Tech's Duke Thorpe on way to stardom

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OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. — It may not be long before the name Duke Thorpe becomes a household word for the fans of Virginia Tech basketball.

The 6-5 freshman from West Point has made his mistakes in the first nine games. But in the last two games of the All-College tournament completed here Saturday night, Thorpe let it be known that he might be one of the main Hokie stars for the rest of his career.

Thorpe scored 13 points in a loss to Weber State, but 11 of these were in the second half. Then in Tech's 102-66 win over Southwestern University for seventh place on Saturday, Thorpe pumped in 12 points in spite of playing less than half the game because of fouling out.

"I was not going to hold Duke back," Tech Coach Don DeVoe promised. "I felt since we started practice this fall that Duke has two qualities. He rebounds at both ends of the floor and gives us the inside shot we need desperately."

Thorpe still plays defense like most college freshmen. He is inexperienced and in this phase seems to be lost at times. On other occasions he does the job expected of him.

"I'm pleased with his defense. We've seen him do some things lately that he didn't in the past," said DeVoe. "Like blocking out on the boards and giving us weak side help on defense."

Thorpe is confident he'll do the job. "I think I've been cutting down on my mental mistakes. I play hard on defense. I think my offense will come once I play good defense."

A year ago Thorpe was playing at West Point before just a few hundred fans a game. Now he's been to places like the Charlotte Coliseum and the 15,000-seat Myriad here where the All-College tournament was held.

"I've never played in places like this before," he admitted. "But I've only been scared once and that was before the opening game (against VMI)."

Thorpe wasn't the only Tech standout in the tournament. Craig Lieder bucketed 74 points in the three games to lead Tech's scoring. It was reminiscent of last year at this time when he scored 29 points against Old Dominion that showed what fans could expect from him for the rest of the season.

For his effort, Lieder made the second team all-tournament squad.

The Hokies now regroup to try to get over the .500 mark this week with two home games. Tech plays Eastern Kentucky on Thursday and St. Bonaventure on Saturday.

"I'm sure of one thing," said Lieder. "We'll be 6-5 at this time next week." With Lieder and Thorpe performing like they have been, there's every reason to believe it will happen.