KEN EKANEM, ISAIAH FORD, and JOEY SLYE are ready to kick off a new season under new head coach Justin Fuente.
Maryah Sydnor thought her knee injury would end her dream of playing professional basketball. Our doctors thought differently. To see how our team worked together to help Maryah reach her goal, visit CarilionClinic.org/Goals.

Common ground. Common goal.
For the fifth consecutive year, a group of Virginia Tech student-athletes spent a portion of the summer studying abroad, this time going to Switzerland and France as part of a course entitled UAP (Urban Affairs and Planning) 3954: Sport, Policy and Society. The course broadly focuses on how sports affects international development and the different roles that sports assumes within a greater society.


They spent time in Geneva, Switzerland at the United Nations and the UN Office of Sport for Development and Peace; in Lausanne, Switzerland at the International Olympic Committee offices; and in Rita San Vitale, Switzerland at The Steger Center for International Scholarship, which is named after former Virginia Tech President Dr. Charles Steger. While in Lausanne, the group sat in on a graduate level sports administration course at the International Academy for Sports Science and Technology.

The trip concluded with a stop in Paris to give the student-athletes a cultural/art experience. They saw Da Vinci’s Last Supper, Notre Dame, the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre Museum.

The athletics department’s Office of Student-Athlete Development coordinated the trip in conjunction with the university. Staff members who went included Danny White (associate AD for student-athlete development), Gary Bennett (sport psychologist), Shelby Miller (coordinator of student-athlete development) and Joe Tront (faculty athletics representative).

"Within this trip, we were able to explore the rich culture and history of each of the countries visited, while also learning about how sports can help the development of a country. It was great that we were able to learn everything, while also not missing out on anything these countries had to offer."

Chris Wang
Junior, Newton, New Jersey

"I never want to take my education for granted, but use it for the good of others. I know the education and the incredible experience we have gained from this class will not stop here."

Marie Johnston
Senior | Midlothian, Virginia

"This study abroad program taught me the importance of teaching peace through the game. It’s amazing how blessed we are at Virginia Tech and how we should value our education, resources and abilities. Thank you to all the donors, staff, and Virginia Tech for making this experience possible."

Allison Woodward
Redshirt Sophomore | Unicoi, Tennessee

TRIP TO EUROPE LEARNING EXPERIENCE
FOR GROUP OF TECH STUDENT-ATHLETES

THE STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE
Q: What made you become Hokies?
A: The atmosphere and community interest generated by the Virginia Tech athletics teams, and at the time, Coach Frank Beamer and family, who are excellent examples of what it means to be a Hokie by the way they live their day-to-day lives.

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because ...
A: Its population has a common thread of loyalty, support, and language in Virginia Tech sports that spreads beyond the limits of the campus and the town of Blacksburg. Those things continue to spread among contacts within their communities.

Q: What is your best memory of Virginia Tech athletics?
A: The 1999 undefeated football team included the 62-0 defeat of the Syracuse Orangemen in October when Tech was ranked No. 4 and Syracuse No. 16. I did business travel in Europe (1999-2003), and when wearing a Hokie clothing article, would be approached and asked how the Hokies football team was doing (international interest!).

Q: How did you get involved with the Hokie Club?
A: We wanted to help the athletes and the Virginia Tech athletics programs and the Hokie Club was the avenue/conduit available to us, making it an easy process.

Q: Describe your perfect day at Virginia Tech.
A: Seated in Lane Stadium, a bright blue sky, wind out of the west, a full stadium, and a Hokies’ win. The same could be said for each Virginia Tech sport in its own venues.

Q: What is your all-time favorite Virginia Tech football player?
A: Shayne Graham, placekicker.

Q: What motivates you to give back to help Virginia Tech athletics?
A: Not being an alumni of Virginia Tech, the motivation stems from the our ability to provide assistance and help to current and future student-athletes with both their educational and athletics needs and also to have a small impact on making them prepared for their futures no matter where the avenue leads.

Q: What are the benefits of joining the Hokie Club?
A: The Hokie Club provides us the avenue to assist the student-athletes at Virginia Tech and connects us with others who have the same interest and love for Tech sports.

Q: How will my donation be used?
A: As part of the Hokie Scholarship Fund Recent Graduate Program, your donation will go toward providing scholarships for our student-athletes, giving them the opportunity to be successful in the classroom, the community and in competition!

Q&A

Hokie Scholarship Fund
Recent Graduate Program

I Just Started My First Job. Is It Expensive to Join?

NO! You can join the Hokie Club for as little as $50 per year. Recent graduates will receive a 50% discount on their first two years of membership and a 25% discount on years three and four. At the $100 "Hokie" giving level, that's $4.17/month in years one and two and $6.25/month in years three and four for a savings of $150 over your first four years!

What Are the Benefits of Joining the Hokie Club?

In addition to helping Virginia Tech student-athletes succeed, your donation to the Hokie Club will be 80% tax deductible. Plus, as a member, you’ll receive:
- Opportunity to earn & accumulate priority points which determine priority seating and parking
- Annual membership package
- 10% discount to Hokie Club Store
- Subscription to Inside Hokie Sports
- Invitation to exclusive Athletics event

How Will My Donation Be Used?

As part of the Hokie Scholarship Fund Recent Graduate Program, your donation will go toward providing scholarships for our student-athletes, giving them the opportunity to be successful in the classroom, the community and in competition!

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Former Tech great inducted into another hall of fame

Former Tech receiver Andrey Davis added another accolade to an already impressive resume when he was inducted into the Capital Region Football Hall of Fame—a Hall of Fame that honors those with upper New York state ties who have excelled in football. The induction ceremony took place on July 30 in Albany, New York.

Davis attended high school in Niskayuna, New York, not far from Albany. He played mostly soccer growing up, but decided to go out for the football team before his junior season at Niskayuna High School and that decision paved the way for an unbreakable career.

Davis enjoyed a record-setting career at Virginia Tech from 1998-2001. His 962 receiving yards and nine touchdown receptions in 1999 were single-season records that lasted until 2015 and his 27.5 yards-per-catch average still stands as a school record. He also holds or shares three punt return records at Tech.

Following a career in which he caught 103 passes for 1,986 yards and 18 touchdowns, Davis spent nine seasons in the NFL. He recently made an undisclosed financial gift to the Virginia Tech Athletics Department to help support the Hokies’ Leadership Institute, which focuses on helping student-athletes become future leaders in society.

The six new honorees will be inducted during a hall of fame dinner on Saturday, July 30 in Albany, New York. The late Jim Weaver arguably headlines the class, as he will be inducted a little more than a year after passing away. He served as the AD at Tech for more than 16 years from 1997-2013 and played in instrumental role in getting the school in the ACC. He also contributed nearly $200 million toward facilities—while also keeping the athletics department on solid financial footing.

Other inductees include:
- **Dangelo Hall**, who earned All-America honors in 2003 and still holds or shares three punt return records;
- **Kevin Jones**, who broke the school’s single-season rushing record at the time with 1,647 yards in 2003 and still ranks as the second-leading rusher in school history (3,473 yards);
- **Ashley Lee**, who has held the NCAA record for interception return yardage in a game since 1983;
- **Spyridon Jullien**, a four-time national champion and a seven-time All-American as a thrower in track and field; and
- **Kerri Gardin**, who holds or shares six single-game school records and two single-season school records in women’s basketball.

Former Tech assistant coach passes

Former Virginia Tech football assistant coach Buddy Bennett passed away in mid-July in his hometown of Jesup, Georgia. The 78-year-old Bennett coached at several schools during his career, including stints at Georgia Tech under Bobby Dodd, at South Carolina (his alma mater), at East Tennessee State, at Tennessee and at Arkansas.

