

INSIDE

HOKIE SPORTS

Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics



THREE-PEAT PERFORMANCE?

Frank Beamer and the Hokies have won two straight ACC crowns, and with a lot of talent returning in 2009, they have their eyes set on a third championship trophy.

Vol. 2 No. 1, August 2009 • \$4



Boston College

INSIDE: Kam Chancellor is leading young kids by example.

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INSIDE HOKIESPORTS

The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics

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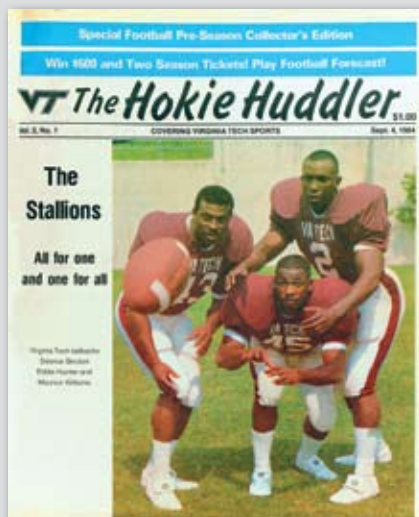
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Celebrating a Silver Anniversary

In the spring of 1984, Doug Waters started the Hokie Huddler, a publication devoted to the coverage of VT athletics. The publication has changed names and formats over the course of 25 years, and this year, we want to celebrate the silver anniversary of the publication by taking a look back at what transpired at VT in 1984.

We're starting with the football preview and an excerpt from a piece Waters wrote in that preview.

Competitors, and friends By Doug Waters, Editor

... Are the Hokies deep at tailback, you ask? Does a stallion have hooves?

The term "The Stallions" was started last year by now-departed fullback Tony Paige, affectionately recalled as Granddaddy Stallion.

As the five-back system took shape last year and began running defenses dizzy, sports writers quickly used all the horse metaphors they could muster, and the members of The Stallions assumed an identity and deep pride that formed a bond.

AUGUST

- 23** Women's Soccer vs. High Point 7:00 p.m.
Fall Sports schedule key tag giveaway to first 500 fans!
- 28** Volleyball vs. Montana 7:00 p.m.
- 29** Volleyball vs. UNC Greensboro Noon
Volleyball vs. Liberty 7:00 p.m.

SEPTEMBER

- 4** Volleyball vs. East Carolina 7:00 p.m.
Fall Sports schedule key tag giveaway to first 500 fans!
Cross Country Virginia Tech Relay 5:00 p.m.
- 5** Volleyball vs. Norfolk State Noon
Volleyball vs. Arkansas 7:00 p.m.
- 11** Hilton Garden Hokie Invitational Women's Soccer vs. UNC Greensboro 5:30 p.m.
Team photo card giveaway!
Hilton Garden Hokie Invitational Men's Soccer vs. #13 South Florida 8:00 p.m.
Fall Sports schedule key tag giveaway to first 1,000 fans!
- 12** Football vs. Marshall 1:30 p.m.
WHITE OUT!
- 13** Women's Soccer vs. C. of Charleston 2:00 p.m.
Men's Soccer vs. ETSU 7:00 p.m.
- 19** Football vs. Nebraska 3:30 p.m.

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WHAT'S A HOKIE?

"I've lived in Virginia and played soccer here my whole life, and I'm so happy I've had the opportunity to continue my education and soccer career at an amazing institution like Virginia Tech."

Robin Chidester
Senior - Women's Soccer

"Thank you Hokie Club for the greatest four years of my life as a Hokie on the soccer field and in the classroom."

Charlie Campbell
Senior - Men's Soccer



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Susie & Eugene Skelton

Current Hokie Club Level:
Golden Hokie

Currently Resides:
Sunnyvale, Calif.

Q: What year did you graduate?

A: Eugene – 2000 & 2003; Susie – 2002

Q: What is a Hokie?

A: Someone who is proud to be a fan of Virginia Tech. GO HOKIES!

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because ...

A: Even on the West Coast we hear "Go Hokies!" all the time.

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

A: We will never forget the 1999 football game against Boston College in the rain – the sunset over our undefeated season.

Q: What motivates you to be so involved with the Hokie Club?

A: We want to support Virginia Tech in any way that we can. As young alumni, we were searching for a way to give back to the university. The Hokie Club makes it easy to get involved.

Q: How do you support the Hokies in the San Francisco area?

A: We are working to rebuild the alumni chapter in the San Francisco Bay Area. There are over 2,000 Virginia Tech grads in the region, and we would love to meet them all.

Q: How do you spread Hokie Spirit on the West Coast?

A: We wear orange and maroon everywhere we go. We are working to expand the Hokie Club into the Bay Area.

Q: Do you have any game day superstitions? If so, what are they?

A: Yes, Eugene has to wear his Virginia Tech beads that he got at the Sugar Bowl. Everything Susie wears on game day must be orange or maroon.

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech Football players are ...

A: Frank Beamer and Michael Vick

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech student-athletes from another sport are ...

A: Drew Weaver, Angela Tincher and Deron Washington.

A Letter from Lu

Dear Hokie Club Members,

Welcome to a new academic year and a new season for Hokie sports. I am pleased to report that, despite a sluggish economy, our fundraising efforts have gone well. You have continued to support our scholarship fund and the expansion of our facilities. Thank you!

We are excited about the completion of the new basketball practice facility and the statement it makes about Virginia Tech's commitment to college basketball for our men's and women's programs. Construction is underway on the new football locker room, players' lounge and wrestling facility and is scheduled to be completed next fall. We will need your support to complete this project for our football and wrestling programs.



You will notice some changes to our pages in the magazine. I hope that you will enjoy this "new look." It is our goal to continue to provide interesting information on our donors, student-athletes, facilities and, of course, the various options available to you regarding support for the athletics program. I hope you take time to read the "Ways To Give" sections when they are featured.

I encourage each of you to show Hokies Respect this fall in Lane Stadium. Do your part to make the game day experience enjoyable for everyone. Welcome our guests and cheer hard and loud for your Hokies. We really do have something special going on here in Blacksburg! Let's keep it going in the right direction.

Go Hokies!
Lu Merritt

Director of Development, Intercollegiate Athletics

WAYS TO GIVE: OUTRIGHT GIFTS VS. DEFERRED GIFTS

Understanding the different ways to give to the Hokie Club

OUTRIGHT GIFTS

Outright gifts of cash, securities or other qualifying assets can go to work for your Hokie Club membership as soon as they are received. And you can immediately enjoy full income tax benefits.

Every gift is unique, so you will want to consider your individual goals and tax implications when you select the asset for your gift. Outright gifts can be made online or by check, or by using matching gifts, stocks or securities, real estate and gifts-in-kind.

DEFERRED GIFTS

Your deferred gift benefits you now and provides support to the Hokie Club at some time in the future. With its combination of flexibility and financial advantages, a deferred gift may be your largest and most powerful charitable contribution.

Need income, either now or later? Perhaps for retirement? Charitable remainder trusts, gift annuities and pooled income fund gifts pay you lifetime income, generate current tax benefits and provide future support for Virginia Tech.

Planning your estate? Bequests and retirement account designations are among the options that will reduce estate taxes and establish your legacy at Virginia Tech without affecting your current assets. Several of the deferred giving opportunities include bequests, charitable lead trusts, retirement account gifts, beneficiary designations, life income gifts and retained life estate gifts.

Hokie Club fundraisers are more than willing to explore outright and deferred giving opportunities with you. For more information on any of the opportunities listed, contact the Hokie Club at (540) 231-6618 or learn more online at hokieclub.com.



Hokie Club Parking Information

Many of the parking lots on campus are reserved for Hokie Club members on football game days (see map). Parking in these lots requires a valid parking pass that is mailed before the beginning of the season to qualifying Hokie Club members. Opportunities to purchase a season parking pass for home football games is a benefit of Hokie Club membership, and all parking passes are assigned according to the Hokie Club Point Priority System. Hokie Club members are limited to one parking pass per membership.

On football game days, a valid parking pass is required for entrance into these parking lots. Upon entering, parking passes must be visibly displayed on the vehicle's rear view mirror or dashboard and must remain there at all times while the car is in the parking lot. Vehicles without a valid parking pass are subject to being ticketed or towed at the owner's expense. Lost, misplaced or stolen parking passes will not be replaced, and parking passes are not available on game day. Tailgating is permitted but must be confined to the area immediately behind your vehicle. Parking lots will be monitored through the end of the game. Additional parking information for football is available on the Parking Services website at: www.parking.vt.edu/football

PUBLIC PARKING

Public parking is available on game day for a \$10 fee in designated parking lots (see map). Parking information is available at www.parking.vt.edu/football.htm. Satellite parking is available at Blacksburg High School and the new Blacksburg Middle School. Blacksburg Transit provides a shuttle service from the satellite parking lots to the stadium.

RV PARKING

Hokie Club members who have purchased parking passes for RVs are located either in Lot 3 or 16. To park in either of these lots, a season parking pass must have been purchased in advance. A new alternative will be offered to the RV patron for the 2009 season. The Public/RV lot will now be located at the Virginia Tech Airport (formerly Prices Fork). The Virginia Tech Airport will have space ready for RVs by noon on Friday prior to a Saturday game, and by noon on Thursday for a Thursday night game. The cost is \$30 per game for one or two nights for a motor coach or \$150 for a season permit (six home games). Motor coach owners with personal vehicles other than the tow vehicle will be assessed an additional \$15 per game or \$75 for a season pass in addition to the motor coach. To purchase a season pass in the public Virginia Tech Airport RV lot, patrons can send an email to st@vtbcb.com.

BUS PARKING

A very limited number of parking spaces are available for buses. Game day passes may be purchased in advance by calling (540) 231-6731.



1. FOR SAFETY REASONS AS WELL AS EMERGENCY ACCESS, IF NECESSARY, THE FOLLOWING IS NOT PERMITTED IN THE PARKING LOTS:

- A.** Throwing objects – This includes, but is not limited to, footballs and Frisbees.
- B.** Blocking the roadway – Placing tables, chairs, or other items that may extend into the roadway beyond the bounds of the parking space provided is not permitted.
- C.** Blocking the sidewalks – The sidewalks must remain open for pedestrian travel.
- D.** Sound systems/noise amplification – This includes bands and DJ entertainment.
- E.** Cutting, removing or destroying the boundary ropes or signs.
- F.** Destroying landscaping or fencing.
- G.** Underage drinking.

2. PARKING LOT HOURS OF OPERATION:

Saturday Games	Arrival	Departure
RVs (contributor)	3 p.m. Friday	5 p.m. Sunday
RVs (public/airport)	noon Friday	5 p.m. Sunday
Cars	6 a.m. Saturday	6 a.m. Sunday
Weekday games	Arrival	Departure
RVs (contributor)	noon game day	6 a.m. following
RVs (public/airport)	noon game day	6 a.m. following
Cars	5 p.m. game day	6 a.m. following

3. BUS PARKING ON WASHINGTON STREET:

- A.** There are currently 10 bus spaces on Washington Street.
A season pass is \$1,050.
 - B.** In the event all spaces are not taken by the use of a season pass, the charge will be \$200 per game.
- NOTE:** Game-by-game requests are to be made after Aug. 1.

4. IMPROPER USE OF PARKING PASSES:

- A.** All cars in the contributor lots must keep their parking pass displayed at all times or be subject to towing.
- B.** The owner of the pass is responsible for any violations of the policy due to someone using the pass (e.g. if you lend it out or sell it and there is a violation, you, as the owner of the pass, are responsible if any penalty occurs).

5. ENFORCEMENT OF THE POLICY:

- A.** First violation: a ticket will be issued (\$30).
 - B.** Second violation: will result in a loss of the pass for an indefinite period of time.
- Corporate/professional tailgates** – Corporate tailgates are not allowed, and no corporate signage is permitted at any time unless prior written approval by the Department of Athletics and ISP Sports has been obtained.

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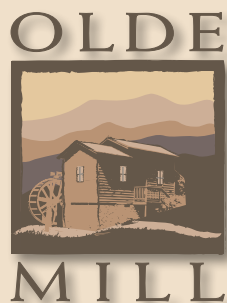


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News & Notes

By Jimmy Robertson

Tech to meet Boise State at FedEx Field

Virginia Tech's 2010 football schedule incurred some changes recently, as the Hokies took advantage of another opportunity to play at FedEx Field in Landover, Md. Tech will be playing Boise State in a non-conference match-up on Oct. 2, 2010.

The game will be the first football meeting between the two schools. The Hokies will be the home team for the game, with the television rights belonging to the ACC.

Tech played the University of Southern California at FedEx Field in the 2004 Black Coaches Association Football Classic. The top-ranked Trojans won that game 24-13.

As a result of this game, Tech will not be playing Syracuse next year. The Orangemen wanted out of the series, which called for a game at Syracuse and a game in Blacksburg the following year (2011). Tech announced that Arkansas State agreed to fill the void in 2011.

(For more on Jim Weaver's comments regarding the changes, please check out the Q&A with Weaver on page 20.)

D. Taylor breaks all-time mark

Tech defensive tackle Demetrius Taylor made the most of his final campaign in the strength and conditioning program, setting the program's all-time mark in the push jerk with a lift of 410 pounds in recent summer testing. That lift ties the previous mark set by Will Montgomery in 2005. Since Taylor's body weight is less than Montgomery's, Taylor moves to the top of the list.

Taylor, a 6-foot, 274-pound redshirt senior from Virginia Beach, Va., also made it into the top 10 on the Hokies' all-time list in two other categories. He recorded a 475-pound bench press and a 380-pound power clean. These marks rank seventh and sixth, respectively, on the all-time list.

For good measure, he also broke his own position record in the front squat category. His 465-pound lift in the front squat edged out his former record of 460. Taylor will leave with four position records.

Taylor earned Super Iron Hokie honors in the strength and conditioning program this summer, the top honor in the program (ahead of Iron Hokie, Hokie, Orange and Maroon). He was one of 11 players to earn Super Iron status.

More from the weight room

In all, 39 players earned some sort of honor in Mike Gentry's strength and conditioning program following summer testing. In addition to Taylor, Blake DeChristopher, Josh Oglesby, Joey Phillips, Danny Coale, Marcus Davis, Tyrod Taylor, Jake Johnson, Barquell Rivers, Ron Cooper and Dorian Porch earned Super Iron Hokie honors.

Thirteen position records fell, and three more players – in addition to Taylor – broke into the top 10 all time in certain categories. DeChristopher recorded a 395-pound push jerk, and Ed Wang had a 390-pound push jerk. Those two lifts rank sixth and eighth all time on the program's mark. Also, Marcus Davis recorded a 42.5-inch leap in the vertical jump, a mark that ranks second on the all-time list behind Pierson Prioleau's 43.5-inch mark set in 1997.

