**The Evolution of Conference Representation in March Madness**

Over the past four decades, the landscape of college basketball conferences and their representation in the NCAA Division I Men’s Basketball Tournament has undergone significant changes. This evolution reflects the dynamic nature of college basketball and the profound impact of conference realignment on March Madness participation. The attached graphic shows how many teams the major conferences have put in the tournament each year since the expansion of the field size to 64 (in 1985).

Conference expansion and realignment have been major drivers of change. The Big Eight transformed into the Big 12, while the Big Ten and SEC significantly expanded their membership. These changes have generally led to increased tournament bids for these conferences, a logical outcome of their growth.

The SEC, in particular, has seen a remarkable surge in tournament participation. In 2025, they shattered records by sending 14 out of 16 teams (87.5% representation) to the tournament. This unprecedented achievement surpasses the previous record set by the Big East in 2011, which sent 11 out of 16 teams (68.75% representation). The SEC’s 2025 dominance is further highlighted by Auburn securing the #1 overall seed and Florida also earning a #1 seed.

Despite losing several key members, the Big East has maintained a strong presence in the tournament, consistently sending multiple teams each year. In contrast, the ACC, once the premier basketball conference, has faced challenges recently. In 2023, they experienced back-to-back seasons with only a third of their teams making the tournament, a significant decline from their historical performance.

The Pac-12’s journey tells another story of change. After expanding from the Pac-10, recent conference realignment has led to its effective dissolution as a major basketball conference. In a historic turn, 2025 will mark the first time since 1944 that no Pac-12 team will participate in the NCAA Tournament.

As conferences continue to evolve, we can expect further shifts in tournament representation. The SEC’s record-breaking performance and the ACC’s efforts to regain prominence will be key storylines to watch in the coming years, shaping the future landscape of college basketball and March Madness participation.