

## 2005 NCAA Tournament Preview: March Madness - Road to the Final Four! BY MATTHEW HATFIELD

### Chicago Regional:



**#1 Illinois Fighting Illini:** Illinois' undefeated dream run came to an end in their regular season finale when unheralded Buckeyes forward Matt Sylvester drilled a 3' to stun the Illini, giving them loss numero uno. Question now is can Illinois live up to the favorite title they earned prior to the loss at Ohio State?

**Quote: "Best team we've ever played." --- Oakland U Golden Grizzlies Head Coach Greg Kampe regarding the Illinois Fighting Illini.**



**#16 Fairleigh Dickinson Knights:** Founded in 1942, the Knights coached by Tom Green (358 wins) make their first NCAA appearance in seven years. Gordon Klaiber, Tamien Trent and Chad Timberlake are all averaging double-figures in points for the second straight season. One other interesting note about Fairleigh Dickinson is they have not lost a game when leading or tied at half-time.

**Inside the Matchup:** Don't think Illinois is worried about that, though. Luther Head (16.1PPG), Dee Brown and Deron Williams (12.4PPG 6.6APG) are the three best guards on one team. Brown (55 steals) is my favorite because he is so fast, has quick hands and has a huge heart. He's a lot like the road-runner. The instinctive energy player will give the Knights fits all game long. Illinois, making its fourth straight NCAA appearance (first time since 87-90), has two good low post players in the versatile Roger Powell and James Augustine. Just watch how Illinois operates offensively in the half-court, especially when they get bench players Rich McBride, Jack Ingram and Nick Smith involved. You'll know why I like them to win it all. **Pick: Illinois by about 40 points.**



**#8 Texas Longhorns:** They struggled for a little bit there, but the Texas Longhorns have been right in the thick of things in the beat each other up Big 12. Losing LaMarcus Aldridge and P.J. Tucker hurts when you are in a win-or-go-home format.



**#9 Nevada Wolfpack:** Like Texas they miss some key components from the 2004 team that got to the Sweet 16. Todd Okeson and Kirk Snyder made for an excellent backcourt, both are gone. This Wolfpack team will make you work to get off a good shot which means Natl. Freshman of the Year Daniel Gibson (TX) may have trouble.

**Inside the Matchup:** Nevada's Nick Fazekas is the key to this game. Fazekas, averaging 21.5PPG and 9.4RPG, can step out and shoot the long shot as a 6-11 sophomore. Believe it or not, Nevada has more experience back with Fazekas and a few others. Most of Texas' seniors from last season are gone. Longhorns have good, young talent, but will need them to mature quickly against a good defensive club. **Pick: It's a coin flip with the suggestion to split your brackets between them. Loser is done in round two and I guess I'll take Nevada in a tight one.**



**#5 Alabama Crimson Tide:** Under Mark Gottfried, Bama was one win away from getting to the Final Four. Reason they did not get there was because the Crimson Tide just ran into a better team in the Elite Eight - Connecticut. Like fellow SEC foe Kentucky, the Tide have a dynamo freshman floor leader that can do some special things in Ronald Steele. Having that said, it's the play of Earnest Shelton, Kennedy Winston and Chuck Davis that makes them a hard out.



**#12 Wisconsin-Milwaukee Panthers:** Tom Creen at Marquette and Wisconsin's Bo Ryan are the two most recognizable college basketball coaches in Wisconsin. But don't sleep on Bruce Pearl and his Wisconsin-Milwaukee basketball team. Couple years ago they nearly upset Notre Dame and Pearl's name has been linked with some big-time coaching vacancies.

**Inside the Matchup:** Got a feeling tough defense and rebounding will play apart in the outcome? You betcha'. Stingy describes the Panthers defensive play and Alabama was good enough defensively in 2004 to oust Syracuse, So. Illinois and #1 seed Stanford. Ed McCants, not Carolina's Rashad, was named Horizon Player of the Year. He drilled 94 3's and averaged over 17PPG. They'll need a monster game from him to get the win. **Pick: We have seen it happen 28 times since 1985, including twice in last year's tourney. That is a #12 seed upend a #5. It could happen again, but I think the Tide surge the last three minutes to win it something like 67-61.**



**#4 Boston College Eagles:** BC got off to such a red hot start and was the second to last team in the entire NCAA to lose a game. Al Skinner's team really stumbled on Big Monday when Pittsburgh essentially hammered them, eliminating their chances of earning a #1 seed for the tourney. Get a suitable first round match with Penn.



