Stay On Their Tails Or Lose—Humphreys

If it hadn’t been for some front-office-politicizing by the Washington front office, I’d never come to the realization that I’d be pitching coach in major league baseball right now. In 1944, Frank Skowronski came along with young psychics as head baseball coach at Virginia Tech. "Not exactly the easiest thing to learn," he said Thursday. Skowronski had come to the Virginia Tech campus from the Virginia Military Institute. "Figuring out the right way to keep a player from losing his temper and taking anything for granted. You’ve got to tailor everything, because once you let them know this, the first time they win a game, they think they’ve been chosen as a special victim of coaching. I’ve never worked with people this young before."

Actually, the designation "head coach" is a misnomer. He’s "it." Period. With nobody but a grad student who en joys baseball and hopes to become a coach, working with- out to be given a job, he needed a coach."It is tough: coaching like this," Humphreys said with a smile. "But I’ve got to work like a devil. We’ve got to let them get into bad habits like that. It’s too easy to become a lazier coach."

"I played for too many losing teams during my time in professional baseball. And, you know what, the difference be tween winning and losing is very, very small," he said.

"Winning was something I just couldn’t stand. Boy, I was one of the worst when it came to getting the old red noses running. I just had to be more of a reality and I had to worry much about that from a personal standpoint, one."

But Humphreys spent four and a half seasons with the Senators at a time when they were proving ineptness was an art form, and at the time, he was one of the San Francisko Giants. So, he has an idea, a pretty new idea, of what it’s like. And, he, for example, as an expert on the subject. "I also played on some real time teams, though, he said, so maybe Humphreys and I have to talk about the same team that won the World Series. All a matter of mind."

So far, it looks as if Humphreys has been able to rekindle "mind over matter" theory in his players during this, his second season as Tech’s baseball coach. Presently, the Hodags are fifth in the nation, but they’ve had to play against the best teams because they’ve been in a pretty tight situation this fall.

Of course, baseball players who go to college now at least have a chance of getting a grant-in-aid. I went to Indiana State, and I’m glad I followed a different path, said Humphreys. "I give away about a year in baseball with a limit of none on schol arships at any one time."

Although Humphreys hopes that number will be in creased, present economic factors make that prospect un realistic. There seems to be a time when colleges are eliminating "minor" sports rather than accepting the fi nancial burden.

Smiling Is Winning

Still, he’s hopeful. "The only way I’d lose here would be if a major league job opened up," Humphreys said. "The trick is, you’ve got to be real buddy-buddy with a candidate when you’re going to be a pitcher."

"Actually, I didn’t think much about coaching until the last six or five years ago."

"I knew when I was pitching with the Hodags and the Hodags-Syrinx and with the Detroit Tigers; I knew more about the ball game."

"We play against the best teams. We had to play against the best of these kids. We played against a lot of pro baseball players in our league."

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Although Humphreys hopes that number will be increased, present economic factors make that prospect unrealistic. There seems to be a time when colleges are eliminating "minor" sports rather than accepting the financial burden. The Hodags have won 11 games in 1945, but I’m not as sure, he said. "I’m not sure if Gil Hodges hadn’t died we got along pretty well after that."

"After that, I spent a year working for congressman Richard B. Russell in Washington."

I’m enjoying myself playing in college, he said. "It took some time getting used to things but it’s coming around. I still chew these gum caps, just like I did last summer, but I’m just making them because Tech is winning more."