

inside

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HOKIESPORTS

The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics

RISING ABOVE THE COMPETITION

Sam Gostling is leading the way for the Hokies both on and off the court

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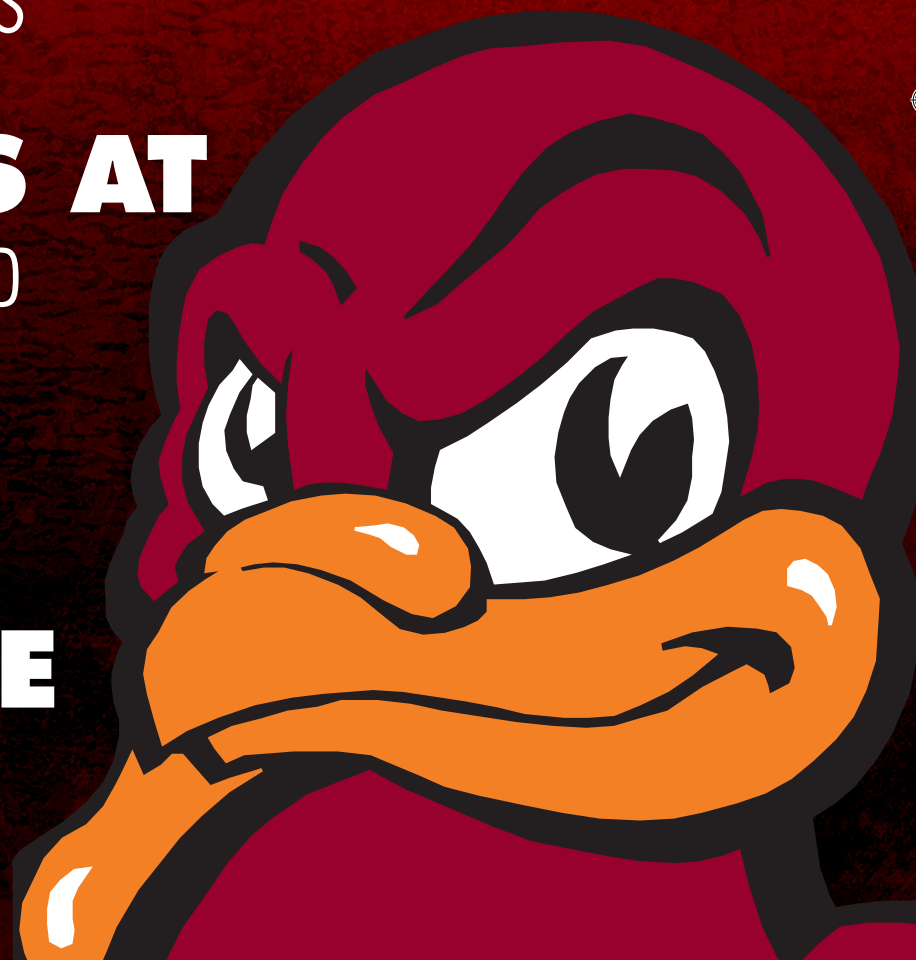
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inside **HOKIESPORTS**

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Jimmy Robertson
Editor

Marc Mullen
Editorial Assistant

Bill Roth
Columnist

Tim East
Executive Editor

Dave Knachel
Photographer

Stacey Wells
Designer

Contributors
Brian Thornburg - Hokie Club
Kyle Winchester - IMG

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A SEASON FOR SMILES

The Tech women's soccer team has been smiling a lot this season, particularly after notching the program's first win at the ACC Championships since 2009. Jazmine Reeves' header with 1:13 left in overtime propelled the Hokies past Notre Dame 2-1 in the quarterfinals - a victory that was their second over the Fighting Irish this season.

"Thank you for supporting Hokie Nation! Your hard work and contributions are what make our time at Tech so special!"
Katie DeToro
Senior | Women's Soccer

"Thank you for all that you do! I am so thankful for my experience here at Virginia Tech! We appreciate your support!"
Taylor Antolino
Senior | Women's Soccer

The Donor File

Sam Camden

HOKIE CLUB LEVEL: Golden Hokie

HOKIE CLUB MEMBER SINCE: 1989

CURRENTLY RESIDES: Roanoke, Va.

WHAT YEAR DID YOU GRADUATE? 1968

FAMILY: Brenda (wife); Chris and Teresa (son and daughter-in-law); Kelly and Steve (daughter and son-in-law); Jeremy and Erin (son and daughter-in-law); grandchildren Brennan, Reece and Alexa (Chris and Teresa), Kenley (Kelly and Steve) and Graham (Jeremy and Erin).



Q&A

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

A: I grew up in the Lexington, Va., area and attended the VPI and VMI football games in the 1960s. Once I became a student at VPI, I became a super fan.

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

A: It is very gratifying to help provide athletics scholarships to the young men and women who represent Virginia Tech in sports. I want to help improve the athletics facilities so they will be among the best in the country.

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

A: We do our share of tailgating before the games. However, we also enjoy eating at West End Market. We remember with fond memories our great friend, John Price, who was the "brain child" of West End Market. He had some of the best tailgating get-togethers and was one of the best Hokie reps ever.

Q: How are you involved with the Roanoke Valley Hokie Club? Has it been a positive experience for you, and what is going on for Hokie members in Roanoke?

A: I serve on the board for the Roanoke Valley Hokie Club and am vice president of

events. I enjoy working with the other club members on the fall luncheons at Hidden Valley Country Club each Friday before home football games. We have our annual "recruit night" in February. Our biggest event is the "kickoff" dinner at the Hotel Roanoke in July. This event always draws a large attendance.

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

A: This would be basketball's Dell Curry. Dell was a tremendous long-range shooter for Virginia Tech in the days when there was no such thing as a 3-pointer. My family and I drove to Charlotte, N.C., on many occasions to see Dell play professional basketball for the Charlotte Hornets. What a Hokie!

HOKIE CLUB ANNOUNCES NEW POINT PRIORITY GUIDELINES

Effective with the ACC Championship and/or bowl game following the conclusion of the 2013 football season, the Virginia Tech Athletic Fund is implementing new point priority guidelines for season and postseason tickets purchased through Virginia Tech. In the past, points were fixed and awarded regardless of the number of tickets purchased for both season and postseason tickets. Moving forward, each Hokie Club member will now receive the following priority points for tickets purchased from the Athletics Ticket Office:

- Three (3) priority points for **EACH** postseason ticket purchased in football and men's and

women's basketball. This includes the ACC Championship, bowl game, ACC Tournament, NCAA and (W)NIT games.

NOTE: Points will be applied to each donor's membership during the year the game was actually played, not when the tickets were ordered.

- Five (5) priority points for **EACH** season ticket purchased in football and men's and women's basketball. For football, this now includes both regular-season and club seat tickets.

The Athletic Fund, in conjunction with the athletics department, felt this was a positive

way to reward those members who support Virginia Tech athletics by purchasing season tickets and postseason ticket allotments. This gives them the opportunity to improve their annual point priority ranking. With the 2013 ACC Championship and bowl game order deadline of Nov. 22 quickly approaching, this is the perfect time to show your support of the football team and add additional points to your individual membership. The Hokies will be making their 21st consecutive trip to a bowl game and need you there providing the continued support you have shown time and time again.

LETTER FROM LU

Dear Hokie Club Members,

The Hokie Club is preparing for the end-of-the-year giving activity, and it will be an important time for all of our donors. Each one of you has made a significant personal investment in our athletics program, and you have made a difference for our student-athletes. I hope that you will continue to support these outstanding young men and women who proudly wear the orange and maroon as they compete in their chosen sport.

As we look toward the end of the year, I think it's important that I share with you some of the important dates and deadlines that affect our membership. **The last day** to set up or upgrade your membership using either "Hokie Matic" or "Employee Payroll Deduction" to qualify for privileges to be awarded before the Benefits Deadline is Nov. 29. To make any changes to an existing Hokie Matic, including increasing your monthly deduction, please submit a new form indicating the updated information. Hokie Matic forms can be found on the Forms page of our website, hokieclub.com.

The Benefits Deadline of **Dec. 31** is perhaps the most important deadline for Hokie Club members behind your anniversary month membership renewal, so I wanted to bring it to your attention, as we are approximately six weeks away. The Benefits Deadline serves as the deadline for all Hokie Club benefits for the 2014 year. As we look toward the Benefits Deadline, I will encourage you to think about your membership and your giving level within the Hokie Club. You can upgrade your point priority ranking and improve your parking and seating choices for the 2014 season by upgrading your VTAF membership.

Because of the university's holiday schedule and the Hokies' potential bowl game schedule, I would ask that you make every effort to speak with the Hokie Club staff or visit our office now if you have questions about your membership. Remember, checks must be postmarked by Dec. 31 and online contributions must be made at hokieclub.com by midnight EST, Dec. 31.

Like many other schools in the ACC and across the country, we are being challenged to meet the rising cost of higher education. The budget for the 2013-14 academic year for tuition, room, board and computers has reached \$11.7 million. It is our hope that the new Hokie Referral incentive program will bring new members, as will the Recent Graduate program. You can help the membership grow by referring friends and neighbors and earn additional priority points that will improve your priority ranking in 2014.

Your support of the athletics program is very much appreciated. We can be very proud of the student-athletes who have excelled in the classroom and on the fields and courts of play while finding time to make a difference here in the New River Valley. I see them every day, and I continue to be impressed with the high quality of young people who represent our university.

As we close out the fall semester of 2013, let me express how thankful I am for our consistently successful athletics program. The women's soccer team has worked its way into the top 10 in the country, an all-time high season ranking. Volleyball is having another good fall season, and the football team is bowl eligible for the 21st consecutive season. On behalf of the Hokie Club staff, let me take this opportunity to wish all of you a Happy Thanksgiving. GO HOKIES!

Go Hokies,
LU MERRITT

Senior Director of Development for Intercollegiate Athletics

Curtin finishes second at ACC Championships

Thomas Curtin, a junior from Leesburg, Va., finished in second place at the ACC Cross Country Championships held Nov. 1 at Beeson Park in Kernersville, N.C.

Behind Curtin, the Hokies – who won the ACC title last year – finished in fifth place. Syracuse won the event with 64 points, followed by North Carolina (84), Notre Dame (105), Virginia (108) and Tech (120).

Curtin finished with a time of 24 minutes, 2.2 seconds, approximately 25 seconds behind winner Andrew Colley of NC State. Curtin finished seventh at last year's ACC meet.

Lee Degfae was the Hokies' second finisher, ending the race in 23rd place. Jared Berman (30th), Stuart Robertson (32nd) and Grant

Pollock (33rd) rounded out the Hokies' scorers.

On the women's side, Courtney Dobbs and Sarah Rapp recorded top-13 finishes for the Hokies. Dobbs came in 11th in a time of 20:49.90, while Rapp wound up 13th in a time of 20:51.60. Shannon Morton (54th), Madalyn Nuckols (59th) and Katarina Smiljanec (62nd) rounded out the Hokies' scorers.

As a team, the Hokies finished in eighth place. Florida State won the event with 52 points, followed by Virginia (65), Syracuse (108), Notre Dame (124), Duke (130), BC (151), NC State (183) and the Hokies (188).

Juliet Bottorff of Duke won the race on the women's side. Curtin, Dobbs and Rapp all received All-ACC honors for the Hokies.

Graduation rates continue to rise for Tech programs

Seven Virginia Tech varsity sports had 100 percent Graduation Success Rates (GSR), according to an NCAA report released Oct. 24. The Tech teams included women's basketball, men's golf, lacrosse, softball, women's soccer, women's swimming and diving and women's tennis.

The Graduation Success Rate was developed by the NCAA as part of its academic reform initiative to better measure student-athlete academic success. It allows student-athletes six years to earn their degree, and this year's results are based on student-athletes who entered college in the fall of 2006. Also, the four-year cohort of student-athletes who began college in 2003-2006 is included.

Virginia Tech's GSR combined for all sports was 90, a number that ranked tied for 10th nationally and sixth among ACC schools behind Notre Dame (99), Duke (98), BC (96), Wake (94)

and Miami (92).

In football, the Hokies had a GSR of 78, which ranked fifth among ACC schools and eight percentage points above the national average of 70. In men's basketball, Tech had a GSR of 90 – 20 percentage points above the Division I average. The Hokies' GSR was tied for second among ACC schools with North Carolina and behind only Duke and Notre Dame, both of whom had 100.

Four other sports at Tech finished with a GSR of 90 or higher – men's swimming and diving (95), men's track and field and cross country (93), baseball (93) and volleyball (92). The men's track and field and cross country programs were tied for fifth among ACC schools, while the men's swimming and diving program was tied for sixth. The baseball program was seventh among ACC schools, while the volleyball program was 12th (11 volleyball programs in the ACC had GSRs of 100).


Weaver nominated for Courage Award

Tech AD Jim Weaver has been nominated for the 2013 Discover Orange Bowl-FWAA Courage Award presented by the Football Writer's Association of America. The winner of the award will be announced at the end of the season.

Weaver disclosed in 2006 that he suffers from Parkinson's disease, a degenerative disorder of the central nervous system that can cause speech and coordination problems. He was diagnosed with the disease in 2004. In recent years he has undergone several back surgeries, but still serves as the Hokies' athletics director. He doesn't plan to retire until the end of December of 2015 when he will be 70.

Weaver, who played football and was an assistant coach at Penn State, has been the AD at Tech since 1997. He guided the school through two membership changes and a school-wide tragedy, and he formulated a blueprint for one of the best-run athletics departments in the country.

The Courage Award was created by ESPN's senior columnist Gene Wojciechowski, also a FWAA member. A select group of writers from the FWAA vote on the winner each year. The requirements for nomination include displaying courage on or off the field, including overcoming an injury or physical handicap, preventing a disaster or living through hardship.

Past winners include Clemson wide receiver Daniel Rodriguez (2012), Michigan State offensive lineman Arthur Ray Jr. (2011), Rutgers defensive tackle Eric LeGrand (2010), the University of Connecticut football team (2009), Tulsa's Wilson Holloway (2008), Navy's Zerbin Singleton (2007), Clemson's Ray Ray McElrathbey (2006), the Tulane football team (2005), Memphis' Haracio Colen (2004), San Jose State's Neil Parry (2003) and Toledo's William Bratton (2002). 

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editor's desk | by Jimmy Robertson

Stanford shows his potential with big game versus BC

For a young man coming off the game of his life and playing not terribly far from his hometown across the border in Canada, Josh Stanford wasn't in a particularly cheery mood.

The Canadian had just set career highs in receptions and yardage in one of the best performances by a Tech receiver in head coach Frank Beamer's 27 seasons. He single-handedly torched Boston College's secondary in the second half, accumulating more receiving yardage in 30 minutes than he had the first five games combined this season.

So why the glum face, eh?

"I'm bitter," Stanford said. "We play for the W's [wins]. I'll take any game of the year where we got a W over this game. Offensively, we can't turn the ball over. We've been coached that from day 1. Whenever you turn the ball over, it's hard to win games. We had a lot of production on the offensive side of the ball. But we turned the ball over. We've got to get it corrected."

Stanford caught six passes for 171 yards, but not even his terrific performance could overcome the Hokies' four turnovers in a 34-27 loss to BC. The Eagles scored 17 points off Tech turnovers, returning an interception for a touchdown and twice taking over inside the Tech 20 and coming away with points (a touchdown and a field goal).

