VMIComesBackToStunVirginiaTech22-21

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BLACKSBURG — The Virginia Tech fans will remember it as the game they lost on a fumble in the final minute. VMI fans will remember it as the game they won by a point.

But regardless of the reason, the fans will always remember the VMI-Tech game Saturday afternoon at Virginia Tech. The Hokies won by one point 22-21.

"I had to do was to hold on to the ball," said Tech quarterback Eddie Joyce of Salem. He was the victim of a fumble with just 27 seconds left in the game. Tech was on VMI's three-yard line and positioned for a field goal.

"I didn't really feel anybody grab the ball, it was just knocked out of my hand," said the freshman.

"I was supposed to run outside, but I had to cut back. After I lost the ball, I looked for it but couldn't even see it. I really feel bad about it," he said.

Tech Coach Charlie Coffey said, "We planned for Joyce to keep the ball all game. We wouldn't have to take a chance with a handoff. We didn't expect a fumble out of that run. It was designed to position the ball in front of the goal." "But we can't put your finger on that or anything in particular that lost the game for us. We lost it before then," Coffey said.

Both teams had their opportunities to win the game, but neither team had good luck. The Keydets missed on two attempts to score two-point conversions, and the Hokies missed a 37-yard field goal that would have won the game for them with 1:02 left in the game.

Both teams moved the ball well. Joyce and VMI quarterback Tim Schultze both threw well, but the Keydets moved the ball just a little better, just enough to win by a point.

"We didn't think we could shut them out, but we did think we could beat them and we did," said VMI Coach Bob Thalman. "We knew we could run the ball against them, so that's what we did early. Then we passed when we had to. We knew they had two fantastic backs so we tried to control the ball as much as we could.

"Tech picked up more yards rushing and passing than the Keydets. The Keydets had a total defense of 424, while VMI had 420.

The Keydets scored on the first play after receiving the opening kickoff when Mike Cofie ran a 41-yard field goal.

Then neither team could get inside the 20-yard line until midway through the second quarter when VMI moved the ball 55 yards with Schultze throwing a 54-yard pass to Allen Morgan who was open in the Tech secondary and the Keydets led 10-0.

Tech came back with two touchdowns quickly in the second quarter on the running of James Barbier and Phil Rogers and Joyce's punting. The first score came on a 68-yard bomb from Joyce to Rich Scoby.

Then, just three minutes later, Joyce threw a 25-yard TD pass to Billy Hardee and Tech led 14-10 at halftime.

"At the half, we understood plays and we wanted to use them and we came out in the second half and did it," said Coffey. "We moved the ball real well there in the start of the second half."

In just five plays, the Gobblers (with Barbier and Rogers running) moved 74 yards with Barber scoring from the five-yard line. The series took just two minutes and two seconds.

When VMI started its next drive, it looked like Tech was going to stop it. With the Gobblers moving the ball easily and the Keydets unable to, it looked like Tech was taking command.

But in a second-and-21 situation, Schultze went to the air with passes to Ronnie Moore and Ronnie Norman. VMI not only picked up the first down, but scored when freshman Keith Bartlett went in from the four. The Keydets decided to go for two points so a field goal could not tie the game. VMI's Schultze pass was incomplete and Tech led 21-18.

Tech's Wayne Latimer tried a 69-yard field goal as the third quarter ended, but he was short. After a VMI fumble which was recovered by Tech's Ken Henry, Latimer tried a 34-yard field goal, but missed. VMI then took over on its own 20, Norman, who finished the game with 133 yards on 27 carries, moved the ball 15 yards on a run, Schultze

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threw three sideline passes to Moore to move the ball 49 yards and Norman scored from the six.

Again the Keydets tried to pass for two, but they were incomplete. With one minute left in the game and VMI ahead, 22-21, the Gobblers couldn't move and were forced to punt. But the Keydets punted right back and Tech had new life.

From the VMI 36, Joyce started passing and threw three complete to Scales to move to the Tech 33. With 1:01 left on the clock and on a fourth-and-four situation, Latimer tried a 25-yard field goal. The kick was off, but VMI was called for offsides and Tech was given a first down at the Keydets 25. Rogers then broke open for 12 yards and gave Tech a first down on the three-yard line. Because of a holding penalty, the Gobblers fumble on the next play and VMI held the ball for the win.

Barber finished the game with 177 yards on 26 carries and the Gobblers while Rogers had 98. Joyce completed 13 of 28 passes for 216 yards while Schultze connected on 14 of 22 for 267 yards.

But the fumbles column was the only statistic that counted in the end and that's where Tech had two and VMI just one.

"It leaves a bad taste in my mouth to lose on my fumble, but I have to wait a year to do anything about it," said Joyce.

The Gobblers will have to wait a year to do anything about their 3-9 record, which is their worst since 1954. The Tech defense should be looking forward to another year so it can forget this one. VMI held the ball for the win.