

Losing memorably

If you are a basketball fan, you're anticipating March Madness 2010. The first round games begin on Thursday. More than 16 million fans will watch the championship game that will be played on April 5. Another seven million will follow the tournament on CBS's Web site.

With March Madness getting under way and in an effort to forget WSU's recent loss to Montana, I have been thinking about the Weber State NCAA tournament game that I remember more than any other. The game I remember is also a game that WSU lost. Unlike the loss to Montana, which had all the beauty of a cat choking up a hairball, the game I remember was a magnificent game.

The game I have in mind is the game Weber State played against the Georgetown Hoyas in the second round of the 1995 tournament. That year, WSU started the tournament by knocking off Michigan State. This was no small accomplishment as Michigan State was a number 3 seed and was hoping to send their legendary coach Jud Heathcote out on a winning note.

This resulted in WSU being matched against the Georgetown Hoyas. The Hoyas were led by Allen Iverson who would go on to be the first player selected in the 1996 NBA draft and become an 11-time NBA All-Star. Virtually everyone thought that WSU had no chance of staying up with Georgetown. Most thought that the WSU team was spent after the Michigan State game and would be content to go home. They were wrong.

WSU outplayed Georgetown in the first half and took a 27 to 25 lead into halftime. WSU continued to play well in the second half. With 7.4 seconds remaining, the score was tied 51 to 51 when WSU's star player Ruben Nembhard was fouled, sending him to the line to shoot one and one. Uncharacteristically, Nembhard missed the first shot.

Georgetown got the rebound, and Allen Iverson brought the ball up court for the Hoyas. WSU played good enough defense to keep Iverson outside the three-point circle. With only 1.4 seconds

remaining, Iverson was forced to take an awkward, off-balance shot. Iverson's shot was way off the mark and players on the WSU bench jumped in celebration. Yet, Georgetown's Don Reid managed to find his way under the basket and tip the ball in at the buzzer.

I have watched the replay countless times, and I still think that time had expired before Reid tipped the ball. The referees didn't see it that way, and WSU was deprived of a trip to the Sweet Sixteen, a distinction no WSU basketball team has achieved. The 1995 game against Georgetown is consistently ranked as one of the top-ten "buzzer-beating" games in the history of the men's NCAA basketball tournament.

For a sports fan, a heartbreaking loss is burned in your memory. If your team wins, you are elated and you celebrate the victory. If your team loses, you replay the game again and again and again. After countless replays, you find yourself with a memory of the game that you will never forget.

If you were a sports fan in the days before ESPN, you will remember ABC's Wide World of Sports. The television program always opened with a video montage superimposed with announcer Jim McKay's voice proclaiming "The Thrill of Victory" and "The Agony of Defeat."

I would challenge anyone who is familiar with the program to describe the video footage associated with the phrase "The Thrill of Victory." On the other hand, anyone who watched the program more than a few times will recall the image associate with the "Agony of Defeat." That image was a ski jumper midway down the ramp of a ski jump.

The skier loses his balance and does cartwheels off the end of the ramp crashing into the crowd below.

Sixty-four teams will enter the NCAA men's basketball tournament. Sixty-three of those teams will lose. My wish for the losers is that they exit the tournament in a glorious and memorable fashion.

Top of Utah Voices



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Commentary

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