Ratiff, Watts Key Prospects

Recruiting Success Vital for Gobblers

"While most of the college basketball World continues the long countdown to the eventual championships in the NCAA, Division I, II and III, Virginia Tech is finished early." That could be a blessing in disguise. While other coaches will have to worry about their upcoming games, Tech Coach Charlie Moir is on the road recruiting. "I've met all of our prospects," Moir said Saturday night following the 75-29 loss to Marquette, "but I haven't met all of their parents yet."

The first key date for Moir and Tech is March 12 at 8 a.m. That is the first time that a player can sign an ACC grant, and Tech has an agreement with ACC schools. What Moir would much like to do is sign Washington, D.C., budding superstar James Ratiff to a scholarship next week. "I certainly hope he signs with us," Moir said.

Moir already has VCU transfer Tic Price in school and that 6-5 leaper from Danville will be eligible next year. Nevertheless, Moir would like to bring in six additional recruits.

That could give Tech as many as 14 or 15 scholarship players, which in this age is too many. There is always the chance that somebody might depart, however.

All four of the guards are scheduled to return, but Tech is still seeking a backcourt man or two. Moir would like to have a big, power guard, although Price could play small forward here.

"Up front," returns forward 6'4" Wayne Robinson, who showed signs of promise in his freshman year, 6'5" high-jumping Lee Henson, another freshman, and the fans' favorite, Sam Foggin, who will be a senior.

What Moir needs most is a couple of guys who can really shoot. Tech was not a good shooting team all year, and in most of its losses, it was poor accuracy from the field that did the Hokies in.

"When I looked at our December statistics and we were shooting 51 percent, I couldn't believe it," Moir said. "I wasn't sure that we would shoot 50 percent for the year."

The Hokies cooled considerably after that, and had games like Marquette, when Tech shot 40.9 percent and still lost by merely five points.

"I'm satisfied with the season," said Moir. "The kids worked hard all year and they gave us great effort. You have to be satisfied with that."

Tech won 18 games more on pure hustle than on pure skill. They also won coaching. No team wins four one-pointers on luck alone, and there was a two-point throw-in for good measure.

Moir's coaching was the big factor between an 18-9 year and one that easily could have been 14-13. There were the big wins over Wake Forest and Memphis State, each far more talented, plus two triumphs in three tries against arch rival Virginia.

What the Hokies couldn't do is win on talent alone. That was evidenced in the home loss to West Virginia and the road defeat at Ohio U., a couple of games the Hokies figured to win.

Moir has proven his abilities as a head coach at Roanoke, Tallahas and now Tech. Yet he has never been blessed with super talent at any of those stops.

The whole object of this latest recruiting trip is to change that.

That would eliminate Maryland from the picture with the 6'9" Ratiff, who could play either forward or center, although he prefers the former.

The national letter of intent isn't until mid-April, so schools like Marquette and Louisville could continue to recruit Ratiff. In fact, one member of Marquette's tourist party said Saturday to a Tech man. "You aren't going to get Ratiff, we are," Moir remains confident, however.

The Tech coach also is hoping to sign 7-0 Craig Watts early. The big kid from Massachusetts also is being sought by Clemson, and that battle could end on March 12.

"If we get the two or three players I think we'll get early," said Moir, "we'll have the base for a very good recruiting year."

Despite an 18-9 record in his first season at Tech, Moir feels strongly that he must have an outstanding recruiting campaign.

Although quite a few players return, the starting front line of Duke Therue, Phil Thimensen and Ernest Wamsley all graduate.

The difference between scrambling for an NIT bid and an invitation to the NCAA almost every season is talent. Just ask the other power independents like Marquette, Notre Dame and Nevada-Las Vegas.

If Tech wants to be that sort of independent, Moir has to win the recruiting wars. That's why he won't be found in Blacksburg often in the next couple of weeks.

"We've just got to get some players," he said. Charlie Moir doesn't fail often. He doesn't plan to fail this time.