SMU Toughest Yet For Tech Defense

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George McKinney figures he has a problem...maybe a whole lot of them. "How do you expect to cover three 9.3 receivers with a 10.6 defender?" the top defensive chief of Virginia Tech asked.

"And how do you stop a tough pair of 9.4 and 9.5 runners who have been averaging nearly 156 yards each per game?" "And what do you do about a quarterback who hasn't thrown much but has an arm capable of throwing it 60 yards in the air?"

McKinney has been working all week grooming his Tech defense for what might well be its toughest opponent of the season—the big, fast, young and unbeaten Mustangs of Southern Methodist University.

SMU roars into Lane Stadium tomorrow afternoon at 1:30 bent on making the Gobblers victim No. 3 this season. Tech, itself, is just as aroused for a victory...something it has been denied in two games this season and is badly needed to get Explosion '72 off the ground.

An expected crowd of 30,000 is expected for the Gobblers' first home game.

Hoyt Fry of SMU admits he has been more than pleased with the play of his Mustangs. But he also points out the youthful look of the team (44 of the 70 are either freshmen or sophomores) and claims the team still has to prove itself over the long haul.

"But we have some truly gifted athletes," Fry said. "It's by no means a matter of size. We have had 11 years at SMU. We could become an exceptional team."

Fry claims the Tech game is a must if his young Mustangs are to continue to improve and become a factor in the Southwest Conference race and gain national ranking.

When Fry talks of great gifted athletes, he is not telling McKinney or the rest of the Tech staff anything that hasn't had them more than a bit concerned all week.

SMU can offer such speedsters for receivers as Rufus Shaw, who claims he is the fastest player in major football; and the Poony twins—Joe and Gene, the two-time SWC 220 and 100 champions, respectively.

In the way of runners, the Mustangs can offer Alvin "Duck" Maxson, who is being boomed for All-American honors and is the nation's top scorer with six touchdowns in victories over Wake Forest and Florida; and Wayne Morris, a big but elusive freshman who reminds McKinney of O.J. Simpson.

Leading the way for this terrible duo will be veteran fullback Dennis Howell while at the controls will be quarterback Casey Orten, a rugged 6-3, 195 pounder with the big arm.

"But we have two other quarterbacks who have come on strong," Fry said. "I have promised all three they will play tomorrow." The other two are Keith Bobo (5-10, 170) and John Blackburn (5-11, 185).

"We'll have to be ready when they kick it off," said McKinney. "We sure can't wait around like we did at Virginia and Florida State. We weren't ready to play either game."

The records back up McKinney's contention. Tech has yet to score in the opening quarter this season.

"SMU doesn't do a lot of fancy things," he said. "They give you a lot of different sets and run the same things. But they run them darn well."

"We'll gamble some but not a lot. We can't afford to slant and blitz too much. We have to have a lot of people around the ball. We can't let Morris or Maxson break the long one on us."

Tech must get pressure from its defensive ends and down linemen and some top play from its linebacker corps.

But defense isn't Tech's only problem. Offensive chief Wally English also has had some sleepless nights trying to figure out how to run and pass on the Mustangs, who lead the nation in defense against the run.

The Gobbler offensive line will certainly face its toughest test of the season. The front four of SMU is an awesome group. Then there is middle linebacker Leonard "Mad Dog" Carey and cornerback and return specialist Kris Silverstone, who broke a 60-yard punt return at Florida.

If they weren't enough, there is Robert Popelka at safety who was named to six pre-season All-American teams.

Tech is the Techman fears the most.

"He's a great one," Fry said. "Every time I look at him in the films I get more concerned."

"But Tech has a sound, well-coached team. I know how hungry they will be for a win...especially since it's their first home game. They'll have a lot going for them. It will be up to us to be ready."

Coach Charlie Justice claims this Techman deserves a victory. He believes the team has shown steady improvement and needs only a win to become a real tough ball club.

Brock could use the air lanes more than he has in the opening two games. But his line will have to give him the protection needed. The offensive line, which quite likely holds the key to the whole game, also must provide some running room for J.B. Barber and freshman star Paul Adams.

The Tech seniors will have an added incentive. They have never won a varsity game in September and this is their last chance.

SMU was to arrive in Roanoke today but Fry planned to afternoon workout.

"We are a little superstitious," he said. "We haven't practiced on Friday all season and we have been winning so we'll just keep it up."

Tech would like to put the Mustangs back on a Friday practice schedule by pulling off a big upset and at the same time provide some true ammunition for Explosions '72.