It marked Tech's second straight game with four turnovers – and thus a second straight loss. Stanford may be a Canadian, but football isn't played much differently north of the border than it is here in the States. Like all American football fans, he knows the quickest way to a loss in the sport.

"When you turn the ball over, it's hard to win games," he said. "That's just how football is at any level.

"Turnovers equal losses."

But good things can come out of a dispiriting loss, and Stanford's performance was the best thing that came out of the Hokies' loss. In fact, most fans expected this type of performance from him from the beginning of the season.

A year ago, Stanford was the rage of August. He learned quickly, and he caught everything in sight. He earned the right to play as a true freshman, and he played early before a knee injury sidelined him. The coaches held him out, and he ultimately received a medical hardship waiver.

For whatever reason, he got off to a slow start

to this season. He dropped several passes in the early going, and he hadn't morphed into that go-to receiver whom the Hokies desperately needed. Until, that is, the BC game.

Stanford's 171 yards marked the fourth-most by a Tech receiver under Beamer and tied for the fifth-most in school history. He made his catches count, too. All six came in the second half and none went for less than 16 yards. In fact, he caught passes of 69, 27, 23, 18, 18 and 16 yards.

"Offensively, they [Tech's coaches] saw some things they wanted to exploit on their [BC's] defense," Stanford said. "This game, it happened to be me. Next game, it'll probably be someone else. The previous games, it was other guys. It's a team thing and whatever we can do offensively against their defense. Whoever's number is called, it's all about production on the offensive side of the ball."

VIRGINIA TECH'S TOP RECEIVING YARDAGE GAMES


Player	Yardage	Year	Opponent
Ernest Wilford	279	2002	Syracuse
Ricky Scales	213	1972	Wake Forest
Antonio Freeman	194	1993	Temple
André Davis	172	1999	BC
Sidney Snell	171	1979	VMI
Josh Stanford	171	2013	BC

At 6-foot-1, 200 pounds, Stanford possesses the size to be a go-to receiver. He also possesses good hands, despite the early-season drops. As he becomes more familiar with Scot Loeffler's offense, he figures to be a guy to watch going forward – both this season and in the coming years.

"I feel that I'm capable, and I think that all the other receivers are capable," Stanford said. "Offensively and whatever matchup we're trying to exploit, that guy is going to have the [big] game depending on what the scheme is. So it's not really about me having games like this all the time. It's about offensively executing whatever matchup it takes to win."

That's why he was disappointed after the BC game. He wasn't thinking about his potential. To his credit, he was thinking about why his team didn't win.

"I know I and the other guys have a chip on their shoulders," he said. "We're trying to do better this year.

"So to take losses when you're trying to make up for last year ... that's the most frustrating thing." 

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Tyler's emergence as defensive leader proves history has way of repeating itself

This is a tale that seemingly has been written before, and now it appears again.

It's a story about an undersized linebacker from Oakton High School who walks on to Virginia Tech's football team and becomes a true star, leading one of the nation's best defenses.

He never appeared on any recruiting lists before arriving on campus, but by the time he ran onto Worsham Field at Lane Stadium for his senior day introduction, he had completed a tremendous career and received perhaps the loudest roar of any player on Tech's team.

Well, the first time you read this story was in 2005 when Cody Grimm walked on at Tech, earned a scholarship, became a three-year starter and was named All-ACC and an All-American as a senior.

The guy who replaced Grimm at linebacker for Oakton was, of course, Jack Tyler, who, despite breaking all of Grimm's tackling records at Oakton, didn't have a single FBS [Football Bowl Subdivision] scholarship offer.

What to do?

Walk on at Virginia Tech, of course.

History has a way of repeating itself, eh?

For the record, like Grimm, Tyler had a terrific senior season at Oakton High in 2008 when he set a school record with 147 tackles to go along with five interceptions, three sacks and a pair of defensive touchdowns.

There was that 36-tackle game against Robinson High that turned heads. Tyler was a good student and very solid high school football and lacrosse player, "but I never thought this [having such a great career at Tech] would happen," he said recently.

But he dreamed. He saw what Grimm



Jack Tyler has followed a similar path to that of Cody Grimm, coming to Tech as a walk-on and developing into an all-conference performer.

accomplished at Tech and admits to this day that he always had looked up to Grimm even back in high school. Tyler then followed Grimm's path by walking on to Virginia Tech's team in 2009.

The two remained tight during Tyler's freshman year – when Tyler paid his own way to go to school. But Tech coaches noted Tyler's potential and awarded him a scholarship in the spring of 2010.

Then, as a redshirt freshman, Tyler played in every game and started in the Orange Bowl. As a sophomore, he played more than 300 snaps and started four games, including the ACC championship game against Clemson.

Then as a junior, Tyler exploded. He started every game, led the Hokies with 119 tackles and was named first-team All-ACC as a linebacker by the league's coaches.

Now, as a senior, he's once again leading the

team in tackles and directing a defense that's been ranked in the top 10 all season long.

"Did I expect all of this? Back from five years ago?" Tyler asked rhetorically. "This ... is unbelievable.

"I was just a freshman walk-on trying to find his way. Never thought any of this would happen. It wasn't supposed to happen."

Maybe not.

He was named all-state as a linebacker as a senior, but his size left some recruiters wary. When he committed to walk on at Tech in 2009, he was rated just the No. 68 prospect in Virginia: <http://blogs.roanoke.com/insiders/2009/02/all-state-lb-picks-tech/>

But Tyler had a lot of things going for him.

He had great bloodlines – his father, Tim, was a Division I athlete who played football at East

Carolina. The younger Tyler came from a terrific high school program and had very solid coaching under Jason Rowley, the current head coach at Oakton who was Tyler's defensive coordinator during his years with the Cougars.

He had a great role model in Grimm. And he had a remarkable mentor and teacher in Virginia Tech defensive coordinator Bud Foster.

"We have the best defensive coaching staff in the country," Tyler said. "We could roll out long snappers to play middle linebacker on this team, and they'd make just as many tackles as I do."

Modesty aside, Tyler is an instinctive, cerebral football player who, just like Grimm, has thrived in Foster's system.

"Our defense is 90 percent 'Check with me's,' which is Coach Foster giving us the personnel and whatever formation they [the opponent] come up with," Tyler said. "Me and Kysheen [Jarrett] call the defense, and we get everyone lined up. It's easy. If they come out in trips [three wide receivers], I'm covering this guy, or I'm covering the back. There's no confusion. You always feel like you're in a good defense because, whatever formation you see, we have a good defense for it."

After years of seeing Foster's sideline signals, Tyler admitted that, at times, he doesn't even wait for Foster to finish the call before he yells it out himself.

"I look over at Coach, and I know what he's going to call. He gets halfway through the call, and I turn around and just call it because I've seen it a million times," Tyler said.

That defense is having a terrific season. It ranks among the national leaders in sacks, tackles for loss and interceptions.

"We're having a lot of fun," he said. "We love playing with each other and having those great defensive stats like that for each other. Our defensive line helps our defensive backs get those interceptions. And our defensive backs cover

guys long enough that we can get all those sacks. We know we work off each other. We have that camaraderie in the defensive meeting room."

On the field, Tyler tops the Hokies in tackles once again and is serving as a true leader for the team. Away from the field, he looks and acts not so much like an All-ACC linebacker, but more like a normal kid from Northern Virginia who's enrolled at Tech – always cutting up with his friends and keeping things loose.

"I'm enjoying every moment of it," Tyler said. "I'm having a great time. I could've been just another special teams player here and nobody ever would've heard my name. I've very excited and blessed."

Now, just a couple weeks shy of his 23rd birthday, he's getting ready for his senior day at Virginia Tech.

Tyler will run onto Worsham Field before the Maryland game to meet his parents, Tim and Maggie, at midfield, and he'll be welcomed by a thunderous roar from the crowd at Lane Stadium – like the ovation Grimm heard a few years ago.

It's the same story – from a star at Oakton High to a walk-on at Tech to an All-ACC linebacker. We've seen (and told) this story twice – and it never gets old.

Rogers next in line?

So there was Grimm and then Tyler. Who's next? "It's going to be Sam Rogers," Tyler predicted. "Definitely. Just the way he works. I noticed it right away when he got here. He's always in film room, always trying to get better. He learned our playbook faster than 90 percent of the offense. He works his butt off. You're going to know his name for a long time."

Rogers joined Tech's football team as an invited walk-on for this season and earned the starting fullback position. A two-time, first-team All-Metro selection by The Richmond Times-Dispatch,

Rogers played quarterback, receiver, running back and multiple positions on defense at Hanover High School in Mechanicsville, Va., last season.

"I didn't have many offers right away," Rogers told me. "Coming out of high school, the only offers I had were Bucknell and St. Francis (Pa.), which are I-AA [FCS] schools."

He thought he could do better, and both Virginia Tech and Virginia invited him to walk on.

"My mom went to UVa, so she might've been pushing me to UVa, but I realized that Tech was the right place for me," he said. "I saw how the team reacted to the 7-6 season.

"The character of the team is outstanding. That's the kind of people I want to surround myself with. You can see the character of the coaches here, and they judge people by how hard they play."

As a true freshman, Rogers has played a bunch this season, and everyone on the sidelines saw his competitiveness, tenacity and passion when he injured his ankle in the game against North Carolina. He became quite frustrated when told he was out for the rest of the contest.

"Yeah, I have to apologize to the trainers," Rogers said. "I wasn't nice to them. I just wanted to get back on the field, just tape me up and get me back out there because you want to be there for your team and show them that you'll do anything you can to get back on the field."

However, his ankle was severely sprained, and he was out for the game.

"After that, you live in the training room," he said. "That's what you do when you get hurt. I was in there from 6:30-11:30 a.m. and then had lunch and then came back for more ice."

Rogers was back the next week for the Hokies' game with Pittsburgh, and he hasn't missed a game yet during his rookie season at Tech.

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Keeping up with Compliance

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

Q: When can a high school prospect start taking official visits? Thanks, Heather in Blacksburg.

TP: "Prospective student-athletes in all sports except basketball cannot take an 'official visit' (a visit for which the recruiting school pays some or all expenses) until the opening day of classes during their senior year in high school. In men's basketball, though, prospective student-athletes can start taking official visits after Jan. 1 of their junior year. In women's basketball, prospective student-athletes cannot take official visits until the Thursday after the NCAA Division I women's basketball national championship game during their junior year of high school.

"Rules allowing for earlier official visits in men's and women's basketball were adopted in an attempt to emphasize relationship-building between college coaches and prospects, while also limiting the influence of third parties (specifically, shady AAU coaches) on the recruiting process."

Q: I read recently where the NCAA is going to allow midyear enrollees to sign a letter of intent in August. Is this true, and is this the beginning of any early signing period for all of college football? Thanks, Danny in Blacksburg.

TP: "You're only partly right. The NCAA made a new rules interpretation that allows student-athletes who plan to enroll at an institution in

January of their senior year of high school to sign a financial aid agreement with the school as early as Aug. 1. They are not signing a letter of intent. Also, keep in mind that this is for all sports, and not just football.

"This interpretation gives many coaches some of what they wanted. They get unlimited communication with a prospect once he or she signs the financial aid agreement. However, this does not bind the prospect to the university. He or she still has the freedom to make a different choice.

"The American Football Coaches Association has long pushed for an NCAA regulation that would establish an early signing period for football to reduce some of the recruiting madness. But there are drawbacks. A lot of coaches do not like to juggle official visits with games and prefer to bring prospects in for official visits in December and January, which allows them to spend more time with the prospect. Also, what if a prospect signs early and then the coach leaves his school? What happens then? And many coaches want to see a prospect's first-semester senior-year grades before going deeper into the process.

"So there are a lot of variables to work through in creating an early signing period for football. An NCAA football recruiting subcommittee is looking at the issue, but there is no timetable set to reach a final decision."


Q: Why did it take so long for the NCAA

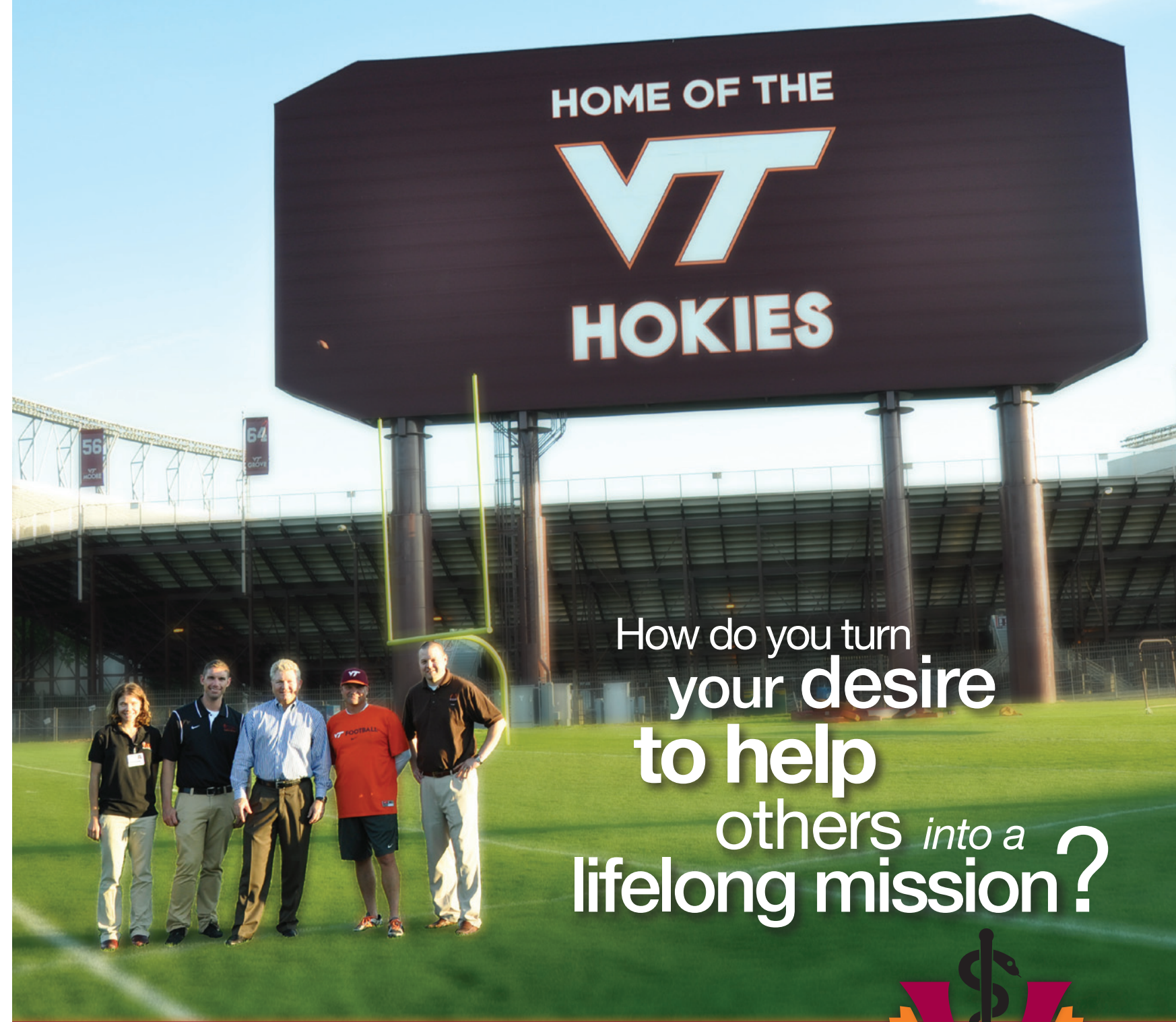
to rule on Miami's violations? It was nearly three years ago when the NCAA started investigating. That just seems ridiculous. Best wishes, Carl in Roanoke.

