I have to get us in—Arians

BLACKSBURG—Bruce Arians sat on the bench, sweat still flowing freely down his dirty face. He held his helmet in one hand and with the other, rubbed his well-trimmed mustache.

"I've got to be a better leader," he finally said. "When we get in close it's up to me to get us across. I think our defense did a pretty good job. But our offense... well, we didn't give the defense enough help. We left them in the game too long."

Arians was just one of many disappointed but certainly not discouraged players in the Virginia Tech dressing room here Saturday after the Gobbler's had taken a sound and educational 38-7 defeat from a pretty solid Kentucky football team.

It was Arians who was at the offensive controls throughout for Tech. And he realized fumbles, miscues and the inability to take advantage of breaks proved the big downfall for the Techmen.

Arians was trying to shoulder the blame. But it certainly wasn't all his. The powerful Kentucky offensive line blew holes in the Tech defense. The Tech offensive folks had trouble blocking the young defense of Kentucky and the new Tech Coach Jimmy Sharpe readily admitted he and his staff made some strategic mistakes.

Sharpe said if he had to do over, he would have called different plays when the Gobbler's had their opportunities in the first half. He also said "we waited too long to start passing." And he now realizes he has to play his best players as much as possible.

In the future, the best of the Gobbler's will be seeing duty on the special teams. It was in the kicking game that the Techmen showed a definite lack of ability.

Probably the biggest single situation in which different plays might have brought different results came in the first period with the score tied 7-7.

Arians hit Ricky Scales on a sprint pass that carried 67 yards to the Kentucky two. "I thought I was over," Scales said. "I dove into the end zone but they said my knee touched on the two-yard line."

But four plays later—all smashes at the Kentucky middle— the ball still was inches short of the goal line. Sharpe wishes he had tried an option or a wide play at the Kentucky defense.

Coach Fran Curci, the capable young Kentucky coach, agreed that the game was won in the first half despite three Wildcat touchdowns in the third period.

"We should have been down two scores," Curci said. "Instead, we had a 10-7 lead. We told our kids at halftime that it was now our game. I guess they took us seriously because you saw what happened in the third period."

Defensively, one of the brighter looks of the future was at linebacker where freshman Rick Razzano of New Castle, Pa., led the tackleing. Razzano was credited with 14 tackles and three assists.

Free safety Tommy Cooper had nine tackles and four assists, which actually is too many if the Gobbler's had been doing the proper job up front.

Sharpe used some wrinkles in his defense in the first half that had Kentucky a bit confused. But Curci corrected the blocking assignments and then used a two tight-end offense to start the third period and this was the big reason for the three-touchdown outburst.

Good points noticed

It was a disappointing debut for Sharpe but he certainly didn't put the blame on his players. "If we had coached them better they wouldn't have fumbled and made the mistakes," he said.

Despite the one-sided decision—which could have been worse if Curci had chosen to play his regulars more in the second half—there were some encouraging points for Tech. Arians, while no speed merchant, is a tough runner and he showed some passing ability. He had a total offense of 223 yards—68 rushing and 155 passing on seven completions to Scales.

But Arians also fumbled twice in critical situations and threw two interceptions and those were the things that concerned him most. Scales is definitely one of the finest receivers in college football and his catches with the Kentucky boys using two men on him much of the time proved the fact.

No cutting players

Three former Roanoke Metro stars dressed for Tech. Sophomore Mike Brummer of Patrick Henry played well at offensive guard. Freshman Ricky Bush of William Byrd played some at linebacker. Freshman Ricky Harman, a free safety from PH, didn't see action but is working himself into a position where he should in the future.

Sharpe gained more respect from his players for the manner in which he shouldered the blame and praised their effort.

"He never cut us down and tried to shame us," said Razzano. "He kept telling us we'd get better. All the coaches were the same... that's a big reason why I came here."

Sharpe also offered a refreshing climate to his TV football show yesterday afternoon. He calls it the Virginia Tech Football Show with Jimmy Sharpe. Before it was the Charlie Coffey Show.

Sharpe also offered some candid remarks that added to the program. And the idea of offering some nonathletic views and scenes from the Tech campus should prove interesting.

Arians was far from discouraged. "We are going up hill—not down," he said.

Sharpe said, "don't throw anchor on us. We just put out from port."