

INSIDE

HOKKIESPORTS

The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics



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Heather Savage left the competition in her wake last season by winning ACC gold and earning All-America honors, and she's swimming for more success this season

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RETAINING THE RIVALRY'S PRIZE

In the regular-season finale, Virginia Tech beat in-state rival Virginia for the ninth straight time, downing the Cavaliers 17-14 on Cody Journell's last-second field goal and keeping the Commonwealth Cup in Blacksburg. By the time these two teams meet next season, Tech will have held possession of the Cup for more than 3,000 days.





THE STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

"The student-athletes at Virginia Tech would like to thank all the donors and supporters for their support. We wouldn't be a successful program without you all. God bless!"

DERRICK HOPKINS

Junior | Football

"We are deeply appreciative of everyone's support. It's because of your support that Hokie Nation is the greatest in the world. Thank you."

ZACK MCCRAY

Sophomore | Football





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Q&A

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

A: Virginia Tech is a big part of our lives, and we want that same feeling to continue throughout future generations. We also feel a great sense of pride in watching the student-athletes mature and become successful adults, knowing that we played a small part in their achievements.

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

A: Without a doubt, being in the end zone and watching the ball come straight at us when Chris Kinzer made "The Kick" to win the Peach Bowl in Atlanta!

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

A: F.W.'s Hokie underwear - we don't

leave home without it!

Q: You are involved with the Tri-Cities Hokie Club as the president. How and why did you get involved and has it been a good experience for you?

A: My father was an alumni and Hokie Club member in the 40's so you could say I was born to be a Hokie! Liebert Hawkins was a great mentor for us and made us realize what a great feeling it is to give back to something that gives back to you in so many ways. We would encourage anyone to become involved and join the fun and fellowship that goes with it.

Q: Virginia Tech has had a lot of successful teams and wins over the years. Do you have a favorite team/season or game that stands out the most?

A: That's a tough question - probably the 1999 football team that went on to the 2000 national championship game and the night in Lane Stadium when

they accomplished it (a perfect regular season)!

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech football player is _____ and my favorite memory of him is _____.

A: Danny Coale because he always gave that extra effort and was such a team player. We will remember for a long time that great catch in the end zone to "win" the game against Michigan.

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech student-athlete from another sport is _____ and my favorite memory of him or her is _____.

A: Angela Tincher (softball team of 2008), who won the NCAA National Player of the Year Award.



Hokie Club Year-End Items of Importance

The fall semester has been filled with many exciting moments for our Virginia Tech student-athletes. The football team is preparing for their 20th consecutive appearance in postseason play, which is the third-longest in the nation, and I hope to see you cheering on the Hokies at the bowl. Congratulations are also in order to coach Ben Thomas, ACC champion Will Mulherin and the entire men's cross country team on capturing the school's first ACC championship in men's cross country.

I hope that you are enjoying the exclusive content in each issue of Inside Hokie Sports magazine, as I am. The magazine highlights many of our outstanding student-athletes, student life on campus as well as the community involvement by our players and teams. We are surrounded by terrific young people who will be the leaders of tomorrow, and it is a pleasure to come to work each day to work on their behalf. I know that they appreciate your support from their comments as shown on the Student-Athlete Experience two-page photograph that leads off each issue.

As we think about year end, I ask that you please be sure to make your gift to the Hokie Club by the Dec. 31 benefits deadline. Each year, we are challenged to meet the rising cost of tuition, room, board and textbooks, and your annual fund gift helps us meet this goal. Also, I'd ask you to please consider increasing your gift this year. Your investment in Virginia Tech is paying real dividends, and you are making a difference in the lives of hundreds of young Hokies!

Cassell Coliseum Reseating

Information for the reseating of Cassell Coliseum for men's and women's basketball for the 2013 season is now available. A brochure was recently sent to all Hokie Club members and basketball season ticket holders and can now be found online by visiting either hokiesports.com or hokieclub.com. If you have questions about the reseating process or if you would like to receive a brochure, please contact the Hokie Club office at (540) 231-6618.

2013 Football Season Parking

As has always been the policy, parking for football season ticket holders is assigned yearly and parking locations are based on Hokie Club members point priority rank as of the most recent benefits deadline. For the upcoming 2013 football season, the opportunity to select parking will be based on your rank as of the benefits deadline of Dec. 31, 2012. When it is time to select parking, we will once again utilize the Ballena Technology software used last year.

Hokie Club Reception at Russell Athletic Bowl

The Hokies will be making their 20th consecutive bowl appearance at the Russell Athletic Bowl, being played Friday, Dec. 28, 2012 at Florida Citrus Bowl Stadium. The Hokie Club will once again host its annual Hokie Club Reception at the team hotel. We hope you will support the Hokies by attending the bowl game, and we hope to see you at our event at the Orlando Hilton. For more details on the Hokie Club Reception, please visit hokieclub.com.

Holiday Schedule

Because of the university's holiday schedule and the bowl game schedule, please make every effort to speak with the Hokie Club staff or visit with our office ahead of time. The Hokie Club office will be closed per the university's holiday schedule on Dec. 24, 25, 26, 31, and Jan. 1.

Benefits Deadline and Year End Giving

The benefits deadline for all Hokie Club benefits for 2013 is Dec. 31, 2012. If you are planning to make a gift to the Hokie Club as we approach the deadline, please make sure to take note of the following reminders and please contact the Hokie Club office at (540) 231-6618 in advance if you have any questions:

1. Checks must be postmarked by Dec. 31, 2012
2. Online contributions must be made at hokieclub.com before midnight, Dec. 31, 2012.
3. For your security, please do not send credit card payments via the mail.

Gift Acknowledgements and Year End Gift Accounting

Once the Hokie Club receives a gift, donors receive a gift acknowledgement letter. This letter is usually mailed within one to two weeks after the donation is made and serves as your VTAF tax receipt. As we move toward the end of the year, the number of gifts received and processed by the Hokie club typically increase. Because of the added volume of gifts, the amount of time it takes to mail out gift acknowledgement letters may increase. Our gift accounting staff is working diligently to process and acknowledge all gifts as quickly as possible, and we thank you for your patience.

Updated Point Priority Sheets to be mailed in late January 2013

Once all 2012 gifts are received, processed and acknowledged, the Hokie Club will send out updated point priority sheets to each member. We anticipate that these updated point priority sheets will be mailed to the entire Hokie Club membership in late January, 2013.

Best wishes for a joyous holiday season,

LU MERRITT

Senior Director of Development for Intercollegiate Athletics

Three Hokies earn All-ACC Recognition

James Gayle, Jack Tyler and Antone Exum earned All-ACC honors after the regular season in voting conducted by the Atlantic Coast Sports Media Association, a group of media members who cover ACC sports.

All three Tech players received a spot on the All-ACC second team. Gayle earned second-team honors for the second straight year, while Exum made the team for the first time after being an honorable mention selection a year ago. This is

Tyler's first conference honor.

Gayle, a redshirt junior from Hampton, Va., has started 11 games, recording 40 tackles, including 10 for loss and five sacks. He is second on the team in both tackles for a loss and sacks, and he is 10th in the ACC in tackles for a loss and 13th in sacks.

Tyler, a redshirt junior from Oakton, Va., is the team's leader in tackles with 112. Included in that total are 11 tackles for loss and 2.5 sacks. His 112 tackles rank fourth in the ACC, while his 11 tackles for a

loss lead the team and rank eighth in the conference.

Exum, a redshirt junior from Glen Allen, Va., leads the ACC in pass breakups with 15 and is tied for third with four interceptions. He also has 47 tackles, including 1.5 for loss, two forced fumbles and a fumble recovery.

Four other Hokies earned honorable mention honors – cornerback Kyle Fuller, defensive tackles Antoine Hopkins and Derrick Hopkins and linebacker

Bruce Taylor.

Clemson quarterback Tajh Boyd received the league's offensive player of the year honor, while FSU Bjorn Werner won the league's defensive player of the year honor. Duke head coach David Cutcliffe was named the ACC's coach of the year after guiding the Blue Devils to a 6-6 mark. Miami tailback Duke Johnson was the league's offensive rookie of the year and FSU cornerback Ronald Darby was the league's defensive rookie of the year.

Prioleau named an ACC Legend

Former Virginia Tech rover Pierson Prioleau was chosen to serve as the Tech representative at the ACC's Night of Legends held Nov. 30 at the Charlotte Convention Center in Charlotte, N.C.

Prioleau was one of the leaders of the great Hokie defenses of the mid-to-late 1990s. He lettered four times for coach Frank Beamer, helping Tech to a 26-12 four-

year record that included four consecutive bowl games. A three-year starter, he totaled 237 career tackles and had two returns for touchdowns.


Prioleau, who today lives in Radford, Va., earned first-team All-Big East in 1997 and third-team All-America honors (The Sporting News) that year. As a senior, he led a defense that finished first in

the Big East in scoring defense, allowing just 12.9 points per game.

A fourth-round selection of the San Francisco 49ers in the 1999 NFL Draft, Prioleau played 12 seasons in the National Football League for San Francisco, Buffalo, Washington, Jacksonville and New Orleans. He was a member of the Saint's championship team in Super Bowl XLIV.

Thomas named ACC coach of the year

Virginia Tech cross country coach Ben Thomas was named the ACC's men's cross country coach of the year after a season in which he guided the Hokies to their first ACC men's title. Keyed by Will Mulherin's individual championship, Tech placed three runners in the top seven and five in the top 22 to edge in-state rival Virginia by six points (55 to 61) for the team championship.

Thomas has been Tech's cross country coach since 2001. This is his first coach of the year honor since arriving in Blacksburg. 

Baarendse earns third-team All-ACC honors

Tech volleyball player Cara Baarendse earned a spot on the All-ACC third team according to a vote of the league's head coaches. Baarendse, a senior from Mason, Ohio, earned a spot on the team for the third

straight year; she was on the ACC's all-freshman team following her freshman season.

Baarendse recorded 244 kills this season, averaging 2.18 kills per set while tallying a .350 attack

percentage. She posted 25 aces, 169 digs and 83 blocks. She recorded double-digit kills 10 times this season. In addition, Baarendse eclipsed the 1,000-kill milestone and finished with 1,236 for her career.



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editor's desk | by Jimmy Robertson

Christmas means a little more this season for Cole

Tis the season to put up Christmas trees, hang stockings, put up Christmas decorations and lights, and buy and wrap gifts. It's also a time to reflect on the holiday and its meaning, and also to count one's blessings.

Michael Cole has done a lot of reflecting the past month or so. He's also counted his blessings – several times.

Tech fans last saw Cole lying still on the sod at Lane Stadium in the third quarter of the Hokies' game against Florida State on Nov. 8. The redshirt freshman appeared to make an innocent-looking tackle of FSU's Lonnie Pryor on a run early in the third quarter.

Rather than hopping up after the tackle, as he normally does, he felt a sharp pain in his neck and his arms went numb. He lost feeling in his limbs.

Fear instantly gripped his heart. Tech's sports medicine staff sprinted onto the field, telling him to remain still. They asked him questions, and finally, they asked for the ambulance to come onto the field. They placed him on a spine board and then on a stretcher.

Could the nightmare he had seen several times on television be happening to him?

"It was one of the scariest things I've ever experienced," Cole said. "You see it on TV, when guys get carted off the field, and you think, 'Gosh, that sucks.' But you never expect it to be you being the one carted off. That was pretty scary."

Cole's mother, Mary, rode in the ambulance with him to LewisGale Hospital Montgomery,

while his father, Jim, brought their car. The ride was undoubtedly the longest 10 minutes of the Coles' lives.

Fortunately, Cole turned out to be okay, as a CT scan revealed no broken bones. He was diagnosed with a neck sprain, and the feeling in his limbs gradually returned. He later went with his parents to their home in Roanoke.

"I'm doing pretty good," Cole said in a recent phone conversation. "My neck's still a little stiff. I'm doing my therapy and getting back into lifting. I'm just taking things day by day. I go to the doctor here in a few weeks. I'm just waiting things out."

Cole obviously missed the Hokies' final two games of the season – their victories over Boston College and Virginia. Part of him wants to play again, continuing a development that had led to 43 tackles and a couple of interceptions in his first season (he redshirted last year).

Yet part of him remains apprehensive about returning to the field, a natural feeling given what transpired and his past history with neck issues. He's suffered stingers before, including in August of last year, that led to him being redshirted.

"I definitely missed it," he said of playing. "I watched the BC game at home and then I went to the UVa game, and that was a weird feeling. At the same time, I'm happy that it (the injury) wasn't worse than it was. I'm able to live a normal life. It could have been so much worse, so I can't be mad about the situation."

Cole did go back and watch the play that led to his injury. In fact, a few days later, he marched into the defensive backs meeting room and watched the coaches' video of the game, with angles from both an end zone perspective and from the side.

He came away a bit surprised, and maybe a bit perplexed. The tackle looked like a routine one, one he'd made many times before.

"I was just curious," he explained as his reasoning for watching the video. "I wanted to see if there was anything I did wrong. It (the tackle) didn't seem any different than a routine tackle. I didn't duck my head or anything like that. I couldn't tell why it (the injury) happened. It's just one of those things that you can't control."

Cole didn't watch the television version of the game. He didn't watch the part where the sports medicine people worked on him, or the part where the ambulance came onto the field.

"I don't know if I will," he said.

He doesn't know if he'll play in the bowl game – it looks unlikely as of this writing. He knows he probably faces a decision on his football future, whether to continue or to hang up the cleats and not risk further injury.

"I don't have any answers," he said. "I'm just taking it day by day, doing my therapy and trying to get better."

And counting his blessings, particularly this Christmas. As he said earlier, things could have been much worse. 



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With 20th straight bowl bid, Tech puts itself in a rare club

On Dec. 28, Virginia Tech's football team is going to take the field at Orlando's Citrus Bowl in front of who knows how many fans for a weekday afternoon drive-time bowl game against Rutgers.

It's not the bowl many fans were hoping for back in August when the Hokies were the overwhelming favorite to win the ACC's Coastal Division and The New York Post tabbed Tech as its preseason No. 1 squad. Nobody anticipated the Hokies would finish the regular season with a 6-6 record.

Despite their rough season, the Hokies won their final two regular-season games, and as a result, history will be made when the Hokies take the field in Orlando. When that happens, Tech will become just the sixth team in the history of college football to play in a bowl game for 20 straight seasons. Tech will join Nebraska, Michigan, Florida State, Alabama and Florida as the only members of the "20-bowls-in-20-years club."

Let that soak in for a second.

Penn State has never done that. Nor Oklahoma. Or Texas. Or USC. Or Notre Dame. Just five dominant programs in the history of the game have done this, and on Dec. 28, Tech will become the sixth.

Even more impressive is this fact: only three head coaches – Tom Osborne, Bobby Bowden and Bear Bryant – have coached in 20 straight bowl games. Tech head coach Frank Beamer will become the fourth.

"I think it says a lot about the consistency of the program, of our coaches, and the kind of people

we try to recruit," Beamer said about the bowl streak. "For a while there, I wasn't sure if we were going to make it."

Beamer's not alone. When the Hokies were 4-6 and trailing Boston College 13-3 at halftime a few weeks ago, there were many who thought the bowl streak might end. The Hokies, of course, rallied to win that day in overtime and then beat UVa on the final play of the game the following week to qualify for the postseason.

