Who Said Lewis Neal couldn't Play at 80 Pounds?

By DOUG DOUTHY
Sports Writer

BLACKSBURG — At a time when encroaching obesity is a concern of almost all of us, Virginia Tech lineman Lewis Neal is wracking his brain trying to find ways to gain weight.

Not that anybody is calling the 5-11, 180-pounder skinny, at least not in his football uniform. It’s just that ever since he was in grade school, people have been telling the Patrick Henry graduate he’s got too small to play college ball.

“I’ve tried to gain weight; I really have,” said Neal, a sophomore who has proved the skeptics wrong by working hard to get enough playing time for the Hokies in place of the injured Rick Razzano.

“I remember this one coach from Richmond telling me there was no way I’d play if I didn’t get up to 190 and that really scared me. I had this stuff called Nutriment and I used to drink four cans a day. It got to the point where all I had to do was smell the stuff and it would make me sick.”

While Razzano, for one, was able to put on pounds by lifting weights, Neal hasn’t found that any help, either. “I’ll get up to 190 or so,” he shrugs, “but, as soon as I start working out, I’ll be right back down again.”

Funny thing, Neal’s weight—or lack of same—hasn’t posed nearly as many problems as the sprained ankle he suffered midway through last season or the foot bone he sustained in the spring. When regular Mike Stollings had inner ear problems, the weakside lineman’s position was there for the asking.

“No, I didn’t expect to start,” said Neal, who missed much of spring ball due to the injury. “I knew our defense was going to be good, and we were going to be two deep for the Hokies in place of the injured Rick Razzano.”

After the game, the coaches who recruited me said I could play and that was enough for me,” said Neal, “but, I must admit, like every freshman I was a little anxious at first.”

Charlie Pell, who recruited Neal for Tech before becoming the head coach at Clemson, warned the Volunteers’ fullback lineman that the Hokies had no particular position in mind for him. “Back then, they talked most about free safety,” said Neal.

Neal, who has started both days at the Clemson game before being replaced by Craig, had to adjust to the move. “I’m interested to see how the week against Virginia.”

Virginia’s defense is one of the best in the nation and it will be a tough assignment for the Tech offense. “I’ve been working on the offensive line with Coach Jimmy Sharpe to help us get past the Hokies,” said Neal.

NC State, the only other school to offer Neal a scholarship, basically told him the same thing. “I’ve been working with Coach Jimmy Sharpe to help us get past the Hokies,” said Neal.

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