Tech Field Hockey Opener Important

By JIM McDONALD
Sports Writer

The Virginia Tech women's field hockey team, trying to extend an 11-game unbeaten string, opens its season tomorrow against Averett College at home.

Coach Jo Kafer is placing a great deal of importance on the opener. Averett is not one of the stronger teams on Tech's schedule, but according to the coach, if Tech is to have the kind of season it's hoping for, an opening game win is "imperative."

"Last year we lost our first three games because we were in such poor physical condition at the start of the season," Kafer said. "This year we started practice three weeks earlier and expect to be in much better shape than we were at the first of the last season."

Another plus is that Tech has nine of 11 starters back from last year's 8-3-3 squad.

The returnees are: last year's leading scorer, senior Judy Nicklas, senior Cheryl Weston, sophomore Peggy Wells, and sophomore Sarah Malbon on the front line; junior Theo Bertola (this year's captain), and sophomore Laurel Carter at rover; sophomore Starr Downing, who made all region last season, and sophomore Cindy Christ at thruster; and junior Carole Zerbe handles the sweeping slot.

The only positions manned by new faces are goalie and left thruster. Linda Knight has taken over the goalie spot from Debbie Sherber, and Joyce Griffen and Nancy Loizeaux are battling for the starting nod at left thruster.

Kafer expects the team to improve considerably as the season progresses. Because of a stronger schedule Tech must come out tougher.

The University of North Carolina is a powerful new addition to the slate, while Bridgewater, Roanoke and the University of Virginia are threeoughies remaining from last season.

Tech is building an intense rivalry with UVA and Bridgewater. Last year, UVA won the state title and Bridgewater finished second. Kafer feels the contests with these two schools will be the most crucial Tech will play.

"For us to win the state I can say for sure that we will have to beat Bridgewater and Virginia," Kafer said.

Tech plays in the Blue Ridge Field Hockey Association of which Kafer is president. Other teams in the league are UVA, Averett, Eastern Mennonite, also expected to be tough, Hollins, Lynchburg and Bridgewater.

TECH'S LEADING SCORER
Judy Nicklas Always Hangs Near Ball

Tech is strongest and deepest on defense where it puts the most emphasis, but has depth and ability throughout the playing field.

"If the players continue to develop the way they have thus far, I think our chances to win the region are very good," Kafer said. "As a coach I have to be careful not to let them peak too soon."

Some top newcomers who might be heard from as the season develops include freshman front liners Jana Puffenberger and Tammy Taylor and freshman thruster Gretchen Wilder.

Beginning her third year as coach, Kafer said, "It's going to be a busy season. I'm looking forward to it. The university will be proud of these players this year."