

inside

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HOME SPORTS

The Official Publication of Virginia

Tech Athletics

WHAT'S INSIDE

The Tech **WRESTLING** and **SWIMMING AND DIVING** squads are set to start the season and have high expectations for the upcoming campaigns



ZACH LEDAY is one of many key returning players for the Virginia Tech men's team, while **VANESSA PANOUSIS** leads the women's squad in Kenny Brooks' first year as head coach





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CARD STUNT DRAWS NATIONAL ACCLAIM

During the Virginia Tech-East Carolina game - which occurred on the university's Homecoming weekend - fans were asked to participate in a card stunt at Lane Stadium, spelling out the words of the athletics department's marketing slogan, "This is Home." The card stunt drew national attention from Jason Kirk of SB Nation, a website that covers college sports. Kirk gave praise to Tech fans and to Coca-Cola, which provided the corporate support needed to do the stunt. Virginia Tech went on to roll past the Pirates 54-17, making it a happy Homecoming for all.

THE STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

"The people who give to the Hokie Club mean a lot to everyone on this team. They are the ones who pay for us to go to school, and there are a lot of us who probably wouldn't be able to go to school if we didn't have the help and the support of them. They help us and aid us a lot, and we're appreciative of that support."

Chuck Clark
Senior, Suffolk, Virginia

"I want to thank all those who give to the Hokie Club from the bottom of my heart. It means a lot to be able to come to Virginia Tech and to have a full ride. I wouldn't be able to do it without them, so I'm truly blessed to have this opportunity."

Jonathan McLaughlin
Senior, Mauldin, South Carolina



The Donor File



Paul V. Lombardi

HOKIE CLUB LEVEL: Hokie Benefactor

GRADUATION YEAR: 1995, B.S. in mechanical engineering

CURRENTLY RESIDES: Chantilly, Virginia

FAMILY: Allison (wife); Lucas (son, 11); Isabella (daughter, 11)

Q: Do you have any gameday superstitions? If so, what are they?
A: The only superstition I have is not missing a tailgate!

Q: Describe your perfect day at Virginia Tech.
A: Game day, the air is crisp and leaves turning. We start with Chappy's Choice for breakfast at Gillie's and get ready for a 3:30 p.m. game with a packed tailgate prior. The Hokies are victorious, and we celebrate at PK's/TOTS/Cellar/Cabo before retiring to The 303.

Q: Do you have any tailgating traditions? If so, tell us your best.
A: The cuisine depends on the game time, but it is always well thought out and prepared. We've had the same bartender for the past five years, an outstanding caterer, and a VIP section on Beamer Way. We try to incorporate types of foods/desserts that compliment the specific game—we had No. 25 glazed shortbread cookies for Coach Beamer's last game. We take our tailgates very seriously!

Q: What motivates you to give back to help Virginia Tech Athletics?
A: We appreciate the importance of a formal college education and felt it was our duty to give back in a way that would help support the student-athletes at the school of which we're most passionate. Tech has played a major role in our personal and professional lives. We wanted to make sure we shared the same opportunity with a student-athlete.

Q: My favorite Virginia Tech sports are....
A: Football and basketball, but we will cheer on all Hokie sports programs.

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech football player is ...
A: John Burke. Not only was he a great athlete, he's also a shining example of a college and professional football player who transitioned to a successful career following his athletics tenure. His Tech coaches respectfully refer to him as "Wall Street."

Q&A

Q: A Hokie is ...
A: A Hokie is someone with integrity, character, ambition, and who exemplifies Virginia Tech's motto, "Ut Prosim."

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because ...
A: I always feel an immediate bond any time I interact with Tech alumni and associate a deep sense of family and community. I experience it every day and am extremely proud to be a part of the Hokie Nation!

Q: How did you get involved with the Hokie Club?
A: After great post-graduate experiences, a good friend introduced me to Scott Davis and the rest was history! He's been a pleasure to work with and has helped put together programs aligned with our family's interests toward Tech athletics.

Q: What caused you to become a fan of Virginia Tech?
A: I spent some of the best years of my life getting a top-tier education and establishing lifelong friendships. I have nothing but positive memories of Tech and attribute the successes in my life to my Tech experiences. I will always be a diehard Hokie fan!

Remembering JOHN MOODY



For many who interacted with him during his more than 40 years of service to the university, John Moody was Virginia Tech. Moody, who passed away in August at the age of 83, graduated from Tech, played football for the Hokies, and served as a fundraiser for the Virginia Tech Athletic Fund in various capacities for more than four decades. However, more than his resume, Moody brought people into the Hokie Family through his approach to fundraising—or, as he called it, "friend-raising."

With thousands of friends within Hokie Nation, Moody was a pillar in the Hokie Club and worked tirelessly for the betterment of the student-athlete experience at Virginia Tech. The Hokie Club family

grew through his ability to forge relationships with Tech supporters, and his contributions to Virginia Tech can be seen by looking at the number of facility upgrades and improvements to the student-athlete experience that came during his time with the Hokie Club.

With an endowed scholarship named in his honor, Moody will continue to be synonymous with Hokie student-athlete scholarship support. After his passing, the Moody family requested for friends to give to his endowed scholarship in memory of the man who encompassed all the great qualities of Virginia Tech. Since then, more than 70 donations have been made in memory of Moody to support Hokie student-athletes who receive the scholarship bearing his name.


The Virginia Tech Athletics Department, the Hokie Club, and Moody's hundreds of friends will miss his presence and friendship, but his work to improve the lives of Virginia Tech student-athletes continues to live on through the generous support of Hokie Club members now and in the future. We ask that all of Hokie Nation keep his wife, Kay, his three children, and six grandchildren in their thoughts.

Thank you!
 The Hokie Club staff

Scholarship endowments provide an additional way for Virginia Tech Athletics to support student-athletes and meet the scholarship costs in a given year. Through long-term investments, endowed scholarships mature over time and leave a lasting impact on Hokie student-athletes. The Hokie Club would like to recognize and thank the generous Hokie Club supporters who have endowed 633 scholarships in support of Virginia Tech student-athletes. For more information on endowed scholarships or how you can contribute to an existing endowment, please contact the Hokie Club at (540) 231-6618 or by email at hokieclub@vt.edu.


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Tech announces plans for English Field, Rector renovations

The Virginia Tech Athletics Department received final approval from the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors to begin enhancements to both Union Park at English Field and Rector Field House.

The plans at Union Park at English Field call for a reconstructed seating area that brings fans closer to home plate, along with a new press box tower structure that includes four suites, new working spaces for media and game operations and better restrooms and concessions areas.

