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## Postseason competition

### Newcomer CBI battling NIT for non-NCAA teams

BY DUSTIN DOW | [DDOW@ENQUIRER.COM](mailto:DDOW@ENQUIRER.COM)

If Rick Giles has his way, a dozen or so college basketball teams will know well in advance of Selection Sunday, March 16, where they will be playing their first postseason game.

Giles is the president of Gazelle Group, the firm that is staging the College Basketball Invitational, a 16-team tournament in its first season that is trying to challenge the National Invitation Tournament for supremacy in the market for teams that aren't good enough to get into the NCAA Tournament.

Just what the sport needs, huh? More mediocre basketball that fans ignore in favor of watching the NCAA Tournament.

Maybe not, but there is something intriguing about two tournaments competing for what's left over after the NCAA Tournament selection committee makes its picks. Giles, however, doesn't want to wait until then.

Over the next three weeks, the College Basketball Invitational will try to secure commitments from teams to play in its tournament before the NCAA Tournament pairings even are announced, taking teams from the NIT before it has a chance to select them.

"If Team X says to us, 'We don't want to put our fate in the hands of the NIT to be selected. We want some certainty,' we're open to that," Giles said. "If we think a team merits it, we'll say, 'We'd like to have you.' "

A conflict could occur because of paperwork. The NIT and CBI both send out agreements asking teams to sign pledges to participate in their tournament if selected.

Chris Fallon of the NIT told The Enquirer the binding agreements aren't new this season and originally were meant to speed up the selection process. They had not been an issue until the presence of the CBI.

The situation is forcing some athletic directors and coaches to face tough questions.

The logical pecking order in terms of postseason preference goes from the NCAA Tournament to the NIT to the CBI. But a team in doubt about its NCAA Tournament credentials could easily - or surprisingly - slide out of NIT contention by March 16. It happened to Akron last year when the Zips, with a Ratings Percentage Index ranking of No. 67, lost on a last-second shot in the Mid-American Conference championship game and never got a call from the NIT.

At what point would a team in a similar position consider placing a call to the CBI? Or at what point would a team with an RPI in the 90s consider calling the CBI in an attempt to guarantee postseason play?

Giles said the CBI staff is talking to teams on a daily basis, describing it as similar to working on a college football bowl game committee.

His largest obstacle might be that many athletic directors are wary of the CBI's newness and cost.

No one makes money by playing in the NIT, but at least the tournament offers a traditional reputation and a television contract with ESPN. At what cost should an athletic director accept an invitation to an unproven event just for the sake of playing in the postseason? It's not hard to free up \$20,000-\$30,000 in the budget for the NIT, but to do so for the CBI is a harder sell even though Gazelle Group has a reputation for putting on well-run early-season tournaments.

The CBI will be easier to evaluate after it has gone through a season of existence. One athletic director whose team is in contention for both the CBI and the NIT told *The Enquirer* he'd be willing to talk to the CBI in a week or so if it would guarantee him a first-round opponent that is close enough to travel to by bus.

"Tell us what your preferences are," Giles said. "This is new ground for the postseason, and I hope teams are savvy to the fact that they have a choice."

But it might take even savvier wheeling and dealing to convince them the CBI is a better choice than the NIT.

## **ALL THUMBS**

### ***Thumbs Up***

#### **NJIT**

It has been a long four months for the New Jersey Institute of Technology. In its second season of Division I basketball, NJIT is winless (0-28). Fortunately for the Highlanders, the losing ends after today. It has to. NJIT, an independent team without a conference, plays its final game of the season at Utah Valley State at 4 p.m. Coach Jim Casciano is resigning after the game, which could help the Highlanders set a Division I record for defeats in a season if it ends in their 29th loss.

#### **TEXAS**

The Longhorns, who host Oklahoma today,

haven't lost in February. Their recent winning streak, which includes a victory against Kansas, combined with previous wins against UCLA and Tennessee, makes them a strong candidate for a No. 2 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

#### **DARRYL PROCTOR**

With 11 doubles-doubles, Proctor has led Maryland-Baltimore County to the top of the America East standings. If the Retrievers (19-7, 11-2) can win the league tournament, they'll make their first trip to the NCAA Tournament.

