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2025 March Madness Betting Guide

2025 March Madness: A Deep Dive into Trends, Stats, and Bracket Strategies

It's that time again, March Madness is officially here! The bracket just dropped, and we've got 68 teams ready to bring nonstop excitement, epic moments, and plenty of chances to make the right picks and cash in on some wins.. From the First Four in Dayton to the Final Four in San Antonio, the next few weeks are gonna be pure chaos, buzzer-beaters, Cinderella runs, and some poor 2 seed getting embarrassed on national TV.

So, let's break it down. We're looking at trends from the past decade, teams that fit the mold, and some sneaky picks to keep your bracket from getting torched on day one. Let's get into it.

Key Trends to Watch

March Madness is all about the unexpected, but over the years, certain trends have emerged that can help guide your bracket decisions and betting strategies. Below, we break down the most important trends to consider for the 2025 NCAA Tournament, from the First Four to the Championship Game.

General Trends

1. 5 vs. 12 Seed Curse: Since 2012, No. 12 seeds have won 39.1% of their games against No. 5 seeds in the first round. In 2024, No. 12 seeds went 2-2 against No. 5 seeds. This year, keep an eye on the matchup between (5) Clemson and (12) McNeese. McNeese, a mid-major team with a strong defense, could exploit Clemson's inconsistencies and pull off the upset.
2. First Four Teams: Teams that win their First Four games have a 60% chance of winning their next game in the Round of 64. This year, (11) San Diego State could carry momentum into their matchup against (6) Ole Miss if they win their play-in game. Don't sleep on these play-in teams—they often come in hot and can be dangerous in the early rounds.
3. Defense Wins Championships: Since 2012, 70% of Final Four teams have ranked in the top 40 in adjusted defensive efficiency (per KenPom). Teams like (1) Houston, (2) Tennessee, and (1) Auburn are among the top defensive squads in the tournament and are strong candidates to make deep runs.
4. Double-Digit Seeds: At least one double-digit seed (10 or higher) has reached the Sweet 16 in every tournament since 2015. This year, (10) Utah State could give (7) UCLA trouble with their disciplined play and three-point shooting.

First Four Trends

- Underdogs own a 26-21 ATS (55.3%) edge in the First Four over the last 12 tournaments.
- Favorites of less than 5 points are 28-23 SU but 21-29-1 ATS (42%) since 2001.
- Outright winners have gone 39-3 ATS (92.9%) in the First Four since 2013.
- Games with totals higher than 139 have trended 15-7 Under (68.2%).

First Round Trends

1. 5 vs. 12 Seeds: No. 12 seeds are 39.1% against No. 5 seeds since 2012. This year, watch (5) Clemson vs. (12) McNeese.
2. Double-Digit Favorites: Double-digit favorites are 94-9 SU and 57-46 ATS (55.3%) since 2016.
3. Small Favorites: Favorites of -1 to -3 are just 59-62 SU and 48-69-4 ATS (41%) since 2009.
4. Mid-Level Favorites: Favorites of -3.5 to -7.5 are 41-27 SU but 28-40 ATS (41.2%) since 2016.
5. Totals: Games with totals of 149 or higher have trended 21-10 Under (67.7%) in the last five tournaments.

Second Round Trends

- Bettors have not enjoyed a winning second round since 2017, going 27-45-1 ATS (37.5%).
- Top 4 seeds that won but didn't cover in the first round are 44-17 SU and 33-27-1 ATS (55%) since 2013.
- Double-digit favorites are 52-2 SU and 34-20 ATS (63%) since 2001.
- Favorites in the -5.5 to -6.5 range are 50-12 SU and 42-20 ATS (67.7%) since 1998.

Sweet 16 Trends

- Favorites of 5 points or more are 14-11 SU but 8-17 ATS (32%) since 2017.
- Double-digit seeds are 16-7-1 ATS (69.6%) as underdogs since 2011.
- Games with totals of less than 138 have gone 18-7 Under (75%) in the last 10 years.
- #1 and #2 seeds are 38-17 SU and 31-23-1 ATS (57.4%) over the last 10 seasons.

Elite Eight Trends

- Better-seeded teams are just 50-46 SU and 36-56-4 ATS (39.1%) since 2000.
- Favorites of 4 points or fewer are 4-10 SU and 3-10-1 ATS (23.1%) in their last 14 games.

- Cinderella teams (non-power conferences) are 14-12 SU and 15-10-1 ATS (60%) since 2003.
- Overs are 88-66-2 (57.1%) since 2001, with lower totals (143 or less) going 59-30 Over (66.3%).

