Hokies Hope To Solve Opening Contest Jinx

Virginia Tech will be trying to do something Saturday night that no Hokie team has been able to do in nine years—win an opening football game.

Tech, which faces Wake Forest of the ACC Saturday at Groves Stadium in Winston-Salem (gametime 7:30 p.m.), has lost its last eight opening games, and nine of its last 10. Although Tech has a winning tradition it hasn’t been because the Gobblers have gotten off to roaring starts.

The last time Tech won a season opener was 1967 when the Hokies outlasted Tampa 13-3. But the month of September has been almost as much of a jinx over the past seven years with Tech going an abysmal 2-18.

Wake Forest will be gunning to open their season on a winning track.

The Deacons think that Tech’s 40-10 victory last season was a fluke, that they were simply devastated by fatigue and injuries in last year’s season finale.

Wake may have enough to back up their statements. It will be the most experienced and talented team ever at the disposal of coach Chuck Mills at Wake Forest. Returning to an offensive contingent that scored more points than any Deac team since 1948 will be eight starters and several more lettermen.

One of Tech’s main objectives in Spring practice was to develop playable depth, but last week injuries took their toll so much that Coach Jimmy Sharpe had to call off scrimmages and lay off the contact work so they’ll be combat ready by Saturday.

Tech did have limited contact work for 30 minutes last Saturday morning before they took off the pads to finish practice.

Tech will be counting on its defensive unit. Although only five seniors are on the unit, it is an experienced group with three of those seniors starting. They are Stuart Patterson and Keith McCarter, both ends along with tackle Tom Beasley.

The other two are Larry Blunt and noseguard Curt Lowry. Other defensive starters are junior linebacker Rick Razzano, sophomore tackle Mike Faulkner, junior cornerback Henry Bradley and sophomore free safety Gary Smith.

Sophomore defensive backs Gene Bunn and Chip Keatley will be tested early.

Tech’s first offensive unit probably will present only one new starter, sophomore guard Mike Roy who saw a little action on defense early last year.

Moses Foster, a former running back, will start his senior season as number one wide receiver, and another senior, Tom Cooper, likely will get the call at tight end, after two years’ service in the defensive secondary.

Except for junior burner Roscoe Coles, the backfield comprises several solid seniors—Mitch Barnes, the quarterback, and Chuck Nuttycombe, Paul Adams, George Heath, Billy King and Tony Houtt—with speedy sophomores waiting for their shot: Dickie Holway, Dennis Scott, Ellis Savage, Larry Fallen, Eddie Snell, Don LaRue and David Lamie.

Lamie, a 75 letterman in the secondary is still in a triangular battle with Snell and LaRue for the backup quarterback job.

The kicking game was somewhat of a question mark. But Sharpe has been rather pleased with the late progress. Paul (“Chile Bean”) Engle inherits placement duties, although kickoffs will probably be handled by freshman Eric King.

George Roberts, a walk-on, left footed punter, apparently has taken over the job held for the last three years by Bruce McDaniel. Holway also could be called on as a punter.

Wake has what it feels is its most explosive offense. A battle continues to be waged at quarterback but it appears that last year’s starter Jerry McManus will hold off junior Mike McPherin, at least until the Tech game.

There’s a veteran receiver corps with Steve Young at the tight end slot and Solomon Everett and Bill Millner.

The offensive line is led by tackle Jackie Robinson who leads four returning starters.

The defense is, of course, highlighted by All-American Bill Armstrong who has become a near unanimous choice by pre-season publications as the best free safety in the nation.

He’s joined in the secondary by speedsters James Royster and Ed McDonald.

The linebacking crew was totally wiped away by injuries when Wake faced Tech last season. This year it will be headed by all-conference hopeful Randy Carroll.

Saturday night’s contest will be the 24th meeting on the gridiron between Virginia Tech and Wake Forest. The series began in 1916, with Tech taking a lopsided win, 52-0.

For the Gobblers, the series stands at 14-8-1. In the nine games played at Wake, the Hokies are 4-5. Tech last played in Winston-Salem in 1972 and won, 44-9.

Wake is always tough early in the season, but how tough they are Saturday may be the key to stopping physical Tech.