Henry: Indians Touched Off Tech Tailspin

By Bill Millsaps

As members of the search and rescue party sift through the wreckage to discover the reason for the crash of Virginia Tech’s 1973 football season, Tech linebacker Kent Henry emerges from the debris with an answer.

According to Henry, an Indian ambush started the whole thing. On the afternoon of Sept. 8, William and Mary took a 24-10 at Blacksburg, and that proved to be the snowball which touched off the avalanche.

Tech is now 1-8 going into Saturday afternoon’s game at Lane Stadium with an even more unsuccessful Florida State (0-8) team.

“The whole thing started with that first game,” said Henry. “If we had won that game, it would have been an entirely different season. That game may have cost us our confidence.”

Like most of the Hokies and their fans, Henry expected big things from the ’73 Tech football team, even though the schedule looked ominous, what with road games at Alabama, Houston, SMU, West Virginia, Kentucky and Memphis State. “I was actually thinking we had a chance to go to a bowl game,” said Henry. “We do have some athletes.”

Tech’s major season-long problem has been a defense that is hardly worthy of the name. The Hokies are averaging giving up 38.3 points and 553 yards per game. Even when you take away Alabama’s 77 points and 833 yards in total offense, the Hokies are still averaging a yield of 33.5 points and 510 yards per game in their seven other engagements.

Henry said the Hokie defenders have never simply given up, “but I can’t say anything for certain about the Alabama game. I don’t even remember anything about it. I was knocked out on the third or fourth play and I stayed knocked out the rest of the night.”

WHILE TECH’S basic defensive scheme, a five-man front with two linebackers and a “monster man,” is coming under considerable fire, Henry insisted the system is not at fault. “It’s not the scheme,” said the 6-0, 212-pounder from Louisville. “It’s the execution.

“The big problem has been the fact that the big play has killed us. Against Houston in the first half (the Hokies led at intermission in a game they eventually lost, 54-27), we made them march a long way, work hard, for their scores. But in our other games, people have gotten quick scores on us. It does something to you when that happens.”

Those big plays have caused the Hokie defenders to lose confidence in each other. “We’ve had too much of one guy trying to do somebody else’s job on defense,” said Henry. “because he is afraid the other guy won’t do his own job.”

Henry said there “isn’t that much dissension” on the team but added that “with all the young guys we have (25 of the first 44 are either freshmen or sophomores), we’re not that close. We don’t get very emotional. It seems that enthusiasm is lacking.”

And when you’re 1-8, it’s no wonder.

HENRY SAID that Tech coach Charlie Coffey “told us seniors that he could tell us to take a hike and de’d do it with his younger players. But he told us he didn’t want to give up on us, and that he wouldn’t.”

For Henry, the “awful frustrating” season has gotten “worse and worse” as it has staggered along, yet he said if he had it to do all over again, he would still play football at Virginia Tech. “The only thing I’d do differently is come in here with a different attitude,” he said, “be more of a talk-it-up, enthusiastic player.”

Henry has an idea he’d like to coach football and he said that the current season has taught him a lesson he would try to instill in any team he might tutor. “It really hurts to lose,” he said in a voice that indicated how deep the hurt really is. “Winning,” he added wistfully, “is a whole lot different feeling.”