

inside

Vol. 9 No. 3, January 2017

HOKIE SPORTS

The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics

ONE
FOR THE
AGES

Tech rallies from 24 down to win the Belk Bowl, finishing with 10 wins in Justin Fuente's first season as the Hokies' head coach

WHAT'S INSIDE

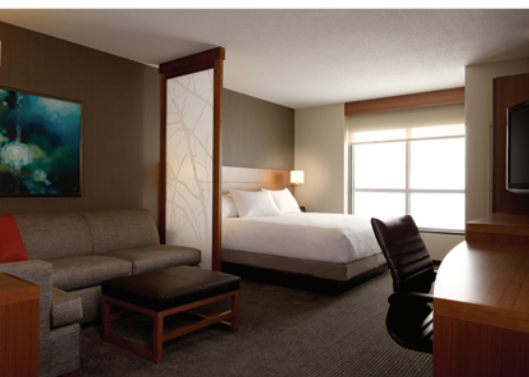
After transferring from Maryland, **SETH ALLEN** is now playing a big role in the Hokies' hoops resurgence

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The Place at University Crossroads

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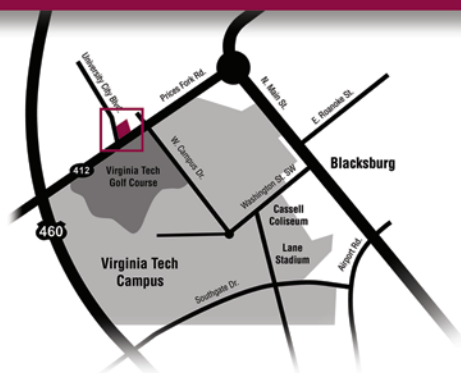
The Place Owner
Marty Johnson



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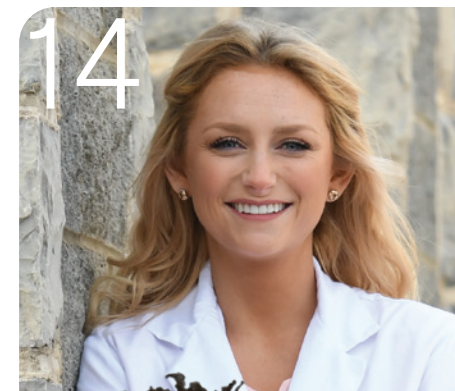
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Published by the Virginia Tech Athletics Department • Inside Hokie Sports (ISSN 8750-9148, periodical postage paid at Blacksburg, VA 24060 and additional mailing offices) covers Virginia Tech athletics and is published six times annually. The publisher is the Virginia Tech Athletics Department, 21 Beamer Way, Blacksburg, VA 24061. **SUBSCRIPTION PRICES:** \$37.95 for one year (six issues) and \$69.95 for two years. Mail all subscription inquiries, renewals, address changes, written inquiries and complaints to Inside Hokie Sports, Jamerson Athletic Center, Virginia Tech, 21 Beamer Way, Blacksburg, VA 24061 or call (540) 231-6726. Inside Hokie Sports assumes no responsibility for companies and persons who advertise in this publication. Reproduction of contents in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. Publisher does not guarantee accuracy of information contained in any advertisement. **ATTN POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Inside Hokie Sports, P.O. Box 11101, Blacksburg, VA, 24061-1101. Printed by Worth Higgins & Associates of Richmond, Virginia



HOKIES GO UNDEFEATED IN THE FALL;
OPEN ACC PLAY STRONG

The Virginia Tech women's basketball team so far has gotten off to a perfect start to the 2016-17 season under new coach Kenny Brooks, opening the campaign with 14 straight wins. The Hokies, ranked No. 18 in the Jan. 3 Associated Press poll, concluded non-conference play with a 13-0 record and then opened ACC play with a 76-68 win over North Carolina. Three players recorded double-doubles in the win, led by Regan Magarity's 24 points and 17 rebounds. The Hokies are off to their second-best start in school history. The 1998-99 team won its first 18 games.

THE STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

"I am very privileged to attend Virginia Tech and be a member of the women's basketball team. Virginia Tech has given me the opportunity to receive an excellent education, while competing at the highest collegiate level. The support around our program is amazing, and Hokie Nation has welcomed me with open arms, as I transitioned from Sweden to Blacksburg, Virginia."

Regan Magarity
Redshirt Sophomore, Norkopping, Sweden

"I am extremely privileged to be a Hokie here at Virginia Tech. I love the support we get from the fans and the alumni. This is a great environment, and I am very grateful to be around it. I'm glad I am able to wake up and be a proud Hokie every day."

Chanette Hicks
Sophomore, Norfolk, Virginia

The Donor File

Linda Stephenson Wood

HOKIE CLUB LEVEL: Platinum
GRADUATION YEAR: 1981 (IEOR)

CURRENTLY RESIDES: Clemmons, North Carolina

FAMILY: Keith (husband); Kristen Wood Crews (daughter); Hunter Crews (son-in-law); Jackson Crews (grandson); Lindsay Wood Vines (daughter, class of 2011, psychology, and masters in educational psychology in 2013); Brian Vines (son-in-law, class of 2011, agricultural and applied economics)



Q&A

Q: A Hokie is ...

A: A passionate supporter of everything Virginia Tech.

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because ...

A: Everywhere you go when you see a sign of Virginia Tech (hat, shirt, sticker, etc.), there is an immediate connection and usually a loud "Go Hokies!" There is a very strong bond shared by those who are a part of the Hokie Nation!

Q: What is your best memory of Virginia Tech Athletics?

A: Our best memory of Virginia Tech athletics would have to be the 1999-2000 season that culminated with the national championship game in New Orleans.

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

A: Virginia Tech provided me with a great education, fabulous experiences and long-lasting relationships. Being a part of the Hokie Club is my way of showing my appreciation and giving back to my beloved university.

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

A: I have been a fan of Virginia Tech since I was a young girl, and my oldest brother chose to attend Tech and join the Corp of Cadets. From that time on, my entire family has embraced Virginia Tech and all it stands for, cheered for Tech athletics through thick and thin, and we continue to show our appreciation and support because of all it has provided to our family.

Q: Do you have any gameday superstitions? If so, what are they?

A: Always be in the stands for "Enter Sandman" and never leave before the last tick of the clock.

Q: Describe your perfect day at Virginia Tech.

A: A beautiful fall day with our school colors displayed through the leaves on all the trees, tailgating with friends and family, and jumping our way to victory in Lane Stadium.

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

A: Our best tailgating tradition is to share the experience with friends and family. Since we started getting season tickets in 1999, we have used Virginia Tech football weekends as an opportunity to reunite with my Delta Zeta sorority sisters and to share the Tech football experience with my daughters, their husbands and now our grandson, Jackson, who attended his first game at 8 months old.

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

A: Virginia Tech has provided so many wonderful experiences to me and my family, and we have been fans of Tech athletics for so long that it was important to us to give back in a way that would provide ongoing support to Tech athletes, so they, too, could experience what being a Hokie is all about.

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

A: I want to be a part of supporting our Virginia Tech athletics programs.

Q: My favorite Virginia Tech sports are ...

A: Football, basketball and volleyball.

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

A: Michael Vick.

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

A: Dell Curry (men's basketball).

DRIVE FOR 25 critical for VIRGINIA TECH athletics

All money generated from the Drive for 25 will go toward offsetting the rising costs of scholarships
by Jimmy Robertson

While growing up in Waynesboro, Virginia, Kenny Brooks remembers well the day that then-James Madison coach Lefty Driesell offered him a scholarship to play basketball for the Dukes.

It was a feeling of relief, more so than anyone could imagine.

"It wasn't a situation where, 'OK, I got the scholarship, so my parents won't have to pay for it,'" he said. "It was like, 'OK, now I have this scholarship, so now I can go to college.' Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to go. I had two hard-working parents, and as much as they loved me, they wouldn't have been able to afford to send me to college."

Not much has changed over the years, as Tech's current student-athletes echo similar sentiments, and Virginia Tech Director of Athletics Whit Babcock wants Tech fans to understand that. This is the type of impact that the financial contributions for athletics scholarships have on student-athletes and their futures.

With that at the forefront of his thoughts, Babcock announced the launching of the "Drive for 25"—a tag-team initiative by the athletics department and the Hokie Club designed to increase the membership of the Hokie Club from 11,000 to 25,000 members. The increase would make the school's fundraising organization the biggest in the ACC, and more importantly, provide revenue needed to offset the ever-rising costs of tuition and fees.

The Hokie Club raised more than \$20 million during the past year, but only \$11.5 million was designated toward scholarships. The athletics department projects the scholarship bill for the upcoming year to be at \$14.4 million, creating a potential \$2.9 million shortfall.

Thus, Babcock said the Drive for 25 was the single-most important thing that the athletics department will do this year.

"It is about raising money," he admitted of the Drive for 25. "We're not going to hide behind that. It is specifically for scholarships."

"It provides our foundation and the cornerstone for all that we do. It is all re-invested back into our student-athletes and our programs."

Former Virginia Tech football coach Frank Beamer has volunteered to serve as the spokesperson for the Drive for 25. The symmetry is fitting since Beamer wore the No. 25 and the top fundraising organizations in the ACC are approaching 25,000 members.

In addition to be a student-athlete at Tech, Beamer served as a coach and went into the homes of prospects — many of whom would not be able to go to college without a scholarship offer from a school like Virginia Tech.

"When you go in, you think, 'We're giving this guy an opportunity that, if we didn't, he wouldn't be able to go to college,'" Beamer said. "He'd have to go and do something else."

The goal is certainly ambitious. The Hokie Club hasn't been much above 11,000 members over the past couple of decades. As a result, the amount of money raised for athletics ranks 11th among ACC schools.

So Babcock and the Hokie Club want to recalibrate the Hokie Club's goal, with the central focus being on raising money for scholarships.

"We want to change the mindset," Babcock said. "We want to rebrand the Hokie Club to be about philanthropy and opportunity, not solely a transaction for good tickets. We will educate our alumni and friends ... this is the single-best way for alumni and friends to get involved in athletics."

The Hokie Club plans a solicitation of new members through a mass mailing. Fans and alums can expect to see videos, letters, emails



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Tech student-athletes eclipse 2,000 hours of community service this past fall

As part of its trip to the Belk Bowl held in Charlotte, North Carolina, a small group of Virginia Tech football players visited the Levine Children’s Hospital to hand out miniature footballs, sign autographs, pose for photographs and simply offer holiday cheer to ailing children of all ages. The remainder of the team went to Second Harvest Food Bank in Charlotte to pack food and grocery items to be delivered to needy people throughout the Charlotte metropolitan area. Those two events were the final two community-service events of the fall semester for Virginia Tech’s student-athletes, and as a group, they completed 2,092 hours worth of community service in a five-month span starting at the beginning of August. Student-athletes from each of the school’s 22 varsity sports helped with at least one community service project during the fall semester.

Tech’s football program led the way by participating in four projects this fall. The program worked through Team IMPACT, a non-profit organization that matches kids with life-threatening illnesses to college teams, to make Elijah Oltmanns an honorary member of the squad. Oltmanns, who lives in nearby Vinton, Virginia and is battling lymphoma, attended practice, met with the players, received a jersey and attended at least one game. Also, the team packed shoeboxes with gifts as part of Operation Christmas Child, a Samaritan’s Purse faith-based initiative in which shoeboxes filled with small gifts are collected and sent to children around the world, and several members of the team worked with former player Shayne Graham, who sponsored a shopping spree for needy local children in the New River Valley. Finally, the team participated in the bowl-sponsored outings. “For me, I’m thankful for everything I have, just being healthy and stuff like that,” said Tech mike linebacker Andrew Motuapuaka, who was part of the group that visited the children at Levine Children’s Hospital. “I’m just glad that I could be a light to these kids and give them hope and let them know that their dreams can come true.” Community-service projects throughout the fall ranged from reading to children at local elementary schools to working fall festivals at local schools to working at the Montgomery Country Christmas Store to volunteering as a marshal at the Color Me Rad run that raises money for Special Olympics. The Tech women’s soccer team helped with the flood relief efforts in West Virginia, the softball and men’s basketball teams made visits to Carilion Children’s, a pediatric care services unit of Carilion Clinic, and numerous student-athletes worked at United Way events throughout the community and with Micah’s Backpacks. The Virginia Tech Athletics Office of Student-Athlete Development coordinates most of these events with officials from the various organizations. Each team is required to participate in one event throughout the academic year, though as the aforementioned list suggests, most of Tech’s student-athletes participate in such projects multiple times over the course of an academic year.



With 2017 here, Tech football program in similar position as last year

The New Year’s celebration for Virginia Tech faithful began early this past year, as their beloved Hokies made a historic rally to win a bowl game, Buzz Williams’ bunch led from start to finish in upsetting Duke, and the women’s basketball team kept its record spotless—all before the big ball dropped in Times Square. A fall full of accomplishments left Hokie Nation feeling euphoric about the possibilities and eager to take on all challenges. Then Jerod Evans made his decision to punt on his senior season and make a run for the NFL—and that came as a sucker punch to those in orange and maroon. Yet all the best to Evans and to Isaiah Ford and Bucky Hodges, who also made the same decision. Their decisions came as no surprise, though, considering their years of consistency and overall bodies of work. But Evans plays the position of the most importance. He not only obviously led the Hokies in passing, but also stood as the team’s leading rusher, accounting for nearly 4,400 total yards and 41 touchdowns. So his departure begs the question—where is this program headed in 2017? Will the Hokies be able to build on their 10-win season and their third straight bowl win? “I’m not saying that we’ve arrived or that we’re back,” Tech coach Justin Fuente cautioned shortly after the Belk Bowl win and before the Evans decision. “I’m not saying any of those things, but for this season and that group, they worked toward getting Virginia Tech back some of the recognition and the way that Virginia Tech football has been thought of. They’ve earned some of that back.” The truth is this—the Hokies find themselves in a similar position as last January. They were coming off a bowl win and getting prepared to search for an answer at quarterback—albeit with new coaches at the helm. The confetti had settled long before Fuente named a starter out of the trio of Evans, Brenden Motley and Josh Jackson. Jackson now goes into the offseason as the leading contender for the position, though expect him to get some competition from an early enrollee. Jackson reminds some of Bryan Randall—around 6-foot-1, 215 pounds, smart and probably a better runner than thrower at this point in his young career. The key may be finding him some help. Cam Phillips represents a good starting point, and the Hokies need Travon McMillian to become that feature tailback again. The Hokies get Deshawn McClease back from injury, and Chris Cunningham shows promise as a tight end, along with receivers Divine Deablo and Eric Kumah. Steven Peoples probably assumes that Sam Rogers role, and look for Kyle Chung, Parker Osterloh and Tyrell Smith to battle for the vacancies on the offensive line created by the departures of Jonathan McLaughlin and Augie Conte. “We’re going to have some huge holes to fill moving forward,” Fuente admitted. But all those guys played this past season, and the rest of the squad figures to be solid. Defensively, the Hokies finished in the top 20 nationally in total defense (340.7 ypg),

and seven starters return. Tim Settle and Ricky Walker were quasi starters this past season, easing the losses of Woody Baron and Nigel Williams. Trevon Hill and Houshun Gaines will battle to replace Ken Ekanem. That leaves the rather large task of finding someone to replace Chuck Clark—the quarterback of the defense. Both kickers return. Expect Joey Slye to be better with distance kicks, and Mitchell Ludwig to add length to his punts. Arguably the best news for Tech is that many of its ACC Coastal Division foes need to find quarterbacks as well. Pittsburgh lost a bunch of seniors, including its quarterback. Georgia Tech, Miami and Virginia also will be looking, as well as North Carolina, which saw Mitch Trubisky forgo his final season and make himself available for the NFL Draft. All this uncertainty makes for an interesting offseason for Fuente and his staff, and yet Tech’s faithful fans should be confident. A year ago, media members picked the Hokies to finish fifth in the Coastal—and they won it. Fuente and the staff obviously know how to get a team ready. “We kept getting better and better from the spring through the summer, and we kept getting better through the fall,” defensive coordinator Bud Foster said after the Belk Bowl. “You’re seeing the end result right now. The work ethic and the commitment of our kids, that’s why we are where we are.” Rest assured, there wasn’t a lot of time for this staff to sip champagne and reflect on 2016. The future is just around the corner.

