

The semifinals lineup

1:15 p.m. NBC, Ch 6 3:15 p.m.
North Carolina-Charlotte, 28-3, vs. Marquette, 23-7
North Carolina, 27-4, vs. Nevada-Las Vegas, 28-2

sports of the times

UT Magic Show is here



Cliff Gustafson

Not very much of the bat got on the ball when pinchhitter Chris Raper took a swipe at a pitch in the ninth inning against Minnesota the other night. No matter. The way things are going for the Texas Longhorns baseball-wise these days, a ticked foul is liable somehow to wind up a home run.

When Raper blooped one into the outfield against Minnesota with the score 2-2 in the second extra inning, it started as a pretty routine out. But wait! The Gophers' outfielder slips. He's down. The ball is dropping. It hits the ground — base hit — the runner on second lights out for the plate and makes it easily.

Texas wins — again. It was just another part of what is being called the Longhorn Magic Show, an act that has produced an apparent national-record 33 consecutive victories, an incredible feat in any sport, but particularly baseball where a .600 win percentage



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generally is championship caliber.

Making Raper's "hit" even more ironic is that he was pinch-hitting for Jerry Jones, who merely had driven in the tying and winning runs in Texas' earlier win over Tulsa that day and had produced the tying runs — with two outs and two strikes in the bottom of the seventh — against Minnesota.

Are you ready for more? Jones, who "walked on" as a tryout last season, wasn't even supposed to be playing that day. He had broken the thumb on his right hand several days earlier. But centerfielder Charles Proske had suffered a badly-bruised ankle the day before and



was unable to play, so Jones had to get into the lineup, broken thumb and all.

"I don't know if it's an incredible team, but it's an incredible streak," said Coach Cliff Gustafson, who must be reserving some special pages in his scrapbook for this team and this season. In his 10th season as coach of the perennial Southwest Conference champions after producing a string of state high school champions at South San Antonio, Gustafson has never gone through anything like this.

"We lost all our catching and (Richard) Wortham, our No. 1 pitcher," after last season, Gustafson points out. "We also lost our second baseman, Gary Pyka, to the pros, as well as our rightfielder and leading power man, Karl Pagel. And our third baseman, Joe Ayers, who was all-conference, tore up his knee near the end of last season. And we lost all three players who had been our DHs (designated hitters)."

That set the stage for a remarkable saga. One hardly knows where to begin to tell it. Jones, for instance, is a native of Temple and played at his home town's junior college on a team Gustafson says was outstanding. Several members of that club were highly-recruited, but no one even talked to Jones. So he came to UT on his own, tried out for the Longhorns and this year has produced virtually a critical play per game to keep the amazing win string alive.

There's catcher Bobby Kearney, Gustafson's No. 1 recruit out of Bilnn Junior College last year. Except that in December, the San Antonio Jay graduate was discovered to have a tumor in the ball of the shoulder joint. It required surgery and some digging to remove it and cementing of a section of frozen bone to replace that which had to be cut away.

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Might have to win twice

The University of Texas has won 33 games without a loss overall and nine that count in Southwest Conference championship baseball play. Texas A&M has rallied from a sluggish start and trails the Longhorns in league play just 1½ games with the bulk to play. Baylor is fielding one of its better teams ever, newcomer Houston is a genuine contender. It could go on and on.

Yet, some, most, even all of these could wind up staying at home during playoff time to qualify for the College World Series.

The reason is a new, little-noted plan to have the top four teams in a post-season tournament to determine the SWC representative in the regional play-off tournament in Arlington.

That could mean, though it isn't likely because of a built-in

safeguard, that the regular season champion would have to settle for only that if it loses out in the tournament.

But the format, hatched out of an idea first broached by Texas Tech Coach Kal Segrist and nurtured by the success of the SWC's now two-year-old post-season basketball tournament, is designed to avoid that calamity if possible.

Under the plan adopted in January but given little public notice, if the regular-season champion fails to win the tournament, it will be designated as the conference runnerup. The feeling is that its record likely will be good enough that the team almost surely will receive an at-large invitation from the NCAA for a different regional tournament.

"The basketball tournament probably encouraged Segrist in

his thinking," Texas Coach Cliff Gustafson said of the baseball playoff. "But the basketball format was not acceptable to us (baseball coaches)," he went on. "We didn't feel all nine teams should be in; we felt the tournament should put a premium on regular-season play."

Gustafson said he felt the playoff is "a good thing for college baseball and for the Southwest Conference in particular it should be a real plus. It will keep more schools competitive. I'm pretty intrigued by it. It should be a lot of fun and profitable all the way around, not only economically but in developing Southwest Conference baseball to a higher degree."

The double-elimination tournament will be held in Austin's new Disch-Falk Field starting May 20.

...Emil Tagliabue