Vorhies’ Death Casts Shadow Over Tech-VMI Game

By BOB TITELBAUM / sports writer
BLACKSBURG — It is not totally unexpected that Virginia Tech football players decided to dedicate today’s game against VMI to the memory of Bob Vorhies.

The Tech freshman fullback died unexpectedly Monday night in the athletic dormitory. Since then, there has been quite a bit of emotion and question marks raised about the Hokies’ final game here this afternoon at 1:30.

For one thing, this might be the last game for Coach Jimmy Sharpe. Though the Tech coach still has four years left on his contract, the school hasn’t said whether he will return next year.

As strongly as Tech football players have stood behind their embattled coach this season in the face of adversity, there might have been another dedication for today’s game.

"We as a team," said senior linebacker Rick Razzano, who is one of Sharpe’s stoutest defenders, "don’t believe in the rumors going around. That’s why we haven’t dedicated the game to Coach Sharpe. Every person on this team believes Coach Sharpe will be here next year."

Although the squad is playing this game for Vorhies, Razzano has no idea what state of mind the Tech team will be in this afternoon.

"How we’ll be mentally, we’ll just have to wait and see," said Razzano.

But Razzano says he wants the team to realize the importance of this game. "No matter how many doubts there are inside them about playing, this game means a lot to Bob and Virginia Tech. He’d want it this way. If they (Tech players) have any question about playing this game, I just wanted to clear it up."

Razzano admits it has been a week where the emotions have run the gamut.

"Tuesday was just empty and a very sorrowful day. Monday night had been worse. We just had to think of a way to regroup," he explained.

"There was no organized practice on Tuesday. But the seniors divided the squad into groups and we played pass and tag football. That relieved the tension because the guys weren’t thinking about what had happened."

"Before that, they had been cooled up in the dorm and dwelled on it more. This sort of helped us relax."

Razzano says that no one took Vorhies’ death any harder than Sharpe. It was just one more misery piled on top of what has already been an unbelievable season.

"I tell my teammates he (Sharpe) has a tremendous amount of pressure. He took the death of Bob hard. But he’s the only one I know who could keep going in spite of this. That’s why we haven’t thrown in the towel."

Razzano feels the decision has been made to retain Sharpe as Tech’s football coach, although he admits that’s just a gut feeling and nothing official.

"There never has been one member of this team say something bad about him. It’s always been someone else. When you want to get rid of someone, it’s usually based on how the people around him feel. I think the players have shown that we love him to death."

With all this, there is no telling how Tech will play. It is a cinch VMI will come into the game fired up. While the Hokies are trying to salvage something from a 2-7-1 record, VMI has a 7-3 mark and can reach a new high under Bob Thalman.

A win would give VMI its best record since the 1960 team went 7-2-1 and it would be the first time the Keydets have beaten all the other state schools since the unbeaten 1967 team pulled off that trick.

By comparative scores, VMI ranks as the favorite.

The Keydets beat Richmond and Virginia while Tech lost to the Spiders and rallied to tie Virginia. Both clubs beat William and Mary.

Thalman has no idea how the week’s unusual events will affect the Hokies.

However, he has been in this same situation as recently as last year when Virginia football player Kevin Bowie was shot on the same weekend that the Cavaliers, ironically, beat Wake Forest.

UVA’s next game was against VMI and the Keydets won 13-7. Thalman did the same thing this week, sorrowfully sending a telegram of condolence to Tech, as he did last year for Virginia.

"It Vorhies’ death was very sad news to us and hard to believe," said Thalman. But like his team and Tech, he’ll just have to wait until today to see how the Hokies react.

Thalman plans to move some people around as needed today. Johnny Garnett will start on offense as a flanker or wide receiver, but late in the game he might also be used as a back in the defensive secondary.

Garnett originally played defensive back for the Keydets, but for the last two seasons was a receiver. When injuries hit VMI in the secondary this season, Garnett was moved back to defense to fill the void.

Section C

Sports
Roanoke Times & World-News
Saturday, November 26, 1977

Classified Ads