THE HONOR ROLL:

MICHIGAN WINS FIRST NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP SINCE 1989

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Another season has concluded, which means it is time for my final edition of the Honor Roll.

Michigan (37-3) finished No. 1 after beating Arizona and UConn to claim the program's second national title. They were the best defensive team all season long, and you could see this team's potential during the Players Era Festival in November. Congrats, Wolverines. Well deserved.

UConn (34-6) finished No. 2 after an incredible run to a third national championship game in four years. However, the fouls and missed shots had the Huskies come up short for the first time (6-0 in title games prior to Monday night). Thank you, Alex Karaban, Malachi Smith and Tarris Reed Jr.

Arizona (36-3) finished No. 3 despite getting destroyed in Saturday's Final Four loss to Michigan. This team was loaded: Jaden Bradley, Brayden Burries, Koa Peat, Motiejus Krivas. Not to mention, the Wildcats were one of two teams to finish top-5 in offensive and defensive efficiency, the other being Michigan.

Illinois (28-9) finished No. 4 after having one of the best offensive seasons in KenPom history. The Fighting Illini made the Final Four for the first time since 2005, losing to Connecticut in the national semifinal.

Duke (35-3) finished No. 5 after a heartbreaking ending in the Elite Eight as Braylon Mullins hit the game-winning shot with 0.4 seconds left. What a year Cameron Boozer had. Too bad the Blue Devils dealt with injuries at the wrong time.

Purdue (30-9) finished No. 6 after falling to Arizona in the West Regional Final. Braden Smith set the all-time assists record during this season as the Boilermakers reached the end of an era.

Tennessee (25-12) finished No. 7 after coming up short yet again, as Michigan ended the Volunteers' season in the Elite Eight. Ja'Kobi Gillespie and Nate Ament, take a bow.

Iowa (24-13) finished No. 8 after a miraculous run to the Elite Eight, where the Hawkeyes came up short against Big Ten foe Illinois. The Hawkeyes did not end the season the way they hoped, but no one expected an Elite Eight run with the lack of momentum they had. Well done, Ben McCollum and Bennett Stirtz.

Houston (30-7) finished No. 9 after losing to Illinois in what was practically a home game in the Sweet Sixteen. The Cougars, led by freshman phenom Kingston Flemings, were one of four teams in the top-15 in offensive and defensive efficiency.

Iowa State (29-8) finished No. 10 after falling to Tennessee in the Sweet Sixteen. I will give the Cyclones the benefit of the doubt, as Joshua Jefferson got hurt during the NCAA Tournament.

Michigan State (27-8) finished No. 11 after nearly completing a 19-point comeback in the Sweet Sixteen against UConn, the national runner-up. Jeremy Fears Jr. was one of my favorite players to watch in college basketball this year.

Alabama (25-10) finished No. 12 after getting beaten by eventual champion Michigan, 90-77. It was impressive the Crimson Tide were in the Sweet Sixteen with all the off-the-court issues they dealt with. Props to Nate Oats on getting his team ready.

Nebraska (28-7) finished No. 13 after the most magical season in program history. Fred Hoiberg deserved to sweep all the National Coach of the Year awards after leading the Cornhuskers to not only their first NCAA Tournament win, but to the Sweet Sixteen.

Arkansas (28-9) finished No. 14 after John Calipari and freshman superstar Darius Acuff Jr. (who will be a stud in the NBA) helped the Razorbacks win the SEC Tournament and make it to the Sweet Sixteen.

St. John's (30-7) finished No. 15 after winning back-to-back Big East regular season and tournament titles, helping the Red Storm make the Sweet Sixteen, where their season would end at the hands of Duke. Zuby Ejiofor is forever one of the greatest players in St. John's history.

Texas (21-15) finished No. 16 after a run from the First Four to the Sweet Sixteen in year 1 of the Sean Miller era. The Longhorns finished with a top 15 offense in terms of adjusted efficiency and could be making noise for the years to come.

Gonzaga (31-4) finished No. 17 after yet another successful season under now-Hall of Fame coach Mark Few, a well-deserved induction.

Virginia (30-6) finished No. 18 following a terrific first season of the Ryan Odom era. He will be terrific for the Cavaliers for a long time.

Kansas (24-11) finished No. 19 after the Jayhawks had their third-straight 10+ loss season. The season was a roller coaster for Bill Self's squad, with the health of Darryn Peterson providing headlines throughout the season. I went to Allen Fieldhouse for UConn's win over Kansas, and I took away this: no other arena beats the Phog and Melvin Council Jr. is awesome. The Jayhawks will be back, but Flory Bidunga hitting the transfer portal is painful for them.

