Tech Goes After 'Greatness'

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COLUMBUS, Ohio — Whether or not Virginia Tech has that "great basketball season," Coach Don DeVoe has talked about will depend upon what happens in the next few days.

That might sound strangely premature, since the schedule is merely five games old, but it is nevertheless true. Tech is in the midst of what might be the toughest part of its season.

Tonight, the Hokies will challenge Ohio State here at St. John's Arena. The Friday, Tech will play Michigan and Saturday either in Manhattan or Washington in the Michigan Tournament. Monday, Alabama's eighth-ranked Crimson Tide will be in Blacksburg.

Tonight's game with Ohio State will be televised by Channel 2 at 8 p.m.

"We'll have to play within the top 10 percent of our capabilities to beat Ohio State, looking at it realistically," DeVoe said Tuesday afternoon. "If we do, it could put us in the proper frame of mind for the next three games."

"Of course, if we lose those next three games, it could be more of a mental jolt than this team can handle. I just don't know yet."

"I'd like to be able to sit here and say just how good this team is, but I can't. I won't be able to do that until these four games are behind us. That's how important they are."

The key to this game against Ohio State, according to DeVoe, will be effective pressure on the Buckeyes' guards, Larry Bolden and Mark Bayless.

"They're extremely quick," DeVoe said, "and they make State's fastbreak work. To stop them, we'll have to get past games from Larry Cooke and Dave Sembach.

If Sembach and Cooke can put up defensive pressure at half-court and slow down State's offensive machine, it'll put us in good shape. We have to control the tempo and play smart, patient basketball, because State has really been winning big at home."

This game is particularly important to Sembach, who grew up in Cincinnati and always dreamed of playing at Ohio State.

"They never recruited me when I was in high school," Sembach said. "Never even sent me a questionnaire. But that part doesn't bother me. I just want to play well and win because my parents are coming up for the game."

"It would be great if we had a game like the one two years ago, when I played pretty well and we knocked off State. That was the first time I ever played in the Arena, and it really made me feel good to State."

Sembach is very aware of his role in this game, and the way he'll have to play in order to stop Holden.

"I heard he hurt his thigh a couple nights ago, maybe that will slow him down a little," Sembach said. "That will be an advantage for me, because he's supposed to be pretty quick."

"I don't know what kind of a ballhandler he is, but I do know he dribbles pretty high. I'm not going to think about stealing the ball, though. The main thing will be containing him and keeping him from getting the ball inside."

Stopping Ohio State's big man, 6-foot-10 Craig Taylor and 6-foot-9 Bill Andrews, will be paramount, according to DeVoe.

"Both of those guys were considered pretty mediocre," he said; "but they've really come on strong in the last few games. We'll have to keep the pressure out front all night or they could hurt us badly."

The fact that DeVoe once played for Ohio State and later spent a year as Fred Taylor's assistant holds no special excitement for DeVoe."

"Maybe the first time we came up here and won it was amusing but not this time," he said. "Right now, I want the guys to win for themselves, not for the Gipper."