

Virginia Tech-North Carolina Game Should Be Tight Battle 12/11

There have been a few basketball highlights in the history of the Roanoke Civic Center, but nothing to rival tonight's sold-out clash between Virginia Tech and North Carolina.

Tickets are impossible to find, even though the game will be carried on television (Channel 7, 8 p.m., with the redoubtable Bill King and the illustrious Jerry Joynes).

Tech publicist Wendy Weisend says his phone has been ringing off the hook all week. The press requests are coming in large orders. The media has generally ignored Tech games in Blacksburg recently, probably because of travel. At last week's Ohio State game, Roanoke and Richmond were the only major dailies represented.

Obviously, the Tar Heels are a big draw. One small paper in North Carolina asked for three press tickets. You can judge for yourself the reason for that.

A Roanoke sellout is rare enough, but never before has a nationally-ranked team appeared at the Civic Center.

The Tar Heels come to town ranked No. 12, which proves only that the early season rankings don't mean very much.

UNC started the year No. 3, lost a one-pointer in overtime to Wake Forest in the Big Four, then fell to No. 9.

This week, after beating Marshall by 20, they dropped three more slots. Obviously some of the voters decided to vote only for unbeaters.

Despite Carolina's obvious ability, Tech has an excellent chance to win. The Hokies, like UNC, are 3-1. Their loss also was by a single point, at West Virginia, a game that Tech had locked up until missing some free throws in the final seconds.

Tech Coach Charlie Moir says he—and his team—are eagerly looking forward to the game. Tech has had a week to prepare for UNC since beating Ohio State. Meanwhile, Carolina has won at Michigan State and at home against Athletes in Action.

The Tar Heels present some problems for the Tech defense, not the least of which is considerable experience. Four starters return from last year's team, which lost just two regular season games.

Three of them—center Tom LaGarde, forward Walter Davis and guard Phil



Bill Brill

Ford—played on the victorious Olympic team. All three, plus guard John Kuester, are three-year regulars. That's as much experience as any team in the nation.

The one new face in the UNC lineup is the shining rookie, Mike O'Koren. The 6-6 Jersey City, N.J., freshman is bidding to be the ACC rookie of the year. In Carolina's complicated rating system (the Tar Heels do not list their players according to scoring averages), O'Koren is No. 1.

He is the first freshman Coach Dean Smith has ever started from the opening game, although it didn't take Ford long to get in the starting lineup. If O'Koren is tabbed as the top rookie, he will succeed Duke's Jim Spanarkel. Ironically, they played on the same high school team.

Actually, O'Koren has replaced LaGarde in the lineup, with the 6-10 senior moving to center to take over for the graduated Mitch Kupchak, now with the Washington Bullets.

"I've really been impressed with LaGarde," said Moir. "He's up to 230 pounds now and he's very aggressive. He always played in the shadow of Kupchak, but he's a natural center. He's taking the ball to the basket with strong moves, and if we don't watch out, he'll stuff us."

That means the center matchup will be a key one. Tech's 6-11 senior, Ernest Wansley, has been playing much better of late, and had one of his finest games against Ohio State. "We've got to have a strong game from Ernest if we're to have a chance to win," Moir concedes.

The other matchups shape up this way: Tech will send Phil Thieneman, a 6-5 senior, against the 6-5 Davis, also a senior. Duke Thorpe, Tech's high scoring senior, will have the task of guarding O'Koren.

In the backcourt, the Hokies will open with Marshall Ashford and Ronnie Bell against Ford and Kuester. UNC has a defi-

nite experience edge here, because sophomore Ashford played sparingly last year and Bell is a junior college transfer still learning to fit in with the team.

Moir says he'll go to his bench much more than he did against Ohio State, when the Hokies made just one substitution—Sam Foggin for Wansley—in the second half.

"They'll keep throwing the shock troops at you," said Moir. "We'll definitely use a lot more players. We know that Carolina has an excellent team, one of the finest we'll play this year. I wish the game was a little later in the season, but it's scheduled now so we'll play it now."

Smith always has substituted liberally. But this year, the subs come in so often it looks like subway rush hour in New York. There are veterans like Bruce Buckley, Tom Zaliagiris and Dudley Bradley, plus the highly regarded freshmen—6-9 Steve Krafscis, 6-10 Jeff Wolf, 6-9 Rich Yonakor, John Virgil and Dave Colescott.

The Tar Heel bench is so deep this year that in some games Smith has used not one "Blue" team (reserves who play a minute or two) but two.

Both are excellent shooting teams. Tech is hitting nearly 54 per cent from the floor while the Tar Heels, though third in the red-hot ACC, are shooting a sizzling 55 per cent.

Tech hasn't beaten the Tar Heels since 1964, when the Gobblers won at Chapel Hill, 90-88, in double overtime. That was one of Smith's early teams and those Tar Heels went just 12-12. Smith's only losing season was his first, when probation-stifled Carolina finished 8-9.

In the last 10 years, Smith has produced nine 20-win seasons, and the Tar Heels have averaged better than 24 victories, second only to UCLA. UNC has won the last nine games against Tech.

As usual, this should be a high scoring game. In the past four seasons, UNC has won 88-75, 87-75, 83-78 and 96-82. "I'm sure it will be played at a quick tempo," said Moir. "That's the way they play and that's the way we like to play." Both teams are averaging better than 86 points per game.

No doubt the 10,000-plus fans will enjoy seeing it played that way, too.