

INSIDE

HOKIESPORTS

The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics



SPRINGING ONTO THE SCENE

Ryan Williams is one of several young Tech players who burst into the picture this spring and could play a huge role for the Hokies next fall.

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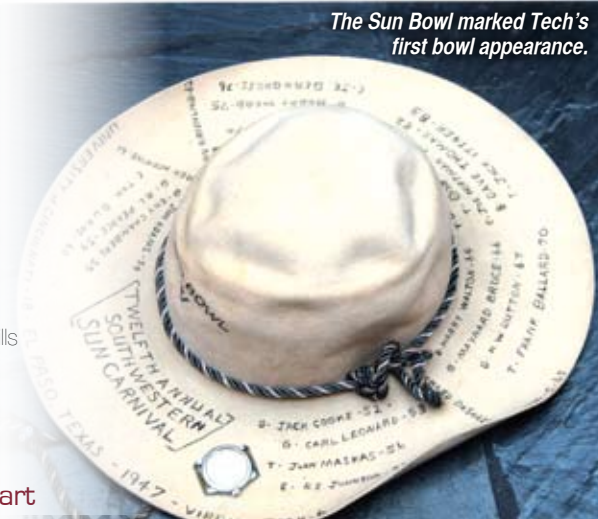


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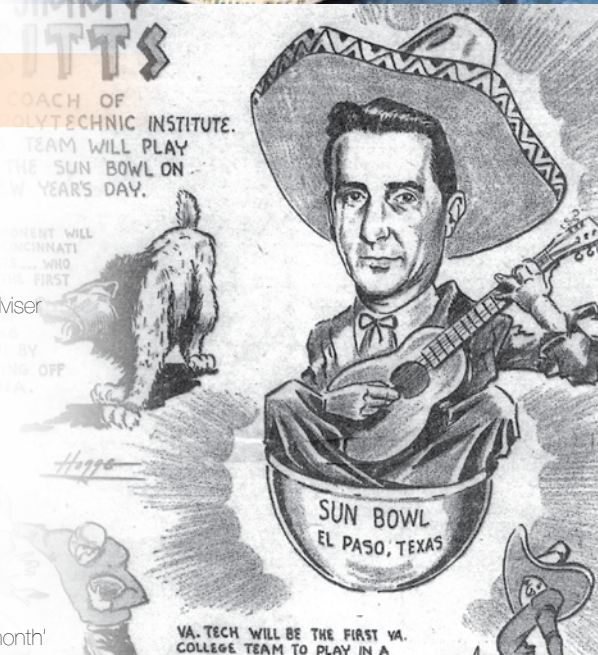
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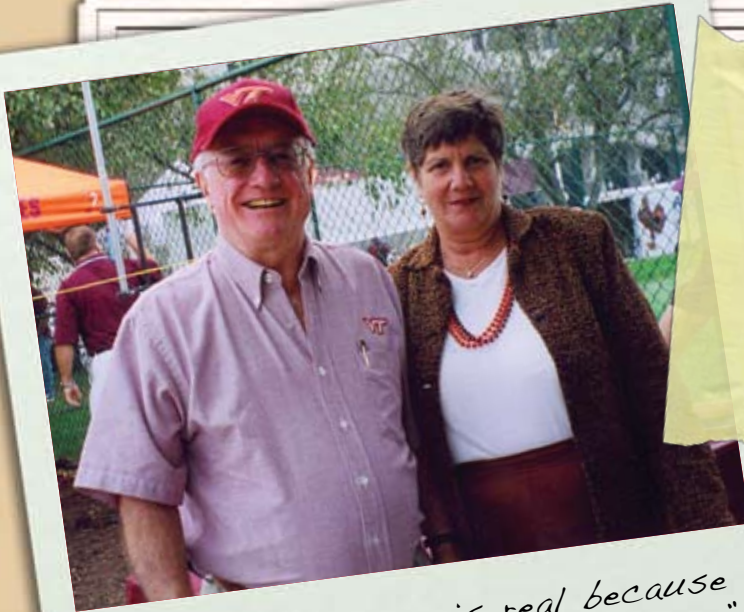
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For more information on how to give to Virginia Tech athletics, contact the Hokie Club at (540) 231-6618 or visit hokieclub.com.



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Renny & Lucky Lynch

Hokie Club Level:

Golden Hokie

Family Members:

Lucky (wife), sons Gil and Chris Lynch, stepchildren Ashley Lingle and Chris Appel

Currently Lives:

Roanoke, Va.

Q: What year did you graduate?

A: 1958

Q: A Hokie is ...

A: A supporter of Virginia Tech whether it be a fan, benefactor, graduate or friend of the university.

Q: What caused you to become a fan of Virginia Tech?

A: My father, who was in the class of 1932.

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

A: The 1995 Sugar Bowl win over Texas and the invitation to join the ACC.

Q: I'm a Hokie club member because ...

A: Our student-athletes and athletics department need the resources to compete at the highest level.

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

A: The friends and fellowship of the Hokie huddle.

Q: What accomplishment by the Roanoke Valley Hokie Club makes you the proudest?

A: The cumulative giving of \$860,000 provided by so many Hokies through fund-raising projects, such as bingo, every week for about 12 years.

Q: Do you have any game day superstitions?

A: Lucky has to wear her Hokie beads and good luck Hokie earrings.

Q: Describe your perfect day at Virginia Tech.

A: A beautiful afternoon and evening in Blacksburg for a Thursday night football game with fireworks and a Hokie win.

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

A: Carroll Dale, Bruce Smith and Bryan Randall.

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech student-athlete from another sport is ...

A: Angela Tincher.



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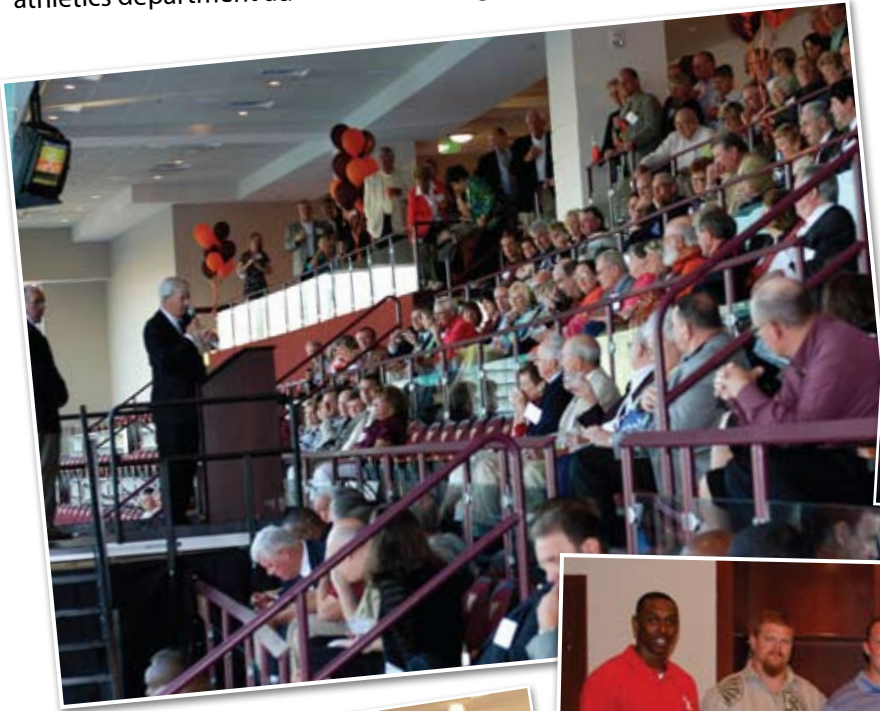
Important Dates to Remember

April-May

2009 Orange & Maroon Tour

Ut Prosim Athletic Social

On Friday, April 24, the Hokie Club served as the host for its third Ut Prosim Athletic Social in conjunction with the Ut Prosim Society weekend. In attendance were Hokie Club members who are Ut Prosim Society members, as well as members of the athletics department administration, Virginia Tech head coaches and current NFL Hokies.





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News & Notes

By Jimmy Robertson

Athletics department holds All-Sports Banquet

The Virginia Tech athletics department held its annual All-Sports Banquet on May 4 at the Squires Student Center and recognized student-athletes who excelled both on and off the field this past academic year.

The department recognized its Scholar Athletes of the Year; a group of 10 who earned perfect 4.0 grade-point averages for the 2008 calendar year. This group included Brittany Cook and Laura Haskins (women's hoops), Chris Sherman (cheerleading), Chris Drager and Dustin Keys (football), Jennifer Harvey (women's soccer), Claire Dickey and Stephanie Jones (women's swimming), Pedro Graber (men's tennis), and Kelly Phillips (women's track).

The department also honored the All-Academic team, which includes those who have earned the highest grade-point average in their respective sports. The list included: Sean Ryan (baseball), Paul Debnam (men's hoops), Cook and Haskins (women's hoops), Sherman (cheerleading), Phillip Padilla (men's track and cross country), Natalie Kretzer (women's cross country), Drager and Keys (football), Drew Weaver (golf), Sarah Otey (HighTechs), Kari Morrison (lacrosse), Justin Tuohy (managers), Craig Burnell (men's soccer), Harvey (women's soccer), Jenna Rhodes (softball), Trey Stewart (men's swimming), Dickey and Jones (women's swimming), Graber (men's tennis), Jessica Brouwer (women's tennis), Phillips (women's track), Kristen Wahlberg (trainers), Stephanie Bartholic (video), Kristen Cunningham (volleyball), and Tim Miller (wrestling).

The ACC sponsors a Top Six for Service Award each year in recognition of the thousands of hours student-athletes collectively volunteer in their communities. Each year, six outstanding

student-athletes from each member institution who have demonstrated an exemplary service attitude are chosen for this special honor. At Tech, the six honored were Ashley Owens (women's soccer), Beth Walker (softball), Jenna Rhodes (softball), Orion Martin (football), Drew Weaver (golf) and Mauri Liberati (women's soccer). The Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) selected a SAAC Member of the Year. This year's recipient demonstrated outstanding leadership to this all-important committee that serves a vital role within the athletics department. Beth Walker (softball) was named the SAAC Member of the Year.

The strength and conditioning staff also recognized one team member from each sport who demonstrated outstanding dedication in the weight room and in conditioning themselves for their competitive season, and each team at Tech recognized a rookie of the year, a coaches award winner (to the consummate team player) and a most valuable performer.

For more on these and for photos of the evening, please check www.hokiesports.com/allsports.

Macho drafted by Philadelphia, continues Tech streak

The Philadelphia Eagles selected former Tech cornerback Macho Harris in the fifth round of the NFL Draft on April 26, extending the Tech streak of having at least one player drafted to 16 consecutive years. Sixty-four Hokies have been drafted in that span and 75 overall under head coach Frank Beamer.

Harris earned All-ACC honors as a cornerback his final two seasons at Tech. The Highland Springs, Va., standout finished with 46 tackles, including 3.5 for a loss, this season. He tied for the team lead with six interceptions and concluded his career with 15 interceptions, a number that ranks third on the school's all-time list.

Harris was one of 33 ACC players drafted – the second most behind the SEC (37). Maryland and North Carolina led the way with five chosen

each. The ACC did have five players selected in the first round, extending the total to 30 selected in the first round since 2006. That number is tops among all conferences in that span.


Four former Tech players signed with NFL teams as un-drafted free agents. Orion Martin signed with the Miami Dolphins and will have plenty of former Tech players helping him with his new surroundings – Brandon Frye, Ernest Wilford, Eric Green and Jake Grove are all on the Dolphins' roster.


Sean Glennon signed with Minnesota and will be re-united with former Tech quarterbacks coach Kevin Rogers in Minnesota. Ryan Shuman signed with the Green Bay Packers and Devin Perez inked a deal with Cincinnati.

Dates set for Greenberg hoops camp

Tech men's basketball coach Seth Greenberg and his staff have scheduled four separate basketball camps for kids of various ages and for those who wish to concentrate on certain aspects of their games. Here's a list of the camps:

- Post and Perimeter Position Camp, June 5-7 – This camp is for rising 8th-12th graders and concentrates on position-specific fundamentals.
- Offensive Skills Day Camp, June 22-24 – This one is for boys and girls grades 1st-8th. This camp focuses on fundamental offensive skills.
- Individual Overnight Camp, July 5-8 – This camp is for boys ages 7-rising 12th graders and is designed to improve individual basketball skills. The skills will be taught through individual and group instruction.
- Individual Day Camp, July 13-16 – This camp is for boys and girls grades 1st-8th and is designed to improve individual basketball skills. The skills will be taught through individual and group instruction.

For more information on Greenberg's hoops camps, please call 231-6725 or register online at www.hokiesports.com/mbasketball. 



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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Jimmy Robertson

Normally, the Maroon-White game that marks the conclusion of Tech's spring football practice lacks entertainment value. The same thing applies to the majority of the practices as well.

After all, Tech's coaching staff uses the spring to mix and match young players and walk-ons, trying to build depth and seeing who fits best at certain positions and who may be able to help in the future. That shuffling alone leads to uneven play, which in turn makes it somewhat difficult to watch.

It's kind of like watching Picasso stain my deck - it must be done, but you know that something much better would be in the works given different circumstances.

That said, this spring practice differed from most in Blacksburg. The young players displayed play-making skills that belied both their age and experience. The gap between first- and second- teamers was slimmer than in years past. And the scrimmages offered some entertainment - which made watching fun.

Following the spring game, we learned some things about this team. Tech goes into the fall with some depth at several positions - mainly because of the improvement of its young players, particularly those who redshirted in that large freshman class last year. From this perspective, that was the overall biggest surprise coming out of the 15 April practices.

Who were the individual surprises? Well, here's a look;

- **Ryan Williams** - Interestingly, Williams

YOUNG PLAYERS CREATE EXCITEMENT WITH THEIR IMPROVEMENT AND OVERALL PLAY THIS SPRING

was a highly rated player coming out of high school, though he only rushed for 650 yards and two touchdowns his senior season because of injuries.

But he truly is the real deal. Think Shyrone Stith with speed, or a shorter version of Kevin Jones. He possesses that breakaway ability that Tech's offense has lacked of late, and yet, he brings power to the field as well.

In every scrimmage, he made a big play. There was the 80-yard run in the first scrimmage and the 56-yard touchdown catch on a screen pass in the spring game. His best run came in the first scrimmage when he made four or five guys miss on what went down on the stat sheet as an ordinary 6-yard run.

Tyrod Taylor won the offensive MVP of spring practice. But we're not so sure Williams wasn't the best player on the field.

• **Greg Nosal** - Tech's staff planned to look at him at tackle this spring, but an injury to Sergio Render led them to trying Nosal at guard and it panned out nicely. At 6-foot-6, he's got a nice frame and he possesses the athleticism of tight end - which he played in high school, a theme among Tech's offensive line.

Nosal won't start, but he's going to be the top backup. He figures to see 15-20 snaps a game.

• **Dyrell Roberts** - Talk about someone who grew into a position. Roberts looked like a different player this spring, which made sense. He actually knew what he was doing out there. The former tailback needed some time to soak into the receiver spot, but Tech's staff didn't have that luxury last fall. So he played quite a bit.

Now, that decision is paying off. Roberts looked like a confident player out there. He

made some tough catches this spring. More importantly, he got in the end zone. With him, Jarrett Boykin and Danny Coale, the Hokies should be able to attack down the field this fall.

• **Jake Johnson** - This kid just loves football and his passion for it has enabled him to move onto the cusp of a starting role as a sophomore. He reminds most of George Del Ricco - and that's not a bad comparison. Johnson will make some mistakes because the backer position is one of the toughest to play on Tech's defense, maybe the toughest. But he learns quickly and rarely makes the same mistake twice. He and Barquell Rivers could be three-year starters at Bud Foster's spots.

• **Matt Waldron** - How does Frank Beamer keep doing this? Two years ago, yours truly didn't think Waldron had the leg to be a kicker. This spring, he didn't miss and he actually showed some range. Beamer appears to have unearthed another gem of a walk-on at kicker, following the likes of Brandon Pace, Judson Dunlevy and Dustin Keys.

There were other surprises, too. Chris Drager was exceptional at tight end before being moved to defensive end following spring practice. Jim Cavanaugh spoke highly of both Jeron Gouveia-Winslow and Alonzo Tweedy. Courtney Prince enjoyed a tremendous spring at defensive tackle before he tore his ACL in the final scrimmage. Cris Hill was the Hokies' most improved defensive back.

Their improvement, and that of other young players, made this spring practice exciting.

Now that excitement will build even more toward next fall.

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Bill Roth

A YEAR LATER, THE HOKIES LOOK BETTER

Dyrell Roberts made plenty of big plays this spring, including this nice touchdown grab in the Maroon-White game.

Following the color, the pageantry and the spectacle that is a Virginia Tech spring football game (that's a head shaker in itself, no?), one clear conclusion can easily be made: the Hokies are a much better football team today than they were one year ago.

Now, where the Hokies fit into the national landscape, or even within their own division

in the ACC, won't be known for a while. Andy Staples of SI.com has slotted Virginia Tech at No. 5 in his post-spring poll. That's rarified air, but it's nearly impossible to gauge in May how Tech compares to others ranked in the top 10. (Andy, by the way, is the former Tampa-based Florida Gators' beat writer. He went to Florida and has the Gators ranked

No. 1, which is likely on target).

But this much we do know: Tech is way ahead of where it was last year at this point at many positions and is remarkably deeper across the board on offense. On defense, depth is an issue at some spots, but overall, the Hokies have the look of a championship contender.

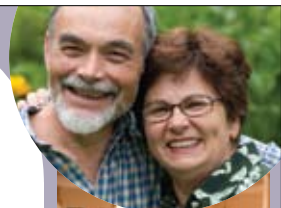


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HERE'S A CLOSER LOOK:

QUARTERBACK: Clearly Tyrod Taylor has taken over the reins of the offense and has become a true leader on this team. He still needs to improve his passing, but he is a definite game-changer across the board. Backup Ju-Ju Clayton has won the No. 2 spot for now, although Marcus Davis might get back into the mix in the fall. While some may be alarmed at Clayton's 4-of-15 passing numbers in the spring game, he played well in the previous two scrimmages and Tech's defense has a way of making quarterbacks look bad. You'll recall the last quarterback who played against Tech's defense, Cincinnati's Tony Pike, was 16-of-33 and was intercepted four times in the Orange Bowl. And Pike was a 22-year-old fifth-year senior quarterback who had thrown for 2,400 yards during the regular season. Clayton has never played in a game, so you'd expect Bud Foster's "D" to cause some problems.

