

inside

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HOKIESPORTS

The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics

WHAT'S INSIDE:

James Gayle didn't play a lot of football in high school, but has made up for lost time since coming to Tech



Jack Tyler

James Gayle

Antone Exum

Kyle Fuller

2013 FOOTBALL PREVIEW

Tech's defense is loaded with veterans and playmakers, and their play will be key to the Hokies' fortunes this season

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STUDENT-ATHLETES STUDY ABROAD

This past June, a group of nine Tech student-athletes spent part of a summer school course on leadership in the Dominican Republic, running sports camps for children while also learning about many different aspects of the local culture.





“The trip this summer to the Dominican Republic was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I grew as a global leader, built relationships, learned about the Dominican culture, and I was fortunate enough to make a difference in the lives of many children that I will forever cherish.”

Shannon Mayrose
r-Junior | Women’s Soccer

“The opportunity given to me to travel to the Dominican Republic was an unforgettable experience in many ways - from the ability to jump into the culture, to the joy found on the children’s faces, to the relationships I formed with fellow students and Dominican people.”

Ashley Manning
Senior | Women’s Soccer

“This experience is one that I will remember forever. I was inspired every day by my peers and the 60 campers that came and left camp with smiles on their faces. I have never been surrounded by so much happiness, love and hope!”

Kelly Conheaney
r-Senior | Women’s Soccer



The Donor File

Jamie & Kim Reid

HOKIE CLUB LEVEL: Golden Hokie

HOKIE CLUB MEMBER SINCE: 2004

CURRENTLY RESIDES: Gainesville, Va.

WHAT YEAR DID YOU GRADUATE? Jamie in 1992 and Kim in 1995

FAMILY:

Daughters- Makenzie & Katelyn, Son- Jamie



Q&A

Q: Being a member of the Hokie Club and supporting Virginia Tech athletics is important to me and my family because ...

A: Our experiences at Virginia Tech are a large part of who we are, so we love the opportunity to help the university. And of course, we also really enjoy spending time with other Hokies who love Virginia Tech as much as we do!

Q: You are involved with the Northern Virginia Hokie Club as a Hokie Rep. What was it that caused you to volunteer your time to get involved with the Hokie Club as a Hokie Rep?

A: We wanted to be more involved with Hokie athletics and becoming a Hokie Rep allows us to help plan really great events for the local Hokie alumni. Helping to coordinate annual events and Q&A sessions with Coach Beamer [Frank and Shane], Coach Foster, Coach Cav [Cavanaugh], as well as coaches from other sports [men and women's basketball], is a great way

to bring the excitement of Blacksburg to a local venue for other alumni to attend. Everyone sees the coaches on the field and reads about them in the news, but I think these events are great opportunities to learn more about them and the program.

Q: Do you have a specific moment when you realized that you were a fan of Virginia Tech athletics and knew without a doubt that you were a Hokie?

A: For both of us, the day we arrived on campus as freshmen, we knew that we'd be Hokies for life! There's nothing like Virginia Tech and being a part of Hokie Nation, certainly every time we hear "Enter Sandman!"

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

A: Game day schedules tend to vary depending on whether the kids join us or whom we're planning to attend the game with. But no matter what, we're

always in our seats for "Enter Sandman."

Q: When you head into town for a game, are there any "must do" things for you and your family?

A: We absolutely have to eat at Mike's Grill when we are in town, sometimes more than once. We also have to drive around the Drill Field and soak it all in. There is nothing else like being in Blacksburg on a football weekend!

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech football player is (player's name) and my favorite memory of (player's name) is ...

A: For Kim, there's no question it is Macho Harris! We had the chance to meet him on a few occasions, and while he is impressive on the field, he is also an incredible person. Great role model and our kids always enjoyed meeting him. Really can't say enough positives about Macho! Jamie's favorite player is harder to nail down and likely not enough space to even list them all.



THE HOKIE CLUB ANNOUNCES THE HOKIE REFERRALS AND RECENT GRADUATE PROGRAMS

The Virginia Tech Athletic Fund (Hokie Club) is proud to announce the creation of two programs focused on growth of membership, the Hokie Referrals and Recent Graduate programs.

“We are focused on growth, and these programs allow us a wonderful opportunity to engage and encourage our Hokie Club membership to join us in this vision. This provides us an opportunity to connect with a very important group of Hokies,” explained Lu Merritt, senior director of development for intercollegiate athletics. “We want our existing members to take an active role in referring new members, and we are excited to provide a discounted membership opportunity to recent Virginia Tech graduates.”



HOKIE REFERRALS

The Hokie Club is pleased to announce the Hokie Referrals program to tackle the issue of growth head on. According to Brian Thornburg, associate director of development, with the launch of this rewards program, existing Hokie Club members will have an opportunity to earn points toward their Hokie Club membership rank as they refer new members to join the Hokie Club.

“We feel that the Hokie Referrals program will be beneficial to our entire membership,” Thornburg said. “Two great things are accomplished with Hokie Referrals. Existing members can earn points toward their membership and the Hokie Club’s membership will grow in the process.”

The Hokie Referrals program will require existing Hokie Club members to talk to potential members about the importance of joining the Hokie Club. Once these people join the Hokie Club, we will ask the existing members to report new referrals to the Hokie Club either online by visiting the Hokie Referrals page on hokieclub.com, or by mailing or e-mailing a referral form to the Hokie Club office. The rewards program has a built-in growing points incentive component, as each verified member who joins within a calendar year will earn the Hokie Club member an increased number of points towards his or her membership.

Number of Referrals	Priority Points per Referral	Total Points Awarded	Equivalent Donor Value
1 member	3 points	3 points	\$100
2 members	3 + 4	7 points	\$300
3 members	3 + 4 + 5	12 points	\$550
4 members	3 + 4 + 5 + 6	18 points	\$850
5 members	3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7	25 points	\$1150

- There is no limit to the number of referrals a Hokie Club member can submit.
- Referrals must be submitted by Dec. 31 to be awarded for that calendar year.
- Referral points will be awarded manually and will be reflected on your year-end points sheet.
- Referral points are not continuous, and are awarded for calendar year they were received only.
- Referrals will be checked for accuracy and priority points will only be awarded for verified referrals.
- Only one active Hokie Club member will receive credit for referring a new Hokie Club member.

RECENT GRADUATE PROGRAM

The Recent Graduate program will offer recent Virginia Tech graduates an opportunity to join the Hokie Club at a discounted rate. If a Virginia Tech graduate joins the Hokie Club within the first two years of graduation, whether he or she is graduating with an undergraduate degree or an advanced degree, the graduate can join the Recent Graduate program and will

receive a two year membership for the price of one year, which is a 50 percent discount. At a time when an undergraduate student is transitioning from college life and going to football and basketball games as a student, the Hokie Club wants to create an entry point that is attractive to recent graduates. “We want our graduates to stay connected to Virginia Tech athletics, and we want them

to build on their wonderful time as a Hokie. By joining the Recent Graduate program, these graduates can ease their way into a Hokie Club membership,” Thornburg said. Information for both the Hokie Referrals and Recent Graduate programs are now available for Hokie Club members and recent graduates of Virginia Tech on the Hokie Club’s official website, hokieclub.com.

Six slated for induction into the Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame

Major League pitcher Joe Saunders and PGA Tour golfer Johnson Wagner headline a six-member class selected for induction into the Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame.

The six will be inducted at the Hall of Fame dinner held Nov. 15 at The Inn and Skelton Conference Center at Virginia Tech. The university also plans on introducing the group to Tech fans at halftime of the Hokies' football game versus Maryland the following day.

The six include:

- Saunders, who became the first Tech pitcher to win nine games or more in three consecutive seasons and who also earned all-conference honors three straight years. His 27 wins rank

third all-time at Tech, and he became the Hokies' highest draft pick ever when the Anaheim Angels selected him with the 12th pick in the first round of the 2002 draft.

- Wagner, who was the Atlantic 10 Rookie of the Year in 1998-99 and won the Big East's individual title as a senior in 2002. His scoring average of 73.97 was a school record at the time and still ranks sixth on the all-time list.

- Bobby Beecher, a basketball standout who still ranks third at Tech in career blocked shots (170) and is in the top 10 in career rebounds (797), field goals made (640) and free-throw percentage (.807). He was the Metro Conference Freshman of the Year in 1983.

- Clarisa Crowell, a softball star who doubled as a pitcher and position player. She still ranks second in winning percentage (.722), third in ERA (1.39) and shutouts (26), ninth in RBIs (103) and 10th in hits (200), doubles (35) and runs (104).

- John Engelberger, who was a second-team All-American in football by The Associated Press in 1999 and ranks in the top five all-time in sacks (26.5), tackles for loss (25) and total tackles behind the line of scrimmage (51.5).

- Jimmy Milley, a tennis stalwart whose 27-2 record in 1979 still stands as the best single-season finish ever. He earned the first national ranking for a Tech player at No. 20 that year.

Wolff brings in two to fill out his staff

Tech women's basketball coach Dennis Wolff brought in two new coaches this summer to fill the vacancies on his staff.

Wolff hired Bett Shelby and Jermaine Woods to replace Chantelle Anderson (who resigned) and Billi Godsey (who left to take the head job at Iona). Shelby served as an assistant coach at Seton Hall for the past two seasons, where she coordinated aspects of recruiting, scouted opponents and coached the guards. She also spent time as an assistant at Southern Illinois, Tennessee Tech and East Carolina. She played two seasons at UNC Wilmington and two at

Greensboro College.


Woods comes to Blacksburg after spending the past three seasons as the head coach of the girls team at Maury High School in Norfolk, Va. Prior to his coaching days, he was a standout at Christopher Newport University. He set Christopher Newport's record for 3-pointers made as a junior and broke the record again as a senior in 2003. He followed up his time at Christopher Newport by competing professionally in Poland. The Virginia native graduated from Norfolk State with a degree in business management in 2011.

Johnson rounds out staff

Tech men's basketball coach James Johnson promoted Andy Moore to assistant coach and named Rob Harris as his director of men's basketball operations in moves made over the summer. The staff juggling came about after Mark Byington left to take over as the head coach at Georgia Southern.

Moore spent his first season at Tech as the director of men's basketball operations after spending four years at Eastern Michigan. His other stops included stints as an assistant at Bowling Green (2007-08) and Michigan (2002-07). Moore played his college ball at Muskingum College, earning first-team All-America honors and

conference player of the year honors his senior season. He moves into Byington's role on the staff.

Harris spent this past year as the AD at Charlottesville [Va.] High School. Prior to that, he spent 12 seasons as the head coach at Shenandoah University in Winchester, Va. He led the Hornets to two second-place finishes and two third-place finishes in the Dixie (later USA South) Conference. In 2003, he was named Dixie Conference Coach of the Year. He played at Shenandoah and received his undergraduate degree in mathematics in 1991 and his master's in business administration in 1995. 




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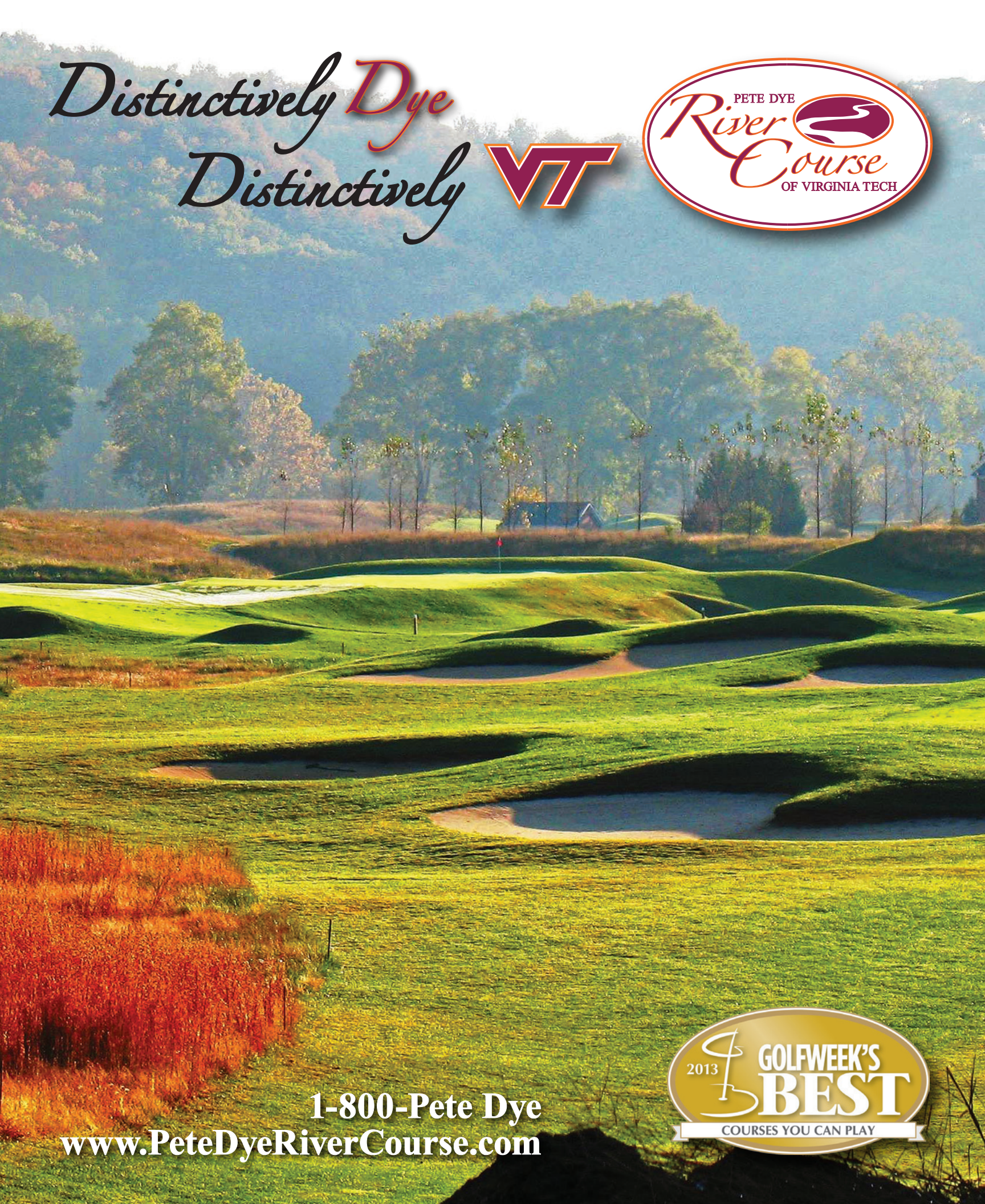
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editor's desk | by Jimmy Robertson

Tech defense looking to be great from the start in 2013

Shortly after the Hokies' 48-34 defeat to North Carolina last October, defensive coordinator Bud Foster walked into the postgame media session – willingly – to face media hounds who were all ready to tree him after his defense gave up 533 yards of offense and made UNC tailback Giovani Bernard look like Walter Payton.

The loss marked Tech's third in a four-game stretch, and the Hokies' defense was sinking like the Titanic, having been gouged by passing attacks from Pittsburgh, Cincinnati and the Tar Heels.

Foster called the UNC performance "pitiful." He said he needed to get the unit "back to the basics." He admitted he was playing too much nickel defense – with five defensive backs – and wanted to reinsert his whip linebacker to make opposing offenses adjust to the things that he liked to do.

That game changed the Hokies' 2012 season, at least defensively. Tech played great defense the final seven games of the season and finished in the top 20 nationally in total defense for the 12th time in Foster's tenure.

Now, as the Hokies get ready to kick off the 2013 season, the question begs to be asked – can Tech's defense play from the beginning the way it played toward the end of last year?

That's arguably the most important question facing this year's team.

The defense needs to be great, not just good and certainly not average, from the beginning because Tech's offense is going to need some time to jell. Outside of quarterback Logan Thomas, the Hokies simply lack proven playmakers at the skill spots, and questions linger about the line. Expecting that unit to gallop up and down the field from the opening kick seems a bit much. However, a defense that forces a bunch of turnovers and puts the offense in great position would be extremely helpful toward any future Hokie successes.

Or in other words, simply do what they did at the end of last season – and not at the beginning.

"I think the mistake we made last year was that we thought we were going to be good just because we played well the year before [Tech was 10th nationally in total defense in 2011]," Tech defensive end James Gayle said. "I don't have any expectations for the defense this year other than to

go out and play as hard as we can. I think the rest will handle itself.

