

## **March Madness**

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March Madness. The Big Dance. The Road to the Final Four. It's that time of year again, when for three weeks in March, most eyes are on the NCAA Men's College Basketball Tournament. It's big business, and at the same time it's bad for business, according to the outplacement firm Challenger, Gray and Christmas. They claim that the U.S. economy loses a staggering \$3.8 billion in lost productivity in March when employees are busy filling out office pool tournament brackets, listening to ESPN radio on their desktops and watching live streaming video of each of the 64 games in the tournament courtesy of CBS Sports. That's a drop in the bucket when you compare it to our nation's Gross Domestic Product of over \$13 trillion, but hey, who couldn't use an extra \$3.8 billion?

And for the first time since 2003, my alma mater Purdue Boilermakers are in the field of sixty-five. That's the good news. The bad news is that if they survive their first round game with Arizona their next opponent would likely be none other than the defending champion Florida Gators, the overall number one seed in the tournament. Oh well.

Fans love the tournament for its David vs. Goliath moments. Last year, eleventh-seeded George Mason made it all the way to the Final Four. This year fans will be rooting for Cinderellas like Winthrop, Old Dominion or maybe fourteenth-seeded Oral Roberts in the East region.

But in this season of Lent, there is something to be said for March Madness. Not the basketball variety, but God's variety. Headed not for the Georgia Dome but for Jerusalem, the center of political and religious authority, Jesus and his disciples were bound for a match with the most dominant players in their league. How could this small-conference, rag-tag team of disciples, led by a rookie head coach, hope to prevail against the might of Rome and the establishment of the temple?

My wife LeeAnn wrote in her church newsletter this month, "God's underdog grace prevails here, and we are more than fans on the sidelines. We are players on the Cinderella team, shorter and less skilled than many of the highly-recruited, big-conference opponents, but graced with the knowledge that when we win, God gets the glory, and when we lose, we still win, by the grace of the same God."

In his locker room conversation with the disciples after he predicted his death in the match with the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law in Luke 9, Jesus said, "Whoever wants to win their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will gain it. What good is it to win the whole world, and yet forfeit your very self?"

Talk about commitment! But how could you not want to play for that team, for that coach? And like all good basketball teams, Jesus' team needs players with different skills, different ways to contribute. One of those ways is giving. Giving is something that all of us can do. The good news is that each one of us can make a difference through our tithes and offerings, reflecting the generosity of our creator and our redeemer.

One of the hallmarks of the Florida Gators basketball team is their unselfishness. Led by a trio of talented juniors, all of whom will probably play in the NBA, the Gators' formula for success is based on teamwork, not on ego or individual accomplishments.

Jesus is the ultimate example of unselfishness. May we follow him to the cross and to the victory celebration on Easter Sunday. See you in church for the team picture.

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