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HOKI SPORTS

Official Publication of the Virginia Tech Athletics



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Offensive line coach Curt Newsome instructed the guards and centers at one of Tech's spring football practices.



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On the Web...

Hey Hokie Fans! Follow all your favorite Virginia Tech teams on Twitter and stay updated on all the latest news!

hokiesports.com/social/



UPCOMING EVENT PROMOTIONS

APRIL

16 Lacrosse vs. Maryland Noon
VT Pink Caps to first 100 Fans!

Baseball vs. FSU 1:00 p.m.
Sweatbands to first 500 fans!
Player Trading Card Set #2 Giveaway!
Post-game Autograph Session with Sophomore Class!

23 Softball vs. NC State Noon
VT Tote Bags to first 300 fans!

MAY

1 Softball vs. Maryland 1:00 p.m.
HokieBird Growth Charts to first 100 kids!
Post-game Ice Cream Social, Autograph Session and Youth Skills Clinic!

14 Baseball vs. Clemson 2:00 p.m.
Player Trading Card Set #3 Giveaway!
Post-game Autograph Session with Junior Class!

All Olympic sports events are FREE!

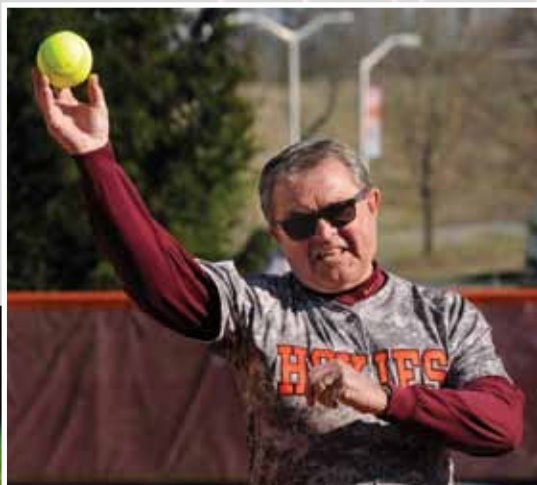
SPRING FESTIVAL SATURDAY, APRIL 23



Inflatables and Games • Face Painting • Autograph Session with the HokieBird
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MILITARY APPRECIATION DAY



Associate Head Softball Coach Al Brauns - a former Marine and Vietnam War veteran - threw out the first pitch on "Military Appreciation Day" at Tech Softball Park prior to the Hokies' March 29 game against UNC Greensboro.



THE STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

"Being a Hokie has been a blessing. The experiences I've had as a student-athlete at Virginia Tech have helped shape me into who I am today. I would have never had this without the support of the Hokie Club. Thank you!"

Richelle McGarva - Senior - Softball

"Thank you for all your support over the years. I have had an amazing experience as a student-athlete because of you! Go Hokies!"

Matt Blow - Senior - Baseball



Donor Files

Molly de Lima-Campos

Current Hokie Club level:

Golden Hokie

Hokie Club member since:

2009

Currently resides:

Oakton, Va.

Family:

Husband - Bruno

Graduation year:

2003



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

A: We are big Hokie football fans. Without the support of the Hokie Club and its donors, our athletics programs may not have made as much progress. The funds we raise help build better facilities, which in turn helps with recruiting and our program. It all comes full circle.

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

A: I originally came to Virginia Tech with the aspiration to play Division 1 softball, so Virginia Tech athletics have always been with me. Knowing I was a Hokie came from the feeling I got as soon as I came onto campus for the first time before I even attended my first game. That's what Virginia Tech does to you.

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

A: Well, I always try to adorn myself in as much Hokie gear as possible. But my must-haves are my Hokie wristbands (the original Team Hokie Orange and Maroon bands, We Are Virginia Tech and my newly purchased Beat Cancer bands), my Hokie shoes signed by Bud Foster and my Hokie belt.

Q: Since becoming a Virginia Tech fan, do you have a favorite team/season or game that stands out the most in your mind?

A: My freshman year was 1999, the same year that Michael Vick started. I was never much of a college football fan before coming to Tech, but I was definitely lucky to become a fan when I did.

The game that stands out the most has to be the Georgia Tech game in 2004. My friends and I took a flight down that day, on a plane full of Hokies, for the Thursday night game in Atlanta. The game was tight all night, and toward the end, we were down by a touchdown. The Georgia Tech fans who had been heckling us all night gave their final yelps and left the game early, figuring there would be no chance for us to make a comeback. But wouldn't you know that our Hokies came back to score three touchdowns in six minutes, winning us the game. There were plenty of Hokies cheering, but not a Yellow Jacket in sight.

Q: How did you become involved with the NOVA Hokie Club? Has being a rep been a positive experience for you; and why?

A: I joined the Hokie Club two years ago, taking over the rep position for my friend who had moved away. Since I've joined, it's been fun and exciting to be involved in our fundraising events. Given how important Hokie football is to me and my husband, it's great to help out as much as I can.

Interesting Hokie fact ...

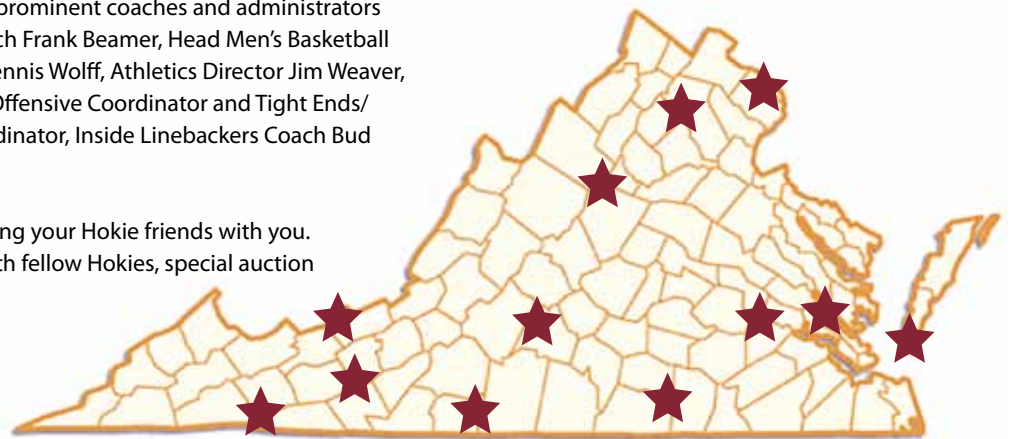
Virginia Tech is located off of Exit 118b on Interstate 81. Our in-state rival, the University of Virginia, is located off of Exit 118b on Interstate 64. Now how did that happen?

2011 ORANGE & MAROON TOUR

The 2011 version of the Orange & Maroon Tour is here and the Hokie Club and Virginia Tech athletics are excited to be coming to an area near you. This year's tour promises to be full of excitement as we are pleased to have our many of our athletic department's prominent coaches and administrators in attendance. Scheduled to attend are Head Football Coach Frank Beamer, Head Men's Basketball Coach Seth Greenberg, Head Women's Basketball Coach Dennis Wolff, Athletics Director Jim Weaver, Assistant to the Head Coach and Senior Advisor Billy Hite, Offensive Coordinator and Tight Ends/Offensive Tackles Coach Bryan Stinespring, Defensive Coordinator, Inside Linebackers Coach Bud Foster and Quarterbacks Coach Mike O'Cain.

We hope you will come out and join us for an event and bring your Hokie friends with you. In addition to good food, great speakers, and a fun time with fellow Hokies, special auction items will be available at most events.

For more information on the 2011 Orange & Maroon Tour, visit hokieclub.com



EVENTS - Date, Location, Speakers - More information at www.hokieclub.com

VIRGINIA EVENTS

April 19 – Lynchburg
Frank Beamer, Dennis Wolff

April 19 – Pulaski/Radford
Jim Weaver, Bud Foster

April 21 – Bluefield
Frank Beamer, Dennis Wolff

April 21 – SW Virginia
Jim Weaver, Billy Hite

April 26 – Fauquier
Frank Beamer

April 27 – Western Tidewater/Franklin
Frank Beamer, Dennis Wolff

April 27 – Staunton/Waynesboro/Harrisonburg
Jim Weaver, Bryan Stinespring

April 27 – Southside
Seth Greenberg, Bud Foster

April 28 – Tri Cities
Frank Beamer

April 28 – Martinsville/Danville
Jim Weaver, Dennis Wolff

May 3 – Peninsula
Jim Weaver, Dennis Wolff

May 11 – Fredericksburg
Seth Greenberg

May 23 – Northern Virginia
Seth Greenberg

EVENTS OUTSIDE VIRGINIA

May 3 – Raleigh/Durham
Seth Greenberg, Mike O'Cain

May 4 – Triad
Jim Weaver, Dennis Wolff

May 4 – Outer Banks
Seth Greenberg, Bryan Stinespring

May 5 – Maryland
Seth Greenberg

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NEWS & NOTES

CARTER NAMED ACC CO-ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

Tech wrestler Devin Carter, a freshman from nearby Christiansburg, Va., went farther than any Tech wrestler at the NCAA Wrestling Championships on March 18, but came up a win shy of earning All-America honors. Carter fell 10-3 in the round of 12 to Bernard Futrell of Illinois at the 133-pound weight class, but he still won three matches in his first NCAA appearance.

A few days later, Carter was named the ACC's co-rookie of the year in voting conducted among the league's head coaches. He shared the honor with Maryland heavyweight Spencer Myers.

Carter finished the year with a 35-7 record overall, including a 21-3 dual match record. After going unbeaten against five conference foes in regular-season matches, Carter was ranked ninth nationally in his weight class and captured the 133-pound title at the ACC Championships.

GAYLE THE TOP PERFORMER IN STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING TESTING

Mike Gentry, Tech's associate AD for athletic performance, and his staff conducted strength and conditioning testing for the football team before spring break, and James Gayle earned the highest honor handed out by the staff.

Gayle, a rising redshirt sophomore from Hampton, Va., earned an Excalibur Award, which takes into account a composite look at the four major lifts (bench press, front squat, power clean and push jerks) and the five conditioning

tests (40-yard dash, 10-yard sprint, NFL shuttle run, sit-reach test and vertical jump). Gentry and his staff put together a scale based upon certain criteria used by Nebraska and the NFL's Dallas Cowboys to come up with the Excalibur Award.

Gayle, a 6-foot-4, 251-pound defensive end, recorded a 420-pound bench and a 420-pound front squat. He finished with a 341-pound push jerk, and he set the defensive ends record in the power clean with a 366-pound lift. He had a 38-inch vertical jump and ran the 40 in 4.45.

"He's a motivated kid," Gentry said. "He's always shown that he wants to be good. He asks a lot of questions, and he's always serious. The strides he made were a little surprising, but his maturity caught up with him. We always say that as you get stronger, you're going to get faster. That's been the case with James."

Gayle was one of 11 Hokies to earn Super Iron status in the strength and conditioning program. In fact, Gentry and his staff recognized 70 award winners in all – the most in recent memory.

"I thought this was one of our better offseasons, not just in terms of performance, but also in terms of improvement and attitude," Gentry said. "We had a group of willing workers who wanted to get better. That we honored 70 players tells you that the group was focused and that they bought in to what we were trying to do."

The rest of the Super Iron Hokies include Winston Painter, David Wang, Josh Oglesby, Riley Beiro, Joey Phillips, Mark Carter, D.J. Coles, Marcus Davis, Telvion Clark and Wiley Brown. Wang, Painter and Phillips all came up just a tad short

of joining Gayle as winners of an Excalibur Award.

Gentry also pointed out several other tremendous performers in the program, even though they didn't quite reach Excalibur or Super Iron status. That list included Jarrett Boykin, Danny Coale, J.R. Collins, Chris Drager, Jayron Hosley, Alonzo Tweedy and Logan Thomas.

STRENGTH & CONDITIONING 2011 SPRING TESTING**Bench Press (lbs.)**

1. Winston Painter (465)
2. Nick Acree (430)
3. James Gayle (420)
4. Tyler Barfield (420)
5. Courtney Prince (410)

Front Squat (lbs.)

1. Derrick Hopkins (485)
2. Winston Painter (485)
3. Tyler Barfield (475)
4. D.J. Coles (450)
5. David Wilson (445)

Push Jerk (lbs.)

