Tech Isn't Ailing With Payne

By DAVID J. BISSET
Sports Writer

Football is truly the name of the game and Virginia Tech Gobblers proved that a strong punting game can do wonders for a team.

The Hokies were leading 3-0 against VMI last Saturday at the half then got an outstanding 70-yard touchdown run from senior Greg Payne which sparked both the offense and Tech's defensive units.

Payne, who hails from Hampton and plays football at Bethel High, declared Monday afternoon that his touchdown run was set up by some fine blocking.

"I didn't think I was going to make the touchdown until the last 20 or 25 yards when Chip Keaty threw a block and it opened a path for me," Payne declared.

Payne, who was a halfback and a punt and kickoff return artist in high school where he managed to break several punt returns for scores, believes that last Saturday's 70-yard jaunt was his biggest thrill while playing for Tech.

"It was my first one that I had ever scored," declared an enthusiastic young man. "It sure can't be for catching passes," he added laughing.

The Hokies churned out 372 yards against VMI last Saturday in the Tobacco Bowl and therefore the passing statistics are few. "I've caught just one pass this year and that was good for six yards," he remarked.

"That's why I put my all into the punt returns. I always feel that I can break loose and scamper down the sidelines either for six or to set up the team in scoring position."

"Our team works between 15 and 25 minutes a day, just on punt returns," Payne declared. "With my speed (which has been clocked between 4.9 and 4.5), I feel that my teammates can give me enough good blocks to spring me open and then it's just a matter of keeping your balance when opponents take shots at you."

At 5-10, 167, Payne feels that he's one of the smaller members of the team.

"I look around me some days in practice and see Rondal Davis (6-4, 246), or Barry Miller (6-4, 235), or even the "Whale", Keith Gibson (6-1, 286 plus), and I wonder if I should be playing. Then, when I see Dave DeHart (5-9, 180) who hits just as hard as some of these other guys I don't feel that small."

Football is a game of desire and your mental outlook can sometimes be the difference when playing. "We have a lot of people who are positive thinkers and I believe that after the William and Mary loss we did not dwell on the game, but began preparing for VMI thinking about beating them."

"That's probably why we won, we came ready to play and didn't wallow around talking about the loss to the Indians."

"Coach Sharpe stuck with the basics last week and we just went out and played the game the best way we could," he declared.

Besides returning punts for touchdowns, Payne who has a twin sister, but she is not attending Tech, says that on Sunday afternoon several of the football players enjoy just riding around and enjoying the beauty of this area.

"It may sound crazy but some of us hop in a car and go up in the woods. We don't do anything, but walk around and enjoy the natural beauty. I also enjoy hiking and camping."

"I'm not a fisherman nor do I hunt game, but I do enjoy this area," remarked the recreation major.

The senior, who will lose his football eligibility at the end of this season, but still has another full year to go before receiving his degree, hopes to get into recreation or public relations work when he leaves Tech.

Although not playing last year, Payne doesn't consider himself as a redshirt. "I worked out daily last season, but never played and my sophomore year I saw limited action but got enough experience to letter and join Va. Tech's letterman club."

"That year (sophomore season), I managed to intercept against Florida State and return it forty some yards," he declared. "Up until Saturday that was my only sports thrill."

TECH'S GREG PAYNE
Kickoff Return Artist