1.4	-2.2	8.7	-0.3	4.3	-0.1
#12 AKRON	10.9	-11.5	-16.5	-9.5	-8.0	-6.7	-8.1	-4.4	1.3	8.0	-7.8	5.0	1.4		-0.8	10.1	1.1	5.7	1.3
#13 HOFSTRA	11.7	-10.7	-15.7	-8.7	-7.2	-5.9	-7.3	-3.6	2.1	8.8	-7.0	5.8	2.2	0.8		10.9	1.9	6.5	2.1
#14 WRIGHT ST	0.8	-21.6	-26.6	-19.6	-18.1	-16.8	-18.2	-14.5	-8.8	-2.1	-17.9	-5.1	-8.7	-10.1	-10.9		-9.0	-4.4	-8.8
#15 TENNESSEE ST	9.8	-12.6	-17.6	-10.6	-9.1	-7.8	-9.2	-5.5	0.2	6.9	-8.9	3.9	0.3	-1.1	-1.9	9.0		4.6	0.2
#16 HOWARD	5.2	-17.2	-22.2	-15.2	-13.7	-12.4	-13.8	-10.1	-4.4	2.3	-13.5	-0.7	-4.3	-5.7	-6.5	4.4	-4.6		-4.4
#16 UMBC	9.6	-12.8	-17.8	-10.8	-9.3	-8.0	-9.4	-5.7	0.0	6.7	-9.1	3.7	0.1	-1.3	-2.1	8.8	-0.2	4.4	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

The grid above outlines how each team in the region matches up against the other teams in the region, creating a hypothetical betting line should the teams meet in the tournament. The values in the grid display how many points the team on the top would be favored (-), or an underdog (positive number), by when facing the teams listed down the left side of the grid by taking the team on the top rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #1 seed Michigan would hypothetically be listed as a 2-point favorite (-2) against #3 seed Virginia, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S MIDWEST REGION

GAME GRADE FORECAST GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 MICHIGAN	#2 IOWA ST	#3 VIRGINIA	#4 ALABAMA	#5 TEXAS TECH	#6 TENNESSEE	#7 KENTUCKY	#8 GEORGIA	#9 SAINT LOUIS	#10 SANTA CLARA	#11 MIAMI OHIO	#11 SMU	#12 AKRON	#13 HOFSTRA	#14 WRIGHT ST	#15 TENNESSEE ST	#16 HOWARD	#16 UMBC
TEAM/SEED	RATING	23.8	22.5	18.8	15.4	12.9	10.9	13.2	16.5	10.9	11.4	18.7	11	17.5	6.9	9	3.1	-1.2	-6.9
#1 MICHIGAN	23.8		1.3	5	8.4	10.9	12.9	10.6	7.3	12.9	12.4	5.1	12.8	6.3	16.9	14.8	20.7	25	30.7
#2 IOWA ST	22.5	-1.3		3.7	7.1	9.6	11.6	9.3	6	11.6	11.1	3.8	11.5	5	15.6	13.5	19.4	23.7	29.4
#3 VIRGINIA	18.8	-5	-3.7		3.4	5.9	7.9	5.6	2.3	7.9	7.4	0.1	7.8	1.3	11.9	9.8	15.7	20	25.7
#4 ALABAMA	15.4	-8.4	-7.1	-3.4		2.5	4.5	2.2	-1.1	4.5	4	-3.3	4.4	-2.1	8.5	6.4	12.3	16.6	22.3
#5 TEXAS TECH	12.9	-10.9	-9.6	-5.9	-2.5		2	-0.3	-3.6	2	1.5	-5.8	1.9	-4.6	6	3.9	9.8	14.1	19.8
#6 TENNESSEE	10.9	-12.9	-11.6	-7.9	-4.5	-2		-2.3	-5.6	0	-0.5	-7.8	-0.1	-6.6	4	1.9	7.8	12.1	17.8
#7 KENTUCKY	13.2	-10.6	-9.3	-5.6	-2.2	0.3	2.3		-3.3	2.3	1.8	-5.5	2.2	-4.3	6.3	4.2	10.1	14.4	20.1
#8 GEORGIA	16.5	-7.3	-6	-2.3	1.1	3.6	5.6	3.3		5.6	5.1	-2.2	5.5	-1	9.6	7.5	13.4	17.7	23.4
#9 SAINT LOUIS	10.9	-12.9	-11.6	-7.9	-4.5	-2	0	-2.3	-5.6		-0.5	-7.8	-0.1	-6.6	4	1.9	7.8	12.1	17.8
#10 SANTA CLARA	11.4	-12.4	-11.1	-7.4	-4	-1.5	0.5	-1.8	-5.1	0.5		-7.3	0.4	-6.1	4.5	2.4	8.3	12.6	18.3
#11 MIAMI OHIO	18.7	-5.1	-3.8	-0.1	3.3	5.8	7.8	5.5	2.2	7.8	7.3		7.7	1.2	11.8	9.7	15.6	19.9	25.6
#11 SMU	11	-12.8	-11.5	-7.8	-4.4	-1.9	0.1	-2.2	-5.5	0.1	-0.4	-7.7		-6.5	4.1	2	7.9	12.2	17.9
#12 AKRON	17.5	-6.3	-5	-1.3	2.1	4.6	6.6	4.3	1	6.6	6.1	-1.2	6.5		10.6	8.5	14.4	18.7	24.4
#13 HOFSTRA	6.9	-16.9	-15.6	-11.9	-8.5	-6	-4	-6.3	-9.6	-4	-4.5	-11.8	-4.1	-10.6		-2.1	3.8	8.1	13.8
#14 WRIGHT ST	9	-14.8	-13.5	-9.8	-6.4	-3.9	-1.9	-4.2	-7.5	-1.9	-2.4	-9.7	-2	-8.5	2.1		5.9	10.2	15.9
#15 TENNESSEE ST	3.1	-20.7	-19.4	-15.7	-12.3	-9.8	-7.8	-10.1	-13.4	-7.8	-8.3	-15.6	-7.9	-14.4	-3.8	-5.9		4.3	10
#16 HOWARD	-1.2	-25	-23.7	-20	-16.6	-14.1	-12.1	-14.4	-17.7	-12.1	-12.6	-19.9	-12.2	-18.7	-8.1	-10.2	-4.3		5.7
#16 UMBC	-6.9	-30.7	-29.4	-25.7	-22.3	-19.8	-17.8	-20.1	-23.4	-17.8	-18.3	-25.6	-17.9	-24.4	-13.8	-15.9	-10	-5.7	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

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MICHIGAN

WOLVERINES

HEAD COACH
Dusty May

CONFERENCE
Big Ten

2025-26 RECORD
31-3 SU, 15-19 ATS, 13-21 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#1 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
97.8 (1)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
28.7 (1)

BETTOR RATING
-26.6 (1)

MOMENTUM RATING
21.2 (10)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
22.4 (7)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
87.3 (6)

DEFENSIVE PPG
68.9 (48)

POSSESSIONS
69.3 (18)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.319 (6)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.911 (2)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.507 (6)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.38 (1)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.362 (47)

FREE THROW %
0.746 (99)

REBOUNDING %
0.563 (8)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.533 (37)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.146 (191)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.137 (236)

The keys to winning in the NCAA Tournament are the same as they have always been. You need good guard play, wings that can shoot and also create, and a big to defend the middle and clean the glass. Michigan has all of those things, with Elliot Cadeau running the point, Yaxel Lendeborg and Morez Johnson Jr. as guys that can play inside or outside, and Aday Mara, who shot 80% at the rim with one of the highest block rates in the power conferences.