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BEHIND THE MIC with
Jon Laaser

Holiday Hokie Hysteria

A great aspect of my job is that I get to be a part of two programs simultaneously. There are times when the excitement of one can intersect with the other, creating an adrenaline rush that can last for weeks. And then there was this past year, when the merging euphoria of Justin Fuente returning Tech football to the ACC Championship Game and Buzz Williams guiding the men's basketball team to its finest start in years created what I have dubbed "Holiday Hokie Hysteria."

The greatest feeling in this profession is truly feeling like you are a member of the team. This comes with mutual trust, which generally takes a while to foster. Fuente allowed Mike Burnop and I to get there relatively quickly, and as we got to know him and his family throughout his first season, we found that our level of emotional investment continued to rise.

Tech beats Duke, Duke takes out North Carolina, Georgia Tech surprises Tech, and Tech responds by beating Notre Dame at Notre Dame Stadium. All those events added up to what appeared to be a football game against Virginia that would determine whether the Hokies were Orlando-bound as Coastal Division champions. NC State would have a say in this later, but the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, the hysteria began.

Enter men's basketball. In my first season as a part of Buzz's basketball family, I had discovered what it truly meant to be "in the room." You see, with Buzz's program, every single person is in the room for a reason. That could be his/her background, work ethic,

unique skill set or personality. Acceptance into the family isn't earned easily or taken lightly—certainly not by me. Once you are in the room, you want to be in the room for every step that the family takes. I feel that way despite knowing that there were going to be a few instances when scheduling conflicts would be unavoidable. However, I told myself that, if I could physically be somewhere, I would. Mike shared that feeling.

This is why we drove to Dulles International Airport on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving to fly to Los Angeles. The team already had departed for a 10-day, four-game road trip, with the first three games to be contested in Anaheim as part of the Wooden Legacy tournament. Reflectively, I know I nearly wore both of us out for the next six weeks, but I still feel it was worth it. We called the opener, as the Hokies beat a talented New Mexico team. I was pleased we had called it, but what made the trip worth it was the ability to have Thanksgiving dinner that night with the family at a historic restaurant in Anaheim. There was such joy and camaraderie in that room. We drove straight from the restaurant back to the airport, and the hysteria was in full swing!

The "red eye" has its name for a reason, and I'm sure Mikey and I could have used some Visine when we landed at Dulles at 7:30 a.m. on Friday. Driving back to Blacksburg, we figured a win over UVA would send the Hokies to the ACC Championship Game, and there was enough adrenaline in that. NC State took care of that Friday night, but that did little to dampen

the mood at Lane Stadium the next day. Less than 48 hours after eating turkey with Justin Bibbs and Seth Allen, I was snapping photos of Sam Rogers and Ken Ekanem clutching the Commonwealth Cup and the ACC Coastal Division trophy. I'll always remember Fuente conducting his postgame interview with his youngest daughter, Charlotte, on his lap. It was a special day.

The hysteria had just begun. Mike and I coordinated "TTL" on Monday night and then hit the airport to head to Detroit, Michigan on Tuesday. We had missed two hoops games in Anaheim, but were going to meet the team in Ann Arbor for the ACC-Big 10 Challenge. For me, a follower of the "Fab Five" as a kid, it was a bucket list trip. The trip, nor the team, disappointed, as the guys opened the game sluggishly, but roared back to claim their third win on the trip. Michigan's announcer asked me if we—the football team—could beat Clemson. The Wolverines needed Tech's help. I winked at him. Basketball was heading home to spend the next month getting better and ready for ACC play. Another memory for me will be laying out my football spotting board for Clemson on the team charter.

Mike and I weren't home long. Andrew Allegretta and I re-racked the equipment (five trunks) for football and dropped them off for Sam Nichols and the equipment guys (unsung heroes) to put on the football truck. We then made our way back to the airport to get to Orlando.

We rendezvoused with the rest of our football crew and spent Friday afternoon setting up for the ACC Championship Game. The stage felt big and energizing. I chatted with ESPN's Chris Fowler for a while during Tech's walk-through if I needed a reminder.

There is nothing like big-spot football, and that was the feeling throughout the game on Saturday night. The Hokies fell, but did so valiantly on a stage they hope to return to



Zach LeDay and the Hokies celebrated with fans after closing 2016 with a win over then-No. 5 Duke at Virginia Tech Carilion Court.

regularly. However, hope for the future was the not the postgame mood in the locker room. Fuente had convinced the team they would win, and they hadn't. It was a solemn room. That mood would fade, as they learned their 24th straight bowl destination.

Meanwhile, Cassell Coliseum was in a festive holiday mood the entire month of December. Buzz and company came off their road trip and ripped off wins over UMES, Ole Miss, The Citadel and Charleston Southern before hitting the holiday break. Mike and I were able to call all of those games, and I also managed to complete all of my Christmas shopping. The Internet is a wonderful thing! Mike and I also squeezed in five holiday parties together. We're a package deal.

The holiday break hit Blacksburg, but both programs were ready for one more stretch to

close out a fantastic 2016. On the 23rd, I drove to Richmond to see friends. On Christmas Eve, I headed to Wilmington, Delaware, for some family time. On the 26th, I returned to Blacksburg. I scooped up Mike, and we drove to Charlotte to put on "TTL" at the team's hotel.

We turned right back around the next morning and returned to Blacksburg in time to call the Hokies' win over UMBC. After the game, we once again grabbed Andrew and drove back to Charlotte. While we ate McDonald's chicken nuggets at midnight, we had no idea the following night we would witness/call the largest comeback in Tech football history to cap the first year of the Fuente era. In that moment, it was, as I heard repeatedly back at the hotel, "a great time to be a Hokie."

We drove home the following morning

feeling that it couldn't get much better. Then Buzz and basketball took the final step for Tech athletics in 2016, drilling No. 5 Duke in the ACC opener. The atmosphere inside the Cassell was electric. It wasn't that Tech had beaten the Devils. It was the manner in which they did it. It resonated with me.

Making it sweeter for me was that my parents, Mark and Debbie, were able to travel to Charlotte for the Belk Bowl and back to Blacksburg for the Duke win. Afterward, my dad told me "Jon, that was the most fun I've ever had!" As I thought about it, I realized that the six-week stretch was the most fun I had ever had as well—and yet it felt like just the beginning.

I woke up on Jan. 1 ready for more action. Can't wait to see where 2017 takes us! Happy Hokie New Year! 



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COMPLIANCE CORNER by Jimmy Robertson

Keeping up with Compliance

Q: How come some schools always seem to be in the news when it comes to NCAA violations—Ole Miss, North Carolina and Auburn come to mind—while others, like Stanford never seem to be in the news for infractions? Is this because of good leadership doing the right things? Just curious. Thanks for your response. William Dwyer, Blacksburg, Virginia.

TP: “Rules violations aren’t exclusive to certain schools or conferences. Just in the past few months for instance, we’ve seen Stanford and Notre Dame tagged with violations. At Stanford, a football player received more than \$3,000 worth of impermissible benefits. The softball program broke the 20-hour weekly practice limit, and that head coach lost his job as a result. And the NCAA ordered the Notre Dame football program to vacate two years’ worth of wins because of an academic misconduct situation (the school is appealing)—a situation similar to that at North Carolina.

“Many violations are not intentional—coaches or student-athletes involved often do not realize that rules are being broken.

In other situations, schools maybe don’t have the financial resources to invest into compliance offices that are used for checks and balances. There is no doubt, however, that numerous coaches nationwide push the envelope because of pressure to win.

“Very rarely are situations in the compliance world black and white . . . and no one is immune.”

Q: I saw where Louisville was charged with four serious transgressions. What do you think will happen to the Cards? Death penalty? Thanks, Natalie in Blacksburg, Virginia.

TP: “To recap, Louisville was charged with four Level I violations—the most serious level—including providing impermissible benefits to basketball players. A former member of the staff refused to be interviewed, while another former program assistant refused to provide phone records. The NCAA defines that as a severe breach of conduct and worthy of a show-cause order (which effectively keeps an individual from working in Division I athletics for specified period of time). Finally, the NCAA alleged that head

coach Rick Pitino violated his responsibilities by not monitoring his staff.

“This case doesn’t rise to the level of the death penalty because Louisville was not charged with a lack of institutional control or a lack of head coach control of the program, but the school may be forced to vacate its 2013 national championship. Louisville had already self-imposed sanctions last spring when it removed its basketball team from the ACC and NCAA tournaments and implemented recruiting restrictions, so those proactive measures may yield some small benefit in the end.

“The school now has 90 days to respond to the NCAA’s notice of allegations (so by late January). Once submitted, the NCAA Committee on Infractions will have a month to respond, at which time it will set a date for Louisville representatives to appear in person. Following that appearance, and barring the introduction of relevant new information, the committee—which is comprised of employees from Division I schools, within and outside of athletics—will then reach a decision regarding the case.” *VP*



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COLLEEN WARD

LACROSSE
Odenton, Maryland
by Jimmy Robertson

Colleen Ward is a senior attack on the lacrosse team who will graduate next December with a degree in biochemistry. She plans on applying to various physician's assistant programs, with the goal of becoming a physician's assistant.

Q: Why did you decide to major in biochemistry?

CW: "Originally, I wanted to work with prosthetics and occupational therapy on the engineering side of it. In general, I wanted to work in the health field and make an impact that way. I've always had a passion for helping people and working with them, and I knew I was better at science and math than English. So that was the direction that I chose to start off.

"Then in college it became, 'Well, why would I want to stick to just one field? Why wouldn't I want to become a general physician's assistant and help people in a broader way?' So that led me to wanting to be a physician's assistant."

Q: Have you worked as an intern or worked in any positions related to this field?


CW: "Last summer, I was an emergency department volunteer at Anne Arundel Medical Center in Annapolis ... basically, I was the handyman for anything the nurses needed. In addition, I shadowed a lot of physicians and PA's [physician's assistants] just to get more experience as to what specialty I might want to go into. I shadowed an OB/GYN, a rheumatologist, internal medicine ... it was interesting seeing all the different fields.

"In high school, I worked at a PT facility [physical therapy] as a part-time job, and I was what you'd call a 'tech.' I told people what exercises they had next and explained what they were. A lot of it was being able to read what the PT wrote in anatomical terms and translate it to English that the patients could understand. I also was in charge of the pool area for when patients came back and did pool workouts. So that was a cool job."

Q: So what are your future plans?

CW: "My long-term plan is to be a physician's assistant, hopefully in the pediatric area. I like working with kids. I plan to finish my undergraduate degree in the fall, and I'll stay in Blacksburg. Hopefully, I'll get a scribe position [to dictate a physician's notes, order medication, enter a patient's information on online forms, etc.] or a phlebotomist position [someone who takes a patient's blood]. For PA [physician's assistant] school, you need so many patient-care, hands-on hours, and to do that, you basically have to work a full-time job for a half a year or a full year before applying. So hopefully, I'll work for Lewis-Gale or Carilion. I'll actually apply this June and hopefully find out next June because it's a year-long application process."

Q: And how long would you be in a physician's assistant program?

CW: "Anywhere from 25 to 35 months, so two to three years, and then you have residency at the end of it. It's a long process, but it isn't nearly as long as a medical school residency. The one thing about being a PA that is different is that you don't have to pick a specialty. You can come out with a generic PA graduate degree, and you can switch between specialties. Your physician just trains you in the specialty. In medical school, you have to pick the specialty and you get specialized in it and your residency is specialized. You can't switch without going back to school and starting over again." 

Zach Switzer is a men's swimmer who competes mostly in the individual medley and backstroke events. He graduates in May with a degree in psychology and plans on furthering his education by getting his master's and doctoral degrees.

Q: Why did you decide to major in psychology?

ZS: "Throughout high school, I couldn't decide what I wanted to do with my studies. I knew I wasn't a fan of math, and I liked science and history classes, but they weren't super engaging. I had tons of conversations about what I enjoyed and what I was good at, and then going into my senior year, I decided to take AP [advanced placement] psychology. It was one of the best classes I have ever taken. I hadn't truly enjoyed a class until this one. I immediately became interested in the many different fields of psychology and being able to learn about how human beings tick. Going into college, I decided to stick with it, and I haven't looked away from the major since."

Q: Have you done any internships or anything related to the field outside of your general coursework?

ZS: "I am currently a research assistant in the interface of leadership and teams lab here at Virginia Tech. The members of the lab complete research on topics such as leadership emergence, leadership perceptions, team dynamics, gender and leadership, etc."

Q: How did this re-affirm that you made the right choice in pursuing psychology?

ZS: "I believe leadership is an essential part of an organization's success today. The lab has given me the opportunity to take what I have learned about the topic of leadership and apply it to real-world situations. It has also helped me narrow my focus and interests within psychology to the industrial/organizational branch of psychology."

Q: You are thinking about pursuing graduate school, right?


Where will you apply?

ZS: "When majoring in psychology, it is pretty much necessary to attend graduate school to be a real asset within the field. Also, I really just want to continue learning and improving my understanding of industrial/organizational psychology before I enter the workforce. I'm going to apply all over the place. Virginia Tech will be one of the schools where I apply, as well as other schools with highly touted I/O doctoral programs."

Q: What is the short-term plan for you?

ZS: "I would like to take a quick break from school and re-adjust before entering graduate school. The plan is to find an internship or entry-level job as a human capital consultant, and then after setting my feet and gaining some experience, I'll go back to the college lifestyle."

Q: What is your long-term goal, and why?

ZS: "Getting my doctoral degree is the long-term goal at this point in my career. Being able to be the first person in my family with this degree would mean a lot to me. After that, I would hope to join a prestigious consulting firm and learn as much as I possibly can. Eventually, one day being able to go off on my own and run a consulting firm would be the end goal." 



ZACH SWITZER

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A COMEBACK FOR THE AGES

Behind a defense that forced four second-half turnovers and an opportunistic offense, the Hokies rallied from a 24-0 halftime deficit to beat Arkansas 35-24 and win the Belk Bowl — the program's third straight bowl win
by Jimmy Robertson

As he walked down the long corridor within the cold bowels of Bank of America Stadium to meet with the media for one final time, his face relayed a million different emotions all seemingly at once.

Ken Ekanem looked elated, sad, exhausted and shocked roughly 45 minutes after Virginia Tech's historic rally in the 2016 Belk Bowl held in Charlotte, North Carolina.

