Coffey Foresees Gobbler Triumph Over W&M Saturday ... If, Maybe

By STAN SHALET
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Virginia Tech Football Coach Charlie Coffey came as close as he ever has in predicting a victory for his Gobblers in Saturday's seasonal opener with William and Mary but quickly retreated behind two "ifs" and a "maybe."

"If we execute properly and we don't make any mistakes, especially silly mistakes, we should win Saturday," Coffey said Wednesday.

"I believe early season games are not so much a win as lost with the team that finishes on the short end making glaring and usually silly mistakes."

"Such things as penalties for offside, blown assignments, mental errors on pass coverage, will hurt teams in early season games and the team that makes the fewest errors will wind up the winner."

Coffey said he and his staff are working the Gobbler squad to prepare mentally for the opener. "We're working hard to cut down the mistakes the ball team is making. If we cut the errors, we'll be in good shape."

The Gobblers lost to William and Mary last year by one point, 17-16, in the mud of Richmond's Tobacco Bowl. This defeat and the defeat by Virginia in the season opener to Virginia, 24-20, rankle Coffey.

If the Gobblers had won both games, they would have finished with an 8-2-1 record and had a good shot at a bowl game.

"We aren't getting overly excited but our ball team knows it has an important game Saturday."

Following the lines of the Washington Redskins', George Allen, Coffey has refused to name a starting quarterback.

Bruce Arians who backed up Don Strick last season, and Ohioan Rick Popp who was red-shirted last season, are battling for the starting job.

"So far, both have looked good except in the pressure situations and we're going to wait and decide on who to start."

Coffey noted that the only Gobbler who will not play Saturday is Newport Newsian Howard Keges. "He made a tackle last weekend and came up with his arm numb. He's out of the collar but a 50-50 doubtful performer Saturday."

Coffey said that one of the big disappointments of the pre-season drills is Hamptonian Alex Hill. "He won't be dressing Saturday. Not because of his ability. He's still doing all the right things but we've had to take him out of practice at least six times due to minor injuries. We can't play people who miss practices."

"The players who have made the most progress so far are offensive linemen Bruce Lemment and Pete Roccoe and defensive backs John Bell and Jerry Scharnus."

The coach said James Barber has shown no signs of weakness after his leg surgery. He added that seven freshmen including Danny Patterson of New Kent have made the squad.

"Patterson could be a starter at offensive tackle in a couple of weeks."