Popp no pop-off in friendly battle

By BOB McLELLAND

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BLACKSBURG—Rick Popp says he knows what people would like to read. "They'd like to read that Bruce and I are enemies," said the spunky little youngster from Akron, Ohio, who is waging a battle royal with Bruce Arias for the No. 1 quarterback position at Virginia Tech.

"They'd like to read that we are after each other... that we were lining up the rest of our teammates on our side so it would help us win the position. They'd like to read that we keep trying to cut each other up and will do anything to make the other look bad."

But, Popp claims, the sporting public will not likely read such things because they just aren't true. However, Popp does admit some overzealous sports writer might manufacture such a story just to stimulate readership.

"Sure it's going to be a big battle," Popp said. "We are really going after each other. I want the job and I know Bruce does. But we realize we need each other. We can help each other and the tough but clean competition for the job will make us both much better players."

There are those who claim Rick is injury-prone and this has him concerned.

"I don't understand it," he said.

RICK POPP

Shuns sports pages in autumn

"I never got hurt before. Then I hurt my shoulder last year and Bruce really looked good in the spring game. Then this summer I got an infection in my arm and after that cleared up I broke my hand in a slow pitch softball game, of all things."

Rick still has his left hand in a cast. It should be removed within a week. Until then, Rick can't take snaps from center but he can do most of the other quarterback drills.

"I know Bruce has the lead because of the way he played in the spring game," Popp said. "But to me, this is an entirely new start."

Ask Popp to compare the plusses and minuses of Arias and himself and you get this reply:

"Bruce has the advantage in size (Arias is 6-1, 190 to Rick's 6-0, 175) but I think I'm quicker and the better runner. He has played some varsity ball and I haven't. But I learned a lot last year.

Rick has his own ideas about the qualities of a top quarterback. He says the No. 1 requirement is self confidence. Talent is only No. 2. Rick certainly doesn't come up lacking in the confidence department.

He also thinks the No. 1 job of the quarterback is to move the offense.

"I don't give a darn about the passing and total offensive records," Rick said. "If we can have a great year as a team I don't care about my personal records or acclaim.

"Just look at the Southern California quarterback. No one knows his name. But he led them to the national championship."

Popp knows what it means to be somewhat overlooked but still a quarterback a winner. He led his high school team to an 18-1 record in two years of varsity ball and to many post-season honors. But he never set any personal records.

"I don't remember running but one or two times," he said, "and I didn't set any passing records. All I did was try to keep the offense moving and to do the right thing at the right time. I hope I can do the same thing here at Tech."