Here is a look at the top five in each category tested:

BENCH PRESS

Sergio Render (480)
Demetrius Taylor (475)
Jake Johnson (425)
Steven Friday (425)
John Graves (410)

FRONT SQUAT

Blake DeChristopher (470)
Demetrius Taylor (465)
Greg Boone (465)
Kwamaine Battle (455)
Kenny Jefferson (450)

POWER CLEAN

Demetrius Taylor (380)
Jake Johnson (373)
Greg Nosal (370)
Kwamaine Battle (356)
Jaymes Brooks (356)

PUSH JERK

Demetrius Taylor (410)
Blake DeChristopher (395)
Ed Wang (390)
Kenny Jefferson (380)
Barquell Rivers (375)

VERTICAL JUMP

Marcus Davis (42.5)
Dorian Porch (41)
Patrick Terry (40.5)
Ron Cooper (40.5)
Tyrod Taylor (38.5)

10-YARD SPRINT

Marcus Davis (1.59)
Danny Coale (1.65)
Brandon Dillard (1.69)
Dyrell Roberts (1.69)
Kam Chancellor (1.69)

Wilson headlines freshman testing

Incoming recruit David Wilson from Danville, Va., headlined the freshman testing, taking top honors in the 40-yard dash, the 10-yard sprint and the vertical jump. Wilson, a 5-9, 194-pound tailback, ran a 4.33 in the 40 and a 1.66 in the 10, and he recorded a 39-inch vertical jump.

Here is a look at the top five in each category tested:

40-YARD DASH

David Wilson (4.33)
D.J. Coles (4.44)
Jerrodd Williams (4.44)
Nubian Peak (4.45)
Jayron Hosley (4.45)


VERTICAL JUMP

David Wilson (39)
James Hopper (36.5)
D.J. Coles (35.5)
Nubian Peak (35.5)
Logan Thomas (34.5)

BENCH PRESS

David Wang (400)
Telvion Clark (370)
Andrew Miller (360)
James Gayle (350)
Lanford Collins (330)

10-YARD SPRINT

David Wilson (1.66)
Wiley Brown (1.71)
Antone Exum (1.73)
Jayron Hosley (1.73)
D.J. Coles (1.74) 

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Jimmy Robertson

FIVE PLAYERS TO WATCH

AS THE HOKIES TRY TO LIVE UP TO EXPECTATIONS IN 2009

The polls show Barack Obama's popularity gravitating toward Earth, the nation skeptical on health care reform, and people generally apathetic on Sonia Sotomayor.

But for those with no interest in politics (or with a general disdain for politics), these same samplings can be applied to the sports world.

And their results reveal the Hokies' popularity rocketing skyward.

Tech enters the 2009 football season as the overwhelming pick to win the ACC title and as a preseason top-10 selection by nearly all those who vote on such things. From what we've gathered, only that rebel Phil Steele did not place the Hokies in the top 10.

He picked them 11th.

That being said, and obviously facing wild expectations, Tech rolls into this campaign with still a young squad and facing arguably the toughest slate in recent memory. Frank Beamer's charge will be to shepherd this group through this schedule, while also trying to massage expectations.

As the Hokies embark on 2009, here are five players to scrutinize before the season kicks off on Sept. 5:

Tyrod Taylor – Taylor serves as the biggest key to this upcoming season for Tech. He enters his third season in Tech's system and coaches often point to the third year as the critical year in a player's progression. Plus, there is no Sean Glennon behind him, and

with 15 career starts and 931 career snaps from scrimmage, Taylor possesses the experience.

He'll need to throw more than two touchdown passes this season (his 2008 total) for the Hokies to reach their potential. But he should easily do that, and we're betting that he breaks Bob Schweikert's 45-year record for career rushing yards by a quarterback (1,723) this season as well.

Ed Wang – Wang and fellow senior sidekick Sergio Render return to anchor the left side of the line. Overall, Tech returns 87 starts along its offensive front. Only two other teams in the country – Notre Dame and Texas – return as much experience on the o-line.

As a side note, consider this: a year ago, eight of the top 10 teams in the final Associated Press poll began the season with at least 65 combined career starts by their offensive linemen. Wonder why Utah finished No. 2 in the country? The Utes returned more than 80 starts of experience. Surprised at Ole Miss' run last season? The Rebels returned more than 80 as well.

Wang's play, though, is critical because he protects Taylor's blind side – and we all know the urgency of keeping that guy healthy. Tech couldn't ask for more than to have a fifth-year senior with 24 career starts under his belt protecting Taylor's blind side.

Jake Johnson – Brett Warren and Purnell Sturdivant went into last season with just four career starts between them. Now, Tech goes into a season with even less experience (one start) at the critical mike and backer spots – Barquell Rivers started the Orange Bowl.

The guy to watch, though, is Johnson, who


plays the play-making backer spot. He played last season as a true freshman, but only on special teams. He'll need to be able to stuff the run, play in coverage and blitz. The position is demanding, yet fun, and Johnson loves a good challenge.

Both Rivers and Johnson enjoyed excellent spring practices and the Hokies will need for their talent to trump experience for continued dominance on defense.

Rashad Carmichael – The biggest starting job up for grabs heading into this season as of press time was the field corner spot, where Rashad Carmichael, Cris Hill and Eddie Whitley were battling it out. Each brings something to the table, but none of the three put a clamp on the job this spring.

Carmichael is the only one with a career start, taking the field for the kickoff of the ECU game last season when Macho Harris was injured. He's also the fastest player on the team. That gives him two advantages over Hill and Whitley. He needs to grab the opportunity here.

Matt Waldron or Justin Myer – Take your pick here. Can Waldron or Myer be the next great walk-on kicker, following the footsteps of Brandon Pace, Judson Dunlevy and Dustin Keys? Waldron went a long way toward doing that this spring when he was virtually automatic, but Beamer also likes Myer and his stronger leg. One of them will need to burst from the pack and then hopefully be as consistent as their predecessors.

Overall, the polls say the Hokies will be good. These players will go a long way in determining if that proves true. 

Go Hokies!

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Bill Roth

Tyrod Taylor

CONFIDENCE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE IN TAYLOR

AS HE GETS SET TO LEAD IN 2009

It was, for lack of a better word, the “perfect” pass.

Earlier this week, during preseason workouts, Virginia Tech quarterback Tyrod Taylor really stepped into one of his throws, launched a deep ball, a tightly spinning spiral, and watched it sail.

Golfers know the feeling. You’re on a long par-4 and you absolutely crush your tee shot and know instinctively “I got all of that one.”

Well, on this pass, Taylor knew he “hit it on the screws” the instant he let it go.

The ball sailed through the muggy August haze before dropping perfectly into the receiver’s hands 55 or so yards down field. Might have been 60.

Taylor gave a quick fist pump and then traded eye contact with his quarterbacks coach Mike O’Cain, who responded with a confident nod.

It’s a pass Taylor expects to make often this season, his third at Tech, but his first as the undisputed full-time starter.

“The biggest difference between Tyrod

today and last year is one word: confidence,” O’Cain said. “He knows he can make that pass. He also knows he can drop the ball over the linebacker and in front of a safety. He can make all those throws, but most of all; he knows he can be a leader. You can see the confidence in him in all areas.”

That confidence is evident in how he leads the team on the field, in sprinting drills, or in the eye-popping accuracy of his throws this preseason.

You can see it off the field, too, like the day

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this past summer when he called a players-only meeting.

"I was letting the guys know that we aren't picked high in the rankings for any reason," Taylor said. "We have a target on our back and we have to go out and prove it. I told them to keep that in their head as you work out all summer, that people are going to be taking a lot of shots at us this year and it's going to be a dog fight for each game."

The confidence and ownership is the biggest difference in the 2009 version of Taylor.

Keep in mind; he was just a month removed from his 18th birthday as a true freshman when he made his college debut in 2007 at eventual national champion LSU. And, remember, this wasn't just any night at LSU. The crowd of 92,739 was the largest ever to see a game at Tiger Stadium in Baton Rouge.

Yet there was that fresh-faced Taylor, still perhaps not sure where McBride 100 was in relation to Torgersen 2100 on Tech's campus, staring down the nostrils of Glenn Dorsey and LSU's defensive line. Two years, and seemingly a lifetime later, Taylor is back as Tech's quarterback, albeit a much different kid than the rookie who trotted onto the field in the Baton Rouge humidity 24 months ago.

He's now started 15 games and played in two ACC championship games and two Orange Bowls.

"The first couple years, I didn't really know the offense as well as I wanted to," Taylor said. "Sometimes (in 2007), I dropped back and ran because I wasn't going through progressions. Last year, I was better at that. This year, I want to prove to everybody that I can throw and I am not a runner."

In 2008, Taylor rushed for 738 yards, which was third on the team. But he threw for just two touchdowns and had seven interceptions.

"For us to be where we want to be, our passing game has to improve dramatically," O'Cain said.

With that in mind, Taylor spent this past spring and summer working religiously on his passing game, first by working on his mechanics by eliminating a hitch in his throw and then by spending hours on the practice field throwing to Tech's receivers.

He went to the Manning Passing Academy in Louisiana last month to work with Eli, Peyton and other top quarterbacks. He solicited advice from ex-college stars like Ronald Curry ("Don't follow anyone else's footsteps. Go out and have fun. Be yourself.") And Michael Vick ("It's a big year for you. Go show people why you went to Virginia Tech.").

He's put on 17 pounds, which you can see clearly in his shoulders and upper back and from several weight room records that he shattered since the end of last season.

"This summer, he's thrown every day. He's done as much as he can to make a great

preparation for this season," O'Cain said. "He needs to be consistent. We don't want him to feel like he has to win the games for us. If we get the ball to the right people at the right time, we can be pretty good."

It's a challenge Taylor has embraced.

"Got to throw the ball better," he said in self-evaluation. "Have to understand the offense and understand the defense. Know what I want to do with the ball pre-snap. Read the defense. Know the tendency of the defense. And understand the game plan going into each game of where we're going with the ball."

At least this year, Taylor knows he'll be the guy throwing the football each week. During the past two seasons, there has been uncertainty as to who would be Tech's starter: Taylor or Sean Glennon, who graduated this past May.

Tech has won back-to-back ACC titles, but its quarterback situation was anything but stable in either year.

"No, it wasn't the perfect situation," was O'Cain's understated response when asked to reflect on the past two years.

While he started 15 games over the past two years, on the field and in quarterback meetings, Taylor was always in Glennon's shadow.

"Sean was an intimidating presence," O'Cain said. "He was smart. He knew more than Tyrod. He knew our offense. As good as Tyrod was, he didn't know as much as the other guy (Glennon)."

"It was uncomfortable for me, so you know it was for them. The best quarterback was not Tyrod Taylor. But he was the best guy to be under center to help us win games. Now in 2007, from the Duke game through the Orange Bowl, Sean was the best guy to help us win. But in 2008, Tyrod was the best guy to help us win, and we felt that unanimously (as a coaching staff)."


"Sean and I are still good friends," Taylor said. "Lots of people tried to make it out that we weren't, but that was never the case since I've been here. He's still a great friend. We were down at the Peyton Manning Passing Academy together in Louisiana."

Because of that relationship and his respect for his teammate, Taylor couldn't have called a team meeting last year. It wasn't his role.

But now, it's his time and he's seizing the moment.

"I see a lot of focus. I see a lot of determination on this team," he said. "I've been ready for this to be the year I can play."

That pass he threw on the practice field this past week was just one of many examples of the exciting progress this humble, likable young man has made in recent months.

And Taylor is hoping it's just the start of a memorable 2009 season for his teammates and Tech fans everywhere. 

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TECH'S SPRING SPORTS STUDENT-ATHLETES HAUL IN MANY ACCOLADES

By Reyna Gilbert

The summer hasn't slowed down academic success and recognition for Virginia Tech student-athletes. Since classes ended in May, several Hokie student-athletes were recognized for postseason awards and for their commitment to balancing academics and athletics during the spring competition season.

ACC Commissioner John Swofford recently announced the list of ACC Honor Roll recipients. The ACC Honor Roll comprises student-athletes who participated in a varsity-level sport and registered a grade-point average of 3.00 or better for the full academic year. For the 2008-2009 academic year, a record 2,772 student-athletes were honored throughout the ACC. One hundred and nine student-athletes from Virginia Tech were honored, and many Hokies have been honored more than once during their careers. Women's cross country and track student-athlete Natalie Sherbak and football quarterback Sean Glennon were five-time honor roll recipients. ACC women's track and field MVP Queen Harrison and men's track ACC freshman of the year Will Mulherin were also named to the list.

Swimmer Sara Smith and softball standout Jenna Rhodes were both awarded NCAA Postgraduate Scholarships. For the past three years, two student-athletes per year have earned this coveted award. In this decade, nine Tech student-athletes received this scholarship compared to seven previously in school history. The \$7,500 scholarship is awarded to student-athletes who excel academically and athletically and who are in their final year of intercollegiate athletics competition.

Smith, a McGaheysville, Va., native, splashed the competition both in and out

of the pool during her tenure at Tech. She received the 2009 Virginia Tech ACC athlete of the year award and holds two team, War Memorial Pool and ACC records. Smith will begin her master's degree in Biomedical and Veterinary Sciences at Tech this fall.

During her career at Tech, Rhodes reached All-American and Academic All-American status and was recently named the 2009 Virginia Sports Information Directors player of the year. Rhodes is currently playing as a free agent with the Rockford Thunder of the National Pro Fast-pitch League and will begin her postgraduate studies this fall at Old Dominion University in Mental Health Counseling.

In addition to the ACC Academic Honor Roll, the league also recognizes student-athletes as members of the All-Academic teams. To be considered for the All-ACC Academic team, a student-athlete must have a minimum GPA of 3.00 for the past two semesters and for their career.


In all, four members of the women's track and field team and four on the men's team received such recognition. The list included Kristi Castlin, Natalie Sherbak, Asia Washington and Kelly Phillips for the women's team and Phillip Padilla, Matthais Treff, Hasheem Halim and Mulherin for the men's team. Castlin, Washington and Sherbak made that team three times in their careers.

Three members of the men's tennis team and two from the women's team also made the squad. That group included Pedro Graber, Yoann Re and Luka Somen from the men's team, with Graber making the squad for the third time. On the women's side, Inga Beermann and Martha Blakely made the squad. Beermann made the squad four times in her career.

Five players from the lacrosse squad made the All-Academic team – Rachel Culp, Kari Morrison, Allie Emala, Sarah Garner and Caitlyn Wier. Culp and Morrison were three-time honorees.

Two softball players also made the team – Rhodes and Erin Ota. Both made it for the third time in their careers. And the baseball team landed three first-timers on the squad – Mike Kaminski, Ben Rowen and Michael Seaborn.

Finally, Drew Weaver represented the golf team on the squad. He was a member of the ACC Academic Honor Roll in 2006 and 2007. He is currently playing on the amateur golf circuit.

Hokie student-athletes consistently raise the bar for success both in their sport and in the classroom. It is no wonder that so many have been honored multiple times throughout their careers for being the epitome of what a student-athlete truly is. 



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HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

KAM CHANCELLOR SURVIVED CHILDHOOD IN A ROUGH NORFOLK NEIGHBORHOOD AND WANTS TO HELP YOUNG KIDS THERE DO THE SAME

By Jimmy Robertson

The shabby building sits on the corner of a crime-infested neighborhood known as Park Place in the western portion of the city of Norfolk. It used to be a Boys and Girls Club, a thriving one at that. But for so many, it was much more than that. It was a safe haven, an escape from the cruelties of a harsh world not of the makings of the ones who frequented there. It was a home. A home for innocence. A home for dreams. A home for hopes.

It's no longer a home, overcome by the world's burdens. Like many things these days, it became an economic casualty.

Most would glance at the building and simply see it for what it is.

Kam Chancellor gazes longingly at it and sees it for what it was – and what it could be.