TAILBACK: Ryan Williams was one of the headliners of the spring. His 80-yard run on his first touch in scrimmage No. 1 and his 56-yard reception for a touchdown in the spring game are examples of his big-play capability. Paired with Orange Bowl MVP Darren Evans and Josh Oglesby, the Hokies appear to have their best backfield since the Lee Suggs-Kevin Jones duo roamed Lane Stadium. With Danville's David Wilson coming in August, you can't help but be excited about the potential there.

RECEIVER: This is where the younger players might have made their biggest improvement since last year. Dyrell Roberts, for example, had a remarkable spring after learning the position last fall. The former

high school running back has big-play capability. The same applies to Jarrett Boykin, who makes tough catches look easy, and Xavier Boyce, who has a bright future, too. If Marcus Davis isn't at QB, the kid has smooth strides and great natural ability. We'll see how it looks in the fall, especially when a couple of freshmen join the group, but you won't get an argument from many if you suggest this is the best-looking group of receivers in school history.


OFFENSIVE LINE: This is where the Hokies have clearly taken a big step forward. Even though Tech has lost two starters up front, it's obvious that, entering August, line coach Curt Newsome will have eight dependable guys to work with, and that added depth will help in the fall. Newsome could use another guard, and that could be an issue if injuries occur. And Tech has terrific depth at tight end as well.

When some of those rookies get here in August (D.J. Coles, Logan Thomas, Wilson, etc.), there will be more firepower on the offensive side of the ball than we've seen ... well ... maybe ever. The Hokies appear to be better across the board at every single position and, to be honest, have more big-play weapons at different positions than any offense I can remember here. Taylor is better, the receivers are better, the running backs are tremendous and there are a bunch of them.

Now, on defense, the issue is depth. Tech's coaches moved tight end Chris Drager to defensive end following the spring and that's because the Hokies are a body short at that position. John Graves got a look there in the spring and could play the spot if needed. But look for him to start at tackle against

Alabama. Jason Worilds needs to come back healthy from shoulder surgery and needs to put together a solid season. He's a terrific player with one good arm! With two, he can be a game-changer at defensive end.

It's the same story with guys like Kam Chancellor and Jake Johnson. Developing depth at free safety and backer is critical. Johnson had a terrific spring and has the look of a four-year starter at that position, but the Hokies don't quite have the depth they'd like to have ... at least not yet.

Every team has its flaws and the Hokies will as well this fall. This might be a team that has rookies at key spots like kicker and that backer spot. But the emergence of playmakers, skill at receiver and running back and the development of Taylor are three reasons why the 2009 Hokies are far ahead of Tech's 2008 team. 



Marcus Davis has the talent to play quarterback, but could help the Hokies quicker as a wide receiver.



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TECH STUDENT-ATHLETES CONTINUE TO PUT THEIR LEADERSHIP SKILLS ON DISPLAY

By Reyna Gilbert

There has always been a debate about whether leaders are born or made. The staff in the Virginia Tech Athletics Office of Student Life, however, believes leadership is a quality that each and every one of the Tech student-athletes possesses. It can and should be fostered throughout a student-athlete's tenure at Virginia Tech to not only impact the athletics experience, but also to provide a strong platform for enhanced leadership opportunities in the future.

This year, several Hokie student-athletes took full advantage of the leadership opportunities available to them and even created a few of their own. At the Athletic Director's Honors Breakfast held in late April, the prestigious Skelton Award was presented to women's track and field pole vaulter Kelly Phillips and to Pedro Graber, a men's tennis player. Academic achievement, leadership and community involvement are all included in the criteria for the award. In 2008, Phillips won the ACC pole vault title and achieved All-America status with a sixth-place finish at the NCAA Indoor Championships. She is also a three-year member of the Virginia Tech Dean's List and a member of the Virginia Tech Athletics Director's Honor Roll. Graber is an ITA Scholar-Athlete and was a member of both the ACC Academic Honor Roll and All-ACC Academic Men's Tennis Team in 2007 and 2008. Phillips and Graber will each receive a \$5,000 scholarship toward their 2009-2010 educational expenses.

In February, women's soccer senior Mauri Liberati represented the student-athlete contingent at the second annual ACCIAC Student Leadership Conference, which was at Virginia Tech this year. Student leaders from 11 of the 12 ACC colleges and universities had the opportunity to learn through intensive engagement in educational sessions, keynote addresses, topical content exploration, simulations, and


experiential application. Liberati was one of the eight Tech students who were selected to take part in the weekend's leadership activities, which centered on the conference theme "Civility in a Global Society: Going Pro."

This summer, four student-athletes will travel to Hoa An, Vietnam through Coach for College, a global initiative to promote higher education through sports. This initiative provides a forum for American college student-athletes to help underprivileged youth develop the motivation, confidence and knowledge needed to obtain a higher education. Men's soccer student-athlete Taylor Walsh, along with women's soccer standouts Robin Chidester and Ashley Seldon, and former women's soccer goalie Ashley Owens, will be making the trip across the Pacific. Follow along with their experiences on the Coach for College Blog on www.hokiesports.com.

The NCAA also does a stellar job of providing leadership opportunities for student-athletes. Each summer, the NCAA puts on the National Student-Athlete Development Conference in Orlando, Florida. This year, a total of 700 student-athletes from all divisions will attend the conference, providing them with a forum to openly discuss issues that may affect them on their campuses and in their communities, while also providing them with the opportunity to enhance their leadership, communication, decision-making and problem-solving skills. Kenny Lewis, Jr., a football player, has been chosen to represent Tech at the 2009 conference. Upon his return to campus next fall, Lewis will be expected to share his experience and serve as a resource to his fellow Hokie student-athletes.

Lewis won't be the only Hokie student-athlete working on his leadership game this summer. Men's soccer player Charlie Campbell is one of the 40 student-athletes chosen from within Divisions I, II and III to attend the

first annual Student-Athlete Development Coaches Forum. The forum provides a three-phase coaching development opportunity to student-athletes interested in becoming collegiate coaches in bowling, soccer, swimming and diving or wrestling. Participants will be educated in the areas of program management, eligibility, budgeting, student-athlete well being, diversity, championship play and committee structure. Campbell, a junior majoring in business, hopes to use this experience to learn about the "business side" of coaching soccer and hopes to coach at the collegiate level.

Whether it's in the classroom, competing in their respective sport, or visiting a foreign land, Hokie student-athletes can't help but display their leadership. Like a seedling, leadership has been planted in each of them upon stepping foot on Tech's campus. Watered with care, discipline, and motivation coming from coaches, teammates and faculty, their leadership has been given no choice but to grow each and every day they are members of the Hokie family! 



Pedro Graber (left) and Kelly Phillips each won the prestigious Skelton Award for their academic achievements, leadership and community involvement.

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YOUNG STANDOUTS SHINE IN MAROON-WHITE GAME AS TECH WRAPS UP SPRING PRACTICE

By Jimmy Robertson



More than 40,000 Tech fans attended the game and left excited about the upcoming 2009 season.

Normally, spring games simply serve as tailgating practice for avid college football fans; an excuse to eat and drink with little expectations of an entertaining affair within the stadium walls.

Tech supporters, though, got the best of both worlds with the recent edition of the annual Maroon-White game.

The maroon-and-orange throng, estimated at 41,000 – the most ever to watch a Tech spring game – received a glorious day in which to indulge in the parking lots around the Tech campus, and then witnessed some of the Hokies' younger generation put their talents on display on the Lane Stadium stage. The end result was a game that left Tech fans, and more importantly, the coaching staff, feeling satisfied as the 2009 spring practice came to a close.

"The encouraging thing today is that I think we've got some playmakers out there," Tech head coach Frank Beamer said following the game. "We've got some guys who can do it. Dyrell [Roberts] had a good day and Ryan Williams had a good day. Tyrod can make plays with his arm and his feet ... I think we've got some playmakers.

"Defensively we've got to keep going. We may be an end short or a linebacker short. But the good thing is we've got some time. Guys can get with Coach [Mike] Gentry and get physically better and they can get mentally better. We've got time, but we understand we've got a lot of work to do, too."

Just not as much as in years past, particularly on the offensive side of the ball.

Tech's offense displayed some firepower

all spring and it was no more evident than in the spring game. Quarterback Tyrod Taylor threw for 188 yards and a touchdown; red-shirt freshman tailback Ryan Williams ran for a game-high 85 yards; sophomore receiver Dyrell Roberts caught four passes for 65 yards and a touchdown; and Marcus Davis, who had just been moved from quarterback to receiver a few practices before the spring game, caught three passes for 48 yards. Tight end Chris Drager's performance is worth mentioning, too, as he caught four passes for 41 yards.

"I think we could be very explosive," Taylor said. "We've still got a lot of work to do. We've got to get everyone meshing with each other and making sure that everyone knows their assignments. We've got work to do, but that's what we're going to take care of during the summer."

On the other side of the ball, the Hokies also have some young players looking to make a name for themselves. That list includes Rashad Carmichael, a cornerback who led everyone with six tackles in the spring game, and Jake Johnson, a sophomore linebacker who recorded four tackles.

The young guy who came up with the biggest play in the spring game, though, was defensive tackle Antoine Hopkins.

Hopkins, a 6-foot, 295-pound redshirt freshman from Highland Springs, Va., had five tackles and recorded two sacks – both in the second half – and also scored the game-winning touchdown when he returned a fumble 20 yards for a score with 2:54 left in the game to lead the Maroon team to a 13-7

victory. Hopkins scooped up the pigskin after Kam Chancellor knocked it loose with a jarring hit on walk-on running back Zac Evans.

The game itself ended in thrilling fashion, with the Maroon team stopping the White team inside the Maroon 10 on the final play of the game. Taylor had guided the White team on a 73-yard march on the final drive. His 12-yard scramble to the Maroon 10 gave the White team a first-and-goal with six seconds left. On the next play, he tried to hit receiver Xavier Boyce coming across the back of the end zone, but the pass fell incomplete with a tick remaining.

On the final play of the game, Taylor looked to pass, but decided to scramble. White team linebacker Barquell Rivers and defensive tackle Demetrius Taylor both touched Taylor – Taylor wasn't live in this game, so he wasn't allowed to be tackled – at the Maroon 2. Officials blew the play dead at the 2 just as Taylor crossed the goal line.

"I don't know. I thought the ball was over the goal line as the contact was being made," Taylor said with a smile.

He was all smiles after this one. The rising junior completed 16-of-33 for 188 yards, with the touchdown. At halftime, Taylor was presented with the President's Award, which is given to the player who demonstrated the most outstanding leadership during the offseason program and spring workouts. He also earned the George Preas Award, which is presented to the MVP of spring practice.

"As far as the offense, I feel I am the No. 1 leader and that's how I carry it," Taylor said.

“Of course, we have Darren Evans [who did not play in the spring game because of an injury] and some linemen who are going to lead, but I try to go out there and lead by example and show the guys that they can follow me.”

The Maroon team’s other score came on its first play from scrimmage when Williams gave a glimpse of his immense potential, taking a screen pass from Ju-Ju Clayton 56 yards for a touchdown. Justin Myer missed the extra point, but the Maroon team took the early 6-0 lead.

Williams, who had an 80-yard run for a touchdown in an earlier scrimmage, finished with 85 yards rushing on 10 carries, including one run of 36 yards. He caught two passes for 66 yards as well.

“When I get on the field and it’s my opportunity to shine, I want to be the big ‘X’ factor,” Williams said. “When it comes to crunch time, I want people to depend on me. I feel like I’m a clutch person. I feel I can always make big plays and I know what I’m capable of doing.”

“Explosiveness is the word with him,” Beamer said. “He runs with quickness, but the pile kept moving a couple of times there. One guy usually doesn’t bring him down.”

The touchdown pass to Williams was the highlight of the day for Clayton, a redshirt freshman from Richmond. Clayton, who had played so well in two scrimmages, completed just 4-of-15 for 103 yards, with one interception, and he also fumbled once.

“I take this as a learning curve,” Clayton said. “The spring game is important, but at the same time, this is just preparing for the season coming up. I’m going to watch the film

and learn from my mistakes and go from there.”


The White team’s only score came late in the first half when Taylor led the White on an 80-yard march. The drive ended when Taylor found Roberts for a 3-yard touchdown.

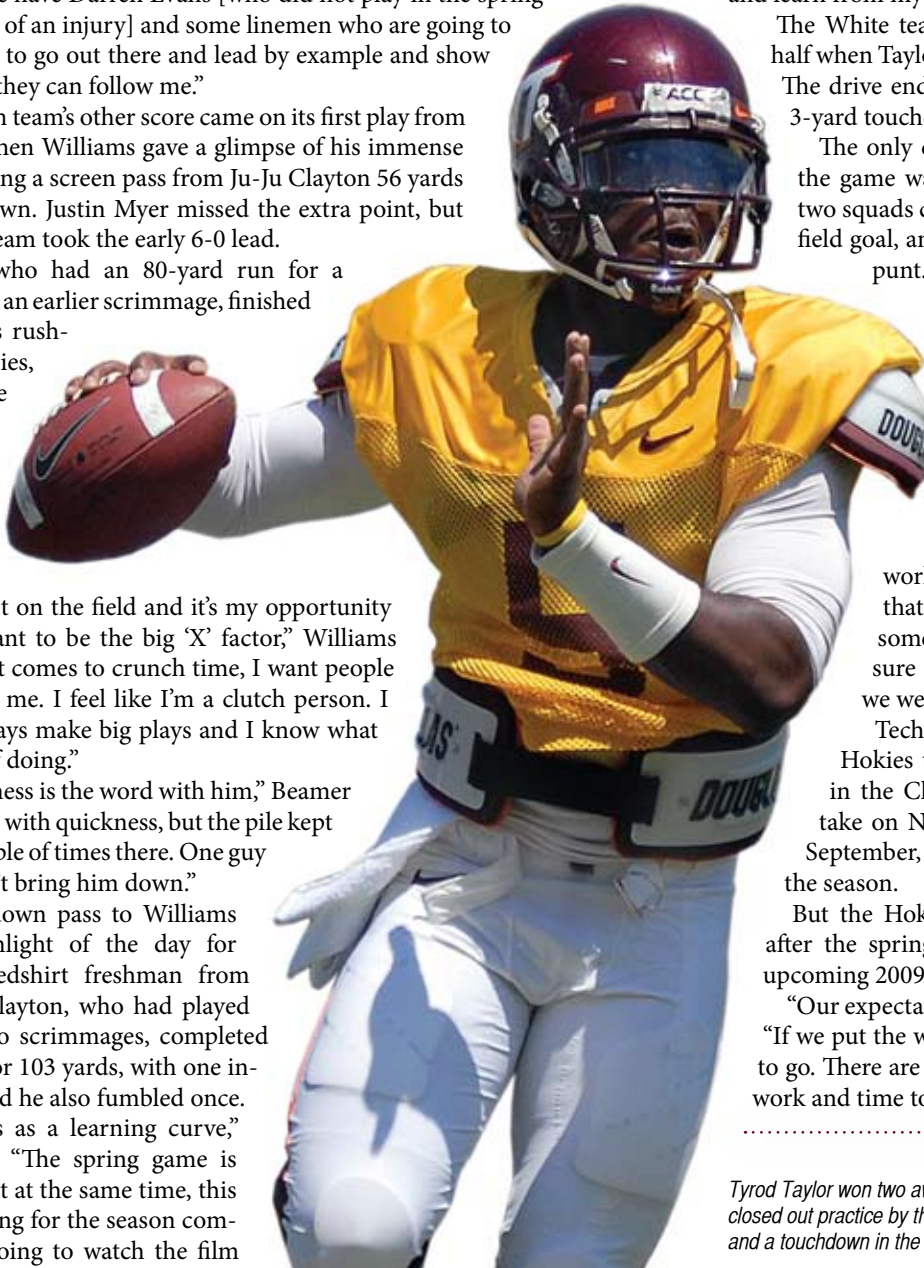
The only downer for the Hokies as a group in the game was the play of the special teams. The two squads combined to miss an extra point and a field goal, and neither punter averaged 40 yards a punt. Part of that, though, goes back to the line snaps, which were poor at times.

“We need to have a talk with that special teams coach,” Beamer said, needling himself since he handles much of the special teams. “I know it was sloppy today. What that tells me is that we need to settle on people and get them in there working. In the spring, you work everyone, but it’s not going to be that way in the fall. We’re going to make some quick decisions and go and make sure we’re better special-teams wise than we were today.”

Tech opens the season on Sept. 5 when the Hokies travel to Atlanta to take on Alabama in the Chick-fil-A College Kickoff. They also take on Nebraska and Miami in the month of September, making for a difficult first month of the season.

But the Hokies, like their fans, left the stadium after the spring game feeling optimistic about the upcoming 2009 season.

“Our expectations are as high as ever,” Roberts said. “If we put the work in, we can go as high as we want to go. There are no limits. We’ve just got to put in the work and time to get the job done.” 



Tyrod Taylor won two awards this spring and closed out practice by throwing for 188 yards and a touchdown in the spring game.

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SPRING
DEPTH CHARTS

By Jimmy Robertson

QUARTERBACKS
DEPTH CHART

- 5 Tyrod Taylor (6-1, 216, Jr.)
- 12 Ju-Ju Clayton (6-0, 215, r-Fr.)
- 7 Marcus Davis (6-4, 231, r-Fr.)
- 16 Jeff Beyer (6-4, 225, r-Sr.)

TAYLOR CONTINUES TO IMPROVE AT QUARTERBACK, WHILE CLAYTON COMES OUT OF SPRING AS NO. 2

Most people focused on the battle for the No. 2 job at quarterback and for good reason. After all, Tyrod Taylor is entrenched as the team's starting quarterback after starting the final 10 games of last season and leading the Hokies to both an ACC championship and an Orange Bowl win.

Taylor, a rising junior, got enough reps this spring to work on the areas in which he needed to improve, including a smoother throwing motion – an issue Tech's staff feels got blown out of proportion a bit. Taylor's performance on the field and his leadership on it and off it left quarterbacks coach Mike O'Cain feeling pleased about the rising star's game heading into August practices.

"I'm very pleased with Tyrod," O'Cain said. "The last three or four games of last year, you could see him really becoming a quarterback. He wasn't just an athlete out there behind center. The game started slowing down for him. He played much better and he played well this spring.

"He's aware of what is going on before the snap, and that's critical for a quarterback. If you don't know what's going on before the snap, you're not going to be successful. He's got command of our offense now and he manages the game well. He's much more improved."

Taylor closed out the spring completing 16-of-33 for 188 yards with a touchdown in the spring game. He wore the yellow jersey for all the scrimmages and for the spring game, signifying that he wasn't to be tackled as the coaching staff sought to keep him healthy this spring. O'Cain said the yellow jersey actually helped Taylor with his game.

"It forced him to keep his options open down the field," O'Cain said. "He couldn't just take off and run. He had to be patient and look for second and third options if the first was covered. He did that, and I thought that was a positive. Overall, I'm pleased with where he is."

