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Sports Writer

Of the 122 football players who reported to Coach Bill Dooley last Saturday for the beginning of Virginia Tech practice, between 50 and 55 are on full football scholarships, which means that approximately another 30 or so athletes are seeking to enter the Tech program as walk-ons.

The Virginia Tech football guide lists just three former walk-ons who, after having earned scholarships, could possibly see action for the Hokies this coming fall.

Among that large group of nearly 30 walk-on candidates is Bob Hill, a 1977 graduate of Blacksburg High School who started on the offensive line and wrestled for the Indians.

Among the distinctions Hill earned in his senior year were a position on the All-Big River District offensive-first team and a second place finish at heavyweight in the Region IV wrestling tournament.

On picture day for the Tech squad last Saturday, the veterinary science major discussed his difficulties and pleasures in attempting to develop enough as a player to fit the needs of Dooley’s staff.

One certainly wonders what would make non-scholarship athletes want to expend so much effort on a proposition in which the odds are so great against success.

The attempt is just the natural thing to do, Hill explains. “You just gotta love the game. For me, with fall coming it just didn’t seem right not getting out there with the team and butting heads.”

As with most pursuits, the 240 lb. defensive tackle found the most difficult aspect to simply be getting started.

“At first I felt like a real outsider, and I knew that I had to get to know the other players so that I could play with them. But everybody turned out to be real friendly and I got along just fine.”

While Hill has set his own goals — “to get a scholarship; keep improving and make myself a better ball player” — the coaching staff has established some weightlifting and running.

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ning performance requirements that demanded a regular summer workout.

Last year as a freshman, Hill won a starting spot in two games for the Tech Jayvees and played regularly in the novice team’s other contests, but in spring he was moved to the defensive line as a tackle.

After always having played as an offensive lineman, Hill was understandably concerned about adapting to the new position, but said he has enjoyed the switch.

“I always thought I was stronger at offense,” he explained, “but I love defense a lot better. On offense, I’m a lot freer, I can turn loose more than on the offensive line. In my new spot I can’t listen to the snap count as I did on offense.

“There are some adjustments; I can’t act. I must react. Defense requires that I have to be more alert which means using my eyes more. As an offensive lineman, I could rely on my ears more.”

Although Hill hasn’t yet dressed for a varsity game, he has moved into Hillcrest, the Tech athletic dorm, and speaks optimistically about the possibilities of an athletic scholarship.

“My coaches,” he said, “talked like a scholarship could possibly be a reality.”

Failure hasn’t been considered by the tackle, who also desires to become a veterinarian. He said that he should probably know by either next fall or spring whether or not he will receive playing time and a scholarship. Hill added that he hasn’t given any thought to being red-shirted.

Bruce Bolling, an assistant academic counselor for the Cobblers, stated, however, that “most walk-ons don’t earn scholarships until their junior or senior year, which constitutes they be red-shirted to allow them to develop.”

Bolling also added that “as a rule walk-ons don't really help the squad.” Nevertheless, the Tech coaches do allow members of the student body to attempt to make the team, and their reasoning is obvious. Two players on their depth charts — split end Mike Keeny and nose guard Mike Borden — are walk-ons who have beaten out scholarship players.

As Bob Hill will tell you, “you never know until you try.”