

WHY EACH FINAL FOUR TEAM WILL AND WON'T WIN THE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

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It's a bittersweet moment for many college basketball fans. This time next week, the season will be over. It's a sad reality check after a month of upsets, buzzer-beaters and broken brackets.

However, before that time comes, a national champion must be crowned. With just four teams left, let's take a look at some reasons why each remaining program will and won't be the ones cutting nets next Monday.

No. 1 Seed Michigan
Why they will win:

Yaxel Lendeborg. Of course, boiling down Michigan's success to just one player, even one as good as the AP First Team All-American, grossly oversimplifies the Wolverines' dominance. After all, Lendeborg has certainly benefitted from Elliot Cadeau placing inside the top 10 in the country in assists.

Still, sometimes winning is as simple as having the best remaining player in the tournament in your lineup. Take Anthony Davis for Kentucky in 2012 or Emeka Okafor for UConn in 2004. Both won national player of the year awards and both excelled in the tournament en route to winning both a national championship and Final Four Most Outstanding Player.

Why they won't win:

Depending on how much stock you put into common opponents, Arizona's second half comeback against Purdue in the Elite Eight may have drastically shifted your outlook on this matchup.

Michigan's ceiling is better than any other team in the entire field. The issue comes when they don't reach those levels. As seen against Purdue in the Big Ten Championship, the Wolverines are susceptible to runs. In that contest, the Boilermakers came out of the locker room and shot out for a 24-11 run to start the second half.

Arizona did something similar, using a 48-26 second half advantage to overcome a deficit

at the halfway point. This is one of those games where Michigan can't afford to let their foot off the gas.

No. 1 Seed Arizona
Why they will win:

The Wildcats have dropped just two games all season. Both came in February, and one came with Koa Peat playing just 11 minutes due to injury.

Arizona's size allows them to dominate physically, while both Peat and Brayden Burries have improved dramatically across their freshman seasons. That's not to mention the presence of arguable AP All-American snub Jaden Bradley.

An offense that's only getting better while sitting in the top 15 nationally in scoring, the Wildcats also hold the second-best KenPom defensive ranking. That combina-

tion will be hard to overcome.

Why they won't win:

Michigan ranks just one spot lower offensively in the KenPom rankings than Arizona. Arizona ranks only one spot below Michigan defensively. These two teams are as close to each other competitively as it gets. Some have even called this game the de facto National Championship.

One area that Michigan does hold an advantage is perimeter shooting.

Though neither team takes an exceptional number of three-point attempts, this tendency for Arizona is far more drastic. While the Wolverines rank just outside the top 100 in three-point attempts per game, the Wildcats took the sixth least per contest in the country out of 361 teams, according to the NCAA website.

Despite taking 348 more shots from beyond the arc, the Wolverines still had a slightly higher shooting percentage from deep. Michigan currently sits at 36.9% on the year, while Arizona trails close behind at 36.7%.

The Wolverines will have this edge in their back pocket if things do end up getting close in the final minutes.

No. 3 Seed Illinois
Why they will win:

Based on KenPom rankings, Illinois has the best offense in the country. As evidenced by the Iowa contest in the Elite Eight, the Fighting Illini can score in a lot of different ways and it all starts with Keaton Wagler. The Second Team AP All-American led the team with 25 points, while Andrej Stojakovic scored 17 off the bench.

Putting up 43 as a team in the

second half to overcome Iowa's quest for a Cinderella run, they demonstrated just how relentless their offense can be.

Why they won't win:

Though still within the top 20 of the KenPom rankings, Illinois is the worst defensive team remaining. While not poor by any means, every advantage matters when each team you play from this point on ranks in the top 30 of the KenPom offensive rankings.

It's less concerning after the Fighting Illini held each of their last three tournament opponents under 60 points and scored over 100 on the only one they let brush 70.

Still, if they get past Connecticut, a big if considering what happened back in November, they'll find a top five KenPom offenses staring back at them in the bracket.

No. 2 Seed UConn
Why they will win:

If luck is truly in the essence of preparation, then the Huskies must have been exceptionally prepared against Duke, because you don't overcome a 1.3% chance of winning just minutes from half-time without luck being in your favor.

The Huskies are the most experienced team in the country and that all starts with Alex Karaban. The two-time National Champion is in the midst of the best personal tournament performance of his career, which is saying a lot about a guy who has an 18-1 career March Madness record.

It's hard to quantify the impact of experience and a winning culture, but effort on defense may be one strategy. The NCAA's highest scoring defense remaining, the Huskies bottled Duke up for 28 second half points.

Why they won't win:

The three-point line has not been the Huskies' friend in this tournament. UConn is shooting 29% from three so far in the tournament and fell under 30% against both Duke and Furman.

Some positive regression is likely in order, but a 5 of 23 evening like they had against Duke won't cut it in the Final Four.



