

inside

Vol. 9 No. 1, August 2016

# HOKIESPORTS

The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics



WHAT'S INSIDE

*A position-by-position  
look at the 2016*  
**FOOTBALL TEAM**

**KEN EKANEM, ISAIAH FORD,**  
**and JOEY SLYE are ready**  
**to kick off a new season**  
**under new head coach**  
**Justin Fuente**

**FOOTBALL**  
**2016**  
**PREVIEW**





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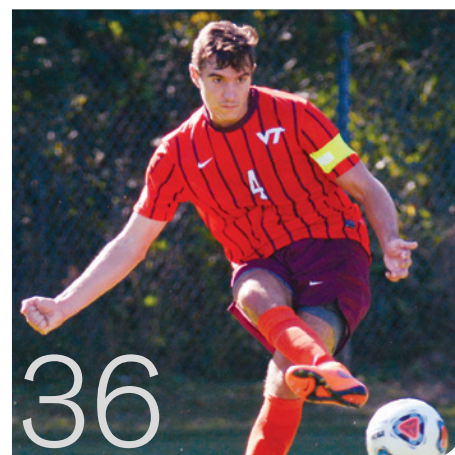
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## TRIP TO EUROPE LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR GROUP OF TECH STUDENT-ATHLETES

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.

The contingent of 12 Tech student-athletes included women's soccer player Marie Johnston, golfer Allison Woodward, lacrosse players Emily Wilson, Brittney VanVeldhuisen, Charlie Fix, Kristine Loscalzo, Kristen Kohles and Haley Lukefahr, and swimmers Laura Schwartz, M.J. Ulrich, Savannah Padgett and Chris Wang.

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).





## THE STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

"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

"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

"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





# The Donor File



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### HOKIE CLUB LEVEL:

Hokie Benefactor (current system)

### CURRENTLY RESIDES:

Blacksburg, Virginia

### FAMILY:

Carolyn Howard (daughter); Rick Howard (son-in-law) and Aaron Howard (grandson)

## Q&A

### 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 his own venues.

### Q: Do you have any tailgating traditions? If so, tell us your best.

**A:** YES! Having homemade chili smothered in Fritos, grated cheese, and tons of chicken wings.

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

**A:** Not being an alumni of Virginia Tech, the motivation stems from 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: I'm a Hokie Club member because ...

**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: My favorite Virginia Tech sports are ...

**A:** Football, and men's and women basketball.

### Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech football player is ...

**A:** Shayne Graham, placekicker.

### Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech student-athlete from another sport is ...

**A:** The Jackson twins—David and Jim. They were on the Virginia Tech 1995 men's basketball NIT championship team.

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## 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!

## I'M IN! HOW DO I GIVE?

To set up your gift on-line, visit  
**[hokieclub.com/give-now](http://hokieclub.com/give-now)**

Be sure to have your donation in by  
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Additional Questions? Contact Us!

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## Former Tech great inducted into another hall of fame

Former Tech receiver André 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 unbelievable 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 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

Three former football players, a women's basketball standout, a track and field national champion and a former athletics director comprise the 2016 class set for induction into the Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame.

The six new honorees will be inducted during a hall of fame dinner on the Tech campus on Friday, Sept. 16, the evening before Tech's home football game against Boston College. The inductees will be introduced to fans at halftime of the football game. The new inductees will bring the

total number enshrined to 187.

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 committed nearly \$200 million toward facilities—while also keeping the athletics department on solid financial footing.

Other inductees include:

- **DeAngelo 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 (3,475 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 6-5 in 1976, but Sharpe was dismissed after a 3-7-1 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, a daughter, and 16 grandchildren. 

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## EDITORS DESK by Jimmy Robertson

# Preseason talk is all about offense, but Hokies' chances hinge on improved play from their defense

Forty-eight hours before the kickoff of August football practices, Bud Foster stood at a podium ready to field questions from reporters.

One reporter opened the questioning by asking about the added weight at the defensive end position. Foster smiled before he heard, "at the defensive end position."

"I thought you were talking about me," he said. "I've had a good summer, but not *that* good of a summer."

Foster seemed at ease, but those who know him best know better. As he got set to kick off his 30th fall in Blacksburg, he did so fully motivated to get Tech's defense back to where it has normally resided—in the penthouse with the rest of college football's elite.

Media members, Tech fans and everyone else with an investment in Virginia Tech football keep talking about the Hokies' offense under new head coach Justin Fuente. They keep throwing out words like "tempo" and "pace."

Tech's offense may well get to the point where it justifies all this conversation, but make no mistake about this—for the Hokies to win in 2016, they need a bounce-back year from their defense.

The numbers last year were ugly for a lot of reasons. C.J. Reavis' dismissal hurt and Dadi Nicolas played a portion of the season with a broken hand. Andrew Motuapuaka missed two games and Kendall Fuller's season-ending injury created a mess in the secondary.

As a result, Tech ranked 44th nationally in total defense (369.8 ypg), 75th in rushing

defense (180.7 ypg) and 59th in scoring defense (26.3 ppg). The Hokies allowed 30 points or more in six games and lost five of those.

"Last year was very poor according to our standards," Foster admitted. "We're going to get back to that level [among the nation's best]. When Coach [Fuente] and I first started talking, he told me that I wouldn't have to play perfect defense any more. I told him that he doesn't know me very well from that standpoint. That's my expectation. It's hard to play perfect, but we are looking for excellence."

Foster and his staff went about retooling the defense this spring and he is excited about the current product. Tech is bigger up the middle, with guys like Tim Settle, Nigel Williams, Ricky Walker and Steve Sobczak all around 300 pounds. While the Hokies lack experience at defensive end, they do have size there. Only two of the ends (Trevon Hill and Jimmie Taylor) weigh less than 245 pounds.

"I'm hoping that will make an impact on our ability to stop the run, which, for us, last year was disappointing, but at the same time, there were a lot of factors that went into that," Foster said. "I'm hoping up front that experience and having some size and athletic ability will help that."

Tech's defense lacks depth at the linebacker and cornerback spots, but Tech's starting unit appears to be a solid bunch littered with several playmakers—guys like the Edmunds brothers, Ken Ekanem and Chuck Clark. That, combined with certain schematic changes, provides reasons for optimism.

Foster and his staff got the secondary settled this spring, keeping those players in their spots. He also played more zone coverage this spring, wanting more eyes on the football when facing spread offenses.

He knows that he's straddling a fine line. The same man-to-man coverage that struggled at times last season also manhandled Ohio State in front of 100,000 fans in Columbus two years ago.


He's not punting man-to-man coverage, as many seem to indicate in news stories. But he plans to mix things up a little more.

"I am excited to be able to play multiple defenses again back there," Foster said. "Obviously, we can play man coverage and challenge the quarterback, but offenses also can design some ways to attack you that can stress you out defensively. I want to be able to make it hard on them."

If they make things hard for opposing offenses, then the Hokies will be in position to win a bunch of games. They know that formula works. It has for the past 23 seasons.

But it is an 'if.' Returning to the top of the mountain is never an easy climb.

"Our kids understand the tradition we have here," Foster said. "There is a responsibility and accountability to uphold that tradition and responsibility."

"They understand the expectations here and what we have done here. I am not concerned about the offense. They are going to be fine. Those guys do some unique things. We just have to take care of business on our own, and hopefully, that will be enough." 

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## New Beginnings

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.

So there 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 him following games rather than simulcast the radio interview, as has been done in the past. It would require an additional 10 minutes of his postgame time, which may not seem like a

big deal, but in the fast-paced world in which he operates, is. He nodded his approval. I asked about 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 get 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. Privately, I had been hoping this was his mindset, but he left no doubt.

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

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 be taking the first hour of our pregame show to the fans in Hokie Village. I can't honestly take credit for this, as it was already in the works, but I really wanted to push it to the finish line and we did.



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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 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 also will 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." It's a simple statement really, but it stuck with me.

I thought about it in the context of my personal life and realized it applied. Since my arrival at Tech, I had been a bit conflicted. All around me, I encountered healthy people intent on bettering themselves. I have always prided myself on being ambitious, but there were areas of my life where I felt stuck. The largest of these was smoking.

When I came to Blacksburg, I was approaching 20 years as a smoker. The story of how I began was cliché. I was simply trying

Jon Laaser interviews Justin Fuente to get his thoughts on a recent preseason scrimmage.

to be "cool" in high school. The continuation included every excuse in the book—stress, anxiety, addiction, habit, you name it.

In my role as a representative of this great institution, I felt perpetually guilty about not setting a better example. So I hid it and felt guilty about that. I wanted to quit. There was no doubt about that, but I didn't know if I could and then life pushed me in a way I could not deny. I found encouragement in confidants at Tech. My dad being diagnosed with multiple myeloma was a booming wake up call. Then I had that conversation with Fuente. We are embarking on a thrilling chapter at Tech and I needed to be an example of improvement if I was going to be a leader in it.

"There's really not going to be a better time to do things the way we want to do them than now."

The way I wanted to be was tobacco-free and so I did it. 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! 



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## Keeping up with Compliance

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

**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.

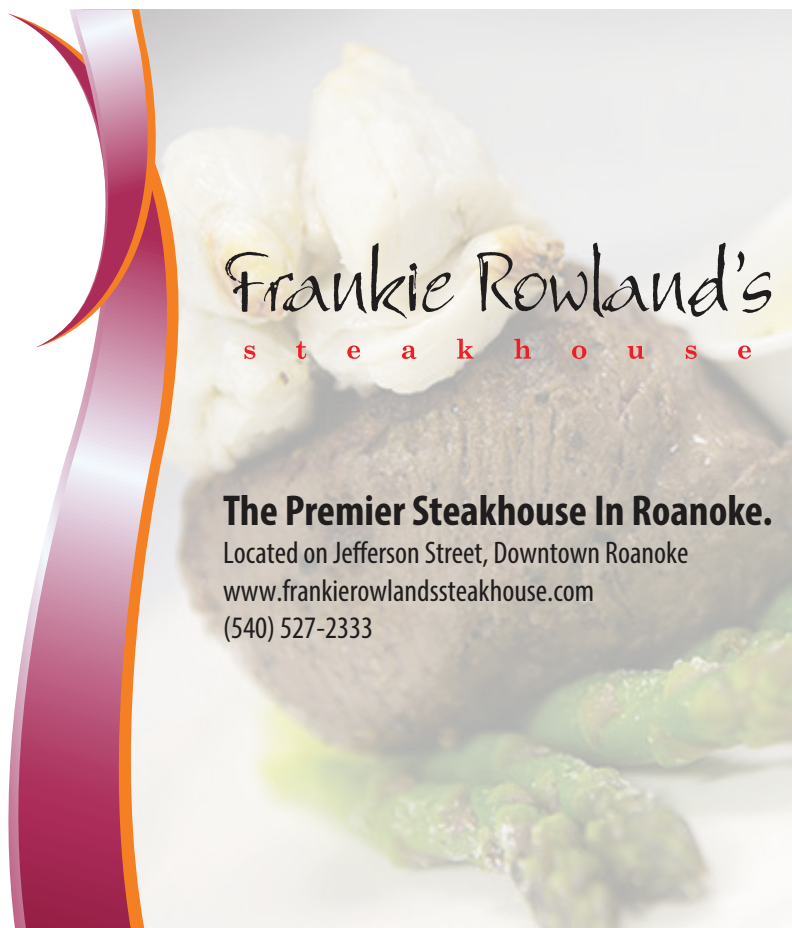
"Alabama self-reported the violation and provided additional rules education for staff members, a corrective action that was accepted by the NCAA Enforcement staff. No punitive actions were taken." 



