Mean Machine Mangles Headhunters

By Bill Mason
Sports Editor

BLACKSBURG—Head coach Jimmy Sharp's long range plan to establish the running game in Virginia Tech's wishbone offense was the big winner Saturday as the White team—the Mean Machine—ground up the Maroon squad—the Headhunters, 31-13, in the spring football game at Lane Stadium.

A total of 18 ball carriers clicked off 331 yards rushing, with the Machine holding only a nine yard advantage over the Headhunters, who led in passing yardage, 187 to 68.

The Blue chips in the running department mainly were on the side of the White—basically the probable starting offense of next season: George Heath, who had a fantastic 10 yard plus average per carry; Roscoe Cole, Phil Rogers making his debut at quarterback, and Radford's Bill King, who showed his best running form since high school days.

The running game, established itself in the first quarter, partly out of necessity. Both Rogers and Maroon quarterback Mitchel Barnard had been intercepted on their last two drives and faced an uphill battle to a win. Mistakes were costly for both sides.

Dick Razzano, rising sophomore linebacker from New Castle, Pa., picked off Rogers' aerial on the first play of the game, returning it nine yards and Nick Rapone of the same home town, returned the favor minutes later, returning it 18 yards.

The passing game never really came on strong again until the fourth quarter when Barons backup, transfer John Mason of Foley, Ala., led the comeback attempt. Rogers kept the ball for 17 carries for a net of 29 hard won yards, a long gainer of 23 yards and two touchdowns. He had two completions and one interception out of four passing attempts for 25 yards. Backing up Rogers, Greg Mullinax was one for four for 30 yards and ran for 17 yards on five carries. A scoring run by Mullinax was erased by a penalty.

Barnes rushed five times for the Headhunters for 34 yards and a long gain of 20 yards and completed four of ten passes (with two interceptions) for 96 yards. Mason rushed nine times for a net of 27 yards, but was the game's top passer with five out of ten for 91 yards and one touchdown.

Sharp listed the following priorities of things to work on when Tech returns in August for pre-season drills:

"We'll have to work on the kicking game and work on offense to eliminate mistakes. We'll have to decide quickly on who's going to be the quarterback and I'll make that decision."

"We've got to find a snapper. Barry Miller (of Radford) is out with a concussion. We hope he'll be ready later but if he isn't we'll have to find one. That kid in glasses (rushing junior walk-on Chris Nicholas of Annandale) is a good player."

The coach, who admitted readily that Tech is much further along in ability than it was at this last year's game ("Then we were nearly zipped") stated: "The best thing we've got going for us is our big men. They really want to win and they're willing to overcome any obstacles that they have to."

Regarding the quarterback situation, Sharp said: "Mason didn't throw the ball bad right at the last. Phil (Rogers) made two decisions when his primary receivers were covered that I considered excellent decisions."

"We won't be very deep, but we'll get better," Sharp continued, summing up: "Take away the early mistakes and we were pretty good, as far as execution goes. All in all I was real pleased. We've got some kids we know can play."

"We made a lot of progress. Some good players got better and some of the young kids came around. Larry Schumit (6-3, 240 rising soph defensive lineman from South Charleston, W. Va.) and Robert Shewin (6-2, 248 freshman defensive lineman from Galax) got to play."

"Commenting on the veteran defensive backbone of the team, Sharp said: "Tom Beasley and Tom Turner both played well and Keith Pickett (rushing junior Colonial Heights) is a football player, gentlemen."

"We have two corner backs (Billy Hardee and Flash Davis) who will strike you."

At linebacker: "(Doug) Thacker and Razzano are good ball players. There's a big drop after that." Sharp said that Steve Cannon (rising junior Silver Spring, Md.) and Gerald Sheehan, another rising soph) both did well for the White defense.

Shap's capsule defensive offensive commentary was: "We'll be able to get after your tail and move the football."

The game didn't offer a completely accurate forecast of the Gobbler line up for next fall, since a few injuries were not in action due to injuries suffered in practice, as was quarterback candidate Eddie Snell.

Speedy Dale Babione, a rising sophomore wide receiver from Annandale, showed good hands and running ability, catching two passes for 52 yards. In reply to a question, Sharp said: "Babyone will be a player. In another year he could be a good receiver."

Rising senior Jerry Inge of Virginia Beach, with three receptions for 71 yards, led all receivers while rising soph Dick Holway had the most electrifying completion, 40 yards for a touchdown. Most of the yardage on the ground after catching a short pass.

Punter Bruce McDaniel had five punts for an average of 42 yards against the Mean Machine while Dave DeHart pumped three teams for the Headhunters for an average of 36 yards.

Saturday's game was officially the last of the allotted 20 practice sessions, ending spring practice.