In addition, the plans call for a club area behind the first base dugout and a social area down the right field line for events in conjunction with baseball games. Also, a new video scoreboard will be installed and a new locker room and player lounge will be built on the ground floor of the Jim Weaver Baseball Center.


Tech officials expect to invest \$18 million for the project and plan to break ground on it in late October. The project should be completed by the start of the 2018 season. Construction will not interrupt play for the upcoming season.

Tech officials also plan to invest \$18 million on renovations to Rector Field House and the construction of a new softball hitting facility.

The biggest part of the Rector project centers on the construction of a new throws area adjacent to the southwest corner of the building. This area—approximately 34,000 square feet—allows for the competition of both the weight throw and the shot put.

In addition, a new wing will be built on the north side of the building to house an expanded training room, two halftime rooms for lacrosse and soccer, two referee locker rooms and increased storage for track.

The enhancements call for a new surface to the track, along with new lighting, a lobby area, seating, restrooms and areas for tickets and concessions.

Like with Union Park at English Field, construction will begin in late October and be completed in time for the 2018 indoor track season. 



Architect Renderings



Tech fans should be optimistic about upcoming men's hoops season — but cautiously so

Buzz Williams always seems to have a unique take on matters, whether they be of the basketball, biblical, leadership, or any other variety. That perspective often results in others seeking him for insight, including business, civic leaders and even coaches from sports other than basketball.

So given his often fascinating take on most things, it absolutely came as no surprise that Williams dropped Emily Dickinson's name into a recent interview when discussing his team and its prospects for the upcoming campaign.

Dickinson, a noted American poet during the mid-1800s, pinned the poem, "I dwell in Possibility," which focuses mostly on poetry and how Dickinson views poetry as limitless.

Williams, now entering his third year as the Hokies' head men's basketball coach, views his 2016-17 squad in a similar light.

"I think our team and what I want our program to be is like Emily Dickinson's poem," he said. "She said, 'I dwell in Possibility.' I want to take away the 'I' and replace it with 'We.'"

"I think that energy comes from anticipation. We want to anticipate the right things and dwell in the possibility of those things, and yet have the grace to love one another and be mature enough to take care of today."

Taking care of the day and getting better each day—(remember #getBETTER?)—is the foundation of Williams' program. He focuses on the process and not the product because one doesn't get the product without the correct process.

Last year's process led to a 20-win season at the conclusion of the year. Following a 16-point loss at Miami on Feb. 17, the Hokies sat at 13-13 overall and 5-8 in the ACC. They then won six straight games, made the NIT and won a game in that tournament before falling to BYU to finish with 20 wins.

Williams and his staff deserve credit for taking a hodgepodge of pieces—transfers, junior-college players, walk-ons, freshmen, etc.—and molding them into a cohesive bunch. He deflects that credit, instead praising the parents who raised such tough-minded young men.

Tech began its fall practice with most of those same pieces. Yes, the Hokies lost hard-working Shane Henry to graduation and a talented player in Jalen Hudson, who decided to leave, along with Satchel Pierce. And yes, Devin Wilson's status is up in the air, as he continues to pursue football.

But Seth Allen, Zach LeDay, Justin Bibbs, Chris Clarke, Justin Robinson, Kerry Blackshear Jr. and Ahmed Hill constitute a strong nucleus. Plus, Williams gets Ty Outlaw back and added Tyrie Jackson and Khadim Sy. Those three can make up for any lost production.

Such potential firepower is enough to make Tech fans think about the NCAA Tournament. It's hard not to blame them—85 percent of the scoring and rebounding from last season returns—as Hokie Nation craves a winner in men's basketball.

But those same fans need to be careful with their expectations. The Hokies won a

bunch of close games last year. They won four conference games by three points or less and another one in overtime. They only won three conference games by 10 points or more, including a win over BC, which failed to win an ACC game.

"I would anticipate being in a lot of those this year," Williams admitted. "That's what makes it fun, but also makes it really difficult."


Also, they won just four true road games during the 2015-16 season, and this season, they play a tougher schedule. A three-game stretch in California, a game at Michigan, four home games to start ACC play—without the Hokies' student body in attendance—and conference road games at North Carolina, Louisville and Pittsburgh give one pause.

In addition, keep in mind that this is just Williams' third season. No one likes to hear, "It takes time," but that remains the fact. His roster finally consists of a majority of OKG's—better known as "our kind of guys." He's finally getting to play the way he wants to play.

Fans need to hope that the Hokies get better each day. Williams has been preaching that to his team since his arrival on campus, and he and his staff have the program trending in the right direction.

Fans should be excited. It's OK to be optimistic. Just be cautiously so. Or like Emily Dickinson said, dwell in possibility.

"I love the story that we're writing," Williams said. "I'm thankful to be learning all the lessons that I've learned thus far."

"We dwell in possibilities. Man, that's fun." 



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BEHIND THE MIC with Jon Laaser

The Way It Was

I don't want to insinuate that I am old. I'm not. I haven't experienced nearly as much life as many of the readers of this column. I also haven't contributed to our way of life in nearly the impactful ways of many others. However, I am getting older, and that seems to bring with it an appreciation for the passing of not just people, but also a more intimate time.

Believe me, it is hard for me to fathom when I look around to root out who just said "back in my day," or "I miss the way it was," only to discover that I made those statements. It pains me during a lull in a press conference to notice everybody staring at smartphones rather than talking to each other about the things said in the previous interview. It's not judgment because I, too, looked up from my own smartphone to make the observation in the first place.

It also isn't a resistance to technological advancement, and I certainly try not to sound like a curmudgeon who constantly opines about the good old days. It is more of nostalgia for the pace of things when I was growing up learning this craft and starting out. I am certainly not blind to advancement, but I also possess an appreciation for subtlety that I lacked in my younger days.

I'm certain other broadcasters feel that way at the moment, as our fraternity recently listened to the best to ever do this job, Vin Scully, who plans to retire after more than 60

years at the microphone. By doing so, he takes away the largest treasure trove of stories ever amassed by a broadcaster.

He gathered those stories the old fashioned way—by talking to people. In my opinion, no one matches his ability as a thorough storyteller. He stayed persistent in his effort to unearth the seemingly minute details of a player's or coach's story and was patient in his method of doling them out during the course of a six-month season. In that way, he created bonds between Dodger fans, Los Angeles, and wherever his characters hailed from, for decades.

That's a simple way to explain his greatness, and it was actually much more complex than that. He combined those aforementioned qualities with a completely unique and charming delivery, as well as profound humility. He also displayed his eagerness to relate.

