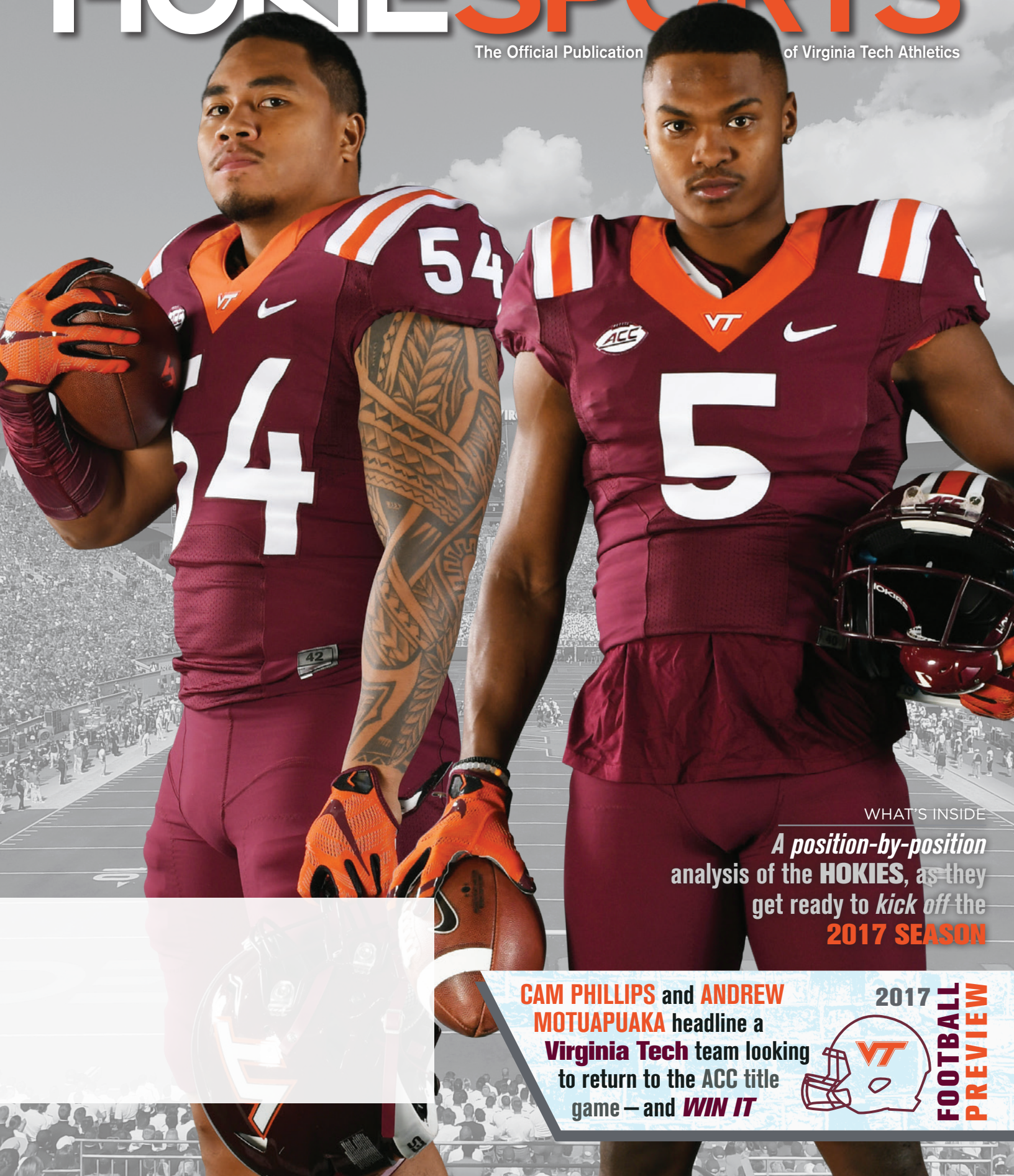


inside

Vol. 10 No. 1, August 2017

HOKIE SPORTS

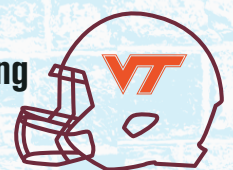
The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics



WHAT'S INSIDE

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

CAM PHILLIPS and **ANDREW MOTUAPUAKA** headline a **Virginia Tech** team looking to return to the ACC title game — and **WIN IT**



2017 FOOTBALL PREVIEW



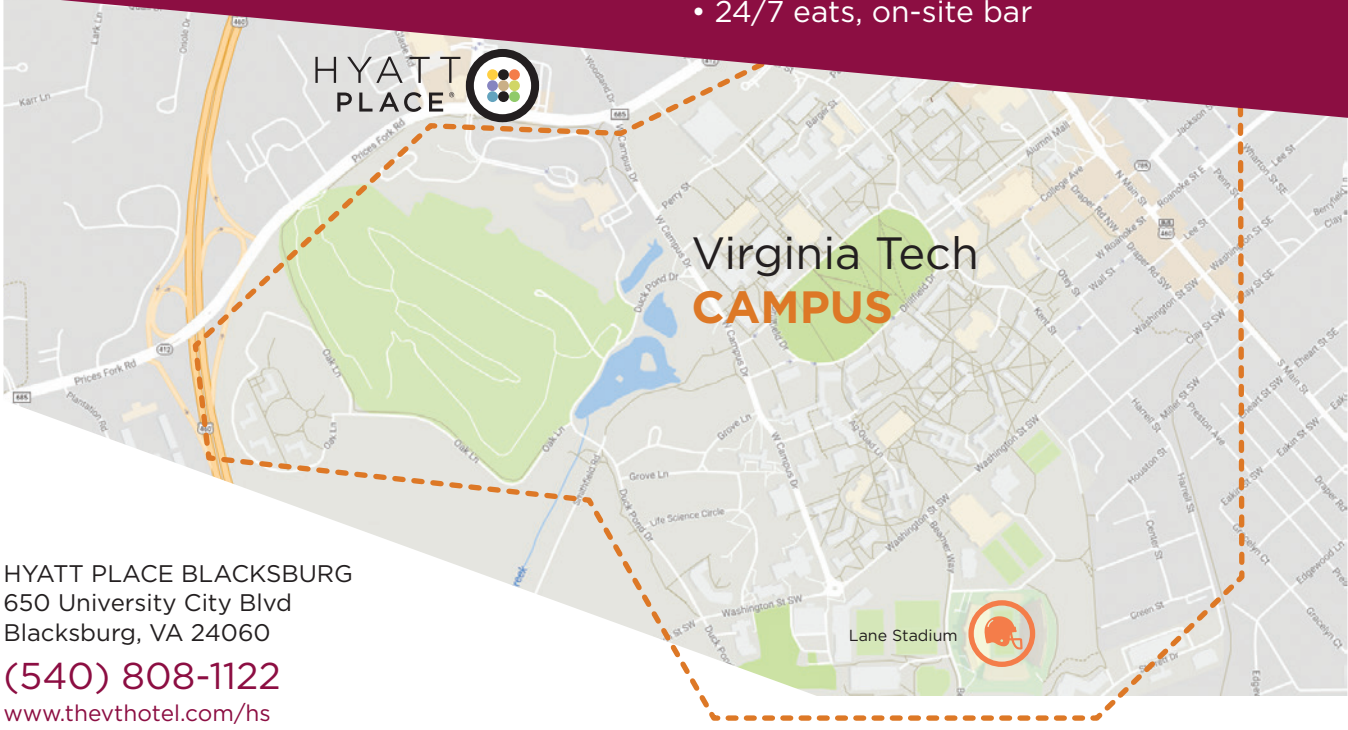
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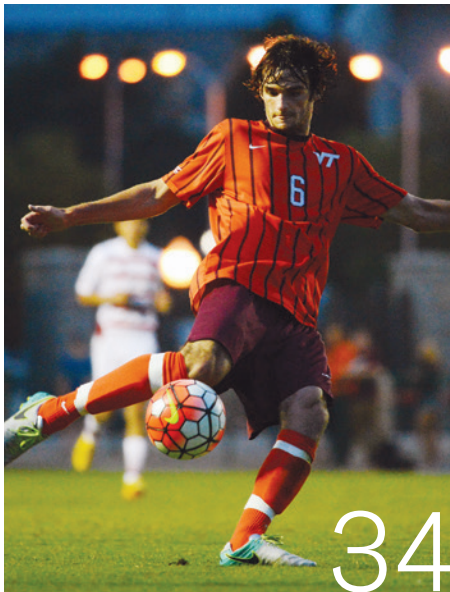
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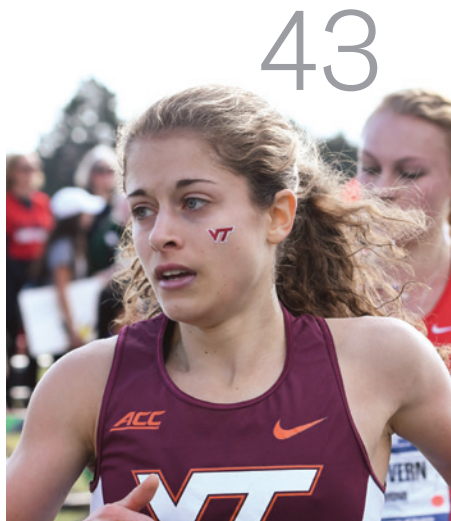
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HOKIE CONTINGENT TAKES SUMMER TRIP TO RWANDA

Yosuah Nijman stands 6-foot-7 and weighs 300 pounds, and in late May, he crammed himself into an airplane seat for a 14-hour trip to Rwanda, a small country in Central Africa.

"It's hard being 6-7 and traveling in economy," he said, smiling.

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

They spent the majority of their two-week trip in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. While there, they went to the Kigali Genocide Memorial, which honors the more than 250,000 people who were killed by a government-led faction during a three-month period in 1994.

None of the students had been born when this event took place, and few knew more than a few details, as the American education system tends to focus more on historical events that impacted the U.S.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The goal is to challenge them and to expose them to the challenges that people in other parts of the world face to deepen their understanding. Hopefully, these young men and women feel compelled to make a difference.

In other words, the goal is to compel them to live up to Virginia Tech's motto, *Ut Prosim* ("That I May Serve"). The course and trip goes a long way toward doing that.



THE STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

"It [the study abroad course] was an amazing trip. It was another opportunity to go out and explore parts of the world and experience a different culture besides just being in the United States. It was a great experience to learn a different culture and to see how they live on a day-to-day basis for two weeks. It was also great to learn about sports development and the development of a country."

Yosuah Nijman
Junior, Maplewood, New Jersey

"It was really eye opening, just seeing how the rest of the world lives and seeing what other people have been through. The genocide there, I had read about that in textbooks, but meeting people who had been through it and how they dealt with it was really amazing."

Vinny Mihota
Junior, Fredericksburg, Virginia



The Donor File



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CURRENTLY RESIDES:
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Bonita Springs, Florida

GRADUATION YEAR:
1972 and 1973

FAMILY:
Daughter Morgan (2003),
son Nolen (2010)

Q&A

Q. A Hokie is ...

A: a dedicated supporter of Virginia Tech (sorry for the trite explanation).

Q. The Hokie Nation is real because ...

A: it lives the university motto *Ut Prosim* ("That I May Serve").

Q. What is your best memory of Virginia Tech athletics?

A: Seeing us beat Texas in the 1995 Sugar Bowl on New Year's Eve in New Orleans with my children.

Q. How did you get involved with the Hokie Club?

A: How could we not?

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

A: We decided shortly after graduation that we wanted to stay involved with the academic and athletics programs of the university.

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

A: Not a superstition, but a tradition—getting together with 10-15 former classmates and spouses and drinking a handcrafted Bloody Mary.

Q. Describe your perfect day at Virginia Tech.

A: Wake up viewing the Catawba Valley from our condo, leisurely pace tailgating for a 3 p.m. kickoff, a Virginia Tech win, more tailgating and back to the condo for a cookout.

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

A: We are proud of where the school was positioned in athletics when we attended, and the level to which it has now risen on the national stage. We all have an obligation to give moral support, but furthermore, financial support. Our expectations of where we want to be require growing the donor base.

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

A: it is a way to stay informed and connected to the university, plus a platform for financial support.


Q. My favorite Virginia Tech sports are ...

A: too many to list.

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

A: Bruce Smith.

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

A: Dell Curry (men's basketball). 

GAMEDAY IS BACK





THANKYOU FROM BILL LANSDEN



Dear Hokie Nation,

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

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

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

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

Go Hokies!

Bill Lansden
Sr. Associate Athletics Director for Development/
Executive Director of the Hokie Club



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Inside Hokie Sports receives national honor at CoSIDA Convention

Inside Hokie Sports, the Virginia Tech Athletics Department's in-house publication, received a national award when the online version was named the top online magazine nationally at the 2017 College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA) Convention held in Orlando, Florida on June 11-14.