TP: "It did take a long time, but this was a fairly complicated case with multiple parties involved. In fact, it's probably the most complex case in NCAA history. Factor in that the NCAA made some missteps in the gathering of some information, and you have the makings for a long process.

"One must also remember that this Committee on Infractions is filled with volunteers, which means they have to find agreeable dates to meet and then put together a long report. That isn't always easy. These people have day jobs and summer vacations, and things of that sort, just like us 'normal' people.

"Miami had its hearing with the Committee on Infractions in June – four months ago – and usually it takes an average of 3.5 months for that committee to make a ruling, again depending on the complexities of the case. USC waited four months to hear back from the COI on the Reggie Bush case in 2010, and Indiana actually waited five months to hear back on the Kelvin Sampson case in 2008.

"Miami was put on three years probation. The biggest penalty came in the form of lost scholarships. The Hurricanes will lose nine football scholarships for the next three years and three men's basketball scholarships." 



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BATTLE AT BRISTOL SET

Tech and Tennessee will play a football game at Bristol Motor Speedway in 2016 and will attempt to break college football's all-time single-game attendance mark

by Jimmy Robertson

Amid confetti and fireworks, officials at Bristol Motor Speedway announced Oct. 14 that Virginia Tech and Tennessee will play a nonconference football game in 2016 at Bristol Motor Speedway.

The game, scheduled for Sept. 10, will be played on the infield of the speedway, where NASCAR racing teams and their haulers reside on race days, and could draw a record crowd for a college football game. The speedway, which ranks as the fourth-largest sports venue in America and the eighth-largest in the world according to Wikipedia, possesses enough seats for approximately 160,000 people. The current attendance record for a college football game is 115,109 set in September when Notre Dame and Michigan played in Ann Arbor, Mich.

The idea for the game is not something new. Bruton Smith, the chairman and CEO of Speedway Motorsports, Inc., has wanted to do this for more

than a decade, and a Tech-Tennessee matchup represents the best geographical fit for a game at the speedway.

"It really is amazing and fantastic to be here [Oct. 14] to talk about making this game a reality because I remember being in Jeff Byrd's office [the former president of the Bristol Motor Speedway], along with my dad, Bruton Smith, and Jerry [Caldwell, the general manager of the Speedway], and we talked about this idea and thought it would be awesome if we could ever do that," said Marcus Smith, President and COO of Speedway Motor Sports. "At the time, it was just a crazy idea, but if you know anything about Bruton Smith, he has a habit of making dreams a reality, and that's come to fruition."

Despite residing four hours from each other, Tech and Tennessee have not played football in the regular season since 1937, though the two

programs did meet in the 1994 Gator Bowl (a 45-23 Tennessee victory) and the 2009 Chick-fil-A Bowl (a 37-14 Tech win). The Volunteers own a 5-3 advantage in the series.

"It's very special to be here on this day that the announcement is made," Tech Director of Athletics Jim Weaver said. "Seventeen years ago, I just came to Virginia Tech, and I remember talking to Doug Dickey [former Tennessee Director of Athletics] about the possibility of the game.

"Then, Dave Hart [current Tennessee Director of Athletics], a great friend for many years, and I engaged in some dialogue this past summer. We worked together with Jerry, and it's a reality that's as big as anything that's ever happened in the world of football."

Information on how to purchase tickets for the Battle at Bristol will be forthcoming in the near future.

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The Hokies dropped a tough one to Duke, but Andrew Miller did his part, recording 20 knockdown blocks against the Blue Devils – one of the best performances ever by an offensive lineman under head coach Frank Beamer.

AFTER WRESTLING WITH DECISION, MILLER MAKES HIS MARK IN FOOTBALL

Offensive lineman Andrew Miller gave up a potentially great career in wrestling to go to the mat in football – a decision that has turned out well for both him and the Hokies

by Jimmy Robertson

Kevin Dresser remembers the phone call vividly.

It came in February of 2008, in the midst of his second season as the Virginia Tech wrestling coach. The man on the other end was someone with name recognition in Blacksburg and the surrounding parts – Tech football coach Frank Beamer.

“Coach, I’m down here in Bassett [Va.],” Beamer told him.

This wasn’t good news for Dresser. He knew then Beamer wasn’t calling to exchange pleasantries. After all, Bassett served as the home of Andrew Miller, Dresser’s top wrestling recruit and arguably the top wrestling recruit in the country. Dresser had already secured Miller’s

signature on a letter of intent, but he knew Miller also played football, and Beamer’s call meant bad news for him.

“He said, ‘We’re looking at this Miller kid and we really like him, and I think we’re going to take him off your hands,’” Dresser said. “I was like, ‘Oh ... great.’ I had offered Andrew a full ride, and we don’t do that in wrestling. We do that about once every four years.

“I knew then I was getting him [Miller] two months and they were getting him 10.”

Dresser laughs about the conversation now and certainly harbors no animosity toward Miller or the football coaches, even though Miller gave up wrestling basically after a year to concentrate on football. He respects Miller and respects

his family. Dresser has known Miller’s father, Johnny, since the early 1990s.

That respect has only grown, particularly after watching Miller become a three-year starter on Tech’s offensive line and one of this year’s team captains. Miller carries 296 pounds on his frame, but he carries much more weight in the locker room because of his toughness and work ethic – two traits of importance to a man like Dresser.

“I knew there was more of a future in football,” Miller said. “The thing that wrestling just can’t relate to is Lane Stadium. You’ve got all the fans. My passion for wrestling ... I just realized I had more of a future in football.”

Dresser understands. He is still one of Miller’s biggest fans.

But he still wonders.

“There are a lot of times when I wish I could have him,” Dresser said, wistfully. “I’d like to have him when the season gets over this year. I sit back and wonder many times ‘What if?’ But he’s doing the right thing. This is his shot. How many college players get a shot to play in the NFL? If he stays healthy, this guy is a good bet. He’s a calculated risk.

“I’d take him in a heartbeat.”

Miller’s path to athletics excellence in two sports began on an approximately 100-acre farm in Henry County, a plot of soil that his family uses to raise beef cattle and grow hay.

But for the Millers, athletics success was practically the family business.

All four of the Miller children played collegiately. The oldest, John Jr., played offensive tackle at Duke from 1999-2002 and graduated in 2002. The only daughter in the quartet, Heather, scored a school-record 2,395 points in her career at Bassett High School before going on to play basketball at Wake Forest and finishing her career in 2004. Tim Miller, three years older than Andrew, wrestled at Tech before getting his degree in finance in 2010.

“Of course, me,” Andrew said, smiling, when asked who was the best athlete in his family. “But if you asked any one of us, they’d say themselves just because we’re all competitive.”

That the four children became such good athletes and went to college is a testament to Johnny Miller, who raised the children after the tragic death of his wife and the kids’ mother, Linda.

Linda Miller passed away the summer before Andrew’s seventh grade year after a bout with breast cancer. Her death left a huge void in the family, one that could never be replaced.

“It was really difficult, but I had a good family,” Andrew said. “We had each other’s backs. Everybody just worked together, and we were there for each other when needed. It’s still tough to think about even now. Just losing someone that important to you in your life, that’s real tough.”

But Johnny Miller kept his two youngest sons on track, with an assist from Linda’s parents (the other two children were already in college). He got up every morning and made them breakfast, usually a combination of eggs, pancakes and sausage. The pancakes were about an inch and a half thick, and the gravy for the biscuits resembled Jell-O, but Andrew and Tim appreciated the effort.

Johnny also kept them involved in sports. Both of them played football and wrestled, and in their spare time, they lifted weights. Johnny got involved in coaching, helping with the eighth grade football team.

Usually, after practice, the two boys headed over to their grandparents’ house, which sat on the family farm as well, along with the home of their uncle, Tim Moore. Miller’s grandmother would fix the boys dinner.

“We didn’t get an allowance,” Andrew said. “We had to go work for it. They [his brothers] did it for the money, and I did, too, but I enjoyed it.”

The two kids became good athletes, thanks to their father’s coaching and discipline and



Andrew Miller started his career as a center, but Tech’s coaching staff moved him to guard this season to help a young and inexperienced offensive line.

“She is the best cook I’ve ever seen,” Miller said. “Her biscuits and gravy are the best thing in this world. She treated us right. Every night, we’d have dinner with my granny and grandpa. Their house is like a second house to me.”

The two boys honed their work ethic while working with their uncle and their grandfather, Eldean Moore, on the family farm. The chores consisted of fixing fences, plowing the garden, raking hay and any other task that comes up while living on a farm.

Andrew loved everything about the farm. He loved the work, and he loved being outdoors, with the freedom to roam where he wanted. He also liked the pay that came as a result of the work, as his grandpa lined his and his brother’s pockets with spending money.

the work ethic derived from their farm chores. It all added up to bigger things for them – and especially Andrew.

Dresser first came across the Miller family while serving as the coach at Grundy High School in deep Southwest Virginia. Following a regional match, Johnny Miller walked up to Dresser and introduced himself.

“He told me that if he had had his older son [John Jr.] with me at Grundy, then who knows how good he would have been,” Dresser said. “Then I moved to Christiansburg in 1996, and Johnny started showing up with his two youngest sons.”

For two nights a week from March through the summer, Johnny made the 90-minute trip

from Bassett to Christiansburg with his two sons just so they could work out with Dresser and the wrestlers in Dresser's mat club. He paid the fee for each son to join Dresser's club team, and he paid all the expenses when Dresser took them to places like New Mexico and North Dakota to compete.

Tim eventually went on to wrestle at Tech with Dresser. Andrew morphed into one of the nation's best wrestlers, eventually winning two state championships as a heavyweight at Bassett High.

"I was always into sports, lifting or wrestling or football year round," Andrew said. "My dad always had us into something. I'd go practice wrestling in middle school with the high school team. I remember practicing football in sixth grade with the eighth grade team before they did away with it [the eighth grade team]. My dad was helping coach [the eighth grade team], so they [the coaches] fitted me up [with football gear] and I'd go and practice with them.

"Wrestling started as just a way of helping me get better with football. Then it grew on me

and grew on me, and I started getting better and better. I actually became better at wrestling than I was at football there for a while. But I've always had a love for football. I still miss wrestling, but football has always been the sport for me."

That love of football and his close relationship with his brother led Andrew to choose Virginia

“Wrestling started as just a way of helping me get better with football. Then it grew on me and grew on me, and I started getting better and better. I actually became better at wrestling than I was at football there for a while. But I've always had a love for football. I still miss wrestling, but football has always been the sport for me.”

– Andrew Miller on wrestling

Tech. He decided to work out with the wrestling team while taking a redshirt year in football, and he wrestled in one match, but a shoulder injury suffered coincidentally while wrestling in North Dakota started bothering him and ultimately resulted in surgery that ended his wrestling season.

As a redshirt freshman on the offensive line, he played in 10 games on the gridiron, gaining some valuable experience. He played well for the most part, but got a bit of a lesson in the North Carolina

game against Quinton Coples, who ended up being a first-round draft pick in the NFL Draft.

"It was ugly," he said.

Miller decided not to compete again in wrestling. He earned a starting role on the football team as a redshirt sophomore and wanted to keep his weight between 290 and 300 – above the NCAA's 285-pound limit for a heavyweight wrestler. Plus, the football coaches understandably did not want him to run the risk of getting injured.

He was willing to help out the wrestling program, though. The past two years, he helped in the wrestling room by getting heavyweight David Marone ready for the ACC Championships and the NCAA Championships, working out with Marone in various drills. Marone won an ACC title last year.

"Both sports are really tough," Miller said. "You have to be mentally tough and be willing to beat yourself up in wrestling. You have to be smarter in football. In football, you have a lot of plays, and you have to learn a lot more. You put a lot of hours in watching film and studying the sport, and then the practices are longer, but not as exhausting. In wrestling, it's just so exhausting. Wrestling is just a grind. You have to have a lot of endurance."

Miller graduated last May with a degree in agribusiness. For the past two years, including

this one, he served as the lynchpin of the offensive line, though last season was cut short because of a broken ankle suffered midway through the year.

He changed positions this spring, as new offensive line coach Jeff Grimes moved him to guard. The versatility not only helps the Hokies on the field, but it also helps Grimes by giving him an example to show Tech's younger offensive linemen.

"You would certainly hope that you'd have one guy who was your bell cow, so to speak," Grimes said. "You'd like to have more. But if you

have one guy that you can consistently point to and say, 'See how this guys works? That's why he plays on Saturday the way that he does.'

"Andrew earns the right to play well because he practices hard every week, and he prepares mentally. He watches film. He studies. It's important to him, and it makes my job easier."


Miller's decision to stick with football has paid off for him, and it may pay off more handsomely next May. Most of the NFL Draft "experts" expect him to get taken in May's draft. Playing in the NFL would give him plenty of money to buy his own farm and own equipment, taking

him back to his roots.

Giving up wrestling would have been a small price to pay if that dream pans out, though he may always wonder what the future would have held for him in that sport.

"It would have been interesting," he said.

Of course, one person thinks he knows exactly what Miller's future would have held.

"If he would have concentrated on wrestling all the way through, he was definitely a top-four guy in the nation," Dresser said. "He'd have been an All-American. There's no question. I can say that without any hesitation." 

GETTING TO KNOW ANDREW MILLER

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

Miller: "I go to Claytor Lake a lot and do some night fishing. I hang out with friends. We do a lot of hanging out together and playing cornhole. We'll go to the pool on Fridays and just relax. That's pretty much what we did this summer – go to the pool, play cornhole, maybe go to the river."

Q: Facebook or Twitter?

Miller: "I don't do much on social media at all. I have them, but I never say anything on them."

Q: What's your favorite TV show?

Miller: "Game of Thrones. That's more my style. I also like Dexter. That's what I do with a lot of my free time – watch TV shows."

Q: Who's your favorite NFL player?

Miller: "I'd say Jeff Saturday [former Indianapolis Colts and Green Bay Packers center]. I don't really have one. I didn't watch a lot of NFL growing up. Jeff Saturday was the best center, and he played so long. He never got injured. That's what I admired about him."

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

Miller: "Chuck Norris. It would have to be him. He whips everyone's tail. Plus, I'd like to feel the power of his beard."

Q: What's been your favorite moment at Tech?

Miller: "My favorite moment was the first time I came out to Enter Sandman. It was built up. Everyone talks about it and then you get in there, and it's a real moment. We've got some of the best fans in the nation and one of the loudest stadiums in the nation. It was wild. It really gets you into that mindset. If I hear someone playing Enter Sandman, I tell them to turn it off because that's automatically going to get me fired up."

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

Miller: "Who knows? Hopefully, I'm settled down with a nice house in the country with a pond and a hunting dog. The NFL is a goal, but I like to take one step at a time and see where it takes me. You can't put all your eggs in one basket."

