

TAKE-AWAYS FROM 'COVID MARCH MADNESS' – QUICK 'PATTERN ANALYSIS'

March Madness 2021, with its covid protocols and their impact on the NCAA dance, provided unique insights into the Men's college tourney. From our perspective, the best approaches for gaining insights from the 2021 dance involves looking at the event from 2 distinct picking angles: 1) 'Seed times Round' analysis (who went deep, and why), and 2) Match-up analysis (who won their game matchups and why).

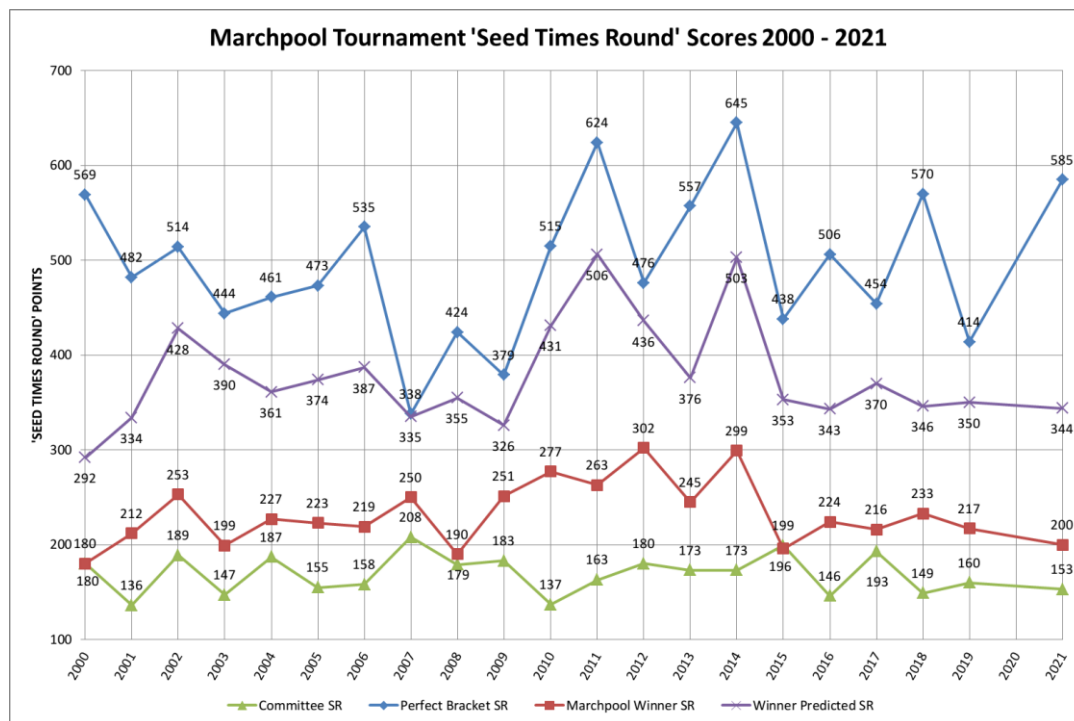
'SEED TIMES ROUND' ANALYSIS: LOOKING BACK ON THE 2021 BRACKETS

'SR' or 'Seed x Round' analysis of last March dance reveals 2021 was the 3rd most wild tournament over 30+ years of stats. Imagine you miraculously picked all 63 tourney games correct, a 1 in 9.2×10^{18} possibility from strictly a math point of view(!). Under such a scenario, you would have scored a total of 585 'Seed x Round' points. In contrast, *The NCAA Selection committee*, who typically defeat 75% of all bracketeers across a variety of bracket games, scored a mere 153 'Seed times Round' cumulative points at the conclusion of the 2021 mens bracket tournament.

How 'Seed times Round' works: **Baylor** won its 1st game (#1 seed 'times' 1 round = 1 SR point), it's 2nd matchup (#1 x 2 = 2 SR points), it's 3rd/4th/5th/ and championship round (6th). Picking Baylor to go all the way netted a bracketeer (1+2+3+4+5+6 =) 21 'Seed x Round' points. **UCLA** led the 2021 tourney with 110 'SR' points overall.

PLEASE NOTE: Marchpool.com is the only brackets game that precalculates your potential SR points. Sign-up in advance to take advantage of our SR Algorithm.

In the 285 contestant just-for-fun pool I bracketed-up in, the highest 'SR' total obtained was 309. That 'Cinderella' bracketeer did not win our pool, critically missing 3 of 4 Final Four teams. In our groups 285 players pool, the bracketeer who 'won' also called the correct championship matchup. Our pool champ scored a mere 200 'SR' points.



