Gobblers Prepare For 4th NCAA Try

By JACK BOGACZYK
Sports Writer

After waiting three weeks for a bid to the NCAA Baseball Tournament, what's another three days to Virginia Tech?

A reward.

Monday afternoon, the Gobblers received the phone call they'd been waiting for, and accepted a bid to play in the NCAA's Mideast Regional at Minneapolis.

Tech will take its 34-7 record into the tournament opener against Mid-American Conference champion Central Michigan (43-12) Friday at 1 p.m. CDT Big Ten champ Minnesota (35-10), the host team, faces Southeastern Conference runnerup Florida in Friday's second game at Bierman Field.

Florida (37-16) joined the Gobblers as an at-large entry in the four-team Mideast field which will play a double-elimination event. Five other regionals also will be played this weekend, with all winners advancing to the College World Series June 10-17 at Omaha. South Regional champ Clemson and South Carolina, a 6-1 winner over Wake Forest in Monday's Atlantic Regional final, have already clinched CWS bids.

Tech had hoped to get an NCAA bid as early as three weeks ago, but the NCAA Baseball Committee kept the Gobblers waiting until the final day of the selection process. It will be Tech's second straight year in the final 34.

"We're happy to be in the NCAA playoffs again because we feel that we've earned it," said Tech Coach Bob Humphreys, whose team owns a 31-game winning streak. "It's been somewhat frustrating being in a 'holding pattern' for the last two weeks, but there are some plusses.

"Our players will be through with final exams before we play, rather than having them postponed. We also had a short layoff (since May 15) which physically we probably needed. We've been practicing since last Thursday, so we should be sharp."

The Gobblers earned a bid after opening the season with a 1-6 record. But an improved pitching staff anchored by sophomore righthander Duke Dickerson turned around Tech's season.

Tech will be making its fourth post-season baseball appearance. Coach Red Laird's team went 2-2 in 1954, beating Clemson twice before dropping a pair of games to Rollins. In 1969, Laird's team played in the regional at Gastonia, N.C. Tech opened with a 7-6, 10-inning loss to Mississippi, then beat Furman in the second game. North Carolina eliminated the Gobblers in their next outing.

A year ago at Columbia, S.C., Humphreys' club fell 7-6 to host South Carolina in a 10-inning opener. Furman eliminated Tech, 5-4, the following day.