Competition Tough for Tech's Mason

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Somewhere between East Mississippi Junior College and Virginia Tech, John Mason must have made a wrong turn.

When Mason left Mississippi, Tech had a football team that was in dire need of an experienced quarterback to take charge. When he arrived here, he found that Tech had four men doing a good job filling that spot. He made the number of contenders five.

"They told me it would be rough," Mason said. "I expected it. The competition here has really been rough."

Mason was recruited from East Mississippi because he was one of the better junior college quarterbacks around last year. When he got here, he found that Phil Rogers had been moved over from running back, and Mitchell Barnes, Eddie Snell and Greg Mullinax were all back, from last year when they were reserves.

Tech coach Jimmy Sharpe explained that there is no No. 1 quarterback now and he has no idea of naming one any time soon. He likes the competition between the contenders.

"I know the coaches are looking for somebody to really take charge. They're looking for a leader," Mason pointed out.

Mason might have trouble being that leader so soon after arriving in Blacksburg. The Hokies run the wishbone and for the past two years Mason hasn't used that offense.

"In high school, we ran the wishbone. But I got out of it in junior college. I really like it. I think it is the best offense around," claimed Mason. "I think that my decision to come to Tech had something to do with the fact that they run the wishbone here."

Sharpe came to Tech last year from the University of Alabama. Mason was a starting quarterback at Foley, Ala., High School. "I was familiar with Sharpe from when he was at Alabama. I knew about him."

Mason transferred to Tech during the winter so he could go through spring drills with the team and become familiar with Blacksburg.

"I'll be able to learn the plays and everything else during the spring drills so I'll be ready when we come back in the fall," said Mason.

Since spring drills have started, Mason has liked what he's seen. "Everything is looking really good. I'm satisfied with the way things have gone. I think we'll have a good team."

"I think I've done a fair job this spring. I knew a lot of what I was doing when I got here and I picked up the rest fairly well," he continued.

One strong point going in Mason's favor is that he was a passing quarterback for his two years in junior college. Tech had almost no passing offense last year but will probably be throwing more this season.

"I mostly passed at East Mississippi so I can pass. But I can run very well in the wishbone. It comes off the running plays. It is a good offense to work a pass off."

"A big help will be that we'll have real good people at running back. We have a really good group of running backs. They'll make the job easier for any quarterback."

But quarterbacking the wishbone is not an easy task. The quarterbacks will be shuffled in and out like the running backs. There probably won't be much difference between the time the No. 1 quarterback gets and the time No. 2 spends on the field.

"When you're running the bone, everybody is going to get tired," admitted Mason.