Tech Hunting First Road Win in Dayton

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DAYTON, Ohio — Consider the plight of the Virginia Tech basketball team to date.

The Hokies stand 3-2, having won three games at home, losing one on the road and another at a neutral site. Their three victories were achieved with little difficulty. Their losses were narrow.

But the fact remains that Virginia Tech has yet to win a game outside of the friendly confines of Cassell Coliseum in Blacksburg.

A team with aspirations for an excellent season and perhaps a crack at post-season play will go nowhere unless it can win on the road.

Tech Coach Charlie Moir is well aware of this. That’s why he finds the Dayton Invitational Basketball Tournament a particular challenge to his team.

Tech opens play in the tournament tonight at 9 against unbeaten (4-0) Dayton. In the first game, scheduled for 7 p.m., Oklahoma State (4-2) goes against unbeaten (6-0) and seventh-ranked Alabama.

The tournament, obviously, features a fine field. “It’s a great tournament,” admitted Moir. “In fact, the field is a bit stronger than I would have thought.”

Tech’s chances at cracking the win column on the road will be severely tested tonight by Dayton, generally a basketball power with the desired advantage of playing on its home court.

“We need to play well on this trip,” said Moir. “The fact that we haven’t won on the road concerns me. Of course, we’ve played two damn tough teams on the road, but winning is now very important to us.”

Tech’s losses away from Blacksburg have been a one-point defeat at West Virginia and a four-point setback in Boonoke against 11th-ranked North Carolina.

“If you lose early, then things are going to get awfully tough later on,” Moir noted. “Sure, we haven’t had an easy road schedule so far, but if we lose early, then the kids begin to think a lot about it. We don’t want that to happen.”

Tech needs to knock off an opponent in enemy territory if for no other reason than it isn’t going to get any easier for the Hokies in the upcoming weeks.

Following their Dayton encounters, the Hokies must play in another tournament in Richmond, Dec. 29-30, which features VCU, Richmond and Virginia.

Then, during the early part of January, Tech has to play St. Bonaventure, Virginia (in Hampton) and Jacksonville in successive road games. It’s obvious that should Tech falter into this schedule without a road victory, its confidence could very well be shaken.

“Don’t hold the ball on offense,” said Moir. “I saw they de play for the good shot. They are in no hurry. They have five guys who hit in double figures.”

“On defense, they press and will also fall into a zone. This could hurt us. In our loss to UNC, when defenses were switched on us six minutes into the game, we began to play poorly and got down by as much as 11 points. In my opinion, that cost us the game.”

The five starters for the Flyers all average in double figures. The team is led by 6-6 guard-forward Jim Paxson, who is hitting 17.5 points per game. Erv Giddings, the best Dayton rebounder at 6-7, leads the team in rebounds with 13 per game and is averaging 15.5 points per game.

Guard Doug Harris (6-0) averages 14.8 points per game and he’s joined on the outside by 6-2 Jack Zimmerman, who has a 10.3 average.

Dayton’s big man is 6-9 Tony Wells, who pulls down eight rebounds per game and hits for 11.5 points.

With good scoring from the outside and inside and sufficient rebounding, Tech’s defense will have to play up to par.

Moir feels that Tech’s defense and rebounding have been good, but he wants a more consistent offense. He cites the UNC game as another example, saying that Tech was tight and took poor shots at first before becoming confused over the Tar Heels’ defensive switch.

“In the second half, we played well, but did Carolina,” Moir said. Tech can ill afford any poor showings beginning tonight.

Tech will use the same starting lineup it has maintained for most of the season. That means Marshall Ashford and Ken Bell will be the guards, with Renes Wamley at center and Phil Thiemann and Duke Thorpe the forwards.

Dayton has played three of its four games at home and hasn’t played a team of any repute.

Oklahoma State is in much the same situation as Tech, having lost its two games on the road to tough Texas and Oral Roberts. The Cowboys are coached by former Tech assistant Guy Strong.

Ohio, which has to rule as the odds-on favorite to win the tournament, has already whipped the likes of Purdue and South Carolina this season. The Crimson Tide had a 25-5 season last year, advancing to the NCAA regionals where they knocked off North Carolina before ultimately losing to national championship Indiana.