Tech, Cowboys Offer Offensive Contrasts

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Virginia Tech has an aerial attack deluxe but continues struggling to establish a running game.

Oklahoma State seems to think it simply slows down the operation to put the ball in the air. It is perfectly content — and most successful — using its wishbone offense to move by land.

Thus it should be a real battle of offensive contrasts Saturday afternoon in Lane Stadium when these two cross-country rivals clash.

How's this for contrast? Don Strock, who might be the top passing quarterback in the nation, has hit on 87 of 159 tosses for 1,150 yards in four games. This is an average of nearly 300 yards per game.

Meanwhile, Brent Blackburn, the mite-like quarterback for the Cowboys, has thrown only 28 passes in four games — that's right. He has hit on only nine for 186 yards.

However, there is one interesting sidelight to these figures. While Strock has 87 completions to Blackburn's 9, he has only three touchdown passes to four for the Cowboy.

Now, let's take a quick look at the running of the two teams.

Tech has managed a net gain of only 471 yards in four games. Blackburn has more than that alone in running the wishbone to perfection. He has 490 to rank among the nation's leaders.

Brent Blackburn
Cowboys QB

Oklahoma State is among the top four in the nation in running yardage. The Cowboys have 1,532 yards in four games for a lofty 381 average — just 90 short of Tech's season total.

While Blackburn is the leading rusher, he gets plenty of help from fullback George Palmer, a 6-1, 210-pound sophomore who is ripping off the yardage at the rate of 7.5 per carry.

Fountain Smith, a 5-8, 170 speedster, is averaging 4.9 per try.

Oklahoma State is so loaded with young running talent, coach Dave Smith decided last spring to move his second leading rusher of 1971 to defense.

Cleveland Vann, a 6-1, 228-pound junior, claims he has found a home at middle linebacker. He enjoys making life miserable for opposing runners. He was credited with 17 tackles last week as the Cowboys edged Missouri to run their record to 3-1.

But Vann isn't the only defensive star for Oklahoma State. There is Barry Price, a 6-1, 235-pound junior who is talked about in Big Eight circles in the same breath with Nebraska's Rich Glover.

One publication which named Price to its pre-season All-America squad had this to say about him: "He is the least publicized player on the squad. But ask Cowboys opponents. They rave about him and many think he is better than Rich Glover."

The Cowboys come to Blacksburg with wins over Texas-Arlington (21-3) and Colorado (31-7) in addition to the edge over Missouri. The only loss was by 24-23 at Arkansas.

Tech, meanwhile, has been disappointed with its 1-2 record. Coach Charlie Coffey claims the state might just as easily be 4-0. The win was a 13-10 decision over Southern Methodist. The tie was 27-27 last week to Houston while the opening losses were 24-20 at Virginia and 27-15 at Florida State.

Blackburn is well remembered by Coffey and his turning players. The little quarterback ripped off a 79-yard scamper in the final period as the Cowboys held off a Strock-led surge for a 24-16 decision last year.

Blackburn might be the smallest major college quarterback. He stands only 5-11 and weighs just 161. But this is still 10 pounds more than he weighed last year when he wrecked the Gobbler hopes.

Colorful Pat Quinn, the Oklahoma State sports information director, likes to talk about his team.

"We aren't far from being a real top team," he said. "We have been dreaming and hoping for many years. Now we're just a step away. We are much improved — especially in our offensive line and overall on defense. We can be an outstanding team before the season is over."