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## Mizzou may look good to new basketball tournament

By MIKE DeARMOND  
The Kansas City Star

The celebrations over grabbing one of the 65 spots in the 2008 NCAA Tournament are winding down. The NIT has just filled in its 32-team bracket. But Selection Sunday isn't over.

All eyes and ears — well, at least a few, anyway — turn to Princeton, N.J., and the offices of a company known as The Gazelle Group.

The good folks who have given us the 2K Sports College Hoops Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer, the O'Reilly Auto Parts College Basketball Experience Classic and the Legends Classic, are about to tell 16 other men's hoops teams the season is not over yet.

They have been accorded the honor of playing in the first, brand-spanking new and different College Basketball Invitational.

Can't you just hear the battle cry now from the top-seeded team in this play-on for those not invited to the Not-Invited Tournament?

"We're No. 98!"

Except that some players on one team that could find itself in the NOT-NIT — say the Missouri Tigers — aren't quite sure what to make of such a possible honor.

"It's not the tournament you want to be in," MU's Matt Lawrence said after Saturday's 100-63 blowout loss at Kansas State dropped Mizzou to 14-12.

Last season, the Tigers were left out of the NIT after an 18-12 finish.

"But we're playing this season for something," Lawrence said. "If we can play, we want to play."

Teammate Leo Lyons wasn't so sure.

"It's not something to look forward to," Lyons said.

But just what is the NOT-NIT? OK, officially it is the CBI. Well, it is a bit different in intent and format.

Late on Selection Sunday, 16 teams will be selected for eight first-round games at campus sites March 18 and 19. The four regionals will be seeded according to geography and perceived competitive balance.

The losers go home; the winners advance to the second round March 24, again at campus sites.

The third round will be played March 26.

And then the Champion Series — a best two-of-three — will be played March 31, April 2 and April 4. The higher-seeded team will play host to the first and (if necessary) third games. The second game will be played on the campus of the lower-seeded finalist.

Within the 16-team field will probably be a healthy representation of teams from power conferences, reducing the screaming of Big 12, Big Ten, Pacific-10, Big East and Southeastern Conference schools left out of the NCAA because of its inclusion of more midmajors.

The Gazelle Group has tipped that hand by issuing a mock CBI tournament field as it would have been comprised in 2007.

That field would have included Missouri, Nebraska and Oklahoma from the Big 12, Iowa from the Big Ten,

UConn from the Big East, LSU from the SEC and Washington from the Pac-10.

There seems no doubt Missouri would consent to play in the CBI, though it isn't a subject MU coach Mike Anderson discusses much.

"I haven't even thought about that," Anderson said.

Matt Lawrence confessed that before Saturday night when he was asked about the CBI, he had no idea it existed.

"Well, if that's the case," Lawrence said, "we're playing for something. We still want the main prize, the big time. But wherever we play afterwards is where we play."

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