Tech Rushes Past Gamecocks, 3

By Vic Fulp

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COLUMBIA, S.C. — Virginia Tech finally found some joy Saturday night in what has been a very frustrating season — defeats in its first four games.

The Hokies found it by discovering the key to a Gator Bowl is to kill Tech's first four games.

Ramming the football right down South Carolina's throat, Tech stormed back from a 17-7 halftime deficit to take a 34-7 lead in the third quarter.

The air game gave the Gamecocks the edge in the first half as the teams matched ground efforts, South Carolina getting 142 yards to Tech's 138. But both had 34 attempts.

Randy Chastain wrapped up an 81-yard, 1-yard Gamecock drive with a one-yard run to give USC a 7-6 lead. Although Tech failed to score — Latimer was short on a 35-yard FG try after a clipping penalty negated the drive — the Hokies showed on their second possession they could move the ball.

It was just a matter of time. And the patient Hokies didn't let even a 14-yard deficit set back their hopes for a first victory too far.

Halfback Jay Lynn Hodgin, who had a key 20-yard pass to Thomas wound up a 25-yard, seven-play drive for the Gamecock's second TD on a one-run run.

Even though the Gamecocks carried that 17-7 lead into the intermission break on a 2-yard Steve Young field goal three plays later, at 7-7 Tech's kickoff was blocked and the Hokies launched their scoring late in the second period.

Seven Hokies carried the ball on a 73-yard, 15-play move as Tech finally upended quarterback Yancey Arias diving over center for the score.

You're not going to give USC's next possession, but in the second half the Gamecocks failed to get past Tech's 30.

The trio of Phil Rogers (33 carries for 130 yards), Tracey Cofles (17-111) and George Heath (17-104) powered the Hokies to a 77-yard, 17-rushes Arias was forced in the third.

Latimer's field goal came on Tech's first possession in the second half. A 15-yard penalty against the Gamecocks came on the kickoff to start the period and Tech gained the key third-down position for the former Meatrow brothers. Hokie coach Slamberg then kicked the three-pointer.

Four plays and a punt after the previous drive, the Hokies were off again. Only this time Arias tested the rain again. He missed the opening drive of the drive and again three plays later.

However, Rogers, who had a 39-yard run to boost this 75, 12-play thrust that deadlocked the score at 17, and his running mate had things well in hand.

Arias scored from the two and Latimer boosted the tying point with 2:50 left in the third period.

Arias' pass to the Tech defender produced a streak of 30 running plays, a highly unusual approach for a team making a comeback.

This time it took six plays and a punt for the Hokies to regain possession, 15 plays and 1 yard later. Rogers, who scored the last two Tech TDs, took a pitchout around the right side for the breaking points and Tech never came close to losing the lead.

"It was a long time coming, but I knew we kept the faith that we could do it," said Tech coach Jimmy Sharpe. "Now they know they really can win."

"Our approach was that we just wanted to make first downs (17 of their 23 coming in the second half). Our offensive line did a heckuva job," added Sharpe, who was congratulated by Creasey, Steve Philbrick, Randy Vye, Keith Gibson and Randall Davis, who drew the Gamecocks defensive line out.

"Pointing out the obvious, Gamecocks defensive line out," said, "we just could not stop them. We have a real problem on defense."

Tech's longest drive served to add insurance to the lead and use up time as the Hokies moved 84 yards in 14 plays. After Tech had gained 27-20 left (USC punter from the Hokie 35), Tech scored with exactly two minutes left.

First appearing to have settle for a field goal, Tech was halted short of a down on the Gamecock four. But prior to the break, the Hokies took the USC jumped offside and Tech had first-and-goal on the two, from where Rogers scored.

"We finally got things turned around. Momentum is a funny thing. You never know what's going to hit you," said Sharpe.

"I hope we can enjoy this one... but won't spend too much time celebrating."