WHAT'S INSIDE

A position-by-position analysis of the HOKIES, as they get ready to kick off the 2017 SEASON

CAM PHILLIPS and ANDREW MOTUAPUAKA headline a Virginia Tech team looking to return to the ACC title game — and WIN IT
Yosuah Nijman stands 6-foot-7 and weighs 300 pounds, and in late May, he crammed himself into an airplane seat for a 14-hour trip to Rwanda, a small country in Central Africa.

“It’s hard being 6-7 and traveling in economy,” he said, smiling.

Nijman was part of a small contingent of Virginia Tech student-athletes, students and administrators who traveled to Rwanda as part of UAP 3984: Sport, Policy and Society—a study abroad course that explores different sectors of international development and how sports can support such development. Danny White, associate AD for student-athlete development, oversaw the course and led the group, which included 10 student-athletes: Nijman, Vinny Mihota (football), Ty Outlaw (men’s basketball), Adriana Grabski (women’s swimming), Kelly Henry (women’s swimming), Sydney Pasetti (women’s swimming), Logan Williams (women’s swimming), B.C. LaPrade (wrestling) and Jordan Hemmen (women’s soccer). Also, Tech students Emily Mertes and Joseph Cruz took part.

They spent the majority of their two-week trip in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. While there, they went to the Kigali Genocide Memorial, which honors the more than 250,000 people who were killed by a government-led faction during a three-month period in 1994. None of the students had been born when this event took place, and few knew more than a few details, as the American education system tends to focus more on historical events that impacted the U.S.

“I learned about the genocide and how that ties into the culture and where they are now,” Nijman said. “I’ve learned how they’ve grown from that, and forgiveness is one of the biggest components in how they’re living now. That was an eye opener to me, and I feel that it’s important to be taught about how people can come together after such a tragedy. The genocide memorial was one of the highlights of the trip.”

The group also went to Akagera National Park as part of a safari trip, toured the Rwanda National Olympic Committee offices, met with a representative of the Rwanda Youth Peace Clubs Organization, and taught physical education classes at an international school.

White oversaw a class session each day, with the emphasis being on understanding international development and how sport aids in that development. The students read and wrote papers, and they participated in discussions about what they saw, and more importantly, learned that day.

“We had a journal entry every day,” Mihota said. “We had two one-page papers and a final paper when we got back.

“But most of it was hands-on stuff that you can’t read in textbooks. It’s the best way to learn, just going over there, and we met with other organizations that were helping to develop the country. It was cool to see their approach as to how they get things done.”

This year marked the sixth consecutive year in which a group of Virginia Tech student-athletes spent a portion of the summer studying abroad. In that time frame, approximately 90 student-athletes have traveled to places like the Dominican Republic, Switzerland and now Rwanda.

The goal is to challenge them and to expose them to the challenges that people in other parts of the world face to deepen their understanding. Hopefully, these young men and women feel compelled to make a difference. In other words, the goal is to compel them to live up to Virginia Tech’s motto, Ut Prosim (“That I May Serve”). The course and trip goes a long way toward doing that.
Dear Hokie Nation,

On behalf of the entire Hokie Club staff, I want to thank those individuals who supported the Hokie Club during the 2016-17 giving year. Your ongoing commitment supports the evolving needs of our student-athletes at Virginia Tech and helps our programs to remain competitive in the ACC, while we continue striving for national excellence.

As you may know, it was a record-breaking year for the Hokie Club, as total giving exceeded $33 million! More than 10,000 Hokies joined together to specifically give more than $16.2 million to the Hokie Scholarship Fund, resulting in full coverage of 2016-17 scholarship costs. In addition to the Hokie Scholarship Fund, Hokie Club members supported Virginia Tech student-athletes through gifts toward specific endowments, sport-specific funds, and capital projects, all of which positively impact Coach Beamer leading the ‘Drive for 25’ initiative, the Hokie Club now boasts an all-time record 13,500 members, and we are excited about the positive momentum surrounding Virginia Tech Athletics!

As we look to the 2017-18 giving year, I encourage all those reading this letter who may not be members of the Hokie Club to join us as we ‘Drive for 25’! The single best way to impact the lives of Virginia Tech student-athletes and the future of Virginia Tech Athletics is through joining the Hokie Club. Please visit hokieclub.com, or call 540-231-6618 for more information on how you can support Hokie student-athletes today!

Again, thank you for your continued support of Virginia Tech Athletics through your generous gifts to the Hokie Club for the 2016-17 giving year! The future of Virginia Tech Athletics is bright, and our success is not possible without your support!

Go Hokies!

Bill Lansden
Sr. Associate Athletics Director for Development/Executive Director of the Hokie Club
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Virginia Tech begins Aug. 28, with the football season kicking off six days later, as the Hokies open 2017 with a game against West Virginia at FedExField.

Tech's starting defensive end spot appears to be set with Vinny Mihota and Trevor, Hill, but the Hokies need for at least a third end to emerge. Gaines and/or Minor may be the best bets for a number of seasons.

Gaines, at 6-foot-5, 245 pounds, possesses the size, length and speed, while Minor is an intriguing option after not playing last season. Defensive coordinator Bud Foster and defensive line coach Charley Wiles really liked what they saw from Belmar this spring after moving him from backer to defensive end late last season. He possesses athleticism, got stronger this summer and now weighs 240 pounds. He possesses the ability to play several positions.

That said, there are options at these spots. Gaines and/or Minor may be the intriguing option after not playing last season. Defensive coordinator Bud Foster and defensive line coach Charley Wiles really liked what they saw from Belmar this spring after moving him from backer to defensive end late last season. He possesses athleticism, got stronger this summer and now weighs 240 pounds. He possesses the ability to play several positions.

Two former Virginia Tech football players showed their talent in another sport this past summer — golf.

Tech football duo wins golf tournament

Two former Virginia Tech football players showed their talent in another sport this past summer — golf. Former Tech head coach Frank Beamer and legendary former wide receiver Carroll Dale, two members of the Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame, won the Member-Member Tournament at The Olde Farm Golf Club held June 23-24 outside of Bristol, Virginia. Beamer and Dale won their flight with 94 points and won the Shootout. The event featured 40 golfers. 

With 2017 kickoff looming, Hokies hoping several players emerge at several spots

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Every aspect of our world evolves, and we can hope that our personal reaction to that evolution leads to success and satisfaction in life. Are we the types of people who aggressively track new technology trends and ideologies, or do we stubbornly cling to things in our lives that provide us comfort? If you resemble me, you find that answer somewhere in the middle. This provides opportunities for growth, but also moments of frustration and a nostalgic lament for opportunities for growth, but also moments of satisfaction in life. Are we the types of people we only can hope that our personal reaction to changes in communications methods. What is the feel of the newspaper in the morning, and therefore, we available with a tap of my smartphone. I miss highlights on ESPN.

I used to see this as somewhat of a disadvantage. The sheer speed at which life is disseminated by millennials can seem daunting. I imagine that is only magnified for those who represent generations prior to mine. However, I came to embrace that space in the middle. I find that lodged in between is the challenge that we all face with the proliferation of content options and the speed at which they become available. It is that internal compromise that I try to lean upon, as our team attempts to shape the future presentation of Virginia Tech athletics. We need to explore new frontiers, while also respecting the reliability of some of our core franchises. Those core franchises include our radio game broadcasts and “Tech Talk Live,” which people listen to across the Virginia Tech/IMG Sports Network. This is an arena where I refuse to compromise. I continue to believe that the network of affiliates needs to be maintained, and in some cases, expanded. I diligently make an effort each year to extend those relationships and add other key markets. You will make some missteps along the way. I hope that you bear with us as we do.

