Tech's Chili Bean grows to task

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BLACKSBURG — Paul "Chili Bean" Engle didn't fit the prototype of a football player.

He was only a whisper of a person at 106 pounds. He wore size 6½ shoes. Yet here was Engle's high school coach, Joe Caffrey of East Bank in Kayfard, Va., asking him to come out for the team as a junior.

What's more, Engle had never played football.

What he had played was soccer. Engle was born and raised in Chile, then moved to West Virginia when his father was transferred by Bethlehem Steel.

"My coach," said Engle, who came by his nickname because of his native country, "knew I had played soccer and that a lot of people who play the game develop into kickers."

Engle didn't fit right into the team. It was difficult, in fact almost impossible, to find shoes that fit a size 6½ foot. He played with shoulder pads that were far too large.

But four years later Engle is still playing football. He is now Virginia Tech's place kicker and he booted three field goals in the Hokies' opening 22-6 win last week at Wake Forest.

Chili Bean has changed somewhat in his appearance. He has filled out to 160 pounds, thanks to a weight program. He also has size 6½ shoes which will make it easier for him to replace departed kicker Wayne Latimer.

"I was thrilled when Coach Caffrey came over and asked me to come out," recalled Engle. "I said yes right away."

Engle, who has only a slight Spanish accent despite growing up Chile, has no ambitious dreams. Indeed, a player of his background would hardly have time to think of anything too far in the future.

Even when Tech recruited Engle, he was a late signee.

"Some coaches came by in late May, but I didn't sign until June 6th," said Engle.

But there was no rush. Other than partial scholarships to small state schools, Engle wasn't being rushed into a college career.

Maybe this is why he doesn't dream of future riches awaiting him in the National Football League.

"I'm really just thinking of this year and then I'll think of next year," he said.

But Engle can kick for distance. He estimates his range at 45 to 50 yards using the soccer-style kick.

"I've tried to kick the ball straight," he confessed about the orthodox style that probably intrigues him just a bit. "But I really don't know how far I can kick it that way."

Engle says the kids teased him at first about his accent, but it only took him three months to pick up English.

Asked how he likes the mountains of West Virginia and Southwestern Virginia. Engle replied, "I had to get used to it. It's cold, but we're (his family) getting along fine. I like it."

Pressure isn't something that bothers Engle.

"I don't think about it when I kick. It happens so quick after I put the tee down. But when it's third down and I know I might have to kick, that's when I start worrying," he said.

So far his parents haven't seen him in college football. They listened to last week's game at Wake and plan to come down for the game against West Virginia. "They understand football," he explained.

But what did Engle's mother think when he first went out for the high school team? Did she realize the dangers of a little boy in a world of giants?

"I don't think my mother realized what could happen," said Engle. "But I haven't been faiyet."

No, but the opponents have been hit—by a kick in the pants which usually adds from one to three points for Tech on the scoreboard—straight from Chile.