Banks won't be raising 'Cane
Va. Tech defender injured, again

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BLACKSBURG — Miami is this weekend. Virginia Tech corner back Antonio Banks is injured. Probably won't play.

So what else is new?

Banks may be a four-year starter, but if a groin injury indeed shelves him for Saturday's 3:30 p.m. clash at the Orange Bowl, he'll end his career having played against the Hurricanes exactly once.

Asked about this fact, fellow defensive back Torrnan Gray flashed a devilish grin before responding.

"I told him I think he's scared to play Miami," Gray said.

A victim of hard luck is more like it, but Banks' misfortunes nonetheless have been career-starters for some of his teammates. Consider:

• In '93, an injured Banks sat home in Blacksburg when Tech hit the Orange Bowl. His replacement? Redshirt freshman Gray, with his first career start.

• In '95, Banks injured his knee the week of Miami's visit. His replacement? True freshman Loren Johnson, with his first career start.

• In '96, the strained groin muscle Banks incurred last weekend against East Carolina will likely keep him on ice. His replacement? True freshman Anthony Midget, with his first career start.

One more thing. Each of Banks' replacements is from the Sunshine State.

"He keeps letting us Florida guys get our start," Gray said with a laugh. "So we'll take it."

Midget drew raves in his first extended collegiate action last weekend, even after being burned for a touchdown pass soon after he spelled the injured Banks. He followed with a key third-down sack to go with an interception.

Now Midget heads to the Orange Bowl, a place he no doubt revered while growing up in Clewiston, Fla. Sure, Miami already has lost twice at home this season and no longer has that aura of Orange Bowl invincibility. But it's still the Orange Bowl, and that's where Midget likely will have his starting debut.

"I can think of better places," Tech coach Frank Beamer said yesterday. "... But I think Anthony will welcome the opportunity."

Maybe so, but he might not welcome what Miami surely has planned for him. Namely, expect the Hurricanes to pick on him, just as they did with Johnson last season.

"Most definitely," Johnson said. "That's how they started off on me. They threw the ball at me, they threw the ball at me, they threw the ball at me."

It's official. Junior tailback Ken Oxendine has finally played in enough games for eligibility among the Big East's statistical leaders. And his per-game average of 104.7 yards per game is No. 1 in the league shield of West Virginia's Amos Zereese at 98.7.

Oxendine, the Thomas Dale High School alum, missed getting his fourth straight game of at least 100 yards by 36 inches against ECU. He also missed keeping his no-fumbles-in-'96 string intact. Oxendine had two drops against the Pirates.

"And they ended up getting a touchdown after one of them," Oxendine said yesterday. "You can't really redeem yourself for that, but I wanted to at least try to make up for it a little bit."

He did, with the 62-yard run of the ECU 16 to set up the TD that put Tech ahead 36-14 — the final score.