

# MARCH MADNESS

## FINAL FOUR

April 1, 2025

THE MORNING SUN

# Memories of Madness

## PSU coach Boschee recalls NCAA tournaments at KU

By Jim Henry  
jhenry@morningsun.net

It's been more than 20 years since Jeff Boschee played in four NCAA Tournaments for the Kansas Jayhawks.

In all, he played in 12 tournament games, losing in the second round his first two years and the Sweet 16 as a junior before reaching the Final Four in his final season.

Boschee averaged 13.0 points and 3.1 3-point goals per game during tournament play. His high games were 19 points against Cal State Northridge in the first round of 2001 and Stanford in the second round of 2002, and he drilled six treys in an overtime loss to Kentucky in 1999.

Boschee, who just completed his third season as Pittsburg State's basketball coach, sat down and reflected on his March Madness days.

**Question: In your first postseason experience, you were named Most Outstanding Player when Kansas won the Big 12 Tournament. What's your biggest memory of that?**

Answer: "That was a tough year for us for KU standards (23-10). Thankfully we didn't have social media back at that time or somebody would have been getting death threats. Coming off the year that they had had (35-4) and having to replace so much, and really I got thrown into the starting lineup in the beginning because of an injury to T.J. Pugh. He broke his foot, so that moved me into the point guard spot and moved Ryan Robertson out to the 2.

"We struggled throughout the year, and we were the 3 seed going into the (Big 12) tournament and ended up winning the whole thing. That was pretty cool to be named most outstanding player. I felt like Rudy when the players put me up on their shoulders. I was trying to get down as quick as I could."

**Q: Was that one of your shaved-head years?**

A: "I did it in high school. I started off my freshman year, I had a flat top. A couple of buddies of mine, we would always cut our hair before the games at my house the night before. One game – I think it was halfway through my freshman year – we're like let's just buzz it. From there on, I did it my whole high school career and did it my first two years of college.

"After my sophomore year, I grew it out. The Lawrence Journal World's Gary Bedore, who was the beat writer, did a huge article that Boschee has hair now. People didn't recognize me around Lawrence at all. Actually it was kind of nice. I got to go in a restaurant or store without being bothered."

**Q: For your first NCAA Tournament, where did the Jayhawks go?**

A: "New Orleans. We beat Evansville in the first round and then we played Kentucky, which was the reigning national champion. We lost in overtime. We had them beat; we were up 3 late and had to get one stop. We gave up an offensive rebound and Scott Padgett banked in a 3 to tie it to send it to overtime."

**Q: That first year, did the reality of the NCAA Tournament meet what you expected?**

A: "I remember at the Big 12 Tournament getting that excitement and that feeling, sitting in our hotel room watching the other teams play. I got that same excitement that you get in postseason play in high school.

"The NCAA was really just another game honestly. We played in the Superdome and obviously KU travels well and we had great fan support. I think when you're in it, you kind of get used to it because we were so used to playing in front of big crowds. It was just kind of another game. When you're out of it, when I was done playing, you realize how cool it was. When you're in it, it's just another game."

**Q: Your sophomore year, where did the Jayhawks go?**

A: "We went to Wake Forest and beat DePaul in the first game. We were the 8 seed that year – we didn't have a great year that year -- 23-9 going into the tournament – and we played the No. 1 seed Duke with Jason Williams and Mike Dunleavy and all of them. Again, we had them beat and gave up an offensive rebound to Carlos Boozer. He put it back in to go up 2 late and we lost.

"I remember the next year at our preseason meeting – we would always go over to Coach (Roy) Williams' house the first day of school. He talked

about how we were going to be a better rebounding team because the last two years an offensive rebound has ended our season. My junior year, we had a really good year. We just came up short in the Sweet 16."

**Q: Your junior year, where did the Jayhawks start the NCAA Tournament?**

A: "Dayton, Ohio. We beat Cal State Northridge the first round, then we pounded Syracuse by like 30. And then we lost to Coach (Bill) Self and Illinois in San Antonio in the Sweet 16. They just out-toughed us, more physical. Frankie Williams, Cory Bradford, they were really good. They barely lost to Arizona in the Elite Eight to go to the Final Four."

