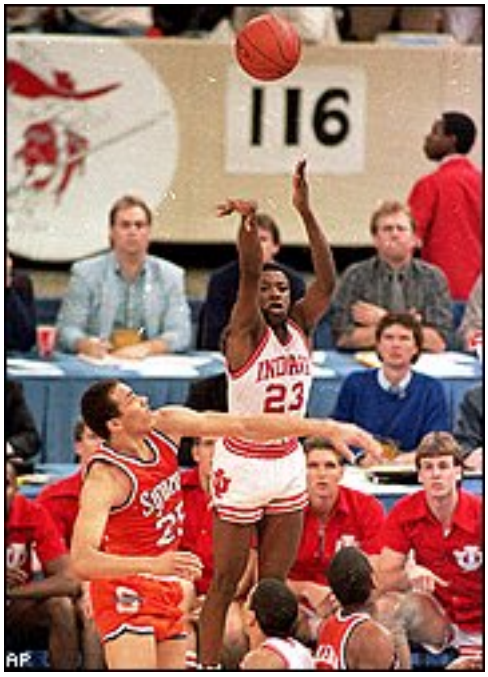
Today is one of my favorite days of the year. In addition to being one of the greatest sporting events in existence, the NCAA Tournament serves as the official marker that spring is upon us. We exit out of the dead period for sports fans, and get flung head first into the beginning of baseball season, the NBA Playoffs, and the NFL Draft. In this superb piece, Brian McPeek talks about some of his most memorable tournament games and how they serve as checkpoints of his life.



Time can be measured by typical means like minutes, days, hours and years. As a kid growing up in Northeast Ohio time was measured by seasons. Not spring, summer, fall and winter so much, though of course they applied. I'm speaking more in terms of baseball, football and basketball season.

The NCAA men's basketball tournament is a surer sign than some diseased buzzards returning or robins whistling in the trees that winter is ending. The tournament serves as the official marker that spring has arrived but it's also a springboard for a lot more. We've spent the better part of the last six weeks in sports purgatory with only the Cavs to watch and discuss. The NCAA tournament gives birth (and berths) to the most exciting time of the college basketball season, fantasy baseball drafts, the NFL draft and baseball season itself, while still carrying through with the stretch run of the NBA regular season.

As a kid I recall watching the tournament and seeing Danny Ainge going coast-to-coast to lead BYU to a tourney win over Notre Dame and U.S Reed

bombing Arkansas past Louisville on the same day. Moments later, like we had received the siren's call, the entire neighborhood was gathered at the local park playing full court games until dark, blowing in our hands to ward off the 40 degree chill.

As I got older the players changed but the tournament always was a focal point in the year. Thursday and Friday nights with friends from the baseball team, crossing games off our tournament pools, working through a case of awful Little Kings or Old Milwaukee that cost us twice us what it should have because we had to buy another case for the degenerate who actually was old enough to buy it.

After the basketball games were over for the night the other games began. Quarters bounced off tables and into shot glasses or rock glasses and balls were busted until it was time to get home. And going home meant jamming your face full of Grape Bubble-Yum because you were certain your old man was stone-cold stupid enough to buy that line of crap and ask no questions. Saturday was our day to either run our asses off at baseball practice or play 7 innings. And then it was back to the house of whoever's parents were either out of town, really old and neglectful and/or drinkers themselves. None of those were in short supply.

Better yet was when the NCAA games coincided with spring break. I have very vague recollections of NC State beating Houston for a national championship on a hazy Monday night in the early 80's. Likewise, I recall watching CSU shock the world in general and Indiana in particular from an Uptown/Downtown barstool in Bowling Green. Watching that game was made more enjoyable due to the fact that my future roommate's parents were IU graduates and their apple didn't fall far from their tree. He stumbled home drunk, bitter and certain to be the object ridicule for the remainder of the semester.

You know, you don't really appreciate the freedom you had back then until you have to try and carry on the tradition of watching those games while employed. It's shocking how many fools and philistines (also known as upper level managers) don't understand or care that these games tip off on Thursday afternoon. Throw in

the fact that with employment comes some discretionary income that was lacking in high school and college and you suddenly have a little cake tied up in the results of these ballgames.

But you manage. Lunch comes later in the day and for longer than allowed. It also comes at the local sports bar where you look at those tools fortunate to have time off sucking down their beers or drinks with no concerns over getting back to the office. And you rightfully hate them.

These are also the days when you participate in as many office pools and private pools as you can. You refresh the ESPN scoreboard like that's your real job. There are no kids yet to consume your days or your nights and the wife (if you have one) is still young and hasn't yet had three kids who sap her sense of humor or her will to live. She also hasn't seen your NCAA act for 20 straight years either so it's all good. You even win a pool or two or learn to lay off some bets if you reach the finals with a chance. But you're rewarded when you get to watch Christian Laetner miraculously hit ‘the shot' against Kentucky in what may have been the greatest NCAA tournament game ever.

Then the kids come.

All your time is spent either at work or in taking care of the kids. The responsibilities change as they age but they still take time that was previously spent highlighting winners and losers and lying to the satellite company so you can receive multiple national channels ("No sir. My antennae sure doesn't get CBS here in Leroy, OH. What? No. I have a well for water. Yes, I'll pay the $4.95 to get CBS/ABC/FOX and NBC from both New York and Los Angeles. No, thank **you** sir.") and therefore games from multiple regions. So you're homebound for March Madness. Logically, you turn your attention to running a pool or two. You initially do it by hand until it gets out of control and then you find software that allows you do it electronically. No paper brackets to lose when Tyus Edney goes coast-to-coast to beat Missouri.

You happily lay down the cash and you find a site to host the tournament and you spend the four hours per night that your kids and wife are sleeping to enter and tabulate results. You handle call after call and email after email about tournament scenarios after the opening round games. "Yeah, I thought Belmont had a shot there at the taking the whole thing too. Too bad. Maybe all the top seeds will lose and you'll backdoor your way back into this thing." And of course you immediately start pestering those hard-to-reach people who are always the first to ask about the tourney pool and the last to pay to ship you the cash for their entry. Occasionally you'll bang your head into that wall one too many times and you'll devote an entire blog entry to the jagoff who stiffed you the $20 or $30. It happens .

But none of that stuff matters when you have a front row couch to Weber State, led by Harold "The Show" Arceneaux, beating North Carolina in 1999. It doesn't make a difference when #15 Hampton knocks out #2 Iowa State in 2001. Not when Steve Nash leads #15 Santa Clara over #2 Arizona and their future NBA stars Damon Stoudamire and Khalid Reeves or when Bryce Drew hits a miraculous shot at the buzzer to lift Valparaiso over Mississippi in 1998.

Where were you watching when #13 Princeton shocked #4 UCLA in 1996? How about when Villanova shocked the world by upsetting Georgetown in the 1985 finals?

I know where I was for each and every one of those ballgames. Those games and moments stand out when you use them to mark time. Enjoy.