

★ StarTribune

# THE FINAL FOUR

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## Wholly Buckets

Media should focus on players, coaches, not unfair treatment

**JIM SOUHAN**



An admonition to fans and media at the Minneapolis Final Four: This weekend should be about the games and the atmosphere, the drama of a captivating tournament.

This is no time for lengthy reminders on last year's "workout" "facilities" available to women players in the NCAAs, which consisted of little more than a Shake Weight and a slightly used ThighMaster.

This weekend is about four excellent coaches, four great programs and dozens of exceptional athletes. The only non-No. 1 seed in town is superpower UConn, featuring Paige Bueckers of Hopkins, who made eight consecutive shots and all six of her free throws after halftime of a regional final to help beat No. 1 seed North Carolina State in two overtimes.

That might have been the best basketball game played  
See **SOUHAN** on C9 ▶

**The Final Four**  
National semifinals  
Friday • Target Center

South Carolina vs. Louisville, 6 p.m.  
Stanford vs. UConn, 8:30 p.m.

**National championship**  
Sunday • Target Center  
Semifinal winners, 7 p.m.  
All games on ESPN

**TODAY'S BEST BET**  
Tourney Town, the official Final Four fan fest, opens and festivities begin at the Target Center plaza. **A1, A5**

**INSIDE**  
Player profiles on Hailey Van Lith, Aliyah Boston and Haley Jones. **C7**  
Friday's semifinal matchups. **C8**  
Sara Scalia, the U's leading scorer in 2021-22, enters transfer protocol. **C5**

Paige Bueckers has a presence you just can't stop watching

By CHIP SCOGGINS • ascoggins@startribune.com

She stood at the edge of the basketball court all by herself facing the crowd, fists clenched, arms locked, and unleashed a full-throated scream, a moment captured in a photograph that quickly went viral.

Staring back at her was a sea of faces in various forms of exaltation. Adoring fans cheering and fist-pumping and answering with their own screams, all of them captivated by a single player. Even the opposing team's cheerleaders, sitting on the court inches from her sneakers, had their eyes locked in, staring up in wonderment.

Add that snapshot from last weekend in Connecticut to the pile of evidence, a pile stacked so high now that this is undeniable: People can't take their eyes off Paige Bueckers.

All of Target Center, all of Minneapolis and the women's Final Four, will have their eyes on No. 5 Friday. It was that way on Monday, when her showstopping performance won the game for Connecticut and sent her Huskies packing for her hometown.

See **BUECKERS** on C6 ▶