Tech defensive back lost for the season

By Gary Crockett
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BLACKSBURG — Virginia Tech's unbeaten football team suffered its first loss, with starting cornerback Larry Austin expected to miss the rest of the season with a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee.

Austin was injured in the first quarter of the Hokies' 49-34 win at Boston College on Saturday. He's scheduled to undergo surgery Friday.

"It's definitely a setback," said Tech coach Frank Beamer. "Our young defense just got a little younger."

Austin, a redshirt junior from Norfolk, had started the first four games at "boundary" cornerback and entered the BC game ranked fourth on the team with 21 tackles.

When Tech hosts Temple on Saturday, Davis and fellow wide receiver Emmett Johnson aren't catching as many passes, but both have been noticeably better at downfield blocking. Each flattened opponents Saturday to help open the gate for long runs by Vick.

"They've been excellent," Beamer said. "Generally when you get long plays, you can go back and look somewhere along the way and someone got a key block down field that actually sprung the thing. And on touchdowns the other night, Andre Davis was down there blocking. Emmett Johnson has been excellent blocking. That's been a key part for us."

Offensive guard Josh Redding, who owns a Tech record with a 500-pound bench press, put his strength to use Saturday when one of BC's defenders was trying to harass Vick after the play.

"I was pretty angry," Redding said. "He was on top of Vick and yelling in his ear. I just grabbed him and chuckled him like a bale of hay. I don't know who it was. One of the linebackers."

Ridding said he and the rest of the offensive line realize the added pressure of protecting Vick, who makes Tech one of the country's elite teams.

"I think Michael Vick gets a little more respect than anybody else would, but that's the philosophy every O-line has for a quarterback," Redding said. "That's their boy, their man. You don't mess with the O-line's quarterback."

Fourth-string tight end Seth Noonkester also will undergo surgery Friday to repair a torn ACL suffered during practice last week. He'll be out for the season.

... With backup defensive tackle Channing Reed slowed by a groin injury, Beamer said true freshman Kenny Lewis will play more Saturday. ... Tech is No. 2 in this week's USA Today Sagarin ratings, behind Florida State. ... The Hokies are an early 31-point favorite against Temple. ... Saturday's game will feature the Big East's top-three rushers: Temple's Tanaro Sharps (121.0 ypg), Tech's Lee Suggs (108.2) and Vick (107.2) ... The Hokies, averaging 327 yards rushing per game, ran for 315 yards against Temple last year and 337 yards two years ago.

Tech's Larry Austin, 24, will miss the remainder of the year with a knee injury.

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Saturday, Austin's spot will be taken by Ronayll Whitaker, a redshirt sophomore who had started the first four games at "field" cornerback. Eric Green, a true freshman, will make his first career start, assuming Whitaker's former spot.

The Hokies used that arrangement in the second half against BC.

Garrell Wilds, a redshirt freshman, will back up Green, and redshirt freshman Billy Hardee will back up Whitaker.

"I think this is going to be our best combination," Beamer said. "(Whitaker) is plenty tough enough to come in there and make some tackles in the 'boundary.' Billy Hardee is a very tough guy. Then (Wilds) and (Green) are very athletic, and I think they can handle the 'field.'"

Green has played in all four games this season and has one of Tech's nine interceptions. Against Rutgers, he also blocked a punt and set up a Hokies touchdown when he tackled punter Mike Barr (Brookville) for a 22-yard loss following a bad snap.

Green said he was surprised to learn he would be starting against Temple, which averages 223.2 yards passing per game.

"I didn't expect them to put a true freshman out there," he said.

"There's not many true freshmen out there playing big-time football, and starting. So I was surprised and happy at the same time."

"field" position that Green will be playing gets the on-one on pass responsibilities. Tech's corner spot has more run responsibilities. Law said corner is the hardest position on the said Green, a quarterback at Clewiston High in Florida. "You never know what they're going to be one-on-one, just you and him.

I feel confident. If you're not confident, you'll make it at this position."

element missing from this year's offense has been speed, notably to speedster Andre Davis. Redshirt junior, who last year led the Big East in yards per catch (27.5), failed to catch a pass BC and is averaging 12.9 yards on nine receptions.

Michael Vick has overthrown Davis on several long attempts, including two more against BC.

"We've just been off a little bit," Beamer said. "We've been off a little bit," Beamer said. Talking about a 70-yard pass play, and every one has been off just a hair. The second one up at Austin, if he had dived out there, he might have

gotten that thing. It looked like he lost it a little bit at the very end.

"I think we're real close, and I think it's getting ready to happen."

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