

inside

Vol. 10 No. 6, June 2018

HOKIESPORTS

The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics

^{VT} *Athlete* of the **YEAR** ²⁰¹⁷⁻¹⁸

JARED HAUGHT

is Inside Hokie Sports' ***Athlete of the Year*** after winning an ACC title, earning All-America honors, and finishing as an NCAA runner-up

WHAT'S INSIDE

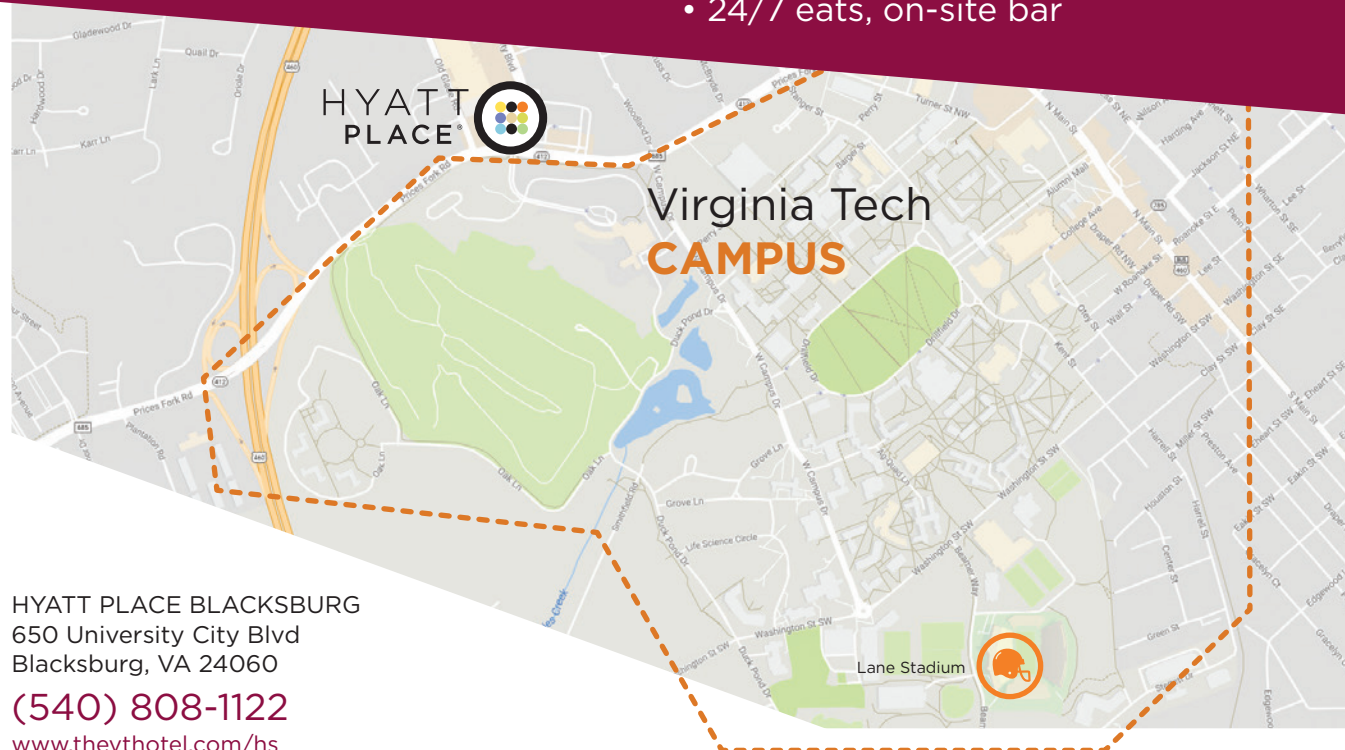
Vincent Ciattei capped his Tech career by winning a silver medal at the NCAA Championships

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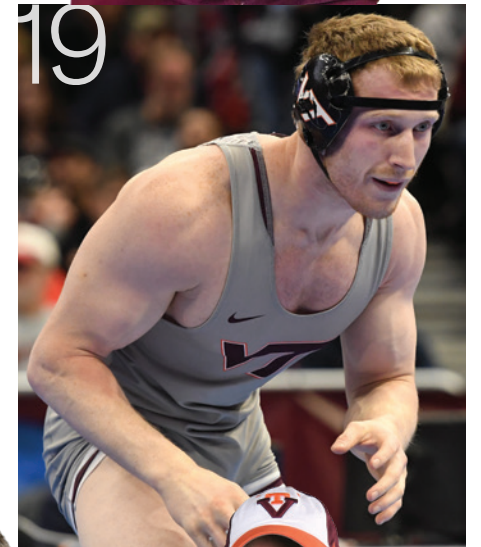
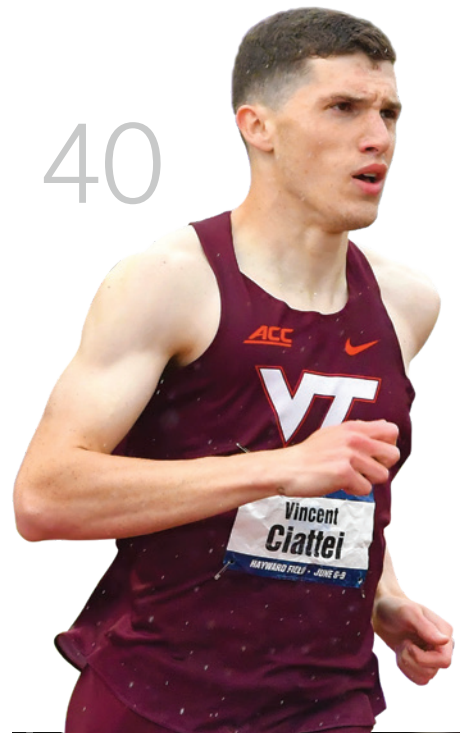


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- 2 Hokie Club News
- 7 News and Notes
Tech wrestlers make
U.S. national teams
- 9 From the Editor's Desk
- 10 Behind the Mic — Jon Laaser
Sports intersects itself
in wedding reception
- 12 Student-Athlete Development
Trip to Rwanda changes
student-athletes' perspectives—and lives
- 14 NCAA Outdoor
Track and Field Championships
Both Tech squads finish in top 15;
12 earn All-America honors
- 16 Top 10 of 2017-18
DMR team's national title
and wrestling's ACC crown top the list
- 19 2017-18 Athlete of the Year
Jared Haught's run to the NCAA final leads
to him being magazine's Athlete of the Year
- 20 2017-18 Athletes of the Year (by sport)
A breakdown of each sport's
Athlete of the Year
- 40 Track and Field Spotlight—Vincent Ciattei
Tech runner battled injuries for a long time
before coming one of the nation's best
- 43 IHS Extra — Tech names new coaches
in swimming, softball
Both have ties to AD Whit Babcock and
both are proven winners as head coaches

contents



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HOKIES' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

FOR 2017-18

VIRGINIA TECH'S success on the field, on the courts, on the mats and on the track has been well documented over the years, but the school's student-athletes are getting it done in the classroom as well. These two pages have been dedicated to the Hokies' great work academically in 2017-18, much of which can be attributed to their hard work, to the dedication of the coaching staffs and the Student-Athlete Academic Support Services office, and to the contributions of donors, who give the athletics department the resources needed to help these student-athletes be successful in all phases. *(Disclaimer: some academic honors for spring sports have not been announced yet.)*

SKELTON AWARD FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

(A \$5,000 scholarship given to a chosen Virginia Tech junior, senior or fifth-year male and female student-athlete who has participated in intercollegiate athletics for at least two seasons at Tech and holds an overall grade-point average of 3.40 or better.)

Heather Timothy, women's soccer
Brooks Wilding, wrestling

WEAVER-JAMES-CORRIGAN AWARD

(A \$5,000 postgraduate scholarship from the ACC to those who intend to pursue a graduate degree following completion of their undergraduate requirements.)

- **Alani Johnson** (women's soccer)—graduated with a degree in human nutrition, foods and exercise.
- **Vincent Ciattei** (men's track and field)—graduated with a degree in engineering science and mechanics, with a minor in biomedical engineering. Has applied to and been accepted to graduate school at Virginia Tech and may pursue a master's degree.

ACC SCHOLAR-ATHLETES OF THE YEAR

(The ACC Scholar-Athlete of the Year awards were established in September of 2007 to be awarded annually to the top junior or senior student-athletes in his/her sports. Candidates for the awards must have maintained a 3.0 grade-point average for their careers, as well as a 3.0 grade-point average for the past two semesters.)

Vincent Ciattei, men's indoor track and field

NCAA PUBLIC RECOGNITION AWARDS

(An award that goes annually to the sports programs with an Academic Progress Rate in the top 10 percent nationally of that particular sport.)

Women's golf
Women's tennis
Women's track and field
Baseball

GOOGLE CLOUD ACADEMIC ALL-DISTRICT III SELECTIONS

(An award that recognizes the nation's top student-athletes for their combined performances athletically and in the classroom.)

Elizabeth Bose, women's golf
Vincent Ciattei, men's track and field
Carrie Eberle, softball
Eric Gallo, football
Torben Laidig, men's track and field
Emma Thor, women's track and field

ALL-ACC ACADEMIC TEAMS

(A student-athlete must have earned a 3.0 grade-point average for the previous semester and maintained a 3.0 cumulative grade-point average during his/her academic career to be eligible for selection. The spring sports teams haven't been announced yet.)

BASKETBALL Men

Devin Wilson (political science)

Women

Taylor Emery (creative writing)
Regan Magarity (communications)

CROSS COUNTRY Men

Vincent Ciattei (engineering science and mechanics)
Neil Gourley (mechanical engineering)
Daniel Jaskowak (human nutrition, foods and exercise)
Jack Joyce (economics)
Peter Seufer (finance)
Diego Zarate (criminology/psychology)

Women

Katie Kennedy (public relations)
Laurie Barton (human nutrition, foods and exercise)
Sarah Edwards (interior design)
Sara Freix (biological systems engineering)
Kayla Richardson (computer science)

FOOTBALL

Dalton Keene (building construction)
Vinny Mihota (mathematics)
Joey Slye (human nutrition, foods and exercise)

SOCCER Men

Elias Tamburini (psychology)

Women

Alani Johnson (human nutrition, foods and exercise)
Mandy McGlynn (human nutrition, foods and exercise)

SWIMMING AND DIVING

Men

Ian Ho (mechanical engineering)
Harrison Pierce (finance)
Ben Schiesl (management)

Women

Adriana Grabski (communication studies)
Maggie Gruber (business information technology)
Ashlynn Peters (finance)
Joelle Vereb (human nutrition, foods and exercise)

INDOOR TRACK AND FIELD

Men

Greg Chiles (consumer studies)
Vincent Ciattei (engineering science and mechanics)
Neil Gourley (mechanical engineering)
Daniel Jaskowak (human nutrition, foods and exercise)
Torben Laidig (biochemistry and biology)
Mackenzie Muldoon (human nutrition, foods and exercise)
Peter Seufer (finance)
Diego Zarate (criminology, psychology)

Women

Stefanie Aeschlimann (university studies)
Laurie Barton (human nutrition, foods and exercise)
Rachel Baxter (university studies)
Courtney Blanden (business information technology)
Sarah Edwards (interior design)
Lisa Gunnarsson (general engineering)
Katie Kennedy (public relations)
Shannon Quinn (finance)

VOLLEYBALL

Ester Talamazzi (business)
Jaila Tolbert (international studies)

WRESTLING

Jared Haught (mechanical engineering)
Zack Zavatsky (packaging systems and design)

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

- 320 Virginia Tech student-athletes maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better
- The average cumulative GPA for a Tech student-athlete is 3.06
- Five student-athletes maintain a cumulative GPA of 4.0
- 17 out of 22 varsity teams maintain a cumulative team GPA of 3.0 or better
- Teams with the top GPA: women's swimming and diving (3.54), women's tennis (3.54), women's soccer (3.53), women's cross country (3.52), women's golf (3.35), volleyball (3.33)

The Donor File

Q&A

Q: A Hokie is ...
A: A loyal Virginia Tech fan.

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because ...
A: Hokies have a special love for the university. We have talked to students, athletes, and their parents who have been at other schools before coming to Virginia Tech, and they all say there is just something unique to this place. It's fun to see Virginia Tech represented all over the globe.

Q: What is your best memory of Virginia Tech Athletics?
A: There are so many—from the 1995 Sugar Bowl, the 1999 Championship game, all of the ACC Wrestling Championships, finishing fourth in the nation in 2016 at the NCAA Wrestling Championship, watching men's basketball at Rupp Arena, the Women's NIT basketball championship at Indiana, and watching Jared Haught in the finals of the 2018 NCAA Wrestling Championships.

Q: How did you get involved with the Hokie Club?
A: I was a young alumni, and a co-worker asked me to split football tickets, so I gave \$100 to the Hokie Club.

