Cleveland State heads into its BracketBusters game at Old Dominion (21-6, 33 RPI) with its at-large chances hanging by a thread. One of the showcase games in the BracketBusters series, the Cleveland State-Old Dominion game will be televised by ESPN2 Sunday at 1 p.m. and offers both teams its best remaining chance to bolster the at-large resume.

The Vikings currently stand at 23-5 with an RPI of 34 and a 4-4 record against the RPI top-100. The Cleveland State resume includes victories over **Valparaiso** (54 RPI), **Kent State** (94), **St. Bonaventure**
(98), and
Milwaukee
(99). CSU also boasts a victory over
Iona
(112) and two wins against
Wright State
(115), with both teams having a chance to move back into the top-100 before all is said and done.

Victories against top-100 opponents are important for an at-large birth because no team has ever been selected as an at-large with fewer than three top-100 victories . In all of those instances, at least one of the top-100 wins came against a top-50 team. A team like Cleveland State, without a victory over a top-50 opponent, needs at least four top-100 victories to be selected.

The Vikings currently sit right on the historical border of being a bubble team, but with three of their top victories a loss or two from dropping out of the top-100, CSU still needs to pick up some big wins and get some help along the way.

Comparisons to Other Bubble Teams:

Cleveland State's five losses have come at the hands of West Virginia (23), twice to Butler (34), Valparaiso (44) and Detroit (150). The only loss that stands out is Detroit, but even that one is not as bad as some losses on the resumes of other bubble teams.

Joe Lunardi of ESPN has **Boston College**, **Michigan State**, **Richmond** and **Memphis** as his last four in to the tournament. Boston College lost to Yale (144), Michigan State lost to Iowa (153), Richmond lost to Georgia Tech (165), and Memphis lost to SMU (189).

The closest comparison to CSU out this group is Richmond. The Spiders lost to an Iona team that CSU beat, has a strength of schedule ranking of 153 compared to 123 for CSU, and is 4-5 against the top-100 teams with one top-50 win. The top-50 win happened to come against Purdue, and that upset is the main thing putting the Spiders in the tournament over CSU. A couple of late losses by Richmond, like their 20-point loss at the hands of Temple on Thursday, could help the Vikings cause.

Lunardi also has **Wichita State**, **UAB**, **Butler** and **Washington State** as his first four out. All four of these teams have comparable resumes to Cleveland State's:

Wichita State: 21-6 (48 RPI)

Worst Loss: Southern Illinois (206)

Record vs. Top 100: 2-5

Top 50 Wins: None

UAB: 18-7 (35)

Worst Loss: Arizona State (152)

Record vs. Top 100: 6-6

Top 50 Wins: None

Butler: 18-9 (44)

Worst Loss: Youngstown State (278)

Record vs. Top 100: 5-6

Top 50 Wins: Cleveland State twice (34)

Washington State: 17-9 (73)

Worst Loss: Oregon (120)

Record vs. Top 100: 5-6

Top 50 Wins: Washington (37)

The Vikings compare favorably to all four of these teams. Washington State probably has a slight edge, while CSU and UAB are nearly identical. The Vikings could get in ahead of Wichita State thanks to a slightly higher RPI and *not as bad* of a bad loss. Wichita State will also be doomed if they can't pick up a couple more top-100 wins.

Butler is interesting because they have a terrible loss and a lower RPI than Cleveland State but they're 2-0 against the Vikings. If Cleveland State beats Butler in the conference tournament, but then loses in the championship game, they may move past Butler as a bubble team.

Historical Significance of Top 40 Teams in the Tournament:

Cleveland State is looking to avoid history as a potential top-40 RPI team with 18-plus victories. Since 1992, only 22 such teams have been left out of the NCAA Tournament . That's about one team per year in the past 18 seasons. No data was available to show how many teams from the top-40/18-wins group have actually been
selected
to the tournament, but I think it's a safe bet to assume that every team in the top-40 usually finishes with 18 victories

Assuming that would mean that on average, 39 teams from this group make the tournament in

any given year. This means that since 1992, only 22 out of 698 teams (3%) that finished in the RPI top-40 and won 18-games have not been a part of the NCAA Tournament.

A victory over Old Dominion on Sunday would surely make a strong case for the Vikings as a tournament team. With a game still remaining against No. 99 Milwaukee and a potential rematch with No. 44 Butler awaiting in the Horizon League Tournament semi-finals, the Vikings have a real chance to hold strong in the top-40, and add much-needed top-50 and top-100 victories to their resume.

Although the focus has been on battling Valparaiso for the top spot in the Horizon League standings and holding off surging Milwaukee and Butler for the coveted second seed in the Horizon League Tournament, Sunday's non-conference game may be the biggest game of the season for the Vikings if they have any hope at getting an at-large selection into the NCAA Tournament.