Coles' Goal: 2,000 Yards, Heisman

By BILL BRILL
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BLACKSBURG — In the history of college football, three Division I backs have gained more than 4,000 yards. Their names are household words—Archie Griffin, Ed Marinario and Tony Dorsett, the new record holder.

By late November, another name should be added to the list.

Roscoe Coles.

It may come as a surprise to Coles, the fleet-footed Virginia Tech halfback, that he has set as goals for himself next fall to rush for 2,000 yards and “to be a serious candidate for the Heisman Trophy.”

Coles admits he likes to set goals “that I might not achieve because I’m never satisfied with what I accomplish.”

It is a bit far-fetched to visualize Coles in the running for the Heisman Trophy, because that depends as much on the success of the team as of the man. The Hokies would have to be at least a Top Ten team for Roscoe to get many votes, and that won’t happen.

The 2,000 yards, that previously unattainable figure attained only by Dorsett in ’76, isn’t as far out as it appears at first glance.

Consider that Coles, who set a Tech record with 1,174 yards as a sophomore, gained 1,119 last year without ever once being in top physical condition.

Roscoe hurt his knee in the Wake Forest opener, separated his shoulder in the second game at Texas A&M, and later hurt the other shoulder. Despite all that, he led the Hokies with nine touchdowns and took everything the enemy could throw at him.

Coles needs 1,221 yards this fall to reach the 4,000-yard mark. Since, by his own estimation, he played at no more than 75 per cent capacity all last year, it is easy to see how he could do that well, and perhaps even challenge the 2,000 total.

These are remarkable figures—career totals of 2,787 yards and 25 TDs—for a 5-10 man who now weighs 170 pounds, but who played most of last year in the 150s. “I always lose weight during the season,” said Coles.

Despite his lack of size, Coles has proved during his three years here that he can take punishment. “He gets hit on every play,” said Tech Coach Jimmy Sharp.

Coles agrees with that assessment—up to a point.

“I found out that when you play in the wish-bone, you’re gonna get hit. I decided if that was the case, I’d initiate the hitting myself and see if I couldn’t do some damage.”

So, after coming from a high school program (Bayside at Virginia Beach) where he never had to block, Coles became an effective blocker as well as a wispy runner who also can get tough yardage inside.

Coles, who ran an official 9.6 in the 100-yard dash in high school, did not go out for track this spring, although fleet teammate Dennis Scott, Larry Fallan and Kenny Lewis are mainstays on that squad.

Instead, Coles said he wanted to concentrate on football. Since he’ll be a senior in the fall, and the only returning backfield starter, Roscoe feels added responsibility.

“In the past, maybe I was like a follower. This year I’m in a leadership role. I felt it was necessary to be around for spring football. I plan on beating Texas A&M (Tech’s fall opener).”

Sharp calls Coles “a rarity. He has great ambition and super character. You can see he’s had a very disciplined home life.” He’s in the Army ROTC. “I like the military, especially the traveling,” he says.

But Coles has done almost no traveling since he’s been at Tech. He’s stayed in Blacksburg every summer and he’ll remain here again this summer, probably working at a local department store. “I’ll be down at the track every day, too, getting ready for football season.”

Last year, after a great start, Tech folded to a 6-5 record by dropping its final three games. Coles took the defeats personally. “I could have done a lot better,” he said, ignoring the series of injuries. “It wasn’t that bad during the games, but it killed me when I took the pads off.”

If it’s left up to Roscoe, Tech will get some revenge this fall, starting with A&M. “Personally, I was embarrassed by Texas A&M (19-9), and I don’t like being embarrassed.”

“I look on A&M, Clemson, William & Mary and Richmond as grudge games this year.”

W&M and Richmond beat the Hokies. Coles conceives that Tech has trouble “getting up for the state teams, except maybe a little for Virginia.”

Why Clemson?

“Because I want to show Pell and Ford that they shouldn’t have left here.”

Charlie Pell, the new head coach at Clemson, was Sharp’s assistant head coach two seasons back. Danny Ford was on the Tech staff last year, joining Pell as chief assistant.

Coles said he has done as well as he has “because I’ve tried hard every game. Nothing in football is fun except the games on Saturday. Only the strong survive.”

Clearly, Roscoe Coles, slight of stature but big of heart, plans on surviving.