Kentucky Staves Off Gobblers’ Comeback

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LEXINGTON, Ky. — Fran Curci began his coaching career at the University of Kentucky on a winning note Saturday, but just barely.

The Wildcats squeaked past Virginia Tech, 31-26, after holding a 31-6 lead at halftime.

The Gobblers were still in contention in the last minute when quarter-

back Rick Popp’s fourth-down pass to Steve Galloway trickled through the receiver’s hands at Kentucky’s 40-yard line.

Virginia Tech’s late rally deflated the 48,000 Wildcat adherents who were on hand for the opening of 56,000-seat Commonwealth Stadium.

For the first 30 minutes Kentucky controlled the game, gaining 210 yards on the ground and 84 in the air.

The Wildcats had eight possessions; scored four touchdowns, a field goal, punted once, lost the ball on a fumble and ran out the clock at the end of the half.

In the second half, they also had eight possessions but were forced to punt five times; one was blocked, fumbled away the ball twice and ran out the clock at the end of the game.

Coach Charlie Coffey’s Gobblers had the opportunity to win the game. In the third period, the Gobblers ran out of downs on the Wildcats 30, 7, and 32.

The latter two were set up by fumble recoveries.

The Gobblers’ Charles Martin recovered a Wildcat fumble on the one. Two thrusts into the line gained nothing. A penalty for illegal procedure pushed the ball back to the six. Popp lost a yard and Wayne Latimer missed a 25-yard field goal.

Latimer missed field goals

when the other drives petered out and it looked as if the Gobblers would wind up completely embarrassed.

Norfolk’s John Bell ignited the Gobblers by blocking a John Tatterson punt at the...