Tech offense 'no problem'  

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BLACKSBURG — Virginia Tech isn't worried about its offense—even if everyone else seems to be these days.

The Hokies aren't rolling up big hunks of yardage. They have managed just 39 points in three games.

But Coach Jimmy Sharpe and his quarterback, Mitch Barnes, remain cool in the face of what seems to be some adversity.

Barnes is almost deaf when it comes to the critics in the papers, fans or on television.

"I read the papers," he said disdainfully, "and I throw them away.

"I'm not worried about the offense. We've done things in the games that we've set out to do. We've made some mistakes. There are one or two things here and there that keep us from scoring more points.

Barnes recalls last year's William and Mary game as Tech's Saturday contest here against the Indians approaches.

With Tech holding only a 10-7 lead, Barnes burst through the line 43 yards for a touchdown. Tech went on to a 24-7 Oyster Bowl victory and in the final three games scored 107 points.

"We have to get it going earlier this year," said Barnes. "The offense realizes we have to move the ball better to be a big winner.

"We have to play our type of game more instead of pressing. Sometimes instead of running the wishbone (offense) the way it's supposed to be run, we're stopped by penalties, missed assignments or go for the big play."

Barnes feels Tech turned its offense around much earlier than last year's game against William and Mary.

"I'd have to say one of the biggest turnarounds came at Auburn (a 23-16 Tech win in the fourth game). We knew we could move the ball against anyone then," said Barnes.

But the William and Mary game came a week after Tech's offense fizzled in a 10-7 loss at West Virginia. That was the defeat that really knocked Tech out of post season contention, though the Gobbler maintained hope to the end that the Tangerine Bowl would choose them over South Carolina.

"I think the key to the William and Mary game (last year)," said Barnes, "was that the offensive line just blew them out."

He says he'd like another 43-yard touchdown run Saturday against William and Mary. "Heck," Barnes added, "I wasn't even winded last year."

Of course there is no perfect day on offense for Tech. A win is a win.

Sharpe admits his team isn't scoring or racking up the big yardage games.

"But I'm not worried. I've said it every Sunday. Everyone is worried about the offense except the offense," said Sharpe.

"I'll take a one-point or 3-0 win every week," he added.

Barnes says he would be more than satisfied everyday if the offense exhibited ball control and had the tempo of the game at its discretion.

Barnes won't say how many points Tech needs to clinch a win. "I don't think there's anyway to insure a victory except to have more points when the clock runs out," he emphasized.

"As for a goal, ours is 500 total yards every game. If we get that, everyone will be happy. But the next week we'll want more. And the points will take care of themselves."

No matter, everyone is still waiting for Tech's wishbone to take over. Sharpe admits to trying different combinations. If the offense ever develops into a high-scoring unit, Tech will have nothing to worry about—except hoping it is impressive enough to make someone's bowl list. Points will help.

TECH NOTES: Back George Heath is hobbling, but he is expected to play against William and Mary...Gippy Belcher, a walk-on defensive back who started the Wake Forest game, has been lost for the year with a knee injury. He underwent surgery Wednesday morning after being injured in Tuesday's practice....Also lost to Tech is baseball player Scott Atkins. The former Glenvar All-Metro star must undergo back surgery next month and he'll be forced to miss the coming season. He was Tech's regular shortstop...A crowd of around 32,000 is expected for Saturday's game.