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Final FOUR

The Arizona Daily Star
Tucson, Monday, March 31, 1997

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HOW THEY MATCH UP

Mike Bibby

Point guard

Whereas Mike Bibby does not hesitate to shoot from the perimeter, Wayne Turner would rather not heave it from three-point range. Turner, who has started the last eight games for Kentucky, has tried only 15 three-pointers all year. Turner has been extremely efficient in the tournament, committing only five turnovers. Bibby seems to be a more complete player, with his outside shooting, playmaking and rebounding (he had seven boards against North Carolina). Turner has good quickness and defensive tenacity, registering 78 steals this year, five more than Bibby. Each being young – Bibby a freshman and Turner a sophomore – it appears they have placed no pressure on themselves.

Edge: Bibby. He's been Mr. Clutch for Arizona in the tournament. He sets the tone for the Wildcats.

Wayne Turner

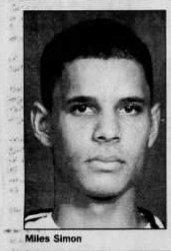
Michael Dickerson

Off guard

Michael Dickerson most likely will switch to Ron Mercer on occasion, but he said yesterday that Miles Simon will draw that assignment. If that's the case, Dickerson will be matched against Epps, who is three inches shorter than him at 6 feet 2 inches. Epps, the only senior starter in today's championship game, is extremely cool under pressure as his free throw shooting (88.9 percent in the tournament) and turnovers (only 10) would attest. Epps is not the scorer that Dickerson is, averaging only four points a game in the postseason. Both have endured shooting slumps of late, especially from three-point range. Epps is shooting 28 percent and Dickerson 16 percent.

Edge: Toss up. Epps is the glue of the team with his veteran leadership. Dickerson has a world of potential that is untapped.

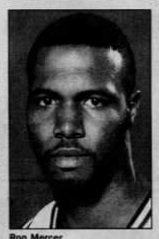
Anthony Epps


Miles Simon

Wing players

Simon will probably draw the difficult assignment on Mercer, much like he did against Kansas forward Paul Pierce, who had a career game against the Wildcats last week. Both players provide the scoring punch their respective team needs. Mercer, a lottery pick, has the entire package: strength, quickness and good leaping ability. He is perhaps the game's most impressive finisher on the break. He's similar to Sean Elliott in that he is a smooth and graceful player. Simon personifies a tough guy with his attitude, and that has been as important as his scoring in key parts of the game for Arizona. He will give up a couple of inches to Mercer (who is 6-7), but that won't faze Simon.

Edge: Mercer. He is not only an All-American, he is a relentless worker. He was the MVP of the Final Four a year ago.


Ron Mercer

Bennett Davison

Power forward

After finally getting his academics in order – he was ineligible last year – Scott Padgett has become a valuable player for Kentucky because of his versatility. Padgett, a former football player, is strong enough to gain position inside and he often extends his shooting to three-point range. But that is not anything new for Bennett Davison, who is a sound defender because of his athleticism. Davison has shut down Keith Van Horn, Raef LaFrentz and Austin Croshere, so why can't he make Padgett obsolete? Davison appears to be a slightly better rebounder because of his leaping ability. Padgett is more of a natural scorer.

Edge: Davison. In the last month, Davison has worked hard to become a complete player, and he's been more than adequate away from the ball.

Scott Padgett

A.J. Bramlett

Center

Jamaal Magloire will start for Kentucky, but the freshman will likely not finish. Or at least he won't have as much impact as fifth-year senior Jared Prickett. Magloire has good size at 6-10, 236, but he is primarily a shot blocker (77 this year) and not much else. He is averaging only 12.4 minutes in the NCAA Tournament. Prickett is not much of a scorer, but he is strong on the boards, leading the team with 7.6 a game in the tournament. He has an impressive 64 steals. A.J. Bramlett has been a different player in the last month, although Saturday he appeared to go back to his tentative ways shooting the ball, going 0 for 5 against the Tar Heels. Solid rebounder, averaging 11.2 a game in the postseason.

Edge: Bramlett. What's impressive about the sophomore is his 11 blocked shots in the tournament, meaning he has a presence inside.

