

inside

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HOKIESPORTS

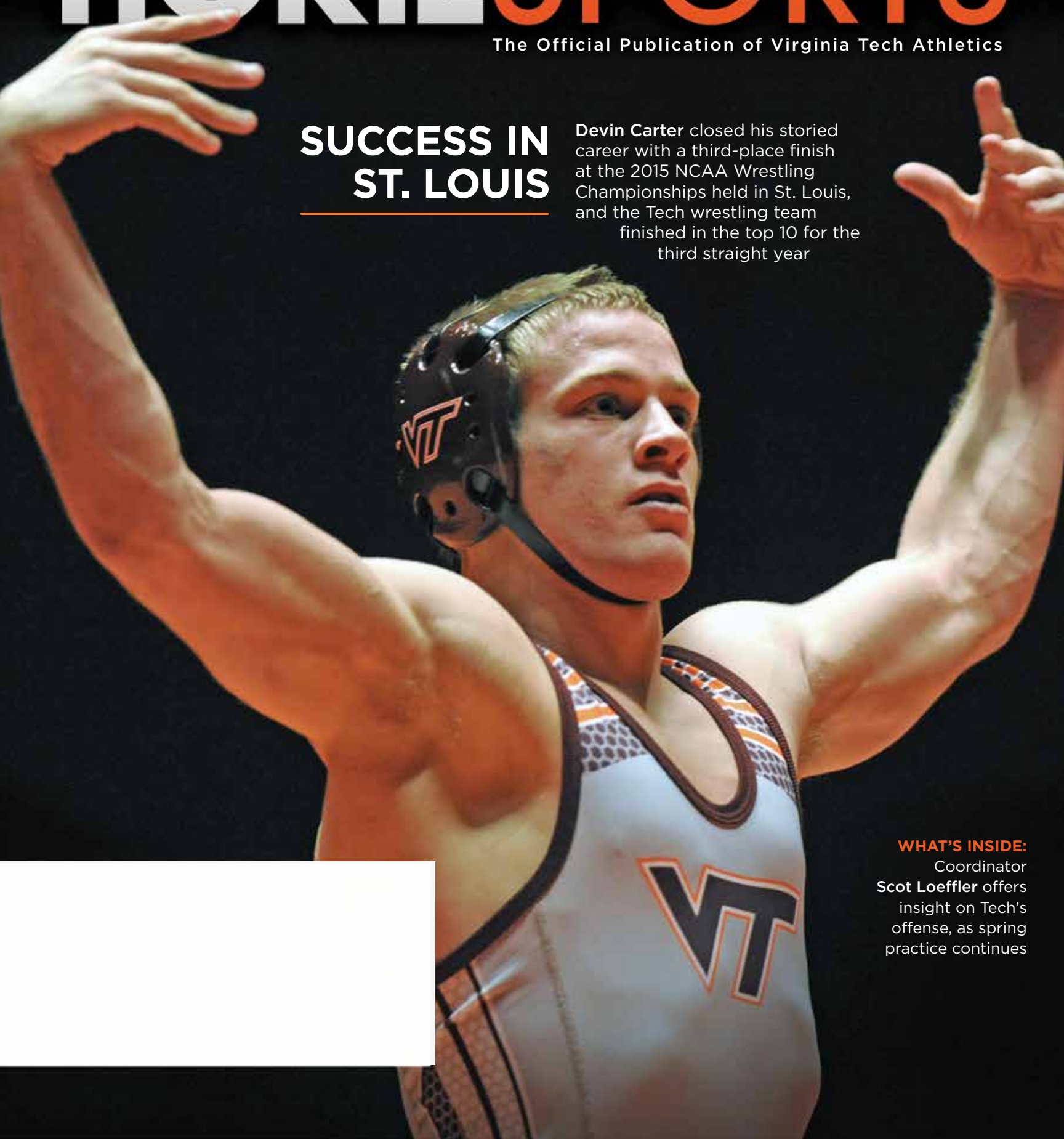
The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics

SUCCESS IN ST. LOUIS

Devin Carter closed his storied career with a third-place finish at the 2015 NCAA Wrestling Championships held in St. Louis, and the Tech wrestling team finished in the top 10 for the third straight year

WHAT'S INSIDE:

Coordinator
Scot Loeffler offers
insight on Tech's
offense, as spring
practice continues



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April 2015 • Vol. 7, No. 9

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Jimmy Robertson
Editor

Marc Mullen
Editorial Assistant

Bill Roth
Columnist

Dave Knachel
Photographer

John Sours
Designer

Contributors

Terry Bolt - Hokie Club
Chris Saccoccia - IMG

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TECH MEN'S TENNIS

DELIVERS HOKIE HIGH

The Virginia Tech men's tennis team recorded its best win since joining the ACC when the Hokies stunned then-No. 2 Duke 6-1 on March 8 at the Burrows-Burleson Tennis Center. Tech lost the doubles point, but came back to win all six singles matches.

"This was a great win for our program," head coach Jim Thompson said. "We were down a player in singles [Amerigo Contini was injured], and for the guys to come in here and step up really shows our depth. I'm proud of this team and the work that these guys put in every day to be the best they can be."

Tech started the season by winning 14 of its first 16 matches at press time, including a 6-1 mark in league competition. The Hokies have seven wins over ranked teams.

MEN'S TENNIS

"I think scholarships give an amazing experience as a human and as an athlete. Even though costs can be high in order to get such a level of education, receiving a scholarship gives us this opportunity. Also, it brings a possibility to meet and play with all kinds of student-athletes with different backgrounds and really high levels of performance. Indeed, our team would probably not be at such national ranking without scholarships, with players from all over the globe. The help of the Hokie Club also brings an incredible personal experience. As I said, meeting all these nationalities broaden my view of the world, and I wouldn't have had that anywhere else."

Florian Nicoud
Senior | St. Marcellin, France

"I don't think I could be more appreciative of people who donate. We have a bunch of donors who come to our matches, and the reason they come is because they love learning about us. We interact with them, and without them, a lot of us wouldn't be here. It's not possible without them, and we couldn't be more appreciative of them."

Hunter Koontz
Senior | Richmond, Virginia





The Donor File



Bijan Peters

STUDENT HOKIE CLUB ROLE:
Leadership Council Member

CURRENTLY RESIDES:
Vienna, Virginia

GRADUATION YEAR:
May, 2015

FAMILY:
Bret (father); Roshi (mother);
Arjan (brother); Azita (sister)

Q&A

Q: What's a Hokie?
A: I am.

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because ...
A: It has global reach. I had the opportunity to study abroad in Lugano, Switzerland during the spring semester of 2014. While abroad, I traveled to 30 cities in 11 countries in Europe. In almost every country, I met other Hokies. There's a special bond among the members of the Hokie Nation. We're a very tight-knit community.

Q: What is your best memory of Virginia Tech athletics?

A: My favorite memory of Virginia Tech athletics is the Virginia Tech vs. Georgia Tech game on Labor Day, Monday, Sept. 3, 2012. The Hokies were ranked 16th in the nation for the season opener. A heavy storm was traveling up the East Coast and was expected to hit Blacksburg just in time for kickoff at Lane Stadium. Virtually every fan in Lane Stadium was wearing Virginia Tech Student Government Association (SGA) "Orange Effect" shirts. The game was my first as SGA Director of the Hokie Effect Program, and seeing the stadium filled with Orange Effect shirts gave me chills. Even the Marching Virginians opted to wear Orange Effect shirts, as the impending storm would have made it impossible for them to wear their uniforms at the next home game five days later. By some miracle, the storm bypassed Blacksburg, and the rumors of a potential

evacuation of Lane Stadium were put to rest. Metallica's "Enter Sandman" blasted from the speakers, and on cue, the Hokie faithful started jumping. Little did these fans know they were about to witness the first ever overtime game at Lane Stadium. As the game-winning field goal crossed through the uprights, the Skipper cannon fired, validating the slogan of the Orange Effect shirt "The Sweet Sound of Victory." Virginia Tech prevailed 20-17.

Q: What is your favorite Virginia Tech athletics tradition?

A: The football team's entrance through the tunnel is one of the greatest traditions in all of sports. Each coach and student-athlete touches the Hokie Stone that reads, "For those who have passed, for those to come, reach for excellence" before they run onto the field during "Enter Sandman." I was able to experience the walk through the tunnel firsthand after I won the "Coach 'em Up" video contest hosted by the athletics marketing department. I was invited to join the team on the field for warm-ups prior to the Virginia Tech vs. Marshall game on Sept. 21, 2013. I then met Coach Shane Beamer outside the locker room prior to the team's march. He advised me not to trip as I prepared to lead the team out of the tunnel with his father, head coach Frank Beamer. The legendary Frank Beamer then appeared from the locker room after giving his pregame speech to the team. After a brief

introduction, I walked alongside Coach Beamer into the tunnel and waited at the entrance with the team behind me ready for action as "Enter Sandman" blared. The tunnel was lined with cameramen, and the Corps of Cadets and cheerleaders were jumping on the field ahead of me along with 66,000 fans in the stands. When I got the signal, I reached up, touched the Hokie Stone and sprinted onto the field. Behind me, the captains carried the flags and the rest of the team followed. Despite intense weather conditions, the Hokies went on to win the game 29-21 in triple overtime.

Q: How did you get involved with the Student Hokie Club?

A: My role as Student Government Association (SGA) Hokie Effect Director led to my appointment as Undergraduate Representative to the University Athletic Committee (UAC) by President [Charles] Steger in 2012. I'm now in my third and final year on the committee. Another member of the UAC, Robena Hughes, introduced me to the Student Hokie Club. Her son, Scott Hughes, played football at Virginia Tech and spearheaded the creation of the Student Hokie Club. Since then, I've been working closely with Scott to help establish the program. While I will be graduating in May, I am invested in the success of the Student Hokie Club, as it will benefit future Virginia Tech students, including my younger brother, Arjan, who will be a freshman in the fall.



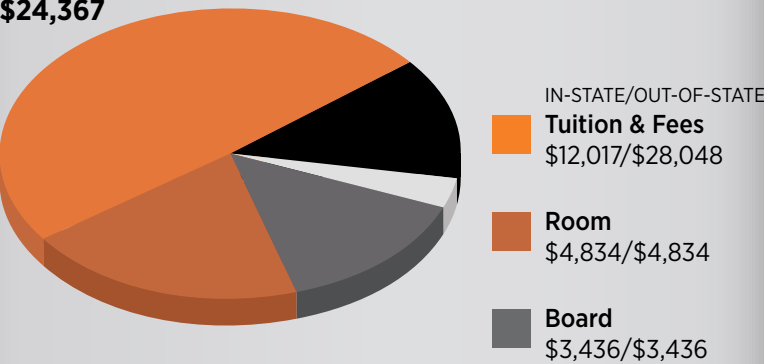
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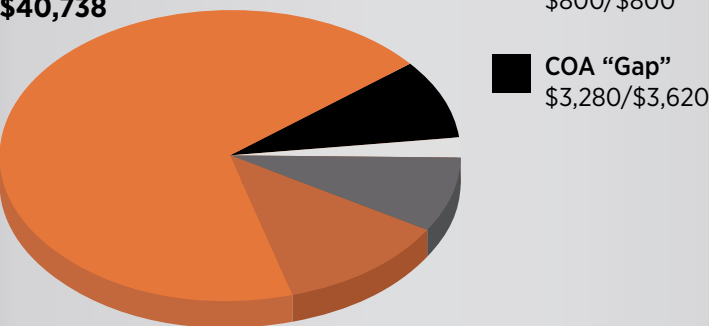
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For more than 40 years, the maximum allowable NCAA Division I athletics scholarship covered tuition, fees, room, board, and books but not the incidental, personal costs of attending college. Beginning August 1, 2015, that will change.

In January, the NCAA passed legislation allowing institutions to pay a student-athlete's full cost of attendance (COA), essentially covering the scholarship "gap." These scholarship enhancements (of \$3,280 for in-state and \$3,620 for out-of-state at Virginia Tech) will increase Tech's total scholarship bill by approximately \$950,000, to approximately \$12.9 million annually.

A student's cost of attendance is an estimate of expenses designed to represent his/her projected

actual cost to attend a specific college or university. Each school's financial aid office determines COA, using broad federal guidelines originating from the Higher Education Act of 1965. The cost of attendance number serves as a maximum, and comprises only those expenses that are directly related to college attendance. Typical items include tuition, fees, room, board, books, and now, miscellaneous personal expenses, transportation home, etc.

The Virginia Tech Student-Athlete Pylons of Promise sets forth our commitment to student-athletes during their time at Virginia Tech and beyond. Further detailed information may be found on the Pylons website at www.hokiesports.com/pylons

Former Tech president Torgersen passes away

Former Virginia Tech president Dr. Paul Torgersen passed away on March 29 at the age of 83. He taught engineering courses at Virginia Tech in some capacity for more than 40 years and served as the president from 1993-2000. Dr. Torgersen was a fixture at Tech sporting events during his time as president, preferring to walk along the sidelines at football games to be closer to the action and to soak in the sounds permeating throughout Lane Stadium. The beginning of Torgersen’s tenure at Tech coincided with the start of the Hokies’ current bowl streak, one which now spans 22 straight seasons. He confronted athletics issues head on during his time, overseeing the school’s departure from the Metro Conference in 1995 and then hiring Jim Weaver as the athletics director in 1997 after Dave Braine left to become the AD at Georgia Tech. Torgersen and Weaver were instrumental in keeping head football coach Frank Beamer in Blacksburg, and Torgersen’s approvals enabled Weaver to start an unprecedented upgrading of Tech’s athletics facilities, including multiple expansions to Lane Stadium, the construction of the Merryman Center and renovations to Cassell Coliseum.

Dresser named ACC Coach of the Year for third straight time

Virginia Tech wrestling coach Kevin Dresser was named the ACC’s Coach of the Year for the third straight time after guiding the Hokies to an ACC-best 10th-place national finish – their third straight top-10 finish at the NCAA Championships. Tech also won the regular season ACC title with a perfect 5-0 dual match record in the league, but finished third at the ACC Championship.

Torgersen decided to retire as Tech’s president effectively on Jan. 1, 2000, but he delayed his retirement one week because he wanted to be the president during the Hokies’ appearance in the 2000 national championship football game played in the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans on Jan. 4. Even after retiring, Torgersen attended football games and basketball games, and he often stopped by football practice just to keep in touch. “I’ve been honored to get to know Dr. Torgersen and his family since arriving in Blacksburg,” Director of Athletics Whit Babcock said. “His son, James, is a valued member of our staff, and our thoughts and prayers are certainly with him and the family during this time. “I learned quickly about the impact that Dr. Torgersen had on our athletics department, and I’m certainly grateful and respect all that he accomplished. But more importantly, I’ve learned about his impact on people, one that cannot be measured. Fans, coworkers, coaches and former student-athletes speak so highly of him, and he’s someone whose legacy will never be forgotten.” Dresser became the first coach to win three straight ACC Wrestling Coach of the Year honors since North Carolina’s Bill Lam won four straight from 1997-2000. “I am honored to be recognized by my peers to receive this award again, especially in a year when the ACC made big strides as a conference,” Dresser said. “It takes a lot of great people to make a great program, and that is our goal each year.