We could heap plenty of praise on Michigan's offense, and will do so, but this defense has been one of the stars of the show all season long. The Wolverines have consistently been in the top five in adjusted defensive efficiency, even with a low TO%, due in large part to a Big Ten Conference that doesn't play a lot of pressure defense. The Wolverines have been at or near the top in eFG% defense from start to finish and have been a top-10 team in 2P% and 3P% defense. That's no small feat with a Big Ten Conference that ranks second nationally in 2P% offense and in the top-10 in 3P%.

In other words, the Wolverines have shined on defense with arguably the nation's toughest non-conference schedule and in one of the most efficient offensive conferences of them all. We knew how good Michigan would be when they went to Las Vegas for the Players Era Festival during Thanksgiving Week and beat San Diego State by 40, Auburn by 30, and Gonzaga by 40 over a three-day span. Of course, we may have also had questions raised on Feb. 21 when Michigan shot 40% from the floor and 24% from 3 in a five-point loss to Duke.

Results in matchups featuring two elite teams are subject to variance since it usually comes down to execution over a small handful of possessions. In the case of that game, Duke had five more offensive rebounds and more shot attempts at the rim. The Big Ten has a few teams that excel at second-chance opportunities, but most of the conference sat outside the top 100 in ORB%. That will be something to follow as this title contender gets deeper into the tournament. The supporting cast doesn't have a ton of size and the 7-foot-3 Mara only plays about 56% of the available minutes.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

-900

REACH
FINAL 4

-130

REACH
ELITE 8

-380

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

+360

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
96.3%

SWEET 16
78.3%

ELITE 8
58.0%

FINAL FOUR
36.3%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



IOWA STATE

CYCLONES

HEAD COACH
TJ Otzelberger

CONFERENCE
Big 12

2025-26 RECORD
27-7 SU, 20-14 ATS, 14-20 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#2 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
92.3 (7)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
24 (6)

BETTOR RATING
-21.7 (7)

MOMENTUM RATING
25.6 (4)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
27.4 (3)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
81.8 (36)

DEFENSIVE PPG
65.1 (9)

POSSESSIONS
64.8 (224)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.306 (9)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.939 (7)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.49 (22)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.426 (74)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.387 (12)

FREE THROW %
0.672 (340)

REBOUNDING %
0.535 (28)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.679 (16)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.129 (55)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.197 (4)

It's not quite the pattern for the 2010s San Francisco Giants, who won the World Series in 2010, 2012, and 2014, but even-numbered years have been better for T.J. Otzelberger than the odd-numbered ones. The Cyclones have Sweet 16 appearances in 2022 and 2024 on his watch, but also have first-weekend exits in 2023 and 2025, with last year's coming in the second round as a No. 3 seed.

On paper, this is the best offense that Otzelberger has had, but this team, while very good on defense, would be the weakest unit he's taken into the NCAA Tournament. Iowa State's claim to fame on defense is taking the ball away. When they don't, they've had some difficulties, especially in marquee games. The Cyclones only went 6-6 in Quadrant 1 games during the regular season and 3-5 in Quadrant 1-A games. They were just seventh in eFG% defense during the regular season portion of Big 12 play. But, they did hit a lot of shots and maximized the extra possessions gained by a 20.1% TO% on defense during league action.

Tamin Lipsey is the type of experienced guard you want in the NCAA Tournament, but scoring is done by committee here, with Milan Momcilovic's 50% 3P% carrying a lot of weight for the team's overall performance from beyond the arc. Not surprisingly, Iowa State was a bottom-40 team in Haslametrics' Away From Home rating, as were a lot of Big 12 teams, until the Big 12 Tournament. The Cyclones shot 40.3% from 3 at Hilton Coliseum. Without the Hilton magic, they shot about 36% in road/neutral settings. That's still very good and well above the national average, but it becomes noticeable against quality competition.

From an ATS standpoint, be careful with the Cyclones as their tourney tenure rolls along. This is one of the worst free throw shooting teams among the major conferences, as they sat in the bottom 50 overall virtually all season, making around 68% of their charity shots. Otzelberger's first three teams also sat around a 25% TO%, while this year's team excelled at around 22%. That was good to be in the top five most of the season, but furthers the similarities with last year's team that had an early exit.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

-400

**REACH
FINAL 4**

+245

**REACH
ELITE 8**

-130

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

15-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
94.5%

SWEET 16
70.0%

ELITE 8
47.0%

FINAL FOUR
26.8%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



VIRGINIA

CAVALIERS

HEAD COACH
Ryan Odom

CONFERENCE
ACC

2025-26 RECORD
29-5 SU, 18-16 ATS, 15-19 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#3 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
88.5 (17)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
18.9 (18)

BETTOR RATING
-18.7 (14)

MOMENTUM RATING
20.2 (12)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
20.4 (12)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
80.6 (55)

DEFENSIVE PPG
68.4 (41)

POSSESSIONS
63.7 (296)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.283 (21)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.986 (15)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.463 (88)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.395 (10)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.359 (63)

FREE THROW %
0.726 (180)

REBOUNDING %
0.551 (14)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.53 (38)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.133 (94)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.134 (259)

These are not Tony Bennett's Cavaliers anymore. After a throwaway season with former Bennett assistant Ron Sanchez at the helm, Virginia is back in the NCAA Tournament with rising sideline star Ryan Odom, who made history back in 2018 with UMBC as the first No. 16 seed to beat a No. 1 seed. And, of course, as we know, it was Virginia. Things have a way of coming full circle and that's what has happened here.

Odom's first season in Charlottesville went better than his first seasons in Logan and Richmond during previous stops at Utah State and VCU, where his teams fell short of the Big Dance in Year 1, but got fitted for boogie shoes in Year 2. This Cavaliers crew has been good from the jump and this is a very dangerous team in the field. Much like the Bennett years, Virginia is feisty on defense. Unlike the Bennett years, this team is a force on the offensive glass and doesn't play at one of the slowest tempos in the nation.

Virginia does still play below the national average, but more like the 260s in tempo instead of the 350s or 360s. A subpar non-conference schedule may have kept the Cavaliers from being on a higher seed line, but they performed well when tasked with stepping up in class, especially in conference play. The pack line defense is no more, but UVA still did a tremendous job challenging shots, especially at the rim, where they were among the nation's best at blocking attempts.