Final Four Trends

- Outright winners are 37-7-2 ATS (84.1%) since 2001.
- #1 seeds are 19-5 SU and 14-9-1 ATS (60.9%) when not facing another #1 seed.
- Favorites of 5 points or more are 21-3 SU and 15-8-1 ATS (65.2%) over the last 25 years.
- Games with totals of 130 or less have gone 7-0 Under in the last seven matchups.

Championship Game Trends

- Favorites of 3 points or more are 15-3 SU and 13-5 ATS (72.2%).
- Better-seeded teams are 13-3 SU and 11-5 ATS (68.8%) in the last 15 championship games.
- Big East teams are 8-0 SU and ATS in championship games since 2001, while Big Ten teams are 0-8 SU and ATS.
- Games with totals of 150 or higher are 6-2 Under (75%) since 2001.

Betting Insights

1. Underdogs in the First Round: Historically, underdogs have covered the spread at a rate of 55% in the first round.
2. Three-Point Shooting: Teams that rank in the top 20 in three-point shooting percentage have a higher likelihood of pulling off upsets.
3. Offensive Rebounding: Teams with strong offensive rebounding (e.g., Houston, Tennessee) are more likely to advance deep into the tournament.
4. Coaching Experience: Coaches with prior tournament success, such as Tom Izzo (Michigan State) and Bill Self (Kansas), have a proven track record in March.

Bracket Strategies: What to Avoid

While trends can be helpful, blindly following them can lead to bracket disaster. One common pitfall is overvaluing seed-based trends. For example, picking a No. 12 seed to win just because they often upset No. 5 seeds can be risky. Not all No. 12 seeds are created equal. Matchups and team strengths matter more than historical trends. Don't just pick an upset for the sake of it—do your research.

Another mistake is chasing conference trends. Just because the SEC has been strong in recent years doesn't mean all SEC teams will perform well this year. Conference strength varies year-to-year, and individual team performance is a better indicator of success. Don't get caught up in conference hype.

Finally, don't ignore defense. Picking a high-scoring team with a weak defense to win it all is a common mistake. Defense wins championships. Teams with poor defensive metrics rarely make deep runs. Don't fall in love with a team just because they can score—defense matters.

Region-by-Region Breakdown

Now that we've established some key trends, let's apply them to each region in the 2025 tournament. We'll identify teams that fit these patterns and make predictions for potential upsets and deep runs.

East Region

The East Region is headlined by (1) Duke, a team that has undergone a remarkable transformation. After years of being a polarizing program under Coach K, the Blue Devils have become likeable under new head coach Jon Scheyer. The freshman phenom Cooper Flagg has been the catalyst for this change, making Duke a team worth rooting for. Despite suffering an ankle injury in the ACC tournament, Flagg is expected to return at full strength, and Duke has a clear path to the Elite Eight. In their half of the bracket, (4) Arizona and (5) Oregon are unlikely to pose significant threats. The bottom half features strong teams like (2) Alabama, (3) Wisconsin, (6) BYU, and (7) Saint Mary's, but Duke should emerge as the favorite to reach the Final Four.

According to EvanMiya, Duke has a 24.7% chance to win the national championship, the highest of any team. They also have a 54.2% chance to reach the Final Four. My first-round bets in this region include BYU -2 over VCU, Montana +17.5 over Wisconsin, and Akron +14 over Arizona.

Another potential upset to watch is (4) Texas A&M vs. (13) Yale. Yale, the Ivy League champion, has a balanced attack and a strong defense that could give Texas A&M trouble.

Midwest Region

The Midwest Region features (1) Houston, the No. 1 seed most likely to be upset early and fail to reach the Final Four down the road in San Antonio. Despite their strong defensive metrics, Houston's slow tempo (ranked No. 360) leaves little margin for error in close games. They'll face the winner of the Gonzaga-Georgia play-in game in the second round, which could be a tough matchup. (4) Purdue and (5) Clemson are also on upset alert in the first round. The darkhorse in this region is (11) Xavier, a team with the potential to make a surprise run to the Sweet 16. My first-round bets in this region include Xavier -2 over Texas, High Point +8 over Purdue, and McNeese +7.5 over Clemson.

Another game to watch is (6) BYU vs. (11) VCU. VCU, a First Four winner, enters the tournament with momentum and could give BYU trouble.