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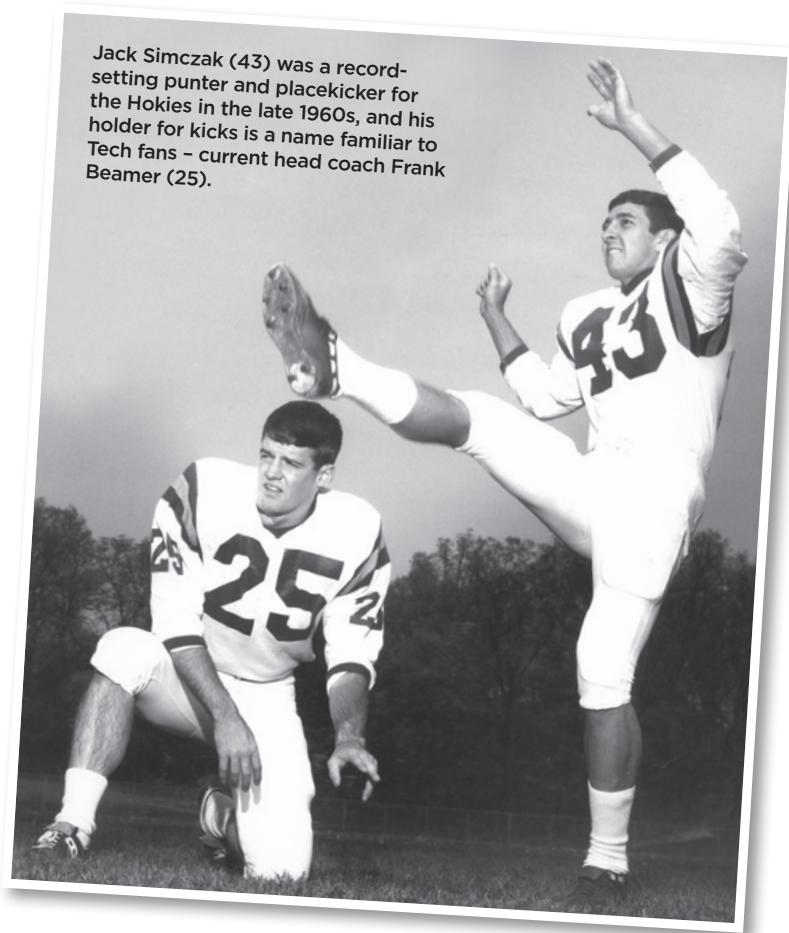
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FOOTBALL STILL IN HIS BLOOD

Former Tech kicker and punter Jack Simczak has retired and moved to South Carolina with his wife, but he hasn't quite given up the game he loves

by Jimmy Robertson



Jack Simczak (43) was a record-setting punter and placekicker for the Hokies in the late 1960s, and his holder for kicks is a name familiar to Tech fans – current head coach Frank Beamer (25).

Jack Simczak doesn't spend much of his spare time on the Internet. So he expressed surprise when his wife informed him recently that one of his records at Tech had been broken.

"I said, 'What was that?'" Simczak said. "She said [punt] yardage against Alabama on X amount of punts. I told her that wasn't a really good record."

Then he added, laughing, "The 55-yarder was nice for a while [his 55-yard field goal against Kentucky in 1969 was a school record at the time], but ... I don't know how quite to take that one."

The former Tech kicker and punter set a record with 564 yards punting in the Hokies' game against Alabama in 1968, a record that stood until this year when A.J. Hughes' 586 yards punting, coincidentally also against the Crimson Tide, in the season opener broke the record. Simczak's record of 14 punts in a game, which also came in that 1968 Alabama game, still stands, as Hughes came up a punt short of tying that mark.

Simczak doesn't remember much about that game, nor does he have any fond memories of playing the Crimson Tide – Tech and Alabama played three times in his career. On one occasion, he got injured, suffering a hip pointer that caused him to miss a few games.

"I do remember kicking off, and I do remember [Alabama coach] Bear Bryant wanted me out of the game," he said. "He sent three guys at me, and they made contact, and I think each part of my body went in a different direction. I got a hip pointer. I was able to continue on in that game,

but I missed three or four games after that. But I'm not remembering what year that was.

"I have a friend, and he can tell me about every play he played at Virginia Tech. Who he tackled, what yard line, things like that, but I just don't have a whole lot of recollection on what I did or did not do at Virginia Tech."

What he did was become one of the best punters and kickers in school history. He averaged 41.2 yards per punt as a sophomore, breaking the school record, and his career average of 39.3 yards per punt also set a school record. Both have since been broken.

Simczak also served as one of the rare football players who both punted and kicked. He made 59 of 64 extra points and he also connected on 21 field goals in his career, including the 55-yarder against Kentucky.

That Simczak made it to college and became a good kicker is a success story. The Highland Park, N.J., native sat the bench for three years in high school before winning the starting quarterback job as a senior. By the end of the season, he started getting college scholarship offers.

But he had never thought about going to college. He always expected to work at the local General Motors plant, just like his dad did.

"My father talked to the high school coach, and we came up with the idea to send me to Fork Union Military Academy," Simczak said. "My dad had to take out a second mortgage so I could go. I took the courses that I needed, and I was able to get my college entrance scores where they needed

to be."

The Vietnam conflict occurred during this time, and like many young men, Simczak thought he would get drafted. A shoulder injury, though, caused him to fail his physical, thus leaving him an opportunity to go to college after his year at Fork Union.

He got his test scores late and appeared to be stuck without a school. He called Terry Strook, a former Tech player and assistant, and asked for a scholarship.

"He didn't know if there was anything he could do," Simczak said. "A week later, he called me and told me that they had found me a scholarship. That's how I ended up at Virginia Tech."

When he arrived on campus, he immediately ran into Luke Linden, the equipment manager at the time. Linden asked Simczak if he was the kicker. Simczak wasn't sure. He expected to play quarterback, though he had done some kicking.

Linden wanted to see Simczak punt. So Simczak put down his suitcase and changed into his kicking shoes. Gene Fisher, Tech's punter at the time, was working on his punting, and Simczak joined in, kicking the ball just as far as Fisher.

"I guess that's how the whole thing started," Simczak said. "Then, when we played Navy, the plebes [first-year students at the military academies] – we couldn't play varsity football back then – and I was punting. We didn't make a first down, and Coach [Dick] Redding wanted me to go in and punt. I said, 'Coach, let me try a field

goal.' He said, 'No, it's too far.' I said, 'But I think I can make it.' He finally let me try it, and I made it. I think it was around 38 yards.

"He called Coach Claiborne and my quarterback days came to an end. Coach [Jerry] Claiborne was a big advocate of special teams and the kicking game."

Simczak served as the starter for three years from 1968-70. In 1971, he graduated with a degree in physical education.

That spring, the Denver Broncos drafted him and later released him. He tried to latch on with the New York Giants, but that situation didn't work out either. He later played for the Philadelphia Bell of the World Football League.

Simczak then went back to New Jersey and began a career as a businessman, starting up a few small businesses and making "a few bucks here and there." But he missed football and took advantage of an opportunity that presented itself to allow him to get back in the game.

"I don't know how many years later, but I got a call from my [former] roommate at Virginia Tech," Simczak said. "I knew him from New Jersey because I had run track against him. He got a head coaching job at Perth Amboy High School and called me and asked me if I wanted a job coaching. I said, 'Well, what do I have to do?' He said, 'You're going to have to be a teacher.' I didn't know if I wanted to be a teacher, but I

followed him and went over there. I became a full-time substitute teacher, and I coached football and track for three years. I pretty much worked with the special teams.

"I had some businesses and did what I had to do to survive. I got married, and I've got a great wife. She was influential in my coaching. She watched me and told me, 'You see things that other people don't see.' So I ended up starting my own kicking camp. I'd do one-on-one coaching, and I'm still doing that to this day."

Three years ago, Simczak and his wife sold their home on the Jersey shore and moved to Goose Creek, S.C., near Charleston. Simczak had recovered from open-heart surgery, but as he pointed out, "Blizzards and open-heart surgery do not mix."

Rather than play golf every day, he decided to talk to the coach at Goose Creek High School and offer to help as a volunteer. Chuck Reedy, a former head coach at Baylor and current Goose Creek coach, accepted the offer, and Simczak has been working with the kickers and special teams ever since. Three years ago, Goose Creek won a state championship.

Simczak works with kickers during the offseason and has his own website - www.jacksimcsakmomentumkicking.com/default.html. Kickers from as far as New Jersey have traveled to South Carolina to receive instruction


from him.

"It's been fun, and it gets me out of the house," he said. "I'm just not playing golf every day now, but I truly enjoy it. You just can't take the football out of the football player."

Simczak keeps in touch with many of his former teammates and gets to Blacksburg on occasion. He plans on coming up next spring for the spring game.

A group of his teammates get together every January in Myrtle Beach, S.C., to play golf, but mostly to reminisce about the old days. Simczak may not remember vividly the specific plays and games, but he remembers the impact that playing football at Virginia Tech had on his life.

"Coach Claiborne was a disciplinarian. That was the best thing that happened to me – being able to survive what we went through," he said. "We had 80-some guys come as freshmen or something like that, and out of all those players, only 10 or 11 made it to be seniors. That was a heckuva accomplishment to do that because it wasn't easy."

"There were times I wanted to quit, but I couldn't because of my parents. I remember lying in bed with tears in my eyes because I was so sore that I couldn't sleep. There were times I didn't think I could do it, and I thought about my parents and what they had invested in this. I knew I had to stick it out, and I'm glad that I did." 

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Tyrel Wilson doesn't have a lot of free time because of his responsibilities with football and academics, but longboarding around campus has become one of his newfound passions.



ROLLING WITH HIS ROLE

Tyrel Wilson hasn't gotten a lot of attention in his career for his role on Tech's defensive line, but he has earned the respect of his teammates and coaches for his work ethic and unselfish attitude

by Jimmy Robertson

He had spent four years as a football player and never done a radio interview. And of course, he received his first invitation to be on Tech Talk Live!, the athletics department's live Monday night radio show at Bull & Bones Brewhaus and Grill, only moments before he was scheduled to be there and on the air.

Tyrel Wilson managed to arrive on time. But he was nervous.

"I'm the type of person who likes to be prepared and know what's going on," he said. "But I had a blast doing it. I was cracking jokes, and even asked for Coach Beamer's autograph as he was going on the radio.

"I don't mind it, but I don't seek attention. That's not my type of thing."

That may explain why Tech fans know so little about this young man. Sure, they recognize his name, but for someone who has played in nearly 50 games (49 as of the time of this writing) and started a handful in his career, he generates little in the way of conversation among Hokie Nation.

That's not to diminish his role. Yes, he doesn't record the sacks of a James Gayle or the interceptions of a Kendall Fuller or the sheer volume of tackles of a Jack Tyler. But he plays his defensive end position with the consistency and dependability that coaches love. He is one of those blue-collar, behind-the-scenes types of players, the type who help their teams win games and championships and also the type who tend to be taken for granted.

"Not by me," Tech defensive line coach Charley Wiles said.

As his collegiate days wind down, Wilson spends his free time prepping for the final few games of the season and crafting his newfound hobby – longboarding. Coming out of Hampton High School in the Tidewater part of the state, he never expected to be playing for Wiles. He never expected to be a defensive end. He played linebacker for the Crabbers and helped them win a state championship in 2005, along with a name actually quite familiar to Tech fans – Tyrod Taylor.

In September of his senior year, he committed to Tech over Tennessee, choosing the Hokies primarily because of Bud Foster, Tech's defensive coordinator. He liked Foster's scheme and expected to play for him at the backer position.

"He was hard nosed and had a defense that bashed people in the mouth," Wilson said. "That's what I grew up with in high school. He [Foster] was always talking about your motor and 11 hats to the ball. I liked that mentality. It also beat that eight-hour trip to Knoxville. You could see Blacksburg loved Virginia Tech and loved football. It all just fit in together."

Perhaps Wilson was destined to play defensive end, though. After all, his father, James, played the position, carving out a nice career at Tennessee and later going to the NFL.

James Wilson, who won three state championships



Tyrel Wilson's steady and unselfish play over the past four seasons has earned him the respect of both his teammates and the coaching staff.

at the same Hampton High during his playing days in the mid-1980s, actually signed with Tech in 1989. But a series of circumstances, mostly beyond his control, led to him being released from his letter of intent by head coach Frank Beamer. He wound up at Tennessee, where he recorded 104 tackles and 20.5 sacks in his career.

Tyrel was born during his dad's playing days at Tennessee, and he vaguely remembers going to some games. He remembers sitting in the end zone with his grandfather underneath a poncho watching his dad play in the rain.

After a stint with the Detroit Lions, James Wilson moved his family back to his hometown of Hampton. He later played in NFL Europe, but has been a firefighter for the city of Suffolk for many years, while his wife, Shari, currently works as a real estate agent. Together, they have raised their three sons admirably in a disciplined manner, keeping them away from the troubles that tend to grab young people in that area.

"I think growing up in Hampton made me who I am," Tyrel said. "A lot of people are like, 'How can you live here?' just because of the area and all the drama that goes on. But it's my city. I've always carried my city on my back. I always try to represent and be that good one that got out of there."

"My parents had certain requirements. They weren't letting me out running around. I had to be home at a certain time. But I never had time to do anything. I was always doing sports, and I was happy doing that."

"But I had to maintain my grades and I had to do chores. I had to cut the grass and do stuff like that.

But my parents weren't overly strict. I had my share of chores, but at the same time, they would let me experience things. As long as I did my part, I was fine."

That's what he has done here at Tech – his part. For starters, he took care of things in the classroom, graduating last May with a degree in sociology. As part of his degree requirements, he performed an internship with the Virginia Tech Police Department, and he may pursue a career in law enforcement down the road.

On the field, he has given Tech solid reps as a reserve, playing in every game his first three seasons at Tech after taking a redshirt year during the 2009 season. This season, he has played in every game except for one, missing the Western Carolina game with a knee injury. He also participates on special teams.

"He's been a great teammate and a good player," Wiles said. "He's just a great kid, a great person and a big part of the team. I know he wants to play more, but we're fortunate to have a lot of good defensive ends this year and that limits reps for everybody. But I trust him. He's been a great asset to the team."

"Every sport I've played, I've started," Wilson said. "I've never been the second guy. But at this point, I know my role on the team, and I try to help out as much as I can. It's a team, not an 'I'. It's not an individual sport. I've learn to adapt and done what I needed to do."

Wilson may not be grabbing the headlines every Saturday for the Hokies. He may not be directly under the glare of the spotlight. But when he gets on the field, he gets the job done.

For that, Hokie Nation should take notice. 

GETTING TO KNOW TYREL WILSON

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

Wilson: "It depends on whom I'm hanging out with. Here lately, I've been hanging out with David Wang. We picked up longboarding, so I'd probably be longboarding or sitting around talking or laughing. We might stroll through downtown Blacksburg and see what's going on. But it's usually sitting around doing nothing."

Q: Who is your favorite NFL player?

Wilson: "I probably shouldn't say this because he's been in some trouble, but Aldon Smith [San Francisco outside linebacker] is one of my favorite players. Also, Dwight Freeney [San Diego defensive end]. I like how they play. Everyone asks me if I have a favorite team,

but I don't really. I just like certain players from different teams. That's more my thing. I don't necessarily like the impact player, either. I like the player who goes out and plays hard."

Q: What's your favorite TV show?

Wilson: "I can give you a favorite network. I don't know if I can give you a favorite TV show. It's the Discovery Channel. I don't watch anything but the Discovery Channel and the History Channel. I tell myself that if I'm watching TV, at least I'm learning."