### ***Thumbs Down***

#### **DUKE**

One week after getting a "Thumbs Up," the Blue Devils have lost two straight because of frequent errant 3-point shooting. They might still get a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament, but a bad shooting night can spoil an otherwise great season.

#### **MEMPHIS**

The No. 1 Tigers might beat No. 2

Tennessee tonight and might go on to finish the season unbeaten. But shooting 59 percent from the free-throw

line as a team is no way to advance deep into the NCAA Tournament.

## UTAH STATE

The Aggies are an example of why the Western Athletic Conference is a one-bid league this season. After starting 8-1 in the WAC, Utah State lost three straight road games. Being undefeated at home doesn't mean much if a team can't win on the road.

## ENQUIRER'S SWEET SIXTEEN

Team	Record	Comment
1. Memphis	26-0	The Tigers might be the only team that can match Tennessee's talent player for player.
2. Tennessee	24-2	Tough state. After visiting Memphis, UT plays at Vandy.
3. Kansas	24-2	Two road games at Oklahoma State and Iowa State this week will be hard.
4. UCLA	22-3	Hope for a No. 1 seed exists in potential road victories next week at Arizona and Arizona State.
5. N. Carolina	25-2	Roy Williams is hopeful injured Ty Lawson can play some Sunday against Wake Forest.
6. Duke	22-3	The tension on Tobacco Road is silly when Mike Krzyzewski and Roy Williams trade barbs about whether or not to publicize player injuries.
7. Texas	22-4	A Big 12 regular-season title is still possible - and could mean a No. 2 seed - if not a No. 1.
8. Stanford	21-4	Three straight home games should keep the Cardinal close to UCLA until the rematch March 6.
9. Butler	25-2	As big as today's game against Drake might seem, Thursday's game against Wright State is more important within the Horizon League.
10. Xavier	23-4	Xavier is enjoying the pressure of being ranked so high and will face it head-on Sunday at Dayton.
11. Georgetown	21-4	Today the Hoyas host a UC team desperate for the Selection Committee's attention.
12. Connecticut	21-5	UConn is the Big East's most intimidating team.
13. Purdue	21-6	The rest of Purdue's Big Ten schedule is very winnable.
14. Wisconsin	22-4	If the Badgers win out, they can do no worse than tie for a Big Ten regular-season title.
15. Louisville	21-6	A win at Pitt Sunday would be an impressive fourth victory against the top 25 of the RPI.
16. Indiana	22-4	The Hoosiers seem to be using the Kelvin Sampson controversy as a rallying point.

## COLLEGE RPI

Projected Ratings Percentage Index by Jerry Palm of CollegeRPI.com:

Rank	School	W-L	RPI	SOS rank
1.	Tennessee	23-2	0.6833	2
2.	Memphis	26-0	0.6770	25
3.	Duke	22-3	0.6664	4
4.	N. Carolina	25-2	0.6661	5
5.	Texas	21-4	0.6564	3
6.	Kansas	23-2	0.6500	54
7.	Xavier	23-4	0.6445	19
8.	Georgetown	21-4	0.6425	42
9.	UCLA	22-3	0.6390	30
10.	Vanderbilt	22-4	0.6359	52
11.	Connecticut	21-5	0.6346	10

12.	Wisconsin	22-4	0.6251	49
13.	Mich. State	21-5	0.6251	47
14.	Louisville	21-6	0.6228	15
15.	Drake	21-3	0.6224	87
16.	Marquette	18-6	0.6198	16
17.	Butler	25-2	0.6180	146
18.	Indiana	22-4	0.6145	60
19.	Arizona	15-10	0.6115	1
20.	Wash. St.	21-5	0.6109	58
21.	Notre Dame	20-5	0.6103	65
22.	Stanford	21-4	0.6102	101
23.	Pittsburgh	18-7	0.6097	34
24.	Clemson	18-7	0.6044	26
25.	BYU	21-5	0.6038	94

**OTHER AREA TEAMS**

Rank	School	W-L	RPI	SOS rank
33.	Dayton	17-8	0.5939	31
45.	Ohio State	17-9	0.5799	51
72.	Kentucky	14-10	0.5597	23
77.	Cincinnati	13-12	0.5548	11
86.	Miami	13-12	0.5498	57

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