THE TOP DEFENSIVE football player at Virginia Tech this fall may be a rugged defensive end who sat out the 1973 season ineligible after transferring from the University of Tennessee. Kenny Lambert, a cat - quick flankman who was Sophomore All - America at Tennessee in 1972, left the Vol camp prior to the '73 season because of being alternated at defensive end. The aggressive Lambert wanted to play full time. Lambert undoubtedly will play full time at Tech this fall.

"No one has to tell me about Lambert," says new Tech head coach Jimmy Sharpe, who has left Bear Bryant's Alabama staff to head the Hokies this fall.

"We played against him when I was at Alabama and he's a football player. He has been a leader on our squad and is an inspiration to the rest of the squad. Tennessee admits that Lambert is a quality defense player.

"He's like a cat," says Tennessee assistant Jerry Elliott. "He's one of those defensive players you can't block off his feet. Like a cat, you can knock him up in the air and he will always come down on his feet ready to strike.

BUDDY BENNETT, one of Sharpe's top defensive aides, is trying to assemble another band of "Bennett's Bandits" at Tech. Bennett, who has coached such great defensive backs as Mike Casey and Al Guy at ETSU, Bobby Majors and Tim Priest at Tennessee and Randy Rhine at Georgia Tech not to mention some pretty fair ones at Arkansas, mentions at least three names when you talk about the Hokie secondary for 1974.

"Tommy Cooper is going to be a good one," he says. "And we think Ron (Flash) Davis and Billy Harddee will get the job done."

Of all the great defensive backs Bennett has coached, who was the best one?

"Mike Casey," says Bennett without hesitation. "He was a lot left in the ball carrier. He made a play for us one time against Murray that was one of the greatest I've ever seen. They sent a big tight end down to block him on a pass play and he knocked down the big end and made the interception. It was quite a play and saved a tough game for us.

Bennett, incidentally, is building a new home in Blacksburg on six acres of land he purchased from veteran Tech official H.M. McEver. We visited with Buddy during the recent Tech outing for news media at Blacksburg and he had those four little 'uns working like Trojans. "You got to start them out young learning to work," he grinned as the little Bennetts picked up scraps of lumber left from the construction.

JERRICK WEAVER, Tech assistant from Tennessee who was coaching at Chattanooga Red Bank when Tennessee High's famed "Maroon Machine" ripped them apart in the TSSAA playoffs, was asking where the rest of the Viking stars were now off that great schoolboy team. George Heath, of course, is at Tech.

"I didn't know much about the Veer prior to that game with the Tennessee High," admitted Weaver, "and I learned enough about it that night to last me a lifetime. That was one of the greatest high school teams I've ever seen and it was no surprise to me they were named national champions. They deserved every honor they got."

Weatherford thinks Vanderbilt may be about to put some pressure on Tennessee in Big Orange Country. Steve Sloan and the new Vandy staff, which includes John Cropp, are reportedly making some progress and recruited some top notch prospects for 1974.