

## Feature

# Women Playing Major Roles In Tampa's NCAA Final Four

BY KENYA WOODARD  
Sentinel Feature Writer

For **Bemetra Simmons**, the NCAA Women's Final Four is more than just a tournament of her favorite sport.

It's how the former Christian Brothers University basketball player was introduced to the city she now calls home.

"I came as a guest in 2008," she said. "So when my job offered me the chance to relocate here some years later, I had a positive view of Tampa."

This year's tournament – 11 years since her first visit to root for the Tennessee Volunteers – **Simmons** will be more than a spectator. She's one of several Black women who are part of the planning and promotion of the championship games and related events – which is expected to pump millions into the local economy.

Friday's semifinal matchups – Baylor vs. Oregon and Notre Dame vs. UConn – along with Sunday's national title game and other events is expected to attract thousands to the downtown area throughout the weekend.

**Simmons**, a banking executive, said she was "pumped" to be part of the



**BEMETRA SIMMONS**  
..Tampa Bay Local Advisory  
Committee

Tampa Bay Local Advisory Committee that's rallying support for the Final Four.

"To have the Final Four here is a testament to our city," she said. "It allows us to show off this beautiful asset we call Tampa."

Advisory committee member **Trimeka Benjamin**, owner of marketing firm Swim Digital Group, said Tampa's third selection as host city of the tournament puts it in an elite class.

"It explains that we are one of the most superior cities in the world," she said.



**TRIMEKA BENJAMIN**  
...Owner Of Marketing Firm

While the games are sure to generate much attention and excitement, it's the philanthropic gestures – such as renovation of an outdoor playing court at Dowdell Middle School and a donation from Kay Yow Cancer Fund to Moffitt Cancer Center – that will make a deep imprint, **Benjamin** said.

"These are the types of ties that bind," she said. "These are the types of things that pull people together."

**Claire Lessinger**, Executive Director of the Women's Final Four Local Organizing Committee, concurred.

"Those social impact initiatives leave a lasting impact," she said.

ESPN announcer **Tiffany Greene** won't be



**CLAIRE LESSINGER**  
...Executive Director,  
Women's Final Four Local Or-  
ganizing Committee

calling the games, but has participated in various events leading up to the tournament, including Press Pass, a mentoring program for aspiring journalists.

**Greene** said the world-class tournament making its third appearance in hometown is proof that the area is more than beautiful beaches and great weather – it's a serious ball town, too.

"Tampa continues its reputation as a destination for premiere sporting events," she said. "I believe we have continued to set the standard from our programming activities around an event to the overall execution."

**If You Go**  
Here's a list of 2019 NCAA

Women's Final Four events:

## National Semifinal Games

Catch the action at 7 and 9:30 p. m. Friday, April 5, at Amalie Arena. Tickets start at \$35. Visit [www.ncaa.com/wbbtickets](http://www.ncaa.com/wbbtickets) for more information.

## Women's Final Four Tourney Town

Free Festival Friday, April 5 – Sunday, April 7 at the Tampa Convention Center with interactive games, giveaways, youth clinics, basketball contests and more. Visit [www.ncaa.com](http://www.ncaa.com) for times.

## Women's Final Four Bounce

Youth ages 18 and younger are invited to participate in this unique parade starting at 1 p. m. on Sunday, April 7 at Curtis Hixon Park. The first 2,000 participants will receive a free basketball and shirt.

## Party on the Plaza

Both the semifinal and championship games will kick off with a free party Friday, April 5 – Sunday, April 7, outside Amalie Arena, featuring live music, merchandise, and interactive games. Visit [www.ncaa.com](http://www.ncaa.com) for times.

## Super Saturday

Free event from 6 to 11 p. m., Saturday, April 6 at Curtis Hixon Park featuring live music and fireworks.

## National Championship

Tip off starts at 6 p. m. at the Amalie Arena. Tickets can be purchased online at [www.ncaa.com/wbbtickets](http://www.ncaa.com/wbbtickets).