Although I use technology in my professional work, I also have noticed that this greatly enjoy contributing. You already have noticed that this magazine is now available online, beginning in August, “Virginia Tech Sports Today” will be as well. Check out Hokiesports.com for online editions. At the same time, I believe there is negligence in complacency, and remain grateful that virtually everyone associated with Tech athletics shares this belief. In this highly competitive arena, we need to adapt to win with the leaders of the pack. With that in mind, I stand exceptionally excited to unveil the following new initiatives for the coming year. I do so with the caveat that, as we implement new mediums, we undoubtedly will make some missteps along the way. I hope that you bear with us as we do.

We greatly enjoyed having Willie Byrn as a member of our broadcast team last year, but we were thrilled that he boldly decided to chase his musical dreams in California. I always applaud that. However, his departure created the opportunity for Wes McElroy, to join our team. We plan to use Wes as a co-host for the “Kubota Kickoff Show” and “Hokies Kickoff Countdown,” along with Andrew Allegrutta, across our radio network. And fear not, our radio postgame show still remains available across our entire radio network.

We also will team with HokieVision, marketing, strategic communications and athletics programs to provide diverse video and audio elements across a variety of social media platforms. This includes football training camp coverage that invites you behind the scenes, as the Hokies prepare for the season. In addition, Allegrutta, Mike Burnop and I will bring you “The Hokie Pod,” a weekly podcast dedicated to Tech athletics. The show also will air on our radio network.

I hope you continue to enjoy the Hokies and their teammates. We greatly enjoyed having Willie Byrn as a member of our broadcast team last year, but we were thrilled that he boldly decided to chase his musical dreams in California. I always applaud that. However, his departure created the opportunity for Wes McElroy, to join our team. We plan to use Wes as a co-host for the “Kubota Kickoff Show” and “Hokies Kickoff Countdown,” along with Andrew Allegrutta, across our radio network. And fear not, our radio postgame show still remains available across our entire radio network.

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Group of Tech athletes participate in Hokie L.E.A.D. Internship Program

by Reyna Gilbert-Lowy, senior associate AD for student-athlete development

What do marketing and promotions, nutrition, fundraising and photography all have in common? In addition to being essential elements of a well-run athletics department, they are also just a few of the areas in which Virginia Tech student-athletes can gain experience as part of the Hokie L.E.A.D. Internship Program.

In 2015, the Office of Student-Athlete Development created the Hokie L.E.A.D. Internship Program, with the intention of providing student-athletes interested in careers in intercollegiate athletics the opportunity to gain experience in an environment that was understanding of their academic and athletics schedules. L.E.A.D. — which stands for Learn, Experience, Achieve and Develop — provides real-world experiences over a 10-week period during the summer.

This year’s program began May 30 and concluded the first week of August. The 2017 cohort consisted of six student-athletes, including football player Coleman Fox, who spent his summer working with the Hokie Club. Fox, a junior pursuing a degree in finance, was interested in finding an internship that would coincide with summer classes and training.

Brent Musselman, senior associate AD for student-athlete development, and Peter Seufer interned with sports nutrition and marketing and promotions, respectively. As a human nutrition, foods and exercise science major, Musselman applied to the program to gain experience toward his career goal of becoming a physical therapist. Gaby Senties and Julia Tolbert, both members of the volleyball team, participated in the internship program as well. Senties spent time honing her photography and editing skills with Dave Knachel, senior director of photography and design, while Tolbert interned within marketing and promotions.

“This internship program interested me because of the opportunity to gain career experience,” Tolbert said. “As student-athletes, we are so busy and don’t get a chance, or have the same opportunities, as other students. Being an athlete in a team sport, you have to be able to take into account people’s emotions and energy. Getting to work with the other marketing interns and working with a lot of different people allowed me to incorporate some of the skills I’ve learned through sports.”

Sydney Steinberg interned with the Office of Student-Athlete Development and brought a unique perspective as a Division II lacrosse player at The University of Virginia’s College at Wise. The Blacksburg native spent two weeks last summer assisting with new student-athlete orientation and returned for the full 10 weeks this summer to gain more experience. A business administration major with a minor in communications, Steinberg hopes to narrow down what career path she would like to pursue post-graduation and believes the Hokie L.E.A.D. Internship Program will assist her in doing just that.

“I wanted to take my experiences from UVA Wise, incorporate them into my summer internship and bring back what I learned this summer at Virginia Tech,” Steinberg said. “I wanted to take those experiences back to Wise.”

When she returns to Wise in mid-August, Steinberg will play an active role in her campus’ Student Government Association and also will serve as the vice president for the Student Activities Board.

The internship program not only exposed student-athletes to careers in intercollegiate athletics, but also offered networking and professional development opportunities. The cohort was required to attend bi-monthly professional development workshops, which were facilitated by select staff members from within the department. Kelsey Appleton, associate director in strategic/social communications, addressed the group about social media responsibility. The group also learned how to identify and effectively communicate transferrable skills from Shelby Miller, director of student-athlete development.

In addition, the group learned how to integrate experiences from the internship into their resume from Natalie Forbes, senior director in student-athlete development. Senties and Jaila Tolbert, both members of the volleyball team, participated in the internship program to gain experience toward their career goals.

Cross country runners Brent Musselman and Peter Seufer interned with sports nutrition and marketing and promotions, respectively. As a human nutrition, foods and exercise science major, Musselman applied to the program to gain experience toward his career goal of becoming a physical therapist. Gaby Senties and Julia Tolbert, both members of the volleyball team, participated in the internship program as well. Senties spent time honing her photography and editing skills with Dave Knachel, senior director of photography and design, while Tolbert interned within marketing and promotions.

“Summer internships can provide an ideal opportunity for students to learn more about career fields in which they are interested, and even more importantly, learn about themselves. The opportunity for these student-athletes to gain experience in their own backyard was just icing on the cake!”

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The past three years, Cam Phillips has taken a backseat to the bigger stars on Virginia Tech’s offense, but the receiver heads into the upcoming season ready for the leading role.

By Jimmy Robertson

I’ve thought about it, but I don’t place as much emphasis on it as other people do. I just worry about playing the best that I can play, and I believe that stuff will come. Just go out and treat the game the same, and don’t worry about how many catches I need, or how many yards I’ve got to get.

Cam Phillips on breaking Tech receiving records

Almost defies logic that a 6-foot, under 200-pound young man failed to be under the Pop Warner Football weight limit on more than one occasion as a kid. But it’s true that Cam Phillips never played as a “tiny mite.” Instead, the same guy in midst of threatening nearly every Virginia Tech receiving record lived a larger existence as a youth and often found himself playing up a level, as he continuously checked in over the limit.

Rest assured, he always had athleticism, barreling through and darting around unsuspecting older foes as a running back. Yet his extra mass led to his coaches giving him added duties on the other side of the ball — as a defensive lineman.

“I was cool,” Phillips said, smiling as he recollected. “Even when I was 12, I was one of the taller, bigger guys, so I played running back and defensive end. Those combinations are kind of off, but it was cool. It makes for good stories to tell.”