"I don't have any worries. I know we have a solid unit. If we could just play these next 14 games like we played the last six of last year, we'll be in good shape."


There is every reason to think Tech will do that. Unlike a year ago when the Hokies juggled a bunch of guys in the secondary – the biggest issue of their early-season issues – they are set at every spot heading into this season. Tech returns nine starters on that side of the ball, though losing Bruce Taylor's leadership and Alonzo Tweedy's playmaking stings a bit. But Tariq Edwards appears ready to return to the form of his sophomore year after being bogged down with a leg injury last year, and Ronny Vandyke seems to be perfect to slide into Tweedy's role.

The Hokies possess some depth on defense, too, particularly at the defensive end spots and in the secondary. Yes, they need tackles to step forward, but an end [J.R. Collins, Corey Marshall?] could slide down. And of course, Foster ranks as one of the best defensive coordinators in the nation, year in and year out.

Maybe more importantly, this unit is motivated. The group's statistics turned out fairly well last season (top 20 in several categories), but the numbers that matter to these players are 7 and 6 – the Hokies' record.

"We underachieved greatly last year, so there isn't any complacency," said cornerback Antone Exum, whose torn ACL suffered last January will keep him out until at least the Georgia Tech game. "From a defensive perspective, we played very well at the end of the year, but we struggled at the beginning. As a team, that was a disappointing season. We fell short of a lot of expectations. There shouldn't be any complacency, and there isn't any complacency in the program."

Tech's staff has won with defense many times. The coaches know this formula well, and it works. To win in 2013, Tech's defense needs to continue its tradition of excellence, while the offense gradually builds its own.

Foster loves that type of challenge. Always has. Rest assured, he'll be revved up when the season starts. Hopefully, his defense follows suit. 



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kroger roth report | by Bill Roth



Questions plentiful as Tech readies for 2013 football season kickoff



Tech offensive coordinator Scot Loeffler wants the Hokies to have a balanced attack this season, and having a fifth-year senior quarterback will help.

Like you, I'm excited about the start of another college football season, and this year, that excitement comes with the usual hopefulness, but a bit of anxiety as well. We're excited because of the fresh faces at key positions for Virginia Tech's team. We're eager to see the impact that Tech's new coaches will have on this team on both game day and on the recruiting trail. And everyone is eager to see a new-look Lane Stadium, with the installation of a mammoth video board. But the anxiety exists because there are more questions than normal for the Hokies as the season opener against top-ranked Alabama nears.

Here are some questions – and a few answers – that will prove to be key for this year's team:

HOW WILL VIRGINIA TECH'S OFFENSE BE DIFFERENT IN 2013?

Tech head coach Frank Beamer brought in three new assistants on the offensive side of the ball: coordinator Scot Loeffler, receivers coach Aaron Moorehead, and line coach Jeff Grimes. Their job is to help ignite a Tech offense that struggled too often in recent years for Beamer's liking. Twelve months ago, when the Hokies kicked things off against Georgia Tech at Lane Stadium, their offense was multiple. We saw the pistol. We saw the no-huddle. We saw four-wide sets. We saw the I-formation.

This year?

"We won't see that," Beamer said.

Instead, the head coach wants something simple and effective.

"I look at Alabama's offense in recent years," he said. "And I look at Stanford. They run the ball well. They're physical up front. They can pass the

ball and pass it great, but they control the line of scrimmage and play powerful football."

Expect the 2013 Hokies to "play to their strengths," as Beamer said. They may lean to the more conservative side of things, particularly early in the season, and that's likely the smart strategy with so much youth at key positions on offense.

"I went back and looked at the last 60 games Virginia Tech has played and won the turnover battle," Loeffler said during one of our recent Hokie Club stops. "Do you know what Tech's record was in those games? 54-6. Virginia Tech is 54-6 when it wins the turnover battle. Our goal is to create offensive advantages through our personnel groupings. We want to confuse the defense.

"In terms of run and pass, we want to be balanced. You have to be balanced, and that's what we're going to be. So we're going to throw the ball probably half the time and run it half the time, and having a veteran quarterback in there who has been around for five years helps."

WHICH LOGAN THOMAS WILL WE SEE IN 2013?

Tech's quarterback was great as a sophomore and not so great as a junior. Loeffler has worked over and over on Thomas' mechanics – everything from his throwing motion (ball, arm and shoulder should line up over the hip) to his footwork at the moment of release (step at the target, don't open up).

Thomas threw 16 interceptions last season "which is far too many," Loeffler said. "He's going to be a senior quarterback. We need to

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get him down to about six interceptions for the season. That's not an unreasonable number for a fifth-year senior quarterback."

Thomas has an NFL skill set and the leadership and poise that any coach would love to have. In the past, the Hokies have excelled when they've had a fifth-year senior taking snaps, as we know. That's a big part of the optimism in Hokieland this year.

WHO IS GOING TO RUN THE FOOTBALL?

For the second year in a row, this is a key question heading into the season. Redshirt freshman Trey Edmunds is solid (6-foot-1, 215 pounds) and quick (4.37 in the 40-yard dash), but will be making his collegiate debut against Alabama in the Georgia Dome. He has a lot to learn, but so did Ryan Williams and he had his breakout game against Alabama in the 2009 game in Atlanta. Hopefully, Edmunds can do that and solve one riddle that really hampered the Hokies' last year: the inability to convert on short-yardage situations.

J.C. Coleman is Tech's most experienced back, and while he did have a big game against Duke, he didn't gain more than 50 yards in any other game. This year, expect Coleman to have some explosive plays for the Hokies. He's a big-play guy. He may not be a 20-carry-per-game tailback, but he's an explosive kid who will be important in 2013.

WILL THE OFFENSIVE LINE BE IMPROVED IN 2013?

One of the most often-asked questions over the summer at the various Hokie Club tour stops was about Tech's offensive line. At many places, the offensive line lives in obscurity and anonymity, but not for savvy Hokie fans who know that, when Tech has a solid offensive line, it usually wins a

bunch of games. And when it doesn't? The wins are tougher to get.

"I want us to be the toughest, most physical offensive line in the ACC," Grimes has said.

Preseason is a key time for the line. If Tech wants to run the ball better this year, it needs good play up front. Andrew Miller's ankle injury last year required season-ending surgery, and that had a catastrophic effect on the offensive line. Miller is now healthy and will certainly emerge as a leader up front.

The Hokies will rely more on zone blocking this season.

"You'll be able to see the difference," Miller predicted. "We're going to work better together. We're blocking in spaces better. We have the cohesiveness and toughness."

That's just what Grimes wants to hear, and what Hokie fans want to see. You can sense an immediate change in the culture of Tech's offensive line since Grimes' arrival from Auburn earlier this year.

DOES TECH HAVE RECEIVERS WHO CAN STRETCH A DEFENSE?

They're going to have to prove it against Alabama. Get used to names like Josh Stanford, Demetri Knowles and Charley Meyer, who all join veteran D.J. Coles at the receiver positions. How will they handle a guy like Alabama safety Ha Ha Clinton-Dix and other really good defensive backs this season? It's going to be a learning experience, for sure, but this is a group that really needs to improve as this season progresses. This is one area where you assume someone, or two or three will emerge. The question is who?

HOW GOOD WILL TECH'S DEFENSE BE?

Last year, the Hokies finished 18th nationally


in total defense (333.15 yards per game), tied for ninth in tackles for loss (7.62 per game), fifth in third-down conversions (28.2 percent), and tied for 19th in sacks (2.69 per game). It marked the eighth time in nine seasons as a member of the ACC that Tech's defense was ranked in the top 20 in total defense. And this year's defense could be even better.

Why? In the last six games of last season, the Hokies recorded 27 sacks and played with tremendous ferocity and discipline, and that has coordinator Bud Foster excited. The Hokies don't have the overall depth on defense we're used to seeing, but boy, do they have some playmakers up front and on the back end.

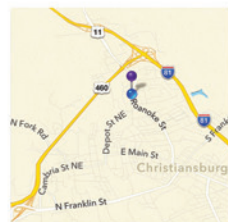
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Any time you combine a fifth-year senior quarterback with an elite defense and an outstanding kicking game, you have the chance to have a very special season. In Thomas, placekicker Cody Journell, punter A.J. Hughes, and that defense, the Hokies have a fantastic base.

But inexperience at receiver, tailback and along the offensive line raise serious question marks. Will this offensive unit have the ability to run the ball, stretch the field and be consistent, or will it be a stutter-and-putter group that struggles in the red zone, in short-yardage situations, and have turnover issues as it did last year? Does this team truly have enough talent to win at the highest level?

The attitude and work ethic around the program has been encouraging, and the fresh faces around the offices and on the practice field have brought with them a contagious enthusiasm. The Hokies have a chance to have a really nice season this year if things come together. We'll get our first look at them at the Georgia Dome. 

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Keeping up with Compliance

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

Q: I was saddened to hear recently that one of our men's basketball recruits failed to qualify academically. How late in the summer can the process go before that particular ruling is made? Thanks, Jack in Christiansburg.

TP: "Usually by the start of fall classes, though in some cases, maybe a week or so past that date. Also, a prospect could sit out the fall semester while trying to qualify (there are three SAT tests and three ACT tests offered in the fall) and enroll in January.

"For a prospect to be a nonqualifier in July, it would need to be one of a couple situations. The prospect would need to be more than one credit short of the core course requirements, or be so short of the required grade-point average based on the test score that he or she cannot get the grades up using the exception that allows one core course credit earned after graduation. As most Virginia Tech fans know, the university does not accept nonqualifiers."

Q: Do football players have to pass a certain number of hours in the fall? Thanks, Tommy in Blacksburg.

TP: "Yes, football players are required to pass at least nine credit hours in the fall. If they fail to do so, they are ineligible for the first four games of the following season. However, there is a one-time exception available. Football players who do

not pass the nine hours can regain eligibility for all four games provided they pass 27 hours through the combination of fall, spring and summer. If they have to use the exception again, they can only regain eligibility for only two of those four games, again, provided they pass the 27 hours."

Q: Do you foresee the NCAA allowing head coaches to conduct summer workouts on the practice field? The players are already on campus in summer school courses, and many of those players are doing voluntary passing drills on the practice field now. Why not have the coaches regulate the workouts? Maybe even limit the workouts to no pads or helmets. Just a thought. April in West Virginia.


TP: "This is an idea that has been discussed and may gain more traction after the NCAA recently granted a waiver to Ole Miss, allowing the quarterbacks coach to work with a quarterback who had injured a shoulder. The argument behind allowing it was that the quarterbacks coach could make sure the quarterback was throwing with the proper mechanics and preventing a re-injuring of the shoulder.

"Most perceive that as an advantage for Ole Miss, and one has to believe that other coaches will try similar tactics going forward. Allowing summer workouts could alleviate the need for coaches to try and take advantage of the waiver

system, and this topic will probably be discussed more in-depth by member institutions in the future."

Q: Is it true that the NCAA regulates the size of postcards that can be sent to recruits? Thanks, Chris in Radford.

TP: "It is true. The NCAA tries to create a level playing field when it comes to recruiting correspondence. So things like the size of logos, envelopes and postcards are regulated. A postcard cannot be larger than 4.25 inches by 6 inches.

"There was a proposal to eliminate all regulations on recruiting correspondence. But many schools were uncomfortable with a total absence of regulation in this area, so it remains in the NCAA Manual, at least for now." 

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James Gayle's hard work in the weight room is the primary reason why he's enjoyed success on the football field.

IN A RUSH TO BE GOOD

James Gayle's lack of experience with football and lack of weight as a teenager weren't big issues for him to overcome on his way to becoming a two-time All-ACC player at Tech

by Jimmy Robertson

Gaze at him on the street, and you'd never guess that, roughly eight years ago, the best combination of size, strength and speed on Tech's football team weighed all of about 130 pounds.

To put that into better perspective, as a freshman in high school, he weighed roughly the same size as an adult ball of fur known as a St. Bernard.

Of course, back then, he was more interested in video games than watching video of game films. He enjoyed Superman more than Michael Vick. And organized sports consisted only of the games he and his friends organized in the backyard or on local playgrounds.

Simply put, James Gayle didn't look like a football player during his first year of high school because he didn't actually play football. Never had. Never expressed any desire even though his father and uncle both played football at Ohio State and his uncle later won a Super Bowl ring with the Chicago Bears.

"I don't remember a lot about dreaming about football," Gayle admitted, with a smile. "It was more like action heroes for me.

"Once I started playing, it came. It happened pretty fast. I played one year and then started getting offers, and then I ended up committing and now I'm here."

"Here" meaning at Virginia Tech, where he goes into the 2013 season as a leader on what could be one of defensive coordinator Bud Foster's best defenses. This past winter, the now 6-foot-4, 255-pound defensive end shunned potential NFL fortunes and decided to return for a final season at Tech to add one more championship and one more all-conference honor to what has been a productive career.

Meteoric, maybe, best describes his rise to All-ACC and potential NFL draft choice. After all, most star players pick up the sport in the

early years, playing in Little Leagues or Pop Warner leagues or whatever recreational league is available just to lay a foundation in the sport. They play in uniforms too big and oversized helmets, and fuzzy pictures of their exploits often adorn the end tables and workplace desks of their parents.

Not so with Gayle.

Born in Los Angeles, he spent his childhood years in Minnesota, where his mother, Michelle, hails. His parents split up, and his dad, named Jimmy, moved back to his hometown of Hampton, Va. The younger Gayle stayed with his mom in Minnesota, where football arguably takes a back seat to hockey and thus it never really caught his attention as a kid.

Despite not being very big then, he was tough. The brutal winters up there make one that way. He once pedaled home on his bike from a local

Ohio State from 1979-82 – "He was good, too," his son said – he never pushed his son to play football. In fact, he never pushed him to play any sport.

It just happened. Chalk it up to the whims of a teenager.

"I just decided I wanted to play," Gayle said. "He never pushed me into sports at all. It was just more that I decided I wanted to play."

The summer before his junior season, Gayle decided he wanted to go out for the football team. He knew he needed to get bigger, and his father saw the desire was sincere, so he went out and bought his son a bench press. So Gayle started lifting weights.

He gradually got bigger. He started eating more, largely thanks to his grandmother's cooking. He knew he already possessed the toughness and speed, and he was confident in his ability to make the team.

He did make it and made an impact quickly.

"I knew I was good at football," he said. "I was kind of a smaller guy, and everyone was telling me that I probably wouldn't make the team. They were saying, 'You're not going to make the team. You're small.' So my dad bought me a bench, and I just worked hard over the summer and made the team. Then I ended up starting.

"What stands out the most is my first high school scrimmage. That's when I kind of let it be known that I was kind of good. I think I was second- or third-string going into the scrimmage, and after the scrimmage, I was starting."

Playing defensive end, Gayle went on to record 10 sacks his junior season at Bethel High. He also finished that season with 56 solo tackles.

After the season, he started receiving some interest from college recruiters. They saw his slender 6-foot-4 frame and knew he could get bigger once he got into a quality strength and conditioning program.

Purdue took the first plunge, offering him a scholarship. Less than a year after deciding to go out for the high school team, Gayle had received a

“I don't remember a lot about dreaming about football. It was more like action heroes for me. Once I started playing, it came. It happened pretty fast. I played one year and then started getting offers, and then I ended up committing and now I'm here.”

- James Gayle on his rapid development in football

YMCA during a blizzard and suffered frostbite on his ears as a result.

"I don't know why I was on my bike," he said. "I ended up getting frostbite on my ears, and my ears were red for weeks. It's a different type of cold up there. You come here, and it's 65 degrees and people have their coats on and their mittens. In 65-degree weather in Minnesota, we'd be out in shorts playing basketball."

Around the age of 12 or 13, Gayle decided he wanted to live with his father, even though the move meant leaving all his friends in Minnesota. His mother agreed to it, so Gayle moved in with his father down in Hampton.

Though Jimmy Gayle played running back at

football spotlight | james gayle

scholarship offer from a major Division I program.

“It came out of nowhere,” Gayle said. “I wasn’t getting a lot of letters. I think I had gotten one letter, and then, my coach [Jeff Nelson] called me into his office and told me that the Purdue coach wanted to talk to me. He offered me a scholarship, and that was surprising to me.

“I was excited. I went home and told my father, and he didn’t act surprised. I guess he always knew that I would have a chance to play somewhere.”

