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## The All-Academic NCAA Bracket

Talent and heart rule on the basketball court — the teams with the most skill and the players who want it the most tend to win. So it's kind of a crazy exercise to look at who might advance through the bracket of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's men's basketball tournament with an eye toward anything else but those factors.

But this is higher education, after all — right? So if you happen to cling even faintly to that antiquated notion that college sports are supposed to be about what happens to students in the classroom, too, maybe, just maybe, it's appropriate to view the NCAA tournament bracket through a slightly different prism, as we did last year.

On Monday, the University of Central Florida's [Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport](#) released its annual look at the graduation rates of teams in the NCAA's Division I men's basketball tournament.

Of the 65 colleges and universities with teams in the men's tournament, 41 had graduated more than half of the basketball players who entered their institutions from 1996 through 1999, using the NCAA-derived Graduation Success Rate. That rate does not count as non-graduates those athletes who left the institutions (to transfer to other colleges or to play in the NBA) as long as they were in good academic standing. But only 30 of the teams exceeded 50 percent on the standard graduation rate that the federal government uses, which counts any athlete who did not graduate within six years as a non-graduate.

The picture was significantly worse for black basketball players, according to the institute's data. While 41 of the men's tournament teams graduated 70 percent or more of their white basketball players under the Graduation Success Rate, only 19 graduated 70 percent or more of their African-American players using that measure. Twenty-nine teams have a 30 percentage point or greater gap between the graduation rates of white and black basketball student-athletes.

"I remain alarmed at the persistent gap between African-American and white basketball student-athletes," said Richard Lapchick, director of the Institute and Eminent Scholar Chair of the DeVos Sport Business Management Graduate Program at Central Florida.

Looking at individual colleges, there is, of course, a mix of good news and bad. Four colleges graduated 100 percent of their basketball periods during the period in question, using the NCAA's Graduation Success Rate: College of the Holy Cross, Davidson College, the University of Florida and Weber State University.

Florida is last year's national champion and one of four No. 1 seeds in this year's tournament, but many of the other teams that have topped the polls this year fare less well in the institute's graduation-based ranking. Of the three No. 1 seeds, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has a Graduation Success Rate of 70 percent, but the University of Kansas has a rate of 45 percent and Ohio State University lags with a GSR of 38 percent – and a federal graduation rate of just 10 percent.

So what would happen if the teams that have already earned their way into the NCAA tournament with their talent and grit would, from here on out, have their path through the bracket determined not by how many of their jump shots fall or the intensity of their defense but because of how successfully they have earned degrees?

[In our bracket](#), teams advance based on how their Graduation Success Rates match up, and when ties occur, the tiebreaker is the teams' federal graduation rate. (One team, the University of Pennsylvania, loses its first-round game because — like the other Ivy League institutions — it does not report graduation rates, because it offers no athletic scholarships.)

And while we wouldn't recommend wagering on this outcome (not that we'd recommend wagering at all), the idea may not be quite as crazy as it seems. After all, our Final Four teams include like Florida, Michigan State University and the University of Virginia – plus one dark horse, the College of the Holy Cross, whose men's team will be joined in the NCAA tournament by the college's women's team, which also won the Patriot League title.

Who wins the all-academic bracket? You'll have to [click here](#) to find out ...

— [Doug Lederman](#)

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