Stevens, Tech Find Target

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BLACKSBURG—At halftime Monday night, Don DeVoe gave Bobby Stevens some good advice.

"Establish yourself as the point shooter," the Virginia Tech coach told his blond senior guard.

Stevens took DeVoe to heart. In fact, he even went overboard.

It was a jumper by Stevens, two foul shots by Stevens, a nifty Stevens pass that enabled Tech to hold off Ohio State, 68-67.

Tech has not shot well all year. Going into the game, the Gobblers were as cold as the snowy weather outside the Coliseum (34 per cent for the season).

Things didn’t get much better in the first half against the Buckeyes. Tech hit only 37 per cent against the Ohio State zone, and it wouldn’t have been nearly that good except for some good offensive rebounding by soph Kyle McKee, making his first start.

One reason was that Tech couldn’t get the ball inside the 3-2 zone. It was the first time this year that Ohio State had used a zone but DeVoe said he wasn’t surprised. "They knew how we were shooting."

"We had to get some movement," said DeVoe. "All we were getting was shooting from the perimeter."

One quick hot streak by Stevens, with three baskets from outside, gave Tech a 37-36 lead. But then the Buckeyes, good shooters, regained the edge and held it most of the way. Ohio State was up by eight with 10 minutes left.

For some reason, the Buckeyes were their own worst enemy. Even though they were winning, they tried to come down the court too fast.

“We were ahead and five times we threw the ball away trying to fast break," moaned coach Fred Taylor, who lost for the second straight year to DeVoe, his former assistant.

Tech changed the tempo in the last four minutes and that produced enough points by Stevens and running mate Charlie Thomas to square the record at 2-2.

With unbeaten North Carolina coming up Thursday, this was a game the Gobblers had to win. "This game was a lot more important for us than it was Ohio State," said DeVoe. "They have their conference. Every game for us is big if we want postseason play."

Speeding up the action, Tech scored nine straight points to turn a 57-51 deficit into a 60-57 margin. Once the Gobblers took that lead, they never lost it; although five times Ohio State cut it to one.

It was 62-61 when Stevens, showing the same confidence that won the NIT a year ago, took a bad shot. But it went in.

After a Jack Wolfe tap-in, Stevens made two free throws to make it 66-65. Then Stevens did his passing thing, hitting Craig Lieder for a layup with 25 seconds left.

The Gobblers got the ball back on a charge, and by now Stevens wasn’t about to stop. He took a wild shot with eight seconds left and Ohio State got the ball. Wolfe made a layup with two seconds left to make it 68-67.

"Coach, I’m sorry about that last shot," Stevens told DeVoe. "I got a little carried away."

“You sure did," said DeVoe.

Before then, however, Stevens had carried Tech to victory.