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FINAL FOUR FEVER

The Final Four is finally here. We're not talking about the basketball tournament, where 16 teams still stand. We're talking about no-rook passes, no pain-no brain, good knight Irene. That's right, it's dance time at the sixth U.S. Intercollegiate Chess Tournament, which will conclude April 1-2 in Dallas.



The University of Texas at Dallas will renew acquaintances with the University of Maryland, Baltimore County in one semifinal, while a pair of bracket busters - Duke and Miami Dade College - hook up in the other semifinal. And yes, Billy Packer is upset the ACC is not better represented.

Nonetheless, the four finalists earned their keep by finishing among the top four U.S. teams in December at the 2005 Pan American Intercollegiate Team Chess Championship, the most prestigious college chess competition held in the Western Hemisphere. But you knew that.

UMBC won the "Jam in Pan-Am" by the narrowest of margins, defeating two-time defending champ UTD by one-half point. UTD won at Pan-Am in 2004 and 2003 and tied for first with UMBC in both 2001 and 2000. Let's face it, these teams don't like each other.

Remember, this is chess, not basketball, but some cliches transcend sports. Despite the fact no team other than UTD and UMBC ever has won the event, UTD professor Tim Redman told Ascribe Newswire the finals are wide open.

"This is chess. Anything can happen," said Redman, a professor of literary studies at UTD and a provider of staid comments. "The team that wants it most will win."

A double check on that, prof.

RECEIVER RAP

When the Dallas Cowboys introduced Terrell Owens at a news conference last Saturday, signing him to a three-year, \$25 million deal, Owens addressed his previous problems in Philadelphia, saying, "I'm going to put those things behind me. They can only make a man stronger, wiser. For me, that's what it's done. I'll be a better teammate, a better person, a better man in life."

Well, the better person got things rolling this week by ripping the Eagles and glorifying himself in a lengthy rap on his Web site.

"Ask Philly was it hard trying to stop T.O.? I got a brand new team. I am a Cowboy now. No more black and green. To the haters that said I'm not going to get my money, I'm laughing in your face. ... That's funny."

No doubt about it, he's a changed man.


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