By JERRY VERNON

Sports Writer

Mitchell Barnes spent his first three years at Virginia Tech in a sort of limbo — working and waiting.

After an illustrious prep career at Southampton High School in Courtland, the quarterback rose to college football where he spent a lot of time thinking on the bench.

“Your going to get a little discouraged,” admitted Barnes of his on and off signal calling years at Tech, “but you have to realize you’re always going to get your chance.”

Barnes first opportunity came during his sophomore year when starting quarterback Bruce Arians was injured. The next year, as a junior, the 190-pound back-up signal-caller got the second chance he had been waiting for when Phil Rogers was knocked out of a match against Kent State.

Neither relief appearance won Barnes the starting job, but he refused to return to the bench with the present day Joetheismann ‘I want to play’ attitude. Instead, the six-foot Tech reliever figured he had proven a point.

“I think the coaches realized I could get the job done,” recalled Barnes. “I knew they would use me when the time came. So I just had to wait with positive thoughts.”

The junior quarterback’s optimism worked as he evolved into the helmsman of Coach Jimmy Sharpe’s wishbone offense this year, helping the Hokies to a 6-3 season.

“Too small, too slow, but he gets the job done, that’s been my trademark,” admitted Barnes. “It makes me feel really good to know the coaches have confidence in me. I’d say I’ve worked a little harder to get the job done.”

Most of his efforts come under the heading of psychology, as he said, “having confidence in myself.” More than anything else, as his teammates attest, this quality helped Barnes to the most mentally demanding job in football.

“You’ve got to have confidence in yourself,” said the mustached senior. “It goes with the position and it helps me and the team.”

This season Barnes earned Tech’s most coveted football honor. The Frank Loria Award, presented annually to the football team’s most outstanding athlete, was given to him two weeks ago.

“It means a lot just to play my position,” admitted the quarterback. “I mean winning the award and the team having such a good year is something I’ll never forget.”

Another memory that could cling to Barnes may not be as pleasant. The quarterback will find out Thursday if he performed in a Hokie uniform for the last time this past Saturday.

During a disheartening loss to Tulsa last weekend Barnes suffered what may be a fracture to his wrist. It could cut his senior year two games short.

“If it’s up to me I’ll be playing,” said the dedicated Hokie, “but if I can’t, I can’t.”

Despite Barnes modesty this week’s game in Richmond would be a tough one for the quarterback to miss since it’s in his hometown area.

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If I can’t, I’m sure David Lamie can do the job Saturday.’

—Mitchel Barnes

“It’s (the Richmond game) close to home,” said the Courtland native, “and some folks have labeled it Mitchel Barnes Day. So this game means a little more to me than it ordinarily would.”

Mitchel Barnes may have travelled a full circle since he came to Virginia Tech four years ago.

The senior quarterback could spend his final two games in Virginia Tech colors at the same place he began his Hokie career — on the bench.

“It’s up to the doc (Ed Ferrell),” said the hopeful Barnes. “If I can’t, I’m sure David Lamie can do the job Saturday.”

GOBBLERS’ MITCHEAL BARNES
May Not Play Against Richmond.