Sharpe Fired; Did Not Fit Tech ‘Image’

By BILL BRULL
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BLACKSBURG - Jimmy Sharpe was fired as Virginia Tech’s head football coach Monday.

Tech President William E. Lavery announced that the 38-year-old Sharpe was being replaced "in the best interest of the university and its intercollegiate football program."

Sharpe had just completed his fourth season at Tech, where he led the Hokies to a 3-7-1 record. He said he had played the 30-year-old Sharpe was being replaced "in the best interest of the university and its intercollegiate football program."

Sharpe had four years remaining on a contract that paid him $31,240 in 1976. Lavery cited "other considerations" for the change of coaching personnel.

"We believe that a decision was made in the best interest of the university and its intercollegiate football program."

"I do not believe that we have a viable alternative."

"It is evident that the football program must be given new leadership if Virginia Tech is to achieve the potential that it obviously has."

"I am sorry that Coach Sharpe has not been able to achieve the success he desires."

"No source at Tech said that in a meeting Monday with Lavery, the coach was told he was being fired "because he did not fit the image of the university."

"The Tech players held a news conference Monday night at which several of them blasted Lavery’s handling of the situation.

"Staff linebacker Rick Razzano said that Lavery spoke to the team prior to the game and left the impression that Sharpe would be retained. "I guess he didn’t want us to throw in the towel," said Razzano. "We were definitely despondent."

"Several Tech players said they would still consider transferring, among them fullback Michael Fitzgerald.

"Junior Nick Hagane, a redshirt with one year of eligibility, said he would not play again next year. "And there are 13 others, just like me."

"Lavery said that the decision to fire Sharpe was made after careful consideration and evaluation of the overall program."

"The president met Monday with the Tech board of directors and ‘Tech athletic association board."

"Sharpe played at Alabama and coached there for 11 years as an assistant under Bear Bryant. He was hired by Tech in January 1974 to replace Charlie Coolidge, who quit after it became apparent that the football program was falling apart."

"The 1973 Tech team, under Coolidge, had the worst defensive record of any major college team. Sharpe’s first team went 4-7, but improved vastly on defense."

"Tech’s 8-3 record in ’75 was the school’s finest since 1966. Following that season, assistant head coach Charlie Pell left to go to Clemson, and Tech’s downward trend had begun."

"The Hokies won six of their seven final games in 1976, but dropped a 35-31 decision to Tulsa, missing out on the New Year’s Day bowl, then were beaten by Richmond and Florida State."

"Tech lost its first four games this year, then beat William & Mary and tied Virginia. After losing three more games, the Hokies turned things around by defeating Wake Forest and VMI."

Sharpe becomes the third coach in Tech’s seven years. Jerry Claiborne, who led the Hokies to two bowl, was fired during the 1970 campaign and replaced by Colley. Colley produced one winning season in three years, but Tech fell to 2-9 in 1973 and players were discontented and leaving the program.

"Sharpe’s first team lost its first four games, but after upsetting South Carolina, the Hokies improved steadily until the final three games of last year."

"Sharpe was criticized for running a wishbone offense without a proven quarterback or fullback, and Tech did not throw a single touchdown pass this season."

"The Hokies did play better at the end of the year, after sophomore Michael Fitzgerald was converted to fullback. Fitzgerald scored six touchdowns in the two closing victories."

"Although recruiting season is well under way, and players may sign scholarships."

"Sharpe at News Conference Saturday After Last Game of Season