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Sports Writer

BLACKSBURG — Jim Baron had problems getting admitted to Virginia Tech. Saturday in his first game in a Hokie uniform, Baron had a free pass to the Arkansas State's backfield.

Baron, a 6-foot-4, 228-pound defensive tackle, was one of the bright spots in Tech's season-opening 34-7 victory over the Indians. The transfer from Triton (Ill.) Junior College got his Tech career under way with six tackles including three quarterback sacks.

Tech head coach Frank Beamer was happy with Baron's performance and viewing the game film earned the backup second-team two thumbs up.

"Watching him on each and every play on the video, I was impressed," Beamer said. "He showed some real quickness in there. He's throwing those guys around. Really, I thought he had a very good football game."

Despite opening the game in a backup role to starters J.C. Price and Wavelry Jackson, Baron wasted no time in making his presence felt. With Tech clinging to a tenacious 21-7 lead midway through the second quarter, Baron slammed quarterback Brent Pettus for an 8-yard loss. It was the last time Arkansas State was in Tech territory until the game's final series, which was stalled by another sack by Baron.

The applause Baron heard from the crowd of 38,626 was particularly sweet because it was his first football game in nearly two years.

"It was very gratifying," Baron said. "It's been awhile since I've been on a field."

Baron took a long road to Blacksburg. He signed with Tech in 1993 and showed up on campus last fall, but found out he didn't have enough credits to get in school. Instead of pulling out, Baron hung in. He took some classes at Virginia Western Community College in Roanoke and went to work in a local office supply store owned by Tech Radio Network color commentator Mike Burnop.

Tech assistant coach Todd Grantham worked the phones and kept tabs on Baron and he finally enrolled in the spring.

While Baron was highly visible Saturday in Lane Stadium, he really stands out in Tech's press guide. Baron is the only junior college transfer in the Hokies' entire program, a staggering statistic.

Why is that?

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