The dictionary defines a Griffin as "a fabled monster" from classical mythology "usually having the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion." The Golden Griffins of Canisius College in Buffalo, N.Y., can tell you that such a configuration makes flight darn near impossible.

Anyway, the Hokies (who defy definition but keep winning) of Virginia Tech, managed to subdue the tougher-than-advertised Griffins despite being about as "up" for the game as Joe Namath would be "up" to view a butterfly collection. Tech has an 11-1 record, not bad at all, but the tougher portion of the schedule is just ahead, starting tomorrow night.

When the Hokies and the equally remarkable Cavaliers of Virginia tangle at 7 p.m. at Roanoke's Civic Center there should be no trouble about being "up" for the game, on either side. Tech's Wayne Robinson declared flatly, "I know we'll be up for the game" and Les Henson chimed in: "That's the one they're all waiting for. It's a big game for them as well as for us."

A Biggie for Both

"When they lose they always say "It wasn't an ACC game and didn't mean that much to us," but we know it does. When they won last year, (Billy) Langlois went running around all over the place and shook his finger in Ron Bell's face."

If either team had a reason to be overconfident it would be Virginia, after it's well-earned win over North Carolina State on Saturday, not Tech, which was only this side of adequate in vanquishing Canisius, now 2-10.

Virginia's well-publicized newcomers, Jeff Lamp and Lee Raker, haven't carried the Cavs but have pulled their share of the load while Virginia has resembled Tech in that it has balanced scoring. Five Cavs were in double figures against the Pack and Virginia's defense was good enough to hold Hewitt White to a dozen.

The Cavs can do the job inside and outside and if guard Dave Koesters can keep repeating the 16 he scored against Norm Sloan's group, Virginia can continue to be a major threat to North Carolina for the ACC crown.

Tech, which also had five in double figures in its last outing, has a fine edge that can be honed well only against an opponent of the caliber of Virginia. Carbondale stock could go up tomorrow night.

The Hokies need to play as well as they did in the final five minutes against Canisius to compete against Terry Holland's Wahoos. Tech has shown the ability many times to get a hefty lead on an opponent but has lacked the killer instinct. If Charlie Moir's backcourt bunch are to get the national ranking that they seek, Wednesday will have to be killer time.

Contrasting Coaches

There is at least one similarity between the two coaches whose teams faced Virginia Tech last week: West Virginia's Joedy Gardner and Canisius' Nick Macarchuk. For openers, both are in dire need of more wins.

Other than that, they are different.

Nick Macarchuk of Canisius had a harder row to hoe with Ron Peaks the only scorer likely to keep things from turning into a total disaster while Gardner has soph Lowes Moore and junior Dave Allara who would help Maurice Robinson gets things done.

The tall Macarchuk, who looks like a basketball player... was an outstanding one and has been named to the Fairfield U. Basketball Hall of Fame. He coached Ernie DiGregorio at St. Thomas Moore prep school in Connecticut and was an assistant with the Providence U. Friars.

"When I took this job (he is a rookie head coach) I told them that there is no way I could win this season but the thing I wanted to do most was to be competitive." Canisius, which has been blown out only twice, is a scrappy team that is used to battling against superior odds. They play teams like St. Bonaventure, Sycrane, Duquesne, Detroit, La Salle and Niagara.

The basketball program at Canisius has been on the downsweeping recently and Macarchuk, a realist, realizes that before you can swing the pendulum back in the right direction you have to stop its motion.

Gardner, a man of contrasting moods, was in a chipper one Wednesday night, although not leading cheers for the officials. The coach, who two years ago skated in the visiting team's dressing room at the Coliseum after his team was humiliated and and who crowed after last year's twin wins over Tech, was jovial and joking.

He started out musing about his ultra-encouraging profession: "They are always firing coaches and hiring coaches. I've had two pretty successful careers. I was a good student. In my other career I used to fly planes off and onto the deck of an aircraft carrier at night and now I'm doing this. Both are so dangerous that you have to be crazy to do them. Say, what are you guys doing here talking to a madman?"

Gardner appears to be a man torn between the talent on hand and the job he wants to do with it, hoping that Robinson, Moore and Allara can all have great nights at the same time. Another frustration is being close to affecting a genuine turnaround at West Virginia, returning it to the tradition of winning basketball that flowered in the days of Rod Hundley and Jerry West.

Gardner has patience and with it a sense of humor, without which coaches probably would spend a lot of time climbing walls.

Shawnee Sharpshooters

It's probably a safe assumption that most coaches would prefer that their teams got all their points on high percentage shots from right under the basket. It's probably another safe assumption that they'll take what they can get.

Shawnee coach Gerald Thompson, whose team is definitely stronger than last season, recently said happily: "This is by far the best outside shooting team I've ever had. They have been putting them up from places I can't even see from the bench."

Thompson doesn't feel he's totally prosperous, noting that defense and rebounding are a problem. Benjy Russel has been getting 12-14 rebounds per game but could stand some help.

Thompson gets a visit tonight from coaching neighbor Nelson Simpkins and the Auburn Eagles tonight in a renewal of one of the top rivalries in Mt. Empire district play and a county tug-of-war.