1st victory of season
sends the Hokies ‘high’

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COLUMBIA, S.C.—The essence of it all was probably captured best when a South Carolina majorette looked up disgustedly at a group of whooping Virginia Tech football players.

Those players had reason to holler. There were less than two minutes left in the Tech-South Carolina game here Saturday night at Williams-Brice Stadium and Tech had outclassed Carolina 31-17. It was Tech’s first victory of the season, a victory that was long coming.

Tech’s first win of the season proved a point that Tech coach Jimmy Sharpe had been trying to make all year long. “We never quit working,” Sharpe said, his voice hoarse. “We could’ve given up after our losses. But we didn’t. I had told them that we’d been working too long and too hard not to have something good happen to us. Let them celebrate now. I want them to enjoy this as long as they can.”

Tech’s mode of victory was unglamorous but very, very effective. The Hokies, utilizing nearly every healthy running back they had, simply ran right at South Carolina and made it eat the ball until the Spalding label disappeared.

Tech rushed for 442 yards and had scoring drives of 72, 60, 75 and 78 yards. Wham, bam, snap, crackle, pop.

Phil Rogers picked up 120 yards on the ground, George Heath got 104 and Roscoe Cole got 111, the bulk of it all coming in the second half when Tech obliterated a 17-7 South Carolina halftime lead.

“It’s nice to go on the ground like that,” said Heath. “You can go for 80 yards or so then you get tired and someone else can come in for you. Everybody gets their share and things get done, man.”

“I felt we were capable of this all along,” Sharpe added. “We decided in the second half that we were going to take three or four plays and mix them up on the inside and the outside and just run at ‘em. We were going for first downs.”

What the victory will do now for Tech, 1-4, is easy to predict.

“It will give us confidence,” said defensive lineman Larry Bereakman. “And you can print that in big letters.”

“It’s like a kickoff to a new season,” said quarterback Bruce Arians, who started and played nearly all of the game, obviously recovered from his shoulder injury. “We always believed in ourselves. I think we proved that in our games earlier, because we never quit in the fourth quarter. Before, when we got behind, we would have a letdown, but in this game we decided we weren’t going to have that happen again and we came back.

“Actually, we have been beaten in only one game this year,” Arians added. “We beat ourselves in the other three. The only team that beat

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us was Houston. They pushed us around because we were a bit intimidated."

This time, there was no intimidation. "We moved the ball like we moved it in the past," said Heath, "only this time there were no mistakes. We had no fear."

As big a role as Tech's offense played in the victory, the defense can't be denied anything. After giving up 17 points to the Gamecocks in the first half, the Hokies simply put South Carolina out of business. The Gamecocks were allowed to have the ball only four times. They had to punt three times and were intercepted late in the game.

South Carolina got only three first downs to Tech's 19 with 59 yards on the ground and 12 in the air in the second half.

"We knew we had to concentrate on stopping the first down," said Breauxman. "Before, we were so worried about trying to stop a big play like third and nine or something. We just set ourselves mentally to keeping them from getting the first down."

Tech, now thoroughly convinced that it is a football team and anxious to prove it once again, faces archrival Virginia in Charlottesville Saturday. It will be a test for the rejuvenated Hokies. But as far as they are concerned at this moment, there's nothing that can stop them now.

"If we can execute our offense for the rest of the season like we did tonight, no one can beat us," said Arians. "That's the key to the wishbone. When it's executed right, it can't be stopped.

"I can't wait for Virginia. I've been looking forward to this for a long, long time."