**Q: Then in your senior year, you finally get to the Final Four. How big of a difference was that from your first three NCAA trips?**

A: "That was game-changing. The amount of attention you get as opposed to the first two rounds or Sweet 16, that whole week there was media

SEE BOSCHEE, 4C



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## Boschee: Productive, durable player at KU

It's common knowledge that Jeff Boschee is one of the best shooters in Kansas Jayhawks history as he still holds the school record with 338 career 3-point goals.

But few realize that Boschee is also one of the most durable players for the Jayhawks. He started 132 games in four seasons to rank third in school history behind Danny Manning (146) and Aaron Miles (137). His 137 total games are tied for 19th place, and his 4,109 minutes rank fifth.

He averaged 11.4 points for his career and double figures in every season – 10.9 as a freshman, 10.0 sophomore, 11.1 junior and 13.4 senior. He shot 42 percent from the field, 40 percent from beyond the arc and 78 percent at the foul line.

**Other accomplishments:**

- one of 50 McDonald's High School All-Americans to play at KU;
- 1999 Big 12 Conference Freshman of the Year;
- 1999 Big 12 Tournament Most Outstanding Player;
- Mr. Basketball in North Dakota in 1998.

Source: Kansas Basketball Media Guide





Karenna Gerber (5) and Grace Pyle (24) finished among the top-10 career scorers in Pittsburg State history. COURTESY DEREK LIVINGSTON / PSU SPORTS INFORMATION DEPARTMENT



# Gorillas post best season in school history

By Jim Henry  
jhenry@morningsun.net

Pittsburg State has completed its best women’s basketball season in program history. A 33-4 record represents four more victories and two fewer losses than any previous Gorilla team, and the 18-1 MIAA mark ties the most conference victories and sets a new record for fewest losses. Then for the finishing touch, the Gorillas registered their first Elite Eight victory in three appearances with a 66-55 decision over Lubbock Christian. The season ended two days later with a 68-61 loss to Grand Valley State, but the loss has merit. The Lakers (38-2) won the national championship, and every victory was by double figures except the one against PSU. The Gorillas had winning streaks of 9, 15 and 9 games. The 15-game streak from Dec. 20, 2024 through Feb. 20, 2025 tied the school record. “We thought we had a good amount of talent, but it’s getting all the pieces to fit together,” coach Amanda Davied said. “It seems like some things morph as

you go and people figure out their roles. We had the right mindset of kids who transferred in, and they truly said they just wanted to help with whatever we needed them to do. Combine that with the already established talent we had, that divided the task and allowed us to have that next piece ready to go in case their was a sprained ankle or foul trouble. “Kids truly stepped up when their time was called. Alba (Lozano) in the conference tournament, Clara (Swearingen) hitting a big shot in Fort Smith ... just so many moments that we needed somebody to step in, and they did that. I feel completely blessed. As I’ve said before, I think God put it together better than I ever could have. And timing was a lot of it. The players and the coaches just joined forces.” The Gorillas became the first one-loss regular-season conference champion in five seasons, and they avenged the league loss at Fort Hays State by beating the Tigers in the post-season tournament championship game. “Conference is such

a long season,” Davied said. “The mental toughness it takes to not slip ... people slip when they get comfortable, thinking they can just go through practice and we’re playing some of the lower teams in the league. Those are things we’ve done in years past, and I think those lessons served us well. We kept preaching to them that preparing the same will keep us at a high level.” Winning the conference tournament earned the Gorillas the No. 1 seed in the Central Region tournament, and that will be remembered for many reasons, including three great games and crowds exceeding 2,100. The Gorillas beat Harding 87-75, Minnesota State 94-91 and Southwest Minnesota State 85-82, and they trailed by 15 points in the second half in each of the last two games. “The regional, I’ll remember the community support,” Davied said. “And it was like that in 2016 that we were able to host. “I’ll remember the way the girls battled in all the games because we were down at half-time every game. The

way they continued to have their head down and believe and work – and losing Macie Mays (with a knee injury against Minnesota State) was obviously the crushing part of our season.” The support continued at the Elite Eight in Pittsburg, Pa. “Gorilla Nation really stood out with us,” Davied said. “The support that we got by the band going, the cheer (squad) going ... for women’s basketball to be what I had thought was the whole reason I wanted to be at Pittsburg State and not go Division I because I wanted to be big-time here. It gave proof to what we’d been telling recruits and kids who are here that if you win, they will come.” The season ends the careers of center Karenna Gerber, guard Grace Pyle and forward Sydney Holmes, who were teammates the last eight years between summer basketball and PSU. Gerber set single-season records for points (638), rebounds (309) and double-doubles (15), and she broke career records for field-goal percentage (.591), rebounds (936) and double-doubles (36).

