Tech Rally Spills Virginia, 65-60

Thorpe-less Hokies Find Will to Win

By Mike Bevans

Virginia Tech likes nothing better than to have Duke Thorpe in the lineup, but the Hokies learned last night that all is not lost if their 6'4" senior forward has no alternative but to take a seat on the bench.

Such an occasion arose in the championship game of the first Times-Dispatch Invitational Tournament at the Coliseum. Thorpe, affectionately known as "Docl" to Hokie faithful, picked up his fourth personal foul with 1:44 left and Virginia on top, 36-33.

Upon his return to the lineup 12 minutes later, there was no need for him to peel his jersey, reveal an "x" and save the day. The Hokies had things well in hand, thank you, and the lead, 53-48, as well.

Senior forward Phil Thienesman (six), junior guard Ron Bell (six) and sophomore guard Marshall Ashford (eight) accounted for all the Tech scoring in the 20-13 surge with their leader on the bench.

"We knew we had to pick up the slack," said Ashford, who was nothing short of brilliant in all facets of the game during the two-night event. "We just went all out and, when we took the lead (37-36), it gave us a lot of confidence.

"Duke is No. 1, but now we know we can do it. We'd rather play with him in the game because he is a great player, but now we know we can play without him when we have to." Thienesman, Tech's leading scorer (17.6) entering the game, returned with 4:48 left, but fouled out with 2:23 to go and his team on top, 61-52. There was no catching the Hokies, Thorpe or no Thorpe, as they eased home a 65-60 victory.

Ashford came away with the Most Valuable Player trophy.

Hokies Find Will to Win

and a deep gash under his right eye courtesy of a scrap for a rebound, Bell, a junior college transfer who has been struggling through Tech's first nine games, picked up some confidence.

Thienesman, one of only three seniors on the squad, recognized the strength and talent of those newcomers on the bench waiting to take his spot in the frontcourt. Freshmen Les Henson and Wayne Robinson spelled Thorpe and, while they did not score, handled themselves well.

"We've got about 12 guys who practice every day and they are so competitive five-on-five you couldn't tell which was the starting five if you walked in from another planet," claimed Thienesman, who saved all six of his points for the second half.

"We've got a real strong bench and we showed it all tournament." Thienesman also found Thorpe's foul trouble to be profitable for the Hokies in the long run. "The other guys got a chance to prove themselves and they came through," he said. "It's good for the team to see how they can play without their best player." For the 61-1-3 transfer from Cayuga County (N.Y.) C.C., the clutch performance was particularly rewarding. Bell wound up with seven of 13 shots from the floor, five of seven from the line and a steal in 37 minutes of action, tying Ashford for scoring honors with 19 points.

"In the beginning of the season, I was little shaky," he said. "I wasn't sure what was expected of me... shoot more, pass more. It was the best we (Ashford and Bell) have played together, we know what to expect from each other now."

"With passing up some shots and Marshall was passing up a few, but everybody's got some confidence, now." Thores, who has been bothered by a groin pull all season, suffered an injury to his knee in Wednesday night's semifinal win over the University of Richmond. There was some question as to whether he would play in the championship game.

"I was in the room with him all day," said Thienesman. "He told me, 'I can't play.' I said, 'Who do you think you're talking to a freshman?' I knew he would play."

Thorpe saw 23 minutes of action, scored eight points, grabbed four rebounds and recorded one steal. The Hokies never said they could do it without him, but they know now Virginia Tech is far from being a one-man show.