MINNEAPOLIS — At the beginning of the season, Virginia Tech Coach Bob Humphreys wondered about the depth of his team's pitching staff.

Now, 41 games later—and despite a 31-game winning streak and a top-five ranking for his moundmen—the former major league hurler is recalling those early-season thoughts as the Gobblers begin play in the NCAA Midwest Regional this afternoon.

Duke Dickerson (10-1) is Humphreys' choice to open Tech's second straight NCAA appearance. The sophomore righthander will again against Mid-American Conference champ Central Michigan (43-12) in the tournament opener at 1 p.m.

In the 4 p.m. nightcap, host Minnesota—owning a 23-0 record at tournament site Bierman Field this season—meets Florida.

Minnesota, with four pitchers having earned-run averages under 1.50 and ranking in the top three in this four-team, double-elimination event. The consensus of opinion here is that the winner of today's second game will go on to the College World Series in Omaha.

The Gobblers arrived here late Thursday on a flight from New York City and worked out at Bierman Field on the Minnesota campus. And Tech third baseman Rick Wade said he and his teammates do not intend to embarrass themselves as they did a year ago in losing two straight in the Atlantic Regional at Columbia, S.C.

"Most of us have been there before, and we know what to expect,

"I talked to two coaches from their league," said Humphreys of the Chippewas. "I asked them if Central Michigan swung the bat better than Toledo (a team Tech bested twice in April). They said that Toledo was a better hitting ball club.

"But one guy said Central Michigan will run at any time. He was really irritated. He said they were stealing bases with 80 and 90 left.

"We have to hold them on base. If our pitchers give (catcher Wayne) Shelton a shot, then he'll handle them. Dickerson does a good job of holding people on. And Bobby Fisher has a good move. But the other guys need a lot of work on their moves.

"Junior righthander Chris Capka (9-0, 1.64 earned-run average) is CMU Coach Dave Kellets' mound choice for the opener. He has six complete games in seven starts this year.

"Minnesota Coach Dick Siebert—in his 30th season—will go for his 729th career win by sending sophomore righthander Jerry Udjer against Florida. That displays some of the Golden Gophers' confidence, as Ujdir (10-2, 1.42) is considered the Big Ten champs' No. 2 hurler behind righthander Dan Morgan.

"Minnesota's 23 home wins are part of a 26-10 record, compared to Florida's 37-16 slate compiled as Southeastern Conference runner-up. The Gators enter the tourney with six regulars hitting .310 and .325 against the opposition's .34.

"I think we're loose. We've had good practices ever since we heard about the bid. This time, we're ready."

But while Humphreys feels the Gobblers belong in the NCAA's final four, he wonders whether an auto accident involving Dean Powell—Tech's left-handed mound ace—will hurt his team.

"Powell was going to start the first game," said Humphreys. "But last week he was out with a couple other guys down at the New River. On the way back, the rear axle on their car broke and the car rolled over after it had gone off the road.

"Powell went through the back window of the car, and took 20 stitches in his left knee. The stitches were removed Tuesday, and he warmed up Wednesday for the first time in 10 days.

"I don't know if Dean's going to be able to pitch," added Humphreys. "If he can go, I certainly don't know for how long. I'd like to start him in our second game. If I can't, I guess it will be (freshman left-hander Mike) Rhodes."

"My arm's O.K.," said Powell after working out in the 90-degree temperatures and high humidity that brought a brief thunderstorm Friday. "But when I throw, my chest hurts. I know I have bruised ribs. But I intend to pitch."

Humphreys' other concern entering today's game is Central Michigan's speed on the base paths. In 55 games, the Chippewas have stolen 154 bases. Second baseman Dan Rubin leads CMU thieves with 51 in 40 attempts.