

VSIN **PRO**

MARCH MANIA

BETTING GUIDE

PRO EDITION

SHARP WEEK

YOUR CAPTAIN FOR NAVIGATING THE MARCH TOURNAMENT

OUR **PRO GUIDE** INCLUDES

- PROFILES OF EVERY NCAA TOURNAMENT TEAM
- TRENDS FOR EVERY ROUND
- STRATEGIES FOR BRACKETS & FUTURES

VSIN

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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.

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ALL TEAM PREVIEWS WRITTEN BY
ADAM BURKE

Greetings, all!

When Andy Williams released “It’s The Most Wonderful Time of the Year” in 1963 about the Christmas season, it’s fair to assume that he was not a college basketball fan. Because, as we all know, this is the most wonderful time of the year.

March Mania is here. And so is our March Mania Betting Guide. This is one of our most significant projects of the year and we know that it is a big part of why you are a VSIN subscriber. I cannot go any further in my welcome letter without acknowledging my Senior Editor Zachary Cohen and our Guide Designer Matt Devine. This is a very fast turnaround with an extremely tight deadline to get this out to our audience with the lead time necessary for each and every word to resonate before the games tip off. My heartfelt appreciation goes out to the two of them.

As well as everybody who had a hand in this publication, including our VSIN hosts and personalities who submitted their best bets, Final Four/National Champion picks, and brackets. Similarly, a word of thanks to those whose bylines you will read in this Guide:

- Steve Makinen’s conference, round, and seed betting trends, “Shared Traits” of potential champions, Cinderellas, and upset teams, plus Power Ratings brackets, and all of the stats that you see on the team pages
- Matt Youmans’ analysis of each region
- Adam Burke’s team capsules for all 68 NCAA Tournament teams
- March Madness contest strategies, including Survivor and Calcutta, from our friends at TeamRankings/PoolGenius
- Host best bets for futures and first-round games

We know that your friends, family members, colleagues, that annoying guy at the water cooler, the barista at the coffee shop, the person calling about your car’s extended warranty, and that girl you wish you could have dated in high school are all thinking about March Madness this week.

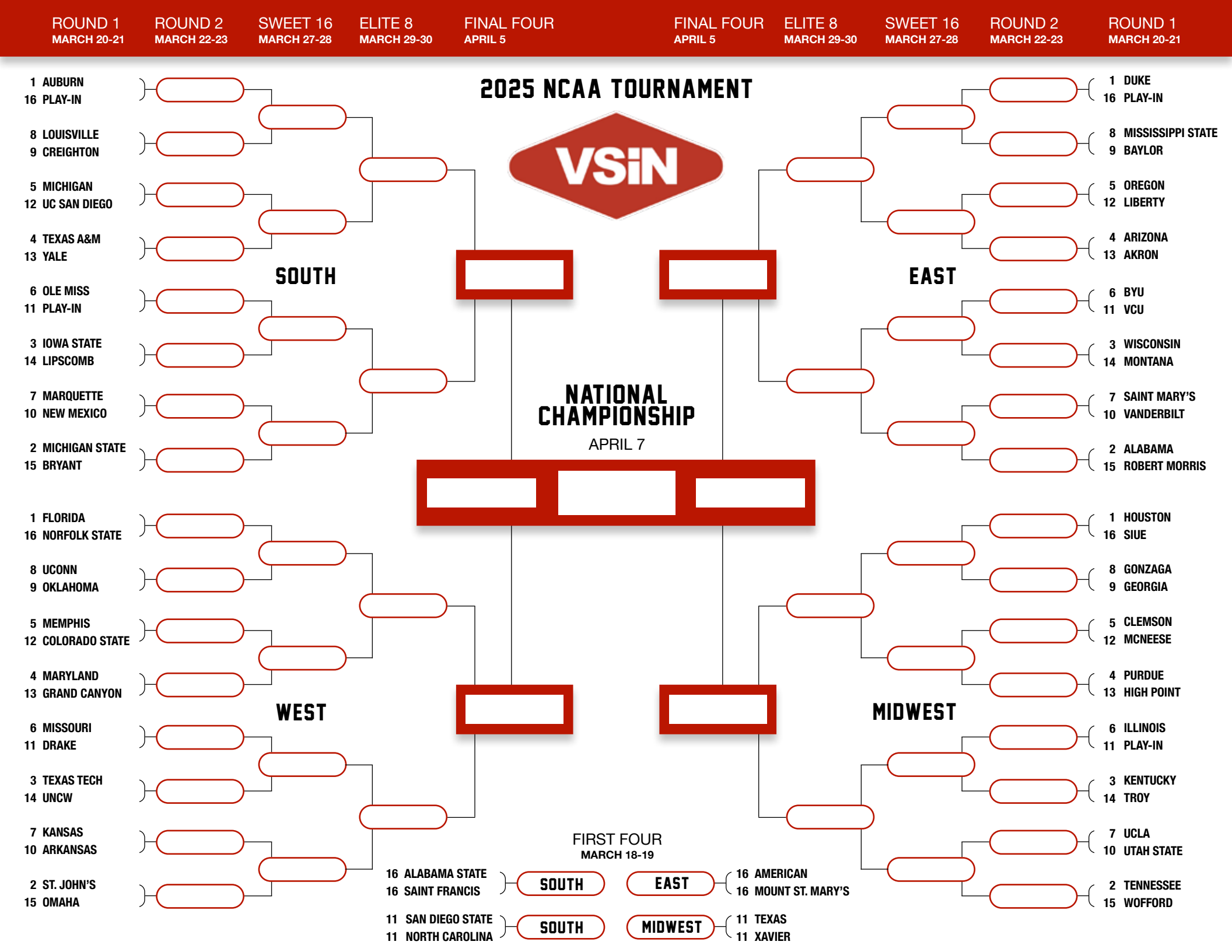
Please let them know that our \$9.99 Intro Offer is active to give them the first 30 days of VSIN Pro access for under \$10. Not only will they get this Guide, but we’ll have previews on the website of every NCAA Tournament game, daily best bets including the other postseason tournaments, and all of our coverage of other sports.



Join the [March Bracket Challenge](#) for free and take your chance at winning \$5,000!

Happy March Mania and thank you for being a VSIN Pro subscriber!

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VSIN EXPERT MARCH MANIA

BEST BETS

MATT YOUMANS

DUKE TO WIN EAST REGION (-120)

If Cooper Flagg stays healthy, nothing is stopping the Blue Devils from reaching the Elite Eight. Arizona, Oregon and Mississippi State are not serious threats in the top half of the bracket. With this bet, we essentially get Duke at -120 against the team that survives the bottom half of the bracket — Alabama, BYU, Wisconsin or Saint Mary's. The Blue Devils are No. 1 overall at KenPom.com and rate No. 3 in offensive efficiency and No. 4 in defensive efficiency.

A 13 SEED WILL WIN A GAME (-145)

Yale, a 7.5-point dog to Texas A&M, is the best shot for this prop to hit. The Bulldogs took down Auburn last year, and the Ivy League champs are capable of knocking out another SEC heavyweight. The other 13 seeds — Grand Canyon (vs. Maryland), High Point (vs. Purdue) and Akron (vs. Arizona) — are big dogs, but they all face opponents with a history of getting upset early in this tournament. Look for a better number on this prop because it's not ideal to be laying this price, but the chances of winning are good. I'm taking the points with all four of the 13 seeds in the first round.

MONTANA +17 VS. WISCONSIN

The Big Ten has eight teams in the tournament, and I have considered betting Under 11.5 for total wins. I do want to fade most of the league's teams against the spread in the first round. Wisconsin has the potential to make a run, but it's also a team that could fail to survive the first weekend. The Badgers played four games in four days in the conference tournament and their 3-point shooting bottomed out (7 of 39) in the title game, a 59-53 loss to Michigan. A tired team now goes to Denver to play in altitude and is asked to cover a big number against a 25-win team from the Big Sky.

UConn (-190) VS. OKLAHOMA

A team that finished 6-12 in Big 12 play deserves a No. 9 seed? No. The Sooners are barely worthy of being in the tournament. Oklahoma's best player is a freshman point guard, Jeremiah Fears. UConn busted out in the Big East tournament semifinals, but that could be a positive. The Huskies should be hungry, and coach Danny Hurley is a master of preparation. The two-time defending champions are not going out with a whimper and will win a game in this tournament.

DAVE ROSS

VCU +3 VS. BYU

Yes, it's a homer alma mater pick, but VCU will challenge the shooters like Houston did against BYU. No, VCU isn't Houston, but it's called "havoc" for a reason. If BYU hits enough contested 3s to win and cover, I'll tip my cap to them.

DRAKE +6 VS. MISSOURI

All about tempo. Drake wants to put you to sleep. The Tigers want to run. It's easier to slow a team down than speed them up in tourney play. As long as the actual Drake doesn't pick Drake, I think we're good here.

GRAND CANYON +11 VS. MARYLAND

Fear the turtle...laying double digits. GCU spends money wisely in NIL. They won't be lacking for talent vs. the Terps. Not only do I like them to cover, but I'd sprinkle a little on the moneyline as well.

WILL HILL

UC SAN DIEGO +2.5 VS. MICHIGAN

You will hear all week how the Tritons of UC San Diego are too trendy to win, but I am not a believer in the overly simplistic “blindly fade the public” approach. Michigan is a turnover machine, and they draw a ball-hawking UC San Diego team that forces a ton of turnovers. Michigan played three games in three days to win the Big Ten. They now have to turn around and play in altitude on Thursday night in Colorado. The committee did no favors to the Wolverines by putting them on the 5/12 line.

LIPSCOMB +14.5 VS. IOWA STATE

Lipscomb had to overcome a late 10-point deficit vs. Queens in their conference semifinals in order to ultimately win the A-Sun automatic bid, but now that they’re here, they could be feisty. They draw a beat-up Iowa State team and bring some variance to this 3/14 matchup, as they take and make a ton of 3s, and are not turnover-prone. I wouldn’t be surprised if this is a close game in the final minutes.

PAULY HOWARD

AKRON +14 VS. ARIZONA AND OVER 167

The Zips lost one game in the MAC, and they can score. It should be a track meet and go Over. Don’t be scared. The MAC semifinal with Akron had a final score of 100-90.

MICHIGAN -2.5 VS. UC SAN DIEGO

Great story and a team that has four top players from Division II schools, but they remind me of McNeese State last year. Everybody picked them vs. Gonzaga, and they got blown out.

GRAND CANYON +11.5 VS. MARYLAND

A team that won a game last year in the tourney and had Alabama on the ropes. They can play slow and fast and were great in the WAC final vs. Utah Valley.

AARON MOORE

OREGON -4.5 VS. LIBERTY

The 5/12 games always draw plenty of eyes for those searching for this year’s 12 to pull off the customary upset. Liberty is going to fit that profile for a number of bettors since the Flames play slow and have a Top 50 defense. All of that makes Oregon playing in Seattle, as the favorite, a contrarian play. The Ducks have a solid point guard in Jackson Shelstad, who can handle the pressure and get the ball to TJ Bamba and 7-footer Nate Bittle, the type of bodies and scorers Liberty didn’t face in Conference USA. Glad to get this number under five points.

VCU +3.5 VS. BYU

Not many defenses jump the guards and seal the perimeter better than the Rams. Doing so would help them stop BYU’s offensive game plan. Houston demonstrated how physical play can disrupt the chemistry between the Cougars tandem of Egor Demin and Richie Saunders. VCU has the pieces to create a similar game plan and keep it a one-possession game.

MEMPHIS +2.5 VS. COLORADO STATE

The Rams will be a very popular play as they are riding a 10-game winning streak. However, a number of hot Mountain West Conference teams failed to win at least one game in the NCAA tournament. This is slightly a play against the MWC but more so based on the athleticism and height of the Tigers. Dain Dainja and Moussa Cisse can help keep CSU stud Nique Clifford away from the basket. This is still a play, even if Tyrese Hunter is unavailable for Memphis.

MICHIGAN -2.5 VS. UC SAN DIEGO

Yes, the Titans have a Top 30 defense and an effective offense, but this short number feels like the books are luring in public bettors who are going to wager on what they want to see. The Wolverines have the Twin Towers of Danny Wolf and Vlad Goldin, who will serve as the type of safety values to neutralize UCSD’s funky defense.

MATT BROWN

ALABAMA -22 VS. ROBERT MORRIS

KenPom has the Robert Morris strength of schedule at 304th in the nation. They played one team with a pulse all year in West Virginia (arguably the biggest tourney snub) and they lost by 28. Don’t let the record fool you. Alabama is a borderline title contender and will be far too much for Robert Morris. Different class of athletes in this game. Bama rolls.

GREG PETERSON

UC SAN DIEGO ML (+125) VS. MICHIGAN

Two of the past three Big Ten Tournament champions have been bounced from the NCAA Tournament in the first round, with Iowa losing as a five-seed to Richmond in 2022 and Purdue going down in an epic 1/16 upset against Fairleigh Dickinson in 2023. UC San Diego ranks second in the country in turnovers forced per possession, while Michigan is 328th in turnovers per possession on offense.

NEW MEXICO ML (+150) VS. MARQUETTE

While Marquette generates tons of turnovers on defense, ranking 20th in turnovers per possession on defense, New Mexico matches that, ranking 36th in this category while owning a big advantage on the glass. Marquette ranks 241st in rebound percentage; while New Mexico is 57th in this category. New Mexico forward Nelly Junior Joseph is the most dominant big man in this matchup, ranking third in the country in rebounds per game among qualifying players with 14 points, 11.2 rebounds, and 1.5 blocks per game.

TENNESSEE -18.5 VS. WOFFORD

Tennessee is one of the most dominant defensive teams in the country, ranking ninth in points per possession allowed. They allow teams to shoot just 27.6% from 3-point range, which is number one in the country. Wofford attempts 47.7% of their shots from 3-point range, which is the 23rd-highest 3-point shot rate in the country. Wofford is 238th in points per possession allowed. In games played away from home, they allow teams to shoot 36% from 3-point range.

LIBERTY ML (+255) VS. OREGON

Oregon is a unit that truly doesn’t have much of a true strength or weakness, while Liberty is amazing at controlling the 3-point battle, ranking third in the country in 3-point shooting percentage away from home at 40.3%. They are also third in opponents’ 3-point shooting percentage at 28% and are 14th in points per possession away from home.

GEORGIA/GONZAGA UNDER 152.5

Gonzaga gets a bad rap from their defense, but the reality is they rank 17th in the country in points per possession allowed on defense. Both teams have struggled to make 3-point shots away from home. Georgia is 347th in road 3-point shooting percentage at 28.7%, while Gonzaga makes only 31.1% of their 3-point shots away from home. Georgia is also 287th in points per possession in games played away from home.

TYLER SHOEMAKER

MISSISSIPPI STATE/BAYLOR OVER 143.5

The market disagrees with me here, as the total has dropped three points since opening at 146.5, but TSI projects this game into the 150s, and every formula I run is in alignment that these teams’ combination of pace and efficiency should lead to this game going Over.

ALABAMA/ROBERT MORRIS OVER 166.5

I’ve been burned numerous times on Alabama Unders this year, but it seems TSI has caught up to the lightning-quick pace and barrage of 3s from the Crimson Tide and is projecting this game to have around 170 points. So I will do what I haven’t been able to do all year and bet an Alabama Over in this first round of the NCAA Tournament.

RYAN KRAMER

ALL 36 1H UNDERS FOR THE FIRST FOUR AND FIRST ROUND

Since 2011, when the tournament expanded to 68 teams and introduced the First Four, 1H Unders for the First Four and First Round Games have gone 258-193-17, good for 57.21%. Suggesting that in the first 20 minutes of tournament play you might find slow starts as teams are playing potentially the most watched game of their season in a gym they most likely have never played in before. Furthermore, if you dive into season-by-season success, the trend has been profitable in nine of the last 13 seasons. The kicker, it had its worst season since 2011 last year. Lock in, load up, and here's to the best bet in sports, the March Madness First Half Under. [For those looking at the historical data.](#)

DAVE TULEY

TENNESSEE TO WIN TITLE (+2000)

HOUSTON TO WIN TITLE (+575)

Going through the brackets (with an eye glancing at my VSiN colleague Gill Alexander's "historical criteria" to pick a national champion – even though he says it's more vulnerable than it's ever been), I arrive at Tennessee as the best value pick at juicy odds of 20-1 (Westgate). The Volunteers are a little under the radar coming from the SEC. Auburn winning the regular-season title and being the No. 1 overall seed and Florida winning the conference tourney and as a No. 2 seed are priced way higher than the other Gill qualifiers: Duke (+350), Auburn (+450) and Houston (+575). I'm also betting Houston at +575 at Circa, as the Cougars are being overlooked a little. They have the highest odds among the No. 1 seeds, though they do have a tough potential second-round matchup vs. under-seeded Gonzaga and, of course, must also get by Tennessee to even make it out of the Midwest Regional to the Final Four. I'm looking for some book to offer odds on "region to win national title" to see if there is any value there with the Midwest.

TEXAS TECH TO WIN WEST REGION (+515)

Everyone seems to be jumping on the Florida bandwagon off of the Gators winning the deep SEC conference tournament and checking all the boxes to win the national championship, so I'm looking for a way to fade them instead of just taking teams with the points on a game-to-game basis (as they're -29 vs. No. 16 Norfolk in the first round and are going to be overpriced as long as they survive). Texas Tech can score every which way, whether from 3 or pick-and-rolls, so the Red Raiders will be dangerous throughout. I also like their path to the West Regional final, where they'll probably face the Gators (potentially just have to get past NC-Wilmington, Missouri and St. John's).

MIKE SOMICH

HOUSTON AND DUKE TO REACH THE ELITE EIGHT (+117)

One of the things I love about the expansion of betting is the additional options that are now offered at sportsbooks, including the ability to parlay results like teams to reach a specific round. When analyzing the draw, the two teams with the easiest path to the Elite Eight are Duke and Houston. Putting them together results in a plus-money bet.

Duke's top half of the East bracket drew very weak, especially on the defensive side. Both Baylor and Mississippi State pose a minimal threat to this Duke team, and the Sweet 16 match of either Oregon or Arizona does not possess a top defensive team to slow Duke down. Similarly, Houston draws favorable second-round matchups against either Gonzaga or Georgia and then the winner of Clemson and Purdue. This will have the best offense and defense in every matchup and, like Duke, avoid having any high-ranking SEC school in their section of the bracket. If you want to add St John's and Michigan State to the parlay, two additional teams who I believe have favorable draws, this balloons out to +1521.

GRAND CANYON TO REACH SWEET 16 (+900)

Love the price on Grand Canyon in a wide open section of the West region. When playing these 12 or 13 seeds to make the Sweet 16, it's important to note the second-round matchup. If you believe that both the 12 and 13 seeds are live, there is almost always going to be value in the Sweet 16 bet since the price generally factors in the higher-seeded teams winning. Grand Canyon is a deep, veteran team with length that can score and defend. They drew a first-round opponent in Maryland that has had highs, but can struggle to score at times and is a younger squad. The 12-seeded Colorado State is actually favored over #5 Memphis in the other matchup, so there is not a world-beater in this grouping. I also like Grand Canyon +10.5 and a money line sprinkle (+440) in Round 1 as well.

OLE MISS TO REACH SWEET 16 (+220)

This is all about finding a way to play against Iowa State, who is limping into the tournament. After a 15-1 start, Iowa St simply could not find consistency on the offense end, closing out the season on an 8-7 stretch while turning the ball over on nearly 20% of offensive possessions. Ole Miss seems like the most logical way to fade the Cyclones. They boast a top 30 offensive and defensive rating and do not turn the ball over, third least in the nation. That bodes well against Iowa State. My bigger concern is the winner of the SDSU/UNC play-in game. No matter who plays Iowa State to make the Sweet 16, assuming they beat Lipscomb, I will be on the other side.

JONATHAN VON TOBEL

TROY +11 VS. KENTUCKY

Underdogs who pull off upsets in the NCAA Tournament play slow and shoot a high rate of 3-point attempts. Troy checks those boxes. The Trojans are 229th in the country in tempo and 57th in 3-point attempt rate. Those are very similar qualities to the Oakland team which ousted Kentucky last year. The problem with Troy is that, unlike Oakland, it does not shoot well. The Trojans are the worst shooting team in the field. However, the team's offensive floor should be raised against the Wildcats. Kentucky allowed 112.3 points per 100 possessions in SEC play. It also ranks 289th in the country in 2-point percentage allowed. Troy led the Sun Belt in 2-point percentage and is 77th in the country in that category.

UC SAN DIEGO +3.5 VS. MICHIGAN

Slow pace and a high rate of 3-point shooting will be common traits among the teams I am backing here in the first round. The Tritons fit that mold perfectly. They are 271st in the country in tempo, eighth in 3-point rate, and 57th in 3-point percentage. This play isn't all about UC San Diego. It's about Michigan as well. The Wolverines have a massive turnover problem. They give away the ball on 19.8% of their offensive possessions. It is the third-worst rate in the field. Michigan also fails to force turnovers on defense. The Wolverines will likely lose the possession battle in a low-possession game like this one projects to be, and that will be a problem. Furthermore, Michigan seems to be living on borrowed time. Despite finishing 11-4 in their final 15 games, the Wolverines posted a -24 point differential.

AKRON +15.5 VS. ARIZONA

Usually, it does not bode well for an underdog to play at a fast tempo. More possessions means the better team has more of an opportunity to win the contest. In that sense, the quick pace of the Zips might not bode well. The Wildcats will be more than willing to match tempo as well, as both teams rank 16th and 54th respectively in tempo this season. However, this is a play on the potential variance Arizona brings to the table. The Wildcats shot 32.4% from beyond the arc in the regular season. Akron is 52nd in 3-point rate and 49th in 3-point shooting. The Zips enter this contest with an advantage in the math battle. They take and make more 3-pointers than their opponent. That is a good edge to have when catching such a big number.

DRAKE +6.5 VS. MISSOURI

This is a fade of Missouri. The Tigers enter the NCAA Tournament on a 2-5 SU and ATS slide. Over that span, they are 219th in the country in defensive rating. Six of their last eight opponents have scored 91 or more points. The Tigers' defense has bottomed out, and now it must face an extremely efficient offensive foe in Drake. The Bulldogs average 112.6 points per 100 possessions this season, and they are the slowest team in the field in terms of tempo. Drake does not shoot a high rate of 3-point attempts, but it does hit 35.0% of its shots from deep. The Bulldogs are also one of the best offensive-rebounding teams in the country. That is a strong matchup for them in this game, as the Tigers are the third-worst defensive rebounding team in the field.

NEW MEXICO +3.5 VS. MARQUETTE

New Mexico was a trendy pick last year, and the Lobos embarrassed their supporters by losing to Clemson by 21 points. This New Mexico squad is much better, and it is led by different role players. It also has a very strong advantage on the glass. Marquette's biggest weakness is rebounding. It is 176th in offensive rebounding rate and 244th in defensive rebounding rate. The Lobos rank 127th and 21st in those categories, respectively. They finished second in the Mountain West in offensive rebounding rate. New Mexico should be able to generate second-chance opportunities at a high rate, while limiting a jump-shooting Marquette squad to one shot regularly. The Lobos also have the best player on the floor in guard Donovan Dent.

SEAN GREEN

OREGON -6.5 VS. LIBERTY

Oregon comes in with a top-40 offense and defense and should match up well against Liberty. I love leaning into teams that are good at the FT line come tournament time. Oregon is almost 11% better than Liberty, who is the worst team in the tournament from the charity stripe. Am I being swayed by my 35-1 ticket on the Ducks to make the Final Four? Absolutely, but Oregon is still the play as they extinguish the Flames.

YALE +7.5 VS. TEXAS A&M

Buzz Williams will be sweating through his three-piece suit in this game, as the Ivy League has proven to be a tough out in the tournament. Yale plays a clean and efficient offensive style and doesn't turn the ball over. Texas A&M will struggle to generate enough offense to get this big cover.

WES REYNOLDS

NORTH CAROLINA ML (-170) VS. SAN DIEGO STATE

With a 1-12 Quad 1 record and its best win of the season being against a 7-seed (UCLA), North Carolina did not deserve to be selected for this year's NCAA Tournament. That is an opinion, by and large, that is universally shared across the college basketball landscape.

Nevertheless, we have seen this movie before in the NCAA Tournament. The team that everyone says should not be in the dance comes in with a little extra motivation. The Tar Heels should certainly qualify in that regard commingled with a sigh of relief being included in the field of 68.

They thought they were done after Jae'Lyn Withers' unfortunate lane violation on what could have been the game-tying FT likely taking it to overtime against a Cooper Flagg-less Duke in Friday's ACC Tournament Semifinals. Now, they get a reprieve.

Meanwhile, San Diego State brings a solid defensive team (Sixth in Effective FG% defense, 13th in Adjusted Defensive Efficiency), as they always do. Plus, Mountain West Defensive Player of the Year Magoon Gwath is likely to return from a knee injury after missing the Aztecs' last five games.

The competition since mid-February has not exactly been the most stringent for North Carolina, save for two games vs. Duke, but they are shooting the 3-ball better. In their last 10 games, the Tar Heels have shot 42.6% from outside the arc compared to 35.3% for its season average. San Diego State's pack line will allow ample opportunity for the Heels as

the Aztecs allow opponents to take 47.3% of their shots (11th most out of 364 D-1 teams) from deep.

While Carolina did have to play three games last week in the ACC Tournament, and the Aztecs were one and done in the Mountain West, the energy combined with both relief and extra motivation carries the Tar Heels on Tuesday in Dayton.

TEXAS TECH TO WIN WEST REGION (+600)

On Selection Sunday evening, it felt like we were flashing back to NBC News' 2000 election night coverage, seeing the late, great Meet The Press host Tim Russert saying, "Florida, Florida, Florida." The Florida Gators seemed to be the consensus pick on all the networks to cut down the nets in San Antonio. Why not, considering they rolled through the SEC Tournament with victories over Missouri, Alabama, and Tennessee? The Gators also have the nation's No. 1 offense.

St. John's is the 2 seed, and Rick Pitino's guys dominated the Big East, winning both the tournament and regular season championships. However, the Red Storm, who are No. 1 defensively, rank just 65th in offensive efficiency per KenPom. This is not a good shooting team. One bad night will find them heading for an early exit.

The team under the radar in the West Region is 3-seed Texas Tech. The short-handed Red Raiders were playing essentially just six guys and lost in the Big XII semifinals to Arizona. Chance McMillian and Darrion Williams missed that game with injuries. Texas Tech head coach Grant McCasland sounded optimistic about both of their availability. The Red Raiders have had injuries all year. Only wingman Kerwin Walton played all 33 games. Despite most players missing some time this season, this team is a solid eight deep and is one of the most efficient offenses (6th) in the country.

While the SEC deserves all the love in its greatest season in conference history, there are no tougher venues to win away from home than in the Big XII and Texas Tech won at Houston, at BYU, and at Kansas.

We will likely get a meeting of "mission teams" in the Elite Eight, as both Florida and Texas Tech were bounced in last year's first round. NCAA Tournament games tend to become grinders late. That style favors the Red Raiders in a potential matchup with the Gators.

JENSEN LEWIS

HOUSTON TO REACH THE FINAL FOUR (+105)

The Cougars boast the top defensive efficiency in the country, paired with a Top 5 offensive efficiency, making them a truly formidable team. With their elite defense and rebounding, I'm confident they have what it takes to dominate any opponent they face in the Midwest region in 2025.

ST. JOHN'S TO REACH THE ELITE EIGHT (+210)

Call it a gut feeling, but if any region is primed for chaos ahead of the Red Storm, this could be the year "The Godfather" Rick Pitino takes full advantage. With only the Houston Cougars ahead of them in defensive efficiency and St. John's riding the momentum of their first Big East tournament championship in years, they're poised for a strong run. A potential showdown with the Gators in the West regional final could very well be the path to the Final Four.

TEAM TO ADVANCE FURTHER:

FLORIDA (-115) OR AUBURN (-105): FLORIDA

The Gators could have two opportunities to make a deep run: a seemingly more favorable path through the West region compared to War Eagle in the South, as well as a potential head-to-head showdown in the Final Four if the bracket plays out as expected. Auburn's struggles, losing three of their last four games heading into the tournament, are concerning. I'm backing the team that appears the most complete and formidable at the moment.

NICK WHALEN

MICHIGAN STATE TO REACH THE ELITE EIGHT (+140)

I was plenty skeptical of this Spartans team earlier in the season, but they've won me over, and you have to like the draw at the bottom of the South region. Michigan State should have no trouble with Bryant in Round 1 before facing the winner of Marquette and New Mexico – two relatively uninspiring teams. Three-seed Iowa State will be limited by injuries, so the path is fairly clear for Michigan State to set up a potential showdown with Auburn with a Final Four berth on the line.

WISCONSIN TEAM TOTAL OVER 84.5 VS. MONTANA

While the Badgers were passed over not once, but twice, to begin their Tournament run in Milwaukee, they have to be pleased with their first-round matchup against Montana. Not only were the Grizzlies the luckiest team in the nation, per KenPom, but they rank 250th in defensive efficiency. That's exactly the type of matchup the Badgers want to see after ending the Big Ten Tournament with a disastrous shooting game in a loss to Michigan. I love this as a high-scoring, bounce-back spot for the Badgers.

DRAKE +6.5 VS. MISSOURI

Drake may not be as battle-tested as Missouri, but few teams are playing better than the Bulldogs entering the Tournament. Drake has just one loss on its ledger since January 5th and will look to slow the pace against a Mizzou team that's dropped five of its last seven games. Missouri is the more explosive team, but Drake rates better on the defensive end and should have a decided advantage on the glass (13th nationally in TRB%).

DUSTIN SWEDELSON

SAINT MARY'S TO MAKE ELITE EIGHT (+500)

The Gaels' path couldn't fit better for their style of play. They're an elite defensive team wrapping up the season eighth in adjusted defensive efficiency, 14th in effective defensive field goal percentage, 44th defending 3-pointers, and 12th against 2-pointers. If they get past Vanderbilt, they are built to slow down the 3-point-dependent teams they could see along the way in the East, like Alabama and BYU.

GRACE REMINGTON

UC SAN DIEGO +3.5 VS. MICHIGAN

Michigan just played three games in three days at the Big Ten tournament and now has to fly to Denver to play in altitude. The Wolverines' biggest weakness is turnovers (#328th in giveaways). That happens to be the Tritons' strength, as they rank sixth nationally in offensive turnover rate and second in defensive turnover rate.

LIBERTY +6.5 VS. OREGON

The Flames rank second nationally in effective field goal rate because they let it fly from beyond the arc. They rank 22nd in 3-point attempts and fifth in 3-point makes, hitting their shots almost 40% of the time. They're also a disciplined team that protects the ball well and runs at a slow pace, all things that bode well for an underdog.

WISCONSIN TO MISS THE SWEET 16 (-110)

Wisconsin just played four games in four days in the Big Ten tournament and lost the title in the final seconds. It faces short rest – the team had to fly back to Madison, WI, then to Denver, where it will have to adjust to the altitude. Their first-round opponent, Montana, and potential second-round opponent, BYU, are both accustomed to playing at altitude and will be better rested after their conference tournament schedules ended early.

STEVE MAKINEN

DUKE TO WIN THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP (+320)

So much has been made this year about the SEC and its supremacy as a whole, but in the shadow of that, Duke has gone about its business somewhat quietly, playing elite basketball all year long. There were really no droughts. Despite the youth concerns I once had, I think this team has demonstrated maturity beyond its years. Cooper Flagg is a potential tourney MVP, and the Blue Devils are the first team I've had in a while that went into the tournament as the #1 ranked team in all five of my rating sets, including the Game Grade Forecast. Their momentum rating is 3.9 points better than anyone else.

MARYLAND TO REACH SWEET 16 (-180)

I was pleasantly surprised to see how highly Maryland ranked on my overall ratings and projections when I finalized them Sunday evening. If you look at my Shared Traits article, you will see that the Terps were one of four teams to score a perfect 17 as being a Final Four-worthy team. The first game is a relative "gimme" versus Grand Canyon despite CBS analysts' crazy gushing, and the second game would be against the Memphis-Colorado State winner. Memphis is ordinary, and CSU, while hot, is still a Mountain West team. From my Conference Trends article, you can easily see how bad MWC teams have been in the Dance.

MICHIGAN STATE TO REACH SWEET 16 (-180)

The Spartans are one of six teams that, according to my average of the ratings, have better than a 60% chance of surviving the weekend and reaching the Round of 16. Head coach Tom Izzo's teams are known for thriving at this time of year. Assuming the two teams advance in round 1, MSU will be in line for a matchup versus Marquette in round two. The Golden Eagles played their best ball at the start of the season. Michigan State is playing its best ball now when it matters most.

GONZAGA TO REACH SWEET 16 (+340)

I figured I'd throw one longshot in the mix for my best bets. Earlier in the season, I included Houston among six teams I thought were worthy of winning the title. I still think the Cougars are there, but a round two matchup with Gonzaga is not what I would have had in the cards. Houston has my lowest chance of the #1's to reach the Final Four at 30.2%. Gonzaga could quite possibly be the most under-seeded team I've seen in a while and should be playing with a chip on their shoulder accordingly. Regardless of any improvements made this season, Houston's shotmaking come tourney time is always a concern, as is the status of stud big-man J'Wan Roberts.

COLORADO STATE -2.5 VS. MEMPHIS

For as much as it pains me to invest in a Mountain West team in the tournament, this Colorado State team has been on fire lately. As a 12 seed, they are a small favorite over #5 Memphis. My Momentum Ratings show that CSU has been a 9.7-point better team than the Tigers down the stretch, and that doesn't even include any potential adjustment to Memphis for guard Tyrese Hunter's status.

TIM MURRAY

MOUNT ST. MARY'S/AMERICAN UNDER 129.5

Entering the MAAC Tournament as the 6 seed, Mount St. Mary's was tied for the highest seed (Wofford) to win its conference tournament this March. How did they do it? Slow games down and play great halfcourt defense. In their three games in the MAAC Tournament, the Mountaineers averaged 62.7 possessions per game, and all three games went Under the total by an average of 14 points per game. The Mountaineers lost two of their most productive players during the season—big man Terrell Ard and sharpshooter Carmelo Pacheco (47% from 3). There is a chance Pacheco could return for the NCAA Tournament. On the other side, American is one of the slowest teams in the country. The Eagles are 349th (out of 364) in adjusted tempo and are 356th in average possession length. The market quickly bet this game Under 131.5 on Selection Sunday, but I think it is still playable at 129.5.

DRAKE +6.5 VS. MISSOURI

Insert the Jim Carrey GIF from Me, Myself, and Irene: "Oh boy. Here we go..." For a third straight year, I am backing the Drake Bulldogs in the first round. Just a quick refresher. In 2023, 12th-seeded Drake (+2.5) led Miami, 55-47, with five minutes to play in regulation. Miami ended the game on a 16-1 run en route to a 63-56 win. Last year, 10th-seeded Drake flipped from a one-point underdog to a one-point favorite against Washington State. The Bulldogs led 54-46 at the under-eight media timeout but ultimately lost 66-61 to the Cougars.

Darian DeVries departed Drake after last season and is now the head coach of West Virginia. Ben McCollum stepped in from Division II powerhouse Northwest Missouri St. Drake went 30-3 this season under McCollum and won the Missouri Valley Conference again. The Bulldogs profile as an ideal upset candidate. Drake is last in the country (364 out of 364) in average possession length and adjusted tempo. Missouri is elite offensively (fifth in adjusted offensive efficiency) and could pose a significant issue down low with Mark Mitchell. Mitchell was sidelined in Missouri's loss to Florida in the SEC quarterfinals, but Mitchell is expected to play vs. Drake. The 6'9" forward averaged 14.1 points per game this season and could be a matchup problem for the Bulldogs. That said, McCollum has plenty of NCAA Tournament coaching experience, leading NW Missouri State to four Division II National Championships. I think Drake can drag Missouri in the mud and make it a slog of a first-round game.

YALE +7.5 VS. TEXAS A&M

While the 5/12 game in the South Region (Michigan vs. UC San Diego) is garnering lots of attention, the 4/13 matchup is quite enticing as well. Last year, as a 14.5-point underdog, Yale upset Auburn, 78-76, in the first round. Back in 2016, Yale knocked off Baylor in the first round as well. The 2016 Baylor team has some similarities to the 2025 Texas A&M squad. The 2016 Bears were fourth nationally in offensive rebounding rate, while the Aggies are currently first this year. Yale is 22nd in the nation in limiting its opponents on the offensive glass. Texas A&M thrives on second-chance opportunities, but if Yale can limit that, the Aggies could have issues against the Bulldogs. Texas A&M enters the NCAA Tournament shooting just 31.1% from 3 (317th in the nation), 48% from inside the arc (293rd), and 69.5% on free throws (274th). Yale head coach James Jones has been here before and should have his squad up for the challenge.

STORMY BUONANTONY

COLORADO STATE TO MAKE THE SWEET 16 (+400) COLORADO STATE ML (-135) VS. MEMPHIS

CSU is a team that struggled early on this season, but they have been very different since the calendar flipped to 2025. They lost four starters from last year, and it took some time for Nico Medved to re-tool and allocate the proper roles for his guys. Since ringing in the new year, CSU is 19-3 (with all three losses coming to KenPom Top-60 teams). The shots have been falling (17th nationally with 58% shooting inside and sixth shooting 49% from 3-point range), and they've continued to play good D (third-best defense in the Mountain West behind only New Mexico and San Diego State). As the season got later, the Rams got even better. Per Bart Torvik, since Feb 15th, the Rams have the eighth-best overall rating in the country and bring a 10-game win streak and MW Tournament title into the Dance.

This is also the time of year when we look for lesser-known stars to emerge. CSU has a potential March Madness darling on their hands in stud 6'6" wing Nique Clifford. Looking at their portion of the bracket, CSU is favored in their 12/5 matchup with Memphis. Then, should they win as the odds indicate, they'll get the winner of Grand Canyon-Maryland in the Round of 32. The Terps are a good team but not trustworthy in a close game late, and Grand Canyon hasn't had to play teams of CSU or Maryland's caliber. The buck will stop in the Sweet 16, likely facing Florida, but we're not asking them to win a game like that. They just need to get there. Give me CSU to make a little run and get to the Sweet 16. I also selfishly hope they won't be the lone Mountain West team to win a game or two. Despite the history of the league, I'm leaning Mountain West Over 2.5 conference wins at +150, with New Mexico, San Diego State and Utah State also dancing.

UC SAN DIEGO ML (+125) AND +2.5 VS. MICHIGAN

I'm still stunned that Michigan won the Big Ten tournament. I do not find them trustworthy at all, and unfortunately for them, the tournament win may have come at a cost. They played three games in three days (including two physically and mentally exhausting games against Maryland and Wisconsin), and we've seen two of the last three Big Ten champs lose in the first round against "lesser than" opponents. I put that in quotations for a reason. UC San Diego is good—really good. They have an opportunity to make a splash against a Power Conference opponent in their Big Dance debut. They've won 15 straight entering the tournament, including the Big West Tournament title. They're a high-volume 3-point-shooting team, which makes them dangerous if they get hot and are great on defense. With that in mind, arguably their biggest strength is Michigan's largest weakness: Turning over the basketball. The Tritons are top-five nationally in offensive and defensive turnover percentage, while Michigan is 328th in turnovers per possession. While many will argue Michigan's size and rebounding edge are too much, I think the Tritons have enough of the right recipe elsewhere to keep the Wolverines on early upset watch.

SCOTT SEIDENBERG

GONZAGA -6.5 VS. GEORGIA

Mark Few is 21-3 SU in the first round and should make it 22 wins here. Gonzaga is an analytics darling, ranking ninth overall in KenPom. What could be the difference here is the Zags' ability to cash in from the free throw line. At 80.1%, Gonzaga is the fourth-best free throw shooting team in the country. A close game late could turn into an easy cover of 6.5 with free throws.

FIRST 4 / FIRST ROUND BET

NORTH CAROLINA -4.5 VS. SAN DIEGO STATE NORTH CAROLINA ML VS. OLE MISS

North Carolina should not be in the NCAA Tournament. The resume is not good enough. However, there they are. KenPom ranks the Tar Heels 33rd overall, Bart Torvik has them 39th, and EvanMiya has them 29th. This is not a terrible team and when it comes down to motivation, no one has more than UNC. Plus, history is on our side here. The First Four started in 2011. In every year of its existence, with the exception of 2019, at least one team that has won in Dayton has gone on to win their Round of 64 game. I predict North Carolina will be that team as they are the best of the four 11 seeds in the play-in round.

JEFF ERICKSON

ARIZONA -13.5 VS. AKRON

Analytically, I hate taking a favorite in a 4/13 matchup, especially one with Arizona's history of falling short early in the tournament. Yet, I can't quite get past the notion that the Zips side is too clever for its own good. Akron has the 13th fastest pace in the country, but that often plays into Arizona's hands. With the game in Seattle, Akron also has a negative travel disparity. Furthermore, anytime they've stepped out of their comfort zone schedule-wise, they've been knocked back down, with blowout losses to St. Mary's and Yale. KenPom has Arizona at 14, Torvik has them at 9, and Akron at 99 and 100, respectively. I'll fade the early line movement on this one and take the Wildcats.

ADAM SCHEIN

Arkansas +5.5 vs. Kansas
Liberty +6.5 vs. Oregon
Creighton +2.5 vs. Louisville
VCU +3.5 vs. BYU
Yale +7.5 vs. Texas A&M
Michigan -2.5 vs. UC San Diego
Vanderbilt +3.5 vs. Saint Mary's
Connecticut -4.5 vs. Oklahoma

PATRICK MEAGHER

UC San Diego +2.5 vs. Michigan
High Point +8.5 vs. Purdue
Drake +6.5 vs. Missouri
St John's/Omaha Under 148
Colorado State -2.5 vs. Memphis
Clemson -7.5 vs. McNeese State

VSIN EXPERT FINAL FOUR

BEST BETS

GILL ALEXANDER

Auburn
Duke
Tennessee
Florida

CHAMPION: DUKE

MATT BROWN

Michigan State
Alabama
Houston
Florida

CHAMPION: HOUSTON

STORMY BUONANTONY

Michigan State
Duke
Houston
Florida

CHAMPION: FLORIDA

ADAM BURKE

Michigan State
Duke
Gonzaga
Florida

CHAMPION: FLORIDA

KELLEY BYDLON

Auburn
Alabama
Houston
Texas Tech

CHAMPION: HOUSTON

JEFF ERICKSON

Auburn
Duke
Tennessee
Florida

CHAMPION: FLORIDA

SEAN GREEN

Michigan State
Duke
UCLA
Florida

CHAMPION: MICHIGAN STATE

WILL HILL

UC San Diego
Duke
Houston
Florida

CHAMPION: DUKE

PAUL HOWARD

Michigan State
Alabama
Tennessee
Florida

CHAMPION: ALABAMA

RYAN KRAMER

Michigan State
Duke
Houston
Drake

CHAMPION: HOUSTON

JENSEN LEWIS

Auburn
Duke
Houston
Florida

CHAMPION: HOUSTON

STEVE MAKINEN

Auburn
Duke
Tennessee
Florida

CHAMPION: DUKE

AARON MOORE

Michigan State
Duke
Houston
Florida

CHAMPION: HOUSTON

TIM MURRAY

Auburn
Duke
Houston
Texas Tech

CHAMPION: DUKE

BRENT MUSBURGER

Auburn
Duke
Houston
Florida

CHAMPION: FLORIDA

GREG PETERSON

Iowa State
Duke
Houston
Florida

CHAMPION: FLORIDA

WES REYNOLDS

Auburn
Duke
Tennessee
Texas Tech

CHAMPION: DUKE

DAVE ROSS

Michigan State
Alabama
Houston
Kansas

CHAMPION: ALABAMA

ADAM SCHEIN

Auburn
Duke
Tennessee
Florida

CHAMPION: DUKE

SCOTT SEIDENBERG

Michigan State
Duke
Houston
St. John's

CHAMPION: HOUSTON

TYLER SHOEMAKER

Iowa State
Alabama
Gonzaga
Florida

CHAMPION: FLORIDA

MIKE SOMICH

Texas A&M
Duke
Houston
Florida

CHAMPION: DUKE

DAVE TULEY

Auburn
Duke
Tennessee
Texas Tech

CHAMPION: TENNESSEE

JONATHAN VON TOBEL

Auburn
Duke
Houston
St. John's

CHAMPION: AUBURN

NICK WHALEN

Michigan State
Duke
Houston
Texas Tech

CHAMPION: HOUSTON

MATT YOUMANS

Auburn
Duke
Tennessee
St. John's

CHAMPION: DUKE

CHAMPION SUMMARY





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DANCING WITH THE DEVIL,

DANCING WITH DUKE

BY MATT YOUNANS

Instead of avoiding the elephant in the room, it's best to immediately confront it. A college basketball team that many of us despised for many years has suddenly become likable. That team, of course, is Duke. The player who makes that team possible to admire and even root for is freshman phenom Cooper Flagg.

As a longtime critic of Mike Krzyzewski, it's not easy for me to write nice things about the Blue Devils. However, Coach K retired in 2022, and a dark cloud lifted. Jon Scheyer is a cool, young coach who wins without making it all about himself. He's a fresh-faced 37-year-old, not a two-faced, insufferable egomaniac. The best player Scheyer has recruited is Flagg, who's great without being annoying, unlike so many Duke stars of the past. This is a new era.

I'm dancing with the Devils in this NCAA tournament and not feeling bad or hypocritical about it.

In the 12 hours or so after the 68-team bracket was revealed Sunday, I bet a handful of games, hosted a VSiN show with Greg "Hoops" Peterson and filled out my bracket. Unlike Peterson, I am not picking all of the No. 1 seeds to reach the Final Four. But in the end, I did advance two top seeds with one of those as my national champion, and that's Duke.

It was 2:25 a.m. Monday, when I walked into the Circa sportsbook and the lone ticket writer on duty said, "Where are all the upsets? I don't see any."

I assured him there will be upsets and mentioned a few possibilities, but he shook his head in denial. What makes this tournament so intriguing is the games are never as easy to predict as they appear on paper.

Here's a breakdown of my initial bets and bracket picks.

EAST REGION

Flagg suffered an ankle injury in the ACC tournament and was put in a wheelchair, which is always concerning. We have not witnessed a player jump out of a wheelchair and win a game since Paul Pierce pulled off the miracle for the Boston Celtics in Game 1 of the 2008 NBA Finals. Flagg missed two games, and it was encouraging to see Duke beat North Carolina and Louisville without him. Scheyer said Flagg is "full steam ahead" to return this week, so that's no longer a concern.

The Blue Devils have a clear path to the Elite Eight. In their half of the bracket, No. 4 Arizona and No. 5 Oregon should not be upset threats. The bottom half of the bracket does feature four teams worthy of respect — Alabama, Wisconsin, Brigham Young and Saint Mary's — but Duke obviously must beat only one of those teams to reach the Final Four. I have sixth-seeded BYU reaching the East final and falling to Duke.

I studied the math probabilities at [EvanMiya.com](https://www.EvanMiya.com), where 10,000 tournament simulations were run

using team ratings, and Duke emerged as the most likely NCAA champion at 24.7 percent. (The next three on the list are Houston at 15.4 percent, Florida at 15.1 and Auburn at 13.1). The Blue Devils are given a 54.2 percent shot to reach the Final Four.

My three first-round bets in this region: BYU -2 over VCU; Montana +17.5 over Wisconsin; Akron +14 over Arizona.

MIDWEST REGION

I believe Houston is the No. 1 seed most likely to get upset and fail to reach the Final Four down the road in San Antonio. The Cougars are No. 3 in the KenPom.com ratings (behind Duke and Florida) and sit in the top 10 in both offensive and defensive efficiency, yet their slow tempo (No. 360) can lead to close games and leaves less margin for error when trying to overcome a poor shooting performance. Houston gets the Gonzaga-Georgia winner in the second round. No. 4 Purdue and No. 5 Clemson will be on upset alert in the first round.

Tennessee should survive as the No. 2 seed in the bottom half of the bracket. Illinois is too inconsistent, and Kentucky has sustained too many personnel losses this season. My darkhorse team here is Xavier, a No. 11 seed with the potential to go from the First Four in Dayton to the Sweet 16. Musketeers coach Sean Miller is no stranger to March misery, but maybe he will make a run now when it's least expected.

A go-to scorer who can take over games is a huge key to winning in this tournament. Last year, Houston had that in Jamal Shead and Tennessee had that in Dalton Knecht. I have not been that high on either the Cougars or Volunteers this year, but this looks like the weakest region beyond the top two seeds, so I can't find Cinderella and will roll with the Vols to get coach Rick Barnes over the top.

My three first-round bets in this region: Xavier -2 over Texas; High Point +8 over Purdue; McNeese +7.5 over Clemson.

SOUTH REGION

Auburn is the tournament's No. 1 overall seed, despite losing three of its last four games, and headlines the 14 Southeastern Conference teams in the field. If Flagg is not the nation's top player, it's the Tigers' Johni Broome. After getting stunned by Yale in last year's first round, Auburn will come in angry and play with an edge.

This is the 25th anniversary of Michigan State coach Tom Izzo's only national title, but I don't believe in fairytales or any team from the Big Ten, which is 0-8 in title games since Izzo's win in 2000 and after Purdue's loss to Connecticut a year ago. The second-seeded Spartans' weakness is 3-point shooting (30.2 percent) and that will likely be their downfall.

Iowa State, seeded No. 3, was 15-1 on Jan. 15. The Cyclones are 9-8 since then and now will be without injured guard Keshon Gilbert, the team's second-leader scorer. My darkhorse in this region is sixth-seeded Mississippi, which has the scoring, toughness and coach to advance to the Elite Eight. Rebels coach Chris Beard has March magic in his past. Auburn is too talented, with too many veterans to lose early. In this case, it's good to be old — coach Bruce Pearl's rotation has an average age of 23.2 years, comparable to the NBA's best team (24.4 for the Oklahoma City Thunder).

My only first-round bet in this region: Yale +7.5 over Texas A&M. I will add more, but this region requires further review. Big West champ UC San Diego, the best ATS team in the nation at 25-7, is already too popular as a 2.5-point underdog to Big Ten tournament champ Michigan. The Wolverines could be a classic contrarian favorite in a 5-12 matchup.

WEST REGION

UConn coach Dan Hurley is not getting a title three-peat, though I do expect the eighth-seeded Huskies to get to the second round and fall to Florida. It's probably not a great thing that the Gators won the SEC and expended a lot of energy to accomplish it. I hate that two of my best futures bets (Florida 10-1 and St. John's 80-1) are on teams in the same region.

Rick Pitino is a coaching wizard who has been there and done it, which gives him an advantage over Gators coach Todd Golden, who never has won an NCAA tournament game. Pitino recently said St. John's could lose in the first round or make a run to the Final Four. He's not losing to Omaha, but Pitino will face either Bill Self (Kansas) or John Calipari (Arkansas) in the second round.

This region is loaded with talented teams, so there is plenty of upset potential after the first round. It's tough not to love Florida, but Pitino has been my guy for a long time. The Red Storm (30-4) lost four games by a total of seven points, which is remarkable. St. John's ranks No. 1 in defensive efficiency, ahead of Houston, Tennessee, Duke and Michigan State.

My two first-round bets in this region: Arkansas +4.5 over Kansas; Grand Canyon +10.5 over Maryland.

So my Final Four includes two No. 1s (Auburn and Duke) and two No. 2s (St. John's and Tennessee). As an underdog bettor, I hate to play so much chalk, but there's no denying the strength of this tournament's top seeds, especially Duke.

As Rocky Balboa once said to the Russian crowd after beating Ivan Drago, "If I can change, and you can change, everybody can change."

I no longer dislike Duke, which I bet at 12-1 odds before the season, and will dance with the Blue Devils to win it all.

