Mike Faulkner—
'We Need A Win'

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Sophomore defensive tackle Mike Faulkner took last Saturday's 19-0 loss at the hands of Texas A&M particularly hard. But that's nothing to worry about.

"Personally I take losses hard," said the 6-2, 250-pound hulk of defensive power. "I took it hard because deep down inside I know that we'd've won. We could have beaten them."

Faulkner was one of several members of the Tech defensive unit to make Jimmy Sharpe's "dean's list" for his performance against the Aggies. A&M quarterback David Shipman was sacked only three times in the game, twice by Faulkner.

The defensive star, who was named after last season to The Football News freshman All-America first team defense, feels the way most his teammates do about the loss. "We realize that they (A&M) were tough. But they didn't outclass us. We had some breakdowns on defense and made some mistakes here or there, but we realize that we can play with anyone in the country."

But the future is now, and the sophomore, who lettered in '75 realizes another thing. "We gotta pick our heads back up, and get back on the right foot against Southern Mississippi.

"It is a home game, and really, it wouldn't matter who we are playing Saturday, we have to be ready to play and win," noted Faulkner.

If there was any one ingredient that led to the 1975 turnaround by Tech's defense from one of the worst in the nation to one of the top 25, it probably would be attributed to Faulkner's play.

An All-Metro defensive tackle for Frank Nietozy at Bishop McNamara in Washington, D.C., Faulkner was discovered in August, sat out almost the whole first week of '75 pre-season took over a starting job which he never relinquished.

"At first I was recruited heavy, but I got into grade trouble and by the time I was a senior a lot of schools began to drop interest in me," Faulkner said before scurrying away to a defensive meeting to map out strategy against Saturday's opponents.

But Faulkner began to work hard in that department to, thanks to the guidance of some of Tech's coaches. Sharpe promised when he came to Blacksburg that his coaches would improve the players and be as close to them off the field as on the field.

"I can honestly say that there's good relationship between the coaches and players here at Tech," notes Mike. "I'm not afraid to go to one of them when I have a problem and talk. They eat with us sometimes, and it's not like being around a bunch of strangers when our coaches are around."

Faulkner is closer to T.D. Phillips than any of the other coaches. "Yes, I'm close to him. I can see why he pushes me on the practice field. He wants to make me as good as he can."

Phillips had some gracious words about his young defensive star. "Mike made some freshman mistakes. He's still young and he still makes a few miscues. But he has much ability, and he does so much for our defense."

"He's not only willing to work hard, but has that extra edge of a burning desire to be just as good as he can be."

Mike's early season goal was to contribute to an undefeated season. Even though A&M wiped out chances of that, many feel Tech's chances to win the rest is ideal, with a 10-1 season and perhaps a bowl bid in the offing.

"But mostly, I want to do a lot better, to make improvements and grow and learn by my mistakes."

"I wanted to prove to myself that I can play against all the teams on our schedule as long as I'm here, and not be overwhelmed by their big names."

F-A-U-L-K-N-E-R. That's big enough a name. And before he's through the only ones concerned with being overwhelmed are his opponents.