

LEVELED BOOK • Q

March Madness



March Madness



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Focus Question

What makes March Madness
so popular in the United States?

Words to Know

bracket
committee
miracle
predict
professional

qualify
single-elimination
tournament
underdogs
upset

Page 1: The Syracuse Orange drive against the Connecticut Huskies during the championship game of the 2016 NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Tournament.

Page 3: City College of New York wins the NCAA Division I Men's trophy in 1950.

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In the 1983 tournament, North Carolina State was the underdog. Yet in the final game's final seconds, they won over Houston 54-52.

The Maddest Time of the Year

March Madness—the name says it all. In March 1939, this college basketball tournament began with just eight teams. Over the years, the tournament has grown, but it still sweeps across the country every March, and it's still crazy. In fact, with 68 teams playing in a **single-elimination tournament**, anything can happen.

Now or Never

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) runs college sports in the United States. Since 1939, the NCAA March Madness tournament has included some of the greatest basketball talents of all time. Many **professional** athletes perfect their skills in college. So it is no surprise that the path to professional basketball goes straight through the March Madness tournament. The National Basketball Association (NBA) includes many past March

Madness players. NBA stars Shaquille O'Neal, Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, Stephen Curry, and many others first showed their stuff in the NCAA men's tournament.



Before he joined the NBA, Stephen Curry (center) played for the Davidson Wildcats.



A Xavier guard reacts after a last-second shot by Wisconsin beats his team on March 20, 2016.

Yet for most players, college is the final stop in their basketball career. For them, the chance for basketball glory is now or never.

NCAA athletes are full-time students who do not get paid. They play for the love of the game. Players have been known to collapse onto the floor and burst into tears at the end of a game. Sometimes it's out of happiness. Sometimes it's out of sadness. Either way, their fans love them for it.

