By DENNIS LATTA
Times Sports Writer
BLACKSBURG — Right now, they humorously call him Coach Lambert. He walks the sidelines like a coach and even wears a coaches’ hat during practice.

But in the fall, he’ll be known as Ken Lambert, defensive end for Virginia Tech. Lambert isn’t working out in Tech’s spring football practices because of a shoulder separation he suffered. He was operated on about two months ago.

"Ken is what you could call the ideal player," Tech Coach Jim Sharpe said. "He’s got the talent and a great attitude to go with it. He works with the younger players and now when he can’t have any contact, he still comes to practice everyday and works. I’d like to have a team full like him."

Lambert transferred to Tech from Tennessee last year. He was a starter with the Vols, but he just didn’t like it in Knoxville. He didn’t like the way he was being treated.

"It seemed as if they didn’t need me, that was their attitude," Lambert explained. "They sort of gave me the cold shoulder and didn’t really let me develop like I wanted to."

Now the 6-3, 300-pound Floridian has just one year of eligibility left and he’ll use it up this fall at Tech.

"I’m certain that my shoulder won’t bother me. Even now, it feels like nothing happened. I hurt it in a fluke accident. I fell flat on my ride. Ironically, it wasn’t done in football. I’ve never been injured playing football. You could call this a dishonorable injury because it wasn’t done in combat."

After a dismal season last year with a 2-9 record, big things aren’t expected out of Tech football this year, but Lambert thinks they’ll surprise people.

"I’m really looking forward to playing. I’m expecting something to come out of this season. There are some good people on this team."

"Last year, it was a mental thing more than a physical thing," Lambert claimed. "The players are here and they don’t have that mental problem any more. If people could see the attitude of the players now, they would understand."

The Jacksonville native is trying to spread that attitude in his role of nonplayer now.

"I try to do everything I can to encourage the players," Lambert explained. "I have that experience against some of the best teams and I try to tell the players that they’re just like us."

Even with all his experience, Ken feels he’ll have to prove himself to be a starter with the Gobblers.

"Nobody feels like they have a starting spot here. It’s tough to keep your job when you get a new coach. All the players are sincerely trying to show up this spring. Everyone is working hard and it is showing."

"From the improvements the defense is making, it’ll be difficult for any one player to be a star this year. If a player stands out, it’ll be a matter of opportunities," Lambert said.

And if he gets enough opportunities, Ken might be able to make a career out of football. "I was on the Southeastern Conference all-sophomore team and named to the sophomore all-America team by Football News."

"I expect to graduate in December. I was getting a lot of letters from teams when I was at Tennessee and I’ve gotten a couple since I’ve been here. After I start playing again, I’ll have a better idea of how my chances are."

"If I don’t play football, I’ll probably go to graduate school. I think my grades are good enough," Lambert said.