David McFadden and the Virginia Tech wrestling team won the ACC tournament title for the second consecutive year

WHAT'S INSIDE
Q&As with coordinators BUD FOSTER and BRAD CORNELSEN and a feature on Tech swimmer Ian Ho
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Tech offense looking to take next step
Chris Clarke is only a junior, but he was a beast down the stretch on Senior Day, as the Virginia Tech men’s basketball team shocked then-No. 5 Duke 64-63 at Carilion Clinic Court on Feb. 26 to close out the home portion of the men’s basketball schedule. Tech’s basketball staff honored seniors Justin Bibbs and Devin Wilson and two managers before the game, but Clarke made the biggest plays in the final 90 seconds. This resounding dunk (see photo) with 1:24 remaining cut the Duke lead to 63-60, and he scored two more baskets, including a stick-back of a Nickeil Alexander-Walker air ball with 4 seconds left that was the game winner. Clarke finished with eight points, while Alexander-Walker added 17 and Bibbs 14 in his final home game, as the Hokies upset the Blue Devils for the second straight year.

“I’m so grateful for my scholarship because coming from not much, my mom couldn’t afford for me to go to school, so just being able to come here at this beautiful town and just being able to play in front of all you fans in the Hokie Club, it means a lot. I just want to say thank you for giving me this opportunity, and it means a lot.”

Ahmed Hill
Redshirt Junior, Augusta, Georgia

“Having a scholarship to Virginia Tech means everything to me. I get to go to a great school. I’m a little bit away from home, but it’s cool because this is home now, and I get to play the game I love.”

Kerry Blackshear Jr.
Redshirt Sophomore, Orlando, Florida

“Tech bedevils Duke on Senior Day”

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Q&A

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

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because …
A: we are all bound by our love for Virginia Tech.

Q: My best memory of Virginia Tech athletics is …
A: when we beat Boston College to send us to the national championship game in New Orleans. Also, beating Notre Dame in 1973 to win the NIT.

Q: How did you get involved with the Hokie Club?
A: We became active members when our son, Scott, was a student at Virginia Tech.

Q: What caused you to become a fan of Virginia Tech?
A: I graduated from Virginia Tech. Also, my brother, Robert, and my son, Scott graduated from Virginia Tech. I have been a fan ever since my days at Virginia Tech.

Q: Describe a perfect day at Virginia Tech.
A: A bright, sunny, fall day watching a victory at Lane Stadium.

Q: Do you have any tailgating traditions?
A: Visiting with fellow alumni and friends and spending time with our family.

Q: What motivates you to give back to Virginia Tech athletics?
A: It is rewarding to know that we are helping Virginia Tech athletes to achieve their goals in sports and life.

Q: I am a Hokie Club member because …
A: I am proud of what Virginia Tech stands for as a leader in athletics?

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Q: I am a Hokie Club member because …
A: I am proud of what Virginia Tech stands for as a leader in athletics and academics.

Q: My favorite Virginia Tech sports are …
A: Football, basketball and tennis.

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech football player is …
A: Bruce Smith.

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech athlete from another sport is …
A: Dell Curry.

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ACC announces basketball All-Academic Teams

The Atlantic Coast Conference announced all-academic teams for men’s and women’s basketball in early March, and three Virginia Tech student-athletes earned a spot on those teams for their respective sports.

To be eligible for consideration, a student-athlete must have earned a 3.00 grade-point average for the previous semester and maintained a 3.00 cumulative average during his or her academic career.

On the men’s side, Justin Robinson earned second-team All-ACC recognition as the first Tech player to make an All-ACC team since Erick Green in 2013.

Other players who received notice were Devin Wilson and Chris Clarke. Clarke finished second in the voting for the Sixth Man of the Year Award, while Wilson received two votes for the Defensive Player of the Year honor.

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It’s time for that annual rite of spring. No, not Groundhog Day, or moving the clock forward an hour, or even the family Easter egg hunt.

No, in Hokie Nation, the most important rite of spring is the start of spring football practice, and their beloved Hokies started the first of their 15 allotted practices March 17. For the players, the time marked the end of the first quarter to their season — grueling winter workouts.

Tech finished its 2017 season with a respectable 9-4 record and a No. 24 national ranking. The Hokies look forward an hour, or even the family Easter egg hunt.

Dylan Rivers

Basically, all the material written about Ashby applies here, as Tech’s staff last potential NFL first-round draft pick Tremaine Edmunds and steady backup Anthony Shegog at the backer position. Rivers played a little more on defense in a mop-up role than Ashby this past season, but outside of that, the similarities are striking. Rivers, at 6-1, 230 pounds, was highly recruited, and the rising sophomore finds himself in the perfect position for a young player — with the edge on a starting role on Tech’s defense. Hopefully, he takes advantage of that opportunity over the next month.

Eric Kumah

The Hokies entered spring practice with 13 players listed at the receiver positions. A year ago, they relied extensively on one — Cam Phillips, who took all of his Tech records and departed. Josh Jackson needs for some receivers to emerge this spring, and Kumah makes the best bet. The rising junior caught 28 balls for 334 yards this past fall and needs to take the next step in his development. He provides the best combination of size (6-2, 220 pounds) and hands, which he showed last season when he made several difficult catches. He just needs to be a little more consistent. Tech’s staff, and this team, really need for him to develop into a 70-catch option this fall.

Tyree Rodgers/Bryce Watts

Pairing these two makes the most sense because one of them figures to be the favorite to start at the cornerback position opposite of Adonis Alexander. Which one? Well, Watts, a rising sophomore, played in all 13 games a year ago, mostly on special teams, while Rodgers, a rising redshirt sophomore, played in seven games. Watts certainly brings serious speed, having won the 55-meter state indoor championship as a high school senior in New Jersey. Tech’s staff has lacked depth at the cornerback position in part because the Hokies play so many defensive backs at other spots (safety, rover and nickel). The coaches certainly need for another consistent corner to step forward — and this is the time for Watts and Rodgers.

Tyrell Smith/Andre Plantin

Tech’s staff appears to be leaning toward moving last year’s starting right tackle, Kyle Chung, to center to replace Eric Gallo. That leaves an opportunity for Smith or Plantin, both of whom are rising redshirt juniors. Smith nearly won the starting job at right tackle this past season before offensive line coach Vance McCluer elected to go with the more experienced Chung. Plantin played quite a bit at left tackle toward the end of the season after an injury to Younas Nijman. The time is now for both, but especially the 305-pound Smith, who is in his fourth spring practice since coming to Tech. The Hokies actually possess a lot of depth and talent on the offensive line, and Vice elected to go with the more experienced Chung.smith nearly won the starting job at right tackle this past season before offensive line coach Vance McCluer elected to go with the more experienced Chung. Plantin played quite a bit at left tackle toward the end of the season after an injury to Younas Nijman. The time is now for both, but especially the 305-pound Smith, who is in his fourth spring practice since coming to Tech. The Hokies actually possess a lot of depth and talent on the offensive line, and Vice elected to go with the more experienced Chung. Smith nearly won the starting job at right tackle this past season before offensive line coach Vance McCluer elected to go with the more experienced Chung. Plantin played quite a bit at left tackle toward the end of the season after an injury to Younas Nijman. The time is now for both, but especially the 305-pound Smith, who is in his fourth spring practice since coming to Tech. The Hokies actually possess a lot of depth and talent on the offensive line, and Vice elected to go with the more experienced Chung. Smith near...
The people had lingered on Carillon Clinic Court in numbers larger than usual and for longer than usual. Tech head men’s basketball coach Buzz Williams had been emotional, and brilliantly candid, on the postgame radio show with Mike Burnop and me. My dad had texted me a handful of “WOWs” and a few exclamation points. The crowd had surged onto the floor where Nicklee Alexander-Walker had seconds before thrown a perfect lob (air ball) to Chris Clarke for the game-winning stick-back. Just before that, Clarke had missed a potential go-ahead layup off a coast-to-coast drive. A minute before that, he had missed a potential go-ahead layup off a coast-to-coast drive. Eventually, they turned to the process by which Williams and his family had gotten to this moment—and how I had so emotionally invested. Their literal path extends back well beyond my observation, and I am grateful for their recollections of it, but for the purpose here, I’ll keep it in the relatively recent past.

Hindsight has a way of shaping our memories and our history books, but isn’t always as accurate as we think. Our immediate hindsight would tell us that last year’s tournament appearance was preordained, and in many ways, we already might have taken it for granted. But now, as I lay awake, I started to reflect on some of the moments along the way that were certainly never certain.