Q: What caused you to become a fan of Virginia Tech?
A: I am a proud graduate of Virginia Tech, and my wife, who did not attend Virginia Tech, is 100 percent supportive and just as big a fan.

Q: Do you have any game day superstitions? If so, what are they?
A: So many—what I wear, and I carry my link from when Molly went to the Ladies Clinic years ago—to name a few.

Q: Describe your perfect day at Virginia Tech.
A: Every day is a perfect day at Virginia Tech. Since moving to Blacksburg in 2017 when Molly retired, I start almost every day walking through campus. There is always something interesting going on.

Q: Do you have any tailgating traditions? If so, tell us your best.
A: Not really traditions, but we love hosting friends who don't have the opportunity to come back to campus often. Oftentimes, we haven't seen them for 10 years or more.



Mark & Molly Whitehouse

HOKIE CLUB LEVEL:
Platinum

CURRENTLY RESIDES:
Blacksburg, Virginia

GRADUATION YEAR:
1980


FAMILY:
Molly (wife); Adam, Seth (sons);
Annie, Kelsey (daughters);
Daniel (grandson)

Q: What motivates you to give back to help Virginia Tech Athletics?
A: We both worked to put ourselves through school and appreciate the sacrifices our parents made. We have been fortunate in our careers and feel it is important to help students attain what could be a life-changing education.

Q: We are Hokie Club members because ...
A: We have been blessed in our lives and feel fortunate to be able to give back.

Q: My favorite Virginia Tech sports are ...
A: All of them. We have had the opportunity to meet many of the athletes, and we do our best to support them all.

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech football player is ...
A: Antonio Banks. We met him on the street in Sedona [Arizona] before a bowl game, and we consider him part of our family.

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech student-athlete from another sport is ...
A: That is like asking me to pick my favorite child. I can't name just one. 



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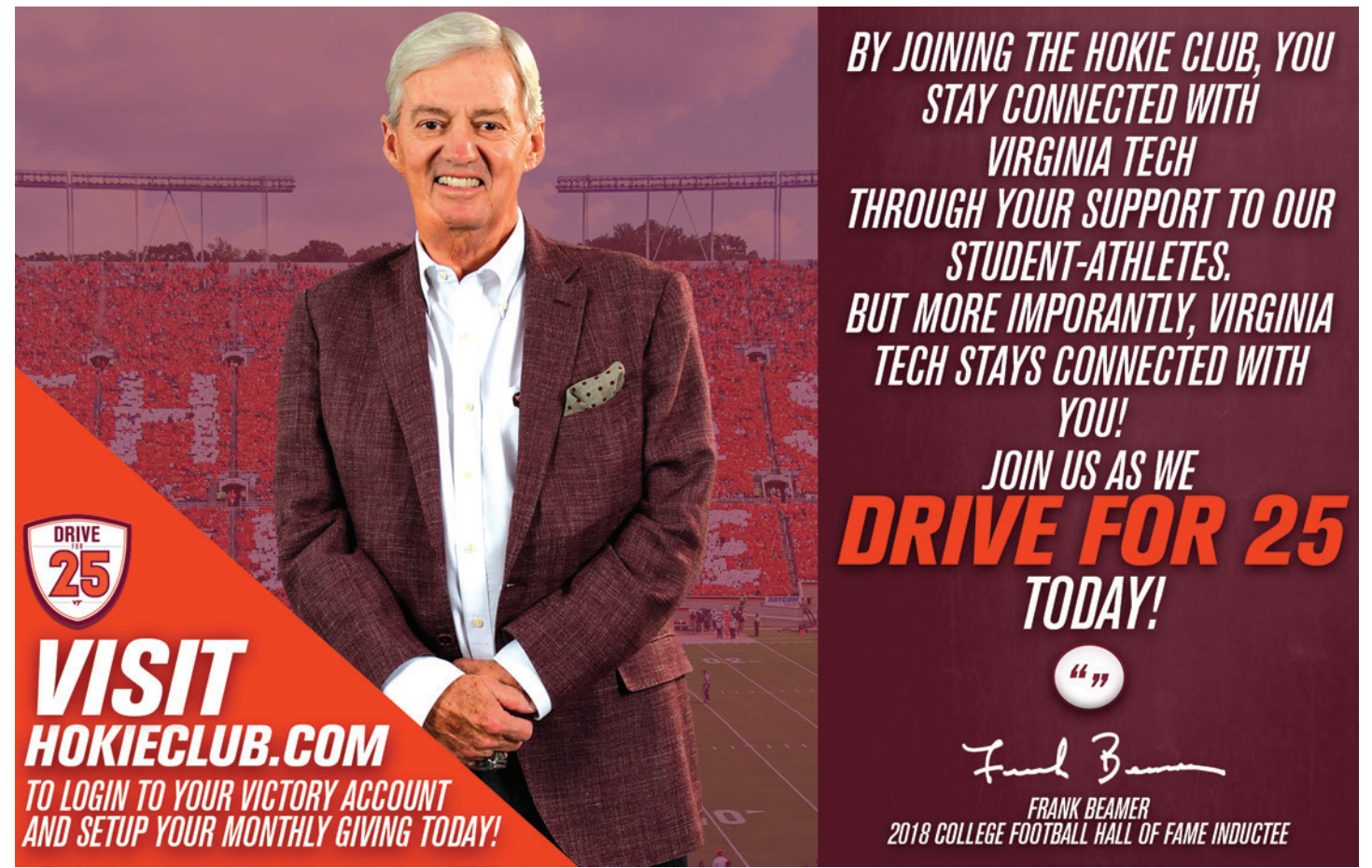



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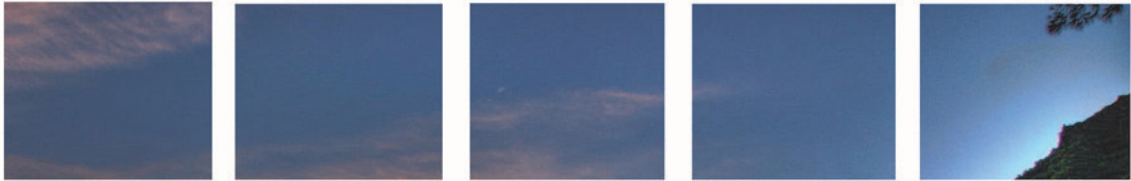
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NEWS&NOTES by Jimmy Robertson

Former Tech great on College Football Hall of Fame ballot

Corey Moore, who dominated as a defensive end for the Hokies over a two-year stretch in the late 1990s, continues to receive accolades, as the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame named him as one of 76 former players on the 2019 ballot for induction into the College Football Hall of Fame. The NFF and College Hall of Fame announces the class Jan. 7, 2019.

Moore earned All-America honors in both 1998 and 1999, the final year of which he led the Hokies to the BCS National Championship game and won both the Bronko Nagurski Award (college football defensive player of the year) and Lombardi Award (college football lineman of the year). He recorded 60 tackles, including 11 for a loss, and 17 sacks that season.

As a junior in 1998, Moore recorded 67 tackles and 13.5 sacks. He finished his career with 35 sacks—a total that ranks second behind Bruce Smith on the Hokies' all-time list.

Moore looks to become the eighth College Football Hall of Fame inductee affiliated with Virginia Tech football to be enshrined—Andy Gustafson (inducted 1985), Hunter Carpenter (inducted 1957), Carroll Dale (inducted 1987), Frank Loria (inducted 1999), Jerry Claiborne (inducted 1999), Bruce Smith (inducted 2006) and Frank Beamer. Beamer, who was selected for induction in his first year on the ballot, will be inducted at the 61st NFF Annual Awards Dinner held at the New York Hilton Midtown on Dec. 4.

McFadden, Lewis to compete on U.S. national teams

Virginia Tech wrestlers David McFadden and Mekhi Lewis earned spots on separate United States wrestling national teams with their performances at team trials in late May/early June.

McFadden, a rising redshirt junior who won the ACC crown at 165 pounds and earned All-America honors this past season, went 7-0 at the U.S. U23 World Team Trials held in Akron, Ohio in early June. He swept Missouri All-American Daniel Lewis in a best-of-three finals match to

clinch the 79-kilogram spot. He won two matches to get to the finals, and in the first match against Lewis, he pinned him before ending things with a 15-5 technical fall in the second match. He clinched his spot on the U.S. team that will be competing at the Senior U23 World Championships in Romania on Nov. 12-18.

Lewis, who took a redshirt year as a freshman this past season, competed at the U.S. World Junior Trials held in late May in Rochester, Minnesota, and he won three matches to get to the finals at 74 kilograms. He faced Iowa's Jeremiah Moody and won twice by technical fall to preserve his spot on the U.S. Junior World team that will be competing at the Junior World Championships in Slovakia on Sept. 17-23.

Lewis became just the second Hokie to make a Junior World Team while wrestling at Virginia Tech, joining Sean Gray, who made the team in 1999. Joey Dance also made a Junior World Team as a senior at Christiansburg High School in 2012 prior to enrolling at Tech.

Two Tech baseball players taken in Major League Baseball draft

For the 10th consecutive year, at least two Virginia Tech baseball players were selected in Major League Baseball's First-Year Player Draft, as both Andrew McDonald and Connor Coward found themselves taken by the Cincinnati Reds and St. Louis Cardinals, respectively.

McDonald, a Cincinnati, Ohio native who just finished his career at Tech, went in the ninth round with the 259th overall pick. During his senior season, the 6-foot-6, 240-pound right-handed pitcher went 1-8, but had a respectable 4.45 ERA, and in 54.2 innings, he struck out 67 batters.

Coward, another right-handed pitcher, went in the 26th round with the 783rd overall pick and became the eighth player in the history of the program to be drafted by St. Louis. Like McDonald, the senior from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, just concluded his career at Tech and went 2-7, with a 5.19 ERA this past season. In 13 starts, he struck out 76 in 78 innings.

Coward and McDonald became the 27th and 28th Tech players selected during this 10-year run. 



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EDITORS DESK by Jimmy Robertson

Young talent across all Tech sports points to promising future

Those who hop on Twitter frequently and also follow various noted sports figures probably learned recently that Phil Steele submitted his pages to his 2018 College Football Preview to his printer and mailed advance copies to various sports dignitaries.

Many consider Steele as *the* crystal ball for college football. He conducts an inordinate amount of research and makes an array of predictions in his magazine, usually with breathtaking accuracy and often to gamblers' delight. Your editor wasn't quite fortunate enough to score one of those early copies, but a guess would be that Steele predicted the Hokies to finish in the upper half of the ACC's Coastal Division this season—a reasonable evaluation given personnel losses, especially on defense.

Tech certainly features a lot of interesting, young potential, with guys like Emmanuel Belmar, Phil Patterson, Khalil Ladler, Dylan Rivers, TyJuan Garbutt, Zion Debose and Caleb Farley all showing flashes at some point over the past two seasons. That creates excitement, but also uncertainty—though keep in mind that talent always wins.

And therein lies the theme of this piece—Virginia Tech has no shortage of young talent. In most of its sports, too. The future looks bright.

This thought came up while watching the Tech track and field athletes compete at the NCAA Championships in Oregon in early June. All eight of the women's qualifiers return next season, and with another year

of training, athletes like Rachel Pocratsky (distance runner), Eszter Bajnok (jumper) and Lisa Gunnarsson (pole vault) could become national title contenders.

There is a ton of young talent in all of Tech's sports. Take, for instance, the men's basketball program. Nickail Alexander-Walker averaged in double figures as a freshman, and freshmen Wabissa Bede and P.J. Horne showed flashes. This trio, teamed with veterans Justin Robinson, Chris Clarke, Ahmed Hill and Ty Outlaw, ... well, is a third straight NCAA appearance a stretch?

On the women's side, incoming freshmen Dara Mabrey and Shaniya Jones give the Hokies much-needed guard depth to go with exciting sophomore Aisha Sheppard. Those three combined with seniors Rachel Camp, Taylor Emery, Regan Magarity and Alexis Jean make for a nice nucleus. NCAA tourney, anyone?

The lacrosse team, which set all sorts of records this past spring and won a game in its first appearance in the NCAA Championship, returns scoring phenom Paige Petty, a sophomore. Watch out for fellow sophomores Sarah Lubnow and Leigh Lingo, too.

Sophomore Kristo Strickler and junior Brendan Moyers are ready to help the men's soccer team to another NCAA bid. The women's soccer team lacked scoring punch a year ago, but sophomore Allyson Brown returns, along with juniors Jordan Hemmen and Mandy McGlynn. The added experience may be enough to push the program back to its customary lofty level. They're close.


New softball coach Pete D'Amour insists that he likes the roster. Sophomore pitchers Keely Rochard and Jordan Dail and junior All-ACC player Carrie Eberle are nice pieces for a foundation. On the baseball front, the Hokies are in the midst of a rebuilding project, but sophomore Ian Seymour pitched like an ace as a freshman.