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Sep 11-17	Branson, MO / America's Music Show Capital	1,150
Sep 11-17	Niagara Falls / Montreal & Quebec	1,150
Sep 12	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee, NC	40
Sep 15-17	"Samson" / Lancaster, PA	495
Sep 15-18	Myrtle Beach, SC / Beach Music Weekend	725
Sep 16-17	Baseball / Atlanta Braves	260
Sep 16-18	Washington, D.C. / Our Nation's Capital	395
Sep 19-24	Agawa Canyon Canadian Train / Sault Ste Marie	975
Sep 19-30	Nova Scotia & New England in the Fall	1,850
Sep 22-25	Long Island, NY / Hamptons	675
Sep 23-24	Tygart Flyer / American Mtn. Theatre / Elkins, WV	325
Sep 25-Oct 1	New England in the Fall	1,125
Sep 29-Oct 2	National Quartet Convention / Pigeon Forge, TN	595
Sep 30-Oct 2	Neptune Festival / Virginia Beach, VA	495
Oct 1	Brushy Mountain Apple Festival / Wilkesboro, NC	45
Oct 2-5	Atlantic City / Resorts Casino & Hotel	350
Oct 2-8	Branson, MO / America's Music Show Capital	1,150
Oct 2-8	New England in the Fall	1,125
Oct 4-19	Hawaiian Island / Four Island Tour	4,595
Oct 4&5	Cass Railroad / Cass, WV	90
Oct 7-8	"Samson" / Lancaster, PA	325
Oct 7-9	Ohio Amish Country	450
Oct 8	"TOOT" / Taste of Our Town	75
Oct 8-24	The Great Southwest / California / Motorcoach	2,625
Oct 9-13	Niagara Falls / Toronto / Canada	775
Oct 12	Shatley Springs Inn / Fresco Paintings / Lunch	60
Oct 15	Billy Graham Library / Stowe Botanical Gardens	60
Oct 15-16	New River Amtrak Fall Excursion	425
Oct 17&25	Andy Griffith's Mayberry / Mt Airy, NC	65
Oct 21-23	Nashville, TN / Music City USA	495
Oct 22	Carolina Balloon Fest / Statesville, NC	60
Oct 24	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee, NC	40
Nov 4-6	Sunshine Tours Family Reunion	525
Nov 7	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee, NC	40
Nov 10,11&12	Southern Christmas Show / Charlotte, NC	60
Nov 12	Concord Mills / Bass Pro Shop / Concord, NC	45
Nov 12-13	Reading & Lancaster, PA / Factory Outlets	195
Nov 13-15	Sands Casino & Resort / Bethlehem, PA	275
Nov 15-20	Olde English Christmas / Omaha, NE	795
Nov 17-20	Biltmore House / Smoky Mountain Christmas	695
Nov 17-21	Chicago's Mile of Lights / Kentucky	775
Nov 19	Asheville Outlets / Asheville, NC	50
Nov 23-26	New York / Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade	1,295
Nov 30-Dec 4	Charleston & Savannah / Christmastime	925
Dec 1-5	Niagara Falls / Festival of Lights	695
Dec 2-4	Christmas at Myrtle Beach	450
Dec 2-4	New York / Radio City Christmas Spectacular	1,095
Dec 2-4	Nashville Country Christmas / Opryland Hotel	995
Dec 3&10	Biltmore House & Gardens / Christmas	95
Dec 4-5	Colonial Williamsburg / Grand Illumination	295
Dec 4-10	Branson, MO / Ozark Christmas	1,150
Dec 5	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee, NC	40
Dec 6&8	Christmas Lights at Tanglewood Park / Hanes Mall	45
Dec 8-11	Christmas at the Galt House / Louisville, KY	695
Dec 9-11	Nashville Country Christmas / Opryland Hotel	995
Dec 9-11	New York / Radio City Christmas Spectacular	1,095
Dec 10	Grove Park Inn / Gingerbread Competition	100
Dec 26-31	Florida/Christmas at Disney World	1,125



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# KATIE KRUEGER

**VOLLEYBALL**  
Tampa, Florida  
by Jimmy Robertson

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 learned a lot about salt intrusion into 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 Vinton. 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 program and so I would love to find someone to do research with on water quality issues. I think that would be amazing. I'm in the process of looking at graduate schools and it's a daunting task, but it's cool.

"There are all kinds of water quality issues around the world and some of it is because of humans and some of it is because of nature. I think a dream of mine would be to do research on water quality some day. Whether that leads me down the path of getting a Ph.D. or working with someone to do research with on water quality, we'll see. I want to do research in a way that I'm helping to provide knowledge so that issues can be fixed." 

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A projected starter on the defensive line this season, **Nigel Williams** will graduate in May with a degree in applied economic management. Once his football career ends, he plans to take the certified financial planner exam and become a certified financial planner.

**Q: What led you to pursue a degree in applied economic management?**

**NW:** "My freshman year, we had a forum during football camp where we had some advisors come and explain to us how some past athletes were struggling with losing their money even though they were signing these big contracts. You saw a lot of them fall into bankruptcy and lose their money. I thought about the average person and how they manage their money and how they may not know how to do it. That always interested me and I thought about how could I help someone and guide them to make sure they're making the right decisions with their money."

**Q: Was a career in that field even in your mind before you got to Tech?**

**NW:** "I knew I wanted to do something in business, but I wasn't sure exactly what I wanted to do. My mom is a business teacher at a high school in Richmond and my dad works in the business field. I knew I wanted to do something in that area, but that forum definitely helped me focus in on that [financial planning]."

**Q: You've been doing an internship this summer. Please tell us about that.**

**NW:** "I've been 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?**

**NW:** "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?**

**NW:** "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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BRENDEN  
MOTLEY

## Motley ready to resume competition at QUARTERBACK

by Jimmy Robertson

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. This spring, all five quarterbacks on the depth chart got an even number of repetitions through the first half of spring practice, but Motley and J  rod Evans separated themselves.

Now, the two of them are continuing the competition heading into the Sept. 3 opener against Liberty.

"I've always had to fight for something I want," Motley said. "Competition is a good thing, too. There is competition all over the place—it's not just at quarterback. It's making everyone on the field better. Having someone to push you or you pushing somebody ... it makes the people around you so much better.

"We all have one goal—I don't want to see you fail and my teammates don't want to see me fail. We all want to keep lifting each other up when something goes wrong. We know what we're working for, so we're ready to go."

Motley—who graduated in May and is working on a second degree—has the edge in terms of experience. He started six games

a year ago when Brewer went down with an injury and the Hokies went 3-3 in those games. For the season, he threw for 1,155 yards and 11 touchdowns, with seven interceptions.

Evans came to Tech last January after spending the season at Trinity Valley Community College in Texas. He threw for nearly 400 yards per game and 38 touchdown passes.

Both spent the spring learning the offense of new head coach Justin Fuente and his offensive coordinator, Brad Cornelsen. Motley said the transition wasn't too difficult.

"Football is football," he said. "You've got the same stuff in every offense. It's all about how you get to it, how you line up in it, how you want to expose the defense ... all those things. But football is football. It's different terminology and the coaches are coaching it a different way. That's really the big difference.

"I love it [Fuente's offense]. It's fast-paced. You get an opportunity to make some plays. You get an opportunity every drive and that's what it comes down to—making plays. That's what the offense is allowing us to do. I'm excited about it. I love it."

In addition to quality quarterback play, Fuente wants to see some leadership. As one of just 10 seniors, Motley plans on giving him just that.

Obviously, that means leading by example, but it also means holding younger players accountable. In addition, it means not being afraid to be held accountable.

Motley isn't afraid to do either one.



## VIRGINIA TECH QUARTERBACKS

AUGUST, 2016 (In numerical order)

- 4 J  rod Evans** (6-4, 238, Jr.)
- 9 Brenden Motley** (6-4, 230, r-Sr.)
- 11 Jack Click** (6-3, 218, r-Fr.)
- 17 Josh Jackson** (6-1, 211, Fr.)


"I've gained a lot of trust from the guys in the locker room and I appreciate that," he said. "I'm not the huge 'rah-rah' guy, but when I feel like I need to say something, I'm going to step in and say it. Or if I feel I need to correct something that someone else is doing, I'm going to step in and do it. They also know that if I'm doing something wrong, or if they notice something that they don't like about what I'm doing, then I encourage them to come and say something to me.

"I'm not above any of them. We're all the same. We're one team and we have one goal."

For the Hokies, that goal is winning the ACC's Coastal Division and advancing to the ACC title game—something they haven't done since 2011. It figures to be a tall order, though, with a new coaching staff, only 10 seniors and a difficult schedule.

But this team isn't using those as excuses.

"Expectations never change," Motley said. "We may have new faces, but the expectations don't change. We don't come into any season hoping to finish subpar. Expectations are always high.

"We're not coming into the season trying to get third in the ACC, or second. We want ACC championships. We want the possibility of going to the playoffs and the national championship is on everyone's minds, or otherwise, they wouldn't be here. Faces change, but expectations never do." 



