Who's Starting QB? Coffey Not Talking

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BLACKSBURG—It won't be until the Virginia Tech offense takes the field for the first time Saturday that the starting quarterback for the Gobblers will be known, but until then rumors will be running wild as to whether it will be junior Bruce Arians or sophomore Rick Popp.

Taking the place of the nation's top quarterback isn't an enviable job, but both Popp and Arians have been red-shirted a year to prepare them for the time when Don Stock would be a legend instead of a quarterback at Tech. The time has come.

Coach Charlie Coffey has made up his mind who will be his starter but he isn't saying. He wants to keep William and Mary in suspense and at the same time keep up the fight that the two, inexperienced hopefuls have been putting up.

Arians, 6-1, 190-pounds, is given the inside track over the smaller Popp. Arians saw less than two quarters of action last year but he is still the most experienced quarterback on the team.

But which ever player gets the call, the whole offense will be different looking this year because both of the newcomers play differently from the offense that was built around Stock for two years.

"Both are of the runner type, yet they both can throw the ball," explained Coffey. "They are both fine passers but with them we should have a balanced running and throwing attack like we want."

"Last year if Stock couldn't find an open receiver, he would either eat the ball or throw it out of bounds. This year both of the new quarterbacks won't be afraid to run. That should help."

"We have a damn good running team this year," said Arians. "Before, we've just put the ball in the air and depended on the pass but we won't do that this year. The philosophy of our whole offense has changed."

Last year Arians threw for two touchdows and ran for two more. "I like running but I like throwing too. When I'm passing, I'd rather drop back because I don't like throwing on the run."

"I would have liked to have played more last year, but I learned a tremendous amount by just watching and working behind Stock," claimed Arians. "If Don had been hurt last year, however, we would have had to change our whole offense."

Popp was sitting in the stands last year, growing a year older but gaining no experience. "Of course, at first, you don't like the idea of being red-shirted. But I'm glad it happened now. I have three more years to play and I realize how much better I am," said Popp.

"I'm glad that Bruce and I are fighting for the starting job this year. I don't think you can accomplish anything without competition. It's good for you and you help each other."

Popp didn't start playing the quarterback position until his senior year in high school and he didn't start but two games his freshman year at Tech. "I didn't run the ball at all in high school, but I like to. I think that if I concentrate hard enough, I can do the job and do it well."

An experienced offensive line should be a big help to the two inexperienced signal callers.

"The interior of the offensive line is made up of all lettermen you know you can depend on," pointed out Popp. "According to Arians, "They're all seniors but one and they've been through it. You've got to have a line like that until we get some experience and can help ourselves more."

Actually Tech started the year with four men fighting for the quarterback job with no experience among them. "We had to limit it to two men so they would get some practice. You just can't work with four quarterbacks," said Coffey.

When the offense takes the field, the competition will be narrowed to one man. He might not start but one game, might even see much action if he can't move the offense, but he will be able to say he was the starting quarterback in 1973.