For her career, she is sixth in points (1,822) and second in blocks (189), and her 129 games are the most by a four-year player and second overall behind Tristan Gegg’s 139 games in five years. Pyle, who holds the single-game scoring record of 41 points, is third in single-season points (603) and 3-point goals (96). On the career lists, she is eighth in scoring (1,664), fourth in 3-pointers (263) and 10th in assists (306). Holmes is tied for fifth in games played (127), and she joined the 500-rebound career list. “I did expect that this group, ‘the Big 3,’ was capable of having this run,” Davied said. “It was a great time recruiting them and watching them play. It’s been a complete privilege for me to be with them four years, and they are leaving the program better than they found it. “But it takes more than three kids to get it all done. That supporting cast, I can’t stop talking about them enough. It takes every single person, and I’m talking about Alba and the things she has given this team. About (Destiny) Buerge, Han-

nah Miller and Ja’Miya Brown, the efforts they have put in every day to help us prepare. I love talking about Syd, Grace and Karenna, but I also love talking about those kids in other roles who made this special.” Macie Mays averaged 13.7 points and moved into the top-10 in career free-throw shooting (81.4 percent) and field-goal shooting (52.2.). Harper Schreiner had the third-best season in school history with 162 assists, and she is third in career assists (428). Schreiner, Savannah Campbell, Maycee James, Holmes and Hannah Nilges all averaged from 5-7 points. Nilges and Lozano are two more seniors the Gorillas are losing, and now the attention shifts to recruiting. “We’re going to get after it and sign the best available just like everybody else in the country is trying to do,” Davied said. “The portal is the new thing, and you have to adjust to it. “We’re hard at it, and we want to give the next group of players these same experiences. You have to act now, and you have to be aggressive. You don’t get to sit in the glory very long.”

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**Division II Elite Eight Women**  
**At Pittsburgh, Pa.**  
**(Seeds in Parentheses)**  
**First Round**  
(3) Cal State-Dominguez Hills 82, (6) Coker 66  
(7) Union 80, (2) Bentley 62  
(1) Grand Valley St. 60, (8) Gannon 32  
(4) Pittsburg St. 66, (5) Lubbock Christian 55  
**Semifinals**  
Cal State-Dominguez Hills 68, Union 50  
Grand Valley St. 68, Pittsburg St. 61  
**Championship**  
Grand Valley St. 70, Cal State-Dominguez Hills 58

**Men**  
**At Evansville, Ind.**  
**(Seeds in Parentheses)**  
**First Round**  
(3) Dallas Baptist 98, (6) Lake Superior St. 85  
(7) Cal State-Dominguez Hills 86, (2) West Liberty 84  
(1) Nova Southeastern 102, (8) Assumption 93  
(4) Washburn 90, (5) Le-noir-Rhyne 78  
**Semifinals**  
Cal State-Dominguez Hills 94, Dallas Baptist 83, OT  
Nova Southeastern 94, Washburn 68  
**Championship**  
Nova Southeastern 74, Cal State Dominguez Hills 73

# Nova Southeastern nips Dominguez Hills 74-73

**From staff, AP reports**  
sports@morningsun.net

EVANSVILLE, Ind. — MJ Iraldi made two free throws with 17.8 seconds left and finished with 27 points to rally Nova Southeastern to a 74-73 victory over Cal State Dominguez Hills in the championship game of the Division II Tournament on Saturday at the Ford Center.

It was the second national championship in

the last three seasons for the top-seeded Sharks (36-1) under coach Jim Crutchfield. Crutchfield is 563-86 over 20 seasons. His .867 winning percentage is the best in college basketball at any level among coaches with at least 10 years experience.

Iraldi's free throws came after David Cheatom had given the seventh-seeded Toros (30-6) the lead with 24 seconds remaining.

Cheatom had a scoop shot in the lane in traffic roll off the rim in the final seconds.

Iraldi made 8 of 16 shots with a 3-point-er and 10 of 12 foul shots. He added nine rebounds and three steals. Tyler Eberhart totaled 14 points and six boards. Dallas Graziani pitched in with 13 points and nine assists.