HANDICAPPING THE TOURNAMENT ROUND BY ROUND WITH GENERAL AND SEED TRENDS

by Steve Makinen

Some very reliable patterns have formed in recent NCAA Tournament action. This past year was a banner one for those who chased the chalk, a complete turn from 2023's craziness. In fact, over the course of the tournament last year, favorites went 40-27 ATS (59.7%). Also, we are currently in a pattern of early-round Unders, with those going 45-26-1 (63.4%) over the last two tournaments. I like to feel that readers of this particular piece have been not only able to stay afloat through these variations but also thrive by simply following some of the trends and systems I shared that break down the tournament on a round-by-round basis. In it, I look for edges by seed, line range, conferences, and much more.

The data used to derive these trends was pulled mostly from tournament games dating back to 2001. The year 2001 was not chosen randomly. That was the first year the tournament was expanded beyond 64 teams. Remember, we had no tournament at all in 2020 and an unusual single locale (Indianapolis) event in 2021.

PRIOR TOURNAMENT GAME SYSTEMS

Before getting into the round-by-round stuff, I wanted to share five different "prior game reactionary systems" of 60% or better that I found. 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 NCAAs by scoring less than 60 points have gone 46-43 SU and 56-33 ATS (63%) in the follow-up game since 2006

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.

NCAA TOURNAMENT PRIOR GAME SYSTEM #2

Teams that win in the NCAAs by scoring 88 or more points have gone 57-10 SU and 42-25 ATS (62.7%) in the follow-up game since 2000 when favored by 6 points or more.

Obviously, 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 NCAAs by allowing 56 or fewer points have gone 28-28 SU and 38-18 ATS (67.9%) in the follow-up game since 2010.

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 NCAAs but are beaten by 7+ points on the point spread have rebounded nicely in the next game, going 30-8 SU and 25-12-1 ATS (67.6%) since 2010.

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.

NCAA TOURNAMENT PRIOR GAME SYSTEM #5

Teams that win in the NCAAs by scoring less than 60 points have gone 48-30 Under the total (61.5%) in the follow-up game since 2017

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 12 NCAA tournaments, underdogs own a 26-21 ATS (55.3%) 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 28-23 SU but just 21-29-1 ATS (42%)
- Outright winners have gone 39-3 ATS (92.9%) in the First Four round since 2013, although in a strange most recent loss, Drake did win vs Wichita State without covering in 2021 on a 1.5-point spread.
- Higher totaled First Four games, or those higher than 139, have also trended 15-7 Under (68.2%)
- Formerly, all First Four games used to match #16 seeds. Recently, First Four games featuring seeds 12 or better have trended 17-7 Under (70.8%)
- 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 14-9 ATS (60.9%) run. In the games featuring #10-#12 seeds, favorites hold a recent 10-6 ATS (62.5%) 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 NCAAAs.
- Power conference schools that lost SU and ATS in their conference championship game are 64-18 SU and 46-34-2 ATS (57.5%) in the first round over the last 16 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 59-62 SU and 48-69-4 ATS (41%) since 2009. However, this trend has also swung the other way in the last two years, going 11-5 SU and ATS.
- Of late, mid-level favorites of -3.5 to -7.5 have also struggled, going 41-27 SU but 28-40 ATS (41.2%) since 2016 in the first round.
- Since 2016, first round double-digit favorites have been very successful, going 94-9 SU and 57-46 ATS (55.3%). This goes entirely against the Cinderella negative that the media and fans seem to crave.
- On totals in the first round recently, games posted with totals of 149 or higher have trended decisively Under in the last five tournaments, going 21-10 (67.7%).

BY SEEDS

- There are some sweet spots when it comes to betting #1 seeds. As huge favorites of -25.5 or more, they are 35-0 SU and 21-14 ATS (60%) since 2001. As favorites of -19 to -25 points, they are just 14-24 ATS (36.8%) since '09. 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 14-6 Under the total (70%) while holding opponents to 59 PPG.
- Be wary of laying big numbers with #2 seeds, as they are just 14-24-1 ATS (36.8%) 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 27 #3 seeds to play in first round games are on an impressive 25-2 SU and 17-10 ATS (63%) surge. Of course, one of those outright losses came a year 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, going 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, going 20-7 (74.1%) since 2003, with games producing almost 6.9 PPG below their posted numbers on average.
- #4 seeds have been somewhat unreliable lately for bettors, going 15-24-1 ATS (38.5%) over the last 10 tournament seasons, including 7-15-1 ATS (31.8%) when favored by 8.5 points or more.
- 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 #12's in 2023 by going 4-0 SU and ATS. They fell back to normal last year by going 2-2 SU and 1-3 ATS. In all, they are 23-34-3 ATS (40.4%) over the last 15 tournaments. These #5 seeds remain extremely vulnerable when playing as 6-point favorites or more lately, going 20-9 SU but 9-18-2 ATS (33.3%) since 2009.
- Power conference schools are 24-19 SU and 13-28-2 ATS (31.7%) as #5 seeds in the first round since 2008, including Wisconsin's outright loss in 2024. As #12 seeds, they are on a 13-4-1 ATS (76.5%) surge.
- #5's have also struggled in expectedly lower scoring games with totals of 141 or less recently, going 13-27-2 ATS (32.5%) since '09.
- #6 seeds are 28-32 SU and 22-37-1 ATS (37.3%) in their last 60 first round games versus #11's (also 39-19-2 Under - 67.2%)
- In #6-#11 games set with the #6 playing as an underdog or pick 'em, the #6's are just 5-12 SU and ATS (29.4%) since 2001. This is a classic trap set by oddsmakers and it happened twice in 2024, with the seeds splitting the games.
- Mid-major schools playing as #6 seeds have floundered against power conference #11's, going 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 20-5-1 (80%) in such games since '09, with games producing just 129.8 PPG on average, with totals of about 138.7.
- Mid-major schools playing as #7 seeds have been a sound wagering choice, going 22-9-1 ATS (71%) since 2004. In the 2024 bracket, #7 Dayton (+1.5) edged Nevada by 3.
- #7 seeds playing in the +3 to -3 line range have proven to be quite profitable over the long haul, going 42-21 SU and 39-23-1 ATS (62.9%) since 2003, including 4-0 SU and ATS last year.
- #8 seeds went 1-3 SU and ATS in 2024, running their six-year mark to just 8-16 SU and ATS (33.3%).
- As small favorites of 3 points or less over #9's, #8 seeds are on a brutal skid of 8-15 SU and 5-17-1 ATS (22.7%)!
- Of the last 29 #8-#9 matchups, 19 have gone Over the total (65.5%).
- Combined, mid-major conference programs playing in the #4-#6 seeds over the last 22 years have gone 30-24 SU but 21-32-1 ATS (39.6%). They have been far more successful against the spread in the lesser pressure #7 and #8 seeds, going 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 30-19 SU and 31-17-1 ATS (64.6%) since 2008. In the 2024 tournament, #11 seeds Oregon, NC State, and #10 Colorado all won their first round games.

SECOND ROUND GAMES

GENERAL TRENDS

- Bettors have not enjoyed a winning second round since 2017, going 27-45-1 ATS (37.5%) 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 6-8 ATS in 2024.
- Second round Top 4 seeds that won but didn't cover the spread in the first round are 44-17 SU and 33-27-1 ATS (55%) since 2013. They are also 34-24-3 Under (58.6%) the total.
- Second round double-digit favorites are 52-2 SU and 34-20 ATS (63%) since 2001. Sixteen of the last 25 such games went Under (64%) the total, with the favorites allowing just 61 PPG.
- Second round worse seeded teams playing as favorites have been wildly successful, going 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 50-12 SU and 42-20 ATS (67.7%) record since 1998.

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 24-1 SU but 10-15 ATS (40%).
- #1 seeds are currently on a 5-12 ATS (29.4%) skid versus #8 seeds in the second round but are 11-8 ATS (57.9%) versus #9 seeds in that same 10-year window.
- Second round #2 seeds have felt the upset pressure, going just 16-25-2 ATS (39%) in their last 43 games. Those favored by 5 points or less are just 14-19 SU and 10-21-2 ATS (32.3%) since 2002.
- #3 seeds haven't been great overall for bettors, but they have been at their best in expectedly higher scoring games (totals ≥ 144), going 14-3 SU and 12-5 ATS (70.6%) since 2005.
- Seeds #4-#6 have been stellar lately in the second round, with these spread runs entering 2024: #4 seeds 20-12 ATS (62.5%), #5's 21-9 ATS (70%), #6's 20-10 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 19-1 SU and 17-3 ATS (85%) since 2014!
- Second round #10 seeds are on a 4-14 SU but 11-5-2 ATS (68.8%) run since 2011.
- 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.
- #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 10-17 SU and ATS (37%) when playing as underdogs to worse-seeded teams in the second round since 2001.
- 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%).

SWEET 16 GAMES

- Laying big points seems to be getting riskier in the Sweet 16 in recent years, as favorites of 5 points or more are 14-11 SU but just 8-17 ATS (32%) since 2017.
- Sweet 16 favorites of 8 points or more are on a 27-8-3 Under (77.1%) the total run allowing 62.7 PPG.
- Sweet 16 #1 and #2 seeds have taken care of business lately and combined are on a 38-17 SU and 31-23-1 ATS (57.4%) run over the last 10 seasons. However, they are just 4-8 SU and ATS over the last two years, as many people's brackets have been obliterated on those Thursday and Friday nights.
- Sweet 16 round is usually the end of the line for double-digit seeds. However, they have been very competitive as underdogs, going 16-7-1 ATS (69.6%) in that role since 2011.
- The popular #1-#4 matchup has been all #1 lately, going 12-4 SU and 9-6-1 ATS (60%) over the last 10 tournaments. However, #4 seeds Duke and Alabama both won last year over #1 seeds.
- In Sweet 16 games between teams "both not supposed to be there" or both seeded 5 or worse, the lower-seeded team is 11-7 SU and ATS (61.1%) since 2001.
- 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 lower-seeded Power 6 conference team, the latter are on a current 7-5 SU and 7-4-1 ATS (63.6%) run.
- Since 2010, in Sweet 16 games involving at least one mid-major conference program, Under the total is 26-14 (65%).
- Over the last 10 years, there have been 25 Sweet 16 games with totals of less than 138, and Under the total is 18-7 (75%).
- 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 38-27-1 ATS (58.5%) in moving opening lines since 2012.

ELITE EIGHT GAMES

- The Elite Eight round has for long been a dangerous spot for better-seeded teams, as they are just 50-46 SU and 36-56-4 ATS (39.1%) since 2000.
- Elite Eight favorites of 4 points or fewer have gone just 4-10 SU and 3-10-1 ATS (23.1%) in their last 14 games and are just 17-33-1 ATS (34%) since 1998. However, both teams that qualified last year won their games outright and ATS.
- Elite Eight games have been decisive, with outright winners owning a stellar record of 65-5-2 ATS (92.9%) since 2006.
- Cinderella teams, or those not from power conferences, have been good bets when they reach the Elite Eight round, going 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 34-25 SU but 25-30-4 ATS (45.4%) in this round since 2001.
- 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, as the Over is 88-66-2 (57.1%) since 2001. In games with lower totals of 143 or less, it has been 59 Overs and 30 Unders, for 66.3%.
- In Elite Eight games between teams "both not supposed to be there" or both seeded 3 or worse, the lower-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 12-3 SU and 11-4 ATS since 2007 (73.3%).
- 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, outright winning teams own a record of 37-7-2 ATS (84.1%) 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 last year, 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 been most successful in the Final Four, going 11-7 SU and 10-8 ATS (55.6%) since 2001, including 8-2 SU and 6-4 ATS when favored.
- 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 24-17-2 Over (58.5%) in the Final Four since 1999.
- Bettors have been sharp in moving lines for the Final Four games since 2015, going 12-1 SU and 8-5 ATS (61.5%) in games that have seen the point spread shift off the opener.
- Eight of the last 10 Final Four games that have seen an opening total moved downward through the week until tip-off have ended up going Over the total (80%).

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 4-4 SU and ATS since 1998. Last year, UConn (-7) handled Purdue rather comfortably, 75-60.
- Only twice in the last 24 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.
- 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.
- 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 7-10 ATS (41.2%) in their last 17 championship games when moving opening lines towards one team or the other. In the last two years, they have won with UConn, however. This same group is on a 14-7 (66.7%) run when moving totals one way or the other. Last year's game pushed downward from 147.5 to 143 and went Under handily.

Johni Broome



MARCH MADNESS 2025

WINNING STRATEGIES FOR BRACKETS, SURVIVOR POOLS, AND CALCUTTAS

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 \$2.5 million and 3.1 times the expected rate since 2017.



March Madness is almost here, and millions will enter bracket contests, survivor pools, and Calcutta auctions. While Lady Luck plays a role, data-driven strategies give players a real edge over gut-feel picks.

There is a special offer for VSIN readers and subscribers [right here](#) to use all of the tools that PoolGenius and Team Rankings have to offer.

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM STUDYING 19,436 BRACKET POOLS

For over 20 years, PoolGenius has refined bracket optimization software to help pool players outsmart the competition. Since 2015, subscriber insights have helped us fine-tune bracket advice that actually works—not just what sounds good on TV.

Here are the results:

- Subscribers have reported over \$2.5 million in pool winnings—and that's just from the 23% who responded to our surveys.
- Since 2015, PoolGenius subscribers have won bracket pools 3.1 times as often as expected.
- On average, 52% of subscribers have won a prize in at least one March Madness pool every year.
- In 2024, that number jumped to 61%, meaning the majority of subscribers won a bracket pool.

Clearly, beating your pool isn't about getting lucky—it's about having a smarter approach.

HOW THIS DATA LEADS TO SMARTER BRACKET PICKS

Our analysis of 19,436 bracket pools has shown that data-driven brackets consistently outperform those built on gut instinct—and that makes sense. Most NCAA bracket advice is generic and ignores key factors like scoring system and pool size. Without that context, how could it possibly predict which upsets are right for you?

Here's a smarter approach—one that actually factors in what matters.

THREE KEYS TO BETTER BRACKET PICKS:

1. Know Your Scoring System

Different pools require different strategies. A 1-2-4-8-16-32 format (where points double each round) makes your champion pick worth as much as all 32 first-round games combined. Most people take too many upsets in this format. On the other hand, flatter scoring systems (1-2-3-4-5-6) or upset bonus formats shift the strategy, increasing the value of first-round accuracy and underdog plays.

2. Pool Size Strategy

Pool size changes everything. In smaller pools (under 50 entries), safe picks win more often as others take unnecessary risks. In larger pools, you need to make bold but calculated contrarian picks to separate yourself from the pack.

3. Game Theory Optimization

Winning isn't about a perfect bracket—it's about outscoring your competition. This is where the PoolGenius Bracket Optimizer shines, as it analyzes public pick trends (sourced from multiple bracket hosting sites—our secret sauce) and combines them with expected value (EV) to find the smartest spots to follow the crowd or break away—especially in late-round, high-leverage matchups.

[NCAA BRACKET OPTIMIZER FROM POOLGENIUS >>](#)

NCAA TOURNAMENT SURVIVOR POOL STRATEGY

NCAA Tournament survivor pools add a fun twist to March Madness, requiring players to pick a team (or several) to win each round—without using that team again. Unlike traditional bracket contests, these pools require planning and adaptability as the tournament unfolds.

3 TIPS TO WIN YOUR NCAA SURVIVOR POOL:

1. Plan For Multiple Rounds

Save the strongest teams likely to advance far for later rounds. Look for teams with good early matchups but a lower probability of reaching the Final Four.

2. Monitor Pick Popularity

Certain teams become extremely popular picks, especially after the first round. For example, after first-round upsets in 2021, Florida (facing 15-seed Oral Roberts) and UCLA (facing 14-seed Abilene Christian) became overwhelmingly popular second-round picks. Florida lost, eliminating many entries.

3. Consider Taking Calculated Risks

Unlike NFL survivor pools, where picking underdogs rarely makes sense, sometimes backing an underdog in later NCAA tournament rounds is smart if most remaining entries are concentrated on their opponent.

Survivor success comes from balancing immediate win probability with long-term survival. PoolGenius maps optimal paths using round advancement odds, so you're never making a pick in the dark.

[GET NCAA PLUS \(BRACKET + SURVIVOR\) FROM POOLGENIUS >>](#)

CALCUTTA AUCTION STRATEGY

Calcutta pools are the cool older cousin of traditional bracket contests—more intense, more strategic, and far less predictable.

In this format, participants bid on teams in an auction, with payouts based on how far those teams advance. It's part game theory, part risk management, and part March Madness chaos. Here's how to set yourself up for success.

CALCUTTA AUCTION TIPS:

1. Determine Objective Team Values

Convert advancement odds into expected pot percentage values. Otherwise, you're bidding blind. (Good news—PoolGenius can do this for you.)

2. Look For Market Inefficiencies

The public tends to overvalue high-profile teams from major conferences and undervalue strong teams from less prestigious conferences or with recent tournament disappointments.

3. Early Bidding Advantage

Teams that come up for auction early often sell at a discount before the market establishes pricing patterns. Be ready to pounce on early values.

4. Track The Board

Pay attention to how many teams have gone to how many players. If several bidders are still waiting to buy their first team halfway through, expect prices to rise.

The goal in a Calcutta isn't necessarily to own the champion—it's to get teams for less than their expected return.

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WHY SMART POOL PLAYERS CHOOSE POOLGENIUS

Our success isn't just from basketball expertise—it's from solving a mathematical optimization problem.

Our NCAA Bracket Picks tool combines:

- Objective team ratings adjusted for injuries and lineup changes
- Betting market data that factors in sharp money
- Public pick data to track what your opponents will likely do
- Millions of simulations to find the best plays for your pool

Unlike generic bracket advice, PoolGenius customizes picks to your pool settings—because the optimal bracket for a 25-person office pool is vastly different from the best approach for a 500-person contest with upset bonuses.

For less than most pool entry fees, you get access to the same advanced analytics that have helped thousands of subscribers dominate their bracket pools, survivor contests, and Calcutta auctions.

[GET 2025 NCAA BRACKET TOOLS FROM POOLGENIUS >>](#)



The advertisement banner features a bright orange background on the left with the text "BRACKET PICKS" in large, bold, white and black letters. Below this, it lists "OPTIMIZED BRACKETS", "PUBLIC TREND ANALYSIS", and "MATCHUP PREDICTOR". A white button with orange text says "GET ACCESS NOW >". On the right, there's a blurred image of a basketball game with a basketball in the foreground. The PoolGenius logo is in the top right. At the bottom right, it says "\$2.5+ MILLION IN PRIZES WON".

CONFERENCE TRENDS TO CARRY YOU THROUGH THE TOURNEY

by Steve Makinen

ACC

TRENDS

- Over the last three NCAA tournaments, the ACC boasts a record of 33-15 SU and ATS (68.8%).
- ACC teams have been most successful in the Final Four, going 11-5 SU and 10-6 ATS (62.5%) since 2001. However, NC State did lose last year.
- 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 32-49-1 ATS (39.5%) as favorites of 5 points or less in the NCAAs since 1998.
- ACC teams are 34-3 SU but 12-25 ATS (32.4%) in their last 37 as double-digit tourney favorites.
- ACC teams playing as double-digit seeds are 19-11-1 ATS (63.3%) since 2012.
- #2 ACC seeds are on a brutal 11-28-1 ATS (28.2%) slide since 2001. However, Duke did go 4-1 SU and 3-2 ATS in 2022.
- ACC teams are 16-4 SU but 1-19 ATS (5%) combined versus Atlantic Sun, CAA, and Ohio Valley teams since 2001.
- ACC teams are on a current surge of 11-4 SU and 13-2 ATS (86.7%) in the NCAAs versus Big 12 foes, including 3-0 SU and ATS last year. In addition, underdogs are on an impressive 9-9 SU and 13-5 ATS (72.2%) surge in the matchup.
- In the 19 most recent NCAA tourney matchups between the ACC and Big East, Over the total is 13-7 (65%).
- Seventeen of the last 24 NCAA tourney matchups between the ACC and SEC have gone Under the total (70.8%). However, both went Over last year.
- In that same ACC-SEC conference NCAA matchup, underdogs are on a 13-3-1 ATS (81.3%) surge since '17.
- 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

TRENDS

- Vermont's loss to Duke in 2024 dropped the America East record in the NCAAs to 11-5 ATS (68.8%) since 2011.
- America East teams are 16-8-1 Under (66.7%) the total in NCAAs since 2003.

AAC

TRENDS

- AAC teams are 13-4 Under the total (76.5%) in their last 17 tourney games as underdogs.
- In their last 25 tourney games versus power conference foes, AAC teams are 18-10 Under the total (64.3%).
- AAC teams boast a recent NCAA tourney record versus fellow mid-major conferences of 8-2 ATS (80%).
- 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. However, FAU did lose a year ago, as did Memphis in 2023.

ATLANTIC 10

TRENDS

- Atlantic 10 teams have won just four of their last 15 NCAA tourney games, both SU and ATS (26.7%).
- A-10 teams are also on a 3-9 SU and ATS (25%) skid in the NCAA's against fellow mid-major conference foes. However, Dayton did beat Nevada last year.
- Underdogs are 10-3 ATS (76.9%) in the last 13 NCAA tourney games between Atlantic 10 and Big East.
- Favorites are on a 20-6 SU and 17-9 ATS (65.4%) surge in A-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

TRENDS

- Atlantic Sun teams are on an 11-5 ATS (68.8%) run in tourney games since 2013, including 9-4 ATS (69.2%) vs. Power 5 conferences.
- Atlantic Sun teams are on a 12-7 Over (63.2%) run in NCAAs.

BIG 12

TRENDS

- Big 12 teams have been dominant in the First Four/first round games since 2017, going 35-13 SU and 30-18 ATS (62.5%).
- Big 12 teams in the #4-#8 seed ranges are 25-35 SU and 22-37 ATS (37.3%) since 2010, making them popular upset victims.
- Favorites are 14-6 SU and 12-7-1 ATS (63.2%) in the last 20 NCAA tournament games between the Big 12 and Big Ten.
- Against mid-major teams, Big 12 teams are 22-10 ATS (68.8%).
- 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 3-7 SU and 1-9 ATS (10%) since 2001.
- Big 12 teams have lost 59 of their 74 NCAA tourney games since 2000 as underdogs of 2.5 points or more and are 30-43-1 ATS (41.1%) in those games.
- As favorites of 7 points or more in the NCAAs, Big 12 teams are on a current run of 31-2 SU and 22-11 ATS (66.7%).

BIG EAST

TRENDS

- Big East schools own a perfect 8-0 SU and ATS record in championship games since 2001, including Connecticut's current back-to-back wins.
- Big East teams have also thrived in the tournament's second round of late, going 13-7 SU and 15-5 ATS (75%) since 2017.
- Top two seeded (#1s and #2s) teams from the Big East have validated their positions by going 28-6 SU and 25-9 ATS (73.5%) in the NCAAs since 2016.
- The last 46 Big East teams to play as seeds of #7 or worse in the NCAA tourney are just 12-34 SU and 16-30 ATS (34.8%).
- Teams from the Big East Conference have been highly reliable double-digit favorites in the NCAAs since 2007, going 44-3 SU and 32-15 ATS (68.1%).
- Teams from the Big East in the #8-#9 first round matchup are just 4-13 SU and 3-14 ATS (17.6%) in the NCAAs since 2005.
- Big East teams are on a 10-2 SU and ATS (83.3%) run against Mountain West teams in the tournament.
- Favorites are 51-19 ATS (72.9%) in the last 58 Big East NCAA tourney games, including 23-5 ATS (82.1%) in the last two years.
- In NCAA tourney games between Big East programs and non-major conferences since 2015, favorites are on a 33-11 SU and 32-10 ATS (76.2%) run.

BIG SKY

TRENDS

- Big Sky teams are just 1-23 SU and 6-18 ATS (25%) in the tournament since 2001, including 3-16 ATS (15.8%) as an underdog of less than 20 points.
- Big Sky teams have lost 21 straight NCAA tournament games against major conference teams, going 5-16 ATS (23.8%).

BIG SOUTH

TRENDS

- Big South teams are 8-4-1 ATS (66.7%) as #16 seeds in the tournament since 2003, 3-8 ATS (27.3%) in all other seeds.
- Big South teams are on a 15-6 Under the total (71.4%) tourney surge vs. major conference teams, scoring just 56.6 PPG.

BIG TEN

TRENDS

- Big Ten teams are winless at 0-8 SU and ATS in the championship game since 2001, including Purdue's loss a year ago.
- Big Ten teams have been vulnerable in the #4 seed of late, 4-13-1 ATS (23.5%) in their L18 tourney tries.
- Overall, Big Ten teams and top 6 seeds haven't meshed well since 2015, as they are 49-33 SU but 35-46-1 ATS (43.2%) in that scenario.
- Big Ten teams have been relatively strong in the double-digit chalk role in the tournament, going 54-5 SU and 34-21-4 ATS (61.8%) since 1998, including 5-0 SU and ATS last year.
- Big Ten teams are on a 13-8 SU and 15-5-1 ATS (75%) run vs. SEC foes in the NCAA tourney, including 2-1 SU and ATS last year.
- Big Ten teams have gone just 16-20 SU and 15-20-1 ATS (42.9%) 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, going 6-53 SU and 21-38 ATS (35.6%) since 1998. They were 0-3 SU and ATS in this role a year ago, losing by 19 PPG.
- In tourney games with single-digit point spreads versus mid-major conference foes in the NCAAs, Big Ten teams are on an ugly 30-44 ATS (40.5%) skid since '06.
- In tourney games of the second round and later, Big Ten teams are just 22-35 SU and 23-32-2 ATS (41.8%) since 2017.

BIG WEST

TRENDS

- Big West teams are just 4-20 SU and 9-14-1 ATS (39.1%) in their last 24 NCAA tournament games.
- Big West teams have trended Under on totals in four straight NCAA tourney games.
- Big West teams have struggled in the role of large underdog, going 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

TRENDS

- CAA teams used to be among the country's best in terms of NCAA tournament spread performance. However, they have lost their last five games SU and ATS and are on an 11-game outright losing streak.
- CAA teams are on a 23-9-2 ATS (71.9%) run as NCAA tourney dogs to major conference teams. Again though, they are off four straight losses currently.
- Under the total is 8-2 (80%) in the last 10 CAA NCAA tournament games versus other mid-major conference teams.
- CAA teams have covered the spread in all nine NCAA tourney games (9-0 ATS 100%) vs. ACC teams since 2001.

CONFERENCE USA

TRENDS

- Take away Florida Atlantic's 4-1 SU and ATS run in 2023 and it's a 6-17 SU and 7-16 ATS (30.4%) NCAA tourney slide for Conference USA teams since 2009.
- Versus power conference schools in the NCAA tournament, Conference USA teams are just 24-39 SU and ATS (38.1%) since 1998, including 9-22 ATS (29%) 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 a 10-2 SU and ATS (83.3%) run in NCAA tournament games between Conference USA and Big Ten, although North Texas did upend Purdue in 2021.
- Conference USA teams are on a brutal slide of 4-22 SU and 6-20 ATS (23.1%) as an underdog of +2 to +9.5 in the NCAA tournament.
- Double-digit seeded Conference USA teams are on a 6-17 SU and 7-16 ATS (30.4%) slide in the NCAAs.

HORIZON

TRENDS

- Horizon League teams have lost 13 of their last 15 NCAA tourney games while going 7-8 ATS (43.8%). However, they are currently on a five-game ATS win streak.
- Horizon League teams are on a 17-8 Under the total (68%) NCAA run.
- Line placement has been key in Horizon League NCAA tourney games. As dogs of 8 points or more, they are 1-14 SU and 6-9 ATS (40%) 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 2-15 SU and 7-10 ATS (41.2%) since 2002. Versus other mid-majors, Horizon League teams are on an 8-2 SU and ATS tourney surge.

IVY

TRENDS

- Ivy League teams have gone 8-13 SU and 13-8 ATS (61.9%) in their last 21 NCAA tourney games, including Yale a year ago, who upset Auburn to reach the second round.
 - Ivy League teams are on a 20-12 Under the total (62.5%) NCAA run, but they have gone Over in each of their last three tries.
 - As underdogs of 5 points or more in the NCAAs, Ivy League teams are just 5-23 SU and 11-17 ATS (39.3%) since 2000. They are also 19-9 Under the total (67.9%) in those games, scoring just 62.1 PPG.
-

MAAC

TRENDS

- MAAC teams are now 1-6 SU and ATS (14.3%) in their last seven NCAA tourney tries as a non-double-digit underdog. They are 4-1 ATS (80%) in their last five as a double-digit dog.
 - MAAC teams are 2-2 SU and 0-4 ATS (0%) historically in First Four games.
 - MAAC teams have produced a record of 3-4 SU and 5-2 ATS versus SEC teams since 2001 in the NCAAs, but St Peter's did lose a year ago to Tennessee, 83-49.
-

MAC

TRENDS

- MAC teams are 14-7 ATS (66.7%) in their last 21 NCAA tourney games as a #13 seed or worse but 9-11 ATS (45%) in other seeds during that stretch.
 - MAC teams are on a run of 11-4 ATS (73.3%) in their last 15 tries as dogs of 6.5 points or more in the NCAA tourney.
 - MAC teams have gone Under the total in their last six NCAA tourney games (100%).
-

MEAC

TRENDS

- MEAC teams are on a 4-16 SU and 5-15 ATS (25%) slide in the NCAAs.
 - MEAC teams are 1-10 SU and 2-9 ATS (18.2%) in their last 11 NCAA tourney games as double-digit dogs.
 - NCAA Tourney games featuring MEAC teams have trended heavily Under on totals, 18-10 (64.3%) in the last 28.
-

MISSOURI VALLEY

TRENDS

- Missouri Valley Conference teams have gone 20-15 SU and 20-14-1 ATS (58.8%) in the NCAA tournament since 2013 but are currently on a 0-4 SU and ATS skid.
- Missouri Valley teams are on an 18-10-1 ATS (64.3%) NCAA tourney run against power conference schools.
- Missouri Valley schools are 6-4 SU and 7-1-2 ATS (70%) in their last 10 NCAA tourney contests vs. the SEC.
- Missouri Valley teams are 15-6-1 ATS (71.4%) since 2006 as a NCAA tournament underdog of 3 points or more.
- Underdogs are 20-7-1 ATS (74.1%) since 2013 in Missouri Valley NCAA tourney games.
- Under the total is 15-6 (71.4%) in the last 20 Missouri Valley NCAA tourney games.

MOUNTAIN WEST

TRENDS

- I have documented Mountain West teams' struggles well in the NCAAs in recent years, as collectively, they are just 30-63 SU and 29-61-3 ATS (32.2%) since 2001, including 4-6 SU and 3-7 ATS in 2024.
 - As tournament underdogs, Mountain West teams are just 11-44 SU and 14-38-3 ATS (26.9%) since 2001.
 - Mountain West Conference teams have been totally overmatched against major conference programs in the NCAAs since 2000, 13-51 SU and 16-46-2 ATS (25.8%).
 - As seeds of 8 or worse in the NCAAs, Mountain West teams are on a brutal 5-37 SU and 7-33-2 ATS (17.5%) since 2003!
 - It's a stretch to find any NCAA tourney Trends in which Mountain West teams are successful, but they do boast a 14-14-1 ATS (50%) mark versus fellow mid-major schools since 2002.
-

NORTHEAST

TRENDS

- Northeast teams are 4-1 ATS over the last two NCAA tourneys, snapping a slide of 4-9-1 ATS in the prior 14 games.
 - Northeast Conference teams are on an 8-3 Over (72.7%) surge as a double-digit NCAA tourney underdog.
-

OHIO VALLEY

TRENDS

- Ohio Valley Conference teams have gone 1-5 SU and ATS (16.7%) in their last six NCAA tournament games after a 15-6 ATS run prior.
 - Ohio Valley teams are 8-3 ATS (72.7%) in their last 11 NCAA tourney games when playing as dogs of 9 points or more.
 - Over the total is 10-3 (76.9%) in the last 13 Ohio Valley NCAA tourney games.
-

PATRIOT

TRENDS

- Patriot League teams are 10-9 ATS (52.6%) in the first round of the NCAA tournament since 2004 but are 1-4 ATS (20%) in all other games.
- Patriot League teams are 10-6 (62.5%) ATS as double-digit underdogs in the NCAAs since 2000.
- Patriot League teams are 12-8 (60%) ATS vs. power conference foes in the NCAAs since 2000, but 1-7 SU and 2-6 ATS (25%) against fellow mid-major teams.

SEC

TRENDS

- The last five NCAA tournaments have been a struggle for SEC teams, as they are just 44-43 SU and 33-54 ATS (37.9%) since the Friday of the first round in the 2018 tourney. They were a combined 8-8 SU and ATS in 2024. This trend figures to get tested heavily in 2025.
- As NCAA favorites of more than 20 points, SEC teams are 11-0 Over the total (100%) since 2001, scoring 86.5 PPG.
- Underdogs are 48-32 ATS (60%) in the last 80 SEC NCAA tourney games Overall, but they were just 5-11 ATS last year.
- As pick 'ems or small favorites of 5 points or less, SEC teams are an ugly 45-51 SU and 37-55-4 ATS (40.2%) in the NCAAs since 1999.
- SEC teams have been a solid wager in the Sweet 16, going 23-14-2 ATS (62.2%) since 2003.
- SEC teams are on a 17-8 Over the total (68%) run in Elite Eight games.
- Seeded in the bottom half of the field (#9-#14), SEC teams have struggled to a 10-25 SU and 13-20-2 ATS (39.4%) record since 2007.
- The #4 seed and the SEC haven't meshed well of late, as they are 18-25 ATS (41.9%) in that spot since 2000 and have gone Under the total at a 30-12-1 (71.4%) rate.
- SEC teams are on a 3-8 ATS (27.3%) skid versus mid-major teams in the NCAAs and are 7-14 ATS (33.3%) in the last 21.

SOUTHERN

TRENDS

- Southern Conference teams have been very competitive in the NCAAs when playing as an underdog of fewer than 15 points, going 17-6 ATS (73.9%) in the last 23.
- Southern Conference teams have trended Under the total in recent NCAAs, going 12-4 (75%) in the last 16.
- Teams from the Southern Conference have covered six straight NCAA first round games (100% ATS).

SOUTHLAND

TRENDS

- As underdogs of 8.5 points or less (or favored), Southland Conference teams are 8-6-1 ATS (57.1%) in their last 15 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 12-5 Under the total (70.6%) in their last 17 NCAA tournament first round games.

SUMMIT

TRENDS

- Overall, Summit League teams are on a 7-4-1 ATS (63.6%) run in NCAA tourney action, and underdogs are 8-3-1 ATS (72.7%) in those games. However, both Trends are 0-3 SU and ATS in the last three years.
- Summit League teams have been a very competitive first round NCAA team in recent years, going 2-8 SU but 6-3-1 ATS (66.7%) in the last 10.
- Recognized as a high-scoring, up-tempo league, five of the last seven NCAA tourney games featuring a Summit League team went Under the total (71.4%).

SUN BELT

TRENDS

- Sun Belt teams have gone Under the total in eight of their last nine (88.9%) NCAA tourney games.
- As #14-#16 seeds in the NCAAs, Sun Belt teams are on a 6-11-1 ATS (35.3%) slide since 1999, 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 13-5 ATS (72.2%) since 2000.
- Sun Belt teams seem to take some motivation from playing major conference teams, as they are on an NCAA tourney run of 8-4 ATS (66.7%) versus those foes since 2008.
- Sun Belt teams are 12-3 Under the total (80%) in NCAA tourney games since '13

SWAC

TRENDS

- SWAC teams are on a 6-4 ATS (60%) run currently in NCAA tourney games, including three straight wins in First Four games.
- As NCAA tourney dogs of +26 or more, SWAC teams are 0-7 SU and 1-6 ATS (14.3%) since 2000.

WAC

TRENDS

- WAC teams have won just three of their last 25 games in the NCAAs since 2006, going 11-14 ATS. However, they are 6-1 ATS (85.7%) in their last seven, and Grand Canyon did end an 18-game losing skid last year.
- Six of the last eight WAC first round NCAA tourney games have gone Over the total (75%).

WEST COAST

TRENDS

- Going into the 2025 NCAAs, West Coast Conference teams are on a 5-13 ATS (27.8%) tourney skid.
- West Coast Conference teams are just 2-12 SU and 3-11 ATS (21.4%) in their last 14 NCAA games against top 3 seeds.
- West Coast Conference teams haven't been as good as suspected as NCAA tournament underdogs, going 7-23 SU and 8-22 ATS (26.7%) since 2007, including 11 straight outright and ATS losses.
- WCC teams have struggled against other non-major conference teams in NCAA tourney play, going 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 last seven tourney games SU and ATS (100%) between West Coast and Big East conferences in the NCAAs.

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STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS BRACKET

SOUTH REGION

1st Round March 20 & 21			2nd Round March 22 & 23		Sweet 16 March 27 & 28		Elite Eight March 29 & 30		First Four Games March 18 & 19		
1	AUBURN	94.3	AUBURN	94.3	AUBURN	94.3	AUBURN	94.3	11	N CAROLINA	84.6
16	ALABAMA ST	64.7	LOUISVILLE	85.6	LOUISVILLE	85.6	TEXAS A&M	87.6	11	SAN DIEGO ST	81.2
8	LOUISVILLE	85.6	MICHIGAN	86.3	MICHIGAN	86.3	MICHIGAN ST	89.1			
9	CREIGHTON	83.8	TEXAS A&M	87.6	TEXAS A&M	87.6	IOWA ST	88.8			
5	MICHIGAN	86.3	OLE MISS	85	OLE MISS	85	MICHIGAN ST	89.1			
12	CAL SAN DIEGO	83.9	IOWA ST	88.8	IOWA ST	88.8	ALABAMA ST	64.7			
4	TEXAS A&M	87.6	MARQUETTE	85.9	MARQUETTE	85.9	MICHIGAN ST	89.1	16	ALABAMA ST	64.7
13	YALE	78.3	MICHIGAN ST	89.1	MICHIGAN ST	89.1	BRYANT	71.9	16	ST FRANCIS-PA	61.7
6	OLE MISS	85									
11	N CAROLINA	84.6									
3	IOWA ST	88.8									
14	LIPSCOMB	77.2									
7	MARQUETTE	85.9									
10	NEW MEXICO	83									
2	MICHIGAN ST	89.1									
15	BRYANT	71.9									

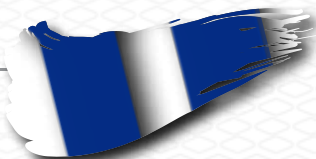
WEST REGION

1st Round March 20 & 21			2nd Round March 22 & 23		Sweet 16 March 27 & 28		Elite Eight March 29 & 30	
1	FLORIDA	96	FLORIDA	96	FLORIDA	96	FLORIDA	96
16	NORFOLK ST	70.1	CONNECTICUT	86.2	MARYLAND	89		
8	CONNECTICUT	86.2	COLORADO ST	82.7				
9	OKLAHOMA	82.6	MARYLAND	89				
5	MEMPHIS	81.8	MISSOURI	86.3				
12	COLORADO ST	82.7	TEXAS TECH	89.1	TEXAS TECH	89.1	ST JOHNS	89.2
4	MARYLAND	89	KANSAS	87	ST JOHNS	89.2		
13	GRAND CANYON	76.8	ST JOHNS	89.2				
6	MISSOURI	86.3	NEBRASKA-OMAHA	71				
11	DRAKE	79.6						
3	TEXAS TECH	89.1						
14	UNC-WILMINGTON	75.9						
7	KANSAS	87						
10	ARKANSAS	81.8						
2	ST JOHNS	89.2						
15	NEBRASKA-OMAHA	71						

STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS BRACKET

EAST REGION

1st Round March 20 & 21		2nd Round March 22 & 23		Sweet 16 March 27 & 28		Elite Eight March 29 & 30		First Four Games March 18 & 19	
1	DUKE 96.7	DUKE 96.7		DUKE 96.7		DUKE 96.7		16	AMERICAN 66.8
16	MOUNT ST MARYS 66.9							16	MOUNT ST MARYS 66.9
8	MISSISSIPPI ST 84.1	MISSISSIPPI ST 84.1							
9	BAYLOR 84.1								
5	OREGON 84.3	OREGON 84.3							
12	LIBERTY 79.2			ARIZONA 87.7					
4	ARIZONA 87.7	ARIZONA 87.7							
13	AKRON 75.7								
6	BYU 85.1	BYU 85.1							
11	VA COMMONWEALTH 85			WISCONSIN 88.5					
3	WISCONSIN 88.5	WISCONSIN 88.5							
14	MONTANA 71.7								
7	ST MARYS-CA 85.5	ST MARYS-CA 85.5							
10	VANDERBILT 82.3			ALABAMA 92.6					
2	ALABAMA 92.6	ALABAMA 92.6							
15	ROBERT MORRIS 72.9								



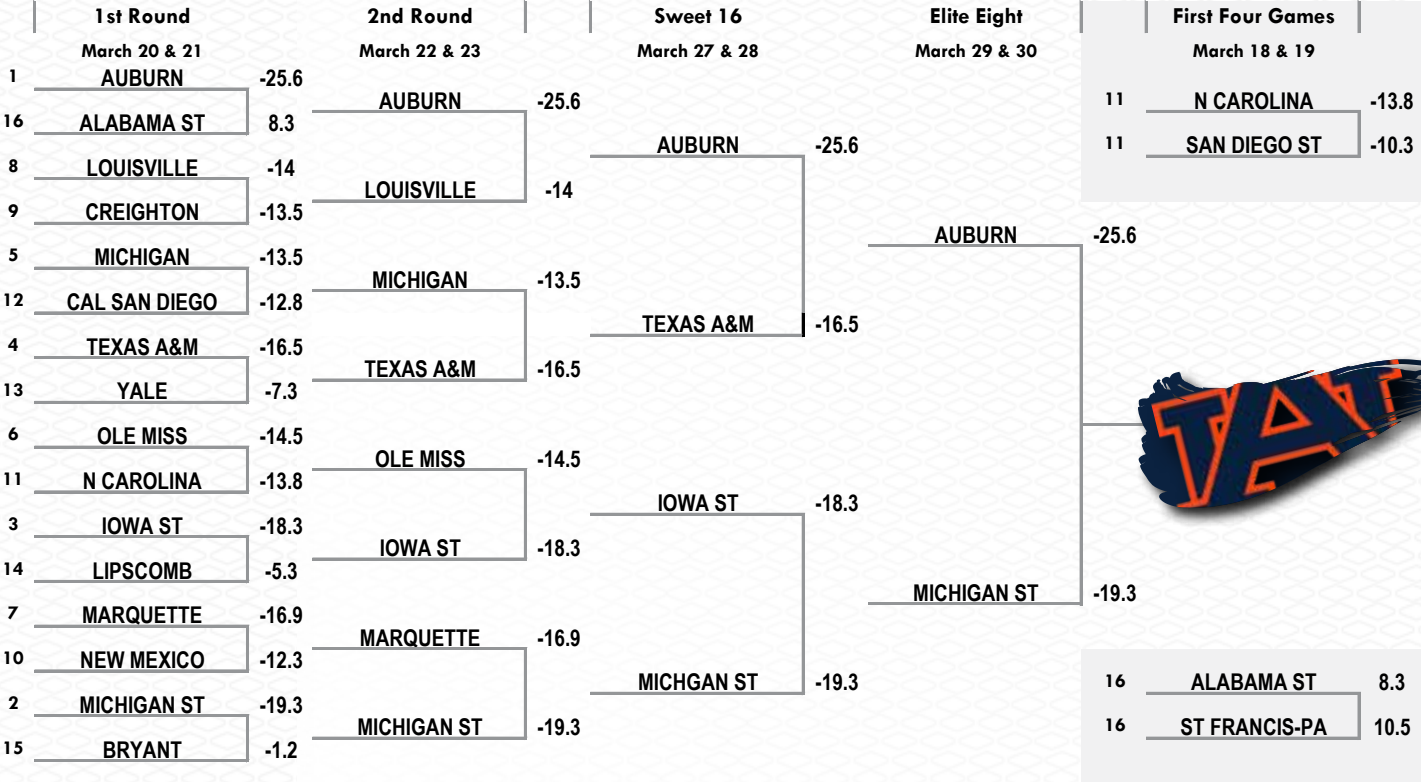
MIDWEST REGION

1st Round March 20 & 21		2nd Round March 22 & 23		Sweet 16 March 27 & 28		Elite Eight March 29 & 30		First Four Games March 18 & 19	
1	HOUSTON 93.2	HOUSTON 93.2		HOUSTON 93.2		HOUSTON 93.2		11	TEXAS 81.6
16	SIU EDWARDSVL 67.9							11	XAVIER 83.2
8	GONZAGA 90.4	GONZAGA 90.4							
9	GEORGIA 83.2								
5	CLEMSON 86.5	CLEMSON 86.5							
12	MCNEESE ST 81			CLEMSON 86.5					
4	PURDUE 85.7	PURDUE 85.7							
13	HIGH POINT 77.7								
6	ILLINOIS 87.8	ILLINOIS 87.8							
11	XAVIER 83.2			ILLINOIS 87.8					
3	KENTUCKY 87.5	KENTUCKY 87.5							
14	TROY 75.3								
7	UCLA 85.2	UCLA 85.2							
10	UTAH ST 81.1			TENNESSEE 90.8					
2	TENNESSEE 90.8	TENNESSEE 90.8							
15	WOFFORD 73.7								

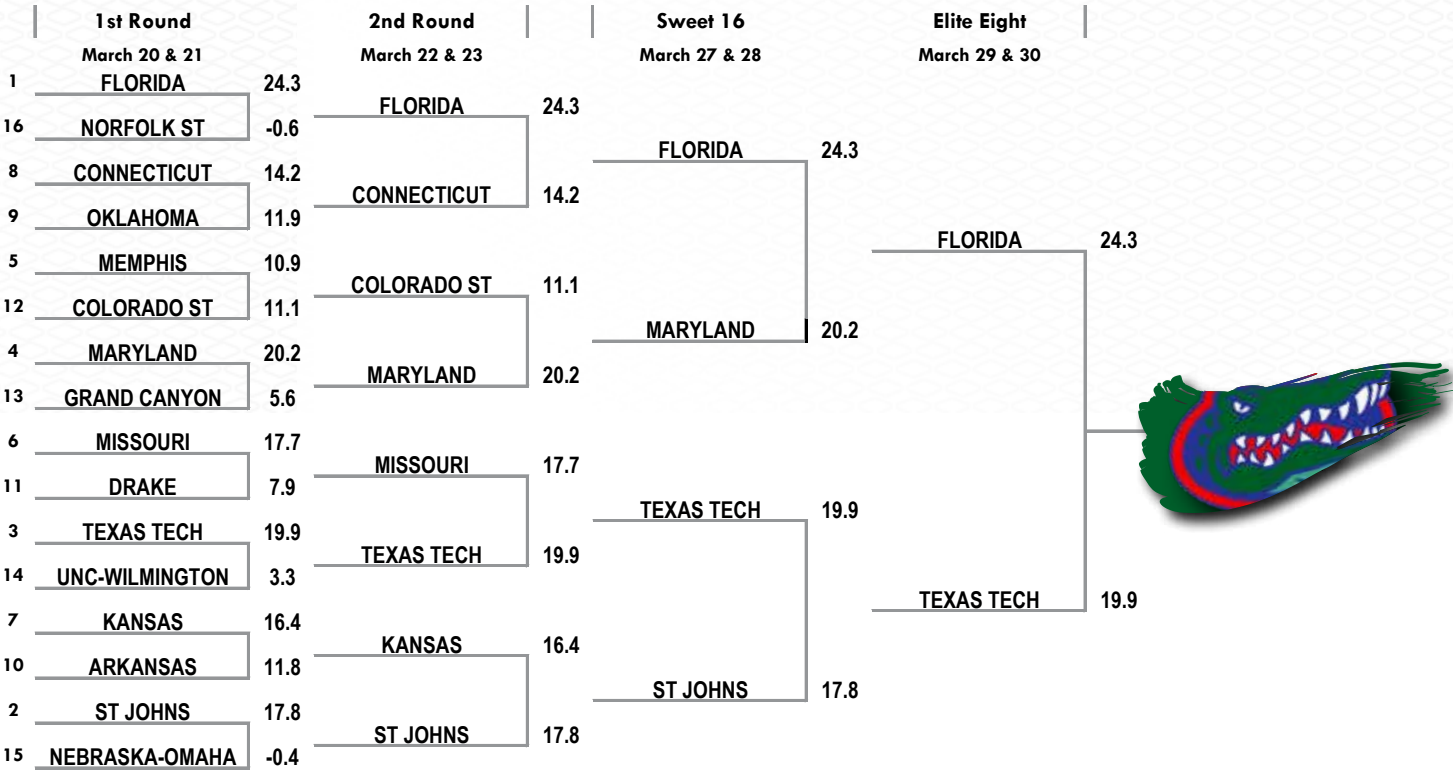


STEVE MAKINEN'S EFFECTIVE STRENGTH BRACKET

SOUTH REGION

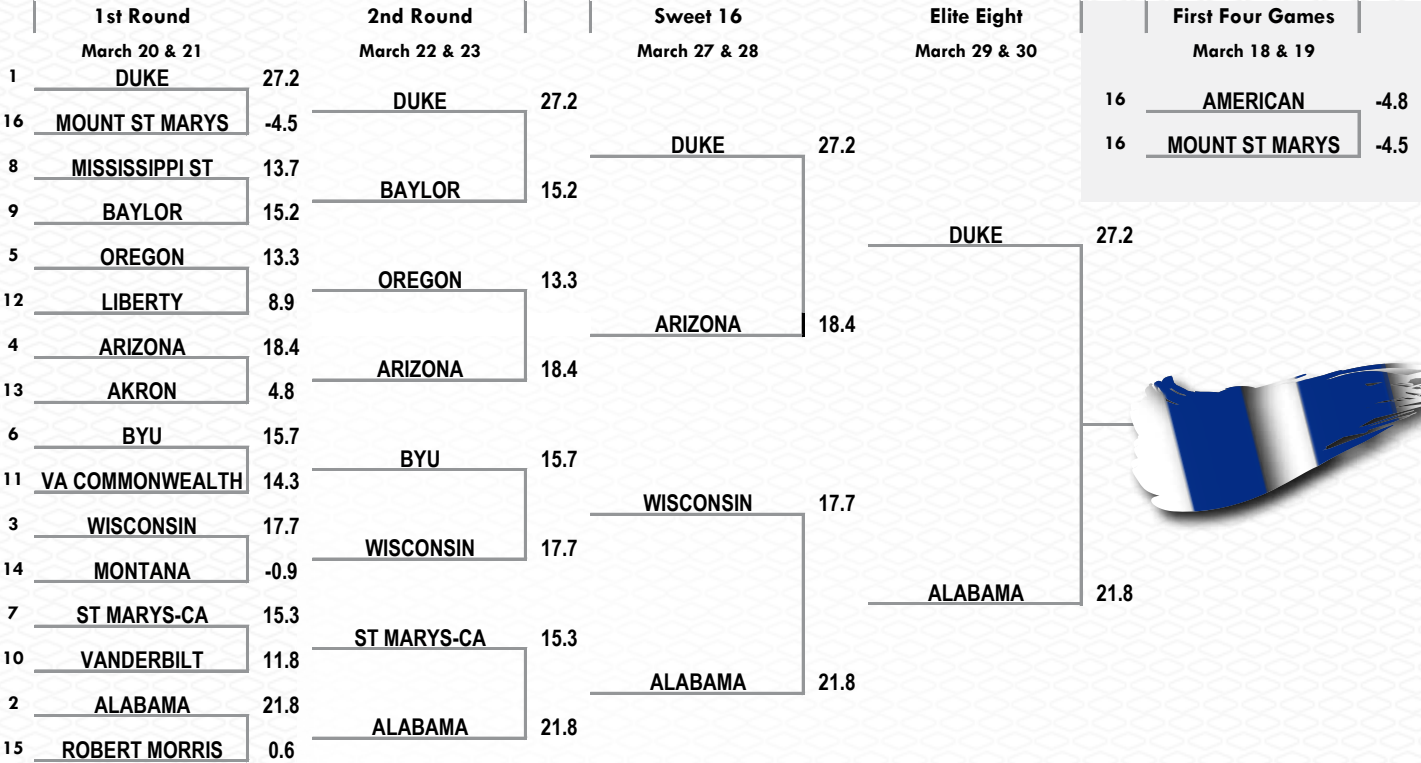


WEST REGION



STEVE MAKINEN'S EFFECTIVE STRENGTH BRACKET

EAST REGION



MIDWEST REGION



STEVE MAKINEN'S BETTORS RATING BRACKET


SOUTH REGION

1st Round March 20 & 21			2nd Round March 22 & 23		Sweet 16 March 27 & 28		Elite Eight March 29 & 30		First Four Games March 18 & 19		
1	AUBURN	-25.6	AUBURN	-25.6	AUBURN	-25.6	AUBURN	-25.6	11	N CAROLINA	-13.8
16	ALABAMA ST	8.3	LOUISVILLE	-14	LOUISVILLE	-14	TEXAS A&M	-16.5	11	SAN DIEGO ST	-10.3
8	LOUISVILLE	-14	MICHIGAN	-13.5	MICHIGAN	-13.5	IOWA ST	-18.3			
9	CREIGHTON	-13.5	TEXAS A&M	-16.5	TEXAS A&M	-16.5	MICHIGAN ST	-19.3			
5	MICHIGAN	-13.5	OLE MISS	-14.5	OLE MISS	-14.5	MICHIGAN ST	-19.3			
12	CAL SAN DIEGO	-12.8	IOWA ST	-18.3	IOWA ST	-18.3	MICHIGAN ST	-19.3			
4	TEXAS A&M	-16.5	MARQUETTE	-16.9	MARQUETTE	-16.9	MICHIGAN ST	-19.3			
13	YALE	-7.3	MICHIGAN ST	-19.3	MICHIGAN ST	-19.3	MICHIGAN ST	-19.3			
6	OLE MISS	-14.5					MICHIGAN ST	-19.3			
11	N CAROLINA	-13.8					MICHIGAN ST	-19.3			
3	IOWA ST	-18.3					MICHIGAN ST	-19.3			
14	LIPSCOMB	-5.3					MICHIGAN ST	-19.3			
7	MARQUETTE	-16.9					MICHIGAN ST	-19.3			
10	NEW MEXICO	-12.3					MICHIGAN ST	-19.3			
2	MICHIGAN ST	-19.3					MICHIGAN ST	-19.3			
15	BRYANT	-1.2					MICHIGAN ST	-19.3			



