Gobblers Are Still Alive

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (UPI) — “I’m still living,” said Virginia Tech football coach Charlie Coffey. “But that’s about all.” If Coffey feels that badly, imagine how the players feel about last week’s 77-6 bashing by second-ranked Alabama.

“We played everybody I could talk into getting out there on the field,” said Coffey. “They’ve (Alabama) got the finest offensive football team I’ve ever seen — on film, on the field, as a player or as a coach.”

So how does Coffey get his thoroughly-plucked Gobblers (1-7) up for Saturday night’s 7:30 p.m., CST, meeting here with favored Memphis State (5-2)? “All you can do is tell them it’s another game and another week,” he said. “We just aren’t very good defensively.”

He’s right. The Gobblers, according to the adding machine, have given up 316 points in eight games this year. But VPI can score points, too, and that has Memphis State coach Fred Pancoast worried. The Gobblers have two outstanding runners in tailback Phil Rogers (718 yards in 120 carries) and fullback James Barber (623 yards in 120 attempts).

Pancoast insists he is playing them one at a time despite a crucial game with tough Southern Mississippi next week and a bid to the Sun or Peach Bowl dancing in his head.

“We’re catching Virginia Tech at the worst possible time,” said Pancoast, who pulled Memphis State out of the Missouri Valley Conference and went independent in his second year this season.

“They were embarrassed by Alabama and they are going to try to redeem themselves against us.” Memphis State appears much too solid offensively and adequate defensively for VPI. The Tigers are guided by 6-5 starting quarterback Joe Bruner and substitute Mike Robb.

Robb will see more action Saturday night, said Pancoast. The junior has tossed only 19 passes this year but has completed an amazing 14 of them. The Gobblers have their biggest problem on offense at quarterback.

Coffey has gone through three quarterbacks — two with injuries — this year and is now working with freshman Eddie Joyce.

“But we’ve been far more consistent on offense than defense,” said Coffey.

Which may be the understatement of the football season.