Q: Why do you wear the No. 66?

Wilson: "I wore No. 33 in high school. I wanted No. 45, but one of the older guys had it, so I couldn't get it. I was going to wear 33 and then change to

45. I was only playing defensive end, and then the [high school] coaches said, 'We need you to play left tackle,' and I said, 'I don't want to play left tackle.' But then they started making these plays where I was cracking back on the linebacker, and I started having fun with it. I was like, 'Cool. I can do this all day.' But I had to change my number. There was another number – I don't remember what it was – and 66, and I took 66. I kept it, and when I got up here [to Tech], it was available."

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

Wilson: "To be honest, I wouldn't want to be anyone else. I like my life. I'd want improvements, but there is no one else I'd honestly want to be. Everyone has issues. I don't know what their issues in life

might be, and they might have it worse than me. My mom always says somebody has it worse. I'd like to add a couple of million to my bank account, but I'd rather just be me."

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

Wilson: "Ten years from now, I'll probably be married and happy. Maybe I'll have a kid. Career-wise, hopefully I'm doing a job that I can help other people. I don't know what it will be, but hopefully I'm helping other people."

I'm leaning toward being a U.S. Marshal. Or maybe sell some real estate. My mom is going to have her brokerage license. My dad is a firefighter, so if all else fails, I'll go be a firefighter for a little bit to have a job. I don't know anything else but football, so I can't see what I would do every day."

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SIX INDUCTED INTO THE VIRGINIA TECH SPORTS HALL OF FAME

by Jimmy Robertson

On Nov. 15, the Virginia Tech athletics department inducted six new members into the Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame at a banquet on the Tech campus. The new inductees bring the total number enshrined to 169. The Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame was established in 1982. Here's a closer look at each new inductee:

JOE SAUNDERS

Joe Saunders has many memories of his playing days at Virginia Tech. But one that stands out couldn't exactly be classified as "fond."

"I remember getting mono [mononucleosis] and pitching in a regional game [NCAA] at Cal State Fullerton," Saunders said. "That one stands out."



Saunders, who missed the Atlantic 10 tournament that year because of his sickness, suffered a loss to the Titans, giving up six runs in seven innings. But that was a rare blip on an otherwise fantastic collegiate career.

His career at Tech almost didn't occur. The Philadelphia Phillies selected Saunders in the fifth round of Major League Baseball's amateur draft in June of 1999 following Saunders' senior season at West Springfield High School. He contemplated signing with the Phillies, who offered him a six-figure contract, but his parents – both Tech graduates – wanted him to come to Blacksburg, and he ultimately decided that playing college baseball would be best for him.

"That was an important decision in my life," Saunders said. "I definitely think it was the right decision. You always wonder 'what if,' but I can't imagine what if I hadn't gone to Tech. I developed as a player and I met my wife there. I have a good life now and I'm enjoying every minute of it, and that wouldn't have been possible if I hadn't made the right decision."

Saunders won nine games in each of his three seasons at Tech. He became the only Tech pitcher to win nine or more games in three consecutive

seasons when he went 9-2 in 2002. He led the Big East in strikeouts with 102 in 97.2 innings, while walking just 22 batters. His 1.81 ERA in league games was the best of any Big East starter and his overall ERA of 2.86 was a personal best. He was a first-team All-Big East pick.

Saunders' 27 career pitching victories rank third on the school's all-time list. After his junior season, he became the Hokies' highest draft pick ever, going in the first round to the Anaheim Angels, who selected him with the 12th overall pick in Major League Baseball's amateur draft. He signed with the Angels, thus ending his career at Tech.

"I think my best memories are just traveling with the team and hanging out with the guys," Saunders said. "Playing cards in the hotel room, just having fun. The fun for me was the friendships that developed and all the people I got to meet."

After signing with the Angels in 2002, Saunders spent three seasons in the minors and was named the Angels' Organization's Pitcher of the Year in 2005. He made his major league debut on Aug. 16, 2005, against the Toronto Blue Jays and was selected for the Major League Baseball All-Star Game in 2008. Over his nine full seasons in the majors, he has pitched for the Angels, Arizona Diamondbacks, Baltimore Orioles and currently the Seattle Mariners.

Saunders, his wife Shanel – a former Tech softball player – and their two children live in Arizona.

CLARISA CROWELL

Clarisa Crowell opened the letter from Virginia Tech AD Jim Weaver this summer and did a double take. She expressed disbelief that she, of all people, was going to be inducted into the Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame.



"I was taken off guard," she said. "My first thought was, 'Was this supposed to be sent to me?' In addition to being shocked, I was humbled and honored."

"It's a great opportunity for me to represent our softball program. That's the most important thing

to me about this induction. I don't feel like it's about me. It's about the entire program. I wouldn't have been able to do what I did without my teammates."

Crowell's modesty is enduring, but truthfully, her play from 1999-2002 was a main reason why the Hokies enjoyed so much success during her time in Blacksburg. She batted .289 for her career, with 16 home runs and 35 doubles, while also going 65-25 in the circle. She finished her career with a 1.39 earned run average and 475 strikeouts.

As a freshman, Crowell went 25-8 with an ERA of just 1.05, had 209 strikeouts and three no-hitters, and earned a spot on the Atlantic 10 All-Conference Team. In 2000, she was named to the Atlantic 10 All-Conference Team as an outfielder and was named to the Virginia all-state team as a pitcher and an outfielder as voted on by state sports information directors, becoming the first player in state history to make the team at two different positions in the same year. She hit .296 with nine home runs and went 20-8 in the circle with a 1.48 ERA.

Her junior season, Crowell moved to third base when not pitching and posted an ERA of 1.26 while hitting .240. In her final campaign, she earned first-team all-region and second-team All-Big East honors as a third baseman. She led the team with a .367 batting average and had 11 doubles and 30 RBIs.

Crowell still stands second all-time at Tech in winning percentage as a pitcher (.722) and remains third in career ERA and shutouts (26), and fourth in wins and complete games (62). She is ninth in career runs batted in (103) and 10th in career hits (200), doubles and runs scored (104).

Crowell became just the second Tech softball player inducted into the Hall of Fame, joining Michelle Meadows, who was inducted in 2010.

"There have been so many great players in Virginia Tech history," she said. "I played with some great players myself. Ashlee Dobbe was a phenomenal pitcher, Carmen Farmer was a great player, Kara Krumhardt ... the list goes on and on. For me to have been chosen among that group, that's a pretty special award because they're all great players. I'm humbled and honored, and hopefully in the future, some of those other great players will be inducted."

Today, Crowell, who graduated in 2002 with a degree in psychology, is in her second year as the head softball coach at Miami University in Ohio. She spent the previous six seasons as the pitching coach at Oklahoma State, leading the Cowgirls to the Women's College World Series in 2011.

JIMMY MILLEY



Jimmy Milley grew up in Danville, Va., and like many in that area of this state, he became somewhat fond of the North Carolina Tar Heels, whose campus resides roughly 90 minutes from Danville.

He liked the Tar Heels' tennis program, but when it came time to make a college choice, he took a more practical view of the situation.

"There were three children coming up behind me, so I needed to go where I could get some scholarship help," Milley said.

Then-Tech coach Joe Collins offered Milley a scholarship and it turned out to be an astute decision, as Milley elevated the Tech men's tennis program in the mid-1970s. He beat out former teammate and current good friend Tom Hood for the No. 1 spot, and as a senior, he became the first Tech player to earn a national ranking and the first to participate in the NCAA singles championships.

"Carolina had such a good tennis team at the time, but I probably would have gotten lost there," Milley said. "Virginia Tech was the best place I could have gone. I got to play No. 1 right off the bat and got to play a lot of good players at that position."

As a freshman, Milley posted a 12-13 mark,

playing against the opposing team's best players. That group included a couple of players whom Milley grew up admiring – North Carolina's Billy Brock and Maryland's John Lucas, who was an outstanding basketball player, too. Both of those players were All-Americans.

Milley nearly upset Brock. He won the first set 6-2 and led the second set 4-2. But Brock won the next 10 games to win the match.

Milley went 20-3 as a sophomore and 20-7 as a junior in singles competition. As a senior, he put together arguably the best season ever by a Tech men's tennis player.

He went 27-2 in 1979 – a season that still stands as the best single-season finish for a Tech tennis player. He became the first Tech player to participate in the NCAA Singles Championships, but his season ended when he lost in the first round to the No. 4 seed, Robert Van't Hof of the University of Southern California. Van't Hof went on to win the national championship the next season, played professionally for a while and later served as former professional star Lindsay Davenport's coach.

Still, the defeat didn't blemish Milley's accomplishments or his career.

"I would always watch the guys I was getting ready to play and think that they were very good, and then I'd get on the court with them and do fairly well against them," he said. "That was right about the time when players started lifting weights. Before that, it was frowned upon for a tennis player to lift weights, but we did lift some weights back then and that helped. And when I went to Tech, that was the first time I had played tennis year round. That helped, too."

Immediately after graduating from Tech with a degree in mass communications, Milley spent some time on the professional circuit, earning Association of Tennis Pros ranking points in singles and doubles, while playing in satellite tournaments on the East Coast and in Europe. He was invited to participate in two Grand Prix tournaments.

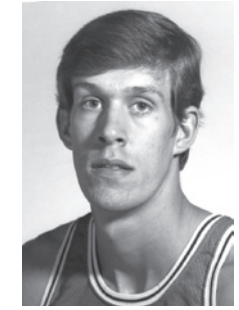
It was quite a tennis career from a man who never had a lesson growing up in Danville.

"I just started playing with my dad," Milley said. "He would hit with his friends, and I would hit with him. I never really had any lessons."

"I played a lot with a guy named Ron Charity [an African-American tennis player who helped coach Arthur Ashe]. He helped start The Arthur Ashe Foundation. He didn't teach me, but we played a lot. I guess I was just blessed with good hand-eye coordination."

Milley currently lives in Richmond, Va., where he works as an operating room nurse at Memorial Regional Medical Center.

BOBBY BEECHER



As a kid, Bobby Beecher never harbored any aspirations of playing basketball. He never gave the sport a second thought until his dad, who had played basketball at Kentucky for legendary coach Adolph Rupp, talked him into it two years after the family had moved from New Jersey to North Carolina.

"It [basketball] didn't interest me," Beecher said. "We moved down from New Jersey when I was in the fourth grade. My dad just came to me when I was in the sixth or seventh grade and said, 'I want you to try basketball.' I wasn't tall at the time. I hadn't had my growth spurt at the time. It wasn't until the eighth or ninth grade when I really started growing. He asked me to try it, and I did and started enjoying it."

Thank goodness for fathers with a keen eye for seeing potential in their children.

Beecher went on to become a key cog for then-coach Charlie Moir on those great Tech basketball teams of the early 1980s. He, Dell Curry and Keith Colbert formed one of the top-rated recruiting classes in Tech men's basketball history, and the trio propelled the Hokies back into prominence. Curry went on to become the school's leading scorer at the time (he's still second), but Beecher was successful, too.

In fact, the 6-foot-9 forward started 33 of 34 games as a freshman during the 1982-83 season and led the team in field-goal percentage (57 percent) and free-throw percentage (91.3 percent) while averaging 13.7 points and 6.1 rebounds per game. He was named the Metro Conference Freshman of the Year, beating out Curry for the honor.

"I don't boast on things, but it was an accomplishment that I was proud of," Beecher said. "That was a surprise, when you have guys like Dell Curry. To this day, a lot of people don't realize that."

"Playing with Dell was enjoyable because we were successful. I've made this comment so many times, but we played team basketball. There were so many nights – more so with Dell because he was a great shooter – but when someone got hot, the ball was fed to that person. It was a team effort rather than just relying on one or two people."

Beecher averaged 9.8 points per game as a sophomore and led the team with 46 blocked shots as the Hokies received a National Invitation Tournament berth for the second straight year. His junior year, he averaged 11.8 points and 6.2

rebounds per game, helping Tech receive an NCAA Tournament bid. That summer, he played on the USA team in the World University Games.

As a senior, Beecher averaged 14.3 points and 7.9 rebounds to finish his Tech career eighth in scoring (1,548 points) and sixth in rebounds (797). He played in 128 of 129 games as a Hokie, starting 126. Currently, he still ranks third all-time at Tech in blocked shots (170) and stands in the top 10 in career rebounds, field goals made (640) and free-throw percentage (.807). He is 16th all-time in scoring.

Beecher's most memorable moment – and the most memorable basketball moment of many Tech fans – came during that 1985-86 season when the Hokies knocked off No. 2 Memphis at Cassell Coliseum. Memphis was slated to go to No. 1 in the polls before the Hokies knocked off the Tigers.

Today, people still bring up that game in general conversations with Beecher.

"It's amazing. A lot of people remember it better than I do sometimes," he said. "A lot of people can remember exactly where they were that day."

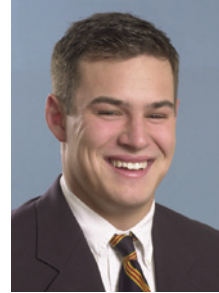
"I remember just the excitement. A lot of people don't realize this, but back when I played with Dell Curry and those guys, we had students camping out for tickets for every home game. It was a packed house every night, but that game especially, it was over the top as far as the excitement and the

crowd. It was just electric. Everyone played well that game."

Beecher, who was selected in the fourth round of the 1986 NBA Draft by the Sacramento Kings, earned his Tech degree in human services with an emphasis in family and child development. He currently lives in Roanoke, Va., where he works as the lead estimator for the mechanical department of Varney, Inc.

JOHNSON WAGNER

The Virginia Tech golf team practices at one of the finest facilities and on one of the finest courses in the nation. But former golfer Johnson Wagner remembers a different era.



"We used to pick up our own balls at the campus course," Wagner said. "We'd hit balls right there at the first tee and then walk out there and

pick them up. The locker room wasn't much to write home about. Now you go in their facility and they have their own end of the driving range and a study room, a locker room, and a conference room. They've got everything now. All our trophies are in there. It's pretty cool.

"When Coach [Tech coach Jay Hardwick] was showing me around, I was kind of whining, 'Why didn't we have this when we were around?' He said, 'Well, Junior, you guys built this place. If it wasn't for you all, we wouldn't have this.' That made me feel good, and it's nice to see the Virginia Tech golf program on the up and up."

Wagner, who played at Tech from 1998-2002, was a big part in the huge rise of Tech golf. As a freshman, he recorded the lowest stroke average (75.79) on the team and ended up being named the Atlantic 10 Conference Rookie of the Year. As a sophomore, he led the nation in eagles made in the final NCAA regular-season statistics with eight. In 2001, when Tech moved to the Big East, he was one of the team leaders as the Hokies captured the conference title and finished eighth in the NCAA Championships.

Wagner garnered All-Big East honors his last two seasons, winning the conference tournament individual title as a senior in 2002, while the Hokies repeated as team champs. Tech made another visit to the NCAA Championships, finishing 20th, and Wagner was named All-South Region and third-team All-America.

"There were so many," Wagner said of his favorite memories at Tech. "We had such a good team my junior and senior year. We finished eighth my junior year at Duke [at the NCAA

Championships]. My freshman year, we were one of the worst teams in the country, and in two short years, to go from one of the worst teams in the country to finishing eighth was huge.

