

# NCAA EXTRA

SATURDAY, MARCH 27, 2021 • SECTION B

Editor: Ryan Finley / sportsed@tucson.com



## WILDCATS' THOMAS DOES IT ALL

UA needs stat-sheet-stuffing senior to step up in Saturday's Sweet 16 game vs. Texas A&M

PHOTO BY KELLY PRESNELL / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

**Hansen: Game a battle of program-building coaches**

Arizona's Barnes, A&M's Blair crossed paths on their way to the top. **B2**

**Aggies must contend with Wildcats' sensational Sam**

Four-year captain Thomas baffles opponents with versatility, defensive tenacity. **B6-7**

**Familiar faces joining new ones in Sweet 16 field**

Early upsets have changed the calculus in a tournament that's typically chalky. **B8**



**SPORTS SECTION STARTS ON B9**

Check out the Star's UA football and softball coverage, and read up on Saturday's NCAA Tournament games.

# RESTORATION SPECIALISTS BARNES, BLAIR MEET IN SATURDAY'S SWEET 16

The master builders of the women's Sweet 16 are Arizona's Adia Barnes and Texas A&M's Gary Blair. They are restoration specialists, no job too big, too messy or too tiresome.



Greg Hansen

Maybe they should go into business together: Barnes and Blair: We Fix Your Basketball Program.

After all, they've got a special connection.

Blair was hired by Texas A&M athletic director Bill Byrne. Barnes was hired by Greg Byrne, Bill's son.

Blair took charge of an A&M operation that had not had a winning season for seven years, a bottom feeder of Big 12 bottom feeders, having reached the NCAA Tournament once. Ever.

Barnes accepted the monumental challenge of taking over an Arizona's women's basketball program that had one winning season in 12 years. It was such a daunting venture that on Thursday Barnes admitted she didn't immediately say "yes" to Byrne's offer.

"I had second, third, fourth and fifth thoughts," she said in a Zoom interview, putting it in a long-range context that accept-

Calipari.

Barnes and Blair have everything and nothing in common.

Barnes is 43. Blair is 75. Barnes was a pro basketball player. Blair was a proud member of the United States Marine Corps who worked in the restaurant business before returning to school at age 27 to play college baseball at Texas Tech. He has coached in 25 NCAA Tournaments, including 15 in succession. This is Barnes' first.

These unlikely rivals in restoration have one shared memory: In the 1996 WNIT semifinals, Barnes, then a sophomore at Arizona, led the Wildcats past Blair's Arkansas Razorbacks 80-77 in Amarillo, Texas.

Yes, Amarillo, Texas. How's that for the first step to Saturday's Sweet 16 Barnes v. Blair match in San Antonio?

Barnes was the game's leading scorer, with 25 points, and she made an impression on Blair, then in his third season as the Razorbacks head coach.

"Barnes was a better post player than post players in the SEC who are 6-4," Blair said in a postgame press session. "She was the difference."

Arizona won the WNIT title a day later, Barnes went on to be the Pac-10's 1998 Player of the Year and the leading scorer in Arizona history. Blair, then, 50, was just getting started, too. He coached Arkansas to the 1998 Final Four and was soon whisked away by A&M's Bill Byrne where Blair became a first-ballot Hall of Famer.

Here's some perspective: At Barnes' age, 44, Blair coached Stephen F. Austin to the Sweet 16. Yes, Stephen F. Austin. He was just getting started, as is Barnes.

The women's Sweet 16 is, as always, stacked with blue-blood programs: UConn, South Carolina, Baylor, Maryland, Stanford and A&M.

There are relative newbies like Arizona and Missouri State, but none of the coaches have made a climb to match that of Arizona's Barnes.

Missouri State coach Amaka Agugua-Hamilton, hired in 2019, took over a 25-10 program and went 26-4 her first season. That's quite a change from Barnes' 14-16 and 6-24 baptism to coaching seasons.

At this level, Cinderella stories often burn out in the Sweet 16.

You get the best shot from the super-powers like A&M. How good are the No. 2-seeded Aggies? They start three McDonald's All-Americans: Aaliyah Wilson, Jordan Nixon and Ciera Johnson.

Arizona has recruited one McDonald's All-American in history, junior forward Cate Reese. Even though she played high school basketball in Cypress, Texas — 70 miles from the A&M campus — Reese resisted recruiting pitches from A&M to take a chance on Barnes' restoration project at Arizona.

If Blair is bitter, he didn't sound that way after his club beat Iowa State in Wednesday's Round of 32 victory.

"Give Coach Barnes so much credit for building that team, blending in a few transfers, blending in what she's going to need because that is probably the best rebuilt program that we've seen in the last five to six to seven years," he said.

If anyone would know, Gary Blair would.

Contact sports columnist Greg Hansen at 520-573-4362 or ghanzen@tucson.com. On Twitter: @ghansen711.

## ON EIGHTH TRY, CATS CAN MAKE FIRST-EVER ELITE 8

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

This year marks Arizona's eighth-ever trip to the NCAA Tournament, and just the second time they've made the Sweet 16. Here's a look at how they fared:

### 1996-97

**Final Record:** 23-8

**Roster:** Adia Barnes, Lisa Griffith, Marte Alexander, Felecity Willis, DeAngela Minter, Mikko Giordano, Monika Crank, Cha-Ron Walker, Amber Phoenix, Fatima Imara, Shontey Hambrick

**What went down:** Arizona's first-ever appearance in the NCAA Tournament started with a bang. In the first round, No. 7-seeded

Arizona won handily over Western Kentucky, 76-54, with 21 points coming from Alexander. The Wildcats led the entire game. Griffith added 18 points and went 5 of 6 from the 3-point line.

In the second round, Arizona ran into No. 2 Georgia. Barnes scored 16 first-half points but was limited by foul trouble early in the second. Georgia's lead ballooned in the second half up to 18 points.

The Wildcats made a comeback in the last 5:32 with steals and 3-pointers from Griffith and Barnes to pull within three. It wasn't enough, though, as the Bulldogs beat the Wildcats 80-74.

### 1997-98

**Record:** 23-7

**Roster:** Barnes, Alexander, Griffith, Crank, Willis, Reshea Bristol, Minter, Giordano, Hambrick, Phoenix, Walker, Imara, Monique Paige, Lakeisha Taylor

**What went down:** The Wildcats' first — and so far only — trip to the Sweet 16 began with a first-round win over Santa Clara. Arizona found its groove at the beginning of the second half with a 15-4 run that solidified the 75-63 win. Alexander scored 23 points.

Barnes led the No. 3-seeded Wildcats in the second game against Virginia, scoring 21 points, grabbing eight rebounds,

dishing two assists and posting two steals in the first half alone. She finished with 30 points and 10 as Arizona won 94-77.

