

CBI's a heck of a thing for Tulsa

by: JIMMIE TRAMEL World Sports Writer
3/25/2008 12:00 AM

BETWEEN THE NCAA Tournament and the NIT and the female incarnations of both events, it seemed like college basketball fans needed another postseason hoops tournament about as much as Ottawa County needs another casino.

But along came the CBI -- that's the College Basketball Invitational, if you haven't been properly introduced -- and darned if Tulsa hasn't come to love the new kid on the Bracketville block.

Tulsa won its second consecutive game in the inaugural CBI and it seemed like 5,764 fans at the Reynolds Center were more than happy to catch a new strain of March Madness.

Call it CBI fever and TU fans sweated through some nervous second-half moments (a 17-point cushion got whittled to five) before the Golden Hurricane secured a 69-60 victory over Utah in a second-round CBI game Monday night.

The Reynolds Center isn't always the rowdiest of joints, but win-or-go-home postseason stakes seemed to juice the place and the decibel level rose every time a Hurricane player made a big play down the stretch. Fans gave the home team a standing ovation after the final buzzer sounded and they roared in approval when it was announced that TU will play Houston in a CBI semifinal game Wednesday at the Reynolds Center.

What that means is a final four is coming to Tulsa. It's not the Final Four (the one with capital letters will be staged in San Antonio), but it's a final four and it's good medicine for a TU program in need of a signal that golden years could return.

Playing in the CBI semis doesn't mean necessarily that Tulsa, eight years removed from an Elite Eight and five years removed from its last NCAA Tournament appearance, is back on the big stage. But at least you can CB-eye it from there.

Super soph Ben Uzoh, who has the potential to become TU's first first-team all-league player since Kevin Johnson in 2003, said he heard that there was going to be a new postseason tournament way back before the season started, but he confessed that he didn't know the name of it until halfway through the year.

"We're just trying to seize the moment," he said.

Losing coach Jim Boylen began his postgame press conference by thanking the CBI for the opportunity to play in the tournament. He called it a great experience for his team. He said it was a well-run tournament and a classy event. Said Boylen, "I would recommend it highly to anyone who has a chance to play in it."

Let's second the recommendation, and here's why the CBI is a heck of a thing for Tulsa:

- The CBI helped debunk the myth that Tulsa can't be good in football and basketball at the same time. Hard to believe, but, until now, TU had never won a bowl game and a postseason basketball game (not counting conference tournaments) in the same academic year. It wouldn't have happened this year if not for the CBI.
- The CBI helped matchmake a revenge game for all those former Tulsa players like Shea Seals, Michael Ruffin and (let's go back a ways) Bobby Lee Goodall who got Ute-tubed by Utah in the past.

Utah was the only team the Golden Hurricane never beat during the brief life span of the

16-team Western Athletic Conference, when TU lost three three times to the likes of NBA-bound Utes Michael Doleac, Andre Miller and Keith Van Horn. TU also got waxed by Utah in a 1957 game, failing to make a field goal in the first seven minutes of a lopsided defeat.

This is how long it has been since TU had beaten Utah. The last time it happened, Clarence Iba was coaching, C.I. Pontius was TU's president, D.D. Eisenhower was the U.S. president and the only colors on TV were black and white (the first color TV sets went on sale 11 days after Dick Nunnally and Bob Patterson scored 19 points each in that 1953 win).

TU fans with long memories can thank Uzoh for the first series victory since. His 22 points were the most by a Utah or Tulsa player in series history and he helped the Hurricane carve itself a place in history on the new more-crowded-than-ever college basketball landscape.

Only three schools have ever won two or more NIT championships, advanced as far as the NCAA Tournament's Elite Eight and won at least two CBI games. That means you, Tulsa, Virginia and Bradley. Now let's see if CBI fever spreads here like NIT fever did back when the Golden Hurricane became a national player back in the 1980s.

[Read Jimmie Tramel's blog .](#)

Associate Images:

**JIMMIE
TRAMEL**

[jimmie.tramel@
tulsaworld.com](mailto:jimmie.tramel@tulsaworld.com)



Copyright © 2008, World Publishing Co. All rights reserved

[Return to Story](#)