**#13 Pennsylvania Quakers:** Penn got in with an 80-72 win over Columbia in the Ivy league title game. They were the first NCAA team this season to receive an automatic bid to the big dance.

**Inside the Matchup:** Tim Begley, 6-foot-6 senior guard for the Quakes, is the catalyst out there. He shot 45.6% from three-point land last year and averages 13-4-4 (points, rebounds and assists). It'll be interesting to see if Begley can take some of the Eagles players off the dribble. For BC to reach the Sweet 16 painlessly they will need Jermaine Watson, who was injured in a raid at his home, to perform better than adequate. **Pick: Take BC, but not by an overwhelming margin.**



**#6 LSU Tigers:** LSU has somewhat been the pleasant surprise in the SEC West. Projected to finish third or fourth by a few preseason basketball publications, it has not deterred Brandon Bass and company. Bass just might be one of the five best sophomores in the land. How he performs on the big stage could determine whether they are upset right away or do some upsetting of their own later on.



**#11 UAB Blazers:** Remember what Mike Anderson's Blazers, who have a #59 RPI, did in the tournament this past postseason? Knocked off #1 Kentucky, 76-75, to advance to the Sweet 16. It was right after their 102-100 shoot-out win over Washington and prior to getting waxed by Kansas, 100-74. Pushing the ball up the floor with tremendous speed is their forte.

**Inside the Matchup:** Speed certainly kills and UAB has it plus the killer instinct I love to babble about. They've got Conference USA's sixth man of the year - Ronnell Taylor, an All-Second team conference selection in Donnell Taylor and one of the fastest small guards around in 5-10 Carldele "Squeaky" Johnson. LSU has to do what they've been able to successfully the last part of the season - command attention down low to free up outside shooters. Underrated UAB defender Demario Eddins will make it tough for them. **Pick: In my second official toss up I will take my first official upset. Like UAB to outscore the LSU Tigers to advance to the second round.**



**#3 Arizona Wildcats:** Compared by some (i.e. Digger Phelps and a few others) to last year's Connecticut team, this Arizona group lacks one key ingredient: consistent defensive effort night in and night out. Other than that, the comparison is somewhat fair. They have an explosive offense, one of the best shooters in the country with Salim Stoudamire and an under the basket/double-double threat in Channing Frye. Just like with Duke, Syracuse, Maryland, UCONN and others - we've seen better.



**#14 Utah State Aggies:** Very few, if any saw Utah State putting an end to Pacific's dominance throughout the regular season. The Aggies definitely got revenge for missing the tourney last season after recording an excellent 25-4 overall record (17-1

vs. Big West opponents). They got by Pacific in the league title game and get the privilege of facing an explosive offensive team like Arizona.

**Inside the Matchup:** Soft spoken, yet forward/center terror Spencer Nelson (16.4PPG 8.1RPG) goes up against Frye in this one. That, believe it or not, could be an even matchup. Where Arizona wins this game is with their athleticism, ball handling and smooth shooting touch. And having Lute Olson as a coach does not hurt either. **Pick: Zona wins this one, maybe not that close or by a whole lot. Unless Utah State can keep it low scoring, shoot efficiently and really play smart defense, I think the Cats contain Jaycee Carroll (Big West Freshman of the Year) and crew.**



**#7 Southern Illinois Solukis:** Sophomore Jamaal Tatum is one of the quietly good sophomores in the country. He averaged 12.1PPG in his second year and helped the Solukis win 25+ games once again. Turnovers may be a tiny problem for So. Illinois if they have trouble getting 65-70 points vs. St. Mary's. One more thing to note: 6-7 225 pound freshman Matt Shaw was put in the lineup by Chris Lowery and they've lost only one time since the bold move. #14 RPI really got them this spot.



**#10 Saint Mary's Gaels:** The Saint Mary's Gaels from Moraga, California have to travel to Oklahoma City for this game. Tempo is certainly key for Saint Mary's to get the win. It's easy to say the Gaels must play the same kind of defense or play the same kind of offense SWMS did vs. the Missouri Valley's top team during the regular season. If they can dictate the tempo, whether it be rapid or half-court set, they are capable of winning it somewhat close. Paul Marigney (17PPG) also has to do well.

