Tech's Sharpe Pleased With Spring Drills

By DENNIE LATTAN Times Sports Writer

BLACKSBURG -- Spring football at Virginia Tech is only five days old, but "We have already accomplished more than we did in all the practices last spring," said Gobbler Coach Jimmy Sharpe.

Last spring, Sharpe and his staff were new to Tech and the team. They spent more time meeting the players and learning what was going on at Tech than the players did learning football.

"We didn't even know what field to go on last year," explained Sharpe. "We've made an awful lot of progress this year. There's no way that we're the same team that we were last year."

Sharpe and his staff had to teach the Hokies' wishbone offense last year. This year, the players are familiar with the wishbone, making the coach's job much easier.

But Tech has a lot of holes to be filled and graduates to be replaced this year. The Gobblers are working much harder on their specialty teams and have had to experiment with different players at various positions.

"I guess the big story is working Phil Rogers at quarterback," pointed out Sharpe. "He has looked good.

"But I guess Mitchell Barnes has looked best," Sharpe continued. Barnes played in several games last year and ran the wishbone well before being injured. Eddie Snell and Greg Mullinax are backup quarterbacks who are returning from last year and Sharpe is giving them all a chance.

Junior college transfer John Mason is also working out at quarterback. "John is not used to our system but has shown good quickness and real poise," said Sharpe. "Having competition at quarterback like this is a healthy situation."

But Tech's defense isn't as fortunate. The Gobblers are looking for people to fill holes in the defensive line. "He had to replace the ones we lost. But we've gotten outstanding job out of our defensive ends. We've moved Keith McCarter to the other side and he's done well."

Tech lost only one player in its defensive secondary. "A real highlight has been the way the defensive secondary has taken charge. Billy Hartler and Doug Thacker has shown some real leadership. All we need is to develop some young fellows in the middle," said Sharpe.

But Sharpe is quick to point out. "We still have a long way to go. The new kids will give us a lift where we need it when they come in the fall."

Part of the last year's problems were in the specialty teams. "We're looking for a kicking team. We're working on the kicking game which was neglected last year. We're not on the plane for our game at Kentucky will be the kicking teams."

Sharpe is so pleased with the effort his team has shown that he plans weekly scrimmages. "We're going to have game-type scrimmages every Saturday at Lane Stadium starting at 1:30 and the public is invited at no cost. "I'm really pleased with the enthusiasm the players have shown and the intensity of the hitting."

"Spring practices are always tough. The players have no games to look forward to. But we have to prepare now to get us off to a running start next year."