The Wildcats couldn't get much traction against No. 2 UConn in the round of 16, losing 74-57. The Huskies outrebounced the Wildcats 51-33. UA drew within two points with 11 minutes to go, but could get no closer. Much of it was due to Alexander leaving the game with a knee injury in the second half.

### 1998-99

**Record:** 18-11

**Roster:** Griffith, Bristol, Willis, Crank, Julie Brase, Hambrick, Jen Callahan, Angela Lackey, Elizabeth Pickney, Tysell Bozeman, Taylor, Tatum Brown, Michelle Mitchell

**What went down:** It was supposed to be a rebuilding year as Arizona had lost four key players from its Sweet 16 run to graduation.

In the first game against Florida, a big-time layup from Bristol sent the game into overtime after UA rallied from a 17-point deficit. Arizona ended up winning in 87-84 in overtime. Bristol finished with 20 points and Lackey led all Wildcats with 29 points.

The No. 6-seeded Wildcats then lost to Rutgers and its stifling defense, 90-47.

### 1999-2000

**Record:** 25-7

**Roster:** Bristol, Willis, Griffith, Lackey, Brase, Mitchell, Bozeman, Jaime Sturdivant, Krista Warren, Pickney, Taylor, Mitchell, Brown

**What went down:** Arizona lost again in the second round — this time to No.

1-seeded and eventual national runner-up Tennessee, 75-60.

In the first game, the Wildcats shut down Kent State's Dawn Zerman, the Mid-American Conference Player of the Year en route to a 73-61 victory. It wasn't an easy win, as the Wildcats opened up a 23-point lead before Kent State rallied. Griffith led UA with 19 points.

Arizona fell to powerhouse Tennessee in the second round. Griffith scored the first eight points of the game for UA and finished with 11 points. Tamika Catchings, the Naismith Player of the Year winner, scored 21 points for the Lady Vols.

The teams went to the free throw line for a combined 49 attempts and two Wildcats — Willis and Taylor — fouled out.

### 2002-03

**Record:** 22-9

**Roster:** Shawntinice Polk, Dee-Dee Wheeler, Danielle Adefeso, Amiee Grzyb, Brase, Warren, Candice Allen, Cocoa Sanford, Anna Chappell, Katrina Linder, Natalie Jones, Jessica Duger, Sveltana Papcevic, Phakisha Peterson

**What went down:** The Wildcats' return to the NCAA Tournament after a three-year absence was a brief one, as No. 11-seeded Notre Dame bounced the UA in the first round, 59-47.

UA shot 23.3% from the field, the team's worst offensive performance of the season.

The difference in the game was a 15-0 run by the Irish. Warren led the Wildcats with 17 points, and Polk added 14.

### 2003-04

**Record:** 24-9, tied for first place in Pac-10 with Stanford

**Roster:** Polk, Wheeler, Adefeso, Grzyb, Sanford, Linda Pace, Chappell, Linder, Jones, Dugar, Peterson, Shannon Hobson, Rachael Schein

**What went down:** The No. 9-seeded Wildcats lost to Michigan State 72-60 in the tournament's first round. Polk led all scorers with 23 points, yet her early foul trouble and time on the bench put the Wildcats out of sync.

Wheeler scored 11 points, making her the only other Wildcat in double figures. All five Michigan State starters scored in double figures.

The Wildcats came within three points, three times down the stretch, but couldn't close it out.

### 2004-05

**Record:** 20-12

**Roster:** Polk, Wheeler, Adefeso, Pace, Chappell, Linder, Jones, Schein, Hobson, Joy Hollingsworth, Chari Smith, Che Oh, Jessica Arnold, Ashley Whisman

**What went down:** The Wildcats broke through their first-round exit syndrome, beating Oklahoma 72-69 in the first round before losing to top-ranked LSU 76-43.

The Tigers dominated from the jump, and the dynamic duo on offense of Seimone Augustus and Temeka Johnson combined for 32 points.

Polk, who was battling a left knee injury, played only 25 minutes and finished with 10 points. Wheeler scored 13 points.

**ARIZONA**  
vs **TEXAS A&M**  
SATURDAY 11:50 PM

**SWEET 16**

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KELLY PRESNELL / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Aari McDonald has helped Arizona to some of the biggest wins in school history, and there may still be some more to come as the Wildcats seek their first-ever Elite Eight berth.

# 'MCDONALD TIME': RANKING AARI'S TIMELESS SCORING PERFORMANCES WITH THE WILDCATS

By Justin Spears

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

You'd be hard-pressed to find a player in Arizona women's basketball history that's had a bigger impact than Aari McDonald.

McDonald is the Pac-12 Player of the Year and Pac-12 Co-Defensive Player of the Year, and has been named a second-team Associated Press All-American for the second year in a row.

This season marks McDonald's final run at the UA. As the Wildcats look to make the program's first-ever Elite Eight, we take a look at McDonald's best performances at Arizona:

## Start of something special

**Opponent:** Loyola Marymount

**When:** Nov. 13, 2018

**Where:** McKale Center

**Final stats:** 39 points (20-23 FT), 8 rebounds, 3 steals, 6 turnovers

**What went down:** Arizona, meet Aari. Aari, meet Arizona. The game after McDonald's UA debut, where she dropped 22 points against Idaho State, the Washington transfer recorded a season-high 39 points, becoming the first Wildcat since LaBrittney Jones in 2015 to score at least 30. McDonald made 9 of 21 field-goal attempts but the majority of her scoring came from the free-throw line, where she went 20 for 23. However, the Wildcats fell to LMU 66-64. Regardless of the outcome, it was one of McDonald's top offensive showings as a Wildcat. A star was born.

**She said it:** "I took it upon myself to get my teammates together, just try to talk, just try to be a leader out there." — McDonald

## Treinta in Tempe

**Opponent:** Arizona State

**When:** Feb. 28, 2021

**Where:** Desert Financial Arena, Tempe

**Final stats:** 30 points (10-19 FG), 4 rebounds, 4 assists, 6 steals

**What went down:** McDonald's season-high performance of 30 points and six steals wasn't enough, and Arizona was upset by ASU 66-64. McDonald will finish her UA career with a 4-2 record against the Sun Devils.

**She said it:** "We gave them momentum, we let them stick around. Then they just punched us in the face and took it from us. And that's unfortunate." — Barnes

## Wildcats make program history with in Corvallis

**Opponent:** No. 9 Oregon State

**When:** Feb. 9, 2020

**Where:** Gill Coliseum, Corvallis, Oregon

**Final stats:** 22 points (8-23 FG), 9 rebounds, 4 steals



STEPHEN SPILLMAN / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS 2019

Arizona guard Aari McDonald put on a clinic in Austin at the beginning of last season, pouring in 44 points on 14-of-18 shooting in the Wildcats' rout of then-No. 22 Texas.

