By Harold Pearson

Some things you just don’t forget.
For Orlandus Branch, that’s the University of Richmond-Virginia Tech football games...be it because of season-ending injury or season-crowning recognition.

Branch has known both the last couple of years, as he has gone from little more than an ordinary defensive tackle to one of the outstanding linebackers in Spider history, possibly one of the best in the country.

“Looking back, I always remember those games,” recalled Branch on the eve of Tech’s visit to the Capital City as second party to UR homecoming at City Stadium today (1:30 p.m.), “because they have played such an important part in my football career.”

MEMORY NO. 1 IS the injury. That came Sept. 27, 1975, the date of Branch’s second start as a linebacker.

“First, all I could think was, ‘Why me?’” said Branch, who missed the final eight games in ‘75 but gained a make-up year of eligibility.

“Now I’m glad. I got put into a situation where I could come back an extra year (and gain enough credits for a triple major), and it has opened up a few more doors for me as far as going into professional ball.

“It gave me the inspiration to really work at playing linebacker, to become proficient at it. I felt I had the tools to play the position...it was a matter of getting down and concentrating on the position, put myself totally into it.

“It gave me the chance to really play linebacker for a year and it did bring me national recognition.”

THE RECOGNITION came a year ago — actually 11 months and a week — at City Stadium, when the Spiders were 3-6 and heading for their worst season since 2-8 of 1986.

“The outstanding thing of that (Tech) game probably was the goal-line stand right before the half,” said Branch, who twice made the initial hit on Roscoe Coles to keep the Hokies from scoring with first-and-goal from the three.

“We talked about it a lot after the game...talked about it this week. That in itself, more or less, boosted our season, because we knew then if we had to, we were capable of stopping people. It gave us enough initiative, enough momentum and did prove to us that we could stop people and we can go out on a winning note.”

UR, after preserving its 14-0 lead, won that game, 16-0, then upset William and Mary the following week for a 5-6 campaign. For his part in the first UR victory over Tech since 1969 — in addition to the two hits on Coles, he initiated 10 other tackles, assisted on seven more and caused a fumble — Branch was named National Lineman of the Week by The Associated Press.

“THAT WAS a culmination of us winning, getting back on a winning road,” said the 6-3, 232-pound senior from Hampton. “Looking at films, I realize that for an individual player to receive that honor, there has to be a team effort. . . .

“I’m glad I received the honor, but then, too, you have to look at it in a more realistic sense that the team itself was really being honored.”

Again this afternoon, the team — in fact, both teams — needs something for which to be honored, like a win. UR comes to the fray with a 1-5 record and Tech is 1-3-1 after the embarrassment of having to come from behind to tie Virginia last week.

“. . .and we are both big rivals,” said Branch. “The people, the fans themselves, Virginia Tech and Richmond fans, always look forward to this game. Regardless of what your record is, this is a game that makes or breaks the season.”

“I think it’ll be a very interesting game because (Tech coach) Jimmy Sharpe is on it. He’s gotta start winning and we’ve gotta start winning.

“It’s important for both teams.”
And, probably, memorable for Branch.

College Football Today

VIRGINIA TECH (1-3-1) vs. RICHMOND (1-5) at City Stadium, 1:30 —

Homecoming. . .Tech leads series, 31-7-4, but lost, 16-0, last season. . .. Spiders have lost three straight and have not scored in the second half since safety against Hokies in 10th game of last year. . . . Third straight Big Five test for Hokies, who beat William and Mary and tied Virginia. . .Tech needed 76-yard drive on final possession, plus two-point conversion pass, to deadlock Cavaliers last week.

WAKE FOREST (6-3, 1-5) at VIRGINIA (6-3, 0-5-1), 1:30 — Parents Day. . .Cavaliers lead series, 11-8-1. . .Dick Bestwick recorded first win as college head coach when Virginia ripped Wake, 18-17, in last minute last season. . .Cavaliers snapped seven-game losing streak last week with tie against Virginia Tech. . .Deacons have lost five straight after season-opening win over Furman. . .Virginia quarterback Chip Mark expected to start despite bruised ribs suffered last week, Wake QB Mike McGlarry doubtful (thumb ligaments).

VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE (3-2) at LEHIGH (4-2), 1:30 — Parents Weekend. . .VMI leads series, 3-2-1. . .Keydets have won last two. . .Lehigh quarterback Mike Rieker has completed 74 of 122 passes (60.7 percent). . .VMI tailback Andre Gibson halfway to 1,000-yard season rushing. . .Keydets have not allowed touchdown in last nine quarters. . .Lehigh dealt 20-6 defeat by Rutgers last week, ending three-game winning streak.

WILLIAM AND MARY (3-3) at NAVY (3-3), 1:30 — Middies lead series, 29-4-1, but Tribe won, 21-13, last year. . .Pitt polished off Navy, 34-17, last week, while W&M was idle. . .Several Indians — including QB Tom Rozantz (knee), tailback Jim Kruis (hip pointer), safety Scott Hays (knee) — used extra week of rest to recuperate from injuries. . .Sixteen starters back from last year’s 4-7 squad of Middies. . .Tommy Thompson, son of former W&M standout, is Navy middle guard.

OTHER STATE GAMES — Saint Paul’s (1-5) at Liberty Baptist (1-5), 1:00; Virginia Tech (4-0, 4-2) at Hampton Institute (4-1, 5-1), 1:30; James Madison (3-3) at Frostburg State (0-7), 1:30; Randolph-Macon (3-3) at Guilford (2-4), 1:30; Emory and Henry (0-1, 0-6) at Bridgewater (0-1, 2-3), 2:00; Hampden-Sydney (5-1) at Davidson (4-2), 2:00, Washington and Lee (0-6) at Sewanee (1-4), 2:00; Norfolk State (3-2, 3-4) vs. Virginia Union (3-1, 3-1) at City Stadium, 7:00.

OTHER AREA GAMES — N.C. State (3-1, 5-2) at Clemson (2-1, 5-1), 1:00; Duke (1-1, 5-2) at Maryland (2-1, 3-3), 1:30; South Carolina (4-3) at North Carolina (4-2), 1:00.