Fonzie Lives

Tech's Mickey Fitzgerald Will Relive Football of 50's Saturday

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BLACKSBURG — Being only 19 years old, Mickey Fitzgerald's idea of life in the '50s is perhaps best reflected in the television lives of guys like Fonzie, Richie and Potsie.

But Saturday at Lane Stadium, Fitzgerald really will experience the life of a 1950's college football player when Virginia Tech opens its 1977 season by hosting seventh-ranked Texas A&M.

Because of two knee injuries to Tech teammates, Fitzgerald will rekindle memories of single platoon football as Coach Jimmy Sharpe has the Lynchburg sophomore slated for lots of work on both units.

On offense, Fitzgerald will play tight end, while on defense he will go at tackle. Ironically, were it not for injuries to Mike Faulkner and Dave Dolphin, Fitzgerald might be starting at offensive tackle or guard.

"Coach Sharpe asked me if I wanted to set a record," said Fitzgerald, recounting his surprise visit with his coach last weekend. "Then he talked about me playing both ways. I was really surprised, because I didn't know what kind of depth we had on defense."

Fitzgerald, the former E.C. Glass High star, was working on the offensive line until Faulkner, a two-year starter, suffered a knee injury eight days ago. So, Sharpe moved Fitzgerald to Faulkner's defensive tackle spot, figuring Dave Dolphin as the starting tight end.

In workouts, Fitzgerald had been alternating with Dolphin at tight end, as well as taking his turns at guard and tackle. But now at defensive tackle, Mickey figured he wouldn't be playing much on defense. Then on Saturday, Dolphin went down, also with a knee injury. That left Sharpe shorthanded and Fitzgerald with lots of work to do.

"I think I'm going to be starting at tight end and alternating with Danny Hill at defensive tackle," said Fitzgerald. "I guess it depends on how the game goes, but I'll be ready to play a lot. One thing Coach Sharpe told me was that I'd better learn how to get a breather on my feet."

Fitzgerald has been running extra sprints after practice to increase his wind. Sharpe says he "hasn't decided whether to start Mickey both ways or one way. But we're prepared to do both or either."

Fitzgerald will be wearing uniform No. 88 Saturday, but the wise-cracking lineman said he might have a couple other identifying marks.

"I'll be the one wearing the leather jacket with my hair slicked back," joked Fitzgerald, wondering if he could attract the females, a la Fonzie. "I'll also be the guy that's out of breath."

Somehow, Fitzgerald isn't remindful of The Fonz. Fonzie stops jukeboxes, and a handshake with Fitzgerald shows he probably could do likewise. But Saturday, he only wants to stop the Aggies—and go home and rest.

GOBBLERS' GOSSIP: Sharpe has decided on junior David Lamie as his starting quarterback, joining halfbacks Roscoe Coles and Dennis Scott and fullback Dickie Holway on the first unit. Don LaRue will back up Lamie, although Sharpe said "I am anticipating and expecting to play both. They both move the ball well. But David might be a little quicker on getting us outside." Danville sophomore Kenny Lewis is the backup at both halfback spots. "I consider him a starter," said Sharpe. A decision on the future of defensive back Gary Smith still is in the air. Smith, who has a shoulder separation, will miss this week's game. Sharpe said Smith might need an operation and if that's the final diagnosis, the safety would then miss six weeks.