By United Press International

Second-ranked North Carolina had its work cut out against scrappy Virginia Tech Thursday night but Tar Heel coach Dean Smith figures the experience was good for his team.

"This game should help us," Smith said afterwards. "It was close and against a good team ... it was a very physical game."

North Carolina was down 41-39 at the half Thursday night, but got three straight baskets in the opening minutes of the second period and went as much as 10 up on the Gobblers before Virginia Tech started a late rally that moved them within a point.

But then Carolina went into its four corner offense, forcing Tech to foul, and Darrell Elston got six crucial points, four on free throws, to ice the game.

Bobby Jones scored 12 points in the second half for N.C. and finished with 20 to lead all scorers. Elston totaled 18.

"Elston certainly played well for us in the clutch," said Smith. "But Jones was magnificent throughout the game."

Virginia Tech, which led the Tar Heels by as many as eight in the first half, was led by Charlie Thomas with 15 points and Ed Frazier with 10 as it posed its third loss in five outings.

Globber coach Don Devoe called Carolina "a great team, the best pressing team we've ever faced." But he praised the way his squad had come through, particularly the drive from 10 points back.

"A lot of teams would have folded," he said. "We didn't fold and that's certainly to our credit."

The Tar Heels, 6-0, now head into a Christmas vacation with the next game set for Dec. 28 against Biscayne, Fla. while the Atlantic Coast Conference spotlight shifts to Maryland, ranked No. 5, and undefeated Wake Forest, both of whom are headed for tournaments on the road.

The Terps begin competition tonight in the Cable Car Classic at San Francisco, while the Deacons are in the Sunshine Classic in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Maryland will meet San Francisco in the opening round of the Cable Car, which also has St. Joseph's and Santa Clara as entries, The Sunshine Classic includes Western Kentucky, LaSalle and Florida State as well as the Deacons.

In other games Thursday night, third-ranked Notre Dame romped over Denver 99-95, eighth-ranked Providence trounced William and Mary 105-75, Loyola of Chicago beat Wichita State 82-70, Bradley edged Washington 80-76, Fairfield whipped Villanova 84-58, Nebraska ripped Northern Iowa 73-55, Fresno State nipped North Texas State 96-95 in double overtime and Furman defeated Davidson 69-62.

Kevin Stacom and Barnes combined for 34 points to lead Providence to an easy victory over William and Mary.

The Friars shot 63 percent from the floor with Stacom's 18 points leading all scorers. In addition to his 16 points, Barnes pulled in 18 rebounds. Matt Courage led William and Mary with 15 points.

Notre Dame's players hit the books all week ... and then gave Denver a lesson in basketball.

"We had an average of six guys out studying each day," said Notre Dame Coach Dick Phelps, whose team certainly didn't look too studious putting the Pioneers away 99-59 Thursday night.

"They are certainly one of the top teams in the nation," said Denver Coach Al Harden. "Notre Dame is a fine ballclub and deserves its No. 3 ranking. There's no way possible to match up against the Fighting Irish."