FSU Represents The Tech Goal

The prelude to the battle, as one might expect, is the conversation about what looms as a classic confrontation between two of America's most gifted quarterbacks.

Any pro scout will tell you that Florida State's Gary Huff and Virginia Tech's Don Strock are among the top five pro quarterback prospects in the nation.

But that, as exciting and as promising as it may be, is not what Saturday's football contest between Florida State and Virginia Tech is all about.

You see, what Florida State is, Virginia Tech would like to be. And, although Gary Huff and Don Strock will have something to say about that Saturday at Tallahassee, in the long term they will not be so significant.

Seminole Are Winners

Florida State is a winner, a team with a national football reputation, a team that is a good candidate for a bowl appearance year in, year out. FSU is an independent university in a relatively small town. The Seminoles have basking in the limelight, they are currently basking where Tech is grooping. FSU's last losing season was in 1965. Tech's was last year, its third in a row.

FSU has been playing football for only a few years. It began in 1947, some 25 years ago, and it really doesn't seem to make much difference who has coached the Seminoles. They have enjoyed success almost since the inception of their football program. Don Veller, Tom Nugent and Bill Peterson (now with the Houston Oilers) all enjoyed a winning record. Last year, Larry Jones took over from Peterson and went 9-4, including a bowl game. This year he is 2-0.

How do you become a Florida State? It may be easier than finding the answer, but probably no one is more qualified to express an opinion than Dan Henning, the Tech offensive assistant of last year (now with Peterson at Houston) who has worked in both programs.

"What Florida State has now in difference to what Tech has," says Henning, "is that FSU is situated in a more football-oriented high school area. Last year, Tech got the best high school players in the area, but the difference is that some of those players who go into Florida State are going to be better schooled, football-wise, because of their excellent high school programs.

"It's not so much that the programs are better, but they have spring practice, they've had all-star games for a number of years. So an 18-year-old football player in the states of Florida, Georgia or Alabama may not be as good an athlete as the same player in Virginia but he has more football experience.

"Florida State's program became nationally prominent because they started getting some of those players and they found by playing the style of offense they play, along with a sound defense, they could compete. When Bill Peterson got the job, it took him five years to have an outstanding program. I don't think it will take that long at Tech."

Henning, although busy trying to figure out the best way for Houston to keep from losing, is still vitally interested in the Tech (and Florida State) programs. Tech's loss to Virginia Saturday did not go unnoticed.

"It slowed Tech down in the eyes of those who think recruiting is going to be the big thing," Henning said "but I feel, knowing Charlie (Coffey), they'll come back strong from that."

Henning bases his opinion on the personnel. "Tech, this year, has to be better than we were last year," he says. "They should be underdogs to Florida State Saturday, FSU has better personnel, but last year they were better than we were. This year they are not as strong and Tech is stronger. The possibility is there, with a great effort from Tech, to win the football game. But the odds are against Tech."

Henning Favors Strock

Henning, an old quarterback himself, coached Huff and Strock. He likes them both.

"Strock is a touch thrower," says Henning. "He has great touch on the short and medium pass. He has to strain a little to throw the long one, although he throws it very well.

"Huff has a strong arm, as strong as anybody's you'll see anywhere. Unlike Strock, he throws a driving long pass. But he doesn't have as good a touch as Strock does.

"Strock has him in height. Huff may be a little faster. In over-all athletic ability, Strock may be a little ahead."

Henning says the pro scouts are a little higher on Huff now "because of what Florida State is accomplishing. But you have to remember Huff is accomplishing what he is in a program which has been throwing the football and has been successful for the past 10 years."

And that is what the game Saturday, the confrontation between Virginia Tech and Florida State, is about. Success. Not just for today, but for the day after tomorrow.