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## Why you should root against Indiana University, and for Butler, in NCAA tourney

By: Neal McCluskey – March 19, 2013

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If you love March Madness, but not unfair competition, there are three top seeds you just can't root for: Indiana, Louisville or Kansas. That leaves only Gonzaga as a top seed you can support in this year's NCAA basketball tournament. You can also, though, pull for any members of the soon-to-be-new Big East.

What makes Indiana Louisville and Kansas – all storied programs – unsupportable if you favor fair play? Are they stacked with ringers, cheaters, or just plain dirty dealers? No, but they have big subsidies from state taxpayers that give them huge advantages over little guys like the Zags.

The numbers are startling. Gonzaga, has a total enrollment of 7,764 students, making it a midget compared to its top-seeded peers. Louisville's enrollment rings in at 21,153, Kansas has 27,939 students, and Indiana 42,731.

Why the mammoth differential? As a private college, Gonzaga has to charge students a greater share of the cost of education than heavily subsidized state institutions, greatly limiting its ability to attract students and grow. To get a sense of the handicap, the latest data from the State Higher Education Executive Officers shows that in 2012 state and local subsidies stood at \$4,869 per student in Indiana; \$5,184 in Kansas; and \$6,269 in Kentucky.

These subsidies can lead to substantial athletic advantages, in particular the huge fan bases public universities enjoy. These enable them to fill seats in giant stadiums and get millions of television eyeballs on games, especially football, the big cash cow. That, in turn, generates major revenues to support other sports, which either keeps big state schools in conferences with lucrative television contracts, or gets them in. And it doesn't hurt that state and local governments often kick in big bucks for stadia and arenas, as Kentucky has recently done for Louisville's football stadium and basketball arena.

In other words, thanks to forced taxpayer support, the rich keep getting richer.

Which brings us to the new Big East.

Formed as a basketball-centric league in the late 1970s, the Big East as we've known it has incorporated both schools that play bowl-division football and those that do not. The end result has been constant tension between the "football" and "basketball" schools, and a model that has fallen victim to the poaching of football institutions by leagues such

as the Atlantic Coast Conference and Big Ten. Louisville – which in addition to being a number one seed in the NCAA Tournament won this year’s Big East tourney – will be departing for the ACC in the 2014-15 academic year.

What is about to emerge after all of this pillaging is a new Big East, one founded by private institutions that don’t play bowl-division football. It’s the only configuration likely to give the conference stability, but it will also draw on much smaller fan bases than the “power” conferences inhabited by Kansas, Indiana, and soon, Louisville.

The founding members of the new conference are Georgetown, Villanova, Marquette, St. John’s, Providence, Seton Hall, and DePaul, and they are likely to be joined – as of this writing, there’s been no official announcement – by Butler Xavier and Creighton. The schools’ average enrollment, 11,970, is roughly half of Louisville’s and just a quarter of Indiana’s. That’s a big differential in potential fans and viewers, without even considering how many people root for their home-state schools even if they didn’t attend them.

If you want a level playing field – er, court – in college hoops, root for Gonzaga and the new Big East, and against big state schools. Anything else would be, well, madness.