By STEVE CLARK
Basketball season is a welcome relief at Virginia Tech. Hokie fans are still wondering what happened to the Tech football team, which was supposed to be good but turned out to be very bad.

Tech experienced a miserable 2-9 football season, which explains why the folk in Blacksburg are so anxious to get the basketball show on the road.

Every starter except center Allan Bristow is back from last year's National Invitation Tournament championship team that had a 22-5 record, and that enhances the anticipation at Tech.

But Tech fans should be forewarned: Don't get your hopes up too high. It is unlikely that the Gobblers will repeat last year's basketball success, Bristow is gone and that's a big, big loss.

"Bristow's presence in itself was immeasurable to last year's achievements," said Coach Don DeVoe, beginning his third season at Tech.

Bristow, a 6-7 Richmonder (Henrico High School) now playing pro ball with the Philadelphia 76ers, was Tech's leading scorer (23.9 points per game) and rebounder (11.6 per game).

Losing your superstar doesn't always hurt a team, but it can produce wretched results. Tech fans should know this as well as anyone. All they have to do is look at their own football team. A lot of outstanding players from last year's winning team were back this fall. But quarterback Don Strock, the nation's leading passer, was gone and look what happened.

So what is DeVoe doing to replace Bristow? Well, he's moved veteran Craig Lieder from forward to center, and if you think Tech had a short basketball team last year, check this team out.

The independent Hokies will have one of the smallest front lines in the nation. Lieder stands just under 6-6, almost two inches shorter than Bristow. And the forwards are even shorter. Ed Frazier is 6-4 and Calvin Wade, last year's sixth man, is 6-5.

The size factor could hurt the Gobblers, especially against teams with good big men. Tech won't be at a disadvantage so much on offense, but defense could be a problem.

"Lieder handles the inside game well because he can use either hand going to the basket," said DeVoe. "But I have some reservations about our defensive consistency."

Tech is in good shape in the backcourt with Charlie Thomas and Bobby Stevens. Thomas was the team's third leading scorer (12.2) and Stevens was the NIT hero with the winning jump shot in the 92-91 overtime victory over Notre Dame in the finals.

Top reserves will be 6-4 guard Mark Cartwright, a transfer from South Carolina; 6-9 sophomore center Kyle McKee; 6-5 forward-guard Dennis Shrewsberry, a transfer from Appalachian, and 6-7 sophomore forward Mike Collins.

Tech is an experienced bunch (all five starters are seniors) who will play with confidence thanks to the NIT trophy. But the Gobblers' lack of size could catch up with them this time around.

SCHEDULE
Dec. 1 — VMI, 8 — at Auburn, 10 — at Alabama, 17 — Ohio State, 20 — North Carolina, Charlotte Coliseum, 22 — Florida, 26-29 — All-College Tournament, Oklahoma City.
Feb. 2 — Wake Forest, 6 — Toledo, 11 — at William & Mary, 12 — at Richmond, 16 — at West Virginia, 20 — at South Carolina, 23 — at Mercer, 27 — at Virginia.
March 2 — at George Washington.