Tech Looking Past
Reflections of '73

By BOB LIPPER

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Don DeVoe has had a week to digest the facts, formulate some opinions, consider what lies ahead.

It was a week ago that Virginia Tech, everybody's darling of the 1972-73 college basketball season, opened a new year. With pomp and circumstance filling the coliseum and everybody extolling the virtues of the team that won the 1973 NIT championship, the Gobblers were given a royal sendoff. Then, the 10,000 spectators sat back to watch VPI demolish Virginia Military Institute by 60 points or so.

Only it didn't happen. Bobby Stevens, whose jumper at the buzzer beat Notre Dame in the NIT final, said that "there was too much ceremony before the game." Whatever the problem, the Gobblers—after leading by only one at the half—prevailed, 62-51, over a team that subsequently was to lose to West Virginia Tech.

And so, faced with the first road trip of the season—at Auburn tonight, at powerful Alabama on Monday—coach Don DeVoe ("I'm leery of playing any basketball team on the road regardless of what type of talent we have") has assessed the situation and hopes his Gobblers do not commit similar transgressions—like shooting 33 percent from the floor.

"I was disturbed," he acknowledges of the opener. "We didn't play a brilliant game whatsoever—that's apparent. I was a little disappointed in our overall decision-making on the court. The boys seemed a little tense, a little overanxious. It was kind of like a light disease. Everybody was trying to impress everyone."

It is under that sort of stigma that this VPI edition will labor until it realizes its identity. "It's an all-new situation even though only one starter is gone," says DeVoe.

That one man is Allan Bristow, who only led the team in scoring and rebounding. At 6-7, he was the tallest starter, and he has been replaced in the lineup by 6-5 Calvin Wade, giving Tech a front line of 6-5, 6-5, 6-4. DeVoe says, "It's not how big you are but how big you play," and while VPI indeed played tall last year, there are those who wonder if a repeat is possible.

Against VMI, DeVoe was unable to give as much playing time as he would have liked to frontcourt subs Kyle McKee, Mike Collins and Duke Thorpe. But that threesome must contribute—especially against a very tall Alabama team that Tech defeated in the NIT semifinals, 74-73, with Bristow scoring 29.

Indeed, the rematch with Alabama may serve to demonstrate symbolically the transition for VPI basketball.

"The NIT was great, but that's in the past," says DeVoe. "We have to prove ourselves all over again."