The men's tennis team returns the entire lineup. The women's tennis squad lost three seniors, but sophomores Nika Kozar and Nina Sorkin won 21 and 19 matches as freshmen, respectively. They come back, along with standout junior Natalie Novotna, which makes the Hokies a tough out in ACC play.

The volleyball program continues to rebuild under head coach Jill Wilson, but there certainly appears to be a nice foundation with sophomore Kaity Smith and junior Ester Talamazzi. Smith made the All-ACC Freshman Team this past fall.

The wrestling team seems to feature talent year in and year out. David McFadden, a junior, and Mekhi Lewis, a redshirt freshman, just made U.S. national teams. Brent Moore was an ACC champion as a redshirt freshman this past season, and Hunter Bolen was the ACC Freshman of the Year. Expect McFadden to make a serious run at a national title.

This list just represents a sampling and bodes well for the future, especially considering that the present hasn't been bad by any means. This past academic year, eight Tech teams qualified for NCAA postseason play, with individuals from six other sports (men's golf, men's swimming and diving, women's swimming and diving, men's track and field, women's track and field, and wrestling) participating in postseason action.

Given the young talent on Virginia Tech's rosters, one might be tempted to channel his/her inner Phil Steele and predict 2018-19 as the year of the Hokies. It would be an easy call to make—and one in which Steele probably would agree. 



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BEHIND THE MIC with
Jon Laaser

Fly Eagles Fly

I was standing on a dance floor, swept away by an odd feeling—comfort. For Laaser men, that rarely happens, if ever. God blessed my family with certain talents. Rhythm wasn't one of them. But sure enough, that was the feeling, coupled with contentment and happiness. All while “Fly Eagles Fly,” the dreaded fight song of the Philadelphia Eagles, blared above a screaming crowd. This needs some context.

I grew up a diehard Minnesota Vikings fan, and that's exactly what happens to your emotions when you grow up a devoted follower of the purple. They die ... hard! I was a little too young to have witnessed four consecutive losses in the Super Bowl, but that hasn't spared me the pain.

The near misses generally come right about the time you have written them off. In 2009, the author of years of divisional heartbreak while with the Packers, Brett Favre, turned into a Minnesota mercenary and almost led us to the Promised Land only to break our hearts in an even more cruel fashion. His late and inexplicable interception handed the New Orleans Saints the NFC Championship. Drew Brees went on to claim his lone title. In 2000, the Vikings went in as road favorites in the NFC Championship game against the New York Giants. I felt pretty sure we were going to win that one—41-doughnut is how the game is now known in the great white north. As the story goes, Randy Moss got distracted trying to get his friends on the sideline before the

game, and in that moment, Kerry Collins' body somehow became inhabited by Joe Montana.

And then there is '98. That year is all you have to say where I'm from, and people will shake their heads in shared loathsome memory. Led by Denny Green, the '98 Vikings had a video-game offense. In his rookie year, Moss was the most dangerous deep-threat the league had ever seen. Future Hall of Famer Cris Carter caught nothing but touchdowns, Robert Smith ran the rock, and Randall Cunningham came out of retirement for one last ride.

It was a glorious ride. I was a freshman in college. I didn't know it at the time, but I was at the prime age for getting my heart ripped out. The Vikings went 15-1 and set the NFL's regular-season scoring record. They were unstoppable. The Atlanta “Dirty Bird” Falcons weren't expected to have a chance in the NFC Championship Game. They shouldn't have. It was going to be a Nordic coronation.

And then everybody panicked. Green played the clock not to lose. Cunningham woke up from his season-long dream. And still, it was there for the taking. Placekicker Gary Anderson hadn't missed a field goal all season—46 in a row! As he lined up the 39-yarder that would have put the game away, Will Smith's “Miami” played in my head. We were heading to the Super Bowl—to smash John Elway and the Denver Broncos.

Wide left. I can still close my eyes and see that kick. I remember where I was. I'd like to

tell you that I have let it go, but that wouldn't be true. It eats at me. I loved that team. I loved that time. And just like that, it was gone. The “Greatest Show on Turf” St. Louis Rams broke the Vikings' scoring record a year later, and except for those painful memories, it was as if the ride had never happened.

Losing your innocence in sports is much the same as losing the innocence of your youth. You only have to be jilted once, and there's no going back. Am I jaded? Without question. However, I've discovered that sharing a common slight can be bonding. So it has been for my wife, Renée, and me.

She grew up a dyed-in-the-wool Philadelphia Eagles fan. While my fandom could be classified as torturous, hers was just plain, old disappointment. Sure, there had been some hope through the years, but ultimately their fan base was still best known for pelting Santa with snow balls. Don't bring that up around her, by the way. Since our teams didn't cross paths much, we found our way generally to supporting each other on Sundays. I fired up “Fly Eagles Fly” for her when the birds scored. She tried to get the timing down for the Skol chant when the Vikings found the end zone.

As we counted down to our wedding, both the Eagles and Vikings were having great seasons. We joked about a collision course, but we both knew that one, or probably both, would blow it before that point. After

Carson Wentz tore his ACL, I offered a hollow “hang in there.” When Nick Foles helped the Eagles limp through the divisional round of the playoffs, I was happy. For her, sure, but more so for me because, once the Vikings handled the Saints, the wounded birds figured not to supply much resistance on the way—finally—back to the Super Bowl. Prior to the “Minnesota Miracle,” I had rightly given up hope. She consoled me. And then lightning struck. Stefon Diggs sprinted to the end zone, and I lost my mind. And we made a wager.

The Vikings and Eagles would meet in the NFC Championship Game. Whoever's team won would have their fight song played as we entered our wedding reception. Seemed like good fun. And the Vikings were going to win anyway. We were the team of destiny, after all. Curse, what curse?!

Midway through the week before the game, I had an epiphany. It might be better for me if the Vikings lost. The stress of the wedding was coming, and I realized I was much more worried about how she would handle the Eagles losing than I was about the Vikings getting beat. That, I knew how to handle. It may not be the most poetic way to discover that you've identified something more important than you in your life, but that's the way it went down. As did the Vikings, in typically stunning Minnesota fashion. The kind of fashion that leaves you maniacally laughing in disbelief by the third quarter and then tossing and turning at night wondering how you let them make you believe again.

She tried to be a gracious winner—and failed. It's not in her DNA. That's why I love her. But now the Eagles needed to finish the job. Otherwise, my anguish was for nothing. Watching her watch the Super Bowl was more stressful than any game I have ever called or witnessed. It took her a solid 10 seconds after

Tom Brady's Hail Mary landed incomplete before she comprehended that the Eagles had done it. And then a funny thing happened. She let me share it with her.


“This is the greatest year ever” she screamed. “The Eagles win the Super Bowl, and I get to get married!”

Pure joy. And suddenly it was my win, too. That's what marriage is, right? Sharing triumph, weathering sorrow—together. I hold onto the thought that maybe next year we will share a Vikings' triumph. Hey, I'm a sucker, what can I say? And that Kirk Cousins ...

But for now, I had a bet to pay off. If this was going to happen, though, it was going to happen in a big way. I started my career interning for the “Voice of the Vikings” Paul Allen. I knew he would help, and he did with typical gallows humor. I had him voiceover the introductions for the bridal party. When he got to announcing us, however, I had him turn it over to the iconic “Voice of the Eagles” Merrill Reese. My friend, Wes McElroy, worked for him in the past and called in a favor.

So it was that, as we waited to make our grand entrance, Merrill, in his trademark style, announced, “touching down in public for the first time ... Mr. and Mrs. Jon Laaser!” When “Fly Eagles Fly” began, she burst through that door like an unblocked linebacker.

And there we were. The lights shimmered off her gown, as she danced and jumped—and smiled. I'll never forget that smile. The Vikings had failed again, and it was perfect. I was right where I was supposed to be. The honeymoon wasn't too shabby either. And she was right, it has been the best year ever.

So, time to start our lives—of joint fandom—together. Feel free to come mediate some time. Go Hokies! And Vikings, and fine ... Eagles! 



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Passionate about traveling, Olivia Odle always had an interest in studying abroad, but never really expected to get the opportunity at Virginia Tech, given the demands that her schedule placed upon her as a result of her academic workload and as a member of the Virginia Tech women’s soccer team.

Then a teammate, Jordan Hemmen, informed her about a course that she took, one that led to a group going to Rwanda, a small, landlocked country in Central Africa.

“Due to the rigorous schedule of athletics, a semester studying abroad isn’t feasible,” Odle said. “So when I learned it [the trip] was only two weeks, I jumped on it. I was not very familiar with Rwanda and its history prior to knowing about this trip, and that made me even more eager to want to learn and take advantage of this chance.”

So Odle, a Matthews, North Carolina native pursuing a degree in business management, ultimately became part of a small contingent of Virginia Tech student-athletes, students and administrators who traveled to Rwanda in late May as part of UAP 3984: Sport, Policy and Society—a study abroad course that explores different sectors of international development and how sports can support such development. Danny White, associate athletics director for student-athlete development, oversaw the course, with assistance from athletics department staff members Dr. Gary Bennett (sport psychologist) and Shelby Miller (coordinator of student-athlete development).

Of the 15 students who went, 11 were student-athletes. That group included Odle, Marcelo Acuna (men’s soccer), Aaron Boyd (men’s swimming and diving), Charles Filby (men’s soccer), Jarrett Hopple (football), Jenna Beattie (women’s swimming and diving), Jessica Beattie (women’s swimming and diving), Baillie Cameron (women’s swimming and diving), Erin Scott (women’s swimming and diving), Amanda Swaak (women’s track and field), and Jaylyn Thompson (women’s soccer).

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

The group also met with officials from government organizations, non-governmental organizations and non-profit groups. Some of those included The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID),

World Vision, and Right to Play officials, all of whom are committed to broad-scale development in the country.

In addition, they met with those who coordinate and run Kids Play International there. This non-profit outfit, formed by former Olympian Tracy Evans, works in the rural part of the country and focuses on gender equity, using sport in those areas to bring children together.

“This year was probably the best overall set of meetings we’ve ever had,” White said. “It’s not just a meeting. Students are learning about what these organizations do in our class when I’m doing the teaching, but then they get to go and meet with representatives from these organizations. These people talk about their projects and where they work and who they work with. The learning starts to come full circle at that stage.”

The group also mixed in a trip to the U.S. Embassy there in Rwanda and went on a safari tour at Akagera National Park. During the final four days, the students taught physical education classes to the children at the Kigali International Community School.

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

The mix of students makes for an interesting dynamic. Student-athletes often lack the time to mingle with the general student population, but this class offers that opportunity, which is a benefit to all.


“I was honestly a little nervous to be on a trip with mostly athletes,” said Charlotte Rich, a Midlothian, Virginia native who is pursuing a degree in international studies. “Since I’m not a student-athlete, I thought that I wouldn’t get to know them very well since I didn’t have that [athletics] in common with them. Well, I was completely wrong.

“I am more than thankful that I got to go through this with every single one of them. They are incredible people who have hearts for justice, and it was beautiful to see that in each of them. I know that they’ll be my friends for a long time.”

This year marked the sixth consecutive one in which White has overseen a course and led Tech students abroad to expose them to other parts of the world and broaden their horizons. In that time frame, more than 100 student-athletes have traveled to places like the Dominican Republic, Switzerland and Rwanda.

In the first four years, White guided groups to the Dominican Republic, where those who went ran sports camps, visited a local hospital constructed by the Virginia College of Osteopathic Medicine (VCOM), saw the living conditions in one of the poorest sections of the country, and more. Two years ago, he, Dr. Bennett and Miller took a contingent to Switzerland, which serves as the home of the International Olympic Committee and the former United Nations’ Office on Sport for Development and Peace. These people create the policies that use sport as a tool to improve development in under-developed nations. The past two years, he, Dr. Bennett and Miller have brought students to Rwanda.

“Dr. [Timothy] Sands [Virginia Tech president] has placed an emphasis on experiential learning and international outreach,” White said. “The students are participating in the course, doing the readings I give them and the assignments I give them, but then they meet these high-level, high-caliber people who have given their lives to these very things we’re teaching these students. I can’t duplicate that, and you can’t beat it either. You could read a textbook all day, but if you meet with someone who is doing this on the other side of the world, their understanding is so much more impactful on our students.”

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



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TECH TRACK TEAMS STRONG AGAIN AT NCAA CHAMPIONSHIPS

Twelve of the 14 Hokies who qualified earned All-America honors, and the women’s team recorded its second-best finish ever, while the men’s team ended up in the top 15 once again
by Jimmy Robertson

To get an indication of the current state of the Virginia Tech track and field programs, one only needs to consider this:

Not even wind, rain, hail or cold can slow down this bunch.

