Tech’s Wade: ‘We Gotta Be In There Somewhere’

By JACK BOGAZYK

BLACKSBURG — When Rick Wade is remembered by Virginia Tech baseball historians, the recollection will be of stolen bases and a rifle arm from third base.

But Sunday at Tech Park, Wade left Gobbler fans with something of a Ruthian reminiscent. Now, the senior infielder only hopes the NCAA remembers the team with the longest current winning streak in collegiate baseball.

Wade hit solo home runs in his final two plate appearances at home as Tech completed its regular season with a 31-game winning streak by sweeping a doubleheader from Howard, 4-2 and 10-6.

The wins lifted the Gobbler’s record to 34-7, beating the school record of 33 victories established in 1976.

This achieved, the Gobbler will learn if they will receive a bid to the 34-team NCAA Tournament, an event in which they participated last year. A week ago, Tech was bypassed for spots in the Atlantic and Southern regional.

In the nightcap with the two-round-trippers — a solo, and walked twice.

In between games, Wade even found time to judge a women’s swim: competition run by WVT, the campus radio station.

When no one appeared to enter the contest between games, the radio folks decided the contest would come to the contest. So, Wade and teammates Sandy Hill and Duke Dickerson headed for the sea of humanity perched on the hill behind the rightfield fence to find the contest winner.

Wade returned to the field escorting Andy Calhoun, a Tech coach who barely qualified for the contest because he was wearing a yellow bick in which she was wearing was barely a swim read. Needless to say, the crowd approved of Wade’s choice — as it did again in the fourth and sixth innings of the nightcap after he picked up Bryan Nichols’ popper pitches and deposited them over the left field fence.

A 59-minute break after Tech’s Duke Dickerson had bunched a four-batter in the opener apparently bother Gobbler’s second-game starter Jim Puglisi.

Puglisi retired the first two Howard hitters after the swim: competition and a “Hit the Hump” contest (in which sparrow: bats battled against Tech Coach Bob Humphreys), but then was tagged for five straight hits and four runs by the Bees.

From the bullpen emerged lefthander Dean Powell, the former Franklin County high school ace. Powell, displaying a blazing fastball, fanned nine and allowed just four hits in 6 1/2 innings of relief. He earned his fifth win in as many decisions after Tech came from behind on Wade’s two homers and a pair of 199-foot flies by Skip Dofflemeyer and Dennis Duff that fell just inside the rightfield foul line.

“I don’t know if that swim: suit stuff hurt Jimmy (Puglisi) or not,” said Wade, laughing. “It sure seemed like it helped me, though.”

“I really didn’t think about being in the last at-bat here when I came up in the sixth. When I hit the ball, I knew it was out. Maybe I should have stood and watched it.”

“The only honor that traveled farther than Wade’s was the one hit by Howard Coach Chuck Hinton off Humphreys between games. Hinton, an old major league friend and foe of Humphreys, hit what the Tech coach called “overhand heat” over the leftfield fence following the “Hit the Hump” competition.

“Powell has the best stuff of anybody I’ve got,” said Humphreys of the Tech junior southpaw. “I wondered about getting him in, because Howard didn’t have a left: hand hitter in the lineup. But if he throws the ball over the plate, nobody can beat him.”

Humphreys figures his team’s 34-7 record is good enough for the NCAA field, but he refuses to get worked up over the possibility of the Gobbler going to a regional in another section of the country.

“I thought about it, but I haven’t lost any sleep over it,” said the Tech coach of the NCAA bid, which will either come today or not at all. “I really think we’d get one last week. When we didn’t, there’s no way to be more positive about it now. But if we don’t get one, then who should.”