Tech coach no beggar for help

By BOB TEITLEBAUM
Sports Writer

BLACKSBURG—The first battle for new Virginia Tech Coach Jimmy Sharpe is over.

For the most part, the initial recruiting campaign is finished. The results are that 24 boys signed with Tech, but perhaps the big one—Larry Bethia—got away.

Tech made a valiant pitch for Bethia, one of the south's top prospects. In the end, the Hokies lost the Newport News star to Michigan State.

It was not a good experience for Sharpe, but out of it has come a new philosophy of football for the Hokies. Sharpe found that he had lost Bethia, there was no public bitterness or last-minute negotiations to try to win him back.

"We will only try to sell recruits," said Sharpe. "We won't beg them. It was certainly a disappointment to lose Bethia, but you can't sacrifice the program for any individual."

Because a player makes All-American, it is no sure guarantee that he'll be a standout in college. Bethia was simply a prospect—a good one—but no more.

"Even if he had never played for us," said Sharpe in using an example of what happens to some All-Americans, "the initial publicity in signing Bethia would have helped the program."

"You'll never know how good he'd be. Potentially, he's outstanding. He received a lot of publicity."

"We're looking for folks to join hands and work with us. It's like building a house, laying those bricks and drive those nails right into the foundation."

Sharpe, of course, is out of the Bear Bryant school at Alabama. He played under the Bear. Now listen to Bryant on the same subject:

"I don't like the idea of chasing and pummeling a boy and I don't do it," said Bryant. "But I used to when I was younger. I'm not going to baby and beg and pet and give away that kind of treatment because he's sure not going to be treated that way when he gets to Alabama."

Since Sharpe came to Tech in January, everyone has been expecting a return to the days of Jerry Claiborne. It was Claiborne, another Bryant disciple, who gave the Hokies some of their finest moments on the gridiron. So it is natural to expect that type of coach after Athletic Director Frank Moseley returned to the Bear for help in selecting a coach.

But there is a difference between Claiborne and Sharpe. It will not be a return to the days of the crewcut and pure defense that Claiborne preached when he was at Tech.

"He was the old Bear Bryant man and now there is a big difference," said Sharpe in indicating that Bryant is turning out new types of assistants.

"Times have changed. Bryant is one of those coaches that could bend, flex and adjust while still having a disciplined program. He has adopted to a new breed of youngsters—the hair and the whole bit."

"A lot of folks in the old school had a difficult time. I'm a product of the new Bear Bryant."

Sharpe will help build a house, help construct a building for Sharpe. Yesterday he relaxed at a nearly deserted campus as Tech students piled into buses and cars to leave for Florida or home during the spring holidays.

Tech's Jimmy Sharpe

A month from now Sharpe will greet his team at spring practice. He'll set on the field and begin assembling next year's squad. He makes no promises.

"Our progress report can be seen in Lane Stadium," he said, jerking his thumb toward the field. "There won't be a lot of lip service—not in the newspapers or on radio."

"We've looked good in our off season program it's short. But we don't play in shorts next year."

That's Sharpe at his best. He might have lost one battle, but the feeling is that he's winning the war. At least for now and in clearing up the Tech disaster of 1973 this is the crucial point.