

# Getting ready for the NCAA Tournament

DAVID RUMSEY  
SPORTS EDITOR

The regular season of college basketball is over and conference tournaments are already underway. It should be an exciting weekend of basketball as teams try to heat up for the NCAA Tournament. The tournament officially begins on Tuesday, March 18 when the "First Four" play each other in play-in games to the real action, which begins at noon next Thursday, March 20. There will be plenty to think about when the bracket is revealed this Sunday.

Before thinking about filling out your brackets, it might be helpful to find out who actually makes the tournament. Many teams still don't know whether they'll be in the tournament or not. Those bubble teams always have the most to play for during championship week, as losing a game could cost them a tournament bid.

Some teams on the bubble this year include Oregon, Arkansas, Tennessee, California, and Florida State, among others. But don't overlook a team in the

tournament just because they barely made it in.

It's been unclear who really is the best team in the nation. Syracuse and Arizona both made deep runs into the regular season without losing a game, but neither could stay undefeated. Wichita State, though, was able to accomplish the feat. After making a surprising run to the Final Four last year as a 9-seed, Wichita State won the Missouri Valley Conference this year and finished 34-0. However, playing in a weaker conference, they haven't played a ranked opponent all season. Nevertheless, they will try to become the first team since the 1976 Indiana Hoosiers to go undefeated and win the NCAA Tournament.

So what should your strategy be when you're filling out your bracket next week? We all know the NCAA Tournament can be absolutely unpredictable, but that doesn't stop us from trying! We all know a few tricks, like picking a 12-seed to upset a 5-seed. It's not a bad idea; at least one 12-seed has beaten a 5-seed in 12 of the last 13 tournaments. A



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bad idea would be to pick all 1-seeds as your Final Four, as that has only happened once, in 2008. You can try to watch as much ESPN as your brain can handle, but often the analysts brackets don't end up much better than ours.

Will you be able to correctly

predict the Final Four this year? Probably not, although there's always a first for everything. Remember to at least be rational when making your picks. Don't pick a team because of a hometown bias or just because your dad went to school there. And even though

your bracket could possibly be busted just a few hours into the tournament, don't get too upset. The NCAA Tournament is one of the most exciting few weeks in sports, so just enjoy it!