Virginia Tech coaches were a little more cautious in their approach toward Gayle and for good reason. They liked what they saw on tape, and they were intrigued by his height. But Gayle had played football for one year. Could he help the Hokies win ACC championships?

Jim Cavanaugh, Tech’s whip linebackers and rovers coach at the time and also the recruiting coordinator, invited Gayle to a one-day prospect camp in June before Gayle’s senior season. Tech’s coaches wanted to see more before offering him a scholarship.

“I had to come up here and run a 4.5 [in the 40-yard dash] before they offered me,” Gayle joked.

That time caught the eyes of the coaches, prompting the offer, and Gayle accepted it not long after the camp ended. He unbelievably parlayed one high school season and one camp into an offer from one of the best programs in the

nation – one that had just won the ACC title and the Orange Bowl.

“It just all kind of happened,” Gayle said. “I wasn’t a big college football guy. I didn’t watch a lot of college football, but I remember watching Virginia Tech with my grandma, and that’s when [Branden] Ore played for us. At that time, I didn’t have any ambitions of playing college football, but it always stuck in my head. Tech is the best school in Virginia for football. It’s a great school, with great academics and a top team. I definitely made one of the best decisions of my life.”

Gayle spent a season redshirting, working out in Mike Gentry’s strength and conditioning program. He got bigger, stronger and more athletic. In offseason testing the following spring, he recorded a 375-pound bench press, a 36-inch vertical jump and recorded a 4.58 in the 40.

The following year, he got his bench press over 400 pounds and sliced his 40 time to a 4.45. He won the Excalibur Award – the highest honor in the strength and conditioning program.

Since then, Gayle routinely has earned Super Iron Hokie honors – the highest rung on the strength and conditioning scale. He has weighed as much as 270 pounds, but usually plays around 255 or 260.

“I put a lot of hard work into this,” he said. “As a freshman in high school, I was like 130. The heaviest

I’ve been is 270, so that’s well over 100 pounds.

“I put it into my head after my sophomore year [of high school] that I wanted to play football. I ate to the point that I was about to throw up, and then I’d get mad because I knew that if I threw up, I’d have to eat more. I was lifting every day. It got to the point when kids were accusing me of using steroids because I blew up so quickly. I just took it to the next level when I got here. Coach Gentry is a great strength and conditioning coach.”

Gayle’s work in the strength and conditioning program certainly has helped him become a productive player on the field. As a redshirt sophomore, he recorded 38 tackles, including 12.5 for a loss, and seven sacks to earn second-team All-ACC honors. Last season, despite missing two games with an ankle injury, he recorded 43 tackles, including 11 for a loss, and five sacks. He earned second-team All-ACC honors last year as well.

After Tech’s win over Rutgers in the Russell Athletic Bowl, Gayle took some time to ponder his future, contemplating leaving school early and making himself available for the NFL Draft. An NFL panel that advises college players on their draft potential predicted that Gayle would get drafted, but not where he wanted. So he decided to come back and wrap up work on his sociology degree – he needed only to pass a

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Spanish class this summer to finish – and pursue more championships and accolades.

“I was close,” he said. “It was a harder decision for me than people probably think it was just because it’s the NFL, and it’s right there. All I had to do was say, ‘All right, I’m not coming back to school.’ I’d be training right now in an NFL camp.”

“But I did a pros and cons sheet, and I thought the better decision was to come back and finish my degree and get better. I have a lot of room to improve. I’ve improved tremendously from the point I was at last year until now. This year, I’m not even worried about the NFL. I’m worried about getting better and trying to win a championship – or two.”

Gayle has his sights set on an ACC championship and a national championship. Those are lofty goals, ones not easily attained.

But he will remain undaunted. After all, he’s used to being doubted. Six years ago, no one expected him to make the Bethel High School football team. Now, he’s a 255-pound freight train of muscle coming off the line of scrimmage, barreling down on helpless quarterbacks.

He has transformed his body and his game in an unprecedented amount of time. Now, for the kid who grew up playing video games and idolizing comic figures, gridiron greatness awaits. 

GETTING TO KNOW JAMES GAYLE



Q: It’s Friday night in the offseason, what are you doing?

JG: It depends. I might be hanging out with friends. I like to watch movies. I don’t like to go out like I used to. I guess I’m getting kind of older. I just like to relax.

Q: What are you reading these days?

JG: I just started reading *In Cold Blood* [by Truman Capote]. I’m not a huge reader, but I’ll read occasionally.

Q: Twitter or Facebook?

JG: Twitter. Facebook is getting kind of old. Sometimes Twitter can put a smile on your face with some of the stuff people say.

Q: Favorite NFL player?

JG: It would probably be [Paul] Kruger from the Ravens [he signed with Cleveland back in March]. The outside linebacker from Green Bay [Clay Matthews], he’s one of my favorites. I like the way he plays. And Aldon Smith from the 49ers.

Q: Toughest player you’ve played against?

JG: It’s probably Tajh Boyd [Clemson quarterback]. He’s a great competitor. He finds a way to pull it out. I haven’t found a way to beat him either. Morgan Moses [Virginia tackle] is a pretty good player. I look forward to playing against him. He’s good, and I know a lot of people will be watching. I’ve known him since high school, and it’s fun to play against guys you know.

Q: If you could trade places with someone for a day, who would it be?

JG: If Superman was real, I’d trade places with him. That would be pretty fun.

Q: In 10 years from now, what will you be doing?

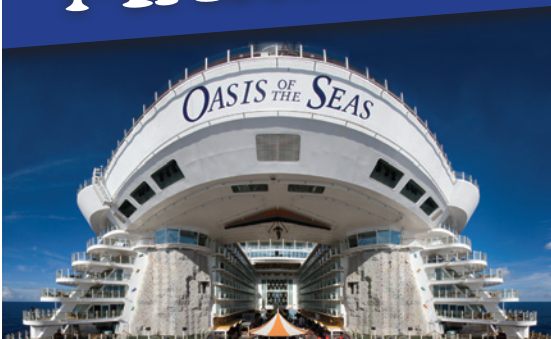
JG: I’d either still be in the NFL or retired from the NFL doing nothing. Just relaxing.

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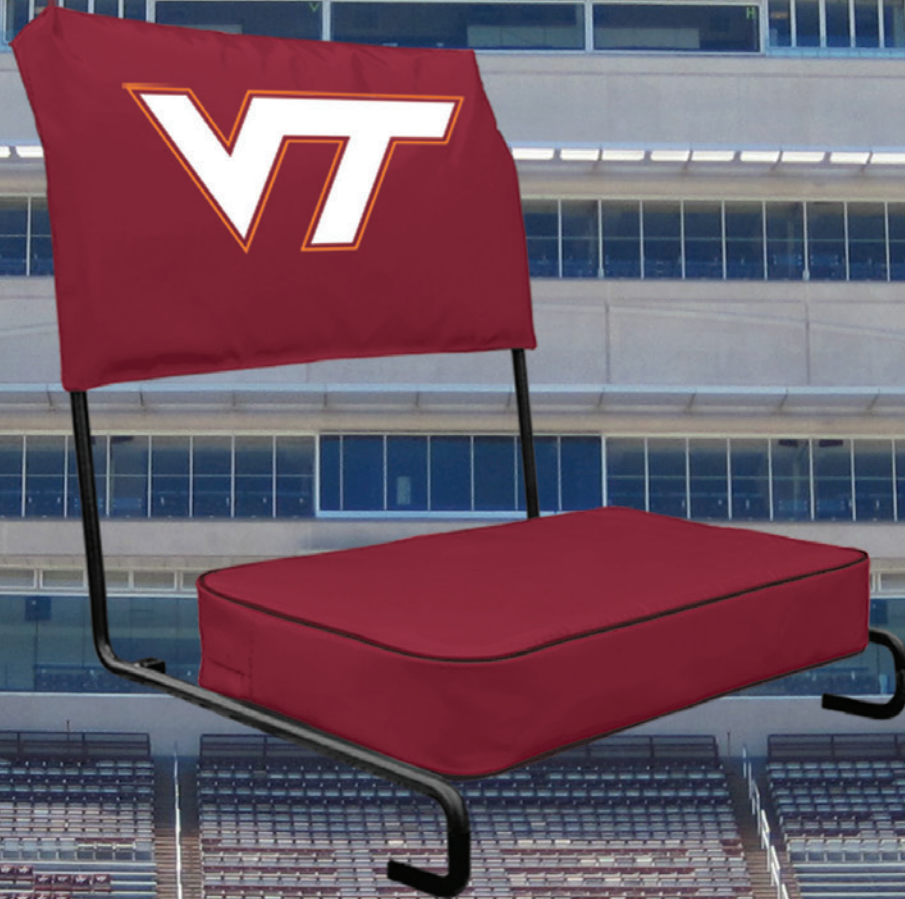


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IMG

WITH 2012 BEHIND HIM, THOMAS READY TO LEAD HOKIES TO BIG SEASON

by Jimmy Robertson

Toward the end of a rather busy summer for Tech quarterback Logan Thomas, he gave a brief assessment of his golf game, arguably his second greatest passion besides football. Like most non-professional golfers, he said he hadn't gotten to play a lot.

"I've been too busy," he said. "And I don't have enough money in the bank account."

Thomas' bank account probably would have been flush with cash had he decided to forgo his final season at Tech and enter the NFL Draft. But an NFL panel that advises underclassmen on these decisions couldn't guarantee Thomas of being selected in the first round. Besides, a disappointing 2012 left him with a bitter taste in his mouth, and after Frank Beamer brought in Scot Loeffler, who possesses NFL experience, to be the offensive coordinator, Thomas decided to stay for his senior season.

"It [last season] made it tough to leave because you don't want to leave on a 7-6 record," he said. "You don't want to leave on a bad note or with a bad taste in your mouth. That's a pretty big reason why I came back. Another reason is because I love the school so much and the area here and the people. That made it pretty easy to come back as well.

"It's nice not having people asking me what I'm doing in August [about leaving early and going to the NFL]. It's nice not having to worry about the next level for the next six or eight months, whatever it is, while I'm still in school. I can just focus on football right now, especially since I've graduated. I can focus on one game at a time and be excited and have these guys ready to go."

Thomas returns after a junior season in which he broke his own single-season record for total

offense, finishing with 3,500 yards. He threw for 2,976 yards and 18 touchdowns, but he also threw 16 interceptions and his completion percentage dipped eight points from his sophomore year.

Loeffler worked with Thomas and all quarterbacks on mechanics and fundamentals, and Thomas enjoyed a good spring. But in the spring game, he threw three interceptions, and the offense's overall performance left some Tech fans wondering about the upcoming season.

"I think we made leaps and bounds," Thomas said. "I know people are going to say stuff about the spring game, but what Coach [Loeffler] told me was that I played 48 plays and 46 of the 48 were perfect. I just had two bad balls. I made the right read and threw two bad balls. That's the thing with the spring game, but throughout the spring, I got better and better and better."

Thomas, who led the team with 524 yards rushing last season, orchestrated summer workouts, leading 7-on-7 passing drills twice a week throughout the summer. He picked out the plays, making sure he and the receivers were on the same page with the stuff they all learned in the spring, while incorporating new material that Loeffler implemented after August practices began.

The work they put in over the spring and summer has Thomas and his teammates optimistic heading into the season opener against defending national champion Alabama.

"I'm ready to get it started because I think we've all got a bitter taste in our mouth from last year," Thomas said. "We've put in some good preparation this spring and summer, especially with some of the changes we've made. So I'm anxious to see how much better we'll be this year." 



Logan Thomas

2013 DEPTH CHART

- 3** Logan Thomas (6-6, 254, r-Sr.)
- 6** Mark Leal (6-0, 217, r-Jr.)
- 16** Brian Rody (6-6, 236, r-So.)
- 9** Brenden Motley (6-3, 216, r-Fr.)
- 12** Trey Gresh (6-1, 209, r-Jr.)

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starter: Logan Thomas (27 career starts)

Starter lost: none

Projected new starter: none

Top reserve: Mark Leal

Newcomers: Connor Jessop, Brenden Motley

Breakout candidate: Thomas

Notes: Thomas' 27 career starts rank tied for third on the team with Derrick Hopkins behind Kyle Fuller (33) and Antone Exum (32) ... Thomas has thrown for more than 300 yards in two games in his career ... Barring injury, Thomas should leave Tech with career records for total offense, passing yardage and touchdown passes ... Mark Leal has played in five games in his career.



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EDMUNDS AND COLEMAN IN THE SPOTLIGHT AT TAILBACK *by Jimmy Robertson*

It's safe to say that Trey Edmunds puts his priorities in the proper order.

When asked in mid-July what Edmunds hoped to get done during the second summer school session at Tech, he responded without hesitation – and his response had nothing to do with football.

“First and foremost, I want to get through this math class I'm in,” he said, referring to Elementary Calculus I.

Save for a few days visiting his grandmother in Michigan, Edmunds spent his summer working on summer school classes – he took three over the two sessions – and working in Mike Gentry's strength and conditioning program. His on-field education begins in earnest Aug. 31 when the Hokies take on Alabama at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta.

Edmunds will not be eased into his role. There is no introductory course for a freshman to prepare against a defending national champion. He very well may be the starting tailback for Tech against Alabama.

Edmunds' chances at doing that became more likely when the university's Student Conduct System decided to dismiss Michael Holmes in June. As most know, Holmes, who started five games at tailback last season, was involved in a well-publicized incident outside a Blacksburg night spot following Tech's spring game. While Holmes' charges ended up being reduced to misdemeanors, thus enabling him to be reinstated by Tech AD Jim Weaver, he never got the opportunity as the student conduct office made its ruling and ended Holmes' career at Tech.

“Me and Michael were starting to grow and be close friends,” Edmunds said. “Playing the same position, we were able to spend a lot of time with each other and talk to each other about a lot of things. Him not being in the meeting room and not being able to crack jokes or not being able to help me when I don't know stuff is devastating. I

think the whole situation is tragic. I wish the best for him.”

Holmes' dismissal leaves the tailback position in the hands of Edmunds and J.C. Coleman. Edmunds, a big, burly runner with speed, redshirted a year ago as a freshman, while Coleman, a quick, darting type, played as a true freshman. He finished with 492 yards to lead all of Tech's tailbacks.

Both Edmunds and Coleman have shown the potential to handle the job and put up similar numbers of previous tailbacks. Coleman recorded Tech's only 100-yard rushing game last season (vs. Duke), and this spring, he won the President's Award that goes to the player who demonstrates the most leadership during the offseason program and spring workouts.

Edmunds, too, won an award this spring for his play, receiving the Frank O. Moseley Award, which goes to the player who exhibits the most hustle during offseason and spring workouts. Some expected him to be moved to whip linebacker this spring, but he showed that the 2,500 yards he rushed for during his senior season at Dan River [Va.] High School were no fluke.

“I am very happy at tailback,” Edmunds said. “I like having the ball in my hands, and I've learned a lot at this position. Coach [Shane] Beamer [Tech's running backs coach] has done a good job of teaching me things I didn't know, and I'm anxious to get back there this year.


“I think I'm a better tailback than I was at the beginning of spring. I'm definitely more confident. I've started doing the little things more consistently. When your game is consistent, things start to get easier for you, and you make progress.”

Edmunds, Coleman and the rest of Tech's tailbacks will be running behind an unproven fullback. Riley Beiro, the projected starter, decided to give up football because of a shoulder injury. Walk-ons Fuller Hoepner and Greg Gaddell and

freshman Jerome Wright are battling for the job.

The Hokies' rushing attack will find out just how much its improved rather quickly. A year ago, Alabama led the nation in rushing defense, allowing just 76.4 yards rushing per game and giving up just 2.43 yards per carry. Graduation and departures to the pro ranks robbed the Tide of some of its stalwarts, but they always are strong defensively under coach Nick Saban.

For Edmunds, it's quite a daunting task, considering the game represents his first as a collegian. His education in college football is approaching quickly.

“The thing is, it's where you want to start,” Edmunds said. “There's no bigger stage than this – playing the reigning national champs in the Georgia Dome. It doesn't get better than that.” 

2013 DEPTH CHART

TAILBACKS

- 14 Trey Edmunds (6-1, 216, r-Fr.)
- 4 J.C. Coleman (5-7, 191, So.)
- 22 Tony Gregory (6-0, 187, r-Sr.)
- 28 Chris Mangus (6-0, 184, r-Fr.)
- 39 Daniel Dyer (5-10, 204, r-Jr.)
- 32 Maurice Taylor (5-8, 171, r-So.)

