

WOMEN'S NCAA TOURNAMENT

FINAL FOUR • APRIL 1-3, TARGET CENTER

Who will be our guest?

STAR TRIBUNE STAFF • Photos by STAR TRIBUNE and ASSOCIATED PRESS

Since the women's NCAA tournament began in 1982, there have been 156 appearances in the 39 women's Final Fours by 44 different schools. And while it's no secret the top programs have dominated the last 40 years, the schools that make up the heavyweight division have shifted since the last time the Final Four visited the Twin Cities in 1995. These 44 schools can be grouped into four categories defined by their frequency of dominance and number of appearances: The Perennials, The Risers, Founders Club and One Magical Year:



THE PERENNIALS

UConn (21), Tennessee (18), Stanford (14)

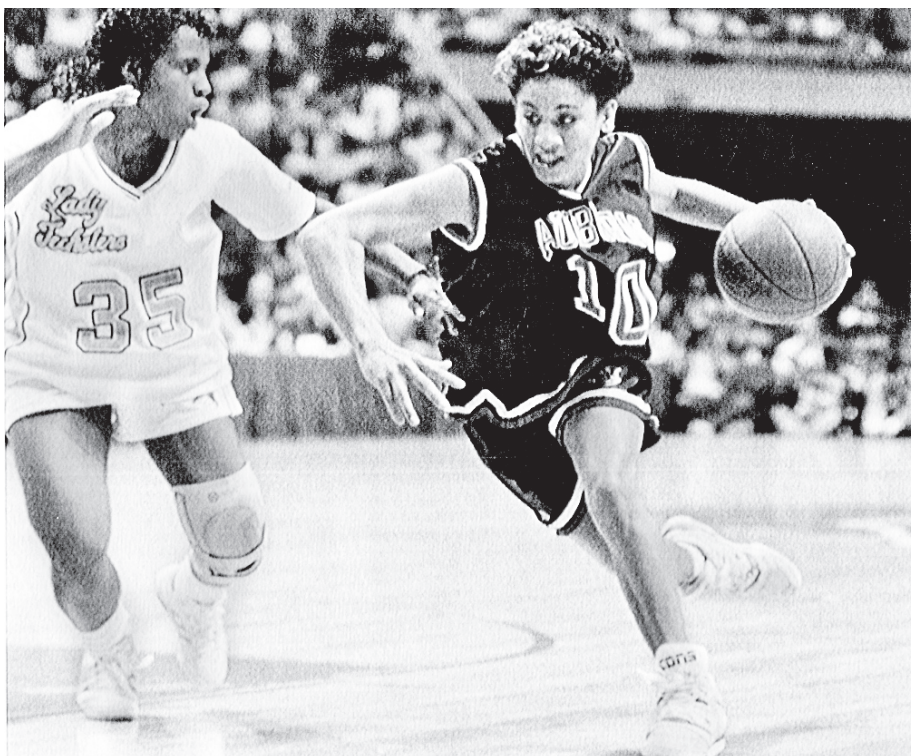
UConn, led by Paige Bueckers (above) enters the tournament on a streak of 13 consecutive trips to the Final Four and is the sport's standard bearer with 21 appearances, 19 of which have come since winning the title at Target Center in 1995. The Vols are close behind and won titles in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Stanford has won it all twice between 14 Final Four berths over a 31-year span. Consistency over decades puts each in this class.



THE RISERS

Notre Dame (9), LSU (5), Maryland (5), Baylor (4), Duke (4), Louisville (3), South Carolina (3), Mississippi State (2), Oklahoma (2)

As UConn took over the mantle as the nation's power program, others began to emerge from its shadow in the 2000s. Notre Dame (above) was its primary rival and won its second title in 2018, but programs like Baylor and South Carolina have also surged in recent years to take a share of the spotlight. Together, this group has won it all three times since 2017.



FOUNDERS CLUB

Louisiana Tech (10), Georgia (5), Auburn (3), North Carolina (3), Old Dominion (3), Texas (3), USC (3), Virginia (3), Cheyney State (2), Long Beach State (2), Missouri State (2), Rutgers (2), Western Kentucky (2)

These are the programs that laid the foundation for the sport's growth and provided memorable moments, from USC's back-to-back titles in 1983-84, Louisiana Tech's run of seven Final Fours in nine years, and Auburn's three consecutive runner-up trips from 1988-90.



