Memphis State Aims To Make VPI Next Home Streak Victim

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If Memphis State has its way tomorrow night, Virginia Tech will be just another milestone on a pleasant football journey. The Tigers' coach, in fact, is a man to be envied.

After losing a season-opening bout with Mississippi, last week's upset conqueror of Notre Dame, Coach Dick Williamson and his MSU Tigers embarked on a string of seven straight home games which, quite naturally, has as its aim the improvement on a quite respectable 7-4 record in 1976.

Two of those home contests have already been transferred to the victory column, 27-9 and 31-26 decisions over Tulane and Utah State, so Tech Coach Jimmy Sharpe can look for no mercy on the basis of having served with Williamson as an assistant coach on Alabama's staff a few seasons ago.

Instead, Sharpe might prepare his Gobblers for something resembling an all-out aerial bombardment. Not only because the Tigers like to put footballs in the air, but also due to reports that Tech's star linebacker, Rick Razzano, was expected to be announced Thursday as fit to play.

With Razzano back, and hot off a brilliant afternoon against Texas A&M, the Techmen can reasonably count on checking the Tigers' ground offensive, so sheer logic indicates MSU will take to the air lanes with gusto.

That would seem to presage hard times for the Gobblers, based on last week's success by A&M in that department, but Sharpe is confident his charges can handle the challenge — and with fewer adverse results, not only fewer mistakes but also a cutback in pass interference penalties.

If the Gobblers accomplish that mission without being burned too much, then Sharpe's main concern will be the blossoming of his club's offense, which again will be under the direction of Bristol (Tenn.) product David Lamie.

Barring another affliction with fumbleitis, Sharpe is also confident Lamie and Danville's Don LaRue can put zip into the attack. One reason for Sharpe's optimism could be the fact that MSU's defensive corps lacks experience and showed it by yielding Utah State's 26 points last week.

Hopefully, too, Tech's mentor is looking for his offensive and defensive lines to improve on what he thought were commendable performances last week against Texas A&M's more vaunted and personnel-rich units.

That's not to say the Tigers don't have athletes capable of finer efforts. It's just that they're in a rebuilding stage after a graduation which stripped See VPI, Page 38, Cols. 5-6

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the squad of 22 seniors.

Among MSU's more formidable defenders will be senior tackle Bud Sipple and veteran nose-guard Sam Hurst, both tipping the scales at 245 pounds. Somewhat of an unknown quantity, but not in the weight department, is Ricky Jenkins, who weighs in with 300 as the other tackle.

Also returning is the Tigers' leading tackler of '76, linebacker Keith Butler, but the secondary defenses is where the Memphis are currently most vulnerable.

Whether Tech's secondary is vulnerable or not will be quickly determined by MSU's talented junior quarterback, Lloyd Patterson. Last year his leadership spurred an offense which averaged 344 yards, and in the passing department his personal record shows 178 passes, 87 completions netting 1,563 yards, and 14 touchdowns (by air strikes).

MSU's running game depends almost entirely on younger backs, because its top three ground-gainers of last year are gone. To open up things for them, Patterson has three new aerial targets; wide receivers Ernest Gray and Keith Wright and tight end Bill Austin. Between them they hauled in 56 of Patterson's on-target throws.

It doesn't figure to be an easy night for the invading Gobblers, who will be meeting MSU in the stadium where the annual Liberty Bowl is played. Twice before the teams have clashed, and both times the Tigers were victorious, by 21-20 in 1970 and (oops!) by 49-16 just three campaigns ago.