Cianelli brings in Coach of the Year honors Dave Cianelli oversaw a men’s track and field team that won the ACC indoor title in late February, and he continues to reap the rewards.

Cianelli was named the ACC’s Men’s Indoor Coach of the Year roughly three weeks after his Hokies ran, jumped and vaulted their way past Florida State to claim the crown at the league indoor meet held at Rector Field House. The title marked the ninth by his programs since the school joined the league, including five by the men (three indoor, one outdoor, one cross country). Cianelli also received the United States Track and Field and Cross Country Coaches Association’s (USTFCCCA) Southeast Region Men’s Indoor Coach of the Year award. It marked the 13th time that he has received the regional honor. Tech’s Manuel Ziegler won the ACC Men’s Indoor Field Performer of the Year honor after winning the ACC title in the triple jump, setting a conference record with a leap of 54 feet, 6 inches. He topped a record that had stood since 1998. Assistant coach Ben Thomas was named the USTFCCCA Southeast Region Men’s Assistant Coach of the Year, and Thomas Curtin was named the USTFCCCA Southeast Region Men’s Indoor Athlete of the Year. Thomas’ middle distance runners accounted for three ACC individual championships, and Curtin, a redshirt junior from Leesburg, Virginia, won the 3,000-meter race. Thomas received the honor for the second time in his career.

I feel it is only fitting to share this award throughout the department and especially with my immediate staff. Coaches [Tony] Robie, [David] Hoffman, [Jeremy] Johnson, and our trainer, Sean Collins, deserve to share this award. “Lastly, I want to thank the athletes on this team. They are overachievers. The future is very bright at Virginia Tech.”

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editor's desk | by Jimmy Robertson

Loeffler optimistic about direction offense is headed

Roughly a week before spring practice started, Scot Loeffler possessed the look of a man who hadn't slept a lot recently. The circles under his eyes and a chin that hadn't visited with a razor for a day or two said as much.

The other assistants might joke that this is Loeffler's standard look, but the man who oversees Virginia Tech's offense certainly deserves credit for his work ethic. Not many offensive coordinators grind away in mid-March, five months before the season kicks off.

But Loeffler understands the importance of the 2015 campaign, his third in Blacksburg, and also to his credit, he will tell you as much. After two years of watching his offenses toil in inconsistency, he expressed confidence that the Hokies are on the verge of being able to win with offense for the first time in a while.

"All the pieces and all the things we think it takes to play good championship football next year are in place, in my opinion," he said.

Tech fans may scoff at that statement, and for sure, the Hokies struggled offensively the past two years. Loeffler readily admits that.

In fairness, he inherited a difficult situation. In 2013, the Hokies returned a terrific quarterback in Logan Thomas, but little in the way of proven talent. Then this past season, Tech featured some good, young skill players and a few solid offensive linemen, but the quarterback was new, and injuries ultimately decimated the group.

Still, they were close. The Hokies lost to Georgia Tech by seven, Pittsburgh by five and Wake Forest by three – all games in which the offense played poorly.

So what went wrong?

"When you watch it, it's turnovers," Loeffler said. "It's penalties. It's perimeter blocking – our perimeter blocking was atrocious. We lost so much hidden yardage through poor perimeter blocking. We've got to play better up front, and the quarterback has to play better."

Tech went minus-3 in turnover margin in the three above-mentioned losses. Looking back, the numbers overall weren't pretty. Tech ranked 12th in the ACC in scoring offense (24.1 ppg), 12th in total offense (365 ypg) and 12th in pass efficiency (118.7 rating).

But the turnovers and sacks really contributed to the Hokies' struggles. Starting quarterback Michael Brewer threw 15 interceptions, the fourth-most in the ACC. Tech's 26 turnovers were the second-most in

the league, and the 34 sacks allowed were the third-most.

"If we improve in the area of turnovers and improve in the area of sacks, which I think we will, and reduce the negative plays ... it's amazing how many times we'd move the football and then have a negative play," Loeffler said. "So our youth and all the things that go into non-championship football, if we eliminate those, we should have a productive offensive, as productive as we've been."

Loeffler admitted that the quarterback position needed to play better. He insisted the competition is open this spring. Brewer and Brenden Motley opened spring practice at the top of the depth chart, but only because "you've got to walk in with some type of pecking order."

He also wants to see depth emerge at the receiver spots. Willie Byrn departed, and Isaiah Ford and Cam Phillips played too much as true freshmen this past season – Ford played nearly 900 plays and Phillips more than 700. Can someone emerge? Demitri Knowles? Jaylen Bradshaw?

"One of the biggest tragedies of last year was that Isaiah Ford played almost 80 some plays a game," Loeffler said. "That should never happen here. That's ridiculous. I'm complaining about perimeter blocking, but when we're not spelling those guys, a true freshman that is 18 years old and out there for 80 plays ... that's just ridiculous. Some guys in that receiver room need to step up, be accountable and play."

If a quarterback emerges and some backups provide quality depth, then there is the potential for what could be a good offense. Some express worries over the offensive line, but the starting five looks fairly solid. The Hokies return some big-time skill talent in J.C. Coleman, Trey Edmunds, Bucky Hodges, Ryan Malleck, Ford and Phillips. Marshawn Williams' return would add icing to the cake. Travon McMillian shows lots of promise.

There certainly are worse situations to be in at this point.

Loeffler has been in those situations for the past two years. They kept him up at night, as he used every hour searching for answers.

He may have most of them now. We'll find out this fall. If those circles under his eyes disappear, then we'll know.

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“Dr. T” was more than a university president – he was a friend to us all

If you’re an alumnus, student, constituent or just a Virginia Tech fan, there’s probably a place on the Blacksburg campus that feels like “home” to you.

Maybe it’s your freshman year dorm, or a classroom where you felt a special connection to your instructor. Maybe it’s the Duck Pond or the Drillfield, or your seat at Lane Stadium. Whenever you’re there, like a comfortable chair, it just feels like “home.”

For Paul Torgersen, who passed at age 83 on March 29, there were many such places on Virginia Tech’s 126-acre campus. After serving 20 years as dean of Virginia Tech’s College of Engineering and eight years as the university’s president, he visited and made an impact on nearly every place on this campus.

Even moving up the academic ladder from instructor to dean to president, he insisted that he continue teaching because he enjoyed being around the students. Theory of Organization – that was his class, and anyone who took it loved and admired his style in front of a room filled with students.

Comfy in the big chair at Burruss Hall, speaking to the Board of Visitors, or talking to a group of students in ISE4004, Paul was in his element.

But perhaps no place felt more at home for Paul – we called him “Dr. T” – than when he was around the Virginia Tech football team, particularly at football practice. During his presidency, he would be a frequent visitor at Tech practices, and in retirement, he’d attend workouts, sitting in a folding chair while watching the Hokies practice. He was never without a witty

comment about a player or coach. Gosh, he loved the Hokies.

He had a beautiful, temperature-controlled private box, but Paul preferred to be on the sidelines watching the game. He wanted to be near the team, standing in the muck on the field.

On Fridays of road trips, Paul and Senior Woman Administrator Sharon McCloskey would engage in a field-goal kicking contest at the visitor’s stadium. That was until one day Torgersen unveiled a flat-toed boot to help him kick. “Unfair,” shouted the competitive McCloskey. The players, coaches and media always found the humor and irony of the university president kicking field goals (or at least attempting them) at the end of a road workout refreshing.

During the 1990’s, Torgersen would play weekly handball games in Cassell with former trainer Eddie Ferrell (now deceased) and members of the faculty. At the end of the 1995 season, Ferrell’s team won what Paul claimed was a “highly disputed” championship of their friendly series. That didn’t stop John Ballein, Tech’s current associate AD for football operations, from having a trophy presented to Ferrell and put on display at the team’s Sugar Bowl hospitality room in New Orleans. After a few days, however, the trophy was gone.

“Paul, where is Eddie’s trophy?” someone asked.

“Check the river,” Paul responded with a chuckle.

The president, evidently, had tossed the disputed trophy into the mighty Mississippi.

Paul had that tremendous quick wit and was

known for his self-deprecating humor. He would always offer a quick word to create a chuckle, whether he was meeting with a group of students or the Board of Visitors. He had that knack.

Also, as president, he could park pretty much anywhere he wanted – and usually did. “Presidential Privilege!” he would shout at me as he angled his car between two dumpsters behind Cassell so he could race in to his treadmill to get in a workout.

The white BMW with the vanity plate “TENNIS 1” was always near Cassell. Paul, a varsity tennis player at Lehigh, used the treadmills at Cassell to stay in shape. But a little known fact: in the back of the car was a cooler ... with a single beer. Just one. That single beer was Paul’s motivation, one that would always serve as his post-workout reward.

Here’s another story that probably could be told now. In November of 2000, Tech football coach Frank Beamer met with officials at North Carolina on a Sunday afternoon and was very close to taking the Tar Heels’ head coaching position. The following Monday morning, Beamer arrived at the football offices in Blacksburg, where fans were waiting for him outside of the Merryman Center holding signs that said, “Frank, Don’t go!” and “Honk if you want Coach Beamer to stay!” At the same time, Paul Torgersen was on his treadmill in Cassell getting in a workout. When he finished, Paul exited Cassell, pulled a U-turn and quickly walked back into the building.

Many assumed that Paul went back inside to meet with Beamer. After all, within minutes, Beamer announced he was staying at Tech.



Dr. Paul Torgersen (middle) loved athletics and never missed an opportunity to stop in and say hello to Bill Roth (left) and Mike Burnop, Tech’s radio broadcasting team, before football radio broadcasts.

The truth of the story: “I left my watch on the treadmill,” Paul told me later. “I just went back inside to get my watch.” That’s all that ever happened that day.

Since then, you’d see him behind the batting cage at softball practice, or sitting in his wheelchair at a Tech men’s or women’s basketball game. He loved being around student-athletes and cheering for his Hokies.

Personally, I’ll miss his visits to the radio booth. Every game, home or away, Paul would swing by the radio booth before each game to say hello to Mike Burnop and me and shake hands with our entire staff. Even in retirement, “Dr. T” would make it to the booth, as he did this past season.

I’ve grown close to his son, James, who is the facilities director at Cassell, and grandson Paul through our Sigma Chi connections. They’re wonderful people and a true Hokie family. Each is incredibly smart, overwhelmingly warm and equally quick-witted.

From Ballein: “One other story that showed Dr. T’s wit was all the times he borrowed my truck. I told him he needed to get his own old pick-up. He said that’s not as important as *knowing someone with an old pick-up.*”

Each year, at the end of spring and fall practice, Virginia Tech football hands out its annual Paul Torgersen Award. It goes to the player who shows a commitment to hard work and great effort every time he takes the field. Marshawn Williams, Blake DeChristopher and John Graves have been among the many winners, all of whom are high-class kids and super successful. That award will take on even greater significance today


(this year’s honoree will be named on April 25 at halftime of the Maroon-Orange Spring Game).

This man’s contributions to this campus and the history of Virginia Tech can’t be capsulized in a single story. The academic advancement under his leadership was unprecedented. The facilities on both the academic and athletics side exploded under his watch. The rankings, particularly in engineering, skyrocketed during his tenure.

But more than anything was his impact on people and his ability to communicate. That cerebral, quick wit will sure be missed.

And for generations of Hokies – kids who are here now and will be on campus in decades to come – please remember that Torgersen is not just the name of a bridge on campus. It’s not just the name of a hall with classrooms and labs.

It’s named in honor of a man whose impact goes far beyond Hokie stone and mortar. Burruss, Hahn, McComas, Pamplin, Lavery, Lane, Cassell, Merryman and now Torgersen ... they’re all great buildings, and each was a great man who helped shaped the course of the school and Tech athletics.

But the next time you walk across the Torgersen Bridge or sit down in Torgersen Hall, make sure you feel comfortable ... and feel like you’re at home. Because Paul certainly would. 



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Keeping up *with* Compliance

The compliance corner answers questions concerning the governance of intercollegiate athletics and its impact on our athletics department. Have a question? Please send it to inside@hokiesports.com and we'll answer it in upcoming issues. Now, here are a couple of questions that we've received from Tech alums and fans over the past few months, with responses from Tim Parker, Senior Associate AD for Compliance & Governance:

Nice of the NCAA to smack LSU, even though the school followed the rules to a T. I thought that penalty was a little extreme. Thoughts? Thanks, Tom in Christiansburg.

TP: “This question is in reference to LSU being banned by the NCAA from signing early enrollees (prospects planning to enroll in January, rather than June/July/August) to financial aid agreements. The football program lost 10 percent of its evaluation days for the current year and cannot sign early enrollees to financial aid agreements for the next two years. They also may lose a scholarship.

“By way of background, a school is permitted to sign a prospect who plans to enroll early to a financial aid agreement, and that gives the school unlimited contact with the prospect. However, it also subjects the school to retroactive penalties if the prospect does not eventually enroll in January or sign a national letter-of-intent since the school’s coaches have been contacting him outside the normal recruiting timeframe.

“In LSU’s case, a prospect signed a financial aid agreement with LSU, did not enroll in January, and instead signed a national letter-of-intent with Alabama on the initial NLI signing day (Feb. 4). Due to this, LSU was penalized for having contact with him outside of the normal access periods.

“So there is an inherent risk in signing a potential early enrollee to a financial aid agreement and reaping the benefits of unlimited

contact. Coaches must balance that risk. I do think this is something that will receive scrutiny by the NCAA membership in the future.”

Q: From past questions, I’ve come to learn that student-athletes are limited to 20 hours per week of training (with a maximum of four hours per day), which includes practices, weightlifting, conditioning and watching film. But I was wondering if this also included the actual games themselves. Thanks for your time! Michelle in Christiansburg.

TP: “Great question. Actually, games ARE included as part of what the NCAA terms as ‘Countable Athletically-Related Activities.’ NCAA regulations count any competition as three hours, regardless of how long the competition actually lasts. So, for example, if a basketball team plays two games in a week, then that would be six hours that would count toward the 20-hour maximum limit. Also, keep in mind that the 20 hours comes into play while a sport is “in” season. More restrictive rules apply when a sport is not in season.

“Most people know that the 20-hour limit includes required activities such as practices, weightlifting, conditioning and watching film. But it also includes – among other things – any shootarounds before the game (e.g. in hoops) and walk-throughs (e.g. in football), as well as individual meetings with one or more coaches


that are initiated by a coach.

