A Humbling Experience For Virginia Tech

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RICHMOND — Two weeks ago, Virginia Tech was looking for national recognition through a football bowl bid.

Now, the Gobblers are searching for respect in their own state after a humbling experience at City Stadium Saturday.

Richmond cornered the Tech running game and used an offense powered by some new faces to produce a 10-0 upset victory—else the Gobblers have waited for since 1974.

"I've had a lot of good victories, but this certainly has to be one of the best," said UR Coach Jim Tait after the Spiders had lifted their record to 4-4. "They (Tech) set goals on us two years ago of 680 yards and a shutout. Well, we set some goals, too. We reached them today.

Tech's earlier loss to William and Mary and Saturday's setback eliminated the Gobblers from "Mills Godwin Bowl" contention, just as last week's loss to Tulsa crushed Tech's hopes for a real bowl spot.

"Jim Tait and his staff did a super job of preparation," said Tech Coach Jimmy Sharpe, "and his team played with a great deal of enthusiasm—which we didn't.

"I thought we were ready to play. I don't think anybody can tell any more if they're ready. Our kids were kind of maybe too much so. I was hoping that was confidence."

Saturday's confidence belonged to Richmond quarterback Dave Taylor, starting his first game of the season in place of the injured Larry Shaw.

Taylor, a junior from Ocean, N.J., threw the first two touchdown passes of his career in the first half. His offense got a punch on the ground from familiar Ed Krellis, freshman Tom Thacker and Krellis' backup, Buster Jackson.

Thacker, playing in his first collegiate varsity game, rushed for 77 yards in 18 plays to pace the Spiders' rushing attack. Krellis and Jackson combined for another 130 yards on the ground and Jackson caught Taylor's second TD throw—a 35-yarder with 9:20 left in the first half.

Meanwhile, UR's defense, keyed by linebacker Orlando Branch and tackle Bil-ly Cheshire, slowed Tech's running game by limiting the first Rocose Coles to 41 yards on 16 tries.

Coles, who had hoped to reach the 1,000-yard plateau for the year, will need 41 more yards when the Gobblers—now 6-4—finish up next Saturday at Florida State.

Richmond's defense stopped Paul Adams on fourth down and inches at the Spider five-yard line midway through the first quarter, giving Taylor and Co. leeway field position. But 15 plays and 55 yards later, UR had taken a 7-0 lead as Taylor hit John D. Call with a seventh-yard scoring pass in front of the right corner of the end zone.

Most of that drive—completed with three minutes left in the first period—came via the feet of Jackson and Thacker. The only thing that stopped the Spiders during the drive was the antiquated City Stadium scoreboard clock.

The timepiece—which has two hands like a wristwatch and must have been invented just after the sundial became a no-go—stopped running for the second straight week.

Eight minutes later, UR took the ball from its own 38 and scored in five plays. Taylor found Jackson wide open near the left sideline and the junior running back scored on the 35-yarder.

With the clock operating again, it ran out on Tech's best scoring opportunity. Rushing three plays into the final 50 seconds of the first half, Richmond allowed the Gobblers only 23 of the three yards they needed to score. Three UR tacklers halted Coles inside the one on third and goal as time ran out.

"A fourth-quarter safety—when Ches-hire ran Tech quarterback Michael Barnes out of the end zone on a pass attempt—finally ended the scoring.

"We've played pretty well against the wishbone all year," said Tait after the Spiders had beaten Tech for just the second time in their last nine matches. "The big thing with the wishbone is it keeps the speed away from the corners and we did that today.

With a two-touchdown lead at halftime, Tait said the Spiders made definite plans at halftime designed according to their first-half success.

"We wanted and needed to control the ball in the third quarter," said Tait. "We had to run the ball to keep the clock on our side. The two drives we had (and) 10 plays in their own territory really ate up the clock. They made a big difference."

Tech's highly acclaimed defense played without star linebacker Rick Razzano who is suffering from a thigh bruise. But Taylor—who started just one game last season as the Spider signal caller—didn't think Razzano's absence made any difference.

"The heck with Razzano," said Taylor. "We've heard all this stuff about Tech all season. And two years ago they did all that talking about shutting us out (in a 41-7 Tech win).

"They said some things the last couple years they paid for today. It doesn't take too much to get up for Tech. We're always ready to play them."

Indeed, Richmond outclassed the Gobblers throughout the raw afternoon before a crowd of 20,200—UR's biggest home audience of the season.

"That time out (called by Barnes just before halftime after a penalty turned out to be crucial)," said Sharpe, remembering Tech's almost-score. "I'd have thought we'd have gotten it over in three plays...

"When asked if last week's 35-31 loss to Tulsa created a letdown for the Gobblers, Sharpe wondered. "We can say those things, but who knows?"

The Spiders pointed out that they've beaten two state foes by a combined 90-6 score—including a 43-0 pasting of VMI in September.

And Saturday, the Spiders proved that not everything's lost in a losing season.

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