Tech's Problem: Bristow Gone

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BLACKSBURG — Most basketball coaches would give up two good water boys and a year's subscription to Mad Magazine if they could have four starters back after a successful season.

Virginia Tech will have four starters back from its NIT championship team, but replacing that one man could be a real problem. That man just happens to be the team's leading scorer and rebounder, Allan Bristow, and a team like Tech which lacks height needs all the rebounding help it can get.

"We'll only average about 6-6 up front, and that's mighty small," says Hokie Coach Don DeVoe. "Kyle McKee will be replacing Bristow, McKee is actually taller (6-4) but he's not as quick. Bristow was so quick that he played and rebounded like he was taller."

With Craig Lieder, Ed Frazier, Charlie Thomas and Bobby Stevens back from last year's team, newcomers have little or no chance of breaking into the Tech lineup. When the Hokies started practice Monday, just five new players were on the team, three freshmen and two transfer students who become eligible this year.

"Experience is so important on a team like this, you have to go with the players who you know can do the job," said DeVoe. "The guys with the experience can do the drills more efficiently and you know they're going to execute well in the game."

The plays the Gobblers will be executing will be the same as last year when, with a short, fast team, they ran up a 22-5 record and surprised everyone by winning the NIT.

"We were so darn successful last year, we're not going to be changing things this year. We'll still have to rely on quickness, outside shooting and fast breaks. In the two years that I've been here, we've never played a team that hasn't had a height advantage.

"We've always done a good job of blocking out under the basket. Last year, we averaged three rebounds a game more than our opposition."

But it is hard to convince people that a team like Tech ranks among the top in the country. The Hokies weren't supposed to win last year and they probably won't be picked to win much again this year.

"We have made great strides in basketball, but we'll have to be successful in year out before we'll get real recognition. We'll have to go out and and prove ourselves to receive any publicity. I'm sure we're second in this area because we're an independent near a conference that has established itself year after year," pointed out DeVoe.

But this year, the Gobblers face a tougher schedule and will have a challenge just repeating their record.

"I think that the road schedule is more difficult this year. We play South Carolina, North Carolina and Florida State on the road. We also open with tougher teams like Alabama and Oral Roberts."

Tech opens on Dec. 1 at home against VMI.