Being defensively sound is a hallmark of Virginia basketball, but the same question lingers from the past. Can Virginia score enough? While the full-season offensive numbers look pretty good on the surface, this is a Cavaliers team that shot just 33.2% from 3 in ACC play, finishing the regular season 16th out of 18 teams. They were 16th in TO% on offense and 10th in eFG%. This is a team that had a lot of excellent offensive performances against a weak non-conference schedule, shooting over 39% from 3 with a top-15 adjusted offensive efficiency.

As a team that took a 3-pointer nearly 37% of the time for the season, falling on the right side of variance from beyond the arc could lead to a very deep run with this caliber of defense on the other end of the floor.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

-125

REACH
FINAL 4

11-1

REACH
ELITE 8

+310

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

75-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
91.0%

SWEET 16
53.2%

ELITE 8
23.2%

FINAL FOUR
10.1%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



ALABAMA

CRIMSON TIDE

HEAD COACH
Nate Oats

CONFERENCE
SEC

2025-26 RECORD
23-9 SU, 14-18 ATS, 18-14 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#4 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
89.6 (11)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
20.3 (12)

BETTOR RATING
-18.3 (15)

MOMENTUM RATING
18 (23)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
18.9 (19)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
91.7 (1)

DEFENSIVE PPG
83.5 (352)

POSSESSIONS
70.1 (8)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.326 (4)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.047 (49)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.458 (113)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.434 (99)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.358 (72)

FREE THROW %
0.765 (42)

REBOUNDING %
0.504 (153)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.649 (21)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.112 (6)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.107 (363)



With four Sweet 16 appearances in five seasons, not to mention a trip to the Elite Eight and a trip to the Final Four, Alabama has had a lot of NCAA Tournament success under Nate Oats. But, they haven't gotten to the pinnacle yet and that is the hope for this year. This Alabama team is better in some ways and worse in others compared to the previous few seasons, but there is always one constant - the Crimson Tide will shoot from just about anywhere.

Shot volume, more specifically, 3-point volume, is a big part of the strategy for Alabama. This is a team that took a 3 nearly 20% more often than opponents. Furthermore, the Crimson Tide played at one of the fastest tempos in the country. The goal is to score in 3s instead of 2s, but they were pretty good at scoring inside the arc as well, shooting nearly 58%. It's about shooting and making 3s, though. This year's team has shot better than last season's Elite Eight team, but worse than the Final Four team from two seasons ago.

There is a misconception about Alabama that they are bad defensively because a lot of their games end up very high-scoring. Sure, the Tide could force more turnovers, as they were among the five worst teams in that department, but held opponents under 50% from an eFG% standpoint and from a 2P% standpoint. While they were closer to the national average in 3P% defense, the low rate of 3s attempted by opponents definitely helped. Along with the low TO%, the only other major blemish on defense came in the rebounding department, a big reason why Oats and the school tried to push Charles Bediako's eligibility through.

The 7-footer played five games before the school was notified that he was ineligible. This isn't a team that lacks size, per se, but they're looking to get out in transition and push the pace and sometimes that leaves a few details unchecked. Also, three of the top 15 offensive rebounding teams reside in the SEC, so that can put a dent in those numbers. Perhaps that's something Alabama won't really have to contend with in this field.

Alabama definitely checked the "guard play" box for a deep tourney run with Labaron Philon and Aden Holloway (16.8 PPG) before Holloway was removed from campus after a drug-related arrest and that hurts the Crimson Tide's hopes a lot.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

+105

**REACH
FINAL 4**

22-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

+750

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

180-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
78.2%

SWEET 16
49.0%

ELITE 8
19.1%

FINAL FOUR
8.6%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

TEXAS TECH

RED RAIDERS

HEAD COACH
Grant McCasland

CONFERENCE
Big 12

2025-26 RECORD
22-10 SU, 16-16 ATS, 14-18 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#5 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85.1 (30)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
18.2 (20)

BETTOR RATING
-16.5 (20)

MOMENTUM RATING
15.4 (30)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
17.6 (24)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
80.4 (60)

DEFENSIVE PPG
72.6 (122)

POSSESSIONS
64.4 (252)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.296 (13)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.01 (26)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.467 (69)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.439 (126)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.393 (5)

FREE THROW %
0.715 (226)

REBOUNDING %
0.52 (80)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.465 (53)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.136 (113)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.127 (311)



Unfortunately for Texas Tech, the full body of work doesn't carry much weight these days because you need to separate the season into BJT and AJT - before and after JT Toppin. The torn ACL suffered by Toppin knocked him out for the final five regular season games and the Red Raiders went 3-2 in that span, but did have an impressive road win at Iowa State in the mix. The truth is, you don't just replace a JT Toppin. He was right around the top 10 nationally in PPG with 21.8 and in the top 10 in RPG with 10.8. You can't just replace a double-double machine like that.

In place of Toppin, Luke Bamgboye had a couple of double-digit scoring efforts in wins and Josiah Moseley got some more playing time. But, overall, the pressure to score simply fell on standouts Christian Anderson and Donovan Atwell, who are both among the nation's best 3-point shooters based on percentage and volume. Over those final five regular season games, Texas Tech's 3P Rate was 53.6%, a decent-sized bump from their 47.9% 3P Rate for the regular season as a whole.

From a pace standpoint, McCasland slowed things down even more. You almost always see a pace change when a big goes down, but the team usually ends up playing faster because the lineup is smaller and more dependent on guards. With the Red Raiders, though, McCasland opted to limit the variance of the game by further limiting possessions without arguably his best all-around player. In that respect, despite the heightened volume of 3s, the Red Raiders might be good Under bets in this tournament. Toppin's offensive rebounding will be missed, especially with the rate of 3s taken by the team.

In four of the five regular season games without Toppin, the Red Raiders allowed at least 1.131 points per possession. It's tough to evaluate the conference tournament body of work because Texas Tech was already safely in the NCAA Tournament and McCasland's goal was probably just to not lose anybody else of consequence, as his heart skipped a few beats when Anderson went down with a minor injury.

Toppin's injury is certainly a bummer, as we saw Texas Tech's ceiling with him back on Dec. 20 when the Red Raiders beat Duke on a neutral floor. This is still a very good, very talented, well-coached team, but the ceiling is not what it once was.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

+105

REACH
FINAL 4

17-1

REACH
ELITE 8

+600

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

130-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
67.2%

SWEET 16
33.0%

ELITE 8
10.8%

FINAL FOUR
4.1%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

TENNESSEE

VOLUNTEERS

HEAD COACH
Rick Barnes

CONFERENCE
SEC

2025-26 RECORD
22-11 SU, 14-19 ATS, 16-17 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#6 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
87.8 (20)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
19.3 (15)

BETTOR RATING
-19.2 (11)

MOMENTUM RATING
17.7 (25)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
19 (18)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
79.5 (77)

DEFENSIVE PPG
69.4 (52)

POSSESSIONS
62.8 (330)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.263 (34)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.956 (9)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.463 (89)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.409 (24)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.334 (202)

FREE THROW %
0.694 (289)

REBOUNDING %
0.588 (2)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.449 (57)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.138 (136)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.142 (192)



Perhaps back-to-back Elite Eight appearances are a sign that Rick Barnes is on the verge of playing some NCAA Tournament demons. The 71-year-old Barnes is 33-28 lifetime in the NCAA Tournament and only has one Final Four appearance to show for a head coaching career that started back in 1987 and includes 18 seasons with Texas, including some very, very good Longhorns teams.

