Virginia Tech's football machine Monday rolled down the first mile of the long and winding road that leads to Sept. 17 and beyond. It's a rough, bumpy road. It's likely that the standard fare for the spring game won't be known until a day or two before it is played, due to injuries.

Progress in a practice season is approximated by the improved skills shown, bumps and bruises and the ability to bounce back. The exact degree of progress won't be known until the massive, muscular and very likely nationally-ranked Texas A&M Aggies came to town for the opening game.

The '77 home season also features the Clemson Tigers, Virginia Cavaliers, Florida State Seminoles, Wake Forest Demon Deacons and West Virginia.

Tech also must be at its best on the road where it faces Richmond and William and Mary, both of which upset the Hokies last year, always strong Memphis State, Kentucky, which Tech hasn't beaten in recent years, and West Virginia.

It is a schedule that deserves all the preparation Tech can bring to it, and that's what the spring training is all about.

The three-on-three drill with which Virginia Tech wound up its first day of practice in the spring drills Monday is an example of the basics of what football is about.

It's a crushing confrontation between a few players wanting to move the ball and another small group equally dedicated to the proposition of stopping them. It's a thumping, bruising, enterprising kind of a drill, as part of a film camera sequence, and says, "That was a good hit," you find that you didn't need to be told, it was a good hit.

Watching the pro-efing with interest and obviously wanting to do well in it, then watching, but watching was hardest was Rick Rizzano, the linebacker who has anchored the short secondary for the past few seasons. Rizzano wears a sort of mini-corset because of the back problem that has troubled him for about a year and which may keep him out of most or all heavy contact work during the spring.

Also out of the rough stuff at least temporarily is noseguard Bill Househeart, also injured before drills began.

Shouting encouragement to fellow defensive backfield men from the sidelines was assistant Tech who it is hoped will be in the thick of things in the fall, Henry Bradley, sporting a cast on one leg.

The digits broke a bone foot a year ago in spring practice. It failed to heal properly and troubled him again last fall. Since then a bone split operation was performed and he is expected to be ready for play next fall. Bradley's cast comes off just to days before the spring game.

Monday's opening & spring drills brought the kind of frenzied, warming action that you usually see only when the blinding lights are flaring.

Typical of the extra muscle that went into the contact work was the slashing effort defensively of Steve Halvorson who under the manager took his drill with the wild hitting that he recovers from a knee injury.

20 Penny Effort

A new kickar on the squad has earned the name that gets him some ribbing especially since it seems to describe his small size but he is expected to prove his value to the team next season, probably in a backup capacity for Paul "Chili" Bean" Engle.

The newcomer is Steve Tenpenny, a junior fullback whose place kick who stands 5-10 and weighs in at 160 lbs, and rival, Gipp Belcher for the designation of the smallest player on the squad.

Tenpenny is from Hillsville and played for Carroll County but Tech assistant Buddy Bennett says he isn't sure that Steve ever kicked a field goal for the Hill twelve. "The only film we had of him kicking field goals is in practice."

The inside word is that the walk-on is tough and will serve notice that Penny has played a lot of high school football.

Said onlooker Mitchell Bames, selecting senior quarterback: "He could really help our program.

One of the strongest showings on the first day of practice was the jarring tackle of Dave Dehart of Radford.

Lotta of the Biggest

Looming on the backyard is the Tiger dance as ominously as the recent meeting of North Carolina and Marquette--well almost--is the Shawnee Alumni basketball game set for Saturday night at Shawnee gym.

The winning team isn't number one but goes to the play the Shawnee facility. "We'll kill em," predicts Shawnee basketball coach Gerald Thompson on behalf of the faculty in what you would have to call a note of confidence.