1. David Wang (370)
2. Tyler Barfield (363)
3. Josh Oglesby (361)
4. Winston Painter (360)
5. Andrew Miller (358)

Power Clean (lbs.)

1. David Wang (380)
2. Jaymes Brooks (375)
3. Joey Phillips (370)
4. Andrew Miller (351)
5. Michael Via (285)

Vertical Jump (in.)

1. Marcus Davis (44)
2. David Wilson (40)
3. Jarrett Boykin (40)
4. Alonzo Tweedy (38.5)
5. Ricardo Young (38.5)


40-yard Dash (sec.)

1. David Wilson (4.29)
2. Mark Carter (4.33)
3. Alonzo Tweedy (4.33)
4. Corey Fuller (4.36)
5. Marcus Davis (4.37)

10-yard Sprint (sec.)

1. David Wilson (1.63)
2. Kyle Fuller (1.67)
3. Danny Coale (1.68)
4. Mark Carter (1.68)
5. Jayron Hosley (1.68)

NFL Shuttle (sec.)

1. David Wilson (3.85)
2. Mark Carter (4.02)
3. Kyle Fuller (4.02)
4. Alonzo Tweedy (4.03)
5. Willie Byrn (4.04) 

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THE SPOTLIGHT'S ON THOMAS AS HOKIES PREPARE FOR LIFE WITHOUT TAYLOR

Logan Thomas' week off for Spring Break roughly a month ago was anything but a week at the beach.

He spent most of it in his hometown of Lynchburg, actually most of it at his home while his untrustworthy car sat in a repair shop with a litany of ailments. Thomas got his car back, but the unreliable 2003 Mitsubishi Gallant proved – well – unreliable yet again and needed another visit to an automobile's training room.

"I'm not driving that anymore," he said, laughing. "It's just parked now."

Instead, unless someone takes them from him in an improbable display this spring, he's inherited the keys to a much more important ride – the smooth-running machine that is the Virginia Tech football program. How well he steers it will go a long way toward determining the Hokies' 2011 destination.

Thomas, a hulking rising redshirt sophomore, takes over for Tyrod Taylor, one of the most decorated quarterbacks in Tech history – and also the winningest. Taylor threw for more than 2,700 yards last season, with 24 touchdowns and just five interceptions. He also won the ACC's player of the year award. He holds virtually every passing and total offense record at Tech. But more importantly, he won 34 games as the Hokies' starting quarterback.

For the first time in four springs, No. 5 will not be the primary signal caller. The honor now belongs to No. 3, who served as Taylor's apprentice a year ago.

"There is if you let it get to you, but I'm

trying to keep it out right now," Thomas said of the pressure of replacing Taylor. "I try not to read any blogs or watch any ESPN ... what they say about it. I just keep to myself and focus on my studies and just stay with my friends so I can stay away from all that."

Thomas appears to be well equipped to deal with any pressure. For starters, he got just enough playing time in a mop-up role last season to dust off the fears of playing in front of the cameras and bright lights. He completed less than 50 percent of his passes (only 26 attempts), but his third-down pass to Danny Coale at a critical point in the Miami game gave him tremendous confidence.

Physically, he stands 6-foot-6, and he weighs 245 pounds. He's certainly not as elusive as Taylor, but he's not a plodder either. He ran the 40-yard dash in 4.69 seconds in strength and conditioning testing before spring break.

Mentally, he's spent two years in the quarterbacks meeting room with Mike O'Cain and Taylor and the rest of the quarterbacks. He knows Tech's offense, probably inside and out. The question will be whether he knows opposing defenses well enough to exploit them.

As a quarterback, it's not an either/or proposition. One must know both.

"I watched a lot more film than I did in the past," he said. "A lot of it was just being able to read the defense and knowing where to go with the ball before the ball was snapped. That really helped me out

knowing our play, what they were doing on defense and knowing where to go with the ball. I'd just have a little pause of the tape (before the snap), knowing what you have play-wise, then looking and you see Cover-1 or Cover-2, and then you know where to go with the ball."

The Hokies' ride possesses plenty of bells and whistles for Thomas. His entire receiving corps returns, led by Danny Coale and Jarrett Boykin, and David Wilson provides an exciting option at tailback. Four very good starters return on the offensive line as well.


In other words, he will have plenty of horsepower.

Thomas has some things to work on, particularly his leadership skills. Oh, he possesses them, but O'Cain and the rest of Tech's staff wants to see him use them.

"I guess he just wants me to speak up more and lead vocally, not only just running around out there and having energy," Thomas said. "All throughout high school, that's what I was. So it's just getting adjusted and feeling comfortable doing it right now."

At least one teammate doesn't foresee Thomas having any trouble getting guys' attention.

"He's 6-6 and 250 pounds," Wilson said. "I think he'll be able to take control in the huddle."

Spring practice has started, Thomas is at the wheel and he's already hit the road. For sure, Tech fans are hoping it's a ride that leads to a week at the beach for New Year's. 

Bud Foster's Lunch Pail Defense Foundation



The purpose of The Lunch Pail Defense Foundation, a recently formed non-profit corporation headquartered in Blacksburg, VA, is to annually fund a need-based academic college scholarship to an eligible student from the New River Valley. In short, the eligible student will personify the focus and fortitude embodied in the spirit of "The Lunch Pail" by demonstrating hard work, good character and determination to succeed in all areas of life.



To find out more about the scholarship and eligibility please visit <http://lunchpaildefense.com>.



SPRING FOOTBALL PRACTICE ONCE AGAIN REVEALS NUMEROUS STORYLINES

Virginia Tech's spring football game – also known as the Hokie Nation's annual *Spring Tailgate Party Extravaganza* – is just a couple of weeks away. The spring game at Tech is always a fun time (especially if the weather cooperates). So while you're getting ready to try a new recipe or two for your April 23 tailgate, here are eight storylines to track during the time leading up to this year's game.

1. QUARTERBACK – Logan Thomas moves into the role to replace Tech's all-time winningest quarterback, the record-shattering Tyrod Taylor. Thomas has the size (6-6, 245) and the big-league arm, but he's thrown a grand total of just 26 passes in his collegiate career. Quarterbacks coach Mike O'Cain, who has assumed play-calling duties, has thrown a lot at Thomas this spring, and head coach Frank Beamer has praised Thomas' mental makeup and leadership skills.

"He's got everything you'd want in a quarterback," Beamer said. "He's got the intangibles and leadership skills that you like in that huddle."

Recent Tech quarterbacks like Bryan Randall and Taylor were heady kids, and Thomas seems to be similar. That should be really exciting to you if you're a Tech fan. He's written down personal notes to himself since the end of last season, which are reminders of his personal "points of emphasis."

It's been a big spring in Thomas' development in many ways as he prepares for the curtain to rise on his role as the starting quarterback in the fall.

2. WHIP LINEBACKER – This is one area where the Hokies have to get better play in 2011.

"We had to play a hodge-podge of guys there last year," Beamer admitted.



David Wilson has a ton of explosiveness, and it's his turn to star at tailback after the departures of Darren Evans and Ryan Williams.

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As a result, the Hokies never got the consistency and productivity they've grown to expect out of that spot. Tech had to adjust so much last year and play a ton of nickel defense. Thus, the Hokies got away from the basic template defensive coordinator Bud Foster has used over the years. Jeron Gouveia-Winslow, Alonzo Tweedy, who has played a lot of good football on special teams, and a pair of redshirt freshmen in Nick Dew and Dominique Patterson, remain in the mix for the starting job.

"We are really looking for playmakers [at whip]," Beamer said.

3. DEFENSIVE LINE – Charley Wiles and the defensive line lost three starters from last year's team: defensive end Chris Drager, who moved back to tight end, John Graves and Steven Friday. The new starters at end will be J.R. Collins and James Gayle, both of whom saw time last year and had their moments.

Inside, the Hopkins brothers – Antoine and Derrick – are going to have to play, as Wiles likes to say, with "high motors." Zack McCray and Duan Perez-Means have been exciting to watch, and Kwamaine Battle's return from ACL injury has helped bolster that line as well.

4. RUNNING BACK – Darren Evans and Ryan Williams both left Tech early for the NFL, meaning it's David Wilson's turn to star at tailback for the Hokies. Wilson is running track this spring for Tech and will not play in the spring game – it's the same weekend as the ACC Track & Field Championships. But coaches and fans alike know Wilson's ability.

Josh Oglesby returns to tailback after a season at the fullback position, and rover James Hopper, who was a high school tailback, has

gotten a good look on offense this spring. Hopper, who scored four touchdowns as a tailback in the 2008 North Carolina Class 4A state championship game, rushed for 1,400 yards and 26 touchdowns as a senior.

5. OFFENSIVE LINE – Tech returns four starters, but the staff wants more depth. The Hokies have flipped Winston Painter and Laurence Gibson to try to get that. This year, Painter will play tackle, which was his high school position, and Gibson will move to guard.

Painter has had an interesting odyssey at Tech. He started out on defense, where he was projected as a tackle. After a year, he was moved to offense, but he has played sparingly on the o-line despite an incredible physique. He got only 34 snaps last year.

Overall, Beamer wants more out of his offensive line.

"We had our moments last year," he said. "But we don't want to get to a bowl game and not be able to run the football."

6. GUYS COMING BACK FROM INJURIES – Tailback Tony Gregory, coming back from a knee injury, has gotten limited work. Battle (knee) and linebacker Barquell Rivers (quad) have worked their way back this spring.

When you see how hard guys work over the months to get back on the playing field, you just can't help but really pull for them to have big springs and all three of those kids have spent a lot of time working to come back from really serious injuries. Dyrell Roberts has seen limited work this spring coming back from his compartment syndrome injury.

7. KICKING – Want to hear a mind-boggling statistic? In the past two seasons

– that's a total of 28 games – the Hokies have missed a grand total of four field-goal attempts. Last year, Chris Hazley was 21 of 22.


The Hokies are hopeful that Cody Journell is ready to step up this year. Beamer likes Conor Goulding as both a punter and kicker, too. The strongest leg on the team might belong to kickoff master Justin Myer.

"I think he could be a fantastic field-goal guy if he could just ever get the same stroke time after time, get the consistency. Because he's got a strong, strong leg and he gets the ball up quickly," Beamer said.

Former Murray State Racer Tyler Weiss also is in the mix.

8. CHRIS DRAGER BACK TO TIGHT END – Beamer called Drager "one of the most unselfish guys we've had here," and it's easy to see why. He was perhaps the top tight end on the team when he was moved over to defensive end because of the shortage of depth there two seasons ago. Now, he's back on offense, which "is his natural position," Beamer said.

Drager played 11 games at tight end during the 2008 season. He had three receptions for 37 yards before agreeing to move to defense in 2009. Last year, Drager had 31 tackles, including 4.5 for loss and two sacks. The Hokies need him at tight end, but the move also shows that Wiles is confident in Gayle and Collins at the defensive end positions. Now, Drager can finish his college career where he started – on offense. It's also his best position for a future pro career.

.....
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STUDENT LIFE

SIMON AND DRAGER RECEIVE SKELTON AWARDS AS TECH HONORS ATHLETES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The Hokie student-athletes have reached new heights on the field, court, track and in the pool this semester, and more importantly, in the classroom. It doesn't seem like there are enough hours in the day, but somehow these students manage to balance the challenging rigors of academics and athletics at Virginia Tech.

Each year, the Virginia Tech athletics department bestows its most prestigious award on one male and one female student-athlete for their ability to navigate successfully the challenging terrain of Division I intercollegiate athletics. The Skelton Awards for Academic Excellence in Athletics for the 2011-2012 academic year were recently presented to sophomore swimmer Laura Simon and redshirt senior tight end Chris Drager at the 2011 Athletic Director's Honors Breakfast on April 2. The Skelton Award, named after the late Dr. Bill and his wife Peggy Skelton, is presented each year to a rising junior, senior or fifth-year male and female student-athlete who has participated in intercollegiate athletics for at least two seasons at Virginia Tech. Each recipient receives a scholarship for \$5,000 for the upcoming academic year.

