Tide Pursues National Title

By BILL BRILL
Times Sports Editor
TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — "If we win our last three games," an Alabama man said, "I think we will win the national championship."

Bear Bryant, the famed 'Bama coach, badly wants that fourth title. He hasn't won one since 1965, although 'Bama fans believe the Tide's unbeaten team of 1966 was deprived of the championship.

Alabama starts its stretch run for No. 4 Saturday afternoon (2:30 EST) against upstart Virginia Tech. After playing the Hokies, the Tide has a regular season meeting with Auburn on Dec. 2 and a bowl date against Texas on New Year's Day.

There is a story behind the Cotton Bowl bid, which can not be officially accepted until after the Tech contest. A lot of people who believe they know Alabama football well believe that the Tide is playing the numbers game, looking for a Southern California defeat.

Alabama is purposely avoiding either Nebraska or Oklahoma, so they say, to take Texas, a team which lost to the Sooners, 27-0. 'Bama people feel, 'tis said, that Texas would be far easier to whip than either Nebraska or Oklahoma.

A high-scoring game is in prospect before the 57,000-plus fans in Denny Stadium, where it has been a sellout for weeks. The weather forecast is not favorable, though, with a 30 per cent chance of rain. The temperature will be in the mid-50s.

Alabama has a powerful running game, led by quarterback Terry Davis. It was Davis who destroyed unbeaten LSU last week, rushing for one touchdown and throwing for two more as 'Bama won, 35-21. For his play, he was named co-back of the week.

'Bama does not have any individuals with impressive statistics. But the Tide has so much depth that nine players have run for more than 100 yards and a tenth has gained 96. 'Bama rushes for nearly 300 yards per game.

Tech, now 5-3-1, offers the Strock brothers. Don leads the nation in passing and total offense and Dave is tops in field goals and kicking points.

'Bama has been surprisingly vulnerable to the pass, Tech's best weapon. LSU's Bert Jones threw for 232 yards last week and two TDs.

Tech's chances of moving the ball are very good, even though Alabama's line is huge. The Gobblers' chances of stopping the Alabama wishbone are not nearly as hopeful.

Alabama is favored by up to 24 points, but Bryant is not impressed.

"We can not afford to lose," he said.

That may be Tech's greatest handicap.