Jeremy Dent-Smith led Dominguez Hills with 27 points and 10

rebounds before fouling out with 1:19 left. Dent-Smith helped rally the Toros from an eight-point deficit with 11 minutes remaining. He scored six straight points to tie the game at 62 with 8:15 to go.

Cheatom scored 15.

A layup by Ross Reeves gave the Sharks a 17-9 lead seven minutes into the game. Dent-Smith's basket capped a 15-5 run from there as the Toros moved in front and

played with a lead over the final 7:37, taking a 42-38 advantage into halftime.

The Sharks capped an unbeaten 36-0 season with a 111-101 victory over West Liberty in the 2023 title game before losing to Minnesota State 88-85 last season on a 3-pointer at the buzzer.

The Toros' women also lost in the championship game on Friday night in Pittsburgh, Pa.

## Sharks end Washburn's season

**By Jim Henry**  
jhenry@morningsun.net

No. 1 Nova Southeastern jumped out to a 24-point halftime lead and rolled past fourth-seeded and No. 5 Washburn 94-68 Thursday night in the semifinal round of the NCAA Division II men's Elite Eight at the Ford Center in Evansville, Ind.

The Sharks, who lead Division II at 102 points per game, shot 57 percent (19-of-33, including 7-of-13 from 3-point range) while building a 53-29 halftime advantage.

Ryker Cisarik led the Sharks with 28 points, and D2 national player of the year MJ Iraldi tallied 25. Nova Southeastern hit 49 percent (34-of-69) for the game and held a 39-32 rebounding advantage.

Jacob Hanna, who was the most outstanding player in the Central Region, topped Washburn with 14 point, followed by Andrew Orr with 13 and Jack Bachelor with 11. Orr, who hit 6-of-9 shots, also snagged a team-high eight rebounds.

The Ichabods shot 50 percent (15-of-30) in the second half to finish at 46 percent (26-of-57).

Washburn finishes

30-4, which is second-best in school history behind the 1987 team that went 35-4 and won the NAIA championship at Kemper Arena in Kansas City, Mo.

**WASHBURN 90, LENOIR-RHYNE 78**

The Ichabods led from start to finish in the quarterfinal game and handed coach Brett Ballard career victory No. 200.

Behind Brayden Shorter's nine early points, Washburn jumped out to a 13-4 lead and increased the margin to 27-13 after eight minutes.

Lenoir-Rhyne (29-6) cut the margin to 46-40 at halftime, but Washburn stretched its lead to 64-45 in the first five minutes of the second half.

Shorter scored 18 points to lead six Ichabods in double figures. Dillon Claussen made all seven shots and contributed 17 points off the bench, followed by Hanna, Bachelor and Brady Christiansen all with 12 and Orr with 10. Bachelor also handed out nine assists as the Ichabods shot 53 percent (31-of-58, including 10-of-21 from the arc).

Junior Hodnett scored 19 points for the Bears, who had a nine-game winning streak end.

## BOSCHEE

CONTINUED FROM 1C

in our gym every single day after practice. We had to set up little spots all over the gym after practice where you get national media coming in.

"I think we went up a day earlier than what we were supposed to. We went to Atlanta and stayed away from everybody, away from downtown. That was pretty surreal, going to a practice and you had close to 30,000 people at our practice (the day before the game at the Georgia Dome). That was pretty cool. ... I can't imagine what it is now because now they use the whole arena. Back when I played, they cut the arena in half. I think our game against Maryland, we had 63,000. But now, you're talking 100,000."

**Q: What is it like playing in those domes?**

A: "It never really bothered me. People always talk about it's hard to shoot in those, but for me, that's more of an excuse than anything. I always shot the ball pretty well in domes. We played in the Edward Jones Dome (in St. Louis) the first two rounds my senior year, beat Holy Cross and Stanford and shot the heck out of the basketball. Kirk Hinrich got hurt in the Holy Cross game; it was close the whole game and we wound up winning by 11. Then we just absolutely destroyed Stanford and shot the heck out of the basketball. Then we played at Wis-



**Jeff Boschee started 132 games for the Kansas Jayhawks, third-most in school history.** COURTESY / KU ATHLETICS

consin's home arena in Madison, which is really a big arena, too."