"There are no bad bowls" is one of Beamer's favorite quotes, and he's on target when he says, "The Russell Athletic Bowl has the third ACC selection and picked us over some other teams, including one that had a better record (NC State)."

With its \$2.3 million per team payout, the Russell Athletic Bowl has one of the better revenue distributions outside of the New Year's Day bowls. And it's run by the Florida Citrus Sports group that's regarded as one of the finest organizations of its kind in the country. Year-round events culminate with the Capital One Bowl on New Year's Day, which features Georgia vs. Nebraska this year.

So what if it's I-Drive and Disney, not Bourbon Street or South Beach? That's just fine, actually. Osborne's bowl coaching streak included Nebraska's appearance in the Independence Bowl. The Bear coached the Tide in the Astro-Bluebonnet Bowl.

Even Bowden, in his 12th year as Florida State's coach, led his Seminoles to the Blockbuster Bowl in 1990, three years before FSU won its first



Tech head coach Frank Beamer is one of four head coaches ever to have coached in 20 straight bowl games.

national title. The Blockbuster Bowl, of course, is now the Russell Athletic Bowl.

"For whatever reason, it just never came together for this team," Beamer said. "We never got that consistent play. But at the end of the day, and at the end of two very big ball games that we had to win in November, we won them."

When Tech had to make a stop on defense, convert a fourth down, create a turnover or make a kick to force overtime or win at the gun, it did. And that made Beamer even prouder.

"There have been some seasons that we've played for the ACC championship. Sometimes, for more," Beamer said. "This team wasn't playing for that, but it gave everything it had down the stretch

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to keep this streak going, and I'm proud of the way they finished. If we can find a way to win this game and beat Rutgers and finish with three straight wins, that would say a lot about this team and the players we have in this program."

Going to 20 consecutive bowl games may seem like a minor accomplishment to some cynics. After all, there are 35 bowl games and a .500 record is enough to qualify for most teams in most years.

But seriously, Notre Dame's longest bowl streak is nine years. At Texas, the record is 12 years. And those schools have some inherent advantages over ... well... just about everyone.

At 6-6, the Hokies just barely qualified, but they're in a darn good bowl that featured FSU vs. Notre Dame last year. Now we'll see if they can finish the season on a three-game winning streak.

Orlando calls itself the "happiest place on Earth." And if Virginia Tech beats Rutgers on Dec. 28, Beamer will no doubt be the happiest guy in town.

After 20 years of bowling, who could blame him?

Top 10 All-time Consecutive Bowl Appearances

Nebraska	35	1969-2003
Michigan	33	1975-2007
Florida State	31	1982-present
Alabama	25	1959-1983
Florida	22	1991-present
Virginia Tech	20	1993-present
BYU	17	1978-1994
Tennessee	16	1989-2004
Georgia	16	1997-present
Georgia Tech	16	1997-present

Holiday radio schedule set

Here's our bowl week broadcasting lineup. It's a hectic, but fun week.

Saturday, Dec. 22: Tech vs. Bradley men's basketball game from Las Vegas, 8 p.m. EST tipoff.

Sunday, Dec. 23: Tech vs. Colorado State or Portland men's basketball game from Las Vegas, 9 p.m. or 11:30 p.m. EST tipoff.

Wednesday, Dec. 26: Tech Talk Live! from Orlando, 7-8 p.m.

Thursday, Dec. 27: Tech Talk Live! from Orlando, 7-8 p.m.

Friday, Dec. 28: Tech vs. Rutgers, 4 p.m. airtime, 5:30 p.m. kickoff from Orlando.

Saturday, Dec. 29: Tech vs. BYU, men's basketball game from Salt Lake City, 2 p.m. EST tipoff.

Important offseason looming for Tech

Win or lose, the weeks following Tech's bowl game are going to be very interesting to watch.

First is recruiting. The Hokies have 18 verbal commitments (as of Dec. 4) in what could be a top-20 recruiting class. To be honest, this has to be a good class without many busts because of recent attrition and pressing needs at several key positions. Signing day is Feb. 6, which is 39 days after the bowl game.

I asked Tech receiver coach Kevin Sherman, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it for the Hokies to sign a great receiver in February?"

His response? "11."

No idea if Tech will win on Dec. 28 in Orlando, but the Hokies absolutely must win on Feb. 6. Must.

Second item of note on the horizon is spring football and the re-discovery of Tech's rushing game, which vanished in 2012.

"We didn't block well enough. Or consistently enough," Beamer told me on the Dec. 2 edition of Virginia Tech Sports Today. "We had young

running backs, and we wanted to get that thing down to one or two and really work with those. But nobody distanced himself. That's going to be a priority."

The statistics show that Tech was fifth in the ACC in rushing at 158 yards per game heading into the bowl game, but that's a deceptive number. The Hokies must run the ball better in 2013, or they'll struggle again to be consistent on offense.

Third is the 2013 schedule. Tech was originally scheduled to play Duke, Florida State, Virginia and Georgia Tech on the road, plus Alabama in Atlanta. The 2013 home games were Miami, BC, North Carolina and Maryland, plus Pittsburgh as a non-conference game. But then Pittsburgh joined the ACC (and the Coastal Division), and the league flip-flopped from an eight-game schedule to nine and then back to eight.

When that occurred, Tech added a road game at East Carolina, and so now we have no idea if a.) the Hokies will even play at Florida State, b.) where Tech will play Pittsburgh and c.) will Maryland drop off the 2013 schedule completely?

When will we see the 2013 schedule? Well, the release date seems to get later each year.

2010: Feb. 4

2011: Feb. 14

2012: Feb. 27

Adding to the uncertainty is this: ACC senior associate commissioner Michael Kelly has been in charge of football scheduling since he joined the conference office in 2007, but he is leaving the conference to take over his new role as the COO of the new college football playoff. So that, too, could impact when the schedule gets released. Tech fans may not know until early March.

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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:

Q: Did you see the case involving the San Diego State basketball player who was suspended for receiving impermissible benefits? The NCAA suspended him, but let him play in the season opener against Syracuse first before suspending him the next three games. How is that fair? He'll probably miss three games against lousy teams, but got to play against a great team. Thanks, April in Blacksburg.

TP: "San Diego State argued successfully that the violation was minor in nature and that the event (the Syracuse game was played on an aircraft carrier) was unique, and therefore, the player should be allowed to start the suspension the following week. The NCAA agreed.

"The Committee on Student-Athlete Reinstatement has the flexibility to do this, but does so only in very limited circumstances to preserve the integrity of a particular event (e.g. bowl game, NCAA championship, NIT, etc.). We saw this a couple of years ago when the NCAA allowed Ohio State quarterback Terrell Pryor and others to play in the Sugar Bowl, with their suspensions to be served the following season. Keep in mind that the committee wouldn't do this unless the student-athlete had eligibility remaining the following academic year."

Q: Have you heard anything about Penn State's football team going on a foreign

tour in the future as a bowl substitute since they're banned from going to a bowl for four years by the NCAA? It's a unique idea. Thanks, Bill in Danville, Va.

TP: "Yes, I believe their coach, Bill O'Brien, mentioned that a month ago as a possibility. To be honest, I'm not sure what the thought process is at Penn State.

"Bylaw 17.28.1.8 states specifically that 'a foreign football tour shall be considered that institution's postseason opportunity for that season, the accounting period to commence with the start of the institution's normal beginning of fall practice.' Penn State would need clarification on whether the fact that it has no postseason opportunities through 2015 prevents it from accessing this foreign tour option.


"To me, this is an attempt to get around the sanctions. However, it's a tough spot for the NCAA because it wants to enforce the sanctions while limiting the impact on student-athletes. It'll be interesting to see what transpires in the future."

Q: So is it true that two Indiana freshmen basketball players were suspended for nine games over the amount of \$185? That seems like harsh punishment, doesn't it? Thanks, Megan in Blacksburg.

TP: "In a nutshell, yes. The two players received impermissible benefits provided by

a man who operates both a foundation that brings basketball players over from Africa and the Indiana Elite AAU team. But those benefits were only impermissible because the man had given \$185 over a six-year span from 1986-92 to the IU Varsity Club, which makes him a booster 'forever' under the NCAA's rules. Had he not given the money, then the benefits would have been permissible. But it's important to keep in mind that when the headlines state that the two were suspended over \$185, that amount simply refers to the donations given by the booster. The amount of the impermissible benefits received by each of the players was actually well in excess of \$1,000.

"Has it been a public relations headache for the NCAA? Yes. The reaction to the NCAA's ruling, which has been almost universally negative, is based on the idea that benefits the man provided should not become impermissible just because he donated a little bit of money to the school a long time ago. But the flip side is also true. Had the man or any other youth coach/international education foundation head not donated the money, allowing him to provide whatever benefits he wants and potentially steer kids to certain colleges is also not a good result.

"The challenge is to create a rule that does a good job of distinguishing between folks with good intentions and folks with bad intentions. But booster status, especially as it is currently defined, does little to help separate the two." 

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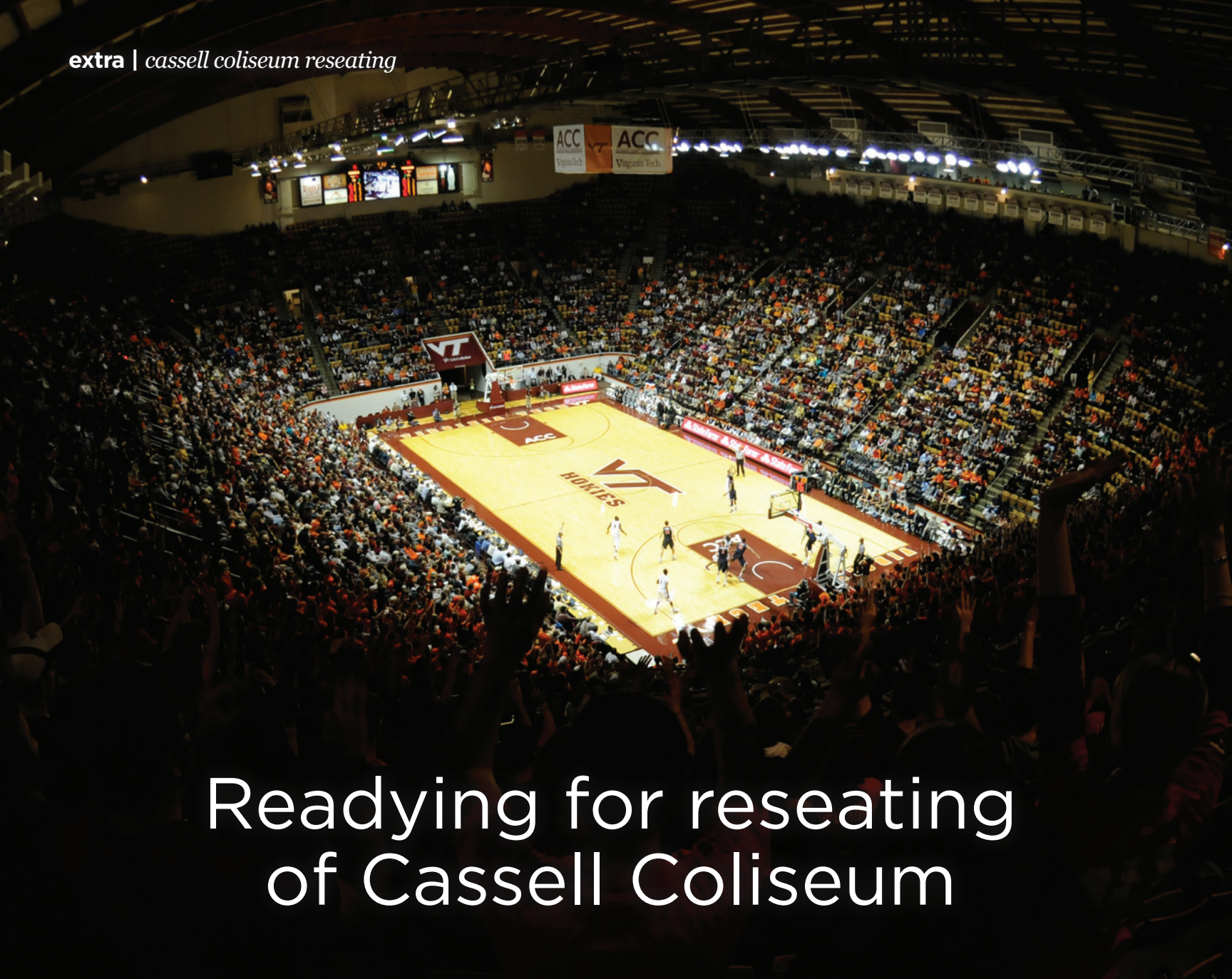
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Readying for reseating of Cassell Coliseum

The Tech athletics department and the Hokie Club plan on using the same general process that was used to reseat Lane Stadium

by Jimmy Robertson

Round 1 of the Virginia Tech athletics department's reseating plan went quite smoothly.

Now, the department is planning for round 2.

Last spring, the athletics department and the Virginia Tech Athletic Fund (or as most know it, the Hokie Club) oversaw the Lane Stadium reseating project. Now, the department and the Hokie Club are making plans for the Cassell Coliseum reseating project for both men's and women's basketball.

This certainly comes as no surprise. In March of last year, the department announced plans to reseat Lane for the 2012 season and Cassell for the

2013 season. But time tends to slip up on people, so the Hokie Club recently mailed out a glossy document to every single Hokie Club member that explains the ins and outs of the process. The Hokie Club also plans on mailing out more information early next summer.

"The general process for reseating is going to be the same as it was for football," said Scott Davis, an associate director of development who is helping oversee the project. "It's just going to involve less people because of the size of the building and the number of tickets available."

“Right now, our first priority is to continue making people aware of the Dec. 31 deadline.”

Davis is referring to the Dec. 31 benefits deadline. Members’ contributions must be in by Dec. 31 to receive points toward the 2013 point priority ranking and thus be eligible for benefits. Members get to choose their tickets based on where they rank.

The reseating process will be similar to the process used to reseat Lane Stadium. The Hokie Club uses a “ladder” that recognizes a combination of giving and continuous years of purchasing season tickets. For men’s basketball, those who have been a continuous season ticket purchaser since 1966 take the top spot on the ladder and get to retain their location of seats. For women’s basketball, those who have been a continuous season ticket purchaser since 1999-2000 take the top spot on the ladder and get the first choice of seats.

Next comes contributors who rank as Benefactors, Century Champions, Golden Champions, Diamond and Platinum Hokies. Then, those who have purchased season tickets continuously between 43 and 46 years (men’s basketball) and continuously since 2000-01 (women’s basketball), followed by Golden Hokies and so forth.

The process also will be similar in that the basketball reseating will use the same online system, one designed by Ballena Technologies. This system allows ticket purchasers to monitor available seats before their selection appointments and provides an easy-to-use platform to select tickets.

After the Lane Stadium reseating process, the athletics department and the Hokie Club sent out a survey to each participant asking for their opinions on the process and the online system. The response was overwhelmingly positive, with more than 2,000 responses.

“We got a lot of high marks,” said David Everett, director of major gifts for intercollegiate athletics who is also helping with the project. “That’s not to say everything was perfect. We understand that, but most people agreed that a good process was in place and that the technology was good and that we were transparent with everything about the process. Our whole goal was to be fair, and we thought we accomplished that.”