“Some things that do **not** count towards the 20-hour limit include study halls, academic meetings, voluntary training or sports-related activities (without a coach present), medical treatment or rehab, compliance meetings and team meals.”

Q: What are the rules as they relate to football spring practice? They can’t go in full pads every day, right? Thanks, Anne in Pembroke.

TP: “Yes, that is correct. NCAA rules spell out exactly how football programs must conduct the 15 allotted spring practices. Of those 15, 12 may involve contact, but the contact cannot occur before the third practice session. The only protective equipment permitted during the non-contact practice sessions is a helmet. Also, tackling is prohibited in four of those 12 contact sessions.

“Spring practices can occur at any time during the winter/spring, but those 15 practices have to occur within a period of 29 consecutive calendar days.

“Another rule to keep in mind – a program may only have three 11-on-11 scrimmages during the spring. The spring game counts as one of those three, though spring games are optional. Some schools just have a regular scrimmage as opposed to a spring game.” 

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MICHELLE PRONG

SOFTBALL
Victor, New York
by Jimmy Robertson

Michelle Prong starts for the Tech softball team and ranks as one of the team leaders in batting and home runs. She also excels off the field. She graduated from Stanford with a degree in human biology in December of 2012 and is slated to graduate from Tech later this spring with a master's in public health. She plans on getting into coaching after she graduates.

Q: You graduated from Stanford with a degree in human biology. What led you to pursue biology?

MP: "I went in thinking that I wanted to major in history. I really loved history in high school, and I got into the classes that I was taking. I think it became something that I really liked to learn about rather than a scholarly interest. The summer after my freshman year, my mom and I sat down and talked, and she said, 'This human biology thing looks really cool,' and I said, 'Yeah!' The major itself is really interdisciplinary. You get to design your own concentration within the major, which I thought was cool. It was flexible and applicable to a wide range of situations and topics, and biology was something that I was good at, so that helps. Once I got into it, I got the feeling that it was the right thing for me."

Q: You graduated from Stanford in three and a half years and transferred to Tech to play softball and pursue a master's degree. What led you to pursue a master's in public health here at Tech?

MP: "I had taken some classes in my human biology major just out of interest. The first one was community health psychology, and I was just like, 'Whoa.' It just opened all the doors to public health. I had never even thought of the field before as a potential career. My professor had her MPH [master's in public health], and she was encouraging. I really liked her. After I took that class, I seriously considered getting my MPH. I had never thought about health on a more macro scale."


Q: You've done a lot of internships and field studies related to your major. Tell us about some of them.

MP: "After my sophomore year, I spent the whole summer shadowing a doctor who works in a pediatric ICU [intensive care unit]. I spent the following summer volunteering at a physical therapy clinic in New York City, and they worked with some Yankees players who came in and got their treatment there, so that was cool. In my final fall at Stanford, I was an assistant coach for an after-school program for kids that are overweight or obese – it was part of a study being done by a professor that was an obesity guru – and I was one of the helpers three days a week and encouraged the kids to enjoy sports and teamwork and learning to work hard, so that was an interesting experience. Then I spent last summer at the University of Rochester doing a summer research program, working with a doctor who did a lot of research on pediatric obesity. Right now, I'm in the middle of a practicum with the Virginia Department of Health."

"My experience is a little all over the place, but I think sometimes you have to figure out what you don't want to do before you figure out what you do want to do."

Q: Have you figured out what you want to do?

MP: "No [laughing]. I've gone through these cycles thinking that I wanted to be a healthcare provider in some way. I thought about being a PA [physician's assistant] because my mom was a PA for a long time. I've thought about doing PT [physical therapy] and came around to that. Then I was in the medical school phase, but the day came when I had to sign up for the MCAT [medical college admission test], and I thought, 'I don't know if I really want to do this.' So I didn't sign up."

"What I'm on right now is softball coaching. My short-term plan is to hopefully get some sort of graduate assistant position or some sort of coaching position. I think a lot of knowledge that I've gained from my public health degree will be applicable to coaching. There are two tracks offered in public health, and I'm in the public health education track. I think the stuff that we've learned from how people behave and respond to criticism and information and experts coming in and telling them what to do ... I think a lot of that stuff will be valuable in anything I decide to do." 

A member of the Tech baseball squad, **Kyle Wernicki** has somehow balanced playing baseball and working toward a degree in engineering. Wernicki already has a job lined up when he graduates in May. He will be heading to Northern Virginia to work for Lockheed Martin, a Fortune 500 company.

Q: Why did you decide to major in mechanical engineering?

KW: "I decided to come to Virginia Tech because of the great engineering program and then walked on to the baseball team. I then declared mechanical as my concentration because I've always been interested in how things work. Mechanical is the broadest type of engineering, so I would get exposed to a wider range of material. It would also give me more options upon graduation because I get experience in many engineering fields."

Q: What sparked your interest in engineering?

KW: "I've always enjoyed taking things apart to find out how they work. I also excelled in math and science classes mostly because I was always interested with those topics. For those classes, there's always a definite answer. You are right or wrong – no gray area or interpretations."

Q: Have you done any internships, co-ops, etc., and what did you learn from these experiences?


KW: "I have had a couple internships. The first was with Johnson & Johnson [in Skillman, New Jersey], where I worked as a mentor to a local high school's robotics team. The second was with Frazier Industrial Company [in Long Valley, New Jersey], where I worked as a design estimator. Frazier is a company that designs and builds structural steel pallet racks for warehouses and distribution centers. These experiences helped me realize what career path I wanted to pursue."

"I found the technology and innovation behind the robotics project much more interesting than working with static structures, like I did at Frazier. This led me to pursue the defense industry. The Department of Defense is always trying to improve what they have, trying to make things faster and more powerful, and I want to work on the most innovative technology."

Q: How have you managed to balance playing baseball and studying mechanical engineering?

KW: "It's been tough managing to major in mechanical engineering and playing baseball. I redshirted my freshman year, which helped me slow down the course load since I knew I had five years. Baseball actually helped me a little because I couldn't procrastinate. I didn't have much free time around class, practice, games and lifting, so whatever free time I did have, I had to spend on getting my class work done. I only have five credits this semester to graduate, so it's a nice last semester. In the long run, it will all be worth it."

Q: What are your future plans, both in the short term and long term?

KW: "I have accepted a job at Lockheed Martin in Northern Virginia after graduation. I will be working on cyber security. As for the more distant future, I have been advised to gain as much experience as I can early in my career. A large company like Lockheed Martin provides many different opportunities, and I intend to explore several of them so that I can see what job suits me best." 

KYLE WERNICKI

BASEBALL
Skillman, New Jersey
by Jimmy Robertson

TECH

OFFENSE

**EXPECTING HUGE IMPROVEMENT
IN YEAR 3 UNDER LOEFFLER**

*Offensive coordinator
Scot Loeffler has a lot of personnel
back and wants to see significant
jumps in production this spring*

by Jimmy Robertson

Virginia Tech's offense struggled at times a year ago. At times, the Hokies moved the ball well, but penalties, sacks and turnovers affected overall point production. With eight starters back, coordinator Scot Loeffler is optimistic about the direction of the offense. He took some time to answer a few questions about the offense, as spring practice continues throughout April.

Q: Before analyzing the offense during spring practice, let's talk about last season. You looked at every single play that was run over the course of 13 games. What went right offensively, and what went wrong?

SL: "Well, in year 1, you knew you had a quarterback [Logan Thomas], and that was it. You were completely lost at who was going to play wideout for you. You had no idea of the running back situation. You had an idea of the line because a few had played the previous year. So you really walked into a complete unknown. Then you set the offense for what you thought you had, and in training camp, we had a massive injury [Ryan Malleck], and we had to wholesale change everything we wanted to do.

"In year 2, we knew that we were going to play a bunch of young football players. We knew that the guys we had recruited were talented and knew that they would be on the field. We expected to play a lot of freshmen. We expected Marshawn [Williams] and Shai [McKenzie] to play, and we expected two of the four receivers to play, maybe three. And we knew that either Mark Leal [who left the team] or Michael Brewer was going to be the quarterback. The Michael Brewer deal, you stuffed a complete year of football into 30 days [in August]. So you walked into the season with youth and a lot of unknowns, and then disaster struck with injuries. I've never been a part of something like that ever. The running back situation was unbelievable. The offensive line situation was incredible. Losing Mark Leal, losing the linemen before the season even started [Brent Benedict and Mark Shuman to injuries] ... it was a domino effect.

"This year, you feel 100 percent confident in who you are. You're not walking into spring

football, thinking, 'I think we can do this. I think we can be this.' We're not walking into training camp guessing who we are. We know where we are with the skill position. Both quarterbacks [Brewer and Brenden Motley] are coming back with a talented incoming freshman [Dwayne Lawson] walking into the door. So you've got a great feel for who you are and what you want to be. There is no figuring out who's good, who's not or who can play. The comfort level is as good as it's been since we walked in the door. That said, we've got a lot to improve upon."

Q: How would you assess Michael Brewer's play last season, and what are you looking at from him the rest of spring practice and during the offseason?

SL: "For coming in and learning for a month, I thought, in the Ohio State game, he played exceptional. You look at the mistakes that happened earlier [in the season], we threw a ridiculous amount of interceptions early in the season. That was the first time he had played in four years, and he was in a new system. Getting that full-speed rep on a particular play, he only had so many of them. The mistakes that occurred were a complete lack of repetition of those plays against those particular defenses. That's not his fault. That's not my fault. That's called you only

Michael Brewer threw for 2,692 yards and 18 touchdowns this past season, but coordinator Scot Loeffler wants to see him reduce the 15 interceptions he threw in 2014.

get so many reps in a practice. It was like starting a true freshman.

"He needs to play better. We watched every single interception and every single sack and every single negative play. The tone has been set. I'm going to put pressure on this guy. He's a senior. I always put pressure on the senior. There are no excuses any more. We've gotten plenty of practice reps, and we've got to play better. We can't say any more that it's practice reps or that it's a new system. It's time to play like a senior quarterback. Period, end. The tone has been set in this office with him. He knows it. He's embracing it. He will come to work and produce much better this spring."

Q: What are your thoughts on Brenden Motley going forward?

SL: "Motley is in the same boat as Brewer. It's the same mentality with him. He's been here long enough. It's time to step up and be a dude. The same pressure I'm putting on Brewer is the same pressure I'm putting on Motley.

If one of these two younger guys [Andrew Ford and Chris Durkin] want to step up and take one of their jobs, then so be it.

"Then the new blood, Dwayne Lawson, will be coming in this fall. Lawson is a very talented player.

He's still raw in that there are things he fundamentally needs to improve on, but he's been coached extremely well. His knowledge of the game is far beyond a senior in high school. I know he's tough and understands the game. It's all about how fast he picks things up to see if he can put himself into a position to compete for a job. It's like with Brewer last year. He's got a month. But he is a very talented player. His best football is ahead of him. He's 210 pounds now and he's going to be a 245-pound guy. He's super athletic, and he can make every throw."

Q: Are you splitting the reps among the quarterbacks throughout spring practice?

SL: "You've got to walk in with some type of pecking order. That pecking order can change daily. Brewer and Motley will get the higher percentage of reps compared to the two young guys, but if Ford or Durkin steps up, then their reps will increase and the others will decrease. It will be a pressure-filled spring for the two older guys, and the two younger guys, I'm going to develop. If one develops faster than planned, then we'll rep him and give him an opportunity to push for the older guys' jobs.

"It's an open competition, but you have to start somewhere. The flame is going to be hot with Brewer and Motley because I have a gut feeling that we have an opportunity to be a good team. If the quarterback position plays better, we'll definitely be a better team. So they're going to step up and start playing better."

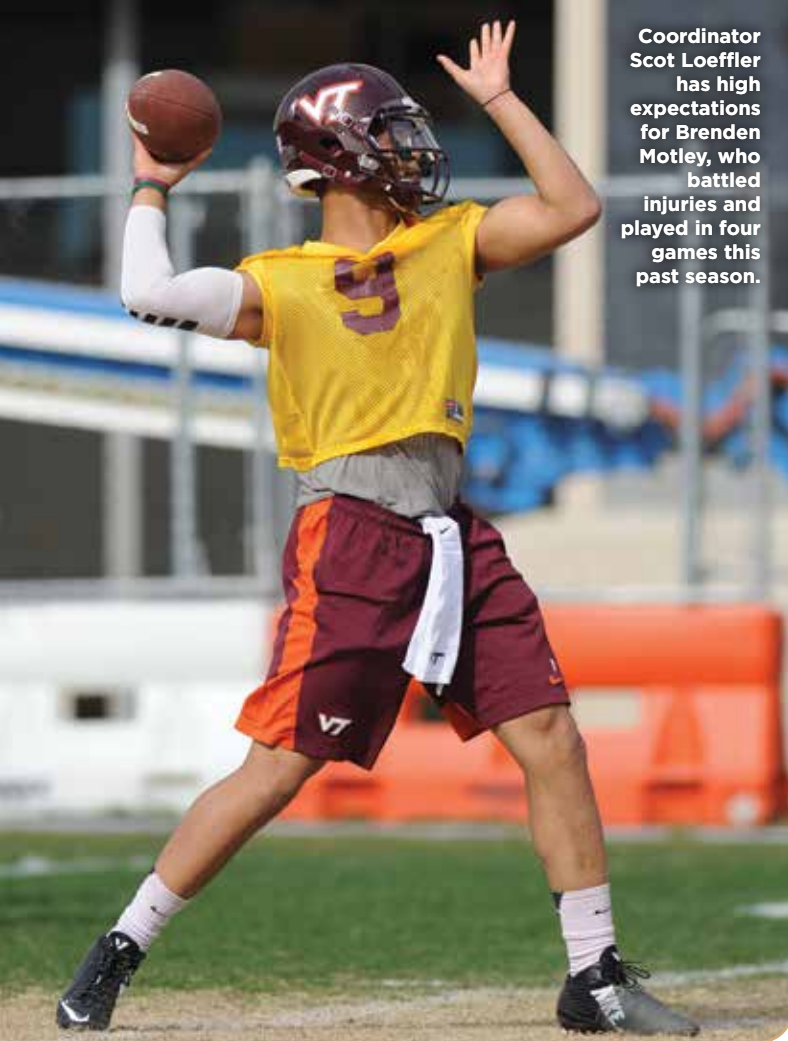
Q: You've said before that you guys gave up too many sacks. What are you seeing from an offensive line that lost veteran guys like David Wang, Caleb Farris and Laurence Gibson?

