

inside

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# HOKIE SPORTS

ia Tech Athletics



## WHIT BABCOCK NAMED NEW TECH AD

Babcock, who had been the AD at Cincinnati, takes over for Jim Weaver, who retired at the end of last year after more than 16 years at the helm of the school's athletics department

### WHAT'S INSIDE:

Tech's football staff focuses on offense with 2014 recruiting class

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## MAKING WAVES

Behind Morgan Latimer, who helped the Hokies win five events, the Virginia Tech men's swimming and diving team beat in-state rival Virginia in a dual meet for the first time since 1981. Latimer won the 100-yard butterfly and the 200-yard butterfly, and he was a member of the 200-yard medley relay, the 800-yard freestyle relay, and the 400-yard medley relay teams that took first place. The ACC Men's Championships begin Feb. 26 in Greensboro, N.C.





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# The Donor File

## Alan "Big Al" Dickerson

**HOKIE CLUB LEVEL:** Golden Champion

**CURRENTLY RESIDES:** Galax, Va.

**WHAT YEAR DID YOU GRADUATE?** 1984



## Q&A

**Q: The Hokie Nation is real because ...**

**A:** I have traveled all over the country following Virginia Tech football, and I have never been anywhere that Virginia Tech was not known!

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

**A:** The 1995 Sugar Bowl. My father (Class of '62) and I were walking out of the Superdome after a thrilling come-from-behind victory over Texas in Virginia Tech's first major bowl game appearance, and my father turned to me and said, "I have been waiting over 30 years for this moment!" That's when I realized how much potential there was for Virginia Tech athletics if the alumni had a winning program to get behind and support.

**Q: How did you get involved with the Hokie Club?**

**A:** I live in the city of Galax, which is between the counties of Grayson and Carroll (home of Frank Beamer). The Hokie Club had been inactive for several years, and I was asked to help in reviving the chapter.

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

**A:** My father took me to my first college football game on Sept. 17, 1977, to watch Texas A&M at Virginia Tech. Texas A&M had a cadet corps like Virginia Tech, and they had traveled to Blacksburg for the game - both cadet corps marched into the stadium before the game, and the pageantry, excitement and crowd noise was unlike anything I had ever seen. Texas A&M had a 280-pound fullback named George Woodard, and Rick Razzano stopped him on consecutive plays on the goal line! From that point on, I was hooked on college football.

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

**A:** I don't really have any game day superstitions other than attending the game and tailgating. The Sun Bowl in El Paso this past year was my 235th consecutive game. The last game I missed, home or away, including bowl games, was in November of 1995.

**Q: I'm a Hokie Club member because ...**

**A:** I enjoy helping to provide athletics scholarships and funds to improve facilities to make the sports programs at Virginia Tech the best in the ACC. Athletics provides exposure to the university like no other medium and that exposure benefits all aspects of Tech.

**Q: Describe your perfect day at Virginia Tech.**

**A:** A Saturday home football game with a 3:30 p.m. kickoff and tailgating before and after the game!

**Q: What motivates you to give back to help Virginia Tech athletics?**

**A:** To be successful, the athletics programs must have support from fans and alumni, and I have so many great memories from the athletics events. I think the least I can do is support the athletics program that has given so much to me.

**Q: My favorite Virginia Tech sport is ...**

**A:** Football!



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### Beamer names Searels new offensive line coach

Tech football coach Frank Beamer named Stacy Searels as the team's new offensive line coach shortly after previous offensive line coach Jeff Grimes departed for the same position at LSU.

Searels comes to Tech from University of Texas, where he served as the offensive line coach for the past three seasons under coach Mack Brown. Brown retired after the season, and new Texas coach Charlie Strong tabbed Joe Wickline from Oklahoma State as his offensive line coach.

Searels brings plenty of experience to Blacksburg, having coached at football powerhouses Texas, Georgia and LSU. Prior to

his stint at Texas, he coached the offensive line at Georgia for four seasons. Before going to Georgia, he worked as the offensive line coach at LSU from 2003-06 and helped the Tigers win a national championship (2003). Searels' other coaching stops include Cincinnati and Appalachian State.

Searels played collegiately at Auburn and blocked for Heisman Trophy winner Bo Jackson in 1985. He graduated from Auburn with a degree in marketing and transportation in 1990 and got his master's in higher education administration from Auburn in 1995. He and his wife, Patricia, have two daughters, Taylor and Savannah.

### Stevens, Mason Melat named ACC Basketball Legends

Former Virginia Tech guards Bobby Stevens and Carrie Mason Melat were named the school's ACC Legends as announced by ACC Commissioner John Swofford.

Stevens helped the Hokies to the 1973 National Invitation Tournament championship. In the championship game against Notre Dame, he hit the game-winning shot in overtime to lift Tech to an upset win over the Irish.

Melat's name sits atop the Tech all-time list for 3-pointers made, tallying 200 across her four seasons in Blacksburg from 2002-06, and she also logged the most minutes played in program history. During her career, Melat helped

guide the Hokies to four NCAA Tournament appearances.

The ACC women's Legends will be honored at the annual ACC Women's Basketball Legends' Luncheon on Saturday, March 8, at 1 p.m., and then will be introduced to the Greensboro Coliseum crowd at halftime of the first semifinal game that evening.

The men's Legends will be honored at the ACC Men's Basketball Tournament in Greensboro at the annual ACC Basketball Legends Brunch, which will be held on Saturday, March 15, beginning at 10 a.m. in the Guilford Ballroom of the Sheraton Four Seasons Hotel.

### Reeves selected in National Women's Soccer League Draft

Jazmine Reeves, who guided the Virginia Tech women's soccer team to the College Cup in December, became the first Tech player ever to be drafted in the National Women's Soccer League Draft when the Boston Breakers took her with the third pick of the third round on Jan. 17.

Reeves is coming off a stellar senior season in which she tallied 11 goals and five assists. The Dover, Del. native was also named a first-team NSCAA All-American, a first-team All-ACC performer and a semifinalist for the MAC Hermann Trophy, becoming the first Tech player to achieve any of the three honors.

"On behalf of the team, coaches and support staff, we offer our congratulations to Jazmine," Tech coach Chugger Adair said in a statement released by the athletics communications office after the draft. "We're extremely proud of everything she accomplished this year, both on and off the field, and we're looking forward to seeing her successes at the next level."

The NWSL, founded in 2012, will kick off play in early April. The Breakers, coached by Tom Durkin, finished fifth in the eight-team league last year. They had an 8-6-8 record on the year and missed the playoffs by six points.

### Dubose chosen in MLS Superdraft

Devante Dubose, a senior defender on this past season's Tech men's soccer squad, was drafted by the San Jose Earthquakes in the fourth round with the 66th overall pick of the 2014 MLS Superdraft.

Dubose started 52 games in his career as a defender at Tech, and he played in 60. He contributed to defensive efforts this season that notched shutouts against No. 1 North Carolina,

No. 16 Clemson, Binghamton and VMI and was a key part of a defense that only allowed 23 goals all season, the lowest total since 2005.

The San Jose Earthquakes, coached by Mark Watson, finished sixth in the Western Conference last season and just missed out on the playoffs due to a tiebreaker. The squad went 14-11-9 last year and is set to kick off the 2014 campaign in early March. 



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editor's desk | by Jimmy Robertson

# Babcock the perfect fit to be Tech's AD

The minute the word came out about Whit Babcock being named the new athletics director at Virginia Tech, many in Hokie Nation expressed the same reaction. Or in other words, "Who?"

Only the most educated of fans and those who toil in the day-to-day operations of athletics enterprises know the names of various AD's around the country. Many have probably heard of Notre Dame's Jack Swarbrick or USC's Pat Haden, but how many know the name of Florida State's AD? Answer: Stan Wilcox – and the Seminoles just won the national title in football.

But Tech fans are going to get to know Babcock rather quickly. And they're going to like him – because he's a lot like them.

Taking a step back for a minute, by nearly every account, the Tech search committee, led by Ray Smoot, nailed it again. Smoot chaired the committee that hired Jim Weaver more than 16 years ago and that worked out quite well, and there is every reason for Tech fans to feel confident that Babcock's hiring will be just as successful, if not more so.

Yes, Babcock sports an impressive resumé. He has sat in the big chair (as the AD at Cincinnati). He has worked at four prominent schools over the course of 20 years, and a background in fundraising and marketing – critical components in leading an athletics department these days – made him attractive. He brings a fresh perspective in areas of utmost important to the future of the Tech athletics department.

Those represent reasons enough for Tech fans to cheer his hiring. But for Tech fans, they can

relate to Babcock's story.

Like many Tech fans and alums, Babcock grew up in Virginia. He served as the batboy for his dad, who was the baseball coach at JMU. He came to Tech many times, first with his dad's team as a batboy in the 1970s and then as a player in the early 1990s. As a teenager in the 1980s, he came to Blacksburg and cheered on Dell Curry and Bruce Smith – just like many Tech fans used to do.

Babcock has blue-collar roots. He readily admitted to being an "average" baseball player during his introductory meeting to athletics department personnel, but he wanted to stay in the sport after college. So he took a job starting at the bottom – just like many Tech fans have done when starting out their careers.

He landed a job in Nashville working for the Triple-A baseball team there. His task consisted of selling tickets – not the easiest of jobs.

He then moved on to Huntsville, Ala., and worked for the minor league team there. He made less than \$20,000 per year, but came away with something much more valuable – his wife.

After working in Huntsville for a year, he came to the realization that he liked college sports more than pro sports.

"I quickly realized that I missed the college experience," he said. "That's in my heart."

Babcock's career then took him to Auburn (as an administrator). Then West Virginia. Then Missouri. Then Cincinnati. Through hard work, determination and persistence, he gradually worked his way into the job he wanted – just like

many Tech fans have done.

He said he obtained his dream job when Tech presidents Dr. Charles Steger and Dr. Timothy Sands, who takes over on June 1, offered him the position. All cited Babcock's experience as to what sold them on him, but he's more, much more, than a numbers cruncher and a boss who knows how to fire coaches and hire good replacements. His experience as a student-athlete enables him to relate to student-athletes and their needs, and having lived with a head coach gives him the perspective of a head coach.


Where else could Virginia Tech have gotten a native Virginian, someone with experience as an AD, someone with a background in fundraising and marketing, and someone who understands the life of a student-athlete and a coach?

"We're pleased to have someone who has this type of well-rounded ability and talent," Steger admitted.

Babcock inherits a good situation. Weaver left things in good shape. But there are looming issues, and there will be others.

He is ready.

"I've been working in it [athletics] for 20-some years," he said. "So directly or indirectly, I've been preparing to sit up here [as the AD at Tech] for 43 years. I'm not intimidated by the job, but I'll need some help. We all learn, and we all need good people around us."

He's got good people, and a nation of orange and maroon. He's about to become a household name to them. And once they get to know him, they'll provide him with as much help as he needs. 



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# Babcock anxious to make Tech athletics a place where dreams come true

When Whit Babcock was introduced to Virginia Tech constituents two weeks ago, the 43-year-old Harrisonburg native sounded almost like the CEO of Disney World, as much as the university's new director of athletics.

Babcock stressed that, among his goals, were for Tech's athletics department to focus on "customer service" and "create memorable experiences" for its visitors.

"I think, today, there are so many competing interests for people's entertainment dollar and their attention," Babcock told me. "To get people off of a couch with a high-definition television and the comfort of their living room, you can't just keep doing it the way you've always done it and open the gates and hope they come.

"Creating memorable experiences and the environment that only Virginia Tech can offer, I do believe mirrors Disney. They've done pretty well for themselves in that regard. Athletics has turned more into that industry."

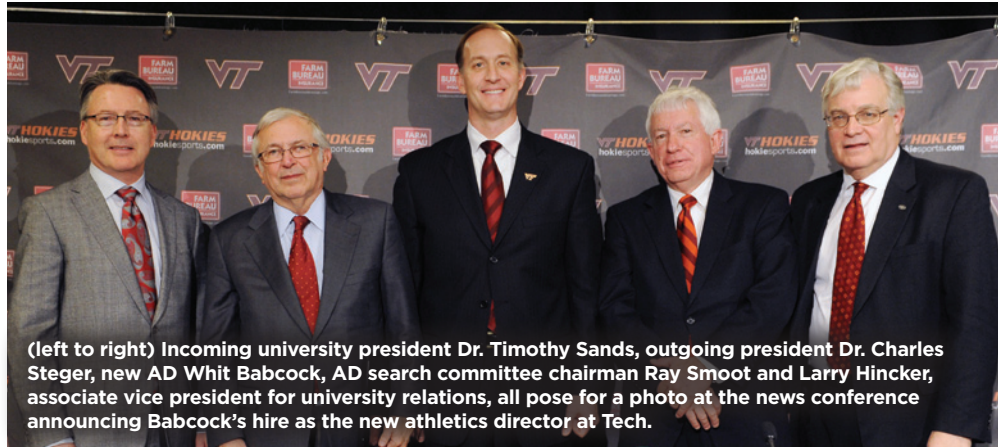
With those words, a new era in Virginia Tech athletics began.

Customer Service.

Creating memorable experiences.

Those words struck a positive note for Hokies everywhere who understand that the business of college athletics is changing. And yes, it's more of a business today than it was just five years ago. And it's changing fast.

Last year, Virginia Tech reported annual athletics revenues of \$70.7 million. Of that, 52 percent came from donations (28 percent) and ticket sales (24 percent). That's a much higher percentage than many of Tech's peer institutions that rely heavily on student fees or taxpayer



(left to right) Incoming university president Dr. Timothy Sands, outgoing president Dr. Charles Steger, new AD Whit Babcock, AD search committee chairman Ray Smoot and Larry Hincker, associate vice president for university relations, all pose for a photo at the news conference announcing Babcock's hire as the new athletics director at Tech.

support to survive.

Revenue distributions from the ACC and IMG will increase dramatically in the coming years. But the lifeblood of Tech's program is weighted heavily on raising funds and selling tickets.

That's why Babcock's background in athletics development was so attractive to the search committee who recommended his name – along with two others – to President Dr. Charles Steger.

"This [Tech athletics] will be over a \$100 million operation in the coming years," Steger projected. "Whit has substantial experience in running a large business enterprise."

Babcock said he'd "diligently" look at Tech's retention rates of both season ticket holders and Hokie Club members.

"Our numbers will never go down if we never lose a donor or a season ticket holder," he said.

Winning and losing has a lot to do with both contributions and ticket sales, but Babcock is more holistic in his approach to cultivating and

maintaining Tech's ever-growing fan base.

"Winning games is great, but I can't always control that. In fact, I can never control that," Babcock said. "So we will try to control the experience people have when they come to campus and come to our events."

Babcock wants you to leave Lane Stadium or Cassell Coliseum (even after a game that Tech loses) and say to yourself, "I can't wait to come back!"

He himself has been coming to games on Tech's campus since he was 7 years old, first serving as the batboy for his father's baseball team at JMU and then later playing against the Hokies in Blacksburg. He recalled sitting in Cassell Coliseum as a teenager and watching Dell Curry star for Tech.

"Everyone knew it would take an incredibly unique and special situation for me to leave Cincinnati," Babcock said. "The fit for me is being a native Virginian and my familiarity with campus



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and this part of the country. The fit is just ideal.”

He later called it his “dream job.”

“The opportunity is for me to take a great athletics program and hopefully build on it,” he said. “It’s the opportunity to be at a top-flight academic institution and a highly competitive, championship-caliber program.”

When asked, Babcock rattled off a list of his mentors: Northwestern AD Jim Phillips, Missouri AD Mike Alden, Oklahoma AD Joe Castiglione and Duke AD Kevin White. Looking for a common thread among those four administrators? Each has a commitment to strong academic and financial success, NCAA compliance and acute business acumen. They all win, too.

Babcock is an example of the new-era athletics administrator – very much engaged to his constituency, yet very tuned in to the student-athlete as well.

“Being the product of the student-athlete experience, and being the son of a coach, I believe it gives me a perspective to understand things from a coaching perspective, a student-athlete

perspective, and 20 years of administration,” he said. “That breadth of knowledge hopefully helps me in my day job. I believe it gives me a little bit of an edge.”

An edge, for sure. And an open mind as well.

Babcock is going to want to hear from you. He’s going to listen to your suggestions and pay keen attention to the experiential aspect of being a part of the Hokie Nation.

As a native Virginian, the son of a college baseball coach, a former Division I athlete, a fundraiser at successful programs, and as an AD at a BCS school, he is uniquely prepared for his new job.

“This is all I’ve ever known,” he said. “All I’ve ever known is intercollegiate athletics. This is a chance to give back to it.”

Of course, Blacksburg is not Orlando, and Lane Stadium is not Disney World.

But for hundreds of thousands of Virginia Tech alums, this place is very much their “Magic Kingdom.” Babcock is eager to make that Kingdom – and your experience – better than ever.

**THE VOICE'S MAILBAG**

Hi Bill,

*I'm both an alum and lifelong Hokie Club member. Becoming more and more evident is the declining state of football and basketball attendance. I know we can't have 10-win seasons in football every year, and it's becoming harder and harder to be competitive in ACC basketball. But is there a concern and/or recognition of this decline in attendance on behalf of the athletics department? If so, what are some tangible action plans that you/they can communicate to stop this decline?*

*I don't want to be all doom and gloom. I think both football and basketball can turn the downward spiral around. It's just that the fans and alumni seem to have this on the front of their minds in the message boards, while the athletics department and administration have said nothing to address this new reality. You usually are good at looking at the upside of things, and I thought you might have some insights. Thanks, and Go Hokies! Brandon, Salt Lake City, Utah*

Hi Brandon,

Thanks for your note and support of the Hokies. In talking with Whit Babcock for the story above, it's clear he would like the to change the way we “touch” or “engage” our fans nationwide. Dr. Steger said Babcock would “energize our fan base.” That quote shows the administration in Burruss Hall shares your concern.

