'Clang's' Decision

For eight years, first at Castlewood High School and now at Virginia Tech, Paul Adams has excelled in two sports — football and baseball. Soon, he will probably have to give up one of them forever.

A bruising fullback for the Tech football team and a record-setting power hitter for the Hokie baseballers, Adams is now wondering whether he should sign a professional baseball contract or return to Blacksburg next fall for his final season of football eligibility.

In both sports his widely-used nickname is "Clang." With a football under his arm or a bat in his hands, Paul Adams can ring your bell.

As a redshirt junior last fall, Adams ran for 785 yards on 178 carries, and his blocking was in large part responsible for the even larger yardage totals amassed by Phil Rogers and Bruce Cola.

This spring, Adams has been crushing the baseball for a team that is cruising toward an NCAA tournament invitation. Through the Hokies' first 33 games, Adams is hitting .330 with six homers and . . . 42 runs batted in.

Tech football coach Jimmy Sharpe said he has "full confidence" that Adams will be back playing football this fall. Adams isn't quite so sure.

A major league baseball draft will be held in June. If Adams is drafted and the team that has the rights to him comes up with a good chunk of cash, somebody else will be first-string fullback for Tech in 1976.

ONCE BEFORE, AFTER his senior year at Castlewood, Adams turned down a $37,000 contract from the Kansas City Royals. He indicates that he wouldn't turn it down again.

"The money will make the difference," said Adams.

Under current NCAA rules, it is possible for Adams to sign a pro baseball contract, play this summer in rookie leagues, and still be eligible to play college football this fall. It is not likely, however, that his pro baseball employers would permit him to return to football and risk another injury.

Adams hurt his left knee and underwent surgery in the fall of 1975. He sat out that season as an injured redshirt. One more knee injury and the baseball scouts would write him off as hopelessly damaged goods.

In summary, a number of baseball scouts believe he must turn pro right now or forget about baseball forever. If he wants until next year, he'll be 23 years old, and while that is a lovely age, the baseball people feel it's far too old to be a rookie just beginning to learn the trade.

SHARPE DOESN'T want his fullback bulldozed or pancaked into making his decision. He believes Adams has a future in professional football, too. "The NFL scouts I've talked to are interested in him," said Sharpe, "even though he doesn't have blazing speed. The thing they like about him, the thing I really like about him, is in the fact he is a SUPER blocker."

Tech baseball coach Bob Humphreys said Adams is also super with a bat. "Paul can hit with the top 10 per cent in the big leagues," said Humphreys, a major league pitcher for seven years.

"The ball just explodes off his bat when he hits it. I've seen him hit two balls on the roof of Tech Coliseum."

By way of explanation, the Coliseum sits just behind the left centerfield fence at the Tech baseball diamond. Any ball hit on the roof of that structure should not only be a home run, it should also show up on NORAD radar.

"Some of Paul's homers look like Jack Nicklaus two-iron shots," said Tech publicity man Wendy Wetstein.

WHILE ADAMS IS OVERPOWERING at the plate, he can be overpowered in the field. He's been used mostly as a designated hitter at Tech, although Humphreys has tried him at catcher and first base at times this season. In the outfield, said Humphreys, "he's not that great a judge of a fly ball."

"I caught him against VAU last week, and he didn't do a bad job, especially when you consider he hasn't caught a game since high school."

Because football requires powerful and tightly-tensed muscles in your back and shoulders, Adams has had some problems throwing the ball, yet the longer he stays away from football, the better his arm gets.

"He's had some sore arms after he's really turned it lose," said Humphreys, "but he doesn't have a bad arm. He just got too tight from playing football and lifting weights."

"The longer he stays in baseball, his muscles will stretch out some and give him more flexibility of motion in his upper body."

Because of his problems afield and with his arm, he's a good candidate to be drafted by a club in the American League, which has the designated hitter. But even the AL clubs "want somebody who can play a position," said Humphreys.

So if he goes the pro baseball route, Adams faces long hours working on his fielding and throwing, while retaining his present fine edge at the plate.

"HE'S A GOOD ENOUGH athlete to become a good fielder," said Humphreys. "If Paul sets his mind to it, he can do it."

"If he wants to be a baseball player, he can be a major leaguer. If he plays another year of football, from what I understand, he can forget baseball. They're not going to draft and sign him next year."

As the time for decision approaches, Adams said, "I'm not leaning either way."

Just in case, Sharpe has moved George Hestor from reserve running back to No. 1 fullback in Tech's spring football practice. If Clang is a goner, Sharpe will need somebody else to ring bells.