Jamaal Magloire

THE BENCH

Ever since Derek Anderson (knee) and Allen Edwards (pulled back muscle) went down with injuries, Rick Pitino has been forced to count on only Prickett, Cameron Mills and center Nazr Mohammed off the bench. Mohammed, 6-10, 240, is a sophomore who has been impressive in postseason play. He's shooting 57 percent from the field and averaging 5.4 rebounds. Mills is posting a 71.4 percentage from three-point range. Lute Olson has never been more pleased with his bench production than in recent games. Gene Edgerson and Donnell Harris have not hurt the Wildcats. That's the most important thing. They have come up with a crucial rebound or a critical basket. Jason Terry is one of the best sixth men in the country because of his lightning-quick speed.

Edge: Kentucky. Prickett, Mills and Mohammed play for long stretches at a time, and their production is necessary to Kentucky's success.

– Javier Morales

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NO. 15 ARIZONA VS. NO. 5 KENTUCKY

Arizona Wildcats

Coach: Lute Olson, 14th year (340-110)

No.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Yr.
10	*Mike Bibby	G	6-3	Fr.
12	Josh Pastner	G	6-0	Fr.
13	Donnell Harris	F	6-11	So.
21	*Bennett Davison	F	6-8	Jr.
23	*Michael Dickerson	F	6-5	Jr.
24	Quinn Tebbs	G	6-1	Fr.
30	Justin Wessel	F	6-8	Fr.
31	Jason Terry	G	6-2	So.
33	Gene Edgerson	F	6-6	Fr.
34	*Miles Simon	G	6-5	Jr.
41	Jason Lee	G	6-4	Sr.
42	*A.J. Bramlett	F	6-11	So.

* probable starter

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach: Rick Pitino, eighth year (219-49)

No.	Player	Pos.	Ht.	Yr.
3	Allen Edwards	G/F	6-5	Jr.
4	Steve Masiello	G	6-1	Fr.
5	*Wayne Turner	G	6-2	So.
13	Nazr Mohammed	C	6-10	So.
21	Cameron Mills	G	6-3	Fr.
23	Derek Anderson	G/F	6-5	Sr.
25	*Anthony Epps	G	6-2	Jr.
32	Jared Prickett	F	6-9	Jr.
33	*Ron Mercer	F	6-7	So.
34	*Scott Padgett	F	6-9	So.
42	*Jamaal Magloire	C	6-10	Fr.
51	Oliver Simmons	F	6-8	So.

* probable starter

Arizona Schedule (24-9)

vs. North Carolina	W, 83-72
Northern Arizona	W, 88-70
at New Mexico	L, 77-84
vs. Utah	W, 69-61
Texas	W, 83-78
Jackson St.	W, 111-63
at Michigan	L, 73-71, OT
Robert Morris	W, 118-54
Penn	W, 93-51
California	W, 81-80
Stanford	W, 78-75
at Arizona St.	W, 92-84
at Southern Cal	L, 75-62
at UCLA	L, 78-84, OT
Oregon St.	W, 99-48
Oregon	W, 88-66
at Washington St.	W, 87-78
at Washington	W, 88-83
Arizona State	W, 87-71
Tulane	W, 61-42
UCLA	L, 64-98
Southern Cal	W, 101-77
at Oregon	L, 72-78
at Oregon St.	W, 74-64
at Southern Cal	W, 100-88
Washington St.	W, 113-82
Washington	W, 80-61
at Stanford	L, 77-79
at California	L, 77-57
>South Alabama	W, 73-69
>College of Charleston	W, 83-62
>Kansas	W, 85-60, OT
>Providence	W, 96-92, OT
>North Carolina	W, 89-58

Date	Opponent	Time
>Today	Kentucky	7:12 p.m.

Pac-10 games in bold
>-NCAA tournament.

Kentucky Schedule (35-4)

Clemson	L, 71-79, OT
Syracuse	W, 87-72
Alaska Anch.	W, 104-74
Co-Charleston	W, 92-91
Purdue	W, 101-84
Indiana	W, 99-91
Wright State	W, 90-62
Notre Dame	W, 80-58
Georgia Tech	W, 89-58
UNC-Asheville	W, 105-51
Ohio State	W, 81-65
Louisville	W, 74-54
Tennessee	W, 74-40
Miss. State	W, 90-61
Canisius	W, 68-54
Ole Miss	L, 69-71
Georgia	W, 86-65
Auburn	W, 77-53
Vanderbilt	W, 58-46
Arkansas	W, 83-73
Florida	W, 92-80
Georgia	W, 82-57
South Carolina	L, 78-84, OT
Western Carolina	W, 85-55
Villanova	W, 93-56
LSU	W, 84-68
Florida	W, 85-56
Alabama	W, 75-61
Vanderbilt	W, 82-73
Tennessee	W, 74-64
South Carolina	L, 66-72
>Auburn	W, 92-50
>Ole Miss	W, 88-70
>Georgia	W, 95-68
>Montana	W, 92-54
>Iowa	W, 79-69
>St. Joseph's	W, 83-68
>Utah	W, 72-50
>Minnesota	W, 78-65

