

INSIDE

HOKIESPORTS

Division of Virginia Tech Athletics

HALFWAY HOME

A.D. Vassallo and the Hokies knocked off N.C. State to go 5-3 in the ACC at the halfway point and now gear up for the stretch run

Vol. 1 No. 7, February 2009 • \$4



INSIDE: Complete coverage of the 2009 football recruiting class, including profiles

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"Unlike any other property I have ever owned – just a great place and simple to own."

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VT Alum, BSEE - 1983

"Our hotel-condo is something our entire family can enjoy for decades to come."

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The **Collegiate Inn of Blacksburg**, a Luxury Condo-Hotel in the heart of Hokie country, is the ideal place for Virginia Tech fans and anyone who enjoys Blacksburg's unique style of rest and relaxation. Hokie alums often speak of buying a second home in Blacksburg. However, those that take action, soon find their Blacksburg weekends meant for rest and relaxation, turn into frustration and work on their second home.

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*Ownership may include rental program opportunities



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Cheick Diakite dunks in the Hokies' win over the Wolfpack.

VT FEBRUARY UPCOMING ATHLETIC EVENTS MARCH VT

20	MEN'S TENNIS VS. BOSTON COLLEGE FIRST 50 FANS RECEIVE A FREE VT HAT!	4 P.M.	1	BASEBALL VS. YOUNGSTOWN ST.	1 P.M.
20-21	TRACK & FIELD	ALL DAY		WOMEN'S TENNIS VS. MARYLAND FREE VT TENNIS RACKET KEY CHAIN!	NOON
21	LACROSSE VS. JAMES MADISON	1 P.M.	3	BASEBALL VS. RADFORD	3 P.M.
22	WOMEN'S BASKETBALL VS. WAKE FOREST E/S NIGHT! MOVIE NIGHT! FREE POPCORN AND SODA TO FIRST 500 FANS	2 P.M.		LACROSSE VS. VANDERBILT FREE VT THERMAL MUG & HOT CHOCOLATE!	4 P.M.
24	BASEBALL VS. EAST TENNESSEE STATE	3 P.M.	4	MEN'S BASKETBALL VS. NORTH CAROLINA	7 P.M.
25	BASEBALL VS. EAST TENNESSEE STATE	3 P.M.	6	MEN'S TENNIS VS. LOUISVILLE FREE VT TENNIS RACKET KEY CHAIN!	5 P.M.
26	WOMEN'S BASKETBALL VS. GEORGIA TECH SENIOR NIGHT! FIRST 1,500 FANS RECEIVE A VT MINI-HOOP SET!	7 P.M.	7	ACC WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIPS	ALL DAY
27	BASEBALL VS. BUCKNELL	3 P.M.	8	LACROSSE VS. GEORGE WASHINGTON	1 P.M.
28	BASEBALL VS. BUCKNELL	1 P.M.	9	BASEBALL VS. BRYANT UNIVERSITY	3 P.M.
	LACROSSE VS. GEORGE MASON	1 P.M.	13	BASEBALL VS. NORTH CAROLINA	3 P.M.
	MEN'S BASKETBALL VS. DUKE WHITE OUT!	3:30 P.M.	14	LACROSSE VS. BOSTON COLLEGE FREE VT KOOZIE, DRINK & POPCORN!	NOON
				SOFTBALL VS. NC STATE (DH) FREE ACC CHAMPIONS T-SHIRT!	NOON
				BASEBALL VS. NORTH CAROLINA FREE VT THERMAL MUG!	2 P.M.
				FIRST RESPONDERS DAY!	

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THE HOKIE CLUB ... THE OFFICIAL FUNDRAISING ARM FOR VIRGINIA TECH ATHLETICS

The Hokie Club is more than just a membership. It's taking a road trip to see the Hokies play. It's that desire to drive to Blacksburg to see a game just so you can be on campus. It's the pride you feel when the Hokies succeed. It's that feeling that overwhelms you and lets you know without a doubt ... **yeah, I'm a Hokie!**

The Hokie Club, supporting Tech athletics since 1949.



WAYS TO GIVE: QUARTERLY PAYMENTS

A gift of cash or a check is the most popular method of payment for annual gifts to the Virginia Tech Athletic Fund. When making this gift, it is important to know that there are several payment options available, including "Hokie Matic," the Hokie Club's monthly electronic transfer from either one's checking or savings account. In addition to this popular option, many Hokie Club members choose to make their annual donations using quarterly payments.

Designating quarterly payments is an option that is easy to set up. For a new member of the Hokie Club, the easiest way to set up your payments for quarterly payment is to make note of this request on your membership application. For an existing Hokie Club member, someone who previously made payments in a different fashion would need to contact the Hokie Club office to designate this payment method.

Once quarterly payments have been designated, the donor will receive reminders during the months of January, April, July and October. For more information or inquiries about setting up quarterly payments, contact the Hokie Club at (540) 231-6618.



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



The following represents annual giving donors (gifts from \$100 to \$10,000 annually) who have either joined as new Hokie Club members or have upgraded their Hokie Club membership since August 2008. We want to celebrate these commitments of helping improve Virginia Tech athletics by recognizing them and by saying "Thank You!"

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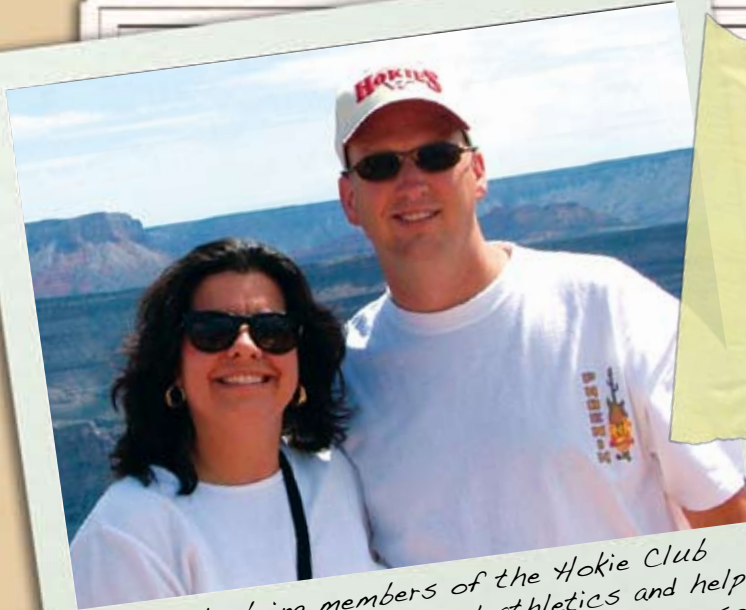
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Alex	Fritz	Blacksburg, VA	Marvin	Mood	Gaithersburg, MD	Eric	Turnpin	Herndon, VA
Russ	Fulcher	Bassett, VA	Randolph	Moore	Midlothian, VA	Leonard	Tuskey	Richmond, VA
Terry	Fuqua	Vinton, VA	Nick	Moore	Virginia Beach, VA	Sam	Updike	Lynchburg, VA
Mark	Gardner	Blacksburg, VA	Melissa	Moore	Marietta, OH	Mat	Urbanik	Dallas, TX
Kurt	Gavaliar	Herndon, VA	Joan	Moore, Jr.	Blacksburg, VA	Joseph	Vipperman	Moneta, VA
Christopher	Goetz	Bristow, VA	Kenneth	Morgan	Southern Pines, NC	Greg & Sandy	Vlahos	Charlotte, NC
Rodney	Goins, II	Salisbury, NC	James	Morrison	Charlotte, NC	Charlotte	Wagner	Pearisburg, VA
Timothy	Golden	Fairfax, VA	Larry	Moss, Jr.	Ridgeway, VA	Steven & Lori	Wagner	Richmond, VA
Deborah	Gonsa	Arlington, VA	Johnson	Muscattello, Jr.	Richmond, VA	Mark	Wales	Bay City, TX
Lury	Goodall, Jr.	Salem, VA	James	Naggs	Christiansburg, VA	Daniel	Walker	Moseley, VA
Daniel	Gordon	Christiansburg, VA	Tommy	Naggs	Blacksburg, VA	Michael	Ward	Tampa, FL
James	Gouger	San Diego, CA	Tommy	Naprstek	Blacksburg, VA	Allison	Wash	Mechanicsville, VA
Owen & Cheryl	Green	Centreville, VA	Benjamin	Nelms	Wake Forest, NC	Darlene	Weatherman	Midlothian, VA
Roy	Green	Alberta, VA	Tracy & John	Newell	Smithfield, VA	Bradford	Weaver	Durham, NC
Harry	Gregori, Jr.	Richmond, VA	Ethan	Nichols	Centreville, VA	Ronald	Weaver	Roanoke, VA
David	Griffith	Salem, VA	Daniel	Northey	Pickerington, OH	Thomas	Webb	Lynchburg, VA
George	Hailer	Natick, MA	Paul	Nunn	Suffolk, VA	Richard & Robin	Webster	Roanoke, VA
Brian	Hall	Beaverdam, VA	Mark	Ostheimer	Clarksville, VA	Kelly	White	Charlottesville, VA
Robert	Hall	Richmond, VA	James	Overholt	Richmond, VA	Ryan	Will	Canton, GA
Christopher	Hardy	Charlotte, NC	Tom & Brenda	Overstreet	Rocky Mount, VA	William & Beverly	Wilson	Lynchburg, VA
Richard	Harman, Sr.	Roanoke, VA	Gary	Paloma	Christiansburg, VA	Thomas	Winborne	Chesapeake, VA
Inez	Harmon	Hardy, VA	Andrew	Pannell, II	Virginia Beach, VA	Lynn	Wolf	Blacksburg, VA
Carla	Harris	Richmond, VA	Robert	Parker	Midlothian, VA	Tim	Woodruff	Richmond, VA
David	Haskins	Poquoson, VA	Steven & Sharon	Pennington	Charlotte, NC	Michael	Wurst	Annapolis, MD
Elaine	Hawkins	Roanoke, VA	Scott	Perkins	Richmond, VA	Martin	Wylie	Katy, TX
Keith	Hedgepeth	Hopewell, VA	Ronald	Peterman	Covington, VA	Clifford	Yerby, Jr.	Kitty Hawk, NC
Gary & Barbara	Helbert	Madison Heights, VA	Thomas	Phillips	Manassas, VA	Nathan	Yingling	Waynesboro, VA
Brent	Helmandollar	Leesburg, VA	John	Pierce	Blacksburg, VA	Paul	Young	Glen Allen, VA
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Wendell	Hensley	Blacksburg, VA	Patrick & Robin		Salem, VA	Vincent	Zoby	Newport News, VA



We like being members of the Hokie Club because we like to support athletics and help further the education of student athletes so that they can be the best that they can be.

Rich & Lisa Cooper

Hokie Club Level:

Golden Hokie

Q: What year did you graduate?

A: Did not attend Virginia Tech.

Q: A Hokie is ...

A: Someone who supports Virginia Tech and all the athletic programs.

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because ...

A: Everywhere you travel, you run into Hokie supporters and fans. Hokie Nation sticks together and supports Virginia Tech as a whole, not just the athletic programs.

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

A: Growing up in a sports-oriented family and starting to attend football and basketball games at a very young age.

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

A: Attending 14 of the 16 straight bowl games that the football team has gone to and getting to meet a lot of the players on those teams.

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

A: Getting to meet a lot of the athletes over the years and raising money for the Hokie Club so you are helping those young student-athletes to succeed. It is a pleasure working with everyone who belongs to the Franklin County Hokie Club and other area Hokie Clubs. Virginia Tech has an excellent Hokie Club staff that makes you want to be involved.

Q: The Franklin County Hokie Club has been a longtime supporter of the Hokie Club. What caused you two to get involved with this group?

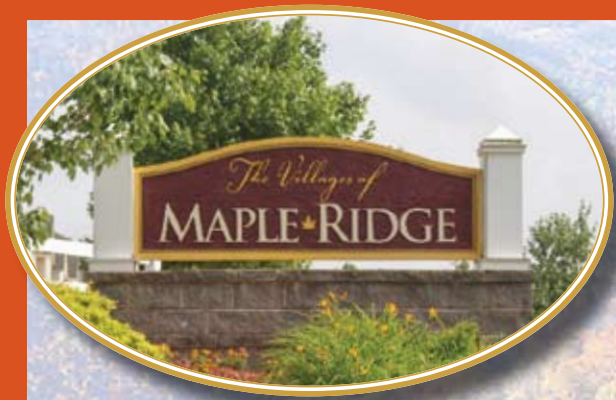
A: Our basketball season ticket seats were beside Arnie and Mary Jane Trope in the 90s (Who are very active in the Franklin County Hokie Club and Arnie is a Hokie Rep.). When we met Arnie and Mary Jane, we were already Hokie Club members but not active in our local chapter. Arnie and Mary Jane knew that we had moved to Franklin County and invited us to attend a Franklin County Hokie Club dinner/social, and we had a wonderful time. It was not long until we were asked to serve on the Franklin County Hokie Board and the rest is history.

Q: Describe your roles with the Franklin County Hokie Club ...

A: Rich is the President; Lisa is the Secretary/Social Chair.

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

A: Lisa carries the same bag to every home game and she has to wear the same watch and bracelets for every game, including the away games. She also has a ring that she calls "her Hokie ring."



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THE HUDSON TEAM



News & Notes

By Jimmy Robertson



Dixon living the life

Former Tech basketball player Carlos Dixon spent last season playing in Korea. This season, though, he decided to take his talents to South America.

Dixon is averaging 12.3 points per game for Quilmes Mar Del Plata, a team from Argentina that plays in the Latin Basket League. He is shooting 54 percent from the floor and almost 84 percent from the free-throw line. More importantly, he's averaged more than 27 minutes per game.

"Life is good," Dixon said. "The weather is great right now. It just turned summer last month and my city [Mar del Plata] is right on the beach, which is awesome. The transition has been good. Just about all my teammates speak English and my coach speaks English, so that made things a lot easier.

"The food is good. I've been eating a lot of steak and pasta, so that's not too bad."

Dixon averaged 13.8 points per game his senior season at Tech in 2004-05 and led the Hokies to the NIT – their first postseason berth since 1996. He finished his career with 1,348 points.

Smith among six elected to NFL Hall of Fame

Former Virginia Tech great Bruce Smith was one of six people who were elected to the NFL Hall of Fame, as announced by the league

the day before the Super Bowl.

Smith will be enshrined with Pittsburgh defensive back Rod Woodson; longtime Bills owner Ralph Wilson; the late Chiefs linebacker Derrick Thomas; former Minnesota guard Randall McDaniel; and the late Bob Hayes, a standout wide receiver for Dallas and the 1964 Olympic gold medalist in the 100-meter dash.

Inductions will be Aug. 8 in Canton, Ohio.

"What a phenomenal class, and especially with having Ralph Wilson, the founding owner of the Buffalo Bills, to be inducted in the '09 class as well," Smith said in an ESPN article. "This is truly special.

"Just thinking about my father and all the sacrifices he and my mother made when I was a child growing up to be a man. How he wanted me to have a life better than he had. I just wish he were here. He would be extremely proud of this day."

Smith is the NFL's career leader in sacks with 200 in 18 years. He also was the defensive anchor for the Buffalo Bills teams that went to four straight Super Bowls in the early 1990s.

He made two all-decade teams (1980s and 1990s) after being drafted No. 1 overall in 1985. He had the most seasons with double-digit sacks (13) and the most postseason sacks (14.5). He earned Defensive Player of the Year honors in 1990 and 1996.

Three Hokies named to NFL all-rookie team

Former Virginia Tech standouts Eddie Royal, Brandon Flowers and Xavier Adibi each earned a spot on the NFL All-Rookie Team as comprised by both *Pro Football Weekly* and the Professional Football Writer's Association of America.

Royal, a receiver picked in the second round of the 2008 NFL Draft (42nd overall), set the Denver rookie record for receptions and receiving yards in a season. He caught 91 passes for 989 yards and five touchdowns, and he also returned punts and kicks. He returned 14 punts

for an average of 10 yards per return and 23 kicks for an average of 26.1 yards per return.

Flowers, the 35th overall player selected, played in 14 of Kansas City's 16 games, missing two November games with a hamstring injury. He finished with 61 tackles, one forced fumble and two fumble recoveries. He also had two interceptions, returning one of those 91 yards for a touchdown.


Adibi, a fifth-round draft choice of the Houston Texans, earned the honor despite playing in just seven games (five starts). The linebacker finished with 35 tackles, including 27 solo stops this season.


Three enroll at Tech for the spring

Three prospects out of the 2008 football recruiting class decided to delay enrollment and instead enroll at Tech for the spring semester. The group includes Tony Gregory, Ben Barber and Eric Martin.

Gregory, a 6-foot, 180-pound running back, rushed for 641 yards and eight touchdowns as a senior at First Colonial High in Virginia Beach, Va. He was ranked the No. 19 prospect in Virginia by Rivals and the No. 31 prospect in Virginia by *The Roanoke Times*.

Barber, a 5-10, 190-pound athlete, played quarterback his senior season at Edison High in Alexandria, Va. He accounted for more than 2,300 yards and 32 touchdowns. As a receiver his junior year, he caught 54 passes for 1,034 yards and 12 touchdowns, while also playing on defense and finishing with 38 tackles and three interceptions. The half brother of former Tech safety Willie Pile, Barber, who was ranked the No. 29 prospect in Virginia by Rivals, figures to be a receiver or a safety.

Martin, a 6-2, 240-pound tight end, caught 22 passes for more than 400 yards and five touchdowns his senior season at Hylton High in Woodbridge, Va. He earned first-team All-Group AAA honors by The Associated Press and was rated the No. 34 prospect in Virginia by *SuperPrep* (No. 38 by *The Roanoke Times*). 



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Tech student-athletes remain active in local communities

By Reyna Gilbert

Practice, class, rehabilitating injuries, film review, training room, study hall and tutoring sessions – it's all in a day's work for a Hokie student-athlete ... or is it? These student-athletes still find time to give back. They know the importance of building and fostering relationships with members of the Blacksburg and New River Valley communities. They also know that they are viewed as role models to the younger members of the Hokie Nation.

Community outreach is just one of the five areas of the NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills Program in which the Office of Student Life mirrors its program. The Office of Student Life organizes Hokies with Heart requests, as well as team community outreach events.

The 2008 fall semester kept many of the athletics teams busy with outreach events throughout the New River Valley.