One of the things I remember Williams saying was how hard it is to make up ground in the ACC. That is absolutely true, and it definitely starts long before a team begins posting wins on the court. I remember the first time I met Zach LeDay, Seth Allen, Justin Bibbs, Ahmed Hill, Justin Robinson, Chris Clarke, Devin Wilson, and everyone else in the basketball family. I remember the first time it felt like family. I remember watching practice for the first time. I remember losing to Alabama State in my first game ever called at Cassell Coliseum. I remember beating Radford at their place and the guys seemingly growing. I remember talking with the Phil Martelli (St. Joseph’s head coach) in the cool bus-spinning area of Barclays Center after the Hawks had handled the Hokies in December of 2015.

I remember the Hokies being serenaded with John Denver’s “Country Roads.” Virginia fans in their own arena after the next game. I remember waiting for Williams to get his game. I remember my anger, not at him, but at the feeling. I remember the Hokies beating NC State in overtime to start a five-game winning streak and how much it was hurt that he was hurt. I remember LeDay’s mean mugs after dropping 35 on Miami. I remember resting up ground in the ACC. That is absolutely true, and it definitely starts long before a team begins posting wins on the court. I remember landing in Utah and the walk into the Christmas party as a reminder to keep digging. That’s how I was hurt that he was hurt. I’m still a little embarrassed that I unprofessionally threw my arms up in triumph from radio row when the Hokies survived at Pitt.

This year, the months have been seemingly even more volatile—the lows of Syracuse and UVA at home, the defensive metamorphosis after Miami and before NC State, the strained beginnings of John Paul Jones arena in Charlottesville. The point is, if I can remember those moments, and how stressful some of them have been, imagine what it has been like for the players who really play parts in this story. The reps in the weight room, the lessons in practice and film session. The time spent with Buzz’s Bunch and on a #getBETTER tour. The reps in the weight room, the lessons in practice and film session. The time spent with Buzz’s Bunch and on a #getBETTER tour. The grind of boot camp. The initial conversations in recruiting that led to these guys being here. The process—how it happened—how to add up to something that hopefully we will be able to grant the players in hindsight because it is undoubtedly hard to make up ground.

It finally came to me. I was feeling overwhelmed. In a way, overwhelmed by what that basketball family had endured and accomplished sure, but more overwhelmed by how emotionally connected I felt to it, and how their makeup had infected me.

I couldn’t sleep. My mind was filled with the immediate. Wow, that was done with ESPNU’s “Big Monday” crew here. Wow, that was done in front of the seventh, but certainly most exuberant, sellout of the ACC season. Wow, that was done while leading for only a minute of the game and only four seconds of the second half. Wow, that Red Panda sure is something. Wow, they could set a program record for ACC wins. Wow, I get to call March Madness again.

An hour passed, and sleep was no closer. The thoughts just kept looping. Eventually, they turned to the process by which Williams and his family had gotten to this moment—and how I had so emotionally invested. Their literal path extends back well beyond my observation, and I am grateful for their recollections of it, but for the purpose here, I’ll keep it in the relatively recent past.

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The goal of the One Love Foundation is to prevent relationship violence by meeting students on campuses and focusing on educating the most at-risk individuals—those between the ages of 16 and 24. The foundation educates students about the signs of abuse, what healthy and unhealthy relationships look like, and the resources available if they or their peers experience relationship abuse. One Love uses a program called the Escalation Workshop as a catalyst for this education. This 90-minute film-based workshop educates about the warning signs of an abusive relationship, creating a safe zone for discussing an all-too-common problem.

Since the creation of the One Love Foundation in 2010, more than 255,000 students from more than 550 schools across the country have participated in the Escalation workshop. Consistently cited as “relatable” and “eye opening,” it has been implemented by various campus departments, including athletics, women’s centers, Greek life and other student organizations.

In September of 2015, the Atlantic Coast Conference announced a partnership with the One Love Foundation and became the first collegiate conference to do so. Soon after, the Virginia Tech Office of Student-Athlete Development became aware of the foundation and quickly joined the movement by bringing the One Love program to Blacksburg. A virtual training session took place that allowed multiple staff members from the athletics department, the Women’s Center, and the Office of Student Affairs to become trained One Love facilitators. These offices then bring this workshop to a variety of student groups, including student-athletes.

The student-athlete development staff began to implement this program in September of 2016, and during the 2016-2017 academic year, every Virginia Tech student-athlete participated in the Escalation workshop. Following the success of the inaugural year of implementing the One Love program, the student-athlete development team set a goal that every incoming Virginia Tech student-athlete, including freshmen and transfers, would participate in the Escalation Workshop within their first six weeks on campus—known as the “Red Zone” time period for sexual assault. The student-athlete development team met this goal during the fall 2017 semester, as all 180 incoming student-athletes participated in the workshop.

Following each One Love workshop since the program’s implementation in 2016, the student-athlete participants complete a survey detailing their experience, and the data collected speaks volumes as to how significantly this programming impacted these individuals. Ninety-eight percent of those surveyed responded that, because of the workshop, they will speak up if they see unhealthy and abusive relationship behaviors in their own or their friends’ relationships. Ninety-eight percent of the student-athletes said that the Escalation Workshop made them aware of the unhealthy relationship behaviors that become abusive, and potentially the most startling response, 92 percent reported that the workshop helped them realize that relationship abuse is present in their or their friends’ lives. When asked for feedback on the program, freshman wrestler John Borst said, “The workshop was eye opening and helped me become more aware of what to look for, and how I can help my fellow teammates and my community.”

The One Love Foundation, fueled by tragedy, has created a movement to change the statistics surrounding relationship violence, and in doing so, continues to help the Virginia Tech Department of Athletics provide education and programming to impact positively the lives of student-athletes.
Inside Hokie Sports

Graduation and early departures leave the Hokies’ defense void of experience, but coordinator Bud Foster is excited about the possibilities of several younger players who hopefully will emerge this spring.

by Jimmy Robertson

Tim Settle is another one. Ricky Walker had a big-time year for us. Andrew Motuapuaka played outstanding. I thought our secondary played extremely well.

IHS extra

Youth the STORY for TECH'S DEFENSE entering Spring Practice

O: Rayshard Ashby and Dylan Rivers played on special teams as true freshmen this past fall, and Dylan played in a mop-up role in a game or two. What do you like about those two, and where do they fit into the mix?

BF: “I think both of them are capable. They were highly recruited kids and top-rated kids. Rayshard did a nice job on special teams [this past fall]. So did Dylan. When Dylan was in there to finish a couple of games, he made some plays. Dylan got to practice a little more, particularly at the end when Sh Ons was banged up a little bit, so he got more practice time on defense, but all those kids got some pass skel [skeleton, 7-on-7 work] work and middle drill work.

“But the competition is going to be wide open. Between Rayshard, between Rico Kearney and Daniel Griffith, those three guys are going to battle at that free spot. I’m excited about Dav Holbrook coming in [from North Carolina]. I think he’s a special guy, and I think he’ll compete once he gets here. I’m anxious to see where Redon Arts fits in, whether he’s a mike or a backer. I like his movements and explosiveness and those types of things. He’s a good football player.”

“Mike is a playmaking spot, and we need to find a playmaker out of this group and a guy that’s consistently good. That position, year in and year out, is going to be our top tackle, or should be, and I want that guy to have some leadership qualities—and I think those guys have the ability to do that.”

At the backer spot, I would say that Dylan is a little ahead of the other guys. Jaylen Griffin is a guy that I was impressed with in the scrimmages and middle drills as a freshman. He played that position at high school, and he shows he can play with them. He has some instincts, so I’m anxious to see his development. We also brought Alon Tisdale in early. He’s not ready to play physically just yet, but I like what he’s all about. He’s long and athletic. He’s not to the strength of some of these guys, but he has some qualities that I like. Zach Trues has a walk-on from Blacksburg, and he’s done a great job of changing his body. We’ll see if he can help us somewhere, but I like what the kid is all about. This program is important to him, which you appreciate. “Those will be the guys battling for playing time, not just at linebacker, but also for special teams. It’s a great opportunity for them to make a name for themselves.”

Q: You also lost both starting cornerbacks—Greg Stroman and Brandon Facyson—and both were extremely productive. That said, how important is this spring for Adonis Alexander?

BF: “I’m counting on him to be the lead guy on one side. He had an opportunity to leave early, and he’s making the right decision to stay for a lot of reasons. If he is focused, and if he is disciplined, he can be as good as anyone we’ve had around here. He’s long, he’s athletic, he’s got great ball skills, he’s got great timing, he’s a good tackler—he has a lot of qualities physically that make him pretty special. He just needs to be consistent, and that means being sound fundamentally and with his techniques. But that’s why he’s coming back—to continue to develop and grow as a football player and a person. I’m hoping he’ll be the leader of that group.”