But I would like to make a very clear point here. Virginia Tech athletics overall finished 33rd in the fall 2013-14 Learfield Sports Directors' Cup

Division I Final Fall Standings, which takes into consideration all sports across the board and not just football. Tech finished ahead of Oklahoma and Alabama and Auburn and Clemson, and even 36 places ahead of Ohio State, which has twice the budget of Tech (this isn't a dig at the Buckeyes, so please no e-mails from Buckeye fans). These are all fantastic programs and dynamite schools, but I would encourage anyone who feels any sense of “doom and gloom” to please take a look at these standings <http://thedirectorscup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Jan9DIRelease.pdf>.

Dear Bill,

*What recruits do you think might be able to help the Hokies this season? Last year, Kendall Fuller and Brandon Facyson started and contributed right away. Can any of this year's recruits do the same thing? Stuart, Richmond.*

Stuart,

While they may not start, receivers Isaiah Ford and Cam Phillips play a position where a.) Tech could use some playmakers and b.) freshmen can often contribute right away. Also, I wouldn't be surprised if Holland Fisher makes his way onto the field for Tech this season.

Among the young men who are already enrolled at Tech, tailback Marshawn Williams will go through spring ball and certainly will vie for playing time this season. The placekicker spot is clearly wide open after four different Tech kickers combined to miss 11 field goals last season. If Michael Santamaria has a good preseason, you might see him on the field this fall as well.

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## Keeping up with Compliance

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

**Q: Is it true that if a high school athlete reclassifies and repeats a year because of poor grades, then he or she is not eligible to spend a postgraduate year at a prep school? I seem to recall hearing something about that in relation to one of our football recruits. Thanks for answering, Katie in Christiansburg.**

**TP:** "Well, anyone is always free to spend a postgraduate year at a prep school. What I think you're getting at here is whether or not a prospect in this circumstance can utilize any additional core courses that he/she may earn during that prep school year to establish his/her NCAA Division I initial eligibility for competition. And the answer to that question will almost always be 'no.'"

"As a general rule, the period of time in which a prospective student-athlete must earn the 16 core courses required to compete as a freshman in Division I is eight semesters. After those eight semesters are completed, a prospective student-athlete may earn one additional core course if he/she has graduated on time (this is known as 'plus-one'). Individuals with a documented, pre-existing learning disability may earn up to three additional core courses after graduating on time (this is known as 'plus-three')."

So, if a student has reclassified and repeats a grade, he/she will not graduate on time (i.e. following eight semesters), thereby rendering any other core courses earned beyond that point as unusable. While the prospective student-athlete can continue to work to improve his/her standardized test score during this time, no impact can be made on the core-course total or

core-course GPA.

"Of course, there is an appeals process. But the value of the prep school year – which I think was at the heart of your question – was greatly diminished following the adoption of the 'plus-one' and 'plus-three' limits in 2010."

**Q: What does the term "show cause" mean? I hear that phrase all the time when referring to coaches who violate NCAA rules, but no one ever explains what that exactly means. Thanks, Eric in Christiansburg.**

**TP:** "A show-cause penalty is an order from the NCAA saying that, for a set period of time, any NCAA penalties imposed on a coach involved in major NCAA rules violations will remain in force if he or she is hired by any other NCAA member-school."

"If the school wishes to avoid the NCAA restrictions imposed on that individual, it must appear before the NCAA Committee on Infractions and 'show cause' as to why it should not be penalized for hiring him or her. The penalty is intended to follow a coach for violations that he or she had a role in committing. It is the most severe penalty that can be handed down to a coach."

"Contrary to popular belief, an NCAA member-school is allowed to hire a coach with a show-cause order outstanding. In practice, however, the show-cause restrictions make it prohibitively difficult for a coach with a show-cause order to get another collegiate job. As mentioned above, any school that hires a coach with a show-cause order in effect can be penalized merely for doing so. Additionally, that school can face severe penalties if a coach commits another violation during the length of the penalty."


Consequently, most schools will not even consider hiring a coach with a show-cause penalty in effect.

"For this reason, a show-cause penalty usually has the effect of blackballing a coach from the collegiate ranks for the duration of the penalty. Many coaches receiving such a penalty never coach again, even after the expiration of the penalty."

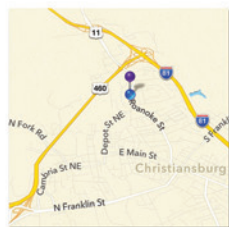
**Q: When is the NCAA finally going to allow unlimited texting? Thanks, Lester in Blacksburg.**

**TP:** "I think that day is coming soon. In October, the NCAA Rules Working Group – after much feedback from member schools and coaches' groups – proposed lifting the restrictions on modes of electronic communication in all sports other than football, swimming/diving, and track/cross country. This proposal has received widespread support, most recently at the NCAA Convention in early January."

"Permitting texting and other more 'immediate' forms of communication used by teenagers today should make things more transparent for everyone. Keep in mind that all communication during the recruiting process must still be private, prior to a signed commitment (e.g. no tweets, and no communication on 'boards' or 'walls' that could be seen by the public). And remember, the NCAA rules already allow basketball coaches unlimited communication with recruits in any private format. There have been few problems or complaints."

"I would expect the restrictions on modes of electronic communications to be lifted for most sports effective August 1, 2014." 

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Whit Babcock was born and raised in Virginia, and he called returning to the state as Virginia Tech's new AD his "dream job."



# TECH TABS BABCOCK AS NEW AD

Native Virginian Whit Babcock returns to his home state to oversee the Hokies' athletics program after a lengthy career in athletics administration at four different BCS schools

by Jimmy Robertson

Whit Babcock's first visit to the Virginia Tech campus came in the 1970s. His father, Brad, served as the head coach of the James Madison University baseball team and brought his team to Blacksburg for a game against the Hokies.

Whit tagged along with the team, and his father put him to work. He was the batboy.

Now, he's back in Blacksburg except he's a skipper – this time, of the entire Virginia Tech athletics department.

On Jan. 24, Virginia Tech announced the hiring of Babcock as the school's athletics director. Babcock takes over for Jim Weaver, who retired at the end of last year following more than 16 years at the helm of the Hokies' athletics department. Sharon McCloskey, a senior associate AD and senior woman administrator, had been serving as the interim AD.

Babcock, 43, will be returning to his roots, as the fifth-generation Virginian was born in Lynchburg and raised in Harrisonburg. He attended Harrisonburg High School and later James Madison, where he lettered all four years on the baseball team.

He's no stranger to Blacksburg, having been to Tech's campus with his father and the Dukes' baseball team many times growing up as a child. In the 1980s, he came to Tech to watch Bruce Smith harass quarterbacks at Lane Stadium and to watch Dell Curry loft sweet jumpers at Cassell Coliseum. In the 1990s, he played at English Field as a baseball player for JMU.

Now, he returns, and he hopes for good.

"When those closest to me would ask, 'Whit, if you could pick one place in the country to be the director of athletics, where would it be?'" he said at an introductory news conference on Jan. 29. "That answer has been and is Virginia Tech. I'm humbled and blessed. Today is a dream come true."

Babcock's hiring ended a two-month national search by a 12-member search committee. Ray Smoot, the former CEO of the Virginia Tech Foundation, served as the chair of the committee, working in the exact same role that he did when Weaver was hired in the fall of 1997.

Smoot and the committee received more than

50 applicants for the position. The committee interviewed eight in person and then suggested three names for outgoing university president Dr. Charles Steger and incoming president Dr. Tim Sands.

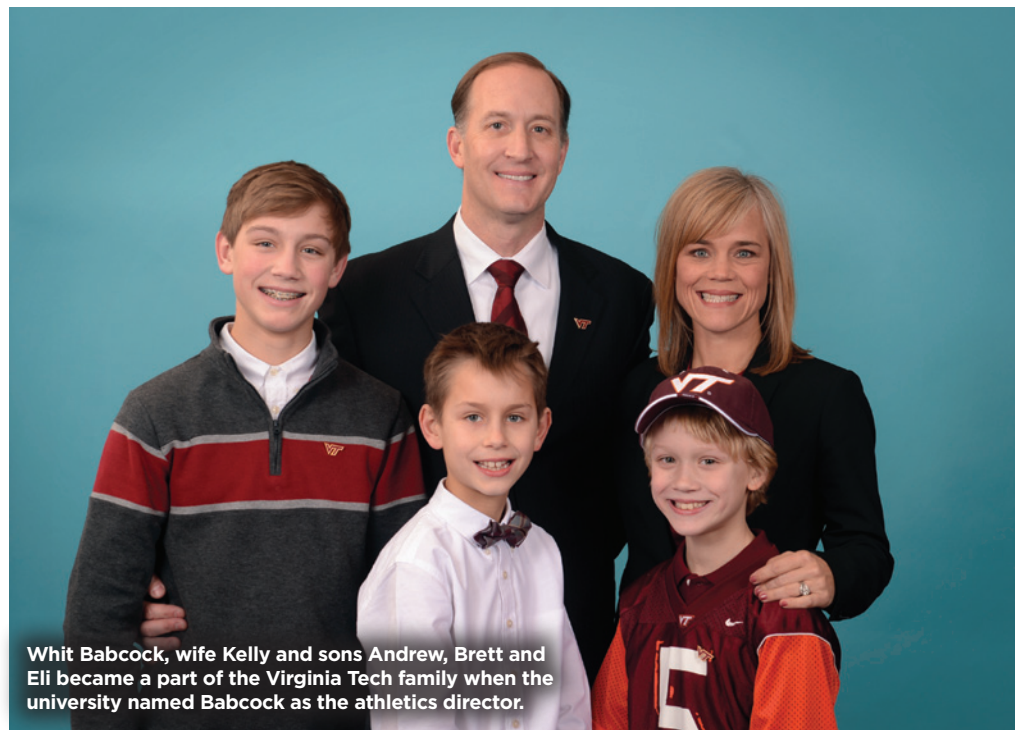
"The search process was broad, thorough and vigorous," said Smoot, who would not reveal the other two finalists. "We had excellent candidates, and we're delighted that it has come to the result we see here today [at the introductory news conference]."

Babcock met individually with both Steger and

pleased to have someone who has this type of well-rounded ability and talent."

Babcock, who started Feb. 17, agreed to a six-year contract that runs through June 30, 2020. He will make \$470,000 per year and receives an annual retention incentive of \$140,000 beginning on Dec. 31 of this year. He also receives a five percent raise each year beginning on Jan. 1, 2015. In addition, he receives incentive bonuses based on how teams finish and if teams reach certain standards in the classroom.

Babcock comes to Tech from Cincinnati, where



Whit Babcock, wife Kelly and sons Andrew, Brett and Eli became a part of the Virginia Tech family when the university named Babcock as the athletics director.

Sands, who begins his tenure as Tech's president on June 1. Steger said that he and Sands quickly formed unanimity on the decision to hire Babcock.

Steger cited several things that worked in Babcock's favor as the choice.

"We recognized his substantial experience in managing what is a large business enterprise that is going to grow, his ability to attract and identify coaches and staff, and his ability to energize the fan base, which is important," he said. "We're

he had served as the AD since October of 2011. During his tenure at Cincinnati, he initiated a new administrative structure within the department and proposed a comprehensive vision and capital campaign for facilities, including an \$86 million renovation and expansion to Nippert Stadium, the Bearcats' football home. He also set forth a scholarship enhancement plan for Olympic sports, crafted a three-year strategic plan for all facets of the program, hired six head coaches and implemented numerous external relations

strategies to connect and engage with Bearcats' alumni, donors, fans and students.

Babcock loved his position at Cincinnati. But he felt he could not pass up the opportunity at Virginia Tech.

"It was appealing to me primarily because of two reasons – fit and opportunity," he said. "My Virginia heritage – I'm a fifth-generation Virginian – certainly helps with fit and understanding the culture, and coming home is a big component.

"But it's more than that. It's also the opportunity to compete against the best and to join a championship-caliber program that is and will continue to be a leader in the ACC athletically and academically."

Most of Babcock's notoriety while at Cincinnati centered on the Nippert Stadium expansion and renovation project, which is scheduled for completion prior to the 2015 season, and for hiring football coach Tommy Tuberville, who guided the Bearcats to a 9-4 record and an appearance in the Belk Bowl this past season. Behind Babcock's leadership, the Cincinnati athletics department financed the stadium project with private funding and future premium seating revenues. No university funds were allocated toward the project.

Babcock's ability to make large business

decisions and his ability to identify and attract talented coaches and staff made him attractive to the Tech search committee, which worked with Collegiate Sports Associates, a consulting and executive search firm, during the process. Also, Babcock's background in fundraising, marketing, promotions, ticket sales, licensing and multimedia partnerships helped lead to his hiring.

In fact, Babcock's background in fundraising and marketing is extensive. Prior to arriving at Cincinnati, he worked for five years at the University of Missouri as the executive associate AD, overseeing all fundraising matters and providing oversight of marketing and promotions, the athletics ticket office, game operations, licensing, Internet services, media relations and Mizzou Sports Properties (multimedia and corporate partnership rights). Under Babcock's leadership, Missouri achieved all-time highs in donor participation, fundraising, season ticket sales and department-wide revenue generation.

Babcock worked for five years (2002-07) as an assistant AD and executive director of development for West Virginia University, where he oversaw the fundraising efforts for the institution's Mountaineer Athletic Club. From 1997-2002, he worked at Auburn, serving as the assistant AD for development there.

He believes that creating memorable experiences and developing relationships is the key to fundraising success.

"A big win is a memorable experience, but I can't control that. Or our staff can't control that," he said. "But is a memorable experience the way they're [fans] greeted by a parking attendant when they come in? Is a memorable experience that the restrooms are the cleanest they've seen in any stadium? I'm just using these as examples. Is a memorable experience the impression that a student-athlete or a prospective student-athlete gets when they come to campus and are greeted by everybody in the building? Is a memorable experience the way our student-athletes sit in the front row of classes with that faculty member?

"From a fundraising standpoint and a fan standpoint, it's about relationships. You have to show people a need. You have to build a sincere relationship. Your customer experience and customer service better be darn good because you can build a relationship for 20 years and screw it up in 20 seconds.

"People have to trust you, and you have to paint a vision for them and show them how they can make an impact. The reason we want to treat all of our fans well is because they are all important. There's an old adage in our business that everyone's first gift is their smallest. If you

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do things right, it moves on up the line. So we'll look forward to engaging everybody and focus on that point of creating memorable experiences when they come in contact with us."

As for the numbers, Babcock told media members that he has looked at Tech's budget, which sits at around \$65 million. Steger has said publicly that the athletics budget will go to \$100 million in a few years.

But Babcock knows that big budgets do not always equate to success.

"If it was all about the biggest budget, then Texas, Florida and Ohio State would never lose a game," he said. "So we've got to 'out-people' people. We've got to hire very well. We've got to be financially sound with our resources."

Arguably one of the biggest question on the minds of Tech fans centered on head football coach Frank Beamer, whose contract runs through the 2016 season. The Tech legend and Hall of Famer will be 70 at that point, and Babcock, in all likelihood, will be naming Beamer's successor when Beamer decides to retire.

Babcock refused to get into speculation on Beamer or any other Tech coach, other than to say his job as an AD requires that he have succession planning in mind.

"That shouldn't make any of our coaches paranoid," he said. "If you're prepared for a coaching search, you should have a list close by or some people you can call on to do it. Hiring coaches is part of the job. Living in the household with one helped, and hiring a few along the way helped. But they're [coaching searches] all different and a pressure cooker when you get into them.

"Right now, I'm more interested in supporting our coaches than replacing them."

Babcock learned how to support coaches at a young age. His father, Brad, served as the baseball coach at JMU for 19 years.

Brad Babcock was at the news conference, along with several members of Whit Babcock's family – most of whom still live in Virginia. Of course, his wife, Kelly, and sons Andrew, Brett and Eli sat in the front row at the news conference, wearing some form of maroon and/or orange.

They are all part of Hokie Nation now – and Babcock couldn't be happier.

"I will work tirelessly to represent that brand and all that it stands for and to represent Hokie Nation in a manner in which you all can be proud," he said. "I can appreciate the heritage and traditions of what makes Virginia Tech so special. We will respect those traditions while also working to build a culture of continuous improvement and dynamic growth.

"Now is not the time to fall back or plateau. It will take all of us, all of the Hokie family pulling in the same direction to accomplish that. I'm confident we can do it together."

**VIRGINIA TECH ATHLETICS DIRECTORS**

Name	Years
Whit Babcock	2014-current
Jim Weaver	1997-2013
David Braine	1988-97
Dutch Baughman	1986-87
Bill Dooley	1978-86
Frank O. Moseley	1951-77
W.L. Younger	1935-50
C.P. "Sally" Miles	1920-34
post abolished	1911-19
L.W. Reiss	1910
B.B. Bocock	1909
R.M. Brown	1908



**THE WHIT BABCOCK FILE**

**Personal**

**Age:** 43

**Wife:** Kelly

**Children:** Andrew, Brett and Eli

**Education**

**High School:** Harrisonburg High School

**College:** James Madison University (bachelor's in kinesiology and sports studies, 1992)

**Postgraduate:** West Virginia University (master's in sports management, 1996)

**Playing Experience**

Baseball, James Madison University (1989-92)

**Professional Experience**

**2011-14:** Director of Athletics, University of Cincinnati

**2007-11:** Executive Associate Director of Athletics, Missouri University

**2002-07:** Assistant Athletics Director and Executive Director of Development, West Virginia University

**1997-02:** Assistant Athletics Director for Development, Auburn University



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Marshawn Williams rushed for more than 2,000 yards as a senior at Phoebus High School in Hampton, Va., and is one of many playmakers recruited by Tech's staff in the 2014 football recruiting class. (Photo courtesy of The Daily Press in Newport News, Va.)

