



MEN'S COLLEGE **BASKETBALL**

BETTING PRIMER

A blue Wilson basketball is held by two hands, one on the left and one on the right. The background is dark with vibrant, colorful splatters in shades of orange, yellow, green, and purple. The Wilson logo is visible on the basketball.

MARCH MANIA

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO BET THE TOURNAMENT

OUR FREE PRIMER INCLUDES

- TOURNAMENT BETTING TIPS
- TRENDS FOR EVERY ROUND
- STRATEGIES FOR BRACKETS AND FUTURES

Hello, everybody.

The Month of Madness is ongoing and we've embraced every second of it here at VSiN. We've been posting previews for all 32 conference tournaments and, just like all of you, we cannot wait for the start of the NCAA Tournament.

That's why we made it a point to put out our College Basketball Tournament Betting Primer in advance of Selection Sunday. This publication will give you some general NCAA Tournament bracket and betting strategies, along with noteworthy betting trends to help you win bets and succeed in your pools during the Big Dance.

While the release of this Primer is an exciting announcement, it isn't the only one that we have. We've taken down the paywalls on VSiN.com to give you a virtual Open House to take a look around and see what becoming a VSiN Pro Subscriber can do for you. Through March 17, you can browse the site as if you are a VSiN Pro, which means unfiltered access to all of our articles, betting tools, including the betting splits, and you can also watch the live video stream of our on-air programming. You also will get our daily email with picks from hosts and their guests.

Our College Basketball Tournament Betting Guide for VSiN Pro subscribers is set to drop on March 19, so when your free week is up, we hope you consider joining us to continue getting the best betting info in the business.

In terms of what you can find in this Primer, you will get:

- Round-by-round betting trends from Steve Makinen
- Tips on filling out a bracket from Dave Tuley
- Five things to know for the NCAA Tournament from Zachary Cohen
- The pros and cons of a moneyline rollover vs. a futures bet from Adam Burke

If this is your first exposure to us, welcome to the wonderful world of VSiN! If you've been around a day, a week, a month, a year, or longer, we're so glad you've chosen to trust us as a resource for betting information and insight.

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NCAA TOURNAMENT HANDICAPPING ROUND-BY-ROUND

by Steve Makinen

The NCAA Tournament is a three-week event that has grown into a far bigger phenomenon than anyone probably envisioned. The only other event that probably captivates the sports world's attention more is the Super Bowl each February. It certainly doesn't make things easier for those handicapping the action, as the enormity of the madness can change things.

The tourney attracts even the most casual fans, whether they are in pools, picking brackets, or choosing random games on which to place their wagers. In many cases, this can alter the bookmaking process and, hence, the routines of the bettors who have been grinding it out since November. This makes it the most important time of the year to have a foundation for your handicapping.

I pride myself on sharing only information that I find to be foundational in nature. One sporting event in which I rely heavily on recent data is the NCAA Tournament. Although the teams involved might change from year to year, the motivation, relative strengths, and other extenuating factors involved in handicapping the games do not. That is one of the foremost principles I look for in developing betting trends and systems.

This past year's tournament aside, some reliable patterns have formed in recent NCAA Tournament action. I can almost assure you that we won't witness anything near the level of crazy we saw last March when not a single No. 1 seed reached the Elite Eight, and the Final Four consisted of a No. 4, two No. 5s, and a No. 9 seed. To put it mildly, brackets were busted, and bettors backing the big favorites, other than UConn, of course, suffered depleted bankrolls.

On top of that, 27 of the first 36 games went Under the total. Still, along the way, readers of this particular piece stayed afloat by following some of the trends and systems I shared that break down the tournament on a round-by-round basis. In it, I look for

edges by seed, line range, conferences, and much more.

I caution every year that trends and systems can turn at any time. Still, they can also prove to be the foundation for successful wagering, especially if they form off of bettor's misconceptions or are the result of physical mismatches that can arise and only the oddsmaking experts understand them. With all that said, gauge carefully for yourself whether or not you find there to be enough of a "foundation" to the info to make it bet-worthy.

Note that the data used to derive these trends was primarily pulled from tournament games dating back to 2001. In almost all cases, however, I've listed a date or the number of games span for which each trend has stood. The year 2001 was not chosen randomly. That was the first year that the tournament was expanded beyond 64 teams. Remember that after no tournament in 2020 and an unusual single locale (Indianapolis) event in 2021, this will be the third year in a row that the proceedings are back to "normal."

If you're curious about the general results from 2023, favorites won 44 out of 66 games, with one contest being a pick 'em spread. They were 33-32-1 ATS (50.8%) in those games. Ironically, the 44-22 outright mark was precisely the same as in 2022, and the ATS record was three wins better.

