Name: _____ Date: _____

How Caitlin Clark's Records Were Counted

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 1207 words

Who is Caitlin Clark? She is a guard for the Indiana Fever of the WNBA. She was born on January 22, 2002, in Des Moines, Iowa, and in 2024 she passed every scorer in Division I college basketball, men and women, and her name went to the top of a list. But a list is only as good as its rules for counting. This book asks how Clark's records were counted. It also asks what the crowds and TV numbers around her show, and what they do not.

Clark passed three scoring records in 17 days, starting February 15, 2024. First came Kelsey Plum's, the Division I women's record. On February 28 came Lynette Woodard's. On March 3 she passed Pete Maravich, whose 3,667 points were the most for any Division I player. The first came against Michigan, when she broke the record with a long shot from the center-court logo. The last came against Ohio State, when two free throws did it. Three records meant three lists. Each list had its own rule about who gets counted, so the rules are worth a look.

Plum's list belongs to the NCAA, and its record book says that official women's records began in 1981-82. They rest on numbers that schools send to a stats office at the NCAA. Before that, a group called the AIAW ran college women's sports. Woodard scored her 3,649 points at Kansas in those years, so the NCAA's women's list does not include them. The AP and Iowa's own sports site still list her. So Clark's second record was called the major-college record, not the NCAA record.

Maravich's mark has footnotes. He played at LSU from 1967 to 1970. Back then there was no three-point line, and first-year students could not play on the varsity team, so he had three seasons, not four. By our arithmetic, he scored about 44 points a game. Clark's average at Iowa was 28.4. Clark's total includes many threes, a shot Maravich never had. Per game, Maravich is far ahead. In total, Clark is. Both are true. They answer different questions.

A total also rewards time. Clark ended with 3,951 points in 139 games. Kelsey Plum, whose total had been the women's record, also played 139 games, so by our arithmetic Clark scored 424 more points in the same number of games. Her best night of the chase came on February 15, 2024, against Michigan, with 49 points. NCAA.com's table of top scorers puts games next to points, so a reader can see how big a total is and how fast it was built.

Even all-time needs a boundary. After Clark's last college game, in April 2024, the AP listed college scorers in every division, men and women. Clark was sixth. The list mixes small colleges and big ones, and old seasons and new ones. John Pierce of David Lipscomb, in Tennessee, was first with 4,230 points. Pearl Moore, who played in the AIAW years, had the most for a woman, 4,061. Move the line, and the list changes.

Assists tell a different story. An assist is a pass that leads right to a teammate's basket. Clark ended college with 1,144 of them. She was the first Division I player with 3,000 points and 1,000 assists. But she does not hold the career assist record. The NCAA's record book, in its 2023 edition, lists 1,307, set by Suzie McConnell of Penn State in the 1980s. The NCAA made assists an official stat only in 1985-86, so its list starts there. A record book can only count what was being counted.

The pros keep their own books. In 2024, Clark's 337 assists were the most in a WNBA season, and in 2025 and 2026 Alyssa Thomas passed that number. Clark's 19 assists in one game, on July 17, 2024, still stands through November 2026. Voters named her Rookie of the Year. A record is true until someone passes it, and it can be for a total, a pace or a mix. In October 2026 the league said Clark was the fastest to reach 1,000 points, 250 rebounds and 250 assists, which took her 54 games. The sentence has to say which.

Her pro career began with a number too. On April 15, 2024, the Indiana Fever picked Clark first in the WNBA draft. She had said on February 29 that she would enter the draft instead of using her last year of college. ESPN said 2.45 million people watched, the most ever for a WNBA draft, through 2026. The old record was 601,000, set in 2004. A draft draws fewer viewers than a title game, as the next numbers show.

Then there are the TV audiences. Nielsen estimated that 18.9 million people watched South Carolina beat Iowa, 87 to 75, on ABC and ESPN on April 7, 2024. It was the biggest audience ever for a women's college game, through 2026. Clark scored 30 points in what was her last game for Iowa. Nielsen's count was live plus same day. That means people who watched live. It also means people who watched a recording later that day.

An average audience, as the Cabletelevision Advertising Bureau defines it, is the audience in an average minute of a game. A peak is the best single minute, and it is always at least as big as the average. For that final, the number quoted was 18.9 million, and Nielsen put the peak at 24.1 million, in the last minutes. The audience had grown at every step: 12.3 million for Iowa and LSU, and 14.2 million for Iowa and UConn. A year earlier the final had drawn 9.9 million.

Crowds grew too. On October 15, 2023, Iowa played an exhibition at Kinnick Stadium, a football stadium. A crowd of 55,646 came, then a record for a women's basketball game, and all the money left after costs went to a children's hospital. That winter, NCAA.com wrote in February 2024, arenas sold out for Iowa's road games, some for the first time in school history. But crowds were already growing. College women's basketball set a total attendance record in 2022-23, and the 2023 final, Iowa against LSU, was a sellout.

In the WNBA, the 2024 season drew more than 2.3 million fans, and the Fever's home crowds were a record for one team. All 12 teams drew more fans than the year before, and Clark's Fever grew the most. But a total grows when the schedule does, and the league added teams

and games. The average crowd is fairer: 9,807 a game in 2024 and 11,474 in 2026, as the league counted them. Even the average hides a bigger league.

What caused the rise? Counting cannot say. In February 2024, NCAA.com wrote that Clark's impact had amplified an upward trend already under way. It also wrote that her viewership numbers were not a complete outlier. The 2023 final had set a record a year before she was drafted. The numbers show that crowds and audiences grew while she played. They cannot split her part from everyone else's. Her college numbers are final. Her pro numbers, through the 2026 season, are still being added to. A number can tell you how many. It cannot tell you why.

Questions

1. Why is Lynette Woodard's total missing from the NCAA's official women's record list?

A. She played before the NCAA ran women's basketball, in the AIAW years
B. She scored fewer points than Kelsey Plum
C. Her games were never counted by scorekeepers

2. Who holds the Division I career record for assists in the NCAA record book?

A. Caitlin Clark
B. Kelsey Plum
C. Suzie McConnell of Penn State

3. Why can a peak never be smaller than the average?

A. It is the best single minute, so it is at least as big as the average
B. Nielsen adds a bonus
C. It counts the whole season

4. Why is the average crowd a fairer comparison than the total across seasons?

A. Tickets cost less
B. Arenas got smaller
C. More teams played more games, which raises the total

5. What does Nielsen's 'live plus same day' count include?

A. Only people watching live
B. People who watched live or a recording the same day
C. Everyone who ever saw the game

6. In the sentence 'The average crowd is fairer,' what does average mean?

A. The biggest crowd
B. The typical amount for one game
C. The crowd at the first game

Words to know

assist: scoring pass
average: typical amount
peak: highest point
attendance: people present
rookie: first-year player

Answer key: How Caitlin Clark's Records Were Counted

1. A. She played before the NCAA ran women's basketball, in the AIAW years
2. C. Suzie McConnell of Penn State
3. A. It is the best single minute, so it is at least as big as the average
4. C. More teams played more games, which raises the total
5. B. People who watched live or a recording the same day
6. B. The typical amount for one game