

# COLLEGE BASKETBALL

## WOMEN'S NCAA TOURNAMENT

### GREENSBORO REGIONAL

**Must-watch player:** Caitlin Clark, Iowa  
Sure, Clark is a prolific scorer, with an NCAA-best 27.4 points per game. But the sophomore guard is much, much more to the Hawkeyes. Clark leads the nation in multiple statistical categories, including assists per game (7.9), triple-doubles (five) and 30-point games (11). The Big Ten Player of the Year, she is on track to become the first women's player to lead the nation in both scoring and assists.

**Must-watch matchup:** South Carolina vs. Iowa  
Should No. 1 seed South Carolina and No. 2 seed Iowa meet in the Elite Eight, that game could decide the national player of the year. Iowa's Clark and the Gamecocks' Aliyah Boston are the top two candidates, and it's a close race. A 6-5 junior forward, Boston has 24 consecutive double-doubles and is a force on offense (16.8 points per game) and defense (12 rebounds and 2.68 blocks per game).

**Who could challenge South Carolina?**  
Iowa swept the Big Ten regular season and tournament titles for the first time. Iowa State, the No. 3 seed, set program records for victories (26) and Big 12 wins (14); Ashley Joens is the top scorer in program history with 2,307 points.  
RACHEL BLOUNT