Performing in what, at times, could be generously described as miserable weather conditions, both Virginia Tech squads still managed to record top-15 finishes in the team race at the NCAA Division I Outdoor Track and Field Championships held June 6-9 at Hayward Field in Eugene, Oregon.

Of the 14 Tech athletes who qualified for the NCAA Championships, 12 earned All-America honors, including nine who earned first-team recognition. As a result, the Tech women’s team finished in 10th place, while the men’s team came in 15th. The performance marked the second-best finish ever by the women’s team, which came in fifth in 2010, and the men’s

team finished in the top-15 for the seventh time since the school joined the ACC.

“It’s really special to me to see how our programs performed here,” Tech director of track and field and cross country Dave Cianelli said. “Our men’s team finished in the top 15, and we came in ranked 30th. And our women’s team came in ranked 16th. To do what we did ... you have to come through with your best effort, and we did that, so I’m really happy.”

The women’s team finished with 21.5 points, with most of those coming from pole vaulters Lisa Gunnarsson and Rachel Baxter. The two freshmen finished third and fourth, respectively, and earned first-team All-America honors. They also became the first freshman teammates ever to finish in the top five at the NCAA’s outdoor meet. Gunnarsson’s top vault of 4.40 meters (14 feet, 5.25 inches) enabled her to bring home a bronze medal, while Baxter cleared 4.30 meters (14 feet, 1.25 inches) to place fourth.

The Tech women also got points from middle distance star Rachel Pocratsky, rising standout jumper Eszter Bajnok and talented thrower Pavla Kuklova.

Pocratsky, who has dominated all year — she had nine individual wins during the indoor and outdoor seasons—came in fifth in the 1,500-meter run with a time of 4 minutes, 10.83 seconds. She finished just a little more than two seconds behind winner Jessica Hull of Oregon.

Pocratsky felt disappointed afterward. Still, her performance during the outdoor season came on the heels on her showing during the indoor season in which she earned first-team All-America honors in the 800—the first All-America honors of her career.

“Rachel came to Virginia Tech as a 5:17 miler and a 2:13 800-meter runner, and three years later, she’s bummed to be fifth at the NCAA Championships to four girls who all ran faster than 4:38 in high school,” Tech distance coach Ben Thomas said. “It’s crazy how far she’s come as an athlete and a competitor. Super proud of what she’s accomplished and excited for her future. She’s still so new to the 1,500, and she’s learned so much from this year. Next year should be special.”

Competing during the worst of the weather, Bajnok kept her composure—and managed to break her school record in the triple jump. The sophomore from Kethely, Hungary, came in

fifth with a top jump of 13.42 meters (44 feet, .5 inch), which snapped her previous school record of 13.39 meters (43 feet, 11.25 inches). She earned All-America honors for the first time in her career.

“I cannot say enough about what Eszter showed me today,” jumps coach Paul Zalewski said. “She finished fifth after coming in 14th, did it in the rain, hail and cold and still pulled out a new school record.

“She stepped up like the champion she is. To have a season like she had this year, with three ACC titles, a new lifetime best and a top-five national finish ... I really don’t know what to say. And to think we have two more years to build on this is really exciting. So proud.”

Kuklova, a junior from Opava, Czech Republic, recorded the second-best throw in school history when she threw 66.18 meters (217 feet, 1 inch) on her second throw to come in sixth.

Sophomore thrower Emma Thor missed on qualifying for the finals, but still came in 10th with a top throw of 62.83 meters (206 feet, 1 inch) and earned second-team All-America honors.

“For her [Kuklova] to throw 66 [meters], ... I knew it was going to go pretty far on her second throw when I watched it out of her hand,” throws coach Andrew Dubs said. “It just kind of kept hanging up there. Seeing her reaction was priceless. It was pretty special, just knowing the work she has put in and with me being new and her buying in from Day 1—and then having that pay off on the final meet of the season is just absolutely phenomenal.”

Two other Tech female student-athletes earned honorable mention All-America honors in their respective events. Sara Freix, a sophomore, came in 19th in the 10,000-meter run, while Laurie Barton, also a sophomore, missed on making the finals in the 800. Both were making their first NCAA Outdoor Championships appearance.

On the men’s side, the Hokies scored 17 points, with eight of them coming from talented distance runner Vincent Ciattei, who won a silver medal in the 1,500. The redshirt senior from Baltimore, Maryland started off strong by getting out ahead and leading the pace. He led the first two laps, and during the third lap, defending national champion Josh Kerr of New Mexico made his move and was neck and neck with Ciattei, as well as Ole Miss’ Robert Domanic.

With 100 meters to go, it was a fight to the finish as Wisconsin’s Oliver Hoare, Kerr and Ciattei all kicked hard. With roughly 20 meters left, Hoare gained a step on the outside and Kerr had a slight edge on Ciattei, but the Hokie hit another gear at the end to edge Kerr by three one-thousandths of a second in a time of 3:45.02 seconds to finish in second place.

“It was a beautiful run by Vince,” Thomas said. “He really couldn’t have played it any better. You know, that’s just the nature of the NCAA Championships sometimes. You beat

the collegiate record holder at the line [Kerr], but then someone comes from outside and steals the national title from you.

“It’s been an absolute pleasure to work with Vince. He’s been a national champion [in the distance medley relay during the indoor season]. He’s been an NCAA runner-up on three occasions between the relay, mile and 1,500. He’s a Hokie Hall of Famer in my book.”

Fellow teammate Diego Zarate collected second-team All-America honors after finishing in 10th place with a time of 3:46.55 in the 1,500 as well. It marked the junior’s first time in collecting All-America status.

Tech’s pole vaulters scored the rest of the points for the Tech men, as the trio of Torben Laidig, Deakin Volz and Joel Leon Benitez combined for nine points. Laidig earned a bronze medal with a top vault of 5.55 meters (18 feet, 2.5 inches), while Volz came in seventh (5.45 meters; 17 feet, 10.5 inches) and Benitez claimed eighth, clearing the same height as Volz and equaling a personal best.

The three of them became the first trio of teammates to become first-team All-Americans in the pole vault event at the NCAA Division I Outdoor Track and Field Championships since 1985.

Laidig, a redshirt senior from Schwabish Hall, Germany, departs Tech as a six-time All-American. Volz, a junior from Bloomington, Indiana, earned All-America honors for the fourth time in his career, while Benitez, a freshman from Nottingham, United Kingdom,

is an All-American for the first time.

“I’m proud of how all five vaulters competed at this championship and am excited for future things to come,” pole vault coach Bob Phillips said.

Also competing on the men’s side was sprinter/hurdler Greg Chiles, who finished third in his heat in the 400-meter hurdles and missed out on advancing to the finals by two-hundredths of a second. Chiles ran a time of 50.87 seconds, while the final qualifier, Jacob Smith of Northern Iowa, ran his heat in 50.85.

Despite that, Chiles earned second-team All-America honors by virtue of his 10th-place overall finish. He departs as a three-time All-American, with one of those coming during the indoor season when he was part of the distance medley relay team that won the national title at the NCAA indoor meet.

The meet marked the conclusion of the track and field season and competition for Virginia Tech student-athletes overall.

It also left the head of the track and field programs feeling optimistic about his programs’ futures.

“Any time you can finish in the top 10, it’s a great accomplishment,” Cianelli said. “The quality in this meet is so high, but I felt good about our chances coming in. We just had to come out and perform solidly—and we did that. I’m really proud of how our kids stepped up, and I’m proud of our coaches, too.

“This gives us a lot of momentum heading into next year.”



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TECH'S

Here are the top-10 moments of the 2017-18 academic year, as compiled by the magazine staff, with help from several in the strategic communications office — by Jimmy Robertson

1 DMR foursome wins national title at NCAA indoor meet

The group of Vincent Ciattei, Greg Chiles, Patrick Joseph and Neil Gourley made history at the NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships on March 9 in College Station, Texas when they won the national championship in the distance medley relay event. Joseph pulled away from the pack during the third leg, and Gourley easily brought it home as the anchor for the Hokies, who won in a time of 9 minutes, 30.76 seconds. The four of them handed the school its 17th national title overall, but its first national title in distance running.

2 Tech wrestlers win ACC crown

Propelled by four individual champions, the Virginia Tech wrestling team once again took home a championship trophy, edging NC State 81-78 at the ACC Championship held in Chapel Hill, North Carolina on March 4. Dennis Gustafson, Brent Moore, and David McFadden all won their respective weight classes, and then senior leader Jared Haught sealed it with a thrilling 6-4 win over NC State's Michael Macchiavello that took five overtime periods. The large maroon and orange throng in attendance went crazy, as Tech won its fourth ACC tournament title and its seventh ACC title overall.

3 Hokies stun No. 1 Notre Dame in men's soccer

The Virginia Tech men's soccer team entered its Sept. 22 match against Notre Dame with a losing record, but the Hokies got two goals

from standout Marcelo Acuna, and Ben Lundgaard had a career-best 10 saves to carry Tech to a 2-1 upset of the Irish at Thompson Field. Acuna gave the Hokies a 1-0 lead with a goal less than seven minutes into the match and then broke a 1-1 tie in the 71st minute when he scored off an assist from Rory Slevin. The win marked Tech's first over a top-ranked team since 2011.

4 Men's basketball squad with shocking road win at No. 2 UVA

Trailing by five points with 38 seconds remaining in overtime, the Virginia Tech men's basketball team managed to put together a tremendous rally and scored a 61-60 upset of then-No. 2 UVA at John Paul Jones Arena on Feb. 10. Kerry Blackshear Jr. scored two buckets in that flurry, including one with six seconds left to give the Hokies the one-point lead, and then Tech held on in the waning moments. The win marked the Hokies' first over a top-five team on the road since 2009 and snapped a five-game losing streak in Charlottesville.

5 Goal-line stand vs. Pitt one for the ages

Nothing came easy for the Virginia Tech football team in league play this past fall, as the Hokies found themselves in several close contests. But the most exciting came in the form of a 20-14 victory over Pittsburgh on Senior Day at Lane Stadium in late November. A big pass play gave the Panthers a first down at the Tech 1 with less than a minute to play, but the Hokies' defense stopped the Panthers on four consecutive plays. Reggie Floyd and Khalil Ladler swarmed Pitt's Darrin Hall for a 3-yard

loss on the final play of the game, preserving the Hokies' six-point win and setting off a wild celebration.

6 Haught pin gets him to national title match

Virginia Tech wrestler Jared Haught enjoyed an incredible senior season, but no match was more exciting than his national semifinal match against Cornell's Ben Darmstadt at the NCAA Wrestling Championships held in Cleveland, Ohio. With the match tied at 2 in the third period, Haught countered a move by the No. 2 seed at 197 pounds, hooking Darmstadt's right arm and tossing him to the mat. He secured the pin at 5:41 and became just the second Tech wrestler in program history to wrestle for a national title. That fall was one of just four on the season for Haught, but it certainly came at the right time.

7 WNIT road win propels Hokies to final

For the second consecutive season, the Virginia Tech women's basketball team received a berth to the WNIT, and the Hokies put together a special run, advancing all the way to the championship game. Their best win in the tournament came in a semifinal game in Morgantown, West Virginia on March 28 when All-ACC guard Taylor Emery drilled a 3-pointer with 22 seconds left to give the Hokies a 63-61 lead, and they held on for the 64-61 win. Emery finished with a game-high 23 points—18 in the second half after missing much of the first half while being hindered with foul trouble.

8 Hokies end skid over UVA in men's tennis


With an important Commonwealth Clash point on the line, the Virginia Tech men's tennis team rallied to win the final two singles matches and knocked off rival Virginia 4-3 at the Burrows-Burleson Tennis

Center on April 22. Tech trailed 3-2, but Jason Kros and Alexandre Ribeiro each won three-set nail-biters to close the match and secure the Clash point. The win also gave the Hokies their first victory over Virginia since 2003, snapping a 14-match losing streak to the Cavaliers.

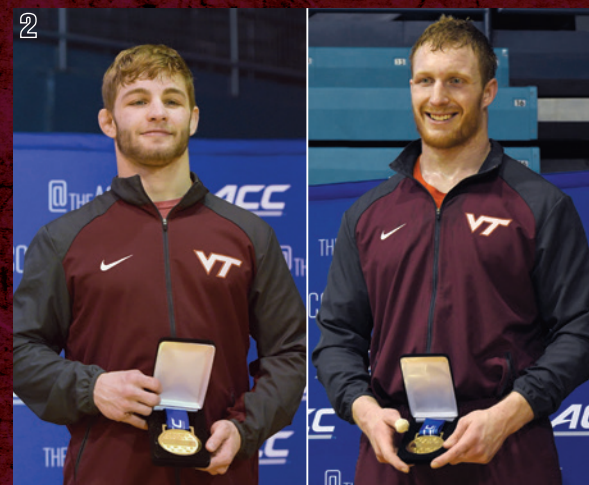
9 Tech notches first NCAA win in lacrosse

The Virginia Tech lacrosse team enjoyed an incredible season, setting school records for overall wins and ACC victories and receiving a bid to the NCAA Championship for the first time in program history. The Hokies made that appearance a memorable one, beating Georgetown 13-10 in the first round for their first NCAA win. Paige Petty and Tristan McGinley led the way on offense, scoring four goals each, while Meagh Graham took care of things on the other end, registering 10 saves. The win capped an incredible two-year turnaround and validated Tech as a program on the rise.

