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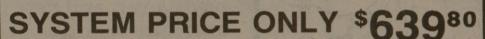
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By Paul Arnett

It's no longer second rate

Five years ago it ranked right up there with dorm hall hockey, water balloon fights and PE. But because of the Arkansas Razorbacks, the Houston Cougars and the Texas Longhorns, college basketball has found a home in the Southwest Con-

"I'm really happy to see this come about," coach Eddie Sutton said after his team's victory over Fullerton State. "It's good to see the fans care about something other than

"For a long time the conference has been considered to be somebody's weak sister when it came to basketball. But I think that day has come and gone

The Razorbacks and the Longhorns have the chance to prove that fact in the next seven days. Tonight Texas plays North Carolina State for the NIT championship. Saturday Arkansas plays Kentucky for the right to challenge the winner of the Duke-Notre Dame game for the

NCAA championship next Monday

Each team has an excellent chance to bring home the coveted

crowns.

"I think we have a good chance of winning the NCAA championship," Sutton said. "The game this weekend against Kentucky will probably be the toughest one of our season. But we no longer represent just Arkansas; we represent the conference as well. And for that reason, I think our guys will give Kentucky all they want."

Texas coach Abe Lemmons had

similar sentiments. "When we stepped on that court at Madison Square Garden, the conference's reputation was on the line," Lemmons said. "Our guys wanted to prove to all those New York writers that we can play something other than football in Texas."

And the 'Horns did more than prove that fact. Before 18,000 partisan fans, Texas defeated Rutgers 96-76. But Lemmons thinks to-

night's finale will be a little tougher. North Carolina State has a great

basketball reputation," Lemmons backs will have to counter! said. "Our guys will have to play the best game they can to defeat the Wolfpack. But if we do beat them, then all the critics will have to get they'll probably face Noted off the Southwest Conference's

Arkansas also faces a team with a great basketball tradition. The Kentucky Wildcats are the No. 1 team in the nation and should have won the national championship last year.

Coach Joe Hall's group is not one to finish second fiddle twice.

"We show Weatherky wents the country are a physical battern, capable of posting anylor the nation down underness basket.

Notre Dame beat Housting opening round of the Midwe gionals like they were playing in the Courton Royal And the country and the cou

"We know Kentucky wants
national championship very badly,"
Sutton said. "But so do we. After
Sutton said. "But so do we. After
But all that is only action
But all that is only action
But all that is only action 'We know Kentucky wants the ing round last year, our guys set a goal to prove that the Razorbacks lose this weekend, have all cused the nation's spotlig That will be on our minds this

Saturday afternoon. Looking at it realistically, it ap pears that Texas will win the NIT. in the southwest. But Arkansas winning the NCAA is

stronger team inside. The

The Irish are playing bette anyone else in the count

gionals like they were play in the Cotton Bowl. And the

Southwest Conference bash has taken many years for the invented in America to find

And for Sutton and Len there's no place like home



Ags Hurdle 'Horns

Sophomore Mike Hurdle sends the ball bouncing over the rightfield fence at Disch-Falk Field in Austin Friday, aiding the Aggies in their 5-4 victory over the 'Horns. In Saturday's double-header, A&M won the opener 1-0, and Texas to nightcap 5-2. The Aggies play USC today at 3 p.m. following dedication ceremonies at C.E. "Pat" Olsen Field.

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