Va. Tech starter from Norfolk out for season with bad knee

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BLACKSBURG — The Virginia Tech football team's charmed run of eluding major injury is over.

In news that had a somewhat sobering effect on its high-flying start, No. 3-ranked Tech learned Tuesday that it will be without starting cornerback Larry Austin the rest of the season because of a knee injury.

An MRI test taken Tuesday confirmed that Austin tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee in the Hokies' 48-34 victory at Boston College on Saturday. Austin, a fourth-year junior out of Norview High in Norfolk, injured the knee midway in the first quarter when he tried to tackle tailback Cedric Washington on a 19-yard run.

Eric Green, a true freshman who had been the primary backup at field cornerback, will start there against Temple on Saturday at Lane Stadium.

Third-year sophomore Larry Austin, a fourth-year junior out of Norview High in Norfolk, tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee while going for a tackle Saturday against Boston College.

Ronnyll Whitaker of Norfolk will swap starting cornerback positions, moving from field corner to boundary corner.

In Tech's defensive scheme, the boundary corner is more involved in

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run defense, while the field cornerback is often given one-on-one responsibility with receivers.

Austin is the first starter Tech has lost to season-ending injury since guard Josh Redding and fullback Cullen Hawkins both went down with knee injuries on Sept. 19, 1998, at Miami.

"We've been very fortunate around here for a while," Tech coach Frank Beamer said. "You've just got to accept it and go on.

The loss of Austin is critical for a young, inexperienced secondary that ranks No. 74 in Division I-A in passing defense, allowing 209.3 yards a game.

"It's definitely a setback," Beamer said. "Eric Green is a talented guy. He's played very well and I don't think he's a typical true freshman. But he's still a true freshman who has played very little."

Green was surprised to learn about Austin's fate while combing the Internet on Tuesday morning.

"None of us really thought it would be that bad," Green said.

"Larry was out there yesterday jogging on it and everybody expected he would be out three or four weeks.

"It's a great loss; it's terrible. I really feel bad for him, but I'm happy to capitalize on it. . . . I'm just going to have to step it up and show everyone what I can do."

Green, who made a quick name for himself when he intercepted a pass and blocked a punt in Tech's 49-0 romp over Rutgers on Sept. 16, said he was "really surprised" at the Tech coaching staff's decision to make him a starter.

"I didn't expect them to put a true freshman out there because there's not that many true freshmen out there playing big-time football and starting," Green said.

"I would say corner is probably the hardest position on the field because you never know what they're going to do and it's just one-on-one with the receiver."

Green said he expected Temple to send plenty of action his way.

"Any coaches, if they see a true freshman out there, they're going to of course try to pick on me. I'm not trash-talking now," Green said, "but I'm saying I've faced some of the best receivers in the nation in practice everyday, so that should help me out."

Austin, a first-year starter, wasn't available for comment Tuesday. Redding, who has been down the season-ending injury road, confessed it's not a fun trip.

"It's real tough," said Redding, a senior. "I know when I was hurt every game was just depressing, really. You don't want to do anything; you just want to get your rehab done and go home. You don't want to do school work; it's rough. Being hurt is probably the worst thing that can happen, especially when your team is doing so well."

In another development, reserve tight end Seth Noonkester tore his ACL during practice and will sit out the season.