

Welsh's Cavaliers aim for overall improvement

By LEE ROBERTS
Staff Writer

George Welsh, fresh from resurrecting the football program at Navy, seemed positive that his 1982 Virginia Cavaliers were good for at least six victories.

Virginia fans seemed less certain, for they had heard this before. They took a wait-and-see attitude. They waited, and waited and waited. . . and they saw their team lose to football featherweight James Madison. They saw losses to Clemson by 48 points, to Duke by 34 points, to Maryland by 31 points. They saw their defense give up 29 points close to 400 yards a game.

When the dust had cleared, Virginia was 2-9, at the bottom of the ACC standings again. This year the Cavaliers return 16 starters from last year's disaster—eight on offense, eight on defense. The Cavaliers also have the same schedule as last season. With virtually the same lineup and the same opponents, how positive can one feel about Virginia's chances this season?

"Our football team is in a state of transition," Welsh said prior to the season opener against Duke. "But we are looking to improve our record and again our goal is to win six games. I don't think that is an unrealistic goal for us."

Welsh's rationale for expecting three times as many victories out of the same personnel is that the Cavaliers have improved over the year, due to a weight training program and to the experience picked up by last year's freshmen. "We have improved," Welsh said. "There is no question that there has been an overall improvement. It's just a question of degree—we'll see after we've played a few games. But we have a lot of sophomores who have a whole lot of game experience."

Now, four quarters may not make a season, but Welsh certainly made a few believers out of his skeptics when his Cavs ripped apart the Duke defense Saturday for a 38-30 victory over Ben Bennett and Co. So, the offense has certainly proved itself, while the defense has shown it may still need some work.

Welsh will be depending on Wayne Schuchts to quarterback the Cavaliers. Last year, Schuchts had the eighth-best passing year in Virginia history, including a 323-yard effort in a win over Wake Forest. Mike Eck was battling for the starting job until a minor injury forced him out of action.

Virginia has a set of running backs that Welsh couldn't be happier about. Antonio Rice was outstanding as a freshman, gaining 764 yards to lead the Cavaliers in rushing, and was a runner-up for ACC Rookie-of-the-Year. Barry Word, another very talented back, is also expected to see a lot of playing time. Derek Jenkins led the team in rushing two years ago but was bothered by injuries last season. He is expected to start at halfback.

Welsh is instituting a new pass offense this season similar to the one used by the Cincinnati Bengals. Schuchts and Eck will be throwing short, high percentage, ball control passes to a variety of talented receivers. Quentin Walker should be pulling in many of those passes. Welsh has called Walker the most talented athlete he has (in some respects). "He is one of the few (players) capable of making the big play," Welsh said. Walker proved Welsh right in the Duke game, pulling in touchdown passes of 80 and 65 yards.

Billy Smith caught 17 passes last year and will be back, along with Gary Phelps and Nick Merrick. Billy Griggs and Shawn Lewis will be at tight end.

While Virginia's talent looks adequate, a questionable offensive line could limit the teams effectiveness. The consensus of most of the major football periodicals is that the line is not big or quick enough, although tackle Jim Dombrowski may disagree. Dombrowski is 6-5, 295 pounds. Welsh called Dombrowski and guard Bob Olderman "the best offensive linemen I've coached in a number of years."

On defense, eight starters return, including sophomore linebacker Charles McDaniel, who led the team with 109 tackles as a freshman. However, those eight returnees must perform better than last year, when they allowed 320

