Razzano's Sub Saves Tech's Morale

By JACK BOGACZYK
Sports Writer

BLACKSBURG — Around these parts, if Virginia Tech linebacker Rick Razzano isn't mentioned in the same breath with God, he's at least spoken of right up there with Mike Widger.

Widger, Tech's former all-America linebacker, and Razzano are considered perhaps the finest at their position to ever play for the Hokies. But those who figure the latter's irreplaceable during the Jimmy Sharpe era apparently haven't heard about Jerry Sheehan.

Sheehan was considered among Tech's missing persons bureau until this fall. In the 1975 spring game, Sheehan was given the award as the best defensive back. But until the Texas A&M opener two weeks ago, the Delaware native was little more than a replacement.

Finally getting his chance to start, Sheehan replaced the medically-discharged Mike Stollings at weak linebacker. Then last week at Memphis State, Sheehan was back as a replacement again—not that he minded.

He started in place of the injured Razzano at the strong linebacker spot. Stepping into Sheehan's old post on the weak side was Lewis Neal, the former Patrick Henry High star.

"Before when Rick wasn't in there, it seemed we would have a letdown morale-wise," said Tech linebacker coach Wayne Hall. "But Jerry didn't let that happen. He had seven tackles and four assists and caused a fumble.

"A lot of other kids would have given up and figured they couldn't replace Razzano. But Jerry graded out at 75 per cent—and that's the best for a linebacker on our team this year."

So, Sheehan heads into Saturday's game with Clemson at Lane Stadium not knowing whether he's going to be on the strong or weak side of the Tech defense.

"Virginia Tech was the only school that recruited me," said Sheehan, admitting that his waiting to play since the 1975 spring game award honor wasn't as long as it might seem. "I wasn't that big in high school, and I wasn't fast either.

"As a freshman, I played on the speciality teams. Then I got hurt—tore a muscle or something. After that I didn't play much at all until this fall."

Stollings returned this summer slated to start alongside Razzano, but a recurring inner ear problem finally forced him to give up the sport. It was then that Sheehan got his chance.

The previous two years, Sheehan kept being regarded as a prospect by the Tech coaches. He was redshirted in 1975 and lettered last year. It seemed like he would never pass Steve Cannon on the depth chart after Cannon replaced Stollings as a starter part way through last season. But then Cannon quit and now Sheehan's the man.

"Last week (at Memphis State) was the first time I ever played the strong side," said the 6-1, 212-pounder. "I had played there for a week in practice. I don't think it makes a whole lot of difference where I play. If you don't hustle, you're not going to stay in there."

After playing for the run against Texas A&M and watching for the pass in Memphis, the Gobbler's defense will need to expect the unexpected against Clemson.

"I'm probably better playing against the run," said Sheehan. "In the first place, I'm not that fast. But a linebacker has to be ready to do both. I wasn't even thinking of pass against Memphis State. Each play is something different. And a lot of times your instinct tells you what to do."

JERRY SHEEHAN
Replaces Razzano

Last week, his instincts apparently told him to play Razzano's position as Razzano would play it. And moonlighting successfully in football is one sure way to keep your primary job.