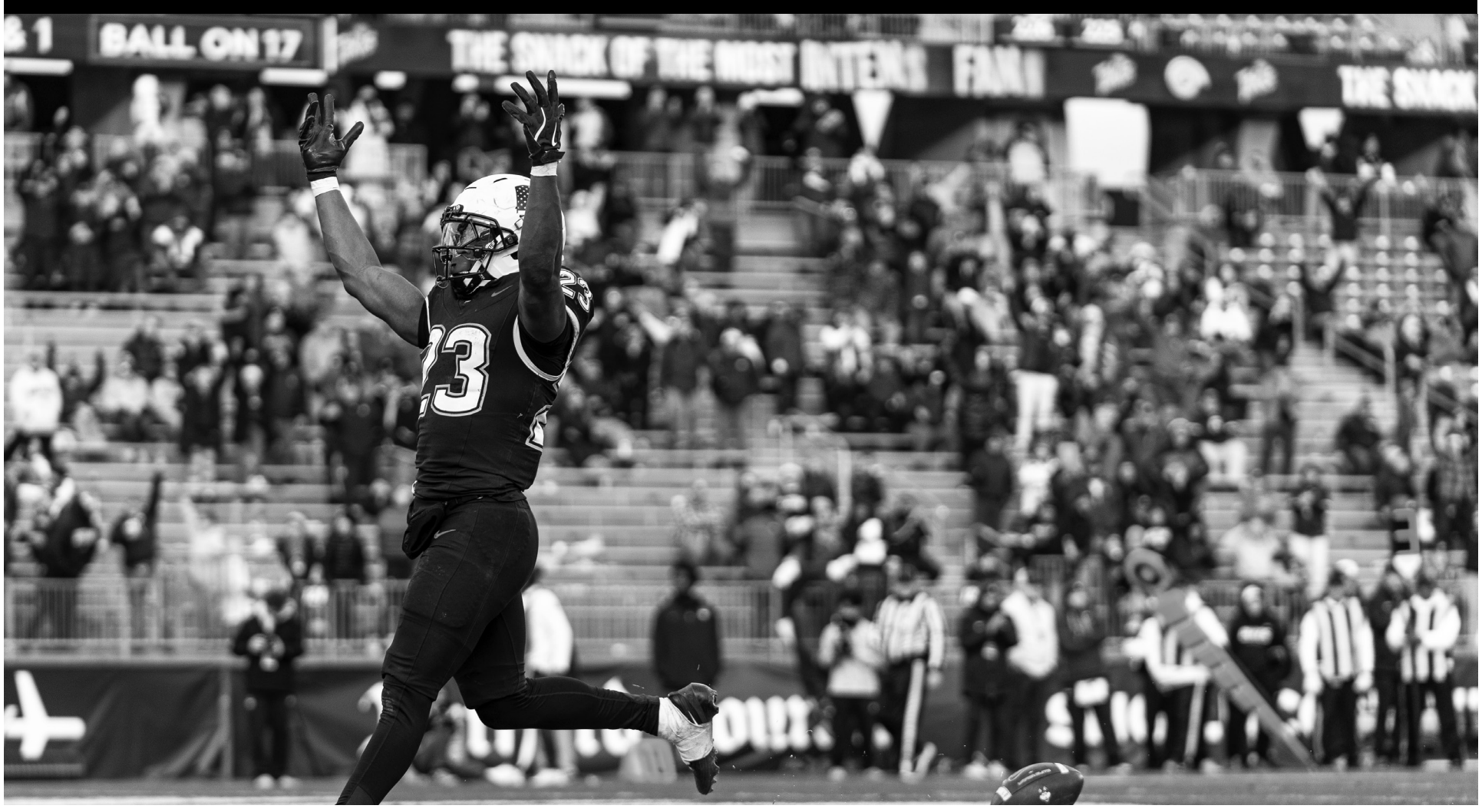
# Sports

## Photo of the Day | Happy Thanksgiving BREAK!!



**UConn running back Cyncir Bowers runs into the endzone in a game against the James Madison University Dukes on Sat, Nov. 14. at Rentschler Field. The Huskies won 46-22, securing their fifth win of the season.** PHOTO BY JACOB BLACKWELL, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

# THE DILEMMA OF THE FLAWLESS MID MAJOR IN COLLEGE BASKETBALL

**by Mitchell Lookner**
CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT
HE/HIM/HIS
Mitchell.lookner@uconn.edu

Every college basketball season sees the usual suspects ranked in the top 25 — the bluebloods, like Duke, Kansas and UConn, who consistently bring in the top recruits to their programs.

There are also teams like Arkansas and Michigan. These types of teams have had years where they remained in the top 25 for the entirety of the season but have also had years where they never even cracked the rankings.

