

## MADNESS IN MARCH

### Arkansas State to play UConn in NCAA Tournament

### Red Wolves crush SLU 103-78 in first round of NIT



PHOTO COURTESY OF A-STATE ATHLETICS  
Coach Destinee Rogers and her team celebrate their selection for the NCAA Tournament at the Selection Sunday watch party.

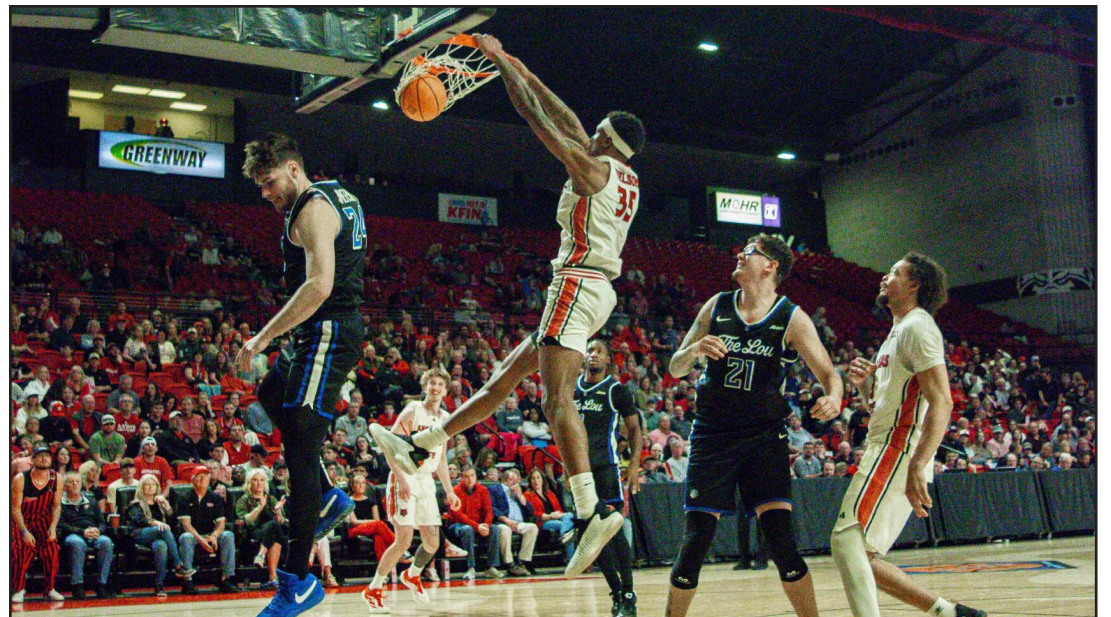


Photo by Abigail Leggett | Staff Photographer  
Forward Izaiyah Nelson slams a dunk over SLU guard Gibson Jimerson.

**WILL LIVINGSTON**

**SPORTS EDITOR**

At long last, the Arkansas State Red Wolves women's basketball team is going to the NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament. This will be the team's first ever appearance in their 50 years of playing.

The team hosted a watch party on Sunday, March 16 at Centennial Bank Stadium to see where the team would be seeded in the 68-team tournament. It was announced that A-State was slated to play the UConn Huskies as a 15 seed.

"We're in a situation that has never been done in program history," head coach Destinee Rogers said. "I couldn't be more thankful for these young women, this program, and this university. We're excited."

The Red Wolves will enter the game against UConn as massive underdogs. ESPN has the Huskies as 44-point

favorites in the game. For those familiar with women's college basketball, it's not hard to understand why that is.

The Huskies are one of the most storied programs in women's basketball history. They have won the national championship 12 times, and have appeared in 23 Final Fours. This includes a stretch where they appeared in the Final Four every year from 2008 to 2022. The Huskies head coach, Geno Auriemma, is considered one of, if not the best head coach in the history of women's collegiate basketball. Currently, the projected first-overall pick in the WNBA Draft, point guard Paige Bueckers, plays for the Huskies.

UConn also has the advantage of history. In the history of the women's tournament, no 15-seed has ever won a game in the tournament. But Coach Rogers said that her team was not intimidated.

"This is a dream come true to

coach against one of the GOATs of women's basketball. But we're not scared," Rogers said.

The Red Wolves have plenty going for them as well. A-State currently leads the nation in made three-pointers per game with 10.6 per game. A-State is also familiar with being an underdog, as they defeated a powerful team in James Madison for the conference championship.

