Coffey Quits; Tech Shopping

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BLACKSBURG—Virginia Tech began a search for a new head football coach here Friday and apparently none of the current assistants will be considered.

Charlie Coffey resigned sometime Thursday night after three years as the Tech head coach. A Committee composed of athletic director Frank Moseley, assistant athletic director Bill Matthews, vice president Stuart Cassell and faculty athletic chairman Dr. Wilson T. Bell was named to pursue the search.

Tech’s assistant coaches, Dan Henning, Marshall Taylor, Richard Traill, Terry Don Phillips and Carl Ellis, met with Moseley Friday afternoon and were told they would be paid through February. There was no indication Tech will not consider any of the present assistants.

Offensive coordinator Dan Henning was thought to have a chance at the job, but he has taken himself out of consideration.

“I am not a candidate for the job,” Henning said. “I might be a candidate under different circumstances. The way things have turned out around here . . . I am not going after the job.”

Henning said he would help out where he can until February, then he would take stock of himself. “I plan to remain in football,” he said.

Coffey’s resignation shocked the administration and his staff. Late Thursday afternoon, he had discussed the hiring of two defensive assistants, then some three hours later he had decided to resign. The recent resignation of Billy Clay, whom Coffey hired as defensive coordinator only three weeks ago, was probably the event which triggered Coffey’s decision.

“This was entirely Charlie’s decision,” said Dr. T. Marshall Hahn, president of Virginia Tech. “We at the university felt we had a top-flight coach and man directing our football program and we were 100 percent behind him.”

However, Hahn had recently weathered a storm from disgruntled alumni who wanted to buy up the remaining four years of Coffey’s contract. It was at that time Hahn made a firm stand.

Coffey said he had planned to retire following the 1973 season and there is reason to believe that is true because Henning returned to Tech from the Houston Oilers with the understanding he would be recommended as Coffey’s replacement.

“I decided several years ago that I would coach until I was 40,” said Coffey, who will be 40 on June 28. “But after the dismal flop (2-9) of this season, I decided to coach one more year.”

However, problems continued to mount. Clay resigned three weeks after accepting the job. Eddie Joyce Jr., the freshman quarterback from Salem’s Andrew Lewis, left school after academic problems, and Coffey was having an extremely difficult time finding suitable defensive coaches who would accept the job.

Late Thursday night, the problems apparently became too severe.

“After more thought, I have decided to retire now,” Coffey said. “I feel an obligation to my staff, and it wouldn’t be fair to bring in new staff members knowing I had planned to coach only one more year.”

Hahn said the university would begin immediately a search not only for a new football coach, but for a new athletic director. Frank Moseley, who had held the latter post since 1961, announced last month that he planned to retire July 1.

Chuck Roe, who has five years remaining on a self-perpetuating contract, is a leading contender for the athletic directorship. Roe, who has served as chief recruiter, administrative assistant and summer camp director, has a meeting scheduled with Hahn early next week.

Coffey, a Tennessee graduate who came to Tech after three years as defensive line coach at Tennessee and five seasons as defensive coordinator at Arkansas, said he plans to devote his time to his trucking firm in Shelbyville.

“After 18 years of coaching, there are things I’ve always wanted to do but haven’t been able to because they conflicted with my football coaching,” Coffey said. “I want to spend more time with my family.”

The foundation has been laid for Virginia Tech football,” Coffey said, “and the material is now here to win.”

Coffey left Blacksburg in a cloak of secrecy Friday, flying to his home in Shelbyville. His family remained in Blacksburg.

“I’ve never seen a man work harder,” said one of his assistants. “He burned the candle at both ends for three years. Maybe it burned out. Maybe hard work isn’t always the answer.”

Matthews, a member of the committee to select a new coach, said he expected something to be done quickly. “We plan to move quickly, but not hastily,” Matthews said. “We can’t afford to make a mistake.”