'Bama's Newton Likes Chances To Win NIT

By BOB MOSKOWITZ
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NEW YORK — It rained here much of Sunday, but C.M. Newton exuded nothing but sunshine. Newton's Alabama Crimson Tide sports a 24-1 record going into the quarter-final round of the 49th annual National Invitation Tournament and his team is not only favored to beat Virginia Tech tonight at 7, but stands as the team to beat in the venerable basketball extravaganza.

The Tide trounced Virginia Tech 108-78 in December in the finals of the Dayton Invitation, but Newton, a product of the University of Kentucky, doesn't think the matter of overconfidence will prove to be a factor tonight.

Tech brings a 19-9 ledger into the action and its credentials include a 5-0 NIT record and a 4-2 Madison Square Garden ledger, which figures out as the class of the bunch, although St. Bonaventure has won 29 times in two buildings known as the Garden.

Newton, now in his ninth year at the helm of the Southeastern Conference power, insists "we caught Tech at the perfect time in December."

"They had come into that tournament just off a holiday layoff and had a tough victory (76-75) over Dayton, while we had an easy game against Oklahoma State, even though we shot only 34 per cent. Then the next night we shot 58 per cent against Tech."

In what Newton describes as a "scrambling season, we've played consistently. Still, it's been a driving kind of year, with a lot of close games."

"We're not strong physically. That makes the need to scramble more important. We try to break if we get the ball off the boards."

One reason for the Tide's consistency, at least on defense, has been the ability of senior forward Donald Bowerman to avoid injuries.

The 6-foot-6 Bowerman is in his fourth season on the squad but is enjoying only his initial injury-free campaign.

As a result, former University of Kentucky pitcher Newton calls the veteran "our most improved player this season."

His development has earned him a starting berth, something he didn't have most of the year.

Bowerman is one of a dozen native Alabamians on the 14-man squad. Newton points out "we've pretty much localized our recruiting as much as possible. It's one big way to pare down expenses."

Both teams experienced chaotic trips here. The Gobblers' bus from Newark to their downtown motel broke down and Alabama had one plane cancelled and then had a near three-hour stopover. For Alabama the trip lasted nearly 11 hours.

N.I.T. NICKNACKS — Tech is 11-3 at home, 5-3 on opponents courts, but most important it's 6-1 in games decided by three points or less and 4-1 where the margin was a point. Gobblers also won their two overtime games.

Newton's baseball coach at Kentucky was Virginia Tech Athletic Director Frank Moseley. Guesting with the Moseleys at a pre-tournament affair at Sardi's Sunday night was legendary Alabama Football Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant.

Second game tonight pairs Illinois State (21-6) against Houston (27-7)...

Semifinals are Thursday, finals Sunday afternoon.

Tech, the 1973 winner, is the only past champion in the field. That title run included a 74-73 conquest of Alabama in the semifinals...

Newton conceded "we were down
See NIT, Page 17, Column 2