In October, both basketball teams served as the hosts for clinics for local children. The men's basketball team put on a clinic at both the Blacksburg and Christiansburg Boys and Girls Club of New River Valley. The women's basketball team held a clinic for students at head coach Beth Dunkenberger's alma mater, Shawsville Elementary.

Members of the cross country and track and field teams put together a campaign for shoes. In one afternoon, members of teams and the community donated more than 300 shoes. Donated shoes were sent to Soles4Souls, which facilitates the donations of shoes to those in need worldwide, and the Nike Recycling Center in Wilsonville, Ore., to be used in the Nike Reuse-A-Shoe Program. Established in the early 1990s, Nike's Reuse-A-Shoe program collects old, worn-out athletic shoes for recycling, transforming them into Nike Grind, a material used in creating athletic and playground surfaces as well as select Nike products.

"Community outreach is a great way to give back to the Blacksburg and New River Valley communities that supports us so diligently in

our athletic and academic endeavors as Hokie athletes," cross country runner Natalie Sherbak said. "Community outreach is a way to humbly care about others more than ourselves. In our sports, we are very self-focused on becoming the best athletes we can be, but through community outreach, we seek to make our local community and the world the best place it can be for the benefit of others – and that is truly rewarding."

The Hokie student-athletes also took part in two annual traditions last semester – Hokie Night at Gilbert Linkous Elementary and volunteering at the Montgomery County Christmas Store. During Hokie Night, members from each team signed autographs and interacted with the students and families from Gilbert Linkous Elementary.

Each year, during the months of November and December, Hokie student-athletes volunteer their time at the Montgomery County Christmas Store in downtown Christiansburg. Although the store is only open for one week in December, a great deal of hard work is required from volunteers to get the store up and running. In November, student-athletes helped by organizing and stocking shelves with toys, clothes and other donated items.

The Student-Athlete Advisory Committee also put together a brother/sister team toy drive competition to collect toys for the Christmas Store. The women's soccer and baseball teams won and received ice cream at the fall Reading Day Luncheon as appreciation for their efforts.


"We feel so fortunate to have the opportunity to do community outreach as a team," women's soccer coach Kelly Cagle said. "Not only do we learn that through giving, we allow others to receive, but we also believe it is a special opportunity for our women's soccer team to come together off the field. We believe this time is invaluable to us and to our community. It has become an expectation on our team and



This past fall, members of the men's basketball team read to children at local elementary schools.

in our athletic department to get involved, and we believe that this kind of outreach is integral to our growth as people and athletes."

The lacrosse team helped the students of Harding Avenue Elementary celebrate Halloween at the school's annual Fall Festival. The team helped with the "Haunted Hallway" concessions and games. Harding Avenue Elementary has been the lacrosse team's community service partner for several years. The team also participates in the Lunch Buddies program, which was initiated in the fall of 2005. Once a week, team members attend lunch with a specific class that they "adopted." The program has been very successful and now includes the women's soccer team and its partner, Margaret Beeks Elementary School, and the volleyball team and Kipps Elementary School.

During the spring semester, several student-athletes will participate in the Winning Choices events, which have become a staple in the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system. As part of the Character Education Program of MCPS, the Winning Choices events reinforce positive character traits. Virginia Tech student-athletes serve as keynote speakers at local middle schools and promote positive character and good citizenship. 

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FROM
THE
EDITOR'S
DESK

Jimmy Robertson

February 2 represents Groundhog Day, the time-honored tradition when Punxsutawney Phil waddles out of his cozy burrow on Gobbler's Knob and predicts the remaining length of winter – which always seems to be six more weeks.

Fifteen years ago, Hollywood became enamored with fuzzy Phil and made a movie about it in which a self-centered weatherman traveled to Gobbler's Knob to cover the event – and found himself repeating the same day over and over and over.

Seth Greenberg certainly can relate to Bill Murray, the main character in the movie. After all, his team seemingly plays the same, nail-biting, heart-stopping game over and over and over, at least for the most part this season.

Before Tech entered ACC play, it found itself on the wrong end of some razor-thin margins. The Hokies lost on a halfcourt prayer at the buzzer to Xavier, fell by two to the cheese heads from Wisconsin and dropped a one-point decision at Georgia.

Then league play commenced, and the Hokies survived UVa by three points, knocked off No. 1 Wake Forest on the road and squelched Miami in overtime. In the next two games, they let a 15-point bulge slip away against Clemson and lost on a tip-in with less than a second left at BC.

Then they rallied in historical fashion, coming from 18 points in arrears to topple N.C. State – and snap an ugly six-game slide to the Wolfpack in the process.

And that game only marks the halfway

CLOSE GAMES CREATE ANGST FOR COACHES, BUT GREAT THEATER FOR HOOPS FANS

point of league play.

“One thing about this league,” Greenberg said. “There is no quit in anyone. You have to put your arms around a game and finish it because the players and the coaches and the environments are so competitive.”

Greenberg can serve as the resident expert in this particular area. After all, just one game prior to the N.C. State game, Tech lost at BC at the buzzer. And after the game, Tech's coach didn't sugarcoat – and never does – things to his team.

“We're going to go through this nine more times this season [the number of regular-season games left],” he told them.

And therein lies the greatness of the ACC. Rare exceptions aside, no one blows anyone out and no one gets blown out. The unexpected is the expected. You think Wake blows out last-place Georgia Tech, right? Or that heavily favored Duke steamrolls Miami at Cameron, no? Well, the Yellow Jackets buzzed the Deacs and Duke needed an extra five minutes to quell the Hurricanes.

The games simply come down to the final ticks, and usually, the team with the last shot carries the day.

In other words, it's like Groundhog Day, the movie.

This makes for great theater for fans of basketball – none better than what Hokie Nation witnessed against N.C. State. The Hokies now sit right in the middle of this prickly ACC race as this column gets written, and within hailing distance of an NCAA Tournament at-large bid with a few more wins.

Consider nearly a year ago. The tournament selection committee all but cited Tech's lack of victories over top-50 opponents as the reason for exclusion – the Hokies didn't get their first top-50 ‘W’ until the ACC Tournament.

Now this year, in the middle of the second half of the ACC slate, Tech already has three (at Wake, at Miami and BC).

Their ride to the Big Dance won't be smooth, though. Tech ends the regular season with a quartet of possible potholes – at Clemson, UNC at home, Duke at home and at Florida State. And while the Hokies possess some talent, they also lack a little leadership.

Before the season, Greenberg pointed out repeatedly that this team was still young and a tad immature. At the time, most dismissed that as coach-speak. Turns out, he was prophetic. A lack of consistency and maturity showed up in back-to-back losses to Clemson and at BC.

That might be the Hokies' biggest challenge here in the final weeks of the regular-season – avoiding a decimating losing streak. Losses are going to happen in this league. Keeping them to minimum, as simplistic as that sounds, stands as paramount.

“When you play in the ACC, you're going to have some hiccups,” Greenberg said. “The only way to deal with it is to stay in the present and not let the hiccup snowball. And it can easily snowball in this conference. Let's get past it, let's stay in the present and let's move forward.”

That, obviously, is not easy to do, especially for Greenberg, who takes every loss hard. But he knows the deal in this league, and his players should, too, at this point. One game you lose to BC at the horn. Then the next, you beat a nemesis in overtime.

Every game is the same. Just like Groundhog Day, the movie.

And without giving the ending away, the egocentric weatherman got what he wanted.

In the next few weeks, we'll find out if the Hokies do as well. 



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Bill Roth

David Wilson

WILSON IS MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER TOP-RATED RECRUIT

When David Wilson and his family returned to their Danville, Va., home on Sunday, Jan. 11, they received a surprising phone call from the football offices at the University of Florida.

The timing of the call in itself, and the message delivered from Gainesville, Fla., were both extraordinary for Wilson, one of the nation's top-rated high school football running backs.

In previous months, Wilson got plenty of calls from coaches at Alabama, Auburn, Boston College, Clemson, Georgia Tech, Maryland, Michigan, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Virginia Tech, West Virginia and others. He is that good. After all, when you average 11.4 yards per carry and total 1,551 yards and 17 touchdowns as a junior, recruiters notice.

When you are the reigning indoor and outdoor track state champion in the triple jump and set a national record by jumping an astonishing 49 feet, 4.5 inches, even more people are going to notice.

So the Wilsons grew very familiar with the recruiting process and understood that when the phone rang, it could be Nick Saban (Alabama), Rich Rodriguez (Michigan), Butch Davis (UNC) or any major coach on the other end.

Most of those calls ended last summer. Wilson committed to Virginia Tech in July and Hokie fans everywhere began to follow his incredible senior season in which he rushed for nearly 2,300 yards and 35 touchdowns. He was named Virginia's Gatorade player of the year and was considered one of the most talented high school prospects in America. He was playing for the George Washington Eagles on Friday nights, but he was a Hokie fan on Saturdays, as just about everyone knew – even the Gators.

But back to that phone call.

Florida had won the BCS championship on Thursday, Jan. 8, with its victory over Oklahoma, and at some point within the 72 hours following



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that game, Virginia Beach, Va., product Percy Harvin, the Gators' star junior receiver and runner, informed his coach, Urban Meyer, that he intended to jump to the NFL. Needing to fill that void late, Meyer and Florida running backs coach Kenny Carter thought it was worth a shot to call Wilson upon the team's return to Gainesville.

"They called me the Sunday after the national championship game," Wilson said. "Coach Carter called and they said they really wanted me. Then he put Coach Meyer on. They said Percy Harvin was going to leave for the NFL and would announce in a few days. They wanted me to know before the media found out. And then they said that I could be the next Percy. They said they really wanted me down there badly."

Wilson wanted to be loyal to Tech. But this was Urban Meyer and the Gators – the national champs and the team that could be pre-season No. 1 next year with its entire defense returning.

Wilson consulted his family and his head coach Dan Newell.

"He listened to [Florida] genuinely," Newell said. "He thought it through. But you know, all along, David didn't want to be a 'slash' player like Percy. We had to use him here (at GW) like that out of necessity, but he didn't want that in college. He turned down a lot of teams that wanted to use him in the spread. We heard a lot of recruiters use Percy Harvin as an example, but David wants to be a traditional running back. Line up in the 'I' [formation] and pound the rock."

Wilson was honored by the Gators' interest, but declined. "I'm a man of my word," he said later.

Wilson did sign with Virginia Tech this past week, marking the fifth time in the past nine years that the Commonwealth's top-ranked prospect has signed with Tech – Bryan Randall (2001), Xavier Adibi (2003), Macho Harris (2005) and Tyrod Taylor (2007) are the others.

So you know he can run like the wind and

jump like he's on a trampoline. You know he goes to church every Sunday and honors his commitments, even if the sexy Gators made a very attractive last-minute pitch.

Want more? He's GQ, too.

Ask anyone in Danville, and they'll tell you that David Wilson is one sharp-dressed man.

"He wears slacks and a tie every day to school," Newell said. "If he's not in a tie, he's in a turtle neck and slacks. He wants to look the part of a scholarship athlete, and so he gets dressed up for school. Every day."

Wilson wants to set an image. An image of what a star scholarship athlete should look like in the classroom. To him, that means a shirt-and-tie, not the Abercrombie hoodie.

So, now we know he can run and jump and goes to church. He honors his commitments and approaches his third period chemistry class as if he's attending an Esquire magazine cover shoot.

Here's more:

In January, Wilson drove to Washington, D.C., with his family to watch the inauguration of President Barack Obama.

"It was amazing to be there," Wilson said. "Seeing people there of all races and all generations was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. How cool is it to be alive during the period in time when history is made? It was great to be there. Something I'll never forget."

When's the last time you heard an 18-year-old say this is a "cool time to be alive?"

Well, it is a 'cool time,' if you're David Wilson and you're about to graduate high school where you've made your mark in so many ways. And also, where in your personal life, you strive to be a leader and have the mental makeup to comprehend and truly appreciate the significance of both a well-done double-Windsor and a Presidential inauguration.

In school, in church, with his teammates or during a telephone interview, he strives to come across as caring, cerebral and engaging. Because ... well ... he is.

"No question he is going to be one of the good guys," Newell said. "He's rock solid. He's laid back, almost like a California kid."

But he's not laid back on the football field.


This 5-foot-11, 195-pound physical tailback is already a household name throughout Virginia. They're still buzzing about his 351-yard night against Franklin County down there, and his 332-yard performance against Matoaca. In December, he was named MVP of the Hawaii/Polynesia-Mainland Bowl in Hawaii after scoring two touchdowns in helping the Mainland team beat the Hawaii home team 22-8.

He has not decided if he'll play in the Virginia all-star game in Hampton this summer, but now he is excited to come to Blacksburg.

"I just felt the most comfortable there," Wilson said. "The coaches were like family. They were just able to really connect with me."

He added that the competition in the backfield will make him better and he's well aware of the talents of Darren Evans and Ryan Williams.

Virginia Tech's had a number of outstanding people and players from the GW program, including Cam and Orion Martin and Kenny Lewis, Jr., on this year's team. All are terrific young men and outstanding players. Clearly, Wilson is in that mold.

And no doubt a very welcome addition to the Virginia Tech family. 

TOP-FIVE DOMINANCE

In Wilson and Logan Thomas, Virginia Tech signed two of *The Roanoke Times'* top five players for 2009. Over the past seven recruiting classes, Tech has signed 18 of the 35 players named to that top-five list, far more than any other school. As we can see now, 2006 was clearly an anomaly. That was Harvin's senior year when the entire top five opted to play football outside of Virginia. That stat shows the Hokies can win some serious recruiting battles (see Wilson, Ryan Williams, Vince Hall, Davon Morgan, etc.). – Bill Roth



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HOKIES END STRUGGLES AGAINST N.C. STATE

AND FINISH FIRST HALF OF ACC WITH 5-3 MARK

By Jimmy Robertson

The attire of a head basketball coach never decides the outcome of a game. But given that the Hokies had lost to N.C. State on six straight occasions, more than one person was wondering if the curse of the red jacket existed.

Sydney Lowe, N.C. State's coach, didn't wear his patented red jacket this time around against Tech, and for the first time in a long time, the Hokies weren't seeing red after a game with the Wolfpack.

Tech rallied from an 18-point, second-half deficit to knock off N.C. State 91-87 in overtime, snapping a six-game skid to the Wolfpack and finishing off the first half of the conference slate.

"It feels great," A.D. Vassallo, a senior, said of beating N.C. State. "At least now I can say that we've beaten everyone since I've been here."

"But it's not just that. We're now 5-3 and in third [place, actually tied for third] in the ACC. That makes it even better."

Tech continued its exceptional play in overtime since joining the ACC, moving to 9-1 in ACC overtime games. But more importantly, the Hokies moved to 15-7 overall and 5-3 in the ACC with the victory at the halfway point of the league schedule.

"It's how you get to 5-3," Tech coach Seth Greenberg said. "You've got to try and be on the plus side because it's hard to win on the road. When you're 5-3 in the first half in this league, that's pretty good because it's hard to win a game in this league. Every team has a chance to win."

"So yes, there is a big difference [between 5-3 and 4-4]. It's just extremely competitive every night. You can play well and lose in this league. We were getting whacked in the first half [against N.C. State] and we decided to bow our necks and stay the course and grind. We got some stops and got the ball in the right guys' hands."

If the Hokies make it to the Big Dance, they may well point to this game's historic comeback as the difference to their season.

Tech trailed by 18 with 13:33 to go in the game and by 11 with 9:53 remaining. But the Hokies dialed up some defense and fought back in the game. They held the Wolfpack to just one field goal – and 10 total points, all by Ben McCauley – over the final 9:53 of regulation and closed regulation with a 21-10 run. Tech tied the game with 17.9 seconds left on a short, baseline jumper by Vassallo over N.C. State's Courtney Fells.

In overtime, Vassallo gave the Hokies the lead

with a lay-up and Tech never trailed. He hit two free throws with 16.4 seconds left to give Tech an 89-84 lead. N.C. State's Javier Gonzalez cut the lead to two, 89-87, for the Wolfpack with a 3-pointer with 11 seconds to go, but Vassallo hit two more free throws with 8.7 seconds left to give Tech a four-point lead, and ultimately, the win.

"I don't know what it is about N.C. State, but they always seem to play their best against us," said Vassallo, who scored 24 points on 10-of-17 from the floor. "But we didn't give up and we made plays ... and we just kept playing defense."

Allen came up two rebounds short of a double-double, finishing with 21 points and eight boards. Malcolm Delaney added 18 points.

McCauley led all scorers with a game-high 25 points and 15 rebounds for the Wolfpack.

"I know this, I'm going to that guy's graduation," Greenberg joked of McCauley. "He might even get a present from me."

The comeback marked the biggest for the Hokies in an ACC game. And it marks a perfect way for Tech to begin the second half of the ACC season.

"We could easily be 7-1 or 6-2, but we've just got to keep playing," Vassallo said. "To be 5-3, I'll take that any day. Four-and-4 puts you in the middle with everybody. Then every game counts even more, so we wanted to separate ourselves a little more."

As for getting rid of the curse of that red jacket – if one believes in such superstitions – well, that's just an added bonus for this team.

A torrid streak

Delaney, a sophomore from Baltimore, Md., figures to receive numerous all-conference votes if he continues to put up such astounding numbers. With eight games remaining in the regular season, he is leading the Hokies in scoring at 18.5 points per game and in assists at 3.7 per game. Amazingly, he is averaging 22.3 points per game in ACC games, and he ranked fourth in the ACC in scoring and sixth in assists.

Of course, those numbers nearly pale in comparison to the ones he put up in a recent 12-game stretch. Starting with the Longwood game and ending with the loss at Boston College, Delaney averaged 20.6 points per game and hit 48.1 percent of his shots from the floor, including 38.2 percent from beyond the 3-point arc.

Jeff Allen's 21 points helped Tech snap a six-game losing streak to the Wolfpack.

"We give Malcolm a lot of freedom and all we ask is for him not to abuse it," Greenberg said. "I want him to be as aggressive as possible. Early in the season, I think he was putting a lot of pressure on himself instead of just playing and attacking. He has deceptive quickness and he shoots the ball with great range and great confidence."

Delaney's best game came when he nearly led the Hokies to an upset of No. 12 Clemson at Cassell Coliseum. Tech fell to the Tigers 86-82 in the game – just its second home loss of the season – but Delaney did his best, scoring a career-high 37 points in a losing effort. Delaney's output also was the most by a Tech player in an ACC game and the most scored by an ACC player in a game this season.

Thorns a different player since coming back

Tech point guard Hank Thorns missed two games with an injured knee in late December, but since he returned, he has played extremely well coming off the bench for Tech.