Scully was the best, but not alone. Ernie Harwell, Jack Buck, Harry Carey and Red Barber all reside in that class, as do many others. Jon Miller, Bob Uecker and a few others still remain, but unfortunately, the next generation of broadcasters appears to be following a different path. Knowing that conjures sadness within me because they possess the talent to do it. Yet the pace of sports—and life—has changed. Some call it 'evolving.' In either case, they couldn't do so if

they wanted to do so.

The greatest compliment I ever received while calling baseball games was never meant to be a compliment:

"Your style reminds me of the old-school broadcasters."

It meant that my call was very descriptive, and in some ways, long-winded and more detailed in terms of the characters on the stage. I thought that was great, but it was not the more quick hitting, rerack consistently for an audience that constantly changes during the course of a game. That now seems to be the normal style of choice—clicking from one station to next, opening one app after another. In the past, the audience simply turned on the radio while on the patio and tuned in for the night. Not so much any more.

It was part of a rejection letter that I received for a Major League job, one of a hundred that I received in the years before I came to Blacksburg. When asked, I always responded that my goal was to be the voice of a community, whether a baseball community or a larger one. The two used to be one in the same. The problem came about because I aspired to something being phased out, whether consciously or not.

I beat my head against the wall for a number of years, naively thinking that, at some point, a team or a situation would see it my way. The relationships that I made in



Tech football coach Justin Fuente has done a nice of job of implementing his philosophies for a program, while remaining respectful of the traditions established in the past.

the business of broadcasting and the game of baseball buoyed me. In hindsight, I realized that those thoughts were predicated on folks tending to be nostalgic for that rapidly passing era as well. I started to make compromises, and in the latter years, tried to adjust my broadcasting style to the simpler, more formulaic style that seemed to be permeating the highest levels of the business. It just never seemed to take.

Then I began to look around, and it startled me that the situations I was looking for no longer existed in big-league baseball cities, but they still did exist. They were on college campuses, none more so than Blacksburg and at Tech.

These days, when I attempt to explain my role here, I discover that I describe the perfect combination of what I wanted, and in many ways, it equates to the essence of Tech.

This is a progressive community, in every way on the cutting edge. But in many ways, it still likes to slow down and absorb things in a largely bygone way.

Justin Fuente, Buzz Williams and Whit Babcock are perfect examples of this. You are beginning to see the fruits of their labor, in facility renovations, recruiting communication, and even in the medium in which you receive this magazine. All remain necessary to keep pace in this highly competitive arena, and the Hokies remain committed to doing that.

But at the same time, the core remains the same, untarnished by the price of progress that permeates many other places. Every time I make a public speaking appearance, or simply interact with members of the community, I feel that level of importance that I know those golden era voices felt. It is not self-importance, but rather the level at which the community, and the athletics that represent it, holds itself.

Which is why, again, I remain so excited about the future. I see the direction we are heading, and that makes me conscious of the changes. But I still feel the consumption and interaction stay more on par with the way it once used to be universally. One witnesses more dedication and more patience.

I am confident that, much like a speeding train vacating the station, the past level of patience won't be returning to other places any time soon. Which is fine. They simply line up with the norm.

As I walked down Washington Street the other night on my way home from football practice, the sun started setting behind me. I became overcome by gratitude at my situation.

Then I thought, 'I should tweet a picture of this'—and almost got ran over by a car while I took it. OK, so I'm not as old as my soul feels sometimes, and this isn't Mayberry.

But Blacksburg stands the one of the last remaining places that blends the past and future together in a beautiful way. It doesn't take Vin Scully retiring to remind me of that, but it certainly spurred this column. So I give a hat tip to a man who performed his task in the right way, as I try in my own small way to do that here. In Blacksburg ... a special place.



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LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES *abound* for student-athletes at the conference level

by Reyna Gilbert-Lowry



ACC SAAC representatives provide feedback to the conference on a wide range of issues.

The student-athlete voice may be more important now than ever, with the ever-changing landscape of collegiate athletics and the influence that student-athletes have to impact the overall student-athlete experience at colleges and universities nationwide. One way student-athletes across the Athletic Coast Conference are making their voices heard is through the Atlantic Coast Conference Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, or ACC SAAC.

ACC SAAC was established to enhance the lines of communication through which student-athletes, conference administrators, institutional representatives, NCAA representatives and coaches discuss and take action on issues relating to rules, regulations and student-athlete well being. Each year, ACC institutions are asked to nominate four student-athletes to represent their campuses on ACC SAAC and provide feedback and institutional positions to the conference on proposed NCAA legislation, conference policies and procedures, and any other issues that affect conference-wide aspects of student-athlete well being.

This year, Sydney Curtis (women's soccer), Brandon Fiala (men's swimming), Marie Johnston (women's soccer), and M.J. Ulrich

(women's swimming) will serve as Virginia Tech's ACC SAAC representatives. All currently serve on the executive team of the Virginia Tech Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, and Fiala was selected as one of the three ACC student-athlete representatives to participate as a member of the NCAA Autonomy Committee.

"The No. 1 issue facing student-athletes, in my opinion, is the lack of schedule transparency and communication between student-athletes and administration or coaches," Fiala said. "The time demands of student-athletes are at the forefront of issues that the NCAA is looking at, and I hope strides can be made to better improve these issues soon."

ACC SAAC representatives are encouraged to provide input on legislative decisions that impact student-athletes at their respective institutions and across the conference. They are also responsible for bridging the gap between coaches and administrators, and as a result, receive valuable leadership experience and the opportunity to create a positive image for college student-athletes.


"It means the world to me to be able to represent Virginia Tech as a member of ACC SAAC," Curtis said. "I believe that great things

are being accomplished at this level, and to be a member with an influence in decision making is a true honor."

Representatives participate in conference calls three to four times annually and attend in-person meetings twice a year. Conference calls allow ACC SAAC representatives to discuss important information with minimal impact on their academic and athletics commitments. The in-person meetings provide representatives with the opportunity to have impactful discussion with other student leaders and share experiences from their respective campuses. The ACC covers the expenses and meetings are led by Shamaree Brown, ACC Director of Student-Athlete Programs and Compliance.

The most recent meeting took place July 15-17 at the Graylyn International Conference Center in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and Curtis, Fiala and Ulrich were in attendance. During the meeting, student-athletes reviewed some of the ACC partnerships from the 2015-16 academic year, which included the Project Life Movement, One Love, and One Shirt One Body, and were asked to provide feedback about the partnerships and their impact on campus.

"For me, being a member of ACC SAAC means a heavy responsibility," Ulrich said. "I am so honored to be a part of such an incredible group of student-athletes, but with this position comes a lot of expectation. I hold myself accountable to be the voice of all student-athletes at Virginia Tech and make sure their needs are met and that their ideas are heard."