This annual breakfast event serves as a platform to recognize the academic successes of the Virginia Tech student-athletes. In addition to the Skelton Award recipients, the members of the 2010 Athletic Director's Honor Roll were also recognized. The AD Honor Roll is designed to pay tribute to student-athletes who have

achieved a grade-point average of 3.0 or better during one or both semesters in the preceding calendar year. Since its inception in 1988, the Honor Roll has recognized an average of more than 200 student-athletes each semester. This year, 362 student-athletes made the AD Honor Roll, which is more than 65 percent of the entire student-athlete population.


The ACC also sponsors an award to outstanding senior student-athletes. Each institution establishes criteria for the award, and Virginia Tech has chosen to honor seniors who excel in balancing the academic and athletic demands of intercollegiate athletics. This year's ACC-VT Male and Female Scholar-Athletes of the Year are Kelly Phillips and Pedro Graber.

Phillips is one of the top female track and field student-athletes in school history. She recently won the NCAA Elite 88 Academic Award and was named to the USTFCCA All-Academic squad for the second time. She is a two-time ACC champion and All-American in the pole vault, and set a new school record during the 2011 indoor season. Graber has been a member of the ACC Academic Honor Roll and Virginia Tech AD Honor Roll since enrolling at Virginia Tech. He is a two-time ITA Scholar-Athlete. During the 2009-2010 academic year, he was honored with the Skelton Award for Academic Excellence in Athletics.

The ACC is also committed to providing student-athletes with financial support for postgraduate endeavors through

the ACC Postgraduate Scholarship Program. Phillips and Graber, along with women's soccer player Jennifer Harvey, are recipients of the 2010-2011 ACC Postgraduate Scholarship Awards, also known as the Weaver-James-Corrigan Graduate Scholarship.

The Weaver-James-Corrigan scholarships are awarded to three student-athletes from each conference institution who intend to pursue a postgraduate degree. Each recipient receives \$5,000 to contribute to his or her postgraduate education. Harvey and Phillips both plan to attend medical school. Graber is currently pursuing a master's degree in industrial systems engineering at Tech and hopes to pursue a career in operational research.

The athletics department is proud to recognize the outstanding impact these student-athletes are making in their academic careers. Not only does it show how successful they are in harmonizing their multiple commitments, but it also proves that they have highlighted the "student" in student-athlete first and foremost. 



Laura Simon and Chris Drager earned the Skelton Award, the top honor given by the Tech athletics department.

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Erick Green, who averaged 11.6 points per game this season in his first as a starter, will be a critical figure for Tech next season.

TECH'S 2010-11 SEASON COMES TO END WITH NIT LOSS TO WICHITA STATE

Seth Greenberg wasted little time in putting this past season to rest and beginning preparations for next season.

In fact, it took him roughly three hours.

Virginia Tech's 2010-11 season came to an end with an excruciating 79-76 overtime loss to Wichita State in the second round of the National Invitation Tournament. A season of injuries, a suspension and a transfer mixed with character, grit and great wins came to a conclusion when the Shockers' Joe Ragland hit a short floater in front of the rim with less than three seconds remaining, a final blow to a trying year for a Tech squad that finished 22-12 on the year.

Not that Greenberg spent a lot of time reflecting on said year, at least in the short term.

"I'm meeting with these guys at 5 o'clock basically to paint a picture of where we're going now," he said following the early-afternoon game.

That's because Ragland's shot all but finished an era in Tech men's basketball. It put an end not only to the Hokies' season, but also to the careers of a senior class that tied the school record for career wins by a class. Led by the trio of Malcolm Delaney, Terrell Bell and Jeff Allen, the senior class won 87 games, tying the 1985-86 senior class' mark.

Greenberg expects this class to be remembered forever for that and for reaching postseason play all four years, though none of those appearances included an invitation to the NCAA Tournament

"They're not going to be defined by not making the NCAA Tournament," Greenberg said.

“Malcolm Delaney and those guys are going to be defined by ... those guys won a lot of games. You can have all the cynics you want, and all the people are going to take swipes at you and say, ‘you need to do this with your schedule’ ... that’s all BS.

“These kids played their tails off for four years. Anyone who doesn’t think they have accomplished a great deal, that’s their problem, not these kids’ problems. We’re not going to be defined by a group of 10 people in a room [the NCAA selection committee]. They’re going to be defined by what they did for every single day for four years, and that’s win a lot of games.”

Statistically, Delaney and Allen rank as two of the best players in the history of the school. Delaney finished third behind Bimbo Coles and Dell Curry on the all-time scoring list with 2,255 points. Allen became the first player in ACC history to finish with at least 1,500 career points, 1,000 career rebounds, 200 career steals and 150 career blocked shots. He ranks in the top five in career rebounds, steals and blocks at Tech.

And while Bell didn’t put up those types of numbers, he certainly provided the invaluable plays that never find their way onto a box score.

“I’ll remember how much I’ve grown with my senior class,” Delaney said. “We came in as a bunch of guys who liked to joke around and play around, but usually when we got in the gym, we got after each other. Whatever we did, we were competitive. Coach helped us out with that. When we got here, everyone was the man on their team in high school. We had to work on coming in with Deron [Washington] and A.D. [Vassallo], two players who had already established themselves in the ACC. We had to play that backseat role.

“I’ll remember T-Bell [Terrell Bell] ... we had to find a spot where we could put him because he was so athletic, but we knew he could play. And Jeff, how he turned his whole career around in one year. It’s good to see how our senior class ended up tying the record for career wins, and Jeff breaking records and me breaking records. That’s stuff we can look back on when we leave here. That’s the biggest thing. I’m just proud of our senior class.”

Now, though, all eyes look toward the future of Virginia Tech basketball – and the picture appears slightly blurred.

Tech returns two starters off this year’s team in guard Erick Green and center Victor Davila. Green started 26 games after Dorenzo Hudson went down for the

Victor Davila, who started all 34 games for Tech this past season, could be one of three seniors in the starting lineup for the Hokies in 2011-12.



season with a foot injury and averaged 11.6 points per game, while Davila started all 34 games and averaged 7.4 points and 5.1 rebounds. Both played solid basketball, particularly Green, who played really well as a starter.

Reserves Manny Atkins and Tyrone Garland are slated to return. Atkins, a rising junior, averaged 4.9 points and two rebounds per game, but he gave Tech terrific minutes down the stretch. He could step into Bell's spot. Garland played in 30 games, but he played way too tentatively. The offseason figures to be huge for him.

After those four, questions remain. Can Hudson return to his All-ACC form? Can JT Thompson, who tore his ACL before the season, return and be an explosive force? Will Cadarian Raines, plagued by foot problems for two years, be able to help in the post? What about Jarell Eddie, an immensely talented youngster who was suspended down the stretch for an off-court issue? Will he return? Then, there's Allan Chaney, the transfer from Florida who missed the season with an inflammation of the heart. Will he play basketball ever again? It's not looking likely.

A nucleus of Green, Davila, Hudson, Thompson and Atkins certainly gives

Tech an experienced five, with three seniors and two juniors. Garland and Raines (and Eddie, if he returns) could provide production off the bench, and Greenberg figures to get significant minutes from four incoming freshmen, including Dorian Finney-Smith, the highest-rated recruit whom Greenberg has ever signed. Finney-Smith led his I.C. Norcom [Va.] High team to back-to-back Group AAA titles.

Of all those players, Green is the biggest key to Tech's future. He assumes the mantle from Delaney, a two-time All-ACC first-team selection who started the final 125 games of his career and every game for three straight seasons. Green appears to want the challenge.

"The main thing I'm going to work on coming up is leadership," Green said. "This is my team, and I want to get these guys right. I have high expectations. We're going to work hard, and our goal is the [NCAA] tournament. There's not going to be joke time. We're going to get after it."

Greenberg called this past season a grind, but "it was a grind that was worth the ride." Now, it's over.

How will the ride be next season? It's tough to say.

But for sure, it's already in motion.

DELANEY NAMED TO ACC ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM

Delaney received a spot on the ACC's all-tournament team after leading the Hokies to two victories at the event in Greensboro, N.C. Tech bounced Georgia Tech and Florida State before succumbing 77-63 to Duke in the tournament semifinals.

Delaney averaged 16.7 points per game in the tournament, including a 19-point performance in a losing effort to the Blue Devils.

In the NIT, Delaney scored 13 points in the Hokies' blowout win over Bethune-Cookman and 30 points in the loss to Wichita State. Against the Shockers, he hit 8 of 14 from the floor, including 3 of 6 from beyond the 3-point arc. He also made 11 of 13 at the free-throw line.

It marked the ninth game in his career with at least 30 points.

"It's tough to go out with a loss like this," Delaney said. "But we played our hardest. I can't be mad about how we did. It's better to leave Cassell like this than the way we did senior night [in the loss to BC]."

Delaney also dished out three assists in the loss to Wichita State. He finished his career with 543 assists – just four short of tying Bimbo Coles' school record.

Delaney does hold the school record for

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Malcolm Delaney finished his career as Tech's third all-time leading scorer with 2,255 points. He left as the school's all-time leader in free throws made (721), attempted (853) and free-throw percentage (84.5).

free throws made (721), attempted (853) and percentage (84.5 percent).

DELANEY AND HIS FUTURE PLANS

After the Wichita State game, Delaney was asked about his future plans as he prepares for the NBA Draft. He moved to Atlanta just a couple of weeks after the season ended to start working out with a group down there.


"I'll be working out two times a day, six days a week," he said. "This is going to be the hardest I've ever pushed myself in my life. This is a big summer for me. Now it's about trying to help my family out and establish my career wherever it is. I'm not pressed to play anywhere. Wherever I can be the best fit, that's where I'll go. Wherever I can help my family out, that's what I'm going to do. But I'm going to push myself as hard as I can this summer."

The NBA Draft is scheduled for June 23 in Newark, N.J. It lasts two rounds.

WRAPPING UP ALLEN'S CAREER

Allen, who earned All-ACC honors for the first time after being named to the second team, scored 10 points and grabbed seven rebounds in his final collegiate game before fouling out with a little more than six minutes remaining.

Greenberg called Allen the key to the team during the season, and that was apparent down the stretch. As Allen struggled, so did the Hokies, as they lost four of their final seven games. He averaged 8.8 points per game and 4.5 rebounds per game in those four losses, and he fouled out in two of those four games.

Still, Allen finished with 1,702 career points, which ranks 11th on Tech's all-time list. His 1,111 rebounds rank fourth, just six behind Ace Custis, and his 233 steals also rank fourth, just eight behind Zabian Dowdell. His 150 blocked shots rank fifth on the all-time list. 

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WOMEN'S HOOPS

EXTRA

Dennis Wolff became the sixth women's basketball coach in Virginia Tech history when Tech AD Jim Weaver named him the head coach on March 22.

WOLFF TAKES OVER

THE TECH WOMEN'S BASKETBALL PROGRAM GETS A NEW HEAD COACH

Normally, when making personnel decisions, Tech AD Jim Weaver and his staff take the traditional and conservative approach.

Yet in making his new hire for the vacant women's basketball head coaching position, Weaver stepped well beyond the norm.

In an example of out-of-the-box thinking, Weaver reached over into the men's basketball staff and tabbed Dennis Wolff as the new women's head coach. Wolff replaces Beth Dunkenberger, who resigned after a season in which Tech went 11-19, 1-13 in the ACC and missed the postseason for the fourth straight year. She served for seven seasons at the helm.

Wolff, who agreed to a six-year contract that pays a base salary of \$233,486 and pays a retention incentive of \$132,000 per year, spent this past season serving as the director of basketball operations for the men's program piloted by Seth Greenberg. He had never been a women's basketball coach – head or assistant – but Weaver looked beyond that, asking Wolff before the women's season ended to entertain the idea of being the head coach of the Tech women's program. After thinking about it for several weeks, Wolff agreed to take the job.

"Because I think he's the best person for the job at this moment in time," Weaver

said when asked why he hired Wolff over someone within the women's game. "I think he has a great knowledge of the game. I think the fact that he coached his son at BU [Matt] and that he coached up his daughter [Nicole] to the point that she was the best player in the land eight years ago [2002 McDonald's Player of the Year] lends itself very favorably to his role as our head coach. And people who know him know he's a tireless worker."

