Tech Claims Unique Trainer

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Sports Writer

Eddie Ferrell has earned a very special distinction in his life.

He went to college like most young people seem to do these days. But after graduating from the University of Arkansas in biology, including two years of pre-med study, Ferrell took a position that would lead to a professional job no one else has claimed since.

"My dad was a trainer at Arkansas for 25 years," said the Virginia Tech football trainer last week. "I helped him and grew up in that type of atmosphere. After a year's absence (from training) in the fast food business, I decided I missed it."

Upon discovering his interest in the medical part of football, Ferrell returned to Arkansas, served as a trainer for the bowl-bound Razorbacks and before the season ended was offered a one-time shot in the National Football League.

"It was 1968 and Arkansas was in the Cotton Bowl," remembered Ferrell. "Brocklin (then head coach of the Minnesota Vikings) was there scouting and I met him. It was just a chance thing. He invited me to dinner, and while we were eating, Van Brocklin said, 'Why don't you come work with us this season.' I thought he was kidding. But the next day he made the offer again, this time with Jim Finks (general manager of the Vikings)."

After the 1968 season, the Vikings released the only assistant trainer they ever had. "It was only a one-time thing," said Ferrell. "It was fun, though." After leaving Minnesota, it was back to the University of Arkansas for the next three years. During this time he met the man who would lead him to Virginia Tech — then Arkansas assistant coach.

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Charlie Coffey brought Ferrell with him upon being named head coach of the Gobblers. Upon Coffey's resignation, Ferrell impressed new coach Jimmy Sharpe so much that he still enjoys his present status.

In his ten years as a trainer, Ferrell has noticed a great deal of change in the profession. "It's much more sophisticated," he stated. "The profession has come a long way."

Ferrell also noted that when he was coming up, there were no specific courses in training. Today, it's a regular curriculum in most colleges, with some, such as UVA, offering a master's degree.

He points out that there is much more to being a trainer than just taping up an ankle.

Trainers are responsible for reporting to the coaching staff those players who are physically able to play and those who are not. "There's a lot of psychology involved," said Ferrell. "You can't just tell a player to get out there, that he's not really hurt. It's knowing the individual personality, and knowing his pain tolerance that makes the difference."

Having been a trainer at both the collegiate and professional level, Ferrell noticed some big differences.

"The pros sit around the locker room and talk about their stocks, their business, and their families. Our kids have fun. In the pros it's not as rewarding. They make you feel as if you're not really needed."

Ferrell finds the reward for his work in the fellowship and camaraderie of a team involved in collegiate athletics, rather than any medical miracles he might have performed.

"I've never had to go out on the field and save a life," explained Ferrell, "I hope I never do."