Spring Practice Underway

Player Limit Tech Problem

By BILL BRILL
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BLACKSBURG — With the NCAA limiting the size of college football squads to 95 scholarship players, Virginia Tech opened spring practice Monday faced with the same problem that other coaches schools around the nation are experiencing.

"I've talked with a lot of the coaches," said Tech's Jimmy Sharpe, who will start his fourth season in the fall, "and they say the biggest problem with the 95-rule is practice organization."

"It used to be when you had more football players, you could send players to one end of the field for special work and still have enough left to scrimmage. That's not possible any more."

One area school, N.C. State, already had to postpone its spring game because it didn't have enough healthy running backs. Sharpe can appreciate the situation.

"When we start today, we'll have 14 offensive linemen and just five defensive linemen. Obviously there will have to be some switching around, or we never would get all of the contact we need."

Perhaps the strongest position on the Tech squad is in the defensive secondary, which has been a trouble spot in the past.

"We have 22 candidates there, and just one of them (Henry Bradley) is a senior. We'll have to move some people there, too, because some of those players are going to have to find another position."

Sharpe recently discovered a spring roster from the 1970 Alabama team, where he played and coached before coming to Tech. Listed on the roster were 11 quarterbacks.

“They all didn’t end up at quarterback,” he said, “but that’s a situation that won’t ever happen again with just 95 players.”

Actually, only 70 scholarship players are presently on the squad. The 95 total will be filled with incoming freshmen. Most of them are line-men and linebackers, and that’s where help is needed.

“We have two really capable defensive tackles in Mike Faulkner and Doug McDougald, and when Bill Houseright is well, he’s as good a noseguard as there is in the country. What we have to develop is some people to back them up.”

For the first time, the squad is virtually all of Sharpe's making. Only two players, Houseright and Steve Scott, remain from the Charlie Coffey regime.

“That has helped us," Sharpe said. "We have more players who understand what we are trying to do. I was watching film the other day with (senior linebacker) Rick Razzano, and it was just like working with a coach. Rick knows that much about what we want.”

Defensively, Tech must replace tackle Tom Beasley and the two ends, Stuart Patterson and Keith McCarter. All three started for three years. Still, there is considerable experience returning on defense, where only Razzano, Bradley and Houseright will be seniors.

On offense, it's a different matter. Only record-breaking Roscoe Coles returns in the backfield, and up front Tech must replace wide receiver Moses Foster, tackles Rondal Davis and Keith Gibson and center Blair Buskirk.

The key to the offense will be the development of a quarterback, either junior David Lamie or soph redshirt Don LaRue, and a bruising fullback to replace Paul Adams and do the blocking for the elusive Coles.