It certainly would be hard to argue against Wolff's impressive credentials as a basketball coach. He served in assistant roles at Virginia, Wake Forest, SMU and St.

Bonaventure. After four years as an assistant at UVa, he spent 15 years as the head coach at Boston University, compiling a 247-187 record, and is the school's all-time winningest coach. He was named America East's Coach of the Year on three separate occasions and guided the Terriers to two NCAA Tournaments. Despite that, the school surprisingly let him go in 2009.

The Queens, N.Y., native took a year off from basketball, attending games and practices and visiting Iraq and Afghanistan on USO tours. Greenberg approached Wolff about a director of basketball operations position on his staff early last summer and ultimately hired him. He allowed Wolff to have a lot of input both in game planning and in-game strategy.

But then Weaver came in with another offer – and Wolff accepted it.

"When he asked me, I thought about it and went, 'Okay,'" Wolff said. "And then I did ask him, 'What makes you think I can do this?' We spoke about the coaching. We spoke about the experiences I've had with my daughter. We spoke about my feelings for the Virginia Tech community. From that point, once I was able to get with my family, I decided this is something that would be a very good thing for us.

"I know that everybody has a lot of questions about this. Let me say this, and before we get into the fact that I haven't coached women in college and I'm absolutely 100 percent aware that there will be some learning curve on some part of it, one of the main reasons that Coach Weaver and I started talking about this is how I began to feel about Virginia Tech. Across the board, my interaction, it really made me feel that this was a special place."

The biggest concerns among those questioning this hire are Wolff's lack of experience coaching the women's game. He was around it a lot while his daughter, Nicole, was being recruited and later playing at UConn under legendary coach Geno Auriemma. But that differs starkly from being around 15 young women every single day.

Wolff admitted as much and addressed the differences in his typical forthright manner.

"I think they want to be coached and they want to be coached in a way that's going to make them be successful," he said. "I think there's probably a little bit of an emotional end of it, and it's something that I had talked to Nicole about before she went to UConn.

"In my opinion, for whatever it's worth, a lot of times the high-level players on

the women's side, they are so dominant all the way through that very rarely do they have anyone say anything to them critical because they've been killing everybody. And when my daughter was making her decision for college, one of the things I made clear was that the minute she went to UConn, that all changed. He [Auriemma] coaches them [his players] like Jim Calhoun [the UConn men's coach] coaches them. You have to have some thick skin. Those are things that at least I've thought about.

"I think that these kids want to have a good team, and I think that they'll be responsive to instruction. I think I'm going to lean on some people and I'm going to hire two ladies that have experience in college basketball to point out things that I might not have thought of."

Wolff certainly inherits a challenge in rebuilding this Tech women's program. The Hokies are 9-47 in ACC play the past four seasons. The roster lacks the talent and athleticism needed to compete in the ACC, and a lot of the in-state talent of late has been heading to other schools.


"I think this is probably as significant a challenge as I've undertaken as a college coach," Wolff admitted.

Wolff met with all the players individually and hopes all of them will stay in Blacksburg. He also met with all the assistants, though he plans on taking his time before putting together his staff.

Perhaps of more importance, he already has called prominent AAU coaches, including Boo Williams – who is not just plugged into the men's recruiting scene, but also the women's. Wolff also visited Oak Hill Academy, which has a dominant women's program, just like the men's program there.

Despite the drawbacks of the job, Wolff welcomes the challenge. He inherited a similar situation at Boston University, and in his third year, the Terriers went 25-5, 17-1 in the league, and advanced to the NCAA Tournament.

"The record isn't what anyone here would like it to be," Wolff said "And I'm sure that the girls, they would like it to be different.

"But the difference is Virginia Tech, the practice facility, the commitment of the people that follow the program and the support of all the people that are in this room [Schott Media Center for the press conference]. I don't think Coach Weaver would go out of the box a little bit on this if everybody here wasn't committed to trying to have a successful women's program that's on par with everything else here." 

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Q&A

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MOVING FORWARD



Tech coaches like Logan Thomas' size, arm strength and leadership ability, and he is the frontrunner to replace Tyrod Taylor heading into next fall.

STAFF CHANGES AND REPLACING TYROD TAYLOR ARE JUST TWO OF MANY MUCH-DISCUSSED TOPICS THIS SPRING

Virginia Tech's coaching staff underwent a transformation in the offseason, on the offensive side of the ball, in particular. Offensive coordinator Bryan Stinespring ran an offense that led the ACC in scoring a year ago, and he sat down to talk about all the changes on that side of the ball as the Hokies continue spring ball.

Q: How much will the offense change now that Tyrod Taylor is no longer at quarterback?

BS: "It'll change only in the sense that you start playing to the individual strengths of whoever the starting quarterback is. The general scheme of the offense and what we're going to do week in and week out is

pretty much going to stay the same.

"Obviously, there are certain routes or certain throws or certain plays that certain quarterbacks like. Each have their own first, second or third choice. You start gearing yourself to whatever this quarterback likes. There's still a little bit of the unknown about that. When you're the second-team quarterback, you have to like what the first-team quarterback likes as you get ready for games.

"I don't see things changing a great deal. Again, there are some things that you'll use to play to individual strengths, whatever they may be. No two guys are exactly the same. But more than not, things will be the same."

Q: What concerns do you have during spring practice?

BS: "This year, a lot of people are asking what we're going to do without Tyrod and without Andre [Smith] and Darren [Evans] and Ryan [Williams]. That's a lot of yards we're losing. So what we're concentrating

on is that it's not David Wilson's time or Josh Oglesby's or Logan Thomas'. We can be productive. We can move the ball. We can score points. But all of us have to step up, and not just center this on the next quarterback or the next tailback.

"First, I think we've got to set a direction quarterback-wise. When they started cutting back on practice time and scrimmages and how many practices you could have ... whether an offensive lineman gets 25 practices or 35, I think there's a difference. But I can assure you, at quarterback, it affects that position even more, especially when you're ushering in a new No. 1, a new No. 2 and a new No. 3. You'd love more reps. How do you rep the guys who need work? They all need work. So coming out and having a direction and finding out who's No. 1 and who's No. 2 and then having a plan of attack is important. When we've been able to go into a season settled on the offensive line and settled at quarterback, we've been good.

"Then, we've got to get settled at tailback. You've got to make a transition with Josh

Oglesby back to tailback from fullback. David Wilson's got to step up and assume a larger role. Same with Josh.

"I like our offense. I like our choices. But any time you lose two tailbacks and both have been freshman players of the year, that's a little disconcerting. To say you're not concerned is painting a nice picture. You're like a duck on a pond, if you say that. You are calm and tranquil above water, but paddling like heck underneath.

"The third concern is at tight end. With Chris [Drager] moving over, that makes us feel more secure. He's a guy who played a significant amount of snaps when we had Greg Boone and Andre and even a healthy Sam Wheeler. He proved that he could catch the ball and that he could block. He's a smart guy. I think he'll step right in where Andre left. The rest of us have to step up. Eric [Martin] has been a proven blocker, whereas Randall Dunn plays well in space. Each has strengths, and each has areas where they need to improve. Do we become more of a role spot or platoon spot at tight end? I don't like that. I know how our defense is. If a guy comes in for this situation, then this is probably going to happen. I don't like that. So we have to sort that out."

Q: You mentioned Logan Thomas. He was the No. 2 last year and easily the favorite to be the starter. What do you like about him?

BS: "Arm strength, can make all the throws, upside ... he gets better at that position every time he steps on the field. I don't think you have a finished product. You've continued to see his development, and when you like where he is already and you know there is more to come, that magnifies things at that spot and how you feel about him.

"It's hard to practice as the second-team



Andrew Miller takes over for Beau Warren at center and is the only newcomer on an offensive line that returns four starters.

quarterback. It's not the same as the second-team receiver or the second-team tailback. You know you're getting in the game at those spots. So it's different. It's tough to stay focused at quarterback when you're in that spot. We're all human. But he handled it well, and I'm anxious to see where he goes this spring."

Q: Are you anxious given all the changes you have made within your offensive staff?

BS: "People say 'changes,' but most of it has been adjustments. I think there's a difference. Now, some of them have been significant adjustments, but I'm excited because it's spring practice and not necessarily because of the adjustments we've made.



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"We make adjustments from year to year every year, and there's been a lot of attention this year for obvious reasons. But the staple has been the same. We've got to go out and get better. We challenge our players to get better. We challenge our staff to get better. We challenge each other to get better. We're using these 15 practices to take another step to defending our ACC championship. That's what excites you about spring."

Q: Yes, but you won the ACC championship and were very good offensively with you calling the plays. Now, you're not going to be calling the plays and Mike O'Cain is. That will be a huge adjustment for you and this offense, right?

BS: "Yes, but this isn't about me. Every decision is about what's best for the program and the players. Obviously, I've taken on some additional responsibilities. I'm helping more with the offensive line, and I have the opportunity to go back into Tidewater and western Pennsylvania and recruit more—which I want to do. For me to do that, there were some adjustments that we had to make. When I was coordinating and recruiting Tidewater, I couldn't get down there on Thursdays and Fridays. That was difficult. Friday is the time when you go through your plans for calling plays. That's kind of hard to do going 75 miles

per hour down Interstate 64.

"For us, at this point, we're going to have a new No. 1 quarterback, a new No. 2 quarterback and a new No. 3 quarterback. The best way to get through that process is not by having Mike [O'Cain] going to his quarterback meetings and then coming back to me and saying, 'Is this okay? Is this what I tell the quarterback?' and so on. He needs to coach the quarterbacks, and he'll know what those quarterbacks like and what plays they're comfortable with running. So that's another reason why we decided to make the move."

Q: So the timing led to this move, with Taylor leaving and you all breaking in a new quarterback, correct?


BS: "Absolutely, the timing as much as anything. With the situation we have at quarterback, I do think it's advantageous to do this.

"But there's more to it. For example, Curt [Newsome] and I want to be more involved with the offensive line. Two heads will be attacking it now. We've got a group of linemen we need to work, and we want that group to get better. To do that, we want to get back to the tight end/tackle concept and the center/guard concept. I'll be less with the quarterbacks and the skill people during practice.

"When I took over the tight ends, I wanted to do more with the quarterbacks and the skill players during practice. As a coordinator, I thought that was important. Now, I'll be with them less. I'm going back in the other direction. Why is that? To go backward like that, we had to do something to move us forward in the other direction. So all that was a part of why Mike is going to handle the play calling.

"Then, to be able to recruit on Thursdays and Fridays is important. That's when you're going over the game plan and the play calls that you're going to do [as an offensive coordinator]. It helps to have that Friday to clear your head and gather your wits. But like I said, it's hard to clear your head and gather your thoughts when you're doing 75 miles per hour down Interstate 64 with a No. 6 combo meal in your lap [laughing]."

Q: Who are a couple of players you've been watching closely this spring?

BS: "I like watching them all. But specifically, Andrew Miller, Winston Painter, Courtney Prince and David Wang. We're really hoping we've got some depth on our offensive line. And I mean depth in terms of additional starters, not just bodies. And then, obviously, I'm watching Logan. I like where he is, and I think there's so much more room for him to grow as a quarterback." 

