Even if you want to — and some do — you can not escape Virginia Tech football in the Roanoke Valley and Southwest Virginia.

There are some 30 billboards scattered throughout the Valley exclaiming: "The principle is the same; the potential is different." Newspapers are crammed full of the same message, that being "Explosion 72." Don't miss a minute, they say, of Explosion 72.

Whether there really will be an explosion, whether Virginia Tech will field an exciting and/or winning team remains to be seen. But it is a fact that it has been a long time since a losing program — two losers under Jerry Claiborne, and one last season under new coach Charlie Coffey — has turned as many heads.

If you didn't know that the Hokies went 4-7 last year, you might think, riding up and down the highways reading the billboards, you were in Big Orange Country or in Alabama, home of the Bear.

The new Tech regime has done everything but win, and you have to believe that winning is only a matter of time. Maybe this season, almost for sure the next.

Charlie Coffey and his staff have done a great selling job. They came in last year without a saleable product and promised it to the tune of a record home attendance for Tech. Already this summer, even after that paltry record of last season, they have already broken the season ticket record at Tech and may triple that record before Don Strock throws his first pass.

The only pitfall to Coffey's promotion, as he well knows, is the possibility of fielding more losing teams. At South Carolina, where Paul Dietzel has done a lot of damage by building a winning program, Gamecock supporters are beginning to get tired of the noise, tired of the promises. If Dietzel doesn't win this year, he could be in trouble especially in light of Hootie Ingram's program at Clemson, a program which is seemingly on the upswing.

There seem to be two completely different ideas on the Tech campus in regards to how to build strong athletic programs. The football people believe in doing everything yesterday. If it isn't done by this afternoon, it's late. And Charlie Coffey will not stand for tardiness.

A floor below, in the Tech Coliseum, are the offices of Don DeVoe, the head basketball coach, and staff. The Tech basketball coach, hired in the same year as Coffey, apparently believes winning will take care of everything.

While Coffey has established an excellent rapport with the press and alumni, DeVoe has chosen to tread along slowly, like a caterpillar going after a monarch butterfly.

While Coffey has seen that brochures and billboards have been widely circulated proclaiming the excellence of quarterback Don Stock, Allan Bros, of the basketball team, was selected to the Helms Foundation All-American team this past winter and this is the first time you've read it.

While Coffey and his staff meet with sportswriters, TV people and alumni at every recruiting stop, the basketball people are like the lone wolves sneaking in and out at night.

If you'd like to look at it factually, the Tech basketball program has as much, if not more, to sell than Tech football. The basketball Hokies have not had a losing season since 1964. They have lost only 16 games since moving into the Tech Coliseum and only two games at home in the last two years. Tech is the only major college basketball team in the state with anybody playing in the pros. And in the 18 losses last season, seven of them were to teams which gained either the NCAA playoffs or the NIT.

It would appear, however, that the Tech basketball program should concentrate heavily on selling the press and alumni because of its nearness to the basketball stronghold, the Atlantic Coast Conference, and the recent success of University of Virginia basketball.

The Tech football program will be easier to sell, despite its record, because ACC football, with the exception of North Carolina, and Southern Conference football, are terribly weak. When you think of Virginia Tech athletics, you think of football. But when you think of Virginia athletics, you think of basketball.

If winning is the solution, and it may be, then Tech basketball may, in time, sell itself. But it has won in the past and currently it is being completely overshadowed by the football program, a loss for the past three years.