Tech coach wants defense to gain some confidence

By DAVE THORNTON

BLACKSBURG—Virginia Tech coach, Charlie Coffey is well aware that many Tech fans are quietly wondering why he can’t come up with a better defensive combination to slow the opposition.

Coffey’s rebuttal goes like this:

“When you’ve got your best athletes playing, what else can you do?” he asked Saturday in the Tech dressing quarters as he tried not to show the frustration of a 27-24 loss to South Carolina, the fifth straight setback for the Gobblers this season.

“We’ve just got to stick with our young athletes — just like we stuck with James Barber last year when he kept fumbling—now he doesn’t fumble,” explained Coffey, who was happy to see the homecoming crowd of 38,000.

Barber churned out 164 yards for his best day on the ground ever.

There were other offensive stars — Ricky Scales, Billy Harddee, and George Heath. Scales caught a 36 yard TD pass; Harddee, a sophomore from Mulberry, Fla., went 74 yards after taking a pass from Rick Popp and later returned a kickoff 96 yards for Tech’s last score. Heath, a freshman from Bristol, returned a kickoff 70 yards.

“We just haven’t been able to put the finishing touches on our offense,” said Coffey. “On defense, our young kids are lacking in confidence. It’s tough to get the concentration of the boys when you aren’t winning.

“We don’t have the great secondary player that we need. In the secondary, you need a good athlete and one that is confident on himself. We’ve got good athletes back there—they just need confidence.”

Coffey pointed out that Tech still has the problem of inconsistency.

“Every week in practice we sit down and analyze our players at each position and try to eliminate the things that are hurting us. I felt like our performances today showed we had made some progress. I really thought we could win until we gave up the ball that last time.”

Barber noted, “South Carolina wasn’t nearly as good as SMU or West Virginia—we were moving the ball good and should have beat them.”

Actually the Techman might have been beaten by a considerably bigger margin had not the Gamecocks, who were without head coach Paul Dietzel who was hospitalized, fumbled on the one-yard line on one occasion and failed to convert on a first and goal from the nine yard line in another.

The Gobblers couldn’t come up with the big play in the second half when they moved into USC territory. Popp was intercepted three times to thwart Tech drives.

Eddie Joyce, the freshman standout from Andrew Lewis, made his first varsity appearance because he is better at throwing the 15-18 yard patterns, according to Coffey.

Coffey noted that Stuart Patterson, a freshman linebacker from Lynchburg who made his first start against South Carolina, has great potential and will make a good linebacker. “He’s just excited right now but he’ll come around.” Patterson saw little action in the second half.

“This is probably the best group of freshman we’ve ever had,” Coffey added.

The Gobblers will face a high-powered offense in Houston’s Cougars in the Astrodome Friday night before returning here on Oct. 20 to tackle the Virginia Cavaliers.