**What went down:** McDonald was once again the Wildcats' top bucket-getter in the program's first-ever road win over a top-10 team. After the UA fell to the Beavers in nail-biting fashion at McKale Center, Arizona avenged its loss to win in overtime and snap a 12-game losing streak to OSU. In the final 17 seconds of overtime, McDonald iced the game with a steal, a pair of free-throws and a defensive rebound. Arizona's win over the Beavers sparked a four-game winning streak.

**She said it:** "It feels great. Today my team showed a lot of toughness and we stuck with 'em and we finished it out." — McDonald

## Aari drops 35 in 3 OTS

**Opponent:** UCLA

**When:** Jan. 27, 2019

**Where:** McKale Center

**Final stats:** 35 points (14-25 FG), 12 rebounds, 7 assists, 4 steals

**What went down:** McDonald's sixth 30-plus-point game as a Wildcat nearly helped the UA upset UCLA. With the game on the line in double-overtime, McDonald sunk a 3-pointer to extend the game into a third extra period — the first triple-overtime contest between two Pac-12 teams since 2001. The Bruins dominated the glass and hauled in 27 offensive rebounds, and survived 98-93.

**She said it:** "I liked the way my team fought despite the outcome. We definitely have things to work on, but we definitely showed a lot

of fight." — McDonald

## Put a ring on it

**Opponent:** No. 3 Oregon

**When:** March 7, 2020

**Where:** Las Vegas

**Final stats:** 34 points (14-25 FG), 5 rebounds, 5 assists, 3 turnovers

**What went down:** Oregon was a buzzsaw during the 2019-20 season, boasting top-10 WNBA draft picks Sabrina Ionescu, Satou Sabally and Ruthy Hebard. Arizona lost to the Ducks twice in the regular season, then faced them once again in the Pac-12 Tournament semifinals. Both teams shot over 40%, but Oregon's star power was too overwhelming for the rising Cats, and Arizona was defeated 88-70.

What happened after the game changed McDonald's life forever.

McDonald walked over to her family members, who held up placards that spelled out "Will you marry me?" Her boyfriend, former UA defensive back Devon Brewer, knelt down and proposed with an engagement ring. The entire thing was shown on the Pac-12 Networks postgame show.

**She said it:** "I was so shocked. I was looking and was like 'What does that say?' And I saw him get on his knee and I was like 'Oh my god! It's crazy. I should have put everything together because the last couple of months he's really been talking about it. I am just shocked because my parents, my siblings and him — even my teammates plotted against me. I'm just happy." — McDonald

## Cutting down the nets

**Opponent:** Northwestern

**When:** April 6, 2019

**Where:** McKale Center

**Final stats:** 19 points (8-17 FG), 7 rebounds, 3 assists, 6 steals, 7 turnovers

**What went down:** On a sunny, cloudless April day in Tucson, a line of spectators wrapped around McKale Center hours before Arizona's WNIT championship game against Northwestern. Near the end of the game, the McKale Center public address announcer relayed that Arizona had set a Pac-12 attendance record. Those fans in attendance caught a glimpse of the Aari McDonald Show, as she tallied a game-high 19 points and six steals in a WNIT championship win.

It wasn't McDonald's best performance, but winning the WNIT changed the direction of the Wildcats' program. She set Arizona's single-season scoring record with 890 points in 2019.

**She said it:** "It's just big. I am so excited just to be part of this team. We did amazing things this program hasn't done in years. It's exciting. The best is yet to come." — McDonald

## A record-setting showing

**Opponent:** No. 22 Texas

**When:** Nov. 17, 2019

**Where:** Frank Erwin Center, Austin, Texas

**Final stats:** 44 points (14-18 FG, 14-14 FT), 5 rebounds, 4 turnovers

**What went down:** McDonald broke Arizona's single-game

scoring record with 44 points as the Wildcats beat the Longhorns 83-58. She remains the only player in program history to score 40 in a game.

**She said it:** "No one could guard Aari. She proved when it counted ... how she's going to step up and perform, that she is one of the best guards in the country." — Barnes

## The Stanford stunner

**Opponent:** No. 4 Stanford

**When:** Feb. 28, 2020

**Where:** McKale Center

**Final stats:** 20 points (7-20 FG), 4 rebounds, 3 assists

**What went down:** Following a sluggish start, McDonald flipped a switch. The UA's star guard scored 13 of her 20 points in the fourth quarter and overtime. McDonald turned the ball over with 42 seconds remaining in overtime, but Helena Pueyo and Amari Carter's defense on the inbounds pass coming out of the timeout break gave the Wildcats the ball with 13.1 seconds left. McDonald sank the game-winning jump shot with eight seconds left to give Arizona a 73-72 triumph. Arizona's victory over the fourth-ranked Cardinal was the UA's first-ever win against a top-five opponent.

**She said it:** "I was like 'OK, time to score! So, we got to (get the) stop and convert it. I didn't hang my head — it was just next play. It was gutsy. I knew my team needed that." — McDonald

## 'McDonald time'

**Opponent:** 11th-seeded BYU

**When:** Wednesday

**Where:** UTSA Convocation Center, San Antonio

**Final stats:** 17 points (7-16 FG), 11 rebounds, 4 steals, 3 assists, 3 turnovers

**What went down:** The second-seeded Wildcats trailed 43-39 with 5:12 left to play when "McDonald time" began. McDonald posted seven points, two rebounds and two steals in the closing minutes to help Arizona beat BYU 52-46 and punch the UA's ticket to its first Sweet 16 since 1998. Shaylee Gonzales, the West Coast Conference co-Player of the Year, was limited to five second-half points with McDonald as the primary defender.

McDonald — and Arizona — will have an opportunity to make more history and enter uncharted territory on Saturday.

**She said it:** "This one in particular was special. (I) definitely didn't want to end my season — didn't want to go home. I just had to put my team on my back. We got some key stops, but definitely had to buckle down on defense. ... just speechless." — McDonald

# SWEET 16! GO WILDCATS



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# GAME'S FAMILIAR FACES JOINED BY SOME NEW ONES IN SWEET 16

By Doug Feinberg  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN ANTONIO — The women's NCAA Tournament regional semifinals field is set with many familiar faces like UConn, Baylor, Stanford and South Carolina. There's also some fresh ones, including Michigan and Arizona.

The Sweet 16 will tip off Saturday with a much anticipated matchup between UConn and Iowa. The schools are led by heralded freshmen Paige Bueckers and Caitlin Clark. Geno Auriemma, who will be coaching the Huskies for the first time in the tournament after being sidelined with COVID-19 the first two rounds, couldn't remember a time when there was so much hype around two freshmen.

"It's been a while since you have two kids that have had this kind of an impact, both on their teams and on the game itself nationally. To have one is kind of cool. To have two and to be so alike in so many ways?" Auriemma said. "And yet unfortunately, they're going to be put in a situation where it's like a big football game, where they say it's (Tom) Brady versus Aaron Rogers. It couldn't be further from the truth.

"It's two really, really young kids, really good players that do a lot for their teams."

