

What To Watch: NCAA Tournament, Sweet 16 — Part 2



Ohio State's NCAA Tournament run came to a close against Villanova on Sunday afternoon, but March Madness will carry on. Buckeye Sports Bulletin details the four basketball games on Friday that will set up the Elite Eight matchups for the East and Midwest Regions.

NO. 3 PURDUE vs. NO. 15 ST. PETER'S - 7:0p p.m.

Purdue averaged 82.2 points in its first 28 games. That number remained relatively consistent in the first two NCAA Tournament games, with the Boilermakers averaging 79.5 points against Yale and Texas. Jaden Ivey, Zach Edey and Trevion Williams are a menacing "Big Three" that will provide problems for St. Peter's in the Sweet 16. They can take over a game and become dominant, leaving opposing defenses with little to no answer.

Ivey has been a Naismith Player of the Year candidate all season for Purdue and will undoubtedly be one of the top selections in the 2022 NBA Draft. He benefitted tremendously with an extra year of development in West Lafayette, Ind., improving his draft stock and becoming a well-rounded player who can score from anywhere on the floor.

St Peter's is this year's Cinderella team. The Peacocks defeated No. 2-seeded Kentucky and No. 7-seeded Murray State to advance to the program's first-ever Sweet 16. They disrupted their opponent's rhythm in both games, causing several turnovers and errant shots.

Aside from KC Ndefo, St. Peter's doesn't have much in the way of offensive firepower. The world loves Doug Edert's clutch baskets and noticeable mustache, but Ndefo is the team's first option when it needs points. He went for 17 points, 10 rebounds, six blocks and three assists in the Peacocks' second-round win over Murray State. He has season highs of 22 points, 13 rebounds, 11 blocks, and seven assists in different games.

NO. 1 KANSAS vs. NO. 4 PROVIDENCE - 7:29 p.m.

Kansas made quick work of No. 16-seeded Texas Southern — as it should have. The Jayhawks never trailed in the second half against No. 9-seeded Creighton. However, Bill Self's squad never looked as fluid as it did at times during the regular season. The team's frontcourt depth hasn't caused critical damage to its success yet, but it could become a more significant issue down the stretch.

Forward David McCormack rarely plays 30 minutes, so Self might need to stretch his minutes if Kansas believes they can advance to the Final Four, where Arizona and Gonzaga could expose that weakness. Still, Ochai Agbaji is a talented scorer who can overcome any downfalls. Look for him to make a significant impact against the Friars.

Providence looked skilled in its first two games. There's been talk of "luck" surrounding the team since the beginning of the season, which is a fair claim. However, the Friars looked good when knocking out South Dakota State and demolishing Richmond. Their field-goal defense is impressive. While they don't rank near the top of Division I in turnover rate, rebounds or blocks, Providence forces their opponents to work for every inch of the floor, which leads to missed shots.

NO. 4 UCLA vs. NO. 8 UNC - 9:39 p.m.

UCLA's defense will help it return to the Final Four this season. However, the team's inconsistent offense could keep it from a deeper run in this tournament. The trio of Jaime Jaquez Jr., Johnny Juzang and Jules Bernard can score from anywhere on the court. The question will be whether or not the Bruins' role players can step up against the Tar Heels.

Jaquez Jr. had 15 points, nine rebounds and six assists against Akron and has scored at least 15 points in eight consecutive games. He suffered an ankle injury late against Saint Mary's that could limit him in the Sweet 16, but he should be cleared to compete without restrictions.

North Carolina's strength also resides in its defense, though only in the interior. The Tar Heels severely limited Marquette and No. 1-seeded Baylor in their first two games, causing both teams to make uncharacteristic plays and limiting them from second-chance opportunities. However, they are lucky that Adam Flagler and James Akinjo couldn't hit an open three on Saturday and Baylor missed a significant amount of shots they usually make.

NO. 10 MIAMI (FL) vs. NO. 11 IOWA STATE - 9:59 p.m.

Miami looked unflappable against USC and Auburn. The Hurricanes have committed only seven turnovers in the tournament. Meanwhile, the defense has generated 22 steals and forced 31 turnovers. Dominating that defensive margin has become the team's new identity.

The 'Canes forced 162 more turnovers than they committed in the regular season. They had a memorable 15-steal game against Duke in January. If Miami can play a similar brand of basketball against Iowa State, it will be in an advantageous position to reach the Elite Eight.

If Iowa State makes its shots, it will have an excellent chance to win. The Cyclones are led by Izaiah Brockington, Tyrese Hunter and Gabe Kalscheur. However, the team has been held under 60 points in four of its last five games. The lone exception to that trend is a 68-point game against Baylor where they were down 29-4 after 12 minutes of play.

Iowa State's bread and butter is its perimeter defense. The Cyclones rank fourth in the nation in turnover percentage and ninth in 3-point field goal defense. They shut down LSU and Wisconsin on their way to the Sweet 16 and could use a similar formula to move past Miami and reach the Elite Eight.