Aggie Coach Expect
t
‘A Real Head Knocker’

By JERRY VERNON
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Texas A&M Football Coach Emory Bellard comes across as an oil magnate who just saw a well go dry when he speaks of this Saturday’s match-up with Virginia Tech.

The Aggies’ head mentor last year lost three players who piled up a combined 10,000 rushing yards in four gridiron seasons.

“We’re young in our running backs. They’re either sophomores or freshmen,” drawled Coach Bellard in a telephone interview yesterday. “They’ll make some mistakes, I’m certain of that.”

But before Hokie fans begin smiling too brightly, get this - the Aggies have 29 returning lettermen on this season’s team.

The offensive line stacks up with five returning starters including a healthy quarterback who spent almost half of last season on the sidelines with a sprained knee and a pulled hamstring. Senior David Shipman returns to the signal slot behind two years of intermediate experience. He passed for only 422 yards last season while his back-up man, sophomore Keith Baker, threw only one pass in three games.

But the air game has never served as the Aggies’ pride. Running backs took Bellard’s fourth Aggie team into a three-way tie for Southwest Conference laurels in 1975 with a 10-2 mark.

“We’ll probably throw more than we have in the past,” surmised the coach, “but it will not be because we can’t run. We have some backs who run well.”

Three sophomores will head the running slots this Saturday. Adger Armstrong and Darrell Smith at the halfback spots and fullback George Woodard are expected to continue the Aggies’ running tradition.

Aside from the running game, the coach underplays this year’s team with the usual flair of a magnate looking at a field of wealth.

“We’ve had some good practices,” said Bellard. “We’re in pretty good physical condition. But it’s very hard to place a full evaluation on the team until you play someone else.”

Last week the Aggies were idle while the Hokies whipped up on Wake Forest. For this reason, Bellard gives Tech a slight advantage.

“They’re (Tech) due to be a lot sharper than we’ll be since they’ve got a game under their belt,” he explained. “We’re expecting a real head knocker.”

Like most coaches, Bellard doesn’t want his investments garnered into one basket of predictions. When he hears his Aggies are slight favorites over Tech he just laughs and suggests the conversation is quickly drawing to a close.

“I don’t control what people do as far as picks,” snarled Bellard. “We both have the same philosophy. It will be a hard nose ball game. You got anything else, I got to go.”

Due to a new NCAA regulation, the Aggies had to bypass last week’s Tech game. The rule disallows any college squad the former right to scout an opponent’s team.

“We’re more or less playing them blind. We’ve never played them before,” said the coach. “Tech has a very aggressive offense and a hard nose defense.”

Another asset the Aggie coach failed to go into detail over was his defensive line. Last season his squad led their conference in defense, allowing only 183 total yards each game. This unit returns six starters to go along with its nine other lettermen. Defense should serve as the Aggies’ motto this Saturday.

And if this block-busting unit works as effectively as last season, Tech could be looking at the hopes of an unblemished season falling aside in its second game of the season.