Obviously, the plot to Phillips’ story changed, as he became a hotshot high school standout, accepted a scholarship to Virginia Tech, became a starter in the Hokies’ game at then-No. 8 Ohio State, and has been a starter ever since. Having now escaped the large shadows of Isaiah Ford and Bucky Hodges, who left for NFL glory and riches, Phillips enters the 2017 season ready to be “the man.”

Ford departed with his name fully etched all over the Tech record books, but Phillips goes into the upcoming season with aspirations of etching his own. He needs just 46 catches and 905 yards to become the school’s all-time leader in both categories.

“I’ve thought about it, but I don’t place as much emphasis on it as other people do,” Phillips said. “I just worry about playing the best that I can play, and I believe that stuff will come. Just go out and treat the game the same, and don’t worry about how many catches I need, or how many yards I’ve got to get.”

Phillips answered the question the way in which he answers nearly every question — softly, with a dose of humility. By doing so, he cuts against the grain, both literally and figuratively. On the field, he does so naturally and gracefully, using smooth strides and open-field awareness. Yet he belies the typical persona of a receiver — cocky, brash and talkative.

That’s why his outfit at the ACC Football Kickoff media event held in Charlotte, North Carolina in mid-July caught many by surprise. The soft-spoken Phillips showed up in a bronze, double-breasted, velvet blazer, with flip glasses popularized by Dwayne Wayne of “A Different World” as an accessory.

His choice of attire had everyone talking. He received more questions about it than about Tech’s football team. Even head coach Justin Fuente joked about it while on the stage fielding questions.

“That’s what I wanted,” Phillips said. “I wanted people to see that, ‘This is Cam coming into his own.’ It was sort of like a business move, I guess, but I wanted to have the lights on me to show that this was my time, and I’m ready for this. But that’s me. Any time I get a chance to look nice and have everybody say, ‘Oh man, where did you get this from? Where did you get that?’ I like that. I try to do that. Guys will tell you that’s me all the time.”

Most who know Phillips do understand that he loves fashion. His teammates say that his attire in social settings usually deviates from the norm. This time, though, he took fashion to another level. The outfit screamed, “Me, me, me,” and that seems counter to the mindset of a self-proclaimed introvert.

“That’s just a way that I talk — with clothing and how I express myself,” he said. “I’ve never wanted to talk or be a loud guy.”

Phillips used to lack that sense of fashion, preferring to wear jerseys of his favorite players as a kid. But his mom, Toessler Nicholson, encouraged him — strongly — to look more presentable, especially after she moved the family from Charlotte to outside of Washington, D.C., before Phillips entered the eighth grade. She drummed up a job in D.C., thus necessitating the move.

She enrolled Phillips at DeMatha Catholic, an all-boys school in Hyattsville, Maryland. School officials enforce a strict dress code there, forbidding hoodies, sweatshirts, shorts, jerseys and even sneakers — the things young boys like to wear. That forced Phillips to begin thinking about his sense of style.
He wanted to meet with me personally in his office. Me and Coach Moorehead, my first wide receivers coach, had a great connection. I met with Coach [Frank] Beamer a couple of times. I believe we met for a reason. It changed me. I made it look more at myself and do more self-assessing and become more accountable in everything I do, so I think having Isaiah here made me better.

Phillips hopes his performance in the Belk Bowl propels him to a huge senior season. In the town where he was born, he caught six balls for a career-high 115 yards, helping Tech rally from a 24-0 deficit to a 35-24 win and securing the game’s MVP honors. The honor caught him by surprise. “I didn’t even score a touchdown,” he said.

The performance left Tech fans wondering if Phillips wouldn’t choose the same route as Ford and leave early for the NFL. Phillips unveiled his plans on Twitter, telling everyone "I think Cam has grown in the past year and a half — and I’m not taking credit for that," Fuente said. "I just think he’s matured. He likes to have fun … but he’s also earned that opportunity by working his tail off every single day. That’s what I appreciate most about him."

Phillips figures to have options once his collegiate career ends in December. He graduates in December with a degree in consumer studies, but hopes his next step comes at the NFL level. He understands that is a fickle situation, particularly after seeing Ford drafted in the seventh round after an incredible career.

So a career as an NFL wide receiver? Perhaps. A career in fashion? Maybe. Work as a personal trainer? Possibly. Phillips certainly has taken advantage of his opportunities at Virginia Tech and given himself an array of possibilities. One thing is for sure—he won’t be a defensive lineman. Those days ended a long, long time ago.

Fuentes is expecting more big performances from Phillips this upcoming season. After all, only three other returning receivers caught a pass last season, and those three — C.J. Carroll, Henri Murphy and Sean Daniel — combined for one start. The lack of experience worries Fuentes. But he also admits it’s nice to feature a player with the ability and intelligence to play more than one spot. He also likes Phillips’ willingness to help the younger crowd. For the Hokies to get where they want to go, they need to follow his lead.

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Whether you’re hiking the Appalachian Trail, kayaking the New River or spending time with the ones you love, there’s more to do in our region than ever before. That’s why we have more locations, more specialties and more physicians, all sharing a common goal—to help you do more.

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"They’re [the video office] made it so that we can just watch us, so I’ve been able to watch a lot of film," he said. "I think it’s helped. I watch and see everyone do their rep, and that’s good for learning, too. So yeah, I think that’s helped me a lot."

Jackson certainly is being challenged by the other two. Bush spent two seasons at Nebaska, taking a redshirt year during one of those seasons. He then spent a season at Iowa Western, a junior college in Iowa. His numbers in junior college weren’t the greatest, but part of that stemmed from the timing of his transfer—he missed offseason workouts there.

Hooker graduated from high school a semester early and enrolled at Tech once Jerod Evans made his decision to make himself available for the NFL Draft. The lanky Hooker spent the spring learning the offense, and more importantly, getting used to the speed of the game. He put up quality numbers in the spring game, though most of that came against projected backups on defense.

The competition figures to run right up until the week before the first game—just like last season when Evans beat out Jackson and Brenden Motley. Jackson understands the meaning of competition, and he embraces it.

"You go in and try to be the best you can be and don’t worry about anyone else," he said. "We’ll see how it goes. That’s all you can really do in a competition, and that’s how I approach it."


do more.

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Virginia Tech trailed Arkansas for the first three quarters of the Belk Bowl, but rallied to cut the deficit to 24-21 entering the fourth quarter.

Tech drove to the Arkansas 27, and quarterback Jerod Evans handed off to Travon McMillian. The tailback took it up the middle and broke two tackles on a 21-yard run to the Arkansas 6. On the next play, he broke another tackle, scoring on a powerful run to give the Hokies a lead that they would not relinquish en route to a 35-24 win.

Evans led the way with 204 carries. Sam Rogers had 77 carries, and eventual winner Phillips, a receiver, finished with 30. That cut into McMillian's attempts.

"I feel like the end of the day, people don't see that," McMillian said. "They see it. 'Oh, he's in a slump.' That's [the number of carries] not in McMillian's attempts.

"I feel like we'd be able to take the pressure off the quarterback this year given that they're not going to be expected," he said. "This is going to be their first time playing this year, so they're going to play the ball really well, then we'll make it a lot easier for whoever the quarterback is going to be.""

Virginia Tech's 2015 opener, but a shoulder injury shelved him for the rest of the season.

"I feel really good. I feel like I didn't lose a step. That's what counts. I'll be able to be this bigger and hit it more inside and carry more of the bulk of the load this year," McMillian said.