Date	Opponent	Time
>Today	Arizona	7:12 p.m.

>-NCAA Tournament
>-SEC Tournament

Arizona Statistics

Player	GP-S	M/E	Fg-a	Pct	3pt-a	Pct	Ft-a	Pct	Reb	Ast	Stl	Blk	Pts
Dickerson	33-33	32	232- 557	.417	54- 163	.331	119- 168	.708	4.5	51	37	3	193
Simon	33-33	31	134- 294	.456	45- 100	.413	81- 109	.743	4.1	96	31	4	173
Bibby	33-33	32	148- 327	.445	64- 165	.388	83- 121	.686	3.0	174	73	7	153
Terry	33-18	30	122- 274	.445	38- 119	.322	70- 99	.707	2.7	145	62	3	787
Davison	33-28	28	119- 235	.506	0- 0	----	82- 122	.672	6.3	30	59	33	97
Bramlett	33-27	23	107- 201	.532	0- 1	.000	49- 94	.521	7.0	18	24	20	63
Harris	33-11	18	74- 155	.477	0- 0	----	40- 68	.588	5.8	15	21	22	59
Edgerson	32- 0	11	28- 69	.406	0- 0	----	20- 74	.382	3.7	6	16	5	27
Lee	19- 0	9	8- 20	.400	0- 0	----	6- 9	.667	1.8	12	7	1	23
Stewart	6- 0	1	3- 4	.750	2- 2	1.00	1- 2	.500	0.6	0	0	0	15
Pastner	6- 0	3	4- 9	.444	1- 3	.333	3- 4	.750	0.4	6	0	0	15
Ash	9- 0	2	1- 3	.333	0- 0	.000	1- 2	.500	0.2	2	1	1	03
Wessel	5- 0	0	0- 0	----	0- 0	----	0- 0	----	0.0	0	0	0	03
Tebbs	5- 0	0	0- 0	----	0- 0	----	0- 0	----	0.0	0	0	0	03
Team			993-2183	.455	314- 887	.354	664- 872	.762	44.7	404	386	161	2314
Opp.			880-2035	.432	285- 974	.328	448- 684	.655	38.2	319	240	134	2121

Kentucky Statistics

Player	GP-S	M/E	Fg-a	Pct	3pt-a	Pct	Ft-a	Pct	Reb	Ast	Stl	Blk	Pts
Mercer	39- 39	32	282- 594	.492	47- 137	.343	81- 104	.779	5.2	91	65	10	182
Anderson	39- 17	25	111- 226	.491	36- 94	.404	77- 95	.811	4.1	57	37	2	172
Padgett	31- 24	23	95- 228	.417	44- 126	.349	57- 78	.730	5.2	56	46	16	94
Edwards	31- 18	24	120- 283	.424	33- 109	.294	58- 84	.667	3.2	109	45	7	68
Epps	39- 36	27	102- 207	.507	66- 170	.388	75- 90	.833	3.1	169	66	4	88
Prickett	37- 19	24	115- 207	.556	5- 12	.417	59- 96	.615	5.9	78	64	19	78
Mohmmad	36- 12	17	126- 248	.508	0- 2	.000	45- 83	.542	5.7	12	33	49	78
Turner	39- 9	32	106- 231	.498	4- 15	.267	36- 67	.537	2.6	115	78	9	68
Mills	30- 0	18	58- 135	.537	40- 75	.533	15- 20	.750	1.3	22	11	1	57
Magloire	39- 21	15	75- 152	.493	0- 0	----	45- 82	.549	4.4	14	25	7	53
Haskelo	22- 0	3	6- 25	.240	1- 9	.111	7- 10	.700	0.4	6	1	1	09
Simmons	1- 0	4.0	0- 0	----	0- 0	----	0- 0	----	1.0	1	0	0	03
Team			1208-2869	.473	277- 747	.371	553- 807	.686	39.4	686	471	196	863
Opp.			833-2069	.398	179- 578	.311	385- 581	.664	33.9	472	240	97	623

GAME NOTES

TV, radio, etc.

