Gobblers out to spoil Vandy’s ‘easy’ setup

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Did Vanderbilt schedule the wrong team as its first-round opponent in the Commodores' invitational small tournament here tonight? Vanderbilt drew Virginia Tech as a first-round foil in a field that also has Arizona, defending Ohio Valley Conference champion, and Southern Illinois in a team that features Joe Martinweather — a player who is regarded as one of the top big men in the nation.

The report Vandy received on Tech was that the Gobblers lost four starters from last year's club. True, the home teams say they draw for their tournaments, but it is well known that they pick the contest team so that they have a good chance to make the finals.

With hindsight, things look a bit different for Tech's game against Vanderbilt, which began at 10 (EST). Austin Perry has lost the highly-regarded "Fly" Williams to the pros, but is at best, only an average player.

Tech, meanwhile, has run off two straight road victories and appears to be tougher than expected. The Gobblers have looked so good that Vandy Coach Roy Skinner admits, "We believe they're better than the NIT championship club (1973)."

What Skinner won't say is that he picked the wrong first-round foe.

"We try to draw the teams," Skinner said, "but we've played the wrong team the first night on other occasions. One time we played Memphis State the first evening when they were 10th-ranked and beat them."

So Skinner won't say that maybe his Commodores could have had easier opposition. After a scoring 73-53 opening win over always-tough St. John's, maybe, Skinner shouldn't care what team Vandy plays.

"We played well and they played badly," said Skinner about the easy win.

Tech Coach Dan DeVoe sees it another way, "Almost all of Roy Skinner's teams have been said," DeVoe said.

"I hope we keep our cool tonight. Vanderbilt is such a good shooting team from the perimeter."

Last year Vanderbilt won the SEC title, then lost to NCAA runner-up Marquette in the regionals. Skinner says his team isn't as good because it lacks depth. "Seven or eight players are freshmen," Skinner explained.

But Skinner has his "F" troop back from last year's championship squad in 6-3 guard Joe Ford and 6-4 guard Butch Fear, and 6-6 forward

Jeff Fosses. Together the three juniors scored 56 points against St. John's and stopping them will be the key for Tech.

Vanderbilt also has 6-8 Mike Moore at the other forward. DeVoe remembers the Donnatuart, Ill., native well. DeVoe gave Vandy a good struggle in trying to recruit the well-built junior.

DeVoe will start the same lineup for the third straight game. That means 6-4 Dave Sensibaugh and 6-4 Larry Cooke, hero of the Florida win Monday night, will open at guards, Kyle McKee, the 6-9 center who hit two important straight baskets against the Gobblers, will be at center while the Tech forwards will be 6-5 Russell Davis and 6-8 Mike Collins.

"We have to do a good job of keeping because Vanderbilt has had good shooters," said DeVoe. But we also have to be more consistent on defense."

"So far we've shot 49 per cent and our opponents have shot 49 per cent. These are unbelievable stats considering we've been on the road. We have to continue this."

Tonight's first game at 8 (EST) matches Southern Illinois (2-0) against Austin Peay (1-0). Winners of the two games meet tomorrow night for the title, while the losers will play a consolation game.