# The 2014 RECRUITING **VT** EDITION

## INSIDE HOKIE SPORTS' FIVE TO WATCH

**SHAI MCKENZIE** | A powerful downhill runner, McKenzie has good vision and changes direction easily. He tore his ACL this past season, but if he recovers fully from that, he could be on the field next fall.

**MARSHAWN WILLIAMS** | Like McKenzie, Williams is a powerful downhill runner. While McKenzie possesses a little more "wiggle," Williams is nearly impossible to get to the ground. The comparisons to Seattle Seahawks running back Marshawn Lynch fit.

**ISAIAH FORD** | Charlie Strong's decision to take the Texas job turned out to be a gift for the Hokies, as Ford de-committed from

Louisville and came to Blacksburg. He is a tall, smooth athlete who adjusts to and catches the ball easily, and he runs good routes for a high school receiver.

**RICKY WALKER** | Walker is a big, strong athlete who gets off the ball quickly, pursues relentlessly and plays a physical brand of football. He could see playing time as a true freshman this fall.

**MELVIN KEIHN** | Keihn has the same body type as that of former linebacker Tariq Edwards, and Tech's coaches hope Keihn develops in the same role. Tall and rangy, Keihn plays with a non-stop motor. He's a little light, but he has a high ceiling.

# Hokies' staff loads up on offense with 2014 recruiting haul

by Jimmy Robertson

Virginia Tech ranked 101st nationally in total offense and 99th in scoring offense this past season. The Hokies' best weapon on offense, quarterback Logan Thomas, departed with numerous school records. Their best offensive lineman, Andrew Miller, also departed.

So it did not come as any surprise that Virginia Tech's staff focused on finding playmakers on that side of the ball with the 2014 recruiting class.

Tech coach Frank Beamer and his coaches brought in a recruiting class that consisted of 28 total players, including two – defensive back Holland Fisher and tailback D.J. Reid – who signed with the Hokies last season but are spending the 2013-14 school year at Fork Union. Of those 28, 17 were projected to play on offense. Of those 17, four were listed as tailbacks and four as receivers.

"We ended up with a couple of great running backs, even though we feel good about the running backs in our program," Tech coach Frank Beamer said. "But we felt like, with our receivers, we needed to upgrade there. I feel good now that we've got some with experience, a couple of more that we redshirted, and then the guys that we signed. I think we really helped ourselves with guys that can catch it and do something after the catch. That's important. You've got to be able to catch it, but you've got to be able to do something with it."

Most services that cover recruiting regularly think highly of the Hokies' haul of skill players. One service, 247Sports, ranked Tech's quarterback class No. 2 nationally, and it rated the Hokies' running back group No. 4 nationally.

The quarterback contingent includes Andrew Ford, Chris Durkin and Travon McMillian, along with tailbacks Reid, Shai McKenzie, Marshawn Williams and Tabyus Taylor. McKenzie, a 5-foot-11, 215-pounder from Washington, Pa., and Williams, a 5-11, 224-pounder from Hampton, Va., earned four-star status (out of five) from Rivals and 247Sports, two services that cover recruiting.

McKenzie received his status despite missing much of his senior season with a torn ACL. Yet he rushed for 4,865 yards in his career – hence the ranking. Williams rushed for more than 4,000 yards in his career, including more than 2,000 this past season.

Ford, the Gatorade state player of the year in Pennsylvania, threw for 2,776 yards and 35 touchdowns as a senior. Durkin, an Ohio native, threw and rushed for more than 500 yards this past season. Both earned four-star status by 247Sports.

Their big numbers and potential for success in college led to most services ranking the Hokies' class pretty high. Yet this class features balance and talent throughout. Tech's staff signed four defensive linemen, and the class also includes four offensive linemen and five defensive backs.

Overall, 247Sports rated the class 20th nationally, while Rivals ranked the Hokies' haul 25th nationally, with 12 prospects receiving four-star status. 247Sports ranked eight prospects with four stars.

"I think sometimes you've got to watch yourself," Beamer said. "I think the Seattle Seahawks just proved that this weekend [in the Super Bowl]. They're playing with a third-round quarterback. Most of their football team wasn't highly recognized, but when they come together and give great effort and play their position smart and are dedicated to winning, you see that."

## BRINGING IN SOME PLAYMAKERS

Offensive struggles the past two years aside, the coaches needed to replenish the offense anyway.

For starters, Tech only has two scholarship quarterbacks on the roster in Mark Leal and Brenden Motley, and Leal is a senior. The coaches moved the quarterbacks in last year's class – Bucky Hodges and Carlis Parker – to different positions.

Enter McMillian, Ford and Durkin. McMillian may be the most versatile athlete in the class and may wind up at another position, but has been promised an opportunity to play quarterback. He threw for 1,472 yards and 17 touchdowns and rushed for 1,537 yards and 20 scores as a senior this past season at C.D. Hylton High.

They appear to be different types of quarterbacks, with McMillian being a dual-threat type and Ford being a left-handed pocket quarterback, while Durkin is nearly 40 pounds heavier than both and runs more. But they all possess one attribute attractive to the staff – intelligence.

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NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	HOMETOWN	HIGH SCHOOL	RECRUITED BY
Jaylen Bradshaw	WR	6-1	180	Chesapeake, Va.	Oscar Smith High	Bryan Stinespring
Kevin Bronson	DE	6-3	258	Boynton Beach, Fla.	Village Academy	Charley Wiles
Xavier Burke	TE	6-3	245	Lawrenceville, Va.	Brunswick High	Bryan Stinespring
Chris Durkin	QB	6-3	230	Poland, Ohio	Ursuline High	Scot Loeffler
Terrell Edmunds	DB	6-1	185	Danville, Va.	Dan River High	Bryan Stinespring
Holland Fisher	DB	6-2	210	Richmond, Va.	Manchester High/Fork Union	Shane Beamer
Andrew Ford	QB	6-3	193	Camp Hill, Pa.	Cedar Cliff High	Scot Loeffler
Isaiah Ford	WR	6-2	180	Jacksonville, Fla.	Trinity Christian High	Charley Wiles
Eric Gallo	OL	6-3	285	Richboro, Pa.	Council Rock South High	Jeff Grimes/Stacy Searels
Kendrick Holland	WR	6-3	190	Winter Haven, Fla.	Winter Haven High	Torrian Gray
Melvin Keihn	LB	6-2	215	Towson, Md.	Gilman High	Aaron Moorehead
Shai McKenzie	RB	5-11	215	Washington, Pa.	Washington High	Scot Loeffler
Travon McMillian	QB/ATH	6-0	200	Fredericksburg, Va.	C.D. Hylton High	Bud Foster
Vinny Mihota	DE	6-5	252	Fredericksburg, Va.	Massaponax High	Bud Foster
Raymon Minor	LB	6-3	215	Ashland, Va.	Benedictine High	Shane Beamer
Billy Ray Mitchell	OL	6-4	280	Westwood, N.J.	Paramus Catholic High	Jeff Grimes/Stacy Searels
Shawn Payne	DB	6-3	175	Chesterfield, Va.	L.C. Bird High	Shane Beamer
Colt Pettit	OL	6-4	260	Deshler, Ohio	Patrick Henry High	Jeff Grimes/Stacy Searels
Cam Phillips	WR	6-1	185	Laurel, Md.	DeMatha Catholic High	Aaron Moorehead
C.J. Reavis	DB	6-0	190	Chester, Va.	Thomas Dale High	Shane Beamer
D.J. Reid	RB	6-0	190	Chester, Va.	Thomas Dale High/Fork Union	Shane Beamer
Michael Santamaria	K	5-8	150	Athens, Ga.	Athens Academy	Torrian Gray
Tyrell Smith	OL	6-3	260	North Brunswick, N.J.	Don Bosco Prep	Jeff Grimes/Stacy Searels
Steve Sobczak	DT	6-1	285	Milford, Va.	Massaponax High	Bud Foster
Greg Stroman	CB	5-11	165	Bristow, Va.	Stonewall Jackson High	Torrian Gray
Tabyus Taylor	RB	6-1	215	Hopewell, Va.	Hopewell High	Shane Beamer
Ricky Walker	DL	6-2	265	Hampton, Va.	Bethel High	Cornell Brown
Marshawn Williams	RB	5-11	224	Hampton, Va.	Phoebus High	Cornell Brown

“Intelligence is one of the least things talked about with quarterbacks,” said Tech tight ends coach Bryan Stinespring, who doubles as the program’s recruiting coordinator. “It’s always, ‘What’s his arm strength? How quick is his release? Is he mobile? What’s his size?’”

“But we really talk about their ability to learn and the foundation they have. That’s going to be important because someone is going to have to come in and get into the quarterback mix. How quickly they can learn is really important to getting into that mix.”

At running back, the staff wanted to get bigger. Outside of Trey Edmunds, who is out this spring with a broken leg, the Hokies lacked a bigger running back, which played somewhat of a role in the Hokies’ red-zone and short yardage issues in 2013.

McKenzie, Williams and Taylor all weigh more than 215 pounds. McKenzie and Williams enrolled for the spring semester to get a head start on possibly getting on the field next fall.

“There were a lot of things that went into our red-zone issues,” Stinespring said. “It wasn’t just one person or one position. But we did want some guys with some size [at tailback], and these guys are already in the 215-pound range, with the opportunity to get bigger. Getting a couple of guys

with size was a part of our thought process.”

Then there is the situation at receiver. Tech’s leading receiver last year was a former walk-on (Willie Byrn). Outside of Demetri Knowles, the Hokies lacked vertical speed to stretch a defense. A year ago, Tech’s offense recorded just 15 pass plays of 30 yards or more.

In addition, the Hokies lacked depth at those spots. Tech brought in just two true receivers the past two years – none in last year’s class.

So Tech’s staff went after playmakers at the receiver spots – in a big way.

The coaching staff signed four receivers, a group that included Isaiah Ford from Jacksonville, Fla.; Cam Phillips from Laurel, Md.; Kendrick Holland from Winter Haven; Fla.; and Jaylen Bradshaw from Chesapeake, Va.

Ford reeled in 37 catches for 719 yards and 12 touchdowns, and he accounted for 1,067 all-purpose yards and 17 touchdowns this past season. Holland caught 32 passes for 770 yards and six touchdowns, while Phillips caught 68 passes for 1,233 yards and 15 touchdowns. Bradshaw hauled in 65 passes for 1,102 yards and 18 touchdowns.

“In the last three years, we’ve lost Danny Coale, Jarrett Boykin, Marcus Davis, Dyrell Roberts and D.J. Coles,” Stinespring said. “That’s a significant group of individuals. Then, all of a sudden,

Demetri Knowles is a junior, and Willie Byrn is a senior. We wanted to reinforce that group, and we thought it was a strong wide receiving class, which suited our needs.”

**SHORING UP THE OFFENSIVE LINE**

Along the offensive line, Tech’s staff kept four of the five offensive line prospects who had committed while Jeff Grimes was the offensive line coach (Grimes left to take the same position at LSU). Only Columbus, Ohio, native Brady Taylor switched commitments after he got an offer from his hometown Ohio State Buckeyes.

Tech’s offensive line signees include Eric Gallo from Richboro, Pa.; Billy Ray Mitchell from Westwood, N.J.; Tyrell Smith from North Brunswick, N.J.; and Colt Pettit from Deshler, Ohio. None of them weigh more than 285 pounds, but the staff liked that about this group

“Each of them has a great upside, and what we take great pride in is our development of players,” Stinespring said. “And this group, because of its upside, is going to benefit from Mike Gentry [Tech’s associate AD for athletic performance] and his staff and our coaching. This group fits into our mold of what we like to think is one of our strengths – their upside and our ability to develop. I think it works well together.”

**ALSO CONSIDERED**

Old Dominion  
 South Florida, Florida Atlantic  
 UVA  
 Michigan State, California, Toledo  
 Cincinnati, Hampton  
 Alabama, Ohio State  
 Penn State, Pittsburgh, Maryland, Rutgers  
 Louisville, South Carolina, Florida, Miami  
 Temple  
 Kentucky, Minnesota  
 UVA, Maryland  
 Pittsburgh, Georgia Tech, FSU  
 Georgia Tech, California  
 UVA, Florida State, Georgia Tech, Alabama  
 Marshall, Miami, Nebraska  
 NC State, Ole Miss, Wisconsin  
 UNC Charlotte, Norfolk State  
 Indiana  
 UVA, Wisconsin, Rutgers, WVU  
 Tennessee, Ohio State, Oklahoma  
 South Florida  
 Vanderbilt, Maryland, Georgia  
 UMass, Florida Atlantic  
 James Madison  
 UVA, Duke  
 JMU  
 Penn State, Michigan State, Nebraska  
 Did not consider any other school

**NOTABLE**

The No. 20 prospect in Va. by The Roanoke Times and Rivals  
 A first-team Class 2A choice by The Associated Press  
 Named Class 2A Defensive Player of the Year  
 The No. 15 prospect in Ohio by 247Sports  
 The No. 24 prospect in Va. by The Roanoke Times  
 The No. 4 outside linebacker prospect nationally by 247Sports in 2013  
 Gatorade state Player of the Year in Pa.  
 Class 3A Player of the Year in Fla.  
 The No. 26 prospect in Va. by 247Sports  
 Second-team Class 6A choice in Fla.  
 The No. 3 prospect in Md. By Rivals  
 The No. 16 RB in the nation by 247Sports  
 Group 6A Offensive Player of the Year by VirginiaPreps  
 The No. 10 prospect in Va. by 247Sports  
 The No. 12 prospect in Va. by 247Sports  
 The No. 17 prospect in N.J. by 247Sports  
 The No. 35 prospect in Va. by The Roanoke Times  
 The No. 32 prospect in Ohio by Rivals  
 The No. 6 prospect in Md. By 247Sports  
 The No. 10 prospect in Va. by Rivals  
 The No. 12 athlete prospect nationally by 247Sports in 2013  
 The No. 14 kicker prospect in the nation by 247Sports  
 The No. 26 prospect in N.J. by Rivals  
 First-team choice to Free Lance-Star's all-area team  
 The No. 22 prospect in Va. by The Roanoke Times  
 The No. 29 prospect in Va. by 247Sports  
 The No. 9 prospect in Va. by Rivals  
 The No. 15 RB in the nation by 247Sports

The offensive line has been a troublesome area for the staff in recent years, though the coaches felt the 2013 line played pretty well, and the staff continues to put resources into the offensive line. A year ago, they inked four offensive linemen as well (Jonathan McLaughlin, Kyle Chung, Braxton Pfaff and Parker Osterloh).

This year's crop means that 17 offensive linemen on the projected 2014 roster are on scholarship. That is a lot, but the Hokies lose six linemen after next season (Caleb Farris, Mark Shuman, Matt Arkema, Laurence Gibson, Brent Benedict and David Wang). Plus, it takes a while to develop linemen.

The last signee on offense, but not the least, was tight end Xavier Burke, a 6-3, 245-pounder from Lawrenceville, Va. Stinespring recruited Burke himself and loves that he's a smooth athlete with the ability to play in space.

"He's an easy runner, and I know he's going to get faster," Stinespring said. "He weighs 245, and he looks like he's 220. It wouldn't surprise me if he got to 275."

**ADDING TO THE DEFENSIVE FRONT**

A year ago, Tech's staff signed just one defensive lineman – Wyatt Teller. Not long after fall practice started, the staff moved Teller to the

offensive line. So in essence, the staff lost four defensive linemen this season – Teller, James Gayle, Derrick Hopkins and J.R. Collins.

That meant the staff needed to find replacements in this recruiting class, and the defensive line signees in this class include Ricky Walker from Hampton, Va.; Vinny Mihota from Fredericksburg, Va.; Steve Sobczak from Milford, Va.; and Kevin Bronson from Boynton Beach, Fla.

Walker and Sobczak should anchor Tech's defensive tackle spots for years to come. Walker recorded 73 tackles and 11 sacks this past season, while Sobczak had 21 tackles for a loss. Expect one or both to play next season, as the Hokies possess little depth at the tackle spot.

Mihota enrolled at Tech for the spring semester. He missed most of his senior season with a foot injury, but the coaches love his potential. Bronson recorded 58 tackles and 9 sacks this past season.

Tech's defensive line got much bigger with this group. None weigh less than 250 pounds.

"These guys share the ability level and skill set, but they also share the intangibles that our defensive staff is looking for," Stinespring said. "These guys have a high-motor level and are looking to get better."

Elsewhere on defense, Melvin Keihn projects as a backer in the Tariq Edwards mold. His speed

enables him to chase plays all over the field, and he recorded 85 tackles and 9 sacks as a senior.

Tech's staff also added to the defensive backfield despite going heavy at those four spots the past few years. A year ago, the staff signed six prospects projected to play in the secondary – Fisher, Kendall Fuller, Brandon Facyson, Chuck Clark, Anthony Shegog and Cequan Jefferson. After a season at Fork Union, Jefferson decided to sign with Temple, but the other five remain, including Fisher, who also went to Fork Union, but re-signed with the Hokies.