**Inside the Matchup:** Experience of being here always helps. However, I think it has an even larger impact when you have to kind of equal teams from mid-major conferences. St. Mary's last got here in 1997. The Solukis, meanwhile, are making their fourth consecutive NCAA appearance. Losing the conference postseason title also has them fuming at themselves. **Pick: In what's categorized as my third toss up, we like the Southern Illinois basketball team to knock off WCC school Saint Mary's. The Gaels have improved greatly under Randy Bennett, but I don't see them having an answer for PG Darren Brooks (15PPG 5.1RPG 4.3APG 2.7SPG)**



**#2 Oklahoma State Cowboys:** Eddie Sutton saw his team lose a tough one to swallow against Georgia Tech not long after handing St. Joe's a heartbreaking loss to advance to the Final Four. Tony Allen (16PPG and 5.5RPG) has departed from that, although most everyone is back. Included are John Lucas, Ivan

McFarlin, Daniel Bobik the Graham brothers and a young man to fill Allen's shoes in the tourney - freshman guard JamesOn Curry. Defense is OSU's specialty and nobody in the Big 12 probably does it better.



**#15 Southeastern Louisiana Lions:** By beating Northwestern State in the Southland conference title game, the Lions earned a trip to the tournament for the first time ever. Projected to finish in the middle of the pack in their conference, SE Louisiana might struggle to find ways to score.

**Inside the Matchup:** Billy Kennedy knows it's hard to swallow big losses, but he's undoubtedly proud to see his team in the NCAA tourney. SE Louisiana ranks fifth nationally in scoring defense, while Okla. St. plays a physical, hard-nosed brand of defense capable of slowing anyone down. The Lions will have a hard time getting 25 points in the first half and the Cowboys might have trouble putting the ball in the ocean later on in the Chicago Regional as well. **Pick: Oklahoma State routes them easily and will look to Curry, Lucas, McFarlin and the Graham boys to setup a potential Sweet 16 showdown with them and Arizona.**

#### Albuquerque Regional:



**#1 Washington Huskies:** Big on speed, but not on size. We all know that good guard play can take you far in the NCAA tourney and the Huskies certainly have plenty of talented little men. 5-9 Nate Robinson is one of the best players under six feet tall, while Will Conroy and Brandon Roy are among the Pac-10's elite. Rebounding will be a top priority for Washington throughout the big dance.



**#16 Montana Grizzlies:** 18-12 Montana, winner of the Big Sky conference, is just happy to be here. The Big Sky was initially thought to be the league Eastern Washington would own and return to the NCAA Tournament. However, it all shifted when Portland State began the year 18-7 (10-2). It was the Vikings' for taking then, but Montana, under new coach Larry Krystkowiak, somehow got in.

**Inside the Matchup:** Get the feel Washington is this year's St. Joseph's? Yes, the Hawks were doubted and behind the player of two first round NBA draft picks - Jameer Nelson and Delonte West - made it to the Elite Eight. Phil Martelli, 2003-04 National Coach of the Year, was in the same position Lorenzo Romar currently is in. Everyone is doubting this team's chances to get to the Final Four, but if they can get good frontcourt play they will be in St. Louis. It's just very iffy at this point. **Pick: Of all the 16-1 games I think this will be the closest. Still, anticipate Washington toppling Montana 97-75, or in that neighborhood.**



**#8 Pacific Tigers:** Expected to get as high as a #6 seed or as low as a #8 seed, the Pacific Tigers get a tough draw in the first round. They have an international flavor in the frontcourt and experience of beating Providence, another Big East team, in last year's tourney. They return ten players, seven of which are seniors, from that team. Man to watch is senior David Doubley - the Big West regular season Player of the Year.



**#9 Pittsburgh Panthers:** Pittsburgh beat quality teams in the Big East and lost to quality teams in the conference. They will go as far as Chris Taft, Chevon Troutman and Carl Krauser can take them. And let me tell you, if any #8 or #9 seed gets to the Final Four it will be this team. Washington better watch out if they've got to play Pitt. in the second round.

