



And the winner is ...

REID CRANFILL | STAFF WRITER

A string of conference tournament upsets has left the NCAA tournament wide-open to all 64 teams; at this point your little sister's guess is as good as Larry Bird's as to who is going to win. Duke and UNC are in the tourney and March Madness is about to hit Tobacco Road like a Category 5 hurricane, so print out a bracket and get down with the sickness.

With regular season records meaningless, who is going to cut down the net? The team with the most drive, the most soul.

Cheerleaders are only a distraction at this point; tired legs and dead arms need a symbol, a source of heart and pride to keep going. Where will they turn when the chips are down and the clock is running out?

That's right — the mascot. Here's how to pick.

Immediately eliminate anyone whose mascot isn't badass. Don't expect a strong showing from the Maryland Terrapins (any turtle that isn't a mutant ninja loses by default), the Purdue Boilermakers, the Virginia Tech Hokies (a turkey), the Creighton Bluejays, or the Wisconsin Badgers. The Ohio State Buckeyes deserve to lose in the first round and should be forever shunned from the Big Dance for picking an acorn for their mascot.

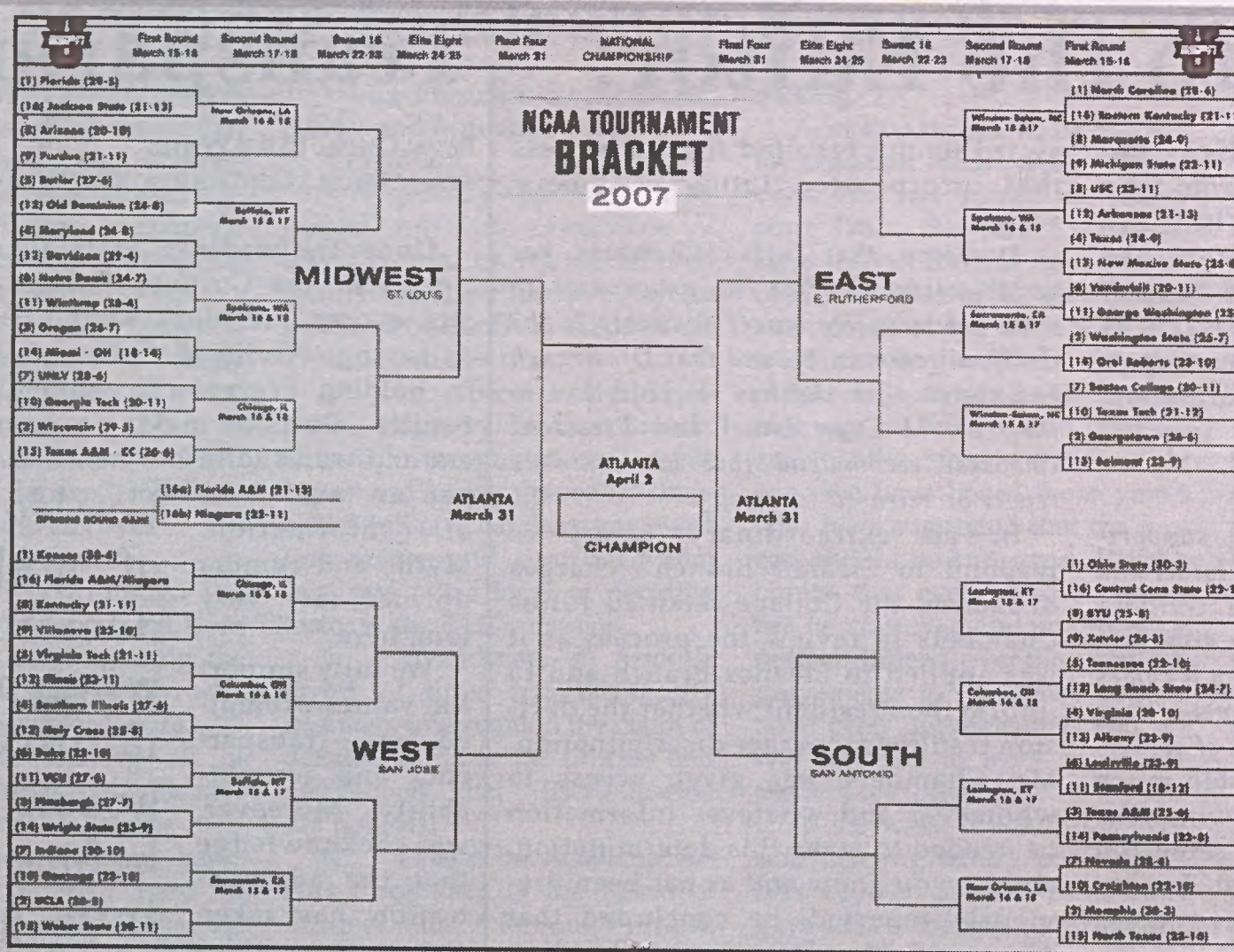
Secondly, anyone with an overused animal for a symbol has no business winning the tournament, since having a cliché for a mascot is even lamer than playing for the Hawaii Rainbows. The Wildcats, Bulldogs, Rams, Eagles, Cardinals, and Tigers are all out; there are about three teams of each in the tournament.

