

2026 NCAA Basketball Pool - Closing Notes

- We have another repeat winner: **Cody Didas**, who also won in 2023. Back then his dad Pat (who worked with Bob Polisseni, a good friend who passed away much too early in life), told me that Cody was big into analytics. This RIT grad also worked for sportsbook.com and currently is a financial analyst for a bank. Well, you don't have to be a financial analyst to know he's \$685 richer now. Back in 2023, I told him to stop with that "damn analytics" and just guess like the rest of us. I apologize for my profanity; I promise not to use that word "analytics" again. Obviously, he didn't listen and I was considering banning him from the pool. But then I decided that I would give him one more chance. However, to ensure the integrity of the pool I will be sitting right next to him while he makes his picks next year. Now, if there happens to be a tie for first place next year, it will be strictly coincidence!
- And Cody, I want you to know how lucky you were that I didn't actually win it all. I was so close: all I needed was Iowa over Illinois, St Johns over Duke, Tennessee over Michigan, and Arkansas over Arizona. You just eked by Cody - not that I'm sore loser.
- Finishing 2nd and collecting \$400 was Mark Rowland. His wife Merri cashed in 2024 so I think he started to feel the pressure of never having cashed. Mark works for a car dealership whose name I am not allowed to mention due to a DNR I signed with Cortese Ford that prevents me from promoting other dealerships. Hmm, DNR, that doesn't sound right. Oh, now I remember, my DNR is what I signed when I put my entry money into the pool: **Do Not Recoup!**
Mark was the only person to have all 4 Final Four teams in the 10-7 slots. So how did he lose by 8 points? Well Cody had Iowa St as his 4-point team (they won 2 games) and Mark had McNeese St (who won 0 games). I do believe that's an 8-point difference. So, I know you all have 2 questions:
 - 1) Question: Where is McNeese St? Answer: It's in Louisiana.
 - 2) Question: Why in hell would someone pick McNeese as their 4-point team (or for that matter any-point team)? Answer: For one of the few times in my life, I am speechless.
- Then there's my wife Pat, who has now cashed in back-to-back years. When she gave me her picks, I mentioned that her 6-1 picks were all the same and that all she had done was vary her 10-7 picks with #1 seeds. She said she did it on purpose and being a good husband, I kept my mouth shut. Then when Florida lost, I said she was most likely out of the pool since her chance of cashing was less than 1%. In fact when it was down to the Sweet-16 with 32768 possibilities left, that entry had a 0.2% chance of cashing. I am so glad I kept quiet when she submitted her entries! In fact, I think I might also sit next to her next year as she makes out her picks.
P.S. Take note those of you who think you're out of it after the first round (aka the person with the initials Keith Osier), that's the beauty of this pool, until your % actually hit 0.0%, you're never out of it.
- Sean Panella (the 2024 winner) and John Brock (cashed in 2023), got to actually enjoy the game as their winnings this year were the same no matter who won. If only someday I could be in that position. Well now that I think about it, I was in that position: I won \$0 in either scenario. Woo Hoo!
- Randy Sawyer (cashed last year too - maybe the start of a new dynasty?) and James Snover (finally joined his family in cashing - Eileen cashed in 2021) were almost in the same boat (probably the Ark with all the rain we've been getting) as they were guaranteed to cash with just minor changes to the actual payout.

- That left Kevin Forrest & Keith Osier needing UConn, and Pat Heidt & John Harms needing Michigan in order to cash. Well, we know how that worked out:
 - John cashed for the first time and won \$300. Talk about making the game 2 hours' worth of torture!
 - I've already talked about Pat: at least someone in the household knows what they're doing!
 - Kevin has been a mainstay in the pool, having cashed 8 times (once 3 years in a row) and is our all-time leader in money won who would have increased his overall lead.
 - Keith has cashed 9x (still 2 times less than me) and would have moved up to 2nd place all-time. Note the keyword "would" above!
- I have gotten this question from many entrants (well, maybe not many, ..., well actually no one has asked, but you should have): why are the composites after rounds 1-5 in reverse alphabetical order? Good question, I'm glad you asked. I have always felt that those people with last names starting with X, Y, or Z have been shunned. We always ask our youngsters: "do you know your ABC's"? Why not ask "do you know your XYZ's"?

