Gobbler Burst Falls Short, No. 8 Alabama Wins 77-73

BY ED RICHARDS
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BLACKSBURG — Virginia Tech barely missed the “boat” in its bid for a hopeful national cage ranking Monday night.

The tide was just too much to overcome — the Crimson Tide of Alabama, that is.

The invaders from the Southeastern Conference overcame Tech’s near-invincibility at home and lived up to their No. 8 national billing by registering a 77-73 verdict.

It didn’t look like the game would be that close as the well-drilled Alabamians, now 5-0, grabbed a 74-65 lead with 1:26 to play.

The Gobbler’s fresh from a victory over 13th-ranked Washington, finished with a burst and drew to within three points (76-73) with 15 seconds left.

Alabama beat the press on the next play and sewed it up as forward Charles Russell hit a free throw with 10 seconds left.

The setback was only the 19th in the last 14 years for the Gobbler’s (now 6-3) on their home court.

Squelching Tech’s upset hopes was 6-foot-10 junior center Jon Douglas, who outpowered the Gobbler’s inside for a game-high 27 points.

“Our game plan,” explained Coach Don DeVoe afterwards, “was to stop Douglas as much as we could. He’s a bonafide All-American. However, we were never effective at all in really containing him. That was our first downfall.”

“Our second,” added the unperturbed Tech skipper while munching on an apple, “was they gave us a good ole-fashioned licking on the offensive boards. That was our fault; we just didn’t keep them away from the glass.”

The Tide kept its “cool” all night and wouldn’t be rattled by the enthusiastic crowd in excess of 15,000.

Tech actually only got outrebounded by two (39-37), but the Alabamians always seemed to haul in the big one when necessary.

The Gobbler’s led only once, at 16:15 on a layup by junior Larry Cooke with 10:50 left in the first half. It was 41-34 at intermission.

Tech kept clawing away, and led by the outside

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Alabama: 41 36 77
Virginia Tech: 34 29 73

Fouled Out: Thayer
Team Points: Alabama 18, Virginia Tech 14
Duke Thorpe Shines Despite VPI's Loss

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shooting of junior center Kyle McKee pulled to within 50-48 with 14:16 left. Right before this basket, however, McKee was "sacked" with his fourth foul and the results showed.

The visitors started dominating play under the basket and maintained leads of from seven to nine points until Tech's final flurry.

"Alabama really played it smart and was patient," emphasized DeVoe. "They knew where the money was (Douglas inside) and they put the ball in his hands."

For more rebounding strength, the Tech chief started West Point product Duke Thorpe in the second half and he responded with 12 caroms in 26 minutes of action, tops on the court. He also added 13 points after sitting on the bench for the first 13 minutes of the proceedings.
DeVoe rated the visitors “equal in talent with the best teams we’ve played, and they’re definitely better than the team we beat in the NIT semifinals two years ago.”

The Tide showed it could play defense, too. The Gobblers’ leading scorer, junior Russell Davis, was held to 16 points, three below his average. Eight of his points, however, came at the free throw line. He was four for 15 from the field.

“Russell just played great defense against Davis,” pointing out DeVoe.