Jimmy Robertson, the editor of Inside Hokie Sports, and graphic designer John Sours oversaw the launching of a new, enhanced, and free online version of Inside Hokie Sports last August. The new online format includes the implementation of video and photo galleries, and it allows readers to bookmark articles, start a slideshow, share stories through one's social media outlets, and more. To read the latest issue, please click - <http://inside.hokiesports.com>.

Today, Inside Hokie Sports is printed and posted online six times a year.

Slye raises \$63,000 for cancer research

Last April and May, Tech kicker Joey Slye participated in The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's "Man & Woman of the Year" competition in which candidates for the honor raise money for LLS blood cancer research. Each dollar raised by a candidate counted as a vote.

Nominated by Tony Peay, a Virginia Tech graduate and executive vice president of Union Bank & Trust — and someone whose mother passed away from multiple myeloma — Slye didn't win the competition, but he wound up raising \$63,000 for the cause. Slye got involved in the LLS competition primarily because his brother, A.J., passed away from leukemia in 2014 at the age of 20.

"My brother is gone," Slye said. "There is nothing I can do to bring him back. But for me and everyone else that helped me in my campaign to give that step forward and to pass the torch to someone else is huge for me. It's hard to sit back and look and realize there is nothing I can

do, but at the same time, I really want to see how many lives we can save with the money we raised."

Slye said the competition raised approximately \$600,000 for cancer research, and the man who won raised \$143,000 of that. As a result of raising more than \$50,000, Slye was able to dedicate a treatment plan in honor of someone, and he chose his brother.

"Actually, the treatment plan we got is AML [acute myeloid leukemia] treatment, and that's the cancer that took A.J.'s life," Slye said. "Now, we're fighting it with A.J.'s name. Anyone who receives treatment of that specific AML treatment will have A.J.'s name attached to it. It beat him, but anyone who gets cured from it is going to be cured by A.J., so that's awesome."

Slye plans on continuing to raise money for cancer research through his family's foundation — SlyeStrong#6 Foundation.

Outlaw to miss upcoming hoops season

Virginia Tech forward Ty Outlaw tore the ACL in his right knee during a pickup game earlier this summer and will be out for the 2017-18 season.

Outlaw averaged 6.3 points and 2.8 rebounds last season, starting 14 of the Hokies' 33 games. He moved into the starting lineup after Chris Clarke's ACL injury, and he wound up averaging 13.9 points and 4.6 rebounds in the Hokies' final eight games.

Outlaw missed the 2015-16 season with a heart condition. The senior from Roxboro, North Carolina would be able to appeal to the NCAA for a sixth season because of missing two entire seasons with an injury.

Tech football duo wins golf tournament

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

Former Tech head coach Frank Beamer and legendary former wide receiver Carroll Dale, two members of the Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame, won the Member-Member Tournament at The Olde Farm Golf Club held June 23-24 outside of Bristol, Virginia.

Beamer and Dale won their flight with 94 points and won the Shootout. The event featured 40 golfers. 



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EDITORS DESK by Jimmy Robertson

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

Virginia Tech begins classes Aug. 28, with the football season kicking off six days later, as the Hokies open 2017 with a game against West Virginia at FedExField.

Tech's staff entered August practices feeling confident about its first-team options on both sides of the ball. But the coaches worry about depth and want to find answers at certain spots.

That said, there are options at these spots. Here are some names to keep in mind, as we kick off the new season:

Houshun Gaines/Emmanuel Belmar

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

Gaines, at 6-foot-3, 245 pounds, possesses the size, length and speed, while Minor is an intriguing option after not playing last season. Defensive coordinator Bud Foster and defensive line coach Charley Wiles really liked what they saw from Belmar this spring after moving him from backer to defensive end late last season. He possesses athleticism, got stronger this summer and now weighs 240 pounds.

These two aren't well known by Hokie Nation, but they could be if they progress.

Darius Fullwood/Jarrold Hewitt

Tim Settle and Ricky Walker probably go into the season as starters. Yet the staff remains worried about depth behind them and hopes Fullwood and/or Hewitt play with more consistency.

Fullwood added strength and bulk this summer. He weighed 282 pounds before August practices began—a gain of 30-plus

pounds. He possesses the tools, but the staff wants to see him play more physically and consistently.

Hewitt dropped his weight to 285 pounds, which should give him the quickness needed to move around inside. The staff likes his potential, but like with Fullwood, wants to see more consistency.

Defensive tackles tend to get dinged over the course of a season (e.g. Nigel Williams last fall), so Fullwood and/or Hewitt need to be able to contribute.

Kyle Chung/Braxton Pfaff

The starting right guard position probably hinges on which of these two young men emerges. Fortunately, both possess the goods to get the job done.

Pfaff has battled injuries in the past, but he played powerfully this spring and held his own going up against Settle. Pfaff weighs nearly 310 pounds to go with good footwork and seems ready to move into a starting role.

Chung bulked up to 302 pounds this summer, and he, too, has battled injuries in the past. He lacks Pfaff's power, but probably moves better. Of utmost importance, Chung possesses the ability to play several positions on the offensive line.

Also, Parker Osterloh, who missed spring practice, may work his way into this mix. Like Chung, the senior can play several different spots—and has in several fall practices.

Expect all three to play extensively this season, no matter who wins a starting job.

Phil Patterson/Eric Kumah

Cam Phillips holds down one side and C.J. Carroll and Kalil Pimpleton man the slot,

but Tech's staff desperately wants a receiver (or two?) to emerge on the other side of Phillips. Patterson and Kumah are the leading candidates.

Kumah played last season as a true freshman, and at 6-2, 220 pounds, stands as the Hokies' biggest receiver—and the most experienced of the younger guys. He played well this spring, showing an ability to go up and get the ball.

Patterson took a redshirt season in 2016, but Tech's staff nearly played him because of the playmaking ability he displayed while on the scout team. He drew rave reviews from the staff for his work this spring, and he, too, possesses size at 6-2, 193.


The potential of these two is limitless. But Tech's staff wants the potential to become reality at least for one, if not both, this season.

Tyree Rodgers/Jovonn Quillen

The Hokies' defense has three potential All-ACC corners in Greg Stroman, Brandon Facyson and Adonis Alexander, but Tech's staff wants to find a fourth in the event of injuries.

Quillen played last season as a true freshman, mostly on special teams. He gives Tech's staff some size at the position, standing 6-0 and weighing nearly 200 pounds. He played some at safety on the scout team in the fall, but his best opportunity for playing time comes by developing as a corner.

Rodgers took a redshirt year. He, too, stands over 6-0, and combined with his speed, possesses the skills to be a top-flight corner. Can he be that this fall?

People rarely think about the third and fourth corners—until injuries occur. For that reason, Quillen and/or Rodgers need to be the guy. 

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The Evolution of Everything



Every aspect of our world evolves, and we only can hope that our personal reaction to that evolution leads to success and satisfaction in life. Are we the types of people who aggressively track new technology trends and ideologies, or do we stubbornly cling to things in our lives that provide us comfort? If you resemble me, you find that answer somewhere in the middle. This provides opportunities for growth, but also moments of frustration and a nostalgic lament for reliable methods of the past.

Therein lies the challenge that we all face in a rapidly evolving world. Things seem to be moving at a break-neck pace, and resistance to the new normal at times seems futile. Maybe that's a good thing. Maybe it isn't. Those conflicting thoughts keep rattling around in my head, as I survey the current landscape of multi-media distribution and the ways in which those in the profession construct content.

At the end of July, my high school (Chaska High School in Minnesota) held the 20-year reunion for my 1997 graduating class. I couldn't make it back, unfortunately, but it certainly made me reflect on how different the world looks now. I vividly remember the senior party after our graduation and the registration book for people to write down their email addresses in the interest of staying in touch. I also remember what I wrote — "Jon Laaser — phone number — if you need me, call me, and we will talk about it." It seems that I wasn't quite ready for the upcoming massive changes in communications methods.

My class was one of the first to flirt with computers in high school, but it certainly didn't permeate everything we learned and how we interacted, as it does with students today. Quite frankly, I remember great anxiety when a college professor required an assignment to be completed online. I found much more comfort with a college-ruled notebook and No. 2 pencils. We were a few more years away from the obliteration of the print media business model and the rise of social media, but technological evolution started in full swing during my college years.

But we were still in a transitional phase. In my first few jobs in sports, I remember such tasks as formatting the postgame fax distribution list, clipping the morning newspaper and magazine articles and touting the impact of traditional media marketing. I was certainly not among the first to embrace Facebook, Twitter and all the platforms that followed. And I certainly wasn't on the cutting edge when it came to imagining how they would revolutionize the communications business model. Full disclosure, I still sometimes opine for the time before everything became available with a tap of my smartphone. I miss the feel of the newspaper in the morning, and yes, highlights on ESPN.

I realize that I live in the "tweener" generation. Our formative years began at the very beginning of the first tech bubble. We are young enough to understand and manipulate new platforms, but didn't grow up with computers in our classrooms and a smartphone in our hand, and therefore, we

lack the instinctual ability that only comes from youthful repetition.

I used to see this as somewhat of a disadvantage. The sheer speed at which life is disseminated by millennials can seem daunting. I imagine that is only magnified for those who represent generations prior to mine.

However, I came to embrace that space in the middle. I find that lodged in between can be an appreciation of more traditional mediums, while also understanding rapidly changing consumption patterns because of the proliferation of content options and the speed at which they become available.

It is that internal compromise that I try to lean upon, as our team attempts to shape the future presentation of Virginia Tech athletics. We need to explore new frontiers, while also respecting the reliability of some of our core franchises. Those core franchises include our radio game broadcasts and "Tech Talk Live," which people listen to across the Virginia Tech/IMG Sports Network.

This is an area where I refuse to compromise. I continue to believe that the network of affiliates needs to be maintained, and in some cases, expanded. I diligently make an effort each year to extend those relationships and add other key markets. You will continue to hear that in the years to come, with extensions brokered with what we call our "anchor" affiliates located in major and mid-major markets. The same holds true of our weekly television show "Virginia Tech Sports Today," and this magazine, of which I continue to



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greatly enjoy contributing. You already have noticed that this magazine is now available online. Beginning in August, “Virginia Tech Sports Today” will be as well. Check out HokieSports.com for online editions.

At the same time, I believe there is negligence in complacency and remain grateful that virtually everyone associated with Tech athletics shares this belief. In this highly competitive arena, we need to adapt to run with the leaders of the pack. With that in mind, I stand exceptionally excited to unveil the following new initiatives for the coming year. I do so with the caveat that, as we implement new mediums, we undoubtedly will make some missteps along the way. I hope that you bear with us as we do.

We greatly enjoyed having Willie Byrn as a member of our broadcast team last year, but we were thrilled that he boldly decided to chase his musical dreams in California. I always applaud that. However, his departure created the opportunity for me to bring in one of my true friends in the business, Wes McElroy, to join our team. We plan to use Wes as a co-host for the “Kubota Kickoff Show” and “Hokies Kickoff Countdown,” along with Andrew Allegretta, across our radio network.

But, the bigger news is that Wes and I will co-host a new endeavor after each game. This season, we debut “Hokies Postgame Live,” a live-streamed video postgame show available exclusively on Facebook Live. The show will feature reaction from Justin Fuente, Bud Foster, impactful players from each home game and analysis throughout. It debuts following football’s home opener against



The Virginia Tech/IMG Sports Network staff has big plans in place for its football and basketball coverage this upcoming season.


Delaware. Look for it—and participate—on Virginia Tech Athletics’ Facebook page. And fear not, our radio postgame show still remains available across our entire radio network.

We also will team with HokieVision, marketing, strategic communications and athletics programs to provide diverse video and audio elements across a variety of social media platforms. This includes football training camp coverage that invites you behind the scenes, as the Hokies prepare for the season.

In addition, Allegretta, Mike Burnop and I will bring you “The Hokie Pod,” a weekly podcast dedicated to Tech athletics. The podcast supplements “Tech Talk Live” and

includes week-to-week conversation covering the range of Tech athletics and in-depth conversations with current student-athletes and coaches. Find it on iTunes, TuneIn and wherever podcasts stand available.

I learned early on in my career that the most dangerous thing to do was to take things away from people accustomed to them. But the second most dangerous thing was not challenging your organization with new initiatives. We attempt to accomplish both beginning with the new athletics year. I hope you continue to enjoy the Hokies and check out all our upcoming new and exciting projects.

Welcome back to campus, and as always, “Go Hokies!” 