"It's just very crazy," he said. "Part of me will remember this for a lifetime, just the way we recovered from being down 24-0 at halftime to the way we captured the momentum at the start of the second half. The defense played lights out. I think we jumpstarted the offense into playing really well, and everything was clicking on all cylinders.

"It was a really wild game. It was a tale of two halves, really."

On a blustery evening in the Queen City, Ekanem and the Hokies were crowned champions of the Belk Bowl after doing the unimaginable, scoring 35 unanswered points in the second half to record a 35-24 exhilarating victory over Arkansas.

When Virginia Tech's quarterback, Jerod Evans, took a knee to wind off the final seconds of the clock, those dressed in orange and maroon in the stands starting chanting, "ACC, ACC." Moments later, head coach Justin Fuente accepted the champion's crystal trophy, and even he, too, seemed a little surprised at what had transpired.

With the win, the Hokies finished the season with a 10-4 record, recording at least 10 wins for the first time since 2011 and for

the 14th time in program history. The Hokies also won their third straight bowl game for the first time in school history, and the 24-point comeback is believed to be the biggest in school history.

"I'm awfully proud to coach this group of kids," Fuente said. "Our senior leadership, I've talked about since day 1. I can't say enough good things about those kids. I think it's fitting that, at least it's my understanding, it's the biggest comeback in Virginia Tech history. I think that senior class, being able to pull that off, is awfully fitting because of the character they have and the discipline and the work ethic."

Tech appeared shell-shocked after fumbling on the first play of the game and played that way for much of the first 30 minutes. Two turnovers led to 10 Arkansas points, the Hokies' offense failed to sustain drives when not turning the ball over, and Tech's defense struggled to stop the Razorbacks. Joey Slye's 48-yard field-goal attempt drifted right on the half's final play, capping an ugly first 30 minutes in which Tech trailed 24-0.

"I didn't say anything revolutionary — I don't think," Fuente said. "But I do believe that our guys were upset with how they played. I don't want to take away anything from how Arkansas played. They played really well. The only way to do anything about it is to go out there and take one step at a time — and they did that."

The first step started with a big play from backup whip linebacker Anthony Shegog, who entered the game with just 16 tackles all season. The redshirt junior jarred the

ball loose from Arkansas' Drew Morgan, and the Hokies' Woody Baron recovered at the Arkansas 30. Three plays later, Evans got the Hokies on the board, scoring on a 4-yard run to cut the Razorback lead to 24-7.

Tech forced three other turnovers in the second half — and all led to Hokie touchdowns. Shegog played a role in three of the four turnovers. He forced the first one, and then toward the end of the third quarter, he intercepted a pass that led to a 3-yard touchdown pass from Evans to Sam Rogers that cut the Arkansas lead to 24-14.

A Tremaine Edmunds interception led to a 5-yard touchdown pass from Evans to tight end Chris Cunningham, slicing the lead to 24-21 with 4 minutes left in the third quarter. The Hokies' longest drive of the game, a 76-yard march, ended with a Travon McMillian touchdown run that gave the Hokies their first lead, 28-24, with 12:03 remaining.

Then Shegog got involved again. He recovered a Terrell Edmunds fumble at the Arkansas 8 after Edmunds had intercepted Arkansas quarterback Brandon Allen. That led to a 1-yard run by Evans with 6:41 left to give the Hokies a 35-24 lead.

"I think it changed the game completely," Shegog said of the turnovers. "Just like in the first half, when we had that first turnover on offense, that gave all the momentum to them. In the second half, we had like, what, three straight turnovers? That helped significantly."

Shegog finished with six tackles, including one for a loss, a sack, an interception, a forced fumble and a fumble recovery. He easily could

have been the game's MVP — an award that went to receiver Cam Phillips, who caught six passes for a career-high 115 yards.

"Coach Foster is always talking about how he wants 22 starters on defense," Shegog said. "It was just 'next man up.' When I got my chance, I tried to do the best I could."

Evans also warranted consideration after accounting for 330 of the Hokies' 402 yards and four touchdowns. He completed 21 of 33 for 243 yards, with two touchdowns and an interception. He also rushed for 87 yards and two scores.

Arkansas amassed 314 yards — but only 56 in the second half.

For the Hokies, the most important number, though, is 1 — as in going 1-0 each week. In the week leading up to the bowl game, they just wanted to go 1-0.

Mission accomplished. Such a strategy led them to 10 wins, which is a first for this senior class.

TECH BOWL RECORDS

RECORD	NUMBER	PREVIOUS RECORD
Points in a second half	35	28 (vs. Cal, 2003 Insight Bowl)
Rushing first downs allowed	1	2 (vs. Georgia, 2006 Chick-fil-Bowl)


BELK BOWL RECORDS

RECORD	NUMBER	PLAYER/TEAM	PREVIOUS RECORD
Total plays	55	Jerod Evans	54 (Dak Prescott, Mississippi State, 2015)
Most touchdowns	2	Jerod Evans	(tied with five others)
Most interceptions	3	Virginia Tech	(tied with two others)
Most rushing touchdowns	3	Virginia Tech	(tied with four others)
Fewest rushing yards allowed	36	Virginia Tech	(N/A)

Ten wins, a third straight bowl win, a comeback for the ages ... who could ask for more?

"It's awesome," Ekanem said. "Virginia Tech is back on the map, back in national contention and all that. To be a part of the only Virginia Tech team to win three bowl

games in a row is a pretty cool thing to hang my hat on. It's a game I'll always remember and be able to tell my grandkids about.

"It's cool to get Virginia Tech back to where I envisioned it when I was getting recruited — back to 10 wins. You couldn't draw an ending up much better." 

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That was me praying and Him answering my prayers right in front of my face. I had been praying about what decision to make and what I was going to do — and it literally happened.

Isaiah Ford
on how his faith helped him with his college decision

”

Given that he now owns practically every Virginia Tech receiving record imaginable, given that he plays with an undeniable passion for winning, given that he displays a fierce pride for his university, and given that he has decided to forgo his final year at Tech and pursue an NFL career, Isaiah Ford finds it almost mind-boggling that a place he has called “home” for the past three years could have been about six hours west of Blacksburg.

Ford committed to the University of Louisville during his senior season at Trinity Christian Academy in Jacksonville, Florida in large part because of football coach Charlie Strong and in small part because of basketball coach Rick Pitino. A tremendous two-sport athlete, he wanted to play both sports in college, and Pitino—a two-time national champion as a coach—was agreeable to the idea, even though football served as Ford’s primary focus. Pitino even met with Ford in his office during Ford’s official visit, mapping out his future practice plans for the young man.

Virginia Tech fans know the rest of the story at this point ... or, well, they think they know it. They know Strong took the head coaching job at Texas, and they know that Ford decided to change his mind, signing a letter of intent with Virginia Tech on signing day in 2014.

They don’t know, however, that Ford might have changed his mind anyway.

“To be honest, before he [Strong] even left, I was torn between the two programs,” Ford said of Tech and Louisville. “I was committed to Louisville, but if he had stayed, I honestly don’t know what I would have done.”

Torn between the two programs and given the blessing to choose between either by his family, Ford turned to praying. The evening that the Strong announcement broke, Ford was spending the night at the home of a basketball teammate, and when he awoke the next morning, he found out the news.

Some would call that divine intervention. Include Ford in that group.

“That was me praying and Him answering my prayers right in front of my face,” Ford said. “I had been praying about what decision to make and what I was going to do—and it literally happened.”

Tech fans are the ones thanking the Lord these days, as Ford wrapped up a record-setting career in Blacksburg. Tech’s staff inserted Ford into the starting lineup for his first collegiate game, and he caught a touchdown pass. He has caught passes ever since—more so than any player in school history.

Ford owns most of the major single-season and career receiving records at Tech. The list includes most receptions (season and career), most receiving yards (season and career) and most touchdown receptions (season and career).

Though quiet by nature, the articulate Ford boldly predicted this type of success. He told the media at

Tech’s annual Fan Day in mid-August of 2014 that he wanted to score 10 touchdowns as a freshman that season. He genuinely believed it to be a realistic goal. He hadn’t even played in a college game yet.

“That was something that had never been done here,” Ford said. “They [media members] were all looking at me like, ‘You’re out of your mind.’”

“I’ve always set extreme goals for myself and worked my tail off to achieve them, even when some seemed unrealistic. As the season went along, we went through some growing pains, but when I look back on it, I think it could have been accomplished [he scored six]. But going into my sophomore year, I wanted to make sure I did that [he had 11]. My entire life, I’ve set tremendous goals and worked hard to achieve them.”

Ford wasn’t always so aggressive when it came to goal setting. He started playing football at the age of 4 or 5 before recreational leagues allow full tackling. The city of Jacksonville annually produces future football stars, but no one would have predicted Ford’s rise to stardom.

Once he became old enough to play in leagues that allowed tackling, he nearly gave up the sport. He shied away from contact.

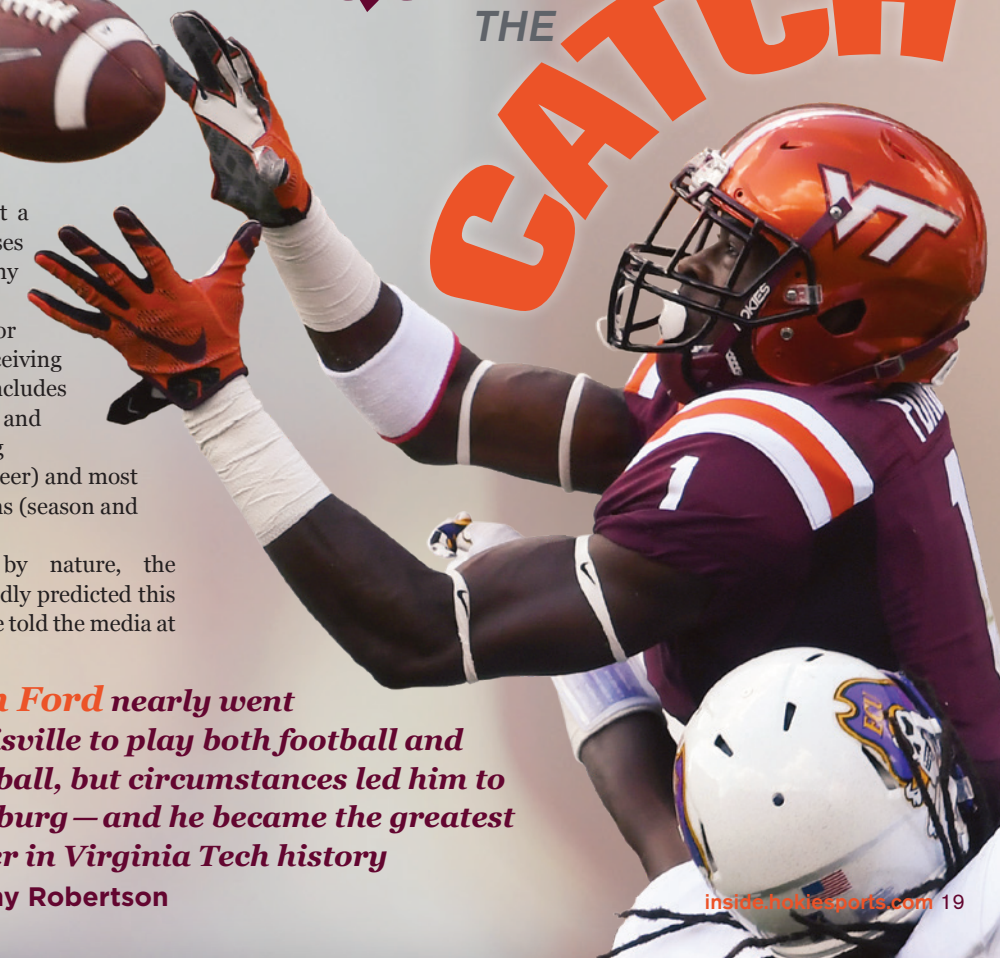
“My first year of playing, I didn’t like football that much,” he admitted. “I moved to receiver when I started playing tackle football. I was younger than everyone, so I was always a little timid. They would throw me the ball, and I wouldn’t catch it. It was bad.”

Obviously, things changed. Ford found a passion for the game, one fueled by his two older brothers. They helped to train him and mold him—and toughen him—taking him to local parks for games. As he got older, he started to get a reputation around Jacksonville as the skinny kid with big skills.

His mom, Jocelyn Grissett, had enrolled him in Trinity Christian Academy, a private school, and there, he received terrific coaching and a great education. Already thinking about college football possibilities, he watched as his cousin, Jamie Harper, became one of the nation’s top

Continued on page 20

QUITE
THE
CATCH



Isaiah Ford nearly went to Louisville to play both football and basketball, but circumstances led him to Blacksburg — and he became the greatest receiver in Virginia Tech history

by **Jimmy Robertson**

recruits, signing with Clemson and later spending a brief stint with the NFL's Tennessee Titans. Harper's success motivated Ford, but so, too, did an incident with a longtime equipment manager at Trinity. Before the beginning of his freshman year, Ford requested the No. 3, which is a "legacy" number at Trinity—many of the greats wore that number throughout their careers. Ford always had worn No. 3 in recreational leagues because he loved Allen Iverson, a former NBA star who wore the number.

"No, you're not deserving of No. 3," the equipment manager told Ford.

Those words lit the spark that turned into an internal rage.

"That stuck with me ever since," Ford said. "So I wore No. 7 in high school. I told myself every day that he was going to regret saying that.

"That still sticks with me today. When I'm working out, and I'm getting tired, I can think of all those moments when people have doubted me, and I get a sudden rush of adrenaline or motivation to keep going."

Ford led Trinity to two state championships during his four years there. He also excelled on the basketball court, becoming one of the state's best in that sport.

He arrived at Tech fully planning on playing both—a plan to which

former head football coach Frank Beamer and former head basketball coach James Johnson agreed. But after his freshman season, he knew he needed to get in the weight room and get bigger. He barely weighed 180 once the season ended.

Ford ultimately gave up his basketball pursuits for good, realizing what his football future might hold for him. He still feels a tinge of regret.

"Maybe a little," he said. "I just miss it. But how my career has been at Virginia Tech, if I had to do it over again, I probably wouldn't change a thing."

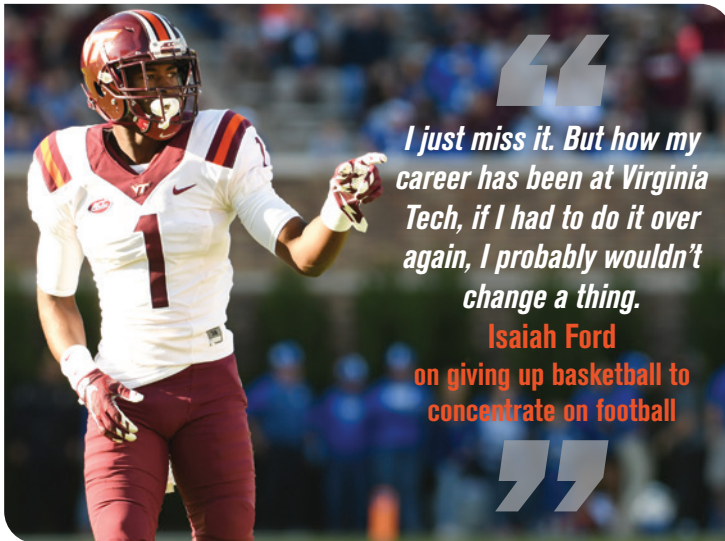
Nor should he. He has enjoyed unprecedented success for a receiver at Tech, earning All-ACC honors on three occasions. Only three Tech receivers had made an all-conference team on three occasions—André Davis (1999-2001) and Carroll Dale (1957-59), though Davis made a team one year as a returner.