The Athletics Ticket Office plans on sending out season ticket order forms in May, though that date is tentative. Both the men’s and women’s basketball programs need to firm up the 2013-14 home schedule – something that, in the past, has taken a while.

If the ticket order forms get mailed in May, then the deadline for returning the forms will be in June.

Hokie Club members can order as many tickets as they want based on availability, but the same priority limits apply. In other words, a Golden Hokie can order seven tickets, but can only pick four seats at his or her priority appointment time. He or she picks the other three tickets at the end of the process as part of the last step on the ladder – tickets in excess of priority limits (according to rank order on the ladder).

In July, the Hokie Club plans on mailing a “How-To” guide that explains how to use Ballena’s system to those ordering tickets. This same “how-to” guide was mailed to those ordering tickets during the Lane Stadium reseating process.


“We’re encouraging ticket holders to use this guide and familiarize themselves with the site,” Davis said. “I think most will find it to be very similar to the one used for the Lane Stadium reseating, and therefore, the comfort level for our members should be higher.

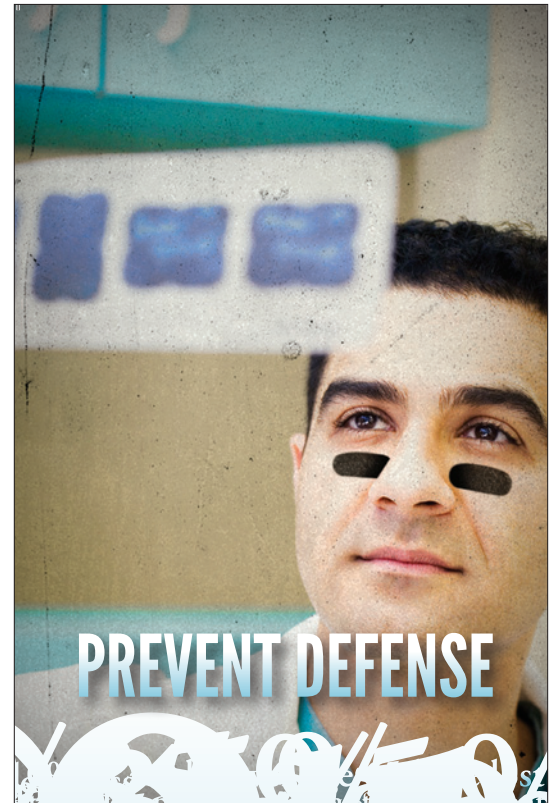
“Then, in late July or early August, we’ll send out the appointment times, and the reseating starts. We think the process will take approximately three weeks based on order numbers from this year.”

As they did during the football reseating process, Hokie Club staff members continue to go to great lengths to educate, inform and also manage people’s expectations. Building new facilities costs money, and the scholarship bill continues to rise annually. The reality of the situation is building new facilities and paying scholarships have to be done to continue Tech’s undeniable success as a member of the ACC.

Reseating Lane Stadium and Cassell Coliseum doesn’t mean that the Hokie Club and athletics department do not appreciate Hokie Club members and season ticket holders’ contributions. On the contrary, they do.

“Our members have really stepped up their support to allow us to build needed venues and meet the rising cost of educating our student-athletes,” said Lu Merritt, senior director of development for intercollegiate athletics. “We can’t thank them enough.”

That’s why this process utilizing the “ladder” was created, one that rewards loyalty for longtime season ticket purchasers and rewards those who have contributed to the Hokie Club. This process marries the best of both. 




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HIGH VOLTAGE

Antone Exum has been a lightning rod for his critics this season, but his confidence in himself enabled him to become an All-ACC cornerback

by Jimmy Robertson

Some players are just lightning rods for attention. Of those, a certain few bring it upon themselves, welcoming it the way a toaster welcomes electricity. Others see it thrust upon them, surging volts that are simply beyond their control.

The list of sports' greatest lightning rods is quite lengthy, running from Alex Rodriguez, a three-time MVP whom Yankee fans love to hate, to Terrell Owens, a former NFL record-setting receiver known more for his loudmouth antics than his accomplishments, to Tiger Woods, at one time, the world's greatest golfer whose aloofness, and later, his infidelities, alienated many.

Such sports lightning rods aren't limited by geography or conference or levels or stadiums or teams. Even at Virginia Tech, with its predominantly blue-collar, scrutiny-dodging bunch of football players, lightning rods for attention pop up from time to time, and this past season, a certain young man drew his fair share from Hokie Nation.

The funny thing is, off the field, he really doesn't fit within the perception. He's certainly no Owens or Randy Moss or Ndamukong Suh. Far from it, actually.

Just consider the following:

- He sports a grade-point average of better than 3.0.
- He graduated in three years with a degree in finance, one of the school's most demanding majors.
- He comes from a well-grounded family, with both parents having their doctoral degrees – his father works as a dentist, while his mother helps run a home infusion therapy company.
- He works relentlessly on his game, often taking notes during film sessions and watching extra film during the evenings. Also, he works out multiple times a day during the offseason.
- He rarely goes out and has never come remotely close to having a run-in with any law enforcement officials.

Yet Antone Exum, he of the game- and season-

saving interception against rival Virginia on Nov. 24, has been, to put it gently, a bit of a lightning rod for criticism this past season.

"With my personality and how I am, if I'm not doing something always right, you're either going to love me or not like me," Exum said, with a smile. "I've accepted it."

The redshirt junior from Richmond just wrapped up his second season as a starter, his first as a cornerback after being moved from rover. The season featured both ups and downs, but mostly ups after some early-season struggles. He tied for the ACC lead during the regular season with 15 pass breakups and finished tied for third with four interceptions. All that, and his 47 tackles, earned him second-team All-ACC honors.

That's how Exum answers his critics. His play speaks so much louder than his words or his occasional tomfoolery on the field. He even understands why some view him the way they do.

But he never lets that bother him. He possesses a bit of nonchalance toward his critics, that

cockiness that coaches quietly love. His inner fuel tank runs low on fear and self-doubt, and instead brims over with confidence, that self belief that refuses to let him ever doubt his ability to beat his opponents.

That's just how Antone Exum, Jr., has always been. Lightning rod or not, that's never going to change.

Exum's path to football stardom began in a recreational flag football league in Richmond. He begged his parents to let him play, and they consented, even though their son was a year younger than the other kids. What he lacked in age, he made up for in size, and his stout physique earned him a spot unfathomable to those who know him today.

"I was an offensive lineman," he said, again, smiling.

That lasted all of a year. The following season, he found himself at quarterback and middle linebacker, and he played on both sides of the ball until he got to Tech.

He's always been passionate about the sport in season, whether it be football or basketball, another love. In the fall, that passion centered on football. He woke up in the pre-dawn hours on game days, put on his uniform, snapped on his helmet, and then stormed into his parents' bedroom to wake them. He was a human box of energy, wired to go off at kickoff – and kickoff couldn't come soon enough for him.

"I loved rec football," he said. "That's the purest form of football in my opinion. No politics or any of that stuff. Just guys out there having fun."

But Exum's passion, or energy, or whatever emotion one wants to choose, occasionally got the best of him. He never played just for the simple joy of playing. Other kids did that.

No, Exum played to *win*. He struggled to see losing as an option for his team's outcomes. Some of his outbursts drew stern lectures from his parents. They liked his competitive nature, but they reminded him to control his emotions.

He still fights that battle within himself, even today, when the stakes are higher and the scrutiny greater.

"It was way worse back then," he said. "I've gotten a lot better than I was in the past, as far as taking losses and how I act in games. My parents probably have more stories than I can remember. Being competitive has always been a part of me."

A big chunk of that competitive nature comes from his parents, two immensely successful people. His father, Antone, Sr., got his undergraduate degree at Hampton University before getting his doctor of dental surgery at VCU. His mother, Barbara, got her undergraduate degree at Maryland and then got her pharmacy doctorate



Antone Exum's physical skills and his confidence enabled him to make a successful switch from safety to cornerback this season.

degree at VCU. Both have thriving careers.

Exum's father served as his son's first basketball coach back in those rec league days and expected great things from his son. His mother was a good athlete in her own right and her expectations were high as well. Together, they expected great things in the classroom from both their son and their daughter, the younger of the two kids. Any grade below a B meant no sports.

Exum, of course, welcomed that challenge and all others – on the field, on the court and academically. He excelled in all phases, but his competitive nature never waned, even as he grew older. At times, it continued to get the better of him, even in family pickup basketball games in the driveway. On one occasion, he even cracked his dad's tooth.

"Yeah, I did," Exum admitted. "He'll say it was intentional, but I was just playing hard. I didn't want to lose."

And of course, there was the time when he hip-checked his mom into the garage door.

"My mom will say that was intentional, too," Exum said.

Needless to say, there was a competitive environment in the Exum household. Exum's parents set the standard high with their life's successes. Their son desperately wanted the opportunity to follow suit.

"I'll give them a lot of credit for where I'm at right now," he said. "They saw a lot of the characteristics that I use now on and off the field. Those came from them."

Those characteristics made him a great middle and high school player. They would later make him a great college one as well.

Exum attracted the notice of college recruiters after a junior season at Deep Run High School in which he scored 13 touchdowns rushing and threw for 12 touchdowns as a quarterback. But Jim Cavanaugh, the Hokies' cagey whips linebackers coach at the time and a man with a finger constantly on the pulse of the Richmond recruiting scene, knew of Exum long before any others.

Cavanaugh developed a close relationship with the Exums, and he watched as recruiters from other colleges tried to wedge themselves into the Exums' graces. Ultimately, the young man whittled his choices from 17 to two – Virginia Tech and Penn State – and after his senior season in which he accounted for 2,357 yards and 30 touchdowns, he chose the Hokies.

"What put Tech over the edge was that Penn State wanted me to play a slot receiver position," Exum said. "Tech told me I would either be a quarterback or cornerback or safety. One day after a couple of workouts in the summer (second summer session), Coach Cav (Jim Cavanaugh) pulled me in the office and told me they were going to start me at free safety."

Tech's staff saw free safety as the perfect fit for Exum, who came in at 210 pounds and ran well. After redshirting his first season, Exum started five games at free safety his freshman year. Then, he started 11 games at safety and three games at rover as a sophomore, and he earned honorable mention All-ACC honors after leading the team with 89 tackles.

But this past winter, Tech's staff decided to move Exum to cornerback because Jayron Hosley had made himself available for the NFL Draft and because of a lack of depth and experience at the

position. They envisioned Exum being a Jimmy Williams type – a corner with size and speed who could lock down one side of the field.

“I always felt I could play that position despite how heavy I was,” Exum said. “You don’t see corners that size in the NFL. Now, I’m 220, and you definitely don’t see corners that big. But that’s the position I always felt I could play.”

“I thought it would be a challenge to me, and I like the fact that it was a one-on-one mindset type of position. I liked that part of the position. When I heard that I might be moving, I was pretty excited just for a new opportunity.”

Exum understood that, to be a good corner, he needed to become quicker and more flexible, and he needed to polish his technique. This past spring and summer, he spent countless hours watching film. He worked with a Pilates instructor. He also worked out religiously, both with the team and on his own.

He became attached to a hill that sits on the other side of Southgate Drive, right across from Tech’s outdoor track and just below the Burrows-Burleson Tennis Center. At nights in the summer, he often drove from his apartment to the parking lot next to the track, where he’d park his car, get out and sprint up that hill, time after time after time.

This is the Antone Exum whom few Tech fans know. They see the confidence, the swagger as he calls it, on game day, when he celebrates after breaking up a pass or making a tackle or grabbing an interception, but they fail to realize that it takes hard work to become a player worthy of all-conference recognition. He undoubtedly possesses a supreme amount of confidence, but that confidence may be matched by his work ethic, one that rivals anyone on the Hokies’ 2012 roster.

The combination of both led to an All-ACC season.

“Yeah, I’ve had some bumps, like the pass interferences, but that’s something you learn from playing,” Exum said. “From the beginning of the year, I’ve progressed with certain aspects of my game. That’s something I’ve focused on. I try to work on something each week and get better each week.”

Exum thinks one game – the Hokies’ loss to Cincinnati at FedExField – has led people to form a blanket opinion of him. In that game, he got flagged for two pass interference penalties and two face mask penalties, and Cincinnati receiver Kimbrell Thompkins hurt the Hokies with seven catches for 134 yards.

Tech’s last-second loss only added to the frustration of Hokie Nation. Many took out those frustrations on him.

“That game sparked people’s idea that I couldn’t play that position, but I didn’t see it like that,” Exum said. “In my eyes, two of those penalties were legitimate and two were questionable. The receiver had eight catches for 135 yards or something like that, but he only had three of them on me and the rest were on other people. That’s not trying to blame my teammates. I’m just saying things aren’t always what they seem.”

“When you’re a corner...you’ll be open to more criticism than any other position on the field. At quarterback or running back, you can mess up three times and no one will blink. But at corner, they catch two balls on you and people are wondering what’s going on. It’s just a different type of mindset with that position.”

Tech’s staff vehemently defended Exum after that Cincy game, particularly defensive coordinator Bud Foster. The coaches love the way he has played this season, too. His willingness

to accept the challenge of playing man-to-man coverage – and his ability to do it – gave Foster a lot more flexibility with his schemes.

It’s certainly hard to argue with the results. Tech didn’t allow an opponent to gain more than 350 yards in the final six games of the regular season.

Antone Exum plans on coming back to Tech for his senior season. No matter what people say about him, he doesn’t plan on conforming to what people want him to be.

If he wants to go with the dyed Mohawk look, as he did for the first part of this season until Tech lost, then he will. If he wants to make a video and upload it on YouTube, as he recently did once the Hokies beat UVa and extended their bowl streak, then so be it.

That free spirit makes him who he is. That confidence to accept any challenge makes him great, not just as a player, but also as a student. He graduated with a degree in finance in three years simply because so many refuse to accept that challenge. Not him. Now he’s working on a second degree, one in marketing.

As for his critics, he knows they’ll come around as long as he keeps playing well. He wants them to, because he’s smart enough to understand their views. But he has to stay confident to be the player he wants to be – and the one they want him to be.

“For those who have not shown me too much love, I love them just as much as I love the fans who do show me love,” Exum said. “The fans who critique me and are hard on me, that just keeps me driven. It’s just extra motivation.”

Not that he needs it. His motivation comes from a closer source – from within himself.



The advertisement is divided into three main sections. The top left section features a blue and white wavy banner with the text "Be Responsible Be Safe Have Fun" in red and blue. Below this, it says "Boating Safety Courses Are Required" in bold black text. A small text box provides the website "www.HuntFishVA.com". The bottom left section shows a photograph of a family of four (two adults and two children) wearing life jackets and sitting on a white and red motorboat on a body of water. The middle section is a green shield-shaped logo with the text "TWO GREAT PROGRAMS" at the top, "VIRGINIA" in the center, and "Department of Game & Inland Fisheries" at the bottom. The bottom right section is a large orange circle containing the text "HUNT RESPONSIBLY AND HAVE FUN" in white and orange, with "HUNT" written vertically. Below the circle, it says "IT'S ALL CONNECTED!" and "www.HuntFishVA.com". At the very bottom right is the "Hunter Education" logo, which includes a small circular emblem with a deer and the text "DEPARTMENT OF GAME & INLAND FISHERIES HUNTER EDUCATION PROGRAM".



