

It's a MAD, MAD, MAD, MAD MARCH

NCAA website has complete coverage of tournament

The only thing people like more than watching sports, is gambling on sports. Putting down some cash and filling out March Madness brackets at work, or your favorite watering hole, is probably the only gambling activity more popular than filling out grids for the Superbowl pool. I bet they generate more casual gambling in America than any other sporting events.



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InSites

In fact, many of the people who participate in these pools don't watch the games or follow the sport. They just want to take a chance at winning a big score.

If you plan on filling out a bracket this year and want to research your picks, go right to

the source at NCAA.com/march-madness. The site is part of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) website at NCAA.com. For some reason, even though March Madness is the biggest thing the NCAA has going on, there's no obvious link from its home page to the March Madness section.

Fill out your bracket

Brackets is the word you hear more than any other when talking about the Division I college basketball tournaments known as March Madness. For the uninitiated, a tournament bracket lists all the competing teams. It is divided into four regional brackets — Midwest, West, East and South. The teams in each bracket are paired up according to seeding. There are 16 teams in each region, ranked from No. 1 to No. 16. The No. 1 seed plays 16, 2 plays 15, 3 plays 14, etc.

As each round of the tournament is played, the lists are cut in half and move toward the center of the bracket, with winners advancing and losers going home. The brackets are progressively reduced to the Sweet Sixteen, Elite Eight, Final Four — where the regional bracket winners meet — and finally the championship game, which is in the center of the bracket.

Beginning Monday, The Times-Tribune will print the complete brackets. As each round is played, the brackets will be updated in the newspaper.

For the electronically inclined, the NCAA site has a March Madness Bracket Challenge that lets you fill out brackets online before the tournament begins and compete against other members of the site. You can't gamble on the site, but for the pure of heart, and young fans, it's a good way to add a little competitive spice while watching the tournament.

In on the game

Advertisers on the site get in on the bracket mania as well. Coca-Cola has a link on the site for Bracket Town, an online portal for purchasing tickets to the Final Four games in New Orleans. AT&T has a series of cute, humorous videos depicting an overly serious sports journalist interviewing 6-year-olds on their picks for the tournaments.

The bottom of the page has sections featuring the latest news, videos and photos leading up to the tournament. There's also a tournament schedule and an interactive poll that lets viewers vote on which teams they think will make it into the tournament.

A series of links across the top of the page takes you to information that can help you fill out your bracket, as well as information on other NCAA sports. The Men's Sports and Women's Sports links both have drop down menus for basketball. The basketball links further expand to reveal links to scores, statistics, rankings, history, videos, photos and more.

Completely connected

The site has a sophisticated integration with social media and mobile applications. Apps are available for both iOS and Android systems that allow you to watch all of the games in the tournament live. Of course, watching over 70 hours of basketball in less than two weeks would be like working a full-time job, sans pay and benefits. Selection U is a feature that integrates with Facebook to take fans behind the scenes of the team selection process. And of course you can follow March Madness on Twitter.

NCAA.com, like other big-time sports sites I've reviewed, is a good example of an organization taking advantage of all the Web has to offer. The design, graphics, typography and navigation are all top notch. It's rich with images, video and interactivity. There's a wealth of information, all well organized and easily accessible. Besides the research and entertainment value of the site, it offers functional tools that allow you to purchase merchandise, buy tickets to events, arrange travel plans and more. For basketball fans, or even people with only a passing interest, this site has a lot to offer.

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