Bennett coached in Blacksburg from 1974-77 under then-head coach Jimmy Sharpe, who came to Tech in 1974 after working with Bear Bryant at the University of Alabama. The Hokies went 8-3 in 1975 and 6-3 in 1976, but Sharpe was dismissed after a 3-7-2 season in 1977.

Bennett returned to Georgia after his tenure at Tech and coached high school football for several years before retiring. He founded a pest control service and ran his farm.

Bennett is survived by his wife of 51 years (Jayne) and four sons, brothers, Ken Ekanem and Chuck Clark. That, several playmakers — guys like the Edmunds at a podium ready to field questions from the rest of college football’s elite.

The hall of fame induction marked the third for Davis. In 2012, he was inducted into the Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame. In 2014, he was inducted into his high school’s hall of fame.

Six set for induction into the Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame

Louisville quarterback Lamar Jackson may be the biggest name in college football this spring, but don’t look for him to be the only story.

Davis was already inducted into his high school’s hall of fame.

Former Tech great inducted into another hall of fame

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We seek new beginnings in our lives in many ways. Often this pursuit takes a subtle form, but sometimes our ambition alters virtually everything. It may be a new exercise regimen, a job change, or even a geographic relocation.

Justin Fuente has experienced a significant new beginning in the past year and is now on the cusp of leading the Hokies’ football program into a new era. I imagine it is equal parts daunting and exhilarating. As that beginning approached, I found myself reflecting on my encounters with Fuente over the past few months—encounters that have brought me to a place of great excitement in terms of the direction of the football program, the Virginia Tech IMG Sports Network, and in one significant case, my personal health.

My biggest pet peeve always has been a reluctance to explore new ideas. It isn’t that places I have been, or the people whom I have succeeded, haven’t had great success. But I shudder when I hear someone say, “that is the way it has always been done” without taking the time to explore whether there might be avenues that would lead to improvement.

Virginia Tech football is a prime example of that. There is absolutely no disputing the heights to which Frank Beamer elevated the program, the university, and in countless ways, the region as a whole. The same is true of my predecessor, Bill Roth, who is among the greatest voices that collegiate athletics has ever known.

Success is a tremendous baseline of success that both Fuente and I have followed and that demands the acknowledgement of the traditions and structure that such success was built upon. However, that doesn’t mean that there aren’t ways in which things can be examined, modified, and in some cases, improved.

In my first year, I arrived too late to look too much into the way we formatted our broadcasts. There were definitely directions I felt we could go to advance our broadcast, but there simply wasn’t time and so we essentially worked off the format that had been used successfully for years. Fuente’s hiring presented an opportunity to innovate. The only issue would be his willingness to allow us that freedom. There are many reasons why I know that Tech hired the right man and this would soon prove to be one of them.

Fuente and I sat down in May to discuss broadcast formats and what I felt we needed from not only him, but the other members of his program as well. I quickly realized that we were kindred spirits. I bashfully requested that we do a separate television interview with his program as well. I quickly realized that we had found the right man and this would soon prove to be one of them.

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I’m pretty sure he noticed the wide grin I sported after hearing that. He was absolutely right.

I left that meeting buoyed, inspired to implement many of the facets of the broadcast that I felt would better it. To that aim, we will ask for moving our scheduled pregame interview back a couple of days, so it would be timelier in relation to that week’s game. Having gotten the reaction I sought, I pressed my luck and inquired about a few shoot-for-the-moon ideas in terms of access. At one point, he stopped me and said, “Jon, I’m all in. I got what you’re trying to do and we will do everything we can to help you do it.”

Well, now we were rolling! We continued to discuss the many facets of our operation, and at one point, I said, “Well, in the past... Really? I was the one to say that? Then he said something that I have remembered since.

“There’s really not going to be a better time to do things the way we want to do them than now,” he said.

As we conceptualized the show, I saw an opportunity to expand upon another of my beliefs. I believe a broadcast is better with multiple voices. There are so many lively people who are impactful to Tech athletics and I wanted to try to involve as many as possible.

With that in mind, I am pleased to announce that Andrew Allegretta will be expanding his role within our broadcast team and serve as host for that hour of the broadcast. He provides us youth, but I wanted to go a bit further and bring on a recent member of the football program.

We found the perfect person in former Tech receiver Willie Byrn, whom we will debut as a pregame analyst for home games this season. We will also incorporate student-athletes from other sports who represent the Student Hokie Club, as well as prominent area radio and television personalities.

I also believe that live sound is better than canned (recorded) sound. We will focus more on the feel of the day and attempt to capture the spirit of each particular game with additional live segments. I hope you will hear an upbeat pace, much like Fuente’s new offense.

“There’s really not going to be a better time to do things the way we want to do them than now,” he said.

Justin Fuente arrived in Blacksburg this past winter, but a new beginning for him kicks off on Sept. 3 when he coaches in his first game as the Hokies’ head football coach.

As we open the 2016 athletics year, my second season, I am smoke-free for the first time since 1996. I quit on Memorial Day and have no plans of going back. It has been a rejuvenating new beginning for me.

I offer that as we collectively prepare for a new beginning, I am confident it will be a rewarding one.

To all that lies ahead, Hokies! Thank you for all your support!
Q: Whatever happened to the Pac-12's proposal that would let athletes profit off of their names and images to promote non-athletic business ventures? That seemed like a sensible idea. Regards, April in Beckley, W.Va.

TP: “Some people were confused by this, but the proposal would have allowed student-athletes to make money off their names, provided they actually owned the business and the business wasn’t considered ‘athletically related.’ Many fans viewed the proposal as student-athletes simply being able to sign endorsement deals and profit from them, but that wasn’t the case.

“In this proposal, the student-athlete could make money off his/her likeness, name, etc., provided that the athlete owned more than 50 percent of the business and the university couldn’t be involved in promoting the athlete’s business. Keep in mind that a student-athlete already can do this provided he or she gets a waiver through the NCAA. For example, last year, a Georgia football player wrote a children’s book and a waiver was granted that allowed him to get it published and to profit from the sales.

“The Pac-12 ultimately tabled its proposal after it was agreed that NCAA waivers would be expeditiously processed and granted in a manner consistent with the rationale behind the proposal. The Pac-12’s proposal may not have been adopted, but it definitely warranted the additional discussion and attention it received.”

Q: Did you see where Alabama got dinged for an “impermissible recruiting decoration” when the Tide coaches placed a replica trophy in an area where recruits would be passing through on official visits. Hard-hitting stuff there from the NCAA. Thanks, Cherie, from Eggleston, Va.

TP: “I sense some cynicism in your voice, Cherie. All kidding aside, I’ve got to say that the fact that that violation became public did cause a few laughs in the compliance world. Not that other schools wouldn’t have reported it—we absolutely would have reported it, too, if it had happened here. But that specific violation is only a small part of the heavily governed world of recruiting that unfortunately all of us in Division I have to live in.

“NCAA Bylaw 13.6.7.9 states that institutions may not arrange miscellaneous, personalized recruiting aides, including, but not limited to, personalized jerseys and personalized audio/video scoreboard presentations. The rule also includes the use of decorative items and special additions to any location the prospective student-athlete will visit. The trophy, which had been moved specifically for the recruits, was far from its normal location, and that comprised the actual violation.

“Alabama self-reported the violation and provided additional rules education for staff members, a corrective action that was accepted by the NCAA Enforcement staff. No punitive actions were taken.”

The Tradition Continues...
A member of the Virginia Tech volleyball team, **Katie Krueger** will graduate next May with a degree in geochemistry and minors in Spanish and chemistry. She is doing unique research as it pertains to water-quality issues and wants to pursue a future career helping localities resolve these issues.

**Q:** Why did you decide to pursue geochemistry at Tech?

**KK:** I grew up in Florida, and in Florida, a lot of my classes were environmental science-based, so you learn a lot about environmental issues. We were on the coast. You learn a lot about salt intrusion and aquifers and all kinds of different pollution issues. I just fell in love with environmental science.

