Tech's losing streak big puzzle to Barber

From Staff Dispatches

DALLAS—J.B. Barber, the Virginia Tech runningback who has made more touchdown runs than anyone in Hokie history, sat in the crowded training room.

It looked like the emergency room at Community Hospital. Doctors were whisking around. A couple of guys had scissors in their hands. The only things missing were the white coats.

Barber had a gash on the bridge of his nose, an injury suffered in an afternoon of agony on the Texas Stadium Tar- tan playing surface. Southern Methodist had just pasted the Hokies 37-6.

"Isn't there something we can do about this?" Barber asked Tech trainer Eddie Ferrell. Ferrell moved in for a closer look. "We're going to have to get you another headgear," Ferrell said.

"It hurts," Barber said, pointing to his injury which he originally suffered in the Kentucky game. "It was all right for awhile today... until one of those guys really fried me."

It was an afternoon of being fried. The synthetic surface was hot. SMU was hotter.

But, as they say, there's always next week. Actually, Saturday's opponent, South Carolina, gives Tech the best chance at victory in three weeks. In losing to West Virginia and SMU, the Hokies lost to superior teams. South Carolina, however, is not particularly strong. The Gamecocks lost to Oklahoma Saturday night.

Tech, however, has reached the point where the morale is dangerously low. "It is really discouraging, losing four games in a row," said Barber. "And it seems to get worse every week. It's hard to understand. I thought we had a pretty good football team. I was really looking forward to the season. But then we lost those first two we should have won, then these last two weeks..."

"It seems like every time we get something going we mess up some way. Like today, we fumbled again at critical times. (Tech lost f o u r fumbles, two of them at times when it had an excellent opportunity to score.) We're making too many mistakes. I keep thinking we'll quit making them but we don't."

Although the Tech offense blew some good opportunities, it was the defense again which was really outplayed. Tech gave up 560 yards rushing, the highest in SMU's history, against a team that made it perfectly clear it didn't intend to pass. The Mustangs went to the air only four times. Of course, there was no reason to pass.

"It's hard to figure," said the tobacco-chewing defensive tackle Tom Turner. "We go out and have good practices all week, then play like this. They say you play like you practice, but we don't. We've really worked hard lately, and you can see what we're getting out of it."

"We've gone out every Saturday thinking we were going to win. But it hasn't worked out that way. One of these days we're going to start winning when we do it. We'll keep it up.

Tech is obviously missing something. There appears to be some unrest on the team, although you could probably expect some after four losses. However, Tom Shirley, Tech's best linebacker, didn't start. Neither did wide receiver Rickie Scales. Both played. Steve Galloway, once considered one of Tech's best receivers, got in in the second half. It was his first action in two weeks.

Outside the dressing room, a Tech supporter, his orange jacket slung across his shoulder, looked down as if counting the air holes in the concrete. Maybe he was thinking about the $800 or so he had just spent for a miserable weekend in Dallas.

"Something needs to be done," he said finally. "No, something has to be done."

But what?

—BILL GATE