Veteran Tech Coach Sees Baseball Revival

By Bill Mason

College baseball is alive, regardless of rumors to the contrary. And VPI baseball coach, G.F. "Red" Laird, who is in his 37th season of keeping it that way, sees some encouraging signs for the sport that has declined in attendance from what it was 15 years ago, and it wasn't overwhelming then.

The encouraging signs are the slow but sure swing back toward baseball as a major spring sport by the high schools (and the revival of interest in American Legion Junior Baseball—for example the brand new triangular team-replicating Legion posts in Christiansburg, Blacksburg and Radford. Says Laird: "this could help a lot." (The new team is scheduled to see action soon after the end of the current public school term in the localities).

Laird recalls the time when Lynchburg was the westernmost frontier of college baseball in Virginia. This has changed in recent years, with more southwest Virginia high schools fielding baseball teams in addition to (or sometimes instead of) track squads. Track, he observed, was for many schools mainly a means of keeping football players in condition during the off season.

The coach feels there are entirely too many towns with no summer baseball program, and he credits Lynchburg and Roanoke for keeping such programs—almost interest in baseball—alive.

Why has interest in college baseball declined? Laird thinks affluence is part of the season. More students have cars than formerly. And there is also a wider variety of activities on the campus year around. College baseball attendance generally has changed its composition from lots of students and a few faculty members (and townspeople) to fewer students, more (and older) faculty members and townspeople. (Laird quickly adds that attendance has been good in recent years for Tech baseball games, Part of this has been due to winning seasons: 75-31 in the won-lost column from 1968 through '71; part to individual standout players, and part—oddly enough, to television.)

Television baseball and fans of other sports, anyway—they certainly don't show up for the halftime show.

Laird says college baseball has definitely lost ground in attendance since the mid-50's (major league baseball hasn't been a standing-room-only proposition either) and he declines to predict future trends for attendance for the college sport.

In a day when more and more people are concerned about the effect of television on the minds of the young, Laird takes a constructive tack and hopes the youngsters watch enough baseball to develop a keen interest in the sport. Once that interest has been developed, participation is the next logical step. And Laird, a logical man, smiles.

G. F. 'RED' LAIRD

especially the use of the instant replay and slow motion video tape techniques, has created more knowledgeable fans, the coach feels—and fan knowledge of the game is more important in baseball than in other more predictable sports. The coach feels that a fan who knows and appreciates the finer points of the game will naturally come back for more, and baseball fans may be a more dedicated lot than