

# March Madness

*A Reading A-Z Level W Leveled Book*  
*Word Count: 1,286*

## 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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## Focus Question

What makes March Madness so popular in the United States?

## Words to Know

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

Title page: 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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## Correlation

### LEVEL W

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## The Maddest Time of the Year

The date is April 4, 1983. The entire country watches as the North Carolina (NC) State Wolfpack faces off against the heavily favored Houston Cougars in their national championship game. **Underdogs** NC State are playing the game of their lives, and with mere seconds left the score is tied 52-52. NC State guard Dereck Whittenburg has possession of the ball but is quickly running out of time. With the final seconds ticking away, Whittenburg has no choice but to launch the ball at the net and hope for the best. The shot falls short.



Lorenzo Charles

Suddenly, NC State teammate Lorenzo Charles 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 **chaos** and celebration. It has just witnessed one of the biggest and most exciting **upsets** in college basketball history.

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

## Now or Never

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) organizes, coordinates, and **regulates** college and university sports in the United States. On March 17, 1939, the NCAA Division I Men's

Basketball Tournament began its historic run. Back then, only eight teams got to compete. Over the decades, the championship tournament continued to grow into a raging phenomenon, one that sweeps the country every March.

### Do You Know?

Canada has one member in the NCAA—Simon Fraser University.

Since 1939, this tournament—known informally as March Madness—has introduced the world to some of the greatest basketball **legends** of all time. Since many athletes perfect their skills in college, it is no surprise that the path to the National Basketball Association (NBA)—the professional men's basketball league—goes straight through the March Madness tournament. NBA legends Shaquille O'Neal, Earvin "Magic" Johnson, Larry Bird, Michael Jordan, 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.



Though most of the NBA legends first competed in the March Madness tournament, they are among an elite class of athletes. Unfortunately, just a select few spots are available in the NBA. Scarcely 1 percent of all NCAA Division I Men's Basketball players are **drafted** into the NBA each year. This means that for the vast majority of 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 disappointment, but no matter what, it's out of love for the game.

