Cloud Of Astroturf

Mark Kozak

Anyone riding the team bus home from Richmond Saturday might assume the Hokies had just won the Rose Bowl instead of the Tobacco Bowl. And the VMI Keydets probably feel like they just played Ohio State rather than Virginia Tech.

The Buckeyes are known for their "three yards and a cloud of dust," offense. The Hokies pulled a chapter eight out of the Ohio State football machine book in amassing 332 yards total offense, all on the ground. On the Hokies only attempted pass early in the game, quarterback Michael Barnett was sacked on a safety blitz.

None of the Hokies will make the New Virginians, though, they tried hard in singing their renditions of "Alouetta," "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," and "Play That Funky Music" (a strange combination in itself). But one thing is for sure Tech finally found the consistency that produces an explosive offense.

"I knew if the team put it all together, we had the explosive potential," head Coach Jimmy Sharpe said. "We've got a great team when we quit making the little mistakes.

Sharpe has been saying all season that the Hokies were just small execution mistakes away from making the big play. "Today, we executed very well," he said.

Playing on astro turf before 21,000 people in Richmond's rinky dink City Stadium, the Hokies made all the big plays. Tech was also in control enough to save some of the young guns an embarrassing experience.

Dennis Scott, sophomore running back and a 9.5 printer who won the Virginia Intercollegiate 100 yard dash, took advantage of his playing time in style, scoring the ball two times for 38 yards, including 37 yards for the Hokies final touchdown.

Sharpe was also able to give his sophomore quarterbacks, Eddie Snee and David Lamie playing experience under slightly better conditions than in last week's loss to William and Mary.

Senior Greg Payne provided some of the day's biggest excitement with his punt returning. Payne, listed as a defensive back, has made a hobby of running back punts for touchdowns.

In the Spring games of 1974 and 1975 he returned punts for touchdowns, but missed out on a chance in the 1976 Spring game. Against the Keydets, he more than made up for it with a 27 yard return into VMI territory and a 70 touchdown run that put the game out of reach 23-7.

Payne's run was followed by one of the most emotional scenes since Wayne Latimer's 61 yard field goal. The whole Tech squad milled Payne in the endzone, picking up a five yard penalty in the process. No one seemed to mind, including Sharpe.

The keys to winning are desire, determination, and emotion," Sharpe said. All three were definitely there on Saturday.

A noticeable change in the Hokies running attack was the rushing and blocking of right half back George Heath. The Hokies had much more success getting around the corners and were able to do some lateraling farther down field instead of just behind the line of scrimmage.

Not only was Heath successful in springing Roscoe Cole, who had 11 yards on the day, but Cole returned the favor to Heath. Heath gained 67 yards including an 11 yard touchdown run, dragging two VMI players the last five yards.

Barnes had his best day execution wise, getting the ball out quickly to backs. He also showed that he is still a running threat himself with his 46 yard touchdown scamper.

The Hokies had a little extra incentive to win the game after losing their starting backfield. They decided in the team meeting Friday to give a game ball to Mrs. Stuart K. Cassell in memory of the late co-president for Administration.

"Stuart Cassell did as much for Virginia Tech athletics as any one else ever has," Sharpe said. "The team is honored to be to recognize his contribution."