Starting cornerback suffers torn knee ligament

Hokies lose Austin for rest of season

This is the first time Tech has lost a starter to a season-ending knee injury since Sept. 19, 1998.

By RANDY KING
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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, third-ranked Tech learned Tuesday it will be without starting boundary cornerback Larry Austin for the remainder of the season because of a knee injury.

An MRI test taken early Tuesday morning confirmed that Austin tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee in the Hokies’ 48-34 Big East victory at Boston College last Saturday. Austin, a fourth-year junior from Norfolk, injured the knee midway in the first quarter when he attempted to tackle BC tailback Cedric Washington on a 19-yard run.

Eric Green, a true freshman from Clewiston, Fla., who had been the primary backup at field corner, will start in that spot against Temple on Saturday at Lane Stadium. Third-year sophomore Ronny Whitaker of Norfolk will swap starting positions, moving from field corner to boundary corner.

Austin marks the first starter Tech has lost to a 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 faced some of the best receivers in the nation in practice every day, 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 schoolwork, it’s rough. Being hurt is probably the worst thing that can happen, especially when your team is doing so well.”

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AUSTIN

ranks No. 74 in Division I-A in passing defense, allowing 209.3 yards per 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 learned about Austin’s fate while combing the Internet on Tuesday morning. He was surprised to see the news.

“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. Going from No. 2 corner to No. 1 corner, 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.

Former walk-on Billy Hardée, a redshirt freshman, will continue as the No. 2 boundary corner.

“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,” said Green, who was informed of his new assignment by Beamer late Tuesday morning.

“I was surprised and happy at the same time. 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, you and [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,” he said.

In Tech’s defensive scheme, Beamer said the boundary corner is more involved in run defense. The field corner goes “one-on-one a lot” with receivers.

“I’m not trash-talking now,” said Green, “but I’m saying I’ve faced some of the best receivers in the nation in practice every day, so that should help me out.”

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