Tech rings ‘Bell’ in somber spirit

By BOB TEITELBAUM
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BLACKSBURG — There was no smile on John Bell's face. Strange.
There was no excitement in his voice or words that hung together in a blur of excitement.
Strange.
The Virginia Tech monster man was more sullen than happy. It was a serious Bell who talked about Tech's 36-13 victory over Florida State, a win that he had a big part in with three interceptions and a fumble recovery.
What Bell did was return one interception to the Florida State one and score a touchdown with another. The three pass thefts tied a school record.
On his fumble recovery Bell ran for a touchdown even though he knew there was a rule against advancing an opponent's bobble. So it didn't count.
"The guy kept chasing me," explained Bell about his futile jaunt, "so I figured I had better keep on running." But what about Tech's much maligned defense? Did stopping a Florida State team, which looked as bad as the Seminoles' winless record indicates, salvage anything for the Hokies' defensive unit?
"We wanted to prove something," Bell mumbled. "I guess it could have come against a stronger team. I don't know whether this makes up for the season."
It hasn't been easy for the junior who was mentioned for All-American as a wide receiver in Maury High School of Norfolk. In the spring he was switched from corner back to monster. Then a few weeks ago, when Tech coaches purged a few of the starters, he lost his spot on the first team.
"I don't set any goal for interceptions," Bell said in a quiet voice that caused everyone to lean a little closer to hear the muffled tone. "I had two before today."
Finally he was asked if anything was wrong. "No," he said casting his eyes downward. "I'm just not a very good talker."
The rest of the Tech squad was not as subdued as Bell, but neither did the team act as if it had just upset Notre Dame. After all, Tech is 2-8 with only intrastate rival VMI (2-8) to play here Saturday.
Running back Phil Rogers, who has played well all year, had just had his best running day with 155 yards in 20 carries. But it failed to excite the Gate City sophomore.
"It wasn't my best game," Rogers insisted. "Maybe yardage wise. But not in physical effort. Those were the best holes I've had this year. Our line was charging well."
Even head Coach Charlie Coffey managed to pick on a mistake or too. And he didn't insist that this victory was a comeback for the Gobblers.
"We stalled when we got in scoring areas too much," said Coffey who had to send Wayne Latimer in to kick three field goals. "We made too many offensive mistakes."
One mistake turned into a touchdown when Ricky Scales dropped a pass behind the line of scrimmage, then picked it up and went down the sidelines to score. The official, who evidently ruled that Scales was behind Tech quarterback Eddie Joyce making it a lateral, didn't call the play back. It stood for a touchdown.
"The official is hoping he made the right call," said Coffey. "But the play was designed to be a forward pass. The official said Ricky was behind Eddie."
Joyce, a former Andrew Lewis star, agreed that Scales was behind him. "It's designed to be a quick screen," said the Tech freshman. "It was not a very well executed play, but I'll have to look at the films to see whether I was shallow or he (Scales) was deep."
Another busted play found Joyce running 42 yards. "I never did that before," he said. "I thought I might get a touchdown out of it—if I lasted long enough."
Still, Bell summed up the feelings for the Tech team. "It's the best we've felt after a game," he said. They couldn't hide that.