COLUMBIA, S.C. — When you're 0-4 with no foreseeable help in sight, words like faith, pride and character have a hollow ring.

But, few could dispute the "Jimmy Sharpe Way" after Virginia Tech's convincing 31-17 upset win over South Carolina here Saturday night.

In the joked about battle between winless independents, the Gobblers presented Sharpe with his first win as a head coach and sent Paul Dietzel's Gamecocks to their fifth consecutive defeat.

Disdaining the pass to such an extent that they called 39 straight running plays in the game's waning moments, the Gobblers unleashed a running attack that relentlessly tore up South Carolina's defense.

Running backs George Heath, Phil Rogers and Roscoe Coles each gained over 100 yards and the Hokies as a team ground out 442 yards. Quarterback Bruce Arians, a doubtful starter until game time, passed only six times, failing to complete a single pass.

Despite his wipeout in the statistical department, Arians could not have been happier with the win. "It's what we've been capable of all along; we've just been messing up."

"There's no way they could stop us. On every play we could either go up the middle, off tackle or run the option around end. Near the end of the first half we knew they were ours."

Four-hundred yards rushing has been our goal. We anticipated having to throw a lot more, but we were gaining eight or nine yards on the ground every first down."

With second-string quarter- back Ron Bass at the controls, South Carolina scored first and the Gamecocks took a 14-0 lead midway through the second quarter on a drive engineered by regular quarterback Jeff Grantz.

Except for a field goal just before halftime, which gave the 'Cocks a 17-7 advantage, that was the extent of South Carolina's scoring.

“We just told them they had 30 minutes to show some character, some bottom," revealed Coach Sharpe of his halftime instructions to the Hokies. "It was a long time coming, but I knew that if we kept the faith that it would come. I said all along that we were a better team than we had shown."

Tech scored every time it had the ball in the second half except for the Hokies' last possession, when time ran out with VPI a mere seven yards from another score.

On the evening, Arians scored twice and Rogers had two touchdown runs. Wayne Latimer added 22-yard field goal and four extra points.

For Dietzel and the Gamecocks the loss was most disappointing. Dietzel has announced his retirement after an illustrious 20-year career and he must be thinking that the end of the season is not soon enough for it to become effective.

“We just could not stop them,” he analyzed the game to no one's surprise. "We have a real problem on defense. Our best linebacker, Garry Mott, hasn't played in three weeks and his replacement was injured and also couldn't play. We were absolutely butchered at linebacker."

With an 0-5 team at this stage, Dietzel was in much need of sympathy, although he didn't get it from Sharpe.

"We're just 1-4," said Sharpe. "We can't concern ourselves with other people. After what we've been through, I just can't feel sorry for him."