BLACKSBURG — “Losing five straight isn’t what upsets me nearly so much as now showing marked progress on defense,” declares Virginia Tech Coach Charlie Coffey.

“Our offense still lacks some consistency, but at least it has shown improvement,” Coffey explained. “The offensive line has done a fairly consistent job. Sophomore quarterback Rick Popp has shown that his command of the offense, both mentally and mechanically, is much better. And we’ve gotten some super efforts from individuals like running backs James Barber and Phil Rogers and Billy Hardee, wide receiver and kick return specialist.

“And sophomore punter Bruce McDaniel, with few exceptions, has done his job.

“But the defensive unit simply hasn’t made the progress it should have.

“We’ve had some outstanding individual efforts, and at times the defense has played well as a unit. But it has too often given up the big play, and repeatedly it has appeared not ready to give its best at the start of the game.”

To some extent, injuries have played a role. Three freshmen started on defense last Saturday. Two of them, tackle Tommy Beasley and end Bill Houseright likely will start again this week against Houston. In fact, sophomores Doug Thacker, end, and Larry Herndon, tackle, along with Beasley and Houseright comprise a very young front four.

Getting well against the Houston veer isn’t the most likely prospect for such a young group, but Coffey is working harder than ever for progress.

“It’s obvious that we’ll be severely tested again, but I’m convinced that we have enough ability to accomplish more than we have so far.”

The Fighting Gobblers will arrive in Houston Thursday in time to work out in the Astrodome, where Friday’s kickoff is slated for 7:30 p.m., CST.