So as crazy as the tournament got in the late rounds, there was little abnormal prior. However, there were three more double-digit teams to advance to the second round than in the prior season, with only one of those, Princeton, winning a second-round contest.

As you'll see from the analysis, the tournament can change from round to round. Certain systematic patterns have formed regarding how to profit from this transition.

First Four Games

- Over the last 11 NCAA Tournaments, underdogs own a 24-19 ATS (55.8%) edge in the First Four round.
- Since 2001, there have only been eight First Four games with lines of 5 points or higher. Favorites are 7-1 SU and 6-2 ATS (75%) in those contests.
- More on point spread benchmarks, in that same span since 2001, favorites of less than 5 points are 26-22 SU but just 19-28-1 ATS (40.4%)
- Outright winners have gone 35-3 ATS (92.1%) in the First Four round since 2013, although in a strange most recent loss, Drake did win vs. Wichita State without covering in 2021 on a 1.5-point spread.
- Formerly, all First Four games used to match No. 16 seeds. Recently, First Four games featuring seeds 12 or better have trended 15-7 Under (68.2%)
- Higher totaled First Four games, or those higher than 139, have also trended 14-7 Under (66.7%)

First Round Games

Overall Trends

- Teams that didn't make their conference tournament championship game are on a first-round slide of just 37-58-2 ATS (38.9%) versus conference champions, good go-against teams. However, in another sign of how rare things were in the 2023 tourney, this group was 5-1 ATS.

- Power conference schools that lost SU and ATS in their conference championship game are 60-16 SU and 42-32-2 ATS (56.8%) in the first round over the last 15 seasons, a sign that the tournament experience they gained was valuable despite the conference championship loss.

- Oddsmakers have done bettors a favor by signaling first-round upsets, as small first-round favorites of -1 to -3 are just 54-59 SU and 43-66-4 ATS (39.5%) since 2009. However, this trend also swung the other way last year, going 6-2 SU and ATS.

- Of late, mid-level favorites of -3.5 to -7.5 have also struggled, going 38-22 SU but 27-33 ATS (45%) since 2016 in the first round.

- In the last 10 NCAA Tournaments, first-round favorites of 13.5 points or more have only enjoyed one winning ATS season, that coming in 2022. In that span, they have compiled a record of 82-9 SU but 39-50-1 ATS (43.8%). Last year, these teams were 2-5 ATS, with Arizona and Purdue losing outright.

- On recent first-round totals, games posted with totals of 149 or higher have trended decisively Under in the last four tourneys, going 17-6 (73.9%).

By Seeds

- There are some sweet spots for betting No. 1 seeds. As favorites of -19 to -25 points, they are just 13-24 ATS (35.1%) since 2009. When favored by 18.5 or less, they are on an 8-1 ATS run.

- No. 1 seeds have flexed their muscles defensively over the last six tournaments, going 12-4 Under the total (75%) while holding opponents to 60.6 PPG.

- Be wary of laying big numbers with No. 2 seeds, as they are just 13-23-1 ATS (36.1%) since 2005 when favored by 17 points or more. Those No. 2s favored by less than 17 points are on an impressive 20-8-2 ATS (71.4%) run since 2007.

- The last 23 No. 3 seeds to play in first-round games are on an impressive 22-1 SU and 14-9 ATS (60.9%) surge.

- No. 3 seeds playing as single-digit favorites are on a massive Under the total run, 20-7 (74.1%) since 2003, with games producing almost 6.9 PPG below their posted numbers on average.

- No. 4 seeds have been somewhat unreliable lately for bettors, going 13-22-1 ATS (37.1%) over the last nine tourney seasons, including 6-14-1 ATS (30%) when favored by 8.5 points or more.

- The No. 5 seeds broke a lengthy 18-31-3 ATS (36.7%) skid versus the No. 12 seeds last year by going 4-0 SU and ATS. Still, these No. 5s remain extremely vulnerable when playing as 6-point favorites or, more recently, 18-8 SU but 8-16-2 ATS (33.3%) since 2009.

- Power conference schools are 24-18 SU and 13-27-2 ATS (32.5%) as No. 5 seeds in the first round since 2008. As No. 12 seeds, they are on a 13-4-1 ATS (76.5%) surge.

- The No. 6 seeds are 27-29 SU and 21-34-1 ATS (38.2%) in their last 56 first-round games versus No. 11s (also 37-18-1 Under, 67.3%)

- In No. 6 vs. No. 11 games set with the No. 6 playing as an underdog or pick 'em, the No. 6s are just 4-11 SU and ATS (26.7%) since 2001. This is a classic trap set by oddsmakers, and it happened last in 2022, with No. 6 Colorado State losing to Michigan.

