Tech offense—‘Hell breaks loose’

By BOB McELLAND
Sports Editor

Ask new coach Jimmy Sharpe about the Virginia Tech offense and you will get this answer:

“Well, we come out of the huddle, line up on the ball, snap it to the quarterback and then all hell breaks loose.”

That might be a hyperbolic reply but Sharpe seriously thinks he has some skilled breaks in his wishbone attack. The problem is that there just aren’t enough of them.

Sharpe also admits he has butterflies and has been suffering many sleepless nights in recent weeks as he tries to prepare for his debut as a college head coach.

He puts it on the line tomorrow afternoon at 1:30 in Tech’s Lane Stadium when the offensive-minded Kentucky Wildcats come calling.

“I’ll be glad when it’s over,” Sharpe said.

“Thfirst game is something. I’ve been getting to the office about 6 each morning and getting home around 10. I talk with the wife and visit with the kids and then go to bed about 10:30 p.m. But at 2 or 2:30 I’m wide awake thinking about pads and plays and about what we can do to be better prepared. It’s been something.”

There also have been some concerns in the Kentucky camp where Coach Fran Curel is ready to open his second season as head coach. The 5-4 record of last year might not be impressive to some but for the Wildcats it was their best mark in many years.

Billy Mitchell, a defensive assistant at Kentucky, was a member of the Tech staff during the days of Jerry Calhoun. He and another Kentucky aide scouted Tech’s spring game and came away impressed.

“They have some skilled folks in Phil Rogers, George Heath and Ricky Scales,” Mitchell said. “But the thing that concerns us most is their enthusiasm and spirit with their new coaching staff. It’s something like last year and we don’t want things reversed.”

“Remember we had just come here at Kentucky and everyone was all fired up. We beat Tech (38-35) and that got us off right. We know Tech will be like a bunch of wildcats tomorrow and we hope we can contain them.”

The game will match two of the best running backs in college football. Scenic Collins of Kentucky is a certain first-round draft pick. He was the SEC’s Southeastern Conference last year and is a pre-season All-American this time.

“It’s simply great,” said Mitchell. “This has the size (6-3, 204) to run over folks. But his biggest assets are his speed and the quickness in his feet.”

Sharpe also likes to talk about Rogers. “Phil might not have that blinding speed or the weight (5-10, 176) but he has great quickness and the natural gift of running. His great vision also is a big plus when it comes to running.”

Heath will open at the opposite halfback with either Greg Toal or Paul Adams at fullback. The swingman at fullback is Morris Blueford, who was a defensive back last season.

“I consider Blueford a starter,” Sharpe said. “He probably is our most improved player. And he has worked hard to accomplish this.”

Two backs likely will miss the action due to injuries—Bill King and Steve Galloway. Moses Foster and freshman Roscoe Colley also are in line for some running duties.

Bruce Ariens has shown improvement as a quarterback, according to Sharpe. He is quicker with a big loss of weight. He weighed 225 last March when he thought he was finished with football. He is now a trim 6-1, 202.

Ariens’ passing also has improved and he has one of the top wide receivers in college football in Ricky Scales, who holds most of the Tech receiving records.

Ariens and Scales will be the offensive captains for Tech tomorrow while tackle Brent Bledsoe and Ken Lambert will be the defensive leaders.

Sharpe has only three returning starters—defensive end Tommy Eilers, a defensive end turned linebacker; Mike Cassaday, the gunman; and tackle Ben Thomas. Another tackle, Pat Donley, started early last year but was sidelined with injuries and never regained his position.

If Sharpe has reason to be as proud of the play of the Techmen in game conditions as he has been with the way they have responded to great practice demands this fall, Kentucky could be in for a surprise.

“I have never been around a group of kids who have worked any harder,” said Sharpe, who has been around a lot of Alabama teams as a player and assistant coach. “I sincerely mean that. We told them when they came back that we were behind and needed the work. We have been on the practice field hours longer than I like. But we needed it.”

“The kids have cooperated and have given us all we could ask... and then some. I just hope I’m as proud of them tomorrow night. I think I will be.”