Q: The rest of the cornerbacks are relatively unproven, with Bryce Watts and Tyree Rodgers probably the most experienced after having played mostly on special teams in 2017. What do you like about those two, as you look to replace Stroman and Facyson?

BF: “Obviously, with a guy like Bryce, he was the 1000-yard champ out of New Jersey, so he can run, and Tyree is a guy that when we put him in the game, he did a nice job. Sometimes, he played some clean-up spots, but I just like how they’re working in the offseason. Football is important to them, and you’re seeing that through their body of work. We need for them to step up just because of who we lost. They’re the next guys in line.”

Continued on page 16
We brought in two freshmen early—Dyler Cousen and Jermaine Walker—and I like their length and athletic ability. They haven’t taken a rep yet. We’ve done some classroom work, but there is a difference between doing that and doing it on the field, but I have been impressed by their abilities and athleticism during early-morning workouts. Those are guys that have a skill set that we’re looking for and what we’ve played with in the past.

Q: I wanted to ask you about Devon Hunter, who came in highly touted, but struggled with injuries some this past fall. Where do you see him fitting in, and what are your expectations of him?

BF: “He played rover, but we’re going to potentially look at Devon as our nickel guy with Moo [Reynolds] being our strong safety. And, we’ll maybe look at DJ, too, because he played the strong safety last season before he broke his foot. I like the kid. It’s important to him, and he played well. He was really starting to understand the position, so we’re excited to get him back.”

“I think he’s a notch above the other guys [in his position because he played last year. He’s a lot like Dylan Rivers and I think he’s going to be a better player and have a chance to compete for a starting position because he played last year. He’s a lot like Dylan Rivers and Rayshard Ashby in that he’s a notch above the other guys [in his class] because all they were able to practice a little more and do some different things.”

“I’m excited about him and his future, with the way he runs. He’s a dynamic athlete. We need for him to figure it out and hopefully we’ve got a big spring for us.

Q: You did lose Terrell Edmunds, but you’re gaining Divine Deablo, and you’re moving Khalid Ladler to free safety. Do you feel good about the free safety position?

BF: “We’re extremely pleased with Divine last season before he broke his foot. I like the kid. It’s important to him, and he played well. He was really starting to understand the position, so we’re excited to get him back.”

“At that time, I thought Khalid came in and did a good job. I was extremely pleased when he stepped in and played—and with how he played. He’s not the fastest guy, but he knows how to compete. He knows what his strengths and his weaknesses are. He’s just a smart, heady player. There will be some competition there.”

Q: Maybe the strongest part of this defense right now is the defensive line, led by Ricky Walker, Vinny Mihota and Trovon Hill. Looking at Settle’s spot, whom do you see as the frontrunner for Settle’s spot since both tackle positions

BF: “We’re going to move Vinny down inside. I think he’s weighing around 285. He tore his ACL at the end of the Pitt game, and he’ll miss spring ball, but I think he’s a good fit at tackle. If he’s going to play at the next level, I think that’s his best chance to showcase his talents, and he knows that.

“But I think it’ll be him and Jarrod Hewitt next to Ricky. I’m excited about Jarrod. He can run. He played a little more and get better as the season went along. You saw his production continue to improve as the season progressed.

Q: You did two freshmen [Trevon Hill and Darius Fullwood] are the next guys because of their age and maturity. But, you know, Robert Porcher [a freshman] because he was hoping to get a good evaluation on, but he’s not going to get one. I think the team lead in sacks in 2017. As a redshirt freshman who enrolled in January in the mix, that gives you four young ends that are going to continue to work to go along with a couple of guys that are playmakers for us in Trevon and House. It’s

be interesting to see. I like those young kids. Zion and Tyjuan were two guys that stood out during middle drills and some of our team stuff that we did during our bowl preparations when we had some extra time. They played on the other side of the line of scrimmage and played fast, so we’ll see.”

Q: Where would you hope to see this defense by the end of spring practice? What do you hope to get accomplished?

BF: “It’s not a whole lot different than every year, but we are younger at a lot more spots. I think we’ve got 60-65 guys on this team that are freshmen or sophomores, and it’s real, especially on defense. They’ve got to learn their position, they’ve got to understand their position and the experience within their position, and then they’ve got to understand how that fits within the defense. Then they need to work every day and grow every day, hopefully, we’ll get a little better.”

This will be a group—and it’s no different every year—when you have 15 practices and you’re finished with the spring game, you’d like to start over again, but you can’t.”

“Hopefully, these guys will get enough instilled in them as far as what their position demands and what our defense demands and the game demands through spring practice that it will carry over through summer workouts and doing the 7-on-7s [passing drills] and that type of thing. That’s where they can take what they’ve learned into the summer and improve. The linebackers, for example, they can go out and do the fundamental stuff, except for tackling, without pads. That’s what we’ve had before, with the leadership of guys like Andrew Motauapa and Greg Stroman or Terrell Edmunds or Ricky Walker. Those were guys that would take those young guys out and work them a little bit and get better.

“I’m hoping all of these guys will learn their positions and understand the expectations. I’d like to see that fit the scheme and get to the point where their mind is not tying up their feet and then go play.”
Virginia Tech’s football program amassed nine wins in 2017, and it comes as no surprise that the Hokies played well across the board. The Hokies averaged 412.8 yards per game, which ranked 53rd, while finishing 54th in rushing offense (173.4 yards), 54th in passing efficiency (135.9) and 57th in passing defense (229.2 yards).

Arguably, Tech’s most important accomplishment in 2017 was taking care of the ball. Redshirt freshman quarterback Josh Jackson only threw nine interceptions in 13 games, and Tech only turned the ball over 14 times. That ranked tied for 9th nationally for fewest turnovers.

Jackson returns to the lineup, along with A.J. Bush and Cam Phillips, both of whom were in the top five across the board when they played last season.

Q: Josh Jackson was sixth in the ACC in yards passing (2,981) and fifth in touchdowns passes (22) and completion percentage (59.6) this past season. How would you assess his play?

BC: “He’s was pleased. Going into the season, we knew we were going to be pretty young and inexperienced offensively, certainly, at the skill positions. We had a pretty good defense coming back, so protecting the ball on offense... We knew we had a chance to have a pretty good year if we could protect the ball and execute a little bit. We knew there were going to be some growing pains. So having a guy there where we knew would take care of the ball and steady through some ups and downs and continue to be a leader for us was important. I was really pleased with him with that. ‘I think he was certainly a freshman, too. There were some really good plays in there at times and there were some mistakes at times. I think there definitely is another level he can get to with with his consistency. But overall, I was pleased. We’ve got to get better at quarterback, and he’s got to get better—and he knows that. To be a freshman and be inexperienced at the positions around him. I thought he did a good job.”

Q: What can we expect to see from your quarterback this spring?

BC: “I’m really excited about that group. It’s going to be an extremely competitive spring. It’s going to be the situation that you want—a returning starter and guys that have the ability to win his job, to beat him out. So now, you’ve got an extremely competitive situation, which you hope to have at all positions. “Hooker is a kid that is really, really talented. He’s got a really nice skill set. He’s still figuring out the nuances of the position and the offense, and he is an extremely hard worker. He’s really got a big upside.

“Throwing the ball, just his consistency with his ability to execute at a fast pace, quickness with which he gets the ball out, accuracy—or rather the things that, just at times, he missed a few things. There is a fine line with quarterbacks of anticipation, throwing the ball with precision and taking care of the football. It’s really fine, hard to coach. There are instincts and talents that are involved with that. I think Josh is going to improve in that area, that that line of thought could be more at risk in times for us to continue to improve in the passing game.”

Q: Will this be an open competition? This isn’t Josh’s job automatically, is it?

BC: “No, not even close. The thing you earn by starting a year like that is you get the benefit of the doubt because you’ve done it with us against these teams in games. That certainly helps, but those guys are going to get pretty equal reps all spring. Josh won’t go live as much as the other two guys. We’ll want to make sure we get some really good work in scrimmages where those guys are live. We won’t feel the same about Josh. We know what he’s about live. We know what kinds of decisions he can make live.”

Q: Cam Phillips was in the top five of the ACC in nearly every receiving category, but he has departed. Is there someone who can be that “go-to” guy in this receiving corps?

BC: “We had three or four freshmen that played last year. We had a couple of sophomores. It’s going to take all those guys again. It’s going to take some new guys still. We’re still pretty inexperienced in the grand scheme of things at that position and a little bit unproven as to who is going to take certain roles. ‘I think we know what type of guy we have in [Eric] Kumah and that he can be one of those big, physical guys that can catch balls in traffic and catch 50-50 balls. To me, after that, there are still a lot of guys trying to prove what kind of receiver they can be for us. We’re starting to get a glimpse of that, but it’s still really early. I’m going to have to coach him the other way around.”