- Be aware of a total opportunity when No. 6 seeds are favored by 4 points or more, as Unders are 19-5 (79.2%) in such games since 2009, with games producing just 128.7 PPG on average and totals of about 138.2.

- Non-power conference schools playing as No. 7 seeds have been a sound wagering choice, 21-9-1 ATS (70%) since 2004. In the 2022 bracket, No. 7 Murray State (-2) edged San Francisco by 5.

- The No. 7 seeds playing in the +3 to -3 line range have proven to be quite profitable over the long haul, 38-21 SU and 35-23-1 ATS since 2003.

- The No. 7 vs. No. 10 matchups have been among the rare higher-scoring tilts of late, going 18-13 Over (58.1%) since 2015.

- The No. 8 seeds went 2-2 SU and ATS in 2023, running their five-year mark to just 7-13 SU and ATS (35%).

- As small favorites of 3 points or less over No. 9's, No. 8 seeds are on a brutal skid of 8-15 SU and 5-17-1 ATS (22.7%)!

- Of the last 25 No. 8 vs. No. 9 matchups, 17 have gone Over the total (68%).

- Combined, non-power conference programs playing in the No. 4-No. 6 seeds over the last 21 years have gone 28-23 SU but 20-30-1 ATS (40%). They have been far more successful against the spread in the lesser pressure No. 7 and No. 8 seeds, 33-24-4 ATS (57.9%) in that same time range.

- Power conference programs have been very dangerous in the No. 11-No. 14 seed range, going 27-19 SU and 28-17-1 ATS (62.2%) since 2008.

Second Round Games

Overall Trends

- Bettors have not enjoyed a winning second round since 2017, going 21-37-1 ATS (36.2%) in moving opening lines since then. This is a change from the first round, perhaps explained by the shorter prep period for the second round.
- Second-round top-4 seeds that won but didn't cover the spread in the first round are 44-16 SU and 33-26-1 ATS (55.9%) since 2013. They are also 34-23-3 Under (59.6%) the total.
- Second-round double-digit favorites are 49-2 SU and 31-20 ATS (60.8%) since 2001. Fifteen of the last 22 such games went Under (68.2%) the total, with the favorites allowing just 60.8 PPG.

By Seeds

- Over the last 25 years, there has been a clear benchmark for when heavily favored No. 1 seeds struggle to win ATS, which comes at the 12-point line. In fact, in that span, No. 1 seeds favored by 12 or more are 23-1 SU but 9-15 ATS (37.5%).
- The No. 1 seeds are currently on a 4-12 ATS (25%) skid versus No. 8s in the second round but are 9-7 ATS versus No. 9s in that same 10-year window.
- Second-round No. 2 seeds have felt the upset pressure, going just 14-23-2 ATS (37.8%) in their last 39 games. Those favored by five points or less are just 13-19 SU and 10-20-2 ATS (33.3%) since 2002.
- It's been a struggle lately in the second round for the top 3 seeds overall, as here are the current ATS slides they are on: No. 1s 12-18 ATS, No. 2s 14-23-1 ATS, No. 3s 9-17 ATS.
- Seeds No. 4-No. 6 have been stellar lately in the second round, with these spread runs entering 2020: No. 4s 18-11 ATS, No. 5s 20-9 ATS, No. 6s 20-10 ATS. Surviving the first-round upset attempt has seemingly propelled these teams to solid round-two performances.
- Second-round No. 10 seeds are on a 4-13 SU but 10-5-2 ATS (66.7%) run since 2011
- In second-round games between two double-digit seeds, the better seed is 12-2 SU and ATS since 2001, playing each time as the favorite. Alternatively, when facing seeds in the 5-7 range, double-digit seeds are just 5-21 SU and 8-15-3 ATS (34.8%) in that same timeframe.
- The No. 14 seeds that pulled off upsets in the first round are 0-10 SU and ATS (0%) in the second round since 1998, losing by an average of 14.8 PPG.
- Better-seeded teams are just 10-16 SU and ATS (38.5%) when playing as underdogs to worse-seeded teams in the second round since 2001.
 - In second-round games between mid-major teams, underdogs of more than 7 points are on a 6-5 SU and 9-2 ATS run (81.8%).

