Memphis State has bowl dreams

Tech in dark about next foe

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For Virginia Tech, Memphis State is the mystery team. The Gobblers knew what they were in for when visiting SMU, Houston and Kentucky. But this week’s opponent isn’t painted like a picture.

Memphis State is 5-2. But the record is unclear. The losses are to Houston and Kansas State. Victories are over Louisville, North Texas State, Mississippi, Tulsa and Florida State. But the win over Mississippi was before John Vaught returned as coach. Florida State is weak and the others are unknown.

If the record shows little, the atmosphere at Memphis State is even less telling. For example, the Tigers are entertaining thoughts of a major bowl, Scouting from the Peach, Sun and Liberty bowl games will be there to see the Tigers.

In years past Memphis State, with its outlaw reputation, had a hard time attracting bowl scouts. Post season games always bypassed good Memphis State teams.

The game is also important to Tiger Coach Fred Pancoast. Certain Florida alumni are looking at Pancoast as a possible replacement for Doug Dickey should the former Tennessee coach be asked to leave.

For all of these reasons the Tigers have a lot going for them in this game. And Pancoast can think of other things.

“We’re completely blocking out last Saturday (Tech’s 77-6 loss to Alabama),” said Pancoast. “The kids know the circumstances. They’ve seen Tech play well against Kentucky and Houston.”

Pancoast attended the Alabama-Tech fiasco, which quite frankly Gobbler players are also trying to blot from their memory.

“I was just bewildered,” the Memphis State coach said. “I’m not really happy to be playing Tech. They had played well before that. I think they were the victims of circumstances.”

Pancoast doesn’t say much about a possibility of moving to Florida. But then no coach would who is trying to win the remaining four games and earn a spot in a post season game.

“Naturally, a bowl game is a slight factor,” Pancoast said. “But it’s still early and our record is not much in thinking about it. It’s a long range possibility.”

“If we should slip up we’d be completely out of it. There are too many good teams around.”

Pancoast took over from Billy “Spook” Murphy as the Memphis State coach. Murphy, now the athletic director, was a successful coach at Memphis State. But the Tigers also became known as an outlaw school and he never did earn a trip to a major bowl.

“We’ve done a lot of things to help upgrade the football program,” said the Tiger coach.

“We’re recruiting the high level athlete—both academic and character. It helps us to play with more pride. The players seem to feel they’re a class team. Now the crowd is with the team more. It gives us o-vations.”

“We no longer have the outlaw image or play a lot of transfers. But we’re still a long way from being there.”

That’s why Memphis State is a mystery team. Virginia Tech will find out all about the Tigers on Saturday night at Memphis.