Tech coach Red Laird (1) has his trusty scorecard, (2) catches a quick snooze, (3) encourages his team.

Tech’s Laird In ‘Honey Do’ Club

By BOB TEITLEBAUM
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Virginia Tech baseball coach G. F. (Red) Laird will step aside from his occupation this weekend and join the “honey do” club.

You ask what the “honey do” club is? If so, you fell hook, line and sinker for Laird’s fast pitch.

“That’s my wife’s club,” he said with an impish smile on his leathery face. “Honey do this and honey do that.”

But one thing Laird is sure to do when he retires is plan for a trip to major league spring training next year.

Laird, 70, has been coaching since 1926. He became Tech’s baseball coach in 1940. And in his more than quarter century as the Gobblers’ head man he has yet to see a spring practice. Laird’s been busy getting his team prepared for its schedule which begins just when spring training is at its peak.

Red will retire following tomorrow’s game with Virginia, a fitting opponent to be the last team to challenge a Laird-coached squad.

“There’s no nostalgia over quitting,” he said. “It’s probably time for some young man to come in who has some zip and energy.”

Laird has his strange ways, but he is the soul of honesty. Sometimes he appears to be dozing on the bench, but he’s not.

Every time a new hitter comes into the lineup that the Tech coach forgot to record on his ever-present lineup card, he asks the umpire to put the man out. Laird figures the new player should be called out “for not reporting.”

Years ago a coach from another team didn’t like the home umpires. He told Laird theumps ought to like Tech since it seemed they were working on a lifetime contract.

Laird replied by telling the coach he could take his team and get off the Tech campus and never come back. It just wasn’t proper to question Laird’s honesty.

A native of Decatur, Ga., Laird recalls the days when it was fashionable in college to coach and play three sports.

“When I came here from Davidson I coached the backfield in football, freshman basketball and then baseball. Now football is a year around job. But when I got finished with one sport I would just go to another one,” he explained.

Laird says baseball hasn’t really changed over the years. “It has changed less than any other sport,” he offered.

“They were always reluctant to change any rule. Right now it seems to be in some kind of transition with the designated hitter and the aluminum bat being used by the Big 10.

“They tried the speed-up rules, but those didn’t catch on. I can’t say whether all this is bad for baseball. But I think they will add a little color to the game.”

Laird says the colleges will have to make changes and begin playing in the fall. It is almost impossible to play an Atlantic Coast Conference team now after May 1.

“The ACC is through just when the weather is getting nice in this part of the country,” Laird asserted.

Laird doesn’t ever see Tech as being a baseball power. “It’s tough to compete with teams from Florida, Arizona and Southern California. They play 70 games from February right on through. We play just 30. We have no license to beat those teams. I don’t care how good we are. Oh, we might do it once every 30 times,” he asserted.

Laird recalls the Gobblers’ 1954 trip to the NCAA. It wouldn’t have been possible had Tech not beaten Clemson and Billy O’Dell in a playoff. And O’Dell went on to become a star pitcher with the San Francisco Giants.

Laird has had his own share of big leaguers. Leo Burke was an outfielder with the Chicago Cubs after starring on the 1954 team. Catcher Johnny Oates is currently a member of the Atlanta Braves after being traded by the Baltimore Orioles this past winter.

However, the Tech coach isn’t worrying about retirement. “I’ll find something to do,” he said. “Like golfing and fishing.”