Tech goes for an upset

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Sports Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—It is early for the basketball season and any team to be at a crossroads, but if Virginia Tech is to attract national notoriety, then the Gobbler may have to start here tonight.

Tech takes on nationally ranked North Carolina in the Charlotte Coliseum at 7 p.m. and the Hokies seemingly must make something super happen to have a chance in the regionally televised (on WDBJ-TV, Channel 7 in Roanoke) contest.

Still, Tech Coach Don DeVoe isn’t saying it’s a make-or-break game for the Hokies, who are only 1-2 and 77-64.

“IT’s too early in the season for it to be a make-or-break game,” said DeVoe. “If you put too much emphasis on this game and the team loses, the kids could have a mental letdown.”

But the Tech coach realizes the importance of tonight’s battle. “If we lose, it’s not the biggest disappointment. But if we win, it will be one of the greatest since I’ve been here.”

The Hokies so far have beaten Ohio State and VMI in home games and lost to Alabama and Auburn on the road. The only nationally ranked team in this group is 10th-ranked Alabama where Tech lost 75-64.

“THERE’s no comparison between North Carolina and Alabama,” DeVoe asserted. “North Carolina is more disciplined and better defensively.”

“They’re the greatest. Just a great team. Playing them is like playing Ohio State in football. Their defense is super and they take the ball to you offensively. They have all kinds of depth.”

DeVoe sees some hope for his team, though, in spite of this big buildup which seems to be a ritual with all coaches.

“We think we’re capable of going down there and playing tough. We’re fired up,” the Tech coach observed. “We had a super practice Tuesday. Our players know they’re going against the best.”

“So far the only thing that has made us appear erratic is our shooting. If we had shot well we’d be 3-1 now instead of 2-2. I think we can do a good job defensively even though North Carolina is much bigger.”

The Tar Heels are 4-0 and that is good enough for a ranking of fourth. The latest win was over East Tennessee, but the Tar Heels also have disposed of Houston, Kentucky and California.

Tech must shut off 6-9 Bobby Jones, a member of the United States’ Olympic team, if there is one Tar Heel star to concentrate on most.

DeVoe says he’ll go with the same lineup that opened on the Ohio State game on Monday. That means 6-8 Kyle McKeen will be at center flanked by 6-6 Craig Lieder and 6-5 Ed Frazier at forwards.

The guards will be Bobby Stevens and Charlie Thomas and if there is a position where Tech might have a slight edge, it is here with these two veterans.

Tech returns home after tonight’s game to begin preparing for Saturday’s invasion by Florida of the Southeastern Conference. The Hokies take off for Oklahoma City and the All-College tournament next week following Christmas.