

2005 NCAA Tournament: Sweet 16 Preview
BY MATTHEW HATFIELD --- Tuesday, March 22nd 2005

Chicago Regional: Thursday - #12 Wisconsin-Milwaukee v. #1 Illinois @ 7:25PM

Watching Illinois is a thrill as is the same when viewing Bruce Pearl's Panthers in action

Doubt Bruce Weber will change up the defensive game plan for Thursday night's Sweet 16 tilt. By that I mean go from a man defense to zone vs. Wisconsin-Milwaukee, who can flat out shoot the basketball. They, being Illinois, have the capable defensive to get a hand up in their face when shooting the rock.

Illinois' play-calling in the half court set is simple, yet difficult to defend. They run a number of plays where perimeter players such as Dee Brown, Luther Head and Deron Williams come off back screens each way and get a quality outside look. No question about it, the Illini use the baseline to their advantage, and because of the intensified concentration on the three guards, are able to find James Augustine. He and Roger Powell get post up opportunities and flash to the high post really well. Augustine has really emerged since the Big Ten Tournament, becoming a force to throw it down.

Pearl, a Boston native and disciple of Dr. Tom Davis, will need to find someone that can disrupt Augustine, too. Believe it or not, he's equally as dangerous as those guards. It's all about forcing turnovers and they were to force 12 in the first 12 minutes against Boston College. It'll be harder for Illinois to swing that ball around the perimeter, but it'll be just as hard for Joah Tucker and Ed McCants (no relation to Rashad, though has a quick release) to score at will.



Bruce Pearl knows how hard it will be to sustain energy and hustle with that fire in their bellies for 40 minutes Thursday night.

Pick: Illinois beat Fairleigh Dickinson by 12, Nevada by 12 and ought to win this one by 12. Their defense is fierce and aggressive enough to keep the Panthers from hitting double-digit three's in addition to making 20+ trips to the line.

Chicago Regional: Thursday - #3 Arizona v. #2 Oklahoma State @ 9:55PM (EST)

What will win out: Oklahoma State's rugged defense and physicality, or the finesse and up-tempo rate in which Arizona plays at?

The headline says it all for this one as Oklahoma State will try to pound their opponent into submission by playing a physical game, while Arizona wants to get easy points off breakaways. With a win on Thursday it would be the Cowboys' sixth straight. Last time they did that they proceeded to lose their of their next four conference games, including back-to-back at Nebraska and Kansas. And it's not like they've looked sharp in either tourney win to this point, trailing So. Illinois by seven at the break and turning the ball over 17 times in a 13-point win over SE Louisiana.

Arizona has not looked overly impressive either. They had to fight to the very end to dispatch Utah State, and saw UAB capture an early 12-7 lead by using a risk-reward pressure strategy before bowing out, 85-63. Both teams have to put those games behind them and will. Where I give Oklahoma State an edge is on the bench. Terrance Crawford and Stevie Graham have been two wonderful subs who simply give the starters a boost. On Sunday it helped free up Ivan McFarlin, who scored a career high 31 points on 10-13 shooting. McFarlin will get the task of having to slow down Channing Frye (15.8PPG 7.4RPG coming into the tourney). Arizona may need someone to come up big off the bench whether it be Kirk Walters, Chris Rodgers, Ivan Radenovic or somebody else.

One tough matchup for AZ will be Mustafa Shakur, an occasionally erratic, though talented point guard, going up against John Lucas. Another one is OSU's JamesOn Curry, only a freshman, facing steady lateral defender Hassan Adams. Cowboys can play better on the defensive end and chase down loose balls. So it could all come down to, if those matchups and inside one cancel each other out, Salim Stoudamire. Arizona **must** have Stoudamire on his game and shooting rather hot.

Pick: For Lute Olson's team to outlast Eddie Sutton (making his 26th NCAA appearance) and company it will have to be a game of runs. This looks like the best Sweet 16 game and hardest one to call. Utah State was really able to exploit Arizona's weakness (defense) for about 25 minutes. My guess is Oklahoma State will be not nearly as inconsistent shooting the ball on offense down the stretch and win it by a close four point margin.