16	ALABAMA ST	8.3
16	ST FRANCIS-PA	10.5

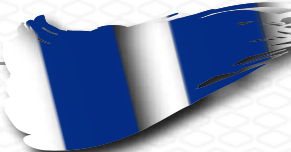
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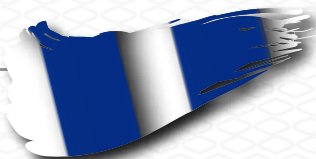
1st Round March 20 & 21		2nd Round March 22 & 23	Sweet 16 March 27 & 28		Elite Eight March 29 & 30		
1	FLORIDA	-24.1	FLORIDA	-24.1	FLORIDA	-24.1	
16	NORFOLK ST	-0.1	CONNECTICUT	-15.6			
8	CONNECTICUT	-15.6	MARYLAND	-18.2			
9	OKLAHOMA	-9	TEXAS TECH	-20.6			
5	MEMPHIS	-9.8	KANSAS	-16.6	KANSAS	-16.6	
12	COLORADO ST	-10.5	ST JOHNS	-15.3			
4	MARYLAND	-18.2					
13	GRAND CANYON	-5.5					
6	MISSOURI	-18.4					
11	DRAKE	-8.4					
3	TEXAS TECH	-20.6					
14	UNC-WILMINGTON	-5.5					
7	KANSAS	-16.6					
10	ARKANSAS	-10.5					
2	ST JOHNS	-15.3					
15	NEBRASKA-OMAHA	1.4					

STEVE MAKINEN'S BETTORS RATING BRACKET

EAST REGION

1st Round March 20 & 21			2nd Round March 22 & 23		Sweet 16 March 27 & 28		Elite Eight March 29 & 30		First Four Games March 18 & 19		
1	DUKE	27.2		DUKE	27.2				16	AMERICAN	-4.8
16	MOUNT ST MARYS	-4.5				DUKE	27.2		16	MOUNT ST MARYS	-4.5
8	MISSISSIPPI ST	13.7		BAYLOR	15.2						
9	BAYLOR	15.2						DUKE	27.2		
5	OREGON	13.3		OREGON	13.3						
12	LIBERTY	8.9				ARIZONA	18.4				
4	ARIZONA	18.4		ARIZONA	18.4						
13	AKRON	4.8									
6	BYU	15.7		BYU	15.7						
11	VA COMMONWEALTH	14.3				WISCONSIN	17.7				
3	WISCONSIN	17.7		WISCONSIN	17.7						
14	MONTANA	-0.9						ALABAMA	21.8		
7	ST MARYS-CA	15.3		ST MARYS-CA	15.3						
10	VANDERBILT	11.8				ALABAMA	21.8				
2	ALABAMA	21.8		ALABAMA	21.8						
15	ROBERT MORRIS	0.6									





MIDWEST REGION

1st Round March 20 & 21			2nd Round March 22 & 23		Sweet 16 March 27 & 28		Elite Eight March 29 & 30		First Four Games March 18 & 19		
1	HOUSTON	-23.1	HOUSTON	-23.1	HOUSTON	-23.1	HOUSTON	-23.1	11	TEXAS	-10.9
16	SIU EDWARDSVL	3.9	GONZAGA	-18.9	PURDUE	-16.1	TENNESSEE	-19.8	11	XAVIER	-12.5
8	GONZAGA	-18.9	CLEMSON	-15.6	ILLINOIS	-17.3					
9	GEORGIA	-12.4	PURDUE	-16.1	TENNESSEE	-19.8					
5	CLEMSON	-15.6	ILLINOIS	-17.3							
12	MCNEESE ST	-10.6	KENTUCKY	-14.5							
4	PURDUE	-16.1	UCLA	-14.7							
13	HIGH POINT	-7.6	TENNESSEE	-19.8							
6	ILLINOIS	-17.3									
11	XAVIER	-12.5									
3	KENTUCKY	-14.5									
14	TROY	-3.3									
7	UCLA	-14.7									
10	UTAH ST	-11.6									
2	TENNESSEE	-19.8									
15	WOFFORD	-1.8									

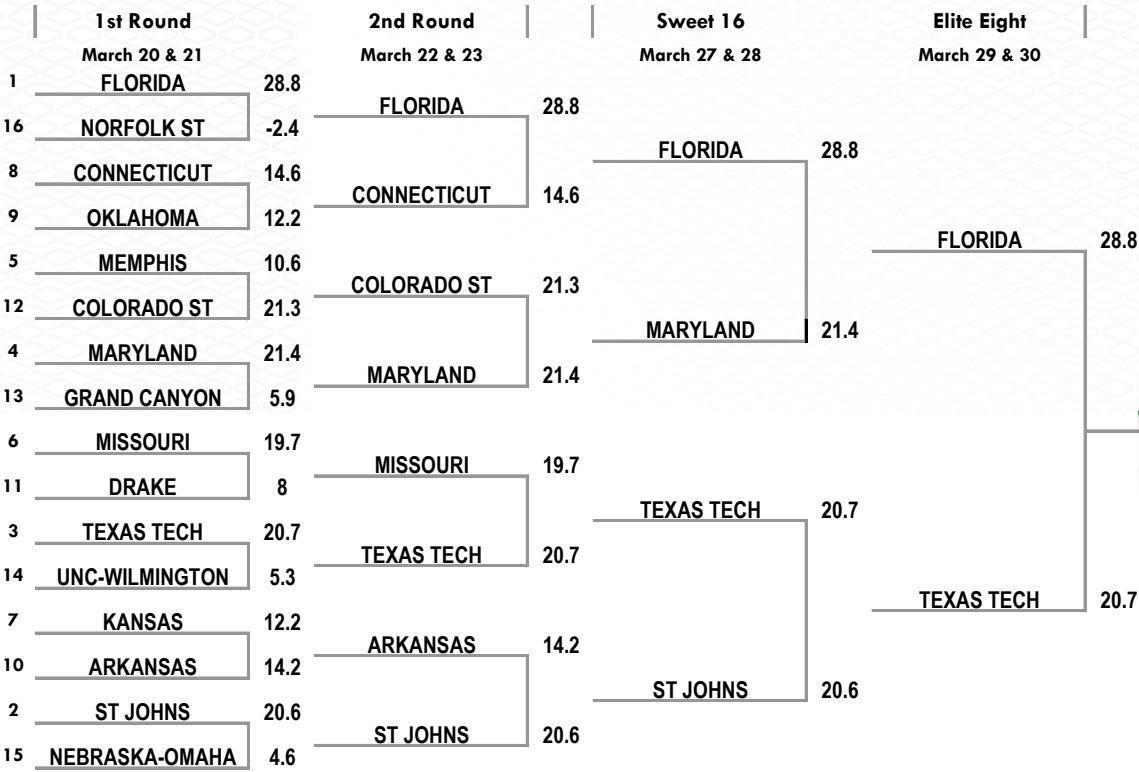


STEVE MAKINEN'S MOMENTUM RATING BRACKET

SOUTH REGION

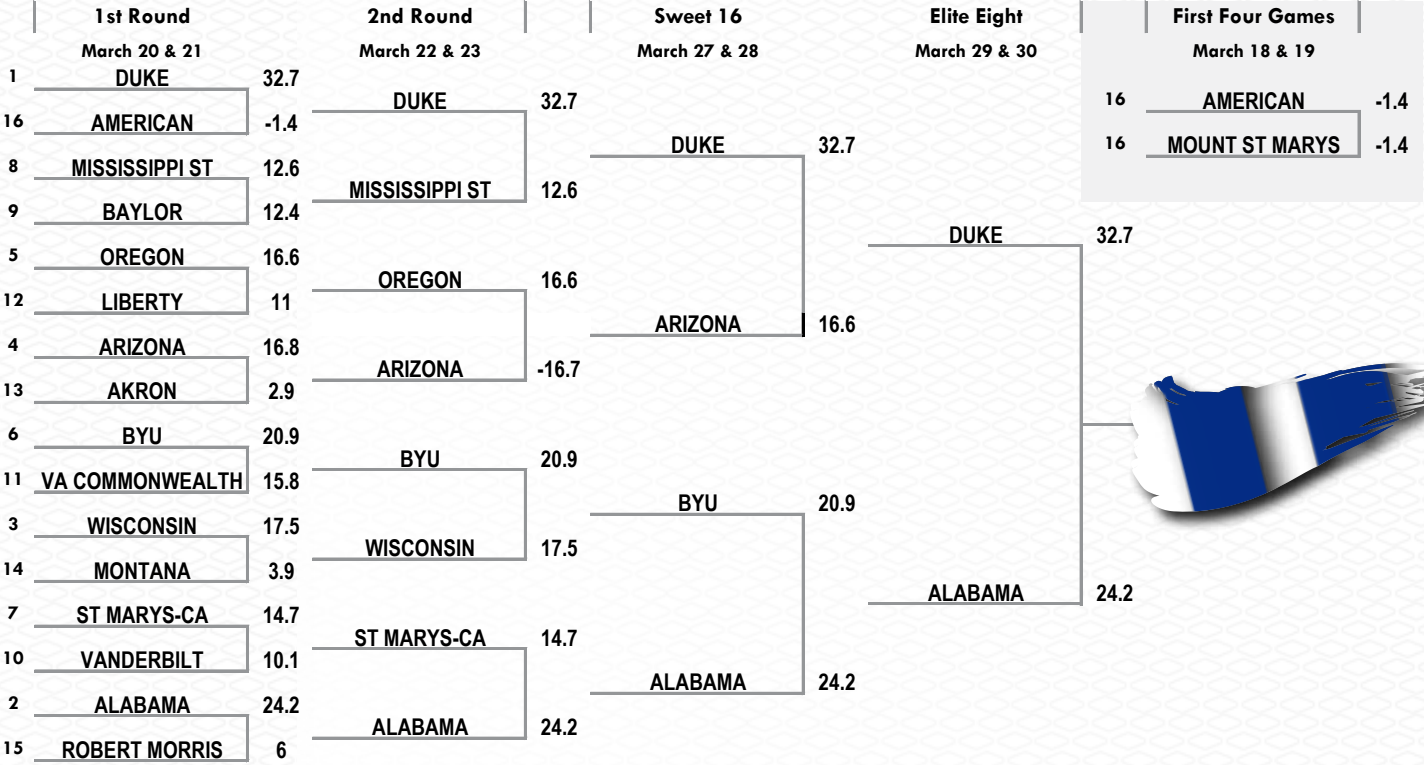


WEST REGION

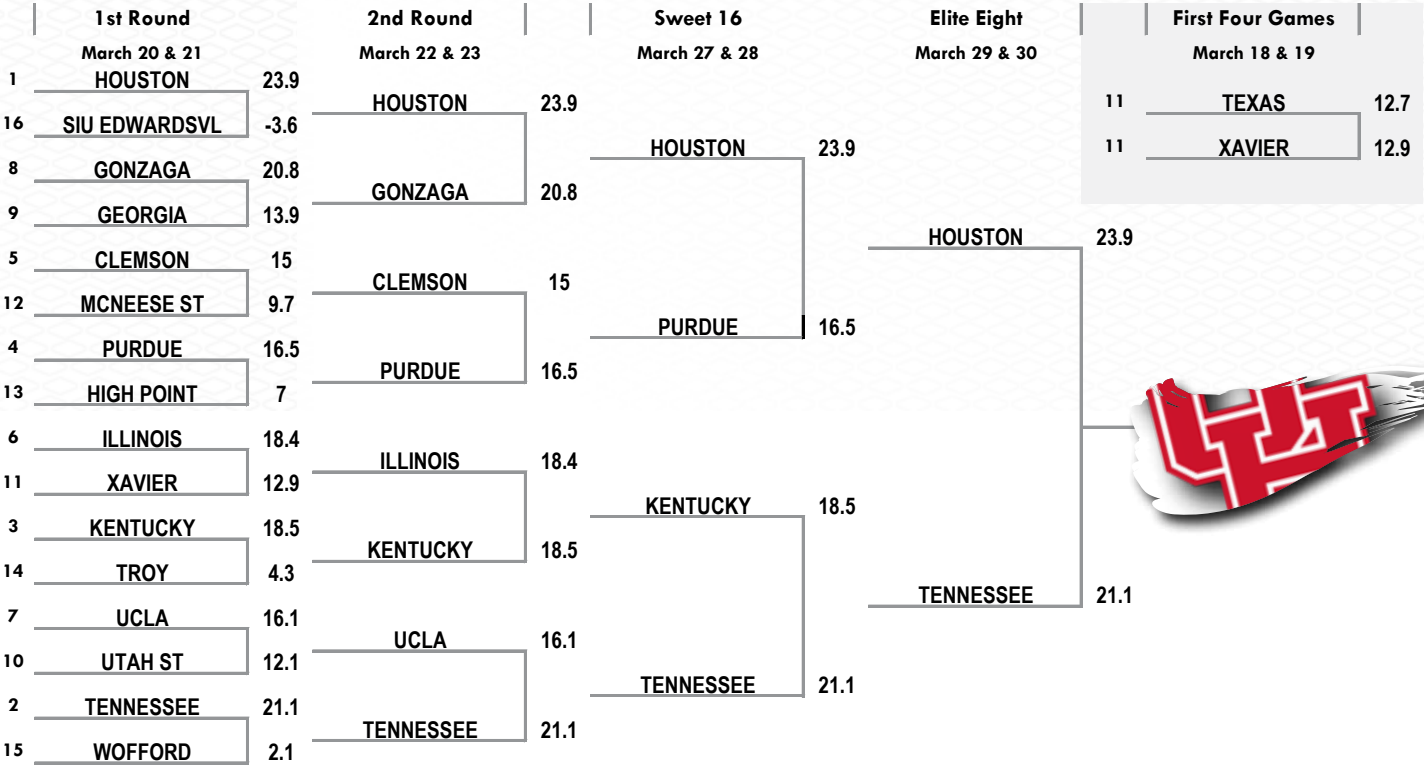


STEVE MAKINEN'S MOMENTUM RATING BRACKET

EAST REGION

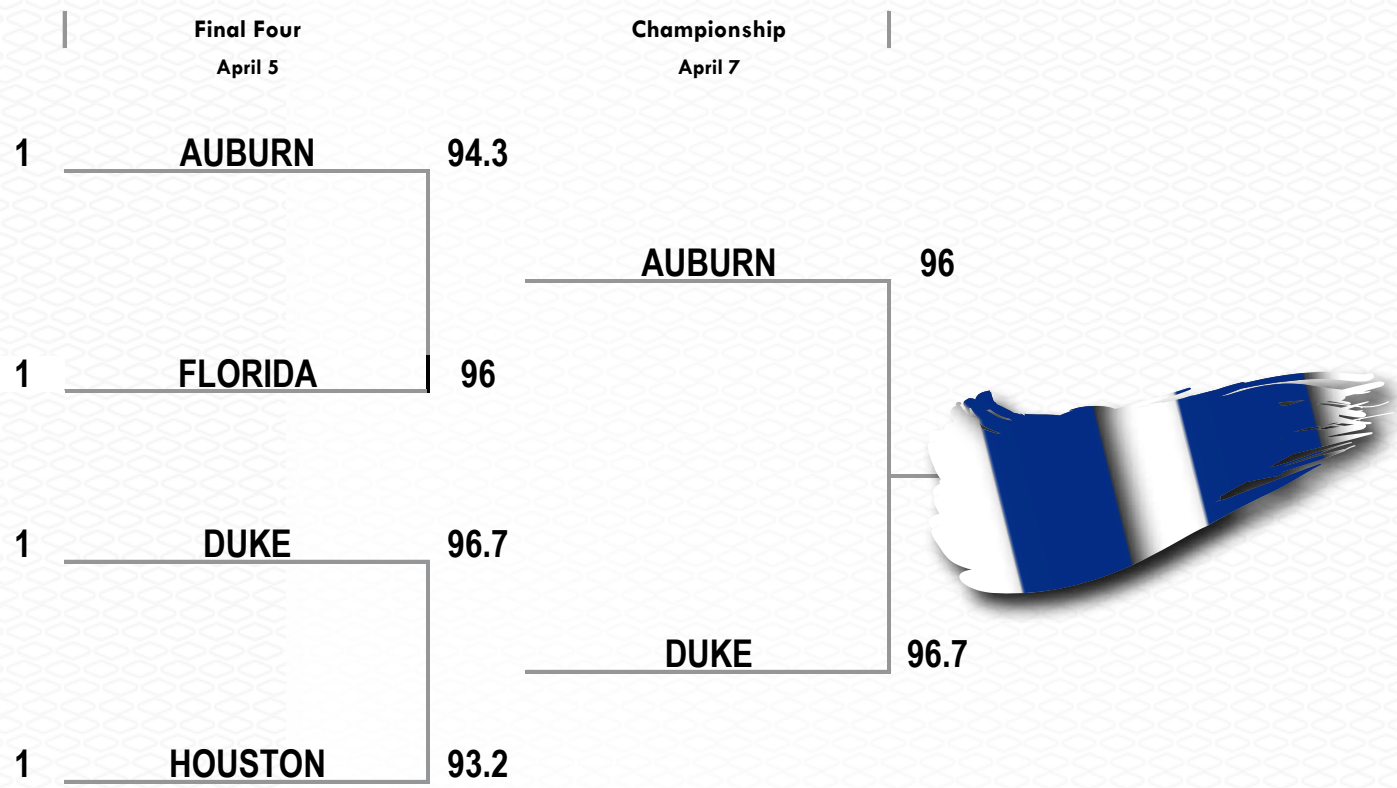


MIDWEST REGION

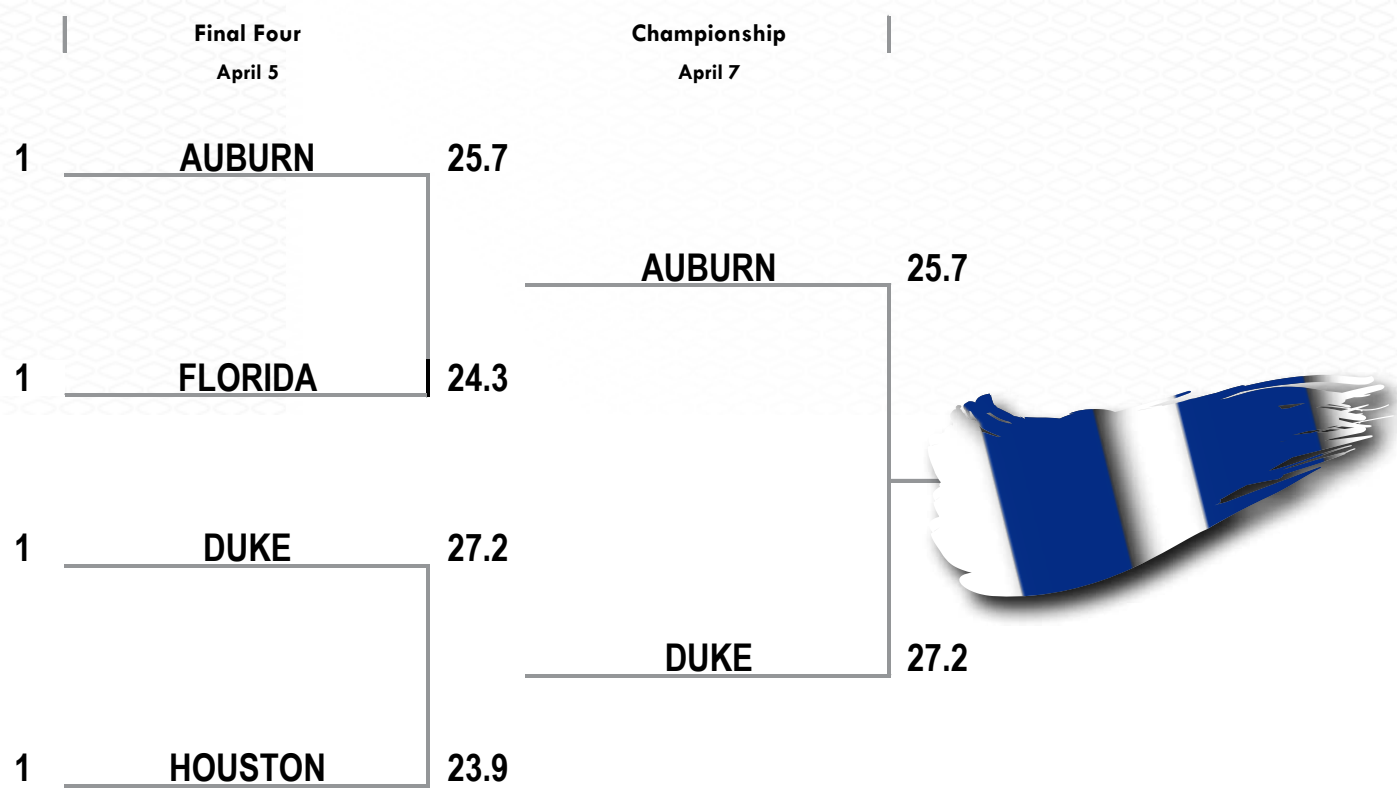


STEVE MAKINEN'S FINAL FOUR RATINGS BRACKET

POWER RATINGS

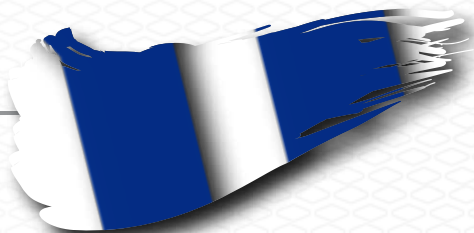
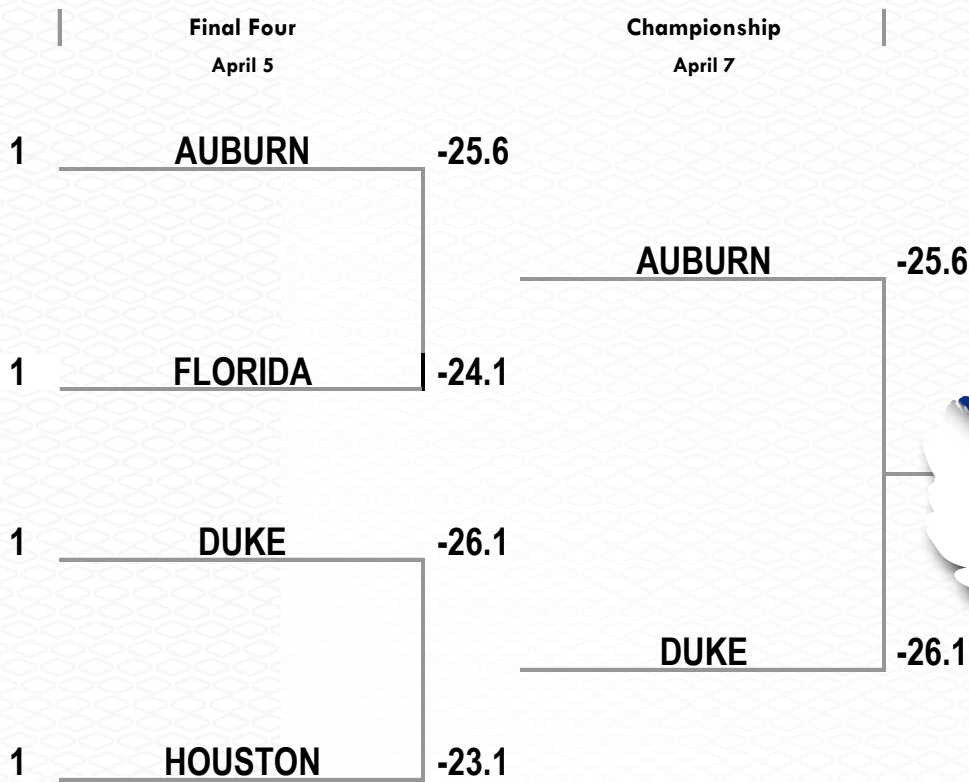


EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATINGS

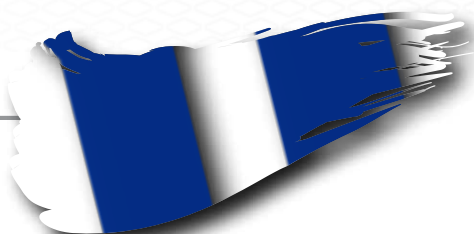
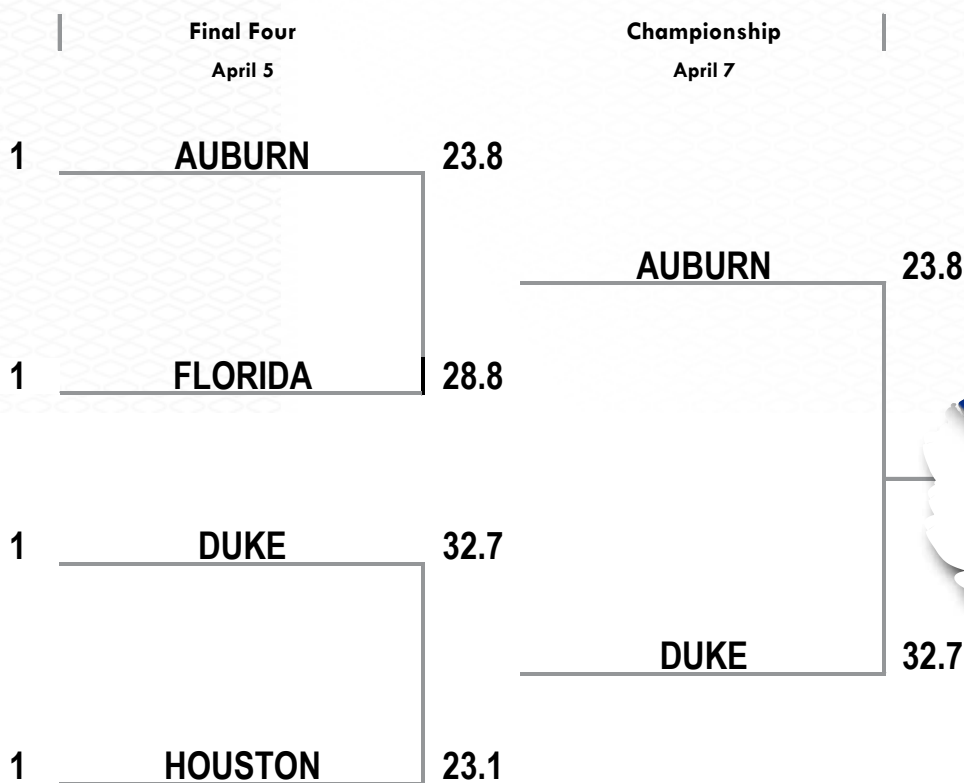


STEVE MAKINEN'S FINAL FOUR RATINGS BRACKET

BETTORS RATINGS



MOMENTUM RATINGS



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SHARED STATISTICAL TRAITS OF TOURNAMENT TEAMS

CHARACTERISTICS OF:

- **UPSET VICTIMS**
- **CINDERELLAS**
- **FINAL 4**
- **CHAMPIONSHIP TEAMS**

by Steve Makinen

Every year at this time, I do a piece called the “Shared Traits of NCAA Tournament Teams,” in which I look at the statistical and strength rating characteristics of Upset Victims, Cinderellas, Final Four, and Champion teams over the last 10 tournament seasons. I then compare the resumes of those teams to the 68 teams in the current year’s bracket. It gives readers a good feel for what the prognosis is for every team.

When I say “characteristics,” I have picked out 12 different key statistical categories and four of my own personal Strength Indicators, plus a Combined Average Ranking, and charted the recent qualifying teams by their performances in these categories. Here they are:

- Steve Makinen’s Power Rating
- Opponent Power Rating (Schedule Strength)
- Offensive Points per Game
- Defensive Points per Game
- Steve Makinen’s Effective Strength Indicator
- Steve Makinen’s Bettors’ Rating
- Steve Makinen’s Momentum Ratings
- Effective Offensive Points per Possession
- Effective Defensive Points per Possession
- Offensive Field Goal %
- Offensive 3PT Field Goal %
- Rebounding Percentage
- Assist to Turnover Ratio
- Offensive Turnovers per Possession
- Defensive Turnovers per Possession
- Defensive Field Goal %
- Combined Average Ranking

After determining the national season ranks for all the Division 1 teams, I pulled all of the Upset Victims, Cinderellas, Final Four, and Champion teams from the last 10 tournaments for special analysis. For each stat category, I look for minimum performance, typical national ranking, and the percentile of teams that qualify within certain ranges. As a final exclamation point on the analysis, I take a Combined National Ranking of the 15 sortable categories to separate the more complete teams from the rest.

To summarize the findings, it was determined that the relationship between my Effective Strength Indicator was the most significant of all the categories analyzed. The average of the last 40 Final Four teams ranked 14.5 in the country in that rating. Among the hardcore statistical categories, Effective Offensive Points per Possession has now become the most important, with an average Final Four team ranking of 18.9 over the last 10 tournaments, 3.4 spots higher than the same rating for defense. Interestingly, the least important factor was Defensive Turnovers per Possession, or the ability to force turnovers on defense.

Let’s look more closely at each of the qualifying charts I just described in terms of how the teams stack up for 2025.

SHARED TRAITS OF UPSET VICTIM TEAMS

The following is a list of the traits shared by teams that would be considered ‘Upset Victims,’ or those that were seeded #6 or better and lost their first round game. In general, I use an 80th-percentile cutoff to eliminate some of the more fluky teams from recent years. These stats include only those obtained as of Selection Sunday and contain no games beyond that point, so they should be accurately reflective of those you’ll be using when picking this year’s brackets. These were the Upset Victims considered:

2013

#2: GEORGETOWN
#3: NEW MEXICO
#4: KANSAS STATE
#5: OKLAHOMA STATE, UNLV, WISCONSIN
#6: UCLA

2014

#3: DUKE
#5: CINCINNATI, OKLAHOMA, VA COMMONWEALTH
#6: OHIO STATE, MASSACHUSETTS

2015

#3: IOWA STATE, BAYLOR
#6: SMU, PROVIDENCE

2016

#2: MICHIGAN STATE
#3: W VIRGINIA
#4: CALIFORNIA
#5: BAYLOR, PURDUE
#6: SETON HALL, ARIZONA, TEXAS

2017

#5: MINNESOTA
#6: MARYLAND, SMU, CREIGHTON

2018

#1: VIRGINIA
#4: WICHITA STATE
#5: ARIZONA
#6: MIAMI, TCU

2019

#4: KANSAS STATE
#5: MARQUETTE, MISSISSIPPI STATE, WISCONSIN
#6: IOWA STATE

2021

#2: OHIO STATE
#3: TEXAS
#4: PURDUE, VIRGINIA
#5: TENNESSEE
#6: BYU, SAN DIEGO STATE

2022

#2: KENTUCKY
#5: IOWA, CONNECTICUT
#6: ALABAMA, LSU, COLORADO STATE

2023

#1: PURDUE
#2: ARIZONA
#4: VIRGINIA
#6: IOWA ST

2024

#3: KENTUCKY
#4: AUBURN
#5: ST MARY'S (CA), WISCONSIN
#6: BYU, TEXAS TECH, SOUTH CAROLINA, FLORIDA

Of these last 58 Upset Victims seeded #6 or better, approximately 80% of them:

- Went into the tournament with a Steve Makinen Power Rating of 87 or lower.
- Finished the regular season with a Schedule Strength ranked outside the top 13 nationally.
- Ranked outside the Top 20 in Offensive Points per Game.
- Ranked outside the Top 18 in Defensive Points per Game.
- Had a Steve Makinen Effective Strength Indicator Rating of +17.5 or less and/or ranked outside the Top 10 nationally.
- Had a Steve Makinen Bettors Rating of at most -15 and/or ranked outside the Top 10 nationally.
- Had a Steve Makinen Momentum Rating outside the Top 10 nationally.
- Scored less than 1.235 Effective Points per Possession on offense and/or ranked outside the Top 10 nationally.
- Allowed more than 0.940 Effective Points per Possession on defense and/or ranked outside the Top 11 nationally.
- Shot less than 48% from the field on the season, ranking outside the Top 25 nationally in FG%.
- Made less than 38.5% of their 3PT attempts on the season, placing them outside the Top 30 of all teams.
- Had a Rebounding Percentage Rate of less than 55.2% and ranked outside the Top 10 of the country.

POTENTIAL UPSET VICTIM QUALIFIERS

TEAM	SM Pwr Rtg <=87	Schedule Strg Not Top 13	Off PPG Not Top 20	Def PPG Not Top 18	SM Eff Str Rtg <=17.5	SM Bettors Rtg not top 10	SM Mom Rtg outside Top 10	Eff Off Pts/Poss Not Top 10	Eff Def Pts/Poss Not Top 11	Off FG% <= 48% not top 25	3PT FG% <= 38.5% Not Top 30	Reb % Rate Not Top 10	Asst/TO Ratio Not Top 12	Off Turnover % Not Top 30	Def Turnover % Not Top 90	Def FG% >=39% Not Top 15	Comb. Rank >=58.5	Total Marks
OREGON	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	17
MICHIGAN	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	16
WISCONSIN		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	15
CLEMSON	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		15
MEMPHIS	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	15
BYU	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	15
ARIZONA				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	14
TEXAS A&M	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	14
ILLINOIS		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	14
PURDUE	x		x	x	x	x	x		x			x	x	x	x	x	x	13
OLE MISS	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	13
ST JOHNS		x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x				12
MICHIGAN ST		x	x	x	x			x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	12
IOWA ST		x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x		12
MISSOURI	x	x		x	x		x		x		x	x	x	x		x	x	12
KENTUCKY				x	x	x	x		x			x	x	x	x	x	x	11
TENNESSEE			x				x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x			9
ALABAMA				x					x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9
TEXAS TECH		x	x	x			x		x	x		x			x	x		9
MARYLAND		x		x		x		x		x		x	x			x		8
FLORIDA		x		x						x	x		x		x			6
AUBURN				x							x	x			x	x		5
HOUSTON		x	x							x		x	x					5
DUKE		x													x			2

- Had an Assist to Turnover Ratio of less than 1.45, ranking outside the Top 12 nationally.
- Ranked outside the country's 30 top teams in terms of Offensive Turnovers per Possession (approx. 15%).
- Ranked outside the country's 90 top teams in terms of Defensive Turnovers per Possession (approx. 19%).
- Allowed opponents higher than 39% on field goal attempts, a mark typically not good enough for the Top 15 in the country.
- Had a Combined Average Ranking of 58.5 or worse in all of the analyzed stats.

Using the logic of qualifying all of this year's 24 teams seeded #6 or better under our criteria above, here is a chart showing the number of times each team qualified for the 17 categories. Based upon our belief that the Upset Victims share characteristics, the teams at the top of the list are at the most risk of getting upset in their first-round game.

SHARED TRAITS OF CINDERELLA TEAMS

The following is a list of the traits shared by teams that could be considered 'Cinderella Teams,' or those that were seeded #7 or less and won at least two games to reach the Sweet 16. In general, I use an 80th percentile cutoff to eliminate some of the more fluky teams from recent years. These stats include only those obtained as of Selection Sunday and contain no games beyond that point, so they should be accurately reflective of those you'll be using when picking this year's brackets.

These were the Cinderella Teams considered:

2014 CONNECTICUT (#7)
2014 KENTUCKY (#8)
2014 TENNESSEE (#11)
2014 DAYTON (#11)
2014 STANFORD (#10)
2015 MICHIGAN STATE (#7)
2015 WICHITA STATE (#7)

2015 NC STATE (#8)
2015 UCLA (#11)
2016 GONZAGA (#11)
2016 SYRACUSE (#10)
2017 SOUTH CAROLINA (#7)
2017 MICHIGAN (#7)
2017 WISCONSIN (#8)
2017 XAVIER (#11)
2018 FLORIDA STATE (#9)
2018 KANSAS STATE (#9)
2018 LOYOLA (IL) (#11)
2018 NEVADA (#7)
2018 SYRACUSE (#11)
2018 TEXAS A&M (#7)
2019 OREGON (#12)
2021 OREGON (#7)
2021 LOYOLA (IL) (#8)
2021 UCLA (#11)

2021 SYRACUSE (#11)
2021 OREGON STATE (#12)
2021 ORAL ROBERTS (#15)
2022 NORTH CAROLINA (#8)
2022 MIAMI (#10)
2022 IOWA STATE (#11)
2022 MICHIGAN (#11)
2022 ST PETER'S (#15)
2023 MICHIGAN STATE (#7)
2023 ARKANSAS (#8)
2023 FLORIDA ATLANTIC (#9)
2023 PRINCETON (#15)
2024 NC STATE (#11)

POTENTIAL CINDERELLA QUALIFIERS																		
TEAM	SM Pwr Rtg >=80.5	Schedule Strg Top 100	Off PPG Top 185	Def PPG Top 165	SM Eff Str Rtg Top 55	SM Bettors Rtg Top 56	SM MOM Rtg Top 115	Eff Off Pts/Poss Top 70	Eff Def Pts/Poss Top 70	Off FG% >= 44% Top 140	3PT FG% >= 34% Top 215	Reb % Rate Top 175	Asst/TO Ratio Top 130	Off Turnover % Top 180	Def Turnover % Top 290	Def FG% <= 43.5% Top 160	Comb. Rank <=103	Total Marks
ARKANSAS	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	17
GONZAGA	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	17
CONNECTICUT	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	17
UCLA	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	17
KANSAS	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	17
COLORADO ST	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	16
XAVIER	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	16
TEXAS	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	16
NEW MEXICO	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	16
LOUISVILLE	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	16
ST MARYS-CA	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	16
CAL SAN DIEGO	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	15
MCNEESE ST	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	15
VCU	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	15
NORTH CAROLINA	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	15
UTAH ST	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	15
BAYLOR	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	15
GEORGIA	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	15
CREIGHTON	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	15
MISSISSIPPI ST	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	14
MARQUETTE	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	x	x	x	14
VANDERBILT	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x		x	13
YALE			x	x			x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12

Of the last 38 Cinderella teams seeded #7 or worse, approximately 80% of them:

- Went into the tournament with a Steve Makinen Power Rating of 80.5 or better.
- Finished the regular season with a Schedule Strength ranked in the top 100 nationally.
- Ranked in the Top 185 in Offensive Points per Game, scoring around 70+ PPG.
- Ranked in the Top 165 in Defensive Points per Game, allowing approximately less than 69.5 PPG.
- Had a Steve Makinen Effective Strength Indicator Rating of at least +10.0 and/or ranked in the Top 55 nationally.
- Had a Steve Makinen Bettors Rating of at least -8.5 and/or ranked in the Top 56 nationally.
- Had a Steve Makinen Momentum Rating in the Top 115 nationally
- Scored at least 1.150 Effective Points per Possession on offense and ranked in the Top 70 nationally.
- Allowed better than 1.0 Effective Points per Possession on defense and ranked in the Top 70 nationally.
- Shot at least 44% from the field on the season, ranking in the Top 140 nationally in FG%.
- Made about 34% of its 3PT attempts on the season, placing them in the Top 215 of all teams.
- Had a Rebounding Percentage Rate of at least 50% and ranked in the Top 175 of the country.
- Had an Assist to Turnover Ratio of at least 1.07, ranking in the Top 130 nationally.
- Ranked in the country's 180 top teams in terms of Offensive Turnovers per Possession (approx. 18%).
- Ranked in the country's 290 top teams in terms of Defensive Turnovers per Possession (approx. 16.5%).
- Allowed opponents 43.5% or less on field goal attempts, a mark typically good enough for the Top 160 in the country.
- Had a Combined Average Ranking of 103.0 or better in all of our analyzed stats.

Using the logic of qualifying all of this year's 44 teams seeded #7 or worse under our criteria above, here is a chart showing the number of times each team qualified for the 17 categories. Based upon our belief that the Cinderella teams share quality characteristics, the teams at the top of the list are most prepared to make an exciting tournament run.

SHARED TRAITS OF FINAL FOUR TEAMS

The following is a list of the traits shared by teams that eventually reached the Final Four. Again, considering an 80th percentile cutoff to eliminate unusual teams from recent years. Below were the last 40 Final Four teams.

Of the last 40 Final Four teams, approximately 80% of them:

- Went into the tournament with a Steve Makinen Power Rating of 84.5 or higher.
- Finished the regular season with a Schedule Strength ranked in the top 68 nationally.
- Ranked in the Top 130 in Offensive Points Per Game, scoring about 72.5 PPG or more.
- Ranked in the Top 135 in Defensive Points Per Game, allowing about 69.5 PPG or less.
- Had a Steve Makinen Effective Strength Indicator Rating of at least +15.0 and ranked in the Top 18 nationally.
- Had a Steve Makinen Bettors Rating of at least -12.5 and ranked in the Top 27 nationally.
- Had a Steve Makinen Momentum Rating ranked in the Top 31 nationally.
- Scored at least 1.180 Effective Points per Possession on offense and ranked in the Top 25 nationally.
- Allowed better than 0.970 Effective Points per Possession on defense and ranked in the Top 32 nationally.
- Shot better than 45% from the field on the season, ranking in the Top 110 nationally in FG%.
- Made at least 35.5% of its 3PT attempts on the season, placing them in the Top 115 of all teams.
- Had a Rebounding Percentage Rate of at least 51% and ranked in the Top 120 of the country.
- Had an Assist to Turnover Ratio of at least 1.18, ranking in the Top 77 nationally.

2014 WISCONSIN (#2)
2014 FLORIDA (#1)
2014 KENTUCKY (#8)
2014 CONNECTICUT (#7)
2015 KENTUCKY (#1)
2015 DUKE (#1)
2015 WISCONSIN (#1)
2015 MICHIGAN STATE (#7)
2016 OKLAHOMA (#2)
2016 NORTH CAROLINA (#1)
2016 VILLANOVA (#2)
2016 SYRACUSE (#10)
2017 NORTH CAROLINA (#1)
2017 GONZAGA (#1)

2017 OREGON (#3)
2017 SOUTH CAROLINA (#7)
2018 LOYOLA (IL) (#11)
2018 KANSAS (#1)
2018 MICHIGAN (#3)
2018 VILLANOVA (#1)
2019 VIRGINIA (#1)
2019 MICHIGAN STATE (#2)
2019 TEXAS TECH (#3)
2019 AUBURN (#5)
2021 GONZAGA (#1)
2021 BAYLOR (#1)
2021 HOUSTON (#2)
2021 UCLA (#11)

2022 KANSAS (#1)
2022 DUKE (#2)
2022 VILLANOVA (#2)
2022 NORTH CAROLINA (#8)
2023 CONNECTICUT (#4)
2023 MIAMI (#5)
2023 SAN DIEGO STATE (#5)
2023 FLORIDA ATLANTIC (#9)
2024 CONNECTICUT (#1)
2024 PURDUE (#1)
2024 ALABAMA (#4)
2024 NC STATE (#11)

- Ranked in the country's 140 top teams in terms of Offensive Turnovers per Possession.
- Ranked in the country's 250 top teams in terms of Defensive Turnovers per Possession.
- Allowed opponents about 43% or less on field goal attempts, a mark typically good enough for the Top 130 in the country.
- Had a Combined Average Ranking of 73.0 or better in all of our analyzed stats.

POTENTIAL CINDERELLA QUALIFIERS																	Total Marks
TEAM	SM Pwr Rtg >=80.5	Schedule Strg Top 100	Off PPG Top 185	Def PPG Top 165	SM Eff Str Rtg Top 55	SM Bettors Rtg Top 56	SM MOM Rtg Top 115	Eff Off Pts/Poss Top 70	Eff Def Pts/Poss Top 70	Off FG% >= 44% Top 140	3PT FG% >= 34% Top 215	Reb % Rate Top 175	Asst/TO Ratio Top 130	Off Turnover % Top 180	Def Turnover % Top 290	Def FG% <= 43.5% Top 160	
HIGH POINT			x	x			x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12
LIBERTY			x	x			x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	12
LIPSCOMB			x	x			x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	11
UNC-WILMINGTON			x	x			x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	10
SAN DIEGO ST	x	x		x	x	x	x		x					x	x	x	10
WOFFORD			x	x			x			x	x	x	x	x		x	9
AKRON			x					x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	9
OKLAHOMA	x	x	x		x		x	x		x	x				x		9
GRAND CANYON			x	x			x		x	x		x			x	x	8
BRYANT			x							x	x	x		x	x	x	7
ROBERT MORRIS			x	x			x			x	x	x			x		7
OMAHA			x				x			x	x	x	x	x			7
DRAKE				x			x		x	x	x	x			x		7
NORFOLK ST			x	x						x		x			x	x	6
SIU EDWARDSVILLE				x						x	x			x	x	x	6
TROY			x	x			x					x			x	x	6
MOUNT ST MARYS				x						x	x				x	x	5
MONTANA			x							x	x			x	x		5
AMERICAN				x						x				x	x		4
ALABAMA ST													x	x	x	x	4
ST FRANCIS-PA										x					x		2

Using the logic of qualifying all of this year's 68 teams under our criteria above, here is a chart showing the number of times each team qualified for the 17 categories. Based upon our belief that the Final Four teams share quality characteristics, the teams at the top of the list are most prepared to make a deep tournament run to San Antonio.

SHARED TRAITS OF TOURNAMENT CHAMPIONS

Recent years of tournament action have shown that there is a big difference in reaching the Final Four and winning the title. Typically, only the truly elite teams accomplish the latter. Here's a look at the minimum requirements for winning a tournament championship over the last 10 tournaments. Just to jog your memory, these are the champions during that time span:

2014 CONNECTICUT (#7)
2015 DUKE (#1)
2016 VILLANOVA (#2)
2017 NORTH CAROLINA (#1)
2018 VILLANOVA (#1)
2019 VIRGINIA (#1)
2021 BAYLOR (#1)
2022 KANSAS (#1)
2023 CONNECTICUT (#4)
2024 CONNECTICUT (#1)

Looking for clear separations in the teams' stats/ranks, of the last 10 NCAA Champions:

- Eight of them went into the tournament with a Steve Makinen Power Rating of 89.5 or higher.
- Eight of them finished the regular season with a Schedule Strength ranked in the top 46 nationally.
- Seven of them ranked in the Top 55 in Offensive Points per Game and scored at least 76.5 PPG.
- Eight of them ranked in the Top 135 in Defensive Points per Game or allowed less than 70 PPG.
- Nine of them had a Steve Makinen Effective Strength Indicator Rating of at least +19 and ranked in the Top 6 nationally. Nine of the L10 ranked in the top 7 in this crucial category.
- Eight of them had a Steve Makinen Bettors Rating of at least -17.5 and ranked in the Top 5 nationally.
- Eight of them had a Steve Makinen Momentum Rating ranked in the Top 6 nationally
- Eight of them scored at least 1.245 Effective Points per Possession on offense and ranked in the Top 5 nationally.
- Eight of them allowed better than 0.955 Effective Points per Possession on defense and ranked in the Top 15 nationally.