SL: "Half of the sacks last year, in my opinion, were on the line, and the other half were on the quarterback or the skill guys. A lot of people don't get that a wide receiver not running a route properly or not creating the proper space can cause those sacks. A sack is an offensive negative, but not necessarily an offensive line negative. At times, the offensive line did better at some things than the previous year, but we need to reduce the mistakes. We need to become consistent and play better, just like the quarterback position needs to play better. That's the best way I can explain it. The pieces are in place, in my opinion. We've got an opportunity to play better at that position, and if you play better at that position, you play better at the quarterback position. You reduce turnovers, and if you stay healthy, you've got a chance to be ok.

"Overall, we want to see improvement, and we want to get back to the physical nature that

Continued on page 20





Coordinator Scot Loeffler has high expectations for Brenden Motley, who battled injuries and played in four games this past season.

IHS extra | Q&A with Scot Loeffler—Offensive Coordinator & Quarterbacks Coach *Continued from page 19*

this place has been built on. It's critical how the quarterback goes, and I get that. But every place that I've been that's been a championship team has five guys up front that are running the show. I think with Wyatt [Teller] and Augie [Conte] and Jon McLaughlin, they're tired of the crap we went through the last two years. They're carrying themselves differently, which I 100 percent expected to occur in year 3. A decision has to be made about toughness at those positions, and I think it's been made. They've made the decision that they've heard enough. We've been mediocre at best the past two years, and it's time."

Q: One thing you guys did well toward the end of last year was run the football, especially with J.C. Coleman. He entered spring as the No. 1 tailback, and just give us your thoughts on him.

SL: "J.C. was in a position where he had some talented guys in front of him, and injuries occurred. That guy finds a way to keep coming to work every day and never complain. He could have easily gone in the tank. He could have easily given up. My hat's off to him because I think he, at the end of the year, stepped up in a tough situation. We were beat to hell across the board, and he was able to do some really, really good things in really tough situations."

Q: You return some good receivers, but they will be under the tutelage of a new receivers coach. How has the transition been between you and new receivers coach Zohn Burden?

SL: "It's been great. Aaron [Moorehead] was very easy [the transition] in terms of the terminology he used at Stanford, which was very similar to the terminology I used for 10 years at Michigan. Obviously, we're not completely using that terminology now, but we're a hybrid of it. So communicating with each other and understanding what we were trying to accomplish was very easy. "Zohn has not been a part of that, but conceptually we're on the same page. They're [Burden and Moorehead] very similar. Both are very good recruiters and very good teachers. We're excited to have him. They are different. Aaron was

very outgoing, whereas Zohn is a little more reserved. However, the important traits of being a great teacher and a great coach and a great recruiter, they're very similar. It will be an easy transition."


Q: Who are some of the younger players whom you're keeping an eye on this spring?

SL: "Travon McMillian and D.J. Reid, and also the young wide receiver that we redshirted [Jaylen Bradshaw] and a few others. We know what a lot of our guys can do. We know that Bucky Hodges is going to improve and Cam Phillips is going to improve. Isaiah Ford is the same, and Ryan Malleck is the same. We know what Marshawn is. It's the guys that didn't play last year that we redshirted are the guys we really want to find out if they can help us. We're expecting 100 percent improvement from the young guys that played and then the guys that we redshirted, we're going to see if they can help us."

Q: How do you go about replacing a valuable guy like Willie Byrn? He thrived in that slot receiver/third-down role.

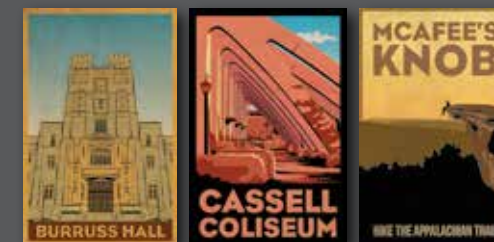
SL: "We've got a couple of different things we're going to try. We've got a couple of different personnel groupings. We know who we have, but we want to try a couple of new personnel groupings to get a different set of people on the field. We're really intrigued to see if some of these young receivers or running backs can give us what Willie gave us last year. Can we move Cam Phillips to that role and move another receiver out to the Z? What can we do? That's probably our only searching at the skill position. Where are we going to place Cam Phillips? Where are we going to place Isaiah? What's Bucky's role truly going to be? In terms of talent, though, we know what we are. For the first time sitting here, it's refreshing to know who you are and what you have."

Q: Will you guys as coaches go anywhere this spring and look at some different things that other coaching staffs are doing?

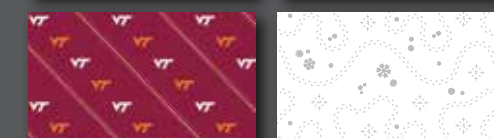
SL: "I don't want to get into details. I normally do that in June. I normally go to three or four places every year. I have a specific agenda. We always do our professional development in May and/or June." 

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J.C. Coleman has been the lead tailback for Tech this spring after rushing for at least 95 yards in each of the Hokies' final four games in 2014.



The Virginia Tech football team took its athletics midterm exams shortly before spring break, and Mike Gentry, who oversees the team’s strength and conditioning testing, didn’t need to look at the grades to determine the overall success of the group this semester.

“We’ve had a tremendous offseason,” Tech’s associate AD for athletic performance said. “We have the ‘it’ factor going for us in that we have

good leadership, and we have enough talent to win. We have good chemistry within the team. When you have that, it usually presents itself in the offseason, and we certainly had that this winter.”

The numbers certainly support Gentry’s claims, as 58 players – more than half the team – earned some type of award following the team’s strength and conditioning testing in

early March. That includes seven who earned Super Iron Hokie status, which takes into account the bench press, power clean, back and/or front squat and the overhead push jerk.

Those seven players are defensive backs Donovan Riley and Chuck Clark, running back Travon McMillian, whip linebacker Ronny Vandyke, kicker Joey Slye, offensive lineman Augie Conte and fullback Johnathan Galante.

In addition, nine others earned Iron Hokie Status, the second-highest level in the Hokies’ tiered levels of achievement. That group includes running backs J.C. Coleman, Trey Edmunds and Jerome Wright, safeties Desmond Frye and Greg Jones, receiver Charley Meyer, rover Adonis Alexander, offensive lineman Wyatt Teller and whip linebacker Mike Wandey.

As expected, Conte enjoyed a tremendous offseason. The redshirt junior from Richmond, Virginia, led the team in the back squat (575 pounds), the power clean (390) and the push jerk (405), and he finished third in the bench press (440).

(For a listing of the top five in each category tested, please see the chart on the previous page.)

Teller, a redshirt sophomore from Bealeton, Virginia, also ranked in the top five in four categories, including the bench press, back squat, power clean and push jerk. Another offensive lineman who enjoyed a solid winter was Alston Smith, whose bench press (405) and push jerk (325) ranked among the top five on the team. Smith and converted tight end Darius Redman were the only offensive linemen to break 5.0 seconds in the 40-yard dash. Smith ran it in 4.99 seconds, while Redman ran it in 4.96.

Receiver Demetri Knowles, a redshirt senior from Freeport, Bahamas, dominated the speed categories, leading the team in the 10-yard and 40-yard dashes. Knowles sprinted the 10-yard dash in 1.6 seconds, and he ran the 40 in 4.37 seconds. He also recorded a 40.5-inch vertical jump.

Two freshmen who enrolled in January also fared rather well – a surprise considering that it takes most freshmen a year or two to get their strength built up enough to challenge for honors. But Alexander, from Charlotte, North Carolina, led the team in the vertical jump (41 inches) and earned Iron honors, and Yosuah Nijman, a defensive end out of Maplewood, New Jersey, by way of Fork Union, had a 550-pound back squat and earned Orange honors. Nijman also had a 36-inch vertical jump and ran the 40 in 4.84 seconds.

The Hokies’ plans for the timing of the 40-yard dash were disrupted by a late-winter snowfall, which forced the postponement of it until after spring practice had started. Workers took down the indoor track at Rector Field House for the Hokies’ annual Pro Day in which those departing work out for NFL scouts. That forced the strength and conditioning staff to test the current players in the 40-yard dash on

the turf at Rector instead of on the track.

Still, the times were good. Five finished with times of better than 4.50 and nine others finished with times better than a 4.60. Those nine included Clark, Dadi Nicolas (4.53), Shawn Payne (4.53), Trey Edmunds (4.54), Terrell Edmunds (4.57), Alexander (4.57), McMillian (4.59), C.J. Reavis (4.59) and Curtis Williams (4.59).

But as Gentry always says, the numbers don’t always tell the story. He and his staff look at attitude and work ethic.

They like what they saw out of this group in those categories.

“A lot of what we do isn’t always measured by how high they jump or how much they lift,” Gentry said. “It’s also about their attitude and work ethic and how they either come together or not.

“What I’ve seen this winter is, collectively, a group of guys that are committed to working hard and have good leadership and seem to like each other, which to me, spells good chemistry. In turn, if you have those things, you usually have better numbers. We had a great offseason, but more importantly, I think those intangibles are happening.” VT



2015 STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING WINTER TESTING RESULTS

BENCH PRESS Luther Maddy (450) Andrew Williams (445) Augie Conte (440) Wyatt Teller (430) Alston Smith (405)	BACK SQUAT Augie Conte (575) Wade Hansen (575) Corey Marshall (575) Wyatt Teller (560) Yosuah Nijman (550)	PUSH JERK Augie Conte (405) Wyatt Teller (400) Josh Eberly (340) Dakota Jackson (340) Alston Smith (325)+	VERTICAL JUMP Adonis Alexander (41) Demetri Knowles (40.5) Terrell Edmunds (39) Curtis Williams (38) Chuck Clark (37.5)
FRONT SQUAT Johnathan Galante (440) Jerome Wright (435) Trey Edmunds (430) J.C. Coleman (420) Travon McMillian (400)*	POWER CLEAN Augie Conte (390) Wyatt Teller (365) Corey Marshall (350) Johnathan Galante (335) Chuck Clark (330)#	10-YARD DASH Demetri Knowles (1.60) J.C. Coleman (1.63) C.J. Reavis (1.63) Kevin Asante (1.64) Deon Newsome (1.64)	40-YARD DASH Demetri Knowles (4.37) Kevin Asante (4.39) Kendall Fuller (4.48) J.C. Coleman (4.48) Greg Stroman (4.48)

(Note: Tiebreakers are determined by the weight of the player. In the lifts, the player who weighs less is considered to have lifted more. In the sprints and vertical jump, the heavier player is considered to have the better result.)

* - Desmond Frye, Donovan Riley and Charley Meyer also recorded front squats of 400 pounds.
- Bucky Hodges, Darius Redman and Alston Smith also recorded power cleans of 330 pounds.
+ - Wade Hansen also recorded a push jerk of 325 pounds.



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INAUGURAL SEASON OVER, WILLIAMS AND HOKIES LOOK AHEAD

*Virginia Tech
suffered a tough
season under first-year
men's basketball coach
Buzz Williams, but returning
young talent and the addition
of newcomers creates optimism
for the future*

by Jimmy Robertson

Roughly 15 minutes following the Hokies' season-ending loss to Miami at the ACC Tournament, Virginia Tech men's basketball coach Buzz Williams walked onto the stage at the Greensboro Coliseum, with Will Johnston and Christian Beyer flanked to his left.

The trio answered eight questions, with Williams getting six of those. Most were innocuous. One stood out, though not so much because of the question itself. It garnered attention because of Williams' response.

He got asked if he felt like he established a culture and built the foundation for the future in his first year in Blacksburg. Most coaches would fire off an immediate "Yes" and then elaborate by saying something along the lines of, "the kids now know what to expect," etc.

Williams, though, pondered the question for a moment.

"I'll have to think about that," he said.

The Hokies finished with 22 losses in Williams' inaugural season – the most losses ever for a

team under him as the head coach. Tech finished in last place in the ACC for the fourth straight year, winning just two conference games. That is not to be critical of Williams. That just serves as a reflection of the situation he inherited when he took the job last spring, one that left him a roster short on depth and talent.

Interestingly enough, Tech fans almost view the 2014-15 season as a success, citing a small roster, close losses, the win in the ACC Tournament over Wake Forest and the effort in

which the players expended as justification for their thoughts. Certainly, those things in combination form a plausible argument.

But coaches view things through a different prism. In Williams' eyes, playing hard should be a given, not a virtue to be celebrated following a win or loss. And no one competes just to be "in" the game at the end. A team competes to win.

Tech won 11 times this past season. It lost seven games by three points or less and another game by five points in overtime. But it also lost eight games by 15 or more points.

So where is the program right now? A struggling one trying to gain traction, or one trending in the right direction? It's a tough question to answer.

"I think too many times – maybe it's just society – you think that there's going to be an event that's a turning point," Williams said. "And I think our egos - coaches, people, players - your ego is fighting when is that event going to occur that it changes.

"I think it's a process, not to be Nick Saban [Alabama head football coach], but it's not an event. You have to work with a passion level and an energy level that the turning point is this minute. The turning point is this possession. It's this practice. It's this film session. It's this road trip.

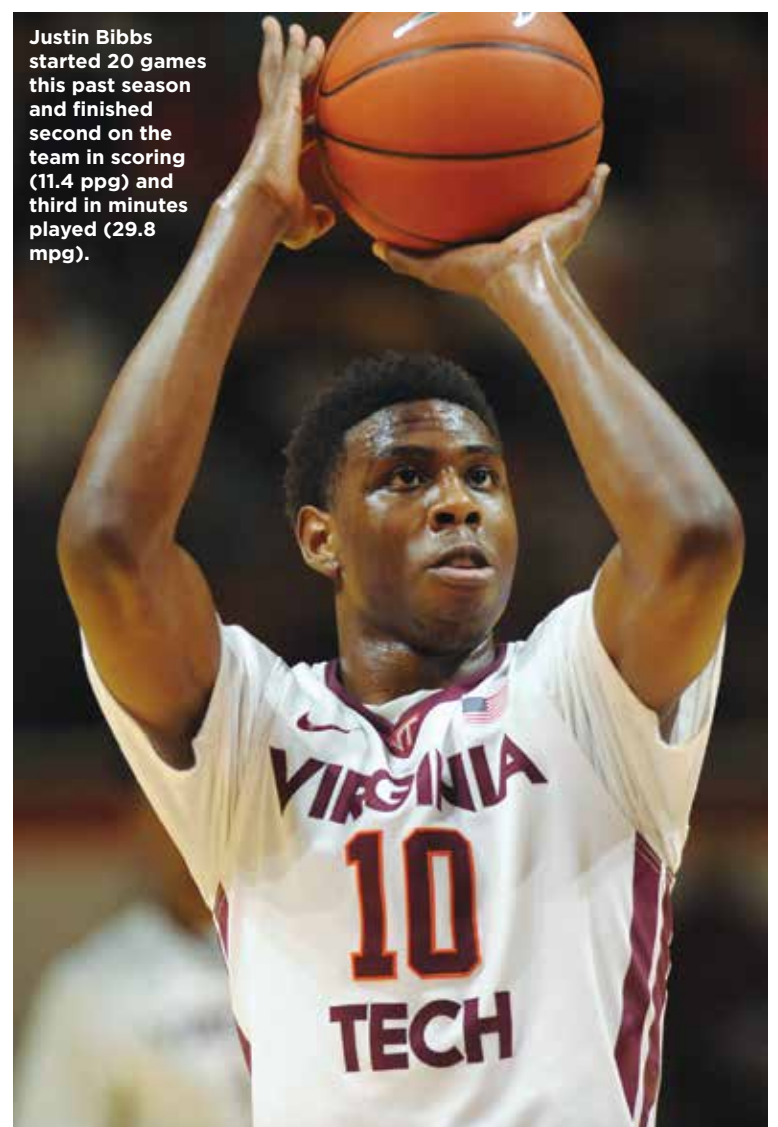
"There's been a lot of really good stuff [this season], and I hate that it's over because I think the turning point had not happened, but the trend was going in the highest angle that it had been going in thus far."