However, it is not always just the same teams cycling in and out of the rankings. Sometimes, a team like Wichita State from a mid-major conference sneaks its way into the top 25. But how?

If you look at what it takes for a team to become ranked in college basketball, you may think that it is impossible for non-power conference schools to find their way into the rankings. However, lower-level mid-majors can earn their way into the top 25 by winning essentially all of their games.

In the 12th top 25 poll of last year's college basketball season, Miami of Ohio sat at No. 25 in the rankings. This was the Redhawks' third time ever cracking the top 25 and first time doing so in 27 years. Miami of Ohio had a flawless 19-0 record at the time when it first got ranked and was the only undefeated team left in all of college basketball.

While it may seem like a team shouldn't have to win 19 games in a row to get ranked in the top 25, if you look at Miami of Ohio's schedule, then you will understand why it had to go undefeated in order to get ranked. The Redhawks did not face any high-major programs in their first 19 games, and the only high-end mid-major team they faced was Air Force, who finished last in its conference with a 3-29 record.

Now, regardless of a team's strength of schedule, winning 19 games in a row is an incredible feat in and of itself, and that's why the committee decided to rank Miami of Ohio in the first place.

By the time the conference tournament came around for Miami of Ohio, the Redhawks were still sitting at a flawless record of 31-0.

That is, until they lost in the first round of the tournament to 16-15 UMass.

This loss sparked a huge debate in the college basketball world about whether Miami of Ohio deserved to make the tournament or not. In reality, this debate was ridiculous. Miami of Ohio lost just one game all season; the last time that a team had no more than one loss after playing both the regular season and conference tournament, excluding the shortened 2020-21 season, was No. 2 ranked Gonzaga in the 2016-17 season.

After all, the committee cleared the Redhawks to go dancing in March as a No.11 seed. After defeating SMU in the first four, Miami of Ohio would fall to No. 6 Tennessee by 22 points in the Round of 64, ending its historic season.

If you think that Miami of Ohio was not qualified enough to make the tournament, then you need to see where the committee decided to rank Wichita State in the second-to-last AP poll of the 2013-14 college basketball season.

After winning their conference tournament, the Wichita State Shockers finished the 2013-14 season with a flawless 35-0 record. The Shockers competed in the Missouri Valley Conference, a mid-major conference that did not exactly have strong competition in it. It also did not help that Wichita State played only one team all season that reached the top 25 at some point.

Yet, the committee decided to rank it No. 2 in the country and gave it a number one seed in the NCAA Tournament.

It sounds ridiculous in theory, but it also doesn't. Winning 34 games in a row, no matter the competition, is impressive. If you gave Wichita State's schedule to other top-ranked teams, it would probably have lost at least one game because it's hard to play better than your opponent for 34 straight games.

However, unfortunately, the committee's decision to rank the Shockers so high aged like milk.

Wichita State cruised past No. 16 seed Cal Poly in the first round, but when it came time to face No. 8 seed Kentucky in the second round, the Shockers did not live up to the hype, falling to Kentucky 78-76.

We've talked about the mid majors who failed to prove they were worthy of their high national ranking, but has there ever been a ranked mid-major who has actually met, or even exceeded expectations? Let me introduce you to Florida Atlantic.

At the end of the 2022-23 college basketball regular season, the Florida Atlantic Owls held a record of 28-3. Their conference, Conference USA, was arguably the best mid-major conference in the country at the time, but it was still nowhere near the level of a power conference.

Florida Atlantic finished the regular season unranked; however, the Owls had climbed into the rankings four different times already that season. They went on to win their conference tournament, securing them a spot in March Madness.

The committee decided to give Florida Atlantic a No. 9 seed due to its impressive record. However, the Owls had more in mind than just having a good regular season record.

Florida Atlantic advanced all the way to the Final Four, defeating top-ranked teams such as No. 4 seed Tennessee and No. 3 seed Kansas State in the Sweet Sixteen and Elite Eight, respectively. The Owls were a game-winning buzzer beater away from reaching the National Championship, but they ultimately fell to No. 5 seed San Diego State in the semifinals.

Unlike Miami of Ohio and Wichita State, Florida Atlantic proved why it deserved to be ranked in the top 25 during the regular season.

The debate over whether mid majors should be allowed to get into the top 25 rankings continues as more and more mid majors have near-undefeated seasons that force the committee and fans to question: Is this team for real or is its success simply a result of a poor strength of schedule?




**The 2026-27 Wichita State men's basketball team. After winning their conference tournament, the Wichita State Shockers finished the 2013-14 season with a flawless 35-0 record and the AP ranked them No. 2 In the country.**

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