Tech's DeVoe has Shrewsberry--at last

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Don DeVoe almost got the Virginia Tech basketball coaching position too late.

Too late for what? To recruit Dennis Shrewsberry and keep one of the good area players from escaping Tech's clutches.

In past years, before DeVoe took the head coaching job in late April of 1971, Tech had not always induced the best area players to stay close to home for their college basketball.

The most famous escapee was Blacksburg's Rick Aydlett who started for two years on some of Frank McGuire's strongest South Carolina teams.

When DeVoe arrived, Shrewsberry was the hottest prospect in the area. But he went unclaimed by Tech and signed with Appalachian State, a school that isn't making any waves on the college basketball scene.

"We couldn't get an evaluation on him," DeVoe explained. "I really didn't know anything about his ability."

"I regret it because (Shrewsberry) could have been a junior now. But in a way it's good because he's had a chance to mature."

Shrewsberry is regarded as one of Tech's top four guards, which isn't bad when you consider that the top three backcourt men return from last year's NIT championship squad.

Right now, with Charlie Thomas sidelined by a fractured bone in his leg, Shrewsberry is playing behind Bobby Stevens and sophomore Dave Sensibaugh who played in every game but one as a freshman.

"If something happened to Dave or Bobby, I wouldn't be afraid to go into the first game against VMI with Dennis opening at guard," said DeVoe.

The Tech coach says that Shrewsberry is close to his best guards and that the big difference is experience.

"Dennis has tremendous basketball savvy, he's unbelievably quick and he gives us a big second guard," the Tech coach added.

The last statement is the truest since Shrewsberry almost towers over the other guards. He stands 6-5. "It's like having a fourth rebounder in there," DeVoe added.

Shrewsberry recalls his senior year. He had talked to Richmond. "I would like to have gone to Tech," he remembers, "but it just didn't work out."

So he wound up signing with Appalachian, a school buried in the mountains of Western North Carolina. Between his freshman and sophomore seasons Appalachian hired Press Maravich, a well-known basketball coach who had been at such places such as North Carolina State and LSU.

"When I went to Appalachian," said Shrewsberry, "I fully intended to stay there. But I got married. When I had to tell Coach Maravich that I was going to Tech, it was hard."

It must have been hard on Maravich also. Shrewsberry had scored 28 points a game for the frosh at Appalachian. He had a 25-point average in high school.

"It's doubtful if I'll ever do that again," said Shrewsberry who can also play forward. "Where he plays, however, doesn't matter."

"Mainly," he said, "I just want to play."

Odds are good that he'll get his chances in the next three years.