NIT's New Format Big Hit
As Openers Draw Crowds

There can be little doubt now that the NIT's new format is here to stay.

The eight first-round games will draw around 100,000 people, which is more than the entire tourney has drawn in recent years in New York.

What's more, the rental of the coliseums is far less than it costs to get Madison Square Garden. Pete Carlesimo, the NIT chairman who attended the game at Blacksburg, said that the participating teams this year would get far more money than in the past.

In previous years, the only way to break even financially in the NIT was to reach the semifinals.

However, it would have been interesting to see the reaction in the Garden to some of the fantastic first-round performances. The most remarkable efforts came in losing causes, with Anthony Roberts of Oral Roberts scoring 65 and Indiana State's Larry Bird getting 44.

Oregon's Greg Ballard had a school record 43 as the Ducks won at ORU.

All of the furor over playing games at one team's home site should have subsided. Three of the first five NIT games were won by the visiting teams—Oregon, Villanova (over Old Dominion) and Illinois State (over Creighton). Houston won by a single point when Bird missed a shot at the buzzer.

There's got to be a better way to select All-American teams. Some of the teams announced thus far are truly jokes. The worst belongs to The Sporting News, which picks a team based on the opinions of the pro scouts.

The Sporting News team had N.C. State's Kenny Carr on the first team. Carr may be a brilliant pro prospect, but he was not as good this year as he was as a sophomore. Carr has been far too erratic to be considered a true A-A player. Carr made the team ahead of Bernard King.

Phil Ford, who almost never has a bad game, wound up on the second team along with teammate Tommy LaGarde, who missed the last eight games of the season. If LaGarde was one of the three best centers in the country, as this would indicate, then it was an awful year for pivot men.

The choice that is the most puzzling is that of Kent Benson, the Indiana center. Benson was terrific last year. This year, he was handicapped by playing on a bad team, and he was injured most of the season.

While Benson will be a very high draft choice—perhaps No. 1 in the nation—he did not have an All-American season. It is my considered opinion that if a player really is one of the five best in the country, on performance any given year, his team will finish better than 14-13.

I am prejudiced, since I served on the selection committee, but I think that the U.S. Basketball Writers team is the best I've seen. Ballard made that squad, and he hasn't even made third team on any other A-A listing.

Ballard is a 6-7 senior who outplayed player of the year Marques Johnson in one game and got no worse than a standoff the other time. Oregon won both games. Ballard was the leading scorer in the Pac-8 in conference games, and second behind Johnson overall. He played in a tough league, which means something to me.

The choice of Clemson's Tree Rollins to at least a couple of third team A-A squads is amazing. While Tree's statistics were good, he had far too many bad games to be considered. His performance in the ACC tournament, when it really counted, was subpar.

The ACC Sports Writers and Sportscasters Assn., which picks the all-league team, has changed its way of voting for the umpteenth time.

Now the all-ACC team will be named after all regular-season games, but the player, rookie and coach of the year won't be picked until after the tournament. This year, everything but the coach was chosen prior to the tournament.

Many people voted prior to the last two regular-season games, in which Wake Forest lost twice and North Carolina won twice. Wake's Rod Griffin was a runaway winner as the league's MVP. Under the new format, Phil Ford probably would have won instead. UNC's Mike O'Koren likely would have gotten more than nine votes for rookie of the year, probably at the expense of N.C. State's Hawkeye Whitney. The tourney would have raised the stock of Duke's Mike Gminski, who tied Whitney for rookie honors.