Better Days Coming for Big 5

The Big Five in Virginia will be doing its impression of the Slaughterhouse Five this weekend, with none of the state's major football teams being given much of a chance to win. If that holds up, then no school in Virginia will have a winning record, with only VMI even having a break-even record.

But don't despair, things will look up. They won't look up in a hurry, however, since all five may be picked to lose again next week.

After Army, VMI has the honor of playing at East Carolina, conqueror of N.C. State and Duke. Virginia Tech drops from seventh-ranked Texas A&M to Memphis State. Richmond stands a chance against Appalachian State if the Spiders find an offense, and Virginia could beat Duke, but that's unlikely.

Before the season even starts for Tech, the Gobblers are losers. They have lost three starters at positions where they could ill afford losses.

The Hokies need Mike Faulkner in their lineup. Faulkner was operated on last week, a knee, of course. Faulkner was Tech's second largest man in the defense at 6-2, 249. At defensive tackle, big men are necessary. The Gobblers' largest starter on defense is the other defensive tackle, Doug McDougald, 6-6, 260.

Texas A&M fullback George Woodard isn't telling anyone how much he weighs. The official estimate is 283. Even Woodard admits he weighs too much.

Last week Woodard, however, had 150 yards on 20 carries against Kansas. Tech will need all the big men it has to stop the world's biggest (at least heaviest) fullback.

A crowd of about 30,000 is expected for Saturday's game in Blacksburg. That would be the biggest crowd ever to see a game when the students were out.

The result will be a terrible traffic problem. All 30,000 people will be heading into Blacksburg Saturday instead of 10,000 or so walking over from their dorms. Parking will be at a premium and the jams will be many.

VMI even had a run on tickets this week and the Keydets are playing at West Point. VMI was allotted 3,000 tickets and about 600 of those were taken by the corps, which will be traveling to Army.

The other 2,400 or so were taken and VMI had to turn down requests for more. Between 25,000 and 30,000 are expected for the game, so there are seats available at West Point.

Of course, VMI graduates in the military will be able to hear the game from just about anywhere they're stationed. Army's radio network is understandably built to suit the military. The West Pointers are heard on two stations in New York, New Jersey, Georgia, South Carolina and Texas. There also are radio outlets in Kentucky, Connecticut, North Carolina, Alabama and Florida.

All of these stations are on or near an Army base.

The Keydets had private practices this week. Last week, before the season-opener against William and Mary, guards were posted around the practice field to make certain no spies caught a glimpse of what the Keydets were planning. Last year, two W&M scouts were caught in the bushes.

But, apparently VMI either thought Army was honorable and above such things, or the Keydets showed everything in their first game. The guards were removed.

VMI Coach Bob Thalman had a small scare Tuesday during practice. He looked across the field and saw placekicker Craig Jones laying on the ground and trainer Steve Yates working on him.

Jones had five field goals in the W&M game which the Keydets won, 23-13.

But when Thalman checked, Jones was just loosening up under Yates' supervision. "I'm glad he's not hurt," said Thalman. "I'm planning on him being on the plane when we head to West Point Friday."

Thalman was interviewed by the New York City Touchdown Club via telephone Monday. It seems the New Yorkers had trouble believing VMI was so small and still thought it had a chance to beat the Cadets of West Point.

While both Army and VMI are military schools, any similarity stops there. Army has much better facilities and a much larger student body. Army also has Jim Simpson, a quarterback from Falls Church who had signed with VMI, and the Keydets aren't forgetting that.

VMI will be one of six teams to play at Army's Michie Field this year. The Cadets have nine official home games, but they're playing Notre Dame and Pitt in the new Giants Stadium at Meadowlands, N.J., and the Navy game always is in Philadelphia. The only away games for Army are at Air Force and Boston College.

It's too bad Virginia won't be able to enjoy it's trip to Austin, Tex., this week. Austin's a nice town, but the Longhorns won't make it a pleasant visit for the Cavaliers. The two teams are in different worlds.

Maybe UVa should send its JV team to Texas. The varsity could stay home and practice for Duke the following week, a game that at least will be reasonable, and Texas will be scoring as many points as it wants against whomever Virginia sends.

Then again, William and Mary could do the same. A team that beats Norfolk State by just 14 points and can't move the ball against VMI couldn't hope to do much against Pitt's defense.