Gobblers enjoy early Yule gift

By JACK BOGACZYK
Sports Writer

BLACKSBURG — Christmas came five days early to at Virginia Tech.
But the visitor in red and white wasn’t Santa Claus. Then, it wasn’t Alabama, either.
The Gobblers, 30-point losers to the Crimson Tide on Saturday night at Dayton, returned to friendly Cassell Coliseum for a 92-55 victory over Northern Illinois Monday night. Today, they went home for the holiday.

But actually, Tech got off to its vacation early, rolling up a 22-4 lead in the opening 9:27 against the mysterious Huskies, who somehow earlier this year had beaten Wisconsin by 24 points. That’s the same Wisconsin that owns a win over DePaul and only lost by eight points at Kentucky.

But on this Monday night, the Huskies were certainly dogs. And when Tech Coach Charlie Moir had finally finished running all of his players in and out of the lineup, one question still remained.

Will the real Matt Hicks please stand up?

Hicks, a 6-4 senior forward, averaged 25 points per game last season and entered the Tech visit with a 22.3 scoring average this year. But he displayed none of the credentials that have caused some people to mention him in All-America talk.

“I don’t know what he was doing,” said Tech forward Phil Thieneman, who spent most of his defensive time during his 21 minutes of action watching Hicks do nothing.

“He has the tools all right. I mean, you could see that in a couple of his moves and that slam dunk. But most of the time he seemed like he was satisfied to pass the ball or just move with it a couple steps. He never really tried to go to the basket a lot.”

Hicks didn’t score in the first 13:30 of the game, and when he did Tech’s starters were already on the bench. The NIU star finished with 12 points, a figure eclipsed by three Gobblers— including reserve forward Les Henson.

Henson, the freshman from Richmond, scored 18 points by hitting 8-for-10 from the floor. Tech finished with a 54.3 per cent shooting mark, while the Huskies connected on just one-third of their tries.

The World-News
Sports

22 Roanoke, Va., Tuesday, December 21, 1976

“Les needed a game like this,” said Moir, whose troops will return here Sunday to begin workouts for next week’s Richmond Times-Dispatch Tournament where the first round foe is the University of Richmond. “His (Henson’s) confidence has been down lately. We know he can play. He’s as fine an athlete as we have.”

With Northern Illinois out of it early, Moir got a chance to give his reserves some much-needed playing time. But before they left, the starters impressed the Tech coach with their ability to stick with the game plan—pattern basketball and a stiff defense.

“We worked the ball on offense better than at anytime this year,” said Moir. “It has to be our best effort offensively. We were consistent, and we played good defense. I still honestly believe that Northern Illinois is better than they showed here.”

They’d better be, or it’s going to be a long first year at the college game for Huskies’ Coach John McDougall. He came to NIU this season after 26 years of coaching at Illinois high schools.

The win was Tech’s fifth in eight starts, four of those triumphs coming at home.

“It’s just good to be on the other end of the score again,” said Thieneman, recalling the 108-78 blasting the Gobblers received from Alabama. “It’s hard to say whether a game like this will help us before taking a break.

“Still, I’d have hated to lose to Alabama like we did and then have to go home and think about it. I thought this one would be tougher. Somebody said Northern Illinois was pretty good.”

Somebody fibbed.