“When I go home, people always ask me about it, people on the streets,” said Chancellor, a native of Park Place and the neighborhood's top success story. “Especially the older guys. Some of the older guys I used to look up to when I was little now look up to me. They're like, ‘Don't forget us, Kam.’

“I want to do it for them and for the kids. The kids don't have anything to do. I see them walking around all the time or riding bikes. They just look bored. A lot of them get into trouble because they don't have anything to do.

“So I want to open it up and put a lot of stuff in there. I want to have programs for them and have overnight stays and camping trips. That's how it used to be.”

The aching desire in his voice is unmistakable. It's what gave him pause to consider leaving school early and getting paid handsomely by some NFL team in dire need of his talents.

It wasn't that he wanted the dollars for himself, but rather for use to help a blighted area become a brighter place. He wants to help the adults. He wants to help the kids. He wants to help his own mother, a single mother who has worked two jobs seemingly forever while raising six children – a heroine in her own right.

But he decided to put those dreams on hold for one more year.

“I was going to let him come to me, but he didn't really say a lot about it [about going pro],” said Karen Lambert, Chancellor's mother. “I knew then he was going back for his senior year.”

For Chancellor, there is first business to concern himself with in Blacksburg. There are degrees and championships to pursue.

Then he'll get on with his life's real pursuit.

A cousin named Rico introduced him to the game. Like so many young kids in Park Place, Chancellor and Rico were walking down the street, looking for something to do. Good or bad was irrelevant. Rico offered a suggestion – one that may have ultimately saved their lives.

“I still remember the day,” Chancellor said. “We were walking down the street, and he said, ‘Kam, do you want to go play football?’ I thought he meant backyard football, so I was like, ‘Yeah.’”

Rico escorted him to James Monroe Elementary School, where a large group of





Kam Chancellor wants to play in the NFL and then use his salary to rebuild an old Boys and Girls Club in a rugged area of his hometown.

young children were putting on pads and helmets and getting ready to practice. The two of them asked the coach if they could join, and a nice coach told them absolutely.

“We get there and the Park View Vikings were practicing and I see a whole bunch of people and a whole bunch of teams,” Chancellor said. “From that day on, I kept going out there. I liked the coach and I started liking football more and more. The first year wasn’t all that great, but after my first year, I started getting good.

“When I was little, right when I started playing in rec league, I used to hang with older dudes because I was big for my age, and I used to do what they did. I didn’t know any better. I didn’t have anyone to look up to, so I was trying to follow people outside on the streets. When my cousin told me about the football thing, that’s when things started to change. Football and basketball kept me from going bad.”

Not long after that day, Chancellor started embracing his athletic talents. He picked up basketball, the game of choice in rundown urban neighborhoods. He also gave track a run. The busier, the better. After all, more time spent at practices meant less time for tomfoolery out on the streets. Heck, Lambert, his mother, even put him in karate for a brief spell.

His mom never hesitated to let him or any of her other five children play sports, no matter what it cost. She has worked two jobs for a long time, and even though she recently got laid off from a job delivering parts to different places, she still works the ticket booth at the parking garage at McArthur Center and drives a shuttle bus at Norfolk State when school is in session.

Lambert always found a way to pay for the essentials while also scraping up enough to fund her children’s endeavors. She relied heavily on her two oldest daughters to watch over her four sons, one of whom is Kam, the third youngest. But she always managed to find a way to go to most of his games.

“I tried to go to every game,” Lambert said. “I wanted him to see how much I supported him. And I always tried to talk positive with him. I wanted to keep him from the negative. There is so much negative around.”

“It was hard for my mom,” Chancellor said. “She always managed to do it, but it was hard for her to, like, get us gifts for Christmas. Or stuff for school. We’d all get one pair of shoes for school and maybe a couple of outfits. That had to last us.

“We moved a lot, too, all there in Park Place. We were in an apartment and then a house. Then back to an apartment and back to a house. The apartment was a three-bedroom and all the boys were in one room. We had

two bunk beds and we were all in one room. That was rough.”

Despite being blessed with a terrific mother, Chancellor still needed a male role model in his life. After all, two of his brothers are younger, and the one older brother is just two years older. His father is not in the picture.

“I’ve seen him once and that was it,” Chancellor said.

Enter Kumasi Johnson, who played a leading role in Chancellor’s childhood. Johnson never expected to be in such a role. After all, he was a simple barber, running a local barbershop that his grandfather started. He simply cut hair – including Chancellor’s and his siblings – collected his money and minded his own business.

But Johnson, with Lambert’s permission, gave Chancellor a job as a 10-year-old, assigning him odd jobs such as sweeping up the hair, cleaning the clippers and taking out the trash. He earned a little money for his efforts, but occasionally he’d ask for more.

“I asked him one time what he was doing with his money,” Johnson said. “Of course, he can’t lie. He told me he had bought food for his brothers and sisters. I told him, ‘Kam, that’s all well and good, but you can’t go to school and try to study when you’re hungry.’ But that’s just Kam. He was always looking out for his family.”

Chancellor received more than just money from Johnson. He received an education in life. After all, people talk and try to solve the world’s problems in a barbershop.

“He [Johnson] gave me some wise words and I started staying away from bad people who were doing bad things,” he said. “I stayed away from that path.

“He always told me to stay away from clowns and to watch my company. I liked working there. They used to throw some hard jokes at me because that’s all you do at a barbershop – joke and tell stories. That’s what made me stronger.”

Thanks to the guidance of his mother and his role model (Johnson), Chancellor ultimately became immersed in his academic and athletics endeavors. He paid little heed to the shenanigans going on in the streets of Park Place, though the unfortunate deaths of some good friends served as the ultimate and constant reminder.

He made good grades, and by the time he got to Maury High School, he played the quarterback spot for head coach Dealbert Cotton. At 6-foot-4 and with a nice arm, he played it well, too.

A finger injury, though, cost him half of his junior season. And while he threw for 1,000 yards and played free safety in spells, he and his coach found recruiters being



Chancellor's size, strength and speed make him a perfect fit in the Hokies' attacking defensive scheme.

rather miserly with scholarship offers. In fact, only JMU's Curt Newsome, now at Tech, showed him any love.

"It was kind of crazy," Chancellor said. "I mean, I was OK in high school. I wasn't bad."

Bryan Stinespring knew this. Tech's offensive coordinator had his finger on the pulse of Tidewater recruiting and knew all about Chancellor – and loved his raw ability as a quarterback.

But in recruiting, you have to be 100 percent sure. So Stinespring waited, and in the meantime, during the first half of his senior season, Chancellor started microwaving the competition, shredding defenses with his passing and running at will in Maury's spread attack.

Then came the offer from Virginia Tech.

"I always thought he could play quarterback here and I recruited him as a quarterback," Stinespring said. "But he was injured his junior year and there wasn't a lot of film to evaluate. Everything was a projection with Kam. I did feel he could play quarterback here, but I couldn't guarantee it."

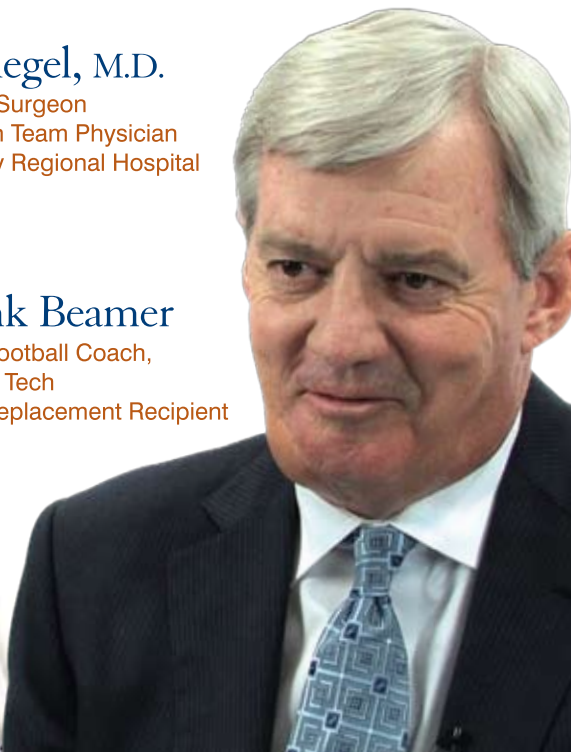
Surprisingly, Chancellor did not pounce on the Tech offer. He pondered going to JMU anyway.

Seriously.

"Yeah," he said, with a smile. "I didn't know anything about Tech. When you're coming out of high school, you're sometimes afraid to try things or go away. I guess because this program was so big, I was scared I wasn't good enough or wouldn't fit in.



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"I thought JMU was just right for me and that I would go there. Then my coaches at Maury told me that Tech would be a better place for me. It's a great program and they saw in me that I could be successful."

His days at quarterback ended, though, once he got to Tech. In fact, one look at him and the defensive staff immediately snapped him up, winning an important intra-staff battle.

Since then, he's played three different positions in three years, starting first at cornerback and playing as a true freshman. During his sophomore season, the staff moved him to rover, where he excelled, registering 79 tackles and an interception. Then they moved him again before last season, shoring up the critical free safety spot in Tech's scheme.

Last season turned out to be a major adjustment for Chancellor. The coaches defended his play and justifiably so, but given the role, his numbers dipped. He recorded 52 tackles and two interceptions, though he finished the season with an outstanding game in Tech's win in the Orange Bowl.

"I've had a pretty good career here," Chancellor said. "I think it could have been better last year. Maybe I took a step backward,

but I finished strong. I had to start trusting my instincts and speed and technique a little more. But I felt like I did that in the bowl game, and really, the last four games of the season."

Which has him excited for this season – and the future.

He only fleetingly considered leaving school and heading to the NFL. Sure, he wanted to

"I also wanted to stay for my teammates because I like this group of guys and I feel like we can win the national championship this year. I feel like everyone is serious about it and putting in everything they've got. We've taken steps every year since I've been here and I think we're ready." - Kam Chancellor

pursue that dream of helping the youngsters in Park Place, but he's also loyal – to both his teammates and himself.

"I wanted to be the first one in my family to graduate with a college degree, but my sister just beat me to it," Chancellor said. "She graduated last semester from Delaware State. But I still want to get a college degree [in human development, which he'll get next spring] and I'll be the first male [in his family] to get it.

"I also wanted to stay for my teammates

because I like this group of guys and I feel like we can win the national championship this year. I feel like everyone is serious about it and putting in everything they've got. We've taken steps every year since I've been here and I think we're ready."

"We talked about it and he told me, 'I've got to get that paper [diploma]," Johnson said. "I thought to myself, 'That's my boy. You've really grown up now.'"

"I admire him a lot. I really do. He didn't have a father and he's shown you don't have to do the bad things that other kids do. You can still make something of yourself."

That doesn't mean Chancellor won't let his mind wander about the future, particularly with his mom working two jobs and trying

to make ends meet, though as she says, "He owes me nothing."

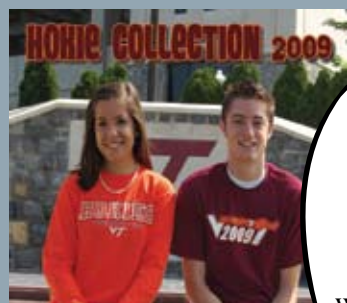
And particularly, he'll think about the kids at Park Place, meandering around the streets, ever ready to embrace whatever life throws their way, good or bad.

He knows the odds aren't in their favor.

But he plans on changing that. That old Boys and Girls Club raised and saved a lot of kids years ago.

It will again. Chancellor will see to it. 

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TECH AD ADDRESSES IMPORTANT TOPICS CONCERNING ATHLETICS

By Jimmy Robertson

Virginia Tech is entering its sixth year as a member of the ACC with three championships in football and 10 overall league titles. As usual, the department continues to invest for future success, and we sat down with Jim Weaver, Tech's director of athletics, as a part of our annual Q&A to get his thoughts on a wide range of topics.

Q: The big topic, not just in athletics, but also around the country, today is the economy. How has the poor economic climate affected the athletics program?

JW: We have planned for the down side of the economy, just like the rest of the university. We're very fortunate that our season ticket sales in football are just like they've been the past 10 years. We're fortunate that our basketball season tickets sold out last year and we have every expectation they will continue to do that this year. So the revenue streams that we can control are virtually very solid.

But we had planned for more than \$1 million less in revenue than last year. We feel very fortunate that we have not had to lay off any employees or drop any programs or furlough anybody at this point. A lot of athletics programs across the country have had to make critical decisions with regards to personnel and programs.

Q: What cost-cutting measures has the department taken to reduce the impact of the tough economy?

JW: Oh yes, we've done a lot, more than \$500,000 worth. Every segment of the department, every sport program and every support unit is operating on the same budget they had last year. Football alone will save the department \$80,000 by busing to Maryland instead of chartering. We've asked all sports to try and stay within two states of Virginia for non-conference competition to cut back on travel costs. We've done lots of other little things to make sure we're being as cost effective as we can.

Q: Even with the difficult economy, the department is going ahead with the new football locker room project. How is that project coming along and how much will it cost?

JW: They've started moving dirt and it's scheduled to be ready by the first of August next year. It's going to be a nice addition to our entire complex. It's a facility that's desperately needed. When you're playing at the high level we are, you've got to maintain every thing in the program at that high level, including facilities. Our locker room facility, in my opinion, needed attention.

The cost will be around \$16-18 million. It will give us three stories (locker room, lounge and wrestling practice room).

Q: What was the thought process behind having the wrestling room as a part of that project?

JW: The reason is we're going to convert the back gym where wrestling currently practices into a first-class weight room. All of our Olympic sports have been in a 3,500-square foot weight room that used to be football's weight room until about 10 or 11 years ago. So we're making that change.

As a result of moving out of the current football locker room, we'll be able to, with some minor construction, create three new locker rooms for Olympic sports. There's a lot of win-win here, and that's what we've always tried to do any time we've built new facilities. We've tried to create new space for someone else. We did that when our academic support services people moved to Lane Stadium. We created some offices for men's and women's soccer and volleyball, and they're really first class.

Q: As far as football scheduling, talk a little about playing Boise State at FedEx Field in 2010 and removing Syracuse?

JW: We've been working for four or five months with the Redskins. They want to start hosting college games and we've been going back and forth. They had about four or five different teams in the mix, and we signed a contract to play Boise State at FedEx Field on Oct. 2, 2010.

Syracuse has asked for relief for the last two or three years. It's very difficult to make the kind of scheduling changes you need to replace someone like that. Then we needed a one-time home game to replace Syracuse here in 2011


and we put that on the group that is working with the Redskins. The only team they could get was Arkansas State, which is a Division I team.

It's not going to be a particularly attractive non-conference schedule in 2011. But what we've done the last couple of years with Nebraska and the Alabama game, and what we're doing in the future with games against Pittsburgh (2012-13), Ohio State (2014-15), Kansas State (2014 and 2016) and Wisconsin (2016-17) is pretty strong.

Q: What is your vision for the future of Tech athletics given the uncertainty right now with the economic outlook?

JW: What I see in the future is for us to continue to develop and grow our enterprise as best we can under the circumstances of the economy. We've finally been able to help some of our Olympic sports operating budgets and salaries and we want to continue along that line because we haven't completed our task in that area. And we want to continue to advance the Olympic sports facilities as well because we play in the best conference in the country in Olympic sports. For us to be competitive, we've got to continue to build on our current strengths and address some of the issues that need our attention. Of course, we've got to keep the engine that drives the train moving down the track, which is football.

