Gobblers Overcome Southerners

By BILL DRILL
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BLACKSBURG — It took the Strock brothers a half to warm up this blustery fall Saturday, but they came alive just in time.

Quarterback Don Strock shook off the worst half of his career to fire two second half touchdowns, and brother Dave put on the clencher with two of the longest field goals in collegiate history.

Dave Strock's mammoth, wind-aided kicks of 69 and 59 yards put the finishing touches on a hard-earned 27-14 victory for Tech over stubborn Southern Mississippi.

For two periods, however, Tech had a Tobacco Bowl hangover. Even after converting a Southern Miss fumble into a quick touchdown and preventing a score with another fumble recovery in the third, the Hokies trailed 14-7 at intermission.

Southern Miss had gained the lead by completely stifling Don Strock, the runaway national leader in passing and total offense.

Putting a fierce rush on Strock, the Southerners held Tech to a mere 63 yards in first half offense. Strock, who misfired on his first seven attempts, had only four completions in 15 tries and brilliant Ray Guy had intercepted twice. Strock had just 17 yards in offense.

But as Southern Miss coach Pear Underwood sadly noted, "You don't keep a good man down all day. Strock is a helluva passer."

Strock did his thing right away, thanks to a change in the Tech plan.

"We found out they were giving us the flat to the strong side," said Tech coach Charlie Coffey. "So, Tech lined up up琢磨 flanker Ricky Scales at tight end and, boom, the Hokies got a big touchdown."

Strock started the second half with a 16-yard strike to fullback Rodney Schnurr. Then came the flat, strongside pass to Scales from the Tech 40.

"I felt the ball behind the scrimmage line at the sidelines. He reversed his field, went against the grain and outran all defenders on a 60-yard play for a school record sixth TD by passing," Coffey said.

Scales did all the work, but in made Strock's statistics look much better.

"That play got us back in the game," Coffey said. Southern Miss didn't fold.

The Southerners marched to the Tech four, but on third and inches, quarterback Buddy Palazzo tried to roll out and lost a yard.

In again, end-ball Guy, the nation's punting leader and a man who now has eight interceptions in as many games. This time, however, Guy missed a chip-shot field goal from the 11.

Tech returned the favor, however, after moving behind Strock to the Southern Miss five. Dave Strock missed a 25-yard field goal from extra point range and it remained tied. After another fumble recovery by Tech, Strock again failed from 46 yards.

But now Tech had the brick wind at its back, and Strock could throw spirals instead of wobblers. He hit Scales for 16 yards to the 25, then on third down from the 22 threw a perfect strike to flanker Craig Valentine, cutting between two defenders at the five. Valentine took the ball in stride and scored standing up. Dave Strock made it 21-14 with 12:46 left.

Tech now was in full charge.

After a short punt by Guy into the breeze, the Hokies were in position at the Southern Miss 41. Three plays gained just six yards, but in came Dave Strock. He booted a 50-yarder, the longest in Tech history and one of the longest in football history.

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Tech Tops Southerners

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The Lane Stadium crowd of 25,000 went wild.

Less than three minutes later, Strock did it again. This time he was on target from 35 yards and Tech had its fourth win against three losses and a tie.

Tech had taken a quick 7-0 lead after linebacker Dennis Dodson recovered a Doyle Orange fumble at the Southern 22. J. B. Barber gained 13 yards in two tries, then scored from the three. But that was it, for Tech in the first half.

After Wilson Plunkett fumbled the ball away at the Tech three to blunt one drive, Southern Miss tied it suddenly.

Freshman Barry Gibson fielded an Andy Hromyak punt at his 36, sprinted to his left and went untouched 64 yards down the sidelines for the touchdown. This was only the second game for Gibson.

Guy then set up the go-ahead score. He intercepted a pass unwisely thrown by

Strock under pressure and returned to the Tech 23. "Don was trying to make something out of nothing," said Coffey, "but that Guy is a thief!"

Palazzo got the TD on an 11-yard pass to tight end John Sawyer and it was 14-7 at halftime.

But it was all Tech after intermission as the Strock boys unfolded their talents.

"We didn't do anything different in the second half except put in our "wind" offense," Coffey said. Strock had his first three passes dropped, and, Coffey noted, "He subconsciously quit zinging the ball."

Strock wound up the day with 14 completions in 35 attempts, his worst percentage of the year. But he totaled 260 yards and now has 2,499 yards passing as he zeroes in on a 3,000-yard year, something that has been accomplished only four times in NCAA history.

However, Strock did have his string of consecutive 500-yard passing games halted at four, one short of the NCAA record held by Tulsa's Bill Anderson (1964) and San Diego State's Dennis Shaw (1969).

Of more value, though, was the victory. It helped erase some of the sting of last week's shocking loss to William and Mary.

"I was extremely proud of the comeback," Coffey said. "For a while, it looked like another William and Mary game."

In the end, Tech had one Strock too many for Guy and Southern Miss.

Times Photo by Howard Hammersley Jr.

Ricky Scales On a 62-Yard TD Jaunt

Waiting

Times Photo by Howard Hammersley Jr.

Tom Shirley of Roanoke, Virginia Tech's outstanding linebacker, watches the VPI-Southern Mississippi game Saturday. Shirley is out of action with an injury.