Goin' back to New Orleans?

Jack Styczynski
The NCAA Tournament's return to New Orleans for the first time since Katrina served as a test case for whether the Big Easy could handle another Final Four. There's still no easy answer, and finding one is among the least of the city's problems.

By Jack Szyrczynski

N O W E L S — From Michael Jordan in Chicago, to CBS’ Warren, to the city of New Orleans last month became one of the most memorable instances in NCAA championship history. The rebuilt Superdome and the post-Katrina world, should the Final Four come back?

Before running out to the city, the media sought the event to aid its recovery, knowing that the Big Easy was not the biggest basketball battleground. The waiting for Saints season tickets - $100,000, and seats are immediately readme. A Riverside souvenir- shop dirt is a shige to the Sugar Bowl, but from New Orleans to New Orleans, hoping very hard happens.

Throughout the week leading up to the NCAA sub-regional here, the city was noticeably emptier with March Madness. No bonds around town promoting the event, no more typical of the city, no more baseball fields to watch for minimums, the same. A bear market at LSU cup had never heard of Katrina, wasn’t aware that the tournament was coming to town and wasn’t aware that they’d be played in the city, 18,500-seat New Orleans Arena rather than the spacious Superdome west. The small and facility still fell thousands of short of a sellout.

“T’s a tough city,” says former New Or- thes Times-Picayune sports columnist Pat Fenney. “That’s remains obvious when only 100 or so fans were on hand to watch open team practices in the arena that much remained obvious when only 100 or so fans were on hand to watch open team practices in the arena.

That’s always true, Fenney said. “Every building over 10,000 people could be filled to be empty there since Katrina.” The list of towns remains. Streets of the city still without electricity. A lack of desks and directors bogs. Businesses struggling on credit. Red tape getting government funds. No car pools managing multi-family, FEMA auctions (“unadministration”), insurance battles. Schools. That’s all a suggestion, so no good news. The New Orleans Police Department recently graduated its first class of •policemen since the hurricanes. Bribes for humanity is one of several groups doing volunteer work in the newest communities (see sidebar story). Donald Trump maintains that if he has a new town built in the Superdome and a Convention Center in 2003. The Super- dome and Convention Center are completely restored.

Last but not the least, the Crescent City and most of downtown are fine, including the old-fashioned restaurants and the Smoothie King at Mississippi palace.

In towns for the sub-regional, some teams – in- cluding Billy Donovan’s Florida squad – turned down a request to move to Delgado Community College and the bus tour was through that Lakeview area and some areas that are really tight here, and I don’t know if people truly understand the recovery that is going on in this city and the amount of disruption that’s happened,” Donovan said. “We’re talking about 16 months removed from that storm and to move blocks and blocks of empty and vacant homes, some homes not there at all, people trying to pick up and start over, it’s a very, humbling experience.”

Yet Donovan advocates bringing a Final Four back to the city. “I think having New Orleans as a site for the Final Four the future would be a great thing. It’s a great city, and it has a lot of great events, and it will help to the rebuilding process financially, I think it would all help good.”
Melvin Watkins during the 2003-04 season, when the it was the temple to basketball indifference under coach and for what is left – a much better job and atmosphere.

You know who you’re talking about. Might be you.

As obsessed as you might be, you understood this. You’re not as obsessed as the guy who University just hired but as basketball coach. You’re not obsessed as Billy Gillispie.

Kentucky hired from Texas A&M a native Texan who would have taken a bucking bunch to Lexing- ton from College Station to accept this mammoth responsibility. They hired a guy who didn’t care that the school he had been

One man who can attest to that is Curly Conley, the Virginia athletic director whose five-year term on the Big 12 regular-season title, won at Kansas, in 1987 under coach Shelby Metcalf.

such as Gillispie want to coach the No. 2 or 3 or No. 4 like it was before Gillispie arrived. Certainly basketball is a No. 3 there. But not a distant No. 3 or No. 4 or No. 5 like it was before Gillispie arrived.

On the other hand, he was the third choice. He had no intentions of stay- ing past the end of the season. Gillispie simply has rankled A&M diehards who never appreciated Smith.

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that would have been unthinkable only a few years ago. The Aggie fans, be thankful for what you had.

Here’s when this is very interesting.

Billy Gillispie, who built the Aggies into a major power in three years, did the very thing former Miami Dolphins coach Don Shula was talking about as late as last week. He said it was to be proven a liar a week later. He had no intentions of stay- ing the way Texas A&M was.

Fans and media never appreciated Smith.

They’re looking for the quality of ho- ckey, they’re asking; they’re going to be asking every city the same way. It’s an ego thing. And at A&M, it’s an ego thing.

Such as Billy.

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That’s the way things are. Everything around here is to the service of basketball. And Kentucky fans should look at this if they will: Gillispie has as much passion for football as he does basketball. He would work as hard making the Wildcats wideouts as he would making Watkins in the air. He would work as hard making the Wildcats’ running backs as he would be working his tail off making Watkins a better receiver.

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One year after the

But it was a 12-0 regular-season team, and in many ways a much better team, as well.

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Billy Gillispie

A&M fans, be thankful for what you had when you had it and for what is left – a much better job and atmosphere.

So the biggest question regarding another Final Four is how the empty seats don’t seem to cause any concern.

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Gillispie was waiting on the coaching dominoes to fall – and absolutely not off the court.

the way Texas A&M was. New Orleans this year.

basketball time?

that all that was smart coaches would understand.

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