Tech's defense holds SMU, 13-10

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How beautiful can defense be? Super!
Playing against one of the most dangerous running teams, SMU's Alvin Maxon, Virginia Tech's defense last Saturday gave a performance that certainly was one of the greatest of all time. It definitely will be etched into the annals of history alongside other great defenses of the '60s. And maybe there's something special for Techmen when it comes to opponents trying to score that final strip at the north end of Lane Stadium.

Coach Charlie Coffey, quivering at the magnitude of the defensive effort, declared: "Not enough can be said for the defense. It was the greatest I've ever seen."

And it was poetic justice that the Tech "D" should stop the Mustangs with 13 seconds to go at the one-yard line to preserve a hard-fought 13-10 decision.

Coffey exuded confidence, not surprisingly, that the Techmen were going to stop SMU's last attempt. It wasn't surprising because Coffey had placed utter confidence in the defense even in the half. Decision to choose play into the wind during the third quarter.

When the Gobbler defensemen managed to maintain field position in the third period, the skies started to brighten, literal and figurative.

In that third quarter, Tech's "D" turned the ball over four times to the offense, twice deep in SMU territory. For the day, Tech's offense had possession 14 times, while the defense was on offense 25 times inside the Gobbler 25 that at the 19.

Before the season started, Coffey predicted that the Hokie defense would be improved, especially at the linebacker position. In the last two games, the accuracy of his foresight has become increasingly evident.

Against the dangerous Mustangs, Tech's linebackers sophomore Tom Shirley and juniors Don Sprouse and Kent Henry accounted for 27 tackles, 12 assists, three

fine plays in breaking up passes, an interception and a blocked field goal attempt and return.

"Of course, we expect our linebackers to make a lot of tackles, that's our defensive design," Coffey commented. "But there's no question that as a group they had an especially fine day."

Maybe the key to Tech's unrelenting defense was best exemplified by tackle Bill Ellenbogen. The one-time SMU is crack the bulwark. Maxon turned the corner on the Techmen and went 79 yards (partially nullified by a clipping penalty). Ellenbogen, pursuing across the field, missed Maxon near midfield. But as Maxon dived-dodged his way down the field, Ellenbogen picked himself up from the ground and made the tackle at the 11.

"That's the kind of effort it takes to play winning football," Coffey declared.

It's also the kind of effort that will be recorded as beautiful.

Tech suffered a blow early in the game when senior offensive guard John Schneider sustained a knee injury that will sideline him for an extended period.

Mike Burnop, Tech's record-breaking receiver last year, in the first quarter made a tough catch on a blooper for a two-yard loss. "I probably should have knocked it down, but I had to have the reception they're too hard to come by this year," he joked. (Last year he averaged 4.2 a game. So far this season he's caught only six in three games).

James Barber (42) plunges for a gain. Barber led Tech in rushing against SMU.

Kent Henry (58) blocked an SMU field goal attempt and carried the ball to the Tech 16.