## A QUICK GLANCE

**Returning starter:** none

**Starter lost:** Michael Brewer (20 career starts)

**Projected new starters:** Brenden Motley (six career starts) or J  rod Evans

**Top reserves:** Dwayne Lawson, Josh Jackson, Jack Click

**Newcomers:** Jackson, Click

**Breakout candidate:** Motley

**Notes:** Motley did not play in the final three games of last season ... Motley led the Hokies in passing yardage last year until the final game of the regular season ... Motley ranked seventh in the ACC in pass efficiency (128.9) and eighth in yards per completion (12.6) ... In addition to throwing for 1,155 yards, Motley rushed for 224 yards and three touchdowns ... Six of Motley's 11 touchdown passes last season went to Isaiah Ford ... Despite playing in just 10 games, Motley finished third on the team in rushing and tied for second in rushing touchdowns.



TRAVON  
MCMILLIAN

# McMillian with lofty goals heading into UPCOMING SEASON

by Jimmy  
Robertson

At the start of the 2015 season, the Virginia Tech coaching staff decided to work several running backs in hopes that one would emerge.

Five games into the season, that person did 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 102.5 yards rushing per game in the Hokies’ final eight games of last season. That run included five games of 95 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.

“I’m not surprised,” McMillian said of his season. “I feel like this year is going to be a better year for me, though, just because I know how to press the line of scrimmage a lot better. I know the blocking schemes better. I know how a power play is blocked. I know how a counter play is blocked. That was stuff I didn’t really have a feel for last year.”

McMillian, like the rest of the running backs and other players on offense, went into spring practice learning a new system under a new position coach. Zohn Burden, who was retained from Frank Beamer’s staff, became the running backs coach after coaching receivers last year. He takes a little different approach to coaching than Shane Beamer, the previous running backs coach.

Burden is quieter and wants things done a certain way. Beamer took a more boisterous approach, constantly encouraging his players. He also allowed them the freedom to do things their way, provided the job got done. Both methods work.

Going into spring practice, McMillian knew a starting job was not guaranteed. Tech returns dependable Sam Rogers and injured tailbacks Shai McKenzie and Marshawn Williams went into August practices at full strength. Deshaun McCleave impressed this spring with his ability to make people miss in the open field and Coleman Fox can do some things.

Even the fullbacks bring skills. Rogers, who often plays both spots, and Steven Peoples can run, block and catch the ball out of the backfield. Burden has to love that versatility, particularly with the Hokies going to an up-tempo style that creates more plays and thus the need to play more players.

All running backs got a relatively even number of reps this spring. So they knew the urgency to show their abilities.

“When a new coach comes in, it’s a fair shot for everybody,” McMillian said. “I know what I’m capable of, and I feel like I’m the best back



## VIRGINIA TECH RUNNING BACKS

AUGUST, 2016 (In numerical order)

### TAILBACKS

- 16 Coleman Fox (5-11, 193, r-Fr.)
- 28 Shai McKenzie (5-11, 215, r-So.)
- 33 Deshaun McCleave (5-9, 180, r-Fr.)
- 34 Travon McMillian (6-0, 205, r-So.)
- 42 Marshawn Williams (6-0, 227, r-So.)
- 48 D.J. Reid (6-1, 235, r-So.)

### FULLBACKS

- 32 Steven Peoples (5-9, 218, So.)
- 41 Trey Skeens (5-11, 216, r-Fr.)
- 45 Sam Rogers (5-11, 230, Sr.)

here. Every other back would say the same thing. That’s the kind of attitude you have to have.”

New coach Justin Fuente likes to hear that. He wants to run the football and he likes to play many different backs in an attempt to rack up yardage on the ground. Again, the tempo creates more plays — and the need for more depth.

Tech needs to run the ball better than it did a season ago when it ranked 81st nationally at 159.2 yards per game — even with McMillian’s good season. Sacks influenced that number, for sure, but the offensive line appears to be in good shape and that, along with McMillian’s return, gives reason for optimism.

“I’m really confident,” McMillian said. “I feel like Sam and I are versatile. We can pass block. We can run the ball. Deshaun McCleave has speed and can get on the edge. He can also get involved in the passing game. Shai [McKenzie] is a good ball carrier on short yardage and so is Marshawn. D.J. [Reid] can do that as well. Coleman is versatile. We’ve got a lot of guys who can do different things.”

## A QUICK GLANCE

**Returning starters:** Travon McMillian (seven career starts), Sam Rogers (13 career starts)

**Starters lost:** none

**Projected new starters:** none

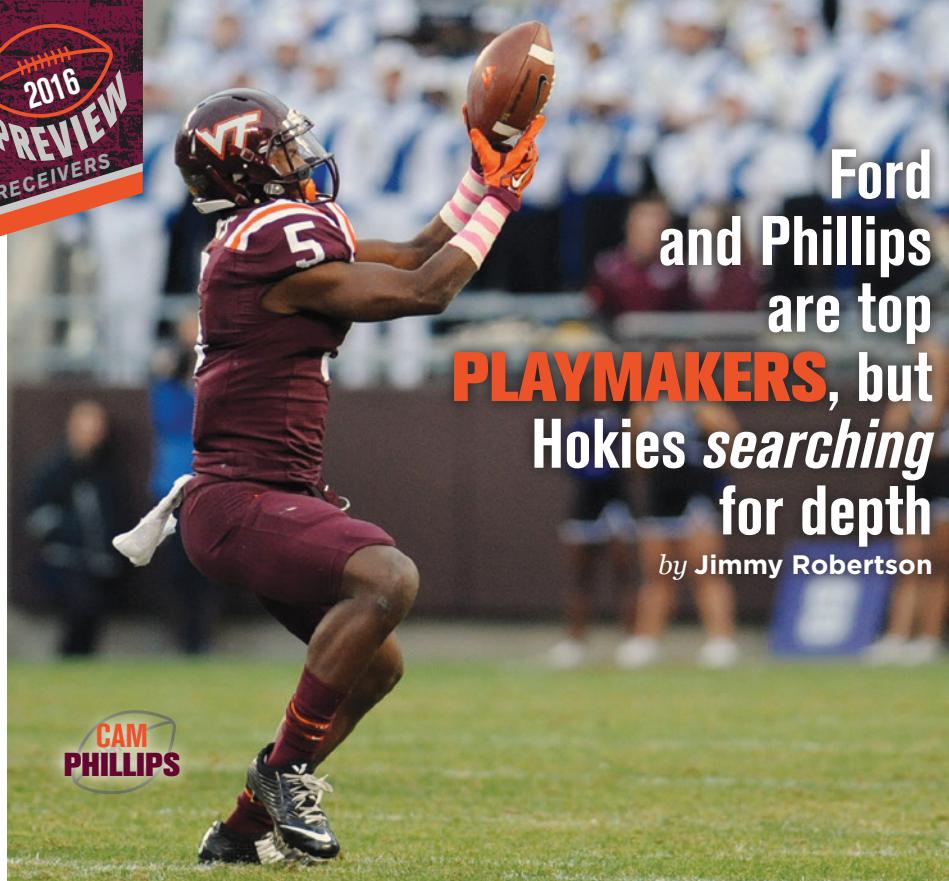
**Top reserves:** Shai McKenzie, Marshawn Williams, Deshaun McCleave, D.J. Reid, Coleman Fox, Steven Peoples

**Newcomers:** McCleave, Fox, Trey Skeens

**Breakout candidate:** McCleave

**Notes:** McMillian was the only back to rush for more than 100 yards against BC, the nation’s top defense, last season ... McMillian’s 80.2 yards rushing per game last season ranked fifth in the ACC ... McMillian’s 200 carries ranked seventh in the ACC ... Rogers has played in 39 games in his career ... Rogers needs 90 yards of offense to reach 1,000 for his career ... Williams and McKenzie both have rushed for more than 100 yards at least once in their careers (Williams twice) ... McKenzie received a medical hardship waiver after playing in just two games last season ... Williams tore his ACL against Duke in November of 2014 and hasn’t played since.





CAM  
PHILLIPS

# 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 because, even though there is a physical aspect to it, there is more of a mental aspect to it. When you have three plays in a pass skeleton drill, they're [the coaches] calling plays every 10-15 seconds. It's a mental grind. You're like, 'I've got to get back [to the line of scrimmage]. I've got to know what I'm doing.' With the practices building up, you get stronger both physically and mentally. I think that's a big positive for us."

Phillips hopes that a new system brings forth different results for the Hokies as an offense this upcoming season. Tech ranked ninth in the ACC in passing offense at 225.8 yards passing per game, though the Hokies ranked third in the ACC with 24 touchdown passes.

Fans expect more, especially with the implementation of that new offense and the return of guys like Phillips and Isaiah Ford, a first-team All-ACC choice who led the ACC with 1,164 yards receiving last fall. Ford enjoyed a record-setting year, establishing single-season marks for receptions (75),

receiving yardage, and touchdown receptions (11), while Phillips caught 49 passes for 582 yards and two touchdowns. Only two other receivers on Tech's 2015 roster—Kevin Asante and Demetri Knowles—caught a pass last season and both of them have completed their eligibility.

Ford and Phillips, though, give the Hokies' passing game a great foundation from which to build an offense.

"We know what we can do, but for the coaches to have that confidence in us and us believing in the scheme, I think the sky is the limit for us," Phillips said. "I think, with the playmakers we have, we can be tops in the country. I'm very excited."

But Tech's staff wants to find more at the receiver spots than just Phillips and Ford, who both played more than 800 snaps a year ago. Once aboard, the new staff quickly took steps that they hope alleviate the depth issues.

First, the coaches secured commitments from Divine Deablo, Samuel Denmark, Eric Kumah, and Phil Patterson. Deablo, Denmark, and Kumah enrolled in January and participated in spring practice, with the hopes of being ready to play this fall.

"I think the coaches did a great job of recruiting guys who have some talent as well as some wide receiver ability as far as knowing how to read coverages and run routes," Phillips said. "They brought in a lot of guys. If anything, it's great for them because they get to come and learn from me and Isaiah and we get to work on our leadership skills, helping them and being big brothers to them."

