

March Madness

A Reading A-Z Level T Leveled Book
Word Count: 988

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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March Madness



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Written by Michael T. Foley

www.readinga-z.com

Focus Question

What makes March Madness so popular in the United States?

Words to Know

bracket	statistics
dominant	underdogs
drafted	unpredictability
legends	upsets
single-elimination	
tournament	

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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Fountas & Pinnell	P
Reading Recovery	38
DRA	38



Table of Contents

The Maddest Time of the Year	4
Now or Never	5
How the Madness Works	7
The Bracket Racket	9
Women's Wins	11
Upstarts and Upsets	13
Conclusion	15
Glossary	16

The Maddest Time of the Year

The date is April 4, 1983. North Carolina (NC) State faces off against **dominant** Houston in the national championship game. **Underdogs** NC State are playing the game of their lives, and with just seconds left the score is tied 52-52. An NC State guard has the ball but is quickly running out of time. With the final seconds ticking away, he has no choice but to toss the ball at the net and hope for the best. The shot falls short.



With this last-second dunk, NC State wins 54-52.

Suddenly, an NC State teammate comes out of nowhere to catch the ball in midair. He dunks it into the net just as the clock ticks to zero. The crowd erupts in celebration. It has just witnessed one of the most exciting **upsets** in college basketball history.

This is what March Madness is all about: excitement and **unpredictability**. With sixty-eight teams playing in a **single-elimination tournament**, anything can happen.

Now or Never

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) coordinates college sports in the United States. On March 17, 1939, the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament, also known as the March Madness tournament, began its historic run. Back then, only eight teams got to compete. Over the years, though, the championship tournament grew into a raging phenomenon, one that sweeps across the country every March.

Since 1939, the March Madness tournament has introduced the world to some of the



greatest basketball **legends** of all time. Since many professional athletes perfect their skills in college, it is no surprise that the path

to professional basketball goes straight through the March Madness tournament. The National Basketball Association (NBA) includes many former March Madness players. NBA legends Shaquille O'Neal, Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, Stephen Curry, and many others first made their impact in the tournament.



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

Only a tiny number of NCAA players are **drafted** into the NBA each year, however. This means that for most players, college is the final stop in their basketball career. For them, the chance for basketball glory is now or never.

These players play with passion. It is not uncommon for one 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 disappointment. No matter what, it's out of love for the game.

How the Madness Works

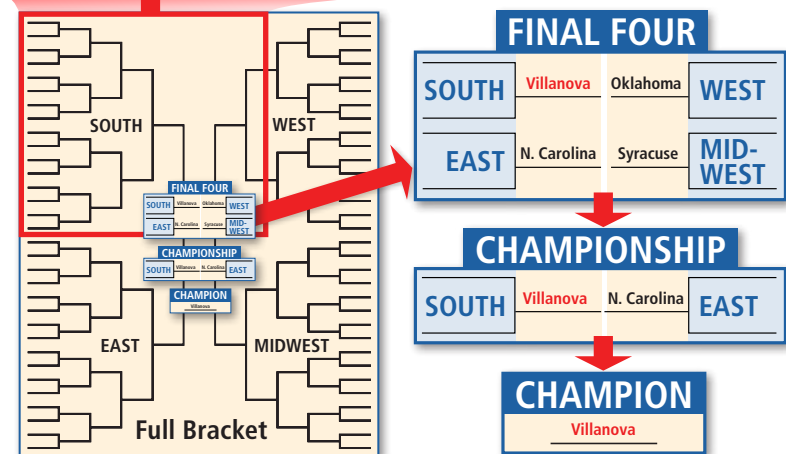
The path to the championship is long and difficult. In 2016, there were 351 eligible schools, with teams grouped by region into 32 conferences of different sizes. All the teams want to play in the tournament, but only 68 make it each year. So how are the 68 teams chosen?

Each conference has its own tournament. 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 before the tournament on a day commonly known as Selection Sunday.



The University of North Florida pep band and mascot celebrate on Selection Sunday after learning their team will play in the 2015 March Madness Tournament.

First Round	Second Round	Regionals	National Semifinals	Final Four	Final Four	National Semifinals
1 Kansas	Kansas	Kansas	Kansas			Oregon
16 Austin Peay						
8 Colorado	Connecticut					
9 Connecticut						
5 Maryland	Maryland	Maryland				
12 S. Dakota St.				Villanova	Oklahoma	
4 California	Hawaii					
13 Hawaii						
6 Arizona	Wichita St.	Miami (FL)				Oklahoma
11 Wichita St.			Villanova			
3 Miami (FL)	Miami (FL)					
14 Buffalo						
7 Iowa	Iowa	Villanova				
10 Temple						
2 Villanova	Villanova					
15 UNC Asheville						



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 base their picks on **statistics**. Others like the safe bet and choose the best-ranked teams, while still others love the excitement of rooting for the underdogs. Almost everyone is trying to beat somebody else—family and friends, coworkers, or strangers online.

One of the most famous March Madness fans is former U.S. president Barack Obama. In each of his eight years as president, he filled out his own March Madness bracket on television.

Bracket Bragging

At least while in office, President Obama did not have much success with his March Madness picks. In 2015, an eleven-year-old girl wrote him a letter to let him know that 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 a signed photo of him and his bracket that read, "Next time, I'll check with you first!"



Duke's head coach presents President Barack Obama with a copy of the men's bracket in 2010. Duke's Blue Devils won the tournament that year and visited Obama at the White House.



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

Women's Wins

In 1982, the NCAA started a women's March Madness tournament. The Division I Women's Tournament began with 32 teams and has since doubled to 64 teams. The Connecticut Huskies have been the most dominant women's team in March Madness tournament history with eleven national championships.

Win After Win

Over the course of her career, head coach Patricia Summitt earned 1,098 career wins. That's the most in NCAA basketball history. From 1974 to 2012, she coached the Tennessee Lady Volunteers. The Volunteers never failed to qualify for the tournament although in the beginning, good funding failed them. When Summitt started, a donut sale paid for the players' uniforms.



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.



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

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 turns out Villanova didn’t need a miracle. All they needed was to play the greatest game of their lives.

Do You Know?

In basketball, the term *field goal* refers to 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 by breaking the record for the highest field goal percentage in a game in Final Four history (22 of 28 baskets; over 78 percent). 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 in what many call the biggest single upset in March Madness history, the Blue Raiders shocked basketball 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 is looking to choose the perfect bracket. In 2014, billionaire Warren Buffett and Quicken Loans offered \$1 billion 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 passion. This is March Madness. Good luck with your bracket!



Duke rejoices after beating Wisconsin in the 2015 men's championship game (left). Maryland beats Louisville in 2014 to advance to the women's Final Four (right).

Glossary

bracket (<i>n.</i>)	a grid that pairs opponents in a tournament (p. 9)
dominant (<i>adj.</i>)	more important, effective, or powerful than others (p. 4)
drafted (<i>v.</i>)	selected out of a group of candidates to play on a professional sports team (p. 6)
legends (<i>n.</i>)	famous people who are known for a special talent or achievement (p. 5)
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)
statistics (<i>n.</i>)	numerical data that is collected, organized, and studied (p. 9)
underdogs (<i>n.</i>)	the expected losers in a struggle or contest (p. 4)
unpredictability (<i>n.</i>)	the quality of being impossible to know ahead of time (p. 4)
upsets (<i>n.</i>)	unexpected results in sports games or other competitions (p. 4)