

4-4-1997

Basketball Championship

Richard C. Crepeau
University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Journalism Studies Commons](#), [Other History Commons](#), [Sports Management Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)
Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety>
University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Public History at STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in On Sport and Society by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Basketball Championship" (1997). *On Sport and Society*. 125.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/125>

SPORT AND SOCIETY BROADCAST FOR FRIDAY APRIL 4, 1997
WUCF-FM 89.9 ORLANDO, FLORIDA
(7:55 a.m. and 5:55 p.m.)

Championship games should be close and intense with the players giving every ounce of their energy and coaches struggling to adjust and readjust as the game unfolds. The only flaws in this year's struggle between the Wildcats of Kentucky and Arizona were provided by CBS which continues to be unable to identify its best announcers and commentators, and whose broadcasting crew has grown like kudzu in August.

Two things especially stick with me in the wake of this tournament: the way in which college basketball is beginning to resemble the pros and the dominating presence of Rick Pitino.

Although the skill levels are not as high as the pros, the level of college play has jumped as players have become bigger and faster. The result has been an adjustment of the officiating which allows for more physical pounding and a resulting inconsistency in the calling of fouls. The pushing and shoving for position in the middle has become nearly Ewingesque, and the meat-grinder runs full force during rebounding. The result has been no-calls on the physical play inside, often followed by the phantom touch-foul in the open court. The inconsistency is baffling and maddening to partisan fans or to those who don't regularly watch the NBA.

Like the NBA the college game has seen the replacement of the three second violation, by the four or five second violation. Travelling is moving toward the endangered species list except on a good stutter-step when the officials get fooled, or when it is called for no apparent reason. This occurs because, as in the NBA, college officials are randomly programmed to make that call once or twice a game. Palming, or carrying the ball, has vanished entirely, going the way of the double-dribble and the two-handed set-shot.

Who knows, someday soon at a college game you may even here the announcer say, "First in the last two minutes."

As for Rick Pitino it seems to me that this was his tournament, or at least his final four. For several days before the start of play at the RCA Dome, most of the discussion centered on whether or not Minnesota could handle the press, and then if Arizona having handled North Carolina and Kansas could handle the

Kentucky press. Minnesota could not, while Arizona could. The Gophers had nearly 30 turnovers while Arizona had only 18, with very few caused by the Kentucky pressure in the back-court.

The press has become a trademark of Pitino teams. The trapping, the closing of passing lanes, and the constant pressure on the ball, left Minnesota gasping for air. Arizona, however, had several players who could break the defense with ball-handing abilities and good court sense. Like all defenses, it can be broken and the opponent can be made to pay. Arizona's guards drove through the press, or skillfully passed over it, creating three-on-one advantages in the front court several times, while they almost never got trapped or made a pass in panic.

Pitino's press reminds everyone that defense generally wins games, and the presence of John Wooden at halftime of the telecast reminded me of the tremendous zone-press that UCLA used over its glory years to dismantle the offensive plans of its opponents. Wooden explained what makes this work, when he said that the first thing he looked for when recruiting was to find players who were faster at their position than anyone else at that position. You can teach quickness, but not speed. Certainly this is one of the great strengths of this Kentucky team.

The second thing Wooden wanted was a player who looked for the pass first, and then for the shot. Wooden knows that basketball is still a team game. Pitino's comment that he will no longer recruit players who want to go the pros after one or two years in college, makes a similar statement.

This final four was made up of teams that play very good team basketball. The towering individual stars of the college game were either at home watching on TV or already in the NBA.

Kentucky's offense made excellent use of screens and cuts to get the open shot, and dominant rebounding which is a function of both effort and positioning, or blocking-out. These are skills that are taught, and Pitino does an excellent job on both.

I was also impressed by Rick Pitino in defeat, saying that he was proud of his team and their effort, and congratulating Arizona for an excellent game. There was no whinning about the injuries that ravaged his team, only pride in a Kentucky team that gave every ounce of its effort, talent, and skill, only to come up short. It may have been his finest coaching job as well as a sign that he is maturing as coach and a person.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

Copyright 1997 by Richard C. Crepeau