

## **March Madness**

**-Matt Lieberson**

This article is bittersweet for me to write. My freshman year, I got to write about March Madness, and I vividly remember being so proud of that article. I saw it in the paper the next week, and I was so happy with myself. Since then, every year I've written about the NCAA Basketball Tournament. So this is sad for me, as this is my final March Madness article in Headlight.

This article is also bittersweet for me to write as a college basketball fan. To be honest, I didn't watch too much college basketball this year. The games I did manage to watch, though, were all fantastic games. Two of these games happened to be on February 25. One of these games was a double-overtime thriller between Kansas and Missouri, which Kansas won 87-86. The other game this night was Syracuse vs. UConn in Connecticut, which Syracuse won at the buzzer, 71-69. These two games were just high quality basketball games. The teams were intense, the crowd was charged up, and the basketball was great. I lucked out with the games I picked to watch.

The only problem? These two games likely won't happen again. With conference realignment, these unbelievable rivalries will fall to the wayside when Syracuse leaves the Big East for the ACC (along with Pittsburgh) and Missouri bolts the Big 12 to join the SEC. I can't fault these schools for wanting to leave their respective conferences. Each school has their reasons to leave, and I understand if they need to move for better opportunities in whatever they see fit. But the problem I have is that this is a football-driven decision to move conferences. During a function I went to with some Syracuse athletic representatives this past December, the representatives admitted that the main reason behind the move to the ACC was to broaden their football recruiting base. Missouri moved to the SEC, along with Texas A&M, to create a 14-team football juggernaut in the SEC.

The depressing fact to me is that the schools themselves have been unreceptive to continuing these rivalries. The Missouri-Kansas rivalry will cease to exist after this year. In football, Texas A&M will stop playing Texas, ending a rivalry that has spanned decades. Watching such emotional, charged games is what keeps me interested in college basketball over the pros. These college kids seem to have so much more heart than NBA players, and I personally enjoy college basketball much more than the NBA. But ending these rivalries will reduce the amount of these games that go down as classics. Remember the 6-OT game that Syracuse and UConn played? We have to hope for that in the NCAA Tournament now. The conference shifting ends classic series that produced some of the best games of both this season and all time.

Many rivalries will stand. There will still be classic games. Maybe some of these schools will continue to play each other in one-game series each year. But it is still bittersweet for me to see the rivalries end. It's a shame to know that I won't be able to watch repeats of these games next year.