He returned for the Duke game and was one of the bright spots in a 69-44 Tech loss, dishing out three assists and recording two steals in 21 minutes. In his nine games since returning, he has dished out 30 assists. In contrast, he's only turned the ball over five times in that span. He has 49 assists and 21 turnovers on the season as of Feb. 9.

But more importantly, he gives Delaney

the freedom he needs to thrive in the shooting guard spot, his more natural position. That allows the Hokies a little more fluidity on offense.

"He [Thorns] gives us an energy," Greenberg said. "He gives Malcolm the freedom to play off the ball. Hank's been a big part of the little bit of success we've been having."



2008-09 SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent	Time
Nov. 14 Fri.	GARDNER-WEBB	W, 65-62
17 Mon.	MOUNT ST. MARY'S	W, 62-57
<i>O'Reilly Auto Parts Puerto Rico Tip-off</i>		
20 Thurs.	vs. Fairfield	W, 74-57
21 Fri.	vs. Xavier	L, 62-63 (OT)
23 Sun.	vs. Seton Hall	L, 73-77
26 Wed.	ELON	W, 76-67
<i>Big Ten/ACC Challenge</i>		
Dec. 1 Mon.	Wisconsin	L, 72-74
<i>BB&T Classic</i>		
7 Sun.	vs. Navy	W, 79-70
9 Tues.	at Georgia	L, 66-67
14 Sun.	LONGWOOD	W, 79-57
<i>Aeropostale Holiday Festival</i>		
20 Sat.	vs. Columbia	W, 64-52
21 Sun.	vs. St. John's/Marist	W, 81-67
29 Mon.	at Charleston Southern	W, 75-66
Jan. 4 Sun.	at #5 Duke *	L, 44-69
10 Sat.	VIRGINIA *	W, 78-75
14 Wed.	RICHMOND	W, 62-48
17 Sat.	BOSTON COLLEGE *	W, 79-71
21 Wed.	at #1 Wake Forest *	W, 78-71
25 Sun.	at Miami *	W, 88-83 (OT)
29 Thurs.	#12 CLEMSON *	L, 82-86
31 Sat.	at Boston College *	L, 66-67
Feb. 8 Sun.	NC STATE *	W, 91-87 (OT)
11 Wed.	GEORGIA TECH *	7 p.m.
14 Sat.	at Maryland *	4 p.m.
18 Wed.	at Virginia *	8 p.m.
21 Sat.	FLORIDA STATE *	8 p.m.
25 Wed.	at Clemson *	7:30 p.m.
28 Sat.	DUKE *	3:30 p.m.
Mar. 4 Wed.	NORTH CAROLINA *	7 p.m.
8 Sun.	at Florida State *	2 p.m.
<i>ACC Tournament</i>		
12-15 Thu-Sun	Atlanta (Georgia Dome)	TBA

*ACC game - Home games in CAPS

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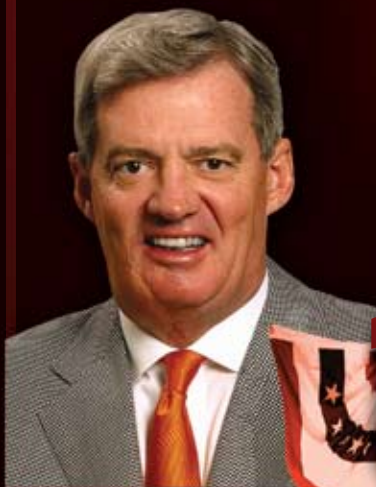
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In search of a fourth


The Hokies suffered an excruciating loss to BC on Jan. 31 when Rakim Sanders scored on a stick-back with four-tenths of a second remaining to give the Eagles a 67-66 victory in Chestnut Hill, Mass. This allowed the Eagles to come away with a split of the season series.

Vassallo scored all 21 of his points in the second half and Allen recorded 23 points and 11 boards for his sixth double-double of the season and the 16th of his career. Delaney finished with 18 points, as the "Big Three" combined for 62 of the 66 points. Only Dorenzo Hudson (3 points) and Hank Thorns (1 point) added points.

So far this season, the Big Three have accounted for more than 71 percent of the team's scoring.

"We need a fourth scorer," Greenberg said. "There's no doubt about it. The more people we have contributing, the better off we are."

A case in point is the win over No. 1 Wake Forest. The Hokies got 15 points from their bench, led by Cheick Diakite's eight points.

"We'd love to have someone step up and be more consistent and be that guy," Greenberg said. "We'd love to have a fourth and fifth scorer. I think we have some guys who can do that. We've got to get it consistent. The teams that have a fourth and fifth guy consistently contributing are the teams that have separated themselves." 

TECH STUNS NO. 1 WAKE

The Virginia Tech men's basketball team added an impressive win to its NCAA Tournament resume when it made history by knocking off No. 1 Wake Forest 78-71 on Jan. 21 in Winston-Salem, N.C.

The victory marked the Hokies' first over a No. 1-ranked team on the road and just the third ever over a No. 1 team in the program's history. In 2007, Tech downed No. 1 UNC 94-88 at Cassell Coliseum, and in 1983, beat Memphis 69-56 at Cassell.

"I'm really proud of our guys," Greenberg said after the game. "I thought they really bought into how we needed to play to have a chance to win."

"It's a great win for our program. It just shows you what the ACC is all about. It's a perfect example of how good this league is and there are no easy outs. You have to play at a really, really high level every night to have a chance,

and I thought we did that."

The Demon Deacons – the last team in the nation to lose a game – had moved to No. 1 in both The Associated Press and the ESPN/USA Today coaches' poll two days prior.

Tech cobbled together enough free throws down the stretch to hold off Wake, hitting 10-of-19 from the stripe in the final 2:50. Wake got no closer than four points after Delaney's free throws, hitting just one of its final seven shots from the floor.

"We came through at the end," Vassallo said. "We knew this was a game we had to get our NCAA Tournament hopes up. We got it."

For the game, Tech shot an even 50 percent from the floor against Wake, which went into the game ranked second in the nation in field-goal percentage defense (36.2). Delaney led the way for Tech with 21 points, hitting 6-of-14 from the floor and 8-of-12 from the free-throw line.



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FROM PUERTO RICO TO PROMINENCE

A.D. VASSALLO'S DECISION TO COME TO THE UNITED STATES HAS RESULTED IN HIM BECOMING AN ACC STAR

By Jimmy Robertson

A.D. VASSALLO FEATURE



Like most young kids growing up in Puerto Rico, he came home from school, went into his house, probably tossed his book bag on the couch and grabbed a snack, and then returned outdoors.

Under the warm evening sun, and with the breezes lazily blowing off the Caribbean, he and a few of the neighborhood kids did what a lot of youngsters do on islands in the Caribbean – they played baseball in the streets.

That's a rather awkward sight for Virginia Tech fans to envision. After all, the A.D. Vassallo they know is a basketball standout in one of the best conferences in the nation and the son of a former professional basketball player. Vassallo now has a solid 6-foot-6 frame, an immaculate shooting form and a 14-karat stroke.

So it's rather hard to comprehend him playing baseball, throwing and hitting the tiny white pill and running bases in the streets.

But it's true.

"I really started playing baseball first," Vassallo said. "I started baseball when I was 5. I didn't start playing basketball until I was, like, 7. That [baseball] was my dad's sport. He loves baseball. He put me into baseball first, and I like baseball as much as I do basketball.

"In high school, I played both. It was more of a hobby because I knew I wasn't going to college to play baseball. I still loved playing it. I was better at baseball than I was at basketball in high school. Obviously, I wouldn't say that now."

Nor would anyone else in this hemisphere, not after watching him launch his beautiful jump shots toward an iron rim time and time again the past four years. Vassallo burst on the Tech scene four years ago when an emaciated squad needed a young freshman not only to play, but also to produce, in a game at Wake Forest. Undeterred, he serenely dropped 29 on the Deacs, a barrage that ultimately catapulted him into a rather prodigious career in Blacksburg.

Now the sun is setting on his collegiate days. He's not sure where he's going to wind up, but it may very well be back where it all started.

Utter the name “Daniel Vassallo” on the island and everyone knows to whom you’re referring. He possesses legendary status there, a former professional player who filled it up back in the day. For comparison’s sake, he’s like the Michael Jordan of the Puerto Rican professional league.

Though he retired more than a dozen years ago, he still plays, participating in the 45-50 age group of a seniors league. Father Time has robbed him of half a step and it takes a little longer for the joints to get lubed up. But the vision remains 20-20, the handle still clean and the jumper still pure.

A.D., which stands for Angel Daniel, certainly remembers the games. He sat behind the bench in an airy gym for every game, but he wasn’t eagerly anticipating the on-court action. No, instead, he couldn’t wait for halftime. He and his buddies provided the entertainment.

“During halftime, I’d go out on the court and shoot with the other kids while waiting for the teams to come back out,” he said. “They didn’t really have halftime shows. The court would be clear and kids would go out and shoot until the teams came back out.”

A.D. grew to realize his father’s game wouldn’t quite fit into his own version. After all, Daniel Vassallo was quicksilver with the ball in his hands. A.D. is not a plodder, but he more likes finding his spot, being fed the ball and lofting jumpers.

“He was impressive,” A.D. said of his father. “He was different than me. He was more of a driver. He could still shoot the ball, but he was more of a driver, and he could jump higher than me. He had some tremendous dunks. He was quicker than me. He could handle the ball. He was a good, smart player, but we’re different.”

Daniel Vassallo and his wife always went to great lengths to care for their son. Daniel grew up in Santurce, a barrio of decay in northern San Juan that borders the Atlantic. He ended up buying a house in Toa Baja, roughly 15 minutes west of San Juan, to move his family into a better environment.

He also wanted to make sure A.D. got a good college education, so together, they hatched a plan, one that would send A.D. to the United States.

“When I was around 14 or 15, my dad and I had a plan to try and get a scholarship,” A.D. said. “I’d move to the United States to try it, and then when the opportunity came, I took it. That’s why I moved when I was in the 10th grade.”

A family friend helped arrange for A.D. to get to the States. The family researched several different schools in various parts of the country, mainly in Miami and Philadelphia, but A.D. – by his own choice – decided to disembark at tiny Faith Christian Academy in south-central Virginia.

“I didn’t know much about the school,”

A.D. said. “I just told them to send me there.

“Part of the reasoning was that Miami has a lot of Hispanics and Puerto Ricans and all that, and I really wanted to make sure I learned English. I knew that was going to be important for getting into a college. I didn’t want to speak Spanish all the time. And I know in Philadelphia, there was a large concentration of Hispanic people, too.

“In Virginia, I was going to be by myself. At those other schools, I had friends from Puerto Rico who were going there. But I wanted to go by myself and get away from everyone. That was a factor in the situation, too.”

A vivid description of A.D. Vassallo reveals all sorts of details about his basketball exploits, but what often gets left out is his fierce willingness to compete. Even at the ripe young age of 15, he practically salivated at the challenge of coming to a new country, not knowing a soul, and trying to carve out a basketball future for himself.

Hurt, Va., the town that houses Faith Christian Academy, presented the ultimate challenge. After all, the town consists of all of about 1,300 people – less than 1 percent of whom are Hispanic – and the local weather and mountains mark a stark contrast to Puerto Rico’s coastal paradise.

“It was not that bad,” Vassallo said. “It was different. Weather-wise, it was different, and



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getting from one place to another. In Puerto Rico, you can go anywhere in a matter of minutes. Everything is packed in. Here, there is so much space. The food is the same, but it's cooked differently here.

"But it wasn't that bad. I was so focused on making it for myself. I enjoyed every minute of it. I'm the type who enjoys challenges and I like going different places and exploring."

Vassallo spent three years at Faith Christian, living with a local host family his first year. After his sophomore season there, he moved in with another host family, the Carwile family. At the time, Gene Carwile served as the athletic director at Faith, while his wife, Becky, worked as an associate dean at Liberty University.

Vassallo has been known as a bit of a loner during his days at Tech, a young man who enjoys spending time by himself – "I was used to coming home and being by myself," he said. "That sounds bad, but my dad was usually at practice and my mom was working. At the same time, I learned how to take care of myself and that helped me." – but he became quite attached to the Carwile family while attending Faith. Gene and Becky treated him as one of their own four children, fostering a relationship with a young man not used to getting close with those outside of his family.

"The kids adopted him and we treated him like one of our own," Gene Carwile said. "There were some times when he missed home, but he knew if he was going to make it [to college], then he was going to have to stay in the States and prove it against good competition."

Vassallo graduated from Faith and committed to the University of Richmond, but wound up at Hargrave Military Academy on the advice of the Richmond coaching staff after the school denied him admission – even though he had met NCAA requirements. While there, Becky Carwile prodded him to remain focused on his academics and Vassallo

took the advice, fully expecting to head to Richmond after the stint at Hargrave.

It never happened. Richmond denied him admission for a second time, and then Jerry Wainwright, the head coach, bolted for the head job at DePaul. Seth Greenberg, seeing an opportunity to land a premier shooter, made a call and Vassallo ultimately chose Tech over N.C. State and West Virginia.

"Here, I knew Carlos Dixon had graduated and I knew I could get some minutes at the 3," he said. "So that, and that Tech was close to home, were the reasons why."

Excited about getting a scholarship and coming to an ACC school, Vassallo arrived in Blacksburg eager to get started.

Freshman years tend to spin out of control at times for even the most grounded of students, and Vassallo found himself on a college flight path filled with turbulence.

It started with his second collegiate game, a game at Cassell Coliseum against Bowling Green. He actually got the start in that game, and the game was close at the end.

In the waning moments, while going up to rebound a Bowling Green brick, Vassallo jumped a little too soon and wasn't able to secure the ball with both hands. It actually deflected off one of his hands and into the basket – which turned out to be the winning points for Bowling Green.

Greenberg and his teammates downplayed the incident. And after being in the doldrums, Vassallo accepted the play for what it was – a random, fluke incident and one that certainly wouldn't detract from his budding career. It just wasn't quite the take-off he wanted.

The real tragedy, though, occurred a couple of months later when Vassallo received notice that Becky Carwile has passed away after a yearlong bout with breast cancer. The news served as a sharp elbow to the face.

"It was a difficult time," Vassallo said. "She helped me out a lot. She was a good lady. She

cared a lot for people. She tried to do a lot for everybody. When that hit, it was kind of a surprise. So that was harder than normal."

"He and Becky butted heads occasionally, but she kept pushing him academically," Gene Carwile said. "He was a part of our family and she wanted him to succeed. At the funeral, we all gathered at the gravesite as a family to say a prayer and A.D. was there, too."

Fighting with basketball struggles, academic struggles and personal struggles his first year, Vassallo desperately needed something to go right for him. It finally happened on Jan. 28, 2005, in Winston-Salem, N.C., of all places.

With the team in dire straits – Tech was 0-6 in the ACC at the time – Vassallo notched his first double-double, scoring 29 points and grabbing 10 rebounds, as the Hokies shocked Wake Forest. The 29 points were the most by a Tech freshman since Dec. 16, 1978, when Dale Solomon scored 33 points at Old Dominion.

The game sparked something within Vassallo.

"In that game, I got to play a lot and I was able to do some of the things I had done in high school," he said. "I just played and didn't worry about what was going on. Once I did that, I knew I was able to do it. I knew I was capable of doing anything I wanted to do. It worked out after that."

Vassallo's career rocketed from that point forward. He averaged 11.1 points per game as a sophomore, helping the Hokies to the NCAA Tournament. Last season, he averaged almost 17 points per game and led the team to the NIT, and a few months after the season, he earned a spot on Puerto Rico's national team and spent part of this past summer playing on that team. This year, he's averaging almost 18 points per game and is making a rather hearty case for first-team All-ACC nods.

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He does some of his best work in the big games. He scored 17 points in Tech's upset of No. 1 North Carolina in 2007. He added 19 points and 10 boards in the Hokies' huge road win at Georgia Tech that same year. He dropped 30 on Wisconsin this season in a losing effort, but his 16 points fueled another Hokie upset of a No. 1-ranked team, as Tech beat Wake Forest on Jan. 21 of this year.

He ranks 14th on Tech's scoring list, with more than 1,500 points, and has a chance of getting into the top 10. He also has more than 500 career rebounds.

"The coaches have done a good job and I've accepted my roles along the way," Vassallo said. "And I kept working. I had a chance to play with the national team, so that gave me more experience. I just became more confident each and every year and started playing better and better. Last year, I had the chance to start and have a bigger role and I took advantage of it. I've always tried to work on my game every year and I think I've gotten better over the years."

His career is certainly coming full circle. It started when his dad taught him the game as a 7-year-old boy in Puerto Rico. Daniel Vassallo moved to Blacksburg a couple of months ago to live with his son, taking time off that he had saved from his job managing a gym in Puerto Rico and savoring his son's waning days as a collegian.


"Just having him around is nice," Vassallo said. "It's like recovering a couple of those years. I haven't seen him as much in eight years. Having him around has allowed us to

"The coaches have done a good job and I've accepted my roles along the way. And I kept working ... I just became more confident each and every year and started playing better and better. Last year, I had the chance to start and have a bigger role and I took advantage of it." - A.D. Vassallo

catch up a little bit on that time."

Vassallo wastes little time these days thinking about his future. He knows one thing – it will include a pursuit of basketball, now his dream. He just doesn't know the league or the country, nor does it matter. He plays for the love it; the money would be a secondary reason.


He very well may go back to Puerto Rico, his home. Back to warm weather and back to the streets where he grew up playing baseball.

Back to a time when he had a kid's heart – only this time, back to pursue a man's dream. 



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A WELL-BALANCED RECRUITING CLASS

has Tech staff optimistic about program's future

By Jimmy Robertson

James Gayle, a defensive end from Hampton, Va., is a member of the Hokies' 2009 recruiting haul.

Photo courtesy of *The Daily Press*

Not long after Florida played Oklahoma in the BCS national championship game, David Wilson received a phone call that Bryan Stinespring found a little disturbing.

Florida coach Urban Meyer, known as a relentless recruiter, gave Wilson, an extremely talented tailback from Danville, Va., who was rated by many as the top prospect in Virginia, a buzz. He informed Wilson that his receiver/running back, Percy Harvin, was going to go pro and then Meyer spent much of the conversation feeling out Wilson to see if he would be willing to back out of his commitment to Virginia Tech and come to Florida.

Wilson said, "No, thanks."

"I wanted to be a man of my word," he said. "I told Coach Stinespring and Coach Beamer that I was coming and that's what I wanted to do.

"Then he [Meyer] called me again – and I told him 'No' again."

