Hokies Run Through VMI

By Jerry Verone
Staff Writer

It took Virginia Tech more than a half to convince Virginia Military Institute that its running attack just wouldn’t cut the Hokie line at Richmond City Stadium, yesterday.

This lack of keydet insight left the Lexington school scoring at the short end of a 27-7 score at the end of the 26th Annual Tobacco Bowl.

Even if the Keydets had moved in an aerial attack sooner in the game, the results would have probably been the same. The Hokie defense allowed VMI only five receptions in 17 attempts.

Tech, on the other hand, never went to the air. The Hokies did it all on the ground churning out 327 yards in 77 plays.

"We’re a running football team," said Tech Coach Johnny Sharp in the cramped quarters of the winning locker room.

"We work on our passing everyday, but we didn’t need it today.

The Keydets discovered in the first half of play the Tech defense planned to improve the week showing it sponsored last week against William & Mary.

The Keydets could grind out only 10 tough rushing yards in the first half to the Miners’ 114. For the period, the Hokies failed to convert a field goal from 47 yards with 1:36 remaining in the opening period. The opening score culminated as eight play 41-yard drive highlighted with slick backfield play by quarterback Michael Barnes, and a trio of running backs, Bruce Cole, George Hech and Paul Adams.

Fullback Hecht put the first touchdown of the game on the board halfway through the second period with an 11-yard run over the left side of the Keydet line. His efforts gave the players jumped on the ball and just dropped the ball," shrugged Barnes in the locker room. "It happens, you know."

A new bright spot in the Hokies line-up came out in the third period of play. Wide receiver Greg Payne, substituting for injured Henry Bradley, returned a Keydet punt 70 yards for six points. Earlier in the game, the 185-pounder ran back another for 43 yards.

These were the first touchdowns of their careers for Payne.

Hokies the score they had missed by only seven seconds earlier.

At the beginning of the second period the Hokies lined up the VMI 27 after driving 36 yards. Five plays later Tech owned a first and goal on the Keydet two, but Barnes lost the grip on a snap. The Hokies hoped to expand on a huddle of VMI players.

I’ve ever had in a game," grunted Payne. "I didn’t think I was going to make the touchdowns until the last 20 or 35 yards. A lot of my luck helped me and the kick was high so I had time to get underneath it."

Payne’s score perhaps served to show the Hokies are not the only team with returning specialists.

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Tech’s three-yard line. Two plays later, fullback Steve Oddis pushed his 208-lb. frame into the end zone, trimming Tech’s lead to 10-7.

But even before Payne churned out his 73-yard touch- back, the Tech offensive unit put together the day’s longest touchdown drive of 51 yards. Coles chalked up 81 of his day’s 118 yards in the drive before fullback Adams earned scoring honors in a one-yard plunge, giving Tech a 13-7 spread.

For all practical purposes the game ended with Payne’s return. The Keydets were put on simmer and everything belonged to the Hokies after its score.

Barnes added a score to the Tech lead with a 49-yard run in the fourth quarter on an option. Sophomore running back Dennis Scott closed out the day’s scoring with a 72-yard run around end with 4:33 left in the game.

Yesterday’s game was filled with high emotion that lent confusion to the opening of the game and some sideline excitement to the estimated 21,000 fans who sat through a break for more than two and a half hours.

The Keydets committed a strategic error when the rain was flipped for kick-off hour. VMI won the toss and elected to kick after Tech decided to take the goal with the wind.

"Told the entire team before we left the locker room that if we won the toss we would take the wind," lamented Keydet Coach Bob Thalman. "But, it was a tale in the beginning. But in the third quarter, excitement there was excitement, emotions and all, our captains got confused. Nevertheless, I accept the responsibility."

The game’s excitement carried to the sidelines late in the fourth quarter. Tech and VMI coaches scuffled in the end zone when a group of Hokie linemen approached the Tech sideline seats with a victory banner. After a few minutes of pushing and shoving, the police disbanded the excited students without incident.