McKee impresses as Tech struggles

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BLACKSBURG—Sophomore Kyle McKee demonstrated it best for Virginia Tech. But VMI Coach Bill Blair probably said it best.

What it all adds up to is that Tech needs somebody inside if it is to enjoy a successful season. Even Tech Coach Don DeVoe admits this.

McKee, a gangling 6-8½ blond sophomore, pulled in 11 rebounds and the Hokies finally controlled the boards enough to pull away in the second half for a 62-51 win.

But if Tech is to do well on next weekend’s jaunt to Auburn and Alabama, more consistency will be needed in the middle.

“McKee’s tough. He turned the rebounding around,” Blair admitted. “I’ll be surprised if he’s not starting real soon. Coach DeVoe will have to get some bigger people in there than the ones he is playing.”

DeVoe agreed, but he’s not ready to start McKee. “We’ll have to do a better job of blocking out,” the Tech coach said.

“If VMI comes within one rebound (47-46) we’re in trouble because this is the smallest team we play.”

DeVoe said he would continue to start his senior front line of Craig Lieder, Calvin Wade and Ed Frazier. But indications that he might have a change of heart were evident when he played McKee at the pivot and shifted Lieder back to his 1973 position of offensive forward.

“I felt good tonight,” said McKee who scored only six points in spite of his rebounding. “Right now I have no confidence underneath (he was a forward last year).”

What will it take for him to develop his confidence? “One good game,” McKee snapped back.

DeVoe saw one positive thing about the tough game which saw Tech open a 24-23 halftime lead to as much as 17 points late in the contest. “I think a game like this will help us better as far as getting ready for the Alabama trip,” admitted the youthful Tech coach.

Blair said a lot of pluses for his VMI club which had an edge in rebounding at the half. The Keydets, who have three games this week starting with tonight’s home opener at 8 against Hampden-Sydney, used a zone defense to clog up the middle and force Tech to shoot from outside.

“I think we’ll win some games,” said Blair who is starting his second year as the Keydets’ head coach. “Our guards didn’t shoot like they can (they made 8 of 28). Tech didn’t shoot well either. But they started hitting in the second half and we didn’t keep up with them.”

Nevertheless, Tech wasn’t happy with its performance no matter how it is analyzed in retrospect.

“We can’t live and die by the jump shot,” DeVoe observed.

Craig Lieder, who was the second leading scorer on Tech last year, put it a different way after he got only eight points and hit just three of 10 shots from the floor.

“It was a win,” he said simply. “Everybody was trying too hard. I think everybody knew we were supposed to win.

“But I feel a game like this helps us get ready. Our defense didn’t play that badly. We just missed our shots.”

Lieder says the Tech team prefers a man-to-man defense. “But I think we’ll see a lot of zones. I’m sure the Alabama and Auburn coaches were here tonight and saw how it worked,” he emphasized.

The key to overcoming the zone defenses and rebounding woes might just wind up being McKee. He demonstrated it last night and Blair is convinced. Tech’s hope is that McKee is able to convince a few more opponents before the year is over.