T-D Stars Of The Week

Each week, the Times-Dispatch honors state college football players for outstanding offensive and defensive performances of the previous weekend.

This week’s winners are a pair of Virginia Tech standouts, quarterback Don Strock and linebacker Tom Shirley, stars in Saturday’s 34-32 Gobbler victory over Oklahoma State.

Strock, who was honored just last week for his work in the 27-27 tie with Houston is the first repeat winner since Howard Stevens won TD recognition twice while playing for Randolph-Macon. Stevens now is at the University of Louisville.

Previous winners (besides Strock), have been William and Mary quarterback Bill Deery, Washington and Lee and Chappy Conrad, W&M tailback Doug Gerhart and Virginia Union’s Anthony Leonard (offense) and Virginia tackle Tom McGraw. Virginia Tech defensive tackle Bill Ellenbogen, Richmond safetyman Bob Loprete, Virginia defensive tackle Dick Ambrose and Virginia linebacker Danny Blakey.

HOKIE HEROES: Shirley...

Take a look at the statistics. Oklahoma State ran the ball 73 times for 356 yards. That’s an average of 4.9 yards per tote, a lot of averaging.

They had been averaging 380 and 5.5.

"There were a lot of (defensive) mistakes," said Virginia Tech coach Charlie Coffey after the 34-32 Gobbler win over Oklahoma State Saturday. "But you’re going to have some when you’re playing against great backs."

At various times during the Homecoming contest these mistakes reared their ugly heads. But, then, these same heads were put back down and so were the Cowboy running backs.

"THERE WERE," Coffey added with emphasis, "a lot of big plays in that game."

Don Strock made a few, as usual for the record-setting passer; John Sprenkle, defensive tackle, made a couple, including the fumble recovery that set the Gobblers in motion for TD No. 2; Bill Ellenbogen, the other tackle, recovered the fumble that led to TD No. 4; safety Jerry Scharnus had an interception and a 39-yard punt return; Dave Strock had a 53-yard field goal and the 18-yard effort with 12 seconds left that provided the margin of victory; linebacker Donnie Sprouse, recovered the fumble that set up the winning field goal.

And sophomore linebacker Tommy Shirley had a couple.

“If he continues as he is now progressing,” said linebacker coach Bill Clay, “he’s going to be a great one.”

Already, there are those who liken him to the man generally considered the best of the middle linebackers. “He’s going to be another Dick Butkus (Chicago Bears),” is the word, “He’s getting stronger and better every week.”

This past weekend, he was strong enough to make five tackles of Cowboys without help and assist on 10 others. He graded 81 per cent when the coaches read the game films. And he caused two fumbles.

That last fumble he caused was the one Sprouse recovered and Dave Strock later kicked for the winning points.

Not a bad afternoon for a 19-year-old (6-2, 222 pounds) from Roanoke who made his first start three weeks ago (Tech 13-10 over SMU) and is now the "key" to a rejuvenated Gobbler defense.

For making the "big play" often, The Times-Dispatch honors Tom Shirley as Defensive Player of the Week.