NN native providing big hits

Banks anchors Va. Tech's defense

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BLACKSBURG

On Saturday, Southern Mississippi running back Howard McGee took off around left end but was met by a Virginia Tech defender who delivered a blow so devastating he broke his own nose.

One surgery later, Tech's sophomore "hit man," Antonio Banks, finds himself even more deserving of his crushing reputation.

"I try to pride myself on intimidating other players," Banks said. "You have to have an edge, and that's my edge. The opponents know if they come in my area, I'm going to put a shot on 'em."

Banks and his reputation will return to action Saturday at noon against Boston College and its vaunted passing attack.

"We have to concentrate on Boston College; we can't look past them," Banks said. "I think it's an honor to be on the field with them because they're so good. We'll have to try and keep it close to pull out a close one."

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A native of Newport News, Banks transferred to Warwick High School during his sophomore year, and played corner back across from William Yarborough.

"When he came to visit the campus, I wound up being his host and right then and there I knew he was coming to Tech," Yarborough said. "It's nice being able to play with him again. He's a good player, and a good person, too."

The two are back together in the secondary with Yarborough at corner and Banks at free safety.

"I knew I was eventually going to move to free safety," Banks said. "Tech tried me at corner to see what I had, then moved me to free safety to better patrol the ball so I can attack from both sides."

The Hokies are off to a 2-0 start this season, in large part due to the play of Banks and the rest of the defense. Following the Hokies' 24-14 turnover-plagued victory against Southern Miss, coach Frank Beamer was quick to credit the defense.

"That was one of the greatest efforts I've ever seen," he said. "To be put in a hole like we were and to come in play after play and make the big plays ... the first thing I did in the locker room was stand up and give our defense an ovation."

Off the field, Banks said he hopes to be able to help out his home town.

"I want to give back to the community I came from and try to help other kids fulfill their dreams, too," he said. "And I want to stay as close to the sport as possible."

Does staying close to the sport mean professional football?

"I think about it but you have to keep it in perspective," Banks said. "Playing at the next level is like winning the lottery; It's a long shot."

But if the opportunity does present itself, then Banks would be able to fulfill a promise he made to his mother years ago.

"I always told my mom I would take care of her one day," he said. "She worked so hard to get me to this point I'll do whatever's best for her, to give her time to rest instead of working so hard."

For now, Banks said he is concentrating on the present.

Just what is it that draws Banks to football?

"I love the cheers from the crowd on big games and after big plays when the guys come together, huggin' and lovin' each other like a family — it keeps me going."

"Tech was the school that was willing to take a chance on me, and I'm just trying to make it pay off."

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