Pocatello basketball tournament: March Madness-Catholic style

March Madness is not limited to the NCAA. Among passionate Catholic basketball fans in Idaho, February might belong to the legendary Sacred Heart Halliassky Tournament in Boise, but Pocatello’s Holy Spirit Catholic Tournament owns March.

Since basketball is a game of numbers, here’s a look at the Holy Spirit Basketball Tournament by the numbers:

29. Years that the Catholic schools’ basketball tournament has been hosted in Pocatello.

54. Total teams. When the tournament started there were 8. This year’s field included 23 teams of 5th- and 6th-grade boys, 17 teams of 5th- and 6th-grade girls, eight 4th-grade boys’ teams and six 4th-grade girls’ teams.

29. Teams from the Greater Salt Lake area from Ogden south to Draper. 22 teams were from the Treasure Valley and three teams represented the host school, Holy Spirit Catholic School in Pocatello.

134. Total games played. 82 “regular season” games that determined the ranking for 52 “playoff” games.

6. Games being played at the same time during 20 hours of tournament action and then 5 additional hours of championship games.

By Gene Fadness

Editor

If you’re a Gonzaga basketball fan living in the Treasure Valley, the third-best news you could hear is that your team is going to be playing in Boise.

The second-best news: You’ve scored tickets.

The best news: Gonzaga wins both games.

At Taco Bell Arena on the Boise State campus, the Bulldogs (better known as the “Zags”) knocked off North Carolina-Greensboro 68-64 and then Big Ten power Ohio State, 90-84.

Taco Bell arena got loud during the win over Ohio State, said Brian Connolly, a Bishop Kelly High School graduate and co-president of the Boise Alumni Chapter for Gonzaga.

“The Boise fans were definitely underdog – in this case, North Carolina-Greensboro,” Connolly says. “That was a student,” Sterling said. “It was a ton of fun. The energy was amazing, especially at the second game. I can understand how going to the games can be addictive. It was just so energetic and great to be a part of a giant Gonzaga community.”

The Zags didn’t have the same volume of support during the first game, with many fans carrying on the NCAA tradition of cheering on the underdog – in this case, North Carolina-Greensboro. Gonzaga is no longer considered an underdog, no matter where it plays, after many appearances in the tournament and last year’s run to the national title game before losing to the North Carolina Tar Heels. (The consensus favorite underdogs for the entire tournament came from another Jesuit school, the University of Loyola-Chicago Ramblers.) You add to your sentimental favorite aura when you have a 98-year old nun as a team chaplain. “We need a Sister Jean of our own,” Connolly says.

Gonzaga did make it to the Sweet 16 before losing to Florida State in Los Angeles. If you’re going to lose, Zag fans here say, do it away from home.

Gonzaga’s presence in the Treasure Valley extends beyond basketball. There are more than 1,000 alumni here and another thousand Gonzaga parents. According to the alumni association, Boise is a great place for Zags to work. Top employer of Gonzaga graduates are Hewlett-Packard, Micron Technology, the Boise School District, POWER Engineers and Idaho Power companies.

The Boise chapter, following its school’s Jesuit social mission, sponsors an annual event packing food at the Idaho Community Food Bank. They also conduct a bike ride to raise money for scholarships for potential Gonzaga students.

Gonzaga alumni also act as mentors to some of the 153 Gonzaga students who come from the Treasure Valley. 80 of those undergraduate students. The Gonzaga Alumni Mentor Program (GAMP) involves 101 mentees and 72 mentors in the Boise area.

Gonzaga's first round games 68-64 and 90-84 were instrumental in making this year’s tournament a success.

Maria Smith and Greg McReynolds, 80 of those undergraduate students. The Gonzaga Alumni Mentor Program (GAMP) involves 101 mentees and 72 mentors in the Boise area. Gonzaga students.

One thing is for sure, Gonzaga’s presence in Boise includes more than basketball. It’s a student,” Sterling said. “It was a ton of fun. The energy was amazing, especially at the second game. I can understand how going to the games can be addictive. It was just so energetic and great to be a part of a giant Gonzaga community.”

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