Saturday Could Determine If VPI Has 'Come Of Age'

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Fresh from its come-from-behind homecoming victory over Oklahoma State, Virginia Tech goes on the football road to oppose an erratic Ohio University team.

Saturday's game can go a long way toward determining if the Gobblers have really come of age or if they have been living in a cloud in their home Lane Stadium.  

Tech opened its season with a loss to Virginia 24-20 at Charlottesville, then lost again against Florida State University 27-15 in Tallahassee.  

According to the players, that's when the team came of age. The Seminoles had a big first quarter, then the Gobblers rose and out scored and outplayed them over the final three periods.  

The Techmen came home and in three weeks defeated SMU 19-10, and blundered into a tie with Houston, 27-27, before the big victory Saturday.  

The players believed they have matured in this brief but difficult homestand.  

"We think we can play with anybody in the country now, we may lose, but we won't be outclassed." This sentiment, expressed by defense senior tackle Bill Ellenbogen was echoed by teammates in the locker room after the victory.

RICH BEVLY  
Ohio Sophomore Ace  
over Oklahoma State.  
Now they go back on the road to face Ohio University. The Bobcats have won three and lost the same number. The word on the Athens, Ohio based team is that they win the games they aren't supposed to and lose when they are favored.  

If that's the case, The Gobblers may be in for a tough time, yet Tech should be a strong favorite.  

The Bobcats have defeated Central Michigan (26-21) Toledo (38-22) and Cincinnati (26-14). They have lost to Miami of Ohio (31-7) Idaho (17-14) and Kent State (52-14).  

"They use a defense we haven't seen this year. It's a monster scheme we used at Arkansas, but they play it differently. They rush anywhere from four to eight men and use a whole bunch of different coverage on pass plays," Tech Coach Charlie Coffey explains.  

The Bobcats will be busy Saturday, stopping or attempting to stop the Tech passing game.  

Don Strock, the Tech quarterback is considered one of the best, if not the best passing quarterback on the college scene this year. He has completed 197 of 199 attempts for 1,905 yards and five touch downs. A dozen of his passes have been intercepted.  

"Don is level-headed and doesn't go into the dump about the interceptions or get overly excited about the completions or the scoring passes," Coffey adds.  

"Don is as good as there is," the coach concluded. Bill Hess, the Bobcat coach, gives Coffey's statement a strong "amen."  

Hess says Strock is the best throwing quarterback he has ever coached against and that includes Purdue great Les Dawson and Bob Greise; John Brodie of Stanford and Greg Cook of Cincinnati. The four are all pro standouts.  

Coffey says the Gobblers will continue to stress the pass this year even though the opposition is looking for it. "We spent more time Tuesday preparing for our passing game. I get a thrill out of a thrown pass. I like to throw the ball myself."  

Coffey explained why he likes the passing game.  

"Before I became head coach at Tech, I worked a lot as a defense coach. I found that teams with good passing games often did better against my defenses even though my team had the better players.  

"Players like to use the passing game. They enjoy the practice and it's something our kids can work on all year round.  

"Our kids smile when we put in a new pattern, they like to add to our passing game," the coach concluded.  

Coffey says Tech had been "up" for the past four weeks and could suffer a let-down.  

"We think our players are mature enough now to handle a situation like this. If we suffer a little let down, we expect them to get together and rise to the situation."  

Ohio University's ace is its sophomore quarterback, Rich Bevly, who leads the team in rushing with 447 yards on 113 carries. As a passer, he has completed 41 of 77 for 639 yards, eight touchdowns and had nine intercepted.  

The Bobcats have been plagued by injuries with their top two backs hurt before the season started.