Are Tech Baseballers Waiting in Vain?

If all things come to those who wait, then Virginia Tech should receive a bid to the NCAA Baseball Tournament. But with two weeks having passed and the Gobblers still waiting for some definite word from the NCAA Baseball Committee, the more-than-casual observer must seriously ask if Tech is waiting for a streetcar in the desert.

NCAA Controller Lou Spry, who coordinates things for the six-man committee, says 10 teams are still being considered for eight at-large spots. But in the next breath, Spry says that the committee is having “problems with the schedules of Virginia Tech and the University of New Orleans.”

That’s two teams. And 10 teams minus two equals eight, just the number of openings available. What is continuing in this scenario is the constant difference of opinion between conference schools and the independents, like Tech.

The NCAA says it will consider runnersup from seven conferences in addition to Clemson, which lost the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament but plays in the South regional with a 38-7 record.

For the past two weeks, Tech Coach Bob Humphreys has said “it’s out of our hands now,” in reference to his team’s NCAA chances. He is right. But the Gobblers’ opportunity to play in either the Mideast, Midwest, Rocky Mountain or South-Central regionals isn’t completely in the hands of a slow-moving committee, either.

It appears that if Tech is going to get a bid, it needs help from some teams that have made baseball No. 1 while UCLA was doing the same in basketball.

In five of the seven conferences where the NCAA is taking a look at runnersup as possible candidates for the tournament, titles by certain teams could swing the Gobblers’ opportunity to the positive. But if those five teams finish as runnersup, Tech will almost surely have to take its 31-game winning streak into next season.

With conference races ending this weekend, perennial collegiate baseball powers Southern California, Arizona State, Minnesota, Texas and Oklahoma could finish second in league races after compiling good overall records against top-notch competition.

The more of those teams that clinch league titles, the higher Tech’s NCAA stock rises. But if other teams win, then the Gobblers can probably pack up their bats and head for the beach.

While Humphreys is saying “it’s out of our hands now,” the NCAA Baseball Committee claims it was in his hands when he made Tech’s schedule.

The Gobblers’ schedule is hurting them when the committee holds its telephone conference calls. Spry says two things count—your record, and who you played. Tech’s 34-7 ledger looks good, but the NCAA selectors are having trouble keeping a straight face when it checks the Gobblers’ wins over teams like Morris Harvey, Concord, Buffalo State and Canisius.

And although the Gobblers reached the NCAA event last year, they are hardly a household word in college baseball. In 1976, they made the Atlantic Regional with a 33-7 record. But perhaps more important was the three wins in four regular-season decisions against perennial biggie South Carolina.

It would not be stretching the point to say that a two-game Gobblers’ sweep over the Gamecocks just before the bids went out last year gave Humphreys and Co. the NCAA berth. Two losses in those games drops Tech to 31-9 and probably out of contention.

The Gobblers can argue all they want, but the fact is that compared to the schedule they played a year ago, the 1977 slate was considerably easier. Gone from Tech’s 1976 card were Southern Conference champ Furman, a pair of home games with South Carolina, Wake Forest, North Carolina, a pair with The Citadel, one of two contests against Maryland, and George Washington. The only 1977 addition to the card that probably helped Tech was Georgia Southern, which took a 5-4, 13-inning decision from the Gobblers on their Southern trip in early March.

Humphreys says he will play any team, anywhere that will also come to Blacksburg and play. Agreed, that type of agreement is sometimes necessary. But you can’t refuse to go on the road forever.

The NCAA Baseball Committee—composed of Chal Port of The Citadel, Penn State’s Chuck Medlar, Massachussets’ Dick Berquist, Dick Siebert of Minnesota, Kal Sergus of Texas Tech and Arizona’s Jerry Kindall—must make its final eight choices Monday, since six regionals begin less than four days later.

The conferences vying for two spots (and teams) are these: Pacific Eight: Southern Cal (40-17) and Washington State (37-13); Western Athletic: Arizona State (47-11) and Brigham Young (32-15); Big 10: Minnesota (31-9) and Michigan (27-11); Southwest: Texas (51-7) and Texas A&M (36-12); Big Eight: Oklahoma (33-9) and Missouri (34-13); Southern California Association: San Diego State (45-14) and Fullerton State (34-11); Mid-American: Miami of Ohio (40-10) and Central Michigan (39-12).

The Gobblers have one consolation, and that is Spry’s feelings that the committee places little emphasis on the rankings in Collegiate Baseball, the newspaper that’s the Bible of the sport.

“Virginia Tech wasn’t rated in the most recent issue,” said Spry, referring to the May 13 edition of the paper. “I don’t think the committee is influenced at all by those rankings.

“For example, last year UCLA was rated 15th but didn’t get a tournament bid. They played a tremendous schedule, but had a 35-25 record.

“Take the most-recent ratings. Stetson was 24th and they’re not a serious candidate any more. Madison (32-9) is 26th and they’re out of it. And Tulane is 26th and they aren’t mentioned any more.”

The Gobblers must console themselves with the news that they are at least being considered, even if it’s in the same breath with talk of a weak schedule. It’s better than not being mentioned at all.