Q: Phil Patterson dealt with injuries most of the season, so he returned to catch seven passes in the bowl game. Would he have helped the receiving corps earlier in the season had he been healthy?

BC: “Absolutely. Going into the year, he and Kumah were two guys who had been here longer than these true freshmen. They were guys that have ability. They have to bridge the gap between the old guys that we lost and the newcomers coming in. The last few games for Phil were really encouraging for us, just starting to see what we were kind of.”

On Last Season’s Successes

by Jimmy Robertson

Virginia Tech’s offense broke in a lot of new players last season, including at quarterback and wide receiver, and this spring, offensive coordinator Brad Cornelsen wants to see all his players—and his offense—take yet another step forward.
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Building on Last Season’s Successes

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“Looking back at the cut-ups, McCliese had a really good year. He made some mistakes. He bustied in protection a couple of times. But just top to bottom, taking care of the football, being productive, making big plays, breaking tackles just because he’s running harder than they were trying to tackle him … we were really pleased and excited about him moving forward.”

“Steven [People] was the same way. Really, since we started messing with him at tailback two years ago, he’s been the most explosive guy. You hand the ball off and there is nothing there, and he still gets you two or three yards every time. That’s kind of an invaluable part of an offense. He was still banged up at times this year, but I think both of those guys, what we’ve seen and what we saw … I still think it’s going to be by committee. There are still some young guys, with Jalen Holston, and we’re excited about him and the things he can do.

“I don’t see it being us going into the season saying, ‘Here’s our tailback that’s going to get 30 carries a game and the other guys are going in when he’s tired.’ It didn’t feel that way going into the season, and after evaluating the season and what we’ve got going forward, I expect all those guys to contribute. I really like how they work, what kind of upside they have, and we’re excited about using them all.”

“The offensive line appears to be in solid shape with three starters returning and quite a bit of depth, but Eric Gallo departed, leaving that void at center. As a coordinator and quarterbacks coach, how closely will you be watching the center position this spring?”

“BC: Absolutely on both. They’re both really, really hard-working kids. Chris has been here it seems like a lot longer. He continues to get better. He continues to get bigger and stronger and is starting to develop into a guy that isn’t trying to get thrown around up there, but a guy that can move people. That’s the kind of athlete he can be.

“Dalton came in and showed us some nice football intelligence. That’s a tough position, that hybrid H-back position. It takes some savvy, some intelligence and toughness. It takes the right type of skill people. That’s the kind of upside they have, and we’re excited about using them all.”

“Q: Deshawn McClease was outstanding in the bowl game. Do you think all those guys with the ability to go be a good player. It’s going to be how many young, inexperienced guys can grow up, and how many guys that haven’t figured it out have the light bulb come on. That will determine if we’re really good and really deep, or being average and hanging on by a strand if injuries occur. But I think it’s an exciting group.”

“Q: Who are some younger players whom you’re anxious to see this spring?"

“BC: I think the guys that you haven’t got to see play in a game yet. For me, that would be the two other quarterbacks. That would be Hamilton. That would be Terosia Wheatley, who has really shown big strides on and off the field. He’s starting to grow up. His body is changing, and he’s in shape. Caleb Stewar is an early graduate freshman, and Drake, Up-front, it’s Silas Dzansi, it’s Lecitus Smith, it’s T.J. Jackson, it’s Aiden Brown — those young guys that have the ability. You know they have the ability, but didn’t play last fall. They didn’t play or didn’t have a big role. Those are the ones that I want to see.”

“Q: Where do you hope this offense will be at the end of 15 spring practices?"

“BC: ‘I think we’re still so young and inexperienced. I don’t see us at the end of spring saying, ’Here’s our 11 starters, and it’s set in stone. Here is exactly what we’re going to be and here are our best guys.’ I think it’s going to be a spring and a summer and a fall camp until we really know about these guys and what we’re going to be the best at. There is a lot of development that needs to be done.”
Tony Robie is by no means a gambling man, but he certainly felt confident in his hand as the matches wound down in the finals at the ACC Wrestling Championship on March 3.

After all, his team held a small cushion, and he possessed as ace in his hand.

“I’ll put my money on that every day of the week,” Robie said. “Winning or losing, I felt like if we went out and wrestled up to our abilities, I felt like we had a very, very good chance of winning this thing.

“I was just grit and believing,” Haught said. “We just had to believe, believe in ourselves. A lot of people didn’t believe in us, but we believed in ourselves. We believed we could do it. We’re just lucky to be here.

“Tied at 4 at the end of regulation, the two went to overtime, and Moore’s take-down gave him a 6-4 win over the two-time defending ACC champion.

“The title marked the first for the redshirt freshman, who was named the tournament’s most valuable wrestler.

“I’m not going to say I didn’t have an expectation to win,” Moore said. “I wanted to focus on my effort and stay in a good position and weather the storm early in the match. I wore him out and was able to get the take-down late.”

McFadden, a redshirt sophomore, was his usual outstanding self and easily could have taken the title.

“The coaches have done a great job this year, and the results show tonight.”

Nine wrestlers qualified for the NCAA Championships, which were held March 15-17 in Cleveland, Ohio. Tech will be in the search of its sixth straight top-10 finish.

With the way the Hokies wrestled in Chapel Hill, no one should bet against them.
Reka Gyorgy, Ashlynn Peters and Klaudia Nazieblo won individual medals on the women’s side, while Norbert Szabo brought home a silver medal for the men by Jimmy Robertson

Performances that earned a gold medal, two silver medals and two bronze medals served to headline the accomplishments of the Virginia Tech swimming and diving teams at the ACC Swimming and Diving Championships held in late February at the Greensboro Aquatic Center in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Reka Gyorgy won the lone gold medal, while Norbert Szabo and the women’s 200-yard medley relay team of Klaudia Nazieblo, Joelle Vereb, Maggie Gruber and Adriana Grabski claimed silver medals. Nazieblo claimed a bronze medal in the 200 butterfly, while Ashlynn Peters, a junior from Cypress, Texas, won the ACC’s Most Valuable Diver of the women’s championships. She won a bronze medal in the platform event by finishing with 239.25 points, while recording fifth-place finishes in both the 1- and 3-meter events. She was the only female diver to qualify for the finals in all three events.

The Tech women also pocketed a silver medal and another bronze. The 200-yard medley relay team of Nazieblo, Vereb, Gruber and Grabski came in second with a time of 1:36.32, while also setting a school record. Nazieblo, a senior from Warsaw, Poland, claimed the bronze medal in the 100 butterfly, swimming the event in a time of 1:53.01. She also registered a fifth-place finish in the 100 backstroke, swimming that event in a time of 52.56 seconds.

In addition, Nazieblo was part of the 800-yard freestyle relay team of Gyorgy, Grabski, and Chloe Hicks that came in fifth with a time of 7:07.49. The 400-yard freestyle relay team of Grabski, Vereb, Danielle Griggs and Gyorgy came in fifth as well, setting a school record with a time of 3:15.

"It appears four relays will swim at the NCAs, and improving relays was a big goal of ours," Skinner said. "Including breaking one of our oldest school records in the 400 free relay to end the meet. We will look forward to building on this as a program and for our march to the NCAs next month."

Other notable individual performances came from Gruber, who finished sixth in the 100 butterfly with a time of 53.64 seconds, and Vereb, who came in fifth in the 100 breaststroke with a time of 1:00.49.

On the men’s side, Szabo claimed the only medal with his second-place finish in the 200 IM. The junior from Budapest, Hungary swam the event in a time of 1:42.70, which marked the second-fastest time in the event in school history.

Szabo also scored points in the 200 freestyle and 200 butterfly events. He came in fifth in the 200 freestyle in a time of 1:35.06 and 13th in the 200 butterfly in a time of 1:44.82.

"Even though the final scores show we did not meet our team goal, we sure did go out and perform well with all we had," Skinner said. "The men stood by each other... and we took away many positives. The Hokies had so many awesome performances."

Lane Stone, a freshman from Springfield, Virginia, set two school records and scored points in three events. His time of 41.86.80 in the 50-yard freestyle set a school mark by nearly two seconds and enabled him to finish 12th, while he came in eighth in the 1,650 freestyle in a school-record time of 14:55.51. He also finished seventh in the 200 freestyle.

