Thanksgiving Comes Early For VMI's Keydets

By JERRY RATCLIFFE
Times Sports Editor

BLACKSBURG—Virginia Military defensive back Dan Newcomber dived on a loose football fumbled by Virginia Tech freshman quarterback Eddie Joyce on the VMI five-yard line Saturday, with only 27 seconds left in the game to preserve the Keydets' one point lead and give them a 22-21 upset victory.

VMI, heavy underdogs going into the game, was in definite trouble after scoring the go-ahead touchdown with 9:21 left to play in the game.

Cool quarterback Tom Schultz directed the Keydets 77 yards in 12 plays for the score, using workhorse running back Ronnie Norman, and mixing in passes to VMI record receiver, sophomore Ronnie Moore. Norman, who had only 30 yards rushing in 11 carries going into the game, ended the day with 153 yards on the ground in 20 rushes and continually ripped through the bewildered Tech secondary.

Norman, a junior from Norfolk, was injured in the first game and hasn't played much since. But with a third and 8 situation at the Tech 50, Schultz went to Moore on a short pass to the six for a first down. Norman got the call twice, and scored from the six over left tackle.

VMI Coach Bob Thalman instructed his troops to go for two points. They tried, but Tech linebacker Keith McCarter batted down the ball and VMI still had a 22-21 lead.

An incomplete pass on third down thwarted Tech's next drive and Bruce McDaniel punted to the VMI 23.

VMI couldn't control the ball as Tech's defense stiffened, and the Keydets punted the ball away to Tech at the Hokies' 45 with 5:37 left in the game.

Joyce, a freshman from Salem, who was pressed into services after regular quarterback Rick Popp was injured midway through the season, hit Ricky Scales twice down to the VMI 27. Soph Running back Phil Rogers, who set a record for the most yards rushing in a season by a Virginia Tech back in addition to breaking the 1,000 yards rushing barrier, carried to the 33.

Joyce Barber carried to the 20 to make it fourth down and four yards to go. So with 1:22 left in the game, Coach Charley Coffey called on place-kicker Wayne Latimer. Latimer had already missed field goals of 49 and 34 yards during the game.

This one would be from 37. He kicked it, and the ball went wide, but VMI was offsides. Tech took the five-yard penalty on the Keydets for a first down at the 15-yard line.

Rogers broke three tackles to rumble to the three yard line. Then it happened. Joyce rolled left as he did against Florida State last week, aiming to score. But safety Gene Williams came up to hit him, the ball popped loose and defensive back Dan Newcomber pounced on the ball with 27 seconds left at the five.

Schultz simply ran out the clock to hand Tech its head on a platter.

A sign hanging over the wall at the VMI cheering section said it all. It was a sign which showed a Keydet with knife and fork in hand about to dig into a big turkey. It said: "It's about that time again."

The win made VMI's dismal 3-8 record a success, and sent Tech reeling into a 2-9 tailspin, the school's worst record since 1951 when the Hokies went 2-8-4.

VMI took an early lead when record setting place-kicker Mike Cole booted a 43-yard field goal with 10:49 to go in the first period for a 3-0 score.

The Keydets took a 10-0 lead with 6:16 to go in the first half when Shultz, a junior hit Moore, a sophomore, wide open over the middle on a 34-yard touchdown pass. The drive was 86 yards in 13 plays and consumed six minutes of the clock as VMI tried to salt away control of the first half.

Tech got back on the scoreboard with 4:26 to go in the half when Joyce hit Scales on a 69-yard fly pattern when Scales got behind safety Williams. That made it 10-7.

The Hokies took a 10-7 lead into the dressing room at halftime after Joyce hit Billy Hardie on a 43-yard scoring pass between Williams and defensive back Kirk Minton. Tech came in 1:28 to go and Tech led it by four.

The Techmen showed signs of turning the game into a rout when Barber and Rogers ran the ball with great balance and scored on the first drive of the second half to jump way out front 21-7.

But later, Schultz hit wingback Bruce Torbett on a 16-yard pass at the four. Back Keith Barefield ran in the ball for a touchdown with 2:30 left in the third period. VMI went for two but the pass was incomplete and Tech led 21-14.

Latimer missed on a 33-yard field goal attempt, then later missed on a 34-yarder after Kent Henry had recovered a VMI fumble at the Keydet 27. After that, VMI drove down the field for the go ahead touchdown and the stunning upset.

Rogers, who needed only three yards to break Terry Smoot's 1969 rushing record for one season, ended up with 1,049 yards, way ahead of Smoot's record of 949.

Smoot is the only Tech rusher to gain over 2,000 yards in his career with 2,118 yards. Rogers, only a sophomore, has an opportunity to top that mark next year.

STATISTICS

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>VMI</th>
<th>Virginia Tech</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Downs</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yards Rushing</td>
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<td>Punts Returned, Yds.</td>
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<td>Total Offensive Plays</td>
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INDIVIDUAL LEADERS

Running: VMI, Schultz 26 carries for 127 yards and one TD; Rogers 23 carries for 126 yards, 469 yards, one TD. Tech, Henriquez 44 carries for 133 yards, one TD. Passing: Joyce complete 13 of 30 with 338 yards, two touchdowns, his longest pass was 60 yards. Schultz completed 14 of 16 for 153 yards and three touchdowns, for 267 yards, one touchdown, his longest pass was 54 yards.