Jimmy Sharpe Says It Would Be Helpful If He Received a Vote of Confidence at the End of the Season

Rumors Flying

Sharpe Not Worried

By BILL BRIEF

BLACKSBURG — The rain was pelting down on Cassell Coliseum Wednesday, a perfectly miserable afternoon, but Jimmy Sharpe professed that "I feel better than I have in two years." The weather could have been an omen, but Sharpe insists no cloud hangs over his head. He neither talks nor acts like a man who feels his job might be in danger.

Indeed, there is no groundswell from the alumni to replace Sharpe, who in three-plus seasons as Virginia Tech’s football coach has guided the Hokies to 10 wins, as many losses and one tie.

Even after a tie with Virginia and a loss to Richmond, the phones haven’t rung off the hook in Athletic Director Frank Moseley’s office. Few people are seeking Jimmy Sharpe’s scalp.

There are reasons, of course.

Everybody likes Sharpe. Even his greatest critics can find few things in the man they do not appreciate. His coaches and players love him. One person close to Tech athletics said the other day: "The players are still trying so hard, they’re giving 100 per cent." That, in fact, might be part of the problem. In this disastrous 1-4-1 campaign, Tech has been beating itself.

Yet the feeling persists that Sharpe is not as secure, not completely. He has four years remaining on a contract that paid him $51,200 in 1976 and no doubt pays more today. But Tech, preparing to add seats at Lane Stadium, geared for a schedule in the 1980s against almost exclusively the big boys of the sport, might revise Sharpe’s position at the end of the season and find the coach wanting.

It is to be the case, Jimmy Sharpe says he isn’t worried.

"I can’t be bothered with myself and wish we’ve done here in four years if I didn’t plan for the future. I’m taking such a youngster high school prospect as his home tomorrow night. We’re continuing recruiting as we always have. We’re making decisions on our football program, and where we need help.

Sharpe maintain that it would be helpful if he would receive a vote of confidence at the end of the season, something like “Jimmy Sharpe is the football coach at Virginia Tech.” But that is something over which he has no control. That will be done, or won’t be done, “by the folks upstairs.”

"I don’t care how dark and cloudy it gets today, the sun’s gonna shine tomorrow,” Jimmy Sharpe’s “real strong, monnnna.”

Meanwhile, Sharpe insists that he’s “delighted that Tech is playing No. 7 Kentucky Saturday night.”

"That’s exactly what we need. We can get away from all of the distractions and concentrate only on the challenge of Kentucky. It’s a game where we have everything to win and nothing to lose.

Sharpe sees a certain irony in playing Kentucky right now: “Just two years ago, things were a lot worse for them than they are for us,” he said.

"It was the middle of the ‘75 season, and my good friend Fran Cusps (Kentucky coach) called me about a film exchange. They were being investigated by the NCAA and there was the threat of probation. Some of their players had been involved in drugs and crimes.

"I remember what Fran told me. ‘I can’t let them chase us.’ Now look what’s happened. I spoke at their football clinic in the spring of ’76 and I helped them install the wishbone. Now they’re one of the best, if not the best, teams in America.

"Just two years ago, they were in deep trouble. But they weathered the storm.

In recent weeks, numerous rumors have cropped up. Moseley would resign and former Tennessee Coach Bill Battle would become Tech’s athletic director and football coach.

Tech would fire Sharpe and bring in his former coaching cohort at Alabama, Pat Dye of East Carolina.

"Tech would clean house, removing Sharpe and all of the officials in the athletic department.

"Ad infinitum.

"None of the rumors are true. It is not inconceivable that Moseley would offer to retire now if it became his sincere belief that Tech should have somebody else in a new coach. But that decision has not been made. ‘Nothing about the football department has been discussed,’ said Moseley, who was working on a budget. ‘I haven’t even thought about it.’

Sharpe believes that the rumors haven’t helped, but he realizes there is little he can do about them.

I had all of the players wives in for a talk and they all left smiling and went back to work. By the time they got home, they were telling their husbands that they had heard our house was up for sale.

"That is absolutely not true, but that’s the sort of stuff that gets around.”

At halftime against Virginia, as the Tech team was leaving the field, a fan leaned over the railing and screamed obscenities at Sharpe. The fan suggested that if Sharpe would get drunk at halftime, maybe Tech would play better.

The Tech players were stunned. One of the assistant coaches had to be restrained from going after the spectator. It is that kind of distraction, Sharpe said, which keeps the Hokies from performing up to their capabilities.

"I know a lot of people don’t like my offense,” said Sharpe. "But it’s the same offense we ran when we were 9-0. I didn’t tumble the ball all those times, and I didn’t get all those penalties. I ain’t sure we got them, either.

"I didn’t miss the call when Clemson had 12 men on the field when they scored. I didn’t miss it when Virginia ran an illegal formation on the big play to their tight end.

"But I can’t do anything about that. These things happen, and the mistakes the team has made are my responsibility.

Sharpe said that Bear Bryant called the other day: “He doesn’t call when things are going good, only when it’s getting tough. He told me to hang in there, not to change what I knew would work and not to change my beliefs.

"He wasn’t talking about offense and defense.”

He was totally relaxed, dressed in brown slacks, a shirt with large dots, a brown tie and a sleeveless sweater. His blue eyes flashed as he talked about his team.

"We only lose six of our top 35. We can see the improvement in the freshmen. We felt then and we feel now that we had a good recruiting year, and we’re real close on some of the best players in the state.

"I’ve got to prepare for five more games. Then we’ll go recruiting for what we need. The future is still there.”

"Then the smiling.” But that’s optimistic, that’s me. I try never to second guess myself regardless of rumors that fly about my ancestry.

His only coherent, he reiterated, was with his coaches, his players, and the immediate challenge of Kentucky and four more tough games.

"We’ve got five more hours,” he said. "Five more hours.”

Racoo College Still Wants 4,000 Yards