



MARCH MADNESS



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Successful seasons come to a crashing halt because of COVID-19.

REPEAT CHAMPIONS
BY BOB GRIMSON '81
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Bradley's men's basketball team won its final game — an 80-66 victory over Valparaiso in the Missouri Valley Conference tournament's championship game — earning a repeat as conference champions and a second consecutive spot in the NCAA Tournament. But the season came to a heartbreaking end when the NCAA Tournament was abruptly canceled by the COVID-19 global pandemic.

The attempts to shut down the spread of the virus also cut short the best women's basketball regular season in program history. The MVC canceled its women's tournament after the first day, before third-seeded Bradley, which finished with school records for victories overall and in conference (22-7 and 13-5 in the conference), played on the second.

And spring sports never got a solid start. The NCAA curtailed all sports and championships, wiping out the remainder of the seasons for baseball, softball, men's and women's golf, outdoor track for men and women and tennis. A pair of sports, soccer and volleyball, have limited spring exhibition seasons, which also are affected.

In basketball, it's the first time the men's basketball team had repeat NCAA appearances since 1954–55. The Braves also won MVC titles in 1980 and 1988 and are the ninth team to successfully defend the crown. It's the 10th trip to the NCAA Tournament

in school history, with Final Four appearances in 1950 and 1954 and a Sweet Sixteen spot in 2006.

On the women's side, the team's 16-2 start was the best through that point in the season and the 7-0 start in the conference was the best in team history. The record of success helped put three players on the All-MVC First team.

Chelsea Brackmann '20 and **Gabi Haack '21** repeated their spots on the team, joined by **Lasha Petree '22**.

For the first time in 16 seasons, three member of the men's team gained All-MVC honors, led by three-time selection **Darrell Brown '20** on the second team. He was MVP of the conference tournament. **Elijah Childs '21** joined him on the second team, **Nate Kennell '20** made the third team.

The three selections were the most among conference schools. ■



See more of the Braves in action at bradley.edu/magazine/braves2020.



SCENES FROM A SEASON

Danya Kingsby '21 goes up for a dunk in Bradley's 80-66 victory over Valparaiso in the title game at the Missouri Valley Conference Tournament. The victory meant a second consecutive conference title but the global coronavirus pandemic knocked out the repeat appearance in the NCAA Tournament. **BELOW:** Coach Brian Wardle shares a joyful moment with senior **Darrell Brown**.



"Y'all know it's a once in a lifetime opportunity, so make the most of it. Be remembered forever. Team first. Self last."

— Team huddle before final game of the MVC



ABOVE: Senior **Darrell Brown**, the team's leading scorer and tournament MVP, charges ahead with the ball in Bradley's title game. The Braves finished the season with their second straight MVC title and a 23-11 overall record, 11-7 in the conference. **RIGHT:** The Braves crowd around the trophy after their repeat win as conference champs.



“This team was truly an honor to coach! While this team’s accomplishments have been celebrated and documented, what will always stand out to me is the selflessness and spirit this team shared with each other. They celebrated one another’s individual successes and always represented our program and university in a positive way. The definition of a true team.”

— Andrea Gorski '92, women's basketball head coach



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