How the Madness Works

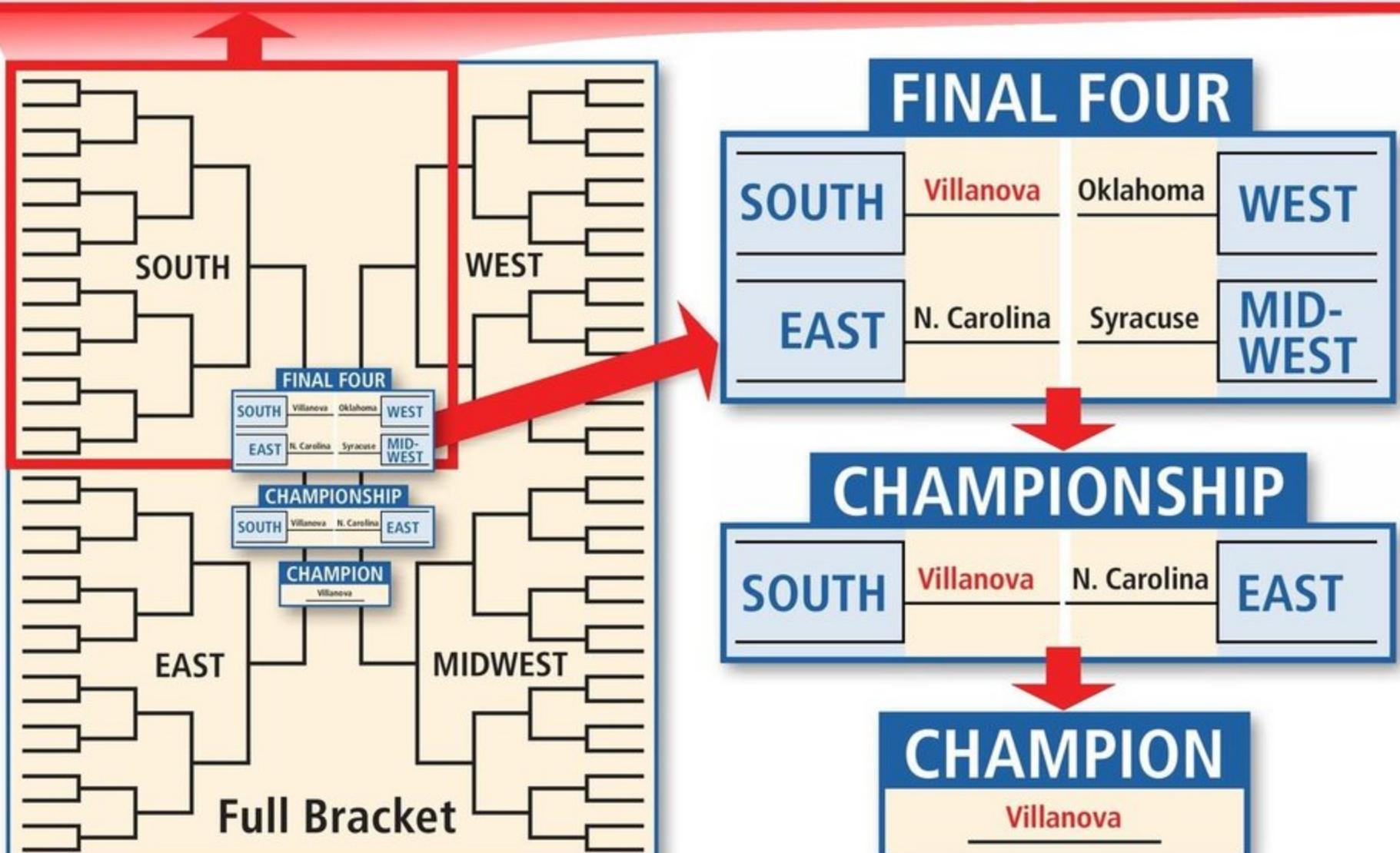
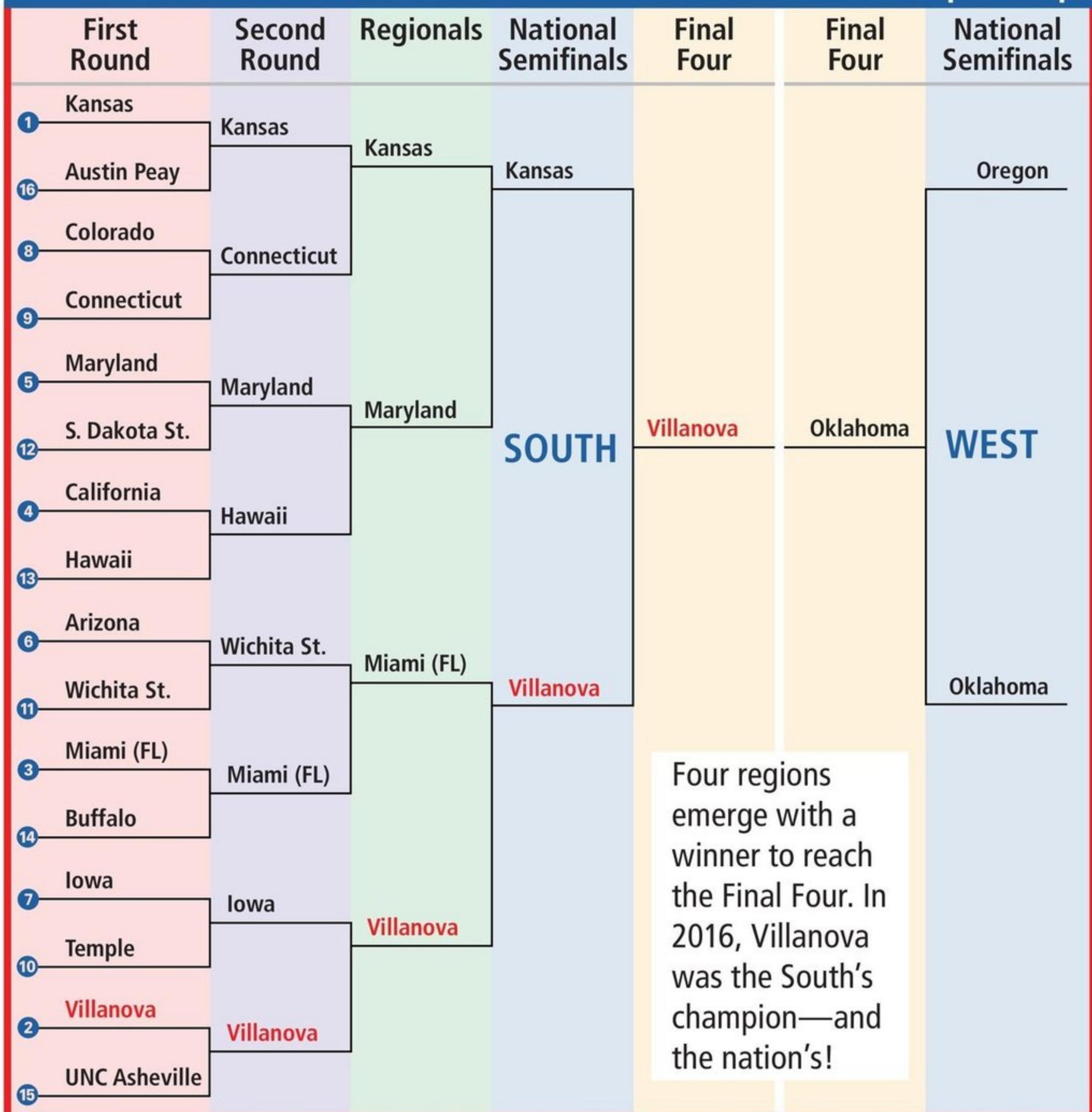
The path to the March Madness championship is long and difficult. As of 2016, teams are grouped by region into 32 conferences of different sizes. All the teams want to play in the tournament, but only 68 make it each year. So how are the 68 teams chosen?

The winners of each of the 32 conferences automatically **qualify** for the March Madness tournament. The remaining 36 teams are chosen by a ten-person **committee**. Its members vote on a Sunday a few days before the tournament.



The University of North Florida pep band and mascot celebrate after learning their team will play in the 2015 tournament.

