Virginia Tech Season Ends With Loss to Marquette

By BILL HENDL
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BLACKSBURG — Virginia Tech closed its season on a sour note Saturday afternoon, losing to Marquette, 75-70. The game, however, may have been lost a week ago.

We were in beautiful position then, said Marquette's retiring coach, Al McGuire. "We were 16-3 and looking ahead. We were starting a homestand. Then I went to Edsel Manufacturing a week." Translated, that means Marquette dropped three home games, unboarded for McGuire. "We lost the hot trick," said McGuire.

Faced with five straight road games to finish the year, the Warriors regrouped. "One more loss and that's it," said McGuire of his team's perennial NCAA chances. "So we dedicated ourselves to playing one game at a time."

Thus far it has worked perfectly. Marquette won at Wisconsin, then ended Tech's year on an 8-1 record.

The key to Marquette's win was unselfish Butch Lee, who overcame a poor shooting night to get 16 of his 22 points after intermission. That, and excellent rebounding by Bo Ellis, Jerome Whitehead and Bill Neary, scotched Tech's upset hopes.

McGuire said Marquette worked hard on a new offense. "It was a surprise to me, but the Warriors showed enough to withstand Tech's comeback stuff through Wallenda, who had only 16 points. The Warriors' defense was tough, and they broke the back of the rally."

"Watch Those Elbows," Marquette Coach Al McGuire Tells the Referees

A stat pointer by Lee dropped a 77-70 Marquette lead to 65-70, and the Warriors showed enough to withstand Tech's comeback effort through Wallenda. "I knew they had come from 11 down in the last two minutes to beat Memphis State," said Leach.

Although it was almost always close, Marquette never trailed in the last half after leading 34-33 at the break. Whenever Tech pulled within one point, Lee would break the back of the rally.

Five straight points by Lee expanded a 37-36 Marquette lead to 43-37, and the Warriors showed enough to withstand Tech's comeback effort through Wallenda, who had only 16 points. The Warriors' defense was tough, and they broke the back of the rally.

"Over the years, "McGuire said, "our coach record has been frightening. I don't even want to look it up. It's over."

"We've only lost at Cincinnati (one point), but we haven't counted on five home losses.

"But the losses came, so winning on the road became a necessity. "We've played in every snapshot in the county," said McGuire. "If you'll play us, we'll play you. Tonight we tried to be patient, to take the crowd out of the game."

"It worked, even though the Warriors cracked a couple of times." "So Ellis and Butch Lee got loose. I coach out of fear. I'm afraid to take them out, even though they would be better if they're rested."

The Warriors sealed the win on Lee's two free throws with 26 seconds left and shot just 40.9 per cent for the game, while the Hokies hit 50 per cent in the second half to bring up a weak shooting first stanza to 41.3 per cent overall.

The boards also made a big difference. Marquette owned them, 33-26, and Tech seldom got a second shot. Mor was upset that the Warriors also rebounded several of their own missed free throws. See Tech, Page 4.

Tech

"It doesn't show up in the statistics," Mor said, "but against a team like Marquette, ball position is very important."

Tech had a chance to win this one in the first half, but the Hokies failed to capitalize on several fast-break opportunities. "Once we had a real good two-on-one that would have given us a nine-point lead. Instead we botched it up and they scored at the other end and were down only five. That was a real big play," Mor said.

Ellis kept Marquette in the first half with 18 of his 19 points. In the second half, Lee and Whitehead did the damage. Whitehead tallied 11 of his 15 points then before getting his fifth foul.

"Joy (Whitehead) has been among the missing for the last two weeks," said McGuire. "Tonight he caused some damage underneath." Mor figured that Whitehead's layups and shots were the result of letting Lee and guard Jon Birdsell penetrate too far, then dish off for the easy ones.

Marquette is now 18-4, a drop from past years, but McGuire isn't downcast.

"This team is having to live with the criteria established by either Marquette teams for the past 13 years. This team isn't that good, but we've still won 75 per cent of our games.

"There is just more good talent in the nation and it's spread around. On any night there are 20 teams that can beat anybody."

Is Tech one of these teams? "Sure, they're a great club," said McGuire. "Anybody who wins at Wake Forest has to be good."

Even near the end, McGuire remains a class guy. And his team, while not great, is still good enough.