Late Comeback Sparks Tech Past Ohio State

By JERRY RATCLIFFE
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BLACKSBURG—There's a popular country-western song out now that's entitled, "If We Can't Make It Through December." That must be how Virginia Tech head coach Don DeVoe feels at this point after watching his underdog Hokies rekindle memories of a season ago when they beat the Big Power Ohio State Team Tuesday night at Blacksburg, 68-67. The way Tech played in the game had to remind them of the rest of the N.C.W.L. last year.

Last year was Tech's win over Ohio State that sparked the Hokies' run of straight victories in route to their greatest season ever. DeVoe's hoping the big win will do the same this year as the Techmen face North Carolina at Charlotte Thursday night, then host Florida Saturday. DeVoe believes the All-College holiday tourney in Oklahoma City with the likes of Oral Roberts and Southern Cal. Yes, if Tech can make it through December, things might be better since it plays 8 of 10 games at home in January.

But Tuesday night it was DeVoe, the pupil, who did some teaching as Ohio State Coach Fred Taylor, the master. It was the second straight year that Taylor's protege has upset him. DeVoe played Taylor under Ohio at State.

It appeared that early in the game Tech's height would build an insurmountable lead, but as they did so many times last year Tech fought back tooth and nail.

With the Hokies' balanced attack, Tech trailed 9-2 with 16:28 to go in the first half. But 6-10 center Jay McKeever provided enough aggressive play to keep Tech in the game. Tech in two losses to Auburn and Alabama, but though McKeever was not dominate, Ohio State definitely knew he was in the area. The big youngster from Richmond picked 11 of his game-high 14 rebounds off the boards in the first half to give Tech a 22-17 edge in that department.

Ohio State, now 2-3 on the season, came out in a 3-2 zone defense against Tech which was completely away from their regular pattern, a straight man-to-man. The Hokies raced back and forth from outside the Buckeyes' strategy was letting out or rather forcing the Hokies to shoot from outside.

It was killing Tech the first half as Hokies paced by forward Craig Lieder's seven points, connected on only 13 of 35 from the floor, a cool 37 percent, about their average for the first three games. Ohio State wasn't exactly setting the nets on fire but managed to use its ability to hit the open man to hit on 25 of 39 for 64 percent and a slim 32-29 lead.

McKeever's stickback, along with baskets by Ed Frazier and two Buckeyes inside brought the Hokies back to a 10-19 deficit at the 12:47 mark, and moments later fast-moving guard Bradley Stevens, hero of the N.C.W.L. used a double pump, mid-air layup to lock it at 16-18, Tech's first tie of the game with 1:40 to go.

But Steve Wenner and Gary Repulla put OSU back front 21-18.

Soon it was 24-18, but Thomas stole the ball and laid it in, then paused to preserve Calvin Wade on a two-on-one fast break to bring it back to 24-23, State with 5:39 left.

Tech got its first lead when Collins hit and Wade drove inside with 4:27 left in the half for a 27-26 Hokie lead.

Stevens made a great save when heaping over the scorer's table and into the stands while batting an errant OSU pass in bounds to Wade who drove down and in for a point Old Buckler lead at 29-28. But Ohio State substituted big men Andy Stegemeier (6-15) and Craig Taylor (6-10), in along with awesome Wardell Jackson (6-7) and Wensler (6-6).

OSU went to its height and took a 32-29 lead, outscoring Tech 6-0 in the last minute and a half.

But Tech came roaring back with all it could muster the next 30 minutes and looked a lot better than their first three appearances. Bobby Stevens started shooting like he's capable.

We were cold shooting," said DeVoe. "We were not getting enough balance inside. If we can establish something in the middle it will give our outside shooters some confidence.

DeVoe said he did change some strategy at the half. "At the half we told Bobby (Stevens) he had to go out there and establish guard Larry Wade's shooting. He had to shoot over Wardell Jackson. His shooting was more effective the second half.

DeVoe noted that he wasn't surprised that Ohio State came out on fire since their tech was being shooting poorly. "That was his sole reason for using it," DeVoe said.

But Tech began to hit a little in the second half. In the first half Ohio State did a beautiful job of hitting the open man and making the jumpers. Tech trailed 34-29 early in the second half then 37-31.

But Stevens began to shoot like he was urged to do. He did shoot over the Buckeyes free throw buckets from the top of the key as Tech soon scored unanswered points for a 37-36 lead with 9:39 to go in the game.

Tech held the lead momentarily, but then the score began to seesaw, with both teams doing points eating it up in the middle and the Buckeyes leaped out to a 51-47 advantage.

At that point Potulski's Dennis Shrewsberry entered the game. Shrewsberry didn't do much offensively, but Fred Collins drove inside and flipped a pass to Potulski who was the key. OSU again up, 57-51 with two quick buckets. But again Tech came charging back.

With 6:01 showing the Hokies began to make their move. Thomas scored and neither team could hold the ball for more than two minutes. Wade hit and then rebuffed and hit Thomas on the fast break for a layup that tied it all up at 57-57 with 3:54 to go.

Thomas—rebundled the Buckers' missed shot and passed to Lieder inside who went up over the taller Ohio State skyscrapers and was fouled. He converted the three-pointer for a 60-57 lead and the 4.900 seconds began the chant, "defence, defence," They smelled victory.

The two teams traded baskets before Jack Wolfe got a putback to make it 62-61, Tech.

Stevens hit again, over Jackson, from the foul line for a 64-61 lead. Wolfe tapped again, 64-63.

But Buckden foiled Stevens who sank both ends of a one-and-one for a 66-63 lead with 1:07 to play.

Jackson hit with suddenness from outside and it was 66-66. But Lieder was found open underneath and promptly correctly tapped a pass to 68-60 lead with 24 seconds to play. Bolden, charged, and Tech had an improved ball on the ball.

Stevens didn't sit on the ball, though. He pumped from outside with 10 seconds showing, but this time he didn't lose his OSU one more breath of life.

Wolfe scored with two seconds left, put the icing on the cake for Tech, a 68-67 win, and a big win at that.

DeVoe was asked about Stegemeier's shooting with two seconds to go with a three-point lead. "It's just the confidence in himself beginning to show and that's what we need in tough situations like this," said DeVoe whose Hokies are 4-3.

"We played tougher, but our offense came in spurs. The last three and a half minutes was the same time all year when we've put it together. We haven't established an inside game, and we have to get utility on offense," the young Gobbler chief explained.

"We did a good job on the boards the first half, but not the entire game," he added.

DeVoe said changing the tempo at the half (three-quarter court pressure), forced a few mistakes that were helpful and we have to get utility on offense, the young Gobbler chief explained.

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