Hokies Have Good Shot A Postseason Journey

After Virginia Tech defeated DePaul the other night, there was inevitable talk about a post-season basketball appearance.

The talk is justified, even at this stage of the season. But while it does talk stop and reality begin?

Tech's chances of getting in the (a) NCAA and (b) NIT must be considered (a) remote and (b) excellent.

The ACC men's basketball tournament is March 13 on the season. There are six games remaining, which means that the best Tech can wind up is 19-7. That would be excellent, of course, but anything beyond that is also possible that the Hokies would end the year with a nine-game winning streak, which would be impressive.

Four of the final games are at home. Tech will be highlgy favored to beat Richmond Saturday, and likewise a chance for William & Mary and West Virginia, although the Hokies lost to W&M and beat WVU by a point over in earlier games.

Tech's toughest home game comes against North Carolina on Feb. 17, which is a Monday night. The Hokies catch the Ter Heels at a perfect time, UNC will play Maryland in a vital ACC game on Saturday, Feb. 13, while Tech has five days to get ready. From an emotional standpoint, Tech will have the benefit of an edge.

The remaining road games come on a trip to Oklahoma against Oklahoma City (Feb. 20) and Oral Roberts (Feb. 22). Oklahoma City is having a modest 10-9 year, while Oral Roberts is 14-4.

Thus the most educated guess is that Tech should finish somewhere between 17-0 and 19-7. Anything worse than 19-7 will eliminate the Hokies at any rate.

Start Each Time First Time

The new NCAA format this year calls for 32 teams, with no first round byes. For the first time, a second team from any of the nation's 16 major conferences is eligible to be picked for the NCAA.

Right now, the NCAA field shapes up this way.

The 16 conference champions will automatically be selected. Four at-large teams will be selected from the NCAA, a widely divergent group of eastern independents. Those four teams are being selected this year through tournaments.

Dr. Tim Scott, former Davidson athletic director who is the original of the 32-team field, says that the ECAC is being awarded four spots "because we always pick three or four eastern teams anyway."

There are 83 teams listed in the NCAA East, by far the largest of the four sections. There are 69 teams in the Midstate, 38 in the Midwest and 16 in the West.

That takes care of 20 of the 32 teams. Scott further concedes the second team will be taken this year from the ACC. Big Ten, Southeastern Conference, Western Athletic and Pac-10. In most years, the Big Eight also would get a second team, but no team in that league is having an outstanding year.

Notre Dame Is In

The ACC's second team will be placed in the Midwest and will play its first round game at Tulsa (Oral Roberts). The second teams from the Pac-8 and WAC will wind up in the Midwest.

The SEC's second team will go to the Midwest and the No. 2 team from the Big Ten will go to the West.

That means there will be spots left for seven independents outside of the east.

As sure things, but Marquette, South Carolina and Notre Dame and the ACC. The other teams, but they have a national reputation, have a great national name and have played perhaps the toughest schedule in the country.

That cuts Tech's chances to four. Teams with records currently better than Tech include Memphis State (14-6), Clemson (12-7), Creighton (10-4), Oral Roberts and Southern Illinois (13-5).

There are a group of fringe independents with excellent records but little or no reputation. Include in this group UNC-Chapel Hill (14-6) and Pan-American (11-7).

They are not a serious group. The NIT, however, is there for the taking. Tech should be able to play itself into that field even with a couple more losses.

Right now, it's all up to the Hokies. The odds favor them for the NIT, especially with that homecourt advantage.