Tech shows signs of a solid team

BLACKSBURG—There are at least two traits all good basketball teams have in common—they win the close ones and they can win on the road.

It’s really too early to make any definite predictions on the Virginia Tech basketball team for 1974-75 but the exciting Gobblers have shown evidence that these are two ingredients they might possess.

First of all, it should be said that Tech does not have a group of superstars. But the fact they play together as a unit is certain to offset a lack of raw talent in many games.

Tech now stands a surprising 4-1 for the season after Russell Davis again proved a pressure player here Saturday night in the Gobblers’ thrilling 83-82 win over Auburn.

It was Davis who stepped to the line with one second left and dropped in a pair of free throws for the win. It also marked the second time the junior college graduate had come through in the clutch.

Davis earlier this month had grabbed a missed free throw by a teammate and pushed back a field goal that gave Tech an 86-85 last-second edge at Florida.

“I don’t like to think about shooting a free throw,” said Davis Saturday night. “I just take the ball from the official and concentrate on the basket and let it fly. If I think too much, I get nervous and mess up.”

The system has been paying off for Davis. He has hit 17 of his 19 free shots this season.

Tech’s record also includes three road wins and this many of the Gobblers attribute to Davis, Larry Cooke and Barry Isom—all former junior college players.

“Those guys are used to traveling,” said lanky Kyle McKee, who enjoyed his best game against Auburn with 15 rebounds and 18 points. “It makes no difference to them where they play or where they play. They aren’t pampered. They always play hard.”

“This has rubbed off on a lot of us and it’s making us a much tougher ball club.”

Junior forward Mike Collins, who also had a good game, agreed. “You should have seen Davis when he got those free throws,” Collins said. “Man, it didn’t bother him one bit. He threw ‘em in like it was practice.”

This hardnose attitude is a must if Tech is to enjoy any success this week in a trio of demanding road games. The Gobblers visit Ohio State Wednesday night and then compete Friday and Saturday in the Michigan Invitational.

Tech faces the host Wolverines Friday night while Manhattan goes against Washington in the other game. All three teams are tough and each has hopes of postseason tournaments.

“It’s going to be a tough week,” said McKee. “But right now all we are thinking about is Ohio State. We have beaten them twice and I know they are looking for us.”

One Techman who is eager to get to Ohio is junior guard Dave Sensibaugh. He is from Cincinnati and will be playing before a lot of hometown fans. He and McKee were top reserves two years ago when Tech took a 67-62 win on the Buckeyes home court.

Sensibaugh almost didn’t make the Auburn game. He had little practice last week due to an ankle injury and this contributed to his relative poor play.

“I just couldn’t get my timing down,” he said. “It looked like everything was a step behind. But I’m glad we won and I played. It will make me much sharper for this road trip.”

Coach Don DeVoe was in a bind Saturday for guards. Sensibaugh and Cooke went all the way. Cooke also was fortunate to play. He had some fluid drained from a foot injury late Friday.

Oddly enough, junior Mark Cartwright was the guard who had to sit out the game. He was the only healthy guard with much playing experience to work last week. But he reinjured his back in practice late Friday and didn’t dress. But DeVoe feels all three of the top guards will be ready for Ohio State.

Tech doesn’t have any players who would be classified as really big men. But the Gobblers are jumpers and hold an impressive rebounding advantage over their opponents this year.

This could be the best group of players at Tech in some time—probably more talent than the NIT champions of two years ago.

Over-all team quickness and jumping ability will enable Techmen to handle many larger and more impressive opponents.

The mental toughness displayed in early games, also should pull Tech through in some tight situations.

Saturday’s win kept Tech’s opening home record in the Coliseum unmarred. The Gobblers have now won all 14 opening home games in the big arena.

Auburn was a top opponent—one that will definitely improve and become a serious contender in the Southeastern Conference. Coach Bob Davis starts three freshmen, one sophomore and a junior. It was ironic that Eddie Johnson, flashy sophomore guard, missed a free throw Saturday with 12 seconds left that played a major part in the Tech win.

It was Johnson who tossed in a field goal in the final moments at Auburn last year for a 76-74 win over Tech.