10 Bose records first win for Tech women's golf program

This season was one of firsts for the Virginia Tech women's golf team, as the squad earned the program's first NCAA regional bid, and standout Elizabeth Bose became the program's first medalist. Bose, a junior from Norfolk, Virginia, secured that win at the Hurricane Invitational held at Biltmore Golf Course in Coral Gables, Florida on March 5-7. She shot under par for all three rounds of the tournament and finished at 6-under-par to win by a stroke over three other players. She finished her junior season with six top-20 finishes, including two in the top five. 

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Athlete of the YEAR

Jared
HAUGHT

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WRESTLING



As a redshirt freshman on the Virginia Tech wrestling team in 2014-15, Jared Haught had a losing record, dropping 18 matches and leaving some to question his future impact.

Well, he certainly quieted the doubters, losing just 17 matches the rest of his career.

Haught capped an incredible career by winning an ACC title, advancing to the championship match at his weight class at the NCAA Wrestling Championships, and earning All-America honors for the third time. As a result of all his accomplishments this past season, the young man is Inside Hokie Sports' 2017-18 Athlete of the Year.

Haught became just the second Tech wrestler (Devin Carter) to be named the magazine's Athlete of the Year since the publication started doing this in 1995. The complete list of winners includes Cornell Brown (football), Jim Druckenmiller (football), Katie Ollendick (women's track and field), Corey Moore (football), André Davis (football), Lee Suggs (football), Bryant Matthews (men's basketball), Kevin Jones (football), Queen Harrison (women's track and field), Dorotea Habazin (women's track and field), Marcel Lomnický (men's track and field), Spyridon Jullien (men's track and field), Angela Tischer (softball), Alexander Ziegler (men's track and field), Erick Green (men's basketball), Devin Carter (wrestling), Irena Sediva (women's track and field), Tommy Curtin (men's track and field) and Hanna Green (women's track and field).


Haught beat out strong crop of athletes for this recognition, including Taylor Emery (women's basketball), Rachel Pocratsky (women's track and field), Marcelo Acuna (men's soccer), Greg Stroman (football) and Vincent Ciattei (men's track and field). That contingent enjoyed phenomenal seasons in their respective sports, for sure, but Haught's accomplishments on the mat were too many to overlook.

Haught won his second ACC championship at 197 pounds when he knocked off NC State's Michael Macchiavello 6-4 in five overtimes at the ACC Championship held March 3 in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. That win—it was the next-to-last match of the Championship—secured the Hokies' victory in the team race for the fourth time in program history.

He carried that momentum into the NCAA Wrestling Championships. The No. 3 seed at 197, Haught rolled to four consecutive wins, including a pin of Cornell's Ben Darmstadt in the semifinals. He became just the second NCAA finalist in program history, joining Carter, who made it to the finals in 2014.

Haught dropped a heartbreaking 3-1 decision in the national title match in what was the third bout with Macchiavello this season. The Wolfpack wrestler won by taking down Haught with just 10 seconds left in the match. Still, Haught concluded his career as an All-American, becoming the fourth three-time All-American in program history.

Haught finished the season with a career-best 30 wins, and he departed from Tech with 97 wins in his career. He also took care of things in the classroom, earning a spot on the All-ACC Academic team four times and graduating with a degree in mechanical engineering.

Haught set the program standard for work ethic, leadership and discipline during his five years in Blacksburg. His production will be missed, but in the short term, his legacy will be felt for years to come. 

**Tom
STOFFEL**
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**BASEBALL
Athlete
of the
YEAR**
2017-18

Virginia Tech's baseball program went through a transitional phase this spring, as new coach John Szeftc and his staff took the first step toward rebuilding the program. Helping along the way were many players, though none more consistently than longtime outfielder Tom Stoffel.

Stoffel served as the leader of the Hokies, who won 21 games in Szeftc's first season. The fifth-year senior was one of just two players to start all 54 games for Tech, and he led the Hokies in batting average (.298), hits (67) and slugging percentage (.467). He also tied for the team lead in homers (eight) and total bases (105).

Stoffel had 18 multi-hit games this season—tying for the most on the team—including a 4-for-6, 4-RBI performance against Pitt and a 4-for-5 performance against Marshall in which he drove in seven runs. He also went 3-for-4, with a homer and three RBI in a late-season win over William & Mary, and he went 3-for-5, with a homer and three RBI in a win over Liberty.

One of eight seniors on this year's team, Stoffel started the final 114 games of his career in which he played in at Tech and he played in 192. He departed with more than 200 hits (213) and 133 RBI to go with 18 homers. **VT**

**SOFTBALL
Athlete
of the
YEAR**
2017-18

**Carrie
EBERLE**
SO • CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Rarely does a player in the sport of baseball or softball excel at both the plate and as a pitcher, but the Virginia Tech softball program certainly found such a player in Carrie Eberle. Eberle was the most consistent player for a Tech squad that finished 23-30 overall, including 7-16 in ACC play. As a pitcher, she threw it well, winning 12 games and recording a 1.72 ERA in 33 appearances (28 starts). She pitched 187 innings this spring and allowed just 123 hits, while striking out 131 and walking just 62. Opponents hit just .182 off of her. At the plate, she wound up leading the team with eight homers and was the only player in the ACC to lead her team in both ERA and homers. She finished second on the squad in slugging percentage (.518) and third in batting average (.264). Her 17 RBI were tied for fourth on the squad.

Eberle played arguably her best game in the first round of the ACC Championship when she pitched a complete-game four-hitter in the Hokies' 4-0 upset of Duke. She struck out six and walked just one, and she drove in a run as well.

Following the regular season, Eberle earned second-team All-ACC honors—the lone Hokie to be placed on the all-league team. She also was tabbed to the All-Mid-Atlantic Region second team by the National Fastpitch Coaches Association.

Eberle figures to anchor a team with lofty expectations heading into next season under a new coach, as the Hokies lose just three starters and thus return the core of the squad back for what they hope will be an improved campaign in 2019. **VT**

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Justin ROBINSON
JR • MANASSAS, VIRGINIA


MEN'S BASKETBALL
Athlete
of the
YEAR 2017/18

The Virginia Tech men's basketball team featured a couple of steady seniors, a few talented freshmen and an important post player this past season. But the Hokies enjoyed another successful campaign in large part because of the consistent play of point guard Justin Robinson. The 6-foot-2 junior was one of just two players to start every game for a Tech squad that won 21 games and earned an at-large berth to the NCAA Tournament for the second consecutive year. He now has started 75 consecutive games.

Robinson led the Hokies in several statistical categories, including points (462), points per game (14.0), free-throw attempts (323), free-throw percentage (78.2), assists (185), steals (41) and minutes played (30.9).

On 12 occasions this season, Robinson either led or tied for the team lead in scoring—all in ACC games in which he averaged a team-best 16.2 points per game. His best performance came in the Hokies' home win over NC State when he scored a career-high 32 points, and three days later, he paced Tech with 20 points in its upset of then-No. 2 Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia. Those two performances enabled him to become Tech's first Naismith Player of the Week.

Another memorable moment for Robinson came in the Hokies' upset of then-No. 5 Duke at Cassell Coliseum. He scored 11 points and went over the 1,000-point plateau for his career.

Robinson, who scored 19 points in the Hokies' season-ending loss to Alabama in the first round of the NCAA Tournament, earned second-team All-ACC honors following the season. He returns next season to lead a veteran group that should be in contention for another NCAA Tournament bid yet again. 

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
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With the return of a terrific all-around player in Regan Magarity and several other key components, the Virginia Tech women's basketball team went into this past season optimistic about another postseason appearance. Yet the player who carried the Hokies was a newcomer—junior college transfer Taylor Emery.

The 5-foot-9 shooting guard started all 36 games in which she played—she missed one game with a concussion—and she led the Hokies in an array of statistical categories, including points (667), points per game (18.5), field goals (236), field-goal attempts (481), 3-point percentage (38.8), free throws made (126), and free-throw attempts (147). She led the Hokies in scoring in 22 of her 36 starts, including six of the final eight games. She scored in double figures in Tech's final eight games.

Emery's season also was a record-breaking one in a couple of respects, as she set two Tech single-season records. Her 667 points and her 236 field goals are now the new standards for women's basketball in Blacksburg.

Emery was arguably at her best during the Hokies' run to the WNIT championship game. Her jumper with a second remaining helped Tech avoid a first-round upset to Navy, and then she drained a 3-pointer with 22 seconds to go to help the Hokies to a road upset of West Virginia in the WNIT semifinals.

Emery made the WNIT all-tournament team, and she earned second-team All-ACC honors after averaging nearly 20 points per game in league play. She became just the fourth Tech player to earn All-ACC honors (Kerri Garden, Brittney Cook, Uju Ugoka) and returns to lead a team with lofty goals heading into the 2018-19 campaign. 

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL
Athlete
of the
YEAR 2017/18



Taylor EMERY
JR • TAMPA, FLORIDA



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**Peter
SEUFER**
JR • LYNCHBURG, VIRGINIA

MEN'S CROSS COUNTRY
Athlete
of the
YEAR 2017/18

Virginia Tech featured a stacked men's cross country team this past fall, one that included a group of seniors. But an underclassman led the way with a dominant season. Showing his ability to run long distances at a consistent pace, Peter Seufer finished as the Hokies' top runner in four of the five races that he ran this past season, and he also finished in the top 10 on all four of those occasions. He started the season running in the Virginia Tech Alumni Invite and concluded the 8K version of Tech's cross country course in a time of 25 minutes, 11.6 seconds to come in sixth—and finishing just a tenth of a second behind teammate Vincent Ciattei. That race sparked a tremendous season for Seufer, as he went on to finish 15th at the Louisville Sports Commission meet and then came in second in the Adidas Pre-Nationals, earning himself national acclaim

with such a strong performance in what was a loaded field. At the ACC Championships, he came in seventh, and at the NCAA Southeast Regional, he finished ninth at the Panorama Farms course outside of Charlottesville, Virginia. Behind Seufer and that veteran group of runners, the Hokies finished second at the NCAA Southeast Regional and earned an automatic bid to the NCAA Championships—the program's seventh appearance and third since 2012. Seufer closed the season by finishing a team-best 45th at the NCAA meet, which was held in Louisville, Kentucky. Seufer earned All-ACC and All-Southeast Region honors for the first time in his career. With so many seniors departing from the men's team, he figures to be the leader of this group once again, as the Hokies head into the 2018 fall season. 

**Katie
KENNEDY**
SR • SPRINGFIELD, VIRGINIA

For the second consecutive year, Katie Kennedy was named Inside Hokie Sports' women's cross country Athlete of the Year—and for good reason, too. She finished as the Hokies' lead runner at every meet in which she participated this past fall. Kennedy ran in four meets and won the season-opening Hokie Invite, which marked her first collegiate win. She later finished 50th at the prestigious Adidas Pre-National meet, and that meet led up to the ACC Championships, where she came in 19th in a time of 20 minutes, 44.2 seconds. Behind her performance, the Hokies came in third as a team, tying for their best finish ever at an ACC Championships meet. Kennedy closed the season by coming in 15th at the NCAA Southeast Regional held at a tough, hilly Panorama Farms course outside of Charlottesville, Virginia. Tech finished fourth at that meet, which was the program's second-best performance at an NCAA regional. By virtue of her top-20 finish at the ACC meet and her top-25 finish at the NCAA regional, Kennedy earned All-ACC and All-Southeast Region honors for the second straight year. Kennedy departs as one of just three runners in Tech history to be named to the All-ACC team on two occasions (Sarah Rapp, Tasmin Fanning). She was the only senior on this past year's women's team, and for sure, will be missed. 

WOMEN'S CROSS COUNTRY
Athlete
of the
YEAR 2017/18







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Greg
STROMAN
 SR • MANASSAS, VIRGINIA

The Virginia Tech football team won nine games this past season, and much of that success arguably could be attributed to a rather salty defense and big plays on special teams. Of course, Greg Stroman played a rather large role in both of those areas.

The 6-foot cornerback headlined a Tech defense that held opposing offenses to less than 200 yards passing per game. Stroman started all 13 games, and he led the squad in interceptions (four), pass breakups (11) and passes defended (15).

More than just a guy who put up numbers, Stroman made the biggest of plays. He returned one of his interceptions for a touchdown against Georgia Tech, and his interception against Pittsburgh led to the Hokies' game-winning touchdown. Also against the Panthers, he knocked away a pass on a play that was part of Tech's goal-line stand to preserve a 20-14 victory.

