By BOB MOSKOWITZ

Hoyas Toppled 83-79, Thorpe, Guards Shine

By Bob Moskowitz

Duke Thorpe, the legendary Virginia Tech senior forward, was bubbled with all kinds of praise for his teammates after Wednesday night's giddy triumph.

"Both our guards amaze me everyday," the big fellow out of West Point bubbled.

Virginia Tech had just defeated the Cassell Coliseum throng of 5,400 with an 83-79 triumph over Georgetown that sends the Hokies into the quarterfinals of the NIT at Madison Square Garden. (See Way Ball Bonnie Page 60 for other details.)

They meet the winner of tonight's Memphis State-Alabama matchup Monday night.

Thorpe was ebullient about Marshall Ashford, who scored a career high 26 points and Ron Bell, an 18-point scorer.

Thorpe had reason to laud his own showing during the contest which was enriched by nine ties and 13 exchanges of leads before the Hokies took over for good early in the second half.

Thorpe not only pulled down 12 rebounds against the strong Hoyas' board crew, but he came through with timely foul shooting in the closing seconds, when Georgetown still nourished slim hopes of coming back.

With Tech up 80-77, Thorpe first hit one of two shots with 19 seconds to go. Then he dropped in the victory-clinching final two Tech points with 13 seconds left.

That the Hokies (19-9) could never really sail away the success was pretty much the work of the Hoyas' junior Derrick Jackson, who pumped in 20 points to equal his career high.

With Tech leading 61-50, Jackson literally exploded. He dropped in his team's next 10 points (missing two straight foul shots in the process) and the Hoyas (19-9) were very much back in the thick of the fight.

They had trailed at eight points at 63-55, 67-58, 69-61, and 71-73 before Jackson connected from around the foul line twice in an 18-second span to narrow the spread to 71-73.

It remained that close and closer the rest of the way.

Indeed, with 2:01 left, the gap was only 75-73. Then, Tech started playing conservatively, although it wasn't until some seconds later that Coach Charlie Moir reluctantly sent the four corners which actually produced the triumph for the 1973 NIT champs.

"I was leery of using it because we've mishandled the ball so much in the past. I don't like to use it with less than a four-point lead," he said.

Ashford's two foul shots made it 79-75, but even then, the Hoyas kept scratching persistently close until Thorpe's string of foul shots.

Most of the players and Moir indicated they probably would rather face Alabama than Memphis State only because the Tigers blew a 75-point lead here a few weeks back and lost a thriller while Alabama simply ran the Hokies off the court 108-78 in the SEC.

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68scorers

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The Hokies and their coach also cited second-half defense as a major contributor to the hard-earned victory that caps Moir's initial season at the helm.

"In the second half," said Thorpe, who was marked with a smile no matter who he talked to, "was a matter of improved defense, especially the rebounding."

"The rebounding was the key," Actually, Georgetown led the board battle 26-18 the first half and was held to a 25-23 standoff the second go-around.

The Hoyas were led in the category by Steve Martin's 13, followed by 12 from Ed Hopkins, the 6-9 junior who missed last week's 80-58 loss to Old Dominion (a first-round loser in Norfolk to Villanova. See story elsewhere this section).

The Hokies had pretty well been able to keep their head above water the first half until the closing minute.

A layup by Lee Henson pushed Tech ahead 37-36 with 56 seconds to go. Then, Martin connected on two foul shots with 44 seconds left. Henson missed the front end of a one-and-one and big Mike Praisner hit from the top of the circle for the Hoyas with three seconds left.

That gave the Hoyas a 40-37 bulge they kept until six seconds later by Bell (four points) and Ashford lifted Tech ahead 47-46 after a little less than four minutes of second-half action.

Georgetown promptly went back up at 50-47 before an eight-point charge by Ashford (four points), Bell (two) and Phil Theiseman (two) produced a 55-50 bulge. Tech was up for good.