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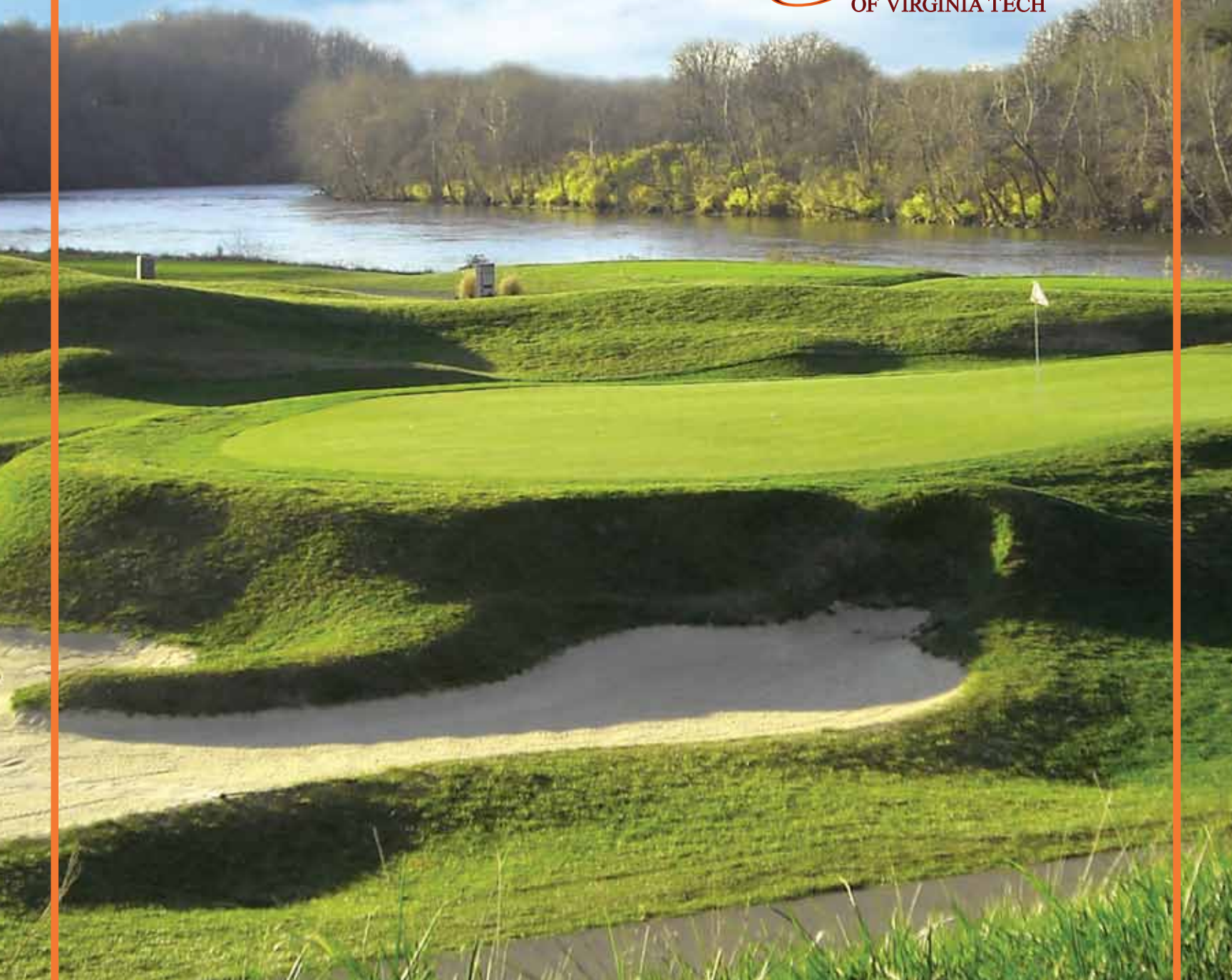
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Q&A

BUD FOSTER

BACK TO BASICS



Antone Exum got a lot of playing time as a redshirt freshman, and he should be the starter at rover heading into the 2011 season.

THE HOKIES' DEFENSE AGAIN FEATURES A LOT OF YOUTH, AND COORDINATOR BUD FOSTER IS FOCUSED ON A COUPLE OF SPOTS

Tech's defense finished eighth in the ACC in total defense and fourth in scoring defense last season, so coordinator Bud Foster wants to see improvement, particularly at a couple of positions. He sat down to answer some questions about last fall and what he's been looking at this spring.

Q: Let's start with a difficult topic first – the Orange Bowl – before discussing spring practice. What happened on the defensive side of the ball in that game?

BF: "I'm just very disappointed. We broke more assignments and busted more coverages in one game than we did the last half of the season, which was disappointing to me. We gave up too many big plays, and they all were the result of poor technique or busted coverages. To me, it's unacceptable.

"Now, they [Stanford] were a good football team. Don't get me wrong. But all their long plays were poor run fits or busted coverages or poor technique. That's the bottom line. Those are all things that can be corrected. The disappointing thing is all the things they did were things that we had practiced, and we were playing much better down the stretch.

"So I was disappointed. Actually, I was [ticked] off. I was on the sidelines during the game, and when I came back and

watched the film, I was even more [ticked] off. Just to put it point blank."

Q: Talk about your defense this spring and what you're looking at specifically.

BF: "Well, let's look back a little bit. Going into last fall, people were talking about us winning the ACC, and they were doing that as a compliment to our program. But if you look at the people we were replacing and the young kids we had on our defense, we were as green and young as we had been in a long, long time, and I think it showed in how we played.

"I'll compliment our kids. They were resilient and played hard for 60 minutes, and it showed if you do that, then good things will happen. Did we play like I wanted us to? No. We gave up way too many big plays, and that's the first thing we did this

offseason was to look at those big plays because I wanted to see if it was the structure of the defense or personnel and technique. As it turned out, it was personnel and technique and fundamentals.

"We've got some positions that are playmaking spots where we didn't have playmakers, and we've got to find some guys who will make plays at those spots. If that means we've got to play new people, then we'll play new people because we're going to get back to playing defense the way we're accustomed to around here. I'm not talking about our fans. I'm talking about us. We went through a stretch run where we were playing such great defense, but you're not going to do that every year. You're going to have a point in time where you have injuries or personnel issues, and that came into it a bit last year. But I fully expect us to be a lot better, and it starts with this spring practice."

Q: What do you all need to do to get back to playing the dominant style of defense that Tech fans have seen from your units in the past?

BF: "We've got to get back to being more physical up front and stopping the run, and chasing the ball better. With the exception of John Graves, we weren't very athletic inside, and we didn't chase the ball. We had opportunities to chase the ball down, but we weren't athletic enough, and we've got to be better there."

"We've got to be better on the perimeter, as far as leveraging the ball and getting better tackling from our rovers, whips and safeties. We played four different whips last year. At one time, our safety was the whip, and we're rotating those guys around, and we weren't consistently good at those spots to be consistently good as a defense, if that makes sense. So we've got to find the right guys at rover and whip. Those are key playmaking spots. Those are critical positions for us. We want to find guys who are good open-field tacklers and who are going to keep the ball inside and be playmakers."

Q: This spring, you've been keeping close tabs on the rover and whip spots. Can you talk about some changes there and what you're expecting?

BF: "Antone Exum will be at rover. We've taken James Hopper and moved

him to offense because Tony Gregory's out, and that hurts our depth. We're looking at Lorenzo Williams at rover, and Eddie Whitley is at safety, with Theron Norman backing him up. Our safety spot is a little thin right now. Maybe we can find a safety with one of these corners, I don't know."

"At whip, we've taken Nick Dew and brought him to whip. We've taken Dominique Patterson and moved him to whip. Gouv [Jeron Gouveia-Winslow] is a young player, and he's got to get better. We need a guy who can play in space. We've had a lot of good whips over the years. They need to be good enough to play in space and good enough to be a force in blitzing and those types of things. We've got to find that guy. That's a key battle in my opinion. We hope a guy like Alonzo Tweedy will step up. It's his turn. He's got

a lot of tools, but he hasn't found that 'on' switch. I'm hoping he can go out and play ball instead of 'work' ball, so to speak.

"That's a playmaking spot, and that guy's a special cat. We need to find that guy. He's a cross between a safety and a linebacker and a cornerback. You haven't seen me do much nickel defense this spring because I want to see what those guys can do. Can they cover, can they play, can they blitz, can they make plays in space – I'm finding out what those guys can do."

Q: You played a lot of nickel defense last year. Is that because of youth at certain spots, or because of all the spread offenses you were seeing early in the season?

BF: "A little bit of both, but we just didn't make enough plays in space. It got to the point where teams were spreading



Defensive end James Gayle had arguably the best offseason of any player, earning top honors in the strength and conditioning program. The staff expects big things from him going forward.

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us out, and we needed an athlete who could play in space. That was the biggest issue.

"Then, we got into a situation where we were playing [Kyle] Fuller, and we wanted to find a spot for Exum. We were playing Fuller with 'this' personnel grouping and Exum with 'this' personnel grouping. Sometimes, we had Eddie Whitley as the whip with 'this' personnel grouping and Exum as the safety. To me, that was too much.

"In my opinion, we weren't consistently good enough. We hung in there, and Torrian [Gray] did a great job of coaching that up, and the kids were opportunistic and made some plays. But that made things hard, and we weren't consistent with our run fits and leverages. We're getting back to that."

Q: In watching your defense this spring, it's hard not to notice that you guys are young again. Eddie Whitley is the only senior starter.

BF: "Yes, again, we're going to be very young. We don't have many seniors period. You've got Eddie, and then you've got Kwamaine Battle coming back from a knee injury and Barquell Rivers from that quad injury. If we started tomorrow, Eddie would be the only senior starter.

"Our ends are going to be new faces. Our back-up corners are going to be new faces. There are two positions, defensive tackle and linebackers, where we'll have a little depth with experience."

Q: Looking at the defensive front, there appears to be some unknowns, particularly with Graves and Steven Friday departing. Are you hoping to see some guys step up?

BF: "I think we're pretty good at the point of attack, but turning and chasing the ball, other than John Graves, we didn't make a lot of plays chasing the ball down the line of scrimmage.

"We're trying J.R. Collins inside a little bit. It depends on how some of these ends come along. You've got James Gayle, and we're hoping that Zack McCray will step up and Duan Perez-Means steps up. If they can help you, it may be a situation like when we had Jim Davis move inside. He gave us an athletic tackle who could make plays.

"We've got to be better at chasing the ball inside out. We've still got a lot of question marks from a depth standpoint, but we've got a lot of talented guys there."

Q: You played Bruce Taylor at backer in the Orange Bowl because of Lyndell

Gibson's injury and Gibson is no longer with the program. What are you eventually going to do with Bruce?

BF: "Good question. It depends. I took him out of his element in the bowl game when I played him at backer. Even though the positions are very similar, there's a big difference, especially when it comes to coverage. Bruce is our best linebacker, but he's not a guy you want outside. He's better inside, and he's got a good football IQ. He's smart about making calls. That's probably where he needs to be, but at the same time, I'm going to play my best two linebackers.

"If Barquell comes back and is playing like he did before, then next fall, if Bruce and Barquell are our best two linebackers, then I'll start Bruce off at backer. He can always go back to mike.


"There are too many subtle things that are different about the positions. Backer is closer to whip than it is to mike in some instances. At the same time, backer is closer to mike than whip in some cases. In the passing game, there are big differences, and I think I took Bruce out of his comfort zone in the bowl game. From my opinion, in watching the film, I thought he was off in the bowl game.

"The backer position has been a play-making spot for us over the years. It's been a very productive spot. But the last two years, it's been an average spot for us. We need an athletic, explosive, dynamic guy, and I think Tariq [Edwards] has some of those qualities. He needs to finish spring out strong."

Q: Who are a couple of players you've been watching closely this spring?

BF: "Up front, I've been watching the Hopkins boys [Antoine and Derrick]. I want to see them take their game up a notch and chase the ball more. I've been watching some of those back-up guys, like [Isaiah] Hamlette and [Dwight] Tucker and Nick Acree.

"I'm excited about our ends, especially with what James Gayle has done in the offseason. I'm hoping to see the emergence of a dynamic defensive end, like we've had here in the past. I think he and [J.R.] Collins could show up, and I'm excited about the potential of Zack McCray.

"I'm anxious to see how our backer position unfolds. That needs to be a more productive position, and I'm anxious to see how our whip position unfolds, too. I think we'll be okay in the secondary, especially with Exum at rover." 

DIVING

EXTRA

TALKIN' DIVING WITH LOGAN SHINHOLSER



Logan Shinholser became Tech's first All-American diver after finishing eighth in the platform event at the NCAA Championships in Minneapolis, Minn., on March 26. The sophomore from Burtonsville, Md., won the platform and 1-meter titles at the NCAA's Zone A meet in early March. Logan sat down and offered some unique perspectives on platform diving:

1. THE BASICS

"The 10-meter [platform] is the highest one [33 feet high]. There are three different ones – the 5-meter, the 7.5-meter and the 10-meter. You have to do six total dives, and you can do all of them off the 10-meter, or you can do half and half. It doesn't matter as long as you do all six. In the Olympics and in senior competitions, you have to go off at 10 meters. I do all mine off the 10-meter.

