VPI's Moir — 'Great Effort'

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NEW YORK — Charlie Moir called it "as great an effort as I've gotten from any team I've ever coached."

It was a revealing analysis of Virginia Tech's up-and-down basketball season, which ended respectfully but in defeat Monday night in New York.

The Gobblers were ousted from NIT play by Alabama 79-72 and wound up with a 19-10 record.

One of the ironies of that finale came at the foul line where Phil Thieman didn't take a shot.

Thieman is the veteran forward who will wind up as the nation's No. 2 man in foul shooting. He sank 98 of 187 shots for a 91.6 percentage, about half a percentage point behind Nevada-Las Vegas' Bob Smith.

Thieman makes a few interesting points. One important one has nothing to do with foul shooting.

Long-time roommate Duke Thorpe, he says, had his knee drained several times in mid-season. "He really shouldn't have been playing, but he knew the team needed him."

Thorpe, the big fellow out of West Point, despite a lackluster January, still finished his Tech career leading the club in scoring with an average of 15.6 points a game and an average of 8.3 rebounds.

He also set a school record for most games played in a three-year career.

Thorpe has played in 83 varsity games, eclipsing the previous high held by Assistant Athletic Director Bill Matthews (1952-56) and Ed Frazier (1971-74). Each had been in 77 games. Matthews holds the four-year mark with 100 games.

The latter is a standard that eventually could belong to Marshall Ashford, who in two seasons has played in 53 games.

Ashford, who enjoyed late-season consistence that enabled him to live up to his billing as a freshman, looks forward to next year, even though the entire front line of Thorpe, Thieman and center Ernest Wansley graduates.

"We came a long way this year," he says, referring to starting Tech guards Ashford and junior college transfer Ron Bell, the club's third- and fourth-leading scorers.

He concedes there could be a problem if recruiting doesn't collar some new height, but he feels "our guard play should be very strong."

Ashford also feels Alabama enhanced its role as tournament favorite and rates the Crimson Tide "one of the best three teams" Tech has faced.

That puts the Tide in a category with See Thieman, Page 21, Column 1.

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Marquette and North Carolina, which Ashford labels "the best."

Moir was pleased that "this team had no superstar. They wanted to play together."

On the negative side, Moir concedes "the most disappointing part of the season came in January. We played really sloppy ball. We were in a slump. "We lost to Oral Roberts and West Virginia at home and at Ohio University. We shouldn't do things like that and have a good season."

On the other hand, Moir concedes "we won some we shouldn't have, too."

For Thieman it was "a satisfying year from a personal standpoint up to the Marquette game (which ended the regular season)."

In NIT action against Georgetown and Alabama, Thieman had been nursing a bruised foot.

Nevertheless, he feels proud of his accomplishments, especially at the foul line.

"I'll probably tell my kids I won the title. It was that close," he says with a smile. "Then they'll look it up and tell me I was wrong."

Thieman only shot 70.4 per cent from the line last year, certainly not a figure that would indicate he would aim on the national title.

He started out the season, however, dropping in 17 of 18 shots in six games. "That kept my confidence up and my rhythm was right." He also began bouncing the ball before he shot, something he hadn't done before.

It added up to a good year for all the Gobblers.