Assistants Stunned By Sharpe’s Firing

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BLACKSBURG — Boxes. Long before the announcement became official Monday afternoon, Jimmy Sharpe’s dismissal as Virginia Tech football coach was foreshadowed by the movement of boxes.

Pictures came down off the walls, calendars from beneath the glass on desks, recruiting files out of the drawers. All were packed in cardboard boxes, as managers, trainers and even players sought to ease the coaches’ tasks.

“What’s that?” asked defensive line coach Red Stickney as fellow assistant Joe White carted away a picture of star linebacker Rick Razzano shedding a block.

“I recruited him,” said White sadly. “Now, I think I’ll take him home with me.”

It was a gloomy afternoon in the Tech football office, one that was made even more sorrowful by the steady procession of people stopping in to say good-bye.

Quite clearly, several of the assistants had been crying. It is understood they will leave with Sharpe.

“I was shocked; I really was,” said Stickney, one of Sharpe’s staunchest supporters. “The man was a player’s coach and I always thought that the most important thing was the players. Obviously at Virginia Tech, it’s not.”

Indeed, when Sharpe was asked to resign by Tech President Dr. William Lavery, it was not on account of the team’s record, but because he did not fit the image according to one reliable source.

Sharpe was allegedly intoxicated at a meeting of the Roanoke Valley Sports Club in August and has had to survive rumors about his status ever since.

“The biggest thing—I think—was not being able to beat the state teams,” reasoned Stickney, noting that the Hokies had lost to Richmond and tied Virginia.

“The alumni, at least the ones in Richmond, were after us after the loss down there. When you lose, they look for excuses, and I think they used the incident in Roanoke as an excuse.”

The assistant coaches learned of their fate at 3 o’clock Monday afternoon, after which Sharpe called Lavery and said that he would not resign. Sharpe was then told he would be fired. Like Sharpe, few of the assistants had ever been fired, including Stickney, the 40-year-old dean of the Virginia Tech staff.

“I think I’ll go back to high school,” Stickney said.

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said Stickney, a successful coach in Maryland before building a powerhouse in Northern Virginia at Woodbridge. “I was always happy in coaching in high school, and, as far as college coaching goes, I’m not sure at my age I’d get another chance.

“I’ve got a wife and two kids who are in school down here.

“I’ve got to find some way to take care of them.”

While Stickney said he would probably look into the vacant post at Patrick Henry in Roanoke, not all of Sharpe’s assistants were certain what they would do next.

“I’m supposedly a grown, mature person. I’m supposedly college educated, with decent common sense,” said 25-year-old Wayne Hall. “There are very few coaches who haven’t been fired. I guess I’ll have to find a job like all the rest.”

Hall had missed part of the 3 p.m. meeting Monday because he was meeting with campus security officers investigating the death of freshman fullback Bob Vorhies, a tragedy which preceded the VMI win.

None of the coaches felt Vorhies’ death had anything to do with the decision. “If anything, it showed how the players stood together,” said Stickney. “The last two games showed that we were on the right track.”

“Whoever comes in will have a winner next year,” said Stickney, “and people will wonder why we didn’t. But, I still feel they’re going to have a hard time coming up with a better coach than Jimmy Sharpe.”