

# IT'S ABOUT THAT TIME!

Round	Dates	Notes
<b>Selection Sunday</b>	<b>March 15, 8 PM ET</b>	Bracket revealed live on ESPN. <a href="#">NCAA</a>
<b>First Four</b>	<b>March 18–19</b>	Hosted on campus sites of top-16 seeds. <a href="#">ESPN</a>
<b>First Round</b>	<b>March 20–21</b>	Campus sites (top-16 seeds host). <a href="#">www.sportbusy.com</a>
<b>Second Round</b>	<b>March 22–23</b>	Campus sites. <a href="#">www.sportbusy.com</a>
<b>Sweet 16</b>	<b>March 27–28</b>	Fort Worth, TX & Sacramento, CA. <a href="#">ESPN</a>
<b>Elite Eight</b>	<b>March 29–30</b>	Same regional sites as Sweet 16. <a href="#">www.sportbusy.com</a>
<b>Final Four</b>	<b>April 3</b>	Phoenix, AZ. <a href="#">ESPN</a>
<b>National Championship</b>	<b>April 5</b>	Phoenix, AZ. <a href="#">sportsbrackets.net</a>

By Villager staff

(VILLAGER) - The road to the 2026 NCAA Women's Basketball Championship is officially underway, and March has once again become the month when every possession, every whistle, and every late game run can rewrite a season. With Selection Sunday set for March 15, teams across the country are fighting through the final stretch of conference tournaments, hoping to secure their place in a bracket that has grown into one of the most-watched events in American sports. For programs with national reputations, this week is about fine tuning rotations and protecting seeding. For bubble teams, especially those from HBCUs and mid major conferences, it is a final audition before the committee makes its choices live on ESPN.

The tournament officially begins with the First Four on March 18 and 19, hosted on the home courts of top 16 seeds. Those games will determine the final entrants into the 68 team field and often deliver some of the most emotional moments of March, as teams that rarely receive national attention fight for the right to keep playing. The First Round follows immediately on March 20 and 21, with the top seeds again hosting. The Second Round will be played March 22 and 23, closing out the opening weekend and sending the strongest teams to the regional stage.

This year's Sweet 16 and Elite Eight will be split between Fort Worth, Texas, and Sacramento, California, giving Texas fans a rare chance to watch the

nation's best programs compete for a Final Four berth without leaving the state. Those rounds will run from March 27 through March 30, and both sites are expected to draw heavy crowds, especially with the University of Texas entering the postseason as a likely top seed. For East Austin readers who follow the Longhorns closely, the regional placement could offer a meaningful home court advantage, with thousands of fans able to travel to Fort Worth on short notice.

The Final Four will take place April 3 in Phoenix, Arizona, followed by the national championship game on April 5. The NCAA has invested heavily in elevating the women's tournament in recent years, and Phoenix is preparing for one of the largest crowds in the event's history. With television ratings climbing and women's basketball continuing to break attendance records, this year's championship weekend is expected to be a cultural moment as much as a sporting one.

Before the bracket is revealed, however, the spotlight remains on conference tournaments unfolding across the country. The SWAC and MEAC are deep into quarterfinal play, with automatic bids on the line and HBCU programs fighting for national visibility. These games carry particular weight for communities that rarely see their teams highlighted on major networks, and an automatic bid can shift the trajectory of an entire athletic department. Other conferences, including the American, Confer-

ence USA, and the Coastal Athletic Association, are also in action this week, shaping the final at large picture and determining which teams will enter March Madness with momentum.

For Texas teams, the stakes are equally high. The Longhorns have spent the season building a résumé strong enough to keep them in the national conversation, and their path through the Big 12 tournament will influence their seeding on Selection Sunday. A top four seed would guarantee home games in the opening rounds, a significant advantage in a tournament where travel, fatigue, and crowd energy can determine outcomes as much as talent.

As the nation waits for the bracket reveal, the story of this year's tournament is already taking shape: a field deeper than ever, a growing national audience, and a postseason that continues to elevate women's basketball into a defining force in American sports. For communities across Austin and for readers who follow the game through a lens of equity, representation, and opportunity, March offers more than a championship chase. It offers a reminder of what investment, visibility, and access can do for athletes who have spent decades pushing the sport forward.

If you want, I can also produce a version tailored specifically for East Austin distribution, an HBCU centered sidebar, or a Texas focused tournament preview.

## GOP attack backfires

(VILLAGER STAFF) - James Talarico has become the rare Texas politician who turns every attack into fuel. What was meant to be a GOP "gotcha" moment—an out of context clip framed with a flashing red warning—ended up amplifying his own message. Instead of scrambling, Talarico simply retweeted it with a calm, almost mischievous "I approve this message," flipping the script with the ease of someone who knows exactly who he is and who he's speaking to.

It's a pattern now. Every attempt to sideline him seems to ricochet back with more force. When a national



Texas State Rep. James Talarico

TV segment featuring Talarico was blocked, the interview migrated online and exploded, pulling in millions of views and millions of dollars in donations. When critics tried to paint Talarico's faith

rooted language as radical, it only sharpened his profile as a seminarian teacher turned candidate who refuses to separate moral clarity from public service.

The more opponents try to dim Talarico's spotlight, the brighter it burns. Even political commentators are starting to say the quiet part out loud: the attacks aren't landing. They're backfiring. And with the general election looming, Talarico is walking into the next phase of the race not as the embattled underdog some expected, but as the candidate whose momentum keeps growing every time someone tries to stop it.

## Other Election Races Around the Nation

(VILLAGER STAFF) - Election night didn't roar so much as hum—quietly, insistently—like a current running beneath the country's political floorboards. In three very different states, voters sent up signals that, taken together, felt like a weather report for the months ahead.

In New Hampshire, a district long tinted red flickered unexpectedly blue, as Bobbi Boudman edged out a Republican in a place that had twice backed Trump. It wasn't a landslide; it was a pulse—proof that Democratic energy still has a way of slipping into unlikely corners.

Down in Georgia, the race to fill Marjorie Taylor Greene's seat turned into a crowded scramble, and in the chaos, Democrat Shawn Harris managed to climb to the top of the heap. He won't flip the district—no one's pretending otherwise—but his first place finish was a jolt, a reminder that even in deep red terrain, the ground can shift just enough to make people look twice.

Mississippi, meanwhile, told a different story. There, longevity beat out the drumbeat for generational change. Rep. Bennie Thompson, at 78, brushed aside a much younger challenger, proving that experience still carries weight in communities that have seen promises come and go.

And threading through it all was the unmistakable imprint of Trump's endorsement. Clay Fuller's win in Georgia's GOP contest showed that, even in a state where Republicans sometimes buck him, the former president's nod still lands with force.

Taken together, the night felt like a patchwork of contradictions—old power holding firm, new energy breaking through, and voters in every corner reminding the country that nothing in politics stays still for long.