Kentucky Gives Weary Gobblers No Time to Rest

By Mike Bevans

No one had to explain to Nelson Stokley the repercussions of Kentucky’s 33-13 win over Louisiana State two weeks ago in Baton Rouge. It had happened only once before and that was when those two teams first met in 1949.

Stokley was LSU’s quarterback in the mid-1960s and, back then, Kentucky “was the door-mat of the Southeastern Conference. They weren’t quite the type of team they are now,” he understated.

As a Bayou Bengal, Stokley savored four victories over the Wildcats in four years. As the offensive coordinator and backfield coach at Virginia Tech, he has watched the Wildcats gain revenge twice and, Saturday night in Lexington, Kentucky will be a three-touchdown favorite to make it three wins over Tech in four years.

“There’s no comparison between this Kentucky team and the ones I played against,” said Stokley, third on LSU’s all-time total offense list with 2,308 yards. “It’s a matter of them having athletes (now) and not having athletes (then).

“When I was a sophomore, they came in undefeated and we beat them. They were always having pretty rough times. After we played them that year, their quarterback was hurt and they didn’t finish too strong.”

KENTUCKY ENDURED EIGHT straight losing seasons until the Wildcats posted a 6-5 record in coach Fran Curci’s second year (1974). A 2-8-1 season followed, but Kentucky rebounded last year to go 7-4, then whipped North Carolina, 21-0, in the Peach Bowl.

Despite the loss of a half-dozen starters to injuries, Kentucky is headed for its finest year since Bear Bryant was the coach of the Wildcats’ only SEC championship team in 1950.

Currently ranked seventh in the nation, the Wildcats (6-1) have won five straight, including road games with Penn State, LSU and Georgia. Vince Dooley, whose Georgia squad was clubbed, 33-0, last week, called Kentucky the best team in the SEC.

After viewing the films of the game, Stokley informed Tech head coach Jimmy Sharpe, “They are probably the best football team we’ve played since we’ve been here. Winning those three big games on the road has to jack them up... not too many beat Georgia between the hedges (which surround Sanford Stadium).”

Kentucky may well finish 10-1, as it did in 1950, but there will be no trip to the Sugar Bowl this time. A one-year probation excludes the Wildcats from post-season play.

VIRGINIA TECH, meanwhile, will certainly have its string of winning seasons snapped at two. The Hokies (1-4-1), to quote the Gold Sheet, a pamphlet with the gambler at heart, “are having problems, even against their minor league intra-state rivals.”

Tech won, tied and lost against William and Mary, Virginia and Richmond, respectively, the last three weeks as the offense struggled to get untracked.

Without going into specifics, Stokley indicated the Hokies’ offense will undergo alterations with regard to personnel and formation.

“There will be a few adjustments at fullback that you will see Saturday that I don’t want to mention now,” he said. “We’re going to play the other quarterbacks more and, right now, we haven’t decided who will start.

“One problem we’ve had is defenses stacked against us and we will use different variations of our offense to help balance the people out.”

THE HOKIES HAVE broken their wishbone formation by using two wide receivers on passing situations, but they will break it for the sake of the running game as well. Halfback Roscoe Coles (88-428) is well off the pace of the 1,000-yard seasons he had as a sophomore and junior, while no one is picking up the slack.

Sophomore Kenny Lewis and junior Larry Fallen will get more work at halfback, while freshmen Mike Romagnoli and Lewis Stuart are expected to see more action at fullback.

Starting quarterback David Lanie has completed only 42.4 per cent of his passes (28-66) and has suffered six interceptions, while backup Don LaRue has hit on only 4 of 12 aerials with three completed to the other team.

Sophomores Mike Zouzalik and Allen Brown are getting a long look in practice this week.

“We haven’t panicked, we’re not making wholesale changes,” said Stokley. “We just want to get something going NOW. We want to get some momentum going. We’ve got a lot of young kids and we want to get it started, so hopefully it will carry them over into the spring and into next year.”