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Offensive line returns ‘THREE STARTERS’ heading into 2017 season

by Jimmy Robertson

Eric Gallo spent a chunk of his summer helping to manage people's money while working an internship in preparation for a future career in financial planning.

Now, with the 2017 season opener against West Virginia rapidly approaching, Gallo spends his days managing Virginia Tech’s offensive line, preparing that unit for what he hopes will be a successful season in the fall.

“Then, just from a mental standpoint, watching a lot of film and understanding what I did well and what I need to work on from the spring, I want to turn weaknesses into strengths,” Gallo said.

“Then thirdly, leadership. I want to be one of those guys that younger guys look up to as far as someone who comes to work every day, and someone to whom Virginia Tech football is very important.”

Tech’s coaching staff expects Gallo to be a leader on an offense that projects to start just three seniors—Gallo, left guard Wyatt Teller and receiver Cam Phillips. Obviously, that number could change pending final personnel decisions, especially line coach Vance McClain’s looming determinations on the right guard and right tackle spots. But Gallo’s leadership remains of utmost importance.

“Mostly, that’s because of the departures of Jonathan McLaughlin and Augie Conte, who played right tackle and right guard a season ago. McLaughlin started 49 games in his career and Conte started 37, and they really set the standard in terms of work ethic, leadership and daily approach for the group. Unfortunately, their departures left a void of on-field experience and off-field intangibles.”

Gallo, Teller and left tackle Youssouf Nijman know that Vice expects them to assume much of those responsibilities. It starts by setting a great example during practices and weightlifting sessions, but also includes fostering chemistry off the field. To their credit, they’ve organized dinners and off-field excursions to take care of that aspect of the equation.

“As a group, we’ve improved in every single aspect of the game. I think it’s something where everyone has to step up their games this season. We’re not just returning starters, we’re returning starters who really set the standard in terms of work ethic, leadership and daily approach for the group. Unfortunately, their departures left a void of on-field experience and off-field intangibles.”

There are still questions up front, but Gallo is confident in the development of the replacements for McLaughlin and Conte. Tyrell Smith, Parker Osterloh and center Zachariah Hoyt. They went through some growing pains this spring, but they showed potential.

Overall, the Hokies are in better shape financially planning for the upcoming season and for future seasons. “Tech fans know the importance of a quick fact: Tech started the same offensive line for the final 11 games of the 2016 season.”

In addition, Vice likes his contingent of young skill talent behind the line, including whoever wins the quarterback job. And if the skill players improve, then they give the Hokies a chance at producing in the manner of last season’s offense, which set numerous records behind great play from the skill players and the offensive line.

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Also, Parker Osterloh, who missed spring practice with an injury, factors into the equation. Osterloh and Chung, both seniors, possess some versatility, with the ability to play multiple positions. In particular, Vice views Chung as someone with the ability to play very well at any of the three interior spots. The Hokies don’t have a true first and second team on the offensive line just yet, but Gallo, Teller, Nijman, Pfaff, Smith, Chung and Osterloh give Vice seven reasonably consistent and dependable players. “Then, just from a mental standpoint, watching a lot of film and understanding what I did well and what I need to work on from the spring, I want to turn weaknesses into strengths.”

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“The Hokies ranked 83rd nationally in sacks allowed per game (2.29) — an improvement from 2016, when they allowed 3.22 per game. The Hokies ranked 83rd nationally in sacks allowed per game (2.29) — an improvement from 2016, when they allowed 3.22 per game.

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Most Tech fans, media members and those in the know about college football focus their attention on the Hokies’ youth at the quarterback and receiver positions. Yet does anyone realize the Hokies return just two tight ends who have played in a college game?

Bucky Hodges’ departure and Xavier Burke’s move to defensive end leaves Colt Pettit and Chris Cunningham as the only tight ends to have played in a collegiate game. Yet head coach Justin Fuente didn’t receive a question about the tight end position at the ACC Football Kickoff, nor at his preseason news conference.

Pettit is the most intriguing story of the group, having moved from the offensive line to tight end days before the Hokies played at Notre Dame last fall. Coaches rarely make in-season moves like this, but Tech’s staff saw an opportunity for Pettit to help.

“Honestly, the first thing was, ‘If it helps us beat Notre Dame, and that’s what’s best for the team, I’ll do it,’” Pettit said of his reaction. “They thought it was best for the team, and I was all about it. I was excited.”

Pettit never played tight end in high school. He only played it a couple times in all-star games, and he enjoyed it.

However, he never expected it to be such a transition. He expected to look for a few defensive ends and catch a few passes, but found the position a little more nuanced than that.

“Yeah, it was,” he admitted. “I knew a lot of the stuff from playing on the line. Obviously, on the line, you have to know what everyone is doing, so it was a big change. But it was just different fundamentals and different techniques, and I had to lose weight. It was a challenge, but it was fun getting to do something different.”

At his heaviest, Pettit weighed 315 pounds, and he usually resided in the 300-pound range. Now, he weighs 265, and he thinks the added quickness will benefit him in the passing game. Last season, he mostly played on the line.

“If my role is just blocking on the line, then I’m fine with that,” he said. “I feel confident that I could do that [be a factor in the passing game], though.”

Along with Pettit, Cunningham figures to be a factor at the position. He played in 12 games as a redshirt freshman in 2016, starting two of them, and he caught six passes for 48 yards—with four of those catches going for touchdowns. He certainly proved himself as a capably red zone threat.

What does the rest of the position look like?

“In a word—young.”

Of the five remaining tight ends on the roster, none have played in a college game, and four are true freshmen. Casey Harman, a redshirt sophomore, represents the only one of that contingent to claim more than a year’s worth of experience in the program.

Dalton Keene, who enrolled in January, Draul Deluiss and Cole Blakey certainly add size, with all three standing over 6-3 and weighing more than 230. But none are bigger than Lecitus Smith, a 376-pounder from Georgia. Smith certainly possesses the size to be a factor in the running game, while also being athletic enough to help in the passing game.

“It would come as no surprise if any or several of these freshmen hit the field this fall,” Pettit said. “They all want to learn, and they’re out there and they want to compete. That’s the ultimate goal.”

“Yeah, it was,” he admitted. “I knew a lot of the stuff from playing on the line. Obviously, on the line, you have to know what everyone is doing, so it was a big change. But it was just different fundamentals and different techniques, and I had to lose weight. It was a challenge, but it was fun getting to do something different.”

Returning starter: none

Starters lost: Bucky Hodges (37 career starts)

Projected new starter: Cole Pettit

Top reserves: Chris Cunningham, Dalton Keene

Newcomers: Keene, Draul Deluiss, Cole Blakey, and Lecitus Smith

Breakout candidate: Pettit

Notes: Cunningham caught six passes in 2016, but never caught more than one in any game. Deluiss caught seven passes for 114 yards and 14 touchdowns in his high school career. Blakey played quarterback at nearby Narrows High and threw for more than 5,100 yards and 50 touchdowns in his career.
The backup situation is a little more precarious. Darius F ullwood, Jarred Hewitt and Jimmie Taylor went into August as the top backups at the two defensive tackle spots. All three bring various attributes, but all three played inconsistently this spring and need to improve in certain areas. They all need to get stronger and quicker.

