Hokies-Cavs: Offensive Battle?

By Mike Bevans

The last four Virginia Tech-Virginia games have not been lacking for points as each team has won twice on its home turf. This afternoon’s (1:30) 58th meeting at Scott Stadium in Charlottesville should be no different, because it just so happens that what the Hokies and Cavaliers do best on offense is what the other is most vulnerable to on defense.

Virginia Tech (3-2) employs a wishbone offense capable of exploding halfbacks Roscoe Colas and George Heath to the outside for long gainers. Virginia (0-5) has been burned on the corners and the Cavaliers have been most damaged by the big play.

On the other hand, when Virginia has been able to move the ball, it has been through the air as quarterback Andy Hitt has passed for more than 600 yards, despite completing only 42 percent of his aerials. The Tech secondary—plagued by inexperience from the start—has been furthered crippled by injury.

Four previous Virginia Tech-Virginia games have attracted crowds which rank among the top 10 at Scott Stadium. This afternoon’s engagement is a sellout and is expected to draw better than 30,000, which would give this series five places among Scott Stadium’s top 10.

Virginia’s Young defense will get its first look at the wishbone this afternoon and one features Colas, a junior who owns a Tech record 10 games of 100 yards or more rushing and who is working on a second straight 1,000-yard campaign.

“We haven’t seen the wishbone formation, but we’re going to approach it like any other game,” said Randy Eade, Virginia assistant coach in charge of linebackers, said earlier in the week. “We’re going to work to correct where our breakdowns have been.

“The wishbone incorporates the power offense with the option offense, so you’ve got to be concerned with both aspects.”

Hokie fullback Paul Adams (65 carries, 270 yards) will keep any defense honest up the middle while quarterback Mitchel Barnes is wishbone-smart. Colas, who has three straight 100-yard efforts (121, 115, 111) to his credit, has accounted for 435 yards on 81 carries.

“You watch wishbone teams and they’ll break touchdown runs of 40 yards, 50 yards, things of that nature,” noted Eade. “You can have it contained and, all of a sudden, BANG... someboby pops through there and they’re gone.”

ON ONE HAND you can contain it, but you better hang on to your hat, because you don’t know when that guy is going to break through there,” Eade added. “Virginia Tech runs their wishbone very well.”

Virginia will start a freshman and a sophomore at end, a freshman and a junior at linebacker and two sophomores at cornerback.

“Our tackling has left a little to be desired at times,” said Eade. “I think we need some concentration from our kids, a little more mentally involved in the game. It can be the cause for a big play.”

Virginia has scored five touchdowns this season and four have come on Hitt passes. All five scoring drives were powered by the aerial game.

At Washington, Hitt completed four passes for 47 yards of a 72-yard drive, while a 43-yard pass interference keyed a 62-yard thrust.

At Georgia Tech, two passes covered all 53 yards to the end zone, then four aerials accounted for 80 of an 83-yard march.

At South Carolina, two passes were good for 46 yards of a 52-yard drive.

“THEY HAVE GOOD receivers, they make good throws and they do a good job with their passing game,” said Buddy Bennett, Tech assistant in charge of the secondary. “They do a good job of running their routes, too.”

Junior Henry Bradley was the only starter returning from last year’s secondary, but he has seen limited duty because of a foot injury and he is questionable this afternoon. Sophomore Gary Smith has been sidelined for two weeks and isn’t expected back until next week.

In addition, the Hokies lost junior Rick Harman and sophomore Nick Rapone for the season before it started and since then have lost sophomore Gippy Belcher and freshman Tom Boody for the duration.

Sophomore Gene Bunn, who has managed to avoid injury and key the secondary, will start at one cornerback, while senior Tom Cooper, a former tight end who made his first start in the secondary last week, will be back at left cornerback.

Dale Babione, a junior who made the switch from wide receiver to defensive back a year ago, probably will start at free safety and Eddie Snell, Tech’s No. 2 quarterback until Monday, may get the starting nod at strong safety.

“THE SECRET TO a good pass defense is a good pass rush,” noted Bennett. “If we can get ahead and force them to throw, the line can lay their ears back so to speak and put the pressure on and we’ll get better play in the secondary.

“If we stop them from running, we’ll be able to take some pressure off the secondary and get a good pass rush. If we don’t stop the run, the secondary is going to have to keep coming up to help make the stop.”

The Tech secondary has yielded only 115 yards a game and two touchdowns through the air for the season.

“We haven’t been disappointed,” said Bennett. “They try hard and they’re learning. They make mistakes, but they make them at full speed. They haven’t made as many mistakes as some people think.”