Ju-Ju Clayton, a rising redshirt freshman, staved off Marcus Davis in the battle for the No. 2 job. Clayton spent last fall in O'Cain's meeting room while redshirting and absorbed a lot of what was taking place. That put him ahead of Davis, who wasn't able to do much last fall because of a shoulder injury that ultimately needed surgery.

Clayton got better as the spring went along. He threw two touchdown passes in each of the final two scrimmages leading up to the spring game. But in the spring game, he suffered a tough outing, completing just 4-of-15 for 103 yards. He threw one touchdown on a screen pass to Ryan Williams, but he also threw an interception and fumbled once.


"His decision making was fine," O'Cain said. "He went where he was supposed to go with the ball, but he didn't make the right pass in certain situations. But that's something we can correct. He needs to throw a lot this summer and work with those receivers and work on his consistency throwing the ball. The more he throws, the better he'll get.

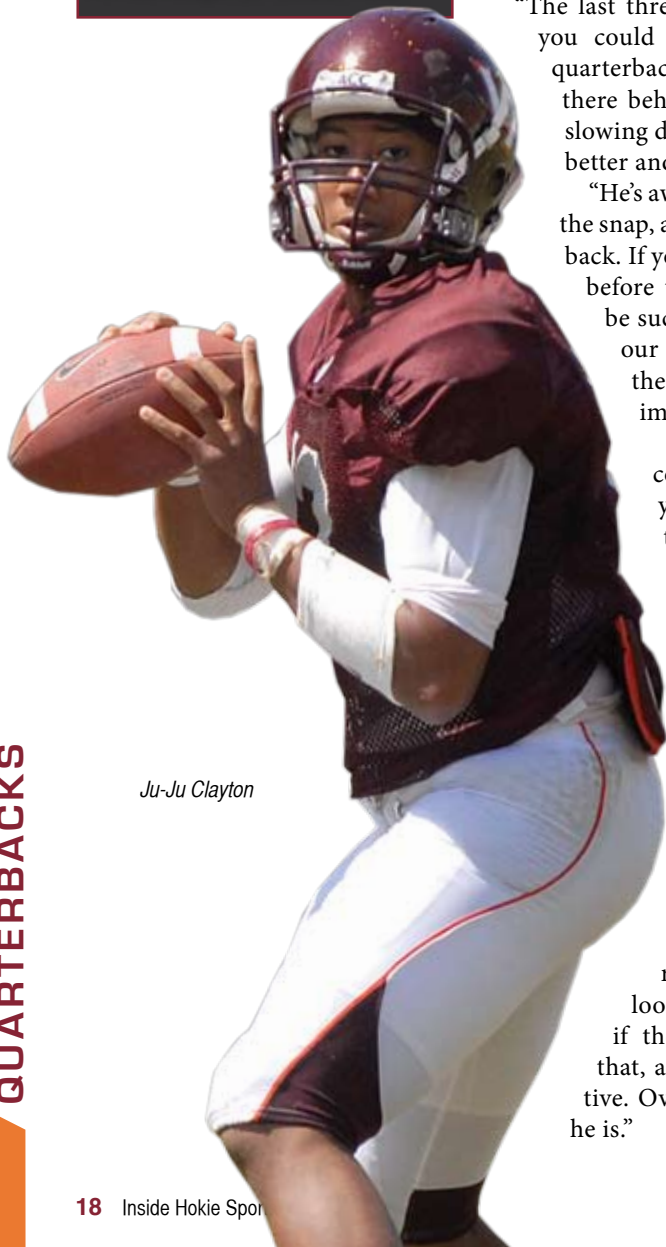
"I'm pleased with where Ju-Ju is at. Though he's not where he needs to be; he has a good knowledge of our offense but I want him to work on learning about what's happening on the other side of the ball. He moved around okay. He's got a little wiggle to him. He's just got a knack for getting things done out there and that's a positive."

As for Davis, Tech's staff hasn't eliminated him from the quarterback competition just yet, even though they moved him to receiver with four practices left this spring. In the spring game, he caught three passes for 48 yards, showing his versatility and athleticism, but the staff may take a look at him again in August.

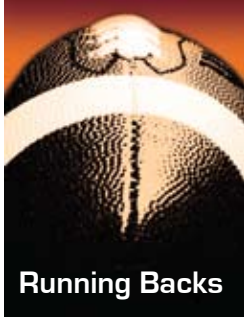
"Marcus was just so far behind when we started," O'Cain said. "He was at receiver when he first got here last August and then he had the shoulder injury (throwing arm), and his arm just isn't where it needs to be.

"Can he play quarterback? Yes, he can play it mentally and physically if he builds up his arm strength. We want him to work on throwing the ball and building up his arm strength and then we'll see what happens.

"He needs to be out there playing because he can help us. It's like I told him, 'We don't need you standing beside me on the sideline.' We need for him to be out there somewhere." 



Ju-Ju Clayton



Running Backs

TECH STABLE FULL OF TALENTED TAILBACKS

Tech running backs coach Billy Hite already has told his tailbacks not to pay attention to the depth chart.

“They all got work with the 1’s [first team] this spring,” he said. “I told them when I called on them and it’s their turn, they better get out there and do it.”

The tailback position is certainly in fine shape, with last year’s starter, Darren Evans, returning and two talented prospects in Josh Oglesby and Ryan Williams pushing him at every turn. All three played extremely well this spring – at least until Oglesby went down with an ankle sprain in the final scrimmage – and figure into the plans for the upcoming fall.

As expected, Evans, who rushed for 1,265 yards a year ago, got limited reps this spring, as Hite wanted to give the other two an opportunity.

“I know what Darren can do,” he said. “I wanted to give those other guys some reps.

“I thought Josh made great strides. He saw the holes and he made the cuts, and he did so at full speed. That’s what we were trying to get him to do last year. He’s much improved.

“Ryan had a great spring. He’s a threat every time he touches the ball. He’s got the vision, he’s got the moves and he’s strong. He’s an exciting prospect. Last fall, he struggled with pass protection and blitz pickups, but he got in the film room and he’s figured it all out.”

Also, Zac Evans, a walk-on from nearby

Christiansburg, Va., had a good spring. Hite hopes he can develop into that Dustin Pickle-type role.


At fullback, Kenny Jefferson stood at the top of the depth chart following spring practice, which is no surprise because the rising redshirt senior has the experience ahead of the other candidates.

“He had a good spring,” Hite said. “He’s very physical, and he’s played a bunch. He understands the offense and what defenses are doing.”

Kenny Younger, Joey Phillips and Josh Call round out the depth chart at fullback. Younger is returning from a torn ACL suffered last fall and labored during the early part of spring. But he gradually gained confidence in his knee and his play improved as a result.

“It’s really amazing he was even on the field,” Hite said. “I think the knee was on his mind the early part of spring. He was playing too high and he didn’t turn himself loose until the end. He finally started getting his pads down and he played much better.

“Joey made strides as well. He’s got great hands and he’s got that wrestler’s background, which helps. He’s still learning and needs to keep improving.

“Josh is a strong player. He’s physical. But he’s a little too heavy and he struggles some in space. He and I have talked about that.” 



Ryan Williams exhibited a ton of big-play capability this spring.

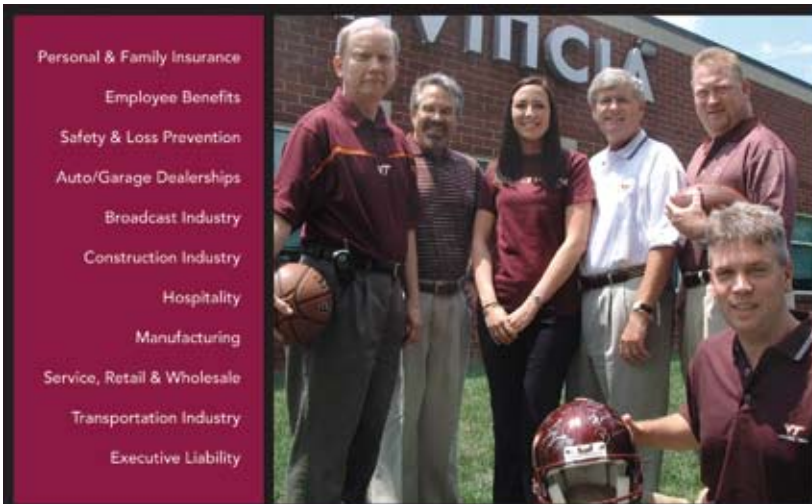
RUNNING BACKS DEPTH CHART

TAILBACKS

- 32 Darren Evans (6-0, 213, r-Soph.)
- 34 Ryan Williams (5-9, 205, r-Fr.)
- 25 Josh Oglesby (5-11, 207, r-Soph.)
- 27 Zac Evans (5-10, 191, Fr.)

FULLBACKS

- 42 Kenny Jefferson (5-9, 220, r-Sr.)
- 31 Kenny Younger (5-11, 214, r-Jr.)
- 40 Joey Phillips (5-11, 218, r-Fr.)
- 44 Josh Call (5-10, 255, r-Fr.)



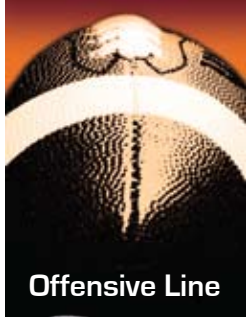
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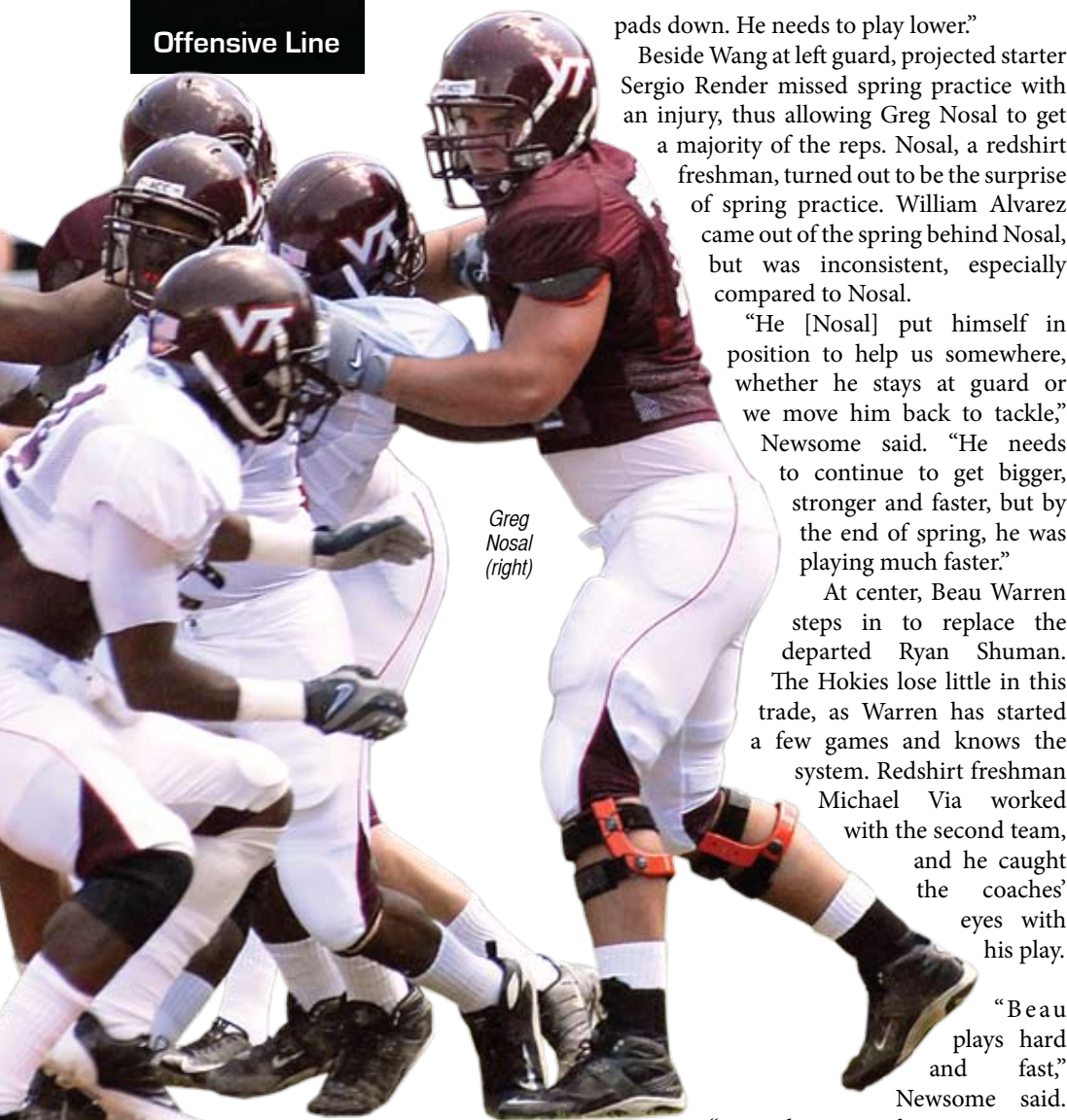
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TECH'S YOUNG OFFENSIVE LINEMEN ENJOY TERRIFIC SPRING PRACTICES



Greg Nosal (right)

pads down. He needs to play lower.”

Beside Wang at left guard, projected starter Sergio Render missed spring practice with an injury, thus allowing Greg Nosal to get a majority of the reps. Nosal, a redshirt freshman, turned out to be the surprise of spring practice. William Alvarez came out of the spring behind Nosal, but was inconsistent, especially compared to Nosal.

“He [Nosal] put himself in position to help us somewhere, whether he stays at guard or we move him back to tackle,” Newsome said. “He needs to continue to get bigger, stronger and faster, but by the end of spring, he was playing much faster.”

At center, Beau Warren steps in to replace the departed Ryan Shuman. The Hokies lose little in this trade, as Warren has started a few games and knows the system. Redshirt freshman Michael Via worked with the second team, and he caught the coaches’ eyes with his play.

“Beau plays hard and fast,” Newsome said.

“I want him to work on recognizing defenses and work on his shotgun snaps. The big thing is I’d like to see him get bigger. He’s at 280 and I think we can get 10 more pounds on him.

“Michael just has football smarts. He’s a coach’s son, so he knows the game. He came in at 255 pounds and now he’s 277. He had a very good spring and we potentially could move him somewhere else.”

At right guard, Jaymes Brooks – who started the Orange Bowl – was enjoying a fantastic spring until he sprained his ankle in one of the scrimmages and that cost him the remainder of spring ball. Richard Graham filled in on the first team once Brooks went down and Winston Painter backed him up.

“I like what Jaymes is all about,” Newsome said. “He has some pop and he knows what he’s doing. He had an excellent spring.

Slowly, but surely, the Hokies are starting to build some quality depth along the offensive line. That was evident this spring, as Tech’s offensive line refused to let spring practice become a sack-fest for Bud Foster’s bunch.

Starting at the left tackle spot, Ed Wang anchors the line as the leader and enjoyed a tremendous spring. Behind him is Nick Becton, a redshirt freshman with all the talent in the world. He just needs a little more “seasoning.”

“Ed had a really good spring,” offensive line coach Curt Newsome said. “He played faster and was more physical. He finished strong last fall and it really carried over.

“Nick’s not quite ready now, but he took some strides. He needs to get used to the speed of the game and he needs to keep his

OFFENSIVE LINE DEPTH CHART

RIGHT TACKLES

62 Blake DeChristopher (6-5, 303, r-Soph.)

72 Andrew Lanier (6-5, 274, r-Soph.)

64 Richard Graham (6-6, 292, r-Sr.)

RIGHT GUARDS

68 Jaymes Brooks (6-2, 300, r-Soph.)

71 Winston Painter (6-5, 310, r-Fr.)

CENTERS

60 Beau Warren (6-3, 277, r-Jr.)

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

57 Bo Gentry (5-10, 238, r-Fr.)

LEFT GUARDS

75 Greg Nosal (6-6, 285, r-Soph.)

76 William Alvarez (6-4, 326, r-Soph.)

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

LEFT TACKLES

77 Ed Wang (6-5, 301, r-Sr.)

54 Nick Becton (6-5, 292, r-Fr.)

“Richard is going to be a backup for us at a number of positions. Winston, though, needs to improve. He showed some signs and he has the strength, but he needs to be more physical and play much faster.”


Finally, at right tackle, Blake DeChristopher returns after playing well last fall as a redshirt freshman. He concentrated on pass protection this spring and got much better.

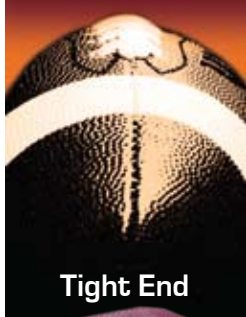
“We really wanted to concentrate on his footwork,” Newsome said. “That was the one area where he needed to improve and I thought he got much better. He’s just a solid, coachable guy and I think he could have a big year for us.”

Behind DeChristopher is Andrew Lanier, who moved over from the tight end spot last fall. Like Nosal, Lanier surprised with his steady play.

“He had a good spring,” Newsome said. “He’s athletic. I like how he moves and I like how competitive he is. He needs to work this summer and get bigger, faster and stronger.”

Overall, the unit is much more athletic – four of the linemen are former tight ends and one can expect that trend to continue – and there are more offensive linemen in terms of numbers. The Hokies can almost start rotating offensive linemen over the course of a game.

“We’re getting there,” Newsome said. 



Tight End

TIGHT END POSITION MAY BE THE OFFENSE'S DEEPEST COMING OUT OF SPRING - EVEN WITH THE DRAGER SWITCH

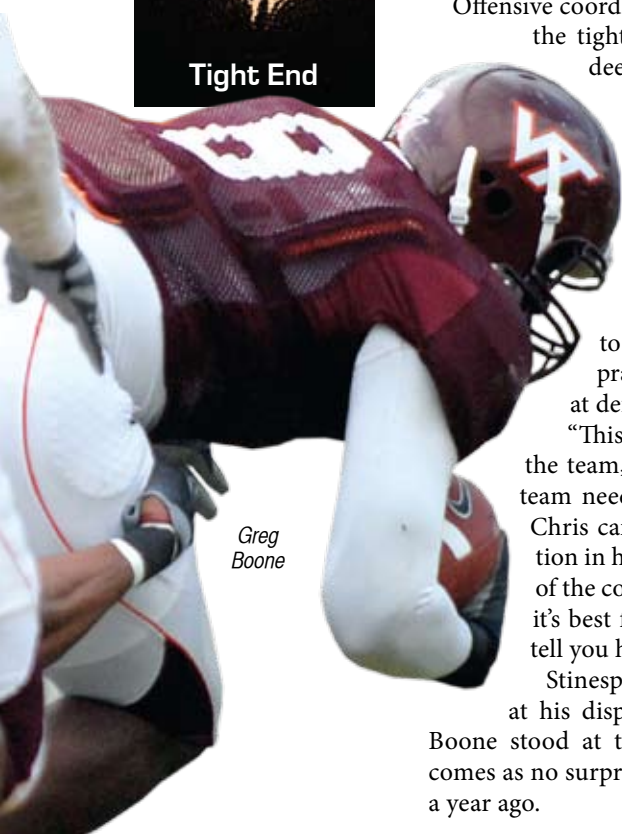
Offensive coordinator Bryan Stinespring doubles as the tight ends coach and he may field the deepest position on the team.

