

Opinion: Who's got (better) game: College hoops or the pros?

By Fred Bowen, Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.03.17

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North Carolina's Tony Bradley (5) reaches for a rebound against Gonzaga's Zach Collins during the second half in the finals of the Final Four NCAA college basketball tournament, April 3, 2017, in Glendale, Arizona. Photo from: AP Photo/Chris Steppig, Pool.

This opinion piece was written by Fred Bowen, an author who has written 21 sports books for kids.

The NCAA basketball Final Fours will be played this weekend, and the National Basketball Association (NBA) playoffs are just around the corner.

Kids are thinking about hoops. So let's look at an old sports question: Which is better, pro basketball or the college game?

Some folks like the pros, while others prefer college hoops. Just like some kids like chocolate ice cream and others always order vanilla.

But let's get something out of the way. The NBA clearly has better players. It's the same with the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA). I think it's silly when fans argue that some dominant college team could beat a professional team.

No way! Even the best college team has only two, three or maybe four players who go on to play in the pros. Every player on an NBA or WNBA team is a pro player. Even the worst pro team would beat the best college team.



But the best players do not always make the most exciting game. One of the best games I ever saw was an overtime high school field hockey game years ago that was close and hard fought.

It's the same with the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) tournament games. The tournament games are super exciting because it is win-or-go-home for each team. NBA playoff games are like that only in the final game of a seven-game series.

Similarly, college teams play fewer games during the season, and so every game is more important. NBA teams play 82 games during the regular season. Regular-season NBA games run into each other, and no single game seems that important.

I'll admit college rivalries are more intense. I can't think of a pro matchup that can equal North Carolina against Duke, or Kentucky against Louisville.



Still, pro games are more evenly matched. Pro leagues are designed to be more competitive through such things as the player draft and rules about how much teams can pay their players. So it's harder for any pro team to stay on top for a long time.

College teams such as Kansas, Kentucky and North Carolina are always near the top because they can recruit the best players. Although a couple of surprises - South Carolina and Oregon - made it to the men's Final Four this year.

It's close, but I'll take the pro game. Sure I'll watch the Final Fours. But ... LeBron James, Stephen Curry, James Harden. And then there's Russell Westbrook or Elena Delle Donne.

It's always a thrill to watch the very best in action.