When Henning first came to Tech with Charlie Coffey and the new regime, he found himself in an organized situation. It ran like a machine. But when he went to Houston, it seemed like the left hand had no idea what the right hand was doing.

"It seemed we could never get anything done at Houston," Henning says. "All of the coaches had several good suggestions which would have helped us, but all people wanted to do was drag their feet.

"For example, when we first went to Houston we made the suggestion of the necessity for practice film. We wanted to film certain practices because it is much easier to progress toward a winner. We got that accomplished in training camp although we had to drive 80 miles to Austin to get the film processed and we got it back a day late.

"Although it was inconvenient, it helped us. But when we left the training camp and got back to Houston, we got a directive that no more practices would be filmed. The only thing we had to teach from then was game film and that's too late."

After Houston was waxed by Pittsburgh, Peterson and Henning made the decision that young quarterback Dan Pastorini needed to be benched and that veteran Kent Nix would start in the home opener against Cleveland.

The Oilers worked four practice days with Nix at quarterback, then two days before the game Peterson told his coaches that Pastorini would start and he did not want any discussion on the matter. It didn't take a master's degree in psychology to determine that the Houston owner, Bud Adams, was more interested in selling tickets than winning a football game.

There are many more examples, but soon Henning had enough. He knows, and almost everyone else knows, that some day he will be a head football coach. It just made sense to him to get back into an organized situation, leaving one where not only did they not know who was playing quarterback, they didn't know who was the coach.

BLACKSBURG—Attention, please! I'm giving summer 15 minutes to change to autumn. I'm giving the game of baseball 10 minutes to get out of this world. I'd rather watch a guy pick his teeth than watch a baseball game. I never could play tennis. And I'm losing so much money on the golf course my opponents are driving to the course in a truck so they'll have something with which to haul it off.

Since I began in the newspaper business, summer has always been the dull time. I always look forward to a few days of vacation, but about this time every year I start wishing I could watch Don Strock throw a pass or see David Thompson sink a 20-foot jumper.

Actually, however, the world hasn't really stopped. Over here in Blacksburg, the people at Virginia Tech haven't quit for the summer.

On one end of the Tech campus, a bulldozer is pushing dirt off of what by next spring will be a nine-hole addition to the golf course. On the Southern side of the campus, workmen are installing a synthetic surface in the fieldhouse.

In the coliseum—in the ticket office—manager Tom McNeer is answering requests for football tickets. And those requests are running about 12 percent ahead of last season.

About a block away, in the same building, Dan Henning sits in his office watching film, trying to figure out how he is going to get more touchdowns this fall out of a Don Strockless-offense.

You have to wonder what Henning is doing here. Last year at this time, he had just completed his first week of training camp with the Houston Oilers. Henning, head coach Bill Peterson, and about six more coaches had been hired to build a competitive National Football League team in Houston. A year later, Henning is back in Blacksburg as a college assistant. It may have been the most enlightening, and most miserable, year of his life.

Peterson, the former Florida State coach, is still in Houston. But many of last year's assistants are elsewhere.

Henning came back to Blacksburg under his own power. He was not fired. Simply, he found the situation intolerable and he left. Although he doesn't say so, it was a matter of the head coach being a puppet. As is the case in most losing professional situations, the owner coaches the Houston Oilers.