Trip to National Tourney -- New Beau Cards for Tech

Make room at your table, Mr. Goren: because a lanky giant is falling from your cards to play his own. The suits might be a bit thin, there certainly aren't many trumps or aces, but Don DeVoe acts like a true bridge Master.

His bids are conservative and proper, but don't be fooled. He's just waiting for the right moment before he starts hitting the rubber band.

One by one, DeVoe has whipped his foes with a calculating demeanence and steady hand. If Russell Davis' punch can't take a trick, DeVoe uses Dave Sandborn's hustle or Ollie Stone's anger.

DeVoe coaches the Virginia Tech basketball team with a rational, no-nonsense style. He gets carried away in exaltation on occasion, but usually holds strict control of his emotions.

Hokies Will Keep on Plodding

Winning excites him, National recognition doesn't. But if the Hokies maintain their present pace, that recognition surely will come.

"Right now, I'd just as soon people kept looking elsewhere it comes to polls or national rankings," DeVoe said Monday night. "Other coaches would use it as incentive to get their team fired up if we were ranked."

"Besides, there's only one team in the top 20 with Virginia Tech. That's Kansas, and they have a super team but there despite their record right now."

DeVoe was aware, of course, that his team would have skyrocketed in the polls if it had beaten Alabama. As it is, DeVoe was upset because of a few bad calls by the officials and the overall poor performance of his team that allowed the Crimson Tide to win Monday's game, 77-73.

"People would have taken us more seriously if we beat Alabama," DeVoe said, "there's no doubt about that. Anytime you beat a nationally-ranked team it enhances your program, and I'm in the position we're in through. At least I can keep my mind working, instead of relaxing because of a spot in the polls."

At the moment, DeVoe can afford to be uncommitted. The schedule is just one-third finished and his team is 6-2, even better than what he had hoped for at the outset.

"I'll start worrying about polls and rankings once we get down to the last 10 days of the season," DeVoe said. "That's when it's going to start looking around at independents toward round out the fields.

"And, at that part of the season, we have some pretty tough games to think about. Feb. 17 we have North Carolina here, then we go to Oklahoma City and Oral Roberts before coming home against West Virginia in the last game.

"If we keep our present pace, that would make us roughly 17-9, I don't know if that's good enough for a place in the NCAA or National Invitation Tournament.

"All of this is pretty premature, anyway," DeVoe said. "Talking about tournaments after just nine games is impossible."

Independents Are Strong

Merely for the sake of conjecture, however, consider the non-conference team other than Tech that could rate a post-season invitation.

First, of course, there are Marquette and Notre Dame. Both of those schools are perennial contenders and are playing this season. Providence, ranked 12th, is presently undefeated.

Florida State is on an upswing, Memphis State is strong. DePaul (which comes to Blacksburg Feb. 8) is a possibility and Houston isn't out of the running despite its four losses.

"Being ranked," DeVoe said, "our game against Vermont (Feb. 11) is pretty important. But then we have to go to St. Bonaventure, then come back against South Carolina and Virginia before going to Morgantown to play West Virginia.

"That's a pretty rugged string of games. If we get through those in good shape, that takes us into the final four. But if we don't, we might not even think about tournaments. Right now, I'm just worried about Virginia."

Of course, that's what all coaches say. "Just don't bet the J-C on spending some time at a tournament center throwing the rolls around."

Tony Reifeld