Rozantz, Tribe: No More Rough Spots

The small crowd outside the door at Tech Coliseum Saturday afternoon took up a chant: “We want Root! We want Root!”

A little less than a year ago, Jim Root would have responded with the words, “For what?”

This day, there was no questioning the crowd’s motives. Root’s William and Mary football team had just finished dismantling Virginia Tech, 27-15, and the Indians’ fans were out there honking for the man who put the team together and carried it through the rough spots of the 1975 season.

The Indians, 2-9 last year, are now 3-1 and headed for a very fine record. They have soundly beaten VMI, Virginia and the Hokies, with the only blemish a one-point loss to East Carolina. The Tribe is thus off to its best start since 1971, when the team opened 4-0 and completely fell apart after that.

That’s not likely to happen this time — unless something happens to Tom Rozantz. He is the Indians’ quarterback. This is like saying Joe Morgan is the Reds’ second baseman.

Without Rozantz, the Indians would be hurting, even though Preston Green showed some flashes of promise during the fourth quarter of the Tech game.

IT’S NOT SO MUCH that Rozantz is physically talented, which, of course, he is. Beyond his ability to throw (33 of 63 passes for 473 yards and five touchdowns) and run (26 carries for 123 yards) is his leadership of the Indians’ Veer offense.

The 6-2, 180-pound sophomore, a “sleepier” prospect out of Fairview, Pa., makes very intelligent choices, both in his play-calling and in his options on hand-offs and pitches. At this aspect of the game, Tech coach Jimmy Sharpe called Rozantz “a magician.”

“I don’t like to say too much about him,” said Root, “I used to be a quarterback myself, and you have a tendency to get a fat head. Quarterbacks get plenty enough publicity as it is. But Rozantz is just doing a super job, and I’ve got to say it.”

Against Tech, Rozantz threw mostly underneath Tech’s pass coverage. Of his eight completions, four were to tight end Ken Cloud and two to fullback Keith Fimian, who scored three touchdowns.

The Referee

By Bill Millsaps

Executive Sports Editor

“In the films,” said Rozantz, “we noticed that when the linebackers saw the quarterback drop to throw, they flew back hard and deep into their zones. That left a big open area just off the line of scrimmage.”

The result was that Rozantz sent the tight end and backs drifting into that area for frequent gains. “I think it worked pretty good,” he said.

ROZANTZ, SON OF a high school football coach, disagreed with one reporter’s suggestion that he had played a flawless game. “Hey, a flaw-free game is all but impossible,” he said.

“There are a couple of plays that you can work on and always get better.”

While Rozantz and friends were doing the job on offense, the W&M defense had an equally productive day. Tech had only five first downs through three quarters, and by the time the Hokies mounted their first good drive, the game had long since been decided.

Sharpe blanched at a suggestion that he drop the Wishbone offense, as Georgia Tech did last week. He indicated he is still committed to it, even if he can’t decide which of three quarterbacks he’s going to play.

Sharpe opened with Mitchell Barnes, then went with Eddie Sneil before going to the bench for David Lomie, a sophomore the Tech coaches had hoped to red-shirt. Against William and Mary, it didn’t seem to make much difference.

W&M linebackers Jim Ryan and Jeff Hosmer were the leading Tribe “hitters,” while left cornerback Ken Smith made two tackles and broke up two passes. One that he didn’t break up could have cost the Indians dearly but for the poise of the Indian offense.

Smith, moving to make a less-than-difficult interception late in the second quarter, tipped a Barnes pass into the hands of Tech’s Moses Foster, who scored a touchdown on the play and enabled Tech to go into intermission behind only 14-7. William and Mary had totally dominated the half, yet Tech was still very much in contention.

“You was just one of those dumb things that happen in football,” said Root. Smith said his try at the interception was “…too easy. I got my hands turned the wrong way, and the ball bounced the wrong way. I want people to remember the two other knockdowns, not one that cost us a touchdown.”

Considering the way the game turned out, Smith will certainly get his wish.

THE HOKIES, WHO began the fall with hopes of a 9-2 (or better) season and a bowl bid, must now regroup — if they can. Almost nobody believed William and Mary would be a force to be reckoned with in area football this year, and yet here the Indians are, needing only to beat Richmond in their season finale to complete a sweep of Virginia’s Big Five.

And even better days may be ahead for the Indians. Only six of the Tribe’s 22 starters against Tech are seniors. For W&M, the future is here and now.

Root is not surprised. “We got excited in the spring when we knew, really KNEW, how good we could be. Our players were just good enough to listen to us and know that they haven’t yet got all the answers.”

Now all Root wants is for the football fans of Virginia, and particularly of the Peninsula, to show the recognition of the Indians’ progress by filling Cary Field — starting this Saturday afternoon against a good Delaware team.

Rozantz senses that the people are coming around. “Oh, I’m sure there are still some people who are going to say, ‘It was all luck.’ But I think we’re winning them over.”