POTENTIAL FINAL 4 QUALIFIERS																	
TEAM	SM Pwr Rtg >=84.5	Schedule Strg Top 68	Off PPG Top 130	Def PPG Top 135	SM Eff Str Rtg Top 18	SM Bettors Rtg Top 27	SM MOM Rtg Top 31	Eff Off Pts/Poss Top 25	Eff Def Pts/Poss Top 32	Off FG% >= 45% Top 110	3PTFG% >=35.5% Top 115	Reb % Rate Top 120	Asst/TO Ratio Top 77	Off Turnover % Top 140	Def Turnover % Top 250	Def FG% <= 43% Top 130	Comb. Rank <=73
DUKE	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	17
AUBURN	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	17
MARYLAND	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	17
FLORIDA	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	17
TEXAS TECH	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	16
HOUSTON	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	15
GONZAGA	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	15
IOWA ST	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	15
TENNESSEE	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	15
CLEMSON	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	15
UCLA	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	15
MICHIGAN ST	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	15
WISCONSIN	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	15
ST JOHNS	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x			x	x	x	x	x	14
BYU	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	14
ARIZONA	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	14
ALABAMA	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	14
CONNECTICUT	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	13
KENTUCKY	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	13
MISSOURI	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x			x	x	x	12
PURDUE	x	x	x		x	x		x		x	x		x	x	x	x	12
KANSAS	x	x	x	x		x			x	x	x	x	x			x	12
CAL SAN DIEGO			x	x		x			x	x	x		x	x	x	x	11
VCU	x		x	x		x			x			x	x	x	x	x	11
ST MARYS-CA	x			x		x	x		x			x	x	x	x	x	11
LOUISVILLE	x	x	x	x		x			x			x		x	x	x	11
NORTH CAROLINA	x	x	x			x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	11
OREGON	x	x	x	x		x			x	x		x		x	x	x	11
UTAH ST			x	x				x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	10
YALE			x	x						x	x	x	x	x	x	x	10
ILLINOIS	x	x	x		x	x		x	x			x		x		x	10
TEXAS A&M	x	x	x	x		x	x		x			x			x	x	10
MCNEESE ST			x	x						x	x	x		x	x	x	9
COLORADO ST			x	x			x			x	x	x	x		x	x	9



Norchad Omier

POTENTIAL FINAL 4 QUALIFIERS

TEAM	SM Pwr Rtg ≥ 84.5	Schedule Strg Top 73	Off PPG Top 110	Def PPG Top 125	SM Eff Str Rtg Top 18	SM Bettors Rtg Top 27	SM MOM Rtg Top 28	Eff Off Pts/Poss Top 26	Eff Def Pts/Poss Top 32	Off FG% $\geq 44.5\%$ Top 110	3PTFG% $\geq 34\%$ Top 160	Reb % Rate Top 110	Asst/TO Ratio Top 90	Off Turnover % Top 140	Def Turnover % Top 235	Def FG% $\leq 43\%$ Top 115	Comb. Rank ≤ 73	Total Marks
BAYLOR	x	x	x	x				x				x	x	x	x			9
MARQUETTE	x	x	x	x		x			x				x	x	x			9
OLE MISS	x	x	x			x			x				x	x	x	x		9
GEORGIA		x	x	x			x		x	x		x			x	x		9
NEW MEXICO			x	x					x			x		x	x	x	x	8
XAVIER		x	x	x						x	x		x	x	x			8
LIBERTY			x	x						x	x		x	x	x	x		8
MISSISSIPPI ST	x	x	x					x				x	x	x	x			8
HIGH POINT			x	x						x	x	x		x	x	x		8
TEXAS		x	x							x	x			x	x	x		7
MICHIGAN	x	x	x						x	x		x				x		7
CREIGHTON		x	x	x						x		x	x			x		7
LIPSCOMB			x	x						x	x		x	x		x		7
AKRON			x							x	x	x	x	x	x			7
UNC-WILMINGTON			x	x						x		x	x	x	x			7
ARKANSAS		x	x						x	x					x	x		6
MEMPHIS			x							x	x	x			x	x		6
GRAND CANYON			x	x						x		x			x	x		6
VANDERBILT		x	x										x	x	x			5
SAN DIEGO ST		x		x					x						x	x		5
OKLAHOMA		x	x							x	x				x			5
DRAKE				x						x	x	x			x			5
BRYANT			x									x		x	x	x		5
OMAHA			x							x	x	x		x				5
NORFOLK ST			x	x						x					x	x		5
ROBERT MORRIS			x	x								x			x			4
TROY				x								x			x	x		4
SIU EDWARDSVILLE				x								x			x	x		4
WOFFORD				x								x		x				3
MONTANA			x							x	x							3
AMERICAN				x							x				x			3
MOUNT ST MARYS				x								x				x		3
ALABAMA ST														x	x			2
ST FRANCIS-PA																x		1

- Eight of them shot at least 46.5% or so from the field on the season, ranking in the Top 45 nationally in FG%.
- - Eight of them made at least 35.7% of its 3PT attempts on the season, placing them in the Top 91 of all teams.
- Eight of them had a Rebounding Percentage Rate of at least 52% and ranked in the Top 65 of the country.
- Eight of them had an Assist to Turnover Ratio of at least 1.335, ranking in the Top 37 nationally.
- Eight of them ranked in the country's 115 top teams in terms of Offensive Turnovers per Possession.
- Seven of them ranked in the country's 190 top teams in terms of Defensive Turnovers per Possession.
- Eight of them allowed opponents 42.0% or less on field goal attempts, a mark typically good enough for the Top 75 in the country.
- Eight of them had a Combined Average Ranking of 47.0 or better in all of our analyzed stats.

Looking at each of these key categories and every team's standing as of Sunday (3/16), here is a chart showing the teams most ready for a title run in 2025.

A reminder from recent years on the Potential Champions Chart: Virginia, the 2019 champion and a popular pick of many experts such as yours truly, ranked second of the 68 tournament teams with 15 qualifying marks on this chart. Baylor of 2021 ranked 3rd with 13 marks. Only Michigan and Gonzaga were better. In 2022, Kansas ranked behind six other teams in championship "worthiness" with 11 marks. No team above the Jayhawks reached the Final Four. And in each of the last two years, UConn topped the chart, with 14 marks in 2023, and 15 last year.

Each year, it seems to prove again and again that the eventual Upset Victims, Cinderellas, Final Four teams and Champion will be found near the top of these respective lists. I will be personally investing heavily in this resource again for 2025.

POTENTIAL CHAMPIONSHIP QUALIFIERS																		
TEAM	SM Pwr Rtg >=89.5	Schedule Strg Top 46	Off PPG Top 55	Def PPG Top 135	SM Eff Str Rtg Top 6	SM Bettors Rtg Top 5	SM Mom Rtg Top 6	Eff Off Pts/Poss Top 5	Eff Def Pts/Poss Top 15	Off FG% Top 45	Off 3PT FG% Top 91	Reb % Rate Top 65	Asst/TO Ratio Top 37	Off Turnover % Top 115	Def Turnover % Top 190	Def FG% <= 42% Top 75	Comb. Rank <=47	Total Marks
AUBURN	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	17
FLORIDA	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	17
DUKE	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	16
HOUSTON	x	x		x	x	x	x		x		x	x		x	x	x	x	13
TENNESSEE	x	x		x	x				x			x	x	x	x	x	x	11
GONZAGA	x		x	x						x		x	x	x	x	x	x	10
TEXAS TECH	x		x	x				x			x	x	x	x	x		x	10
IOWA ST		x	x	x					x	x	x	x			x	x	x	10
ALABAMA	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x		x						9
MARYLAND			x	x					x		x			x	x	x	x	8
MICHIGAN ST	x	x		x			x		x			x	x			x		8
YALE			x	x						x	x	x	x	x		x		8
ST JOHNS			x	x					x			x		x	x	x		7
WISCONSIN		x	x	x							x		x	x		x		7
UTAH ST			x	x						x	x		x	x	x			7
LIBERTY				x						x	x		x	x	x	x		7
UCLA		x		x					x				x	x	x			6
CAL SAN DIEGO				x							x		x	x	x	x		6
BYU			x	x						x	x	x			x			6
MISSOURI		x	x							x	x			x	x			6
PURDUE		x								x	x		x	x	x			6
KANSAS		x		x					x			x	x			x		6
CONNECTICUT				x						x	x	x	x			x		6
ARIZONA		x	x							x		x		x		x		6
ST MARYS-CA				x					x			x	x	x		x		6
KENTUCKY		x	x							x	x		x	x				6
HIGH POINT			x	x						x	x	x		x				6
TEXAS A&M		x		x					x			x			x	x		6
VCU				x								x		x	x	x		5
NEW MEXICO			x	x								x		x	x			5
MCNEESE ST				x							x			x	x	x		5
MARQUETTE		x		x									x	x	x			5
TEXAS		x	x								x			x		x		5
MISSISSIPPI ST		x	x										x	x	x			5



Vladislav Goldin

POTENTIAL CHAMPIONSHIP QUALIFIERS														Total Marks
TEAM	SM Pwr Rtg >=89.5	Schedule Strg Top 46	Off PPG Top 55	Def PPG Top 135	SM Eff Str Rtg Top 6	SM Bettors Rtg Top 5	SM Mom Rtg Top 6	Eff Off Pts/Poss Top 5	Eff Def Pts/Poss Top 15	Off FG% Top 45	Off 3PT FG% Top 91	Reb % Rate Top 65	Asst/TO Ratio Top 37	
MICHIGAN	x	x								x		x		5
GEORGIA	x		x									x		5
MEMPHIS			x							x	x			5
ILLINOIS	x	x										x	x	5
CREIGHTON	x		x							x		x		5
AKRON		x									x	x	x	5
GRAND CANYON		x	x									x		5
CLEMSON				x							x		x	4
LOUISVILLE			x	x								x		4
XAVIER				x							x		x	4
COLORADO ST				x						x	x			4
BAYLOR	x		x										x	4
NORTH CAROLINA	x	x								x			x	4
OLE MISS	x												x	4
LIPSCOMB				x							x		x	4
VANDERBILT	x	x											x	4
SAN DIEGO ST				x					x					4
OKLAHOMA	x	x									x			4
DRAKE				x						x		x		4
UNC-WILMINGTON				x								x	x	4
BRYANT			x									x		4
TROY				x								x		4
OREGON	x		x											3
ARKANSAS	x												x	3
ROBERT MORRIS				x								x		3
NORFOLK ST				x						x				3
SIU EDWARDSVILLE				x									x	3
MOUNT ST MARYS				x								x		3
WOFFORD				x								x		2
OMAHA											x		x	2
MONTANA										x	x			2
AMERICAN				x										2
ALABAMA ST													x	2
ST FRANCIS-PA														0



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STEVE MAKINEN'S SOUTH REGION

POWER RATINGS GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 AUBURN	#2 MICHIGAN STATE	#3 IOWA STATE	#4 TEXAS A&M	#5 MICHIGAN	#6 OLE MISS	#7 MARQUETTE	#8 LOUISVILLE	#9 CREIGHTON	#10 NEW MEXICO	#11 NORTH CAROLINA	#11 SAN DIEGO STATE	#12 UC SAN DIEGO	#13 YALE	#14 LIPSCOMB	#15 BRYANT	#16 ALABAMA STATE	#16 ST FRANCIS
TEAM/SEED	RATING	94.3	89.1	88.8	87.6	86.3	85	85.9	85.6	83.8	83	84.6	81.2	83.9	78.3	77.2	71.9	64.7	61.7
#1 AUBURN	94.3		5.2	5.5	6.7	8	9.3	8.4	8.7	10.5	11.3	9.7	13.1	10.4	16	17.1	22.4	29.6	32.6
#2 MICHIGAN STATE	89.1	-5.2		0.3	1.5	2.8	4.1	3.2	3.5	5.3	6.1	4.5	7.9	5.2	10.8	11.9	17.2	24.4	27.4
#3 IOWA STATE	88.8	-5.5	-0.3		1.2	2.5	3.8	2.9	3.2	5	5.8	4.2	7.6	4.9	10.5	11.6	16.9	24.1	27.1
#4 TEXAS A&M	87.6	-6.7	-1.5	-1.2		1.3	2.6	1.7	2	3.8	4.6	3	6.4	3.7	9.3	10.4	15.7	22.9	25.9
#5 MICHIGAN	86.3	-8	-2.8	-2.5	-1.3		1.3	0.4	0.7	2.5	3.3	1.7	5.1	2.4	8	9.1	14.4	21.6	24.6
#6 OLE MISS	85	-9.3	-4.1	-3.8	-2.6	-1.3		-0.9	-0.6	1.2	2	0.4	3.8	1.1	6.7	7.8	13.1	20.3	23.3
#7 MARQUETTE	85.9	-8.4	-3.2	-2.9	-1.7	-0.4	0.9		0.3	2.1	2.9	1.3	4.7	2	7.6	8.7	14	21.2	24.2
#8 LOUISVILLE	85.6	-8.7	-3.5	-3.2	-2	-0.7	0.6	-0.3		1.8	2.6	1	4.4	1.7	7.3	8.4	13.7	20.9	23.9
#9 CREIGHTON	83.8	-10.5	-5.3	-5	-3.8	-2.5	-1.2	-2.1	-1.8		0.8	-0.8	2.6	-0.1	5.5	6.6	11.9	19.1	22.1
#10 NEW MEXICO	83	-11.3	-6.1	-5.8	-4.6	-3.3	-2	-2.9	-2.6	-0.8		-1.6	1.8	-0.9	4.7	5.8	11.1	18.3	21.3
#11 NORTH CAROLINA	84.6	-9.7	-4.5	-4.2	-3	-1.7	-0.4	-1.3	-1	0.8	1.6		3.4	0.7	6.3	7.4	12.7	19.9	22.9
#11 SAN DIEGO STATE	81.2	-13.1	-7.9	-7.6	-6.4	-5.1	-3.8	-4.7	-4.4	-2.6	-1.8	-3.4		-2.7	2.9	4	9.3	16.5	19.5
#12 UC SAN DIEGO	83.9	-10.4	-5.2	-4.9	-3.7	-2.4	-1.1	-2	-1.7	0.1	0.9	-0.7	2.7		5.6	6.7	12	19.2	22.2
#13 YALE	78.3	-16	-10.8	-10.5	-9.3	-8	-6.7	-7.6	-7.3	-5.5	-4.7	-6.3	-2.9	-5.6		1.1	6.4	13.6	16.6
#14 LIPSCOMB	77.2	-17.1	-11.9	-11.6	-10.4	-9.1	-7.8	-8.7	-8.4	-6.6	-5.8	-7.4	-4	-6.7	-1.1		5.3	12.5	15.5
#15 BRYANT	71.9	-22.4	-17.2	-16.9	-15.7	-14.4	-13.1	-14	-13.7	-11.9	-11.1	-12.7	-9.3	-12	-6.4	-5.3		7.2	10.2
#16 ALABAMA STATE	64.7	-29.6	-24.4	-24.1	-22.9	-21.6	-20.3	-21.2	-20.9	-19.1	-18.3	-19.9	-16.5	-19.2	-13.6	-12.5	-7.2		3
#16 ST FRANCIS	61.7	-32.6	-27.4	-27.1	-25.9	-24.6	-23.3	-24.2	-23.9	-22.1	-21.3	-22.9	-19.5	-22.2	-16.6	-15.5	-10.2	-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, #1 seed Auburn would hypothetically be listed as a 8-point favorite (-8) against #5 seed Michigan, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S SOUTH REGION

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 AUBURN	#2 MICHIGAN STATE	#3 IOWA STATE	#4 TEXAS A&M	#5 MICHIGAN	#6 OLE MISS	#7 MARQUETTE	#8 LOUISVILLE	#9 CREIGHTON	#10 NEW MEXICO	#11 NORTH CAROLINA	#11 SAN DIEGO STATE	#12 UC SAN DIEGO	#13 YALE	#14 LIPSCOMB	#15 BRYANT	#16 ALABAMA STATE	#16 ST FRANCIS
TEAM/SEED	RATING	25.7	18.8	19.1	16.6	16.2	14.8	15.4	15.4	12.7	12.7	13.6	11.3	13.6	8.2	7	1.2	-6.6	-9.4
#1 AUBURN	25.7		6.9	6.6	9.1	9.5	10.9	10.3	10.3	13	13	12.1	14.4	12.1	17.5	18.7	24.5	32.3	35.1
#2 MICHIGAN STATE	18.8	-6.9		-0.3	2.2	2.6	4	3.4	3.4	6.1	6.1	5.2	7.5	5.2	10.6	11.8	17.6	25.4	28.2
#3 IOWA STATE	19.1	-6.6	0.3		2.5	2.9	4.3	3.7	3.7	6.4	6.4	5.5	7.8	5.5	10.9	12.1	17.9	25.7	28.5
#4 TEXAS A&M	16.6	-9.1	-2.2	-2.5		0.4	1.8	1.2	1.2	3.9	3.9	3	5.3	3	8.4	9.6	15.4	23.2	26
#5 MICHIGAN	16.2	-9.5	-2.6	-2.9	-0.4		1.4	0.8	0.8	3.5	3.5	2.6	4.9	2.6	8	9.2	15	22.8	25.6
#6 OLE MISS	14.8	-10.9	-4	-4.3	-1.8	-1.4		-0.6	-0.6	2.1	2.1	1.2	3.5	1.2	6.6	7.8	13.6	21.4	24.2
#7 MARQUETTE	15.4	-10.3	-3.4	-3.7	-1.2	-0.8	0.6		0	2.7	2.7	1.8	4.1	1.8	7.2	8.4	14.2	22	24.8
#8 LOUISVILLE	15.4	-10.3	-3.4	-3.7	-1.2	-0.8	0.6	0		2.7	2.7	1.8	4.1	1.8	7.2	8.4	14.2	22	24.8
#9 CREIGHTON	12.7	-13	-6.1	-6.4	-3.9	-3.5	-2.1	-2.7	-2.7		0	-0.9	1.4	-0.9	4.5	5.7	11.5	19.3	22.1
#10 NEW MEXICO	12.7	-13	-6.1	-6.4	-3.9	-3.5	-2.1	-2.7	-2.7	0		-0.9	1.4	-0.9	4.5	5.7	11.5	19.3	22.1
#11 NORTH CAROLINA	13.6	-12.1	-5.2	-5.5	-3	-2.6	-1.2	-1.8	-1.8	0.9	0.9		2.3	0	5.4	6.6	12.4	20.2	23
#11 SAN DIEGO STATE	11.3	-14.4	-7.5	-7.8	-5.3	-4.9	-3.5	-4.1	-4.1	-1.4	-1.4	-2.3		-2.3	3.1	4.3	10.1	17.9	20.7
#12 UC SAN DIEGO	13.6	-12.1	-5.2	-5.5	-3	-2.6	-1.2	-1.8	-1.8	0.9	0.9	0	2.3		5.4	6.6	12.4	20.2	23
#13 YALE	8.2	-17.5	-10.6	-10.9	-8.4	-8	-6.6	-7.2	-7.2	-4.5	-4.5	-5.4	-3.1	-5.4		1.2	7	14.8	17.6
#14 LIPSCOMB	7	-18.7	-11.8	-12.1	-9.6	-9.2	-7.8	-8.4	-8.4	-5.7	-5.7	-6.6	-4.3	-6.6	-1.2		5.8	13.6	16.4
#15 BRYANT	1.2	-24.5	-17.6	-17.9	-15.4	-15	-13.6	-14.2	-14.2	-11.5	-11.5	-12.4	-10.1	-12.4	-7	-5.8		7.8	10.6
#16 ALABAMA STATE	-6.6	-32.3	-25.4	-25.7	-23.2	-22.8	-21.4	-22	-22	-19.3	-19.3	-20.2	-17.9	-20.2	-14.8	-13.6	-7.8		2.8
#16 ST FRANCIS	-9.4	-35.1	-28.2	-28.5	-26	-25.6	-24.2	-24.8	-24.8	-22.1	-22.1	-23	-20.7	-23	-17.6	-16.4	-10.6	-2.8	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

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STEVE MAKINEN'S SOUTH REGION

BETTORS RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 AUBURN	#2 MICHIGAN STATE	#3 IOWA STATE	#4 TEXAS A&M	#5 MICHIGAN	#6 OLE MISS	#7 MARQUETTE	#8 LOUISVILLE	#9 CREIGHTON	#10 NEW MEXICO	#11 NORTH CAROLINA	#11 SAN DIEGO STATE	#12 UC SAN DIEGO	#13 YALE	#14 LIPSCOMB	#15 BRYANT	#16 ALABAMA STATE	#16 ST FRANCIS
TEAM/SEED	RATING	-25.6	-19.3	-18.3	-16.5	-13.5	-14.5	-16.9	-14	-13.5	-12.3	-13.8	-10.3	-12.8	-7.3	-5.3	-1.2	8.3	10.5
#1 AUBURN	-25.6		6.3	7.3	9.1	12.1	11.1	8.7	11.6	12.1	13.3	11.8	15.3	12.8	18.3	20.3	24.4	33.9	36.1
#2 MICHIGAN STATE	-19.3	-6.3		1	2.8	5.8	4.8	2.4	5.3	5.8	7	5.5	9	6.5	12	14	18.1	27.6	29.8
#3 IOWA STATE	-18.3	-7.3	-1		1.8	4.8	3.8	1.4	4.3	4.8	6	4.5	8	5.5	11	13	17.1	26.6	28.8
#4 TEXAS A&M	-16.5	-9.1	-2.8	-1.8		3	2	-0.4	2.5	3	4.2	2.7	6.2	3.7	9.2	11.2	15.3	24.8	27
#5 MICHIGAN	-13.5	-12.1	-5.8	-4.8	-3		-1	-3.4	-0.5	0	1.2	-0.3	3.2	0.7	6.2	8.2	12.3	21.8	24
#6 OLE MISS	-14.5	-11.1	-4.8	-3.8	-2	1		-2.4	0.5	1	2.2	0.7	4.2	1.7	7.2	9.2	13.3	22.8	25
#7 MARQUETTE	-16.9	-8.7	-2.4	-1.4	0.4	3.4	2.4		2.9	3.4	4.6	3.1	6.6	4.1	9.6	11.6	15.7	25.2	27.4
#8 LOUISVILLE	-14	-11.6	-5.3	-4.3	-2.5	0.5	-0.5	-2.9		0.5	1.7	0.2	3.7	1.2	6.7	8.7	12.8	22.3	24.5
#9 CREIGHTON	-13.5	-12.1	-5.8	-4.8	-3	0	-1	-3.4	-0.5		1.2	-0.3	3.2	0.7	6.2	8.2	12.3	21.8	24
#10 NEW MEXICO	-12.3	-13.3	-7	-6	-4.2	-1.2	-2.2	-4.6	-1.7	-1.2		-1.5	2	-0.5	5	7	11.1	20.6	22.8
#11 NORTH CAROLINA	-13.8	-11.8	-5.5	-4.5	-2.7	0.3	-0.7	-3.1	-0.2	0.3	1.5		3.5	1	6.5	8.5	12.6	22.1	24.3
#11 SAN DIEGO STATE	-10.3	-15.3	-9	-8	-6.2	-3.2	-4.2	-6.6	-3.7	-3.2	-2	-3.5		-2.5	3	5	9.1	18.6	20.8
#12 UC SAN DIEGO	-12.8	-12.8	-6.5	-5.5	-3.7	-0.7	-1.7	-4.1	-1.2	-0.7	0.5	-1	2.5		5.5	7.5	11.6	21.1	23.3
#13 YALE	-7.3	-18.3	-12	-11	-9.2	-6.2	-7.2	-9.6	-6.7	-6.2	-5	-6.5	-3	-5.5		2	6.1	15.6	17.8
#14 LIPSCOMB	-5.3	-20.3	-14	-13	-11.2	-8.2	-9.2	-11.6	-8.7	-8.2	-7	-8.5	-5	-7.5	-2		4.1	13.6	15.8
#15 BRYANT	-1.2	-24.4	-18.1	-17.1	-15.3	-12.3	-13.3	-15.7	-12.8	-12.3	-11.1	-12.6	-9.1	-11.6	-6.1	-4.1		9.5	11.7
#16 ALABAMA STATE	8.3	-33.9	-27.6	-26.6	-24.8	-21.8	-22.8	-25.2	-22.3	-21.8	-20.6	-22.1	-18.6	-21.1	-15.6	-13.6	-9.5		2.2
#16 ST FRANCIS	10.5	-36.1	-29.8	-28.8	-27	-24	-25	-27.4	-24.5	-24	-22.8	-24.3	-20.8	-23.3	-17.8	-15.8	-11.7	-2.2	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

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STEVE MAKINEN'S SOUTH REGION

MOMENTUM RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 AUBURN	#2 MICHIGAN STATE	#3 IOWA STATE	#4 TEXAS A&M	#5 MICHIGAN	#6 OLE MISS	#7 MARQUETTE	#8 LOUISVILLE	#9 CREIGHTON	#10 NEW MEXICO	#11 NORTH CAROLINA	#11 SAN DIEGO STATE	#12 UC SAN DIEGO	#13 YALE	#14 LIPSCOMB	#15 BRYANT	#16 ALABAMA STATE	#16 ST FRANCIS
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 AUBURN	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 MICHIGAN STATE	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 IOWA STATE	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 TEXAS A&M	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 MICHIGAN	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 OLE MISS	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 MARQUETTE	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 LOUISVILLE	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 CREIGHTON	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 NEW MEXICO	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 NORTH CAROLINA	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 SAN DIEGO STATE	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 UC SAN DIEGO	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 YALE	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 LIPSCOMB	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 BRYANT	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 ALABAMA STATE	-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 ST FRANCIS	-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	

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AUBURN TIGERS

HEAD COACH
Bruce Pearl

2024-25 RECORD
28-5 SU, 17-15 ATS, 20-13 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
94.3 (3)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
25.7 (2)

BETTOR RATING
-25.6 (2)

MOMENTUM RATING
23.8 (4)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

It wasn't that long ago that there was a huge gap in the SEC between football and basketball, as the conference was the unquestioned king of the gridiron, but left a lot to be desired on the hardwood. That is no longer the case and Auburn was believed to be the best team in the nation's best conference throughout the course of the season.

Erik Haslam's "Record Quality" metric had Auburn consistently at the top throughout the season, a sign that not only were they good, but they were also beating good teams. By the end of the regular season, Auburn had 16 Quadrant 1 wins and nine of them were Quadrant 1-A wins as defined by Bart Torvik. Johni Broome and Cooper Flagg traded places a few times on the odds board for the Wooden Award for the nation's best player and the Tigers spent a lot of time at or near the top in adjusted offensive efficiency.

The difference between this team and Pearl's excellent teams of the past is that this one has shined on both ends of the floor, ranking in the top 25 in both eFG% offense and defense per Torvik. The closest Pearl has been was 38th in eFG% offense and first in eFG% defense last season, but the Tigers got upset in the first round by Yale less than a week after winning the SEC Tournament.

Other Pearl teams, including his Final Four team in 2019, were much better on one side of the court or the other. But, as promising as the statistical profile and the resume look for the Tigers, Pearl hasn't made it past the first weekend since that 2019 tourney and he's squandered 4, 9, 2, and 4 seeds in the other years. Let's see what he does this time with a No. 1 seed.

According to Bart Torvik's rankings in conference play, Louisville was the eighth-best team in the nation, so Auburn should root for Creighton to make their path a bit easier. That said, neither team can take advantage of the Tigers' poor defensive rebounding numbers. Auburn did lose the lone head-to-head meeting with Texas A&M, who did expose the defensive rebounding flaw in a big way, but the Aggies may not get to the Sweet 16 to have a chance.



SOUTH REGION

#1 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

**ODDS
TO...**

-400

WIN REGION

-150

WIN TITLE

+350

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
83.8 (8)

DEFENSIVE PPG
69.6 (85)

POSSESSIONS
65.1 (183)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.345 (1)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.943 (7)

OFFENSIVE FG%
48.3% (20)

DEFENSIVE FG%
40.9% (32)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
36.8% (40)

FREE THROW %
74.0% (115)

REBOUNDING %
52.6% (54)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.784 (3)

OFFENSIVE TO%
11.4% (5)

DEFENSIVE TO%
15.1% (165)

**% CHANCE
TO REACH**

2ND ROUND

99.1%

SWEET 16

77.6%

ELITE 8

59.1%

FINAL FOUR

41.6%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

MICHIGAN STATE SPARTANS

HEAD COACH
Tom Izzo

2024-25 RECORD
27-6 SU, 22-10 ATS, 11-22 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
89.1 (10)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
18.8 (11)

BETTOR RATING
-19.3 (8)

MOMENTUM RATING
22.5 (6)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

We're seeing more and more coaching legends of college athletics call it quits or try out a change of scenery. Tom Izzo is not one of them yet and he has his best post-COVID Spartans squad ready to go in the NCAA Tournament. Izzo had a really strong team in 2020 on the heels of the 2019 Final Four run, but the emergence of coronavirus wiped out the Big Ten Tournament.

Michigan State's run of NCAA Tournament appearances is up to 27 straight seasons. It began in 1998, which was the program's third season under Izzo. That team made it to the Sweet 16. The next year, Michigan State made the Final Four. The year after that, Sparty won it all. While the Izzo years have been incredibly fruitful, including the one title, one runner-up, eight Final Four appearances, 10 Elite Eight appearances, and 15 Sweet 16 appearances, it feels like it has been a while since Izzo had a team capable of making it to the second Saturday or Sunday of the tourney.

This might be the one, as the Spartans fared very well in their Quadrant 1-A and Quadrant 1 games as a top-10 defensive team and one of the best teams at stopping opponents from making 3s. That has been a hugely important trait because Michigan State has been awful shooting the ball from beyond the arc. They've made up for it with a lot of offensive rebounds and a high volume of 2-point shots.

With one of the lowest 3P Rates of any tournament team, this is a bit of an old-school approach on offense, which seems fitting for a 30-year guy like Izzo. You do wonder if scoring in 2s instead of 3s will be enough the deeper the Spartans go, especially with a lot of trigger-happy teams among the nation's best. At least they are one of the nation's most successful squads on the glass, which helps make up for a distinct lack of takeaways on defense.

The Spartans got the best draw of any No. 2 seed in my estimation. It would be a little hyperbolic to say that anything short of making the Elite Eight is a disappointment, but I don't think they run into any potential opponent where their limited 3-point prowess is a major detriment, as they are loaded down with good offensive teams in that part of the bracket. Sparty should also be well-represented in Cleveland this weekend.



SOUTH REGION

#2 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS TO... -180

WIN REGION

+550

WIN TITLE

25-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
78.2 (57)

DEFENSIVE PPG
67.2 (37)

POSSESSIONS
65.3 (169)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.226 (27)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.934 (6)

OFFENSIVE FG%
46.1% (81)

DEFENSIVE FG%
40.3% (19)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
30.8% (327)

FREE THROW %
78.1% (20)

REBOUNDING %
56.4% (3)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.457 (33)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.2% (121)

DEFENSIVE TO%
14.5% (206)

% CHANCE TO REACH

2ND ROUND

91.0%

SWEET 16

60.4%

ELITE 8

36.2%

FINAL FOUR

17.0%

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

IOWA STATE CYCLONES

HEAD COACH
Tj Otzelberger

2024-25 RECORD
24-9 SU, 19-14 ATS, 14-19 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
88.8 (12)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
19.1 (10)

BETTOR RATING
-18.3 (11)

MOMENTUM RATING
18.8 (15)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

With two Sweet 16 runs in four seasons leading Iowa State, T.J. Otzelberger is hoping that this year's version will be good enough to take the team to some new heights. The Cyclones haven't made it to the Elite Eight since 2000 and haven't made it to a Final Four since FDR was President. This year's squad is stout on defense, good enough on offense, and certainly battle-tested for the task ahead.

Guard play is critically important in the NCAA Tournament and will especially be a factor against Iowa State. The Cyclones have been one of the nation's most prolific teams in terms of taking the ball away from the opposition and those extra possessions are a big reason why they had the season that they had.

However, we do have to wonder if the Cyclones are hitting the tourney at the right time. They opened up the season 15-1 with a non-conference win over Marquette and started conference play 5-0 with a Quadrant 2 win and three Quadrant 1 wins. However, they finished the regular season playing pretty much .500 ball the rest of the way. That did include a win over Arizona, though, so this team has proven to be capable of beating anybody at any time.

Inconsistency is the biggest threat to overcome in the Big Dance, so Iowa State will have to string together at least three good performances in a row for that elusive Elite Eight spot. The defense, and the team, have been in the top 10 in rankings throughout most of the season and the offense grades better than last year, at least in terms of making 2-pointers. The low 3P Rate for the Cyclones and some mediocre shooting have given them several games under one point per possession in conference play, so that does worry me as the field narrows and the remaining teams get better. But, they're still a borderline top-20 offense with a top-10 defense and that, my friends, checks two main boxes for championship contenders.

Keshon Gilbert is out, so the Cyclones will be missing their top facilitator and the guy that makes the offense go. It shouldn't matter against Lipscomb, who is just outclassed and out-talented, but Ole Miss and their high turnover rate on defense could be problematic. They're a metrics darling, but the Cyclones do feel a little vulnerable.

SOUTH REGION

#3 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS TO... **-140**

WIN REGION

+750

WIN TITLE

45-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
80.4 (29)

DEFENSIVE PPG
68.1 (55)

POSSESSIONS
66.2 (115)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.238 (21)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.953 (9)

OFFENSIVE FG%
48.0% (29)

DEFENSIVE FG%
41.7% (52)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
35.8% (68)

FREE THROW %
75.7% (59)

REBOUNDING %
52.7% (51)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.262 (102)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.7% (168)

DEFENSIVE TO%
19.1% (10)

% CHANCE TO REACH

2ND ROUND

80.4%

SWEET 16

50.0%

ELITE 8

26.9%

FINAL FOUR

11.9%

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

TEXAS A&M AGGIES

HEAD COACH
Buzz Williams

2024-25 RECORD
22-10 SU, 17-13 ATS, 13-19 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
87.6 (16)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
16.6 (18)

BETTOR RATING
-16.5 (18)

MOMENTUM RATING
15.4 (27)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Some analysts and pundits have been wondering about the SEC and whether or not it could be a little bit overrated heading into the NCAA Tournament. The seed line for Texas A&M could be something of a barometer, as the Aggies are pretty solid on defense, but rather bad on offense. Yet, their adjusted metrics shine more favorably on them because of the schedule and one clear strength.

The Aggies are the top offensive rebounding team in the nation per Bart Torvik. As a result, they get to the free throw line a lot. And yet this is a team that ranks in the 310s in 3P% and 290s in 2P%. No team in the nation has had a higher percentage of their shots blocked. This isn't a one-year fluke either, as the Aggies were a stout defensive squad last season and a similarly bad shooting team.

That team failed to make it past the first weekend, getting bounced in the second round by Houston in a 100-95 overtime thriller. In fact, the Aggies, who had missed a lot of shots all season long, had 1.325 points per possession against Nebraska in the first round and 1.183 PPP against the Cougars, who were the best defense in the nation by some metrics.

This year's team is on a much more favorable seed line in terms of a second-round matchup, but it is still hard to see a path in which the Aggies make a deep run. The only team with a lower eFG% on offense to make the NCAA Tournament is Alabama State, the champion of the SWAC.

So, Texas A&M, a team that can't really shoot, ends up with a Yale team that makes shots from everywhere on the floor. The Aggies have a good chance at bullying the Bulldogs on the glass and with their ability to defend on the interior. But, they are at a big disadvantage in a battle of teams that force a lot of 3-point attempts because Yale shoots way better than they do. On the other hand, non-SEC opponents only shot 28.8% from 3 against the Aggies, who should win this one and have an interesting game against the Michigan/UC San Diego winner.

SOUTH REGION

#4 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+120

WIN REGION

17-1

WIN TITLE

65-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
74.3 (130)

DEFENSIVE PPG
67.9 (50)

POSSESSIONS
63.6 (276)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.202 (50)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.962 (13)

OFFENSIVE FG%
41.6% (315)

DEFENSIVE FG%
40.3% (18)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
31.1% (317)

FREE THROW %
69.5% (274)

REBOUNDING %
56.3% (4)

ASST/TO RATIO
0.965 (282)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.7% (170)

DEFENSIVE TO%
17.2% (51)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

74.8%

SWEET 16

40.7%

ELITE 8

13.4%

FINAL FOUR

6.3%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

MICHIGAN WOLVERINES

HEAD COACH
Dusty May

2024-25 RECORD
25-9 SU, 16-18 ATS, 18-16 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
86.3 (21)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
16.2 (21)

BETTOR RATING
-13.5 (31)

MOMENTUM RATING
12.9 (38)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

After missing the NCAA Tournament in consecutive seasons for the first time since 2007-08, the Wolverines replaced Juwan Howard with Dusty May. In Year 1, May has the maize and blue in the Big Dance once again. This is one of the most fascinating teams in the field to me because I think they have the pieces to go on a deep run, as the Big Ten Tournament title showed.

But, I also think they're a team that could fall victim to a Cinderella squad, which would be a cruel twist of fate for May, who went from the glass slipper-wearing FAU Owls to an NCAA blue blood. The Wolverines have the capacity to be a great offensive team with two 7-footers in Vladislav Goldin and Danny Wolf, who are No. 1 and No. 2 in terms of Usage Rate. The team finished in the top 10 in 2P% and parlayed that into a top-40 eFG% ranking.

However, the Wolverines also don't value the basketball much, finishing with a TO% over 20% during the regular season and over 19% in Big Ten play, where most teams don't generate a lot of takeaways. The Wolverines also have 13 wins by six or fewer points, including their final nine wins of the regular season and two of their three Big Ten Tournament triumphs. They find ways to win close games and that's a positive trait in the NCAA Tournament.

It also means that this team may be ripe for some regression and they did not shoot 3s well at all late in the season. With two very large bigs, the Wolverines come into the tourney as a borderline top-20 team in 2P% defense and the height at the rim allows the guards to be even more aggressive defending the perimeter, so they did well challenging 3-point shooters. This is a top-20 defense by the adjusted metrics for KenPom. So, this team has a lot of pieces.

As luck would have it, the Big Ten Tournament champs get paired with the most popular Cinderella candidate of them all in UC San Diego, one of the best teams in the nation at forcing turnovers. What I really like for Michigan, though, is that they should win the battle on the glass and be able to leverage the height of two 7-footers. It's a decent draw in the dreaded 12/5 game and so is facing the Texas A&M/Yale winner.

SOUTH REGION

#5 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+190

WIN REGION

16-1

WIN TITLE

65-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
78.8 (47)

DEFENSIVE PPG
71.8 (154)

POSSESSIONS
67.1 (66)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.216 (36)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.978 (18)

OFFENSIVE FG%
47.9% (33)

DEFENSIVE FG%
40.8% (25)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
33.7% (184)

FREE THROW %
72.5% (169)

REBOUNDING %
53.5% (30)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.136 (173)

OFFENSIVE TO%
17.3% (333)

DEFENSIVE TO%
14.0% (258)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

53.0%

SWEET 16

28.3%

ELITE 8

9.0%

FINAL FOUR

4.0%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

OLE MISS REBELS

HEAD COACH
Chris Beard

2024-25 RECORD
22-11 SU, 16-17 ATS, 17-16 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85 (29)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
14.8 (29)

BETTOR RATING
-14.5 (27)

MOMENTUM RATING
10.9 (51)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Andy Kennedy had two NCAA Tournament appearances (2013, 2015) with the Rebels and Kermit Davis had one (2019). Chris Beard already has one in his second season at the helm in Oxford and he'll be looking to secure the program's first tourney victory since 2013 and first Sweet 16 appearance since 2001. Beard's boys looked to be in good shape after an 18-3 start last season, but they completely fell apart down the stretch, losing eight of 10 to finish the regular season and a one-and-done in Nashville for the SEC Tournament.

The Rebels didn't have the same type of collapse this season, but they didn't play well in a much stronger SEC down the stretch. After a 4-0 start in league play, the Rebels finished 10-8 before taking on Arkansas in the conference tournament, where they beat the Razorbacks and then lost a close, low-scoring game to Auburn. Beard's teams are usually known for their defensive prowess, but the Rebels gave up over a point per possession in 12 straight to end the regular season and gave up well over 1 PPP in most of those games.

Now the question is whether or not getting away from the best and deepest conference in college basketball can help the Rebels get back on track and make a bit of a push. This is one of the best turnover differential teams in the nation, as Ole Miss had a top-five TO% on offense and a top-35 TO% on defense. Those extra possessions help a lot, especially for a team that struggles mightily on the offensive glass.

The SEC is littered with great offensive teams, as the Rebels were below the national average in both 2P% offense and defense, but a little bit better in 3P% offense and defense. They were eighth in adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency during the SEC regular season. So, when you consider that they played a very tough schedule and held their own, you can be encouraged going into the Big Dance. On the other hand, aside from the enormous turnover advantage they had against most opponents, very little stands out about Ole Miss.

The Rebels await the winner of San Diego State and North Carolina, two very different opponents to plan for. Iowa State is a weakened No. 3 seed in that region with Keshon Gilbert out. A Sweet 16 future on the Rebels is very intriguing.

Ole Miss

**ODDS
TO...**

REACH SWEET 16

+220

WIN REGION

19-1

WIN TITLE

100-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
77.2 (70)

DEFENSIVE PPG
71.7 (152)

POSSESSIONS
65.5 (152)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.214 (37)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.99 (23)

OFFENSIVE FG%
44.2% (181)

DEFENSIVE FG%
43.3% (122)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
34.1% (157)

FREE THROW %
73.8% (120)

REBOUNDING %
46.7% (322)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.595 (8)

OFFENSIVE TO%
11.3% (3)

DEFENSIVE TO%
17.8% (33)

**% CHANCE
TO REACH**

2ND ROUND

45.6%

SWEET 16

19.1%

ELITE 8

7.6%

FINAL FOUR

2.4%

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

MARQUETTE

GOLDEN EAGLES

HEAD COACH
Shaka Smart

2024-25 RECORD
23-10 SU, 13-18 ATS, 14-19 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85.9 (23)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
15.4 (24)

BETTOR RATING
-16.9 (15)

MOMENTUM RATING
13.2 (36)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

If Shaka Smart can hold up the pattern that he has established at Marquette, then the Golden Eagles will make it to the Elite Eight. In his first three seasons, Smart has lost in the first round as a No. 9 seed, made the second round as a No. 2 seed, and lost in the Sweet 16 as a No. 2 seed. Obviously the seed line has dropped a good bit from the last two appearances and this team is not as good on paper or in the metrics as the previous two.

But any team that plays the “havoc” style of defense employed by Smart is going to be a handful in the tournament because most teams just don’t see anything like that. After taking a year to put in his systems, Smart’s Golden Eagles have ranked in the top 20 in TO% on defense. This year’s team is actually taking better care of the basketball than the last two and has made a modest improvement over last year’s squad at generating takeaways.

But, the biggest difference for Marquette is that they are not making as many shots as they have in the past. This is easily the worst 3-point shooting team that Smart has had, as they rank in the 230s in 3P%. It is also his first offense shooting under 55% on 2s since the 2021-22 season that began his tenure. They are still a borderline top-50 offense in that department, but not nearly as efficient as they’ve been in the past.

The last two teams ranked seventh and 22nd in eFG% offense according to Bart Torvik. This one ranks in the mid-110s. That being said, this version has also made some modest strides in performing better while set up in the half-court defense, as this is the best team by eFG% defense in the last three seasons. So, Marquette is still dangerous, but they do need to be more consistent from deep to make a big run.

A cheeky little matchup here, as Richard Pitino and New Mexico take on a team that his father knows very well from the Big East. Also, two teams that have similar styles of play by forcing turnovers. Marquette’s better shooting numbers and higher 3-point frequency are probably the difference, though it may come down to whoever plays better between Kam Jones and Donovan Dent.



SOUTH REGION

#7 SEED

ODDS
TO...

+260

REACH SWEET 16

WIN REGION

22-1

WIN TITLE

120-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
76.9 (74)

DEFENSIVE PPG
68.5 (62)

POSSESSIONS
65.8 (129)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.22 (35)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.991 (25)

OFFENSIVE FG%
44.5% (164)

DEFENSIVE FG%
43.5% (143)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
32.5% (245)

FREE THROW %
72.3% (177)

REBOUNDING %
48.8% (241)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.487 (28)

OFFENSIVE TO%
11.6% (8)

DEFENSIVE TO%
18.7% (17)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

58.9%

SWEET 16

24.2%

ELITE 8

11.4%

FINAL FOUR

4.0%

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

LOUISVILLE

CARDINALS

HEAD COACH
Pat Kelsey

2024-25 RECORD
27-7 SU, 20-14 ATS, 12-22 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85.6 (25)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
15.4 (25)

BETTOR RATING
-14 (28)

MOMENTUM RATING
16.5 (24)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

What Pat Kelsey has done in one season to reinvigorate the fan base, fully embrace himself in the city and its rich basketball culture, and in the standings has been nothing short of remarkable. And there is nothing fluky about it. When you think about teams with the statistical profile to win a title, Louisville is very close to knocking on that door. Bart Torvik actually has the Cardinals in the top 25 in adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency, while KenPom has the offense graded a little lower, but the defense still ranks as a top-25 group.

A conference-opening loss to Duke and an "it happens" loss to Georgia Tech on Feb. 1 were the only blemishes during ACC play. Louisville did not win a Quadrant 1-A game until beating Clemson in the ACC Tournament and was a 5-5 team in the regular season against Quadrant 1 opponents, so it is fair to downplay the numbers a bit.

However, this is another team, much like I wrote about Illinois, that has some very good offensive and defensive statistics, but spotty 3-point shooting has stood in the way. The Cardinals have not been nearly as bad as the Illini in terms of connecting from distance, but they still rank outside the top 200 in 3P% per Torvik. For a team shooting a 3-pointer over 48% of the time, that may be too much to overcome, despite a lot of promise in other areas.

It should be noted, though, that Louisville shot over 37% from 3 in ACC play, so their non-conference numbers while they were getting used to Kelsey's offense are skewing the full-season percentage. Torvik actually graded the Cardinals as the eighth-best team in conference-only games. The ACC was down, but Louisville was very strong. It should also be noted that they were 7-1 in games decided by six or fewer points.

Three No. 8 seeds seem like legitimate threats to the No. 1 seeds in their region and Louisville feels like one for Auburn. What we saw in conference play as Kelsey got a feel for his team and they adjusted to him isn't fully reflected in the season-long numbers. Creighton is no cupcake, as the line clearly implies, but I think the Cardinals can give the Tigers a game if they can get to the second round. If they do, they're better than Texas A&M and Michigan. They might be an interesting price to invest in to make the Elite Eight.

SOUTH REGION

#8 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+450

WIN REGION

25-1

WIN TITLE

80-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
78.6 (52)

DEFENSIVE PPG
68.9 (67)

POSSESSIONS
66.5 (91)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.223 (31)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.977 (17)

OFFENSIVE FG%
45.4% (115)

DEFENSIVE FG%
42.5% (80)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
33.0% (216)

FREE THROW %
74.4% (101)

REBOUNDING %
52.9% (45)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.224 (129)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.2% (122)

DEFENSIVE TO%
16.3% (82)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

57.4%

SWEET 16

14.1%

ELITE 8

7.1%

FINAL FOUR

3.1%

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

CREIGHTON BLUEJAYS

HEAD COACH
Greg McDermott

2024-25 RECORD
24-10 SU, 19-13 ATS, 16-18 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
83.8 (36)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
12.7 (39)

BETTOR RATING
-13.5 (32)

MOMENTUM RATING
10.9 (52)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

For the 10th time in 14 seasons as the head coach of Creighton, Greg McDermott is in the NCAA Tournament. Creighton probably would have had their highest seed ever in 2020 had COVID not forced the cancellation of the event. The Bluejays aren't some regular season flash in the pan either. McDermott has made the Sweet 16 in three of the last four seasons and the one year that he didn't, 2022, the Bluejays were a No. 9 seed and had to play No. 1 Kansas in the second round. They lost by 7, but were down by one with under 90 seconds left.

This is not McDermott's best tourney team, due in large part to some outlier statistics. The first is that the Bluejays are outside the top 150 in 3P%. They haven't been there since 2015. The other is that they have a TO% over 18% for the first time since 2019, which, coincidentally, is the last time that Creighton missed a berth in the field. Another is that the Bluejays shot better than 78% from the free throw line each of the last two seasons and they're down around 73% this year and outside the top 100 nationally.

But, this is the nation's best team when it comes to shooting 2-pointers and a team that ranks in the top 45 in adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency per both Ken Pomeroy and Bart Torvik. They're also in the top 25 in both eFG% offense and defense. The defensive stat is made even more impressive by the fact that Creighton is once again among the five worst teams in TO%, so they're forced to defend full possessions in the half-court a whole heck of a lot.

McDermott, understanding that he's likely to have his team in the tournament, scheduled up in the non-conference, as the Bluejays measured themselves against San Diego State, Texas A&M, Kansas, and Alabama, among others that are solid, but didn't make the NCAA Tournament. A couple of head-scratching losses put Creighton where they are in the seeding, but this is still a solid basketball team.

The Selection Committee did Creighton no favors with Louisville and then Auburn in the top of the South Region. They've out-shot opponents in the past with their anemic turnover rate, but Auburn would be a very tough team to outscore without a few takeaways. The Bluejays would also have to shoot better than they have this season from 3 to knock out both of them. I don't think McDermott's crew gets past the weekend.

SOUTH REGION

#9 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO... **+700**

WIN REGION

30-1

WIN TITLE

80-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
75.2 (112)

DEFENSIVE PPG
69.5 (83)

POSSESSIONS
65.3 (167)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.206 (44)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.015 (41)

OFFENSIVE FG%
47.5% (38)

DEFENSIVE FG%
41.2% (40)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
33.9% (177)

FREE THROW %
73.3% (139)

REBOUNDING %
52.4% (65)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.387 (51)

OFFENSIVE TO%
16.0% (270)

DEFENSIVE TO%
10.2% (361)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

42.7%

SWEET 16

8.2%

ELITE 8

3.5%

FINAL FOUR

1.3%

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

NEW MEXICO

LOBOS

HEAD COACH
Richard Pitino

2024-25 RECORD
26-7 SU, 15-17 ATS, 14-18 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
83 (39)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
12.7 (40)

BETTOR RATING
-12.3 (42)

MOMENTUM RATING
11.4 (45)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

For the second time, Rick and Richard Pitino are both in the NCAA Tournament in the same year. It happened back in 2017 just before Rick was fired at Louisville. Barring something insane, they won't meet in the tournament and are in different places this week, with New Mexico in Cleveland and St. John's fairly close to home in Providence.

We'll see if father and son can make deeper runs here. New Mexico was the regular season champion in the hotly-contested Mountain West Conference, but got bounced in the MWC Tournament semifinals by Boise State. Still, the Lobos had done more than enough to get in, including an early-season win over UCLA. Richard and Rick actually faced off on Nov. 17 in an 85-71 win for St. John's, as that remains the one Quadrant 1-A loss for the Lobos.

They picked up a Q1-A win at Utah State on Feb. 1 to go with a road win over Colorado State on Dec. 28. The Lobos are 3-4 in Quadrant 1 games and have some notable traits, but also some pretty clear shortcomings. New Mexico is really good at generating takeaways and strong on the defensive glass, two metrics that heavily influence the adjusted defensive efficiency statistic. UNM is a top-20 defense per Bart Torvik and KenPom.

However, the Lobos are not a very good offensive team. They rank in the 150s in 3P% and almost 200th in 2P%. Because they take care of the ball and get to the line at a decent rate, their efficiency metrics hide how average their shooting numbers are. The Lobos also have one of the lower 3P Rates in the field, yet they play at a very fast tempo, so they want to slash to the basket and get into the paint by any means necessary. The Lobos were a top-25 team by shot share on Close Twos, so they want to force the issue there.

This isn't quite the Spiderman meme personified, but New Mexico and Marquette have a lot of similarities in how they play. The one major difference is that Marquette shoots way more 3s. If those fall, it's a problem. If those don't, this may be an ugly game with a lot of turnovers and points in transition, which helps the Lobos. It's not a full-fledged coin flip, but it's relatively close. Michigan State probably beats either team over the weekend.

SOUTH REGION

#10 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+500

WIN REGION

60-1

WIN TITLE

250-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
80 (33)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.8 (123)

POSSESSIONS
70.9 (4)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.17 (73)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.992 (27)

OFFENSIVE FG%
45.3% (124)

DEFENSIVE FG%
42.7% (90)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
34.1% (164)

FREE THROW %
75.3% (75)

REBOUNDING %
52.6% (57)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.281 (95)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.4% (56)

DEFENSIVE TO%
18.2% (25)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

41.2%

SWEET 16

13.7%

ELITE 8

5.3%

FINAL FOUR

1.5%

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

NORTH CAROLINA

TAR HEELS

HEAD COACH
Hubert Davis

2024-25 RECORD
22-13 SU, 15-20 ATS, 18-17 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
84.6 (31)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
13.6 (34)

BETTOR RATING
-13.8 (30)

MOMENTUM RATING
18.7 (16)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

It would seem as though “that’s why they play the games” only matters in some cases. North Carolina went 0-10 in Quadrant 1-A games and 1-12 in Quadrant 1 games overall. They were able to beat up on the teams that they were supposed to beat and played the bully role effectively, going 21-1 against Quadrant 2 or lower foes. Seemingly, that was enough to get the Tar Heels in the NCAA Tournament for the second time in as many years and third out of four under Hubert Davis.

This is a solid offensive ballclub, as the Jumpman Brand will be represented in March largely because of that. The Tar Heels are a borderline top-20 team from an adjusted offensive efficiency standpoint and ranked in the top 50 in 2P% and top 100 in 3P%. They also only turned the ball over around 15% of the time, which is good because they only forced a turnover around 15% of the time.

The strength of schedule is doing a lot of heavy lifting on the defensive efficiency metrics. This was a team that ranked outside of the top 100 in eFG% defense. Pair that with the low turnover percentage and you can see why UNC struggled badly against the top teams that they played. And, to be fair, they played a gauntlet of a non-conference schedule with games against Kansas, Dayton, Auburn, Michigan State, Alabama, Florida, and UCLA.

In other words, the definition of “quality losses” came into play in a big way, even though the Tar Heels lost to Stanford, Wake Forest, and Pitt during ACC play to go along with three losses to rival Duke, including one in the ACC Tournament without Cooper Flagg. We’ve seen teams that draw the ire of the public sentiment go on NCAA Tournament runs before and maybe North Carolina will be the latest.

