Schedule Is Party-pooper, 'Bama Hangs Over Tech

By STEVE CLARK

If you don't mind, the Virginia Tech football players would like to enjoy their first victory party of the season a little bit longer.

Pass the hat for money to pay the band to stay overtime. Send somebody out for some more ice and beer.

Don't worry if the Gobblers make whoopie too long. They won't have any trouble sobering up. All you've got to do to straighten 'em out is mention Alabama.

Uh-oh. The party's over.

Tech's next opponent is Alabama. That's Alabama as in No. 2 in the nation. And when the Gobblers take the field Saturday night in Tuscaloosa, they'll be quarterbacked by a lanky freshman who began the season on the junior varsity.

"It's a load on my shoulders," said Eddie Joyce, who will know come Saturday how little David felt when he first saw big Goliath.

In the true David spirit, Joyce is willing and able to sling a rock at Alabama's head, but he's realistic about the whole thing.

"You just can't walk out there and do what you want," said the 6-4, 195-pound frosh from Salem. "It sure ain't like high school."

Joyce became Tech's No. 1 quarterback Saturday midway the fourth quarter of the Gobblers' 27-15 victory over Virginia in Blacksburg in the Big Game That Meant Little.

Rick Popp, the sophomore QB who had been one of Tech's bright spots this dark year, suffered an injury to his right knee when he was hit hard while running with the ball.

When Popp was carried off the field, the score was Tech 17, Virginia 15. About seven minutes remained and the Hokie faithful in the crowd of about 38,000 knew what the deal was: If Tech were going to get that elusive first win, young Joyce was going to have to produce.

He did — with a lot of help from running backs James Barber and Phil Rogers. And a little help from some overly-aggressive Cavaliers.

With less than five minutes to play, Tech took over on its own 32. The score now was 20-15, thanks to a 19-yard field goal by Richmond's Wayne Latimer (Meadowbrook High School) a couple of plays after Popp was hurt.

Joyce's instructions were simple: Keep the ball on the ground. Nothing fancy and no fumbles.

He followed his directions to a tee and the Hokies marched 68 yards to the touchdown which put the game out of reach. Joyce scored the TD himself on a three-yard keeper off the left side with 1:06 to play.

Barber, who finished the day with 138 yards on 21 carries, and Rogers, who had 136 on 24 rushes, both ran well on the winning march. But the key play was a left end sweep by Joyce that gained one yard and came up short of a first down on a third-down-and-three situation at the Virginia 31.

But the Hokies got a break when some Cavalier tacklers piled on Joyce out of bounds. The penalty kept the drive alive. In fact, the officials' handkerchiefs helped Tech all day. The Cavs were penalized 107 yards.

The game contained more offense than the score indicates. Both teams moved the ball — Virginia gained 467 total yards compared to Tech's 406.

Virginia quarterback Scott Gardner completed 14-of-30 passes for 244 yards, including two long TD passes — a 63-yarder to tight end Jim Colleran and a 52-yarder to split end Harrison Davis.

The biggest surprise was that Tech's passing game wasn't a factor against Virginia's vulnerable pass defense. Take away an 80-yard TD bomb on a trick play from Rogers to Ricky Scales, and the Gobblers gained just 34 yards passing.

Tech is now 1-6 going into the Alabama game, Virginia is 2-5 and appears doomed to another losing season.

In another game involving Atlantic Coast Conference teams, Clemson whipped Duke 24-8, Maryland drubbed Wake Forest 37-0, and North Carolina was shut out by independent powerhouse Tulane 16-0.