“I also had a rock collection as a kid and my mom suggested that I look into geology. As I looked more into it, I loved it. I had originally decided that I wanted to leave Florida for geology because I knew that all the geology in Florida was water-based, so Virginia Tech, being in the mountains and being amazing geologically, was a dream come true for me. As I went through the geology department, I realized that I did want to work with water, so it all came full circle.”

**Q:** You've done a lot to prepare yourself for a career in this field. Please tell about some of the things you've done.

**KK:** I did a volunteer internship with the U.S. Geological Survey the summer before my freshman year and the summer between my freshman and sophomore years. Then I did a faculty-student agreement [between her sophomore and junior years] where I worked underneath one of my teachers who does a lot of work with surface water. Then I'm also doing what's called research experience for undergraduates this summer with that same professor and studying metal contamination in surface water.

“Each experience has been different. Each has been so much fun and it's been interesting to learn about all of it. I love all of it. It's been a lot of fun.”

**Q:** You've been involved with a project that's looking into a reservoir in nearby Roanoke, Virginia. What have you been doing with that?

**KK:** I'm working at Falling Creek Reservoir in Virginia. They put an oxygenation system in there and they study how that is affecting the reservoir compared to a reservoir that is not oxygenated. I do field work twice a week and I'm studying specifically how iron and manganese in the sediment naturally will be reduced and released into a soluble form in the water. Then you have iron and manganese in the water and it turns the water brown, which is an issue. It can be expensive to treat. They're hoping the oxygenation system is eliminating the reduction of the iron and manganese in the water. I study that and that's been a continuation of my graduate mentor's work that he just finished for his Ph.D. thesis.

**Q:** What do you hope to do in the future?

**KK:** I want to go on to graduate school. For geology, it's a research-based master's degree. I'm working with Morgan Stanley, the Wadsworth Group, out of Roanoke [Virginia]. It's a paid internship and I'm working 25 hours a week. They've been great about letting me have a flexible schedule so that I'm not missing summer workouts.

“So far, I'm learning how to build relationships with clients and helping clients define their needs and life goals. I'm working with the group to help them reach those goals by using different asset fields to help them build a plan.

“This is my second year with Morgan Stanley and the past two years have definitely shown me that this is something I could see myself doing. It's fun to me, just seeing how different people react to things and how they enjoy the services that the firm provides. I like giving back and helping people to help their families.”

**Q:** How have you been able to balance football, workouts, academics, and your internships?

**KK:** “It can be difficult, especially during the season. I remember last fall, between the meetings and the classwork, it was pretty hard, but it's definitely worth it. I'm a student-athlete and I try to be the best I can be at both. I'm just taking it day by day and trying to be the best at both.”

**Q:** What do you hope to do in the future?

**KK:** “After my football career is over, I see myself preparing and studying for the CFP exam [certified financial planner] and passing that. I just want to get on track with people and help them build their relationships with their finances. I want to help them reach their goals with their lives and their families.”

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**NIGEL WILLIAMS**

**FOOTBALL**

Richmond, Virginia

by Jimmy Robertson

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Nothing has come easy for Brenden Motley since he arrived at Virginia Tech from neighboring Christiansburg four years ago. He spent much of his first four years behind Logan Thomas and then Michael Brewer, waiting for his opportunity. He’s dealt with nagging injuries. Then Frank Beamer retired, ushering in a new coaching staff that forced all players, even veterans like Motley, to learn a new system and prove themselves once again. As Motley enters his final fall, he finds himself fighting to be the starting quarterback.

At the start of the 2015 season, the Virginia Tech coaching staff decided to work several newcomers into the offense. That would emerge – Travon McMillian. McMillian, who started six of the final seven games, finished the year with 1,043 yards rushing and seven touchdowns. Brimming with confidence after his accomplishments, he goes into this season with some rather lofty goals.

“My goal is 1,800 yards, but I’m going to try and get at least 1,500,” he said.

McMillian averaged 10.5 yards rushing per game in the Hokies’ final eight games of last season. That run included five games of 75 yards or more and three of more than 100. He even rushed for 105 yards on 33 carries against Boston College, which featured the best defense in the nation last season.

The Virginia Tech running backs...
Ford and Phillips are top PLAYMAKERS, but Hokies searching for depth by Jimmy Robertson

Perhaps no position on Virginia Tech's roster this spring had a bigger adjustment to the up-tempo offense of new coach Justin Fuente and new offensive coordinator Brad Cornelsen than the receivers.

Running a route 15 or 20 yards down the field—or more—and then sprinting back to the line of scrimmage to do the exact same thing, and to do it over and over and over, can be taxing, both mentally and physically.

Just ask Cam Phillips, one of the best-conditioned athletes on the squad.

"It was a big adjustment," Phillips said. "It took me a couple of practices to get acclimated and get my wind right. But I think it helps. When you have three plays in a pass game, there is more of a mental aspect to it. When you have 20 passes for more than 3,000 yards in high school. He showed enough flashes this spring to convince the coaches of his ability to help the team this fall.

Finally, during spring practice, they worked Bucky Hodges, arguably the most talented receiver on the roster, on the tight end position. Hodges, a tight end, played a lot as a receiver a year ago, so the transition wasn't that difficult for him. But success requires the men's basketball squad, caught more than 200 passes for more than 3,000 yards in high school. He showed enough flashes this spring to convince the coaches of his ability to help the team this fall.

"It's a big positive," Phillips said. "I have high expectations of myself in the classroom. That same thing applies to this season—yet again. I'm going to be my toughest critic," Phillips said. "Personally, it wasn't the season I wanted to have. I have high expectations of myself in everything. That same thing applies to this season. I've got the bar extremely high." 

Hodges’ VERSATILITY to be on display this fall by Jimmy Robertson

Several television monitors throughout the Tech football locker room and weight room inform the players of meeting times, lifting routines, and such. The information also includes study hall times for select players.

Bucky Hodges was a regular visitor to study hall, but this summer, his name was notably absent from the list.

"I'm trying to be on top of my game," he said. "I'm trying to graduate this December and I've got five classes this fall to get done. I've definitely struggled. All the people in the academic students’ Academic Support Services have helped me so much. They are there for you. As long as you stay on top of your schoolwork, you don't have to worry about study hall and things like that. You can enjoy your free time.

"But I really want to graduate. My mom really wants to see me graduate. I want to do that for her and for myself also." If all goes according to plan, Hodges will graduate in December with a degree in human development and a minor in political science.

Then following the upcoming season, he faces another decision in regards to a possible NFL future.

The two-time All-ACC choice faced that same decision earlier this winter. He contemplated leaving Tech and making himself available for the NFL Draft, but decided to return after much reflective thought and after discussions with his family and his mentors.

"Definitely think I made the right decision," he said. "I had to mature. I'm still new to the position. I played quarterback until I got to college. Another year under my belt is going to help me succeed at the next level." A lot of Hodges' football future hinges on how well he plays in offensive coordinator Brad Cornelsen's offense this fall. Cornelsen moved Hodges all over the field this spring—a good sign that he plans on taking advantage of Hodges’ versatility.

Hodges, who has 85 career catches and 13 touchdown receptions, spent the first few spring practices at tight end, but Tech's staff essentially moved him to receiver for the remainder of the spring. He is still considered a tight end and heads into the season on the "watch list" for the Mackey Award, which goes annually to the nation's top tight end.

Playing so much at receiver forced Hodges to look at his conditioning. He got winded with regularity, as his 245-pound body struggled with the faster pace of Cornelsen’s offense. He gradually worked himself into shape and spent the summer making sure that conditioning will not be a problem heading into the opener.

