Top 28 tourney saw top years in Cajundome

LHSAA tournament contract up for renewal.

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LAFAYETTE — During its six-year run in the Cajundome, the LHSAA Top 28 basketball tournament attracted more fans than at any other venue.

Still, the event may move elsewhere in June, when the LHSAA accepts bid proposals.

The contract between the Cajundome and the LHSAA expired following last week’s tournament.

The Cajundome first signed a two-year contract with the LHSAA in 1997, and the deal was renewed for four more years in 1999.

Attendance at this year’s event numbered 56,430 fans, according to Lafayette tournament Director Gerald Hebert.

That figure ranks second to 69,269 hoops fans, the most ever in the event’s 41-year history, who filled through Cajundome turnstiles in 1999.

Five of the six years Lafayette has played host to the tournament rank in the top 10 for attendance since the event began in 1961.

Cajundome Director Greg Davis said no other city can offer better community support. Davis said although the Cajundome charges LHSAA no rent and no reimbursable costs, other venues like the New Orleans Arena could land the tournament with better economic offers.

“The only way another market would be better is to offer a financial incentive,” Davis said. “We don’t do that. The New Orleans Arena has a marketing fund they use to pay events to go there.”

The New Orleans Arena is adjacent to the Superdome, which plays host to the LHSAA high school football

Top 28 attendance by city:
1. 1999, Lafayette — 69,269
2. 2002, Lafayette — 56,400
3. 1972, Alexandria — 49,887
5. 1998, Lafayette — 48,418
6. 1996, Baton Rouge — 48,123
7. 2000, Lafayette — 46,016
8. 1995, Baton Rouge — 45,540
10. 1989, Alexandria — 41,043
11. 2001, Lafayette — 40,974

SOURCE: Gerald Hebert, Lafayette Top 28 tournament director
Top 28

championships. Bill Curl, public relations director for the New Orleans Arena and the Superdome, was noncommittal about the Top 28 tournament.

“We have no specific plans yet, but we’re not closing the door on that option either,” Curl said.

Gerald Breaux, executive director of the Lafayette Visitors and Convention Center, said the combination of small-town atmosphere and big-city amenities make Lafayette the perfect host city.

“Besides, we have a proven track record,” Breaux said, who added the impact the tournament has on Lafayette’s economy makes it attractive to business, as well as sports fans.

The crowd on hand for the last day of Top 28 play Saturday filled the Cajundome.

Renee Areng, LCVC convention marketing manager, said amateur sporting event attendees who stay overnight in Lafayette spend an average of $125 per day.

LHSAA Commissioner Tommy Henry said Lafayette has been a good host city.

“To say Lafayette didn’t do this or didn’t do that, I can’t,” Henry said.