Well, at least he may have until head coach Frank Beamer and the defensive coaching staff pilfered one of his standouts.

Chris Drager, who won the Coaches' Award as the offensive player who had an exceptional spring, was moved from tight end to defensive end following spring practice. A lack of depth/experience at defensive end necessitated the move.

"This program is all about what's best for the team," Stinespring said. "Right now, our team needs some help at defensive end and Chris can address that. He played the position in high school and he can address some of the concerns we have. He indicated that if it's best for the team, then he'd do it. I can't tell you how much that means to all of us."

Stinespring still has some talented players at his disposal. Coming out of spring, Greg Boone stood at the top of the depth chart, which comes as no surprise considering he started 13 games a year ago.



Greg Boone

TIGHT ENDS DEPTH CHART

- 8 Greg Boone (6-3, 287, r-Sr.)
- 18 Sam Wheeler (6-3, 258, r-Sr.)
- 85 Rob Stanton (6-4, 244, r-Jr.)
- 89 Eric Martin (6-2, 250, Fr.)

"He was solid this spring," Stinespring said. "He worked hard at his spot. He caught the ball well and he did good things with the ball in his hands. I need for him to lose a little weight and I want him to be more of a leader, which he is doing. But I'm asking more from him. I expect more from him."

Sam Wheeler and André Smith now stand as the No. 2 and No. 3 tight ends.

"Sam was limited this spring because he didn't practice on Mondays and Wednesdays with classes," Stinespring said. "Last year, he was coming back from a knee injury. Yes, he was cleared to play, but he couldn't play as fast as he needed to play. Now, he is healthier and more confident. I feel he can get in the mix."

Smith missed spring practice after undergoing offseason surgery on his shoulder. He was not listed on the depth chart because of his injury, but figures to be heavily involved next fall once he returns to the field.

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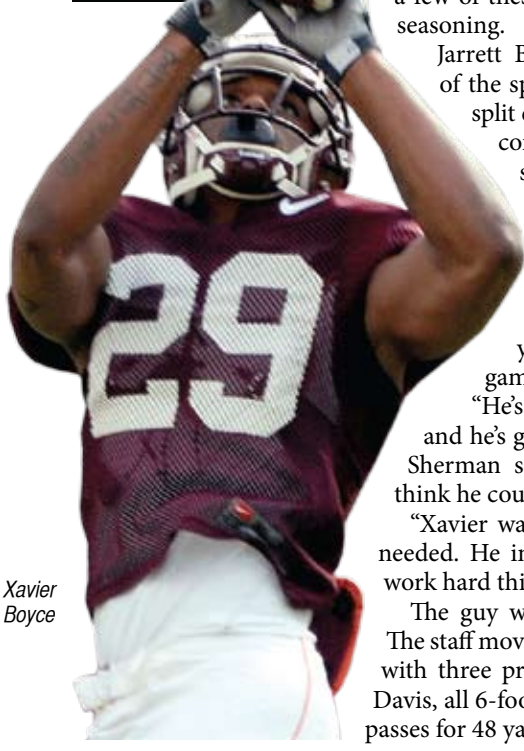
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Xavier Boyce

The Hokies are starting to stockpile some weapons at the receiver spots, and the only thing a few of these younger guys need is a little more seasoning.

Jarrett Boykin and Danny Coale came out of the spring at the top of the depth chart at split end and flanker, respectively, and that comes as no surprise considering both started last season. Those two, Xavier Boyce and Dyrell Roberts serve as the top four receivers – right now. Boyce and Roberts enjoyed fine springs, with Roberts capping his spring by catching four passes for 65 yards and a touchdown in the spring game.

“He’s got to be a difference maker for us and he’s got that ability,” receivers coach Kevin Sherman said. “He has some explosiveness. I think he could be a really good player for us.


“Xavier was able to get a lot of reps, which he needed. He improved a lot and now he needs to work hard this summer and continue to get better.”

The guy who opened eyes was Marcus Davis. The staff moved Davis from quarterback to receiver with three practices remaining in the spring and Davis, all 6-foot-4, 231 pounds of him, caught three passes for 48 yards in the spring game.

“He’s certainly going to bring competition to our [receivers] room,” Sherman said. “He’s a big, tall athlete with speed. He’s raw and talented. I’ve got to get him playing a little faster, but with his size and athletic ability, he can do anything.”

The remainder of the group consists of Tony Gregory, who enrolled in January, Patrick Terry, Brandon Dillard, Austin Fuller, Ben Barber and Prince Parker.

Gregory can really run, but needs to learn the playbook a little better, and Sherman has been preaching consistency to Terry on a daily basis. Dillard labored through the spring while recovering from a torn Achilles suffered last summer.

“He battled through it,” Sherman said of Dillard. “He came back faster than I expected. He needs to rehab this summer. I still think he can help us.” 

WIDE RECEIVERS DEPTH CHART

SPLIT ENDS

- 81 Jarrett Boykin (6-2, 213, Soph.)
- 29 Xavier Boyce (6-4, 223, r-Fr.)
- 7 Marcus Davis (6-4, 231, r-Fr.)
- 35 Austin Fuller (6-2, 207, r-Fr.)
- 87 Prince Parker (6-5, 235, r-Jr.)

FLANKERS

- 19 Danny Coale (6-0, 205, r-Soph.)
- 11 Dyrell Roberts (6-1, 192, Soph.)
- 83 Patrick Terry (5-11, 194, r-Soph.)
- 9 Tony Gregory (6-0, 181, Fr.)
- 80 Brandon Dillard (5-11, 177, r-Sr.)
- 86 Ben Barber (5-10, 208, Fr.)

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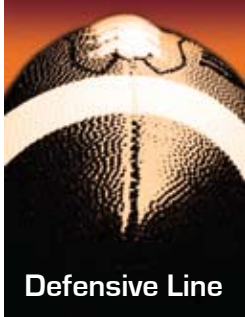
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Defensive Line

THE DEFENSIVE TACKLE SPOTS ARE IN GOOD SHAPE, but the Hokies are hoping some ends emerge

Defensive line coach Charley Wiles went into spring practice searching for some ends, with Orion Martin having graduated and with Jason Worilds out for the spring with a shoulder injury. Following spring practice, that position got a boost when the staff decided to move Chris Drager, who had an exceptional spring practice at tight end, to defensive end.

Drager's move provides depth and talent to a spot in need of it. Before spring practice began, Wiles and defensive coordinator Bud Foster moved John Graves from tackle to end to give Graves some reps at the spot. They plan on keeping Graves at tackle, but could move him to end if Nekos Brown or Worilds get hurt in the fall.

"If Nekos or Jason got hurt, we could move him [Graves] out there [to end]," Wiles said. "John was solid for us this spring. He's just a good football player. He always does a good job. I think the move out there was good for him."

Wiles had hoped to see a lot of Steven Friday this spring, with the hope that Friday could develop into that much-needed third end. But Friday injured his elbow on the very first play of the first scrimmage and missed the rest of spring.

"That was really unfortunate," Wiles said. "He needed the work. He needed the reps and he needed to get better."

Wiles did get to take a close look at a couple of redshirt freshmen – Isaiah Hamlette and Joe Jones (who ended up being moved

to tackle following spring practice). But both need to get bigger, stronger and faster before they can help the Hokies against the likes of Alabama, Miami and others.

"Isaiah's not quite ready to play," Wiles said. "He needs to get faster and more physical. He does have a better understanding of the game and he showed some flashes."

"Joe did not show many flashes. He needs to play harder. He redshirted last fall, but he wasn't able to do much because of a shoulder injury [he had surgery]. He needs to get stronger and more physical, so this summer is key for him."

At tackle, the situation is much better. Cordarrow Thompson and Graves form a nice tandem, and Demetrius Taylor makes for a solid reserve. Taylor would move into a starting role if Graves were to be moved to end in the event of an injury.

"Cordarrow had a good spring," Wiles said. "He's done a nice job of keeping his weight in check. Demetrius had a nice spring, too. He gives great effort and he's playing with much better technique. I'm really pleased with what he did this spring."

Wiles also was pleased with some of his younger back-ups; a group that includes three redshirt freshmen and a redshirt sophomore. The redshirt freshmen are Courtney Prince, Antoine Hopkins and Dwight Tucker, and Kwamaine Battle is the redshirt sophomore. Unfortunately, Prince tore his ACL in the final scrimmage before the spring game and his status for next fall remains up in the air.


"Antoine is a guy who just got better every time out," Wiles said of Hopkins, who had two sacks and scored a touchdown on a fumble return in the spring game. "He was a little up and down at

times with his effort, but I think he'll be more consistent. He can be a good player for us. And Kwamaine has separated himself a little. He was feeling his way around last year while coming back from those shoulder problems [two surgeries], but he made a lot of progress this spring.

"Courtney and Dwight did some things, too. I hate that Courtney got injured because he was probably my surprise of the spring. Dwight has some potential. He needs to improve his technique, though."

The summer will be critical for this unit, probably more so than any other position on the team. Most of them need to get bigger and stronger – and they need to stay healthy.

"The key for us is staying healthy," Wiles said. "We really can't afford any injuries at those end spots."

The depth chart doesn't include Worilds, who did not practice this spring, but should be ready next fall. Wiles also said a few freshmen will get close looks, including Lanford Collins, James Gayle, Duan Perez-Means and Tyrel Wilson. 



Antoine Hopkins (98) had a nice spring and a huge performance in the spring game.

DEFENSIVE LINE DEPTH CHART

STUDS

- 47 Nekos Brown (6-2, 252, Sr.)
- 82 Steven Friday (6-4, 229, r-Jr.)

ENDS

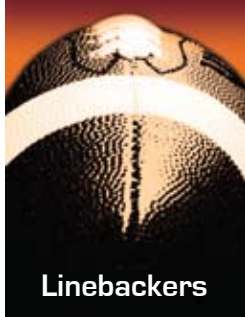
- 91 John Graves (6-3, 275, r-Jr.)
- 55 Isaiah Hamlette (6-4, 242, r-Fr.)
- 33 Chris Drager (6-3, 240, r-Soph.)

NOSE TACKLES

- 56 Demetrius Taylor (6-0, 262, r-Sr.)
- 93 Kwamaine Battle (6-0, 283, r-Soph.)
- 45 Joe Jones (6-2, 257, r-Fr.)

TACKLES

- 95 Cordarrow Thompson (6-2, 308, r-Sr.)
- 98 Antoine Hopkins (6-0, 295, r-Fr.)
- 53 Dwight Tucker (6-1, 285, r-Fr.)
- 59 Courtney Prince (6-3, 270, r-Fr.)



TECH LINEBACKERS ARE YOUNG, BUT SHOWED THEIR TALENT THIS SPRING

Defensive coordinator Bud Foster also doubles as the linebackers coach and he may very well have the youngest group on the squad. The backer and mike linebacker spots consist of just one senior – walk-on Mark Muncey – and no juniors.

Coming out of spring practice, Barquell Rivers solidified his hold on the mike linebacker spot. Rivers, a redshirt sophomore, started the Orange Bowl game and played well, and that carried over to spring practice.

“He had a good spring,” Foster said. “I trust him. I think he could play a little faster, but he knows his assignments. I think he’s going to be solid for us.”

The No. 2 guy at mike linebacker is Bruce Taylor, who came to Tech as a linebacker, but was moved to defensive end before being moved back to linebacker in the offseason. Taylor got a lot of reps against Tech’s No. 1 offense in the scrimmages and caught the atten-

tion of the staff because he made a lot of plays.

“He showed some promise,” Foster said. “I like how he made some plays in space. He’s got tremendous upside. He needs to get stronger, but he knows what we’re trying to do. He’s a quick learner.”

Muncey is the third mike linebacker and will help on special teams next fall.

At backer, Jake Johnson came out of spring as the top guy. As expected, the sophomore got better and better and won Foster’s trust.

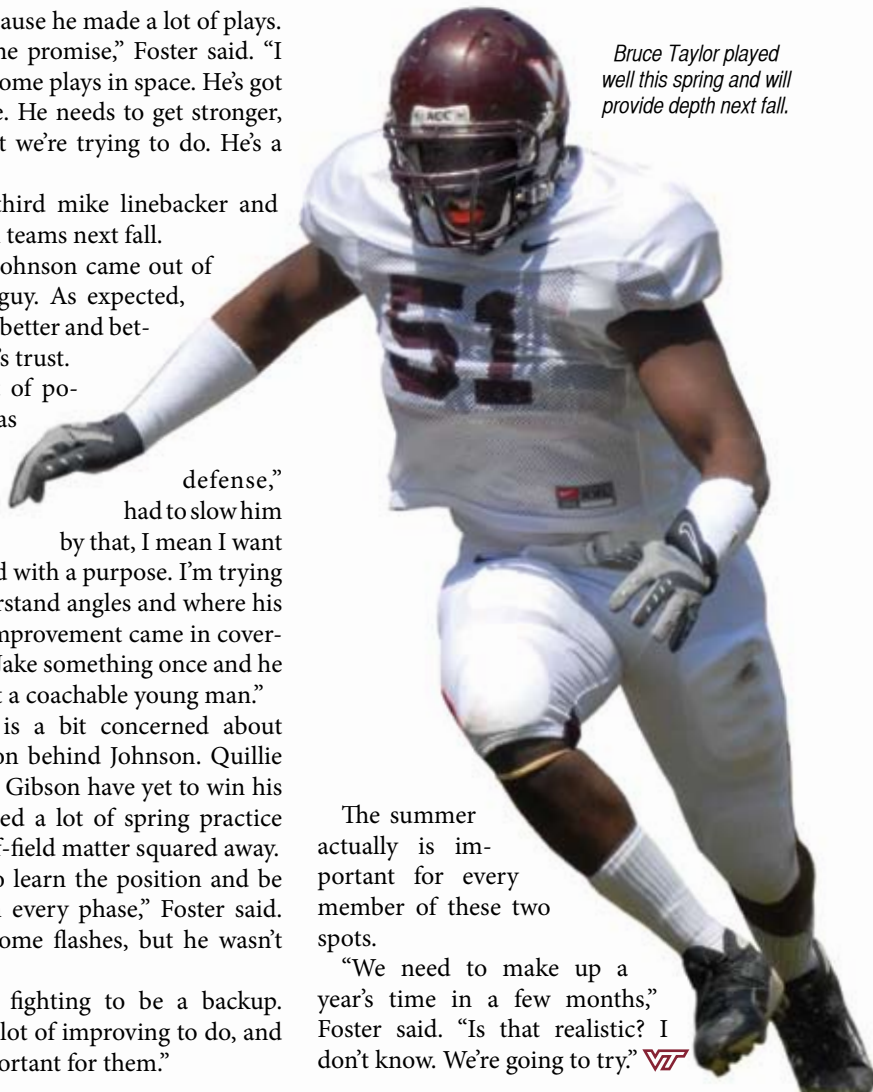
“He shows a lot of potential and he was one of the most improved guys on defense,” Foster said. “I had to slow him down a little, and by that, I mean I want him to go full speed with a purpose. I’m trying to get him to understand angles and where his help is. His most improvement came in coverage. You can show Jake something once and he corrects it. He’s just a coachable young man.”

Foster, though, is a bit concerned about the backup situation behind Johnson. Quillie Odom and Lyndell Gibson have yet to win his trust. Gibson missed a lot of spring practice while getting an off-field matter squared away.


“Quillie needs to learn the position and be more consistent in every phase,” Foster said. “Lyndell showed some flashes, but he wasn’t out there much.

“Those two are fighting to be a backup. They’ve both got a lot of improving to do, and the summer is important for them.”

Bruce Taylor played well this spring and will provide depth next fall.



The summer actually is important for every member of these two spots.

“We need to make up a year’s time in a few months,” Foster said. “Is that realistic? I don’t know. We’re going to try.” 

LINEBACKERS DEPTH CHART

BACKERS

- 46 Jake Johnson (6-1, 229, Soph.)
- 38 Quillie Odom (6-1, 225, Soph.)
- 39 Lyndell Gibson (5-10, 236, r-Fr.)
- 16 Tim Richardson (5-10, 245, r-Jr.)

MIKE LINEBACKERS

- 52 Barquell Rivers (6-0, 230, r-Soph.)
- 51 Bruce Taylor (6-2, 251, r-Fr.)
- 94 Mark Muncey (5-11, 227, r-Sr.)



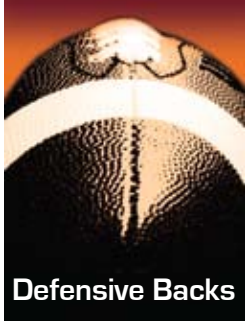
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THE POST-MACHO ERA BEGINS FOR TECH'S DEFENSIVE BACKFIELD

Life without Macho Harris began this spring for Tech's defensive backfield and assistant coach Torrian Gray, who spent the 15 allotted practices searching for Harris' replacement. Coming out of spring, Stephan Virgil is the frontrunner to step into Harris' vacated boundary corner position – even though he practiced little this spring because of class conflicts.

"I rotated all my corners at both positions," Gray said. "But we know Stephan can be productive. We know he's a game-changer. I just would have liked to have had him all spring to see if he can physically hold up at that position because you have to be physical. I think he can, but I would have liked to have seen it."

Gray figures to be able to depend on four corners this upcoming season – Virgil, Rashad Carmichael, Cris Hill and Eddie Whitley. Carmichael, like Virgil, was limited this spring because of some class conflicts, but coming out of spring, he leads the way among the contenders at field corner.

"He really understands the game," Gray said. "He's starting to play the game at a different level now."

Of course, all this might change once fall practice starts. Both Hill and Whitley improved tremendously over the course of this spring.

"I thought Cris really improved greatly," Gray said. "He's still got some things to improve, but he has come a long way from where he was last year. Eddie's also come a long way, and I'm pleased with him."

"I think all of those guys [at corner] are about the same from an ability standpoint. Virgil's got a little more experience, but I think, with the others, we have a lot more depth. Now whether we have a Macho or a Brandon [Flowers] type of corner, that remains to be seen."

Jacob Sykes and walk-on Germond Oatneal round out the cornerbacks.

At safety, Kam Chancellor returns as the starter and took over the leadership role this spring. He looked much more comfortable in his second spring practice at safety.