The coaches also convinced Devin Wilson to come out for the team. Wilson, a player on



## VIRGINIA TECH RECEIVERS


AUGUST, 2016 (In numerical order)

- 1 Isaiah Ford (6-2, 195, Jr.)
- 5 Cam Phillips (6-0, 199, Jr.)
- 7 Bucky Hodges (6-7 245, r-Jr.)
- 8 Phil Patterson (6-2, 180, Fr.)
- 15 Sean Daniel (5-9, 183, Fr.)
- 29 Tyler Fitzgerald (5-9, 178, r-So.)
- 30 Jordan Jefferson (5-8, 170, Fr.)
- 39 Jaylen Bradshaw (6-1, 202, r-So.)
- 81 Samuel Denmark (6-0, 183, Fr.)
- 83 Eric Kumah (6-2, 210, Fr.)
- 86 C.J. Carroll (5-8, 167, r-So.)
- 88 Divine Deablo (6-3, 208, Fr.)
- 89 Devin Wilson (6-3, 206, Jr.)

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.

Finally, during spring practice, they worked Bucky Hodges, arguably the most talented player on the roster, at receiver. Hodges, a tight end, played a lot at receiver a year ago, so the transition wasn't that difficult for him.

But success in the passing game probably hinges on Ford and Phillips, who increased his numbers from a year ago, but wasn't satisfied.

"Anyone who knows me knows that 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 set the bar extremely high." 



## A QUICK GLANCE

**Returning starters:** Isaiah Ford (23 career starts), Cam Phillips (19 career starts)

**Starters lost:** none

**Projected new starters:** none

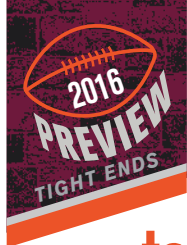
**Top reserves:** C.J. Carroll, Jaylen Bradshaw, Divine Deablo, Eric Kumah, Samuel Denmark, Devin Wilson, Phil Patterson

**Newcomers:** Deablo, Kumah, Denmark, Patterson, Wilson

**Breakout candidate:** Phillips

**Notes:** Outside of Ford and Phillips, none of Tech's returning receivers played in a game last season ... Outside of Ford and Phillips, Tech's receivers combined to play 124 snaps during the 2015 regular season ... Ford needs 54 receptions to become Tech's all-time leader in career receptions and 1,011 yards to become Tech's all-time leader in career reception yardage ... Ford also needs six touchdown receptions to become Tech's all-time career leader in that category ... Ford had four 100-yard receiving games last season ... Only one other Tech player had a 100-yard receiving game last season (Bucky Hodges vs. Duke).





# 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 times, and such. The information also includes study hall times for select players.

Bucky Hodges was normally 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 it done. I've definitely matured. All the people in academics [Student-Athlete 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 head coach Justin Fuente.

"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 college 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



## VIRGINIA TECH TIGHT ENDS

AUGUST, 2016 (In numerical order)

- 7 Bucky Hodges (6-7, 245, r-Jr.)
- 13 Chris Durkin (6-4, 223, r-So.)
- 80 Casey Harman (6-3, 245, r-Fr.)
- 82 Xavier Burke (6-3, 255, r-Fr.)
- 85 Chris Cunningham (6-2, 236, r-Fr.)



## A QUICK GLANCE

**Returning starter:** Bucky Hodges (23 career starts)

**Starter lost:** none

**Projected new starter:** none

**Top reserves:** Chris Durkin, Casey Harman, Xavier Burke, Chris Cunningham

**Newcomers:** Durkin, Harman, Burke, Cunningham

**Breakout candidate:** Hodges

**Notes:** Hodges' 85 career receptions rank 20th on the school's all-time list and second among tight ends (Mike Burnop, 90) ... With 40 receptions this season, Hodges would move into the top five at Tech in career receptions ... Hodges' 13 career touchdown receptions are tied for eighth in school history and are the most ever by a Tech tight end ... Despite having 85 career receptions, Hodges has just one 100-yard receiving game in his career (Duke last season, 101 yards) ... Hodges has started 15 consecutive games ... Hodges is one of just three players on offense to start every game last season (Jonathan McLaughlin, Augie Conte) ... The backups behind Hodges have combined to play in four collegiate games ... Burke played on special teams in the East Carolina game last season, but received a medical hardship waiver because of an injury.

playbook and just getting comfortable, but now he's ready to put up big numbers this season—yet again.

"I'm really 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."

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JONATHAN  
McLAUGHLIN

## 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. Music represents a stark contrast to property management, but the latter is a backup plan — a must in today's world.

"I definitely want to be a music producer," McLaughlin said. "I've been playing since I was 2 years 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 really can't 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 singing a winning tune 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 Vice, who came from Memphis with new head coach Justin Fuente. Vice is the Hokies' third offensive line coach in four seasons.

But McLaughlin said the transition went smoothly.

"Coach Vice 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 people 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 for us to be successful."

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 every position this spring to develop depth.

### A QUICK GLANCE

**Returning starters:** Jonathan McLaughlin (35 career starts), Augie Conte (23 career starts), Wyatt Teller (18 career starts), Eric Gallo (13 career starts)

**Starter lost:** Wade Hansen (16 career starts)

**Projected new starter:** Parker Osterloh

**Top reserves:** Yosuah Nijman, Demetri Moore, Kyle Chung, Tyrell Smith, Billy Ray Mitchell, Colt Pettit

**Newcomers:** Moore, Smith, Austin Cannon, D'Andre Plantin,

**Breakout candidate:** Gallo

**Notes:** Tech is one of just 19 teams in NCAA Division I with at least 90 career starts returning on the offensive line ... Only North Carolina (131) has more career starts returning on the offensive line than the Hokies among ACC teams ... Tech ranked 100th nationally a year ago in sacks allowed per game (2.62) ... McLaughlin has started every game in which he has played in his career.



"I have no clue," McLaughlin said when asked if he was a right tackle or left tackle. "When people ask me what position I play, I always say, '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 Vice's coaching style. The unit spent the majority of its spring getting used to the tempo in which the offensive staff 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 staff ... all that is tempo-oriented. When we get to the season, it shouldn't be a problem."

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. Yosuah 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 81st nationally in rushing offense (159.2 ypg). They also allowed 34 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




## VIRGINIA TECH OFFENSIVE LINE

AUGUST, 2016 (In numerical order)

- 52 Austin Cannon** (6-2, 302, Fr.)
- 57 Wyatt Teller** (6-5, 308, r-Jr.)
- 58 Colt Pettit** (6-3, 298, r-So.)
- 61 Kyle Chung** (6-3, 290, r-Jr.)
- 62 D'Andre Plantin** (6-5, 295, r-Fr.)
- 63 Daniel Bailey** (6-3, 301, r-Fr.)
- 64 Eric Gallo** (6-2, 295, Jr.)
- 65 Matt Christ** (6-3, 274, r-Fr.)
- 66 Billy Ray Mitchell** (6-4, 285, r-So.)
- 67 Parker Osterloh** (6-8, 326, r-Jr.)
- 68 Connor Kish** (6-2, 280, r-Fr.)
- 69 Yosuah Nijman** (6-7, 300, So.)
- 70 Kevin Kish** (6-2, 286, r-Fr.)
- 71 Jonathan McLaughlin** (6-5, 294, Sr.)
- 72 Augie Conte** (6-6, 305, r-Sr.)
- 74 Braxton Pfaff** (6-5, 293, r-So.)
- 75 Zachariah Hoyt** (6-5, 285, Fr.)
- 77 Demetri Moore** (6-6, 303, Jr.)
- 79 Tyrell Smith** (6-3, 295, r-Fr.)

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. 



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## Slye with *higher goals* heading into the SEASON

by Jimmy Robertson

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."

### VIRGINIA TECH SPECIAL TEAMS AUGUST, 2016 (In numerical order)

#### PUNTERS

- 90 Mitchell Ludwig (5-11, 198, r-Jr.)
- 46 Joey Slye (5-11, 210, Jr.)

#### KICKERS

- 35 Michael Santamaria (5-9, 174, r-So.)
- 46 Joey Slye (5-11, 210, Jr.)

#### SNAPPERS

- 54 Chaska Moon (5-10, 227, r-Fr.)
- 59 Joe Callas (5-11, 200, r-So.)
- 87 Colton Taylor (6-1, 220, r-Jr.)
- 89 Wright Bynum (6-4, 233, r-Fr.)

### A QUICK GLANCE

**Returning starter:** Joey Slye (26 career starts)  
**Starter lost:** A.J. Hughes (52 career starts)  
**Projected new starter:** Mitchell Ludwig  
**Top reserve:** Michael Santamaria  
**Newcomers:** none  
**Breakout candidate:** Ludwig

**Notes:** Slye's 30 field-goal attempts ranked tied for second in the ACC ... Slye ranked fourth in the ACC in field goals made and sixth in scoring per game (8.5 ppg) last season ... Hughes' 70 punts and his total yardage (3,002) were the third-most in the ACC a year ago ... Stroman's 31 punt returns were the most in the ACC last season ... Stroman's average of 7.8 yards per return ranked third in the league ... Colton Taylor figures to be the snapper and has played in five college games in his career ... Der'Woun Greene's kickoff return average (27.4 ypr) ranked third in the ACC last season.

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.

He's certainly ready for that challenge. "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 relieving to know that I can help them out in a significant way." **VT**

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## Led by Baron, DEFENSIVE LINE looking for improved play this season

by Jimmy Robertson

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 against Tech's Kendall Fuller-less secondary opened things in the running game. But the Hokies admit they need to improve.

"If you look back on the year as a total, we were up and down as a defense," Baron said. "There were games where we played really well. We executed the game plan and played well. Then there were games when we got picked on by offenses in some instances, whether that was in the run game or the pass game. There is definitely some things you can build on from last year, but there is also a lot of room for improvement."



### A QUICK GLANCE

**Returning starter:** Ken Ekanem  
(26 career starts)

**Starters lost:** Dadi Nicolas (26 career starts),  
Luther Maddy (46 career starts),  
Corey Marshall (20 career starts)

**Projected new starters:** Woody Baron,  
Nigel Williams, Seth Dooley

**Top reserves:** Ricky Walker, Tim Settle,  
Trevon Hill, Darius Fullwood, Houshun Gaines

**Newcomers:** Settle, Hill, Fullwood, Gaines

**Breakout candidate:** Walker

**Notes:** Ekanem, Baron, and Williams are the only members of Tech's defensive line to start a collegiate game ... Ekanem has started 26 straight games ... Williams has played in 39 career games—tied for the most on the team (Sam Rogers) ... Tech's defense ranked 70th nationally in sacks per game (2.00) ... Tech's defensive line recorded 16 of the team's 26 sacks ... The Hokies' returning defensive line accounted for half of those sacks last season ... The Hokies' rush defense ranked 75th 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 325-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.

