Mark My Word

Baseball Brawls

Mark Kozak

Hokie baseball coach Bob Humphreys has made it clear to his players that he places fault on them for last Thursday's brawl with West Virginia.

The Tech skipper said he has told his players he has "nothing against protecting themselves, but not to start anything."

He said Tony Metts, the Hokies designated hitter who initiated the fight was "100% wrong and had no reason for starting the whole thing."  Tension built in the first game when Metts broke up a double play with a triple roll block on the Mountaineers' second baseman, Rick Angeline, West Virginia shortstop Jerry Navy had his finger in Metts' eye.

Also in the first game, Hokie first baseman Harold Williams fielded a grounder down the first base line, and waited to put the tag on the runner. The runner, much smaller than Williams, tried to run him over, and was bumped into the visitors dugout.

Another play at first base brought more words from Mahoney however. It occurred when Hokie third baseman Rick Wade tried to beat out a bunt by diving into first base. In the process, he tripped up the Mountaineer covering the bag, and again Mahoney and Wade exchanged thoughts on the play. The play that started the fight was an innocent one. Metts hit what appeared to be a sure double off the right centerfield fence, but he tripped going home to first, and was late coming into second.

"I was waving runners in to score, and I looked up in just in time to see Metts tagged out," Humphreys said. "It was a good call."

"I didn't see what started the fight because I was so mad wondering where Metts had been that I turned my back on the field."

I saw Metts slap Mahoney, but I think the fight was about to quit when their catchers came running out. Next thing I know my bench is emptying past me."

Humphreys went on to say that it really wouldn't have been much of a fight if a jaw hadn't been broken and if West Virginia hadn't forfeited.

"When the fight gets started, injuries are just a byproduct," Humphreys said. "It could just have easily been somebody from Tech hurt."

The Mountaineers' star shortstop had his jaw broken in four places, the result of a combination right cross-left hook by Williams, who also hurt his hand.

The Mountaineers forfeited the game, saying they had no replacement for their shortstop and they had a part of baseball," Humphreys said, "but I don't want to sound like I'm condemning them. Things like that will happen until guys learn how to play the game. Metts was wrong and he hasn't learned.

Humphreys suspended Metts for the season, saying he thought that was "appropriate action."

"I want them (Tech players) to play aggressive, but not to become bullies," Humphreys said. "Some of our guys can give more than they can take.

The fight was the second of the year for the Hokies, who were also involved in a brawl at Maryland were they lost 4-3. Humphreys said the Maryland fight was the result of losing frustration, but was helped out a lot by the Terrapins.

He has been quoted as saying that the fight probably helped to spark the Hokies to their now 2-7 game win streak.

"I hope it doesn't spill over the wrong way this time," he said. The Hokies have won three games since, so it doesn't look like the fight left any mentally damaging effects.

Asked whether the fights would have any effect on the Hokies chances for an NCAA at large bid, Humphreys said definitely not.

"The NCAA looks to see whether you can play baseball or not, and a fight doesn't mean anything as long as you win." Those guys know I don't teach that kind of stuff."

"That's the worst I've ever felt after sweeping a doubleheader," Humphreys added. "I was embarrassed. It was an unfortunate incident that never should have happened."