

Hoping for a foul



JAY KELLEY/Colby Free Press

Karli Shirley watched a pop-up foul out of bounds in the Colby Community College softball double-header against Garden City on Thursday. The Lady Trojans split, losing the first game 10-9 in extra innings and coming back for a 7-4 win.

No underdog in the Final Four this season

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Those who embrace lovable underdogs have no team to call their own in Minneapolis this week.

This year's gathering is for Duke, Maryland, Michigan State and Arizona — four big-name teams from big-name conferences with low seeds and star players. All four spent good portions of the season at or near the top of the polls. "Not only do we have four really good teams, but we have four teams who are playing their best basketball right now," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "That doesn't usually happen at the Final Four."

The Duke-Maryland semifinal Saturday is the fourth meeting between Atlantic Coast Conference rivals who have already played two of the most entertaining games of the season. The Arizona-Michigan State meeting is a pick'em contest between the defending national champion and the pre-

season No. 1. Sure, all these teams have been through tough times, too.

But it hardly comes as a shock to see any of them here. Just ask Illinois coach Bill Self, whose team played all four.

"Three of the four teams may have the best offensive firepower in the tournament," said Self, speaking of Arizona, Duke and Maryland. "Then you have a team that labors sometimes to score points, but is probably the best defensively, and the best rebounding team."

That would be defending champion Michigan State (28-4), which made it despite the loss of Mateen Cleaves, Morris Peterson and A.J. Granger from last year's championship team. There were plenty of people, including Spartans coach Tom Izzo, who thought a return to the Final Four was a stretch.

But Izzo still has a wealth of talent

in Charlie Bell, Jason Richardson and Zach Randolph. And these are the defending champions, who won the Big Ten for the fourth straight time and never fell out of the Top 5.

"We've got a different team in a lot of ways and we kind of took things a day at a time and let them just happen," Izzo said.

Arizona (27-7) also went through tough times, slipping to 8-5 in January and stumbling from suspensions and the death of coach Lute Olson's wife.

More recently, the Wildcats have looked like the team picked as the pre-season No. 1. Since Olson returned from a two-week absence, the Wildcats have gone 17-2.

"They were placed under a lot of adversity this year, and it was not a case of my losing confidence in them," Olson said. "Sometimes they may have thought that, but it's like I tell them, the day I'm not on them is the day they should start worrying about things."

Duke, of course, is Duke — a program deep in talent and tradition that has been here nine times since 1986.

Its worst moments this year came when Carlos Boozer missed the ACC tournament and the first two rounds of the NCAAs with a broken foot. The Blue Devils (33-4) substituted Casey Sanders and went 5-0. Late in the season, senior guard Nate James struggled, and Krzyzewski replaced him in the starting lineup with freshman Chris Duhon. Duke is 8-0 since that change.

If there's any semblance of an underdog here, it's Maryland (25-10), a 97-year-old program making its first Final Four appearance.

The Terrapins lost five of six in midseason after blowing a 10-point lead in the final 54 seconds against Duke and seemed in jeopardy of missing the tournament.

But it would be wrong to call them a complete surprise. They were a Top-5 team to start the season.

A month after their collapse, they beat Duke at Cameron Indoor Stadium, then nearly beat the Blue Devils again in the ACC semifinals, losing 84-82 on a last-second tip-in.

Tourney Schedule

Here is the schedule for the Men's Final Four games at The Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome in Minneapolis.

Saturday
Michigan State (28-4) vs. Arizona

(27-7), 5:42 p.m.
Duke (33-4) vs. Maryland (25-10), following first game
National Championship Monday, April 2
Semifinal winners at 9:18 p.m.

Women's Final Four is Cinderella story

ST. LOUIS (AP) — About 10 minutes remained in Southwest Missouri State's Final Four practice session Thursday when coach Cheryl Burnett pulled her players off the floor.

All except Jackie Stiles. Her prolific scoring is the reason the Lady Bears (29-5) emerged from the mid-major Missouri Valley Conference and made it to the national stage as a No. 5 seed. The rest of the session became a personal shootaround for Stiles.

Fans clapped rhythmically as the 5-foot-8 guard drained shot after shot from the perimeter, and when the show was over they gave her a standing ovation.

"This is definitely very wild," Stiles said. "It's been quite a ride."

Big Ten regular-season champion Purdue (30-6) is the latest team that will try to control the NCAA women's career scoring leader, who is averaging 30.6 points, on Friday night. Coach Kristy Curry isn't sure that can be done.

Stiles, who set the NCAA career scoring record earlier this month, has 3,371 points after getting 32 in the West Regional final against Washington.

"Can you stop her?" Curry asked. "No one has stopped her. But we're going to try."

Good luck, Stiles, who has a very

quick first step on the drive and an accurate 3-point shot, has done it all.

"Burnett began recruiting Stiles, from the tiny town of Claflin, Kan., at age 12.

In the last month, the nation has discovered Stiles, too. Despite her celebrity, Stiles is having no trouble concentrating.

But there's more to Southwest Missouri than just Stiles.

Tara Mitchem scored 23 points and had a perfect shooting game, going 7-for-7 from the field, 3-for-3 from 3-point range and 6-for-6 from the free-throw line against Washington.

"I think the thing everybody gets focused on is Jackie, Jackie, Jackie," Curry said. "Southwest Missouri came because they have a great team."

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Area Schedule

Saturday, March 31
Colby High School varsity and junior varsity track at McCook at 10 a.m.

Colby Community College hosts Seward County at 1 p.m. at Trojan Field.

Baseball at Garden City Community College at 1 p.m.

Track at Kearney, Neb. Rodeo at Garden City.

Monday, April 2
Colby High School junior varsity tennis at Garden City at 8:30 a.m.

Quinter High School junior varsity track at Ness City at 3:30 p.m.

Wheatland High School freshman/sophomore track at Ness City at 3:30 p.m.

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