The Atlantic Coast Conference not only supports student-athletes athletically, but also provides opportunities to enhance their overall student-athlete experience. These student-athletes, and others like them, are taking advantage of opportunities to develop personally and professionally on campus and throughout the conference. 



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Oct 1	Brushy Mountain Apple Festival / Wilkesboro, NC	45	Nov 12-13	Reading & Lancaster, PA / Factory Outlets	195
Oct 2-5	Atlantic City / Resorts Casino & Hotel	350	Nov 13-15	Sands Casino & Resort / Bethlehem, PA	275
Oct 2-8	Branson, MO / America's Music Show Capital	1,150	Nov 15-20	Olde English Christmas / Omaha, NE	795
Oct 2-8	New England in the Fall	1,125	Nov 17-20	Biltmore House / Smoky Mountain Christmas	695
Oct 4-19	Hawaiian Island / Four Island Tour	4,595	Nov 17-21	Chicago's Mile of Lights / Kentucky	775
Oct 4&5	Cass Railroad / Cass, WV	90	Nov 19	Asheville Outlets / Asheville, NC	50
Oct 7-8	"Samson" / Lancaster, PA	325	Nov 23-26	New York / Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade	1,295
Oct 7-9	Ohio Amish Country	450	Nov 30-Dec 4	Charleston & Savannah / Christmastime	925
Oct 8	"TOOT" / Taste of Our Town	75	Dec 1-5	Niagara Falls / Festival of Lights	695
Oct 8-24	The Great Southwest / California / Motorcoach	2,625	Dec 2-4	Christmas at Myrtle Beach	450
Oct 9-13	Niagara Falls / Toronto / Canada	775	Dec 2-4	New York / Radio City Christmas Spectacular	1,095
Oct 12	Shatley Springs Inn / Fresco Paintings / Lunch	60	Dec 2-4	Nashville Country Christmas / Opryland Hotel	995
Oct 15	Billy Graham Library / Stowe Botanical Gardens	60	Dec 3&10	Biltmore House & Gardens / Christmas	95
Oct 15-16	New River Amtrak Fall Excursion	425	Dec 4-5	Colonial Williamsburg / Grand Illumination	295
Oct 17&25	Andy Griffith's Mayberry / Mt Airy, NC	65	Dec 4-10	Branson, MO / Ozark Christmas	1,150
Oct 21-23	Nashville, TN / Music City USA	495	Dec 5	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee, NC	40
Oct 22	Carolina Balloon Fest / Statesville, NC	60	Dec 6&8	Christmas Lights at Tanglewood Park / Hanes Mall	45
Oct 24	Harrah's Casino / Cherokee, NC	40	Dec 8-11	Christmas at the Galt House / Louisville, KY	695
Nov 4-6	Sunshine Tours Family Reunion	525	Dec 9-11	Nashville Country Christmas / Opryland Hotel	995
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ABIGAIL MOTLEY

TRACK AND FIELD AND CROSS COUNTRY
Virginia Beach, Virginia
by Jimmy Robertson

Abigail Motley is a distance runner on the women's track and field and cross country teams and will graduate next May with a degree in international studies. She is leaning toward getting a master's degree in English and then maybe teaching English as a second language.

Q: Why did you decide to pursue international studies at Tech?

AM: "I chose to attend Virginia Tech for the distance program. My sister ran and coached here, and I really trusted the program and the athletics department, which was big for me when I was applying to schools."

"When I came here, I really didn't have a clue what I wanted to do career-wise, but I eventually decided to major in international studies because I found it really engaging, and I figured as long as I had no idea what I wanted to do, I might as well enjoy what I was studying in the meantime. I considered English and design, but international studies won out. The major requires studying a language, and I've found that I really enjoy learning Spanish."

Q: Have you done any internships related to international studies? If so, what were they?

AM: "I haven't done any internships, but I have volunteered in positions related to my major. Last semester, I worked with the Language and Culture Institute and practiced English with a foreign exchange student from Saudi Arabia. Her English was excellent, so we had lots of great conversations."


"I also worked with a middle school student from Honduras. I've enjoyed working with him, but it's been hard to see how difficult life can be if you don't speak the nation's official language."

Q: Did working in those volunteer positions re-affirm your decision to major in international studies?

AM: "Working with this student [from Honduras] has pointed me toward becoming an ESL [English as a Second Language] instructor, or helping the Spanish-speaking population in some capacity. I've realized that I really need to improve my Spanish before I can be truly useful, so I plan to spend a few years abroad, probably teaching English, while becoming fluent."

Q: So is that your plan after graduation?

AM: "I have another year of track eligibility (she redshirted this past outdoor season, so she'll be able to participate during the outdoor seasons in 2017 and 2018), and with my last year of eligibility, I'll start a master's in English, where I can work as a GTA [graduate teaching assistant] and see if I have any knack for teaching."

"I feel like I'm slowly uncovering my niche and have a lot of plans up my sleeves, but I definitely have a long way to go and realize that lots of things can change in the meantime." 



CAROLINE BUSCAGLIA

SWIMMING & DIVING
Midlothian, Virginia
by Jimmy Robertson

Caroline Buscaglia is a swimmer on the Tech women's swimming and diving team and graduates next May with dual degrees in political science and psychology. She eventually wants to go to law school and then pursue a career in politics, perhaps as a chief of staff or a judge.

Q: Why did you decide to major in political science?

CB: "I grew up with my family always talking about what was going on in the world and watching the news and sort of being able to see what was going on in politics. Once I was in high school, taking U.S. History and U.S. Government really showed me that I liked understanding the inner workings of it. I've always had an affinity for wanting to be a good citizen."

Q: How does psychology figure into this?

CB: "It gives you an idea of how other people are perceiving things. With the law, there is a straight-forward aspect to it, but there is also picking up on human behaviors. It just fit nicely."

Q: You worked as a paid intern for Virginia Senator and Democratic Vice Presidential Candidate Tim Kaine this summer. What did you do?

CB: "I was working in one of his state offices in Roanoke. It [the internship] showed how much Senate offices do for the people. They're constantly meeting with constituents and seeing what sort of things that they're concerned about in their areas. The state teams collect that information and bring it to the senator and make sure that those interests are being noticed and heard."


"We also did a lot of events, and I was handling a lot of casework for constituents whose paperwork got lost in the shuffle at various federal agencies. Senate offices follow up and find out where there are any discrepancies and what's going on with the case. We also did a lot of research on what is going on in the area and let the senator know. It was really interesting and gave me a different perspective."

Q: Did that re-affirm what you want to do in the future?

