Dennis Dodson wants a bowl trip

By LEE WOOLF
Staff Sports Writer

"My personal goal is to play in a bowl game. We're figuring on being somewhere besides home over Christmas this year. That's how Dennis Dodson, who with brother, George, will leave for Virginia Tech next week to begin fall football practice views the fast-approaching college season.

Dennis is a senior linebacker and George a sophomore wide receiver. Both went to James Monroe High School where they starred in the three major sports - football, basketball and baseball.

Concerning his attitude going into his senior year, Dennis commented, "By now you've learned what's required of you as an individual and as a team player. You realize that you can't say things like, 'Oh well, we'll get Virginia next year.' There are no more next years."

Both Dodsons are optimistic about Tech's potential in spite of a heavy schedule. "Alabama of course will be the roughest game we'll have," stated Dennis, "but Florida State, Houston and SMU will all be tough. We added West Virginia to our schedule this year and with their speed, they'll pose a real problem for our defense."

Tech will open its season Sept. 6 in Blacksburg against William & Mary, a team that defeated the Gobblers by one point last year. It was a loss that helped knock the Gobblers out of any bowl possibilities. "We have some real breakaway threats this season," commented Dennis. "The team will be very young but there's a lot of talent."

Tech's opening lineup figures to have three seniors in the defensive unit. The offense will have an experienced line, but a young backfield and receiver corps.

The biggest problem for coach Charlie Coffey will be to replace quarterback Don Strock, who led the nation in passing and total offense last year.

The leading contenders for Strock's vacant position are juniors Bruce Arias and Ricky Popp. Arias is the better runner of the two and Popp the better passer. The Dodsons say fans are likely to see Tech use the veer offense often this season regardless of the quarterback.

This summer has been a busy one for the Dodsons, who coached bantam baseball league teams for the City Recreation Department in the mornings, then switched to playing tennis and working out in the afternoons and playing softball for their father's Dodson's Security team at night.

Tech players have been in touch with the Dodsons throughout the summer by mail. During the past five weeks, the Dodsons have been training according to workout cards which they have received from Tech.

Dennis has followed the linebacker workouts which consist of weight training, agility drills and running. George, a former quarterback, has done a great deal of running as part of the wide receiver training. His workouts consist mostly of running patterns and agility drills.

Both Dodsons are near playing weight as they enter the fall practices. Dennis is at 215 pounds and George about 190. "I usually get to school at two or three pounds over my playing weight," says Dennis, "but this summer we've worked harder."

George played at 200 last year as a defensive back on the freshman team. He was switched to wide receiver in spring practice and lowered his weight to 190 where he has maintained it over the summer. "I like it much better at wide receiver," he says. "I just need to improve my quickness and get some playing experience."

George will be playing behind junior Ricky Scales of Martinsville, who the Gobblers are touting as an All-American candidate.

In the past, however, Tech has carried several wide receivers on their traveling squad due to their extensive passing game with Strock and the emphasis placed on receivers blocking down field on running plays. "I know my chances of starting are slim, says George, "but I should get some playing experience and I hope to make the traveling squad."

By having players defensive back last season, I should be able to recognize the coverages pretty well. Having to work against Strock in practice last year should help me too."

Dennis began last season at middle linebacker but gave way to sophomore Tom Shirley. Shirley was injured in mid-season and Dennis came on to replace him with some fine performances late in the season.

This year Dennis should open at the middle position, with Shirley and senior Kent Henry at the outside spots.

"I felt like I had a good spring practice," says Dennis, "but there's still a lot of work ahead. We'll have to go about 8-3 to make a bowl game."

The Dodsons will face a conditioning check when they first arrive at Tech and then endure 10 days of double-practice sessions.

Dennis pointed out that Tech didn't lose a home football or basketball game all last year. "We really appreciate the support we get from our alumni. We think we have the best around."

If the attitude of the Dodson brothers is a reflection on the success Tech's athletic program is going to produce this year, times for the alumni will be very enjoyable.