



# Final Four

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## Talk about a pressure situation

### UA could make it by breaking it

By Javier Morales  
The Arizona Daily Star

INDIANAPOLIS — From the first minute to the last, they are in your face. They trap. They constantly move their legs, their arms. They jump over to get at least a finger on the ball.

"It's a great feeling when you're on defense to see that the other team is so confused," senior forward Jared Prickett said. "It's chaos out there, and they don't know where you're coming from."

"It's tougher mentally than physically. That's a huge mental aspect of the game to fight through the fatigue. You're tired, but you see your opponent is twice as tired."

Tennessee was tired enough to commit 33 turnovers in one game, which resulted in 41 points for Kentucky. The Wildcats scored 42 points off 24 turnovers by a good Georgia team earlier this year.

### THE PRESSING ISSUES

Kentucky has forced an average of 22.8 turnovers per game this year. Arizona led the Pac-10 by forcing 20.1 turnovers per game. Following are the top five turnover-forced games by each team:

KENTUCKY		
Yds	Opponent	Result
31	Mississippi St.	Won, 95-41
30	Florida	Won, 85-56
28	Purdue	Won, 102-87
28	Indiana	Won, 99-66

ARIZONA		
Yds	Opponent	Result
26	UCLA	Lost, 66-64
25	Liane	Won, 83-62
25	WU	Won, 88-70
27	Florida	Won, 87-78
27	Robert Morris	Won, 118-54

"Obviously, in playing Kentucky, it begins and ends with how you deal with their full-court press," UA coach Lute Olson said. "I think one of our strengths is the fact that we have three guards (Mike Hibby, Miles Simon and Michael Dickerson) who can handle the ball with Jason Terry coming off the bench."

A telling stat is Kentucky's points off turnovers against the credible backcourt of South Carolina, which includes the

talented B.J. McKie, Larry Davis and Melvin Watson.

Kentucky was swept by the Gamecocks largely because the trio of guards made the press obsolete with their ball-handling.

In the first game, South Carolina only had 11 turnovers and Kentucky scored 14 points following them, and in the second game, the Gamecocks had 15 turnovers, resulting in only 13 points for the Wildcats.

"I'm not scared of them," Simon said. "If we beat the pressure, it's just going to be easier shots for us down at the other end of the court."

Kentucky couldn't contain against South Carolina, and I think our guards have the same capability as those guards. I think we can cause them a lot of problems."

Although Arizona (24-9) has experienced occasional turnover problems in the NCAA Tournament, posting 71 to go along with 69 assists in the five games, Pitino knows the Wildcats can expose the press because of their quickness.

Olson's perimeter-oriented teams, especially recent history, have succeeded.

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### TODAY'S GAME



Arizona (24-9) vs. Kentucky (35-4)

What: National championship game  
Where: RCA Dome, Indianapolis  
When: 7:12 p.m.

TV: HOLD Channel 13 (Channel 7 on TCI and Jones Interchange, Channel 13 on People's Choice)

Radio: WISN (790-AM), KCEM (940-AM) and KTUC (1400-AM), 6 p.m.

### A stray Cat? Not this Olson

By Jack Magruder  
The Arizona Daily Star

INDIANAPOLIS — Late Olson may have been on the other side of the Wildcat's sideline tonight if not for the powerful persuasion of grandchildren's tears.

The day Olson was scheduled to visit Kentucky in 1989 to discuss the school's coaching vacancy, his wife, Bobbi, picked up two of her grandchildren at school.

"On the way home, they said something to her about, 'That's OK if you and Papa Lute decide to go,'" Olson said, "and while they are saying it, they've got tears streaming from their eyes."

"For those of you who are grandparents, you'll understand how that tug at you."

Olson was considered a leading candidate to replace Eddie Sutton at the time, instead, the UA coach opted not to pursue the position eventually filled by Rick Pitino, who has a 219-49 record during his tenure at Kentucky.

"I called (Kentucky athletic director) C.M. Newton at sort of the 11th hour to indicate we really appreciated his interest in us, at least coming in and taking a look with how many other coaches they had in that situation," said Olson, 201-50 at Arizona since turning down the UK job.

"But family has always been very critical to us, and that was why we decided that Arizona would be a good place for us to finish things up."

Four of the Olsons' five children live in Tucson, and so do eight of their 11 grandchildren.

The 1989 experience was Olson's second flirtation with Kentucky.

Olson visited the school during the coaches' convention at the 1985 NCAA Final Four in Lexington, Ky. At the time, the school was looking for a replacement for Jon B. Hall, who resigned under pressure.

"He was in one of the biggest, Kentucky-bluest lunas I've ever seen," one assistant coach at the convention said of Kentucky's courtship.

Olson said he spent a lot of time at the university, looking it over and talking with the athletic director and the school's president.

"I was in the mix," he said. "But in the end, I felt the best thing for us would be to remain at Arizona."

Still, Olson admitted, when Kentucky talks, a coach can't help but listen.

"From a coaching standpoint, that would be considered the option, I think, of a job," Olson said. "As far as the tradition of Kentucky, there's not much you can say. I mean, it's Kentucky. It's like a religion in the state, and you can go back forever."

