Lack of wins, not TDs worries Tech's Rogers

By BOB McLELLAND
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Phil Rogers must feel like a man running on a treadmill.
He’s been gaining yards at a record pace but he doesn’t seem to be getting anywhere. He has yet to score a touchdown and he and his Virginia Tech teammates have yet to gain a victory.

“I wouldn’t mind not scoring if we could just win,” Rogers said. “I don’t care how many yards I run, it’s no good without winning. I’d trade it all to beat South Carolina Saturday.”

Tech has lost four straight and spirits are dipping low in Hokieland. But it could also become a bit brighter if the Gobblers could manage to knock off the Gamecocks when they come to Blacksburg Saturday to help Tech celebrate homecoming.

Homecomings have been most enjoyable in recent years for the Techems. They have won 12 of their last 13. The only loss in the string was a 7-6 decision to Kentucky in 1969.

Rogers, a 5-11, 178-pound sophomore from Gate City, isn’t the swiftest of runners. Actually, he claims lack of speed and blocking are his two major weaknesses.

But he has the natural ability to dart in and out of traffic and leave defensive backs grabbing at air. It is because of such talent that Rogers received his nickname in high school and carries it today at Tech.

“They call me F.P.,” Rogers smiles. “They started it back home when they called me Phantom Phil.”

Phantom Phil has taken the ball 67 times for Tech this season and checked off 430 yards for a healthy average of 6.4 yards per carry. He also has grabbed 15 passes for 43 yards, giving him a total offense of 473 yards.

Yet, he hasn’t scored a touchdown. And that must bring the kind of frustration to Rogers his fellow Gobblers must have for their four losses.

“I really don’t know what’s wrong,” Rogers said. “I don’t think it’s any one big thing...just a lot of little ones, all coming at the wrong times.

“No, I don’t feel good about it. None of us does. We all feel like we have taken some ‘downers’. But there is nothing wrong that a win wouldn’t cure. If we beat South Carolina, just wait and see what we can do the rest of the year.”

Although Rogers has natural running ability, he has improved himself with hard work. He spends much time developing a quicker start and has drills to better follow his blockers.

“But sometimes I just go out by myself and work,” he said. “I get in an open field and imagine things. I pretend there is a defensive man here and there and then I try to set him up for a block.

“It may look silly but it helps.”

Rogers would like nothing better than to throw a few of his “phantom” moves at the Gamecocks Saturday. And he’d like to know how it feels to score his first varsity touchdown.

But, more important, he would like to enjoy the sensation of Tech’s first 1973 victory.

“Now, that would be a real ‘upper’,” he smiled.