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

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

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

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

This year's program began May 30 and concluded the first week of August. The 2017 cohort consisted of six student-athletes, including football player Coleman Fox, who spent his summer working with the Hokie Club. Fox, a junior pursuing a degree in finance, was interested in finding an internship that would coincide with summer classes and training. He saw the internship as an opportunity to gain experience toward his career goal of obtaining a finance position within the wealth management sector.

Cross country runners Brent Musselman and Peter Seufer interned with sports nutrition

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

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


Sydney Steinberg interned with the Office of Student-Athlete Development and brought a unique perspective as a Division II lacrosse player at The University of Virginia's College at Wise. The Blacksburg native spent two weeks last summer assisting with new student-athlete orientation and returned for the full 10 weeks this summer to gain more experience. A business administration major with a minor in communications, Steinberg hopes to narrow

down what career path she would like to pursue post-graduation and believes the Hokie L.E.A.D. Internship Program will assist her in doing just that.

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

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

The internship program not only exposed student-athletes to careers in intercollegiate athletics, but also offered networking and professional development opportunities. The cohort was required to attend bi-monthly professional development workshops, which were facilitated by select staff members from within the department. Kelsey Appleton, associate director in strategic/social communications, addressed the group about social media responsibility. The group also learned how to identify and effectively communicate transferable skills from Shelby Miller, director of student-athlete development. In addition, the group learned how to integrate experiences from the internship into their resume from Natalie Forbes, senior director in student-athlete development, and interns were required to complete Clifton StrengthsFinder, an online assessment that provided insights into their strengths.

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



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THE MAN



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

By Jimmy Robertson

It almost defies logic that a 6-foot, under 200-pound young man failed to be under the Pop Warner Football weight limit on more than one occasion as kid.

But it's true that Cam Phillips never played as a "tiny mite." Instead, the same guy in midst of threatening nearly every Virginia Tech receiving record lived a larger existence as a youth and often found himself playing up a level with each passing year, as he continuously checked in over the limit.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That's what I wanted," Phillips said. "I wanted people to see that, 'This is Cam coming into his own.' It was sort of like a business move, I guess, but I wanted to have the lights on me to show that this was my time, and I'm ready for this.

"But that's me. Any time I get a chance to look nice and have everybody say, 'Oh man, where did you get this from? Where did you get that?' I like that. I try to do that. Guys will tell you that's me all the time."

Most who know Phillips do understand that he loves fashion. His teammates say that his attire in social settings usually deviates from the norm.

This time, though, he took fashion to another level. The outfit screamed, "Me, me, me," and that seems counter to the mindset of a self-proclaimed introvert.

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

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

She enrolled Phillips at DeMatha Catholic, an all-boys school in Hyattsville, Maryland. School officials enforce a strict dress code there, forbidding hoodies, sweatshirts, shorts, jerseys and even sneakers — the things young boys like to wear. That forced Phillips to begin thinking about his sense of style.

Continued on page 16



“

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

Cam Phillips on breaking Tech receiving records

”



Continued from page 14

Of course, he had plenty of style on the football field. DeMatha annually churns out college talent, both in football and basketball, and Phillips became a desired prospect, catching 34 passes for 632 yards and eight touchdowns as a junior. Then-Tech assistant Aaron Moorehead went after Phillips, who ultimately committed to Tech before his senior season.

"I felt like they [Tech's coaches] wanted me more than anybody, and I'm a big loyalty guy," Phillips said. "Being around the people that's going to take care of you and do right by you. Me and Coach Moorehead, my first wide receivers coach, had a great connection. I met with Coach [Frank] Beamer a couple of times. He wanted to meet with me personally in his office. I don't know if he did that with every recruit, but it made me feel special."

Phillips fully expected to play as a true freshman, and given the Hokies' lack of depth at the receiver positions, he played almost by default. Moorehead started him in Tech's win at Ohio State that season, and he basically has remained in the starting lineup ever since.

He enters his senior season with 165 career catches and more than 2,000 career receiving yards. He put up those numbers despite

playing with Ford on the other side of him. Otherwise, he, not Ford, would be the school's all-time leading receiver.

"I do," Phillips said when asked if he thought about that. "But I wouldn't change anything. I believe everything happens for a reason. I believe we met for a reason. It changed me. It made me look more at myself and do more self-assessing and become more accountable in everything I do, so I think having Isaiah here made me better."

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

The performance left Tech fans wondering if Phillips wouldn't choose the same route as Ford and leave early for the NFL. Phillips unveiled his plans on Twitter, telling everyone that he had decided to choose ... Papa John's over Chipotle. Hokie fans laughed in relief, though Phillips wondered why they worried at all.

"When they [reporters] asked me that in an interview, I was like, 'No, that wasn't even a thought. I haven't done anything at all,'" he said. "There was so much more that I thought I could do here in college. I had never gotten a chance to be the main guy and show what I could all season. I wanted that opportunity, and that's what I've worked for. I believe it will come."

Fuente is expecting more big performances from Phillips this upcoming season. After all, only three other returning receivers caught a pass last season, and those three — C.J. Carroll, Henri Murphy and Sean Daniel — combined for one start. The lack of experience worries Fuente.

But he also admits it's nice to feature a player with the ability and intelligence to play more than one spot. He also likes Phillips' willingness to help the younger crowd. For the Hokies to get where they want to go, they need to follow his lead.

"I think Cam has grown in the past year and a half — and I'm not taking credit for that," Fuente said. "I just think he's matured. He likes to have fun ... but he's also earned that opportunity by working his tail off every single day. That's what I appreciate most about him."

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

So a career as an NFL wide receiver? Perhaps. A career in fashion? Maybe. Work as a personal trainer? Possibly. Phillips certainly has taken advantage of his opportunities at Virginia Tech and given himself an array of possibilities.

One thing is for sure — he won't be a defensive lineman. Those days ended a long, long time ago.



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GETTING TO KNOW CAM PHILLIPS



Q: If you could trade places with someone for a day, who would it be?

CP: “Somebody I really admire is Kobe Bryant [Los Angeles Lakers great] because he’s a testament to hard work. The stories about him in his playing days ... you hear about how hard he works. They’ll have a game, and he’s in there early that morning before the game. Or maybe Odell Beckham [New York Giants receiver]. He’s a hot guy right now. Everyone wants a piece of him to see what he goes through. Or maybe a fashion designer.”

Q: What is your dream vacation?

CP: “Probably somewhere where I can shop and spend a lot of money on clothes and a new wardrobe, or something like that. I’ve always liked water, so maybe some place with clear, nice water, like Aruba.”

Q: What is your favorite social media platform?

CP: “Instagram. I don’t have Snapchat or Facebook.”

Q: What is the one talent you’d like to have?

CP: “I like to eat a lot, and I really wish I had the patience for cooking and messing up one time and coming back and making it better. If you could cook a good meal or make it your


own and put your signature on it, I think that would be really cool.”

Q: On Friday nights in the offseason, what are you doing?

CP: “Relaxing. Probably look at an Instagram post. Maybe watch a video of Antonio Brown [Pittsburgh Steelers receiver] working out. Or playing a video game. Or looking up glasses that I could buy, or new shoes.”

Q: What is your favorite thing about being a Virginia Tech football player?

CP: “I like the responsibility, really. I like how people look at me, not just me, but it’s sort of like a symbol for hope, or I could make someone’s day. Also, the responsibility of having a standard to uphold, just interacting with fans and saying ‘Yes, sir’ or ‘Yes, ma’am,’ or holding the door for people. Some people don’t talk with you, so the only interaction they get with you is how you say ‘Good morning’ in the morning when you walk by them. I like that I get a chance to let people form an opinion about me through minimal interactions.

“I just like the responsibility and the many opportunities I get to impact people. I’m a big ‘moments’ guy, like the moments in life. I want people to remember me as a guy who worked hard for his opportunities and tried to make the most of them and not waste any of them.” 

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Quarterback COMPETITION

features three inexperienced contenders

by Jimmy Robertson

Mention the phrases “value the football” and “predicted outcomes,” and Josh Jackson simply smiles.

“Oh yeah, I’ve heard all his terminology,” Jackson said. “I try to do well at all of that.”

That’s because he wants to be the starting quarterback, and head coach Justin Fuente constantly reiterates his top prerequisites for being named the starter—No. 1, take care of the football, and No. 2, make the proper play. The quarterback who exhibits the best of these two traits will be the starter Sept. 3 versus West Virginia.

Jackson, a rising redshirt freshman, is one of three candidates in the mix and the most experienced within the Hokies’ system. He enrolled in January of 2016, took a redshirt season in the fall, and headlined a crew this spring that also included junior college transfer AJ Bush and highly touted freshman Hendon Hooker. Bush and Hooker enrolled this past January.

The coaching staff refused to name a pecking order at the position, at least publicly, coming out of spring practice. Offensive coordinator Brad Cornelsen liked what he saw from all three, including Jackson, who received most of his repetitions with the projected first-team unit.

“He said I did well,” Jackson said. “One of my biggest things that I bring is that I’m good at reading defenses, and I’m pretty smart. He wants me to sharpen that up. There were two or three plays throughout the spring that he brought up, and he wanted me to make the correct decision. But overall, he said I had a good spring.

“He wants me to speed up my feet, especially with our quick game. I’ve been doing that all summer. Other than that, he wants me to work on reading defenses and looking at third-down cut-ups.”

Jackson also spent a portion of his free time this winter and this summer in his recliner—but not watching *The Lion King*, one of his favorite movies. He kept his eyes focused on West Virginia’s defense, which forced 25 turnovers in 2016. The Mountaineers ranked in the top 25 nationally in that category.

In addition, he spent a lot of time watching himself, all in the attempt to become better.

“They’ve [the video office] made it so that we can just watch us, so I’ve been able to watch a lot of film,” he said. “I think it’s helped. I watch and see everyone do their rep,



- 2 Hendon Hooker (6-4, 216, Fr.)
- 5 Ryan Willis (6-4, 220, Jr.)
- 6 AJ Bush (6-4, 225, r-Jr.)
- 11 Jack Click (6-3, 215, r-So.)
- 17 Josh Jackson (6-1, 215, r-Fr.)
- 18 Chase Mummau (6-2, 192, r-Fr.)
- 26 Dane Frantzen (5-10, 192, Fr.)

and that’s good for learning, too. So yeah, I think that’s helped me a lot.”

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

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

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

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

QUICK FACTS ON TECH’S QB’s

- Returning starter:** None
- Starter lost:** Jerod Evans (14 career starts)
- Projected new starter:** Josh Jackson, AJ Bush or Hendon Hooker
- Top reserves:** Jackson, Bush or Hooker; Jack Click, Chase Mummau
- Newcomers:** Bush, Hooker, Mummau, Dane Frantzen
- Breakout candidate:** Jackson

Notes: Click is the only Tech quarterback to play in a college game, seeing mop-up action against BC last fall ... Hooker threw for 6,000 yards and rushed for nearly 3,000 during his high school career ... Bush spent two seasons at Nebraska, but never saw action in a game.

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Bigger **MCMILLIAN** ready for larger workload this fall

by Jimmy Robertson

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

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

“When I scored the touchdown, I feel like that gave us the momentum to finish strong,” McMillian said.

For McMillian, those two carries marked a nice ending to a somewhat tumultuous season. He rushed for 671 yards last fall, averaging 4.6 yards per carry, and he scored seven rushing touchdowns. But his overall numbers were a decrease from his 1,043-yard season in 2015.

A decrease in carries accounted for the decline, as McMillian ran the ball 55 fewer times. Many questioned McMillian and head coach Justin Fuente about that, and Fuente explained that he didn’t care where the yards came from as long as the Hokies got them. Seven players carried the ball more than 20 times.

Evans led the way with 204 carries. Sam Rogers had 67 carries, and even Cam Phillips, a receiver, finished with 30. That cut into McMillian’s attempts.

“At the end of the day, people don’t see that,” McMillian said. “They see, ‘Oh, he’s in a slump.’ That’s [the number of carries] not in my control, but I’m glad we had a successful season, and we finished the season strong. That’s what really counts—not my personal accolades, but us winning ball games.”

McMillian hopes to play a bigger role in the Hokies’ rushing attack this season, and he figures to get that considering Tech’s personnel losses. Evans, Rogers, Marshawn Williams and Shai McKenzie all are gone, leaving behind McMillian, tailback/fullback Steven Peoples and untested Deshawn McCleave and D.J. Reid.

In preparation for a bigger role, McMillian got bigger in the offseason. He wanted to hold

up better in pass protection and also do a better job on inside runs, yet he also wanted to keep his speed—which he insists he has.

“I wanted to get in the 208-210 range, and I’m there now,” he said. “This is the heaviest I’ve ever been. Last year, I was around 203, 205, so I’ve gained some pounds so that I could be bigger and hit it more inside and carry more of the bulk of the load this year.