Koa Peat of the Arizona Wildcats shooting during practice. Arizona is playing in the Final Four game on Saturday. PHOTO COURTESY OF @ARIZONAMBB ON INSTAGRAM

Mocked to Missed: Italy's Arrogance Ends in Zenica as Bosnia Sends Them Out Again

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Hello and welcome back to another rendition of the Full 90. I wanted to discuss the fallout of the final World Cup qualification spots. The biggest headline from these final qualifying matches came from Zenica, a small city in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the final playoff match, footballing powerhouse Italy visited the host city to decide which team will acquire the final spot in the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Days prior, a video showed Italian players Federico Di Marco and Guillaume Vicario watching Bosnia and Herzegovina's first-leg game against Wales. The Italian players celebrated and cheered when Wales fell to Bosnia and Herzegovina in a penalty shootout, insinuating that the easier opponent had one and that the Italians had an easier path to the World Cup.

The actions of Di Marco and Vicario were ridiculed and widely discussed in the lead-up to the final showdown between Italy and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with many soccer fans saying this was clearly Italy underestimating its opponents.

The game started with Italy controlling much of the possession. For long stretches of the game, the Italians kept control of the ball; however, they never really turned that possession into clear-cut chances in front of goal. The buildup was lethargic, allowing Bosnia and Herzegovina to stay compact and organized within a defensive low block.

The Bosnians were comfortable sitting deep, absorbing the pressure the Italians put

on them, waiting for their moment to counterattack. Italy was able to find the back of the net in the 15th minute through Fiorentina striker Moise Kean. Nikola Vasilj could not clear his lines, and the ball fell to Italian midfielder Nicolò Barella, who rolled the ball into the path of Kean, who dispatched his goal with a touch of first-time class.

This was a dream start for Italy, allowing its long spells of possession to play in its favor and forcing the Bosnians to chase the game. This continued throughout the first half until the 40th minute when Inter Milan defender Alessandro Bastoni was sent off for a poorly timed challenge on Bosnian winger Amar Memić.

From a simple play like a goal kick, Gianluigi Donnarumma, the Italian goalkeeper, scuffs the ball, and the Bosnian midfielder heads it back into the path of Memić, who was through on goal until Bastoni chopped him down outside the box. Although the team hadn't conceded a goal, this was a huge turning point in the game as Italy were now down to 10 men and Bosnia and Herzegovina could smell blood in the water.

Coming out of halftime, Bosnia and Herzegovina pushes forward and applies pressure to Italy's 10-man defense. They continue to exert sustained pressure, forcing Italy to sit deeper and struggle to relieve it. The Bosnians create multiple chances until finally, in the 79th minute, the Italian defense breaks. Haris Tabaković equalized for Bosnia after a cross was fizzed in from the right flank. Donnarumma saved the first header, but the Italians could not clear, and Tabaković pounces to equalize in the 79th minute. The Bosnians push for



Federico DiMarco about to kick the soccer ball during a game. He plays as a defender for Inter Milan. PHOTO COURTESY OF @FEDERICODIMARCO ON INSTAGRAM

another against the weakened Italian defense; however, at the end of regulation time, the game ends 1-1.

The extra time period is best summed up through chaos and fatigue, with Italy's faltering 10-man defense hanging on for dear life, now playing for penalties against a team some of them mocked before the match. Extra time finished, and penalties were in order to determine who would go to the 2026 World Cup. Bosnia and Herzegovina struck first in the shootout, with a well-placed driven penalty sending the Italian goalkeeper the wrong way. Italy's first penalty is blasted over the net and into the sea of Bosnia fans behind the goal, showing the pressure and Italy's repeated mistakes in crucial moments.

The second Bosnian penalty is scored beautifully into the top

corner, taking a 2-0 lead. Italian midfielder Sandro Tonali dispatched Italy's second penalty with class, bringing them back into it. The third Bosnian penalty is scored, and the gap narrows for Italy. The third penalty for Italy and the most important is rocketed off the crossbar and stays out of the Bosnian goal. Italy must save the next Bosnian penalty, or its World Cup dreams are over. Esmir Bajraktarević, born in Appleton, Wisconsin, representing Bosnia and Herzegovina, scored his penalty under the arms of Donnarumma to win the shootout 4-1 and send his team to the 2026 FIFA World Cup, with the Italian curse continuing.

The crushing defeat further adds to the narrative around Italy's "curse" in World Cup qualification. Since their last World Cup appearance in 2014,

the Italians have fallen short in every World Cup qualification since.

It has been 12 years since their last appearance, and they have missed out on three different World Cup summers. For supporters, the disappointment cuts deeper each time they fail. The World Cup is not just a tournament for Italy. The four-time World Cup winners have missed out yet again on the opportunity to repeat their country's best sporting moments, with many fans questioning the Italian football federation.

Times have changed for the once European powerhouse, with many fans wondering when it will be restored to its former glory. Until then, one of football's most storied nations remains on the outside looking in, its legacy remaining intact but its future uncertain.