This class features defensive backs Terrell Edmunds, Greg Stroman, Shawn Payne and C.J. Reavis. The first three probably got more notoriety for their exploits on offense in high school (Edmunds as a running back, Stroman as a quarterback, Payne as a receiver), but project as defensive backs because of their athleticism. Reavis, from Chester, Va., recorded 87 tackles and 4 interceptions as a senior at Thomas Dale High School this past season.

McMillian could factor in as a defensive back as well, though the coaching staff wants to give him a look at quarterback and maybe receiver.

"You always have two or three guys in your class with diversity," Stinespring said. "They can play any number of positions. I think he's [McMillian]

one of them. He'll get a look at quarterback because he's played that position, and we want to evaluate him there. But he's versatile. Stroman and Terrell Edmunds have shown they can play a couple of different positions. We'll zone in on one [position] once they get here and go from there."

**WRAPPING IT UP**

Tech's staff also signed a kicker in Michael Santamaria from Athens, Ga., the lone specialist in the class. Given the Hokies' kicking issues a year ago – they used four different kickers – they needed a kicker. Beamer said he expected two walk-ons to join the program and also contend for the job.

There was no resting for Tech's staff following signing day. The staff held a "junior day" the Saturday after signing day – the coaches' earliest junior day yet – and planned at least two more junior days, including one that coincides with Tech's spring game.

"We've done a great job in our evaluation and developing, but this [recruiting] game has sped up," Stinespring said. "We wanted to make a few adjustments to meet the challenges in recruiting and advance ourselves, too."

"We're diligently at work on our 2015 class, as you can tell by some commitments already, and we have a board set up for our 2016 class. We have

**INSIDE HOKIE SPORTS' SLEEPERS TO WATCH**

**STEVE SOBCHAK** | Sobczak possesses a thick, powerful body, and Tech's staff loves him. But the thing that stands out was his willingness to drop a lot of weight after his junior year and get into shape. Football means something to this young man.

**KENDRICK HOLLAND** | Holland has the measurables (6-3, 190), and he showed an ability to make tough catches in traffic on film. He's also a smooth returner. Holland played part of his junior year with a torn labrum, so football means alot to him, too.

**TYRELL SMITH** | Smith looks like a tight end. On film, he's athletic, and he plays with balance and agility. He didn't have a ton of offers, but this is a young man who could

really thrive once he spends some time in Tech's strength and conditioning program.

**VINNY MIHOTA** | Mihota missed most of this past season because of a foot injury, but the early enrollee's junior film shows a young man who gets off the ball quickly, gets off of blocks and chases down plays. His size (6-5, 252) makes him a fit at James Gayle's old spot (stud end).

**XAVIER BURKE** | Burke played at a smaller school in a rural part of Virginia and didn't get the attention that some of Tech's recruits received, but he's a big, smooth athlete with long arms. He played defensive end as a senior, but has played tight end before, and the staff likes his potential at that spot.

a present plan, an immediate future plan, and then a two-year plan in recruiting. We've even got the beginning foundation of the 2017 plan."

For now, he, Beamer and the rest of the staff like the immediate future. The 2014 recruiting class will go a long way toward determining next year's success – and beyond.

"This wasn't going to be a class that was defined by an individual," Stinespring said. "We're not

going to get away from finding the best players that you can recruit, but you've got to meet your needs and stay on target. There is a fine balancing act. You've got to make sure at the end that you feel good about strengthening the areas that you needed to strengthen. You want to strengthen every area, but certain areas may require more attention, and I think we did a good job at that."



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**JAYLEN BRADSHAW**  
6-1, 180, WR  
Chesapeake, Va.  
Oscar Smith High School  
**Also considered:**  
Old Dominion

**Stats:** Caught 65 passes for 1,102 yards and 18 touchdowns as a senior (led Class 6A in receiving yards) ... Hauled in 35 passes for 720 yards and three touchdowns his junior season.

**Top honors:** Rated the No. 20 prospect in Virginia by both The Roanoke Times and Rivals ... Listed as the No. 35 prospect in Virginia by 247Sports ... A first-team All-Tidewater choice as a receiver by The Virginian-Pilot this past season ... First-team All-Group 6A choice by Virginia Preps as a receiver this season.

**Why he chose Tech:** "When I went on my visit, I felt at home. It was a real warm feeling. The coaches and the people around there are very welcoming, and that just sat well with me."

**On his position:** "They [the coaches] told me that they would like to use me as a slot receiver, but they'd also use me on some deep routes. I like to progress at my position. I like to learn new ways to run routes and work off a defender. I'm looking forward to that."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I think I'm good at making my defender

uncomfortable. I need to work on getting leverage on defenders, just the way of separating myself from a defender and creating more space between him and me."

**On his favorite player:** "In college, I look up to Amari Cooper [Alabama receiver] and Sammy Watkins [Clemson wide receiver]. I like Amari Cooper because he has sure hands, and he really goes up and gets the ball. So does Sammy Watkins. I like how Sammy Watkins uses his speed. My favorite NFL guy is Marques Colston or Robert Meacham [New Orleans Saints receivers]. I'm a Saints fan."

**On his most memorable moment:** "My most memorable moment would have to be when we played on ESPN against Lake Taylor. It was national TV, and it was my breakout game. I caught three passes for three touchdowns. I had 93 yards, and I also had an interception."

**Personal:** Born July 31, 1996, in Jacksonville, Fla. ... Son of Tracey Bradshaw ... Has an older brother and a younger sister ... Contemplated major is business.



**KEVIN BRONSON**  
6-3, 258, DE  
Boynton Beach, Fla.  
Village Academy  
**Also considered:** South Florida, Florida Atlantic, Vanderbilt, Nebraska

**Stats:** Recorded 58 tackles, including 24 for a loss, and had 9 sacks as a senior ... Also forced six fumbles his senior season.

**Top honors:** Listed as the No. 8 recruit on Palm Beach Post's PBGametime Class of 2014 Big Board ... The small schools Defensive Player of the Year by The Palm Beach Post ... The No. 11 prospect in Palm Beach County by The Sun-Sentinel ... A first-team Class 2A choice as a defensive lineman by the Associated Press.

**Why he chose Tech:** "Defensively, they [the Hokies] play in a 4-3, and that's what I wanted to play in. I've got a great relationship with Coach [Charley] Wiles. A couple of players from down this way went up there and did what they had to do and were successful. It's a college town, so there's not too much distraction. It's family up there, and on game day, the fans are very supportive of you."

**On his position:** "Coach Wiles said he knew I could play defensive end, but he thought in certain passing situations that they would put me at a three-technique [defensive tackle]


and let me rush against guards and go make plays."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I get off the ball very fast and get in the backfield and be disruptive. That's my biggest strength. I know how to read blocks well, too. I need to get better with my pass rush, and I need to get better at reading screens, things like that."

**On his favorite player:** "I'd say Domonique Easley. He played at Florida [as a defensive lineman]. He has a motor and he gets off the ball very fast. He gets in the backfield and disrupts things."

**On his most memorable moment:** "I would say this year in my last game [a playoff game against eventual Class 2A champions Champagnat Catholic]. That was the best game I've ever played. I had, like, 8 tackles, 4 for a loss, 2 sacks and a forced fumble. I'd say that was my most memorable moment."

**Personal:** Born Oct. 23, 1995, in Boynton Beach, Fla. ... Son of Fiel and Thelma Bronson ... Has an older brother ... Major is undecided.



**XAVIER BURKE**  
6-3, 245, TE  
Lawrenceville, Va.  
Brunswick High School  
**Also considered:** UVa

**Stats:** Finished with 95 tackles, including 18 for a loss, and 10 sacks his senior season ... Also had 20 hurries and four pass knockdowns.

**Top honors:** Named the Group 2A Defensive Player of the Year by VirginiaPreps and a first-team all-state selection as a senior ... A second-team All-Group AA choice as a defensive lineman his junior season ... Played in the Semper Fidelis All-American Bowl in Carson, Calif., on Jan. 5 and caught a touchdown pass in the game ... Ranked the No. 20 prospect in Virginia by 247Sports and No. 24 by Rivals.

**Why he chose Tech:** "Virginia Tech felt like home. I had a good connection with the coaches, and every time I went down there, they showed me a lot of love. I really liked Virginia Tech."

**On his position:** "I like tight end because you're able to do more than one thing. To be a tight end, you have to be able to block and you have to be able to catch. Tight end is one of the most versatile positions on the field. You do more than one

thing every play, so I think it's kind of cool."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I think I'm an exceptional blocker. I have pretty good hands and run pretty good routes. I have decent speed out of my cuts. I always play until the whistle blows. I think I could improve on running certain routes and having more elusiveness running the ball [after the catch]."

**On his favorite player:** "My favorite player is Cam Newton [Carolina Panthers quarterback]. I love watching Cam Newton. He has so much fun while he's playing. As a tight end, I love Vernon Davis [San Francisco 49ers tight end]. He's not the biggest tight end, but he's one of the fastest. I'd look at myself as him. I'm not one of the biggest, but if you run good routes and have good hands, you can be very effective in an offense."

**Personal:** Born Oct. 24, 1995, in Petersburg, Va. ... Son of Davie and Valerie Burke ... Has a younger sister ... Contemplated major is sports marketing.



**CHRIS DURKIN**  
6-3, 230, QB  
Poland, Ohio  
Ursuline High School  
**Also considered:** Michigan State, California, Toledo

**Stats:** Threw for more than 500 yards and rushed for more than 500 yards his senior season ... Threw for more than 700 yards and seven touchdowns and ran for more than 900 yards and six scores as a junior.

**Top honors:** Ranked the No. 15 prospect in Ohio by 247Sports ... Listed as the No. 20 prospect in Ohio by Rivals.

**Why he chose Tech:** "When I committed to Michigan State earlier in the year, they needed a guy. They didn't have a guy. Then Connor Cook stepped in and did his thing and won a Big Ten championship and a Rose Bowl. He's the guy for the next couple of years. Then Virginia Tech came around, and I thought, 'Why wait?' There was a chance for early playing time. They're in a great conference, and I'd be playing for a coaching legend in Coach [Frank] Beamer. Just looking at Coach [Scot] Loeffler's track record, he worked with [Tim] Tebow, [Tom] Brady and Chad Henne. That stuck out with me. He knows what to do with quarterbacks."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I have a strong arm, and I can move

around in the pocket. I'm a powerful runner, and I'm kind of elusive. I think I'm pretty smart. I need to work on some technique stuff, which will help me be more accurate on some throws. I need to really learn how to break down a defense, read coverages from the line, give a hard count and see what defenses roll into and be able to pick it up as they're rolling into something else ... those types of things."

**On his favorite player:** "I'd say Big Ben [Roethlisberger, Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback]. I've always been compared to him."

**On his most memorable moment:** "I'd have to say my junior year against our rival, the Mooney Cardinals. I ended up rushing for four touchdowns that game, and we ended up winning. It was pretty exciting."

**Personal:** Born Feb. 15, 1995, in Youngstown, Ohio ... Son of Chris Durkin, Sr., and Doreen Durkin ... His stepmom is Rachelle Durkin ... Has two younger sisters ... Contemplated major is business management.



**TERRELL EDMUNDS**

6-1, 185, DB  
Danville, Va.  
Dan River High School  
**Also considered:** Cincinnati, Hampton, North Carolina, Maryland, NC State

**Stats:** Rushed for 1,753 yards on 143 carries and scored 25 touchdowns as a senior ... Had 53 tackles (16 solo), including two tackles for a loss his senior season ... Also intercepted two passes and broke up 32 passes as a senior.

**Top honors:** Rated the No. 24 prospect in Virginia by The Roanoke Times ... Listed as the No. 49 prospect in Virginia by 247Sports ... A second-team Group 2A choice as a running back his senior season ... Named the offensive player of the year in Conference 37 as a senior.

**Why he chose Tech:** "It was just a great school, and there's a great group of people up there trying to do the right thing. I've just loved Virginia Tech ever since my brother's [Trey] been there and I love the environment."

**On his position:** "Right now, they [the coaches] have me labeled as a defensive back. But Coach [Bryan] Stinespring and I have been talking, and he's asked me if I ever thought about going on the offensive side of the ball. We've had that conversation. But right now, I'm at corner. It doesn't matter to me."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I think I'm good at covering, and I'm quick. Those are the two things I think I'm good at. I need to work on my footwork. You can improve on everything, but mostly I want to improve my footwork."

**On his favorite player:** "The one player I really liked was Deion Sanders [former Atlanta, Dallas and San Francisco cornerback]. I liked the way he played and how he's a ball hawk on each and every play. He's someone I look up to."

**On his most memorable moment:** "There was a close game that we won 32-28 [against Martinsville High], and in that game, I scored five touchdowns and had 344 yards [rushing]. That's a game to remember. We were down 14 going into halftime. It was a crazy game."

**Personal:** Born Jan. 20, 1997 in Danville, Va. ... Skipped a grade of school when he was younger ... Son of Ferrell, Jr., and Felecia Edmunds ... Father played in the NFL for seven seasons ... Has an older brother and a younger brother ... Contemplated major is industrial engineering.



**ANDREW FORD**

6-3, 193, QB  
Camp Hill, Pa.  
Cedar Cliff High School  
**Also considered:** Penn State, Pittsburgh, Maryland, Rutgers

**Stats:** Completed 161 of 238 passes (67.6 percent) for 2,776 yards and 35 touchdowns as a senior ... Completed 225 of 339 passes (66.4 percent) for 2,957 yards and 35 touchdowns as a junior.

**Top honors:** Listed as the No. 9 prospect in Pennsylvania by 247Sports and No. 16 by Rivals ... Named the Gatorade state Player of the Year ... A first-team Class AAAA choice as a senior.

**Why he chose Tech:** "It was just very comfortable for me. Everyone told me that I would get this feeling when I was on a campus that this was the place God intended for me to be. I came down for the first camp in June, and that drove it home. I knew Virginia Tech was the place for me."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "When it comes to the X's and O's and the schemes, I think I have a pretty good feel for the game. Obviously, I have a long way to go, and Coach [Scot] Loeffler is going to push me with that. But that's one of my best attributes, just being able to see things before they

happen. I think I need to get better in everything every day. I need to get bigger stronger and faster, and improve in every aspect of being a quarterback."

**On his favorite player:** "I watch Peyton Manning [Denver Broncos quarterback] and like the control of the game that he has. He knows what he's doing before the ball is snapped. From a leadership standpoint, I try to emulate Tom Brady [New England Patriots quarterback]. The way he rallies his guys is impressive. I've been lucky to watch those two play."

**On his most memorable moment:** "The ninth game of the year this year, we played the No. 1 team in the state, Bishop McDevitt, and we beat them 49-41 [Ford threw for 409 yards and six touchdowns]. For us to go out on their home field and play the game we did, it was a game I'll never forget."

**Personal:** Born Oct. 27, 1995, in Camp Hill, Pa. ... Son of Pete and Grace Ford ... Has a younger brother and a younger sister ... Contemplated major is business.



**ISAIAH FORD**

6-2, 180, WR  
Jacksonville, Fla.  
Trinity Christian High School  
**Also considered:** Louisville, South Carolina, Florida, Miami

**Stats:** Had 37 catches for 719 yards and 12 touchdowns as a senior ... Also rushed for 201 yards and four touchdowns and passed for a touchdown his senior season.

**Top honors:** Named the Class 3A Player of the Year in Florida by The Associated Press ... Ranked as the No. 25 player in his state by 247Sports ... Rated the No. 54 player in the state of Florida by The Orlando Sentinel ... Listed as the No. 68 prospect in Florida by Rivals.

**Why he chose Tech:** "It was the consistency they had throughout the whole recruiting process. Even when I committed to Louisville, they still stayed in contact with me. They made sure that I realized how much they needed me at their school."

**On potentially playing basketball at Tech:** "That was huge in my decision because basketball is my first love. Basketball is just as important, if not more important, than playing football. My heart has been in the sport since I was 4 years old. I thought about pursuing just basketball in college, but I like

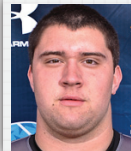
playing two sports. I think that makes me who I am."

**On how much attention he got after scoring 59 points in one game:** "Before that, I had a 44-point game. I think I've been turning a lot of heads this year. I've been playing off the charts. But that game [the 59-point game] turned a lot of heads. It let a lot of people know that I'm not just an athlete playing basketball. I'm actually a basketball player."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I think my strengths are running routes, my yards after the catch, and my leaping ability. I think I need to get a little bigger and stronger."

**On his most memorable moment:** "Probably winning the state championship my senior year. When I came in as a ninth grader, we won it, but I didn't feel like I played an important role. To win it with this team was very special."

**Personal:** Born Feb. 9, 1996, in Jacksonville, Fla. ... Son of Aaron Ford and Jocelyn Griffett ... Has two older brothers ... Contemplated major is engineering.



**ERIC GALLO**

6-3, 285, OL  
Richboro, Pa.  
Council Rock South High School  
**Also considered:** Temple

**Top honors:** Listed as the No. 26 prospect in Pennsylvania by 247Sports ... Named to the Class AAAA all-state team following his senior season ... A first-team All-SOL National Conference choice as a senior ... Played in the Semper Fidelis All-American Bowl in Carson, Calif., on Jan. 5.

**Why he chose Tech:** "I chose Virginia Tech because I liked everything about the school. I thought I got along well with the coaching staff. I just thought it was the best fit for me."

**On the impact of his brother, P.J. Gallo, who is a tight end at Maryland:** "He let me make my own decisions. He definitely helped me with the process a lot. Seeing him go through it and how he handled it definitely made my process easier."

