

Sadly, we live in a degraded age of college basketball. The first weekend of the 2013 NCAA Tournament has been proof enough, with arenas around the country



reverberating with the harsh sound of shots banging off backboards and clanging off rims. It's been competitive but it's also been ugly. When a 13th seed (LaSalle) can make three field goals and shoot under 20 percent in the second half and still win a game, you know it's ugly.

Things weren't always this way. To find a different game, a better game, we need to go back a generation. The month was March; the year was 1990. Janet Jackson was dominating the pop charts with *Rhythm Nation 1814*; the number-one movie at the box office was *The Hunt for Red October* ;
"Roseanne" topped the Neilson ratings.

Meanwhile, the 1990 NCAA Tournament was the showcase for a golden era of college basketball. Round after round spectators were treated to thrilling games with fantastic finishes.

And the games weren't just close- they were also well played, particularly on offense. Players handled, moved and shot with great skill in games where the scores routinely cracked the 90-point barrier.

It was college basketball played at the highest level. The field was breathtakingly deep, with even middle-seeded teams boasting multiple future NBA players. The coaches were legendary. The storylines were enduring. And the action was end-to-end, from the first minute to the fortieth and beyond.

Let's take a look back at 1990 and why this was the greatest NCAA Tournament ever played.

Buzzer-Beaters: The buzzer-beating shot is a staple of the March Madness highlight films, and there were enough in 1990 to fill an entire reel. No fewer than nine games featured shots that either tied or won games in the last five seconds:

- In the first round, Ohio State's Alex Davis drilled a three-pointer with three seconds left in regulation to tie Providence in a game the Buckeyes went on to win in overtime, 84-83.
- Also in the first round, [Northern Iowa's Maurice Newby hit a three-pointer](#) just before the horn to stun heavily favored Missouri, 74-71.
- Also in the first round, Murray State's Greg Coble nailed a three-pointer at the buzzer to force overtime between the 16th-seeded Racers and top-seeded Michigan State. Sparty went on to win in the extra session, 75-71.
- Still in the first round, Ball State's Parris McCurdy hit a turnaround jumper while being fouled and knocked in the game-winning free throw with zeros on the clock to take out Gary Payton and Oregon State, 54-53.

- Moving to round two, North Carolina's Rick Fox eliminated top-ranked Oklahoma [with a baseline drive](#) at the one-second mark.
- On the same day in the same arena (the Frank Erwin Center in Austin) Arkansas's Todd Day followed his own miss to beat underdog Dayton with three seconds left.
- In the Sweet 16, with UConn trailing Clemson 70-69 and one second remaining, Scott Burrell threw a length-of-the-court pass to Tate George, [who hit a turnaround jumper at the horn](#) to give the Huskies the victory.
- The next night, still in the Sweet 16, Georgia Tech's sensational freshman [Kenny Anderson hit a long jumper](#) to tie Michigan State at the buzzer. (To be technical, the shot came *after* the buzzer but the officials counted it anyway.) Tech wound up winning in overtime, 81-80.
- In the Elite 8, Duke's [Christian Laettner hit a leaning jumper to beat UConn at the buzzer](#) (a shot that is overshadowed by the one Laettner hit two years later against Kentucky.)

In addition, two second-round games were won on the free-throw line in the last ten seconds. UCLA freshman Tracy Murray sank a pair to beat Kansas 71-70, while two freebies by Texas's Travis Mays gave the Longhorns a [73-72 upset of Purdue](#) .



[standed](#) [stopping free throws](#)