In addition, Stroman came up large on special teams. He averaged 11.3 yards per punt return, and he returned two of those punts for touchdowns—one in the Hokies' win over Delaware and the other in Tech's blitzing of North Carolina. He finished with four punt return touchdowns in his career.

Stroman earned first-team All-ACC honors as a cornerback this past season, and he was an honorable mention All-ACC choice as a punt returner. He wrapped up his athletics career by being drafted in the seventh round by the Washington Redskins in the 2018 NFL Draft. **VT**

It took Virginia Tech lacrosse head coach John Sung just two years to make the Hokies' lacrosse program an NCAA Championship participant, and one of his best moves to help accomplish that feat was bringing in Paige Petty.

Petty quickly adjusted to the college lacrosse scene as a freshman, starting all 20 games in which she played for a Tech squad that set a school record for wins (14), set a school record for ACC wins (five), received its first NCAA Championship bid, and won a game at the NCAA Championship. The midfielder became the Hokies' "go-to" player, as she led the team in goals (58), points (65), and free-position goals (19) and tied for the team lead with two game-winning goals.

With her performances, Petty inserted herself quickly into the Tech record book. Her 58 goals were the third-most in a single season in Tech history, and her seven goals in a March 31 win over Louisville tied for the fifth-most goals ever in a single game. The 65 points also tied for the fifth-most points in a single season.

Petty, who earned first-team All-ACC honors, scored at least two goals in 16 of her 20 games played, and she scored four or more on seven occasions. Her four goals against Georgetown in the first round of the NCAA Championship propelled Tech to a 13-10 victory.

Fortunately, Petty is scheduled to be in Blacksburg for the next three seasons. Another season like her freshman campaign, and she could obliterate several of Tech's career records—while hopefully leading the Hokies to ACC and NCAA success in the process. **VT**



Paige
PETTY
 FR • BERNARDSVILLE, NEW JERSEY

Mark LAWRENCE JR.


JR • RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

The Virginia Tech men's golf team suffered through a bit of an up and down season, but nothing was down about the play of the top player in the lineup. As expected from last year's Virginia State Amateur champion and a U.S. Amateur semifinalist, Mark Lawrence Jr. led the way for the Hokies all season.

Lawrence tied for the team lead with 33 rounds played, and he led the Hokies in just about every statistical category. His low round of 66, which he accomplished three times, was the team's lowest of the season. He also led the squad in rounds under par (22), top-20 finishes (eight), top-10 finishes (four), stroke average (71.45) and final-round average (70.27).

Lawrence recorded a fifth-place finish at the Gopher Invitational to open the season, shooting 1-under-par. He also recorded a sixth-place finish at the 3M Augusta Invitational, and he came in seventh at the General Hackler Championship.

He was the lone Hokie to make the NCAA's regional play, as he received an at-large bid to play in the NCAA Raleigh Regional held in Raleigh, North Carolina. He finished 65th in that tournament.

Following the ACC Championship, Lawrence earned All-ACC honors in a vote conducted among the league's head coaches. Fortunately, he returns for another season to a Tech men's golf program looking for a big turnaround in 2018-19. 


MEN'S GOLF Athlete of the YEAR 2017-18



The 2017-18 season turned out to be a record-breaking one for the Virginia Tech women's golf program, as the Hokies made their first NCAA regional appearance in the brief three-year history of the program. And as expected, Elizabeth Bose had a lot to do with the Hokies' success.

Bose tied for the team lead with 33 rounds played and led the Hokies in nearly every statistical category. Her stroke average of 73.21 led the squad, along with her final-round average of 73.36. Her seven top-20 finishes also led the squad, including four top-10 performances. Her low round of 66, which came in the very first round of the season, was the lowest on the team and the lowest by a Tech women's golfer in program history.

But Bose's biggest accomplishment came in early March when she won the Hurricane Invitational at Biltmore Golf Course in Coral Gables, Florida. She shot rounds of 71, 69 and 70 to finish at 6-under-par and beat a field of 75 golfers. In doing so, she became the first women's golfer in Tech history to win an event.

Bose led Tech at its NCAA Austin Regional appearance, finishing 24th overall at 3-over-par after shooting a final-day 69. She was Tech's top finisher in seven events this season and should be the leader once again, as she heads into her 2018-19 senior season. 

Elizabeth BOSE

JR • NORFOLK, VIRGINIA



WOMEN'S GOLF Athlete of the YEAR 2017-18



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**Marcelo
ACUNA**
SR • SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA

Perhaps it comes as no coincidence that the resurgence of the Virginia Tech men's soccer program started two years ago. The Hokies needed some scoring punch at the time and brought in a little-known transfer from Houston Baptist University named Marcelo Acuna.

In his two years, the 6-foot-2 forward from Costa Rica served as a primary cog on a team that now has made back-to-back NCAA appearances. This past season, Acuna scored 12 goals and handed out three assists in leading the Hokies to a 10-10 record. For the second straight year, Tech won a game in the NCAA tournament, as the Hokies knocked off Air Force 2-0 in the first round behind Acuna's goal and assist.

Acuna was one of five Tech players to start all 20 games for the Hokies this past season (he started all 42 games in his career). His 12 goals ranked third in the ACC, and his 27 points were fifth. He also tallied five game-winning goals, a number that stood tied for second in the league at season's end.

Arguably, his most memorable game came in the Hokies' 2-1 upset of then-No. 1 Notre Dame on Sept. 22. He scored the second of his two goals in the 71st minute after getting an assist from Rory Slevin to lift the Hokies to the upset — one of the main reasons why they received an at-large bid to the NCAA tournament.

Acuna earned first-team All-ACC honors after earning second-team honors as a junior. He also closed his career by earning second-team honors to the United Soccer Coaches All-East Region squad and third-team honors to the Top Drawer Soccer Best XI team.

The Hokies lose a lot of good players of this past year's squad — and certainly Acuna ranks right up there among the best of that group. **VT**

MEN'S SOCCER
Athlete
of the
YEAR
2017/18

The Virginia Tech women's soccer team just missed on an NCAA Championship bid, and the season could have been much better if not for five ties. Despite the disappointment, the Hokies and head coach Chugger Adair found a lot to be happy about in the play of Alani Johnson.

The forward started all 17 games in which she played this past fall, and she led the Hokies, both statistically and from a leadership perspective. Johnson paced Tech with a team-best four goals and led the squad with eight points. Her three game-winning goals and 20 shots on goal also were team bests.

Two of Johnson's game-winning goals came in the first four games of the season. Her shot from the left side in the second overtime went in and helped Tech record a 1-0 victory in the season opener versus San Diego. Less than 10 days later, she scored another game winner, taking a pass from Madi Conyers and putting it in the back of the net early in a game against Georgia. Tech's defense made it stand, as the Hokies upset the Bulldogs 1-0 at Thompson Field.

Johnson's four goals gave her 24 for her career, and she finished her time in Blacksburg with seven game winners. At the conclusion of the academic year, she was named the team MVP by the coaching staff. Her production and experience certainly will be missed. **VT**

**Alani
JOHNSON**
SR • VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

WOMEN'S SOCCER
Athlete
of the
YEAR
2017/18


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The Virginia Tech men's swimming and diving team ran into some rather stiff competition in the ACC this past season, but individually, Norbert Szabo more than held his own.

Szabo paced the Tech men at the ACC Championships by claiming the team's only medal. He won a silver medal in the 200-yard individual medley, finishing the event in a time of 1 minute, 42.70 seconds—the second-fastest time in the event in school history. He also scored points in the 200 freestyle and 200 butterfly events, coming in fifth in the 200 freestyle in a time of 1:35.06 and 13th in the 200 butterfly in a time of 1:44.62.

Szabo qualified for the NCAA Championships in three events—the 200 IM, the 100 breaststroke and the 200 butterfly—and his best finish came in the 200 IM, where he wound up 18th. He was one of just three Tech swimmers to qualify for the Championships.

Szabo returns for his senior season, looking to pace the men's team to a resurgence under new head coach Sergio Lopez Miro. Given his performances over the past two years, Szabo should go into the 2018-19 season as one of the better swimmers in the ACC. 

MEN'S SWIMMING
Athlete
of the
YEAR
2017-18

Norbert
SZABO
JR • BUDAPEST, HUNGARY


Reka
GYORGY
SO • ULLO, HUNGARY

The Virginia Tech women's swimming and diving team once again finished in the top half of the ACC Championships standings, and once again, several student-athletes performed well at the NCAA Championships. Though only a sophomore, Reka Gyorgy has shown that she knows how to compete with the nation's best.

Best known for her prowess in the individual medley events, Gyorgy was the lone Tech swimmer—male or female—to win a gold medal at this year's ACC Championships. She took home gold in the 400-yard IM for the second consecutive year, winning in a time of 4 minutes, 4.42 seconds and breaking her own school record.

Gyorgy also swam in two relay events at the ACC Championships, helping the women's team finish in seventh place in the team standings. Both the 400- and 800-yard freestyle relay teams came in fifth at the meet, adding to the team's total.

Gyorgy went on to qualify in both the 200 and 400 IM at the NCAA Championships, and she earned honorable mention All-America honors in the 400 IM. She finished 16th out of more than 50 entrants, swimming the event in a time of 4:12.02.

The Hokies lose seven seniors off this year's women's team, meaning that some of the younger swimmers and divers need to emerge next season under new coach Sergio Lopez Miro. At the least, a talented swimmer like Gyorgy gives him a great foundation from which to start building his own program. 

WOMEN'S SWIMMING
Athlete
of the
YEAR
2017-18



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Thanks to a nice late-season run, the Virginia Tech men's tennis program earned its 11th NCAA Championships berth in the past 12 seasons. Mitch Harper certainly played an integral role in the Hokies' success.

Harper went 21-13 this past season, including a 14-6 record in dual matches—with all 14 wins coming out the No. 1 spot in the lineup. He paced the Hokies with an impressive 8-4 mark against ACC competition, and he won a team-best eight matches against nationally ranked foes.

Consistently ranked in the top 30 for much of the season, Harper played his best toward the end of the regular season when he won six matches against nationally ranked foes in a seven-match stretch. That included a win over then-No. 27 Carl Soderlund of Virginia by a score of 6-2, 6-4, helping the Hokies knock off rival UVA for the first time since 2003.

Harper beat the No. 22, No. 47, No. 51, No. 53, No. 67 and No. 101 foes this season before receiving an at-large bid to the NCAA Men's Singles Championships, becoming the 17th player in program history to earn a bid to the NCAA Men's Singles Championship. At that tournament, he knocked off No. 68 Majed Kilani of Tulsa in three sets before falling to No. 26 Cameron Klinger of Vanderbilt in the next round to end his season.

Harper earned first-team All-ACC honors in a vote conducted among the league's head coaches following the regular season—his first all-conference honor—and he was listed as an ITA Atlantic Region Player to Watch.

With him returning—along with the rest of the starting lineup—the Hokies should be primed for another NCAA appearance next spring. 



Mitch
HARPER

JR • BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

MEN'S TENNIS
Athlete
of the
YEAR

2017-18

WOMEN'S TENNIS
Athlete
of the
YEAR

2017-18

The Virginia Tech women's tennis team struggled at times this past season, but still managed to beat three ranked teams during the regular season and then made a nice little run at the ACC Championships. The player who played the main role in many of the Hokies' big wins was Natalie Novotna.

Novotna enjoyed a solid sophomore season, going 24-13 overall, including 16-10 in dual-match action. Her 24 victories led the Hokies, along with the 16 wins in duals and six victories over nationally ranked opponents. She also led the squad in tournament singles wins with eight and tied for the team lead in ACC wins with six. Perhaps most impressively, all 16 of her dual wins came out of the No. 1 spot in the lineup where she constantly went up against the opposing team's best player.

Novotna's best win came at the ACC Championships, where she knocked of Florida State's Carla Touly, who came in ranked No. 19 nationally, but lost 6-0, 6-4 to Novotna. That win propelled the Hokies to a 4-3 upset of the then-No. 17 Seminoles. Novotna also beat No. 65 Anna Rogers of NC State in three sets and No. 83 Asiya Dair of Boston College in straight sets in matches earlier in the season.

Novotna earned second-team All-ACC honors at the conclusion of the ACC season, and she received an at-large bid to the NCAA Women's Singles Championships—the lone Hokie to do so this season and just the third under head coach Terry Ann Zawacki-Woods. Novotna fell to No. 23 Michaela Bayerlova of Washington State in the first round.

Tech loses three seniors off this season's squad, but Novotna returns to lead a lineup that will be looking to make a move upward in the ACC standings next spring. 