CB: "Yes and no. I had been planning to go to law school after graduating, but now I'm planning on taking a year to work before going to law school. I'll probably be working in Richmond. One of the things that doing this internship taught me was that there are a lot of staff assistant positions that are high-turnover positions. A lot of people stay in them for a year and then go to graduate school or law school. Then they come back and work in a higher-level position, or do something else in a higher-level position. That gave me a new idea of what I wanted to do. So that is the plan — to get a year of working experience and then pursue a law degree."

Q: What would be your long-term career objective?

CB: "I don't actually want to run for political office. I'd rather be a chief of staff and do the background stuff, or focus on the legal side to eventually be a judge. I like policy and working on pulling it all together. I might even be interested in doing some lobbying. Having a law degree gives me more specialization, and I can use it a lot of different ways."

"I could work for a private firm and make a lot of money, but that's not where my passion is. My passion is more how I can use it to help people." 

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HOKIES

KEEP *FOCUS* ON THE DAY,

As They Begin Preparations For Upcoming Season

Last season, the Tech men's basketball team went to the NIT in Buzz Williams' second year as the head coach, and while many on the outside have NCAA Tournament aspirations, he and his players are simply trying to get better each day

by Jimmy Robertson

The Virginia Tech men's basketball team won 20 games and made it to the postseason for the first time in five years, and for Ty Outlaw, sitting and watching was enough to break his heart, figuratively speaking.

Yet doctors shelved him for the entire year, and that decision came about because they thought he actually had a broken heart, literally speaking.

Outlaw's nine-month ordeal ended in mid-June when doctors cleared him to resume workouts with the Tech basketball team. They feared that he had hypertrophic

cardiomyopathy, a disease in which the heart muscle thickens, making it harder for the heart to pump blood. The disease often goes undiagnosed because people with it exhibit few symptoms and often live normal lives. Yet it can be fatal.

A year's worth of tests, monitoring, healthy eating, and medication resulted in Outlaw being cleared. In early October, he participated in Buzz Williams' infamous boot camp, one designed to help with conditioning, improve mental toughness and build chemistry. He also participated in his first team practice, as the Hokies began preparations in earnest for the 2016-17 season.

As arguably the most important newcomer on this season's roster, he is ready to add scoring punch and defense to the Hokies' squad.

"It all worked out for the best," Outlaw said. "There was a small light at the end of the tunnel, and I eventually got to it after a long nine months."

"No one saw me getting cleared. I had to see two or three different doctors, but I'm glad I stuck it out. It makes me that much grateful to be here and have this opportunity. It shows me how fragile it is and to take advantage of it."

Now he gets to be part of the excitement, as Williams enters his third season as the coach and appears to have the Hokies' train steaming forward in a positive direction.

Tech surprised everyone outside of the program by going 20-15 last season, one that ended with a painful 80-77 loss to Brigham Young in the second round of the NIT. The 20 wins marked a whopping nine-game improvement from the previous season.

Those numbers create excitement in and of themselves, but what really generates the enthusiasm among Hokie Nation is that all the key components return for this campaign. Tech only lost workmanlike big man Shane Henry, who graduated, and Jalen Hudson and Satchel Pierce, both of whom transferred.

Williams and his players focus on simply getting better each day—a savvy strategy that served them well a year ago. But fans hope to see this group advance to the NCAA Tournament, which would be the program's first appearance since 2007 and second in two decades.

"It's never brought up," Williams said of the NCAA Tournament. "I'm not saying we're ignorant to what's swirling around. I think we're all aware of how grateful we are, and having said that, we're all aware of how fragile this all is."

"We've [his staff] spent a lot of time asking ourselves how can we better teach, better execute, and be better organized, so that we're better prepared. The way that you get off the track is when you're bored. The chase can't be just physically. It has to be in all facets of your life. That chase has to be based on, 'We have to do this today because tomorrow we have to get on to the next thing.' Let's set aside tomorrow and be consumed with today."

Any opportunity of playing deep into March probably hinges on the performances of the inside-outside tandem of seniors Zach LeDay and Seth Allen. The 6-foot-7 LeDay averaged a team best in points (15.5 ppg) and rebounds (7.9 rpg) on his way to earning honorable mention All-ACC honors last season. Allen, a 6-1 guard, averaged 14.7 points and hit 44 3-pointers. He also led the team with 33 steals.

Allen leads a talented, versatile perimeter group for the Hokies. Justin Bibbs, a 6-6 small forward, averaged 11.7 points and 3.3 rebounds per game a year ago. Bibbs shot 46.9 percent from the floor—strong for a perimeter player—and served as the Hokies' primary

3-point threat, making a team-best 76 3's and shooting 45 percent from beyond the arc.

Justin Robinson is a combo guard—and a Williams favorite—who led Tech with 97 assists and just 57 turnovers as a freshman. If he returns from playing football, Devin Wilson gives the Hokies a veteran presence in the backcourt. He dished out 70 assists, with just 32 turnovers last season.

The wildcard is the return of Ahmed Hill, who took a redshirt year because of a knee injury. Hill started 30 games as a freshman in 2014-15 and averaged 8.7 points, 3.7 rebounds and 1.5 assists per game. More importantly, he thrives on the defensive end of the court and gives Tech an element of toughness.

"Never in my career have I seen someone of his age have the impression without words that he has within the entire program of how tough he is," Williams said. "When his heart is beating, it's excreting figurative blood on the floor. That's how hard it's beating. There is not one player or one coach who does anything but stand at attention at how hard he goes. I've never seen that in all my years of coaching."

Freshman Tyrie Jackson, a high-scoring guard from Georgia, adds depth, along with forward Matt Galloway, who played in eight games last season.

In the post, LeDay anchors things and should get help from both Chris Clarke

and Kerry Blackshear Jr. Clarke, who plays multiple positions, missed 13 games last season, primarily because of a broken foot, but when in the lineup, he averaged 8.4 points and six rebounds per game. Blackshear Jr. gave Tech a presence in the post as well and averaged 6.2 points and 4.5 rebounds per game. Williams also hopes Johnny Hamilton, a 7-footer, progresses, and Greg Donlon, a 6-8 senior forward, adds depth.

Williams and his staff addressed the Hokies' size issues with the signing of Khadim Sy, a 6-10, 240-pounder who played at Oak Hill Academy last season. They also added Nick Fullard, a 6-10, 235-pounder who transferred from Belmont Abbey, but must sit out this season.

The key, though, could be Outlaw, who, like Clarke, is a 6-6, 220-pound forward with the ability to play multiple positions. A North Carolina native who played his freshman season at UNC Greensboro, Outlaw signed with the Tech program in the spring of 2015 after a season at Lee College, a junior college in Baytown, Texas. He averaged 21.8 points and five rebounds per game at Lee College.

