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# **Hokies search for lost arc**

Mark Berman

BLACKSBURG -- The Virginia Tech men's basketball team has turned to a revamped frontcourt and a new addition named Noah in hopes of shoring up two of its weak points last season.

Tech, which began preseason practice Friday, is seeking to bounce back from a 14-16 season in which it tied for 10th in the ACC with a 4-12 league record. The Hokies return all five starters, but rebounding and free-throw shooting were glaring weaknesses last winter.

Tech has already spent a lot of time this fall working on free throws -- aided by a device called "Noah Select" that was purchased over the summer. The machine, which costs about \$5,000, not only records video and prints photos of a player shooting a free throw but also calls out the degree of the arc of the shot.

"It's very helpful," guard Zabian Dowdell said. "I've been noticing an improvement in my free-throw shooting just because it yells out the arc. It's a good investment."

"It helps me work on my arc -- shoot high and know my peak [when] I need to let the ball go," fellow senior guard Jamon Gordon said.

The Hokies ranked next-to-last in the ACC in free-throw percentage (64.5 percent) last season for the second straight year.

"We've worked on shooting a lot more," said coach Seth Greenberg, whose team opens the season Nov. 10 against visiting Coppin State. "The machine's not going to make us a better free throw-shooting team -- it's the repetition. And it's taking the information we get back from the machine and trying to get our guys to buy into it so they know what their perfect release point and their perfect arch feels like."

Improving on the boards is another priority. The Hokies were outrebounded by three rebounds per game last season -- last in the ACC in rebounding margin for the second straight year. Gordon, the point guard, was the team's second-leading rebounder (6 rpg).

Greenberg has moved Deron Washington, a 6-foot-7 junior who has started at power forward the past two seasons, to small forward. A.D. Vassallo, a 6-6 sophomore who is the returning starter at small forward, will see time at that position and at off-guard.

"We should be a better rebounding team from the small forward spot" because of Washington's move, Greenberg said. "We're committed to playing a bigger lineup."

The post players will be 6-9 senior Coleman Collins, a returning starter; 7-foot Robert Krabbendam, a third-year sophomore who sat out last season as a medical redshirt; 6-9 sophomore Cheick Diakite; 6-6 senior Chris Tucker; and 6-9 freshman Lewis Witcher, a Franklin County graduate.

"If you don't defensive rebound the ball, you're out" of the game, Greenberg said. "If you don't work to get to the offensive glass, you're out."

"We've got to be more aggressive."

Greenberg will use the preseason to not only pick the two starting post players but also determine which duos work best together in the paint.

Collins will be looking to bounce back from a subpar junior season in which he dealt with the death of his father.

"There's competition up front," Greenberg said. "Coleman's got to earn his minutes."

The Hokies also desire better outside shooting. Last season, they ranked last in the ACC in 3-pointers (4.6 per game) and next-to-last in 3-point field-goal percentage (32.2 percent).

"We could be a better 3-point shooting team as long as we keep working on it -- work on it in-season and not just before the season," Gordon said.

Tech will look a bit differently on defense.

"We want to get into our bench," Greenberg said. "We want to get our players in a full-court mentality of being an attacking team. ... We want to extend our defense -- sometimes to trap, sometimes to just wear people down. ... We're going to change our defenses more."

"I want guys to play as hard as humanly possible for three and four minutes at a time and then give someone else a chance."