NIT Battles Send ‘Loose’ Wildcats Against ODU, Hoyas To Techland

BY BOB MOSKOWITZ
Daily Press Sports Writer
In NATO, Villanova players were loose.
"How old are you?" a writer asked senior guard Joe Rogers.
"I'm 21. How old are you?" he quipped. It was not disrespectful, just relaxed, bubbling humor.
That's the attitude the Wildcats take into Scope tonight against Old Dominion University before an expected 10,000.
Across the State in Blacksburg, Virginia Tech's floor leader talks of winning "for our seniors. I want them to go out winners," says sophomore guard Marshall Ashford, whose Virginia Tech Govblers host Georgetown. Cassell Coliseum also is expected to house 10,000.
The two contests are part of tonight's four-game schedule in the far-flung NIT first round.
Other action sees Indiana State (25-2) vs. host Houston (26-7) and Oregon (19-9) plays Oral Roberts (21-6) in Tulsa.
The Wildcats (30-9) of fourth-year Coach Rollie Massimino represent the peak of a rebuilding effort that started four years ago, when they won only seven games.
Remaining from that group are the triumvirate of Rogers, 6-7 forward John Olive and 6-8 forward-center Larry Herro, the oldest of three brothers playing for the 'Cats.
"The three seniors represent the culmination of a lot of hard work," says the stumpy Massimino, who played basketball for the University of Vermont. The trio, he adds, "are fantastic people. I wish you knew them well."
The Wildcats' rebounding challenge against the prowess of ODU's 6-9 Wilson Washington, 6-7 freshman Ronnie Valentine and 6-5 Jeff Fuhrmann would appear to be formidable one.
Massimino over-simplifies by quipping: "We don't rebound at all." The players echo him. "Our leading rebounder is everyone," they say smilingly, almost in unison.
Nevertheless, the Wildcats have disposed of such rebounding powers as Notre Dame, George Washington (twice) and Massachusetts.
As their coach puts it: "We have a good team." Villanova employs the press well, shoots fouls excellently (76 per cent) and does not try to run.
Massimino's forces, then, are missing one major item, possibly two.
The first, in the coach's words "is a killer," meaning a rebounder of Washington's stature. The second could be Keith Herron, the most talented of the brethren from Washington, D.C.
He is nursing an ankle injury, and while he is most likely to play, his capacity as a starter remains "in doubt."
Both teams are trying to rebound from losses, the Wildcats by 57-54 to Duquese and ODU to 138-ranked Syracuse by 67-54.
ODU's front line of Valentine, Washington and Fuhrmann dominates the scoring with averages of 22.1, 18.0 and 13.0.
The Monarchs are 25-5 and had won 22 straight before the Syracuse loss in See Ashford, Page 25, Columns 23

Ashford Likes Play Of Young Ron Bell; ODU Sellout Nears

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Scope Senior Joey Caruthers (6.7) and freshman Richie Wright lead in assists with 113 and 100.
Those still seeking tickets have a shot starting at 9 a.m. today, when a little more than 700 general admission tickets go on sale in the ODU fieldhouse.
In Blacksburg, the Govblers (18-9) have been working feverishly to regain the edge they had before they ostensibly ended their season 10 days ago.
Coach Charlie Moir has said all season, "we go as our guards go." In particular, he refers to Ashford, the club's No. 4 scorer with a 11.8 average and 68 assists.
The latter figure is second only to senior forward Phil Thiemann, the nation's leading free throw shooter with a .922 completion percentage.
Thiemann has 75 assists. Ashford figures — and rightfully so — "that the coach puts me in as a leader. ... I guess I like it. I know I like what Dave did for us last year," he says referring to the graduated Dave Sensibaugh.
Ashford, whose season was disappointing one as a freshman when he averaged only 2.2 points a game, credits much of the Govblers' late-season jelling (despite a year-ending loss to Marquette) to play by Ron Bell, the other starting guard.
Bell is a slender junior transfer from Cayuga Junior College in Albany, N.Y.
Ashford feels his best individual showing came in the 71-61 conquest of Virginia. In that game "Bell also was playing well."
"We found we can help each other a lot. That's really what we want.
"Since then, we've been getting each other up. I get a lot of points off his play and he gets points too. We complement each other."
The lowest scorer among Gobbler starters is 6-11 senior Ernest Wansley,