UVa, Wicks To Attack
With Pass Against Tech

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Amid all the hoopla that has prefaced Saturday’s Virginia Tech-Virginia game, one recurrent theme has been the Cavaliers’ passing game.

Chip Keatley, who plays strong safety for the Hokies, swears that UVa quarterback Andy Hitt will come out throwing.

Tech Coach Jimmy Sharpe, supremely confident in his secondary, says he doesn’t care.

The Virginia camp remains noncommittal, reluctant as ever to renounce a powder puff running game.

“I can’t say as how we’ve emphasized the passing game this week,” said tight end Jim Wicks, who has become Virginia’s leading receiver four years after he was voted play defensive player of the year in Harrisburg, Pa., “but, I’m not sure I’d say anything even if we had.

“The coaches made sure we knew about their inexperience in the secondary. Up to this point, they’re the youngest we’ve faced.”

While he is far from conceived, Wicks figures he is enough of a veteran to take advantage of any defender’s mistakes. And, surprisingly, he gives part of the credit to former Cavalier head Coach Sonny Randle.

“When all was said and done, he was a great receiver coach,” said Wicks, who finished ninth in the ACC with 24 catches in 1975. “Mostly it was just fundamentals—little things like where a receiver positions himself in relation to the defender.”

Under Randle’s tutelage, Tom Fadden led the conference in receiving last year and Wicks had the most catches of any ACC tight end. But, while Fadden has been phased out gradually at flanker, Wicks remains a key figure in the Cavaliers’ attack.

“I was worried last spring when Coach (Dick) Bestwick took over; I wondered whether he would just neglect those of us who had been here,” Wicks confessed.

“At the time, he told us that wouldn’t be the case and, so far as I know, there hasn’t been a case a senior has been replaced by a freshman of equal talent.”

Wicks, in fact, had to fight off the challenge of two of the Cavaliers’ best freshmen. Louis Collins, a 6-5, 210-pounder from Highland Springs, eventually moved over to defense while Mike Newhall from Norfolk Academy remains Wicks’ backup.

“We must have started out with 10 players at the position this spring,” Wicks recalled. “I didn’t consider it an affront. In a way, I liked to think of it as a challenge.”

Wicks, who is 6-2 and 205 pounds, thought considerably less of another challenge. Shortly after he took the job, Bestwick called Wills into his office and offered him a shot at defensive end, where he had been a standout in high school.

“It was a casual chat; he mentioned that he would have made me a defensive end if I were just coming out of high school,” said Wicks, who politely declined Bestwick’s offer. “It’s funny—Joe Paterno once said the same thing when he was trying to recruit me at Penn State.”

Wicks says he doesn’t really think much about the turn his career would have taken had he become a Nittany Lion. He resisted a modest amount of family pressure to go to Penn State, reciting the traditional reasons—academics, beauty of the campus, etc.—as the basis for casting his lot with Virginia.

“Of course, I never expected Virginia to have the longest losing streak in the country when I came here,” he says ruefully. “When I make a decision, I try not to think about it; I try not to allow myself to have second thoughts.

“I don’t care who you are, though. You’re still bound to think about it.”