The same holds true at the end spots. Wiles played a trio of Raymon Minor, Emmanuel Belmar and Xavier Burke at the end positions this spring because of the injuries to Mihota and Hill and the suspension of Houshan Gaines. None of the three have played the end position in a college game. In fact, Burke played right end for two seasons before being moved to defense.

All three got better in the spring, and certainly in the cases of Minor and Belmar, they bring much-needed speed to the position. That ability to turn the corner caught the eye of Mihota, as he watched spring practice from the sideline.

“I have a lot of faith in our end guys,” Mihota said. “I see them developing every day and really coming into their own. You look at Minor and Belmar, and they’re two converted linebackers who picked it up real quick. I’m excited to see some plays off and watch them go. They’re really good with speed. They’re a lot faster than I am.”

Gaines could be the wildcard of the defensive line. He played in 12 games last season as a redshirt freshman, and the staff wants him to put it together both on and off the field. He brings a nice combination of size and speed and hopefully he takes the next step in his development.

Wiles expects continued development from the entire group, but if these guys lack consistency throughout the remainder of August practices, then he won’t be afraid to play one or more of them — provided they progress enough to warrant game reps. Tech’s staff signed five defensive linemen in February, including Robert Porcher IV, J’Bril Glaze, Zain Debose, Nathan Proctor and Tyhason Gaubert.

“Somehow, some way, Wiles wants quality defensive linemen in his rotation. When the Hokies play their best on defense, they usually rotate eight guys up front. Last season, Wiles essentially rotated seven — Barney, Williams, Ekanem, Settle, Walker, Mihota and Hill — and the Hokies’ defense overall played well. They possess the talent to play well again. They just need to work at it and make the most of opportunities in practice — and they need for Mihota to lead them along the way. “I try to lead by example,” he said. “I’m the only returning guy, but truthfully, all those guys are starters. They all could have started last year. If the guys there weren’t ahead of them, they could have started and been just fine. They all started at some point because a guy went down, and they performed beautifully. I think we’re going to have a great defense.”
In addition to starting at mike linebacker this upcoming fall, Andrew Motuapuaka will be in the process of2 setting up requirements for a degree in multimedia journalism.

Such an academic pursuit puts him in rarified company amongst his teammates. After all, he may be the only Tech player with the ability not only to play a football game on Saturday, but also to write the game recap afterward.

"Vah," Motuapuaka said at the ACC Football Kickoff media event when asked if he could do media members' jobs as well as they could. "I wanted to stick around football, stay around sports, and enjoy it. I'm not sure what path I'm going to take, but I definitely enjoy it."

Tech's coaches hope to see Motuapuaka's name in the local newspaper a lot this fall, as the fifth-year senior with the penchant for making big plays headlines Tech's 2017 defense. He led the Hokies in tackles a year ago with 114, and he added three interceptions, two sacks and two fumble recoveries. Such play surely will get him recognized, but defensive coordinator Bud Foster, who doubles as the linebackers coach, wants to see more leadership from Motuapuaka and fellow linebacker Tremaine Edmunds.

Edmunds finished second behind Motuapuaka with 106 tackles, and he tied for the team lead with 18.5 tackles for a loss last season. A special talent at 6-foot-3 and 250 pounds, Edmunds was named to the "watch list" for three awards—the Butkus Award (nation's best linebacker), the Nagurski Trophy (nation's best defensive player) and the Bednarik Award (nation's best defensive player).

"He just has it all, really," Motuapuaka said of his teammate. "He has the size and the speed. Maine's a freak. He's been definitely taking strides, making his game better, studying film, stuff like that. That's what's going to separate us defensively from other teams."

Tech went into spring practice with little depth behind this duo, but Foster moved Anthony Shegog to backer behind Edmunds, and Tavante Beckett played outstanding behind Motuapuaka this spring. So he feels better about the situation.

Shegog seems to make plays when he gets the opportunity—he recorded six tackles, a sack, a forced fumble and an interception in Tech's 35-24 win over Arkansas in the Belk Bowl. Beckett may have been the best player on the field this spring.

Also, Sean Huelskamp returns. Though Tech went into spring practice with little depth behind Motuapuaka this spring. So he feels better about the situation.

These five guys arguably serve as the heartbeats of this season's Hokie defense. If the Hokies want to win the Coastal Division again and return to the ACC Championship Game, they probably need for these five to play critical roles.

"That's our expectation, and we don't lower our expectation because the team changed," Motuapuaka said of the team's goals. "That's definitely where we want to be. If we don't make it, it is what it is, but that's definitely the goal."
quarterback rating (51.1) among returning cornerbacks.

Also, Stroman's 2016 pass breakups rank third among returning cornerbacks in the ACC behind Florida State's Javaries McFadden and Louisville's Jaire Alexander.

Stroman, though, attributes those numbers to the entire secondary working in unison. "It's all of us," he said. "It starts with all of us watching film together. We work together as a unit. Numbers like that pop up, but it's five of us back there, and all of us cover, so it's just all of us working together and watching film and all of those things."

In 2016, the Hokies ranked 14th nationally in pass efficiency defense — and second in the ACC—and the expectations are even higher this season. The key, though, probably centers on keeping Stroman, Facoyson and Alexander healthy, given the youthful reserves at the cornerstone positions.

Several of Tech's safeties and nickel defensive backs have played cornerstone in past seasons, so defensive coordinator Bud Foster could shuffle people around in the event of a spate of injuries. But Stroman warns fans not to sleep on those younger guys, specifically redshirt freshman Tyree Rodgers and sophomore Jovonn Quillen, who played last year, though mostly on special teams.

Most of the spotlight during Virginia Tech's spring practice centered on the cornerstone position, as the coaching staff evaluated several candidates for the all-important spot. If offensive coordinator Brad Cornelsen needed yet another option, he could have looked to the other side of the ball, where one certain individual rushed for more than 1,200 yards and threw for more than 1,500 yards in his final season of high school — making him a rather nice fit for what Cornelsen likes in the offense his first two seasons at Tech, played strictly cornerback last fall and developed into an all-conference player. He led all of Tech's corners in 2015 in passes defensed (intereceptions and breakups), with 13 passes defensed (interceptions and breakups), which led him to earning third-team All-ACC honors by the Atlantic Coast Sports Media Association.

All his production a season ago came despite a lower leg injury that forced him to miss three games in November and play sparingly in both the ACC Championship Game and the Belk Bowl. Offseason surgery led to him missing spring practice, but he spent the summer rehabbing and feels ready to go.

"I feel like things are coming along good," Stroman said. "I feel strong. I've had a lot of time in the weight room to build my upper body strength, and my lower body is coming along. I'm doing everything in the weight room. I've been making all my times (in conditioning drills), so everything is going well."

Stroman quietly headlines Tech's cornerbacks group — a unit that also features redshirt senior Brandon Facoyson and junior Adonis Alexander. For whatever reasons, those two seem to get more publicity than Stroman, but Stroman deserves to be in any discussion when it comes to the talent on Virginia Tech's defense.

He received national recognition this past summer when Pro Football Focus College Football analyzed his 2016 season and revealed he allowed just a 52.4 passer rating when targeted in coverage - second best among returning cornerbacks in the ACC. Only Clemson's Ryan Carter allowed a lower
Edmunds LEADS deep, talented bunch at safety and rover

by Jimmy Robertson

Though he started 13 of 14 games a year ago, Terrell Edmunds remains somewhat unnoted about not starting the Georgia Tech game. That served as his punishment for a questionable targeting call in the previous game at Duke. He nearly found himself in the same predicament following a game at Notre Dame, but officials did not throw the flag on that particular play.