NOTEWORTHY: Marchpool is the only Brackets Game that precalculates your potential SR score based on your bracket ballot selections. It's just one of many advantages Marchpool bracketeers utilize while making their picks.

While bracketeer SR totals are useful sanity checks, **Final 4 and champion bracket picks matter the most**. Nevertheless, SR points are instructive while using your picks as a sounding board regarding the sanity of your bracket picks, or lack thereof!

The following graph shows 'Seed times Round' or SR picks for the nonexistent perfect bracket over each of the past 20 tournaments. It also shows how many SR points our 200+ bracket winner predicted would occur. Lastly, SR totals for the conservative Selection Committee are totaled and shown. IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER: The NCAA Committee historically defeats 75% of all bracketeers.

MARCH MATCH-UPS MATTER MORE THAN SELECTION COMMITTEE SEEDINGS

As an aside, I was my high school basketball teams '7th man'. I could really only do two things on the court; 1) hit the 3, and 2) D-up on anyone my size. Our team's opponent often dictated the amount of playing time I received, or 'pine time' my coach made me endure. I learned a key lesson about winning and losing early in life; victory or defeat often boils down to the match-up at hand. Life could be cruel in this regard! Like blind dates, matchups don't always work out in your favor.

FULL DISCLOSURE: I am a graduate and fan of **Illinois** basketball. My alma mater entered the dance as a #1 seed. I cringed when I saw a potential second round matchup with defensive minded **Loyola**, along with its coach and Final 4 Senior veterans. I entered my Illini to take home the title, and tried to 'will' the universe to help them get past the Ramblers. I played with my heart and not my head – and lost!

5 OF 6 MIDMAJORS WHO LED 1 NCAA STAT CATEGORY OVERPERFORMED. An **8 seeded Loyola** led the nation in Defense; **1 seed Illinois** was held to a season low of 58 by the Ramblers. **14 seed Abilene** led CBB in 'Turnover Margin' and destroyed **3 seed Texas** by a 'turns margin' of 23 to 11. Mid Major power and **2 seed Houston** led the country in FG defense. The Cougars put the clamps on **10 seed Rutgers** at the end of their Round 2 match-up, seizing victory from the jaws of defeat on their way to the Final 4.

Mid Major NCAA Stat leader success in the 2021 Dance		
Category	NCAA D1 Leader	Comments
Scoring Defense *	Loyola Chicago	Ramblers Defeated Georgia Tech, Illinois
Free-Throw Percentage *	Oral Roberts	Eagles Defeated Ohio State, Florida
Field-Goal Percentage Defense	Houston	*** Cougars made it to the Final Four!
Three-Point Field Goals Per Gan	Oral Roberts	Eagles nearly beat Arkansas at the buzzer
ThreePt FG Defense	Colgate	Raiders held Arkansas to 31% from the 3
Turnover Margin	Abilene	Wildcats destroyed Texas in turns 23:11 !!

Only **14 seed Colgate**, who *led the nation in 3-point Defense*, failed to hold the pattern in terms of mid-major March tourney over-performance. *The Patriot league champs had the misfortune of running into a 3rd seeded Arkansas team with NO stats deficiencies!* The Razorbacks joined Baylor and Gonzaga as 1 of only 3 teams in the 'Covid Dance' with ZERO grades of **D** or **F** in any of the key 18 NCAA categories.

Even in defeat, Colgate's Raiders still held Arkansas to a dismal 31% of their attempted 3 pointers. Colgate led by double digits just before a halftime implosion.

2 CINDERELLA'S ARE BETTER THAN 1 – UCLA AND ORAL ROBERT'S RUN DEEP

I noticed 15 seed Oral Roberts ranked 1st in 2 NCAA stats categories, but still picked #2 Ohio State to win that matchup. I never saw 11 seed UCLA coming into the tourney like a freight train, given their 4 game Pac 10 losing streak entering the big dance. It's hard to measure a team's heart, or judge a team that you never see play.

How could I miss it in retrospect! 15 seed Oral Roberts led the NCAA in not 1 but 2 stats categories; Free Throws and 3 Pointers per game! The Golden Eagles shot a solid if not blistering 81% from the charity stripe in their 3 game run. Oral Roberts also drained 29 three's total in 3 games, narrowly missing a buzzer beater that would have sent SEC powerhouse Arkansas packing. What a run to watch/enjoy!