"It was terrible," Hodges said of his struggles during the early part of spring ball. "It wasn't a good feeling. I had to get in shape. I learned that early. I had to eat right and get my body right. Every chance I had to get in shape, I had to take advantage of it. Through summer workouts, Coach [Ben] Hilgart [Tech’s associate AD for football strength and conditioning] and the staff got me in the best shape I've ever been in."

The Hokies need for Hodges to be at his best because the position lacks experience. None of the four players listed behind him have played tight end in a collegiate game. In fact, Chris Durkin, like Hodges, came to Tech as a quarterback.

That doesn’t mean the quartet of Durkin, Casey Harman, Xavier Burke and Chris Cunningham do not have potential. All bring height, size and athleticism to the field. They just need to learn the game—and Cornelsen’s offense.

Hodges knows that feeling. He said he felt like a freshman this spring, learning the playbook and just getting comfortable, but now he’s ready to put up big numbers this season—yet again.

"I'm very excited about this offense and the new coaching staff," he said. "We've been working hard and I think we can do some great things this year."
Offensive line with EXPERIENCE heading into 2016 campaign

by Jimmy Robertson

Jonathan McLaughlin is on schedule to graduate in December with a degree in property management, but he wants to put his musical talents to work in the future.

The big guy plays the drums, dabbles on the keyboard, and desires a career as a music producer once his football playing days run their course. McLaughlin said, “I’ve been playing since I was a 1-year-old. My father plays the organ and I’ve played with him in church. That’s something I really want to do.

“I do it on the side a little, learning production and that type of stuff. I play a little of everything. I play the drums, I play a little on the keyboard … I’m not great. I just kind of pick it up by ear. I can’t really read music.”

But yes, I’d like to get into sound production or engineering or something in that category. Property management is a fallback option for me. Got to have that.”

McLaughlin hopes that Tech’s offense is winning a tuning this fall, with he and his offensive line teammates on lead vocals. “They deserve to be in that position, too, given their level of experience. Four starters return from last season’s unit.

The group spent the entire spring getting used to new line coach Vance Vezic, who came from Memphis with new head coach Justin Fuente. Vezic is the Hokies’ third offensive line coach in four seasons.

But McLaughlin said the transition went smoothly.

“Coach Vezic has been great,” McLaughlin said. “I’m on my third offensive line coach and I wouldn’t have wanted anyone else. He’s been everything person that he said he would be. He’s hard on you, but at the same time, you can tell he cares about everybody — not just scholarship players, but everybody. He’s a great coach.”

“I wouldn’t say it’s that much different than before because college coaching is college coaching to me. As far as him knowing this offense and him being able to teach us in the short amount of time that he’s been here has been more impressive to me. He knows how to get us to where we need to be.”

Of course, the returners’ experience helped make that transition easier. McLaughlin started every game at left tackle last season, and center Eric Gallo and right guard Augie Conte started every game at their respective positions, too. Left guard Wyatt Teller started all but one game.

Wade Hansen’s departure leaves the right tackle spot up in the air. Vice worked a few different guys at the spot this spring, including McLaughlin — then again, Vice moved guys at different guys at the spot this spring, including McLaughlin — then again, Vice moved guys at different positions, too.

“Tackle. You never know if you’re going to be on the right or left side. It just depends on whatever Coach Vice thinks is good for the team.”

The biggest transition for the offensive line, though, hasn’t been to Vezic’s coaching style.

The unit spent the majority of its spring getting used to the tempo in which the offensive stuff wants to play. That tempo includes running a play and then sprinting to the line of scrimmage to run the next play as quickly as possible — and doing it over and over again.

For 300-pound linemen not used to doing such things, this was tough. Summer conditioning, however, has them prepared for the fall.

“At first, it [the pace] was tough,” McLaughlin said. “I didn’t know what to expect. At first, they said, ‘Tempo,’ but I didn’t know what that meant. Then you realize, ‘OK, this is fast. This is what they mean.’

“It wasn’t too hard to adjust to. We’re working on stuff now that will get us ready for that during the season. All the conditioning, we’ve been doing with Coach [Ben] Hilgart [Tech’s associate AD for football] and his stuff … That’s tempo-oriented. When we get to the season, it shouldn’t be much different.”

The bigger concerns for Tech’s offensive line center on finding that right tackle and developing depth, particularly at the center position. Parker Osterloh worked a lot at right tackle this spring and could be the one to emerge there. Yousah Nijman played in 12 games last season as a true freshman, though he missed most of the spring with an injury.

Demetri Moore and D’Andre Plantin also are options.

At center, Kyle Chung missed most of spring practice with a knee injury. Vice worked redshirt freshman Tyrell Smith at center, along with freshman Austin Cannon. Teller and Conte even got a few reps.

Plantin, Smith and Cannon have not played in a college game. Other backups such as Billy Ray Mitchell, Colt Pettit and Braxton Pfaff possess very little experience.

“We are definitely young with that second team,” McLaughlin admitted. “But I have confidence in all those guys to step in and play if one of the starters gets injured. That happens. It’s part of football, but I have confidence in those guys. The older guys need to bring them along.

Experience and improved depth hopefully leads to a better rushing attack and better pass protection. Travon McMillian emerged as a quality tailback last fall, but the Hokies ranked 8th nationally in rushing offense (59.3 ypg). They also allowed 54 sacks.

But Tech has been in much worse shape up front in the past. Led by McLaughlin and Conte, several guys within this group possess experience and the ability to play multiple positions.

Those two things usually make for a better offensive line—and a better offensive line usually makes for a better offense. Tech fans are hoping that’s the case in 2016.
No player on Tech's roster has spent more time under pressure the past two years than Joey Slye. After all, each day in practice, he worked under the watchful eye of Frank Beamer, who has his own display in the College Football Hall of Fame because of his body of work related to special teams.

"I was more nervous kicking in front of Coach Beamer than kicking in front of a crowd because of how important special teams were to him," Slye said. "You never wanted to let him down."

Beamer retired at the end of the 2015 season and head coach Justin Fuente has left Tech's special teams in the hands of James Shibest, who also doubles as the tight ends coach. The Hokies take a little different approach to special teams these days, but the overall goal remains the same—to be good in all phases.

Shibest and Slye came up with goals for Slye after spring practice, and Tech's third-year placekicker wants to make at least 80 percent of his field goals and hit at least 70 percent of his kickoffs for touchbacks. A year ago, he made 77 percent of his field goals, tying Tech's single-season record with 23 field goals, and 69 percent of his kickoffs went for touchbacks.

"I'll shoot for perfection, but my numbers are attainable," Slye said. "Missing sometimes comes with the job. I'm not going to get too upset in those situations. I just want to bounce back and make them when I need to make them."

Tech's situation at punter is a little more unsettled, with Mitchell Ludwig being the favorite to replace four-year starter A.J. Hughes. Ludwig, who has not punted in a college game, showed the most consistency of the group this spring.

Greg Stroman returns as the punt returner having averaged 7.8 yards per return, including one for a score. Tech's staff worked several kick returners this spring, including last year's primary returner, Der'Woun Greene (27.4 ypr last year). Expect that position to be looked at again in August practices.

Fair or not, though, the success of Tech's special teams probably hinges on Slye's ability to put points on the board. He may need to do that again this season, while Tech's offense finds itself.

"I love it when games are close and it's on my back," Slye said. "I work really, really hard. Sometimes it goes unnoticed because I'm not the top skill position, but I like to propel our team in situations like that. I see the dedication that they put in and it's reassuring to know that I can help them out in a significant way."
Baron said. “We talked even before we knew Tennessee, teammates who are on the team at Tennessee,” said Baron. “I’m really excited, but for now, it’s all Liberty.”

“One would think that no player on Tech’s defensive line recorded 16 of the team’s 26 sacks nationally (180.7 ypg).”

