Tech, VMI Bid to Improve Past Efforts in Festival

By Mike Bevans

While Virginia Military established itself as a "mudder" with last week's rain-soaked victory over Furman, the likelihood of precipitation during this afternoon's (1:30) Tobacco Festival date with Virginia Tech won't necessarily benefit the Keydets, unless they are outfitted with steel-belted shoes that grip the City Stadium Astroturf.

As one VMI athletic department official noted, "Some of the players asked, if it rained, could they pull up the turf and throw a little mud in there." Richmond director of community facilities Emil Mosheim might have something to say about that.

"It really doesn't make any difference to us," said VMI offensive coordinator Joe Bush of the 80 percent chance of rain forecast as of last night. "We've worked in the rain all week, so if it rains here it's okay with us.

"Our passing statistics aren't anything to jump up and down about, anyway."

THE TOBACCO FESTIVAL game has been less than kind to either team. Virginia Tech has a 4-5 record to show for previous appearances, including a 1-3 mark against state teams. VMI has a 2-5 record for Tobacco Festival dates, all against state teams.

This rivalry dates to 1894 and has been waged as part of the Tobacco Festival only one previous occasion — in 1974 when the Keydets secured a 23-17 triumph.

"Tech is a great rivalry and this year we are especially pleased that it is in Richmond, because we have been wanting to go back there and redeem ourselves," said VMI coach Bob Thalman. The Keydets were humiliated, 43-0, by the University of Richmond two weeks ago at City Stadium.

VMI bounced back against Furman, recording a 17-3 win after three losses to open the season. Tailback Andre Gibson burst into the clear for an 83-yard touchdown run to highlight the Keydets' effort.

"Gibson's run was what we had been waiting for... a guy to get us the big play," said Bush. "It showed we could score from far out, that we could break away for the big play."

VIRGINIA TECH HAS been looking for the same thing, only the Hokies (2-2) haven't found it yet. This afternoon would be a good time to get it out of the way.

Senior Mitchel Barnes will start at quarterback in the Tech Wishbone as he has all season, but sophomores Eddie Snell and David Lamie could take over as they did a week ago. The Hokies were unable to move the ball in a 27-15 defeat to William and Mary until it was too late.

"We're looking for someone to take charge," said Tech coach Jimmy Sharpe. "We're looking for someone to make something happen and we want to try to explode tomorrow. Mitch has the experience, but the other two are better runners."

The Hokies have injury problems on defense, particularly in the secondary, where Henry Bradley is doubtful, Gary Smith definitely will not play and reserve Dennis Windmuller is hurt. Freshmen Tom Boody and Matt Mead made the trip and could see action in the defensive backfield.

THE LOSS TO Richmond shook up the Keydets and Sharpe hopes the defeat to William and Mary will arouse his troops.

"We had a super week of practice and they all look intent," reported Sharpe.

"We're going to feed them half a cow tonight, tuck them in with some warm milk and hope they wake up ready to play."

The Keydets won't have any sand in their eyes.

"Coach Sharpe stated (on his TV show) that I'll have our team all jacked up and foaming at the mouth to beat Tech," said Thalman. "He's right."