**On his position:** "They [the coaches] said I'd most likely be playing center. I played center in high school."

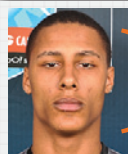
**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I'd say my strength is my footwork. I think I have good footwork for an

offensive lineman, and I'm quick off the ball. I think I need to work on my technique and getting stronger. I probably need to get a little bigger. I'd like to report to Virginia Tech at 290 pounds."

**On his favorite player:** "I like watching Justin Pugh [New York Giants offensive tackle]. He went to my high school, and we're friendly. He plays physical, and he plays hard. I also like watching David Wang [Tech's center] play. I like watching what he does and also how he plays the game."

**Most memorable moment:** "I would say my sophomore year. My teammates and I made it to the district championship. I was playing on the offensive line at that point. That was the most memorable. It was a lot of fun to play in a championship game. We lost the championship, but it was still a lot of fun."

**Personal:** Born Oct. 18, 1995, in Philadelphia ... Son of Pat and Patty Gallo ... Has an older brother, a younger brother and a younger sister ... Contemplated major is business.



**KENDRICK HOLLAND**

6-3, 190, WR  
Winter Haven, Fla.  
Winter Haven High School  
**Also considered:** Kentucky, Minnesota

**Stats:** Hauled in 32 passes for 770 yards and six touchdowns his senior season ... Caught 50 passes for 779 yards as a junior despite playing with a torn labrum late in the season.

**Top honors:** A three-star recruit by Rivals ... Ranked the No. 70 prospect in Florida by 247Sports ... Second-team Class 6A all-state choice as a receiver by The Associated Press his senior season ... A third-team Class 6A choice by the AP following his junior year ... Honorable mention Class 6A by the AP after his sophomore season.

**On his position:** "I enjoy receiver [more than free safety]. I just enjoy getting the ball in my hands and doing something with it. I enjoy catching the ball and making people look stupid."

**Why he chose Tech:** "I was down to three options, and I went to Minnesota and I liked Minnesota, but it was too far for my family. They didn't want me to go that far away, so I didn't go. Kentucky started picking up a bunch of receivers. It came down to Virginia Tech, and when I visited, I enjoyed it, and I think I'll fit in well with them."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:**

"I think my strong points are catching the ball at its highest point and breaking tackles. Those are my main two. I have a lot I need to work on. I want to work on my speed and quickness, and I need to get stronger. I want to improve my vertical jump, too."

**On his favorite player:** "I'd have to say Megatron [Detroit Lions receiver Calvin Johnson]. I'm not as big and tall as he is, but I like the advantage he has over other defensive backs, and I try to do the same thing he does."

**On his most memorable moment:** "I'd have to say last year in the second round of the playoffs. We played against Mainland High School [out of Daytona Beach], and I had a pick-six and two touchdown receptions to put us up. We ended up losing to them, but it was one of my best games."

**Personal:** Born Jan. 22, 1995, in Marietta, Ga. ... Lives with his grandmother, Karen Brooks ... Has an older brother, an older sister and a younger brother ... Contemplated majors are business management or marketing.



**MELVIN KEIHN**

6-2, 215, LB  
Towson, Md.  
Gilman High School  
**Also considered:** UVA, Maryland

**Stats:** Had 85 tackles, including 16 for a loss, and 9 sacks as a senior ... Recorded 13 sacks and 9 other tackles for a loss as a junior.

**Top honors:** Rated the No. 3 prospect in Maryland by Rivals and the No. 9 prospect in the state by 247Sports ... A first-team choice to the All-Met team as a defensive end by The Baltimore Sun following his senior season ... A two-time all-state selection as a defensive end ... Participated in the Under Armour All-America Game in St. Petersburg, Fla., on Jan. 2.

**Why he chose Tech:** "When I went on my visit, it was just a great atmosphere, and it just felt like home to me. I like the kids, and I got along with them. It was just home for me."

**On his position:** "They [the coaches] want me to play the outside linebacker position, like what Tariq Edwards played. Coach [Bud] Foster and I have talked a little bit, and he wants to be able to use me in a lot of ways, like with blitzing and pass coverage and helping with the run. I can't wait to

get started and see how they want to use me."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I feel like my speed gives me a lot of advantages for what I do. With my speed, I'm allowed to do a lot of things, like dropping back in pass coverage and keeping up with running backs and tight ends. I'm a pretty good blitzer and I can help with the run. I believe I need to work more on my hand placement and using my hands more to get off blocks a little faster."

**On his favorite player:** "I'm a big J.J. Watt [Houston Texans defensive end] fan and Terrell Suggs [Baltimore Ravens outside linebacker]. I like his energy. It's the same with J.J. Watt. I like his energy and the enthusiasm he brings to the defense."

**Personal:** Born June 21, 1995, in Monrovia, Liberia ... Son of Baina and Satta Keihn ... Father lives in the States, but his mother still lives in Liberia ... Has two younger brothers and a younger sister in the States ... Contemplated major is mechanical engineering.



**SHAI MCKENZIE**

5-11, 215, RB  
Washington, Pa.  
Washington High School  
**Also considered:** Pittsburgh, Georgia Tech, Florida State

**Stats:** Rushed for 650 yards and 11 touchdowns in just two-plus games as a senior before tearing his ACL ... Rushed for 2,689 yards and scored 42 total touchdowns (41 rushing) as a junior ... Rushed for 4,865 yards in his career.

**Top honors:** Listed as the No. 4 prospect in Pennsylvania by 247Sports ... Ranked the No. 7 prospect in Pennsylvania by Rivals ... The 2012 Observer-Reporter Player of the Year as a junior.

**Why he chose Tech:** "I decided on Virginia Tech because it was an area I felt very comfortable with. I like the people I was with on my official [visit] and in the summer time. I could relate to the coaches, and it wasn't too far for my mom or my dad. My mom lives in Georgia, and my dad lives in Pennsylvania."

**What led to his decision to enroll early:** "To get the free rehab and basically to prevent from being a redshirt. I'll get to rehab six times a week instead of three. It's going well. It's been four months since

the surgery, and I feel fine. Also, I'll be around the players more and be in the system early, so I'll be good to go when the season starts."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I have a mix of power, speed and patience. It's going to take me a little bit to get my speed back because of the injury. I just now started putting back on the weight, getting back to my regular size. I need to get back my power and speed that I had before the injury."

**On his most memorable moment:** "I would say in the third-round playoff game [his junior season] to get to the championship. I carried the ball 42 times and had 300 yards and four touchdowns, and that helped us to the championship."

**Personal:** Born Sept. 19, 1995, in Washington, Pa. ... Son of Sean McKenzie and Misty Nolder ... Has two older brothers and two younger sisters ... Contemplated major is sport management.



**TRAVON MCMILLIAN**

6-0, 200, QB/ATH  
Fredericksburg, Va.  
C.D. Hylton High School  
**Also considered:** Georgia Tech, California

**Stats:** Completed 97 of 169 passes for 1,472 yards and 17 touchdowns, with 9 interceptions as a senior ... Rushed for 1,537 yards and 20 touchdowns his senior season ... Threw for 1,326 yards and 12 touchdowns his junior season as a quarterback, with 9 interceptions ... Also ran for 1,242 yards and 16 touchdowns his junior season.

**Top honors:** All-Group 6A Offensive Player of the Year by VirginiaPreps ... Ranked as the No. 14 prospect in Virginia by The Roanoke Times ... Listed as the No. 18 prospect in Virginia by both Rivals and 247Sports ... An honorable mention selection to the All-Met team by The Washington Post.

**Why he chose Tech:** "I went there and saw them and everything, and then their engineering department was like 24th in the country [15th by U.S. News and World Report]. I'll be closer to home and my family can watch me play. So that's why it came down to the decision to choose them [the Hokies]."

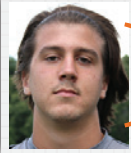
**On his position:** "They [the coaches] promised an opportunity to play

quarterback. If quarterback doesn't work out, then we'll look at other positions. That's pretty exciting. It's a win-win situation from where I'm at."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I think my strength is my speed. I'm a one-cut runner, so as soon as I make a cut, I can take it to the house. As for my weaknesses, I want to improve my throwing mechanics, things like that."

**On his most memorable moment:** "My most memorable moment would be my first touchdown against Battlefield [High School]. It was a 64-yard run, and it was my first touchdown. Battlefield had won the state title the year before. It was the first time for me [he was a sophomore], and I was pretty nervous, but after that run, I started playing my game and started getting recruited."

**Personal:** Born Feb. 5, 1996, in Woodbridge, Va. ... Son of Yolanda McMillian-Vaughan and Howard Vaughan ... Has three younger sisters and an older brother ... His older brother, Charles, played at Shenandoah University last year ... Contemplated major is engineering.



**VINNY MIHOTA**

6-5, 252, DE  
Fredericksburg, Va.  
Massaponax High School  
**Also considered:** UVa, Florida State,  
Georgia Tech, Alabama

**Stats:** Broke a bone in his left foot in the team's second game and missed the rest of the 2013 season.

**Top honors:** Listed the No. 10 prospect in Virginia by 247Sports ... Rated the No. 19 prospect in Virginia by Rivals ... Ranked the No. 29 prospect in the state of Virginia by The Roanoke Times ... Was a first-team All-Group AAA choice as a defensive lineman his junior season by the Virginia High School Coaches Association.

**Why he chose Tech:** "Of all my options, I thought Virginia Tech would be the best fit for me. The whole place just seems like a great family. The football atmosphere was great, and all the alumni love football. They have the major that I wanted, which is mechanical engineering, and it's one of the best programs in the country. It's close enough to home that my family can come and see me play. I just feel comfortable around everyone there."

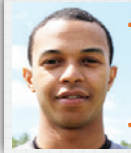
**On the impact of his brother, former UVa lineman Anthony Mihota, on his decision:** "Me and my brother are very close, and we talked during the whole process. Even though

he wanted me to hold out a little longer before I made my decision, he supported me every step of the way."

**Why he decided to enroll early:** "Last spring, me and Coach [Bud] Foster discussed that option, and I had set myself academically to graduate early before that because I took some high school classes in middle school. So it wasn't too difficult from an academic standpoint, and I can get an extra six months in the weight room before my freshman season."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "My strengths are getting off the ball, my agility and being able to read where the ball is going before the snap. Also, I think I have good strength in general. I definitely need to work on my 40 [-yard time] and just being a better student of the game, so I can understand offenses and what they're trying to do."

**Personal:** Born July 18, 1996, in Morgantown, W.Va. ... Son of John and Valerie Mihota ... Has an older brother and a younger brother ... Contemplated major is mechanical engineering.



**RAYMON MINOR**

6-3, 215, LB  
Ashland, Va.  
Benedictine High School  
**Also considered:** Marshall,  
Nebraska

**Stats:** Recorded 54 tackles, including 11 for a loss, and had two forced fumbles as a linebacker his senior season ... Caught 28 passes for 570 yards and five touchdowns as a receiver his senior year ... Caught 31 passes for 571 yards as a junior ... Caught 21 passes for 203 yards and 11 touchdowns as a junior at Patrick Henry High School before reclassifying at Benedictine.

**Top honors:** Listed as the No. 10 prospect in Virginia by Rivals ... Ranked the No. 12 prospect in Virginia by 247Sports ... Rated the No. 13 prospect in Virginia by The Roanoke Times ... A first-team all-state linebacker by the Virginia Independent Schools Athletic Association his senior year ... A second-team All-Met pick by the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

**Why he chose Tech:** "I have a good relationship with the coaches there and with the players. They treat me like I'm part of the family. They treated me like family even before I committed. Also, I can play my first year there."

**On his position:** "I was a receiver and an outside linebacker in high school. I played both ways. I like both. I don't have a favorite. They can put me at either one. I just want to play."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I think I do a lot of things well, but I need to work on everything. I definitely want to work on getting faster."

**On his favorite player:** "I would say Taylor Mays [Cincinnati Bengals free safety]. A lot of people say I look like him [on the field] and that I play the same way."

**On his most memorable moment:** "Mine would be when we beat LCA [eventual VISAA Division I state champion Liberty Christian Academy] to go to the playoffs [this past season]. We won 40-36. Also, being ranked the No. 7 outside linebacker prospect in the nation [by Scout] was memorable."

**Personal:** Born Sept. 17, 1994, in Richmond, Va. ... Son of Sonny and Kim Minor ... Has a younger brother ... Contemplated major is sports management.



**BILLY RAY MITCHELL**

6-4, 280, OL  
Westwood, N.J.  
Paramus Catholic High School  
**Also considered:** NC State,  
Wisconsin, Ole Miss

**Top honors:** A first-team all-state selection as an offensive lineman following his senior season by The Star-Ledger, by American Family Insurance and by MSG Varsity ... Ranked the No. 17 prospect in New Jersey by 247Sports ... Played in the Offense-Defense All-American Bowl in Orlando, Fla., on Jan. 3.

**Why he chose Tech:** "I've been a lifelong Virginia Tech fan, and it was a pretty easy decision. I loved it when I visited and my parents loved it when I visited, and I felt comfortable there. I used to watch them on TV growing up, and Tyrod Taylor [former Virginia Tech quarterback] was one of my favorite players in college growing up."

**On his position:** "They [the coaches] told me I'll probably be an interior lineman. I'll probably be a center or guard. I don't have a problem with that. I just want to make an impact as soon as possible."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "My biggest strength is my footwork. I'm pretty athletic for an offensive lineman. I play aggressive, and I feel like I'm a pretty mobile guy. I love the

game, too. I feel like I love the game more than most people do. I need to get a little bit bigger and work on my arm strength. I want to get better in all aspects every single day."

**On his favorite player:** "I like Chris Snee [a guard for the New York Giants], and I like the center for the Philadelphia Eagles [Jason Kelce]. I watch him all the time. The center may be a little bit undersized, but he takes on the best tackles and dominates them."

**On his most memorable moment:** "I would say it was beating Don Bosco [Prep] for the first time [since 1999, snapping a 16-game losing streak]. It was in the playoffs, and they missed a last-second field goal [Paramus Catholic won 21-20]. It was in the state semifinals. That was awesome because they're good every year."

**Personal:** Born April 11, 1996, in Bergen County, N.J. ... Son of Russell and Diane Mitchell ... His dad played football at Ole Miss in the early 1980s ... Has a younger brother ... Contemplated majors are communications or business.



**SHAWN PAYNE**

6-3, 175, DB  
Chesterfield, Va.  
L.C. Bird High School  
**Also considered:** UNC Charlotte,  
Norfolk State, Maryland

**Stats:** Caught 22 passes for 331 yards and four touchdowns as a receiver his senior season ... Intercepted six passes as a junior ... Had 307 yards receiving and six touchdowns as a receiver his junior season.

**Top honors:** Part of a team that won back-to-back state championships ... Ranked the No. 35 prospect in Virginia by The Roanoke Times ... Listed as the No. 39 prospect in Virginia by 247 Sports.

**Why he chose Tech:** "Virginia Tech has been my dream school since I was in the fifth grade, since I was ready to go to middle school. Virginia Tech was the school I actually wanted to go to, and then I went up to the camp [last June] and they offered me. Not even a week later, Coach Shane Beamer called me. I went and talked with my mom and decided to take the offer."

**On his position:** "I really don't know. Coach [Torrian] Gray really likes me, and Coach Shane likes me, too, so I have no clue. I just want to get on the field as soon as possible."

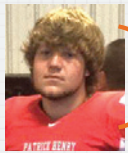
**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I'd say my strength is being a wide

receiver because I do that the most. I just started playing safety two years ago, and I actually started playing corner at the end of last year. I need to get bigger and faster and get my footwork better."

**On his most memorable moment:** "I'd have to say winning the state championship as a team. For me, personally, it was against Hermitage last year. I had a big interception in that game, and then this year, I caught a touchdown pass that changed the momentum, and we ended up winning the game."

**On his favorite player:** "On defense, it would be Richard Sherman [Seattle Seahawks cornerback]. He's actually similar to my size and playing the corner. People are telling me all the time that you can't find 6-2 or 6-4 corners, so I mostly look up to him because he's my size."

**Personal:** Born June 17, 1996, in Killeen, Texas (Fort Hood) ... Son of Christy Brown, who used to serve in the military ... Has a younger brother and sister ... Contemplated majors are sports medicine or business.



**COLT PETTIT**

6-4, 260, OL  
Deshler, Ohio  
Patrick Henry High School  
**Also considered:** Indiana, Harvard, Yale, all the MAC schools

**Stats:** Recorded 77 tackles and 11.5 sacks as a defensive lineman his senior season ... Had 70 tackles and three sacks as a defensive lineman his junior season.

**Top honors:** A first-team Division VI choice as a defensive lineman his senior season by The Associated Press ... The Division VI Co-Defensive Player of the Year his senior season ... A first-team Division V All-Ohio selection as an offensive lineman his junior season ... Ranked the No. 32 prospect in Ohio by 247Sports and the No. 60 prospect in Ohio by Rivals.

**Why he chose Tech:** "Overall, it's just a great school. When I went and visited, I fell in love with the place. I really like the coaching staff a lot. They're a bunch of great coaches and great guys. I loved the campus and academics. Everything felt right at Virginia Tech."

**On his position:** "They [the coaches] think I'm versatile enough to play almost any position. I personally feel I'll be a guard or center because I'm not 6-foot-5 or 6-6. But whatever happens, I'll be happy with it, no doubt."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:**

"I definitely think my strength is my athleticism. I'm more of a quick, explosive player. A lot of coaches tell me that my physicality helps me out a lot, and that I have a lot of heart. I definitely need to get accustomed to college blocking, run blocking and pass blocking. I need to get bigger and stronger. I need to just get better as an all-around player."