**Q: Many fans believe the semifinal game against Maryland was the actual championship game. Do you agree?**

A: "They beat Indiana pretty easily in the championship game. That year, us, Duke and Maryland were like 1-2-3 back and forth all year. Duke didn't make it (to the Final Four).

"I felt that game against Maryland was

the national championship game. I felt we were the two best teams. We got down 20 points in the second half and clawed our way back. We were down five with a minute and a half left. We couldn't fully close the gap (losing 97-88).

"It was hard. We had Kirk, Nick Collison and Drew Goodin, and Keith Langford, Wayne Simien and Aaron Miles were young. That team could score. In conference play we shot almost 50 percent from

the 3 and averaged almost 95 points a game."

**Q: Can you believe it's been 23 years ago?**

A: "I don't feel like that personally because I still feel young and vibrant, but every once in a while, I'll go back and watch that Final Four game on YouTube. I'll watch it and reminisce a little bit, but it's hard to believe it's been that long. I definitely don't feel like it; that's for sure."



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# Grand Valley captures D2 women's crown

From staff, AP reports  
sports@morningsun.net

PITTSBURGH, Pa. — Freshman MacKenzie Bisballe scored 14 points and her sister Rylie Bisballe added 13 as Grand Valley State secured its second Division II championship with a 70-

58 win over California State-Dominguez Hills on Friday night at the UPMC Cooper Fieldhouse on the Duquesne University campus. Top-seeded Grand Valley State (38-2) played in the title game for the second time in program history, with the 2005-06

team beating American International 58-52 to finish 33-3. It was the winningest team in program history. Among the Lakers' 38 victories this season, 37 were by double-digit margins. The exception was a 68-61 victory over Pittsburg State two

nights earlier in the national semifinals. California State-Dominguez Hills (36-2), which won 29 straight games to start the season, was in the championship game for the first time in program history. Grand Valley State

held a 15-12 lead with 1:13 left in the first quarter before scoring 11 of the next 12 points to go ahead 26-13 midway through the second. The Toros struggled from the field in the first half, starting the game by making just 5 of 18 shots (28%).

The Lakers led 38-21 at halftime and then scored the opening nine points of the third quarter. Asia Jordan led Dominguez Hills with 17 points and 10 rebounds. WBCA player of the year Nala Williams had seven points on 3-of-14 shooting.

# Duke reaches 18th Final Four

By EDDIE PELLIS  
AP National Writer

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) — Duke freshman Cooper Flagg swooped across the paint and swatted an Alabama player's shot completely off the court. The ball landed in the stands. Flagg and the Blue Devils -- they're headed to the Final Four. Duke's long, tall, NBA-ready standouts smothered the Crimson Tide's nation-leading offense and even papered over Flagg's rough shooting night to lift the Blue Devils to the program's 18th Final Four with an 85-65 victory Saturday night in the NCAA Tournament's East Region final.

Flagg made only 6 of 16 shots, including a brick that got stuck in the flange of the rim, but still finished with 16 points. Kon Knueppel, another potential lottery pick, led the Blue Devils with 21 points, and Tyrese Proctor — who came to the post-game news conference with the freshly cut net hanging from his neck — finished with 17. But the most important stat: Alabama's offense, one coming off a record-setting night from 3 in the Sweet 16, failed to crack 70 points for only the second time this season.

The Crimson Tide's 35.4% shooting from the floor was their worst all season and their 25% from behind the arc (8 for 32) matched their fourth-worst showing of 2024-25. "To hold them to 65 points is incredible," Duke coach Jon Scheyer said. "We watched them play the other night. They scored 113 and made 25 3s. The biggest thing for us was not taking the bait of getting so spread out." Mark Sears, who came one short of a tournament record with 10 3s two nights earlier, finished with



