Coffey turns to youth

Patterson to start for Tech Sat.

BLACKSBURG — There could be at least four freshmen in Virginia Tech’s starting lineup for Saturday’s homecoming game here against South Carolina as Coach Charlie Coffey grasps for a winning combination.

On the offensive unit, Tech will start a freshman tackle, Danny Patterson, 6-5, 250, from New Kent, as well as seven sophomores.

Freshman starters on defense include tackle Tommy Beasley, 6-5¼, 217, from Elkhorn, West Va., and Bill Housewright, 6-2, 225, of Gate City, and linebacker Stuart Patterson, 6-1, 205, of Lynchburg. And three sophomores also are on the first defensive unit.

That’s 14 of the first 22, and both kicking specialists, Bruce McDaniel and Wayne Latimer, are also sophomores.

“When you’re 0-4, you have to figure that you have no way to go but up,” Coffey said. “Of course, recent injuries have forced some of the moves, but we also believe that some of our youngest players have been developing and are now ready for a chance at varsity competition.”

Among those waiting in the wings of the second unit are quarterback Eddie Joyce, 6-4, 180, from Salem, and running back Denny Ladd, 5-9, 180, from Baltimore, Md., via Massanutten Military.

Four seniors, tackle Bruce Lemmert, guard Pete Horosko, center Rod Sedwick and fullback James Barber, add some stability to the offensive unit, but safetyman Jerry Scharnus is the only senior starter on defense. (Linebackers Dennis Dodson and Kent Henry are question marks due to injuries sustained last Saturday).

“If it looks like a youth movement, so be it,” Coffey said. “We’re looking for a winning combination.”

The six sophomores on the offensive unit for Saturday’s game are split end Billy Hardee, guard Steve Philbrick, tight end Kevin Dick, quarterback Ricky Popp, tailback Phil Rogers and flanker Jerry Inge.

Joining the three freshmen defensive starters are linebacks Tom Shirley and Charley Martin, both juniors, sophomore end Doug Thacker; sophomore tackle Larry Herndon; cornerbacks, Morris Blueford (soph.) and David Halstead (Jr.); safetyman Scharnus and monsterman John Bell, a junior.

A crowd of more than 25,000 is expected at Lane Stadium Saturday afternoon and most of the Gobbler fans are expecting the Techmen to get that first victory.

South Carolina was impressive in an opening win over Georgia Tech but has since suffered losses to Houston and Miami of Ohio.

Rogers leads the Gobbler rushing with 430 yards while Barber has 232. That’s 662 of the 723 yards the Gobbler have netted in four games.

The Tech quarterbacks have hit on 62 of 116 passes (.534 avg.) for 626 yards and five touchdowns. Rogers has 15 catches for 43 yards while Hardee has 13 for 196 and Scales nine receptions for 167.

McDaniel has punted 22 times for a 42.5 average while Latimer is six-for-six in extra points and four of six in field goal attempts.

The Tech defense has allowed their four opponents 1252 yards rushing and 374 passing, a total of 1626. Tech has 1349 yards in total offense.

Rogers gives zip to Tech offense

BLACKSBURG — Phil Rogers so far hasn’t scored a touchdown, but he’s already Virginia Tech’s most exciting running back in at least a decade—and he’s a cinch to become the most productive sophomore runner in Gobbler history.

Having gained 430 yards in the Gobbler’s first four games, the Gate City youngster should very soon be assaulting Tech’s blue ribbon list of all-time productive runners.

At least in the last quarter century, only eight Tech ball carriers have gained more than 600 yards in a single season. They are Terry Smoot, 940 (1969); Bob Schwerkert, 839 (1963); Terry Smoot, 820, (1968); Sonny Utz, 777 (1964); Perry Tibiario, 764 (1970); Tommy Francisco, 753 (1966); Dickie Beard, 647 (1954); James Barber, 624 (1972) and Alger Pugh, 615 (1959).

Coach Charlie Coffey makes no secret of his intentions of getting the ball to Rogers. In fact, Rogers is Tech’s leading pass receiver. Last Saturday he also was pressed into service as a kickoff returner. And if Coffey didn’t feel compelled to allow him an occasional breather, he probably would be called upon to run back punts.

No matter how he gets his hands on the ball, Rogers, 5-11, 189, scintillates with quickness, agility, reasonable power and tremendous effort.

“His extra effort on occasions has caused him to stumble, but it’s hard to fault the kind of extra effort he has given us,” Coffey notes.

While Rogers doesn’t have blazing speed, he’s still the fastest Tech has had in a long, long time. And for certain he keeps the spectators, as well as defenders, on their toes.

With Rogers, Tech always has potential offensive explosiveness. With several more like him, the Gobbler likely would not be in the slump they’re in.

He’ll make a niche for himself—and perhaps for Tech.

Stuart Patterson