South Region

The South Region is led by (1) Auburn, the tournament's No. 1 overall seed. Despite losing three of their last four games, the Tigers are a formidable team led by Johni Broome, one of the nation's top players. Auburn's veteran roster, with an average age of 23.2 years, gives them an edge in experience. However, (2) Michigan State and (3) Iowa State are strong contenders, though both have weaknesses that could be exploited. The darkhorse in this region is (6) Mississippi, a team with the scoring, toughness, and coaching to make a deep run. My only first round bet in this region is Yale +7.5 over Texas A&M. Another potential upset is (5) Michigan vs. (12) UC San Diego. UC San Diego, the Big West champion, is a disciplined team that excels in limiting turnovers and controlling the tempo. On the top of the bracket, (2) Tennessee is a strong candidate to reach the Final Four with their solid defense and deep roster.

West Region

This West Region because it's stacked. First off, Dan Hurley and UConn aren't pulling off the three peat, but I do see them getting past the first round before running into a buzzsaw named Florida. Now, the Gators just went all out to win the SEC, which could mean tired legs, but still, this team is legit. That said, I hate that two of my best futures (Florida 10-1, St. John's 80-1) are in the same region. Brutal.

Now, let's talk Pitino. The dude's a legend, and he's got the coaching edge over Todd Golden, who hasn't won a single NCAA tourney game. Pitino himself even said St. John's could either flame out early or go on a deep run. No way they're losing to Omaha, but things get real in Round 2 when he's likely facing either Bill Self (Kansas) or John Calipari (Arkansas).

This region is loaded, so expect some upsets after the first round. Florida's a beast, but I've been riding with Pitino for a while now. St. John's has been ridiculously close in their losses,

only four all year, and by a total of seven points. Plus, they've got the best defensive efficiency in the country, even better than Houston and Tennessee.

My plays for Round 1? Arkansas +4.5 over Kansas and Grand Canyon +10.5 over Maryland.

Conference Performance Over the Past Decade

When it comes to March Madness, certain conferences have consistently performed well over the past decade. The ACC, Big Ten, and Big 12 have been powerhouses, regularly sending multiple teams deep into the tournament. The SEC has also made significant strides in recent years, with teams like Kentucky, Tennessee, and Auburn making deep runs. This year the SEC made history with 14 teams in the tournament, an all time record. Out of 16 teams in the conference, only two missed the cut, making this the deepest tournament run by any conference ever.

The ACC has been particularly dominant, with teams like Duke, North Carolina, and Virginia regularly reaching the Final Four. The Big Ten has also been strong, with Michigan State, Michigan, and Purdue making deep runs. The Big 12 has been consistent, with Kansas, Baylor, and Texas Tech regularly making noise in the tournament.

On the other hand, mid-major conferences like the Mountain West, Atlantic 10, and Missouri Valley have also had their moments in the spotlight. Teams like Gonzaga (West Coast Conference), San Diego State (Mountain West), and Loyola Chicago (Missouri Valley) have made deep runs and pulled off shocking upsets.

Conference Trends in the NCAA Tournament

ACC

- Recent Success: Over the last three tournaments, ACC teams are 33-15 SU and ATS (68.8%).
- Final Four Performance: ACC teams are 11-5 SU and 10-6 ATS (62.5%) in the Final Four since 2001.
- Underdogs: As pick 'em or small underdogs (up to 4.5 points), ACC teams are 19-5 ATS (79.2%).
- Favorites: ACC teams are 32-49-1 ATS (39.5%) as favorites of 5 points or less since 1998.
- Double-Digit Seeds: ACC teams are 19-11-1 ATS (63.3%) as double-digit seeds since 2012.
- Matchups:
  - Big 12: ACC teams are 11-4 SU and 13-2 ATS (86.7%) against Big 12 foes.
  - SEC: ACC-SEC matchups have gone 17-24 Under (70.8%) since 2001.

America East

- Recent Performance: Vermont's loss in 2024 dropped the conference to 11-5 ATS (68.8%) since 2011.
- Totals: America East teams are 16-8-1 Under (66.7%) in NCAA games since 2003.

AAC

- Underdogs: AAC teams are 13-4 Under (76.5%) in their last 17 tourney games as underdogs.
- Mid-Major Success: AAC teams are 8-2 ATS (80%) against fellow mid-major conferences.
- Seeds #7-#10: AAC teams are 11-10 SU and 14-7 ATS (66.7%) in their last 21 games as #7-#10 seeds.

Atlantic 10

- Recent Struggles: A-10 teams are 4-11 SU and 3-9 ATS (25%) in their last 15 NCAA games.
- Favorites: A-10 teams are 19-6 SU and 14-7-4 ATS (66.7%) as tournament favorites.
- Matchups: Underdogs are 10-3 ATS (76.9%) in A-10 vs. Big East NCAA games.

