Ex-Tech Star, Wetzel, Retires

PHOENIX (AP) — John Wetzel, 31, is leaving the National Basketball Association after a seven-year career.

"I made the final decision about two days ago," he said Tuesday. "But this has been in the back of my head for quite a while now.

He plans to go back to Virginia Tech, and graduate in a year with mathematics degree. After that, Wetzel is undecided.

"In the last year or so I've given a lot more thought to coaching. If I could get into it, I'd like to. My life has been basketball for a long time now.

"I should be able to understand how anybody on the team feels," he said. "I've been on both ends, from being the team's leading scorer in college to the other end in the pros."

The "other end" came last season when Wetzel arrived here after being waived by the Atlanta Hawks. He played only 239 minutes in 37 Suns' games.

"I felt during the slump (Suns won four of 22 in a December-January span) that I should have gotten a chance to play," said Wetzel. "Nobody else was going that good."

But, he added, "I'm not bitter about it because I really respect John MacLeod."

The Suns coach said Wetzel's contribution was of the sort "you don't see in box scores.

"It was busting his tail every day in practice so that everybody else would bust tail, too."

Wetzel entered the NBA as the Los Angeles Lakers' eighth-round draft choice in 1967.

"Jerry West hurt his hand before the season began," Wetzel recalled. "I started the first 12 games along with Archie Clark. "Then Jerry got better and I went way down, as you might expect."