Victory Over Tech an Instant Replay for Richmond

Bettie Jean Tait says she likes football "except when my husband's team plays." When winning memories are on the table and clothes on the back, losing a game could possibly mean a trip to the unemployment office. It's easy to understand her thinking.

Suddently it becomes more than just a kid's game or a social diversion on a fall afternoon. Bettie Jean Tait, is, after all, wife of University of Richmond coach Jim Tait.

Through the season's first six games, there had been more agony than ecstasy for the Family Tait, all eight of them. The Spiders simply had not distinguished themselves except on rare occasions. Offensively, Richmond was 6-0 for the second half, and the athletic office at Robinson Center was nowhere to go looking for laughs.

The Spiders' 1-5 and already had run through three quarterbacks. They tried running a lot and passing a lot in addition to a more balanced approach. Nothing seemed appropriate. The defense had been okay, but not great.

Virginia Tech, likewise hard-pressed (1-5), was a two-touchdown choice, and as the minutes dwindled toward the opening kickoff, UR assistant Lauren Collins said, "I don't care. I have a feeling. This is going to be our day.'"

WITH DAVE TAYLOR back at quarterback, a position he owned at season's start and subsequently lost, the Spiders made Collins' bunch come true. More important, they proved something to themselves, if not to veteran Spider watchers who finally had a reason to celebrate.

"All year I think we've been confident. It was just a thing of going out there and showing ourselves we could do it, then do it again," said Taylor, his voice cracking with heariness after Richmond dumped Tech, 17-14, and undoubtedly left as awful lot of people-most of them Hokies-in shock.

Call it an instant replay. Last year Tech came in heavily favored. Richmond needed a win and won, 16-0, as Taylor threw two touchdown passes. There is something about Tech that lights up Richmond team. More than a few of Tech were surprised by the outcome, but apparently not the UR staff.

"We had 55 prospects in here this weekend, with their parents more than 200 people," said UR assistant Buck Buchanan. "We bring them in for the Tech game every year. Wiesel is a lot of kids who came down for this game last year. Obviously it made a good impression. Yesterday's return engagement should have, too."

FOR TAYLOR, a senior who became a starter last year practically by default—Larry Shaw was injured—it was a vindication of sorts. The Spiders could be successful with him at the controls.

"Coach Tait had a lot of pressure on him all year," said Taylor, reluctant to speak much since the fourth quarter of the season's last game (at North Carolina). "He explained to me what he was doing and why he was doing it. I understood completely. I never complained."

Taylor got a second chance when Jeff Smith was injured last week at East Carolina and was not in uniform for Tech."I knew if I got back in, I had to prove myself. All I hope in I did today," Taylor said.

What the Spiders did was exercise ball control by taking advantage of Tech's defensive quickness. "They showed us everything we were prepared for—but they were quicker than we expected...so quick that they over-ran the ball," Taylor explained.

Richmond ran 81 plays, 21 more than Tech, and turned the ball over only once. Even that—an interception of a long Taylor pass—worked in the Spiders' favor. Combined with the ensuing penalty it left the Hokies deep in their own territory. They finally punted from their seven, and UR promptly marched 44 yards in eight plays for the winning touchdown.

THE UNACCUSTOMED ABSENCE of crucial mistakes, with and without the ball, was the difference for Richmond. Tech responded by giving up the ball five times—two fumbles and three interceptions—and broke only two long plays from scrimmage.

Most games leave big question marks when they're over. This was no exception. For example, Roscoe Coles gained 84 yards including a draw play that he broke for 51 yards to set up Tech's second touchdown.

Coles, who has more than 3,000 yards for his career, was called on only nine times. Why? Richmond linebacker Orlandus Branch offered an explanation.

They run the type of offense to set up Roscoe. If they don't set him up, it's very easy to defense him. He's fast but he's small...and some have doubts about his speed," Branch said.

At that, Coles was caught from behind on his long sprint by Ray Chase, UR's 63, 215 pound defensive end.

THIS GAME HAD special implications for Chase, too. He's been playing in the shadows as UR's other end, while Mike Copley earned most of the headlines.

With Copley on crutches and presumably lost for the season, Chase has moved out of the wings and into the spotlight. "Mike was getting all the publicity and, yeah, it bothered you little I still play as hard as I can," Chase, a junior, said.

No one had to tell Tech how hard Chase was playing. In the dying moments, with the Hokies facing a second-and-10 from their own 46, Chase broke through to quarterback David Lamie for a five-yard loss. Then, on fourth-and-15, Chase charged in from the right and forced a fumble by Coles and slammed Lamie to the ground again.

"I just let it all out," Chase later said. "Tech has a bunch of guys who've been hitting me a lot. They think they're much better than we are. Last year they said they couldn't get up on us. We're just waiting to see what they'll say after this game."

WAIT NO LONGER. Listen to Rick Razzano, Tech senior linebacker and one of the area's— if not the country's—best.

"We didn't have any spark. They didn't have any spark. Nobody played with any enthusiasm," the invariably outspoken Razzano began.

The thing that killed us was when they scored the go-ahead touchdown near the end. Once they hit the showers, we didn't have any more guts on this team. peppers who don't realize that playing with emotion is the key to winning.

"Everyone in the country, good and bad, makes mistakes. The difference is that the good teams don't quit. This team keeps waiting for someone to make the big play. Our team doesn't have 11 players working hard on every play.

"You ought to see the films. A block here, a tackle there is all that's between us and a good season."

It would have been difficult for anyone else in a City Stadium crowd of 19,500 to suggest Richmond didn't have any spark, that the Spiders failed to play with enthusiasm.