"He was awesome," Gray said. "I'm not sure he missed a tackle all spring, and that's something that he struggled with early last year. He's a great communicator and a leader. He played on a consistently high level all spring."

Cris Hill (9) was one of the most improved players on defense this spring.



DEFENSIVE BACKS DEPTH CHART

SAFETIES

- 17 Kam Chancellor (6-4, 226, Sr.)
- 14 Lorenzo Williams (6-2, 212, Soph.)
- 12 Ron Cooper (5-10, 187, r-Jr.)


BOUNDARY CORNERS

- 22 Stephan Virgil (5-11, 189, Sr.)
- 15 Eddie Whitley (6-0, 187, Soph.)
- 37 Jacob Sykes (6-0, 181, r-Soph.)

FIELD CORNERS

- 21 Rashad Carmichael (5-10, 192, r-Jr.)
- 9 Cris Hill (5-11, 185, r-Soph.)
- 4 Germond Oatneal (5-11, 182, Soph.)

Lorenzo Williams, who played as a true freshman last year, came out of spring practice at No. 2 on the depth chart, with walk-on Ron Cooper at No. 3. Cooper missed last season with a knee injury. He'll figure in more on special teams.

"Lorenzo did not take the steps that I wanted him to take," Gray said. "He's going to have to get better. He's got a ways to go. He knew where to line up and he plays hard and fast, but he didn't make the plays when they came his way." 

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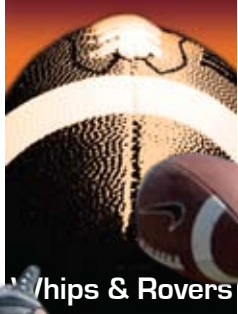
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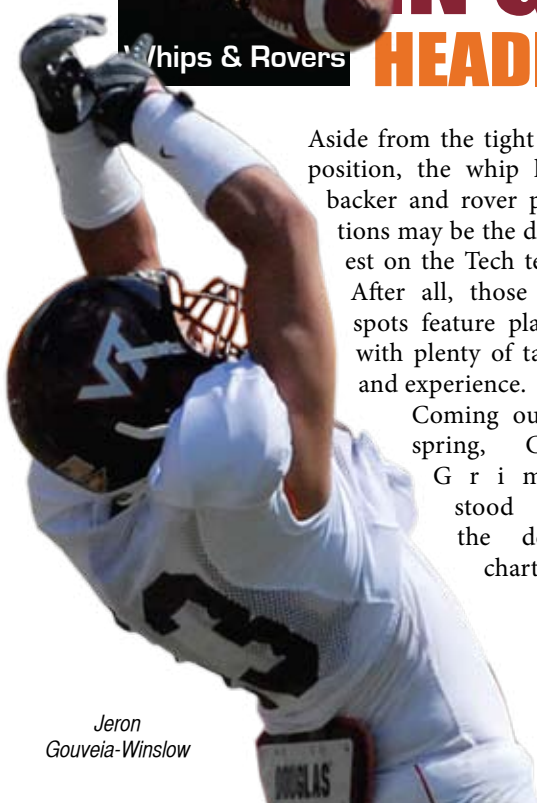
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WHIPS AND ROVERS IN GOOD SHAPE HEADING INTO THE FALL



Jeron
Gouveia-Winslow

Aside from the tight end position, the whip linebacker and rover positions may be the deepest on the Tech team. After all, those two spots feature players with plenty of talent and experience.

Coming out of spring, Cody Grimm stood atop the depth chart at

whip linebacker. Grimm enjoyed a terrific season this past fall and that carried over to this spring. Once August rolls around, he and Cam Martin will push each other at the position like last year. Martin missed spring practice while recovering from knee surgery, and because of that, was not listed on the depth chart.

"Cody did very well this spring," whips and rovers coach Jim Cavanaugh said. "He's just a good, solid player. He has a great sense of timing and he just understands the game."

Cavanaugh also liked what he saw out of his two freshmen at whip linebacker – Jeron Gouveia-Winslow and Alonzo Tweedy. Both got a lot of reps and showed flashes of being solid players down the road.

"Jeron's greatest asset is his head," Cavanaugh said. "He rarely makes the same mistake twice. He has to be a better tackler, though. He's not strong enough right now.

WHIPS & ROVERS DEPTH CHART

WHIP LINEBACKERS

- 26 Cody Grimm (5-11, 202, r-Sr.)
- 43 Jeron Gouveia-Winslow (6-2, 206, r-Fr.)
- 28 Alonzo Tweedy (6-2, 181, r-Fr.)

ROVERS


- 24 Dorian Porch (5-11, 212, r-Sr.)
- 2 Davon Morgan (6-0, 196, Jr.)
- 23 Matt Reidy (6-0, 210, r-Sr.)

"Alonzo is a bit of a train wreck. But he can run and he can hit. To be honest, he's farther than I thought he'd be."

At rover, Dorian Porch came out of spring in the top spot. Davon Morgan, who tore his ACL last fall, practiced, but is still not quite 100 percent.

"Dorian is a solid player," Cavanaugh said. "I have no complaints with him. Now, it's imperative that he has a good summer."

"Davon was dragging his leg some, but I'll give him credit. He wasn't supposed to be ready for any contact, and yet he did everything. That speaks well for him."

The third rover is Matt Reidy, who is valuable for depth purposes and for his contributions on special teams. 

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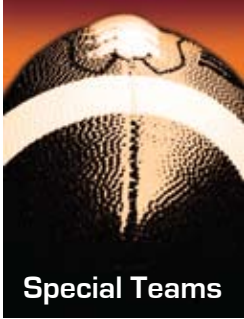


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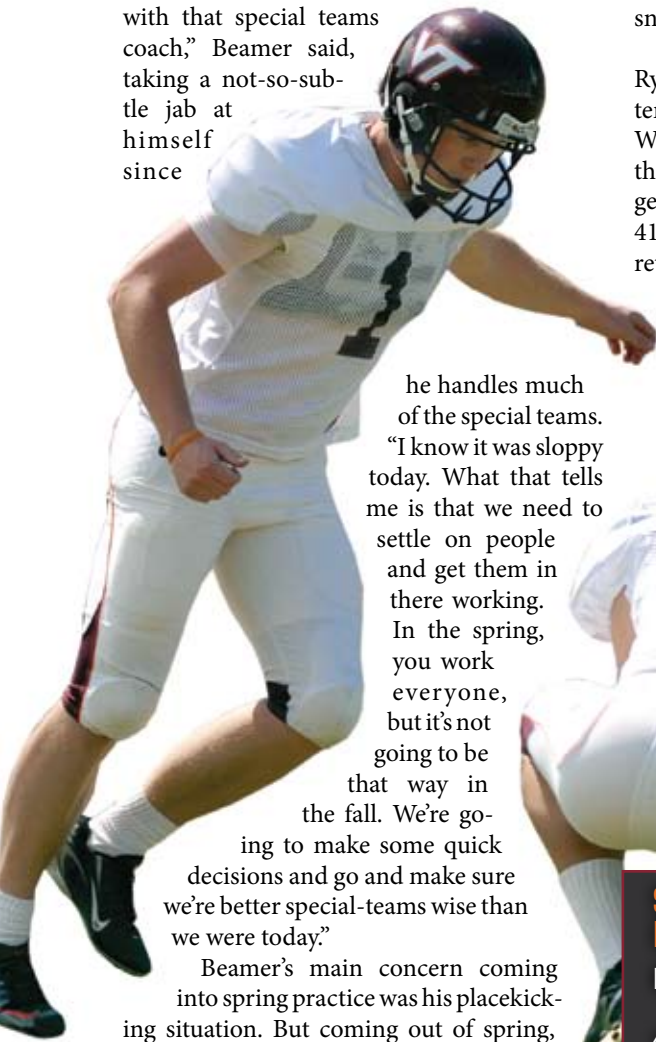


WALDRON COMES OUT OF SPRING IN THE LEAD TO REPLACE DUSTIN KEYS

Tech head coach Frank Beamer certainly expects much better special teams play than what occurred in the spring game.

After all, the two squads combined to miss an extra point and a field goal, and neither punter averaged 40 yards a punt. Part of that, though, went back to the snaps, which were poor at times.

"We need to have a talk with that special teams coach," Beamer said, taking a not-so-subtle jab at himself since



he handles much of the special teams. "I know it was sloppy today. What that tells me is that we need to settle on people and get them in there working. In the spring, you work everyone, but it's not going to be that way in the fall. We're going to make some quick decisions and go and make sure we're better special-teams wise than we were today."

Beamer's main concern coming into spring practice was his placekicking situation. But coming out of spring, he felt much better mainly because of the kicking of Matt Waldron. The redshirt senior did not miss a field goal in any of the scrimmages.

"He's been the most consistent all spring," Beamer said. "We did a kicking contest every day in practice and he won most of them. He's been the most consistent that we've got."


"[Chris] Hazley and [Justin] Myer have kicked the ball well at times, too. We're fortunate to have some good kickers here at Virginia Tech. Overall, though,

Waldron has been the best."

The competition will continue into the fall, with Myer, last year's kickoff guy, Hazley, Tim Pisano and Scott Demler in the mix. Incoming freshman Cody Journell from nearby Giles County figures to get a close look as well. Journell possesses a strong leg.

At punter, Brent Bowden will handle those duties. Brian Saunders will be the backup. The snappers will be Collin Carroll and Matt Tuttle.

The return game figures to be sparked by both Ryan Williams and Dyrell Roberts, who will attempt to replace return standout Macho Harris. Williams displayed an ability to make plays in the open field, which should come in handy if he gets to return punts. Roberts returned a kickoff 41 yards in the spring game, and Patrick Terry returned two for 50 yards, including a 27-yarder. Cris Hill may work himself into the mix as a

kickoff returner as well. 



Matt Waldron (1) and Brent Bowden (97)

SPECIAL TEAMS DEPTH CHART

KICKERS

- 1 Matt Waldron (5-11, 190, r-Sr.)
- 48 Justin Myer (6-0, 198, Soph.)
- 15 Chris Hazley (6-1, 194, r-Jr.)
- 23 Scott Demler (5-11, 184, r-Fr.)
- 4 Tim Pisano (5-9, 181, r-Soph.)

PUNTERS

- 97 Brent Bowden (6-3, 201, r-Sr.)
- 30 Brian Saunders (6-0, 197, r-Jr.)

SNAPPERS

- 50 Collin Carroll (6-3, 243, r-Soph.)
- 63 Matt Tuttle (6-0, 228, r-Sr.)
- 66 Jon Conlon (6-1, 228, r-Jr.)



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The 1947 Sun Bowl team was the first Tech team to go to a bowl game and the first team from the state to do so as well.



MORE THAN SIX DECADES LATER, THE 1947 SUN BOWL TEAM REMEMBERS ITS HISTORIC ACCOMPLISHMENT – ONE THAT MANY HAVE FORGOTTEN *By Jimmy Robertson*

Over the course of the decades, the memories have faded, becoming blurred images that only come into some semblance of focus when someone or something triggers a thought that brings that image forth through the channels of their minds. They struggled, at times, to provide sharp details, and then apologized for that, even though no apology was warranted and certainly when none was expected.

But they do remember the end result. In the end, that may be the only memory that matters.

Twelve members of the Virginia Tech football team who played during the 1946 season that led to a berth in the '47 Sun Bowl gathered at the Inn and Convention Center on the Tech campus for a two-day reunion the week before Tech's spring game to commemorate their spot in history.

Nineteen members remain from that team, with four others unaccounted for. The rest are presumably playing the game they love on that gridiron up above. The ones left readily admit that this will probably be their last huddle. After all, they are all in their mid-80s and in a hurry-up offense against Father Time, whom, as we all know, is undefeated.

Most have some sort of physical ailments. But, while some of the recollections are foggy, they certainly possess their mental faculties.

They clearly remember beating rival VMI that season and tying UVa. They remember vividly that they were the first Virginia Tech

team to go to a bowl. They also remember distinctly that they were the first team from the commonwealth of Virginia to go to a bowl.

And they remember all this expressly today during a time when many current Virginia Tech fans and alums have forgotten.

In many ways, they – this 1947 Sun Bowl team – have become the forgotten team.

World War II's impact

Nothing impacted college athletics in the 1940s more than World War II, a global conflict, sparked by a maniacal German dictator that ended up being played out on three continents. Of course, nothing impacted Tech athletics more, especially during that time period.

After all, the Corps of Cadets served as the foundation for the school, as all students were cadets in the early days. The United States' entry into World War II in 1941 resulted in many of Tech's finest being called to serve their country – athletes and coaches weren't excluded, including head football coach Jimmy Kitts, who joined the Navy and went to serve after the 1941 season.

The school shut down the athletics department after scores of cadets went off to fight. In fact, Tech did not field a football team in 1943 or 1944.

In 1945, with the war winding down, the school restarted the football program. The highlight of the season came when Tech beat

a Bear Bryant-led Maryland squad, as a running back named Charlie Forbes rushed for more than 100 yards. Forbes, who came to Tech as a walk-on from Newport News, Va., was an 18-year-old freshman at the time.

"I doubt there was anyone else in the 1940s who ran for more than 100 yards in a game," said Ross Orr, a tackle and a kicker from Smyth County, Va., who played on that team and for the next two years.

Orr – who spearheaded this Sun Bowl team reunion – may be right. Tech's records only go back to 1950. No one kept them before then.

Like Forbes, Orr and a handful of other Tech players had not fought in the war. Their youthful, teenage exuberance made for an interesting dynamic when the war veterans – many of whom were married – returned to Blacksburg in 1946 to continue both their schooling and to play football.

Kitts returned in 1946 as well, and set about molding his football team. Only nine guys who played in 1945 actually played on the '46 team. The '46 team ended up being comprised of mostly freshmen or sophomores, most of whom were returning from the service.

Some were married at the time and lived with their wives, and in some cases, their children. Others lived in the dorms. Yet chemistry wasn't an issue with this bunch.

"Sure, there were some cliques," said Oren Hopkins, a freshman end from Norfolk, Va., who was drafted by the Army right out of high school and fought in the Battle of Bulge

in Europe before coming to Tech. “We had a lot of married guys on the squad and they didn’t always mingle socially with some of the others. We didn’t always see each other much. But I never saw any animosity whatsoever.”

“I thought the transition was easier coming back from the war,” said Bob Taylor, a guard from Winchester, Va., who fought both in the European theater and the Pacific theater. “After the war, the veterans wanted a degree. It was either go to work or go to school and play football.

“I think most of those boys were mature. They were ready to get back and play ball and everyone pretty much fit right in.”

Many of these players returned with hardware and honors pinned on their uniforms. Taylor actually earned a Bronze Star for his role in combat. Harry Walton, a back and now deceased, was awarded two Purple Hearts. John Kroehling, an end from Springfield, N.J., also received a Purple Heart and a Soldier’s Medal after saving a man from drowning in the south Pacific. Floyd Bowles, a fullback from Richmond and the captain of the 1945 team, was a German prisoner of war. R.E. Johnson, an end from Tennessee who is now deceased, also was a German prisoner of war.

In all, 35 veterans formed the nucleus of the 1946 team, which, according to some counts, consisted of only 46 players.

“They never talked a lot about the war,” Orr said of the veterans. “It’s amazing. They just came back and played hard and tried hard.”

“You didn’t hear many stories,” Forbes agreed.

It certainly was a transitional time, both nationally and at Virginia Tech. After all, there was the shadow of World War I and the Great Depression, and the recent horrors of World War II. At Tech, for the first time, civilians outnumbered cadets on campus, and some of the civilians resented the war. The school itself appeared to be in the throes of transitioning from an institution with a military background to primarily an educational school.

For these guys, the gridiron provided a much-needed escape from the outside world.

The 1946 season

Tech’s road to a bowl game got off to a rather bumpy start. On Sept. 28, the Gobblers – as they were called back then – opened the season by traveling to Chapel Hill, N.C., to face North Carolina and found themselves down 14-0 at half-time. The Tar Heels featured one of the nation’s best players in running back Charlie “Choo Choo” Justice, who would later go on to be inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame.

But Tech flipped things around in the second half. Justice also doubled as the Tar Heels’ punter and Tech managed to block two of his punts – the only two blocked punts of Justice’s illustrious career. Both of those blocks led to Tech touchdowns, as the Gobblers scrambled to tie the game at 14.

Amazingly, Tech had a chance

to pull the upset. But Orr, who doubled as the kicker, had a short field goal blocked late in the game, and the game ended in a 14-14 tie. North Carolina would finish with an 8-1-1 record that season and ranking No. 8 in the final Associated Press poll.

“I got the blame for that one,” Taylor said. “I had two or three guys lined up over me and they came over my side.”

Then he chuckled.

“I always told Ross that he kicked it too low. Then he sent me a note a while back, saying that, yes, he did kick it too low. I don’t know if that was true. But that made me feel better anyway.”

Blocking kicks turned out to be Tech’s calling card for the ’46 season. Again, in-



This is a copy of the 1947 Sun Bowl program autographed at the time by the members of the team and the coaches.



The following members of the team attended the reunion: (sitting, from left to right) Frank Taylor, John Kroehling, Bob Taylor, Ross Orr, Jack Itner and Oren Hopkins; (standing, from left to right) Gerry Zekert, Ray Beasley, Fred Shanks, Charlie Forbes and Chip Collum.

Ross Orr, a tackle and the team's kicker, was diving as he posed for a photo for the 1946 version of the Tech media guide. Orr (right), who went on to serve in the Air Force and to become a doctor, organized the reunion of the '47 Sun Bowl team.

Oren Hopkins (left), Chip Collum (middle) and Ray Beasley get some laughs while looking at a photo of Collum acting crazy for a posed shot (right) before the 1946 season.



formation from those days is sparse, but a couple of sources credited the Gobblers with blocking at least 10 punts that season. That team actually started the kick-blocking tradition at Tech that continues to this day.

John Maskas, a strapping 6-foot, 210-pound tackle – strapping for those days anyway – blocked six himself. Now deceased, Maskas, a native of Pennsylvania with a Greek heritage, was an honorable mention All-American that season. He, Hopkins, Taylor and Jack Ittner accounted for most of the blocks.

“John was pretty good at blocking punts, but I believe he got credit for one or two he didn’t block,” Ittner joked.

By all accounts, Ittner, a 6-0, 200-pound tackle from Richmond, was an outstanding player. He earned honorable mention All-America honors the following season, but served notice in 1946. In fact, most interviewed for this story mentioned Ittner as the best player on the team.

“He was the best player I ever saw in my life,” Orr said.

“Jack was fast and tough,” Forbes said. “I’ll never forget in the Maryland game when he hit Lu Gambino [a running back who later played in the pros] so hard that it knocked both of them out.”

Tech tied Virginia, but after four games, found itself at 0-2-2 on the season. The Gobblers, though, turned their season around in the following game when they took on N.C.