And of course – and probably most important – we need to continue to provide our student-athletes with the resources to help them graduate. Last year, our graduation rate was 76 percent, which is tremendous.

Overall, we want to be a well-rounded and competitive athletics department in the Atlantic Coast Conference. We're going to work hard to continue down that path. 



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2009 FOOTBALL
PREVIEW
BY JIMMY ROBERTSON

QB
Quarterbacks

**TAYLOR ANCHORS
THE QB SPOT AS A
RETURNING STARTER**

Tyrod
Taylor

For the first time in several years, there is an established pecking order at the quarterback position, and a lot of the Hokies' hopes for the 2009 season hinge on the play of quarterback Tyrod Taylor.

Taylor, a junior, returns after a season in which he started the final 10 games and led the team to both an ACC title and an Orange Bowl victory. He rushed for 738 yards, second on the team, and seven touchdowns, and he completed 57.2 percent of his passes for 1,036 yards and two touchdowns.

Tech will need better numbers from him in the passing game, but the big number that stands out about Taylor is his record. He's 13-2 as a starter, with one of those losses coming at Florida State when he was injured on the first play of the game.

For the first time, he goes into this season as the main guy at quarterback, which should have him feeling confident.


"He was a different guy this spring," Tech quarterbacks coach Mike O'Cain said. "He was more vocal and he understands the situation. The last three or four games of last year, he really started to become a quarterback instead of an athlete playing quarterback, and then he played well this spring. I expect to see a continuation of that."

Tech, though, goes into this season without an experienced backup and that concerns the staff, especially considering that Taylor has been injured each of his first two seasons. Ju-Ju Clayton came out of spring practice at No. 2 on the depth chart. He played well this spring, but struggled some in the spring game.

"Consistency is the thing with him," O'Cain said. "I want to see him consistently get better each and every day."

As it stands right now, Tech's staff plans on using Marcus Davis at receiver, but is leav-

ing open the option of a return to quarterback, where he played for most of the spring before being moved to receiver the final four practices. Davis is one of the best athletes on the team and he will play somewhere.

The staff also plans on giving highly touted recruit Logan Thomas a shot at quarterback. Thomas played quarterback at Brookville High in Lynchburg, Va., but many projected him to be a tight end at the college level. 

**QUARTERBACKS
DEPTH CHART**

- 5 Tyrod Taylor (6-0, 219, Jr.)
- 12 Ju-Ju Clayton (6-0, 214, r-Fr.)
- 7 Marcus Davis (6-4, 234, r-Fr.)
- 3 Logan Thomas (6-5, 230, Fr.)
- 16 Jeff Beyer (6-4, 214, r-Sr.)



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EVANS HEADLINES A DEEP AND TALENTED BACKFIELD

A year ago, Darren Evans barely got a mention in the preview story of the running backs position.

So much for foresight.

In his debut season, Evans took advantage of a season-ending injury to Kenny Lewis, Jr., to record one of the best seasons in Tech history. He rushed for 1,265 yards – the third-best single-season total ever at Tech – and 11 touchdowns. For good measure, he added 17 catches for 117 yards.

“I never would have guessed that Kenny would go down,” Evans said. “When he did, I thought the ball would be spread around a little more. I never would have guessed how things turned out.”

Evans turned into a workhorse for the Hokies. He ran the ball 287 times – the second most in a single season at Tech. He played little this spring, but as a result of his work in the strength and conditioning program, he is leaner, stronger and faster. Not playing much this spring has left him well rested.

So it goes to reason that he would put up similar numbers in his sophomore season, right?

Not quite.

“I hope I’m a good part of our offense,” he said. “But we have a lot of great backs. I’m not so much into stats anyway. As long as I’m a part of the offense and we’re winning and being productive, that makes me happy.”

Tech does, indeed, have plenty of backs behind Evans. In fact, it may feature the deepest and most talented backfield in school history this upcoming season.


In addition to returning Evans, the Hokies also bring back Josh Oglesby, who played in 12 games and rushed for 88 yards a year ago, and super-

star-in-the-making Ryan Williams, who redshirted last season. As for Lewis, his status remains up in the air as he tries to recover from a torn Achilles suffered in the middle of last season.

Williams was the best offensive player on the field this past spring. He provides the burst, speed and big-play capability that Tech’s offense needs. After all, the Hokies’ backs only provided three runs of longer than 25 yards a year ago. But Williams had a 36-yard run in the spring game and an 80-yard run in one of the scrimmages. He also took a 56-yard screen pass for a touchdown in the spring game.

“He brings a lot of everything,” Evans said of Williams. “He has all the moves, but he also runs hard. He knows that just shaking and baking won’t cut it. I don’t think people realize how strong of a runner he is.”

In an example of the rich getting richer, incoming freshman David Wilson also deserves a mention. Wilson rushed for 2,291 yards and 35 touchdowns his senior season at George Washington [Va.] High, and over the summer, was named the MVP of the IFAF Junior World Championship after helping lead the USA to the gold medal. In three games, he rushed for 425 yards and nine touchdowns.

Tech’s backfield also includes the fullback position, an oft-forgotten group. Kenny Jefferson, a smart, tough, dependable player, leads that pack, with Kenny Younger returning to back him up. Younger missed part of last season with a torn ACL, but will be full speed this fall. 



Darren Evans

RUNNING BACKS DEPTH CHART

TAILBACKS

- 32 Darren Evans (6-0, 213, r-Soph.)
- 34 Ryan Williams (5-10, 204, r-Fr.)
- 25 Josh Oglesby (5-11, 210, r-Soph.)
- 37 Zac Evans (5-10, 190, Fr.)
- 20 Kenny Lewis, Jr. (5-9, 198, Sr.)
- 4 David Wilson (5-11, 195, Fr.)

FULLBACKS

- 42 Kenny Jefferson (5-10, 238, r-Sr.)
- 31 Kenny Younger (5-11, 214, r-Jr.)
- 21 Joey Phillips (5-11, 214, r-Fr.)
- Josh Call (5-10, 255, r-Fr.)



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TE

Tight Ends

BOONE LEADS A STRONG TIGHT ENDS CONTINGENT

Greg Boone and the rest of the tight ends know how to pull a prank or two on their position coach – Bryan Stinespring.

In fact, rare is the day that Stinespring, who also serves as the offensive coordinator, doesn't walk into the position meeting room and see the diagram of a new play on the grease board.


A play that, of course, calls for the tight end to get the ball.

"We draw up stuff all the time," Boone said. "We want to see some deep balls come our way. But he's [Stinespring] always got some excuse."

Tech's tight ends caught 35 passes in 2008, and even with Chris Drager having switched from tight end to defensive end, the position returns Boone, André Smith and Sam Wheeler. One would expect them to be even more involved in the offense this season, but the Hokies have a bunch of young, talented receivers who may cut into the tight ends' production.

"I think a lot of it will depend on what defenses do," Boone said. "We don't look at it as if Tyrod [Taylor] has to come our way any more or any less. We should just take what the defense gives us."

Boone caught 22 passes and is going to be used in a variety of ways this season, as Stinespring also wants to expand Boone's role at quarterback in the Hokies' "Wild Turkey" formation. That includes having him throw the ball more, which is fine with him.

"That's the plan," he said. "My arm's good. I ain't lost it yet." 

TIGHT ENDS DEPTH CHART

- 8 Greg Boone (6-3, 287, r-Sr.)
- 88 André Smith (6-5, 268, r-Jr.)
- 18 Sam Wheeler (6-3, 256, r-Sr.)
- 85 Rob Stanton (6-5, 237, r-Jr.)
- 86 Eric Martin (6-2, 250, Fr.)



Greg Boone

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WR

Wide Receivers

YOUNG RECEIVING GROUP HAS ALL THE TOOLS

Danny Coale might not be the biggest receiver on Tech's roster. Or the quickest. Or the fastest.

But right now, he's the best.

Coale certainly was the Hokies' most consistent receiver as a redshirt freshman a year ago, starting all 14 games and leading the team with 36 catches for 408 yards. This past spring, with a bevy of talented, physical youngsters challenging him, he still came out of spring ball atop the depth chart at flanker and he goes into the 2009 season as the top target for quarterback Tyrod Taylor.

Coale, like most of his comrades, spent both summer sessions in Blacksburg. He worked on his strength and his speed, but most of his emphasis centered on the intricacies of his position.

"I just tried to get better at the little things," he said.

"I worked on the way I run my routes and seeing coverages. I watched a lot of film. I think you need to be able to see what the quarterback sees. I think that's helped me prepare for this season."


Led by Coale, the receiving group figures to be a strong one. Jarrett Boykin played as a true freshman a year ago and led the team in receiving yards (441). Dyrell Roberts also played as a true freshman, starting five games and catching seven passes. Xavier Boyce, another freshman, played in three games before getting a medical hardship waiver with an injury.

A redshirt freshman, Marcus Davis, at 6-4, 231 pounds, possesses the size and speed to be a tremendous receiver – assuming he doesn't go back to quarterback, where he worked for most of spring practice. Another freshman, Tony Gregory, put his blazing speed on display this spring and has a bright future as well.

Hopefully, Brandon Dillard – the lone senior in the group – can have a big year. Dillard was set to start last season before tearing his Achilles in an offseason workout, and that injury cost him the year.

With the exception of Dillard, all these guys are at least 6-feet tall. The entire group can run and should catch more than the meager two touchdown passes they hauled in last fall.

"It's a fun group," Coale said. "We're all trying to get better and we work well together. We've got a chance to be alright.

"Last year, those of us who played, we were taking things in steps. The game was new to a lot of us. But now we're a year older – and a year better." 

Danny Coale



WIDE RECEIVERS DEPTH CHART

SPLIT ENDS

- 81 Jarrett Boykin (6-2, 219, Soph.)
- 29 Xavier Boyce (6-4, 224, r-Fr.)
- 7 Marcus Davis (6-4, 234, r-Fr.)
- 35 Austin Fuller (6-2, 213, r-Fr.)

FLANKERS

- 19 Danny Coale (6-0, 208, r-Soph.)
- 11 Dyrell Roberts (6-2, 191, Soph.)
- 83 Patrick Terry (5-11, 190, r-Soph.)
- 40 Tony Gregory (6-0, 183, Fr.)
- 80 Brandon Dillard (5-11, 180, r-Sr.)
- 6 Ben Barber (5-10, 209, Fr.)



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OL

Offensive Line

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN READY TO PUT PAST BEHIND THEM

For the first time in years, Tech's offensive line will actually have some depth. The Hokies feature anywhere from seven to nine players on the front wall with the ability to contribute, and thus, offensive line coach Curt Newsome may be able to employ a rotation system this fall.

Most like the thoughts of that. Most, but not all.

"I hope he's not talking about rotating me in and out," left guard Sergio Render said, with a smile. "I don't want to come out unless I'm absolutely exhausted."

Render is one of four starters returning from the unit that started the Orange Bowl and one of the nation's best at his position. He figures to be a high-round draft choice in next April's NFL Draft provided that he enjoys a splendid senior campaign.

Render missed spring practice while recovering from surgery performed to repair a torn labrum in his shoulder, but he has worked efficiently to get himself into shape for the upcoming season. He had dropped 21 pounds and weighed 313 at the time he was interviewed for this preview – and he hoped to get down to 300-305 by the start of the season.

"I knew I needed to [lose weight] and the coaches wanted me to," Render said. "I feel great. My shoulder is fine. I'm able to pretty much do everything in the weight room now. I'm ready to have a good season and I think the entire offensive line is ready."

Render and Ed Wang, a fellow senior and starter at left tackle, anchor the line. The two have combined for 64 career starts. Blake DeChristopher, who started 11 games at right tackle as a redshirt freshman, also returns, along with Jaymes Brooks, who started at right guard in the Orange Bowl (in place of Nick Marshman) and played well. He enjoyed a tremendous spring before an ankle injury sidelined him, but he's at full speed now.

At center, Beau Warren takes over for steady Ryan Shuman. Warren did not start a game last season, but started two games the previous season. Therefore, all five of Tech's projected starters have started at least one game.

Quality reserves await if one those starters get hurt. Richard Graham, a senior, has played everywhere on the line and his versatility helps the front. Greg Nosal, a redshirt sophomore, took advantage of Render's injury in the spring and played very well. He possesses the instincts and athleticism to play guard or tackle. Though he needs to get stronger and add weight, Michael Via, a redshirt freshman, impressed everyone with his ability to pick up the center position this spring. And Andrew Lanier, a redshirt sophomore, worked himself into a position to get playing time at right tackle.


Newsome also likes a couple of youngsters – redshirt freshmen Nick Becton and Winston Painter. Neither is quite ready to step in and play extended minutes, but if they work at it, both possess the tools to be very good players in the future.

"I think we could be good, but it depends on how we come out," Render said. "If we come out and work together and produce, we can be good. But on the offensive line, if one person makes a mistake, the whole group looks bad. That's been our problem."

A year ago, Tech's offensive line paved the way for Darren Evans to rush for 1,265 yards – part of the Hokies' 2,441 yards rushing as a team. But the passing game was another story.

Tech allowed an ACC-worst 42 sacks a year ago. In the past two years, the Hokies have given up 97 sacks – the most of any team playing Division I. In fairness, some of those sacks weren't the fault of the offensive line. But not all of them.

"We've got to get rid of those," Render said. "We know if we protect Tyrod Taylor, then he can make plays.

"Ever since I've been here, people have talked about how awful the offensive line is. But we're not as bad as people think. We've just got to play more as a unit. We've got to know our plays and we've got to study our opponents more. That's what I'm priding myself on doing this summer. If we do that, I think that's really going to help on the playing field." 

Sergio Render

OFFENSIVE LINE DEPTH CHART

LEFT TACKLES

77 Ed Wang (6-5, 313, r-Sr.)

54 Nick Becton (6-5, 311, r-Fr.)

LEFT GUARDS

70 Sergio Render (6-3, 313, Sr.)

75 Greg Nosal (6-5, 288, r-Soph.)

69 Jim Brown (6-3, 311, Fr.)

CENTERS

60 Beau Warren (6-3, 286, r-Jr.)

67 Michael Via (6-6, 277, r-Fr.)

58 Bo Gentry (5-10, 239, r-Fr.)

RIGHT GUARDS

68 Jaymes Brooks (6-2, 297, r-Soph.)

64 Richard Graham (6-6, 296, r-Sr.)

RIGHT TACKLES

62 Blake DeChristopher (6-5, 312, r-Soph.)

72 Andrew Lanier (6-5, 281, r-Soph.)

71 Winston Painter (6-5, 325, r-Fr.)



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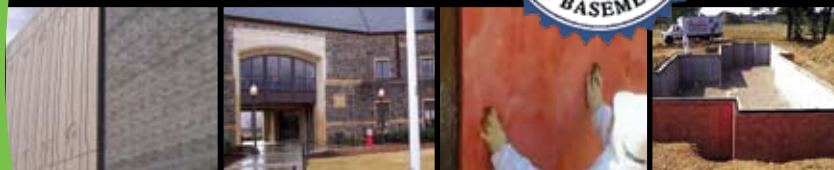
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DEPTH COULD BE AN ISSUE, BUT TECH'S STARTING DL COULD BE TREMENDOUS

When Charley Wiles, Tech's defensive line coach, sat down with John Graves after spring practice to discuss goals and summer plans, he knew not to waste time asking if Graves planned to stay in Blacksburg for the entire summer.

