By Mark Bullock
Staff Writer

Full of confidence and enthusiasm, Tech Head Coach Jimmy Sharpe addressed an anxious crowd Monday at the Sports Club luncheon, kicking off the 1977 season.

Citing his squad's positive attitude, Sharpe assured his listeners that Tech will "present a team with enthusiasm and drive, and one you'll be proud to support."

Pointing to the season opener Saturday against Texas A&M, he called the Aggies, "one of the top five teams in the country," and acknowledged them as a very worthy opponent in the lid-lifter. A&M invades Lane Stadium after a convincing opening win over Kansas last week.

Despite the loss of three starters due to injuries, Sharpe noted that enthusiasm was very high in the Hokie camp, and promised to surprise a few folks this season. "A lot of people are predicting us to go 2-9, 3-8, but we don't have that kind of attitude. Attitudes are positive here, and have been since the completion of last season. We play a tough schedule, and we know that, but we'll be ready."

Sharpe expects several freshmen to provide Tech with balance at key positions. Calling this freshman class, "the finest group of youngsters we've had in years," he plans to use "eight or ten" freshmen in the game Saturday.

Tackle Bucky Methfessel, an academic standout, will test his field knowledge in a back-up role initially, as will most of the newcomers. "Our freshmen all have good football instinct," Sharpe noted, "but it takes awhile for these kids to grasp a new system. We want to break them in gradually."

Frosh wide receiver Ron Zollicoffer of Virginia has been impressive in fall workouts and could figure early in the success of the Tech passing game.

Running backs Lewis Stuart of Floyd and Mike Romagnoli hope to add some depth to the backfield, and both are trying to nail down back-up positions.

Junior David Lamie has the inside track on the quarterbacking duties, but second-year man Don LaRue also figures into the offensive plan. "We'll find out Saturday if quarterback is a strong position," Sharpe confessed. "Both men are very versatile, and we hope they will be able to handle the chores well."

"We plan to throw the football this year," Sharpe continued. "We haven't done a whole lot of that the past couple of years, but we want to open things up for the running game. To do that, we have to be able to pass the football."

An impressive start against a rugged Texas A&M squad would start the Hokies in the right direction towards a successful season. Much of that will depend on Tech's ability to move the ball against the impressive Aggie defense. It all gets underway Saturday at 1:30.

Tech's first football game of the season is dedicated to the memory of Stuart K. Cassell, the University's vice president of finance and business manager for 30 years, and super sports supporter.