As a result of Wilson's remaining true to his word, he became one of the headliners of the 2009 Virginia Tech recruiting class, a group of 21 members who collectively rank among the best in the nation (Rivals ranked the class No. 24 nationally). Overall, the group includes five prospects who earned All-America honors by various recruiting services.

"I think we got a terrific recruiting class," Tech head coach Frank Beamer said. "Not just a good class, but I think a really terrific class. I like our athletic ability, but I really like the academics and the character of this class.

I think that's very, very strong."

Wilson, a 5-foot-11, 195-pound tailback, and Logan Thomas, a 6-6, 230-pound athlete from Lynchburg, Va., hogged the headlines in this class and justifiably so. Wilson, ranked the No. 1 prospect in Virginia by *The Roanoke Times* and the Gatorade state player of the year, rushed for 2,291 yards and 35 touchdowns as a senior for George Washington High, with two games of more than 300 yards rushing. Thomas played quarterback at Brookville High and guided the Bees to the Group AA title game by throwing for 1,535 yards and 20 touchdowns and rushing for 842 yards and 11 more scores his senior season. He possesses the ability to play multiple positions, though both *SuperPrep* and Rivals ranked him the top tight end prospect in the nation.

Three other prospects earned All-America status as well. DeAntre Rhodes, a 6-3, 270-pound defensive lineman from Varina High in Richmond, earned *SuperPrep* All-America honors after a season in which he had 48 tackles, including 14.5 for a loss. And both Cody Journell, a 6-0, 180-pound kicker from Giles High in Pearisburg, Va., and Jayron Hosley, a 5-11, 180-pound cornerback from Delray Beach, Fla., earned *PrepStar* All-America honors. Journell booted six field goals this past season – three of 42 yards or longer – and Hosley finished with 37 tackles and five interceptions.

Four of those five prospects are from Virginia, as is most of Tech's class. Sixteen of the 21 hailed from the commonwealth – a

common theme among Beamer's recruiting classes. Three more prospects hail from South Carolina, and the staff secured one each from North Carolina and Florida.

In-state flavor

As usual, Tech's staff put much of its emphasis on recruiting the state of Virginia and for good reason. According to Doug Doughty, who covers recruiting for *The Roanoke Times*, more than 60 prospects in Virginia had signed with Football Bowl Series schools (formerly Division I) as of Feb. 5. The commonwealth possesses a ton of football talent and recruiting in such a fertile area is a no-brainer for Tech's staff.

After all, Tech has been winning with primarily Virginia kids – it has won at least 10 games for five straight seasons. The Hokies also continue to get the better of the Cavaliers on the field (they've won nine of the past 10) in large part because they get the better of the commonwealth's prospects.

In the past three recruiting classes, Tech's staff has signed 49 prospects from the commonwealth. It's a trend that the staff expects to continue, too.

"I think there are always going to be good players in this state," said Jim Cavanaugh, Tech's recruiting coordinator. "Now, different areas may have more or less, depending on the year, but the population is growing. You see more and more military personnel down in the Tidewater area, and the corridor from Richmond to D.C. is growing. People are

going where the jobs are, and more people equates to more players.

“Coaches are noticing, too. I see more and more from all over the country. Places like West Virginia, Penn State, Tennessee and Florida are coming here. Even the MAC [Mid-American Conference] schools came down here a lot. Everyone wants good players and this state has them.”

This year’s in-state haul included Wilson and Thomas, the No. 1 and No. 4 prospects in the state, according to Doughty (*SuperPrep* ranked Thomas No. 1 and Wilson No. 3). The haul also included eight of Doughty’s top 23 prospects and 10 of the top 30.

Stinespring and Cavanaugh cleaned up in their respective areas. Stinespring, who recruits the Lynchburg/Martinsville/Danville part of the state, landed both Wilson and Thomas, and also Andrew Miller, an offensive lineman from Bassett, Va.

Cavanaugh landed four of Richmond’s best. His list includes Rhodes from Varina High, Antone Exum from Deep Run High, and two prospects from Hermitage High – Theron Norman and Duan Perez-Means. Those two are the latest in a long line of Hermitage graduates to come to Tech (Duane Brown, Ju-Ju Clayton and Alonzo Tweedy,

among others). Cavanaugh also signed James Gayle, a defensive end out of Bethel High in Hampton, Va.

“I think one of the keys was that we’ve had kids from Varina and Hermitage here at Tech,” Cavanaugh said. “It’s the same with Bethel [High] when we had Chris Ellis here. Those guys have been successful here and these recruits trust those kids. That works in our favor.”

Rhodes came in at No. 8 on Doughty’s list. Exum, a top-notch athlete who was one of the few prospects to wait until late December to make a decision, stood at No. 16 on Doughty’s list, while Norman and Perez-Means were No. 23 and No. 34, respectively. Gayle was at No. 26.

Interestingly, Curt Newsome, who recruits the Virginia Beach-Norfolk area, only signed one prospect out of that area this year – 6-1, 220-pound linebacker Telvion Clark out of Granby High, who had 123 tackles and eight sacks this past season. Newsome also recruits Hampton High and landed Tyrel Wilson, a defensive end.

But a year ago, Newsome reeled in seven prospects from the Virginia Beach-Norfolk area alone.

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TOP FIVE

1. David Wilson – One of the top tailbacks in the nation, Wilson fielded calls from the likes of Florida coach Urban Meyer, among others, but never wavered from his July pledge to Tech. At 5-foot-11, 195 pounds, he brings some size and plenty of speed, running a 4.4-second 40-yard dash. He also can make just about any defender miss. His stats – 2,291 yards rushing and 35 touchdowns in Virginia’s highest classification – attest to that. He should be a part of an explosive Tech backfield down the road.

2. Logan Thomas – Thomas may have been the most versatile prospect in Tech’s class. He got offers from legions of schools because he possesses a 6-6, 230-pound frame and the ability to do so many things on the football field. Playing quarterback for Brookville High, he accounted for more than 2,377 yards and 31 touchdowns this past season in leading the team to the Group AA championship game. Tech’s staff hasn’t settled on a position for Thomas yet, but he’ll probably get a look at tight end or receiver, or play in an H-back type of role.

3. Antone Exum – Exum was one of the few recruits to wait until late December to make a decision on his college choice. Fortunately for the Hokies, he picked them and now Tech’s staff will have the luxury of trying this talented athlete at several positions. He played quarterback in high school and may get a look there first after throwing for nearly 1,000 yards and rushing for 745 more, accounting for 30 total touchdowns. The strong 6-0, 190-pounder is an outstanding returner as well – he returned six for scores his senior season.

4. Lanford Collins – Collins waited until a few days before signing day before making his decision to come to Tech, turning down both UVa and Penn State in part because he loves the way the Hokies play defense. At 6-4, 240, he provides the Hokies with a huge presence at the defensive end spot, and his specialty is getting to the passer. Collins – who, amazingly, was a running back and a cornerback until his junior season – may very well have been the best defensive end prospect in the state this past season.

5. DeAntre Rhodes – Tech’s staff also went after defensive tackles in this class and landed arguably the state’s best in Rhodes, who finished with 48 tackles, including 14.5 for a loss his senior season. He projects as a defensive tackle, given his size. At 6-3, 270 pounds, he possesses the frame to get much bigger and stronger, and while he also excelled on the offensive line for Varina – a school that has provided the Hokies with many good players – he figures to anchor Tech’s defensive line in the future.

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NAME	POSITION	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	HOMETOWN	HIGH SCHOOL	RECRUITED BY
Telvion Clark	LB	6-1	220	Norfolk, Va.	Granby	Curt Newsome
D.J. Coles	WR	6-3	215	Fork Union, Va.	FUMA/Goochland	Jim Cavanaugh
Lanford Collins	DE	6-4	240	Stafford, Va.	Brooke Point	Bud Foster
Tariq Edwards	DE	6-3	212	Cheraw, S.C.	Marlboro County	Charley Wiles
Tyrell Edwards	ATH	6-3	220	Cheraw, S.C.	Marlboro County	Charley Wiles
Antone Exum	ATH	6-0	190	Glen Allen, Va.	Deep Run	Jim Cavanaugh
James Gayle	DE	6-5	215	Hampton, Va.	Bethel	Jim Cavanaugh
Kory Gough	OL	6-5	265	Goldvein, Va.	Liberty	Torrian Gray
James Hopper	CB	5-9	180	Fayetteville, N.C.	Seventy-First	Charley Wiles
Jayron Hosley	CB	5-11	180	Delray Beach, Fla.	Atlantic	Charley Wiles
Cody Journell	K	6-0	180	Ripplemead, Va.	Giles	Billy Hite
Andrew Miller	OL	6-4	275	Bassett, Va.	Bassett	Bryan Stinespring
Theron Norman	S	6-3	190	Richmond, Va.	Hermitage	Jim Cavanaugh
Nubian Peak	ATH	6-1	180	Radford, Va.	Pulaski County	Billy Hite
Duan Perez-Means	DE	6-4	230	Richmond, Va.	Hermitage	Jim Cavanaugh
DeAntre Rhodes	DL	6-3	270	Sandston, Va.	Varina	Jim Cavanaugh
Logan Thomas	WR	6-6	230	Lynchburg, Va.	Brookville	Bryan Stinespring
David Wang	DT	6-2	290	Ashburn, Va.	Stone Bridge	Torrian Gray
Jerrodd Williams	CB	6-0	185	Central, S.C.	D.W. Daniel	Torrian Gray
David Wilson	RB	5-11	195	Danville, Va.	George Washington	Bryan Stinespring
Tyrel Wilson	LB	6-2	230	Hampton, Va.	Hampton	Curt Newsome

SLEEPERS

1. D.J. Coles – Coles was a standout tailback at Goochland High in 2007 and then spent this past fall at Fork Union. People tend to forget about him when talking about Tech's recruiting class, but this kid enjoyed a terrific season playing as a receiver against very good prep school competition. He's a huge target at 6-3 and more than 215 pounds and he can run for a guy with that size. With his size, speed and ball skills, he could end up on the field quickly for the Hokies.

2. David Wang – Wang is a familiar name in Blacksburg because David's brother, Ed, starts at left tackle for the Hokies. The younger player is shorter, but has the potential to be just as good, if not better. He combines quickness and explosiveness with balance – three common traits in any good lineman. Plus, he's a tremendous worker. He'll start off at defensive tackle, but could also move over to the other side of the ball.

3. Cody Journell – Tech's staff always seems to come up with good kickers and Journell figures to be the next in line. Head coach Frank Beamer thought so much of Journell's field-goal kicking and his kickoffs during a one-day camp last June that he offered Journell a scholarship. Journell isn't just a kicker – he's a pretty good athlete. He rushed for more than 1,000 yards as a running back in Giles High's single-wing attack this past season.

4. James Hopper – Hopper made a name for himself as a tailback this past season and enjoyed a huge game in the North Carolina Class 4-A championship game. He rushed for 192 yards and four touchdowns, but he'll be a cornerback at Tech. He played on defense quite a bit, both at cornerback and at safety, and has instincts for either position. Tech's coaching staff liked one thing – he was already around the ball.

5. Nubian Peak – The local native from nearby Pulaski County High put up some big numbers as a tailback this past season, rushing for more than 1,400 yards and scoring 22 touchdowns. In fact, he rushed for more than 3,000 yards combined the past two years, so he knows how to haul the mail. He could fit in at tailback, though Tech's backfield is crowded. He also could work at receiver or cornerback, given his ability to make plays.

2007], our class was going to be less than 15, so we couldn't make as many offers – and we would have with more scholarships," said Newsome, who only made five offers. "And, too, a lot of it is based on needs. For example, we took a lot of receivers last year, so we weren't going to sign a bunch of receivers this year. The numbers just didn't fit."

D-line the pressing need

The Hokies' only lost one senior defensive lineman off of last season's squad, but a program never wants to be short of defensive linemen. So Tech's staff signed six prospects listed as defensive linemen – four at end and two at tackle. Rhodes headlines the bunch, but the overall success of the group hinges on him developing to the fullest along with the other five.

The remaining five include Lanford Collins, a 6-4, 240-pounder from Stafford, Va.; David Wang, a 6-2, 290-pound tackle from Ashburn, Va.; Gayle, a 6-5, 215-pounder from Hampton, Va.; Perez-Means, a 6-4, 230-pounder from Richmond; and Wilson, a 6-3, 215-pounder from Hampton, Va.

Rhodes and Wang project as tackles; while the other four will begin their careers at end.

"We needed some [defensive linemen], particularly ends," Cavanaugh said. "The thing I like about all of these guys is they can run."

HOST	ALSO CONSIDERED	NOTABLE
Kam Chancellor	UNC, Penn State	No. 29 LB prospect in nation by Rivals
N/A	Only considered Tech	Signed with Tech last year, but went to FUMA
Isaiah Hamlette	UVa, Penn State	No. 14 prospect in Va. by <i>SuperPrep</i>
Jarrett Boykin	Illinois	No. 23 LB prospect in nation by Scout.com
Jarrett Boykin	UNC, N.C. State	No. 82 ATH prospect in nation by Rivals
Davon Morgan	Penn State	No. 16 prospect in Va. by <i>The Roanoke Times</i>
Jaymes Brooks	UVa, Purdue, UCF	No. 26 prospect in Va. by <i>The Roanoke Times</i>
Beau Warren	Penn State, Arkansas, Ohio	First-team All-Met selection by The Washington Post
Lorenzo Williams	Wake Forest	A first-team Class 4-A choice by NCPreps.com
Lorenzo Williams	South Florida, Georgia, Michigan	A <i>PrepStar</i> All-American
Austin Fuller	Only considered Tech	No. 7 K prospect in the nation by Scout.com
no official visit	UVa, Wake, FSU	Piedmont District and Region IV defensive POY
Ju-Ju Clayton	Maryland, UVa	No. 16 ATH prospect in nation by ESPN/Scouts, Inc.
Patrick Terry	UVa, UNC, Maryland	Region IV offensive POY in Va. as an RB
Ju-Ju Clayton	Maryland, UVa, Syracuse	No. 26 weakside DE prospect in nation by Rivals
Davon Morgan	UVa, Maryland, Clemson	No. 8 prospect in Va. by <i>The Roanoke Times</i>
Tyrod Taylor	FSU, UNC, Wake	No. 1 TE prospect in nation by Rivals
Ed Wang	Only considered Tech	No. 18 prospect in Va. by <i>The Roanoke Times</i>
Eddie Whitley	WVU, Georgia Tech, UNC	No. 30 CB prospect in nation by ESPN/Scouts, Inc.
Eddie Whitley	Florida, Auburn, Clemson, PSU	Top prospect in Va. by <i>The Roanoke Times</i>
Tyrod Taylor	Tennessee	First-team All-Group AAA in Va. as a LB

Tyrel Wilson



Photo courtesy of *The Daily Press*

Tech's staff also focused on defensive backs, signing four, including three cornerbacks – all from outside the state. The headliner is Hosley, the *PrepStar* All-American who went to the same high school as former standouts Brandon Flowers and David Clowney. Michigan and Ohio State were in on him early and Georgia expressed interest. He ultimately picked Tech over South Florida on signing day.

"The thing with him is he kept it open until the very end," Beamer said. "Us having the last visit turned out to be a good thing. That's a risky thing, too. But it was one of those things that just worked out well."

The other two corners include Jerrodd Williams, a 6-0, 185-pounder who hails from South Carolina, and James Hopper, a 5-9, 180-pounder from Fayetteville, N.C.

"You're always trying to find those corners," Cavanaugh said. "And if some of them don't work out, you can move them."

The fourth defensive back is Norman, a 6-3, 190-pounder from Richmond. He's a tall, rangy player who projects as a safety at Tech.

Filling other needs

The rest of Tech's recruiting class was balanced. The Hokies' staff signed two offensive linemen (Miller and Kory Gough) with big frames and quick feet. They also added two

linebackers – Tariq Edwards (potentially) and Clark.

On offense, David Wilson and Thomas headline the skill players. Tech already possesses three good tailbacks in Darren Evans, Josh Oglesby and Ryan Williams. But Wilson isn't afraid of competition – and Beamer isn't afraid to play true freshmen.

"We're going to put the best players out there on the field, and that's just the deal," Beamer said. "It's up to him and how he does when he gets here. He's has the potential to be a great player and he's such a good person, too."

Thomas is as intriguing if only because of his versatility. Tech's staff listed him as an "athlete" on the signing day release and plans on looking at him at receiver, H-back, tight end and maybe even quarterback.

"I think he's a guy that you want to move around," Beamer said. "I think he's going to be athletic enough to do a lot of things for you. I think he's got possibilities at a lot of places."

The Hokies also added three more high-powered offensive skill players. D.J. Coles, a 6-3, 215-pounder who spent the fall at Fork Union after signing with the Hokies last year, gives Tech a huge presence at receiver. Exum, a 6-0, 190-pounder, and Nubian Peak, a 6-1, 180-pounder from Pulaski County High in Dublin, Va., round out the group. Tech's staff

listed both of them as athletes.

Exum accounted for 2,357 yards and 30 touchdowns as a senior and he returned six kicks for touchdowns. Peak rushed for 1,436 yards and 22 touchdowns this past season.

"We'll probably give Antone the opportunity to play both sides of the ball and see how he does," Cavanaugh said. "I know this – he's a talented kid and a good student.

"And I think you'll see Nubian play some receiver. Maybe try to get him the ball on screens and reverses, things like that."

Wrapping it up

One area where the Tech staff came up short was at quarterback, though not by design. On the contrary, the coaches worked every possible angle. They made offers to two in-state quarterback prospects who went elsewhere, and a third in-state prospect never showed any interest in the Hokies. The staff even tried to bring in a prospect from Texas at the last minute, but that failed to pan out, as the kid ended up signing with Baylor.

Beamer addressed the quarterback situation, saying that he planned on giving Ju-Ju Clayton and Marcus Davis, two rising redshirt freshmen, plenty of reps there this spring, and that he might increase Greg Boone's workload at quarterback as well. In this class, Exum and Thomas both will get looks.

"I think our quarterback situation will be OK," Beamer said. "I'm not sure these guys are not pure quarterbacks. Yeah, we missed on a couple. But we think we've got a couple good ones in our program, too."


The staff is already working on possibilities for next year's class. Of course, that goes for every position, not just quarterback. Tech's staff practically wrapped up a lot of its recruiting early, and the extra time enabled them to get a jumpstart on next year's recruiting.

"We've probably watched more video and

we're more ahead than we've ever been on next year's class," Beamer said. "And I really think we've got a shot to have another terrific class next year."

