Tech, Virginia Coaches Call The Shots

BY BOB MCELLEND

"The kicking game," answered coach Charlie Coffey of Virginia Tech.

"The pass rush," replied coach Don Lawrence of Virginia.

And there in a capsule is what the rival coaches feel will prove the telling factor in winning their big battle tomorrow afternoon in Charlotteville.

An overflow crowd of more than 30,000 is expected to sit in on the action which starts at 1:30 in Scott Stadium. The weatherman is giving his blessing with a prediction of fair weather with temperatures in the low 80s.

There is expected to be much scoring this time than last year when Tech's Dave Strock booted a pair of field goals for a 6-6 nod.

"Virginia has installed a big play offense," said Tech assistant Bill Clay, who was a defensive coach last year at Virginia. "They have changed their offense and now can kill you on one big play. That really puts the pressure on our defense."

When Coffey talks about the kicking game, he includes many more things than the average fan would expect. He talks about the center snap, the placement of the ball on the tee, the block protection, the coverage on punts and field goals, the kicker himself; and the return specialist.

"The kicking game is always important," Coffey said. "But this is especially so in an early game. Just one muffed punt or poor coverage could decide the outcome. I know we have worked hard on our kicking game and after all this talk, I'd sure hate for us to lose on a kicking breakdown."

Lawrence, while realizing the importance of the kicking game, still placed the big importance on rushing Tech quarterback Don Strock.

"He's as good as any in the nation," Lawrence said. "And that's just not one man's opinion. All the pro scouts say the same thing. He has it all and should go on the first round of the draft...he's just that good."

Virginia had little trouble putting the hurt on South Carolina's Bill Troun last week. But all the Cavaliers realize Tech will offer a much stronger offensive line...one that will pick up their stunts and pressure.

The big question mark in pre-game conversation is the playing condition of Harrison Davis, the elusive Virginia quarterback who suffered a slight shoulder separation at South Carolina.

Davis has been limited practice time this week and his playing condition will not be known until just before kickoff tomorrow. "I could tell you he's going to play," Lawrence said. "But that wouldn't be the truth. I could say he wasn't and still not be giving it to you right. So I'm telling everyone I just don't know and that is the truth."

Should Davis not be ready the starting nod will go to George Allen Jr. And he will be backed by a most talented but untested freshman—Joe Schaefer, 6-2, 175 from Parma Heights, Ohio.

The two punt return specialists will be Gerard Mullins, a tried and proven junior cornerback for Virginia; and Phil Rogers, an untested but most impressive freshman for Tech.

Billy Maxwell handles the punting and kicking for Virginia while Tech uses two men to do the jobs—Andy Hrymyak, the punting and Dave Strock for the kicking. Sophomore Wayne Latimer could share the kicking duties with Strock.

Each team will display a dangerous tailback. Kent Merrill, a 225 junior, has more speed and possible breakthrough potential. But Tech's J. B. Barber, a 260-pounder, junior, probably has better moves and more power.

"The first quarter will be the most important," said Lawrence. "If we can stay close and make the proper adjustments, we could be in business."

Tech has the advantage of having scouted the Cavaliers at South Carolina and has spent the week mapping the proper offense and defense.

On the other hand, Virginia is making plans on several possibilities and Lawrence, himself, admits he doesn't know just what to expect. Thus is his hope for a good first period and proper adjustment.

Breaks, as always, will prove a factor. A quick touchdown could give one team the necessary push to enjoy what could be an easy victory.

"We'll have to be mentally tough," said Lawrence. "If we get behind, we'll have to be tough and patient. We can't panic and try to catch up at all once."

Coffey, on the other hand, will be hoping the Gobblers don't get beat by any early mistakes.

"We have been playing ourselves in scrimmages," he said. "It will be entirely different tomorrow. Some of the things we have been getting by with in practice might hurt us tomorrow. We'll have to be alert and unified."

Speaking of unity, that is an ingredient that Coffey feels will make Tech a much better team this season.

"We know more what we are doing as a team," he said. "We have been more consistent in practice. I just hope it's that way tomorrow."

The teams seem fairly well balanced in the starting units but Tech might have an advantage in depth, although the Gobblers, themselves, certainly can't be called deep.

Lawrence offered this final pre-game comment—"We have to pressure Strock but we'll also have to have 100 per cent effort out of our entire squad and be damn lucky to win."

Coffey simply replied, "We'll have to win the kicking game."