Maybe Don DeVoe is having the last laugh on all of us here in Virginia.

While we are freezing and trying to endure a shortage of natural gas, the former Virginia Tech basketball coach is literally backing the sun.

It's a lot warmer here than it is back there," said DeVoe, who was willing to bet the usually frigid Laramie, Wyo., could beat Roanoke on the thermometer.

DeVoe was correct. It was 38 degrees in Laramie at noon on Tuesday while this part of the country was fighting to get above freezing.

"There's been very little snow," said DeVoe. "When I came here, I thought we'd have enough snow to pile up as high as a donkey's tail. The skiing is bad, but the weather is beautiful."

DeVoe, though, is also finding his place in the sun for other reasons. The most important is the resurgence of the Cowboys' basketball fortunes.

Wyoming hasn't competed seriously for the Western Athletic Conference title since the 1970 team finished second. In the three years previous to this one, Wyoming had won only four conference games. Last year the Cowboys won only twice.

This season started out in similar fashion. Wyoming lost twice on the road. Then came a victory over arch-rival Colorado State followed by weekend wins over Arizona State and Arizona.

The win over Arizona knocked the Wildcats down to 19th in the country.

"The only time we were in the lead," said DeVoe, "was when the final score was posted."

"We hit a shot with 27 seconds left. Then Arizona had two shots and a jump ball under our basket with four seconds to go."

But DeVoe had taught his team well. His big man, Joe Fazekas, was jumping and knew what to do.

"He just knocked the ball into the backcourt," said DeVoe, "and they never could get a shot at the basket."

DeVoe is doing all this with three sophomores and two juniors. Not bad for a program that last winter won only 10 games. The record is already 11-4 this year.

However, DeVoe's dreams of staying in contention in the tough WAC might end Thursday night. The Cowboys play at Texas El Paso, a club tied with Wyoming and New Mexico for third place in the standings.

"We're recruiting from New York to San Diego," said DeVoe with a laugh. "Our sophomores didn't play a lick of varsity basketball last year," said DeVoe.

"They played people close, but they held their own. We're exciting everyone and scoring ability. But we're still very slow, though we do a good job of rebounding."

"At the best, we're a long shot to contend for the conference title. We've trailed most of the games and been able to come back. But we're really shooting for a winning season and we're just three wins away from it. They might be tough to get."

Bob Teitlebaum
Tough game
DeVoe, who is just one win away from his 100th career victory, isn't ready to admit he turned the program around as yet. He still can't recruit extensively in Wyoming because high school basketball isn't very good in the state.

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The former Tech coach says spirit in the WAC is as good as that in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

"But you can't believe the crowds. When we were at Utah and Brigham Young, we played in front of 28,000 people tonight."

To put that in perspective, Virginia must play in front of four ACC home sellouts to surpass or equal what figure. Tech has had nearly three sellouts.

The Cowboys played in front of 17,000 at Brigham Young which is more than any one session of the ACC tournament, because of capacity, will attract this year.

Oddly, DeVoe has a chance, with five more home games, to have a better record than Tech. His team could win 16 by winning the home games while the Hokies will be hard pressed to better or reach that mark.

His Wyoming team is playing before more vocal and larger crowds.

Yes indeed, a guy named DeVoe has found his place in the sun. The Wyoming sun.