

ASU women's basketball team gets NCAA Tournament bid

First-year coach Molly Miller leads Sun Devils into tournament for first time since 2019

By Scott Bordow, ASU News
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They waited and waited and waited, and as each minute of the Selection Show for the 2026 NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament dragged on Sunday, the room got quieter and quieter.

The band stopped playing. The cheerleaders stopped cheering. And the members of the Arizona State women's basketball team who had gathered at alumni-owned [Hundred Mile Brewing Co.](#) in Tempe to watch the selection began to wonder if their hoped-for celebration would turn into disappointment.

"It was nerve-racking," senior guard Marley Washenitz said.

Then, at 5:39 p.m., with only one team left to announce in the bracket, there it was: Arizona State University, in its first year under coach Molly Miller, had made the tournament.

The players jumped into the air and madly hugged each other. Streamers propelled confetti onto everyone and everything.

The who and when — ASU and the University of Virginia, both No. 10 seeds, will square off in a First Four game Thursday in Iowa City, Iowa — was, for a brief moment, inconsequential.

Instead, there was jubilation over an accomplishment and a season that few thought possible.

After all, only three players returned from the 2024–25 team that finished 10-22 and 3-15 in the Big 12 Conference. Miller brought in 10 new players. That kind of turnover usually requires a period of transition.

Instead, ASU (24-10 overall) is in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2019. Miller's 24 wins were the most in program history for a first-year coach and the most since ASU won 26 games in the 2015–16 season.

“I just think it’s incredible what (Miller) and her staff did,” former ASU women’s basketball coach Charli Turner Thorne said. “Really impressive doesn’t seem strong enough.”

When ASU Athletics Director Graham Rossini hired Miller in May 2025, he spoke glowingly about the winning culture she had created in her previous coaching stops.

Ten months later, that culture is evident at ASU.

“You could tell early on that she put together a special staff,” Rossini said. “And then as she started putting the roster together, you’re like, ‘Wow, there’s a lot of experience on this team.’ And then you saw them play, and you could just tell there’s a little edge here that’s starting to develop.

“I’m just super proud of them. They put in a ton of work. They deserve this. And it’s just fun to celebrate these kinds of moments.”

Guard Gabby Elliott was one of the 10 new players on ASU’s roster. Elliott, who led the team in scoring with 16 points per game, said she knew from the team’s first practices that it was good enough to make the tournament.

“Coach really just recruited the right people,” Elliott said. “She really just handpicked everybody from the coaching staff to the players, and it worked out perfectly.”

When Miller cobbled together her roster in the offseason, she looked for specific characteristics in her players. They had to care for one another, be ferocious and competitive, and work hard.

“That combination,” she said, “makes for a really good locker room and a really great product on the basketball floor.”

It didn’t take long for Miller to believe her team might be better than expected. She said she could tell from summer practices that the players had bought into her teaching. And her belief was confirmed when ASU lost to No. 15 Baylor by only three points in February.

“Even though we lost that game, I was like, ‘We can hang with the top 25 teams in the country if we play really good basketball,’” Miller said.

Few have a better perspective about ASU basketball — and coaching — than Turner Thorne, who coached the Sun Devils from 1996 to 2022. Turner Thorne, who went to several ASU practices, called Miller a “really good defensive coach” and an “elite” motivator.

“She knows how to push the right buttons,” Turner Thorne said.

Washenitz, who played last season for the University of Pittsburgh, said Miller’s ability to demand the most from her players but also make basketball enjoyable was instrumental in the success of this year’s team.

“We have fun, and I think that’s the thing a lot of coaches miss now in college basketball because it’s a business,” Washenitz said. “People’s jobs are at stake every day. But she made sure we were having fun, and when you have fun playing the sport, you love it. It all just comes to fruition.”

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Fruition, on Sunday, was an interminable wait followed by a joyous eruption. And in the middle of it all was Miller, a wide smile on her face, a first step taken.

“I am really fond of this team,” Miller said. “Their ability to put together the resume that they needed to make it to the dance and change the narrative has been phenomenal all year long.

“I’m so very proud of them.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



ASU women's basketball head coach Molly Miller (center left) and the team celebrate after hearing that they made a bid to the 2026 NCAA Tournament on March 15. Photo by Emma Fitzgerald/Arizona State University

Gallery



The ASU women's basketball team watches the Selection Show for the 2026 NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament on Sunday, March 15.



ASU women's basketball head coach Molly Miller (left) and players dance while watching the Selection Show on Sunday.



The team poses for a photo with Sparky on Sunday after finding out they made a bid for the 2026 NCAA Tournament.



Members of the ASU women's basketball team sign a frame during a NCAA Tournament invite watch party on March 15.