"You have to submit all six dives before you go [start competing]. You can change it up, but you can't improvise in mid-air. In diving, the judges know exactly what you're doing. You get judged on things like your DD [degree of difficulty], how well you execute the dive and your entry.

"On the platform, I usually shoot for a certain score, and if I hit that score, I'll be good to go. If the judging is really hard, I'll drop my score. You've got to play it by ear sometimes. You want to be realistic but hard enough to where you have to do well to get that score."

2. DO THE BEST DIVES FIRST AND LAST

"Usually, your best dives are your first one and last one. You want to start off on a good

note and end on a good note. My front and back twists are my easiest, so I split those. My front is first and my back is toward the end. The middle four are tough.

"My toughest is a reverse 3.5 [flips]. You do a back flip going forward and do 3.5 and then land on your hands. That's the highest DD that I do right now. I used to do a front 4.5, but since we didn't have a 10-meter last year [at War Memorial pool], I didn't train much for it and I didn't want to just jump back into it. Hopefully, this summer, I'll get back into it.

"What I do on 10-meter now is about average for what they did in the 2004 or 2008 Olympics. Now, with what's coming up, this sport keeps progressing and guys are doing harder stuff. I'm trying to get better and get to that level."

3. OVERCOMING THE FEAR

"It's very scary even for the Olympians. It's one of those things that I thought when I did it a lot more, I'd be less afraid of it. The older you are, the wiser you get. But I get up there, and it's like, 'Man, this isn't what I want to do.' It's scary because there isn't much room for error. If I think too much about the dive, I'm doomed. I get really worried, so a lot of times, I'll communicate with my teammates on the deck to keep my mind off the actual dive coming up."

4. INJURIES CAN HAPPEN

"I've never hit my head. If I do that, I'll have to take a step back and see if I really


want to dive. You hit your hands a couple of times and you hit your feet. They hurt for a bit, but it's more that it scares you. You're like, 'Wow, that was a little bit close.' But I've never hit my head. I'm typically a pretty safe diver. I have good distance from the board."

5. PREPARE FOR LOTS OF PRACTICE

"We practice Monday through Friday, and some on Saturdays. We dive every day. Monday is usually working on the basics, and then Tuesday through Friday is real-time diving. Saturdays, we'll go back to fundamentals.

"On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, we lift. On Tuesdays and Thursday, we'll do dry-land stuff [mostly cardiovascular exercises] and do some plyometrics [exercises for power] and work on the trampoline. A lot of diving is doing work on the ground."

6. A CRAZY PERSONALITY HELPS

"You've got to be kind of crazy, and you have to be able to focus pretty well. I get up there and have fun, but when it comes down to it, you have to go 100 percent because you can never bail on a dive. You have to be a thrill junkie. You use so much adrenaline doing this 10-meter stuff that when you do other stuff, it's like, 'Eh, that was okay. I guess that was cool.' You have to be focused, but at the same time, have a wild hair. The average person is not going to get up there and dive like that." 

PROUD OF HER PEOPLE



DESPITE BEING 6,000 MILES AWAY, TECH TENNIS PLAYER YASMIN HAMZA FELT PRIDE AT THE REVOLUTION THAT ENDED AN OPPRESSIVE REGIME IN HER NATIVE EGYPT

Yasmin Hamza is not an American – in fact, she’s an Egyptian – but she certainly resembles any other normal American college student. She carries around a Blackberry and is an incessant texter. She loves to randomly surf the Internet, and she talks quickly in general conversation. She comes from a good family and has one sibling, a younger brother, of course, named Mohamed.

“Like every other Egyptian,” she laughed, displaying a camera-ready smile.

But she’s not normal. Anything but, actually. She attended a German high school in Cairo, and she speaks four languages,

among them Arabic, German, English and French, though she modestly says her French isn’t “fluent.” She took ballet lessons for the longest time and considers that among the many sports in which she’s participated. Until she arrived at Tech in the fall of 2007, she had no idea what a quarterback was.

“Everyone was talking about a quarterback, and I didn’t even know what a quarterback was,” she said, again laughing. “It was so overwhelming.”

What really sets her apart, though, is that she plays on the Virginia Tech women’s tennis team, and she holds a rather unique

spot in Tech athletics – she’s currently the only Tech athlete who hails from Egypt.

And she’s the only one whose country just won its freedom.

Hamza kept track intently over the Internet from more than 6,000 miles away as her fellow countrymen took to the streets and protested the regime of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in late January. The protests began on Jan. 25, and Hamza first found out when she received a text from a friend saying there was going to be a big protest in downtown Cairo.

“They’ve been saying that for so long, but then it happened,” Hamza said. “My

friend texted me, 'Do you know what's happening back home?' So I opened up my computer and looked. It went from, like, zero to a million. It was all happening so fast. I was thinking, 'Oh my God, is my country going to fall apart?'"

Adding to her worries, the heart of the protests occurred in a place called Tahrir Square, a central gathering spot of shops,

went out and got my coffee this morning. It's not a big deal.' They were trying to make it much easier on me."

Mubarak and Egyptian government officials complicated the situation when they shut down the Internet on Jan. 26. They did so because protestors used Facebook and Twitter, two social media outlets, as a way to coordinate demonstrations.

tests, though, was jobs.

In Egypt, unemployment runs rampant, and the people are very poor. More than 40 percent of the population lives on the equivalent of \$2 a day, according to Wikipedia. Plus, food prices were on the rise, and without money to pay for food, Egyptians started worrying about their very existence.

“ My friend texted me, 'Do you know what's happening back home?' So I opened up my computer and looked. It went from, like, zero to a million. It was all happening so fast. I was thinking, 'Oh my God, is my country going to fall apart?' ” – Yasmin Hamza

eating places and hotels in downtown Cairo. Hundreds of thousands of people crowded there, and Hamza started worrying about her family. They live a 15-minute drive from Tahrir Square.

"I was very concerned because what the media was showing was really extreme," Hamza said. "They were saying that everything was going crazy, and people were trying to take care of their own houses and all this.

"But every time I talked to my dad, he'd joke around about it. He'd be like, 'Oh, I

The residual effect of that decision was that it eliminated Hamza's main source for information. She relies on the Internet for most of her news. Without that option, she found herself texting friends to check up on current events instead of using social media.

"I was pretty concerned because the Internet was gone for a long time," she said. "So I didn't really know what was going on."

Eventually, Mubarak started caving on certain issues, and the government turned on the Internet again. The crux of the pro-

"We have this huge gap between rich people and poor people. I think this causes a lot of problems," Hamza said. "A lot of people think it's about who you know, which is all over the place. But these people get so upset because it's like, 'How will I get there? I'm too poor to know you.' It could be solved with more jobs and getting people more than \$2 a day. If the prices are getting that high, then there has to be something wrong."

Hamza, though, is fortunate. Both her father, Rand El Baghdadi, and mother,



Yasmin Hamza's passion is interior design, and she loves spending her spare time in one of Tech's studios doing design work.

Hesham Hamza, are doctors in Egypt, so Hamza never lived under trying economic conditions, though through her parents' occupations, she witnessed firsthand the problems caused by poverty.

Her parents provided her with opportunities to expand her horizons. As a kid, she played all sorts of sports, but settled on tennis – the sport of her father. El Baghdadi was an accomplished tennis player in his younger days and still excels in various leagues in Cairo. He put his daughter in a high-quality German school and let her play tennis in France and Spain in the summers.

But it was her mother who actually helped Hamza secure a college scholarship. A friend of her mother's helped Hamza receive a scholarship offer from UCLA, but the Bruins' staff wanted her to wait a year before coming to the States. So Hamza's mother started sending out CD's of her daughter, and that led to her receiving a scholarship offer from Virginia Tech coach Terry Ann Zawacki-Woods.

Hamza's father originally wasn't keen

Yasmin Hamza's father taught her how to play tennis, and she ranks as one of the best players on Tech's team, participating in the No. 1 spot.



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on the idea of Hamza leaving Egypt to go to college. He believes strongly in family and wanted her to stay close to home.

But after seeing how much his daughter wanted to play tennis at Virginia Tech, and more importantly, enroll in Tech's interior design program, he gave his blessings.

"He liked the fact that I worked so hard," Hamza said. "Because I did that and gave all I had, he was going to give me the chance to do that [come to the U.S.]. He trusted me. He didn't want me to leave, but he thought I had worked too hard, and since I got a scholarship, I should go ahead and do it. Both of my parents were supportive."

Like most international students, she struggled early on with the adjustment to a different culture. Also like most, she has adapted, become very good at her sport and makes good grades, while keeping an eye toward the future.

On the court, she was the team's co-rookie of the year as a freshman and earned All-ACC honors. Her junior year, she was voted the team's most valuable player by her teammates, and this season, while competing at the No. 1 spot, she holds a respectable 20-13 record as of April 4.

She enjoys tennis, but she admits her pas-

sion is interior design, one of the toughest curriculums at Tech. She loves spending time at one of the studios in Burruss Hall, which houses the College of Architecture and Urban Studies. Ultimately, she wants to design building or homes, or both.

"I enjoy it," she said. "I stay up at nights. I'm very happy doing this. When I have free time, I'd rather look at an interesting architectural feature or a building than watch TV. I like to learn new things and

“I’ve never been as proud to be an Egyptian. We stood up for ourselves. I know it’s not the best situation now back home. But there’s hope. Before, there was no hope.” — Yasmin Hamza

explore, and this teaches you so much about the world and how things work. You make all these concepts, and these concepts make you hit all these different areas, which is really cool."

Her face lights up as she talks about her major. Of course, she's got a lot to smile about these days. She's playing well on

the tennis court, she's making good grades and she's become a huge fan of the Tech football team.


"I do love football games," she said, laughing. "I used to hate it. But now, I love it. I go to every game I can."

But those aren't the main reasons for her happiness. For the first time in a long time, the people in her home country are free. Her people stood up for themselves. They protested firmly, and on Feb. 11, Mubarak resigned after 30 years as president.

"I've never been as proud to be an Egyptian," Hamza said. "We stood up for ourselves. I know it's not the best situation now back home. But there's hope. Before, there was no hope."

Once Hamza graduates in 2012, she wants to move to London and work for a while to gain some experience. Then she wants to return home to Egypt.

Yes, she wants to work there. But she also wants to celebrate her people's independence, and more importantly, she wants to be a part of her country's future.

"I'm very loyal," she said. "It's always going to be a piece of my heart. I do love going home. I miss it. Even if we're a poor country and even if everything goes bad, it's still home. I love it." 

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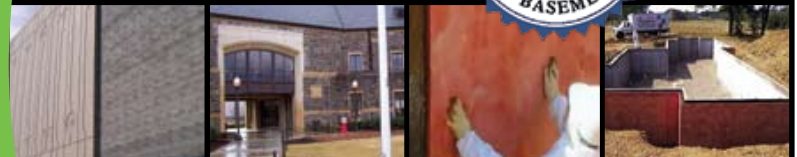


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AFTER A YEAR AT KENTUCKY, TECH SECOND BASEMAN MICHAEL SEABORN HAS FOUND VIRGINIA TECH TO HIS LIKING BOTH ON AND OFF THE FIELD



There has been a bit of irony to the past two season openers of the baseball season for Michael Seaborn. During both the 2010 and 2011 opening weekends, the Virginia Tech squad has played at the Caravelle Resort Tournament in Conway, S.C., a three-game event put on by Coastal Carolina University.

Last year, Seaborn was on the same field but in the opposite dugout of the school he originally played for coming out of high school – the University of Kentucky. He transferred from Kentucky, the Hokies' opening day opponent, after three semesters in Lexington.

To open the 2011 season, the Hokies took on the Big 10 Conference's Indiana Hoosiers, a team in which Seaborn's best friend from high school, Sterling Mack, had played. During the time Seaborn was looking to transfer, he visited and considered Indiana, so he could have been in that dugout this year.

"I was looking at a couple different schools, and I went on a visit up to Indiana and met the coaches and met a lot of the players. But it just didn't seem like it was the right fit," Seaborn said. "I came here [Virginia Tech] on my next visit, and it was over Thanksgiving break, so I didn't get to meet a lot of the guys, but I went to the football game.