Sweet 16 Games

- Laying big points seems to be getting riskier in the Sweet 16 in recent years, as favorites of 5 points or more are 13-9 SU but just 7-15 ATS (31.8%) since 2017.
- Sweet 16 favorites of 8 points or more are on a 26-8-3 Under (76.5%), the total run allowing 63.0 PPG
- The Sweet 16 No. 1 and No. 2 seeds have taken care of business lately. Together, they are on a 35-12 SU and 28-18-1 ATS (60.9%) run over the last nine seasons. However, they were just 1-3 SU and ATS a year ago.
- The Sweet 16 round is usually the end of the line for double-digit seeds. However, they have been very competitive as underdogs, going 15-7-1 ATS (68.2%) in that role since 2011.
- The popular No. 1-No. 4 matchup has been all No. 1 lately, 12-2 SU and 9-4-1 ATS (69.2%) over the last nine tournaments.
- In Sweet 16 games between teams “both not supposed to be there” or both seeded 5 or worse, the lower-seeded team is 11-7 SU and ATS (61.1%) since 2001.
- Better-seeded teams playing as underdogs or pick 'ems in Sweet 16 games are on a 6-2 SU and ATS (75%) surge.
- In recent Sweet 16 games featuring a better seeded mid-major team taking on a lesser seeded Power 6 conference team, the latter are on a 7-5 SU and 7-4-1 ATS (63.6%) run.
- Since 2010, in Sweet 16 games involving at least one non-major conference program, Under the total is 24-14 (63.2%).
- Over the last 23 years, there have been 23 Sweet 16 games with totals of 128 or less, and Under the total is 16-6-1 (72.7%).

ELITE 8 GAMES

- The Elite Eight round has long been a dangerous spot for better-seeded teams, as they are just 47-45 SU and 33-55-4 ATS (37.5%) since 2000.
- Elite Eight favorites of 4 points or fewer have gone just 2-10 SU and 1-10-1 ATS (9.1%) in their last 12 games and are just 15-33-1 ATS (31.3%) since 1998.
- Elite Eight games have been decisive, with outright winners owning a stellar record of 61-5-2 ATS (92.4%) since 2006.
- Cinderella teams, or those not from power conferences, have been good bets when they reach the Elite Eight round, 14-12 SU and 15-10-1 ATS (60%) since 2003, including 9-2-1 ATS as underdogs of 3 points or more.
- The Elite Eight round is clearly a “survival round” for No. 1 seeds, as they are just 32-25 SU but 23-30-4 ATS (43.4%) in this round since 2001.
- Elite Eight No. 1-No. 3 seeds have struggled mightily against teams seeded No. 4 or worse, going 17-14 SU and 8-21-2 ATS (27.6%) since 2001.
- The Elite Eight round has easily been the best round to play Overs on totals, 87-63-2 (58%) since 2001. In games with lower totals of 143 or less, it has been 59 Overs and 29 Unders, for 67%.
- In Elite 8 games between teams “both not supposed to be there” or both seeded 3 or worse, the lower-seeded team has gone 7-3 SU and 8-2 ATS (80%) since 2013.

Final Four Games

- In the Final Four, outright winning teams own a record of 35-7-2 ATS (83.3%) since 2001, although most recently, San Diego State did beat Florida Atlantic in a 2023 clash without covering.
- Final Four No. 1 seeds are 17-5 SU and 12-9-1 ATS (57.1%) since 2001 when not matched against another No. 1 seed.
- Final Four favorites of 5 points or more are on a solid surge of 19-3 SU and 13-8-1 ATS (61.9%) over the last 24 years.
- The last seven Final Four games that didn't feature a No. 1 or No. 2 seed have all gone to the better-seeded team, with that team going 6-1 ATS (85.7%).
- The last seven non-power conference teams to reach the Final Four and face a power conference team have gone 4-3 SU and 3-4 ATS (42.9%).
- ACC teams have been most successful in the Final Four, going 11-6 SU and 10-7 ATS (58.8%) since 2001, including 8-2 SU and 6-4 ATS when favored.
- On totals, the last seven Final Four games that posted numbers of 130 or less went Under, producing just 112.2 combined PPG on average. In all other games, totals are 24-15-2 Over (61.5%) in the Final Four since 1999.
- Five of the last six semifinal games all went Over the total, extending a string of 12-5-1 Over (70.6%) in the last nine tournaments.
- Bettors have been sharp in moving lines for the Final Four games since 2015, going 11-0 SU and 7-4 ATS (63.6%) in games that have seen the point spread shift off the opener.
- Eight of the last nine Final Four games that have seen an opening total moved downward through the week until tip-off have ended up going Over the total (88.9%).

