Might have to win twice

The University of Texas has won 26 games without a loss overall and nine that count in this year’s Southwest Conference basketball play. Texas A&M has called 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, none, most, even all of them 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 playoff tournament in Arlington. That could occur, though it isn’t likely because of a built-in safeguard, that the regular season champion would have to settle for only if it loses out in the tournament.

But the format, hatched out in an idea first brainstormed by Texas Tech Coach Karl Segrat and married by the success of the SWC’s new two-year-old postseason basketball tournament, is designed to avoid that calamity if possible.

Under the plan adopted in January but given little publicity now, 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 Segrat in his thinking,” Texas Coach Cliff Gustafson said of the baseball playoff. "But the basketball format was out acceptable to us (baseball manager)." he was asked if the baseball teams should be in, we felt the tournament should go a miniumum regular-season play.

Gustafson said he felt the playoff is a "good thing for college baseball and for the Southwest Conference in particular because it should be a real plus. It will keep the interest of the public in baseball by ending the season on the highest pitch and making it pretty intriguing by it. It should be a lot of fun and profitable all the way around, not only economically but in developing Southwestern Conference baseball to a higher degree."

The double-elimination tournament will be held in Austin’s new Dutch-Falk Field starting May 18. ...Emil Tagliabue

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

"I didn’t know if it’s an irreparable team, but it’s an irreparable ankle," said Coach Cliff Gustafson, who must be reserving some special pages in his scrapbook for this team and this season. In his 15th season as coach of the perennial South- west Conference champions after producing a string of state high school champions at South Side Antonio, Gustafson has never gone through anything like this.

"We lost all but our catcher and (Richard) White was out with a pulled muscle. "We lost our second baseman, Gary Pflue, to the press, as well as our rightfielder and leading power man, Karl Piaget. 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 DIs (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 was outstanding. Several times he told the coach he was going to be one to talk to in 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 Kennery, Gustafson’s No. 1 recruit out of Blaine Junior College last year. Except that in December, the San Antonio Joy graduate was discovered to have a tumor in the hall of the shoulder joint. It required surgery and some digging to get and something of a move, the one that had to be now away.

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