

Bracket chatter

Who's destined to be the next Cinderella? Who's destined to make an early exit? What's potentially the best game of the tournament? Before sitting down in front of your three TVs for the weekend, here's a region-by-region guide to the bracket. — Dirk Chatelain

SOUTH



FIVE STARS

Jahil Okafor ▲
Duke
Kyle Wiltjer
Gonzaga
Georges Niang
Iowa State
Delon Wright
Utah
Tyler Harvey
Eastern Washington



RED HOT

Iowa State has won five in a row, including two unbelievable comebacks against Oklahoma (in Ames) and Kansas (in Kansas City). Barring another Georges Niang injury, the 'Clones should make a run.



FEELIN' THE BLUES

St. John's lost the regular-season finale to Villanova 105-68. Then it got whipped by Providence (on its home court) in the Big East tournament. Now Chris Obekpa is suspended. This won't end well for Steve Lavin.



CINDERELLA WATCH

In 2008, Davidson made the Elite Eight as a 10 seed, upsetting Gonzaga the first weekend. The Wildcats don't have Steph Curry, but Tyler Kalinoski is pretty good.



BEWARE OF ...

Georgetown's recent flops. Since taking the Hoyas to the Final Four in 2007, John Thompson III is 2-5 in the NCAA tournament, including losses to a 10 seed, a 14 seed, an 11 seed, an 11 seed and a 15 seed. Ouch.



REMEMBER ME?

Larry Brown hasn't coached an NCAA tournament game since Kansas upset Oklahoma in the 1988 national championship game. But it is Brown's other former school — UCLA — he'll see in the opener.



SET YOUR DVR

A Duke-Gonzaga regional final would be the most enticing regional final in years. They're third and first, respectively, in field-goal percentage. The Zags have never made a Final Four. Coach K has made 11.

THURSDAY
Iowa State vs. UAB
11:40 a.m. (truTV)
SMU vs. UCLA
2:10 p.m. (truTV)
Utah vs. Stephen F. Austin
6:27 p.m. (truTV)
Georgetown vs. Eastern Washington
8:57 p.m. (truTV)

FRIDAY
Duke vs. Robert Morris
6:10 p.m. (CBS)
San Diego State vs. St. John's
8:40 p.m. (CBS)
Iowa vs. Davidson
6:20 p.m. (TNT)
Gonzaga vs. North Dakota State
8:50 p.m. (TNT)

EAST



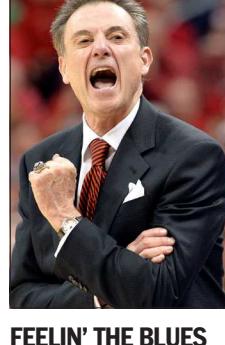
FIVE STARS

Malcolm Brogdon ▲
Virginia
Buddy Hield
Oklahoma
Seth Tuttle
Northern Iowa
Kris Dunn
Providence
Larry Nance Jr.
Wyoming



RED HOT

Most of the season, Tom Izzo was pulling out his hair. Finally his Spartans are surging. They've beaten four tournament teams since March 4 and nearly upset Wisconsin in the Big Ten final.



FEELIN' THE BLUES

ACC powers Virginia and Louisville haven't looked good the past three weeks. Rick Pitino's team is 3-3 without guard Chris Jones (dismissed from the team). And UVa lost two of the past three after a 28-1 start.



CINDERELLA WATCH

Northern Iowa enters the tournament 30-3. The Panthers aren't flashy, but their offense is actually very efficient. They won't be overwhelmed by Villanova's or Virginia's athleticism.



BEWARE OF ...

Unproven favorites. Last year, Virginia and Villanova were the top seeds in the East. Neither made the regional final, opening the door for eventual national champion Connecticut. Are the Cavaliers and Wildcats better this year? Hard to say.



REMEMBER ME?

Who beat Virginia in the Sweet 16 last year? Tom Izzo! This year, Virginia should see the Spartans in the round of 32. Oklahoma's Buddy Hield was Big 12 player of the year. Providence's Kris Dunn scores 16 points a game and his average of 7.6 assists ranks second in the country.



SET YOUR DVR

Two of the 10 best guards in the tournament should meet in the round of 32. Oklahoma's Buddy Hield was Big 12 player of the year. Providence's Kris Dunn scores 16 points a game and his average of 7.6 assists ranks second in the country.