FULLBACKS

- 29 Fuller Hoepner (6-2, 258, r-Jr.)
- 47 Greg Gaddell (5-10, 207, r-Jr.)
- 25 Jerome Wright (6-2, 221, Fr.)

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starter: J.C. Coleman (six career starts)

Starters lost: Michael Holmes (five career starts), Joey Phillips (nine career starts)

Projected new starters: Trey Edmunds or J.C. Coleman, Riley Beiro

Newcomers: Edmunds, Chris Mangus

Breakout candidate: Edmunds

Notes: Coleman led all running backs in carries (109), rushing yards (492), receptions (21) and receiving yards (132) last season ... Coleman may be the Hokies' kick returner after returning 19 for an average of 21.6 yards per return last season ... Gregory started two games last season and rushed for 299 yards, with 69 of those coming in Tech's win over BC ... A year ago, Tech's fullbacks did not log a single carry.



Demetri Knowles

2013 WIDE RECEIVERS DEPTH CHART

SPLIT ENDS

- 18 D.J. Coles (6-4, 238, r-Sr.)
- 5 Joshua Stanford (6-1, 189, r-Fr.)
- 85 E.L. Smiling (6-4, 202, r-Jr.)
- 16 Carlis Parker (6-3, 184, Fr.)
- 21 Mark Irick (6-3, 197, r-Fr.)

FLANKERS

- 80 Demetri Knowles (6-1, 177, r-So.)
- 83 Charley Meyer (6-1, 208, r-Fr.)
- 15 Joel Caleb (6-2, 213, r-Fr.)
- 82 Willie Byrn (5-11, 177, r-Jr.)

KNOWLES HOPES HE AND RECEIVERS SPRINT TO SUCCESS IN 2013

by Jimmy Robertson

Demetri Knowles arrived in the United States from the Bahamas with the reputation of being an outstanding track athlete who just happened to play football, and even when he received a scholarship to play football for Virginia Tech, he planned on participating in track as well.

In two years in Blacksburg, his track career hasn't exactly gotten out of the blocks. But he's certainly sprinting toward future success on the football field – and he's fine with that.

"This is what I came to the States for," Knowles said. "If I wanted to run track, I'd have stayed in the Bahamas. But this is why I came. For some reason, I've always loved football. My mom used to ask, 'How are you going to play football? There is no football here.' But some way, some how, it happened, and I got here. I think it was meant to be."

Knowles enters his redshirt sophomore season penciled in at the top of the depth chart at the flanker position. A year ago, he served as a backup to Marcus Davis, catching 19 passes for 240 yards and a touchdown, but he wound up starting the final three games of the season, and perhaps not coincidentally, Tech won all three.

Given his experience, he is a virtual lock as a starter when the Hokies open the season against Alabama on Aug. 31.

"This is my first time as a starter, and I'm really looking forward to having to step up," Knowles said. "When an opportunity is given to me, I try to make the best of it. I'm really excited. This is what I came here for."

Knowles' transformation into a quality receiver has been a rapid one. Tech's coaches nearly played him as a true freshman, falling quickly in love with his speed. But his rawness, his lack of strength and his lack of knowledge with Tech's schemes held him back just enough to keep him on the sidelines that season.

Last year, he gained valuable experience in

his backup role, and this summer, he worked on adding weight and muscle. The increased muscle mass came, but the weight still lingers around 180 pounds.

"I don't like breakfast, so I'm trying to work that in there," he said. "I think I'll be 185 by the time we play."

"I feel more confident in a lot of different areas, though. Now, when I see man [coverage], I'm excited because I know somebody is in trouble. That's the way I feel about it. Before, I felt a little iffy about it. But now, I feel pretty confident."

Tech figures to rely heavily on Knowles and D.J. Coles at least early on in this upcoming season. Outside of those two, the receiver spots lack experience.

The Hokies lost three receivers off last year's team to graduation – Davis, Corey Fuller and Dyrell Roberts. The three of them combined for 127 catches for 2,166 yards and 12 touchdowns. Outside of those three and Knowles, no other receiver caught more than two passes last season.

Coles missed the year while recovering from a knee injury, but two years ago, he caught 36 passes for 480 yards and three touchdowns. The redshirt senior goes into the season atop the depth chart at split end.

After Coles and Knowles, though, there is a lot of unknown. Receivers coach Aaron Moorehead liked what he saw this spring from Joshua Stanford, a redshirt freshman who caught three passes for 86 yards in the spring game. Also, Charley Meyer showed flashes, and Moorehead hopes that Joel Caleb, a redshirt freshman, can help. Caleb was one of the more highly touted recruits in the 2012 recruiting class, but he played quarterback in high school and is still adjusting to being a receiver.

Compounding the situation was the departure of Kevin Asante over the summer. Asante, like Knowles, played in spurts last season and would

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starters: none

Starters lost: Dyrell Roberts (23 career starts), Marcus Davis (20 career starts), Corey Fuller (eight career starts)

Projected new starters: D.J. Coles, Demetri Knowles

Top reserves: Joshua Stanford, Joel Caleb, Charley Meyer

Newcomers: Stanford, Meyer, Caleb, Mark Irick, Carlis Parker

Breakout candidate: Knowles


Notes: Stanford played in the Austin Peay game last year and caught one pass for 6 yards, but missed the rest of the season with a knee injury and received a medical hardship waiver ... Outside of Coles, Knowles and Stanford, only one other receiver has caught a pass in a game – Willie Byrn, who caught one pass in 2011.

have been a redshirt sophomore.

"It is a concern, but I feel that somebody is going to step up," Knowles said of the lack of experience at the receiver positions. "That's what we came here for. That's why we're playing Division I football. Somebody is going to step up. I don't know who it is yet. But it's going to be somebody."

This person needs to step up quickly because Alabama, the defending national champion, is around the corner. Tech's offense needs more big-play capability and consistency to deal with the explosive Crimson Tide, and spring game headaches showed it.

"I don't let things get to me, but I was very upset with that spring game," Knowles said. "I had planned to go out that night, but I didn't even go. I just stayed home. It was very disappointing for me."

"It (that performance) just means we have to work that much harder." 

Andrew
Miller

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starters: Andrew Miller (21 career starts), Caleb Farris (five career starts), Brent Benedict (six career starts), David Wang (10 career starts)

Starters lost: Nick Becton (13 career starts), Winston Painter (13 career starts), Michael Via (12 career starts)

Projected new starters: Jonathan McLaughlin, Laurence Gibson

Top reserves: Mark Shuman, Matt Arkema, Augie Conte, Adam Taraschke

Newcomers: McLaughlin, Conte, Taraschke

Breakout candidate: McLaughlin

Notes: Miller is on the Watch List for the Outland Trophy, which goes to the nation's best interior lineman ... Farris played 428 plays on offense in place of Miller last year ... Wang missed much of spring practice with an ankle injury and keeping him healthy is crucial - he played 500 snaps on offense last year ... Gibson played in 12 games last season, but most of those reps came on the field-goal and extra-point teams ... Shuman has played 39 snaps on offense in his career, but may be a swing player this season (playing at both guard and tackle).

MILLER THE LEADER OF A YOUNG, UNPROVEN OFFENSIVE LINE

by Jimmy Robertson

At the Hokies' team meeting on July 9, one that centered on the lifting schedules and academics for the second summer session, Andrew Miller and Brent Benedict showed up in old school tank tops, short shorts and aviator sunglasses.

Offensive coordinator Scot Loeffler liked the look and promised to dress similarly at some point over the remainder of the summer. Miller jokingly planned on holding Loeffler accountable.

"Absolutely," Miller said. "He's big on accountability. Well, I'm going to hold him accountable."

Miller actually spent much of the summer holding arguably a much more important group of individuals accountable - the offensive line - as he and his offensive line teammates prepared for the upcoming season.

This group may be the key to any success enjoyed by the Hokies this season. As a unit, they lack experience, but with Miller leading the way, they've tried to make up for that. He led the unit this spring and summer, making sure that everyone gave their all in lifting sessions and organizing twice-a-week workouts that focused on technique and fundamentals.

It marked a bit of a change of character for Miller, who prefers to lead by example. Yet Loeffler expected Miller and Logan Thomas to

handle things over the summer, when coaches aren't allowed by NCAA rules.

"I accept that challenge completely," Miller said. "I think that's a role I need to take. You've got to hold each other accountable. That's the main thing this year. You have to do things right every day, in the weight room and on the practice field. Everything that happens off the field will dictate what happens on the field."

Hopefully, this unit jells and becomes a powerful force, particularly in the running game. A year ago, the Hokies, breaking in four new starters along the offensive line, ranked 79th nationally in rushing offense at just under 146 yards per game. Injuries made a mess of things, with guys like Michael Via and David Wang suffering through various leg ailments.

Making matters worse, Miller broke his ankle in the Duke game and missed the final six games of the season. Without him, the unit struggled, and therefore, the offense sputtered.

In the spring, new offensive line coach Jeff Grimes wiped the slate clean with this group, moving players to different positions to learn more about them and their skill sets. Miller, who had started 21 straight games at center, spent most of his spring at right guard, with Caleb Farris, who started the last five games of the season at center, working at the center spot.

"At first, I was a little skeptical," Miller said of

the move. "But toward the end, I realized that this is what was going to be the best for our team. The team comes first.

"I just like playing the offensive line, no matter what position. Center is a little bit different than guard. You're usually helping the guard and then getting out on a linebacker. At center, you're making the calls. At guard, to tell you the truth, it's a lot easier. You don't have to snap the ball and then get out on your block. I'll be blocking someone one-on-one, and I'm usually better in a one-on-one situation."

Coming out of spring practice, the offensive line wasn't set, as Grimes continued the competition during the first couple of weeks of fall practices. Farris, Wang and Matt Arkema spent time this spring at center, with Benedict and Mark Shuman battling at left guard. With Miller at right guard, the interior of Tech's line possesses a lot of guys with some playing experience.

At tackle, things are a bit murky. Laurence Gibson, who saw just 22 snaps on offense a year ago, figures to be the right tackle, with true freshman Jonathan McLaughlin at left tackle. Redshirt freshman Augie Conte showed flashes at the tackle spot as well this spring.

"I like their work ethic," Miller said of the line. "Jon has been doing really well. He's shown everybody a lot. He's got a lot of natural ability.


There is a lack of experience, but I think that is going to come. They're all picking it up fast and working hard.

"I think we're a tough bunch. We've been working hard this whole offseason. We got a lot better this spring. We've still got a lot of improving to do. We've worked out twice a week as an offensive line and as a team. We're getting better."

The line hopes to be much improved from last year's group. A year ago, Thomas paced the team in rushing with 524 yards – the second-fewest yards rushing in a season by the team's leading rusher since 1988 (Ralph Brown, 514). Thomas became the first quarterback to lead the team in rushing since 1965.

To put Tech's rushing struggles into perspective, the Hokies rushed for 1,896 yards last season. David Wilson nearly rushed for that by himself in 2011 (1,709 yards).

But one doesn't have to remind the offensive linemen of these numbers. They know them all too well. They want to be held accountable.

"That's what our base is going to be – running," Miller said. "The offensive line is going to start everything. Without us playing the way we need to play, with great technique, everything will not come together. It's that way with any team. The pressure is on us." 

2013 OFFENSIVE LINE DEPTH CHART

LEFT TACKLES

- 71** Jonathan McLaughlin (6-5, 312, Fr.)
- 70** Jake Goins (6-5, 273, r-So.)
- 62** Ross Ward (6-3, 303, r-So.)

LEFT GUARDS

- 55** Brent Benedict (6-5, 292, r-Jr.)
- 69** Mark Shuman (6-6, 295, r-Jr.)

CENTERS

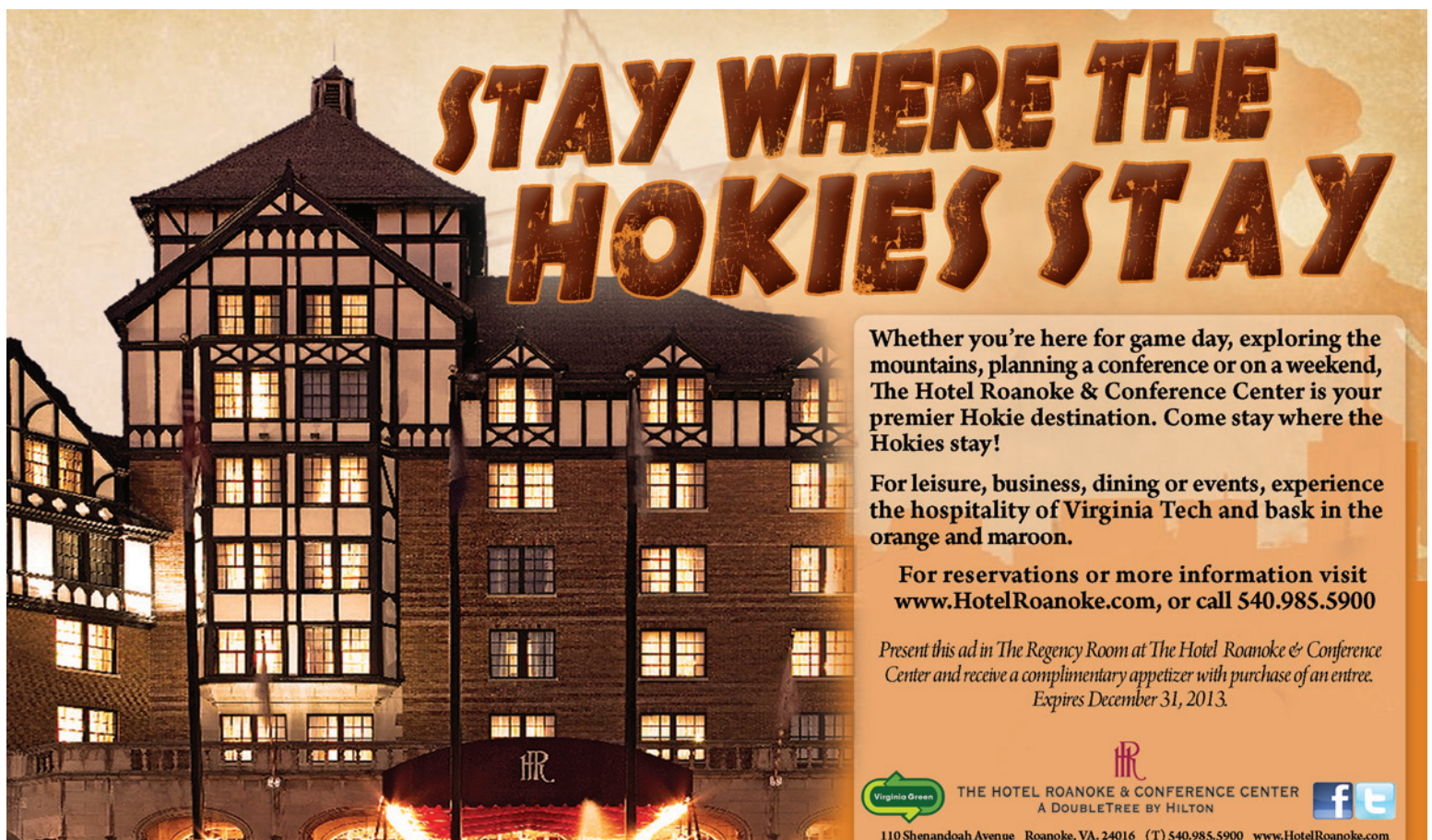
- 79** Caleb Farris (6-3, 308, Jr.)
- 76** David Wang (6-2, 299, r-Sr.)
- 64** Matt Arkema (6-3, 296, r-Jr.)
- 51** Jack Willenbrock (6-2, 237, r-Fr.)

RIGHT GUARDS

- 74** Andrew Miller (6-4, 296, r-Sr.)
- 75** Adam Taraschke (6-5, 296, r-Fr.)
- 54** Marcus Mapp (6-4, 295, r-So.)

RIGHT TACKLES

- 63** Laurence Gibson (6-6, 290, r-Jr.)
- 72** Augie Conte (6-6, 302, r-Fr.)
- 67** Parker Osterloh (6-8, 318, Fr.)