“I feel really good. I feel like I didn’t lose a step. That’s what counts. I’ll be able to be this size with the speed that I previously had the year before, so I’m looking forward to this year.”

Tech’s staff wants to see the offense run the ball better than last season. The Hokies averaged 183 yards rushing per game, a respectable number, but one that ranked 55th nationally.

Running the ball takes on more importance this year, though, because of the unsettled situation at quarterback. Tech’s staff wants to alleviate pressure on whoever wins that job, which means running the ball more, at least early in the season.

McMillian says that he, Peoples and the rest of the running backs are ready for that responsibility.

“I feel like we’ll be able to take the pressure off the quarterback this year given that they’re not going to be experienced,” he said. “This is going to be their first time playing this year, so ... if we run the ball really well, then that will make it a lot easier for whoever the quarterback is going to be.”

For sure, McMillian’s two runs at the end of the Belk Bowl represented what Hokie Nation saw with regularity in 2015. He plans on showing even more of that this season. 



QUICK FACTS ON TECH’S RB’S

Returning starter: Travon McMillian (14 career starts)

Starter lost: Sam Rogers (25 career starts)

Projected new starters: none

Top reserves: Steven Peoples, Deshawn McCleave, D.J. Reid

Newcomers: Terius Wheatley, Jalen Holston

Breakout candidate: McMillian

Notes: Tech ran the ball at least 33 times in every game in 2016 and at least 40 times on 10 occasions ... Tech rushed for at least 150 yards in 12 of 14 games ... Tech lost both of its games when it did not rush for at least 150 yards ... The Hokies went 5-0 when they rushed for 200-plus yards last season ... McMillian rushed for 131 yards against Miami and 127 against Tennessee last fall—Tech’s top two rushing games ... McMillian’s season high in carries was 18 against Miami ... McCleave carried the ball eight times in Tech’s 2015 opener, but a shoulder injury shelved him for the rest of the season.



- 4 Jalen Holston (5-11, 219, Fr.)
- 16 Coleman Fox (5-11, 200, r-So.)
- 32 Steven Peoples (5-9, 220, Jr.)
- 33 Deshawn McCleave (5-9, 190, r-So.)
- 34 Travon McMillian (6-0, 210, r-Jr.)
- 40 Trey Skeens (5-11, 215, r-So.)
- 44 Terius Wheatley (6-0, 192, Fr.)
- 48 D.J. Reid (6-1, 239, r-Jr.)



CAM PHILLIPS

Phillips to LEAD an inexperienced group of receivers

by Jimmy Robertson

Cam Phillips stole the show at the 2017 ACC Football Kickoff with a sweet outfit that included a double-breasted, velvet blazer and a unique set of spectacles.

Now, he hopes to steal the show with his play on the field this fall.

Phillips plays at arguably the position most scrutinized by the Virginia Tech coaching staff, as the coaches seek to find replacements for both Bucky Hodges and Isaiah Ford at the receiver spots. Ford, who elected to forgo his final season at Tech and make himself available for the NFL Draft

after an outstanding career, holds virtually every school receiving record, including career receptions, yards and touchdowns.

Phillips, the lone senior of the group, now serves as the leader at one of the skill spots that head coach Justin Fuente has said concerns him more than the quarterback position.

"I see why he says that," Phillips admitted. "One receiver can't win you a whole season. You're going to need plays from the younger guys, guys that don't have that much game experience. They're going to have to come in and make a tough catch on third-and-5 to keep the chains moving, or make a key block to spring a big play. They want to do it. They're showing the want-to and the maturity and the progress."

At least Fuente has Phillips, who enjoyed a breakout campaign a year ago. He caught 76 passes for 983 yards and five touchdowns, and he also ran the ball 30 times for 140 yards. He figures to be the Hokies' go-to receiver.

Tech does return two other receivers with a modest amount of experience in C.J. Carroll and Henri Murphy. Carroll finished fifth on the team with 18 catches for 258 yards in 2016, while Murphy caught just three passes in a limited role.

The Hokies' success offensively probably hinges on the development of their younger receivers, specifically Eric Kumah, Phil Patterson and Kalil Pimpleton, a freshman who enrolled in January. Kumah played mostly on special teams last season, while Patterson took a redshirt season. At 6-foot-2, both Kumah and Patterson bring the size that a coach wants to see in a receiver.

- 5 Cam Phillips (6-0, 202, Sr.)
- 8 Phil Patterson (6-2, 193, r-Fr.)
- 9 Sean Savoy (5-9, 188, Fr.)
- 12 Henri Murphy (5-10, 190, Jr.)
- 13 Caleb Farley (6-2, 192, Fr.)
- 14 James Clark (5-10, 185, r-Sr.)
- 19 Hezekiah Grimsley (6-0, 172, Fr.)
- 27 Justin Hairston (6-0, 176, Fr.)
- 30 Jordan Jefferson (5-8, 180, r-Fr.)
- 39 Sean Daniel (5-9, 180, r-So.)
- 81 Samuel Denmark (6-0, 187, r-Fr.)
- 83 Eric Kumah (6-2, 220, So.)
- 86 C.J. Carroll (5-8, 173, r-Jr.)
- 87 Bodhie Long (6-3, 200, r-Fr.)
- 88 Kalil Pimpleton (5-8, 170, Fr.)
- 89 Damon Hazleton (6-2, 215, r-Fr.)

Unfortunately, Caleb Farley will not be in the mix. The 6-2, 192-pounder enrolled in January and spent much of spring practice at cornerback. Toward the end, though, Fuente moved him to receiver—and he played so well that Fuente proclaimed him a receiver for the upcoming season. But Farley tore his ACL in the first August practice, and now he'll spend his fall receiving daily tutorials from Phillips—something all the other receivers get to do as well.

"I like what I've been seeing," Phillips said. "It's been more off the field than on the field, which is what you want to see. Those guys are making better decisions with study hall and being at class on time and with workouts. You see their minds changing more than physical change, which I'd say is most important. They're working hard through the tough workouts that we have and not showing too many signs of fatigue."

"They're working to that standard that Coach Fuente is trying to set, and I'm trying to set as well. Mentally, you can see those guys trying to mature. They want to be better. They want to be leaders. They want to make every play, every catch, and that's what they're showing."

Phillips probably will see extra attention from opposing defenses, at least during the early part of the season. But he possesses the ability to play multiple spots—flanker, split end, or in the slot. That makes him harder to defend.

Seeing a few of those younger receivers develop into playmakers would free him up even more. For that reason, he invests his time and efforts into their development.

"When they do well and I do well, then the team does well, and we win," Phillips said. "Everyone wants to win, and that's the ultimate goal."

QUICK FACTS ON TECH'S WR's

- Returning starter:** Cam Phillips (32 career starts)
- Starters lost:** Isaiah Ford (37 career starts), Bucky Hodges (37 career starts)
- Projected new starters:** Eric Kumah, Phil Patterson
- Top reserves:** C.J. Carroll, Henri Murphy, Kalil Pimpleton
- Newcomers:** Patterson, Pimpleton, Caleb Farley, James Clark (graduate transfer), Sean Savoy, Hezekiah Grimsley
- Breakout candidate:** Kumah
- Notes:** Phillips needs just 46 catches and 905 yards to become the school's all-time leader in both categories ... Phillips and Carroll are the only two returning receivers to have started a collegiate game ... Phillips has started 32 of the 40 games in which he has played in his career ... Phillips has caught at least one pass in 27 straight games ... Phillips' 115 receiving yards against Arkansas in the Belk Bowl marked a career high ... Kumah played in 13 games as a true freshman in 2016, mostly on special teams ... Clark transferred from Ohio State and played 28 games over the past two seasons.

2017
PREVIEW
OFFENSIVE LINE

ERIC GALLO



Offensive line returns **THREE STARTERS** heading into 2017 season

by Jimmy Robertson

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

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

Gallo, the senior from Richboro, Pennsylvania, anchors the Hokies' front as the team's center. He has started all but two games in the past two years, providing experience, strength, and most importantly, consistency at the line's most important spot.

He hopes to provide even more of those things in 2017, as he looks ahead to a promising campaign.

"I'm looking this year to play as physically as possible," Gallo said, listing his goals for the season. "That's something I can improve

upon from last year. It's something I've worked diligently on over the offseason, as far as strength and conditioning and getting as strong as possible and changing my body type. I'm hoping that it translates onto the field, as far as gaining movement in the run game and holding the pocket in the pass game.

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

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

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

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

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

"Part of it is that it has hit me that this is my last year, so I want to spend as much time with my friends as I can," Gallo said. "But also, the better you know each other, the better you'll communicate out on the field. Learning how someone thinks, if you know how they think, things will be easier.

"I think it's something where everyone has to step up their games now. Everyone in the room has to step it up, regardless of who they are. The great part about it is that we have awesome role models to look up to. Jon and Augie set the status quo for leadership on the offensive line, and now it's our job to live up to it."

Gallo, Teller and Nijman give Vice potentially three All-ACC caliber players and headline an offensive front that could be very good—pending the development of the replacements for McLaughlin and Conte. Tyrell Smith got most of the first-team reps at right tackle in spring practice, while Braxton Pfaff and Kyle Chung rotated at right guard. All three played well this spring.

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VIRGINIA TECH OFFENSIVE LINE

AUGUST • 2017 (In numerical order)

- 50 Patrick Kearns** (6-5, 290, r-Fr.)
- 52 Austin Cannon** (6-2, 314, r-Fr.)
- 53 Aiden Brown** (6-2, 273, Fr.)
- 57 Wyatt Teller** (6-5, 315, r-Sr.)
- 60 Silas Dzansi** (6-5, 305, Fr.)
- 61 Kyle Chung** (6-3, 302, r-Sr.)
- 62 D'Andre Plantin** (6-5, 301, r-So.)
- 63 Daniel Bailey** (6-3, 300, r-So.)
- 64 Eric Gallo** (6-2, 300, Sr.)
- 65 Matt Christ** (6-3, 273, r-So.)
- 67 Parker Osterloh** (6-8, 325, r-Sr.)
- 68 Connor Kish** (6-2, 295, r-So.)
- 69 Yosuah Nijman** (6-7, 320, Jr.)
- 70 Kevin Kish** (6-2, 292, r-So.)
- 71 T.J. Jackson** (6-6, 320, r-Fr.)
- 74 Braxton Pfaff** (6-5, 308, r-Jr.)
- 75 Zachariah Hoyt** (6-4, 298, r-Fr.)
- 76 Jarrett Hopple** (6-7, 305, r-Fr.)
- 77 Demetri Moore** (6-6, 302, r-Jr.)
- 79 Tyrell Smith** (6-3, 301, r-So.)

Also, Parker Osterloh, who missed spring practice with an injury, factors into the equation. Osterloh and Chung, both seniors, possess some versatility, with the ability to play multiple positions. In particular, Vice views

Chung as someone with the ability to play very well at any of the three interior spots.

The Hokies don't have a true first and second team on the offensive line just yet, but Gallo, Teller, Nijman, Pfaff, Smith, Chung and Osterloh give Vice seven reasonably consistent and dependable players. Guys like Chung and Osterloh give him more with their versatility.

In addition, Vice likes his contingent of young linemen—a group that includes mammoth tackle T.J. Jackson, tackle D'Andre Plantin and center Zachariah Hoyt. They went through some growing pains this spring, but they showed potential.

Overall, the Hokies are in better shape numbers-wise on the offensive front than a year ago and even in years past. The staff likes the mix of youth and experience, both for this upcoming season and for future seasons.

Tech fans know the importance of a good offensive line. Depth and talent on the offensive line certainly make things easier for the collection of young skill talent behind them, including whoever wins the quarterback job. And if the skill players improve, then they give the Hokies a chance at producing in the manner of last season's offense, which set numerous records behind great play from the skill players and the offensive line.

"We don't want to take any steps backward," Gallo said. "We want to keep getting better, no matter what position we're playing individually or as an offense. We're always looking to improve, whether it's points scored or yards

gained. We're focusing in on each week and focused on winning. We take it one game at a time."

Of course, Gallo knows that doing big things requires doing little things first. The offensive line started working on the little things this spring and continued Aug. 1 when fall practices commenced.

Hopefully, the little things add up—and as a finance major, Gallo knows all too well the importance of that.



QUICK FACTS ON TECH'S OL

Returning starters: Wyatt Teller (30 career starts), Eric Gallo (25 career starts), Yosuah Nijman (14 career starts)

Starters lost: Jonathan McLaughlin (49 career starts), Augie Conte (37 career starts)

Projected new starters: Tyrell Smith, Braxton Pfaff, Parker Osterloh, or Kyle Chung

Top reserves: Zachariah Hoyt, T.J. Jackson, D'Andre Plantin, Austin Cannon

Newcomers: Hoyt, Jackson, Cannon, Patrick Kearns, Jarrett Hopple, Silas Dzansi, Aiden Brown

Breakout candidate: Nijman

Notes: Tech started the same offensive line for the final 11 games of the 2016 season ... The Hokies return 72 career starts on the offensive line ... Of those returning, only Nijman started every game last season ... The Hokies ranked 83rd nationally in sacks allowed per game (2.29)—an improvement of 17 spots from the 2015 season.