State on Homecoming in Blacksburg. The Wolfpack came in unbeaten, but Ralph Beard threw a touchdown pass, and then a blocked kick late in the game led to a Beard touchdown run. Tech stunned the Wolfpack 14-6 – and the Wolfpack finished 8-2 and ranked 18th in the Associated Press poll.

The Gobblers went on to win or tie four of their final five games. A 20-7 win over VMI enabled them to finish the regular season with a 3-3-3 record.

Walking off the field after that victory, with smiles galore, they thought their season was over.

The Sun Bowl

A 3-3-3 record might have made for a rather forgettable season if not for one thing – the Gobblers shockingly received an invitation to play in the Sun Bowl in El Paso, Texas, on New Year’s Day.

Tech got the bid because of an alum who worked for a power company in El Paso. The alum – Marion Adams, Class of 1941 – also served on the Sun Bowl committee. Two other teams, Hardin Simmons and Texas Tech, declined bids, so Adams pitched Tech’s name to the committee, something he had actually been doing since the N.C. State victory, and the Gobblers ultimately received the bid.

The team, of course, wanted to play in the



game, and the athletics department was all for it, seeing a way to add \$10,000 to the coffers – the payout for each team.

“It was a big surprise to us,” Hopkins said. “Word spread before we had an actual formal team meeting about it, so most of us knew.

“It [the bowl selection process] was a lot more political back then. Today, the best teams pretty much go.”

Tech was to take on Cincinnati, a team with an 8-2 record heading into the game. Like the Gobblers, the game marked the Bearcats’ first official bowl game.

Because of injuries and attrition, only 32 players went for the game. Tech left for El Paso shortly after Christmas and found weather similar to that in Blacksburg – cold, snowy and icy.

“We had a rough ride out there out of Roanoke,” Forbes said. “I remember I was sitting beside Dave Thomas, and Dave used to parachute out of planes for the Army. He got sick, and I joked with him, ‘Dave, you should be used to this. You’re used to jumping out of planes.’

“But we landed and there was snow on the ground. The people from the local Chamber of Commerce were apologizing all over the place. They said they hadn’t seen snow there in 25 years.”

In spite of the weather, the week turned out to be a fabulous one for the players and the coaches. They stayed at the Hotel Cortez, the nicest establishment in El Paso. They got to make a foray into Mexico, journeying across the border to Juarez, where they saw a live Mexican bullfight conducted by Manolete,

the best bullfighter of all time. The team went to two Texas ranch breakfast parties, went on tours of the city, attended luncheons and received gifts, including watches with the words "The Sun Bowl '47" engraved on them.

"I bought a ring and some jewelry when we were in Juarez, and by the time we got back to El Paso, it had turned green," Forbes laughed. "But the whole trip was a wonderful experience."

"The people there just treated us magnificently," Orr said.

Unfortunately, the week ended on a bit of a sour note, with Cincinnati beating the Gobblers 18-6 during extremely cold, snowy and icy conditions at 15,000-seat Kidd Field.

Tech blocked the three extra points and Maskas blocked his seventh punt of the season. But the Gobblers' only score came on a 3-yard run by Beard in the fourth quarter. Two interceptions by Harold Johnson and Cincy's 369 yards rushing were too much to overcome.

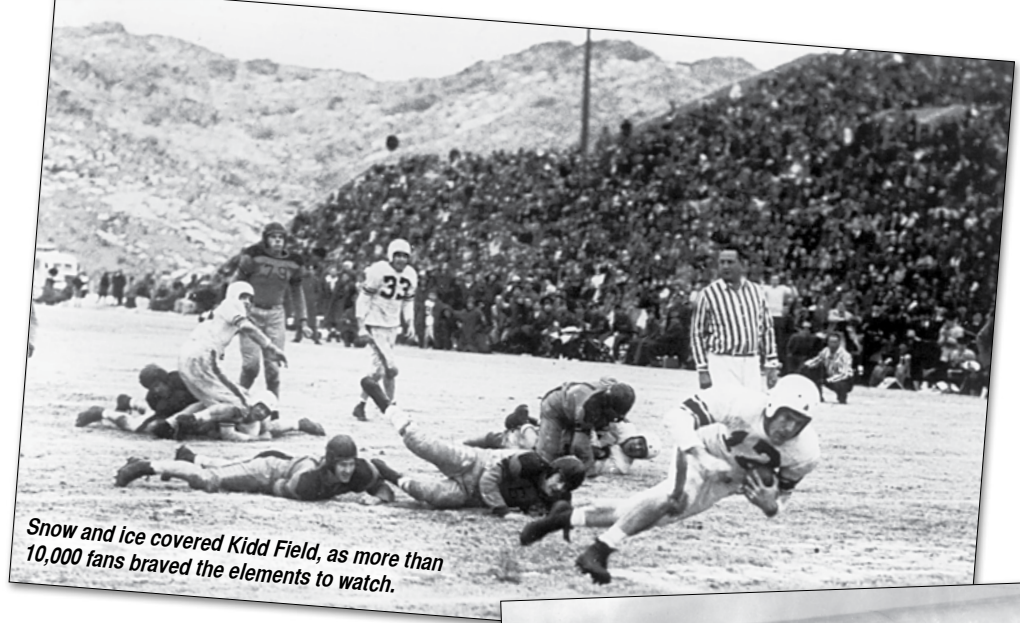
"They had a couple of good players," Ittner said. "And they just beat us soundly."

Though they lost the game, the team represented itself well. Perhaps Kitts put it best in the Jan. 15, 1947, Techgram:

"We just played a better team, and as a general rule, the best team always wins."

Their place in Tech history

The Gobblers of 1946 finished with a 3-4-3 record, a losing record only by the strict definition



Snow and ice covered Kidd Field, as more than 10,000 fans braved the elements to watch.

of that particular term.

Yet this bunch was anything but losers.

They served their country with honor and valor, and then came back and served their university with character and dignity. Of the 46 members of that team, 45 graduated from Tech, and Orr, who gathered the information for the reunion, wasn't sure about the other one.

They went on to distinguished careers, too. Orr became a surgeon and later developed the vascular program and the clinical vascular laboratory (which bears his name) at St. Luke's Hospital in Bethlehem, Pa. Taylor worked for



The team arrived in El Paso to extremely cold weather.

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the FBI, and his brother, Frank, worked for the CIA. Forbes worked for DuPont as an engineer for a while, but later came back to Tech and worked for President Bill Lavery as the first Vice President for Development and University Relations. He spent 14 years at Tech before leaving to become the vice president of the University of Delaware, where he stayed until retiring.

Hopkins worked for DuPont, Sharples Corp., and Envirotech, Inc., as an engineer before later founding his own company. Pat Denardo worked for NASA as a researcher of hypervelocity aerodynamics, while Sally Rand worked for the New Holland division of the Sperry Rand Corporation. Kroehling has retired twice, but formed his own company (J.H. Kroehling Associates) in 1991 – and still designs air pollution control equipment at the age of 85!

There are many, many other great stories. These and what they accomplished on the gridiron should be remembered. Without question, they cemented themselves in Virginia Tech athletics history.

Though sadly, many appear to have forgotten that. And for such a distinguished group, that stings.


“I felt a little sensitive about that,” Taylor said. “We weren’t the greatest team. But we were the first. I’m not sure a lot of people know that.”

“I think most feel a little neglected,” Orr said. “They didn’t get the recognition they would have liked or deserved.”

The athletics department recognizes the Sun Bowl team with a banner in Lane Stadium and also a banner in Legends Hall (in the Merryman Center). Orr’s diligence in his pursuit of information on his former teammates and pictures of them has helped. Several of those pictures have been put in a display at the Tech Hall of Fame over at Lane Stadium. The athletics communications staff probably will use these newfound pictures in the bowl section of the annual media guide. Some of the other information and pictures may be put into a display.

This will help bring attention to their deserving accomplishments. After all, they were the first Tech bowl team and the first team from the commonwealth to play in a bowl game. They always will be. Everyone knows you cannot rewrite history.

As the final chapters of their lives are drawing to a close, they are proud of their place in that history.

Their only hope is that others will be as well. 



Ross Orr (left), Ray Beasley (middle) and Oren Hopkins gaze at the plaque recognizing all the Williams Award winners (top). All three won the Williams Award - Orr in 1945, Beasley in 1948 and Hopkins in 1949 - which goes to a team member who demonstrates leadership and character. Below that is a team shot posed before the '46 season.

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BLACKSBURG SPORTS CLUB HAS A LONG HISTORY OF AIDING TECH ATHLETICS

By Jimmy Robertson

For some particular clubs and organizations in the town of Blacksburg, one must be either of brilliant mind or bulky wallet.

But for one, the criteria are far more attainable for ordinary, hardworking folks.

“The only qualification is having an interest in sports,” Wayne Campbell said.

Campbell serves as the president of the Blacksburg Sports Club, and for those who live outside the town proper and know little about this organization, it’s simply a group of grassroots Virginia Tech and Blacksburg High School fans who congregate once a week during the academic year for lunch at Custom Catering Center on Patrick Henry Dr. While there, they eat, listen to a Tech or Blacksburg High coach talk about his or her team and discuss in general the local sports scene. This group possesses an undying passion for the Hokies and the Bruins, no matter what happens on the field or on the court.

There is a nominal fee to be a part of the club – a rather palatable \$20 a person for a yearly membership (\$30 for couples). The lunch costs \$8 per person, but for that price, one gets a fine meal and an hour’s long program with a member of the Virginia Tech or Blacksburg High athletics department, who often speaks first and then fields questions.

The interesting part of this club, though, is the transformation from a group of sports fans who come together each week to a valued partner of both the Tech and Blacksburg High athletics departments. The Blacksburg Sports Club’s mission, as stated on its Web site, is “to support local varsity athletic programs, primarily those of Blacksburg High School and Virginia Tech, and to provide a setting for fellowship and education around a sports theme.”

Mission accomplished. Their financial support reached record status for them this year, as the Blacksburg Sports Club raised \$27,000.

“We split it down the middle and gave each one of them [Tech and Blacksburg High] \$13,500,” Campbell said. “I think if you looked back 11 years ago or so, we probably gave them less than \$1,000 each. From 1963 through 2000, we probably never gave them more than \$500.

“That just shows how much we’ve grown as a club and how much the interest has grown in local sports here.”

The numbers certainly reflect that. The club consists somewhere between 500 and 600 members. This includes 400 individual memberships and the rest are corporate memberships.

This represents a stark contrast from the club’s meager beginnings. In 1963, a group

closely associated with the Tech athletics department, including athletics director Frank Moseley, Bill Matthews and Stuart Cassell, saw the need for a local, hometown support unit that would help the program to grow and be successful.

Moseley, who had given up his football coaching duties in 1960 after a splendid career to become the athletics director, turned out to be the driving force. He wanted an organized group of individuals and local businesses to gather together periodically to encourage and support Tech athletics. He initiated the contacts and discussions with some of the townsfolk, and that resulted in the formation of the Blacksburg Quarterback Club on Dec. 1, 1963.

Officers and a board were elected, with E.H. Creasey, Jr., serving as the first president, and a constitution was ratified. Seventy-five members paid their dues of \$5 each to become charter members. The club originally met every Monday at the old Hardie House Restaurant, but down through the years, moved to the Continuing Education Center and the Bowman Room in the Jamerson Athletics Center before currently finding residence at Custom Catering.

Of course, there was one slight problem back in those days.

“Maybe only a dozen or so people ever attended,” Campbell said. “They never knew who the speaker was going to be. I think sometimes they’d grab a coach from the hallway and get him to speak.”

Gradually, though, things changed. At the time, Moseley and friends wanted a club that would help the overall program grow, but in reality, this was a ‘football’ club. Yet in 1974, the club changed its name to the Blacksburg Sports Club, and over the course of time, changed its perspective, seeking to draw support for every sport at Tech. Years down the road, the club saw a need to help the local high school, so drumming up support for Blacksburg High became part of the mission.

Today, drumming up support primarily means raising money, with running an athletics department at both the college and high school levels being a costly endeavor. The club’s biggest fundraiser is a golf tournament every fall that generated between \$5,000 to \$6,000 last year.

“We also do other things,” Campbell said. “We do a 50-50 drawing each week in which we sell tickets and the winner gets to keep half the pot. The rest goes toward our contributions to the departments. We keep a portion of the \$8 charge for lunch, and of course, our dues go toward the departments as well.

“We’ve also gotten more into corporate sponsorships. We’ve seen a lot of interest from local businesses – banks, real estate companies, restaurants and even some non-profit organizations. We give each one of them an opportunity to speak before the club and to sell their wares, so to speak. That [the corporate sponsorships] has really helped us increase our funds.”


Most of their contributions to Tech athletics go toward scholarships. However, \$1,000 of it goes to the Tech marketing department, which places the Blacksburg Sports Club logo on certain promotional items, and another \$1,000 goes toward the Jack Ridinger Memorial Softball Scholarship. Ridinger, whose stepson, Scot Thomas, is the head softball coach at Tech, worked for the Tech Police Department for years. He tragically passed away while on vacation in 2006.

The club, though, sees the potential for more growth and recently committed to a five-year pledge of \$50,000 to the construction of a new football locker room – a direct reflection of the club’s growth and popularity.

“If you asked 10 people, you’d get 10 slightly different answers,” Campbell said as to why the club has become so popular. “I think a lot of it is the fellowship. We have a group who arrives for the weekly lunch at 10 o’clock just to reserve their table and sit around and talk.

“And a lot of people like to have lunch with their friends and listen to the coaches. It’s fun. It’s not a tense thing at all. We love having the coaches come and I think they enjoy coming. There aren’t any confrontations. We’re not a forum for criticism. It’s a place where they [the coaches] can let their hair down a little, and I think they’d all tell you that it’s one of their favorite places to talk.”

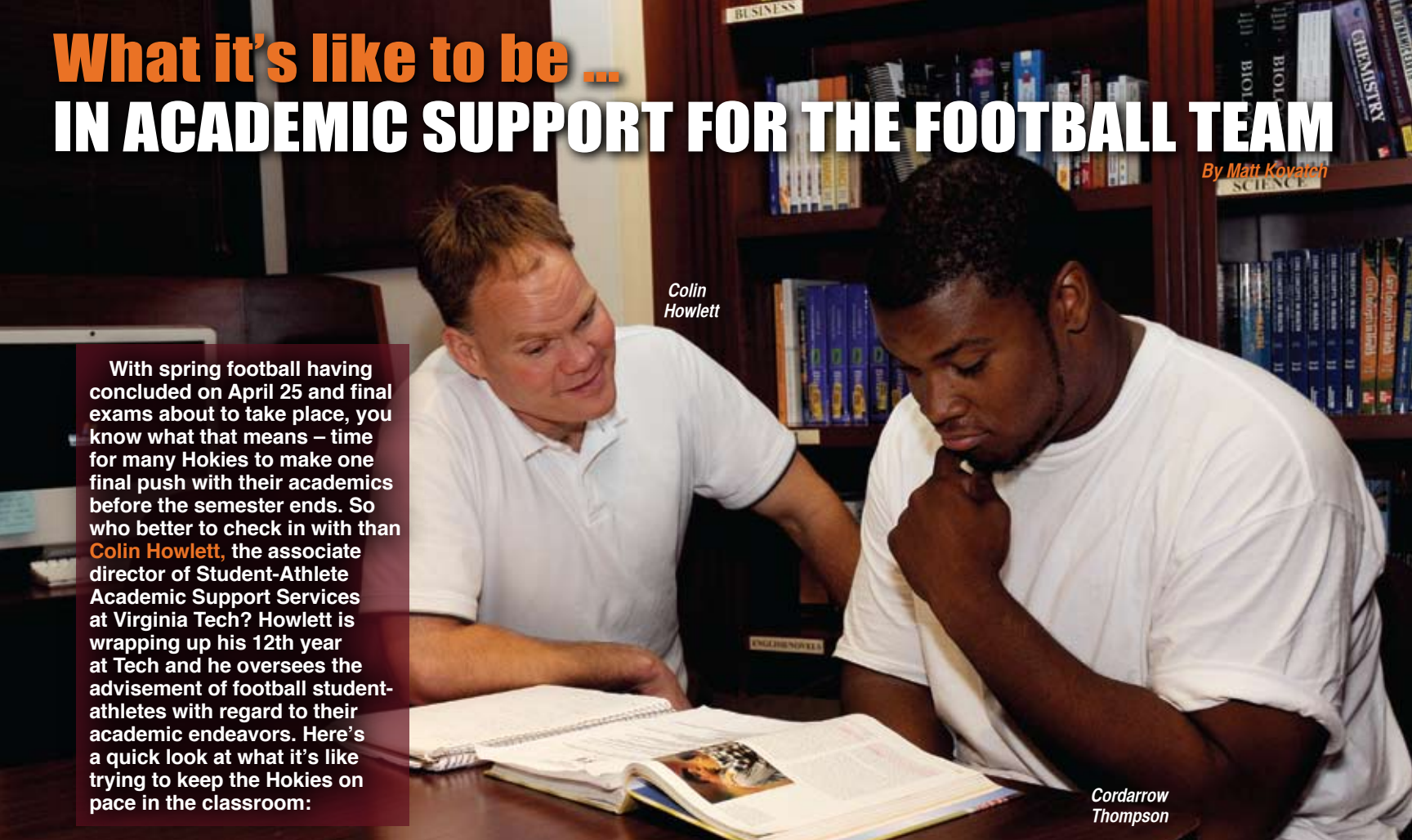
For sure, the Blacksburg Sports Club has come a long way in 46 years when club officers were searching the halls of Cassell Coliseum for speakers.

And the good thing is this – there appears to be no limit on where the club can go in the future. 

What it's like to be ...

IN ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR THE FOOTBALL TEAM

By Matt Kovach



Colin Howlett

Cordarow Thompson

With spring football having concluded on April 25 and final exams about to take place, you know what that means – time for many Hokies to make one final push with their academics before the semester ends. So who better to check in with than **Colin Howlett**, the associate director of Student-Athlete Academic Support Services at Virginia Tech? Howlett is wrapping up his 12th year at Tech and he oversees the advisement of football student-athletes with regard to their academic endeavors. Here's a quick look at what it's like trying to keep the Hokies on pace in the classroom:

BY THE TIME FINAL EXAMS ROLL AROUND, MOST OF MY WORK IS DONE.

“By the end of the semester, I have a pretty good idea of where each student is going to end up. The busiest time is actually the beginning of each semester when we're trying to make sure each student's schedule is set. That's when we need to set up when they're going to have study hall, what tutors they're going to meet with, and so on. And then pre-registration for courses, which is in the middle of the semester, is also a busy time. Getting classes on this campus is at a premium right now, so you need to plan ahead. Provided that a student does well in all the classes he's enrolled in now, what's the next step? The end of the semester is more stressful than busy because I know who my question marks are and all I can do is sweat it out.”