Championship Games

- Championship game favorites of 3 points or more are on a 14-3 SU and 12-5 ATS (70.6%) run, while those favored by 2.5 or less are just 4-4 SU and ATS since '98. Last year, UConn (-7.5) handled San Diego State rather comfortably, 76-59.
- Only twice in the last 23 years did the championship-winning team not cover the spread (Duke against Butler in 2010, Kansas versus North Carolina in 2022).
- In the last 15 championship games matching non-equal seeds, the better seed is on a 13-3 SU and 11-5 ATS (68.8%) run.
- Over the last 23 years of championship games, excluding the improbable 2014 matchup of No. 7 vs. No. 8 and last year's No. 4 vs. No. 9, teams seeded No. 3 or worse are just 2-9 SU and 4-7 ATS (36.4%).
- Big East schools have a perfect 7-0 SU and ATS record in championship games since 2001, while Big Ten teams are winless at 0-7 SU and ATS. These trends last "collided" in Villanova's 2018 title game win over Michigan.
- The last eight mid-major conference teams to reach the championship game are just 2-6 SU and ATS (25%). All but one of the seven of those games had totals that went Under (85.7%).
- There have been eight championship games since 2001 that closed with totals of 150 or higher, and those contests were 6-2 Under the total (75%).
- Bettors have gone just 6-10 ATS (37.5%) in their last 16 championship games when moving opening lines towards one team or the other. Last year, they won with UConn, moving the line from -6.5 to -7.5. This same group is on a 13-7 (65%) run when moving totals one way or the other.

Betting on college basketball is betting on college basketball. If you're good at it for 90% of the year, you'll probably be just fine during the NCAA Tournament. And that's also true of the opposite. But there are some things you can do to give yourself a better chance of winning in March. There are some big differences between betting on these games, and we want to make sure you're as prepared as possible. Keep reading for five tips that can help you find success in the Big Dance.

1

DON'T BLINDLY ASSUME MID-MAJOR PROGRAMS CAN'T HANG

While there are inherently advantages that come with playing in the ACC, Big 12, Big East, Big Ten, Pac-12 and SEC, there is more parity in college basketball than ever. It was just last year that San Diego State showed that the best of the Mountain West can hang with anyone. The Aztecs were the tournament runners-up, earning wins over Alabama and Creighton along the way. And the signs were there all year long. Very helpful advanced stats resources like KenPom and Bart Torvik were high on the Aztecs. San Diego State was the 14th-ranked team by KenPom in 2023, and Bart Torvik had the group at 11.

It's important to try and separate the team from the conference. Of course, it's harder to navigate an entire season against high-major competition than it is a mid-major schedule. But advanced stats account for whom the teams are playing. So, things like adjusted offensive and defensive efficiency numbers are doing the work for you. And you can generally trust that those numbers won't lie. If you don't believe us, just look at what Florida Atlantic did last season. The Owls popped when it came to analytics all year, but people doubted them heading into March Madness. Well, Florida Atlantic went all the way to the Final Four and looked every bit as good as some of the top teams in the country.

Ignoring conference bias will be just as crucial in 2024 as it is any other year. There are several impressive tournament teams coming from mid-majors. Don't be close-minded about betting them against some of the household names. Rely on numbers instead.

2

DO YOUR RESEARCH ON BOTH TEAMS

KenPom and Bart Torvik do a lot of the work for you. Both sites will give you an understanding of whether or not teams are good offensively or defensively, and they'll also tell you whether or not a team plays with pace. Bart Torvik will also tell you a lot about a team's shot profile. You can see how they do with 2PT and 3PT attempts. You can also see how they guard both of those. And you also can get a good idea of how effective teams are on the glass. That type of information is crucial for bettors at this time of year.

Our VSiN Power Ratings also provide you with rankings that heavily factor in a bunch of different statistics. However, there's more that you can do to get prepared for each matchup.

Try to find some betting trends that tell you how teams perform as favorites and underdogs. Also, try and see whether teams regularly go Over/Under totals. And try to dig up some numbers on how teams performed in early-season tournaments. That gives you an idea of which teams will be ready to play on neutral courts.

Another thing to look at is experience. It's never a bad idea to ride a team with a coach that has been successful in the tournament before. Similarly, you can have a lot of success by backing teams with a good

amount of upperclassmen in their rotations. March Madness can be overwhelming. You want players and coaches that have been there before.

3

CONSIDER THE IMPORTANCE OF EACH TIP-OFF TIME

Something as small as the time of a game can be very important during March Madness. It's not completely uncommon that you'll see a team from the West Coast playing an early game on the East Coast. That can be a major disadvantage in some cases. Some games tip at roughly 12:00 pm ET, making it a morning game when it comes to the internal clock of a team out West. It can also be a disadvantage if an East Coast team is playing very late.

