Coach Wants Lively Game

By Bill Mason
Sports Editor

“Get in and get it over with.” That’s the way baseball can draw crowds and make money, according to former major leaguer Bob Humphreys, Virginia Tech’s new head baseball coach.

Humphreys, whose aim is to make baseball pay for itself at Tech, already has met with team members and says 40 and 50 candidates have indicated they will try out for the team.

Vitality and hustle are the key ingredients to successful baseball, the coach says and he favors the elimination of all unnecessary delays that upset the rhythm of the game. He feels that hitters and pitchers, if they are competitive, have no need to go through meaningless time-consuming rituals before each pitch. He refers to batters rubbing dirt on their hands, hitching up their trousers, stepping out of the batters box, and to the long wait between pitches used by some pitchers to throw the batter’s timing off.

Rose Philosophy

Humphreys could be called a subscriber to the Pete Rose philosophy of speed in all things (such as running to first when awarded a base on balls), boldness on the bases, and sheer competitiveness. He believes that a team that regularly runs from the field at the end of an inning will believe in itself more than one that struts slowly to the dugout. While wanting no “false hustle” he wants a team that is alert, eager and quick enough to take advantage of the breaks when the breaks appear.

While not wanting to go quite as far as Charley Finley, innovator of League “wearing white” as a color for a baseball uniform while in Kansas City, Humphreys says “things can be done to build up interest.” (He adds, incidentally that Finley has done a lot for baseball).

The coach, who completed his career in professional baseball as a pitcher in 1971, realizes that the quality of the baseball offered will determine the size of the crowd that shows up for the game. He says of the physical setup at Tech: “We have super facilities here. The playing field is better than some big league fields as far as the grass is concerned.”

Winter Workouts

Humphreys plans to have players working out all winter in Rector Field House on pitching and catching and hopes to acquire a batting cage for the hitters. He feels that college baseball is becoming more important as a feeder of talent to the major leagues since about one-third of the old minor league clubs have gone out of operation in recent years.

He notes that Arizona State University already has supplied a wealth of talent to organized baseball, including Reggie Jackson of the Oakland Athletics.

Under the heading of making baseball more lively he said “Baseball needs livening up and we want to do that.”

The coach said this of prospects:

“If you can show me a kid who can play professional ball, if he’s good enough to be drafted (by the pros) I want to convince him that it’s better to go to college. If he has it as a player we can help him get into pro ball.”

Humphreys plans to use the contacts he built up as a player to schedule periodic clinics at which active major leaguers can instruct his team in all phases of the game. He feels early February would be a good time for a clinic.

The coach, who formerly roomed with Darrell Knowles, considers himself an Oakland Athletics fan. Among his friends on the team are Orlando Pena and Paul Lindblad, both of whom played for the Old Washington Senators when he did.

Concerning starting times for World Series games he said “If you want people to see it, you will have to have it at night.”

‘Top Flight Kids’

Humphreys says that generally there has not been enough emphasis at the high school level on baseball to the degree that “top flight kids” who could go on to be professionals can be found often or easily.

The coach is thinking about having workouts on the field, trimming the player roster in the fall, and getting in plenty of practice in the field house with an eye to being ready to play when the season begins next spring and the for the road trip.

In past the road swing has usually resulted in losses since the teams played may have started their seasons two weeks to a month before Tech’s and spring weather in Blacksburg usually makes outside practice in March or earlier all but out of the question.

Looking to the future, Humphreys thinks that annual clinic for high school coaches and players could help improve the quality of the game and Tech would be the logical place to hold it.

Designated Hitter

Humphreys, who spent most of his playing years in the American League, thinks the designated hitter rule is generally a good thing for