

Teens recreate March Madness in mom's basement using Twitch & Xbox 360

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff
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Josh Safran, age 19, was facing months without school. To make things even worse, the basketball fan and media studies student had no March Madness.



The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I Men's basketball tournament is also known as March Madness. It is a single-elimination tournament played each spring in the U.S. It features 68 college basketball teams. A win progresses the team to the next round. A loss eliminates the team from the competition. It has become common in popular culture to predict the outcomes of each game. This is done using a bracket that pits the teams against each other.

Like many others around the world, Safran has been coping with the coronavirus quarantine, which cut off his studies at Temple University when the school shifted its courses online. Temple University is in Pennsylvania.

Coronavirus is a flu-like illness. It began in China and has been spreading across the globe since December 2019. Health officials have been encouraging social distancing. This means staying home and staying away from other people to help slow the spread of the virus. Many schools have shut down. Many companies are telling employees to work from home. Major sporting and entertainment events have also been canceled or postponed.

As a production major, none of his online classes would help Safran's career track because the production equipment he needs is on campus. He has no production crew. Worst of all, he has no sports.

Sports Fans Need Something To Watch

However, he does have a friend, 21-year-old Jackson Weimer, who owns an Xbox 360 and a copy of the discontinued game "National Collegiate Athletic Association College Basketball." He also has a mom with a basement. So Safran and Weimer both started planning an entire virtual March Madness tournament. They would play as every team and stream the entire thing on Twitch to entertain other bored sports fans.

National sports leagues have canceled games and pushed back seasons for the indefinite future, and sports fans around the world are suffering. Many sports fans have asked ESPN to air old games, just to have something to watch and reminisce over. Safran wanted something more hands-on.

"[We] were devastated that March Madness was over; it's the biggest part of the year," Safran said. "I needed to watch something, and I realized no one else is going to do this so I figured I'd do it myself."

Weimer just graduated from the University of Delaware this past winter. He landed a job at Literally Media, which owns several meme-focused entertainment sites, including the early-aughts humor website eBaum's World. It was a dream job. Then the coronavirus hit. His long-awaited move to New York City and working life was put on hold.

However, eBaum's World has a Twitch channel for streaming shows. The venue is perfect for their video game-center basketball tournament. Just one more problem.

"This is our first time streaming ever," Weimer said laughing.

1. How do YOU feel about all sports being cancelled due to the coronavirus?

They Made Their Own Talk Show

Safran and Weimer were joined by Weimer's little brother, Louis, and their friend Ryan Gunsiorowski, who was still living on campus at Pennsylvania State University. They spent two weeks learning how to stream. Safran also had to ask his dad for help in putting together a bracket.

The four launched on March 15 with a mock Selection Sunday special. Safran and Weimer will spend the coming weeks playing head to head as both teams, with the winning team advancing.

"It's pretty much our own talk show, with a green screen and high angles, or at least the closest thing we could get to," said Louis Weimer.

On what would have been Selection Sunday, the four launched a 26-minute show. It streamed live from the Weimer basement in Pennsylvania.

They imitated sportscasters, and Louis Weimer played the trumpet. The episode also featured "live field reporting" from Penn State student Gunsiorowski. He filmed at various empty locations around campus, pretending he was at other schools.

The whole set was held together by duct tape and extra storage containers. Wardrobes consisted of a bunch of ill-fitting dress shirts and blazers.

Creativity Blooms During Quarantine

It was silly, lighthearted, snarky and wholesome. Then it ended with a more sober tone. Weimer's father, Carl, appeared on stream with the family's 21.4-pound cat, Princeton. "Make sure you maintain safe social distancing," he said on the stream.

Karl Weimer, 53 years old, has worked in epidemiology outreach for the last two decades. Epidemiology is the study of diseases. He is proud of his sons and their friends for their creativity and their urgency to learn in a time of crisis.

"If you look over the centuries, there have been many creative people who have developed things while they're in quarantine," Weimer said. He is referring to recent stories about Shakespeare's productivity during a plague quarantine.

"This is certainly not on the same scale," he said laughing. "But people young or old will respond in so many innovative and fantastic ways when they're in a situation they've never seen before."

The stream ended with more than 4,600 viewers, by most measures a successful stream.

Even as their tournament continues in the days ahead, Safran has his gaze fixed beyond March Madness. Signing off on March 15, he stared into the camera and declared, "I'm Josh Safran and I am looking for an internship this summer!"

2. What do you think of the claim that “creativity blooms during quarantine”? Have you found yourself or anyone else in your house doing anything creative while you’ve been stuck at home the past 2 weeks?

Sportscasters have begun offering to narrate people’s home videos they’re so bored at home. If you haven’t seen them, here’s a few particularly funny examples of that:

- [CNN montage](#)
- [Joe Buck narrates basement tennis](#)
- [Nick Heath](#) (a rugby commentator) has a hilarious feed full of everyday narrations