After all, no one likes working out more than Graves, even during the so-called offseason. In fact, he and a small group that included Jason Worilds, Jake Johnson, Antoine Hopkins and Demetrius Taylor often stayed 30 minutes later or more following a scheduled workout just to get in a few more lifts.

"We're just trying to get in a little extra work," Graves said. "We're trying to get better. All of us want to excel in games, and hopefully, this will help us. It also builds camaraderie. Guys are helping each other and motivating each other."

Graves and Worilds anchor what figures to be an outstanding starting unit on the defensive front. Heading into fall practice, the starting lineup featured Graves and Cordarrow Thompson at the tackle spots, providing the Hokies with plenty of bulk in the middle of the defense, while Worilds and Nekos Brown held down the end positions. All four possess All-ACC ability.

The question for this unit will be depth, particularly at the end spots. This spring, Graves spent most of his time at end, as Wiles prepared for a worst-case scenario – an injury to Worilds or Brown – this fall.

"You never know what may happen," Graves said. "I'm prepared. I learned a lot and I feel like it [playing defensive end] went well. It wasn't too awkward for me."

The back-ups at end include Steven Friday, who missed most of spring with an injury, and a redshirt freshman, Isaiah Hamlette, who may not be ready for a huge role this fall. The X-factor, though, is Chris Drager, who moved from tight end to defensive end after spring practice, as the staff felt a need to solidify the end spots. The situation certainly bears watching.

In the middle, things are more tenable. Taylor is the perfect back-up and is considered a co-starter, and Hopkins could be a standout – he had two sacks and returned a fumble for a touchdown in the spring game. Kwamaine Battle also improved tremendously this spring.

As a unit, they know they need to be good. Great defense starts up front.

"That's our goal – to be the best," Graves said. "We have the potential. As long as we stay focused and stay away from injuries, we should be fine."

Cordarrow Thompson



DEFENSIVE LINE DEPTH CHART

STUD ENDS

- 47 Nekos Brown (6-2, 244, Sr.)
- 33 Chris Drager (6-3, 247, r-Soph.)
- 54 Isaiah Hamlette (6-4, 246, r-Fr.)

ENDS

- 6 Jason Worilds (6-2, 256, r-Jr.)
- 82 Steven Friday (6-4, 235, r-Jr.)

NOSE TACKLES

- 91 John Graves (6-3, 279, r-Jr.)
- 56 Demetrius Taylor (6-0, 274, r-Sr.)
- 93 Kwamaine Battle (6-0, 283, r-Soph.)
- 45 Joe Jones (6-2, 244, r-Fr.)

TACKLES

- 95 Cordarrow Thompson (6-3, 307, r-Sr.)
- 98 Antoine Hopkins (6-0, 299, r-Fr.)
- 53 Dwight Tucker (6-2, 283, r-Fr.)
- 59 Courtney Prince (6-2, 270, r-Fr.)

Cordarrow Thompson (95) and John Graves (91) put a lot of pressure on Maryland quarterback Chris Turner in Tech's 23-13 win over the Terps last year and should be able to do more of the same against opponents this season.



John Graves

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JOHNSON AND RIVERS OUT TO MAKE NAMES FOR THEMSELVES

Year in and year out, Tech's defense features some of the nation's best players, and in particular, linebackers.

But heading into this season, more than a few Tech fans will need to scan the game program to find the names of the projected starters.

The names are Jake Johnson and Barquell Rivers, and between them, they have one career start. In fact, all of the scholarship linebackers are redshirt sophomores or younger.


Rivers, though, eased the mind of defensive coordinator and linebackers coach Bud Foster with a solid game against Cincinnati in the Orange Bowl. Starting in place of an injured Brett Warren (knee) at mike linebacker, Rivers played his position well and made a huge fourth-down stop near the goal line – a play that helped the Hokies to a 20-7 victory. He also played well this spring, solidifying his spot, and more importantly, Foster's trust.

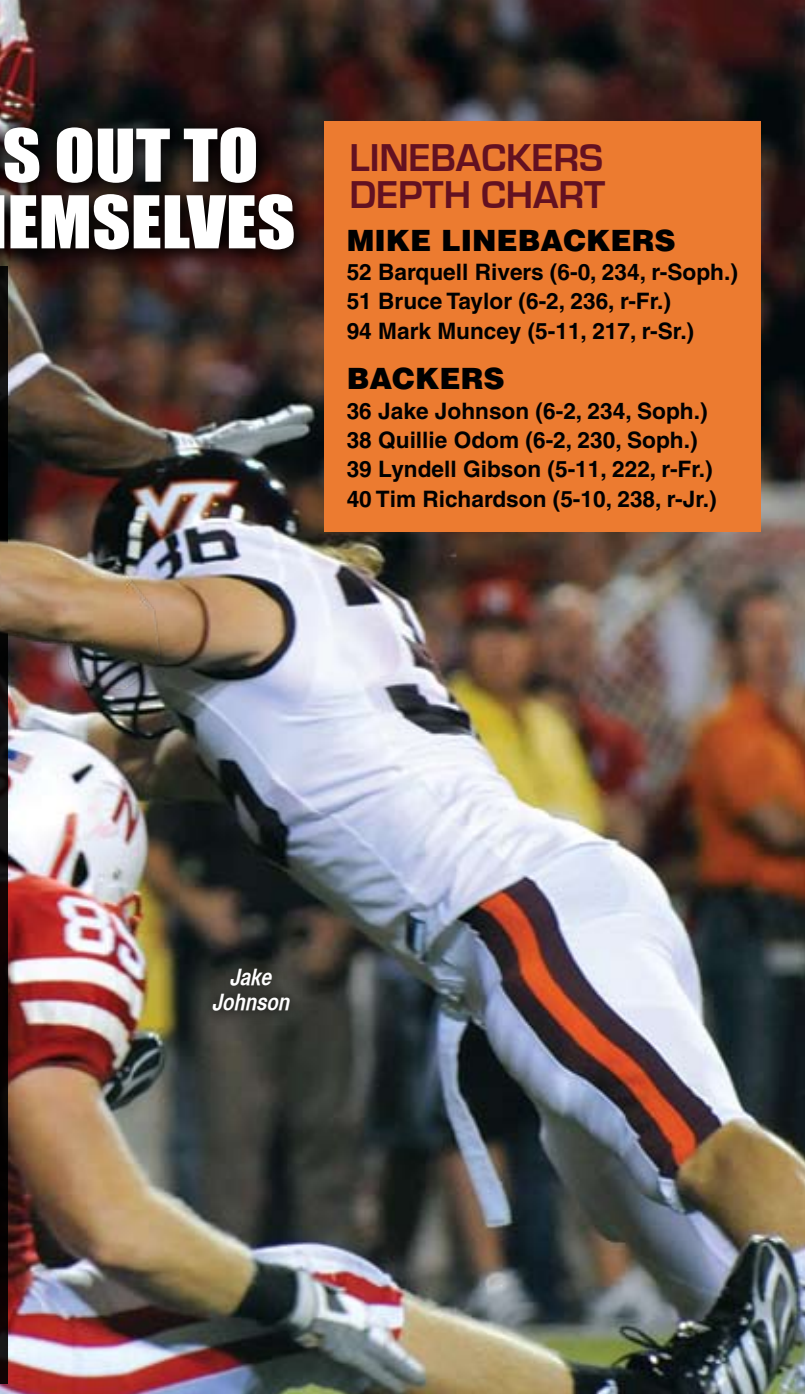
Johnson, who was a backup at mike last season, won the job at backer with a tremendous spring. He was the team's most improved defensive player this past spring.

"The backer position was wide open and the coaches thought I could produce there," Johnson said. "I think I was able to show them that. I love the position and I think it's a good fit for me. We do a lot of blitzes off the edge and do some things in coverage. I get to hit receivers coming over the middle. It's a fun position."

Johnson, a weight room addict, was a little heavy, by his own admission, when he arrived on campus a year ago. But he spent this spring and summer getting his weight down and his body right for his new position, and he resembles the physical specimen many saw in his recruiting photos when he committed to Tech.

"I feel good," he said. "I wanted to lose weight and I did. My conditioning is good. I came in at 245 pounds, and in the spring, I dropped to 230 and then to 220. Now, I'm back to 230, but it's good weight. I knew I had to do something, so I put in some hard work, got in a little extra time in the cardio room and started eating healthy. Now I'm ready."

Inexperience reigns behind Rivers and Johnson. At mike, redshirt freshman Bruce Taylor will back up Rivers, while true sophomore Quillie Odom and redshirt freshman Lyndell Gibson will back up Johnson. Only Odom played among those three a year ago – and he only played 45 snaps, most of those coming on special teams. 



Jake Johnson

LINEBACKERS DEPTH CHART

MIKE LINEBACKERS

52 Barquell Rivers (6-0, 234, r-Soph.)

51 Bruce Taylor (6-2, 236, r-Fr.)

94 Mark Muncey (5-11, 217, r-Sr.)

BACKERS

36 Jake Johnson (6-2, 234, Soph.)

38 Quillie Odom (6-2, 230, Soph.)

39 Lyndell Gibson (5-11, 222, r-Fr.)

40 Tim Richardson (5-10, 238, r-Jr.)

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TECH FEATURES DEPTH AND EXPERIENCE AT BOTH SPOTS

A year ago, Dorian Porch was not in the best of moods.

And he readily admits he was to blame for the problems.

Porch spent last summer working an internship for a residential property management company in Largo, Md., and he came back in poor shape. As a result, he saw Davon Morgan move ahead of him on the depth chart and ultimately win the starting job at rover.

"The situation I was in, I let my teammates down as far as my conditioning," Porch said. "I felt it was my fault. I wanted to go to the coaches and say I needed a chance. But I understood where they were coming from. That drove me to work harder, and when my time came, I was ready."

Porch got his opportunity when Morgan tore an ACL in the Nebraska game. He started for Morgan the final nine games of the season and played every down during that stretch. In the regular-season finale against UVa, he made the game-saving interception late in the game, and in the Orange Bowl, he led the Hokies with eight tackles.


He continued his solid play this spring, and unlike last summer, he spent his entire time in Blacksburg, working out. Now, he goes into the season No. 1 on the depth chart.

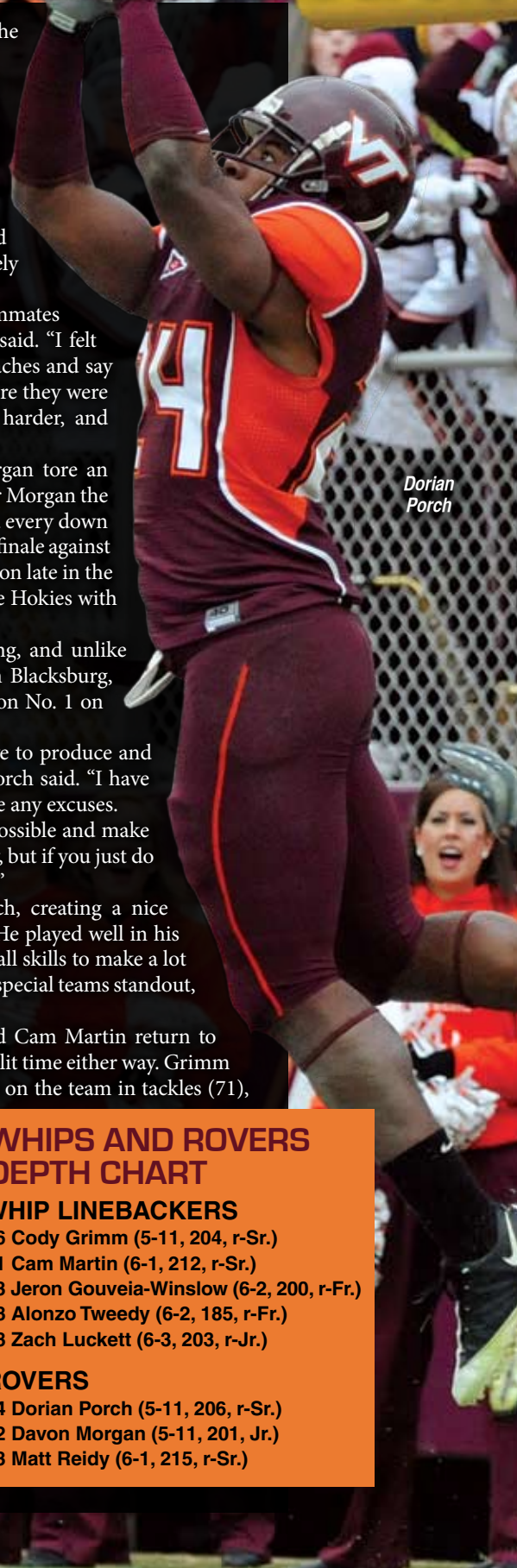
"I look back on it and I have that drive to produce and correct the mistakes I made last year," Porch said. "I have that drive to come out on top. I don't have any excuses."

"My goal is to make as few errors as possible and make the plays I'm supposed to make. It's funny, but if you just do your job, then the plays will come to you."

Now healthy, Morgan will push Porch, creating a nice competition between two good players. He played well in his five starts last season and possesses the ball skills to make a lot of plays in coverage. Steady Matt Reidy, a special teams standout, goes into the season as the third rover.

At whip linebacker, Cody Grimm and Cam Martin return to battle for the starting nod. The two will split time either way. Grimm was tremendous last year, finishing third on the team in tackles (71), second in tackles for a loss (14) and tied for second in sacks (7.5). Martin, who missed spring practice with a knee injury, will be ready once the season starts. He had 51 tackles and a pair of sacks a year ago, starting 13 games.

Jeron Gouveia-Winslow, Alonzo Tweedy and Zach Lockett are the remaining whips. Lockett, who was moved from the receiver spot, returns after missing last season (suspended). All figure to help out extensively on special teams this season. 



Dorian Porch

WHIPS AND ROVERS DEPTH CHART

WHIP LINEBACKERS

- 26 Cody Grimm (5-11, 204, r-Sr.)
- 41 Cam Martin (6-1, 212, r-Sr.)
- 43 Jeron Gouveia-Winslow (6-2, 200, r-Fr.)
- 28 Alonzo Tweedy (6-2, 185, r-Fr.)
- 18 Zach Lockett (6-3, 203, r-Jr.)

ROVERS

- 24 Dorian Porch (5-11, 206, r-Sr.)
- 2 Davon Morgan (5-11, 201, Jr.)
- 23 Matt Reidy (6-1, 215, r-Sr.)

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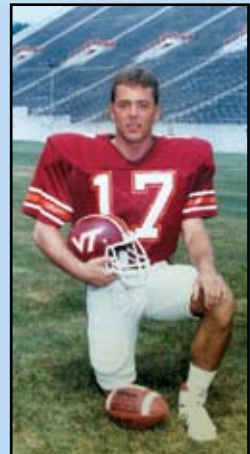


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VIRGIL READY TO ASSUME ROLE AT BOUNDARY CORNER

Tech's list of distinguished boundary corners is quite impressive and lengthy and includes the likes of Macho Harris, Brandon Flowers, Jimmy Williams and DeAngelo Hall.