DON'T BELIEVE THE MISCONCEPTIONS.

“The perception nationwide by some people is that many football players don't belong in college. Well, that's not true. These guys are smart enough to be successful here – they just need to be motivated in the right direction. The other misconception is that they have it so easy. There are going to be people reading this who say, 'Football players get their school paid for.' They do and that's a tremendous benefit, but football itself is a 20-hour-a-week job at the minimum – it's actually more than that when you count things like getting in early to visit the training room

or going to study hall. There's a real time commitment. Some people work a full-time job to be able to afford going to school and I respect that, but what sets the football players apart is the physicality of it – it is a meat grinder out there. People don't understand how physically demanding their job is – most people don't expend the physical energy that the players do.”

JUST LIKE THE COACHING STAFF, WE ALSO PREACH THE LUNCH PAIL MENTALITY.

“If you go to class, work hard, be conscientious, do your assignments on time and behave the right way, you're going to go out to the field and do the same. My take on things, and Coach Beamer may agree with it, is that's what our football program is also about. It's the lunch pail attitude. If I show up every day and do what I'm supposed to do, I'm going to get better. That's what we try to apply to our academic work.”

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, ONE OF OUR BIGGEST OBSTACLES IS THE NFL.


“A lot of the students I work with are motivated to be successful athletically. There is a rainbow out there with a pot of gold at the end of it that is the NFL. And I understand that motivation – it's a lot harder to look at academics and see the same kind of thing. If you were to get your degree and get an extraordinarily good job out of college, you might make \$75,000 a year. But for this group of football players, you can make at least three times that if you

are successful athletically. They allow that to cloud their vision sometimes, even though the chances of making it in the NFL are so much tougher. It's our job to get them to buy into the academic route.”

OUR COACHES DO THEIR PART TO HELP US COMPLETE OUR MISSION.

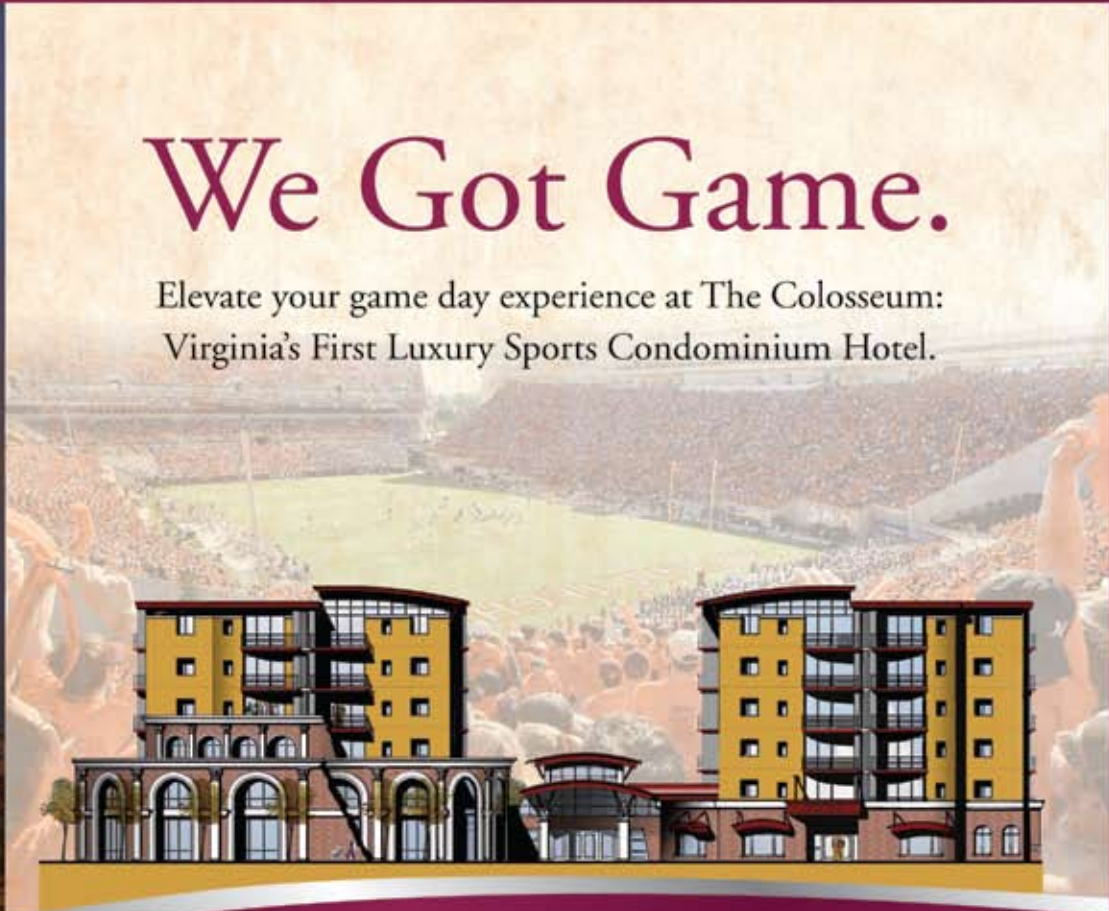
“There's a certain amount of motivation that we provide to the students through our office, but a lot of that comes from the coaches. For people who are basically judged on winning and losing, they spend a great amount of time on preaching the importance of academics. They have grasped the relationship between being successful academically and winning. If a student does things in a certain way that allows them to be successful on campus, they're going to be the same on the field. Coach Beamer really understands that and pushes like crazy on these students to be successful and that really makes my job easier.”

BUT IN SOME WAYS, FOOTBALL CAN BE JUST AS IMPORTANT AS CLASS.


“When I was a college football player at Division III Susquehanna University in Pennsylvania, I learned just as much through football – with the teamwork and time budgeting and leadership – as I did in the classroom. I've relied on those experiences to pull me through every job that I've had. I think athletics is one of the greatest supplements to an education that there can be – I'm a big believer in athletics as a way to educate oneself.” 

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GOING THE DISTANCE

PITCHER RHETT BALLARD LOOKS BACK ON A CAREER OF UPS AND DOWNS

By Matt Kovatch

When Rhett Ballard sits down to look back on his young adulthood, he can point out many instances that left him oh-so-close to teetering off his path to baseball stardom. And as the fifth-year senior nears the end of his collegiate career, one can argue what exactly his level of stardom is.

For one, the 6-foot-6, 244-pound right-hander will leave Virginia Tech as one of its all-time strikeout leaders – he ranked fifth, just behind current major leaguer Joe Saunders, with 249 punchouts entering the season's final two weeks.

Also, he is regarded as one of the most durable and consistent pitchers in the Atlantic Coast Conference. He's never piled up the wins and he doesn't have the lowest earned run average out there, but with his sidearm, in-your-face delivery, there aren't many teams clamoring for a chance to face him.

But maybe his success doesn't come in the form of statistics. For a young man who's jumped between schools and gotten into a good amount of trouble over the years, the fact that he's still on the Hokies' roster with a chance to go pro might be considered stardom enough.

One thing is for sure – Ballard has been through his share of ups and downs. But in the same way he trots back out to the mound each inning with no regard to his rising pitch count and no matter how intense the game situation is, he has continued to bounce back for more.

Ballard was born and raised in the Greensboro/High Point, N.C., area, and he entered Southwest Guilford High School in 2000 as a talented freshman. But about halfway through his first year there, he and his family realized that a change might be for the better.

"The high school I went to had a lot of trouble surrounding it," Ballard remembered. "Kids were always getting arrested and a lot of kids were getting kicked out of school. I wasn't really on the right track either, so I went to visit a few private schools around the area."

Ballard, a phenomenal basketball talent who reportedly can still dunk any which way you ask him to, sought to play hoops at his new school, so his choice was an easy one. He settled on Oak Hill Academy in Mouth of Wilson, Va., which, with such alumni as Jerry Stackhouse, Josh Smith, Rajon Rondo and Kevin Durant, is one of the premier high school basketball outlets in the nation.

The fact that Ballard made the team at Oak Hill speaks for itself, and he certainly enjoyed going toe-to-toe with former teammates and future NBA stars Carmelo Anthony, DeSagana Diop and Marcus Williams, but one thing was missing. The baseball program at Oak Hill left much to be desired.

"The whole baseball team was basically the basketball team," Ballard said. "I pretty much had to beg people to play just to get a team together. It's not true high school baseball – we played mostly against junior varsity teams. We only had 8-10 games a season, I pitched almost every game my sophomore year."



And get this – Ballard didn't play baseball at all as a junior! Itching to get back out on the mound and to return to the diamond, Ballard decided to leave Oak Hill after his junior year, opting to return to public school and the Southwest Guilford baseball team for his senior season.

Maybe because he didn't have many offers after disappearing from the baseball scene for a few years, and maybe because he wanted the discipline of a private Christian school, Ballard opted for Liberty University following high school graduation. Besides, he was even allowed to practice with the basketball team a couple of times per week.

But it wasn't a good fit. Ballard ended up redshirting for the baseball season before deciding to seek a transfer. He cited a disconnect between himself and the head coach of Liberty at the time.

"I didn't get along with my coach, and a lot of players felt disrespected by him," Ballard said. "When I decided to leave, he assumed anywhere else that I went would be a downgrade. I just never had a good vibe with him."

Ballard spent the following summer playing for the Kernersville (N.C.) Bulldogs of the Southern Collegiate Baseball League and auditioning for college coaches. Wake Forest

showed interest in him and he was set on going there, but only a handful of his college credits would've transferred into the school, instead forcing him to find a place that wouldn't take so long to get back on track academically.

Ballard later came up to the New River Valley to throw a bullpen session for a coach with the Pulaski minor league team, who doubled as the head coach at St. Petersburg Junior College in Florida during the college season. Longtime Hokie head coach Chuck Hartman was in attendance for the session, and not long after that ("It was kind of a life-long dream to play in the ACC, so I wasn't going to turn it down," Ballard said.), Ballard was on his way to Virginia Tech.

Ballard turned in a rather ho-hum freshman season as both a starter and a reliever for the Hokies, going 3-3 with a 6.22 earned run average. It was in the summer following that season that his immaturity reared its ugly head.

"I was pretty wild when I first got here," Ballard admitted. "I guess you could say that I wasn't 100 percent committed to baseball or school yet. I was more into the party life."

Ballard said he routinely went out drinking during his first couple of years in Blacksburg, many times getting into fights

and doing what he called "stupid stuff."

Ballard made it clear that he had no qualms with Hartman and his staff – "Coach Hartman was a great coach," he said. – but added that practices under Hartman were a lot more laid back than current practices under third-year head man Pete Hughes.

"I wasn't really held accountable for anything," Ballard said of his first year in Blacksburg. "If I didn't do my running, it didn't matter."

So Ballard saw no repercussions if he went out drinking the night before a game or didn't keep up with his schoolwork. At least until one night in the summer of 2006 – the details of which we won't delve into – that left Ballard in prison for the next 45 days.

"That was my first wakeup call," Ballard said. "I learned that I couldn't go out and be wild and fight."

While Ballard was behind bars, Virginia Tech baseball was in the process of transitioning from the retiring Hartman to the newly hired Hughes, who made his way to Blacksburg after an eight-year stint at Boston College. Since Hughes had an entire roster to evaluate, he refused to make a snap judgment on the young pitcher.

"I make my own observations and I form my own opinions," Hughes explained. "I know that 19- and 20-year-old kids make

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dumb decisions and sometimes get in trouble because of them, but that doesn't necessarily define who they are."

Ballard returned to the team as a sophomore and wound up leading the 2007 Hokies with six pitching victories and 74 strikeouts, but things weren't all warm and fuzzy just because of that.

"I wasn't exactly on the same page with Coach Hughes during his first year here," Ballard admitted. "I was still in party mode and going out a lot. I didn't start on the right foot with him by telling him all the trouble that I got in the year before."

"I tried to see what kind of student he was, what kind of teammate he was, and also if he could play," Hughes recalled, thinking back to the beginning of that season. "He was deficient in all three categories – he didn't care about academics and he was too social."

It was a battle all year long between the two sides. While Ballard stayed out of trouble and had some success on the mound, he still didn't embrace the big picture of being an unselfish teammate and a responsible student. That alone nearly cost him the rest of his baseball career, as Hughes contemplated booting him from the team.

"It got to the point where I was like, 'I would throw this kid off the team in a second because he's representing everything that I don't stand for in college athletics,'" Hughes said. "But we were so limited on serviceable pitching arms at the time that I didn't have any other options. I couldn't go to the next kid down the line – we didn't have a line to go to."

"I didn't do it for Rhett," Hughes revealed when asked why he kept Ballard around. "I did it for the 10 seniors who I really respected and admired because I wanted to give them a chance to be successful on their way out. I don't think Rhett knew that until I told him."

And it's true. Ballard says that was his second wake up call, affecting him even more so than when he was in jail.

"Coach told me at the end of the year that I needed to grow up," Ballard remembered. "His exact words were, 'If I didn't like these seniors so much and want them to win, I would've kicked you off the team.'"

"I really took that to heart. I was thinking, 'God, if I get kicked off the team, I'm done!' There was no other way around it. I didn't have another option. I couldn't transfer again or I'd have to sit out another year and I'd be like 27 by the time I got out of school."

So Ballard turned himself around. He started holding himself accountable for his actions, he stayed out of trouble and the following semester, he put together the highest grade point average he'd ever had. Suddenly, and not so coincidentally, he had morphed into the Hokies' most reliable pitcher, an intimidating innings-eater who was called upon midseason to switch from

**"The personal growth that Rhett has gone through is immeasurable, and it's definitely the most I've ever seen with any kid I've coached."
- Hokie head coach Pete Hughes**

The Hokies needed someone to be a stop-gap when things got ugly on the mound, and because of Ballard's physicality – "He's been such a horse for us," Hughes said. "I've never seen a kid as resilient as him. He never gets tired – he's a monster." – he was used three or four times a week out of the bullpen, eventually setting a school record with 34 pitching appearances.

Hughes said he could've sent Ballard packing and thrown some inexperienced positional players on the mound, but he didn't think it would be fair to put his hard-working seniors behind the 8-ball by doing so.



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reliever to Friday night starter.

"As soon as Rhett figured out that all of those things correlate, he developed into a really good pitcher," Hughes said. "I give him all the credit in the world. [Associate head coach/pitching coach] Dave Turgeon and I were really, really hard on him, and he could have said, 'You're wrong, I'm right, screw you, I'm out of here.'"

"But he stepped back, evaluated himself and decided that he could change. Next thing you know, his grades are going up to where he's more than respectable academically, and he's the first guy on the field taking the tarp on and off. The personal growth that Rhett has gone through is immeasurable, and it's definitely the most I've ever seen with any kid I've coached."


So with Ballard winding down his collegiate career and trotting out for the proverbial ninth inning in search of the metaphorical complete game, he can only wait and see what the future holds.

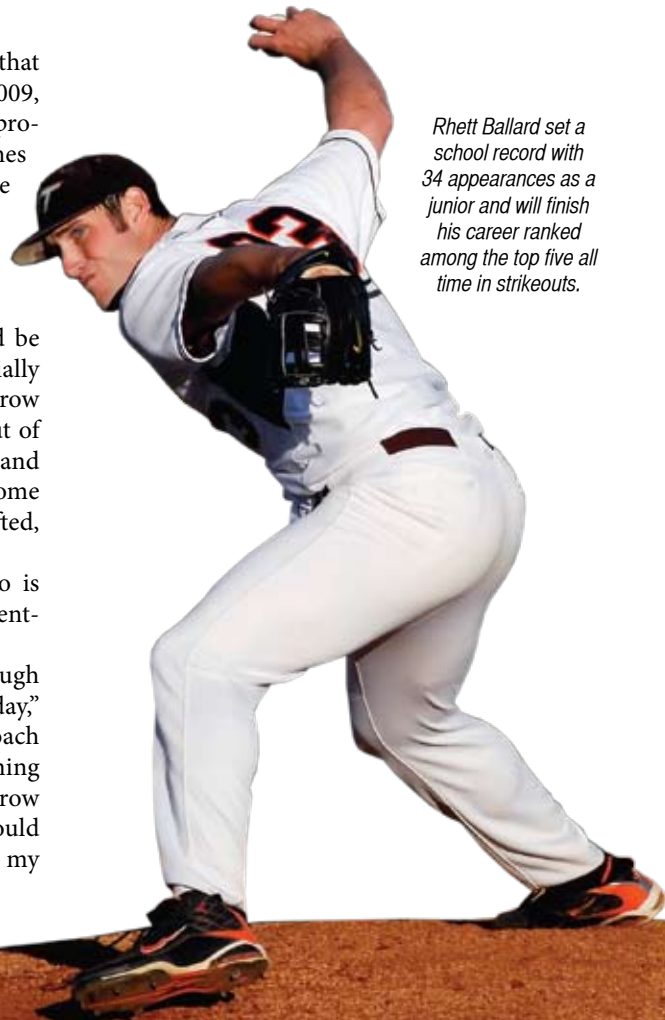
Hughes was absolutely shocked that his No. 1 pitcher didn't get selected in the Major League Baseball draft last summer, and even Ballard kind of wondered why. But after playing in the Cape Cod Baseball League – the premier collegiate summer league in the country – last year and turning

in another solid season for a Tech team that has improved by leaps and bounds in 2009, the chances are good that one of the 30 professional teams will call his name. Hughes wasted no time making his pitch for the transformed young man.

"I think Rhett would tear up a wood bat league," he said. "We sent him to the Cape last summer and those hitters didn't even sniff him. I think he would be an asset to anyone's organization, especially because he's so resilient and he can throw almost every day. You could use him out of the pen to protect all your prospects, and then look up at his numbers and see some outstanding things. If he doesn't get drafted, they're all crazy."

In the meanwhile, all Ballard can do is wait, but not without appreciating the eventful ride he's been on.

"I can't thank the coaching staff enough for the person they've made me today," Ballard said. "Coach Hughes and Coach Turgeon stayed on me in the beginning when I needed it and they helped me grow up a lot. There's no telling where I would be today without them. They changed my whole life around." 



Rhett Ballard set a school record with 34 appearances as a junior and will finish his career ranked among the top five all time in strikeouts.

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GAME, SET, MATCH

**INGA BEERMANN RECENTLY
CONCLUDED AN IMPRESSIVE TENNIS
CAREER AT VIRGINIA TECH**

By Matt Kovatch

When Inga Beermann went up on stage to accept her strength and conditioning athlete of the year award at the Virginia Tech All-Sports Banquet on May 4, she spontaneously and jokingly flexed her biceps as she posed for the photo, prompting a burst of laughter from the crowd of several hundred. Out of the dozens of student-athletes to receive an end-of-the-year award that night, Beermann was the only one who strayed from the 'handshake-and-smile' pose, instead choosing to flash some personality.