In looking at this season’s defensive line, the Hokies possess a lot of depth at defensive tackle and not so much at end. Baron and Williams give the Hokies two tough and experienced players at defensive tackle. Baron has played in 38 games in his career. He started five of them last season and finished with 28 tackles, including eight for a loss, and a sack. Williams played in all 13 games in 2015 and had eight tackles.

Ricky Walker and Tim Settle figure to push Baron and Williams for playing time. Walker played well as a true freshman two years ago, but took a redshirt season last year because of Tech’s depth and he played well this spring. Settle, all 350-plus pounds of him, also took a redshirt season and made some noise this spring.

A five-star recruit out of high school, Settle possesses the tools to be a dominant player. He’s quick, powerful, and runs well for someone his size.

“When you look at Tim in the weight room, you can see that he is a hard worker,” Baron said. “He comes in every day and he gets to work. I love his attitude and his approach on the field and in the weight room. I think, just like everybody else, that the sky is the limit for him. It’s all about learning every day from your mistakes and getting better.”

Steve Sobczak is another promising young defensive tackle. He played in six games as a redshirt freshman last season.

One would think that no player on Tech’s squad is more anxious to play Tennessee in the “Battle at Bristol” than Woody Baron. But if one asks the Nashville, Tennessee native—and the lone player on Tech’s roster from the Volunteer state—one gets a different response.

“I have a lot of former [high school] teammates who are on the team at Tennessee,” Baron said. “We talked even before we knew we were going to play that game.

“I’m excited for that game, but I’m more excited for Liberty. I’m just ready to get back on the field with this new team and see what we’re all about. When we do get there, I’ll probably be really excited, but for now, it’s all Liberty.”

Spoken like a senior.

Baron ranks as a veteran and also one of the Hokies’ most dependable players. He plays on a defensive line that features two other seniors in Ken Ekanem and Nigel Williams and the three of them hope to be leaders on a defense that seeks to play with more consistency than last year.

Tech’s line lost three talented players off last year’s squad in Dadi Nicolas, Luther Maddy, and Corey Marshall. Yet even with those three, the front seven struggled, as opponents rushed for 180.7 yards per game. Tech thus ranked 75th nationally in rush defense.

Injuries certainly played a role — Nicolas, Maddy, and Marshall all nursed various ailments at different points throughout the season — and opponents’ success passing exploited the front seven’s struggles, as opponents rushed for 219.7 yards per game and 2.00 sacks per game. Tech’s defense ranked 70th nationally in sacks per game (2.00) … Tech’s defense ranked 70th nationally (180.7 ypg).

Injuries have been a problem for Tech’s defensive line, with the likes of Dadi Nicolas, Luther Maddy, and Corey Marshall. Yet even with those three, the front seven struggled, as opponents rushed for 180.7 yards per game. Tech thus ranked 75th nationally in rush defense.

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Spring practice offered Tremaine Edmunds the opportunity to show his abilities as a linebacker and to quell all these rumors about him becoming a defensive end.

He embraced that challenge, too, even when it meant taking his 6-foot-5, 236-pound frame and trying to catch someone like Deshawn McCleese in the open field.

“Whoever it is, I’m going to embrace the challenge,” Edmunds said. “I know different guys are going to come with different skills. It’s fun that you brought McCleese up, though. He was my roommate last year, so we talk about that a lot. He’s a shifty dude. He’s quick. But I’m going to embrace the challenge whoever it is.”

Edmunds solidified himself as the top candidate at the backer position heading into August practices after playing well this spring. He not only brings size, length, and athleticism to the position, but he also brings football savvy—one of a player’s more underrated characteristics.

Edmunds started two games a year ago as a true freshman when Deon Clarke’s transgressions afforded Edmunds the opportunities. The first one came in the Hokies’ win over Georgia Tech, while the second came in Tech’s win over Tulsa in the Independence Bowl. He displayed his talent that game, finishing with five tackles, including 2.5 for a loss.

For the season, he played in all 13 games—mostly on special teams—and recorded 11 tackles.

“It was definitely a great experience, just starting a big game like that as a freshman,” Edmunds said of the bowl game. “It was a good experience to help me prepare for the upcoming season. I got a taste of how the game is and how the speed of the college game is. Now I’m just anxious to get back out there.”

Edmunds will be working in tandem with Andrew Motuapuaka, the Hokies’ mike linebacker who started 11 games last season. He missed two games with an injury, but still amassed 73 tackles, including a team-best 11.5 for a loss, and four sacks. The productive linebacker also forced three fumbles, recovered two fumbles, and intercepted a pass.

The Hokies need for Edmunds and Motuapuaka to stay healthy because there is a lack of proven depth at those spots. Depth became even more of an issue over the summer when Carson Lydon decided to transfer after playing 11 games as a true freshman last fall.

Sean Huelskamp and Trent Young go into the season as backups behind Motuapuaka, while Jamieon Moss will be behind Edmunds. Huelskamp started the two games that Motuapuaka missed and recorded a combined 12 tackles.

The staff also signed three linebackers in Tavante Beckett, Eron Carter, and Emmanuel Belmar. Typically, true freshmen linebackers struggle to pick up Bud Foster’s scheme because one needs to know both run defenses and pass coverages.

Then again, Edmunds played as a true freshman—but he may be outside the norm. “I’ve played linebacker all my life, so I feel comfortable there,” he said. “Wherever position helps my team, honestly, I’m fine with it. I just want to go out there and contribute and be a factor in each and every game.”

“Tremaine Edmunds is a quick decision-maker,” Foster said. “He’s a shifty dude. He’s quick. But I’m going to embrace the challenge whoever it is.”

“Coach Foster always stresses the need to be consistent,” Edmunds said. “We need to come out each and every game with the same mindset. We need to finish plays and we need to execute. We need to play as a team. Coach Foster knows what he is doing, so we need to listen to him and listen to what he has in store for us and I think we’ll definitely get back up there [in the rankings].”
Facyson set to be a LEADER at Tech's cornerbacks spots
by Jimmy Robertson

Listening to Brandon Facyson talk about his summer is almost painful. He spent his entire summer in Blacksburg, a rather tranquil place with comfortable temperatures during those months. But Facyson’s days during the first summer school session consisted of two hours of an organic chemistry course followed by two hours of lab work. He then took another organic chemistry course during the second summer session, which again consisted of two hours of classroom work and two hours of lab work.

“Then I’d come over here [Tech’s weight room] and work out and do rehab and things like that,” he said. “Then I’d go and study. We do it day-by-day and I’ve learned to make do with the situation at hand,” Facyson said of his injuries. “I’ve got a great support staff behind me. Every day, I feel like I’m progressing. That’s all I really want to do. I don’t think about anything else but progressing, both on and off the field. It got frustrating, but you have to learn to accept it and keep going. I’m all in, I feel like I’m getting where I need to be.

“It’s getting better and better each day. I’m taking it day-by-day, listening to my body and what it tells me. Overall, I feel like I’m getting stronger. I will be ready for August, so that shouldn’t be a problem.”

Tech’s defense desperately needs a healthy Facyson, as he represents one of the few cornerbacks with any playing experience. Despite battling nicks, bruises, and nagging ailments last fall, he started 10 games and played in all 13, recording 31 tackles and breaking up 10 passes.

Two years ago, he dealt with a stress fracture that ended his season after three games. Then toward the end of that season, he broke his leg. This spring, he missed spring practice after injuring his knee in an offseason workout.

“It’s [the injuries] frustrating, but I take it day-by-day and I’ve learned to make do with the situation at hand,” Facyson said of his injuries. “I’ve got a great support staff behind me. Every day, I feel like I’m progressing. That’s all I really want to do. I don’t think about anything else but progressing, both on and off the field. It got frustrating, but you have to learn to accept it and keep going. I’m all in, I feel like I’m getting where I need to be.

