"Four-Steer’ Front Line Awaits Hokies at A&M

By Mike Bevans

When Virginia Tech rolled up 350 yards of total offense in its season-opening 23-6 victory at Wake Forest last Saturday, the Hokies had little trouble with a defensive line featuring Deacons weighing 210, 225, 220, 220 and 215 pounds.

However, when Tech visits Texas A&M tomorrow, the Aggies will serve up a four-steer, uh, four-man front tipping the scales at 255, 253, 260 and 265. In short, next to the Aggies, the Deacons were beef jerky.

"No doubt about it," said coach Danny Ford, Tech assistant in charge of offensive linemen, "this will be the biggest challenge for our linemen since we've been here. We've played against some big individuals, but this will be the first time we've gone up against four like this."

THREE-QUARTERS of that line — end Tank Marshall and tackles Edgar Fields and Jimmy Dean — are returning starters from a unit which last year led the nation in defense, particularly against the rush. The other end, Eugene Sanders, is a transfer from the University of Washington.

They are supported by linebackers Grady Wilkerson (225), Robert Jackson (225) and Jesse Hunnicutt (210). Wilkerson and Jackson shared the middle linebacker spot last season.

"You can look across their line and see they're superior in terms of size and strength," admitted Tech center Blair Buskirk, a 6-4, 215-pound senior. "It's going to require a total ef-

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fort to compensate for the imbalance in physical strength.

"We're going to have to come up with the second and third efforts."

On either side of Buskirk or junior center Mike Heizer (6-0, 210) will be guards Mike Roy (245) and Leonard Walker (245) with Rondal Davis (245) and Keith "Whale" Gibson (285) at the tackles. In just about every case, the backups weigh less than the starters.

"We haven't got the physical ability to match them man-for-man, so we're going to have to have a lot more effort and desire than they're going to have," said Ford. "We're going to have to want to a little more."

The Hokies of coach Jimmy Sharpe have never been accused of coming up short in that department. "I'm not afraid," assured Buskirk. "I rely on technique, instead of size, anyway."

THE PERFORMANCE of the offensive line in the first game of the season was encouraging, but hardly free of errors. Quarterback Mitchel Barnes was sacked twice for losses totalling 15 yards, and the Hokies were thrown for losses five other times for another 20 yards.

"We weren't really as good as I think we can be," said Buskirk. "We've got to be quicker coming off the ball . . . everybody's not coming off like seven bullets. We're not consistent enough yet."

The Aggies, who went 10-2 and gained a share of the Southwest Conference title a year ago, are rated No. 14 in The Associated Press pre-season poll. It is the one game on the Hokies schedule they are supposed to lose.

No one connected with Virginia Tech football thinks along those lines.

"They've worked hard all week and they have confidence in the game plan," Ford said. "Now, they're going to have to go out there and carry it out. There's nobody up here dreading to play them."

"We didn't talk about getting ready for Wake last week," continued Ford. "We said, 'Get yourself ready to play and do whatever it takes.' It seemed to work."

TECH WON TWO big games on the road last year, upsetting Auburn (23-16) and Houston (34-28). However, neither one of those wins could hold a candle to one at College Station tomorrow evening (game time, 5 p.m. EDT)."