The Tech men’s team also got top-10 performances from Ian Ho and Michael Craddock. Ho came in fifth in the 50 freestyle with a time of 21.34 seconds, breaking a school record set a year earlier. Craddock wound up ninth in the 1,650 freestyle with a time of 15:03.76.

In addition, the Tech men received three top-eight performances from their relay teams. The 800-yard freestyle relay team of Stone, Szabo, Harrison Pierce and Hassler Carroll finished fourth, while the 200 yard freestyle relay team of Ho, David Herbert, Pierce and Thomas Hallock wound up fifth after swimming the fastest-time in school history. The 200-yard medley relay team of Jake Lamparella, Hallock, Pierce and Ho was eighth.

Like the women’s team, the Tech men’s squad received solid performances from its divers, who scored 377 points themselves. That total was the third-most of the divers on ACC men’s teams behind Duke (212) and Florida State (195).

Thomas Shinholser finished in the top 11 of all three diving disciplines, led by his fifth-place finish in the platform event, where he scored 377 points. Shinholser also registered a ninth-place finish in the 1-meter event, and he came in 11th in the 3-meter event.

Ben Schied finished in the top 12 of each discipline. He recorded seventh-place finishes in the platform and 1-meter events, and he finished in 12th in the 3-meter event.

Now, athletes from both of Tech’s squads await possible NCAA competition. The NCAA Women’s Swimming and Diving Championships will be held March 14-17 in Columbus, Ohio, while the NCAA Men’s Swimming and Diving Championships will be held March 21-24 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.
The Virginia Tech track and field teams combined to win eight gold medals, and 20 of them earned a spot on the All-ACC first team, and yet the Hokies trudged back to the team following the ACC Indoor Track and Field Championships with somber looks on their faces.

This bunch didn't necessarily want medals. They wanted the big trophies, one symbolic of team championships, and unfortunately, they still came up short.

"If you're in a position where you're disappointed with second, then I think your program is in a pretty good spot," Tech director of track and field and cross country Dave Cianelli said.

Both Tech squads finished second at the league's indoor meet, which was held Feb. 22-24 at the Clemson Indoor Track and Field Complex on the Tigers' campus. Despite scoring 107 points—an impressive number—the Tech men came up four points short of Florida State in the race for the league crown. The Tech women scored 81 points and also came up short against the Seminoles, who won with 91.

Cianelli and his coaches found it hard to fault their athletes, who displayed their grit, toughness and talent over the course of three days. Their painful takeaway was this—the Seminoles were just a touch better on both sides.

"It think it's human nature to go back and say, 'We could have done this here, or this,'" Cianelli said. "I've been on the other side—winning meets by very very small margins—and I've been on this side, where you lose a championship and get second."

"But I'm really proud of the kids, with the way they fought to the end. You've got to give Florida State credit. They had a good meet, and they're very talented. They did what they needed to do. Hats off to them."

The Hokies got strong performances from their pole vaulters and their middle-distance and distance runners on both sides. Most notably, the men's pole vaulters swept the top three spots early on the final day to bring the team's men back into the hunt.

The men's vaulters continued their dominance in the event—a Hokie has won the individual indoor title in this event 11 times since the school joined the ACC. Deakin Volz won his first career ACC championship, leading the trio of Hokies atop the leaderboard.

Volz and teammate Otten Ladig finished with top vaults of 5.59 meters (18 feet, 0.5 inch), but Volz won on progressions. Ladig claimed the silver medal, while freshman Joel Benitez captured his first ACC medal with a top vault of 5.10 meters (16 feet, 8.75 inches). Jaslyn Denorny finished sixth with a personal-best vault of 4.90 meters (16 feet, 10.5 inches). Gunnarsson and Baxter were part of the 4x400 relay team that won the indoor and outdoor crowns in 2014. They were both the top-ranked runners coming in, and so, the expectations for them were to be on the podium," Phillips said. "Still, it's easier to say than to do it, and they did a great job of making sure that happened."
As a former ACC Scholar-Athlete of the Year and a young man pursuing two degrees in the hardest of fields, Torben Laidig possesses an abundance of intelligence. In fact, he ranks as arguably one of the smartest student-athletes on Virginia Tech’s campus.

Yet Laidig remembers a time when his decisions weren’t so astute — such as the time when he first attempted to pole vault.

At roughly the age of 14, he was working as a multi-athlete in his native Germany, participating in a series of track and field events in which the results all combine for a score during any given meet. Though not quite of age to compete in the pole vault, he felt the urge to get a head start on the event.

Rather than wait for proper instruction, he headed over to the pole vault area following a practice at the center where he trained and grabbed a pole.

“The coach was like, ‘OK, grip low, take it easy,’ which I didn’t do,” Laidig said. “I came down the runway full speed, and it did not go well. I actually planted and pulled as hard as I could, which is something you should not do — and just came right back on the runway.”

Suffice it to say, Laidig learned his lesson, and he eventually took well to appropriate coaching, refining the techniques that, today, make him one of the best collegiate pole vaulters in America.

Hiscredentialsinclude two ACC titles, four ACC silver medals and four All-America honors in the event. He nearly won the national championship in 2006 when he came in second at the NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships held in Eugene, Oregon.

The short-term goal for the redshirt senior centers simply on becoming the first pole vaulter to win a national championship for Virginia Tech.

“I want to perform well at the NCAA [indoor] meet [March 9-10], and then going into outdoors … I’m still not quite in the shape that I could be in,” he said. “I think I can still improve a lot of things about my jump, and hopefully, that will show outdoors.”

It represents a rather lofty goal for the small-town young man from Schwabisch Hall, a Blacksburg-sized place in the southern part of Germany. He knew of Virginia Tech’s hometown because of his relationship with former German pole vaulters who previously excelled for the Hokies — Martina Schultze, Stephan Munz and Victoria Von Eynatten. They all came over and enjoyed decorated careers for the Hokies.

They spoke highly of Blacksburg, of the university, and perhaps most importantly, of Bob Phillips, a three-time Virginia Tech graduate (undergraduate, master’s and doctorate) and the Hokies’ pole vault coach who once held the school record in the event. He nearly won the national championship in 2006 when he came in second at the NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships held in Eugene, Oregon.

“Before I came here, I was training in Stuttgart at the Olympic training center, you could call it,” Laidig said. “There were three other pole vaulters that also went here — Martina Schultze, Stephan Munz and Victoria Von Eynatten. We were all from the same area, and I was very close with Martina and Stephan. Obviously, I wanted to go to the school they had. They were telling me about how great it is here and how great the facilities are and how good of a coach Bob is. That convinced me to come here, just listening to their experiences.

“As soon as Bob offered me, I was sold.”

Largely because of his smarts, Laidig adjusted to American life rather easily. He knew enough English to understand conversations, though it took him a month or so to engage in them. As far as the food — arguably the biggest difference between life here and life at home for international students — he made the best of the situation.

On the track, things went nearly perfectly. He won the ACC title at his first league meet and finished in sixth place at the NCAA Indoor Championships. During the outdoor season, he came in second at the ACC meet and earned All-America honors at the NCAA meet.

But a hip injury completely derailed his sophomore season — the first of two major injuries for Laidig during his time at Tech.

“I probably trained a little too much coming out of my freshman year when everything went pretty well,” Laidig said. “I wanted more. I wanted to improve even more my second year. That fall, I was probably going a little too hard for my body, which unfortunately resulted in the injury in my hip, so I had to sit out that year.”

Laidig bounced back as a redshirt sophomore, nearly winning that national title in June of 2016. He won his second ACC title in February of last year at the league’s indoor meet and finished sixth at the NCAA Indoor Championships that March, but still, despite the accomplishments, he felt unsatisfied with his progress.

Unfortunately, disaster struck again weeks after the NCAA indoor meet. During a practice later that March, he went up for a vault, and his pole snapped. He crushed to the track and broke his wrist.

Continued on page 30
That was really frustrating," Laidig said. "That whole indoor season, something was missing. I was in really good shape, and I think I could have jumped higher, but it just never happened at the meets that we went to.

"After indoor was over, I had two really good weeks of practice, where things started to click, and it resulted in me jumping 5.70 [meters] at the Texas Relays. So I was super happy about that, but five days later, the following Thursday, I had a really good practice, and on my third or fourth jump, I broke my pole."

The injury took him out right when he was vaulting his best. His 5.70-meter vault (18 feet, 8.25 inches) at the Texas Relays in Austin, Texas set the school's outdoor record and the ACC record and also qualified him for the 2017 World Championships. So he not only missed the Hokies' outdoor season, but the injury also wiped out his opportunity to represent Germany at the World Championships held last summer in London.