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Tech’s staff moved several cornerbacks to other positions in the secondary this spring to solidify those spots. The coaches moved Terrell Edwards to rover and kept Der’Youn Greene at free safety behind Chuck Clark. Also, Mook Reynolds spent nearly all spring playing the Hokies’ nickel position, a spot of ever-growing importance in Tech’s scheme.

The moves left the two cornerback spots with little in the way of depth. Only Facyson, Greg Stroman, and Adonis Alexander possess any true experience. Stroman started six games last season and finished with 24 tackles and two interceptions, while Alexander started eight games and had 55 tackles and four interceptions.

The cornerback positions not only lacked experience, but also worked under a new coach this spring. Torrian Gray, a former Virginia Tech player and longtime defensive backs coach, left for the same position at the University of Florida. Tech head coach Justin Fuente brought in Brian Mitchell to coach the cornerbacks and Mitchell brings a different style than what the Hokies’ current cornerbacks have been accustomed to over the years.

“They’re two different types of people,” Facyson said of Mitchell and Gray. “We love Coach Mitchell. We’ve accepted him into this family. That was never going to be a problem.

“Then I’d come over here [Tech’s weight room] and work out and do rehab and things like that,” he said. “Then I’d go and study. We do it day-by-day and I’ve learned to make do with the situation at hand,” Facyson said of his injuries. “I’ve got a great support staff behind me. Every day, I feel like I’m progressing. That’s all I really want to do. I don’t think about anything else but progressing, both on and off the field. It got frustrating, but you have to learn to accept it and keep going. I’m all in, I feel like I’m getting where I need to be.

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Edmunds excited about new role as ROVER in Tech’s defense

By Jimmy Robertson

Most fans know that the NCAA frowns upon wagering, but a couple of Virginia Tech players recently made bets on their own talents. Edmunds and Clark started eight games at cornerback and recorded 34 tackles and seven pass break-ups, but defensive coordinator Bud Foster and his coaches felt Edmunds’ skills fit better at rover and asked him to move.

“I wasn’t upset about it,” Edmunds said. “I was actually excited because rover at Virginia Tech is an important position. Those are big shoes to fill, considering the past players who have played that position. I just know that I have a lot to learn and a lot of work to do to try to get to that level.”

Past rovers include guys like Kyshoen Jarrett, Davon Morgan, Derrian Perch, Aaron Rosier, Kevin McCadam, and Cory Bird. All those guys enjoyed success at the position and Jarrett, Rosier, McCadam, and Bird all were drafted by NFL teams at the conclusion of their collegiate careers.

Foster and the rest of the staff thought Edmunds possessed similar potential when Edmunds went out this spring and played terrific, easing most of their concerns, particularly those of his new position coach, Galen Scott, who took over the safety spots this past spring.

“Terrell’s ability to be a versatile player, I think that’s a real strength of his,” Scott said. “I didn’t say it was the shuffling,” he said. “Coach Foster and Coach Gray put us in the secondary last fall after Kendall Fuller’s injury led to some of the inconsistent play – though don’t tell Edmunds that. “I wouldn’t say it was the shuffling,” he said. “Coach Foster and Coach Gray put us in the spots that they thought were best for us. We just have to make the plays when they are there.”

Edmunds plans on doing his best to make those plays. He joked that he will make more tackles than his younger brother, Tremaine, who plays the backer position and lines up on the same side as him.

Joking aside, he loves the rover spot and plans on living up to the tradition of the position. That, he hopes, goes a long way toward returning the secondary back to its standard of excellent play.

“It’s a little thing to help us go out and play our best,” Edmunds said. “I’m ready to get back to the old ‘DBU’ [defensive back university] and to the lunch pail defense because, in the last couple of years, people might say we’ve fallen off and I don’t believe that’s true. I was on Twitter and saw some polls and we’re the No. 1 defensive unit in the nation or something like that and I just think that’s down for us. “We’re way better than that. I don’t think we’re No. 50. I think we’re No. 1. I don’t think there is another defensive back corps better than ours.”

When Tech’s coaching staff decided to move him from cornerback to rover following last season, that small change played an integral role in Tech’s defensive scheme and requires a player with good tackling skills and also the ability to play in pass coverage.

Last fall, the staff rotated several players at the position, with varying degrees of success. Edmunds started eight games at cornerback and recorded 34 tackles and seven pass break-ups, but defensive coordinator Bud Foster and his coaches felt Edmunds’ skills fit better at rover and asked him to move.

Clark are approaching this as if the ante is value, though Terrell Edmunds and Chuck recently made bets on their own talents.

“Clark is one of just two returning players on defense who has started 23 straight games … Clark is one of the Tech’s safeties/rovers combined for one interception last season (Clark vs UVA). … Clark started the final five games of last season, recording 26 of his 29 tackles during that span … Clark is one of the fewest interceptions this season has to do with a loss. Shugog played very well down the stretch last season and he had 29 tackles and two pass breakups. Those two possess the versatility to play multiple positions, but Foster and Scott kept all the secondary players in the same spots this spring. That enabled players to get important reps and learn the expectations of their positions rather than trying to learn multiple positions. The juggling around in the secondary last fall after Kendall Fuller’s injury led to some of the inconsistent play – though don’t tell Edmunds that.

Scott also coaches the nickel back/whip linebacker position – a spot that has become more important in Tech’s scheme, as all the Hokies went with five defensive backs most of the time last season. Four players, including Moosk Reynolds, Anthony Shegog, Raymon Minor, and Johnathan Galante worked at that spot this past spring.

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Edmunds plans on doing his best to make those plays. He joked that he will make more tackles than his younger brother, Tremaine, who plays the backer position and lines up on the same side as him.

Joking aside, he loves the rover spot and plans on living up to the tradition of the position. That, he hopes, goes a long way toward returning the secondary back to its standard of excellent play.

“It’s a little thing to help us go out and play our best,” Edmunds said. “I’m ready to get back to the old ‘DBU’ [defensive back university] and to the lunch pail defense because, in the last couple of years, people might say we’ve fallen off and I don’t believe that’s true. I was on Twitter and saw some polls and we’re the No. 1 defensive unit in the nation or something like that and I just think that’s down for us. “We’re way better than that. I don’t think we’re No. 50. I think we’re No. 1. I don’t think there is another defensive back corps better than ours.”

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The Virginia Tech women's soccer team's 2015 season ended in the most painful of ways.

The Hokies lost 1-0 to Ohio State in the second round of the NCAA Tournament, falling when the Buckeyes scored on a deflection off a Tech player in the 78th minute. Making matters worse, the Hokies dominated the action, launching 20 shots compared to Ohio State's five, but Tech never got a ball in the net.

Days before heading into the first practice of the 2016 season, head coach Chugger Adair was still thinking about that November day.

"I think about things we could have done differently to prepare," he said. "We played fine on the day, but we didn't have the killer instinct to put the game away. We out-shot them 20-5. We were trying to be patient because they defended. They had a good game plan to sit in and make it difficult on us.

"We just didn't do enough and have enough in the attack to change the game. We didn't have enough passion to win the match."

That game marked the final one for a five-member senior class that included two of the best players in program history in Ashley Meier and Jordan Coburn. Meier earned All-ACC recognition all four years of her career, while Coburn made the team three straight seasons.

As a group, those five— which also included steady contributors Morgan Conklin, Courtney Stitts, and Delia Maresco— led the program to 63 wins over the past four seasons, including 24 ACC victories. Their resume also includes four straight NCAA Tournament appearances, including a 2014 College Cup appearance. Just this past season, the five of them combined for six goals and 14 assists.

