Sharpe Wants To Forget

BLACKSBURG — If there was one thing Virginia Tech Coach Jimmy Sharpe wanted to forget about Sunday, it was his team’s loss to Texas A&M. The Hokies had gotten in late from Houston, he’d been up since 8 for his weekly TV show, and Sharpe had to stop by his office one last time before calling it a day.

“My assistants had been grading film and they’d all gone home,” recalled Sharpe. “I’d told them I wanted to forget about the Texas A&M game but, there on the blackboard, was a list of teams: Southern Cal, Texas, Tennesee, Arizona State…

“I knew what they were doing.”

Of course, the Hokie assistants had been engaging in a pastime Sharpe likes to call “what-if-ing”. They’d been wondering if the Hokies would have made the Top 20 had they been able to pull off an upset at College Station.

“I’m sick and tired of hearing about how good Texas A&M is,” Sharpe complained Wednesday, admitting that he refused to take his assistants to task for their idle speculation.

“I want people to start talking about how good Virginia Tech is.”

Sharpe was particularly upset at a radio announcer’s crack that the Hokie football team playing Texas A&M in football was the frustrating equivalent of the basketball team playing Indiana. And, he wasn’t too pleased at newspaper accounts that said he lost confidence in his team in the third quarter.

“If we played Texas A&M tomorrow, I would predict we could move the ball on them,” said Sharpe, noting that the Hokies only managed 78 yards total offense when it counted. Tech’s offense completed two of six passes for 27 yards and amassed just 51 yards rushing in 45 carries.

For openers, Sharpe said Tech hadn’t exploited the “read” phase of its option attack Saturday. To those initiated in wishbone terminology, almost every play involves an option. The “read” comes in when the quarterback rolls down the line of scrimmage and decides whether to pitch out or keep the ball himself.

“Coach (Danny) Ford showed me some statistics where we’re running the read 34 per cent of the time,” said Sharpe. “Normally, we’re around 60 per cent. And, against A&M, we only ran it 15 of 58 plays.”

The player most effected seems to be junior running back Roscoe Coles, who has already set the school single-season rushing record and appears to be a cinch to break the career mark. The 5-9 speedster needs just 793 yards in two years to break Phil Rogers’ record, although he only has 93 yards so far this season.

Admittedly, playcalling has curtailed Coles’ production. However, there seems to be more to it than that. Namely, Coles has been nowhere near as effective without George Heath out in front blocking on sweeps.

At the present time, Heath is being platooned with Paul Adams at fullback, a luxury the Hokies can ill afford too much longer. Sharpe won’t say he’s considering replacing right halfback Chuck Nuttycombe with Heath, but admits he’s “toying with the idea of having my three best backs (Heath, Adams and Coles) playing at the same time.”

Other than that, Sharpe doesn’t think the Hokies have too many problems offensively. “People wonder why we didn’t throw the ball more,” he observed. “Well, we only threw six passes, but Mitch (Barnes) was sacked about 10 more times trying to set up.”

Attribute part of that to Texas A&M’s line, anchored by two tackles Sharpe calls all-Americans, Edgar Fields and Jimmy Dean, and linebackers Robert Jackson. “I didn’t realize Jackson was that good,” said Sharpe of the pre-season all-American who didn’t start for the Aggies until the eighth game of last season. “He must have gotten a lot faster over the summer.”

What Sharpe hadn’t anticipated was an all-out rush from the blind side of the Aggie line. “I thought we would regroup at halftime,” Sharpe said, “but they just kept coming.”

It became obvious why Sharpe had declined to chastise his assistants as he indulged in a little “what-if-ing” himself. “Looking at the films,” he said, “you can’t believe what a great game our defense played.”

In fact, Sharpe has apparently dropped his plans to move quarterback David Lamele back to safety, where he was a starter last year. According to his coach, Lamele does things in practice that none of the other quarterbacks can, leading to speculation that the sophomore from Kingsport may be red-shirted.

That’s long-range planning, however, and Sharpe wants to make sure all eyes are centered on this week’s home-opener with Southern Mississippi, or Mississippi Southern as Sharpe calls the Golden Eagles.

Considering that Southern Miss dropped its opener to East Carolina, 48-0, Sharpe was asked if there is a possibility the Hokies can suffer a letdown. It was originally thought that Tech would have to play its best to beat a team that went 7-4 a year ago. Now, something less might do the trick.

“Obviously, that score (48-0) can’t help us,” said Sharpe. “but, there are a lot of players and coaches who were really down after the Texas A&M game. Instead of telling them we can lose to Southern Miss, I’ve tried to emphasize that we’re still a very good football team.”

“We’ve got 10 games left,” continued Sharpe, obviously counting post-season play. “I honestly believe we can win them all.”