AMASA—When the NCAA men's basketball finals are played at the Superdome in New Orleans this weekend, millions across the world will watch the action on courts that started taking shape in Iron County last September.

The sleek hardwood court on which the men's finals will be played started its journey to the Final Four site March 17 with a fan rally in Louisville, Ky. Its journey to New Orleans was called "The Connor Sport Court Final Four Floor Tour Transported by UPS," thanks to a partnership between Connor Sport Court and UPS.

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This is the first year in the five-year history of the court tour that Connor Sport Court has partnered with another company. The court tour made a number of stops on its way to New Orleans, some for the public, others for UPS employees only.

A one-hour documentary about Connor Sports Flooring, the Amasa facility and the men's Final Four floor will air on the CBS Sports Network on Sunday, April 1, at 8 p.m. Central Time. The channel is carried on DirecTV and Dish Network.

Also, USA Today has toured the Connor facility and interviewed employees, and Connor officials say a multi-day article will run in the paper starting late this week.

Connor also manufactures and supplies 21 other floors for the men's NCAA tournament regional sites and the women's Final Four floor court.

The Final Four floor started its story in Amasa last fall at a complex of four buildings housing one of the manufacturing operations of Connor Sport Court International.

Connor, founded in 1872, is the leading manufacturer of hardwood courts in the U.S.

In addition to the NCAA Final Four courts, Connor's Amasa plant also manufactures about 750 playing courts every year for schools, gyms, colleges and NBA teams.

"We are very proud of the portable courts we build for the NCAA and the NBA teams," said Conrad Stromberg, manager of the plant and a 23-year Connor employee. He cited the unique parquet hardwood portable floor the company built for the Boston Celtics.

The NCAA Final Four courts are manufactured from hard maple which Connor purchases as rough lumber from about 60 different sawmills, mostly in Michigan and Wisconsin.

"First it is cut to a width size of 2¼ inches," said David G. Smith, production manager at Amasa. It is then planed, and defects are cut out of the wood. After that, it runs through a side-matcher, which planes it down and cuts the tongue and groove on each side of the strip.

"It then goes to the end-matcher, which makes a tongue and groove on the end of each strip. It is graded first, second and third, according to Maple Floor Manufacturing Association "The NCAA gets only first grade maple," says Smith.

The courts then go into a separate building, where it is "portabilized," assembled into sections measuring 48¼ inches by 96 1/8 inches. The total size of each court, once assembled, is 60-by-120 feet, an area of 7,200 square feet.

One of the most critical elements is the subflooring, a patented Connor structure that goes under the maple surface and provides just the right amount of resiliency and shock absorption to assure good performance and player safety.

Once each portable section is complete, it is placed in a stack of 12 under stringently controlled

temperature and humidity conditions.

A few weeks before the Final Four tournaments, the floor is assembled and inspected at the Amasa plant. The floor is then disassembled and sent to one of the company's finishing facilities, in this case Ohio Floor Co., Apple Creek, Ohio, for the men's Final Four Court.