

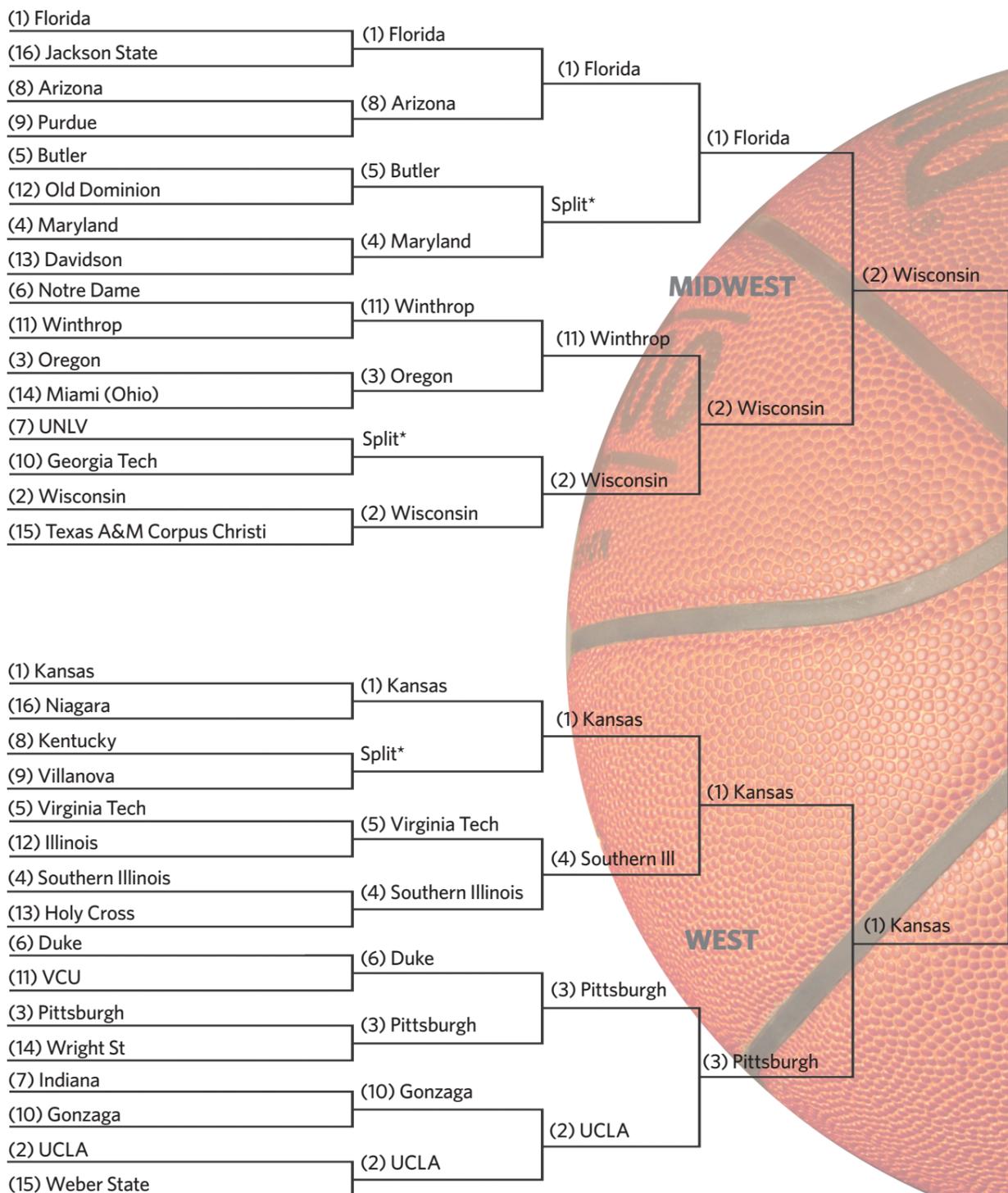
# BUSTING TH

## The Gateway goes crazy f

The most boring stretch of the sports year has finally concluded—from the Super Bowl until now, poor sports fans have been forced to suffer through a severe lull in activity. Sure, the NHL and NBA seasons continued to plod along, but beyond those, there has been a severe lack on the athletic front. That all ends today, however, as 32 teams will kick off March Madness in search of the NCAA men's basketball title.