Now it's Stephan Virgil's turn.

Virgil, a rising senior who started all 14 games as a field corner a season ago, flips over to the other side to handle the boundary corner duties with Harris' departure. He tied for the team lead (with Harris) in interceptions with six (to go along with 43 tackles and four pass break-ups) and the two of them were the main reasons why Tech ranked tied for second in the ACC with 20 interceptions last season. Now, Virgil hopes to make an even bigger impact in 2009 at one of Tech's premier play-making positions.

"I'm excited about it," Virgil said. "There are a lot more opportunities to make plays at the boundary corner, not just in the passing game, but in the running game. I'll feel more at home there. There will be more contact and I like being in the mix of things. I feel like I have the complete game to play at boundary.

"I learned a lot from watching Macho and Brandon and watching Jimmy on film. I'm trying to take what I've learned from them and put my own little twist on it."

Virgil and returning free safety Kam Chancellor anchor the Hokies' secondary. Chancellor, a senior, got off to a bit of a slow start in his first season at free safety but made more and more plays down the stretch. He intercepted a pass and broke up two others in the Orange Bowl and enjoyed an outstanding spring. He and Virgil both have all-conference ability.


The starting job at field corner remains a little up in the air, with Rashad Carmichael, Cris Hill and Eddie Whitley all fighting for it. Carmichael, a redshirt junior, is the fastest player on the team and probably is the leading contender because of his speed and experience. But Hill, a redshirt sophomore, was vastly improved this spring and Whitley, a sophomore, is a physical presence whom the coaches like. He also possesses the versatility to play at safety, too.

Heading into the fall, Hill backed up Carmichael at field corner, while Whitley backed up Virgil at boundary. But things could change.

"All those guys are great guys and they love to compete," Virgil said. "They all bring different things to the table. Rashad [Carmichael] has the speed, and Cris has speed and technique. Eddie's more physical. They're all competitors and they're going to compete until the end for that job."

At safety, the backup is Lorenzo Williams, who played mostly on special teams as a true freshman a year ago. He suffered a knee injury halfway through the season and missed some time, and that may have hindered him this spring. He possesses the physical skills needed to be a good safety, but defensive backs coach Torrian Gray wants to see him make more plays.

Virgil, though, is the key to this defensive backfield. He missed part of spring practice while taking care of his academic responsibilities but worked extra hard over the summer to make up for it and to prepare for the task of replacing Harris, a playmaker who earned All-America honors by three organizations last year (Associated Press, *The Sporting News* and *Sports Illustrated*).

"I feel good," Virgil said. "I've gained weight and I've gotten faster. I feel like I've done what I need to do in the offseason to hold up the boundary tradition. Now I need to do it on the field." 



Stephan Virgil

DEFENSIVE BACKS DEPTH CHART

FIELD CORNERS

- 21 Rashad Carmichael (5-11, 184, r-Jr.)
- 9 Cris Hill (5-11, 185, r-Soph.)
- 30 Germond Oatneal (5-11, 182, Soph.)

BOUNDARY CORNERS

- 22 Stephan Virgil (5-11, 191, Sr.)
- 15 Eddie Whitley (6-1, 184, Soph.)
- 37 Jacob Sykes (6-0, 193, r-Soph.)

SAFETIES

- 17 Kam Chancellor (6-4, 229, Sr.)
- 14 Lorenzo Williams (6-2, 211, Soph.)
- 1 Antone Exum (5-11, 209, Fr.)

ST

Special Teams

BOWDEN SEEKING TO PUT PAST BEHIND HIM

Brent Bowden isn't quite sure what happened at the beginning of last season.

Coming off a sophomore campaign in which he averaged 42.5 yards per punt, he expected to be launching rockets down the field during his junior year. Instead, he mis-hit a bunch, and though he finished the year with a 40.4-yard average, he gave his honest assessment of his season.

"I was really disappointed," he said.

Bowden stayed in Blacksburg the entire summer for the first time since he arrived on campus and he enters his final season with a new attitude. Long gone are the thoughts of hang time and yardage and winning all-conference honors. Instead, he has slightly more modest goals.

"I want to have fun," Bowden said. "This is my last season and I want to help the team in any way I can and enjoy it.


"Last year, I had a great camp and thought I was going to do better than I did the previous year. For whatever reason, those first few punts, I was so nervous. I was putting so much pressure on myself, and I hate to say

this – I became a head case.

"When I went out and relaxed, I did so much better. I think I added two yards to my average the last six games."

For a team that likes to play the field position game, Bowden will be a key performer for Tech. So, too, will be the field-goal kicker, and right now, that figures to be Matt Waldron, who was sensational during spring practice.

"He's my best friend and roommate and I know how bad he wants it," Bowden said of Waldron. "He's always accurate. From 45 yards and in, he's going to make it."

The return game figures to be sparked by both Ryan Williams and Dyrrell Roberts, who will attempt to replace return standout Macho Harris, an All-American defensive back a year ago. True freshman David Wilson could also be in the mix. 

Brent Bowden

SPECIAL TEAMS DEPTH CHART

KICKERS

49 Matt Waldron (5-11, 190, r-Sr.)
48 Justin Myer (6-0, 201, Soph.)

PUNTERS

97 Brent Bowden (6-3, 202, r-Sr.)
30 Brian Saunders (6-0, 197, r-Jr.)

SNAPPERS

50 Collin Carroll (6-3, 235, r-Soph.)
63 Matt Tuttle (6-0, 229, r-Sr.)

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GETTIN' DOWN TO 'BRIZ'NESS

Mike Brizendine talks about his new job as Tech's head men's soccer coach and previews the 2009 season

By Matt Kovatch

On June 2, Oliver Weiss abruptly and unexpectedly resigned from his post as the head men's soccer coach at Virginia Tech. Nine days later, on June 11, longtime assistant Mike Brizendine was promoted to the vacant spot after spending five seasons as Weiss' right-hand man.

Brizendine now has the task of turning around a team that finished last in the ACC in 2008, just one season removed from a run to the NCAA College Cup semifinals in 2007.

'Briz,' as he is known around the athletics department, sat down in mid-July for a Q&A to discuss his first month on the job, as well as the outlook of the first season in the new era of Virginia Tech men's soccer.

IHS: First of all, congrats on the promotion. How has life been treating you as the new head man?

MB: It's been very hectic, but also exciting. Just trying to get our staff together [finding newly-hired Patrick McSorley to join Brizendine and first-year assistant Kevin Doyle] has been a crucial element. Between that, recruiting and all of the office work, it's been busy.

IHS: Oliver's resignation kind of came out of nowhere. What was your initial reaction?

MB: I was shocked and kind of disappointed. I worked for him for five-and-a-half years, and over that time, I developed a respect for him and a friendship with him. It was sad to think that we wouldn't be working together because we were trying to do some

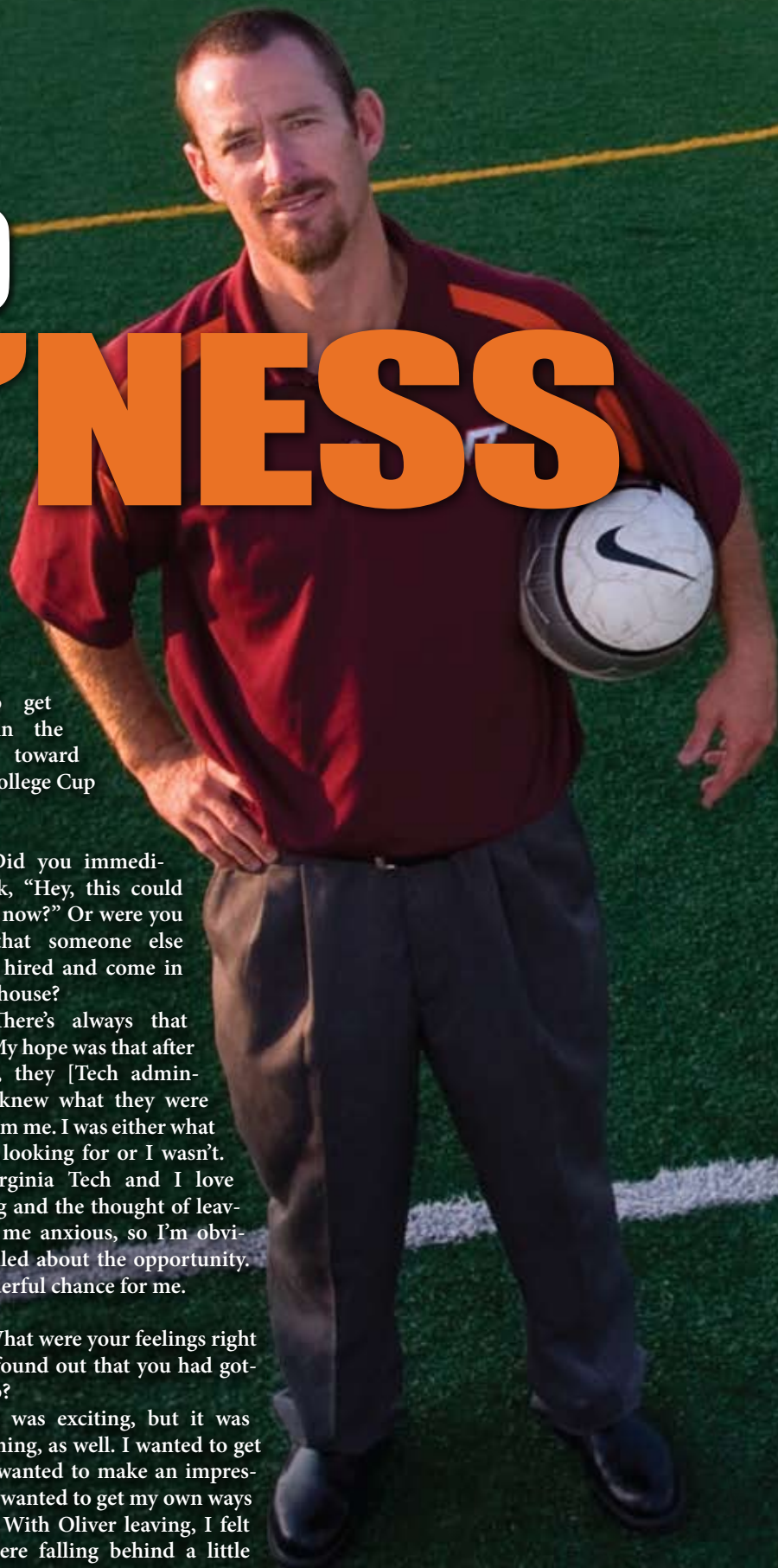
things to get moving in the direction toward another College Cup run.

IHS: Did you immediately think, "Hey, this could be my job now?" Or were you worried that someone else might get hired and come in and clean house?

MB: There's always that concern. My hope was that after five years, they [Tech administrators] knew what they were getting from me. I was either what they were looking for or I wasn't. I love Virginia Tech and I love Blacksburg and the thought of leaving made me anxious, so I'm obviously thrilled about the opportunity. It's a wonderful chance for me.

IHS: What were your feelings right after you found out that you had gotten the job?

MB: It was exciting, but it was overwhelming, as well. I wanted to get started, I wanted to make an impression and I wanted to get my own ways out there. With Oliver leaving, I felt like we were falling behind a little bit, so I wanted to get in there, get us caught up and get us up to speed. We not only needed to get ready for this season, but



we also needed to get moving on recruiting for the next two years. When Oliver left, that left us with 2010 recruits who were already committed to him, so we had to talk with those folks. We were also looking at kids for 2011 as well. Things kind of stood still until we saw what was going to happen [in terms of the hiring]. Once that decision was made, we had to act quickly, get on e-mail and get people to call us so we could chat about our direction. The recruiting aspect was very important.

IHS: How has the reaction of the guys on the team been?

MB: I think it's been good. There has been a lot of communication between the guys and myself. Obviously, there was definite shock amongst the players, but we have competitive players and they want to succeed. They're excited about the upcoming year and the task of trying to prove that they're better than the 5-13 record we had last year. Especially with guys like Alexander Baden, James Gilson, Charlie Campbell and James Shupp – these guys are leaders who want to win. For a couple of them, it's their last go-round and they want to make it as competitive and successful as possible.

IHS: You mentioned that you had to jump right into recruiting from day 1. What would you say your recruiting philosophy is now that this is your team? Does it differ from Oliver's?

MB: I definitely picked up some great things when I was working with Oliver. The key with all of this – coaching and recruiting and everything else – is to take what I've learned over the years from different people, add in my own impressions on how it should be done, and that's the way that we'll do it. Basically, my formula will include some of the key pieces that I thought were excellent from other coaches whom I've worked with, and then I'll add my own twist to it.

IHS: That being said, what are some specific strategies you'll be applying going forward?

MB: We really want to get into the market with the top-tier American kids, which is something we haven't attracted in the past. To do that, one risk – and it is very much a risk – is to start recruiting kids earlier. That's one thing that we haven't done. To do a thorough job, especially with the way that the NCAA [recruiting] rules are, it's difficult. You can't call the kids and you can't e-mail some of them so you have to work through a club coach. Trying to do that thorough of a job so early on is a risk because things often don't pan out, but we need to get into

that market because our competitors are already there. We haven't traditionally gone heavy into the under-17 U.S. national team either, and that's another market that we plan on picking up. Kevin Doyle has great contacts in the Midwest and also with the national team, so we plan on really using those avenues to broaden the states from which we get kids, as well as raising the level of kids that we go after.

IHS: An outsider might wonder how a team can go from the College Cup one year to going winless in the ACC the next, but you guys had a much different roster last season. What was that situation like?

MB: It was difficult. It was kind of a 'perfect storm' type of setting. First of all, we lost arguably the best player in all of college soccer in Patrick Nyarko. Secondly, we had Alex Baden, who was one of our next best players, go down in the last spring game with an ACL injury. Then we lost Charlie Campbell, who had a myriad of injuries. Also, some of our international players didn't work out. If everybody played and it was how we pictured it, last year would've been a very different scene. We had brought in a bunch of freshmen – fringe guys who needed a year or two to develop – to take some time to learn and get accustomed to things, but they had to step in right away and that became challenging to get them ready to contribute so early. The good news for us this year is that those guys became a little more seasoned. They know what it takes now.

IHS: Because of all that inexperience, you guys were forced to experiment a lot with different combinations to find something that worked. What did you learn from that, and will you have to do it again this year with another large rookie class?

MB: Last year, we were pretty much trying anything to get some momentum going. This year, I don't think we'll mix and match as much because I think we have enough of



Luiz Yamashita (left) and James Gilson (center) will be counted on as two of the Hokies' main goal scorers in 2009.

the older guys. My hope is that we even end up redshirting a number of our freshmen this year so they can get a year to develop. When we went to the College Cup, we had guys like Ben Nason and Scott Spangler, both of whom were fifth-year players who had taken redshirt years. We had older guys and that's how you succeed. We want to get back into doing that. We might take our lumps, but I think it will be very beneficial in the long term. I think we have a couple freshmen in this class who could potentially start or play significant minutes, but others may need to sit for a year and learn.

IHS: You already mentioned Alex Baden and Charlie Campbell – how glad are you to have them returning from injury?

