Kicking Game Gains Gobblers' Attention

By CHUCK FRAINIE
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The units on the field when a football team kicks the ball are called "special teams" in some circles.

At Virginia Tech, their overall duties are lumped under the term "kicking game." However, the Gobblers' coaching staff probably had other names for this phase of football after their 38-7 season-opening loss to Kentucky Saturday.

"We'll be much improved in this department when we get to Southern Methodist Saturday," promises Assistant Charlie Pell, who handles the Gobblers "special teams."

Virginia Tech will be trying to even its slate at 1-1 and grab a 2-1 lead in the three year-old series between the two schools in the 1:30 p.m. clash in Dallas' Cotton Bowl.

"At first glance," admits Pell, "we'd seem to be in pretty fair shape. Bruce McDaniel averages about 40 yards, which is more than adequate. He gets the ball good and high, too.

"Our mistakes occur in covering the punts. It was a mistake by a freshman tackle which opened the way for the 47-yard punt return. The same for the 53-yard kickoff return. Both plays meant we started our defense with our backs to the wall. We got away with it once but it hurt us the other time."
Pell has taken the freshmen off the kicking teams, inserting experienced Larry Bearkman and Tom Beasley, the two starting tackles, in their place.

"It's not a question of speed," claims Pell. "It's a matter of savvy and confidence—things which come with experience."

Correcting defense errors has occupied a great deal of the Gobblers' time this week.

"Look at the drive which followed the 53-yard kickoff return," says Pell. "We held them for a fourth-and-four situation and we thought we might get away.

"Then we get a mixed-up assignment. Both the tackle and end go after the quarterback, nobody covers the pitch man and he makes it first and 10. Then a tackle missed a signal on the touchdown play.

"These are the things we're trying to correct by simplifying our defensive assignments before the SMU game."