Upsets also happen in the women's tournament, although somewhat less frequently than in the men's. While no 15-seed has ever won a game, a 16-seed has. In 1998, the 16th seeded Harvard Crimson defeated the Stanford Cardinal in an upset for the ages, becoming the first 16-seed to ever win a game of either the men's or women's tournament. So an upset is possible for the Red Wolves as well.

**WILL LIVINGSTON**

**SPORTS EDITOR**

After ending the Sun Belt Conference tournament with a crushing loss to Troy, the Arkansas State Red Wolves men's basketball team came roaring back into postseason play with a blowout victory over the Saint Louis Billikens.

The game was over barely after it started. The Red Wolves opened the game with a blistering 17-2 run, powered by three successful three-pointers and dominance in the paint from power forward Izaiyah Nelson.

Nelson had a huge night against SLU. Nelson led the game in scoring with 26 points, and grabbed 10 rebounds. This made the game yet another double-double for "The Big Man."

The Red Wolves were also aided by excellent three-point shooting. A-State shot a massive

16 successful threes in the game, with 10 of them being shot in the first half. The Red Wolves shot 16-37 from three in the game.

The Billikens on the other hand could not buy a bucket. SLU shot 11-27 in the first half, and ended the game shooting 28-58 from the field. Two SLU players recorded double-doubles. Billikens center Robbie Avila led the team in scoring with 22 points.

At halftime, A-State held a healthy 13-point lead over the Billikens with a score of 50-37. The Red Wolves kept their momentum going thanks to thunderous dunks from Nelson and continued success from three. With about three minutes left in the game, starters were pulled and the game was all over.

With the win, the Red Wolves record moves to 25-10, and they will move on to the second round. They will take on

either the North Texas Mean Green or the Furman Paladins, depending on the outcome of their game on Wednesday.

**What's Next:**

National Invitational Tournament, Second Round

**Opponent:** North Texas Mean Green/ Furman Paladins

**Tipoff:** Saturday, Time TBA

**Where:** Denton, Texas

**Tune in:** ESPN2

## Women's hoops deserve more love

**COLUMN BY ALLIE CARSON**

**STAFF WRITER**

With the start of March Madness, men's basketball is at the forefront of every sports fan's mind. However, women's basketball should be just as viewed and thought about.

During the 2024 regular season, the WNBA had a record average attendance season with 9,807, the most over the last 22 years. However, that's nothing compared to the NBA average attendance during the 2023-2024 season at 18,324, nearly double that of the women's league average attendance.

However, the viewership numbers for women's basketball are starting to get better than how they used to be in previous years. The NCAA tournament game, featuring the Caitlyn Clark- led Iowa Hawkeyes and

the undefeated South Carolina Gamecocks had far more viewers than the men's tournament, 19 million viewers for the women's tournament while the men's had 14.82 million viewers.

There's no real reason for these attendance gaps throughout the basketball leagues though as the only real difference between women's basketball and men's basketball is who is on the court.

Many people do believe, however, that's where the problem stems from as people say women's games aren't as fun as men's because of pacing and play style.

When it comes to Arkansas State, there's a major difference between going to a women's game vs a men's game in terms of attendance.

The men's games racked in a total attendance of 77, 542 while the women's game had 22,122, nearly three times

less than the men's games.

The main issue with this is that many of the promotions and events are given during the men's games. Two nationally televised games brought record breaking attendance into First National Bank Arena, with 6,212 fans in attendance for the game against Appalachian State.

The women didn't lose a single game in January, which should have been a good incentive to the fans, who don't want to show up when we're losing games, to come and watch.

The women played just as good as the men did this season, with both teams going to the Sun Belt Championship. It was the women's team that took home the hardware. Yet, the attendance and the watch parties were vastly different.

Only 847 were in attendance for the women's championship while 3,187 went to watch



PHOTO COURTESY OF A-STATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL INSTAGRAM

**The Red Wolves celebrate their victory in the Sun Belt Conference Championship.**

the men's championship. The difference there could be within James Madison's fans or Troy's fans, but statistically, there's no way it wasn't partially the fault of A-State fans.

Meanwhile back in Jonesboro, the men's game watch party took place in the basketball arena while the women's game was in the student affairs lounge. It's a start for sure, but

fans still need to show up and show out for their college's women basketball team, especially if they're having their "year of firsts" like Arkansas State did this past season.