



There's an old proverb among fans of Mid-Major basketball: "Tis better to have played in the tournament and lost than never to have played in the tournament at all." After watching the humiliating, nationally televised demolition of the Akron Zips at the hands of the VCU Rams last night, however, that trusted philosophy starts to ring hollow. To put it another way: "If a tree falls in the woods and nobody is there to hear it, that's way better than a primetime CBS audience watching it go down."

For all the talent they displayed in winning 19 consecutive games this season, and all the heart required to bounce back and grab the MAC title with their pot-dealing point guard on lockdown, Keith Dambrot's Akron squad was still essentially operating in a dark, quiet corner of the basketball universe—nothing more than a name on a sheet of paper until that 9:45 tip-off on Thursday night.

Just or unjust, this reality is largely what makes the NCAA Tournament the uniquely captivating spectacle that it is. For almost half the field of 68, THIS is our ONE moment—the one we have waited for all year, or in some cases, for many years. And by no coincidence, it's the moment that will eventually define the team to which we've attached our allegiances.

Of course, this whole concept can sometimes confuse your average Indiana, Michigan State, or even Ohio State fan. Case in point, when Akron vanquished the Ohio Bobcats to take the MAC title just one week ago, the celebrations of the Zips faithful were greeted with plenty of smug eyerolls from the denizens of Big Ten country. "Congrats on getting yourself a first round loss in the Big Dance," they said, trying to temper our enthusiasm with some textbook sarcastic condescension. The "haters" were missing the mark, though, by assuming we had our eyes on the same prize they did.

Unless you're a fan of Butler, Gonzaga, VCU, or the handful of other schools that have "crossed over" from Cinderella Land into legitimacy, a fan of a Mid-Major basketball program sets his or her bar much lower when it comes to the tournament. A National Championship is never even a consideration, of course. And in Akron's case, even the usual hope of a fluke upset or two—as Ohio pulled off last year—was washed out almost completely by Alex Abreu's wacky tobacky dismissal two weeks ago. What we were left with instead was something perhaps a bit more petty—some might say pathetic, even. Simply put, we just wanted some damn attention. And with the national scrutiny March Madness brings, we were finally gonna get it.

Even after learning of our highly unfortunate pairing with VCU, and the matchup nightmares it presented, Zips fans still went to bed on Wednesday night with visions of a national showcase floating in their heads—the kinds of things major college programs just take for granted in the middle of the season.

*Just imagine, those obnoxious old farts Verne Lundquist and Bill Raftery... calling an Akron game!*

*The CBS basketball theme music playing while they announce Zeke Marshall's name!*

*Holy shit, Charles Barkley talking about Demetrius Treadwell's ferocious rebounding skills at halftime! "He reminds me a bit of a young me," he might say.*



