Short Season Hurting Tech

By DENNIS LATTA
Times Sports Writer

Next spring, coach Bob Humphreys would like to just pick up the whole Virginia Tech baseball team, move it south and take up residence in sunny Florida where it can play in warm weather.

Humphreys is in his first year as Tech's baseball coach. He's disappointed in the season his team is having, his pitching and defense and the help he isn't getting.

"We've lost about eight games due to the weather," Humphreys said. "It's no fun playing or even watching the games in the cold. I've come to realize that if you're going to play here, you're going to have to play in the cold."

The Gobblers are 12-13 on the season which, isn't bad considering a disastrous southern trip they had to open the season. It's tough to open against teams like Georgia Southern which have warm weather for practice and money for scholarships.

"Sure, it hurts to lose early like that," Humphreys explained. "It helps the team to play a better team like that. We were probably overmatched. They had better personnel. But Tech makes that trip every year.

"I would like to play Georgia Southern a little later in the year. I'd like to play the whole schedule a little later. Our last home game was Saturday. The ACC is having its baseball tournament this week because they finish school in a week or two.

"We still have a whole month to go, but we have to play early like everyone else," the coach pointed out. "May has the best weather for baseball, but we're finished before it gets here."

Humphreys has big plans for the Tech baseball program. To start with, he'd like to play a few home games in Roanoke, Salem or Bristol. He'd also like the to play the Salem Pirates an exhibition game every year to help drum up interest.

"I had gotten approval from the school to play the Pirates, but we had games at the only time they could play us. I never approached them because I knew we would have to play them before the season opened and we were busy then. That would give our kids a chance to test the competition in pro ball.

"I'd like to play a good team like Georgia Southern or South Carolina or maybe one of the state schools in Roanoke or Salem. Baseball doesn't have a home field advantage like some sports.

"Then we could draw some people and make some money. It also helps you if kids get to see you play. It helps your recruiting," Humphreys said.

"I'd like to play somebody who will draw some gate. Football and basketball don't let people in free, but we do here."

Recruiting might be the important asset to a home game at a neutral site. Humphreys needs all the help he can get.

"I haven't had a chance to see a single player this year," the ex-major leaguer explained. "I'm a one-man staff. I have no assistants. We play about four days a week and practice on the days we don't play. I can't just leave the team to practice by itself.

"The only thing I've done in recruiting is send out and get back a stack of correspondence I've got to get out and make my own contacts. That's one area I've really got to work on."

Humphreys would like to get out and find a few pitchers and some players to beef up his defense. The only starter he loses is second baseman Vince Carbaugh, but he needs some defense.

"I thought that record-wise we would have a better year. We've scored enough runs, but our pitching and defense have let us down. We've had many games we've been up in and then blown. We have gotten maybe eight complete games out of our pitchers this year."

The bright spot for Humphreys is the freshmen who have come through for him this year. Leftfielder Tommy Aree (.390), first baseman Lewis Dillon (.330) and centerfielder Sandy Hill (.270) are three of his leading hitters and all are freshmen.

"Scholarships is one area we'll have to improve in if we want to compete. The NCAA allows 19 scholarships, but we have no one on full scholarship. All the good players will of course go where they can get the most and that's a full scholarship. We can't compete for them. Most of the ACC schools give scholarships, but we don't."

Maybe Humphreys will find a few pitchers who don't need a scholarship and who love cold weather.