For the short term, though, they savoring what they've put together – another top-25 recruiting class, one certainly with the potential to keep those 10-win seasons, ACC

championships and bowl berths continuing.

"The thing that I like about this group is that they can all run and they're all athletic," Cavanaugh said. "There's athletic ability in this class no matter what position. If you're going to win at this level, you better have kids who can run and kids who have athleticism, and I think we've got that with this class." 

Logan Thomas is one of Tech's most touted recruits and could play any number of positions once he arrives on campus.

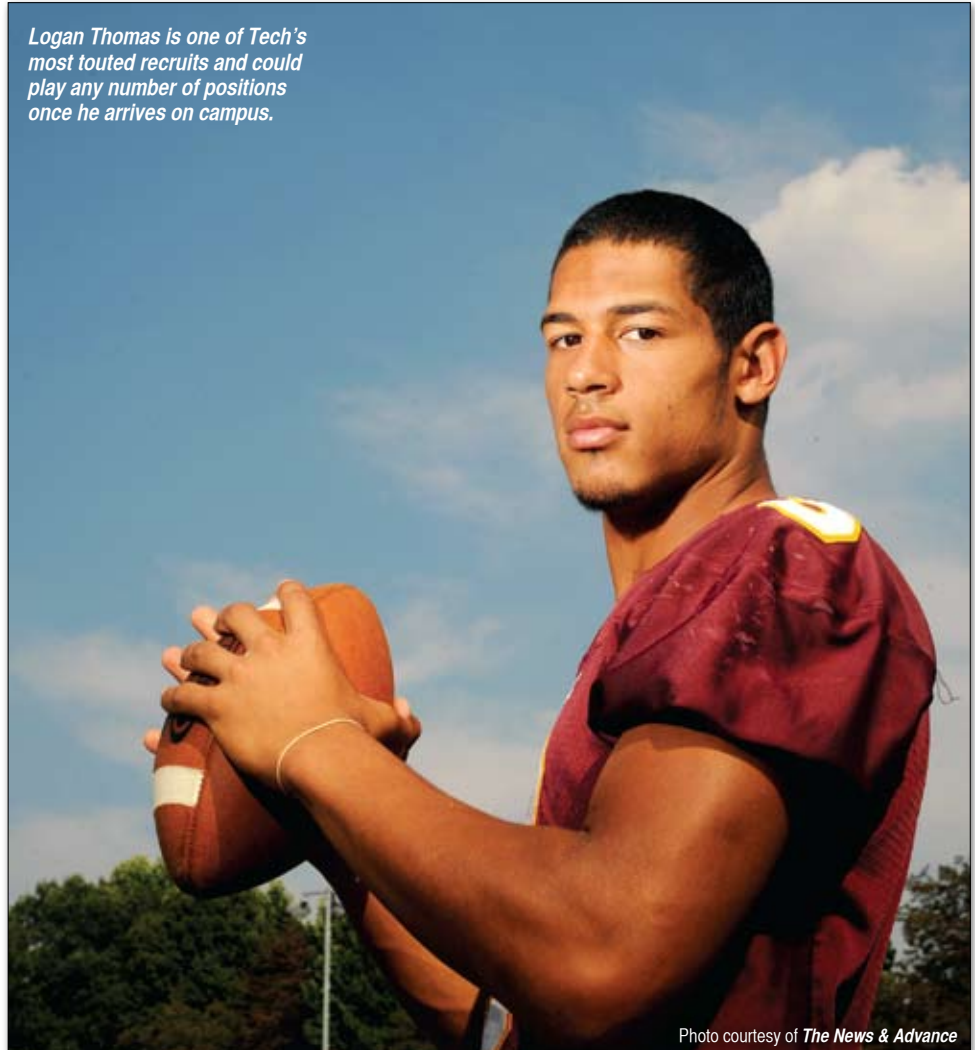


Photo courtesy of *The News & Advance*

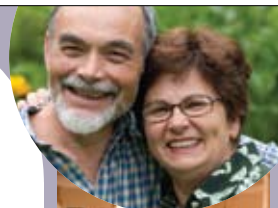


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Here's a look at the profiles for the members of the recruiting class, with the exceptions of D.J. Coles, who was portrayed last year. *By Jimmy Robertson*



Telvion CLARK

6-1, 220, LB
Granby High; Norfolk, Va.

Stats: Tallied 123 tackles, eight sacks, five forced fumbles and four interceptions as a senior ... Had 153 tackles and nine sacks as a junior.

Top honors: Rated the No. 29 prospect in Virginia by *The Roanoke Times* and No. 25 by *SuperPrep* ... Rated the No. 29 linebacker prospect in the nation by Rivals ... A first-team All-Tidewater selection.

Why he chose Tech: "When I came up there for my visits, I always felt at home. It was just a family atmosphere there and all the guys made me feel welcome.

"And I was interested in their defense. I love the way they attack and blitz. Coach [Bud] Foster is legendary. He's a great guy and a great coach, and anyone would be honored to play for him."

On being a tremendous wrestler: "Coach Jim Lambert came to me and told me it would be good for me and that the team needed leadership. At first, I shot him down. But I went to a tournament and saw them wrestling and that changed my mind.

"It was hard getting back into it [he wrestled in middle school]. But I came on quickly and I think it's going to help me in the long run."

Notables: Born Sept. 25, 1990 in Greensboro, N.C. ... Son of Tonya Wade ... Has an older brother and a younger brother ... Contemplated major is business.



Lanford COLLINS

6-4, 240, DE
Brooke Point High; Stafford, Va.

Stats: Recorded 124 tackles, including 24 for a loss, and 16 sacks combined his junior and senior seasons.

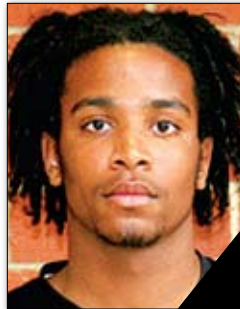
Top honors: Rated the No. 20 defensive end prospect in the nation according to Rivals and ESPN/Scouts, Inc. ... Earned first-team All-Commonwealth District and All-Northwest Region honors as a senior ... Named to the *Free Lance-Star's* all-area team.

Why he chose Tech: "I really like the environment and the coaching chemistry. I wanted a stable environment and I know the coaches are going to be there."

On being the last Tech commitment: "I wanted to take my time and take a look at everybody. During football season, it was hard to focus on all the recruiting stuff. I wanted to wait until the season was over and then take my visits and check out all the schools."

On his strengths and weaknesses: "I think I rush the passer well and I never give up on a play. I probably need to work on my technique. I've only been playing the position two years. Before, I was a running back and cornerback, and then over the summer, I grew and put on weight."

Notables: Born Feb. 20, 1991 in Clarksville, Miss. ... Son of Lanford and Connie Collins ... Has one older sister and a younger brother and sister ... Contemplated major is computer science or business information technology.



Tariq EDWARDS

6-3, 212, LB/DE
Marlboro County High; Cheraw, S.C.

Stats: Finished with 102 tackles, including five for a loss, and three sacks as a senior ... Caught 12 passes for 225 yards and four touchdowns his senior year.

Top honors: Listed the No. 15 prospect in South Carolina by *SuperPrep* ... Ranked the No. 23 strongside linebacker prospect nationally by Scout.com ... Listed as the No. 50 outside linebacker prospect in the nation by Rivals.

Why he chose Tech: "Because of how they treated me and the things they'd showed me every time I went up there. I felt comfortable there when I went on my visits, and when I took my official visit, I was even more comfortable. They players there treat you with respect."

On his father's impact on him and his brother [his father, Bo Campbell, played at Tech]: "He was always active in the recruiting process, and we knew he was going to be a factor. He made us look at things like the depth chart and position coaches and academics to see how schools compare. He helped us out a lot."

On his position: "I think they're looking at me as an outside linebacker. They call it their whip position. I guess it depends on how big I get."

Notables: Born May 1, 1991 in Cheraw, S.C. ... Son of Bo and Felicia Campbell ... Twin brother of Tyrell Edwards, a Tech recruit ... Has three sisters ... Contemplated major is psychology or graphic design.



Tyrell EDWARDS

6-4, 220, TE
Marlboro County High; Cheraw, S.C.

Stats: Caused one fumble and recovered two fumbles on defense his senior season ... Had 15 tackles as well ... Also caught two passes for 17 yards ... Recorded 71 tackles and had two sacks as a junior.

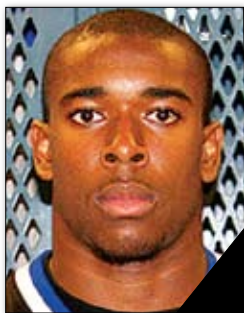
Top honor: Listed the No. 31 prospect in South Carolina by *SuperPrep* ... Ranked the No. 82 athlete prospect nationally by Rivals.

Why he chose Tech: "It was mostly a family thing. We have a history here and I've been coming to games there since I was 7 or 8. I wouldn't say it was a package deal with my brother. We were both looking for the best situation and Virginia Tech was it."

On his father's impact: "He had a great deal of an impact. He was always getting us to go to camps and helping us get noticed. He was always helping us to get ready for college."

On his position: "I'll probably end up at tight end or maybe work as a slot receiver. I'm more of an offensive guy, so anywhere they put me on offense, I'll be ready to play. I feel like I can make blocks downfield and catch the ball and make things happen."

Notables: Born May 1, 1991 in Cheraw, S.C. ... Son of Bo and Felicia Campbell ... Twin brother of Tariq Edwards, a Tech recruit ... Has three sisters ... Contemplated major is psychology or graphic design.



Antone EXUM

6-0, 190, ATH
Deep Run High; Glen Allen, Va.

Stats: Accounted for 2,357 yards and 30 touchdowns his senior season, including six on returns ... Threw for 978 yards and nine touchdowns and rushed for 745 yards and 15 scores as a senior.

Top honors: Rated the No. 16 prospect in Virginia by *The Roanoke Times* and the No. 17 prospect in Virginia by *SuperPrep* ... A first-team All-Group AAA selection by The Associated Press as a kick returner ... Listed as the No. 38 athlete in the nation by Rivals ... Rated the No. 42 athlete prospect nationally by ESPN/Scouts, Inc.

Why he chose Tech: "I got along with the staff. It was basically them and Penn State, and Virginia Tech was recruiting me to play the positions where I felt comfortable. It was close to home and Coach Beamer wins with in-state kids. I'll get a great education and it was just right for me."

On his position at Tech: "I'm not sure. They've told me we'll see what happens. I'll probably split some time between quarterback and defensive back. But I'm not sure which one they want me to play. Either way, it's fine. I just want to get on the field early."

Notables: Born Feb. 27, 1991 in Richmond ... Son of Antone and Barbara Exum ... Has a younger sister ... Contemplated major is business.



James GAYLE

6-5, 215, DE
Bethel High; Hampton, Va.

Stats: Registered 96 tackles (60 solo) and 12 sacks as a defensive end his senior season.

Top honors: Listed as the No. 26 prospect in Virginia by *The Roanoke Times* ... Ranked the No. 27 prospect in Virginia by *SuperPrep* ... Rated the No. 25 strong-side defensive end in the nation by Rivals.

Why he chose Tech: "I was going to stay in the state all along and Virginia Tech has one of the best defenses in the nation. When I went to camp up there [the one-day camp last summer], I really liked the campus a lot. I actually had planned on taking some visits to other schools and committing later, but I changed my mind and decided on Virginia Tech."

On his rapid development: "I didn't start playing football until I moved in with my father here [James had been living with his mom in Minnesota] in the 10th grade. After my 10th grade year, the guys were telling me to just stay on the JV team. But I gained like 50 pounds and worked hard in the weight room. Then I took a senior's starting position and things have been going well since then."

Notables: Born Feb. 15, 1991 in Los Angeles ... Son of Jimmy Gayle and Michelle Gayle ... Has one older sister and three younger ones ... Major is undecided.



Kory GOUGH

6-5, 265, OL
Liberty High; Goldvein, Va.

Stats: Graded out at 90 percent for much of the season.

Top honors: Earned first-team All-Met honors by *The Washington Post* ...

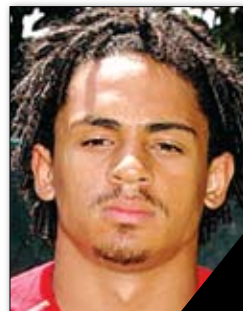
Listed the No. 40 prospect in Virginia by *SuperPrep* ... Rated the No. 46 prospect in Virginia by *The Roanoke Times*.

Why he chose Tech: "It's close to home and I've always liked them. Actually, I grew up a fan of both Virginia Tech and UVa - I didn't really know about the hate between the schools. But I always like Tech a little more."

"I had about 15 offers, but Tech was the main school. They told me they were going to sign just one offensive lineman, so as soon as they offered, I took it."

On being a big-time wrestler: "I've been wrestling for seven or eight years and it's a lot of fun. My little brother actually started me on it as a way to help with my conditioning and I just kept on with it. It helps with your core. It keeps you flexible and in shape, and makes you quicker with your hands."

Notables: Born March 20, 1990 in Fauquier, Va. ... Son of Kimberly and Kevin Gough ... Has two older brothers and one younger brother ... Contemplated major is business or perhaps something to do with nutrition.



James HOPPER

5-9, 180, CB
Seventy-First High; Fayetteville, N.C.

Stats: As a tailback, ran for 192 yards and scored four touchdowns in the 4-A championship game - a 28-7 victory by Seventy-First - his senior season ... Had 88 tackles and an interception as a junior.

Top honors: Listed as the No. 21 prospect in North Carolina by *SuperPrep* ... A first-team Class 4-A selection as a running back by NCpreps.com ... Ranked the No. 33 cornerback prospect in the nation according to ESPN/Scouts, Inc.

Why he chose Tech: "It's a good school and a good program. I have dreams of getting to the NFL and I think they can get me on the right path to where I want to go."

On winning the state championship: "That was a great feeling. I was the MVP of the game and couldn't ask for more."

On his position: "I played a lot of safety and that's where I probably feel most comfortable. I like to hit and I like being able to move freely. At safety, it's instinct more than talent. It's what you feel, and I think I have a good feel for the game."

"But I'm fine with anything they want me to do as long as I get on the field."

Notables: Born Feb. 28, 1991 ... Son of John and Tracy Huff ... Has an older brother and a younger brother ... Contemplated major is business or marketing.



Jayron HOSLEY

5-11, 180, CB
Atlantic High; Delray Beach, Fla.

Stats: Had 37 tackles and five interceptions as a senior ... On offense, had 15 catches for 300 yards and five touchdowns ... Also had five special teams scores (three punt returns, two kickoff returns).

Top honors: A *PrepStar* All-American ... Rated the No. 11 cornerback in the country and the 25th overall prospect in Florida by Rivals ... Ranked the No. 22 cornerback nationally by ESPN/Scouts, Inc.

Why he chose Tech: “On my visit there, I just felt like I was at home. The players and the coaches there showed me a lot of love, and the staff was just unbelievable. The defensive coordinator [Bud Foster] and Coach Beamer, they’re just great people.”

On the impact Brandon Flowers, another former Atlantic High standout, had on him: “His dad and my dad are very close, and me and Brandon talked quite a bit. He’s a guy I trust. He’s been through it and I trusted him.”

On waiting to make his decision on signing day: “I just wanted to think everything through. I wanted to take some visits and weigh my options. I think it all worked out well in the end.”

Notables: Notables were not available.



Cody JOURNELL

6-0, 180, K
Giles High; Ripplemead, Va.

Stats: Booted six field goals as a senior, including three of at least 42 yards ... Rushed for 1,060 yards and 13 touchdowns ... Kicked 10 field goals his junior season, including a long of 54 yards.

Top honors: Listed as the No. 7 kicking prospect in the nation by Scout.com ... Ranked the No. 13 kicking prospect in the nation by Rivals ... A first-team All-Timesland selection by *The Roanoke Times*.

Why he chose Tech: “My family has lived in Giles since I was born and its only 20 minutes away. I grew up a Hokie. And with Coach Beamer coaching the special teams and the kickers, that’s a big deal. I looked at some other schools, but once I came to camp and they offered, I was set after that.”

On how he got started kicking: “My dad took me out in the fourth grade and we started kicking it around a bit. Then in the sixth grade, we had tryouts and I won the kicking competition.

“I didn’t really start going to camps until the 10th grade when I went to see Doug Blevins [a kicking instructor] in Abingdon. He’s helped me a lot, and I’ve worked on it.”

Notables: Born June 13, 1991 in Blacksburg, Va. ... Son of Jim and Debbie Journell ... Has a younger brother ... Contemplated major is business management.



Andrew MILLER

6-4, 275, OL
Bassett High; Bassett, Va.

The vitals: Recorded 102 tackles (58 solo), including 16 for a loss as a defensive lineman his senior season ... As a junior, he tallied 110 tackles and three sacks ... Won the state championship in wrestling as a heavy-weight in 2008.

Rankings: *The Roanoke Times* defensive player of the year ... Earned first-team All-Group AA honors ... Rated the No. 21 prospect in Virginia by *SuperPrep* ... Ranked the No. 33 offensive tackle prospect nationally by Rivals.

Why he chose Tech: “It’s an all-around good school. It has good academics and good athletics. My brother goes there and I’m used to coming up there. I know all about the place.”

On his plans to wrestle and play football: “I’m going to wrestle my first year, while I’m redshirting in football. I want to see what I can do in wrestling for one year at the college level. I like the intensity of it. If you

make mistakes, you have no one else to blame.

“After my first year, I’ll be full-time into football. I’ll be too heavy to wrestle.”

Notables: Born April 24, 1990 in Martinsville, Va. ... Son of Johnny and the late Linda Miller ... His oldest brother, John, played football at Duke. His sister, Heather, played basketball at Wake Forest. His older brother, Tim, is on a wrestling scholarship at Virginia Tech ... Major is undecided.



Theron NORMAN

6-3, 190, S
Hermitage High; Richmond, Va.

Stats: Caught 16 passes for 185 yards his senior season ... Had 32 tackles and three interceptions as a junior.

Top honors: Ranked the No. 23 prospect in Virginia by *The Roanoke Times* and No. 31 by *SuperPrep* ... Listed the No. 16 athlete nationally by ESPN/Scouts, Inc. ... Rated the No. 42 athlete in the nation by Rivals.

Why he chose Tech: “When I went there on my unofficial visits, the players and the coaches made me feel like I was at home. The coaches are up front with you and I liked that. I was comfortable there.”

