Southern Miss Eagles
Invade Lane For Opener

Staff Writer

Saturday’s battle between Virginia Tech and Southern Mississippi will be the fourth in the two team’s series. Ironically, Tech trails in that series, 1-2. Southern defeated the Gobblers in 1958, 41-0, and in 1971 at Blacksburg 17-8. The lone Tech win came in the last meeting of the two teams when the Gobblers prevailed, 27-14, in a game played at Lane Stadium.

Tech’s loss at Texas A&M last Saturday snapped a five-game win streak for the Hokies. The streak had been Tech’s longest since 1966.

Still, the Gobblers have won nine of their last 11 games.

Tech will be defending a five-game winning streak for games played at Lane Stadium when it goes against the Golden Eagles Saturday at 1:30 p.m. A&M snapped Tech’s string of consecutive scoring games at 66. The Hokies had not been shutout since the opening game of the 1970 season.

It marked only the fourth time since 1962 that Tech has failed to score.

It’s unusual in college football today to have opponents coming off shutouts. But Tech dropped a 19-0 decision to A&M, and Southern Miss fell in its’ opener 48-0 to East Carolina in a shocking score. Most thought that game would be close.

But Golden Eagles Coach Bobby Collins, who served as defensive backfield coach at Virginia Tech under Jerry Claiborne from 1964-66, says his team was the victim of a scoring blitz it couldn’t recovor from.

East Carolina had three quick touchdowns and the Southerners couldn’t develop any momentum after that. The Eagles were out of the game before they knew it, something that Collins feels will never happen again.

The Eagles were 7-4 last season, beating rival Ole Miss 8-7, whipping Memphis State 21-7, and losing to Alabama only 27-6. Southern’s biggest victory in ’75 was a 70-0 triumph over California State-Fullerton.

Overall, the Eagles outscored opponents 279-129 last season.

A total of 31 lettermen return to the independent school’s roster. Six offensive starters and six defensive starters return, running the veer offense and the 5-2 defense.

Everyone returning on the offensive line is experienced. Eric “Big E” Smith at 6-5, 278 leads the way while other tackles are Gene Sanders 6-4, 242 and Porter Mitchell, 250 and 6-1.

Guards are Steve Boytte, 6-2, 250, and Eddie Caplan 6-1, 237. Center is Barry Caudill 6-4, 235.

In the backfield, everyone returns except the quarterback slot. Taking over that job is a familiar name to area folks.

Former Radford High quarterback Kenny Alderman, who led the Bobcats to two championships a few years ago, is a junior at Southern Miss and will be calling the signals Saturday when the Eagles invade Lane Stadium.

Joining Alderman are “Go-Go” Gary, a 6-1, 193 running back, and Carlos Montgomery 6-1, 202.

Defensively, Southern Miss may be hurting. The only experience returns at ends where Bobby Smithhart (6-4, 239) and Ben Hale (6-1, 197), along with tackles Stoney Parker (6-4, 228), and Eddie Eunez (6-0, 243) return.

The game is especially important because Tech has an open date next Saturday and are not scheduled to return to action until Oct. 2 when William & Mary visits Lane Stadium.

Hokie teams haven’t necessarily been invincible at home (27-16-3 in the past 11 seasons in Lane Stadium), but Gobbler eleven’s seldom have been embarrassed in their own ballpark.

Come Saturday, some 35,000-plus will be on hand to encourage the Hokies in continuing that tradition.

And unless the sky falls Tech’s “D” will be on hand to start it right, and the “O” will be hoping to balance the load.

The entire Gobbler squad will know they’re at home.

It’s seldom easy to find positive notes in defeat and especially after suffering a shutout, but neither Sharpe nor the Hokies were down from Saturday’s setback.

“We’ll be back,” from Sharpe weren’t hollow words. He might well have added, “We’ll be at home.”