This is actually one of the lesser Tennessee teams in his tenure, as the Volunteers are among the nation's leaders in ORB%, but that's the only area where they are elite. With a losing record against Quadrant 1 opponents, it's fair to wonder how deep into the tournament we'll hear "Rocky Top", as the signature early-season win against Houston feels like a lifetime ago. That's not to say that Tennessee is a bad team and they've been a top-15 team for both KenPom and Bart Torvik for a good chunk of the season.

But, it is to say that they may be propped up a bit by association. We can certainly say that the Vols are a solid defensive team, as they posted top-50 marks in eFG%, ORB% against, and 3P%, but they didn't force a lot of turnovers. Tennessee also has a massive differential in 3P Rate, as the offense only takes a 3-pointer about 32% of the time and opponents are firing from beyond the arc over 44% of the time.

Given that the Vols don't shine shooting the basketball, coming into the tourney in the 140s in eFG% and 2P%, the pressure on the defense is immense. Big man Nate Ament was sidelined at the end of the regular season with a sprained ankle and his 6-foot-10 presence with a clean-ish bill of health would be huge in the Big Dance.

All in all, the Vols are talented, but not much stands out in their statistical profile to support a deep tournament run and the lack of signature wins and a lackluster end to the regular season pushed their seed line lower, creating a much tougher path.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

+130

REACH
FINAL 4

13-1

REACH
ELITE 8

+400

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

120-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
69.9%

SWEET 16
35.5%

ELITE 8
14.8%

FINAL FOUR
6.1%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

KENTUCKY

WILDCATS

HEAD COACH
Mark Pope

CONFERENCE
SEC

2025-26 RECORD
21-13 SU, 17-17 ATS, 17-17 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#7 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
86 (23)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
16.6 (24)

BETTOR RATING
-15.5 (23)

MOMENTUM RATING
16.3 (28)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
15.3 (29)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
80.8 (54)

DEFENSIVE PPG
73.8 (152)

POSSESSIONS
65.7 (167)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.249 (42)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.009 (25)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.464 (83)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.425 (68)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.341 (167)

FREE THROW %
0.728 (177)

REBOUNDING %
0.521 (75)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.524 (41)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.128 (54)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.137 (237)

Historically speaking, the bar for success in Lexington is very high. That's why it's so crazy to think about how last year's Sweet 16 appearance was the first for the Wildcats since making the Elite Eight back in 2019. Before John Calipari's change of scenery down the road in Fayetteville, the 'Cats were clipped in the first round twice, once as a No. 2 seed and the other time as a No. 3 seed, and lost in the second round as a No. 6 seed. For Mark Pope to take them to the Sweet 16 as a No. 3 seed last year was actually a success in a relative sense.

If you have no idea what the 2026 NCAA Tournament holds, you are not alone. Kentucky was the only team to win a game at Arkansas during the regular season, which was one of the more impressive wins during SEC play. On the other hand, Kentucky didn't have many of those signature wins in conference play or otherwise during the season. They played a ton of Quadrant 1 and Quadrant 1-A games, so they've certainly been challenged, but haven't won enough of those challenges to feel confident in their tournament forecast.

As a top-40 team in adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency, the surface-level analysis suggests that Kentucky was pretty good. In some areas, they were. This was a better defensive team than offensive team, as challenging shots in the SEC is a challenge and they were fourth in 2P% defense. They were 10th in 3P% defense, but 34.5% isn't that bad and they actually had a positive 3P% differential. But, details matter and the Wildcats were 12th in TO% on both offense and defense and finished 11th in 2P% and 13th in FT%.

This is a much poorer offensive team than last year's Sweet 16 squad. However, this is a better defensive team. Last year's team ranked 295th in 2P%. This one was substantially better in that department and that is a reason to look at the bourbon glass as being half-full. Athleticism is never a question for the Wildcats and the primary players for Pope in conference play all graded well overall. There are enough good wins to feel optimistic about a run, but also enough losses to comparable or better opponents to wonder if the 'Cats get past the second round.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

+550

**REACH
FINAL 4**

45-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

13-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

200-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
53.0%

SWEET 16
16.3%

ELITE 8
7.1%

FINAL FOUR
2.4%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



GEORGIA

BULLDOGS

HEAD COACH
Mike White

CONFERENCE
SEC

2025-26 RECORD
22-10 SU, 16-16 ATS, 17-15 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#8 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85.7 (24)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
17.2 (22)

BETTOR RATING
-13.9 (32)

MOMENTUM RATING
18.4 (22)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
9.6 (61)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
89.8 (3)

DEFENSIVE PPG
79.2 (302)

POSSESSIONS
69.4 (17)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.284 (20)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.036 (38)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.471 (50)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.438 (118)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.341 (170)

FREE THROW %
0.754 (67)

REBOUNDING %
0.505 (151)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.396 (75)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.122 (24)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.156 (96)

Last year was about making it to the NCAA Tournament. This year is about trying to do something with it. Georgia made the Big Dance for the first time since 2015 and just the second time since 2011 to partake in the festivities. But, their stay was short-lived, as the Bulldogs drew an egregiously under-seeded Bulldogs team in the 9 vs. 8 matchup and lost by 21 points to Gonzaga.

For a team that finished 8-10 in SEC play during the regular season and failed to win a game in Nashville, maybe it was fate to draw such an awful first-round opponent. This year's Georgia team has already done a couple games better, finishing with a winning record in conference play for the first time since 2016. This year's group is playing much faster and is a lot better on offense, including a huge decrease in turnovers, but last year's version was better defensively. So, there's been some give and take.

We weren't really sure coming into the season what the offense would look like without 6-foot-11 Asa Newell, who went to the NBA, and 6-foot-5 Silas Demary Jr., who transferred to UConn. As it turns out, things have gone just fine. White's portal haul plus the evolution of some in-house talent deepened the roster and created more offensive flexibility, as the Bulldogs had way more shot attempts at the rim this season, even without Newell and his high Usage Rate. UGA also barely missed a beat on the offensive glass, improved at the free throw line, and made a much higher percentage of 2s and 3s.

Defensively, there's no question that the 2025-26 version is worse, but the numbers are not terrible in most cases. Georgia did struggle badly on the defensive glass, likely a byproduct of wanting to get out and run some more. Despite a higher rate of turnovers, the team struggled to stay in the top 100 in adjusted defensive efficiency. Furthermore, Georgia finished the regular season 13th in 2P% and 11th in 3P% defense in the conference, along with 14th in eFG% defense.

