Hokies Face New Year,
And Anything Can Happen

By Ray Filegar

Last basketball season, the Virginia Tech Gobblers went a long way—all the way to the NIT championship, as a matter of fact—with a center who would certainly have been more at home at a forward spot.

"He wasn't really a big man, but he sure played like one," remembers coach Don DeVoe of 6-7, Allan Bristow. "The things he did"

"Were amazing. But then, so was the Tech team in general."

The best evidence of that was in the form of the NIT trophies the team carried back to Blacksburg.

"Now we have to prove it was no fluke," says DeVoe.

"And easy it will, not be," Bristow and his 24-point (23.1

for his career) average are gone and his replacement at center is, of all things, smaller.

"We just look at it as a challenge," notes DeVoe with his now well known enthusiasm. "Every boy had to really give his everything to get where we did last year. And it will have to be that way again this year.

"We'll have to play as a team because there is no one player to lead us out of the woods."

What DeVoe does have is everybody but Bristow back. And the guy who will take over the position vacated by the Richmonder-turned-pro (Philadelphia 76ers) is one of them.

Craig Lieder, the former Maury of Norfolk standout, vacates his forward spot and takes his 6-6 1/2 frame to the pivot. His plusses include the best shooting percentage among last year's regulars (52 per cent) and nearly a 16-points-per-game average.

"And he definitely has improved," thinks DeVoe. "He handles the inside game well because he can use either hand going to the basket."

Joining Lieder up front will be Ed Frazier and Calvin Wade. The former started opposite Lieder last year, while Wade was the sixth man, "we always considered a starter."

The 6-4 Frazier has added an extra 15 pounds, and it will be needed in each battle of the boards the Techmen get involved in.

The backcourt will eventually consist Bobby Stevens, the 5-10 sparkplug whose last second shot kayoed favored Notre Dame in the NIT finals, and Charlie Thomas—presently nursing a hairline fracture of the lower leg. If Thomas is not able to go full steam when the season opens against VMI Dec. 1, Dennis Shrewsbury, a sophomore transfer, may get the start.

Platooning, which the Techmen could not do effectively last year because of a lack of depth, is a possibility this time around.

"We have a nearly equal second group that will allow us to play as units," believes DeVoe.

"The depth and good quickness should enable our team to do a lot of fast breaking and use the full court press on defense."

So the Gobblers will be runners. And to be sure, they will be running targets to every opponent. For above all, DeVoe and his team will represent something to shoot for everytime out.

"Remember," opposing coaches will remind their teams. "These guys are the defending NIT champions."

"It's gonna be tough," says DeVoe, "but we're capable."

"And because of the NIT we really have more confidence than we did at this time last year. These kids feel that they can beat anybody."

"We're going to try ... that's for sure."

VIRGINIA TECH GOBBLERS

Coach: Don DeVoe, 3rd year (38-15).
1972-73 Record: 22-5.

Lettermen Returning: 6-6, Craig Lieder (19.8), 6-4 Charlie Thomas (10.2), 6-10 Bobby Stevens (7.7), 6-4 Ed Frazier (8.3), 6-6 Calvin Wade (8.3), 5-9 Kyle McKee (2.8), 6-4 Dave Sembash (3.6).

Promising Newcomers: 6-5 guard Dennis Shrewsbury (soph), 6-6 forward Duke Thorpe (fresh), 5-11 guard Dennis Fugate (fresh).

Key Losses: Allan Bristow (24.0).

Strength: Experience, quickness, teamwork.

Weaknesses: To quote DeVoe: "A lack of height." That's the major point against repeating the success of a season ago.

Without rebounding, the Hokies could find their running game smothered and the disadvantage could be disastrous.

Outlook: The guards have been through considerable pressure not the least of which came at New York. Their confidence in handling an offense lacking a big man could make a difference in what DeVoe aptly describes as, "a BIG challenge." The schedule is tough but not overwhelming. Matching the 18 regular season wins of a year ago would be a tribute to DeVoe's program.