Gamecocks Kill Hokies

By JERRY RATCLIFFE
Times Sports Editor

BLACKSBURG—Two “coffin corner” punts and two interceptions by South Carolina’s Gamecocks erased the hopes of 38,000 Virginia Tech Homecoming fans here Saturday, when the ‘Cocks whipped the winless Techmen 27-24 in Lane Stadium.

Tech had hoped to get back on the winning track after four straight losses, but things just didn’t turn out for the Hokies, now 0-5, with the shadow of the University of Houston looming ahead next Saturday in the Astrodome.

Virginia Tech started things off with a bang when quarterback Rick Popp hit wide receiver Ricky Scales on a 76-yard pass on the second play from scrimmage to give the Hokies a 7-0 lead which enlightened the fans, and even a conservative figure like Coach Charlie Coffey must have been a little optimistic.

But with 10:44 left in the first quarter South Carolina marched down the field to tie it up at 7-7.

Coffey, taking advantage of a loophole in the new “unlimited substitution rule”, used sub quarterback Greg Mullinax to simply run the play into the huddle on each down, then promptly turn around and run back to the sidelines waiting for further instructions, no one leaving the field or anything, just simple running the plays into the huddle and that’s it.

South Carolina soon took the lead when quarterback Jeff Grantz directed the Gamecocks down the field using running backs Jay Lynn Hodglin and Randy Spinks.

The drive climaxed when placekicker Bobby Morino booted a 42-yard field goal with 3:46 left in the first quarter for a 10-7 lead.

Tech, using James “Jungle” Barber and Phil Rogers in a dynamic running game, moved well on the next drive but ended up punting into the end zone.

At that time, South Carolina, without head coach Paul Dietzel (who was hospitalized earlier in the week and forced to miss the game), inserted its second team line for one series and Tech methodically stopped them. Tech came charging back to tie the score at 10-10 with 12:18 in the half on a 35-yard field goal by Lattimer when a third and one pitch by Popp rolled seemingly endlessly back to the Tech 18, which may have thwarted a potential Gobbler touchdown.

It took South Carolina only moments to regain the lead. South Carolina, using an awesome running game that saw the Gamecocks rush 68 times, kept the ball on the ground on eight plays to march 76 yards ending on an option pass. Grantz pitched to running back Hodglin, which sucked the Tech secondary up expecting the run. But rather than run, Hodglin passed the ball to a wide open receiver Mike Farrell at the 10, who turned and ran it in for the score and with the kick, the ‘Cocks led 17-10 with 9:29 left in the half.

Coffey’s winless Techmen were determined however. Barber, who gained 164 yards rushing for the day, gained a first down, and three plays later Ricky Scales was called on for the first of two end around plays which took Tech to the Gamecocks 36.

Scales, who’s back among the living now, after some several bad games recently, starred on the next play also, catching a breathtaking fingertip bomb by Popp at the one from 36 yards out, then scoring on the run, not breaking stride. Wayne Latimer’s boot made it 17-17 with 7:46 left in the half.

Much of South Carolina’s success of the day came off their ability to convert the third down play. The Gamecocks converted nine third down plays into first downs which accounted for several lengthy time-consuming drives.

Grantz started the final USC touchdown drive from his own 20.

A long run by the very good Grantz, along with a personal foul penalty tacked on, gave Carolina a first down on their own 40.

Grantz hit flanker Eddie Muldrow with a pass at the Tech 43 for another first down. On a third and eight situation, again the ‘Cocks came through when Grantz hit tight end Marty Woolbright at the Hokie 38 for a first down. Grantz hit Jack Thomas and Woolbright again down to the Tech 7 and another first down after being faced with a third and one.

Grantz scrambled to the one, and three plays later on a fourth and one, spoiled Tech’s goal line stand effort by keeping on an option to the left for the score. A good kick made it 24-17 with 2:36 left in the half.

Tech tried to narrow the lead with an attempted 52-yard field goal by Latimer with a minute, eighteen left to play but it was way short of the mark and the Gamecocks led 24-17 at the half.

USC got the ball back in the second half on the kickoff and finally delivered the eventual death blow to Tech on a 36-yard Marion boot for a 27-17 lead. In that drive, Grantz made his first incompletion of the game.

