Colette's Commentary: In women's March Madness, the madness is already here

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March Madness didn't have any delay to the beginning of the madness. In the opening rounds of the women's tournament, the chaos came in various forms, statement wins, explosive scoring and a level of dominance that made it clear this tournament was never going to be easy. From the LSU Tigers putting up 100 points to the South Carolina Gamecocks destroying their opponent, the message was sent: women's college basketball has entered a new era, and it's only growing.

The top seeds have already displayed their dominance in the opening rounds, showing exactly why they have been seeded at the top. All four No. 1 seeds, UConn, UCLA, Texas and South Carolina, have advanced to the Sweet 16. No. 1 overall seed UConn defended its top spot by winning against No. 16 UTSA 90-52 in the first round and defeating No. 9 Syracuse 98-45 in the second round, extending its win streak to 52 games. UConn's performance defended its place at top after some questioned its No. 1 overall seed over UCLA as some argued the Bruins had a stronger schedule. The Selection Committee ultimately gave the Huskies their spot on top due to a greater "observable component" throughout the season.

UCLA has defended its spot as the No. 2 overall seed, defeating No. 16 Cal Baptist 96-43 and later defeating No. 8 Oklahoma State 87-68. Lauren Betts displayed exactly why she is a finalist for Jersey Mike's Naismith Trophy Women's College Player of the Year, putting up a career-high of 35 points in UCLA's win against Oklahoma State to lead the team to a spot in the Sweet 16.

No. 1 seed of the Fort Worth 3 bracket, Texas and No.1 seed of the Sacramento 4 bracket, South Carolina have also overpowered the competition in the first rounds. Texas defeated No. 16 Missouri State 97-45 and No. 8 Oregon 100-58. South Carolina defeated No. 16 Southern University 103-34 and No. 9 USC 101-61. The Gamecocks will have their biggest test in the Sweet 16 and look for revenge against No. 4 Oklahoma, who handed South Carolina its second loss of the regular season.



Azzi Fudd of the UConn Huskies against the Syracuse Orange at Gampel Pavilion in Storrs, Conn. on March 23, 2026. PHOTO BY CONNOR SHARP, PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

While top seeds have largely controlled the narrative of the opening rounds, one team has shown that seeding doesn't truly matter in March. The LSU Tiger's women's basketball team, while not having a No. 1 seed, has played with the same intensity and has dominated its competition in the same fashion as the top seeds. LSU opened the tournament with 116-58 win over No. 15 Jacksonville and followed with another dominant win over No. 7 seed Texas Tech, 101-47.

While the top seeds have largely cruised through the opening rounds, the tournament has not been without its fair share of upsets. No. 10 Virginia has positioned itself as an early Cinderella team, showing it can compete beyond expectations. The Cavaliers are truly underdogs in the tournament, finishing eighth in the ACC and making only their second NCAA tournament appearance since 2010. The team began its tournament run in the First Four, defeating Arizona State 57-55 and has not slowed down since. In the first round, it clinched the win in overtime against No. 7 seed Georgia, 82-73. The team fought for a major upset in the second round, defeating No. 2 Iowa 83-75 in double overtime, punching its ticket to the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2000. The Cavaliers will now look to continue their tournament run as they are set to face No. 3 seed TCU on Saturday, March 28.

No. 6 seed Notre Dame has also been part of the upsets in the tournament so far, defeating No. 3 Ohio State 83-73 to advance to its fifth straight Sweet 16. The Fighting Irish's star player, Hannah Hidalgo, led the feat with 26 points, 13 rebounds and eight steals, once again putting on a dominant performance.

The dominance has been clear and the upsets have already begun in the opening rounds of the tournament. If the opening rounds have shown anything, it's that the madness is already here and it's only going to grow.

WHEN IT MATTERS MOST:

ARSENAL COLLAPSES AS MANCHESTER CITY SEIZES THE CUP

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Hello and welcome back to the Full 90. In this week's edition, we will discuss the English League Cup final between Manchester City and Arsenal. The next two weeks in European club football will be slightly less exciting, as the final international break before the World Cup is underway. I figured with this break, this is a perfect time to update fans on what's happening in the world of football.

