Sharpe Approach at Tech: From Bottom

Emphasis on "Us"

Tech Footballers Feeling 'Change'

BLACKSBURG — There were times during this past fall when it would have been hard to catch the Virginia Tech football players passing kind words about their football coach—but don't use the same Kind words among themselves.

Early this past week there was a change. Now, there are any number of kind words and most of them seemed to be carrying the same meaning—only the pronunciation is different.

What you're hearing now are such words as: CARES, ENTHUSIASTIC, NEW CHANCE, COMMUNICATES, IMPRESSED, etc.

All are from inside football players. All are in reference to Tommy Shirley, who Tuesday officially succeeded Charlie Coffey to become the 39th man to coach Hokie footballers since they first started chasing the crazily bouncing ball here in 1892.

THE KEY

Jimmy Sharpe
Not a 'Title' Man

By Harold Pearson
Times-Dispatch Sports Writer

BLACKSBURG — Jimmy Sharpe has been in "Tech Territory" less than a week now. A bushel of days.

He was named Virginia Tech football coach Tuesday. By Monday, he hopes to "have the stuff (assistants, etc.) complete as fast as possible to be able to start planning for the spring."

"Three days after he officially became successor to Charlie Coffey, he hired four assistants — "I'm not at liberty to say who, because they have commitments, some this weekend."

He was not at liberty to say who, but after only a few minutes conversation, you can build a picture of what type:

Young — Sharpe’s 34; personable — Sharpe has time for you; decent man — you can’t have anything if you don’t work.

"This must be a good situation," said the former Alabama aide, "because people from California, New York, Florida, all over have been calling, inquiring — good people."

SHARPE KNOWS what a good situation it is — contrary to what most observers were trying to imply — "I was shocked (when I was voted) to find such facilities. The good attitude on the part of the people."

It took such to lure him away from Bear Bryant’s side — as player and assistant he was there 15 years — "I was in an excellent situation, wasn’t shopping."

Oh, he has been to the market, has had offers, but the "first five or six years with Bryant, I didn’t feel I was ready." The last three or four years — "How do you say it? You know, a thing has to turn you on. I was not for accepting a job just to have ‘Head Coach’ after my name."

"Up here. Well, it’s like that blind date you go on and something clicks. Bang! It’s love at first sight."

What made the clicking for Sharpe were such things as a 35,000-seat Lane Stadium, a spacious field house, a 10,000-seat Coliseum, ad infinitum: people ready and waiting to promote a program.

"I SAW A TREMENDOUS opportunity to go out and coach without having to worry about facilities, support, all those little things that take so much time away from coaching," said Sharpe.

"I saw an opportunity to coach and recruit without worry."

One of the things he isn’t going to worry about is Tech’s intermediate past — "I’m only concerned with the future."

"OUR APPROACH is that we’re going to try — no, we’re not going to try — no, we’re not going to try, we’re GOING TO BUILD a foundation for a program that can stand up against all adversity."

"We’d like to say we’re going to turn it around (immediately), but I don’t want to put our kids in a position of having all the eggs in one basket."

So, there is no time schedule. "But if I didn’t think it could be done, I wouldn’t be here," said the former offensive and defensive guard. "You’ve got to have the foundation and the foundation starts from the bottom, you can’t start at the top."

And, presently, Virginia Tech, the bottom of the football foundation means the coaching staff — there are some skilled players. Sharpe wants them motivated. That’s the type coach he is, wants.

"I’m not a titlesman," beamed. "We won’t have a coordinator of this and that, we will have eight coaches who can coach, teach, communicate. Communicate is coaching. If you can coach offense, you can coach defense, but you must be able to motivate the players."

IF YOU CAN’T do it, you need not apply.

"You’ve got to admire people who are ready in pitch in and go to war with you," he said.

But all of them aren’t the people you want — as player or coach. There are great players and players who are GREAT.

There are coaches and COACHES."

"You have to have compatible people, people who feel as you do, look at things as you do. "Sharpe feels. "A head coach is only as good as the people around him."

If the players are not sound, the coaches not sound — "He’s not going to have any traditions."

"You can’t meet and talk with this Hokie head man without feeling he knows something about tradition — AND coaching."

Tommy Shirley
Steve Philbrick
Bruce McDaniel

Shirley, who will be a senior linebacker this fall, Philbrick, junior guard, and junior punter (and placekicker) Bruce McDaniel already feel a "change in attitude" on the part of their coach.

"YOU CAN TELL he’s not political like coach Coffey," said McDaniel. "It seems like he cares more for the players."

"There was the feeling that this next season it was not going to be "IT" as the predominant word from on high but "WE."

"He talked like he was going to treat us as grownups," was Shirley’s impression. "That we were all going to be working for the same thing."

"I think there’ll be less open competition between the two teams (offense-defense). It would have taken something as drastic as what happened to bring that about."

"We’ll probably feel more like a team," said McDaniel. "We’ll probably feel more like a team."

"IT’S A NEW change," he said, "a chance for a whole new picture. He has said he wants to build a foundation... get rid of all the trappings... all who don’t want to build."

"I feel that Tech has needed this kind of coach all along along."

"Coach Coffey," said McDaniel, who classed himself as probably the only one who liked the immediate past coach, "wanted everybody in his image."

The 34-year-old Sharpe "has a way..." said Philbrick. "You feel like getting closer... and believe you can."

"It seems like the Hokies are already moving toward the native Alabamians."

"The players, I’m sure," said McDaniel, "want a winner.""

And all of them know what Alabama — and Sharpe — port the last 15 years doing.

They can read — and react.