BLACKSBURG—Some 30 months ago, two football coaches at Virginia Tech stepped up to this small college town armed with a five-year contract, a fierce determination, and almost enough good football players to play against the Washington Road Browns.

It soon became obvious, especially to Coffey, that his first year would be one of promotion. He had a few skilled players—a quarterback who would rewrite all of the Virginia Tech football records—a couple of receivers and one adequate run- ningback.

The idea was not unique, especially for a first-year coach. It was simple—put your best people as offensive starters and tell them to try to sell tick- ets, and recruit, recruit, recruit.

The second year was much the same. There were a few more skills, the freshmen role helped, the quarterback was steady, and the kickoff returner 72? sounded like a good idea. Do it with mirrors. Sell more tickets and you’ll see even more.

The record was better. The average attendance was up 6,000. Season ticket sales increased by 30 per cent. And some of the recruits obviously could play.

Exclamation’72, you might say, backfired with losses to Virginia and William & Mary, but actually it simplified what it was designed to do—sell—tickets.

Saturday, Coffey will coach his third spring game at Tech. If you know him, you can detect the essence of man and not just what he tells you, but you can tell he feels the day of doing it with mir- rors is over. There will be some changes prom- inent enough to sell a lot of copy but it con- tinues to advertise. Frankly, however, Coffey feels his boys can play.

“73? This has been the best spring practice I’ve ever had anywhere,” he says, smiling. “We have some players born here. Maybe not enough to be a good football team but we’re getting much closer. This team is not far away from being very good. It’ll take some luck and we can’t make many mis- takes, but in most cases it is going to take a good football team to beat us. If we lose one we’ll try it be because we best ourselves.”

After two seasons, Coffey knows he can run the football. He has at least one runningback, Phil Hag- gard, who was switched from the quarterback, who may be a super. They whisper him about Blacksburg in return times. He has gained over 100 yards in every spring scrimmage and Tech has scrimmaged every day.

“He hasn’t been scrimmaging against a bunch of biggies,” Coffey says. “But he has been against the best, the best, the first team offense against the first team defense. It has cost us in injuries as we’ve had many injuries. But we’ve given these young kids some experience.”

Tch had 19 missing from spring drills because of injuries at one time. Twelve of them will not participate in the spring game.

“Of course,” says Coffey, “a lot of our success will depend on the competition. Our road schedule is very difficult. We have people like SMU, Houston, Kentucky and Memphis State in Blacksburg, but I think we are up to the challenge. Our kids don’t believe they can lose here.”

Coffey admits he isn’t ready to challenge the world yet, “but some of our players are as good as you’ll find. There is not a better linebacker in the nation than Tommmy Shirley, Tennessee, even with his tradition of producing top players. He has in his defense. He has never had a better one. Tennessee has never had a receiv- er as good as Ricky Scalise. I can’t remember anybody ever coming up the Supplement so fast that he has to go. He is good and can catch the football.”

Coffey’s team may suffer from inexperience be- cause they will be freshmen, sopho- 

Some of them,” he says, “have never played a down of varsity football. But I’m not worried about them.”

Thirty months ago, Charlie Coffey would not have made such a statement.