Relief, Homers Win for Tech

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BLACKSBURG — Bob Humphreys, how do you spell relief?

Considering Virginia Tech's early-season pitching statistics, the Gobblers' coach might answer R-o-l-a-i-d-s. But Thursday at Tech Park with a 12-game winning streak on the line, Humphreys didn't have time to spell.

"When you come in like that, you have to throw strikes," said Duke Dickerson, who hurled 7 2/3 innings of scoreless relief as the Gobblers came from behind for a 6-4 triumph over High Point College. "I have been starting, but I found out that the longer layoff hurts me. If I could pitch every fourth or fifth day in long relief, I'd be happy."

Humphreys would be happy if Dickerson, the sophomore righthander from Columbus, Ohio, just pitches like he did Thursday as Tech ran its win streak to a school-record 13 games and avenged an earlier loss at High Point.

Dickerson, now 5-1, needed only 68 pitches in his first relief appearance of the season. He permitted just three hits and didn't walk a batter, taking over for starter Dean Powell with a 4-0 deficit.

High Point, now 19-5 and the only team to beat Tech in the Gobblers' last 16 games, reached Powell for three first-inning runs, getting help on a pair of errors by the home team. But Tech rallied from behind on three runs in the fifth and homers by Sandy Hill and Harold Williams.

Dickerson got the victory against Virginia a week ago, but the righthander admitted that "I didn't do too hot" in the 9-7 triumph.

"I hadn't pitched for eight days," he said. "I don't throw that hard anyway, so going out every four or five days shouldn't hurt me. I talked to Hump about pitching long relief. I was ready to go in the VMI game (Tech's 8-4 win Tuesday), but I wasn't needed."

Humphreys said he wanted to save Dickerson to hurl out of the bullpen in Saturday's doubleheader here against Old Dominion, but since the Gobblers are striving for their second straight NCAA Tournament trip, winning is now everything.

"Now, I'm going to have to flip another coin," said Humphreys, laughing about his day-to-day pitching changes. "I know, I started the wrong guy. But Powell threw that one ball away (a three-base error after fielding a high chop in front of the mound). Still, he hasn't been able to do a lot of work because he got hit with that ball the other day when he pitched (Saturday against Buffalo State)."

Tech appeared to be pressing in the opening innings, while High Point played with the same relaxed manner that permeates the spectators on the hill behind Tech Park's rightfield fence.

Entering the fifth inning, the Gobblers had reached High Point starter Billy Sorrell (6-0) for just an infield single. But Dennis Duff woke up the home team with a sharp single to start the inning. An infield error paved the way for the first Tech run, and Williams' sacrifice fly plated the second score. Dan Griel singled home another run and Tech was within 4-3.

In the sixth, with Sorrell gone in favor of righthanded reliever Kevin Keene, even the rightfield fans—many of whom watch the games in various states of undress and drink something stronger than the Cokes sold behind the backstop—found something to cheer.

Hill, the ex-Glenvar High outfielder who is hitting 200 points below last year's team-leading .364, caught a slider and dove it over the fence in right-center for a two-run homer to send the Gobblers in front. The following inning, Williams—the freshman first baseman—dialed long distance with a rocket shot high off the back of Tech Coliseum over the leftfield fence.

"With a 2-and-2 count and as much trouble as I've been having at the plate, I was just trying to connect," said Hill, admitting his second homer of the year was a surprise. "I don't know what my problem is, but I've got several different feelings on it. It doesn't do any good to dwell on it.

"I'm having a bad year. But so far I've been lucky because of the way the team has played. It's fortunate for the team and myself that other people have come through and picked up some of my slack. That's made me look a lot better."

Last year, Tech took a 33-7 record to the NCAA, where it promptly lost its first two games in the South Atlantic Regional. Now 16-7, the Gobblers can top their school-record mark—but only by winning their remaining 18 games.

Virginia Tech 6, High Point 4

High Point 3 0 0 0 0 0 0 4 7 3
Virginia Tech 0 0 0 2 0 0 0 4 6 8

Sorrell, Keene (5) and Wilbur; Powell, Dickerson (2) and Shelton. WP—Dickerson, LP—Keene. HR—Hill (VPI), 6th; one on; Williams (VPI), 7th, none out.