A Perfect Opener
For Virginia Tech

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WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — If Jimmy Sharpe was writing the script for a perfect football opener, he scarcely could’ve improved on the first 56 minutes his Virginia Tech team produced Saturday night.

Awesome on defense and efficient on attack, the Gobbler simply dominated a Wake Forest team that thought revenge was possible.

Forget all that. The only ingredients missing after Tech’s solid 23-6 victory were a shutout the defense deserved and the question of how potent the opposition was.

But with the mighty Texas A&M Aggies coming up next Saturday in College Station, Tech couldn’t have asked for a better opener.

Last year, there was a matter of a bowl-hungry Gobbler team pouring it on in the final period long after the decision had been determined.

This time, the quality of mercy within Sharpe was well defined. Tech’s first unit offense left the game midway through the third quarter and never returned.

The Gobblers obviously developed some much needed depth by using the reserves as they intimidated the Deacons.

The completely rebuilt secondary featured a host of new faces. All of the starters were sophomores. With star cornerback Henry Bradley hobbled, defensive coordinator Buddy Bennett came up with Gippy Belcher.

I confess I had never heard of Belcher before, and surely neither had Wake Forest. But Belcher introduced himself with a belting tackle on pass receiver Steve Young just before halftime. That resulted in a Deacon fumble recovered by Rick Razzano, and ultimately the second of a school-record tying three field goals by another newcomer, Paul “Chili Bean” Engle.

Belcher, it develops, is a walk-on from Colonial Heights who wasn’t even invited out early a year ago. But he stuck it out, playing safety for the jayvees.

“I was confident he could do the job,” said Bennett. “He’s had a year of practice.”

The Tech secondary was made up of Belcher, Chip Keatley, Gene Bunn (who had an interception) and the familiar Gary Smith. They played well enough, and if Tech has any problems at all, surely that is the place where the enemy will attack.

The Tech defensive line simply smothered any effort Wake made to run the ball. The Deacons managed a woeful 55 yards rushing, and 46 of those came late in the game on a run by freshman James McDougald to the Tech three.

In fact, until McDougald’s run set up Wake’s only score and spoiled Tech’s first opening game shutout in 23 years, Wake Forest did not have a first down on the ground.

Wake had less than 200 yards total offense and 80 of that came on the drive against the reserves. The first unit defense, keyed as usual by Razzano, tackles Tom Beasley and Mike Faulkner and ends Keith McCarter and Stuart Patterson, overwhelmed the Deacs.

Offensively, Tech played it close to the vest for a half, but changed its attack after intermission to move steadily up the middle. The Deacons replaced three backs.

The offense generated by quarterback Mitch Barnes wasn’t flashy, but you couldn’t fault it for effectiveness. Barnes would send his fullbacks, Paul Adams and George Heath, probing the ever-weakening middle.

When Wake pulled in tight near the goal, Barnes pitched perfectly to Roscoe Coles for the first TD.

Tech’s other touchdown was a dazzling 30-yard heave from Barnes to the converted running back, Moses Foster. A diving catch in the end zone by Foster put the finishing touches on the perfect night throwing by Barnes, who would like to throw as many strikes for the baseball team.

Throwing only when Wake Forest expected it, Barnes was perfect on his four tosses, three of them to Foster. Moses also caught one from backup Eddie Snell.

“We just weren’t running the right plays in the first half,” said Barnes, calm as ever. “We decided in the second half to run right at them.”

Tech did that without a mistake, bulling its way down the field to 200 rushing yards in the final half.

So total was Tech’s control that the Hokies held the ball for 13 minutes in the third quarter, when the outcome of the game was practically decided.

The capper to the evening was the kicking by Engle, another of the many sophomores who got their first real taste of action.