VPI's Coach Anxiously Awaits 'World Famous Tobacco Bowl'

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Warning to undertakers: Your services are not needed in Blacksburg.
Indeed, an 0-3 record has Virginia Tech Football Coach Jim Sharpe anything but disconsolate.
"We are going to play in the world famous Tobacco Bowl," he quips of the Gobblers' 1:30 p.m. Saturday date with William and Mary in Richmond's City Stadium.

Taking it from there, the supposedly beleaguered boss of the Techmen queries with the same tongue in cheek: "How many 0-3 teams do you know of who are on their way to a bowl?"

True, the ledger shows the Gobblers with six successive setbacks over a two-season period. Still, Sharpe chooses to act like a man who very distinctly sees the light at the end of the tunnel.

He makes several positive points.
One is "we're healthy for the first time." In particular, that means Tech's veteran secondary player, Gary Smith, is ready for action at last.

Secondly, "our morale is excellent. The players haven't given up. They realize this can still be a good year, but it has to happen on the field."

Continuing on the theme that the season hasn't been nearly as glum as it might appear to be, Sharpe adds: "From the point of view on what has actually happened — the record doesn't mean that much; what does matter is the guts of the situation — I see a lot of plusses."

With eight games to go, he explains "I never said we'd win them all."

Instead, he points to three goals that remain attainable following losses to Texas A&M, Memphis State and Clemson.

The State championship, for instance, lingers in reach with William and Mary, Virginia and Richmond coming up the next three games and Virginia Military Institute the season-ending foe.

It can also be the third winning season in a row under Sharpe and "the third goal was to win as many as possible (as a rookie head coach in 1974, Sharpe was 4-7, followed by 8-3 and 6-5 ledgers)."

"Achieving all three goals is still very possible," he maintains.

In other words, "we're not walking the plank. We're just beginning to fight."

Certainly, the timing is ripe. This is an ancient rivalry going back to 1904. It also is a series which the Gobblers have dominated, winning 30 and losing 18 (there were four ties). However, W&M has taken three of the last five meetings, including last year's clash by 27-15.

The Indians (3-2) were especially awesome on the ground last week in whipping Villanova 28-8.

W&M operates out of a Power-I similar to the style employed by Clemson (a 31-13 winner over Tech last week in the rain) and Richmond.

Sharpe won't concede the Tribe's line on offense offers any special problem. Instead, he says "they do an excellent job of play selection. Their game plan is to beat you off tackle and on the option. They have seasoned veterans in their line."

TECH TALES — Smith has been nursing a shoulder separation. To protect it, he has been moved from the left cornerback's slot, where he "would have to take on blockers with his left shoulder," Sharpe says the junior from Kingsport, Tenn., will work as backup at both free safety and strong safety. . . .

Coca-Cola people in Blacksburg are blushing. They spent $13,000 on souvenir Tech cups emblazoned with the word "Hoakie". It most certainly hasn't improved Hokie spirits. . . .