The defense will get a respite not facing a gauntlet of SEC teams and that could elevate the offense as well. Once again, though, despite late-season wins at Kentucky and at home against Alabama, the seed line appears to cap Georgia's ceiling come tournament time.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

+900

REACH
FINAL 4

65-1

REACH
ELITE 8

20-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

500-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
63.1%

SWEET 16
15.3%

ELITE 8
7.0%

FINAL FOUR
2.4%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



SAINT LOUIS

BILLIKENS

HEAD COACH
Josh Schertz

CONFERENCE
Atlantic 10

2025-26 RECORD
28-5 SU, 19-13 ATS, 15-17 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#9 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
84.3 (36)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
15.9 (29)

BETTOR RATING
-13.4 (37)

MOMENTUM RATING
4.8 (112)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
2.9 (137)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
86.4 (11)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.7 (73)

POSSESSIONS
69.3 (20)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.263 (33)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.034 (36)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.506 (7)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.385 (2)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.405 (2)

FREE THROW %
0.744 (104)

REBOUNDING %
0.545 (19)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.444 (58)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.153 (247)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.14 (209)



We were robbed in 2024. Robbie Avila, better known as “Cream Abdul-Jabbar” and “Larry Nerd” could have been an instant global superstar in the NCAA Tournament. Unfortunately, the nation’s best offensive team lost in the MVC Tournament final to Drake and we can’t even agree on whether or not a team that started 31-0 should be in the NCAA Tournament, let alone a 28-6 MVC runner-up with only one Quadrant 1 win. Indiana State had no hope of dancing, despite their marketability and a very impressive resume for a mid-major.

But, that wrong will be righted this season, as Avila followed head coach Josh Schertz to Saint Louis and the Billikens are back in the tourney for the first time since 2019. The goggle-wearing 6-foot-10 forward cut right out of a VHS tape on basketball fundamentals doesn’t just have great nicknames and a meme-worthy presence. Dude can ball and he’s a 62% shooter on 2s and a 42% shooter on 3s for a Billikens bunch that has been at or near the top nationally in eFG% and 3P%, plus a consistent top-20 team shooting 2s.

Late in the season, SLU did falter a bit, but the full body of work is so statistically impressive that their place in the Field of 68 was never really in doubt. This is a team that spent most of the season in the top 10 in 2P% and 3P% defense, as well as eFG%. A win over Santa Clara and two wins over VCU are the signatures from a schedule standpoint. Weak schedule or not, the efficiency displayed by this team on both ends of the floor deserved a spot in this tournament.

You’d certainly like to see some better current form from the Billikens. They were 3-3 over their final six regular season games and needed a furious comeback against George Washington in a game they trailed by 21 in the conference tournament to advance to the semifinals, where they lost to Dayton. Fatigue could’ve definitely been a factor late in the year for the westernmost member of the Atlantic-10 Conference, not that it gets any easier stepping up in class in the Big Dance.

Whether or not the Billikens have the goods to win their first game and pull off the unlikely upset of a No. 1 seed over the weekend, basketball fans and bettors will get to watch poetry in motion when they’re on the floor.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

15-1

**REACH
FINAL 4**

170-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

45-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

400-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
36.9%

SWEET 16
5.8%

ELITE 8
1.9%

FINAL FOUR
0.4%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

SANTA CLARA

BRONCOS

HEAD COACH
Herb Sendek

CONFERENCE
West Coast

2025-26 RECORD
26-8 SU, 18-15 ATS, 19-14 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#10 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85 (31)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
14.7 (35)

BETTOR RATING
-12.4 (42)

MOMENTUM RATING
13.7 (35)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
18.7 (22)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
82.8 (29)

DEFENSIVE PPG
73 (134)

POSSESSIONS
67.2 (78)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.281 (23)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.071 (74)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.468 (67)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.455 (228)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.349 (130)

FREE THROW %
0.74 (139)

REBOUNDING %
0.516 (101)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.526 (39)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.132 (79)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.174 (22)



Life as a mid-major can be really tough, especially in the West Coast Conference, where Gonzaga and Saint Mary's rarely give anybody else an opportunity at making the NCAA Tournament. But, that is not the case this season, as the WCC is a three-bid league for the first time since 2022 and just the second time since 2012 when BYU was still a member of the conference. And let's be honest, it's way more fun to see a team like Santa Clara get a shot than some major-conference team that went 19-14 with an 8-10 conference record.

While the Broncos went 0-for-3 against Gonzaga and lost two of those games by double digits, they did go 2-1 against Saint Mary's and may have beaten them when it mattered most in the WCC Tournament to slide into a more comfortable position among bracketologists and in the NET Rating. The Broncos are an example of why winning by margin matters. Of their 26 wins during the regular season plus conference tournament, only three were by six or fewer points.

Blowouts, especially against some decent teams like what the WCC had this season, strengthen the metrics and the statistical profile. Thanks to a 20.1% TO%, Santa Clara was able to crack the top 80 in adjusted defensive efficiency, plus their strength of schedule wound up being pretty good when all was said and done. It didn't really matter that the Broncos were just 2-6 in Quadrant 1 games because they hammered lesser teams regularly by having more possessions and then maximizing them.

Herb Sendek's squad enters the field as a borderline top-15 team in adjusted offensive efficiency between the schedule, a low TO%, a top-20 ORB%, and a lot of made shots. The Broncos were a top-50 team throughout the season in 2P% and shot above the national average from 3. Those things helped with some mediocre defensive numbers, including an eFG% defense that ranked outside the top 200.

They weren't a conference champion. They didn't have any signature wins beyond the two over Saint Mary's. They don't really have a traditional point guard, as the team leader, Sash Gavalyugov, only had 2.6 assists per game. But, they are still one of the more intriguing mid-majors in the field.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

+800

REACH
FINAL 4

75-1

REACH
ELITE 8

19-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

500-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
47.0%

SWEET 16
12.8%

ELITE 8
5.2%

FINAL FOUR
1.6%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

MIAMI (OH)

REDHAWKS

HEAD COACH
Travis Steele

CONFERENCE
Mid-American

2025-26 RECORD
31-1 SU, 19-10 ATS, 19-10 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#11 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
77.7 (83)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
8.1 (76)

BETTOR RATING
-7.3 (85)

MOMENTUM RATING
5 (110)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
5.9 (100)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
87.2 (7)

DEFENSIVE PPG
76.3 (226)

POSSESSIONS
67.5 (64)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.217 (60)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.115 (142)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.508 (5)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.448 (186)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.375 (21)

FREE THROW %
0.75 (82)

REBOUNDING %
0.502 (171)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.451 (55)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.13 (68)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.153 (121)

In the case of Miami of Ohio, it is a big win for the “games should matter” crowd. We all know what’s been said about the RedHawks as their NCAA Tournament hopes hung in the balance. The strength of schedule is downright laughable. They’re the first team to not even have a Quadrant 1 data point on their resume. They didn’t even win their conference tournament. They had 10 wins by six or fewer points against said terrible schedule. And, as luck would have it, well, as bad luck would have it, their only loss of the season to this point came in a close game and knocked them out of the MAC Tournament.