There are multiple reasons for optimism, starting with the development of the Hokies' five freshmen who combined to play more than half of the team's minutes this past season. Ahmed Hill started 30 of 33 games and averaged 8.7 points and 3.7 rebounds per game. Justin Bibbs started 20 of 29 games this season, missing four games with a concussion, and he averaged 11.4 points per game, second on the team.

Bibbs seemed to hit the proverbial freshman wall down the stretch. He averaged just 8 points per game once he returned from the concussion and did not reach double figures in four of the final five games, but still, he shot a respectable 42.7 percent from the floor and 41.3 percent from behind the arc for the season. He put up solid numbers for a first-year player.

Malik Müller, a redshirt freshman, started 20 of 33 games and averaged 6.2 points and 2.5 rebounds per game. Satchel Pierce played the least amount of the freshmen, but still got in 31 games (seven starts) and averaged 3.2 points and 2.4 rebounds.

Arguably, the freshman with the most potential is Jalen Hudson. He averaged 6.9 points per game, but showed his immense potential with a 32-point performance in Tech's ACC Tournament win over Wake Forest and a 23-point outburst against then-No. 4 Duke on Feb. 25.



Justin Bibbs started 20 games this past season and finished second on the team in scoring (11.4 ppg) and third in minutes played (29.8 mpg).

"I've said since Thanksgiving that Jalen was our most talented player, but he didn't play hard enough to be that every game," Williams said after the Wake Forest game. "He knows that. He's as smart as Christian Beyer is. When he plays hard, he's really good, and when he doesn't play hard, he's just a 6-4 guard that doesn't play hard."

Continued on page 26



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“If it was that easy to do every single day, then everybody would do it ... He’ll figure it out. He’s a great kid. I love him. He knows that. I coach him really hard, and sometimes that’s really hard to endure my coaching and to execute what I’m asking you to do.”

In addition to getting solid contributions from the freshmen, the Hokies also got solid contributions from leading scorer Adam Smith (13.4 ppg) – who, unfortunately, has decided to graduate and play his final season of eligibility elsewhere. That hurts, but University of Maryland transfer Seth Allen will be eligible, and Allen averaged 13.4 points and 3.0 assists per game his sophomore season at Maryland.

He’ll probably work in tandem with point guard Devin Wilson, who led the team in minutes (30 mpg) and assists (140 total) this past season. Those two, with Hudson, Hill, Müller and Bibbs, form a nice backcourt for 2015-16.

Collectively, the team shot the ball well this past season, ranking seventh in the ACC at 44.6 percent and second in 3-point percentage at 38.9 percent. Only Notre Dame shot better from beyond the arc than the Hokies among league schools.

But Tech desperately needs to improve its free-throw shooting and the rebounding situation. The Hokies ranked near the bottom of the ACC in free-throw shooting (14th, 64 percent),

as only two regulars (Smith and Wilson) shot better than 70 percent. Also, Tech ranked at the bottom or near the bottom of the ACC in nearly every rebounding category (offensive rebounds, defensive rebounds, rebounding margin, etc.). Some of that was because of style, as Williams did not want to get beat in transition, so he and his players focused on that rather than attacking the offensive glass. But lack of size – not just height, but girth – was the primary problem.

The Hokies also ranked near the bottom in scoring defense (14th, 69.4 ppg). But that goes back to rebounding. Tech played pretty well defensively, but gave up so many second-chance points. Teams will score when given two or three chances to do so.

“Knowing we’re going to be undersized, we’ve got to be able to box out better,” Wilson admitted after the ACC Tournament loss to Miami. “I think that hurt us this year, but I think the last couple of games, we did a better job. I think we learned from it. We can’t give people second and third chances.”

Williams hopes to alleviate some of the issues next season. He and his staff signed 6-foot-9 Kerry Blackshear from Orlando, Florida, and 6-6 Chris Clarke of Virginia Beach, Virginia – one of the top prospects in the nation – also figures to help. Plus, Zach LeDay, a transfer from South Florida, enters the mix next season

and the 6-7, 235-pounder gives the Hokies some muscle. One would expect to see added improvement from current post players Pierce and Shane Henry.


Despite the Hokies’ warts as a team this past season, they grew on Williams, who expressed remorse that the season had ended. He loves the players, and he appreciated their efforts, even with their limited ceilings.

“Yeah, I’m really depressed, just to be honest with you,” he said. “I don’t handle it [the end of the season] very well at all. That’s not because it’s year No. 1. You just function on such a premium level of emotion, and your brain and your body is functioning at a very high clip.

“I’m not very mature at how I handle beginnings or endings. I don’t like saying hello. That’s why my first impression is typically bad, and I don’t like saying goodbye, and that’s why I don’t give hugs when it’s over because I don’t want it to be over because I want to keep fighting.

“So I don’t handle it very well at all, just to be very frank. Not a pity party. Just that’s the truth.”

At the very least, the Hokies are going to be interesting next year, with all that young potential. They may even be exciting.

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VIRGINIA

HOKIES FINISH IN TOP 10 AGAIN



Zach Epperly

Paced by four wrestlers who earned All-America honors, the Virginia Tech wrestling team claimed a spot in the top 10 in the team standings for the third straight year

by Jimmy Robertson

Most coaches do everything possible to keep expectations in check.

But Kevin Dresser isn't "most coaches." The leader of Virginia Tech's wrestling program makes it perfectly clear what he expects from his wrestlers. The goal isn't to be good, but rather, great.

So following an NCAA Wrestling Championships in which four of his wrestlers earned All-America honors and the team finished in the top 10 for the third straight year, Dresser gave the expected response when asked his feelings following the event.

"I'm never happy, but I guess we'll take it," he said. "I felt like we left a little bit on the table."

Only a little, though, as the quartet of Devin Carter (141 pounds), Nick Brascetta (157), Zach Epperly (174) and Ty Walz (heavyweight) wrestled strongly in the consolation rounds the final two days to lift the Hokies into the top 10 in the team race at the event held at the Scottrade Center in St. Louis, Missouri, on March 19-21. Tech finished with 56 points, just ahead of Michigan, which needed a victory from heavyweight Adam Coon in the national title match to slip past the Hokies. Instead, Coon lost to NC State's Nick Gwiazdowski, thus keeping Tech in the top 10.

The series of strong performances came following a dismal quarterfinal round on Friday morning (March 20) in which the Hokies lost five matches – the aforementioned four got beat, along with 125-pounder Joey Dance. But Carter, Brascetta, Epperly and Walz all won in the consolation round that evening to earn All-America honors. Overall, Carter claimed third place at 141, and Brascetta finished in fourth place at 157. Epperly and Walz both ended in seventh place at 174 and heavyweight, respectively.

"That was really satisfying," Dresser said. "To come back in the consolation round takes a lot of guts, a lot of heart and a lot of fight because you're done if you lose. We lost some tough matches yesterday [Friday, March 20] on paper, a couple we were favored in and a lot we weren't favored. But for these guys to come back and fight the way they fought ... it was really a great finish.

"I'm proud of us. It's a testament to these guys."

The biggest surprise in the tournament came in the quarterfinal round when Carter, the runner-up at 141 pounds a year ago, lost to NC State freshman Kevin Jack. The unseeded Jack got a takedown and a near fall in the first period to lead 6-2. Carter eventually tied things at 8 in the third period, but Jack got a reversal in the final minute and held on for the 10-8 victory.

"Crazy stuff happens at the NCAAs," Carter said. "I got caught in a bad move and got down early. With my style, let them up and take them back down again, sort of a two-for-one game, it's really hard to come back when you're down. I was just two points short."

"Devin just didn't feel good," Dresser said. "He was fighting an injury [a minor knee injury], and it's harder for him to get going in the mornings. They had a good game plan, but obviously we weren't the same guy we normally are. We just had a bad match."

Carter bounced back, though, later that evening, winning two matches. He beat Princeton's Jordan Laster 18-7 and then knocked off Missouri's Lavion Mayes 10-8.

The next day, Carter got the Hokies off to a quick start. He took on Old Dominion's Chris Mecate, whom he had beaten earlier this season at the Virginia Duals, and got a couple of first-period takedowns to grab a 4-1 lead. Then in the second period, Carter pinned Mecate, advancing to the third-place match.

In the third-place match, he faced Oklahoma State's Dean Heil and went on the attack right from the start. He got two first-period takedowns and another takedown early in the second period. That started a barrage of takedowns, and the Christiansburg, Virginia native concluded his career with a 17-8 major decision win over Heil.

"This isn't really what I wanted, but I thought I came back and wrestled well and ended up winning out," Carter said. "I think that was the best way I could have gone out if I was going to go that way. I guess it's that much easier to live with myself."

Brascetta drew a tough opponent in the quarterfinals – top seed Isaiah Martinez of Illinois, a young man who would go on to win the national title. Brascetta lost 10-4 to Martinez, but responded with evening wins over South Dakota State's Cody Pack (5-2) and Lehigh's Mitchell Minotti (8-0).

The junior from St. Paris, Ohio, won his next match when Minnesota's Dylan Ness, the No. 3 seed, forfeited because of an injury. That propelled him into the third-place match, where he wrestled well, but lost 3-2 to Nebraska's James Green, the No. 4 seed.

It was a strong showing for Brascetta, who missed much of the season with an elbow injury and went into the Championships as an unseeded wrestler because of that.

"I don't think a lot of people looked at the bracket and viewed me as an unseeded [wrestler]," Brascetta said. "It's just the way the cards played out. For me, it wasn't about that. There was an excitement to show all these people what was going on.

"I just tried to move forward. I didn't think too much about the seeds or the number next to my name. I don't think anyone really does. You can look at a couple of guys that were in the finals, and they weren't seeded at all. That could have been me, but unfortunately, it wasn't. But I'm still an All-American. I may not have been seeded, but in my mind, I'm in the top five in the country."

Tech's other two All-Americans, Epperly and Walz, wrestled very well. In his first NCAA Championships, Epperly made it to the quarterfinals at 174 pounds, where he faced No. 2 seed Matt Brown of Penn State, another young man who would go on to win the national championship. Epperly lost 2-1 to Brown, falling to the consolation bracket.

In the consolation round, he faced Virginia's Blaise Butler, who had beaten Epperly three times this season. But the redshirt freshman from Christiansburg rode Butler for the entire second period, refusing to let Butler escape. In the third period, Epperly got a reversal for a 2-0 lead, and then, with less than 40 seconds left in the match he pinned Butler, getting the win and All-America status.

Later on in that round, Epperly lost 3-1 to Minnesota's Logan Storley. But in the seventh-place match, he beat North Dakota State's Kurtis Julson 3-1 to finish seventh, concluding a season in which he went 24-8.

Epperly certainly should be confident about his future. During the regular season, he beat the two wrestlers who competed for the national title in his weight class – Brown and Pittsburgh's Tyler Wilps.

"Four-time All-American at least and two-time national champ," Epperly said. "That's the goal. I showed it out there. The two guys in the finals, I've beaten them. That shows where I'm at right now

as a freshman, but I've got a lot more work to do."

Like Epperly, Walz also finished seventh. He lost on the first day to Northern Iowa's Blaize Cabell in sudden victory – wrestling's version of overtime – but won three straight matches in the consolation round, including a 2-1 win over No. 4 seed Austin Marsden of Oklahoma State to earn All-America status. He lost to Penn State's Jimmy Lawson in sudden victory, which put him in the seventh-place match instead of the fifth-place match, but he dominated Minnesota's Michael Kroells 6-2 to claim seventh.

"Now I know what it feels like to be an All-American," said Walz, who finished the season with a 28-9 mark. "Now I know what it feels like to lose in the wrestlebacks [consolation rounds]. It's interesting. You find the emotions that you hate and the ones you love, and you now know what you're working for."

"It's about figuring it out, and they figured some stuff out this weekend," Dresser said of Epperly and Walz. "For Zach to come back and beat Blaise Butler after losing to him three times and then for Ty to battle back after being the only one of our guys to lose in that round Thursday night ... to come back from Thursday night and be here Saturday afternoon, wow, that takes toughness."

Tech's other four wrestlers who qualified for the Championships each won at least one match. Dance, the No. 3 seed at 125 pounds, went 2-2, with both losses in sudden victory. Sal Mastriani,

NCAA Championships | Wrestling

the No. 7 seed at 149 pounds, also went 2-2. Kevin Norstrom, Tech's 133-pounder, and Jared Haught, the Hokies' 197-pounder, went 1-2.


Dresser stated before the season that he wanted to see his program finish in the top five of the team standings. But that opportunity probably disappeared after season-ending injuries to Chris Moon (165 pounds) and Austin Gable (184 pounds). Neither of Tech's backups at those weight classes qualified for the NCAAs.

So for this program to finish in the top 10 for a third straight year says a lot about the wrestlers who qualified and the coaching ability of Dresser and his staff.

"The last three or four years, we've been in the top 10, but we need to make a step, and I said that at the beginning of the year," Dresser said. "I felt like, if we were healthy and had some breaks, we could be a top-five team, and it didn't happen."

"But we were on the verge of 30th place [Friday], and we fought our butts off to come back, so yeah, it's good, but we still strive to be great, and we're not great yet."

Other than Carter and Moon, the rest of Tech's lineup returns, and 2014 ACC champion Dennis Gustafson returns after taking a redshirt year, along with two talented freshmen who took redshirt seasons – Solomon Chishko and Zack Zavatsky.

Replacing Carter and his 121 career wins certainly will be difficult. But the Hokies have some pieces in place to do it. 

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He stood there on the mat, and the official grabbed his wrist, lifting his arm in victory one last time.

