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It's mine! Duke's Taylor King, right, guarded UNC's Tyler Hansbrough during the first half of a college basketball game in Durham, N.C., on March 8.  
GERRY BROOME/AP

## DISPLACED BY MARCH MADNESS

**Boyfriends will just have to be patient while female basketball fans take time for what's really important: watching the games.**

By Jennifer Willis  
from the March 20, 2008 edition

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After being single for years, I've started seeing someone new. And he's about to become a college basketball tournament widower.

Surveys estimate that about one-third of all college basketball fans are women. So when the NCAA tournament rolls around (March 20 – April 7), Mike could find himself in good company among the other temporarily displaced boyfriends – or he could learn to like basketball.

We already have our fair share of differences – he's a conservative, vegetarian Gentile; I'm a liberal, carnivorous Jew. But this potential conflict promises some entertainment value, as my new beau discovered when he bravely sat down at my place for an Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) game: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) versus Duke University in Durham, N.C.

Mike quickly decided that watching me was more interesting than the game itself.

I went to Duke and am a serious Blue Devils basketball fan. I have Duke sweat shirts, T-shirts, hats, and sweat pants. I have a giant – size XL – Duke hockey jersey that comes out of the closet for important round-ball games. I have to be careful not to trip myself up while wearing it – I'm 5-foot, 4-inches tall and weigh 120 pounds – but that's part of the fun.

UNC is Duke's biggest rival. These matchups are always tense and exciting – the best college hoops has to offer.

A few minutes before tip-off time this particular Saturday night, I pulled the giant jersey on over my head and turned on ESPN. Mike showed up and stopped in his tracks when he saw me. My sleeves were about eight inches too long, and

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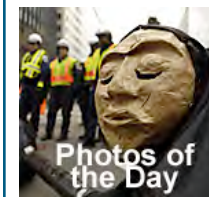
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the hockey jersey's hem fell below my knees.

Mike's a hockey player. A curious smile spread across his face, and I wondered if the Duke superjersey offended his sensibilities.

"Umm, nice dress," he commented.

After that, I barely noticed he was there. UNC was leading by a large margin, but the Blue Devils were rallying, closing the gap. Mike expressed disbelief that a basketball game is made up of only two 20-minute halves.

He wasn't sure whether to sit or stand, because I was in constant motion – perched on the arm of the couch, then jumping up and dancing around in a circle when Duke's Greg Paulus sank a three-pointer. I snapped my fingers and shifted my weight from one foot to the other when UNC stole the ball. Mike thought I was having some kind of fit.

Crouched on the floor like a feral cat, I dug my hands into my hair as UNC's Tyler Hansbrough got the ball and squared his feet. "No, no, no!" Hansbrough made the basket. I climbed to my feet and muttered at the screen.

Mike erupted in laughter. "I never knew basketball could be this much fun."

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I cleared my throat. I'm unused to being the center of attention. "Hansbrough's a great player," I stammered. "He's just on the wrong team."

Mike walked me back toward the couch and patted me on the shoulder. "Sure. Whatever you say."

The final minutes of the second half were ticking away. Duke was losing. I silently contemplated burning the superjersey before the conference championships. Then the game was over.

Mike tapped me on the knee. "So, what happens now?"

"It's tournament time, baby."

His eyes glazed over as I rattled off the ACC Tournament details. "Then on Sunday, after all the conference championship games, they do the bracketology program to announce what teams are in which region for the national tournament, and who the four No. 1 seeds are."

"Bracketology?" His eyebrows were practically even with his scalp. "And you actually watch that?"

He didn't get the importance of seeding and the advantage a team gets by being able to play in its home region. "It means you don't have to travel as much, so you're rested," I explained. "If Duke or Carolina gets top seed in the East Region, they'll get to play their pod games in Raleigh and have the regional championship in Charlotte."

"Pod games. Sure." Mike thought I was making this up. I considered putting him on the phone with my father – a die-hard University of Virginia Wahoo – but recognized that there might be better circumstances under which to introduce my new boyfriend to my dad. I reached over and tickled his ankle instead. "You'll learn."

I've since e-mailed him the game schedule for the ACC Tournament, along with a preview for the NCAA March Madness games. If nothing else, he'll know when he has a shot at getting my attention and when he'll be on his own.

Mike doesn't love basketball the way I do. That's fine. We've tried sharing activities before – he's gotten me up on in-line skates, and I've lured him out rock climbing. It's all part of the give and take of any relationship.

But if he wants to kiss me between now and April 7, it will have to be at half time.



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