GETTING TO KNOW ANTONE EXUM

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

AE: "Working out on the practice field. I go out every once in a while, but on a Friday night in the offseason, that will usually consist of me at home most of the night, and then later on in the night – because I like to work out at late hours – I'll come over here and run the hill across from the track. You can ask any of my teammates. That's usually what I'm doing."

Q: Facebook or Twitter?

AE: "I have both. I think both have their pluses. I'm probably more active on Twitter than Facebook because that's a minute-to-minute thing. But Facebook has things that I like."

Q: Who's your favorite football player?

AE: "It was Sean Taylor (former Washington Redskins safety who died in

2007 from a gunshot wound) before he passed away. I used to watch his highlight film over and over and over the nights before games. Now, it would have to be Darrelle Revis (New York Jets corner) now that I'm at corner. Those are the guys I pay the most attention to in the NFL."

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

AE: "Marcus Taylor. He's my god brother, and he's in prison right now. I'd trade places with him just so he could have a free day."

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

AE: "Playing in Pro Bowls in the NFL."

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QUIETING *the* COMPETITION

Nick Becton is quiet off the field, but the left tackle's play this season has spoken quite loudly to Tech's opponents

by **Jimmy Robertson**

Occasionally, one who works in the journalism world comes across an athlete who is as quiet as Lane Stadium in July. Therein said journalist must put sleuthing skills to work, looking under every piece of artificial turf and every cranny in said athlete's football locker, so to speak, to find something of interest.

Detective work on a recent mission revealed that a certain Virginia Tech football player loves shoes, owns a pit bull puppy named Charlie, cruises around in a sweet-looking Dodge Challenger and, at least on one occasion, went to Taco Bell and purchased a 12-pack – of tacos, that is.

"You saw that on my Instagram," Nick Becton said, with a smile.

Guilty as charged.

When on the prowl for information, one often finds it handy to turn to social media, the places to find thoughts and opinions on a range of subjects like class work, politics, girlfriends, boyfriends and trivial details such as a subject's cereal of choice. Twitter, widely the preferred social media

platform for many, reveals this information 140 characters at a time, and Instagram provides the pictures.

Of course, this recent mission wasn't exactly some nosy, perverted quest into Becton's life. This was simply a foray for information on a young man who shuns attention the way he shuns holding penalties from his left tackle spot. Indeed, he is a man of few words.

At 6-foot-6 and with 320 pounds of brawn, Becton rates as the biggest man on Tech's 2012 roster. But put together a list of the quietest dudes on that same roster, and Becton would rank in the top five in that category, too, maybe at the top.

"I'm probably in the running for it," he admitted. "Sometimes, I can open up a little bit, but most of the time, I'm quiet."

Despite his soft-spoken nature, Becton's play has been anything but quiet this season for the Hokies. In fact, his play has been quite the scream, a success story among an inconsistent, and at times, maligned group this season.

Technically, this season marks Becton's

inaugural one as a starter. But without question, it marks the culmination in Becton's transformation from a basketball player into a college football player into a college football starter to a possible NFL Draft pick.

Actually, considering the NFL possibility, maybe his transformation isn't quite complete – after all, the big, quiet fella possesses a bountiful supply of potential. But at the least, he's come a *loooooooooooooong* way from the young lad whose love affair with basketball superseded everything else while growing up in his hometown of Wilmington, N.C.

Becton lived a rather utopian lifestyle in Wilmington, a direct contrast to many of his teammates who grew up in broken homes or served as victims of certain socioeconomic situations. Becton's family lived 10 minutes from the beach. His father works at a bank, while his mother serves as the assistant superintendent for instruction and academic accountability for New Hanover County Schools. Her status in the local education hierarchy forced Becton to watch his

step at school and in the community.

“I had to watch myself,” he said. “She was my principal for a few years, and I had to be on my best behavior because I couldn’t keep anything from her. Education is at the top of the list for her, so I always had to do well in school. I didn’t want to disappoint my mom.”

As an only child, Becton got the goodies. No, his parents don’t have a bank account that rivals Donald Trump, but they took good care of their boy. They bought him multiple pairs of sneakers over the years, and Becton has since added to the collection – to the point that he now keeps more than 100 pairs, with roughly 30 back at home and the rest sitting in a big rack at his Blacksburg apartment.

They also bought him a Hummer for his first ride. They wanted him to be in a safe vehicle, thus the purchase of the SUV. Becton recently traded it in for his Dodge Challenger, with a sound system that rivals a MegaDeth concert and the horsepower of an Airbus.

“That’s my baby. I love it,” he said. “I got rid of the Hummer with the big rims and got a muscle car. I love the way it looks. I love all the horsepower I’ve got with it. I’ve always wanted a faster car. My parents wanted me to have a safe car for my first car, so I got the Hummer. But I got a little more input this time around.

“I loved the Hummer. I still wish I had it. But I’d rather have 470 horsepower.”

Despite getting such special attention, Becton hasn’t been afraid to put in some old-fashioned

hardwork. As a kid, most of that work was put in on Wilmington’s local basketball courts, where round ball became his passion.

He became a good player, participating in both the travel and AAU circuits. By the age of 15, he started dunking. Not long after, he started shattering backboards.

He ripped off two in pickup games at New Hanover High. Then another one came down in the first game of his senior season, forcing the cancellation of the game. His power practically became a budgetary issue, as new backboards aren’t cheap.

“I broke two at my high school and then one the first game of my senior year,” he said. “I was just trying to dunk. I guess I weigh a little too much to be dunking.”

Becton rolled on the court with some prominent names. George Bryan, the current NC State tight end, played with him at New Hanover. Also, Ty Walker, a 7-1 center who plays at Wake Forest, was on his team, along with David Pellom, who now plays at George Washington. The group won the 2007 North Carolina state basketball championship (Class 4A).

That Becton wound up playing football seems an unsolvable mystery, a fate that simply goes unexplained. He had never played before, and yet somehow, at the first football practice of his junior year, he found himself out there awkwardly stumbling around, participating in a sport he knew little about – and to this point, a sport in which he had shown little interest.

“It was something else to do,” he said. “One of my friends wanted me to play, and the coaches always asked me to play. I figured I’d try it. I didn’t really know what I was doing, but I was out there, being big.

“I didn’t know what to do. They (the coaches) told me what to do. I wanted to play tight end, but George Bryan, who is at NC State, was our tight end, so I played on the offensive line. I wanted to play defense, but they had me on offense most of the time. I played both ways, but more on offense than on defense.

“It worked out pretty well.”

Standing 6-6 and with flagpoles for arms, Becton became a very good offensive lineman. After his junior season, he decided to give up AAU basketball. In the summer before his senior season, he started attracting looks from college football recruiters. They arrived in Wilmington, drool buckets in tow, in awe of Becton’s size and athleticism.

In December of 2007, he committed to Virginia Tech, choosing the Hokies over NC State. Bryan’s pull wasn’t enough to keep Becton from driving past Raleigh on his way to Blacksburg.

“When I came on my visit, it felt like everyone was together,” he said. “It was like a big family. I liked the atmosphere, and there was a lot of good football up here. I didn’t want to be too, too far away from home. It seemed like the best fit for me.”

Tech’s staff remained patient with Becton, redshirting him that first season and then watching with glee, as he got better day after day. He played in five games as a redshirt freshman in 2009.

He went into the 2010 season all set to start at left tackle, but then a toe injury stubbed those plans, and he ended up in a timeshare with Andrew Lanier – one that lasted two years.

“That was the most frustrated I’ve been in my life,” Becton said, referring to the injury. “I had worked hard to get to that point, and to have it taken away, it was frustrating. I didn’t know how bad it would be. I thought it was a little sprain, and I’d be back in a few weeks. But the whole season, I struggled. I had to get painkillers just to get through the year. I didn’t feel better until the spring.”

Becton certainly saved his best play for his last season. He has graded out better than 90 percent in nine of 12 games. Even in his worst game, he graded out at 83 percent – and that came against FSU stud end Tank Carradine, a likely high NFL Draft pick.

“I expected a tough day, and I got it,” Becton said. “Hopefully, he feels the same way.”

Becton hopes to follow in the same projected path as Carradine, or in the same path as former




Nick Becton was a very good basketball player while in high school in Wilmington, N.C., but he has developed into a respected offensive tackle during his career at Virginia Tech.

Clemson end Andre Branch or former North Carolina end Quinton Coples – two guys whom Becton battled and accounted himself well against last year.

He certainly possesses the size to play at the next level, and also the athleticism, thanks to all those years of playing basketball. Fate is a funny thing, isn't it? The very sport Becton loved growing up may well lead him toward his dream of playing the sport he wants to play in the future.

"That's my goal – to get drafted and play," Becton said. "That's my dream. I've always wanted to play a professional sport, and that's my only route."

If that doesn't pan out, he can put his degree in residential property management to good use. He performed an internship with Prudential Laney Real Estate Company in Wilmington, which molded him for a potential future in the business. After all, there are certainly worse things than managing beachfront property.

Tech fans probably won't know what he ends up doing unless, of course, he works in the NFL. Barring that, whatever the big guy does, he'll do so quietly – just like he always has. 

GETTING TO KNOW NICK BECTON

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

NB: "I'm either working out or playing video games. I just like to relax. Maybe I'll be sitting around and playing with my dog, Charlie."

Q: Facebook or Twitter?

NB: "I don't tweet a lot and I don't post a lot on Facebook. I post a few pictures on Instagram. That's about it."

Q: Favorite food?

NB: "I've been eating a lot of sushi lately. I go to Sake House and get it. I also like fried shrimp and fried turkey."

Q: Favorite movie?

NB: "He Got Game, with Denzel (Washington) and Ray Allen."

Q: Who is your favorite football player?

NB: "In football, I don't really have one. I watch basketball, and I like the Heat. Right now, LeBron (James) is my favorite player. I own about 10 pairs of his shoes."

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

NB: "Bill Gates [former CEO and founder of Microsoft]. I'd like to see how it feels to have billions of dollars."

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

NB: "Hopefully, still playing football."

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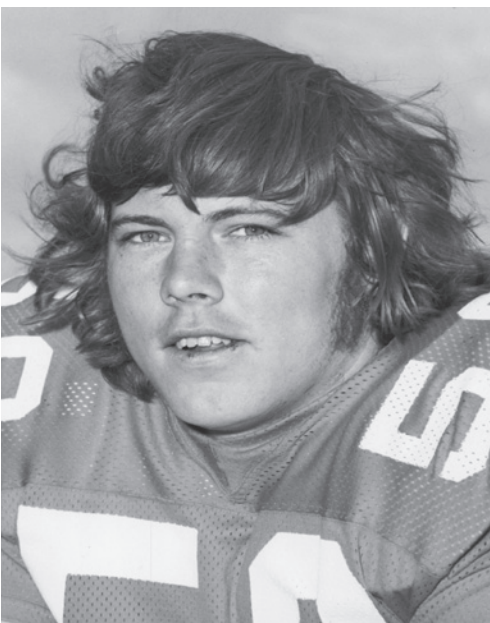
Keeping tabs from Kentucky

by *Jimmy Robertson*

Former Tech linebacker Kent Henry still keeps up with the Hokies even though he lives these days in the Bluegrass State, where he was born and raised



Kent Henry (58) took advantage of an opportunity early in his career and became a three-year starter at linebacker, where he finished with seven career interceptions.



The sport of football often leaves its participants with a lot of memories, and occasionally, trophies, rings and various other awards and honors.

Kent Henry recently received something else from his days as a football player – a new knee.

Undergoing knee replacement surgery, though, hasn't dented Henry's fond affections for his school or his playing days at Virginia Tech, where he played as an outside linebacker during the short-lived Charlie Coffey era back in the early 1970s. In contrast, he viewed his recent medical procedure as simply the price to be paid for doing something he loved.

"I wouldn't trade my decision to come to Tech for anything in the world," Henry said. "I made a lot of close friends there, and we had a great time. We still keep in touch."

Henry committed to Tech after a standout career at Flaget High School in Louisville, Ky. At the time, Jerry Claiborne served as the Hokies' head coach, and he used to recruit the Bluegrass State with regularity – after all, he was a Kentucky native. He liked Henry and liked that he had played in a split-six defense in high school.

Henry visited Blacksburg and signed with the Hokies, choosing the school after also visiting Kentucky and Tennessee.

"They didn't offer me a full scholarship," Henry said of the other two schools. "They were offering me a partial scholarship, and Coach Claiborne was offering me a full. I also liked having the opportunity to play more."

Henry enrolled at Tech in 1970 and sat out the season, as required in those days by NCAA rules. The 1970 season, though, turned out to be Claiborne's last at Tech, which went 5-6 for its second straight losing campaign. The university then brought in Coffey to replace Claiborne.

Coffey marked a stark contrast to the conservative, defensive-minded Claiborne. He brought in Dan Henning – most Tech fans know him for his multiple stops in the NFL as a coordinator and quarterbacks coach – to power a high-scoring offense, and Henning delivered,

as quarterback Don Strock went on to set numerous school records.

"They (Claiborne and Coffey) were totally different," Henry said. "Claiborne was the type who always had his nose to the grindstone and expected his players to be that way. He'd practice three hours at a time.

"Coffey was a promoter. He came in and changed the uniforms and the helmets, and he brought in his type of offense, which was a high-octane offense. I think Don Strock led the country in total offense that year."

Henry went on to adjust to the coaching change rather easily. Interestingly enough, he also adjusted to a name change of sorts, one courtesy of his teammates.

During his freshman season, he and a few of his teammates went to the Lyric Theater in downtown Blacksburg one Sunday to watch *Catch-22*, a movie based on the novel with the same title that rates as one of the best literary pieces of all time. While there, the producer's name flashed across the screen – Buck Henry. From that day on and even today, Henry's teammates called him "Buck" instead of "Kent."

Joking aside, Henry quickly became a prominent player in Coffey's 4-3 defensive scheme, though that wasn't exactly planned. He went into the 1971 season fully expecting to be redshirted, but he found himself in the middle of all the action on that defense when two guys got hurt at the middle linebacker position. The first injury enabled Henry's good friend, Dennis Dodson, to break into the lineup and allowed Henry to receive some playing time on special teams.

In the second game that season, though, Dodson suffered a stinger, and Henry was put in the game in place of Dodson.

"I intercepted a pass and made a few tackles," Henry said. "Then the next game against Florida State, I started and recovered a couple of fumbles and had an interception. Then Dennis came back, and they moved me to outside linebacker.

"It just shows you've always got to be ready. You never know what may happen."

Henry enjoyed a terrific season, even though the Hokies went 4-7 in Coffey's inaugural campaign. He intercepted a team-high five passes. The team finished with 15 total the entire season.

Henry went on to start all three years, and he intercepted seven passes for his career. He was part of a small collection of players to play for Coffey all three years of their careers during Coffey's three-year tenure. Following a 2-9 season in 1973 – the year after Strock had left – Coffey retired despite having several seasons left on his contract.

"That year was sort of a youth movement," Henry said. "Coffey and the staff had a lot of young players and decided to work them in. But we never gelled as a team. Strock was gone, and nothing clicked. It was not a good year.

"We had moments when we were good while I was there, and moments when we were not. We played a tough schedule back in those days. I think we were everyone's Homecoming. Our schedule was as good as anyone's in the country, when you talk about playing teams like Florida State, SMU, Houston and Oklahoma State. That was another thing that got me to Tech."