His ability captures the attention of the ones who watch him every Saturday and even inspire the ones who play with him.

"I really think it's special what he's able to do," fellow Tech receiver Cam Phillips said. "He has such great body control. You've seen some of the catches

in traffic, with him going up and getting a ball. I think it's really special that he has that body control and catches pretty much everything."

Tech's coaching staff thinks Ford is special, too, for obvious reasons. They love his consistency, as back-to-back 70-plus receptions, 1,000-yard seasons attest. They love his demeanor, and they love his work ethic.



They also love the most underrated part of his game—his intelligence.

"The thing that is the added bonus with Isaiah is that he's so intelligent," head coach Justin Fuente said. "He can tell you exactly what's happening in the course of a game, and that sounds easy, but it's a lot easier said than done. He understands leverage and all the nuances that go into playing the position well. In any given year, you don't have that many guys that have that level of understanding."

Most of his traits come from his brothers and his parents. His mom gets a lot of attention because of her presence on Twitter and her attendance at every one of his games, with the exception of one, during his career. But Ford quickly tells people that his father, Aaron Ford, comes to a bunch of games as well.

In the end, though, his success, the feeling one gets after a touchdown, drives that work ethic.


"My parents have instilled a great work ethic in me, and my coaches, not just my football coaches, but my AAU coaches and my travel coaches as well," he said. "If you were to talk to them, they would tell you that I grew up before their eyes more than anyone else, in terms of working hard and understanding that success comes with work."

"Once I started to realize that, I became an addict. I always wanted to work on my game and perfect my craft in basketball and football because of the feeling I had when I had success on the field or on the court. I'm addicted to it. I want it. I need it. I'll do anything for it."

Ford now will try to achieve that same success at the NFL level. He appears to be at least mature enough to handle enhanced competition.

His long-term future consists of eventually returning to Tech to get his degree in human development. It's his ticket to do what he wants when playing football runs its course—coach and be impactful on young people's lives in the way his coaches were on his.

Wherever he goes, he assures fans that he'll never forget a place he loves and a group of people whom he loves.

It's a place where he wasn't sure he'd end up. Now, it's a place he'll always call home. 



RECORD-SETTING CAREER

A look at Isaiah Ford's career records at Tech

Record	Number	Years
Career receptions	210	2014-16
Career TD receptions	24	2014-16
Career receiving yards	2,967	2014-16
Single-season receptions	79	2016
Single-season receiving yards	1,164	2015
Single-season TD receptions	11	2015
Consecutive games with TD reception	5	2015-16
Consecutive 100-yard receiving games	5	2015-16

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When Virginia Tech officials posted final grades for all of its 30,000-plus students, they, as always, put smiles on some faces and frowns on others.

Josh Jackson, a Tech quarterback who took a redshirt season this past fall, took to Twitter to express his thoughts.

“Finished with a 3.66 this semester,” he tweeted.

Jackson certainly took care of business in the classroom during the fall semester, as his lofty grade-point average suggests. Now, he prepares for his on-field testing, which begins at some point in March following winter workouts.

Jackson, who enrolled last January, is one of 13 players in the 21-member 2016 recruiting class to spend the fall lifting, watching, learning and practicing on the scout team as part of the redshirt process. Tech’s staff only played six true freshmen out of the class this past season, a group that included receivers Divine Deablo and Eric Kumah, linebacker Tavante Beckett, defensive backs Reggie Floyd and Jovonn Quillen and defensive end Jimmie Taylor. A junior college player, quarterback Jerod Evans, also played.

Overall, Fuente likes the 2016 recruiting class, many of whom he inherited as part of the transition from Frank Beamer’s staff. In fact, Fuente and his staff signed Evans and Moore, along with Florida linebacker Eron Carter and New Jersey defensive back Tyree Rodgers. The remainder of the class stayed true to their original commitments.

The football team stayed in Blacksburg following final exams to practice in preparation for the Belk Bowl. Fuente and his staff used portions of those practices to get a sneak peak of some of the younger players.

“There is a balance between preparing your team to win and getting good work for your developmental players who have been running plays off of cards [as members of the scout team that runs opposing

READYING *for* SPRING

Thirteen players in the 2016 recruiting class took redshirt seasons, using the time to get bigger and stronger, and now they’re ready to play a more prominent role in the Hokies’ program

by Jimmy Robertson

teams’ plays] for the better part of several months,” Fuente said two weeks before the Belk Bowl. “We balance rest and practice and young player development with preparation to win a game.

“I always enjoy [these practices], and I think those kids do so. There is some anticipation for them in practice. They get to run our stuff, even if it’s for a small segment of practice. They get back engaged in what’s going on.”

Evans, of course, headlined the class and enjoyed a record-setting season, setting single-season marks for total offense, total touchdowns, passing yards and passing touchdowns. He hopes to parlay all that into an NFL career, as he decided to forgo his final season as a collegian and make himself available for this spring’s NFL Draft.

Evans’ curious decision makes Jackson’s development all the more imperative. He goes into spring practice as the frontrunner for the starting job.

People forget, though, that, in August, Jackson was in a three-way battle for the starting job with Brenden Motley and Evans. Fuente named Evans the starter roughly 10 days before the opener.

The decision did not catch Jackson by surprise. He participated in last year’s winter workouts, in last year’s spring practice and in last year’s summer workouts. But he knew he needed more development.

“It wasn’t disappointing at all,” Jackson said of Fuente’s decision. “I was just trying to be the best that I could be and whatever happens, happens. I was perfectly OK with

redshirting. I think it’s going to be a good year. This was a good year to get stronger, better and learn the offense more.”

Therein lies the true importance of 2016 for Jackson, who also traveled with the team this fall, though he didn’t play. He needed to get physically ready, but more importantly, become a more cerebral quarterback.

Evans’ departure makes Jackson, who has bulked up to around 215 pounds, arguably the most important recruit in the class, if, for nothing else, because of his position. So that makes spring practice of the utmost importance for him. He needs to develop — and quickly.

“I’m looking forward to the opportunity,” he said. “I’m going to try to be the best that I can be throughout the spring and the summer, and we’ll see how everything works out.

“I’d say this has been a good learning experience, just to be able to sit back, watch and look at all the teams I’m going to be playing in the future. It’s good to see all the tendencies and things like that. It’s been good to watch and learn from Jerod and see how the coaches coach him throughout the game. All of that’s been real helpful.”

The spring figures to be of importance to pretty much all of those on the offense who took redshirt seasons, particularly the receivers. The 2016 recruiting class consisted of four receivers, including two — Deablo and Kumah — who played. Samuel Denmark and Phil Patterson took redshirt seasons.

Deablo and Kumah saw most of their game action on special teams, but they at least got practice reps that should serve them well in spring practice. All four receivers bring size and speed, with each listed over 6-foot tall. Tech’s receiving group lacked depth this season beyond the big three of Isaiah Ford, Cam Phillips and Bucky Hodges. Ford and Hodges also decided to leave school early and make themselves available for the

NFL Draft. So developing depth at these spots remains paramount.

The staff also wants to develop depth on the offensive line — the prime reason that the coaches signed six offensive linemen last year. Silas Dzansi, a 6-foot-5, 270-pounder from Woodbridge, Virginia, expects to enroll in a couple of weeks for the spring semester.

Demetri Moore, a junior college offensive lineman, dealt with an injury for much of the fall and didn’t play. TJ Jackson, Patrick Kearns, Jarrett Hopple and Zachariah Hoyt used the fall to get bigger and stronger. All of these guys are huge, with each standing taller than 6-5, so the potential with this group is tremendous.

On the other side of the ball, Tech’s staff played four true freshmen — Beckett, Floyd, Quillen and Taylor. Beckett played in all 13 games, while Floyd and Quillen played in 11. Most of their action came on special teams, and Beckett led the trio with six tackles.

The coaches on defense hope to see an emergence from those who took redshirt seasons. Tech’s defense played well during the 2016 campaign, but the Hokies lacked depth at every position outside of defensive tackle. They were fortunate to keep most of their prominent players healthy this past fall, particularly at cornerback and at linebacker — hence the reasoning behind working Beckett at backer as a true freshman and playing both Quillen and Floyd as true freshmen in the secondary. The coaches needed them as insurance policies.

Now it’s time to learn about the rest of the freshmen who took redshirt seasons. Expect to see Carter, a 6-1, 231-pounder, get a lot of work at mike linebacker this spring, and expect to see Khalil Ladler and Rodgers, two lanky defensive backs, see plenty of action as well. Ladler, a one-time four-star recruit from Georgia, enrolled last January and spent much of 2016 getting stronger after suffering a torn ACL his senior season of high school. The 5-11, 183-pounder should be ready to live up to his lofty rankings.

Continued on page 24



Josh Jackson



Phil Patterson



Justin Fuente

Tyree Rodgers



Emmanuel Belmar



Khalil Ladler

READYING for SPRING

Continued
from
page 23

The Hokies lose three starters on the defensive line—Woody Baron, Nigel Williams and Ken Ekanem—and of those, Ekanem figures to be the hardest to replace. Taylor and Emmanuel Belmar should get plenty of reps at the end spots, with Jarrod Hewitt, a 290-pounder from Florida, seeing time at defensive tackle.

Fuente mentioned Belmar as one to watch. The 6-2, 236-pounder from Georgia played a lot at linebacker in high school, but Tech's staff loves his potential as a defensive end.

"Belmar looks good running around," Fuente said. "He doesn't know what he's doing yet because he's been over there [on the scout team] running plays on a card, but he's continued to develop his body, and he moves around well."

Some expected Belmar to play backer when he arrived at Tech—because of the Hokies' depth situation. Players like Dahman McKinnon and Jamieon Moss left the program, leaving a tenuous situation behind starter Tremaine Edmunds.

But the coaches like Belmar's tools coming off the edge. He possesses the speed, and more importantly, the athleticism to bend his body. Plus, there is nothing more important on defense than being able to rush the passer, particularly in today's spread-offense world.

"Coach [Bud] Foster said I could play linebacker or defensive end—it was up to me," Belmar said. "I played defensive end my senior year, so I thought, 'Why not just make the transition? I'll probably end up getting bigger anyway.' I like it. I'm getting adjusted to it."

Like Jackson, Belmar knew he needed more developing when he got to Blacksburg. He arrived on Tech's campus weighing 228 pounds—a solid number, but not nearly big enough to take on the ACC's top tackles.

Not only that, he saw that successful ends like Ekanem and Vinny Mihota weighed 260-plus. How much Belmar helps this spring probably hinges on his ability to maintain his weight, or even gain more.


"The weight training coaches got me bigger, faster and stronger," Belmar said. "I've gained weight. I'm trying to be around 245 by springtime to play defensive end. My number has been going up. I'm at 236 right now. I'm came in at 230 and went down to

225, but now I'm going back up.

"You always wish you could come out here and play as a true freshman, but sometimes you have to wait for your opportunity. I didn't think too much of it [the coaches' decision to have him take a redshirt year]. I had to get bigger, faster and stronger, so I just decided to go in the weight room and try to get better."

Every winter and every spring is important for the development of a football team. These times afford individual players the opportunity to develop and mature, both physically and emotionally. They can work on the nuances of their positions without the pressure of absorbing a game plan. They also develop chemistry with their teammates, something of tremendous value, though often understated.

The members of the 2016 recruiting class who took redshirt years expressed joy at seeing the season end. Now they get to compete for playing time—and they are ready to make their marks, both individually and collectively.

"A lot of our class has potential," Belmar said. "They just need to keep their minds right, keep in the weight room and get bigger, faster and stronger. We'll do our thing." 



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MAKING THE MOST OF A 2ND OPPORTUNITY

Seth Allen started his collegiate career at Maryland, but decided to transfer to Virginia Tech, putting his faith in Buzz Williams and playing a large role in turning around the Hokies' basketball fortunes
by Jimmy Robertson

Deborah Allen worked a full-time job during the day and another in the mornings and evenings while raising four children, and she struggled enough to get all of her “mom” chores done during the course of a day.

But her youngest kid often made matters a touch more difficult, particularly when it came to getting the laundry finished. He routinely pulled socks out of the laundry basket, backed up and launched “jumpers” — in a precursor to his future.

Tiring of finding socks scattered throughout the house, she decided that he needed to find a more appropriate venue to work on his blossoming game. One day, as Seth Allen plucked Cheerios from a bowl, he fielded a jersey from his mom, who told him it was time to move from the living room to the court.

“I was 4 or 5,” Allen said. “I had my first rec game, and that was a big moment in my life.”

Allen — who interestingly does everything right handed except shoot — has been playing basketball ever since and now arguably stands as the most talented member on a Virginia Tech men’s basketball team enjoying its best season in a decade. The Hokies last made the NCAA Tournament in 2007, and behind Allen and a lot of other experienced, versatile parts, they appear well positioned for a return following a 10-year hiatus.

Depending on whom one asks, Allen may not be the most talented athlete in his family. His father, Joe, played football at Arizona State. His older brother, Brandon, played basketball at Mount Olive in North Carolina and his older sister, Starr, played at Virginia State before giving up the sport to concentrate on academics. Another older brother, Cameron, was a good athlete, too.

