Thacker gives Tech Sparrow with power

By BOB McLELLAND
Sports Editor

When Doug Thacker was a senior at Cave Spring High he weighed only 165. He was an offensive fullback and defensive linebacker.

But it was at linebacker that the competitive youngster caused the most havoc. And much of the havoc was caused with his own teammates. "Man, Doug would strike anything that moved," said Cave Spring Coach Charlie Hammes. "He wasn't the biggest thing in the world but I never saw anyone hit anything harder. Heck, we had trouble finding people to run offense against him. He was killing his own players."

Now, three years later, Thacker isn't much larger (187) but he is still putting the hurt on folks—his Virginia Tech teammates and their opponents.

Thacker will be the starting left defensive end for the Gobblers Saturday afternoon at 1:30 in Lane Stadium when the team opens its season against an experienced William and Mary squad.

Thacker's size causes him to get a lot of nicknames from his coaches and fellow players. The coaches call him "Sparrow" and most of his teammates call him "Birdman."

"He's a little man who doesn't know he's little and he certainly doesn't play that way," said Tech assistant Tommy Brasher.

Defensive end coach Monty Crook is another of Thacker's big fans. "He's a No. 1 competitor," says Crook. "He has quickness and the reaction to make a mistake and still recover."

"He's a very intense and hard working young man. He never lets up. Maybe that's why he doesn't gain weight. But let me tell you, I never saw a tougher youngster. You have to see him to believe him...then you doubt yourself."

Jim Heizer, a former teammate at Cave Spring, was to open at the right end spot against W&M. But he isn't fully recovered from an ankle injury and will be relieved man at the line for Larry Bearekman. A pair of freshmen—Norris Rutherford and Larry Blunt—will be the swingmen.

Due to his size and his admitted disappointing record in the classroom at Cave Spring, Thacker wasn't rushed with college offers. He had wanted to attend Ferrum Junior College. But his dad talked him out of that and instead sent him to Staunton Military Academy.

"That was the smartest thing I ever did," Thacker said. "I guess it proves 'Father Knows Best.'"

Thacker became an instant star at Staunton. He moved his weight over the 190 mark for the first time in his life and did such a terrific job at linebacker, he won All Military honors and received several college offers.

Tech, Tennessee, North Carolina, Pittsburgh were just a few of the schools bidding for his services. VMI was in the running but he told them one year of military was enough.

His older brother, Mike, had been a regular defensive end and linebacker three seasons at VMI. Mike was even smaller than Doug but just as tough. He has served a tour in Vietnam and is now employed by the Appalachian Power Co.

"He called me a traitor when he heard I was going to Tech," Doug said. "But now, he's over it, I guess."

Doug sees no special drawback in his relative lack of size. The only time he claims he's in trouble is when a play comes straight at him and the big tight end puts the squeeze on him.

Thacker thinks Tech has a host of talented runners. He rates sophomore Paul Adams as the one who will put more hurt on you. He thinks Phil Rodgers, another sophomore, probably is the most elusive.

"But they're all good," he quickly adds. "Just wait and see."

Thacker realizes W&M will prove a big test for him and the rest of the Tech defense. Bill Deery, the Indian's quarterback, is one of the best around. He hit on 13 of 20 passes for 176 yards and one touchdown last year when the Indians upset Tech 17-16.

"Deery is the kind of guy who can break open a ball game," Thacker said. "He's probably their best runner and he can pass. This will cause us a lot of problems. The big thing is not to make any mental mistakes."

The nicknames and kidding don't bother the rugged young man from Cave Spring. He just keeps knocking down anything that moves in a different colored jersey.