Big 12

- First Round Dominance: Big 12 teams are 35-13 SU and 30-18 ATS (62.5%) in the First Four/first round since 2017.
- Upset Vulnerability: Big 12 teams in the #4-#8 seed range are 25-35 SU and 22-37 ATS (37.3%) since 2010.
- Matchups:
  - Big Ten: Big 12 teams are 14-6 SU and 12-7-1 ATS (63.2%) against Big Ten foes.
  - Missouri Valley: Big 12 teams are 3-7 SU and 1-9 ATS (10%) against Missouri Valley teams since 2001.

Big East

- Championship Dominance: Big East teams are 8-0 SU and ATS in championship games since 2001.
- Second Round Success: Big East teams are 13-7 SU and 15-5 ATS (75%) in the second round since 2017.
- Top Seeds: Big East #1 and #2 seeds are 28-6 SU and 25-9 ATS (73.5%) since 2016.
- Matchups: Big East teams are 10-2 SU and ATS (83.3%) against Mountain West teams.

Big Ten

- Championship Struggles: Big Ten teams are 0-8 SU and ATS in championship games since 2001.
- Double-Digit Favorites: Big Ten teams are 54-5 SU and 34-21-4 ATS (61.8%) as double-digit favorites since 1998.

- Underdogs: Big Ten teams are 6-53 SU and 21-38 ATS (35.6%) as underdogs of 5.5+ points since 1998.
- Matchups: Big Ten teams are 13-8 SU and 15-5-1 ATS (75%) against SEC foes.

SEC

- Recent Struggles: SEC teams are 44-43 SU and 33-54 ATS (37.9%) since 2018.
- Sweet 16 Success: SEC teams are 23-14-2 ATS (62.2%) in the Sweet 16 since 2003.
- Matchups: SEC teams are 17-8 Over (68%) in Elite Eight games.

Mid-Major Conferences

- Missouri Valley: Teams are 20-15 SU and 20-14-1 ATS (58.8%) since 2013.
- Mountain West: Teams are 30-63 SU and 29-61-3 ATS (32.2%) since 2001.
- Ivy League: Teams are 8-13 SU and 13-8 ATS (61.9%) in their last 21 NCAA games.
- Summit League: Teams are 7-4-1 ATS (63.6%) in their last 12 NCAA games.

Smaller Conferences

- SWAC: Teams are 6-4 ATS (60%) in their last 10 NCAA games.
- WAC: Teams are 6-1 ATS (85.7%) in their last 7 NCAA games.
- Sun Belt: Teams are 12-3 Under (80%) in NCAA games since 2013.

Key Takeaways

- ACC and Big East have been dominant in championship games and high-seed matchups.
- Big Ten struggles as underdogs but excels as double-digit favorites.
- Mid-Majors like the Missouri Valley and Ivy League have been competitive, while the Mountain West has struggled.
- Smaller Conferences like the SWAC and WAC have shown recent improvement in covering spreads.

By leveraging these trends, you can make smarter bracket picks and betting decisions during March Madness.

How Many Upsets Should You Pick?

When it comes to predicting upsets in the NCAA tournament, one important question applies to every fan: How many upsets should I pick? We examined the last 39 NCAA tournaments since

the field expanded to 64 teams in 1985 and crunched the numbers for each round. Now we're here to encourage you to make as many upset picks as possible without going overboard.

First, let's set some ground rules. We defined an "upset" as when the winning team in an NCAA tournament game was seeded at least five seed lines worse than the losing team. There are too many common matchups where the difference in seeding is only one seed line (e.g. the 8/9 game in the first round, the common 4/5 game in the second round and a 1/2 matchup in the Elite Eight, for example), so it seems to take away from the spirit of an "upset" to say that a No. 9 seed beating a No. 8 seed is an upset.

Using this definition of an upset, there have been at least 10 upsets in 15 of the past 39 seasons. The annual average is roughly 8.5 upsets. There have been as little as three upsets (2007) and as many as 14 (2021 and 2022) but the sweet spot is obviously somewhere in between. Upsets have become more frequent lately as well: There have been at least 10 upsets in nine of the past 13 years. There were exactly 10 in the 2023 NCAA tournament. There were nine in 2024.