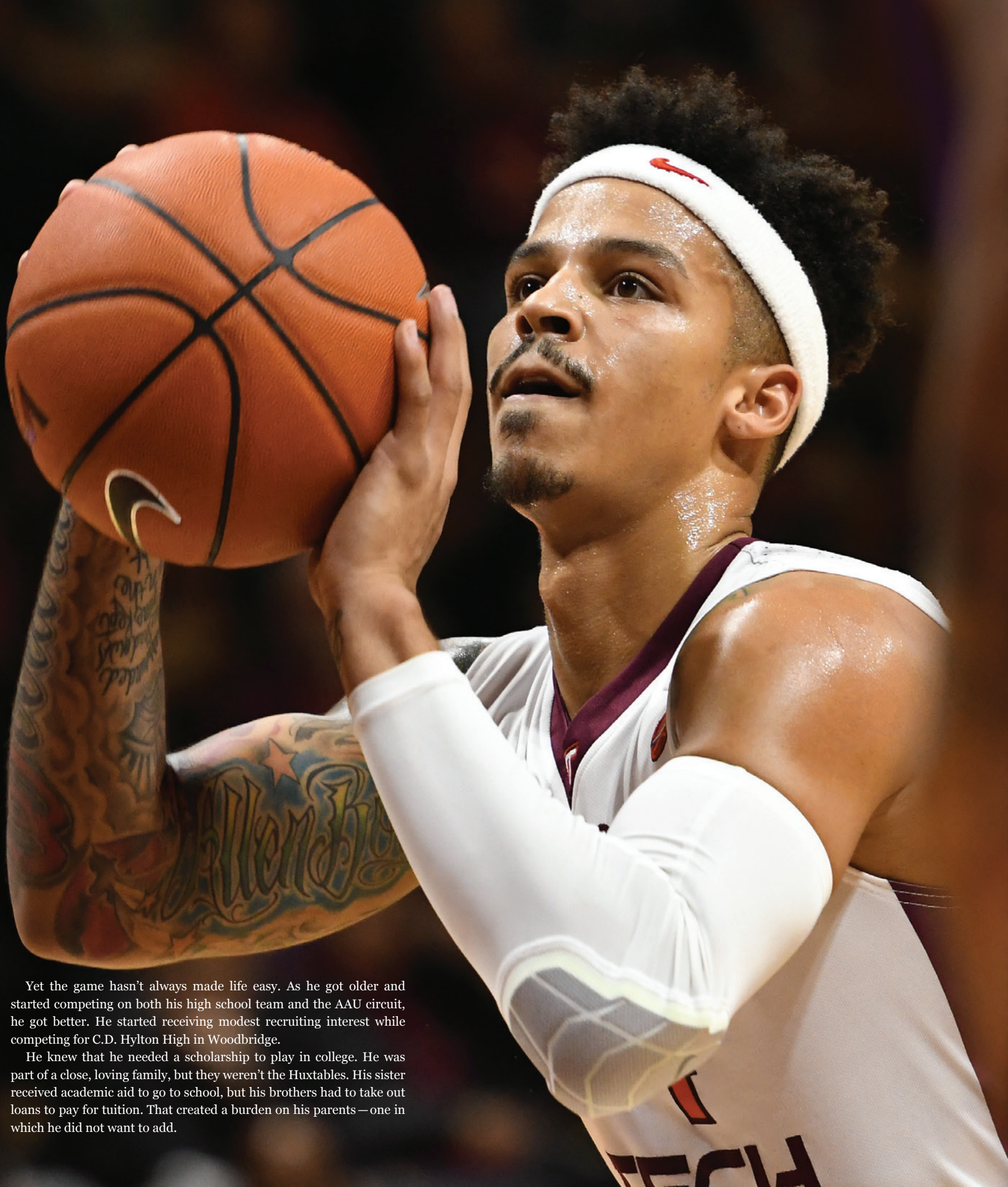
Cameron is the oldest of the quartet, while Brandon finished at Mount Olive in 2011. They tortured their youngest sibling in pick-up games held in the driveway of the family’s home in Woodbridge, Virginia, just south of Washington, D.C. They’d swat his shot and then make him run down the hill next to the driveway to retrieve the ball.

The constant rejections ticked off Seth, but he never once thought about quitting. He fetched the ball, ran back up the hill and yelled, ‘Check up,’ eager to resume the game in a masochistic sort of way.

“Being able to compete with older people gets you better,” he said. “I’d get my tail beat all the time. I’d get my shot blocked, and then I’d have to run down the hill and go get the ball. I would never quit. I always kept going at them. It [the game of basketball] was my escape away from everything. It’s never done me wrong.”

Yet the game hasn’t always made life easy. As he got older and started competing on both his high school team and the AAU circuit, he got better. He started receiving modest recruiting interest while competing for C.D. Hylton High in Woodbridge.

He knew that he needed a scholarship to play in college. He was part of a close, loving family, but they weren’t the Huxtables. His sister received academic aid to go to school, but his brothers had to take out loans to pay for tuition. That created a burden on his parents — one in which he did not want to add.



men's basketball spotlight seth allen

With that in mind, he decided to transfer to Fredericksburg Christian Academy, a private school in Fredericksburg. The move would allow him to play better against competition and gain more exposure.

But the move came with a price.

“When I went to the private school, it was an hour away,” Allen said. “That first year, I didn’t have a driver’s license, so I had to live with random families and get rides to school every day. I just tried to make it work. That was tough, just sleeping in a house that isn’t yours and just finding a place to live the next day.

“Sometimes, my dad could drop me off before he had to be at work, and I would sit outside the school for two hours until it opened. It would be freezing cold [in the winter]. But we always found a way to make it work. It made me really tough, and it made me focus on basketball even more. When they opened the school, I’d just go in the gym until school started and shoot the whole time. It really widened my eyes. If you want something, you have to go get it.”

The move ultimately paid off, as Allen received a little more interest. He wasn’t a nationally known name necessarily, but a solid “three-star” recruit. Virginia offered him a scholarship, but Maryland’s newly hired coach at the time, Mark Turgeon, showed him the most affection.

College Park was 40 minutes from the Allen house, allowing his family easy access to watch him play. Turgeon recognized the importance of family to Allen and showed his parents the most respect of any of the suitors. Allen became his first recruit.

As a freshman, he enjoyed a solid campaign, averaging nearly eight points per game and scoring 16 points in the Terps’ upset win over then-No. 2 Duke. As a sophomore, he averaged 13.4 points per game.

But something was amiss. At the end of his sophomore season, he decided to ask Turgeon for a release to transfer to another school.

“There were a lot of factors,” Allen said. “It was happiness. I felt like I needed a change. They were leaving the ACC [for the Big Ten], and I love the ACC because you’re playing the best teams ever. It’s hard to make it to the [NCAA] tournament, but the exposure you’re getting from the ACC is like none other. There is no other conference better than this conference.”

Turgeon had secured a commitment from Melo Trimble, a McDonald’s All-American from Upper Marlboro, Maryland, so many speculated that Allen left because of that. Allen denies that.

“Nah, he [Turgeon] was going to start me and Melo together,” Allen said. “We were going to play the 1 and the 2. The best teams play with two guards like that on the floor. Villanova played with two guards last year. Duke has played two guards. Louisville had Russ Smith and Peyton Siva [when it won the national championship in 2013]. It wasn’t that.”

Allen went through the recruiting process yet again — only this time, with considerable more interest. Almost every big-time school checked in, including Virginia Tech, with its new coach, Buzz Williams.

Continued on page 28

MAKING THE MOST

Continued from page 27

Hired from Marquette to rebuild the Hokies' program, Williams went after anyone who brought talent to the roster — transfers, junior college players, etc. He scored a conversation with Allen's parents and set to winning them over.

"He took the process through them, and I was like, 'Hold up now,'" Allen said, chuckling.

Of course, he went about winning over Allen as well, but not in a traditional sense. Then again, nothing Williams does can be construed as traditional.

Nearly all of their conversations focused on life situations, academics and Allen's plans for his future. The unique approach gradually started to win over Allen, who decided to visit Tech's campus — and committed on his way home.

"We didn't talk about basketball when I came here," Allen said. "We talked about everything else. He knew I knew basketball, and I knew that he knew basketball. It was more than that."

"I've never had a coach recruit me like he did. He recruited me really hard, and in my heart, I really felt like he wanted me and believed in me. That's all you want in a coach. It doesn't matter where you're at or what you're doing. As long as a coach believes in you, that's all you need."

He wanted to be a part of a Tech turnaround, but his biggest concern centered on whether he would have enough time. It usually takes at least three to four years to turn around a program. He would be available for just two.

But he decided to gamble on Williams, seeing how he turned junior college players into stars in just two years. He sat out the year as required of transfers by the NCAA, and last year, he worked to get the Hokies back to postseason play.

Mission accomplished, as Tech played in the NIT last season, its first postseason bid since the 2010-11 season. The Hokies won 20 games for the first time since that 2010-11 season as well. The program improved a whopping nine games from the previous season. For his part, Allen averaged 14.7 points, 3.0 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game.

"Going to the last-place team in the ACC and having a nine-game improvement my first year and having a 20-win season ... I can't believe we did it," Allen said. "Looking back, it was so hard. People said it couldn't be done. They picked us last."

"They still picked us 10th this year. There is still no belief. Part of me likes that. Part of me wants my respect because we just did something that had never been done in the ACC before. But part of me is like, 'OK, that's what got us here in the first place, playing like underdogs.' So we're just going to keep doing it."

Allen continues to do his part. His scoring is down this season, largely because of the depth and talent in the Hokies' lineup. He committed more than 100 turnovers a year ago, but his assists are up and turnovers are down this season. Plus, he shoots it at better than 50 percent.

More importantly, the Hokies continue to win, claiming victory in 11 of their 12 non-conference games.

"We can go as far as we want to go," Allen said.

Allen graduates in May with a degree in sociology, but before putting that to use, he hopes

“

I've never had a coach recruit me like he did. He recruited me really hard, and in my heart, I really felt like he wanted me and believed in me. That's all you want in a coach. It doesn't matter where you're at or what you're doing. As long as a coach believes in you, that's all you need.

Seth Allen

on Tech coach Buzz Williams”

”

to get a shot at playing in the NBA. He also is willing to play in Europe.

Once the ball stops bouncing, he wants to get into coaching, preferably at the college level. Williams told him that he wants to hire him when that day comes.

It would be an interesting end to Allen's basketball story—a kid whose basketball career began by tossing socks in a laundry basket, who had never been out of the city, leaving his beloved family to transfer to Virginia Tech and the mountains of Southwest Virginia, and returning to the school to coach.

Allen hopes that day is far away, though the thought carries with it a certain appeal.

"I'm going to miss that Hokie Stone and West End," he said, with a smile.

Then he added, "I've had a wonderful experience here. Being able to be accepted as an outsider, it's like, 'Welcome to Tech.' People are just so nice. This town is full of good people."

"I love Tech. I'm kind of sad I'm leaving."

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READY TO REPEAT BEBEVL

The Tech men's track and field team is aiming for another ACC crown, while the women's squad feels that it has positioned itself to contend for one, as the Hokies get set to launch the 2017 season
by Jimmy Robertson



Neil Gourley

The ongoing renovations to Rector Field House call for the building of an area to display the Virginia Tech track and field teams' ACC championship trophies among other awards and honors.

The program desperately needs such an area. Dave Cianelli's office looks a little cluttered these days with 10 ACC team trophies tucked away in various places within his lair.

Cianelli, the director of Tech track and field and cross country, saw his Tech men's team demolish the competition at the ACC Outdoor Track and Field Championships last May in Tallahassee, Florida en route to the team's sixth ACC title. It was almost a perfect performance, as the Hokies won four gold medals and six silver medals, scoring 129 points and winning in a landslide (36 points).

"I've been coaching for 33 years, and that's happened maybe three times," Cianelli said of his team's performance. "Maybe four. In our sport, it doesn't happen much."

Bolstered by 14 seniors, the men's team appears to be in excellent shape to make yet another run at an ACC crown and finish high at the NCAA Championships. The women's team features 10 seniors, and that team should be much improved this upcoming season.

In preparation for the indoor season, which starts Jan. 13, Cianelli answered questions about his program.

Q: How much is the Rector Field House project going to help your programs?

DC: "I think the biggest thing is in recruiting because recruits will be able to see that we've invested in our sport, and I think that's important. They can see that track and field is important here at Virginia Tech. Then from a training aspect, it will be a much better situation for everyone, and then for our meets, this facility will allow us to showcase some of the better athletes. Overall, it helps everything."

Q: The men's team has won at least one ACC title in five of the past six years. Why have the men enjoyed so much success recently?

DC: "We've been fortunate in the recruiting process to attract some very good student-athletes that fit into our program. It starts with that, and that's a product of our staff identifying the right people. Identifying talent in our sport is pretty easy because you're working with numbers. You have something quantitative that you can compare. But you have to dig deeper to find who is going to be a good fit for your environment — Virginia Tech and our team. That's the

harder part. That takes time. The coaches have done a wonderful job of identifying the right fits."

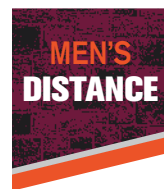
Q: The women's team finished 12th at the ACC's indoor meet and 9th at the outdoor meet last year. Yet you're optimistic about this group. Why?

DC: "I said last year that I really thought that this year would be a turning point based on the development of the kids that we have in the program and also this influx of freshmen that we have. Coaches are leery of expecting a lot out of freshmen, but I'm optimistic about this group contributing immediately, and that can put us in an area where we can start talking about a championship. Even if we don't win one this year, I think we're going to be close, and to me, that's a key. If you get close, then the athletes can kind of feel it. It's more real to them. For us, I think this year will be that breakthrough year."

Q: What concerns you heading into this season?

DC: "Well, you've got to keep everyone healthy to have a shot. That's always key. But also, complacency is always a concern when you're coming off a successful year, like we had on the men's side. It's human nature to sometimes relax a little bit. Even as coaches, I think we do that. What I try to do with the staff — and they carry that over to the team — once the previous year is over, it's over. We never talk about the previous year. I never say, 'You're trying to defend a title.' They're not. That title was won by that group. This group is a different group, and they're going to have to establish what they want, and they may go about it a different way."

"But this is a pretty mature team overall, so I'm not too worried about them becoming complacent. I think there is a lot of leadership, and I think it's a group that is motivated. We lost a couple of key people to graduation. These were people that were at a high level and contributing, but also ones that provided a lot of leadership. Now, other individuals will have to fill that role. We have those people, which is good."



TOP RETURNERS

Andrew Gaiser, Daniel Jaskowak, Peter Seuffer, Neil Gourley, Patrick Joseph, Brent Musselman, Vincent Ciattei, Diego Zarate

NEWCOMERS

Fitsum Seyoum, Jack Joyce, Drew Piazza

OVERVIEW

This group lost arguably the best distance runner in Tech history in Thomas Curtin, but the returning group possesses both talent and depth in the middle distance and longer distance events.

In the longer distances — the 3,000- 5,000- and 10,000-meter runs — Gaiser, Jaskowak, Seuffer and Musselman form a formidable quartet. Gaiser, who scored for Tech in the 10,000 at the ACC Outdoor Championships last spring, and Jaskowak are coming off cross country seasons in which both earned All-NCAA Southeast Region and All-ACC honors. Those two serve as the leaders of the group.

Gourley, Joseph and Zarate lead the way in the middle distance events. Gourley earned second-team All-America honors in the 1,500 during the outdoor season last spring and won a silver medal at the ACC Championships in the same event. Zarate also excels in the 1,500, having won a gold medal at the USA Junior Outdoor Championships this past summer.

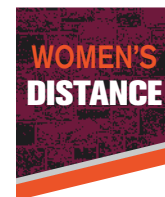
Joseph is a two-time All-American and two-time ACC champion. He earned second-team All-America honors in the 800 during the outdoor season and won silver in the same event at the ACC Championships.

Any of this contingent is capable of scoring at an ACC meet — or even winning.

DISTANCE COACH BEN THOMAS' TAKE

"Tommy Curtin is irreplaceable. You can't replace Tommy Curtin. He is arguably the best distance runner we ever had, but we also have more pieces overall. Guys like Andrew Gaiser really stepped up in the cross country season, as well as Daniel Jaskowak. They are both coming off the best fall they've ever had. Hopefully, a combination of individuals can replace some of the points we miss with Tommy Curtin gone."

"[In middle distances], we have a lot of experience coming back. We have Neil Gourley and Patrick Joseph. Transfer Drew Piazza has competed at a high level coming from New Hampshire. He's been to the NCAA Indoor Championships before, so I think he will really boost our efforts in the middle distance area as well."



TOP RETURNERS

Hanna Green, Shannon Morton, Tessa Riley, Abigail Motley, Katie Kennedy, Lauren Berman, Rachel Pocratsky

NEWCOMERS

Laurie Barton, Sara Freix, Kayla Richardson, Sarah Edwards

OVERVIEW

This season marks the final one for Green, a four-time All-American and the school record holder in the 800. She won the gold medal in the event at both ACC meets in 2016, earning All-America honors during the indoor season.