**On his favorite player:** "I never really grew up watching football. My biggest role models were my brother and my dad, and they both played college football. My brother [Cody] just graduated from Central Michigan on the offensive line. I'd definitely say he was my role model."

**On his most memorable moment:** "I'd say just the experience overall. High school football, there is nothing like it. Just being with your friends 24-7 and playing the game, that's the most memorable thing."

**Personal:** Born Feb. 19, 1996, in Hamilton, Ohio ... Son of Gregg and Fawn Pettit ... Has an older brother and an older sister ... Contemplated major is business.



**CAM PHILLIPS**

6-1, 185, WR  
Laurel, Md.  
DeMatha Catholic High School  
**Also considered:** UVa, Wisconsin, Rutgers, WVU

**Stats:** Hauled in 68 passes for 1,233 yards and 15 touchdowns his senior season ... Caught 34 passes for 632 yards and scored 8 touchdowns as a junior.

**Top honors:** Listed as the No. 6 prospect in Maryland by 247Sports ... Ranked the No. 7 prospect in Maryland by Rivals ... A first-team All-Met selection by The Washington Post ... A first-team all-state selection and the state's offensive player of the year by the media ... Played in the Offense-Defense All-American Bowl on Jan. 3 in Orlando, Fla.

**Why he chose Tech:** "After my visit in the spring, I felt really, really good. I committed the day before we went into camp [high school practice]. I talked to my mom about it, and she told me that if that's where I wanted to go, then go ahead and commit. There was no need to prolong the process."

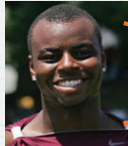
**On his position:** "I'm excited about being a receiver there. They have a great wide receivers coach [Aaron Moorehead], and he's one of the reasons why I committed there and feel good about my decision. I hope I

can add a spark."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I think my strong points are my attitude and my confidence. I'm very confident in my skill set. I feel I'm knowledgeable about the game. I'm agile and a good route runner. I want to become more explosive. I don't think you can ever become too explosive. I think adding that will put me ahead of everyone else. So being explosive, knowing the game and being confident and being a good competitor, those things will help."

**On his favorite player:** "I try to take parts from guys' games that I like and add it to my own. My favorite receiver is Michael Crabtree [San Francisco 49ers], and I like Sammy Watkins [former Clemson receiver], how explosive he is and how good he is with his hands. And I like Steve Smith [Carolina Panthers receiver], and just how tough he is."

**Personal:** Born on Dec. 16, 1995, in Charlotte, N.C. ... Son of Raymond Phillips and Toelesar Nicholson ... Has two older sisters, a younger sister, and an older brother ... Contemplated major is business.



**C.J. REAVIS**

6-0, 190, DB  
Chester, Va.  
Thomas Dale High School  
**Also considered:** Tennessee, Ohio State, Oklahoma

**Stats:** Had 87 tackles and 4 interceptions his senior season ... Also had 12 pass breakups, a sack, a fumble recovery and a forced fumble.

**Top honors:** A second-team Group 6A choice as a defensive back by VirginiaPreps ... A first-team All-Metro selection by The Richmond Times-Dispatch ... Ranked the No. 15 prospect in Virginia by The Roanoke Times ... Listed as the No. 10 prospect in the state by Rivals and No. 14 in Virginia by 247Sports ... Participated in the Offense-Defensive All-American Bowl in Orlando, Fla., on Jan. 3.

**Why he chose Tech:** "Virginia Tech felt like home to me. It was a home away from home. I could definitely see myself there for four years."

**On his position:** "They [the coaches] say I'm pretty versatile, and I could play anywhere in the defensive backfield. I like free safety, but I've played a lot of corner lately. They're both fun to me. I love being a DB. You get to test your skills one-on-one with an opponent. I like the pressure that comes with it."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I think my strengths are tackling,

making plays on the ball and great instincts. I need to work on getting in and out of my break faster and being disciplined and not gambling so much. I need to be more patient sometimes."

**On his favorite players:** "Sean Taylor [deceased Washington Redskins safety] and Richard Sherman [Seattle Seahawks cornerback]. Sean Taylor was a hitter, and I liked that about him. He's very versatile, like I feel like I am. Richard Sherman just makes plays. That's all he does, and I feel like that's what I'm capable of doing."

**On his most memorable moment:** "When I got my first interception in my high school career my freshman year. The receiver was an older guy, and he was talking trash the whole game to me. They tried [throwing at] me a few times, and when they tried me the last time, I picked the ball off. That was a fun time."

**Personal:** Born Nov. 27, 1995, in Chester, Va. ... Son of Cary and Shawnequa Reavis ... Has a younger sister ... Contemplated major is communications (broadcasting).



**MICHAEL SANTAMARIA**

5-8, 150, K  
Athens, Ga.  
Athens Academy  
**Also considered:** Vanderbilt, Maryland Georgia

**Stats:** Hit two of his four field-goal attempts as a senior ... Hit 78 percent of his kickoffs for touchbacks his senior season ... Made 6 of 8 field-goal attempts as a junior ... Connected on 7 of 9 field-goal attempts as a sophomore ... Career long is 48 yards.

**Top honors:** Listed as the No. 14 kicker prospect in the nation by 247Sports ... Rated the No. 11 kicker prospect in the nation by Chris Sailer, a renowned kicking expert ... A GACA (Georgia Athletic Coaches Association) all-state selection as a junior ... Played in the Northeast Georgia FCA All-Star Football Game and made two field goals in that game (48 and 33 yards).

**Why he chose Tech:** "I'd say Virginia Tech was one of my top schools going into the recruiting process at first because Coach [Frank] Beamer's legacy, especially with special teams. Once I visited and came to camp, Coach Beamer was so inviting, and I had a great time. Something felt right about it. After he offered, it was tough to say no."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "My greatest strength is field-goal kicking, but I've also kicked off, and this

past year, I was the punter. But at the collegiate level, I'm more of a field-goal guy first and then a kickoff guy. I want to work on my strength and getting bigger, and I want to improve on getting the ball higher because that's more important at the collegiate level."

**On his favorite player:** "I used to always watch David Akers [Detroit Lions kicker]. I remember having his DVD as a boy and watching him. Currently, I like watching Shayne Graham [New Orleans Saints kicker] a lot. He's someone I want to be like. I want to have a career like his."

**On his most memorable moment:** "My junior year, we had three games that were decided by the kicking game, which was exciting for me. We were regional champions, and that was a lot of fun. Then working for Chris Sailer and competing on the national level and finishing in the final four in his field-goal competition ... those were some highlights."

**Personal:** Born June 11, 1995, in Atlanta ... Son of Pablo and Cyndye Santamaria ... Has a younger sister ... Contemplated major is international business.



**TYRELL SMITH**

6-3, 260, OL  
North Brunswick, N.J.  
Don Bosco Prep High School  
**Also considered:** UMass, Florida Atlantic, Miami, North Carolina

**Top honors:** Listed as the No. 26 prospect in New Jersey by Rivals ... Rated the No. 44 prospect in New Jersey by 247Sports ... A first-team all-state selection by The Star-Ledger following his senior season ... A second-team all-state choice by MSG Varsity as a senior.

**Why he chose Tech:** "I had a few other offers, but when it came down to it, Virginia Tech was the best fit for me. It had everything I was looking for in a university. The coaches were a great fit for me. I got along with the players. It was just the perfect place for me."

**On his position:** "Definitely the guard position. I don't know exactly if it'll be right or left. I just have to work on getting my weight up first because I'm not where I need to be weight-wise. I'll get my weight up and play whatever helps out the team the most."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I'd say my run blocking and my footwork. I think I'm versatile and athletic enough to get out on the edge or get up on the second level. I need to get a better understanding

of the game so I'll be able to read defenses from the offensive line. Just more understanding of the game itself will help me become a better player. I need to get bigger, too. I'm weighing 260 now and I'd like to get up around 290."

**On his favorite player:** "I really like Nate Solder, who plays for the Patriots [as an offensive tackle], but I mainly watch all offensive linemen to learn from them and see what techniques they use that I can use to make myself better. But I like Nate Solder because he's big, and he's versatile and athletic. When it comes down in the trenches, he handles his business and protects [Tom] Brady [New England's quarterback], which is all the matters."

**On his most memorable moment:** "My senior year this past year, we played our rival school [Bergen Catholic] and won in triple overtime."

**Personal:** Born June 22, 1996, in New Brunswick, N.J. ... Son of Fred Smith and Sandra Robinson ... Has a younger sister ... Contemplated majors are pre-law or communications.



**STEVE SOBCZAK**

6-1, 285, DT  
Milford, Va.  
Massaponax High School  
**Also considered:** JMU

**Stats:** Recorded 75 tackles as a senior (55 solo) and had 21 tackles for a loss ... Also recovered a pair of fumbles his senior season ... Had 39 tackles as a junior, including 10 for a loss.

**Top honors:** A first-team selection to the Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star's all-area team as a defensive lineman his senior season ... A second-team All-Class 5A selection by VirginiaPreps as a defensive lineman as a senior ... Played in the Offense-Defense All-American Bowl held Jan. 3 in Orlando, Fla.

**Why he chose Tech:** "It was always the dream school growing up in Virginia. It's always been the powerhouse school in Virginia to watch. I had committed to JMU, but that was when I was about 40 pounds heavier. I didn't play at the level I'm playing at now, and once I had a great senior year, Tech decided to bring me in this summer [for the second summer session], I had to go."

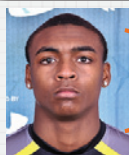
**On his position:** "I'll be a defensive tackle. That's definitely where I want to play. I'll play anywhere on the line. Anywhere I can make a difference, I'll play."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I'm able to soak up knowledge pretty well. I think I'm a hard worker. I think I can apply what I've learned into the game. Those are my biggest attributes. I want to work on everything. Anything I can possibly do to get my game better, I'm going to do."

**On his favorite player:** "Nikita Whitlock from Wake Forest [defensive lineman]. My dad pointed him out to me one game, and ever since then, we started following him. I like his technique. He's short and undersized, and a lot of people say that about me."

**On his most memorable moment:** "Probably beating North Stafford in overtime my senior year. I had a sack to put the game into overtime, but it was more just the moment. It was a learning experience. You got to see that if you don't give up, you can still possibly win."

**Personal:** Born April 8, 1996, in Newport News, Va. ... Son of Steve and Yahsa Sobczak ... Father played at Newport News Apprentice ... Has an older sister ... Contemplated major is communications.



**GREG STROMAN**

5-11, 165, CB  
Bristow, Va.  
Stonewall Jackson High School  
**Also considered:** Duke, UVA

**Stats:** Threw for 1,544 yards and 17 touchdowns and rushed for 1,233 yards and 15 touchdowns as a quarterback his senior season ... Missed four games with a hip injury ... Threw for 2,000 yards and ran for 1,000 yards as a quarterback his junior season, accounting for 35 touchdowns.

**Top honors:** Rated the No. 22 prospect in Virginia by The Roanoke Times ... Ranked the No. 44 prospect in Virginia by 247Sports ... A first-team All-Class 6A choice as an athlete by VirginiaPreps ... Played in the Offense-Defense All-American Bowl in Orlando, Fla., on Jan. 3.

**Why he chose Tech:** "It just felt right. I've visited down there a couple of times. I have a great relationship with Coach [Torrian] Gray, and I talked with some of the kids that are already there and some that are already committed. They all want to win."

**On his position:** "Most likely, I'll be a corner and play on some special teams. I'm ready to come in there and contribute as best as I can. I haven't played cornerback much since my sophomore year, but I think being a quarterback will help

me. I still practiced my DB stuff, so it won't be that big of an adjustment. I think quarterback helped me learn coverages and things like that."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I think I'm fairly fast and quick. I think I can make plays. I need to get stronger in all aspects, and I need to learn more."

**On his favorite player:** "Defensively, Richard Sherman [Seattle Seahawks cornerback], and offensively, DeSean Jackson [Philadelphia Eagles receiver]. I like Richard Sherman because he's a tall, athletic corner. He's a playmaker and makes big plays. So is DeSean. Both of them are big-time playmakers."

**On his most memorable moment:** "Just winning. My first two years, we had losing records, and then my junior year, we went 9-2. Then this year, we went 8-5. So just winning is what stands out to me."

**Personal:** Born March 8, 1996, in Warrenton, Va. ... Son of Greg, Sr., and Priscilla Stroman ... Has a younger brother and a younger sister ... Contemplated major is business or marketing.



**TABYUS TAYLOR**

6-1, 215, RB  
Hopewell, Va.  
Hopewell High School  
**Also considered:** JMU

**Stats:** Threw for 1,037 yards and averaged 177 yards rushing per game, scoring 26 touchdowns his senior season as a quarterback ... Ran for 403 yards and five touchdowns in a game against Petersburg High ... Had 990 receiving yards and 1,500 all-purpose yards as a receiver his junior season.

**Top honors:** Rated the No. 29 prospect in Virginia by 247Sports ... Listed as the No. 30 prospect in Virginia by The Roanoke Times ... A second-team Class 3A choice as an athlete following his senior season ... A first-team All-Metro choice by The Richmond Times-Dispatch as a utility player following his senior year ... An All-Metro choice as a receiver following his junior season.

**Why he chose Tech:** "I decided on Virginia Tech because it's close to my family, and they could get to me [to see him play]. I was also interested in the school because it's a great school. I visited JMU, but other than Virginia Tech, I wasn't really interested in any other school."

**On his position:** "They [the coaches] said I'll be a running back.

But we've got a lot of running backs, so I guess some people will be switching positions. I played wide receiver and quarterback [in high school], but I feel good about playing running back. I like running the ball. If they wanted to move me, I wouldn't have a problem with it. I'll do anything to get on the field."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I think I run best. I break tackles, and I'm a north-and-south runner. I need to work on my speed and acceleration."

**On his favorite player:** "I like Adrian Peterson [Minnesota Vikings running back]. I like the way he runs, and the way he breaks tackles. I like how he works on and off the field."

**On his most memorable moment:** "When I was 8 years old, I ran for the winning touchdown in the championship game. It was against Fort Lee. I'll never forget it."

**Personal:** Born Nov. 24, 1995, in Hopewell, Va. ... Son of Orlando and Vannette Taylor ... Has two older sisters and two younger brothers ... Contemplated major is physical education.



**RICKY WALKER**

6-2, 265, DL  
Hampton, Va.  
Bethel High School  
**Also considered:** Penn State,  
Michigan State, Nebraska

**Stats:** Finished with 73 tackles, including 15 for a loss, and had 11 sacks as a senior ... Recorded 70 tackles and 11 sacks as a junior.

**Top honors:** Listed as the No. 9 prospect in Virginia by Rivals ... Rated the No. 10 prospect in Virginia by The Roanoke Times ... Ranked the No. 11 prospect in Virginia by 247Sports ... A second-team All-Class 6A choice by VirginiaPreps as an offensive lineman following his senior season ... Played in the Semper Fidelis All-America Bowl held Jan. 5 in Carson, Calif.

**Why he chose Tech:** "It felt like the best spot for me. It felt comfortable. There's a great family environment there. The coaches are great, and they have a great program there."

**On the impact of his brother, former UVa defensive back Rijo Walker, on his decision:** "He helped me out a lot. He had been through the process before. He definitely gave me tips, and he helped me out a lot. He didn't try to steer me to UVa. He told me it was my decision."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I play with a chip on my shoulder. I

have a high football IQ, and I'm very coachable and humble. Nobody's perfect, so I need to get stronger. That's No. 1. Then I need to work on the little stuff, like using my hands and feet and so on, so that I'll be ready for that next level."

**On his favorite player:** "Aaron Donald, a defensive tackle from Pitt. I like his instincts on the field. He led the country in tackles for a loss, and he's only about 6-foot. He's an undersized defensive tackle. I think that's the way I am, and I hope I can play like him."

**On his most memorable moment:** "I would say beating Hampton High two years in a row my sophomore and junior years. Those were good victories for us because they usually beat us every year. So to beat those guys two years in a row was a humbling experience."

**Personal:** Born April 18, 1996, in Newport News, Va. ... Son of Richard Walker, Sr., and Asia Garcia ... Has an older brother, a younger brother, and two younger sisters ... Contemplated major is business.



**MARSHAWN WILLIAMS**

5-11, 224, RB  
Hampton, Va.  
Phoebus High School  
**Also considered:** Did not consider any other schools

**Stats:** Rushed for 2,192 yards and 30 touchdowns as a senior ... Rushed for 1,845 yards and 33 touchdowns combined in three seasons at Hampton High.

**Top honors:** Rated the No. 8 prospect in Virginia by 247Sports ... Listed as the No. 15 prospect in Virginia by Rivals ... Ranked the No. 17 prospect in Virginia by The Roanoke Times ... A second-team Class 4A choice as a running back following his senior year ... The Daily Press' Player of the Year as a senior.

**Why he chose Tech:** "It was close to home. I just liked it. They welcomed me in and were real nice. I've always liked the school, and I wanted to play for the school. It was kind of a dream come true to be able to play there. I was pretty much sold as soon as they offered."

**On enrolling for the spring semester:** "It had been in the plans, but I never knew it'd be real until it ended up happening. It allows me to get in the system early and get adjusted to things before everyone else gets there. I'll be able to participate in spring practice and have a chance to compete and play."

