Gobblers' Brammer goes from quitter to starter

By BOB McLLELLAND
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Mike Brammer is smarter, more dexterous and certainly happier today than he has ever been as a football player.

And all it took to give him this new outlook on the sport was several thoughts of quitting last fall, a period of quitting for one week last winter, two operations, a double makeup session in the winter weight program and a series of demanding 5 a.m. runs.

Now he's a completely different player from the one who was simply going through the motions last fall this time as he alternated between center and offensive guard for a freshman on the Virginia Tech jayvee team.

There actually was one game in which he was the only member of the traveling squad who failed to get into the game. He was disgusted with what he found at Tech and he was disgusted with football. He began wishing he had accepted a scholarship at one of several other schools which recruited him.

Things got worse for him during the winter and, after a brief fling at the winter program of new head Coach Jimmy Sharpe, Brammer decided to stay home after the quarter break.

He came to his senses after a personal chat with Sharpe and decided to return to school and football. But he had to pay the price for his error. He had to double up on his weight program until he was even with his class. He also had to get out of bed while it was still dark last winter and make many 5 a.m. runs.

"I don't know what got into me," Brammer said. "I guess I just didn't like the way things were going at Tech. But after talking with Coach Sharpe and some of the other coaches, I came to my senses."

"I made up my mind to come back and do my best to play. I knew I would start way behind but that just made me all the more determined. I didn't want to sit on the bench. I wanted to play and I knew the best way to play was to work - that's what I've done. But now everything is fun."

"Everyone used to have the 'dreads' ... I know dredding to do this and dredding to do that. But Coach Sharpe has put fun back into football. We are working hard but we are all having fun ... that's the way it should be."

The road back wasn't easy for Brammer. After his double schedule last winter, he started spring practice as a fifth-string center. He soon was moved to guard but still rated no better than third string. He is not even listed in the three-deep chart in the Tech brochure.

But hard work and determination paid off. By the opening game with Kentucky, he was No. 2 on a swing offensive guard. But he played more against the Wildcats than the starter at the position.

This won him a starting position against SMU last week and he is expected to keep the spot.

"Mike has really wanted to win his position," said Danny Ford, the offensive line coach at Tech. "He is a smart young man with good quickness. He is always trying to improve. He isn't large (6-1, 220) and usually faces a man 40 to 50 pounds heavier. Against Houston, the man in front of him will be 6-5, 275."

Mike said he never lets the size of an opponent concern him. "There are ways to block any opponent," he said. "I just try to find the right one."

Brammer said the big reason for his improvement is that he listens closely to Ford. "Whatever he says, I grasp," Brammer said. "Whatever he tells us to do, I do. He knows what he's talking about and I try to do my damnedest to do what he says."

Brammer had an outstanding sandlot ball career in Roanoke and played on numerous championship teams. He was a three-year regular at Patrick Henry and helped the Patriots to a 1-9-4 record as a senior. He won all-Roanoke Metro, district and regional honors as a senior and had a number of scholarship offers.

He had to have an ankle operation the summer before he entered Tech and this past summer he had a shoulder operation. He still wears a thick brace on his shoulder while playing. Against SMU, he also played with a broken thumb.

Brammer realizes he has made mistakes in the past. But he is thankful that he grew up in time to save what can be an outstanding college career.

"I never knew playing football could be so much fun," he said. "And I'm not just saying it. Just look at the faces of our players and you see what I mean. Sure we hate losing but it's not going on forever. We'll win and I'm just darn glad I'm here to enjoy it."