Michigan toughest Big 10 foe

Tech's streak on line

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Virginia Tech has never lost to a Big 10 basketball team, but that streak will get its most severe test here tonight.

The Hokies collide with Michigan in the Wolverines’ invitational tournament. Tipoff is at 9 and it follows the other opening round-game that sends the University of Washington against Manhattan. Winners clash tomorrow night for the title and the losers will play in a consolation round.

Tech has played Big 10 teams six times in basketball. The Gobblers have beaten Indiana once, Purdue twice and just Wednesday night polished off Ohio State for the third time, 72-71.

“It’ll be mighty tough to keep that string going,” said Tech Coach Don DeVoe. “Michigan has seen us play three games and they have most of the players back from the team that won the Big 10 championship last year.”

DeVoe says the Michigan squad his team faces is much tougher than the Ohio State his club vanquished Wednesday.

“There’s no comparison between the two teams,” DeVoe said.

“Michigan has experience and more quickness. Without a doubt, Michigan is a much better shooting team. Ohio State is not a great shooting team.”

Michigan is missing only one starter from last year’s team which fell to Marquette in the NCAA Mideast finals. That is Campy Russell, who was the leader for the Wolverines.

This year’s Michigan team isn’t blessed with a lot of height, but has relied on quickness in racking up a 5-1 record.

The guards are 5-11 senior Joe Johnson, the team’s leading scorer with a 21.5 average, and 6-2 sophomore playmaker Steve Grote, who carries a 9.8 average.

At center is 6-8 senior C. J. Kupec, who averages 12 points and almost 10 rebounds a game. The forwards are 6-2 Wayman Britt and 6-5 Rick White. Both carry double-figure scoring averages.

DeVoe has indicated that he’ll go with his usual starting lineup. That means Tech will have an edge in height. Dave Sensibaugh, at 6-4, and 6-4 Larry Cooke will open at guards, 6-9 Kyle Mc Kee will be at center and the forwards will be 6-8 Mike Collins and 6-5½ Russell Davis.

“Michigan has the ability to invert the guards and forwards,” said DeVoe, meaning the four Wolverines players at those positions can play either in the front or backcourt.

“It means we’ll have to play all over the floor,” said DeVoe, who has his forwards and guards well divided. However, it should be a perfect move for Cooke, who is a rebounding guard that has gone inside frequently this year.

DeVoe says he hopes his strategy of keeping the game close and then winning in the final few minutes will work again.

“There’s no way to go on the road and blow a good team out. So you have to stay close where you know anything can happen,” said DeVoe.

It worked that way at Ohio State as Tech overcame a nine-point lead for the Buckeyes with a comeback to get the victory. Tech also won that way at Florida.

“Fortunately at Ohio State, when we went out to press, we made the big plays. I told the kids when we called time and were behind with about four minutes left that this is the place where they prove whether they’re a ball club,” said DeVoe.

“I told them they wouldn’t get any breaks from the officials and that they’d have to take the ball away without making any fouls. Fred (Taylor, Ohio State coach) called the game ‘give away.’ I’d prefer to think of it as ‘take away.’”

But DeVoe also admitted that he’ll take another win over a Big 10 team here tonight anywhere the team cares to give it to him.