Winning Becoming Habit
For Tech Ballplayers

By Edmund Greene

"Winning is contagious," says Tech baseball coach Bob Humphreys. "I think our kids have gotten used to it, and that's contributed to keeping our success going," he added, in explaining his team's 29 game winning streak.

The effectiveness of the Tech pitching staff continues to be a key factor for the Hokies. "It (winning) fuels confidence and attitude," adds Humphreys. The pitching staff has definitely gotten used to winning and the added confidence is evidenced by the 18 complete games the staff owns.

Leading the Tech mound corps thus far this spring has been righthander Duke Dickerson. The Columbus, Ohio native sports a 9-1 record (a Tech record for wins in a season) and a 1.97 earned run average, having won his nine games in succession.

Dickerson is not overpowering, but spots the ball with ease after conquering early season control problems. The 6-3, 195 lb. sophomore has not been limited to a starting role, either. Dickerson has appeared in two games in relief, picking up victories in each appearance.

Joining Dickerson in leading the Tech staff through the 29 game streak is junior Jim Puglisi. Puglisi (6-2, 2.75 ERA) leads the team in strikeouts and complete games, and is just behind Dickerson in innings pitched.

With a NCAA bid a possibility, Puglisi, with two more wins could tie the Tech mark for most victories in a career which is held by Mike Arrington with 20.

Also returning from last year's staff to aid the Hokies is Bob Fisher. When his arm has been healthy, he has been one of Tech's most reliable hurlers, posting a 3-1 record—losing only a one run decision to Connecticut. The Roanoke All-Metro Player of the Year in 1974 has posted one of Tech's five shutouts.

Dean Powell, after his decision not to sit out the season because of an eye virus, has come on strong since the streak began and has posted a perfect 2-0 mark. Powell, Ferrum College's mound ace last spring, leads the Hokie staff in earned run average with a 1.62 mark.

The big lefty has also had a shutout to his credit and came within a single out of picking up his second against Milligan.

Mike Rhodes has stepped right into the starting rotation as a freshman, and has done an outstanding job. Rhodes, who helped pitch Bayside High (Virginia Beach) to the Virginia AAA State Championship last spring, has posted a 5-1 record, and has allowed only three earned runs in his last four starts.

John Power and Harold Berkey have manned the bullpen this year and between them have amassed a 4-0 mark with six saves. The 18 complete games the staff has compiled (including 14 during the 29 game streak) have helped Humphreys not to notice the loss of reliever Orvin Kiser as much. But when the situation arises, Humphreys has confidence in both Power and Berkey to get the job done, and has not hesitated to use them.

Also helping out the Tech hurlers has been the outstanding play of catcher Wayne Shelton. Besides calling an excellent game, Shelton has gunned down 14 out of 35 stolen base attempts.

"Wayne has done a good job behind the plate this year," commented Humphreys. "He really helps our pitching out."

"When we catch the ball we can play with anyone," Humphreys added. "We've scored enough runs to win if we get any kind of pitching—and the pitching has been good enough when it needed to be."

"Pitching is keeping us in there," said the Tech coach. "In the last nine games (not including the Tennessee game) we've only given up five earned runs. You've got to do well when you get that type of pitching."

If you call winning 29 games in a row doing well, the Tech pitching staff has certainly been doing its share.