**On his strengths and weaknesses:** "I'm hard to go down. I usually break the first tackle. I make one-cut and go up the field. I think I have good speed. I think I'm good all-around, but I need to work on everything. Nothing is good enough that I'll have to stop working on it. Everything needs work."

**On his most memorable moment:** "After I switched from Hampton [to Phoebus High], playing against them. We beat them 42-0. I can't remember how many touchdowns I had. Maybe four or five and maybe 200 yards."

**On scoring eight touchdowns and rushing for 308 yards against Warwick High:** "That's one of the first things everyone brings up [when they meet him]. When it first happened, I was doing interviews all over the place. It was a little too much. I don't really like all the attention."

**Personal:** Born Jan. 6, 1996, in Hampton, Va. ... Son of Solomon Bassett and Tracey Williams ... Has two older brothers and an older sister ... Contemplated major will probably be something related to science.

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# BIDING HIS TIME

The NCAA forced Malik Mueller to sit out this season, but the German native is making the most of a difficult situation

by Jimmy Robertson

The Virginia Tech men's basketball team is immersed in a deep slump, and interestingly, no one feels worse about it than a player who hasn't played a minute all season.

The NCAA shackled freshman Malik Mueller to the Hokies' bench for the 2013-14 campaign because of issues related to his transcript from his school in Germany. That, in and of itself, is tough enough for the young man, but watching his teammates struggle makes the situation that much more difficult.

"I love to play, but more importantly, I hate to see my team lose and suffer," Mueller said. "I'm sitting on the bench, and I'd love to help my team out right now. You see so much on the bench, and the experience you gain sitting on the bench and watching the team play could help a lot.

"I'm just wishing I could play, but I'm not letting anyone see how frustrated I am. I try to be hyped and get the guys going. But it's definitely frustrating after a loss. There's so much that you'd like to do for the team, but you can't."

Tech coach James Johnson expected Mueller to play an integral part on this season's squad. He loved Mueller's size at 6-foot-3, 220-plus pounds, and he loved Mueller's experience. The young man's German team had played in the United States before, winning the Arby's Classic in Johnson City, Tenn., in December of 2012. Before that, Mueller played in the 2010 Jordan Brand Classic at Madison Square Garden in New York City, scoring 21 points and earning Most Valuable Player honors.

Johnson signed Mueller last spring, along with Devin Wilson, and the school accepted Mueller. But the NCAA called into question two of Mueller's classes and ultimately ruled him ineligible for this season. He will have four years of eligibility left starting next season.

The news of his ineligibility devastated Mueller, and he contemplated staying in Germany and competing professionally over there.

"Every 16-, 17-, 18-year-old boy thinks about playing and making money and having a place to live and having my own car," Mueller said. "But my dream was always to play in the States. Every player wants to get to the league [the NBA], and the best way is to play college basketball.

"So when I made the decision to come to Virginia Tech, it was pretty definite. Even after the [NCAA] decision came down and I couldn't play, the coaches gave me all the options. So I took one day and thought about it. I was frustrated. My mom was here, and I was talking with her and going through the options. But at the end, I knew I wasn't quitting. That's not me. I'm not a quitter, and I decided to stay here. I'm glad I did it, definitely."

Mueller has spent the season working on the Hokies' scout team and going up against Wilson every day in practice. He arrived last fall a little overweight, but under the careful watch of strength and conditioning coach David Jackson, he has lost 30 pounds.

Though he needs Mueller now – injuries to Adam Smith and Ben Emelogu, and the decision

by Marquis Rankin to give up the sport have decimated Tech's backcourt – Johnson must wait until next fall to get Mueller's services. Then he will be getting a 20-year-old combination guard with international experience and the ability to score and make others around him better.

Until then, Mueller impatiently waits.

"I can't wait until November," he said. "Right now, I'm just trying to get better in practice and prepare for the summer when I play for the [German] national team. When I come back, I'll be ready to get going. I can't wait to step on the court with my classmates and with the incoming freshmen and the returning players. It's going to be great. I can't wait.

"This is a year that it takes sometimes to get a program going, but I think it's going to be worth the wait."

## TOUGH SEASON FOR EDDIE

Jarell Eddie opened this season by scoring in double figures in the Hokies' first 11 games and in 12 of the first 13. But ACC opponents have clamped down on Eddie, and the senior had scored in double figures just three times since the start of the new year.

Heading into a game at Pittsburgh, Eddie had shot just 26 percent from the floor in the Hokies' previous nine games, including 25 percent from beyond the 3-point arc. He averaged 8.9 points per game in that span.

"He's having some clean looks," Johnson said. "I think he's just trying a little bit too hard and

wanting to get things going so bad. Defenses are doing a decent job on him, but I think he's missing some baskets that I've seen him make in the past. He's got to relax and let the game come to him. Hopefully, he'll get going soon."

Eddie did record two 20-plus point outings in that span, scoring 20 points in Tech's 83-78 loss to Wake Forest and scoring 23 points and grabbing 10 rebounds in the Hokies' 76-52 loss at BC. The BC game marked his fourth double-double of the season and the seventh of his career.

Eddie did go over the 1,000-point milestone for his career on a 3-pointer early in the Syracuse loss. He became the 44th player to do so, and he ranked 39th in career scoring at Tech heading into that Pittsburgh game.

### SMITH INJURY HURTING HOKIES

After continually trying to get Smith back on the court, Tech's sports medicine staff decided to shut him down for a two-week stretch after he re-aggravated a calf injury in the Notre Dame game. Smith, who suffers from a fracture in the fibula of his leg and from the strained calf, played just 15 minutes in that game.

Smith has missed eight games this season with the injury, including five straight heading into a game at Pittsburgh. In this same stretch, C.J. Barksdale has missed three straight because of a groin injury. And of course, Emelogu has missed five games this season with various injuries.

"It just seems we've been banged up all around," Johnson said. "This time of year, injuries are a part of the game. Look around the league, and everyone probably has someone banged up or injured.

"It is what it is. We've got to find a way to play with what we have. We've been in some games. We've just got to find a way to finish it."

Johnson hoped to get Smith back for the Miami game on Feb. 15.

### RAINES SETS CAREER HIGH

It has been a roller coaster season for senior center Cadarian Raines, who has seen his minutes decline after the emergence of redshirt sophomore Joey van Zegeren. But Raines enjoyed a career performance against Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind., on Jan. 19.

Johnson subbed Raines in at the 9:32 mark of the first half. Eighteen seconds later, Raines got the ball, scored and was fouled. He made the free throw and that propelled him to a career evening.

Raines scored 20 points, surpassing his previous career high of 17, which came in the season opener against USC Upstate. He made 8 of 15 from the floor and 4 of 7 from the free-throw line in 22 minutes.

"He had been practicing hard and been trying to move forward on the depth chart," Johnson said. "His attitude has been great. He kept his head in the game and in practice. I kept telling him, 'Your opportunity is going to come. Be ready when it comes.' I thought Joey got off to a slow start offensively, and we went in there with Raines and he came through. That was good to see."

Raines, whose field goals made and shot attempts also set career highs, had not played in the previous two games leading up to the Notre Dame game – losses to Clemson and Boston College. He has played in every game since then, a span that included a 13-point performance in the Hokies' 70-50 loss to Florida State on Feb. 5. He hit 6 of 11 from the floor in that game.

### WILSON WITH BACK-TO-BACK CAREER NIGHTS

Like Raines, Devin Wilson also had a career game against Notre Dame. The freshman point guard scored a career-high 20 points against the Irish, surpassing his previous career high of 16 points, which came in wins over West Virginia

and Maryland-Eastern Shore earlier in the season.

Wilson made 7 of 10 against the Irish and 5 of 7 from the free-throw line. He also dished out seven assists and grabbed four rebounds. Wilson leads the Hokies in assists this season.

"Devin has come on extremely well," Johnson said. "He's getting better every minute on the floor. I've demanded a lot from him from day one. I need him to be a leader and a coach on the floor. He's always had that toughness in him. He's a winner. His teams win every drill in practice.


"I was hard on him early about leading the team and running the team and seeing certain things on the floor. He's just getting better every day, every day in practice and every minute on the floor."

Playing all 40 minutes because of injuries to Smith and Emelogu, Wilson continued his scoring binge in the Hokies' next game, a home game against Wake Forest on Jan. 22. He scored a career-high 26 points, with 25 of those coming in the second half and 17 coming in the final 5:35 of the game. He scored Tech's last 10 points in an 83-77 defeat for the Hokies.

Wilson made 6 of 10 from the floor against the Demon Deacons, including 3 of 4 from beyond the 3-point arc. He also hit 11 of 14 from the free-throw line.

### ROOKIE RECORDS DOUBLE-DOUBLE

Trevor Thompson got extensive minutes in the Hokies' loss to Wake Forest, and the freshman made the most of them, scoring 10 points and grabbing 12 rebounds. It marked his second double-double of the season and the second time this season in which he has scored in double figure.

Thompson's previous double-double came against Western Carolina on Nov. 15 when he scored 15 points and grabbed 11 rebounds. 

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## TECH WOMEN END SKID WITH HOME WIN OVER BC

Playing without injured star Uju Ugoka, the Hokies rallied from a 13-point deficit to get their first ACC victory of the season

by Marc Mullen

After completing a winless January – eight overall losses and seven in the ACC – Virginia Tech welcomed the month of February with its first conference win of the season, a 70-63 overtime victory over Boston College in Cassell Coliseum on Feb. 2.

Four Hokies scored in double figures in the win – and none of them were Uju Ugoka, who did not play because of a sprained knee suffered in practice a day earlier.

Freshman Vanessa Panousis led the Hokies with 18 points, with half of them coming in overtime, as Tech scored the first 10 points in the extra session and then held on for the win. Senior Monet Tellier forced the overtime, though, as she knocked down a free throw with 4 seconds left to tie the game at 56.

“We knew this day would come,” Tellier said. “We just fought a little bit harder to actually get the win. It just relieves a lot of stress and pressure that we had on our shoulders.”

Tellier had a solid all-around game, scoring 17 points, handing out seven assists and pulling down six rebounds in 44 minutes of action. Hannah Young posted her third double-double of the year with 11 points and 10 rebounds, while Maddison Penn came off the bench to score 15 points, tying her season high.

“I’m very, very proud of these kids,” Tech coach Dennis Wolff said. “We don’t have to talk about not having an ACC win or any of that. We can just try to concentrate on winning the next game.”

“I told the girls before the game that, if we all put forth the type of effort that we ended up putting forth today, then it would be a memorable day. Monet deserves about as much credit as you can give a player, because – forgetting about the numbers – with her desire to win the game, she almost played herself to exhaustion.”

The game also marked the first time under Wolff that the Hokies were able to overcome a



Hannah Young scored 11 points in Tech's win over BC - her sixth double-digit scoring outing of the season.

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deficit of 10 or more points and record a victory. Boston College led by 13 points with 3:01 left in the first half.

The largest deficit overcome by Tech under Wolff was nine points and all three occasions occurred last season – against Wisconsin, Hampton and Georgia Tech. Tech overcame its largest deficit since falling behind by 17 against Vanderbilt in a 74-68 win on Dec. 30, 2010.

**TELLIER REACHES 1,300-POINT MILESTONE**

On Feb. 9, Tellier scored the 1,300th point of her Tech career, as she capped a 9-0 run by her team to give them a 10-point, second-half lead over No. 14/17 NC State. Unfortunately, the Wolfpack would erase that deficit and pull out a 72-71 overtime win, dropping the Hokies under .500 (11-12 overall) for the first time this season.

To spoil the afternoon even more, late in the second half, Tellier injured her wrist as she attempted to stop a Wolfpack fast-break opportunity, leaving her unavailable afterward to speak at the postgame news conference.

Entering the season, Tellier sat in 21st place on the school's list for career scoring and has passed 12 players to become just the ninth Hokie to score more than 1,300 career points. In the NC State game, she passed Amy Byrne (1986-90; 1,291 points).

Tellier could pass more players and has a legitimate shot at being one of just seven players to score 1,400 career points, provided she stays on her current pace.

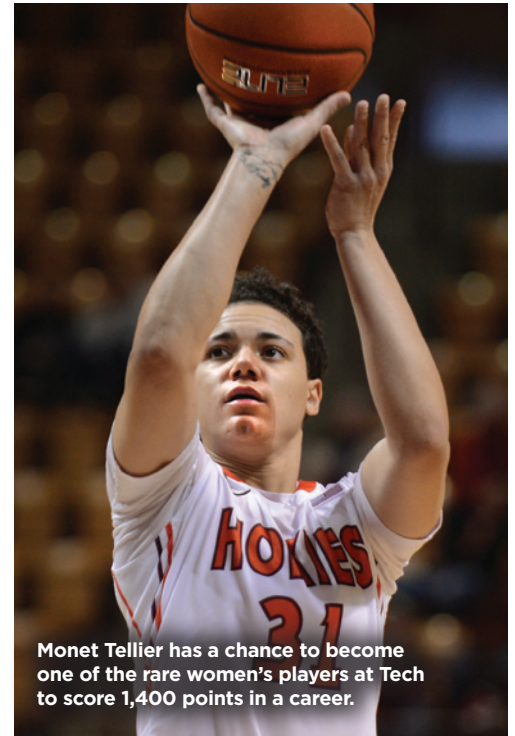
Of the school's top-10 scorers, only Carrie Mason (2002-06; 1,369 points) played any of her time in the ACC and that was her last two seasons. So Tellier stands as the Hokies' all-time leading scorer in ACC games.

**TECH GIVES HOME CROWD SOMETHING TO CHEER ABOUT**


Even though the loss to the Wolfpack dropped the Hokies to 8-6 in Cassell this season, they've certainly given the home crowd their money's worth. After starting 7-1 at home, a start that included wins over Florida out of the SEC and Michigan State from the Big Ten, the Hokies have suffered their setbacks in league play, but have battled in all of them except one.

They've played two overtime games – and won one – and had Miami and No. 3 Duke close down the stretch. Even their seven-point loss to Virginia was tied with two minutes remaining.

The Hokies' scoring margin in ACC road games this year is minus 18.5 points per game, but their home margin is minus 5.2 points per game – and that includes a 21-point loss to Georgia Tech.



Monet Tellier has a chance to become one of the rare women's players at Tech to score 1,400 points in a career.

That bodes well for Tech, as its final two ACC games in Cassell are against teams that are outscored by more than 10 points a game in league play – Pittsburgh (minus 18.9) and Clemson (minus 12.5) 



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Patrick Mason became just the fifth head baseball coach at Tech in the past 66 years, and he hopes to continue the winning tradition established by his predecessors.



## NEW COACH EXPECTING SAME SUCCESSFUL RESULTS

New skipper Patrick Mason takes over for Pete Hughes, and despite many new faces on the mound and in the lineup, he expects the 2014 Hokies to produce similar results to that of the 2013 squad that advanced to the ACC title game and qualified for an NCAA regional

by **Marc Mullen**

A lot has happened in the eight months since the Virginia Tech baseball team walked off the turf at English Field having just succumbed to Oklahoma in the first NCAA baseball regional championship in Blacksburg to end the 2013 season – and not just with its program.

Campus news included the announcement of a new president at the university, Dr. Timothy Sands, who will start June 1. Then in late January, the university announced the hiring of a new athletics director, Whit Babcock, who started Feb. 17, and both men expect to lead at Tech for many years to come.

Program-wise, six Tech players were selected in the Major League Baseball First-Year Player

Draft, a group that included four Hokies with eligibility remaining. But the big news came when coach Pete Hughes elected to take the head job at Oklahoma, and then-AD Jim Weaver promoted Hughes' top assistant, Patrick Mason, to the head coaching position at Tech.

The major principals surrounding the school and the program may have changed in the offseason, but what haven't changed are the program's goals.

"My expectations are that we are going to compete and get back to the ACC Tournament," Mason said. "We're going to have to figure out early what the right lineup is, what the right mix is, but with that being said, we should still be

competing like crazy early and still be able to be successful in terms of wins and losses.

“I know we have enough horses in the stable and enough bats in the lineup to get back to where we were last year, and then start to play an elite level of baseball when the last third of the season approaches, like we did last year. My goals are to get to the ACC Tournament and get hot and make a run – just like every team that wins it does at that time of year – and then roll that into a regional.”

After being named the head guy on June 27, Mason quickly went to work on completing his staff. He promoted Mike Kunigonis to associate head coach. Kunigonis has helped the offense compile some lofty numbers since his tenure as hitting instructor.

Tech is just one of six teams in the country to hit at least 44 home runs each of the past three seasons and is fifth in home runs per game in that span (0.924). Also since 2011, the Hokies, as a team in the three years combined, are fifth in the nation in slugging percentage (0.4524) and total bases per game (15.791).

Joining Mason’s staff is pitching coach Robert Woodard, a man very familiar with the ACC, as he won a program-best 34 games as a starting pitcher at North Carolina and had spent last season at UNC Wilmington. Former Tech player Gabe Ortiz rounded out the additions, as he came in as a volunteer assistant.

“Woody has come in and has established an immediate connection with the pitching staff,” Mason said. “For the most part, our mindset and our goals are the same as what I was trying to do last year [as the pitching coach]. He has a little bit different of a way about going about that, but his communication with those guys has been outstanding. He established instant credibility with them, and they’re really comfortable working with him now.”

“Then having Gabe back, he was a perfect player here in the sense that you never had to worry about anything he was ever doing, so that’s tremendous. He was self-accountable on and off the field, and to bring him back with the large amount of newcomers in our program – someone who is familiar with campus, familiar with the workload that they have academically, familiar with both myself and Coach K [Kunigonis] – has been a great addition.”

