

the brackets

No other major sport squeezes in 63 games over three weeks and has as many nail-biting, buzzer-beating and giant-killing finishes as the annual NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament.

And no other major sporting event does more to transform casual fans into self-aggrandizing experts than that rite of March known as the NCAA Tournament pool. Be it at the office, among friends or now online, the task of prognosticating the results of all 63 games to capture prize money breeds greedy statistic crunchers, scouting report readers and armchair coaches full of bluster.

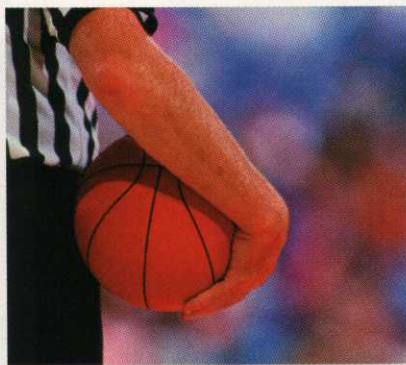
But before you complete the bracket for the pool and before you scan the special sports sections for a secret edge, it's paramount to keep the following in mind: If you win the cash, it has far less to do with you than what you think. You probably caught a few unbelievable breaks along the way.

This doesn't mean your basketball knowledge and gut feelings don't count, but like the tourney itself, scoring well in a pool is a function of funny bounces, swallowed whistles, split-second decision making and dumb luck. In other words, it's a crap shoot, which is precisely the reason it's so fun to participate. So here are a few pointers before you start penciling in your picks:

• **Know the score.** Unlike hoops, pools have a variety of scoring options. The most common is you score more points

DON'T LET MARCH MADNESS BEGIN WITHOUT PONDERING THESE

POINTERS TO HELP YOU WIN THE OFFICE POOL **BY MARK LUCE**



for correct picks in later rounds, something such as 1-2-4-8-12-24 or a similar variation. Some prefer to pick each round separately (with or without point spreads) and take a composite record. This is the most fun, but also the most work.

• **See the floor.** Before you start scrawling your choices, anticipate potential matchups. Try to determine which team is the best in each region.

Think of the brackets in terms of mini tournaments, which helps you break down the matchups.

• **Work backwards.** Pick your Final Four teams first, and fill in the blanks for them all the way back. Do the same for your Elite Eight teams and fill them in all the way back. Doing so helps you see the bracket better, as well as avoid the common problem of, "Hey, how did Joe's College end up in the Elite Eight?"

• **Choose your upsets wisely.** There are always a few shockers in the early rounds, and normally a few No. 2 and No. 3 seeds are eliminated by the end of the second round. While it's great to cheer for the underdog, it's usually a sucker bet. Why bet the farm on Alcorn State when it's only worth a point?

• **The key is in the 'tweeners.** Most people screw up brackets in the mid-level matchups — No. 5 vs. No. 12, No. 6 vs. No. 11. If you can win a majority of these games in the first round, you'll be in good shape.

• **Do your homework.** Before choosing teams based on their reputations, look at how a team got to the tournament and how experienced it is. Also consider potential matchups, common opponents and stuff like field-goal percentage, field-goal defense and rebounding. Teams that play solid D and hit the boards are normally the teams that win.

And, hopefully this year, my Kansas Jayhawks will be that team.

Happy picking and let the madness begin.

Mark Luce, who rocks and chalks in Lawrence, Kan., can be reached at mluce@sunflower.com.

GOLFDOM, Volume 57, Number 3, (ISSN 1526-4270) is published monthly by Advanstar Communications, Inc., 131 W First St., Duluth, MN 55802-2065. Subscription rates: One year \$30.00 (U.S. and possessions), \$49.00 (Canada and Mexico) and \$78.00 (all other countries). Air expedited service is available in countries outside the U.S. and Canada at \$45.00 per year. Current issue single copies (prepaid only) \$5.00 (U.S. and possessions), \$7.00 (Canada and Mexico) and \$8.00 (all other countries). Back issues (if available, prepaid only) \$10.00 (U.S. and possessions), \$14.00 (Canada and Mexico) and \$18.00 (all other countries); add \$6.00 per order shipping and handling for both current and back issue purchases.



Periodicals postage paid at Duluth MN 55806 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to GOLFDOM, 131 W 1st St, Duluth, MN 55802-2065. Canadian G.S.T. Number: R-124213133, Publications Mail Agreement number 1436694. Printed in the U.S.A.

Copyright (c)2000 by Advanstar Communications, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by Advanstar Communications for libraries and other users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center, 222

Rosewood Dr., Danvers, MA 01923, phone 978-750-8400, fax 978-750-4470. call for copying beyond that permitted by Sections 107 or 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law. For those not registered with the CCC, send permission request in writing to Advanstar Marketing Services, Attn: Permissions, 7500 Old Oak Blvd, Cleveland, OH 44130 or fax to 440-891-2740.