Albuquerque Regional: Thursday - #4 Louisville v. #1 Washington @ 7:10PM

Romar's Huskies actually come into this game as a #1 seed and the underdogs against a Louisville team that has quality weaponry

Not too often do you see a #1 seed as the underdog in the third round vs. a #4 seed. However, we very seldom see much stir up over one team getting a #1 seed and another being as lowly seeded as Louisville was. Rick Pitino's Cardinals have kind of flown under the radar in C-USA prior to Selection Sunday. That's when many, including

myself, believed they turned out to be good enough to earn a #2 seed, or #3 at the worst. The knock on Pitino's 2004-05 team is they can get up and down the court swiftly, but lack a pure point guard. Also, Louisville does not have the inside scorer or dominating post presence many teams possess. They failed to get the job done on defense in their opening round match with Louisiana-Lafayette, who faded down the stretch due to fatigue. Having that said, the Cardinals were outstanding on the glass vs. Georgia Tech, out-rebounding the Yellow Jackets 32-15.

If they are able to do that same kind of damage on the boards and get out to an early lead against Washington, then look for a similar outcome. They may be able to win the battle rebound wise, acknowledging the fact that Washington is a small basketball team. Albeit small, Lorenzo Romar's Huskies bit is pretty big, especially from the out-start when someone comes unprepared. Like Illinois, second chance points are needed for Louisville to stay away from danger if they are not shooting sensationally. Bench points helped WSH hold off Montana... could it be a factor Thursday night? Quite possibly.

I look at these two teams very different from say an Oklahoma State, who runs nothing special in particular on offense, but will run the flex (number of screens), 1-4 high plays and quite a few isolations. They are predicated on scoring fast with transition buckets, getting the small guards into the paint in Washington's case, and dialing it up from deep in Louisville's case. Mismatches - whichever team can create the most will win this game.

Pick: Louisville by about 6-8 points. Brandon Roy has come forth as the leader of the Washington team, while Francisco Garcia is seizing the moment for Louisville. Still, tiny Nate Robinson needs to have the game of his life for Washington to advance. Cards are doing much better from mid-range than earlier in the year - that could very well be the difference.

Albuquerque Regional: Thursday - #7 West Virginia v. #6 Texas Tech @ 9:40PM

Contrasting Styles meet as Texas Tech's motion offense gets the test of West Virginia's 1-3-1 zone defense

Thursday night Texas Tech makes its first Sweet Sixteen appearance since 1996. In fact, Bobby Knight, Head Coach of the Red Raiders, last coached this far into the season in 1994. Knight, a three-time National Champion, then coached the Indiana Hoosiers and has changed the basketball program around enormously in Lubbock. He can be one win removed from returning to the Final Four if Texas Tech can bounce West Virginia, and that is a bigger if than many think.

West Virginia played their hearts out in a double-overtime thriller, where they eliminated one of the top contenders to win this tournament - Wake Forest. Whether it was the active play of D'or Fischer, Kevin Pittsnogle hitting a dagger three late, Tyrone Salley scoring 21 points on 7-8 shooting before fouling out or J.D. Collins attacking the weak

Wake defense, WVA made plays when they had to. Known for picking and popping with Pittsnogle, the Mountaineers ended up going to Mike Gansey late during the OT sessions.

Texas Tech most has to worry about West Virginia driving to the hoop and dumping off to open guys that can shoot or finish at the rack. The Red Raiders can sometimes get caught off guard defensively, mainly the big guys - Darryl Dora and Devonne Giles. Each are 6-8 or bigger and played considerably better in the second half vs. Gonzaga than they did in the first 20 minutes. Still, Texas Tech thrives on the play of Ronald Ross and Jay Jackson. It's mandatory that John Beilein's group makes Ross more passive than aggressive, and get good play of their own at the point guard position. They (West VA) can get good positioning on offense and use superb body control to establish a rhythm vs. the Red Raiders defense.