UCLA proved another life lesson by their inspiring March performance; *everything can change in an instance!* The Bruins run 'began' with a long 2 point shot at the end of the first half in their **Round Zero** 13-point comeback win over Michigan State. A resilience factor that was hiding in the Bruins stats shined thru in their 5 game 16 day run. Our Marchpool Resilience index showed the Bruins had a better rating than #2 seeded Alabama (#34 to #39 in CBB), helping to beat the Tide in overtime.

A PATTERN THAT DID NOT HOLD – BIG 6 CONFERENCE TOURNEY CHAMPIONS

A favorite bracket betting pattern for most college basketball fans involves picking conference tourney champions to make deep March tourney runs. That bracketing approach proved to be disastrous during the past 'Covid March Madness' of 2021.

Power Conference March Champions Failures = Busted Brackets		
POWER CONFERENCE	CONFERENCE CHAMPION	NCAA TOURNEY RESULTS
BIG TEN	Illinois	Season low in points in Round 2 loss
BIG 12	Texas	Sloppy 1st round loss to a 14 seed
PAC 10	Oregon State	Deep run to the elite 8 - overperformed!
BIG EAST	Georgetown	Embarassing display in Round 1 loss
SEC	Alabama	Ran into UCLA buzzsaw in Sweet 16 loss

The mighty Big 10 and Big 12 champions (#1 Illinois and #3 Texas) did not survive against mid majors who forced them to play outside of their game style. Big East champion 12 seeded Georgetown self-defeated in their loss to 5 seed Colorado. 9 seeded Georgia Tech of the ACC fell victim to defensive minded Loyola in round 1. The SEC's Alabama advanced to the Sweet 16 before exiting a round early to UCLA.

Only the Pac 10 tourney champion, the 12 seeded Oregon State, bucked this often reliable tournament picking trend. The poorly seeded #12 Beavers, surprise winners of the Pac 12, took out #5 Tennessee, #4 Oklahoma State, and always-in-the-mix #8 Loyola before getting knocked out by #2 Houston in their elite 8 matchup.

And how about giving some respect up to the Pac 10 for their 2021 Covid Madness performance? At one point, the Pac 10 put together an 11-1 record in the 2021 dance! The

Pac 10 entered the tournament ranked as the 6th best conference, and exited in April as the 2nd best conference in terms of Massey Indices Rankings.

THE CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH-UP: WHY BAYLOR PREVAILED OVER GONZAGA

Gonzaga led all 353 Division 1 men's basketball teams in 4 of 18 key statistical categories! Baylor, on the other hand, only led in 1 of 18. The category the Bears led, however, has proven over the years to be key to tournament success: *Three point shooting percentage*. Baylor outshot Gonzaga in terms of the 3-ball by 44% to 29%, making 10 from downtown to the Zags mere total of 5 three pointers.

Comparing the key 18 stats of college basketball in the Championship game shows Baylor winning 15 of 18 'stats battles'. The Baylor Bears *owned* the boards, controlled the ball, and showed a tenacity on defense Gonzaga could not athletically match. Add all those 'little things' up together and you get a 16 point victory margin in the title game; Baylor 86, Gonzaga 70.

Baylor Defeats Gonzaga - Championship Game Matchup Stats Breakdown				
Category	Gonzaga	Baylor	Matchup Results: Game Stats Comments	
Scoring Offense *	1 A+	3 A+	Baylor outscored Gonzaga 86-70	
Scoring Defense *	135 C+	62 B	Baylor outdefends Gonzaga 70-86 *** KEY TO WIN	
Free-Throw Percentage *	107 C+	216 C	Baylor 89%, Gonzaga 71% *** KEY TO WIN	
Rebound Margin *	17 A	55 B	Baylor 38, Gonzaga 22 ***KEY TO WIN	
Assists Per Game *	3 A+	10 A	Baylor 18, Gonzaga 16	
Turnovers Per Game *	95 B-	109 C+	Baylor 9, Gonzaga 14	
Assist Turnover Ratio	7 A+	22 A-	Baylor 18/9, Gonzaga 16/14 *** KEY TO WIN	
Blocked Shots Per Game	209 C-	92 B-	Baylor 5, Gonzaga 3	
Field-Goal Percentage	1 A+	14 A	Gonzaga 51%, Baylor 45% --- ZAGS BEST PUNCH	
Field-Goal Percentage Defense	90 B-	167 C	Gonzaga 45%, Baylor 51%	
Personal Fouls Per Game	114 C+	161 C	Gonzaga 17, Baylor 19	
Scoring Margin	1 A+	3 A+	Baylor +16, Gonzaga -16	
Steals Per Game	25 A-	10 A	Baylor 8, Gonzaga 4	
Three-Point Field Goals Per Game	165 C	7 A+	Baylor 10, Gonzaga 5 *** KEY TO WIN	
Three-Point Field-Goal Percentage	55 B	1 A+	Baylor 44%, Gonzaga 29% *** KEY TO WIN	
ThreePt FG Defense	107 C+	198 C-	Baylor 29%, Gonzaga 44	
Turnover Margin	28 A-	6 A+	Baylor 14:9, Gonzaga 9:14 *** KEY TO WIN	
Won-Lost Percentage	1 A+	4 A+	Baylor Champs, Gonzaga Runner-Up	

