Tech Wins 73-66

BY BOB TITTLEBAUM
W-N Sports Writer

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — It wasn't pretty, but it was exactly what Virginia Tech Coach Don DeVoe wanted.

The Gobblers managed to squeeze by Austin Peay 73-66 here Saturday night in the consolation game of the Vanderbilt Invitational Tournament.

The win came in the face of 42 Tech turnovers as the jittery Gobblers almost seemed to wilt under pressure from Austin Peay.

But one Tech player who didn't buckle was sophomore forward Duke Thorpe. The 6-5 West Point native took control in the final six minutes to propel Tech's third win in four games.

Thorpe sank all five of his baskets during this stretch and hauled in seven of his eight rebounds for the Hokies.

His first basket came on a spinning layup with 5:58 left in the game to push Tech in front 60-58. Less than a minute later he had another basket to make it 62-60 as the Gobblers grabbed the lead for good.

Then Thorpe put it away for Tech. He popped two more baskets at the three-minute mark as Tech roared ahead 70-65 to take command.

"This wasn't the prettiest victory we've had," said DeVoe. "Those guys (Austin Peay) got after us. They forced us out of our pattern time and again. We didn't do a good job the way they pressured us."

Tech fell behind by 11 points in the first half. But Tech's press whittled this Austin Peay lead down to three by intermission.

"I thought that stretch turned the game around for us," said DeVoe. "We started fast in the first three minutes (with an 8-2 lead) and then let them have two three-point plays. That put them in command until we came back just before the half."

Austin Peay Coach Lake Kelly, who thought his team had played terrible defense in its semifinal loss to Southern Illinois (73-70), agreed his team made a big switch.

Odd Defense

"I felt that our defense caused most of their turnovers. I think Thorpe got free at the last because he was fresh and the man we had guarding him (Richard Jimmerson) wasn't."

"But I'll tell you this," he added with emphasis, "Tech might have just been the best team in this tournament."

What Kelly's defense did do was to shut down Tech's high-scoring Russell Davis. The 6-5 junior college transfer managed 16 points, but he got only four after the half.

Tech wasn't exactly losing on defense. When big Ralph Garner, Austin Peay's 6-8 sophomore, scored 12 first-half points inside, DeVoe felt something had to be done.

"We started playing behind him instead of fronting him," said the Tech coach. "We jammed down on him and gave up the outside shot. We felt if they were going to beat us it would have to be from the outside."

Tech once again got into foul trouble: Mike Collins and Kyle McKee both fouled out. But the Hokies got some relief from 6-8 Barry Isom, who helped lead Tech's pressure defense that whittled down Austin Peay's first half lead.

VA. TECH

Collins 5-7 2-3 9 12
Davis 14-8 0-0 5 16
McKee 11-8 10 5 15
Cooke 12-10 12 3-15
Sensibaugh 6-6 0-2 2-8
Thorpe 9-8 1-8 0-10
Isom 5-7 0-1 1-7
Totals 35-38 4-8 8-21 72

AUSTIN PEAy

Howard 3-4 0-0 4 11
Jimmerson 6-9 3-10 3-15
Garner 3-6 0-0 4 6
Fishback 16-7 3-4 10
Fisher 4-4 0-0 1 4
Johnson 4-4 0-0 1 4
Jackson 2-2 0-0 1 4
Britt 4-4 1-1 5
Howard 4-4 0-0 3 3
Totals 37-47 12-20 31 66

Halftime score: Austin Peay 39-36
Attendance: 12,000

This unusual defensive maneuver is executed by Marshall University's Steve Zemba as Florida State's Wayne Smalls prepares to shoot over Zemba's feet. The technique didn't work as FSU won 90-63.