Last year we informed you that Michigan State would go deep, the SEC Champion would falter and that midnight would strike for Cinderella in the Sweet 16. We told you Gerry McNamara would bolster Syracuse in the post-season, and Duke, Connecticut, Georgetown, Villanova, Gonzaga and Memphis were potential Final Four teams. Of course, Michigan State was upset as a sixth seed in the first round, and Florida rolled through the SEC and the Final Four to win the whole thing. George Mason ran their eleven-seed into the National semifinals, McNamara shot 0-6 in the Orange's first-round upset and not a single of our Final Four picks made it—only three even hit the Elite Eight. The lesson here is clearly that last year was an outlier for college basketball. No one knew what was going on in the league, and neither did the teams participating, as none of the top seeds made the Final Four, yet George fucking Mason did.

Also, just in case last year's "experts" didn't know what they were talking about, we decided changes needed to be made. In an effort to do a better job of not getting everything completely wrong, Chris watched more college basketball and Paul followed it considerably less, and we added two more writers to the panel. We even filled out an entire bracket instead of just alerting you to the good teams and potential busts. What we've discovered is that this year the good teams are very, very good, while the bottom half of the brackets aren't impressive. Overall we predict that the top teams will, for the most part have an easy time getting through their brackets, and this year will be the opposite of 2006's tournament, where the underdogs had a field day. We see very few obvious upsets out there, and even fewer questionable high seeds—Washington State being the only one none of us are confident in. Sure, there'll be a twelve who upsets and five—an upset that has happened a third of the time since the tournament's current format was adopted in 1979—and the best coaches will push mediocre teams through the first round, regardless of seeding, but beyond that the favourites should take care of business.



### >> The Contenders

#### University of North Carolina

The Tar Heels have been one of the best programs in the country all season long, and for good reason. Tyler Hansbrough is unstoppable, even with a broken nose, though you could see that he was uncomfortable wearing the protective face mask in the ACC tournament. UNC will need their leading rebounder and scorer to find his comfort zone once more, but we think he will, which is why they're our pick to win the whole thing. Backing Hansbrough is athletic big man Brandon Wright, who's hitting a ridiculous 66 per cent of his shots as the second option. Point guard Ty Lawson is efficient and spreads the ball well on offence, while also having the ability to create his own shot. If anything can undo UNC, however, it's their lack of experience. Wright, Lawson and fellow guard Wayne Ellington are all in their first years out of high school, while Hansbrough's only a sophomore.

#### University of Kansas

Our other National finalist has the deepest team in the country. Mario Chalmers, Brandon Rush

and Julian Wright all have the ability to take over and dominate a game to get the Jayhawks a win. Additionally, when one guy catches fire, his teammates have become adept at finding him and getting him the ball. Three Jayhawks average over 3.0 assists per game, while Wright and Rush dish for 2.2 and 1.9 respectively. The Jayhawks are another young team; however, they're without a single senior on their roster. And, while Wright has been impressive on the glass this year with 8.0 rebounds per game, Kansas prefers to play a smaller, more athletic lineup, making them susceptible to a team with a solid post presence. And we can't shake that early season loss to Oral Roberts.

#### Ohio State University

The Buckeyes would be the kind of team to give Kansas troubles, with probable first-overall NBA draft pick Greg Oden anchoring the middle. Oden's played with an injured right wrist all season, keeping it wrapped and relying on his left hand. Still, the 7'0" freshman has averaged 15.5 points, 9.7 rebounds and 3.5 blocks per game. OSU also has ballsy point guard Mike Conley Jr, who feeds Oden the ball for most of the game, but has the ability and desire to take big shots late in games. He's also one

of the better defensive guards in the country. OSU's only losses this year are to Florida, Wisconsin and UNC, making them one of the few top teams in the bracket without an embarrassing blemish on their record.

#### University of Florida

The Gators have looked lackadaisical at times this season, but they've still managed to put together one of the best records in the NCAA. Returning all five starters from last year's championship squad, Florida is still lead by juniors Taurean Green, Joakim Noah, Al Horford and Corey Brewer. The four give the Gators the size, speed and athleticism to play against any team in the country, and Horford, Noah and Brewer are all potential lottery picks when they finally leave school for the greener pastures of the NBA. To be successful, however, the team will need to avoid the complacency that has plagued them in losses to Florida State earlier in the year, and Vanderbilt, LSU and Tennessee in the past month.

#### Georgetown University

The Hoyas made it out of arguably the toughest conference in the NCAA, becoming Big East champs with a convincing win over Pittsburgh. Jeff Green