If there is a single axiom to winning brackets, it involves the importance of getting the right champion pick. Anybody who saw Baylor play knew they were the most athletic team in the dance! The Bears showed humility in victory; that goes to heart. Add in their coach who is a *March legend* himself as a player ... how could they miss?

COVID MARCH MADNESS: INSIGHTS INTO MYSTICAL BASKETBALL FORCES

For me, the most important insight from the 2021 dance is that 'Fans in the stand matter'. It doesn't matter if there's 200 or 20,000 fans watching a game live. Player mistakes and successes get amplified in their heads when instant feedback from friends and foes is heard real time. These are kids, after all, playing a kids game.

Long layoffs will take their toll on players – and entire teams! The **4 seeded Virginia Cavaliers** can attest to that, losing to upstart **13 seed Ohio University** after being forced out of the ACC tournament due to early March Covid testing problems.

Injuries will always matter. **#1 Michigan** and **#5 Villanova** runs were limited by the loss of each squads' best player and floor leader. Coaching can only go so far before attrition on that level takes its toll, forcing a solid team to exit, possibly prematurely.

Referee's remain the key wildcard. As a bracketeer, you will never know who your refs will be until as little as 45 minutes ahead of tip. College basketball involves 13 floor players (3 refs), as opposed to 5 on 5. Brackets force one to pick/work off of incomplete information. With referees, 'You get who you get' in the dance, and have no advance visibility to that key variable when you bracket up. Refs bring their style to tourney games they call. Some refs 'let them play' while others call ticky-tacky fouls. With regard to referees, things tend to balance out ... but not always in your team or your bracket picks favor.

SIMPLE METHODS OF 'IMPROVING YOUR ODDS' OF WINNING YOUR POOL

- 1) Study conference tourney boxscores the weeks proceeding Selection Sunday
- 2) Play 'Bracket Redo Tournaments' every year to refine you bracketing skills
- 3) Get a Television 'eye test' of all likely 1 seeds sometime in February/March
- 4) DO A STATS COMPARISON of *all Dance matchups*: do your due diligence!
- 5) Do not let your emotions influence your picks – you'll pay a price if you do!
- 6) Know the injury status of all teams; specialist players matter, not just stars
- 7) Understand that the SELECTION COMMITTEE beats 75% of all bracketeers
- 8) GET THE CHAMPION TEAM PICK RIGHT !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

PLAY MARCHPOOL - 'THE GAME WITHIN THE GAME' AND ITS 18 B-BALL STATS

Marchpool's extensive game code allows for bracketeers to compare team in terms of match-ups across 18 key statistical categories. Our maps features show how far each team travels to venues (distances and time zones do matter!). We list historic performances of teams dating back to 1985. Leverage our game's data to your advantage! Most importantly, press the 'brackets matchup' button on our ballot (which we email Selection Sunday) for each tourney game. Use our data to conduct your research, read voraciously, and determine who you will pick to win/advance.

Please sign-up in advance, ideally RIGHT NOW, at Marchpool.com. We will ensure a brackets ballot will be delivered to your email address on Selection Sunday. Sign up friends as well, especially if they are teammates in popular Calcutta bracket pools.

Many serious bracketeers play Marchpool for it's stats and related features, and then play other pools for their money interests. Play to win, but always remember when you fill your picks out ... **BRACKETS ARE FOR BLOOD** ... 🩸

*Written by Bob Barton, Commissioner, **Marchpool.com** 'The Game within the Game'*

Sign up yourself and/or friends at family to play brackets at Marchpool.com and we will **email your brackets** ballot shortly after the Selection Sunday show. **GOOD LUCK!**