He shook his competitor's hand, and then walked over and shook the opposing coach's hand. Then he slowly walked toward Kevin Dresser, the Hokies' head wrestling coach. Dresser did not shake his hand, but rather embraced him, as he would one of his three children.

The two shared a touching moment, and then Devin Carter looked at the roughly 170 Tech fans in the corner of St. Louis' Scottrade Center who were giving him a standing ovation. He raised his left arm, a salute to them for their support.

And a salute to the conclusion of an outstanding career.

"Right now, he's the greatest wrestler in Virginia Tech history," Dresser said.

Carter's career came to an end in near-perfect fashion. On the final day of the 2015 NCAA Wrestling Championships in St. Louis, Carter pinned Old Dominion's Chris Mecate, and then in the final match of his collegiate career, he used a barrage of takedowns to record a 17-8 major decision over overmatched Dean Heil of Oklahoma State. Of Carter's 121 career wins, 91 of them – including these two – garnered bonus points.

For Carter, the only thing better would have been to win a national championship in his weight class. That was the only thing he didn't win in his five years in Blacksburg. He finished second last year and third this year.

"I've won a lot of matches, but it's not what I wanted to do," Carter said in reflection following the match. "I was thinking two-time national champion going in [to his career at Tech], but obviously, you've got a guy like Logan Stieber [of Ohio State, who won four straight national titles, including two at 141 pounds], and it was rough being behind that, but I'm just as good as where I thought I would be."

Certain athletes at Virginia Tech have transcended their respective sports. Bimbo Coles did this when he became an Olympian in the late 1980s. Michael Vick did so for the football program in the late 1990s. Angela Tinchier did the same for the softball program seven years ago. So, too, did Queen Harrison for women's track in 2010.

Carter certainly belongs in that class. He has transcended his sport like no other Tech wrestler. He's the first, and currently only, four-time ACC champion and three-time All-American in the program's history. His 19 NCAA Championship wins stand as a school record.

“
Right now, he's the greatest wrestler in Virginia Tech history.
”

– Tech coach Kevin Dresser
said of Devin Carter.

“I am proud,” he said. “I owe it all to my coaches and teammates. Obviously, I wouldn't be where I am if I didn't have my teammates working out with me every day. We're going to build on that. Individually, it's nice, but hopefully I can build on that for them later on down the road.”

Tech fans appreciate Carter for many reasons – winning, great student, great kid off the mat. But most of the Tech contingent in Southwest Virginia like him because he represents what they've always wanted to be, the local kid who goes on to accomplish great things.

Some in the Tech athletics department joke that Carter has the shortest drive home for winter and spring breaks of any of the Hokies' student-athletes. That may be true. He went to high school in Christiansburg, roughly a 10-minute drive from campus.

His family actually hails from New Jersey, but his parents, Jeff and Debbie, got tired of the hectic lifestyle. They tired of the traffic and sought something quieter – and safer – for their family, and they also wanted to get their two sons into a good wrestling program. So before their two sons and a daughter reached high school age, they moved to Christiansburg. Jeff ended up landing a job at the Radford Army Ammunition Plant, and Debbie got one as a nurse, and both Braden – the oldest son – and Devin went on to star for Christiansburg High's wrestling team.

Devin won three state titles, and when it came time to make a decision on where to go to college, he never really looked anywhere beyond

A four-time ACC champion and three-time All-American, Devin Carter finished in third place at the 2015 NCAA Championships and departs as arguably the greatest wrestler in Tech history

by Jimmy Robertson

GREAT CAREER Concludes for CARTER

“
There wasn't a day that I didn't work my [butt] off. So I have no regrets.
”

– Tech wrestler Devin Carter

Blacksburg. He wanted to wrestle for Dresser, a 1986 national champion at Iowa.

Carter qualified for the NCAA Championships all four years he wrestled, taking a redshirt season during the 2012-13 campaign. He never lost an ACC match and only lost 16 times in his career – seven of those came as a freshman.

“He's a leader by example,” Dresser said. “He's not a very verbal leader, but just watching him and being around him ... he's been great for our program. He's a super kid. He's re-written all the record books at Virginia Tech. He's a superstar.”

Not that his career didn't have a few bumps. His father suffered a heart attack shortly before Carter competed at the Midland Championships in Chicago his sophomore year. His mom, recognizing the symptoms and keeping them to herself, dropped Devin off at the hotel to work out before his match – Devin needed to cut some weight – and then got her husband to a local

hospital, where doctors saved his life.

Carter knew his father was feeling better after he showed up at the hospital to see him.

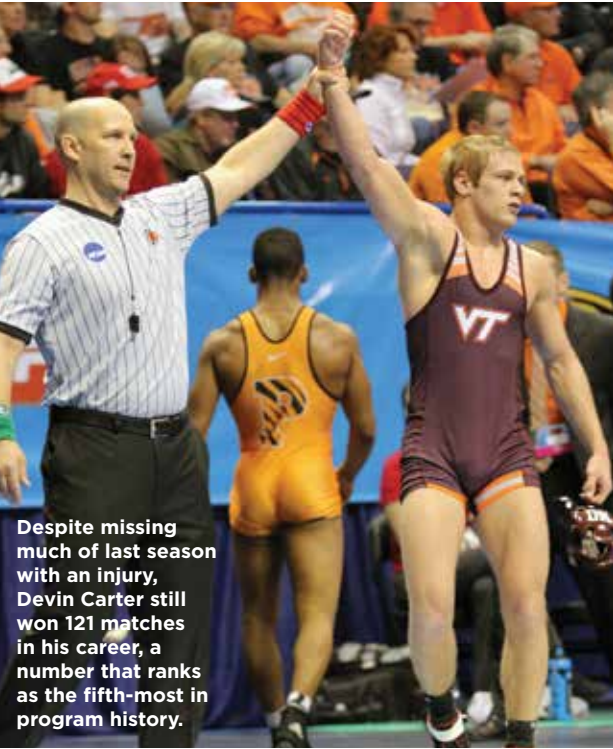
“How are you feeling?” Devin asked.

“How is your weight?” Jeff asked in return.

Carter also tore his hamstring last year, an injury that cost him much of the season. Yet he returned months ahead of schedule and competed for the national championship, falling to Stieber in the finals. His runner-up finish was the best ever by a Tech wrestler at the NCAA Championships.

He wanted to get back to that point, a final opportunity at an elusive national championship. But unseeded Kevin Jack of NC State upset him in the quarterfinals. Though he wrestled on a balky knee, Carter refused to use that as an excuse. Instead of sulking, he roared through the consolation rounds en route to a third-place finish.

Continued on page 32



Despite missing much of last season with an injury, Devin Carter still won 121 matches in his career, a number that ranks as the fifth-most in program history.

As he said in a post-match interview on three occasions, “This isn’t really what I wanted.” But getting there and being an All-American is certainly of value, and he will miss the competition, especially the NCAA Championships.

“I’m definitely going to miss this,” he said of the tournament experience. “Bonding with the team and coming out here and competing in front of 18,000 fans, it’s just amazing. Getting that feeling when you’re done with your match, there’s nothing better than that. Nothing I do down the road can compare to that. There are going to be other triumphs, just in different settings.”

Carter graduated last spring with a degree in psychology and is wrapping up a master’s degree in instructional design and technology. Last year’s ACC Wrestling Scholar-Athlete of the Year recently applied to Tech’s doctoral program and was accepted. He plans on getting a doctoral degree in industrial organizational psychology, with a focus, fittingly, on motivation and teamwork in the workplace.

“If you have a bachelor’s in psychology, not many places are taking you too seriously,” Carter said. “I saw that, and I figured that I’m done with my wrestling career and I don’t have to focus on wrestling as much. I can now sell my academics rather than just getting by on good

grades and getting my degree. It’s something that is going to carry a lot more leverage when I get out of here.”

Carter sounded like someone ready to move on from wrestling. He does hope to help out the Hokies as a volunteer assistant coach, but one gets the sense that his bigger purpose lies outside the mat.


That’s understandable. Wrestling takes a mental and physical toll perhaps the likes of no other sport – and he’s been doing this since he was 4 years old.

“Everything that you do in life is easy after wrestling,” Carter said. “There is nothing that compares to the physical and emotional toll it takes on you. I can deal with books, computers, tests and research. That’s fine with me. This [wrestling] is a lot harder than anything in the academic world.”

Unfortunately, college careers race by and cruelly come to an abrupt end. For the great ones, theirs will be remembered. Their legacies will remain intact.

Carter’s legacy will be one of working and winning – in everything.

“There wasn’t a day that I didn’t work my [butt] off,” he said. “So I have no regrets.”


For Tech fans, their only regret is this – they won’t get to see him wrestle any more. And that’s a huge regret to overcome. 

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TEN TRACK ATHLETES EARN

ALL-AMERICA HONORS AT THE NCAAS

Thomas Curtin earned All-America nods in two events and helped the Tech men's team to a top-30 finish by Jimmy Robertson



Dave Cianelli already had eaten his cake, courtesy of his men's team winning the ACC title at the league's indoor meet in late February.

Anything beyond that to end the indoor track season would simply be icing.

The director of Tech's track and field and cross country programs got a sweet sampling of exactly that, as middle distance runner Thomas Curtin led a group of 10 Tech athletes who earned All-America nods at the 2015 NCAA Division I Indoor Track and Field Championships held March 13-14 in Fayetteville, Arkansas

The Tech men's team finished tied for 28th in the competition with seven points, while the women's team came in tied for 41st with four points. Only the top eight finishers in each event score points for the team total.

"The initial feeling, we were disappointed because we felt we had a shot at being a top-10 team, which we did, but things have to go your way," Cianelli said, referring to the men's squad. "It was sort of like the conference meet. We knew we had a chance, but things would have to go our way – which they did. At the national meet, it's even more critical that each event falls your way because you have fewer opportunities. We had a couple of bad breaks, and things didn't go our way.

"But the conference meet is our No. 1 priority as a program, and after what the men accomplished, I really couldn't be disappointed with anything that happened at the national meet. The bottom line is, if you ask me what I'd rather have, a conference championship or a top-10 finish at the nationals, I'll take the conference championship any time."

Curtin, coming off a thrilling win in the 3,000-meter race at the ACC Championships that sealed the team crown for the Tech men, competed in both the 5,000-meter and 3,000-meter runs at the NCAA meet. On the first day of the competition, the redshirt junior from Leesburg, Virginia, posted an eighth-place finish in the 5,000, earning first-team All-America honors after running the race in a time of 13 minutes, 57.87 seconds. He dropped out of the top eight with a few laps remaining, but used a kick at the end to earn a point for Tech.

The next day, Curtin finished in eighth place again and earned first-team All-America honors, running the 3,000 in a time of 8:03.56. He led the field until five laps remained, but was unable to sustain his pace and ultimately fell to eighth.

The two All-America nods were the first of Curtin's career. In fact, this appearance marked his first ever at an NCAA Championship.

"For the first time to be at the national championships and doubling up in those events, that's tough to do," Cianelli said. "That's one of the reasons we didn't do that at the conference meet with him. He didn't run the 5,000 at the conference meet. He ran the distance medley relay instead. We felt it would be better for him not to try and double up [run the 5,000 and 3,000].

"For him to place in the top eight in his first time out there, I was very pleased. At the national meet, you're talking about the top 16 people in the country that get there. It's incredibly hard to get to the meet. That's half the battle, and then once you're there, everyone is either a conference champion or a former conference champion. Everyone is at a high level. So I was really happy with his effort – and his season overall was amazing."

Manuel Ziegler, the transfer from Memphis by way of Germany, recorded the top finish of the meet for the Hokies, claiming fourth place in the triple jump to earn first-team All-America honors. Ziegler's second jump proved to be his best, one in which he jumped 54 feet, 2 inches (16.53 meters). Ziegler's jump tied that of the third-place finisher, Louisville's Ben Williams. But Williams – whom Ziegler beat at the ACC meet – hit the same distance on his first attempt, so Ziegler got moved to fourth.

"His last jump was his longest, but it was a foul, a marginal foul by maybe a centimeter," Cianelli said of Ziegler. "It was a long jump, maybe 55 [feet], 55-4, something like that. That shows you that he was ready to jump that kind of distance.

"He was probably a little disappointed because he knew that he was ready physically for a big jump, somewhere in the 55 range. He showed that, but it didn't materialize because that particular jump was a foul. It still gives him confidence that he was ready to go that distance and gives him something to shoot for outdoors [during the outdoor season]. He's a pretty consistent jumper."

Patrick Joseph, Tomas Kruzliak and the quartet of Juan Campos, Prince Owusu, Grant Pollock and Neil Gourley all earned second-team All-America honors for the men's team. Campos, Owusu, Pollock and Gourley qualified for Tech in the middle distance relay event, but an unfortunate fall early on in the first leg proved to be the difference, and the Hokies' attempt to make up lost ground fell short. The quartet finished in 11th place with a time of 9:53.98.

Kruzliak posted a 14th-place finish in the men's weight throw with a mark of 66 feet, 10 inches (20.39 meters). He earned second-team

All-America honors for the second time in the event after finishing in 10th place in 2013.

Joseph competed in the men's one-mile race and finished in 15th place overall with a time of 4:07.97. He failed to qualify for the final, but walked away with a second-team All-America nod. The sophomore from Leesburg, Virginia, took a redshirt year during the indoor season last year.

The other Tech men's athlete to compete in the event was Chris Uhle, the ACC champion in the pole vault. Uhle, however, was unable to hit the opening height in the men's pole vault and did not place.

On the women's side, Hanna Green continued her amazing season, finishing in fifth place in the 800-meter race with a time of 2:05.29. The ACC champion in the event, she set a school record with a time of 2:03.18 in the preliminaries, besting her previous school record of 2:03.43, which she set at the ACC meet.

Green, a sophomore from Latrobe, Pennsylvania, earned first-team All-America honors for the first time in her career. She earned second-team honors last spring at the NCAA outdoor meet.


"She's a big-meet performer, and I knew she'd go into the meet with a lot of confidence

after the conference championships," Cianelli said. "What surprised me was how fast she ran in the preliminaries. Her and the Clemson girl [Natoya Goule], those were two of the fastest times in the history of the meet.

"In the final, she didn't quite have the gas in the tank. She ran a smart race and she tried to hang as best as she could, and that may have cost her toward the end, but I'd rather see someone be aggressive than be conservative at that meet. So to get fifth at that meet with that field is a tremendous accomplishment for a sophomore."

Amanda Smith also ran the 800 for Tech and finished in 14th place overall, crossing the finish line with a time of 2:08.67. She did not qualify for the finals, but earned second-team All-America honors for her efforts. She's now a two-time All-American, having finished in fifth last year in this event.

Oregon won the men's title with 74 points, while Arkansas claimed the women's crown with 63 points. The Tech men had the second-highest finish of all ACC teams, placing just behind Virginia, which tallied eight points and came in tied for 23rd.