Pick: I like the Tech's motion o' here against an extremely effective 1-3-1 zone. WVA beat a team that had terrific guards and so much has to be taken out of them not only from the double overtime win over Wake, but also the wire-to-wire affair with Creighton two nights before. TT had very little trouble with UCLA and the chance of the Mountaineers beating another team with solid guards is less likely.

Syracuse Regional: Friday - #5 Villanova v. #1 North Carolina @ 9:55PM (EST)

Does the injury to junior forward Curtis Sumpter take Nova from having a small chance to none at all opposite the talented Tar Heels?

No Curtis Sumpter spells trouble for Villanova if you ask me. Yes, Nova has about six or seven very capable other performers that can keep them in the game vs. UNC, and who knows, maybe create an upset. However, Sumpter is no ordinary player. He really had his coming out party earlier in the year at home against Kansas, handing the Jayhawks their first loss on the year at the time. Jason Fraser made up for the 17 and 7 Sumpter gives them with 21 points and 14 boards in a satisfying 76-65 win over the Florida Gators. Fraser and Will Sheridan are going to have to be difference makers Friday night, simple as that. Because Marvin Williams, a freshman being talked about as a top five overall pick, and Sean May are going to play like beasts on the inside.

Nova's guards - Mike Nardi, Randy Foye and Allan Ray - can match UNC's for quickness; not quite skill, though they are good. Kyle Lowry, a freshman, is the Cats' change-up player coming off the bench. He's kind of like Jack Manuel is to Carolina as far as making instinctive plays and jump starting runs. Marvin Williams, however, is the top sixth man in the country as he spells the reliable heady senior, Jawad Williams. In this game I'd expect Ray Felton to take on more of a distributive role and Rashad McCants to be more of an elite scorer. Pulling May away from the rim will be a key for Villanova.

Pick: UNC 83-73. Villanova has been able to get off to nice starts and get a lead against New Mexico and Florida. Despite not shooting all that well against the Lobos, they were able to do better in the other aspects of the game. If they cannot

buy a bucket, which I think they will since UNC's defense can be spotty, Jay Wright's Cats will not win the other areas and win the game.

Syracuse Regional: Friday - #10 NC State v. #6 Wisconsin @ 7:25PM (EST)

No matter who's the victor, the winner will have to keep it in the low 60's vs. UNC or get out to a quick start against Villanova

Won't be a frenetic track meet by any means, boys. NC State is where they are because of free-throw shooting and their ability to initiate contact. Julius Hodge was expected to be a candidate for National Player of the Year honors coming into the season. His team entered the tournament with a sub-.500 record in the ACC. However, the Wolf Pack benefited from the fierce competition in the Atlantic Coast Conference, indicated by the team's wins over Charlotte and Connecticut. Both of those wins were come-from-behind one's, and they actually trailed the 49ers by 14 in the early going before rallying in the second half. Last year the Wolf Pack shot a nation's best 79.9% from the free-throw line. Ironically, arguably their two best players - Hodge and Ilian Evtimov - are the most successful shooting FT's. Hodge made all seven of his attempts vs. Connecticut, while Evtimov was in the mid-80's in 03-04.

State will run a 2-3 zone on defense in some spots, but they will try to focus on stopping the other team's most dangerous weapon. For Charlotte it was guard Brendan Plavich, who went from being a first half threat to second half liability. Charlie Villanueva failed to get the same touches the last 15-20 minutes or so as he did in the first half last weekend. NC St. will be looking for favorable one-on-one matchups where they can isolate Hodge and often run the 1-4 high set.

Wisconsin goes to the duo of Mike Wilkinson and Alando Tucker for a bulk of their points. Boo Wade was dismissed from the team as the point guard and sophomore Kammron Taylor, a Chris Rock look-alike, has filled in at the position admirably alongside Sharif Chambliss. Brian Butch has not been what he was all hyped up to be, but Zach Morley has really produced as of late. When Wilkinson puts the ball on the floor it opens up outside shots and it could be something hard for their opposition to defend.

Pick: Wisconsin by about 6-8 points. Herb Sendek likes to run that Princeton style offense. It'll be interesting to see how Wisconsin counters that on defense if NC State is able to find open cutters and slashers around the baseline. Morley, Wilkinson and Tucker combined for 55 points and 21 rebounds last time out. I see Hodge struggling somewhat for part of the game, not all of the game.

