Hokies Win 59-58

By JERRY VERNON
Sports Writer
RICHMOND—Although he hit only two of nine field goal attempts, Marshall Ashford was all teeth Wednesday night.
The 6’2 Virginia Tech guard had just proved a point and he was beaming in recognition of it minutes after the Hokies had nipped the University of Richmond 59-58 in the first round of the Times-Dispatch Invitational Tournament in Richmond Coliseum.

“I’ve been getting a lot of criticism from the press on my defense,” smiled the sophomore in the Hokie locker room. “I decided to work a little bit harder on it and it paid off tonight.”

Ashford, who scored only five of his 16.5 season average in Richmond, kept crucial points out of the basket in the last minute of this run and shoot game.
The Tech perimeter man blocked Richmond’s John Campbell’s short jumper in the waning seconds of the game and then stole a pass headed for Kevin Eastman to preserve the Hokies’ sixth win against three losses. The victory sends Tech to the championship game tonight at nine against the University of Virginia which upset Virginia Commonwealth University 63-58 in the opener.

Ashford ripped off the pass to Eastman, the game’s top scorer with 13 points, with 20 seconds left in a match where the head changed hands 20 times. “As soon as I hit, I (Tech Coach Charlie Moir) get to know I had it,” smiled Ashford. “I anticipated they were going down low to Eastman. I saw Sullivan looking that way.”

Ashford’s interception prevented what could have been a shocking surprise to the nearly 5000 fans who ventured into the half-filled coliseum.

Tech opened the game like most fans expected, zipping to a 5-0 lead by frustrating the Richmond offense. The Spiders refused to give and quickly closed the game’s longest lead to set the scene for the last second dramatics.

Tech, which benefited from sharpshooting forward Duke Thorpe’s abilities for only half of the opening period, trailed 32-30 at intermission.

Eastman is the one who impressed me. He’s a real battler.”

A lot of players on the court Wednesday looked like soldiers bowing and bending in the heat of battle. Both squads collected their share of knocks with Tech winning the game, but looking as if it had lost the war.

Thorpe sat on the bench the entire second half with a grapefruit-size toepack soothing his knee and teammate Phil Thieneman spent the last 20 minutes with a piece of gauze dabbling a bloody nose.

“One of those guys caught me with an elbow,” explained Thieneman who scored eight points. “I don’t know which one. They all looked the same to me—about 6-8.”

The Tech forward was not far off in his estimation of the Spiders’ height. Richmond’s revolving five man front line stand that exact height with the exception of Craig Sullivan who missed by an inch.

But the 6-8 forwards could not compete adequately on the boards with Tech’s Thieneman: 6-11 Earnest Wansley and 6-5 freshman Les Henson who replaced Thorpe. Wansley led the Hokies with 13 points and nine rebounds while Henson gave his hometown crowd a 22 point performance plus three rebounds. Thorpe scored 10 points and hauled in five missed shots as the Hokies outrebounded Richmond 35-28.

“I thought we did a great job on defense,” said Tech Coach Charlie Moir, “but we had the worst outside shooting we’ve had this season and we took some good shots.”

The Hokies’ starting guards, Ashford and Ron Bell, connected on a dismal three of 18 attempts. Tech still shot a blazing 61 per cent in the second half for a 49.5 game percentage to Richmond’s 44.6.

“I thought we had shot the ball poorly,” laughed Moir after the game, “but I guess the reason is that we took so few shots.” Richmond took seven more shots than Tech’s 49.

Most of the Hokies agreed Richmond played much better than expected. Thieneman may have been the most surprised as well as the most relieved at game’s end.

“When we were ahead 72-1, I thought we could blow those guys out,” he admitted, “but they came back. I think they’re a lot better than they’ve been in the past. Thank God, we don’t have to play them anymore.”

Richmond meets VCU tonight at seven in the tourney’s consolation game.

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SPIDER’S STEVE MCCURDY (51) ISN’T THE ONLY ONE WITH BALL
Tech’s Wansley’ (50) and Ron Bell (22) Manage To Grab It Too

The News Journal

Sports Today

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