Clark has led Iowa back to the Sweet 16. The Hawkeyes are one of



Iowa guard Caitlin Clark (22), has already become of the game's biggest names as a freshman. The Hawkeyes tangle with No. 1 UConn on Saturday.

a record four Big Ten teams in the regional semifinals with Michigan, Indiana and Maryland joining them.

Wolverines coach Kim Barnes Arico is happy to have her team in the regional semifinals for the first time as opposed to Connecticut, which is making its 27th consecu-

tive appearance in the round of 16.

"Things have changed. You could go somewhere else and you could have the opportunity right away to make an impact and create something that's never been done before," she said. "Those kids are different. They are special in their own right and they wanted to do

## SWEET 16 SCHEDULE

### Saturday's games

- No. 5 seed Iowa vs. No. 1 seed UConn: 10 a.m. (Ch. 9)
- No. 6 seed Michigan vs. No. 3 seed Baylor: Noon (Ch. 9)
- No. 4 seed Indiana vs. No. 1 seed NC State: 3 p.m. (ESPN2)
- No. 3 seed Arizona vs. No. 2 seed Texas A&M: 5 p.m. (ESPN2)

### Sunday's games

- No. 5 seed Georgia Tech vs. No. 1 seed South Carolina: 10 a.m. (Ch. 9)
- No. 5 seed Missouri State vs. No. 1 seed Stanford: Noon (Ch. 9)
- No. 6 seed Oregon vs. No. 2 seed Louisville: 4 p.m. (ESPN)
- No. 6 seed Texas vs. No. 2 seed Maryland: 6 p.m. (ESPN)

things. You just kind of go out and play."

Some other things to know about this Sweet 16 field:

**Inside the numbers:** For the first time since 2013 three No. 6 seeds advanced to the Sweet 16 with Michigan, Oregon and Texas all reaching the regional semifinals. At the other of the spectrum, for the third straight tournament all the No. 1 and No. 2 seeds reached the Sweet 16.

**She said it:** "More and more people are noticing, more and more people are watching. I think a lot of people will tune in and watch this game and that's exactly what you want for women's college basketball." — Caitlin Clark, Iowa.

**Crowd noise:** For the first time in the tournament the NCAAs will allow the public to attend games. That will be limited to 17% of the Alamodome's capacity per game — which is roughly 4,800 tickets.

"We're in Texas, so, I feel like we're going to have a lot of fans," Baylor forward NaLyssa Smith said. "People's families finally start to get to come and everybody's friends and everybody that weren't on the ticket list, they finally get to come and watch the game. So, it's about to be very exciting."

The first couple of rounds only allowed each participant up to six tickets.

# AFTER SQUEAKING BY FIRST TWO FOES, AGGIES NEXT GET CATS IN CHALKY REGION

By Kristie Rieken  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN ANTONIO — As a No. 2 seed, Texas A&M was expected to breeze through the first two rounds of the women's NCAA Tournament.

Instead they squeaked in both of their first two games in the Mercado Re-

gion, winning by a combined six points to advance to the Sweet 16 for the third straight time.

They avoided becoming the first two-seed to lose to a No. 15 in the first-round with an 84-80 victory over Troy. The Aggies then rallied to beat No. 7 Iowa State 84-82 in overtime

on Wednesday night with a buzzer-beater by Jordan Nixon.

"Is that because they have played so well or have we underplayed," Texas A&M coach Gary Blair rhetorically asked, before answering his own question: "I think it's just March."

The Aggies have provid-

ed some of the most exciting moments of the women's tournament so far and hope to build on that when they meet No. 3 Arizona in the regional semifinal. The Wildcats are in the Sweet 16 for the first time since coach Adia Barnes was a player in 1998.

Nixon became a social media sensation after her heartfelt postgame television interview that came after she banked in the game-winner to cap a career-best 35-point night against Iowa State. LeBron James praised her on his Instagram story on Thursday and actress Gabrielle Union, who is married to former NBA star Dwyane Wade, tweeted about her, too.

Nixon's Instagram account featured a picture of her teammates mobbing her after the shot and a video of the play. With it was a simple caption that has embodied the Aggies as they've survived these first two rounds: "Never say die!"

"The term resilient is something that always comes to mind when I think of any Texas A&M team, but especially this one," she said. "We fight. It's what we do. It's what we've been doing all season."

### ARIZONA-TEXAS A&M

**Outlook:** Nixon has been the breakout star of the tournament for the Aggies by combining for 56 points in two games. But Texas A&M (25-2) normally relies on a much more balanced scoring attack with all five starters averaging between 10.6 and 12.6 points a game this season.

The Wildcats (18-5) are led by Pac-12 Player of the Year Aari McDonald, who is averaging 19.6 points a game. McDonald was also the league's defensive player of the year and has scored 20 and 17 points respectively in tournament wins over Stony Brook and BYU.

McDonald had several key plays down the stretch to help the Wildcats finally pull for the win against BYU. "I knew that was my moment," she said. "I didn't want to go home, and I know my coaches and my teammates didn't want to either. So, I had to put the team on my back and just come through clutch offensively and defensively."

**The X-Factor:** Arizona's Sam Thomas. The 6-foot senior can — and has — played all five positions for



Texas A&M guard Jordan Nixon (5) celebrates after the Aggies rallied in both regulation and overtime to hold off No. 7-seeded Iowa in the second round Wednesday.

the Wildcats this season. Thomas is the overlooked key to the Arizona. She isn't flashy but is the kind of player who does the kind of things that don't make it into the box score. "She's the glue that keeps us together," McDonald said.

**Players to Watch:** Wildcats forward Trinity Baptiste averages just 8.6 points a game but had a career-high 18 in the first-round win. The senior leads the team by averaging 6.0 rebounds a game. Texas A&M center Ciera Johnson had a season-high 19 points against the Cyclones in a performance that was overshadowed by Nixon's heroics. She also had three blocks, capped by one on Iowa State's final possession that led to Nixon's final shot.

**Time:** 5 p.m., ESPN2

### INDIANA-NC STATE

**Outlook:** No. 4 Indiana (20-5) is in the Sweet 16 for the first time since the field was expanded to 64 teams and will face top-seed North Carolina State on Saturday.

The Hoosiers have relied on stellar defense in the first two rounds, limiting Belmont to 48 points in the second round after holding VCU to just 32 in their first tournament game.

N.C. State, which earned a No. 1 seed for the first time, is in the Sweet 16 for the third consecutive season. The Wolfpack's leading scorer is 6-foot-5 Elissa Cunane, but she has cooled off in this tournament after scoring a combined 70 points in three games to earn MVP honors in the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament.

She scored just 12 points in an opening round win over NC A&T and was 3 of 15 from the field in another 12-point performance in the Wolfpack's second-round win over South Florida.

Despite the struggles she remains confident in her abilities and talked about the difference from her first Sweet 16 as a freshman in 2019 to now.

