Virginia Tech Has a 'Midget' For a Defensive End

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BLACKSBURG — Virginia Tech football coaches always shout at David DeHart:

"Get off your knees. Stand up."

Opponents call him Pee Wee—without fear of reprisal.

DeHart’s favorite words when he describes how he charges a quarterback are: "Very carefully."

The reason is that DeHart stands 5-8 and weighs 175. In some cases, this wouldn’t raise eyebrows because everyone would assume that DeHart is a corner back or safety.

But he isn’t. DeHart is a defensive end and that’s not a position where people would say good things come in small packages.

Defensive ends usually resemble bull elephants—not ants or fleas.

So, there was DeHart actually tackling burly Texas A&M fullback George Woodward, a 280-pounder, last Saturday. And there was DeHart sacking the A&M quarterback.

"I’m not going to bat down any passes," says DeHart. "But I can get to the quarterback quicker than most people."

DeHart has had to overcome his lack of size ever since high school. He was offered a scholarship to play for Appalachian State when he finished under Norm Lineburg at Radford.

But Appalachian double-checked DeHart’s size and instead offered him the role of a walk-on who might earn a scholarship.

That caused DeHart, then a defensive back, to come toTech where he ran into the Hokies’ defensive coordinator, Buddy Bennett.

"Coach Bennett decided I had the strength and moved me to defensive end," said DeHart, who was still a walk-on without a position on the team.

"Coach Bennett told me I would be at the open end slot so that what I’m playing is more like a linebacker. I would drop off on some pass plays."

"I was reluctant, I thought I wouldn’t get a chance to play."

How wrong he was. By the middle of his sophomore year, DeHart was on the squad as a scholarship member. Last year he backed up h-2, 210-pound Keith McCrubar and this season he’s it—all of 175 pounds, dripping wet.

"I’m kidded good naturedly all the time," said DeHart, who isn’t bothered by his size. "I’m about the smallest guy on the team."

"The day I received the scholarship was the happiest day of my life. It was the first step. I think I achieved the second step by starting."

DeHart’s taken another step. "Last year I was called ‘Snack Pack’. Now they just call me David. I don’t have any nicknames," he said.

DeHart’s parents don’t mind their son playing football—in spite of his size differential with some of the people he is matched against on Saturday afternoons.

"To go along with his dimensions, DeHart has an athletic hero of similar proportions: Pat Fischer of the Washington Redskins."

"He’s my main man. He’s got my number," said the feisty DeHart, who wears 37 on his jersey just like the Redskins star.

DeHart’s secret is quickness. "A lot of times I have to make up for a lack of size with quickness against the bigger guys," he explained.

He laughs about a pro career. "Maybe the NFL Midget League," DeHart joshed.

Then, in a more serious vein, he added, "I hope people who think they can’t do something look at people like Monte Towe (N.C. State guard who is now a pro at 5-8) and Fischer."

And maybe DeHart should have added his name. It might be a long time before another 175-pound defensive end comes to Tech.

TECH TIDBITS: Memphis State, Tech’s opponent Saturday in the Tennessee Bluff City, has lost junior halfback Mike Bates for possibly the remainder of the season. He was the Tigers’ leading ground gainer. A crowd of 25,000 to 30,000 is expected for the contest. On the basketball front, Coach Charlie Moir welcomed his team back Wednesday with the rest of the student body and found that Ronnie Edwards, Tech’s third guard last year, will not return because of academic deficiencies.