South Bracket: 2016 NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Championship



The Bracket Racket

March Madness has become one of the most popular sports events in the United States, even among people who aren't sports fans. In large part, this is due to the fun of filling out a **bracket**—a grid of all the teams in the tournament. People fill out a bracket to **predict** who will win each game and move on to the next round of competition. A bracket shows the path a team would have to follow to reach the championship game.

Millions of people around the country fill out a bracket every year. Some like the safe bet and choose the best-ranked teams, while others love rooting for the **underdogs**. Almost everyone is trying to beat somebody else—family and friends, coworkers, or strangers online.

Lucky Librarian?

High school librarian Diana Inch said some men at her school were doing their own pool in 2011, and they wouldn't let her play. In the end, she beat them all . . . along with more than three million entrants in an online contest to pick the entire Final Four.





President Barack Obama points to a copy of the men's bracket in 2010. The winning team that year visited Obama at the White House.

One of the most famous March Madness fans is past U.S. president Barack Obama. He did not have much success with his picks, however.

Bracket Bragging

In 2015, an eleven-year-old girl wrote President Obama a letter because her bracket beat his.

"You are a great president," she wrote, "just not the best bracket picker."

President Obama wrote her a letter back with his bracket that read, "Next time, I'll check with you first!"

Women's Wins

In 1982, the NCAA started a women's March Madness tournament. It began with 32 teams and has since doubled to 64. The Connecticut Huskies have been the most dominant women's team in this tournament's history with eleven national championships. The Tennessee Volunteers are next with eight.



The Tennessee Lady Volunteers drive against the Rutgers Scarlet Knights during the 2007 women's championship game.



Breanna Stewart takes the ball during the Final Four stage of the 2016 tournament.

Some argue that Husky Breanna Stewart may be the greatest player in women's college basketball history. From 2013 to 2016, her team won the title four years in a row. For each of those four years, she won the honor of Most Outstanding Player.

Upstarts and Upsets

The most exciting stories that come out of March Madness are “Cinderella stories.” Cinderella teams are underdogs that aren’t given very good odds to win. The single-elimination format of March Madness, however, means that any team can claw its way to an exciting **upset** victory.

1985 Championship Finals

Nobody gave Villanova much of a chance against Georgetown in the 1985 championship finals. Georgetown was the defending champion and was awarded the top rank that year. Villanova was ranked eighth, and many thought their only chance of winning was by a **miracle**. It turned out Villanova didn’t need a miracle. All they needed was to play the greatest game of their lives.

Do You Know?

In basketball, a *field goal* is a basket scored on any shot other than a free throw. It is worth two or three points, depending on the player’s distance from the basket. *Field goal percentage* is how many field goals succeed out of all those that the team attempts. The higher the percentage, the better!



A Villanova Wildcat reacts with joy after beating Georgetown for the national championship in 1985.

Villanova shocked Georgetown with their high field goal percentage (over 78 percent; 22 of 28 baskets). This led to Villanova winning their first national championship in men's basketball with a score of 66-64.

2016 Blue Raiders

In the 2016 opening round, the Michigan State Spartans were ranked second. The Middle Tennessee Blue Raiders were ranked fifteenth. Yet the Blue Raiders shocked March Madness fans by defeating and eliminating Michigan State 90-81. The Blue Raiders didn't win the tournament, but they did bust a lot of people's brackets in the first round!

Billion-Dollar Bracket

Everyone wants to choose the perfect bracket. In 2014, \$1 billion was offered to anyone who chose the perfect bracket, but no one could. This is not surprising. The odds of picking every game correctly are between 1 in 5 billion and 1 in 135 billion. As far as we know, nobody has ever chosen the perfect bracket.

Conclusion

Every March, millions of people take in the excitement of Cinderella teams, rising stars, and game-winning shots at the buzzer. Dreams will either come true or fade away forever. This is March Madness. Good luck with your bracket!



Duke shouts for joy after winning the 2015 men's championship game (left). Maryland moves on to the women's Final Four in 2014 (right).

Glossary

bracket (<i>n.</i>)	a grid that pairs opponents in a tournament (p. 9)
committee (<i>n.</i>)	a group of people who consider or decide on a course of action (p. 7)
miracle (<i>n.</i>)	a wondrous event, especially one that cannot be explained by nature or science (p. 13)
predict (<i>v.</i>)	to say what is going to happen in the future, often using observation or experience (p. 9)
professional (<i>adj.</i>)	earning money for taking part in an activity, rather than doing it purely for pleasure (p. 5)
qualify (<i>v.</i>)	to show enough skill to be allowed to compete in a difficult event or hold a certain job (p. 7)
single-elimination tournament (<i>n.</i>)	a series of games or contests in which a single loss prevents the loser from moving on in the competition (p. 4)
underdogs (<i>n.</i>)	the expected losers in a struggle or contest (p. 9)
upset (<i>n.</i>)	an unexpected result in a sports game or other competition (p. 13)

March Madness

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Connections

Writing

What about March Madness makes it “mad”? Write a paragraph describing your ideas.

Math

Discuss with a partner the following questions using the bracket on page 8: How many teams from all four regions are in the bracket? How many games does the bracket show that Villanova won?



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