Big game brewing

Virginia Tech football Coach Jimmy Sharpe was all thumbs.

While most coaches were busy Saturday afternoon trying to get their charges running the right X's and O's, Sharpe was fiddling with an antique table and radio. Tech had an unusual open date. So, after a morning scrimmage, Sharpe was puttering around the house.

"I was trying to finish painting an antique kitchen table for our new house," said Sharpe.

But football was still on his mind. He had a trusty radio beside him.

"I kept trying to get the William and Mary game (with East Carolina) on radio. That's a new experience for me. I really wanted to listen to it," Sharpe emphasized.

Alas, the Tech coach failed to track down the Indians on the radio. Hopefully, for his side, Tech will have better luck this Saturday.

The two teams clash in Lane Stadium at Blacksburg. Before the season, this looked like a ho-hum game. Now it has all the makings for a good old fashioned barn-burner.

William and Mary, in spite of losing 20-19 to East Carolina, is full of life. The Indians are 2-1 and if you take comparative scores, William and Mary appears to be a good bet to give Tech all sorts of trouble.

For example, East Carolina blew the cover off Southern Mississippi 48-0. Tech managed to beat the same Southern Mississippi team 16-7 a week later. Then came William and Mary's one-point loss to the Pirates. It proved the Indians aren't the usual slouches on the football field they have been since Lou Holtz left for North Carolina State.

Sharpe's main hope for overcoming such items as comparative scores is the open date. Under Sharpe, Tech has always played 11 straight Saturdays. Now the question is how the Hokies will react.

"I don't remember losing at Alabama (where Sharpe was an assistant and player) after an open date. But then we always seemed to play Auburn after an open date. That's no test. You don't even have to practice to get ready for that game," said the Tech coach.

The William and Mary game is important in other ways. Tech embarks upon three straight weeks of battling in-state rivals. VMI and Virginia follow William and Mary on the Tech schedule.

"But right now," said Sharpe, "we can't talk about anything other than William and Mary."

Sharpe said the team has worked on improving items that plagued the Hokies in the first three games. "I don't look for improvement," he noted, "I'm praying for it. We need it to make a game of this one.

The first test is over. If only Virginia Tech can pass the second, then the rest of the season could lead up to the Hokies' finest grid-year ever.

You hate to keep referring to Tech and Alabama in certain respects, but Coach Jimmy Sharpe used superior personnel like his old boss Bear Bryant in numbers to wear down Wake Forest Saturday night. Tech played around 70 players and when the bench was in, there wasn't a slack in the performance.

The Hokies used eight backs in the wishbone and "modified wishbone" offense that racked up 352 yards total offense. When Tech had to pass, Mitch Barnes came through in flying colors, completing all four aerials he tossed up.

Moses Foster hauled in four passes including a great touchdown catch. Tech had 17 first downs on the ground alone.

But defensively, Tech boomed. It's still hard to determine if Tech's defense is that good or Wake Forest's offense was that bad, but one thing is for sure...Tech's defense is of the point producing culture, the kind that can turn ball games around.

Particularly vicious in limiting Wake to under 100 yards on the ground (46 of those came on one running play late in the game), were Rick Razzano, Tom Beasley and Keith McCarter. Razzano led the way with 12 tackles, while Beasley, who Sharpe has called the best defensive tackle in the country, had 11. McCarter added 10.

Sharpe also had to be pleased with his secondary with Gene Bunn and Chip Keatley getting interceptions and young sophomore Gipp Becher of Colonial Heights coming through with some inspiring play including causing a fumble with a bone-jarring hit.