Top Forwards Meet
Hokies Visit Wake

Staff Writer

Two of the nation's best shooting forwards will be featured when Virginia Tech journeys to Winston-Salem for a meeting with Wake Forest at 8 p.m. on Saturday at Memorial Coliseum.

The Deacons' Rod Griffin and the Gobblers' Duke Thorpe, ranked fourth and ninth, respectively, in the nation in field goal percentage, will be the featured performers. Griffin, at 6-6, is the leading candidate for player-of-the-year honors in the Atlantic Coast Conference, and sports a 20.4 scoring average to go with his 63.6 percent accuracy mark. Thorpe is scoring 16 points per game and shooting 62 percent.

The Gobblers swamped Wake Forest a year ago in Blacksburg, 102-95, in a furious game which saw the Deacs close from a 60-44 halftime deficit. Griffin led the charge in that game with the best scoring effort of his career, 34 points, hitting 14 of 20 shots in the process. He added 11 rebounds in the wild affair. Thorpe, then a non-starter, scored just four.

In fact, only ten of Tech's 102 points return to the VPI lineup this year to face the Deacs. Holdover starters are gutsy Phil Theineman and center Ernest Wansley. Theineman is a 6-5 senior forward who is second on the Tech team in scoring, with a 12.3 average entering the week. Wansley is a 6-11 pivotman who is second to Thorpe in rebounding.

Both starting VPI guards average in double figure scoring, soph Marshall Ashford and junior Ron Bell. Bench strength abounds in forwards Les Henson and Wayne Robinson and 6-9 center Sam Foggini.

Wake Forest is currently atop the A.C.C. with a 23-2 mark, 20-3 overall. A top ten national ranking will be at stake in the game for the Demon Deacons. Virginia Tech is 15-8 coming into the Wake Forest encounter.

In past recruiting wars, Tech's Wansley and Ashford nearly cast their lots with the Deacons. But Wake's Carl Tacy did come out on top in the race for Skip Brown, now an All-A.C.C. guard. Virginia Tech was Brown's second choice four years ago, and he has responded with several outstanding games against his almost teammates.

Brown pairs his 18-point scoring average in the backcourt with freshman speedster Frank Johnson. A top candidate for conference rookie-of-the-year awards, Johnson is a main cog in the Deacon fast break and in the increasingly-effective "Tacy Freeze."

Senior Jerry Schellenberg, trying to break out of a shooting slump, is Griffin's partner at the forward position. He is the team's third-leading scorer at 14.5. In the middle will be team-leading rebounder, Larry Harrison, who has become a deadly defensive force of late.

While Thorpe was Tech's "super sub" a year ago, the Deacons 1977 answer is Leroy McDonald, whose inspired play has been instrumental in all of the Deacons' classic comebacks this season. He contributes eight points and five rebounds per game to the Deacon cause.

Wake Forest mentor Carl Tacy says, "In proper perspective, this game does not mean as much to us as a conference game, but we need the win to keep our momentum. Virginia Tech has a very fine team and we must be careful not to let down in our anticipation of our key league games next week."