MB: Oh, it's significant. Charlie was our man during the run to the College Cup – he was outstanding. And Baden – even if he's at 50 percent – helps us a bunch. Those two are key elements just because of their leadership. Alex's leadership alone makes us a better team. We would've won two or three more games last year just with him back there organizing things. I'm very excited to have them back.

IHS: The time in net last year was split almost evenly between three goalkeepers. How do you see that position shaking out?

MB: It's going to be a battle between Brendan Dunn and Stefan Caulfield (Thomas St. Germain is not returning.). One of them needs to solidify the spot. I'll lean on [goalkeeping coach] Kevin Doyle, and whatever direction he wants to go, that's the direction we'll go. Just having some consistency back there will help tremendously. We're confident that one of them will step up and take care of the job for us, but we need to find a starter in there – somebody whom we're going to stick with.


IHS: James Gilson was primarily a defender early in his career, but he stepped up last year and led the team in nearly every category. What do you expect out of his senior campaign?

MB: He can do anything. He's a special player and I honestly think he's a professional prospect. Last year was just a case of him doing what the team needed, but he can defend, he can go forward, he can play the middle and he can play out wide. There's really nothing that he can't do.

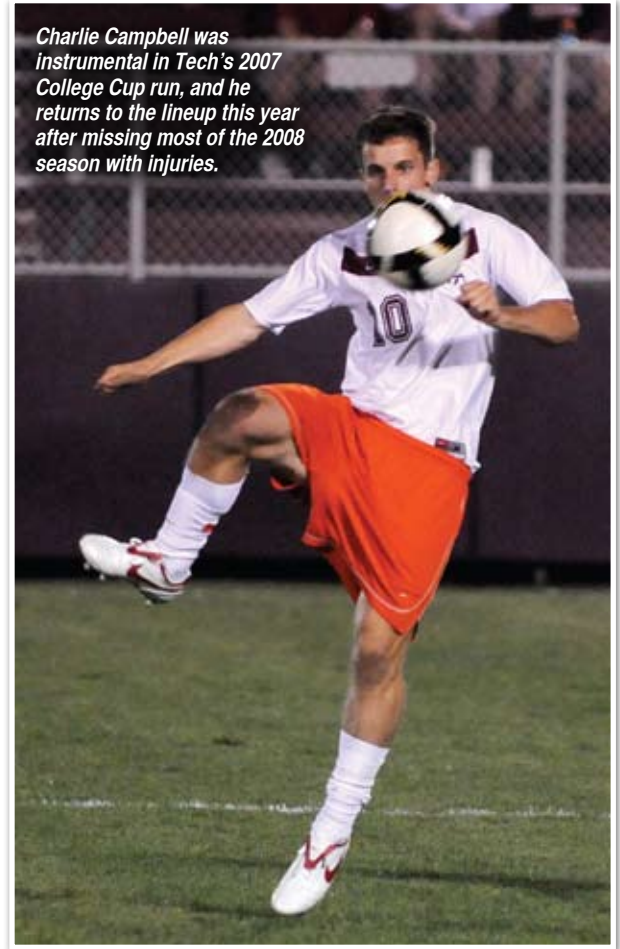
IHS: Who do you see helping him out on the offensive end?

MB: Our defense should be pretty stable, but we're going to have to call on some young guys – [sophomores] Luiz Yamashita, Emmanuel Akogyeram and Clarke Bentley – to help on the attack. We're going to have to score by committee, and my hope is that we'll have a bunch of different guys with four, five or six goals. I want us to be a high-pressure team that gets after people. I want us to be defending by attacking.

IHS: Finally, what are your realistic goals and expectations for the upcoming season?

MB: In this first year, I want us to make strides toward getting back to the top. We need to win some ACC games. I believe that we have the talent to be competitive in every game. We may come up with the short end of the stick in some of those games, but we'll win some of them, too. My goal is to make sure that we're competitive and that we're maxing out our potential to try to get some results. I want us to be back in the NCAA Tournament. Our ultimate goal is to make the College Cup – but we first need to expect to make the NCAA Tournament. 

Charlie Campbell was instrumental in Tech's 2007 College Cup run, and he returns to the lineup this year after missing most of the 2008 season with injuries.



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AFTER A SUMMER IN VIETNAM, ROBIN CHIDESTER RETURNS TO THE HOKIES AIMING TO HELP THEM BUILD ON LAST YEAR'S TREMENDOUS SEASON

By Matt Kovatch

It was another blisteringly hot day in rural Vietnam, and Robin Chidester reached down for what she thought, or at least hoped, was a piece of chicken. It was the latest offering in what had become a long line of 'mystery meat' at the dinner table in the southeastern Asian country that she was visiting this past summer.

But as she poked around at it, she quickly realized that it wasn't a typical drumstick. Glancing back down at the table, she noticed that what she was holding was just part of a creature that had literally been sliced – not carefully carved – into pieces. What Chidester was gripping was not the bone of a chicken leg, but the bill of duck, with the rest of its head and neck – vertebrae and all – clearly attached and visible upon further review.

Though Chidester, a senior on the Virginia Tech women's soccer team, ultimately passed on the decapitated waterfowl, she was able to help herself to some of the Vietnamese fruit that she said makes the fruit over here pale in comparison.

"The fruit over there is amazing," she said. "There are all kinds of exotic fruits that I had never even heard of and they serve it after every meal."

What does this have to do with soccer? Not much at all, but it was just one of the many memorable moments that Chidester experienced during what had to be one of the most interesting summers spent by any Virginia Tech student-athlete.

Chidester, along with former women's soccer players Ashley Owens and Ashley Seldon, as well as former men's soccer player Taylor Walsh, spent three weeks in Vietnam this past June as part of the "Coach for College" program. The program, in short, is a global initiative to promote higher education through sports. In particular (according to the "Coach for College" Web site), it provides a forum for American college student-athletes, as those who have received access to higher education through sports, to, in turn, use sports to help provide disadvantaged youth in rural parts of developing countries abroad with access to higher education.

The program was designed two years ago by a former student-athlete from Duke, and after a pilot run in 2008, it was back in full force this past summer with the Hokies in tow.

Chidester is an avid traveler and had already been to places



like Europe, the Caribbean, New Zealand, Australia, Fiji, Hawaii, Alaska, Mexico and Venezuela, so there were no reservations about being far from home after she found out about the program from Owens.

"Whenever I see an opportunity for travel, I jump on it," she said. "That's actually what first caught my eye about this trip."

So three flights, one long drive into the Vietnamese countryside and over 24 hours of traveling later, Chidester and nine other student-athletes from Tech, Duke and UNC were firmly entrenched in an environment where academics and athletics rarely make it into a child's post-high school years. And that's exactly what she and her fellow travelers were there trying to change.

"They don't have formal sports training over there, so it's really neat for them," Chidester explained. "Basically, we're over there promoting higher education. We're role models for them. We represent higher education and we are pushing for them to pursue it. It's a very rural area and it's very common for kids to just stop going to school during high school to work and help out their parents."

Chidester, who was paired with a fencer from UNC and two students from Vietnam's Can Tho University (to help with the language barrier), was responsible for mentoring a group of 15-20 rising ninth-graders twice a day on things such as team-building and leadership. Throughout each day, different groups of children would rotate through different stations, where they learned the basics of sports like soccer, tennis, volleyball and basketball. Naturally, Chidester taught them soccer, which she said the children,

especially the boys, adapted to the easiest.

A communications major, the Virginia Beach, Va., native also taught the children English, which, for obvious reasons, was a lot tougher for them to pick up on than math.

"It was really difficult at first because I'd catch myself using big words," Chidester said. "You really have to simplify things. They know the grammar, but they don't have the vocabulary because they don't start actually speaking it until late in high school."

As she begins her final year in college, Chidester is also working toward minors in German and Spanish, and said she has thought about traveling to other countries in the future to teach English and coach soccer. Her experience in Vietnam strengthened that notion, and it also left her well equipped to deal with her new role as one of the soccer team's captains.

"I definitely learned a lot of things about patience, not getting frustrated with others, and different ways to communicate," she said.

All things which, coincidentally, Virginia Tech head coach Kelly Cagle desires out of her soccer team one season after it completed a stunning run to the title game of the ACC tournament and earned just the second NCAA Tournament bid in program history.

"I think leadership, communication and how smoothly things are run ... it almost overpowers any talent that you may or may not have," the seventh-year head coach said. "We're really going to be relying on some of the culture we've created. We want our leaders to get us through everything day by day and to help us enjoy one another and enjoy the process. I think the talent that we have is

the best that we've returned since I've been here, but if we can create an smooth environment like that, then we'll be in even better shape."

That thought rang true last season, when despite four surgeries in the season's first few weeks – including a season-ending injury to leading scorer Marika Gray – the Hokies managed to string together a 10-7-2 regular season record and qualify for the ACC tournament for just the second time.

"Our leadership was some of the best it's ever been last year," Cagle said. "If you would have told me how well the season was going to end up after what we were handed in our first three weeks, I never would have believed it. But I think it was a testament to how broad our foundation was and that we weren't reliant upon one or two players. The girls really started to pick up the slack for each other."

After earning the seventh seed in the conference tournament, the Hokies improbably marched to the title game after outlasting two of the top teams in the nation – No. 5 Florida State and No. 12 Virginia – in penalty kick shootouts after ties through double overtime. Though the Hokies lost to fourth-ranked UNC in the title game, they had done enough to earn a bid to the NCAA Tournament, where they bowed out in the first round to No. 22 BYU.

"It was a tough draw," Cagle said of the trip to Provo, Utah, where the BYU match was played. "But it was a great learning experience and a great accomplishment. We've got to get back there again and do our best to get past that first game."

"We were so excited to make it [to the tournament], but I think we need to learn to act like we've been there before," Chidester added. "Yeah, it's the NCAA Tournament, but that's what we've been expecting the whole time. We play the top teams in the nation every season, so we need to remember that the next time we make it. That should give us confidence in itself."

If the Hokies are seeking confidence, they need look no further than the front attacking line on which Chidester plays. Not only



Robin Chidester, seen here in some photos she provided from her trip to Vietnam, spent three weeks over the summer teaching underprivileged children the basics of athletics and academics.



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Forward Marika Gray returns to contribute to the Hokies' offensive attack this year after missing much of last season with a knee injury.

does it possess the leadership that Cagle raves about – senior forwards Chidester, Emily Jukich and Julian Johnson will serve as the three team captains this year – but it also contains a grab bag of talents that should serve the offense well.

It all begins with Jukich, who took over Tech's all-time lead in goals scored (25) with a whopping 15 tallies last season, an effort that earned her second team all-conference honors.

"She's one of the most talented players I've ever been around in front of the goal," Cagle said. "She truly has a gift and a knack for finding the goal, but if we expect her to score 15 goals again, that would be unfair to her. We need to put her in a position where she can just rely on her God-given talents."

Aiding in the goal scoring will be Gray, who led the team with eight scores as a freshman in 2007 before missing all but eight games last year with an ACL tear in her knee. She netted four goals in those eight games to prove that her rookie output wasn't a fluke, but as with any injury, she's going to need some time to feel her way back into things.

Feeding the ball to Jukich and Gray will be Johnson, who, despite her own share of injuries throughout her career, is Tech's all-time leader in assists with 24.

Then there is Chidester. She hasn't put up numbers like the other three have, but Cagle said she is "dynamic with the ball" and "scares people on the dribble like nobody in the conference."

"There are different attributes that each one of us brings to the table," Chidester said of her attack mates. "It would be good if we could work on combining and working off of each other's strengths to hopefully spread out the scoring a little more."

As good as Tech's offense can potentially be, it was the defense that Cagle feels got the job done last year, something that will need to remain constant.


"A lot of our games last year were very close," she said. "We kept ourselves in the game by protecting our goal, and it will need to be the same this year. As long as we do that, I think we've got the attacking talent to make a difference in any game we play."

Center back Kim Hickey anchored the defense as a senior last year and will need to be replaced, but Cagle feels like there are enough returning defenders available (Kelly Lynch, Brittany Popko, Megan Strawther, Kylie Stankovics and Kristi Sieber) to fill the gap. No matter who steps up on the back line, it needs to happen quickly because neither of Tech's two goalkeepers from last year return, and it will be up to Rebekah Brook, a newcomer from New Zealand, to take over the duties in net.

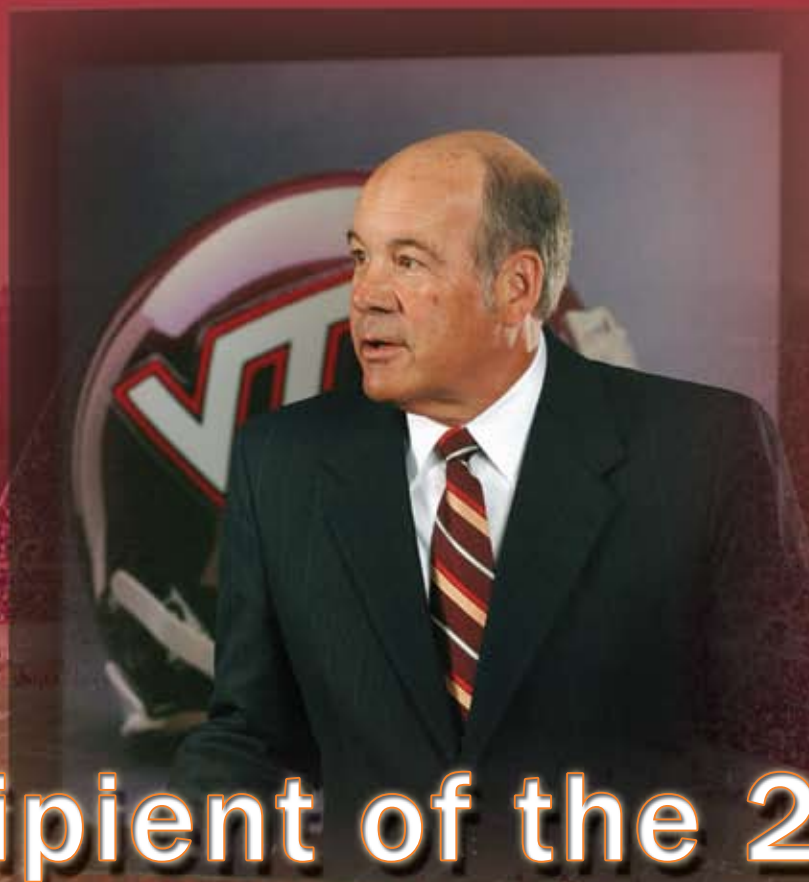
If all goes according to plan and the Hokies fill those holes, they should be staring down their second consecutive NCAA Tournament bid for the first time in program history, something that has been officially stated as the goal for this season.

"We're going to challenge ourselves to be the first team in program history to go the NCAA Tournament in back-to-back seasons," Cagle said. "We've done it twice in six years, but now we want to do it twice in a row."

"We want to keep raising the bar higher," Chidester added. "Every year that I've been here, we've gotten a little better, but sometimes the hardest thing to do is to come off of a successful season because you've gotten too comfortable. I don't want us to look back at last year and think it was easy. We put in a lot of work last year, and if we think it's going to be any less work, then we're delusional."

If the Hokies put in that work and take the next step forward, then the chances are good that Chidester will get to do a little more traveling this fall as Tech makes its way through the NCAA Tournament bracket. Here's hoping she comes across a better dinner menu than she did in Vietnam. 

