BLACKSBURG, Va. — For a while last Saturday at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas it looked as though SMU’s Mustangs were going to repeat the stampede of a year ago at Texas Stadium.

But at game’s end the rampaging Mustangs had been slowed to a corrall of mild ponies who were content to settle for a meager bag of 26-25 oats.

The consensus was the Virginia Tech was a much better football team than the previous Saturday against Kentucky, and Coach Jimmy Sharp concurred.

“The best thing was that we got tougher in the fourth quarter,” he noted.

“I’m mighty proud of them because they never gave up.”

The Gobblers made some big plays both offensively and defensively, and the overall execution was considerably improved.

The difference in the game probably was SMU’s fleet sophomores quarterback, Ricky Weston, who kept the Gobblers off balance most of the day by continuously putting on pressure with his running ability. He finally applied the clincher with a 77-yard TD jaunt in which solo maestro.

Yet, Tech’s defensive front came up with some fine play from Larry Bearekman, Brent Bledsoe, Ken Lambert and Keith McCarter, as well as from backs Billy Hardee and Chuck Perdue. And for the second straight week the most noticeable performer in the Gobbler defense was freshman linebacker Rick Razzano.

Offensively, the Gobblers showed signs of better cohesion with improved blocking along the front, especially by tight end Kevin Dick, tackle Rondal Davis and guards Steve Philbrick and Mike Brammer.

Greg Toal had the biggest game of his career, including scoring his first varsity touchdown, and with SMU forcing play inside Bruce Arians turned it up on the run or found his receivers (13-20 passing) for 254 yards total offense, including two TDs and a two-point conversion.

Although he drew double coverage most of the day, Ricky Seales hauled in four passes for 91 yards. The four receptions tied him with Mike Burnop’s career record 30.

Sharpe, after noting SMU’s size, quipped, “Next comes the giants.” And, compared to SMU, Houston will look like giants. But the Techmen already have proved to themselves that they don’t have to cover from size.

The Gobblers might find that it’s tougher to corral a Cougar than it is to ride a Mustang, but they also are learning that with solid preparation they might be equal to whatever task confronts them on the gridiron.