Now in his final season, he hopes to make the most of a final opportunity. He nearly won his third ACC gold medal when he vaulted 5.59 meters at the recent ACC Indoor Championships, but teammate Deakin Volz vaulted the same and edged him on progressions.

In ACC competition, teammates have been his biggest competition. Guys like former teammate Chris Uhle and Volz have kept Laidig from mining more ACC gold.

"I think that competitiveness is really important to push each other and jump high, push each other to the next level and get every little bit of energy out of you during workouts," Laidig said. "I think it's very beneficial. It's something I didn't have in Germany, and it's also one big reason why I came here, just because everything is so competitive, and joining a competitive team, I knew I was going to get that every day."

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"I think everybody who's been here has made me better — Chris [Uhle], Jeff Linta, Brad Johnson, Jared Allison — all those guys have really made me a better athlete. All of them have their strengths and things that they're better at than me. Obviously, I'm trying to reach their level in whatever they're better at. Like James Steck, he was a really good gymnast, and I'm trying to get to his level when it comes to gymnastics. Chris is really fast. Joel [Benitez, a current teammate] is really fast. Obviously when we're doing spirited, I'm trying to beat them at practice, and I think that really helps to just push myself and push them to the next level. I think that's a big reason why we've been so successful as a pole vault team over the years."

Laidig plans to keep vaulting once he departs Virginia Tech in May, with an eye toward the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. He may find it difficult to work in practice time, though, considering he's set to enroll in medical school in Germany later this summer.

Laidig not only embraced the challenge of being a student-athlete at Tech, but also welcomed the opportunity to pursue two degrees in track, and yet he rarely complained.

"I've always been interested in science," Laidig said. "I went to a biotechnological high school that put a big focus on sciences. I've always been interested in it, and with me wanting to go to med school, it was just something that I wanted to do."

"I just like how the human body works. It's kind of related to sports, I guess. It's just something that interests me, and in the long term, I want to be able to help people as a doctor, and in order to do that, you've got to have an in-depth understanding of how the human body functions."

Of course, Laidig's staying in the United States would meet with approval from Tech coaches, teammates and friends who would want to see him on a more regular basis. And for sure, the U.S. features approval from Tech coaches, teammates and friends who would want to see him on a more regular basis. And for sure, the U.S. features approval from Tech coaches, teammates and friends who would want to see him on a more regular basis.
Being a successful student-athlete takes more than just the effort on the part of the individual. The process takes a team, no matter what sport. No one knows that more than Virginia Tech swimmer Ian Ho.

The former Virginia Tech walk-on has leaned on his parents, coaches, and teammates to make it where he resides today. That support system has helped raise one of Virginia Tech’s top swimmers into a leader both in and out of the pool.

Originally from Blacksburg, Ho never intended to leave the area that he had grown to love when it came time to choose a college. When one asks most high school students where they want to attend college, they say that they want to leave their hometowns. They want to explore the world and see something new, while exhibiting a sense of independence. Ho, however, felt right at home and wanted to remain in Blacksburg.

“The mountains here are beautiful, and I had no desire to leave,” he said. “Between New River Community College and Tech, they worked really well in terms of classes. I knew I was going to Tech before I knew I was going to swim for Tech.”

Ho didn’t know he wanted to swim at the collegiate level right away. In fact, he never intended to swim in college. After talking to the coaching staff at Virginia Tech, he ended up walking on to the team. Tech head coach Dr. Ned Skinner, who has resided at the helm of the Virginia Tech swimming and diving program since 1998, knew there needed to be some significant work put in for Ho to contribute.

“I remember, as a freshman, he could only do the 50 [yard freestyle],” Skinner said.

Ho didn’t have the best times his first year. His best time in the 50-yard freestyle was 20.25 seconds, and in the 100-yard freestyle, 45.39 marked his best time.

Fast forward a few years, and Ho finds himself competing with the best that the ACC offers. His time of 20.39 in the 50-yard freestyle at the ACC Championships in February broke a school record that had stood for 10 years and enabled him to finish fifth. The Hokies’ sprinter also swam the 100-yard freestyle at the ACC Championships held in late February.

In addition to these races, Ho was a member of the men’s 800-yard freestyle relay team that placed 24th at the NCAA Championships in 2017. He also qualified for the NCAA Championships in the 200- and 400-yard medley relays, and he received accolades outside the pool as well, earning a spot on the All-ACC Academic Team and earning College Swimming and Diving Coaches Association of America Scholar All-America honors. He finished eighth in the 50-yard freestyle at the ACC Championships last season, too.

In 2016, Ho competed at the Olympic Trials and finished second in his heat and 19th overall in the 50-yard freestyle with a time of 20.94. So after barely swimming at the collegiate level to becoming one of the best sprinters to come through the Virginia Tech program, Ho has seen his swimming career come a full 180 degrees.

“Now at one of the best engineering schools in the country, Ho, like many other athletes, has to balance his busy school schedule. Participating in a Division I sport and in a demanding academic program leaves little free time during the day. While high school, he started taking engineering classes that accelerated his interest in the field. Not only did Ho take difficult classes, but he also received his associate’s degree from New River Community College while in high school.

While at New River, Ho took a class taught by his father, Caisy Ho, who is a professor at the college.

“He was a little harder on me, but what parent wouldn’t be,” Ian said. “Growing up with him as a teacher throughout my life, knowing the ways he wants you to approach a problem, definitely helped.”

As for one of the sources for his dedication to swimming and school, the Blacksburg native credits his father. As a kid, Ho noticed how devoted his father was to his job, their family, and his faith. Those traits left an unforgettable impact. Ho’s willingness always to strive for more and never to settle also comes from his family.

While Ho hails from Blacksburg, his family calls Hong Kong home. Ho recently visited the city of more than seven million people.

“I still love Hong Kong as a city. Its super-fast paced, and the food there is amazing. It was good to visit family again,” he said.

Ho, like many other athletes, has many hobbies, including building things as part of his mechanical engineering coursework and playing the violin, but he also has become one of the fastest sprint swimmers in Virginia Tech history.
That's where fellow athletes Jared Haught and Robert Owen come in to help. Haught, a current wrestler for the Hokies, and Owen, a former swimmer, also pursue degrees in mechanical engineering. Together, the three continue to work their way through college while Ho and Haught currently excel at their respective sports (Owen also excelled during his four years). Often, students and fans tend to forget the pressure facing student-athletes because they only see them on the athletics fields, on the court, on the mat or in the pool. To sum it up briefly, Ho said, “Engineering is a team sport.”

For Skinner, there isn’t much reason to be concerned about his engineering. Mike Swanhart, our academic coordinator, merits a lot of credit. The culture of the men’s team, where academics is important, helps Ian. He tutors a lot of the guys and is always looking out for them. He also finds ways to incorporate his field of study into helping improve his personal life. As a talented violin player, Ho recently designed a 3-D shoulder rest that fits him for when he plays his violin. He put his musical talent on display last April at The Gobblers, which is the year-end athletics department awards event.

Some more of Ho’s recent projects include a 3-D printed case for his 3-D mouse and a lamp that he made out of pipes. These may sound like odd projects to those not familiar with engineering, but these projects challenge Virginia Tech students, and other top engineering schools assign similar projects as well.

As for the next step, Ho still has one year of eligibility left for swimming. He plans on pursuing a master’s degree in mechanical engineering at Virginia Tech, so much more remains for the talented swimmer who keeps beating his own times.

However, Ho knows that his time with the team remains short, and there’s no doubt that he’ll miss it once he touches the wall for the final time, whenever that time arrives. “You spend 20-plus hours with these guys. You’re on a board, and your surfing on top of it, but you can still use all the same muscles for getting around.”

It’s no surprise that a swimmer enjoys surfing, but when it comes to rock climbing, Ho finds the finesse part the most interesting. “Seeing other people who are super good, and if they have amazing body control, that blows my mind sometimes,” he said.

He also finds ways to incorporate his field of study into helping improve his personal life. As a talented violin player, Ho recently

"Ian is just one of the most kind-hearted people I’ve ever met. He’s fast, and he’ll swim fast, but he doesn’t have an attitude that goes with it. To me, he’s always been Ian Ho, whether he was 12 years old or now to an elite ACC finalist and NCAA qualifier."

Tech swimming coach Dr. Ned Skinner on Ian Ho

After walking on to Tech, Blacksburg native Ian Ho holds the school record in the 50 freestyle event, which makes him one of the fastest swimmers in Tech history.
A rguably the best player on the Virginia Tech lacrosse team plans to return to her home outside of Philadelphia after she graduates in May. And yes, her future career entered deeply into herthoughts process when she made that decision. But Tristan McGinley readily admits that other factors of great importance went into that decision as well.