The situation is a little more unsettled at

defensive end, where only Ekanem brings any semblance of game experience. A two-year starter who has played in 37 games in his career, Ekanem recorded 39 tackles last season, including 9.5 for a loss and 4.5 sacks.

He leads a position with a lot of youth, but also a lot of talent. Seth Dooley and Vinny Mihota bring size, with Dooley at 6-foot-5, 252 pounds and Mihota at 6-5, 264. Both of them bring athleticism as well, and Tech's coaches expect an increase in production this fall.

Behind those three are three redshirt freshmen who haven't played a game yet—Darius Fullwood, Houshun Gaines, and Trevon Hill. Of those, Hill stood out this spring as a 6-3, 240-pounder with the ability to bend his body coming off the edge. He possesses the explosiveness to work his way into the rotation rather quickly.

Tech's defensive line had the smoothest transition of anyone once Justin Fuente took the job. After all, Fuente kept defensive coordinator Bud Foster and defensive line coach Charley Wiles. So this unit should be a group that serves as leaders to the rest of the team—and more importantly, plays up to the potential it possesses.

"I think the expectation is what it's always been," Baron said. "You've got your older guys, which is me, and then you have your younger guys, like Ricky [Walker]. Everyone is expected to learn in the film room and do the best they

## VIRGINIA TECH

## DEFENSIVE LINE

AUGUST, 2016 *(In numerical order)*

**ENDS**

**4 Ken Ekanem** (6-3, 260, r-Sr.)

**11 Houshun Gaines** (6-3, 248, r-Fr.)

**43 Seth Dooley** (6-5, 252, r-Jr.)

**47 Darius Fullwood** (6-3, 252, r-Fr.)

**94 Trevon Hill** (6-3, 240, r-Fr.)

**96 Jimmie Taylor** (6-2, 240, Fr.)

**99 Vinny Mihota** (6-5, 264, r-So.)

**TACKLES**

**60 Woody Baron** (6-2, 280, Sr.)

**90 Dalton Roe** (6-1, 263, r-Jr.)

**91 Steve Sobczak** (6-1, 287, r-So.)

**95 Nigel Williams** (6-2, 297, r-Sr.)

**97 Tim Settle** (6-3, 328, r-Fr.)

**98 Ricky Walker** (6-2, 282, r-So.)

can once they step on the field. Whether that's me or whomever it is, someone has to start on day No. 1. Whoever is on the field is expected to execute the defense.

"I have high expectations for every team that I'm a part of, whether we're too young or a team full of veterans. I think that we have the opportunity to learn from mistakes and the sky is the limit for each team. This one isn't any different."

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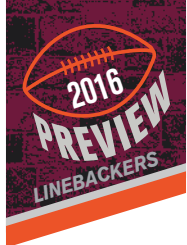
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# Younger Edmunds *ready for* **EXPANDED ROLE** *this season*

by Jimmy Robertson

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.

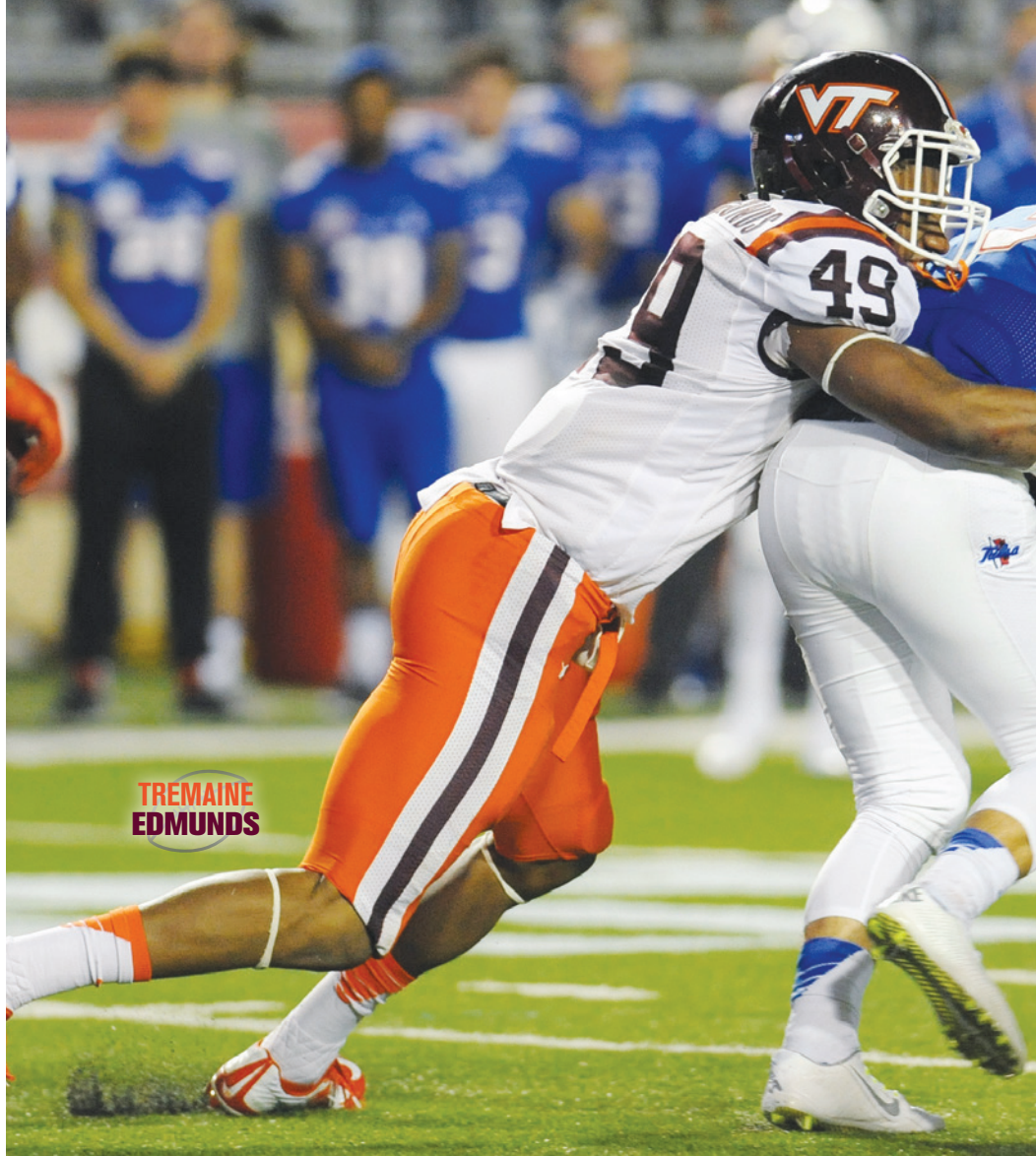
He embraced that challenge, too, even when it meant taking his 6-foot-5, 236-pound frame and trying to catch someone like Deshawn McClease in the open field.

"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 funny that you brought McClease 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



**TREMAINE  
EDMUNDS**

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."



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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 11 tackles.

The staff also signed three linebackers in Tavante Beckett, Eron Carter, and Emmanuel Belmar. Typically, though, 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. "Whichever 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."

"But I like linebacker. We're leaders on the defense and a lot of things go through us. I like taking a leadership role and going out there and getting to the ball. Backers definitely get to the ball a lot and it's definitely a playmaker position. I feel great there."

Tech's defense was a little up and down last fall and the numbers show that. The Hokies ranked 44th nationally in total defense, allowing nearly 370 yards per game. Usually they reside in the top 20.

Getting back to that level will require more consistent and better play. That includes the linebacker positions and Edmunds expects that he and Motuapuaka will give the unit just what it needs.

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

**VIRGINIA TECH**  
**LINEBACKERS**

**AUGUST, 2016** *(In numerical order)*

**MIKE LINEBACKERS**  
**53 Trent Young** (5-10, 214, r-So.)  
**54 Andrew Motuapuaka** (6-0, 233, r-Jr.)  
**56 Sean Huelskamp** (6-1, 222, r-Jr.)

**BACKERS**  
**49 Tremaine Edmunds** (6-5, 236, So.)  
**50 Jamieon Moss** (6-1, 229, r-Jr.)

"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]."

**A QUICK GLANCE**

**Returning starter:** Andrew Motuapuaka (15 career starts)  
**Starter lost:** Deon Clarke (24 career starts)  
**Projected new starter:** Tremaine Edmunds (two career starts)  
**Top reserves:** Sean Huelskamp, Jamieon Moss, Trent Young  
**Newcomers:** Tavante Beckett, Eron Carter, and Emmanuel Belmar  
**Breakout candidate:** Edmunds  
**Notes:** Motuapuaka has recorded at least 10 tackles in a game on 12 occasions during his career ... Motuapuaka's four sacks last season ranked second on the team ... Edmunds saw action in 294 regular-season plays, including 273 on special teams ... Huelskamp recorded 10 tackles, including 3.5 for a loss, and a sack in a start against East Carolina last fall ... Moss has played in 25 games in his career, but has not played a snap from scrimmage.

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## Facyson set to be a **LEADER** at Tech's *cornerback spots*

by Jimmy Robertson

**BRANDON  
FACYSON**

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. It was a hands-on class and you had to keep up with it. I found myself studying a lot. We covered two chapters a day and then had a test every Friday."

As expected from an All-ACC Academic Football Team member, Facyson rolled through the courses and remains on track to graduate in December with a degree in biology. His oft-publicized future plans remain the same—he wants to go to medical school and eventually become a heart surgeon once his football career ends.

The next step on the football journey begins

### A QUICK GLANCE

**Returning starters:** Brandon Facyson (22 career starts), Greg Stroman (seven career starts), Adonis Alexander (eight career starts)

**Starter lost:** Kendall Fuller (28 career starts)

**Projected new starters:** none

**Top reserves:** DuWayne Johnson, Shawn Payne, Curtis Williams, Erik Banks

**Newcomers:** Johnson, Khalil Ladler, Jovonn Quillen, Tyrone Thornton

**Breakout candidate:** Stroman

**Notes:** Facyson's 22 career starts are the second-most by a Tech secondary player (Chuck Clark, 26) ... Outside of Facyson, Stroman, and Alexander, the remainder of the cornerbacks on the depth chart have played in three collegiate games ... The Hokies' cornerbacks recorded six of the team's 10 interceptions last season ... Alexander led the team with four interceptions ... Alexander's 55 tackles ranked fifth on the team ... As a defense, the Hokies tied for 78th nationally in interceptions (10 interceptions), but ranked 19th in passing yards allowed per game (189.2 ypg).

this fall where the Newnan, Georgia product hopes to put the injuries of the past two seasons behind him and play the way that he played as a true freshman when he recorded five interceptions. Since then, he hasn't picked off a pass.