Despite his playing days ending on a sour note, Henry remembers them with affection, even the ones that would seem a touch embarrassing. His

fondest memory occurred during his junior year when a teammate blocked a field-goal attempt by Houston, and Henry scooped up the loose ball.

"I was running and looking to score, and then someone caught me at the 5-yard line," he said. "I hear about that all the time. I tell people all the time that the guy was on the Olympic 4x100 team. That was an embarrassing moment for me, but memorable."

In 1974, Henry graduated with a degree in marketing management. He decided to go back home to Kentucky after graduation, and he landed a job in the trucking industry sales business, where he served as a sales representative for a local company. Roughly 15 years ago, he switched companies, and he started working as a sales rep for a company in Minnesota that sells promotional items such as shirts, hats, jackets and other "stuff." He has worked in sales all his life.

"I like working for myself and working from home" he said. "You get to make up your own schedule, and you make as much money as you put into it. But you still have time to play golf if you want."

Of course, being in Louisville has its other privileges. He doesn't live far from Churchill Downs, the home of the Kentucky Derby –


arguably the most famous horse race in the world. He and Dodson, his former teammate, go to the race every year.

"I'm a horse racing fanatic," he said. "I love it here."

Henry still keeps up with the Hokies these days. In fact, he and seven other buddies come back to Blacksburg for at least one game a year – his wife of 27 years is an understanding woman. Dodson, who works for State Farm in Fredericksburg, Va., owns a home in Blacksburg that he rents out, but he keeps the finished basement area reserved for his family and his friends, and Henry and his buddies stay there.

"We'll throw some mattresses down and stay there," Henry said. "It's like a big fraternity weekend. We'll go down on a Thursday and play golf. Then, we'll tailgate and go to the game on Saturday. The guys love it."

Like most Tech fans, Henry is keeping tabs on conference realignment these days. Maryland's departure to the Big Ten knocked the ACC into a state of flux, but the league took a step to replace the Terrapins, adding Louisville starting in 2014.

"Henry now will have the opportunity to see the Hokies play a little more often in his home state. One can feel certain he'll take advantage of it. 



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Former Tech tailback Darren Evans trying to take advantage of Tennessee Titans' opportunity

by Jimmy Robertson



Darren Evans rushed for more than 2,000 yards in his career at Tech and is trying to land a permanent spot in the Tennessee Titans' backfield.

Darren Evans played football at Virginia Tech for three seasons, even setting a single-game rushing record his redshirt freshman season, and he later graduated with a degree in sociology.

So he never expected to be perfecting his acting skills – while working in the NFL, no less.

Like most players, Evans spent his youth emulating some of his favorite running backs, and for much of this 2012 season, he has done

exactly that, taking the lead role as the opposing team's best running back while participating on the Tennessee Titans' practice squad.

In week 12, he finally got on the center stage, serving in a supporting role while on the active roster in the Titans' game against Jacksonville. Unfortunately, a quadriceps injury resulted in him being put on injured reserve shortly after the game, thus ending his season.

Still, being signed to the active roster served as payment of sorts for all his hard work up to that point in the season.

"They [Tennessee's coaches and personnel officials] told me that they were signing me to the practice squad and that I would have an opportunity to come up later in the year," Evans said via a phone interview before the Jacksonville game. "Here it is. They lived up to their word, and that's all you can ask."

Evans wound up in Nashville, Tenn., after his hometown Indianapolis Colts cut him on Aug. 31. The Colts had signed the Indianapolis native not long after Evans went undrafted in the 2011 NFL Draft, and while Evans spent most of his season on Indianapolis' practice squad, he was activated for six games and played in two. At the time, it marked a dream come true.

"That was just a proud feeling," he said. "Just to suit up and run out of the tunnel ... that was a cool experience. I've just been so blessed. Just to experience what I did at Tech and then to get to do that in the NFL with the Colts, I've just been blessed. I'm so thankful and proud."

But Evans got caught up in the chaff after the Colts' owner, Jim Irsay, dismissed head coach Jim Caldwell last January following a 2-14 season. Irsay hired a new coach (Chuck Pagano) and a new general manager (Ryan Grison), and those two came in with their own plans on rebuilding the franchise. Unfortunately, those plans didn't include Evans.

"In the grand scheme of things, I didn't fit in," Evans said. "They had reassured me that I would have an opportunity. I thought I had worked hard and ran hard and played my tail off (this past

preseason). I had played on special teams for them. But then, they cut me."

Evans, though, has become used to overcoming adversity. He became a father at a young age and took various odd jobs, such as working at PK's and delivering office supplies, to support his girlfriend and his son. Then, before his redshirt sophomore season at Tech, he suffered a torn ACL in an August practice, and he missed the entire season.

He bounced back, but was forced to share the load with Ryan Williams the following season. He then left school early, citing a need to support his family, but he went undrafted, a stinging blow to a young man who had dreamed of playing in the NFL.

He thought the Colts had provided him with a lifeline to live his dream. But that lifeline lasted a year before the Colts cut it, forcing him to look at his future.

Evans wasn't sure where life would take him after the Colts cut him. But he only remained in limbo for about four hours. Four hours after being cut, he received a call from his agent, who had fielded an offer from Tennessee. The Titans wanted additional depth at the running back spot, and Evans packed his bags and headed to Nashville. A practice squad player makes at least \$5,700 a week, but for Evans, the move was about taking advantage of an opportunity.

Fortunately, he didn't have to search for a place to stay. A friend of his family's – someone who used to attend his church – had moved to Nashville, and he invited Evans to stay with him until Evans got settled.

"I was pretty hurt after I got cut," Evans said. "Indianapolis was home for me, and I thought we had something good going. It's weird being away from there and from my family. But I'm blessed to have this opportunity."

The toughest part of the transition has been being away from his wife, the former Taneesha Lange, and their two children. As most Tech fans know, Evans and Lange had a son, James, before Evans came to Blacksburg. They married before

he finished at Tech, and last year, had a daughter, who turned 1 in August.

Evans left his family in Indianapolis because both his and Taneesha's families live there and could help with the raising of the children. Plus, he wants to return to Indianapolis when he finishes playing football.

"My son was already in school, and being on the practice squad, nothing is guaranteed," Evans said. "So I'd rather keep them there and keep them settled. I miss them during the week, but Nashville is only about four hours from Indianapolis, so it's not a bad drive. I get to see them quite a bit on weekends."

Evans has enjoyed his time in Tennessee, but the tempo in practices is much faster than he expected. The Titans, under new coach Mike Munchak, want their practice squad players to learn the playbook right from the start to be ready for whatever may happen down the road.

Evans likes and respects Munchak, and he speaks glowingly of his teammates, especially the running backs. Guys like Chris Johnson and Darius Reynaud have been more than willing to help Evans make the transition from Indianapolis to Tennessee.

"All of those guys have been here," Evans said. "I follow those guys around a lot. They've been

helpful with the playbook.

"It's also good that Xavier Adibi (a former Tech linebacker from 2003-2007) is here. He was leaving as I was coming in to Tech, but I used to watch him play all the time. It's good to be on the same team with him, just someone you share a common interest with."

Evans still manages to keep in touch with a lot of his teammates. His closest friends include Kenny Lewis, Jr., Josh Oglesby, Kwamaine Battle and Jarrett Boykin.

Of course, he also keeps in touch with Williams, who now plays for the Arizona Cardinals. Evans and Williams used to team up in the Tech backfield and create nightmares for opponents. Williams, though, has been plagued with injuries the past two seasons, injuring his knee last year and his shoulder this year. Both injuries cost him that particular season.

"There's not much that I can tell him," Evans said. "Ryan's such a positive and confident guy. He's determined to bounce back. He understands that this game can be brutal, but he's still upbeat. It's really cool to see how hungry and how positive he is."


As for Evans, he harbors no ill effects from the torn ACL he suffered during his sophomore season at Tech, or any other nagging injuries

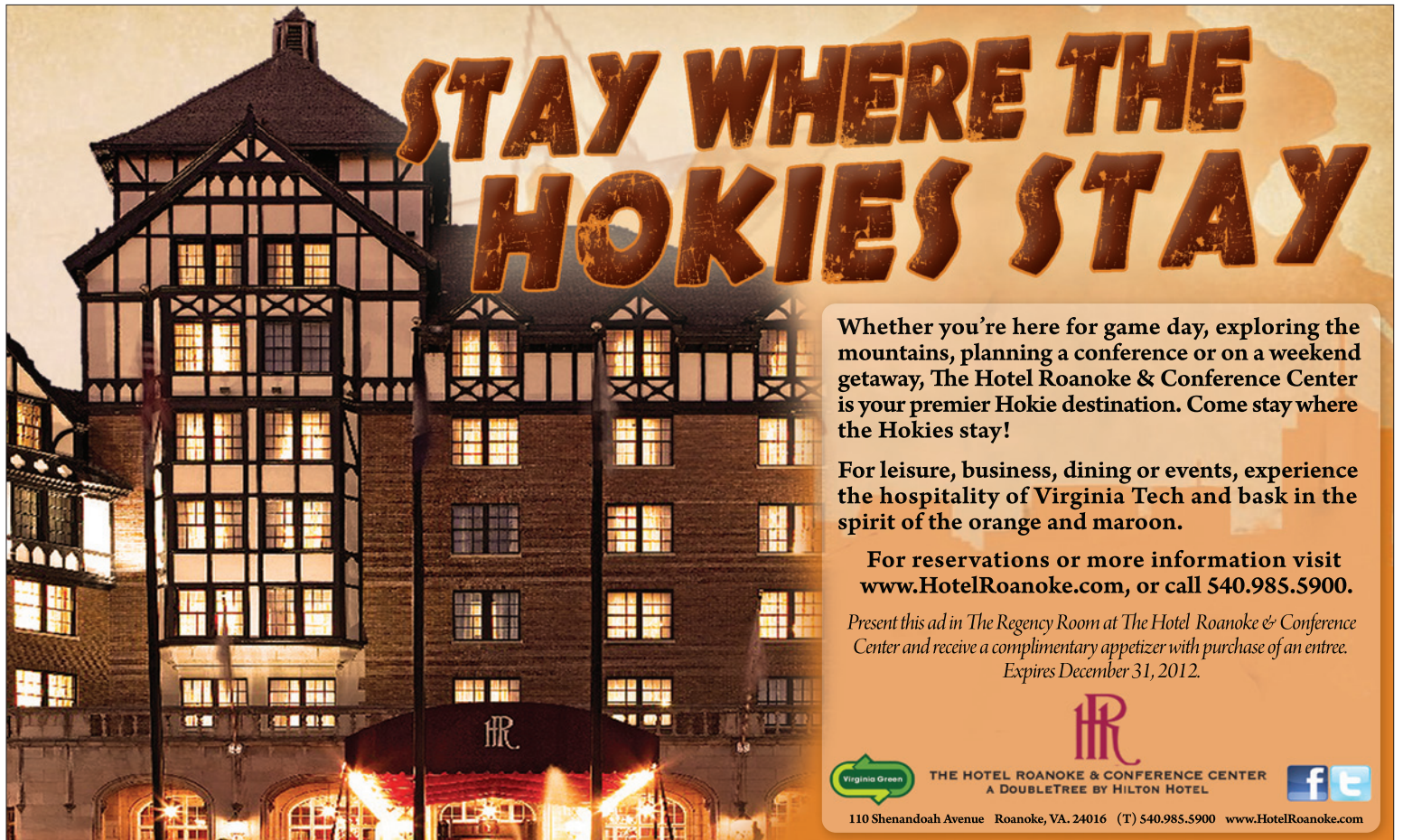
that he suffered in that same time span. He fully expects to recover from his quadriceps injury, one generally not considered too serious in NFL circles.

"I take good care of my body," he said. "Obviously, I haven't been out there week to week like a lot of NFL players, but I still take good care of myself. We've got a good lifting program here, and we do a lot of stretching. Those are the keys to keeping your body right."

Then he added with a laugh, "I haven't been eating right, though. That's another reason I miss my wife. She made sure I ate right. I avoid the bad takeout places, but it's still not the same."

Like most practice squad players, Evans doesn't know what the future holds. In many ways, that doesn't scare him. He's already overcome so much, and no matter what happens, he can draw confidence in knowing that he's persevered many times before.

"I just try to do what I can do," Evans said. "That's all I can control. You just have to work hard and take care of the little things and prepare yourself the best you can. Then when the opportunity comes, you have to be ready to produce. That's all I worry about – controlling what I can control. The rest will take care of itself." 




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FAST START

The Tech men's basketball team won its first seven games and got off to the program's best start in 30 years

by Jimmy Robertson



New Virginia Tech men's basketball coach James Johnson has done a masterful job of downplaying his team's victories thus far this season, but it probably took a little more effort following the Hokies' upset of Oklahoma State.

"Big win for the Hokies," he said after the game. "Big win."

Talk about understatements.

In a game in which leading scorer Erick Green picked up two quick fouls and spent a majority of the first half on the bench, in a game in which Tech trailed for much of the first half and at halftime, and in a game in which the Hokies had numerous reasons to cave, Tech responded by dominating the final 20 minutes in knocking off the No. 15 Cowboys 81-71 in front of a raucous Cassell Coliseum crowd on Dec. 1.

The win marked Tech's first over a ranked

nonconference opponent in 17 years, dating back to a 1995 victory over UVa in Roanoke. It marked the Hokies' first home win over a ranked nonconference opponent since 1978 when they toppled Syracuse under coach Charlie Moir.

More importantly, it moved the Hokies to 7-0 heading to a game at West Virginia. The 7-0 start marked the program's best since the 1982-83 team started 7-0 exactly 30 years ago.

"I think people were sleeping on us because of the coaching change and because of the players that left," said Green, who scored 18 of his career-high 28 points in the second half against Oklahoma State. "But I hope that we've shown people we can play with anybody and that we're a great team. We've got to keep it going. Consistency is the key."

Certainly no one expected this type of start. After all, Tech was picked to finish 10th in the ACC by

media members. The Hokies saw one player transfer and a top-notch recruit back out of his commitment during the offseason, and Johnson himself had never been a head coach.

But the Hokies have played confidently and with poise, both of which were evident in the win over Oklahoma State. Tech trailed at halftime, but opened an eight-point lead in the second half. Then the Cowboys cut that lead to one late in the game.

Yet behind Green, Tech made all 10 of its free-throw attempts in the final 1:16 and 13 of its final 15 free-throw attempts in the game. Green went 12 of 13 from the line and 8 of 8 in the final minute.

The win, and the Hokies' method for winning, may have surprised many Tech fans. But Tech's players never sold themselves short.

"I'm going to say yes," Jarell Eddie said when asked if he expected this team to start 7-0. "I'm not going to tell you that I doubted anyone on our team. I did think it was possible.

"We're not going to short-change ourselves. We're going into every game thinking we can win."

If they continue to do that, they'll prove all the naysayers wrong. Though Johnson doesn't want his team concentrating on that.

"Those guys out there are playing their hearts out right now," he said. "They're playing hard, they're playing smart, and they're playing together. I'm not trying to prove anything and the team isn't trying to prove anything. We're taking this thing day by day, game by game."

It's been a winning strategy so far. One that, for sure, Johnson won't be changing any time soon.

JOHNSON'S DEBUT

For the first time in nearly a decade, a new man was in control of the Virginia Tech men's basketball program. And as debuts go, Johnson's could not have gone much better.