Last Sunday was the Carabao Cup Final between Manchester City and Arsenal. The Carabao Cup is an English-based tournament in which teams face off throughout the first half of the season, culminating in a final in March. Last Sunday, rivals Arsenal and Manchester City faced each other in a fiery match to determine who would take the trophy home.

Arsenal entered the match looking to claim their first trophy in nearly seven years under manager Mikel Arteta. The Spanish manager has faced heavy scrutiny over the past several years due to his team's lack of determination in lifting trophies. For years, Arsenal's hopes of gold have evaded them, with them usually choking in the tail end of the competition, whether that's the Premier League or other competitions. Fans and the media have been critical of Arsenal's style of play this year, as they sit atop the Premier League; however, they play a very boring, limited style. In the 2025-2026 season, Arsenal has relied heavily on controlled possession and defensive solidity to reach its current standing. However, fans are critical of their lack of entertaining play and criticize Arteta's team for relying on set pieces and overdoing game management, especially when they lead. They entered this final with the same mentality, except that facing them was Arteta's former mentor and football legend, Pep Guardiola.

Guardiola's Manchester City side has been the thorn in Arsenal's side for many years now, with Man City usually being the ones to capitalize on Arsenal's struggles closing out seasons. The game started with Arsenal on the front foot. Chances from Arsenal captain Bukayo Saka and frontman Kai Havertz were both thwarted by Man City backup goalkeeper James Trafford. The first half was dominated by Arsenal, but like many games this year, they struggled to score from open play. This is frustrating for Arsenal fans because a high-possession, slow-build-up style of play may be dominant, but when you lack the killer instinct in front of goal, it all becomes quite meaningless. The game went into halftime at 0-0, with both managers sure to bolster their teams in their respective locker rooms.

The second half was a different story. Around the 60 minute mark, Manchester City completely opened the game up. Guardiola decided to abandon his slow buildup from the first half and push his wingbacks wider while letting his wide forwards stay higher up on the pitch. He urged his players to play the ball forward quickly and deliver early crosses to apply increasing pressure on Arsenal's backline. With this change, we saw City's first goal. The ball was sent wide to winger Rayan Cherki, who drove it into the box, and Arsenal's backup goalkeeper, Kepa Arrizabalaga, spilled it under immense pressure. Manchester City Academy product and left back, Nico O'Reilly, was the first to react and headed the ball in the back of the net for the first. This wasn't a trademark Guardiola goal that exuded brilliance; instead, it was a goal born of immense pressure and chaos on the Arsenal defense.

Shortly after conceding, Arsenal tried to reshape their style of play; their shape became drawn out, the midfield opened and wingbacks started to underplay their defensive duties. For Manchester City, this tactical change from Arsenal is exactly what they wanted. Then, in the 64th minute, Manchester City delivered the lethal blow. City yet again produced a high-paced attack down the flank and delivered another early cross. Arsenal defenders were not set, and on the back post once again is Nico O'Reilly ready to score his second header goal in the span of five minutes for his boyhood club.

After his second goal, the game was essentially finished. Arteta's team started playing a desperate, risky version of football. The Arsenal players relied on long shots and forced crosses to apply pressure; however, the City team dropped into a compact defensive block and sat back comfortably, letting Arsenal have the ball. In the final moments of the game, Manchester City players gave Arsenal a taste of their own medicine with excellent time management as the final whistle approached. City completely slowed the game down by keeping the ball and taking smart fouls to wind the clock down. The final whistle blew, and once again, viewers saw Mikel Arteta and his team fall short.

The true story of this game was in the second half. For an hour, Arsenal dominated, but once Guardiola flipped that switch, there was no turning back. Manchester City played faster, attacked higher and wider and forced a magnitude of mistakes. Arsenal couldn't adjust and made a key mistake, which was the beginning of their collapse and subsequent loss in the final. It's a story that many Arsenal fans have seen before.

What does this mean for the Premier League title race? Only time will tell. However, Manchester City's mindset is clear. On CBS Sports Golazo Network, goalscorer Nico O'Reilly said, "The blood never went; we've always smelt blood. We're confident in ourselves, we know we can do it, they've got to come to our place, which is a tough place to come to, as everyone has seen this season. So, we do smell blood, and we've got to keep going."



Nico O'Reilly celebrating winning the Carabao Cup Final 2026 with holding the trophy. He plays for Manchester City. PHOTO COURTESY OF @NICO33 ON INSTAGRAM