Alabama forward Grant Nelson blocks a shot by Duke guard Sion James during their Elite Eight game Saturday night in Newark, N.J. (AP PHOTO/JULIA DEMAREE NIKHINSON)

one this time. His six points were his fewest since he got shut out in limited playing time in a win over LSU in January. "They've got length all over the place, just look at their starting lineup," Alabama coach Nate Oats said when asked to explain his team's struggles. The top-seeded Blue Devils (35-3) won their 15th straight. At the Final Four in San Antonio, they'll play the winner of Sunday's game between Houston and Tennessee. Their win erased any chance of an all-Southeastern Conference show at the Final Four, but with No. 1 Florida winning earlier, it kept alive the prospect of all four top seeds playing on the sport's biggest stage for only the second time. Khaman Maluach — he of the 9-foot-8 standing reach — scored 14 points on 6-of-7 shooting, had two blocks and altered a few more Alabama shots. Duke shot 53.6% despite its best player's rough night. Flagg was hardly bad in this one. He had nine

rebounds, three assists and the one mega-block that sent Mouhammed Dioubate's floater flying over press row. But in a game in which both teams were focused on taking away the other's best player, it was Duke that did it more effectively, switching off on Sears, locking down the perimeter and never letting him find breathing room. The fifth-year senior's first bucket of any kind came nearly 18 minutes into the game and the shot was a 16-footer from the elbow — the exact kind of midrange shot Oats' team of dunkers and 3-point specialists avoids. Sears' first 3 came with 16:19 left in the game. His final line: 2 for 12 from the floor, 1 for 5 from 3. He also had six assists. "It was by committee," Duke guard Sion James said. "We were switching a lot. We knew the biggest thing for him is showing him bodies, making sure whoever was guarding the ball is not on an island by himself." Labaron Philon led the second-seeded Crimson Tide (28-9)

with 16 points. Not a single Alabama player made more shots than he missed. Scheyer, leading the program to the Final Four for the first time since his predecessor Mike Krzyzewski's last season in 2022, has up to six NBA prospects on his roster. "Loose, confident, competitive and not fazed by this environment," Scheyer said of his group of freshmen, led by the 18-year-old Flagg, who are trying to bring the first title back to Cameron Indoor Stadium since 2015.

### FINAL FOUR FIRSTS

The only other Final Four to feature all No. 1 seeds was in 2008 when Kansas, Memphis, UCLA and North Carolina made it. The site: San Antonio.

### ANOTHER TITLE FOR TIDE WHEELCHAIR TEAM

It wasn't a totally lost night for Tide fans. Shortly before tipoff, the Alabama women's wheelchair hoops team beat Texas-Arlington 67-52 for its fifth straight national championship.

# Late rally propels Gators past Texas Tech 84-79

By JOSH DUBOW  
AP Sports Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Coach Todd Golden cut the final strand of the net, waved it to the crowd and performed the famed Gator Chomp. A celebration that seemed completely improbable just a few minutes earlier was in high gear. Florida is heading back to the Final Four.

Walter Clayton Jr. rescued top-seeded Florida with two late 3-pointers, and the Gators rallied from nine points down late to beat Texas Tech 84-79 in the NCAA Tournament's West Region final on Saturday. "It goes to show how together we all are," Clayton said. "Many times could easily just break, start pointing the finger, blaming each other for this and that. But we just stayed together through the end and stayed the course. And thankfully we got it done today."

The Gators (34-4) trailed 75-66 with less than three minutes to play before staging a furious rally against the third-seeded Red Raiders (28-9), who had done the same in the Sweet 16 against Arkansas.

Clayton dribbled out of

the paint and hit a fade-away 3 with 59 seconds left to give Florida a 78-77 lead, and the Gators held on from there to advance to their first Final Four since 2014 in Golden's third season. Florida will face the South Region champion — either Auburn or Michigan State — next Saturday in San Antonio. "There's not another player in America you would rather have right now than Walter Clayton with the ball in his hands in a big-time moment," Golden said. "The biggest thing in those moments is you need to have somebody that wants to take those shots. They're obviously difficult plays, but someone that has the confidence to step up and make incredible individual plays. Walter did that for us tonight." The comeback provided a happy ending to Golden's return to the Bay Area, where he played in college at Saint Mary's and got his start as a head coach at San Francisco. As the final horn sounded, Golden turned to the Gators fans and demonstrably pumped his fist as his players rushed out to the court to celebrate.



Florida guard Walter Clayton Jr. drives on Texas Tech forward Darrion Williams during their Elite Eight game Saturday night in San Francisco. (AP PHOTO/MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ)



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# Defense carries Houston past Tennessee

By **MICHAEL MAROT**  
AP Sports Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Houston's relentless, harassing defense had Tennessee's shooters dancing around.

Now, the Cougars are two-stepping it back to Texas.

