

# Missing the “Madness”



BY RACHEL STEINHOFF  
Staff Writer

Last-second heroics, impossible comebacks and unbelievable upsets — you know, an average day during the NCAA basketball tournament... for the men, that is.

After all, does the men's March Madness tournament ever disappoint? During March, you can expect the unexpected. You can believe in the underdog and fall in love with a Cinderella story. College basketball reaches its peak during March, and sports fans buckle up for a ride through 67 games of relentless competition.

2016 brought a new level of madness. There have been highs, lows and bracket-busters that seemed impossible. In fact, March 19 is being called the wildest day in March Madness history.

Watching March Madness, I've collected the greatest moments of triumph and defeat so far in this year's tournament — moments and memories of games I'll share with my kids someday.

This tournament has proven to be a roller coaster of the unexpected, and basketball fans around the country are soaking up every minute of the excitement. The fall of Michigan State University, the University of Notre Dame's ability to pull off improbable shots and even more improbable wins, and the surge of No. 10-seeded Syracuse University to the Final Four are just a few examples seen during this season's tournament.

With all the action this year, one particular team caught my attention and quickly became my favorite story of 2016.

First round action in the West region featured No. 11 University of Northern Iowa against No. 6 University of Texas. Because I like to root for the underrated, mid-major schools, I was a UNI Panthers fan for the day, and the game yielded incredible results. After a phenom-

enal second half of runs and lead changes, the game came down to the final play. With 2.7 seconds left and no time-outs, Northern Iowa heaved a half court buzzer-beater that gave the Panthers one of the first upsets of the tournament.

The Panthers moved on with hopes to continue their run in the big dance, but the second round against the third-ranked Aggies of Texas A&M University wasn't as kind to UNI. No game of this tournament — and quite possibly no college game ever — will stay with me in the way that watching the complete self-destruction of the Panthers was able to. Called the greatest collapse in NCAA history, UNI allowed the biggest comeback of all-time — 35 seconds that undoubtedly will haunt the players forever.

Down 12 points, A&M defied the statistical odds and came back to eventually defeat UNI in double overtime.

Texas A&M had less than a 0.0004 percent chance of winning that game in the final seconds, according to FiveThirtyEight. In ordinary circumstances, coaches might pull their seniors, and players might accept defeat and back off the press — but the Aggies did the exact opposite and gave real meaning to the phrase “it's not over 'til it's over.” The Aggies turned up the pressure, forced turnovers, knocked down shots, and made me wonder how many other games could turn out that way if teams met the challenge of a deficit rather than throwing in the towel. The comeback was amazing, but heart-wrenching. It's a game I don't think I'll ever forget.

That's what March Madness is to me. It's witnessing the impossible and watching incredible talent on the biggest stage. March Madness is an opportunity to learn the game and watch some of the most memorable moments in all of sports.

During the excitement of the men's tournament, many of us tend to forget another event happening at the same time. The NCAA Women's National Tournament offers the same pressures of chasing greatness in a win-or-go-home setting, yet the women's tournament not only takes a backseat to the men's, but goes almost entirely unnoticed by the majority of the country.

As a basketball player, it can be hard to see so little attention cast on the women's bracket, but as the years go on, the problem is clear:

Where's the madness? Sports are a business — an entertainment business — and the women's tournament simply hasn't been bringing the excitement. During the past year, women's basketball has faced rule change after rule change, all in the hopes of making the game more appealing to fans, but no matter how many things you change, it's up to the athletes to go out and compete.

When it comes down to it, the controversy within Div. I women's college basketball is the absolute dominance of the University of Connecticut. The Huskies are on an attendance streak of nine Final Fours and have reigned as champions since 2013. This year, the Huskies stand undefeated on their way to the Final Four, sitting at 35-0 with all 35 games won by double digits.

Winning like this is not normal — it's exceptional. I respect greatness, and that's what UConn's women's program is. It is historic, and possesses talent that makes the game look easy. I've always been a fan, and enjoy watching the best of the best, but this year, I haven't been as excited to watch.

UConn's advance to the Elite Eight this year, came during a blow-out that was 61-12 at halftime. It was painful to watch, and I experienced second-hand embarrassment for their opponent. Mississippi State University entered the game with a talented roster and 28-7 record, but Connecticut made MSU look foolish.

While I watched the game, one of the commentators noted fans were stunned, thinking, “What did we just watch?” On one hand, I was in awe of the talent and power I had just witnessed from perhaps the most dominant women's basketball team ever. On the other hand, I felt uncomfortable for the players who ended their season in a slaughter, and feel no desire to watch another game similar to it.

Competition is supposed to thrive during March, and I would love to see the women's side catch up with the men's in that aspect. I want to see a team challenge Connecticut, and I want the sport to get more of the respect it deserves. The women's side should strive for the intensity of its male counterparts and start a little madness of its own. Because at the end of the day, sports fans live for the madness, and the madness lives during March.

# A sweet season for sports



BY TIM PICKEL  
Staff Writer

Every year, people across America celebrate the official first day of spring, March 20. To most of us, the vernal equinox comes with promises of longer days, warmer weather and beautiful flowers sprouting up from the ground. Spring brings with it three months of picturesque weather, transitioning us out of the depths of winter and into the freedom of summer.

If you're a die-hard sports fan, however, spring has an entirely different meaning. Once the middle of March comes around, the sweetest part of the year for sports is in full bloom. The next three months bring the most exciting time in sports, full of opening days and championship games.

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The first event that usually comes to mind for sports this time of year is the NCAA Div. I Basketball Tournament and its yearly showcase of the 68 best men's and 64 best women's teams in the country. During three consecutive weekends the top-dogs, underdogs, hot shots and bracket busters all duke it out for their chance to be the last team standing and bring the spirit of March Madness to life. This tournament alone packs enough entertainment for the whole season into about a week and a half of total action.

March Madness only marks the beginning of the fun, though. For many sports fans, springtime means one thing — baseball's opening day. Kirksville might just be a small town in northeast Missouri, but its passion for baseball stacks up against any big city, and three rival fan bases clash as they bicker about which team is best during the next six months. The Cardinals and Cubs are coming off promising 2015 campaigns, and the Royals are even better off after winning their second World Series last year.

But there's no need to wait another week for baseball to start. Bulldog baseball and softball teams have been playing every weekend for the past month and a half, providing plenty of opportunities to catch a game and support Truman State. Both teams will play at home this weekend.

Forgot to fill out a bracket? Is baseball not your thing? Then what does springtime have to offer you in terms of sports? Only some of the most intense and heated playoff campaigns professional sports have to offer. Just a week or so after NCAA basketball champions are crowned and the MLS and MLB begins their regular seasons, two of the most exciting playoff races in all of professional sports begin — the best NBA and NHL teams try to prove their worth and put together a championship run. The NBA playoffs will feature the Golden State Warriors trying to make a run at history and dethrone the 1996 Chicago Bulls as the best team of all time, while center Tim Duncan with the San Antonio Spurs and forward LeBron James with the Cleveland Cavaliers will do their best to crash the party. In the NHL playoffs, left wing Alexander Ovechkin will try to break the Washington Capitals' curse and finally get his name etched on the Stanley Cup, and a potential first round matchup between the St. Louis Blues and Chicago Blackhawks could ruin some friendships at Truman before the spring semester is done.

Spring is when the weather is fine, the sun will shine and teams put it all on the line. So whether you're a die-hard sports fan, a casual observer or feel like getting into something new, do yourself a favor and sit back, relax and enjoy.

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