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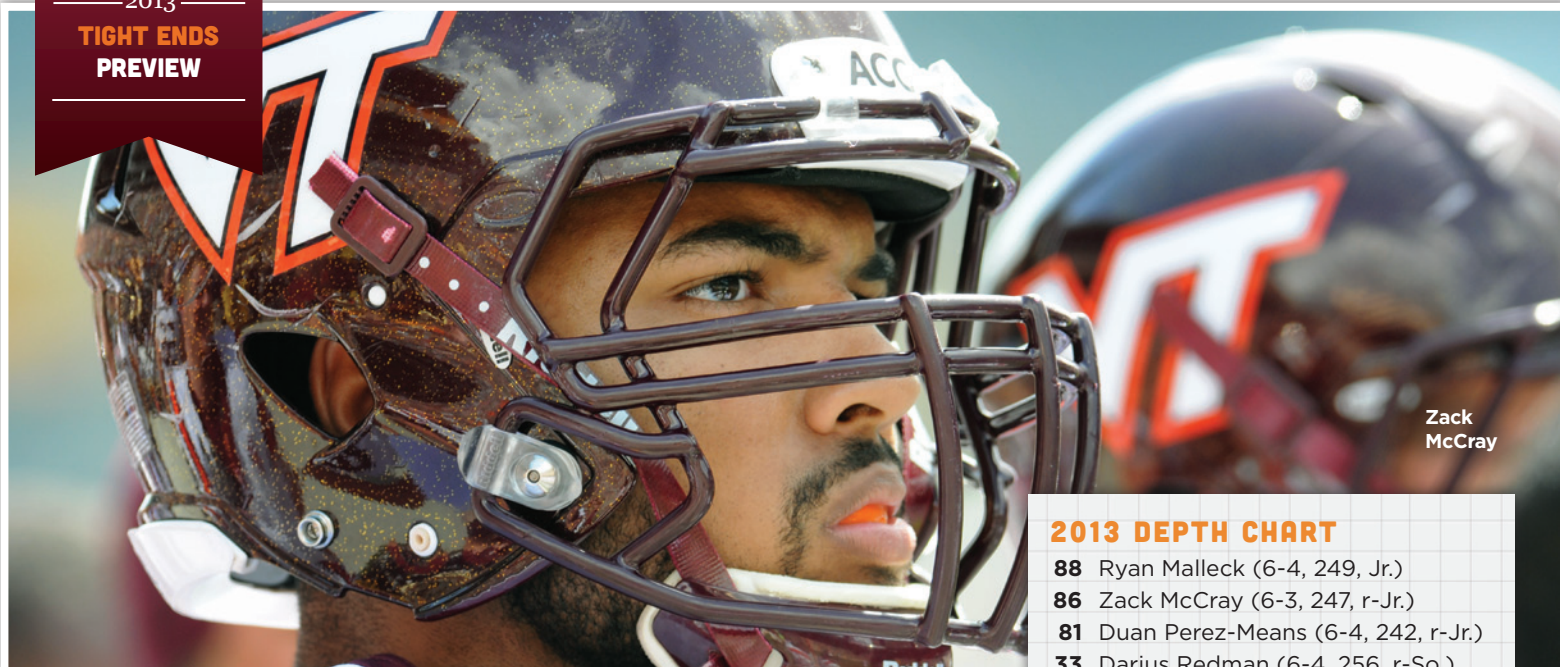
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Zack
McCray

2013 DEPTH CHART

88	Ryan Malleck (6-4, 249, Jr.)
86	Zack McCray (6-3, 247, r-Jr.)
81	Duan Perez-Means (6-4, 242, r-Jr.)
33	Darius Redman (6-4, 256, r-So.)
49	Dakota Jackson (6-3, 267, r-Fr.)

AFTER MOVING TO TIGHT END, MCCRAY EXCITED ABOUT 2013 SEASON

by Jimmy Robertson

Zack McCray has been at Tech for three years and made small contributions on the field for the Hokies in each of the past two seasons.

But this spring, he started from scratch.

McCray, a former SuperPrep and Parade All-American out of Brookville High School in Lynchburg, Va., requested to be moved to the tight end position at the end of last season after three years as a defensive lineman (including his redshirt year). He played in all 13 games last season, but only 35 snaps from scrimmage (all on defense). Most of his action came on special teams.

His first real action as a tight end came this spring, and like the rest of the Hokies' tight ends, he got better as the spring went along. He finished strongly, catching four passes for 65 yards in the spring game and showing the athletic ability that made him a prep All-American coming out of high school.

"Going into it [spring practice], I was confident because I had played tight end before [in high school]," McCray said. "Once I learned everything and got caught up, the spring game was fun. I felt like I knew the plays and was able to do some things. Once I got comfortable and got there and got going, I made that first catch and everything just slowed down for me. I was able to just play ball and not worry about what I was doing."

Most of the concern about McCray's move to tight end centered on his ability to block and be physical at the point of attack. His athletic ability and his hands are his strengths, so he excels more in the passing game and playing in space.

He got better as a blocker, but still needs to work on that aspect of the game. The Hokies' staff has

switched to a zone-blocking scheme, so everyone at tight end and along the offensive line spent the spring learning that scheme, and all hope it pays off this fall with an improved running game.

"It was different," McCray said of the zone blocking. "In high school, they didn't send me out on a lot of routes, and when they did, I knew I was getting the ball every single time. In high school, I blocked a ton, but this is a different scheme. We're doing zone blocking, and in high school, I was always blocking a certain man. It was more one-on-one. Zone blocking is a little simpler. If I do my job right, hopefully it gives the running backs a good read to go and make a play."

In a way, the change of offensive coordinators and the changing of schemes benefited McCray, as everyone spent the spring making the transition and learning all the new stuff. He was able to put himself into a position for playing time as a result.


He came out of spring practice behind Ryan Malleck on the depth chart. Malleck figures to be the starter, and he, like McCray, finished the spring strongly. He caught three passes in the spring game, including a 30-yarder for a touchdown.

"Coach Loeffler told us that he likes tight ends, but we had to prove ourselves," McCray said. "We had to want the ball and be able to carry the load. Otherwise, he'd find other positions and put them in motion and things like that if we couldn't handle the load."

"I think we proved ourselves. I think we've got a lot of things to work on, but he [Loeffler] gave us a challenge, and that motivated us to go out there and get the job done. We're excited to be in this system where we're going to have a chance to get

the ball. We're more involved in the passing game."

After two years of seeing little playing time, McCray is excited about this upcoming season, perhaps more than most. He likes his new position, and he likes playing for tight ends coach Bryan Stinespring, who recruited him out of high school.

"This is the happiest I've been since I've been in school," McCray said. "Moving around on defense, I enjoyed it, but after a while, I think this is the place [tight end] where I've found my home. In the spring, I was able to prove myself a little bit. I still have a ways to go. I have to continue to work hard, but I'm excited about this season, and the hopes I have for it are pretty high." 

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starter: Ryan Malleck (seven career starts)

Starter lost: none

Projected new starter: none

Top reserves: Zack McCray, Duan Perez-Means

Newcomers: McCray, Dakota Jackson

Breakout candidate: Malleck

Notes: Malleck led all tight ends with 17 catches for 174 yards last season ... He has yet to catch a touchdown pass in his career ... Perez-Means played in all 13 games, but saw only 12 snaps on offense ... Darius Redman played in five games last season, but saw only six snaps on offense.

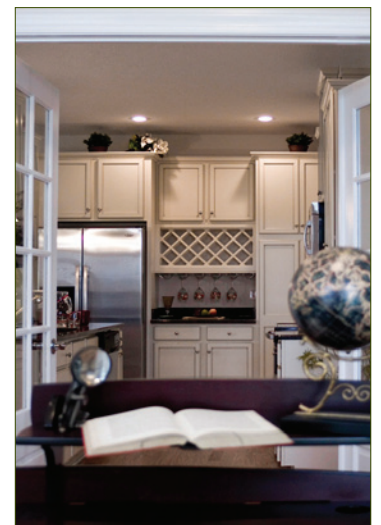
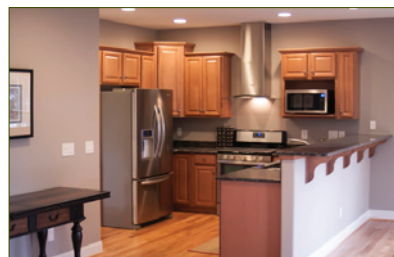
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J.R. Collins

COLLINS READY TO PUT PAST BEHIND HIM AND LEAD A LOADED DEFENSIVE LINE

by Jimmy Robertson

For the first time since high school, J.R. Collins did not spend the majority of his summer preparing for a football season.

But don't misinterpret that statement. He still worked.

Collins spent the first part of the summer in Los Angeles with Athletes in Action, a nationwide group of Christian athletes who use their platform as athletes to bring people to Jesus. The trip gave him the opportunity to step away from football and give him a perspective on life in a different part of the country.

"It was a summer project called 'Urban Project '2013 where we learned the gospel and then went and served and worked in different rec centers in L.A.," he said. "Most of the time, I was working with kids and meeting with other Christian athletes. I am a human development major, so it was good using the things I've learned and putting them into practice.

"This is my first summer off since way back

in high school. It was good to step away and get some rest from it all. But I was happy to get back to being a Hokie and fighting to beat Alabama."

For Collins, his 2012 season was not a happy one. He finished with 31 tackles, but only nine solo ones. He recorded just 1.5 sacks after having six sacks the previous season – one in which he was an honorable mention All-ACC selection.

Collins started seven of the first eight games last season, but lost his job following the Clemson game. The decision had more to do with his off-field conduct than his on-field production.

"There was a lot I had to learn, and I learned it the hard way," Collins said. "I wasn't what Coach [Beamer] wanted me to be behavior-wise off the field. I was late to things. The best part is I learned a lesson for future purposes, like when I'm in a job somewhere. I learned what's right from wrong and to show up on time. Last season wasn't ideal, but this season, I'm going to take what I've learned from all my years here and

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starters: James Gayle (26 career starts), Derrick Hopkins (27 career starts), J.R. Collins (23 career starts), Luther Maddy (16 career starts)

Starters lost: none

Projected new starters: none

Top reserves: Dadi Nicolas, Corey Marshall, Kris Harley, Woody Baron

Newcomers: Baron, Alston Smith, Nigel Williams, Jarontay Jones, Ken Ekanem

Breakout candidate: Maddy

Notes: Tech's defensive line returns a combined 102 career starts ... The Hokies' 35 sacks ranked tied for 19th nationally a year ago and 23 of those were by returning defensive linemen ... Of Tech's 99 tackles for a loss last season, 51.5 were by defensive linemen and 48 by returning defensive linemen ... Gayle is on the "Watch List" for the Bednarik Award, which goes to the nation's best defensive player ... Gayle's 11 tackles for a loss last season ranked 10th in the ACC.

hopefully have one great year.”

By no means is Collins entrenched as a starter heading into the 2013 season. Tech’s defensive line features five defensive ends capable of being starters, led by two-time All-ACC selection James Gayle, who had five sacks and 11 tackles for a loss last season. Others vying for a starting job at two spots include Corey Marshall, Tyrel Wilson and spring standout Dadi Nicolas. Nicolas won the Dr. Richard Bullock Award, as the defensive player who showed the most improvement during spring workouts.

The defensive tackle positions aren’t nearly as deep, though projected starters Derrick Hopkins and Luther Maddy certainly rival any tackles in the ACC. Hopkins finished sixth on the team a year ago with 51 tackles, including 10 for a loss, and 3.5 sacks. Maddy recorded 35 tackles and four sacks.

But the players behind those two are unproven. The group of backups includes rising redshirt sophomore Kris Harley and redshirt freshmen Nigel Williams, Alston Smith and Jarontay Jones. Also, Woody Baron, a true freshman who enrolled in January, worked his way into the mix. Harley played in 10 games last year and had six tackles.

The lack of depth at the tackle spots may lead to Collins or Marshall playing inside there, in addition to playing at end. Defensive line coach Charley Wiles has done this at points in the past, playing Collins at tackle together with Gayle, Marshall and

Hopkins.


“Over the past couple of years, we’ve talked about me playing tackle and end,” Collins said. “I feel more comfortable at end, but there are some chances that I’ll play some at tackle, depending on what our depth is.

“A lot of guys are battling to be among the starting four – Corey, Dadi and others. Coach Wiles wants his best athletes out there, and I have a lot of work to do to prove that I’m one of the best four out there.”

Tech’s defensive line spearheaded the Hokies’ late-season surge on defense. In the final seven games, the Hokies allowed just 80.4 yards rushing per game, and opponents converted on 22 percent of their third-down situations. In the bowl game against Rutgers, Tech’s defense held the Scarlet Knights to 196 yards of offense – one of only three bowl teams to hold its opponents to less than 200 total yards (Alabama and Texas)

As a whole, Tech’s defense finished in the top 20 in total defense. The defensive line figures to be the key to accomplishing that again.

“Expectations are high,” Collins said. “A lot of the starting defense is my graduating class, and we’ve all been here and know what needs to be done to be great. So there are a lot of expectations.

“I have high expectations myself. I want to go out and reach my full potential. I want to go out and have fun. This may be my last year playing football, and I want to go out and give it all I’ve got.” 

2013 DEFENSIVE LINE DEPTH CHART

STUD ENDS

- 99 James Gayle (6-4, 255, r-Sr.)
- 66 Tyrel Wilson (6-2, 230, r-Sr.)
- 91 Matt Roth (6-3, 239, r-So.)
- 87 Dewayne Alford (6-2, 240, r-Fr.)
- 43 Seth Dooley (6-5, 245, Fr.)

ENDS

- 42 J.R. Collins (6-2, 248, r-Sr.)
- 90 Dadi Nicolas (6-3, 224, r-So.)
- 96 Corey Marshall (6-1, 257, Jr.)
- 4 Ken Ekanem (6-3, 242, r-Fr.)

NOSE TACKLES

- 98 Derrick Hopkins (6-0, 311, Sr.)
- 60 Woody Baron (6-1, 265, Fr.)
- 94 Alston Smith (6-2, 281, r-Fr.)
- 57 Wyatt Teller (6-5, 271, Fr.)

TACKLES

- 92 Luther Maddy (6-1, 296, Jr.)
- 96 Corey Marshall (6-1, 257, Jr.)
- 93 Nigel Williams (6-3, 283, r-Fr.)
- 97 Kris Harley (6-0, 283, r-So.)
- 53 Jarontay Jones (6-2, 235, r-Fr.)



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Tariq
Edwards

2013 DEPTH CHART

MIKE LINEBACKERS

58 Jack Tyler (6-0, 230, r-Sr.)
36 Chase Williams (6-1, 220, r-Jr.)
44 Devin Vandyke (6-0, 218, r-Fr.)
25 Drew Burns (6-3, 218, r-Fr.)

BACKERS

24 Tariq Edwards (6-3, 234, r-Sr.)
40 Deon Clarke (6-1, 202, r-Fr.)
35 Dahman McKinnon (6-1, 207, r-Fr.)
27 Josh Eberly (5-7, 216, r-Fr.)

AFTER DIFFICULT SEASON, EDWARDS READY FOR BETTER LUCK

by Jimmy Robertson

Tariq Edwards wanted to do something extreme for his college graduation. So the young man from the quiet country town of Cheraw, S.C., did something totally out of character for him.

He got his hair cut into the shape of a Mohawk – and then dyed it.

“I don’t like standing out too much, but my twin brother [Tyrell] ended up doing it, and I went on ahead and did it, too,” Edwards said. “It was just for graduation. A lot of the players like it. I’ve thought about cutting it, but they like it, so I may keep it throughout the season. I’m thinking about it.”

Maybe doing something so extreme will shake

up Edwards’ luck. After all, though he played in seven games a year ago, he basically missed the entire 2012 season.

Edwards’ 2012 nightmare actually began during the 2011 season – the one in which he started all 14 games and recorded 71 tackles. At some point during the season, he fractured his leg, though he continued to play despite the ever-worsening pain.

“I’m not even sure which game it was,” he admitted. “I thought it was just shin splints.”

Tech’s sports medicine staff later diagnosed the fractured leg and originally prescribed rest. But later in the spring, the staff decided to operate on Edwards’ leg, putting him out of commission for spring practice.

Then, in August, Edwards was bothered by pain in his knee related to a screw installed to keep his leg stable. That entailed a second surgery to remove the screw, and Edwards simply never felt well enough to contribute after that. He finished the season with four assists – and no solo tackles. He saw most of his action on special teams.