Four of the Hokies drafted last year, and six total who signed pro contracts, were pitchers, but the cupboard certainly isn’t bare. There may actually have been more question marks surrounding the 2013 starting staff than this year’s.

Entering last season, only Joe Mantiply was

**Brad Markey made 15 starts last season and is expected to be one of the Hokies’ workhorses again in 2014.**



a proven starter, while Devin Burke and Brad Markey, the two pitchers who emerged as the other two weekend starters, had combined for just six starts at the Division I level in their careers.

This year, Markey (5-4, 4.94 ERA in 15 starts last year) and Tanner McIntyre (3-0, 3.81 ERA in four starts) both return for their final seasons.

“There are question marks,” Mason said. “But I do know that we have a lot of depth, which is important. We have a lot of untested guys. Brad’s obviously proven and the cornerstone of our staff.”

“Tanner is coming back from his injury [shoulder], and where he’s at right now is really a testament to how hard he’s worked. Tanner was 10-0 the last two years for us, and he is a 22-year-old presence on the mound, a proven winner. So with those two guys, that’s a good starting point.”

Behind Markey and McIntyre are juniors Sean Keselica and Brendon Hayden, with four career starts each in their two years on the mound. Then come the question marks, but Mason believes there are younger guys who are ready to take that next step.

“Sean looks great, and Brendon’s coming back and looking pretty good as well,” Mason said. “So with those four and their leadership, and then when you start sprinkling in some of the younger guys, like an Aaron McGarity, Luke Scherzer, Kit Scheetz, Mack Krupp and Andrew

McDonald, we are in good shape.

“I think that upperclassmen and veteran experience can help those other guys’ progress. Hopefully those older guys do what they’re supposed to do and we don’t have to rely on our younger guys or put them in difficult situations too early. But I think those guys I mentioned are ready, and that makes us about nine deep. I think we’ve got another six or seven, too, and I’m hoping that one or two of those guys are going to step up.”

Surprisingly, Mason is very optimistic about his lineup and the defense that he will put out there in 2014. The draft took away two big offensive weapons [Chad Pinder and Tyler Horan, who combined for 19 homers and 100 RBIs], but because of some injuries last year, a number of Hokies got valuable playing time and worked themselves into the starting lineup by year’s end.

“I love where our offense is right now,” Mason said. “On opening day, we will probably start six guys in our lineup who started last year in multiple games in the ACC tournament or in the regional. It’s sneaky because we lost Pinder, Horan and [Andrew] Rash [who had 11 homers and a team-leading 62 RBIs], but we are still returning six guys who contributed a lot last year.”

“So that’s a lot for any team to be returning. Obviously, it kind of centers around [Mark] Zagunis, Keselica and Hayden, and we need for

Hayden to return to what he was as a freshman [when he hit .336] – and I think he’s going to. There’s a big difference in how he’s swung the bat in the fall, and I feel really confident he’s going to have a big year.”

Those three juniors have all produced seasons in which they hit at least .300 or better. Zagunis, a junior, has done so in both years, and Keselica raised his average 30 points to .307 last year, while Hayden hit .336 as a freshman.

The Hokies, who have just two seniors on the team (Markey and McIntyre), also return juniors Kyle Wernicki and Alex Perez, who has started and played in 117 straight games for Tech. Mason points to sophomore Ryan Burns as another potential opening day starter.

“Kyle Wernicki was an all-regional outfielder here last year in Blacksburg, and obviously Alex Perez kind of anchors our defense,” Mason said. “Alex is a two-year starter at second base. It’s going to be his third year starting in the middle of the infield in the ACC, and that is a pretty valuable commodity.

“Ryan Burns came on real strong last year at the end of the year. He cracked that lineup in the regionals, and he can really hit. We need to figure out where the best position for him is going to be on the field. We expect to see those six guys pretty much as mainstays in our lineup,

which means we need three new guys to round it out. But we have a lot of real young hitters, and I know that we’ll find our three guys.”

Looking at the schedule, no matter how it’s sliced, it will be a challenging one for the Hokies, as the team will face nine teams (22 games) that made the 2013 NCAA Baseball Championship and includes four teams (10 games) that made Super Regionals and three teams (seven games) that made the 2013 College World Series.

Adding to the challenge, of the 28 programs the Hokies are scheduled to face in 2014, 23 of them made their respective conference tournaments. Tech will play 28 games against programs that had a final 2013 RPI [Ratings Percentage Index, used to select at-large teams to the NCAAs] in the top 50, 37 games versus teams in the top 100 and 47 games against the top 150.


After a four-game opening weekend in Charlotte starting Feb. 14, the Hokies will face an early test at LSU, a team that is a preseason top-10 choice in several polls and ranked No. 2 in the USA Today coaches’ poll. The Friday night event in Baton Rouge, La., will feature a crowd of more than 10,000, and that game might have Hokie fans using it as a barometer on how the 2014 Hokies will fare.

“It will be a good test,” Mason said of the LSU

game. “But we are obviously really locking in on that first weekend right now. We have four games that weekend, and we’re going to figure out who our four starters are going to be. Try to come out of that weekend with four wins, and then evaluate where we are at that Monday and figure out how to best attack the next weekend, when we only have three games.

“Right now, we have Markey penciled in to start that game against LSU, if we are projecting out through the course of the first couple of weekends, which we do. So we can plan our practices accordingly.

“Brad will start that game, and that will be a good test. LSU is a great program, and they are going to present the same challenge a lot of, if not all, the teams in the ACC present to us on a Friday night. So it will be a little bit of a measuring stick, but it’s not going to be anything out of the normal for a program at this level.”

That early test for the Hokies will be the first of many as they try to get back to the ACC Tournament, which features a different format with the addition of two more teams into the conference. Ten teams will qualify, but only eight will advance to the normal pool play. Teams seeded No. 7 and No. 10 will face each other, as will No. 8 versus No. 9, on the first day, with the winners moving on to pool play. 

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## GETTING TO KNOW MARK ZAGUNIS

Mark Zagunis is one of the Hokies' leaders both on the field and in the classroom. The 2013 Capital One Academic All-District first-team selection has been named to a pair of 2014 preseason All-America teams. Below are several questions that allow Tech fans to know a little more about the Tech junior catcher.



### My winter break was spent ...

"Just hanging out with my friends and family and having a good time. I was enjoying the time off and just relaxing. I did work out. I stayed in shape and lifted, and hit as much as I could indoors."

### My pregame routine consists of ...

"Trying to do the same things before each game. I'll hit off the tee and then go to the machine and hit. After that, I'll go out to the field and hit in the cage."

### My favorite Tech moment, so far, was ...

"Definitely my walk-off home run against Florida State in last year's ACC Tournament. I don't think anything will beat that."

### I wear No. 2 because ...

"I grew up a Yankees fan, and I loved Derek Jeter. I just always liked No. 2 and wore it in every sport I played - basketball, football and baseball."

### My favorite uniform combination is ...

"I definitely like the maroon tops with the white pants. I think that's my favorite uniform combination."

### You've stolen 39 bases in your Tech career, and that's due to ...

"Being confident. Knowing that you are expected to steal the base, and if you don't go in there confident, you're not going to be successful. But you just get good leads, and the rest is just being confident."

### Tech fans will be excited for the 2014 season because ...

"I think we're going to prove to people that, sure, we lost a lot of great players from last year, but I think we have a lot of talent, and if we use it the right way, I think we'll be able to shock a lot of people. So I think Hokieball is in for another good season."





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Lauren Gaskill is moving to shortstop, and she'll be Tech's leadoff hitter after hitting .299 a year ago and leading the team with 20 stolen bases.



## HOPES HIGH AGAIN FOR TECH SOFTBALL SQUAD

The Hokies saw their top hitter and pitcher depart, but coach Scot Thomas is optimistic about his team's chance at reaching an NCAA regional for the third straight year

by **Marc Mullen**

The Virginia Tech softball program has come full circle since its first season in the Atlantic Coast Conference and should hope that trend continues.

Back in 2005, the Hokies earned their first bid of what would become four straight trips to the NCAAs, and they ended that stretch in 2008 by advancing out of the regional round for the first time on their way to the Women's College World Series.

After three seasons of missing out on the NCAAs, Tech has been back to the postseason each of the past two years, but has failed to make it out of the opening round both times – just like in 2005 and 2006.

Maybe he was trying to buck that trend, or maybe

he wanted to bring back some of that 2008 magic, but when head coach Scot Thomas had an opening on his staff late last summer, he turned to a familiar name among Hokie Nation and hired Angela Tinchler O'Brien as the team's pitching coach.

"Everyone's been really excited [of Tinchler O'Brien returning]," Thomas said. "I think the girls already feel like they have a good working relationship with her. They just feel like the things that they are learning now are very much a positive, and they are heading in the right direction.

"So we are excited. I think the pitching staff as a whole is excited about where they are. They are

excited about the new relationship, and it's just a matter of applying it to game circumstances."

Tincher O'Brien, who was a three-time All-American and the 2008 national player of the year, will help a young staff led by sophomores Kelly Heinz and Maggie Tyler, who will combine to replace last year's ace, Jasmin Harrell.

Heinz performed well in her rookie campaign, leading the team with a 2.68 ERA in 156.2 innings. She posted a 17-8 record, with three saves, and she struck out a team-high 169 batters. Tyler showed promise in her first season, going 3-2, with one save and a 3.12 ERA in 60.2 innings. She struck out 44.

"Kelly had a lot of big wins last year against some big-named teams, ranked opponents and so forth," Thomas said. "So the expectations for Kelly are to come back and have a similar sophomore campaign, and she's somebody who we are going to kind of lean on because she has been in big games.

"But Mags [Tyler], it probably didn't play out the way we kind of had anticipated for her last year. She probably didn't get quite the number of games early, but she did down the stretch. In fact, we started her in the ACC tournament against NC State because they had not seen her, and she was starting to really get more innings at the end.

"Expectations for Maggie are equal to Kelly, and we see them as two No. 1s and not just a 1 and a 2. I think they do different things. They're two different kinds of pitchers, but both of them can be effective in their own rights. So that's kind of where we're looking to utilize them as two No. 1s instead of a 1 and 2."

Right behind the circle, the pitchers will see two familiar faces, though one might need a second glance. Junior Kylie McGoldrick returns as a two-year starter at second base (113 career starts), while junior Lauren Gaskill will move from centerfield (122 career starts) to shortstop. McGoldrick, a first-team All-ACC choice, hit .344 last season, with 11 homers and 33 RBIs. Gaskill hit .299 and led the team with 20 stolen bases.

Gaskill replaces Bkaye Smith in the infield and will team with McGoldrick as Tech's double-play tandem. It won't be too unfamiliar to the duo, though, as they played for three years at those positions on the same high school club team – Newtown Rock Gold out of Newtown, Pa.

"Lauren is a tremendous athlete, and of course, she played shortstop in high school, so it's not like it's a big move," Thomas said. "As a matter of fact, I think all of our outfielders are former shortstops, so we're taking athletes and putting them where we feel like we need them to be, and Lauren is very capable of playing.



Two-year starter Kylie McGoldrick returns at second base after earning first-team All-ACC honors following a sophomore year in which she hit .344 and had 11 homers.

"She doesn't have the big arm in the hole, but she's going to get balls and keep them in the infield, which is great, and we feel good about it. And then she and Kylie have a lot of confidence in each other playing up the middle together, so I think that will be a comfort for her, and they'll be great together."

The biggest question mark on defense for the Hokies entering the 2014 season will be behind the plate. Tech lost both Courtney Liddle and Betty Rose, who platooned last year at catcher, to graduation, and Kelsey Mericka, who was the frontrunner to start this year, is taking a redshirt year because of an injury, thus leaving a hole.

A number of players saw action at catcher during the fall, but Michelle Prong, a transfer from Stanford, may get the starting nod despite just enrolling in classes in January. Tech's staff recruited Prong out of Victor High School in Victor, N.Y., but she chose Stanford instead. With a degree already in hand, she comes to Blacksburg with two years of eligibility left and Pac-12 experience under her belt.

"Well, the catcher position is not a place where you want to have a question mark, but we do," Thomas said. "Kelsey Mericka is who we thought was going to be there, but she had surgery, and she's going to be out for the year.

"Katey Smith [who took a redshirt year last season] is who we worked there in the fall, and she did a really nice job. I think Katey can be great back there. She knows the game. She's a former shortstop herself, a big kid with a great

arm, and she's thrown great pop times [from the time the ball hits the catcher's glove until the time it hits the glove of the middle infielder at second base]. It's just a matter of her having to hit to stay in the lineup.

"Michelle Prong has some experience behind the plate as well. She's really a true utility player who can catch, play outfield, play infield. Again, it's going to come down to who's hitting, and then the catching spot is a little bit different. You got to have someone who can receive and catch, but I feel confident that Katey or Michelle can handle that."

Liddle, who returns to the Tech dugout as a volunteer assistant, also led the Hokies at the plate and her .347 batting average, 42 runs, 37 RBIs and .489 on-base percentage will have to be replaced.

That's where Thomas begins to point to newcomers like Elizabeth Birlle out of Winter Spring, Fla., and Vanessa Gonzalez from Torrance, Calif. He also believes that some veterans need to live up to their potential, but sometimes the production comes from the least likely of places.

"Well, Bkaye [Smith] was the big surprise for us last year," Thomas said. "She had struggled offensively basically for the first three years, and then she had a nice year last year for us and really set the table for the top of the lineup. That was a big loss, but there is always someone ready to step up.

"Vanessa Gonzalez led us in the fall. She's

going to be playing in the outfield. Elizabeth Birle is a kid who comes into here with mad power, and she'll be able to replace anything that Courtney left us there.

"And there is always someone that steps up and gets it done. I think it will be interesting to see where Bailey Liddle is, if she can come back and be consistent and get it done. And then there are some other people, like Dani [Anderson] was up and down, but Dani has the potential to be a .300 hitter. So there are a lot of question marks, not in ability, but in who is going to step up, and a lot of that you don't know until the games start."

Three new teams enter the ACC on the softball side, as Notre Dame, Pittsburgh and Syracuse all field teams. That brings the total number of softball teams to 11, of which eight will advance to the conference tournament.

Not only does the addition of new teams alter the postseason, but it also changes the dynamic of the regular season, and the Hokies have certainly drawn the short straw when it comes to the ACC schedule. Their first four conference series will be against the preseason top four teams in the league, as voted on by the ACC's coaches and released Feb. 3.

"The way the league plays out, we never had to play league games prior to spring break,"



Kelly Heinz becomes the ace of Tech's pitching staff after going 17-8 during her freshman season.



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Thomas said. “This year, we have North Carolina before we leave for spring break, Florida State on spring break in the middle of the week and then we come back here and play Notre Dame.

“So you got a team in North Carolina, who is a perennial power in our league; Florida State, who is predicted to win it; and then Notre Dame, who was in a regional with us as a perennial power in the BIG EAST. Then we turn around and the next weekend play NC State, who won


the conference [last year].

“So we are seeing the top teams right away, and then there are still some tough teams, like Georgia Tech. They’re going to be really good. I think you’ll see new life out of Virginia. So there is going to be quality, but we define our season early on.”

Thomas believes that Tech’s nonconference schedule will prepare it for later and hopes that a couple of big wins early, like say at preseason

top-10 Alabama or against a Big Ten team like Michigan State or Illinois, will build the team’s confidence heading into the second half.

And that’s most important – how a team finishes, not how it starts. Just ask the 2008 squad, which sat at 14-8 after a March 8 loss to Notre Dame. The Hokies then ripped off a 35-9 string that took them to Oklahoma City for the Women’s College World Series.

They hope history repeats itself. 

## GETTING TO KNOW LAUREN GASKILL

Lauren Gaskill is one of Tech’s most productive offensive weapons. She was twice named a NFCA Mid-Atlantic all-region player, an ACC all-tournament selection and first-team all-state player by the state’s sports information directors. Below are several questions to allow Tech fans to learn more about the junior shortstop.

### My winter break was spent ...

“Doing a lot of training – a lot of running and hitting, just making sure I stay in good shape. I also spent some time giving lessons. I’m also a big family person, so it’s always good catching up with them and spending time with them any chance I get.”

### My pregame routine consists of ...

“Putting on my headphones and listening to music. I have four or five songs that I listen to on the bus to help get me focused. I also try and visualize

the pitchers we will be facing and focus on what I’ll need to do in the game to help us win.”

### My favorite Tech moment, so far, was ...

“I don’t have a favorite moment, but the run to the ACC title game my freshman year was great. It all felt surreal to be happening, and it was such an incredible year. To make regionals for the first time since 2008 was great.”

### I wear No. 3 because ...

“I always had worn No. 11 – that’s my number. I wore it my entire career, but when I came here, that was taken, and it was hard because I never had worn a different number. So I wear No. 3, and Babe Ruth wore No. 3. It was weird the first time, but I’ve gotten used to it.”

### My favorite uniform combination is ...

“For me, I would have to say orange,

white, orange. That uniform looks good on everybody, and when we wear it, you don’t hear anyone complain about it. It just looks sharp!”

### You’ve stolen 44 bases in your Tech career, and that’s due to ...

“My speed. That’s the key component, but also just being smart. Being able to read the ball out of the pitcher’s hand and getting good jumps is important. You also have to make sure your head’s down and you’re staying aggressive.”

### Tech fans will be excited for the 2014 season because ...

“We have a lot of players coming back, even though we lost four key girls. Our freshmen should help us out. We’re young, but we are experienced. The majority of the team has been to the regionals twice now, so we are ready to get out there and get back to another one.”



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