Just Wait, Bledsoe Says

Epidemic Over For Gobblers

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BLACKSBURG — Brent Bledsoe didn’t look forward to Saturdays last fall. He spent 11 long afternoons on a football field watching runners easily dance through Virginia Tech’s defense. He was a defensive tackle for the Gobblers.

Tech had a bad defense last year in no uncertain terms. It ended up in last place in the nation. The Hokies were weak against the run. The Hokies were weak against the pass. The Hokies were weak. The best defensive move Tech had was a penalty.

But it’s a new year at Tech. There’s been a complete change in the coaching staff. The new coaches are confident that the defense will be better. From his view at the defensive right tackle spot, Bledsoe thinks things will be better. Just how much better, no one knows.

“With confidence and poise this year,” the Kingsport, Tenn., native explained, “Instead of getting down when people score on us, we’re going to get tougher. It is impossible to go all year and not get scored on, so we’re not going to let it bother us when it happens.”

Last year, it didn’t bother the Gobblers when they gave up points. Since they gave up an average of seven touchdowns a game, it must not have bothered them.

“Things have really changed this year,” Bledsoe pointed out. “We have confidence in ourselves. We aren’t worried about our defense or even our offense which is using the wishbone.

“We don’t expect people to believe that we’ve changed. People will have to see for themselves when they come here for the game,” Bledsoe said in reference to Saturday when the Gobblers open their season at home against Kentucky.

“Kentucky thinks it can run right at us and score like it did last year,” Bledsoe continued. “It won’t be able to do it. We’re much better than last year. I don’t think anyone will run over us like they did last year.”

All five defensive linemen have experience this year. End Ken Lambert will be a big boost. He was all-SEC at Tennessee his sopho-

more year before transferring to Tech. He played in two years.

“Lambert has both ability and leadership. He should be a real help. People will want to try him out. They’ll come at him,” said Bledsoe who will be playing beside Lambert.

Start Patterson will be at right end and Larry Bearekman at right tackle with Charlie Martin in the middle for Tech.

“We don’t have the giants that dominate with size but we should have a good defense,” said a worried defensive line coach Charlie Pell. Pell inherited basically the same team that gave up whenever it was scored on last year. He has worked on attitude more than technique this year.

“We have very carefully pointed out that this team started at point zero when we got here. We haven’t referred to last year at all and we’re not going to,” Pell said.

“Lack of pride is as contagious as pride and failure is as contagious as winning.” Tech must have had an epidemic in failure last year. The attitude was bad and the team turned out to be bad.

“We’re stressing self pride, unit pride and pride in the team. We’ve got to develop a one-

ness and we’ve come a long way since March when we got here.”

The new Tech staff has never seen its players in action. Game action is a completely different world from the practice field. All Pell can do is hope that his defensive lineemen perform as well as they practice.

“What I like the most is that we’ve got a good quarterback (Randy Eubanks) and his ability to handle pressure and make good decisions in the pocket. So if they get into the backfield, he’ll step up and get the ball out.”

The defensive line is also a key. A quick and agile line can disrupt a quarterback’s view of the field. Pell feels this line is more than capable of being a key factor in Tech’s defense.

“Let me see how well we do when Kentucky has first and goal at the nine once or twice and then I’ll tell you how good a defense we have. We’ve got tremendous potential. We’ve got good depth and a lot of substitutes.

“One thing about Kentucky is that they have the ability to make you feel like you’re in a different game every week. They run a lot of different formations and offensive schemes.”

But learning poise is something that is hard to do in practice. You’ve got to be in that situation like third and short yardage before you really know how a player will react. We aren’t tested yet,” Pell explained.

But all the practicing is over. Everyone is healthy physically and mentally, and the fans are anxious to see the season start.

“When you’re hitting one another all the time, after a while you cease to improve. We’re anxious to go into battle. It would be wrong to say we couldn’t use more practice time, but we’re ready.”