Duke Is Back; Hokies Breeze

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BLACKSBURG — Virginia Tech, playing just well enough in the second half to keep a first-half lead, beat the men from West Point with help from the man from West Point Saturday night.

The Gobblers beat Army, 78-74, in a game that could have become a rout in the second half but had Tech playing well. But it took Duke Thorpe, who is from West Point, Virginia, that is, to just keep the Hokies ahead of the scrappy Cadets.

Thorpe, who has been bothered recently by a knee injury, led the Gobblers in scoring with 18 points and in rebounding with 19. "My knee is better, much better," said the senior forward. "The coaches took me out of the game several times because they haven't been practicing me because of my knee.

Army came into the game as the No. 4 team in the nation definitively. The Black Knights had a reputation for slowing the game down with a patient offense that makes the other team impatient.

But the Gobblers never let Army get into its offense. Tech scored the first eight points of the game and was ahead 28-16 midway through the first half. From there it looked like the Hokies would put the game away early and everyone could head home at halftime. It never happened.

A big problem for the Gobblers was fouls. No one fouled out, but five Hokies finished the game with four fouls and three with three. Two players did foul out for Army, including hot-handed Gary Watson, who was the game's high scorer with 20 points.

"We were both reaching and grabbing," said Tech Coach Charlie Moir. "The game started with a lot of knocking."

"It was a physical game," agreed Thorpe. "The referees kept warning us, but we like to play tough."

There were 55 fouls called in the game, 29 against Tech.

While the Hokies played well in the first 30 minutes, they weren't impressive the remaining 30. The Black Knights cut the lead to as little as 2 in the first minute of the second half, but then Tech would hit a few baskets to pull away.

"We played well in the first half," Moir observed. "But we got sloppy in the second half. I'm really disappointed with the way some of the guys played in the second half. We had chances to put it away, but we didn't do it."

Moir had to be pleased with scoring 18 points against a team like Army. "I was surprised we were able to get so many fast breaks. If they're close to you after 10 minutes, like 18-18, then you're in for a long night. But we took control early."

According to freshmen forward Leo Hemeny, "We knew they had guy e-up a pretty good team. Coach kept telling us that they never give up and they didn't.

"They were so deliberate that I think it bothered us sometimes. It might look like we didn't play well in the second half, but everybody was afraid they might foul out so we had to take it easy."

Center Ernest Wansley explained, "We could have played better in the second half, but we have a tendency to let up when we're ahead. You can't do much against a team like this."

What Tech did was run its record to 19-2 and provide itself with a shot at the ACC. In its last seven games. But the Gobblers looked like two different teams in accomplishing it.

"The first half was probably our best first half of the year," Thorpe claimed. "But the second half, well, it was just mediocrity."

Duke Thorpe's 33 points against Tech.

Hokie Scored Again for Tech.