Slate of Wake Tough to Take

By Mike Bevans

Wake Forest, which counts four post-season bowl participants on its schedule, will welcome any game resembling a breather this fall. But coach Chuck Mills knows his Deacons won’t find one in tomorrow night’s season opener with Virginia Tech in Winston-Salem.

"VPI is one of the toughest teams we’re going to play," Mills said, placing the Hokies alongside Michigan, South Carolina, Maryland and N.C. State — all Wake opponents coming off bowl performances a year ago. Also on the Deacons’ slate are two teams which were considered for bowl appearances — Tech (8-3) and Vanderbilt (7-4).

Wake and Tech met in last season’s final game, with the Hokies springing for 23 points in the fourth quarter and a 40-10 triumph in Blacksburg. At the time, Mills wasn’t too appreciative of Tech’s scoring with 22 seconds to play, but yesterday he put down any talk of revenge.

"WHEN YOU'RE YOUNGER, you’re likely to think of vendettas, but at my age last year is last year and this year is this year," Mills contended. "The kids feel like they could have done better last year, but they’re not good enough yet to have the luxury of a vendetta."

Tomorrow night, Mills will begin his fourth season as the Deacons’ coach — his first with an entire squad of players recruited by his staff. Wake, 1-9-1 and 1-10 Mills’ first two years, improved to 3-8 last season with three losses by a total of five points.

"For the first year, we feel we have a program and can see some continuity in it," said Mills. "We’re not around the corner as a football team yet, but I’m optimistic about the possibilities of this team and the ability to build on it."

That schedule, which also includes Kansas State, North Carolina, Duke, Clemson and Virginia, makes Mills’ task all the more difficult. "There’s no question," he said. "The external pressures of the schedule and the internal philosophy of the school make it an extremely difficult task."

After scoring only 73 and 74 points Mills’ first two seasons, Wake broke loose for 221 last year. Quarterbacks Jerry Manus and Mike McGlamry return to operate the Deacons Veer. Wake also plans to incorporate an I-alignment this season with junior John "Ziggy" Zeglinski at tailback.

SOPHOMORE STAN ROLARK is expected to start at fullback, where the graduate Clark Gaines collected 936 yards a year ago. In all, Wake returns eight starters, including a few who were injured and missed the Tech game last season. Depth will remain a problem until some of the younger players improve.

"Our pre-season preparation was not nearly as physical as we would have liked," said Mills. "We came out of it healthy, but we had to sacrifice rugged preparation to achieve it. At some positions where we had good people, we lacked depth and couldn’t take a chance of someone getting hurt."

There will be plenty of time for that during the regular season.