



*March Madness* is widely considered the most exciting sporting event of the year. You're basically combining 68 teams with 65 games and throwing them into a pressure cooker for three straight weeks. Upsets, blowouts, buzzer beaters, pandemonium -- the NCAA tournament has it all.

You may have watched the games on television or on your work computer (tisk, tisk), but did you ever wonder what was happening behind the scenes? Did you ever wonder what coaches were saying when they were *screaming* at their bench? Did you watch players from a losing team walk off the court in tears and think, ‘*man I wonder what being in their locker room feels like right now*’  
?

Writing for this website has its benefits. Yes, the fame and recognition is nice sometimes (seriously people, all I want to do is have a nice, quiet dinner with my girlfriend -- not sign autographs all night), but what really makes this gig so incredible is the opportunities it creates.

For some reason, the NCAA was crazy enough to give me media credentials for the second and third round tournament games in Cleveland. The credentials put me right behind the “home-teams” bench in press row, approximately one *Zydrunas Ilgauskas* away from the court.

Eight teams (Ohio State, Syracuse, Xavier, George Mason, Villanova, Marquette, Indiana State and UTSA) converged at “The Q” two weeks ago for practice sessions and pre-tournament press conferences.

I started and maintained a running diary of the weekend when I reached The Q (and no, diary’s aren’t lame if you’re writing about sports). When I wasn’t [busy working my tail off](#), I was

trying to soak in the entire experience, writing down anything that seemed amusing, odd, or downright funny. Thursday and Saturday were practice days -- Friday and Sunday were game days.

What follows may be a bit choppy, but hey, it's a diary -- so just go with it. You won't find any blazing analysis below, just funny tidbits I noticed over the course of the weekend.

*\* Note -- I wasn't aware at the time that I was going to be watching Ohio State's last two victories of the season. My optimistic tone when referring to the Buckeyes seems so foreign to me now, but hey -- use this as an opportunity to go back to a time when things were right in the world.*

### **Thursday, March 17: Team arrivals, open practices and pre-tournament press conferences...**

When George Mason players were asked if they feel like they're living in the shadow of the '06 team that made it to the final four, the answer was basically, *Hell yes we do*. They also said they want to give their fans something to talk about with a run of their own.

[Que Bonnie Raitt](#)

During Villinova and Marquette practice sessions, both teams used part of their session to play a version of the game "knock out" where no one was actually knocked out... Must be a Big-East thing.

Ohio State coach Thad Matta told an amusing story about William Buford during his press conference. Matta said that last year, national outlets were giving Ohio State no chance in their game against Purdue on the road. In an effort to motivate his team, Matta wrote the cost of travel, room and board, food, etc... that Ohio State would take on during their trip to Purdue (\$39,000) on the white board in Ohio State's locker room. Matta asked, "Should we save the university the \$39,000 and just stay home?" All of the players smiled and said no, but Buford raised his hand and asked, "If we don't go to the game, can [the team] split the money?" Classic Buford.

**Friday, March 18: Villanova - George Mason | Ohio State - UTSA | Xavier - Marquette | Syracuse - Indiana State**

Gus Johnson was calling the action in Cleveland, and when I was heading to my seat for the start of the Villanova - George Mason game, I bumped butts with him. It was either by accident or intentional, and either way, I liked it.

The Villanova mascot (a Wildcat) was using his tail as a guitar while the band played "Sweet Caroline". What a douche.

Nova either has a priest on their coaching staff or a man who fancies weird, priest-looking collars.

Nova players on the bench looked like someone had punched them in the collective stomach after George Mason's Hancock drilled the deciding 3-pointer in the final 30 seconds.

David Lighty's mother, who was sitting in the front row with the rest of the Lighty family behind press row, said hello and waved at me. Probably to break the tension because I was staring.

I went to the bathroom before the start of the Ohio State - UTSA game, and when I came out, the Roadrunner mascot was 10 feet away, staring at me/the bathroom door. That's scary because [UTSA's mascot looks like all of your fears wrapped up into one terrifying, realized nightmare](#).

Ohio State trumpet players put #1 foam fingers on the end of their trumpets... I get what they were going for, but it just [looked really weird](#) when they were playing.

When the Quicken Loans arena announcer... announced there was one minute left in the

OSU-UTSA game, the Ohio State band shouted in unison "AND MICHIGAN STILL SUCKS!"