Natalie
NOVOTNA

SO • VYSOKA NAD LABEM, CZECH REPUBLIC

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MEN'S TRACK & FIELD
Athlete
of the
YEAR
2017/18

The Virginia Tech men's track and field program didn't win an ACC team championship this past season, but the Hokies captured something that had been much more elusive—a national title in a distance running event—and Vincent Ciattei played a role in that.

Ciattei ran the leadoff leg for Tech in the distance medley relay at the NCAA Division I Indoor Track and Field Championships held in College Station, Texas in early March. He, Greg Chiles, Patrick Joseph and Neil Gourley won the national title in the event, becoming the first Tech men's runners to win a national title and joining Queen Harrison as the only runners in Tech track and field history to do so (Harrison won three crowns in 2010).

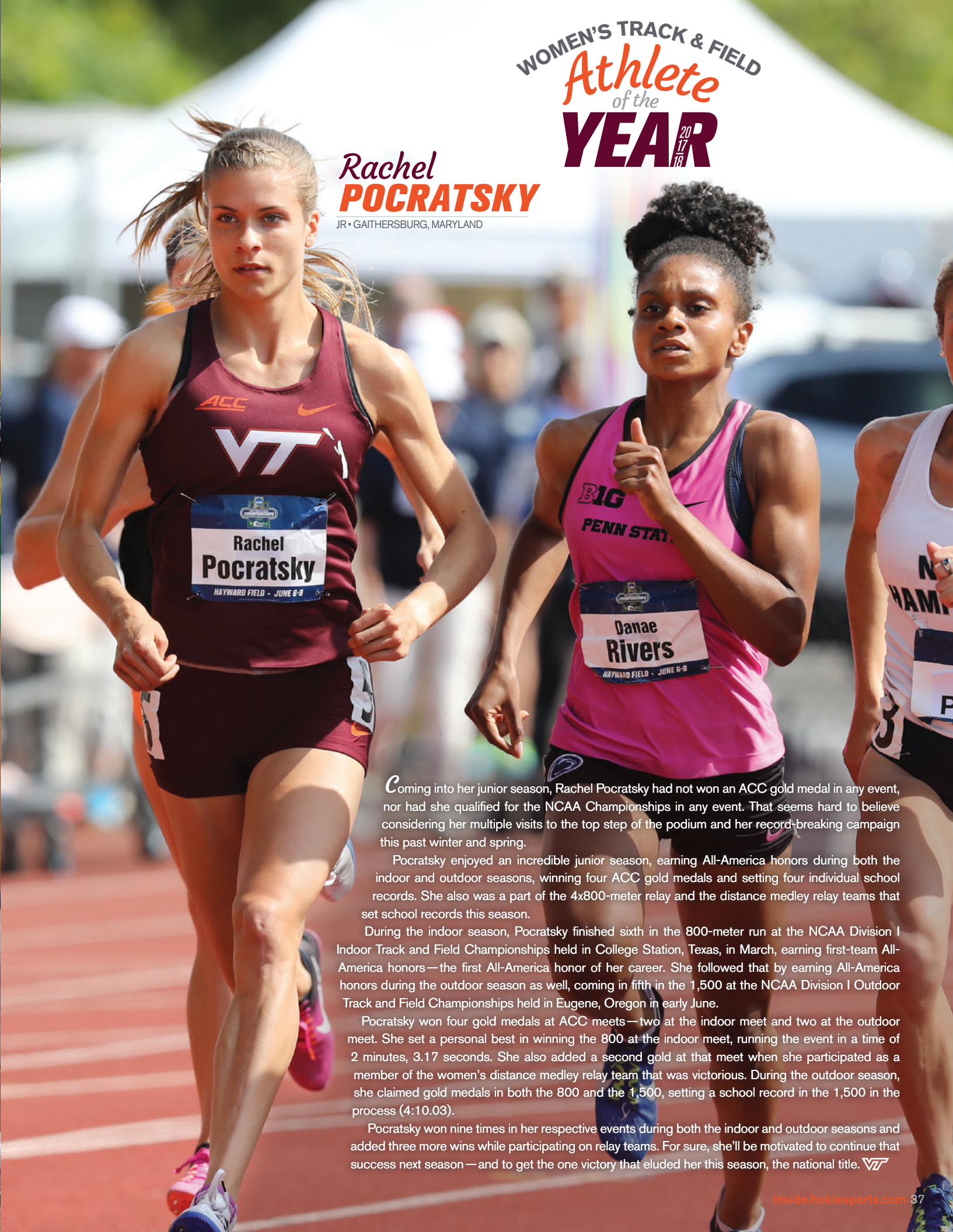
That national title served as the highlight of an outstanding season for Ciattei. He twice won silver medals in his individual events at NCAA Championships, claiming a silver in the mile at the NCAA's indoor meet in a school-record time of 3 minutes, 58.36 seconds. His other silver medal came at the NCAA's outdoor meet when he finished second in the 1,500 with a time of 3:45.01. He earned first-team All-America honors at both meets.

Ciattei also dominated at the conference level. He won gold medals in the mile and the 1,500 at the ACC's indoor and outdoor meets, respectively, and he won a bronze medal in the 800 at outdoor meet while attempting to win the 1,500-800 "double" to give the Hokies more points.

Though maybe not as well-known as some of his teammates, Ciattei certainly leaves behind a tremendous legacy. He departs as a national champion, a three-time NCAA silver medalist, a three-time ACC gold medalist, and a five-time All-American. **VT**

Vincent
CIATTEI

R-SR • BALTIMORE, MARYLAND



WOMEN'S TRACK & FIELD
Athlete
of the
YEAR
2017/18

Rachel
POCRATSKY

JR • GAITHERSBURG, MARYLAND

Coming into her junior season, Rachel Pocratsky had not won an ACC gold medal in any event, nor had she qualified for the NCAA Championships in any event. That seems hard to believe considering her multiple visits to the top step of the podium and her record-breaking campaign this past winter and spring.

Pocratsky enjoyed an incredible junior season, earning All-America honors during both the indoor and outdoor seasons, winning four ACC gold medals and setting four individual school records. She also was a part of the 4x800-meter relay and the distance medley relay teams that set school records this season.

During the indoor season, Pocratsky finished sixth in the 800-meter run at the NCAA Division I Indoor Track and Field Championships held in College Station, Texas, in March, earning first-team All-America honors—the first All-America honor of her career. She followed that by earning All-America honors during the outdoor season as well, coming in fifth in the 1,500 at the NCAA Division I Outdoor Track and Field Championships held in Eugene, Oregon in early June.

Pocratsky won four gold medals at ACC meets—two at the indoor meet and two at the outdoor meet. She set a personal best in winning the 800 at the indoor meet, running the event in a time of 2 minutes, 3.17 seconds. She also added a second gold at that meet when she participated as a member of the women's distance medley relay team that was victorious. During the outdoor season, she claimed gold medals in both the 800 and the 1,500, setting a school record in the 1,500 in the process (4:10.03).

Pocratsky won nine times in her respective events during both the indoor and outdoor seasons and added three more wins while participating on relay teams. For sure, she'll be motivated to continue that success next season—and to get the one victory that eluded her this season, the national title. **VT**

**Jaila
TOLBERT**
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VOLLEYBALL
Athlete
of the
YEAR
2017
18

The first phase in the rebuilding of the Virginia Tech volleyball program under new coach Jill Wilson took place this past fall, and while the Hokies incurred their share of bumps and bruises, they at least received consistent play the entire season from right-side hitter Jaila Tolbert.

Tolbert became just the seventh Tech player to be named to the All-ACC first or second team, as she received second-team honors following a junior season in which she led the Hokies in kills (318), hitting percentage (.331) and points (358.5). She also led Tech in three categories during conference matches—kills (222), kills per set (3.00) and hitting percentage (.335).

Tolbert, who made the ACC All-Freshman Team in 2015, posted career bests in kills, hitting percentage, assists (11), service aces (four) and digs (75). Her .331 hitting percentage was the seventh-best in the ACC this past fall and the top mark among non-middle blockers.

Tolbert's best game arguably came in the Hokies' 3-1 loss to NC State. She recorded 22 kills—one of 19 matches in which she finished in double figures in kills. She also notched 16 kills in the Hokies' win over rival Virginia in the penultimate match of the season, helping the Hokies to sweep the Cavaliers and contributing a point toward the school's victory over UVA in the Commonwealth Clash.

The Hokies lose six seniors off this past fall's team, but Tolbert's return, along with that of rising sophomores Kaity Smith and Ester Talamazzi, provide the nucleus for a program looking to move into the upper echelon of the ACC. 

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Dogged DETERMINATION KEEPS CIATTEI on TRACK

A patient, persistent approach helped Virginia Tech runner Vincent Ciattei overcome injuries and led to the multiple-time All-American departing as one of the better distance runners in program history

by Jimmy Robertson

Student-athletes rarely enjoy any substantial amount of free time in today's world of college athletics, and when they actually receive some, they often use it to relax and unwind.

For Vincent Ciattei, that occasionally means putting on some headphones and soaking in the distinct tones of certain classical or symphonic artists. And on rare occasions, he'll even pull out his beloved saxophone, shake off the rust and immerse himself as the music comes out. As those who play the instrument often like to say, you don't play the instrument — it plays you.

"I played the alto saxophone, and I really enjoyed that," Ciattei said, referring to his middle and high school days. "I played in the jazz ensemble, which was fun. It's a fun instrument, and it's flexible. You can use it in symphonic bands and jazz ensembles."

Ciattei, for sure, played sweet music on the track this past season — the redshirt senior just concluded his collegiate career by winning a silver medal in the 1,500-meter run at the NCAA Division I Outdoor Track and Field Championships in Eugene, Oregon — his second silver medal this season. Not many in this sport leave having excelled in cross country, indoor track and outdoor track, but the middle-distance specialist departs to the tune of a national championship in indoor track and field, first-team All-America honors in both indoor and outdoor track and field, and first-team All-ACC honors in those two along with cross country.

That's not too bad for a young man who sacrificed his beloved sport of basketball in high school in his hometown of Baltimore, pushing aside dreams of following Carmelo Anthony and many others of that city's greats to stardom after ultimately seeing where his future lie. He had been running cross country for his Perry Hall High School team, and after a year spent mostly sitting on the bench on the junior varsity basketball squad, he decided to focus on a sport that at least gave him a chance at a college scholarship.

"With how I was developing physically, I knew that it would be more likely for me after my sophomore year of cross country ... to take this running thing and be an athlete in college doing this than playing basketball," Ciattei said. "I hadn't had a lot of time in JV, and I was certainly dedicating a lot of time to it and improving in basketball, but I had more upside in running, and I was starting to develop more of a passion for it."

Despite the late start out of the blocks, Ciattei went on to become one of his high school's most decorated athletes — if not *the* most decorated. He won an astounding seven state championships, including four his senior season.

Part of his success stemmed from natural talent, but the majority of it could be credited to his work ethic and his attention to detail. He committed to the training when he knew others would slack off. He spent time reading about the latest workout trends and writing detailed logs of his performances when he knew others wouldn't.

"I don't have as much natural talent as a lot of other people that I'm competing with, but I do have some," he said. "I think it's a sport that matches up well with my personality and how I was raised."

Training and researching and writing daily logs is pretty heady stuff for an 18-year-old, but Ciattei likes immersing himself into an analytical approach. He graduated from Perry Hall with better than a 4.0 grade-point average, and schools with academic prestige pursued him. In the end, he chose Tech over Georgetown and Yale.

"It came down to here and Georgetown, and Virginia Tech had an engineering program, which Georgetown didn't," he said. "I felt a little more like I would fit in with the team here, but that was nothing against Georgetown ... it was a very close decision."

He came out of the blocks solidly as a collegian, but an injury nearly derailed his career. He started feeling pain in his hips toward the end of his freshman campaign, and it bothered him most of the summer. Tech's sports medicine staff diagnosed him with osteitis pubis — an inflammation of the pelvic region.

The injury limited his workout regimen. He spent a lot of time in the swimming pool at McComas Hall and working on the AlterG, an anti-gravity treadmill that reduces impact on the body. He became better, but the injury flared up again during the outdoor season, forcing him to take a redshirt campaign. His sophomore year was essentially a waste.

"I didn't develop at all," he said. "I was cross training and doing everything that I could to get back, but it was definitely a very frustrating time."

Ciattei worked himself back to the cross country course and eventually to the track in 2016. But at a home meet before the ACC Indoor Track and Field Championships that winter, another injury occurred — tightening in his back.

"That's when I was questioning whether things were going to work out," Ciattei admitted.

Fortunately, distance coach Ben Thomas came up with an idea. Ciattei's back bothered him whenever he ran a mile or longer, so Thomas moved him to the anchor leg of the 4x800-meter relay for that meet at Rector Field House. The move allowed the first three runners to get in their work, while allowing Ciattei an opportunity to see how his back would fare at a shorter distance.

