ELLIOT'S WEEKLY TIP-OFF:

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN: BUBBLE TEAMS, TITLE HOPES AND MUST-SEE MATCHUPS

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Another week of college basketball means another week of must-watch games.

Feb. 25 pits No. 15 St. John's against No. 6 UConn. The Huskies have now lost three straight to the Red Storm dating back to last season.

Dan Hurley's squad fell short to Creighton on Feb. 18 but rebounded well on the road against a tough Villanova squad. They will need that same energy to take on the Johnnies in Hartford.

The defending national champion, the Florida Gators, will travel to Texas in a big showdown in the SEC. The Gators are riding a seven-game winning streak including wins over ranked Alabama and Kentucky. The Gators are looking more likely to defend their title after an inconsistent start to the season.

The Longhorns are on the bubble with a win against No. 7 Florida helping their case to be a First Four in. Three of their final four games are against Quadrant one teams, making their road much more difficult. However, with wins against these opponents, they can only build their case on why they should be playing in March.

No. 25 Vanderbilt is also a team near the bubble, but in a higher ranking than Texas. The Commodores should be a lock when it comes to March with a 21-6 record on the season. They will face Georgia who is fighting for a spot in the bubble as well and will be playing for a lot on Wednesday night.

No. 20 Arkansas will also have a tough game against Texas A&M as the Aggies are fighting for a bubble spot as well. The Razorbacks should already be a lock in the tournament with a strong resume on the season; however, a few late slip-ups could put them lower than they want to be.

Feb. 26 has a big top 15 showdown between No. 8 Purdue and No. 13 Michigan State. Both squads are 22-5 this season and 12-4 in the conference. This matchup is bound to come down to the wire with both teams showing big strides this season along with a few hiccups. The ranked Big Ten teams have multiple Quad one wins and are looking to make deep runs in the tournament. Their talent will be tested sooner with both teams looking for an advantage over the other.



UConn Men's Basketball plays Creighton University at Gampel Pavilion in Storrs, Conn. On Feb 18, 2026. The crowd hyped up the team throughout the entire game.

PHOTO BY SYDNEY CHANDLER, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

On Feb. 27, No. 3 Michigan will look to bounce back against a top ranked opponent after falling short against No. 3 Duke. The Blue Devils were able to hold off and secure the victory, defeating the top ranked Wolverines 68-63.

This matchup will be a big one for both schools with both teams sitting atop the Big Ten. Michigan has been perfect all season dropping only two games, one in conference. This top 10 matchup might reshape the Big Ten tournament, even with Michigan's lead over the rest of the conference.

Feb. 28 has a whole slate of top 25 matchups which are sure to spoil some team's flow.

No. 11 Virginia will travel to newly ranked No. 1 Duke. After Duke's big victory over Michigan, they will look to keep the hot streak going against ranked opponents. Virginia is also heating up, winning eight straight.

No. 2 Arizona will host No. 14 Kansas, this time in Arizona. The two powerhouses met at Allen Fieldhouse at the beginning of the month, which gave Arizona their first loss of the season. They would go on to lose the next one at home against Texas Tech, before bouncing back and defeating No. 23 BYU and No. 2 Houston.

The Jayhawks are coming off a big win as well, defeating Houston 69-56 on Monday. Both squads sit on top of the Big 12 and are looking for that final push before postseason play. The powerhouses are hoping to make deep runs in March and are both showing potential to play in Indianapolis.

Also in the Big 12, No. 4 Iowa State will host No. 16 Texas Tech for their only meeting of the season. Both teams are also near the top of the Big 12 at 10-4 in conference play. This game will be pivotal for momentum and getting on track before the Big 12 tournament begins.

Later in the night, No. 22 Tennessee will host No. 17 Alabama for the top ranked SEC opponents. Both teams are 10-4 in conference and 20-7 on the season. They both pair up well against each other, with Tennessee taking the win earlier in the season 79-73. That game was played in Tuscaloosa, so Tennessee will be the home team this time around.

To round out the SEC, No. 7 Florida will host No. 20 Arkansas for the other matchup between top SEC opponents. The top four teams will face each other on Saturday making for a good day to watch some SEC ball.

All talent will be on display this week as the final push to March continues. Teams will hope to separate themselves from others and build up their chances of making runs in their respective conference tournaments.

We are just three weeks away from the start of Madness, get ready to witness some history.

HUSKIES IN THE PROS

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Stephon Castle:

To finish the 2026 NBA Rising Star games, Castle averaged five points, 1.5 rebounds and three assists per contest for Team Melo.

In a combined total, the guard played 9.5 minutes, banking four of eight (50%) shots from inside the arc, missing two triples and going two-for-two from the free-throw line.

Following the 2026 All-Star weekend, the 21-year-old continued his baffling performances. In the San Antonio Spurs' previous three meetings, the former Husky has posted 15-plus points.