When I was in school many, many, many days ago, teachers assigned seats based upon your last name. So the A kids got the first seat, and the Z kids always got the last seat. I met my best friend from high school (and still my best friend Marty Drilling) only because it so happened my H name ended up in the next row directly across from his D name. What if my last name had been Zippo? Besides lighting up the room (not sure how many will get that reference) and probably being made fun of my whole life, I would have been in the last seat in the last row and Marty would probably have never been given the tremendous opportunity of being my best friend (okay, it's actually the other way around). So, for all the Zoltoski's, Wall's, Webster's, Wager's and Yoda's (probably not a real last name) in the world, I decided to pay homage to them and put them first. And most are so used to being ignored that they don't even start their entry name with their last name. Kudos to Toby Wager who wasn't ashamed to do so (damn, what a great last name). Admittedly their picks would rarely put them at the top of the leaderboard anyway, but I can only do so much.
- Well Roy Burr, what can I say? At least my entry for you ended up on the 2nd page while Mike's entry for you was on page 4! I think next year is the year we finally come thru for you. Hmm, that sounds familiar. Oh yeah, being a Bills' fan, I say that every year!
- And as always, here is my statistical analysis of this year's results to help make your next year's picks so easy that you won't even have to worry about exactly what teams you pick.
 - 0% of the people who played only one entry cashed so going thru a complex algorithm I think that means that 100% of the money went to those playing multiple entries.
 - But what should be really helpful in submitting next year's entries: all the money was won in entry names ending in 1 or 2. So you could try and fake out the system and submit only one entry and put a 1 or 2 at the end. But to prevent that I might consider having my program look for such sneaky tactics and change that # to a 3 which would obviously prevent you from winning anything.
 - So how many entries should you play?
 - 56% of the money was won by those playing 4 or more entries
 - 0% of the money was won by entries starting with T. Heidt
 - 64% of the money was won by those playing an even # of entries
 - 0% of the money was won by entries starting with T. Heidt
 - 71 % of the money was won by people whose entry name contained their real last name
 - 0% of the money was won by entries starting with T. Heidt
 - I don't think I can lay it out any better than that, providing you with all my analytics for next year's picks. (hopefully you picked up on my subliminal message on what not to name them)

- And for my annual educational section: when you think of the University of Michigan, the two things that pop into your head are Lake Michigan and Wolverines. That obviously leads to the next questions that pop into your head (yes, I have trouble sleeping with all this popping going on in my head):
 - “Why is Lake Michigan blue”:

Well, it exhibits a variety of colors, primarily blue. The lake's color can change frequently, displaying shades ranging from deep blue to greenish hues, and even pearly white or steel gray at times. But what factors influence its' color, you ask? I'm so glad you asked:

 - Sunlight Scattering: The blue color is mainly due to the scattering of sunlight by water molecules, which absorbs longer wavelengths (red) and reflects shorter wavelengths (blue).
 - Invasive Species: No, not Michigan State, but over the past two decades, the invasive mussels have led to a clearer water condition, enhancing its blue appearance compared to its previous greenish-brown hue.
 - The lake's color can also vary with seasons (football, basketball, ...) and weather conditions, making it a dynamic visual experience.
 - In summary, it's predominantly blue, with its color influenced by environmental factors, biological changes, and NIL money. Okay I made up that last factor but that certainly makes a difference in Michigan's sports programs.
 - “What the hell is a Wolverine”:
 - It's a member of the weasel family that lives in cold northern latitudes of North America and Eurasia, especially in timbered areas. The wolverine is noted for its strength, cunning, fearlessness, and voracity, and the species is renowned for its ability to face down and fight larger predators that are more than twice its size.
 - Well with a 7' 3" player, I question the “twice its size” ability but the rest is definitely true of that team!
- Until next year...