On being the latest Hermitage graduate to come to Tech: “I think we were all picking a place where we would feel comfortable. Ju-Ju [Clayton] and Alonzo [Tweedy] are there and they made me feel comfortable. They’d joke around and say that I needed to come there, but they wanted me to feel comfortable with where I was going.”

On his strong points as a player: “I think my strongest point is that I love to compete. I’m a competitor. I like to have fun, but I also like to work hard and play hard.”

Notables: Born Oct. 4, 1991 in East St. Louis, Ill. ... Son of Theron and Tracy Norman ... Has two older sisters and an older brother ... Contemplated major is communication.



Nubian PEAK

6-1, 180, ATH
Pulaski County High; Radford, Va.

Stats: Rushed for 1,436 yards on 182 carries and scored 22 touchdowns his senior season ... Had 1,349 yards on 158 carries his junior season and scored 16 total touchdowns as a junior.

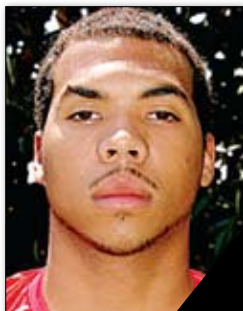
Top honors: Rated the No. 33 prospect in Virginia by *The Roanoke Times* and No. 32 by *SuperPrep* ... Listed as the No. 67 running back prospect in the nation by Rivals ... First-team All-Group AA as a running back.

Why he chose Tech: “I’ve always been a fan. I grew up around here [the New River Valley] and I’ve watched them play a lot. The times I’ve been down there, I’ve liked the staff. They were down to earth. It wasn’t a hard decision.”

On his position: “I’m not sure. It doesn’t matter to me. Probably something on offense, though. That’s where I’ve played my whole life. I haven’t played a lot of defense, so offense would probably be the best thing.”

On playing defense: “I played a little bit this season when I was needed. I was a cornerback. I hadn’t done it before, but I think I adjusted well. Wherever they put me is fine.”

Notables: Born Jan. 11, 1991 in Radford, Va. ... Son of Vernon and Donna Peak ... Has a younger brother and two older sisters ... Also a standout on the Pulaski County basketball team ... Major is undecided.



Duan PEREZ-MEANS

6-4, 230, DE
Hermitage High; Richmond, Va.

Stats: Played in just six games his senior season because of an ankle injury ... Averaged 27 yards per catch as a tight end ... As a junior, accounted for four defensive touchdowns and one safety from his defensive end spot.

Top honors: Ranked the No. 34 prospect in Virginia by *The Roanoke Times* and by *SuperPrep* ... Rated the No. 26 weakside defensive end in the nation by Rivals ... Listed as the No. 34 tight end prospect in the nation by ESPN/Scouts, Inc.

Why he chose Tech: "I've always liked Virginia Tech and they had my major [veterinary science]. They have a good team down there and it's close to home. Those were the main reasons."

On the frustration of missing half his senior season: "It was real frustrating because I wanted to top what I had done last year. I had no control, though, so I just cheered and tried to motivate my teammates."

On his hobby: "Boxing is my hobby. Me and my dad spar a lot. My dad almost put me into a boxing league. I can't pinpoint exactly why I like it so much. I guess because it showcases my skills. You have to be quick and strong."

Notables: Born Feb. 4, 1991 in Staten Island, N.Y. ... Son of Duan and Eva Means ... Has three older sisters ... Contemplated major is veterinary science.



DeAntre RHODES

6-3, 270, DT
Varina High; Sandston, Va.

Stats: Finished with 48 tackles, including 14.5 for a loss, his senior season ... Also had 4.5 sacks as a senior and three forced fumbles.

Top honors: A *SuperPrep* All-American and the No. 10 prospect in Virginia by *SuperPrep* ... Rated the No. 8 prospect in Virginia by *The Roanoke Times* ... Listed as the No. 54 defensive tackle prospect in the nation by ESPN/Scouts, Inc. ... Ranked the No. 35 defensive tackle prospect nationally by Rivals ... A first-team All-Capital District selection as a defensive lineman his senior season ... A second-team All-Group AAA selection according to the Virginia High School Coaches Association his junior season.

(Note: DeAntre Rhodes could not be reached for comment before our deadline.)



Logan THOMAS

6-6, 230, ATH
Brookville High; Lynchburg, Va.

Stats: Completed 118 of 204 passes for 1,535 yards and 20 touchdowns as a quarterback his senior season ... Threw four touchdown passes in a 50-46 loss to James Monroe in the Group AA Division 3 championship game ... Ran for 842 yards and 11 touchdowns as a senior ... As a defen-

sive back, recorded 80 tackles and intercepted four passes.

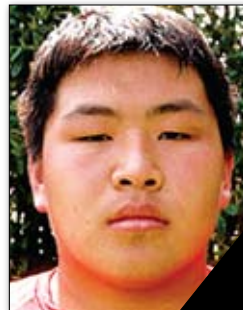
Top honors: A *SuperPrep* All-American and the top prospect in Virginia by *SuperPrep* ... Named The Associated Press Group AA player of the year in Virginia ... Ranked the top tight end prospect nationally by Rivals ... Rated the No. 4 overall prospect in Virginia by *The Roanoke Times*.

Why he chose Tech: "It's the place where I felt most comfortable. I thought it was the best fit for me, both as a football recruit and academically."

On the recruiting process: "It was good. It was a little hectic. Coaches were calling and wanting you to go here and there. But all in all, it was good. It wasn't that big of a deal."

On his position at Tech: "I think they're looking at me as a wide receiver. They're going to try to get me mismatched with some smaller corners. I'll play wherever they want. I don't care."

Notables: Born July 1, 1991 in Charlottesville, Va. ... Son of Eddie and Kim Carazona ... Major is undecided.



David WANG

6-2, 290, DT
Stone Bridge High; Ashburn, Va.

Stats: Stats were not available.

Top honors: Ranked the No. 18 prospect in Virginia by *The Roanoke Times* ... Rated the No. 28 prospect in Virginia by *SuperPrep* ... Listed as the No. 60 defensive tackle prospect in the nation by Scout.com ... Rated the No. 44 defensive tackle prospect in the nation by Rivals.

Why he chose Tech: "I've seen how everyone supports the school and I really liked the coaches and players when I went down there."

"Because of my brother [Ed Wang], I've had a great opportunity. He's let me be around the program a lot. I've been able to see how great everything is there."

On what his brother has told him: "We don't talk a lot about football. But he has helped me some. He's played a lot, so I listen to him. I know he wants what is best for me."

On his strengths: "My feet. I have quick feet and a lot of that comes from working out with my dad. My dad's helped me with a lot of stuff. We have weights at home and we train a lot. I can lift with him and it's a lot of fun."

Notables: Born Oct. 28, 1990 in Fairfax, Va. ... Son of Robert and Nancy Wang ... His older brother, Ed, starts at left tackle for Tech ... Major is undecided.



Jerrodd WILLIAMS

6-0, 185, CB
D.W. Daniel High; Central, S.C.

Stats: Had 44 tackles, broke up 10 passes and had four interceptions as a senior ... Returned 12 kicks for 312 yards and one touchdown ... Also returned 11 punts for 175 yards and one score ... Sealed South Carolina's victory over North Carolina in the Shrine Bowl with a 59-yard interception return for a touchdown.

Top honors: Listed the No. 19 prospect in South Carolina by *SuperPrep* ... Rated the No. 30 cornerback prospect in the nation by ESPN/Scouts, Inc. ... Rated the No. 36 cornerback prospect in the nation by Rivals and No. 1 in South Carolina.

Why he chose Tech: "Me and Coach [Torrian] Gray built a relationship last year and he kept in touch with me. They brought me up for that camp [the one-day camp] and then made me an offer. The coaches are down to

earth. They keep it real and don't sugarcoat things. I thought it was a good fit for me."

On his position: "I'll be a cornerback and a kick returner and probably a punt returner. I love being at cornerback. You can shut down a receiver and make an impact on the game. That's where I've always played."

Notable: Born July 31, 1991 in Seneca, S.C. ... Son of Jerome and Polly Williams ... Has an older sister and brother, Jerome, who attends Clemson but plans on transferring to Tech and walking on ... Contemplated major is business.



David WILSON

5-11, 195, RB
George Washington High; Danville, Va.

Stats: Rushed for 2,291 yards and 35 touchdowns – both school records – his senior season ... Rushed for more than 300 yards in a game twice ... Finished with 1,551 rushing yards and 17 touchdowns as a junior.

Top honors: A *SuperPrep* All-American ... Named the Gatorade player of the year in Virginia ... Top-rated prospect in Virginia by *The Roanoke Times* ... Listed the No. 4 running back prospect in the nation by *Rivals*.

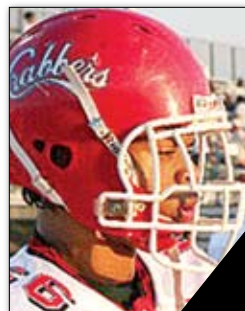
Why he chose Tech: "I chose Virginia Tech because I got that home feeling when I went up there. The people are like a close family and they have a great program there and great coaches."

On playing running back at Tech: "I know they have a lot of great running backs, but I like the challenge. I like it when people push me. I think that makes me better and makes everyone better."

On his record-setting season: "I knew I was going to have a good season, just not how good. I was worried after that first game. We played Varina and I had, like, 50 yards, and I thought, 'Man, this isn't how I wanted to

start my senior year.' But after that, things started rolling."

Notables: Born June 15, 1991 in Danville, Va. ... Son of Dwight and Sheila Wilson ... Has an older brother and a younger sister ... Contemplated major is architecture.



Tyrel WILSON

6-3, 230, LB
Hampton High; Hampton, Va.

Stats: Stats were not available.

Top honors: A first-team All-Group AAA selection by The Associated Press as a linebacker his senior season ... A first-team member of *The Daily Press* Football All-Stars team ... Rated the No. 45 prospect in Virginia by *The Roanoke Times* and by *SuperPrep*.

Why he chose Tech: "It was between Virginia Tech and Tennessee and it came down to distance. It was closer to home and I felt comfortable there. Everything fit for me. Virginia Tech met all my needs athletics-wise and school-wise."

On his position: "I'll probably be a linebacker or a defensive end. It depends on my weight and where that falls. I'm 220 now, but my dad [who was a player at Tennessee] was the same weight before he got to Tennessee and he shot up. If I'm 240-250, I'll probably play the defensive line."

On having his dad help him as a player: "My dad is laid back, but if I had a question, he'd help me out. Sometimes, he'll offer me some pointers. He lets me do what I want, but he keeps me on the right path. At times, he can be hard, but that's rare."

Notables: Born Jan. 29, 1990 in Chesapeake, Va. ... Son of James and Shari Wilson ... Has two younger brothers ... Major is undecided.

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THOUGH NOT VISIBLE IN THE WIN COLUMN, WOMEN'S HOOPS TEAM MAKING PROGRESS

By Matt Kovatch

As the Virginia Tech women's basketball team stumbled its way through an overtime win against USC Upstate on Feb. 2, there were audible grumbles in the crowd, some of which can't be repeated in this family magazine. There was some rolling of the eyes, and some fans even headed for the exits before the game was finished.

And that's not to say any of that was unwarranted – the Hokies shouldn't have any trouble taking care of the Spartans, a team playing in just its second year at the Division-I level. And that this came just one day after Tech sputtered through one of its worst halves of the season (Tech lost to N.C. State after leading at halftime) makes the Hokie loyalists' frustration understandable.

But before losing faith in Beth Dunkenberger's squad and calling it a season, think about how relatively well this team has done considering what it's had to deal with.

Not more than a week or two after this publication released its optimistic basketball preview issue, things began to fall apart for the Hokies. Supremely talented sophomore Andrea Barbour was dismissed from the team, and it was determined that senior A.J. Lemaitre likely wouldn't play because of her slowly healing, surgically-repaired knee. Then Brittany Cook, the ACC's leading scorer from a year ago, blew out her anterior cruciate ligament during a preseason practice and was lost for the season. Since then, senior

post player Amber Hall has been reduced to the bench, having not played since Dec. 20 due to her chronically problematic back. And all of that doesn't even include the loss of 6-foot-4 center Eleanor Brentnall, who decided not to return to school before the season even began.

There are a lot of reasons to throw in the towel, but to Dunkenberger and her players' credit, not once have they used any of those personnel losses as an excuse for a single defeat this season. That's why those two ugly games against N.C. State and USC Upstate need to be taken with a grain of salt. We've all had bad days or weeks at work – maybe that's all it was for the Hokies.

Besides, even with all of those players who are unavailable this season, the 2007-08 Hokies won only two conference games. And after an impressive, 65-61 road win over Clemson on Jan. 28, this year's squad was already halfway to that figure with eight league contests to play.

Something is different about this team. Though it's not showing up in the win column, for the most part, this team has played harder than last year's team. There hasn't been as many blowouts, and this team, aside from that N.C. State game, doesn't disappear for entire halves at a time like it did last year.

The Hokies lost by just four points on Jan. 8 to a Florida State team that sat atop the



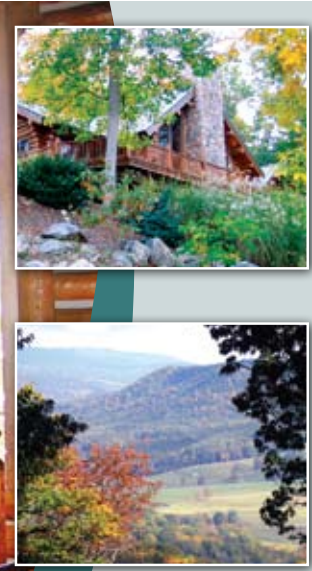
Junior Utahya Drye continued her breakout season when she tallied career highs of 30 points, 16 rebounds and seven steals on Feb. 2 against USC Upstate.



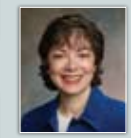
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ACC heading into the month of February. They kept the loss at Boston College on Jan. 11 to single digits despite going up against arguably the best post duo in the league, and then trailed by only three with under a minute to play against No. 4 Duke on Jan. 16. Tech put up 79 points, 16 more than its per-game average, in a loss to No. 12 Maryland on Jan. 18, before taking No. 16 Virginia to the wire on Jan. 21. If there was a 'moral victory' column in the standings, the Hokies might very well be in first place.

Maybe the loss of all of those aforementioned players has caused the current players to band together a little tighter. Juniors Utahya Drye and Lindsay Biggs have stepped it up in a big way, and as of Jan. 6, ranked ninth and 16th in the conference in scoring, respectively. Freshman Shanel Harrison has done an admirable job as her playing time has increased, and sophomore Brittany Gordon has learned on the fly as she's grown into the center position. Even sophomore transfer Nikki Davis has been a much-welcomed, change-of-pace addition.

Are those players where they need to be yet? No, but they're certainly making the progress needed to turn things around in 2009-10. Though no coach wants to con-


done moral victories, Dunkenberger has got to see the light at the end of the tunnel with her best recruiting class on the way and Cook still having a good chance of obtaining a medical waiver for a sixth year of eligibility.

Here's hoping the Hokie faithful see that light at the end of the tunnel as well because it seems to be on its way.

Hokies extremely generous to Yow fund

On a side note, Virginia Tech played host to N.C. State on February 1, just eight days after the Wolfpack's legendary head coach, Kay Yow, succumbed to a decades-long battle with cancer.

Before the game, on behalf of Virginia Tech and the Hokie Hardwood Club, Dunkenberger presented N.C. State interim head coach Stephanie Glance with a check of \$26,190 to be donated to the Kay Yow/WBCA Cancer Fund.

The Kay Yow/WBCA Cancer Fund is a charitable organization committed to being a part of finding an answer in the fight against women's cancers through raising money for scientific research, assisting the underserved and unifying people for a common cause. 

2008-09 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time	Result
Nov. 10	PEACH STATE (Exh.)		L, 70-79
14	Fri. UNC GREENSBORO		W, 59-53
18	Tues. RADFORD		W, 78-54
20	Thurs. NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL		W, 81-45
23	Sun. at George Mason		W, 69-52
<i>Vanderbilt Thanksgiving Tournament</i>			
28	Fri. vs. St. Joseph's		W, 66-63
29	Sat. vs. #17 Vanderbilt		L, 43-72
Dec. 4	Thurs. at Wisconsin (ACC/Big Ten Challenge)		L, 52-61
14	Sun. JAMES MADISON		W, 72-70 (OT)
<i>South Padre Island Shootout</i>			
19	Fri. vs. IUPUI		L, 52-64
20	Sat. vs. SMU		L, 56-63
<i>Hokie Hardwood Classic</i>			
29	Mon. LAFAYETTE		W, 66-44
30	Tues. LIBERTY		L, 43-45
Jan. 5	Mon. Presbyterian		W, 64-31
8	Thurs. FLORIDA STATE*		L, 63-67
11	Sun. at Boston College*		L, 62-73
16	Fri. #4 DUKE*		L, 52-57
18	Sun. at #12 Maryland*		L, 79-96
21	Wed. #16 VIRGINIA*		L, 69-75
25	Sun. LONGWOOD		W, 73-57
28	Wed. at Clemson*		W, 65-61
Feb. 1	Sun. NC STATE*		L, 46-57
2	Mon. USC UPSTATE		W, 68-62 (OT)
5	Thurs. at #8 North Carolina*		L, 77-93
8	Sun. at #17 Virginia*		L, 61-69
12	Thurs. MIAMI*		7 p.m.
15	Sun. at Wake Forest*		3 p.m.
19	Thurs. at Duke*		7 p.m.
22	Sun. WAKE FOREST*		2 p.m.
26	Thurs. GEORGIA TECH*		7 p.m.
<i>ACC Tournament</i>			
5-8	Mar. Greensboro, N.C. (Greensboro Coliseum)		

*ACC game - Home games in CAPS

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What exactly is a DOBO?

By Matt Kovatch

When you watch a basketball game, you're probably just focused on what goes on between the lines while the clock is ticking and the ball is in play. But how did the teams get to the arena? Where did they sleep? What did they eat? Those are all important things, and for the Hokies, that's all taken care of by one person – **Jill Jameson**. As the director of basketball operations (DOBO) for the women's hoops team, Jameson, a former coach, is in charge of all the logistical happenings that go on before the Hokies ever take the court. Here's a little look into what her job entails:

I'm kind of like a travel agent.

"I'm in charge of everything that goes on behind the scenes and all of the logistics. I arrange all of the team travel and plan out most of the trips, including the buses, airplanes, charters and hotel rooms. I also order the team meals and the equipment, uniforms and shoes."