"I played a lot of post in high school, but when I got to junior college, I developed a 3-point shot," Outlaw said. "I stayed consistent with it. That's what I did at junior college. Now I'm at the Division I level, and you're going to

Continued on page 18

MEET THE NEWCOMERS



TYRIE JACKSON

6-1, G, Fr.
Tift County High
Tifton, Georgia

- Averaged 18 points, seven rebounds, five assists and five steals as a senior
- Named second-team All-Class 6A by the Atlanta Journal Constitution
- MVP of the South team in the Georgia Athletic Coaches Association All-Star Game after scoring 26 points
- Chose the Hokies over Georgia Tech, Wichita State and Jacksonville



KHADIM SY

6-10, C, Fr.
Oak Hill Academy
Dakar, Senegal

- Averaged more than 10 points per game his final year at Oak Hill
- Chose Tech over Kansas State, Georgia Tech, Purdue and Wake Forest
- Was the first Oak Hill prospect to sign with Virginia Tech in more than 30 years
- Was one of six Oak Hill players to sign with a Division I program



NICK FULLARD

6-10, C, Jr.
St. Mary's Ryken/Belmont Abbey
LaPlata, Maryland

- A transfer from Belmont Abbey who has to sit out this season
- One of three players who left Belmont Abbey after last season
- Averaged 3.2 points and 3.5 rebounds per game last season
- Averaged six points, eight rebounds and four blocked shots per game his senior year of high school



SETH LEDAY

6-7, F, Jr.
The Colony/ Northwest Mississippi Community College
Dallas, Texas

- Brother of Zach LeDay
- Will take a redshirt year this season
- Averaged 18.5 points and eight rebounds per game last season
- Chose Tech over Nebraska, Florida Gulf Coast, Southern Miss, Murray State and Texas-Arlington

HOKIES

KEEP *FOCUS* ON THE DAY

Continued from page 17

see a lot of 3-point shooting and posting up. I'm big enough to guard a post player, but quick enough and have the ability to play on the perimeter.

"I'll do whatever Buzz wants, but I see myself as a 3 [small forward] or a 4 [power forward] because we have plenty of guys at 1 and 2. But if he asks me to play the 5 [center], that's what I'll do."

"He [Outlaw] really wants to do right," Williams said. "He wants to understand what right is. He wants to understand the why as much as he does the how or the what. He's a very confident shooter. He has good size, and he has done a marvelous job of getting his body ready after a year off."

"The thing we have to figure out with him is who can he guard? I like those mean, tough, undersized guys that we don't really know where to play. We call it the 4. It's really not the 4. Zach is a great example of that. Throughout our career, we've always tried to find that mismatch problem, but so much of that is based on who you can guard."

Such talent and depth does not guarantee future success. For the Hokies to make a second straight postseason appearance, they need to shore up a few areas that proved problematic last season.

Tech ranked 12th in the ACC in scoring defense, giving up an average of 72.6 points per game. Much of that could be attributed to the second-chance points that they allowed. Often, the Hokies played good defense, but gave up an offensive rebound that led to a basket.

The Hokies ranked 13th in the ACC in rebounding margin a year ago. Only three other teams in the ACC (Duke, Syracuse and Boston College) were out-rebounded for the season.

"We, for sure, need to improve," Williams admitted. "But I don't know that our roster, because of how I coach, will have a bunch of guys who can shoot and miss and chase it down. I'd rather have a roster full of guys who can shoot and make. The down side of that is on the other end of the floor."

"We're probably going to be shorter in stature. If the other team is shooting and missing, then we're going to have an issue — and that [rebounding] was an issue last year. It has to improve, but I don't necessarily have it as a goal that I'd like to lead the league in rebounding."



He does, however, want to see his team take better care of the basketball. The Hokies turned the ball over more times — 447 — than any team in the ACC except for Wake Forest.

That may come as a surprise to many considering Tech's talent in the backcourt. But Allen himself turned the ball over more than 100 times. Turnovers mean empty possessions and usually lead to points for the opponent.

"Seth's turnover percentage was way too high, and many of his turnovers came about in one of two areas — he was making tired decisions, or he was trying to force something that wasn't there," Williams said. "Five' [Williams' nickname for Robinson] was playing the hardest spot on the floor as a freshman, and he was playing with an ultra-talented guy [Allen] with the ball in his hands. We told him, 'If you think he's [Allen] getting a little reckless, you keep the ball a little longer.' As a freshman. So none of that is good."

"The issue is when you take Devin off being the primary ball handler. Is his defender going to guard him? All of the sudden, you have Devin's defender playing help on 'Five' [Robinson] and Seth, which only compounds the issue."

"So we [as a staff] need to be a little more creative. They all need to be more disciplined. We need to value the ball and the possession

at a much higher clip."

Better defense, improved rebounding and enhanced ball handling will help the Hokies in 2016-17. So, too, would a continuance of their good fortune.

Last season, Tech won seven conference games by seven points or less, including five by four points or less. The Hokies also took care of the bottom third of the league, finishing the season with nary a blemish against those teams (6-0).

A few more wins against the top third of the league and those in this program could be in line to get sized for dancing slippers.

But Williams isn't looking that far ahead. He never looks beyond the current day.

"I think we're much more in tune with how important the day is," he said. "I think we're much better at embracing the opportunity to get better within the day. I think we're more mature in knowing that we're not good enough to look ahead, and we can be absorbed in the moment."

"The key going forward is do we have the sustainability emotionally to stay on that same track? It's semi-easy in September in comparison to what it will turn into. Will I answer the same question the same way in January? That will determine whether or not our growth has been sustainable."

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NEW ERA BEGINS FOR TECH WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Kenny Brooks takes over after a highly successful tenure at James Madison and is looking to change the fortunes of a women's basketball program that hasn't been to the NCAA Tournament in a decade
by Jimmy Robertson

Virginia Tech announced the hiring of Kenny Brooks to lead its women's basketball program on March 28 and the longtime former James Madison coach found himself relocating for the first time in his career.

He fashioned a "to-do" list. It included hiring a staff, meeting his new players and moving his family from Harrisonburg. But the item at the top of that list is the key to the survival of any coach, new or veteran—the acquisition of talent.

Brooks spent much of this past summer and a chunk of this fall in places like Northern Virginia, Charlotte, Atlanta and Nashville in his quest to find players to help the Hokies return to the NCAA Tournament—something they haven't done in a decade.

When asked which positions topped his search list, his reply indicated that he did not discriminate.

"A little bit of everything," Brooks said. "We have five scholarships available. I don't know if we'll use all five, but if we can get the kids that we want ... we're off to a good start. We have one commitment, but we're also looking to get three more. We need some post players. We have some really good guards, but we need some post players."