Louisville (24-11) finished No. 20 after a brutal ride through ACC play. The Cardinals were not healthy at times, especially with Mikel Brown Jr. only playing in 21 games. This Louisville team could have been dangerous in March, but they were far too inconsistent.

Kentucky (22-14) finished No. 21 following a rocky season that had fans panicking (shocker). Can you believe that this team was at one point the No.1 team on KenPom?

Miami (Fla.) (26-9) finished No. 22 in the first year of the Jai Lucas era. He is a promising fit for the Hurricanes.

Utah State (29-7) finished No. 23 after back-to-back NCAA Tournament appearances under Jerrod Calhoun (no relation, by the way). Calhoun will now take over at Cincinnati, so expect some growing pains in Logan, now.

Saint Louis (29-6) finished No. 24 after one of the best seasons in program history. Josh Schertz has built one of the best mid-majors in the country.

TCU (23-12) finished No. 25 after yet another strong finish by Jamie Dixon. There was a stretch where the Horned Frogs lost four straight. A near-perfect February helped TCU get to the Big Dance.

BRAYDEN'S BREAKDOWN:

RANKING MY TOP 10 FAVORITE UCONN AND CELTICS BASKETS OF THE 2020S.

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Still riding the high of Braylon Mullins game winner against Duke, I started to think about the best baskets in my recent memory. As a spoiled Celtics and UConn basketball fan, I have seen my fair share of awesome shots since 2020. I had to limit it to 10, but there are so many more that could have made the list.

10. Jayson Tatum's first two baskets after tearing his Achilles (3/6/2026)

Just 298 days after tearing his Achilles, Tatum returned to one of the most anticipated regular season games in the history of TD Garden. Days after turning 28, Tatum made his season debut on a Friday night against the Mavericks. He missed his first few shots including a missed dunk, showing some signs of rust. Then Payton Pritchard had a transition three opportunity, and he let a shot fly. The shot missed, but Tatum was in the perfect place for a putback dunk. The crowd erupted. Dallas got a quick basket, but the Celtics came flying towards their end. Pritchard drove to the basket and found Tatum who knocked down his patented sidestep three. The crowd went wild again, and Tatum reintroduced himself with just two baskets.

9. Solo Ball's fastbreak dunk in the 2026 Final Four against Illinois

Through the ups and the downs of the 2025-26 season for Ball, he never quit. His shooting percentages dropped and his defense was called out on multiple occasions. That is why his throw down at the end of Saturday's game against Illinois was so rewarding. Ball knocked down three triples to keep the Huskies in the lead over the Fighting Illini. A missed Keaton Wagler three sent the ball flying toward the out of bounds line. Illinois tried to save it but threw the ball straight to Alex Karaban. The senior wisely found Ball who did the rest. The lefty threw down a right-handed slam and sent the crowd into a frenzy. The Huskies held on largely thanks to the resilient Ball.

8. Paige Bueckers touch pass to Kaitlyn Chen in the 2025 Final Four vs UCLA

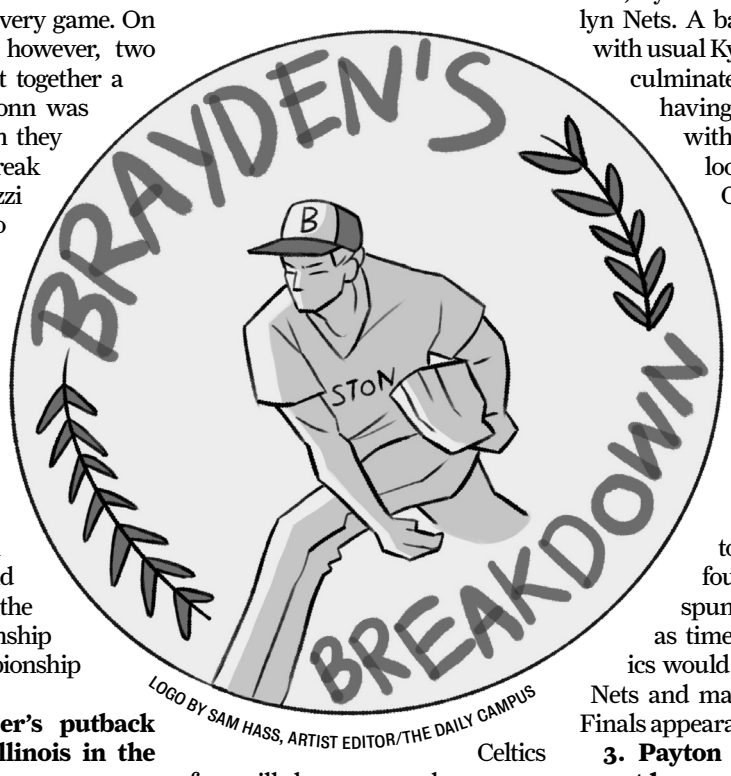
It's hard to have a favorite basket from the women's team because they are up 40 in every game. On the biggest stage, however, two veteran players put together a highlight play. UConn was already up 15 when they were on a fastbreak opportunity. Azzi Fudd passed it up to Bueckers who was double-teamed by UCLA. The future first overall pick barely touched it but directed it right to Chen who laid it up and in. The Huskies would dominate UCLA in the Final Four and South Carolina in the National Championship enroute to championship number 12.