ONE MAGICAL YEAR

Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Iowa, Louisiana-Monroe, Michigan State, Minnesota, North Carolina State, Ohio State, Oregon, Oregon State, Penn State, Purdue, Syracuse, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, Vanderbilt, Washington

The Gophers in 2004, led by Lindsay Whalen (above), were a group that capitalized on an opportunity with a special team and reached the Final Four. Texas A&M (2011), Texas Tech (1993) and Purdue (1998) won national titles in the schools' lone appearances.

HOW TOP SEEDS HAVE FARED

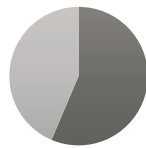


55.7

Overall percentage of teams seeded No. 1 to advance to the Final Four.

How many?
87 of 156 teams

TWO NO. 1 SEEDS

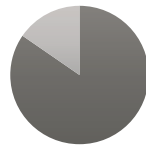


56.4

Percentage of Final Fours with two teams as No. 1 seeds in the tournament.

How many?
22 of 39 Final Fours

TWO OR MORE NO. 1 SEEDS



84.6

Percentage of Final Fours with at least two No. 1 seeds in the tournament.

How many?
33 of 39 Final Fours

FOUR NO. 1 SEEDS



10.2

Percentage of Final Fours comprised of just No. 1 seeds in the tournament.

How many?
4 of 39 Final Fours

UConn AS NO. 1 SEED

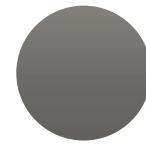


46.1

Percentage of Final Fours the Huskies have reached as a No. 1.

How many?
18 of 39 Final Fours

STANFORD AS NO. 1 SEED

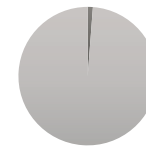


100.0

Stanford's success rate of winning a title when seeded No. 1 at the Final Four.

Which years?
1990, 1992, 2021

TEAMS SEEDED NO. 8 OR LOWER



1.28

Percentage of teams (2 in 156 appearances) to get to the Final Four.

Who made it?
No. 8: Missouri St., '92
No. 9: Arkansas, '98

Cinderella probably isn't coming to Minneapolis

Upsets are the lifeblood of March Madness. The lower the double-digit seed, the bigger the underdog, the bigger the story line. Major upsets break up bracket pools and send lower seeds to the second round, or Sweet 16, or Elite Eight — and sometimes all the way to the Final Four.

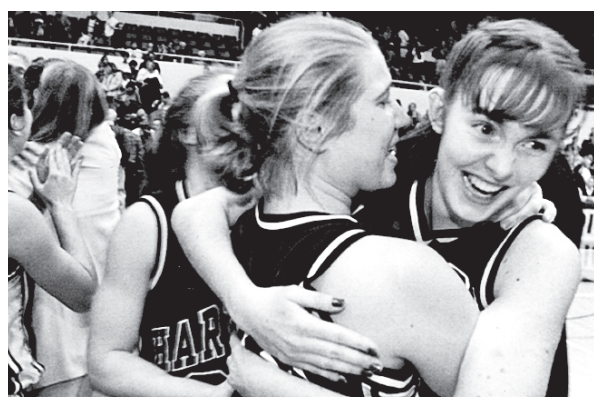
Except, in the women's tournament, this rarely happens. The lowest-seeded team to reach the Final Four was No. 9 Arkansas in 1998 and even then, it benefited from the biggest upset in tournament history.

Arkansas was able to avoid top-seeded Stanford because the Cardinal lost to No. 16

Harvard 71-67 in the first round — 20 years before such an upset happened in the men's tournament (No. 16 Maryland-Baltimore County beat No. 1 Virginia in 2018).

What about women's teams seeded No. 14 or 15? They have not even won a game. Teams seeded 14, 15, 16 are a combined 1-324 all-time. That's a .003 winning percentage.

In the men's tournament, the lowest seed to reach the Final Four is No. 11, accomplished by five schools (LSU in 1986; George Mason in 2006; VCU in 2011; Loyola Chicago in 2018; and UCLA in 2020). All five lost in the national semifinals.



Harvard Athletics photo

Harvard upset Stanford 71-67 in the first round of the NCAA women's tournament in 1998.

HISTORY LESSON

Teams with the most NCAA tournament bids that have yet to win a women's title:

24: DePaul

21: Montana

19: Florida State, Iowa State, Middle Tennessee, Stephen F. Austin

Source: NCAA.com