**Inside the Matchup:** A truly great 8-9 game if you ask me. Pittsburgh does play rugged defense and will rebound the basketball. Let me tell you something about them you don't know - they went 31-5 last season and the top three players (Krauser, Taft and Troutman) are still on this team. As far as the game with Pacific goes, Mark McCarroll has to hit some open shots from downtown. **Pick: Don't see Pacific knocking off two Big East teams in the first round in two consecutive years. Got to go with Pitt by five.**



**#5 Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets:** Some wondered if last year's national runner-up would even get an at-large bid after a mediocre regular season in the ACC. But the injuries to shooting guard B.J. Elder and freshmen Jeremis Smith were taken into consideration by the committee. As was the fact that they did beat Wake and reach the final game in April 2004. Nice way to end the season by getting to the ACC Tournament final vs. Duke also did not hurt matters. Elder and Jarrett Jack are not easy to stop.



**#12 George Washington Colonials:** One highly respected basketball person told me that had GW (59<sup>th</sup> in the RPI), Red Auerbach's alma mater, not won the A-10 Tournament that St. Joe's would have been in and maybe someone like Georgetown or Notre Dame from the Big East may have taken UAB's spot. Don't know how much of that is true and how much is not. What I do know is that this team beat Michigan State and Maryland in the BB&T Classic. Georgia Tech might be next on the list.

**Inside the Matchup:** Ga. Tech's shooting is critical vs. the GW Colonials. Against Duke on Sunday the Yellow Jackets did not shoot the ball well and were out of sync. Also, Luke Schenscher, the 7-1 big guy in the middle, has to be more aggressive and less soft. They were there last year and have familiarity. However, if it is close late you have to like GW's chances. Pops Mensah-Bonsu (12.4PPG 6.6RPG) can be an intimidating

force, and guards Carl Elliot and T.J. Thompson can score/distribute nicely, too. **Pick:** How can you say this is not a toss up game? It depends on which GW team shows up and which Georgia Tech team comes to play. In the end, my guess is we'll have the 12<sup>th</sup> seeded Colonials partying into the second round.



**Georgia Tech's Isma'il Muhammad is an exceptional dunker and in-your-face defender.**



**#4 Louisville Cardinals:** This team really looked dangerous before losing at home big to Memphis. Since then they've won nine straight, including outlasting those same Tigers, 75-74, in the Conference USA title game this past Saturday. What Louisville will do is continue to dial-it up from long distance. Constant three-pointers, use Francisco Garcia (15.4PPG) and freshman Juan Diego Palacios (9.8PPG 6.6RPG) to attack the hoop, and take that explosion/quickness on offense and apply it on the defensive end. They are fully capable of getting to the Final Four, but their toughest games might be in the second round vs. the Ga. Tech/GW winner and possibly against Wake in the Elite 8.



**#13 Louisiana Lafayette Ragin Cajuns:** Winners of the Sun Belt conference tournament, UL Lafayette better respond on defense. Like Louisville, they can score and had 82 points in a conference tourney game. Tiras Wade (77 3's) is their 20-point scorer. Robert Lee is the Head Coach and no, we're not talking about the guy from American history either. Those four straight 20+ win seasons mean nothing if they don't defend the Cardinals later this week.

**Inside the Matchup:** What Louisville must do in this game to stifle the doubters is get steals and turn them into transition baskets. People will say they lack a pure point guard

and Taquan Dean is more of a two-guard. They'll also say that even though they can get up and down the floor without any problem they do not have the inside scorer/dominating post presence. For UL Lafayette to win they must get to the foul line and have success there, kind of like how Winthrop and ODU did in their tournament title games victories, and crash the glass. **Pick: Louisville behind real good play via Larry O'Bannon.**



**#6 Texas Tech Red Raiders:** General saw his team behind Andre Emmett make it to the second before falling to St. Joe's. Darryl Dora had an impressive game vs. Charlotte in the first round and may need another one to keep UCLA from winning. Red Raiders love to run the motion offense and that could confuse the Bruins.



**#11 UCLA Bruins:** Just imagine how good UCLA, who won at Notre Dame earlier in the season, would be had Trevor Ariza, a current member of the New York Knicks, not opted to enter the NBA Draft after his freshman season? Dijon Thompson really is the only 15-25 point scorer on a nightly basis for them. Solid #2 and #3 options must emerge for UCLA to do any kind of serious damage.