She anchors a mix of seniors and underclassmen. Morton, Motley and Riley, three seniors, bring experience, though Motley may take a redshirt year. Morton earned second-team All-America honors in the mile last winter and only has outdoor eligibility remaining. Riley possesses talent, but injuries seem to crop up at inopportune times for her. Hopefully, she stays healthy this spring and gives the Hokies some points in the distance events.

Kennedy and Pocratsky will be ones to watch this season. Kennedy, a junior, enjoyed a fantastic fall in which she earned All-NCAA Southeast Region and All-ACC honors in cross country. Pocratsky, a sophomore, earned All-ACC honors during both the indoor and outdoor seasons last year, excelling at both the 800 and the 1,500.

The freshmen ran well during the cross country season, and the coaches hope to see that carry over to the track. Overall, the group is deeper than last year.

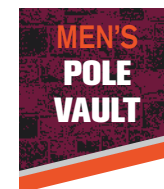
DISTANCE COACH BEN THOMAS' TAKE

"I see Hanna Green having a great year. She was No. 2 in the country last year in the 800 meters for the indoor season. She's looking good."

season preview track & field

She's overcome a few injury bugs that she had in the fall, but overall, she has been training very well. She is in her last indoor and outdoor season, so she is fired up and hoping to go after a national title.

"Freshmen Laurie Barton and Sarah Edwards are two really solid newcomers that can give us some strength as well. Katie Kennedy just came off her best cross country season ever. She has really stepped up her game, and I think she definitely has a chance to help us in the longer distances this track season. All those folks can really help us in trying to get back to the top of the ACC."



TOP RETURNERS

Torben Laidig, Brad Johnson, Jeffrey Linta, James Steck, Deakin Volz

NEWCOMER

Jaelyn Demory

OVERVIEW

This group claimed the top seven spots at last spring's ACC Outdoor Championships, paced by Chris Uhle's gold medal. Uhle graduated, but the rest of the group returns and should provide the points needed for the Hokies to be in the hunt for an ACC team crown at both the indoor and outdoor meets.

Laidig and Volz lead the bunch. Laidig won a silver medal at the NCAA Championships last June, while Volz set the school record in winning the gold medal at the IAAF U20 World Championships in Poland this past July.

The others are no less impressive. Johnson, the 2015 ACC outdoor champion in the event, won a bronze medal at the league's indoor meet last February and then earned second-team All-America honors at the NCAA's outdoor meet. Linta finished fourth at the ACC's outdoor meet, while Steck finished in the top six at both ACC events.

The expectations are high for this group — and they should be. No other program in the ACC boasts the talent and depth of the Hokies in this event.

POLE VAULT COACH BOB PHILLIPS' TAKE

"We have three All-Americans in Torben Laidig, Deakin Volz and Brad Johnson. Torben and Brad have been conference champions, and Deakin was just a freshman last year who medaled at the conference outdoor meet and went on to have an outstanding summer season. He won the U20 World Championships in Poland, so those guys are going to contribute a lot to the leadership of the team. With the quality of athletes that we have coming back, I really think that they can accomplish some really great things this year."



TOP RETURNERS

Erica Hjerpe, Kristen Lee, Hannah Meador, Olivia Privitera,

NEWCOMERS

None

OVERVIEW

The women's squad lacks the depth of the Hokies' male counterparts in this discipline, particularly after Erinn Schaal and Emma King — two point scorers at the ACC's outdoor meet — departed. But that doesn't mean the Hokies plan on throwing away points in the pole vault, as three of the four returners scored points at the ACC's meets.

Meador, a junior, recorded the team's highest finish in the event, coming in sixth at the ACC outdoor meet last spring. She also finished eighth at the league's indoor meet, and one would expect her to take the next step in her development.

The same applies to Hjerpe, who came in seventh at the league's indoor meet, but injuries limited her during the outdoor season. If she remains healthy, she could contend for a medal at either league meet this season.

Continued on page 32



Torben Laidig

season preview track & field

OVERVIEW

The Hokies saw arguably their most consistent thrower depart in Tomas Kruzliak, a five-time All-American and the 2013 national champion in the hammer throw. But three ACC medalists return, including two who qualified for the NCAA Outdoor Championships—and one who earned All-America honors.

This group figures to be much stronger during the outdoor season than the indoor one, as they all excel more in the outdoor events—the javelin throw and the discus.

Barta leads the way after a fantastic 2016 season in which he became the first Tech track athlete ever to earn All-America honors in the discus. The ACC silver medalist finished third at the NCAA Outdoor Championships and holds the school record in the event. He competed in the shot put during the indoor season, but did not place at the ACC's indoor meet.

The Muhar brothers are javelin specialists. Matija Muhar, the younger of the two, won the ACC title on just one throw, and he qualified for the NCAA Championships, where he finished 19th. He underwent shoulder surgery in the offseason, but should be ready for action later this

spring. Jaka Muhar finished second behind his brother at the ACC's outdoor meet.

Like Barta, McKenny competes in the discus, and he also competed in the shot put during the indoor season. He'll be looking to provide points toward the Hokies' team totals at league meets.

For the first time in a long time, the men's throws group lacks a specialist in the hammer throw—historically the program's most successful event. But the Hokies possess the talent to win the javelin and discus, or finish highly in those events.

THROWS COACH GREG JACK'S TAKE

“Matija [Muhar] had a great fall in terms of training. I really like how he is progressing. Jaka [Muhar] is an outstanding student-athlete. He is an all-around guy. He is always there to help us out at the conference and national level. The two of those guys are the best one-two punch in our league. They went one and two last year [in the javelin], and I fully expect them to do it again.

“Marek [Barta] is a super talented guy. He placed third at the national championship, and we want to improve on that. Why come

in second when you can come in first? He definitely has all the ability in the world, and we look forward to seeing how the season progresses for him.”



TOP RETURNERS

Irena Sediva, Pavla Kuklova,
Eva Vivod

NEWCOMERS

Emma Thor,
Kajsa Wennberg

OVERVIEW

The Tech women's team may not be getting points from this group at the ACC indoor meet, as this group, like with the men's group, excels in the outdoor events—the javelin throw and the hammer throw.

But the Hokies could finish first and second at the ACC outdoor meet in both the hammer throw and the javelin. They realistically have that type of talent.

Sediva anchors the group. The 2015 national champion in the javelin suffered an injured heel during the ACC Championships last spring and that prevented her from repeating as both the ACC champion and the NCAA champion in the event. But the school record holder should be the top contender for both titles this season.

Vivod is not quite at the level of Sediva, but not far off. She won silver in the javelin at the ACC's outdoor meet, and in 2014, earned All-America honors.

Kuklova is a threat to win ACC gold in the hammer throw. She finished second a year ago at the league's outdoor meet, and while she missed on qualifying for the NCAA Championships, she goes into this season as a contender for All-America honors.

The two freshmen, Thor and Wennberg, are two talented hammer throwers from Sweden. Thor ranked as one of the top 15 junior throwers in the world following the 2015 season.

Provided they stay healthy and continue to progress, this group alone could amass enough points to propel the Hokies into contender status for the ACC title during the outdoor season.

THROWS COACH GREG JACK'S TAKE

“We are looking nice and loaded for the women's team. We have a nice little combination of experience and youth, and this is going to be one pretty cool year. I am excited to see how it all plays out.”



RETURNERS

Mackenzie Muldoon,
Ryan Shepard,
Will Kendall, James Carver

NEWCOMER

James Holt

OVERVIEW

The Hokies are rebuilding in the jumps, as they lost both Manuel Ziegler and David Prince off last season's squad. So unproven guys will be looking to add to a very good men's team.

Muldoon appears to be the one best ready to help. Early in his career, he competed mostly in the long and high jumps, but last year, he finished seventh in the decathlon at the ACC Outdoor Championships. Tech's staff feels that he could be an upper-level decathlete this season.

Carver returns after a season in which he competed at the ACC Indoor Championships last February, coming in 13th in the high jump. Shepard and Kendall also compete in the high jump and will be looking to help the Hokies in that event, though neither competed at an ACC championship meet last season.

Freshman James Holt enters the picture this season as a competitor in the long jump. He twice won medals in the long jump at the Pennsylvania indoor state meet during his prep career.

Continued on page 34



TOP RETURNERS

Jaka Muhar, Marek Barta,
Collin McKenny, Matija Muhar

NEWCOMERS

None



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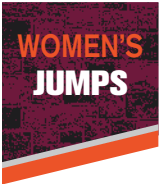
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JUMPS COACH PAUL ZALEWSKI'S TAKE

“I’m looking for Mackenzie Muldoon to do some things this year. He had a great season last year, and he had a really good fall. He is way ahead of where he was at this point last year. James Carver had a great fall as well. He is coming off a solid freshman season, so I am looking for him to step up. Again, he is another one that is well ahead of where he was at this point last year.

“We had a great fall. The team has done really well. I am excited about where we are at this point. Most of the kids that have come back are already ahead of where they were at this point last year, so that is exciting for me.”



RETURNERS

Emily Miller,
Kacia Vines

NEWCOMER

Eszter Bajnok

OVERVIEW

The women’s team lacked depth in the jumps last season. Vines competed in the long jump several times during the outdoor season, but competed in the 400-meter dash at both ACC meets and probably serves as a better fit in that event than in the jumps.

Miller competed in the high jump on a couple of occasions during the outdoor season, winning the event at the Highlander Invitational and coming in fifth at the Hurricane Invitational. She may be more of a multi-event specialist, though, with the potential to score points in the pentathlon and heptathlon.

The one to keep an eye on in this small group is Bajnok, who was the Hungarian Junior Female Athlete of the Year in 2016. She placed seventh in the long jump at the IAAF World U-20 Championships in July and holds the Hungarian junior record in both the long and

triple jumps. She could be a contender for a medal at both ACC meets this season.

JUMPS COACH PAUL ZALEWSKI'S TAKE

“Eszter had a phenomenal high school career with a lot of great honors and accomplishments for her home country, so we are really looking forward to her having a huge impact on the women’s side. The talent that I have seen out of her and what she has been able to accomplish up until this point is unbelievable, but we also have to take what she has done and add in some of the things that we do here. That might be a little different than what she is used to. I think the sky is the limit for her. There is a lot of upside still.”



RETURNERS

Jared Bane, Samuel Denmark, Corey Hackett-Greene,
Dante Price, Austin Kolko, Jack Strollo, Alexander
Merritt, Aaron Simpson, Darius Watkins

NEWCOMERS

Greg Chiles, Matthew Baker, Brandon Thomas,
Michael Davenport

OVERVIEW

Sprints and hurdles coach Tim Vaught continues the process of rebuilding the sprints/hurdles areas on both the men’s and women’s teams. On the men’s side, he returns a talented sprinter in Watkins, who scored points at the ACC outdoor meet this past season by finishing seventh in the 200 and serving as part of the 4x100-meter relay team that was seventh. He should score points at both ACC meets this season.

Vaught hopes two transfers—Chiles and Hackett-Greene—have major impacts this season. Chiles competed in the 400 and 400-meter hurdles at South Carolina, and he participated in two SEC championships meets, giving the Hokies big-time experience. Hackett-Greene transferred to Tech from Coastal Carolina in 2015 and competed

for the Hokies during the indoor season last winter (he took a redshirt year during the outdoor campaign). He won the 400 at the Big South meet as a freshman.

There are a lot of pieces in this group. Hopefully, several emerge to add to what appears to be an already strong men’s team.

SPRINTS/HURDLES COACH TIM VAUGHT'S TAKE

“The men’s team (overall) won the conference championship last year. They are on a high, and they want to keep going. My group is a small group, and we added more sprinters this year. It has given us extra motivation to be able to go back to the conference meet and have a big impact on the conference championship this year.”



RETURNERS

Courtney Blanden, Jada Gundran,
Ama-Selina Tchume, Shanel Burr,
Nora McKiver, Kacia Vines

NEWCOMERS

Alicia Bush, Amanda Thomas,
Kyra Parker

OVERVIEW

McKiver anchors an experienced group of sprinters who hope to produce on the ACC stage. The senior enjoyed her best indoor season in 2016 when she earned All-ACC honors in the 200 and the 400. Unfortunately, an injury set her back, and she missed the outdoor season, but the Hokies are expecting big things this year.

Blanden ran a personal best in the 400 at the ACC outdoor meet, and she qualified for the 200 at the NCAA East Regional. Burr gained ACC experience last season, competing in the 60- and 100-meter hurdles at the league’s indoor and outdoor meets, respectively. Gundran ran a personal best in the 400-meter hurdles at the ACC’s outdoor meet, while Bush was a three-time state champion in high school and could



Nora McKiver

be a factor in the 400 early in her career.

There is a lot of potential in this group. Continued progression could result in many of them scoring many points for the women’s team at ACC meets this year—ones they’ll need to complete for a league title.

SPRINTS/HURDLES COACH TIM VAUGHT'S TAKE

“Nora is like Darius—she is one of the leaders. Courtney is definitely making strides and was the only sprinter who made outdoor regionals last year. She is a hard worker, and she wants to be No. 1.

“We are going to make an impact—on both sides. Last year was last year. I always tell them that last year is in the past. We have nothing to do about that now, but we have everything to do with the future. They have to stay focus and keep working hard, and great things are going to come out of this year.”

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Jared Haught grew up in a rural part of West Virginia, and his humble roots have instilled in him a work ethic that has led to him becoming an All-American and possible national title contender

by Jimmy Robertson

FROM *The Country* TO THE **BIG TIME**

A cursory glance at the Virginia Tech wrestling roster reveals the weight classes for each of the Hokies' 28 wrestlers, but the best way to size up any student-athlete isn't through the information found on an online roster, but through the oft-forgotten means of communication known as conversation.

Such a means would lead one to deduce rather quickly that Jared Haught is a small town, country kid. Haught himself would agree—for the most part.

"There's no town, really," he said.

The least heralded and least known of the six wrestlers who earned All-America honors for the Hokies last season calls a remote spot in West Virginia his home. He grew up on a farm, and he prefers casting a line to congregating at any of Blacksburg's downtown establishments. He even saves his meal money to purchase fishing lures.

But judging this young man from his rural upbringing would be utterly foolish. Academically, he continues his dogged pursuit of a degree in mechanical engineering. Athletically, he knows how to work, he personifies toughness, and most importantly to Virginia Tech faithful, he carries both over to the mat, where he quietly could be a national championship contender this season.

Haught never dreamed of such lofty goals growing up on the family farm in Calhoun

County, a secluded chunk of acreage north of Charleston, the state's capital. He dabbled in football as a kid and only got into wrestling after watching his older brother, Jacob, take up the sport in middle school.

"There is not a whole lot to do where I'm from, so I just came and watched practice and played around," Haught said. "I shot basketball. I didn't really do much. I just watched him, and that's when I started thinking about wrestling."

He decided to attempt the sport, and it quickly became a passion that rivaled fishing. He excelled at it, and his father, Tracy, saw his youngest son's potential. More importantly, he invested in it.

Tracy Haught enrolled his youngest son into a youth wrestling club in Parkersburg, a town roughly an hour and 10 minutes away from the family's home. The opportunity provided Jared with better coaching and better competition.

Of course, it came with a sacrifice. Tracy Haught makes the drive to Parkersburg every day to the chemical plant where he works. He was used to driving, as most in rural communities are, but getting Jared to practices meant he and wife Patricia needed to coordinate logistics. That, in turn, meant a lot of late evenings.