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Pettit HEADLINES a young, raw group of tight ends

by Jimmy Robertson

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What does the rest of the position look like? In a word—*young*.

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



QUICK FACTS ON TECH'S TE'S

Returning starter: none

Starter lost: Bucky Hodges (37 career starts)

Projected new starter: Colt Pettit

Top reserves: Chris Cunningham, Dalton Keene

Newcomers: Keene, Drake Deluliis, Cole Blaker, and Lecitus Smith

Breakout candidate: Pettit

Notes: Cunningham caught six passes in 2016, but never caught more than one in any game ... Deluliis caught 71 passes for 1,140 yards and 14 touchdowns in his high school career ... Blaker played quarterback at nearby Narrows High and threw for more than 5,100 yards and 59 touchdowns in his career.

Dalton Keene, who enrolled in January, Drake Deluliis and Cole Blaker certainly add size, with all three standing over 6-3 and weighing more than 230. But none are bigger than Lecitus Smith, a 276-pounder from Georgia. Smith certainly possesses the size to be a factor in the running game, while also being athletic enough to help in the passing game.

It would come as no surprise if any or several of these freshmen hit the field this fall. Tech's staff wants to find depth for this season, while also building for the future.

"I think we've got a really strong group," Pettit said. "They all want to learn, and they're all working really hard. The young guys have come along really well, and they want to get out there and they want to compete. That's the most you can ask of them."

There is a lot to love about this group—big, strong and fast athletes with skills to do a lot of different things. Really, all possess the potential to help the Hokies this fall.

Hopefully, they develop quickly as a group. If they do, then everyone will know them—and be talking about them in terms other than inexperience.



VIRGINIA TECH TIGHT ENDS AUGUST • 2017 (In numerical order)

- 15 Drake Deluliis (6-5, 235, Fr.)
- 29 Dalton Keene (6-4, 240, Fr.)
- 42 Cole Blaker (6-3, 230, Fr.)
- 80 Colt Pettit (6-3, 265, r-So.)
- 82 Lecitus Smith (6-3, 276, Fr.)
- 85 Chris Cunningham (6-2, 241, r-So.)
- 90 Casey Harman (6-3, 242, r-So.)

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Slye **READY** for big senior season to cap his career

by Jimmy Robertson



VIRGINIA TECH SPECIAL TEAMS

SPRING • 2017 (In numerical order)

PUNTER

91 Oscar Bradburn (6-1, 202, Fr.)

KICKERS

46 Joey Slye (5-11, 213, Sr.)

93 Brian Johnson (6-1, 180, r-Fr.)

SNAPPER

87 Colton Taylor (6-1, 223, r-Sr.)

Though he finds himself on the cusp of breaking Shayne Graham's career scoring record at Virginia Tech, Joey Slye gave a brutally honest assessment of his 2016 season.

"It was a letdown for me, to be honest," he said.

Slye, who needs just 52 points to surpass Graham's all-time mark of 371 points set from 1996-1999, should break the record considering he has scored more than 100 points in each of the past two seasons. He scored 118 points in 2016, making 20 of his 27 field-goal attempts and 58 of his 59 extra-point attempts. He also led the nation with 73 touchbacks on kickoffs.

But his displeasure with his junior campaign comes from missing six of his seven field-goal attempts from 40 yards or longer. Contrast that with his sophomore season when he made 13 of 19 from that distance, including 13 of 16 from between 40 and 49 yards.

"I was consistent where I should be," he said of last season. "Inside of 40, I missed one

kick from 35 at Duke, but I was very consistent where I should be. But inside of 50, for me personally, I should be automatic, which I felt like I was my sophomore year. Last year, I was 1-for-6 [between 40 and 49 yards], so that was a letdown for me. I should be a lot more consistent there."

Slye worked in the offseason with his kicking coach, Paul Woodside, and also with Graham. A lot of his missed kicks went wide right, so he made some tweaks with his technique.

He appears to have figured out the issue. In the spring game, he put his powerful leg on display, hitting field goals of 49 and 58 yards.

"I feel good," he said. "I feel like in the spring game I showed how hard I had worked.

"I just want to help our team. That's why I want to be more consistent in everything I do. It's not for personal goals. I want to win. That's the ultimate goal."

Slye headlines a special teams group that returns snapper Colton Taylor and returners such as Greg Stroman, C.J. Carroll and Henri Murphy. Stroman led the ACC in punt returns (25) and finished fourth in punt return yardage (221).

The unknown of the group is new punter Oscar Bradburn, who takes the place of Mitchell Ludwig. The left-footed Australian, who played Australian Rules Football, enrolled in January and spent the spring learning the game. Now, Tech's coaches want to see him take the next step in his progression.

Also, Bradburn serves as Slye's holder on field-goal attempts. So Slye has a vested interest in the young man and his confidence.



QUICK FACTS ON TECH'S SPECIAL TEAMS

Returning starters: Joey Slye (40 career games played), Colton Taylor (18 career games played)

Starter lost: Mitchell Ludwig (32 career games played)

Projected new starter: Oscar Bradburn

Top reserve: Brian Johnson

Newcomer: Bradburn

Breakout candidate: Bradburn

Notes: Slye earned first-team All-ACC honors from league coaches last fall ... Slye shares the single-game and single-season record for field goals made ... Slye also holds single-season records for extra points made and attempted ... Slye should become the first Tech player since Don Wade (1981-84) to lead the Hokies in scoring for four straight seasons.

"I told him, 'Don't worry about hitting a 50- or 60-yard punt. We don't need that as a group. You'll out-punt your coverage,'" Slye said. "We've been working on placement and all that stuff, and he's getting used to it. He looks good, so I'm excited for him."

Slye is anxious to get his final season underway. He enters the season aware of the records, but his first three seasons left him unfulfilled. He knows he possesses more — and wants to put it on display to Hokie Nation.

"I really haven't been able to have the year that I feel like I can do," he said. "I feel like I should be in the 90 percent range [on made field-goal attempts] on a consistent basis. I want to show how good I am."

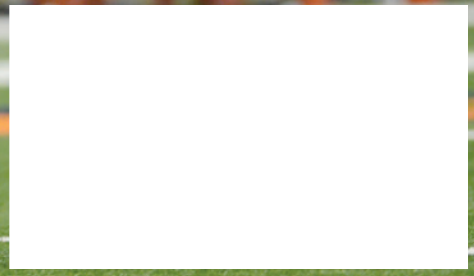


2017
PREVIEW
 DEFENSIVE LINE

VINNY MIHOTA

Mihota to take on **LEADERSHIP ROLE** for inexperienced defensive line

by Jimmy Robertson



In mid-May, Vinny Mihota traveled with a contingent of Virginia Tech student-athletes to Rwanda as part of a study abroad course. The trip encompassed more than 20 hours of flight time.

He expects his trips to the quarterback to be much shorter this upcoming season — and he hopes to make many of them.

Mihota, a redshirt junior, stands as the lone returning starter among a defensive line that lost three starters, and he anchors a unit looking to replace the production of stalwarts Woody Baron, Nigel Williams and Ken Ekanem. That trio combined for 109 tackles, including 33.5 for a loss, and 13.5 sacks in 2016.

Losing such numbers causes consternation among coaches, and certainly defensive line coach Charley Wiles enters this season with a bit of trepidation about his group. But Mihota takes the opposite approach — he cannot wait to get things underway.

“I couldn’t be more excited,” Mihota said. “I think that a lot of guys on defense are coming into their peak year. In [Justin] Fuente’s second year, everyone’s kind of gotten accustomed to what to expect. Nothing is brand new to anyone. Everyone knows the deal. We’re ready, and we have high expectations.”

Mihota certainly represents a good building block for Wiles. He started 13 games at one of the defensive end spots in 2016, and he finished with 43 tackles, including seven for a loss, and two sacks. He put up those numbers

despite a shoulder injury that only got worse as the season rolled along.

In fact, in mid-December, after the Hokies’ loss to Clemson in the ACC Championship Game, Mihota decided to shut it down and ultimately underwent surgery. He missed spring practice, but Tech’s sports medicine

staff cleared him to lift weights in early July, and he claimed himself ready for the season.

“It was tough,” he said of the end of last season. “I missed the bowl game, and the bowl game is the treat for the year. It’s the game you look forward to all year to cap off your season. All that hard work I did to try and get our team there ... it was nice to see our team go out there and win it. That made it really special for me.

“But I’m all good now. I’m 100 percent.”

Replacing three starters seems like a daunting task — and it is. But Mihota’s return and the play of guys like defensive tackles Tim Settle and Ricky Walker certainly alleviated some of Wiles’ concern. The 335-pound Settle played in 14 games a season ago and recorded 17 tackles, including seven for a loss, while Walker started four games after Williams went down with an ankle injury. The 300-pound Walker recorded 28 tackles, including 6.5 for a loss, and 1.5 sacks.

Those two played outstanding this spring, and Wiles expects the duo to make things extremely difficult for an opponent’s offensive line. He just needs to find another end and some reserves.

Trevon Hill figures to be that other end, and he certainly ranks as an electrifying type of player. Hill played in all 14 games last season, starting two of them, and he made the most of his limited action, recording 37 tackles and 2.5 sacks. He missed spring practice with an injury, but Wiles expects him to be a nice bookend to Mihota.

VT
VIRGINIA TECH
DEFENSIVE LINE
 AUGUST • 2017 (In numerical order)

DEFENSIVE ENDS

- 11 Houshun Gaines** (6-3, 245, r-So.)
- 18 Raymon Minor** (6-2, 245, Jr.)
- 35 Zion Debose** (6-1, 244, Fr.)
- 40 Emmanuel Belmar** (6-2, 240, r-Fr.)
- 43 Xavier Burke** (6-3, 282, r-So.)
- 45 TyJuan Garbutt** (6-1, 221, Fr.)
- 58 Nathan Proctor** (6-2, 224, Fr.)
- 94 Trevon Hill** (6-3, 245, r-So.)
- 98 Robert Porcher IV** (6-1, 262, Fr.)
- 99 Vinny Mihota** (6-5, 270, r-Jr.)

DEFENSIVE TACKLES

- 4 Tim Settle** (6-3, 335, r-So.)
- 8 Ricky Walker** (6-2, 300, r-Jr.)
- 47 Darius Fullwood** (6-3, 282, r-So.)
- 55 Jarrod Hewitt** (6-1, 285, r-Fr.)
- 59 J’Bril Glaze** (6-1, 270, Fr.)
- 61 Joe Koshuta** (6-1, 253, r-So.)
- 96 Jimmie Taylor** (6-2, 256, r-Fr.)

The backup situation is a little more precarious. Darius Fullwood, Jarrod Hewitt and Jimmie Taylor went into August as the top backups at the two defensive tackle spots. All three bring various attributes, but all three played inconsistently this spring and need to improve in certain areas. They all need to get stronger and quicker.

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

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

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

Gaines could be the wildcard of the

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

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

Somehow, some way, Wiles wants eight quality defensive linemen in his rotation. When the Hokies play their best on defense, they usually rotate eight guys up front. Last season, Wiles essentially rotated seven — Baron, Williams, Ekanem, Settle, Walker, Mihota and Hill — and the Hokies' defense overall played well.

They possess the talent to play well again. They just need to work at it and make the most of opportunities in practice — and they need for Mihota to lead them along the way.

"I try to lead by example," he said. "I'm the only returning guy, but truthfully, all those guys are starters. They all could have started last year. If the guys there weren't ahead of



QUICK FACTS ON TECH'S DL

Returning starter: Vinny Mihota (14 career starts)

Starters lost: Ken Ekanem (39 career starts), Woody Baron (21 career starts), Nigel Williams (20 career starts)


Projected new starters: Ricky Walker, Tim Settle, Trevon Hill

Top reserves: Houshun Gaines, Darius Fullwood, Jarrod Hewitt

Newcomers: Hewitt, Emmanuel Belmar, Robert Porcher IV, J'Bril Glaze, Zion Debose, Nathan Proctor, TyJuan Garbutt

Breakout candidate: Settle

Notes: Mihota's 43 tackles were second among Tech's defensive linemen in 2016 and the most of any returning defensive lineman ... Tech's returning defensive linemen combined for 6.5 sacks last season ... Minor (coaches' decision) and Belmar (redshirt) did not play in a game last season ... Walker recorded 11 of his 28 tackles in his four starts ... Both Walker and Hill made their first career starts in Tech's 37-16 win over Miami ... Walker had three tackles and half a sack in that game, while Hill had five tackles and 1.5 sacks ... Hill had four tackles and a sack in the Hokies' win over Arkansas in the Belk Bowl.

them, they could have started and been just fine. They all started at some point because a guy went down, and they performed beautifully. I think we're going to have a great d-line." 