Aliyah Boston and NaLyssa Smith.  
AP photos

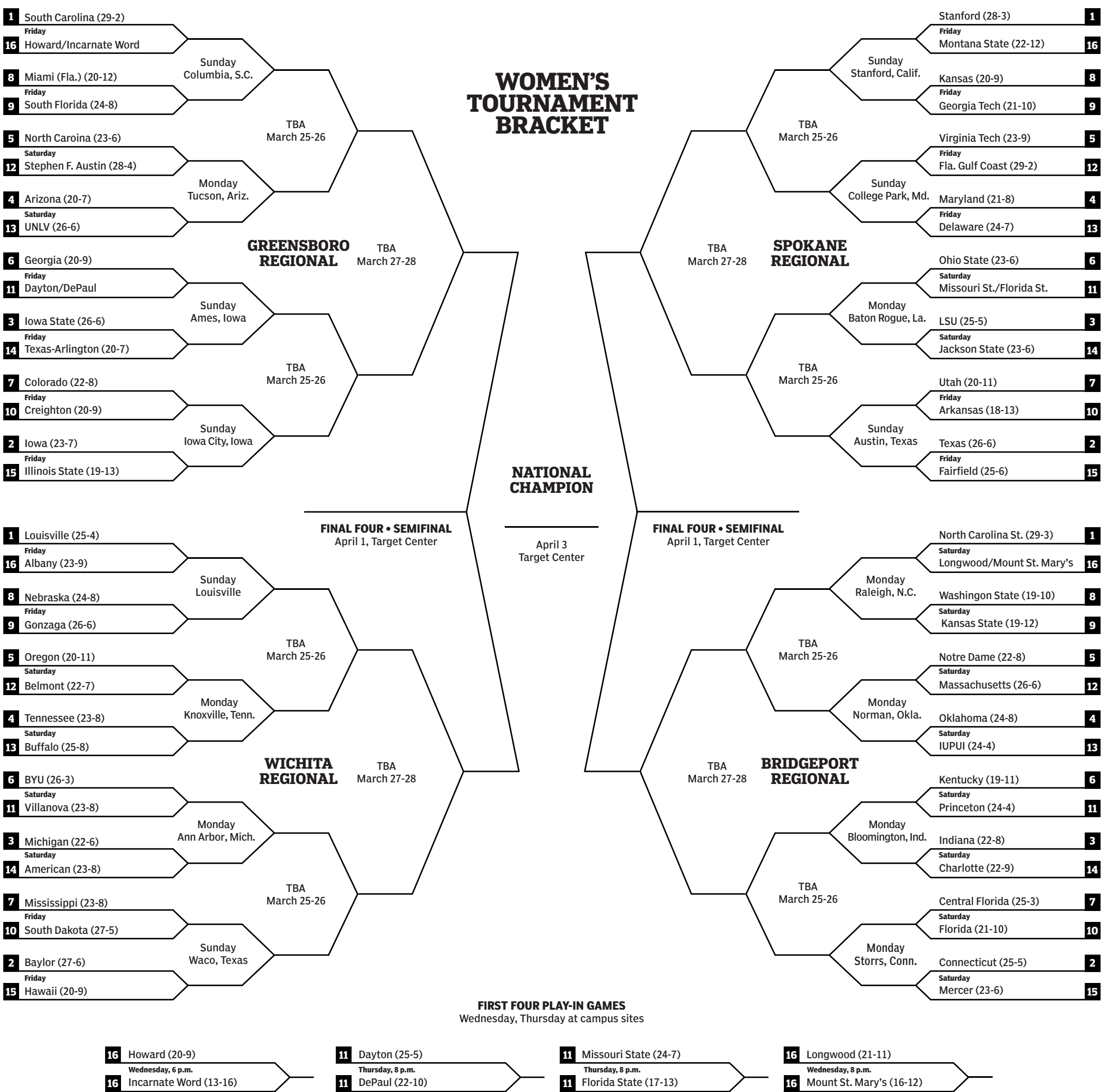


### SPOKANE REGIONAL

**Must-watch player:** Cameron Brink, Stanford  
Defending NCAA champion Stanford is known for its defense, led by this sophomore forward from Oregon. Brink was named Pac-12 Defensive Player of the Year this season, averaging 2.9 blocks and 1.0 steal per game. She has increased her overall production, averaging 13.6 points and 8.0 rebounds for a squad eyeing a repeat national title.

**Must-watch matchup:** Stanford vs. Maryland  
This could be a Sweet 16 matchup between two powerhouse programs and two powerhouse coaches, in Stanford's Tara VanDerveer and Maryland's Brenda Frese. The Terrapins won a national title as recently as 2006 and made the Sweet 16 last season. The Cardinal are defending champions, having won it all for the first time since 1992. The teams played Nov. 27 in the Bahamas, with Stanford winning 86-68.

**Who could challenge Stanford?**  
The Cardinal has a 20-game winning streak since its last loss on Dec. 21 against South Carolina. But Maryland is a threat and so is Big 12 champion Texas. No. 3 seed Louisiana State is also dangerous in its first season under Kim Mulkey who won three NCAA championships at Baylor.  
JOE CHRISTENSEN



### WICHITA REGIONAL

**Must-watch player:** NaLyssa Smith, Baylor  
The 2021 winner of the Wade Trophy as national player of the year, Smith is likely to be the first or second selection in the WNBA draft. The senior forward ranks fifth in the nation in points per game (22.5) and ninth in rebounds per game (11.5), and her 24 double-doubles are a program record. Smith scored a career-high 37 points in the Big 12 tournament semifinals, the sixth time this season she has surpassed 30 points.

**Must-watch matchup:** Baylor vs. Texas  
Baylor had a No. 1 seed in its grasp until falling to Texas in the Big 12 title game Sunday. That loss allowed Louisville to grab a top seed and ended Baylor's 12-game winning streak. No doubt the Bears would like to show the selection committee it got it wrong. The teams could meet in the Elite Eight.

**Who could challenge Baylor?**  
Despite that loss to Texas, Baylor is having an outstanding season under first-year coach Nicki Collen, and the Bears can never be counted out. Nebraska, the No. 8 seed, beat Michigan — the No. 3 seed in this regional — twice this season. No. 4 seed Tennessee is hoping to get leading scorer Jordan Horston back for the tournament; its hopes hinge on her return from an elbow injury.  
RACHEL BLOUNT



Paige Bueckers and Cameron Brink. AP photos

### BRIDGEPORT REGIONAL

**Must-watch player:** Paige Bueckers, UConn  
The consensus national Player of the Year as a Connecticut freshman in 2020-21, the former Hopkins standout is the wild card for the Huskies in this tournament. She was averaging 21.2 points, 6.2 assists, 5.5 rebounds and 2.7 steals before suffering a knee injury on Dec. 5 that cost her 19 games in which UConn went 15-4.

**Must-watch matchup**  
If chalk holds, as it often does in the women's tournament, a matchup of No. 1 seed North Carolina State vs. No. 2 UConn would provide plenty of story lines. The Huskies have won 11 NCAA championships, and Bueckers is the latest in the long line of UConn greats. The Wolfpack, led by 6-5 All-America center Elissa Cunane, has lost to only No. 1 South Carolina, No. 17 Georgia and No. 20 Notre Dame.

**Who could challenge N.C. State?**  
Along with UConn, challenges could come in the Sweet 16 from either No. 4 seed Oklahoma, which owns wins over Texas and Baylor, or No. 5 Notre Dame, which beat N.C. State 69-66 on Feb. 3, when Maya Dodson had 20 points and 10 rebounds. No. 6 seed Kentucky has won 10 in a row, including an upset of No. 1 South Carolina in the SEC tournament final.  
RANDY JOHNSON