To someone meeting the seemingly shy and reserved tennis player for the first time, it was a little unexpected. But to Beermann's coaches and teammates, it was just the norm.

"I'm really shy until I get to know somebody," Beermann said. "I always need time to warm up to people, but I'm pretty wild and outgoing once you know me better."

It's certainly a long way from where the senior started four years ago as a freshman visiting the Tech campus for the first time.

"During the recruiting process, it was really hard to talk to her," Tech women's tennis head coach Terry Ann Zawacki-Woods said of Beermann. "Sometimes you'll talk to a prospect on the phone and it will be a two-hour conversation, but with her, it was closer to two minutes. It was the same when she came to visit here. She didn't really say much. To be fair, she was sick and had lost her voice, but she's very shy until you get to know her."

Unfortunately for the Hokie Nation, not many truly did get to know her, with the tennis team tucked away by its lonesome at Burrows-Burleson Tennis Center and separated from the rest of Tech's athletics facilities. But Beermann is well known in tennis circles, having played at the Hokies' No. 1 position for all four years of her Blacksburg tenure.

Beermann, a native of Bad Salzufflen, Germany, exploded onto the scene as a freshman in 2005-06, winning 29 matches on her way to All-ACC recognition, the Intercollegiate Tennis Association East Region Rookie of the Year award and a bid as the program's first NCAA Tournament participant.

"I had high expectations, but I didn't think I would achieve all that I did my freshman year," Beermann said. "Coming in, there was no pressure – everything was new and exciting. School wasn't quite as hard and time consuming as it is now. I didn't know anybody so I just played tennis."

But it didn't stop there. The 5-foot-4 right-hander earned All-ACC honors again as a sophomore and All-ACC Academic Team honors as a junior. She then helped the Hokies this season to

their best winning percentage since 2002-03 and their best conference finish since joining the ACC. Beermann concluded her career ranked fourth at Tech in all-time singles victories and tied for second in all-time doubles victories. And she's done all of it while consistently facing the best that each opponent has had to offer.

"It's very rare, especially in our conference, to have a freshman come in right from the get-go and play at the No. 1 spot," Zawacki-Woods said. "But to keep that spot throughout the four years is really quite an accomplishment and something that you don't find in a lot of programs, especially at this level."

As uncommon as Beermann's consistent success has been, it only seems fitting considering how random her discovery was by the Hokies. Believe it or not, you can credit Zawacki-Woods' parents for that.

"It was actually a coincidence," Beermann said. "Coach's dad was a teacher in my high school, so that was my connection."

You see, Zawacki-Woods' parents live in Hilton Head, S.C., where they teach at a school called Heritage Academy, a place that describes itself on its Web site as a "refuge for teenagers with an extracurricular passion." According to Zawacki-Woods, Heritage is a specialized school for elite athletes and drama students who need to be flexible with their schedule, but still want to get a high school degree by going to classes like other kids their age.

"It's just a bit more of a special school in terms of allowing more leniency for training and traveling," Zawacki-Woods said.

With Zawacki-Woods having been a former All-American tennis star at Wake Forest, her parents had obviously developed an eye for talent, and young Beermann was schooling at Heritage because she was honing her ten-

nis game at the nearby Van Der Meer Tennis Academy.

"It was supposed to be just a one-semester exchange during my junior year of high school," Beermann said of her time away from Germany in Hilton Head. "But I liked it so much that I extended it to a year, and then I extended it to another semester.


"Then I won the Family Circle Cup, which was a huge success, so some college coaches became aware of me."

But fortunately for the Hokies, Zawacki-Woods' parents were already aware of her. Even though Beermann didn't know much about college in America – German schools don't offer sports in conjunction with school – Zawacki-Woods quickly pounced.

"My parents were able to tell me about her and what a great person she was," the Hokies' now sixth-year head coach said. "They said that she was a good player, a hard worker and great student. They got me a telephone number where I could contact her, and the rest is history."

It's history, indeed, as Beermann has already entered the record books as one of the most successful women's tennis players in Virginia Tech history. But she's not done with school yet – she has one more year at a satellite campus in Alexandria, Va., to finish up her architecture degree – and she's likely not done with tennis.

"I don't think I could give it up after 15 years of practicing three hours a day," she joked. "I don't know to which extent I'll play because I've had shoulder problems for the past year and I'm going to give that a rest for a little bit, but I'll probably play a couple of times a week. I would miss it too much."

And with all she's accomplished at Virginia Tech, tennis would probably miss her, too. 

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Getting to know ... **INGA BEERMANN**

Born: 6/23/88 in Salzkotten, Germany
Parents: Gunther (deceased) and Gabriele Beermann
Car you drive: Volvo
Favorite food: Everything ("I'm a big fan of food.")
Last movie seen: *Obsessed*
Favorite music: Hip hop and R&B – Jay-Z, T.I., Lil Wayne
Other sports played growing up: Gymnastics, ballet, tap dancing, horseback riding
Favorite tennis pros: Pete Sampras and Kim Clijsters
Major: Architecture

Favorite courses: World Regions, Environmental Building Systems, and Professional Practice

Toughest course: Concrete Building Structures ("I like geometry better, and it was a lot of calculus. It was almost like an engineering course – it wasn't design oriented.")

Roommates: Teammate and fellow senior Jessica Brouwer ("That's probably the hardest part about leaving. I'm going to miss my team. We travel so much and share hotels. It's a family.")

Something nobody knows about me: "My sister was actually better at tennis than me, but she quit playing at age 16. Playing for fun was always my highest priority, but her goal was always to be No. 1 in the world. She was so serious that it almost took over her life at one point, so she decided it was best for her to give it up."



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THERE'S NO CATCHING THE 'RHODESRUNNER'

JENNA RHODES HAS FOLLOWED IN HER SISTER'S FOOTSTEPS TO BECOME ONE OF VIRGINIA TECH'S ALL-TIME RECORD HOLDERS

By Matt Kovatch



The running joke around Virginia Tech softball is that Jenna Rhodes, who grew up on a chicken farm in Broadway Va., got to be so fast because she trained by chasing chickens around like the Italian Stallion did in *Rocky II*.

While the graduating senior admits that she did have to run down a few sheep in her day to get them ready for shearing, she said that the most involvement she ever had with the chickens was to clean their excrement-covered eggs.

While Rhodes gave up her egg washing a long time ago, she has continued to clean up in different fashion, instead washing away some pretty significant Hokie records.

When the fifth-place Hokies (27-27, 8-10 ACC) headed into the conference tournament on May 8, Rhodes had already obliterated some of Virginia Tech's single-season bests. Her 49 stolen bases had broken her own record of 41 from a year ago, and her 89 hits surpassed the previous mark of 76 set in 2005.

But the most eye-popping number of the three was her unfathomably high batting average of .478, a figure that ranked fourth in the country at press time and a number that was 102 points higher than Tech's previous highest clip of .376.

"She's been phenomenal," Hokie head coach Scot Thomas said of Rhodes. "Her bat control has been as good as I could ever expect or hope for it to be. She's been a lot smarter and she's so fast

that if that ball bounces twice, she's safe.

"As far as stolen bases go, she's got the God-given ability of speed, and she's worked on the timing of it all and learned how to slide correctly. She's raised her game to totally different level."

Rhodes' performance this year has not only helped the Hokies in their first season without national pitcher of the year Angela Tincher – "We were in the comfort zone having Angela," Rhodes said. "We knew we only had to score one or two runs to win, so we've really had to step it up this year" – but it's also placed her atop Tech's career list in both offensive categories. At the end of the regular season, Rhodes had built up a .385 career batting average, which, unless the Hokies go deep into the postseason with Rhodes in a prolonged slump, would break Michelle Meadows' career mark of .347 set in 2000. Finally Rhodes' 114 stolen bases exceeded the 113 bags swiped by her older sister, Callie, from 2003-07.

What makes Rhodes' batting average mark unique is that she's done it as a slap hitter. For those unfamiliar with softball, a slap hitter essentially makes a living off of swinging bunts, batting from the left side and starting the move to first base as the pitch is on its way. It's not something that is done once in a while when the coach gives the signal – one is either a slap hitter or isn't. And the opposition knows it's coming, often moving the infielders in to try and stop the Hokies' speedy leadoff hitter.

"It's usually just a split-second difference between being safe and out with slap hitters," Rhodes said. "Because the infield is in and if you don't have the power to get it out of the infield, you're kind of stuck trying to get it exactly where you need to. I really focused on ball placement in the offseason."

Slappers rarely get to experience the glorification of swinging for the fences – Rhodes has just six extra-base hits in her career – instead doing all they can to set the table for the power hitters that follow them. It's a role that Rhodes has played to perfection in her final campaign, and a lot of that success could be indirectly credited to the aforementioned Callie.

Callie, who is three years older than Jenna, sort of paved the way for her younger sister, arriving in Blacksburg three seasons before Jenna and morphing into the same type of player whom Jenna would eventually mirror. Thomas and the Tech coaching staff decided to switch Callie from the power hitter that she was in high school into a slap hitter, mostly because of her speed and quickness. Though both Rhodes sisters were invited walk-ons, Thomas had Jenna on his radar and envisioned her in the same role as Callie.

"We had been in conversations with Jim Rhodes [Callie and Jenna's father], and suggested that he turn Jenna around and have her ready to slap once she got here," Thomas said.

"Once my dad realized that Jenna and I were both fast and built the same way, and seeing how slapping was my ticket to playing in college, he decided that it kind of fit for her, too," Callie added.

So Jenna and Jim worked on the new approach at the plate, and Jenna showed up on campus ready to play. The only problem was that Callie still had two years left in a Hokie uniform.

"I feel like it would be kind of hard to play behind your older sibling," Callie said. "But Jenna is probably the most unselfish player that I've ever played with, and she always wanted to do whatever she could for the team."

So Jenna served primarily as a pinch runner, accumulating just 13 official at-bats over her first two seasons. She was used to being a big fish in a small pond, so all that time on the bench made her question her

desire to continue playing.

"Heading into my junior year, I was like, 'Do I still want to play if all I'm going to be doing is pinch running?'" she said.


And she had a reason to leave. Jenna, a double major in psychology and sociology whose passion is to become a counselor for older children and teenagers, had done missionary work during the previous two summers in Africa (Zambia), sharing the Gospel and helping to break ground on a new hospital. It's a place that she said she fell in love with, and she seriously contemplated ditching school to do it full time.

"I was ready to move over there after my sophomore year," Jenna said. "My dad thought I was gone. But I was lucky enough that he paid for me to come to college, so I wasn't going to squander that. I wanted to come back to get my degree so I had the skills do whatever I wanted to do in that field."

So Jenna returned to campus and it's paid off, not only in the form of broken records, but also because she helped the Hokies to the Women's College World Series last season. She's also all set to graduate, having gotten more experience for her career path by volunteering at a local crisis hot line in which she fields phone calls from suicidal teens and those crying out for help.

Whether she decides to make the move to Africa ("I'd have to switch from softball to cricket!" she jokes.) or whether she decides to continue her education in grad school, those surrounding her have no questions about whether she will succeed.

"She's a great kid and a great character," Thomas said of Jenna. "She's got a great set of values and she's been a joy to be around."


"It takes a special person to be able to put themselves in situations like she has," Callie said of her sister. "She's a very strong Christian and she really has a heart for serving others and putting them above herself. No matter what she does and where she lives, she's going to have a long-lasting impact on a lot of people." 



The Rhodes sisters: Callie (left) stole a school-record 113 bases in her career (2003-07), but Jenna broke it two years later with her 114th steal on the last day of the regular season.



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TRACK AND FIELD SQUADS HIGHLIGHT 'CHAMPIONSHIP MONTH' FOR HOKIES

By Matt Kovatch

Queen Harrison was named the ACC Women's Performer of the Year after winning two conference titles at the ACC outdoor meet.



April was unofficially 'championship month' in the Atlantic Coast Conference, with league titles up for grabs in the sports of men's and women's track and field, men's and women's tennis, golf and lacrosse. Here's a look at how each of the Hokie squads fared:

TRACK AND FIELD

The Virginia Tech women's track and field squad earned second and the Hokie men placed third at the conference championships, which were held on the campus of the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Fla., on April 16-18.

The Tech women racked up 127 points, while the Hokie men tallied 130. Florida State captured the women's title outright with 160 points, while the Seminoles and Virginia tied for the men's team crown with 141 points.

"It was a phenomenal meet on both sides," Tech director of track and field Dave Cianelli said. "The men were in contention until the very end, and we had 11 ACC champions, which is the most we've ever had at any meet. Because we are young, I think we will continue to be in contention for ACC titles in the future."

The women's squad bounced back from a fourth-place showing at the indoor championships in February thanks to five individual titles by four different people. Queen Harrison, a 2008 Olympian, won both the 100-meter and 400-meter hurdles and was named the ACC Women's Performer of the Year for her efforts.

The Richmond, Va., native clocked a time of 12.98 seconds in the prelims of the 100-meter hurdles, and ran a time of 13.14 seconds to win the conference title in the event. In the 400-meter hurdles, Harrison took first with a time of 56.03 seconds after posting a time of 58.68 seconds in the prelims.

Other titlists for the women included redshirt senior Brittany Pryor in the discus, who threw a career-best distance of 170 feet, one inch with her first throw of the competition. Sophomore Dorotea Habazin continued the throwers' success by capturing the hammer throw with a season-best mark of 209 feet, two inches, while senior distance runner Natalie Sherbak repeated as the women's 10,000-meter champion with a strong performance. Sherbak pulled ahead with two laps to go en route to a time of 35:48.42 and another ACC gold medal. With the victory, the Virginia Beach native has won an individual conference title in three consecutive ACC meets.

On the men's side, the Hokies rode the wave of six individual champions to take third after placing an impressive second during the indoor season. The meet could not have started out any better for the Hokies, as sophomore Marcel Lomnický captured his second ACC individual title since joining Tech in January, winning the hammer throw in the meet's first event with

a toss of 232 feet, one inch.

Then in the men's javelin, freshman Matthias Treff, a Burgthann, Germany, native participating in his first collegiate competition, threw a staggering 239 feet, 10 inches to win the crown, a mark that ranked in the top five nationally at the time and that was fewer than three feet shy of the school record in the event.

On the track, senior Billy Berlin opened the distance action with another Hokie ACC championship, setting a meet record en route to a first-place finish in the men's 1,500-meter run with a time of 3:43.52. Two more ACC champions came via the men's distance events. Sophomore Ryan Witt duplicated his effort from the ACC Indoor Championships in February, winning the 800-meter run with a time of 1:50.93. Freshman Will Mulherin put an exclamation point on his outdoor freshman campaign with a first-place finish in the 5,000 meters. Mulherin crossed the finish line in 14:15.5, and was named the ACC Men's Co-Freshman of the Year for his efforts.

Will Mulherin shared ACC Men's Freshman of the Year honors after winning the conference crown in the 5,000 meters.



Courtesy of John P. Billingsley, Jr.

MEN'S TENNIS

The men's tennis squad had a noteworthy April, winning its opening round matchup in the ACC tournament before being selected to the NCAA Championships for the ninth time in program history.

Tech defeated Maryland 4-0 in the first round of the conference championships in Cary, N.C., on April 16 before being eliminated by No. 20 Wake Forest 4-3 the next day. The Hokies faced one of the toughest schedules in the program's history this year – which included 16 ranked teams and seven top-25 programs – but entered their NCAA Championship bout against UNC Wilmington on May 8 ranked No. 26 in the nation with a 14-7 record.

In addition to being selected by the NCAA as a team, the Hokies' Yoann Re was chosen as one of the 64 individuals who will compete in the NCAA singles tournament May 20-25. Re, an All-ACC honoree, posted a 19-10 dual match singles record this season, including a 4-1 mark in the ACC.

But the individual recognition didn't end there, as Tech's Luka Somen was named the ACC Freshman of the Year after leading the Hokies with 24 wins.

GOLF

The Tech golf team finished with a three-round total of 868 and tied North Carolina

for seventh place at the 56th annual ACC Men's Golf Championship, which was held April 17-19 at the par-72, 7,102-yard Old North State Club at Uwharrie Point in New London, N.C.

Hokie senior Drew Weaver, who was tied for first after the event's first day of competition, shot an even-par 72 on day three and finished with a three-day total of 6-under-par 210, good for fifth place individually.

Sophomore Marshall Bailey shot a 2-over-par 218 and finished in a tie for 20th place, while redshirt junior Matt Boyd shot a 4-over-par 220 and tied for 27th place. Sophomore Garland Green finished in 45th place at 224 and freshman Blake Redmond finished in 52nd place at 228.

Georgia Tech won team honors with a three-day total of 846.

LACROSSE

Virginia Tech actually served as the hosts of the ACC women's lacrosse tournament at Thompson Field, but the home-field advantage didn't do any good for the Hokies, who lost their opening-round contest on April 23 to ninth-ranked Virginia by a score of 13-5.

The Hokies got two goals from freshman Caitlyn Wier, one score apiece from sophomores Allie Emala and Liz Carpenter, and


one from senior Rachel Culp. Culp, who also tallied an assist in her final collegiate game, finished the season with 54 goals, a number that ranks third on Tech's single-season list. She finished her career with 119 goals – second on the all-time list – and 29 assists.

Following the tournament, which undefeated Maryland won, Culp was named to the All-ACC team, having led the conference with 4.27 points per game. Culp joined Kady McBrearty (2005-2008) and Lindsay Pieper (2004-2007) as the only Hokies who have earned All-ACC accolades since Tech joined the league in 2005.

Tech finished its season with a 7-10 overall record.

WOMEN'S TENNIS

The women's tennis team managed just one point in its lone match at the ACC Championships on April 16 in Cary, N.C. The eighth-seeded Hokies faced off against ninth-seeded Wake Forest and the Demon Deacons prevailed by a score of 4-1, ending the Hokies' season with a 13-11 record – their best winning percentage since the 2002-03 campaign.

Senior Inga Beermann recorded Tech's only victory in the match, defeating Wake's Sasha Kuilkova 4-6, 6-1, 6-0. Kuilkova was the nation's 56th-ranked player at the time. 

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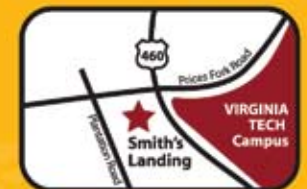
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You could say that long-time Hokie Club members Jack and Sandy Davis are stuck in the past. After all, in addition to their ongoing support for Hokie athletics, their generosity plays a key role in supporting the Virginia Tech Center for Civil War Studies where Jack serves as director of programs. But they also understand a thing or two about the future and how to invent it. That's why they are among the university's most dedicated volunteers, rallying behind causes all across campus, including Virginia Tech's ambitious Arts Initiative.

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