

Catholic teams in the Big Dance: Who has the best chance?

The Jesuits might have more emotional investment in the NCAA men's basketball tournament than any other group in the country. Of the 68 teams vying for the national championship, six of them are from Jesuit colleges. Crieghton, Gonzaga, Loyola University Maryland, Georgetown, Marquette and Xavier are all run by the order. In total, there are nine Catholic schools in the tournament.

Georgetown and Marquette are the highest seeded Catholic teams at third in their regions.

Every team in the tournament has one dream - to cut down the nets in New Orleans next month. But, which Catholic school has the best shot to do that? If you look at my bracket, you'll see that the farthest I have a Catholic school going is the Sweet 16 and that's Marquette out of the West region.



Unfortunately for people who like rooting for Catholic teams, two of them - Notre Dame (7th seed) and Xavier of Ohio (10th seed) - will face one another in the first round of the South Region. At the same time, it guarantees at least one school in the faith moves on to the next round. Notre Dame, under Maryland-native and coach Mike Brey, don't historically last long in the NCAA tournament. This might be a year to shake things up.

Similarly, Xavier has a spotty history in the tournament and just lost the Atlantic-10 title this past weekend. I don't expect either team to go far, but Notre Dame has the better chance.

Marquette, meanwhile, will face either Iona or BYU, who are fighting for the 14th seed tonight, later this week. After that, the Golden Eagles could face Florida or Virginia. Although talented, neither team should be able to hang with Marquette.

St. Bonaventure will need to say a few Hail Marys and Our Fathers because the East region 14th seed has to face Florida State, which won the ACC and is one of the most dangerous teams in the whole tournament right now.

Locally, people have a vested interest in Loyola University Maryland, the 15th seed in the East. Unfortunately for the Greyhounds, they're facing one of the best teams in the country, No. 2 seed Ohio State, runners up in the Big Ten tournament. The Buckeyes have been tested over the years in the NCAA tourney and should be a tough out for any team. If Loyola pulls off the miracle, they might face fellow Jesuit institution Gonzaga in the second round. Gonzaga has been a Cinderella and a disappointment in the tournament before. You never know what you'll get with them.

Creighton, an eighth seed in the West, has a good shot to advance to the second round because they face ninth-seeded Alabama, another team with an inconsistent tournament history. Creighton would then likely face No. 1 seed North Carolina in the second round and that's not a good draw, obviously.

Georgetown, meanwhile, could go deep in the Midwest region, but has a potentially tough second round game with San Diego State if that team gets past NC State. Keep an eye on San Diego State. In that same region, seventh-seeded St. Mary's could be a winner in the first round against 10-seeded Purdue, but will have to scrap and claw to have a chance against No. 2 seeded Kansas in the second round.

If you're filling out your bracket based on faith, remember to keep track of Georgetown and Marquette. Good luck!

Remember, if you want in on the Catholic Review tournament challenge, which comes with a \$50 gas card for the top prize, email me at mpalmer@CatholicReview.org and follow us at [Facebook.com/CatholicReview](https://www.facebook.com/CatholicReview).