

Whitsitt: Team Scholar

By Tony Biancardi

Tod Whitsitt of Oxford got the kind of sports award you don't hear much about anymore.

Whitsitt, who just finished his freshman year at LaGrange College, was given the "President's Award", which recognizes academic excellence, at the LaGrange all-sports banquet last week.

The former George Walton Academy basketball standout earned a perfect "A" (4.0) grade average.

The 6-foot-2 guard broke his ankle during the Christmas break, ironically, while working out at the George Walton gym, and he didn't see much playing time as LaGrange posted a 16-15 record.

But Whitsitt, who attends LaGrange on a full athletic scholarship, was recognized along with the other Panther athletes for his work in the classroom.

He said he didn't mind being the team's resident "egghead."

"They kid me about it sometimes, I guess it's unavoidable," cracked Whitsitt. "I help the other guys out with their work every once in awhile, so it's not bad."

Many college athletes struggle to keep their grades up while simultaneously concentrat-

rating on their sport. Whitsitt, however, sees it from a different angle.

"My basketball may take away from my classwork--right now, it's (classwork) more important," declared Whitsitt. "If basketball will pay for your education, fine. But it's just a game."

Whitsitt, you may recall, averaged 32 points and 13 rebounds per game as he led the George Walton Bulldogs to the SEAIS Class - A basketball title in 1975-

'He (Ron Bradley) Has His Own Way and it Works.'

76. The change from the SEAIS to the Georgia Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, which is part of the NAIA, has been profound, he said.

"I was a fairly tall player in the SEAIS, and now I play against people 6-foot-6, 6-foot-7 all the time," explained Whitsitt.

"You've just got to adjust to the fact that you're not tall anymore and compensate for it.

"You're not going to overpower anybody," he added.

Whitsitt went on to say that the other differences between high school and

the NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics) were too numerous to mention.

The NAIA consists of the smallest four-year schools in the college ranks, as apposed to the NCAA, which is comprised of the largest four year institutions. According to Whitsitt, NAIA competition differs from Junior College play.

"There's more discipline than Junior College ball," he said.

Although Whitsitt missed most of last season with the ankle injury, he was confident he would make the adjustment to college basketball. The main reason, he said, was that he had the equivalent of a college coach in high school.

Ronald Bradley coached Whitsitt for two years at Newton County and then at George Walton, and Whitsitt gave his former coach high marks.

"He's the best coach around, college or otherwise," Whitsitt declared.

"He knows the game better than anyone I've ever seen, and he can motivate people.

"He has his own way, and it works."

Many otherwise good athletes enter college ill-prepared for the stepped-up competition, and Whitsitt ascribes this to



TOD WHITSITT, right, receives the LaGrange College "President's Award" from school President Waights G. Henry, Jr. The award recognizes academic excellence and was given at the annual all-sports banquet.

inferior coaching.

"You see that with a lot of college players, most will come up and work at what they're strong at. But some will have obvious weaknesses, like they can't use their left hand or they can't box out," said Whitsitt.

"Coach Bradley taught you everything, every aspect of the game. Some of these guys were so big,

so talented in high school the coaches didn't teach them the fine points," said.

With the injury behind him, Whitsitt hopes to learn some of what he's learned to practice for new coach, Phil Williams. And with Whitsitt on the squad, the Panthers will never have to worry about getting some extra tutoring for their coaches.