**Inside the Matchup:** Bob Knight's motion offense has in fact gotten guards Jay Jackson and Ronald Ross more involved in the offense. Ross, a walk-on to the basketball team at Lubbock, is putting up 16.6 points and 5.1 rebounds. Ben Howland wants his young Bruins, led by Thompson (18.3PPG 8RPG) and Jordan Farmer, to protect the basketball. They are skilled and can win the game if it comes down to creating a shot late in the second half. **Pick: It's another one of those toss up games... there are about ten of them out there according to my systematic, loco bracket. Like Knight and Texas Tech, but if it comes down to isolations and one-on-one play then UCLA could benefit from that and get the nod.**



**#3 Gonzaga Bulldogs:** Gonzaga, the alma mater of one John Stockton, tends to do better in the tourney when not expected to do well and vice versa. Last season the Zags bowed out in the second round. It's all about the matchups for them. They are apart of the worst regional in the NCAA field. If the Zags ever go to a Final Four anytime soon would be the time to do it so that they can pack the McCarthy Athletic Center in its second year come 2005-06. Erroll Knight and sophomores Sean Mallon and Derek Raivio must contribute for them in this tourney.



**#14 Winthrop Eagles:** Making their second NCAA appearance in four years, the Winthrop Eagles under Gregg Marshall, one of the hot coaching commodities out there, enter their match with Gonzaga at 27-5 overall. Torrell Martin, considered to be inconsistent in the past, has been a stabilizer this season, averaging nearly 13 points

and shooting right around 50%. Martin had 13 points and nine boards to propel Winthrop to their 18<sup>th</sup> straight win and into the NCAA dance.

**Inside the Matchup:** Adam Morrison's 30 points in the WCC title game vs. St. Mary's showed he's a scoring force to be reckon with in this tourney. Morrison and Ronny Turiaf (16PPG 9.1RPG) are the two guys that have raised their game to that next level with the departure of Blake Stepp, the second best point guard the last 25 years out of Gonzaga (Stockton being the best one). For Winthrop they've got to get to that foul line. Nevada was able to get them in foul trouble last year so it can be done. The Eagles are young with about ten underclassmen players. **Pick: Zags will power their way inside and win. However, if a #14 wins a game it will be either Winthrop or Niagara, mark it down.**



**#7 West Virginia Mountaineers:** It's a good thing they beat Providence 82-59 in a statement way in the opening round of the Big East Tournament. Because had they not they may not have gotten a bid to the big dance. West Virginia ended up losing to Syracuse in the Big East Tournament final, but avenged their most lopsided loss of the season last Friday - a 38-point defeat to Villanova.



**#10 Creighton Blue Jays:** Creighton now makes its sixth appearance in the NCAA Tournament in the last seven years. They are kind of similar to West Virginia in the way they shoot the basketball. Blue Jays essentially knocked out Wichita State by going 3-0 vs. them this season. Dana Altman's group needs positive play from Johnny Mathies.

**Inside the Matchup:** Creighton has good jump shooters, including Nate Funk - the Missouri Valley's top three-point shooter as far as field goals made beyond the arc. However, as good a jump shooting team as Creighton is, Kyle Korver no longer plays there. Unless they can penetrate the effective Mountaineers 1-3-1 zone defense it will be all long shots, very few mid-range shots. Ought to be a good game, though I feel West Virginia can separate themselves the last six or seven minutes. **Pick: Mountaineers win thanks to Kevin Pittsnogle (11.2PPG). Pittsnogle is good in pick and pop plays and can flat out shoot the rock.**



**West Virginia's Kevin Pittsnogle could be the key to a Mountaineers first round victory. (AP)**



**#2 Wake Forest Demon Deacons:** Is Wake good enough to win this whole thing? Absolutely. Do I think they will? No, and there are three good reasons why. First one is they'd probably have to beat Illinois, second one is they'd probably have to beat North Carolina (again) and third is they've got to play better on the defensive end. Wake does have someone who can get them there and that's second-year PG Chris Paul.



**#15 Chattanooga Mocs:** John Shulman was the top assistant under Jeff Lebo, now the Head man at Auburn. Shulman has done well in year one getting the Mocs to the NCAA Tournament. Now comes their exit card vs. the Demon Deacons.

**Inside the Matchup:** Who's going to stop Paul? Then once you have him beat who's going to keep Justin Gray and Taron Downey from knocking down big shots? And if Eric Williams and the inside guys are doing well who will match them? Those are three questions for Chattanooga and there are probably many more. Doesn't look good when your top scorer averages under 13PPG either. **Pick: Wake by a hefty margin.**