WVU ‘Lightning’ Fails, Tech Victor by 82 to 80

Reprinted From Yesterday’s Late Edition

By Vic Fulp
Times-Dispatch Sports Writer

BLACKSBURG — Theory has it that lightning never strikes twice in the same place.

And Wednesday night, Virginia Tech was grasped from a theory-breaking strike by the late heroics of Charlie Thomas.

The 6-3 guard from Harrisonburg scored Tech’s last five points in a span of 46 seconds to give the Gobblers an 82-80 decision over West Virginia.

The last time the Gobblers suffered a home defeat was at the hands of the Mountaineers, bowing by 83-82. Since that 1971-72 season defeat the Hokies have reeled off 18 consecutive home wins.

After battling through the first 38 minutes with 14 deadlocks and six lead changes, the Gobblers and Mountaineers went to the same method of closing a game as the NFL, leaving it all up the final two minutes.

A six-point run by Tech — two each by Craig Leider, Ed Frazier and Thomas — sent the Gobblers into a 77-72 lead (one point shy of the game’s biggest margin) with 3:57 left to play.

It was the third time that it appeared the Hokies were going to slip off and make things easy on themselves. But two long jumpers by Ertha Faust and another by Levi Phillips resulted in the game’s seventh of eight lead changes, putting WVU back on top at 78-77 with 1:53 left.

Then Thomas took over, using a long jumper, three of four hits at the foul line and a key steal to put Tech above the .500 mark again, 7-6.

Following Phillips’ jumper that gave the Mountaineers their final lead, Tech took a timeout, laying plans for a close-range shot by Leider, who had scored 16 of his 23 points in keeping Tech’s head above water in the first half.

That just didn’t work. After some dozen pauses, two going to Leider, Thomas fired up a jumper from the top of the key that made it 79-78 with 46 seconds left.

“We were trying to get the ball to Craig,” said Thomas. “They let me get it, but they were sagging back on the wings.”

“We got the ball into his (Leider’s) hands twice, but he turned and kicked the ball out both times,” noted Tech coach Don DeVoe.

Thomas wasn’t through performing his late heroics. He came up with a steal at 0:29 and by 0:25 was chopped down, going to the line and making two foul shots.

“I just watched the guy’s eyes and could see he was looking inside. He just threw it in my hands,” commented Thomas of the steal. Of the chopping down, he said, “That’s fun, that’s all part of the game.”

Before the clock could call it quits, Thomas went to the line again. Bob Hornstein made it 81-80 with 13 seconds left on a long jumper and as Tech brought the ball in, Thomas was fouled again, hitting one of two at 0:09 to put the score at its final margin.

“This was a must game for us,” said DeVoe, who owns a 25-1 home record. “We didn’t contain (Warren) Baker the way we wanted, but we did cut off their fast break somewhat.”

Baker scored 22 points and pulled down 19 rebounds as only Kyle McKee (14), who fouled out with 4:42 left to play, was the only Gobbler able to match the 6-7 Mountie sophomore on the boards.

West Virginia’s biggest problem was in the turnover department as the Mounties had 26 to 16 by Tech, which did a lot to deflect the lightning.