Special to the News Leader

HOUSTON — “We were 100 per cent ready. We came to play,” said Virginia Tech coach Charlie Coffey.

“We were flat,” said Houston’s Bill Yeoman. “Any time you stroll around before a football game you are ready to get beat. That’s exactly what happened in the first half.”

Sounds like unbeaten Houston might have encountered trouble last night at the Astrodome here, doesn’t it?

Right, but only for a half. The Gobblers won the first half 17-14. Houston took the second half 40-10. Put them together and you have a 54-27 romp by the Cougars who entered the contest four touchdown favorites.

For a while winless Tech, now 0-6, had Houston, 5-0, in a state of shock.

Quarterback Rick Popp got the Gobblers on the Astrodome scoreboard first with a 29-yard scoring pass to Ricky Scales and Wayne Latimer added to the Cougar uneasiness with a stunning 51-yard field goal.

“We were in a daze, we were thinking about next week’s game with Miami,” admitted Houston quarterback D. C. Nobles.

The Cougars followed Tech’s first quarter outburst with two touchdowns on a 53-yard punt return by Joe Rust and a nine-yard scoring jaunt by Reggie Cherry but Tech zoomed out front again on a 40-yard scoring pass from Popp to Scales just before the half.

“Coach said ‘I told you so’ at halftime,” said Nobles. “He had said before the game we would be flat.”

Houston turned the game into a runaway in the third quarter with a 26-point outburst. Larry Jefferson started the spree by romping 98 yards with the kickoff to open the second half.

Nobles and Cherry added touchdowns and it was apparent that no upset was in the making.

“I had to think about beating Virginia Tech,” conceded Nobles.

Houston entered the game ranked fourth in rushing with a 356 mark and fourth in total offense at 457.5.

As it turned out the Cougars picked up 364 yards on the ground against Tech and added 107 passing for a total of 471.

Four fumble recoveries in the first half figured in the Gobblers’ surprise resistance movement.

But ultimately Tech’s inability to play defense proved to be its undoing.