L.J. Cryer finished with 17 points, Emanuel Sharp scored 14 of his 16 points in the second half and the nation's stingiest defense delivered a historic NCAA Tournament performance, leading top-seeded Houston past second-seeded Tennessee 69-50 on Sunday for the Midwest Region title and its seventh trip to the Final Four.

Next up is Cooper Flagg and five-time national champion Duke on Saturday in San Antonio, just a 3 1/2-hour drive from Houston's campus. First, the Cougars wanted to savor the journey they took to this net-cutting celebration, one that failed to materialize each of the past two seasons when they were eliminated in the Sweet 16 as a No. 1 seed.

"It's a good feeling knowing what we've been through," Sharp, the region's most outstanding player, said of Houston's first Final Four appearance since 2021. "A lot of people doubted us."

The Cougars (34-4) broke the school's single-season record for wins, extended the nation's longest active winning streak to 17 games and gave coach Kelvin Sampson a third chance to reach his first national championship game.

Houston has played on college basketball's biggest stage twice, losing title games in 1983 to N.C. State and in 1984 to Georgetown during the Phi Slama Jama era.

They're back this time thanks to Sharp, who made two of his



**Houston's Emanuel Sharp (left) steals the ball from Tennessee's Chaz Lanier during the second half of their Elite Eight game Sunday afternoon in Indianapolis.** (AP PHOTO/MICHAEL CONROY)

four 3-pointers in quick succession to thwart a second-half charge from Tennessee.

Chaz Lanier and Jordan Gainey scored 17 points apiece for the Volunteers (30-8), who again fell short of the program's first Final Four appearance. Coach Rick Barnes' team was also eliminated in a regional final last year.

Houston won this one with a familiar formula.

The nation's top scoring defense held the Vols to 15 first-half points, the fewest in an Elite Eight game since 1979. It was also the lowest first-half scoring total by any No. 1 or No. 2 seed in a tourney game since seeding began that same year.

"I feel like we always want to throw the first punch," said Milos Uzan, who scored four points after making the decisive basket against Purdue. "Emanuel was able to get a jump ball early. I feel like that shook those guys up a little bit and it was super important to keep our foot on their neck."

The Cougars stayed locked in even when the Vols could have cut the deficit to single digits in the second half. The nation's top 3-point shooting team quickly

extended the margin back to 17.

How bad was it for the Vols?

They made only 6 of 28 shots in the first 20 minutes and missed their first 14 3s before Zakai Zeigler finally ended the drought with 38 seconds left to make it a 34-15 game, an all but insurmountable advantage. Tourney teams that trailed by 19 or more points at halftime fell to 0-244 all-time.

Tennessee's top scorers, Lanier and Zeigler, were a combined 5 of 27 from the field. Zeigler had five points and five assists.

"When Zakai came off, it hurt me because I knew how much he cared. He said, 'I'm sorry,'" Barnes said. "He's got nothing to be sorry about because he gave us everything. I know those guys. They know I'm an older guy, they know I'd love to win a national championship, but they have not one thing to hang their head down or be sorry about."

As the Vols head home, Houston is getting ready for this season's last dance — close to home.

"There's probably 16,000 Tennessee fans here," Sampson said when told the atten-

dance was about 18,500. "That's awesome for Tennessee — jump on the interstate and get here. That's what we'll do next week — jump on the interstate and head down to San Antonio."

### POINTS AT A PREMIUM

Georgetown had the previous lowest-scoring first half in March Madness with 16 points in a second-round victory over SMU in 1984. That Hoyas team went on to win the national title. The paltry first-half total was matched by Miami in a 2013 Sweet 16 loss to Marquette and by Michigan in a 2019 Sweet 16 loss to Texas Tech.

### HELLO, FRIENDS

Peyton Manning watched his alma mater, Tennessee, from a courtside seat Friday. On Sunday, it was Jim Nantz's turn.

The longtime CBS Sports play-by-play man wore a sweatshirt from his alma mater, Houston. Nantz retired from calling NCAA Tournament games in 2023 but continues as the network's lead announcer for NFL games and, perhaps most notably, the Masters — which he hopes to continue calling through the 100th edition in 2036.

# Broome sweeps Auburn into Final Four

By **CHARLES ODUM**  
AP Sports Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — Johni Broome had 25 points and 14 rebounds, and Auburn took command with 17 unanswered points in the first half to beat Michigan State 70-64 on Sunday and complete a sweep of No. 1 seeds advancing to the Final Four.