Two contrasting styles meet up in Dayton with UNC vs. San Diego State. Suffocating defenses are few and far between in the ACC and this will be a pace war. I don’t know if the Aztecs make enough shots, but Ole Miss is a similar matchup if the Tar Heels do advance. I’m not sure if that helps or hurts, but either way, North Carolina needs to prove that they belonged in the field.

SOUTH REGION

#11 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+425

WIN REGION

65-1

WIN TITLE

300-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
80.8 (25)

DEFENSIVE PPG
75 (244)

POSSESSIONS
68.4 (32)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.228 (24)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.033 (63)

OFFENSIVE FG%
47.6% (35)

DEFENSIVE FG%
43.2% (117)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
35.3% (92)

FREE THROW %
73.3% (140)

REBOUNDING %
52.1% (82)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.353 (62)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.3% (52)

DEFENSIVE TO%
13.3% (304)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

33.6%

SWEET 16

15.5%

ELITE 8

6.8%

FINAL FOUR

2.3%

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

SAN DIEGO STATE

AZTECS

HEAD COACH
Brian Dutcher

2024-25 RECORD
21-9 SU, 12-17 ATS, 15-14 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
81.2 (50)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
11.3 (52)

BETTOR RATING
-10.3 (55)

MOMENTUM RATING
11 (48)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

They don't ask how. They ask how many. And for San Diego State, this represents five straight years in the NCAA Tournament, a feat only surpassed when they had six straight from 2010-15. They barely got in, as San Diego State has to take the long trek to Dayton, OH to play their first game east of the Mississippi since last year's 30-point loss to UConn in the Sweet 16 at TD Garden Arena in Boston.

Being one of five teams to beat No. 3 overall seed Houston had to carry a ton of weight with the Selection Committee, as that was far and away San Diego State's biggest triumph of the season. In fact, they only had two other Quadrant 1 wins, with victories over Creighton and Boise State. Otherwise, the Aztecs lost their other four Q1 games in Mountain West play, including a quick exit in Las Vegas at the hands of Boise State in the conference tournament.

This will absolutely shock you, but the Aztecs are excellent on defense and lacking on offense. SDSU was the best team in the MWC in adjusted defensive efficiency and ranks in the top 15 nationally for Bart Torvik and KenPom. Unfortunately, this is a really pedestrian team on offense. They ranked outside the top 100 in every key offensive category and also ranked as one of the 30 worst teams at the free throw line.

For all of the great things on defense that the Aztecs do, they make it very hard on themselves offensively. That said, they are 8-2 in games decided by six or fewer points, likely on account of that defense. All in all, this is a pretty common profile for this team, though this year's offense is definitely lacking compared to the offenses of the last two iterations. This is more like the 2022 offense and that team lost in the first round. The other two went to the National Championship Game and Sweet 16.



SOUTH REGION

#11 SEED

ODDS
TO...

REACH SWEET 16

+950

WIN REGION

150-1

WIN TITLE

400-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
69.9 (259)

DEFENSIVE PPG
64.1 (13)

POSSESSIONS
64 (252)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.137 (120)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.964 (15)

OFFENSIVE FG%
44.2% (186)

DEFENSIVE FG%
38.1% (3)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
32.8% (228)

FREE THROW %
66.7% (334)

REBOUNDING %
49.9% (191)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.142 (172)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.6% (152)

DEFENSIVE TO%
16.8% (63)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

20.8%

SWEET 16

9.6%

ELITE 8

4.2%

FINAL FOUR

1.5%

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

UC SAN DIEGO TRITONS

HEAD COACH
Eric Olen

2024-25 RECORD
30-4 SU, 25-7 ATS, 13-18 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
83.9 (35)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
13.6 (35)

BETTOR RATING
-12.8 (36)

MOMENTUM RATING
17.5 (20)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Justice was served by UC San Diego winning the automatic bid in the Big West Tournament because it would have been a major injustice to leave the Tritons out of the field. Eric Olen's team just became NCAA Tournament eligible this season. They were unable to participate in last year's conference tournament, despite a 15-5 record in league play that would have made them the No. 2 seed in that field.

This is a legitimately good team that will be a very popular mid-major Cinderella pick. The Tritons are a top-40 team in KenPom's rankings and a top-50 team in Bart Torvik's rankings, so there is nothing fluky whatsoever about their conference tournament win or their 30-4 record. They are outstanding at both ends of the floor and have one of the highest turnover percentage differentials in the nation, as they rank in the top five in TO% on offense and on defense.

They went on the road and beat Utah State in the non-conference and played very tough against San Diego State to open the season at Viejas Arena. They also got revenge against UC Irvine on the road, accounting for another Quadrant 1 victory. Along with the turnover advantage, they also have one of the biggest differentials on 2P% success offensively and defensively, as they are a borderline top-30 team scoring inside the arc and a borderline top-20 team defending there.

The only major weakness for the Tritons is on the offensive glass. They don't have a ton of height, which makes their shooting efficiency that much more important. After all, this is a team with fewer than 40 dunks on the season. They don't really get to the rim at a high rate, but nearly 50% of their shots are 3-pointers and they shot better than 36% on those, which is typically part of the Cinderella formula. The only teams with a lower percentage of dunk attempts relative to shot attempts to make the NCAA Tournament field are Colorado State, Lipscomb, Wofford, Saint Mary's, Yale, and Saint Francis per Torvik.

UC San Diego gets a power-conference team with a turnover problem in the 12/5 game. How they handle two 7-footers down low is a big question mark. You don't see that kind of height often in the Big West. The battle on the boards is unlikely to go their way, so the Tritons are going to have to maximize their high 3P Rate by shooting well at elevation in Denver.



SOUTH REGION

#12 SEED

ODDS
TO...

+390

REACH SWEET 16

WIN REGION

70-1

WIN TITLE

400-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
77.9 (61)

DEFENSIVE PPG
62.8 (8)

POSSESSIONS
63.6 (270)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.205 (47)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.996 (32)

OFFENSIVE FG%
46.4% (71)

DEFENSIVE FG%
40.4% (20)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
36.5% (57)

FREE THROW %
74.6% (93)

REBOUNDING %
48.7% (247)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.691 (5)

OFFENSIVE TO%
11.9% (11)

DEFENSIVE TO%
20.5% (2)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

47.0%

SWEET 16

23.8%

ELITE 8

6.7%

FINAL FOUR

2.7%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

YALE BULLDOGS

HEAD COACH
James Jones

2024-25 RECORD
22-7 SU, 17-10 ATS, 14-14 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
78.3 (69)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
8.2 (66)

BETTOR RATING
-7.3 (73)

MOMENTUM RATING
6.9 (78)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

For the fourth time in five Ivy League Tournaments, Yale emerged victorious. The Bulldogs absolutely got tested in their two games in Rhode Island, narrowly escaping against Princeton in the semifinals before outlasting Cornell in a 90-84 game in the finals. It only makes sense that Yale won the Ivy, given that they finished four games better in the regular season than Cornell and five games better than the other two to qualify for the conference tournament.

The Ivy League adopted a conference tournament in 2017 and the Bulldogs have won four of the seven that have taken place. But, the Ivy winner is not some pushover in the NCAA Tournament. No. 15 Princeton knocked off No. 2 Arizona back in 2023 and Yale upset a very good Auburn team last year before getting crushed by San Diego State.

This year's Yale squad actually ranks higher than last year's, due in large part to some much better 3-point shooting. The Bulldogs have made over 38% of their 3s for the first time in the James Joyce era and do all of the other things that they normally do. They take excellent care of the ball, make a lot of 2-point shots, rebound very well, and play good defense without fouling.

While it was not a strong year for the Ivy, Yale was 2-1 in Quadrant 2 games, beating Akron and Cornell away from home. Their Quadrant 1 loss was a 92-84 defeat at the hands of Purdue, but they had 1.157 points per possession on offense. As a solid, disciplined, smart team that doesn't beat themselves, the Bulldogs certainly have a chance to bark in the first round and maybe beyond.

Yale's ability to spread the floor served them well in the Ivy League, but Texas A&M has been defending those types of offenses all year long. Physical play is rare in the Ivy and that's precisely what Texas A&M brings to the table here, along with a defense whose numbers were hurt by the SEC. Non-conference opponents only shot 28.8% from 3 against the Aggies and that makes me worried for Yale.



SOUTH REGION

#13 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+600

WIN REGION

130-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
80.7 (27)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.1 (100)

POSSESSIONS
65 (195)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.202 (51)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.077 (105)

OFFENSIVE FG%
48.5% (15)

DEFENSIVE FG%
40.3% (17)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
37.7% (22)

FREE THROW %
73.7% (123)

REBOUNDING %
55.0% (12)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.547 (14)

OFFENSIVE TO%
12.7% (30)

DEFENSIVE TO%
14.1% (242)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

25.2%

SWEET 16

7.3%

ELITE 8

1.1%

FINAL FOUR

0.3%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

LIPSCOMB BISONS

HEAD COACH
Lennie Acuff

2024-25 RECORD
25-9 SU, 15-15 ATS, 13-19 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
77.2 (80)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
7 (79)

BETTOR RATING
-5.3 (94)

MOMENTUM RATING
9 (63)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Lipscomb is back in the Big Dance for the first time since 2018 after surviving a semifinal scare from Queens en route to a 13-point win over North Alabama in the Atlantic Sun Tournament final. The Bisons are a very well-coached team with a star in big man Jacob Ognacevic, who missed all of last season due to injury. Ognacevic led five Bisons in double figures with 20.1 PPG and added 8.1 RPG for good measure.

This is a team that fits the Cinderella profile in that they have a good big and experienced guards with Will Pruitt and Joe Anderson. There is also nothing fraudulent about this team. KenPom had them highly ranked all season long and they finished in the low 80s in his rankings. Bart Torvik also had the Bisons as a borderline top-100 team to finish the season.

With those experienced guards, the Bisons are really good at protecting the basketball and spreading it around offensively. Lipscomb's 3P Rate was north of 47%, so they're going to have to find a way to shoot well in far bigger arenas than they typically play, where the sightlines and depth perception can be a whole lot different. But, if they do get a friendly whistle and can force the issue by getting the ball inside to Ognacevic, this is a team that shot nearly 80% at the free throw line.

Like so many of the automatic qualifiers from a one-bid league, the question is about how they level up against far stiffer competition. Lipscomb's best win was a home triumph over Wofford. They were beaten by 16 by Arkansas and 29 by Kentucky, but the magic of March is that anything can happen in any given game and the Bisons have a strong coach in Lennie Acuff and the type of roster that has a chance to pull a stunner.

The Bisons are going to have to shoot 3s really well because it is tough to get inside on Iowa State. At least they protect the basketball well, but that was against Atlantic Sun competition and Iowa State will be a different beast, even without Keshon Gilbert. This might be a shooting contest with two defenses that protect the rim well and that's probably the best thing Lipscomb could ask for against a power-conference team.



SOUTH REGION

#14 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

20-1

WIN REGION

350-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
77.7 (67)

DEFENSIVE PPG
67.8 (49)

POSSESSIONS
63.6 (274)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.156 (91)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.061 (85)

OFFENSIVE FG%
47.2% (46)

DEFENSIVE FG%
42.9% (101)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
36.7% (46)

FREE THROW %
79.6% (7)

REBOUNDING %
50.7% (151)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.497 (26)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.0% (38)

DEFENSIVE TO%
13.8% (267)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

19.7%

SWEET 16

5.8%

ELITE 8

1.3%

FINAL FOUR

0.2%

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

BRYANT BULLDOGS

HEAD COACH
Phil Martelli Jr

2024-25 RECORD
23-11 SU, 15-17 ATS, 15-16 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
71.9 (140)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
1.2 (141)

BETTOR RATING
-1.2 (141)

MOMENTUM RATING
3.1 (128)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Following their first conference regular season championship since 2022, Bryant went on and held serve as the No. 1 seed in the conference tournament to secure their second Division I NCAA Tournament berth. This was, however, their first America East Conference title, as the other one came as a member of the Northeast Conference. They didn't have to go through traditional AEC power Vermont in the title game, as Maine upset the Catamounts in the semifinals.

The main thing to know about Bryant is that they play very fast and have for a long time. Phil Martelli Jr. took over for Jared Grasso, who resigned during the 2023-24 season, and kept up the team's breakneck pace. The Bulldogs have ranked in the top 12 in adjusted tempo per Bart Torvik in each of the last five seasons and are a top-10 team in that department this season.

Despite the fast pace, Bryant still commits to the details on defense. The Bulldogs are a borderline top-50 team by eFG% defense, which is a big step down from when they were a top-10 team in that department last season. This year's team is better on offense, though, as they've improved from beyond the arc and at the free throw line.

The 2022 team got sent to Dayton and lost to Wright State, who was playing at UD Arena, but still playing in their home city. This time around, the Bulldogs, whose best non-conference wins came at Drexel and Delaware, have avoided that play-in round, but still face very long odds in the first round.

It was going to be hard to find a good matchup for a 15 seed like Bryant in the first round no matter what, but what they do well is counterfeited by a much better team that either does a lot of the same things well or won't have their shortcomings exposed. To me, the biggest question here is whether or not Michigan State is content running with Bryant or if they try to slow the game down from the perspective of betting on the total.



SOUTH REGION

#15 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

25-1

WIN REGION

500-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
80.3 (30)

DEFENSIVE PPG
74.5 (233)

POSSESSIONS
70.1 (5)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.117 (149)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.097 (146)

OFFENSIVE FG%
45.2% (128)

DEFENSIVE FG%
41.9% (61)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
33.4% (198)

FREE THROW %
71.8% (198)

REBOUNDING %
52.8% (50)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.178 (151)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.9% (96)

DEFENSIVE TO%
14.3% (223)

% CHANCE TO REACH

2ND ROUND

9.1%

SWEET 16

1.7%

ELITE 8

0.2%

FINAL FOUR

0.0%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

ALABAMA STATE HORNETS

HEAD COACH
Tony Madlock

2024-25 RECORD
19-15 SU, 15-18 ATS, 13-20 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
64.7 (270)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-6.6 (274)

BETTOR RATING
8.3 (308)

MOMENTUM RATING
-1.2 (190)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Head coach Tony Madlock really challenged his team during the non-conference portion of the season. The Hornets played just two home games - and only one against a Division I opponent - from the start of the season on Nov. 4 to Jan. 4 when conference play began. In that time, they played at UNLV, LSU, Akron, Cincinnati, SMU, and Missouri, along with neutral-site games against Omaha and Norfolk State. The Omaha win is easily their best of the season.

Maybe it was those experiences or maybe it was something else, but Alabama State is in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2011 after winning three games in the SWAC Tournament by a combined 11 points over Texas Southern, Grambling, and Jackson State. Ironically, he replaced now Jackson State head coach Mo Williams with the Hornets job.

Madlock's team went 8-23 in his first season and improved by five wins the next season and by six wins this season. Williams was just 14-35 in his two seasons in Montgomery, so this was a program that really had to be built from the ground up and Madlock did just that, with the help of son, TJ, and two multi-year standouts in CJ Hines and Amarr Knox. The Hornets head into the tourney having won 10 of their last 11 games.

But, as we know, the caliber of competition levels up now. They did beat Omaha for their best win of the season and have three Quadrant 3 wins, but they were 0-6 in lopsided fashion against Quadrant 1 and 2 opponents. They'll cross that bridge when they get to it, as they draw another No. 16 seed in Dayton for the play-in games first. Alabama State was fourth in both adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency in SWAC play. Defensively, they had a top-100 TO% and were right around the national average in 2P% and 3P%. They have one of the lowest TO% in the nation on offense, but also struggle badly to make shots, especially 2-pointers, where they are in the bottom 20 nationally.

Alabama State is a great story, but their NCAA Tournament appearance either ends in Dayton against St. Francis or ends in a blowout in Lexington against Auburn. I do like the Hornets over the Red Flash, as turnovers are likely to play a huge role in that ballgame and Alabama State has a big edge there.

SOUTH REGION

#16 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

100-1

WIN REGION

500-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
72.2 (191)

DEFENSIVE PPG
72.5 (181)

POSSESSIONS
65.3 (164)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.059 (246)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.162 (271)

OFFENSIVE FG%
40.0% (348)

DEFENSIVE FG%
43.7% (153)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
32.9% (222)

FREE THROW %
69.8% (270)

REBOUNDING %
47.2% (309)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.241 (114)

OFFENSIVE TO%
11.4% (6)

DEFENSIVE TO%
16.1% (94)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

0.7%

SWEET 16

0.1%

ELITE 8

0.0%

FINAL FOUR

0.0%

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

SAINT FRANCIS

RED FLASH

HEAD COACH
Rob Krimmel

2024-25 RECORD
16-17 SU, 17-13 ATS, 19-11 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
61.7 (315)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-9.4 (312)

BETTOR RATING
10.5 (333)

MOMENTUM RATING
-6.9 (281)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

The Northeast Conference champions literally saved their best for last. Per Bart Torvik's Game Score rating, the Red Flash had a 66 against Central Connecticut State, tying their previous best performance against LIU on Jan. 24. This win, though, sent them to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1991. It is actually the first postseason berth for Saint Francis since the 2019 NIT.

This was not a good team during the regular season. They were better than last year, when they finished with an 8-22 record and went 3-13 in NEC play. But, this was an 8-8 team in the conference regular season that won three straight games in overtime to finish things out and then won three games by exactly three points each in the conference tourney.

The 46-43 win against the heavy favorite Blue Devils came in a game where Saint Francis was 19-of-60 from the floor. They were, however, second in the NEC in adjusted offensive efficiency and wound up fifth on defense. They led the conference in 2P% at nearly 56%, a fairly impressive feat given that offensive rebounds were in short supply.

You typically don't get as far as the Red Flash have ranking in the 320s in TO% on offense, 310s in offensive rebounding percentage, and 350s in free throw rate. As a team, Saint Francis had 16 dunks this season. Height is really in short supply on this roster, as you would expect in a conference where that isn't prioritized all that much.

The Red Flash earned a trip to Dayton for their fortunes, but even if they escape UD Arena with a win, they're not going to pose any threat to a No. 1 seed like Auburn. Frankly, I don't even like the matchup with Alabama State, as the Hornets force a lot of turnovers and Saint Francis doesn't really protect the ball all that well.

SOUTH REGION

#16 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO... 100-1

WIN REGION

500-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
68 (299)

DEFENSIVE PPG
73.5 (208)

POSSESSIONS
65.3 (174)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.043 (279)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.181 (301)

OFFENSIVE FG%
44.6% (158)

DEFENSIVE FG%
44.3% (190)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
33.4% (195)

FREE THROW %
72.5% (166)

REBOUNDING %
48.0% (279)

ASST/TO RATIO
0.955 (287)

OFFENSIVE TO%
17.4% (336)

DEFENSIVE TO%
14.2% (236)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

0.2%

SWEET 16

0.0%

ELITE 8

0.0%

FINAL FOUR

0.0%

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

STEVE MAKINEN'S WEST REGION

POWER RATINGS GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 FLORIDA	#2 ST JOHNS	#3 TEXAS TECH	#4 MARYLAND	#5 MEMPHIS	#6 MISSOURI	#7 KANSAS	#8 CONNECTICUT	#9 OKLAHOMA	#10 ARKANSAS	#11 DRAKE	#12 COLORADO STATE	#13 GRAND CANYON	#14 UNC-WILMINGTON	#15 OMAHA	#16 NORFOLK STATE
TEAM/SEED	RATING	96	89.2	89.1	89	81.8	86.3	87	86.2	82.6	81.8	79.6	82.7	76.8	75.9	71	70.1
#1 FLORIDA	96		6.8	6.9	7	14.2	9.7	9	9.8	13.4	14.2	16.4	13.3	19.2	20.1	25	25.9
#2 ST JOHNS	89.2	-6.8		0.1	0.2	7.4	2.9	2.2	3	6.6	7.4	9.6	6.5	12.4	13.3	18.2	19.1
#3 TEXAS TECH	89.1	-6.9	-0.1		0.1	7.3	2.8	2.1	2.9	6.5	7.3	9.5	6.4	12.3	13.2	18.1	19
#4 MARYLAND	89	-7	-0.2	-0.1		7.2	2.7	2	2.8	6.4	7.2	9.4	6.3	12.2	13.1	18	18.9
#5 MEMPHIS	81.8	-14.2	-7.4	-7.3	-7.2		-4.5	-5.2	-4.4	-0.8	0	2.2	-0.9	5	5.9	10.8	11.7
#6 MISSOURI	86.3	-9.7	-2.9	-2.8	-2.7	4.5		-0.7	0.1	3.7	4.5	6.7	3.6	9.5	10.4	15.3	16.2
#7 KANSAS	87	-9	-2.2	-2.1	-2	5.2	0.7		0.8	4.4	5.2	7.4	4.3	10.2	11.1	16	16.9
#8 CONNECTICUT	86.2	-9.8	-3	-2.9	-2.8	4.4	-0.1	-0.8		3.6	4.4	6.6	3.5	9.4	10.3	15.2	16.1
#9 OKLAHOMA	82.6	-13.4	-6.6	-6.5	-6.4	0.8	-3.7	-4.4	-3.6		0.8	3	-0.1	5.8	6.7	11.6	12.5
#10 ARKANSAS	81.8	-14.2	-7.4	-7.3	-7.2	0	-4.5	-5.2	-4.4	-0.8		2.2	-0.9	5	5.9	10.8	11.7
#11 DRAKE	79.6	-16.4	-9.6	-9.5	-9.4	-2.2	-6.7	-7.4	-6.6	-3	-2.2		-3.1	2.8	3.7	8.6	9.5
#12 COLORADO STATE	82.7	-13.3	-6.5	-6.4	-6.3	0.9	-3.6	-4.3	-3.5	0.1	0.9	3.1		5.9	6.8	11.7	12.6
#13 GRAND CANYON	76.8	-19.2	-12.4	-12.3	-12.2	-5	-9.5	-10.2	-9.4	-5.8	-5	-2.8	-5.9		0.9	5.8	6.7
#14 UNC-WILMINGTON	75.9	-20.1	-13.3	-13.2	-13.1	-5.9	-10.4	-11.1	-10.3	-6.7	-5.9	-3.7	-6.8	-0.9		4.9	5.8
#15 OMAHA	71	-25	-18.2	-18.1	-18	-10.8	-15.3	-16	-15.2	-11.6	-10.8	-8.6	-11.7	-5.8	-4.9		0.9
#16 NORFOLK STATE	70.1	-25.9	-19.1	-19	-18.9	-11.7	-16.2	-16.9	-16.1	-12.5	-11.7	-9.5	-12.6	-6.7	-5.8	-0.9	

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 Florida would hypothetically be listed as a 7-point favorite (-7) against #4 seed Maryland, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S WEST REGION

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 FLORIDA	#2 ST JOHNS	#3 TEXAS TECH	#4 MARYLAND	#5 MEMPHIS	#6 MISSOURI	#7 KANSAS	#8 CONNECTICUT	#9 OKLAHOMA	#10 ARKANSAS	#11 DRAKE	#12 COLORADO STATE	#13 GRAND CANYON	#14 UNC-WILMINGTON	#15 OMAHA	#16 NORFOLK STATE
TEAM/SEED	RATING	24.3	17.8	19.9	20.2	10.9	17.7	16.4	14.2	11.9	11.8	7.9	11.1	5.6	3.3	-0.4	-0.6
#1 FLORIDA	24.3		6.5	4.4	4.1	13.4	6.6	7.9	10.1	12.4	12.5	16.4	13.2	18.7	21	24.7	24.9
#2 ST JOHNS	17.8	-6.5		-2.1	-2.4	6.9	0.1	1.4	3.6	5.9	6	9.9	6.7	12.2	14.5	18.2	18.4
#3 TEXAS TECH	19.9	-4.4	2.1		-0.3	9	2.2	3.5	5.7	8	8.1	12	8.8	14.3	16.6	20.3	20.5
#4 MARYLAND	20.2	-4.1	2.4	0.3		9.3	2.5	3.8	6	8.3	8.4	12.3	9.1	14.6	16.9	20.6	20.8
#5 MEMPHIS	10.9	-13.4	-6.9	-9	-9.3		-6.8	-5.5	-3.3	-1	-0.9	3	-0.2	5.3	7.6	11.3	11.5
#6 MISSOURI	17.7	-6.6	-0.1	-2.2	-2.5	6.8		1.3	3.5	5.8	5.9	9.8	6.6	12.1	14.4	18.1	18.3
#7 KANSAS	16.4	-7.9	-1.4	-3.5	-3.8	5.5	-1.3		2.2	4.5	4.6	8.5	5.3	10.8	13.1	16.8	17
#8 CONNECTICUT	14.2	-10.1	-3.6	-5.7	-6	3.3	-3.5	-2.2		2.3	2.4	6.3	3.1	8.6	10.9	14.6	14.8
#9 OKLAHOMA	11.9	-12.4	-5.9	-8	-8.3	1	-5.8	-4.5	-2.3		0.1	4	0.8	6.3	8.6	12.3	12.5
#10 ARKANSAS	11.8	-12.5	-6	-8.1	-8.4	0.9	-5.9	-4.6	-2.4	-0.1		3.9	0.7	6.2	8.5	12.2	12.4
#11 DRAKE	7.9	-16.4	-9.9	-12	-12.3	-3	-9.8	-8.5	-6.3	-4	-3.9		-3.2	2.3	4.6	8.3	8.5
#12 COLORADO STATE	11.1	-13.2	-6.7	-8.8	-9.1	0.2	-6.6	-5.3	-3.1	-0.8	-0.7	3.2		5.5	7.8	11.5	11.7
#13 GRAND CANYON	5.6	-18.7	-12.2	-14.3	-14.6	-5.3	-12.1	-10.8	-8.6	-6.3	-6.2	-2.3	-5.5		2.3	6	6.2
#14 UNC-WILMINGTON	3.3	-21	-14.5	-16.6	-16.9	-7.6	-14.4	-13.1	-10.9	-8.6	-8.5	-4.6	-7.8	-2.3		3.7	3.9
#15 OMAHA	-0.4	-24.7	-18.2	-20.3	-20.6	-11.3	-18.1	-16.8	-14.6	-12.3	-12.2	-8.3	-11.5	-6	-3.7		0.2
#16 NORFOLK STATE	-0.6	-24.9	-18.4	-20.5	-20.8	-11.5	-18.3	-17	-14.8	-12.5	-12.4	-8.5	-11.7	-6.2	-3.9	-0.2	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

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STEVE MAKINEN’S WEST REGION

BETTORS RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 FLORIDA	#2 ST JOHNS	#3 TEXAS TECH	#4 MARYLAND	#5 MEMPHIS	#6 MISSOURI	#7 KANSAS	#8 CONNECTICUT	#9 OKLAHOMA	#10 ARKANSAS	#11 DRAKE	#12 COLORADO STATE	#13 GRAND CANYON	#14 UNC-WILMINGTON	#15 OMAHA	#16 NORFOLK STATE
TEAM/SEED	RATING	-24.1	-15.3	-20.6	-18.2	-9.8	-18.4	-16.6	-15.6	-9	-10.5	-8.4	-10.5	-5.5	-5.3	1.4	-0.1
#1 FLORIDA	-24.1		8.8	3.5	5.9	14.3	5.7	7.5	8.5	15.1	13.6	15.7	13.6	18.6	18.8	25.5	24
#2 ST JOHNS	-15.3	-8.8		-5.3	-2.9	5.5	-3.1	-1.3	-0.3	6.3	4.8	6.9	4.8	9.8	10	16.7	15.2
#3 TEXAS TECH	-20.6	-3.5	5.3		2.4	10.8	2.2	4	5	11.6	10.1	12.2	10.1	15.1	15.3	22	20.5
#4 MARYLAND	-18.2	-5.9	2.9	-2.4		8.4	-0.2	1.6	2.6	9.2	7.7	9.8	7.7	12.7	12.9	19.6	18.1
#5 MEMPHIS	-9.8	-14.3	-5.5	-10.8	-8.4		-8.6	-6.8	-5.8	0.8	-0.7	1.4	-0.7	4.3	4.5	11.2	9.7
#6 MISSOURI	-18.4	-5.7	3.1	-2.2	0.2	8.6		1.8	2.8	9.4	7.9	10	7.9	12.9	13.1	19.8	18.3
#7 KANSAS	-16.6	-7.5	1.3	-4	-1.6	6.8	-1.8		1	7.6	6.1	8.2	6.1	11.1	11.3	18	16.5
#8 CONNECTICUT	-15.6	-8.5	0.3	-5	-2.6	5.8	-2.8	-1		6.6	5.1	7.2	5.1	10.1	10.3	17	15.5
#9 OKLAHOMA	-9	-15.1	-6.3	-11.6	-9.2	-0.8	-9.4	-7.6	-6.6		-1.5	0.6	-1.5	3.5	3.7	10.4	8.9
#10 ARKANSAS	-10.5	-13.6	-4.8	-10.1	-7.7	0.7	-7.9	-6.1	-5.1	1.5		2.1	0	5	5.2	11.9	10.4
#11 DRAKE	-8.4	-15.7	-6.9	-12.2	-9.8	-1.4	-10	-8.2	-7.2	-0.6	-2.1		-2.1	2.9	3.1	9.8	8.3
#12 COLORADO STATE	-10.5	-13.6	-4.8	-10.1	-7.7	0.7	-7.9	-6.1	-5.1	1.5	0	2.1		5	5.2	11.9	10.4
#13 GRAND CANYON	-5.5	-18.6	-9.8	-15.1	-12.7	-4.3	-12.9	-11.1	-10.1	-3.5	-5	-2.9	-5		0.2	6.9	5.4
#14 UNC-WILMINGTON	-5.3	-18.8	-10	-15.3	-12.9	-4.5	-13.1	-11.3	-10.3	-3.7	-5.2	-3.1	-5.2	-0.2		6.7	5.2
#15 OMAHA	1.4	-25.5	-16.7	-22	-19.6	-11.2	-19.8	-18	-17	-10.4	-11.9	-9.8	-11.9	-6.9	-6.7		-1.5
#16 NORFOLK STATE	-0.1	-24	-15.2	-20.5	-18.1	-9.7	-18.3	-16.5	-15.5	-8.9	-10.4	-8.3	-10.4	-5.4	-5.2	1.5	

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STEVE MAKINEN’S WEST REGION

MOMENTUM RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 FLORIDA	#2 ST JOHNS	#3 TEXAS TECH	#4 MARYLAND	#5 MEMPHIS	#6 MISSOURI	#7 KANSAS	#8 CONNECTICUT	#9 OKLAHOMA	#10 ARKANSAS	#11 DRAKE	#12 COLORADO STATE	#13 GRAND CANYON	#14 UNC-WILMINGTON	#15 OMAHA	#16 NORFOLK STATE
TEAM/SEED	RATING	28.8	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 FLORIDA	28.8		8.2	8.1	7.4	18.2	9.1	16.6	14.2	16.6	14.6	20.8	7.5	22.9	23.5	24.2	31.2
#2 ST JOHNS	20.6	-8.2		-0.1	-0.8	10	0.9	8.4	6	8.4	6.4	12.6	-0.7	14.7	15.3	16	23
#3 TEXAS TECH	20.7	-8.1	0.1		-0.7	10.1	1	8.5	6.1	8.5	6.5	12.7	-0.6	14.8	15.4	16.1	23.1
#4 MARYLAND	21.4	-7.4	0.8	0.7		10.8	1.7	9.2	6.8	9.2	7.2	13.4	0.1	15.5	16.1	16.8	23.8
#5 MEMPHIS	10.6	-18.2	-10	-10.1	-10.8		-9.1	-1.6	-4	-1.6	-3.6	2.6	-10.7	4.7	5.3	6	13
#6 MISSOURI	19.7	-9.1	-0.9	-1	-1.7	9.1		7.5	5.1	7.5	5.5	11.7	-1.6	13.8	14.4	15.1	22.1
#7 KANSAS	12.2	-16.6	-8.4	-8.5	-9.2	1.6	-7.5		-2.4	0	-2	4.2	-9.1	6.3	6.9	7.6	14.6
#8 CONNECTICUT	14.6	-14.2	-6	-6.1	-6.8	4	-5.1	2.4		2.4	0.4	6.6	-6.7	8.7	9.3	10	17
#9 OKLAHOMA	12.2	-16.6	-8.4	-8.5	-9.2	1.6	-7.5	0	-2.4		-2	4.2	-9.1	6.3	6.9	7.6	14.6
#10 ARKANSAS	14.2	-14.6	-6.4	-6.5	-7.2	3.6	-5.5	2	-0.4	2		6.2	-7.1	8.3	8.9	9.6	16.6
#11 DRAKE	8	-20.8	-12.6	-12.7	-13.4	-2.6	-11.7	-4.2	-6.6	-4.2	-6.2		-13.3	2.1	2.7	3.4	10.4
#12 COLORADO STATE	21.3	-7.5	0.7	0.6	-0.1	10.7	1.6	9.1	6.7	9.1	7.1	13.3		15.4	16	16.7	23.7
#13 GRAND CANYON	5.9	-22.9	-14.7	-14.8	-15.5	-4.7	-13.8	-6.3	-8.7	-6.3	-8.3	-2.1	-15.4		0.6	1.3	8.3
#14 UNC-WILMINGTON	5.3	-23.5	-15.3	-15.4	-16.1	-5.3	-14.4	-6.9	-9.3	-6.9	-8.9	-2.7	-16	-0.6		0.7	7.7
#15 OMAHA	4.6	-24.2	-16	-16.1	-16.8	-6	-15.1	-7.6	-10	-7.6	-9.6	-3.4	-16.7	-1.3	-0.7		7
#16 NORFOLK STATE	-2.4	-31.2	-23	-23.1	-23.8	-13	-22.1	-14.6	-17	-14.6	-16.6	-10.4	-23.7	-8.3	-7.7	-7	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

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FLORIDA GATORS

HEAD COACH
Todd Golden

2024-25 RECORD
30-4 SU, 26-8 ATS, 17-17 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
96 (2)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
24.3 (3)

BETTOR RATING
-24.1 (3)

MOMENTUM RATING
28.8 (2)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

It has been a long time since the Gators entered the NCAA Tournament with so much promise and potential. You have to go back to 2017 to find the last Gators group to make it through the first weekend when Michael White took a No. 4 seed to the Elite Eight. That team finished the season 23rd in adjusted offensive efficiency and third in adjusted defensive efficiency per Bart Torvik. KenPom's final rankings had Florida 25th and fifth, respectively.

Well, this year's Gators are a top-10 squad in both metrics for KenPom and in the top 12 for Torvik, so Todd Golden is well-positioned to end the seven-year Sweet 16 drought and the path is there for so much more. This is an outstanding team on both ends of the floor, one that ranks in the top 10 in eFG% defense and top 40 in eFG% offense. Also, Florida takes masterful care of the basketball and picks up extra possessions and scoring chances on the glass.

The Gators actually worked their way into the top five in Erik Haslam's "Record Quality" metric at Haslametrics, a nod to the difficulty level of the SEC and especially the road wins at Auburn and Alabama late in the regular season. Personally, I'm a huge fan of Golden's coaching style and how invested in analytics the Gators are. He did the same thing with great success over three seasons at San Francisco and has really maximized his opportunity with way more resources and talent.

Like so many data-driven teams, Florida has a high Rim & 3 Rate with as few mid-range jumpers as possible, and they also put a tremendous amount of emphasis on defending those two areas. As a result, Florida ranks in the top 10 in 2P% and 3P% defense per Torvik. Many people feel like this is actually the most dangerous team coming out of the completely-loaded SEC. It is hard to argue otherwise.

The SEC Tournament champs will coast in the opener against Norfolk State, but what happens after that? The winner of UConn/Oklahoma is on the horizon and the 4/5/12/13 pod is full of good teams, though Florida is clearly the best team in their region and especially in the top half of the bracket. Maryland would be a good Sweet 16 test. St. John's and Texas Tech are very strong, but I'd still be surprised if Florida isn't in the Final Four.

WEST REGION

#1 SEED

**ODDS
TO...**

REACH SWEET 16

-750

WIN REGION

-120

WIN TITLE

+380

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
85.4 (3)

DEFENSIVE PPG
69 (68)

POSSESSIONS
66.6 (83)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.313 (3)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.943 (8)

OFFENSIVE FG%
47.4% (40)

DEFENSIVE FG%
39.7% (9)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
35.6% (83)

FREE THROW %
71.1% (226)

REBOUNDING %
55.3% (10)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.492 (27)

OFFENSIVE TO%
12.6% (26)

DEFENSIVE TO%
14.8% (190)

**% CHANCE
TO REACH**

2ND ROUND

97.6%

SWEET 16

79.2%

ELITE 8

58.8%

FINAL FOUR

42.1%

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

ST. JOHN'S

RED STORM

HEAD COACH
Rick Pitino

2024-25 RECORD
30-4 SU, 21-12 ATS, 15-19 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
89.2 (8)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
17.8 (15)

BETTOR RATING
-15.3 (22)

MOMENTUM RATING
20.6 (12)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Many (correctly) believed that St. John's was the biggest snub of the 2024 NCAA Tournament. As good as St John's has been during the 2024-25 season, Bart Torvik's final ranking of the Johnnies was just one spot lower last season (16) than it is going into the NCAA Tournament this season (15), a ranking that improved by winning the Big East Tournament. Ken Pomeroy has the Red Storm in his top 15 after finishing just outside the top 20 last year.

This season, Rick Pitino's team removed all doubt by having a better record in close games and going 18-2 in the Big East during the regular season. This is a truly elite defensive squad, but there are some major offensive questions that need to be answered. St. John's is a top-five team by adjusted defensive efficiency. They force a lot of turnovers. They defend extremely well at the rim. They're well above average at defending the 3.

But, this is not a good offensive team outside of their offensive rebounding prowess. Second-chance opportunities and extra possessions are huge, especially with how suffocating the defense is, but the Johnnies really lack shot-makers. They have the lowest 3P% of any team outside of Troy in the NCAA Tournament field and rank less than a percent higher than the national average on 2s.

In fact, St. John's shot just over 30% on 3s against Division I opponents. The last team to shoot under 30% from 3 and make a deep run was Louisville in 2015. They made it to the Elite Eight as a No. 4 seed with a similar statistical profile to the Johnnies. St. John's got over 30% just barely based on what they did in the Big East Tournament, going 19-of-52 (36.5%) over their three victories.

So, for the first time since 2000, St. John's enters the Big Dance as Big East Tournament champs and they've only lost once since the calendar flipped to 2025. It sure looks like they are on a crash course with Texas Tech in the Sweet 16 and that will be quite a battle, but I am very worried about the Johnnies and their lack of shot-making against the Red Raiders. I think that's where the ride ends.



WEST REGION

#2 SEED

ODDS
TO...

-170

REACH SWEET 16

WIN REGION

+650

WIN TITLE

28-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
78.7 (51)

DEFENSIVE PPG
65.9 (26)

POSSESSIONS
68 (41)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.183 (64)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.926 (4)

OFFENSIVE FG%
45.1% (135)

DEFENSIVE FG%
40.1% (14)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
30.4% (338)

FREE THROW %
68.9% (295)

REBOUNDING %
53.9% (25)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.426 (41)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.0% (36)

DEFENSIVE TO%
19.0% (12)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

89.7%

SWEET 16

54.9%

ELITE 8

27.1%

FINAL FOUR

10.6%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

TEXAS TECH

RED RAIDERS

HEAD COACH
Grant Mccasland

2024-25 RECORD
25-8 SU, 17-16 ATS, 19-14 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
89.1 (9)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
19.9 (9)

BETTOR RATING
-20.6 (6)

MOMENTUM RATING
20.7 (11)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

While I wouldn't go so far as to define Texas Tech's non-conference schedule as "laughable", it certainly had a lot to do with why they got seeded where they did. The only top-100 opponents the Red Raiders faced before Big 12 play were St. Joseph's and Texas A&M and lost both of them.

It did take a little while for second-year head coach Grant McCasland to get things going in Lubbock, but he eventually did and now the Red Raiders are a consensus top-10 team heading into the tournament with an impressive collection of statistics and more than enough quality wins for their non-conference strength of schedule to be an afterthought.

This is a team that makes a ton of shots and greatly values their possessions. If there is a knock on the Red Raiders, it is that they don't get to the rim nearly enough, ranking under 30% in shot share on Close Twos. I normally don't like teams with a Rim & 3 Rate like Texas Tech's, but they were extremely efficient on mid-range jumpers and defend so well in all of the key areas that they can afford some inconsistencies on offense.

And, hey, while they don't like layups and dunks, they do like 3-point attempts. It's a good idea in their case because they're a top-20 team in 3P% and fire away from beyond the arc about 45% of the time when choosing which shots to take. The Red Raiders also had the lowest TO% on offense in Big 12 play and ranked second to BYU in adjusted offensive efficiency. There were so many good defenses in the conference that they only ranked sixth in adjusted defensive efficiency, but did have the best 3P% against at 29.6%.

I think this is a very favorable draw for Texas Tech. I do expect UNC Wilmington to give them a bit of a game, but they've already beaten Kansas and Arkansas is an underdog to Kansas. St. John's is an elite defensive team, but the Red Raiders are higher-rated by both KenPom and Bart Torvik, so the seed line doesn't really matter there. Texas Tech to the Elite Eight is a good futures bet, where they likely run into Florida in what would be an awesome game.

WEST REGION

#3 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

-145

WIN REGION

+600

WIN TITLE

35-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
80.9 (24)

DEFENSIVE PPG
67.6 (42)

POSSESSIONS
63.5 (280)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.308 (5)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.999 (34)

OFFENSIVE FG%
47.0% (52)

DEFENSIVE FG%
42.6% (85)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
37.9% (17)

FREE THROW %
76.4% (45)

REBOUNDING %
53.2% (39)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.666 (7)

OFFENSIVE TO%
12.6% (27)

DEFENSIVE TO%
15.1% (160)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

86.8%

SWEET 16

53.6%

ELITE 8

32.7%

FINAL FOUR

14.5%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

MARYLAND

TERRAPINS

HEAD COACH
Kevin Willard

2024-25 RECORD
25-8 SU, 17-15 ATS, 19-14 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
89 (11)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
20.2 (8)

BETTOR RATING
-18.2 (12)

MOMENTUM RATING
21.4 (8)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Michigan had the Fab Five. Maryland has the Crab Five. The Terrapins head into the NCAA Tournament with an excellent cast of starters, led by five players that all played at least 70% of the available minutes for Kevin Willard's team. The major lack of depth could be an issue for the Terps with the quick turnaround required each weekend or if a whistle-happy officiating crew draws their assignment.

But, still. This is a very good team with five very good players and the upside to beat most anybody in the field. Maryland doesn't quite fit the championship pedigree of being a top 25 team in adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency, but KenPom has them down as a top-10 defense and a top-30 offense. Mix in a very good TO% differential and top-50 marks in 3P% offense, 2P% defense, and 3P% defense and you have a club with a strong statistical profile.

You also have a coach in Willard who had virtually no NCAA Tournament success at Seton Hall and endured a first-round exit in his first season at Maryland three years ago. To be fair, this is the best team that Willard has had and one that shines in nearly every defensive metric. That was not the case in 2023 when he had a similarly-ranked offense and a good, but not elite, defense.

What will be fascinating to see is how the Terps do against non-Big Ten teams. Maryland played one of the weakest non-conference schedules of any Power Five team. In fact, KenPom grades it as one of the five worst in the country. A lot of Big Ten teams feel interchangeable on an annual basis. They take a lot of jumpers, aren't terribly aggressive on defense, and usually have one dangerous big. That's why the draw is so important for Maryland.

The officiating crew will play a big part in Maryland's opening game. As I mentioned, this is not a very deep team. Grand Canyon aggressively goes to the rim and looks to draw a lot of fouls. Maryland plays great defense without fouling. The first-round game has a ton of live betting opportunity in my opinion. When the Antelopes won the 12/5 game last year, they beat Saint Mary's, a plodding, not super athletic team. Maryland is the opposite, so I think they're safe from the upset, but it is fair to wonder how far they can go with Florida looming in the Sweet 16 if they get there.

WEST REGION

#4 SEED

ODDS
TO...

-180

REACH SWEET 16

WIN REGION

+700

WIN TITLE

40-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
81.7 (18)

DEFENSIVE PPG
67 (34)

POSSESSIONS
67.2 (63)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.236 (22)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.93 (5)

OFFENSIVE FG%
47.2% (48)

DEFENSIVE FG%
41.5% (50)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
37.2% (29)

FREE THROW %
75.5% (68)

REBOUNDING %
52.2% (73)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.428 (39)

OFFENSIVE TO%
12.6% (24)

DEFENSIVE TO%
17.7% (34)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

84.2%

SWEET 16

59.2%

ELITE 8

23.6%

FINAL FOUR

12.9%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

MEMPHIS TIGERS

HEAD COACH
Penny Hardaway

2024-25 RECORD
29-5 SU, 16-18 ATS, 18-16 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
81.8 (46)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
10.9 (55)

BETTOR RATING
-9.8 (56)

MOMENTUM RATING
10.6 (53)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Penny Hardaway is back in the NCAA Tournament after a one-year hiatus. The Tigers were a No. 9 seed in 2022 and a No. 8 seed in 2023, as they were under-seeded both seasons. Memphis was a top-25 team for Ken Pomeroy both of those years and a top-20 team for Bart Torvik. The Tigers beat Boise State in 2023 before losing to No. 1 Gonzaga. They lost to now conference rival Florida Atlantic in 2023. That was the FAU team that went to the Final Four.

On one hand, you can argue that Memphis needs to be more dominant in a weaker conference in hopes of getting a higher seed line. The curve upon which you are graded outside of a Power Five is quite a bit sharper. They beat Missouri, UConn, Michigan State, Clemson, and Ole Miss in the non-conference part of the season, but had some losses that cancelled out some of that goodwill.

But, that's a pretty good set of five wins and it makes me wonder what Memphis does in the field this year. They are 11-1 in games decided by six or fewer points, so that's a bit of a red flag, but they do deserve some credit for playing well against a top-five non-conference schedule. If the Tigers valued their possessions a bit more, I think people would be more bullish on their chances, as they rank in the 300s in TO%. However, they're also a top-20 team by 3P% and rank near the top 60 in eFG% offense and in the top 70 in eFG% defense.

Unfortunately, while Memphis has shot 38% from 3, only about 50 Division I teams take a 3-pointer less often than the Tigers. This team is something of a riddle. As bad as they are at taking care of the ball, they're just about as good at taking it away. As good as they are on the offensive glass, they don't commit to wiping their own glass clean.

Now, they are one of two higher seeds to be a first-round underdog as of Selection Sunday night and the other is in a 9/8 game. Many on Bracket Matrix had Memphis more like an 8 seed, so they are over-seeded and Erik Haslam of Haslametrics tweeted that they were 12 seeds higher than they should have been. And they draw the hottest team in the nation in Colorado State. It could be a quick tournament for the AAC champs.

WEST REGION

#5 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+600

WIN REGION

55-1

WIN TITLE

200-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
80 (31)

DEFENSIVE PPG
73.3 (203)

POSSESSIONS
68.1 (40)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.168 (75)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.021 (48)

OFFENSIVE FG%
47.4% (42)

DEFENSIVE FG%
42.2% (68)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
37.8% (18)

FREE THROW %
70.5% (244)

REBOUNDING %
52.1% (79)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.057 (216)

OFFENSIVE TO%
16.5% (296)

DEFENSIVE TO%
16.4% (81)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

41.2%

SWEET 16

12.9%

ELITE 8

2.5%

FINAL FOUR

0.7%

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

MISSOURI TIGERS

HEAD COACH
Dennis Gates

2024-25 RECORD
22-11 SU, 18-15 ATS, 19-14 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
86.3 (20)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
17.7 (17)

BETTOR RATING
-18.4 (10)

MOMENTUM RATING
19.7 (14)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

After a one-year absence, Dennis Gates has Missouri back in the NCAA Tournament. He went dancing in his first season at the helm in 2023 and the Tigers actually won a game for the first time since 2010. The hope this year would be that Gates can captain the ship into the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2009.

A season-opening collapse against Memphis could have led to a better seed line had the Tigers sealed the deal, but playing in the gauntlet that is the SEC is more than enough in the strength of schedule department. Missouri actually beat former Big 12 rival Kansas on Dec. 8 to set the stage for the rest of the season, as they were very competitive in games against Quadrant 1-A and Quadrant 1 opponents. They were also a perfect 15-0 against anything lower than that.

The Tigers do have some defensive shortcomings when forced to play in the half-court. They're in the top 45 nationally in TO% in games against Division I opponents per Bart Torvik, but also rank in the 180s in 2P% defense and 150s in 3P% defense. The turnovers have saved the Tigers from being worse, but keep in mind that the SEC has a lot of good offenses and a lot of excellent shot-makers.

And Missouri has some of their own, as this has consistently been a top-10 or top-20 team in adjusted offensive efficiency. They take terrific care of the basketball and rank in the top 35 in both 2P% and 3P%. With a high 3P Rate and a 37% success rate beyond the arc, Missouri has been able to outscore those defensive holes more often than not. The biggest concern heading into the tourney is just how much the defense has struggled down the stretch, especially against 2-pointers.

Missouri got a very rough draw. Drake is as dangerous as a mid-major gets and Texas Tech follows with a win. The Tigers are a better, major-conference version of the Bulldogs based on the statistical profile, so it's a game that they should win, but Drake's slow pace and shot-making ability may make it interesting. Either way, the winner of this game runs into a Red Raiders bunch that I think makes the Elite Eight, so the Tigers may not be around long.

WEST REGION

#6 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO... +250

WIN REGION

22-1

WIN TITLE

80-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
84.5 (5)

DEFENSIVE PPG
73.8 (217)

POSSESSIONS
65.7 (137)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.303 (6)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.03 (59)

OFFENSIVE FG%
48.5% (16)

DEFENSIVE FG%
44.3% (191)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
37.0% (36)

FREE THROW %
72.5% (165)

REBOUNDING %
51.1% (126)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.295 (87)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.1% (43)

DEFENSIVE TO%
17.3% (47)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

76.0%

SWEET 16

37.5%

ELITE 8

20.7%

FINAL FOUR

7.9%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

KANSAS

JAYHAWKS

HEAD COACH
Bill Self

2024-25 RECORD
21-12 SU, 13-19 ATS, 12-21 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
87 (18)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
16.4 (20)

BETTOR RATING
-16.6 (17)

MOMENTUM RATING
12.2 (42)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

What a weird season it has been in Lawrence. After a third home loss at Phog Allen Fieldhouse on Mar. 1, Bill Self felt the need to release a statement apologizing for the team's play and requested that fans direct the blame at him as opposed to the players. For a program that has made the NCAA Tournament every year since 2006, expectations are understandably high, but the Jayhawks are safely in the field despite a season that fell below their normal standards.

This has not been the team that beat Michigan State and Duke in the non-conference for most of the season, but this is also a group that has played one of the nation's hardest schedules and has still shined on the defensive end of the floor. Despite their placement in the field, Kansas is a top-25 team for both KenPom and Bart Torvik and a borderline top-10 team in adjusted defensive efficiency.

Unfortunately, the Jayhawks just haven't made enough shots and haven't forced the issue enough. For a team with the athleticism and length of Kansas, ranking near the bottom 10 in FT Rate on offense is embarrassing, especially for a team that ranks in the 290s in 3P Rate. They're taking a lot of 2s, but they don't charge the rim enough, settling for too many mid-range jumpers.

They have made a very high rate of their longer 2s, but you do tend to get a lot of inconsistency with that type of shot selection. As a result, Kansas only won three straight games one time in Big 12 play during the regular season and all three wins were against teams that didn't make the NCAA Tournament. Since winning the title in 2022, Self has not made it past the first weekend in his last NCAA Tournament appearances, and that includes a No. 1 seed early exit two years ago.