"Also, my senior year, I was selected third-team All-American. That was a huge boost in confidence. I never thought that would happen, and to get that honor was great."

The 2002 Tech graduate finished his career with a scoring average of 73.96, which was the best in school history at the time and still ranks 10th on the all-time list. During his time at Tech, Wagner became the first amateur ever to win all three major titles of the Metropolitan Golf Association (NY) in one calendar year (2002).

Wagner currently plays on the PGA Tour along with another Hokie and former teammate, Brendon de Jonge, who was a year behind Wagner at Tech. Both of them are married, live in Charlotte, N.C., and remain great friends. Their kids are close together in ages.

Wagner has won three events on the PGA Tour – the 2008 Shell Houston Open, the 2011 Mayakoba Golf Classic and the 2012 Sony Open in Hawaii.

No matter where he goes these days, he finds Tech fans cheering him passionately.

"I find it amazing that, every town I go to, there is always someone following me with a Virginia

Tech shirt or hat," he said. "The alumni are so loyal and proud. Virginia Tech fans come out for everything and proudly display their colors. I think that's unique to our school that that is the case."

"I was even in Malaysia last year and saw some Virginia Tech people! It's pretty unique, and it's always nice to see the maroon and orange."

JOHN ENGELBERGER

John Engelberger made the most of his time in Blacksburg, going from walk-on, to four-year starter, to second-round NFL Draft pick, while earning All-America honors and his college degree along the way.



Engelberger, who came to Tech from Springfield, Va., joined the Tech football team in 1995 as a tight end. The coaching staff redshirted him that year, and during

the spring, they moved him to defense and awarded him a scholarship. He played in every game during the 1996 season, including seven as a starter. His six sacks tied him for fifth in the Big East Conference and his 64 tackles led the Hokies' defensive linemen. Engelberger had a

career-best 70 tackles in 1997 and contributed 15 tackles behind the line, including six more sacks. He followed that up with 7.5 sacks and 16.5 total tackles for loss in 1998, earning second-team All-Big East honors for the second straight season.

As a senior, Engelberger teamed with Corey Moore to give the Hokies one of the best pair of defensive ends in the country and helped spark Tech to an unbeaten regular season and a berth in the national championship game. He contributed 53 tackles, seven sacks, six additional tackles for loss and 16 quarterback hurries on the way to second-team All-America honors from The Associated Press. His career totals for sacks (26.5), tackles for loss (25) and total tackles behind the line (51.5) still rank in the top five all-time at Tech.

A hard worker who was one of the top performers at the 2000 NFL Combine, Engelberger was selected in the second round of the NFL Draft by the San Francisco 49ers. He played in all 16 games with 13 starts as a rookie and went on to a nine-year pro career that included five seasons with San Francisco and four with the Denver Broncos. He started 80 of the 139 games he played in the NFL.

Engelberger, who graduated with a degree in interdisciplinary studies, currently lives in Leesburg, Va.

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Sarah Rapp finished a career-best 13th at the ACC Championships on a course where she won a state championship during her senior season of high school.



MAKING A RUN FOR IT

Sarah Rapp struggled last year when the ACC Cross Country Championships were held on the Hokies' home course, but after a 13th-place finish this year, she is almost back on pace for a return to the podium – a place she visited often during her high school days

by Marc Mullen

This story is not really a redemption story because, last year, Sarah Rapp redeemed herself with All-Region honors at the 2012 NCAA Southeast Regional Championships held in Charlotte, N.C., two weeks after ending one of the worst cross country races in which she had ever competed.

And it's not really a homecoming story for the junior, who hails from Raleigh, N.C., because Kernersville, N.C. – the location of the 2013 ACC Cross Country Championships – is about 100 miles west of the Tar Heel state capital city.

However, this story had the feel of both. The 2013 ACC Cross Country Championships were being held at the same place, Beeson Park, where Rapp had been three years earlier, a place where she won her third straight high school state cross country individual title. She said she even had flashbacks to that race while she and her Tech teammates were practicing there earlier this season.

She didn't win the race this time around, finishing 13th against the ACC's best female runners. Yet it's a race she will cherish nonetheless.

"It was awesome getting to run at Kernersville, where I had success in the past," Rapp said. "So I had a lot of positive vibes and thoughts going in. I stayed positive throughout the race and had it planned out [how to run it] for the past week.

"My mom came out and that added to my excitement and motivation, as well as all my teammates who were cheering me on from the side, and that pushed me to my finish. I couldn't have done it without them."

After the first 2,000 meters, Rapp was out in the lead, but just one second separated her from Syracuse's Margo Malone, who was in 14th place. In the wet and rainy conditions, Rapp fell back a bit, but continued to push on.

She's admitted to needing better mental toughness when it came to her races, stating that sometimes doubts wiggle their way into her mind when she's competing. She stopped the clock in a personal-best time (6K) of 20 minutes, 51.60 seconds, to finish 13th and earn All-ACC honors for the first time in her Hokie career.

"The race was empowering, and I learned a lot from it," she said. "I knew I had to get out and be with the top pack in order to have a good race, and I accomplished that. I led the race for a little while, but after about halfway, I fell back. But something inside me got me going again.

"It's funny because, last year, I thought to myself, 'I have to do really well this year since it will be harder to do so next year because of all the new schools coming into the ACC.' I proved to myself that I have grown an exponential amount



Sarah Rapp (left) and Courtney Dobbs both earned All-ACC honors for the Hokies at the ACC Championships. Dobbs finished 11th at the meet, while Rapp came in 13th.

as a runner – mentally and physically – and that I can compete with the best in the conference."

The 2012 ACC race for Rapp was a nightmare, as she placed 51st, 10 places worse than her 41st-place finish as a freshman. Many factors were weighing heavily on her mind going into that race. The opportunity to win was one of them. The race being held in Blacksburg was another, as she knew there would be a strong home crowd there to support her and all her teammates.

Also, maybe there was the pressure of being the most experienced of the six Tech runners in the field, a group that consisted of four freshmen. Several proven Hokie runners were taking redshirt years, including All-Region honorees Paige Kvartunas (2010) and Madalyn Nuckols (2011) and 2013 All-ACC performer Courtney Dobbs.

"One of the things I struggle with as a runner is mental toughness, and I completely psyched myself out for the [2012] ACCs," Rapp said. "I knew I was running on my home course, the home crowd, my mom came – I put way too much pressure on myself.

"I told myself I wanted to win and this was the year to win it because I knew, next year, there

were going to be more teams in it. I remember I got out fast, and there was just something in my mind that just turned it [the race] off for me.

"It was hard, and even now, it's hard to remember exactly what happened, but I just know that it wasn't a good race, and I was just really upset after it was over. I had two weeks before ACCs and regionals to get myself together. Training wasn't too hard, so I just focused. I just really worked on visualizing, and I got my act together and made it [All-Region]. So it was a good way to end the season."

A view into her past would find that finishing and accepting a 25th-place finish as a good result at the 2012 NCAA Regionals showed great progress for Rapp.

Growing up, her dad started taking her on runs as far back as she can remember – and she hated it. She started running competitively, though, in elementary school and rarely lost a race while running for Durant Middle School.

It wasn't much different running for Cardinal Gibbons High School, as she totalled 13 state titles to her list of accomplishments. That list included six indoor track titles and four outdoor titles, mostly in the 1,600- and 3,200-meter

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cross country spotlight | sarah rapp

races, with her three state cross country titles.

“The only time I really lost a race in high school was when we would have big invitationals, where runners would come from out of the state or from across the country,” Rapp recalled. “Like for example, Foot Locker [the Foot Locker Cross Country Championships], I never won that. The bigger national races, I never won one of those, but I think a lot of that goes to show that my conference [3-A] had no competition for me.

“I was always in the newspaper, but it was because the conference was kind of easy, looking back. And I’m not trying to sell the conference short because it was a competitive conference, more so than 2-A or 1-A but not as tough as 4-A.”

Rapp said that she was never arrogant with all of her success, but never really truly understood exactly the progression of going from high school to, say, the Olympics.

“I completely skipped this step [the NCAA level],” she said. “Everyone’s like, ‘Oh, you’re going to the Olympics,’ and I’m not really from a sports family, so I didn’t really understand the idea. You have to be an ACC champion, and you have to make it to the NCAAs. You can’t just go to nationals. You actually have to make it there, and you’re running with the best of the best.

“And then there’s a whole other level above that, and then there’s the Olympics. So I was kind of ignorant when I was in high school. I was not cocky. I would never, ever consider myself cocky. But I was always thinking, ‘Oh yeah, the Olympics. That would be awesome.’ But I definitely don’t go around saying that now, obviously, because I realize that there’s another two steps before that.”

When she stepped onto the Blacksburg campus, she had one goal in mind.

“I knew coming in that I wanted to get my butt beat,” she said. “I wanted to. I wanted to get beat! Honestly, I got tired of winning. It was great, but I knew that there were people out there who were faster, people who could push me and make me better.

“That’s probably one of the biggest reasons for my improvements in my times coming

down. Just knowing that I’m in a really good conference for running – to know that I’m running with the best of the best of the best, especially if you make the NCAAs. That’s the best field for your age right now. You can’t find anyone faster than those girls.”

That kind of adjustment – going from the big fish to the little fish – could cause some to wilt under the pressure and doubt themselves.

“I knew coming in that I wanted to get my butt beat. I wanted to. I wanted to get beat! Honestly, I got tired of winning. It was great, but I knew that there were people out there who were faster, people who could push me and make me better. That’s probably one of the biggest reasons for my improvements in my times coming down. Just knowing that I’m in a really good conference for running – to know that I’m running with the best of the best of the best, especially if you make the NCAAs. That’s the best field for your age right now. You can’t find anyone faster than those girls.”

– Sarah Rapp on the process of becoming a good college runner

But Rapp pointed to someone with a similar background – Erik Spjut, her boyfriend of almost two years – as a person who has helped her with that.

Spjut is a redshirt senior on the Hokies’ wrestling team. He was a three-time 4A Texas state champion and compiled a 65-0 record as a senior. Since coming to Tech, the two-time NCAA qualifier has lived through a series of highs and lows.

“He really adds a lot to me and is definitely a positive influence on my life,” Rapp said. “He’s an athlete as well. He’s a wrestler, and it’s such an intense and tough sport, and I can be like, ‘Oh, I had such a hard running workout.’ Then he’ll tell me what he did, and I’ll be like, ‘Oh, I’m just going to be quiet now.’

“He just reminds me that I have to stay tough, and I can’t let things get to me. He’s just a strong person, and he rubs off on me. I don’t think I would be as tough as I am if it wasn’t for him.”

A mentally stronger Rapp has one more cross country chance and two more years of both indoor and outdoor track to claim her first ACC individual title. She has been steadily improving on the track – she’s a multiple point scorer at the ACC Championships – and it’s conceivable that she can return the podium.

She was there many times during her high school days – and it’s a place where she’d like to return.



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Sam Gostling played soccer as a kid, but picked up volleyball in middle school, received a scholarship from Virginia Tech, and has developed into one of the Hokies' best players.

PAYING IT FORWARD

Tech volleyball player Sam Gostling is appreciative of the many people who have helped her become a great player and person, and she is paying them back by being a great role model for others

by Marc Mullen

She may not be playing in front of 60,000 fans or followed by thousands more on social media, and the destination of legionary diehard Hokie fans in late December doesn't rest on her shoulders. But senior volleyball player Sam Gostling certainly feels the pressure.

For her, though, it's not really the pressure of having to win or perform at the highest of levels. For her, it's the pressure of being a role model, having always to remember that younger fans look up to Virginia Tech student-athletes from all sports.

"I think the worst thing about being a student-athlete is maybe the pressure because you know you have younger kids looking up to you, and that's difficult," she said. "Because you always have to make sure you're being such a good role model, and sometimes you might forget that."

"And that's just hard to keep in your head at all times because people are always watching you. And some people want to see you fail, too. So I think it's just the pressure you have from other people."

Gostling knows first hand how much of an impact she can make on younger fans by playing volleyball. Thanks to the digital age, she can make a connection with all her biggest fans, including one who lives more than 500 miles away.

Charlize Delair, a 6-year-old girl who lives in Albany, N.Y., might be Gostling's biggest fan. She makes her parents, Kris and Kirk, fire up the computer on Tech volleyball game nights and watch, when possible, as Gostling and the Hokies take on their various opponents.

"My little cousin, Charlize, she looks up to me so much, and she's such an athletic little thing," Gostling said. "She told me that she wants to try volleyball, and I was like 'OK, go for it!' I help her as much as I can, but I don't see her that much. So when I do, I try to be with her as much as

possible. I think it just makes me proud that I can be like an older sister to her.

"The past few games, they'll sit and watch my games on the computer, which I know cannot be exciting because of how difficult it is to get it through the Internet. But she'll say, 'Yeah Sammie! Go Sammie!' to the computer."

"And after one of the games, we didn't have a game the next day, but my aunt texted me and said, 'Charlize woke up and asked, 'Is Sammie playing today? Does she have a game today?' They are coming for my senior night, so I'm really excited for her to see a game in person."

Being a role model to a younger generation is

a way for Gostling to "pay it forward." After all, numerous individuals have helped her get to where she is today.

For the 6-foot-1 native of Charlotte, N.C., volleyball was not her first choice when it came to athletics endeavors. She played soccer for nine years, absolutely loved it and thought that would be her pathway to college. And, of course, being from the state of North Carolina, she grew up idolizing Mia Hamm, the former North Carolina great and U.S. Olympian.

However, around the seventh grade, Gostling believed her soccer growth had reached a plateau and was looking to add something else.



Sam Gostling is not only a role model for her younger teammates, but also to many younger volleyball players, including a 6-year-old cousin who keeps tabs on her from New York.

"I just wanted to play another sport," she said. "I was just such a tomboy growing up, so I think it was just that and my friends. They were trying out, and they wanted me to as well. And that was definitely one of the reasons why I did, but I just think it was to play another sport – to see what it was like and to see if I enjoyed it."

In stepped Luke Hill, her stepfather who had decided to help her. He set up a string in the backyard and went out and practiced with Gostling. They worked on serving mostly, as they thought that was the most important thing to concentrate on at the time.

"So I tried out in seventh grade," she said. "And I didn't make it."

Sounds like the plight of an even more well known Tar Heel state athlete – Michael Jordan, who did not make the varsity basketball team as a sophomore (he did play on the junior varsity team). Gostling recalled that only eighth graders made the volleyball team (and in Jordan's case, rarely did sophomores make the varsity team).

"So I was like, 'Oh well, I'll try next year,'" she said. "I got into club [a club volleyball team] that year and I played middle [blocker], and it was just so different. Volleyball is a hard sport to learn. Then in eighth grade, I tried out again and I made it, and our team won the conference. I had

new friends, and it was awesome."

Fast-forward to Gostling's junior at Ardrey Kell High School – a new high school that opened her freshman year and had no seniors. Gostling made the varsity team that season, and she met a very influential person in her life, a woman named Zoe Bell.

Bell was just hired at the school as the new volleyball coach and was a proven winner at her previous high school, Providence, guiding that team to 12 conference titles and four state crowns. It took her just two years to take Ardrey Kell from a new program in 2006 to the 4-A state title game in 2009.

Led by Gostling, Ardrey Kell rolled to a 24-6 record while finishing second in its conference and runner-up in the state tournament. In the process, the team knocked off three conference champions before being derailed by J.H. Rose High School, who finished the season with a 25-0 record, in the title game.

