A Tech(nical) knockout of the Cavaliers

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Virginia's cheerleaders didn't make an appearance at the Roanoke Civic Center Wednesday night, but Cavaliers' Coach Terry Holland can tell them they used their voices wisely by staying home.

For when Holland tried to cheer for his team in the first half, he was told to sit down. And in the second half when the handsome UVa basketball pilot would have liked to yell for his team, Virginia Tech was making it difficult.

The Gobblers kept their composure through a scoreless stretch of 6:30 during the first half. Then broke open a close game in the final seven minutes for a 71-65 triumph over Virginia before a disappointing crowd of 8,497.

The victory, Tech's first in 26 starts and second in three contests against its instate foe from Charlottesville, supposedly settles which of these two rivals is the better for 1976-77.

But what the game did not settle is Holland's stomach. The Cavaliers' coach received one of four technical fouls called against his team by officials John Russell and Chuck Hartman—a pair of men in striped shirts who left even the Gobblers wondering if there's a case for four officials at a game—two to replace the two on the floor.

"I think those two guys (Russell and Hartman) missed a lot both ways," said Tech guard Ron Bell, who engineered the Gobblers' first-half rally with his quickness in a zone press. "It was physical out there, and after a while I think they lost control of it.

"Virginia complained some, and I thought they maybe should have gotten one technical, but not four. Still we won, and that's what I want to think about right now."

Well, Wednesday night, there were Bell's thoughts. But today the Gobblers began preparing for their regular-season finale on Saturday against 13th-ranked Marquette at Blacksburg. That game is a do-or-die. The Tech players feel that if they can beat the 13th-ranked Marquette, they have a shot at a post-season berth.

"I'm not even thinking about it," said Tech Coach Charlie Moore of his team's tournament opportunities. "In my opinion, our chances are very slim, even if we win, I'd just like to end the season on a good note Saturday night. Then what happens, happens."

Virginia entertains Maryland in its regular-season finale Saturday night, then enters the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament as the league's last-place team a week from today.

"It was very obvious what happened out there," said Holland after his team's 16th loss in 25 outings. "They kicked our fannies in the second half. We played fairly well in stretches, but at the same time, we didn't do the things we needed to do to get back into the game in the second half."

Virginia ran to an 18-8 lead with 12 minutes expired after Tech went almost seven minutes without scoring. Then the Gobblers went to a zone press and picked up the tempo, which bothered the Cavaliers.

The Cavs led 36-33 at halftime, but Tech sophomore guard Marshall Ashford remembered how he found the basket in an earlier Civic Center appearance against North Carolina in December and started firing—and hitting.

Ashford got eight of the Gobblers' first 10 points in the final 30 minutes to give Tech a 40-41 lead, but Virginia wouldn't quit. The Cavaliers moved within two points at 56-57 on inside work by Steve Castellan, Otis Fulton and Marc Iavaroni.

Tech followed with eight unanswered points during a 4:56 stretch to finish the excitement, except for the Cavaliers' final two technicals assessed by Hartman on Castellan and Steve Langholt.

Virginia led 58-57 with 3:55 to play in the first half when Russell nailed Holland with the first technical. Ironically, it came just before UVa's Mike Owens went to the line for a bonus free throw chance.

Photo by Bob Phillips

Virginia Tech's Marshall Ashford looks for an outlet amid a group of Virginia players

"It's very unusual," said Holland, referring to the Cavaliers' 49-4 edge in technicals. "I really debated the first one. I was cheering for my kids (four half-court). He (Russell) came over and told me to sit down. I said I didn't have to sit down. I can cheer for my kids. I told him he was referring the bench and not the game. Obviously, he's very tough."

Russell called another technical just 36 seconds later on Virginia guard Bobby Stokes when the little playmaker jumped up and down after being whistled for a personal foul. Holland said: "I guess he (Russell) has something to prove."

At the Cavaliers saw the Jamestown, N.C.-based Tech for the first time since he whistled two technicals on UNC Coach Dean Smith in a game against UVa last season.

The first second-half technical was on Castellan. As Hartman approached the scorer's table, Langholt—a Virginia captain—said something to the High Point official he didn't like and received the final T.

Ashford finished with 21 points and Bell added 16 for Tech as they clearly outplayed Virginia's backcourters. And Sam Foggin came off the bench for 10 Gobblers points inside, where there was more contact than in one hour of dancing on American Bandstand.

"There was a lot of punching and elbowing going on," said Bell of the emotionally-played game. "Virginia set a lot of picks which helped break Langholt free early for easy baskets. There was bumping and shoving all over.

The tech certainly helped us," said Moore of Tech's first half work that made up a 10-point deficit. "It didn't think we were ever gonna score. It was like they had taken the basket off the glass."

After a foul-filled first half of 32 free throws, it was interesting that Virginia did not have a personal foul the first 11:57 of the second half. Hartman called the officials as he left the floor at halftime, but it's doubtful they listened.

Maybe he wanted to cheer some more. Then maybe the refs didn't think Holland qualified as a cheerleader. After all, he didn't have pom poms.