Kansas can wipe the slate clean now and get a fresh start as the second season begins. They are favored to beat the Razorbacks and I do think they'd have a decent chance against St. John's with a win. The Jayhawks might have caught a break getting Arkansas, a team that doesn't shoot 3s very well against a Kansas team that is spectacular at pushing opponents away from the rim. However, Arkansas can match up with Hunter Dickinson, so the Jayhawks will need to shoot well from outside to avoid a huge disappointment.

WEST REGION

#7 SEED

ODDS
TO...

+210

REACH SWEET 16

WIN REGION

17-1

WIN TITLE

75-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
76.2 (89)

DEFENSIVE PPG
69.3 (73)

POSSESSIONS
66 (118)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.207 (43)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.958 (11)

OFFENSIVE FG%
47.1% (49)

DEFENSIVE FG%
39.9% (12)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
35.2% (102)

FREE THROW %
71.1% (222)

REBOUNDING %
52.6% (56)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.513 (21)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.5% (142)

DEFENSIVE TO%
13.6% (286)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

60.3%

SWEET 16

28.4%

ELITE 8

12.0%

FINAL FOUR

3.9%

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

CONNECTICUT HUSKIES

HEAD COACH
Dan Hurley

2024-25 RECORD
23-10 SU, 14-18 ATS, 15-18 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
86.2 (22)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
14.2 (31)

BETTOR RATING
-15.6 (21)

MOMENTUM RATING
14.6 (31)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

I considered writing this team capsule in all caps because Dan Hurley would want it that way. The reigning two-time National Champion coach spent more of the season screaming at officials, assistants, and players than he did celebrating wins. Last year's UConn team felt inevitable. This year's UConn team feels forgettable.

Then again, the Huskies' reign of tournament terror isn't over until it's over. This is a team that has gone 12-0 in the last two NCAA Tournaments with an average margin of victory of 21.7 points per game. They've won those 12 games by 260 combined points, including wins by 15 and 17 in the title games. Their smallest margin of victory has been 13 points (Miami, 2023 Final Four). They have allowed more than 60 points three times and more than 65 points once.

Regression was going to happen this season, simply because the Huskies had two years worth of significant losses. Even with true freshman and probable lottery pick Liam McNeeley on the roster alongside Alex Karaban, it was going to be hard to replace Cam Spencer, Tristan Newton, Donovan Clingan, and Stephon Castle a year after replacing Adama Sanogo and Jordan Hawkins.

Through it all, Hurley still has a very good team. The Huskies are a top-20 team in 2P% offense and defense. They're not nearly as good at defending the perimeter as they've been, but they're still shooting it pretty well from distance and remain a stout rebounding squad on both ends of the floor. UConn has mitigated the lack of 3P% success on defense by running teams off the 3-point line, entering the tourney with a top-35 3P Rate against. While this team doesn't look impenetrable, they are nowhere near a pushover and are likely to give a top seed or two (or three or four or five) hell in this tournament.

UConn opens with Oklahoma and may be staring down a date with Florida. The Sooners are an interesting matchup because they are awful at defending 2s and very good at defending 3s, while UConn is the opposite. But, the Huskies have a massive edge on the glass and that's probably enough to advance, where Florida should put what would be a 13-game NCAA Tournament winning streak to rest.



WEST REGION

#8 SEED

ODDS
TO...

+600

REACH SWEET 16

WIN REGION

19-1

WIN TITLE

75-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
77.4 (68)

DEFENSIVE PPG
68 (53)

POSSESSIONS
62.1 (336)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.272 (14)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.044 (70)

OFFENSIVE FG%
48.0% (28)

DEFENSIVE FG%
42.3% (73)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
35.4% (89)

FREE THROW %
79.1% (11)

REBOUNDING %
54.9% (13)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.568 (13)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.6% (148)

DEFENSIVE TO%
13.7% (278)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

61.7%

SWEET 16

14.5%

ELITE 8

6.7%

FINAL FOUR

2.8%

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

OKLAHOMA SOONERS

HEAD COACH
Porter Moser

2024-25 RECORD
20-13 SU, 18-15 ATS, 20-13 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
82.6 (41)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
11.9 (45)

BETTOR RATING
-9 (58)

MOMENTUM RATING
12.2 (43)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

You rarely see a team with a 6-12 conference record in the NCAA Tournament, but the rising tide lifted all boats in the SEC and Oklahoma's schedule strength, adjusted metrics, and opportunity for resume-building wins put the Sooners safely in the field. Oklahoma went 7-11 in Quadrant 1 games and 5-10 in Quadrant 1-A games, so the Sooners tied for 10th with five Q1-A wins.

Not to mention, their 15 Q1-A games were tied for the second-most in the nation, trailing only Alabama. As you start to look at the level of the opponents that they played, you can understand why they made the tourney with just 19 wins and losses in two-thirds of their SEC games. This is also a good offensive team, so they aren't only there because of the profile of the conference that they played in. They're a borderline top-30 team by adjusted offensive efficiency and have several good shooters.

The Sooners shot 37% from 3 in Division I games and nearly 55% on 2s. They're also one of the nation's top teams at the free throw line. And, while a lot of their defensive metrics left a lot to be desired, they did rank in the top 20 in 3P% defense. It's just that they ranked in the 320s in 2P% defense. They also found very little success on the glass. Most of the SEC is very good on the glass, which is something that badly hurt the boys from Oklahoma in league play.

The irony is that the Sooners were a better team in 2021-22 per Torvik and KenPom's rankings, but got bypassed for an NCAA Tournament bid. Last year's team was similar to this one, but with a better record in conference play, and also got ignored. This will be their first tourney berth under Porter Moser, as the last one came in 2021 under Lon Kruger.

What Oklahoma does well is not what UConn does well and vice versa. But, the biggest difference between the two teams is how bad Oklahoma has been with rim protection defense. UConn is nearly 11% better from a FG% standpoint on Close Two shot attempts against. The Huskies also have major edges on the glass. Oklahoma's tourney run either ends in the first round or the second round, as Florida is in the on-deck circle.



WEST REGION

#9 SEED

ODDS
TO...

12-1

REACH SWEET 16

WIN REGION

80-1

WIN TITLE

400-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
78.8 (47)

DEFENSIVE PPG
74.8 (241)

POSSESSIONS
66 (120)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.224 (30)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.046 (74)

OFFENSIVE FG%
47.2% (47)

DEFENSIVE FG%
44.7% (201)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
37.0% (35)

FREE THROW %
79.4% (9)

REBOUNDING %
48.4% (259)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.133 (178)

OFFENSIVE TO%
15.4% (217)

DEFENSIVE TO%
15.7% (110)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

38.3%

SWEET 16

6.0%

ELITE 8

2.1%

FINAL FOUR

0.7%

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

ARKANSAS

RAZORBACKS

HEAD COACH
John Calipari

2024-25 RECORD
20-13 SU, 14-18 ATS, 15-18 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
81.8 (45)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
11.8 (47)

BETTOR RATING
-10.5 (54)

MOMENTUM RATING
14.2 (32)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

For the first time since 2009, John Calipari will be patrolling a different sideline in the NCAA Tournament. The Kentucky Wildcats legend made the Big Dance six times with Memphis and five times with UMass before heading to Lexington, where he had 12 NCAAT appearances. This will be his first with Arkansas, as the Razorbacks put their dancing shoes back on after a one-year absence.

Like several SEC teams seeded in this range, it is hard to know if they are good by association or actually good. Cal's crew went 2-7 in Quadrant 1-A games and 5-10 in Quadrant 1 games, though I guess what stands out more for me is the pedestrian 4-3 record in Quadrant 2 games. One thing we can all agree on is that Arkansas is a good defensive team. They're a top-25 squad by adjusted defensive efficiency and rank well into the top 100 in 2P% and 3P% defense. With Zvonimir Ivisic, Jonas Aidoo, and Trevon Brazile, they are also among the nation's leaders in blocked shots.

The interior height allowed Arkansas to aggressively challenge 3-point shots, which is a necessity in the SEC. So, all in all, they're a very, very good defensive team. Offensively, the height on the interior has worked to their advantage, but the guards have not held up their end of the bargain. The Razorbacks have taken good care of the ball, but simply have not hit enough 3-point shots.

Arkansas ranked 14th in adjusted offensive efficiency in SEC play and 12th in eFG%. They shot under 31% on 3s and right around 50% on 2s, a big departure from their overall season numbers. Arkansas had a feast-or-famine non-conference schedule, leveling up with teams like Baylor, Illinois, and Michigan, but the rest of the games that they played, aside from Sun Belt champion Troy, were against really inferior competition.

On the surface, Kansas is a slightly better version of Arkansas, as the teams have fairly similar shot selection rates and metrics, just with the Jayhawks ranked a bit higher in nearly everything. That said, Arkansas can match up extremely well with Hunter Dickinson and the Jayhawks have not played well of late. I don't think the Razorbacks can get through both St. John's and Texas Tech, but the Kansas game feels somewhat attainable.

WEST REGION

#10 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+550

WIN REGION

50-1

WIN TITLE

180-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
76.6 (81)

DEFENSIVE PPG
71.2 (139)

POSSESSIONS
66.8 (72)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.174 (69)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.976 (16)

OFFENSIVE FG%
46.6% (60)

DEFENSIVE FG%
42.0% (63)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
33.3% (201)

FREE THROW %
73.4% (134)

REBOUNDING %
50.5% (162)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.239 (115)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.6% (153)

DEFENSIVE TO%
15.3% (148)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

39.8%

SWEET 16

15.0%

ELITE 8

4.9%

FINAL FOUR

1.2%

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

DRAKE BULLDOGS

HEAD COACH
Ben McCollum

2024-25 RECORD
30-3 SU, 17-13 ATS, 13-18 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
79.6 (60)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
7.9 (68)

BETTOR RATING
-8.4 (60)

MOMENTUM RATING
8 (68)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Do you like the Drake? Or do you love the Drake? Maybe you don't even like the Drake. But, the Bulldogs won the Missouri Valley Conference Tournament and barely broke a sweat doing it, allowing just 151 points over three games, so they are in the field and they are a very dangerous No. 11 seed.

Coaching is hugely important in the NCAA Tournament because teams are playing opponents that they likely haven't played yet this season and there is also a quick turnaround to learn all about a new team if you do win and advance. Enter Ben McCollum, who absolutely paid his dues at Northwest Missouri State before following in the rather large footsteps of Darian DeVries. For all the good that DeVries did, though, none of the wins in his six straight 20-win seasons came in the NCAA Tournament in three appearances.

McCollum will get his first crack at the Division I level, but he brings a 32-7 record in Division II tournaments, including four National Championships. This team should have been in the discussion for an at-large berth, had they not emerged from St. Louis with a souvenir net to take home. This is a top-60 team for both KenPom and Bart Torvik and a team that had one of the highest TO% marks in the nation on defense. They are also 364th of 364 teams in tempo.

The question, as it seems to be with every Missouri Valley tourney team, is whether or not they can make enough shots against a longer, more athletic team in a slow-paced game to advance. They beat Vanderbilt and Kansas State earlier this season, so that's some supporting evidence that they can. Leading scorer Bennett Stirtz (19.1 PPG) was terrific in those games with 16 points and 11 assists against Vandy and 22 points against K-State.

Drake's interior defense against Missouri's offense in the paint is the most important element of the first-round game, as Drake is in the 300s in 2P% defense. Opponents cashed in at nearly 63% at the rim with a 41% shot share and Missouri Valley teams don't attack at the rate that Mizzou does. I'm not saying any No. 6 seed would have been a picnic, but this one might be too tough of a nut to crack.

WEST REGION

#11 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+700

WIN REGION

90-1

WIN TITLE

350-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
68.7 (285)

DEFENSIVE PPG
59.7 (2)

POSSESSIONS
57.1 (364)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.164 (79)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.021 (49)

OFFENSIVE FG%
47.4% (41)

DEFENSIVE FG%
45.5% (246)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
35.0% (111)

FREE THROW %
70.7% (234)

REBOUNDING %
54.7% (15)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.135 (174)

OFFENSIVE TO%
15.8% (253)

DEFENSIVE TO%
19.8% (7)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

24.0%

SWEET 16

6.0%

ELITE 8

1.7%

FINAL FOUR

0.3%

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

COLORADO STATE RAMS

HEAD COACH
Niko Medved

2024-25 RECORD
25-9 SU, 21-13 ATS, 19-15 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
82.7 (40)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
11.1 (53)

BETTOR RATING
-10.5 (53)

MOMENTUM RATING
21.3 (9)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

The Rams were going to be in the discussion for one of the final at-large bids, but simply went ahead and controlled their own destiny by winning the Mountain West Tournament. Per Erik Haslam of Haslametrics, no team in the nation has played better over the last several games relative to their full-season performance than Colorado State, as they are atop his Momentum metric, having won 10 in a row by an average of 16.9 points per game.

Niko Medved's team is simply scoring at will, as they've scored over 1.1 points per possession in 10 of their last 12 games and absolutely fit the profile of a mid-major that could be a handful over the first weekend. Nique Clifford is a special player who makes the most of his high Usage Rate to lead the team in points and assists, plus he's the best defensive rebounder on the roster.

But, he makes everybody else better around him. This is a Colorado State team that ranks in the top 50 in 3P% and 2P% and is closer to being a top-25 team in 2P%. They're remarkably efficient with their shots and share the basketball about as well as anybody in the country. The Rams are hardly a pushover defensively, ranking in the top 50 in adjusted defensive efficiency, despite a TO% that is a good bit lower than the national average.

Turnovers are heavily weighted in the defensive efficiency formula, so for the Rams to be as high as they are speaks to how well they contest shots, clean the glass, and also the caliber of schedule that they played. They've played eight Quadrant 1 games and nine Quadrant 2 games. Because they failed to secure any big non-conference wins outside of beating a .500 TCU team, their fate would have been in the hands of the Selection Committee. Instead, they went to Vegas and did something very few visitors do - went home a winner.

And now they're a No. 12 seed laying points against a No. 5 seed. Pundits and prognosticators across the board agree that Memphis is over-seeded and Colorado State is the hottest team in the nation. Unfortunately, I don't love the likely matchup against Maryland with a win over the Tigers, so I don't think the Rams make it past the first weekend, but they are riding very high right now.

WEST REGION

#12 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO... +400

WIN REGION

60-1

WIN TITLE

300-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
75.2 (112)

DEFENSIVE PPG
67.1 (35)

POSSESSIONS
64.1 (236)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.2 (53)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.019 (47)

OFFENSIVE FG%
47.9% (30)

DEFENSIVE FG%
42.2% (69)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
36.6% (52)

FREE THROW %
77.5% (28)

REBOUNDING %
52.4% (67)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.427 (40)

OFFENSIVE TO%
15.5% (225)

DEFENSIVE TO%
14.7% (192)

% CHANCE TO REACH

2ND ROUND

58.9%

SWEET 16

23.0%

ELITE 8

5.8%

FINAL FOUR

2.2%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

GRAND CANYON

ANTELOPES

HEAD COACH
Bryce Drew

2024-25 RECORD
26-7 SU, 13-19 ATS, 17-15 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
76.8 (83)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
5.6 (91)

BETTOR RATING
-5.5 (89)

MOMENTUM RATING
5.9 (94)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Grand Canyon makes an appearance in the NCAA Tournament field for the third consecutive year and fourth time in five years as the WAC Tournament champion. You have to wonder if this one comes at a cost, as there are some coaching openings and Bryce Drew is likely to be an attractive candidate, especially if the Antelopes can replicate what they did last season.

The 2024 GCU team went into the tournament and picked off Saint Mary's in the first round with a 75-66 win in the 12 vs. 5 matchup. They also had a respectable effort against Alabama in an 11-point loss, holding the Crimson Tide to 72 points. Previously in the tournament, they lost to No. 3 Gonzaga and No. 2 Iowa by 12 points, so they've largely been competitive on the biggest stage in college basketball.

For the most part, this year's team is pretty similar to last season's. The Antelopes are better on defense than they are on offense, as a high TO% and some poor 3-point shooting drag down their efficiency numbers when they have possession of the ball. This is actually the lowest 3P% for a GCU team in the Drew era. The Antelopes are also playing significantly faster this season, so we'll see if that gives their first-round opponent some fits.

With the additional pace and pressure, the Lopes are over 20% in the TO% department for the first time. They're also a top-25 defensive unit in 2P% against and well above the national average when it comes to defending the perimeter. It is crucially important that Grand Canyon has Tyon Grant-Foster back and at least somewhat healthy as he missed the final five games of the regular season. He averages 14.8 points and six rebounds per contest.

The Lopes do have a lack of quality wins, as they beat MEAC champ Norfolk State by 18, America East champ Bryant by 46, and knocked off Stanford for their only Quadrant 2 win. They did play well in a neutral-site loss to Georgia and took two of three from Utah Valley, including the WAC title game.

These are pretty long odds for a 13/4 matchup, as Grand Canyon is likely to lose the turnover battle and is at a major disadvantage on the 3-point line. But, the Antelopes force the issue and get inside. That could cause problems for a Terps team with limited depth and a head coach who hasn't proven much in March. I still don't love the matchup, but the Lopes will be content with the pace and style of this game.

WEST REGION

#13 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+900

WIN REGION

200-1

WIN TITLE

400-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
78.5 (53)

DEFENSIVE PPG
69.7 (89)

POSSESSIONS
69 (15)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.132 (125)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.043 (69)

OFFENSIVE FG%
46.0% (86)

DEFENSIVE FG%
41.5% (48)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
31.6% (285)

FREE THROW %
73.5% (130)

REBOUNDING %
52.5% (60)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.035 (228)

OFFENSIVE TO%
16.0% (269)

DEFENSIVE TO%
18.0% (28)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

15.8%

SWEET 16

4.9%

ELITE 8

0.6%

FINAL FOUR

0.1%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

UNC-WILMINGTON

SEAHAWKS

HEAD COACH
Takayo Siddle

2024-25 RECORD
27-7 SU, 20-12 ATS, 17-14 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
75.9 (92)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
3.3 (111)

BETTOR RATING
-5.3 (96)

MOMENTUM RATING
5.3 (105)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Takayo Siddle has consistently put solid teams out on the floor, but the margin for error in a one-bid league like the CAA leaves absolutely no wiggle room. This season, his team finally got over the hump and won the conference tournament, earning a precious bid into the Big Dance for the first time since 2017. That conference tourney title propelled Kevin Keatts to the NC State job where Siddle was actually his assistant until taking the UNCW job in 2020.

The Seahawks are 0-5 in their last five NCAA Tournament games, but they've been extremely competitive. They've lost to No. 6 Maryland by 2, No. 8 George Washington by 3 in OT, No. 4 Duke by 8, and No. 5 Virginia by 5. Of course those appearances are spread out over 15 years, but it wouldn't be a shocker to see the Seahawks put a scare into their first-round opponent as their predecessors did.

The one benefit of playing in the CAA is that you see it all, so you're used to playing a bunch of different styles of basketball. Teams play fast, slow, go to the rim, settle for 3s, attack on defense, play passive on defense. It's all over the map. So, you have a team that has to be malleable and adapt to what's in front of them. You also have a team that was able to get to the free throw line a lot and fared very well on the offensive glass.

Unfortunately, you also have a team that has a strength of schedule in the 280s and they still struggled to shoot 3s and also defend them, ranking in the 210s in 3P% and 220s in 3P% defense. The Seahawks were a bit better protecting the paint and defending the interior, but they played one Quadrant 1 game and went 25-6 in Quadrant 3/4 games. You don't get a Q3 or Q4 opponent being seeded where they are.

I'm a little bummed that the Seahawks drew the strongest of the No. 3 seeds with Texas Tech. This is a team that felt really dangerous for a lumbering major-conference team, but Texas Tech shoots way too well and defends way too well for the Seahawks to pull the stunner in my estimation. Had they gotten Kentucky, Wisconsin, or even Iowa State, I probably would have sung a different tune.

WEST REGION

#14 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

25-1

WIN REGION

250-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
76.8 (77)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70 (96)

POSSESSIONS
63.6 (277)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.159 (85)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.111 (175)

OFFENSIVE FG%
46.3% (77)

DEFENSIVE FG%
43.6% (145)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
33.0% (212)

FREE THROW %
75.3% (76)

REBOUNDING %
54.0% (19)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.36 (60)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.5% (66)

DEFENSIVE TO%
15.2% (154)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

13.3%

SWEET 16

3.0%

ELITE 8

0.6%

FINAL FOUR

0.1%

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

OMAHA MAVERICKS

HEAD COACH
Chris Crutchfield

2024-25 RECORD
22-12 SU, 23-9 ATS, 18-14 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
71 (158)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-0.4 (165)

BETTOR RATING
1.4 (193)

MOMENTUM RATING
4.6 (113)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Omaha has become a social media darling throughout the season for using trash cans as props to celebrate wins. After a 4-9 start, an assistant came into the locker room and obliterated a trash can and turned the season around. The tradition stuck and became their "Every time we win, we peel a section" rallying cry reminiscent of the great baseball movie Major League.

Their most important trash can smash came at Denny Sanford Premier Center in Sioux Falls when they won the Summit League and locked up the first NCAA Tournament appearance in program history. Alum and third-year head coach Chris Crutchfield basically brought this team from obscurity to prominence in short order, as the Mavericks had one winning season since 2017 prior to this one.

As great of a story as the Mavericks are, don't expect much in the tourney from this crew. They are a good offensive team, like most in the Summit, but also a bad defensive team. The Mavs are in the 260s in 3-point percentage defense and 280s in 2-point percentage. They are a great outside shooting team, which can be a main ingredient in a Cinderella, but they also ranked in the bottom 45 in TO%, so they'd have to go nuclear to outscore their big defensive shortcomings.

Marquel Sutton did average better than 19 points and eight rebounds per contest, plus the supporting cast featured two 40+% 3-point shooters in JJ White and Tony Osburn. Those will be the players that have to shine if the Mavs are going to make some noise. They went 0-7 against Quadrant 1 or 2 opponents, including losses to Akron and Iowa State among NCAA Tournament teams, plus a loss to SWAC champion Alabama State.

St. John's won the Big East on defense and offensive rebounding. It will carry them through Omaha, but the question is whether or not the Mavericks have enough offense to make it interesting because the Johnnies are not good at shooting the basketball. Omaha plays in a conference with very little defense, so St. John's is a wake-up call, but we know that they won't be intimidated and are capable of getting hot from deep.



WEST REGION

#15 SEED

ODDS
TO...

50-1

REACH SWEET 16

WIN REGION

500-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
77.8 (64)

DEFENSIVE PPG
76 (273)

POSSESSIONS
65.5 (150)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.14 (108)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.131 (221)

OFFENSIVE FG%
46.4% (70)

DEFENSIVE FG%
45.3% (234)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
36.7% (44)

FREE THROW %
68.4% (307)

REBOUNDING %
51.8% (96)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.23 (121)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.7% (88)

DEFENSIVE TO%
13.3% (302)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

10.4%

SWEET 16

1.7%

ELITE 8

0.2%

FINAL FOUR

0.0%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

NORFOLK STATE SPARTANS

HEAD COACH
Robert Jones

2024-25 RECORD
24-10 SU, 17-13 ATS, 15-16 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
70.1 (174)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-0.6 (168)

BETTOR RATING
-0.1 (164)

MOMENTUM RATING
-2.4 (210)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

The MEAC Tournament champions avoided the play-in round, but may be facing the best of the elite teams in the nation. Many believe that Florida will ultimately cut down the nets when all is said and done. On some level, it is a bummer that Norfolk State takes on Florida right away because it virtually eliminates the chance to pick up a win in the NCAA Tournament.

It has been a long time since the stunning upset of No. 2 Missouri as a 15 seed back in 2012, but the program continues to put together strong regular seasons and be in a good position to get a berth in the Big Dance. The Spartans went to Dayton and beat App State back in 2021 before getting pummeled by Gonzaga. They avoided the play-in game in 2022, but got crushed by Baylor all the same.

Speaking of Baylor, the Bears represented one of the two Quadrant 1 opponents that the Spartans played this season. They lost in Waco by 25 and lost by 15 in Knoxville to Tennessee on New Year's Eve. Their best win came against High Point, serving as just one of the five teams to beat the Panthers so far this season.

This is a pretty prototypical Norfolk State team. They're not very good at shooting threes, but finished at or near the top of the MEAC in most offensive and defensive categories. The conference is turnover-happy, so Norfolk State's inflated TO% probably won't do them much good, especially given the opponent.

There were enough conference champions worse than the Spartans to give them a pass right into the first round, but Florida is likely to do to them what Baylor and Gonzaga have. The Gators are just in a different class and all that's left to decide is when Todd Golden calls off the dogs and if that leaves Norfolk State enough time to cover as one of the biggest underdogs of the round.



WEST REGION

#16 SEED

ODDS
TO...

20-1

REACH SWEET 16

WIN REGION

500-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
74.9 (117)

DEFENSIVE PPG
71 (135)

POSSESSIONS
64 (251)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.117 (151)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.127 (212)

OFFENSIVE FG%
48.1% (26)

DEFENSIVE FG%
42.5% (81)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
31.3% (306)

FREE THROW %
73.7% (122)

REBOUNDING %
50.6% (159)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.065 (212)

OFFENSIVE TO%
16.0% (264)

DEFENSIVE TO%
15.8% (105)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

2.5%

SWEET 16

0.4%

ELITE 8

0.0%

FINAL FOUR

0.0%

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

STEVE MAKINEN'S EAST REGION

POWER RATINGS GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 DUKE	#2 ALABAMA	#3 WISCONSIN	#4 ARIZONA	#5 OREGON	#6 BYU	#7 ST MARYS	#8 MISSISSIPPI STATE	#9 BAYLOR	#10 VANDERBILT	#11 VCU	#12 LIBERTY	#13 AKRON	#14 MONTANA	#15 ROBERT MORRIS	#16 AMERICAN	#16 MOUNT ST MARYS
TEAM/SEED	RATING	96.7	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 DUKE	96.7		4.1	8.2	9	12.4	11.6	11.2	12.6	12.6	14.4	11.7	17.5	21	25	23.8	29.9	29.8
#2 ALABAMA	92.6	-4.1		4.1	4.9	8.3	7.5	7.1	8.5	8.5	10.3	7.6	13.4	16.9	20.9	19.7	25.8	25.7
#3 WISCONSIN	88.5	-8.2	-4.1		0.8	4.2	3.4	3	4.4	4.4	6.2	3.5	9.3	12.8	16.8	15.6	21.7	21.6
#4 ARIZONA	87.7	-9	-4.9	-0.8		3.4	2.6	2.2	3.6	3.6	5.4	2.7	8.5	12	16	14.8	20.9	20.8
#5 OREGON	84.3	-12.4	-8.3	-4.2	-3.4		-0.8	-1.2	0.2	0.2	2	-0.7	5.1	8.6	12.6	11.4	17.5	17.4
#6 BYU	85.1	-11.6	-7.5	-3.4	-2.6	0.8		-0.4	1	1	2.8	0.1	5.9	9.4	13.4	12.2	18.3	18.2
#7 ST MARYS	85.5	-11.2	-7.1	-3	-2.2	1.2	0.4		1.4	1.4	3.2	0.5	6.3	9.8	13.8	12.6	18.7	18.6
#8 MISSISSIPPI STATE	84.1	-12.6	-8.5	-4.4	-3.6	-0.2	-1	-1.4		0	1.8	-0.9	4.9	8.4	12.4	11.2	17.3	17.2
#9 BAYLOR	84.1	-12.6	-8.5	-4.4	-3.6	-0.2	-1	-1.4	0		1.8	-0.9	4.9	8.4	12.4	11.2	17.3	17.2
#10 VANDERBILT	82.3	-14.4	-10.3	-6.2	-5.4	-2	-2.8	-3.2	-1.8	-1.8		-2.7	3.1	6.6	10.6	9.4	15.5	15.4
#11 VCU	85	-11.7	-7.6	-3.5	-2.7	0.7	-0.1	-0.5	0.9	0.9	2.7		5.8	9.3	13.3	12.1	18.2	18.1
#12 LIBERTY	79.2	-17.5	-13.4	-9.3	-8.5	-5.1	-5.9	-6.3	-4.9	-4.9	-3.1	-5.8		3.5	7.5	6.3	12.4	12.3
#13 AKRON	75.7	-21	-16.9	-12.8	-12	-8.6	-9.4	-9.8	-8.4	-8.4	-6.6	-9.3	-3.5		4	2.8	8.9	8.8
#14 MONTANA	71.7	-25	-20.9	-16.8	-16	-12.6	-13.4	-13.8	-12.4	-12.4	-10.6	-13.3	-7.5	-4		-1.2	4.9	4.8
#15 ROBERT MORRIS	72.9	-23.8	-19.7	-15.6	-14.8	-11.4	-12.2	-12.6	-11.2	-11.2	-9.4	-12.1	-6.3	-2.8	1.2		6.1	6
#16 AMERICAN	66.8	-29.9	-25.8	-21.7	-20.9	-17.5	-18.3	-18.7	-17.3	-17.3	-15.5	-18.2	-12.4	-8.9	-4.9	-6.1		-0.1
#16 MOUNT ST MARYS	66.9	-29.8	-25.7	-21.6	-20.8	-17.4	-18.2	-18.6	-17.2	-17.2	-15.4	-18.1	-12.3	-8.8	-4.8	-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 tops rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #1 seed Duke would hypothetically be listed as a 9-point favorite (-9) against #4 seed Arizona, 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 ALABAMA	#3 WISCONSIN	#4 ARIZONA	#5 OREGON	#6 BYU	#7 ST MARYS	#8 MISSISSIPPI STATE	#9 BAYLOR	#10 VANDERBILT	#11 VCU	#12 LIBERTY	#13 AKRON	#14 MONTANA	#15 ROBERT MORRIS	#16 AMERICAN	#16 MOUNT ST MARYS
TEAM/SEED	RATING	27.2	21.8	17.7	18.4	13.3	15.7	15.3	13.7	15.2	11.8	14.3	8.9	4.8	-0.9	0.6	-4.8	-4.5
#1 DUKE	27.2		5.4	9.5	8.8	13.9	11.5	11.9	13.5	12	15.4	12.9	18.3	22.4	28.1	26.6	32	31.7
#2 ALABAMA	21.8	-5.4		4.1	3.4	8.5	6.1	6.5	8.1	6.6	10	7.5	12.9	17	22.7	21.2	26.6	26.3
#3 WISCONSIN	17.7	-9.5	-4.1		-0.7	4.4	2	2.4	4	2.5	5.9	3.4	8.8	12.9	18.6	17.1	22.5	22.2
#4 ARIZONA	18.4	-8.8	-3.4	0.7		5.1	2.7	3.1	4.7	3.2	6.6	4.1	9.5	13.6	19.3	17.8	23.2	22.9
#5 OREGON	13.3	-13.9	-8.5	-4.4	-5.1		-2.4	-2	-0.4	-1.9	1.5	-1	4.4	8.5	14.2	12.7	18.1	17.8
#6 BYU	15.7	-11.5	-6.1	-2	-2.7	2.4		0.4	2	0.5	3.9	1.4	6.8	10.9	16.6	15.1	20.5	20.2
#7 ST MARYS	15.3	-11.9	-6.5	-2.4	-3.1	2	-0.4		1.6	0.1	3.5	1	6.4	10.5	16.2	14.7	20.1	19.8
#8 MISSISSIPPI STATE	13.7	-13.5	-8.1	-4	-4.7	0.4	-2	-1.6		-1.5	1.9	-0.6	4.8	8.9	14.6	13.1	18.5	18.2
#9 BAYLOR	15.2	-12	-6.6	-2.5	-3.2	1.9	-0.5	-0.1	1.5		3.4	0.9	6.3	10.4	16.1	14.6	20	19.7
#10 VANDERBILT	11.8	-15.4	-10	-5.9	-6.6	-1.5	-3.9	-3.5	-1.9	-3.4		-2.5	2.9	7	12.7	11.2	16.6	16.3
#11 VCU	14.3	-12.9	-7.5	-3.4	-4.1	1	-1.4	-1	0.6	-0.9	2.5		5.4	9.5	15.2	13.7	19.1	18.8
#12 LIBERTY	8.9	-18.3	-12.9	-8.8	-9.5	-4.4	-6.8	-6.4	-4.8	-6.3	-2.9	-5.4		4.1	9.8	8.3	13.7	13.4
#13 AKRON	4.8	-22.4	-17	-12.9	-13.6	-8.5	-10.9	-10.5	-8.9	-10.4	-7	-9.5	-4.1		5.7	4.2	9.6	9.3
#14 MONTANA	-0.9	-28.1	-22.7	-18.6	-19.3	-14.2	-16.6	-16.2	-14.6	-16.1	-12.7	-15.2	-9.8	-5.7		-1.5	3.9	3.6
#15 ROBERT MORRIS	0.6	-26.6	-21.2	-17.1	-17.8	-12.7	-15.1	-14.7	-13.1	-14.6	-11.2	-13.7	-8.3	-4.2	1.5		5.4	5.1
#16 AMERICAN	-4.8	-32	-26.6	-22.5	-23.2	-18.1	-20.5	-20.1	-18.5	-20	-16.6	-19.1	-13.7	-9.6	-3.9	-5.4		-0.3
#16 MOUNT ST MARYS	-4.5	-31.7	-26.3	-22.2	-22.9	-17.8	-20.2	-19.8	-18.2	-19.7	-16.3	-18.8	-13.4	-9.3	-3.6	-5.1	0.3	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

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STEVE MAKINEN'S EAST REGION

BETTORS RATING GRID

TEAM/SEED	TEAM/SEED	RATING	#1 DUKE	#2 ALABAMA	#3 WISCONSIN	#4 ARIZONA	#5 OREGON	#6 BYU	#7 ST MARYS	#8 MISSISSIPPI STATE	#9 BAYLOR	#10 VANDERBILT	#11 VCU	#12 LIBERTY	#13 AKRON	#14 MONTANA	#15 ROBERT MORRIS	#16 AMERICAN	#16 MOUNT ST MARYS
			-26.1	-22.8	-17.5	-16.7	-12.9	-14.5	-15	-12.8	-13.3	-12.4	-13.9	-7	-4.9	-0.1	-1.2	4.8	7.5
#1 DUKE	#1 DUKE	-26.1		3.3	8.6	9.4	13.2	11.6	11.1	13.3	12.8	13.7	12.2	19.1	21.2	26	24.9	30.9	33.6
#2 ALABAMA	#2 ALABAMA	-22.8	-3.3		5.3	6.1	9.9	8.3	7.8	10	9.5	10.4	8.9	15.8	17.9	22.7	21.6	27.6	30.3
#3 WISCONSIN	#3 WISCONSIN	-17.5	-8.6	-5.3		0.8	4.6	3	2.5	4.7	4.2	5.1	3.6	10.5	12.6	17.4	16.3	22.3	25
#4 ARIZONA	#4 ARIZONA	-16.7	-9.4	-6.1	-0.8		3.8	2.2	1.7	3.9	3.4	4.3	2.8	9.7	11.8	16.6	15.5	21.5	24.2
#5 OREGON	#5 OREGON	-12.9	-13.2	-9.9	-4.6	-3.8		-1.6	-2.1	0.1	-0.4	0.5	-1	5.9	8	12.8	11.7	17.7	20.4
#6 BYU	#6 BYU	-14.5	-11.6	-8.3	-3	-2.2	1.6		-0.5	1.7	1.2	2.1	0.6	7.5	9.6	14.4	13.3	19.3	22
#7 ST MARYS	#7 ST MARYS	-15	-11.1	-7.8	-2.5	-1.7	2.1	0.5		2.2	1.7	2.6	1.1	8	10.1	14.9	13.8	19.8	22.5
#8 MISSISSIPPI STATE	#8 MISSISSIPPI STATE	-12.8	-13.3	-10	-4.7	-3.9	-0.1	-1.7	-2.2		-0.5	0.4	-1.1	5.8	7.9	12.7	11.6	17.6	20.3
#9 BAYLOR	#9 BAYLOR	-13.3	-12.8	-9.5	-4.2	-3.4	0.4	-1.2	-1.7	0.5		0.9	-0.6	6.3	8.4	13.2	12.1	18.1	20.8
#10 VANDERBILT	#10 VANDERBILT	-12.4	-13.7	-10.4	-5.1	-4.3	-0.5	-2.1	-2.6	-0.4	-0.9		-1.5	5.4	7.5	12.3	11.2	17.2	19.9
#11 VCU	#11 VCU	-13.9	-12.2	-8.9	-3.6	-2.8	1	-0.6	-1.1	1.1	0.6	1.5		6.9	9	13.8	12.7	18.7	21.4
#12 LIBERTY	#12 LIBERTY	-7	-19.1	-15.8	-10.5	-9.7	-5.9	-7.5	-8	-5.8	-6.3	-5.4	-6.9		2.1	6.9	5.8	11.8	14.5
#13 AKRON	#13 AKRON	-4.9	-21.2	-17.9	-12.6	-11.8	-8	-9.6	-10.1	-7.9	-8.4	-7.5	-9	-2.1		4.8	3.7	9.7	12.4
#14 MONTANA	#14 MONTANA	-0.1	-26	-22.7	-17.4	-16.6	-12.8	-14.4	-14.9	-12.7	-13.2	-12.3	-13.8	-6.9	-4.8		-1.1	4.9	7.6
#15 ROBERT MORRIS	#15 ROBERT MORRIS	-1.2	-24.9	-21.6	-16.3	-15.5	-11.7	-13.3	-13.8	-11.6	-12.1	-11.2	-12.7	-5.8	-3.7	1.1		6	8.7
#16 AMERICAN	#16 AMERICAN	4.8	-30.9	-27.6	-22.3	-21.5	-17.7	-19.3	-19.8	-17.6	-18.1	-17.2	-18.7	-11.8	-9.7	-4.9	-6		2.7
#16 MOUNT ST MARYS	#16 MOUNT ST MARYS	7.5	-33.6	-30.3	-25	-24.2	-20.4	-22	-22.5	-20.3	-20.8	-19.9	-21.4	-14.5	-12.4	-7.6	-8.7	-2.7	

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 tops rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #1 seed Duke would hypothetically be listed as a 26-point favorite (-26) against #14 seed Montana, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S EAST REGION

MOMENTUM RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 DUKE	#2 ALABAMA	#3 WISCONSIN	#4 ARIZONA	#5 OREGON	#6 BYU	#7 ST MARYS	#8 MISSISSIPPI STATE	#9 BAYLOR	#10 VANDERBILT	#11 VCU	#12 LIBERTY	#13 AKRON	#14 MONTANA	#15 ROBERT MORRIS	#16 AMERICAN	#16 MOUNT ST MARYS
TEAM/SEED	RATING	32.7	24.2	17.5	16.8	16.6	20.9	14.7	12.6	12.4	10.1	15.8	11	2.9	3.9	6	-1.4	-1.4
#1 DUKE	32.7		8.5	15.2	15.9	16.1	11.8	18	20.1	20.3	22.6	16.9	21.7	29.8	28.8	26.7	34.1	34.1
#2 ALABAMA	24.2	-8.5		6.7	7.4	7.6	3.3	9.5	11.6	11.8	14.1	8.4	13.2	21.3	20.3	18.2	25.6	25.6
#3 WISCONSIN	17.5	-15.2	-6.7		0.7	0.9	-3.4	2.8	4.9	5.1	7.4	1.7	6.5	14.6	13.6	11.5	18.9	18.9
#4 ARIZONA	16.8	-15.9	-7.4	-0.7		0.2	-4.1	2.1	4.2	4.4	6.7	1	5.8	13.9	12.9	10.8	18.2	18.2
#5 OREGON	16.6	-16.1	-7.6	-0.9	-0.2		-4.3	1.9	4	4.2	6.5	0.8	5.6	13.7	12.7	10.6	18	18
#6 BYU	20.9	-11.8	-3.3	3.4	4.1	4.3		6.2	8.3	8.5	10.8	5.1	9.9	18	17	14.9	22.3	22.3
#7 ST MARYS	14.7	-18	-9.5	-2.8	-2.1	-1.9	-6.2		2.1	2.3	4.6	-1.1	3.7	11.8	10.8	8.7	16.1	16.1
#8 MISSISSIPPI STATE	12.6	-20.1	-11.6	-4.9	-4.2	-4	-8.3	-2.1		0.2	2.5	-3.2	1.6	9.7	8.7	6.6	14	14
#9 BAYLOR	12.4	-20.3	-11.8	-5.1	-4.4	-4.2	-8.5	-2.3	-0.2		2.3	-3.4	1.4	9.5	8.5	6.4	13.8	13.8
#10 VANDERBILT	10.1	-22.6	-14.1	-7.4	-6.7	-6.5	-10.8	-4.6	-2.5	-2.3		-5.7	-0.9	7.2	6.2	4.1	11.5	11.5
#11 VCU	15.8	-16.9	-8.4	-1.7	-1	-0.8	-5.1	1.1	3.2	3.4	5.7		4.8	12.9	11.9	9.8	17.2	17.2
#12 LIBERTY	11	-21.7	-13.2	-6.5	-5.8	-5.6	-9.9	-3.7	-1.6	-1.4	0.9	-4.8		8.1	7.1	5	12.4	12.4
#13 AKRON	2.9	-29.8	-21.3	-14.6	-13.9	-13.7	-18	-11.8	-9.7	-9.5	-7.2	-12.9	-8.1		-1	-3.1	4.3	4.3
#14 MONTANA	3.9	-28.8	-20.3	-13.6	-12.9	-12.7	-17	-10.8	-8.7	-8.5	-6.2	-11.9	-7.1	1		-2.1	5.3	5.3
#15 ROBERT MORRIS	6	-26.7	-18.2	-11.5	-10.8	-10.6	-14.9	-8.7	-6.6	-6.4	-4.1	-9.8	-5	3.1	2.1		7.4	7.4
#16 AMERICAN	-1.4	-34.1	-25.6	-18.9	-18.2	-18	-22.3	-16.1	-14	-13.8	-11.5	-17.2	-12.4	-4.3	-5.3	-7.4		0
#16 MOUNT ST MARYS	-1.4	-34.1	-25.6	-18.9	-18.2	-18	-22.3	-16.1	-14	-13.8	-11.5	-17.2	-12.4	-4.3	-5.3	-7.4	0	

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DUKE BLUE DEVILS

HEAD COACH
Jon Scheyer

2024-25 RECORD
31-3 SU, 22-12 ATS, 17-17 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
96.7 (1)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
27.2 (1)

BETTOR RATING
-26.1 (1)

MOMENTUM RATING
32.7 (1)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Cooper Flagg certainly came as advertised, as the Wooden Award market for Player of the Year got down to Flagg and Auburn's Johni Broome with a lot of time to spare in the regular season. Flagg and the Blue Devils have been graded on a curve this season because of the relative lack of strength in the ACC, yet it hasn't mattered in the rankings. Even with adjusted efficiency metrics and strength of opponent factored into the equation, Duke has been a top-five team pretty much all year and the No. 1 team for Bart Torvik and KenPom for a long stretch.

Duke's adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency metrics have ranked in the top five over the course of the season and have led to lots of blowouts in conference play. Their lone conference loss to Clemson might be something that people hold against them, but early-season neutral-site losses to Kentucky and Arizona are nothing to worry about.

There are no apparent flaws with the Blue Devils, who shine offensively and defensively in terms of both 2s and 3s and they are also a top-30 team on the glass on both ends of the floor. If you wanted to poke some holes in Duke, their middling turnover rate on defense could be one concern, but they take such great care of the basketball that they're not giving up possessions easily.

All of the lopsided wins have allowed head coach Jon Scheyer to evaluate his depth and there are numerous players he can rely on going from Thursday to Saturday or Friday to Sunday if need be. Flagg, Kon Kneuppel, and Tyrese Proctor, who seems healthier now than he was late in the year, all averaged double figures and are efficient 3-point shooters, which always seems to matter more in March than other times of the year.

It goes without saying that this team is absolutely a title contender and should make a very deep run, as the ACC champions rolled without Flagg and will reportedly get him back sooner rather than later. As a top-five team in both efficiency metrics, Duke fits the criteria of past champions and may very well cut down the nets, as the path starts with a de facto home weekend in Raleigh.



EAST REGION

#1 SEED

ODDS
TO...

REACH SWEET 16

-800

WIN REGION

-120

WIN TITLE

+320

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
82.7 (11)

DEFENSIVE PPG
61.9 (5)

POSSESSIONS
63.6 (271)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.335 (2)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.913 (3)

OFFENSIVE FG%
48.8% (12)

DEFENSIVE FG%
38.6% (5)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
37.7% (19)

FREE THROW %
78.4% (17)

REBOUNDING %
55.8% (6)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.748 (4)

OFFENSIVE TO%
12.3% (16)

DEFENSIVE TO%
15.5% (128)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

99.1%

SWEET 16

85.6%

ELITE 8

71.3%

FINAL FOUR

52.7%

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

ALABAMA

CRIMSON TIDE

HEAD COACH
Nate Oats

2024-25 RECORD
25-8 SU, 19-14 ATS, 17-15 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
92.6 (5)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
21.8 (5)

BETTOR RATING
-22.8 (5)

MOMENTUM RATING
24.2 (3)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

A few years ago, it would have been an insane thought that Alabama basketball would outshine Alabama football. That is the reality now, as Nate Oats, who has taken the Crimson Tide to a Final Four and two Sweet 16s, has another powerhouse ballclub heading into the NCAA Tournament. This is the fifth straight NCAA Tournament appearance for the program after having five total from 2004-18.

Perhaps the SEC gauntlet wore the team down. After starting 10-1 in conference play, they lost four of six games from Feb. 15 to Mar. 5, but finished on a high note with a road overtime win over Auburn. All of the losses came to consensus top-20 teams, something that they won't see nearly as frequently in the NCAA Tournament, but it does make you wonder a little bit as they get deeper into the event.

That said, Alabama was a top-five team in Erik Haslam's "Record Quality" metric throughout most of the season and even spent ample time in second before that aforementioned stretch against a really tough set of opponents. A little fatigue is understandable, given that Alabama runs and runs and runs. This is the highest adjusted tempo they've had per Torvik since Oats' first season back in 2019-20.

That tempo, coupled with the high Rim & 3 Rate for the Crimson Tide, will be a matchup nightmare for most of the teams in the field. Alabama was third in the SEC for shot share on Close Twos as defined by Torvik and first in 3P Rate. They maximize their shot selection and attempt to get up a lot of them. They also rank in the top 10 in dunks, a nod to their desire to get to the rim and also their athleticism.

Alabama's draw is fascinating, as they'll beat Robert Morris and then play either a very slow and plodding Saint Mary's team or a very up-tempo game against Vanderbilt. In the BYU/VCU/Wisconsin pod, there are three distinctly different styles of basketball. Ultimately, I think it's Alabama vs. Duke in the Elite Eight, but the Crimson Tide have a potentially interesting path, as Saint Mary's could employ the same game-plan that they've used against Gonzaga to slow them down and ugly up the game.

EAST REGION

#2 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS TO... **-200**

WIN REGION

+450

WIN TITLE

18-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
91.1 (1)

DEFENSIVE PPG
81.4 (350)

POSSESSIONS
71.6 (3)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.309 (4)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.992 (26)

OFFENSIVE FG%
48.3% (19)

DEFENSIVE FG%
42.5% (79)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
35.0% (115)

FREE THROW %
71.6% (210)

REBOUNDING %
54.0% (21)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.315 (77)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.2% (124)

DEFENSIVE TO%
11.7% (350)

% CHANCE TO REACH

2ND ROUND

93.1%

SWEET 16

70.0%

ELITE 8

47.4%

FINAL FOUR

21.2%

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

WISCONSIN

BADGERS

HEAD COACH
Greg Gard

2024-25 RECORD
26-9 SU, 22-13 ATS, 20-15 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
88.5 (13)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
17.7 (16)

BETTOR RATING
-17.5 (13)

MOMENTUM RATING
17.5 (19)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Two 7-footers and some very experienced guards have Wisconsin in line for their best NCAA Tournament run since 2017. Head coach Greg Gard has had some good teams in Madison and inherited a very solid program from Bo Ryan, but the Badgers have had first-round exits and near-misses for the better part of the last decade. Four straight first-weekend exits can't sit well with boosters and admins, so a lot of pressure is on the shoulders of this team this year.

The nation's top free throw shooting team should be able to handle the pressure of late-game situations, but will they be the ones going to the line as the seconds are counting down? Wisconsin makes life substantially more difficult on the defensive end of the floor by not forcing turnovers. They are among the 40 worst teams at generating takeaways. However, they have done well contesting shots and limiting second-chance opportunities.

The Badgers are around the top 40 in 2P% defense and well above the national average in 3P% defense. And it is a similar story on the offensive side. Wisconsin takes tremendous care of the ball, makes a lot of 2s, and makes more than enough 3s to be dangerous. One clear knock on Wisconsin and the other NCAA Tournament teams from the conference is that it wasn't a great league this season on the whole.

The Badgers also had a distinct lack of wins away from the Kohl Center, with a February win over Purdue as really the only hallmark triumph outside of the friendly confines prior to neutral-site wins over UCLA and Michigan State in Indianapolis during the Big Ten tourney. For a team that takes a lot of jump shots and led the Big Ten in 3P Rate, it isn't a big surprise to see a home/road dichotomy. Also, it doesn't make the neutral-site element of the NCAA Tournament all that appealing.

The Big Ten Tournament runner-up has a tricky draw. Assuming nothing bad happens against Montana, BYU is a team with a similar 3P Rate and better offensive numbers, but lesser defensive numbers. VCU is the best team in the nation in eFG% defense, so they're going to make it tough on the Badgers. I don't like their draw or likely seeing Alabama in the Sweet 16. I don't think Wisconsin is around terribly long.



EAST REGION

#3 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+100

WIN REGION

+850

WIN TITLE

40-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
80.5 (28)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.8 (121)

POSSESSIONS
65.1 (190)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.274 (13)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1 (35)

OFFENSIVE FG%
46.0% (87)

DEFENSIVE FG%
41.7% (53)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
35.6% (79)

FREE THROW %
82.6% (1)

REBOUNDING %
51.7% (98)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.509 (24)

OFFENSIVE TO%
12.6% (25)

DEFENSIVE TO%
12.7% (326)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

89.0%

SWEET 16

49.4%

ELITE 8

21.5%

FINAL FOUR

6.9%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

ARIZONA WILDCATS

HEAD COACH
Tommy Lloyd

2024-25 RECORD
22-12 SU, 17-16 ATS, 19-15 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
87.7 (15)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
18.4 (14)

BETTOR RATING
-16.7 (16)

MOMENTUM RATING
16.8 (21)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Is there a head coach under the microscope more than Tommy Lloyd going into this year's NCAA Tournament? By end-of-season rankings, Arizona has been 9, 6, and 8 for Bart Torvik and 6, 11, and 5 for Ken Pomeroy. The Wildcats have two Sweet 16 appearances and a first-round loss to Princeton in a 15 vs. 2 game. He's orchestrated some excellent regular seasons with a ton of talent in Tucson and has failed miserably to capitalize under the brightest lights.

Armed with yet another really good team, Arizona goes into the tourney with the lowest seed that they've had in the Big Dance on his watch. But, the ranking remains rather similar to his first three seasons, so many will be talking about the 'Cats as an under-seeded team. Sports are a results-based business, though, and Arizona being perfect against Quadrant 2-4 teams while losing several more games than they won against Quadrant 1 teams pushes you down the bracket.

The biggest difference between this year's team and the past three is that the Wildcats are not nearly as potent from 3. Not only is this their first season outside the top 80 in 3P%, but they rank in the 270s. What that does mean, at least for me, is that this team has a lot of other really valuable qualities and a few weeks worth of hot shooting could be the recipe for immense success.

After all, the Wildcats are a top-50 team in 2P% offense and defense. They're an outstanding offensive rebounding team. Their rim protection is going to alter shots and force teams to change their gameplans a little bit thanks to a top-50 block percentage. I do wonder if the Wildcats will be hurt by a lower TO% on defense this season, but I really think their tournament tenure simply comes down to how they shoot from 3 because they are strong enough in many other areas to get over the hump.