But, there is something to be said about starting 31-0. And some social media posts did circulate about teams that Miami tried to schedule in the non-conference portion of the season that said no. Nobody really noticed or talked about, but this was a 25-win team last season that went 14-4 in conference play, ranked in the top 15 in 3P%, and top 30 in eFG%. From an upside standpoint, there isn’t a whole lot for a fellow mid-major or a mid-tier power-conference team to schedule the RedHawks.

Truth be told, a fair compromise seems to have taken place. Miami will head 55 minutes up the road to Dayton to play in front of a very pro-RedHawks crowd. Nothing wrong with that and if you want to be in the Field of 64, you can go out there and earn it by beating a legitimate, major-conference team.

This is a very gifted offense and a team that managed to go 31-1 without Evan Ipsaro, who was averaging 13.9 PPG when he went down after just 12 games. They can really rip the nets, finishing the regular season second in the nation in 2P% and just barely outside the top 20 in 3P% while only turning the ball over 14.5% of the time. With those efficiency numbers and that level of concern for taking care of the basketball, you’re going to score a lot of points.

At the same time, this was a pretty average defense according to most of their rankings and pairing that with the team’s strength of schedule is why they were not a lock to make the Big Dance. At least they get a chance to prove they belong.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

100-1

REACH
FINAL 4

700-1

REACH
ELITE 8

200-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

1500-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
10.7%

SWEET 16
3.6%

ELITE 8
0.9%

FINAL FOUR
0.2%

**based on average of Steve Makinen’s five ratings.*



SMU

MUSTANGS

HEAD COACH
Andy Enfield

CONFERENCE
ACC

2025-26 RECORD
20-13 SU, 15-18 ATS, 19-14 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#11 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
83.3 (43)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
13.9 (38)

BETTOR RATING
-12.8 (38)

MOMENTUM RATING
9 (67)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
9.5 (64)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
84.2 (22)

DEFENSIVE PPG
77.6 (256)

POSSESSIONS
66.8 (106)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.276 (28)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.07 (73)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.49 (20)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.434 (102)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.374 (23)

FREE THROW %
0.741 (122)

REBOUNDING %
0.525 (59)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.499 (46)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.135 (110)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.148 (154)

As the Selection Show went along, it was noted that VCU would not have been in had they not won the A-10 Tournament, but SMU, a team that had a losing record in conference play and lost five of their final six games, including losses to three non-tournament teams, was heading to Dayton no matter what.

Perhaps it's a matter of entertainment value. SMU was third in the ACC during conference play in adjusted offensive efficiency and shot better than 40% from 3. In eFG%, the Mustangs were second, shooting 53.7% on 2s, which ranked eighth. And defensively, they were an abject disaster. SMU was 16th out of 18 in adjusted defensive efficiency and eFG% defense, not to mention 17th in 3P% defense.

It should come as no surprise with those numbers that SMU was 0-6 in Quadrant 1-A games. You can't be that poor on one end of the floor and have success against the nation's elites in some tough environments. Furthermore, SMU was just 4-9 overall in Quadrant 1 games and 5-4 in Quadrant 2 games. After a 12-2 start, the Mustangs finished 21-13, so maybe it's more about how you start and less about how you finish in the eyes of the Selection Committee.

As much as I've downplayed SMU and, frankly, questioned their spot in the field, shooting better than 37% from 3 overall and more than 40% in a good conference does make them dangerous in just about any context. There are a lot of different keys from a personnel standpoint in the NCAA Tournament and SMU has the guard play to produce results, plus a 7-foot-2 big in the middle and some 6-foot-6 wings that can play inside or outside.

Do the Mustangs have enough defense? Also, can they withstand what will be a wildly pro-Miami crowd in Dayton, just an hour to the northeast of Miami's campus in Oxford? And, if they do, realistically, how far can this team go? It should be noted that SMU was a bottom-50 team in Haslametrics' Away From Home metric.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

10-1

**REACH
FINAL 4**

200-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

45-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

500-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
30.2%

SWEET 16
10.0%

ELITE 8
2.4%

FINAL FOUR
0.6%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



AKRON

ZIPS

HEAD COACH
John Groce

CONFERENCE
Mid-American

2025-26 RECORD
29-5 SU, 17-15 ATS, 14-18 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#12 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
80.2 (59)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
10.2 (55)

BETTOR RATING
-8.8 (62)

MOMENTUM RATING
11.7 (43)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
10.9 (49)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
86.9 (8)

DEFENSIVE PPG
74.5 (176)

POSSESSIONS
67.9 (46)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.24 (48)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.095 (110)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.498 (13)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.43 (83)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.385 (14)

FREE THROW %
0.753 (73)

REBOUNDING %
0.529 (43)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.616 (26)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.134 (100)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.159 (84)

We didn't get the Miami vs. Akron MAC Tournament title game that everybody wanted, but we did get a MAC Madness thriller in Cleveland between the Zips and Toledo Rockets that ultimately sent the Rubber City residents to the Big Dance for the third season in a row. On an annual basis, this is a very solid team, but this is the best version of the Zips that John Groce has taken to the tourney and a team plenty capable of wearing a glass slipper around for a couple of weeks.

Most of the MAC was bad, despite being a two-big league for the first time in 27 years. As a result, Akron's strength of schedule is on the lower end of what you'll see in the Field of 68, but the adjusted efficiency metrics still shine brightly on the Zips because of how they beat teams. Their 79-76 win over Toledo marked just the third time in 29 wins that the Zips won by six or fewer points. They were 0-for-4 in Quadrant 1 or Quadrant 2 games, but when they did win, they often won big.

Akron comes into the NCAA Tournament as a top-10 offense in eFG% and a top-15 offense in both 2P% and 3P%. Defensively, they're going to have to defend the 3-point line more effectively, as they were outside the top 250 nationally, but they did defend well in the paint and won the turnover battle way more often than not. The best attribute of this team is their shot-making and you have to make shots to turn the pumpkin into a carriage and ride around in it at this time of the year.

