'I Never Thought It (1-6) Would Happen'

BLACKSBURG — College football, a good college football program, is at least 50 percent promotion. It's like that everywhere. But it's that age-old adage of which comes first, the chicken or the egg? When a college, such as Virginia Tech, makes a commitment to go "big time," a lot of conversation, a plethora of promotion is needed. You know you aren't going to win every week, but you have to promote because you must fill the stadium in order to raise the money to finally become "big time."

But, you know, it's funny. They still pay off on Saturday afternoon. During that brief two hours and 30 minutes on Saturday is when the real football programs are developed. If you win, then the promotion is taken in stride by everyone.

By Bill Cote
Time: Sports: Writer

If you lose, they laugh at you. Virginia Tech Coach Charlie Coffey is as much salesman as he is football coach. He has sold the program at Virginia Tech. But, unfortunately, they still keep score.

For the past three years, Coffey and his staff have recruited a lot of football players. Obviously, when you consider he'll take something like 20 sophomores and 13 freshmen to Alabama Saturday, he has a young football team. However, much more was expected of Tech this season than a 1-6 record. And no one expected Tech to open with six straight losses. The least of all, Charlie Coffey.

"I've never experienced anything like this," Coffey said Wednesday. "I never thought it could happen. I would have never believed it." But it happened, and every Saturday when it did Coffey may have died a little.

Although Coffey says the events of the past seven weeks haven't shaken his confidence to get the job accomplished, he admits that "it has slowed us down. It has delayed what we're going to accomplish."

Trying to analyze what has happened at Tech is almost impossible. Defense, of course, has been the downfall. Although Coffey has a defensive background, the Hokie defense has not stopped anybody with the exception of Virginia (1971) and SMU (last year).

"We didn't really stop Virginia," Coffey says. "They didn't execute well in critical situations."

It is possible, and probable, that Coffey overrated his defensive players. He says it is not the defensive scheme. He says it is not his coaching staff.

"I take full responsibility," he says. "There is not going to be a scapegoat. If there is a fault, it is mine."

There is no question, with the exception of last week's victory over Virginia, that Tech has gotten few breaks. "If I told you everything that has happened to us in the games and in practice, people would think I was a crybaby. I could make 1,000 legitimate excuses, but they won't change the score."

Coffey defends his defensive scheme by saying, "20 percent of the Nation's defensive schemes are using it. Another scheme wouldn't work any better. The reason our defense isn't any better is a combination of a lot of things."

"You take Alabama—their defensive secondary is not a lot better than ours. But the defensive front doesn't give anybody much time to do anything.
Charlie Coffey Won't Give Up

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much looking. Our defensive front does.

"You have to be damn good to effectively rush the passer. You have to be effective stopping the run. We do a good job stopping a team with a stereotyped offense. We haven't played many of those this year.

"Houston probably has the best defensive line in football and they only rush four men. People say you can't do that. They have two defensive tackles who are superior and two defensive ends who are superior. We're playing defensive end with Doug Thacker, who is 5-11 and 183 pounds. He's a bellwya little football player. Houston's defensive ends are 6-5, 245 and have Doug Thacker's speed."

Coffey says he has some young defensive players like he needs. "But," he says, "they haven't developed yet. Tom Beasley, a freshman, is 6-6 and 218. He's going to get up in that 240 category. If we had five down linemen like what he will be, then we'd be in a lot better shape. But we don't, and that's a lot of our problem."

Coffey says he was greatly encouraged by spring practice. "We saw people like Phil Rogers and Rickey Scales who could do things we couldn't do before. Around here in the past, some of our people played like they had a peg leg. It was easy to get enthused and everybody here got that way.

"T. never told my staff or myself that we would beat anybody, or that we would be a fine football team, but I felt like if we got them in superb condition the attitude and enthusiasm would win the first game for us and then we'd get better week after week."

"But because of a combination of things we didn't win it and then everything snowballed."

Coffey says when things go bad, as they have at Tech, it is a combination of things like effort, talent and coaching.

"You have a better chance analyzing it after the season when you're not trying to win a football game. But anytime we're unsuccessful, I should get the blame. It's my job to correct all inadequacies.

"Tech's non-successes will undoubtedly affect recruiting."

However, the Hokies are fortunate that their chief competitors—Virginia and North Carolina—aren't exactly running rampant. Still, Tech has had to change its recruiting approach. Instead of projecting the "big-time" image, Tech is telling recruits they have a good chance to play. Obviously, particularly on defense, that is the truth.

"Probably 20 of our 30 recruits will be defensive players," Coffey says. "We'll be more selective. We won't take any marginal players hoping they'll develop. We've got several in that category now, and I think some of them will develop.

How long will it take now? Obviously, Tech's progress has been severely impeded. How much has progress been delayed?"

"It depends on how quickly I get results from the young players," Coffey says, "and how many good young players come into this program between January and next September."

Charlie Coffey had no idea what has happened would happen. Now, he realizes it has. "It's scary," he says. "I never knew much about losing. I've been in this program three years. I was in three other programs where we went to a bowl game after the third year. Subconsciously, maybe I expected that here. I know I worked like hell to get there. Well, I'm not quitting. I am going to keep on working."