

## Pep Talk

By David Caraviello



## NCAA Tournament returns; Henson, Illini to claim crown

Fasten your seatbelts, folks. It's tournament time.

Now that the regular season and conference champions have been decided, it's time to see who'll walk away with the National Championship on April 3rd.

You know, National Champion. The Big N.C. Head Honcho. Top Dog. The Real Number One.

Sorry, Super Bowl and World Series fans. Face it, the NCAA basketball tournament is the greatest single-elimination playoff system in the annals of sport. Winner takes all, no ifs, ands or buts about it. Suspense, action, adventure, intrigue and romance like no other sport. A hardwood version of *Gone With the Wind*.

Because of this year's unusual amount of parity in college basketball, the Brass Ring is up for grabs. So, to enlighten you on the pairings and to hopefully help you win a few bucks, this fearless columnist will take you on a bracket-by-bracket analysis of each region and give you the inside scoop on who'll back up the truck come April.

Pad and pencil handy? We'll begin in the weakest division and work our way up.

**West:** When the NCAA committee gave out powerhouses, this region was last in line. Arizona and Indiana are the cream of a sparse crop and are the only two teams with any hopes of making it out alive. Possible first-round upsets are Louisiana State over UTEP and Idaho over UNLV. Idaho? Yes, Idaho. You can't bet against a team nicknamed the Vandals. If they lose, they come over and wreck your living room. Seriously, the boys from Moscow (Idaho, mind you, not Russia) looked impressive in the Big Sky tournament and could have what it takes to show the Rebels an early exit. Indiana's pressure defense should stifle Arizona in the final and send the Hoosiers to Seattle.

**Midwest:** This region should end up as *The Lou Henson Show*, for his Fighting Illini seem to be the strongest of only four contenders in another weak division. Two classic Sweet 16 matchups should evolve here, Illinois vs. Louisville and Missouri vs. Syracuse. Henson's club will have two tough games, Louisville and predictably Missouri, but the Illini should emerge as a Final Four entry. First-round upsets could be Ball State over Pittsburgh (seeded too high), Loyola-Marymount over Arkansas and Texas over Georgia Tech.

**Southeast:** This region should sell some movie rights as *The Return of Billy Tubbs*. After last year's loss in Kansas City, Tubbs and All-America

center Stacey King have vowed to return to the Final Four — and they will. Although the Sooners showed some signs of mortality in the Big Eight Conference tourney, a healthy romp over East Tennessee should rectify the team. Oklahoma should romp an overrated Florida State team and squeak by Michigan into Seattle. Tar Heel faithful may protest, but it doesn't look like UNC will get by Michigan in a predicted Sweet 16 game. Bet on Oklahoma. In a fairly top-heavy region only one upset seems likely, 12th-seeded Providence over No. 5 Virginia. The Wahoos are seeded much too high, and if the Friars don't kill them, the altitude will.

**East:** Here, mama, is where the big boys are. The Mike Tyson region. Of the sixteen teams, half have spent time in the Top Twenty, and nearly everyone can beat everyone else. Two first-round upsets stick out: Notre Dame over Vanderbilt in a close one and USC over North Carolina State. Now before you start shaking your head, listen to the facts. State is coming off a devastating loss to Maryland that may have decimated their confidence. I don't think State will come out all-fired up and looking to get revenge on their first-round opponent because they've had a week to let the loss sink in and think about it. The Gamecocks have proven they can hang with the elite in their trio of wins over Top Twenty teams. Hopefully, the Gamecocks will get over that "we're just happy to be here" attitude and try to make some noise for the first time in fifteen years. And finally, USC matches up extremely well with the Wolfpack with defensive specialist Barry Manning on State's most explosive player, Rodney Monroe. It could happen, but don't look too far beyond that because Iowa, the predicted second-round opponent, is just too strong. As far as region champion goes, take Cinderella Stanford. In a region with so many strong teams, the big boys — notably Georgetown and Duke — could get bumped off early. The Cardinal can cut it.

For national champion, Illinois seems to be the best bet. Kendall Gill, recently back from a foot injury, serves as a catalyst for an Illini team that compounded all four of its losses while he was out. A recent shellacking of a very good Iowa team shows just how strong Illinois is.

So the Fighting Illini will win it all, Lou Henson will get an extension on his contract and become richer than he already is, and Champaign-Urbana will be a very pleasant place to live.

