Don't Overlook Gobbler Kicking

By CHUCK FRAINIE Daily Press Sports Writer

The kicking game, according to Virginia Tech Head Coach Jimmy Sharpe, is the most overlooked phase of football.

If Sharpe and defense aide Charlie Pell have anything to say about it, the kicking game will be one of Tech's strong suits when the Gobblers open their 1974 campaign Saturday as host to Kentucky. Game time is 1:30 p.m.

"It's hard to imagine how important an effective kicking game can be," says Sharpe. "I'm not sure I was fully aware of it until I began looking at last season's game films."

"You know, an average of 33 plays per game involved us either kicking or receiving a kick. That's 33 times a game we could have turned the whole thing around, just by breaking one of these plays or forcing the other team into a mistake which would give us the ball in good position."

While Sharpe had to fret over a shortage of running backs and linebackers, he found a wealth of talent available for his special teams.

"With (placekicker) Wayne Latimer and (punter) Bruce McDaniel returning, we feel we're pretty well set," says Pell. "Latimer's shown us quite a lot, especially in the past couple of weeks. He can hit from far out, he's consistent on extra points and he gets the kickoff deep."

"McDaniel's kicking very well. That's saying a lot, since he topped 40 yards per kick last season."

Sharpe has tabbed reserve quarterbacks Mitchell Barnes and Greg Mullinax as Latimer's holders, although he gives Barnes an edge.

"Mitchell held in the Spring and seems to have more confidence," says Pell. "We haven't decided on what line we'll use, but for the time being, we'll leave everybody in there except that we'll substitute for the..."
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smaller people — Ricky Scales and Phil Rogers.”

The new rule on downfield blocking has presented an unexpected challenge to the Tech staff as they try to set up blocking for return men Billy Hardee and Flash Davis.

“They’re both very impressive in returning the ball,” according to Pell. “It’s a knack that takes more than speed and good moves.

“This business about blocking above the waist has put us (the coaching staff) through a mill,” says Pell. “The rule was put in for safety, but it’s made us work. It’s now more a matter of taking a player out than knocking him down.

“Ken Lambert and Stuart Patterson, our two defensive ends, and (defensive back) Tom Cooper have shown us the most so far, although Kieth McCarter has shown a lot of desire. Isn’t that the key thing anyway?”