Virginia Tech's Novell Will Finally Get a Chance

By BOB TETTLEBAUM
Sports Writer

BLACKSBURG — There's going to be a new look for Virginia Tech at defensive end this fall.

The happiest man about the whole thing will be Charles Novell, a 6-foot-1, 212-pound senior.

Novell, a product of the perennially successful Southampton program, has waited in the wings for three years to get his chance.

Last year, he was even beaten out at defensive end by a player some would call a shrimp for that position. Dave DeHart of Radford stood 5-8 and tipped the scales at a mere 177. Yet DeHart could carry out the assignment of defensive end better — so he won out over Novell.

"The coaches never said why I didn't start," said Novell, "but I always felt I was one of the best (defensive) ends.

"Last year I didn't get a chance to prove myself. I got to start the Florida State game (because of an injury to the other defensive end) and then I was back on the bench for the West Virginia game.

"Yeah, it was upsetting in certain ways. Especially when you've worked your butt off. You can get down on yourself, but you have to come back strong."

And coming back strong is exactly what Novell has done. He wasn't made the No. 1 defensive end at Tech simply because he's a senior.

First, Novell won the Frank Moseley Award for the most improved defensive lineman in spring practice.

Next, he reported back to fall drills last week in top shape. It is evident Novell is serious about making his last year at Tech a big one.

New Tech Coach Bill Dooley really didn't know what to expect from Novell. Though Dooley looked at past Hokie films last spring when he took the Tech job, this made little difference.

"I tried not to let films affect (my feeling) in any way," said Dooley.

"I know that he's (Novell) doing a good job. He's got good speed and he's strong. He's still learning some of the assignment techniques, but I can see physically he can do some of the things that need to be done."

While Dooley hasn't named any starters for the opening game against Tulsa here Sept. 9, it will be a major upset if Novell isn't in the lineup when the Hokies' defensive unit first takes the field.

"The way he's been playing," said Dooley, "I don't know who would beat him out. I'm not saying he can't be beaten out, but if the season opened today, he'd start."

Novell was recruited by all the major schools in Virginia and even the University of Tennessee — which he ruled out because it was too far away.

He settled on Tech because of Mitchell Barnes, then the Hokies' quarterback who also was from Southampton.

"I haven't played as well as I can," Novell admits.

"I couldn't figure out why DeHart was playing ahead of me. I felt I could outplay him because of my size and quickness. I really think I was the best defensive end last year."

But don't get the wrong idea. Novell isn't upset by the past and he's put it behind him.

"It was a down year last fall. I wasn't upset with Coach (Jimmy) Sharpe (who was head coach last year). Things just didn't work out," said Novell, who admitted he was vocal about keeping Sharpe when the school was trying to decide whether to retain him as head coach.

"When they change coaches, you have to prove yourself all over. It's like a fresh start. I was starting even with everyone. I think I proved myself this spring."

Now the ones to convince are the 11 Tech opponents. It appears that Novell will surely get his chance to do that.