VPI Coach Sharpe Fired

BLACKSBURG, Va. (AP) — Jimmy Sharpe, the subject of controversy before his Virginia Tech football team wound up the 1977 season with a 3-7-1 record, was fired Monday with four years remaining on a contract which had been extended just last year.

Virginia Tech President W. E. Lav-ery said the action was taken in the best interest of the university and its inter-collegiate athletic program.

Sharpe, 38, took over four years ago from Charlie Coffey and compiled a 4-7 record his first season. He was 8-3 and 6-5 in the next two years, and his contract was extended to a five-year pact at the end the last campaign despite defeats in the last three games.

Before the season started, Sharpe became the subject of controversy over his appearance before a dinner meeting in the Roanoke area at which his behavior was questioned by some alumni present.

Sharpe met later with Lavery and received a vote of confidence, but the controversy was renewed during the season when the Gobblers went 1-7-1 in the first nine games before winning the last two.

Lavery’s announcement followed a meeting of the board of directors of the Virginia Tech Athletic Association and a lengthy conference with Sharpe.

VIRGINIA TECH star Mickey Fitzgerald, a 250-pound sophomore who gained 513 yards in four games after being moved to fullback from tight end, said Monday night “the majority of the players want to take a hike away from here” as a result of the firing of Sharpe.

“We don’t want to play for any other coach,” Fitzgerald said after the players held a news conference to discuss the firing of Sharpe.

Virginia Tech President Lavery met with the players at their dormitory Monday night. Lavery was questioned particularly about the Roanoke incident before the season. The university president was asked about what role the incident played in the decision to fire Sharpe.

“Dr. Lavery said it was a minor part, but I tend to believe it was a major part,” said junior defensive back Gippy Belcher.

Junior defensive back Dennis Windmuller said Lavery had told the players “he was looking for an image that Coach Sharpe didn’t have.”

Belcher added that Lavery “didn’t give any valid reasons” for his move. “He sounded like a politician to me. All he did was take all the blame for the decision on himself.”

Windmuller and Fitzgerald said they doubted the decision was all Lavery’s.

“The heavy bucks (big contributors to the athletic program) talked, and he listened,” said Fitzgerald. “They gave the money and we gave the effort and sweat, and the money prevailed.” Windmuller said.

Fitzgerald said he had discussed leaving with junior defensive tackle Mike Faulkner, a starter.

Seventeen of Tech’s 22 starters are underclassmen.