Coffey Suffers Quietly

Tech's Youth Shows (0-3)

By BILL CATE
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MORGANTOWN, W. Va.—Billy Clay, the former linebacker coach at Virginia Tech who this summer left what some call a sinking ship, grimaced as Danny Buggs caught a long pass and sailed into the end zone.

"I hate to see him lose again," said Clay, now a coach at South Carolina. "He dies a little everytime he loses. He's too good a man for that to happen."

Clay, of course, was speaking of his former boss, Charlie Coffey. And, if what he says is true, Coffey isn't far from the undertaker.

Coffey has lived three years in the last three weeks. He has seen his team lose twice when it shouldn't have. Then, after the loss to Kentucky last week, Coffey used his trump card, his ace in the hole. He tried to appeal to his team in a caustic fashion. He challenged them the way Gen. Patton challenged his troops. Patton won, Coffey has lost.

But, really, who is to say Coffey's tactics haven't worked? His team played better Saturday against West Virginia. It lost to a superior team.

The best analysis of Virginia Tech now is that the experienced players have little talent and the talent has little experience. It is highly possible Tech is facing a disastrous season. It was thought before the season that Coffey might win seven games. Now, it seems, he could lose seven. Maybe more.

After losing to West Virgin-ia, Coffey was calm, very reserved. There was none of the tirade of last week. You can't do that every week, not even every season.

"I tried to get them up," he said, "I've tried a lot of things. I'm going to keep trying. I still think this has the potential to be a good football team."

Two of the starting defensive linemen are sophomores. So are two of the starters in the secondary. It doesn't matter how talented they are, they're going to make mistakes.

"They're not making the same mistakes," Coffey says. "It's like patching a roof. You stop a one leak, then you feel water hitting you in the head."

Such are the problems with a young team. It would not be as difficult to take if so much was not expected.

Maybe too much is expected of this team, but that is not entirely the team's fault. The promotions which have been used to sell tickets have presented a false picture of the Hokies' abilities. There is great talent on this team, but anybody can see it isn't ready to win the world.

Coffey's first recruits are juniors and he didn't take the Tech job until recruiting season was almost over. He got Tom Shirley, Ricky Scales, Ricky Popp, Howard Keyes and a few others, but primarily his players are sophomores and freshmen.

Phil Rogers, the sophomore runningback, has the potential to be a great one, but he makes sophomore mistakes. Ricky Popp hadn't taken a varsity snap until the William and Mary game. The receivers, Inge, Hardee, Creasey, are young. The starting offensive guard and tackle on the right side are sophomores.