Year of Decision Starts Saturday for College Teams

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College football, the year 1972, opens Saturday, a day which could be the beginning of the end for some and the end of the beginning for others.

The year 1972 will answer some questions for the four state teams which open Saturday. And, somewhat ironically, they open against each other.

William & Mary travels to Blacksburg for a match with Virginia Tech, Virginia Commonwealth's divisional foe. The College of William & Mary scored 10-0 against Virginia Tech last year.

Three of the four coaches, Tech's Charlie Coffey, Virginia's Don Lawrence and VMI's Bob Thalman, will begin their third season as head coaches in 1972 with one of the more interesting games of the year.

Questions, please.

Will Charlie Coffey's high-powered program at Tech begin to materialize? Will the words "optimism" and "enthusiasm" be replaced by a few victories at VMI?

Can Jim Root take 18 returning starters and turn William & Mary into a winner?

Finally, and more importantly in the year 1972 than Don Lawrence salvage his job at Virginia?

Saturday, those questions will begin to be answered.

Likely, Coffey suffered the most embarrassing loss in his career, both as an assistant at Tennessee and Arkansas and as a head coach at Tech, when his team was beaten by William & Mary last year in the Tobacco Bowl at Richmond. Coffey hasn't, and probably won't, forget that loss. Neither, however, has the Indians forgotten the sweet taste of that victory.

This has been a trying period of pre-fall practice for the Hokies. Coffey admits he has no margin for a team as hard. The reason is obvious. Tech has not won an opening game since 1967. And it lost to Virginia on opening day last year primarily because it ran out of gas in the second half. Coffey's team will be in condition Saturday.

The Hokies are missing Don Strock, last season's total offense and passing (national) leader. Either Ricky Popp or B. E. Arias, both better runners than Strock, will be the replacement. How both or one of these fare will be important in determining Tech's success.

William & Mary, obviously, will be stronger with the coming of attack. The Indians will return six men who helped Root's team to a Southern Conference leading 26.5-1 game running last year.

The Tribe has its quarterback back—Bill Deery, who is more of a running threat than he is as a passer. He rushed for 225 yards last season as a sophomore.

Although VMI is in better position to win this year than it was last (when it won), this is a game that Tech needs to win. It's one of those games where Tech is expected to win and it will be very costly if it doesn't.

The believers in Coffey's program will have a difficult time continuing to believe should the Hokies lose to the Indians.

Don Lawrence is definitely on the hot seat at Virginia. He knows it, his bosses know it and the alumni know it. Rainbirds figure Virginia is not going to go at least 6-5 with a victory over Virginia Tech for Lawrence to keep his job. A convincing victory over VMI is almost a must. A loss would be disastrous.

On paper, the Cavaliers have their best talent since the days of Frank Quayle but tradition (one winning season in the last 20 years) is certainly against them.

 Apparently Lawrence has his quarterback situation solved, with sophomore Scott Gardner leading the attack, but, despite rants and raves to the contrary, the Cavaliers definitely have a depth problem at several positions.

VMI, under Bob Thalman, has spent two years talking about optimism, but, generally the Keysdells still end up on the losing end. With more depth, more size and more experience, maybe this is the year VMI will improve. Frankly, however, it's too early to tell. It probably won't be after Saturday.

In another area attraction, the best meets the best: North Carolina State, the ACC champion, hosts East Carolina, the Southern Conference favorite, in Greenville.