Tech's Barry Miller

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BLACKSBURG—As football terms go, the tag "swing man" is among the least glamorous. More often than not, it implies that a player has the versatility to help out at a number of spot positions, but lacks the ability to master just one.

Virginia Tech's Barry Miller knows all about the stereotype, having played seeing action at tackle, guard and center the last three years. In fact, if he hadn't played Miller hadn't played so much during that span, he might even believe it.

"It makes me more confident to be playing one position," said Miller, who moved in as Tech's right guard when Mike Roy underwent knee surgery several weeks back. "I can't complain, though. They've always given me a chance to play."

At first it was just snapping for punts, but Miller started five of the last six games of the 1975 season at right guard when Larry Capps was injured and he also spelled center Balair Buskirk.

Next year, when Buskirk, tackle Rondal Davis and guard Keith Gibson graduate, the 6-3, 235-pounder from Vinton could fall heir to any one of four positions on the offensive line.

For the time being, he'd rather stay at right guard.

"I'll play anywhere they put me," said the good-natured Miller, denying he has covetous eyes for Buskirk's job. "I never even viewed thought of myself as battling Mike (Roy) for a position. When he got hurt, I didn't it never occurred to me that his injury would make me a starter."

Miller's humility is perhaps unbecoming for a player who enjoyed such success as a high
joyed unprecedented success as a high-school player. When he played at Radford, the Bobcats were 33-0, including state championships his sophomore and junior years.

"I don't know what it was, but when we went out on the field, we just knew we were going to win," Miller recalled. "It wasn't a tense atmosphere at all. Things were kind of loose, just like that they were getting they're getting around here."

Miller's teammates

Included among Miller's teammates were Maryland's Ralph Fisher, a certain high draft pick in the pros, and Southern Mississippi quarterback Kenny Alderman. Tennessee's Mike Mauck, who is sitting out this season with a knee injury, played on that team, as well as two of Miller's fellow Hokies, David DeHart and Billy King.

The number of former Bobcats playing for Tech was had reached five before lineman Jan Fisher and defensive back Roger Wills left school several weeks back. It was a troublesome time for Miller, who had been close to Fisher since their days at Radford.

"He was one of my best friends" said Miller.

"It bothered me for two or three days," Miller confirmed. "I hated to see him quit, but he felt like he was making the right decision."

While lack of playing time hastened Fisher's departure, Wills left school shortly after he made the traveling squad as a freshman. No reason was given but Miller said he isn't surprised that any freshman would want to leave.

"When I was a freshman, first came here, I must have told myself I was going to quit 100 times," said the good-natured lineman. "In fact, after we'd lost four or five games in a row, I came as close about as close as anybody can come."

While it rained outdoors, the Hokies were practicing in the fieldhouse and catching unmitigated abuse from the coaches. Finally, Miller decided he'd had enough and just picked up and headed for the door.

"I was about to open it when coach (Danny) Ford tackled me from behind. He made me come back and when practice was over finished we had it out.

"He asked me whether I was mad and I said, 'You're dag-gone right I'm mad'. And, then he told me I'd had my best practice ever. After that, he had me in the palm of his hand."

Miller's rebelliousness has long since been curbed and he remains a friendly, non-violent sort who would sooner jump off the back of the boat. He is reluctant to discuss the latest issue in Blacksburg—the return of George Heath to right halfback—explaining that he really doesn't pay much attention to who carries the ball.

Finally, he admits that "It did that it did kind of give us a psychological lift. When I watch them in practice, cutting off behind blocks, all the running backs look good to me."

It's only at the mention of the Hokies' opponent this week, the University of Virginia, that Miller's temper seems to flare. Not only is the memory of the only is the memory of Tech's 1974 loss (29-28) etched firmly in his mind, but Miller has special reasons for wanting to beat the Cavaliers.

"I got recruited there for a while," he recalls, "but they didn't feel "but they never offered me anything. They didn't feel like I was good enough to play there."

In a small way, it is a decision the Cavaliers have probably come to regret.