Not 'George Who?' Anymore

Punter Earning Reputation

By JERRY RATCLIFFE
Senior Sports Editor

You won't find much about George William Roberts in the Virginia Tech program or press guide book.

Mention his name to most Hokie football fans and they might give you a double take.

But with each booming boot Roberts is quickly erasing his anonymity in "Tech Territory". He's the punter and one of the very few bright spots on a less than spectacular season thus far for the Gobblers.

Roberts, who last Saturday raised his punting average by almost three full yards, is a mere one-tenth of a yard off the Gobbler season record. Considering that his total varsity career now consists of 28 punts, and at the rate he has been improving, he could become the best Tech has had.

The senior boomer has already drawn praise from Coach Jimmy Sharpe. Roberts had kicks of 65, 56, 54, 47, 46, 38 and 28 yards for an average of 47.9 yards per kick against William & Mary. That raised him to 41.3 yards per boot this season.

The 28-yarder was a fluke. "I didn't handle the snap very well and then I shanked it," he said.

Roberts, an urban affairs major who hopes to go to law school, was a letterman as a receiver, punter and placekicker for Coach John Palmer at E.C. Glass back in the '71 and '72 seasons. But his football ended when he graduated.

"I just got to the point where I missed football so much that I had to get back in it," explains George on why he's punting for Tech after a long absence from the game he loves. "I just wanted to see if I could do it again."

Point proven.

"It hasn't changed me any. I'm just involved in something I love again."

Virginia Tech needed a punter badly. Bruce McDaniel had graduated and Tech really had no one to fill the veteran's shoes. That's when Roberts made the scene as a walk-on, who has walked right into a scholarship.

It was a bit difficult for him to get back into the swing of successful punting again after three years idleness. "There's no secret to my success. After Coach (Red) Stickney taught me the basics, working on it became the big effort."

Then the words "hang time" and "release time" became important to his vocabulary. "Hang time (the period the ball is in the air after it's kicked), is extremely important. One of the things they impressed upon me was to develop a hang time of around five seconds," explains the booter.

Another thing was getting the ball from the snapper and punting it cleanly in a less than two seconds flat. "I worked on that a lot. It bothered me at first because they (the coaches) were timing me and I was concious of it."

But Roberts soon got the knack for doing both well and Tech's opponents have been backing up and scrambling to make fair catches ever since.

He really hasn't been surprised by his average. "I knew all along I could kick that well."

"Average is important to me, but I'd rather be an effective team player. A good hang time helps our coverage which also helps out our defense with field position."

Unlike some kickers or punters, Roberts doesn't have a bit of trouble getting "into the feel of things in the game". He's as emotionally into it as the quarterback.

"Especially last Saturday, I was getting ready all day."

Some punters can be considered a valuable piece of property in professional football today. Look at Ray Guy of the Oakland Raiders for example.

George hasn't given the pros much thought, but if he continues to kick the way he does a career may be there. "If I felt I could be successful, I would have to think very seriously about it. But that's all in the future."

And for George William Roberts, the future could be very bright.