VPI Aims At 9-0 Stretch Run, West Virginia Visitor Tonight

By ED RICHARDS
Daily Press Sports Writer

If Virginia Tech loses another basketball game, the Gobblers might as well forget about the NCAA playoffs this year.

Tech Head Coach Charlie Moir readily admits his club, now 12-6, can't afford another setback in its final nine games.

The stretch run for the Gobblers begins tonight at home against West Virginia and Moir knows the Mountaineers won't roll over.

"They are tough anywhere and their win over Duke (70-65) Saturday should give them more momentum," he notes.

The Gobblers, who went to the NCAA Midwest Regionals last year and lost there in overtime to Western Michigan 77-67, have three members of the nation's Top 20 still on their schedule — Memphis State, Wake Forest and Marquette.

"We've also got another tough one Saturday at George Washington," adds Moir. "Beating Maryland by 10 points was an impressive win for them. It looks like a tough February all along the line for us."

The Gobblers' coach feels his squad is on the move.

"We've won three in a row and played one of our best this season in beating Milwaukee-Wisconsin (99-79) last Saturday," he points out. "Milwaukee only had four losses coming into the game."

Six-foot-10 center Ernest Wansley gave his coach renewed optimism with 8 points and 18 rebounds.

"That was the best he's played in a month," raved the Tech mentor. "In fact, our entire first unit played real well. The starters shot 65 per cent from the field."

Except for Wansley, the remainder of the starters landed in double figures. Guards Marshall Ashford and Ron Bell combined for 32 points and forwards Duke Thorpe and Phil Thieman tallied 16 and 14, respectively.

West Virginia (10-7) boasts balance, with all five regulars in double figures.

The clubs met in early December in Morgantown and the Mountaineers eked out a 74-73 victory.

"We played well enough to win that one, but we missed three one-and-one free throw opportunities and had crucial turnovers in the last minute and a half," explains Moir.

The Mountaineers start an experienced front line of 6-7 Maurice Robinson, 6-7 Russell Chapman and 6-6 Sid Bostic to go along with 6-4 guard Bob Hudgins and 6-5 front-court performer Tony Robertson.

"Their guards are big and Hudgins, who is averaging around 18 points, is the one who really destroyed us last time," says Moir.