McDaniel: Two Seconds to Live or Die

By Ray Filiger

"The difference between being good and great," someone told Ray McDaniel this week, "is the small things." When you're a punter, which McDaniel is, the small things can also get you in trouble, quickly.

How quickly? Generally, in half the time it took you to read the first paragraph.

"I've got about two seconds," said the Virginia Tech junior. Two seconds. Just for fun, go to the bottom of the page and time how long it takes to pick up the receiver and dial one. If you cheated, just think the receiver out of the tackle and dialed, without putting the receiver to your ear, you may have taken less than two seconds. Convincing that two seconds is not a lot of time?

Is it any wonder that, "Last year, I was tense ... not really scared, but tense," recalled McDaniel. "I'm really confident, more relaxed, this year."

"What McDaniel hasn't been is overly consistent. But he is getting there." Against Houston last Saturday the 6-1, 185-pounder from West Virginia started with a 28-yard hold and ended the day — his 10th kick of the game — with a 50-yarder. In between, there was a low of 30, and a high of 49.

"My 42.2 average down a half yard from a week ago, is eighth best in the nation (major schools). If he gets the improvement he's looking for, he should stay among the leaders. That, however, is his immediate goal. Winning is. And McDaniel knows how to help, "By using our good field position."

Between the "high, hard one," as McDaniel refers to the good past, and the snap, however, a lot of things can go wrong. Like a kick-up that makes him snap, up or down, for the field. Against Houston, McDaniel was almost always reaching down.

"The center (freshman Barry Miller) said he was worried about getting it over my head," said McDaniel. And there were problems. But McDaniel insisted, "I can't blame it on the center."

In the end, however, he said candidly, "It is a team effort."

"Barry's good," said McDaniel, remembering what it's like to be an inexperienced college player. "It's not like high school. All Barry needs is a couple of games under his belt. He'll be all right."

"I remember last year, when I'd really kick a bad one, I'd say to myself, 'What have I done?'

LEG STRENGTH, key to the long ones, is no problem.

"I use to kick all summer, then, like last year, I'd be burned out in the fifth or sixth game."

His most recent summer saw him limit his kicking to "three times a week. And my leg really feels better. It feels great."

"My longest kick last year was 56 yards," he added, "and I've already hit 60 this year."

And he hopes he's got a few good kicks this week for VMs, McDaniel's opponent in the Tobacco Festival game Saturday at City Stadium.

"Their kicker (Ron Bongiovanni) really beat me," said McDaniel recalled. He recalled the Cavaliers' 23-3 win over the Hokies last season.

"I'd really like to kick the high, long one every other second week."

"For more reasons than one, "I don't want to be losers to them two years in a row," he said.

But then, the Hokies didn't want to be losers last year. What if ...

"They'll reply,"

McDaniel. Figuratively, of course. And within two seconds.