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# March Madness can boost morale, waste time at work

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March Madness begins today with a gluttonous 32 college basketball games in a two-day span.

Each game will either be televised or available for free, with live games streaming on your broadband-connected computer.

That means the American workplace will come to a screeching halt as workers spend all their time checking their office pool to see if they had Davidson beating Maryland.

Or it could mean co-workers will actually talk to each other, team-building will soar, and this will become the most productive nation since post-World War II Japan.

Roger Hurni is the co-founder of Off Madison Ave., a Tempe communications agency with 60 employees. Hurni sees an office pool as a chance for his employees to have some fun and get to know each other better.

"The staff getting together and building friendships and talking together can only help," Hurni said. "The overall culture (here) is one in which we encourage friendships to develop."

Still, there are detractors.

Last year, a Chicago consulting firm, Challenger, Gray & Christmas, made a huge splash by announcing that the six-round tournament would cost the country \$3.8 billion in lost productivity.

The firm reached that number by deciding that 58 million workers would spend 13.5 minutes online every day for 16 days checking up on basketball. At an average salary of \$18 per hour, that translates to \$3.8 billion.

That math was fuzzy enough that, this year, the same firm decided that the country would lose \$1.2 billion. Actual workers are able to see both sides of the office pool debate.

Marty Goodwin, 59, of Cave Creek, sees the benefit of an office pool.

"Having worked for many years in various offices, we always had an office pool for just about anything. They are fun and, I think, harmless. A little healthy competition never hurt anyone."

Bill Hart of Phoenix disagrees. "Pools are for swimming, offices are for working."

But maybe the idea that a \$5 or \$10 office pool only wastes time misses a greater truth.

Stephen Gilliland is a professor in the department of management and organizations at the University of Arizona's Eller College of Management.

"It's great on morale, the pools and the brackets. People actually talking to each other," Gilliland said.

"There is lost productivity in a lot of things in a workplace - the coffee pot or the water cooler - but they still have value."

Gilliland, it must be noted, received his Ph.D. at Michigan State University and has been at UA since 1995. "I'm a big college basketball fan. Go, Cats!"

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Bill Hart is a putz.(**Old Dave (David9584)**, March 15, 2007 06:50PM)

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