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ANDREW MOTUAPUAKA

Motuapuaka, Edmunds LEAD solid linebacker group

by Jimmy Robertson

In addition to starting at mike linebacker this upcoming fall, Andrew Motuapuaka will be in the process of wrapping up requirements for a degree in multimedia journalism.

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

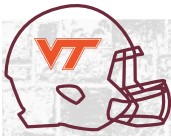
“Nah,” Motuapuaka said at the ACC Football Kickoff media event when asked if he could do media members’ jobs as well as they could. “I wanted to stick around football, stay around sports, and this is one of the ways. I like it. I enjoy it. I’m not sure what path I’m going to take, but I definitely enjoy it.”

Tech’s coaches hope to see Motuapuaka’s name in the local newspaper a lot this fall, as the fifth-year senior with the penchant for making big plays headlines Tech’s 2017 defense. He led the Hokies in tackles a year ago with 114, and he added three interceptions, two sacks and two fumble recoveries.

Such play surely will get him recognized, but defensive coordinator Bud Foster, who doubles as the linebackers coach, wants to see more leadership from Motuapuaka as well. Tech’s defense projects to start just three seniors—Motuapuaka, Brandon Facyson and Greg Stroman—so the unit needs leadership, particularly considering the defensive line in front of Motuapuaka features no seniors.

“I’ve definitely taken that role,” Motuapuaka said. “It’s definitely different than last year when there were seniors on defense last year, but we still know the expectations of what Coach Foster has and our own expectations for ourselves and our team. We still have the same goals in mind and everything like that. There are so many people returning, and we all know what our goals are.”

Those goals include returning to the ACC Championship



VIRGINIA TECH LINEBACKERS

AUGUST • 2017 (In numerical order)

MIKE LINEBACKERS

- 14 Tavante Beckett** (5-10, 221, So.)
- 16 Dylan Rivers** (6-1, 233, Fr.)
- 23 Rayshard Ashby** (5-10, 227, Fr.)
- 41 Jaylen Griffin** (6-1, 238, Fr.)
- 53 Trent Young** (5-10, 215, r-Jr.)
- 54 Andrew Motuapuaka** (6-0, 236, r-Sr.)
- 56 Sean Huelskamp** (6-1, 225, r-Sr.)
- 58 Zack Treser** (6-5, 222, r-So.)
- 87 Tre Coghill III** (5-10, 161, Fr.)

BACKERS

- 24 Anthony Shegog** (6-2, 230, r-Sr.)
- 38 Rico Kearney** (6-0, 230, Fr.)
- 48 Daniel Griffith** (6-0, 230, r-Fr.)
- 49 Tremaine Edmunds** (6-5, 250, Jr.)

Game—and finishing it this time. To accomplish that, Tech’s defense needs big seasons from Motuapuaka and fellow linebacker Tremaine Edmunds.

Edmunds finished second behind Motuapuaka with 106 tackles, and he tied for the team lead with 18.5 tackles for loss last season. A special talent at 6-foot-3 and 250 pounds, Edmunds was named to the “watch list”

for three awards—the Butkus Award (nation’s best linebacker), the Nagurski Trophy (nation’s best defensive player) and the Bednarik Award (nation’s best defensive player).

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

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

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

Also, Sean Huelskamp returns. Though he missed spring practice with an injury, he certainly brings experience to the fold.

These five guys arguably serve as the heartbeat of this season’s Hokie defense. If the Hokies want to win the Coastal Division again and return to the ACC Championship

Game, they probably need for these five to play critical roles.

“That’s our expectation, and we don’t lower our expectation because the team changed,” Motuapuaka said of the team’s goals. “That’s definitely where we want to be. If we don’t make it, it is what it is, but that’s definitely the goal.”



QUICK FACTS ON TECH'S LB'S

Returning starters: Andrew Motuapuaka (29 career starts), Tremaine Edmunds (16 career starters)

Starters lost: none

Projected new starters: none

Top reserves: Anthony Shegog, Tavante Beckett, Sean Huelskamp

Newcomers: Dylan Rivers, Jaylen Griffin, Rico Kearney, Rayshard Ashby, Daniel Griffith

Breakout candidate: Edmunds

Notes: Motuapuaka has scored four touchdowns in his career—three by fumble return ... Edmunds' 18.5 tackles for a loss tied for the most by a Tech player since 2002 (Cols Colas, 19) ... Edmunds recorded a tackle for a loss in 13 of the Hokies' 14 games last season ... Motuapuaka and Edmunds each recorded four games with at least 10 tackles ... Motuapuaka has recovered five fumbles and intercepted four passes in his career ... Motuapuaka has started 23 straight games, while Edmunds has started 15 straight ... Shegog has played in 33 games in his career (seven starts).

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Stroman **LEADS** a trio of veterans at cornerback spots

by Jimmy Robertson

Most of the spotlight during Virginia Tech's spring practice centered on the quarterback position, as the coaching staff evaluated several candidates for the all-important spot.

If offensive coordinator Brad Cornelsen needed yet another option, he could have looked to the other side of the ball, where one certain individual rushed for more than 1,200

yards and threw for more than 1,500 yards in his final season of high school — making him a rather nice fit for what Cornelsen likes in the position.

“Nah, I haven’t said anything to him,” Greg Stroman said, smiling. “My job is hard enough. I’m going to stick with my job. Those guys put a lot of time into what they do, and it’s definitely tough. I’ll let them stick to the hard part.”

Stroman, who dabbled as a receiver on offense his first two seasons at Tech, played strictly cornerback last fall and developed into an all-conference player. He led all of Tech’s cornerbacks with three interceptions and 13 passes defended (interceptions and breakups), which led to him earning third-team All-ACC honors by the Atlantic Coast Sports Media Association.

All his production a season ago came despite a lower leg injury that forced him to miss three games in November and play sparingly in both the ACC Championship Game and the Belk Bowl. Offseason surgery led to him missing

spring practice, but he spent the summer rehabbing and feels ready to go.

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

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

He received national recognition this past summer when Pro Football Focus College Football analyzed his 2016 season and revealed he allowed just a 52.4 passer rating when targeted in coverage - second best among returning cornerbacks in the ACC. Only Clemson’s Ryan Carter allowed a lower

VT **VIRGINIA TECH**
CORNERBACKS
AUGUST • 2017 (In numerical order)

- 2 Tyree Rodgers** (6-1, 185, r-Fr.)
- 3 Greg Stroman** (6-0, 181, Sr.)
- 26 Jovonn Quillen** (6-0, 187, So.)
- 27 Shawn Payne** (6-3, 189, r-Jr.)
- 28 Bryce Watts** (6-0, 167, Fr.)
- 31 Brandon Facyson** (6-2, 197, Sr.)
- 36 Adonis Alexander** (6-3, 197, Jr.)
- 37 Devante Smith** (6-1, 202, Fr.)
- 39 Tyrone Thornton** (5-9, 197, r-So.)
- 42 Erik Banks** (5-10, 180, r-Jr.)

quarterback rating (51.1) among returning cornerbacks.

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

Stroman, though, attributes those numbers to the entire secondary working in unison.

"It's all of us," he said. "It starts with all of us watching film together. We work together as a unit. Numbers like that pop up, but it's five of us back there, and all of us cover, so it's just all of us working together and watching film and all of those things."

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

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



QUICK FACTS ON TECH'S CB'S

Returning starters: Brandon Facyson (36 career starts), Greg Stroman (16 career starts), Adonis Alexander (13 career starts)

Starters lost: none

Projected new starters: none

Top reserves: Jovonn Quillen, Tyree Rodgers, Shawn Payne

Newcomers: Rodgers, Devante Smith, Bryce Watts

Breakout candidate: Stroman

Notes: Tech's cornerbacks recorded just five of the defense's 16 interceptions in 2016 ... Facyson's 36 career starts lead the team ... Facyson set career highs in tackles (48), tackles for a loss (four) and pass breakups (11) last season ... Facyson's 11 pass breakups in 2016 led the team ... Alexander's six career interceptions lead all Tech's returning defensive backs ... Alexander started the final five games of 2016 and had 23 tackles in that stretch.

"They are two that are coming along great," Stroman said. "They looked good this spring. They're definitely physical guys and can hold down that corner spot. I think they'll be better. We've just got to keep bringing them along and help them with the little things. Watching them is helping us. It reminds us that we have to do the little things, too."


Stroman, who graduates in December with a degree in consumer studies and a minor

in business, hopes to retain his punt return duties in spite of last season's injury. He has returned two punts for touchdowns in his career, including one last season against East Carolina, so he knows how to make a big play in that part of the game.

This past spring—and against the wishes of the sports medicine staff—he fielded a few punts on the side while undergoing rehab. He wanted to remain sharp because he loves this part of the game.

"That's one thing that I haven't stopped doing," Stroman said. "When I couldn't move as much after the injury, I would just see if Oscar [Bradburn, Tech's punter] would kick it right to me, so I could catch some punts. It was fun. I definitely haven't stopped catching them, and I would expect to do it again."

"I love it. I think there is something about just having the ball in my hands. I feel like those are my opportunities to make a play. You've got to want to do it."

Overall, the Hokies go into the 2017 season with plenty of experience and a lack of depth at the cornerback spots. If a few younger players emerge to help Stroman and the other veterans, though, they could quickly make this position a strength—something in high demand in today's pass-happy world of college football. 

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Edmunds **LEADS** deep, talented bunch at safety and rover

by Jimmy Robertson

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

Tech's coaching staff finds itself in a bit of a dilemma. The coaches want Edmunds to be a bit more judicious in his approach—and yet be the same ruthless player.

"I'm not going to change who I am," Edmunds said. "I'm still going to come downhill. I'm still going to bring it every play. I'm going to still try to make the big hit, but I'm going to make sure I make every tackle. I don't want anyone bouncing off of me. I'm going to keep my head up as best I can—even though sometimes I didn't feel like I had my head down."

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

Yet for the second consecutive season, he finds himself playing a new position. Shortly before spring practice, Tech's staff moved Edmunds from rover to free safety to replace dependable Chuck Clark, a three-year starter.

Edmunds stood as the logical choice given his play-making abilities and his intelligence. Plus, the Hokies lack a little bit of experience

on the back end, and safeties coach Galen Scott wanted someone whom he could trust at the defense's most important position.

"I wouldn't say it was so much different, but I definitely had to be on my p's and q's," Edmunds said of the moves. "I had to learn new keys and make sure that I had my eyes in the right place at the right time.

"At the same time, I have people that are looking up to me, but I'm learning my position just they are learning theirs. I'm trying to learn it the best I can and teach at the same time, so it was important for me to be in the film room and listen to the coaches and be a sponge of the game.

"I was willing to do whatever helped the team. If this were going to help the team, I would do it, and if this is what you want me to do, I'll do it. At the end of the day, we're team first here. We're all just trying to go to 1-0, and if that's the way to get to our ultimate goal, that's what I'll do."

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

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

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

At free safety, the coaching staff made another move, shifting Divine Deablo from receiver to the free safety spot. Deablo played last fall as a true freshman, with most of his action coming on special teams. His work there gave the coaches confidence in moving him to defense.

In many ways, Deablo resembles Edmunds—a taller, rangy player with good speed. The questions center on his mentality for playing defense.

"He's not afraid to tackle," Edmunds said. "He's fast, and he's long. He's a nice fit for a safety. He's still learning, but he got better throughout each practice this spring. He's going to have his time here, too. I think the conversion went well for him, and he should do a good job."

The other player in the mix at these two spots is Devon Hunter, a highly rated recruit from Chesapeake, Virginia. Hunter, who played offense and defense at Indian River High, arrived on campus in July and projects as a rover.



FREE SAFETIES

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

ROVERS

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

NICKEL

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

Despite being one of the top recruits nationally, Hunter arrived with an humble attitude. He quickly endeared himself to his teammates, and Edmunds continues to help the young man become the best player possible.


"When you get here, everybody is the same," Edmunds said. "You have to prove yourself the same as any other guy. He definitely has the hype with him, but we're on his back to push him every day to make sure he doesn't think it'll be just given to him. He's not even taking it like that. He's working hard every day, and he's going to be a great player."

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

Newsome received plenty of reps at the spot this spring, and he played fairly well. Newsome, like Deablo, spent the early part of his career at receiver, but the staff decided to move him into a defensive back role last year. He played in 12 games in 2016, with most of that playing time coming on special teams.

