Gobblers' NCAA Starter

Dickerson Halfway to Tech Goal

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MINNEAPOLIS — If Duke Dickerson had his way, he'd be pitching in the NCAA Baseball Tournament this weekend.

And he will be.

But two years ago as a high school senior in Ohio, the tall righthander wasn't planning on doing his mound work in the NCAA Mideast Regional as the ace on the Virginia Tech staff.

Dickerson is Tech Coach Bob Humphreys' choice to start the Gobblers' regional debut here Friday at 1 p.m. against Central Michigan. Considering his 10-1 record includes a school-record victory total for a single season, the selection is not surprising.

"Here we are in our second straight NCAA," said Dickerson, who worked a simulated 10 innings to prepare for the start earlier this week. "Really, I'm not surprised what we've done in baseball since I've been here.

"When I got here, I filled out a form for our sports information office and there was a question on there about what I would like to help Tech do in baseball. I answered that I'd like to take trips to four straight NCAA tournaments."

Although Dickerson's father, R.F. Dickerson, is a 1944 graduate of the Blacksburg school, the Columbus, Ohio, native wasn't enthralled about following in his father's footsteps. It was more like brother, like brother.

"I was considering Washington State because they have a really good baseball program there," said Dickerson of the school that will be playing in the NCAA's Rocky Mountain Regional this weekend. "I wanted to go there because of the success my brother had. But I wasn't offered a scholarship.

"Being from Ohio, I looked around at a couple places like Bowling Green and Miami. Then, I heard from Hump (Humphreys) when he came to Columbus to look at a catcher he was going to recruit. I decided on Tech."

Dickerson's brother, Steve Dickerson, was team captain and starting first baseman for Washington State's 1989 club that finished 26-16. He hit plus-.300 on a club that included current major league stars Ron Cey of Los Angeles and Minnesota's Dan Ford.

"As I understand it, Hump was deciding between Wayne Shelton (the current Tech catcher) and a guy from Columbus named John Wolf," said Dickerson. "He decided on Shelton, and then he got me to come to Tech."

Since arriving at Blacksburg, Dickerson has compiled a 14-2 won-loss record and has exhibited excellent control—allowing just over two walks for every nine innings pitched. He gets by with what some Tech observers consider three pitches—slow, slower, and slowest.

"I guess that's true," said the dark-haired Dickerson with a laugh. "In high school, you can get by with blowing the ball by most of the people. In college, you just can't expect to get everybody out that way.

"I try to move the ball around and change speeds a lot. I'll move it inside, then up, then down. And I'll cut the ball from a sidearm motion and coming over the top. If you can be successful that way, that's what counts."

Dickerson started the season in a fit of wildness, issuing 18 walks in his first 27 innings. Since then, he has permitted only 2.5 bases on balls per game—after allowing only 1.8 walks per nine innings as a freshman.

"At the beginning of the season, I was having trouble getting accustomed to the mound outdoors after working indoors. I guess it's the same as a hitter having problems with depth perception when he moves outside after winter workouts."

Dickerson, who pitched Tech's opener in the NCAA last year against South Carolina and left after eight innings with no decision (in a 7-6, 10-inning loss), said the Gobblers have come here with a different attitude.

"Last year, we went to South Carolina like we were world beaters because we were picked to win," said the 6-3, 195-pound hurler. "Now, we have a lot to prove after losing two straight down there. We've won 31 games in a row, and people talk about how our schedule is weak.

"Well, if they want us to be underdogs, we're glad to be underdogs. I think we've earned this trip, and we'll have no excuses if we go up there and get beat."

"All season long we've ridden in vans and eaten in truck stops. So, we fly to Minnesota. We're being treated like kings. I just hope we play like kings."