

## A Guaranteed Thriller?

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}  
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This may be the first year in NCAA Tournament history that all four number-one seeds have advanced all the way to the Final Four, but it won't be the first year that the semifinal and final rounds have featured titanic clashes between top seeds. In his latest, our resident historian Jesse Lamovsky looks back for us at some other Final Fours from the past that featured battles of #1 seeds. And the historical data tells us one thing. This year's Final Four is almost guaranteed to be a thriller.



This may be the first year in NCAA Tournament history that all four number-one seeds have advanced all the way to the Final Four, but it won't be the first year that the semifinal and final rounds have featured titanic clashes between top seeds. Number-ones have battled before on the final weekend, from 1982 when North Carolina and Georgetown met in the title game, right up to last year when Florida and Ohio State threw it up on Championship Monday.

Since we're guaranteed a 1-vs.-1 showdown in the Championship Game this year, it might be instructive to take a look back at the five other occasions one seeds have met for the title, just to get a clue of what kind of game we're in for:

**1982: North Carolina 63, Georgetown 62:** 1982 was the first year a Final Four was held in a domed stadium, and the Louisiana Superdome provided a fittingly outsized stage for a grand show. Both teams shot over 50 percent, neither led by more than six, and the stars- and there were many- all came out to play. Pat Ewing had 23 points, 11 rebounds, two blocks, and a half-dozen goaltending violations, Sleepy Floyd had 18 and the tough jumper in the lane that put the Hoyas ahead with 58 seconds left, Big Game James went off for 28 on 13-of-17 shooting, Sam Perkins brought the lunch pail with ten points, seven boards, and

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zero turnovers, and last but not least, Michael Jordan: 16 points, a team-high nine rebounds, and the game-winning [shot](#)

. Also, if Worthy isn't a good fifteen feet out of position, Fred Brown never throws that pass. It's got to be the most fortuitous defensive lapse in Tournament history.

**1993: North Carolina 77, Michigan 71:** Best remembered for Chris Webber's infamous [timeout](#)

with 11 seconds left and Michigan trailing 73-71, for 39 minutes and 49 seconds this was a high-tension duel between the two most hyped recruiting classes of the early 1990s: Carolina's class of '90, with Eric Montross, Derrick Phelps, Brian Reese, Pat Sullivan (and Clifford Rozier before he decamped to Louisville) and Michigan's Fab Five of Webber, Howard, Rose, King and Jackson. After a back-and-forth second half North Carolina took the lead for good with 3:10 remaining and hung on thanks in no small part to C-Webb's

*faux pas*

. It's too bad this great game ended on such a tawdry note.

**1999: Connecticut 77, Duke 74:** You *can* have an upset in a 1-vs.-1 match-up. Top-ranked and talent-laden Duke, with Elton Brand, William Avery, Corey Maggette, Trajan Langdon and Shane Battier, was considered next to unbeatable, while Connecticut, despite its outstanding Laurel-and-Hardy backcourt of Richard Hamilton and Khalid El-Amin, was

considered merely very good. But Rip Hamilton went off for 27, the Huskies forced Duke into 41 percent shooting and 19 turnovers, and the title went to Storrs for the first time, by an eyelash.

**2005: North Carolina 75, Illinois 70:** It was a match-up of the teams that had dominated college basketball that season: once-beaten Illinois with its guard troika of Dee Brown, Luther Head and Deron Williams, and mighty North Carolina, with four future first-round picks in the rotation. Led by Sean May's 26 and 12 on 10-of-11 shooting, favored UNC never trailed after the 11:22 mark of the first half, led 40-27 at halftime, and were up 15 at one point in the second half before the Illini put together 18-5 and 10-0 runs to tie the game with 5:34 left. It was still tied inside two minutes, but a Marvin Williams tip-in put the Tarheels in front 72-70 with 1:26 left, and they closed it out from there.

**2007: Florida 84, Ohio State 75:** The only one of the first five 1-vs.-1 clashes to not be up in the air inside the last two minutes. After some early sparring, the defending NCAA Champion Gators took the lead with 12:16 left in the first half and never relinquished it. It was 40-29 Florida at halftime, and Ohio State never got closer than six in the second half. Greg Oden had 25 points, 12 rebounds and four blocks, demolishing

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a Florida front line boasting two future lottery picks, but Ohio State couldn't resist firing up a barrage of three-pointers, most of them errant; the Bucks went 4-of-23 from downtown, and Oden's brilliance went for naught.

Aside from the 1-vs.-1 games, there has been one NCAA final between matching seeds: 1989, when third-seeded Michigan and third-seeded Seton Hall played an 80-79 thriller decided by a pair of Rumeal Robinson free throws with three seconds left in OT. Sense a trend?

Let's run down the thirteen other Final Four games between matching seeds:

***1981 Third-Place: #1 Virginia 78, #1 LSU 74 \****

1983 Final Four: #1 Houston 94, #1 Louisville 81

1984 Final Four: #1 Georgetown 53, #1 Kentucky 40

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**1985 Final Four: #1 Georgetown 77, #1 St. John's 59**

**1986 Final Four: #1 Duke 71, #1 Kansas 67**

**1987 Final Four: #1 Indiana 97, #1 UNLV 93**

**1988 Final Four: #1 Oklahoma 86, #1 Arizona 78**

**1993 Final Four: #1 Michigan 81, #1 Kentucky 78 (OT)**

**1995 Final Four: #2 Arkansas 75, #1 North Carolina 68**

**1996 Final Four: #1 Kentucky 81, #1 Massachusetts 74**

**1997 Final Four: #1 Kentucky 78, #1 Minnesota 69**

**1999 Final Four: #1 Duke 68, #1 Michigan State 62**

### 2002 Final Four: #1 Maryland 97, #1 Kansas 88

Of those thirteen, six (those **bolded**) were either tied or a one-score game inside the final minute. Even some of the relative washouts have been memorable: Phi Slamma Jamma's dunkalicious 21-1 second-half run against Louisville in '83, Georgetown's second-half defensive *tour de force* against Kentucky in '84 (11 points on 3-of-33 from the floor for the Wildcats).

*\*- Back in the day the National Semifinal losers played a consolation game prior to the championship. The Virginia-LSU clash- Jeff Lamp's 25 points led the Cavaliers to victory- was the last of its kind, as the third-place game was abolished following the '81 Tournament on account of being asinine.*

So in total, matching seeds have met nineteen times in the Final Four and Championship Game, and eleven times it's come right down to the wire. Of course, the past isn't always prologue. But if history holds reasonably true, we're in for a highly entertaining weekend of basketball.