Peaches Birtsch Big
On Offense For VPI

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The 6-foot-5 mountain of Virginia Tech muscle called "Peaches" has a long memory.

"Peaches" is Greg Birtsch, a tackle on offense who sparkled in his own comparatively unnoticed way Saturday.

While the Gobblers lost to seventh-ranked Texas A&M 27-6, Birtsch made his first varsity start an auspicious one. He led Gobblers' linemen with an 85 percent grading.

His blocking, as much as anyone's, was a force in opening daylight for brilliant senior running back Roscoe Coles. The performance was noteworthy for a number of reasons. Most important to fuzzy-faced Birtsch was proving wrong former Virginia Tech Assistant Coach Danny Ford, now at Clemson.

"He told me (John) Latina we could never play for Tech," Birtsch was recalling Monday. Latina, by the way, now plays alongside Birtsch.

The Gobblers host Clemson Oct. 1, and Birtsch says, "we'll be ready."

First, of course, comes this week's trip to Memphis State, winner of two of its three games, including a 31-26 conquest of Utah State in its latest showing.

For the Tigers, stopping the mercurial Coles will be a major task. The Virginia Beach product is chasing his third consecutive season of 1,000 yards or better.

To achieve this, Memphis undoubtedly will have to minimize Birtsch's effectiveness. That may not be a simple task.

The robust 250-pounder feels he is playing his best.

"It's all mental — concentration on the snap count. You have to know where to step, when and have confidence. Saturday I felt very confident. I wasn't worrying about who to block or things like that. I just did what I was supposed to."

Birtsch is a product of East Aurora, N.Y., which is near Buffalo. Prior to attending Tech, he attended prep school in Milford, Conn.

Then came the culling of bids to make his choice from among Kentucky, Maryland, Cincinnati, Clemson and Penn State. Birtsch visited Tech on his last visit.

Basically a country boy — "I don't like big cities," he says — Tech put "just the right amount of pressure" on at the right time. I really was confused (over making a selection) at the time."

After three years at Tech, Birtsch is at last "enjoying football." A knee op-

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eration, a year as a redshirt and a freshman season have all helped mold him into a 22-year-old junior ready to step into some big shoes.

Filling in holes in the offensive line left by graduation of Rondal Davis and Keith Gibson was a major task for Coach Jim Sharpe.

Birtsch says he was labelled "Peaches" by his high school coach. "Then my teachers called me by that, and now even my parents do. I don't even know my real name any more," he says by way of pleasant exaggeration.

The easy-talking recreation major concedes a career as a professional football player has become a possibility. "I'll know after this year," he says quietly.

"I've got the size and speed, but I've never shown it before," he says.

Birtsch normally is stationed in front of the fleet Coles. Against formations shown by Texas A&M and

Memphis he usually faces a down lineman.

When Coles carries in Birtsch's direction, "it's usually a counter play. That freezes a linebacker and gives me a chance chance to block one of them.

"Saturday, I thought I did a decent job."

"Decent" Memphis spells trouble for State.

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