Tech’s coaching staff finds itself in a bit of a dilemma. The coaches want Edmunds to be a bit more judicious in his approach—and yet be the same ruthless player. “I’m not going to change who I am,” Edmunds said. “I’m still going to come downhill. I’m still going to bring it every play. I’m going to still try to make the big hit, but I’m going to make sure I make every tackle. I don’t want anyone bouncing off of me. I’m going to keep my head up as best I can—even though sometimes I didn’t feel like I had my head down.”

Edmunds enjoyed a terrific season in 2016, as he transitioned from cornerback to rover. He adjusted perfectly, finishing with 89 tackles—a number that ranked fourth on the team—and he led the squad with four interceptions.

Yet for the second consecutive season, he finds himself playing a new position. Shortly before spring practice, Tech’s staff moved Edmunds from rover to free safety to replace dependable Chuck Clark, a three-year starter. Edmunds stood as the logical choice given his play-making abilities and his intelligence. Plus, the Hokies lack a little bit of experience at safety.

Returning starters:
Terrell Edmunds (6-2, 220, r-Jr.)
Mook Reynolds (6-0, 191, Jr.)

Top reserves:
Divine Deablo, Khalil Ladler
Devon Hunter, Deon Newsome

NEWCOMERS:
Devon Hunter, Ladler, Hunter

Rovers:
Terrell Edmunds

FREE SAFETIES

17 Divine Deablo (6-3, 210, So.)
22 Terrell Edmunds (6-2, 220, r-Jr.)
41 John Jennings (5-11, 172, So.)

ROVERS

7 Devon Hunter (6-0, 216, Fr.)
9 Khalil Ladler (6-11, 180, r-Fr.)
21 Reggie Floyd (6-0, 218, So.)
29 Ismial Sesay (5-9, 195, r-So.)

NICKEL

8 Mook Reynolds (6-0, 191, Jr.)
20 Deon Newsome (5-11, 200, r-Sr.)
24 Anthony Shegog (6-2, 230, r-Sr.)

PREVIEW

Quick Facts on Tech’s Safeties, Rovers and Nickel Backs

Notes:
Edmunds’ 48.5 percent passer rating allowed in 2016 (according to PFF College Football) was the lowest among returning safeties in the ACC. Edmunds’ 48 tackles a year ago are the most among Tech’s returning defensive backs. Reynolds’ 5.5 tackles for loss ranked fourth on the team and first among defensive backs. Reynolds was the only Tech defensive back to record three tackles for a loss in a game last season (Buck Bowl). Reynolds recorded at least five tackles in seven of the final nine games. Sesay’s four solo tackles in the Buck Bowl were nearly half of his solo tackles for the season (nine).

For a safety coach, this type of feedback is gold. This is not about self-promotion. It’s about the young man growing and the team growing because of a bond with a player. This is a must-win season for the Hokies to go from 1-0, and if that’s the way to get to our ultimate goal, that’s what I’ll do.”

Clark’s departure and Edmunds’ move were only parts of the story at the two safety spots this spring. In short, a lot happened at free safety and rover.

Reggie Floyd came out of spring leading the contenders at rover. He played in 12 games last fall behind Edmunds and then played extremely well this spring. Also, Tech’s staff moved Khalil Ladler from cornerback to rover to add depth and competition.

Reggie feels comfortable back there,” Edmunds said. “He was there last year, and he didn’t get many reps, but you could tell he was a sponge of the game. Khalil moving from corner to safety ... he moved like it was natural. His footwork is there, and he’s coming downhill”.

At free safety, the coaching staff made another move, shifting Divine Deablo from receiver to the free safety spot. Deablo played last fall as a true freshman, with most of his action coming on special teams. His work this spring, and he played fairly well. Newcomer Ishmiel Seisay was one of the top recruits nationally, Hunter arrived with an humble attitude. He quickly endeared himself to his teammates, and Edmunds continues to help the young man become the best player possible.

“We don’t want anyone to catch a pass, or nobody to get more than 20 yards on us. That’s our expectation every game. I know that’s steep, but you’ve got to set the bar high to get where you want to go.”

RETURNING STARTERS

Chuck Clark (40 career starts)
Reggie Floyd (17 career starts)

PROJECTED STARTER

Reggie Floyd

Top reserves:
Divine Deablo, Khalil Ladler
Devon Hunter, Deon Newsome

NEWCOMERS:
Devon Hunter, Ladler, Hunter

BREAKOUT CANDIDATE:
Floyd

Scott also coaches the nickel defensive back position, and he expects Mook Reynolds to return to full speed after missing spring practice with an injury. Anthony Shegog will be at back this fall, but he, too, possesses the ability to play the nickel spot, along with Deon Newsome, a rising fifth-year senior.

Newsome received plenty of reps at the spot this spring, and he played fairly well. Newsome, like Deablo, spent the early part of his career at receiver, but the staff decided to move him into a defensive back role last year. He played in 12 games in 2016, with most of that playing time coming on special teams. Overall, these positions possess a nice combination of experience, talent and youth. Edmunds and Clark played at a high level last year, and Edmunds expects the group to exceed that in 2017.

“The expectation is very high,” he said. “We want to be the best. There is no being second or being third. We all want to be the best. We want to play for an ACC championship and play for a national championship and hopefully win it. That’s our expectation.”

“We don’t even want anyone to catch a pass, or nobody to get more than 20 yards on us. That’s our expectation every game. I know that’s steep, but you’ve got to set the bar high to get where you want to go.”

We want to play for an ACC championship and play for a national championship and hopefully win it. That’s our expectation.
A few years ago, most men’s soccer coaches in the ACC and outside of it looked at their team’s schedule and marked any games against Virginia Tech as a “W.”

These days, said coaches are taking a more cautious approach where it concerns the Hokies.

They do so with good reason, as Virginia Tech won 13 games last season, received an at-large bid to the NCAA Championships and advanced to the Elite Eight before a 2-0 loss to Wake Forest ended the Hokies’ season. Their incredible campaign and subsequent run in the tournament was one of the best stories in Virginia Tech athletics during the 2016-17 academic year.

“It was great,” Tech head men’s soccer coach Mike Brizendine said. “Before this season, we thought that we would be pretty good. Definitely when we got to the NCAA tournament, we exceeded even our own expectations. It was a really fun season, not just because of the success we had and going to the Elite Eight. We just had a great group of guys.

Most of that great group of guys return for this upcoming season. Yes, the Hokies lost six seniors last year, including steady Juan Pablo Saavedra and second-leading scorer Alessandro Mion. Toronto FC of Major League Soccer drafted Saavedra in the fourth round, and Mion plays in Cyprus, which gives an indication of their talent.

But nine of the 11 starters return, including a trio that serves as the top goal scorer (Marcelo Acuna), the goalkeeper (Ben Lundgaard), and the leader, Collin Verfurth, a “glue” guy who takes care of the little things that allow big things to happen. That alone creates lofty expectations for a program that won just five games two years ago.

“We return nine of 11 starters, and six or seven of them are locks,” Brizendine said a week before fall practice started. “It’s just a matter of blending in those other guys and figuring out how we can get our best 11 on the field. It’s going to be competitive, and that will be another thing that will be so much fun about preseason.”