Bet the farm on it.

## 1989 NCAA Women's Midwest Regional

- 1) Louisiana Tech \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) Miami Fl. \_\_\_\_\_
- 9) Oklahoma State \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Purdue \_\_\_\_\_
- 12) Arkansas \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) LSU \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Iowa \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) South Carolina \_\_\_\_\_
- 11) Tennessee Tech \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) Illinois State \_\_\_\_\_
- 10) NW Louisiana \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Stanford \_\_\_\_\_



Lady Gamecock Martha Parker receives congratulations from her mother at halftime of the USC-DePaul contest March 1, when it was announced Parker's No. 13 jersey would be retired following the season. Parker and the rest of the Lady Gamecocks open NCAA tournament play tonight at 7 p.m. against Tennessee Tech.

## USC begins quest for national title tonight

By CHRIS SILVESTRI  
Assistant sports editor

The 17th-ranked Lady Gamecocks will participate in the NCAA tournament for the second consecutive season, but for only the fourth time in the program's history.

USC, 23-6, received a bid to the tournament as the sixth seed in the Midwest region, and the Lady Gamecocks will play host to No. 11 seed Tennessee Tech in the opening round tonight at 7:00 at Carolina Coliseum. The winner will play eighth-ranked and third-seeded Iowa in Iowa City, where the Lady Hawkeyes own a 40-game home winning streak.

"I was surprised we didn't get a bye in the first round," USC head coach Nancy Wilson said, "but now it's time for us to go out and prove we can end up on top."

The Lady Gamecocks, who were ousted from last year's tournament in a second round loss to then No. 1 seed Texas, have had plenty of regular-season experience against NCAA tournament teams. USC, which owns a 2-3 career record in NCAA tournament play, has played 13 games this season against eight teams participating in this year's tournament. The Lady Gamecocks have posted an 8-5 record against those teams, which include Holy Cross, Georgia, Old Dominion, Southern Mississippi, North Carolina State, Clemson, Tennessee and Cincinnati.

USC has met Tennessee Tech five times previously, and the Lady Gamecocks hold a 4-1 advantage in the series, with the last meeting in 1982. The Lady Eaglettes hold a 21-7 season mark and won the Ohio Valley Conference Tournament, while USC has an impressive 14-2 record at Carolina Coliseum this year.

The Lady Gamecocks, the Metro Conference champions for the third time in four years, are led by their front court trio of sophomore forward Beth Hunt, senior forward Martha Parker and junior center Schonna Banner. Sharing playing time in the backcourt will be guards Lisa Diaz, Sherry David and Karen Middleton.

USC's Parker was named Metro Player of the Year and was also named First Team All-Metro along with Hunt. Hunt was also selected for the

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Nancy Wilson

Metro All-Rookie Team and was chosen as the Metro Tournament's Most Valuable Player. Banner was named Second Team All-Metro and chosen for the All-Tournament Team.

Hunt led the Lady Gamecocks this season with 19.3 points per game and 9.1 rebounds per contest. Banner was second for USC in points and rebounds per game with 14.7 and 7.5 respectively. Parker was next with 13.7 points per game and 5.7 rebounds, and she was also second on the team in assists with 13.7. Diaz led USC this year with 166 assists.

In the Metro Tournament, the Lady Gamecocks received a first round bye after winning a coin toss with Southern Mississippi, which tied USC with a 10-2 regular season Metro Conference record. In the semifinals of the tournament, USC won a tough match with Cincinnati, 63-60. The Lady Gamecocks were led by Hunt, who picked up 23 points and snatched 13 rebounds. USC crushed Southern Mississippi in the championship game, 92-65, and were led by Hunt once again, as she scored 26 points and grabbed 12 rebounds.

"We feel like we're coming off a very good weekend in Memphis, having defeated Southern Mississippi in the Metro Tournament," Wilson said. "We're greatly looking forward to playing at home again, even though Tennessee Tech is a very good team."

"If we can carry the momentum from the Metro Conference Championship, that will be a big plus for us," she said. "The OVC Conference is strong. We can't take them lightly. We have to continue playing with the same intensity."

Tickets for USC's NCAA tournament game with Tennessee Tech are available at the USC Ticket Office on Rosewood Drive. Prices are \$5 for adults and \$2 for students.

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