It's also worth keeping an eye on when teams played their previous tournament games. If a team plays its first game on Thursday evening and has to play its second early on Saturday, that's not exactly an ideal amount of rest. It can be extremely profitable betting on situational spots in all sports, so all of this stuff adds up.

4

KNOW WHERE EACH GAME IS HAPPENING

The location of a game is also something you'll need to know when betting on this tournament. Some regions will give teams significant home-court advantages. Two years ago, we saw Arizona get boat raced by Houston in a 1 vs. 5 matchup. That game was played at the arena now known as the Frost Bank Center, in San Antonio. That meant that Cougars fans were a three-hour drive away, and it ultimately led to a big advantage for Houston. That type of thing happens pretty regularly in March. So, keep an eye where games are being played and know how far each fanbase will have to travel. Although in some cases, fans will show up no matter what. Some fanbases travel better than others.

You'll also want to know what type of arena a game is being played in. While it might sound a little crazy, depth perception is very important in basketball. If you get a team playing in a massive building for the first time, it's entirely possible that will impact jump shooting. That could lead to some Unders, at least in the first half. Players will obviously have time to shoot around, but getting comfortable in a game is completely different. This might be something to remember when we get to the Final Four, which will be played at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona. The home of the Arizona Cardinals seats 63,400 people. You probably don't need Larry David to tell you that's pretty, pretty, pretty big.

5

TRY NOT TO GET TOO CARRIED AWAY

Bankroll management is something you always have to consider, even in March. You are going to have tons of opportunities to bet on games, but you don't need to bet on every single one. Try and pick your spots. And if you do want to heavily increase your volume, at least consider lowering your units. March Madness rivals the Super Bowl as one of the best events of the year for bettors. But you don't want to lose more than you're comfortable losing over these next few weeks.

FUTURES

VS

MONEYLINE ROLLOVER

by Adam Burke

Bettors love to get involved in futures markets. Whether they are making a wager on the hometown team or feel like they have an edge on a team to win a championship or division, the premise is very simple, so it becomes an attractive bet type. Place a bet on a team to win whatever the bet says and you win.

The problem with betting into futures markets is that bettors are often getting short-changed in a big way. A team's true odds of winning typically aren't going to line up with the odds that are being offered. The pricing of futures odds may seem kind of random, but there is always a method to the madness in an industry where profit margins are really important.

Sportsbooks set up their futures odds to reach a target value called the "theoretical hold". They will move the odds based on exposure, results, and player personnel changes, among other things, but they always have a number in mind that they are hoping to achieve. Some results will obviously be better than others for the sportsbooks, but the odds are hardly random or made up.

When it comes to something like the NCAA Tournament, not all teams are created equal. Not only do some teams have a much better chance of cutting down the nets than others, but traders and sportsbook operators will take a lot of factors into account when setting the futures odds, including the path to win, the betting action of their customers, existing liability from the course of the season, and how the team itself is playing.

As bettors, we should always be looking for any edge that we can find or any way of maximizing profit potential. To that end, I present the concept of the "moneyline rollover", also referred to as a "rolling parlay".

There are positives and negatives to this concept. Upsets can skew a lot of things, so you are sort of taking for granted that things shake out the way that you expect them to, but the goal with a moneyline rollover is to wind up getting more equity than a futures price would yield.

EXAMPLE OF A FUTURE VS. A MONEYLINE ROLLOVER

Conference tournaments provide great, small-scale versions of what you'll be looking to do during the NCAA Tournament.

Let's take the example of No. 5 Montana State from the Big Sky Conference. Their futures odds before the tournament at DraftKings Sportsbook were +1600.

It was my belief prior to the tournament that they would face No. 4 Weber State, No. 1 Eastern Washington, and No. 2 Northern Colorado in their quest to win the conference tourney. They would be underdogs in all three games (and also against No. 3 Montana if that was the title game).

To do a moneyline rollover, the onus is on you to project out what the spreads would be for a team's likely matchups. To do this, you can either consult a rankings site like KenPom.com or BartTorvik.com to see the gap between the two teams on a neutral or you can look back at the regular season data points to see what the lines were in those games and remove home-court advantage because it was a neutral-site tournament.

In this example, my projected lines were:

Montana State +3 vs. Weber State
Montana State +6.5 vs. Eastern Washington
Montana State +3 vs. Northern Colorado

The next step after figuring out the spread is to see what the moneylines would be in those games. Using similarly-lined games (or a spread to ML converter), I came up with +150 vs. Weber State, +200 vs. Eastern Washington, and +150 against Northern Colorado.

Then, you can go to a [Parlay Calculator](#), like what we have at VSIN.com and enter those values.