The player getting the most attention is Acuna, who transferred to Tech from Houston Baptist before last season. As a Hokie, Acuna earned All-ACC honors after leading the team with 11 goals—a number that ranked third in the ACC. Acuna gave the Hokies something that they needed—a player with the ability to put the ball in the back of the net on a consistent basis.

He delivered in the clutch, too, as five of his goals were of the game-winning variety.

“He was a compliment to what we already had,” Brizendine said. “I thought we should have gone to the NCAA tournament two years ago. But for one reason or another, mainly injuries, we didn’t. We had a good foundation, but he was the piece that put us over the top, and it helps that he’s a goal scorer. Those three goals that we’d let in or lose late because of something freakish, we’d win [last season] because he’s the goal scorer. Half of his goals were goals that would’ve made us lose.

Brizendine expects to see a more balanced attack this season. Verfurth, who rotates between forward and midfielder, scored two goals and recorded an assist last season. He anchors things for the Hokies, keeping players in the right spots and helping younger guys like Brendan Movers (two goals, three assists), James Kasak (one goal, one assist), Nico Quashie (two goals) and Daniel Damiani, who played in 14 games before an injury ended his season. The four freshmen played significant minutes a year ago, and Brizendine hopes to see continued development.

He also wants to see strides made by some of his upperclassmen, including the likes of Gino Rossi and Forest White. Rossi registered a goal and three assists, while White scored the game-winning goal in the Hokies’ upset of Indiana in the NCAA tournament—his lone goal of the year.

“If those guys can do what I think they can do, that changes everything,” Brizendine said. “If you have these guys that can score five to seven goals, guess what that does for Marcelo? It opens everything up for him.”

On the back line, the Hokies need to find replacements for Saavedra and Mion. The two combined for four goals and five assists, but arguably more importantly, stabilized Tech’s defensive efforts. Expect Will Metia and Elias Tamburini, who both started all 22 games last season, to take over the production and leadership shown by the two departed seniors.

Of course, Tech’s defense gets a huge lift with the return of Lundgaard, who started all 22 games a year ago. Tech finished with a program-record nine shutouts on the season—eight of them with him in goal—and he registered 87 saves.

Lundgaard certainly brings experience at the spot. The Virginia Beach, Virginia native has started all 50 games in which he has played in his career.

We had a conversation [two years ago], and I said, ‘Look, you could be a pro. You have a lot of attributes. But if you want to be a beach guy, that’s fine. Let’s not have a professional conversation,’ Brizendine said.

“Before this past fall, he went and played and trained all summer. He worked hard, and you see the result. I think he did really, really well [in 2016].”

“Tamburini gave us a lot of confidence. He was steady and talented, and he was one of our best defensively. We had a conversation before last fall, and I said, ‘Let’s not have another guy that get injured, that really changes what we look like as a team,” he admitted.

The bigger threat to Tech’s success, though, may be the schedule. The Hokies play a brutal slate that features 11 teams that played in the NCAA tournament in 2016. Tech’s non-conference schedule includes games against Creighton, South Carolina and William & Mary, while the conference slate includes games against Duke, Virginia and North Carolina.

But Brizendine scheduled this way for a reason. He expects his team to be good, and such a schedule only helps the team at NCAA tournament time.

“He was a complement to what we already had,” Brizendine said. “I thought we should have gone to the NCAA tournament two years ago. But for one reason or another, mainly injuries, we didn’t. We had a good foundation, but he was the piece that put us over the top, and it helps that he’s a goal scorer. Those three goals that we’d let in or lose late because of something freakish, we’d win [last season] because he’s the goal scorer. Half of his goals were goals that would’ve made us lose.

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“Before this past fall, he went and played and trained all summer. He worked hard, and you see the result. I think he did really, really well [in 2016].”

“I knew that he had it in him. Once he decided that he was going to put playing at the next level and our team in front of hanging out with his boys at the beach … I knew it would be different. I just didn’t know it would be that drastic of a change.”

Tech’s deep and talented roster gives Brizendine a sense of optimism heading into the season opener against Creighton on Aug. 25. Yet he admits he frets over team chemistry, which he considered a critical factor in last year’s Elite Eight run, creating a lot of preseason optimism, but a difficult schedule looms this fall by Jimmy Robertson
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<td>Biltmore House / Smoky Mtn Christmas</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Florida / Christmas at Disney World</td>
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When those in volleyball circles caught wind of Virginia Tech’s hiring of Jill Wilson as the head volleyball coach, they termed it an “ace.” That hiring took place in January, and in the time since then, she put together a staff, held “get-to-know-you” meetings with her players, oversaw offseason workouts, recruited the next generation of players and began preseason practices. Now within a matter of days, Wilson will coach in her first match.

“Get-to-know-you” meetings with her players, practices. Now within a matter of days, Wilson will coach in her first match.

“We have to have the leader that is going to drive this team, when they've been in the locker room leader. We have to have the court leader. We have to have the locker room leader. We have to have the court leader. We have to have the coach, when you have a group that is open-minded, they're going to be able to take big steps.”

Q: What are the goals for this upcoming season? What would you have hoped to accomplish by the end?

JW: “The biggest goal is to make sure that these women are becoming strong leaders that are ready to be CEO’s in their life of whatever field they want to do. That’s the No. 1 goal because I think the volleyball comes along with that. Their success on the court comes when you have that confidence and have that drive in all areas of your life. So I’m really hoping that, by the end of this season, our team continues to get better every single week on and off the court and that they gain confidence as we go.”

Q: What is going to be the key to having some success in your inaugural campaign?

JW: “I think the biggest thing is what we’ve been talking about. Our season theme is venture, which is a daring, risky endeavor, and this team, when they’ve been in the middle of the park for a while, it takes risking and diving into something new to take a step. Do I think that will be easy? No, but I think that is going to be the key for this team on and off the court. Are they willing to risk and do something that they’re not used to and be able to make the next step for this program within the conference and within the country. So it’s going to be a lot of work. It’s not going to come easy, but we’ve got to keep pushing that theme with them.”

Q: What have you learned about this season? What would you have hoped to accomplish by the end?

JW: “The biggest goal is to make sure that these women are becoming strong leaders that are ready to be CEO’s in their life of whatever field they want to do. That’s the No. 1 goal because I think the volleyball comes along with that. Their success on the court comes when you have that confidence and have that drive in all areas of your life. So I’m really hoping that, by the end of this season, our team continues to get better every single week on and off the court and that they gain confidence as we go.”

Q: How has the transition been both for you and the players?

JW: “The transition has been great. This place is full of warm Hokie fans that just want to cheer for our program and pull for players. This might be the tightest community I’ve ever been a part of. I truly appreciate that, and my staff appreciates that. As far as with the players, I consider them family and have since the day I got here — and I’ll always consider them family. When you’re family with each other through good times and bad times, you’re always family.”
Nearly nine months have elapsed since the Virginia Tech women’s soccer team watched the NCAA Championships selection show — and received a blow to the stomach when the selection committee snapped the Hokies’ string of NCAA appearances by not choosing them.

Their streak ended at nine consecutive seasons, and while the months have passed, the bitterness still remains. After all, the Hokies won 13 games and finished with an RPI of 28.

“It has stuck with me,” Tech women’s soccer head coach Chugger Adair admitted. “I was frustrated with being so high in the selection and was just the program’s second All-American.

“I think, for us, it’s going to have to be by committee,” Adair said. “I think we have to do a better job of plugging players who can step in, and that’s what we have to focus on. We need for those players to just be themselves and continue to grow and make an impact on their own right.”

