

## Saturday, March 17

### 2 Star Best Bet

#### **\*\*Murray State (+5) over Marquette**

Murray State's average game rating isn't that impressive, but the Racers were in letdown mode for most of their conference season against the weak teams of the Ohio Valley Conference after some impressive wins in the pre-conference season (beat Southern Miss by 9, beat Dayton by 17, won at Memphis by 4). Murray State got a wakeup call with their February 9th loss to Tennessee State (their only loss of the season) and the Racers have gone 7-1 ATS since then, including an impressive 65-51 win over St. Mary's and Thursday's dominating 58-41 win over Colorado State. My ratings rate Murray State as the 17th best team in the nation, which is certainly higher than a rating based on the average rating of all of their games (they're 42nd in the Pomeroy ratings) and I favor the Racers by a point (with a total of 138 points) in this game against an overrated Marquette team. Beating up on a BYU team that doesn't play well against other good teams is different than facing a Murray State team that plays their best against other good teams. Teams playing in their home state are 132-89-3 ATS in the NCAA Tournament and Murray State should have a pretty large rooting section. I'll take Murray State in a 2-Star Best Bet at +4 points or more and for 3-Stars at +6 or more.

- **3 Star Best Bet**

#### **\*\*\*Baylor (-7 ½) over Colorado**

Colorado's improbable run continued on Thursday with a 68-64 win over UNLV, but to only win that game by 4 points is actually unimpressive given that the Buffaloes made 58% of their 3-point shots (7 of 12) while UNLV made just 9 of 36 from long range and also shot just 52% from the free throw line. In other words, Colorado's win was more about positive variance (i.e. luck) than it was about them playing well. Colorado has now won 5 straight games but that streak is likely to end today as the Buffs apply to a very negative 37-100-3 ATS NCAA tournament letdown situation and a 2-23 ATS round 2 situation. My ratings favor Baylor by 8 ½ points (134 ½ total points) and I'll take Baylor in a 3-Star Best Bet at -8 or less and for 2-Stars up to -9 points.

### 2 Star Best Bet

#### **\*\*Indiana (-6) over Virginia Commonwealth**

VCU pulled off another NCAA Tournament upset with a 62-59 win as a 7 ½ point dog against Wichita State, but I don't see an upset today. As I wrote about in my round 1 analysis, VCU plays better against better teams because their ability to force turnovers leads to easy baskets regardless of how good the opposing team's defense is – so the Rams play relatively better against good defensive teams. Indiana is just average in the turnover department so I expect VCU to have a positive turnover margin, but VCU's offense is still bad (41% shooting) despite all the easy baskets they get off turnovers and the Rams don't appear capable of taking advantage of a mediocre Indiana defense. The Hoosiers, meanwhile, have the nation's 4th most efficient offense and they should be able to score pretty easily when they don't turn the ball over, which will more than make up for the negative turnover differential. My ratings using all games for both teams would favor Indiana by 8 ½ points, but I get 6 ½ points when I factor in VCU's ability to play better against better teams. Aside from Thursday's win over Wichita, the Rams really haven't played that well against other good teams this season, as they split their 4 games against the Colonial's other good teams Georgia State and Drexel, lost by 15 on neutral court to Seton Hall, and lost by 8 at Alabama. The Rams' average game rating in those 7 games against other good teams is actually slightly worse than their overall rating. The Rams apply to a negative 2-23 ATS round 2 letdown situation, which is the reason for this play, and I'll take Indiana in a 2-Star Best

Bet at -6 points or less.