If you start with \$100, you'd win \$150 if they beat Weber State. Total = \$250

To execute a moneyline rollover, you would now place that entire amount on the moneyline against the next team, which, in this case, is Eastern Washington. That bet would be \$250 to win \$500. Total = \$750

Then you would continue forward and place that \$750 on Montana State at +150 against Northern Colorado to win \$1,125. If the Bobcats won, you'd have a total of \$1,875 off of your initial \$100 investment.

Betting \$100 to win \$1,875 is better than betting \$100 to win \$1,600. In this example, it's pretty close, but there will be examples that are dramatically different throughout future conference tournaments and the NCAA Tournament.

You can even use these as an alternative for Yes/No Odds to Make the Sweet 16 or Yes/No Odds to Make the Final Four for the potential of more profit.

PROS OF USING A MONEYLINE ROLLOVER

- By going game-by-game, you are getting a little bit closer to the "true" odds and are cutting into the high theoretical hold percentage of a sportsbook on futures. Most sportsbooks are upwards of 25-30%, if not higher, on their target holds for futures markets. Betting individual moneylines cuts into some of that vig.
- Another benefit is that hedging is easier and doesn't cost anything extra. Everybody always wants to hedge a futures wager. To hedge an existing future, though, you have to put out more money to bet against the team you already have. To hedge a moneyline rollover, you can simply bet less and pocket some of the profit or just stop betting it. If you don't like a matchup or something happens that you didn't expect (like an injury), you can play it more conservatively.
- The bracket-style format allows you to do this easier and project out what you expect to happen, along with the lines that would come from those games. That can give you a much better return on your investment.

CONS OF USING A MONEYLINE ROLLOVER

- The futures price may end up being worth more in the event of an upset. In the above example, if Eastern Washington gets upset before playing Montana State, you won't be getting better than +1600 on your moneyline rollover because Montana State would likely be favored or be a smaller underdog against the new team that they would be playing.
- For bettors that bet smaller amounts, a moneyline rollover can be uncomfortable. As mentioned in the example above, making a \$750 wager in the final game may feel extremely stressful and hard to fathom. Betting smaller amounts on futures may simply be more palatable.
- It is a little bit more confusing. If you bet \$100 on Montana State to win the Big Sky, that's it. You're done. You can think about hedging or other wagering possibilities, but it isn't the same as projecting out lines and remembering to bet every step of the way. It is definitely more of an advanced play that may be tougher for novice bettors to wrap their heads around.

Whatever you decide, it is always important as a bettor to consider every possible option. Sometimes that will mean a moneyline rollover as opposed to a straight futures bet.

BRACKET CONTESTS

GET AN EDGE IN YOURS

Covering the Las Vegas sports betting beat for more than two decades, I've been a huge proponent of handicapping contests in all forms. I've covered the Hilton/Westgate SuperContest and World Series of Poker since 1999 and horse racing's National Handicapping Championship every year since 2000. I not only cover them but also participate, as I believe it's the best way to maximize your profits when you're "in the zone" and having the best day/week/season of your life.

This also extends to March Madness. When it comes to turning short money into long money, the three-week NCAA tournament is a great way for a quick score if you can outpick your competition.

If I know my readers, you're receiving invitations to all sorts of March Madness contests (brackets and otherwise). You're probably entering a bracket contest or two (or several dozen, in my case!).

Here are a few strategies I've developed over the years.

PICK THE CHAMPION

This seems so obvious that you probably think it doesn't merit discussion. But even though everyone loves the first two rounds to see who was smart enough to pick the right upsets and whose brackets got busted before even getting to the weekend, very few bracket contests are won or lost in the opening round.

Even if you crush it in the first round on Thursday and Friday, if you don't have the overall champion winning your bracket, it's almost certain that you'll be overtaken by someone in the title game, if not before. That's because almost all bracket contests have weighted point systems that increase during the tournament, so no lead is safe.

What most bracket contests come down to is who among those picking the champion did better in the early rounds. To a lesser degree, this also extends to the Final Four; even if you have the champion. If that's your only team in the Final Four, you're probably going to be beaten by someone who has more as they'll get those additional points.

I will fill out upward of 50 brackets in everything from huge online contests to smaller online contests to even smaller ones with friends or former co-workers. I will have a wide variety of champions and Final Four qualifiers. The fewer contests you enter, the more precise you must be in finding that champion. If you choose one of the No. 1 seeds – currently projected to be HOUSTON, UCONN, PURDUE and TENNESSEE as of deadline for this VSIN Betting Guide – you'll have to hit an even higher percentage of your earlier picks, too.

