Latest Disaster Leaves Gobblers Short on Depth

By Bill Millsaps

Almost every day holds a new disaster for Virginia Tech’s hard-pressed football team, and Saturday’s contest with Southern Methodist University was a real beauty.

In the process of taking a 37-6 beating that dropped their record to 0-4, the Hokies lost, through injury, all three linebackers who started the game.

Bruce Dodson, a 215-pound senior who opened in the middle, was again sidelined by a chronic neck ailment he has been battling for three years. Weakside linebacker Kent Henry, a 212-pound senior, suffered a torn knee capsule. Jack Crews, a 6-4, 215-pound sophomore who played brilliantly on occasion against the Mustangs, sustained a severe ankle sprain.

Dodson is a questionable performer, and Henry and Crews are almost certain to miss Saturday’s battle with South Carolina in Blacksburg.

While Charley Martin is an experienced hand behind Dodson at middle linebacker, the Hokies have a very green look at the strong and weakside linebacker positions. Veteran Tommy Shirley will start at the weak side, but he’ll be backed by junior Mike Thomas, who has played little. Two freshmen — Stuart Patterson and Bill Schress — will split time on the weak side.

All told, nine Hokies missed Monday practice with various ailments. Included on the casualty list were sophomore quarterback Steve Mathieson (broken collarbone) and tight end Chuck Perdue (knee), out for the season.

Tech coach Charlie Coffey said yesterday the Hokies would ask the NCAA not to count Mathieson’s brief appearance against SMU (his first of the season) as a year’s eligibility. The 6-5, 215-pounder participated in only eight plays Saturday before being injured. “And it was on a late hit, too,” said Coffey.

“I think the NCAA will concur with our request, which will come from Dr. Wilson Bell (Tech’s, faculty chairman of athletics).”

Also among the missing Monday was sophomore running back Phil Rogers, who has netted 423 of the Hokies’ 732 rushing yards thus far this season. Rogers has an injured shoulder, and he worked out under a “hands-off” policy yesterday.

“I’m hoping that the Good Lord is not as severe on us this week as He was last week,” said Coffey. “I can’t believe this will keep up. I just can’t.

“Every day, there’s a new problem. It’s very, very strange.

“We’ve had a lot of bad things happen to us, one right after another. What we need more than anything now is a bunch of good things to happen to us, one right after another.”

Coffey does not read newspaper sports sections and therefore did not know of yesterday morning’s story that South Carolina coach Paul Dietzel has a painful abdominal ailment which will prevent him from making the trip to Blacksburg.

After being told of Dietzel’s health problems, Coffey said, “To tell you the truth, I’ve been thinking about not showing up for the game myself.”