Tech’s Great Experiment

At Virginia Tech, experiments are not confined strictly to the chemistry and biology labs. Right now, one is taking place in the Hokies’ football program under the direction of that famed scientist, Dr. Jimmy Sharpe.

After doing some very heavy thinking and writing some equations in X’s and O’s, Dr. Sharpe has produced what he believes can be a formula for success next fall. The subject of the experiment is one Philip Cary “Phil” Rogers, a first-rate running back whom Sharpe has decided has great possibilities as a triple-option quarterback.

So, with a wave of his chalk, Sharpe moved Rogers under center at the start of spring football practice. Preliminary test results indicate Rogers may be even a better quarterback than he was a runner.

For the 1973 and 1974 seasons, Rogers was Tech’s best back. He has game-breaking speed to the outside, and despite his lack of size (5-10, 175), the native of Galax is strong enough to gain tough yardage between the tackles. He has piled up 1,690 yards in his career in Blacksburg, and now he’s only 415 short of the Tech rushing record.

Sharpe was naturally reluctant to move such a yardage producer, but he wanted more quickness at the quarterback position. He also wanted Rogers in possession of the football a lot more. So, why not make Rogers a quarterback?

THE TWO DISCUSSED the move last fall, when Sharpe briefly toyed with, and rejected, the idea of turning Rogers into a quarterback at mid-season. When the change was finally made, Rogers said, “It wasn’t any shock.”

At first, however, Rogers didn’t react well to his new position.

“He started very slowly,” said Sharpe. “I think he thought it was a joke.”

A meeting with Sharpe quickly convinced Rogers that it was no joke. He was a quarterback, and he’d do well to learn all he could in the time available during spring practice.

Since then, Rogers has made great strides, according to Sharpe and others around the Tech football team. He isn’t yet a Jack Mildren, a Freddie Solomon or a Kerry Jackson, but he is getting there.

“A winning quarterback must possess a lot of things,” said Sharpe. “It’s not necessary for him to have 4.5 speed, like a Solomon, or be able to throw 50 touchdown passes a year. But he has to be able to make the big play, to turn the busted play into a 15-yard gainer.

“Rogers has super-great ability, the kind of ability that the Good Lord gives you and nobody can coach.”

PHYSICALLY, ROGERS has adopted well to quarterback.

“He has just simply amazed me,” said Sharpe, “the way he’s handled the pitch on the corner. He can give that end a juke step and he’s gone.”

Sharpe also said Rogers has “the strongest arm” of the five quarterbacks on Tech’s roster, and he’s apparently learning how to use that arm.