A particular Marquette player, who shall remain nameless, dropped approximately 953 "F-bombs" during their game against Xavier. Sitting behind the Marquette bench, I heard him use the F-word as a noun, a verb and an adjective. It was actually kind of impressive, although I bet Villanova's priest-coach wouldn't appreciate it.

During warmups -- I caught an Indiana State player staring at the buttocks of a Syracuse cheerleader. I wonder if he stares at his cheerleaders like that, and if he doesn't, if those cheerleaders are jealous.

The announcer highlighted other tournament scores -- showing that Illinois was beating UNLV by 20 and the Ohio State fans cheered. Then they showed that Georgetown was losing to VCU and the Syracuse band started applauding and giving high-fives to each other. Conference allegiance -- you're doing it wrong.

The Syracuse band does the same chant after the opposing team commits a foul -- *YOU! YOU! YOU! YOU! AAAAAALLL YOU!!! // high-hat drum symbol*. It got old at about the 17 minute mark of the first half, but it was just another reminder that no band in the country is as cool as TBDBITL.

### **Saturday, March 19: Round 3 press conferences, closed practice sessions...**

During Ohio State's press conference on the practice day, David Lighty and Aaron Craft were asked about their two losses, and in particular, Jordan Taylor and Etwaun Moore going off. Craft then pressed his lips together and gritted his teeth -- he took those performances personally. He didn't say it, but he showed it.

I'm working on a theory that college basketball referees, or any referees for that matter, were yelled at a lot as children. Then, when seeking employment as an adult, they wanted to find a job that reminded them of home, so they became refs so they could be screamed at by fans for two hours a night.

In between the Marquette and the Syracuse press conferences, I ate lunch with a group of photographers who sit below the baskets to take pictures during the game. They were telling their worst horror stories of a runaway player who dove into the photographer section. One guy said that John Wall had lost control under the hoop one time and fell on his knee, bending it awkwardly and tearing his ACL. I never knew John Wall was such a freaking jerk.

### **Sunday, March 20: Ohio State - George Mason | Syracuse - Marquette**

George Mason's band director [dresses like a man who has probably stolen something from you in the past](#)

I walked by the George Mason cheering section at halftime (who had just watched Ohio State go on a 50-15 run) and they looked like they had just witnessed a brutal, brutal murder. I walked by the Mason cheerleaders and band on the way back and they looked like they were trying to repress the first half like a bad childhood memory.

Start of the second half -- Diebler looked me right in the eyes and raised his eyebrows in a "here we go" kind-of-way. [Diebler and I are like this](#) .

George Mason players coming out of the locker room at half time looked like they were being murdered while simultaneously trying to repress a bad childhood memory.

The [Buckeye Nut](#) and the [Buckeye Guy](#) were sitting 10 feet from me -- I wonder how much face paint they buy a year. I bet they're the reason face-paint companies in Columbus haven't gone under during these tough economic times.

The George Mason cheering section started chanting "Ohio State cheats" during what is now formally known as *The George Mason Massacre*... George Mason, please sit down.

I watched the end of the Texas-Arizona game on my computer with one of the refs that called the Ohio State - George Mason game. It was during the Marquette - Syracuse game, and he came out showered and in street clothes. After Zona won, he looked at me and said, "Later, bro." It made me hate refs a little less.

After the Syracuse loss, I was packing up my things and getting ready to head over to the press conference. That's when I remembered that Syracuse's team slogan this year was "Unfinished Business" -- hinting toward the disappointment from last year's tournament collapse. Maybe next year's team slogan will be "Even MORE Unfinished Business". Maybe by 2015, Syracuse will have so much unfinished business that they'll have to outsource some of their "business" to a company who specializes in helping schools finish their unfinished business. If that company doesn't exist, I will start it right now and cash in when 2015 rolls around. Laugh now, but in four years, I'll have more money than you and 20 of your richest friends combined, so suck it.

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### **Current Day:**

I drove home that night thinking I had watched Ohio State kick off its march to a National Championship. Five days later, I watched Ohio State's season end in the Sweet 16 -- realizing once again that March is just a cold, bitter woman who selects one team from a field of 68 to make her own. I hate that woman so much. But I also love her.

That's March Madness in a nutshell.

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