

The arena's Lazarus-like return to the world of men's college basketball came Sunday as the National Invitation Tournament (NIT) laid its hands upon the corpse that was believed to have been that of Ragin' Cajun basketball '84-85. It seems that the NIT wanted Coach Bobby Paschal's 16-13 team to be among the 32 teams in its 1985 field.

Not only that, the NIT pickers wanted USL to play host to an opening round game against Southeastern Conference (SEC) power Florida tonight (Thursday) at 7:30. Faster than you can say "USL Athletic Director Dr. Terry Don Phillips" the Cajuns' AD accepted the invitation and the offer and USL basketball had returned to the ranks of the living.

The announcement of the Cajuns' inclusion in the NIT field was a surprise primarily because of the way the Cajuns faded down the stretch run when teams were supposed to be getting their acts together for the post-season tournaments. The Cajuns dropped five straight games after completing a seven-game winning streak. So the Cajuns went from 9-8 to 16-8, and then to 16-13.

Still, it was good enough to get into the NIT.

Chris Fallon, publicist for the NIT told *The Times* early this week that a number of factors put the Cajuns in their picture.

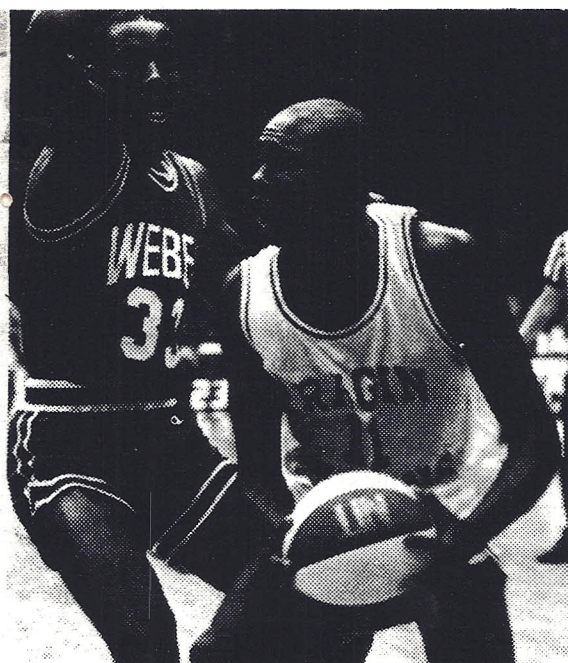
"They had a good power rating (an indicator of their record vs. the strength of their schedule), they were with us last year, the strength of their schedule and, basically, they just appeal to us," Fallon said in a telephone interview.

Fallon said site availability and history of attendance pointed the NIT in the direction of Blackham for the second straight year. USL will pocket 20 percent of the gate receipts from tonight's game with Florida.

The Gators were in the thick of the SEC title scramble until late in the season when a series of crucial losses took them out of it. In the SEC tournament in Birmingham last week, the Gators beat Kentucky which drew a berth in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) tournament.

The NIT decision to include USL in its field only served to further inflame the relations between the local school and McNeese State University in Lake Charles.

McNeese basketball Coach Glenn Duhon was "sent into a tirade" by the NIT selection of USL over his club, ac-



Photos by Brad Kemp

**Both USL's George Almones (left) and La. Tech's Karl Malone (right) will be gunning for more tourney successes.**

cording to the *Lake Charles American Press*.

The Monday, March 11 edition of the *American Press* quotes Duhon thusly on the matter of USL's inclusion in the NIT field:

"It's a sin and a shame and a slap in the face to our players, our basketball program and our school. We were sold down the river. USL has had some great teams in the past, but this year's team is not one of them."

The article, by *American Press* Sports Editor Bobby Dower, goes on to note that USL "posted a 2-7 mark against Louisiana teams and a 1-6 record against Southland Conference teams."

Back to Duhon's tirade:

"It's an embarrassment to McNeese, our athletic department, our school administration and the Southland Conference when USL is picked before us. The NIT should be banned. They are not interested in selecting the best teams. They are only interested in picking the teams that can bring them money. When USL guaranteed them 10,000 and \$50,000 in ticket sales, the NIT invited them."

"I blame it on money and politics and the lack of political push on McNeese's part," the Cowboy coach continued. Duhon lambasted Southland Conference Commissioner Dick Oliver for not putting up a strong enough fight to get McNeese into the tournament. Duhon charged that Oliver allowed Lamar to get into the NIT rather than McNeese because the Beaumont school has been "threatening to pull out of the league."

But, Duhon saved his best shot for the NIT.

"The NIT selection committee should be tarred, feathered and strung up. They say they select teams on their records, strength of their schedule and how they finished the season. That's a bunch of (BLEEP) [in the original article]. Who gets in depends on their power and their stroke with the committee," Duhon concluded.

Didn't anybody tell this guy that this tournament is played every year? Duhon not only will not likely have a team in the NIT soon, he's also blown whatever shot he might have had for a career in diplomacy.

It is a shame though that McNeese's Joe Dumars—a likely first-round NBA draft pick—will not be seeing any post-season action.

Unlike the NCAA, the winners of the first round of the NIT tournament have no idea who they'll play next nor where that game will be. Fallon said the second round matchups and sites won't be decided until after the completion of the Houston-Lamar game Friday night in Beaumont.

Those second round games will be played on March 19-20, with the third round games being played "around" March 23, according to Fallon, at sites yet to be determined.

The semi-finals and finals will be played in Madison Square Garden in New York on March 27th and 29th.

Last year USL made it all the way to the final four of this tournament. A return trip will be a tough one to earn, but then so was the tournament berth.

The Cajuns have a chance to hook

ing  
Knig  
State  
In a  
20-g  
US  
to  
scho  
Dale  
in th  
the  
gone  
with  
in D  
Th  
seaso  
SEC  
to ev  
slouc  
goal  
Th  
siana  
the  
Bulle  
Willi  
Okla  
burg  
team  
was  
brac  
Th  
(19-1  
in th  
uner  
West  
St. J  
of th  
one  
chan  
figur  
year  
of C  
W  
Sunc  
impr  
mom  
tion  
Coac  
on a  
Denn  
nel 1  
ticul  
US  
Gray  
natur  
But,  
invit  
prog  
year'  
"I  
confi  
fans  
game  
Be  
Flori  
out  
thing  
juns