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Final Four important for Dallas' self-image

Associated Press
DALLAS — Mayor Starke Taylor says he wants people to know his city is more than J.R. Ewings in cowboy boots and hats.

That's why Taylor is happy that Dallas is "successfully" preparing and bracing itself for the NCAA Final Four basketball tournament March 29-31 at Reunion Arena. "I travel a lot, and when people think about Dallas they think about the television show," Taylor said Tuesday. "The show has created an image that isn't true. When they think of Texas, they think of western. I think Dallas is more sophisticated than that."

A lot of the projected image in part depends on the Dallas Final Four Committee, that has less than four weeks to prepare a three-day event for an estimated 20,000 visitors.

"People know about our (NFL) Cowboys and hopefully now our (NBA) Mavericks," said Taylor. "People who come to the Final Four from across the country, maybe around the world, should consider that Dallas is a great basketball town, a great sports town."

The city played host to the NCAA regional tournament last year, the NBA All-Star Game Feb. 8-9 and will host the Southwest Conference tournament this weekend.

The All-Star Game generated \$2.7 million for the local economy and the SWC tournament will add \$3.5 million March 7-9.

The estimated \$7.5 million out-of-town guests are expected to spend for the Final Four is not as important as what they see during their stay in the nation's third busiest convention city, city officials said.

Dallas City Manager Charles Anderson cited two-year studies that indicate Dallas leads the nation in job growth, office construction and absorption, and rate of increase in retail sales. Surveys also show the city has the third highest concentration of high-technology industry, he said. "We want to spread the news," Anderson said. "And I think we're ready."

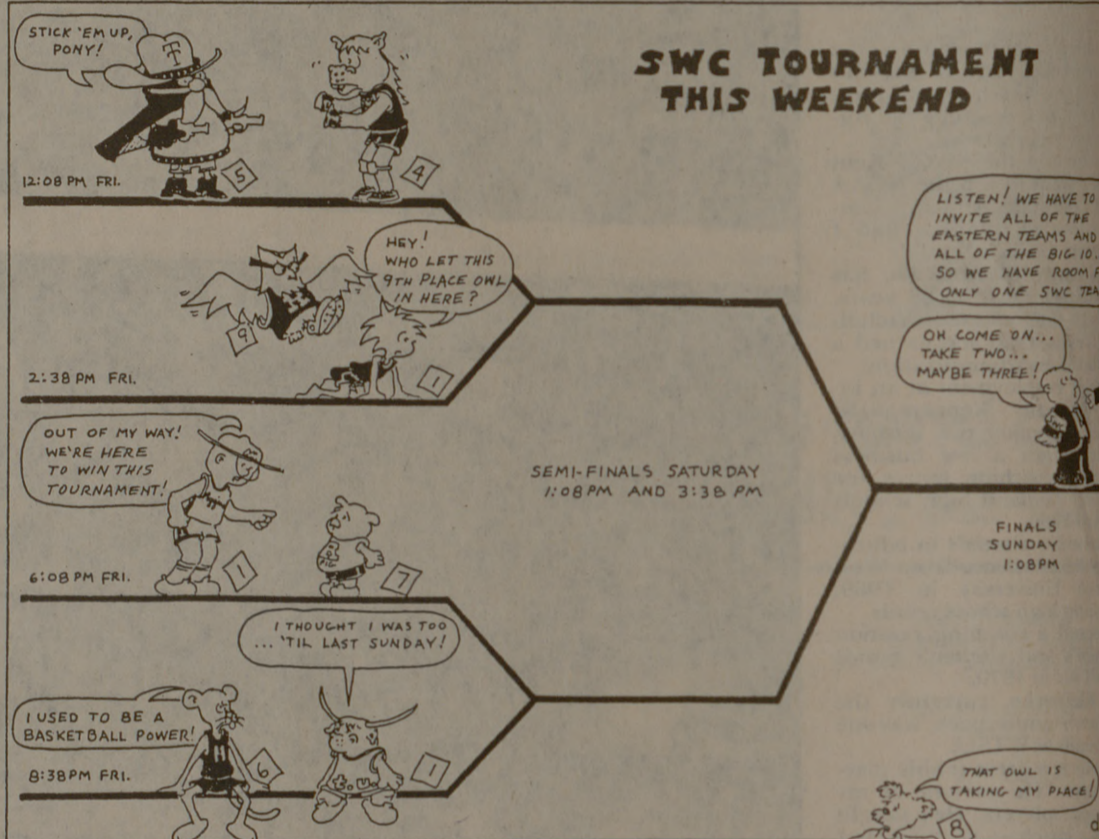
It hasn't been easy preparing, Final Four Committee members say. The committee will have spent more than \$650,000 preparing private events geared mostly toward NCAA officials, National Association of Basketball Coaches conventioners and VIPs and members of the media.

The \$46 tickets — divided between the final four schools, NABC and NCAA — are sold out for the 19,000-seat Reunion Arena that has been reduced to 16,500 to facilitate the news media.

"We should be well into the black because the NCAA allows it," said Beckman. "You can't compromise on this event. You can't be embarrassed. And we're not going to be embarrassed."

TANK McNAMARA

by Jeff Millar & Bill Hill



Arkansas basketball player apologizes for drug usage

Associated Press
FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. — Arkansas basketball player William Mills apologized Wednesday for a drug problem which led to his dismissal from the Razorback squad.

"It was stupid to get into drugs in the first place but once we did, it was hard to get out," William Mills said in a statement released by the University of Arkansas athletic department. "I'm embarrassed about it, but the problem kept eating a little more out of me until I couldn't handle it."

On Feb. 25, Razorback Coach Nolan Richardson suspended Mills and Kenny Hutchinson for the remainder of the season for what he said were disciplinary reasons. The Benton County Daily Democrat reported in a copyright story Friday that Mills and Hutchinson were in Charter Vista Hospital at Fayetteville, a rehabilitation center which treats drug, alcohol and stress-related problems.

Athletic department and hospital officials declined to verify the report.

Mills did not specify which drugs he had used. The athletic department said there would be no further comment on the statements.

Mills is a 6-foot-7 junior from Perkins, Ga. Hutchinson is a sophomore guard from New York City.

"I'd like to apologize to the University of Arkansas administration, the University of Arkansas and the Arkansas fans," Mills said. "I don't know if we should be forgiven but I hope we will be forgiven."

Hutchinson, too, apologized to the school and athletic department.

"This is the best thing for us," Hutchinson said. "Coach Richardson has done a lot for us. We appreciate the fans being supportive of us. When we get out of this, we want to get our lives together and do positive things with our lives."

Richardson has said the suspension does not mean the players cannot return to the Razorbacks next year. "Whether or not they're on scholarship is up to the coach," Richardson told a news conference last week. "The door is not going to be closed and it ain't going to be open. It's not closed but it will be cracked."

"I hope people will give us a chance when we get out. We want to get about our lives in a positive manner," Mills said. "I really appreciate Coach Richardson taking the time to look at our problem and having compassion to forgive and not just cast us out. He recognized our problem and did what was best. It was the most positive thing that could have happened to us."

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