Basketball '74: Little Men Think Big...

And They're Still Waiting For the Ball to Bounce Out

BY BOB LIPPER

Virginia-Highlands sports writer

Allan Bellow and Craig Liedel were under the basket—case there wasn’t a rebound. In case there was time. Calvin Wade and Ed Frazier were converging on the lane—again just in case. Notre Dame’s Willie Townsend, who had logged desperately in hopes of making the block, had come down to earth and had turned around to watch the flight of the ball.

And where were you? Perhaps you were one of the lucky ones in the Garden that day—Sunday, Mar. 25, 1973. Or maybe you were at home—like thousands of others across the Old Dominion—when the shot—Bobby Stevens’ jump shot at the overtime buzzer—hit in the basket to give Virginia Tech the NIT championship.

It was a memorable moment for those who had rubbed fingernails to the quick watching Tech win four games by a total of eight points en route to the title. So, too, for Bobby Stevens—the unlikely hero of that improbable triumph—who has viewed the regular season on film.

I keep setting there,” he says, “watching for it to bounce out one of these times.”

That might have been fitting historically, for Stevens certainly has followed a circuitous path to notoriety. Nothing in his psychological makeup, however, indicated that—and he’s given time to consider the question—he would have harbored any doubt when he launched the shot. But only, he says, apply to that label, but Stevens doesn’t accept it. “If you can back it up,” he says, “it’s confidence. I just think I have confidence I can get the job done.”

And essentially, that is how Bobby Stevens would have you judge him. Forget his physical limitations (5’10”, 165—but quick), his unimpressive statistics (9.7 scoring average), his occasionally erratic ball handling. Instead, consider the image of the gutsy floor leader who knits together a team banded “too short, too white and too Virginian” and helped make it a champion.

“People come up to me and say he’s no good. I wish he’d,” says Liedel, who should become VPI’s voting leader

Virginia Tech’s ‘Pretty Far-Fetched Dream’ Comes True

... they’re just spectating at NIT overtime buzzer

There is a place for the little man

—Bobby Stevens