"It was freezing cold, but they played Miami, and they blew them out. Ever since I stepped on campus, I've loved it here. As soon as I stepped on the campus, I told my parents this was the place I wanted to go. The campus caught my eye, the football game was awesome, and I really liked the coaches. It really seemed like the perfect fit."

Not only has it been the perfect fit for Seaborn, but also the fifth-year senior second baseman has been a perfect fit for the Hokies. The native of Atlanta, Ga., came into the baseball program during the mid-semester break, joining the team in January of 2008. That first



Michael Seaborn has been a mainstay in Tech's lineup since transferring from Kentucky, having started every game the past two seasons.

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season, he made 45 starts in the 55-game season, with 41 coming at third base.

The next season, however, is when he found his spot, and he has not relinquished it in more than 120 straight games. Making 15 early starts during his sophomore year, between third and second, he found himself on the bench to start a game against Georgia Tech on March 22.

The starting second baseman that day was Tony Balisteri, and in the bottom of the second inning, Balisteri was hit by a pitch and took first base. However, in the top of the third, Seaborn trotted out to second and finished the game with four assists and went 1-for-3 at the plate, with an RBI and a run scored.

The next day, and every game since, he has been penned in as the Hokies' starting second baseman.

"I've always had confidence in myself, and I'm just blessed that Coach [Pete] Hughes gave me the opportunity to step in and play right away," Seaborn said. "I had heard that Tech needed an extra infielder, so that was another one of the reasons I wanted to come here to get a chance to play, and I am thankful for Coach Hughes for giving me the opportunity to play. And I've tried to make the most of it while I've been here."

Seaborn mentioned playing time as one

of his biggest hurdles at Kentucky, but was also thankful for the fact that he redshirted his freshman year. He understood the reasoning and the chance it gave him to learn from the older guys.

"I loved Kentucky as a school. I loved the guys on the team, and the school was good. I liked everything about it," he said. "I just felt it was hard to play relaxed there and be able to play your own game. I felt like the coaches put a lot of pressure on their players.

"I got redshirted there my freshman year, and I learned a lot from the older guys. I was able to take a lot away from them. They had won the SEC the year before I got there, and they had a lot of returners coming back. It would have been tough for me to play a lot my freshman year. So, looking back, it's the best thing that's ever happened, getting redshirted and being able to play an extra year here at Virginia Tech."

Coming to Tech, Seaborn joined a tremendous crop of players as part of Hughes' first class. A number of them, as has been well documented, ended up becoming the largest class of Hokies ever selected in the Major League Draft in one year.

Seaborn and those teammates also helped Tech to its first ACC tournament appearance since becoming a member of the conference and advance to the NCAA Championships

for the first time since 1999.

"I came in with Austin Wates, Jesse Hahn, Justin Wright, all those guys were all freshmen when I came in halfway through, right after Christmas," Seaborn said. "As soon as I stepped on campus, I knew that this team had a lot of talent. And obviously that was something I was looking forward to, not only a great coaching staff, but also a team that was going to win."

And last year, they did.

"It was a fun year, to say the least," Seaborn said. "The team got along really well, and we played really well. Everywhere we went, we just knew we were going to win. We just had that confidence. Everyone believed in one another, and as soon as we stepped on the field, we knew from the first pitch that we were going to win that game. I couldn't have asked for anything more – other than maybe getting to Omaha.

"All of last year was great, but what I consider my greatest moment is my entire college baseball career. I wanted to go to a good academic school, a big school that had big-time football, and play in one of the best baseball conferences in America. And I've been able to do that."

Academics play an important role for Seaborn, and he takes it seriously. He will graduate this May with a degree in finance,

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Michael Seaborn, who is Tech's active leader in career homers, plans on pursuing a career in business following his graduation this spring.

and he plans on returning to Atlanta after graduation to pursue his career after baseball. He has twice been an All-ACC Academic team selection and has made the Dean's List every semester since transferring to Tech.

"I take pride in my academics," he said. "Ever since I was young, I've always been a perfectionist. My mom always gives me a hard time about it. When I was little, if I would be coloring and if I would go outside the lines, I would want a new sheet of paper."

"I've always been that kind of guy, so maybe baseball isn't the right sport for me. When you can get three hits out of 10 and be in the Hall of Fame ... I have always been a perfectionist when it comes to grades or baseball. Any sport that I've always played, I've wanted to be the best at it."

At 5-foot-7, 172 pounds, there might not be many "right" sports for Seaborn. That isn't a slight. He even admitted he stopped playing high school football after his sophomore year because he knew there wasn't a future there for him.

But he is relentless in the weight room, earning three "elite athlete" honors for his dedication, and he was a 2011 nominee for the All-American Strength and


Conditioning Athletes of the Year. He credits that devotion for how he has been able to help out his game.

"Even though I'm not the tallest guy out there, I try to be just as strong," he said. "That's one thing that I've always worked hard on and stay on top of."

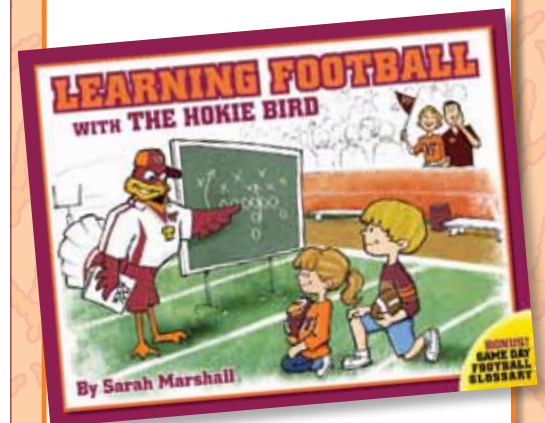
Going back to the season opener, the second-smallest guy on the roster – the smallest now falls on 5-5 third baseman Johnny Morales – came into the season as the clubhouse leader in career home runs.

And despite those new bats – which Seaborn is a fan of, "I kind of like it. It isn't all about who can just go up there and hit the farthest ball, and I think it's better for the game," – Seaborn knocked out a first-inning home run against the Chanticleers for the 23rd of his career.

Ironically, his double-play mate, fifth-year senior shortstop Tim Smalling – a teammate who also shares the same October 14, 1987, birthday – are now tied for the team career high in home runs.

Needless to say, Smalling, who has started almost 80 games as the Hokie shortstop, and Seaborn will be sorely missed up the middle when the Hokies take the field wherever they play their season opener in 2012. 

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EYEING MORE MEDALS

HE'S AN ACC CHAMPION AND AN ALL-AMERICAN, BUT TECH RUNNER MICHAEL HAMMOND IS SETTING HIS SIGHTS ON A NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

In the history of the Atlantic Coast Conference, the league's mile event at the indoor championships had been raced 49 times before a Virginia Tech runner crossed the finish line first. In the last three, a Hokie has captured the crown.

In the history of the ACC, only eight men, including 2011 winner Michael Hammond, have successfully defended their first win by besting the field the next year. Ironically, of the seven before him, five had gone on to win the event a

third time. And just sitting with the young man for 10 minutes, one easily sees that Hammond exudes the confidence that he will join that group next year.

"Oh man, I think the only way that won't happen is if I am needed in other events and we need points in another area because that takes precedence over anything individually related," Hammond said. "Doing it back-to-back was awesome, but three-peating would be really cool.

"I've always just competed in every

sport, and I've always done my best and I've always thought 'No one is better than me.' That's just how I've been since I was a kid, and that's just my competitive nature."

Hammond's competitive nature took him on quite a thrilling ride through a two-week period more than a month ago. He entered the ACC Indoor Championships held at Virginia Tech's Rector Field House on February 26 as the defending champion in the mile. He earned his team 10 points with his .09-second victory over Duke's Ryan McDermott and .46 seconds over Virginia's Brett Johnson.

Ironically, that was the same day the men's basketball team was playing the top-ranked Duke Blue Devils across the street at Cassell Coliseum. Now, except every four years when the Olympics shine a light on the sport, track and field athletes do not get the same attention as football or men's basketball athletes. But that night, the Hokie men walked out onto the court at halftime of the basketball game and were recognized for winning their first ACC men's indoor team title.

"I am definitely envious when I go to a basketball game or a football game and there are just thousands of fans screaming," Hammond said. "It was cool, though, after the ACC Indoor Championships. We got to go to the Duke game, and that was awesome because there were probably a bunch of people there who don't even know a lot about the sport, but they still clapped for us.

"It was all great. Winning the title for Coach [Dave] Cianelli and all the coaches was great. They've been waiting almost a decade for this. And then for myself to win the mile and have that add 10 points to our score, I felt like I did what I needed to do to help the team."



Michael Hammond, a two-time ACC Indoor champion in the mile, earned All-America honors with a seventh-place finish at the NCAA Championships and has his sights set on honors in the 1,500-meter race during the outdoor season.

A week later, on March 5, Hammond and several other teammates headed to South Bend, Ind., to compete in the Alex Wilson Invitational in a last-chance effort to qualify for the NCAA Indoor Championships. Not only did Hammond qualify by .59 seconds, but also, when he stopped the clock at 3:58.41, he set the school record in the event.

Ironically, the previous record holder and the new one share more things in common than holding a Tech school record – most notably, a high school. Billy Berlin, who set his mark of 4:02.47 in 2009, and Hammond both graduated from Midlothian High School.

"As far as mentors, guys that have helped me to get where I am, I would say, first and

foremost, was Billy Berlin," Hammond said. "He was an ACC champ in the mile and 1,500 meters outdoors a couple years ago. And he actually went to my same high school. We ran roughly the same times in high school, and he was just someone that I've been following in the footsteps of and have had similar improvements."

Following in Berlin's footsteps no more, Hammond is now the holder of two ACC indoor mile titles, owns two school records (the 3,000 meters as well), and became just the second Tech runner to earn All-America honors indoors with his seventh-place finish at the NCAA Championships.

In College Station, Texas – less than 100 miles from where the 21-year-old Hammond



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was born (Houston) – he raced the nation’s elite in the preliminaries on March 11 and posted a 4:01.11 to advance to the next day’s finals and have a chance at a dream, an NCAA title.

“In the finals, which is an eight-lap race, I was right there with three laps to go,” Hammonds explained. “I could reach out and touch the leader. I was feeling good up there. And then, you know these guys are the best in the country, and they kind of moved away and I just kind of got left behind.

“But definitely the whole time, I could just taste it, right there in front of me, even though it was my first NCAA meet. I’ve always believed that I have the ability to be the best in the NCAA, but that made it tangible. That made it real. It made it something that I can reach out and take. I know that it’s going to take a lot more work and patience and a lot of miles, but it definitely feels more real. Yeah, before it was a dream, but now, it’s let’s work for this goal.”

The dream of being an NCAA champion could have been in Hammond’s mind since Tech head cross country/distance coach Ben Thomas started recruiting him.

According to Hammond, “As a junior in high school, I ran a pretty quick mile, and that got me some attention. In fact, Coach

Thomas at Tech called me. But then, my senior year, I had a good cross country season, and that ended up getting me more national attention, and I got recruited by a good amount of schools.

“But Coach Thomas was the one that looked me in the eye and told me ‘I think you can be not just a good runner, but a great runner, an All-American-type of competitor.’ He just seemed so real and so believing in my ability.”

What Thomas remembers is a high school kid whom he actually first saw running meets at Tech.

“He ran decent times, but when he was a Foot Locker finalist in his senior year of cross country, which only 40 guys make that, he really got noticed,” Thomas said. “I just remember watching him prepare for races. He just had this mindset, this focus, when I was watching him warm-up. Plus, he has the body, and strides, that are just built to run, and that can’t be taught.”

And again, it’s back to the confidence that Hammond displays, even as a 17-year-old when he was being recruited. He even knew his sport, and he paid attention to the Hokies even before becoming one.


“The current phenom at Tech at the time was Tasmin Fanning, and she was doing extremely well,” Hammond said. “She

had just recently got All-America in cross country and shortly thereafter she would go on to the Olympic Trials and do really well there. And watching her on TV was really awesome.

“But I asked [Coach Thomas], ‘Tasmin Fanning, she’s great, do you think in your program I can be that good?’ So, even though in high school, I wasn’t really running, comparatively, fantastic times, I still thought, ‘Yeah, I can be there someday.’ But I wanted a coach that was on the same lines, not saying, ‘I hope I can bring him in here and score points at conference.’ I wanted a coach that also believed I could be as good as I wanted to be, and I definitely got that vibe from Coach Thomas.”

