

Skirting the Issues

by Kimberly Gadette

“BASKET CASE”

There’s a reason it’s called March “Madness.” Rearing its multiplex head, it’s coming after you. Will you, can you get it right? Even come close? It’s not just about winning big in the office pool—it’s your smarty pants reputation on the line.

Come Selection Sunday, it starts ... you slowly sink into your own mindless malady, tic-tic-twitching ever so slightly each time you hear the same consonant spasmodically spewing two-in-tandem, bet-it-all basketball, cutesy catchwords. Diaper Dandies doing the Sweet Sixteen ... the Elite Eight ... the Final Four. Was it basketball’s double dribble that led to this double drivel? Or just the phancy phonetics of Brent Musberger and Dick Vitale, those alliterative athletic supporters?

Whatever the reason, you’ve got the fever. It’s no longer garbage day—it’s Trash-out Tuesday. You no longer meet at the bar after work with a few friends on hump day—it’s Wet-your-Whistle Wednesday. And because you’re going bonkers over the whole NC-double-A doubletalk, you’re going to have to revisit that same sports bar for Thirsty Thursday. Which will then necessitate you reporting for work with a horrific hangover, dead on time for Fried Friday.

Though the double drivel is bad, it’s nothing compared to the actual journey, the three-week voyage down into the depths of self-doubt, up the river to the apocalyptic nightmare of the mighty bracket. Complexities multiply, probabilities astound. But like a well-meaning, overbearing mother, all the options proffered by the internet, that world wide wasteland, are causing you far more aggravation than necessary.

Oh, those options! First there’s the bracket software—and that annoying I.T. guy at your office just heard about some brand new program that’s just a little bit better than the twelve others you’ve been studying. Then you’ve got your intimate relationships with the expert opinion guys, the Joe Lunardi’s, the Jerry Palm’s, the Ken Pomeroy’s. (Your girlfriend wonders out loud if those bracketologists ever take any time out from their analyses for personal hygiene. Say, to shower? Brush a tooth?) Then there’s the rankings, the polls, CBS, ESPN, SI, SportsCenter and the other 5,492,364 sites that you’ve Googled. You’ve even taken into account the new NBA ruling that precludes graduating high schoolers to jump

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directly into pro ball. Though the casual sports dabbler may have heard of Kevin Durant, Greg Oden and Brandan Wright, you've studied more about these guys in the last few months than your brother did in prepping for the bar exam.

With more choices than the coffee menu at Starbucks, you lie awake at night, your eyeballs moving from left to right as if they were following players running up and down the court between the two backboards. You toss and turn, even in the daytime—which looks slightly silly when you're at your cubicle at work.

Forget about “nothing but net.” You want nothing but gross. This pain and suffering, this March Madness has to be worth something, dammit. And they say that athletes suffer.

Just when you think you're ready to emerge from your shadowy hell with your pics, your aching head held high, cousin Jimmy from Philly calls you about an amazing rumor he's heard about Georgia Tech. But he's Jimmy, he knows nothing. But still ...

You're nearing breakdown mode. So many voices in your head, Yoda, Confucius, SpongeBob, how would you know the right one even if you heard it? The one that could lead you out of your darkness, the one GPS-esque clear voice that could direct you to your ultimate destination?

Bingo—you suddenly remember all the times that somebody's clueless girlfriend won the pot because she liked a particular team's colors. Or because she thought that some player (giggle) was hot.

Silly man. You've been staring at the answer the whole time. You've got a girlfriend, too. Use her (and not just the usual way). Let's employ the feminine mystique in the most mysterious of manners.

Not only pretty, but good-natured and wanting to see a smile crack your miserable face, she gets to work. And comes up with the following highly unscientific, yet impossibly reliable findings: in the last 16 final contests, cute boys wearing some mixture of blue have won 12 times. The East Coast has won 10 times, with North Carolina having won 5 of those 10 times. Therefore, to stay safe, the choice needs to be for a blue-outfitted team, but avoid North Carolina—it's too done. And lightning rarely strikes twice, so nix on Florida. Therefore, girly research chooses UCLA.

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For a second choice, go daring, go for red and the MidWest. Wisconsin? Ohio? Eeny-meeny-miny-moe, Girlfriend chooses O-Hi-O. Lastly, if you must, consider the mileage factor. Who is exactly 724 miles away from both top-ranked Florida and North Carolina? Why little ol' Memphis, raising its country boy head.

You can't go wrong. Well, obviously, you could go wrong, we could all go wrong, even Joe Lunardi and Dick Vitale have gone wrong. But in this case, it's all riding on the Girlfriend. After all, what could she possibly know about basketball?

If you lose, you get to point to her. If you win, she's a classy dame and just may give you all the credit. You may have to buy her silence with a trip to the Final Four next year, but it will all be worth it.

You can bet on it. ❁

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