"The reception has been great. AAU coaches have been very receptive, and kids have been very receptive. We've had some success early on, and we've also been able to get into homes that we normally probably wouldn't have been able to get into."

Brooks, who took over for Dennis Wolff, obviously knows how to acquire talent. His players captured six CAA Player of the Year awards, three Rookie of the Year honors and two Defensive Player of the Year awards.

He also knows how to coach that talent. In 14 seasons as the head coach at JMU, he guided the Dukes to 11 postseason appearances, including six NCAA Tournament showings. He also won more than 75 percent of his games (337-122).

But Brooks inherits a rebuilding situation here at Tech. Though the Hokies went 18-14 and made the WNIT last season—their first postseason appearance since 2007—they haven't recorded a winning ACC record since the school joined the league for the 2004-05 year.

Progress will be a process—and maybe not a fast one. "I want to walk away from this season knowing that we've set the foundation for what we're going to become," Brooks said. "I want to be able to walk away and say that the kids understand what the culture is at Virginia Tech. I want everyone else to say that when they play Virginia Tech, 'Man, Virginia Tech plays really, really hard.'"

"It's like when you have kids and everyone says that your kids are beautiful. You say, 'Thank you.' But when they say your kids are well behaved, that makes you proud as a parent. People would talk about our wins at JMU and I would say, 'Thank you.' But when they'd say, 'Your kids play so hard,' that's when I was most proud. That's what I want to get here. I want people to say, 'When we play Virginia Tech, it's going to be a dogfight.'"

The current situation at Tech, however, may not be all doom and gloom. The Hokies' roster consists of three seniors, three juniors and a redshirt sophomore, which at least gives the program some experience. They return five of their top six scorers from last season, led by Sidney Cook's 10.7 points per game. They also return three of their top five rebounders, including Cook (5.8 rpg) and Regan Magarity (5.8 rpg).

Plus, the backcourt of talented point guard Chanette Hicks and off guard Vanessa Panousis returns. Hicks was snubbed for a spot on the ACC's All-Rookie Team, but certainly worth a look

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MEET THE NEWCOMERS

GENESIS PARKER



DIANDRA DAROSA



KENDYL BROOKS



ERIN GARNER



MICHELLE BERRY



KAELA KINDER



1 GENESIS PARKER

5-9, G, Fr.
Stonewall Jackson High
Bristow, Virginia

- Chose Tech over Georgia, Seton Hall, George Mason, George Washington and VCU
- Rated the No. 67 prospect nationally by ESPN HoopGurlz
- A second-team All-Met choice by The Washington Post
- A two-time first-team All-Group 6A selection by the Virginia High School League

3 DIANDRA DAROSA

5-7, G, Jr.
Somers High/ASA College
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

- Averaged 14.1 points, 5.4 assists and 3.6 rebounds per game for ASA College, a junior college, last season
- Averaged 17 points per game her freshman season at ASA
- Helped her junior college team qualify for the NJCAA Tournament both seasons
- Chose Tech over Ole Miss, Georgia and Kansas

10 KENDYL BROOKS

5-8, G, Fr.
Spotswood High
Harrisonburg, Virginia

- Daughter of Virginia Tech head coach Kenny Brooks
- Led her team to the Virginia Group 3A state championship as a senior
- A four-time All-Valley District choice
- A two-time All-Conference 29 selection

13 ERIN GARNER

6-3, F, Jr.
Trenton Catholic/Georgia Tech
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

- Transferred from Georgia Tech
- Played two games as a freshman before suffering a season-ending back injury
- Played in six games as a sophomore before leaving mid-year and going to Florida International for the spring semester
- Averaged a double-double her senior year of high school

14 KAELA KINDER

5-10, G, Fr.
Christ the King High
Inwood, New York

- Averaged 13 points per game as a senior despite missing time early in the season with a broken foot
- Averaged 13.8 points and 8.9 rebounds as a junior
- Led her team to the New York City crown and to the semifinals of the state tournament
- Named to the second team of All-Queens girls' basketball team by the Times Ledger

15 MICHELLE BERRY

6-2, F, So.
Miami Country Day/Cal State Fullerton
Miami, Florida

- Transferred from Cal State Fullerton, where she started 29 games as a freshman
- Averaged 14.5 points and 9.1 rebounds per game as a freshman
- Made the Big West Conference All-Freshman team and was an honorable mention choice for the all-conference team
- Averaged 14 points and 13 rebounds her senior season at Miami Country Day



NEW ERA BEGINS Continued from page 21

after averaging 8.5 points, 4.1 rebounds and 4.1 assists per game in 2015-16.

In addition, this team knows how to defend. The Hokies led the ACC in scoring defense (53.5 ppg) and field-goal percentage defense (34.8 percent) last season.

That fits within Brooks' philosophy. He earned the reputation for devising schemes that put points on the board at JMU, but rest assured, he values defense more.

"Four years ago, we went to a different defensive scheme," he said. "I slowly learned that we were getting a lot of our offense from our defense. We really concentrated on the defensive end, and our offense never suffered."

"Defense travels. The ball may not always fall in the basket, but you can always play defense. We've bought into that, and we've been a very good defensive team the past few years and our offense still hasn't suffered."

Then he added, with a smile, "Offense is more fun to coach, but defense is more important."

Tech's problems a year ago—and really for the past several years—have been on the offensive end of the court. The Hokies simply struggled to score.

A year ago, Tech ranked 14th out of 15 ACC teams in scoring offense (58.4 ppg) and 14th in field-goal percentage (37.4). Only two players

shot better than 45 percent from the floor—and both Tajah Campbell and Dominique Powell graduated.

Consider this: if Tech had scored 61 points in each of its losses—and the league average was 67—it would have won six more games.

"I think part of the reason that they had trouble scoring was because of the style of play that they chose to play," Brooks said. "They were halfcourt oriented. We want to get out and get easier baskets when we can. If we implement our system, and they grasp it quickly, I think we'll score more points."

Hicks and Panousis give the Hokies an opportunity for better offense. Brooks hopes that Panousis and Rachel Camp can revert back to the forms each displayed during her sophomore and freshman seasons, respectively. Panousis hit 77 3-pointers and averaged 13.5 points per game as a sophomore, but last season, her numbers dipped to 63 and 8.6. Camp averaged 11.4 points per game as a freshman, but just five points per game last season.

Hicks figures to be a perfect fit in Brooks' system. Her athleticism enables her to defend, while also getting to the basket on offense.

"She has top-player abilities, but it's just a matter of getting her to make the right decisions," Brooks said. "If she buys in and understands and wants to be the best point guard she can be, physically, I don't think there is anyone who can match her athleticism."

