THE TALL-SHORT GAME

Outside Virginia Tech's dressing room towered 7-foot, 5-inch Jerry Bell. Undoubtedly, this 250-pound-old man from Portsmouth's Woodrow Wilson High School could have helped the Gobblers in Hampton Roads Coliseum Wednesday night. Indeed, a good-many things could have helped in the poor play by 55-50 Virginia.

It was as Tech Coach Charlie Moir said, "a comedy of errors." There were, for instance, 37 turnovers -- 22 by the losers. Shooting percentages were in the low level, with the conquering Cavaliers hitting 43.3 per cent of their attempts, nearly five-percent-point higher up the ice-lacrosse Gobblers.

Realistically, chances of Bell ever helping Tech, or anyone else for that matter, are poorer than slim. The young skyscraper has yet to play in any sort of organized competition and he is ineligible to face Tech for the Presidents this year. His one shot at becoming a college athlete is to attend junior college.

As for the present, little men contributed as much to the Virginia triumph as anything else. Robert Stokes the 5-foot-9-inch working champion from King William, added more than his little bit. One of the major items was what Coach Terry Holland labeled "a shot to the basket." That occurred with 13:36 left and the Cavaliers still trailing 31-28. Stokes was fouled, made two free throws and added to the early stages of what turned into a 12-2 spurt that gave the Charlottesville crew the lead for good.

Over the length of the contest, the quick sophomore played 33 minutes -- more than any gladiator on the floor except for teammates Mike Owens and Steve Castellan. Stokes only scored six points, but his importance gained stature when stand-ount Mark Lavaroni fouled out with 7:35 to play.

When that happened Stokes figured we "had to pull our pants up." To do that, he said, "my job was to stop (Ron) Bell from getting started." Bell nevertheless was the losers' leading scorer with 14 points.

That figure alone gave sustenance to Holland's claim that "defense won for us." Stokes asserted "most of the time our guards' job is to really play defense. It was the difference tonight," he said, echoing his coach. "We were diving for loose balls. Since we didn't win (against Tech) in Richmond, we really wanted to win here," he said.

Stokes conceded the contest viewed by 6,856 was less than artistic. He also put a good bit of the blame on the Cavaliers' style of play. "We were working for the good shots and things just got sloppy. We wanted the sure shot and just jerked it up and down the court like we did in Richmond (where Tech triumphed 65-60 in the finals of the Times-Dispatch Invitational).

Stokes may not have appeared sensational. In-deed, on one, with the exception of Lavaroni, even sparked noticeably except in sparts. The little fellow, however, is only now becoming accustomed to a campus where the population is over double that of the 7,000 or so in his home town.

He is just beginning to show signs of confidence in the shooting ability which earned him his scholarship in the first place. "I'm still working myself out of it," he said in a tone that makes listeners feel he'll succeed.

The crowd was disappointing to a number of people from both schools. Even not considering the disappointment of the contest itself -- although that was close -- there is a wonder as to what ratio is involved that causes Ticket Manager Todd Turner of the host Cavaliers to assert "anything below a sellout (9,000) is disappointing." Thankfully, a similar assessment of the game's artistry is not solicited.