Johnson's team jumped out to a 15-point first-half lead in the season opener against East Tennessee State and never looked back, cruising to an 80-62 victory at Cassell Coliseum on Nov. 10. Green scored 14 of his 21 points in the first half, as the Hokies shot 56 percent in the first 20 minutes and 52 percent for the game.

Johnson replaced Seth Greenberg in May after the school terminated Greenberg following nine seasons. Johnson had been an assistant under Greenberg for five seasons before leaving in April for what turned out to be a short, three-week stint

as an assistant at Clemson.

As expected, several members of Johnson's family attended the game, along with friends and former college teammates. Johnson's parents, two of his brothers and his sisters came to the game, along with his former college coach, Bill Pullen, who coached Johnson at Ferrum from 1989-93.

After the game, though, Johnson downplayed the significance of his debut victory.

"I just wanted the guys to go out and compete and play as hard as they could and execute the things we've been working on," Johnson said. "I told them before the game that this was about us, and let's go out and execute the things we've been working on. We've been working so hard. The guys have been great since day one. I wanted this to be a really good day for them."

Johnson became the fourth straight Tech men's coach to win his debut, joining Greenberg, Ricky Stokes and Bobby Hussey. The last Tech coach to lose his debut was Bill Foster, whose Hokies fell to Richmond 84-51 to start the 1991 season.

JOHNSON ALSO RECORDS WIN IN ROAD DEBUT

The Hokies rolled to three straight home victories to open the season, but got quite a challenge in their first road game, one in which they managed to prevail over UNCG 96-87 at the Greensboro Coliseum on Nov. 19.



James Johnson

took a step forward," Johnson said. "We hadn't seen adversity like that in the three previous games, and we were on the road against a very good team. For those guys to

keep their composure and to keep fighting and to execute down the stretch and make big free throws, I'm pretty pleased with that."

Tech trailed by four with 6:08 left in the game, but Green and Eddie took over at that point, sparking a 14-1 run that gave the Hokies the lead for good. Green and Eddie combined to score 25 of Tech's final 26 points.

"Me and Jarell, as leaders, we had to take over the game," Green said. "We hit our free throws and got the team together, and they rallied around us. We came together, thank goodness, because it was a dogfight to the end. I give UNCG a lot of credit. They're a good team."

Green, who scored 10 points in that 14-1 run, made all 12 of his free-throw attempts in the final 4:18 and all 16 of his attempts for the game. He finished with 26 points.

Eddie scored a career-high 28 points, hitting 7 of 9 from the floor and 9 of 10 from the free-throw line. He nailed all five of his 3-point attempts. His previous career high of 24 points came last season against Norfolk State.

HOKIES HURRYING TO HIGH POINT TOTALS

Back in the 1980s, the Virginia Tech men's basketball team was known as the "Hurryin' Hokies" because of their up-tempo, high-scoring pace under Moir.

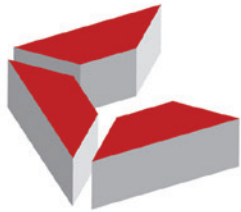
Well, older generation Tech fans are reliving those days, as Johnson has his team playing the up-tempo, high scoring attack that symbolizes his philosophy as a coach.

The Hokies scored 95 points or more in three of their first six games. They also scored 80 or more in six of their first seven tilts, including five-straight at one stretch. The last time Tech scored 80 or more in five straight games was in 1994 when the Hokies scored that many in five straight games early that season.

"We've worked on it a long time," Johnson said. "Playing that way is something that you have to practice. Guys have to be physically in condition. We've got athletes. We've got guys who can get up the floor, and we're playing to that style – and the guys have bought into it."

To put Tech's scoring outbursts into perspective, the Hokies scored 80 or more points just three times all of last season and just nine times in the past two seasons – in a combined 67 games. Under Greenberg the past two seasons, the Hokies averaged 65.1 and 70.3 points per game, respectively.

The recent scoring outbursts are even more impressive considering the Hokies' roster consists



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of nine scholarship players, so Johnson needs to be judicious in resting players. He doesn't have the luxury of rotating players in waves. Yet his substitution patterns have not slowed down an offense that averaged 86.1 points per game in the first seven games.

"This is something new to these guys," Johnson said. "Erick Green has played a certain way for three years, and Jarell Eddie has played a certain way for a couple years. It's not something you can dive right into.

"I think some people think you just run up and down the floor, but it's not like that. There's a method to our madness. There are certain spots where guys have to get to on the floor. We've got to sprint. We talk about winning the first three steps. So it's not easy. Guys have picked it up well, but it's not easy. It's a lot of work."

GREEN SIMPLY TORRID IN THE EARLY GOING

Green stated before the season that he felt he was one of the best guards in the country. That may come across as bragging to some, but he certainly is proving it with his play on the court.

Green scored at least 20 points in the Hokies' first seven games this season, tying his career high on one occasion and then breaking his career high on three others. He tied his career high when he scored 25 in Tech's win over Rhode Island and then scored 26 points against UNCG and 27 against Appalachian State.

His best performance came in the Hokies' upset of Oklahoma State in which he scored a career-high 28 points. He hit 6 of 10 from the floor, 4 of 7 from beyond the 3-point arc, and 12 of 13 from the free-throw line.

The last Tech player to score at least 20 points in the first seven games to start a season was Bimbo Coles, who scored at least 20 points in the first nine games to start the 1989-90 season.

"I have a lot of freedom," Green said. "I understand the game a lot better than I have before, just with pick-and-rolls and finding my teammates. When I find my teammates, that opens things up for me. They (defenders) can't focus on me.

"Coach Johnson is giving me the ball and letting me do what I do best. I honestly feel that I'm in a great situation right now."

Before the Oklahoma State game, the Tech athletics department recognized Green for scoring the 1,000th point of his career. A short jumper early in the second half of the Hokies' victory over VMI at Cassell Coliseum on Nov.

15 marked his 1,000th career point. He became the 43rd player in school history to accomplish that feat.

At his current pace, he could break into the top 10 on Tech's career scoring list.

"A whole bunch of people were giving me crap and telling me I didn't belong up there," Green said, referring to his statement about being one of the best guards in the nation. "That's fine. That's what I wanted because that put a fire in me.

"Honestly, I hope that I'm proving that I'm one of the best in the country, and I feel that way. I honestly do. I've just got to keep it up. I've got to keep it up against good competition and show what I can do."

TECH GETS WIN IN ACC-BIG TEN CHALLENGE

The Hokies entered this year's ACC-Big Ten Challenge with a 2-5 record in the event, with both wins coming against Iowa (2006 and 2009). Well, Tech got its third win in the Challenge, again, at the expense of the Hawkeyes.

Green scored 16 of his game-high 24 points in the second half as the Hokies rolled to a 95-79 victory over Iowa to move to 3-5 overall in the event.


The Hokies took control of the game with a 19-1 run that spanned the two halves. Tech closed the first half with a 10-1 run and took a 46-38 lead at the break, and then Green scored the first nine points of the second half. Iowa cut the lead to 57-54 with 12 minutes left, but got no closer.

Green connected on 8 of 15 from the floor and 8 of 9 from the free-throw line. He saw his streak of consecutive made free throws end at 37 straight.

DOUBLING UP

The Hokies came into this season with exactly one player who had recorded a double-double in his career – Eddie. He scored 12 points and grabbed 14 rebounds in the Hokies' loss to BYU last season.

However, Eddie and Cadarian Raines have already combined for four double-doubles this season after seven games. Eddie scored 17 points and grabbed 10 rebounds in the Hokies' victory over ETSU, and then scored 15 points and grabbed 12 rebounds in Tech's upset of Oklahoma State.

Raines had back-to-back double-doubles in the victories over Rhode Island and VMI. He scored 10 points and grabbed 12 boards against the Rams and followed that with 14 points and 10 rebounds against the Keydets. 

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next GENERATION

Tech coach James Johnson signed four prospects to letters-of-intent as part of his first recruiting class

by Jimmy Robertson

The lack of depth on the Virginia Tech men's basketball team certainly hurts related to on-court performance. But it does help in one respect.

Armed with a handful of scholarships, new coach James Johnson and his staff went out and signed four prospects to letters-of-intent during the early signing period, as the coaches went about stockpiling the roster for future years.

All four players fit in at different positions, giving the class some flexibility. The class includes shooting guard Donte Clark out of Charlotte, N.C., (via Hargrave), small forward Ben Emelogu from Grand Prairie, Texas, post player Maurice Kirby from Chandler, Ariz., and post player Trevor Thompson from Delafield, Wis.

"We addressed a lot of different areas with this recruiting class," Johnson said. "I'm extremely excited about these young men and know that they will be able to help us right away."

The 6-foot-4, 180-pound Clark chose the

Hokies over offers from Miami, Providence, Oklahoma State, Missouri, Tennessee and Memphis. He averaged 15.6 points, 4.2 assists, 3.6 rebounds and 1.2 steals per game as a junior at Kennedy Charter Public School in Charlotte. He played his sophomore season at Queens Grant High School in Charlotte and averaged 15 points per game.

Rivals.com rated Clark a four-star recruit, while ESPN Scout.com ranked him as a three-star recruit. ESPN Scout.com ranked him as the No. 89 prospect nationally. Rivals.com rated him as the No. 27 shooting guard in the country (101st overall nationally).

"Donte is a good combo guard," Johnson said. "We look to play him at both the point and the off-guard spots. He's a long, athletic guard who can score the basketball. He can make plays for himself and for others. With our style of basketball – a running, fast-paced style of basketball – he has a chance to be a really good player. He also has a chance to be a very good defender."

The 6-5, 190-pound Emelogu chose the Hokies over TCU, SMU, Marquette, Texas Tech and Washington. He averaged 8.4 points and 2.3 assists last season and helped South Grand Prairie High to a 23-9 record.

ESPN Scout.com rated Emelogu a three-star recruit and ranked him the No. 56 shooting guard prospect in the nation. TexasHoops.com ranked him the No. 19 overall recruit in the state of Texas.

"Ben is a strong, athletic guard who can really score the basketball in multiple ways," Johnson said. "He's an excellent shooter with deep range. He has a strong body and can score in a lot of different ways. He's one of the better guards in the state of Texas. He is an underrated recruit, and we expect him to come in and help us early in his career."

The 6-9, 235-pound Kirby picked Tech after de-committing from Arizona State following his sophomore season at Poston Butte High School. He ended up choosing the Hokies over



Donte Clark



Ben Emelogu



Maurice Kirby



Trevor Thompson

Donte Clark photo courtesy of Nike. Remaining photos courtesy of Rivals.com

Northern Arizona, Loyola of Chicago and Brown University. He averaged 7.5 points, 7.8 rebounds and 1.2 blocks per game at Basha High School as a junior after averaging 12.9 points and 12.6 rebounds per game his sophomore season at Poston Butte. Kirby's mother played basketball at Northern Arizona.

Both Rivals.com and Scout.com rated Kirby as a two-star recruit.

"With Maurice Kirby being 6-9 and 235 pounds, he gives us a big, strong post player with very good skills," Johnson said. "He can step away to 15 feet and hit the jump shot, and he can definitely play with his back to the basket. He gives us a college-ready body right now."

The 6-11, 210-pound Thompson – who was Johnson's first recruit – actually played


basketball in the state of Virginia as a freshman, suiting up for South Lakes High School in Reston. He transferred to Ben Davis High School in Indianapolis to live with his father, former Major League Baseball outfielder Ryan Thompson, and is now spending a postgraduate season at St. John's Northwestern Military Academy in Delafield, Wis.

Thompson chose Tech over offers from Kansas State, Arizona State, Mississippi State, Auburn and Southern Cal. He averaged 10 points, eight rebounds and 3.5 blocks per game at Ben Davis High last season. All three major recruiting sites rated Thompson as a three-star recruit.

"Trevor is a long, athletic post player with a lot of skill," Johnson said. "He can score inside with both hands. He can score facing up, and

he runs the floor extremely well. He is another player who fits our type of style. He is a talented, young man who can help us right away."

Johnson still has one scholarship left to hand out, but has indicated that he plans on holding on to that scholarship until the spring signing period in April. He figures to sign a point guard to round out the class.

"When you add Adam Smith [the transfer from UNC Wilmington] to this group, you have three guards who can score the ball in different ways" Johnson said. "Then, you add the two guys up front. The way the league is, with the new teams (Syracuse, Pittsburgh, Notre Dame, and Louisville) coming in, physicality, size and athleticism were very important to us with this class." 

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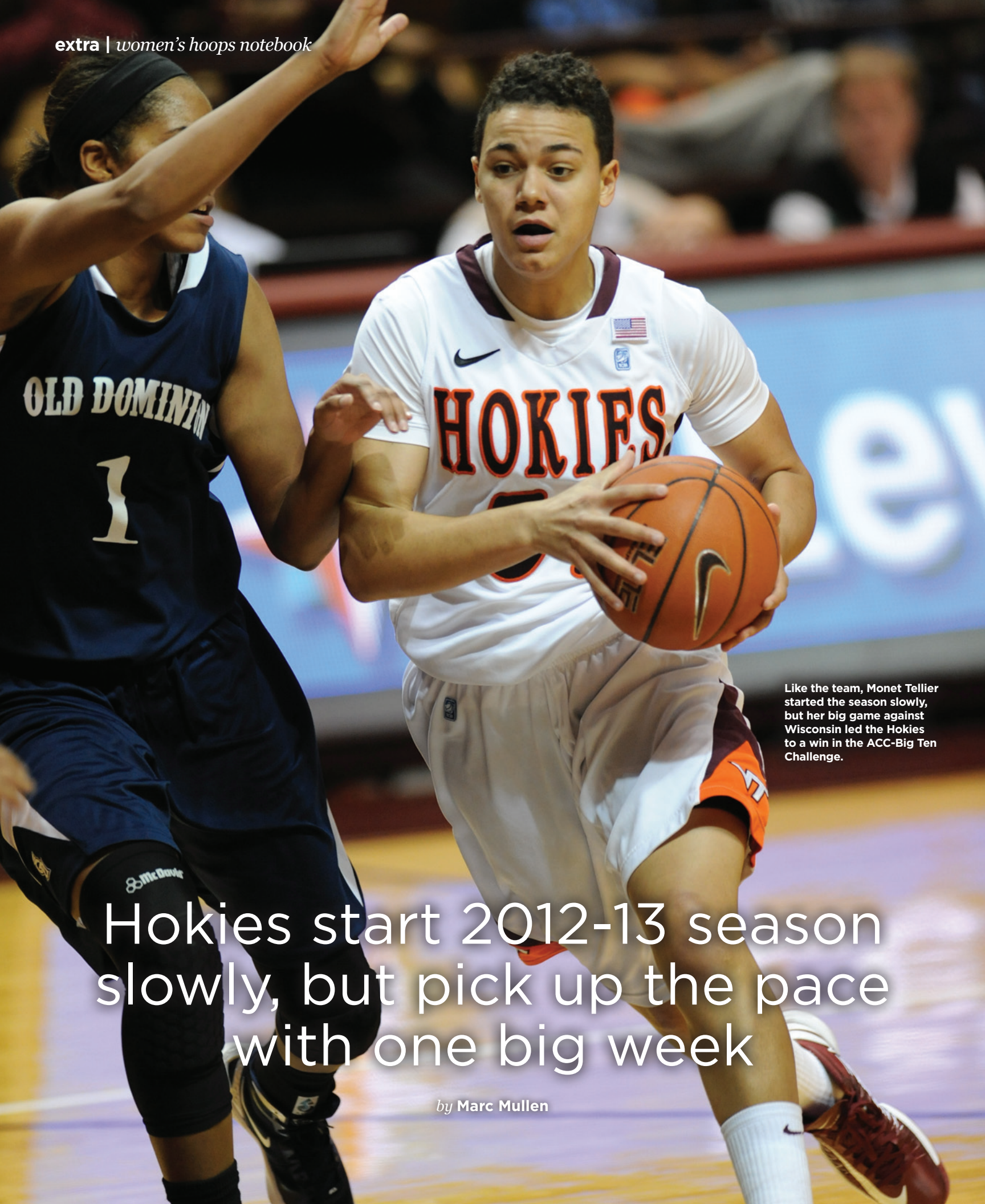
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Like the team, Monet Tellier started the season slowly, but her big game against Wisconsin led the Hokies to a win in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge.