“It’s a place where I can be a loud and bold Eagles fan,” she revealed, laughing. For sure, no one on the planet expressed more outright joy at the Philadelphia Eagles’ 41-33 victory over the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl than McGinley, an Eagles fan since birth. The Super Bowl win marked the Eagles’ first victory in the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl than McGinley, an Eagles fan since birth. The Super Bowl win marked the Eagles’ first victory in the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl era.

McGinley, who calls Moorestown, New Jersey home, hopes some of that magic transfers to the Tech lacrosse team, which is coming off an outstanding 2017 campaign in which the Hokies tied a program record for wins under first-year head coach John Sung. In addition, they snapped a 27-game ACC losing skid, and not only did they win a bunch, they were also fun to watch, setting school records for goals (253) and points (326).

Of course, McGinley played a rather prominent role in the turnaround, scoring 29 goals, setting an ACC record for draw controls, and playing a prominent role in the turnaround, scoring 29 goals, setting a Tech record for draw controls and becoming the program’s first Tewaaraton Award watch list nominee—the Heisman Trophy of college lacrosse.

In short, she made the transition a rather smooth one for Sung, who came to Blacksburg from Winthrop in 2016. “She is definitely a great fit for what we like to do,” Sung said. “Obviously, she brings a tremendous amount of power. She’s one of those kids that you’re so glad you’re able to coach them, but when they graduate and leave, obviously they leave a pretty big hole.”

That McGinley has become quite the lacrosse player comes as no surprise. She stands 6-foot-1, a relative typer-daughter negotiations ended with Tristan agreeing to a visit. She made her first visit to Blacksburg, attended a night football game against Georgia Tech and got to walk on the field with her sister before the game. There were fireworks and “Enter Sandman” and jumping, and the Hokies won a breath-taking affair in overtime.

Days later, Burker called to offer a scholarship. McGinley told her that she would get back to her, and then went downstairs to tell her parents. “Of course, Sunday morning also allowed them to multi-task, as they caught up on Eagles’ news, too. Eagles head coach Doug Pederson lives in Moorestown as well, and he, his wife Jeannie and their three sons attend the same church. One of their sons and Tristan’s younger brother are close friends.

Certainly, Pederson is viewed as God in Philadelphia these days after leading the Eagles to their first title in 58 years. But the McGinleys know the real God, especially Tristan, who credits her faith with helping her navigate some first-year difficulties at Tech.

“Definitely throughout college, it’s been my go-to,” she said of her faith. “My freshman year was tough, but that was the one thing — my faith pushed me and got me through. I think that’s why I feel so much joy in the people and this school and my team. I love them so much.”

“Privacy didn’t really exist at all, but I think we were fine with it,” McGinley admitted. “My sisters are my best friends, so anything that was private to me, I probably would have ended up telling them anyways. The same with my parents. We don’t have too many secrets.”

Such a comment reveals a rather strong family dynamic, and for sure, Bill and Debbie McGinley’s children range from 35 to 11, with the 11-year-old, Tristan, who credits her faith with helping her navigate some first-year difficulties at Tech.

It took a little family persuasion to get Tristan McGinley to Virginia Tech, but thanks to them and her faith, she has grown into one of the lacrosse programs greatest players, as she prepares to return to her beloved Philadelphia area to focus on her future following graduation by Jimmy Robertson.

**Taking Her Shot**

TAKING HER SHOT

**I walked on this campus, and I was like, ‘This is the school I need to come to,’ and I’ve never regretted it. I think it every day — I’m at the coolest place in the whole world.**

**Tristan McGinley on coming to Virginia Tech**

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TAKING HER SHOT

Continued from page 36

years of being influenced by her siblings. Yet she became terribly homesick and missed her large family despite having 30,000-plus friends on campus around her every day.

“Academics, I was not getting the hang of,” she said. “The social life, I wasn’t used to. Balancing my sport, my schoolwork and a social life, I wasn’t good at. I missed home like crazy. I was so homesick that I wasn’t functioning.”

Fortunately, lacrosse season started the following semester and commanded her sole attention for a two-hour window each day. And as she focused, she became better at her sport. In fact, she started her first collegiate game and scored a goal in her second.

Her numbers that season wound up being modest, as she scored six goals. But one came against then-No. 2 North Carolina. Those two goals against then-No. 7 Syracuse and another came in a win against Notre Dame on March 11. Her 50 goals last season were a big part of why she received a starting spot in the team’s 27-game ACC winning streak. That total includes four goals against Boston College and helped spark an unshakeable confidence within her.

“Her development a lot. I wish she was a sophomore because I know how much better she can get. She’s not hit her ceiling at this point. It’s my job as a coach to get it all out of her,” Sung said.

An NCAA Tournament appearance would be a great way to cap a tremendous career. If she maintains her current pace, McGinley will depart as one of the top 10 goal scorers in Virginia Tech history, becoming one of just 11 players in the 23-year history of the program to score more than 100 goals.

Competitive lacrosse probably comes to McGinley left Philadelphia to come to Blacksburg and found brotherly love, along with so much more. Now she’ll make a return, which allows her to pursue her passion, hang out with her family and unapologetically cheer on her city’s pro sports teams.

It’s simply the perfect move for her to make.

GETTING TO KNOW … TRISTAN McGINLEY

Q: Snapchat, Twitter or Instagram … which is your favorite and why?

TM: Instagram. I’m an annoying picture person. I’m like a young mom picture person. I like taking pictures of other people just as I like to be in them.

Q: If you could take a dream vacation, where would it be?

TM: Probably Greece. I’ve never been able to travel much just with sports my whole life and a big family—that’s obviously not something cheap. Anywhere I go, I’m pretty much in awe of. I got to go to the Bahamas for the first time over winter break, and I’m like, ‘Holy cow, people come here all the time.’ But I was say Greece because of what I’ve seen in movies. Not anything else really. It seems wonderful and beautiful.

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

TM: Taylor Swift or Beyonce. I’ve always wanted to be a rock star my whole life. I just don’t have the talent for it. So if I could pretend for a day, that would be awesome. Definitely.

Q: What type of music are you listening to these days?

TM: I’m a big country girl. My mom is from Alabama. I’ve been listening to country forever. I’m not just, ‘I came to Virginia, and now I’m a country girl.’ I always have been, but also anything I can dance to and sing to. I listen to a lot of music, a lot of different stuff.

Q: What has been your favorite thing about being a Virginia Tech athlete?

TM: That there are so many people here to support you and help you. Academically, we have the best people. Nutritionally, we have the best people. People to keep you in shape … we have the best. Definitely so much support. There is always someone to turn to.

“I’ll do a program that takes about a year or less, and then hopefully, I’ll be at a hospital,” she said. “I wanted to be a nurse since I was little.”

The move, of course, will bring her full circle. McGinley left Philadelphia to come to Virginia Tech, and enabled her to enroll in an accelerated program at whichever school she chooses.

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Holiday Inn - Christiansburg
Holiday Inn Express - University
Hollywood’s Restaurant & Bakery
Hostie Ride Driving Service
Imaginations Toy & Furniture Co.
IMBG College
Inside Hokie Sports Magazine
Infinity Unlimited
James & Nancy Wolfe
Jim & Brenda Peaman
Joe’s Diner
Jim Fleming/Flamingo Photography
Just Add Color Designs
Keeler Contracting and Property Management
Les & Patti Talbot
Levy’s
Legacy Builders
Little Leapers
Lucie Worner’s Specialty Coffee
Main Street Inn
Martin Travel
Mary Jane Trope
McAlisters Deli
McCoy Funeral Home
Meredith’s Salon
Michael B. Cooke, CPA, PC
Microtel Inn & Suites
Mike & Laura Heidt
Moe’s Southwest Grill
Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce
Moos Components Group
Nicole Boyle @ In Balance Yoga Studio
NRS Family Dentistry
NRF Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery, LTD
Ohio Mill Golf Course
Original Frameworks
Outback Steakhouse
P & K’s
Paisleys
Pregor Hill Alpacas & Studio
Power Zone
Prather’s at the River Course
Price-Williams Realty
Professional Communications
Progress Street Builders, Inc.
Randy & Janet Jones
Raven True Value Hardware
Rayburn Vandergriff & Terry Bolt
Real Life Dental Care - Dr. Daven Thompson
Red Lobster
Red Robin Gourmet Burgers
Redeck Architects
Richard L. Anthony, DDS
River Course of Virginia Tech
Roundball Club
Seasons of Roanoke, Montgomery & Pulaski Counties
Shan’s
Shear Artistry
Shelor Motor Mile
Shepherd’s Tree & Landscape Maintenance
SIA Group - Wally Nelson
Sonny’s
South Main Auto Service
Southern Classic Soft Cloth Auto Wash
Sovran
Spicer Law Firm - John Spicer
Spirit Clips
Starbucks
State Electric Supply
Substation II
Sweet Toofins Deli
T.G. Coffee Company
Talbot’s
The Blacksburg Partnership, “Gobble de Art”
The Cellar
The Inn at Virginia Tech
The Mitchell Law Firm
The Travis Team - your full service housing team
The Weight Club
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Top of the Stairs
Trelease Wellness
Tuck Chiropractic Clinic/Foley Health and Fitness
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Jaila Tolbert on being a member of SAAC

Currently in pursuit of a degree in international studies with a business concentration, while also learning Chinese, Jaila Tolbert sat down not long ago with a professor whom she considers a mentor and discussed future career options.