Austin Regional: Friday - #5 Michigan State v. #1 Duke @ 7:10PM (EST)

Spartans' speed and athleticism may be too much for a Duke team lacking depth

Michigan State has been able to close out opponents this year. They may have their toughest task of closing out someone if they get the opportunity against Coach K and Duke. MSU fought back after trailing at the break to out-run a good Old Dominion basketball team. Then they trounced on upset minded Vermont pretty good two days later. Duke wants to shorten the game, and if their game with Mississippi State over the weekend is any indicator, they better not get in foul trouble. The big guys like Shavlik Randolph and Sheldon Williams definitely cannot get foul trouble or the Spartans will take advantage. And I say will take advantage because they were the top free-throw percentage shooting team and field goal percentage squad in the entire Big Ten, a conference that also includes Illinois.

Duke's Blue Devils will do a variety of things on offense and stick to the basics defensively. By that I mean play straight-up man d' and go with some effective teams plays on offense (Redick 3', 1-4 high, zone base, 4 around 1, etc.). The two things they must do with backup point guard Sean Dockery's status very questionable is get the ball in J.J. Redick's hands behind the three-point line and post up Williams down low. Danny Ewing played an excellent game vs. Miss. St. and he may need to come up big again.

Alan Anderson is a good defender, Kelvin Torbert and Maurice Ager can be tough alternating on Redick, and the Spartans hope to score points off run-outs via steals. In addition to Ewing, freshman DeMarcus Nelson may need to provide them with a positive surge since they lack depth. For Duke on defense, watch out for Paul Davis, the interior presence. He likes to get in the high post and draw the opponents big man away from the hoop. That in-turn frees up the athletic wing drivers.

Pick: MSU holds a five-point advantage when three zeros are on the clock. Why? They are about eight or nine men deep, while Duke's bench, as mentioned earlier is bare. Too many fastbreak points wins out for Tom Izzo's Spartans.

Austin Regional: Friday - #6 Utah v. #2 Kentucky @ 9:40PM (EST)

Inside matchup between Bogut and Hayes could be a good one to say the least

Tubby Smith's Kentucky Wildcats have been the darlings of the SEC each of the past three seasons. On Saturday they won their 27th game of the season, the third consecutive season Kentucky has achieved such an accomplishment. But unlike Eastern Kentucky and Cincinnati, Utah has a sure-fire, lottery pick lock in one Andrew Bogut. How Kentucky, who from time to time is susceptible to playing a 2-3 zone, goes about defending Bogut could determine the outcome.

Bogut has shown what kind of all-around player he is in two tourney wins over UTEP and Oklahoma. He followed up a 24-point, 11 rebound and four block game with seven assists vs. the Sooners, proving once and for all he can be effective without having to score the basketball. You've got to believe the Cats will double him on the inside with Chuck Hayes and a guard helping or Randolph Morris and a guard helping. Good passing

can win out for Utah. It doesn't have to be Illinois quality... just good enough to beat the SEC's top dog.

It would not surprise me to see Ray Giacoletti go to a 1-3-1 offensive set, something a number people have no idea about. With this they can get sharp passes via Bogut to the wing guys. Actually, Rajon Rondo, not Hayes, is the guy the Utes may have to most worry about on Friday. Rondo bails them out when transfer Patrick Sparks is not shooting well and Hayes is not getting the touches he requires on the low block.

Pick: Upset! 57. That's the number of points Utah scored outside of Andrew Bogut vs. OU, which pretty much means they have other options, too. Justin Hawkins quietly had a double-double (20Pts. 14Reb.), Marc Jackson scored 17 and Bryant Markson chipped in six more than his season average of 10PPG. KY gets contributions from everyone as well. It all comes down to the perimeter jumpers Utah takes, and I believe they will get many to fall through.



Kentucky's Kelenna Azubiike (Elsa_Getty Images) has posted 35 points and 13 rebounds in two tournament wins this March.