"Expectations are a little bit higher this year," she said. "We know that we can perform a lot more and go deeper than we did."

**X-Factor:** N.C. State forward Kayla Jones. She missed the Wolfpack's second-round game after injuring her left knee in the opening round and her status for Saturday's game is uncertain. If she can't play it will be a big blow with the senior averaging 11.9 points and 7.1 rebounds per game.

"A lot of it has to do with her being able to tolerate the pain and discomfort, but the doctors are also going to make sure that there is no risk involved and that it can't do any damage," coach Wes Moore said.

**Players to watch:** Indiana forward Aleksa Gulbe. She had a career-high 15 rebounds in the second round after grabbing 10 in the first game. She is averaging 9.1 points a game. N.C. State forward Jada Boyd. She scored 18 points off the bench in the team's tournament opener before starting in the second game with Jones out and scoring 18 again. She's also a good rebound and has had five games with at least 10 rebounds this season.

**Time:** 3 p.m., ESPN2

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## SPORTS

SATURDAY, MARCH 27, 2021 | SECTION B

Editor: Ryan Finley | sportsed@tucson.com

## NCAA TOURNAMENT

## Thompson's rise helps power Beavers to Sweet 16

By Anne M. Peterson  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ethan Thompson understood the moment. Maybe that's why he couldn't stop smiling.

Oregon State's senior guard had just led the Beavers to a spot in the Sweet 16, the latest milestone for a team picked to finish last in the Pac-12 at the start of the season.

"We knew it was in us, this success," Thompson said, the smile plastered on his face. "We pictured it from the beginning."

No. 12 seed Oregon State will now face eighth-seeded Loyola-Chicago on Satur-

## SATURDAY

- **What:** Sweet 16: No. 12 seed Oregon State vs. No. 8 seed Loyola-Chicago
- **When:** 11:40 a.m.
- **TV:** Ch. 13

day in the Midwest Region of the NCAA Tournament. The winner earns a spot in the Elite Eight against the winner of the game between second-seeded Houston and No. 11 Syracuse.

The Beavers are one of four Pac-12 teams in the Sweet 16, joined by sixth-seeded USC, No. 7 Oregon and No. 11 UCLA.

The Trojans face the Ducks on Sunday in the West Region, while UCLA meets second-seeded Alabama in the East. The Pac-12 hasn't won an NCAA title since Arizona cut down the nets in 1997 — the longest drought for a major conference.

But the Beavers are perhaps the most surprising of the group.

They earned an automatic berth in the tournament by beating Colorado 70-68 in the Pac-12 tournament championship game. Then they downed fifth-seeded Tennessee 70-56, their first NCAA Tournament victory since 1982, before an 80-

70 win over No. 4 Oklahoma State to set up the game against the Ramblers.

"I'm so grateful for this," Thompson said. "I just got a feeling that I don't want it to stop."

This is Oregon State's first tournament appearance since 2016 and only the second since 1990. The Beavers have twice made the Final Four, in 1949 and 1963. The victory over the Volunteers snapped a seven-game tournament losing streak.

For Thompson, this is sort of destiny: He comes

See **BEAVERS, B10**



PAUL SANCYA / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

"We pictured it from the beginning," said Oregon State's Ethan Thompson of his team's surprisingly successful season.

## Wildcats back at Hillenbrand after nine straight road games



KELLY PRESNELL / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Arizona right fielder Hannah Martinez tracks down a sinking liner from Oregon State's Madison Simon for the third out in the top of the third inning of Friday night's game at Hillenbrand Stadium. UA led 4-0 in the fourth inning at the Star's press time. The Wildcats (14-5) were back home after two weeks on the road, including losing both games to Washington in Seattle last week. For more on the game, as well as UA's baseball matchup against Oregon on Friday night, visit [Tucson.com/sports](http://Tucson.com/sports)

## ARIZONA FOOTBALL

## Snaps and drops: How Cruz, other QBs are adjusting to Arizona's new style of offense

By Michael Lev  
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Jedd Fisch is bringing an NFL-style offense to Arizona. It's different from what the Wildcats have run in the recent past — and from what much of college football utilizes these days. It could give the UA a competitive advantage.

But none of it will matter if the Wildcats can't execute the most basic foundational element of each play — the snap from the center to the quarterback.

That's been a focal point during the first week of spring practice as Arizona transitions from a spread, shotgun offense to one that incorporates under-center snaps; three-, five- and seven-stop drops by the quarterback; and turn-your-back-to-the-defense play-action passes.

"We're throwing everything at them right now," passing-game coordinator and quarterbacks coach Jimmie Dougherty said. "Everything's new to them, from taking a snap under center to the terminology to just a lot of different things."

One of the quarterbacks competing for the starting job, Gunner Cruz, said after Thursday's practice that he hadn't taken a snap from under center since junior high. The upcoming season will be his third in college after Cruz spent the past two seasons at Washington State.



KELLY PRESNELL / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Quarterback Gunner Cruz cocks to throw during drills on the first day of spring practice.

"It had been a while," Cruz said. "A little bit of an adjustment period, but it's always good to learn new things, building that relationship with all the different centers and taking snaps different ways."

Cruz might be underestimating his personal adjustment period. He began his college career playing for Mike Leach, one of the founding fathers of the "Air Raid" offense. Cruz then played last season under Nick Rolovich, who runs a run-and-shoot system. Both put the quarterback in the shotgun on every play and, more often than not, feature four wide receivers at a time.

Fisch has said his offense

will have the QB under center around 35% of the time. It also makes significant use of the tight end. Some formations feature two at a time.

"Pretty different," Cruz said. "All three, great offenses. I enjoyed my time that I spent in all of them. Here we're under center, there's a little bit more verbiage in the play call, we use a tight end."

"But I think it's been great. I've been able to take all these different experiences, all these different offenses, and kind of put it together in a way that I can understand the game."

The quarterbacks and centers have operated smoothly for the most part, although Cruz

and center Josh Baker ran a lap around the field at one point Thursday after a bungled exchange. Cruz discussed, and even demonstrated, how much the coaches are focusing on the fundamentals of the snap.

"Every part of it's getting coached," Cruz said, "our stance under center, how our hands are, how we're putting pressure through the bottom hand."

Once the ball is secured, the quarterbacks have to execute the proper footwork, whether handing the ball off, faking a handoff or dropping to pass. As with every other aspect of

See **FOOTBALL, B11**

## Kunnemann rediscovered soccer after loss of sister

By Caitlin Schmidt  
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

When Chloe Kunnemann's younger sister was diagnosed with cancer five years ago, her parents thought it would be best for everyone if they kept some thread of normalcy in their lives.

The following weekend, Kunnemann — then 16 — traveled to California to play in a soccer tournament.

"I was more of the person that made things more normal for us. I continued to play soccer, and they came to watch the games when they could," Kunnemann, 21 said.

Soccer remained a huge part of their lives for the next year. For Kunnemann, the sport was a stabilizing force.

