

# Five best sports books for watching the tourney

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Know what I'm getting a lot of these days? Questions about where to watch the NCAA tournament in Las Vegas. Seems heading to The Strip for the first four days of March Madness is a really big deal. Who knew?

Anyway, I know how important it is to get expert information about the best places to go. And it's too much for one man -- namely me -- to handle. So I put out feelers to a bunch of wise guys, analysts and Vegas reporters I know to get the inside take on their faves. What's interesting -- and different than what you'd get by asking the average square -- is how they view what matters in a book. Comfort is nice. But they are a lot more interested in odds, limits and action. One thing they all agreed on: Get to the books early, even if it means going there straight from a night of gambling, without stopping in the room to recharge. "If you are in a group of more than two people, that means either camping out or staking your seats before 7 a.m. local time," Teddy Covers says. "Every major book in town is positively packed -- even the locals' joints like Green Valley Ranch or Red Rock."

So, herewith, are the consensus picks:

**1. The M Resort**-- The newbie on the scene won hands down. The M is on Las Vegas Boulevard, but it's a 15-minute drive from the main drag. It's not that big of a deal. I've made the trek half a dozen times. You'll spend more time stuck in traffic going from Mandalay to Caesars on a Saturday night. The book is nice, the chairs comfy and the food good. But the reasons it gets the nod from the wise guys are the high limits and the in-game wagering --betting on spreads and odds that change with nearly every play-- which makes the book feel like the floor of a Wall Street trading firm during a game. "The best," Fezzik told me. "Not even close."

**2. Hilton SuperBook**-- "In this case," says Dave Cokin, a Vegas vet and radio host, "I think size does matter." The Hilton's SuperBook is the biggest sports book in the world. It also is consistently the first book to post point spreads, so any small mistakes can be taken advantage of if you are paying attention. Usually the Hilton opens a theater in the casino for spillover because, even with more than 300 seats, there isn't nearly enough room to accommodate all the degenerates visiting. "The theater," says Dave Tuley, who runs the [Web siteviewfromvegas.com](#), "is where Elvis played." If it was good enough for "The King" ...

**3. MGM Grand**-- This is the most theatrical of all the books, set up like the games are on stage and the bettors are in an amphitheater, one big audience rapt with attention. It's got 47 TVs, including 36 60-inch plasmas and three 16-foot by 12-foot monsters. And if you're lucky, you can get one of 50 or so seats with smaller individual TVs. But what gets the MGM on the list is the sports book skyboxes, the only ones in town. Granted, you'll have to bet like an NBA player to get one. But come on, it's just one weekend. What have you got to lose?

**4. Mandalay Bay**-- This is where you go when you've been to Vegas more often than you've been to the doctor in the past 10 years. You've done your time at the down-market joints and need some comfort. Mandalay has seats you'd like to steal and put in your house to replace your bed. And there are lots of them, around 300. For a book that's been around a little more than a decade, it still feels relatively new and, for Vegas at least, a little classy. Kind of like hanging out in the basement screening room at your richest high school buddy's house.

**5. Caesars Palace**-- The classic Vegas standby. Tuley reminded me that, years ago, The Mag did an issue called "99 Things To Do Before You Die." No. 5 on the list was visiting Caesars during the NCAA tourney. Honestly, it's not the most respected book on The Strip according to wise guys, but for four days in March, it will feel more like a tailgate than any other book. Lots of recently graduated frat guys choose it as their go-to spot for yearly trips to Vegas -- the same guys will step up to Mandalay in five years -- so be wary of backward hats and fist bumps. Get a seat around the coffee tables with individual TVs. But you might have to stay up all night to do it. There's no sleeping in the book, and security guards patrol all night to make sure people follow the rules.