Barber, Tech Vow To Beat Fumble Problem

BLACKSBURG—You have just fumbled six times—losing three of them to the enemy. Two of your bobbies were inside the opponent’s five-yard line with possible touchdowns or almost certain field goals being lost in the process.

Your team has to settle for a 27-27 tie with a highly-favored opponent. There were those in the stands who were wondering why the coach even put you in the game and why the quarterback ever called your signal.

Just what do you say and how do you feel after this personal nightmare?

Well, if you are J. B. Barber, junior tailback at Virginia Tech, here is what you talk about to a friend in the Tech dressing room here Saturday after the despair and disappointment of an encounter with Houston.

“I feel bad—but I’ll get over it. I can’t explain what happened. All week we have been preaching ‘don’t fumble... don’t fumble.’ That’s about all I have been thinking about.

“I kept telling myself I wouldn’t fumble. Everytime when they called my play I said, ‘I’m not going to fumble. I’m not going to fumble.’ Honestly, I don’t remember fumbling. I don’t know what happened.

“The worst I felt all day was on that last fumble. I bit for the goal line. I thought I had scored. I remember lying there on the ground and realizing I didn’t have the ball. I felt like digging a hole and covering myself up. I felt sick all over. But I still don’t know what happened.

“I still think I might wake up and find out it was all a nightmare. But I’m determined not to let it happen again. I’m going to lick this thing. I can’t wait until next week. I’m playing against Oklahoma State.”

They Pulled His Arms

Wally English, offensive chief at Tech, agrees with Barber, who made little of the fact he played with an injured left wrist.

“James is a dedicated young man,” said English. “It’s his hands and his arm and he’s carrying the ball. He’s the one who has to convince himself he can do it. But I know he will. I have a lot of faith in his ability. It was just one of those games.”

English said a close review of the game films showed that one of the bobbles was due to a poor handoff from quarterback Don Strock, a fact Strock admitted just after the game.

Two other fumbles came after he had passed the apparent tackle only to have his arms grabbed and to lose possession.

English said much talk and work would be devoted early this week to curing the fumble problems. “But then we probably won’t mention it again Friday and Saturday,” he said.

“There are pros and cons about what to do,” he continued. “I really don’t know which is the right approach.”

But head coach Charlie Coffey had said earlier that there would be an extra amount of work, emphasis and talk on the subject of fumbles.

“We didn’t mention it when we were fumbling earlier in the season,” he said. “That didn’t do any good. Now we’re going to try the other approach. I’m not going to sit in the same saddle and not get anywhere.”

He Thinks of the Team

It was a shame that Strock couldn’t have enjoyed the fruits of his record afternoon. The big senior had one of those games all quarterbacks dream of but only a very few realises.

He hit on 34 of 53 passes for 257 yards and suffered only two interceptions. Oddly enough, with all of this successful bombardment, Strock failed to pass for a touchdown.

“Strock had a sensational game and that is the under-statement of the century,” said a shocked Bill Yeoman, coach of Houston. “I have never seen a better single exhibition. He simply picked us apart.”

English said films of past Houston games showed the Cougars played a tight five coverage for the short pass and only two deep men.

“We just tried to hit them in between,” English explained. “We also saw they sent their middle linebacker after our fullback and running back. So we sent our right end over the middle. You can see it worked pretty good... in fact, it was almost perfect. I never saw such an exhibition.”

Coffey and Strock agreed it took a lot more than just passing to pull off the big aerial game. There was the blocking of the offensive line and the receivers, who ran great routes and made some big catches.

 Tight end Mike Burnop, who had only six catches in three games, grabbed eight and Nick Colobro, his relief, had two. Burnop had 117 yards in receptions and English quickly pointed out that two other receivers at least hit the 100-yard mark—Craig Valentine 5 for 140 and Donnie Heel 5 for 100.

Still Have That Gleam

The tie left the Tech players and coaches perplexed.

“The score today could have been just the reverse of last year’s 33-29,” said Coffey. “We could easily be 4-0 instead of 1-2-1,” said Strock, who always seems to evaluate his personal performance in regard to team success.

“What did you think of the way you played?” Strock was asked.

“Well we tied, didn’t we,” he replied.

“You’re kidding,” said Coffey. “You can’t say that.”

“Well, I nearly did,” he replied.

“Yeah, but look at your record. How could you expect anything more?”

“I know. I guess it was a pretty good afternoon. But it would have been a lot better if we had won. I’d pretty much trade half of those completions for one more point.

Despite the disappointment and the fact the Tech record isn’t what he would like, Coffey still maintains this will be a successful year for the Gobblers.

“These kids are coming,” he said. “They are improving all the time. We can have the gleam in their eyes and that glare on their faces. We’ll win and win more than our share. Just wait and see.”