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UNDER THE RADAR?

TECH VOLLEYBALL EXPLODED ONTO THE SCENE EARLY LAST YEAR BEFORE FALLING BACK TO EARTH, SO WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2009?

By Matt Kovatch



Felicia Willoughby

In mid-July, FOX Sports came to Blacksburg to film “getting-to-know” interviews for ACC All Access, a weekly television series that provides insight into the world of Atlantic Coast Conference sports. Among the three subjects that day were two of the Hokie football team’s biggest stars – Stephan Virgil, the heir apparent to All-American Macho Harris at the boundary cornerback position, and quarterback Tyrod Taylor, the MVP of last year’s ACC championship game. The third, believe it or not, was volleyball standout Felicia Willoughby.

The interviews weren’t anything hard-hitting; rather, they were kept light and jovial in an effort to show viewers the fun side of the student-athletes’ personalities. They were asked to complete sentences like: “I’m secretly scared to death of *blank*,” or, “The last thing that made me say ‘wow’ was *blank*.”

While Virgil was a cut up and it was evident that Taylor had been in front of a camera before, Willoughby was a little more reserved and seemed hesitant to let loose.

But the fact that she was even selected to do the interview in the first place says a lot about the current state of Virginia Tech volleyball, which improved by leaps and bounds in 2008 behind the talent of Willoughby. That’s because up until that day in July, no female – or non-football player, for that matter – had ever been featured in that segment of the show.

“I guess that’s the last thing that made me say, ‘wow,’” Willoughby joked afterward of her newfound superlative. “That was pretty cool.”

Though the interview likely won’t air until sometime during the season, the fact that Willoughby was chosen to film it so far in advance shows how much some outsiders are expecting from the junior middle blocker and the Hokies in 2009.

After all, Willoughby was an honorable mention All-American as a sophomore after posting the ninth-best hitting percentage in the nation, with her mark of .402 leading the ACC and setting a new Virginia Tech single-season record. She also recorded team highs in kills (326) and blocks (117) along the way to earning all-region and all-conference honors.

Her teammates followed suit, and the Hokies started the season by winning 16 of their first 19 matches, including seven of their first eight in league play. It was a blistering start for a young team that included just two seniors, and the Hokies quickly snagged their share of the spotlight after being chosen in the preseason to finish eighth in the league.

The Hokies were in first place and the Tech faithful took notice, as attendance at games in Cassell Coliseum increased by well over 3,000 fans as compared to the previous year.

But as the long conference slate dragged on, the Hokies began to slip, dropping eight of their final 12 matches to end the season in seventh place. Though Tech’s 11-9 ACC record was its best since joining the league

in 2004, and its 20 overall victories were its highest total since 2002, the Hokies ended the season right where they started it – just under the radar.

“It’s not that we got complacent,” head coach Chris Riley said, “But we made more mistakes than we made earlier in the year, so we were losing some of those tight games that we were previously winning. I don’t think our level of play was that much lower – we still forced five sets at North Carolina, Duke and Virginia. We were right there, but we just couldn’t finish off some of those solid teams.”

Willoughby agreed.

“We did have an awesome start to the season, but I wouldn’t say that we got cocky,” the Pleasanton, Calif., native said. “I think we just got too comfortable with where we were. We need to learn to push throughout the whole season.”

Tech hit the proverbial midseason wall in 2008, and after giving four true freshmen heavy playing time as Riley did, that can certainly be forgiven. The late-season swoon may have put things in perspective for the returning players and given them motivation for the impending campaign, but it also may have done something far more advantageous – it may have tempered expectations of Tech by its opponents.

“I feel like teams didn’t give us that much credit [early last year],” Willoughby said. “They may have thought, ‘Yeah, Virginia Tech is doing well now, but when we play them again, they’re not going to do as well.’”

Some of those suspicions proved correct, as four rematches against previously beaten opponents resulted in losses for the Hokies as the season went on. Willoughby and Riley feel that just leaves Tech primed for another surprise run through the conference.

“They [opponents] didn’t believe that we could do it and we didn’t really show it toward the end of the season,” Willoughby admitted. “But by being under the radar, we can prove people wrong. It doesn’t put so much pressure on us because we don’t have anything to lose.”

“I think that any time you have a player as good as Felicia on your team, you’re not going to be too far under the radar,” Riley quickly said. “But I do think that we’ll probably be picked somewhere in the 5-6-7 range in the conference. That’s fine with me, because hopefully some of the teams above us will take us lightly and think that we’ll make the same mistakes again. I just don’t see that happening because I think we’re a better, deeper and more disciplined team. We know what to expect now and we know how to deal with certain situations when they come up.”

While the Hokies clearly want to navigate through this season in a more consistent fashion and avoid the mistakes that cost them some late-season victories in 2008, it’s going to take more than that to make Willoughby

and others say “wow” when it’s all said and done. Here are four things that Tech might focus on to build on last season’s success:

1. Getting leadership from the upperclassmen.

There’s no better way to enjoy consistency than to have solid leadership at the top, and that’s exactly what the Hokies have this year with seniors Jill Gergen, Betsy Horowitz, Taylor Parrish and Michelle Lang. The first three comprise half of Tech’s six returning starters (Lang started her first two years at setter before giving way to Erin Leaser last season), which should allow Tech to build some cohesion to what already existed at the end of last year.

Gergen serves as the team’s libero/defensive specialist, while Parrish has been the team’s most targeted attacking option for three years running. Horowitz, meanwhile, should be back to full strength after missing a good chunk of the season’s second half with a back injury. The experience of this quartet will be even more important considering that the Hokies’ youthful roster includes five sophomores, one redshirt freshman and four true freshmen.

Now in his fourth year at the helm, Riley has guided the development of the senior class and is proud of what that group brings to the table.

“It’s been great to see the progress that they’ve made as players and as people,” he said. “They’ve helped turn Virginia Tech volleyball into what it’s going to be and where it’s headed. We owe a lot to them.”



Setter Erin Leaser returns to lead the offense after a 2008 rookie campaign that earned her ACC All-Freshman Team honors.

2. Keeping the offense on par with the defense.

At this time a year ago, Riley said that he wasn't worried about his defense. In fact, the Hokies led the ACC in blocking in 2007. Instead, he wanted his offense to improve to the point where Tech presented a balanced effort in both aspects of the game. Has it happened?

"No doubt," he said. "I think our ball control allowed us to use the middle as much as possible. Before Betsy got hurt, she was hitting over .400 also [in addition to Willoughby]. So we've got two middles with a hitting percentage of over .400, and that's unheard of."

Riley considers Willoughby and Horowitz to be the best pair of middles in the conference when healthy, and said that if those two, combined with Parrish, are playing to their potential, "We're pretty tough to beat."

Of course, that's not possible without a good setter, and the Hokies have one in Leaser, who is now a sophomore after a rookie campaign in which she was named to the ACC All-Freshman Team. She ranked sixth in the conference with 1,084 total assists, but it was her steady and level-headed play that gave the Tech offense what it needed.

"We allowed our outside hitters to have some openings to attack, and Erin did a great job in allowing that to happen," Riley said. "She deserves a lot of credit for how smoothly our offense was run throughout the year."

3. Making sure that the sophomores take the next step.

While Leaser was extremely valuable as a freshman, there were three other rookies who made regular contributions in their debuts: outside hitter Justine Record, and middle blockers Alison Blasingame and Kirsty Blue.

Record's 5-foot-8 frame doesn't strike fear into opponents, but her incredible vertical leap aided in her finishing third on the team in kills. However, she led the team in hitting errors by a wide margin and that must improve if the Hokies want to avoid giving away free points. Blasingame and Blue were solid hitting and blocking options off the bench and should compete for time, especially if Horowitz – who has suffered an injury in each of her three seasons – goes down again.

Kirsten Higareda has one more year as Gergen's backup at libero, but watch out for 6-3 outside hitter Jenn Wiker, who redshirted as a freshman to get stronger. With the highest approach touch (10 feet, 2 inches) on the team, she could give the Hokies a totally different dimension on the outside with her hitting and blocking.

4. Producing another standout freshman.

The Hokies have placed a player on the ACC All-Freshman Team in each of the past three seasons (Parrish in 2006, Willoughby in 2007,

Leaser in 2008), and there are four individuals who could keep the streak alive this season. The group includes middle/right side hitter Cara Baarendse from Mason, Ohio, middle blocker Liz Trinchere from Salem, Va., and defensive specialist/libero Jessica Wellman from McKinney, Texas. But the one to watch may be outside hitter Morgan O'Neill.


The San Jose, Calif., native first caught the eye of Tech's staff when she was playing club ball with Willoughby, and she went on to become a high school All-American.

"Morgan is one of the best pure ball control players I've ever seen," Riley said.

As one of the freshmen who has bloomed in Tech's program, Willoughby thinks that any one of this year's four rookies could be next in line.

"I think the coaching staff gives the freshmen a lot of opportunities to succeed," she said. "They don't hesitate to put them into games and they give them a chance to show people what they can do."

But according to Riley, getting freshmen who succeed is about more than just giving them a shot.

"We're simply recruiting better student-athletes," he said. "We're always trying to recruit kids who are better than what we have. We're excited about this recruiting class, but next year's recruiting class will be even better than this one. We want to build a national-level program and that's how you do it." 

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YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE

By Matt Kovatch

WITH THE WOMEN'S CROSS COUNTRY TEAM SET FOR A REBUILDING YEAR, THE MEN'S TEAM AIMS TO MAKE HEADLINES



Senior
Devin
Cornwall

It's not often that a team can make program history and go largely unnoticed for it, but that's what happened to the Virginia Tech men's cross country team last season. The Hokies teamed up to finish third out of the 12 conference schools at the 2008 ACC Cross Country Championships, marking their highest team finish at the league meet since Tech joined the elite conference prior to the 2004 season.

The only problem is then-senior Tasmin Fanning finished second that same day for the women's team – the highest finish by a Hokie, male or female, in an ACC title race during that same span. She then went on to win the NCAA Southeast Regional before placing third at the NCAA Championships, capping the most impressive individual season any Hokie runner ever.

Fanning had a similarly successful 2007 season, and the women's team, as a whole, qualified for the national meet in 2006, all the while rendering the men's results to the bottom of the page.

But in 2009, men's runner Devin Cornwall says, that's about to change.

"The guys' team has always kind of taken a back seat to the women's team's success," the senior from Culpeper, Va., acknowledged. "And it's not that we've been jealous; we've just wanted to join them in their accomplishments. But this year, the tables are flipped somewhat."

And he's right.

With Fanning and the other top three runners (the graduated Jessica Fanning, Erin Reddan and Natalie Kretzer) gone, the women's team enters what will be likely a rebuilding year with mostly sophomores and freshmen. But the men essentially return everyone (minus Billy Berlin) from that surprising squad of last season.

"The men's team looks to be the strongest I have seen yet," Cornwall said. "We basically have the same team as last year, which boasts well for our potential."

Head coach Ben Thomas agreed.

"It's the best shape we've been in, especially in terms of depth of returnees," the ninth-year head coach said. "We have the kind of depth where we can go to the regional meet and potentially be among the top four teams, giving ourselves a chance to make nationals as a team. That's our goal."

Cornwall, who placed third at the ACC meet last year and was an all-region performer in 2007, will have plenty of help in trying to accomplish that goal. Senior Paul LaPenna, a former all-region and All-ACC performer himself, returns for his final year after redshirting last season due to injury. Sophomore Michael Hammond is back after being one of the highest-placing freshmen at last year's ACC meet, where finished 15th, one place off of all-conference pace.

Then there's sophomore Will Mulherin, who had a solid rookie season on the cross country course before really breaking through in the spring on the track, where he won the ACC title in the 5,000 meters and was named the ACC men's outdoor track and field freshman of the year. A third sophomore, Brian Welch, was strong throughout his debut season and could round out the Hokies' top five.

"Those five guys right there could be a really good top five," Thomas said. "In addition to that, Matt Kroetch has shown the potential to be as good as anybody we have. As long as he can be consistent and stay healthy, he could be a big player."

So who steps out from that pack and becomes the go-to guy, so to speak? Not so fast.

"The thing that I like about our team is that we don't have a clear-cut No. 1 guy," Thomas continued. "Our strength is not necessarily going to be in our frontrunner, but in having our fifth-place runner be right there with our frontrunner. We're going to live and die by having small-time gaps between our No. 1 runner and our No. 5.

"Will can certainly be our No. 1, or Paul or Devin or Michael. All four of those guys could legitimately be our top guy on any given day. Then I see guys like Brian and Matt being right there, too. When you have five, or even six, guys who could possibly be your No. 1, that shows pretty good depth. If we keep those guys fit and healthy, we could be pretty dangerous."

Should any of those runners not meet expectations, Tech can also call upon two contributors from the track – juniors Eddie Judge and ACC indoor 800-meter champion Ryan Witt.

"We're really hoping Ryan and Eddie can move up in distance," Thomas said. "They've been really strong on the track for us in the middle distances and I think they have the potential to help us out in cross country. It's tough [to make the transition], but they are starting to get the mileage in that they need to make it happen."

While the men's team has plenty of proven veterans to lean on in its quest for higher ground, the women might need some time get back to where they've been.

"It's going to be a team of freshmen and sophomores with a couple of juniors in there, so it's definitely a rebuilding year," Thomas said. "But I'm excited about the talent in this young group. They've mostly been middle distance runners at the high school level, but I think they've got a good attitude. If we get them together and working, they could sur-

prise us this first year, but we're not going to rush it. We're just going to try to develop them and definitely try to get them ready for track season, which is where I think they can really shine for us. It's going to be one of those years where we'll have to wait and see how quickly they adapt to the longer distances."

Only juniors Jackie Merrick and Jessica Trapeni have been around for more than a year, but sophomores Sammy Dow and Lauren Pinkston had consistent results as freshmen and return as two reliable assets. There's also Lauren Lemieux, who will technically be a freshman in cross country, but who gained valuable experience during the outdoor track season when she made the finals of the 1,500 meters at the ACC Championships.


Joining those five, and sophomore Erin Stehle, will be a group of nearly 10 true freshmen, which presents a situation that Thomas hasn't really had to deal with in the past.

"This is the first time we've really reloaded," he said. "But I'm really excited about it because

they all had some pretty good success in high school and they all have some pretty good basic foot and leg speed. Of course, it all depends ... you never know how long it's going to take them to work on sustaining that speed.

"I think that, next fall, we'll definitely be in a lot better shape than we are this fall, but sometimes they surprise you with how fast they come around. It's going to be fun to go and start the process again. We just had an outstanding senior class go out, but there are more of them in this class, so hopefully we'll have the same kind of success with even more of these girls over the next four years."

While the women's team won't quite be on par with those of the recent past, that's okay in the men's book. It's their turn to make headlines this year.

"As long as we do our job day in and day out, I think we'll be pretty strong," Cornwall said. "It's exciting to have teammates like this who like to work and really take pride in running with the VT on their chest." 



The youthful women's team must group together in 2009 as it tries to replace the loss of four seniors.



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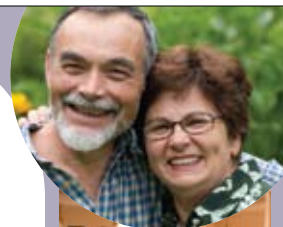
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