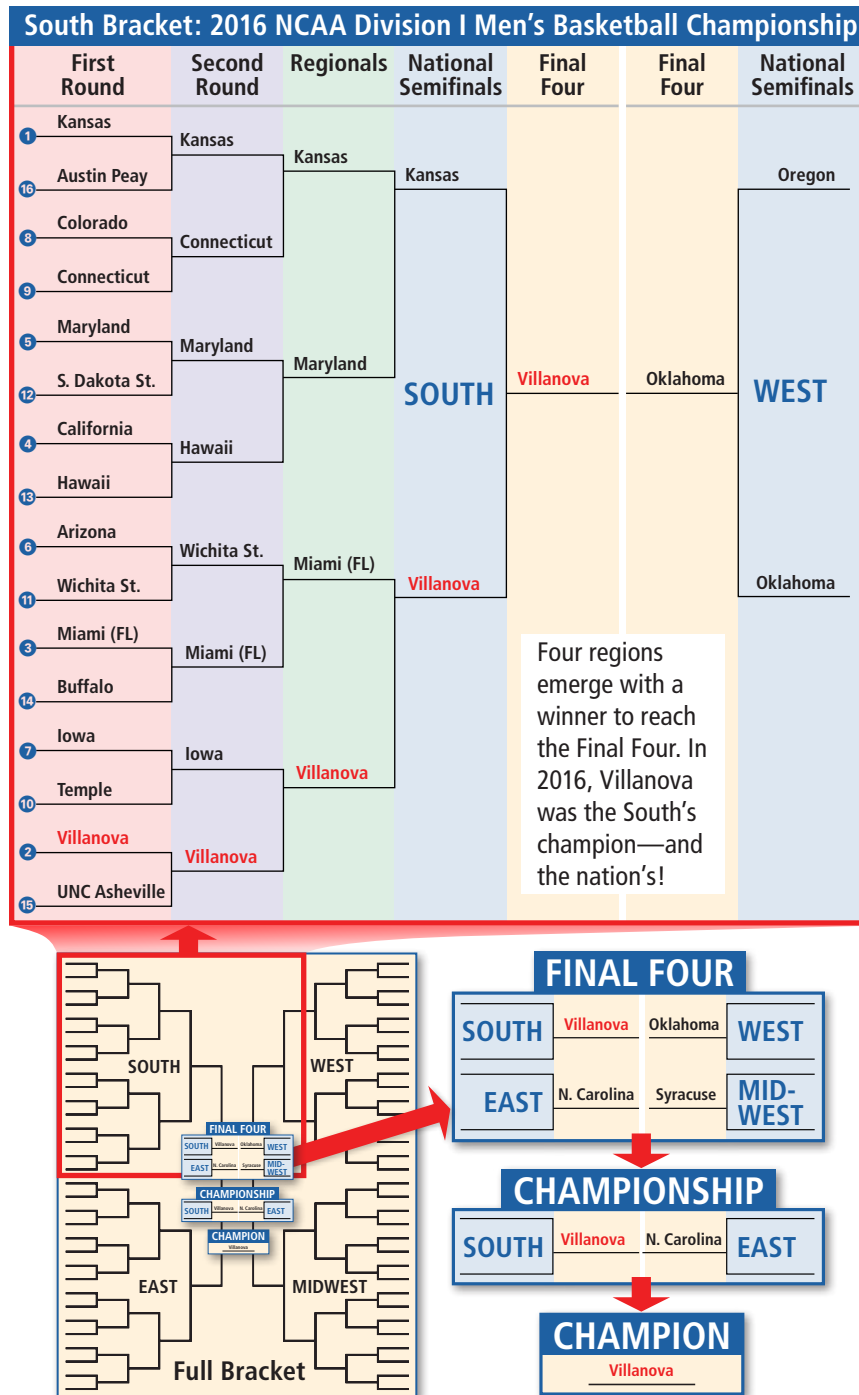
## How the Madness Works

The path to the championship is long and demanding. In 2016, there were 351 schools playing Men's Division I basketball. These teams are separated by region into 32 conferences of different sizes. All the teams want to play in the tournament, but only 68 will 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 selection committee of athletic directors and conference commissioners. The ten-person committee considers many factors in their choices. Based on **statistics**, along with discussions with coaches and one another, the members vote to determine which teams will play in the tournament. This takes place a few days 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.





## The Bracket Racket

March Madness is a fitting title for this historic tournament since every March, complete madness overtakes the country. It is one of the most popular sporting events in the United States, even among people who aren't sports fans. This is largely 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 claims to have the winning **strategy**, and 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 appeared on a televised segment in which he filled out his own March Madness bracket.



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.

President Obama did not have much success with his picks, however. He successfully picked the University of North Carolina Tar Heels to win the tournament in 2009, but at least while in office, he never chose another winner.

## Bracket Bragging

In 2015, an eleven-year-old girl named Emilia wrote a letter to President Obama to "smack talk" his March Madness picks. Her 2015 bracket beat his. "You are a great president," she wrote, "just not the best bracket picker."

President Obama wrote Emilia a letter back with a signed photo of him and his bracket that read, "Next time, I'll check with you first!"

## Win After Win

Over the course of her career, Patricia Summitt earned 1,098 wins. That's the most in NCAA basketball history.

From 1974 to 2012, she coached the Tennessee Lady Volunteers. They 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.



## Women's Wins

In 1982, the NCAA started a women's March Madness basketball tournament with 32 teams. Since then it has doubled, and public interest continues to grow.

The Connecticut Huskies have been the most **dominant** team in women's March Madness tournament history with eleven national championships; the Tennessee Volunteers rank second with eight. 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 the Villanova Wildcats much of a chance against the Georgetown Hoyas in the 1985 championship finals. Georgetown was the defending champion, having won in 1984, and was awarded the top rank that year. Meanwhile, Villanova was ranked in eighth place, 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, 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* in basketball is how many field goals are successful out of all the field goals that the team attempts. The higher the percentage, the better!





A Villanova Wildcat rejoices after beating Georgetown for the national championship in 1985.

The Wildcats shocked Georgetown by breaking the record for the highest field goal percentage in Final Four history—over 78 percent (22 of 28) in the game. This led to Villanova winning their first national championship in men’s basketball with a score of 66-64.

### *1988 Kansas Jayhawks*

The Kansas Jayhawks had a miraculous run in 1988. Led by star player Danny Manning, the team earned the nickname “Danny and the Miracles.” This was because nobody expected them to win or even come close. The Jayhawks had just finished an eleven-loss season—the most losses that a national championship team has ever had. In 2008, Danny Manning helped Kansas capture another March Madness championship, only this time as an assistant coach.

### *2016 Blue Raiders*

The Middle Tennessee Blue Raiders weren’t given much of a chance against the Michigan State Spartans in the 2016 opening round. The Spartans were ranked second, and many thought they should have been first; the Blue Raiders were ranked fifteenth. Most people viewed this game as a mere warm-up for Michigan State. 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!



A Blue Raider shoots against a Spartan in the 2016 opening round.





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).

## Conclusion

Every March, millions of people take in the excitement of Cinderella teams, rising stars, incredible athletic feats, 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!

## 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.

## Glossary

<b>bracket</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a grid that pairs opponents in a tournament (p. 9)
<b>chaos</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	confusion; lack of order (p. 4)
<b>dominant</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	more important, effective, or powerful than others (p. 11)
<b>drafted</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	selected out of a group to play on a professional sports team (p. 6)
<b>legends</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	famous people who are known for a special talent or achievement (p. 5)
<b>regulates</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	controls the behavior of something so it works right or obeys laws or rules (p. 5)
<b>single-elimination tournament</b> ( <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)
<b>statistics</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	numerical data that is collected, organized, and studied (p. 7)
<b>strategy</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a careful plan for solving a problem or achieving a goal (p. 9)
<b>underdogs</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the expected losers in a struggle or contest (p. 4)
<b>unpredictability</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the quality of being impossible to know ahead of time (p. 4)
<b>upsets</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	unexpected results in sports games or other competitions (p. 4)