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NIT notes

Ashford's shot pleased bettors

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Notes from the Big Apple:

Now that Virginia Tech has failed to repeat its 1973 NIT title run in New York, it can be told that Monday night's most exciting play was a final shot by the Gobblers' Marshall Ashford.

The Tech guard couldn't have changed the outcome of a game won by Alabama 79-72.

It's also doubtful if TV viewers in Roanoke could hear the cheers from the crowd as a long shot by Ashford at the buzzer didn't come close.

No, friends who believe in fairy tales, the cheering wasn't for a 'Bama win. Rather, it was for the missed shot that left the Tide a seven-point victor.

Alabama was a 5½-point pick in New York and anyone betting on the Tide would have lost had Ashford hit his shot.

Ah, the delights of gambling.

Something that wasn't a gamble or risk was the appearance of Ernest Wansley in New York.

Tech's 6-11 center probably had failed to impress the pros with his inconsistent play during the season.

But pro scouts always turn out at the Garden to see the NIT. And Wansley performed brilliantly. He drove to the basket, rebounded and did a good job on defense.

What his play might earn him is a draft pick by some NBA team. That doesn't assure him of a spot for next year—but it does mean that a club will at least take a look at him.

If the right team chooses Wansley and has two centers, it might keep him hoping that the former Anderson Junior College player becomes more consistent. If not, Wansley might wind up in Europe. But he is likely to continue playing.

Before you worry about runaway inflation in coffee, just remember it's better than a night at the Statler Hilton in New York.

Dinty Moore's, a restaurant operated in the hotel, has prices to stagger the imagination.

For a bottle of beer and pastrami on rye, it was only $7. The Stork Club went out of business on prices lower than that.

The sandwich includes a couple of slices of pickle. Mustard is free. I kept wondering why the waiter didn't wear a mask and bandana to serve the food.

When I asked for a menu to take back to the boss so he'd believe my expense account, they laughed.

I laughed, too. I left no tip. Any restaurant, I figured, that charges prices like that, must pay the waiters enough to make it without tips.

You'll be interested to know that blueberry pancakes, the menu's cheapest item, was only in the neighborhood of $3.35. The blueberries must come from Europe. A Coke is 85 cents—for a small glass.

Tech's training meal must have cost as much as a presidential dinner for 100 guests.

If you're wondering, NIT attendance was 9,581 for Monday night. Not bad, considering the closest team to New York was Virginia Tech.

Though the Gobblers were well-represented thanks to a charter trip, Illinois State had the biggest crowd. It must have had 600 to 700 fans who bussed, drove and flew in from the heart of America.

There were some special guests. Alabama football coach Bear Bryant sat on the end of the Crimson Tide bench while Indiana basketball Coach Bobby Knight was also present for Monday's game.

Willis Reed, the coach of the New York Knicks for next year, was in the stands with briefcase—looking over prospects.

It is generally agreed that 6-7 Greg Ballard of Oregon, 7-0 Jeff Wilkins of Illinois State and Houston guard Otis Birdsong are the top prospects for the pros in the New York part of the NIT.

All three are considered possible first-round selections. And Oregon Coach Dick Harter maintains Ballard is better than UCLA's Marques Johnson.

Mmmmmmm.

Another visitor was Philadelphia 76er guard Doug Collins to look in on his former teammates at Illinois State.

Of course the NIT isn't the only game going on in New York.

Hitter deluxe Dave Kingman wouldn't talk to writers after he hit his first spring training homer. Tsk, tsk.

Catfish Hunter tried to throw for the Yankees in an exhibition game and had trouble with his fast ball. Its speed wasn't dazzling.

And the Yankees, those rich cats who are supposed to have purchased a pennant with Reggie Jackson, are suddenly lacking a shortstop. So, they are looking for a club that needs money—for a good shortstop.

Chris Evert goes to New York next week for a Virginia Slims tournament at Madison Square Garden. This week she posed for pictures in front of the Garden's marquee and said she's taking nothing (like a win) for granted.

The Mets and Jets are squabbling again. It seems the Mets (baseball) won't let the Jets (football) in Shea Stadium for any games before the end of September. Or the end of baseball season.

Now the Jets are about to steal away out of town again—to New Jersey with the football Giants.

They also might do it without Joe Namath. The LA Rams are still trying to get Joe Willie and writers figure that a change in scenery will rejuvenate Namath.

I wonder if it will help his aging legs?

But, say the men in the know, even an exorbitant price isn't too much for the Jets to get from the Rams. They reason that LA can sell 9,000 extra seats, meaning it will be $75,000 per game to see Namath—on bad wheels.

I wonder what they're charging for a pastrami on rye in LA these days. Or maybe something was in the water in New York.