"He'd drive to work in the morning in

Parkersburg, and then once I got out of school, my mom would drive me halfway," Jared said. "He'd drive back from Parkersburg halfway, pick me up, take me back to Parkersburg for a 6 o'clock practice. We'd finish around 8 and come home. We'd get back around 9:15."

"It wasn't too bad. I guess I got used to it. It was kind of tough at the beginning, but I was a kid. Whenever I was going to the youth stuff, I had a Game Boy, and I'd play it in the car. That kept me busy."

The Haughts gradually tired of the commuting. In the summer before Jared's junior year of high school, they decided to enroll Jared at Parkersburg High. They rented a small house, and Jared stayed with his father during the week, while his mom lived in the family's home. She came over on weekends, or they returned to the family's house in Calhoun County.

Most teenagers balk at the idea of switching schools and leaving their friends behind. But Jared showed maturity beyond his years, taking a long-term approach.

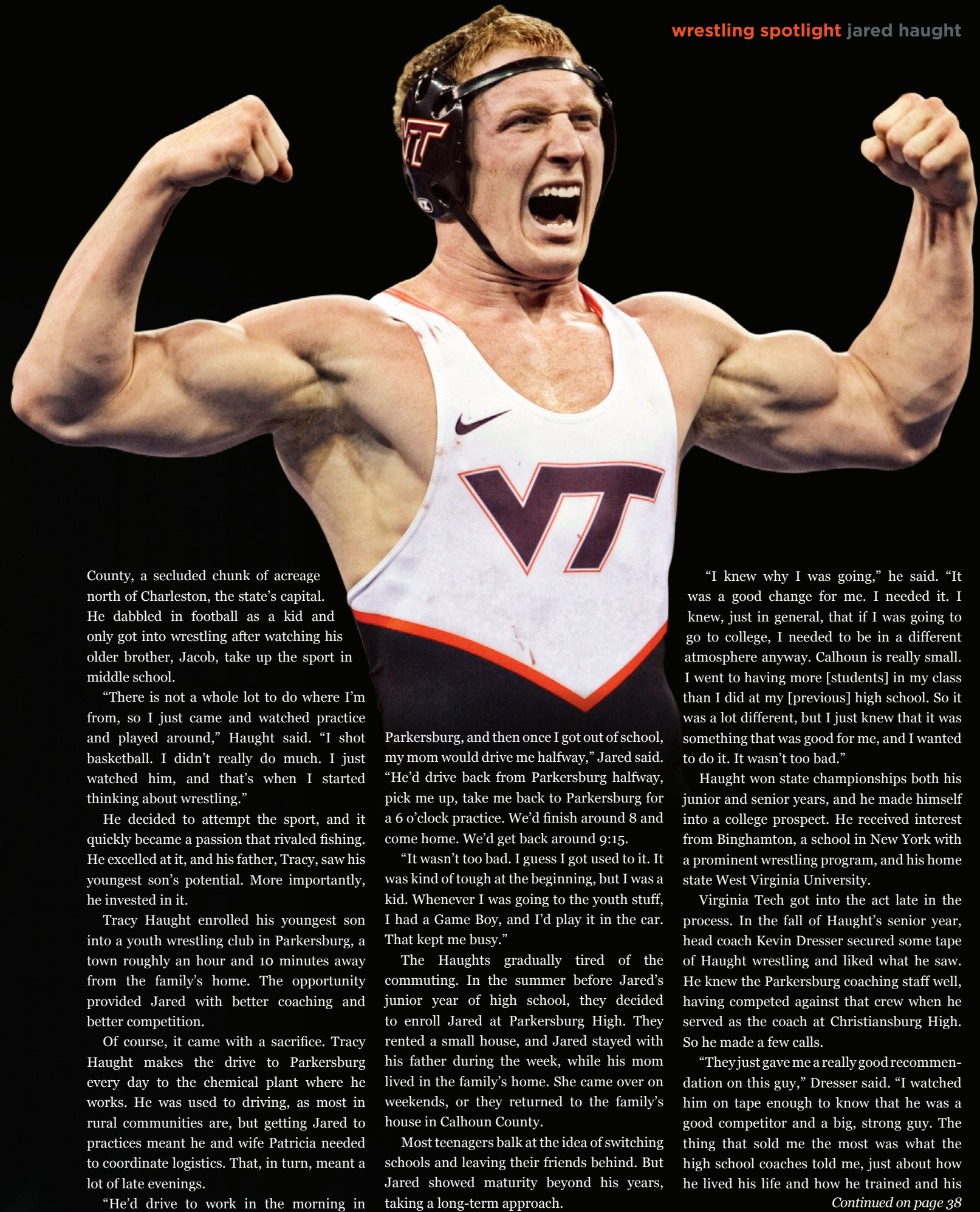
"I knew why I was going," he said. "It was a good change for me. I needed it. I knew, just in general, that if I was going to go to college, I needed to be in a different atmosphere anyway. Calhoun is really small. I went to having more [students] in my class than I did at my [previous] high school. So it was a lot different, but I just knew that it was something that was good for me, and I wanted to do it. It wasn't too bad."

Haught won state championships both his junior and senior years, and he made himself into a college prospect. He received interest from Binghamton, a school in New York with a prominent wrestling program, and his home state West Virginia University.

Virginia Tech got into the act late in the process. In the fall of Haught's senior year, head coach Kevin Dresser secured some tape of Haught wrestling and liked what he saw. He knew the Parkersburg coaching staff well, having competed against that crew when he served as the coach at Christiansburg High. So he made a few calls.

"They just gave me a really good recommendation on this guy," Dresser said. "I watched him on tape enough to know that he was a good competitor and a big, strong guy. The thing that sold me the most was what the high school coaches told me, just about how he lived his life and how he trained and his

Continued on page 38



FROM *The Country* TO THE **BIG TIME**

Continued from page 37

Dresser made a visit to the Haught home and invited Haught to come down on an official visit. He toured the facilities and watched the Hokies' football team play a Thursday night game against Florida State. He got along well with the current crop of wrestlers, and it helped that his high school coaches recommended coming to Tech.

An added bonus was Tech's close proximity to his home. The four-hour drive afforded his parents the opportunity to watch him wrestle frequently.

Haught signed with the Hokies—and he went to work. He took a redshirt season his first year on campus in part because Chris Penny was firmly entrenched at 197 pounds for the Hokies. He also needed to get stronger and work on his technique. He possessed tools, but was raw.

"He was an average college wrestler when he got here," Dresser said of Haught. "That might be generous. But I wasn't worried. I knew he'd be the kind of guy to progress."

"The thing about Jared is that he's such a nice kid. That's the one thing that holds him back sometimes on the mat. Sometimes, he has a hard time flipping that switch when he gets on the mat. Especially in the sport of wrestling, there has to be a warrior within you, and that warrior has to have a mean

work ethic. He wasn't a guy that you looked at and thought, 'Wow, this guy is a super athlete,' but he was a good enough athlete that, if he had that work ethic that they were telling me about, then I felt he could be really good."

streak. Then when you step off the wrestling mat, it's OK to be Jared Haught, the really nice kid, which he is.

"We need for him to flip that switch all the way and be ferocious. We obviously saw that at the end of last year. We saw a guy that was going after people."

Haught qualified for the NCAA Championships as a redshirt freshman, but really received national acclaim last March when he earned All-America honors by finishing in the top eight of his weight class. He lost in the second round, yet came back in the consolation rounds to win four straight matches.

The last of those wins came against Duke's Conner Hartman, a longtime nemesis who actually had beaten Haught for the ACC title two weeks prior to the NCAA Championships. Haught knocked off Hartmann 5-2 at the NCAAs and ultimately finished in sixth place.

"That was really fun, really awesome," Haught said. "Beating him, that was a really a good feeling. I had made it past that milestone of beating someone that had beaten me. I didn't have a great Saturday [the final day at the NCAA Championships], but in the end, I got the All-America honors, and that was cool. Everyone back home was really proud of me."

That win also got him thinking about the future—and wanting more. Haught probably sold himself short when he arrived in Blacksburg. After all, such stories aren't commonplace, ones of rural kids earning such accolades.

Yet, why can't a young man of his background accomplish amazing things? He asks himself that question now.

"Being an All-American, that was my original goal going into college," Haught

said. "I thought that was all there was to it and maybe that was all of my capability, but now I see past that. I definitely think that a national championship is realistic, and that's my new goal."

That may be a tall task, considering his weight class features two of the more dominant wrestlers nationally—and two guys who defeated him earlier this season. Minnesota's Brett Pfarr beat him at the Cliff Keen Invitational in Las Vegas, and Missouri's J'den Cox edged him when the Hokies and the Tigers wrestled in a dual meet on Nov. 20.

The Cox match, though, gave Haught some confidence. Cox is an Olympic bronze medalist and two-time national champion, but he only beat Haught 2-0.

"I felt like I was a little conservative," Haught said. "I put him [Cox] on a pedestal, and I shouldn't have. I wrestled an OK match. I think there is a lot of room for improvement. I look forward to wrestling him again."

"He's a guy that can contend for a title," Dresser said. "I've seen guys like him wrestle on the stage on Saturday night. He improved last year from December to March more than anybody on our team. He exploded from December to March. Exploded. He needs to have that same explosion."

Haught knows the road won't be easy, but then he never chooses the easy route in anything. For example, most athletes pick less strenuous majors. Only the most ambitious balance a subject such as mechanical engineering with their sport, and Haught and a few other student-athletes, including teammate Brooks Wilding—an aerospace engineering major—form study groups as a way to help each other.

But engineering practically runs in

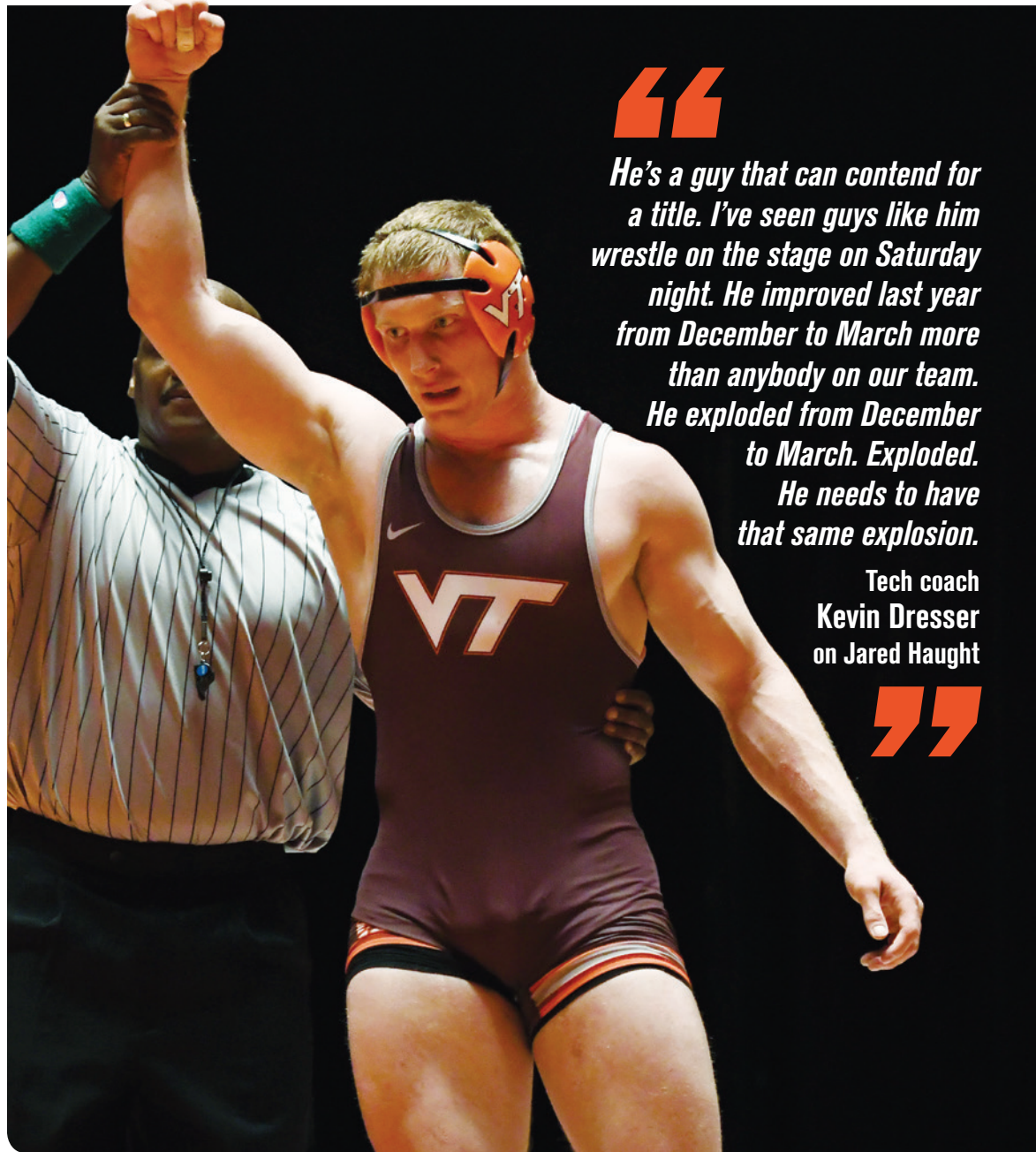
the Haught family. Tracy Haught works as an industrial mechanic, and Jared said his grandfather refers to himself as an "uneducated engineer." He fondly recalls days of wrenching on tractors with his grandfather on the farm.

"He told me it was a good field to look at," Haught said. "A lot of people told me it was too hard to do with wrestling, so I came in thinking I'd do biology or something. Then I took a biology class, and I thought, 'No, I don't want to do this.' Then I switched, and just said that if it was too hard, or I couldn't balance the course load, then I'd change and do something else. It hasn't been too, too rough."

Haught hopes to spend this summer performing an internship, while also training for his final season at Tech. But his focus remains on more immediate goals, such as leading the Hokies to another top-four finish at the NCAA Championships, earning All-America honors, contending for a national championship and surviving 15 hours worth of engineering courses.

If that seems like a full load, it is. But this young man from a rural outpost in West Virginia is up for any challenge.

After all, given his roots, he knows no other way. **VT**



“

He's a guy that can contend for a title. I've seen guys like him wrestle on the stage on Saturday night. He improved last year from December to March more than anybody on our team. He exploded from December to March. Exploded. He needs to have that same explosion.

