Tech, Not Punter, Seeks ‘Break’

By Harold Pearson

When it comes to talking about the breaks of the game, Bruce McDaniel, sophomore, qualifies as authority-in-residence at Virginia Tech.

And, when it comes to having added incentive for a trip to Morgantown, W. Va., and a game against the Mountaineers of that state’s university, Bruce McDaniel is also high on the Hokie list of authorities.

The former has been a help to him in his pursuits since late last season, while the latter, he figures, will serve well Saturday, when the Hokies try to halt a two-game losing streak against West Virginia.

To set the record straight, McDaniel has been one constant in an otherwise inconsistent Virginia Tech outfit and, as punter, he just might have been the only Hokie escaping a verbal “sinning” from coach Charlie Coffey after last week’s dismal, 31-26 loss to Kentucky.

In that one, he averaged 44.6 yards for five punts (one a 50-yarder) and boosted his average for two games to 43.3. “I should have kicked better,” McDaniel admitted telling Coffey afterwards, “because they weren’t putting up much of a rush.”

Thing is, he’s been kicking better ever since coming back from a hard rush and the second of those “breaks of the game” last season, when he had three punts for an average of 28.7. It isn’t likely he’ll ever forget his final try of 1972.

It came a week after the regular Hokie punter (Andy Hromyak) had tried to turn tackle and, for his effort, got both bones in his left arm broken. And that of freshman McDaniel a start the next week against Alabama.

“I knew what it was (like),” he recalled the other night. “I had been kicking for the JVs (45.3 average), but I knew every level was different.”

He was not scared, as a “lot of people thought.” But on his third punt against the Crimson Tide, he got one of those “breaks of the game” to his left ankle. “It was just a freak accident,” he remembered of the play in which everything, except his broken ankle, was nullified by an Alabama official.

“It helped me. I gained a lot of discipline. I told myself that I could just lie down and quit or I could get up and shoot for my goals.”

McDaniel, who came to Blacksburg as a non-scholarship athlete but hasn’t “paid a cent,” doesn’t have a lot of goals — “Go for No. 1 as everybody should,” he said — because “you shouldn’t ever be satisfied. I would like to break the record (46.2 by Ray Guy, who punted for Southern Mississippi last year).

“Looking at him (Guy), I’m about a 5 on a 10-point scale. I hope I can move up.”

That’s as close an estimate as McDaniel will give of his potential. “I have no idea. I just want to do better each game and benefit the team.”

He would like, also, to do the placekicking “but right now, Wayne Latimer is way superior to me and I wouldn’t want anything to happen to him.”

So, for the time being, he will just try raising his scale rating, which he figures will be easier for him this week.

He knows he will “have to hang it up because Danny Bagges (the West Virginia TD threat with each touch of the ball) is tough. But I will have special incentive — since I’m from West Virginia.”

That he is. The 6-1, 180-pounder is from Beckley’s Woodrow Wilson High School. While there, he was a punter, placekicker, offensive and defensive end, being named All-State as a kicking specialist his senior year.

Did the Mountaineer scouts swarm all over him?

“They said I wasn’t good enough for them,” McDaniel said. “Then, last year, they tried out the student body for a kicker.”

Bruce McDaniel KNOWS about special incentive for West Virginia.