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SEC gets two No. 1 seeds in women's NCAA Tournament

BY CHUCK SCHOFFNER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Southeastern Conference powers LSU and Tennessee received No. 1 seeds in the NCAA women's basketball tournament on Sunday, joined by ACC tournament champ North Carolina and a team that reached that level for the first time in program history: Michigan State.

The Big Ten tournament champions edged Stanford, which just last week climbed atop The Associated Press poll for the first time this year, to take the No. 1 spot in a bracket that's sure to be tough.

The Kansas City Regional includes the top-ranked Cardinal as the No. 2 seed; Connecticut, winner of the last three national championships, gets the No. 3 spot; and Kansas State, runner-up in the Big 12 tournament, was No. 4.

"We're just kind of ready to play a game, to be honest," said Michigan State coach Joanne P. McCallie, wearing a wide grin with her jubilant team behind her. "We've had a week off and these girls are getting grumpy."

Stanford coach Tara Vanderveer looked defiant when she learned her top-ranked Cardinal would be a No. 2 — the first No. 1 ranked team

not to earn a top tournament seed in since Texas in 1984.

"I have no reaction to that," Vanderveer said. "We're really excited to be in the tournament. I love coaching this team."

LSU (29-2) landed in the Chattanooga Regional, the closest site to its campus. Tennessee was No. 1 in Philadelphia and North Carolina topped the Tempe bracket.

The women's tournament scrapped the East, Midwest, Midwest and West designations for regionals this year and replaced them with the name of the city hosting the regional semifinals and finals.

The other No. 2 seeds were ACC co-champion Duke (Chattanooga), Big 12 champion Baylor (Tempe) and Big Ten co-champion Ohio State (Philadelphia).

LSU, which was ranked No. 1 much of the season, won the SEC regular-season championship, then dropped a two-point game to Tennessee in the finals of the conference tournament. Tennessee (26-4) was the regular-season runner-up, losing only to LSU in league play.

It's the 17th time in the 24 years of the NCAA women's tournament that

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SEC: Florida blows it open with late second-half streak

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Lee, drove right by Kentucky freshman Rajon Rondo for a layup. The Wildcats turned it over, and Walsh hit another three to make it 51-44.

Ravi Moss broke the run of 11 straight points with a 10-foot jumper, but that was merely a brief respite in Florida's dominance. Roberson swished a three; Walsh hit a leaner in the lane; Corey Brewer scored on a fastbreak layup; Walsh made one free throw, and Brewer scored on another drive to make it 61-46.

At that point, the Florida bench was hopping up and down, knowing the Gators had finally broken Kentucky's stranglehold on the tournament. The Wildcat faithful began heading quietly for the exits.

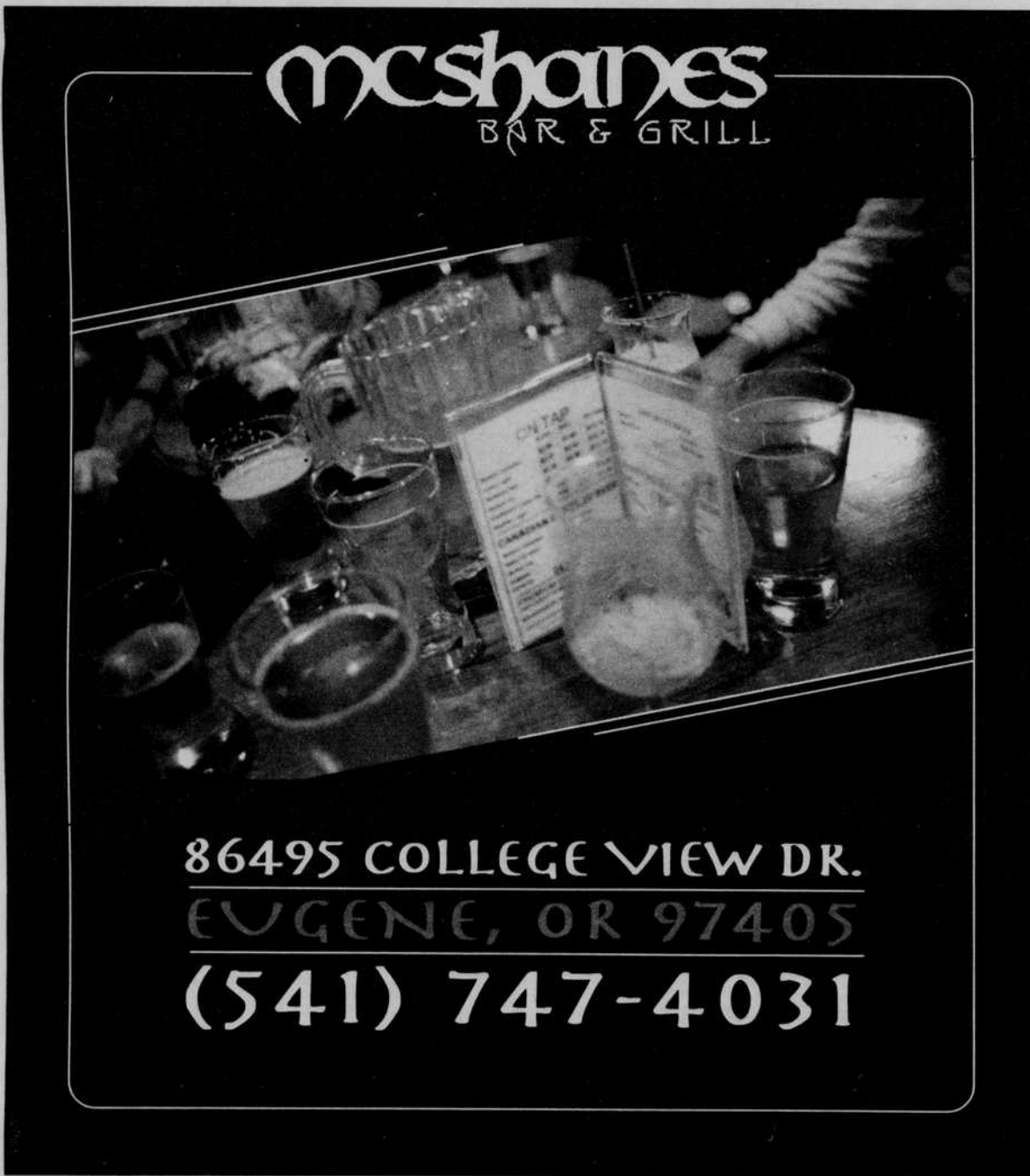
With 20 seconds to go, Florida coach

Billy Donovan called a timeout to give his starters, especially the Big Three, a chance to get one more standing ovation as they came off the court. When the horn sounded, Brewer hurled the ball roofward and leaped in the air at midcourt, pumping his right fist.

Kentucky shot only 37.5 percent from the field, including a dismal 2-of-19 outside the three-point arc, depriving the Wildcats of one of their favorite weapons. Florida also dominated the boards, seizing control in the first half and finishing with a 48-31 edge.

Lee had a staggering 17 rebounds, and Al Horford chipped in with nine.

Kelenna Azubuike led Kentucky with 17 points, but none of his teammates cracked double figures. Sparks missed all six of his three-pointers and managed just four points.



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