Virginia Tech Turns From Lamb To Lion

By ED RICHARDS
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Virginia Tech's football team may have started the football like a lamb but went out like a lion Saturday.

Virginia Military Institute won't argue with that observation, not after being mauled 27-7 by the Techmen in the season finale for both teams in deep-freeze temperatures at Blacksburg Saturday.

The Gobblers, finishing with a 3-7-1 mark, appeared easy prey the first part of the season when they won only once.

Four weeks ago, however, the Techmen changed faces, barely losing to nationally-ranked Florida State 22-21. They didn't bear any fruit the following week against West Virginia, either, dropping a 20-14 decision.

Last week was different. The Blacksburg outfit romped to an easy 28-10 conquest of Wake Forest and they essentially picked up where they left off in crushing VMI, already crowned the Big Five champions.

"We've been moving the ball since the Florida State game and I didn't think it would be any different today," said junior quarterback David Lamie after the Techmen had ruptured VMI's normally tenacious defense against the rush for 246 yards.

"We've been executing real well (VPI didn't have a turnover Saturday) and the line has been doing the job," he added.

The major difference in Tech's offense has been 250-pound fullback Mickey Fitzgerald, who bullied his way over 100 yards for the fourth consecutive week.

The freshman sensation dented VMI's armor for 104 yards on 32 carries. He scored three times on one-yard plunges.

The Keydets tried their best to intimidate Fitzgerald.

"I played against several of their guys in high school and they were giving me messages at the bottom of some piles," the Tech star revealed. "They were telling me that I wasn't going anywhere."

The apparent turning point in the game came with the Gobblers nursing a 7-0 lead and VMI threatening to deadlock the affair.

On a fourth and one at the Tech 35, the Keydets' Andre Gibson tried to go wide around right end but was thrown for an eight-yard setback by standout defensive end James "Sleepy (7)" Johnson.

"That fourth and one in the second quarter was a big play," emphasized VMI Coach Bob Blalock. "The officials waited over the ball too long and they adjusted to our set. Maybe we should have called a time out."

Tech walk-on free safety Denny Windmuller played an instrumental role in throttling VMI's offense. The Tabb High product intercepted one pass and returned it 20 yards, broke up another and was in on six tackles.

Though there has been speculation that Tech Coach Jimmy Sharpe may not be around next year, Windmuller didn't hesitate to give his opinion on the subject.

"He's an inspiration to every kid on the team and I love him. I'm hoping he'll be back next year."

The victory was the third straight for the Gobblers over VMI and ended a four-game winning streak by the Keydets.

The Gobblers, who lose only five starters to graduation, celebrated their victory with a cigar-puffing session afterwards.

"We smoke 'em after every victory, but they haven't had to buy too many this year," quipped Windmuller.