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. In all, 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.



Tech's staff moved several cornerbacks to other positions in the secondary this spring to solidify those spots. The coaches moved Terrell Edmunds to rover and kept Der'Woun 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. It's been a little bit of a change with some of the things we're working on, but you've got to

be willing to accept change. We come in with open arms to that and perfect whatever we need to perfect."

Other changes included Fuente's splitting of the secondary responsibilities, with Mitchell coaching just the cornerbacks and Galen Scott coaching the free safety, rover, and nickel positions. Gray had coached all those positions before departing.

Those changes, though, really forced the players to communicate on the field this spring. The secondary, as a whole, needs to be in sync to be successful.

"It is different," Facyson said. "You're used to being in the meeting room with everyone and being on the same page that way. Now we're split up. We have to be on the same page still, but without those guys in the room, we're working exclusively on things for cornerbacks. We look at what we need to do and what we need to fix and what we need to keep doing to get better.

"I feel like it was a good move. It's really different, but I feel like it will benefit us."

Tech's staff hopes for more consistent play out of the cornerback position than what it received a year ago. Much of that inconsistency came about because of the knee injury suffered by Kendall Fuller, the Hokies' All-American who missed much of the season. Fuller's injury forced the staff to juggle guys at different spots.

## VIRGINIA TECH CORNERBACKS

AUGUST, 2016 *(In numerical order)*

<b>3</b> Greg Stroman (6-0, 180, Jr.)
<b>9</b> Khalil Ladler (5-11, 183, Fr.)
<b>27</b> Shawn Payne (6-3, 192, So.)
<b>28</b> Curtis Williams (5-9, 176, r-Jr.)
<b>29</b> DuWayne Johnson (6-1, 185, r-Fr.)
<b>31</b> Brandon Facyson (6-2, 197, r-Jr.)
<b>35</b> Erikk Banks (5-10, 185, r-Jr.)
<b>36</b> Adonis Alexander (6-3, 193, So.)
<b>39</b> Tyrone Thornton (5-9, 193, r-Fr.)
<b>42</b> Elisha Boyd (6-2, 185, r-So.)

Fuller decided to forgo his final year at Tech and make himself available for the NFL Draft. The Washington Redskins drafted Fuller in the third round. His departure makes it paramount that Facyson stays healthy. He figures to be assuming most of Fuller's boundary cornerback responsibilities.

"I would say every year that we need to progress and we definitely can get better," Facyson said of the secondary. "We had some things go down with injuries and everything like that and it mixed things up a little bit. We don't want to settle. We want to get better every year and I know we can play better than we played last year."



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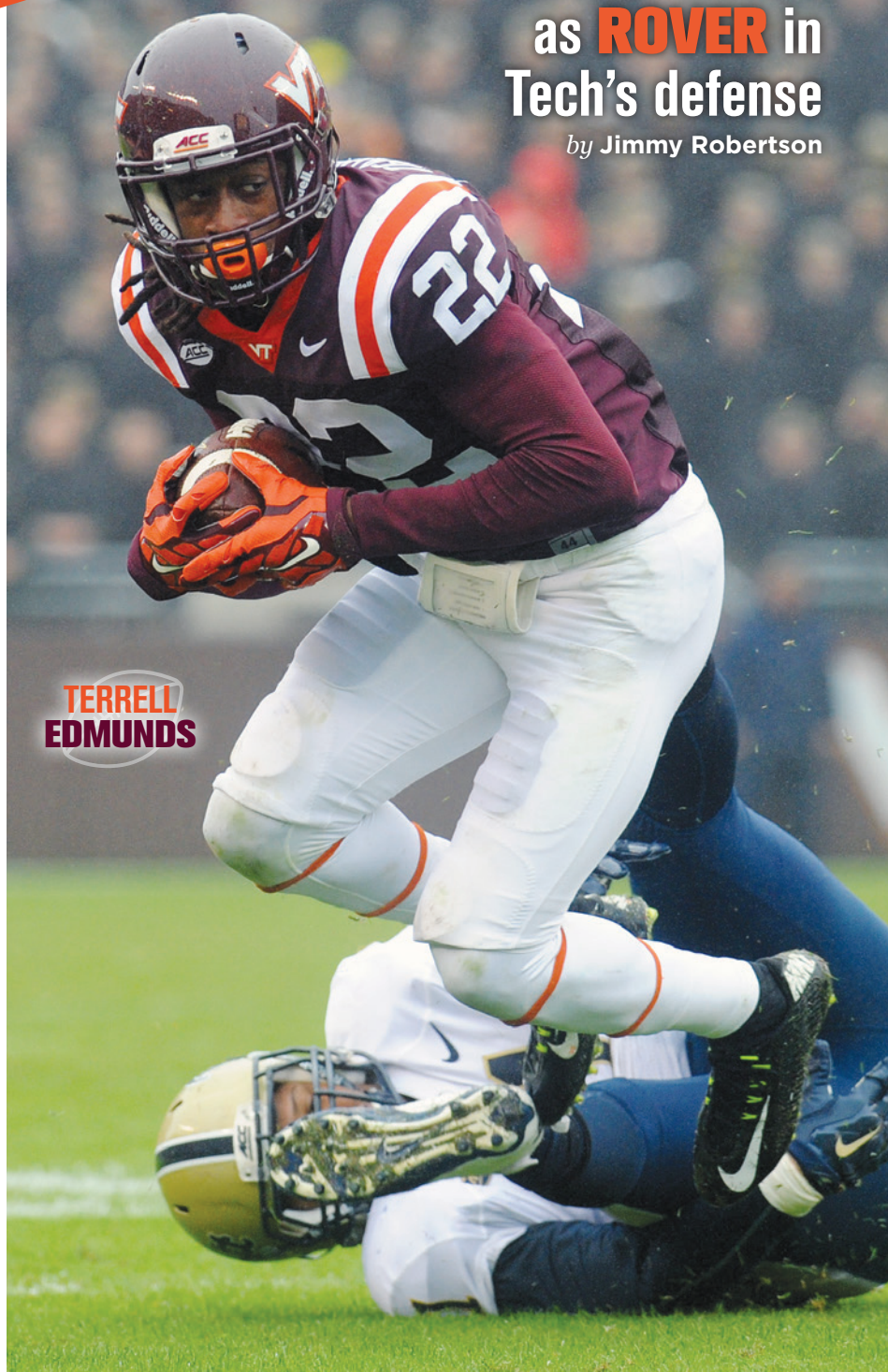


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# Edmunds *excited* about new role as **ROVER** in Tech's defense

by Jimmy Robertson



**TERRELL  
EDMUNDS**

Most fans know that the NCAA frowns upon wagering, but a couple of Virginia Tech players recently made bets on their own talents.

Rest easy, Hokie Nation. The stakes involved push-ups and nothing of monetary value, though Terrell Edmunds and Chuck Clark are approaching this as if the ante is rather high.

Essentially, the wager is this—whoever gets

the fewest interceptions this season has to do 100 push-ups per however many interceptions he trails. For example, Clark getting three interceptions and Edmunds getting one would result in Edmunds doing 200 push-ups.

“It’s a little thing to help us go out and play our best,” Edmunds said.

Edmunds found himself involved in one of the offseason’s most important moves

when Tech’s coaching staff decided to move him from cornerback to rover following last season. The rover position plays 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.

“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 get to that level.”

Past rovers include guys like Kyshoen Jarrett, Davon Morgan, Dorian Porch, Aaron Rouse, Kevin McCadam, and Cory Bird. All those guys enjoyed success at the position and Jarrett, Rouse, 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. Then 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 when Torrian Gray departed to take the defensive backs coaching position at the University of Florida.

“It wasn’t difficult,” Edmunds said. “Playing at corner, you have to know what the safety is doing because we’re all playing together. We’re all trying to be on the same page at all times. I’m telling the corner what to do and he’s telling me what he’s seeing. We have to play off of each other.


“I really like it now. I think I like it better than corner. At rover, you get to come down and hit people and that’s my thing. I like to come down and make tackles. At corner, you make a few tackles, but at rover, I’m in on the action. I know that if I miss a tackle, it’s almost touchdown. So I really like having that on me.”

Edmunds and Clark solidify the back end of the Tech’s secondary. Clark, of course, always has been one of the Hokies’ most dependable players. The free safety enters his third season as the starter. He started all 13 games last season and finished with a team-best 107 tackles and an interception.

Der’Woun Greene, a fifth-year senior, backs up Clark and provides experience and talent. Jahque Alleyne, who played last year as a true freshman, sits behind Edmunds on the depth chart.



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



## A QUICK GLANCE

**Returning starters:** Clark (26 career starts), Edmunds (eight career starts at cornerback)

**Starters lost:** none

**Projected new starter:** Edmunds

**Top reserves:** Der'Woun Greene, Jahque Alleyne

**Newcomer:** Deon Newsome

**Breakout candidate:** Edmunds

**Notes:** Tech's safeties/rovers combined for one interception last season (Clark vs. UVA) ... Clark has started 23 straight games ... Clark is one of just two returning players on defense who started every game in 2015 (Ken Ekanem) ... Clark's 107 tackles were the most by a Tech defensive back since 2003 ... Clark's eight pass breakups in 2015 ranked second on the team, while Edmunds' seven ranked third ... Edmunds' eight starts tied for the most by a Tech freshman last season (Adonis Alexander) ... Shegog started the final five games of last season, recording 26 of his 29 tackles during that span ... Reynolds and Alleyne were two of three true freshman defensive backs to see action last season (Alexander).

Reynolds played in all 13 games as a true freshman last season, starting two of them. He finished with 30 tackles, including four for a loss. Shegog 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.

"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.