Ciattei ran the leg in one minute, 51 seconds, which wasn't particularly good, but he got through the race pain free. Thomas then decided to use Ciattei for the 800-meter leg of the distance medley relay (DMR) event at the ACC Championships, and he ran a better time there, helping Tech to a bronze-medal finish. During the outdoor season, Thomas kept Ciattei at 800 meters, and Ciattei came in fifth at the ACC outdoor meet, while eventually dropping his time to 1:47.91.

Thomas' move at that home meet turned out to be a confidence booster for Ciattei — and maybe even a career saver.

"Basically, Coach still giving me a shot the next day after blowing it and looking like nothing was going to be improving in the mile ... that meet in and of itself wasn't a very important meet, but that was a huge turning point for my career," Ciattei said. "I dropped down to the 800 for that season and had some success there, and then the following year when I was healthier, I came back to the mile, which I knew I was probably going to be better at, and from then on, I've had a lot of success."

Continued on page 42

“

I don't have as much natural talent as a lot of other people that I'm competing with, but I do have some. I think it's a sport that matches up well with my personality and how I was raised.

Vincent Ciattei on running

”

Continued from page 41 **Dogged DETERMINATION**

Ciattei returned to form and gradually returned to his best two events—the mile and the 1,500-meter run. Over the past two seasons, he’s has been nothing short of spectacular.

His recent run to success started in cold, snowy South Bend, Indiana last year. In a bit of a stunning upset, he edged Virginia’s Henry Wynne at the finish line to win the gold medal in the mile at the ACC Indoor Track and Field Championships—and Wynne had won the national title in the event the previous year.

“I tried to view the race as I wanted to beat everyone,” Ciattei said. “I wasn’t focusing on just me versus Wynne or me versus someone else. Coach and I both knew how he raced. He’s pretty consistent with taking it out and daring anyone to hang with him. In that race, I knew I wanted to be as close to him as possible, so that when he really decided to make his move, I could match it. I think I did a good job of tactically being right on his shoulder the whole time and matching the move on that last lap.”

He earned a spot on Tech’s DMR team that ultimately won the silver medal at the NCAA Indoor Track and Field championships, and he carried that run of success into the outdoor season, earning a silver medal behind teammate Neil Gourley in the 1,500 at the ACC outdoor meet and later earning second-team All-America honors in the event at the NCAA Championships.

This winter and spring, he has brought home gold medals in both the mile and the 1,500 at the ACC meets, and he ran the leadoff leg of the Tech DMR team that included Greg Chiles, Patrick Joseph and Gourley. Those four won the national championship during the indoor season—the program’s first ever national crown in distance running.

Ciattei keeps his DMR national championship trophy on his desk in his room—a constant reminder of what his patience and perseverance has wrought.

“It was definitely exciting to be a part of that, with all the time that we’ve spent together training,” Ciattei said. “And to get that first national title for Coach Thomas was pretty exciting, too.”

“What really has made Vince special is his ability to work through failure,” Thomas said. “He has been patient, but persistent in his approach to the sport. Working so hard at something that has no guarantees of success is so counter-culture these days, but Vince stayed the course in his belief that he could compete, even when the results weren’t good.”

Ciattei graduated in May with a degree in engineering science and mechanics—a difficult major that focuses not just on the “what” of engineering, but also the “how” and the “why.” Earning such a degree requires someone to have mathematical skills, with an ability to look introspectively as well.

He also received a minor in biomechanics—something that grabbed his interest, as he rehabbed from all his injuries.


“My individual problems with stuff like that was a driving force of why I’d like to understand, and I liked learning about and continue to like learning about the mechanics of that sort of stuff,” he said.

Now, he gets ready for the next leg in the race, whichever one that may be. He earned a postgraduate scholarship from the ACC for his excellence in the classroom, and he received acceptance into the master’s program at Virginia Tech.

But he also wants to continue running and hopes for a professional future in the sport. Since he missed more than a year with injuries, he feels that he hasn’t quite realized his full potential.

“It’s sort of crazy to look back to where I was two or three years ago, and see where I am now,” Ciattei said. “I’m where I had hoped I would be, but it took a lot longer than I thought to have a realistic shot of being there.”

Looking ahead, his future appears filled with possibilities—running, research, degrees, job options. Ciattei, most certainly, likes the sound of that.

Actually, that, for sure, is music to his ears—even if it means keeping his beloved saxophone stored away for a just a bit longer. 

New TECH head coaches come aboard in swimming and diving and softball

Sergio Lopez Miro and Pete D’Amour have proven themselves as head coaches at other stops, and close connections to Tech AD Whit Babcock helped lead them to Blacksburg

by **Jimmy Robertson**

Right before he accepted the associate head coaching position within the Auburn University swimming and diving program in 2016, Sergio Lopez Miro promised daughter Harley and son Cobi that this career stop would be an extended one.

After all, to this point, his coaching career had taken him and his family from Chicago to Morgantown, West Virginia to Jacksonville, Florida and to Singapore in a span of roughly 15 years. So Lopez Miro wanted to settle down and focus on a more important task.

“I took an assistant job [at Auburn] to be more with my kids,” he said. “I wanted to do my job and help Auburn get to the top, but also, I wanted to have more time to spend with my daughter before she went to college and with my son.”

A coaching shake-up at Auburn, however, and a persuasive phone call from Virginia Tech Director of Athletics Whit Babcock resulted in Lopez Miro packing his U-Haul once again, as Babcock tabbed the Barcelona, Spain native to be the head coach of Virginia Tech’s swimming and diving programs. Lopez Miro takes over for Dr. Ned Skinner, who led the Hokies’ programs for 20 years before resigning in mid-April.

Lopez Miro is one of two head coaching hires made by Babcock in an unusually busy early summer. Babcock also selected Kennesaw State head coach Pete D’Amour to oversee the Tech softball program after relieving longtime head coach Scot Thomas of his coaching duties in late May. D’Amour spent two seasons as the head coach at Kennesaw State, where he led the Owls to a 79-37 record and two postseason appearances, including an NCAA regional showing this spring. Prior to coaching at Kennesaw, he spent 10 years as an assistant at Missouri.

Both coaches cited their familiarity with Babcock as reasons for taking their respective positions. Lopez Miro spent four seasons as the head coach at West Virginia—he led the Mountaineers’ men’s team to a BIG EAST title—during the time when Babcock worked as a fundraiser for The Mountaineer Athletics Club.

“I always liked Whit. I always respected him,” Lopez Miro said. “He called me, and we talked for about an hour and a half. The way he said things to me and what he wanted to do and the reasons why he wanted to bring me in and take care of my family ... I was pretty much sold there. I told Whit that I wasn’t sure I could do it because I promised my son that he wasn’t going to move, so I needed to talk with my kid.

“Finally, what we’re going to do is my wife [Sandy] and son are going to stay back for a year [his daughter is now a freshman at Princeton], and I’ll move here and coach. My son understands that it’s an amazing opportunity, and that I need to do it.”

Lopez Miro inherits a men’s and women’s program that had been consistently among the top five teams in the ACC since the Hokies joined the conference, but both dipped this year in part because of graduation losses from the previous season. The Tech men finished sixth at the ACC Championships, while the women came in seventh, with only one gold medalist combined between the two programs.

But Lopez Miro brings a lot of credibility and experience to Tech.

For starters, he is a two-time Olympian who won a bronze medal in the 200-meter breaststroke for Spain in the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, South Korea. He also has coached 18 Olympic swimmers.

He helped build the programs at Northwestern (as an associate head coach) and at West Virginia. During his time in Morgantown, he earned BIG EAST Coach of the Year honors on two occasions. He left West Virginia in 2007 to return to Spain and care for his mother, but returned and landed a job at the Bolles School in Jacksonville, leading the boys team there to four national titles. In 2014, he left Florida to oversee the Singapore Swimming Association, and he served as the head coach for Singapore in the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro—a position he held for two years before going to Auburn.

Lopez Miro, who swam collegiately at Indiana and graduated from American University, has elected to keep respected diving coach Ron Piemonte and assistant Josh Huger to create some stability within the Tech program. That, plus an awesome facility in the Christiansburg Aquatic Center, leave the 49-year-old optimistic about his situation in Blacksburg.

“It’s pretty healthy,” Lopez Miro said of the program. “I inherited a very good group of kids, and Josh and Ned [Skinner] did a good job with recruiting this past year. I’m excited. I come from a different country, and one of the things I’ve learned is that America is the land of opportunity. You don’t need to have everything to be the best. Many universities have many things that they take for granted, and we have a lot of things at Virginia Tech—we have an amazing academic school, we have good facilities, we have great leadership ... so I think I’m in a very good situation.”

Continued on page 44



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Sergio Lopez Miro

New TECH head coaches

Continued from page 43

D'Amour's bio is similar in some respects to Lopez Miro. He worked at Missouri for 10 years before taking the Kennesaw State job, including the same five-year time period in which Babcock served as executive associate AD for the Tigers. The two knew each other, though D'Amour said they had more of a business relationship back then.

"I'd go in there and ask him for parking passes for football games," D'Amour joked.

Missouri went 453-154 during D'Amour's 10 years on the staff, and more impressively, appeared in the Women's College World Series three times. The Tigers finished ranked in the top 20 nationally all 10 years.

D'Amour started his coaching career as a volunteer assistant at Missouri in 2007 and worked as a batting practice pitching coach for two seasons while finishing up work on his undergraduate degree before later being promoted to assistant coach in 2009. In 2015, he was promoted to associate coach. During his time in Columbia, he primarily worked with the pitchers and catchers, and he mentored 11 All-Americans and three conference Pitchers of the Year.

The lure of returning close to his roots led to his interest in the Virginia Tech position. He grew up in Monrovia, Maryland and his parents today live in Martinsburg, West Virginia—a 3.5-hour drive from Blacksburg.

"It's closer to home, the facilities, the administration, a good conference," D'Amour said, ticking off his reasons for wanting the position. "I like the area. I've been interested in this job for a long time. It was good when it came open. I was ready for it."

D'Amour inherits a Tech program coming off two straight losing seasons and three straight campaigns without an NCAA regional appearance. The Hokies went 23-30 this past season, including 7-16 in ACC play, and lost 10 games by just a run.

The Hokies, though, do return most of a young team from a season ago—they tied for the most newcomers in the ACC with 11. The returning group includes All-ACC pitcher Carrie Eberle, who led Tech with a 1.72 ERA and also at the plate, with eight home runs and a .362 on-base percentage.

"Just looking at the stats, good pitching and good defense," D'Amour said of his impressions of the Tech program. "They struggled to score runs a little bit, but that can be worked on. I think the program is close. It's close. Coach [Scot] Thomas left it in a good spot. I'm excited about the roster and what it looks like."

D'Amour, who played baseball at both Texas A&M-Corpus Christi and Frostburg State and later earned his degree in general studies and a master's degree in sports psychology from Missouri, planned on attacking his list of duties related to his new job rather quickly.

"It's going to be a situation where I'm on the go for the next two months," he said. "I think the first thing is getting to know people in the state and getting to know the travel ball coaches and the recruits that are lined up. I'll be in and out here in Blacksburg, but I plan on being on the road the majority of the time."

Both new coaches were eager to get started because, in both cases, they accepted positions that put them in good situations. The cupboards aren't bare—so hopefully, the wins will be soon to follow. **VT**



Pete D'Amour

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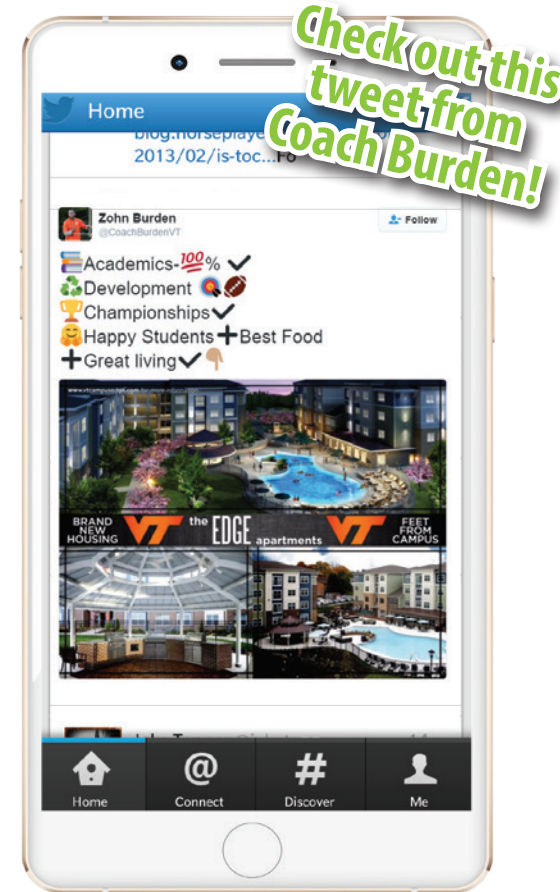
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