Gobblers Lose Blue Chipper To Tennessee

James Ratiff, who would have been the first legitimate blue-chip prospect to sign with Virginia Tech, admitted Tuesday that he chose Tennessee over the Gobblers for that very reason.

Ratiff, a 6-8 center from Eastern High School in Washington D.C., announced he is "75 or 80 per cent" certain he will become a Volunteer, having chosen Tennessee over Tech, Michigan, Marquette, Louisville and Michigan.

"I think there is a good chance of playing right away at Tennessee," Ratiff said. "(Ernie) Grunfeld graduates and (Bernard) King may go pro. So I think I'll have a good shot."

Explaining that Michigan was too cold and San Francisco too far away, Ratiff said that, "Virginia Tech has a program that's on the way up. But I didn't want to be the first (blue-chipper) to go there. There would be too much pressure on me."

When he visited the Blacksburg campus this fall, Ratiff told Coach Charlie Moir that he was ready to commit to VPI and, as late as last Saturday, Moir reported that the 24-point and 16-rebound per game performer was leaning toward the Hokies.

While Moir wasn't certain that the SEC letter Ratiff signed would prohibit Tech from recruiting him until the April 13 national deadline, he confirmed that he has given up the chase.

"We won't recruit him anymore," said Moir. "I know if a kid said he was only 75 per cent sure he wanted to come to Tech, I wouldn't want him. Tennessee just came in and put a lot of pressure on him."