It’s a challenge for Adair and his staff.

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Adair and his staff began the process of finding answers during the Hokies’ spring schedule and resumed that process Aug. 2 when the team opened fall practice.

The committee to replace Tiernan includes Alani Johnson and Kristina Diana — and Tech did not win a game in her absence. This season, though, Adair expects

Alani is more of a target forward,” Adair said. “She’s good out wide as well, so we’re glad to get her back.”

The committee to replace Cephas include a bevy of players, but midfielders Laila Gray and Kristina Diana certainly warrant discussion. Diana scored two goals and dished out two assists in starts as a sophomore last season. Gray started 15 games and finished with a team-best four assists.

Alani Johnson’s six goals ranked second on the team in 2017 and are the most among returning players.

Three of Alani Johnson’s six goals in 2016 were game winners.

Only two of Virginia Tech’s returning players — Alani Johnson and Kristina Diana — scored goals in ACC matches a year ago.

Mandy McGlynn recorded five shutouts last fall.

Laila Gray’s four assists lead the team last season.

Madi Conyers’ 46 career starts rank No. 1 on the 2017 roster.

The Hokies had 16 shutouts last fall, allowing just 25 goals and finishing with a record of 16-4-2.

Virginia Tech has won 12 ACC games since 2012 and is going to be at the center of the pack and be that leader on the field and be the battler.”

Adair and his staff began the process of finding answers during the Hokies’ spring schedule and resumed that process Aug. 2 when the team opened fall practice.

The committee to replace Tiernan includes Alani Johnson and Kristina Diana.
Kallie Peurifoy
Tech missed the redshirt senior last season when she went down with an injury. The forward possesses a lot of skills, but Tech missed her leadership and winning personality more. The Hokies are 13-6-1 in games in which she has started in her career.

Katherine Roth
Roth played in just eight games as a freshman last fall, but the coaching staff liked what it saw of her this spring. She played forward in 2016, but may be able to help the Hokies on the back line this season.

Bridget Patch
The forward played in all 19 games as a freshman last season, starting five of them. She scored a goal and had an assist, and Tech’s coaching staff thinks she possesses the talent to be a consistent scoring threat this season.

Allyson Brown
A forward from Northern Virginia, Brown was two-time, first-team All-Met selection by The Washington Post and the Group 4A state player of the year as a junior. She should be able to add scoring to Tech’s lineup as a freshman.

Chandler McDaniel
The California native played extensively as a freshman last season, seeing action in 17 games and starting three of them. She can play forward or midfielder, adding versatility to Tech’s lineup.

“That’s a good question,” Adair said. “We’re trying to use the talents that we have within this returning team and see how that fits into the style of play that we like to play.”

The schedule offers the Hokies little in the way of breaks to ease players into roles. They open the season against San Diego and Pepperdine, two solid West Coast teams, at the University of San Diego Tournament. They also play Georgia, William & Mary and at Tennessee—none of them will be easy contests.

Tech then opens the ACC slate with two road games, starting Sept. 17 at Duke. Duke, North Carolina and Florida State hold national championship aspirations. The Hokies face the latter two at home, though.

“These are good opportunities for us to pick up some big wins,” Adair said. “That’s the one thing I heard was that we didn’t have a significant win last year. The NCAA tournament selection group had a reason to leave us out.”

To be successful, the Hokies need to avoid injuries, and like any team, need good fortune as well to win some of its toss-up games.

But Adair goes into this season optimistic. Seven of his returning players started at least 11 games last season, and 16 returning players started at least one game. So the foundation appears to be in place.

“I know we’ve got a few injuries, which factor in things that we’re dealing with as we move forward,” Adair said. “That’s limiting a little how the kids and how the team progresses. We’re dealing with that. I don’t know the status of a couple of them right now.

“But there is a good group of kids back who have some experience. That’s important for us. We have a good foundation, and that’s what we have to focus on—those players being themselves and having an impact.”

If the Hokies do that, then they’ll find themselves where they want to be at the end of November—in the NCAA Championships. As they found out last season, the alternative is not an appealing option.

Continued from page 41

KAYLA RICHARDSON

Coming off the greatest year in school history, including three ACC team track and field titles, what could the Virginia Tech men’s and women’s track and field and cross country programs possibly do for an encore? Why, start by winning the ACC cross country titles, of course.

The Tech men and women open the 2017 cross country season Sept. 1 when they participate in the Hokie Invite held at the Buford Meredith Cross Country Course. With a lot of his key runners back, distance coach Ben Thomas is optimistic on his teams’ chances, particularly on the men’s side.

A year ago, the Tech men entered the season with high expectations, but Thomas decided to redshirt Neil Gourley, and then the Hokies lost Patrick Joseph to an injury and Peter Seufer to mononucleosis. Still, Thomas and assistant Eric Johanningsmeier managed to piece together a team that finished fourth at the ACC Championships.

“If you had told me before the season that we would have gotten in the top-four at the ACC meet without those three guys, then I would have taken it and been happy with it,” Thomas said. “Now hopefully, we can get those guys in the fold. We did lose Andrew Gaiser to graduation, but everyone else returns, and we have the potential to have five all-regional guys. Any time you have that, you have a good chance at making the NCAAs.”

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Daniel Jaskowak and Brent Musselman headline the squad after earning All-Southeast Region honors a year ago. Jaskowak, who earned All-ACC honors as well, finished in the top 25 at every meet, and Musselman surprised everyone when he was the Hokies’ top finisher at the NCAA Southeast Regional, coming in 19th.

Seufer, Gourley and Joseph all return this fall, and Thomas expects all three to be among his top seven. Vincent Ciattei and Diego Zarate return as well, and both Jack Joyce and Fitzsimons Seyoum figure to be challenging all of those guys.

A key, though, is keeping Seufer healthy, as he figures to be the Hokies’ frontrunner. The redshirt sophomore won the 10,000 at the ACC Outdoor Championships during the outdoor track season and thrives at longer distances. Most of the roster excels at middle distances, so Thomas needs a guy like Seufer near the front to lead the way. He expects big things from him this fall.

“Those guys have to be cross country runners in the fall and have that mindset of being willing to go out there and hang with Peter because I feel confident Peter will be at the front of the ACC, as long as he’s healthy,” Thomas said. “If he can drag a few of those guys with him, that’s the only chance we have to win an ACC title and get to nationals.”

Peter Seufer continues to develop … if we can get some frontrunners with him, that’s the only chance we have to win an ACC title and get to nationals.

Jaskowak, Musselman, Gourley and Joseph are all seniors, giving the Hokies plenty of experience. If five Hokies earn all-region honors, then they probably make Thomas prophetic and giving the Hokies plenty of experience. If five Hokies earn all-to-nationals.”

“Sarah Edwards knows she has to get a lot better at cross country.”

“Mikayla had a solid year,” Thomas said. “She competed every season, and she was able to stay consistent with her training. She progressed every race, and I think she could break out and be consistent.

“Sarah Edwards knows she has to get a lot better at cross country, and she has the potential to get better. She’s bringing a lot of confidence after winning the ACC championship in the steeplechase. To get better in that event, she has to compete against the best in the ACC in cross country as well, and I think she’s motivated to do that.”

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“Sarah Edwards knows she has to get a lot better at cross country, and she has the potential to get better. She’s bringing...
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