New Look Continues at Tech; Front Line Is Biggest Strength

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BLACKSBURG—The cliche “It's a whole new ball game” is as worn out as the the Washington Senators, but there is no other way to describe Virginia Tech's basketball prospects this season.

New coaches, new carpet, a new system and, more importantly, new ideas about recruiting are the ingredients which head coach Don DeVoe hopes will turn Tech into a basketball powerhouse.

This year? Probably not, but the schedule is favorable and the Gobblers are long in experience if short in qualified personnel.

DeVoe, naturally, is enthusiastic. But it will take a few games to see if his enthusiasm is warranted.

Defense will be among Tech's strengths, but it may not be as important as the element of surprise.

"Definitely the element of surprise is one thing we have going for us," DeVoe says. "Of course, everybody knows we'll be doing some things on defense but they have to be guessing about our defense. I doubt if anybody has any idea of what we'll be doing when we have the ball."

Tech opens on Dec. 4 with Richmond in Blacksburg. That could be tough, although Tech has a fantastic home record. But two of the next three games—North Carolina on the 11th and South Carolina on the 18th, both on the road—will tell something about DeVoe's first Tech game.

If it gets through those two without being embarrassed, Tech has a good opportunity to have a good, it not outstanding, record.

DeVoe inherits a team virtually intact from last year. He does, however, face a problem in replacing Loyd King, now with the Memphis Pros, who was a prolific scorer.

“We've been pretty impressive at times, so far,” says DeVoe, an assistant at Ohio State last year. “We have good strength on our front line with (6-6 Charlie) Lipscomb, (6-7 Allan) Bristow and (6-5 Tom) Trice. They may not be the tallest frontliners in this area but you won't find three fellows who are any stronger and can do the things they can do... especially for their height.”

At present, the guards are Bill McNeer (“at times he can be a real outstanding shooter”) and Randy Minix (“a real heady type kid”), but the fellow being watched is sophomore Danny Elliott, the Washington Daily News player of the year two years ago.

“He's a great shooter, but he's going to have to learn to play some defense,” says DeVoe. “We know he'll enter the picture later on, but we can't think seriously about him till his defense improves.”

How well DeVoe's team does, not only this year but in the future, will depend on how well it plays defense. The offense is based on taking the good percentage shot, although in no sense will it be a slowdown. But for Tech to win, the defense is going to have to slow down some people.

Can it? Will it?

"They're responding extremely well on defense," DeVoe says.

"They're doing things much better than we did at Ohio State last year at this stage of the game. They've been very receptive to my ideas and there is one ingredient that's important to being an outstanding defensive team and that's being aggressive. And these kids are aggressive.

"They really want us to win badly and they've done some things to prove to me that they can play defense well.

The thing that really concerns DeVoe is that Tech has a full 26-game schedule and will not have the opportunity to scrimmage any outside competition.

"I'm worried about that," DeVoe says. "I don't know how well we'll do when the scoreboard is lit."

Neither does anybody else.