"Having me have soccer and some sort of normalcy kept my family together and sane though all this," Kunnemann said. "It was something normal we could all talk about."

But when Abbie Kunnemann lost her battle against Ewing's sarcoma in 2017 at age 12, everything changed.

"I played the entire time my sister was alive," Kunnemann said. "After she passed away, I just said, 'I'm done.'"

Nearly four years later, Kunnemann is back playing the sport she loves. Pima College's starting goalkeeper will lead the Aztecs in their spring season, which begins April 3 at Glendale Community College.

Kunnemann never left soccer — not completely, at least. She volunteered as a coach at Empire High School shortly after graduating. She also entered the workforce, taking a job as a server.

By 2019 Kunnemann couldn't stay away any longer. She talked to one of her former coaches during an FC Tucson game, and mentioned that she missed playing soccer. Her coach pushed her to contact Pima College.

Kunnemann got in touch with Aztecs coach Kendra Veliz, and by the start of the 2019 season, she was back on the pitch.

"It was hard coming back. I gained a lot of weight because of everything going on; that was kind of my coping mechanism," Kunnemann said.

Kunnemann had also undergone some mental changes in her two years away.

"There's a whole persona you take on with being an athlete. I lost my identify for a bit," Kunnemann said. "It was hard, but good for me. I was able to get back into who I am as a person and really take care of myself."

Veliz said that while Kunnemann strug-

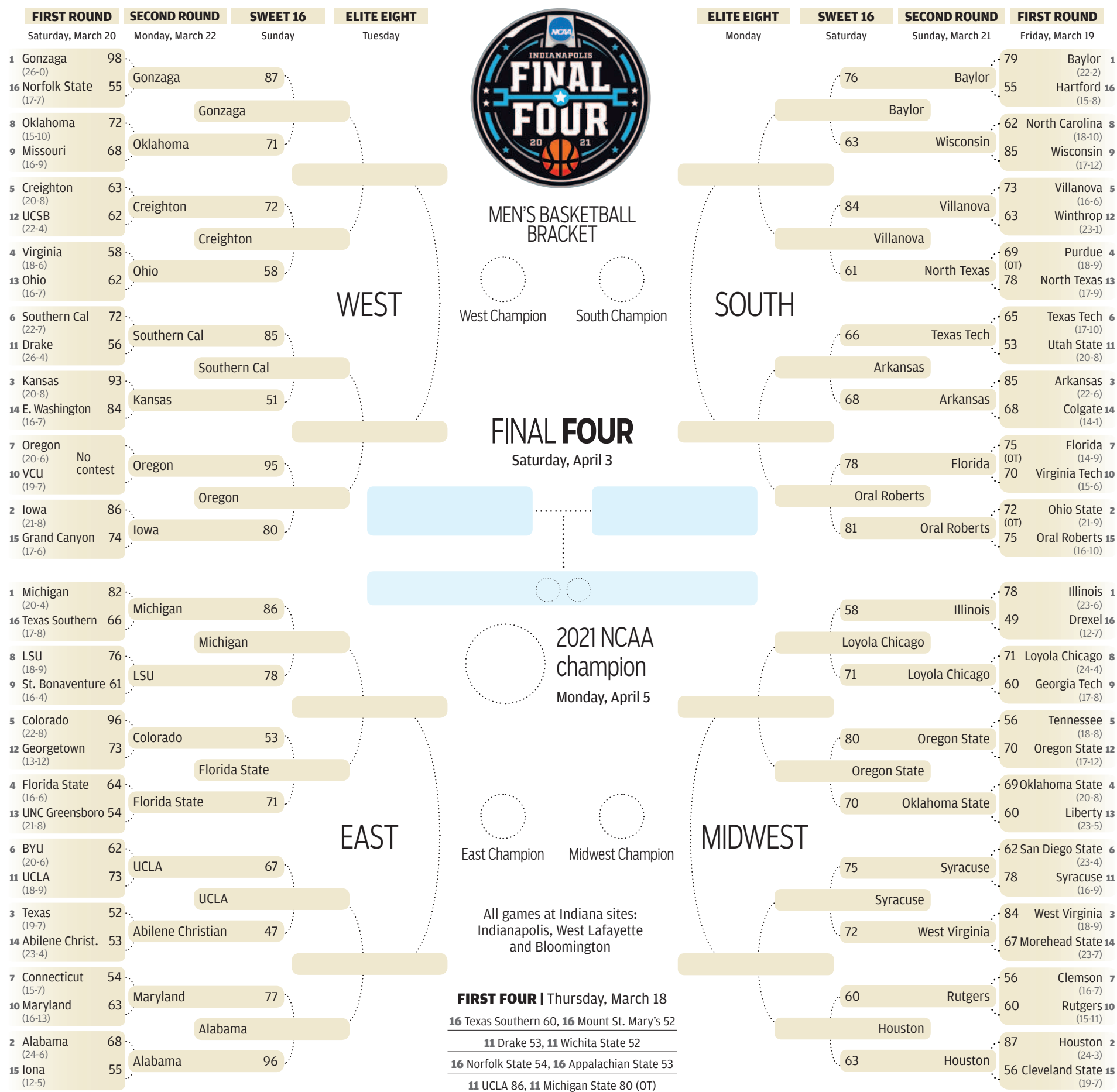
See **SOCCER, B12**



PHOTO COURTESY OF PIMA COLLEGE

Chloe Kunnemann stopped playing soccer after her younger sister Abbie died in 2017.





PAUL SANCYA / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Oregon State guard Ethan Thompson and coach Wayne Tinkle are two wins away from leading the Beavers to what would be the third Final Four in program history.

## BEAVERS

Continued from Page B9

from a basketball family. His dad, Stephen Thompson, is an assistant on Oregon State's staff, and his big brother is a Beavers alum who currently plays in Italy. The elder Thompson played at Syracuse and was on the 1987 team that played Indiana in the NCAA championship game. Except for perhaps the Beavers, few foresaw the success they'd have this season. After the dire prediction by the Pac-12's media, Oregon State dropped early games against Wyoming and Portland — which went just 6-15 this year.

"Honestly, I'll take the tough losses early because I think it taught us a lot of lessons on how to close out games, and we're closing out games at the right time," Thompson said.

Coach Wayne Tinkle agreed.

"We had a lot of guys hurt early when we were able to start practice. I think it was in the first 40 days we only had seven days where we had our whole team at practice. We suffered from tough losses, but we never

threw in the towel. We never doubted ourselves," Tinkle said. "We just do what we do. We just stay hungry and humble, and we keep working, and we peak at the right time. It shouldn't have been a surprise. We just kept grinding it out knowing that we would get to playing our best basketball when it matters most."

Thompson, named to the All-Pac-12 first team, averaged 15.3 points and 3.6 rebounds in the regular season, but he's upped his game in the tournament, averaging 19.5 points and 8.5 rebounds.