Auburn (32-5) earned its second Final Four trip, while Michigan State (30-7) fell short in its bid to send coach Tom Izzo to his ninth national semifinal. Auburn's only previous Final Four appearance came in 2019, also under coach Bruce Pearl.

The South Region champion Tigers, the top overall seed in the NCAA Tournament, became the last of the No. 1 seeds to advance to the Final Four — joining Florida, Duke and Houston.

It's the first time all top seeds have reached the Final Four since 2008, which was the only previous year of all No. 1-seeded semifinalists since seeding began in 1979. And higher-seeded teams went 12-0 in regional semifinals and finals for the first time since the tournament expanded in 1985.

Auburn will face Florida, which beat Texas Tech 84-79 in the West Region final, in an all-Southeastern Conference semifinal on Saturday in San Antonio.

Jaxon Kohler led the Spartans with 17 points and 11 rebounds. Jaden Akins had 15 points.

Broome fell on his right arm while attempting to block a shot with 10:37 remaining and left the game. Broome, the Associated Press SEC player of the year and a first-team All-America selection, appeared to hurt his right elbow on the fall.

Broome returned with 5:29 remaining, drawing an immediate ovation from Auburn fans. He had the elbow wrapped and sank a 3-pointer less than a minute later.

"It was a scary moment," Broome said. "I went down but my team had my back."

Auburn was the only Elite Eight team to win each of its first three March Madness games by double digits, including its 78-65 Sweet 16 victory over Michigan. Michigan State rallied for a 73-70 win over Mississippi in the Sweet 16.

The Spartans led 8-6 before the Tigers took command with the 17-0 run. The Spartans were held scoreless for 5:46 while missing 10 consecutive shots during the Auburn run.

A 3-pointer by Broome, who did most of his scoring near the basket, capped the run for a 23-8 lead.

Auburn led 33-24 at halftime. The Spartans pulled within five points at 35-30 early in the second half but got no closer.

### TAKEAWAYS

Michigan State: Coen Carr, who received his first career start against Ole Miss, was back in the lineup against the Tigers. The forward, a native of Stockbridge near Atlanta, earned the nod after scoring 15 points against Ole Miss, while 7-foot center Szymon Zapala, normally a starter, returned in a reserve role against Auburn after not playing against the Rebels. Carr scored four points against Auburn while Zapala had two points in 14 minutes.

Auburn: Miles Kelly had three field goals in the 17-0 run. After making back-to-back jumpers to start the run, Kelly added a steal and 3-pointer. He finished with eight points. Tahaad Pettiford scored 10.

# All No. 1 seeds reach Final Four



**Kelvin Sampson**

### The Associated Press

And then there were 1s.

With wins by Houston and Auburn on Sunday, next weekend's Final Four will have all four No. 1 seeds for the second time in NCAA Tournament history.

The only other time since seeding began in 1979 was in 2008, when Kansas, Memphis, UCLA and North Carolina went to the Final Four — in San

Antonio, no less.

This year also marks the first time higher seeds went 12-0 in the Sweet 16 and Elite Eight, capping a year of chalk that ends on the Riverwalk.

Houston gave Tennessee a lesson in defensive dominance, shutting down the Vols for a 69-50 win to reach the Final Four for the seventh time. The Cougars held Tennessee to 15 first-half points and 29% shooting overall, including 5 of 29 from 3.

Auburn survived an injury scare to star forward Johni Broome and Michigan State's gritty style to pull out a 70-64 win in the South Region final. Broome left the court with a right

elbow injury and returned a few minutes later to finish with 25 points and 14 rebounds. Coach Bruce Pearl's Tigers are in the Final Four for the second time, having gotten there in 2019.

Florida was the first team to reach the Final Four with an 84-79 win over Texas Tech in the West Region final on Saturday. Duke followed by shutting down high-flying Alabama for an 85-65 win in the East Region final.

That sets up an all-Southeastern Conference national semifinal between Florida and Auburn, with Houston facing Duke in the other.

May the best 1 win.



**Auburn forward Johni Broome collects 25 points and 14 rebounds in a 70-74 victory over Michigan State in Sunday's game in Atlanta.** (AP PHOTO/GEORGE WALKER IV)

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