NIT a longshot

Tech, DeVoe still hoping

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BLACKSBURG—The disappointment surrounding Virginia Tech basketball hopes finally came to rest last night.

With December dreams of a post-season tournament berth seemingly lost within a three-game losing streak, the Hokies pulled themselves together long enough for one more victory.

But ever the optimist Tech coach Don DeVoe feels his club still has a longshot opportunity at a spot in the National Invitation Tournament following last night's 78-68 triumph over West Virginia.

"Who knows," said DeVoe, relaxing in his office and rehashing a campaign that probably is history with a 16-10 record. "Maybe the NIT will get down to a point where it has to take some teams with only 16 or 17 wins. There's that slight chance. And winning (the NIT) in 1972 certainly has to be in our favor if it gets to that point."

But DeVoe isn't counting his tickets to New York City before they arrive. He is leaving tonight on a recruiting trip, his first scheduled stop in Washington.

"This was different from any game we played this year," said forward Russell Davis, who paced the Hokies in the regular-season finale with 25 points. "Every other game we played, we had the idea of going to a tournament in the back of our minds."

"But after losing to North Carolina and then the two games in Oklahoma, it was really tough to get up for this one. And it showed in the way we played."

The first half was little more than lots of exercise for both teams, as West Virginia tried to run but had problems controlling the basketball. Meanwhile, Tech spent most of the first 20 minutes searching for some order on offense and a way to get back to stop the Mountaineers' break.

"We weren't really getting it done offensively in the first half," said Dave Sensibaugh, the Hokies' playmaker. "We got no second shots at all. They were getting the ball off the boards and then beating us down the floor while we watched."

But the Hokies arose from their slumber in the final half for their second triumph over West Virginia this season. After Stan Boskovich scored the initial basket of the second half to bring the Mountaineers within two points (40-38), Tech went to work.

The Hokies outscored the visitors 19-5 during the next nine minutes as Duke Thorpe and Kyle McKee finally went to the boards and Sensibaugh created an attack by engineering a controlled running game.

At the same time West Virginia was playing what coach Joedy Gardner called "our worst basketball of the season." Following Boskovich's opening fielder, the Mountaineers went 12 minutes without putting the ball through the basket from the floor. The lone field goal in that stretch came when Davis was called for goaltending a Boskovich shot.

West Virginia sliced the Hokies' 19-point lead to just eight in the final minutes as Tech had trouble with the Mountaineers' zone press. McKee and Larry Cooke went to the bench in the same stretch via foul disqualification.

"We wanted to go out with a win and have something to start on next year," said Sensibaugh, who will be among the Hokies' five returning starters next season. "We were really disappointed after North Carolina came here and beat us. That carried over to the games at Oklahoma City and Oral Roberts.

"Now there's only the very, very slight chance that we can go to the NIT. But I think we killed their (West Virginia's) chances for an NCAA bid. They were fired up, but it was funny. Neither team played that well."

The loss drops West Virginia to 13-11 with Illinois State visiting Morgantown on Saturday. The Mountaineers still have an opportunity for an ECAC tournament berth. That tourney will determine who gets the East Coast bids in the NCAA field.