Tech's Thorpe modest star

By BOB McELLEND
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BLACKSBURG — It was his best night as a collegiate athlete, yet all Duke Thorpe wanted to talk about was how much help he has received from his Virginia Tech teammates.

Thorpe is a 6-foot freshman from West Point but last night he played like a senior veteran.

It might well have been labeled the "Duke Thorpe Show" because the modest young man did it all in the second half as he paced the Gobblers to an 80-68 victory over William and Mary.

The win moved Tech to 16-7 for the season and dropped W&M to 6-11.

Thorpe's second-half play was something to behold. He roamed the baseline and picked up all the loose balls, took passes from his teammates and grabbed many of the missed shots and snuffed the ball back in the basket. He hit a career-high 20 points, pulled down nine rebounds and made many recoveries. It was his exciting play that gave Tech life after a first half that had most of the crowd of 8,500 wishing it had stayed home to watch television.

But Tech came alive behind Thorpe, with big assists from Bobby Stevens, to make it all worthwhile in the final 20 minutes.

"I'd have to say it was my best game at Tech," Thorpe said. "But I don't deserve the credit. My teammates were giving me great passes and they helped calm me down when I got excited. I really don't care if I start or not. All I want to do is play and help the team win."

Thorpe got 20 of his points in the second half and, in one Tech drive, he scored 20 of 24 points as the score went from 46-35 to 70-51.

Stevens also had one of his best nights as he hit 19 points and directed the Gobblers' floor play. Team captain Craig Lieder added 17 but suffered a rib injury and left the action late in the game.

Tech held a slim 3:20 halftime lead and the Indians held their confidence.

W&M Coach Ed Ashmauld said the game was as good as any the team has played this year.

"We pressed them and we had them playing our game," he said. "But then in the second half we fell apart. We got out of our pattern and were making mistakes at both ends of the floor."

Lieder had a bit different view as to why the score was close in the first half. He blamed Tech's play rather than any trouble caused by W&M.

"I don't know what happened," he said. "We were just going through the motions. We weren't moving and getting into our pattern. We played best when we run and we were letting W&M control the tempo."

"I know one thing. We had better come out playing Saturday or Wake Forest will handle us good."

Wake visits Tech tomorrow night and the Deacons should have a good line on the Techmen. Head Coach Carl Tacy and chief assistant Bobby Watson were both on hand taking notes on the Gobblers.

Thorpe believes he has improved his play since his high school days when he led West Point to the state 1-A title last season.

"I know I'm too left-handed and I'm trying to use my right more," he said. "I'm getting stronger and more confident. I like where I'm playing because I really feel I can jump pretty well and I am quick. But I also know I have a lot to learn."

"But I couldn't ask for better coaches or teammates. They have been great. Anything I might accomplish, you can give credit to them."

Tech Coach Don DeVoe had high praise for Thorpe's play. He labels him as a definite for future star. But DeVoe still is a bit hesitant about listing Thorpe as a starter against Wake.

But that makes no difference to Duke. He likes the way things were last night watching the early action from the bench and then coming on strong to give his mates new life and enjoying doing his thing of putting the ball in the basket.

W&M has no rest ahead. The Indians, suffering a very disappointing season, are at home to nationally ranked Pittsburgh.

"That doesn't worry us," said Ashmauld. "We're happy to be playing a team as good as Pittsburgh. We just might go out there and beat them. It wouldn't surprise me."

Tech's Jaynies made the night complete with an 85-67 romp in the preliminary. Leu Nelson hit 22 and Mark Cartwright had 19 for the Gobblers.