Gobblers Lose 54-27

Houston—There was a time when the only wishbone in town belonged to a chicken. Virginia Tech coach Charlie Coffey wishes that was still true.

Powerful Houston gave Tech its fourth consecutive look at the wishbone—actually the Cougars call it a veer—offense here Friday night and while the Hokie defense looked, Houston rolled up 54 points. Final score: Houston 54, Tech 27.

Fourth-ranked Houston rolled up 471 yards, only 109 in the air, in winning its fifth game without a loss. Tech is now 0-4 with Virginia next on the docket at Blacksburg.

The Hokies had the benefit of six Houston fumbles in the first half, four of which they recovered.

Actually, there was some hint of an upset when Tech took a 10-7 lead on a Rick Popp to Ricky Scales' touchdown pass (29 yards set up by a Cougar fumble) and Wayne Latimer's 51-yard field goal (also set up by a Houston fumble).

But the Cougars came back strong in the second quarter, turning in a 23-yard punt return by Joe Rist and an eight-yard run by Reggie Cherry into touchdowns.

Behind 14-10, Tech recovered another Houston fumble and Popp quickly hit Scales again for 40 yards and a touchdown. Latimer's 46-yard field goal also set up by a Houston fumble.

Houston struck with blocking speed in the second half. The Cougars opened with a 35-yard touchdown run on the kick off by 93-spritzer Larry Jefferson.

Then Howard Elbow intercepted a Popp pass on the Tech 28 and ran it back to the five. Houston quarterback D.C. Nobles ran it in from there.

Ahead 23-17, Houston gave Tech two plays before intercepting another Popp pass and quickly turning it into a touchdown. This time it was Cherry running from the two and the Cougars led 34-17.

Tech got another field goal from Latimer, a 23-yarder, but about all that did was make Houston mad. The Cougars immediately launched a 64-yard drive, culminated by Nobles' 45-yard pass to Frank Scalise. Ricky Terrell missed the point but it hardly mattered.

The Hokies again got within striking distance, 54-27, when they drove 69 yards, the final play a 10-yard reverse by Ricky Scales, who scored their third touchdown.

Houston, however, intercepted Popp again, put together two long runs and then Leonard Parker ran it in from the eight. The Cougars last score was a 37-yard run up the middle by Bill Parker.

The Hokies inserted freshman quarterback Eddie Joyce Jr. with a minute and a half left. He moved them 65 yards to the Houston two where he threw an interception.

Coffey said he was more encouraged after this game than after any of the other five losses.

"We did a lot of good things," Coffey said, "but that's the story of our lives. When we get a spark going, we break down and gave them some touchdowns.

"We have a lot of great kids. One of these days we're going to play like we can."

Coffey was pleased with Popp's performance, despite four interceptions. "He is beginning to take charge," Coffey said.

Wide receiver Scales said, "I could have bashed them all night. They weren't that good, especially on defense."

Linebacker Tom Shirley, however, said the Houston offense was the best he had ever faced. "I got knocked down several times," he said.

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Tech's James Barber Finds No Running Room Against Houston