Last year, when you’d said “Big O,” you’d said it all as far as Virginia Tech baseball was concerned.

That’s the challenge facing Virginia Tech’s 1977 baseball team — replacing Orvin Kiser, righthanded relief specialist, who had a phenomenal year: 13 saves, two wins and an 0.73 ERA.

If Tech’s pitching corps, headed by righthanders Jim Puglisi and Duke Dickerson, can offset the loss of Kiser, the Hokies should be able to maintain the winning pace — 59-19 (.756) — of the past two years. (Tech has had only one losing season in the past 15 years.)

“Pitching still is the name of the game, and I consider Puglisi and Dickerson good college pitchers, capable of winning 10 games apiece,” says Bob Humphreys, now in his fourth season as Tech’s head coach.

“There are some adjustments to be made, some new faces to be worked into the lineup,” Humphreys points out, “but overall our only major problem should be in finding a stopper or enough pitching depth to compensate for what Kiser gave us last year.”

Defensively, the Hokies should be as strong up the middle, with only one newcomer, Skip Doefflemeyer, a junior college transfer, replacing Scott Atkins at shortstop. He’ll team with secondbaseman Danny Grier. Catcher Wayne Shelton will have improved help behind the plate with Chip Smith and Larry Smoot. And hub of the outfield patrol will be senior centerfielder Sandy Hill, a smooth operator, as well as the Hokies’ leading hitter (.364).

In addition to Hill and Shelton (.321), Tech’s sticks include leftfielder Dennis Duff (.309), thirdbaseman Rick Wade, who is far more capable than last year’s .266 mark, freshman firstbaseman Harold Williams and either of a pair of new faces in rightfield, Tony Metts or Mike Preissers.

Overall, Tech should have at least as good, or slightly better, team speed, as good, or slightly improved defense and should be capable of batting as consistently (.292) and likely with as much power as last year. And the Hokies actually will have better depth with which to compensate for injuries, which at times last season accounted for some of Tech’s shortcomings.

But it still comes back to pitching. In addition to J. Puglisi and Dickerson, Humphreys has Tim Puglisi, a “good stuff” righthander, Bob Fisher, a potential “Big O” if his arm is physically sound, and a pair of newcomer lefties, Dean Powell and Mike Rhodes — plus a few more righthanders who were stopgaps last year, Dave Tinsley and Breck Berkery.

The Hokies won’t have many days to regroup once the season starts on March 3, but they should have an idea of how well they can follow last year’s 33-9 act once they arrive off the Spring trip.