Overall, these positions possess a nice combination of experience, talent and youth. Edmunds and Clark played at a high level last year, and Edmunds expects the group to exceed that in 2017.

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

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

QUICK FACTS ON TECH'S SAFETIES, ROVERS AND NICKEL BACKS



Returning starters: Terrell Edmunds (21 career starts), Mook Reynolds (13 career starts)

Starter lost: Chuck Clark (40 career starts)

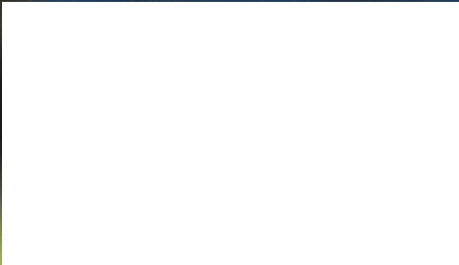
Projected new starter: Reggie Floyd

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

Newcomers: Deablo, Ladler, Hunter

Breakout candidate: Floyd

Notes: Edmunds' 48.5 percent passer rating allowed in 2016 (according to PFF College Football) was the lowest among returning safeties in the ACC ... Edmunds' 89 tackles a year ago are the most among Tech's returning defensive backs ... Reynolds' 9.5 tackles for a loss ranked fourth on the team and first among defensive backs ... Reynolds was the only Tech defensive back to record three tackles for a loss in a game last season (Belk Bowl) ... Reynolds recorded at least five tackles in seven of the final nine games ... Shegog's four solo tackles in the Belk Bowl were nearly half of his solo tackles for the season (nine).



TERRELL
EDMUNDS



A few years ago, most men's soccer coaches in the ACC and outside of it looked at their team's schedule and marked any games against Virginia Tech as a "W."

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

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

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

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

But nine of the 11 starters return, including a trio that serves as the top goal scorer (Marcelo Acuna), the goalkeeper (Ben Lundgaard),

and the leader, Collin Verfurth, a "glue" guy who takes care of the little things that allow big things to happen. That alone creates lofty expectations for a program that won just five games two years ago.

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

The player getting the most attention is Acuna, who transferred to Tech from Houston Baptist before last season. As a Hokie, Acuna earned All-ACC honors after leading the team with 11 goals — a number that ranked third in the ACC.

Acuna gave the Hokies something that they needed — a player with the ability to put the ball in the back of the net on a consistent basis. He delivered in the clutch, too, as five of his goals were of the game-winning variety.

"He was a compliment to what we already had," Brizendine said. "I thought we should have gone to the NCAA tournament two years ago. But for one reason or another, mainly injuries, we didn't ... we had a good foundation, but he was the piece that put us over the top, and it helps that he's a goal scorer."

TECH

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The Hokies return nine of 11 starters and most of their roster from last year's Elite Eight run, creating a lot of preseason optimism, but a difficult schedule looms this fall

by Jimmy Robertson



INSIDE THE NUMBERS

Those close games that we'd tie or lose late because of something freakish, we'd win [last season] because he'd score the goal. Half of his goals were goals that mattered."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We had a conversation [two years ago], and I said, 'Look, you could be a pro. You have a lot of attributes. But if you want to be a beach guy, that's fine. Let's not have a professional conversation,'" Brizendine said. "Before this past fall, he went and played and trained all summer. He worked hard, and you see the result. I think he did really, really well [in 2016]."

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

Tech's deep and talented roster gives Brizendine a sense of optimism heading into the season opener against Creighton on Aug. 25. Yet he admits he frets over team chemistry, which he considered a critical part of the program's 2016 success, and the potential for injuries.

"If we have a certain couple of guys that get injured, that really changes what we look like as a team," he admitted.

The bigger threat to Tech's success, though, may be the schedule. The Hokies play a brutal slate that features 11 teams that played in the NCAA tournament in 2016. Tech's non-conference schedule includes games against Creighton, South Carolina and William & Mary, while the conference slate includes games against three schools with the ability to win the national title — North Carolina, Louisville and Virginia.

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

"I'm cautiously optimistic," he said. "I know that we'll be good, and I know that we'll be competitive in every game. I know a lot of things, but I also know that it's the game of soccer. I also know that we've been the lesser team and won, so it's not guaranteed. It's a game of inches."

"One thing I can assure you is that no one wants to play us. That, I know. We'll be good enough to where no one marks it on the schedule as an easy 'W.'"

For sure, the program appears to be on the ascension under Brizendine. So the days of being an easy "W" appear to be over — hopefully for good.

Continued on page 36

10 Ten different players

scored at least two goals during the 2016 season.

9 Tech's 2016 NCAA

appearance marked its first in nine years.

8 Tech won eight more

games in 2016 than it did in 2015.

7 Seven different players

registered at least two assists last season.

6 The Hokies ranked in the

top 30 nationally in six different categories last fall.

5 Marcelo Acuna scored a

team-best five game-winning goals in 2016.

4 Elias Tamburini's four

assists tied for the team lead last season.

3 Marcelo Acuna ranked

third in the ACC in goals (11) and points (23) last fall.

2 Ben Lundgaard's 87

saves ranked second in the ACC in 2016.

1 Marcelo Acuna was first

in the ACC in shots (94) and shots per game (4.27) last season.

5^{TO} WATCH IN 2017

1 Brendan Moyers

Moyers started 16 games as a true freshman last fall and provided some scoring punch, collecting two goals and three assists. The forward should be even more productive in his second year within the system.

2 Rory Slevin

A midfielder, Slevin started 21 games last season, scoring a goal and adding two assists. With 38 career starts over his first two seasons, the junior takes care of a lot of the little things on the pitch and has emerged as an important player for the Hokies.

3 Will Mejia


Mejia made the Top Drawer Soccer Best Freshman XI first team last season after starting all 22 games as a redshirt freshman. The defender figures to play a large role in replacing the leadership and production vacated by the departures of Juan Pablo Saavedra and Alessandro Mion.



4 Gino Rossi

Rossi started nine games as a redshirt sophomore last fall and tallied a goal and three assists. He has 21 career starts under his belt and should be ready to put up even bigger numbers this fall.

5 Forrest White

White scored the game-winning goal in Tech's stunning road upset of Indiana in the NCAA tournament. With 36 career games to his resume, the senior should play a more prominent role from his midfielder position this season. 

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Sep 8-10	Ohio Amish	450	Oct 30	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee, NC	40
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TECH

VOLLEYBALL PROGRAM ready for a **NEW ERA** under new head coach

Jill Wilson and her assistant coaches have spent the past eight months getting to know Tech's players, recruiting and gearing up for the 2017 season

by Lance Dozier

Special to Inside Hokie Sports

When those in volleyball circles caught wind of Virginia Tech's hiring of Jill Wilson as the head volleyball coach, they termed it an "ace."

That hiring took place in January, and in the time since then, she put together a staff, held "get-to-know-you" meetings with her players, oversaw offseason workouts, recruited the next generation of players and began preseason practices. Now within a matter of days, Wilson will coach in her first match.

The former longtime LSU assistant brings a resume of success to her position — she served as an assistant on six NCAA tournament teams in her 10 seasons in Baton Rouge. She takes over a team that lost stalwarts Lindsey Owens and Amanda McKinzie, but the rest of the roster returns, giving Wilson a solid nucleus, as she seeks to move the Hokies up the ACC ladder.

A few days before preseason practices started, Wilson sat down and answered an array of questions, including those pertaining to the coaching transition, the keys for success this season, and her goals for the upcoming campaign.

Q: How excited are you about starting practice and about your first match on Aug. 25?

JW: "Excited would probably be an understatement. It's really been a great time this summer to kind of plan not just the logistics of a season, but the culture and the feeling of what our theme is going to be for the year and planning that out. The team has been here since the start of summer II, and they're excited. They have a new strength training program, and the culture is already starting to change quite a bit. We've talked about being adventurous and being bold and risky, so that's going to be a big part of our preseason practice — going for things and not being afraid and just driving to really take that next step. So yeah, I'm excited."

Q: What have you learned about this team since taking over the job in January?

JW: "A lot. It's been great to get to know each of them. They're very, very intelligent. They are eager and anxious and open-minded,

which has been really fun for our staff because every new thing we've thrown at them, they've bought in. They've taken it and given the theme life, and I really appreciate that. I'm excited for the season because, when you have a group that is that open-minded, they're going to be able to take big steps."

Q: Though the program lost four-time All-ACC honoree Lindsey Owens, it does return six seniors on the roster. How nice is it to have that type of senior leadership going into your first season?

JW: "Very great because the senior class ... we have some really strong personalities and some very intelligent, driven women that have big goals academically. Some of them are going to be doctors, so it's a great group to kind of be able to put a lot of faith in for this season and figure out what role each of them can play on and off the court. We have to have the locker room leader. We have to have the court leader. We have to have the leader that is going to drive when the team is tired. So I think being able to figure out what role each of those seniors

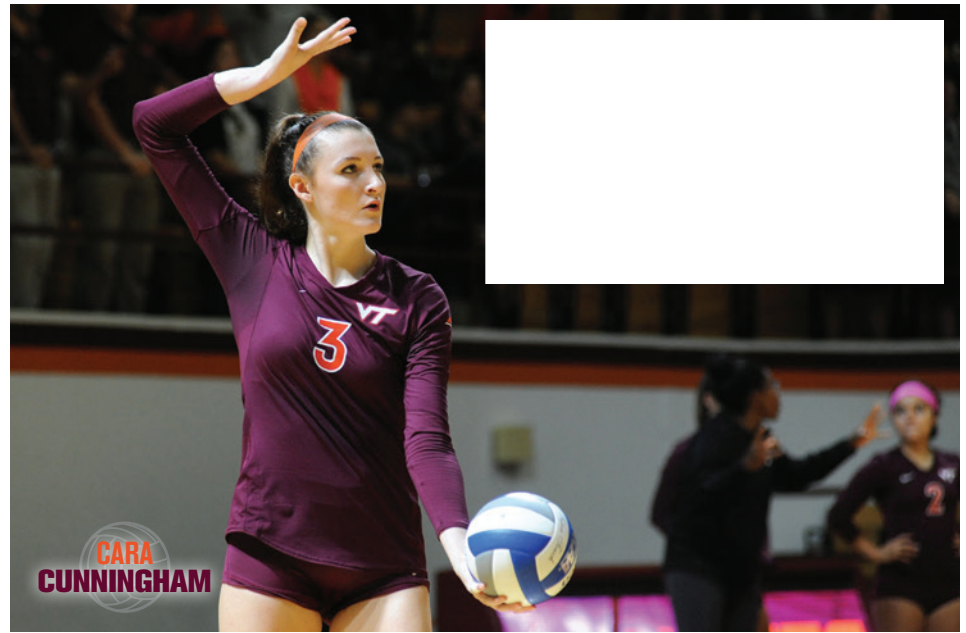
is going to be able to have is and the impact they're going to make on this team is going to be a fun challenge, but one they're capable of."

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

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

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


JW: "The transition has been great. This place is full of warm Hokie fans that just want to cheer for our program and pull for players. This might be the tightest community I've ever been a part of. I truly appreciate that, and my staff appreciates that. As far as with the players, I consider them family and have since the day I



got here — and I'll always consider them family. When you're family with each other through good times and bad times, you're always family."

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

JW: "The biggest goal is to make sure that these women are becoming strong leaders

that are ready to be CEO's in their life of whatever field they want to do. That's the No. 1 goal because I think the volleyball comes along with that. Their success on the court comes when you have that confidence and have that drive in all areas of your life. So I'm really hoping that, by the end of this season, our team continues to get better every single week on and off the court and that they gain confidence as we go." 

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► **Tech women's soccer looking to return to NCAAs** 
Photo Gallery



Nearly nine months have elapsed since the Virginia Tech women's soccer team watched the NCAA Championships selection show—and received a blow to the stomach when the selection committee snapped the Hokies' string of NCAA appearances by not choosing them.

Their streak ended at nine consecutive seasons, and while the months have passed, the bitterness still remains. After all, the Hokies won 11 games and finished with an RPI of 38.

"It has stuck with me," Tech women's soccer head coach Chugger Adair admitted. "I was frustrated with being so high up in the RPI and being overlooked. I think that was unjust to some extent, with the record we had and the season we had. I thought we deserved to make the NCAA tournament.

"I know a lot of the players were unhappy at the time, and I hope it stuck with them in their preseason training and their preparation for this season as well. It's something I've talked with them about a few times, so I'm hoping they are as hungry as I am."

Tech entered its 2017 preseason practice with a lot of pieces returning and optimistic hopes of starting a new NCAA streak. However, the Hokies also face a tall task, as for the first time in four seasons, they begin preparations without Murielle Tiernan and Candace Cephers.