Both Tech programs began their outdoor season in late March. The ACC meet will be held May 14-16 in Tallahassee, Florida. 

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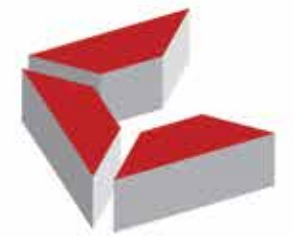
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TECH SWIMMING AND DIVING SQUADS CLOSE SEASON WITH **STRONG PERFORMANCES**

The Virginia Tech men's and women's swimming and diving teams capped the 2014-15 season with some notable performances at the NCAA Championships, but the Hokies came up just a fraction short of continuing some impressive streaks.

The men's team had finished in the top 20 at the NCAA Men's Swimming and Diving Championships for the past three consecutive years, but came in 31st this time at the men's national event held March 26-28 at the Campus Recreation & Wellness Center in Iowa City, Iowa. The women's team had finished in the top 25 for the past three years, but saw that streak end with a 27th-place finish at the NCAA Women's Swimming and Diving Championships held March 19-21 in Greensboro, North Carolina.

"Of course, there's some disappointment," Tech head swimming coach Ned Skinner said. "I don't like to use that word, but there is for all of us because we took sizable teams and teams that we thought were capable of maintaining those streaks. Things happened, and I understand that. We fought hard and scratched hard. We had second swims and All-Americans and honorable mention All-Americans. We just didn't score enough points."

The Tech women's team had two swimmers/divers earn All-America honors, brought home two honorable mention All-America honors and

recorded 12 top-30 finishes. While they didn't finish in the top 25, the Tech women did finish in the top 30 for the fifth time in six years.

Senior Kaylea Arnett concluded her fantastic career by earning All-America honors in the 3-meter diving event and honorable mention honors in the platform event. In the 3-meter event, she was in second place after the preliminary round, but finished in sixth place overall after scoring 360.60 points. The All-America honor was the third of her career.

The Spring, Texas native finished in ninth place in the platform event after winning the "B" final with a score of 296.25 points.

Arnett goes down as the most decorated diver in Tech history. In addition to being a three-time All-American, she received honorable mention All-America honors on six other occasions. She won six gold medals at the ACC Championships in her career to go with three bronze medals and a silver medal.

"I would put Kaylea Arnett as the most prolific athlete in the history of our program – female or male," Skinner said. "It starts with her continuous ACC performer of the year awards [four-time ACC Championships Most Valuable Diver]. It continues with our highest finish at the NAAs [third in the 1-meter event last year]. She's our only medalist, if you will. She's gotten as high as third and no one else has gotten in the top three, men or women. So

I think her body of work makes her our best ever, absolutely."

Also at the NCAA meet, junior Weronika Paluszek earned her first All-America honor when she finished eighth in the 200 breaststroke with a time of 2 minutes, 8.95 seconds. In the morning preliminaries, Paluszek, a native of Wroclaw, Poland, swam the race in 2:07.83 to clinch her spot in the "A" final, only 0.02 seconds slower than the school-record time that she set at last year's ACC Championships. It was Paluszek's second straight top-10 finish at the NCAA Championships in the event, as she finished 10th last year.

Rookie Klaudia Nazieblo garnered her first honorable mention All-America honors when she finished 14th in the 200 butterfly with a time of 1:55.21. Also a native of Wroclaw, Poland, she set a school record in this event several weeks ago with a time only 0.05 seconds faster than her time at the NCAA meet. She already has won two individual ACC medals along with this honorable mention All-America honor.

"Weronika has one more year, and she is more determined than ever to finish the right way," Skinner said. "Klaudia is incredible. She's emerging into her own and has several years of eligibility left.

"It's exciting. We're graduating a very strong class, but we have a lot of things to look forward to, and it's my goal as the head coach to ensure there is no drop-off."

On the men's side, the Hokies recorded 11 top-30 finishes in the championships and two honorable mention All-America nods. They finished with 17 team points.

Robert Owen, a sophomore from Bridgewater, Massachusetts, led the Hokies by earning honorable mention All-America status in two events. He took 11th place in the 400 IM preliminary round and did not qualify for the "A" final, but in the "B" final, he finished second with a time of 3:42.67. He claimed 10th place overall in the event and earned the first honorable mention All-America honor of his career.

Owen grabbed his second honorable mention All-America honor of the event the next day. He finished in 14th place in the 200 backstroke with a time of 1:41.10.

"He's still growing," Skinner said. "He's still hitting the weights. He's really, really talented. He has an incredible feel for the water. He did finish ninth last summer at the U.S. Summer Nationals, so he's emerging at the national level. We see it coming. But to go there and score 10 of our 17 points is outstanding.

"That guy is the real deal. He's a Hokie, and he lives his life the way Whit Babcock [Tech's AD] and all of us would want to see that done. He's a first-class young man."


Morgan Latimer, a senior from Richmond, Virginia, finished his stellar career by becoming an honorable mention All-American in the 200 butterfly after finishing 16th with a time of 1:44.15. Latimer's impressive career also

included six ACC top-10 finishes, two ACC silver medals and six ACC relay medals.

"We're going to miss him a lot," Skinner said. "Thankfully, he's going to be a student assistant for us next year, so I'm not saying good-bye yet. He's just world class. He's fun. He's one of those guys who is fun to be around, but he's super driven. He raced hard and did such a nice job for us in his career."

Tech's 400 medley relay team finished in 16th place on the first day of the event with a time of 3:08.50. The quartet of Collin Higgins, Brandon Fiala, Latimer and Owen Burns earned honorable mention All-America honors for the Hokies. It was the last swim of Higgins' great career, as the senior from Charlotte, North Carolina, earned five ACC top-10 finishes, one ACC bronze medal and one individual honorable-mention All-America honor after taking ninth in last year's 200 backstroke.

Eight men and eight women now depart, taking with them a lot of talent and experience. But Skinner's programs have always been consistent, and with swimmers like Paluszek and Nazieblo on the women's side and Owen on the men's, that figures to continue.

"We want to be among the top," Skinner said. "I've never looked at Virginia Tech as 'We're glad to be there.' Virginia Tech has the opportunities, the resources and the ability to contend for spots in the top eight. We want to get back to work and get where we feel like we're capable of being." 



TAKING HIS OPPONENTS *to Court*

Tech men's tennis player Hunter Koontz has overcome some obstacles in becoming one of the Hokies' most consistent players this season
by Jimmy Robertson

Technology affords Tech fans the opportunity to watch many of their favorite program's Olympic sporting events through live streaming over hokiesports.com. They can sit in their cushy recliners, laptops situated perfectly so, and keep tabs on the action with the click of an electronic mouse.

On one particular Friday afternoon, the Tech men's tennis squad took on Boston College at the Hokies' Burrows-Burleson Tennis Center, and a mouse click on a link to court 3 revealed Hunter Koontz methodically destroying Kyle Childree, who fell prey to Koontz's withering array of ground strokes. Childree didn't win a game, losing 6-0, 6-0.

Two days later, on court 4, Koontz dusted Clemson's Austin Ansari 6-0, 6-2. He hardly broke a sweat over that weekend, helping Tech notch two ACC wins, part of their best start ever in ACC play (6-1 at press time)

Koontz is one of just two seniors on Tech's roster, and he usually works out of the No. 4 spot in the lineup. He won 12 of his first 14 matches to start the season, a prime reason why the Hokies have risen to No. 13 in the national tennis polls at press time.

But the intriguing thing about Hunter Koontz is this – he plays this sport, one that requires the utmost in power and coordination within a player's arms and shoulders, and succeeds in it without a pectoral muscle.

"I was born without a right pectoral muscle," Koontz said. "I never went and saw anyone about it. I was born without it, and my right hand is a lot smaller than my left.

"It hasn't affected me so far. If anything, maybe I have more rotation on certain things [tennis shots]. I could see where it might affect power on certain shots. But there was never a time when I was bummed out or anything like that."

Doctors gave no good explanation as to why Koontz was born without a pectoral muscle and a shorter right arm and hand because they really didn't have a good one to give. Sometimes, such things in life, inexplicable things, tend to occur.

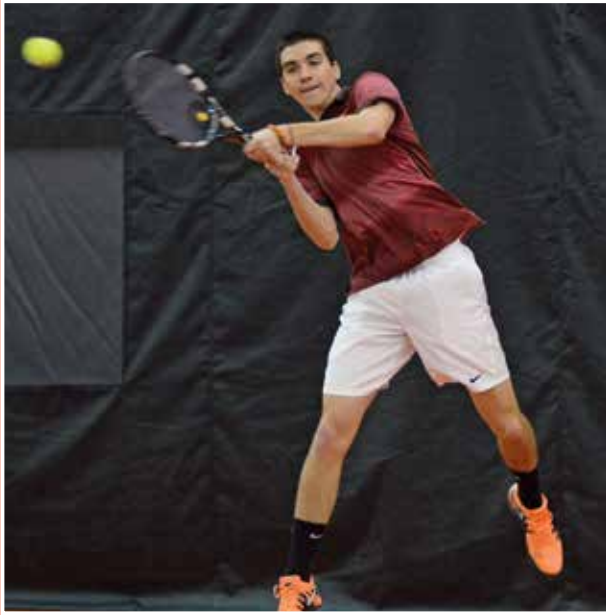
The lack of that muscle never kept Koontz from doing all the things he wanted to do as a kid growing up on the outskirts of Richmond. He played sports, mostly gravitating from soccer to tennis. He never made his differences public, largely because he never viewed them as a big deal.

He and his parents, Greg and Nancy, talked with him about it when he was an adolescent. But they ended up leaving the decision on possible surgery up to him.

"I had talks with my parents when I was younger about maybe getting plastic surgery when I was older," Koontz said. "But there's really no point in that either. It's not noticeable unless I say something or you look closely. So I didn't see anybody about it."

Yes, Tech head coach Jim Thompson knows. So, too, do Koontz's teammates. Koontz knew he would be participating heavily in Tech's strength and conditioning program, and the lack of a pectoral muscle obviously would influence the results in certain lifts.

Continued on page 40



So he was up front about his situation.

“I had to tell him [Thompson] my freshman year just because of the weight room,” Koontz said. “Benching [the bench press] is tough, and push-ups are tough. A few things are tough. It’s not like I can’t do them, but I can’t lift as much weight as everybody else.”

Fortunately, tennis relies more on speed and endurance than brute strength. And while he may not toss barbells in the ilk of football standout Luther Maddy, Koontz certainly does his share of heavy lifting on the court.

He’s been doing that ever since his parents built a clay tennis court in the backyard of their Richmond home. Greg Koontz is a Tech grad and an engineer by trade, and he co-owns his own firm, so he possessed the resources to build the court. He and his wife love tennis, and they got Hunter and his three sisters involved at an early age.

Hunter went on to win two state championships in singles and two in doubles while at Deep Run High School. His team also won the team title twice.

But despite his prep accomplishments, he saw little in the way of attention from college recruiters.

“I didn’t have much of a national ranking at all,” Koontz said. “I didn’t go around playing national tournaments. I played a couple. It’s hard with a lot of sisters, and we didn’t have

time to travel.”

Koontz wanted to come to Virginia Tech. After all, his father graduated from Tech, and so, too, did his grandfather. His twin sister, Hannah, was coming to Tech as well.

But Thompson didn’t have a scholarship available, and Koontz wanted to play somewhere.

“I was pretty much set on Tech at a young age,” he said. “I only almost switched right before I got on the tennis team here. I wanted to play tennis, and they didn’t have room for me when I was trying to decide on a college. So I almost went to Mary Washington, which is in Fredericksburg. Then I got the call from Jim asking if I wanted to walk on, and I said, ‘Of course.’”

Koontz spent two years as a walk-on, paying his own way while working and practicing with the team. He saw limited action as a freshman, going 8-7 overall, but he never contemplated giving up the sport. On the contrary, he saw himself getting better in large part because he spent every day in practice working against players a little better than him. As he got better, he started giving the regulars in Tech’s lineup a run for their money.

As a sophomore, he worked his way into the lineup, going 25-15 overall, including a respectable 13-11 in dual competition, with a 4-5 mark against ACC competition.

“I think the main thing was before coming to college, it was a little less structured and I could

take days off when I wanted,” he said. “I was mostly playing high school tennis, and the level is definitely not near as high as it is here. Once I came here and had structured practice every day and hit with great players every day, it didn’t take long too improve. That was the main thing – hitting with great players every day.”

The turning point in Koontz’s collegiate career actually happened in Richmond. He played in a local tournament the summer before his junior year, and he found himself matched up against Jamere Jenkins of the University of Virginia. Jenkins, one of the best collegiate players in the nation at the time, had just come off an appearance in the NCAA singles championship match.

But Koontz wasn’t in awe. He took it to Jenkins from the start – and won.

“I beat him pretty easily, actually,” Koontz said. “I think he came out on the court thinking, ‘I’m just going to roll over this guy. My level is a lot better than his.’ – which it is. But I played one of my better matches, and he didn’t expect it. I played well and got him.”

“I played him later in the summer, and I thought, ‘He’s going to smoke me because I beat him earlier.’ But I ended up losing 7-6 in the third set. Two close matches against him have shown me that I can play against anyone when I’m on my game.”

Koontz’s sophomore season and the matches against Jenkins certainly caught the eye of Thompson, who obviously noticed the improvement. The summer before Koontz’s junior year, Thompson called Koontz into his office and offered him some scholarship aid.

“I thanked him a lot,” Koontz said. “I called my dad right after that.”

Then Koontz added, laughing, “Who also thanked him a lot. That was definitely a good day.”

Thompson has certainly been getting his money’s worth this season. Seeing action in mostly the No. 3 and No. 4 spots in the lineup, Koontz has only played three sets in a match on three occasions this season, winning one and losing twice. He won his other matches rather handily.

The crowning moment – so far – came on March 8 when the Hokies took on then-No. 2 Duke at the Burrows-Burleson Tennis Center. Tech won all six singles matches over the Blue Devils, a rarity in college tennis, and Koontz’s 7-6 (7-5), 4-6, 6-3 victory over then-No. 99-ranked Raphael Hemmeler aided the cause.

The team’s win, and two subsequent victories after that, propelled the Hokies to the top-15 ranking.

“It was absolutely incredible,” Koontz said of the win over Duke. “There’s still a part of me that almost doesn’t believe it. Just the whole effort our team put into it. We were a man down [Amerigo Contini was hurt], and to beat Duke was incredible. I’m so proud of the guys. It’s great to get this win for the confidence. We’ve had the team, but I don’t know if we believed we could pull off something that big.”

“Hopefully we can keep riding the good times. I thanked the guys right afterward for giving me a good senior year so far. It’s been a lot of fun, so I hope we can keep it up. It was unreal, something I’ll never forget.”