But then came the most exciting moment of the game for the Hokies when freshman George Heath dropped the ball and Billy Hardee picked it up and raced 96 yards with it for a touchdown on the ensuing kickoff. With 11:11 left in the third period, Tech had narrowed the margin to 27-24, and then it really got interesting.

VITAL MOMENTS

South Carolina tried to put together a scoring drive on the next series, converting several third down situations to march from their own 24 to the Tech 44. But defensive end Doug Thacker stopped Grantz and company cold on a third and eight situation.

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Gamecocks Rip Tech

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and the Gamecocks were forced to punt. But wisely, USC did not punt into the end zone, but rather had punter Bobby Reynolds to boot the ball out of bounds in the “coffin corner” at the Tech one yard line.

Tech was in the hole and had to punt it’s way out, but even with that Carolina ended up with fair field position on the runback to the VPI 43.

Again the Hokies held, but again Reynolds hit the coffin corner at the four yard line of Tech and things seemed helpless.

Popp tried to pass his way out, but little C.A. Wilson, 5-9, 145 defensive back for Carolina, alertly picked off a pass intended for Barber, on a leaping dive after the ball bounced out of Barber’s hands.

So, USC had the ball on the Tech 41. From there the Gamecocks drove the ball down to the 21, from where Grantz, under heavy pressure from Tech defensive tackle Tom Beasley, hit Woolbright at the four. Grantz rambled to the two on a 4th and one situation for the first down.

On the next play, some of Tech’s luck prevailed, when a hard hit made Andy LeHuep cough up the ball with Tech’s Bill Houseright recovering at the three.

The game had moved into the fourth quarter now.

Popp hit Hardee at the 35 on a pass then used Barber on the option to the 41. From there Phil Rogers of Gate City, ripped to the SC 49.

Two plays later, however, Carolina’s Gary Mott picked off an underthrown Popp aerial at the Carolina 40 to stall that drive.

Carolina couldn’t move the ball on an inspired Tech defense and punted away.

Popp went to the air again but a third and 13 situation arose with less than 10 minutes left from the Hokie 35. The end around to Scales proved timely again as he raced to the 48 for a first down. Two plays later, however, Carolina, expecting passes, intercepted another Scales pass at the 26, Henry Laws doing the damage.

That came with 7:05 left in the game.

Laws had been beaten consistently in the first three quarters but turned the table this time.

Grantz and Spinks moved the ball to the 45 from where Grantz hit Farrell on a leaping catch at the Gobbler 9 which appeared to be certain doom for the Techmen.

But Tech held for the second straight time, with the fourth down pass incomplete to Farrell in the end zone with Morris Blueford covering.

Tech got the ball back with 4:04 left on the clock.

Then entered freshman quarterback Eddie Joyce of Salem, Va. Joyce was making his first varsity start, after actually working with the varsity for only a week. Joyce had the Gobblers moving as Barber broke loose from his two to the Tech 40. Soon, Popp re-entered and the Hokies, on a fourth and three with 3:07 left from their own 47 decided to punt the ball.

Actually when they did, they kicked the game away too. Carolina had the ball at their own 19 and on third down Grantz was dumped for a big lose by onrushing Housewright and Beasley.

USC punted to Tech with 58 seconds left in the game and the Hokies started from their own 42.

But instead of Popp, Joyce came in under the heavy pressure. Joyce was dumped twice as receivers were covered, with end Monty Mathews sacking the freshman both times for 12 yards in losses. Popp came back in but too late with a third down with 32 seconds left.

Popp used Rogers to run out of bounds at the 38 with no time outs left and seconds remaining.

On fourth and 14, Popp’s aerial was incomplete, and the Gamecocks took control to sit on the ball.

Tech had lost its fifth straight.

Popp was 10 of 22 with three interceptions for 219 yards and two TD’s, while Hardee caught four passes for 115 yards and a score, Scales, four receptions for 94 yards and a score.

Barber had a field day, carrying 18 times for 164 yards and Rogers 10 carries for 68 yards, and still no touchdowns on the season.

Hodgin led Carolina with 98 yards rushing in 23 attempts, Grantz had 51 yards in 22 rushes and Spinks 76 yards in 17 rushes.

Grantz was 13 of 22 for 203 yards passing.