Up next for Hammond is the outdoor track season, and he says that goal No. 1 is to win a 1,500-meter title at the ACC Championships. Then, “I definitely want to qualify for the NCAA meet because outdoors you actually have to run the regional meet and qualify for the outdoor meet.

“I need to take it step by step. But I am definitely thinking at the outdoor national meet, I would certainly like to get another All-America honor and hopefully place higher than I did at the indoors.”

And let’s be honest, does anyone doubt him? 



TRACK & FIELD

INDOOR
NCAA CHAMPIONSHIPMEN'S TRACK AND FIELD TEAM CLAIMS 15TH
AT NCAA INDOOR TRACK AND FIELD MEET

Yavgeniy Olhovskiy (left) and Alexander Ziegler earned All-America honors in their respective events. Olhovskiy became a seven-time All-American in the pole vault, and Ziegler earned his second All-America honor in the weight throw.

The Virginia Tech men's track and field team finished in 15th place at the NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships held March 11-12 in College Station, Texas.

The Hokies, who finished 19th at the same meet a year ago, accumulated 13.5 points because of the efforts of their four All-Americans.

Pole vaulters Yavgeniy Olhovskiy and Hunter Hall, runner Michael Hammond and thrower Alexander Ziegler all claimed All-America honors with their performances.

The honor marked the seventh time in his career that Olhovskiy has been an All-American, having been named such every indoor and outdoor season since 2008. The

Petah-Tivka, Israel, native – who won the ACC championship – recorded a vault of 17 feet, 6.5 inches (5.35 meters) to claim eighth place.


Hall, who became an All-American for the third time, tied for sixth in the pole vault. The Fort Wayne, Ind., native set a personal best with a vault of 17 feet, 6.5 inches, easily besting his previous career high of 17 feet, 2.75 inches.

Hammond, a junior from Midlothian, Va., earned the first All-America performance of his career after he finished in seventh place in the mile. He ran the race in 4:01.80, finishing just over two seconds behind winner Miles Batty of BYU.

Ziegler earned the second All-America

honor of his career after finishing second in the weight throw with a toss of 69 feet, 9.5 inches (21.27 meters). The sophomore from Germany finished less than a meter behind LSU's Walter Henning, who claimed the title with a toss of 22.16 meters. Ziegler's teammate, Marcel Lomnicky, came in 14th.

On the women's side, Dorotea Habazin finished 17th in the weight throw, while Samira Burkhardt claimed 12th in the shot put. Kelly Phillips, the ACC champ in the pole vault, finished in ninth place.

The Hokies have already begun their outdoor season. They compete in several outdoor meets before the ACC Outdoor Track and Field Championships held April 21-23 in Durham, N.C. 

WHERE
ARE
THEY **NOW?**



Bo Durkac, a former Tech third baseman back in the early 1990s, is now in his second season at Illinois State as the hitting coach, infield coach and recruiting coordinator

Photo credit: Dennis Banks, Illinois State athletics

A BASEBALL ODYSSEY

BO DURKAC HAS TRAVELED ALL OVER THE COUNTRY PLAYING BASEBALL, HE'S WRITTEN BOOKS AND JOURNALS ABOUT THE SPORT AND NOW HE'S COACHING IT.

Surprisingly, Bo Durkac's plan wasn't to coach once he graduated from Tech.

Baseball just sort of took him along for the ride.

Durkac, a former Tech third baseman, is now in his ninth season as a baseball assistant coach and his second season at Illinois State in Normal, Ill., where he serves as the hitting coach, infield coach and recruiting coordinator. His first gig as a coach came when he spent seven years as an assistant at Charlotte following seven years of toiling in the minor and independent leagues as a player.

When reality set in and he realized he didn't have a future as a player, he needed to find something to do.

"I did a lot of writing, I guess, because of the boredom of all those bus trips and because I had a laptop," Durkac said. "I thought about doing something with that. I had written journals for *Baseball America* and a couple of books [including 2001: *A Baseball Odyssey*] and some other stuff.

"I considered going back to school. I even considered law school. I had spent seven years playing baseball and didn't have a lot to show for it. Then a friend of mine told me I should get into coaching. I got the job at Charlotte right at the time when college baseball was taking off. It offered me an income and kept me in baseball. It turned out to be the second-best decision of my life."

His best decision came in 1993 when he decided to transfer from the University of North Carolina to Virginia Tech. The Kittanning, Pa., native went to North Carolina after receiving a small scholarship and because he wanted to play in the South, where the best baseball gets played.

After a year in Chapel Hill, one in which he started several games and hit .226, he was told his services were no longer desired.

"I could stay on scholarship, but there was no guarantee I would make the team," he said. "Reading between the lines, North Carolina started recruiting more junior college players, and I knew my days were numbered. I thought it was best for my

career to make a clean break.

"I narrowed it down to VCU and Tech. VCU had a third baseman who was a good player and he was only a junior. Tech had just had a third baseman get drafted, so I had a chance to get the job. Being from western Pennsylvania, I liked being in the country better than the city anyway."

Chuck Hartman, the baseball coach at Tech at the time, took a completely different approach to hitting than what Durkac was used to from his year at UNC. Hartman took the hands-off approach, refusing to clog hitters' heads with a bunch of ideas and letting them work on what felt comfortable to them.

Durkac flourished. He went from hitting .226 as a freshman at UNC to .423 as a sophomore at Tech – with less coaching. He led the Metro Conference in hitting and received the league's Newcomer of the Year award.

For his Tech career, he hit .360. He helped guide the Hokies to a Metro Tournament championship and an NCAA regional appearance in 1994. His senior season in 1995, he and the Hokies swept Southern Miss in a three-game series to claim the top seed in the Metro tournament. He cites those occasions as two of his fondest memories.

After graduating in 1995 with a degree in liberal arts and sciences, Durkac played in

the Arizona Diamondbacks system for two years but never made it above the Class A level. He then spent the next five years playing in various independent leagues and in a league in Taiwan – just pursuing his dream of making it to the major leagues.

"I loved every minute of it," he said. "I loved chasing the dream. I loved having beers with the guys after games and talking baseball. To say it was like *Bull Durham* is not a stretch. A lot of guys viewed it [the minor leagues] as a means to an end, but I didn't look at it that way. I embraced it.

"I played on a team [High Desert Mavericks] in 1997 that won the California League championship, and we played in front of 4,000-5,000 fans. They'd be shouting your name and asking for your autograph. That was pretty cool stuff.

"I just did the best I could and drank it all in. I worked hard and hoped to catch a few breaks, but it didn't work out. That's fine. I know now the only thing that kept me out was my ability."

A good friend and one-time teammate at UNC, Mark Kingston, convinced Durkac to get into coaching after he gave up playing following the 2001 season. Durkac landed at Charlotte as the hitting coach. Kingston got the head job at Illinois State in 2009 and


convinced Durkac to come to the Midwest as the lead assistant and recruiting coordinator. Single and with no children, Durkac decided to move to Normal, Ill.

"I was the second assistant at Charlotte, and if you want to be a head coach, you've got to be a recruiting coordinator," Durkac said. "It was a tough decision because we had done a lot of good things at Charlotte.

"But I've enjoyed being here. We had a chance to build something. We expected it to be a two- or three-year process, but to go from where we were to one of the top programs in the Missouri Valley Conference is very gratifying."

The Redbirds won the MVC regular-season title and the tournament title last season, advancing to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1976.

Durkac doesn't know how long he'll stay in Illinois. He just plans on working hard, as he's always done, and hopes that an athletics director takes notice.

"I'll go out and do the best I can and hope the results speak to where an AD will consider me for a head job," he said. "I don't know when and I don't know where, and I'm not going to get caught up in the arms' race. I'll just work hard and do what I can and hope the results speak for themselves." 

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Virginia Tech wins NIT Championship

By Chris Colston

(Reprinted from Vol. 12, No. 30 edition of the Hokie Huddler)

When years have passed and the beautiful memory of Virginia Tech's National Invitation Tournament championship still glows, all the spins and angles of the game will seem unimportant. It will be the facts that stand the test of time, and here they are:

Virginia Tech captured its second NIT title in Madison Square Garden on Wednesday night, March 29, 1995, before a crowd of 8,549. Tournament MVP Shawn Smith, a junior forward from Gastonia, N.C., hit two free throws with 0.7 seconds left in overtime to give the Hokies a 65-64 win over Marquette.

The Golden Eagles (21-12) had taken a 64-63 lead on an Anthony Pieper lay-up with 18.3 seconds left.

"Marquette defended the last play well," said Smith, who finished with 24 points and 12 rebounds. "I looked up and time was going down. The best thing you can do is go to the hole. You're bound to get fouled or something."



Shawn Smith drained two free throws with less than a second left in overtime to lift Tech to the NIT title over Marquette in 1995.

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Smith spun to the basket and took an eight-footer. Golden Eagle Faisal Abraham, ironically, a native Virginian, fouled him, although official Larry Lembo hesitated a split second before making the call. A Thursday *New York Times* photo showed Abraham got him on the left elbow and with the body.

"When a guy takes a jumper and the ball falls that much short, there has to be some contact," Marquette coach Mike Deane said. "I think there was a foul. In this situation, you talk about advantage-disadvantage, and you put them in too big a disadvantage if you don't call it."

The free throws were no gimmes. Smith, only a 66 percent free-throw shooter, had missed his last attempt.

He kept his head bowed and stood off from the foul line before stepping to the line.

"I knew it was on my shoulders," he said. "If I missed, I'd get blamed for the loss. If I hit them, I'd be a hero."

He calmly sank the first one to tie it at 64. Then Marquette called timeout to let him think about the game winner. He wasn't worried.

"At least then I knew I wasn't going to lose it," he said.

Instead, he thought about his late grandmother, Inez Smith, who died March 19 when the team was in Providence. In the postgame

celebration, Smith told his teammates, "that was for her."

"She meant the world to him," said Shawn's mother, Viola Smith. "I guarantee you she's smiling right now."

The Hokies (25-10) missed a chance to win the game in regulation. With 33.4 seconds to play, Marquette freshman guard Aaron Hutchins, a 72.9 percent free-throw shooter, tied the game at 57 with a foul shot, but missed his second attempt.

Tech freshman point guard Myron Guillory, who was averaging just eight minutes of playing time per game, was in the game because sixth man David Jackson had been struggling. Guillory – who played 19 minutes and nailed a key trey with 2:59 left in regulation – tried to find Smith in the post, but Abraham did a good job of fronting him. Tech chose not to call timeout. Guillory drove to the basket with time running down. His lay-up was short. Marquette got the rebound, and Pieper almost connected on a midcourt runner at the buzzer, hitting the front of the rim.

When they pull their tapes of the game to reminisce, most Tech fans will fast forward through the first half. The Hokies missed 15 of their first 17 shots and shot just 27.6 percent from the floor.

"That was one of the ugliest games I've ever seen," Tech head coach Bill Foster said. "We

just encouraged our kids to hang in, hang in, hang in, because things couldn't get worse."

Despite its shooting woes, Tech led 21-19 with 3:10 left in the first half before Marquette went on an eight-point run and took a 27-21 lead at intermission.

The Golden Eagles led by as many as 10 in the second half, thanks to the quick guard play of Hutchins and Tony Miller, and the inside play of center Amal McCaskill.


Things began to turn Tech's way when reserve Chris Crawford fouled out at the 3:56 mark. At that point, "we wanted to keep sticking the ball inside," Foster said.

With 1:59 left, McCaskill fouled out.

"When he went out, we had an advantage as far as inside moves and post moves," Smith said.

Ultimately, the difference was free-throw shooting – and not just Smith's late ones. Marquette finished 6 for 16 from the line, while Tech was 20 for 26.

"It was a hard-fought, defensive game," Deane said. "It was good to watch, but it wasn't pretty. There was nothing intricate going on. We ran our sets, and they ran theirs. There wasn't a lot of pressing. It was just two teams going head to head."

Virginia Tech is now undefeated in NIT championship overtime games. It beat Notre Dame 92-91 for the title in 1973. 

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