"I'm very excited," Edmunds said. "I'm ready to get back to the old 'DBU' [defensive



## VIRGINIA TECH SAFETIES, ROVERS, AND NICKEL BACKS

AUGUST, 2016 (In numerical order)

**FREE SAFETIES**

**19 Chuck Clark** (6-0, 205, Sr.)

**23 Der'Woun Greene** (5-10, 196, r-Sr.)

**20 Deon Newsome** (5-11, 193, r-Jr.)

**ROVERS**

**17 Jahque Alleyne** (6-1, 177, So.)

**22 Terrell Edmunds** (6-2, 210, r-So.)

**36 Alden Carpenter** (6-0, 189, Jr.)

**NICKEL BACKS/WHIPS**


**6 Mook Reynolds** (6-0, 183, So.)

**18 Raymon Minor** (6-2, 231, r-So.)

**24 Anthony Shegog** (6-2, 213, r-Jr.)

**37 Johnathan Galante** (5-9, 208, Sr.)

backs 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. 50 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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**T**he 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 Stutts, 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).

Tiernan 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 round 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 sat out last season with a torn ACL.

As for replacing Meier, who started 85 games in her career, 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*

**CANDACE  
CEPHERS**



# TECH

## WOMEN'S SOCCER

program with

# BIG GOALS

for upcoming season

*Despite losing several key contributors off last season's squad, the Hokies have their sights set on a ninth straight NCAA Tournament appearance*

by Jimmy Robertson





The biggest unknown with this team is at goalkeeper. Last season, Kaylyn Smith started all 21 games and recorded 72 saves, allowing just 21 goals on the season. But Smith decided to leave the program, creating an important vacancy that needs to be filled.

Returning goalkeepers on the roster are Blayne Fink and Zoe Foxhall, with Fink possessing the only game experience — three career games, including two last fall. Mandy McGlynn, a top-50 prospect nationally out of Jacksonville, Florida, signed with the Hokies this past spring and she could find herself in the lineup rather quickly.

“We have a couple of good options,” Adair said. “Blayne Fink will be our senior coming in. She has a tremendous personality and is a great leader. She’s really outwardly expressive and a personality that everyone loves. Mandy McGlynn is a freshman who is coming in and will be competing and Zoe Foxhall is coming off an injury, so we’ll have to see where she is. Mandy finished high school early and she was able to step in and provide us with some depth.”

McGlynn joins the program along with a talented group of freshmen who figure to keep the Hokies rolling in the future. The contingent includes three Pennsylvanians — Jessica Boytim, Katherine Roth, and Mikayla Mance — who not only give the roster talent, but also an element of toughness. Jaylyn Thompson, a New Jersey native, also provides toughness, and California product Chandler McDaniel has been a part of the Philippines National Team. Lilly Weber, a Northern Virginia native, deserves mentioning as well, ranking as one of the best recruits in the state.

“All of our recruits have a chance to come in and play,” Adair said. “Typically three or four play, but it all depends on their fitness and how they adjust to the speed of the game and how physical they are.”

Adair and the Hokies will be tested early in the season by playing two SEC teams — LSU and Mississippi State — to start the fall. They

## 1 Caroline Kerns

Kerns played in 17 matches as a true freshman, scoring two goals and recording an assist. The coaching staff expects her to make a big leap in her sophomore season.

## 2 Alani Johnson

Someone needs to step forward and take some of the scoring load off Murielle Tiernan and Johnson could be the one. The forward scored nine goals last season as a true freshman while mostly coming off the bench.

## 3 Madi Conyers

Conyers made the All-ACC Freshman team two years ago and has played in 43 career games. The junior midfielder could be another big threat for the Hokies this season.

## 4 Laila Gray

Gray could play one of the most important positions on the team. She scored seven goals last season as a sophomore and has the ability to be an All-ACC performer for the team 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 bring some of the toughness lost with Jordan Coburn’s departure.



also get a rematch with Ohio State on Sept. 1 and play a solid Indiana program on Sept. 9.

A week after that Indiana game, the Hokies start conference play. Their first three games are at UVA, at North Carolina, and Duke — not

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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.

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 put a run together and see how far we can go. That's our goal." 



## INSIDE THE TOP 10

**1** Murielle Tiernan's eight-game winning goals last fall ranked first in the ACC

**2** Murielle Tiernan's 14 goals last fall ranked tied for second in the ACC

**3** The Hokies were third in the ACC in goals per game (2.24 gpg)

**4** Alani Johnson and Laila Gray scored four goals each in conference games

**5** Kallie Peurifoy's five assists last season lead all returning players

**6** Six of the Hokies' nine freshmen last season played in at least 14 games

**7** Seven of the eight players who scored goals last season return

**8** Eight players who played in all 21 games last fall return

**9** Alani Johnson was second on the team with nine goals

**10** This season, the Hokies are hoping to make their 10th NCAA Tournament appearance as a program

**Bonus** Eleven teams on Tech's schedule made the NCAA Tournament last year

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# 11 REASONS TO FOLLOW THE HOKIES

by Erica Avallone • Special to Inside Hokie Sports

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 So. Forward  
Born and raised on the beaches of Costa Rica

**2 BEN LUNDGAARD** #1 Jr. Goalkeeper  
Has broken his back twice

**3 RYAN MARCANO** #17 r-Sr. Midfielder  
Sister played soccer for Tennessee

**4 WILL MEJIA** #2 r-Fr. Defender  
Only child

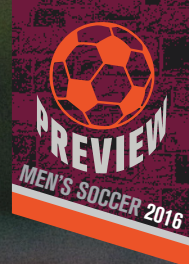
**5 ALESSANDRO MION** #4 r-Sr. Defender  
Knows all of the songs to the movie "Frozen"

**6 JP SAAVEDRA** #26 Sr. Midfielder  
Favorite music artist is Taylor Swift

**7 RORY SLEVIN** #16 So. Midfielder







**8** **ELIAS** #9 Jr.  
**TAMBURINI** Forward  
Speaks four languages: French,  
Finnish, English and Spanish

**9** **ANDRE** #5 r-Sr.  
**THOMAS** Midfielder  
Second-oldest player  
on the team

**10** **COLLIN** #3 Jr.  
**VERFURTH** Midfielder

**11** **OUSMANE**  
**SANOGO** #10 Sr.  
Defender  
Speaks four languages: French,  
English, Mandingo and Zarma



**ALESSANDRO  
MION**



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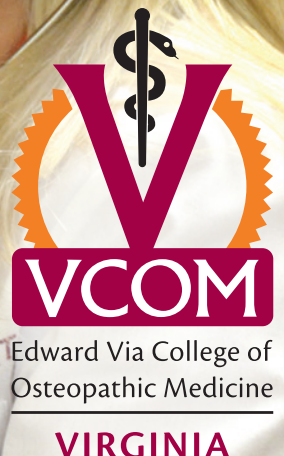
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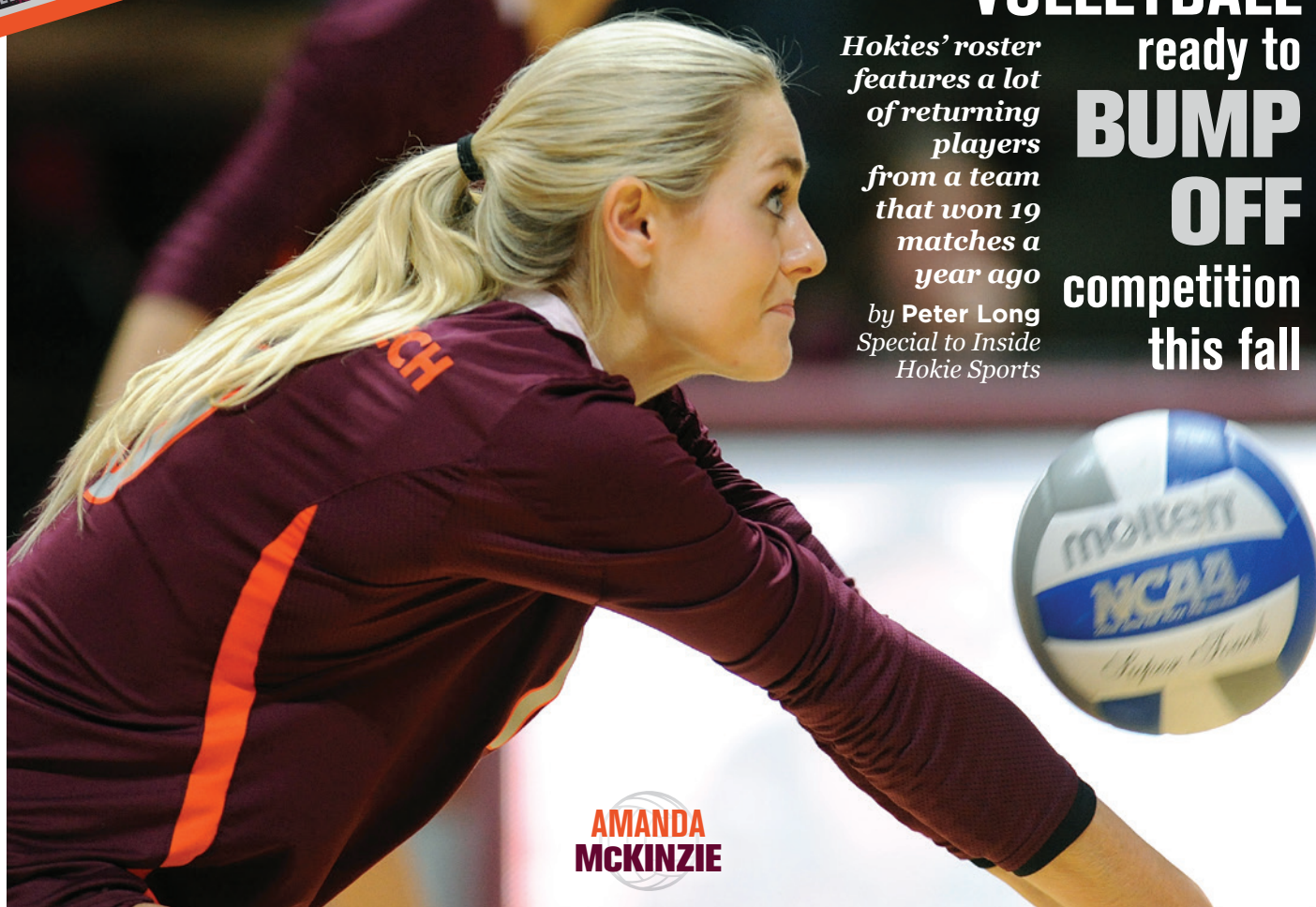


# TECH VOLLEYBALL

ready to  
**BUMP OFF**  
competition  
this fall

*Hokies' roster features a lot of returning players from a team that won 19 matches a year ago*

by **Peter Long**  
Special to Inside Hokie Sports



**AMANDA MCKINZIE**

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 she hit .330 and totaled 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 know exactly what it takes to accomplish what we've set out to do. We have players who

have been in the battle for a long time and we feel like we can match up with just about anybody."

