

## Thursday, March 15

### **2-Star Best Bet**

#### **\*\*Syracuse (-15) over NC Asheville**

Syracuse is easily the worst of the #1 seeds (I rate them as the 7th best team in the nation without C Fab Melo and they were 6th with Melo) and the Orange are just 1-6 ATS in their last 7 games. However, Syracuse did perform relatively better this season against worse teams and NC Asheville was relatively worse against better teams. Asheville is an aggressive team that attacks the basket and draws a lot of fouls (27 free throw attempts per game), but it's tough to penetrate the Syracuse zone and the Bulldogs aren't a good enough 3-point shooting team (35.3%) to really hurt the Orange from the perimeter. My ratings favor Syracuse by 14 ½ points without Melo (with a total of 149 ½ points) but Asheville doesn't appear to be the type of team that matches up well with the Orange. Syracuse is also 8-0 ATS as an NCAA tournament first round favorite of 7 points or more after a loss since 1992. The Orange also apply to a very good 82-29-4 ATS round 1 situation at -16 points or less. Also, teams seeded #1 are a profitable 48-35-1 ATS in round 1 of the tournament since 1991, including 6-0 ATS when favored by 19 points or less. Having Melo suddenly ruled ineligible will probably assure that the rest of the Orange don't go through the motions and Melo's absence probably won't hurt them much in this game – although it probably will in later round. I'll take Syracuse in a 2-Star Best Bet at -16 points or less

### **2-Star Best Bet**

#### **\*\*Murray State (-4 ½) over Colorado State**

Murray State started the season with impressive wins over good teams Southern Miss (by 9 points on a neutral court), Dayton (by 17 points at home), Memphis (by 4 point at Memphis) and entered conference play unbeaten. The Racers didn't have much competition in the Ohio Valley Conference, as they were more than 12 points better than every other team in the league. The absence of challenging games led to many lackluster performances but the Racers rose to the occasion in a resounding 65-51 home win over a very good St. Mary's team in their Bracket Buster game in mid-February and they closed with 6 spread wins in their last 7 games. Because of so many letdown games, the Racers are better than their average game rating and their 30-1 straight up record, including those 4 wins over good teams, shows that they can raise their level of play when they are challenged. Murray State won't be in a letdown mode today and my NCAA Tournament ratings are designed to adjust for the letdown games a team played during the season and focuses more on how teams performed against other good teams. Those ratings favor Murray State by 5 ½ points on a neutral floor (with a total of 134 ½ points), but I think the line on this game should be 7 points with the additional advantage the Racers have playing in their home state of Kentucky. Teams playing in their home state are 130-87-3 ATS over the years and Murray State applies to a 54-24-1 ATS subset of that. I also don't mind going against a Colorado State team that pulled off some upsets at home but really struggled away from home against good teams. The Rams played 7 games away from home against good teams and they didn't cover the spread in any of them, losing to Stanford, Duke, Wyoming, New Mexico, UNLV, and San Diego State twice by an average of 17.7 points with an average game rating that was 10 points worse than their overall average rating. I'll take Murray State in a 2-Star Best Bet at -5 points or less and for 3-Stars at -3 or less.

### **2-Star Best Bet**

#### **\*\*Baylor (-7 ½) over South Dakota State**

South Dakota State has a great player in G Nate Wolters, who averages 21.3 points, 5.2 rebounds, 6.0 assists, and 1.7 steals per game. However, Baylor's Pierre Jackson is a good defensive guard and the

Jackrabbits will have no answer for Baylor's Perry Jones III, who along with Quincy Acy should dominate in the paint. South Dakota State allowed opponents to make 50.5% of their 2-point shots despite playing a small conference schedule and Baylor has made 50.8% of their 2-point shots despite facing a tough schedule of teams. South Dakota State will try to compete by knocking down their 3-point shots, which they're capable of doing, but Baylor applies to a 34-5-1 ATS subset of an 84-30-3 ATS first round situation and the line is fair (my ratings favor Baylor by 7 ½ points with a total of 144 points). It's been mentioned numerous times by analysts that South Dakota State won at Washington by 19 points, which can happen when you randomly make 63% of your 3-point shots while the other teams makes just 28%, but the Jackrabbits also lost by 16 points at Minnesota and by 11 points at Georgia in their other games against decent major conference teams. Overall, South Dakota State was relatively worse this season against better teams and Baylor is much better than Washington, Minnesota, and Georgia. I'll take Baylor in a 2-Star Best Bet at -8 points or less

- **4-Star Best Bet**

***\*\*\*\*INDIANA (-6) over New Mexico State***

New Mexico State had their way with the lowly Western Athletic Conference by dominating the painted area of the floor. The Aggies are not a good outside shooting team (just 32.7% on 3-pointers) but they had their way against weak competition inside and also got to the free throw line more than any team in the nation. The lack of shooting wasn't a problem against WAC opponents, but it's likely to be a problem when the Aggies step up in class today. Indiana is not a great defensive team by Big 10 standards, but they do rate a decent 58th in the nation in compensated defensive efficiency (points per possession) and the Hoosier's defensive weakness is defending the 3-point line (34.9% allowed), which won't be a problem in this game against an Aggies team that doesn't take many 3-point shots (just 14 per game) and isn't good at making them. The Indiana is actually pretty good defending the paint and the Hoosiers have a pretty solid height advantage over New Mexico State in this game, so Aggies' star Wendell McKines won't have it as easy inside as he normally does. Indiana's defense actually rates higher than New Mexico State's offense after adjusting for opponents and the Hoosiers' extremely efficient offense (4th in the nation) should score pretty easily against a New Mexico State defense that is only slightly better than the average defensive rating that Indiana faced this season. New Mexico State was relatively worse against better teams this season and the Aggies were out-scored by an average of 6.8 points in 5 games against good teams (New Mexico twice, Southern Miss twice and Arizona). Those teams are 6.4 points worse collectively than Indiana's rating and my ratings favor the Hoosiers by 10 ½ points in this game (with a total of 155 points). In addition to the line value the Hoosiers apply to a solid 34-11-1 ATS round 1 bounce-back situation while New Mexico State applies to a negative 36-97-3 ATS NCAA tournament situation that is an even worse 7-43-3 ATS when applying to teams seeded #10 or worse. The Hoosiers will be without G Verdell Jones III, but they're actually better offensively without Jones' 42% shooting and the defense has been the same in the 4 games Jones has missed. I'll take Indiana in a 4-Star Best Bet at -6 points or less and for 3-Stars at higher than -6.