Tech Prepared to ‘Exploit’; Richmonders Start at Tulsa

By Mike Bevans

If there’s one thing Virginia Tech wants to accomplish during the course of tonight’s season opener with Wake Forest in Winston-Salem, it’s cranking up its Wishbone offense without delay. While the Hokies have not won a season opener since 1967, over-all slow starts (0-4 in 1974, 0-2 in ’75) stalled the first two campaigns under coach Jimmy Sharpe.

One touchdown in each of the past two season openers with Kentucky were not nearly enough and one trip across the Wake goal line most probably will insure little more than an extension of that string of first-game defeats.

"I look around the country and I see the people having trouble Wishbone-wise are, normally speaking, with your opening game opponent or bowl game opponent, because he has time to look at what you’re doing over and over and over," said Sharpe.

"Being very aware of this means we may do some things, particularly early in the year, a little different that might cause our opponent a little problem."

Don’t look for Sharpe to draw diagrams for a more detailed explanation. The specifics will be on display at Groves Stadium.

"We’ve worked on a lot of things that caused us problems last year," he offered. "We’re also better prepared for any unusual defense or unusual stunts. We want to be prepared to take advantage of anything we can use to exploit our opponent’s defense."

THE WISHBONE personnel is familiar and their experience may be the key to a quick start this time around. While senior quarterback Mitchel Barnes will be making his first start tonight, it’s not as if he’s a newcomer.

He saw a fair amount of action for a No. 2 quarterback last season, taking over whenever Phil Rogers was unable to move the team, was moved to running back or needed a breather. A heady player more than anything else, Barnes was backup to Bruce Arians his sophomore year and saw enough action to chalk it up as experience.

"To me, starting this year is not much more different than what I did last year," said Barnes, who was Most Valuable Player in last year’s 24-7 win over William and Mary in the Oyster Bowl. "I understood what coach Sharpe was trying to do with the program last year and it didn’t bother me that I wasn’t starting, although I like it now."

Brusing senior Paul Adams (768 yards) returns at fullback, while record-setting left halfback Rocose Coles (1,045) is only a junior. Either senior Chuck Nuttycombe or sophomore Billy Savage is expected to start at right halfback.

SENIOR GEORGE HEATH backs up Adams, while speedy sophomores Dickie Holway, Dennis Scott and Larry Fallen stand ready to fill in at halfback.

"We’ve all got the experience with the Wishbone, now, and I’d like to think the offense could take us through the season," said Barnes. "It’s very disciplined and there’s so much involved with this offense. Recognizing defenses and understanding the offense is required to make it work effectively.

"We’re looking to have a better early season than last year as far as execution and recognizing defenses. The offense has stumbled at the start of the last two seasons."

Sharpe is of the opinion the Tech signal-calling chores are in the best hands of his three years in Blacksburg.

"Mitch thoroughly and completely understands what to do in our offense and he’s excellent at reading defenses out of the triple option," said Sharpe. "His only handicap is a lack of speed, but he makes up for it with execution and leadership."

SOPHOMORES EDDIE Snell, David Lamie and Don LaRue are the first three reserves at quarterback with Snell currently holding down the No. 2 spot. There isn’t a game of college experience among them.

There was a Mitchell Barnes to back up Phil Rogers a year ago, but until proven otherwise there is no Mitchell Barnes to back up Mitchell Barnes this season. It would be to the Hokies advantage if they didn’t have to find out ... at least not for a while.

College Football Today

(Virginia Tech (8-3) at Wake Forest (5-8) , 7:30 — Tech’s last opening-game win in 1967 vs. Tampa, 13-3 ... Hokies only returning starter in secondary, cornerback Henry Bradley, doubtful starter with foot injury ... Tech scored 23 points in fourth quarter to defeat Wake, 40-10, in season finale last year in Blacksburg ... Deacons’ combination Veer-I offense led by junior tailback John Zeglin, nation’s No. 5 all-purpose runner as sophomore.

RICHMOND (5-6) at Tulsa (7-4), 8:30 — Game marks first time UR ever played in Oklahoma or ever played a team from Oklahoma. ... Virginians expected to start at 15 positions for Spiders ... Tulsa second in nation in scoring and total offense last season ... Golden Hurricane winner of last three Missouri Valley Conference titles ... OR coach Jim Tait I-1 in season openers.

North Carolina A&T (8-3) at Virginia Union (7-4), 7:00 — Game site: City Stadium ... MEAC co-champ (N.C. A&T) vs. CIAA runnerup (Union) ... Appalachian State, led by Elsworth Turner, should be strong for Panther defense ... Fullback Robert Gibson, halfback Judge Thomas lead Union’s deep corps of running backs ... Union quarterback questions should be answered.

Glenville (3-6-1) at Madison (8-1-1), 1:30 — John Tuell intercepted Glenville pass in Madison end zone with just over minute remaining to preserve last year’s scoreless tie ... Dukes’ first season opener at home ... Madison tailbacks Bernard Slayton and Ron Stith enter game with 3,840 yards rushing and 40 TDs between them ... QB Tom Cowan, tailback Lee Hodges return for Glenville.

Other State Games — Saint Paul’s (2-9) at Knoxville (5-5-1), 7:30; Liberty Baptist (4-5) vs. Hampden-Sydney (7-2) at Danville, 8:00.

Other Area Games — Miami, Ohio (11-1) at North Carolina (3-7-1), 1:30; Furman (5-5-1) at N.C. State (7-4-1), 7:00; Appalachian St. (8-3) at South Carolina (7-5), 7:30.