"That season was awesome," Gostling said. "We knew we had such a good team, especially with Zoe Bell being our coach. Her coming from Providence and having four championships ... we were like, 'This is awesome!'"

"We went into every match just believing that we can win this. We might be new and young,

but we have a chance and we have the talent. So I think we were just on an adrenaline rush the whole season. Just playing each match and winning was awesome."

Gostling holds Bell and Rick Kiser, one of her other coaches, in high regard and credited them with getting her to Tech. She also appreciates the relationship she still has with them, whether she gets a text of encouragement before a game or having one of them being a summer workout partner.

"My coaches, Zoe Bell and Rick Kiser, have always been there for me," she said. "Heading from my sophomore year into my junior year at Tech, I went home for the summer, and we had these workouts. I knew I had to do them, but it's just so hard to do workouts on my own."

"So my high school coach, Zoe Bell, was like, 'I'll work out with you, and I'll make sure you do it.' So each day, I had a set time to go to the high school where she worked, and we would do our lifts and workouts. She would have about an hour and half for lunch, but she took time just to help me get better, and I would go and practice with her high school team and club team. She has just always been there for me."

"And my other coach, Rick Kiser, has texted me before every game since my freshman year,

just to see how practice had been that week. Sometimes, I don't respond because I just want to focus, but I'll either call him or text him afterward. It's just relaxing, and he always knows the right things to say. He always wants the best for me and always knows what's best for me, and he always agrees with whatever I say just to make me feel better. I know he does."

Once in Blacksburg, Gostling immediately gravitated and received the guidance from former Hokies Cara Baarendse, a two-time honorable mention All-American, and Jen Wiker.

"I learned a lot from them," Gostling said. "Cara's a very quiet person, and I'm kind of like her. She's not a vocal leader. She's more of a lead-by-example player, and I feel like that's how I am, too. She probably doesn't know this, but I definitely looked up to her like that because I felt like we kind of had that connection."

"And Jen, she was just so different, very vocal and outgoing. We had our talks and we had our times together and she gave me tips, and she was just really open about everything. We became really close, and I enjoyed that a lot."

Gostling has experienced many things over the past four seasons at Tech, highlighted by the Hokies qualifying for their first NCAA Championship when she was a freshman and

her and a couple of other teammates heading to Colorado Springs, Colo., to try out for the USA Volleyball national squad.

"That was nerve-wracking and awesome at the same time," Gostling said of her Colorado experience. "Just being on that campus – the Olympic campus – it was crazy. I saw all these other volleyball players coming and knowing that UCLA had just won the national championship and their players were there and these girls are amazing ... and I'm just a sophomore. It was incredible, and I learned a lot from it."

Gostling is also learning how fast four years travels. The sociology major is considering going back to school for a master's degree at some point, but she also is thinking about being either a counselor or a therapist. First, though, she knows that there is still work to be done during the 2013 season and some players to help along the way.

"Lindsey Owens, we definitely have a connection, like I did with those older players," Gostling said. "She's a very talented freshman, better than I ever was as a freshman. I just want her to get better. I will give her any kind of tips, and they might not be the nicest – I mean, I can be critical of her – but she's tough. She can handle it, and that's what I like about her."

"But as seniors, we need to make sure the team understands how much work we need to put in to get back to NAAs. So we try to make sure that these underclassmen understand how incredible that experience is. We made it as freshmen, but haven't been back, so you never know how many chances you'll get. We don't say it's our only shot, but we make them know. We try to get them to understand how important it is to us, and we want to make sure that it's important to them also. We put it in their heads every game."

Heading into the month of November, the Hokies' volleyball team was three wins better than they were at the same point during the 2010 season when they reached the national tournament, and their RPI was in the mid-40s. But work still needs to be done if they want to advance to just their second NCAA Championship in school history.

Gostling will probably always remember her final game as a Hokie. It will either be in the NCAA Championship, which would bookend a tremendous career, or in front of one of her biggest fans. Tech concludes the regular season at Cassell Coliseum on Nov. 30 against Pittsburgh on senior night.

Either way, a 6-year-old fan in New York can't wait. 



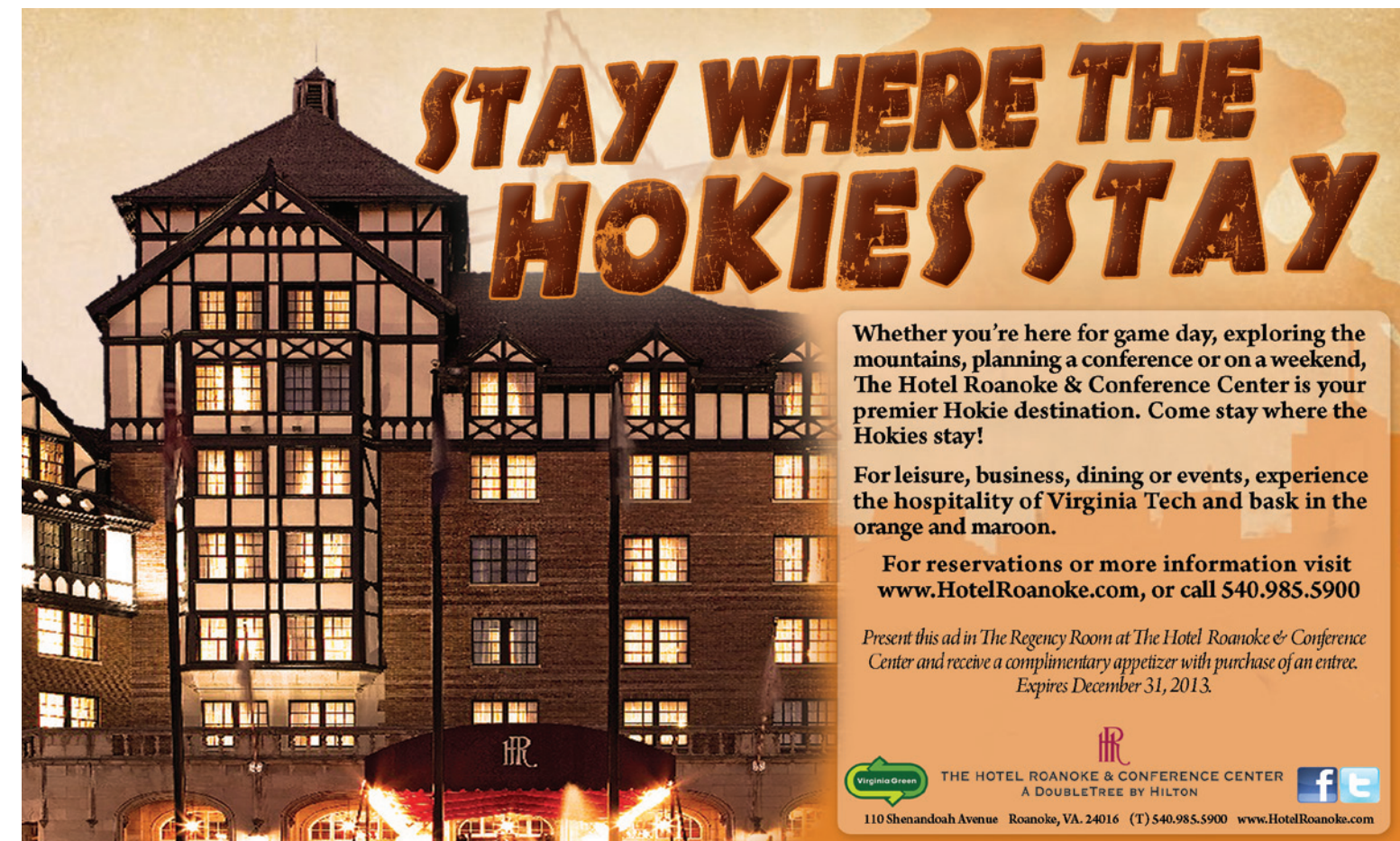
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Midfielder Katie Yensen's play this season is one of many reasons why the Tech women's soccer team is having the program's best season in school history.



MS. CLUTCH

Katie Yensen did not come to Tech with the reputation of being a goal scorer, but the junior has shown a knack for making her goals count – she has seven game winners in her career

by Marc Mullen

The month of November will ultimately determine how successful the 2013 women's soccer season is gauged, with results in the ACC and NCAA Championships being key components. Certainly, though, by anyone's measure the regular season was the best ever, bar none.

The Hokies posted a 14-3-2 record, which included a 9-3-1 mark in the Atlantic Coast Conference. Their only losses were to then-No. 1 North Carolina (2-1), No. 3 Florida State (2-1) and No. 1 Virginia (2-0) – and the Hokies themselves reached a program-best No. 4 national ranking. Tech was not shut out of a regular-season game until that Cavaliers' loss at the end of the regular season. It marked the first time Tech had been shut out since Oct. 21, 2012 – a school-record span of 20 straight games.

Taking into consideration that, at the start of the year, head coach Chugger Adair was without two of his best offensive weapons, that last note seems almost implausible. Kelly Conheeny missed the entire season with an injury, and Shannon Mayrose missed some time early with an injury. Conheeny (26 career goals) and Mayrose (16) were Nos. 1 and 2, respectively, in active career goals scored and third and 12th all-time, respectively, in career goals at Tech.

Senior Jazmine Reeves and sophomore Ashley Meier, both pretty good goal scorers in their own right, were solid all year, helping fill the void. But it would be the emergence of freshman Murielle Tiernan and the timely goal scoring of junior Katie Yensen that proved to be the winning ingredients.

"I know for me personally, even in my club days, I have never been a huge goal scorer," Yensen said. "I've never been a flashy player. I would just consider myself very consistent. I'm very good on the ball, very technical, but that doesn't always get you noticed [during the

recruiting process]. So it was hard, and I think that's why a lot of schools didn't see that [her goal-scoring potential], but some schools did.

"And, luckily, Chugger saw that. He saw the potential that I was a good player. He was looking for those aspects that I had. He was looking for a good possession player, which is what he saw in me. Coaches at this level, they have so much soccer knowledge. They are so soccer savvy, and they can see that, even though you aren't scoring

five goals every game, you are still a great player."

She might not score five goals per game, but Yensen's offensive contributions in 2013 – and in her time in Blacksburg – have solidified her status as a big-time performer.

The numbers are quite impressive. Entering the ACC Championships on Nov. 3, she had scored 10 goals in her career – of which seven were game winners. No other player with seven or more career goals in the school's history can



The Hokies are always successful when Katie Yensen gets involved offensively. They are 16-0 in her three years at Tech when she scores a point in a match.

claim a better percentage. She also has assisted on two game winners.

More impressively, the Hokies are a staggering 16-0 when Yensen tallies a point during a contest. That included eight victories during the 2013 regular season, a span in which she scored four game-winning goals.

Also, here are Tech's records for some current players when they tally a point, again, heading into the ACC Championships – Conheeny (29-4), Reeves (26-4-1), Mayrose (18-2) and Meier (10-5-1). Even senior Ashley Manning, who has 11 goals and five assists in her career, has one blemish on her record at 12-1.

So sure, scoring goals in soccer leads to wins, but Yensen admittedly isn't a goal scorer. Yet she possesses the knack to come through in the clutch.

Of all the game-winning goals Yensen has scored – the list includes one in a much-needed win at No. 7 Wake Forest last season, a penalty kick goal in a 1-0 win at Boston College and her first two-goal game in a victory at Pittsburgh – none compared to the actual game-winning goal scored 44 seconds into the first overtime against Clemson on Oct. 3.

"That was my first true game winner that I had ever scored," Yensen said. "In overtime, it was very exhilarating. I can't even put together

words to describe the feeling. It was incredible. Just the energy in the stadium, the energy of my teammates, all rushing the field at the end – that made me incredibly happy. I just can't even ... there are no words to describe it."

The importance of that goal now may be lost, but the Hokies had just come off a tie at Duke and were sitting at 4-1-1 in ACC play. The Clemson game was the last action they would see before a 10-day layoff that would end with a visit from top-10 Notre Dame (then-No. 9).

A tie – or worse, a loss – was not what the team wanted to have heading into that time off.

"Throughout that whole couple of days leading up to the Clemson game, Chugger really emphasized us getting the win," Yensen said. "Clemson was only three points behind us at the time and had always been a good team. They'd gotten some wins, some ties. They had been doing really well."

"So Chugger wanted to make sure we came out fighting and definitely stressed that we needed a win. When we did go into overtime, everybody on the field just had the attitude that we are going to get three points here. We're not going to come away with one, and we're definitely not going to lose."

Yensen has come a long way since starting out playing soccer at the age of 4. It's understandable

since she said she is always doing something and never likes to take breaks, not even from soccer. Over the past two summers, she's played in the W-League for both the DC United and the Washington Spirit, teams that are about a 30-minute commute from her home in Falls Church, Va.

When she was in high school, she competed in a handful of triathlons and wants to continue that when she's done with her soccer career. Despite many of the images she has pinned in the "bucket list!!" section of her Pinterest account, she claimed, "I'm not a daredevil. I would just say I love adventure."

Coming in as a freshman at Tech, though, she had more modest goals.

"Honestly, I came in as a freshman and my goal was to travel [with the team]. That's just really what I wanted to do," she said. "If you had told me before I came here that I was going to start my first 13 games, I would have said, 'You're crazy.' So I was pretty shocked that that happened."

"I was lucky enough to come in and earn a spot for a little bit. I came in, I was very fit and I was very technical. I just wasn't really that strong. I have always been kind of a smaller player, and throughout the years at Tech, I've worked a lot on that. I think it's gotten a lot better."

"But I think that's one thing that Chugger was looking for a little bit more from me, that tenacity, and the strength on the ball, and I think that's part of it. Then when we got into the ACC schedule, it got a little harder for me. The ACC is very fast and very physical. So I definitely got a lot more playing time than I ever expected, and that was a very pleasant surprise."

Yensen still has one more Tech soccer season remaining, but has already contemplated her next step. As she said, "I think, just as an athlete, it's just so hard to give up the sport just cold turkey after the season. I definitely see myself playing for as long as I can somewhere. I think there might be a chance for me to play overseas, and I want to pursue that if I can."

But once that's over, she is thinking about medical school and her ideal job would be as a doctor. She thinks maybe an orthopaedic doctor, but, "I haven't really explored a lot of the other options yet. I feel like there are so many different fields you can go into in health care, and the option is really open."

Exploring her options, feeding her adventurous side and continuing her non-stop lifestyle, Yensen, who's a biology major with a minor in Spanish, will be partaking in a 10-day trip to Costa Rica in January. Through the International Service Learning organization, which was recommended by Annie Hesp, her Spanish teacher, Yensen will use those attributes that she has been learning in the classroom to assimilate into the culture and work in clinics.

"I'm actually going to go to Costa Rica to work in clinics down there because, for one, it's a good opportunity to use my Spanish while interacting with people in their native villages," she said. "And two, I'm also going to provide health care to people, which is something that I ultimately want to do."




Katie Yensen (left) has another season left to play for the Hokies, and then after that, she may go to medical school and become a doctor.

"In the future, I want to travel, maybe with the military or with Doctors Without Borders, and provide health care to people in other countries. So this is just kind of a really cool opportunity to do that. This trip is more with a focus on medicine, and I've heard so many amazing things about that program."

