'I Wanted To Stay in Virginia'

By BOB TITTLEBAUM
Sports Writer

BLACKSBURG — With a muscular frame and big build, Brooklyn native Nate Parker was a natural for gang leaders.

But it was one recruiting pitch the Virginia Tech linebacker resisted.

"For 13 years," Parker recalls, "I managed to keep myself in the right way. I've been approached by gang leaders, so I had to be determined.

"I've been asked to be in different groups. They'd say, 'C'mon man, get in the gang. We need you.'

"I wouldn't say much. I'd just keep going and I wouldn't argue with anyone."

Now Parker is a junior college recruit at Tech and might be the biggest catch in new football Coach Bill Dooley's first recruiting campaign.

Dooley wooed Parker, an All-American at Ferrum College, away from schools like Duke and Tennessee.

At Tech, Parker hopes to earn a degree in sociology with an idea of emphasizing law enforcement. Eventually, he hopes to enter the FBI or a similar agency.

Parker's choices of colleges came down to Duke and Tech. He had turned down Tennessee as being too far away from home, which he now labels as Virginia.

"I wanted to stay in Virginia," said Parker, who has more connections with the Old Dominion than meets the eye. "Coach (Hank) Norton (Ferrum) used to give me a rundown of players (from the state) like Ron Springs (Ohio State) and Russell Davis (Michigan).

"He told me that if state schools got players like those to stay here, Virginia (colleges) would have winning teams.

"One thing, I was born here and I like the state a lot. I've got a lot of friends at Ferrum who can see me play."

Despite his credentials, Parker still hasn't won a spot on Tech's starting unit. He has been as high as the second team, but his amount of playing time will depend on how fast he catches on to Dooley's system.

"I just think of it as if I was a walkon," said Parker. "They won't hand me anything. I have to earn what I get. I knew I wouldn't start. There have been guys here before me."

Still, when Tulsa plays here next Saturday, Parker feels he'll be one of the team's top linebackers.

tried to push me for Duke or pull me away from Tech. He really never tried to get me to go one place or the other."

Parker's career has been strange. He was an Iowa State recruit out of high school, but left after his freshman year. "I wandered a little bit too far away from home," he said.

The battle for Parker had been between Iowa State and Syracuse. Parker might have stayed in New York until "the Syracuse coach called and started to give me the lowdown on Iowa State."

That turned off Parker — unfortunately for him — and he wound up at Iowa State where he played as a freshman on the specialty teams.

"I was happy at Ferrum," he said of the school he attended after dropping from Iowa State. "I didn't know where it was or what it looked like. It was a big change from the city.

"But I got to know everybody. When the teachers call you by your first name, that's kind of a boost. At Iowa State I was in a class with 600 people and if a teacher saw me on campus, he wouldn't know who I was."

After he signed for Tech, Parker went into a program to build his strength.

"I'd say this has been my hardest summer. I was lifting weights to build my upper body," he explained.

Then things began happening. "I started getting excited on Aug. 1," said Parker. "Tulsa kept flashing across my mind. That's when the adrenaline started flowing."

Now Parker must fit in with Tech. He did at Ferrum and the Panthers had the nation's top JUCO team last year. All this is part of the reason everyone has always wanted Parker on their side — from the gang in New York to the football recruiters at places like Ames, Iowa, Durham, N.C., and even this town. It's nice to be wanted.

"Melvin wasn't distraught (when I chose Tech)," recalled Parker. "He never