Strock and Defense Are Cures For Coffey ‘Stomach Disorder’

By BILL MILLSAPS

In dividing his squad for Saturday’s spring football game (1:30 p.m.), Virginia Tech coach Charlie Coffey faced a real problem. With the exception of one player, Coffey could provide equal talent to both the Oranges and the Whites. The one exception was quarterback Don Strock, “and I figure whoever had Strock had an advantage. I want the game to be interesting.”

So, Coffey took the easy way out. Strock will play one half for each team. “At the end of the first half,” said Coffey, “his team should be ahead. Then I want Don to come out in the second half and bring the other team from behind.”

Strock could do it, too. The 6-5 rising senior was one of the nation’s finest passers (No. 2 in passing, No. 3 in total offense) last season, connecting on 195 of 336 tosses for 2,695 yards and 12 touchdowns.

Noted Tech sports information director Wendy Weisend, “He’s now at least 50 per cent better than he was last fall. He’s so confident he’s like a hitter who comes up the plate expecting to hit a home run every time.”

That is not startling news to Hokie partisans. They know all about Strock and what he can do for the Tech offense. Their question is: what about that defense which proved so porous during the 1971 campaign, Coffey’s first in Blacksburg.

Coffey is pleased to report that the defense is much better, thank you. In tactics, said the coach, “we’re doing the same things we did last year only we’re doing them much better. The defense is the most improved, and it needed to be.

“Last year, for example, our linebacking ran anywhere from poor to pathetic. This year, we’re two deep at all three linebacker spots and there is competition for each starting position.”

Tech’s first-unit defenders at the position are Donnie Sprouse, Dennis Dotson and Kent Henry, moved from middle linebacker to a corner. Dotson spent most of his sophomore season injured and never reached the potential expected of him, but this spring, said Coffey, “he’s danced every set.” Henry was the top pass interceptor on the defense last year, and he’s been moved outside to take advantage of his speed.

“The most satisfying thing up to this point,” said Coffey, “is the unified effort of our linebackers.”

Coffey said the No. 1 defense has acquitted itself well against the first-unit offense. “They can completely shut off the run, but with Strock throwing . . . well, he’s going to complete passes on anybody. But our linebackers and secondary are really punishing the receivers.

“I’ve been able to sleep easy at nights after spring practice.

Coffey said he wasn’t sure how many of the Hokies’ incoming freshmen (48 have been signed to the national letter-of-intent) would be able to oust current starters.

“We’re going to look at film on every boy we’ve signed this summer and evaluate each player. After four days of fall workouts, those freshmen that have a chance to play varsity for us, I’ll keep.”

If size is a criterion some of those freshmen are definitely going to play. “We have signed 19 kids that are 6-3, nine that are 6-4 and five that are 6-5. And they weigh anywhere from 210 to 240. Not a fat one in the bunch.”

Encouraged by what he has seen in spring practice, Coffey said, “When we came here we were as far away as Mars. We’re now at about the moon level.”