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## Three Teams With Virgin Islands Connections Advance to NCAA's March Madness

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The NCAA Tournament, dubbed March Madness, tipped off on Friday and lived up to its reputation as there were surprising results and close games. North Texas pulled off one of the biggest upsets of the day while Baylor and Houston handled their opposition with ease.

Thirteen-seed North Texas stunned the nation by winning their opening round game against No. 4 seed Purdue 78-69, in overtime for the team's first NCAA tournament win in school history.

One of North Texas's assistant coaches is Jarrem Dowling from St. Croix. In his bio on the North Texas website, he is credited with being a crucial recruiter for North Texas. The same bio states that he led the Virgin Islands national teams to two silver medals and a pair of bronze medals during his time with the V.I. Basketball Federation.

Mr. Dowling joined the coaching staff in 2017-18. A year prior, the team had just eight wins. However in a remarkable four-year turnaround, the team is now two-time conference champions and on Friday had the first NCAA tournament win in school history.

North Texas scored the first 11 points of overtime and didn't allow a Purdue point until after 4:32 minutes in the 5-minute extra play period. The Mean Green built an 11-point lead with about four minutes left in the first half but Purdue came storming back to force overtime.

North Texas kept their distance from Purdue on the scoreboard until a late run. They were up by 8 points with just over six minutes to go in regulation, but Purdue scored the game's next eight points to tie it up at 57. North Texas then scored four straight points and were up by that margin with a minute and a half left. Purdue responded and tied the game at 61 a piece with less than 25 seconds left.

North Texas had the last shot of regulation that would have won the game, but missed.

The leading catalyst for North Texas was Javion Hamlet, who had 24 points and 12 rebounds. Mr. Hamlet said after the game, "I'm just trying to show the world the Mean Green belongs."

North Texas will play Villanova after the Wildcats defeated Winthrop 73-63. Winthrop's Chase Claxton is a potential player on the Virgin Islands national team.

Villanova jumped out to a 16-6 lead and with about 10 minutes left in the first half, Winthrop found themselves down nine points at 21-12 before going on a 12-3 run to tie the game at 24-24 with 5:32 left in the half. The team momentarily had a two-point lead after a score with 1:32 left, however Villanova hit a three-pointer before the break to lead 34-33 at halftime.

Chase Claxton drew a charge and caused a turnover in the first half, leading broadcaster Dan Bonner to credit him with being one of the top two defenders on Winthrop.

With just under 12 minutes left in the second half, Villanova went on a run to extend their lead and put the game away for good. They were up by three, before going on a 12-2 run that extended their margin to 13 with 6:58 left to play.

Chase Claxton finished with 5 points and 3 rebounds in 21 minutes of action.

Chase comes from a basketball family as his father, Charles Claxton, born in St. Thomas, played at the University of Georgia and was drafted by the Utah Jazz. His brother, Nicolas Claxton has played for the Virgin Islands National Team, the University of Georgia and is now a member of the Brooklyn Nets.

Baylor and Houston were two teams that dominated from start to finish.

No. 1 Baylor won its opening round game by beating No. 16 seed Hartford 79-55 with Macio Teague leading the way for the Bears with 22 points.

Baylor's associate head coach, Jermone Tang, was born in Trinidad but moved to Frederiksted at a very young age. He has been part of the Baylor staff for 18 seasons and earned his promotion to associate head coach in 2017.

During his time coaching USVI junior teams, he led them to two Centrobasket bronze medals and one silver medal in 2015 — the Virgin Islands highest finish in that competition.

Baylor will play Wisconsin on Sunday.

J'Wan Roberts, from St. Thomas of No. 2 seed Houston made his return from injury and grabbed a rebound in two minutes of action in an 87-56 victory over No. 15 seed Cleveland State.

D'Moi Hodge, from the British Virgin Islands, was Cleveland State's leading scorer with 11 points, making 3-pointers during the team's losing effort.

Houston will move on to play Rutgers on Sunday.

Times and networks for the Sunday games:

- North Texas will play Villanova at 8:45 p.m. on TNT
- Baylor will play Wisconsin at 2:40 p.m. on CBS
- Houston will play Rutgers at 7:10 p.m. on TBS