Tech coach
Kevin Dresser
on Jared Haught

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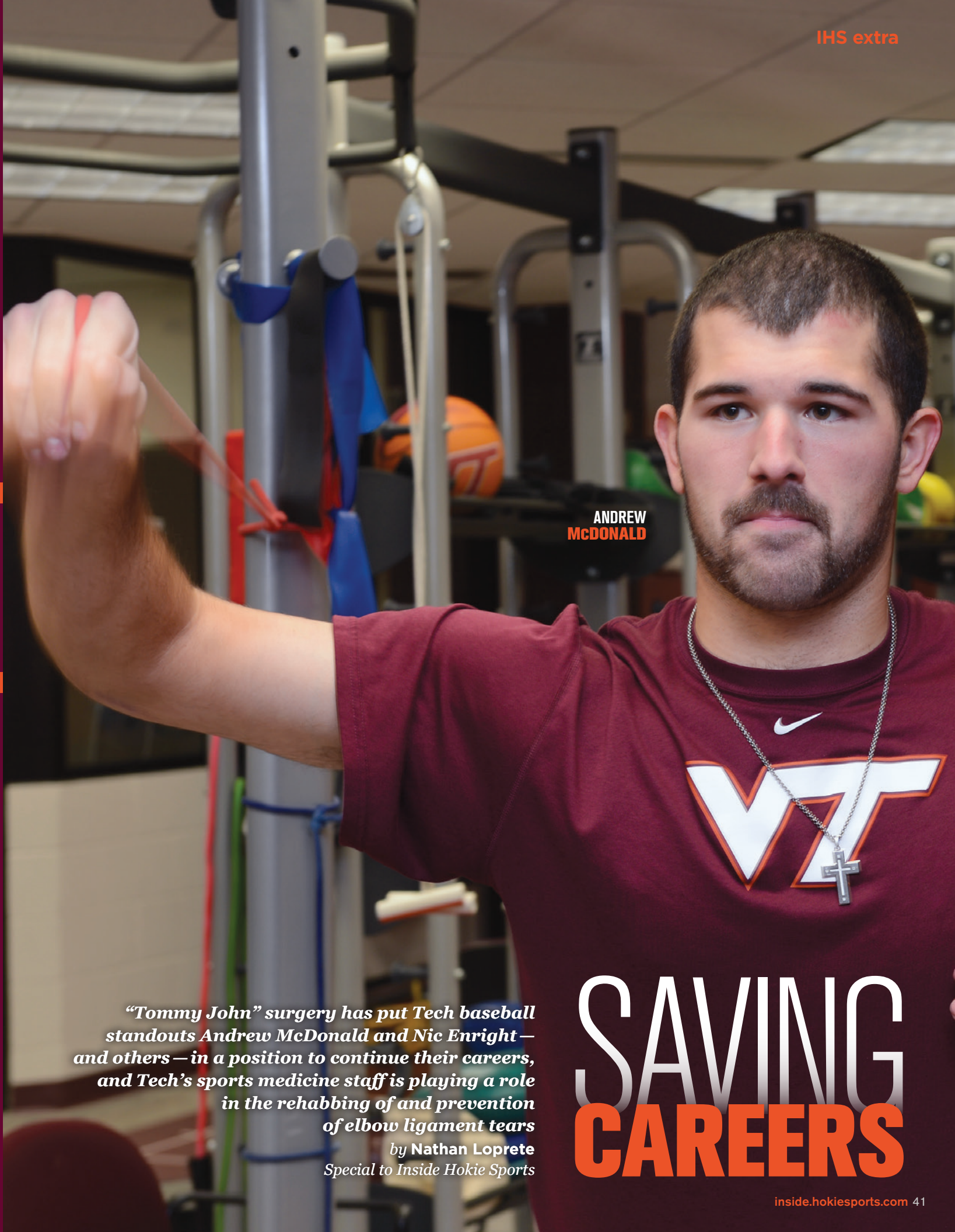
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Feb 5-8	Atlantic City / Resorts Casino & Hotel	350	Mar 23-29	Baseball Spring Training / Florida	895
Feb 11-19	Florida / The Grand Tour / Key West	1,465	Mar 27	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee, NC	40
Feb 13-15	Valentine's Day in the Smokies	450	Apr 1	Asheville Outlets / Spring Shopping	50
Feb 19-21	Sands Casino & Resort / Bethlehem, PA	275	Apr 3-7	Charleston & Savannah / Southern Spring	925
Feb 24-27	Daytona 300 Xfinity / Daytona 500	775	Apr 7-8	"Jonah" / Lancaster, PA	325
Feb 24 & 25	Southern Spring Show / Charlotte, NC	60	Apr 7-9	Washington / Cherry Blossom Festival	450
Feb 26-Mar 2	Mardi Gras / Mobile, AL	675	Apr 8 & 22	Biltmore House / Festival of Flowers	95
Feb 27	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee, NC	40	Apr 9-11	Sands Casino & Resort / Bethlehem, PA	275
Mar 3-5	Winter Wildlife Cruise / Virginia Beach	295	Apr 17	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee, NC	40
Mar 3 & 4	Southern Spring Show / Charlotte, NC	60	Apr 23-29	Louisiana Cajun Country	995
Mar 5-8	Atlantic City / Resorts Casino & Hotel	350	Apr 23-May 9	Great Southwest / California / Coach	2,625
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ANDREW
McDONALD

"Tommy John" surgery has put Tech baseball standouts Andrew McDonald and Nic Enright — and others — in a position to continue their careers, and Tech's sports medicine staff is playing a role in the rehabbing of and prevention of elbow ligament tears

by Nathan Loprete
Special to Inside Hokie Sports

SAVING CAREERS

SAVING CAREERS

On March 5, 2014, Virginia Tech was trailing William & Mary 6-0 at English Field when Hokie head coach Patrick Mason made the move. He decided to bring in Andrew McDonald, a 6-foot-6-inch freshman from Cincinnati, Ohio, to throw the final two innings. The freshman walked the first batter, but then got a strikeout and a double play to end the inning. In the ninth, he walked a batter and gave up a run-scoring triple before getting out of the frame.

McDonald's collegiate career was officially underway. Just as most college athletes do, he remembered his debut.

"I was a little nervous," he said. "I got hit that time, too. I took a one-hopper right off the leg. It was a funny way to release some tension."

McDonald earned three varsity letters while in high school, winning the Ohio High School Division 1 Player of the Year honor prior to arriving in Blacksburg. His freshman year at Tech featured ups and downs, but the future looked bright.

That all changed in 2015 when he found his career in jeopardy. During a bullpen session in the fall, he felt something wrong in his arm and didn't pitch for the remainder of the fall. He tried to come back during the offseason, but the discomfort came in waves.

Eventually, he went to a doctor, and the news was every pitcher's worst nightmare. The ulnar collateral ligament [UCL] in McDonald's elbow had ruptured, leaving holes

in the ligament. That required him to miss the season and undergo what many know today as "Tommy John" surgery. He became a statistic in the rising epidemic of UCL injuries sweeping across all levels of baseball.

"Everywhere around my arm, I had some kind of pain," he said. "There were times that it was a constant ache. I would throw some pitches, and as soon as I would release the ball, it would hurt."

The surgery usually requires taking a ligament from the wrist to replace the torn ligament, but McDonald was born without the ligament in both wrists. So the surgeons took a hamstring graft from his left hamstring to replace his UCL.

"They drill a hole through one of your bones, tie a knot in the ligament and put it through and wrap it around everywhere else it needs to go," McDonald said.

Anyone around the game knows that Tommy John surgery serves as the main way to repair such injuries. Doctors continue to perfect the procedure to get athletes back on the field faster. They also look for new ways to decrease the recovery time without putting the athlete in danger. Pitchers like McDonald are sharing their experience and providing valuable insight into the issue.

After strenuous rehab and conditioning, McDonald made his return Feb. 23, 2016—about 12 months after the surgery. He started against East Tennessee State, threw four shutout innings and earned the win. After the game, Mason talked about McDonald's road back.

"He's come a long way, worked really hard to put himself in a position to even be ready to throw now," Mason said.

McDonald completed the season in good health. He made eight appearances, starting four games.

Nic Enright, another Tech pitcher who actually was drafted out of high school by the

New York Mets and chose to go to college over the big leagues, shared a similar experience, undergoing Tommy John surgery in May of 2016. In high school, he was a four-year varsity player and named the Gatorade Player of the Year in Virginia. The right-handed ace from Richmond featured a fastball that topped out in the lower 90s. He made 12 appearances in 2016 and encountered some early struggles, but seemed to settle in as the season went along.

In late April in a game against Duke, Enright tried to pitch through discomfort in his arm. On May 1, he threw five innings and gave up four unearned runs against Boston College. The next day, he couldn't pick up his backpack.

Yet Enright never felt the "pop" that some guys feel.

"For me, it was more of a gradual thing," he said. "It makes me wonder if it could have started months before, and finally, over the course of a 55-game season, it took its last blow. It started off as a dull pull in my elbow and eventually progressed into the sharp stabbing pain."

He ultimately underwent Tommy John surgery. Four months later, he started throwing a baseball and expects to pitch this upcoming season. Tech pitching coach Jamie Pinzino is optimistic.

"He's in the training room a couple hours a day," Pinzino said. "We're certainly hoping to have him back for the spring."

Advances made in the medical field over the past 25 years now make the recovery process faster. In the early stages following Tommy John surgery, players more likely faded out of the league than recovered and prospered. But Dr. Frank Jobe turned the tables in 1974 when he performed surgery on Tommy John, a major league pitcher at the time and for whom the surgery is named.

Using a healthy tendon from John's forearm, Jobe replaced the torn ligament. The tendon



ANDREW McDONALD

serves as stability for the elbow joint. Surgeons drill holes in the humerus and weave a tendon through by using a figure-eight pattern. With that procedure, Jobe sparked a movement that has saved the careers of countless pitchers. John went on to win 164 more games over the course of 14 years. Other notable pitchers to thrive following the surgery include John Smoltz, Tim Hudson and Adam Wainwright.

Today, doctors perform Tommy John surgery almost every day. Dr. Timothy Kremchek, the Cincinnati Reds team doctor, performed the surgery on McDonald and Enright. On the day of McDonald's surgery, he performed four or five Tommy John surgeries, according to McDonald. Kremchek told McDonald that the surgery used to last four hours, but now only takes a shade more than an hour.

The stance on Tommy John surgery has changed drastically over the years. In fact, some parents think their kids need to get Tommy John surgery early to increase arm strength. According to the American Sports Medicine Institute, 25-50 percent of amateur players, coaches, and parents believe this theory.

Brett Griesemer, the athletic trainer for the Tech baseball team, said some parents think the surgery guarantees their kids come back stronger—a common misconception.

"It's become quite a hysteria," he said. "You have these teenage kids, and they're having some elbow pain, and they [parents] want to just get the Tommy John surgery over with."

According to the institute, 10-20 percent of pitchers never make it back to their previous level after having the surgery. Major League Baseball and the institute conducted a study that examined professional pitchers who underwent Tommy John surgery. It showed no differences in pitching biomechanics.

The institute called the rise in injuries an epidemic. There has been a sharp increase in the amount of UCL tears since the start of the century, and the institute attributed these

changes to young pitchers doing more with their arms before they reach their 20s than a pitcher who played 12 years ago.

Some players overuse their arms on the mound, and others play multiple positions instead of giving their arms a break. Poor mechanics and conditioning are other possible reasons for the rise in UCL injuries.

"I think the biggest reason is because guys are training more," Griesemer said. "They're able to throw harder. They're throwing 90 mph in high school. Over time, that puts a lot of stress on the elbow."

Athletes specializing in one sport also give cause for concern. With scholarships increasing in value and sports becoming more competitive, high school athletes believe they should focus on one sport to receive a scholarship.

"I think it's the specialization of sports that has led to more injuries," Griesemer said. "Guys that play baseball year-round are probably more at risk than back in the day when everyone played every sport. Now college scholarships are a big deal, so if you want to specialize in baseball, then you throw year-round."

Coaches try to do their part to make sure their pitchers aren't dealing with a lot of stress on the mound. Inning limits and pitch counts have been implemented, though there is no magic number. Pinzino said that he takes into account other factors in addition to pitch count.

"The No. 1 indicator is leaving balls up in the zone," he said. "If I'm getting tired, it's not just my arm, but my whole body getting tired. Typically, the mechanics can slow down a tad bit. Most pitching coaches want pitchers to work quickly. Sometimes you see the pace slow down quite a bit. That's a fairly common indicator."

"I do believe pitching them less is safer," Mason said. "I don't have a number, and neither does anybody else because, if somebody had

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SAVING CAREERS Continued from page 43

that perfect number, they would be extremely rich. You have to have a good relationship with your pitcher. You have to have an honest dialogue with your pitcher.”

Other ways to decrease an athlete’s odds of injuring the arm include the forbidding of throwing a curveball at a young age, as many young pitchers still lack the ability to throw a curveball with the proper mechanics. Also, young pitchers need to limit the amount of “full-effort pitching.” This means playing different positions or different sports.

Tech’s sports medicine staff always tries to be proactive in dealing with injuries. This group, led by Griesemer, implemented a system hoping to decrease the chances for injury.

“We have all of our pitchers come in, and we measure them,” Griesemer said. “We look for different ranges of motion in the wrist, shoulder and elbow. We look at grip strength. We put those all in a spreadsheet and compare their numbers to see if guys gave deficits in the internal rotation of their shoulder, extension of the elbow, or extension of the wrist, which may put increased risk on their shoulder or elbow. We have a designed program for them to come in here and do some corrective exercises.”

Schools throughout the ACC compare notes and hold conferences throughout the year.



This creates an open discussion, and ideas get shared. Protecting the next generation of pitchers remains a top priority, and it starts with creating a dialogue between the athletes and doctors.

There may never be a universal answer as to why the UCL tears. So many variables make it difficult to pinpoint a single reason. It can happen on one pitch or over time. In the cases of McDonald and Enright, neither had dealt with previous arm issues. Doctors and scientists continue to flood the field with studies and ideas in search of an answer because they know that athletes will continue

to develop and throw harder.

The rehab following the injury remains the hard part. Athletes must work to get back on the mound. McDonald and Enright put in that work.

“Both guys are pretty militant when it comes to doing their rehab,” Griesemer said. “They’re in here every day. They do their extra work, and they don’t try to push past what we recommend to them. Both are extremely hard-working kids.”

McDonald and Enright didn’t let Tommy John surgery end their careers. Now, they have their eyes set on the future.

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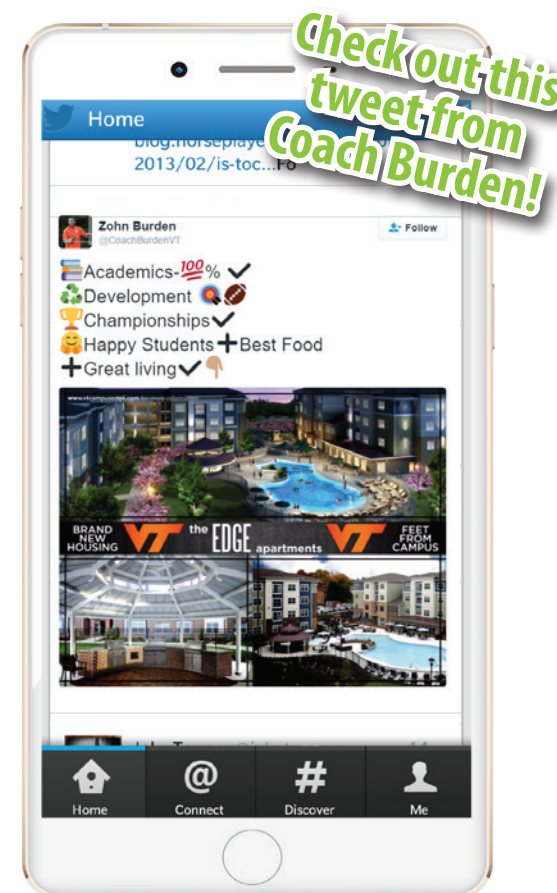
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