The Hokies jumped out to a 6-1 start in ACC play – their best start since the school joined the league for the 2004-05 season. Tech hasn’t won an ACC title in men’s tennis, one of the most competitive sports in the league. In fact, the Hokies haven’t played for the title.

But Koontz feels this team possesses the potential. Contini and Andreas Bjerrehus rank

as two of the better players in collegiate tennis, and with Koontz, Joao Monteiro and Florian Nicoud, Tech has some depth within its lineup.

“I definitely think we have the team for it,” Koontz said of winning the ACC. “Everybody is playing better than last year. The practices are harder. The level is higher. Everyone is pushing each other. I think we can do it. We need to take one match at a time.”

“It’s great to be in the top 15 [ranking], but that’s just a number. The team is the same. If we take it one match at a time, I think we can do great things this year.”


Though his eligibility expires at the end of this spring, he plans on being back at Tech next year, working as a volunteer coach and finishing up coursework on dual degrees in accounting and finance – two of the toughest majors at Tech. A summer internship in Richmond with Dixon Hughes Goodman, a national accounting firm headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, will go a long way toward determining his future plans once he graduates.

His tennis future after college is a little more murky.

“I’d like to try or play one or two or three Futures [a professional tennis tour] just to say I tried,” he said. “I’d like to get an ATP [Association of Tennis Professionals] point. That would be nice to say. As far as doing that for a living, there’s no chance at that.”

“I don’t want to throw away tennis as an option, but playing professionally is not something I really want to do. I don’t think I have the level to keep it up, and I’m not a huge fan of traveling – and that’s all that would entail.”

Certainly he’s traveled a long way to get to this point, and the road at Tech is reaching the end.

But Hunter Koontz has served notice to people who doubt those with physical limitations. You don’t have to be perfect to succeed at this level. Just determined. 

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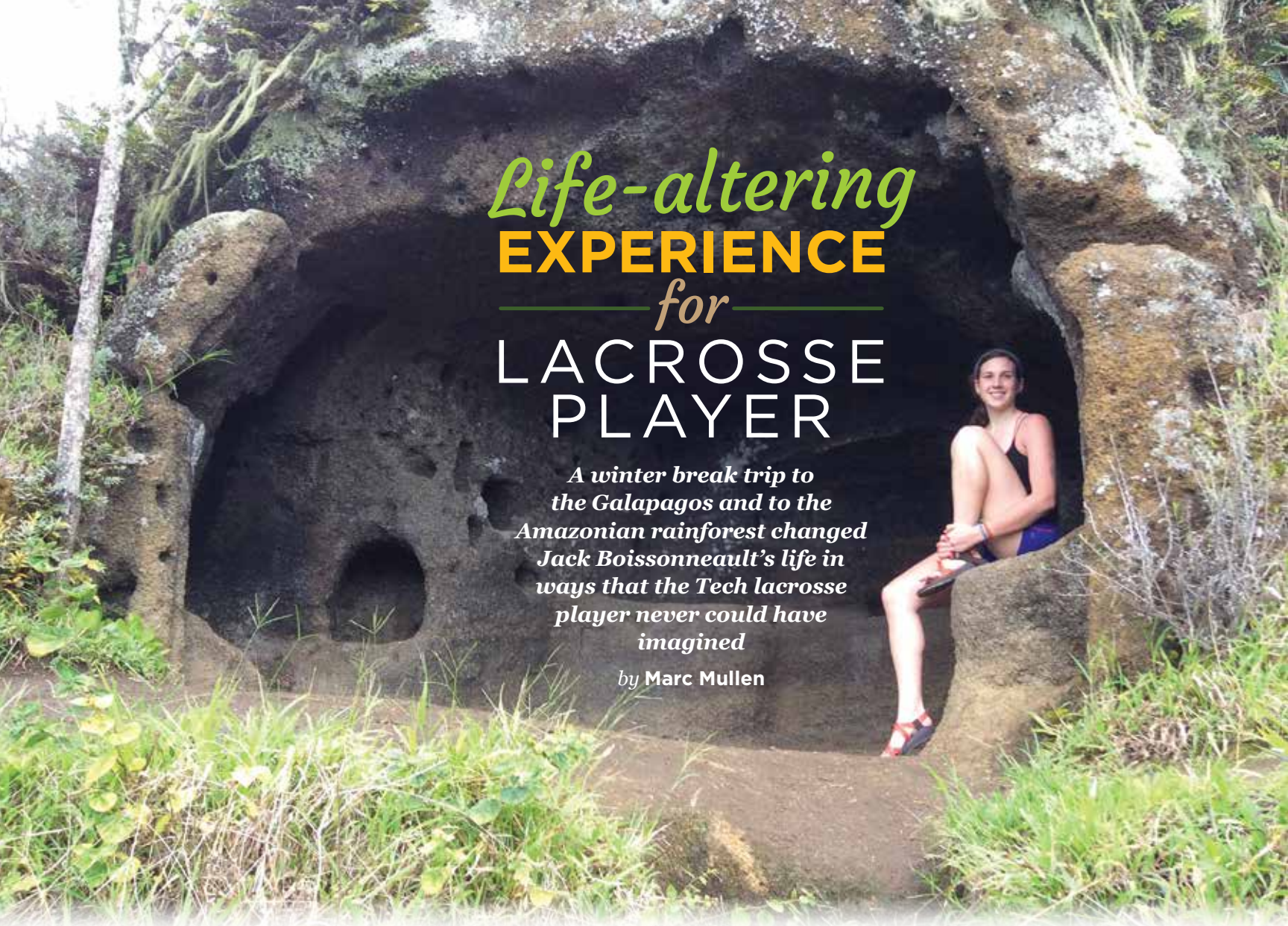
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Life-altering EXPERIENCE for LACROSSE PLAYER

A winter break trip to the Galapagos and to the Amazonian rainforest changed Jack Boissonneault's life in ways that the Tech lacrosse player never could have imagined

by Marc Mullen

Jack Boissonneault had played in every Virginia Tech women's lacrosse game through her junior year, a span that included 29 starts. She had scored 38 goals and added seven assists. The senior's numbers pale in comparison to classmate Megan Will, who will finish as one of the top goal and point scorers ever for the Hokies.

But that's fine with Boissonneault, who, after playing three seasons as a middie, took a step back on the field to a defender position and has become one of the Hokies' top players there, starting all 13 games on the back line so far this season (as of April 3).

That's a role she might be a little more comfortable with, considering her future career plans once her Tech playing days end. Instead of stopping an opposing player from scoring a goal, she'll be trying to protect the environment from the negative influences of humans on the ecosystems of planet Earth.

With that intent, Boissonneault, an environmental science major from Brooklin, Ontario, Canada, took a more than unusual trip over the semester break, a trip that started on Dec. 26 and took her to the Galapagos Islands and Ecuador for more than two weeks.

"It was a course called Culture and Agriculture in Ecuador,

and I first learned about it from my teacher who went on the trip in the past," Boissonneault said. "They [those who plan the trips] didn't do the exact trip before, but had a video from a trip they did in Senegal, and that is originally where we were supposed to go, but with the Ebola [virus] crisis, they were nervous that the trip would be cancelled, so they drew up this new trip to Ecuador.

"I had already committed to Senegal and had my mind set that I was going somewhere over Christmas break, so I decided to go on the trip to Ecuador."

She was one of about a dozen students from Virginia Tech who went with four instructors to the South American country. The trip started in the Galapagos and a stop at the Charles Darwin Research Center. The group then made its way over to the Amazonian rainforest and the Tiputini Biodiversity Station before finishing the excursion in the Andes, which included a trip up the Chimborazo volcano.

Before the journey, though, the class would meet one night a week for about an hour to discuss the trip, and around Thanksgiving, they all got several immunization shots. This wasn't the first such trip like this for Boissonneault, though, as she had taken a trip to the Dominican Republic the previous summer as part of a university-designed study abroad course about leadership and putting leadership into practice.

"I haven't completely decided what I want to do, but ultimately I want to find a job that involves traveling and implementing environmentally sustainable practices in developing countries," Boissonneault said. "One of the things that we did when I went to the Dominican Republic was to go see about the sanitation and water-related issues that they had. While we were there, there was also an engineering group from Virginia Tech that was implementing a water treatment facility for their wastewater. So that was really cool to see. I know that there is a giant water crisis in the world right now, so that would be ideal to get some experience in that."

For Americans, the thought of leaving the laps of luxury – running water, hot showers, cell phone and Internet service – might be the furthest thing from their minds when it comes to a winter semester break. It was nothing out of the ordinary for Boissonneault, though, other than being in a warmer climate.

"We have a cottage about eight hours north from where I live up in Northern Ontario," she said. "And it doesn't have electricity or running water that you can drink. You go to the bathroom in the outhouse, and there is a wood stove. You wash your dishes by hand. There are no lights. So that is like our oasis. We love going there every summer and every other Christmas.

"At that time [at Christmas], it's freezing cold. It's probably minus-40 degrees Celsius, which is kind of ironic because my mom is allergic to the cold, but that's where she grew up. So I think that just having that place to go and get away

from society, or being isolated at this cabin ... it's my favorite place to go."

The cabin may be her favorite place to go, but the wonders she saw on her most recent trip sometimes took her breath away and gave her goose bumps. One of the assignments of the class was to carry around a journal, and the students were asked to write what they expected to see before heading to a certain area. Then students were to write about things while they were there and then reflect upon the experience.



As part of a winter break class, Jack Boissonneault and a group of a dozen classmates took a trip to the Galapagos Islands (below), one of the most biologically diverse places in the world, and also to Ecuador's Amazonian rainforest (above), where they experienced life while living in a rainforest.



Boissonneault filled her 80-page journal – front and back – almost completely.

"Throughout when we were there, we had group discussions at the end of each trip, and then we would write in these journals," she said. "We carried these journals around, and they had prompts for us and we would write about them. I did it for school, but I would also just write things on my own. Anytime I had a chance to write, I would so that I wouldn't forget.

"I actually just got it back because the teacher was grading it. I did reread it before this interview, and it's just interesting to see what I thought before and after, and I feel it's very emotional because, when I was there, I was in the moment. I just wrote exactly what I was feeling. So it's very interesting to go back through and read it."

When asked about giving the best description to what she experienced in the Amazon, she replied, "Being there, it's definitely not the same magnitude of impact as seeing it on a screen and actually seeing it

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yourself ... you really don't get that whole body experience from seeing it on TV or seeing it in a magazine than when you are actually there."

The trip impacted her more than anything else to this point in her young life. It reaffirmed her career path, but more importantly, reaffirmed the way she wants to live her life.

Boissonneault answered a full array of questions in detailed fashion, and these give an idea of the depth and breadth of her experience over the winter break:

Q: What was your takeaway from this experience?

JB: "I think it reinforced that there is no other path that I would take for my future. Environmental science has a lot of opportunities, outdoor opportunities, and I don't think I will ever be a person that sits at a desk. This just reinforced that this is what I want to do, and I just enjoyed it so much that I will go back to those places. I will change my lifestyle because I know what it is like in less-developed countries, and I want to make a difference. When I came back here, I made simple changes to my life just based on what I have seen, and I don't think anyone can really understand what it's like to live in an underdeveloped country unless you go there. I think that people should put in the effort to

learn about other people's lives, and I think that this trip definitively helped that for me."

Q: What was your favorite part of the trip?

JB: "I think everybody would say the Galapagos was their favorite part of the trip, but for me, I think it was the Amazon. We went to this biodiversity station, and there are no tourists. In the Galapagos, it's all tourists. The towns on all the islands cater to tourists even though they try to maintain the biodiversity. It was a lot more 'touristy' than I expected, so when we went to the Amazon, not just anyone gets to go there. There are just researchers and the people who are native to the forest but have been asked to work for the biodiversity station. So the kitchen staff, and the guides, who aren't tour guides, but people who take the researchers and scientists out on the trails ... I mean, if we didn't have our guide, we would get lost, and you couldn't go anywhere by yourself because everything looks the same. You would 100 percent get lost. So I think that the Amazon was my favorite because it was the most authentic experience ... a place that is untouched by human influence, though there are some issues going on there because of the government is letting them drill for oil down there. But that was definitely my favorite part."

Q: At any point, were you scared?

JB: "I was never scared, but I think that was a little naïve of me because, even though we were with guides and everything, there was poisonous stuff all over the jungle. If you stepped the wrong way and fell and touched something, you were bound to grab something that is spikey or poisonous and would be harmful to you. But nobody really had any terrible incidents by getting hurt or anything. One girl did get sick because she drank some water along the way, and she definitely got some bugs. In the Amazon, everything [animals] hides from you. So it's obvious that they are not used to humans being around. I guess you don't see very much because they are just as scared of you, so they run away. I guess I wasn't really scared because I felt they were just as scared."

Q: Did you have any moments that just took your breathe away?

JB: "When we were in the Amazon, we went on a hike, and we went to this canopy tower. We climbed up this massive ladder that didn't seem very sturdy. But when you got to the top, there were these wooden bridges that the people at the station had built themselves. We had harnesses on, and I climbed up this tree that had this steel ladder that was nailed to it. I went right up to the top, and I was looking over and I could see the

Amazon for miles and miles and miles. It was like a picture I had seen in National Geographic, but you don't get chills from looking at a picture in a magazine. It was like nothing I had ever seen before, and it's just something so hard to tell someone what it was like."

Q: Was it hard to come back to the States after this experience?

JB: "We definitely didn't want to come back. It was really hard to settle back into your old ways. Things there were different. You couldn't flush the toilet every time you went to the bathroom. You can't flush the toilet paper down the toilet, so you get into this habit of stuff like that. You have to sterilize your water, or you have to wait for a blue water jug that you could get your water out of. When I came back, going to the bathroom and flushing, I had to get used to it. You kind of feel guilty, expecting a hot shower or drinking water wherever you go. A water fountain doesn't exist in South America unless you are in the airport.


"Actually, it's pretty funny. In the airport, there are signs on the door when you go into the stall that say flush your toilet paper down the toilet because anyone who is from there knows that you can't do that. So it's just funny to see that.

"But just feeling guilty of all of the privileges - you have in living in a developed country. The



Jack Boissonneault became close friends with approximately 20 people who spent more than two weeks together while visiting the Galapagos Islands and various other parts of Ecuador as part of an environmental science class at Tech.


water bottles, the plastic utensils – I would never use that if I didn't have to. I carry a spoon and fork in my backpack. We just have a throwaway culture, and I feel guilty now by being part of that. So it's hard to ... even in a place where you

are used to using to-go containers or plastic forks and spoons. Everything is just so accessible. You just almost feel like you have to use them. And you really have to go out of your way to change, if you want to." 

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