By BOB LIPPER
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The words—they came from one who has watched Virginia Tech football closely—were in praise of Dennis Dodson. "He's one of the few guys on that team," the man said, "who still goes after it like there's no tomorrow."

There was no irony intended in the statement, but for Tech there are no tomorrows, only a couple of home games—against Florida State and VMI—to conclude an ill-begotten season. And as for the compliments... well, they're something Dodson could do without.

"You appreciate 'em," he said of the kind words, "but it doesn't mean as much when you're losing."

And the Gobblers have been losing. Oh, have they ever. With the latest pratfall, a 49-13 loss to Memphis State (asked how the team were recovering, Dodson replied, "Slowly, very slowly"), their record tumbled to 1-8, and across the state those who aren't chortling with glee are wondering what on earth went wrong in Blacksburg—and what coach Charlie Coffey's noise was all about.

Dennis Dodson and his teammates wonder, too. "We've talked about every aspect of it," he said. "All of us have tried to come together and try to work and see what the problem is. Haven't put my finger on it. I ought going into the season 6-4-1 in 1972) and going to a minor bowl of some sort," he said.

"We had a lot of people back, a lot of talent in the skilled positions." He paused. "I had no idea this would ever happen."

Few did. But the offense has been erratic, and the defense simply abominable, all too often surrendering the big play or merely dying during one segment of the game. Or dying period, as in the last two games against Alabama and Memphis State when the Gobblers yielded 1,333 yards total offense—1,073 on the ground. And while some might argue that Alabama moves the ball on everybody, they don't move it 828 yards worth on everybody.

In such a state of siege there are few heroes, but Coffey certainly wasn't talking about Dodson (nor, for that matter, about safety Jerry Scharinus) when he said after the Memphis game that "we were just going through the motions."

"I think that's true," said Dodson, "and I hate to say it. I told my teammates this—don't get me wrong, I'm not putting them down but we don't have the fanatical effort it takes to beat the teams we play. We're not getting that out of some people."

"All season we've been looking for something good to happen for us," he added. "When we beat Virginia we felt it was the turning point, but evidently it wasn't. A lot of people want to win out putting out the effort it takes to win."

Those sentiments have been expressed in the coaches' offices, but Dodson does not question the staff's approach ("the coaches tried being nice and they tried being hard; they tried everything"). Nor does he fault Coffey for the coach's hard sell ("you've gotta get the people involved, and he's done a great job on that") or feel that the advance billing given this year's team placed undue pressure on the players.

And yet there is an air of resignation when he says that "losing speaks for itself." And if you ask whether he is looking forward to the end of the season he replies, "Yes and no. It's gone on so long now. If it was the middle of the season well, we try to regroup every week, but I seem to run out of answers. I don't know what to think anymore."

On another level, however, he will continue to ponder, reflect, brood. Dennis Dodson's football career will end Nov. 7, but the memories will linger on.

"I don't think I'll ever forget it," he said. "You never forget losing. Not like this."


DENNIS DODSON

... praise is spoiled

we'd have a fine football team. Evidently, our hopes were too high.

That is not an easy admission for Dodson to make. A 6-0, 215-pound senior linebacker from Fredericksburg, he enrolled at VPI when the football program had ebbed to a lingering malaise and had then been present during a two-year period of rising optimism and prospects.

"We had built it like this in high school," he said. "Then my senior year we went undefeated. I was kinda expecting the same thing here.

Thus did he relate a glowing outlook when he chatted with hometown reporters last summer. "I was talking in terms of going 8-3 (the Gobblers were