WHILE VIRGINIA TECH fans try to figure out how their 8-3 or 9-2 football team sank to a 6-5 finish, Hokie coach Jimmy Sharpe believes he has found one reason why his bunch did not live up to advance billing.

“For the first two years,” he was saying one night recently, “I coached on instinct, pure gut instinct. If I felt it was right, I did it.

“This year,” he said, makvng a face, “I did some planning.”

Sharpe said he got much more serious, which didn’t help when the Hokies started believing they HAD to win or the sky would fall. “I had a player come to me in my office,” he said, “and say something that took a lot of courage for him. He said, ‘Coach Sharpe, when’s the last time you talked to us about having FUN?’ He was right.

“I talked to the players at a meeting, spoke straight from the heart, and I think we had a much better spirit the rest of the year.”

Sharpe faces a major rebuilding project for next season. The Hokies had seven seniors on their starting offensive unit, including the two backs — Paul Adams and George Heath — whose blocking made it possible for Roscoe Coles to gain record yardage. In addition, Sharpe must find replacements for four of his five starting down linemen on the defensive unit.

There’s going to be a recruiting hard-sell coming out of Blacksburg in the next two months.