By KENNY KERR
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BLACKSBURG, Va. — When it rains it pours. Virginia Tech, suffering through a year of unbelievable happenings, fumbled on the VMI three yardline with 27 seconds remaining in the game and handed the Keydets a 22-21 football victory here Saturday.

It was an incredible event. Virginia Military Institute beating Virginia Tech. Long after the game, VPI fans were asking “Do you believe that?”

When asked if the loss compares to Chattanooga beating Tennessee, head coach of the Gobblers, Charlie Coffey, smiled sadly and nodded in agreement.

The loss leaves Virginia Tech with a season-ending 2-9 record. It’s the first in 20 years the Gobblers have lost nine games in a single season.

For Bob Thalman’s Keydets, it was their third victory in 11 outings.

VMI came into this game averaging but 9.6 points. Further, the Keydets were gaining only 100 yards per contest. But this wasn’t just any Saturday afternoon. Led by the running of Junior Ronnie Norman, VMI rolled up 195 yards rushing and 207 in the air.

Norman, who carried only 15 times for 30 yards before Saturday, slashed his way through the Tech defense for 153 yards in 27 attempts.

Tech’s apparent game-winning drive started on its own 36. Freshman quarterback Eddie Joyce passed the Gobblers down to the VMI 26. From there, Coffey called for running plays to set up a field goal.

Phil Rogers, who became the first Gobbler to ever gain more than 1,000 yards in a single season, and James Barber carried the football to the 19.

With 1:02 showing on the clock, Coffey sent Wayne Latimer into the game for a 37-yard field goal attempt. The kick was no good, but VMI was offsides and the penalty gave Tech a first down and new life.

Rogers gained 12 yards by running around his right end to give the Gobblers a first down at the VMI three. But on the next play, Joyce, moving to his left, was hit by “Mean Gene” Williams and fumbled. Dan Newcomer, who had been a thorn in Tech’s offensive game all afternoon, found the loose football to save the VMI victory.

“That play (meaning the Joyce fumble) was called by me,” Coffey said. “It was designed to move the ball into the middle of the field for a field goal.

“I wanted Joyce to carry the football because we didn’t want too many people handling it. The only bad thing that could have happened, happened... he fumbled.

“The play was not an option play. We wanted to move the ball from the left hash mark. Latimer has a poor percentage from the left hash mark, so we wanted it (the ball) in the middle of the field for him.

“It was a position play, that’s all. We were going to call timeout and attempt the field goal.

“No, I didn’t see the fumble. I had turned around and was making preparations for the field goal try.

“But the game was turned around before the fumble,” Coffey pointed out. “We lost it when we didn’t get anything on the board in our last three possessions in the third quarter.”

The Keydets, whose morale was higher than the murky, low-hanging overcast over Lane Stadium, took a quick 10-0 lead on a 45-yard field goal by Mike Cole and a 34-yard pass from Tom Schultz to Allen Morgan.

That swift kick in the pants awakened a somnambulant Gobbler offense. A 68-yard touchdown pass from Joyce to Ricky Scales and a 33-yard scoring strike to Billy Hardee gave Tech a 14-10 halftime lead.

Barber upped the VIP lead to 21-10 on a nine-yard run, but VMI refused to roll over and play dead. The Keydets came back to score on a four-yard run by Keith Barefield and went for the two-point conversion, which failed and left Tech leading 21-16.

The Keydets, known to be lightweights in football, unleashed a heavyweight attack for the winning touchdown. Norman went to his leftside and strolled six yards for six points with 9:21 left in the game.

“This is the greatest victory of my coaching career,” said the happy Thalman after the game. “It’s been a frustrating season all along — with all the injuries and other setbacks. But the kids stuck it out.”

Thalman, now in his third season, was presented the game ball.

Rogers, from Gate City, closes out his sophomore season with 1,036 yards rushing — a new single season high for Virginia Tech.

Vs. Military

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