The NCAA championship game will start at 7:12 p.m. Tucson time at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis. It will be televised live on CBS (KOLD, Channel 13) with Jim Nantz and Billy Packer calling the action. Brian Jeffries and Joe Nahis will announce the game on KNST (790-AM) and KCEE (940-AM), with the broadcast starting at 6. KTUC (1400-AM) also will broadcast the game live via CBS Radio Sports.

Unlikely champions

Arizona is trying to become only the fifth team in history to win the championship with at least nine losses. Teams that have achieved that distinction: are Indiana (26-9 in 1981); North Carolina State (26-10 in 1983); Villanova (25-10 in 1985); and Kansas (27-11 in 1988). Michigan, unsettled by the firing of Bill Frieder before the 1989 tournament, was another surprise participant in the title game. The Wolverines won the championship, and in their run through the tournament, they beat South Alabama and North Carolina, teams the UA has beaten in the postseason.

Dome difficulty

All four teams in Saturday's semifinal games had terrible shooting percentages – North Carolina (31.1 percent), Arizona (33.3), Kentucky (36.3) and Minnesota (42.2). Players from Kentucky and Arizona denied the spacious atmosphere and lighting had an effect on the shooting. There was some discussion about a breeze affecting the shooting, also. "There's too much going on for you to really worry about a breeze or nothing," Kentucky guard Anthony Epps said. Miles Simon disagrees. "The background here really didn't bother me, but what did bother me was a breeze that was blowing through the gym. I asked some friends and teammates, and they felt it, too."

Trivia question

Name the only returning Kentucky player who scored in last year's championship game against Syracuse? Answer below.

No trash talking

Simon was joking when he said yesterday that Mike Bibby is cocky when he's out of the public eye. Or was he? Bibby admitted yesterday that, yes, he once talked trash, but that's when he was in high school. "My mom told me to stop because it would only hurt," Bibby said, smiling. "I mean, I was talking to the refs, the other team, fans, coaches, everyone. Trash talking will always come back to hurt you."

Parting shot

A couple of reporters tried to get Simon to comment on the unorthodox release of his shot. His release involves a lot of wrist action. "I don't think there is anything different with my shot," he said. "But everybody has a different form." One of the reporters then asked, "Has anybody told you the shot looks strange?" Simon replied: "Not to my face."

Perceptions

UA coach Lute Olson said winning a national championship is not important as far as his overall success. "Images are all in somebody else's mind," he said. Kentucky coach Rick Pitino indicated Olson and other coaches who have yet to win a title would be looked upon differently if they captured the title. "What it does for you . . . it does away with a question, 'Can you win a championship?' Last year, for us, it was the right team, the right circumstances. Coaches know you win in this game (with talent, chemistry and defense. You also have to be a little lucky as well."

Posting up

Pitino said UA's emerging center, A.J. Bramlett, "is one heck of a talent." He is most impressed about the way Bramlett is used in Arizona's offensive scheme. "If you double-team him, he's an excellent passer," Pitino said. "And they use the low post as a way to get it three. They use the offensive rebound as a way to get a three. If he sees single coverage, he does a great job of locating the defense. He has a terrific up-and-under move. He plays even bigger than 6-11 because he is so rangy."

More Pitino praise

Pitino says of Mike Bibby: "He's mentally tough as well as physically tough, and Arizona has just a great future with that young man. Certain people are just not freshmen. And he's one. What I love about him is he keeps taking those shots if he is 0 for 5 or 0 for 6. He doesn't become distracted." Bibby is the only Wildcat who received a recruiting letter from Kentucky. He admitted, "I didn't open the letter, though, until after I committed (to Arizona)."

Trivia answer

Ron Mercer, the MVP of Kentucky's championship game, scored 20 points. Wayne Turner did not play, Anthony Epps didn't score, and Allen Edwards missed his only attempt, a three-pointer. Injured Derek Anderson had 11 points against the Orangemen, but he is not expected to play tonight.

– Javier Morales

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