Speaking of team meals, there are lots of them.

"I am always ordering food. I talk a lot with Amy Freel, the nutritionist for Tech athletics. I plan out our pre-game meals on the road and at home, and we also provide about one meal a day (known as training tables) for the girls throughout the week. We came up with a list of about seven different options for pre-game meals, and I have a list of 12 different menu options that I rotate through for the training tables. When we go on the road, we usually try to go to a nice restaurant ... usually a place that has good cheesecake. The players don't always get dessert, but I do!"

I have other responsibilities, too.

"I help out a lot with our booster club, the Hokie Hardwood Club. A big part of that is helping them to prepare for our annual fundraising auction. I also handle the budget for the team travel and equipment, and I'm

in charge of all the summer camps; every phase of camp is my responsibility. I also set up community service opportunities for our players. It can be stressful because I'm doing a lot of things at once, and I have to be very organized; I really have to be a multi-tasker. I have to think and plan ahead, and I think it helps that I'm a former coach because I know what they like to have taken care of."

I'm attached to my phone.


"One thing I've learned more than anything is to always double check on things and not assume that everything is taken care of just because you've sent it. You need to follow through; communication is huge. I'm on the phone a lot. It's very important, especially when we have a charter flight. I'm constantly calling the airports and I'm constantly calling the hotels. I have so many restaurants and hotels in my phone that you wouldn't believe it. I have a Maggiano's restaurant listed for four different cities. I leave them all in there because you never know when we'll be back."

My job is the best of both worlds.

"People always ask me if I want to get back into coaching and I say 'Not at all.' Why would I? I love this job. I coached for 13 years and just got really burned out. I

was the recruiting coordinator and I just didn't have a lot of time to have a life, so I got out of it. Then Coach Dunkenberger called (Jameson is a Tech alum and a former graduate assistant and assistant coach) and asked if I would like to be her DOBO. I still get to be involved with the team and be a part of their lives. The whole reason that I coached in the first place was because I wanted to be a positive influence on young women and encourage them – not just for basketball stuff, but for life – and to help them as they grow up and mature. I still get to do that. I'm not at practice every day, but I get to travel with them and I get to see them a lot. X's and O's weren't really my strength. My strength is relationships and people and I still get to do all of that."

I still get to coach at the camps.

"I love camp. That still allows me to be involved with the basketball part of things. I love kids and it's a lot of fun. Once again, that's another place where we can just have a positive influence on young women. They get to see our team and what is possible – that they can earn a scholarship with their basketball skills. But there is more to it, like being a good person and getting good grades and having a good work ethic. That's the relationship part and that's what I love the most." 

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PALMER MAKES SECOND BASEBALL NIGHT IN BLACKSBURG A SUCCESS

By Matt Kovatch

Some might say that Hall of Famer Jim Palmer was born to pitch. But after seeing him in action on Feb. 7 at Lane Stadium, it's clear that he was also born to tell a story.

The former Baltimore Orioles legend and three-time Cy Young Award winner visited the Virginia Tech campus as the keynote speaker of the second annual Baseball Night in Blacksburg, an event that served both as a way to raise money for the Virginia Tech baseball program and as a way to kick off the Hokies' upcoming season.

Palmer spoke to a crowd of more than 200 people in the west side stadium club of Lane Stadium for nearly an hour, sharing tales from his years as an all-star pitcher and as a television broadcaster.

After flying up from his home in West Palm Beach, Fla., earlier in the morning, Palmer surprised the Hokie players by meeting privately with them for 30 minutes in their locker room upon his arrival. He then held a half-hour session with some local media before mingling with the fans, posing for photos and signing autographs.

But the highlight of the night was when he got up on stage to speak to the crowd. Now a veteran broadcaster of 16 years, Palmer obviously possesses stellar public speaking skills. But it's in a casual setting like Baseball Night in Blacksburg where he seems the most com-




fortable, simply talking about the game that he knows and that his admiring fans want to know about.

He told stories about signing with the Orioles as a teenager, his magical career with Baltimore that included three World Series championships, what it was like to deal with fame (and those infamous Jockey underwear ads), how he got into broadcasting after his playing days were over, working with (and doing fine impressions of) announcing legends like Howard Cosell and Harry Caray, and what it was like when he was inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Palmer displayed his razor-sharp memory and well-timed sense of humor as he rattled off statistics and anecdotes as if they had just happened yesterday, and his personable nature

made the event an enjoyable and memorable one for all in attendance.

The evening also included a dinner that was fully catered by Blacksburg's newest and hottest restaurant, Bull and Bones Brewhaus and Grill, as well as silent and live auctions of signed sports memorabilia and an autograph session with the Hokie baseball team. A total figure of money raised on the night was not announced, but head coach Pete Hughes thanked everyone for each and every dime that was contributed to the Tech program, especially in the tough, economic times.

It was the second event in as many years for the Tech baseball program, as Orioles legend Cal Ripken, Jr., was the featured speaker at the inaugural 2008 banquet. 

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AFTER PAYING DUES IN 2008, YOUNG HOKIES RETURN LOOKING TO REAP THE REWARDS

By Matt Kovatch

Head coach Pete Hughes and his staff head into the 2009 baseball season a lot more confident in the Hokies' abilities than at this point a year ago. Whereas last season's roster possessed boatloads of talent but not much certainty, the new campaign starts with that gap not quite so wide. The Hokies have overhauled their roster over the past two years and 2008 served as a way to evaluate all of that newfound talent. Now that players have carved out roles for themselves, 2009 looks to be an instrumental year in turning a slumping program back into the proud winner it once was. Here's a look at each of the positional areas:

INFIELDERS

Four Hokies who will definitely see plenty of time on the field include redshirt senior Ty Hohman, redshirt sophomore Michael Seaborn, and true sophomores Tony Balisteri and Austin Wates.

The key to the whole operation will be the play of Balisteri at shortstop. He started 32 games in that spot a year ago and had the up-and-down season that one would expect from a freshman, both at the plate and with the glove.

"Tony is our most athletic infielder," Hughes said. "He makes plays that no one else on our team can make, but he needs to make the routine play. And he needs a nice, consistent approach at the plate where he puts the ball in play more often. If he can do that, our infield will be really solid."

The coaches are really hoping Balisteri can lock himself in at short and be consistent from day-to-day simply because that allows them to move Hohman around to wherever he is needed. Hohman is as reliable as it gets at any of the four infield positions, including first.

"Tyler has been so steady," Hughes said. "I feel comfortable putting him anywhere in the infield. We can use him as a swing guy if one of those others isn't playing consistently."

The others include Wates at second and Seaborn at third. Both had impressive offensive seasons as freshmen, but needed to tighten things up defensively, and that seems to have been taken care of in the fall.

First base will be a by-committee situation after losing stalwart Sean O'Brien to graduation. If Balisteri gets comfortable at short, Hohman could play first. It could be true freshman Ronnie Shaban, a versatile two-way guy who is also able to play second, third or short, or it could be the 6-foot-6 Matt Blow, who spent much of his time last year as a designated hitter. It could even be catcher Anthony Sosnoskie, who worked at first in the fall as a means of finding a way to keep his bat in the lineup when he gets a day off from behind the plate.

OUTFIELDERS

Hughes isn't fretting about the outfield situation in 2009, and that probably has something to do with the fact that he has six players to mix and match in any combination.

"That's our most competitive position on the team," Hughes said. "Any one of those six guys can start for us and I wouldn't be worried. I feel really good about our chances to win with any of those guys out there."

Those six players include seniors Clint Reed and Sean Ryan, redshirt junior Steve Domecus, juniors Steve Bumbry and Mike Kaminski, and redshirt freshman Buddy Sosnoskie. Though all six will contribute, the opening day starters figure to be Domecus in left, Ryan in center and Sosnoskie in right.

Domecus comes to Blacksburg after one season at Moorpark College in California, where he played after spending his freshman year at UC Santa Barbara. He's a versatile athlete who can hit and run, and he's good enough at catcher that he will regularly spell Anthony Sosnoskie behind the plate.

Ryan started nearly every game in center a year ago and is likely to do so again. He is one of the better defenders in the ACC and has greatly improved his offensive game, hitting .305 in 2008.

Buddy Sosnoskie was expected to contribute a great deal last year as a two-way player, but shoulder surgery delayed his Hokie debut until this season. He won't factor in on the mound in 2009, but he should see a great deal of time in the lineup because of his offensive talents and his potential to be a leadoff hitter.

CATCHERS

The Hokies will have three capable catchers at their disposal in 2009, and it starts with junior Anthony Sosnoskie, who has steadily improved since splitting time as a freshman.

He played in all 45 games in 2008 before missing the final 10 contests with a broken cheekbone, and he finished among the team leaders in many offensive categories. He followed that up with a brilliant summer, finishing as the runner-up for MVP honors of the Southern Collegiate League. Hughes thinks that production can go even higher if he gets

some rest this season.

Spelling Sosnoskie will be Domecus and sophomore Chris Kay. Domecus is very athletic behind the plate for his size (6-4, 220 pounds) and could probably start every day if not for Sosnoskie's presence.

Not much was known of Kay's ability until Sosnoskie went down with the injury



After starting nine games in 2008, Jesse Hahn will be making the move to the closer role in 2009.

last year, but he started the season's final 10 games and performed rather impressively.

"I think catcher is our most skilled position right now," Hughes said. "We have three capable guys, and that's been a major area of concern for us the last two years. All three of them can catch every day at the ACC level."

STARTING PITCHERS

While the Hokies' team ERA in 2008 was too high for their liking, the season proved to be extremely beneficial because it allowed a lot of pitchers to work through their struggles and find a role that is best suited for them.

The most obvious result of last year's growing pains is that two-thirds of the 2009 weekend starting rotation spent much of last season coming out of the bullpen. Redshirt senior Rhett Ballard and sophomore Justin Wright figure to be options No. 1 and 2 against ACC foes this year after each smoothly made the transition from reliever to starter a season ago.

Ballard set a Tech record for relief appearances with 34 in 2007 and was on his way to doing it again last year before becoming a starter. While he didn't earn the wins to prove it, the 6-6 submariner became the Hokies' most valuable pitcher because of his ability to work deep into games, let alone the fact that he led the team in strikeouts with 74.

The left-handed Wright was almost an afterthought before the 2008 campaign but wound up as one of the team's biggest surprises. He was so successful out of the bullpen in 17 relief appearances that the coaches tried his hand at starting against VCU in early April. Though he only threw 2.1 innings in that game, his workload steadily increased until he went the distance in an upset of No. 1 Miami in May.

Joining Ballard and Wright in the weekend rotation will likely be Sean McDermott, a left-handed sophomore who learned on the fly in 16 appearances (seven starts) as a freshman. Junior Josh Wymer and freshmen Mathew Price and Luke Erickson will be the main candidates for the mid-week starting roles.


RELIEF PITCHERS

The Hokie who made the biggest improvement in the offseason was 6-5 right-hander Jesse Hahn, and he also represents the biggest change in the pitching staff heading into the 2009 campaign. Hahn started a team-high nine games in 2008, but his stuff has become so electric that the Hokies intend on using him as a lights-out closer this season.

"The age-old question is what do you do with that arm?" Hughes said of Hahn. "Do you start him once a week? Or do you roll the dice with him as a closer and run the risk of not getting to a save situation? We think our program is better now to the point where we are going to be in save situations. We couldn't

do that last year, and that's why Rhett became a starter. It's not written in stone, but I think we're good enough with enough depth to get to save situations this year."

But as Hughes alluded to, there is no reason to have a dominant closer if you don't have the middle relief to reach him when you need to. That's where pitchers like juniors Ben Rowen, Kyle Cichy and Rob Whitley, redshirt sophomore Brandon Fisher, and even Wymer factor in.

"Those guys are going to be the most valuable part of our team," Hughes said. "They're going to have bridge the gap from our starters to our closer." 

2009 BASEBALL SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent	Time/Result
Courtyard by Marriott Classic		
Feb. 20	vs. UNC Asheville #	Noon
21	at Wofford (DH)	1 p.m.
22	at USC Upstate	2 p.m.
24	EAST TENNESSEE STATE	3 p.m.
25	EAST TENNESSEE STATE	3 p.m.
Hawthorn Suites Hokie Invitational		
27	BUCKNELL	3 p.m.
28	BUCKNELL (DH)	1 p.m.
Mar. 1	YOUNGSTOWN STATE	1 p.m.
3	RADFORD	3 p.m.
6	at Duke *	3 p.m.
7	at Duke *	2 p.m.
8	at Duke *	1 p.m.
9	BRYANT UNIVERSITY	3 p.m.
10	at Radford	3 p.m.
13	NORTH CAROLINA *	3 p.m.
14	NORTH CAROLINA *	2 p.m.
15	NORTH CAROLINA *	1 p.m.
17	VMI	5:30 p.m.
18	VMI	5:30 p.m.
20	GEORGIA TECH *	5:30 p.m.
21	GEORGIA TECH *	5:30 p.m.
22	GEORGIA TECH *	1 p.m.
24	USC UPSTATE	5:30 p.m.
25	VCU	5:30 p.m.
27	at NC State *	6:30 p.m.
28	at NC State *	2 p.m.
29	at NC State *	1:30 p.m.
31	at James Madison	3 p.m.
Apr. 3	WAKE FOREST *	5:30 p.m.
4	WAKE FOREST *	1 p.m.
5	WAKE FOREST *	1 p.m.
7	GARDNER-WEBB	5:30 p.m.
8	JAMES MADISON	5:30 p.m.
10	at Maryland *	7 p.m.
11	at Maryland *	4 p.m.
12	at Maryland *	1 p.m.
15	at High Point	6 p.m.
17	CLEMSON *	5:30 p.m.
18	CLEMSON *	5:30 p.m.
19	CLEMSON *	1 p.m.
21	WILLIAM & MARY	5:30 p.m.
22	at Liberty	3 p.m.
24	at Miami *	7 p.m.
25	at Miami *	7 p.m.
26	at Miami *	1 p.m.
28	HIGH POINT	5:30 p.m.
May 1	at Florida State *	6 p.m.
2	at Florida State *	6 p.m.
3	at Florida State *	1 p.m.
5	LIBERTY	7 p.m.
10	DELAWARE STATE (DH)	Noon
14	VIRGINIA *	5:30 p.m.
15	VIRGINIA *	5:30 p.m.
16	VIRGINIA *	1 p.m.
May 20-24	ACC Championships at Durham, N.C.	

*ACC game; # - in Spartanburg, S.C. - Home games in CAPS

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OPTIMISM RIDING HIGH AS LACROSSE OPENS 2009 SEASON

By Matt Kovatch



Senior Rachel Culp tallied 34 goals last season and will look to increase that number in 2009 as Tech's top offensive threat.

LACROSSE PREVIEW

Oftentimes when previewing a team's season, no matter the sport, it is easy to point to a team's youth and either hype up the potential of those youngsters or prepare for the growing pains that will stem from their inexperience. And when it comes to the 2009 Virginia Tech lacrosse team, both cases are extremely prevalent. Why? Of the Hokies' 23-member roster, 20 players are either sophomores or freshmen, and while that may be cause for some concern in areas like depth and experience, head coach Katrina Silva couldn't be more excited about the promise and eagerness of this year's squad. Here's what she had to say in advance of the Feb. 14th season opener with Drexel:

IHS: What are your thoughts on the mood and the chemistry of this year's team?

KS: This is certainly the most upbeat team that we've had here. All of the kids who have come into the program since I've started have the right vision in mind. They want to win in the ACC and they want to be competitive on the national scene. But that takes experience, time and effort, and they're a hard-working group that has a positive attitude about where the program is going. That's a big thing – you've got to have a vision before you get out there and start doing it. They've worked hard and they're upbeat about the possibilities that lie ahead.

IHS: So would you say that you feel more confident in the team right now than you did at this point a year ago?

KS: Absolutely. This is the most athletic team that we have ever had here, hands down. We are faster than we've ever been, we move better than we ever have and we can catch and throw better than we ever have. We certainly lack the experience and the depth that an older group would have, but talent-wise, this is the best team we've ever seen here.

But of course, there are changes that still need to happen here. One of those changes is that our sophomores are learning how to step up and become leaders, and that's good – they were our first recruited class and

they really came in with the right mentality and work ethic. That's the fundamental piece that you have to have when you build a program and they share that. They're figuring out how to lead both by example and with their voices. That's a big challenge for them, but they're doing well and moving in the right direction.

IHS: You only have two seniors on this squad, one of whom is Rachel Culp, the team's returning leading scorer. How valuable will she be this year?

KS: Rachel really embraced our (the coaching staff's) goals as her goals when we got here. She wants this program to get its first ACC win before she leaves. She knew how hard she would have to work, she accepted it, she was excited about it and she has changed tremendously as a player over the three years that I've known her. On the field, you can't deny her. She has a knack for scoring, she has a great field sense and she leads every day by example.

IHS: How important is it that goalkeeper Kari Morrison, who was third in the nation in saves last year, is your other senior?

KS: Kari knew what she was getting into when she came here (Morrison transferred from Colgate in 2006 when Silva left there to come to Tech). She knew my vision and the work that she would have to put into it, and she's always been very excited about that.

2009 LACROSSE SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent	Time/Result
Feb. 14	at Drexel	1 p.m.
18	at Virginia *	4 p.m.
21	JAMES MADISON	1 p.m.
25	at William & Mary	6 p.m.
28	GEORGE MASON	1 p.m.
Mar. 3	VANDERBILT	4 p.m.
8	GEORGE WASHINGTON	1 p.m.
10	at Davidson	6 p.m.
14	BOSTON COLLEGE *	Noon
18	at Duke *	5 p.m.
21	at Louisville	1 p.m.
25	NORTH CAROLINA *	4 p.m.
28	OLD DOMINION	1 p.m.
Apr. 4	at American	1 p.m.
7	LONGWOOD	4 p.m.
11	at Oregon	4 p.m.
18	MARYLAND *	1 p.m.
ACC Tournament (Blacksburg Va.)		
23	First Round	TBA
24	Semifinals	TBA
26	Finals	TBA
NCAA Championships		
May 10	vs. First Round	TBA
16	vs. Quarterfinals	TBA
22	vs. Semifinals	TBA
24	vs. Finals	TBA

*ACC game - Home games in CAPS

She loves the opportunity to play at this level every day against the top teams in the nation. She plays hard, and if she picks up a couple of more ground balls or we win some of those one-goal games, we become a whole different program.

