COFFEY AND FRIEND - Virginia Tech quarterback Don Strock (top photo) talks with his number one fan, head coach Charlie Coffey during a crucial situation in last Saturday's outstanding 13-10 upset win over Southern Methodist University. J.B. Barbour (bottom photo) strains for extra yardage on the cold Blacksburg turf. This Saturday the Techmen entertain always-powerful Houston. (pcs photographs)

Virginia Tech's Easterling Retirement Short Lived

By HAROLD PEARSON
(From The Times-Dispatch)
It was a humild, but otherwise a good afternoon for football. Unless you were a Tech student and/or supporter. It was a great day to start a football season.

Unless you have just recently become an ex-player and your former team is in the process of losing to hated (?) rival Virginia.

That's the way it was Sept. 27, a hot afternoon in Charlottesville at the University of Virginia's Scott Stadium.

Rich Easterling, however, was not enjoying the proceedings much. He was a Tech student-supporter. Just 10 days earlier, the husky Richmonder had also become a promising member of the Tech defense, that group of Gobbler who was counted on to bring the Blacksburg team back to respectability in the football community.

But he quit.

"I felt," he admitted this past Saturday, "it wasn't worth it. It was just so much of a strain. You just get to where you don't concentrate, don't try to improve."

"I wasn't so much that the former Collegiate standout (defensive end and fullback) didn't like the sport. 'I like it all right,' he said. "I just didn't give myself a chance. I hadn't played in a big game."

And that's why he had gone to Virginia Tech, instead of some other school—say Richmond from whence his brother Ray graduated last season to the Atlanta Falcons.

He felt that the program was and a bit better, he liked the school—not to say it's better—just that he thought there would be more big games in the Gobbler picture.

He had his doubts, though, self-doubts.

"When I first came here," he admitted, "I didn't know whether I could play at Tech."

A lot of things have changed, however. After two decisions to quit, and an equal number of decisions to play, the 6-2,215-pound sophomore is eager now.

He's had the big game. It came Saturday, when the Gobbler upended previously unbeaten Southern Methodist, 13-10. What made it even bigger was that the defense did it, the much-maligned defense turned back all the bids of the Southwest Conference team, including a denial from the one with 13 seconds remaining.

In that one, Easterling had five individual tackles, three assists, upset the passer twice and sacked him at least once. That was from his defensive end position. He had been a linebacker for the frosh and in early drills.

That was before the last resignation. The change was after that beautiful, hot, humid day in Charlottesville—a bad day for Tech supporters of any manner. Worse, for Easterling, who had a good seat for the 24-20 comeback win. We Cavaliers mustered over the favored (that's right, favored) Tech.

"That's the reason why I came back," Easterling admitted. "I had quit about a week and a half before and was sitting in the stands.

"But you just can't watch. That hurts worse than taking the licks. So I went to coach Coffey (second year headman Charlie Coffey) The next day Sunday, and asked if I could come back."

There's no quitting in sight. "Football is a big business," he said. "You can't get down on it."

If you do, you are ready to quit and right now there is no such thing as "down" for Easterling and the Gobbler.

"I'm dedicated now," said the 25-year-old. "Yes sir!" And I think everybody will get better and better.

"We've got confidence now." Big games do that, when you win. Of course, bad games viewed from the stands sometimes can do more for a severe case of the "quits."