Alcohol 'Problem'

Sharpe Told To Shape Up

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Virginia Tech President William Lavery has told football coach Jimmy Sharpe to do something about his drinking problem or possibly lose his job, sources said today.

A highly placed Virginia Tech official confirmed this morning that Sharpe, 37, met with Lavery Saturday to discuss the coach's problem, which has been talked about privately for some time.

The same official said he did not want to be named because "it's too hot a potato for me to handle."

The coach could not be reached for comment. According to his office, he was out of town. Lavery is out of state on vacation.

The Tech source said Lavery told Sharpe, who is beginning his fourth season as head coach, "to get straightened out."

The university president said Sharpe's job might hang in the balance.

Sharpe promised Lavery he would seek assistance, the source said.

The meeting between Lavery and Sharpe was apparently prompted by the coach's behavior Aug. 4 at the annual football banquet of the Roanoke Valley Sports Club. People who attended the gathering said Sharpe was drunk.

Lu Merritt, president of the Roanoke club, said today he did not want to comment at length, "because I think a lot of Jimmy."

However, he said, there were indications the Tech coach had too much to drink.

Merritt added he has been with Sharpe on several occasions and has never before seen any indication of excessive drinking.

While Virginia Tech Athletic Director Frank Moseley and his assistant, Bill Matthews, were unavailable for comment, at least one school official reacted with concern about developments.

"I want something to tell my constituents," said H. M. McEver, executive secretary of the Student Aid Association. "I think we've got to get together on this and decide what to tell people."

"And that hasn't been done yet."

McEver said that since the Roanoke incident a week ago "we've had some calls and letters" about what happened.

He said he and Moseley have discussed the situation.

McEver said it was too early to tell if the stories would hurt fund-raising. "That kind of publicity certainly can't help," he said.

One Virginia Tech player reacted with indignation to the reports. Vinton's Barry Miller, a likely starter on Tech's offensive line, said, "It burns me up that somebody would write something like that."

Miller said that the coaching staff had sponsored several affairs—dinners at the Roanoke Civic Center and dances at the Red Lion Inn in Blacksburg—and that Sharpe had always behaved with the utmost decorum.

"He was always dressed well and, while I wouldn't go up and ask him 'Are you drunk,' it was obvious he wasn't," Miller said. "He told us he was going to bring his wife and asked us not to embarrass him."

"He'd never embarrass us."