Oral Roberts Too Much

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Virginia Tech learned a valuable lesson about coming from behind in a crucialCOLlegiate Monday night. The Hokies spotted a lead in the second half but watched ORU grab a 30-game home.

Anthony Roberts, the nation's second leading scorer, helped see to that. Plagued with three early fouls and sitting out most of the first half, Roberts was a terror in the second. The 6-4, All-American forward who hails from Chattanooga, hit his first eight shots from the floor without a miss and ended up with 29 points (two below his average), including 13 of 16 from the field.

"He may be the best pure shooter ever to play here," said Tech Sports Information Director for the past 21 years, Wendy Weisend.

Roberts was watched carefully by the NBA's Philadelphia 76ers' chief scout and by General Manager Jim Williams, the man responsible for that team acquiring Julius Erving and George McGinnis. But even with Roberts out of the game after the first five and a half minutes, Tech couldn't take control.

"We should have been in the driver's seat after Roberts picked up his third foul," said Gobbler boss Charlie Moir. "We expected them to fold when Roberts took a seat, but instead we fouled them." The Titans led Tech 8-7 at the time, with the Gobblers gaining the lead back at 19-18 on Les Henson's stick back with 8:44 left in the first half. However, ORU regained the lead and built the 13-point cushion with Titan guards Lionel Worrell and reserve sparkplug Arnold Dugger penetrating Tech's defense for a boilload of layups and high percentage shots.

Marshall Ashford's shot from downtown with 9:58 showing in the first half with Tech behind 25-21, was the final Tech points until the 1:54 mark when Ron Bell connected on a pair of free throws.

In that six minute span, ORU built a 31-23 lead, which soon ballooned to a 39-26 advantage by halftime.

Although temperatures outside dipped below zero, it hadn't affected ORU's shooting. The Titans hit 58 percent from the floor the first half building the game's biggest lead.

"We didn't play any defense the last 10 minutes of the first half," said Moir, whose squad slipped to 9-6, while ORU is now 13-4.

"When you're 13 points down, it's tough to make up that many points in 20 minutes. We need to play with more enthusiasm. We don't seem to be as sharp offensively as we were or playing with a lot of confidence," he said in analyzing his team's play.

"To have beaten Oral Roberts tonight, it would have taken a great second half. We only had a good one," Gobbler center Ernest Wansley figured in as well. The 6-11 Hokie got into foul trouble in the first half and Tech missed him sorely. Without him, Tech was outsored 19-7.

Although his return in the second half didn't mean that much points-wise, the big man did make a difference inside. But despite Roberts' hitting string, Tech mounted a comeback with Ashford, Duke Thorpe and Bell leading the way.

Roberts' shots were hitting nothing but bottom with ORU ahead 53-38 at the 15:15 mark. Then Thorpe and Ashford scored to cut it to 53-42. Roberts' string of shots were broken up with his first miss after eight straight bullseyes. Ashford, Bell and Thorpe all scored cutting it to 53-46 plus Roberts was whistled for his fourth foul at 11:34 mark. Wansley's basket capped a 12-point comeback unanswered by ORU, with Tech only trailing 55-50.

Bell converted two ORU turnovers into scores to pull within one before Ashford made a steal at midcourt and drove for a slam dunk that put Tech ahead 57-56, the first time the Hokies had led since 9:44 in the first half, almost exactly 20 minutes later.

However, a Roberts dunk put ORU in the lead to stay at the 8:07 mark at 60-59. The Titans' lead swelled to 69-64, with Tech coming down the floor and missing three chances for a basket on missed medium range shots. Then trailing 74-63, Tech got the ball under ORU's basket, but Thorpe charged and turned the ball over.

Oral Roberts did what it likes to, fast break and use its guards to penetrate. When the Titans didn't run, they spread it out and still scored layups.

"They spread it out, reversed it and got layups on us," said Moir. "They have a good ball club. But I think if we played as well as we could, we could have beat them. We can't play mediocre against a club like this.

"Roberts is a tremendous, tremendous player," said Moir (Thieman), working his tail off trying to guard him, but he just shot over Phil. I thought Henson did a pretty good job on him." Besides Roberts, ORU's guards were a major factor. Dugger hit 16 and Worrell 12, mostly on drives to the hoop.

Tech, led by Thorpe and Bell with 19 each, and Ashford with 16, couldn't penetrate quite as well. "We wanted to penetrate, but then to dish the ball off to the open man," said Moir, noting the reason for so many blocked shots by ORU's large lineup.

Of the 10 blocked shots, forward Alvin Scott swatted away six.

"We knew we had a big job to do at halftime, and it appeared we came back by capitalizing on their mistakes and turnovers. I'm just not pleased with the way we were playing defense," Moir concluded.

He was disappointed in the crowd of only 5,000 that showed up, probably due to the cold weather plus the game was locally televised. "I feel we should've had it filled playing against someone like Oral Roberts." Tech hit only 41 per cent for ORU's 55. Tech won the battle of the boards, 39-38.

The Hokies now ease off a bit with Fairleigh Dickinson at Tech Saturday.