Homesickness Strikes Hokie

Tech Mickey Rogers: 'I Was Scared'

BLACKSBURG — If you go by bloodiness — as in horse breeding, Mickey Rogers figures to be a thoroughbred champion.

Mickey came to Virginia Tech, highly regarded to follow in the footsteps of brother Phil — one of the greatest backs in Tech's history.

Known as the "Dazzling Deuce," Mickey led Gate City to a state championship in his final year of football.

And therein was the flaw in Mickey Rogers. His final year of football was his junior season. Under Virginia High School Rules, he was too old to play his senior season. He just had to sit and wait.

"They changed the rule and I missed by eight or nine days being able to play my last year," says Rogers.

"I remember at the beginning of my sophomore year one of the coaches said something to me about it, not being able to play. It seemed so far off. Then it hit me at the end of my junior year."

In spite of the credentials, Rogers was behind the other freshmen at Tech last fall. His Tech teammates had sharpened their skills during their senior season in high school. Rogers' senior year included shooting baskets after school each day with a friend and sitting in the stands watching Gate City football on Friday nights.

"Because of that," said Tech offensive coordinator Nelson Stokley, "Mickey got further back. Last fall he had no chance to get in the groove and get ready to play."

Mickey's fall included an apprenticeship where he ran only five or six plays in Tech's varsity games.

That didn't help. It might have compounded Rogers' other problem.

Asked if he is happy at Tech, Mickey just smiled. It was obvious something else bothered him.

"I like it here," he admitted, "but I miss home a lot."

More than the average freshman with the frustrations of adjusting to college life?

"I'd rather be home. I like Gate City. I'm just a small town boy," he explained.

Still, Mickey's not ready to quit. Things are looking better. His skills have picked up so that he and Kenny Lewis are the second string halfbacks behind Roscoe Coles and Dennis Scott in spring practice.

"Mickey's done better than we thought," said Stokley. "That doesn't mean he hasn't got a lot of areas in which to learn."

For his part, though, Rogers almost didn't stick it out to see if he could make it as a Tech football player.

"Plenty of times," Rogers said, "I was close to not coming back when I'd go home for a weekend."

"I've got an older brother (Stanley) and he fusses at me. He says it was tough on him when he was at Bluford State."

"How bad were things for Rogers?"

"When I came here last summer, I would stay in my room and get all my clothes out to park," he recalled. "I would want to go home. But I would call Phil, and he'd get mad at me."

"Every freshman misses home a lot. To me it's a battle. Dennis (Scotch, a sophomore) and I are good friends. We'd talk about it a lot."

"He'd tell me I didn't need to go home, that he was from Jessup, Ga., and only went home twice his freshman year after school started. It was rough on him."

When Rogers went to practice, that didn't help.

"The first day we went out in pads," he recalled, "I was scared. Coach (Danny) Ford talked to me, but I started crying that day. I was wanting to go home bad after that, but I went on out there (to practice)."

"Still, every chance I got, I would go home on the weekends. The hardest thing is that all my friends are at home and I miss running around with them."

Now the problem seems to be solved.

"I feel like I have it under control," said Rogers. Still, his face betrays the true emotions that tell you there are some bad days.

This brings up the obvious question as to the future of Mickey Rogers.

He said he doesn't like to be compared with his brother.

"That was the first thing that bothered me when I came here. People would compare us as being alike," said Mickey.

"I'm bigger. I'd say I could take more punishment," he added, making his own comparison.

Mickey makes one point about his career compared to Phil's. He won't every try to be a quarterback as Phil did during his senior season at Tech.

Stokley says the potential is there for Mickey to do as much as his brother.

"He has more speed than Phil has," said Stokley. "The only thing is that he doesn't have the lateral movement Phil has. That's a real important."

Stokley, though, feels it's important that Rogers has done as well as he has.

"Hopefully," said the Tech assistant, "if he and Kenny (Lewis) keep coming, they'll get a lot of playing time next year. That will give them the depth we didn't have last year. We would have been in trouble if something had happened to Roscoe."

Rogers looks forward to next fall. He must return to summer school for the first semester to help fill in grades, but he feels he can get past this problem.

"Things look a lot better than they did in fall. I know they had a lot of players in front of me. I know I had a lot to learn. I still have a lot to learn," he said.

But so far he has learned perhaps the biggest lesson — sticking it out. It hasn't been easy. But as they say, the worthwhile things never are.