Hokies Headed For New York City; Ashford Leads Tech Past Hoyas 83-79

by Kyle Parks

A good indication of how the Virginia Tech basketball team will do on any given night is how the Hokie guards, Marshall Ashford and Ron Bell, do. If they’re hot, then look out.

And hot they were Wednesday night, pacing Tech to a hard-earned 83-79 victory over the Georgetown Hoyas in the first round of the NIT. With Ashford scoring 24 points and Bell collecting 18, Tech was able to overcome a one-man Georgetown show in the person of Derrick Jackson, Jackson had 28 points, but it was not enough as the Hoyas refused to fold down the stretch after taking the lead in the second half. Down 60-57 at halftime, Tech went into the locker room trailing 24-18 in the rebound battle also.

Georgetown had beaten Tech badly on the boards in the first half, getting a lot of second and third shots at their end of the floor. But even more of a factor for the Hoyas’ lead was Tech’s miserable first half at the foul line. The Hokies had shot a paltry 33% at the line, and were losing despite outshooting Georgetown from the floor 44 to 42%.

The first half scoring for Tech was led by Ron Bell with 11 as the Hokies got most of their points from the outside. “We were not patient in the first half”, commented Tech coach Charlie Moir after the game. Although Tech had excellent opportunities to hit the ball inside, but were not hitting the shot from the outside. Then Tech’s problems was the constantly changing Georgetown defense, zone one minute and man-to-man the next.

“Late in the first half, we had break opportunities, but didn’t have the outlet pass”, Moir added, but things changed in the second half. With seven minutes gone in the second half, Tech had rallied to a 51-50 lead, and the break came alive. Marshall Ashford scored on a consecutive layups, Ron Bell added 2 on another break, and Phil Thieman was fouled on yet another fast break. Thieman’s two foul shots expanded the Hokie lead to 55-50, and it was obvious that the Tech guards were hot.

Georgetown fought back, though, and closed the gap to 61-57 with 10:05 left in the game. Although Tech held off the Hoyas to build a 69-61 lead with 6:58 remaining, both Bell and Ashford picked up their fourth fouls respectively in this time span. The Hoyas failed to take advantage of the situation, and it was their mistake. Marshall Ashford scored twice at 2:44 and 2:00, and then hit both ends of a one-and-one to give Tech breathing room, expanding a 77-75 lead to a margin of 79-75. Neither team was to score again from the field in the final minute.

Phil Thieman hit half a one-and-one, Duke Thorpe hit one of two on another, and Thorpe hit two foul shots with 1:3 remaining on the clock to ice the victory. Georgetown’s four foul shots in the final minutes were not nearly enough, and the final gun went off with the score Tech 83, Georgetown 79.

Keeping the game close in the second half for the Hoyas was Derrick Jackson, who scored 18 points after intermission to finish with 28.

“Derrick had to shoot a lot tonight, because Al was out. We set a lot of screens for him”, commented Hoya coach John Thompson. “Al” was Georgetown’s second leading scorer, Al Dutch, who had to miss the game due to injury. Thompson made no excuses for the loss, though, adding that he thought “we could beat them, and they could beat us on any given night.”

Tech’s Charlie Moir was very pleased with the Hokies’ performance, especially considering Tech had only found out about the game two days before. “We were a little ragged, but we played well”, he commented, and added that he thought the Hoyas “played on guts” against the Hokies.

Behind Ashford’s career high 24 points and Bell’s 18 for Tech were Duke Thorpe with 12 points and 12 rebounds and Ernest Wansley with 12 points. Georgetown, on the other hand, had only two players in double figures. Jackson and teammate Steve Martin, who collected 16 points.

Ron Bell, who finished with 18 points, connects with an acrobatic move to the basket.

Les Hanson battles two Hoyas for a well-earned tip with the result being two points.

The banner tells the story: the Hokies will play next in New York City in the NIT quarterfinals.