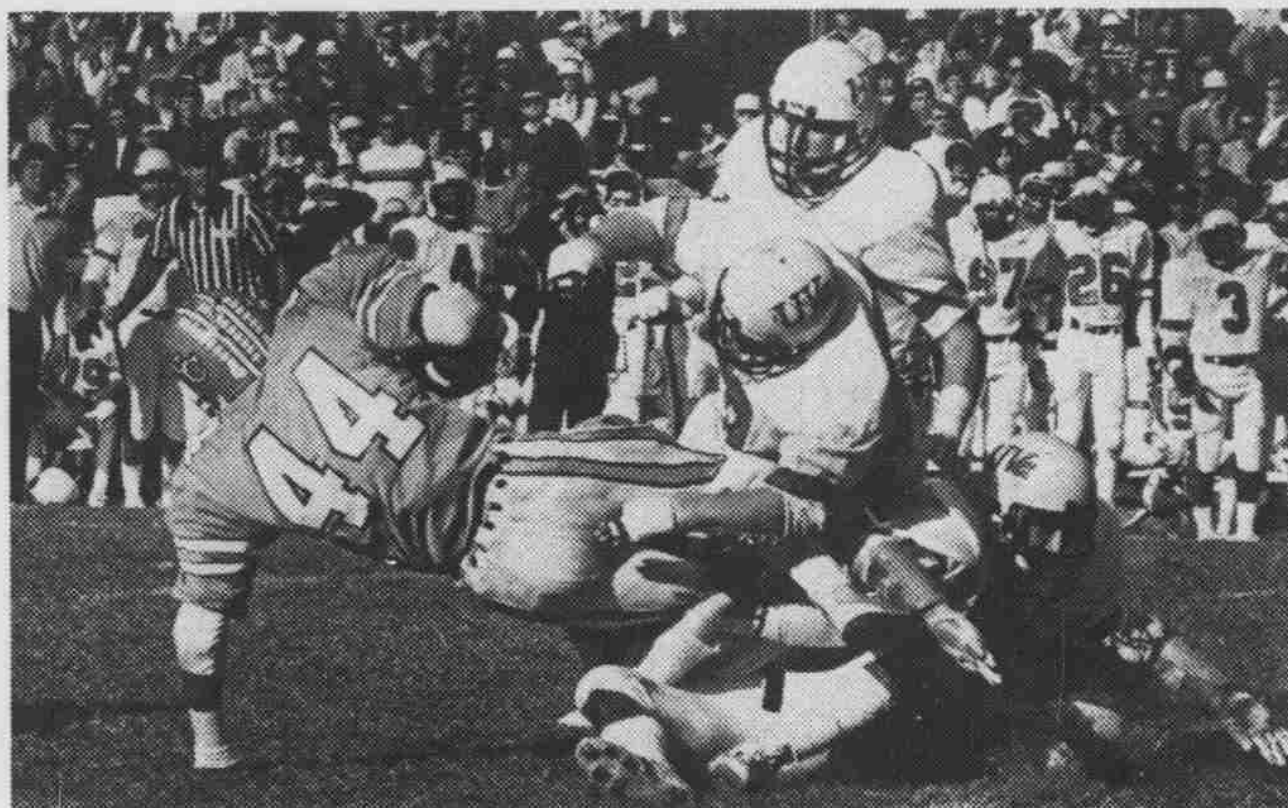
points over 11 games.

Along with McDaniel, the linebacking corps will consist of Russ Swan, Scott Lageman, and John Muntz. The defensive line will feature David Bond at nose guard, surrounded by Ron Mattes and Tom Kilgannon at tackles, and Mark Wiley and Steve Morse at ends. Morse, a walk-on, was among the team leaders in tackles last season.

"We are lacking a lot on defense," Welsh said. "We really have to improve our pass defense."

Rich Riccardi, a three-year starter, will hold up the defensive backfield along with Bart Farinholt. Other possibilities at cornerback include Pat Ingram and Ray Daly, a former starter at Navy. If the defensive backfield falters, so may the entire team.

Wayne Morrison kicked for four years and is gone, so the placekicking job will go to either a walk-on or freshman Maurizio Marea. Junior Jeff Walker was fourth in the ACC last year with a 40.8-yard punting average.



DTH/Charles Ledford

Virginia defenders gang-tackle former UNC star Kelvin Bryant. The Cavalier defense must improve for a successful 1983 campaign.

If the Cavaliers have indeed improved, then despite last week's upset of Duke this team is too young and not talented enough to challenge for the ACC crown this fall.

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