THURSDAY
Villanova vs. Lafayette
5:50 p.m. (TBS)
N.C. State vs. LSU
8:20 p.m. (TBS)

FRIDAY
Michigan State vs. Georgia
11:40 a.m. (truTV)
Virginia vs. Belmont
2:10 p.m. (truTV)
Oklahoma vs. Albany
6:27 p.m. (truTV)
Providence vs. Dayton
8:57 p.m. (truTV)
Northern Iowa vs. Wyoming
12:40 p.m. (TBS)
Louisville vs. UC Irvine
3:10 p.m. (TBS)



FIVE STARS

Frank Kaminsky ▲
Wisconsin
Stanley Johnson
Arizona
Bobby Portis
Arkansas
Joseph Young
Oregon
D'Angelo Russell
Ohio State



RED HOT

This region is loaded with teams playing their best ball: North Carolina, Xavier, VCU and Oregon. The Ducks won seven straight before losing to Arizona in the Pac-12 final.



FEELIN' THE BLUES

It's a wonder Oregon's opponent, Oklahoma State, even made the field. The Cowboys have lost six of their past seven, including a clunker at Texas Tech. If you're looking for an overseeded team, here you go.



CINDERELLA WATCH

The 12 and 13 seeds in Jacksonville are intriguing because of their styles. Wofford and Harvard slow it down. Their opponents, Arkansas and North Carolina, love to play fast. If one of those underdogs can control tempo, expect an upset.



BEWARE OF ...

An Arkansas hangover. The Hogs played Kentucky on Sunday in Atlanta. It's not easy to come back from that test, especially for an Arkansas program that hasn't been to the NCAA's since 2008.



REMEMBER ME?

Wisconsin faced Oregon in last year's round of 32. And the Ducks led 49-37 at halftime in Milwaukee. Think Dana Altman might like another shot at Bo Ryan?



SET YOUR DVR

A rematch of last year's Wisconsin-Arizona regional final wouldn't set ratings records. But their 64-63 overtime battle was among the most competitive of the tournament. Let's do it again.

THURSDAY
Baylor vs. Georgia State
12:40 p.m. (TBS)
Xavier vs. Mississippi
3:10 p.m. (TBS)
North Carolina vs. Harvard
6:20 p.m. (TNT)
Arkansas vs. Wofford
8:50 p.m. (TNT)

FRIDAY
Oregon vs. Oklahoma State
5:50 p.m. (TBS)
Wisconsin vs. Coastal Carolina
8:20 p.m. (TBS)



FIVE STARS

Willie Cauley-Stein ▲
Kentucky
Jerian Grant
Notre Dame
Melo Trimble
Maryland
Roosevelt Jones
Butler
Fred Van Vleet
Wichita State



RED HOT

Kentucky hasn't lost since last year's Final Four. But Notre Dame beat Duke and North Carolina over the weekend. The Irish are second nationally in offensive efficiency.



FEELIN' THE BLUES

Indiana has dropped nine of its past 14 games, including three straight to finish the regular season. The Hoosiers haven't beaten an NCAA tournament team since Jan. 22.



CINDERELLA WATCH

Last year, undefeated Wichita State got a bad draw when it ran into Kentucky in the round of 32. This year, the Shockers can thrive in the underdog role. They certainly have NCAA tournament experience.



BEWARE OF ...

Notre Dame's awful defense. The Irish are 112th in defensive efficiency, which basically disqualifies a Final Four run. Last year, No. 3 seeds Duke and Creighton were outside the top 100 in defensive efficiency and lost the first weekend.



REMEMBER ME?

Seventeen years ago, Valparaiso's Bryce Drew hit one of the NCAA tournament's most famous shots, a 3 at the buzzer to beat Ole Miss. The Crusaders are a 13 seed again and this time Drew is the head coach. They're looking for their first NCAA win since 1998.



SET YOUR DVR

Kansas-Wichita State. The Shockers have waited only 22 years to play KU. Think their fans will be fired up? Bill Self said Sunday getting out of Omaha would constitute a successful season. He knows how tough it'll be.

THURSDAY
Cincinnati vs. Purdue
6:10 p.m. (CBS)
Kentucky vs. Hampton
8:40 p.m. (CBS)
Notre Dame vs. Northeastern
11:15 a.m. (CBS)
Butler vs. Texas
1:45 p.m. (CBS)

FRIDAY
W. Virginia vs. Buffalo
1:10 p.m. (TNT)
Maryland vs. Valparaiso
3:50 p.m. (TNT)
Kansas vs. New Mexico State
11:15 a.m. (CBS)
Wichita State vs. Indiana
1:45 p.m. (CBS)