KNOW YOUR COMPETITORS

This isn't much help in the huge pools, as the players will cut across all spectrums of society and not be affected as much by regional bias, but I'm talking about smaller office pools. If you live in Big 12 country – regarded as the toughest overall conference – you're certain to have a higher percentage of your competitors picking Houston, Iowa State, Baylor, etc. to win the championship or fill multiple spots in the Final Four than we'll see in other parts of the country. You can get an edge by correctly predicting which of those teams get knocked out earlier, especially if you have a team from another conference winning the title.

UNDERSTAND THE TRENDS, BUT BE PREPARED TO FADE THEM

A No. 1 seed had never lost to a No. 16 seed until 2018, when Virginia was upset by Maryland-Baltimore County, so it wasn't surprising that very few bracket players took a shot with UMBC.

Of course, most people treated that like a fluke and went back to picking all No. 1 seeds to advance, only to be shocked last year when Fairleigh Dickinson upset Purdue 63-58.

I believe we will see more people taking stabs at No. 16 teams upsetting No. 1s, but even though I'm the biggest longshot bettor I know, I'm here to tell you not to go overboard in that. The fact is that even if everyone felt their "bracket was busted" last year with Purdue ousted, the fact of the matter is that because nearly everyone had Purdue advancing, it hurt nearly everyone just the same. It still came down to who had the best overall brackets with the remaining teams, right?

So, my advice is to still treat those 1-16 matchups as "free bingo squares." Even if the upsets does happen, you won't lose much ground to the vast majority of your competition (as long as the losing top seed isn't your pick to go all the way like those who had Purdue last year).

Of course, everyone also knows that No. 12 seeds have a long-earned reputation for upsetting No. 5 seeds. While it certainly is important to know that type of information, don't be so robotic that you're doing what everyone else does; you need to handicap each game individually and let that steer your decisions. You might end up coming to the same conclusions anyway, but isn't just pick a No. 12 seed just because it's a No. 12 seed. In fact, the No. 5 seeds went 4-0 last year, so all those searching for the upsets were burned.

Having said that, if a 12 does beat a 5, you'd better have it, or you'll also be spotting a key

game to a lot of competitors. I believe the key is to be selective in which upsets you choose.

DON'T TAKE YOUR UPSET PICKS TOO FAR

We all love finding those first-round upsets and being able to say we knew Cinderella before she was the belle of the ball, but the truth is that midnight usually comes all too quickly. First-round upsets usually return to earth in the second round (even No. 12 seeds, who usually have to face a No. 4 in the second round).

Sure, we occasionally have a double-digit seed that sneaks into the Sweet 16, but it's a rarity, so only pick that first-round upsetter to make the Sweet 16 if you're willing to risk your bracket life on them.

If you pick most of your first-round upsets to lose in the second round, it also prevents you from losing a lot of ground in the standings if the favorites beat your teams in the first round. In addition, you can make up those points in the next round as long as you have the team reaching the Sweet 16 from that sub-regional.

USE BRACKETS TO HEDGE UNDERDOG BETS

There are many ways to diversify your portfolio during the NCAA Tournament. If you're playing multiple brackets, you can certainly flip-flop on toss-up games.

But there's another strategy that I like to employ. Let's say you like an underdog to cover the spread in a first-round game, but you're not sure they can pull the outright upset. You can bet the dog plus the points but take the favorite in your bracket. It's also a chance to "hit a middle" if the favorite wins to advance in your bracket, but the dog covers the spread to win you some cash.

Here's another key point I love as a "dog-or-pass" bettor: This approach also helps because if you're cashing a bunch of these dogs plus the points, you won't be as upset if your chalky bracket is busted. On the other hand, if you're losing more of your side bets, maybe you have a very live bracket in a big pool for a lot more money (or, again, if the games fall right, maybe you win both ways).

LAST RULE: HAVE FUN

This is supposed to be fun, and bracket contests are something so many of us share, whether in an office environment or interacting online with other players. I know I'm sounding like the rah-rah dad-type here, but this should be a fun weekend following all the games and grading our brackets. But as I tell my kids, it's more fun when you win!

ROUND 1
MARCH 21-22

ROUND 2
MARCH 23-24

SWEET 16
MARCH 28-29

ELITE 8
MARCH 30-31

FINAL FOUR
APRIL 6

FINAL FOUR
APRIL 6

ELITE 8
MARCH 30-31

SWEET 16
MARCH 28-29

ROUND 2
MARCH 23-24

ROUND 1
MARCH 21-22

2024 NCAA TOURNAMENT



NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP
APRIL 8



FIRST FOUR
MARCH 19-20

