Injuries Throw Tech's Spring Practices Off Schedule

By BILL BRILL
Times Sports Editor
BLACKSBURG — Jimmy Sharpe's original timetable for Virginia Tech's spring football practice called for a game-type scrimmage Saturday at the end of the second week of drills.

But Tech's new coach said Friday that a plethora of injuries, some of them of the freak nature, have left the Hokies without sufficient depth to stage a regulation game.

Instead, Tech will have a controlled scrimmage Saturday and aim for the game scrimmage next week, perhaps by Wednesday, certainly on Saturday.

In spite of the hurting — "We have two broken feet, three broken hands, one player with broken ribs and a lot of sprained ankles and banged up shoulders" — Sharpe pronounced himself pleased thus far.

"We're starting to show progress," said Sharpe. "Thursday was definitely the best practice we've had, and it was the best hitting I've seen so far." Thursday was Tech's eighth day of the 30 permitted by the NCAA. There was no practice Friday.

Because of the lack of a game scrimmage, Sharpe says the quarterback situation is still undecided.

"We've worked the quarterbacks real hard on fundamentals. We've worked everybody hard," Sharpe said. "This is a new offense (wishbone) and it has taken them a while to get used to. But you can't tell if he's your man until you see him in action. We're trying to be fair to all of the kids, and we won't make any decisions now. We're going to let the No. 1 quarterback earn his job."

Back from last year is Bruce Arias, who started last fall as No. 1 and wound up sitting in the stands after falling into ex-coach Charlie Coffey's disfavor.

Arias is competing with Mitchell Barnes, a freshman from South Hampton who ran the veer in high school, freshman Rusty Bailey and sophomore Greg Mullinax, whose duties last year consisted of carrying the plays on and off the field.

Sharpe had indicated that he might make quite a few personnel shifts during the spring. Actually, the staff hasn't made that many. One of the more notable, however, is the switch of defensive back Morris Blueford to running back.

"Blueford has that 9.7 speed and he's looked good," said Sharpe.

The running backs have all had to learn to block, and this, Sharpe says, has been his most pleasant surprise.

"Our backs all have blocked well on the corners. It was something new for them, and we were concerned about it, but none of our backs are afraid to hit."

Getting hit is the name of the game at Tech. "You can't improve unless you get competition, and that means getting hit," Sharpe said. "In the wishbone, you get hit on every play. It's not like some other formations, where you don't get hit that often. That's one reason why we've had so many injuries, because we've been hitting every day."

Offensively, Tech has spent 35 per cent of its time on the passing game, Sharpe says, working on the wishbone. "We've wasted a lot of time trying to give everybody a fair chance," Sharpe says. "We've run the first defense against the first defense, then the second and on down. We want every player to feel that he's gotten a fair shake."