Tech-UVa. Make 'Dream a Reality

By Bill Deeken

Give state basketball fans their choice of an Old Dominion match-up, and they'd probably pick Virginia-Virginia Tech as the dream game. Well, they've got it tonight at the Coliseum. The defending Atlantic Coast Conference champion Cavaliers and the Hokies, who also made the 1976 NCAA playoffs, will battle for the title tonight at 9 o'clock in the first Times-Dispatch Invitational Tournament.

Even the consolation at 7 is a dream game of recent vintage, matching local rivals Virginia Commonwealth and Richmond.

The championship contest pits the two favorites, but each had more trouble than expected in last night's opening round watched by an enthusiastic crowd of 8,635.

Lango Hits II

The Cavaliers were shocked by VCU's early hot shooting and stout defensive play. But they rallied from a five-point deficit late in the first half, and edged, the Rams 65-58 with the help of guard Billy Langoth's 21 points. In the exciting sight-get, the Hokies had to claw for a 59-58 win over the spirited Spiders and revived-up guard Kevin Eastman, who scored 19 points despite a heavy defensive blanket.

So now it's Tech and Virginia. Clouding the issue is the status of 6-foot-11 forward Duke Thorpe, who reinjured his knee and played only 12 minutes against UR.

"If Thorpe plays, it should be even," said Spider Coach Carl Silone. "If he doesn't, Virginia should be the favorite." Tech Coach Charlie Moir doubts Thorpe will play. "He might be out for several games," he said.

Thorpe says he'll play and has been given the green light by a physician. But his status won't be known until game time.

"Short Forwards"

"Without Thorpe, we'll have two relatively short forwards," said Moir, who probably would go with 6-foot-5 Len Henson and 6-foot-6 Phil Thieneman. "It would create some problems."

If Thorpe doesn't play, the Cavalier front line of 6-foot-10 Otto Fulton, 6-foot-8 Marc Javaroni and 6-foot-8 Steve Castellan would take on an added dimension.

"Our program will be to get the ball to them," said Cavalier Coach Terry Holland. "They are very physical, which creates a problem in ball-handling. That was our program against VCU. Tech is a very good defensive team."

The lead changed 20 times in the UR-Tech game, which had fans in an uproar.

"Richmond had a super game plan," said Moir. "They out-scraped us. They were getting the second shots."

But the Hokies' problem vanished when Thieneman, who dodged a defender with a masterful display of body english, hit a layup with 2:12 remaining for the final points of the game.

OPEN IN CORNER

The big basket followed a calculated risk by the Spiders, who went into a zone-trap defense rather than hang back.

Thieneman got open in the corner in the spread-out defense.

"We had hoped to catch our guards off-balance and produce a turnover," said Silone. "The tactic had worked earlier."

"But Thieneman made a good play. It wasn't an easy shot. It was a dippy-doodle thing. It went in and out and in again."

Tech hit 61 per cent of its field goals in rallying from a 33-20 halftime deficit.

The Hokies had a 35-28 rebound edge, with 6-foot-11 Ernie Wansley pulling down nine. Wansley also led Tech in scoring with 13.

Against Virginia, we've got to figure a way to get the ball to him more," said Moir.

Jeff Butler had 12 points and Bob Bechling 11 as back-up scorers for Eastman, who turned in an remarkable effort con-

sidering the extra-tight guarding by Ron Bell and Chris Scott.

Fans from both sides complained about the officiating. "I'm not complaining," said Moir. "I admire officials. It's a tough job. It's worse than coaching."

Like UR, VCU played fine basketball in a losing cause against the Cavaliers.

The Rams were 16-point underdogs, but led by 25-20 late in the first half.

At this stage, Holland called a time-out, and "let them know they were getting their noses kicked in."

Virginia responded with a 21-8 surge. The no-depth Rams did not make it sticky with a strong rally at the end, cutting the gap to six at one stage.

"I thought we were going to blow it open, but they wouldn't let us," said Holland. "I thought we played pretty well. For the most part, we didn't give them anything easy."

The Rams' slick-shooting Gerald Henderson matched Langloth's 21-point effort.

The height-try Rams suffered from a 38-20 rebound deficit, with Castellan collecting nine for the winners.

Ram Coach Dana Kirk felt his team played well defensively.

"Virginia is a very pointed team," he said. "We lost our composure in the last spell, and it cost us. With the exception of one span, it would have been a wire ball game."

Staff Photo by Don Long

Fingertip Control

Virginia Tech forward Les Henson stretches in an attempt to block a shot put up by Richmond guard Kevin Eastman in the Hokies' 59-58 victory over the Spiders in the first round of the Times-Dispatch Invitational last night at the Coliseum.