“CIA,” he suggested, referring to the Central Intelligence Agency, the nation’s largest intelligence agency and one tasked with gathering, processing and analyzing human intelligence for national security reasons.

“I’m like, ‘Really?’” Tolbert said. “That’s different. That’s not what I expected.”

Before she jumps into a world of covert operations, Virginia Tech’s standout volleyball player may want to consider a future in college athletics administration.

The Minneapolis, Minnesota native added her latest resume piece recently, as Tolbert’s participation in Virginia Tech’s SAAC—Student-Athlete Advisory Committee—led to her attending the NCAA Convention in mid-January as the ACC’s SAAC representative to the NCAA Division I SAAC.

Confused? Well, here’s a little clarity.

Virginia Tech’s SAAC is a leadership group consisting of two student-athletes from all varsity sports at Tech. Those on this committee provide input on rules, regulations and policies that affect student-athletes’ lives, and they serve as a conduit for communication between student-athletes, coaches and administrators.

Two student-athletes on the executive team of SAAC also represent the school on ACC SAAC, which collects student-athlete input on conference issues. Tolbert, a member of Tech’s executive team, was chosen to be a representative on ACC SAAC, along with men’s swimmer Harrison Pierce.

Each Division I conference selects a student-athlete to represent and partner with the NCAA and to vote on legislation regarding student-athlete welfare. The 30-member ACC SAAC chose Tolbert as its representative on Division I SAAC at the NCAA Convention held Jan. 17-20 in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Her attendance marked the first time in Virginia Tech history that one of its student-athletes had been chosen to represent the conference’s SAAC office. She joined former swimmer Brandon Fiala as the only Tech student-athletes ever to attend an NCAA Convention. Fiala served as an ACC student-athlete representative last year.

The NCAA Convention was an amazing experience,” Tolbert said. “Honestly, I was a little nervous because I knew there were going to be ADs [athletics directors], and Board of Directors and a lot of high-ups in the NCAA doing a lot of really important work, and I didn’t know how I would fit into that equation, but everyone was so welcoming.

“They had a great schedule planned for us. I went to a lot of different forums, and we talked about a lot of different issues going on right now at the NCAA level. We’re really trying to pinpoint what Division I SAAC wants to work on and our goals for at least the rest of my term.”

The convention ended with several rule changes and modifications taking place, including—perhaps most notably—the granting of additional health insurance benefits to student-athletes for at least two years after a student-athlete leaves his/her institution. A student-athlete’s significant other also receives this benefit.

The Division I Council also changed the college basketball schedule, allowing teams to start three days earlier. In response, the autonomy conferences—those in the Power 5 conferences—passed a proposal calling for a three-day holiday break for basketball players. This goes into effect for the 2018-19 season.

But the topic that dominated conversation was the NCAA’s existing transfer rules. Currently, student-athletes in football, men’s basketball, women’s basketball, baseball and ice hockey must sit out a year after transferring to another Division I school before becoming eligible to play. That’s not the case in the other sports, as student-athletes receive the opportunity to transfer and play immediately.

The Division I Council plans to make its transferring proposals in April and potentially take a final vote this summer.

“We [Division I SAAC] felt it was a little bit restrictive,” Tolbert said of the current transfer rule. “Our main question is how can we make the student-athlete’s life more similar to a regular student’s life? Regular students can transfer whenever they want, and having that option is really important to us.

“As a committee, we’ve stood on trying to make the transfer environment a little less restrictive and giving a little more leeway to the student-athlete to make a transfer for good reasons.”

The NCAA seeks uniformity in the rule, and it wants to be fair to the schools, the coaches, and the student-athletes. The question is how, given the competing interests?

Most student-athletes want the ability to be able to transfer to any school of their choice, but all student-athletes in football, men’s basketball, women’s volleyball, baseball and ice hockey must sit out a year after transferring to another Division I school before becoming eligible to play. That’s not the case in the other sports, as student-athletes receive the opportunity to transfer and play immediately.

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Most student-athletes want the ability to be able to transfer to any school of their choosing and be eligible to play right away. The coaches fear that allowing them to do so creates “free agency” in which mass quantities of student-athletes leave every year, thus hindering the coaches’ ability to develop programs.

The Big 12 recently put out a proposal that allows student-athletes to transfer to any school of their choice, but all student-athletes in all sports must sit out a year. The exceptions would be for walk-ons, for those who graduated at the original institution, for those whose original school went on probation that limited postseason competition in the student-athlete’s sport, and for those whose head coach at the original institution resigned or was fired, though the student-athlete could not transfer to the head coach’s future institution.

This proposal certainly gives a lot of latitude to student-athletes, but requiring those who aren’t among the exceptions to sit out a year after transferring may be a deal breaker. The Division I SAAC appears to be leaning toward a different model.

“Personally, I’m leaning toward a model that is maybe sitting out a year, but having a one-time exception rule [for instant eligibility if you meet certain academic benchmarks],” Tolbert said. “Those are things in the works, things that we’re hoping will come on paper soon, but that’s what I’m leaning toward and what our committee is leaning toward.”

Other topics discussed by Division I SAAC included early recruiting and student-athlete engagement—getting student-athletes more engaged with SAAC, starting with education at the campus level of what SAAC is and knowing that there are opportunities to have one’s voice heard.

The topic of early recruiting isn’t quite as polarizing as that of the transfer situation, but student-athletes want to see it addressed, as college coaches continually recruit younger and younger prospects in an attempt to gain an edge.

“We, as a unit, are hoping early recruiting will be—I don’t want to say stopped, but give prospective student-athletes time and resources to make educated decisions,” Tolbert said. “In that, pushing unofficial and official visits dates back a little more and leveling the playing field for everyone. Giving people a chance to make an informed decision. Giving them a chance to know the coach and know the campus before having to feel pressure to make that commitment and sign that letter of intent.”

Tolbert said Division I SAAC plans to make its early recruiting proposals in April and potentially take a final vote this summer.

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psychologists—one full time and one part-time—on the staff. Both work out of offices in the Merryman Center within easy access for student-athletes.

“We’re so lucky,” Tolbert said. “We’re trying to get schools on the same playing field. There are schools that don’t even have doctors—and we have two. I think we’re really lucky and hopefully we can use our resources to get the message out and make some changes.”

Tolbert’s term on ACC SAAC runs through May of 2019, so she’ll have a voice in discussions and hopefully legislation at least over the course of the next 17 months. That she gets a say comes as surprise, especially considering that she knew nothing about SAAC before enrolling at Virginia Tech.

In that respect, she resembles most collegiate student-athletes, and that realization somewhat pains her. Today’s student-athlete gets a say—a stark difference from the years past—and to affect change, student-athletes need to take advantage of this opportunity.

“I didn’t really know that student-athletes had a say or a voice,” Tolbert said. “You kind of just go to practice at this time, go lift at this time, and you forget that this is your experience and it’s what you make it. When I became a SAAC rep and I was sitting in on meetings about legislation and what’s going on in our community and how we can make the student-athlete life better … I just felt like I was doing something. I felt like I was contributing back to Virginia Tech.”

Tolbert’s term ends, coincidently, around the time in which she graduates from Virginia Tech. At that time, she’ll be in decision-making mode, choosing between either more education or future career paths. Her education leaves her with possibilities, but her experiences on SAAC, at the NCAA Convention and during an internship with the athletics department’s marketing office certainly give her a foundation for a future in college athletics.

Such a future sounds appealing, particularly now.

“It wasn’t my plan, but I’m open to the idea of continuing a career in college athletics,” she said. “It’s all just a part of gaining experience and learning. “It feels like we, as athletes, are having a conversation with the people who have the power to make change. The student-athlete voice wasn’t represented until now, so being able to be a part of that … I’ve been so humbled and so fortunate.”
We’re looking forward to the official Grand Opening April 14, 2018.

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