If you're a calculated risk taker, try for 11 upsets. That's happened five times (1986, 2002, 2006, 2011 and 2013). If you want to play it somewhat safe — i.e. "How many upset picks is too few?" — then five to seven is a good number to try to hit. There have been only 12 NCAA tournaments in the last 39 years in which there were fewer than seven upsets in a single NCAA tournament — and only once since 2010. The 2007 tournament is the only year in which there were fewer than five upsets.

Here's the full breakdown.

	Avg # Upsets	Least Upsets (Year)	Most Upsets (Year)
Total upsets	8.5	3 (2007)	14 (2021 and 2022)
First	4.7	1 (2000)	8 (2016)
Second	3	0 (5 different years)	6 (1996, 1990, 2018)
Sweet 16	0.25	0 (28 different years)	1 (11 different years)
Elite 8	0.30	0 (27 different years)	2 (2011)
Final Four	0.10	0 (36 different years)	2 (2014)

So, to answer the first question posed earlier, 15 upsets is probably too many to pick and five is probably too few.

Now, onto an equally important question: Where should those upset picks be made? Looking at the averages listed above, around half of your total upset picks should come in the first round, given both the number of games in that round and the quality of teams that advance each round.

Here's a breakdown for the first round of each upset based on seed lines, the number of times such an upset has occurred since 1985 and the percentage of the time such an upset has happened.

FIRST ROUND UPSET	FREQUENCY	PCT
No. 11 seed over No. 6 seed	61	39.1%
No. 12 seed over No. 5	55	35.26%
No. 13 seed over No. 4	33	21.15%
No. 14 seed over No. 3	23	14.74%
No. 15 seed over No. 2	11	7.05%
No. 16 seed over No. 1	2	1.28%

The individual matchups for upsets, in terms of seeding, become less common after the first round, based on the results of the first round games. But in keeping with the rule that an upset is defined by a seed ranked at least five spots worse, we combined some of the seed lines within individual four-team pods (e.g. a No. 7/No. 10 seed upsetting a No. 2 seed or a No. 8/No. 9 seed upsetting a No. 1 seed), to provide a clearer picture for how many upsets you should pick in your bracket.

Related: 7 signs you're picking too many upsets
Teams seeded No. 7 or No. 10 have upset a No. 2 seed 46 times in the past 39 tournaments (roughly 1.2 per year), so history tells us you should probably pick at least one No. 2 seed to lose in the second round. On average, a No. 1 seed has lost about once every other year in the second round.

Here's the full second round breakdown:

Second Round Upset	Frequency
7 seed vs. 2 seed	27

11 seed vs. 3 seed	20
10 seed vs. 2 seed	19
8 seed vs. 1 seed	15
12 seed vs. 4 seed	13
9 seed vs. 1 seed	6
15 seed vs. 7 seed	4
13 seed vs. 5 seed	3
14 seed vs. 6 seed	2

Additional Insights

There are several key betting trends and stats to keep in mind as you fill out your bracket or place your bets. One of the most important trends is the performance of underdogs in the first round. Historically, underdogs have covered the spread at a rate of about 55% in the first round. This means that betting on underdogs, especially in the early games, can be a profitable strategy.

Another trend to watch is the performance of teams with strong three-point shooting. Teams that rank in the top 20 in three-point shooting percentage have a higher likelihood of pulling off upsets, particularly in the early rounds. This is because three-point shooting can level the playing field against more talented teams. Keep an eye on teams like (10) Utah State and (12) McNeese, who excel from beyond the arc.

Additionally, teams with strong offensive rebounding have a higher chance of advancing deep into the tournament. Offensive rebounds extend possessions and create second-chance points,

which can be crucial in close games. Teams like (1) Houston and (2) Tennessee, wo dominate the boards, are strong candidates to make deep runs.

Finally, coaching experience is a critical factor in March Madness. Coaches with prior tournament success, such as Tom Izzo (Michigan State) and Bill Self (Kansas), have a proven track record of making adjustments and leading their teams to victory in high-pressure situations. Don't underestimate the importance of coaching when making your picks.

Final Thoughts

The 2025 March Madness tournament is shaping up to be one of the most exciting in recent memory. By leveraging historical trends and avoiding common pitfalls, you can improve your chances of building a winning bracket. Whether you're banking on a No. 12 seed to pull off an upset or trusting a top-seeded team with elite defense, the key is to balance historical data with current team performance. Using our AI models at ATSwins can be a huge help when making your final decisions on games.

As the tournament tips off this Thursday, keep an eye on the matchups and trends we've highlighted. And remember, in March Madness, anything can happen—so enjoy the ride and let's cash some tickets!