**Close, but not quite, the theme for Hokies this past season**

By Jimmy Robertson

Virginia Tech’s 2012 ACC Tournament appearance ended the only way it really could, considering the way the Hokies’ season went – with a close loss.

Tech stayed within striking distance of No. 6 Duke in the quarterfinals of a cold-shooting affair at Atlanta’s Philips Arena. The Hokies trailed for much of the second half, but cut the lead to four with 1:08 remaining to give themselves a chance.

After Tyler Thornton missed a 3-pointer for Duke, the Hokies came down with a chance to cut the lead even more. But Erick Green missed a contested jumper in the lane with 21 seconds left, and the ball got tipped out toward halfcourt, where Austin Rivers picked it up for Duke, scored on a breakaway and was fouled with 15.1 seconds left. He made the free throw to give the Blue Devils a 58-51 lead and essentially put the game – and the Hokies’ season – away.

The Hokies ended with the close loss, a 60-56 decision, which fit in perfectly for the theme of their campaign. It marked Tech’s 11th loss this season by five points or less.

For the year, Tech finished with a 16-17 record. But that record could have been so much better, considering the Hokies lost one game by a single point and four games each by two points. That’s just how close the Hokies came to a winning season and a postseason berth.

“I think that hopefully it’s a great learning experience,” Tech head coach Seth Greenberg said of the season after the game. “How do you learn to make good decisions? You make some bad ones. If you learn from those, then I think that when you’re put in that same position the next time, you’ll be ready to seize that moment. That’s hopefully what we’re going to learn from this season.”

Tech had its share of struggles on both ends of the court this past season. On offense, the Hokies struggled to score. They shot a respectable 42 percent from the floor, but scored just 65.1 points per game – the program’s worst output under Greenberg and the worst since the 1999 season.

They also got out-rebounded 34.1-33.7, including 35.9-34.1 in ACC play. A lot of that goes back to losing JT Thompson (torn ACL) before the season and then Victor Davila (groin) during the season. Thompson’s absence forced Greenberg to play an undersized Jarell Eddie at power forward and also to give inexperienced Cadarian Raines and C.J. Barksdale extended minutes.

That resulted in some issues on the defensive end, where the Hokies played well in spurts. But in ACC play, teams shot 45 percent against Tech, and four teams shot better than 50 percent against the Hokies. Most of that came from scoring-oriented power forwards – guys like N.C. State’s C.J. Leslie and UVa’s Mike Scott. So Raines and Barksdale need to be more consistent in the post, and incoming freshman Montrezl Harrell needs to be able to help as well.

Despite all that, the Hokies should feel optimistic about their chances heading into next season. Sure, the team loses steady seniors in Dorenzo Hudson and Davila, but the nucleus returns, led by the lone rising senior in Green. Also, rising juniors Eddie and Raines, and four rising sophomores in Dorian Finney-Smith, Robert Brown, Marquis Rankin and Barksdale return. Those seven have combined for 337 career games and 139 career starts.

“I don’t think we’re missing anything,” Brown said. “I think we’ve got all the pieces we need to win. I just think it came down to one play. Maybe if we had played a little harder or dove on the floor a little faster and made that one play, then those two- and three- and one-point losses turn into wins our way and we have a winning season and move on.”

“Having experience – it’s a great thing to have,” Green said. “If you have experience, that takes you a long way. These young guys, they’re about to be sophomores, and that’ll be a good thing. Everybody needs to get better in the offseason, and we’ll go from there.”

The Hokies were, indeed, close this season. Hopefully, they get the cigar by next season’s end.

**Green almost sets Tech mark vs. Clemson**

In the first round of the ACC Tournament, the Hokies knocked off Clemson 68-63 by making some key free throws and getting a huge game from junior guard Erick Green.

Green scored a game-high 24 points, hitting 7 of 11 from the floor, including 2 of 4 from beyond the 3-point arc. He also made all eight of his free-throw attempts.

Green came just three points shy of setting the Tech record for points scored in an ACC Tournament game. In 2009, A.D. Vassallo scored 26 in the Hokies’ loss to North Carolina.