The Blue Devil mascot works, but Duke has been playing like a punk this season (breaking noses, losing to NC State in the first round of the ACC) and doesn't deserve to be in the tourney, though the Wolfpack do based off Sidney Lowe's blazer/tie scheme.

Having a good college name might be essential too; what's better than winning the NCAA for Oral Roberts University? Not being from a school named Oral Roberts. The Xavier Musketeers or the Virginia Cavaliers have the right sort of flair, but the Vanderbilt Commodores are just a little too aristocratic to be likable. The Wright State Rowdy Raiders, Carolina Tar Heels, Nevada-Las Vegas Rebels, Notre Dame Fighting Irish, or Texas Longhorns have the appropriate levels of charisma and panache, but lack finesse.

Maybe it's because Frank Miller's "300" just came out, but the team that seems strongest is the Michigan State Spartans. Heavily armed and ready to take on everybody else's mascots, all at once, the Spartans won in 2000. Look for an epic Spartan vs. Trojan (USC) Sweet 16.

Follow this system, and you're sure to have an edge on anyone else without a Tarot deck this season, because otherwise any winning bracket is just a lucky guess.



Put on your clubbin' shoes 'cause it's time for the BIG DANCE!

DAN ETTER | LAYOUT EDITOR

<h3>EAST DIVISION</h3> <p>The East Division is lead by the exciting UNC Tarheels, who could be the most talented team in the nation. Their bench is deep, which could come to haunt them in the inexperience of their many freshmen. But watch out for number 2 Georgetown. With Jeff Green being one of the few people able to guard Durant, some experts have chosen them to go to the finals. Perhaps the best game of the tournament could come in UNC playing number 4 Texas University. At 6'9", 225lbs, Kevin Durant can take a game over with his average 25.6 PPG. Also keep an eye on George Washington's number 11, Carl Elliot, who many see as one of the best guards in the nation.</p>	<h3>SOUTH DIVISION</h3> <p>Leading the south is Ohio State and only two words need to be said: Greg Oden, listed at 7 feet, 280lbs. They have some competition though, with a tough Memphis team at number 2 and a great number 3 team in Texas A&M, led by Acie Law IV. But his division isn't limited to its top three. A strong Louisville team, number 6, will have the toughest first and second round matchups of all four 6 seeds in the tournament and number 11 Stanford can light up the basket with great outside shooting coming from Lawrence Hill, Anthony Goods and the brothers Brook and Robin Lopez.</p>	<h3>WEST DIVISION</h3> <p>Kansas leads the west division with a huge string of victories going into the tournament. They have momentum behind them and plenty of talent to carry them along the way. Number 2 UCLA, on the other hand, needs to pick up the pace. Losing their last two games, they'll rely heavily on Darren Collison to take them the distance. As for the rest of the bracket, there's plenty of big names, including number 7 Indiana's D.J. White, who many consider to be the best forward in the bracket. This is a hot division up and down with solid teams from Virginia Tech (5) and Kentucky (8) to Villanova (9) and Illinois (12). There's no lack of great coaches either, including Duke's (6) hero Mike Krzyzewski.</p>	<h3>MIDWEST DIVISION</h3> <p>Defending champs Florida University are back for another title as the stars of the Midwest Division. Keep your eyes on Taurean Green and Lee Humphrey for some great play. Also watch out for number 2 Wisconsin, who hope to get Brian Butch back to full health to accompany Alando Tucker. And keep your eyes out for a matchup between this 2 seed and number 10 Georgia Tech. With their run and gun, accelerated style of play, the Yellow Jackets could give a more consistent Wisconsin a run for their money should they meet. And from behind the arc, look out for number 3 Oregon and number 6 Notre Dame. Although the Ducks are one of the best three point teams in the nation, the Irish aren't far behind.</p>
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TEXAS A&M'S ACIE LAW IV
ESPN.COM



TEXAS'S KEVIN DURANT
MSNBC.MSN.COM



OHIO STATE'S GREG ODEN
TIMESUNION.COM

Basketball concludes bittersweet season

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reason we came out as flat as we did," Walters said. "Bridgewater was ready, they had a good plan. They made their shots and put us in a big hole. We pulled it to six points within five minutes of the game, but just couldn't get it in any closer."

When asked about their plans for next season, Flamini said,

"The team will be starting their own postseason workouts after spring break (not mandatory), and they are excited about the future. So I think what they took away from this year is obviously a ton of experience and a taste of the playoffs."

After the ODAC defeat, the Quaker men were pleasantly surprised to discover that they had been invited to the NCAA

Division III Tournament.

"When we got the call that we were going to get the bid for the tournament, we kind of had a little heart-to-heart about things, and we played in the NCAA tournament with a tremendous amount of heart, desire, and passion," said coach Tom Palombo. "Our guys just played with such a sense of purpose. We knew exactly what we wanted to do,

and we just went out and executed extremely well."

They defeated Manhattanville 101-81, Johns Hopkins 80-73, and Lincoln University 129-128 in a dramatic triple overtime. The Quakers fought hard against Virginia Wesleyan College last Saturday, but were defeated 81-71.

"(Lincoln) was the most intense game I've ever been a part of,"

said Palombo. "Hopefully we'll take this experience and use it as motivation for the off-season. We lost in the Elite Eight game; you don't get to start next season and play that game over again, you have to start all over from the very beginning. The journey is what makes it fun, but we've got to make sure we prepare ourselves for that, because it's going to be even tougher next year."