IHS: *You mentioned the importance of your sophomores taking it to the next level. How involved are Allie Emala (28 goals as a freshman) and Caitlyn Wier (12 goals) in that process?*

KS: Allie certainly is. We've made some changes as to how we will use her. She played midfield last year, but she will be more on the attack this year. She has a great presence about her. She's a big, strong, young woman who plays very hard and is very competitive and driven to win. Meanwhile, Caitlyn is working hard every day and she's trying to figure out what she wants her role to be. She has a knack for scoring and that's what I would love for her to bring every day. When she gets a good look at the cage, the ball's going into the back of the net. She had some big goals for us last year. Now we need her to create those types of opportunities every time she touches the ball.

IHS: *How about the freshman class? Someone is going to have to stand out from that group because of necessity, so who might that be?*


KS: There is a group of them – Julie Wolfinger, Tori O'Shea and Jess Nonn – who are going to be in the midfield and they're going to make a big impact. The biggest splash that comes from that group is their sense of team and their sense of being committed together. It's hard to pick one kid out because, every day, one of the other ones will work just as much as the others. A different one surprises me every day and that is really exciting. Jess has really improved on areas of her game that we really wanted to see, while Julie and Tori are two really consistent, athletic, fun-to-watch players. They're not flashy, but they are kids who, when you look at the stat sheet, you will be pleasantly surprised. Also, Morgan Widlake could be a huge surprise. She's emerging on the offensive end. She has a nice, smooth shot, and she works hard at creating more opportunities for herself. I could also see Christina Patten standing out for us on defense.

IHS: *You've talked about some of the things that excite you about this team. What are you still worried about?*

KS: Depth is a huge question for us right now. We're missing that important reserve piece and I think that role never gets recognized the way that it should. To have a kid who comes off the bench for a couple minutes when someone isn't playing well or to give someone a break – that's huge. I don't

think we're going to have the depth that we would like this year, and the other thing is experience. There is nothing like playing in the ACC, especially in women's lacrosse when you're looking at four teams ranked near the top 10. Hopefully, our athleticism can make up for a lot of those missing pieces. Those are two areas – experience and depth – that we are going to be a little bit short on this year, and we have to find creative ways to make up for those things quickly.

IHS: *Finally, is this the year Virginia Tech gets its first ACC win?*

KS: Yeah, I think so. We've been so close. We have lost to Boston College by one goal in each of the past two years. Last year, we had them on the ropes – we were up 6-1 in the first 15 minutes of the game. I think BC was shocked at how quickly we came out, but I think our kids were, too, and that's not a good thing because we couldn't sustain the lead. I think it's a huge hurdle that this team needs to overcome this year. We have the athleticism, and from an all-around standpoint, I think we're ready to make that jump. But the kids need to know that they've worked hard enough and they need to believe that this is their time and this is their year. They've doubted that in the past and asked, "Is this really going to happen?" Instead, we need to say, "This is going to happen, and it's going to happen on March 14." We're excited about it. 

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CHALLENGES AWAIT SOFTBALL TEAM

IN ENCORE TO LAST SEASON'S SUCCESS *By Matt Kovatch*

Senior Charisse Mariconda, who entered the 2009 season having never missed a game, is Tech's top offensive threat after hitting .340 a year ago.



A LOOK AT THE HOKIES' DEPTH CHART

C	Amber Walker	Kelsey Hensel	Alicia Field
1B	Beth Walker	Kim Jalm	Kristin Graham
2B	Kristen Froehlich	Erin Ota	---
SS	Erin Ota	Kristen Froehlich	Kristin Graham
3B	Charisse Mariconda	Alicia Field	---
LF	Jessica Everhart	Jenna Rhodes	Marra Hvozdovic
CF	Richelle McGarva	Jenna Rhodes	Marra Hvozdovic
RF	Whitney Davis	Jenna Rhodes	Marra Hvozdovic
DP	Jenna Rhodes	Kim Jalm	Kristin Graham
P	Kenzie Roark	Abbie Rexrode	Kristin Graham

* Pitcher Heather Lowry will miss the season after undergoing Tommy John surgery.

The 2008 Virginia Tech softball season was one for the ages, as the Hokies enjoyed a magical postseason run to the Women's College World Series in Oklahoma City, upset the U.S. national team, featured the national player of the year and won the ACC championship for the second straight year.

Tech was on cloud nine for much of last season, but things come back down to earth this spring as head coach Scot Thomas and the Hokies face more challenges than they've had to deal with in quite some time. Here's a look at some of those challenges and how the Hokies plan to face them:

Challenge #1:

A target is on Tech's back.

The Hokies were the talk of the softball world last spring, and their ACC foes got the chance to hear all about it while watching on television as Tech marched through the NCAA Tournament. While Thomas and the Hokies have focused on the future and not what happened last year, that's not necessarily the case with Tech's 2009 opponents.

"Obviously, when you have someone who is the caliber of Angela Tincher – someone who is the national player of the year and basically the Heisman Trophy winner of softball – you have to put that era behind you and you have to move forward," Thomas said. "The biggest thing I've tried to preach

to our team is that no matter who is on our roster at this point, we have a bigger target on our back because of the World Series appearance and because of teams seeing us on TV so many times. We need to realize that target is still there and step up to the challenge."

But it's not just the World Series and the fact that Tincher relentlessly mowed down so many batters. The Hokies have captured each of the last two ACC tournament championships, in addition to the 2007 regular-season title. Their conference foes are likely sick and tired of the orange and maroon, and they're waiting to get their next shot at dethroning them.

Challenge #2:

Replacing three productive seniors.

Not only is Tincher gone from the roster, but so is three-year starting catcher Kelsey Hoffman and four-year starting outfielder Caroline Stolle. All three were instrumental parts of Tech's success for a long time, but it's important to remember that the Hokies have a lot of talent returning. In fact, six starters return, five of which are seniors (outfielder Jess Everhart, third baseman Charisse Mariconda, first baseman Beth Walker, infielder Erin Ota and designated player Jenna Rhodes).

"Hopefully, having all of those players back will pay off for us as the season goes

on," Thomas said. "We can use that maturity to not only give us stability at the beginning of the season, but also to help us peak at the right time later on."

New pitching coach Barb Sherwood, who spent last season coaching at ACC rival Florida State, has stressed to the team that she still sees a lot of the players whom she was worried about facing when she was a Seminole. Here's hoping the Hokies recognize that as something from which to gain some confidence.

Challenge #3:

Dealing with pitching injuries.

Replacing Tincher's contributions were going to be difficult enough, but that task has been made even tougher because of a pair of injuries to 50 percent of the pitching staff. Freshman Kristin Graham, a former Georgia Class 5A player of the year, hasn't been healthy since the fall and still isn't throwing yet, while junior Heather Lowry was lost for the season when she underwent Tommy John surgery last August.

That leaves sophomore Kenzie Roark, who appeared in 20 games last season and struck out 60 batters in 58 innings pitched, and freshman Abbie Rexrode as the only two arms available to start the season. Thomas said that Roark will do a great job as long as she prevents the long ball, something she

demonstrated that she could do in the fall, and that Rexrode will be just fine as long as she stays in the right place mentally. But until Graham gets healthy, the Hokies are walking on thin ice in the circle.

“A staff consisting of a freshman and sophomore is not how you want to go into the season, but that’s all we have right now,” Thomas said. “We have more pieces of the puzzle missing right now than what we had planned on, but that being said, I think we have the type of kids to put behind those young pitchers to still get the job done.”

**Challenge #4:
Filling the void
at shortstop and catcher.**

Shortstop Misty Hall was the Hokies’ biggest offensive threat a year ago, and with the graduation of Hoffman, she was set to move to catcher with backup Jess Hodge taking over at short. However, Hodge got homesick and decided not to return to Tech, and Hall was lost for the year because of a violation of university policy. Suddenly, Thomas was in a bind to find starters at two key positions.

“We’re moving some players around and some of them are going to have to step up for us a lot earlier than we anticipated,” Thomas said.

One of those players is freshman Kristen Froehlich, who has been slotted into second base duty now that Ota, a three-year starter at second, will make the transition to short.

The Hokies will also need one of their catchers to step up and fill a need. The two main options include junior Amber Walker, who tallied just 12 at-bats last season, and Kelsey Hensel, a freshman from Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. Thomas said the key for Walker will be relaxing, getting settled in and just playing the game, while Hensel is a “baller” who will just need to learn how to manage a game on the fly.

“Both of those girls are working hard and both will get a shot at the job,” Thomas said. “We’re also working [sophomore] Alicia Field and [freshman] Marra Hvozdovic back there.”


**Challenge #5:
Scoring runs.**

With Tinchler gone, the Hokies can no longer count on one or two runs being enough to win the game. The Tech offense is going to have to produce more than they are used to in order to compensate for some growing pains that the young pitching staff might have to weather.

One source of that offense figures to be sophomore Richelle McGarva, a transfer who played one season at Lake City Community College in Florida and who will take over center field as Everhart moves to left to replace Stolle.

“She’s going to be important for us,” Thomas said of McGarva. “She has a great eye for the ball and she makes the lineup a lot more solid from top to bottom. In the end, she’s going factor in big-time. Our expectations are high for her.”

In addition to McGarva and Mariconda, who hit a team-high .340 last year, two other Hokies who might make a splash are right fielder Whitney Davis and first baseman Kim Jalm.

Davis started last season and hit a big home run against Michigan in the NCAA Tournament, but Thomas feels she is poised for a breakout campaign after a solid pre-season. Another source of runs could be Jalm, a masher who missed last season due to academic troubles and who is competing for the first base job with incumbent Beth Walker. 

2009 SOFTBALL SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent	Time/Result
Chattanooga Challenge		
Feb. 6	vs. Maine	W, 4-1
6	vs. Troy	W, 1-0
7	vs. Tennessee Tech	L, 0-15 (5 inn.)
7	at Chattanooga	L, 0-8 (6 inn.)
8	at Chattanooga	L, 4-5
Georgia State First Pitch Classic		
14	vs. Missouri	2:30 p.m.
14	at Georgia State	4:45 p.m.
15	vs. Evansville	10 a.m.
18	at Radford	2 p.m.
Kickin' Chicken Classic		
20	at Coastal Carolina	2 p.m.
20	vs. Maine	4:30 p.m.
21	vs. Western Carolina	9 a.m.
21	vs. Appalachian State	11:30 a.m.
22	at Coastal Carolina	2 p.m.
NFCA Leadoff Classic		
27	vs. Michigan	1:30 p.m.
27	vs. Alabama	6:30 p.m.
28	vs. Southern Illinois	1:30 p.m.
28	vs. DePaul	4 p.m.
Mar. 1	vs. Illinois State	11 a.m.
USF Under Armour Invitational		
6	vs. Lehigh	11 a.m.
6	vs. South Florida	4 p.m.
7	vs. Fordham	1 p.m.
11	at Lipscomb (DH)	2 p.m.
14	NC STATE (DH) *	Noon
15	NC STATE *	1 p.m.
21	GEORGIA TECH (DH) *	Noon
22	GEORGIA TECH *	1 p.m.
24	RADFORD	7 p.m.
28	at Virginia (DH) *	1 p.m.
29	at Virginia *	1 p.m.
31	at East Tennessee State	5 p.m.
Apr. 4	at Florida State (DH) *	4 p.m.
5	at Florida State *	1 p.m.
10	BOSTON COLLEGE *	6 p.m.
11	BOSTON COLLEGE (DH) *	Noon
15	at Liberty (DH)	2 p.m.
18	at North Carolina (DH) *	1 p.m.
19	at North Carolina *	1 p.m.
21	LONGWOOD (DH)	5 p.m.
25	MARYLAND (DH) *	Noon
26	MARYLAND *	1 p.m.
May 2	vs. Campbell	1 p.m.
2	at East Carolina	5 p.m.
3	at East Carolina	Noon
May 8-10	ACC Softball Championship	TBA

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OLYMPIC SPORTS

WRESTLERS CAPITALIZE ON EARLY FORTUNE BY DRAWING RECORD CROWD *By Matt Kovatch*

With the Virginia Tech wrestling team having the best season in its history, why shouldn't it shoot for having the largest home attendance figure in its history?

On Feb. 8, that's exactly what the Hokies did. Head coach Kevin Dresser and the sports marketing staff blew out the event in a big way for defending ACC champion Maryland's trip to town, and the match wound up drawing a Tech-record 1,763 fans to the event, surpassing the mark of 1,638 that was set in 2001 when No. 1 Minnesota came to Blacksburg.

Sure, there were enticing reasons to show up at Cassell Coliseum on that Sunday afternoon. The match followed a wildly entertaining men's basketball game against N.C. State, the first 200 fans received a free HokieBird bobble head doll, and an \$1,800 scooter was given away to one lucky

fan. The week before the match, Dresser even sent out

a department-wide e-mail encouraging employees and student-athletes to come out and support the team.

But the biggest reason of all? How about the fact that the young Hokie grapplers, a bunch that won just seven matches a year ago, entered the bout with Maryland ranked No. 13 in the nation with a record of 17-1?

That probably had a lot to do with it, and after Tech defeated the Terps that day, wrestling fever is riding high in the New River Valley, especially with the ACC Championships coming to Cassell Coliseum on March 7.

It's been a surprising season thus far for the Hokies, and there very well may be more surprises in store.

"I'm a little surprised at the way that some of these true freshmen have performed," Dresser said. "I knew they had the ability and I knew they were going to be good, but they've really stepped it up early in their careers. For a true freshman to compete in the top 20 of his weight class in the nation right away – that's a real tribute to him."

Two freshmen of whom Dresser speaks are Jarrod Garnett, the country's 14th-best (as of Feb. 8) in the 125-pound weight class, and Pete Yates, who was ranked No. 20 at 149 pounds. Garnett and Yates are just two of the youngsters who have Tech in the national polls for the first time ever,

drawing fans to see them in record numbers. One of those fans is Dresser himself.

"It's cool because before I took over here, I was a huge Virginia Tech wrestling fan," the third-year head coach said of what it's like to see the Hokies' name in the national rankings. "And I still am a huge fan; I just happen to be the coach now. But simply from the standpoint of a Hokie fan, I'll tell ya – I'm excited."

Tennis squads begin spring campaigns

With baseball, softball and lacrosse getting their seasons underway in February, we would be remiss if we didn't mention the start of the men's and women's tennis teams' dual match seasons.

The women's team, behind the play of senior Jessica Brouwer, upset 31st-ranked Ohio State on Feb. 8 to begin its schedule with a 4-1 mark, having also recorded victories over Elon, Longwood and Iowa.

The men, meanwhile, opened their season with a 2-1 record after defeating 44th-ranked Penn State on Feb. 7 by a score of 4-2. The Hokies had previously beaten No. 41 New Mexico before losing to No. 1 Ohio State despite junior Yoann Re's upset of the nation's sixth-ranked player, an achievement that earned him ACC player of the week honors on Feb. 3.



Jarrod Garnett is one of the many young Hokies who have helped the wrestling team to its first national ranking in program history.

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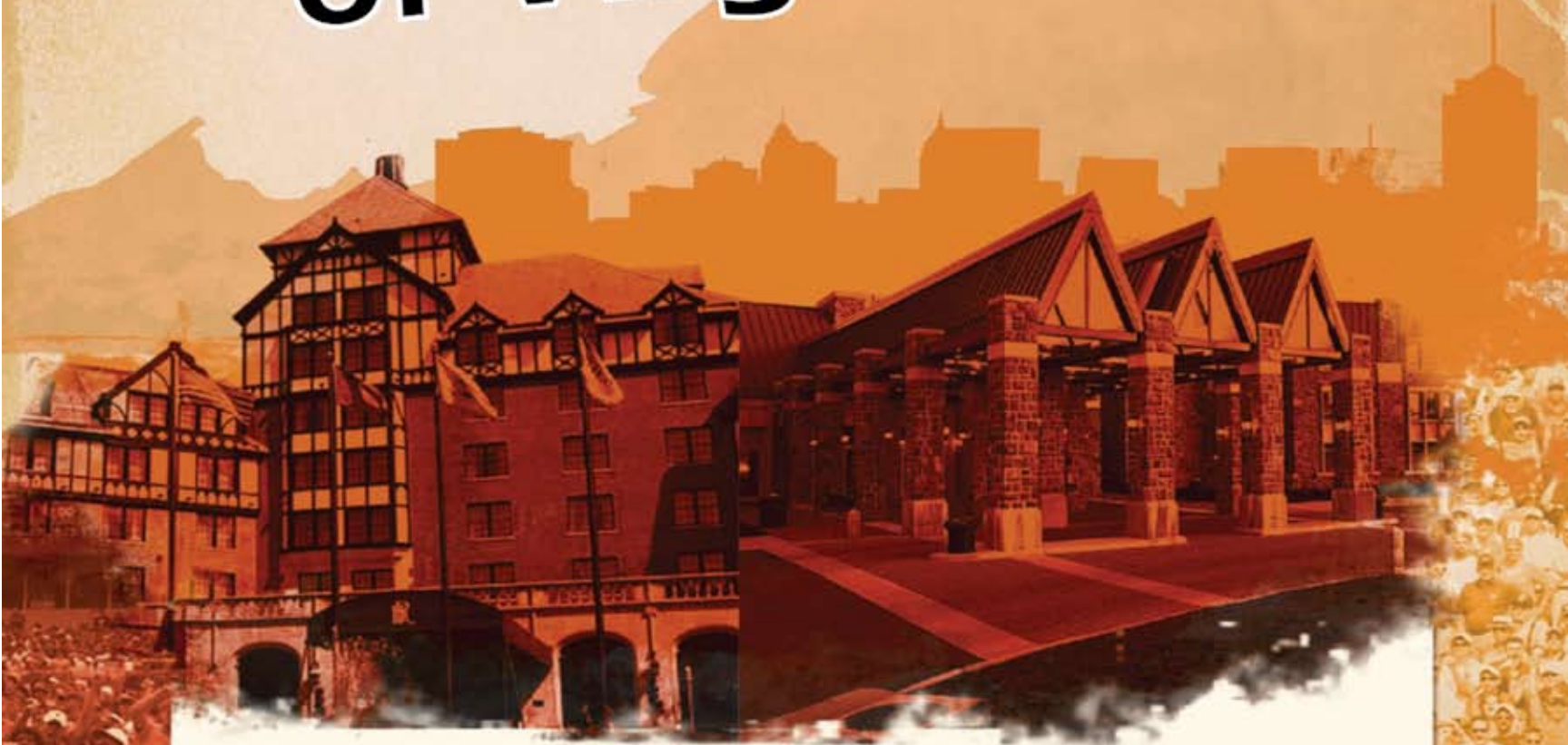


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