Don't count Tech out

Charlie Moir was feeling the blues in Washington Saturday afternoon.

"Moir had gotten little sleep the night before. The Virginia Tech basketball coach had battled a New Jersey snowstorm to see a prospect, and he hadn’t returned to Washington until 3 a.m.

With precious little sleep and a bench that appeared to be full of pygmies, Moir was concerned about his team’s game against George Washington Saturday night.

After all, the Colonials had handily disposed of Maryland a week earlier on the Terps’ court.

George Washington had been a bit of a sore spot for Moir, as he had frequently disappointed him.

Without Holloran, GW looks a lot like Virginia without Sonny Walker or like Sonny and Cher did when they were without each other.

"We could get embarrassed tonight," said Moir, despair dripping from his voice.

Moir’s bench was without the services of talent Sam Foggie and Wayne Robinson, Foggie was ill in the Tech infirmary with a virus. Robinson had had his broken nose reset on Friday, forcing him to miss at least the GW game.

That left only 6-8 John Greene, used mostly in mop-up this year, as the lone tall player on the bench. Essentially, it meant that 6-11 Ernest Wansley had to go all the way or else Tech would likely be blown out by a GW team that used 7-2 Kevin Hall and 6-10 Mike Zagrado at center.

What Wansley did will be remembered as classic. He played 45 minutes and at the end was the difference between the two teams.

Wansley, a 60 percent free throw shooter, hit four straight free throws down the stretch in regulation time. Those free throws put Tech ahead, but alas George Washington’s Tom Tate nailed a 40-footer at the buzzer to send the game into overtime.

In the extra session, it was Wansley again. His layup with 2:51 left gave Tech breathing room and a 71-67 lead. He also pulled in four rebounds as he seemed to get the ball every time GW missed.

For the game, Wansley had 13 rebounds. He got 12 in the second half and overtime. All this was enough to key Tech’s 75-73 victory.

"I knew Ernest would have to play the whole way if we were to win the game," said Moir.

"I thought he played better as time went on. Especially the last 15 minutes." In order to help Wansley stay in the game, Tech opened in a zone defense. You can count the number of times on the fingers of one hand that you’ve seen a Charlie Moir team play a zone defense.

"I guess they don’t have confidence in a zone," said Moir of the maneuver that he junked when GW went into a 15-7 lead.

"We haven’t worked on the zone. You have to practice it a lot and play it a great deal of the time to be good. I spent 60 percent of the pre-season practice on our man to man defense.

Moir’s strategy was the same thing Virginia, another man to man team, tried against Maryand at College Park just three days earlier. The Cavaliers were devastated, but never could come back like Tech did.

"The Virginia-Maryland game crossed my mind," Moir admitted. "I really wanted to play zone and stay out of foul trouble early." The zone did accomplish part of what it was designed to do.

Tech stayed out of foul trouble except for Duke Thorpe. But at the half Thorpe had only two personal fouls. Then he got his fifth foul with 3:09 left in regulation.

Wansley, who has fouled out of three games, only got two personal fouls. That’s why he played 45 minutes.

Most people, including myself, to some extent, were willing to count Tech out after last week’s loss to West Virginia. It did more than likely ruin any notions of a post season tournament, but the Hokies certainly haven’t given up.

In beating GW, Tech returned the favor. The Mounties had given them. They probably hurt the Colonials’ chances at post season play.

Still, GW Coach Bob Tallent wasn’t visibly upset at the tough loss. His team was denied a second overtime when a tip shot rolled off the rim after the final buzzer.

"They’re all tough," said Tallent matter-of-factly about the defeat.

"What can you say except they (Tech) have a helluva club. As good a team as any we’ve played all year. Maybe the best."

Now remember, West Virginia beat GW by 12 points on the Colonials’ court.

Tech simply picked the Colonials’ zone to pieces with Thorpe getting easy layups while he was in the game. At the other end of the court, GW’s offense fizzled except for Holloran who fired in 29 points.

"A good defensive team does that to you," said Tallent. "They wouldn’t let us run our offense and they did a good job on John. I know he got 29 points, but he had to work for everything he got."

Moir agreed. "Maryland started back and didn’t put any pressure on them," said the Tech coach.

But what a week it was. GW upset Maryland. Then Tech in a shocker at home to West Virginia. Finally, Tech beat GW on the Colonials’ court. And GW is no slouch.

"I felt like going into the week, we’d win the West Virginia game and it would be very tough to win at GW," said Moir.

This is why the game of college basketball drives people batty. You never know what’s going to happen next. For Tech, the answer will come Wednesday night in Blacksburg against Memphis State.