Kid Kicker on the Spot

Let us take one moment, please, to empathize with a young man and a situation he might face Saturday afternoon:

Your name is Bruce McDaniel, and you have come to Virginia Tech to play football without a scholarship.

You are a freshman and a punter, nd as you prepare to make only your second punt in a varsity game, you suddenly realize you are standing in your end zone at Denny Stadium and the screams of 60,000 people are making your hair hurt. A moment before the center snaps you the ball, you see the blood red shirts of the University of Alabama mass at the line of scrimmage and prepare to fire at you.

And you are scared to death, right? Wrong.

"Punting is my job," said Bruce McDaniel, who hasn’t been around long enough to know if things can go wrong, they will. Very confidently, he added, "Saturday afternoon at Alabama, I’m just going to do my job."

Less than three days ago, nobody in the Tech camp figured McDaniel’s services would be required for the 1972 season. The Hokies not only had another punter, they had a very good one in Andy Hromyak, a senior from Richmond’s Heritage High School.

Hromyak was a remarkably consistent punter, averaging 41.4 yards on 42 kicks. Then, late in the third quarter of Saturday’s game against South Carolina, he made a touchdown-saving tackle. In preventing the Gamecocks’ C.A. Wilson from going all the way on a punt return, Hromyak broke both bones in his left forearm.

When they assisted Hromyak off the field and out of the Tech picture for the rest of the season, that left only McDaniel to handle a vital chore for the Hokies.

TECH COACH Charlie Coffey appeared somewhat less than confident that McDaniel could adequately replace Hromyak.

"When he goes in for his first punt down at Alabama," said Coffey, "he may not even see the snap."

McDaniel punted once in the fourth quarter against South Carolina. It was a 29-yarder, and he said, "I didn’t hit it good."

His statistics for the Hokies’ junior varsity demnostimates, however, he can be much better than a 29-yarder. IN FOUR GAMES WITH THE Tech JVs, McDaniel punted 25 times for a 45.3 average.

"I don’t know what he’s going to do at Alabama," said Coffey, "but I know the kid has got an awfully strong leg, and he’s been dying for a chance to kick in a varsity game. I didn’t think it would turn out like this, though."

In order to get McDaniel ready for Alabama, tech coaches will give him a crash course in punting tactics and pressure.

"We’ll kick him under a heavy rush almost every practice day this week," said Coffey, “especially when he’s kicking out of the end zone. We’ll try to teach him when to take a safety and not give up an easy touchdown. We’ll try to teach him everything we can in three days, and I really don’t know how much we can do."

Despite his uncertainty about McDaniel’s ability to handle the tense and unusual situation, Coffey was heartened by one development. “After the South Carolina game,” said Coffey, "Bruce walked up to me and said, ‘Coach, don’t worry about it, I’ll handle it.’"