

Sports

SWC tourney championship up for grabs

By Hal L. Hammons
Assistant Sports Editor

Well, there's good news and bad news as the Texas A&M men's basketball team gets ready for the Southwest Conference Classic this weekend in Dallas.

The good news is, there are six teams of the eight that have to be considered legitimate threats to walk away with three wins and the championship. The bad news is, the Aggies are one of the other two.

Granted, distinct favorites for the crown have emerged, but the amazing consistency of wild and crazy shenanigans in the annual shoot-out in Reunion Arena promises anything but a cakewalk for the top-seeded Southern Methodist Mustangs, the second-seeded Baylor Bears or the highly regarded Arkansas Razorbacks.

Were I a gambler, here's how they'd stand up:

Southern Methodist: seed — No. 1. odds — 3-2.

Few logical reasons could be found as to why the Mustangs would lose, as they are hands-down the best team in the conference. When they're on there's no turning

them off, and there's no way to beat a team that gets three points every time down the court. Kato Armstrong, Carlton McKinney, Todd Alexander and Eric Longino can all hit from beyond the three-point stripe.

The trouble is, when they're off they're off. They can't seem to work it out so that only one player at a time has a bad day. Either they all shoot the lights out or they all airball everything. Fix that and they could be a Final Four team.

Baylor: seed — No. 2. odds — 2-1.

The Bears are the hottest team in the SWC and beat SMU handily in Waco in the teams' last meeting. Darryl Middleton has become a somewhat-reliable force on the inside after a long history of no-shows, and guard Michael Williams should have been a lock for SWC Most Valuable Player. If he's left alone he will hit the shot. It's just about that simple. After finding his touch at mid-season, guard Roy Hobbs' confidence is at an all-time high.

However, Baylor is weak on the bench and has proven to be vulnerable. Witness the thrashing they took on the road against Texas. Middleton won't be able to slack off

like last year and still get to the finals.

Texas: seed — No. 4. odds — 4-1.

If Bob Weltlich doesn't get Coach of the Year it will be robbery. He's taken a team that has relatively little talent and formed one of the best in the conference. Lack of actual talent, however, could come to haunt them.

Plagued with injuries the entire season, they have gotten healthy and hot at the right time. Three more strong efforts could spell championship for the Horns.

Houston: seed — No. 5. odds — 4-1.

Another flaky team. When they're good they're close to unstoppable. Junior College transfer Richard Hollis is uncanny when he decides to become part of the offensive attack, and center Rolando Ferreira probably is the most reliable scorer in the conference from inside 10 feet.

Whether or not the Cougars play with the intensity they are capable of showing, the game with Texas definitely should be the best of the opening round games, if not the tournament.

Arkansas: seed — No. 3. odds — 5-1

The fact, inexplicable as it may be, still

remains: the Razorbacks stink when it comes to the tournament. They *ought* to be contenders. They *could* be contenders. But if the last few years' performances are any indication, they won't be.

Plus the Hogs have had discipline problems, consistency problems and their annual difficulties winning on the road. Put the Classic in Barnhill Arena and they'll have a shot. In Reunion, don't count on it.

Texas Tech: seed — No. 7. odds — 10-1.

There's absolutely no reason to think the Red Raiders will do anything at the tournament but lose big, and as soon as possible. Yet there remains an inexplicable force that surrounds the SWC Classic. Some invisible specter forces all stray balls into Tech hands, shoves all Raider shots through the hoop, gives their opponents some strange disease that keeps them from playing well.

A lot of it comes from Coach Gerald Myers, considered by most to be the best in the SWC. If he can get his team to win two or three games this weekend, though, he ought to be running for president.

Texas A&M: seed — No. 6. odds — 15-1.

Agreed, this team ought to have a better chance at the Classic crown than last year's squad had — the team that not only won it, but *beat up* three of the top four seeds. That team, however, had Winston Crite.

With good performances from the "3-Ds" — Darryl, Doug and Donald — as well as just about everyone else, the Aggies could win one or two or even three games — stranger things have happened.

Texas Christian: seed — No. 8. odds — 25-1.

Truth to tell, the odds ought to be about 25-1 that they beat SMU in the opening round. Two more wins after that would be, well, let's just borrow a quote from Jim Wacker and say "unbelievable!"

The Frogs play well in spurts, and players like Rod Jacques can light up the board when they get hot, but let's face it: they edged Rice out on a tie-breaker for the last space in the tournament. There's no reason to think TCU would be able to win as many games this weekend as they won *all season*.

Mustangs' coach, 3 players receive SWC hoop honors

DALLAS (AP) — Champion Southern Methodist placed two players on the Associated Press 1987-1988 All-Southwest Conference basketball first team and Dave Bliss was honored by his peers as Coach of the Year.

