Bob Teitlebaum

Last time they played

Forgotten in the history of big wins against Florida State, Ohio State and three National Invitation Tournament opponents, there is etched in the memory of Don DeVoe his most painful experience as a coach.

It has been nearly two years since VMI's downtrodden basketball team stunned Virginia Tech at the Roanoke Civic Center. DeVoe was the new Tech coach and he was trying to put together a team that really had no guards, to speak of.

VMI clogged up the middle, stopped Allan Bristow and pulled off a shocker against the Gobblers. Criticism was heaped on DeVoe and some began to doubt the wisdom of Tech President T. Marshall Hahn in hiring the Ohio State assistant to replace Howie Shannon.

"I certainly remember that game," said DeVoe. "There hasn't been a week go by since we played the game that I haven't thought about it. It was my most frustrating defeat as a coach."

DeVoe refuses to blame lack of personnel for the defeat. The 1971-72 Tech squad was learning new techniques under DeVoe. Eventually his redemption for that game became a respectable 16-10 record. But it was not a happy Christmas for DeVoe and his new wife, Marianne.

"We lost that game because I just didn't do a good job of getting the team ready to play a rival," DeVoe recalled. "I wasn't familiar enough for the rivalry between the two schools."

When a home-and-home basketball series was arranged between the two schools, DeVoe was pleased that there would be a chance to make up for the defeat.

"I thought, 'Here's the opportunity to play VMI again and how we're a better program than we were two years ago.' But it's home-and-home, so I don't see this as being retaliatory."

DeVoe hasn't forgotten that infamous night. "I remember every minute of it," he said with a grimace. "Marianne and I were leaving for Christmas vacation (to scout some prospects) the next day. I didn't get any sleep. We talked about it (the game) at 4 in the morning. I aged a little bit that night."

The VMI side

Since VMI beat Tech in basketball, its program has improved. The Keydets lost head Coach Mike Schuler after the 71-72 season, but new Coach Bill Blair seems to have the program on the upswing as much as is possible under the military regime that rules VMI.

Blair was Schuler's assistant when the Keydets beat Tech for their finest moment since the battle of New Market in the Civil War.

Blair doesn't really feel that Tech ought to be worrying about any revenge motives when the teams open the season tomorrow night at the Tech coliseum.

"I know if I were in their (Tech's) place that loss wouldn't worry me too much. After all they've won around 46 straight games (the Gobblers haven't lost since 1957 against state teams in Blacksburg)," Blair said.

Of course Tech, as a school, might have another motive for revenge. It will be three weeks to the day that VMI shocked the Gobblers' football team 22-21 at Blacksburg. It ended one of the most horrible Tech football seasons in history and left VMI ecstatic, to say the least.

"There's enough pressure (NIT championship) on this team anyway without worrying about revenge for the football team," said DeVoe. "People expect a great deal of our team."

So apparently no one's thinking about football—just basketball at Blacksburg.