Last year, Thompson flirted with leaving school early and trying his luck in the NBA draft, but he withdrew his name two days before the deadline and decided to return to the Beavers for his senior year.

He said Oregon State has excelled by focusing on the fundamentals.

"We believe that we're capable of doing great things. Whether that be on defense, breaking the press, taking care of the ball, just take it step by step," Thompson said. "If we take all the right steps, they're going to lead to wins."

# Walton on Pac-12's NCAA tourney dominance: 'The dream come true'

By Jeff Miller  
LOS ANGELES TIMES

LOS ANGELES — As the champion of the "Conference of Champions," Bill Walton is having as good an NCAA Tournament as the Pac-12 itself.

The league makes up a stunning one-quarter of the Sweet 16 — no other conference has more than two teams remaining — after entering with so little respect nationally that its top-seeded entry was No. 5 Colorado.

Yet, the man who gave the league its champion nickname and never fails to preach Pac-12 supremacy, dismissed the suggestion that he deserves credit this season for possessing a very prescient form of court vision.

"I'm not about recognition or credit or accolades," Walton said Thursday. "I'm a man of action. I love to work. I love my job. And I love seeing other people succeed."

The difference now is that Walton was one of the few who foresaw the Pac-12 succeeding at this level. Of course, he's always going to forecast the brightest of sunshine for his favorite conference.

His regular broadcast partner at ESPN, Dave Pasch, was the one who joked on social media last week that Walton's prediction for the Final Four featured all five Pac-12 participants.

As it is, UCLA, USC, Oregon and Oregon State advanced to the tournament's second weekend, while Colorado won once before being eliminated. Counting a no-contest victory, the Pac-12 is 10-1.

"We've seen peak performance on command," Walton said. "The Pac-12 right now is on fire. This is the dream come true. ... Now, as in every tournament, you have to keep playing better."

Even while winning at a pace that suggests nothing is impossible, the Pac-12 can't secure each spot in the Final Four because of scheduling that Walton labeled a "disgrace."

Seeded sixth and seventh, respectively, USC and Oregon meet in a West regional semifinal, a matchup that is happening sooner than Walton believes is necessary or particularly fair.

"This should be a Final Four matchup, and the way those two teams are playing, they would be matching up in the Final Four," he said. "That is a disservice to the conference, a disservice to basketball and a disservice to ev-



KELLY PRESNELL / ARIZONA DAILY STAR 2019

Bill Walton, top, with Dave Pasch, said the NCAA Tournament committee dropped the ball this year.

erybody involved. It's an unacceptable turn of events. I want that fixed for the future.

"I just think it's people not doing their job. When I don't do my job or you don't do your job, we get fired. When something like this happens, who's responsible? Who's accountable? We ask our athletes to be responsible. Yet, the people who are responsible for this ... the faceless, the nameless, the anonymous?"

Walton also spoke with passion about the recently exposed imbalances between team accommodations for the men's and women's tournaments, saying the "systemic inequality is just unacceptable." He touted the financial rights of all student-athletes, explaining, "Whatever is going to benefit the athletes, I'm for." He pointed out the Pac-12 has three teams in the women's Sweet 16, saying Stanford's women are "as enjoyable a watch as there is in basketball today on any level."

Then, Walton added, "I'm clamoring for better refereeing, too."

With four teams in the men's Sweet 16, the Pac-12 has as many survivors as the Big Ten, ACC and Big 12 combined. The Pac-12 already has taken out a second-, a third-, a fourth- and a fifth-seed.

On Monday, USC beat third-seeded Kansas, 85-51, the Jayhawks' worst tournament loss ever, and Oregon convincingly pulled away from sec-

## THIS WEEKEND'S SWEET 16 GAMES

### Saturday's games

- No. 12 seed Oregon State vs. No. 8 seed Loyola-Chicago, 11:40 a.m. (Ch. 13)
- No. 5 seed Villanova vs. No. 1 seed Baylor, 2:15 p.m. (Ch. 13)
- No. 15 seed Oral Roberts vs. No. 3 seed Arkansas, 4:15 p.m. (TBS)
- No. 11 seed Syracuse vs. No. 2 seed Houston, 6:55 p.m. (TBS)

### Sunday

- No. 5 seed Creighton vs. No. 1 seed Gonzaga, 11:10 a.m. (Ch. 13)
- No. 4 seed Florida State vs. No. 1 seed Michigan, 2 p.m. (Ch. 13)
- No. 11 seed UCLA vs. No. 2 seed Alabama, 4:15 p.m. (TBS)
- No. 7 seed Oregon vs. No. 6 seed USC, 6:45 p.m. (TBS)

ond-seeded Iowa, 95-80.

"The fierceness of USC, of Oregon just saying, 'We're here to run. We're here to play. How about you guys?'" Walton said. "And Kansas and Iowa, they basically put their hands up and said, 'We can't do this.' It was beautiful. I was just so happy because I love good basketball. We're getting a lot of it."

He praised USC for exploiting its athletic ability and size and playing with so much freedom and spirit. The Trojans opened the tournament with a 16-point victory over Drake.

"This is just another step in Andy Enfield solidifying himself as being the mentor, the coach, of the greatest run in the history of USC basketball," Walton said. "And USC has a tremendous basketball history."

A former UCLA great, Walton also offered an appreciation of Bruins coach Mick Cronin, noting especially his character and authenticity.

"Could not be more proud of Mick or more thrilled that we have him as the coach at UCLA," Walton said. "When he got here, it was a mess, and he's quickly turned it around."

Now, 14 months later, it's all paying off for the Bruins. And for the Trojans and for the Pac-12.

And for Bill Walton, the champion of the "Conference of Champions," a proud salesman with even more to sell.





BASEBALL: NO. 21 ARIZONA 5, NO. 13 OREGON 4

# Silseth shuts down Ducks as UA takes opener

By Michael Lev  
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

The Pac-12 schedule makers did the Arizona Wildcats no favors. Arizona opened the conference slate at No. 23 UCLA. This weekend, the UA is hosting No. 13 Oregon. A trip to 13-5 Arizona State is up next.

Arizona coach Jay Johnson wouldn't have it any other way.

"At Arizona, we're gonna face elite competition," he said this week. "Instead of running from that, we want to run towards that, because I really believe that's going to help us be the best that we can be. And I don't think this week is any different."

Oregon came to Hi Corbett Field ranked ninth in the nation in RPI. The Ducks had the best fielding percentage in the country and the second-best ERA in the Pac-12.

The 21st-ranked Wildcats beat them at their own game.

Chase Silseth struck out a career-high 11 batters, UA outplayed Oregon on defense and the Cats defeated the Ducks 5-4 in front of an announced crowd of 1,031.