"We're going to miss all of them," Adair said. "They were a part of a very good four years for us, but we're returning some very good players. We have players whom we think can step in and do the job. We may have different personalities, but I think those people can step in and be successful." Fortunately for Adair, a lot of good players return, as he and his staff continue to recruit well. This comes across as somewhat of a cliché, but the Hokies truly reload, as eight straight NCAA Tournament berths attest.

Tech's current roster features a nice blend of experience and youth. The Hokies go into the season with five seniors—and all of them contribute.

Perhaps no player is more important to the Hokies' fortunes than scoring machine Murielle Tiernan, who already holds the school record for career goals (39) and career points (92). The Ashburn, Virginia native scored a team-best 14 goals from her forward position last fall on her way toward being the school's second All-American (Jazmine Reeves, 2013).

Taranu earned first-team All-ACC honors for the second straight year. She provides Adair and the Hokies with star power, but Adair doesn't want to see her try to do too much in her final campaign.

"My hope is that she stays healthy and continues to be dangerous," he said. "As a goal scorer, it comes in bunches. We want her to play within the team and do her job. If it's scoring goals, great. If it's setting up goals, great. We don't have any numbers or anything like that in mind. We just want her to be consistent— which she's always been."

Candace Cephers, Bria Dixon, Sydney Curtis, and Kallie Peurifoy rounded out the senior class. Cephers, a midfielder, scored six goals last season, while Peurifoy started all 21 games and had five assists from her forward spot. Curtis, a defender, also started all 21 games, while Dixon, a midfielder, played in 18 games and recorded three assists.

Those five seniors will be aided by others like Alani Johnson, a forward who finished second on the team with nine goals despite starting just three games, and Laila Gray, a midfielder, added seven goals and two assists while starting 20 of 21 games. Adair hopes that he gets enough collectively from the team to replace the production of those departed seniors, particularly Meier and Coburn. Curtis, who has played in 39 games in her career, figures to be among the front runners to replace Coburn, along with Kelsey Irwin, a talented freshman who saw time at节能环保er in her first season. Adair will be looking at several options, including Peurifoy and Madi Conyers, who made the All-ACC Freshman Team two years ago and has 27 starts over the past two seasons.

"We have some different personalities that can go in there," Adair said. "Kallie Peurifoy will be one we’ll look at. Madi Conyers is another one. We'll look at some different people who have been significant members of the team. Maybe they'll have a new role to some extent, but those two are the ones we'll look at right off the bat."

Continued on page 34
1 Caroline Kems
Kems played in 17 matches as a true freshman, scoring two goals and recording an assist. The coaching staff expects her to make a big step in her sophomore season.

2 Alani Johnson
Johnson is someone to watch as she establishes herself as an assist. Her ability to find gaps in the defense will be key for Tech's success in 2016.

3 Madi Conyers
Conyers made the All-ACC Freshman team two years ago and has the ability to be an All-ACC performer for the team this season. She scored seven goals last season as a sophomore and has the ability to continue her scoring streak this season.

4 Laila Gray
Gray could play one of the most important positions on the team. She played in 43 career games. The junior midfielder could be another big threat for the Hokies this season.

5 Kelsey Irwin
The California native missed her freshman season after suffering a torn ACL last summer. The coaching staff hopes that the defender can return to the lineup and provide us with a steady presence.

The Hokies face seven of the ACC’s top-10 teams this season, so Tech needs to get off to a good start in hopes of making the ACC Tournament, which now has been expanded to eight teams.

Adair remains optimistic about his squad’s chances. His program will feature some unfamiliar names to Tech fans—but ones with no less talent than those of the past.

“We’re trying to put ourselves in position to make the ACC tournament and another NCAA Tournament,” Adair said. “We want to run together and see how far we can go. That’s our goal.”

The Hokies return to action on Friday, Aug. 19, against Miami (Ohio) at 7 p.m. at Lane Stadium. Tech is hoping for a strong start in hopes of making the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2009.

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A week after that Indiana game, the Hokies start conference play. Their first three games are at UVA, at North Carolina, and Duke—not an easy start. Eight conference teams made the NCAA Tournament a year ago and the Hokies face seven of them this season, so Tech needs to get off to a good start in hopes of making the ACC Tournament, which now has been expanded to eight teams.

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The Tech men’s soccer team mixes promising young talent and experienced returners in hopes of dominating a challenging schedule in 2016.

With practice having started, the Hokies have many reasons to be excited about the 2016 season. Head coach Mike Brizendine has brought in a lot of young, skilled athletes—a group that he hopes propels his squad to the Atlantic Coast Conference tournament in November.

“I have no doubt that we have the talent to be competitive against our non-conference and ACC foes,” Brizendine said. “With this group of guys, I am particularly excited for the team chemistry. The togetherness they show has been far better than previous years.”

The team will need that talent and chemistry because it faces one of the hardest schedules in the nation. Tech will meet 10 teams that appeared in the 2015 NCAA postseason, including Oakland, Charlotte, South Florida, Virginia, Ohio State, North Carolina, Georgetown, Notre Dame, Syracuse, and Clemson. Six of those teams finished in the top 15 of the Ratings Percentage Index, a metric used to determine the strength of a team and also used by the NCAA selection committee to pick teams for postseason competition.

“We are playing one of the best schedules in the nation,” Brizendine said. “With such a competitive schedule, our players will be required to dedicate themselves far greater than they have in the past. I want our players to give it their all, not only on the field, but also in every aspect of their life.”

The Hokies are no stranger to upsets, having beaten No. 10 Xavier and tying No. 19 Louisville and No. 7 Notre Dame last season. So with the returning talent and 11 impressive additions, the team could be positioned to make a name for itself in the ACC this season.

When asked about this year’s roster, Brizendine could not speak highly enough of his players, including his “11 Reasons to Follow the Hokies.”

1. Marcelo Acuna — #11 Sr./ Forward
   Born and raised on the beaches of Costa Rica

2. Ben Lundgaard — #1 Jr./ Midfielder
   Has broken his back twice

3. Ryan Marcano — #7 Jr./ Midfielder
   Sister played soccer for Tennessee

4. Will Mejia — #15 Jr./ Defender
   Only child

5. Alessandro Mion — #29 Jr./ Defender
   What all of the songs to the movie “Frozen”

6. JP Saavedra — #19 Jr./ Midfielder
   Favorite music artist is Taylor Swift

7. Rory Slevin — #15 Jr./ Midfielder
   Has graduated

8. Elias Tamburini — #9 Jr./ Forward
   Speaks four languages: French, Finnish, English and Spanish

9. Andre Thomas — #5 Sr./ Midfielder
   Second-oldest player on the team

10. Collins Verfurth — #10 Sr./ Midfielder
    Speaks four languages: French, English, Manding and Zarma

11. Ousmane Sanogo — #10 Sr./ Midfielder
    Speaks four languages: French, English, Manding and Zarma

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Following the end of the 2015 season, Virginia Tech head women’s volleyball coach Chris Riley couldn’t help but feel excited when he looked ahead to the 2016 campaign. He had some good reasons to feel that way considering whom he had returning to campus.

Riley lost only two players to graduation and he returns a number of key pieces with another year of experience under their belts. Seniors Lindsey Owens and Amanda McKinzie are back for their final campaigns in Blacksburg after finishing first and second on the team, respectively, in kills last season. Riley also will see his top setter back in sophomore Rhegan Mitchell and junior middle blocker Ashley Battle, who’s coming off a sophomore year when he hit .330 and tallied 143 blocks.

It’s a battle-tested core that is joined by seven newcomers. They combine to form a Hokie volleyball squad that possesses talent, depth, and the chance to exceed expectations against a challenging schedule.

“Our team is pretty experienced,” said Riley, who is entering his 11th season at Tech. “We have a chance to build a really consistent team. That’s what we want to do.”

“We’re going to have a chance to be a really good team this year,” Riley said. “We have some good young players and good ball control players in there.”

