

# March Madness and Infertility Madness

BY GINNY WRIGHT LAPPORTE, PH.D.

As I write this, the sports world is in the early stages of what has become known as “March Madness.” For those of us who truly enjoy college basketball, March is a time when we succumb to our personal madness, entering happily into a nearly month-long obsession with the national basketball tournament. While channel surfing, our eyes lock onto programs where the tournament is being discussed. We seek out conversations about basketball games and yearn to talk to others who are as interested as we are. We follow charts and make predictions about the outcomes of over sixty games, believing somehow that we can combine published statistics with luck to predict the ultimate outcome. At the outset of the tournament, we construe a path through which our predicted outcome will emerge. Along the way, however, adjustments have to be made when early predictions fail to materialize. The “guaranteed” win of Team A over Team B just didn’t go that way, so now every predicted step from this game forward has to be adjusted.

For the non-participating partners, friends or colleagues of those who are caught up in the “madness” it just doesn’t make sense. Can a game (or a series of games) be so interesting or so important that it deserves the vast attention it receives? Although most of the country involves itself in only a peripheral way (if at all), there are those of us who become interested or involved at a level that someone who doesn’t participate simply cannot understand. They describe us as “obsessed”, “crazy” or “mad.”

Those who have experienced “Infertility Madness” may recognize the parallels with “March Madness”. When experiencing



*mad·ness*  
(mad'nis)

*n. The quality or condition of being insane;  
great enthusiasm; excitement*

infertility, all signs of fertility and family building are eye-catching, and we obsessively seek conversation and published information about the topic. We have some inherent belief (or at least hope) that if we study the statistics and pray for luck, we will be able to predict or influence the outcome. We follow charts and, when early predictions fail to materialize, we re-evaluate how the rest of the cycle is going to proceed such that our ultimate goal of pregnancy can still be achieved.

Consider the following scenario:

*Time out is called. The coach pulls the team together and explains the current situation: Despite an aggressive offensive strategy, there are only four follicles. We must shift the game plan from IVF to IUI. This will make ultimate victory more difficult, but we cannot lose hope.*

*We've seen many come-from-behind wins before and we must believe that this is a setback that can be overcome.*

## Madness and Obsession and Infertility

Perhaps most of all, those people undergoing infertility treatments might relate to the experience of madness and obsession. Who among the infertile can say that she has never felt crazy and/or obsessed? The infertile are likely to both condemn their “insanity” and justify it at the same time. When challenged about the amount of time and energy spent obsessing about having a baby, many (if not most) of us will scoff at the insensitivity and lack of understanding shown to us. Privately, however, we chastise ourselves for our inability to manage our emotions and for our lack of composure.

Frankly, I would tend to see madness (to a reasonable degree, of course) as highly justified. When men and women have organized their lives around having a family in the future, infertility *should* compromise their composure, clear-headedness and sanity. Emotional reactivity to such a loss represents good reality testing, not poor reality testing. Popular definitions of "madness" usually include references not only to a state of insanity, but also to a state of excitement and enthusiasm. Perhaps, then, a little bit of madness may help us maintain hope and enthusiasm when all "reality" is telling us to give up. Authors and philosophers have long recognized the motivating power of madness:

*"Madness is tonic and invigorating. It makes the sane more sane. The only ones who are unable to profit by it are the insane."* - Henry Miller

*"We derive our vitality from our store of madness."* - E.M. Cioran

Likewise, obsession is an almost undeniable part of the infertility process. While madness allows us to defy what others would want us to see as reality, obsession can offer us the fortitude to persevere. Without obsession, we might have hopes and dreams without adequate focus to follow through with action.

*"I know quite certainly that I myself have no special talent; curiosity, obsession, and dogged endurance, combined with self-criticism have brought me to my ideas."*

- Albert Einstein

### When "Mad" goes Bad

It is often noted that at the end of March Madness, or any other competitive tournament, only one team leaves the field undefeated. Despite disappointment, almost all of the losing teams and athletes quickly regroup and prepare for the next round of competition. These teams use their losses to help prepare for the future. Their "obsession" focuses not on

the loss itself, but on the options still ahead. It includes an enthusiasm and focus on what they hope will be and does not linger on what could have been.

"Madness" is debilitating when it disallows forward thinking and promotes obsessive focus on pain to the exclusion of hope. Unable to see through the clouds of dismay, this kind of madness paralyzes rather than motivates. In the infertility world, looking forward can mean preparing for the next cycle, exploring other options for family-building or even choosing to live childfree. Such preparations can be confusing, head spinning, and, yes, maddening. Chastise yourself no more. Instead, put your "madness" and "obsession" to good use and embrace the endurance, focus and enthusiasm they can provide. ■

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

*Ginny Wright Lapporte is a clinical psychologist near Chicago. She is also the author of the book, My Very Wanted Child: A Parent's Poem, Fortnight Publishing Group.*

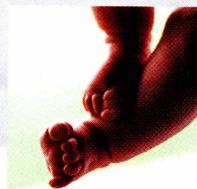
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