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Group starts third postseason tourney featuring 16 teams

Associated Press

NEW YORK -- There's going to be more March basketball.

The producer of some early-season tournaments announced Wednesday it will start a 16-team postseason event that will augment the NCAA and NIT.

The College Basketball Invitational will be staged this March by The Gazelle Group, which is based in Princeton, N.J., and runs the 2K Sports College Hoop Classic that benefits Coaches vs. Cancer and the O'Reilly Auto Parts CBE Classic.

The NCAA invites 65 teams to its tournament and the National Invitation Tournament -- which started in 1938, a year before the NCAA -- selects another 32. The NIT reduced its field last season from 40.

The NCAA has owned the NIT since 2005 as part of a settlement that ended a four-year legal fight between the parties.

The CBI intends to compete with the NIT for teams that did not make the NCAA's field of 65.

"It would be unfair for us to wait, so we're going to let the NCAA pick their field and then we'll invite the 66th team, it wouldn't be fair not to," Gazelle Group president Rick Giles said Wednesday night. "One of the big things is giving teams a choice. Competition is good and makes everything better. To date there hasn't been a choice and we'll make this a viable choice."

Giles said there will not be a committee of outsiders picking the field.

"It will be us inviting the teams, and we'll do the bracketing and seeding," he said. "We will be 100 percent accountable. You might not agree with us, but we will be accountable."

The teams will be invited along the same criteria used by the NCAA and NIT -- overall and conference records and late-season play.

Four geographic brackets will be balanced competitively. Television arrangements will be announced as they are confirmed.

It will be a single-elimination tournament through the first two rounds and the semifinals, all played at campus sites. The Championship Series will be a best-of-three with the higher-seeded team playing at home in the first game and, if necessary, the third.

The first round is scheduled for March 18-19. The Championship Series will be March 31, April 2 and April 4.

The NCAA's Final Four is April 5 and 7 in San Antonio. The NIT semifinals and finals are April 1 and

3 at Madison Square Garden in New York.

There will now be 113 Division I teams playing postseason basketball.

"We think this is a promising turn of events given the contraction of the NIT a year ago and the impact that had on mid-major selections," Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference commissioner Rich Ensor said Wednesday. "We'll be supportive of the development of other options for postseason play."

Big East commissioner Michael Tranghese said his schools "are free to go and play in any event. I just don't know if there's a market for a third tournament, but this is the land of opportunity."

"We would never tell our schools what to do or not to do in a situation like this," Tranghese said Wednesday. "Since this group produces some early-season events I could see that having something to do with certain decisions."

Giles said there are no plans to limit the field to teams with .500 records and better.

"We don't have that rule right now but I can't anticipate taking a team with a sub-.500 record," he said. "There are too many teams out there with good records."

A third tournament, sponsored by the Collegiate Commissioners Association, was held in 1974. It was won by Indiana.

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