Masterminding Tech Sports

BLACKSBURG — The cluttered desk obviously did not belong to a mere paper shuffler. There were no neat stacks in boxes marked “in” and “out.”

The commander of the desk sat in one of the chairs usually reserved for visitors. He dress, the cuffed pants and narrow tie, gave the hint of conservatism. But the mod coat, with its wide stripes and wide lapel, made one want to use the phrase “progressive conservative.”

Stuart Kent Cassell’s dress may be conservative, but as Virginia Tech’s vice president for administration he must be labeled progressive, very progressive.

All one has to do is look over Tech’s vast athletic facilities, certainly the best in the state, to get an idea of what kind of man Stuart Cassell is.

Many people have gotten the credit for Tech’s athletic plant. The only one to deserve it is Stuart Cassell. It was his idea, his plan. For the most part, it was Cassell doing the shoving.

He is modest, to a point. “I don’t know that that’s true,” he says in one breath. “But I guess I worked on the athletic facilities here for a longer period of time than anyone else,” he says in another.

It has been said that if they opened Stuart Cassell up, his blood would run orange. He went to school at Tech. He has been there ever since.

“We realized after World War II, when the veterans began returning, how deficient we were in facilities,” he says. After all, living in a somewhat remotely located area, the main thing students have to do outside of studying is participating in some kind of physical recreation.

“In 1949 I wrote a report for the board. It was one of these things where you sort of dream and project. I pointed out our deficiency and outlined, in a general way, what I thought we needed to do. We had the old stadium over there where we have the dorms now. That was not only the football field, but the baseball field and track. And we just had the old gym and I think about six tennis courts.

“So I pointed out the need for developing completely new facilities, not only because we desperately needed them but also because our old facilities were in the way of needed expansion of other aspects of the school.”

“I proposed the new football stadium, new baseball field, new coliseum and the new fieldhouse which was completed this year.”

The board thought Cassell had lost his mind, talking about a 10,000-seat coliseum and a 35,000-seat football stadium. They thought the idea so wild it would be almost impossible to convert into reality. Therefore they approved it.

Actually, Cassell talked of a coliseum “where size would have to be determined but it should accommodate at least 6,000 spectators.

“Really, I would have like to have said 12,000, but I knew if I said more than 6,000 it would have been a dead duck. Later we went on to 10,000.”

When the board approved Cassell’s plan, he started “with a nail at a time. Everybody asked me ‘what’s your first priority?’ I asked them what they were interested in.

“While I had preferences, I went with what I could get people interested in. We got the baseball field first. When we finished the fieldhouse last year, we finished what I had outlined except another nine holes on the golf course. I hope to have that started within two years. We’re looking for the money now.”

The coliseum was built with $1,350,000 in appropriations, $1 million borrowed on bonds and considerable private contributions.

The stadium was built entirely by borrowed and contributed funds. “When we started building the stadium we didn’t have any money ($40,000,” Cassell says. “We went as far as we could, then got some more money. Now we have more than $2 million in it and it is almost paid for.”

Obviously, Cassell is very much in support of Tech athletics.

“I think athletics, kept in balance, can be one of the greatest image builders you can have,” he says. “A lot of people say you can carry it too far. I’m not sure I believe that. A strong athletic program particularly in our situation, is a real asset.

“Last night I went to a program where some of the students were talking about athletics. I got amused when they asked why we couldn’t take some of the money from athletic scholarships and use it elsewhere. What they don’t understand is that if it wasn’t for athletics there wouldn’t be the scholarships. People who give money for athletic scholarships just wouldn’t be interested in giving it for some of the other things.

“Most of the people who contribute heavily to the university in all areas have become interested through athletics.”

Cassell is quick to admit that he has never been completely satisfied with the Tech athletic program.

“I’m a hard man to satisfy,” he says. “I’ll be satisfied when we win every contest.”