The 2015 season began with great promise, as Tech jumped out to a 6-0 start and received its first votes in the AVCA Top 25 coaches poll in program history. The Hokies' best start to a season since 2009 also featured a 3-1 victory at No. 19 Michigan State.

The early-season success, though, could not be sustain. The Hokies split their remaining six non-conference matches and then went 10-10 in ACC play—a mark bolstered by a season-ending four-match winning streak. Tech finished with 19 or more victories for the third time in five seasons, and heading in 2016, Riley has placed on emphasis on sustaining those successes throughout the course of the season.

"What I'm looking for is how we approach each match mentally," Riley said. "They understand that every match matters and every point matters. That's our goal and that's how we're going to train as a group."

The Hokies will be tested early in the season with a trip outside of the intercontinental

United States for the Puerto Rico Clásico. The showcase, held in the city of Bayamon, will feature Tech in matches against Temple, Alabama and Texas A&M in front of what Riley expects to be some raucous crowds. He hopes that the high level of competition will prepare his squad for road matches in the ACC, where the outcomes can either make or break a season.

Success on the road is even more critical considering that the Hokies hold an impressive 107-39 record at Cassell Coliseum since Riley took over in 2006. In 2015, Tech posted an 11-5 mark on campus.

"Cassell is just a great environment," Riley said. "The fans are fantastic and the place provides depth that most facilities don't have. Other teams come in and they aren't used to playing in this big of an arena and it makes it harder for them to be successful. We practice in here every day and it gives us a significant advantage."

All of the factors—experience, depth, chances against strong opponents—has set the stage for the Hokies to do great things in 2016. For Riley, it all starts with consistency.



"This year is one of those years when I think we're deep enough where we can withstand anything in terms of injuries," Riley said. "We have a chance to build a really consistent team. That's what we want to be."

## LIBERO/ DEFENSIVE SPECIALIST

After the departure of Kenedy McGrath, junior Rhana Mitchell and sophomores Haley Price and Alex Toben are all vying for the starting job at libero entering this season. McGrath led the Hokies at 3.96 digs per set last season, but Riley has confidence in all of his personnel at the position.

"We've got some good young players and good ball control players in there," Riley said. "Our emphasis has been on who meshes best with a pretty senior-laden team. That's what we've been trying to figure out throughout the preseason."

## SETTERS

Rhegan Mitchell stepped up as a redshirt freshman last season and took command at setter, where she started in 23 matches and appeared in all 32. She led the Hokies with 7.51 assists per set and ranked fourth with 1.88 digs per frame. The Peachtree City, Georgia native even chipped in a .307 hitting percentage and nine double-doubles.

"Rhegan has done a great job and she's really progressing nicely," Riley said. "Her mind for the game is getting better and she's understanding more of what's expected of her. Her progression is going smoothly and it has been exciting to watch."

Two newcomers in UNC Asheville transfer Mandy Powers and freshman Gaby Senties join Mitchell. Powers, a Leesburg, Virginia native, started in 12 matches last season for the Bulldogs and ranked second on the team with 407 assists. Senties was an all-city and all-district performer at Laredo United High School in Laredo, Texas and has been labeled as a superb athlete and competitor by Riley.

"Mandy has some great on-court experience coming in and Gabby is an incredible athlete who brings ton of depth to what we're doing," Riley said. "We're looking for both to bring the push and stability we need."

## 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.

"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 1.17 blocks per set and a .330 hitting percentage. Cunningham, a second-year transfer from Villanova, ranked second on the team with 83 total blocks in her first season in Blacksburg.

## 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 Jaila Tolbert. Tolbert was named to the ACC All-Freshman Team last season after posting 65 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 re-inventing the wheel right now, but we are solidifying some of the spokes."

The Hokies have plenty of spokes, and if those get solidified, they could roll nicely this fall. Hopefully, they roll straight to their first NCAA Tournament berth since 2010. 



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# TECH CROSS COUNTRY TEAMS hope to SET THE PACE

*The men's and women's programs have talent and depth and have set their sights on berths to the NCAA Championships*  
by Jimmy Robertson

A sliver 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 in 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 100 meters.

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

"Tommy was an inspiring athlete, with the way that he raced," Thomas said. "It was fun to sit back and watch as a fan. Forget being 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 other guys that are tough racers. We do, 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

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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 27th 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 in mid-August, leading to optimism about the 2016 campaign. Much of that optimism centers on rising seniors Stuart Robertson, Neil Gourley and Patrick Joseph.

Robertson earned All-Southeast Region honors a year ago after finishing 24th at the NCAA Southeast Regional meet held outside of Charlottesville. He also finished 24th at the ACC Championship and 34th at the NCAA Pre-National meet and may well have been the Hokies' most consistent runner outside of Curtin.

Gourley and Joseph excel more in the middle distances as track runners than in the longer distances of cross country. Yet Gourley finished 30th or better in half of the races in which he ran, and Joseph earned All-Southeast Region honors two years ago before battling injuries last season. He only ran in three races before sitting out the rest of the year.

"Patrick just had a rough year last year, but you saw what type of talent he had when he nearly won an ACC title during the outdoor season [in the 800] and was an All-American [in track]," Thomas said. "He's a guy that has the talent to pick up where Tommy left off, if all goes well.

"Neil started that process last fall. He had tremendous progress from the fall before to last fall, and if he continues to have that type

of improvement, he can definitely be All-ACC. He has to work for it, but on the day, he's a tough racer. And Stuart has been an all-region racer. We just need for him to be solid and steady and get slightly better than he's been in the past. I think he has the potential to do that."

Thomas also expects improvement from guys like Peter Seufer, Brent Musselman, Daniel Jaskowak and Andrew Gaiser. Seufer 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.

Musselman and Jaskowak, like Seufer, were usually regulars in the lineup. Musselman had four top-50 finishes, while Jaskowak came in 31st at the ACC Championships and 33rd at the Virginia Tech Alumni Invite. Gaiser dealt with injuries for much of the season, but he returned later in the fall and actually won the Hokie Open in early November when Thomas rested some of his regulars.

Other runners could factor in, including Diego Zarate—who qualified for the IAAF U-20 World Championships in the 1,500—Vince Ciattei, Andrew Eason, Kevin Cianfarini and Andrew Goldman. Thomas also expects Fitsum 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 they went home for the summer was could we lose Tommy and potentially be a better

team next year just by having better depth?" Thomas said. "We should have good depth. We had good depth last year. I'm just hoping the No. 5 guy can be in the top 25 instead of the top 35. That makes all the difference 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, from the group that finished eighth at the ACC Championship and sixth at the NCAA Southeast Regional.

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 Kvartunas both filled that role and usually finished 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 conference. We had good depth, but we didn't have a frontrunner. This group could certainly improve from last year."

Motley is the better of the trio at longer distances, as both Morton and Green run the middle distances during the track seasons. She was Tech's top finisher at the ACC Championship, coming in 37th.

Despite being more of a middle distance runner, Morton ran fairly consistently in

*Continued on page 44*



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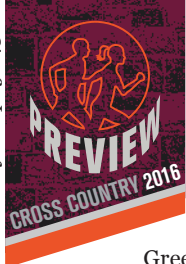

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cross country last fall. She recorded two top-20 finishes and her 41st-place finish at the NCAA Southeast Regional marked the best on the squad.

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.

"Abby gives us some experience," Thomas said. "She's had a good summer and she wants to be a factor. Shannon has been all-region for us in cross country before, and if she puts it together, she could be a high finisher for us. Hanna hopefully will come back a little stronger in cross country this year. She ran late into the summer because of the Olympic Trials, but I think by the end of October, she'll

be ready to hopefully be an all-region runner.

"Lauren Berman has had a good summer. She was ultra consistent last year as a freshman, which is hard to do. She moved up in distance from high school and did a good job and she's had a good summer."

Those four figure to be in Tech's lineup on a regular basis along with Katie Kennedy, a rising junior who had a top-10 finish at the Virginia Tech Alumni Invite and was a strong 49th at the ACC Championship. She stayed in Blacksburg this summer and that allowed Thomas to keep tabs on her training—which went very well. Another freshman last fall, Amanda Swaak, ran just as consistently. She recorded top-20 finishes at the Hokie Invite and the Virginia Tech Alumni Invite and was 49th at the ACC Championship.

Thomas expects to see more of his younger runners emerge. Last year's roster consisted of 12 freshmen and most of them returned for the 2016-17 year. Someone like Jennifer Fleming, who battled injuries last fall, could develop into a member of the lineup, or Rachel Pocratsky, who ran well during the track season in the spring and could carry that over to the course this fall.

Also, Thomas didn't rule out Sarah Edwards, an incoming freshman from Bellingham, Massachusetts, as an option. She possesses the versatility to run anything from the 800 to the longer distances of cross country.

"We have the girls with the potential to do it, but I won't know 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 Championship, 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 to 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. **VT**

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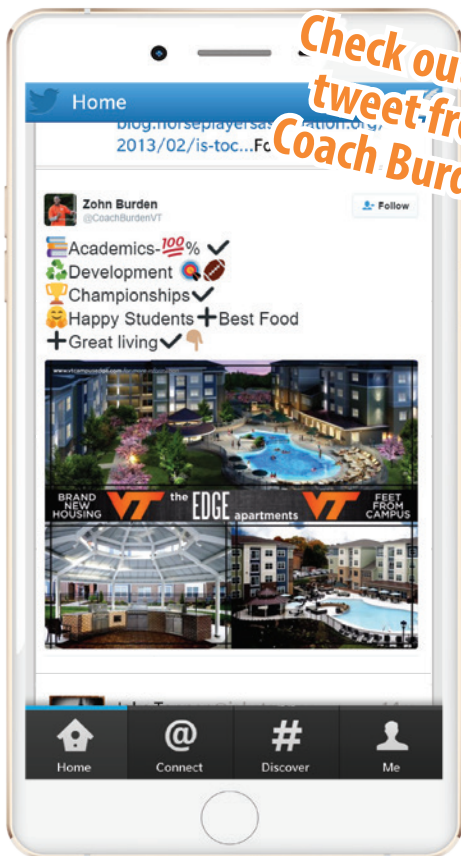
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