'No Shame' For Tech In NIT Loss

By DENNIS LATTA
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NEW YORK — Two weeks ago, the Virginia Tech basketball players thought their season had ended with an 18-9 mark. Monday night, it did end with the Gobblers looking at a final 19-10 record.

"I'm not disappointed at all," said Tech starter Duke Thorpe after the Gobblers lost to Alabama, 79-72, Monday in the quarterfinals of the National Invitational Tournament in Madison Square Garden.

"We got a second chance by just playing in the NIT. A lot of people were saying we wouldn't get in the tournament but we did. We have nothing to be ashamed of. It will be a new season next year and this team will be ready," Thorpe continued.

For the Gobblers, the 1976-77 season was supposed to be a rebuilding year with three starters gone from the squad that got an invitation to the NCAA Tournament.

"This isn't a bad way to end a season," said Tech center Ernest Wansley, a senior like Thorpe. "It was a privilege to get into the NIT. I don't feel bad because we played a good team and could have beaten a ranked team."

"I thought we should have won this game," said guard Ron Bell, one of the two starters who will be back next year. "A whole lot of things would have happened to us if we had. We would have stayed up here until Sunday. Now we just go home.

"We have a lot of time to think about it," Bell claimed. "We got a bid when a lot of people didn't expect us to and we had a chance to go all the way, but we didn't capitalize."

Tech played a good first half and a poor second half against the Crimson Tide. "We collapsed in the second half," remarked sophomore Marshall Ashford. "They defended us differently and we didn't penetrate like we did in the first half. The ball just wouldn't fall for us in the second half."

The Gobblers had something to prove against the Crimson Tide. They had been crushed by Alabama, 108-78, earlier in the year and they wanted to show they could play with the nation's 12th-ranked team. While Tech didn't win, it proved its point.

"We felt that our first game against Alabama was our worst game of the season," said Ashford. "We knew that wouldn't happen again. But we wanted to do more than play with them, we wanted to beat them."

Senior Phil Thieneman ended his Tech career with two of the worst games he had in two seasons as a starter. "I just wish I could have played better. It was terrible to have a nine-point lead and drop it in the last eight minutes," said the forward who finished with just four points.

Big Ernest Wansley closed out his two-year career with one of his better performances. He had 14 points and seven rebounds. "The team was trying to get the ball to me. When they did, I could wheel and deal because Alabama tried to block the shots instead of the pass."

After the game, a representative from the European basketball league asked to speak to Wansley and Thorpe.

"I don't want to talk to him," said Thorpe, "but I guess I will. I wish I was a freshman and had three more years to play at Tech."