Tech led by as many as nine late in the game, but Clemson cut the lead to 61-57 on a 3-pointer by Devin Coleman with 1:48 left. Yet the Hokies held off the Tigers by hitting 5 of 6 from the free-throw line in the final moments, including two each by Green and Hudson.

Green’s two free throws with 20.7 seconds left gave Tech a 66-60 lead, and after a 3-pointer by Clemson’s Milton Jennings with 17 seconds remaining, Hudson knocked down two free throws with 15 seconds left to seal the game.

“We talked all week about finishing and making one more play,” Greenberg said after the win. “One more stop, one more 50-50 ball, take a charge, make an extra pass … just one more play. That’s the thing that has eluded us this season.

“We showed that toughness that is Virginia Tech basketball. When you have that, you find a way to win one of these games.”

Hudson also played well, scoring 19 points and hitting 6 of 12 from the floor, including 3 of 7 from beyond the 3-point arc. Like Green, he made all of his free-throw attempts, going 4 for 4 from the line.

As a team, Tech made 17 of 20 from the stripe.

**Brown with big game vs. Duke**

The Hokies’ season ended with the loss to Duke in the ACC Tournament, but freshman guard Robert Brown gave Tech fans something to look forward to with his performance against the Blue Devils.

Brown scored 16 points in the game, hitting 6 of 9 from the floor, including 2 of 3 from beyond the 3-point arc. The game marked his second-best scoring total of the season, as he threw in 19 points against Monmouth in the Hokies’ second game.

In fact, going into the Duke game, Brown had scored in double figures just once in the previous 14 games and twice in the previous 20.

“I felt good in warm-ups and continued to shoot well throughout the game,” Brown said after the loss to Duke. “Coach told me to stay aggressive. I got a bunch of shots up with Coach Rob [Ehsan] before the game, and that kind of helped. That just carried over to the game.”

Brown averaged 6.8 points, 2.1 rebounds and 1.9 assists per game this season, but shot just 36.2 percent from the floor (32 percent from beyond the arc).

“I didn’t want this year to end so early,” Brown said. “I was hoping we would play tomorrow [Saturday] and so on and win this tournament. But it’s over. We’re going to keep getting better and keep working, and next year, I’m really looking forward to it. We’ve got a great group of guys, and we’ve got a great recruiting class coming in, so I think we’ll do pretty well.”

**Raines the big man down the stretch**

Cadarian Raines averaged 5.9 points and 3.9 rebounds this season, but the redshirt sophomore played well down the stretch, starting the final eight games of the season because of Victor Davila’s groin injury.

Entering the 2011-12 season, Raines had made just 13 of 38 from the floor (34.2 percent). But this season, he made 83 of 161 from the floor (51.6 percent). He raised his career field-goal percentage to 48.2 percent.

In his final eight games of the 2011-12 campaign, he averaged 10.1 points and 4.6 rebounds per game. He also shot 54 percent from the floor in that span.

**Hudson, Davila careers come to a close**

Tech saw the services of three seniors depart following the ACC Tournament loss to Duke. Hudson, Davila and walk-on Joey Racer all concluded their careers in a Tech uniform.

The game marked a bitter ending for Hudson, who scored just six points and hit only 3 of 9 from the floor against the Blue Devils. For the season, he averaged 10.9 points per game, hitting 40 percent from the floor and 33 percent from beyond the 3-point arc.

Hudson scored exactly 1,200 points in his career. He became the 42nd player in Tech history to score 1,000 points in his career and ranks 31st on Tech’s all-time scoring list.

“I really enjoyed this season,” Hudson said. “The group of guys in the locker room, they really fought. It was a rough season for us. We wanted to win more games than we did, but I’m going to take a lot of positive things from this.”

Davila was on the cusp of finishing his senior season in grand fashion, scoring in double figures in four of six games before a groin injury ended his season. The Canovanas, Puerto Rico, native missed the last eight games of the season. He averaged 7.5 points and 4.2 rebounds per game for the 2011-12 campaign, shooting a team-best 57 percent from the floor.

Racer, from Berryville, Va., played in six games, scoring two points and grabbing four rebounds. He started for the Hokies on senior day – his lone career start.