The Big 12 Tournament runner-up has experienced early-round disappointment before and Akron is a potentially dangerous game right out of the chute because of how well they shoot 3s. Assuming the big favorites get past that, a date with former Pac-12 rival Oregon seems likely, or a matchup with a slower version of Akron in Liberty. Drawing the region with Duke means that Arizona's tournament run is either over in the Sweet 16 or before then in all likelihood.

EAST REGION

#4 SEED

ODDS
TO...

-180

REACH SWEET 16

WIN REGION

+950

WIN TITLE

50-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
81.7 (16)

DEFENSIVE PPG
72.4 (177)

POSSESSIONS
67.4 (55)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.276 (11)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.997 (33)

OFFENSIVE FG%
47.3% (44)

DEFENSIVE FG%
41.5% (49)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
32.4% (247)

FREE THROW %
78.4% (18)

REBOUNDING %
54.7% (14)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.421 (43)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.8% (91)

DEFENSIVE TO%
14.4% (213)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

83.3%

SWEET 16

53.2%

ELITE 8

14.1%

FINAL FOUR

6.2%

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

OREGON DUCKS

HEAD COACH
Dana Altman

2024-25 RECORD
24-9 SU, 16-17 ATS, 16-17 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
84.3 (32)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
13.3 (37)

BETTOR RATING
-12.9 (34)

MOMENTUM RATING
16.6 (23)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

The first year in the Big Ten brought some travel challenges and a slew of new opponents, but the Ducks still found themselves in a familiar place by season's end - the NCAA Tournament. After missing in 2022 and 2023, the Ducks are in the field in consecutive years, though they were a No. 11 seed last year. Oregon knocked off South Carolina in a very popular 11 over 6 game before losing to Creighton in double overtime in the second round.

That loss marked the first time since 2015 that Dana Altman failed to get through the first weekend with a tournament team. He had two Sweet 16 appearances to go with the Final Four in 2017 and Elite Eight in 2016. This year's team made a really early statement with wins over Texas A&M and Alabama on Thanksgiving week, victories that make you wonder if another deep run is on the horizon.

Statistically, I wouldn't say that the Ducks really shine in any area. Their adjusted metrics are viewed in a very favorable light because of the quality of the schedule that Oregon had to deal with this season, as they rank in the top 55 in both adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency for Bart Torvik and in the top 45 in both categories for KenPom. Most of their other stats rank in the 90s or 100s nationally, though, and the Ducks were just 11th per Torvik in both efficiency metrics during conference play.

Erik Haslam of Haslametrics does have the Ducks with a top-20 ranking in Record Quality, so maybe we just have to look at the stats for what they are. Oregon played a very tough schedule and did really well all things considered, especially with more air miles in the Big Ten and a very impressive 15-2 start to the season with several strong wins.

Dana Altman is a tremendous head coach in tournament formats and has never lost a first-round NCAA Tournament game at Oregon. But, I do believe Liberty fits the 12 over 5 profile, as they're a top-10 team in eFG% offense and defense. The Ducks may win, but it won't be easy and Arizona creates a lot of matchup problems. Altman's second straight first-weekend exit is a real possibility.

EAST REGION

#5 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

+250

WIN REGION

22-1

WIN TITLE

120-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
76.2 (89)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.9 (130)

POSSESSIONS
65.3 (172)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.2 (54)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.994 (29)

OFFENSIVE FG%
45.7% (100)

DEFENSIVE FG%
43.1% (113)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
34.0% (170)

FREE THROW %
76.3% (49)

REBOUNDING %
51.4% (110)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.293 (88)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.2% (123)

DEFENSIVE TO%
15.3% (147)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

65.9%

SWEET 16

30.9%

ELITE 8

6.3%

FINAL FOUR

2.2%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

BYU COUGARS

HEAD COACH
Kevin Young

2024-25 RECORD
24-9 SU, 20-13 ATS, 19-14 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85.1 (28)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
15.7 (23)

BETTOR RATING
-14.5 (26)

MOMENTUM RATING
20.9 (10)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

No Mark Pope? No problem. Pope took BYU to two NCAA Tournaments in five seasons and it would have been three if not for the cancellation of the 2020 event. What Pope did not do during his time in Provo was win an NCAA Tournament game. The Cougars were one-and-done, losing the 6/11 game twice.

Now it will be Kevin Young steering the ship into the Field of 68. BYU is a team with some pretty drastic differences for Bart Torvik and Ken Pomeroy, as the former has the Cougars as a top-15, and borderline top-10, team, while the latter has BYU outside the top 20. However you feel about BYU and whichever source(s) you prefer to use, everybody agrees that this is a very good offensive squad.

And therein lies the difference between Torvik and Pomeroy. BYU is a top-10 or top-15 caliber offense, but the defensive numbers depend a lot on the stats and metrics that are more heavily considered. BYU is outside the top 200 in 3P% defense and right around the national average in TO%. They've done a better job at defending 2s, but not to any extreme degree. At least they've done a good job of not giving up second chances by grading well on the defensive glass.

And you can win a lot of games with a defense that is average in a lot of metrics, but at or near the top 50 when factoring in the schedule when you have an offense this good. The Cougars are one of the nation's best teams at converting 2-point shots into points and have shot 37% from 3. They have also played extremely well down the stretch and have even had some of their best defensive performances in conference play in that span. This has the feel of a team rounding into form at just the right time and the program's first Sweet 16 appearance since 2011 may be in reach.

Not to diminish what VCU does offensively, but BYU vs. VCU is a straight offense vs. defense battle. BYU is more accustomed to the elevation that we'll see in Denver and VCU played in the A-10 title game on Sunday, so maybe there's an edge there, coupled with the fact that VCU hasn't stepped up in class like this since mid-December. I don't hate the draw for the Cougars, but Dallin Hall and Egor Demin have to take care of the ball against the Rams.

EAST REGION

#6 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+180

WIN REGION

15-1

WIN TITLE

60-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
81 (22)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.9 (126)

POSSESSIONS
64.9 (196)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.275 (12)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.03 (60)

OFFENSIVE FG%
48.2% (21)

DEFENSIVE FG%
42.9% (102)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
37.1% (33)

FREE THROW %
70.5% (241)

REBOUNDING %
54.3% (17)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.423 (42)

OFFENSIVE TO%
15.1% (196)

DEFENSIVE TO%
15.2% (156)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

55.9%

SWEET 16

28.8%

ELITE 8

11.5%

FINAL FOUR

3.4%

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

SAINT MARY'S GAELS

HEAD COACH
Randy Bennett

2024-25 RECORD
28-5 SU, 14-18 ATS, 12-19 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85.5 (26)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
15.3 (26)

BETTOR RATING
-15 (23)

MOMENTUM RATING
14.7 (30)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

The third installment of Saint Mary's vs. Gonzaga went the way of the Bulldogs, so the Gaels head into the NCAA Tournament as an at-large and not as the West Coast Conference champions. Despite all of SMC's success, deep runs in the Field of 68 have evaded them. You have to go back to 2010 to find the last tourney appearance that lasted longer than the first weekend.

The Men of Moraga ranked 19, 10, and 15 for Bart Torvik over the last three seasons and 17, 13, and 20 for KenPom, but lost in the second round twice and got knocked off by No. 12 seed Grand Canyon last year. All three of those seasons, Saint Mary's got dropped on the 5 line, which means they ran into a conference champion and potential Cinderella. In the two years with second-round exits, they ran into an under-seeded UConn and an under-seeded UCLA.

The Selection Committee hasn't made it easy on the Gaels, so their lack of NCAA Tournament success really shouldn't be held against them. But, you could argue that it does illustrate the difference between the WCC and the power conferences. So, I can sit here and talk about how Saint Mary's is once again a top-10 caliber defense. How they play at a super slow tempo and really make life hard on the opposition by making them earn every single point. How they are a top-25 team in 2P% defense again.

None of it matters all that much if they can't make shots and this is a Saint Mary's team that ranks in the 170s in eFG% offense, a gigantic departure from the recent tourney teams and nearly all of the tourney teams under Randy Bennett. This is the worst 3-point shooting team he's had in quite some time. There is also a distinct lack of signature wins outside of the two against Gonzaga. But, the metrics do love them as a top-25 team for Torvik and KenPom yet again.

At least by virtue of being a 7 instead of a 5 this time, Saint Mary's avoids a mid-major conference champ and gets one of the last teams in the field in Vanderbilt. It's a good matchup for the Gaels. Vanderbilt isn't a very efficient offense and isn't a good defense in a game that should be played at a slower pace than they want. I don't like SMC's chances against Alabama, but they should get there.

EAST REGION

#7 SEED

**ODDS
TO...**

+270

REACH SWEET 16

WIN REGION

18-1

WIN TITLE

100-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
73.4 (159)

DEFENSIVE PPG
61.4 (4)

POSSESSIONS
59.8 (359)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.212 (39)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.958 (10)

OFFENSIVE FG%
45.4% (113)

DEFENSIVE FG%
41.3% (43)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
32.7% (230)

FREE THROW %
69.5% (273)

REBOUNDING %
57.5% (1)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.59 (10)

OFFENSIVE TO%
12.4% (20)

DEFENSIVE TO%
14.7% (195)

**% CHANCE
TO REACH**

2ND ROUND

60.3%

SWEET 16

18.9%

ELITE 8

8.7%

FINAL FOUR

2.3%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

MISSISSIPPI STATE BULLDOGS

HEAD COACH
Chris Jans

2024-25 RECORD
21-12 SU, 15-18 ATS, 19-14 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
84.1 (34)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
13.7 (33)

BETTOR RATING
-12.8 (35)

MOMENTUM RATING
12.6 (39)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

It was about this point going through the NCAA Tournament field by seed that I got tired of talking about the SEC. The conference is so good and so deep that it felt like almost every game was a chance to get a win that upgraded the metrics and would impress the Selection Committee. Despite finishing the regular season with a losing record in conference games, the Bulldogs were a lock in the Field of 68, even as they lost four of their last five and 10 of their last 16 before blowing out LSU in the first game of the SEC Tournament.

By no means is Mississippi State a bad team. Well, except for shooting 3s and defending them. Most of the other stats and metrics for Chris Jans' team are solid, especially given the top-20 strength of schedule. A Quadrant 1 win here or there can be fluky, but that wasn't the case here. This is a team that does very well protecting the basketball and very well gaining extra possessions through turnovers and offensive rebounds.

This is also a team that has one of the highest Block% marks on defense in the nation and wins the battle in the paint more often than not as a top-50 team in 2P%. But, I need to circle back to the 3-point problems because those have a lot to do with why Mississippi State had the record that they do.

Opponents have taken a 3-point shot over 44% of the time. The Bulldogs took one over 42% of the time. Opponents shot better than 36% from deep and Mississippi State shot well under 32%. The gap was even more noteworthy in SEC play, as the Bulldogs were 15th in the 16-team conference at 29.2% from 3 and 15th in 3P% defense, as the rest of the conference shot 37.5% beyond the arc against them. If you're wondering what to focus on with your Mississippi State handicap in the NCAA Tournament, it is precisely that.

Win or lose against Baylor, the Bulldogs don't match up very well with Duke. To be fair, almost nobody matches up well with Duke. With their 3-point shooting woes and similarly disappointing 3-point numbers on defense, it will either be a first or second-round exit for Mississippi State. Frankly, as low as I am on Baylor, with how well they protect the interior and limit chances at the rim, this is a jump-shooting contest and Baylor is better at it.

EAST REGION

#8 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+900

WIN REGION

45-1

WIN TITLE

150-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
79.8 (35)

DEFENSIVE PPG
74.2 (224)

POSSESSIONS
65.7 (136)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.233 (23)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.016 (42)

OFFENSIVE FG%
45.1% (133)

DEFENSIVE FG%
43.9% (165)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
31.4% (298)

FREE THROW %
70.0% (262)

REBOUNDING %
51.7% (99)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.436 (37)

OFFENSIVE TO%
12.7% (31)

DEFENSIVE TO%
16.5% (72)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

48.5%

SWEET 16

6.7%

ELITE 8

3.1%

FINAL FOUR

1.0%

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

BAYLOR BEARS

HEAD COACH
Scott Drew

2024-25 RECORD
19-14 SU, 13-16 ATS, 17-15 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
84.1 (33)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
15.2 (27)

BETTOR RATING
-13.3 (33)

MOMENTUM RATING
12.4 (40)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

I'm not endorsing or condemning Baylor by making this statement, but this is going to be a team that people will not like when they evaluate the profile. The Bears went 1-11 against Quadrant 1-A opponents and 5-12 in Quadrant 1 games overall. Nothing really stands out statistically, as the Bears did rank in the top 20 for both Bart Torvik and Ken Pomeroy in adjusted offensive efficiency, but that has a lot more to do with the schedule than their own shooting numbers.

The Bears are comfortably outside the top 100 in 3P% and 2P%. They're also outside the top 100 in TO%. The one area where they thrived was on the offensive glass, but there isn't a whole lot to get excited about otherwise. Defensively, Baylor really struggled to defend the 3-point line and wasn't all that solid on the boards.

You also have a head coach in Scott Drew that is 20-11 in the NCAA Tournament. He did silence some critics when he won the 2021 National Championship in the watered-down tournament held across Indianapolis. Drew has 12 NCAA Tournament appearances with a lot of high seeds. He has two Elite Eight and two Sweet 16 finishes, plus the one title. He's also lost in the Round of 32 four times, including each of the last three seasons as a No. 1 seed once and a No. 3 seed twice, and in the Round of 64 three times.

The last time Baylor was a double-digit seed on Drew's watch was 2008, which represents his first NCAA Tournament appearance with the program. He's close this season as a No. 9 seed. So, 20-11 sounds kind of impressive, but 13 of those wins are against double-digit seeds and seven are against seeds that were 13 or higher. All of that being said, Baylor played a top-10 strength of schedule and still managed to be an above average team.

As far as I'm concerned, Baylor either loses the coin flip to Mississippi State or gets bounced by Duke. As long as Cooper Flagg is healthy enough by the weekend, Duke's size and efficiency on both ends of the floor are a bad matchup for a Baylor team that isn't up to snuff this season. Heck, they may not even need Flagg.



EAST REGION

#9 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+750

WIN REGION

35-1

WIN TITLE

250-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
75.5 (105)

DEFENSIVE PPG
69.7 (89)

POSSESSIONS
62.7 (315)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.266 (15)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.022 (50)

OFFENSIVE FG%
44.6% (160)

DEFENSIVE FG%
43.9% (167)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
34.7% (130)

FREE THROW %
74.6% (96)

REBOUNDING %
51.7% (100)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.326 (72)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.6% (74)

DEFENSIVE TO%
16.2% (89)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

51.5%

SWEET 16

7.5%

ELITE 8

3.5%

FINAL FOUR

1.2%

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

VANDERBILT

COMMODORES

HEAD COACH
Mark Byington

2024-25 RECORD
20-12 SU, 18-14 ATS, 17-15 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
82.3 (42)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
11.8 (46)

BETTOR RATING
-12.4 (41)

MOMENTUM RATING
10.1 (57)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Mark Byington is on quite a two-year run. After coaching for a decade with no visits to the NCAA Tournament, he is there in back-to-back years with two different teams. After leading James Madison to a stellar 32-4 record that included a first-round win over Wisconsin, Byington was hired by Vanderbilt. In Year 1, he's in the Big Dance and the Commodores are getting their boogie on for the first time since 2017.

Vandy hasn't won an NCAA Tournament game since 2012, so we'll see if Byington can replicate last year's heroics in an underdog role. This will probably be a popular fade team by bettors in the first round, though. The Commodores went 7-1 in games decided by six or fewer points and feels like a team that got an A on the group project thanks to others in the class.

Their non-conference schedule was very weak, as the only NCAA Tournament team that they played was Drake and they lost by 11 on a neutral. All five of their Quadrant 1 wins came against SEC opponents, including three of their Quadrant 1-A victories. With the strength of the conference this season, any big win is definitely impressive, but the statistical profile largely isn't.

This is one of the worst 3P% defenses in the field, as the opposition fired away at nearly 37%. Vandy ranks in the 270s in eFG%. The only defense to qualify for the tournament that was worse is Omaha and they play in a conference where defense is mostly optional. Had the Commodores not been able to turn opponents over 20% of the time, it would have been worse. For a team that was dead last in the SEC in adjusted defensive efficiency, I'm not sure the step down in class helps much.

If it wasn't obvious by how I talked about Vanderbilt, I don't think this is a very good team. Their best attribute is forcing turnovers and Saint Mary's is about as responsible with the ball as anybody. The Gaels are not a great offensive team, so that creates some intrigue, but Vanderbilt will probably be bottled up by the tempo of this one. Either way, they gave up 103 points in their only game against Alabama, so the Commodores won't make the second week.

EAST REGION

#10 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO... **+750**

WIN REGION

60-1

WIN TITLE

250-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
79.6 (38)

DEFENSIVE PPG
74.8 (239)

POSSESSIONS
66.9 (69)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.222 (33)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.044 (71)

OFFENSIVE FG%
45.1% (132)

DEFENSIVE FG%
46.0% (270)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
32.5% (239)

FREE THROW %
74.7% (90)

REBOUNDING %
50.3% (169)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.343 (67)

OFFENSIVE TO%
12.7% (28)

DEFENSIVE TO%
17.5% (40)

**% CHANCE
TO REACH**

2ND ROUND

39.8%

SWEET 16

9.7%

ELITE 8

3.5%

FINAL FOUR

0.7%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

VCU RAMS

HEAD COACH
Ryan Odom

2024-25 RECORD
28-6 SU, 20-13 ATS, 19-14 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85 (30)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
14.3 (30)

BETTOR RATING
-13.9 (29)

MOMENTUM RATING
15.8 (25)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

More commonly known as VCU, this is about as much of a household name as you can get from a true mid-major conference like the A-10. The run of success from this program has been something special. Since 2010, the Rams have only missed the NCAA Tournament three times, falling short in 2018, 2022, and 2024. They were forced to forfeit their game in 2021 due to positive COVID tests, but they're back in the dance again.

VCU hasn't had much success of late, though. Their last NCAA Tournament win came back in 2016 under Will Wade. Mike Rhoades went 0-2 in the field and now Ryan Odom gets his first crack. Odom was the head coach at UMBC when the Retrievers did the previously unthinkable and beat No. 1 Virginia as a No. 16 seed.

The Rams likely would have been in the Field of 68 regardless had they not won the A-10 Tournament, but not leaving it up to chance is always important. This is a ferocious defensive team that ranks in the top five in eFG% defense and 2P% defense, along with a top-30 TO%, a top-25 3P%, and a top-25 ranking in adjusted defensive efficiency.

What separates this VCU team from the others, though, is that they're way better at capitalizing on those takeaways and strong defensive possessions. The Rams have their best adjusted offensive efficiency ranking per Bart Torvik since that 2016 team that beat No. 7 Oregon State in the first round and lost 85-81 to No. 2 Oklahoma. This is a much more polished team inside the arc than outside of it on offense, but this is the best offensive rebounding team the program has seen since Shaka Smart left after the 2015 season.

The A-10 wasn't very good this season and the second-best team, George Mason, was nowhere near BYU offensively. VCU hasn't played a really good offense since mid-December. The defensive numbers are magnificent and the high turnover rate is a great asset. Can VCU keep the Cougars' shooters at bay? Because if they can't, this offense can't keep up.



EAST REGION

#11 SEED

ODDS
TO...

REACH SWEET 16

+380

WIN REGION

40-1

WIN TITLE

200-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
76.6 (82)

DEFENSIVE PPG
62.5 (7)

POSSESSIONS
64.1 (243)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.203 (49)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.985 (22)

OFFENSIVE FG%
44.5% (166)

DEFENSIVE FG%
39.2% (8)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
33.6% (189)

FREE THROW %
74.2% (110)

REBOUNDING %
53.3% (34)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.363 (59)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.8% (89)

DEFENSIVE TO%
17.9% (31)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

44.1%

SWEET 16

20.2%

ELITE 8

7.2%

FINAL FOUR

1.8%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

LIBERTY FLAMES

HEAD COACH
Ritchie McKay

2024-25 RECORD
28-6 SU, 21-10 ATS, 16-15 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
79.2 (63)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
8.9 (65)

BETTOR RATING
-7 (76)

MOMENTUM RATING
11 (49)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

The top dog throughout the Conference USA season defended the No. 1 seed by besting Jacksonville State in the conference championship game to secure the lone bid available to the league. Even though the Flames don't have to deal with the likes of UAB, North Texas, or Florida Atlantic anymore, the conference actually graded very well, as Bart Torvik ranked C-USA ninth out of the 31 conferences in his conference power ratings.

To be fair, the Flames are a big reason why. Torvik has them as a top-60 team entering the NCAA Tournament, while KenPom has them slightly outside the top 60. The lads from Lynchburg, VA knocked off Kansas State and McNeese State in non-conference action, plus they took FAU to overtime. They did play three lower-division opponents in the non-conference, which really drags down their strength of schedule.

Nevertheless, Liberty is one of the best teams in the nation when it comes to shooting 3s and also defending them. In games against Division I opponents, Torvik has the Flames in the top five in both areas. They are also an extremely efficient offense inside the arc, as they shot nearly 58% on 2-pointers.

There are two noteworthy areas of concern. They shot around 65% at the free throw line and graded as the worst offensive rebounding team in the nation per Torvik against D-I foes. Still, this is a team that takes a lot of 3s, makes a lot of 3s, was among the league leaders in Assist Rate, and one of the best in the nation in terms of Assist Rate against. Ritchie McKay is back in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2021 and he has a team capable of making a little noise.

Liberty will be a long way from home with the game against Oregon up in Seattle. But, the Flames do have the Rim & 3 Rate I look for, as nearly 90% of their shots are Close Twos or 3s. I'm not sure how they'll shoot in a much larger venue, but as a top-10 team in eFG% offense and defense, this is a 12 over 5 I am very interested in following. And I think they'd be live a la Princeton against Arizona if that's the matchup.



EAST REGION

#12 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+650

WIN REGION

200-1

WIN TITLE

500-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
74.4 (128)

DEFENSIVE PPG
64.7 (17)

POSSESSIONS
63.3 (288)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.18 (66)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.029 (58)

OFFENSIVE FG%
49.0% (7)

DEFENSIVE FG%
41.1% (38)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
39.5% (5)

FREE THROW %
65.4% (348)

REBOUNDING %
47.6% (298)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.59 (11)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.0% (105)

DEFENSIVE TO%
14.8% (185)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

34.2%

SWEET 16

11.1%

ELITE 8

1.3%

FINAL FOUR

0.3%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

AKRON ZIPS

HEAD COACH
John Groce

2024-25 RECORD
28-6 SU, 16-16 ATS, 19-13 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
75.7 (94)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
4.8 (98)

BETTOR RATING
-4.9 (101)

MOMENTUM RATING
2.9 (130)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

After taking a 6-5 lead 109 seconds into the MAC Championship Game against Miami of Ohio, Akron didn't lead again until they took a 74-72 lead with 1:05 left in the game. Nate Johnson's layup with two seconds left proved to be the difference as older stepbrother John Groce beat younger stepbrother Travis Steele in a wild finish.

The Akron Zips men's basketball page on Wikipedia was updated within seconds of the victory, as the Rubber City will be represented in the NCAA Tournament for the third time in four years and for the seventh time in program history, with six of them in the MAC and one in the Ohio Valley Conference. The Zips are 0-6 in the tournament, losing by 6, 13, 13, 46, 4, and 17 points, as they fell 77-60 to Creighton in a 14 vs. 3 game last year.

Akron was clearly the class of the MAC throughout conference play, losing just one game. They're a terrific offensive team once again, ranking in the top 50 in 3P% and 2P%, as well as the top 30 in eFG%. Akron plays with a lot of tempo and loves to shoot from beyond the arc, as over 45% of their shot attempts are triple tries. Ironically, MAC Player of the Year Nate Johnson is shooting under 30% from deep, so that's where the supporting cast has really come in handy.

Akron is not a particularly tall team to have done as well on the offensive glass as they did, a note to keep in mind when they step up in class in the NCAA Tournament. The tallest player on the roster is listed at 6-foot-8 and they have a couple of 6-foot-7 players. That could be part of the reason why they were 10th out of 12 MAC teams in shot share on Close Twos as defined by Bart Torvik and why they take so many 3s.

Akron gets a very strong Arizona team in the 13 vs. 4 matchup, but No. 15 Princeton went 4-of-25 from 3 when they upset the Wildcats back in 2023 and that would be a truly awful shooting effort from the Zips. They're a big underdog, but Tommy Lloyd's NCAA Tournament struggles coupled with Arizona's defensive performance against 3s over the last month and a half make me wonder if they might be live, especially since Arizona also doesn't shoot well from the outside.

EAST REGION

#13 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

11-1

WIN REGION

200-1

WIN TITLE

400-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
84 (7)

DEFENSIVE PPG
75.9 (272)

POSSESSIONS
68.5 (23)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.174 (68)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.103 (154)

OFFENSIVE FG%
47.1% (50)

DEFENSIVE FG%
43.5% (138)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
36.6% (49)

FREE THROW %
74.9% (85)

REBOUNDING %
52.5% (61)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.466 (31)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.3% (127)

DEFENSIVE TO%
14.9% (175)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

16.8%

SWEET 16

4.8%

ELITE 8

0.3%

FINAL FOUR

0.0%

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

MONTANA GRIZZLIES

HEAD COACH
Travis Decuire

2024-25 RECORD
25-9 SU, 18-12 ATS, 19-12 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
71.7 (146)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-0.9 (172)

BETTOR RATING
-0.1 (161)

MOMENTUM RATING
3.9 (120)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

As the season played out in the Big Sky Conference, it became more and more apparent that it was a two-horse race for the auto bid. Northern Colorado and Montana wound up being much better than anybody else and the Grizzlies head into the NCAA Tournament with one loss over the last two months.

After outlasting Northern Colorado by a 91-83 score in the Big Sky final, the Grizzlies celebrated their 12th NCAA Tournament berth and first since 2019. Making the tourney is definitely an accomplishment, but Montana would sure like to represent themselves and the conference a bit better than they have. Their appearances under head coach Travis DeCuire have resulted in losses to Michigan by 19 and 14. The two games prior to that (2012, 2013) were 81-34 and 73-49 losses.

This version of Montana is worse than the 2018 one, but slightly better than the 2019 one. The Grizzlies are not particularly good on defense. But, they are a top-15 team by eFG% offense, as they are a top-20 offense on 2s and a top-60 offense on 3s. They are a horrible offensive rebounding team, so they've had no choice but to make shots, otherwise it would be very tough to score.

Defensively, this is not a good basketball team. Except for a one-year blip in 2018, it hasn't been since Wayne Tinkle took them dancing in 2012 and 2013. Some of it is the nature of the beast in the Big Sky, where teams are very good offensively, but Montana doesn't force many turnovers and ranked in the 260s in 2P% during the season. They're around the national average against the 3, but Oregon, Tennessee, Utah State, and San Francisco all shot pretty well against them in non-conference action.

The Grizzlies meet the Badgers in the first round and probably have more than they can handle. Montana's poor defense is going to be exposed by a Wisconsin team that scores efficiently at all three levels. Montana probably needed a more gimmicky team with less structure to have a chance at the 14 over 3 upset.



EAST REGION

#14 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

20-1

WIN REGION

200-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
75.5 (106)

DEFENSIVE PPG
74.7 (237)

POSSESSIONS
65.3 (171)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.139 (109)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.142 (242)

OFFENSIVE FG%
49.6% (3)

DEFENSIVE FG%
46.3% (292)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
36.5% (55)

FREE THROW %
74.6% (95)

REBOUNDING %
48.2% (273)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.206 (139)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.7% (161)

DEFENSIVE TO%
13.6% (284)

% CHANCE TO REACH

2ND ROUND

11.1%

SWEET 16

1.5%

ELITE 8

0.1%

FINAL FOUR

0.0%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

ROBERT MORRIS COLONIALS

HEAD COACH
Andrew Toole

2024-25 RECORD
26-8 SU, 26-7 ATS, 19-14 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
72.9 (129)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
0.6 (152)

BETTOR RATING
-1.2 (139)

MOMENTUM RATING
6 (93)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

The move from the Northeast Conference to the Horizon League was definitely a step up for Robert Morris. Five years in, they have a conference tournament title and an NCAA Tournament berth to show for it. It is the first appearance since 2015 and technically just the second under head coach Andrew Toole, who took over the program for the 2010-11 season. The Colonials won the NEC Tournament in 2020, but a couple days later, the world stopped and the NCAA Tournament was cancelled.

In seeing how the season ended up for Bobby Mo, it is surprising to see that they actually started conference play with a 2-4 record and one of those losses was to one of the nation's worst teams, Detroit Mercy. Something clicked after their first game against Cleveland State because the Colonials rampaged through the conference the rest of the way, suffering just a two-point loss on the road at Wright State on Groundhog Day.

Interestingly, Robert Morris was only sixth in the conference in adjusted offensive efficiency and didn't even take down the top spot in adjusted defensive efficiency, finishing second to the aforementioned Vikings. But, the Colonials did lead the league in eFG% defense, they just forced fewer turnovers than CSU.

Nothing really stands out stats-wise for Bobby Mo. They did rank in the top 25 in Assist Rate during the season, so they share the basketball really well to create as many open looks as possible. The schedule is a major knock, as they're in the 300s in strength of schedule and, furthermore, KenPom has their opposing slate of defenses ranked in the 350s when there are only 364 Division I teams.

No matchup looks good on paper for a No. 15 seed, but Robert Morris doesn't stand out in the shooting percentage rankings on offense or defense and so Alabama is going to have a field day shooting the basketball. If the Colonials get sucked up in the pace of the game, they're going to have a really hard time covering as well, as Alabama is pretty relentless and the Colonials don't shoot enough 3s or keep teams away from the rim to keep pace.

EAST REGION

#15 SEED

ODDS
TO...

REACH SWEET 16

100-1

WIN REGION

500-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
76.8 (76)

DEFENSIVE PPG
71 (133)

POSSESSIONS
65.7 (139)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.093 (200)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.092 (139)

OFFENSIVE FG%
44.9% (144)

DEFENSIVE FG%
44.3% (187)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
34.9% (121)

FREE THROW %
72.0% (193)

REBOUNDING %
53.2% (38)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.25 (107)

OFFENSIVE TO%
15.6% (234)

DEFENSIVE TO%
16.5% (74)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

6.9%

SWEET 16

1.4%

ELITE 8

0.2%

FINAL FOUR

0.0%

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

AMERICAN EAGLES

HEAD COACH
Duane Simpkins

2024-25 RECORD
22-12 SU, 17-15 ATS, 17-15 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
66.8 (237)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-4.8 (242)

BETTOR RATING
4.8 (251)

MOMENTUM RATING
-1.4 (195)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Contrary to popular belief, the American Eagles did not beat the Aeropostale Tigers or the Hollister Seagulls to earn their first NCAA Tournament berth since 2014. They beat the Navy Midshipmen to claim the Patriot League crown and earned a trip to Dayton for their efforts. Navy actually won the two regular season games and American's run was nearly over before it even got started, as they squeaked past Lafayette at home to begin the conference tourney.

In terms of conference rankings, American was fourth in adjusted offensive efficiency and second in adjusted defensive efficiency. Bucknell was first in both, but Navy upset them in the semis. The Eagles went 10-3 in games decided by six or fewer points, so the season could have gone a variety of different ways, but they shot 76% at the free throw line and their opponents only shot 69%, so that made a difference throughout the campaign.

American plays at one of the slowest tempos in the country. Twenty-five of their 34 games were played against Quadrant 4 opponents. They were 1-2 in Quadrant 3 games, with one of those wins in overtime against George Washington. This is a team whose national rankings are better on offense than on defense, despite their stronger showing without the basketball in conference play.

The Eagles take a lot of 3s, as nearly 45% of their shot attempts are triple tries. They're shooting over 35% on them, too, so they've been good at it, but playing in the small barns of the Patriot League features much different sightlines than what they'll see in the bigger venues, even just playing at UD Arena.

If American wins on Wednesday, their prize is a trip to Raleigh to get pummeled in front of a very pro-Duke crowd just up the road from Durham. Facing a Mount St. Mary's team without Carmelo Pacheco and Terrell Ard Jr. means the play-in game should be played to a very slow pace, as the Eagles, to put it nicely, move methodically and the Mountaineers played games to 65, 59, and 64 possessions in the MAAC Tournament, much slower than their season average.

EAST REGION

#16 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

100-1

WIN REGION

500-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
67.6 (308)

DEFENSIVE PPG
68.1 (57)

POSSESSIONS
62 (339)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.057 (251)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.136 (231)

OFFENSIVE FG%
43.9% (202)

DEFENSIVE FG%
46.1% (274)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
35.1% (103)

FREE THROW %
75.9% (57)

REBOUNDING %
47.8% (283)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.146 (169)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.9% (178)

DEFENSIVE TO%
15.6% (124)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

0.5%

SWEET 16

0.0%

ELITE 8

0.0%

FINAL FOUR

0.0%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

MOUNT ST MARY'S MOUNTAINEERS

HEAD COACH
Donny Lind

2024-25 RECORD
22-12 SU, 22-11 ATS, 14-19 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
66.9 (234)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-4.5 (238)

BETTOR RATING
7.5 (294)

MOMENTUM RATING
-1.4 (194)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

The magic of March made a visit to the MAAC Tournament, where Mount St. Mary's, missing arguably their two best players due to injury, won three games in three days to secure the conference's lone bid to the Big Dance. First-year head coach Donny Lind, a video coordinator for VCU during their 2011 Final Four run, spent over a decade as an assistant before getting a team to call his own.

And now The Mount is in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2021 and for the first time as a member of the MAAC. They've got a date in Dayton for a play-in game and you really do have to wonder how much is left in the tank after rallying in the absences of Carmelo Pacheco and Terrell Ard Jr. to leave Atlantic City as a champion.

To say that the Mountaineers filled those voids with a supreme defensive effort would be an understatement. They allowed 58, 55, and 49 points in the three games, holding their opponents to 15-of-75 from 3-point range at Boardwalk Hall. As a No. 6 seed, Mount St. Mary's is tied with Wofford for the highest seed from their conference tournament to make it into the Field of 68 and it is hard to glean too much from their full-season stats because Pacheco, who suffered a broken finger in the regular season finale, is a 47% 3-point shooter on 163 attempts and Ard, whose season is over, averaged just shy of 11 points and seven rebounds per contest.

Sheer effort on the defensive end of the floor helped the Mountaineers to their best three-game stretch of the season at the right time. This was a defense that ranked seventh in adjusted defensive efficiency during the conference portion of the regular season and fifth in eFG% defense. The Mountaineers also had the highest TO% on offense, which made life harder on that side of the ball. They even turned the ball over 45 times in the three MAAC Tournament wins. We'll see what kind of wave they can ride into southwest Ohio.

They'll take on American in Dayton. I'm way more interested in the total than the spread on this game, as Mount St. Mary's turns it over a ton and you can time American's games with a sundial. The Mountaineers also slowed down dramatically in the MAAC Tournament, playing to 65, 59, and 64 possessions. If they beat the Eagles, they will not beat Duke and hang on for dear life playing as slowly as possible to keep it respectable.

EAST REGION

#16 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

100-1

WIN REGION

500-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
69.5 (272)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70 (97)

POSSESSIONS
65.6 (148)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.038 (288)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.123 (205)

OFFENSIVE FG%
43.9% (203)

DEFENSIVE FG%
41.0% (33)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
34.9% (122)

FREE THROW %
73.0% (146)

REBOUNDING %
52.8% (47)

ASST/TO RATIO
0.996 (266)

OFFENSIVE TO%
18.9% (360)

DEFENSIVE TO%
13.8% (273)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

0.4%

SWEET 16

0.0%

ELITE 8

0.0%

FINAL FOUR

0.0%

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

STEVE MAKINEN'S MIDWEST REGION

POWER RATINGS GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 HOUSTON	#2 TENNESSEE	#3 KENTUCKY	#4 PURDUE	#5 CLEMSON	#6 ILLINOIS	#7 UCLA	#8 GONZAGA	#9 GEORGIA	#10 UTAH STATE	#11 TEXAS	#11 XAVIER	#12 MCNEESE STATE	#13 HIGH POINT	#14 TROY	#15 WOFFORD	#16 SIU EDWARDSVILLE
TEAM/SEED	RATING	93.2	90.8	87.5	85.7	86.5	87.8	85.2	90.4	83.2	81.1	81.6	83.2	81	77.7	75.3	73.7	67.9
#1 HOUSTON	93.2		2.4	5.7	7.5	6.7	5.4	8	2.8	10	12.1	11.6	10	12.2	15.5	17.9	19.5	25.3
#2 TENNESSEE	90.8	-2.4		3.3	5.1	4.3	3	5.6	0.4	7.6	9.7	9.2	7.6	9.8	13.1	15.5	17.1	22.9
#3 KENTUCKY	87.5	-5.7	-3.3		1.8	1	-0.3	2.3	-2.9	4.3	6.4	5.9	4.3	6.5	9.8	12.2	13.8	19.6
#4 PURDUE	85.7	-7.5	-5.1	-1.8		-0.8	-2.1	0.5	-4.7	2.5	4.6	4.1	2.5	4.7	8	10.4	12	17.8
#5 CLEMSON	86.5	-6.7	-4.3	-1	0.8		-1.3	1.3	-3.9	3.3	5.4	4.9	3.3	5.5	8.8	11.2	12.8	18.6
#6 ILLINOIS	87.8	-5.4	-3	0.3	2.1	1.3		2.6	-2.6	4.6	6.7	6.2	4.6	6.8	10.1	12.5	14.1	19.9
#7 UCLA	85.2	-8	-5.6	-2.3	-0.5	-1.3	-2.6		-5.2	2	4.1	3.6	2	4.2	7.5	9.9	11.5	17.3
#8 GONZAGA	90.4	-2.8	-0.4	2.9	4.7	3.9	2.6	5.2		7.2	9.3	8.8	7.2	9.4	12.7	15.1	16.7	22.5
#9 GEORGIA	83.2	-10	-7.6	-4.3	-2.5	-3.3	-4.6	-2	-7.2		2.1	1.6	0	2.2	5.5	7.9	9.5	15.3
#10 UTAH STATE	81.1	-12.1	-9.7	-6.4	-4.6	-5.4	-6.7	-4.1	-9.3	-2.1		-0.5	-2.1	0.1	3.4	5.8	7.4	13.2
#11 TEXAS	81.6	-11.6	-9.2	-5.9	-4.1	-4.9	-6.2	-3.6	-8.8	-1.6	0.5		-1.6	0.6	3.9	6.3	7.9	13.7
#11 XAVIER	83.2	-10	-7.6	-4.3	-2.5	-3.3	-4.6	-2	-7.2	0	2.1	1.6		2.2	5.5	7.9	9.5	15.3
#12 MCNEESE STATE	81	-12.2	-9.8	-6.5	-4.7	-5.5	-6.8	-4.2	-9.4	-2.2	-0.1	-0.6	-2.2		3.3	5.7	7.3	13.1
#13 HIGH POINT	77.7	-15.5	-13.1	-9.8	-8	-8.8	-10.1	-7.5	-12.7	-5.5	-3.4	-3.9	-5.5	-3.3		2.4	4	9.8
#14 TROY	75.3	-17.9	-15.5	-12.2	-10.4	-11.2	-12.5	-9.9	-15.1	-7.9	-5.8	-6.3	-7.9	-5.7	-2.4		1.6	7.4
#15 WOFFORD	73.7	-19.5	-17.1	-13.8	-12	-12.8	-14.1	-11.5	-16.7	-9.5	-7.4	-7.9	-9.5	-7.3	-4	-1.6		5.8
#16 SIU EDWARDSVILLE	67.9	-25.3	-22.9	-19.6	-17.8	-18.6	-19.9	-17.3	-22.5	-15.3	-13.2	-13.7	-15.3	-13.1	-9.8	-7.4	-5.8	

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, #1 seed Houston would hypothetically be listed as a 7.5-point favorite (-7.5) against #4 seed Purdue, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S MIDWEST REGION

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 HOUSTON	#2 TENNESSEE	#3 KENTUCKY	#4 PURDUE	#5 CLEMSON	#6 ILLINOIS	#7 UCLA	#8 GONZAGA	#9 GEORGIA	#10 UTAH STATE	#11 TEXAS	#11 XAVIER	#12 MCNEESE STATE	#13 HIGH POINT	#14 TROY	#15 WOFFORD	#16 SIU EDWARDSVILLE
TEAM/SEED	RATING	23.9	21.2	18.5	16.5	15	18.4	16.1	20.8	13.9	12.1	12.7	12.9	9.7	7	4.3	2.1	-3.6
#1 HOUSTON	23.9		2.7	5.4	7.4	8.9	5.5	7.8	3.1	10	11.8	11.2	11	14.2	16.9	19.6	21.8	27.5
#2 TENNESSEE	21.2	-2.7		2.7	4.7	6.2	2.8	5.1	0.4	7.3	9.1	8.5	8.3	11.5	14.2	16.9	19.1	24.8
#3 KENTUCKY	18.5	-5.4	-2.7		2	3.5	0.1	2.4	-2.3	4.6	6.4	5.8	5.6	8.8	11.5	14.2	16.4	22.1
#4 PURDUE	16.5	-7.4	-4.7	-2		1.5	-1.9	0.4	-4.3	2.6	4.4	3.8	3.6	6.8	9.5	12.2	14.4	20.1
#5 CLEMSON	15	-8.9	-6.2	-3.5	-1.5		-3.4	-1.1	-5.8	1.1	2.9	2.3	2.1	5.3	8	10.7	12.9	18.6
#6 ILLINOIS	18.4	-5.5	-2.8	-0.1	1.9	3.4		2.3	-2.4	4.5	6.3	5.7	5.5	8.7	11.4	14.1	16.3	22
#7 UCLA	16.1	-7.8	-5.1	-2.4	-0.4	1.1	-2.3		-4.7	2.2	4	3.4	3.2	6.4	9.1	11.8	14	19.7
#8 GONZAGA	20.8	-3.1	-0.4	2.3	4.3	5.8	2.4	4.7		6.9	8.7	8.1	7.9	11.1	13.8	16.5	18.7	24.4
#9 GEORGIA	13.9	-10	-7.3	-4.6	-2.6	-1.1	-4.5	-2.2	-6.9		1.8	1.2	1	4.2	6.9	9.6	11.8	17.5
#10 UTAH STATE	12.1	-11.8	-9.1	-6.4	-4.4	-2.9	-6.3	-4	-8.7	-1.8		-0.6	-0.8	2.4	5.1	7.8	10	15.7
#11 TEXAS	12.7	-11.2	-8.5	-5.8	-3.8	-2.3	-5.7	-3.4	-8.1	-1.2	0.6		-0.2	3	5.7	8.4	10.6	16.3
#11 XAVIER	12.9	-11	-8.3	-5.6	-3.6	-2.1	-5.5	-3.2	-7.9	-1	0.8	0.2		3.2	5.9	8.6	10.8	16.5
#12 MCNEESE STATE	9.7	-14.2	-11.5	-8.8	-6.8	-5.3	-8.7	-6.4	-11.1	-4.2	-2.4	-3	-3.2		2.7	5.4	7.6	13.3
#13 HIGH POINT	7	-16.9	-14.2	-11.5	-9.5	-8	-11.4	-9.1	-13.8	-6.9	-5.1	-5.7	-5.9	-2.7		2.7	4.9	10.6
#14 TROY	4.3	-19.6	-16.9	-14.2	-12.2	-10.7	-14.1	-11.8	-16.5	-9.6	-7.8	-8.4	-8.6	-5.4	-2.7		2.2	7.9
#15 WOFFORD	2.1	-21.8	-19.1	-16.4	-14.4	-12.9	-16.3	-14	-18.7	-11.8	-10	-10.6	-10.8	-7.6	-4.9	-2.2		5.7
#16 SIU EDWARDSVILLE	-3.6	-27.5	-24.8	-22.1	-20.1	-18.6	-22	-19.7	-24.4	-17.5	-15.7	-16.3	-16.5	-13.3	-10.6	-7.9	-5.7	

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 tops rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #1 seed Houston would hypothetically be listed as a 5.5-point favorite (-5.5) against #6 seed Illinois, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S MIDWEST REGION

BETTORS RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 HOUSTON	#2 TENNESSEE	#3 KENTUCKY	#4 PURDUE	#5 CLEMSON	#6 ILLINOIS	#7 UCLA	#8 GONZAGA	#9 GEORGIA	#10 UTAH STATE	#11 TEXAS	#11 XAVIER	#12 MCNEESE STATE	#13 HIGH POINT	#14 TROY	#15 WOFFORD	#16 SIU EDWARDSVILLE
TEAM/SEED	RATING	-23.1	-19.8	-14.5	-16.1	-15.6	-17.3	-14.7	-18.9	-12.4	-11.6	-10.9	-12.5	-10.6	-7.6	-3.3	-1.8	3.9
#1 HOUSTON	-23.1		3.3	8.6	7	7.5	5.8	8.4	4.2	10.7	11.5	12.2	10.6	12.5	15.5	19.8	21.3	27
#2 TENNESSEE	-19.8	-3.3		5.3	3.7	4.2	2.5	5.1	0.9	7.4	8.2	8.9	7.3	9.2	12.2	16.5	18	23.7
#3 KENTUCKY	-14.5	-8.6	-5.3		-1.6	-1.1	-2.8	-0.2	-4.4	2.1	2.9	3.6	2	3.9	6.9	11.2	12.7	18.4
#4 PURDUE	-16.1	-7	-3.7	1.6		0.5	-1.2	1.4	-2.8	3.7	4.5	5.2	3.6	5.5	8.5	12.8	14.3	20
#5 CLEMSON	-15.6	-7.5	-4.2	1.1	-0.5		-1.7	0.9	-3.3	3.2	4	4.7	3.1	5	8	12.3	13.8	19.5
#6 ILLINOIS	-17.3	-5.8	-2.5	2.8	1.2	1.7		2.6	-1.6	4.9	5.7	6.4	4.8	6.7	9.7	14	15.5	21.2
#7 UCLA	-14.7	-8.4	-5.1	0.2	-1.4	-0.9	-2.6		-4.2	2.3	3.1	3.8	2.2	4.1	7.1	11.4	12.9	18.6
#8 GONZAGA	-18.9	-4.2	-0.9	4.4	2.8	3.3	1.6	4.2		6.5	7.3	8	6.4	8.3	11.3	15.6	17.1	22.8
#9 GEORGIA	-12.4	-10.7	-7.4	-2.1	-3.7	-3.2	-4.9	-2.3	-6.5		0.8	1.5	-0.1	1.8	4.8	9.1	10.6	16.3
#10 UTAH STATE	-11.6	-11.5	-8.2	-2.9	-4.5	-4	-5.7	-3.1	-7.3	-0.8		0.7	-0.9	1	4	8.3	9.8	15.5
#11 TEXAS	-10.9	-12.2	-8.9	-3.6	-5.2	-4.7	-6.4	-3.8	-8	-1.5	-0.7		-1.6	0.3	3.3	7.6	9.1	14.8
#11 XAVIER	-12.5	-10.6	-7.3	-2	-3.6	-3.1	-4.8	-2.2	-6.4	0.1	0.9	1.6		1.9	4.9	9.2	10.7	16.4
#12 MCNEESE STATE	-10.6	-12.5	-9.2	-3.9	-5.5	-5	-6.7	-4.1	-8.3	-1.8	-1	-0.3	-1.9		3	7.3	8.8	14.5
#13 HIGH POINT	-7.6	-15.5	-12.2	-6.9	-8.5	-8	-9.7	-7.1	-11.3	-4.8	-4	-3.3	-4.9	-3		4.3	5.8	11.5
#14 TROY	-3.3	-19.8	-16.5	-11.2	-12.8	-12.3	-14	-11.4	-15.6	-9.1	-8.3	-7.6	-9.2	-7.3	-4.3		1.5	7.2
#15 WOFFORD	-1.8	-21.3	-18	-12.7	-14.3	-13.8	-15.5	-12.9	-17.1	-10.6	-9.8	-9.1	-10.7	-8.8	-5.8	-1.5		5.7
#16 SIU EDWARDSVILLE	3.9	-27	-23.7	-18.4	-20	-19.5	-21.2	-18.6	-22.8	-16.3	-15.5	-14.8	-16.4	-14.5	-11.5	-7.2	-5.7	

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 tops rating and subtracting the team's rating listed on the left. For example, #1 seed Houston would hypothetically be listed as a 7-point favorite (-7) against #4 seed Purdue, should the teams match up in the tournament, based on this rating.

STEVE MAKINEN'S MIDWEST REGION

MOMENTUM RATING GRID

	TEAM/SEED	#1 HOUSTON	#2 TENNESSEE	#3 KENTUCKY	#4 PURDUE	#5 CLEMSON	#6 ILLINOIS	#7 UCLA	#8 GONZAGA	#9 GEORGIA	#10 UTAH STATE	#11 TEXAS	#11 XAVIER	#12 MCNEESE STATE	#13 HIGH POINT	#14 TROY	#15 WOFFORD	#16 SIU EDWARDSVILLE
TEAM/SEED	RATING	23.1	18.1	17.9	13	20.2	13.9	15.7	22.2	15.2	12.3	8.6	14	11.7	10.2	6.5	6.4	-0.1
#1 HOUSTON	23.1		5	5.2	10.1	2.9	9.2	7.4	0.9	7.9	10.8	14.5	9.1	11.4	12.9	16.6	16.7	23.2
#2 TENNESSEE	18.1	-5		0.2	5.1	-2.1	4.2	2.4	-4.1	2.9	5.8	9.5	4.1	6.4	7.9	11.6	11.7	18.2
#3 KENTUCKY	17.9	-5.2	-0.2		4.9	-2.3	4	2.2	-4.3	2.7	5.6	9.3	3.9	6.2	7.7	11.4	11.5	18
#4 PURDUE	13	-10.1	-5.1	-4.9		-7.2	-0.9	-2.7	-9.2	-2.2	0.7	4.4	-1	1.3	2.8	6.5	6.6	13.1
#5 CLEMSON	20.2	-2.9	2.1	2.3	7.2		6.3	4.5	-2	5	7.9	11.6	6.2	8.5	10	13.7	13.8	20.3
#6 ILLINOIS	13.9	-9.2	-4.2	-4	0.9	-6.3		-1.8	-8.3	-1.3	1.6	5.3	-0.1	2.2	3.7	7.4	7.5	14
#7 UCLA	15.7	-7.4	-2.4	-2.2	2.7	-4.5	1.8		-6.5	0.5	3.4	7.1	1.7	4	5.5	9.2	9.3	15.8
#8 GONZAGA	22.2	-0.9	4.1	4.3	9.2	2	8.3	6.5		7	9.9	13.6	8.2	10.5	12	15.7	15.8	22.3
#9 GEORGIA	15.2	-7.9	-2.9	-2.7	2.2	-5	1.3	-0.5	-7		2.9	6.6	1.2	3.5	5	8.7	8.8	15.3
#10 UTAH STATE	12.3	-10.8	-5.8	-5.6	-0.7	-7.9	-1.6	-3.4	-9.9	-2.9		3.7	-1.7	0.6	2.1	5.8	5.9	12.4
#11 TEXAS	8.6	-14.5	-9.5	-9.3	-4.4	-11.6	-5.3	-7.1	-13.6	-6.6	-3.7		-5.4	-3.1	-1.6	2.1	2.2	8.7
#11 XAVIER	14	-9.1	-4.1	-3.9	1	-6.2	0.1	-1.7	-8.2	-1.2	1.7	5.4		2.3	3.8	7.5	7.6	14.1
#12 MCNEESE STATE	11.7	-11.4	-6.4	-6.2	-1.3	-8.5	-2.2	-4	-10.5	-3.5	-0.6	3.1	-2.3		1.5	5.2	5.3	11.8
#13 HIGH POINT	10.2	-12.9	-7.9	-7.7	-2.8	-10	-3.7	-5.5	-12	-5	-2.1	1.6	-3.8	-1.5		3.7	3.8	10.3
#14 TROY	6.5	-16.6	-11.6	-11.4	-6.5	-13.7	-7.4	-9.2	-15.7	-8.7	-5.8	-2.1	-7.5	-5.2	-3.7		0.1	6.6
#15 WOFFORD	6.4	-16.7	-11.7	-11.5	-6.6	-13.8	-7.5	-9.3	-15.8	-8.8	-5.9	-2.2	-7.6	-5.3	-3.8	-0.1		6.5
#16 SIU EDWARDSVILLE	-0.1	-23.2	-18.2	-18	-13.1	-20.3	-14	-15.8	-22.3	-15.3	-12.4	-8.7	-14.1	-11.8	-10.3	-6.6	-6.5	

HOW TO USE THIS GRID

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HOUSTON

COUGARS

HEAD COACH
Kelvin Sampson

2024-25 RECORD
30-4 SU, 18-16 ATS, 13-20 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
93.2 (4)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
23.9 (4)

BETTOR RATING
-23.1 (4)

MOMENTUM RATING
23.1 (5)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Years of excellent regular seasons have not produced a National Championship for Kelvin Sampson and the Cougars. Another top-tier record is in the books heading into the NCAA Tournament, as Houston looks a lot like the team that we are used to seeing except for one very big, very important difference.