Everybody who played at least 20% of the minutes this season posted a well above average Offensive Rating and an eFG% of 52% or higher. In other words, there are a lot of guys that you need to try and cover with this team, including five players that shot 37.6% or better from 3. What made the team's 2P% defense so impressive is that the tallest player getting regular minutes is 6-foot-7. It's a bit of an undersized team relative to the power-conference opponents they'll draw. That would probably be the main worry, as evidenced by an 18-point loss to Purdue back in mid-November.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

20-1

REACH
FINAL 4

500-1

REACH
ELITE 8

140-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

1000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
32.8%

SWEET 16
10.8%

ELITE 8
2.1%

FINAL FOUR
0.5%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



HOFSTRA

PRIDE

HEAD COACH
Speedy Claxton

CONFERENCE
Coastal Athletic

2025-26 RECORD
24-10 SU, 21-11 ATS, 17-15 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#13 SEED



HOFSTRA
ATHLETICS

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
77.4 (86)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
6.5 (91)

BETTOR RATING
-4 (108)

MOMENTUM RATING
12.6 (41)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
11.7 (43)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
74.5 (181)

DEFENSIVE PPG
67.6 (26)

POSSESSIONS
63.5 (302)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.183 (86)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.088 (98)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.435 (253)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.393 (7)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.368 (29)

FREE THROW %
0.759 (54)

REBOUNDING %
0.528 (44)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.159 (197)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.136 (118)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.129 (301)

Even those with the coldest, deadest hearts had to feel something watching Speedy Claxton sob in the arms of one of his assistants as the seconds melted away in the CAA Tournament Championship Game. Claxton, drafted by the Philadelphia 76ers out of Hofstra back in 2000, had three 20-win seasons coming into this one, including a 25-10 season in Year 2 back in 2023 that resulted in an NIT appearance and the first postseason win for the program since 2006.

But, the NCAA Tournament is the goal in these one-bid leagues and Claxton and his Pride will get to experience it. Hofstra won the CAA Tournament in 2020 under Joe Mihalich when Claxton was an assistant, but COVID wiped out the NCAA Tournament. It should be said that this is not just some sweet story and a feather in the wind March moment. This is a team that has some teeth and one that could very much make life hell on their first-round opponent, if not face a second one.

For whatever reason, Hofstra lost five games in a row from Jan. 15-29. After righting the ship, they lost one game, a four-point decision to UNC Wilmington in which the host Seahawks had 36 free throw attempts. While this year's Pride isn't as good offensively as Claxton's first three teams, including finishes of 35th, 16th, and 16th in eFG% offense, this is the best defense that Claxton has had in Hempstead, NY. They're among the nation's leaders in 2P% and eFG% defense thanks to 7-footer Silas Sunday and 6-foot-10 freshman Victory Onuetu.

Even though Hofstra's offensive numbers are down overall, there is one key area that is often a recipe for pulling a March Madness stunner. The Pride are a borderline top-30 team in 3P%. They don't have the best inside presences, but they can shoot from the perimeter and will get back a pretty decent rate of their misses. Cruz Davis is the name to know as a guy who could become a March star as a 40% 3-point shooter and the team's leading assist man.

One other thing about Hofstra that could come into play is that Davis, Preston Edmead, and German Plotnikov, who were the top three in minutes played, all shot 83% or better from the free throw line. This might be a team getting fitted for glass slippers.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

22-1

REACH
FINAL 4

400-1

REACH
ELITE 8

100-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
21.8%

SWEET 16
7.2%

ELITE 8
1.1%

FINAL FOUR
0.2%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



HOFSTRA
ATHLETICS

WRIGHT STATE

RAIDERS

HEAD COACH
Clint Sargent

CONFERENCE
Horizon

2025-26 RECORD
23-11 SU, 20-12 ATS, 15-17 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#14 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
72.6 (135)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
1.8 (135)

BETTOR RATING
0.2 (168)

MOMENTUM RATING
2.3 (143)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
0.8 (167)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
80 (66)

DEFENSIVE PPG
75.4 (203)

POSSESSIONS
64.8 (229)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.148 (137)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.123 (152)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.483 (29)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.463 (277)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.361 (51)

FREE THROW %
0.745 (103)

REBOUNDING %
0.522 (73)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.175 (176)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.141 (154)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.144 (179)

No. 1 seeds didn't have a whole lot of fun during the two conference tournament weeks, but Wright State sure did. The Raiders are back in the Big Dance for the first time since 2022 and, unlike their last appearance, where they went down the road 15 minutes to Dayton for a First Four game against Bryant, the Raiders are not a No. 16 seed.

Maybe it would help if they were, since they've gone 0-4 in the NCAA Tournament first round with losses by 43, 19, 26, and 17. In terms of the two most recent losses, No. 3 Tennessee in 2018 and No. 1 Arizona in 2022, those were with two very different teams. The '18 team won a lot of games on defense. The '22 team won a lot of games on offense. The '26 team is decidedly better on offense than defense, so we'll see how that works out for them.

The Raiders improved by about 130 spots in Bart Torvik's adjusted defensive efficiency rankings, due in large part to a jump of nearly 150 spots in TO%, but they still finished the regular season outside the top 200 in eFG%. What they did do well, though, was challenge shooters at the 3-point line, holding opponents to just a 34% 3P Rate. Considering how the offense shied away from taking 3s and ranked in the 300s in 3P Rate, preventing others from getting those looks was a big key.

The challenge for Wright State in the first round (and beyond?) will be getting to the rim. The Raiders had one of the 25 highest shot shares on Close Twos, a byproduct of their iso offense and a lot of offensive rebounds from Michael Imariagbe and Andrea Holden. Ball State transfer TJ Burch led the team in Close Two shot attempts with 192 as a 6-foot-1 guard. Imariagbe was second with 189. When Burch was forced into the mid-range, he shot just 31%.

Basically, the margin for error for Wright State is small, and so is their roster with one player over 6-foot-7 who gets decent minutes. Offensively, this was a top-60 team by eFG% and 3P%, while also shooting well above the national average on 2s. But, that also requires them to be able to get the same shots they got against a weak strength of schedule.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

100-1

REACH
FINAL 4

800-1

REACH
ELITE 8

350-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
9.1%

SWEET 16
1.3%

ELITE 8
0.1%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*



TENNESSEE STATE

TIGERS

HEAD COACH
Nolan Smith

CONFERENCE
Ohio Valley

2025-26 RECORD
23-9 SU, 18-11 ATS, 13-16 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#15 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
69.5 (189)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-1.5 (192)

BETTOR RATING
3.6 (228)

MOMENTUM RATING
9.4 (64)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
9.8 (59)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
78.1 (96)

DEFENSIVE PPG
73.9 (157)

POSSESSIONS
68.2 (34)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.138 (155)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.161 (227)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.449 (163)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.452 (211)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.337 (191)

FREE THROW %
0.763 (47)

REBOUNDING %
0.518 (98)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.079 (244)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.14 (150)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.175 (20)



Tennessee State gets to wear dancing shoes for the first time since 1994, as first-year head coach Nolan Smith, who was just five years old at that time, has sparked a resurgence in Nashville. This is actually the first postseason play for the Tigers since 2016, as the 2020 CIT was cancelled due to COVID after Tennessee State was announced as a participant.

