Gobblers Open Season Against VMI Saturday

BLACKSBURG — Virginia Tech, with the pride of its homecourt record on the line, will open its 1973-74 basketball season against VMI here in the Tech Coliseum Saturday night.

Tech hasn’t lost to a state team in Blacksburg in the last 16 years and the Gobblers’ 12-year record in the Coliseum is 110-16. Don DeVoe, starting his third season as Tech head mentor, has seen his Tech editions in the last two years contribute to that tradition with a 20-1 mark.

Saturday’s contest will be the first time in a decade that the Keydets and the Gobblers have met in regular season play, but DeVoe recalls his only previous meeting with the Keydets two years ago in a tournament at Roanoke. VMI scored a 57-56 upset.

Tech’s record at that moment was 3-3 but the Techmen under DeVoe have come a long way since then — to a 38-15 record, to be exact.

There should be a near-capacity crowd to welcome the returning members of Tech’s 1973 N.I.T. champs, and there will be at least four (maybe five) seniors in the starting lineup.

“You don’t have to ‘psyche’ a Tech team to play here at home,” DeVoe notes. “Our players really respond to our fans, and I know they’re looking forward to Saturday’s opener.”

He might have added that the Gobblers also are aware of Tech’s tradition of winning at home.

Tech’s starting frontline will comprise captain Craig Lieder, 6-6, Calvin Wade, 6-5, and Ed Frazier, 6-4. Despite lacking good height by major college standards, all three are experienced seniors.

Bobby Stevens, 5-10 senior, will be backcourt “quarterback.” His running mate will be either 6-0 sophomore Dave Sensibaugh or 6-3 senior Charlie Thomas, who has been out for more than two weeks due to a leg injury.

“We’ll substitute according to the game situation,” DeVoe said, but he also admitted that he will “not be reluctant” to use any of his first 11 players.

Kyle McKee, 6-8 sophomore, figures to be the first most likely substitute, but 6-6 freshman Duke Thorpe also could see early action.

“I think we’ve made reasonable progress, but I’m anxious to see us in regular game conditions,” DeVoe says.