"That was a special effort tonight," Johnson said of Silseth. "Facing Friday starters in the Pac-12 is not easy. Just the confidence

## SATURDAY

- Who: No. 13 Oregon (11-5, 2-2) at No. 21 Arizona (15-6, 2-2)
- When: 3 p.m.
- TV: Pac-12 Network

that he gives our team to say 'I'm gonna keep you right there' is a big deal."

Arizona (15-6, 2-2 Pac-12) won its second game in a row after dropping two of three at UCLA. Oregon (11-5, 2-2) had won three straight entering Friday.

Silseth gave himself a B-plus after improving to 4-0 in his first season as a Wildcat.

"A-pluses, A's are complete-game shutouts," Silseth said. "I could have made some better pitches to not get in some bad situations ... But as the season goes on, definitely getting stronger."

Silseth recorded his third consecutive quality start. He sailed through the first 6<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub> innings, allowing only five baserunners. Silseth then hit a batter and walked another, setting up the game's most dramatic moment.

With the score 3-1 and left-hander Riley Cooper on in relief, Tanner Smith reached on an error

by second baseman Kobe Kato. The miscue loaded the bases for Ducks slugger Kenyon Yovan, who entered Friday with a .436 batting average and six home runs.

Preston Price was summoned from the bullpen. The situation was nothing new for him. He has entered games with the bases loaded multiple times this season.

Per usual, Price delivered. He struck out Yovan with a slider to end the threat.

"That was a big tipping point in the game, obviously," Johnson said. "To execute the pitches he did right there, that was him. But it was awesome."

Price has inherited 19 baserunners this season. Only three have scored.

The senior right-hander notched three more strikeouts in the eighth, and he remained in the game to start the ninth with the score 5-1. A walk and a single brought Vince Vannelle out of the bullpen. Vannelle yielded a three-run homer to pinch-hitter Anthony Hall on the first pitch he saw. Vannelle then retired the next three batters — the 1-2-3 hitters in Oregon's lineup — to register his fourth save.

"Great poise by Vince," said

Johnson, who noticed that Vannelle seemed composed after surrendering the home run. "I thought he sent a real message on the next pitch, throwing it exactly where he wanted to. Just a really good job by him."

Runs were hard to come by against savvy, veteran Oregon left-hander Robert Ahlstrom, who entered Friday with a 2.12 ERA. The Wildcats managed to score just enough to win.

They took a 2-0 lead in the third inning. Third baseman Nik McClaughry, making his first start for Arizona, began the rally with a single. Donta' Williams drove him home with a wind-aided double off the left-field wall. Jacob Berry followed with a single up the middle to score Williams.

Oregon cut the deficit in half in the fifth. Center fielder Robby Ashford led off with a double. After advancing to third on a bunt, Ashford scored on Smith's infield single.

Arizona got the run back in the bottom half of the frame. Kato led off with an infield single. He advanced to second on a McClaughry sacrifice bunt and to third on a wild pitch. Williams then fought off a 3-2 curveball, getting just

enough of it to ground out to first and score Kato despite the infield being drawn in.

The Wildcats padded the lead in the ninth — and, as it turned out, they needed to. Daniel Susac drove in a run with a double and scored on an error. It was the first unearned run Oregon has allowed this season. The Ducks made two errors Friday. They had committed only three in their first 15 games. Kato's error was the only one Arizona made.

## Inside pitch

• **Tanner O'Tremba** made his second consecutive start in left field. Johnson said veterans such as O'Tremba and McClaughry — both transfers — likely will play key roles for UA the rest of the season.

• Right-hander **Cullen Kafka** — who has a 0.43 ERA in four starts — is scheduled to start for Oregon in Game 2 Saturday afternoon. He will face UA lefty **Garrett Irvin** (0-1, 2.55).

• Game 1 was televised by Pac-12 Networks but available only online outside of Oregon. Game 2 will air on the national feed. Like Game 1, Game 3 Sunday will air only on Pac-12 Oregon.

SOFTBALL: NO. 9 ARIZONA 7, OREGON STATE 0



KELLY PRENNELL / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Arizona's third baseman Malia Martinez has to track back fast to snare an Oregon State pop-foul pushed by a brisk wind for the second out in the second inning Friday night.

# Cats return to form, blank Beavers

By John McKelvey

SPECIAL TO THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR

In softball, one at bat can be an emotional rollercoaster.

As Jessie Harper stepped to the plate with two outs in the third inning of Friday's 7-0 victory over Oregon State, the Arizona fans in attendance had to be feeling a mixture of optimism and anxiety.

The No. 9 Wildcats (15-5, 1-2) had lost five of seven games and scored just six runs in their last five games. In the second inning, they needed two passed balls just to get on the board. So, this golden opportunity, one inning later, could easily be squandered.

Yet, as Harper watched three straight balls, the optimism grew. A surefire belief spread through the cold, windy air that the active NCAA career home-run leader was about to make something happen.

Back-to-back strikes quashed this momentum, and the anxiety returned. Coach Mike Candrea shouted encouragement at his sixth-year senior, who was seeking to end her 0-for-11 drought.

"In all honesty, I didn't hear a word he said," Harper said. "During that, I was just thinking, 'Hit the ball hard! That's all I was thinking about.'"

She delivered, sending a deep fly ball over the left-center field fence.

The wind certainly helped, but regardless, the three-run homer ignited something in the Wildcats that had been missing since they left Tucson undefeated.



KELLY PRENNELL / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Alyssa Denham was at her best with runners on base Friday, stranding nine Oregon State runners in the 7-0 victory at Hillenbrand Stadium.

## SATURDAY

- Who: Oregon State (13-8, 2-2) at No. 9 Arizona (15-5, 1-2), doubleheader
- When: 2 p.m.

"That's the thing about these kids, they're pleasers and they're trying to please everyone, sometimes trying to please too many people," Candrea said. "Hopefully, this will jumpstart us."

With a solid lead, Arizona was

impeccable. Harper drilled another homer, the 82nd of her career, in the fifth inning to make it 7-0.

Alyssa Denham never lost her cool in the circle, working through several jams to record the complete-game shutout. She stranded nine runners, getting some defensive help along the way.

The Wildcats turned two double plays. The first was a ground-third baseman Malia Martinez fielded, stepped on third and threw to first in the sixth inning, and Denham did the second her-

self, snaring a liner and throwing to first to get a runner leaning off the base in the seventh. There were also little things, like left fielder Janelle Meono cutting off a sharply-hit single before it reached the corner, setting up Martinez's double play.

The players and coaches recognized this evening constituted a return to form.

The Wildcats, who had hit 20 home runs in their first 10 games, had their bats silenced on the road. A comfortable series-opening win

served as a shot of confidence in the beleaguered program's arm.

"We went through a tough spell there, and I think they're trying very hard, sometimes too hard," Candrea said.

"Coming out and being at home, being in your own bed and having a little bit of a routine throughout the day, is really what the doctor ordered for us."

Arizona continues its series against Oregon State (13-8, 2-2) with a doubleheader starting at 2 p.m. Saturday.