Kato Armstrong and Carlton McKinney, the Mustangs' high-scoring seniors, were named to first-place berths.

Guard Darryl McDonald was the only Aggie to make the team, earning a berth on the second team.

Other first teamers picked by the coaches included Baylor's inside-outside, one-two punch of center Darryl Middleton and guard Michael Williams, both seniors, and sophomore Ron Huery of the Arkansas Razorbacks.

Middleton, who became the first player since 1975 to win scoring and

rebounding titles, is the AP All-Southwest Conference Offensive Player of the Year.

Middleton averaged 19.5 points and nine rebounds per game. Rick Bullock averaged 20 points and 11 rebounds for Texas Tech in 1975.

Defensive Player of the Year was also off Coach Gene Iba's second seeded tournament team, Robert McLemore, a tenacious competitor who usually guards the shooting star on the opposing teams.

Baylor had its finest regular season in 40 years with 21 victories.

Newcomer of the Year is SMU's Todd Alexander, the most valuable sixth man in the SWC. Alexander, a transfer from Minnesota, gave the Mustangs a lift with his solid outside shooting.

Williams moved into the top 15

all-time SWC and broke Baylor's single season assists record of 159 set by Vinnie Johnson, who now plays for the Detroit Pistons in the NBA, during the 1978-79 season. Williams averaged 18 points per game.

For the SMU Mustangs it was their first SWC title since 1967.

It was the first time for Bliss to win Coach of the Year honors in his eight years at SMU.

Armstrong and McKinney each averaged 15 points for the Mustangs and Alexander averaged 14 points coming off the bench as the Mustangs won 24 of 30 regular season games.

Huery, a sophomore, averaged 13 points for the Razorbacks, who finished in a second-place tie with Baylor after being the preseason favorites.

Temple remains on top of poll as tournament time draws near

From the Associated Press

For the fifth consecutive week, Temple remained atop the Associated Press college basketball poll Monday, while Purdue, Arizona and Oklahoma held on to the No. 2 through 4 places for the same period.

Temple, 27-1, has advanced to the semifinals of the Atlantic 10 tournament and a victory in that could assure the Owls of a No. 1 seeding in the NCAA tournament when the pairings are announced on Sunday.

Purdue, 26-2, has already clinched a berth in the NCAA as champions of the Big 10. The Boilermakers won the title on Saturday with an 80-67 victory over No. 10 Michigan.

Arizona, 28-2, clinched the Pacific 10 regular-season title quite a while ago and the Wildcats are as-

ured a bid even if they don't win the conference tournament. Oklahoma, 27-3, had already won the Big Eight regular-season title before losing to Missouri 93-90 in overtime last week and the Sooners should be in the same spot as Arizona as far as a bid is concerned.

Arizona was the only other team to receive first-place votes as the Wildcats got four and 1,148 points, while the Sooners had 1,019 points.

Pittsburgh, the Big East regular-season champion, jumped from seventh to fifth, the same improvement made by Kentucky, the top seed of the Southeastern Conference tournament.

Kentucky beat Georgia and Mississippi last week to improve its record to 22-5 and received 886 points, 66 more than Ne-

vada-Las Vegas which had been No. 5.

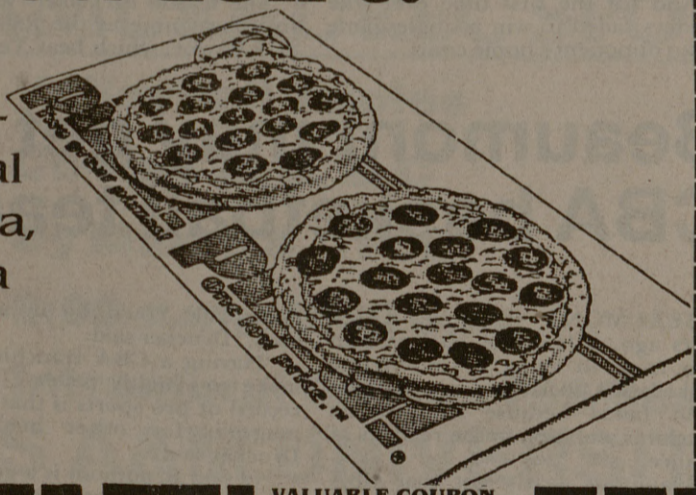
The Runnin' Rebels, 26-4, lost their third home game of the season last week when they fell to Long Beach State 79-77.

Duke, 21-6, improved one place to eighth with 802 points after stopping a three-game losing streak with a 96-81 victory over North Carolina, which fell from sixth to ninth with 772 points. North Carolina had already clinched the Atlantic Coast Conference regular-season title and the loss was the second this year to Duke.

For the second straight week and third of the last four, Michigan rounded out the Top 10. The Wolverines, 23-6, split two games last week, beating Northwestern 105-67 before losing to Purdue.

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