“The kind of team we have this year is pretty experienced,” Riley said. “We feel like we can match up with just about anybody.”

“We have the kind of stability where we can move our middles to the right side interchangeably,” Riley said. “We’re looking for them to bring a block presence to what we’re trying to accomplish. I can move them into either one of those spots and they can play. They’re not just middles.”

Last season, Battle ranked in the top 10 in the ACC with a .37 total blocks per set and a .39 hitting percentage. Cunningham, a second-year transfer from Villanova, ranked second on the team with 83 total blocks in her first season in Blacksburg.

MIDDLE BLOCKERS

Battle and juniors Cara Cunningham and Stacey Christy are designated as middle blockers, but Riley doesn’t see them that way. Their versatility is viewed as a strength in Tech’s schemes on both sides of the net.

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OUTSIDE/ RIGHTSIDE HITTERS

It can be argued that Tech’s deepest position is at outside and right side hitter. Not only do the Hokies bring back their top two hitters from 2015 in McKinzie and Owens, but they also return sophomore Julia Tolbert. Tolbert was named to the ACC All-Freshman Team last season after posting 85 total blocks, with a .265 hitting percentage and 1.48 kills per set.

“We feel like we’re pretty steady at right side and outside,” Riley said. “Lindsey and Amanda have been here a long time, but we have some good outsides behind them whom we can move to the right side. We’re not reinventing the wheel right now, but we are solidifying some of the spots.”

The Hokies have plenty of spots, and if those get solidified, they could roll nicely this fall. Hopefully, they roll straight to their first NCAA Tournament berth since 2010.
A silver of Virginia Tech’s Buford Meredith Cross Country Course will be off limits this fall, as workers continue construction on the new interchange along Route 460 and Southgate Drive, which butts up to the course.

A construction job of smaller proportions is continuing within Tech’s cross country programs, particularly on the men’s side.

Head coach Ben Thomas, the lead engineer, so to speak, on this project, is tasked with trying to find a replacement for Thomas Curtin, who enjoyed arguably the best season of any distance runner at Tech history. One could argue that he enjoyed the best season of any athlete in Tech history.

Curtin earned All-America honors in cross country, indoor track and outdoor track last year, but he probably ran his best during the cross country season in the fall. He won three races, including the ACC’s individual crown when he sprinted past Syracuse’s Justyn Knight in the final 300 meters.

Curtin also won the prestigious NCAA Pre-National Meet and the NCAA Southeast Regional. He finished 22nd at the NCAA Championships, earning All-Americans honors.

“Tommy was an inspiring athlete, with the way that he raced,” Thomas said. “It was fun to watch him and Joseph - the two seniors - running his coach, I just enjoyed watching him as a fan. I’m going to miss that more than anything. It was such a rare attitude that he brought.

I’m really excited that most of our returners had some time with him and hopefully that’s rubbed off. I’m not saying we don’t have someone like Curtin, but I’m hoping it [Curtin’s toughness] rubs off on the cross country side a little more because most of my guys don’t have a lot of experience with cross country. We’ll miss his leadership tremendously. You just don’t replace him.”

Largely because of Curtin, the Tech men’s team received an at-large berth to the NCAA Championships. It marked the first for the men since 2012 and just the program’s second since 1987. The Hokies, who finished fourth at the ACC Championship, came in 21st at the NCAA meet.

In addition to losing Curtin, the Hokies also saw steady Darren Barlow depart, along with Juan Campos. Barlow usually finished in the top 40 of every meet and was consistently among Tech’s top five runners.

Despite those losses, the men’s team returns the bulk of its roster once practice starts. Teamwork is how we win. And it’s how we deliver.

Thomas also expects improvement from guys like Peter Seuser, Brett Muselman, Daniel Jaskowak and Andrew Gaiser. Seuser was the ACC Freshman of the Year last fall as the highest finishing freshman. He came in 34th at the ACC Championship and gained valuable experience after earning a spot in Tech’s lineup for the ACC Championship, the NCAA Southeast Regional and the NCAA Championships.

Muselman and Jaskowak, like Seuser, were usually regulars in the lineup. Muselman had four-top 50 finishes, while Jaskowak came in 31st at the ACC Championships and 53rd at the Virginia Tech Alumni Invitational.

“Other runners could factor in, including Diego Zarate—who qualified for the IAAF 1500m World Championships in 3:50—Vince Ciattei, Andrew Eason, Kevin Cianfarini and Andre Goldman. Thomas also expects Fitzum Seyoum, an incoming freshman from Northern Virginia, to be in the mix.

Thomas understands that he probably doesn’t have another runner like Curtin on the roster—those rarely come around—but collectively, the Hokies may have enough to make up the difference and improve on their fourth-place finish at the ACC Championship.

“Some of the things we talked about before the season ended, the guys are eating and sleeping as they could before practice starts. Some of the things we talked about before the season ended, the guys are eating and sleeping as they could before practice starts. Some of the things we talked about before the season ended.”

Despite being more of a middle distance runner, Morton ran fairly consistently in Tech history. She was Tech’s top finisher at the ACC meet. With 15 teams, there’s a fine line between being at the top and in the top five.

On the women’s side, the Hokies return nearly everyone on the roster—a stark contrast to last fall when they saw seven seniors depart. This time, they only lost two seniors (Julie Wiemerslage and Shalonda Mitchell) and Thomas expects much-improved performances, both from individuals and as a team.

Curtin earned All-America honors in cross country, indoor track and outdoor track last year.

The Tech women lacked that lead runner a year ago — someone with the ability to run near the front and contend for a win. Two years ago, Sarah Rapp and Paige Kvartman both filled that role, and Faith Eke also expects Fitsum Seyoum, an incoming freshman from Northern Virginia, to be in the top 15 of every race.

This season, seniors Abigail Motley, Shannon Morton and Hanna Green are among many vying to move into that role. Without question, they serve as the leaders of this squad.

“We have an experienced group coming back,” Thomas said. “They did a pretty solid job last year to be in the top half of the ACC. We had good depth, but we didn’t have a front runner. This group could certainly improve from last year.”

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cross country last fall. She recorded two top-20 finishes and her 41st-place finish at the NCAA Southeast Regional marked the best on the squad. Green, a four-time All-American in track, came in a team-best eighth at the Virginia Tech Alumni meet and a team-best 21st at the Princeton Invite early in the fall.

But a foot injury hampered her later in the season and Tech’s coaching staff held her out the remainder of the year following her 70th-place finish at the ACC Championship. The coaches wanted to preserve her for the track season.

Lauren Berman figures to push those seniors as she heads into her sophomore season. She had the best fall of the freshmen in 2015, recording four top-45 finishes, including a 10th-place finish at the Virginia Tech Alumni Invite. She came in a team-best 45th at the NCAA Southeast regional to cap a great season.

“We have the girls with the potential to do it, but it won’t happen until we hit the roads here in a couple of weeks,” Thomas said.

Now in his 16th season, Thomas likes the direction of both programs. Both possess more quality, talent and depth than in seasons past.

His goals for this fall are lofty—he wants both teams to receive bids to the NCAA Championships. That means doing well at the ACC Championships, along with a few other meets in which his squads will take on terrific competition.

“Those are our goals,” he said. “Two things need to happen. We need to be consistent throughout the fall, which means staying healthy and getting a lot of good work in. Also, our leaders are going to have to lead and our experienced people are going to have to be very good.

“We don’t have a lot of room for error. But if it all comes together—and we expect it because we’ve been good about doing that—we hope to be at nationals.”

He and the rest of Hokie Nation will find out just how far along this construction job is on Sept. 2 when the Hokies open the season at home in the annual Hokie Invite. That marks the first of three home meets this fall. The ACC Championship will be held on Oct. 28 in Cary, North Carolina.
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