Hokies start 2012-13 season slowly, but pick up the pace with one big week

by Marc Mullen

It certainly wasn't the start that Tech women's basketball coach Dennis Wolff and the team wanted for the 2012-13 season, but the Hokies found themselves on the losing end of a 55-35 decision to Old Dominion in the season opener.

In its previous 1,000-plus games played in the history of the program, the team was held to 35 points or fewer just five times.

"We're extremely disappointed," Wolff said after the season opener. "I thought we were capable of playing better than we did on offense. When you shoot 25 percent, you're not going to give yourself a chance to win. I think defensively we had a pretty good effort. Our problems were on the offensive end."

That trend has continued for most of the early portion of the season, as evidenced by the result nine days later when the team scored 29 points in a loss at Michigan State. However, looking ahead, the Hokies were about to embark on a stretch in which they would play eight of their next nine in Cassell Coliseum and would have a chance at two more Big Ten opponents.

The Hokies got started by knocking off George Washington, 50-31. They tied the school record for fewest points allowed in a basketball game, matching the 31 points allowed to Presbyterian on Jan. 5, 2009 (a 64-31 Tech win). In their history, the Hokies had held an opponent below 40 points on 18 occasions and never below 30.

"I'm very proud of the effort the team put forth," Wolff said afterward. "Coming off a loss at Michigan State and the Thanksgiving holiday, I thought the team really wanted to win the game. So our effort, our defensive intensity and our rebounding were good, but we still need to improve offensively."

"I was told that this was the lowest point total ever by an opponent, which is good, but we've played pretty good defense in all of our games. We just need to somehow find a way to play better on offense."

The team then dispatched Wisconsin three days later in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge and improved to 4-2 on the season with a victory over Longwood that capped a three-win-in-seven-day stretch for the team.

"I told the team that this was a big week for us because we have three tough games," Wolff said. "I was proud of our team, three games in a week, plus missing some kids. I told the team, 'I don't know when the last week was that a Virginia Tech women's basketball team won three games in a week, and one being a Big Ten game.' So this was good for us."

To answer the coach's question, one would find that during the 2007-08 season, Tech actually won five games in a span of 12 days, with a win over a Big Ten opponent. The Hokies won a pair

of games before a win over Minnesota over a span of seven days and then won two more games in a six-day span.

Hokies win ACC-Big Ten Challenge

For the first time since 2007, Tech defeated its Big Ten opponent in the annual competition between the two conferences when the Hokies downed visiting Wisconsin 47-38 on Nov. 28 at Cassell Coliseum.

It was actually the Hokies' first win over any Big Ten opponent in eight tries, dating back to the previously mentioned 68-62 win over Minnesota on Nov. 20, 2007, which was the Hokies' last victory in the challenge. They had lost twice to Minnesota and Iowa, and once to each Michigan school and Penn State.

In the victory, junior guard Monet Tellier accounted for all but 12 points scored by the Hokies, as she ended the night with a team-high 17 points and a career-high nine assists, thus accounting for 35 points. She also added six rebounds and three steals. She helped the team erase a nine-point deficit midway through the second half to register the victory.

"I think, at that point, Coach had called a timeout and was really just telling us to stay aggressive on offense and make good decisions and take care of the ball," Tellier said. "After Coach had let us out of the huddle, we kind of huddled ourselves up and said, 'We've got this. Stay calm. No stupid fouls. Just play our game and stay together.' And that's what we did."

After sitting out the last eight minutes of the first half, Tellier was shut out for nine minutes to start the second half. After freshman Alexis Lloyd hit a 3-pointer to make it a six-point deficit, Tellier came alive, scoring 13 of the team's final 21 points, which included five in an 8-0 run that turned the tide in the game.

"Coach (Thomas) Joyce gave me some very good advice," Tellier said. "He told me that I'd been sitting out, so don't try to force anything in the second half. To start out the second half, I

was forcing it a little bit. But then I sat back and relaxed, and the game started coming to me.

"I'm trying to do whatever I can for the team to win. I am confident down the stretch. I feel like I can take some of those shots for the team, but they had faith in me and their faith in me allowed me to do that."

Freshmen helping team in many ways


Looking at the Tech women's stats six games into the season, one would notice first that just one player is averaging more than 10 points a game – to no one's surprise, that would be Tellier. What could go unnoticed, however, is that no player is averaging more than 29 minutes per game, a stark contrast to last year when three logged more than 34 minutes per game.

Allowing this flexibility for Wolff is that he has a deeper bench that has two of his newcomers averaging more than 25 minutes per game, with five starts each, in forward Taijah Campbell and guard Lauren Evans. Two other newcomers, Alex Kiss-Rusk and Lloyd, average around 15 minutes per game.

Campbell is leading the team in rebounds at 7.4 per game, while ranking third in scoring at 6.4 per game. Evans

has grown into the starter's role, complete with a double-double against Longwood – 10 points and 10 rebounds. Lloyd sparked the comeback win against Wisconsin, and Kiss-Rusk had eight points and four rebounds against the Badgers.

"I think that, when you're building a house, you build part of a foundation to go forward, and we've done that," Wolff said. "I think the freshmen have all been contributing pretty well. We've got Lauren Evans, who had a double-double with 10 points and 10 assists, which is not an easy thing to get."

"Taijah Campbell is going to be a good player, and she's an ACC level player. Alexis Lloyd has helped us, and Alex Rusk helped us the other night against Wisconsin. So credit goes to the people that I work with. We recruited some good kids, and the older kids have all done a good job." 



Taijah Campbell



Wolff and staff traveling far and wide to bring in top-notch recruits

by Marc Mullen

With his second recruiting class, Virginia Tech women's basketball coach Dennis Wolff and his staff pulled in a pair who continued his trend of travelling anywhere to bring in the best student-athletes to the school.

Signing letters-of-intent during the early signing period in November were Oakland, Calif., native Breanna Brown, a 6-foot-3 forward/center, and Samantha Hill, a 5-10 guard from Toronto, Ontario, Canada. All-Star Girls Report ranked this recruiting class as the 45th-best nationally, which follows up on Wolff's No. 35 class from a year ago.

"We're thrilled to be able to announce the signing of Breanna Brown and Samantha Hill," Wolff said. "Both girls are very good students and ACC-caliber players. The signing of both Breanna and Sami will add two good players to our roster as we continue to improve our team."

Brown comes to Blacksburg out of Bishop O'Dowd High School and is one of four players from the school to sign Division I scholarships on signing day, as the others chose Duke, Cal and San Diego State. ESPN's HoopGurlz rated her a three-star recruit and the 27th forward prospect in the country.

"Bree is an athletic post player in a mold very similar to Tajah Campbell, our current freshman," Wolff said. "She is very athletic and very aggressive, and a young lady who is very committed to improving as a player."

She was offered by almost every Pac-12

school, with the exception of Cal and Stanford, and also had offers from Louisville, San Diego State, Georgia Tech and Virginia. She received interest from Mississippi State, Auburn and Cal.

Last year, she helped the Dragons to a 30-3 overall mark, 16-0 in league play, and led the school to its first Division III California State Basketball Championship, as she had 10 points and nine rebounds in the victory. The team finished ranked seventh nationally and third in California and enter the 2012-13 season as the No. 1 ranked high school team nationally in the preseason rankings.

"Brown can be a force on the glass and at the block defensively when she is assertive," NorCalPreps.com basketball analyst Chris Roemer wrote about her. "She is best on the offensive end at grabbing the offensive rebound and going back up for the score or taking advantage of those scoring opportunities that allow her to go right at the basket without using the dribble."

Hill was a four-year starter for Eastern Commerce High School and is currently attending Blair Academy, a prep school in New Jersey. She was entertaining many offers from Ivy League schools, given the fact she was a four-time Honor Roll student and Athlete of the Year with the Lady Saints.

"Sami was a teammate of Tajah's on the Canadian under-18 national team," Wolff said. "She's a combo guard, who's a tremendous


athlete and improving basketball player."

In her time at Eastern Commerce, she helped the team win OFSAA gold in 4A basketball once and led the team to two other 4A berths. She also competed in the 2012 All Canada Classic basketball showcase and was a member of the U18 national basketball team that qualified for the 2013 U19 World Championships in Lithuania.

Also in 2012, she was a nominee for the Ms. Basketball Ontario, ironically along with Campbell. Neither won the honor, but each finished with a second-team All-Canadian selection.

"One of the things that I've said to many people is that she's just scratching the surface right now," Jason Sealy, a former coach of Hill's, told CROWN Girls Basketball on the day of her signing. "She's discovering her incredible athleticism and now starting to connect it with her basketball skills.

"As far as that pertains to the next level, I think the sky's the limit. I think people are really just starting to see how great an athlete and how great a competitor and great of a young woman she is, and at the next level is where she wants to take it."

Last year, Wolff had three scholarships at his disposal heading into the spring signing period and he used all three, including one on Campbell. This year, he still has two at his disposal and will focus on the guard position. 

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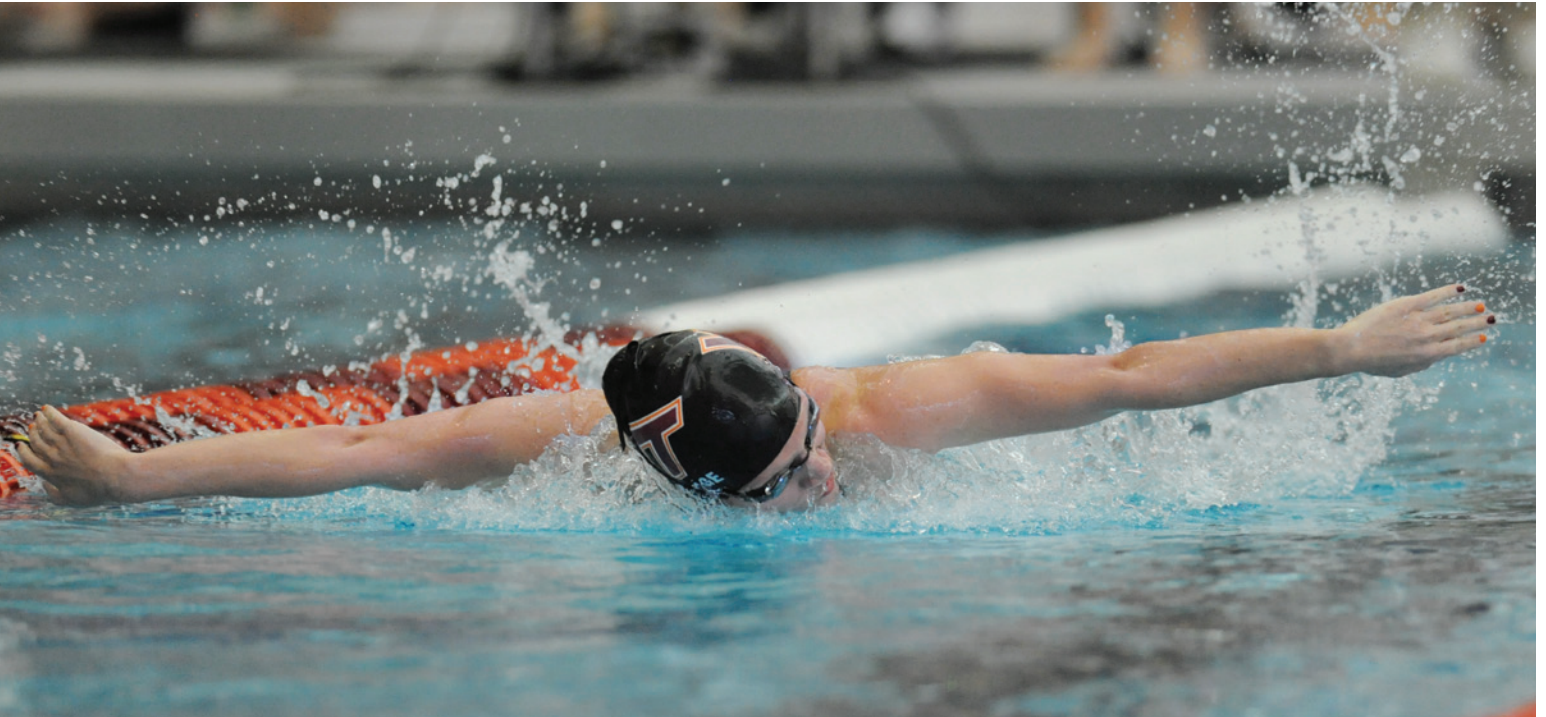


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ROUNDABOUT PATH TO GOLD





Tech swimmer Heather Savage grew up in New York, went to Clemson and nearly transferred to Maryland before coming to Blacksburg and winning a gold medal as a Hokie

by Marc Mullen

It was a remarkable year for Heather Savage. Her junior season came to an emotional peak at the 2012 ACC Swimming and Diving Championships, and then she solidified her swimming status with her results at the NCAA Championships. To cap things off, she received an unexpected honor just before the summer break.

All that is missing from her resumé was a national title, and thanks to a decision she made, not as a high school student, but after her freshman season at Clemson, Savage has a chance to race for that title as a senior in Blacksburg.

That's correct. After completing her high school career in Canandaigua, N.Y. – a town halfway between Buffalo and Syracuse off of Interstate 90 and home to the fourth largest of the 11 Finger Lakes – Savage took her talents to South Carolina to swim for Clemson University.

It wasn't until she got a dreadful call just after the 2010 spring semester, and after talking it over with one of her coaches, that Savage even considered visiting Virginia Tech.

"I was home, and I had gone to visit my best

friend, who goes to school in Buffalo, so I went to see her for the weekend," Savage said, referring to where she was when she received the call. "I knew that there was a team meeting that I was missing on Friday because I had gotten the text that read something like, 'If you guys are going to be in town, we are having a team meeting. Please come to this' or something like that.

"We thought that our coach was actually going to leave and go someplace else. That was kind of what our initial thought was. And so one of my teammates calls me and is just bawling. I said 'Maddie (Tarantolo), what happened?' She said, 'They're getting rid of the team!' And I was like 'What?!' I was honestly in shock. I had no idea that it was coming."

Clemson decided to discontinue both the men's and women's swimming programs and the men's diving team over a period of two years. The women's diving team would be the only one of the school's swimming and diving quartet to survive. The school gave any student-athlete a blanket release, if he or she wanted it.

For Savage, the decision was devastating. She was home, far from her teammates – friends

whom she just made and is still close with to this day – and she had left many of her belongings in storage at Clemson. Her freshman year for the Tigers saw her compete in six events at the ACC Championships and set the school record in the 100-yard butterfly. So she expected a bright future at Clemson. Instead, she found herself in limbo, not knowing what to do.

