Fitzgerald, Tech Just Miss Upset

By BOB TEITELBAUM
Sports Writer

BLACKSBURG — Virginia Tech football Coach Jimmy Sharpe never tried to hide the fact that Mickey Fitzgerald would be his team's fullback.

What Sharpe didn't tell the world was how well the Lynchburg end can run.

Fitzgerald let Florida State know about his ability Saturday. He stumped, fought and bullied his way to 112 yards rushing.

The effort from Fitzgerald gave Tech's heretofore downright odyssey new life. It did not, however, prevent the Gators from sustaining their sixth loss in eight games.

The 15th-ranked Seminoles survived, 23-21, when Dave Cappelen hit a 29-yard field goal with 4:37 left. And when Tech's offense got the ball back, it responded with only one first down before punting in hopes the Seminoles would fumble it back.

"I didn't know Fitzgerald would start until I read it in the paper," said Florida State Coach Bobby Bowden. "I hadn't seen him run before to judge him."

"But last year when he was a tight end, we judged him the best we've played against and he was only a freshman."

Fitzgerald had played fullback against Kentucky the week before, but he ran the ball just once.

That Fitzgerald would have a good day became apparent on Tech's second possession. Following a blocked punt that led to a Seminole field goal, Fitzgerald carried the Hokies on his back as he got 34 yards in five tries before Tech was stopped at the State 43.

But after a punt, Gene Bunn intercepted a pass at the Seminole 32 and returned it 13 yards. On the next play Fitzgerald breezed through for a 19-yard touchdown run and for the rest of the afternoon, how the Tech fullback determined how well the Hokies moved the ball.

"It was a trap play and (John) Latina and (Greg) Birtch did a great job on the left side. I popped through in their confusion," explained Fitzgerald.

For Tech's second touchdown, an 81-yard drive, Fitzgerald was good enough to keep Florida State honest. Though he got only 10 yards on two carries, everyone was looking for him to run when the Hokies were fourth and one on the State five.

Instead, Roscoe Coles, who surprisingly had only one carry the entire first quarter, got the call. He broke a tackle and went over from the five to give Tech a 14-3 lead.

It was obvious, at this point, that Fitzgerald's presence had picked up Tech's offense.

"Coach Sharpe told me I'm here (at fullback) for my career," said Fitzgerald. "I found out about playing fullback when we had a long talk in his office this past week."

For Sharpe, the move didn't come swiftly. Fitzgerald said the Tech coach started thinking about it last spring.

"He said he told his wife (Ann) that he wished to God he had switched me earlier," said Fitzgerald.

"Well," said Sharpe, "Mickey used to kid us about putting him at fullback. We call him the Hulk (after a cartoon character). He ran so hard this week that he was hurting the offensive linemen."

"On Wednesday, he was running the ball so many times and running for our offensive linemen. They said, 'We've got to block or the Hulk will run over us.'"

Fitzgerald said he never realized how well he was doing. "I was concentrating so hard on the game," he emphasized.

"Today I was running trap plays and back against the grain. But this big gain happened all week in practice."

What turned the game around was that State quarterback Wally Woodham started hitting his passes and the Seminoles pulled out a tricky reverse play with wide receiver Mike Shumann running the ball for big gains.

Woodham made it 14-10 at the half when he hit five passes as State came back on an 88-yard drive following Tech's second touchdown. His last pass, which made him five-for-five on the drive, was a 16-yarder to Shumann for the score.

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Florida State

State 14 10 24 21 45 15 13

Tech 0 0 0 10 0 10 16

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Individual Statistics

Rushing: Florida State—355; Tech—166; Shumann 3-9; Woodham 6-18; Sims 6-4; Lyles 5-18; Virginia Tech—Carles 14-46, Fitzgerald 22-52, Lamie 9-17, Cappelen 7-67, Poole 7-61, Stevens 8-53, Ayers 7-50, King 5-40, Key 4-44, Flowers 1-9, Overby 2-7, Sims 1-14; Virginia Tech—Savage 1-14.

Passing: Florida State—Shumann 1-0-0—0, Sims 1-0-0—0, Lyles 2-0-0—0; Virginia Tech—Carles 0-0-0—0, Fitzgerald 1-0-0—0, Lamie 0-0-0—0, Cappelen 0-0-0—0, Poole 0-0-0—0, Stevens 0-0-0—0, Ayers 0-0-0—0, Key 0-0-0—0, Flowers 0-0-0—0, Overby 0-0-0—0, Sims 0-0-0—0; Virginia Tech—Savage 0-0-0—0.

Receiving: Florida State—Shumann 4-24; Sims 3-14; Lyles 1-9; Virginia Tech—Carles 1-4, Fitzgerald 1-12, Lamie 1-17, Cappelen 7-67, Poole 7-61, Stevens 8-53, Ayers 7-50, Key 4-44, Flowers 1-9, Overby 2-7, Sims 1-14; Virginia Tech—Savage 1-14.

Staff Photos by John Cook

The Referee Gives Roscoe Coles of Virginia Tech an Early Touchdown
Tech Running Back Is Only on the 3-Yard Line, But He Still Wants Across for the TD

A TD for Tech
Mickey Fitzgerald Scores