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BLACKSBURG — Suppose you wake up one morning and somebody tells you Al Cephas was really one of the good guys?

Suppose somebody told you Lee Harvey Oswald didn’t know the gun was loaded?

And suppose somebody told you Charlie Thomas, a guard on Virginia Tech’s defending NIT champion basketball team, is serious about the game this year?

You remember Thomas. He’s the one who was suspended for the Florida State game last year because he broke a training rule. He’s the one who, last year, said playing basketball was like going to the office.

Well, that was the old Charlie Thomas.

Charlie likes everything now. He likes to play, he likes his coach (Don DeVoe), and he likes his future.

That’s probably because last season Charlie didn’t know whether he had a future in basketball. Now he thinks he does.

“I can’t afford to miss a round,” Thomas says. “Last year, I GAVE up what my chances were of playing professional basketball. I’ve found out they are pretty good. I have to give myself every opportunity. I have some teams interested in me (Boston, in particular), so I have to give my best shot.”

“Phoenix (the Suns) says they’re going to look at me in our toughest four games and Fred Auerbach (Charlie was at his basketball camp this summer) says the Celtics are real interested in me.”

Thomas, you know, was called “Mr. D” last season because of his great defense. Although he has missed practice for a few days (because of a leg injury), Thomas’ defense is just as good as last year and his shooting is much improved.

“He was really playing well when he got hurt,” says Tech coach Don DeVoe. “If Charlie gets well, we expect him to have a great year.”

The Tech guards, Thomas and Dicky Stevenson, were criticized at times last year. If soon became apparent, however, that they contributed immeasurably to the team’s success. With the loss of Al Iban Britovik, they will be counted on even more this season.

“We’re going to miss Al,” Thomas says. “But I think we’ll take up the slack by running more and playing better defense. I think we’ll fast break a lot more.”

There was occasional friction last season between Thomas and his coach, Don DeVoe. That is over, too.

Thomas is more dedicated and DeVoe, according to reports, has changed his coaching style some.

“He’s more patient with us,” Thomas said. “I think he probably felt some pressure last year because he was trying so hard to have a good year. When you win the NIT, there isn’t any more pressure.”

The pressure this year will be self-inflicted. Now, Tech has a basketball reputation. It is expected to do well. And it expects to.

“We know we won’t slip up on anybody,” Thomas says. “We know that everybody knows us. They know we can be good.”

“We really want to do is have another great season so basketball will be king around here. For a long time, football has been the sport. If we have another good year, it won’t be that way any longer. Already, Virginia Tech people can’t wait until basketball season gets here.”

Neither can Charlie Thomas.