Geography Killed Tech Bid

The following column was written by Art Chansky, sports editor of the Durham Morning Herald. It appeared in last Sunday’s paper, prior to the meeting in which the Atlantic Coast Conference voted down Virginia Tech.

“If you’re a contributor to an Atlantic Coast Conference athletic program and worried about losing your ACC tournament tickets over the admission of Virginia Tech, forget it.

“The Gobblers don’t have a chance.

“They will get two of the necessary five votes at Monday’s special ACC meeting, maybe three, but no more. Schools that cherish their allotment of ACC tourney tickets, and the income the tickets generate from donors, aren’t going to give some of them up for dear old Virginia Tech.

“Besides, it’s a Hokie idea.

“What can Virginia Tech offer the ACC, except approximately a $500,000 entry fee that could be deposited in the conference nest egg or distributed among the seven existing members?

“That’s why Virginia Tech has proposed a one-sided plan for the first few years of its membership in the ACC. Conference schools would share in any Tech appearance on television or a bowl game, but the Gobblers wouldn’t get the same benefits until at least 1980.

“They also plan to enlarge the seating capacity of the stadium to 50,000. Tech has guaranteed to sell out all ACC home games, which would pay visiting teams around $100,000, and bring a healthy contingent of fans to all road dates.

“Such revenue-producing promises are attractive to financially plagued members like Virginia, Duke and Wake Forest. But no ACC school wants to give up any ACC tournament tickets, even though Tech has reportedly agreed to take only a few hundred the first year and graduated amounts in years to follow.

“Losing several hundred tickets could cost some schools several hundred thousands of dollars in donations. Many contributors give money solely for the privilege of getting into the tournament.

“And, let’s face it, Virginia Tech has no image. What is to be gained from admitting a school virtually buried in Blacksburg, Va.? Certainly not the major television market and metropolitan press that Georgia Tech would offer. VPI would add little prestige in football and none in basketball.

“The special meeting is a kind of a hoax in itself. The Virginia Tech question has been hanging for so long that, in effect, three ACC schools sponsored the Hokies as much to get the issue resolved as anything else. At least one of the sponsoring schools, Duke, is expected to vote against letting Tech in. Virginia and Clemson are the other sponsors.

“I realize that this column will get some blood boiling among the resident Hokies, but it is reprinted here because—in my opinion—it fairly well represents the thinking in other areas.

“It does not represent the beliefs of those men who voted Monday, however. They recognize the facilities that Tech has are among the best in the nation, they know that mediocre football teams have attracted large crowds in the past, and they are aware that Tech’s overall athletic program has come a long way.

“It is also safe to say that most, if not all, of the ACC voters would be very happy with Tech, if somehow the Hokies already were in the league.

“But that is the problem. Tech was not in the conference, and in these financially trying days for college athletics, any expansion requires considerable thought.

“Take, for example, the Pacific 8 and the Western Athletic Conference:

“Southern California, which dominates Pac 8 football and, with UCLA, most of the other sports, pulled a power play. The Trojans, unhappy with small paychecks when they played football at Washington State, Oregon and Oregon State, threatened to pull out of the league. USC is one school that clearly could continue to make it big as an independent.

“In order to pacify the Trojans, the Pac 8 agreed to take in the two top schools from the WAC—Arizona and Arizona State. Most of the other Pac 8 schools didn’t like the idea, but they couldn’t afford to lose USC. So it’s now the Pac 10.

“That left the WAC holding the bag. Its new Fiesta Bowl was played at Arizona State. It had become one of the better bowls in just a few years. And Arizona and Arizona State were the football powers.

“So the WAC voted to expand. Just this week it took in Hawaii, Nevada-Las Vegas and San Diego State. It also turned down Utah State.

“Utah State is to the WAC what Virginia Tech is to the ACC. It has a far better athletic program than Nevada-Las Vegas. It has better facilities. It also is better than Hawaii in football almost every year.

“But Hawaii and Las Vegas are exotic places. It will help the entire WAC in recruiting. Eventually, I assume, all of the WAC schools will visit both spots for football and basketball on a regular basis.

“San Diego State was selected because it is in California, it has a large football stadium in which the renamed bowl game can be held, and it has a good football reputation. Utah State, much like Virginia Tech, was victimized by geography. The quality of its teams and facilities was not a major factor.

“After all, Virginia Tech’s facilities are far superior to Georgia Tech’s. But Tech is based in Atlanta, and if the Yellow Jackets ever decide they want in the ACC, they’ll be welcomed with open arms. It is a distinct possibility that the ACC will vote to play its basketball tournament in Atlanta’s Omni, even if Georgia Tech is still an independent.

“In every way except national football reputation, Virginia Tech can more than match up with Georgia Tech. But that is not what the ACC was seeking.

“If a Tech ever gets in the ACC, it will be the one from Georgia, which means that Atlanta is being picked over Blacksburg.