This year's Cougars spent a good chunk of the season ranked in the top five in 3P%. Houston has finished in the top 20 in adjusted defensive efficiency every year for Bart Torvik since 2017, but they haven't really had an offense that makes enough shots. Even this year's team still ranks in the 260s in 2P%, but this year's bunch is firing away at nearly 40% from 3 and that could make all the difference.

As usual, the Cougars have a stellar turnover margin and are a force to be reckoned with on the offensive glass. They are relentless on defense when it comes to challenging shots and secured their fifth straight season in the top 10 in 2P% defense and eighth straight in the top 25. But, it's the perimeter offense that could make all the difference, led by a trio of 40+% 3-point shooters in L.J. Cryer, Emanuel Sharp, and Milos Uzan.

Houston's run of five straight Sweet 16 appearances is nothing to scoff at, and they have a Final Four and an Elite Eight appearance in there as well, but a title appearance has evaded them to this point and the way that they've been bogged down in the offensive half-court has had a lot to do with that. Too many empty possessions in slow-paced games against the caliber of competition in the Big Dance have led to some early exits. Maybe this year will be different.

The Big 12 Tournament champs might have a very interesting second-round game on their hands if Gonzaga beats Georgia. That is a top-10 KenPom matchup in the second round, as the Selection Committee has once again put its best foot forward in terms of trying to cut down dangerous mid-majors. To be honest, Clemson and Purdue are pretty strong 5 and 4 seeds, respectively. For winning the Big 12 and being the No. 3 overall seed, Houston has a tough road to the Elite Eight and Final Four.



MIDWEST REGION

#1 SEED

ODDS TO...

REACH SWEET 16

-350

WIN REGION

+105

WIN TITLE

+600

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
74.2 (132)

DEFENSIVE PPG
58.5 (1)

POSSESSIONS
59.4 (360)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.29 (7)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.889 (1)

OFFENSIVE FG%
45.8% (92)

DEFENSIVE FG%
38.3% (4)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
39.8% (4)

FREE THROW %
74.1% (112)

REBOUNDING %
53.4% (33)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.288 (91)

OFFENSIVE TO%
12.2% (13)

DEFENSIVE TO%
18.9% (14)

% CHANCE TO REACH

2ND ROUND

97.1%

SWEET 16

61.1%

ELITE 8

45.0%

FINAL FOUR

30.2%

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

TENNESSEE

VOLUNTEERS

HEAD COACH
Rick Barnes

2024-25 RECORD
27-7 SU, 18-16 ATS, 15-19 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
90.8 (6)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
21.2 (6)

BETTOR RATING
-19.8 (7)

MOMENTUM RATING
18.1 (17)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Rick Barnes, we meet again. If patterns are to be believed, then Tennessee is going to the Final Four. In four NCAA Tournament appearances since COVID forced the cancellation of the 2020 installment, the Volunteers have been knocked out in the Round of 64, Round of 32, Sweet 16, and Elite Eight. The 3-1 record in the NCAA Tournament for Barnes last season raised his NCAA Tournament record to 30-28.

For all the talent he has had at Texas and now Tennessee, deep tourney runs have evaded him. Last year's Elite Eight appearance was his first since 2008 with the Longhorns. If the Volunteers can stay there, this will be the fifth Tennessee team that has finished in the top 10 under his watch per KenPom and Bart Torvik's rankings. This one statistically resembles most of them - a team that shines on defense and is good on offense, but doesn't shoot as well as the other elite teams.

One big change from last season is that Tennessee ranks in the 330s in adjusted tempo per Torvik after finishing 80th during the 2023-24 campaign. The slower pace has allowed Barnes to tighten up his rotations a bit, as he's been a little more reliant on his starters than he was previously. The Vols rank in the 150s in 3P% offense, but the top 70 in 2P% offense. Given that they've taken a 3 on nearly 43% of their shot attempts with distance shooting not being a real strength, you can see why the Vols struggle in the offensive half-court. They're just not creative enough with their plays and sets.

The Vols should be fine early in the tournament, and they did go 11-8 in Quadrant 1 games, including a 7-7 record in Quadrant 1-A games, which accounted for five of their six SEC losses and the loss to Florida in the SEC Tournament final. As the level of competition increases, that's where you might see Tennessee's offensive half-court inconsistencies show up.

I wouldn't put Tennessee on upset alert against Wofford, but the Terriers love to fire away from deep and will test the Vols' top-ranked 3P% defense. Utah State eked out wins over Saint Mary's and San Diego State, which makes me think they can hang a bit with Tennessee if they get past UCLA, who I believe can hang with Tennessee. And then Kentucky beat Tennessee twice. Barnes & Co. have a lot of landmines to avoid on their attempted march to the Elite Eight.

MIDWEST REGION

#2 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

-270

WIN REGION

+390

WIN TITLE

16-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
74.7 (120)

DEFENSIVE PPG
62.3 (6)

POSSESSIONS
61.4 (353)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.25 (18)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.906 (2)

OFFENSIVE FG%
45.5% (111)

DEFENSIVE FG%
38.0% (1)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
34.1% (159)

FREE THROW %
74.2% (111)

REBOUNDING %
54.0% (19)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.476 (30)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.6% (72)

DEFENSIVE TO%
15.6% (123)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

89.0%

SWEET 16

59.4%

ELITE 8

36.8%

FINAL FOUR

18.3%

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

KENTUCKY WILDCATS

HEAD COACH
Mark Pope

2024-25 RECORD
22-11 SU, 16-17 ATS, 19-14 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
87.5 (17)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
18.5 (12)

BETTOR RATING
-14.5 (25)

MOMENTUM RATING
17.9 (18)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

For the first time since 2008, Kentucky goes into the tournament coached by somebody other than John Calipari. That was a one-and-done appearance for Billy Gillispie, as the Wildcats lost in the first round as an 11 seed to Marquette. After failing to reach the NCAA Tournament the next season, Gillispie was fired and Calipari took over, leading the Wildcats to a National Championship in just three seasons.

Coincidentally, that is the last time that Kentucky cut down the nets at the end of the NCAA Tournament. We're talking about a program that hasn't made it out of the first weekend since 2019, though the COVID year took away what was a really good Wildcats team. But, the point here is that the bar isn't terribly high for Mark Pope in his first Big Dance chaperoning the Wildcats.

We've seen it all from the 'Cats in Pope's first season. They are one of three teams to have beaten Duke. They also lost by 20 on a neutral to an Ohio State team that is not in the field and by 10 at home to Calipari's Arkansas Razorbacks. They also finished the regular season with 10 Quadrant 1 wins and seven Quadrant 1-A wins, which is how they got such a high seed with double-digit losses.

This is a very good offensive team. It is not a very good defensive team. The Wildcats are a top-30 team by 3P% on defense, but they struggle badly to defend inside the arc and are among the worst power-conference teams in TO%. But, they shoot extremely well and so they've been able to overcome the porousness of the defense. This feels like a team with a wide range of outcomes in the tourney.

Of the first-round double-digit spreads, Kentucky vs. Troy is one of the most interesting, as the Trojans are extremely aggressive about trying to get to the rim and Kentucky does not defend well if you can get inside. On the other hand, Troy shoots a lot of 3s and is terrible at it, ranking in the high 330s nationally in 3P%. It'll give us a look at what we can expect from the Wildcats moving forward for a likely matchup with Illinois.

MIDWEST REGION

#3 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

**ODDS
TO...**

+100

WIN REGION

10-1

WIN TITLE

55-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
85.3 (4)

DEFENSIVE PPG
77.9 (314)

POSSESSIONS
68.2 (37)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.281 (10)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.018 (45)

OFFENSIVE FG%
48.2% (22)

DEFENSIVE FG%
43.7% (152)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
37.4% (25)

FREE THROW %
73.8% (119)

REBOUNDING %
52.4% (69)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.523 (19)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.3% (51)

DEFENSIVE TO%
12.3% (338)

**% CHANCE
TO REACH**

2ND ROUND

81.4%

SWEET 16

44.5%

ELITE 8

21.7%

FINAL FOUR

9.2%

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

PURDUE BOILERMAKERS

HEAD COACH
Matt Painter

2024-25 RECORD
22-11 SU, 17-16 ATS, 19-13 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85.7 (24)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
16.5 (19)

BETTOR RATING
-16.1 (19)

MOMENTUM RATING
13 (37)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

All aboard the Matt Painter March Madness Roller Coaster! Cedar Point and Disney can barely hold a candle to the peaks, valleys, twists, and turns of Painter's Purdue tenure. Two seasons ago, he became the second No. 1 seed to lose to a No. 16 seed when his Boilermakers lost to Fairleigh Dickinson. Last season, Purdue lost to UConn in the championship game.

Three seasons ago, Purdue had a first-round exit as a No. 4 seed. So, I guess we'll see how it goes with them as a No. 4 seed this year. As you would expect, this team is dramatically different without Zach Edey. The Boilermakers actually had the lowest rate on shot attempts at the rim in the Big Ten, but continued the excellent 3-point shooting that helped propel them to a No. 1 seed and a runner-up finish last year.

But, this is an objectively bad defensive team on the interior without Edey's 7-foot-4 presence. The two 7-footers on the roster rarely play and Purdue does not have the length inside to stop opponents effectively. This is a team that ranks in the 340s in 2P% defense and remember, there are 364 Division I teams. For what it's worth, last year's team was in the 60s in 2P% defense per Torvik. To make it for it, they are a top-25 team in 3P% defense.

So Purdue enters the tournament as a really high-variance team in my opinion. They'll likely have to outscore teams in high-scoring games to move on. And they're plenty capable of it, as they are an elite shooting team. They're a top-10 team from beyond the arc and a top-40 team inside of it. They share the ball very well and, like most Big Ten teams, take good care of it. To Painter's credit, he really scheduled up in the non-conference, as Purdue hits the Big Dance with wins over Alabama and Ole Miss on their resume.

I really hope somebody in the Selection Committee room made a Dumb & Dumber joke about the 4 Boilermakers line on the bracket. But, they probably didn't because they hate fun. Anyway, I am highly intrigued by this game against High Point, given that Matt Painter's had plenty of NCAA Tournament disappointments. I feel like anything could happen in that 4/5/12/13 pod in the Midwest Region and I wouldn't be surprised.

MIDWEST REGION

#4 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

+120

WIN REGION

13-1

WIN TITLE

80-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
77.9 (62)

DEFENSIVE PPG
71.1 (136)

POSSESSIONS
62.8 (312)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.29 (8)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.017 (43)

OFFENSIVE FG%
49.0% (8)

DEFENSIVE FG%
45.5% (244)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
38.5% (9)

FREE THROW %
73.0% (147)

REBOUNDING %
51.1% (124)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.541 (16)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.6% (79)

DEFENSIVE TO%
15.5% (129)

% CHANCE TO REACH

2ND ROUND

69.9%

SWEET 16

35.9%

ELITE 8

11.4%

FINAL FOUR

5.1%

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

CLEMSON TIGERS

HEAD COACH
Brad Brownell

2024-25 RECORD
27-6 SU, 20-13 ATS, 17-16 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
86.5 (19)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
15 (28)

BETTOR RATING
-15.6 (20)

MOMENTUM RATING
20.2 (13)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

For the first time since making four straight NCAA Tournament appearances from 2008-11, Clemson is dancing in consecutive seasons. The only ACC team to knock off Duke during the regular season obviously has a lot of promise and potential, but head coach Brad Brownell is just 6-7 in NCAA Tournament games in his career. He did make the most of his opportunity last season, taking the No. 6 seed Tigers to the Elite Eight.

We can debate the merits of the ACC beyond Duke, Louisville, and this Tigers team, but you can only play the teams that are on the schedule. Against those teams, Clemson was really good, ranking third in the conference in adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency. They also had some good, but not needle-moving wins against teams like San Francisco and Penn State to go with a needle-mover over Kentucky.

The areas where Clemson does stand out are important traits in the NCAA Tournament. They shoot 3s extremely well, ranking in the top 30 per Bart Torvik in 3P%. They have a lot more takeaways than giveaways, ranking in the top 75 in both areas and even top 50 on defense. They are a strong offensive rebounding team, due in large part to Ian Schieffelin and Viktor Lahkin. They have solid, experienced guards who are good from 3 and good from the free throw line in Jaeden Zackery and Chase Hunter.

They also don't stand out defensively in terms of contested shots, as they rank outside the top 100 in 2P% and 3P% defense. And they're not a great defensive rebounding team. That's why you worry a bit about Clemson, as the ACC was not a particularly strong conference, so a deeper run against gifted shot-making teams or teams that can cancel out or gain an advantage on the offensive glass would be bad matchups.

And that is precisely what Clemson got in the first meeting. McNeese can score and bang down low. Of course, Clemson is better at scoring from 3 against a much tougher schedule, so this should be a very enticing game to watch. Both teams play at below average tempos, but both teams can score. Both teams also defend the rim well, though, again, Clemson's numbers are against stronger teams. Like I said with Purdue, anything can happen in this 4/5/12/13 pod.



MIDWEST REGION

#5 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+140

WIN REGION

14-1

WIN TITLE

65-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
76.3 (87)

DEFENSIVE PPG
65.7 (23)

POSSESSIONS
62.3 (326)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.226 (26)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.983 (20)

OFFENSIVE FG%
46.5% (64)

DEFENSIVE FG%
42.7% (91)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
37.2% (31)

FREE THROW %
76.6% (41)

REBOUNDING %
52.2% (75)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.377 (55)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.5% (64)

DEFENSIVE TO%
17.4% (44)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

67.2%

SWEET 16

40.4%

ELITE 8

14.5%

FINAL FOUR

7.1%

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

ILLINOIS

FIGHTING ILLINI

HEAD COACH
Brad Underwood

2024-25 RECORD
21-12 SU, 16-17 ATS, 20-13 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
87.8 (14)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
18.4 (13)

BETTOR RATING
-17.3 (14)

MOMENTUM RATING
13.9 (35)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Brad Underwood cut down a few demons in last season's NCAA Tournament, as the Illini reached the Elite Eight for the first time since 2005 in their fourth straight invite to the Big Dance. Underwood's three previous appearances with Illinois resulted in first-weekend exits, including one as a No. 1 seed in 2021.

It will be interesting to see what Underwood has in store for an encore, given that none of last season's heroes are on the roster. Seniors Terrence Shannon Jr., Marcus Domask, Coleman Hawkins, and Quincy Guerrier either left for another program or moved on in their careers. Instead, Underwood has a very young roster with just one senior in transfer Ben Humrichous. What Illinois is lacking in experience, they more than make up for in talent.

This is a top-15 offense and a top-50 defense by the efficiency metrics, which is quite a feat both ways when you consider Illinois ranks well into the 300s in 3P% offense and is among the 10 worst defenses in the nation in TO%. Unfortunately, the Illini enter the field with one of the 30 highest 3P Rates in the country, so they'll have to find a way to make more long-distance shots if they want to replicate or even surpass last season's run.

If that doesn't happen, the floor is still high for Illinois because they are an outstanding team on both ends of the court and around the paint. Illinois is a top-20 team in 2P% offense and defense per Bart Torvik and they're a top-35 rebounding team on either end. You can win a lot of games that way. And, if the 3-point shooting can get hot for a short period of time, Illinois has the talent and the potential to be very, very dangerous.

The Illini have to wait to find out if they play Xavier or Texas, but I like them against either team, so it's irrelevant to me. I like this draw for Illinois, as Kentucky can score, but can't defend. Illinois doesn't have to be dependent on 3s to upend the Wildcats. Illinois and Tennessee already played in Champaign and it was a 66-64 win for the Vols with a layup at the buzzer, but the Illini were in the game going just 15-of-51 from the floor. A few 3s here and there and Underwood, whose team dealt with a lot of illness during Big Ten play, has tons of upside.



MIDWEST REGION

#6 SEED

ODDS
TO...

+140

WIN REGION

15-1

WIN TITLE

70-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
83.8 (9)

DEFENSIVE PPG
74.6 (235)

POSSESSIONS
68.6 (21)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.258 (17)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.996 (31)

OFFENSIVE FG%
45.0% (140)

DEFENSIVE FG%
42.2% (70)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
31.1% (316)

FREE THROW %
75.9% (55)

REBOUNDING %
55.8% (7)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.297 (86)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.4% (55)

DEFENSIVE TO%
11.1% (359)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

60.3%

SWEET 16

33.6%

ELITE 8

16.3%

FINAL FOUR

6.7%

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

UCLA BRUINS

HEAD COACH
Mick Cronin

2024-25 RECORD
22-10 SU, 18-13 ATS, 16-16 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
85.2 (27)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
16.1 (22)

BETTOR RATING
-14.7 (24)

MOMENTUM RATING
15.7 (26)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Wins and losses matter, but it is fair to wonder where UCLA would have been ranked if not for their only stretch of games with consecutive losses this season. Mick Cronin's team lost at Nebraska on Jan. 4, came home and got blown out by Michigan, and then went to the East Coast, where they lost to Maryland and Rutgers on Jan. 10 and 13, respectively. That's it. The Bruins lost two games before that stretch and just four games after, including the loss to Wisconsin in their first Big Ten Tournament game.

We knew, and Aaron Moore even wrote about it in our preseason College Basketball Betting Guide, that realignment and the new travel would impact some teams more than others. For that 10-day stretch, UCLA found out firsthand what it's like in the Big Ten after being a member of the Pacific Conference in some capacity from 1927-2024.

The end result is a slightly under-seeded team, as UCLA was fourth in adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency during the regular season in the Big Ten according to Bart Torvik's rankings. Cronin's crew has been a top-20 defensive unit most of the season and a well above average offensive group that ranked in the 80s in 2P% and 3P% before a bad showing against the Badgers. Shooting the ball well is a huge attribute when you are among the nation's leaders in TO% on defense.

Sure, we can hold the non-conference schedule against the Bruins. After all, KenPom has it graded well into the 300s, even with wins over Gonzaga and Arizona, plus what was then a Quadrant 1 loss to North Carolina. Personally, I don't love how UCLA ups the degree of difficulty by rarely getting to the rim, ranking 357th in Close Two shot share per Torvik. But, it works for them and Cronin is back in the Big Dance, where he's taken the Bruins to the Final Four and two Sweet 16s in three appearances.

The game against Utah State is quite a difference of styles, as the Aggies have a Rim & 3 Rate of 88% and UCLA is at 65.3%. The Aggies get to the rim a lot more, while UCLA takes a lot of mid-range jumpers, a blind spot for the Utah State defense during the season. Both teams also force a lot of 3s. That is a tricky handicap and maybe the toughest of the first round, as the winner likely gets Tennessee and I think has a chance to win that game, too.



**ODDS
TO...**

+320

WIN REGION

28-1

WIN TITLE

120-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
74.8 (118)

DEFENSIVE PPG
65.7 (24)

POSSESSIONS
62.9 (307)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.221 (34)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.963 (14)

OFFENSIVE FG%
46.6% (59)

DEFENSIVE FG%
43.1% (111)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
35.2% (100)

FREE THROW %
70.3% (248)

REBOUNDING %
51.2% (119)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.543 (15)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.7% (82)

DEFENSIVE TO%
20.1% (4)

**% CHANCE
TO REACH**

2ND ROUND

60.3%

SWEET 16

25.2%

ELITE 8

12.3%

FINAL FOUR

4.6%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

GONZAGA BULLDOGS

HEAD COACH
Mark Few

2024-25 RECORD
25-8 SU, 14-19 ATS, 19-14 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
90.4 (7)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
20.8 (7)

BETTOR RATING
-18.9 (9)

MOMENTUM RATING
22.2 (7)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Death, taxes, and Mark Few in the NCAA Tournament. Few is in his 26th season with the Bulldogs and they've been in the NCAA Tournament 25 times. COVID was the only thing to stop it from being 26, as Gonzaga would have gone dancing in 2020 and likely would have been a No. 1 seed.

Despite a top-15 ranking for Bart Torvik and a top-10 ranking for KenPom, Gonzaga enters the field with their lowest seed since 2016. That No. 11 seed made it to the Sweet 16 and lost 63-60 to No. 10 seed Syracuse after knocking off No. 6 Seton Hall and No. 3 Utah. Few has silenced a lot of critics over the last decade. Gonzaga had a lot of first and second-round exits early in his tenure, but they've been runner-up twice since 2017 and have made it to at least the Sweet 16 in every season since 2014-15.

This version stacks up pretty similar to past versions. They're playing a little slower and aren't as successful from deep, ranking outside the top 100 in 3P% for the first time since 2010. However, they also have their lowest TO% in the Few era and rank in the top five nationally in that department. They also have their highest TO% since 2021 and their best ranking in adjusted defensive efficiency in the last three seasons.

Non-conference wins over Baylor and San Diego State are overshadowed by losses to West Virginia, Kentucky, UConn, and UCLA, hence the lower seed. The Bulldogs also lost to Saint Mary's twice before beating them when it mattered most in the WCC Tournament. Gonzaga only has a 9-8 record against Quadrant 1 or 2 opponents, but this team is as dangerous as ever, especially if they can find a few more 3s to fall after going just 5-of-32 from deep in their last two games.

Immediate money on Selection Sunday came in on Gonzaga against Georgia and I see no reason to disagree. The prospective top-10 KenPom matchup between Gonzaga and Houston being a second-round game is a travesty, but why would we expect anything more from the Selection Committee? If the 'Zags can beat the Cougars, I think they may very well win the region. That, however, is a big "if".

MIDWEST REGION

#8 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO... **+340**

WIN REGION

+950

WIN TITLE

50-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
86.6 (2)

DEFENSIVE PPG
69.6 (87)

POSSESSIONS
67.5 (53)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.289 (9)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.984 (21)

OFFENSIVE FG%
50.0% (2)

DEFENSIVE FG%
41.4% (46)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
34.4% (147)

FREE THROW %
80.1% (5)

REBOUNDING %
54.0% (18)

ASST/TO RATIO
2.084 (1)

OFFENSIVE TO%
11.4% (7)

DEFENSIVE TO%
16.0% (97)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

69.9%

SWEET 16

30.9%

ELITE 8

20.8%

FINAL FOUR

12.3%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

GEORGIA BULLDOGS

HEAD COACH
Michael White

2024-25 RECORD
20-12 SU, 17-15 ATS, 13-18 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
83.2 (37)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
13.9 (32)

BETTOR RATING
-12.4 (40)

MOMENTUM RATING
15.2 (28)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

For all of the success that Georgia football has had, it has been a long time since Georgia basketball has experienced the same. The Bulldogs are in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2015. They haven't won an NCAA Tournament game since 2002. They have one Elite Eight/Final Four appearance back in 1983 and two Sweet 16 appearances, with the last one in 1996.

A lot of credit goes to Michael White, who was fired from rival Florida after the 2021-22 season and signed on up the road in Athens. In his first season after Tom Crean's uninspiring tenure, the Bulldogs went 16-16, a 10-win improvement from their ghastly 6-26 record and 1-17 mark in conference play in Crean's final year. Now, the Bulldogs are in the Big Dance.

We have to call it like it is. Georgia was absolutely helped by the strength of the SEC, which elevated their strength of schedule enough to be viewed in a favorable light by the adjusted metrics. That being said, it isn't like they got an A and did no work on the group project. They had enough wins in conference play and a non-conference win over St. John's to gain a spot. They did, however, only go 4-11 in Quadrant 1 games, including a very fast SEC Tournament exit against Oklahoma.

As was the case for most of his seasons in Gainesville, White has a strong defense. The Bulldogs are a borderline top-25 team in adjusted defensive efficiency, as they rank in the top 35 nationally in 3P% and top 60 in 2P%, culminating in a top-35 mark in eFG% defense. On offense, however, they only really stand out in two areas. The Bulldogs are great on the offensive glass and, subsequently, get to the free throw line a lot. Thanks to the ORebs, the Bulldogs do take a high percentage of shots at the rim, which is why they're a top-100 offense in 2P%, but they are below the national average from beyond the arc.

Market confidence was not high on Georgia after the draw was released, as bettors flocked to back the Bulldogs from Washington in the game against Gonzaga. The Athens Bulldogs are a stout defensive team, though, and faced plenty of good offenses in the SEC. This one is truly on neutral ground in Wichita and I wonder if Georgia is a little better than the market feels they are.

MIDWEST REGION

#9 SEED

ODDS
TO...

REACH SWEET 16

10-1

WIN REGION

35-1

WIN TITLE

250-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
75.6 (104)

DEFENSIVE PPG
69.3 (76)

POSSESSIONS
64 (248)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.21 (41)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
0.98 (19)

OFFENSIVE FG%
46.4% (72)

DEFENSIVE FG%
40.9% (30)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
33.5% (194)

FREE THROW %
71.7% (205)

REBOUNDING %
53.0% (43)

ASST/TO RATIO
0.964 (283)

OFFENSIVE TO%
16.1% (278)

DEFENSIVE TO%
15.4% (137)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

30.2%

SWEET 16

7.8%

ELITE 8

3.7%

FINAL FOUR

1.5%

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

UTAH STATE

AGGIES

HEAD COACH
Jerrod Calhoun

2024-25 RECORD
26-7 SU, 16-16 ATS, 15-15 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
81.1 (51)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
12.1 (44)

BETTOR RATING
-11.6 (43)

MOMENTUM RATING
12.3 (41)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

You're never quite sure how some hires are going to work out, but Utah State's hire of Jerrod Calhoun seems to have been a good one. Calhoun replaced a really good one-and-done in Danny Sprinkle, who replaced a two-and-done in Ryan Odom, who was the UMBC head coach when the Retrievers became the first No. 16 seed to beat a No. 1. Odom replaced Craig Smith, who was only in Logan for three seasons.

In other words, Calhoun probably made a smart career move going to a place that is obviously a springboard for bigger and better gigs, but he also upheld the standard that Utah State has set. This is the seventh straight season that the Aggies have been a top-60 team for Bart Torvik and it is the third straight NCAA Tournament berth and fifth in seven seasons. Utah State also had an inside track at a berth in 2020 before COVID caused the cancellation of the tourney.

The seed line is slightly lower than last year when the Aggies were a No. 8 seed, but this team might be better. The Aggies are a top-20 team by adjusted offensive efficiency and 2P%, as well as a top-70 team in 3P%. They're also a great offensive rebounding team and have a TO% over 20% on defense.

Outside of forcing a lot of turnovers, though, the Aggies do have some defensive holes. They rank well into the 200s in defensive rebounding, free throw rate, and 2P% defense. They also project to be a bit of a high-variance team, as their opponents' 3P Rate was over 44% and they were a bottom-40 team in Assist Rate against. On offense, they took a 3 on over 42% of their shots and had a top-20 assist rate. In simpler terms, I think we could see high-scoring games with them however long they are in the field.

Utah State actually did well in the draw to get a team that is better on offense than defense, because so are they. UCLA's one claim to fame without the ball is taking it away, which, coincidentally, is also Utah State's. A game that is more about making shots than anything else is favorable for the Aggies and I think they have a very good chance here to meet up with Tennessee.



MIDWEST REGION

#10 SEED

ODDS
TO...

+800

REACH SWEET 16

WIN REGION

110-1

WIN TITLE

300-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
79.8 (36)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.5 (112)

POSSESSIONS
65.7 (141)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.266 (16)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.081 (115)

OFFENSIVE FG%
48.4% (17)

DEFENSIVE FG%
44.3% (189)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
35.8% (69)

FREE THROW %
70.2% (254)

REBOUNDING %
52.1% (78)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.587 (12)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.7% (80)

DEFENSIVE TO%
17.6% (38)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

39.8%

SWEET 16

13.0%

ELITE 8

4.9%

FINAL FOUR

1.4%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

TEXAS LONGHORNS

HEAD COACH
Rodney Terry

2024-25 RECORD
19-15 SU, 16-17 ATS, 21-12 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
81.6 (48)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
12.7 (41)

BETTOR RATING
-10.9 (47)

MOMENTUM RATING
8.6 (65)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

Two teams that had 6-12 records in SEC play made the NCAA Tournament. One of them is a No. 9 seed (Oklahoma). The other one has to fight for its life as a No. 11 seed ticketed for Dayton. That's where the Longhorns will be, as their overtime win over Texas A&M in the SEC Tournament seemed to barely push them over the finish line to get into the field. As far as Power Five teams go, the Longhorns played a really weak non-conference schedule, losing to UConn and Ohio State in their two biggest games.

This is a team that went 3-8 against Quadrant 1-A opponents, 7-10 against Quadrant 1, and even just 3-5 against Quadrant 2. It is also a team that lost seven of nine at the end of the regular season before beating Vanderbilt and Texas A&M in Nashville. It is hard to argue with the talent level of Rodney Terry's ballclub, but we haven't seen it consistently to say the least.

Elevated greatly by the conference schedule, Texas is a top-40 offense and a top-70 defense per the adjusted efficiency metrics per Bart Torvik and KenPom, who grades their defense about 10 spots higher. On offense, the Longhorns take very, very good care of the basketball and make a lot of 3s. On defense, they don't force many turnovers, but still foul a lot, as they play very physical, especially down low.

This is the second season for Terry and his second NCAA Tournament appearance, as Texas beat Colorado State in the 7 vs. 10 game last season and then gave No. 2 Tennessee a real scare in the second round. That team was rated much more favorably than this year's version, so we'll see it goes.

The Longhorns need to earn their way into the first round after being sent to Dayton to take on Xavier. It will be a hostile environment for the Longhorns, as you're going to see a lot more blue and white than burnt orange in Dayton, just an hour up the road from Xavier. By no means is it a bad matchup for the Longhorns, but I'm just not a fan of them. Also, whether they win or not, Illinois beats the winner of this game.



MIDWEST REGION

#11 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+900

WIN REGION

150-1

WIN TITLE

400-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
78.4 (55)

DEFENSIVE PPG
72.2 (170)

POSSESSIONS
65 (193)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.223 (32)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.025 (53)

OFFENSIVE FG%
46.2% (80)

DEFENSIVE FG%
42.4% (75)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
36.0% (66)

FREE THROW %
74.9% (86)

REBOUNDING %
50.6% (153)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.305 (80)

OFFENSIVE TO%
12.4% (19)

DEFENSIVE TO%
14.4% (219)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

17.6%

SWEET 16

7.8%

ELITE 8

3.0%

FINAL FOUR

0.9%

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

XAVIER MUSKETEERS

HEAD COACH
Sean Miller

2024-25 RECORD
21-11 SU, 18-14 ATS, 15-17 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
83.2 (38)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
12.9 (38)

BETTOR RATING
-12.5 (39)

MOMENTUM RATING
14 (34)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

In accordance with the Selection Committee just making it up on the fly, West Virginia, who beat both Gonzaga and Arizona in non-conference action, is out, while North Carolina and Xavier, with a combined 2-21 record against Quadrant 1 opponents, are in Dayton. This has the chance to be a de facto home game for Xavier, as Cincinnati and Dayton are less than an hour apart up I-75 North.

The Musketeers were 1-9 against Quadrant 1 opponents, and failed to win a game in the Big East Tournament, losing by a bucket to Marquette in a stunning finish. To their credit, they did finish the regular season with seven straight wins and every one of them was a must-win game to keep the NCAA Tournament dream alive. In that respect, I'll give them some props.

I also have to give Xavier some props for how well they've shot the basketball this season, as they rank in the top 10 at nearly 39% from 3 and 38% in Big East action. For being a top-40 team in adjusted defensive efficiency per Bart Torvik and a top-45 squad for KenPom, there isn't a whole lot that stands out. They ranked in the high 180s in 3P% against and low 160s in 2P% against. They were a good defensive rebounding team and played defense without fouling, but ranked seventh in eFG% defense in the 11-team Big East during conference play.

The last time Xavier was a No. 11 seed, they went all the way to the Elite Eight with wins over Maryland, Florida State, and Arizona back in 2017. They've won at least one NCAA Tournament game in each of their last five appearances, but the last time they failed to win a game was when they were shipped to Dayton for the First Four against NC State back in 2014.

Xavier may have lost to Marquette, but their recent form is why they were under consideration. Meanwhile, Texas's recent form leaves a lot to be desired, even with a couple wins in the SEC Tournament that got them into this position. The Musketeers got the early love in the betting market and that seems fair, but the winner of this game does not have a good matchup with Illinois on Friday in Milwaukee.



MIDWEST REGION

#11 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO... +750

WIN REGION

120-1

WIN TITLE

400-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
78 (59)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.9 (125)

POSSESSIONS
66.8 (77)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.211 (40)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.018 (46)

OFFENSIVE FG%
46.6% (57)

DEFENSIVE FG%
44.3% (192)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
38.8% (6)

FREE THROW %
79.4% (8)

REBOUNDING %
51.0% (129)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.51 (22)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.4% (139)

DEFENSIVE TO%
15.6% (119)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

22.2%

SWEET 16

10.0%

ELITE 8

3.8%

FINAL FOUR

1.2%

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

MCNEESE STATE COWBOYS

HEAD COACH
Will Wade

2024-25 RECORD
27-6 SU, 15-16 ATS, 14-16 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
81 (53)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
9.7 (59)

BETTOR RATING
-10.6 (52)

MOMENTUM RATING
11.7 (44)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

After steamrolling through the Southland Conference once again, the Men of McNeese State are invited to the Big Dance. Will Wade was not a coach that most athletic departments wanted to touch after his recruiting violations at LSU, but McNeese took the risk and it has absolutely paid off with a 57-10 record over two seasons and a 36-2 record in conference play. That is more wins than McNeese had in five seasons combined before Wade came on.

A strong case can be made that this year's team is better than last year's, which set a program record with 30 wins. The offense isn't quite as good with a pretty noticeable drop in 3P%, but the defense has been better about challenging 3s and contesting mid-range jumpers. It is hard to objectively evaluate McNeese's stats because they are operating on a different wavelength from the rest of the conference in terms of talent. And the Southland is really bad, something we can't say about any of the teams in the NCAA Tournament field.

That said, after playing a decent, but unspectacular non-conference schedule last year, McNeese held their own against Alabama and Mississippi State this time around, along with respectable losses against Liberty and Santa Clara. Their best win came against North Texas.

Last season, McNeese was paired up with a woefully under-seeded Gonzaga team and got blown out, as the Selection Committee did what it often does and cut off a dangerous mid-major at the knees. It was no surprise with Wade's history that they'd do that. Gonzaga also plays a finesse style of basketball and is a bad matchup for a McNeese team that wants to be physical and bang in a game that isn't played at a pace like what the Bulldogs want.

As usual, the Selection Committee adds in a couple Easter eggs with the draw. In this one, Clemson alum Will Wade faces the Tigers with McNeese. The Cowboys check a lot of concerning boxes for Clemson, as they bang on the boards, also force turnovers, and can shoot. There are some size worries for McNeese, something they don't deal with often in the Southland. That 4/5/12/13 pod in the Midwest could go a lot of different ways.

MIDWEST REGION

#12 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

+700

WIN REGION

90-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
75.3 (110)

DEFENSIVE PPG
64.1 (12)

POSSESSIONS
63.5 (279)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.187 (61)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.04 (67)

OFFENSIVE FG%
46.7% (55)

DEFENSIVE FG%
40.0% (13)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
35.6% (77)

FREE THROW %
70.7% (235)

REBOUNDING %
52.1% (81)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.254 (106)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.7% (86)

DEFENSIVE TO%
18.5% (21)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

32.8%

SWEET 16

14.1%

ELITE 8

3.0%

FINAL FOUR

1.0%

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

HIGH POINT PANTHERS

HEAD COACH
Alan Huss

2024-25 RECORD
29-5 SU, 17-15 ATS, 15-17 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
77.7 (78)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
7 (78)

BETTOR RATING
-7.6 (68)

MOMENTUM RATING
10.2 (56)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

One year after squandering home-court advantage in the Big South Conference Tournament, the unquestioned best team in the league took care of business in a neutral setting to go dancing for the first time as a Division I member. The Panthers are going to be a popular Cinderella pick thanks to some very impressive statistics, especially on offense.

Even with the weak schedule, the Panthers got a lot of respect in the adjusted offensive efficiency department because of their shot-making prowess. As a top-20 team in 2P% and a top-50 team in 3P% that has a low turnover rate and is good on the offensive glass, the Panthers are a top-30 team in offensive efficiency per Torvik and a little better than that for KenPom.

However, the Panthers played zero Quadrant 1 games and only one Quadrant 2 game, which came at home against North Texas. High Point does check some of the Cinderella boxes in terms of personnel. They're led by solid upperclassmen, including Kezza Giffa, D'Maurian Williams, and Kimani Hamilton, who all averaged more than 13 points per game. A lot of mid-major or low-major conference champions are really good on one end of the floor or the other and you really have to wonder how the Panthers fare defensively in the field.

That's because the step up in class is something to truly consider. Head coach Alan Huss has gone 56-14 in two seasons and 27-5 in conference regular season games, but double-digit seeds like the Panthers aren't playing comparable competition in March. Current Big South members have not won an NCAA Tournament game aside from one of the First Four games in Dayton since Winthrop beat Notre Dame in 2007.

High Point can shoot the heck out of the basketball. So can Purdue, but the Boilermakers are not very good on defense. Are they actually not very good or did Big Ten teams just pick them apart? The Boilermakers were among the 20 worst teams at defending 2s, but were a top-25 team at defending 3s. Can High Point get inside enough to take advantage? Or can they make enough 3s to overcome it if they can't? This one has potential to be a high-variance game for sure.



MIDWEST REGION

#13 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

12-1

WIN REGION

150-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
81.7 (17)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.5 (113)

POSSESSIONS
64 (250)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.224 (29)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.102 (152)

OFFENSIVE FG%
49.3% (5)

DEFENSIVE FG%
43.1% (114)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
36.6% (51)

FREE THROW %
76.4% (47)

REBOUNDING %
53.0% (44)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.236 (117)

OFFENSIVE TO%
13.2% (44)

DEFENSIVE TO%
14.3% (227)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

30.2%

SWEET 16

9.6%

ELITE 8

1.6%

FINAL FOUR

0.4%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

TROY TROJANS

HEAD COACH
Scott Cross

2024-25 RECORD
23-10 SU, 20-10 ATS, 14-17 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
75.3 (99)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
4.3 (102)

BETTOR RATING
-3.3 (115)

MOMENTUM RATING
6.5 (88)

TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

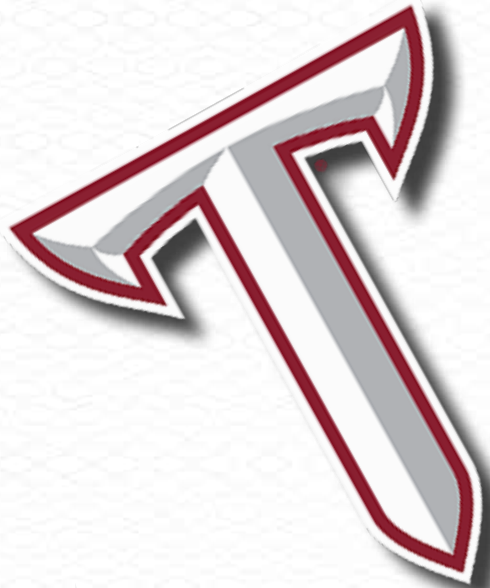
It took six seasons worth of gradual improvement, but Scott Cross and the Trojans are dancing for the first time since 2017. Troy is a really interesting team to me, as the Trojans get to the rim at a very high rate, ranking in the top 20 in shot share on Close Twos per Bart Torvik. They also take a ton of 3s, employing a lot of the analytics regarding shot selection that we've seen take the NBA and the college game by storm.

The problem is that they ranked in the 330s in 3P% out of 364 teams during the season, barely shooting above 30%. Nevertheless, it all came together in the Sun Belt Conference Tournament, as Troy won by 16, 19, and 13 to roll right through the field in Pensacola. Troy will not be anywhere near as heralded as James Madison, who was an extremely popular 12 seed last year from the Sun Belt, nor should they be, because the Trojans aren't as good as that team was.

However, this is something of a rarity in college basketball with a lot of guys who are playing together for the second consecutive season and a team that defends the paint extremely well. Troy plays a little bit of a frantic style, in that they're great on the offensive glass, bad on the defensive glass, great at forcing turnovers, and bad at protecting the basketball. Their statistical profile has a lot of give and take, but they are very good at shooting 2s and very good at preventing other teams from making 2s.

It is also worth pointing out, though, that the Trojans had .715 points per possession against Arkansas back on Nov. 13, .826 against Oregon on Nov. 17, and .763 against Houston on Dec. 10, as they only made 12 shots from the field in that game. Landing on the 14 line is not ideal for Troy given how they stacked up against Power Five competition in those three games, but they are a better team now than they were then.

I want to think that Troy is outgunned here, but Cross is a really good head coach. If he can find a way to get inside and capitalize on a weak interior defense for the Wildcats, this one could get dicey for the heavy favorite. Unfortunately, Troy doesn't shoot 3s well enough and that's the one area where Kentucky defends, so I don't think we get an upset. Could we get a cover? Possibly.



MIDWEST REGION

#14 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

20-1

WIN REGION

250-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
72.5 (180)

DEFENSIVE PPG
66 (27)

POSSESSIONS
64.2 (235)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.115 (154)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.049 (77)

OFFENSIVE FG%
43.3% (230)

DEFENSIVE FG%
41.0% (34)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
30.3% (339)

FREE THROW %
72.6% (162)

REBOUNDING %
53.4% (32)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.027 (240)

OFFENSIVE TO%
16.6% (302)

DEFENSIVE TO%
16.9% (60)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

18.7%

SWEET 16

4.1%

ELITE 8

0.8%

FINAL FOUR

0.1%

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

WOFFORD TERRIERS

HEAD COACH
Dwight Perry

2024-25 RECORD
19-15 SU, 16-16 ATS, 18-14 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
73.7 (117)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
2.1 (131)

BETTOR RATING
-1.8 (130)

MOMENTUM RATING
6.4 (89)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

There's something to be said about getting hot at the right time. Just ask Wofford, the No. 6 seed in the SoCon Tournament that straps on dancing shoes for the first time since 2019. That Wofford team actually went into the NCAA Tournament and beat Seton Hall before losing to Kentucky in the second round. Of course, that Wofford team was a No. 7 seed in the field and was a 30-win team for Mike Young with Fletcher Magee as the leader of a team that shot 41% from 3.

This year's Terriers shot 34.5% from 3 in Division I games, so they're not quite as accomplished from beyond the arc. Nevertheless, the Terriers continue to fire from 3 at a high rate and went 37-for-84 in the SoCon Tourney, knocking off No. 5 seed Furman in the finals. Wofford's lone Quadrant 1 game in the regular season was against Duke and they lost by 51 points. They did beat Summit League runner-up St. Thomas and had a nice road win over Saint Louis, but the degree of difficulty is higher than that as a 15 seed.

Dwight Perry's team plays at a very slow pace, which could make things very interesting if they are shooting it well. Their 47.7% 3P Rate in D-I games ranked in the top 25 during the regular season and their 3P Rate against was among the 20 highest in the nation. They do everything that they can to force teams to take 3s and then do a really good job of rebounding misses. They also rebound their own misses well.

However, those stats are heavily influenced by playing in the SoCon, where long jump shots are en vogue and most teams are bad at rebounding. That isn't exactly the case when you are a high double-digit seed and play power-conference competition with more athleticism.

No matchup would have been ideal for Wofford and this one might be as bad as it gets because of the way that the Volunteers can extend their defense to the perimeter and still shut things down in the paint. The Terriers will have to shoot an outrageous percentage from 3 to have a shot at the upset in what will be a low-possession game. Of course, I never put an NCAA Tournament dud past Rick Barnes, so we'll see if Wofford can make this one interesting.

MIDWEST REGION

#15 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO... 50-1

WIN REGION

500-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
73.4 (157)

DEFENSIVE PPG
70.7 (118)

POSSESSIONS
62.1 (338)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.163 (83)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.124 (206)

OFFENSIVE FG%
45.0% (138)

DEFENSIVE FG%
43.9% (160)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
34.5% (138)

FREE THROW %
66.8% (332)

REBOUNDING %
54.4% (16)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.298 (85)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.3% (126)

DEFENSIVE TO%
13.1% (314)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

11.1%

SWEET 16

2.4%

ELITE 8

0.4%

FINAL FOUR

0.1%

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

SIU EDWARDSVILLE

COUGARS

HEAD COACH
Brian Barone

2024-25 RECORD
21-11 SU, 17-12 ATS, 14-16 O/U

STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS

POWER RATING
67.9 (215)

EFFECTIVE STRENGTH RATING
-3.6 (222)

BETTOR RATING
3.9 (236)

MOMENTUM RATING
-0.1 (166)



TOURNAMENT OUTLOOK

The Ohio Valley Conference isn't what it once was, as Belmont and Murray State used to have some epic battles around this time of the year. But, that still shouldn't diminish a huge accomplishment for head coach Brian Barone and his Cougars. This is the first NCAA Tournament berth for SIU Edwardsville as a Division I member. In fact, this is just the second winning season for the program since joining D-I in 2008.

This defense is no joke. They ranked in the upper 30s in eFG% defense per Bart Torvik and have a top-25 2P% on that side of the ledger. Unfortunately, they're also not a very good offensive team, but the defense and the double bye to the semifinals were more than enough to help the Cougars through the watered-down conference.

Interestingly, though, SIUE wasn't even the best defensive team in the OVC, despite those excellent season-long numbers. They were actually third in eFG% defense and sixth on offense. This is definitely one of the weakest teams in the field and one that won't last long unless Ray'Sean Taylor (19.2 PPG) and his teammates really, really, really overachieve.

A lack of quality opponents and quality wins looks to be a major issue. The Cougars were 17-7 in Quadrant 4 games, 2-2 in Quadrant 3 games, and got blasted by Indiana and Illinois in their only Quadrant 1 games.

At least SIUE avoided an extra game in Dayton, but that also gives them virtually no chance at their first NCAA Tournament win because they're in a battle with Norfolk State for the biggest underdog of the first round after drawing Houston in Wichita.

MIDWEST REGION

#16 SEED

REACH SWEET 16

ODDS
TO...

50-1

WIN REGION

500-1

WIN TITLE

1000-1

STATS/RANKS

OFFENSIVE PPG
70.6 (227)

DEFENSIVE PPG
68 (51)

POSSESSIONS
63.7 (269)

OFFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.059 (249)

DEFENSIVE EFFICIENCY PPP
1.112 (179)

OFFENSIVE FG%
42.8% (255)

DEFENSIVE FG%
41.2% (39)

OFFENSIVE 3PT%
34.0% (167)

FREE THROW %
67.9% (317)

REBOUNDING %
51.4% (108)

ASST/TO RATIO
1.115 (189)

OFFENSIVE TO%
14.6% (151)

DEFENSIVE TO%
14.9% (179)

% CHANCE
TO REACH

2ND ROUND

2.9%

SWEET 16

0.2%

ELITE 8

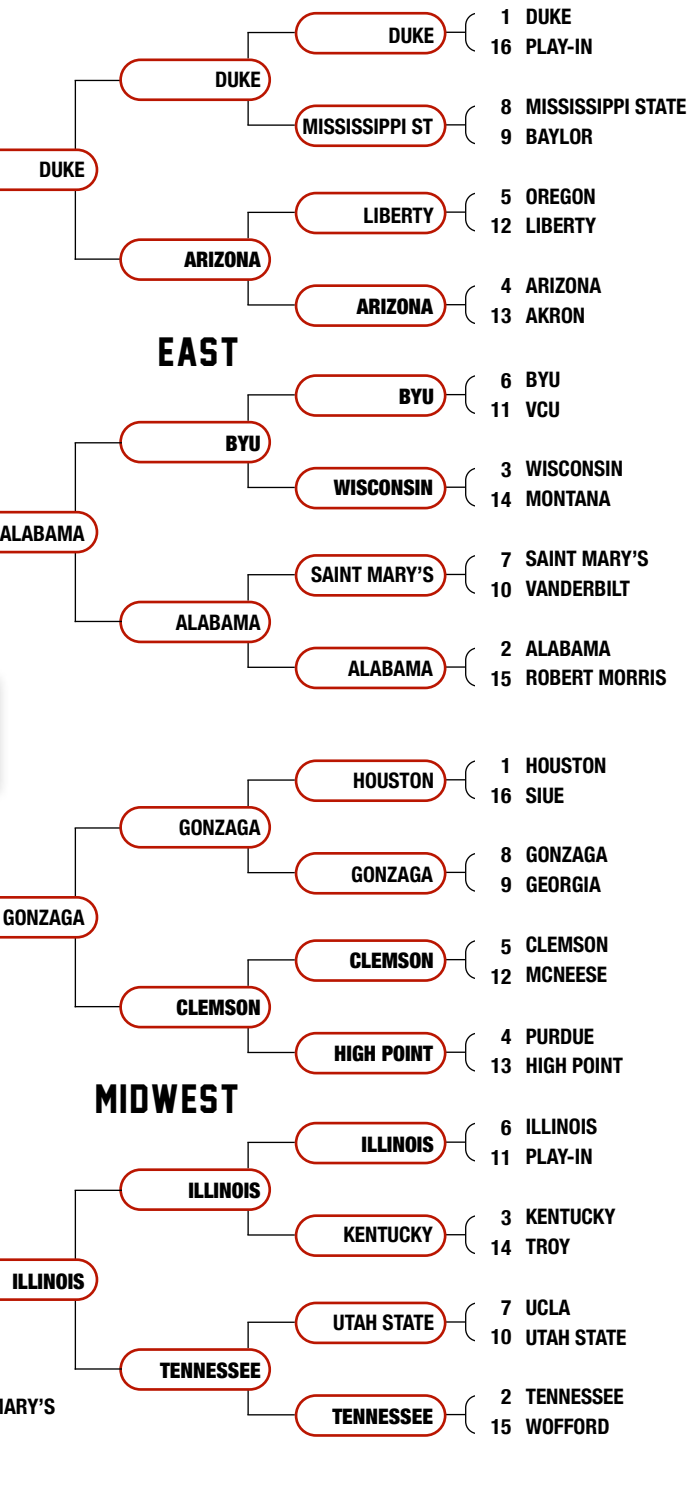
0.0%

FINAL FOUR

0.0%

*based on average of
Steve Makinens
four ratings.

ROUND 1
MARCH 20-21



ROUND 1
MARCH 20-21

TENNESSEE

ROUND 1
MARCH 20-21

MIDWEST

MIDWEST









ROUND 1
MARCH 20-21

ROUND 2
MARCH 22-23

SWEET 16
MARCH 27-28

ELITE 8
MARCH 29-30

FINAL FOUR
APRIL 5

FINAL FOUR
APRIL 5

ELITE 8
MARCH 29-30

SWEET 16
MARCH 27-28

ROUND 2
MARCH 22-23

ROUND 1
MARCH 20-21



ROUND 1
MARCH 20-21

