Tech Likely Entry for NCAA Baseball Tournament

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If the Virginia Tech baseball team thinks a 29-game winning streak is long, the Gobblers should try counting hours this weekend.

With an impressive 32-7 record, Tech can only wait now for word on whether it will make a second straight NCAA Atlantic Regional Tournament appearance. Discussions between NCAA Baseball Committee members have begun, with the first births expected to be awarded Monday.

A reliable source very close to college baseball in the Southeast expects Tech to get the nod from the NCAA as one of the 16 at-large teams that will enter the march towards the College World Series in Omaha June 10-16.

While the source likes the Gobblers' chances because of their overall record and their 29-game victory streak, he feels two losses in the final week of the regular season cost Madison a chance at an NCAA spot in its first Division I campaign.

Although the source is not a member of the five-man committee that will recommend teams for the Atlantic and South regions to the national selection committee, he expects the Monday conference call on bids "to be a matter of confirmation."

Chad Port, baseball coach at The Citadel, is the chairman of both the national selection committee and the Southeastern advisory group that handles both conference and independent Division I teams, numbering 57 is this section of the country.

"On Sunday, I will contact the members of the advisory committee for the Southeast," said Port, discussing the selection process. "Then, there will be a conference call Monday at 11 a.m. for the national committee. Hopefully, we can award some of the births at that time."

Setting up the Atlantic, South and South-Central regions on Monday is a near certainty, since the four-team tournaments will be played May 20-22—one week earlier than the other five regions.

Tech could be placed in any one of the eight regions, but since the NCAA is looking for crowds—because crowds and money are synonymous—it figures that the Gobblers would stay close to home.

Although Port said even the 18 conference champions could be moved, it is expected that Atlantic Coast Conference champion Wake Forest and Southern Conference winner East Carolina will be in the Atlantic field. Our source said he figures Tech and South Carolina for the other two births in the double-elimination event.

That leaves the Southeastern Conference and Ohio Valley Conference champs and a pair of at-large teams in the South Regional. The SEC playoff will be contested this weekend, a four-team affair including Mississippi, Mississippi State, Vanderbilt and Florida.

In the OVC, Morehead State—No. 1 in Division I team hitting—will meet Middle Tennessee in a best-of-three playoff for the crown. That confrontation begins today with a twinbill at Morehead.

Our source expects South Alabama and Miami (Fla.) to join the SEC and OVC kings in the South field.

But that still leaves out the University of New Orleans, which just happens to have the top record (34-7) among Southeastern independent teams. Our source figures UNO will be shifted to the South-Central Regional, which probably will include perennial power Texas. The South-Central Regional will be played at Texas-Arlington.

South Carolina is 33-9, while South Alabama—coached by Eddie Stanky—is 36-9. Miami stands 40-11. Three top independents—Florida State, Memphis State and Georgia Tech—are involved in the Metro Seven Tournament. While that conference doesn't have an automatic bid, it should be one of those three power wins. It would probably get a birth in the Midwest or Midwest as an at-large selection.

A conference runnerup from another part of the country probably won't be moved into the Atlantic or South fields, because of the proliferation of quality independents in this area. There are currently 14 Southeastern Independents—teams that have won at a .640 clip this season. This type of baseball has been demonstrated by these schools for the last decade.

Once the teams in a regional are picked, the NCAA committee then awards the site to a school involved. Both Wake and ECU have put in bids to host a regional, with a word out that the Demon Deacons have a better-than-average shot at getting the Atlantic foursome.

Briggs Miles, owner of the Winston-Salem Red Sox, has told the Deacons he would switch his Carolina League team's homestand with Peninsula should Wake get the host role at Ernie Shore Field.