Sharpe Hunts for QB

By BILL BRILL
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BLACKSBURG — The weather was far more suited to baseball, golf, track or girl watching, but 101 Virginia Tech hopefuls turned out for the start of spring football practice Monday.

That large delegation included 30 or so walkons, perhaps inspired because in his three previous years at Tech, Coach Jimmy Sharpe has seen 18 walkons earn full grants.

Unless one of the walkons is named Sonny Jurgensen or Snake Stabler, however, Sharpe’s biggest problem isn’t settled.

“Our top priority this spring,” he emphasized, “is quarterback.”

With the recruiting season now complete, many Hokie followers inquired of Sharpe, “Why didn’t you sign a quarterback?” (Actually Tech did sign one, late, from New Jersey).

“I told our coaches when they went recruiting not to sign a quarterback unless he could start,” said Sharpe. Obviously Tech did not find such a person.

That means the ’77 quarterbacking, in all likelihood, will be handled either by David Lamie, a rising junior from Bristol, or Don LaRue, a redshirt sophomore from Galax.

Lamie was listed with the first string on Monday, but that means little. He and LaRue each will be given an equal opportunity to earn the position.

Lamie, who played defensive halfback as a freshman, would have been redshirted last year while LaRue would have backed up incumbent Mitch Barnes. However, LaRue got hurt early and it was he who ended up sitting out the year.

Sharpe evaluated the two prospects this way: “LaRue is a big (6-2, 185) old boy. He’s definitely ahead in the mechanics of running the wishbone. He has deceptive speed and he throws well.

“Lamie (6-0, 180) is more of a scrambler. He has the ability to make you miss him. He has shown he can turn the busted play into the big play.”

Whether either of the quarterbacks has the ability to carry Tech against the toughest schedule a Sharpe-coached team has faced will not be determined until the fall. “But I’m not unhappy with our quarterback situation,” Sharpe said. “We just have to find out who will be No. 1.”

Between now and mid-May, when Tech concludes its spring workouts, Sharpe says “we expect the two of them to be competing every day for the job.”

Are they equal enough in ability so that no cut-out choice will be possible after the spring? “You know they are,” Sharpe said.

There are other problems, of course, not the least of which is a schedule that sees the Hokies opening up with Texas A&M and then facing Memphis State and Clemson in the next two games. Also on the slate are road games with Kentucky and West Virginia.

Other than settling the quarterback situation, Sharpe said, “Our main task is to place a winner at every position.”

Returning from last year’s 6-5 team, which lost its final three games, are 40 lettermen, including all the linebackers and all but one of the secondary. Big holes must be filled in both the offensive and defensive lines, where Sharpe concedes the needed depth must come from incoming freshmen.