College Football: Is It Everything?

The television set flickered on Sunday night and there was a grim-faced Charlie Coffey.

Give credit to the show host, Bill Moss. He asked immediately about Coffey's statements after the Kentucky game, statements that had to shock even some stalwart Hokies.

"I've thought about it," said the Virginia Tech football coach. "And I think I said the right things."

Among the things that Coffey said after his team lost to Kentucky were:

"I'm going to start coaching like I did when I was an assistant. When a player made a mistake I either kicked him in the rear or slapped him across the face.

"I'm getting rid of those who don't believe football is everything. I can't take their scholarships away, but I can fire them from my football team."

Later, Coffey would tell a Roanoke sports writer, "I don't plan to injure anyone, intentionally or unintentionally. There will be no kicking, slapping or things like that."

Was Coffey's tirade after the season's second straight disappointing loss aploy? Was it made in order to fire up his football team so that it can win some games and salvage a good season?

Coffey Wants To Win

What a coach says after a losing game can often be taken with a grain of salt. Most coaches are upset when they lose. Some of them say things they regret later, especially when their comments are printed. But there were no retractions on Coffey's TV show.

I understand that Charlie Coffey wants to win. Football coaches who do not win do not stay coaches very long. But, as important as it may be, winning is not so important that football should be everything to a college player.

I can understand George Allen's believing that winning is everything. But Allen coaches in the pros. His players make their living by playing football. If they can't produce or don't produce, they won't be around.

But college football is played by 18, 19 and 20-year-olds. Sure, they are on football scholarships. Their education is paid for by the college of their choice.

The coach, however, does not own them. I don't know whether Charlie Coffey will ever believe this, but football (in college) isn't everything. Honest, it isn't.

When a coach is out recruiting a high school player, he doesn't tell that boy, "Son, come play for me and I'll own you. Football is everything and I want you to feel that way."

Relatively Normal Life

When a player is on the field at practice, or preparing for a game, the coach is the boss. What he says goes. The player should respond.

But there is more to college than just football. Even a scholarship football player should be permitted to lead a relatively normal life.

Coffey's tongue-thrashing of his team Saturday and his hardened attitude in practice this week may well pay off in a victory over West Virginia. If it does, a lot of people will say that it was worth the indignities and the embarrassment in order to win.

But, somehow, I can't believe that winning is all that important. Motivated teams do win games and teams that are not motivated do lose. But is motivation by fear the way to go about it?

I don't know why Tech lost to William and Mary and Kentucky, two teams it had every reason to think it would beat.

But those games have been played and all the wishing in the world won't change the results. It will be interesting to see if the new approach at Tech makes a difference.

If it doesn't, what next?