Tiernan graduated as the greatest goal scorer in program history. She led Tech with 10 goals last season and scored at least 10 goals in all four of her seasons as a Hokie. She left as the school's record holder in career points (112), career goals (49), career game-winning goals (23) and career multiple-goal games (9).

She departed as a three-time All-ACC first-team selection and was just the program's second All-American. So finding a way to replace her remains paramount for Adair and his staff.

"I think, for us, it's going to have to be by committee," Adair said. "Murielle was a special player, and we don't have a Murielle on the team right now. We have some other players who can step in, and that's what we have to focus on. We need for those players to just be themselves and continue to grow and make an impact in their own right."

Adair said not to forget about Cephers' impact as well. She finished third on the team with three goals last season, and she started 83 games in her career. But more importantly, Cephers helped control the action from her midfield spot.

In other words, she did a lot of the grunt work, which allowed other players to become comfortable in their natural roles. "Candace didn't get the notoriety Murielle got as far as goals and things like that, but she did a lot for us," Adair said. "She did a lot of the dirty work and really held down the fort for us, so that others could attack and play. She was a little bit of an

TECH WOMEN'S SOCCER looking for **RETURN** to NCAAs

After missing out on a bid last year, the Hokies hope that six seniors and a lot of returning pieces can bring them back to postseason play

by Jimmy Robertson





unsung hero, so that's something we'll have to look at as well. Who is going to be at the center of the park and be that leader on the field and be the battler?"

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

The committee to replace Tiernan includes Alani Johnson and Madi Conyers, two of the six seniors on the roster. Johnson brings experience, having played in 61 games in her career. Plus, she knows how to score. She finished second on the team with six goals last season and has scored 20 in her career.

Conyers, who is the only returning player to have started all 19 games last season, scored two goals a year ago. She plays in the midfield, but certainly possess an ability to score.

"Alani is more of a target forward," Adair said. "She's good with her back to the goal. She's consistently dangerous in the box, similar to Murielle.

"Madi is more of a flank player. She can play in the midfield, she can play up front, and she's really dynamic and good in one versus one. She can create for others in addition to herself. They're huge as we move forward in how we play and progress."

Others in the mix include forwards Kallie Peurifoy and Bridget Patch. Peurifoy missed nearly all of last season with a leg injury — she played in just two games — but she received a medical hardship waiver and returns as a fifth-year senior with 54 career games under her belt (20 starts). She has scored two goals and recorded five assists in her career. Patch played extensively as a true freshman last season and tallied a goal and an assist.

"Missing Kallie last year hurt us because she's an attacking personality who is good on the ball and dangerous on set pieces," Adair said. "She's good out wide as well, so we're glad to get her back."

Those in the mix to replace Cepher include a bevy of players, but midfielders Laila Gray and Kristina Diana certainly warrant discussion. Diana scored two goals and dished out two assists in 10 starts as a sophomore last season. Gray started 15 games and finished with a team-best four assists.

Adair planned on spending plenty of time on the defensive half of the field during the preseason. Tech's defense struggled at times last season, largely in part because of inexperienced defenders and a freshman goalkeeper.

In fact, Adair cited a game at Miami as an example of a defensive mistake that proved costly. The Hokies led 1-0 with five minutes remaining, but Miami scored a soft goal and then won in the second overtime. That loss, which came in the next-to-last game of the season, probably cost the Hokies more than any other.

"We made too many mistakes in the back and gave up too many easy goals," Adair said. "We weren't as clean defensively as we needed to be throughout the games. We had a freshman goalkeeper and a young back line, so being a little cleaner defensively will be important to us. I think we just gave up too many easy goals defensively."

Experience figures to make the Hokies better on the back line. A year ago, Kelsey Irwin, a redshirt sophomore, was in her first season as a starter, and Jaylyn Thompson started 13 games as a true freshman. Alia Abu El Hawa started 11 games as a sophomore — and all of them return. Adair expects them to be better.

They'll be playing in front of goalkeeper Mandy McGlynn, who started 16 games as a true freshman. She gave up 19 goals and finished with 58 saves.

McGlynn missed a three-game stretch in late October while competing for the U.S. Women's U-18 National Team in Ireland — and Tech did not win a game in her absence. This season, though, Adair expects no conflicts with McGlynn's national team schedule.

"I think she was consistently very good for us," Adair said of McGlynn. "Just having her leadership and her ability to read the game a little more and be a little more vocal ... we're expecting her to continue that growth."

In addition to finding scoring punch and improving on the defensive side of the pitch, Adair and his staff want to see better execution from set pieces and more tempo. Under Adair, the Hokies have played their best when they push the pace and attack. The Hokies like to set the tone for a game.

Will they be able to play that way this season, especially without Tiernan and Cepher?

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

10 Mandy McGlynn's 58 saves in goal were tied for 10th in the ACC last season.

9 Virginia Tech has won at least 10 games for nine consecutive seasons.

8 The Hokies had eight assists in 10 ACC games in 2016.

7 Seven returning players made at least 10 starts for the Hokies last fall.

6 Alani Johnson's six goals ranked second on the team in 2016 and are the most among returning players.

5 Mandy McGlynn recorded five shutouts last fall.

4 Laila Gray's four assists led the team last year.

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

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

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

Continued on page 42

TECH *Continued from page 41* WOMEN'S SOCCER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5^{TO} WATCH IN 2017

1 Kallie Peurifoy

Tech missed the redshirt senior last season when she went down with an injury. The forward possesses a lot of skills, but Tech missed her leadership and winning personality more. The Hokies are 13-6-1 in games in which she has started in her career.

2 Katherine Roth

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


3 Bridget Patch

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

4 Allyson Brown

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

5 Chandler McDaniel

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

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TECH CROSS COUNTRY squads ready to make runs at ACC crowns

Coming off the greatest year in school history, including three ACC team track and field titles, what could the Virginia Tech men's and women's track and field and cross country programs possibly do for an encore?

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

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

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

Continued on page 44

The men's team features a deep and talented squad, while the women's squad is pinning its hopes on a senior and a collection of young runners
by Jimmy Robertson

TECH CROSS COUNTRY

Continued from page 43

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

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

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

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

Jaskowak, Musselman, Gourley and Joseph are all seniors, giving the Hokies plenty of experience. If five Hokies earn all-region honors, then they probably make Thomas prophetic and earn another NCAA Championships appearance — which would be their third since 2012.

First, though, comes the ACC Championships and competing for an ACC title.

"We have some really good teams in our league, of course, but if Peter Seufer continues to develop ... if we can get some frontrunners around that guy, then yeah, an ACC championship is a possibility," Thomas said.

On the women's side, the Hokies also return a lot of components from last year's team that finished a program-best third at the ACC Championships. Seniors Hanna Green, Shannon Morton, Abigail Motley and Tessa Riley all finished their careers, but Green, Morton and Riley dealt with nagging injuries that limited them for much of the 2016 season anyway, forcing Thomas to use a contingent of younger runners.

Thus, four of last year's top five runners are returning, including lead runner Katie Kennedy, who enjoyed the best year of her career. Kennedy, a senior, earned All-ACC and All-Southeast Region honors and never finished worse than 21st in any race.

"She's certainly our most capable, having been All-ACC and all-region, and she finished strong during the track season," Thomas said. "She had a good summer. So far, so good. I think she wants to lead us."

The key for the Hokies will be finding three or four runners to help Kennedy, ones fast enough to be within a minute of her in any given race. Those in the mix include junior Lauren Berman, sophomores Kayla Richardson, Sarah Edwards and Sara Freix, and redshirt freshman Amanda Swaak.

Richardson and Edwards enjoyed fine first seasons. Richardson won a cross country race last fall and ran consistently during the track season, while Edwards won the ACC title in the 3,000-meter steeplechase during the outdoor season and won a gold medal in the same event at the Pan American Junior Championships.

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

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

a lot of confidence after winning the ACC championship in the steeplechase. To get better in that event, she has to compete against the best in the ACC in cross country as well, and I think she's motivated to do that."


Keeping Berman and Swaak healthy remains a key as well. They both suffered injuries last fall, but both are finally healthy and trained over the summer.

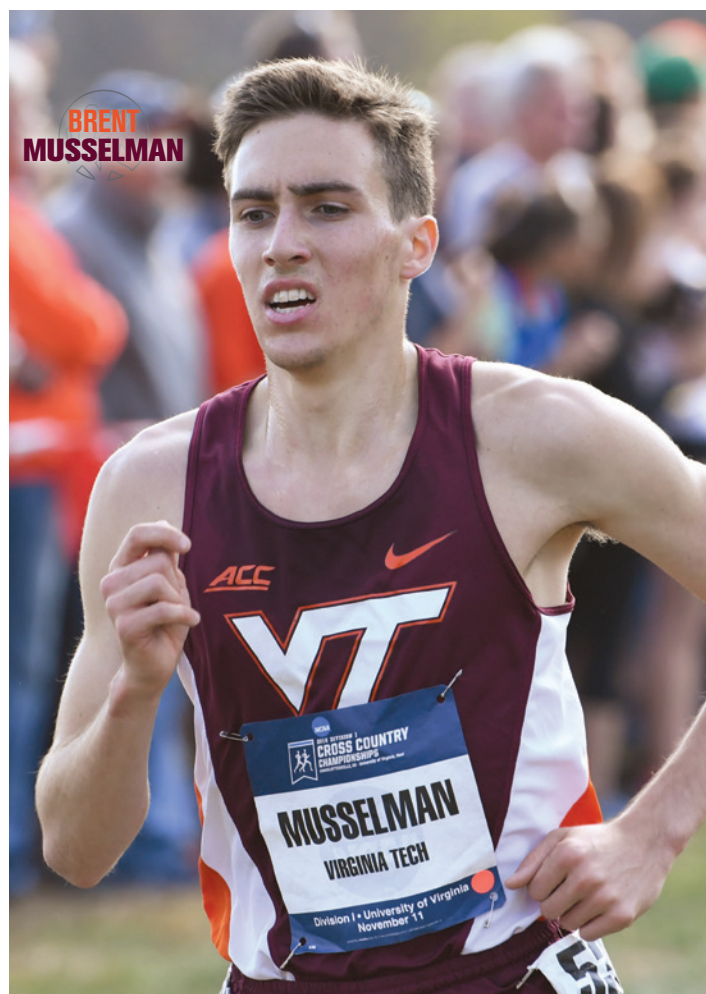
Thomas also expects middle distance standouts Rachel Pocratsky and Laurie Barton to factor in on the cross country scene this season. Both excel in the 800, but could offer depth.

"It's like with the men's team," Thomas said. "We have the potential to have a good frontrunner in Katie Kennedy, and then we've got some supporting cast that, if they could be within a minute of her, we have a chance to improve on our finish from last year at the ACC meet and get to the nationals. That's a big goal for the group."

Thomas would love to see the women's program win its first ACC cross country title and qualify for just its third NCAA Championships. The Hokies are young — Kennedy is the lone senior — but many of this group contributed to the women's team that won the ACC title during the outdoor track season. So they know how to win.

"I'm excited for them," Thomas said. "Hopefully they can carry some of that momentum into cross country. There are several of them that stayed here this summer and got some training in. The opportunity is there. The ACC is always tough, but we were third last year. We're still a good ways away from first or second, but I think this group would like to see that gap close."

Hopefully, both squads repeat what they accomplished during the outdoor season at the ACC meet — winning conference titles. For sure, that's an encore Hokie Nation would love to see. 



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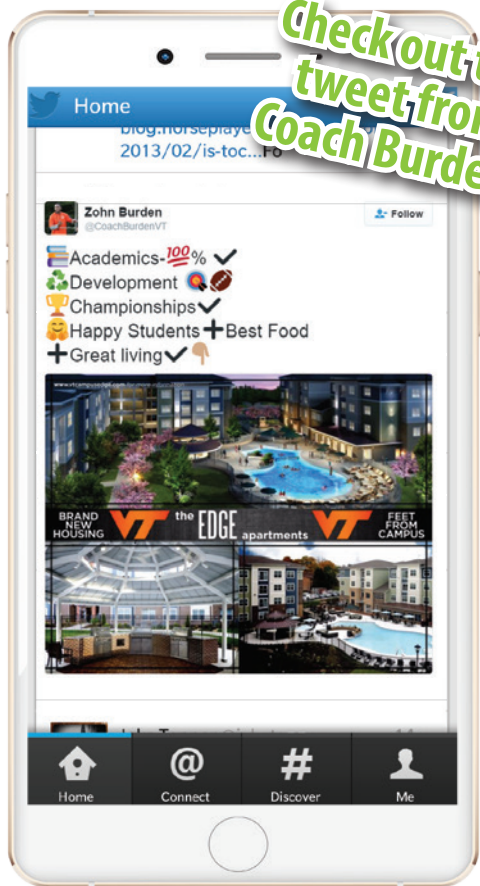
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