7. Cam Spencer's putback floater against Illinois in the 2024 Elite Eight

You could pick any basket from UConn's historic 30-0 run, but this one has always stood out to me. With the Huskies already on a 14-0 run, Karaban misses a transition three, but Cam Spencer was there for the rebound. The first year Husky floated it up and in, resulting in an Illinois timeout. After the whistle is blown, Spencer is flying around screaming and pumping his fist, an image that will live forever.

6. Xavier Tillman's three-pointer in Game 3 of the 2024 NBA Finals

This might be the most niche basket in this whole list, but it's just awesome. Tillman had not played in the first two games in the series, but with Kristaps Porzingis out, Tillman stepped in and stepped up. Tillman provided great defense and this three-pointer was the cherry on top. He had 6 points in 18 total minutes this series, but this three ball is one that Celtics fans will always remember.



LOGO BY SAM HASS, ARTIST EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

5. Jayson Tatum's three to give him 50 points in Game 7 against the 76ers

Another instance of a game where you could pick any basket, but this one is iconic. Tatum picked apart the 76ers defense all Mother's Day afternoon, including a big Celtics run in the third quarter. With 7 minutes to go in the fourth and the Celtics up 23, Tatum got a switch onto Joel Embiid and the rest was history. After a few jab steps, Tatum splashed a three in Embiid's face and held up 50 with his hands. His 51 points are the most in the history of an NBA Game 7.

4. Jayson Tatum's buzzer-beater on Easter Sunday 2022

This was the first time in years that it felt like the Celtics had a chance to win the NBA Finals. The energy had shifted in 2022, but Boston drew a tough round one matchup against Kevin Durant, Kyrie Irving and the Brooklyn Nets. A back-and-forth game with usual Kyrie shenanigans all culminated with the Celtics having the ball down one with 13 seconds left. It looked like the young Celtics were once again going to blow this one, but Tatum stepped up. Marcus Smart had the ball with five seconds left and pump faked a three-pointer, drawing all of the attention to himself. Tatum cut to the basket, Smart found him and Tatum spun and scored a layup as time expired. The Celtics would go on to sweep the Nets and make their first NBA Finals appearance in 12 years.

3. Payton Pritchard's half-court buzzer beater in Game 5 of the 2024 NBA Finals

Once again, as a spoiled Celtics fan you can pick from about a dozen Payton Pritchard buzzer beaters, but this one is by far the best. Off a missed free throw, the Celtics found Pritchard as the first half was expiring. Pritchard took one dribble and let it fly. The rest is history. The shot, the crowd reaction, the Mike Breen call, the Celtics players reaction. It felt like everyone knew this 3-1 Celtics lead was going to become a 4-1 series victory for an NBA Championship after this shot.

2. Braylon Mullins game winner versus Duke in the 2026 Elite Eight

If I did not have a personal connection with the first shot, this would easily be number one. In a play that transcended mainstream media, Mullins shocked the world with a heave from the logo to beat Duke. Being down all game, including down as much as 19, the Huskies rallied while struggling from three. Starting 1/18, the Huskies finished 4/5 including this Mullins dagger, his first three of the night. Every angle, every reaction and every story about this shot is awesome. Mullins will go down in UConn lore forever regardless of how his pro career pans out.

1. Jaylen Brown's game-tying corner three in Game 1 of the 2024 Eastern Conference Finals

Experiencing this moment live in person is probably my favorite sports moment ever. After years of playoff let downs from Brown, he delivered when it mattered most. Fans and the media were not shy to criticize Brown and his postseason performances. That all changed in the 2024 ECF. The Celtics were buzzing out of the gates, but the resilient Pacers hung around and had a three-point lead with less than a minute left. A costly Tyrese Haliburton turnover gave the Celtics the ball with 8.5 seconds remaining. On the inbound, Brown got the ball in the corner and put up a prayer over Pascal Siakam. The shot fell and TD Garden erupted as the Celtics had tied the game. The Celtics had all of the momentum and went on to win Game 1 in overtime and sweep the Pacers en route to banner 18. A moment that I will always remember from my seat at the top of TD Garden.