"It's the kind of tradition that every school works for — the Kentucky, the Kansas, the North Carolina. They are special situations, certainly. I just wondered they would have an interest in talking with me."



Michael Dickerson, 1 of 10 against the Tar Heels, has the support of coach Lute Olson

### Keeping the faith

Dickerson believes he'll overcome scoring slump

By Bruce Pascoe  
The Arizona Daily Star

INDIANAPOLIS — Among the beliefs Michael Dickerson cites as a born-again Christian is the notion that Jesus never leaves those who accept him.

Not even on Easter Sunday. Dickerson was feeling somewhat forgotten.

The Arizona forward's outside shooting has plummeted to just 34 percent in five Arizona NCAA Tournament games after a dismal 1-of-10 effort Saturday against North Carolina.

"I've been calling on him (God), and it seems like I'm not getting any answers," Dickerson said. "But I'm still believing, and hopefully he's going to help me out tonight."

Apparently, Dickerson is more a believer in religion than in the increasingly prevalent keepy-dome theory. None of the Final Four teams shot particularly well from the perimeter on Saturday, and no players struggled more than Dickerson and North Carolina's Shammond Williams (1 of 13 Saturday).

But Dickerson still wouldn't blame the wide-open atmosphere of the apparent breeze for his shooting problem.

As it turns out, Dickerson may not need much help from above — the air shafts or the heavens — the way Arizona coach Lute Olson sees tonight's game.

That stuff about Dickerson taking the night off Saturday to rest for tonight.

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### Key injuries couldn't alter UK's course

By Jack Magruder  
The Arizona Daily Star

INDIANAPOLIS — Kentucky's march to its NCAA title defense has come with a pronounced limp.

While forward Ron Mercer received treatment for leg cramps on the bench during Anderson's victory over Minnesota on Saturday, guard Derek Anderson lagged his damaged right knee to the free-throw line, and swingman Allen Edwards massaged his tender right ankle.

The only thing missing from the Kentucky victory celebration was a file and drum corps.

Anderson, the team's leading scorer at 18.6 points a game, suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee in a game against Auburn.

"We've had a lot of adversity to deal with this season. We're just glad to be here."

Ron Mercer  
Kentucky forward

burn on Jan. 18. He has played only once since — making two free throws against Minnesota with 14:31 remaining, after Gophers coach Glen Hanson received a technical foul — and was whisked off the floor before play could begin again.

"I thought we had a chance (this season) with Derek and Ron and our defense. When Derek went down, we told everybody else to pick it up."

Kentucky was so inspired that it scored 58 points, a season low, in the first game Anderson missed, a 58-46 victory over Vanderbilt on Jan. 22.

"The first two or three days were tough. It was a huge loss to our team," said senior forward Jared Prickett, who knows something about it.

Prickett sat in the front row of the Kentucky

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### Pitino used salesmanship, intimidation to recruit Mercer

By Jack Magruder  
The Arizona Daily Star

INDIANAPOLIS — Kevin O'Neill did not ride Bradie Mercer's city bus, as legend has it, during his recruitment of her son Ron to Tennessee.

Even master recruiter and former UA assistant coach Rick Pitino's sales pitch.

"He told me, 'You know who Allan Houston is, don't you? You know how many he had against us? Four. That's what we're going to do to you if you go to Tennessee,'" Mercer recalled.

"I looked at him. He was dead serious. They double-teamed Allan Houston and took him away. I knew once he told me that, I wouldn't go to Tennessee. I knew they'd be trying to double-team and triple-team me."

At Kentucky, it's tough to stop one player because you have other good players around.

small forward who averages 18.3 points a game, will join Houston, a former Tennessee guard, in the NBA next season after halting endless questioning by declining for the NBA draft on Feb. 26.

Mercer said his announcement has made it easier to concentrate on the task at hand — becoming a member of a select group of teams that have won consecutive NCAA championships.

"My goal when I came in was to win one. I never thought I'd be in a position to win back-to-back championships," Mercer said.

"I want to be known not as an individual, but be remembered as being on a team that won back-to-back championships. People can talk about you, but if you don't win championships, you're not going to get all the credit you deserve."

Mercer, a first-team All-American, might have his last chance, at least in the foreseeable future, at team success tonight.

Because he likely will enter the NBA as the second player taken in the 1996 draft behind Tim Duncan, Mercer will be exiled to Vancouver or Philadelphia, franchises that lose more in a month than Mercer will lose in two college years.

"I'm enjoying the moment. It's going to be a tough road ahead going to the NBA. You're going to lose 30, 40, 50 games a season instead of three," Mercer said.

Mercer announced his intention to turn pro before Kentucky's final home game of the regular season, against South Carolina.

"Coach told me the options I had. Going to the NBA had always been a dream of mine. They were projecting me (to be taken) three, four, five. If I came back to school, what would be different?" Mercer said.

"Would I raise my status any? And then looking at all the injuries we had, you could



Ron Mercer being treated by Minnesota