Smith inherited a decent framework from Brian "Penny" Collins, as the Tigers had three straight winning seasons prior to putting all of the pieces together this season. Smith, who was an assistant at Duke, Louisville, and Memphis prior to getting his own program, oversaw a massive transition in the turnover department. Tennessee State posted their lowest TO% on offense in more than 20 years and had a 20% TO% on defense for the first time since 2021. It's amazing what you can do with more possessions and more shot volume than your opponents, as the Tigers were first in TO% on offense, third in TO% on defense, and tied for third in ORB% in the OVC.

This, however, was not a good defensive team outside of the takeaways. The Tigers were 10th out of 11 teams in eFG% defense in conference play and 10th in both 2P% and 3P%. When they weren't taking the ball away, opponents were making shots. In fact, despite ranking third in 3P%, the Tigers had a negative 3P% differential in conference action. Fortunately for them, a bye to the semifinals meant that they only had to win two games in the OVC Tournament and they were 25-of-48 from 3 over those two games, winning by a combined 39 points.

TSU's signature win came on the road at UNLV in mid-December, in what was one of three games that graded as Quadrant 2 or higher data points. The others were a 29-point loss at Tennessee and an eight-point loss at Belmont in the second game of the season and first Division I matchup. The Tigers did improve as the season went along, but the Tennessee game is a pretty relevant data point for how things may go in the Big Dance.

ODDS TO...

REACH
SWEET 16

300-1

REACH
FINAL 4

800-1

REACH
ELITE 8

400-1

WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
5.5%

SWEET 16
1.0%

ELITE 8
0.1%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

HOWARD

BISON

HEAD COACH
Kenny Blakeney

CONFERENCE
MEAC

2025-26 RECORD
23-10 SU, 20-9 ATS, 13-16 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#16 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
68.7 (202)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-2 (202)

BETTOR RATING
3.3 (223)

MOMENTUM RATING
4.8 (115)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
5.2 (111)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
75 (167)

DEFENSIVE PPG
67.8 (34)

POSSESSIONS
67.2 (74)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.08 (255)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.107 (128)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.447 (184)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.422 (56)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.347 (138)

FREE THROW %
0.742 (117)

REBOUNDING %
0.527 (47)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.11 (228)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.169 (331)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.183 (12)



It wasn't enough to avoid a trip to Dayton, but Howard is sending the best version of their team to the NCAA Tournament on Kenny Blakeney's watch. The Bison hadn't made the NCAA Tournament since 1992 when Blakeney took over in 2020 and the first year was rough, finishing with a 4-29 record and 1-15 mark in the MEAC. But the wins came as Blakeney built things up and now the Bison are dancing for the third time in four years.

Coming off of a 12-20 season, expectations were a little bit low on the Bison for this season, as the rankings sites had them solidly in the 300s, but as the year wore on, Howard moved up the ranks and heads to the tourney ranked 206th for Bart Torvik and 208th for KenPom, the highest rankings for the team since 2013.

What really separates this Howard team from past Howard teams is the performance on defense. Two years ago, Howard ranked 338th per Torvik in adjusted defensive efficiency. This one, even with a hideous strength of schedule, ranks 123rd for Torvik and 118th for KenPom. Teams have struggled to make shots against the Bison, who are a top-30 team by eFG% and 3P% and have also built off of those good numbers by forcing a turnover more than 21% of the time.

Yes, of course, those numbers are influenced by playing in the MEAC, where turnovers are commonplace and inefficient offenses are the norm. But, still, even in non-conference play, Howard's pressure defense led to a turnover more than 20% of the time. The shooting numbers against aren't nearly as strong if you remove the MEAC matchups from the equation, and the offensive numbers take a pretty big dive as well.

Nevertheless, this was a team that made 3s all season long, even if they struggled to convert on the interior and had problems of their own protecting the ball. If nothing else, Howard lost in the First Four to Wagner back in 2024 and lost to Kansas by 28 in the First Round in 2023. I think we get a better showing than that.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

200-1

**REACH
FINAL 4**

800-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

350-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
1.8%

SWEET 16
0.3%

ELITE 8
0.0%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*

UMBC

RETRIEVERS

HEAD COACH
Jim Ferry

CONFERENCE
America East

2025-26 RECORD
24-8 SU, 19-11 ATS, 13-17 O-U

MIDWEST REGION

#16 SEED



STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
69.3 (193)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-2.1 (203)

BETTOR RATING
5.6 (259)

MOMENTUM RATING
6.3 (95)

GAME GRADE FORECASTS
9.6 (63)

STATS (NAT RANK)

OFFENSIVE PPG
75.4 (156)

DEFENSIVE PPG
68 (35)

POSSESSIONS
64.8 (225)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.122 (178)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.152 (209)

OFFENSIVE FG%
0.47 (61)

DEFENSIVE FG%
0.431 (84)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
0.359 (67)

FREE THROW %
0.764 (43)

REBOUNDING %
0.512 (120)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.265 (130)

OFFENSIVE TO%
0.126 (39)

DEFENSIVE TO%
0.134 (262)

Retrievers aren't really known for their bark or their bite, but we all recall when this dog had both back in 2018 as the first No. 16 to take down a No. 1. Coincidentally, that was the last time UMBC was in the NCAA Tournament. In a conference like the America East, there is literally one path to getting in and the Retrievers were finally able to carve out that path again and they're going to be a pesky No. 16 seed again. That doesn't mean I'd expect them to knock off a No. 1 again, but this is a really good team, relatively speaking.

UMBC wrapped up the regular season and conference tournament by being a top-75 team in both eFG% offense and defense. They were very good at making 3s, defending them, and also ranked in the top 100 in 2P% offense and defense. While it is true that all 22 of their Division I wins came against Quadrant 4 opponents and they were 0-5 in anything higher than that, the only Q1 win that the 2018 team had was on the road at Vermont in the AEC Tournament. Six days later, they beat Virginia by 20.

This is an undersized team that struggled badly on the offensive glass, but everybody chipped in on the defensive glass to be among the nation's best. Of the five guys that played at least 54% of the minutes, the tallest one is 6-foot-7, so that could present some difficulties. Of course, the tallest guy with over 50% of the minutes in 2018 was 6-foot-6, so it's not impossible to think that UMBC could at least scare a top seed.

This team is actually way better on offense than that 2018 version was, although that team had three guys shooting better than 40% from 3. This version only has one. But, UMBC was 32-of-74 from 3 in the AEC Tournament, so they were in a pretty good shooting rhythm there. It's a roster with a couple of holdovers from last season, but several players in key roles came from JUCOs. We're going to get a big effort from UMBC. What kind of performance we get given that none of this year's No. 1 seeds profile like the plodding Virginia team that suffered the historic upset is up for debate.

ODDS TO...

**REACH
SWEET 16**

300-1

**REACH
FINAL 4**

800-1

**REACH
ELITE 8**

350-1

**WIN NCAA
TOURNAMENT**

2000-1

% CHANCE TO REACH...

2ND ROUND
3.8%

SWEET 16
0.7%

ELITE 8
0.1%

FINAL FOUR
0.0%

**based on average of Steve Makinen's five ratings.*





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