VPI Runner Hopes To End Frustration

By STAN SHALETT
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When the Virginia Tech football team takes to the Astroturf tonight against Houston, senior running back James Barber will be seeking another good performance, hoping to remove some of the frustrations he has had so far this season.

"For a senior, this is a tough year," Barber said in a telephone interview this week. "You'd like to go out with a winning team. It's difficult for you when the team is 0-5 as we are right now."

Barber added that the younger players, the juniors, sophomores and freshmen who man most of the Gobbler squad are enthusiastic and are trying hard to help the seniors get on the winning side.

"Experience is what we're lacking. Last year when we got close to the goal line, the guys up front would just suck it up and hit harder enabling us to score.

"We have a lot of very young blockers on our offensive line and they haven't learned yet what to do in similar situations." Barber, the leading career touch-down scorer in the history of Gobbler football, has been thwarted several times this year from inside the 5. This is part of Barber's frustration.

"I miss Don Strock," the Charlotte, N.C., native said.

"Strock not only could move the ball, he was a great leader. Ricky Popp will be a good one, but he doesn't have the leadership quality yet, mostly because of inexperience.

"I try to do what I can, but it's the quarterback who does the talking in the huddle."

Barber explained the most frustrating part of playing out his career this year is the fact the team will be better after he's graduated.

Tonight's game could add to Barber's personal frustration as well as the teams as well as the rest of Gobblers'.

Houston is 4-0 and ranked 14th in both wire service polls. The Cougars have averaged 487.5 yards a game on offense and have rushed for 356 yards a game. Both figures place them fourth in the NCAA statistical list.

This kind of awesome power will be going directly against the Gobblers' weakness. Virginia Tech has yielded an average of 426 yards a game to five opponents.

Coach Charlie Coffey's team can move the ball yards per game themselves. Barber has picked up 396 yards running, a shade behind team leader Phil Rogers who has 498 yards so far this season.

"It would be nice to play another year with Phil," Barber said. Barber is majoring in Sociology and will go to graduate school if he doesn't make it in professional football. "It's a long shot that I'll even get drafted, tonight's game in the Astrodome will be part of the learning process for the Gobblers. It could be a painful lesson."