“It was very frustrating, just sitting out and watching everything,” he said. “Then, we weren’t having a good year. Knowing that you couldn’t be a part of the team and help in some kind of way besides coaching people up was real hard. It was hard not being out there with my teammates.”

Edwards, though, returned to his backer spot this spring, taking over for the departed Bruce Taylor, who had slipped over from mike linebacker to fill in for Edwards. Taylor’s departure creates a void, but Edwards certainly possesses the talent and experience to make up for Taylor’s on-field production.

As expected, he came out of spring practice at the top of the depth chart at the backer position. Two young players – Deon Clarke and Dahman McKinnon – were behind him and never mounted a serious challenge for the job, though they possess intriguing skills. Edwards’ skill set was simply too

much for them to overcome.

“I felt it was a recovering type of spring, just to get back out there and get my timing,” Edwards said. “I was able to become more familiar with the schemes and work with my teammates. I didn’t have a lot of action come my way, but if it did, I feel like I was able to make the play and take care of my responsibilities. I had pain during the spring as well, but I tried to keep pushing through it.”

The concern among the coaching staff centers on keeping Edwards healthy. He stayed in Blacksburg over both summer sessions and made all his times in conditioning drills. But he still felt some pain in his knee.

The sports medicine staff gave him some orthotic inserts to place in his shoes, with the thought that these will provide added support. So far, he’s been feeling better.

“I have collapsed arches, so they [Tech’s sports medicine staff] think that’s where some of the pain is coming from as well,” Edwards said. “The orthotics have been working pretty well. I’m feeling pretty good. I’m getting close to 100 percent. It’s getting there.”

Edwards hopes for a big senior season. He graduated in the spring with a degree in psychology, which takes away from any added stress. He also gets to team with good friend and mike linebacker Jack Tyler again. Tyler subbed in for an injured Taylor in the ACC championship game against Florida State in 2010, and he and Edwards helped the Hokies win an ACC title. The two are important cogs at key positions for what figures to be a very good Tech defense.

This season is about redemption for the Hokies, who struggled last year. It’s also about redemption for the new-look Edwards, his last shot at glory.

“I’m very excited,” he said. “This is a comeback season for me, and I have to redeem myself. This is my last season out here in front of the fans. It’s big for me, and I hope that it will be a special season.”

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starter: Jack Tyler (18 career starts)

Starter lost: Bruce Taylor (33 career starts)

Projected new starter: Tariq Edwards (15 career starts)

Top reserves: Chase Williams, Devin Vandyke, Deon Clarke, Dahman McKinnon

Newcomers: Vandyke, Clarke, McKinnon

Breakout candidate: Tyler

Notes: Tyler was a first-team All-ACC selection by the coaches and a second-team choice by ACSMA (Atlantic Coast Sports Media Association) a year ago ... Tyler led the team and finished tied for third in the ACC last season with 119 tackles ... Clarke played in just three games a year ago as a true freshman ... Williams started the Austin Peay game last season in place of an injured Bruce Taylor – his only career start.



Ronny Vandyke

LEARNING YEAR BEHIND HIM, VANDYKE EXCITED FOR BIGGER THINGS IN 2013

by Jimmy Robertson

It turned out to be a rather eventful summer for Ronny Vandyke.

He spent 11 days in the Dominican Republic as part of a summer school course, he went home for a few days to celebrate the Fourth of July holiday and he saw his good friend and mentor, team chaplain Johnny Shelton, depart for a job as the chaplain of the NFL's Baltimore Ravens.

The last of those three hurt the deeply spiritual Vandyke.

"It's a huge loss, not just for us, but for the coaching staff as well," Vandyke said. "Him leaving is bittersweet. I'm excited for him to be the chaplain of an NFL team, but at the same time, we're losing a big piece of the program, certainly spiritually. We know he's going to find someone to replace him – well, no one is going to replace him – but he's going to find someone to keep us on the right track."

Whoever gets the job won't have much difficulty keeping Vandyke on the right track. The redshirt sophomore from Lorton, Va., takes care of business off the field and appears ready to take care of things on it during the 2013 season.

Vandyke goes into the season on top of the depth chart at whip linebacker after splitting time last season as a redshirt freshman with both Jeron Gouveia-Winslow and Alonzo Tweedy. Gouveia-Winslow started the first four games before defensive coordinator Bud Foster elected to go with his nickel defense, thus starting an extra defensive back in place of a whip linebacker. Vandyke started the Clemson and Miami games, but after the Miami loss, whips coach Cornell Brown went with Tweedy

for the remainder of the season.

Vandyke finished with 21 tackles (17 solo), including two for a loss. He also forced a fumble.

"It was," Vandyke said when asked if last season was tough for him. "Going in as a redshirt freshman, I thought I knew the defense. I had a good spring practice, but there were a lot of things that I still didn't know.

"I'm not going to lie. It was tough at the time, but I needed that. I needed to take a step back and really learn from a guy [Tweedy] who could get the job done right now. Not saying that I couldn't and that I didn't have the potential, but there was still a lot that I needed to learn. It was easy for me to step back and learn because I like learning and I like getting better."

It has taken some time for Vandyke to adjust to his position. At South County High School, he played defensive back, earning all-state honors as a safety. But once he got to Tech, he grew out of the position.

Now, at 6-foot-3 and nearly 215 pounds, he certainly possesses the physical attributes to be another in a long line of very good whip linebackers. Tech's coaching staff wants to take advantage of that size by keeping him closer to the line of scrimmage and blitzing him when the situation calls for it.

"I really like the position," he said. "I'm closer to the ball. It allows me to react faster. It allows me the potential to make a lot of plays and come off the ball and blitz. I'm able to move around a lot, so I do like the position."

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starter: none

Starters lost: Alonzo Tweedy (four career starts), Jeron Gouveia-Winslow (16 career starts)


Projected new starter: Ronny Vandyke (two career starts)

Top reserves: Josh Trimble, Derek DiNardo

Newcomers: none

Breakout candidate: Vandyke

Notes: The three whip linebackers on the depth chart have combined for 35 tackles (29 solo) in their careers ... Vandyke recorded five solo tackles in the Hokies' bowl win over Rutgers ... Tweedy and Gouveia-Winslow combined for 184 tackles in their careers, with 14.5 for a loss and 4.5 sacks ... Tweedy started the last three games of last season and had 17 tackles (10 solo), including 4.5 for a loss ... Tweedy led all players a year ago with 220 snaps on special teams.

Vandyke leads two walk-ons at whip linebacker. Coming out of spring practice, Josh Trimble was second on the depth chart, with Derek DiNardo third. Both Trimble and DiNardo played at backer last season, but their skill sets probably fit in better at whip linebacker. All three figure extensively on the Hokies' special teams, given their abilities to play in space. 

2013 DEPTH CHART

- 37 Ronny Vandyke (6-3, 219, r-So.)
- 48 Josh Trimble (6-0, 216, r-So.)
- 41 Derek DiNardo (6-0, 216, r-Jr.)
- 11 Kendall Fuller (5-11, 193, Fr.)

Antone
Exum

EXUM CONFIDENT ABOUT RETURNING TO FORM FOLLOWING KNEE INJURY

by Jimmy Robertson

Last October, Virginia Tech cornerback Antone Exum and Clemson receiver Sammy Watkins battled each other for much of the afternoon down at Memorial Stadium in Clemson, S.C.

Then they battled each other again in late March-early April – on Twitter. Exum, even while rehabbing a torn ACL, told the world that he wasn't afraid to take on one of the nation's best receivers.

"It's all a friendly competition," Exum said, smiling. "We don't have any animosity toward each other. We're cool. We were able to laugh about it in the end. We're both competitive guys and think we're the best at what we do."

Exum still feels that way about his game, even

though he missed spring practice and most of summer workouts while trying to get his knee at 100 percent for the 2013 season. The second-team All-ACC choice last year tore his ACL while playing in a pickup basketball game last winter and underwent surgery to repair it.

Rehab times vary for ACL injuries, and Exum received some disappointing news in early August from Dr. James Andrews, the noted orthopaedic surgeon who performed the surgery on Exum. Andrews wouldn't clear Exum for the season opener against Alabama and instead recommended increasing some of his rehab exercises. He

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starters: Antone Exum (32 career starts), Kyle Fuller (33 career starts), Detrick Bonner (17 career starts), Kyshoen Jarrett (13 career starts)

Starters lost: none

Projected new starters: none

Top reserves: Donaldven Manning, Donovan Riley, Desmond Frye, Der'Woun Greene

Newcomers: Greene, Davion Tookes, Greg Jones

Breakout candidate: Jarrett

Notes: Jarrett started every game last season and finished second on the team with 83 tackles (58 solo) ... Tech's starting defensive backs finished second, fourth (Bonner), fifth (Fuller) and seventh (Exum) on the team in tackles last season ... Jarrett's 58 solo tackles led the team ... Exum's five interceptions last year were tied for the most in the ACC ... Exum's 16 pass breakups led the team ... Tech's backups in the secondary combined for just 13 tackles last season.

wants to check Exum again in two months, thus meaning Exum will miss several games.

Tech's staff hopes to get Exum back for the Georgia Tech game – the conference opener.

"It's one of those things that takes time," Tech coach Frank Beamer said. "In a couple of months, they're going to re-evaluate. It needs to be right for him and for us. It is what it is."

Exum, who said he feels no pain in his knee, will headline what figures to be an outstanding secondary for the Hokies once he returns. All four starters return, including cornerback Kyle Fuller, a two-time All-ACC selection (honorable mention last year, second-team choice in 2011). Safeties Detrick Bonner and Kyshoen Jarrett round out the starting group.

These four guys combined to record eight of the Hokies' 13 interceptions last season, with Exum recording five of those to lead the team. They also led Tech to a No. 14 ranking nationally in pass efficiency defense (108.9 rating) and a No. 24 ranking nationally in pass defense (199.1 ypg).

Those rankings came even after they struggled early on last season, and much of the struggles came about because Exum, Bonner and Jarrett had changed positions. Bonner and Jarrett had been corners before the coaching staff moved them to the safety spots, and Exum went from rover to corner. In particular, Pittsburgh (283 passing yards, three touchdowns) and Cincinnati (392 passing yards, three touchdowns) enjoyed huge days against the secondary in the first half of the season before the secondary meshed and became a top-25 unit the latter part of the year.

"That could have been a part of it, just becoming acclimated to the new positions," Exum said of the early-season struggles. "The transition took a while for everyone to feel 100 percent at their positions. But this year, there shouldn't be any rough period. We should come out guns blazing from where we left off last year. That's what we expect of each other."

Exum's absence this spring and in August practices left Donovan Riley, Donaldven Manning and Brandon Facyson getting plenty of reps. Riley and Manning worked at Exum's spot this spring, while Facyson spent most of his time backing up Fuller at the boundary corner position. In August, though, Facyson and Manning were at the field corner spot, with Riley backing up Fuller at the boundary corner position.

Manning and Riley both played last year as true freshmen with mixed results. Manning came out of spring practice ahead by a slim margin, though Riley showed playmaking potential with an interception in the spring game. Facyson, who enrolled last January, played very well for a true freshman and appears likely to play this fall.

At the safety spots, Desmond Frye came out of spring practice as the backup behind Jarrett



Kyle Fuller

at the rover spot, while Der'Woun Greene came out of spring as the backup behind Bonner. Frye played last season as a true freshman and really played well this spring. Greene still needs to learn the position and play with better fundamentals, but he makes plays. He returned an interception 98 yards for a touchdown in the spring game.

Unlike a year ago, the group possesses some depth. But the success of the group probably hinges on the return of a healthy and playmaking Exum, whose skills allow defensive coordinator Bud Foster a little more flexibility in his schemes. Exum possesses the ability to neutralize any receiver – and he embraces that challenge.

That's why he hopes to see Watkins one more time in his career.

"I'm upset we don't play them [the Tigers] this year," Exum said. "I really enjoy going against the best guys, just to be able to showcase what I can do. You can't judge yourself by what you do against average guys. You want to go against the best and see how you do against them. Maybe we'll get a shot in the ACC championship game.

"I'm just real excited about the season. First, just excited to play football again. I haven't played in a long time, and I haven't been myself in a long time. I'm excited to get back on the field.

"Also, I'm very optimistic about what we can

2013 DEFENSIVE BACKS DEPTH CHART

BOUNDARY CORNERS

- 17 Kyle Fuller (6-0, 194, Sr.)
- 2 Donovan Riley (5-11, 204, So.)
- 13 Davion Tookes (5-9, 167, r-Fr.)
- 6 Chris Caver (5-7, 180, r-Jr.)

FIELD CORNERS


- 1 Antone Exum (6-1, 224, r-Sr.)
- 31 Brandon Facyson (6-2, 188, Fr.)
- 30 Donaldven Manning (5-10, 181, So.)
- 14 Nick Bush (5-11, 181, r-Jr.)

ROVERS

- 34 Kyshoen Jarrett (5-10, 198, Jr.)
- 26 Desmond Frye (6-2, 188, So.)
- 12 Zach Snell (5-11, 204, r-Fr.)

FREE SAFETIES

- 8 Detrick Bonner (6-0, 194, r-Jr.)
- 23 Der'Woun Greene (5-10, 180, r-Fr.)
- 3 Greg Jones (6-2, 201, r-Fr.)

achieve as a team. I feel like we have all the pieces. We still need to continue to get better, but I'm looking forward to seeing what we can do as a team this year." 

A.J.
Hughes

A.J. Hughes admitted that he was nervous for the season opener against Georgia Tech last September. It marked his first collegiate game after winning the starting job as the punter for the Hokies.

His first punt went for a mere 32 yards. His second punt never got in the air, as he dropped the snap, allowing the Yellow Jackets to start their possession at the Virginia Tech 24.

Talk about a rough beginning to one's college career.

"That was probably the best thing that ever happened to me, to be honest with you," Hughes said. "I kept telling myself that I wasn't nervous, but I was. It [the dropped snap] got me focused. Then I had a good game after that."

Hughes went on to have a rather solid season for the Hokies as a true freshman, earning a scholarship, starting all 13 games and averaging 40.6 yards per punt to rank a respectable sixth in the ACC. He hit 15 punts of 50 yards or more, and he placed 22 punts inside the 20.

It's been a meteoric rise to starting as a punter, considering Hughes only punted one season in high school. He served as a wide receiver and really only got into punting by accident.

"Steve Weatherford, the punter for the Giants, actually punted for my high school," Hughes said. "The summer before my senior year, he held a

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starters: Cody Journell (25 career games), A.J. Hughes (13 career games), Joe St. Germain (15 career games)

Starters lost: none

Projected new starters: none

Top reserves: Hunter Windmuller, Eddie D'Antuano

Newcomers: Windmuller, D'Antuano

Breakout candidate: Hughes

Notes: Journell has made 34 of 42 field-goal attempts in his career - 80 percent ... Journell kicked off six times last season ... Brooks Abbott led the team with 39 kickoffs last season, averaging 61.5 yards per kickoff (nine touchbacks), but Abbott decided to transfer from Tech over the summer, leaving the job open for any number of candidates.

FIRST YEAR OVER, HUGHES EXCITED TO IMPROVE ON HIS NUMBERS

by Jimmy Robertson

camp, and I punted with him, and he was like, 'You're really good.' Pat McAfee, the punter for the Colts, was there as well. He set me up with this guy, and he told me that I should go to this scholarship camp and see what happens.

"I ended up going, won the camp and was ranked 11th in the country, just from one weekend. I realized I could do this in college, and doors started opening."

Hughes hasn't rested on his laurels, though. He spent three days a week this summer working on his punting. He worked on things like his drop, his hang time, punting out of an end zone and pooch punting. He wanted to be consistent in everything.

He also attended a bunch of different camps, including one in mid-July in Wisconsin. He took a trip with former Tech kicker Brooks Abbott to Florida to meet up with Abbott's kicking coach, and he came away impressed with the results.

"We worked on my drop, my hold, my steps, keeping square ... emphasizing stuff like that," Hughes said. "I didn't realize kicking was so complicated. I was just an athlete with it, kind of like Danny [Coale] was. I tweaked some things and did some fine tuning, and now I'm pretty confident."


Hughes and Cody Journell give the Hokies a really good tandem of kickers. Journell returns as the placekicker after making 20 of 25 field-goal attempts last season and may be the kickoff specialist after Abbott transferred this offseason.

