Sharpe’s Only Promise: “We’ll Work Hard”

BLACKSBURG—Even in today’s high-beamed shoes, it stretches the imagination to conjure up the image of Jimmy Sharpe as a three-year star for Alabama’s football team, including the 1961 national champs.

But in 1958, Sharpe still maintains his playing weight of 187. Virginia Tech’s new football coach does not expect to recruit any 5-10, 187-pounders for his gridiron squad, but he has his reasons.

Clad in a blue-gray suit, the blond, blue-eyed Alabama native (Montgomery) quietly accepted the job of rebuilding the Hokies.

There were no grand promises. Jimmy Sharpe did not say he expected to make Tech the next Tennessee or Alabama. He did not say he would conquer the state in recruiting.

He promised only to work hard, to build a sound foundation for the future and to do just word to the players we recruit. We want them in

involved in academics. I want them to graduate. I view that as part of my job.” In fact, Jimmy Sharpe sounded a whole lot like a football coach and not at all like a salesman.

The trouble is, you’re never too many end up like Willie Loman. Or Charlie Cheffy.

Nothing But Success

All Sharpe has known is Alabama football. For 15 of his 34 years he has been a player or a coach with Bear Bryant. He has, therefore, known nothing but success.

But do not expect the man to tear out Tech’s orange and white. Sharpe replaces it with Alabama crimson.

“I’ve been influenced by my exposure at Alabama, but I don’t intend to refer to Alabama home.

Sharpe knows what the problems are. He saw Tech in person last year when ‘Bama killed the Hokies 77-6. He knows the team won just two games, one of them over 6-11 Florida State.

“We’ll have to crawl before we can walk,” he said. That sounds like a cliché, but surely it applies to Tech now.

To build his “sound foundation,” Sharpe says he plans to “shake out all of the termites. If you have any termites, you don’t have a foundation.”

Sharpe said that he planned to demand a lot of his players. “My No. 1 prerequisite is demanding effort. If a player will give me total effort, I’ll work with him. More important, he’ll never be embarrassed on the field.”

Sharpe said the effort also meant off the field.

“I’m concerned with academics. I want my players getting their families out of bed and into class. We’ll have a strict program on cuts.”

Out of Bed, Into Class

He told of a current ‘Bama player, a starter with a straight ‘A’ average. “His roommate would see him lying in bed and he developed the habit. Only his roommate was smart. He couldn’t cut class and make his grades. Finally we had to discipline them both. There will be no exceptions for individuals. We’re all in this together.”

Sharpe said he wanted total classroom effort.

“You’ve got to try to help yourself. If a player will do that and he needs help, we’ll see that he gets it.”

Sharpe and the seniors of the staff which he hopes to assemble shortly will become directly in

volved in recruiting. Tech has signed just seven promises so far this fall and will likely receive more grants.

“Everybody knows who the stars are,” he said. “We’re going to get the best. But there are also players who have talent and don’t use it. The players you have to have are those who aren’t great but who can take a lot of guys like that and win with them.

Jimmy Sharpe sounds like a man who could grow on you. He expects to be judged only on results. He made no promises and expects to make none. “I’ll work,” he said. “I’ll work and I’ll make my mistakes with people who will work. Beyond that, I won’t say.”

Tech can’t ask for any more than that.