VPI Hunts For New Coach, Resignation Surprises Hahn

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BLACKSBURG — The Charlie Coffey era ended Friday. Virginia Tech's dynamic but controversial football coach quite unexpectedly submitted his resignation to University President T. Marshall Hahn Jr.

Coffey's letter, handed to Dr. Hahn at 9 a.m. Friday, says, "I feel that it is in the best interest of my family and myself to retire from coaching and devote full time to my business interests."

Earlier this year, after the Gobblers lost to Kentucky, Coffey raged in the locker room that he might quit. He later said when he felt he could not be effective as a coach, he would resign. The Virginia Tech team finished the 1973 season with a 2-9 record. Among the defeats were routs by Houston (54-27), Alabama (77-6), and Memphis State (49-26).

The most stunning loss came in the season's finale when Virginia Military Institute edged the Gobblers, 22-21.

Coffey's three seasons at Virginia Tech showed records of 47-64-1, and 2-9. Despite this lack of winning consistency, the school's administration gave Coffey its support. Dr. Hahn explained Friday afternoon that Coffey's decision to resign was completely his own.

"This came as a complete surprise," Dr. Hahn said. "The first inkling I had was late Thursday night when Charlie called me for an appointment. He told me then he wanted to talk about resigning."

"I changed my schedule to get him in at 9 this morning. I believe he made a real contribution to our program. I feel we had some talent and things were on the way up. For a 2-9 team, we had the best attendance ever, interest was high. We felt that he would be our head coach again next season."

A source close to the situation said morale among players and coaches was low. Part of this was attributable to the 2-9 record and player dissatisfaction with Coffey's playing attitude. "Everyone was afraid," the source said.

The straw that broke the camel's back came after the Thanksgiving holiday when Bill Gay, picked by Coffey to return from South Carolina as line coach, was named as defensive coordinator, turned down the job to work on his farm, working about four weeks.

"The Gobblers, therefore, were virtually without a defensive coaching staff. Only Carl Ellis remained, Coffey would have had to begin all over again, finding at least three competent people to fill the jobs."

"I believe he's such an honorable man, he felt he couldn't help our program, he had kept on, because he had a contract at a good salary for several years," Dr. Hahn noted. The exact annual salary figure wasn't announced, but it was reported to be about $26,000.

The news came as a shock to the remaining members of the staff whose own futures are now in limbo. "Charlie told us this morning, on his own, of his decision," administrative aide Jack Patera said.

Coffey's decision was announced first in the Bristol, Va., newspaper Friday morning. By the time the report had circulated around the campus, the former head coach had cleaned out his office and left for home in Tennessee.

"This came as a complete surprise," said Dr. Wilson T. Bell, faculty chairman of Virginia Tech's athletic council. "I didn't know anything until Dr. Hahn called me into his office for a meeting. That's when he made the announcement."

A search for a new coach was launched immediately. "I asked Frank Mussey, our athletic director, to chair the committee seeking a new coach," according to Dr. Hahn.

"We have two searches on, one for a football coach and one for an athletic director. I see two jobs for two men, but we're open to any other possibility."

"We have drafted a man quickly, but don't want to do it in a panic situation."

Coffey, a native Tennessean, graduated from the University of Tennessee in 1958 and spent the years 1958 through 1968 in the United States Army. He served in the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve.

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