"I won't get the opportunity to study abroad, and my sister [Alex], she studied abroad in Italy for a semester, so I was kind of jealous of that. So my parents [Dave and Tracey] thought this would be a cool opportunity for me to combine

pretty much everything that I love – well, except for soccer."

Right now, though, she and the rest of her Tech teammates are concentrating on some shorter travel plans. After securing their sixth straight NCAA tournament berth, the Hokies are hoping to get into some uncharted waters, as they have never advanced past the Sweet 16 in two appearances.

With Yensen along for the journey and with her knack for helping her team succeed, particularly late in matches, she could get them there. 

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HOKIES HOPE TO KEEP GRIP ON ACC TITLE

The Tech wrestling team won its first ACC team championship last season and finished a program-best 10th at the NAAs, and the return of guys like Devin Carter, Chris Moon and Zach Neibert mean expectations are high again this season

by Jimmy Robertson

The 2013-14 Virginia Tech wrestling team saw 50 percent of its starting lineup depart from last season's team that finished a program-best 10th nationally at the NCAA Championships. Those leaving included a couple of All-Americans, another four-time NCAA qualifier, and a three-time NCAA qualifier.

So how does wrestling coach Kevin Dresser feel about his current team, one with many new faces at different weight classes?

"I really think that, by the end of the year, this team could potentially break records," he said.

Bold words from the Hokies' head coach, who enters his eighth season in Blacksburg.

Tech enters the 2013-14 campaign ranked 8th in the NWCA/USA Today coaches' preseason poll despite losing half of the starting lineup. Longtime stalwarts such as Pete Yates, Jarrod Garnett, Jesse Dong and David Marone are gone, along with Derrick Borlie, who left the program over the summer. Yates, the ACC's Wrestler of the Year last season, finished fourth at 165 pounds at the NCAA Championships and was a two-time All-American, while Garnett finished sixth at 125 pounds and earned All-America honors. Dong won three ACC titles at 157 pounds and qualified for the NAAs four times, while Marone won the ACC's heavyweight crown last season and qualified for the NAAs three times. Combined, the four won 460 matches in their careers at Tech.

But the reason for optimism centers on the unique combination of returning starters, a terrific class of freshmen (ranked fifth nationally by Amateur Wrestling News) and the return of several key performers who took a redshirt year last season – a group that Dresser said is "flying under the radar."

In that latter group is Devin Carter, a two-time ACC champion at 133 pounds and an All-American in 2012 after finishing fifth at the NCAA Championships. He took a redshirt year to get stronger and to work on his game, and the added bulk means that the redshirt junior from nearby Christiansburg, Va., will be moving up to 141 pounds this season.

"We felt he was between 133 and 141, so we focused on getting bigger and stronger, and we probably overdid it a little bit because now he's a tweener between 141 and 149," Dresser said. "But Devin's a tough kid, and he's going to suck it up. He'll be a big and strong 141-pounder."

"He's obviously really special. He moved up a weight, and he's ranked third in the nation [at 141 pounds]. Not many guys can pull that off. He's wrestling the second-ranked guy [Edinboro's Mitchell Port] on Nov. 16, so it's conceivable that he could be ranked first or second in the nation by Thanksgiving."

"So he's not flying under the radar. But I do believe guys like Chris Moon and Chris Penny are

Zach Neibert was an All-American last season, and the Hokies need another great year from the senior to reach their goal of another top-10 finish at the NCAA Championships.

of our team was All-Americans. That's a big feat. That says a lot about the mentality of your team."

Here is a closer look at each weight class for this year's squad:

• **125 pounds** – Freshman Joey Dance takes over for Garnett in this weight class, and Dance has the Tech wrestling room buzzing. The young man from Christiansburg, ranked a top-10 recruit by every wrestling publication, has been dominant in practices, and he often works out against guys heavier than him to get him ready for the season.

"There is going to be a lot of hype around Joey, but from everything we've seen so far, the hype is legit," Dresser said. "This dude can wrestle, and he's tough. Fans are going to love watching this guy compete."

"It would not surprise me if, at the end of the year, he's wrestling on Saturday night at the NCAA tournament. He's going to have to make some adjustments. One thing when you're that confident in yourself, you don't understand the little things – keeping your weight down, getting the right amount of sleep, etc. He thinks he's invincible. That's what makes him good, but that also makes him vulnerable. He's got to be up every weekend."

Tech lacks depth behind Dance in this weight class, so keeping Dance healthy remains paramount.

• **133 pounds** – Spjut returns for his final season and gives the Hokies a proven veteran presence in this class. The two-time NCAA qualifier won a match at the NCAA Championships in 2012 and is 52-34 overall in his career.

"Spjut is a veteran," Dresser said. "He's proven. He's had a good career, but not a great career. I want to see him perform and see if he's made strides. I want to keep this weight class open and see if he's made strides."

Spjut cannot rest because Dresser has two terrific freshmen waiting in the wings in Dennis Gustafson and Kevin Norstrem. Gustafson, from Woodbridge, Va., won a state title in North Carolina in 2010 and in Virginia this past season after his family moved to Northern Virginia. He was rated as a top-100 recruit by every wrestling outlet.

Norstrem, from Brandon, Fla., was rated a top-20 recruit by both Amateur Wrestling News and D1CollegeWrestling. He went 229-3 in his four years at Brandon High School.

"Our intention is to redshirt both of them, but we want to see how those guys progress," Dresser said.

• **141 pounds** – As stated earlier, Carter moved up to this weight class from 133 pounds. He returns after a redshirt year, but kept himself in shape by wrestling unattached in certain events. He finished in third place at the NYAC Holiday Invitational in

New York and in fourth at the Midlands. He also won a bronze medal in the men's freestyle at the Cerro Pelado International in Cuba.

"It's hard to sit a guy out who is that good, but he was in between weights, and we felt he needed a year to develop and get better at some things," Dresser said. "He achieved everything we wanted him to in the offseason, every goal we set for him."

"Devin's biggest issue will be getting used to being that light again and competing that light. He hasn't been that light in a while. He's having to cut weight. He'll have to adjust to that weight. If you don't cut your weight right, it could be a factor late in the match."

Gerald Ronnau, a freshman from Midlothian, Va., backs up Carter in this class. He placed fifth at the Group AAA meet last season.

• **149 pounds** – Dresser faced an interesting dilemma heading into preseason practices, as Neibert outgrew the 141-pound class and Nick Brascetta, an ACC champion and an All-American last season, returned in this class. So Brascetta, who went 31-7 last season as a sophomore, will

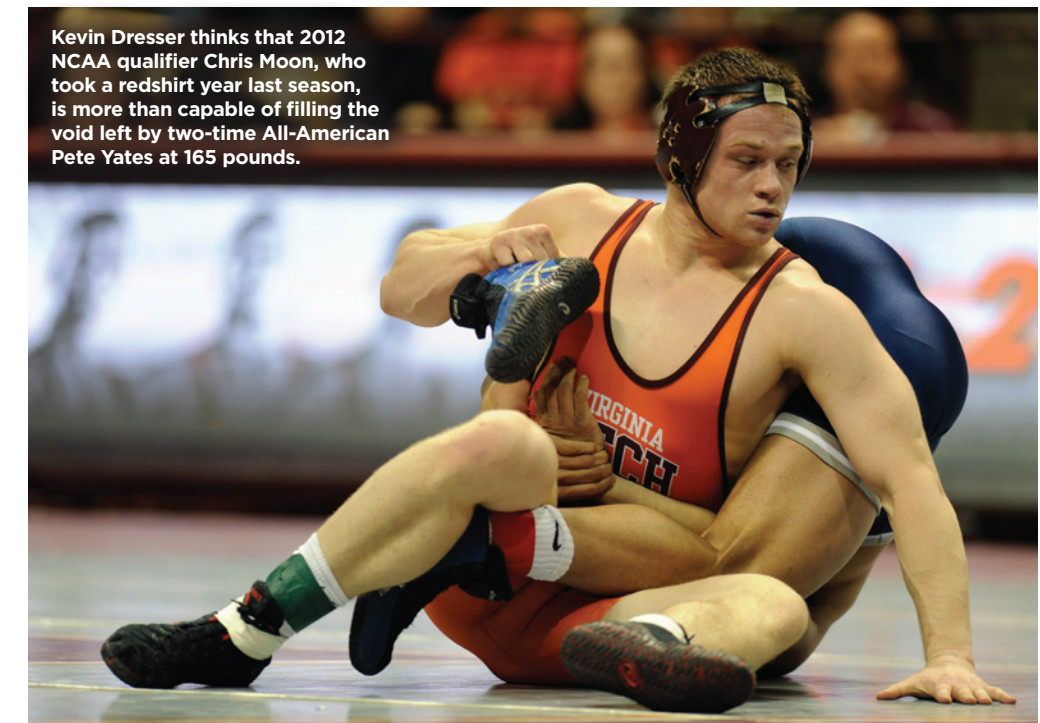
earn All-America honors for the first time, beating three guys seeded higher than him.

"Gamer' is the word for Zach Neibert," Dresser said. "So far, he hasn't been a guy that lights you up in the season, but when it's postseason, he's one of the most dependable guys we've ever put on the mat."

• **157 pounds** – This might be the weight class that is most up in the air for Dresser, as he attempts to replace a guy who won 112 matches in his career in Dong. The battle for the job will be between Sal Mastriani, a redshirt freshman from Towaco, N.J., and Chad Strube, a redshirt sophomore from Frederick, Md.

Mastriani came to Tech as the No. 13 wrestler in the nation at 152 pounds according to InterMat. He went 41-1 his senior year of high school and 139-20 for his career. Strube went 15-8 as a freshman before taking a redshirt year last season.

"Sal Mastriani placed in every open tournament we put him in [last season], and then we've got Chad Strube," Dresser said. "Both those guys had a lot of success last year at the open level. So we'll



Kevin Dresser thinks that 2012 NCAA qualifier Chris Moon, who took a redshirt year last season, is more than capable of filling the void left by two-time All-American Pete Yates at 165 pounds.

take a redshirt year this season, just as Carter, Moon and Penny did last season.

"He's really a tweener [between 149 and 157]," Dresser said of Brascetta. "We want to get him bigger and stronger. We've got an All-American backing him up in Zach Neibert. We've got two All-Americans at that weight, so it makes sense to do that. Nick looks good right now, but it's going to be a struggle for him to make that weight."

Neibert went 20-12 last season, finishing second at 141 pounds at the ACC Championships. But at the NAAs, he finished in eighth place to

have a competition there. I think Mastriani is a slight favorite at this point, but both of those guys bring something. Mastriani brings athleticism and toughness, and Strube brings a real funky style. He's hard to wrestle.

"I'll keep the door open. It's a long season. We'll see who can grind it out."

• **165 pounds** – Yates' departure leaves the biggest shoes to fill, as he won 131 matches in his career – second on the Hokies' all-time list. But at least Tech gets some experience in the form of Moon, who went 19-15 two years ago when he



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qualified for the NAAs at 174 pounds.

"He had a great, great redshirt year," Dresser said. "He placed and won in a lot of open tournaments. He was an NCAA qualifier two years ago at 174, but I think 165 is more his wrestling weight. He's ranked in the top 20 in a couple of polls. I think he's under the radar, but he might not be under the radar for long."

"He's a guy we need to count on. If we want to achieve big things this year, Chris Moon is a guy who needs to help us get it done."

David Bergida, a sophomore from Belle Meade, N.J., backs up Moon. He went 10-12 in his first season with the Hokies.

• **174 pounds** - Austin Gabel was solid at 174 pounds for the Hokies last season, going 22-13 and qualifying for the NCAA Championships. He went 2-1 at the Championships before suffering an injury in a match against Northern Illinois' Matt Mouglin that ended his tournament. He gives Tech a veteran presence at this class.

"Austin Gabel really finished the season well. He's a great defensive wrestler," Dresser said. "He's hard to score on. We worked on offense in the offseason. He needs to get some more offense. He lost a boatload of close matches to some really good wrestlers, and we've got to turn that around this year. He's got to figure out a way to win those."

Gabel will be pushed this season by freshman Zach Epperly, a teammate of Dance's at Christiansburg High School. Epperly won four state titles and arrived at Tech as the No. 26 overall recruit in the nation by InterMat (No. 4 at 170 pounds as a senior).

"Zach's had a great summer and great preseason," Dresser said. "I think giving him a redshirt year is the best thing. But we're in good shape there at 174."

Brooks Morrison, a sophomore from Dallastown, Pa., is also in the mix. He went 8-7 last season.

• **184 pounds** - Nick Vetterlein returns at 184 pounds after a season in which he went 17-14 and qualified for the NCAA Championships. The redshirt senior finished fourth at the ACC Championships.

Another redshirt senior, John Dickson, is battling Vetterlein. Dickson took his redshirt year last season.

"Nick Vetterlein is super athletic, but he needs to get mentally tougher," Dresser said. "Dickson is real tough, but is a little limited wrestling-wise. We've got a contrast in styles. It'll be interesting to see who gets the spot by the end of the year, but that's another weight class that I think will be up for grabs for a good portion of the year."

• **197 pounds** - Dresser hopes this is the year for Penny, who finished second at the ACC

Championships two years ago as a heavyweight. Penny tried to get big enough to remain a heavyweight, but his body structure limited his ability to put on weight, and the 197-pound class seems to be a better fit for him.

"We're excited to have Chris back after a redshirt year," Dresser said. "He experimented at heavyweight, but we couldn't get him heavy enough to make him effective there - not that he didn't try. It's not always easy to gain weight when you're frame is not meant to do that."

"He's having to work a little bit, but he's doing a great job at maintaining his weight. He's super, ultra talented. It's his time. He's got a lot of experience. He needs to make a decision that he's one of the best guys in the nation. If Chris makes that decision, he could have a great year."

"Just like at 165 and 184, we need those fourth- and fifth-year guys to step up for us."

Bobby Lavelle, a junior from Holland, Pa., serves as the backup to Penny, but four or five others add depth as well.

• **Heavyweight** - Ty Walz gets the first shot at taking over for Marone, who was a sixth-year senior last season. Marone went 91-48 in his career, but his most memorable moment came last season when he won his match to give the Hokies' the team title at the ACC Championships.


Walz, a redshirt freshman from Cleveland, Ohio, reminds Dresser of Marone in certain aspects. He won a state title as a senior in Ohio - a good state for wrestling.

"He may be just a little bit bigger than David," Dresser said. "He had a good true freshman year last year, and he'll be a redshirt freshman. He's got a lot of ability. It's just a matter of him getting some confidence and winning some matches. He's going to be competitive for us right away. He's got a lot of tools. He just lacks the experience."

Dan Garwood and true freshman Dawson Peck add depth to this weight class. Garwood, a junior from Mullica Hill, N.J., went 19-12 last season.

InterMat tabbed the Hokies as its top ACC team, with Maryland coming in at No. 16 in its preseason poll. North Carolina (No. 21), Pittsburgh (tied for No. 22) and Virginia (tied for No. 22) also made the publication's top 25.

But Tech needs to improve to get where it wants to go - to the top of the ACC by March 8, the date when the Hokies serve as hosts of the ACC Championships.

"Everyone needs to get 1 percent better every day," Dresser said. "It sounds easy, but it's easier said than done. We've got to continue to do that as coaches and as a team. One percent better means that you're learning consistency. There are a lot of days before the NCAA tournament. If we can get 100 percent improved between now and March, we're going to be right in the thick of it." 

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