"I decided I needed to go back. I just needed to physically be there to figure out what was going on," Savage said. "After talking it through with my coaches down there, I thought 'I love it here. I don't want to leave.'"

"But I also didn't want to swim the next two years and not get a senior year. I wasn't ready to be done. I love the sport, and I just didn't want to get cheated out on my last year. At the time, I knew I wanted to go to Maryland. I left Clemson after talking with my coaches and set in my mind that I was going to Maryland."

Mothers and fathers owe a lot to coaches at any age. They are the people who prepare and run practices, set forth the game plans for competitions, and at most times, receive the

glory or blame depending on those outcomes.

However, coaches, mainly at the college level, are also the people whom mothers and fathers entrust to aid in their child's growth through the end of adolescence into young adulthood. That's why a "family atmosphere" is often attributed to why a student-athlete selects a school.

Former Clemson assistant coach Derek Perkins, who is now at Kentucky, had no foretelling of the future. He just wanted the best for one of his student-athletes and knew the Tech atmosphere was more like that of Clemson's.

"My coach sat across from me and said, 'I want you to take a look at Virginia Tech,' and I really didn't want to look there," she said. "There were reasons why I didn't look there the first time, and that's just not where I wanted to go. He said, 'Do me a favor. Look at Tech. I think you'll love it. If you do anything for me, do this for me.'"

"He and I had a great relationship, so I was like 'All right, fine. I'll look at Tech.'"

So Savage, who thought she was done with the whole recruiting process, first went to visit College Park before her visit to Blacksburg. Regardless of her next school, she was determined to continue competing in the ACC.

"It was a great time at Maryland, but when I left I was like, 'Eh, I'm not sure if I can go there,'" she said. "It is really close to D.C., and kind of a big city. I'm kind of okay with that, but that's not necessarily what I want for my college experience."

"Then, when I was flying in here, honestly, the scenery reminded me a lot of home. So I met the kids who were here in the summer. I met the coaches. I fell in love with the campus. It was beautiful."

"Honestly, when I left, I kept the coaches sweating a little bit, but I knew this is where I was going to come. I was still shaky, though, because I hadn't told the girls at Clemson that I was leaving yet, so I was shaky on how they were going to take it. But it was about a week later that I made the decision."

Ironically, Perkins' candid talk with Savage in 2010 may have prevented her from facing the same fate at the end of the 2012 season. As many now know because of the Big Ten realignment, Maryland announced back in July that it was cutting seven sports, including women's swimming, which would have resulted in a lost senior season for Savage had she chose the Terrapins.

Fast forward to the evening session on the third day of the 2012 ACC Women's Swimming and Diving Championships being held at the home pool of the H2Okies, the Christiansburg Aquatic Center.


Savage entered the finals of the 100 butterfly seeded fourth after finishing the previous heat in 53.67 seconds, a shade slower than her previous best. But her time was a full second behind the top seed, Maryland's Megan Lafferty (52.65), who held the ACC meet (52.39) and conference record (52.28) in the event.

Savage would swim that portion of the team's 400 medley relay in the night's first event before concentrating on the individual race.

"I came off the morning swim, and I wasn't necessarily happy with how my morning swim went," she said. "I came back refocused. The 400 medley relay was the first event that night, and after I got out (of the pool), our coaches said to me, 'You just swam so fast. You had the fastest split among butterflyers across the board.'"

"And I was like, 'Well, why not just go win the thing?' I know that sounds bad, but in my mind, that's what was going through my head."

And she did in a bit of an upset, becoming the school's first female to win gold in a butterfly event at the ACC meet and setting an ACC



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meet, conference, school and pool record in the process. She stopped the clock in 52.14, more than a half second faster than Lafferty.

“The atmosphere in the pool that night was absolutely electric,” Savage said. “Stepping up on the blocks for my race, it was crazy. I was feeling good about it. I was relaxed.

“ACCs was really special for me last year, too, because it was the Clemson girls last meet. So they were all there. I remember hitting my last turn and where they [her former Clemson teammates] were sitting was actually right at the end of my lane. I remember seeing them on my last turn. I was just a train wreck after it. It was absolutely electric.”

A month later, Savage solidified her place, not only among the ACC butterflyers, but also the nation’s. She earned Tech’s 10th All-America honor on the women’s side, just the fourth female swimmer, with her seventh-place showing at the NCAA Championships in Auburn, Ala. But that wasn’t without a bit of confusion between Savage and her coach, Ned Skinner.

“The thing that I loved about NAAs was you have to get up and you have to race,” she said. “You have to go fast in the morning, and if you go fast in the morning, you’ve got that opportunity to come back at night.

“I was actually watching the times as they were coming up, and I remember standing there and thinking, ‘Shoot, I think I’m ninth.’ I literally thought I was ninth, and Ned said, ‘No, you’re eighth.’ And I’m like, ‘No, I’m ninth.’ And he’s like, ‘No, you’re not!’ And it was just mass confusion until we figured it out and finally it scrolled up that I was eighth, and I thought, ‘Oh my God, I’m eighth.’

“And then I thought to myself, ‘All I have to do tonight is finish the race legally, and I’m an All-American. That’s so cool!’ Obviously, I was going to go out there and race, but the pressure was immediately taken off after that morning session. All I had to do is not false start, and we’re good.”

There was no false starting, and she finished the race in 52.16 seconds, a bit slower than her school record, but still good enough for 12 team points for the H2Okies, who finished a program-best 18th with their 52 points.

Topping off the year, Savage was selected as the ACC Women’s Scholar-Athlete of the Year, a truly humbling and unexpected honor for the human nutrition and exercise major.


“I was actually sitting in our academic advisor’s office over in Lane [Stadium] when he got the email,” she said. “And he said to me, ‘I

don’t know how to tell you this, but you’ve been named the ACC Scholar-Athlete of the Year.’

“I said, ‘What are you talking about?’ He had just gotten the email and showed me. We’re in a conference with Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia Tech ... there is no way. I couldn’t believe it. That was a huge honor, and that was something that I wasn’t expecting at all.

“That’s one of those things ... I guess I have control over my grades, but you have no control over who picks that. Swimming I love because it’s in my control – what I do in the pool is what I do. No one else is responsible for what I do in the pool. But it was just a huge and incredible honor, shocking, so it was very cool.”

In the history of Tech swimming, only one woman has ever earned multiple All-America honors – Jessica Botzum (2005-08), who garnered five, including the highest ever finish at the national meet (fourth in the 200 breast stroke). A pair of current Tech divers, senior Logan Kline and sophomore Kaylea Arnett, who were also All-Americans last year, will look to join the elite club.

And, of course, so, too, will Savage. Thanks to the advice of a former coach, Savage, who almost missed out twice on a senior year, has that chance as well. 

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Three of Kevin Dresser's five wrestling signees are ranked among the top 25 nationally by several publications.

All Wrestling recruiting haul among the top in the nation

The Hokies' softball and golf programs also sign highly touted recruiting classes

by Jimmy Robertson

Nov. 14 marked the beginning of the fall signing period for several NCAA sports, and several of Tech's coaches landed high-quality recruiting classes. For a recap, please read below.



WRESTLING

Virginia Tech wrestling coach Kevin Dresser and his program's run of success figures to continue well into the future, as he and his staff put together one of the top recruiting classes in the nation. Amateur Wrestling News, a magazine that covers wrestling, rated the class in the top five, and three of the five signees ranked among the top 25 nationally by InterMat magazine, another national publication that covers wrestling.

The class includes two signees who wrestle at nearby Christiansburg High – Joey Dance and Zach Epperly – along with Kevin Norstrem, a Florida native, Dennis Gustafson from Dumfries, Va., and

Jared Haught, who is from Parkersburg, W.Va.

Dance, who is ranked the No. 5 overall recruit in the nation by D1CollegeWrestling and the No. 1 recruit in the country at 126 pounds by Amateur Wrestling News and InterMat, figures to wrestle at 125 pounds at Tech. Additionally, Dance is a three-time Virginia state champion with a career record of 129-17.

Epperly is rated as the No. 24 overall recruit in the country by InterMat, No. 26 by D1CollegeWrestling and No. 48 by Amateur Wrestling News. He won his third Virginia State title with a 6-4 decision over three-time state champ Jake Crawford of Millbrook in the 160-pound final as a junior. He also won a state title as a freshman at 135 pounds and then a title at 145 pounds as a sophomore before winning the crown at 160 last year. He is currently ranked No. 3 in the country at 170 pounds by InterMat and No. 6 by Amateur Wrestling News and is projected as a 174-pounder in college.

Norstrem, who attends Brandon High School in Brandon, Fla., is the No. 7 overall recruit in the country as rated by Amateur Wrestling News, No. 11 by D1CollegeWrestling and No. 12 by InterMat. He has finished the past two seasons with a combined record of 124-0, while amassing a record of 59-2 as a freshman, to make his three-year high school record 183-2.

Gustafson wrestles for Forest Park High and was a 2012 NHSCA Junior National runner-up. Amateur Wrestling News rated him the No. 98 overall prospect in the nation. Gustafson was a 2010 North Carolina Group 4A champion and followed it up by finishing third in Virginia in both 2011 and 2012. He has a career record of 141-14 heading into his senior season and is currently ranked No. 8 in the country at 132 pounds by InterMat and No. 9 by Amateur Wrestling News. He figures to wrestle as a 133-pounder in college.

Haught will give the Hokies some help in the upper weights. He is a three-time West Virginia

state champion who is currently ranked 12th in the country at 182 pounds by both InterMat and Amateur Wrestling News. He placed third at the Super 32 this year and is projected as a 184- or 197-pounder in college.

“Quality is the word of the day,” Dresser said. “These five guys are top quality guys on and off the mat. We can’t wait to get them in Blacksburg next fall. Hats off to Coach (Tony) Robie and Coach (David) Hoffman for their efforts. Teamwork at all levels is what this business is all about!”

 **GOLF**

Virginia Tech golf coach Jay Hardwick signed two prospects during the fall signing period, including a local standout with a decorated career.

Ryan Mondy, a Blacksburg native who attends Blacksburg High School, won the Virginia High School League’s Group AA championship this past fall and earned all-state recognition for three straight years. His 5-under-par 67 in the final round enabled him to claim the state championship.

The 2011 Alleghany Amateur and Bobby Bowers Memorial champion also has numerous high finishes on the AJGA circuit to his credit. He

finished ninth in the prestigious Scott Robertson Invitational in 2011 and has been named All-Timesland by The Roanoke Times and the Roanoke Valley Hall of Fame Player of the Year during his high school and junior career.

Hardwick’s other signee is Drew Johnson, an Oak Ridge, N.C., native who attends Northwest Guilford High School. A three-time all-state selection and Piedmont Triad 4A Conference medalist, he has also been named conference Player of the Year twice. Earlier this summer, he recorded top-five finishes at the AJGA Golf Pride Junior Classic and AJGA Junior at River Landing, and he was an alternate for the 2012 US Amateur at Cherry Hills.

 **SOFTBALL**


Virginia Tech softball coach Scot Thomas signed four standouts during the fall signing period from four different states. Elizabeth Birle, Vanessa Gonzalez, Cailey Isaacs and Aysha Richardson comprise the class.

Birle, a native of Winter Springs, Fla., headlines the class. A 2012 MaxPreps Junior Class All-American, she pitches and plays first base. She batted .451 during her junior season at Winter

Spring High School, with 13 homers and 41 RBI. She earned first-team all-state honors (Group 7A) after her junior year. She holds the single-season (13) and career (30) home run records at Winter Springs High.

Gonzalez, an outfielder/first baseman from Torrance, Calif., hit .500 last season for North High School and hit .625 in league contests. She finished with 48 hits, including nine doubles, three triples and nine homers, earning first-team All-CIF Southern Cal Division III honors.

Isaacs plays in the outfield for Laurel High School in Georgetown, Del., after spending the past three seasons at Sussex Technical High School in Georgetown. She hit .400 as a junior, with a .500 on-base percentage. She also scored 18 runs in leading Sussex to the state championship. During her sophomore season, she hit .404 and scored 22 runs. She hit .520 as a freshman, with 17 stolen bases and 19 runs.

Richardson is the lone in-state recruit, hailing from Louisa, Va., and playing at Orange County High School. The outfielder hit .527 as a junior, with an on-base percentage of .565, and she struck out 167 in the circle to go with a 0.91 ERA. She earned first-team all-district, all-region and all-area honors, while being an honorable mention all-state selection. 



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Tech men's cross country team wraps up great season with appearance at NCAA's

by Jimmy Robertson

The Virginia Tech men's cross country team made it to the NCAA Championships for the first time since 1987, and the Hokies finished in 22nd place at the event held at E.P. 'Tom' Sawyer State Park in Louisville, Ky., on Nov. 17. The team finish marked the program's third-best finish at the NCAA Championships in five appearances at the nationals.

Will Mulherin, a redshirt senior from Yorktown, Va., led the Hokies, earning All-America honors for the second straight year. He finished in a tie for 28th place after running the course in 29 minutes, 52.7 seconds. He became the first men's runner in Tech history to earn All-America honors twice during his career. His time was two tenths of a second back of his personal-best 10K time that he set at the NCAA Southeast Regional in Charlotte, N.C.

"It was a good race," Mulherin said. "I kind of ran the same race as I did last year. I went out and tried to run with the lead pack, and get a really good improvement on my place from last year. About halfway through, I fell off a little bit and kind of battled back in the second half to stay with the group. I think, at one point, I was 35th, and over the last mile or two, I battled back to get into the 20s."

"I'm really proud of Will Mulherin for becoming a two-time All-American," Tech head coach Ben Thomas said. "A two-time All-American in cross country is really hard to do. There are not a lot of those guys out there, and he's the first guy in our school's history, so that's a perfect cap to a perfect season for him."



Tech's next two finishers were junior Leoule Degfae in 82nd, followed by Thomas Curtin in 88th. Degfae's time of 30:36.3 was more than 30 seconds faster than his previous best 10K time. Curtin, just like his teammate, improved his personal-best 10K with a 30:37.9 finish. It was less than 30 seconds better than his previous best. Both broke their top 10K times that they set at last year's regional held on the same course.


Seniors Jason Cusack and Brian Welch were fourth and fifth among the Hokies. Cusack finished with a new personal-best 10K time of 32:04.4 while coming in 219th. Welch was two spots back of his teammate with a time of 32:05.2.

"Our top three guys ran well enough to be a top-10 team, but unfortunately, it takes five in cross country, and our four and five [runners] just didn't have the backup that we've been having," Thomas said. "Tommy Curtin and Lee Degfae, they'll have opportunities to hopefully

be back at this meet next year, and they certainly showed that they can step up and run well at this level."

For the Hokies, both Michael Hammond and Kevin Dowd were unable to finish the race.

With his achievement of earning his second All-America accolade, Mulherin will go down as arguably the most accomplished male cross country runner in Tech's history. He finished his career as a two-time All-American, a two-time All-Region performer, a three-time All-ACC performer while also leading the 2012 team to its first ACC Championship by winning the program's first ACC individual championship.

"To become a two-time All-American is something that is difficult to get, but I hope it's something people can do in the future at Virginia Tech," Mulherin said. "I hope I'm not the only one for a while. I'm just happy to finish out my cross country eligibility like this." 

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