BLACKSBURG—Nicknames often are ridiculous and none more so than Virginia Tech linebacker Tommy Shirley being called “Midget.”

“Giant” more nearly described his physical hulk even before he became a serious weight lifter. And now he considers himself “bigger, stronger, and faster” than last year when as a sophomore middle linebacker he blossomed into stardom for the Fighting Gobblers.

He never really enjoyed lifting weights until last winter when he pushed himself hard to rebuild from a late season knee injury. At one point during the winter his weight got to 238, dropped to 233 at the end of spring practice and now he’s a svelte 227, aiming for 225.

During the spring he moved to an outside linebacker position, and he says he feels even more at home than he did when he was stationed at a virtual middleguard position.

Most of all he has gained confidence, most of it from playing experience, “but weight lifting in itself is a confidence builder too.”

There’s no question in Coach Charlie Coffey’s mind that Tommy is going to become a great player, and the name Shirley should be