With Kysheen Jarrett returning as a punt returner (averaged 13.9 yards per return last

season) and Demetri Knowles returning as a kick returner (averaged 28.3 yards per return last season), Tech's special teams appear to be in good shape heading into 2013. Those units need to be strong, too, as Tech's offense may need some time to jell early in the season.

The kicking game could certainly help that transition. For sure, these experienced kickers are anxious for the challenge.

"We have high expectations," Hughes said. "We're holding ourselves to a high standard. We want to turn some heads."

"I'm ready. Toward the end of the season, I started to get in the groove of things. My confidence was up. I was really comfortable, just adjusting to Division I football. I'm really excited about this upcoming season." 

2013 SPECIAL TEAMS DEPTH CHART

PLACEKICKERS

89 Cody Journell (5-11, 183, r-Sr.)

93 Ethan Keyserling (6-2, 199, r-Jr.)

PUNTERS

27 A.J. Hughes (6-0, 199, So.)

48 Hunter Windmuller (6-3, 177, r-Fr.)

38 Michael Branthover (5-9, 193, Jr.)

SNAPPERS

65 Joe St. Germain (5-11, 220, r-Jr.)

59 Eddie D'Antuano (6-6, 263, r-Fr.)

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Ashley Meier (15) should be a top offensive weapon for the women's soccer team this season after scoring eight goals as a freshman from her midfielder position.

WOMEN'S SOCCER TEAM LOOKS TO EXTEND STREAK OF NCAA APPEARANCES

Plenty of talent returns to help the Hokies take on a difficult 2013 slate

by Marc Mullen

An incredible home slate and a new-look ACC dynamic are the focal points for the 2013 Tech women's soccer program, as it will attempt to extend its current streak of five straight trips to the NCAA Championship.

Sure, goal scorers and goalies usually get all the headlines, and the Hokies have those two areas covered, with more than 90 percent of their points from the 2012 season returning along with both goalkeepers who combined to average a 0.98 goals allowed per game.

But playing two of the last three national champions in Notre Dame (2010) and North Carolina (2012) at Thompson Field along with back-to-back Final Four participant Florida State and 2011 Final Four qualifier Wake Forest means that things won't be easy this season, though

such a schedule should create excitement among Hokie Nation.

"This year will be tougher than most. We are going to play everyone in our conference one time and then only eight teams make the [conference] tournament," Tech coach Charles "Chugger" Adair said. "So adding Notre Dame, a national champion two years ago, how is that going to impact it? It's going to be harder to make the conference tournament this year than in any other.

"Look at the schedule. We've got UNC at home, Notre Dame at home, Florida State at home and Wake Forest at home – those are four teams that have been in the women's Final Four the last few years. So we have a good home schedule, which is going to be exciting, and hopefully the local fans

will come out and support us."

The addition of the three new teams also means longer road trips, with Tech going to NC State and Duke on the same trip and BC and Maryland on the same trip. So the mental toughness of the team figures to be tested.

But Adair and the Hokies welcome the challenges. It's simply the price to be paid for playing in arguably the best women's soccer conference in the nation.

"I am looking forward to it and it's a good change as we grow and we develop, and it will make it more exciting," Adair said. "It should be a good year for us, and our goals are still to make the ACC Tournament and that would be huge for us and also make the NCAA Tournament. We are looking to continue that run. It's becoming an

expectation for us.”

Only two Tech teams have a longer stretch of current consecutive NCAA appearances – men's golf and men's tennis, both at seven – and the five straight for the women's soccer team is now a watermark for the program.

To make it six straight, the Hokies must fill in the voids left by four departing seniors, including Kelsey Mitchell, who started every game in her career (88), Amanda Gerhard (54 career starts) and Julia Goldsworthy (69). Throw in Anne Lumpkin's 31 career starts, and the Hokies lost 242 starts off last season's squad. Those four combined for 17 goals and 11 assists in 2012.

“We're going to have a little bit more depth up top [at midfield], as far as experience,” Adair said. “We've got Shannon Mayrose, Jazmine Reeves, Ashley Manning and Katie DeTuro coming back, and we've gained a few freshmen who are going to come in and compete and help us to grow up front.

“I think the midfield is going to be solid. We're looking to fill a role in that holding midfield spot for us. We lost Anne Lumpkin, who was very good and made players around her better. We're going to miss that a little bit. We are looking for some of the returning midfielders to step up.”

The group of returning midfielders include junior Katie Yensen, who scored four goals and had two assists; sophomore Ashley Meier, who scored eight goals and had three assists; and Kelly Conheeny – Tech's first career 20-20 player (26 goals and 23 assists).

Conheeny played in just four games last season because of an injury, and after the season, she received a medical hardship waiver, thus allowing her to return for one more year. She possesses all-conference talent (All-ACC in 2011) and the ability to give the Hokies more scoring punch.

“Kelly has been coming through the injury pretty well, and we've been taking our time with her,” Adair said. “There wasn't any urgency to get her back, and the 2013 season is what's important to her. She's coming back for the fall semester only to finish up school and have her fifth year as far as a soccer aspect.

“We missed her last year. She competes. She's infectious within the team. Her attitude and her desire to win and her competitive nature ... she's a winner and just her overall motivation. We were missing that last year in our late run. I think she's been the most impactful player throughout our program's history. When you look at where it's been and how it's grown over the years, she's been one of those players – at least one of the top five for sure.”

Goalkeeping also will feature a senior with tons of experience. Dayle Colpitts holds a couple Tech single-season records, and after this year, should hold career goalie records for minutes played, shutouts and wins.

Her 27 wins and 18 shutouts could also approach arguably Tech's greatest goalkeeper of all-time – Chase Harrison (2002-05), who posted school records of 41 goalie wins and 24 shutouts for the men's program.

A lot of that, though, will depend on how the Hokies respond to the loss of three senior defenders – Mitchell, Gerhard and Goldsworthy, who all played at least 84 games for Tech in their careers. They rank second, fifth and sixth, respectively, in the Tech record book in career games played.

“The backline is the big question mark for us,” Adair said. “We gave some kids some opportunities through the end of the year. We gave some starts to some underclassmen who were earning it, but we were also trying to gain them experience for this season. Hopefully,

they can step up. Taylor Antolino, Dani King, Morgan Conklin and Jodie Zelenky – those are just a few of the returners who will get looks and opportunities to fill those spots.”


Closing out games will be emphasized throughout this season, as the Hokies allowed twice as many second-half goals (12) than first-half goals. Five goals, in particular, stand out to Adair – two in the last seven minutes in a 2-1 loss to No. 4 Boston College, two in a five-minute stretch (67th and 72nd minute) at No. 9 Duke in a 3-2 overtime loss, and one in the 78th minute of a 3-2 overtime loss to No. 14 Georgetown in the Hokies' NCAA game.

“Those games stand out to me – where we controlled the first half,” Adair said. “There were some adjustments made, and I don't think we had players that were stepping in and being able to allow us to adjust in the second half.

“I think we have to do a better job of that and maybe even make some better decisions on our side [coaching]. But when we made some changes, the players didn't step up, and that's the difficult part. But that's why I think, with more depth this year, it will help us to make changes that are needed and will help us close some games out.”

Adair thinks his class of newcomers will add depth in every area of the field, as he said, it's a well-balanced mix of players who came to the campus over the summer to acclimate to college life early.

For sure, this team will be tested. Ten tournament teams from last year highlight the 2013 slate, which begins with a home weekend Aug. 23 and 25 at Thompson Field.

But the Hokies have experience, talent and depth. Hopefully, it's enough to overcome the rough schedule and make a sixth straight NCAA appearance. 

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Samantha Gostling is one of several veteran players returning to lead the Tech volleyball squad this season.



MIXING YOUTH AND EXPERIENCE

The Tech volleyball program lost talented stalwarts Cara Baarendse and Jennifer Wiker, but several returning players and some talented freshmen hope to lead the Hokies to success in 2013

by Marc Mullen

For the first time in five seasons, Virginia Tech volleyball coach Chris Riley will not have a returning All-ACC member on his squad. Felicia Willoughby [2008-2010] and Cara Baarendse [2010-2012] each picked up three of those awards during their Hokie playing days, but now they are just names in Tech's record books.

Any member of the 2013 Hokie squad will have her work cut out to extend the program's streak to six straight seasons with an All-ACC performer. After all, the new-look Atlantic Coast Conference adds three teams, including a strong Notre Dame program.

But don't discount the Hokies. They do have some talent in their own right.

"I am excited about the group," Riley said. "We've got some seasoned veterans who have

played a lot in Sam [Samantha Gostling] and Tori [Victoria Hamsher], Kathryn [Caine] and Jordan [Fish]. They've played a lot of minutes, and they've played some significant time for us. So that part, I'm excited about.

"But we are going to have some challenges, which I'm looking forward to. We graduated almost our entire serve/receive from last year. We've got mostly new passers in there, so for us, that's a challenge and something to work at every day. So we know exactly what we've got to do to get better."

Seniors Gostling and Hamsher definitely fit the bill for possible All-ACC honors, as each enjoyed successful seasons in 2012. Playing next to Baarendse and Jennifer Wiker, the pair put up similar numbers to the departed graduates.

Gostling's numbers of 328 kills, 955 total attacks and 3.39 points per set were on par with Wiker's (327, 1,032, 3.62 pps), while Hamsher's numbers of 236 kills, 464 total attacks and team-high 95 blocks were similar to Baarendse's 244, 55, and 83.

The other two returning starters are juniors in Caine (232 kills, 459 total attacks, 50 blocks) and Fish (1,090 assists and 190 digs), who stepped into the full-time setter's role last year.

"I wasn't surprised at her setting. That's exactly what I expected from her," Riley said. "She needed the experience that Erin [Leaser] had, so it wasn't the same, but Jordan's got that experience now. She's learning very fast, and she's getting much better.

"She's, right now, without a doubt, our best setter. We expect big things from her. We expect leadership. We expect decision-making, and we expect all the right things from her. She gives it to us most of the time now, so I feel very comfortable with her running the show."

But replacing those two top-notch seniors up front – Baarendse and Wiker – was a priority during the preseason and don't be surprised if freshmen are called upon at some point to fill those spots, or if a different style of play is implemented.

"Kathryn did a great job last year, and I think

she is going to be asked to do a lot more this year," Riley said. "I think Tori is going to be asked to do more. But we are pretty solid with three or four very good outsiders that are going to be asked to do more.

"We weren't quite as defensive as we needed to be. We've got Sam, who's better defensively in blocking, and with Kennedy Bryan and freshmen Lindsey Owens and Amanda McKinzie coming in and playing at such a high level, we'll be a different team than what we were. We will be more defensively oriented."

Riley is high on his freshmen and the sophomores he brought in last year. So he sees a nucleus that will be solid for another few years.

"We've got a young team that's pretty physical and pretty solid," he said. "It's a very encouraging and entertaining time. With us being young, we could be great at times, and we could be bad at times. There's going to be a rollercoaster, more so than the last few years when we had a pretty solid upper-class base.

"We've got a great freshman class that is probably the most athletic and most complete freshman class we've ever had. And then to follow that up with last year's freshman class, I think that group playing together is going to be solid. We've got a great foundation."


Those freshmen, along with the rest of the

team, will be tested this season, and not just by a tougher ACC, but also by the early portion of the schedule. The Hokies will face 2012 NCAA Tournament participant Michigan State in the final game of the Hokie Invitational and will also see two NCAA teams at the Louisville Classic – Louisville and Bowling Green – in late September.

"We scheduled very difficult teams to come into Cassell [Coliseum], and we've got difficult tournaments on the road," Riley said. "Everybody is good. There are no easy matches on our schedule, period. We have to show up to play every day. But that's to get us ready for what the ACC is like.

"There are no easy matches in our conference, and not that there ever have been, but now it's just gotten exponentially more difficult. But I'm excited about that. I want that level of competition.

"I want our conference to be – you got the Pac 12 and the Big 10 as far as the premier leagues – but I would like us to be the third-best league in the country. And that helps us all. I like that level. I'd like us [the Hokies] to be pushing to be a top-15 team every year, and the better the conference is, the more chance we have to do that."

Certainly, if the Hokies find themselves in the top 15 this year, they'll probably have more than their share of All-ACC performers – yet again. 

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Kyle Renfro has started all 46 games in which he has played at Tech, and his return as the goalkeeper is one of the many reasons why the men's soccer team is optimistic about its fortunes heading into this season.

RENFRO, CLEMENS HEADLINE 2013 TECH MEN'S SOCCER SQUAD

The return of veterans Kyle Renfro and David Clemens, along with some talented newcomers, have created optimism for Tech's fortunes this season

by Marc Mullen

One word to describe head coach Mike Brizendine and his efforts with his men's soccer program during his first four seasons would be hamstrung. Recruiting violations committed under previous head coach Oliver Weiss resulted in the athletics department implementing a ban on recruiting foreign players for three years, starting in 2009.

But Brizendine, entering his fifth season as the head coach, and his staff now have full freedom when it comes to recruiting, and he is thrilled about that reality and looking forward to the future of his Hokie program.

"When I took over the program, we were on recruiting restrictions, and those restrictions are off now," he said. "Our league is so strong that,

even with no penalties, it's a grind. So on penalties, that's like death row. So now that we're off that, OK, now let's see.

"We can do what other teams can do, and now we'll see how we can compete. One thing I can tell you is that we are definitely going to have a better team – a much, much better team between our veterans who are coming back and the new guys we have coming in. We're going to have a very mature, older group, that I expect big things from."

It's no surprise to anyone that follows the men's soccer program that the Hokies named seniors Kyle Renfro and David Clemens as team captains for the upcoming season.

Renfro was his steady self last year, as he led the ACC in saves (98) and was third in save percentage

(.760). The goalkeeper hasn't missed a start in two years and has played in 3,651 minutes in that span – missing only 13 minutes of a 4-0 win over St. Bonaventure last September.

Clemens had a breakout season in 2012, finishing tied for fifth in points (22), goals (10) and game-winning goals (3) in the ACC compared to 13, 6 and 1 combined in his first two seasons. Three of his goals last year came in the ACC Tournament, which included the game winner versus NC State.

"David and Kyle are two guys in the returning group that I am very excited to have back," Brizendine said. "And talking about returners, a lot of our guys were playing this summer competitively in the PDL (Premier Development League), things of that nature. I think that's

helped them, and I think there's an edge about this group.

"I think the returning guys know again what my goals are, and they've been working very diligently to obtain those goals. The reality is, it's starting now. They need to come in fit. They need to come in prepared. Those are the things that are the standard requirements, and I think that they've reached that and they know how competitive it's going to be."

Brizendine said that his No. 1 goal is to get Tech back into the NCAA Championship, or at least to be "on the board" – to be in a position that the committee is considering the Hokies for an NCAA at-large berth. He would also like to make it back to the ACC Tournament, but certainly knows the difficulties of that objective.

"Look, we go to the ACC Tournament, [then] we're going to get into the NAAs," he said. "But that's no small feat, and we are going to have our work cut out for us. We added three teams to our league that are very good. This year is unique because we are going to play everyone, which is going to be tremendously difficult.

"Only the top eight teams are going to make the ACC Tournament, so that's going to be a grind. I think that you could see what you see in other sports – where you might not even make

the ACC Tournament, but advance to the NCAA Tournament. We've also increased our strength of schedule out of conference a little. We are going to be better, but our conference and our overall schedule is going to be much more difficult, so we have quite a test in front of us."

That's where the 2013 recruiting class enters the mix. An international feel is certainly there, as six players come from overseas, two are transfers, and are joined by five men from the United States.

Brizendine believes this is his strongest class and highlighted a few.

"Alessandro Mion [a defender from Miami], who was in the U-17 World Cup, is a fabulous kid, a fabulous player. I can't say enough good things about him," he said. "There's a German kid, Niels Kirch, who I'm very excited about. During my tenure as head coach, we haven't had a player here like him. He's an 18-to-18 midfielder. He's big, strong and technical. He can use both feet.


"Also, Daniel Amar [a midfielder from Dimona, Israel] is another one that I am excited about, to get him out there. He's an older player, very passionate, another young man that I'm excited to see what he can do in the playing field."

Brizendine said that he looks at his board and just imagines the possibilities of formations he will try with his 2013 squad. He likens it to a

puzzle and seeing how all his new pieces are going to fit into place. Early on, he may try three or four different looks, and he credits the incoming class for these options because they will add needed depth to his team.

