Running against Virginia Tech’s tenacious defense is like running into a meatgrinder. Just as this Southern Mississippi running back Ben Garry (29), Garry is stacked up in this photo by three Gobbler defenders, Chip Keatley (25), Rick Razzano (38) and Keith McCarter (91) in Saturday’s contest.

Deefense!

Photo By Gene Dalton

Gobblers’ Kicking Game A Great Surprise

JERRY VERNON
Staff Writer

Washington Redskins Coach George Allen has always considered kicking important. So did Vince Lombardi. But the late Green Bay Packer mentor figured all aspects of football were important— including kicking.

Alex Karras once labeled kickers foreigners. He suggested, “all their passports be taken away.” He considered them useless.

Many teams have proven Karras’ theory wrong. Last Saturday another squad proved it has joined the list of voices which backs the advice of the kicking advocate.

Virginia Tech relied heavily on its kicking game against Southern Mississippi University. Field goal kicker Paul Engle notched a three point shot that put the game out of reach while punter George Roberts kept the Golden Eagles deep in their own territory.

“I’d have to say that more emphasis has been placed on kicking this year,” explained Hokie Coach Jimmy Sharpe. “My first year, our lack of kicking killed us. And then last year long punt returns hurt us.”

But those days may be over for Sharpe. Roberts boots the pigskin at a consistent clip ranging around 35 to 40 yards. The senior, who has two years of football eligibility left, hangs his pants in the air for four to five seconds. The time span gives Tech defenders plenty of time to bottle up return threats.

“We have to thank the Lord that he brought George to us,” said the coach last night. “I met his father Friday and he said, ‘George hasn’t done the job he’s capable of yet: be did it the next day.’

Roberts’ boosted his longest shot of the season Saturday at 53 yards. Just a three yard off former Hokie Wayne Lattimer’s record shot last year. In fact, with Lattimer leaving last season, Sharpe was a little worried about his kicking game this past spring.

He had Engle for Field goals, but really no one to fill Lattimer’s punting shoes. That is, until Roberts walked into the Hokie tryouts, before long Sharpe’s frown turned to a smile.

“I think George is super consistent,” said the coach. “He started slow in the Wake Forest game, but he did a good job. Now he’s really confident. He feels he’s the guy who has to make things happen with the kicking game.”

Behind Roberts and Engle stands a freshman who comes onto the field only during kickoffs. Eric King rounds out Tech’s very specialized trio of kickers.

“This year we were bound and determined we would have a good kicking game,” said Sharpe. “We’ve really begun to explore our kicking game.”

Tech coaches clock not only hang time, but also how long the kicker takes to boot the ball.

“If we can get the ball off in 2.2 (seconds),” said the coach, “and get a hang time of at least four seconds, maybe five, we can get them (opponents) into tough field position.”

The Hokie kickers haven’t offered their squad any luxuries yet, but they have offered major assistance to Tech’s inconsistent offensive and defensive units.

“Our kicking game has really been a plus,” explained Sharpe. “Now if we can get some offense and defense to go with it we’ll be tough.”