In the franchise's 114-103 victory over the Detroit Pistons on Monday, Castle notched a double-double, registering 16 points, four boards and 11 assists.

Within 30 minutes, the Georgia native swished six of 15 (40%) field goals, went one-for-one from deep and nailed one of three (33.3%) free throws.

During the post-game press conference, Spurs' Head Coach Mitch Johnson acknowledged the second-year player's incredible defense.

"I thought his game plan, execution and competitiveness, while being physical and trying to move his feet and show his hands, was excellent," said Johnson.

Up next, the Spurs will travel to face the Toronto Raptors tomorrow at 7:30 p.m. Fans can tune into the matchup on The Sports Network.

Donovan Clingan:

In the Rising Star clashes, Clingan teamed up with Castle for the first time since winning the 2023-2024 NCAA National Championship.

In the pair of outings, the 7-foot-2 center contributed 7.5 points, 1.5 rebounds and a block within 10 minutes per bout for Team Melo.

In a combined total, the Connecticut native went three-for-three from the floor and knocked down three of seven (42.9%) three-pointers.

After the All-Star weekend, the 22-year-old has continued his rim-protecting madness for the Portland Trail Blazers.

As of now, the former Husky ranks No. 2 with just over 4.6 offensive rebounds and sits at No. 3 with 11.5 boards per contest.

Not to mention, Clingan lands at No. 1 with a little over 13 contested shots per showdown.

Additionally, the second-year player lands at No. 3 with just over four second-chance points and places No. 12 with almost 1.5 blocks per battle.

In the Trail Blazers' most recent 92-77 triumph over the Phoenix Suns on Sunday, it is worth noting that Clingan secured his thirtieth career double-double.

Within 31 minutes, the center accumulated 23 points, 13 boards, three assists and four blocks.

Last night, the Trail Blazers faced the Minnesota Timberwolves and will host the Chicago Bulls tomorrow at 8 p.m. Fans can watch the matchup on KUNP 16.

Cam Spencer:

In his first Rising Stars appearance, Spencer participated in a contest against Team Vince.

Within nine minutes, the off-the-bench player tallied five points, three rebounds and two assists for Team T-Mac. The Maryland native went one-for-one from the paint and drained one of two (50%) shots from downtown.

When it comes to producing offense for the Memphis Grizzlies, Spencer has seen more opportunities since the team traded Jaren Jackson Jr. to the Utah Jazz on Feb. 3.

In the former Huskies' fifteenth 2025-2026 season start versus the Sacramento Kings on Monday, the guard struggled to find points.

Within 22 minutes, the guard posted seven points, three boards and three assists. From the field, the 25-year-old splashed two of four (50%) shots and punched in one of three (33.3%) long-range tries.

Next up, the Grizzlies will stay on the road to take on the Golden State Warriors tonight. Tipoff is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on NBC Sports Bay Area.

Tristen Newton:

Similar to Spencer, Newton appeared in his first Rising Stars game, representing Team Austin.

In the squad's 40-34 fall to Team Melo, the former Husky faced challenges to net the ball.

Within eight and a half minutes, the Florida native finished with two points, a rebound and four assists. From short range, the 24-year-old connected on one of three (33.3%) shots.

While Newton's Rising Star performance did not go as planned, the guard redeemed himself against his former G League team, the Iowa Wolves, on Sunday.

In the Rio Grande Valley Vipers' nail-biting 117-115 win, Newton led the team with 26 points, five rebounds, three assists and five steals.

Within 34 minutes, the back-to-back NCAA champ buried four of 14 (28.6%) field goals, one of four (25%) deep shots and converted nine of 10 (90%) free throws.

Last night, the Vipers began a two-game series with the San Diego Clippers, which will conclude tonight at 8 p.m. on NBAGLeague.com.

Liam McNeeley:

Since sustaining a left ankle sprain versus the Cleveland Charge on Jan. 30, McNeeley has not returned to action.

Currently, the rookie's injury status is listed as out.

Jordan Hawkins:

For the first time in nine games, Hawkins saw five minutes of court time while facing the Kings on Feb. 9.

Within five minutes, the guard drilled two of three (66.7%) floor shots for six points.

Since then, the 23-year-old played in back-to-back meetings for a combined total of six minutes but ended with zero points on Friday and Saturday.

The New Orleans Pelicans hosted the Warriors last night and will travel for a two-game series with the Jazz, beginning Thursday. Tipoff is scheduled for 9 p.m. on Gulf Coast Sports.

Andre Jackson Jr.:

Similar to Hawkins, Jackson Jr. is still receiving limited minutes from the Milwaukee Bucks.

In the franchise's 122-94 loss to the Raptors on Sunday, the former Husky contributed two points and three boards. Within seven minutes, the New York native sank one of four (25%) two-pointers and botched his lone three-point attempt.

The Bucks took on the Miami Heat last night and will host the Cleveland Cavaliers tonight at 8 p.m. on FanDuel Sports Network.