"With this recruiting class, the talent level is going to be better, and the maturity is going to be there, but the other thing is it's going to help us with depth," Brizendine said. "When you add depth, you add competition, and you need that within your training sessions. In years past, our best players, even if they've been bad, they've still played. That won't be the case any more. You have to perform at a top level or a sub [substitute] is coming in for you.

"Which again, that is going to push us well beyond, and it's going to keep guys sharp and focused. With that, we'll also be able to sustain some injuries. In years past ... heck, just look at last year, if David Clemens goes down, no one's scoring goals for us. This year, that won't be the case for us. We will be able to absorb it much better than we have been able to in the past."

After a pair of exhibition matches, the Hokies kick off the 2013 schedule at the JMU Tournament at the end of August before they welcome Syracuse to Thompson Field for their ACC and home opener on Sept. 6. 

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The 2012 men's cross country team won the program's first ACC championship, and the Hokies have several veterans returning to make a run at the 2013 crown.

TECH MEN'S CROSS COUNTRY TEAM READY FOR ANOTHER RUN AT ACC TITLE

Redshirt years should prove beneficial for 2013 women's squad

by Marc Mullen

The trophy still sits on his desk almost a year later. It can't be missed as you walk into Ben Thomas' office. You can't help but notice it, even if you're just passing by the Tech head cross country coach's office in the hallway – the 2012 ACC Men's Cross Country Championship team trophy.

It's appealing to the eye, has a few siblings down the hall in Director of Track & Field and Cross Country Dave Cianelli's office, and is certainly a showcase piece for any high school prospects who may stop by on a recruiting trip. It also serves as motivation to Thomas' teams,

both his men's and his women's squads, for the upcoming 2013 cross country season.

Don't let the departures of some of the most decorated men in the men's program's history – Will Mulherin and Michael Hammond – fool you. There's still plenty left over from Thomas' 2012 squad that earned Tech's first team bid to the NCAA Cross Country Championships in 25 years.

"It's going to be an interesting year," Thomas said. "We have a mix of enough veterans up front to maybe make a run, with Tommy [Curtin] and Lee [Degfae]. It's just going to be about how

much can the freshmen step in and add some depth to the team.

"We do have some outstanding freshmen coming in, and we have had freshmen finish in the top 15 in the conference before. I think, if there is one or two of those in this class, that's kind of what it's going to take for us to win another ACC title."

Curtin, a junior, scored a surprising seventh-place finish at last year's ACC Championship. Then after a disappointing regional (207th place), he rebounded with an 88th-place finish at the NCAAs. Degfae was 22nd at the ACCs, 30th

at regionals and 82nd at the national meet.

“It’s certainly a goal for Tommy and Lee to make it back to the NCAAs this year,” Thomas said. “They went to the national meet last year [with the team] and competed very well. If they had competed at the regional meet the way they did at the national meet last year, they would have advanced through [as individuals]. They just didn’t have great regional meets last year.

“I think they learned at the national meet last year that they belonged at that level, and they, certainly if healthy, will have a chance to make it individually. That’s very difficult to do. Obviously, our goal is to make it again as a team, and I think that’s in the cards if the men can stay healthy and get the work done.”

Thomas points to a number of men who have the ability to step up to help the team attain those goals. Seniors Grant Pollock and Kevin Dowd, redshirt junior Jared Berman and redshirt sophomores Darren Barlow and Juan Campos are the particular runners whom he envisions taking that next step.

He’s also very excited about his incoming freshmen.

“Patrick Joseph stands out,” he said. “He was 12th in the Foot Locker regional, just two spots away – seven seconds – from making the Foot Locker national meet. On the day, he’s one of the premier high school cross country runners and maybe one of the top 40 in the country last year.

“So he could help out as well as Vincent Ciattei and Daniel Jaskowak. These are all guys that I could see coming in and – it’s tough, because they are going from 5Ks in high school to 8Ks or even 10Ks in college, so you never know how they’re going to react to that jump – but those are guys that I feel could get to a point where they are helping as being in the top five by the ACCs.”

On the women’s side, a 10th-place finish at last year’s ACCs was a bit of an illusion. Sort of like a magician, Thomas is always making runners disappear for a year only to have them reappear at the precise time for optimal success – a trick he performed masterfully for last year’s men’s title run. Mulherin and Hammond both redshirted two years ago, and the added year of experience and training aided the Hokies in their ACC title run last year.

Thomas is hoping for similar results from the women’s team after redshirting several key contributors last season.

“The plan was to redshirt four out of our top five last year, at least the way I looked at it,” Thomas said. “[Redshirt juniors] Courtney Dobbs, Paige Kvartunas and Madalyn Nuckols, those three women we redshirted last year with the idea of having a real solid two years with them, starting this year.

“And they are motivated to do that. If they come back strong, we’ll be much improved over last year certainly, and hopefully, we can be in a position to have our best ACC finish ever. Sarah Rapp, along with those three, is the key to that. They’ve all been top-25 ACC types before, and they’ve been all-region before, so they have the ability. If we can get them together and do it on the same day, we will be very good.”

Rapp earned all-region last year with a 25th-place finish, while Kvartunas was an all-region runner in 2010 (18th place) and Nuckols was all-region in 2011 (23rd place). Dobbs is the only one of them to post a pair of top-40 finishes at the regional meets (2010, 38th and 2011, 39th).

However, even if those four post runs of less than 21 minutes – which are all capable of doing – five runners are needed for team points. Thomas believes several women can fill that final role.


“We have a solid freshman coming in this fall in Abby Motley, and she could help out,” Thomas said. “Shannon Morton has the potential to step up and really help our cross country efforts, and that’s kind of what we need to happen – someone who hasn’t really been there before but has the ability to. She’s young. She didn’t run cross country last year, but had an outstanding track season. She could add some depth to our team.”

This year’s ACC Championship will feature a couple new wrinkles, as three new teams – Notre Dame, Pittsburgh and Syracuse – enter the picture, and the site will be at Beeson Park in Kernersville, N.C. (Wake Forest is the host), a course unfamiliar to nearly all of Tech’s runners.

“I think this will be the best distance conference in the country,” Thomas said. “Just from sheer numbers, we just have more teams, and those teams are emphasizing the distance areas. It doesn’t get any easier, but hey, that’s why you come to the ACC. You come to run against the best distance runners in the country, and with those teams coming in, that’s going to be truer than ever.

“We’ve never been [on the host course] before, so we are going to be going down there and checking it out at some point this fall. It’s the North Carolina high school state meet course, so Sarah Rapp is very familiar with it, but outside of her, no one else has really run it before. From what I hear, it’s not as challenging of a course as our course is, which might be better for the freshmen.”

The ACC Championships are set for Nov. 1. It’s a date circled on Thomas’ calendar.

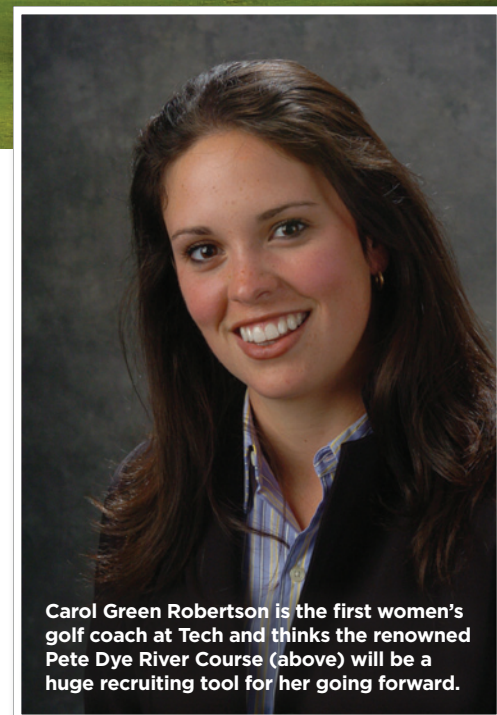
After all, if a few of the younger runners fulfill their potential and the older runners continue to progress – on either the men’s or women’s side – then they may be able to bring home a matching trophy for Thomas to sit on his desk. 



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Carol Green Robertson is the first women's golf coach at Tech and thinks the renowned Pete Dye River Course (above) will be a huge recruiting tool for her going forward.

ROBERTSON READY TO TEE OFF ON BUILDING TECH WOMEN'S GOLF PROGRAM

by Jimmy Robertson

In June, Carol Green Robertson gave birth to her first child.

In July, she was tasked with guiding the Tech women's golf program from its infancy as well.

Robertson became the first women's golf coach at Tech after AD Jim Weaver announced her hiring on July 8. The hiring came less than a month after Weaver announced the addition of women's golf to the slate of varsity sports at the university.

Robertson came to Tech from Old Dominion, where she had served as the head coach for the past two seasons. While with the Monarchs, she led her teams to five tournament titles in her two seasons, including three tournament titles this past season.

Prior to that, she served as an assistant for both the men's and women's programs at ODU. She also worked as an assistant at James Madison, her alma mater, for a season.

Despite having and raising a child – a son named JJ – and all the wonderful craziness, that entails, she and her husband, Jason, never gave her application for the Tech coaching position a second thought.

"I didn't hesitate at all," she said. "I've been

waiting for this program to start even when I was wanting to play college golf. Whether I wanted to play there or coach there [at Tech], I was waiting for this program to start.

"The easy, convenient thing would have been to stay here [at ODU], but I wanted the challenge. If it weren't for the baby, the decision would have been easier, but only because things are more difficult when you're trying to move with a baby or pack a house with a baby. But those are stupid reasons to give up my dream job that I've wanted for the past 10 years."

Robertson certainly knows a lot about Tech. She grew up in Tazewell, Va., roughly a 90-minute drive from Blacksburg, and has been to football and basketball games at Tech. Also, her younger brother, Garland, played golf at Tech from 2007-11.

She grew up in a golfing family. Her father, Charles, is a past president of the Virginia State Golf Association [VSGA] and, her older brother, Chuck, played collegiately at Washington and Lee.

"I honestly didn't have the desire to play until I was 15 years old," she said. "But my brother was playing and my dad was playing, and if I wanted

to see my dad or my brother, I had to play golf. So I picked up a club. I knew everything about the game. I just wasn't out there playing it. But I picked it up pretty fast and luckily got a scholarship by the time I was 18. I never looked back."

In many ways, Robertson is the perfect candidate to lead the Tech program. In addition to having coaching experience, she possesses the playing chops to go with that. At JMU, she received the Colonial Athletic Association Player of the Year Award on two occasions (2003 and 2004) and earned first-team All-CAA honors on three occasions. In 2003, she won medalist honors at the conference championship.

Following her playing days at JMU, she worked as an assistant at the school before trying her hand in the professional ranks. She played on the LPGA Future's Tour from 2007-09.

Life on the road, though, got old quickly, and

remembering the impact her coaches had on her both in high school and college, she decided to pursue coaching full time.

"I wanted to take all the best things I liked about those coaches and be one myself," she said. "I'm so happy that I did it [played on the Futures Tour] and learned so much from it, but living on the road for that many days, I didn't want to do it for the rest of my life. Then I still wanted to be involved in it [golf] and have an impact on young ladies' lives.

"I know how influential my coaches were for me, and I want to be that person and I know I can be a good one. It's such a fulfilling job when the girls turn out so wonderful, whether they win a tournament or get that job they want. Just to know that you were a small piece in how that plan worked out is so fulfilling."

Now, she gets to build a program from scratch. In most circumstances, that would be a daunting task, and for sure, a lot of work needs to be done. But Tech certainly has resources in place for her.

For starters, the Tech practice facility at the Pete Dye River Course of Virginia Tech contains a locker room for the women's team, and incoming women's players get to share the practice facility with the men's team. Of course, they also get to share the golf course with the men's team, a course that ranks among the top

10 college courses in the nation.

"It's a little piece of heaven out there," said Robertson, who has played the course several times. "It's just gorgeous. Virginia Tech can offer it all. Yes, the weather can contain me a little [in recruiting], but that course has so many set-ups and so many tee options. You could play it every day of the year, and it wouldn't feel like it because you've got so many options. They keep it immaculate, and it should be impressive to any recruit. To the eye, to see the river and the trees and how green it is, it's engaging, for sure."

Robertson also has the advantage of time. She gets a year to recruit, and then those recruits will spend the 2014-15 season redshirting, while working on their games. In 2015, Tech begins competition.

She started recruiting the day she took the job and already has received an oral commitment from a player for the 2014-15 academic year. She knows exactly what she wants in a recruit.

"Just athleticism," she said. "I like to look at a girl and think, 'If I handed her a basketball or a baseball, or heck, even a hockey puck, would she be good at it?' That's when you know they are real athletes. You can look at them and tell that golf is one game they'd be good at.

"It's great to watch somebody shoot 5-under-par, but it's also great to watch them struggle and


see how they handle it and see if, on their bad days, they can shoot a good score. It's a game of misses. Everyone is good on their best day, but how good are you on your bad day? That's when you find a good recruit – when they're good on their bad day."

Robertson also has talked with coaches at other programs in the ACC. Virginia added women's golf roughly a decade ago, and Clemson begins competition in women's golf this fall after adding it as a varsity sport in 2011. The people at those schools gave her some insight on how to move forward.

For the time being, moving forward consists of moving out of Norfolk and getting settled in Blacksburg, with her husband and child. Raising a child, while wonderful, can be hectic. Doing so while moving presents even more of a challenge.

But Robertson isn't complaining.

"It's been an amazing year," she said. "We're so blessed with a new baby and a new job and the fact that Virginia Tech wants me and wants my family to be there. It's so amazing.

"Sometimes, I lay in bed at night and think, 'Wow, how are all these nice things happening to me?' I'm not complaining. This is wonderful. It's been a great year, and I think it's going to be a great year, year in and year out, when we get there." 

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MASON NAMED NEW BASEBALL COACH

The former associate head coach replaced Pete Hughes, who departed for the head job at Oklahoma

by Marc Mullen

After 16 years in the college coaching profession, Patrick Mason finally got the news that he'd spent nearly all of his career working toward – he was in line for his first head coaching position.

On June 27, Virginia Tech announced the hiring of the former Hokies' associate head coach as the 24th head coach at the school, but just the fifth in the last 66 years of the program. Mason, who had been the associate head coach for the past three seasons, replaced Pete Hughes, who departed after taking the Oklahoma head coaching position.

On the job for about eight weeks now, Mason has taken the ball and gone with it.

"I think the first couple of days, it was a whirlwind, but as the dust settled and we started moving forward, it [being the head coach] has sunk in," he said. "With planning and preparation for the fall and continuing the recruiting cycle, not really looking to anyone else for answers any more, that really makes that transformation sink in a little bit quicker. When the final decisions are now being made by me, I better speed up with the process myself."

Mason, who came to Tech in 2010 after working stints as an assistant at both Framington State and Boston College, first filled out his staff. He promoted longtime Tech assistant Mike Kunigonis to associate head coach, and he named former North Carolina hurler Robert Woodard as the pitching coach. Mason used to serve in that particular capacity.

He has a couple of things to finalize, but Mason is thrilled with where things stand heading into his first fall as the head coach. Yet he does see how his new role shapes other people's perspectives.

"Transforming into this role, recruiting-wise, we haven't really missed a beat at all," Mason said. "We've been able to lock up some very solid commitments in the past month. Relationships with the current players have been great. Everyone we expected to come back is coming back, and we're now just getting into the planning phase of our fall season."


"I will say this – people seem to look at me a bit differently now that I'm a head coach, which I find a little bit amusing. That's been fun for me because, for whatever reason, they are looking at me through a different lens now, so I've been

having some fun with that with some of the guys and colleagues I've run into."

A lot of veteran players off the 2013 squad departed via graduation and Major League Baseball's First-Year Player Draft (nine total), so the staff is certainly concentrating on how the fall season is going to take shape. More than a dozen new faces will be looking to earn spots on the 2014 roster.

"We lost a lot of players, so our fall is going to be very similar to the fall of 2010," he said. "We're going to intra-squad, we're going to compete – there are a ton of openings in our lineup and our rotation."

"With that being said, we still have a pretty good returning core, both numbers-wise and talent-wise, but there are some openings in innings that need to be won. So we want to make it as competitive as possible."

"We know we have a lot of talented kids, so hopefully we can create that atmosphere where guys will emerge into those roles, similarly to what Devin Burke did last year. We want to make it as competitively as imaginable, but we don't really plan on changing too much." 



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