Brooks also spoke highly of Cook, who, along with Panousis and Sami Hill, comprise the senior class on this team. Cook led the

Hokies in scoring and tied for the team lead in rebounding, and more importantly, gives the team toughness in the post.

Hill played in all 32 games, but averaged just 2.5 points per game. Brooks expects an exponential increase in production from the Canadian.

"Just looking at film last year, I thought she was a little uncomfortable and not as confident as she should be," he said. "The player I'm seeing right now and the player I watched on film from last year are totally different people. I'm looking forward to her stepping up because she's as athletic and fast as anyone I've ever coached."

Brooks' biggest concerns are in the post. Campbell and Powell never scored much for the Hokies, but they defended and rebounded. They blocked shots and altered others. They gave the squad an element of toughness. Making matters worse, another post player, Tara Nahodil, decided not to return to the program after playing in 22 games last season.

Cook and the oft-injured Magarity were the only post players returning before Brooks added some bodies after his arrival. Michelle Berry, a 6-foot-2 from Miami, spent a year at Cal State Fullerton. While there, she averaged 14.5 points and 9.2 rebounds per game. Also, Erin Garner, a 6-3 forward from Philadelphia, played in eight games at Georgia Tech over the course of two seasons before transferring to Virginia Tech. The two of them give the roster much-needed size.

"We're not going to be a big team," Brooks admitted. "We're going to be thin in the post. So



we're going to be playing a lot of small ball and hopefully they grasp it, and hopefully we'll offer an advantage to us even though we won't be as big as everyone else."

Brooks also kept two of Wolff's recruits in guards Kaela Kinder and Genesis Parker, and he added two other guards. Diandra DaRosa spent two seasons at ASA College, a junior college, before coming to Blacksburg, and she averaged 14.1 points and 5.4 assists per game. The other guard is a player whom Brooks knows quite well—his daughter, Kendyl, who led her Spotswood High team to the Virginia Group 3A title last year.

The road to contender status in the ACC will not be an easy one. In addition to playing a challenging non-conference slate that includes home games against Georgetown, Tennessee and Nebraska and a road tilt at Auburn, the Hokies play five ACC teams that finished last season ranked in the top 25, including Syracuse, which lost in the national title game.

Perhaps of more concern, of the four teams that finished behind Tech in the ACC standings last season—Pittsburgh, North Carolina, Boston College and Clemson—the Hokies play three of them on the road. The Hokies play six games against teams that finished fifth or better in the league standings.

But Brooks doesn't look that far ahead. He just wants his team to get better each day. He said his players are trying to do that—and then some.

"They've been very receptive," Brooks said. "Any time there is a new coach, there is going to be some reservation somewhere, somehow, but they've been receptive to the preseason workouts and everything we've asked. They don't understand the culture we're trying to implement yet, but they've been receptive. I'm proud of that and happy with that."

"The key for us is that they play for each other. They have to cover for each other. Once we get into conference play, I don't think we're going to be the most talented team when we step on the floor. We're going to have to rely on each other to play hard. That's the only way we're going to be able to give ourselves a chance to compete."

Tech opens the season Nov. 11 against UNC Asheville. It will be the first step in the journey. How long that journey will take remains to be seen.

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CONFRONTING THE EFFECTS OF CONCUSSIONS

THE EFFECTS OF CONCUSSIONS

Matt Dauby has dealt with panic attacks, anxiety and depression as part of post-concussion syndrome, but therapy and the Hokies have helped him overcome those side effects. He hopes his story will help others

by Jimmy Robertson

“

I knew something was wrong and that I had to get help.

Matt Dauby
on dealing with the effects of post-concussion syndrome.

”



The temperature was approximately 43 degrees, with wind gusts whipping the normally lazy flags at the University of Virginia's Davenport Field. Afton Mountain loomed far in the background, and the sun played hide-and-seek among the clouds on this brisk afternoon. There certainly had been more comfortable conditions for playing baseball.

The overcast afternoon paled, though, in comparison to the dark clouds forming in the back of Matt Dauby's mind. A third baseman on the Hokies' baseball squad, he recognized the all-too-familiar signs and he desperately hoped that no UVA batter would lace one to him at his third base spot.

Unfortunately, a sharply hit grounder, one off the bat of Nate Irving, came right toward him with two outs and runners on base in the bottom of the seventh inning. The fear practically blinded him. He nearly never saw the ball, as it skipped into left field. The go-ahead run raced home, and the Hokies wound up losing 7-4 to the then-No. 1-ranked Cavaliers.

Dauby, charged with an error on the play, wanted to hide. He was a finely tuned athlete, a starter in the ACC. But the panic was just paralyzing—and embarrassing.

He and his teammates got on the bus. He sat in his seat and retreated into his own secluded world, which had turned into a dark place.

“I knew something was wrong and that I had to get help,” Dauby said.

The team arrived back on campus at 9:30 that evening. Dauby told his teammates that he was going to go out with a girl.

He instead hopped in his car and drove nine straight hours to his hometown of Carmel, Indiana, just outside of Indianapolis.

He wasn't sure if he would return.

Depression. Anxiety disorders. Panic attacks. Mental illness. Most Americans shrug off these terms, but the statistics show a burgeoning problem. According to the National Network of Depression Centers, one in five Americans will be impacted by mental illnesses during their lifetimes and as many Americans die from suicide as from breast cancer.

Mental illnesses do not discriminate, as many high-profile stories attest. Examples include Junior Seau, a former San Diego Chargers linebacker, and Mike Flanagan, a former pitcher with the Baltimore Orioles. Both ended their lives, though for differing reasons.

Dauby's struggles with panic attacks, anxiety and depression originated because of concussions. He suffered three in high school, including two while playing basketball. Unaware of the long-term effects of a concussion, Dauby's parents, Steve and Barb, didn't realize the magnitude of the effects on their son until a conversation between Steve

and Matt took place in Steve's car one day while Matt was still in high school.

“He's always been a great kid, but he was down and acting like a teenager, acting like he didn't care,” Steve Dauby said. “I'm like, ‘What are you doing?’ He broke down in the car and started crying. He said, ‘You don't even know what's going on.’ I said, ‘Well, tell me.’ That's when he opened up. He said he felt badly every day and couldn't control his thoughts.

“I didn't know where it was coming from, but I knew then we had to get him in to see somebody. We had a relationship with a psychologist at a local school and I took him in to see her, and she said, ‘Steve, he's got post-concussion syndrome.’ I'm like, ‘What is that?’ I didn't know anything about it.”

The Mayo Clinic defines post-concussion syndrome as a “complex disorder in which various symptoms—such as headaches and dizziness—last for weeks and sometimes months after the injury that caused the concussion.” The symptoms occur usually within the first seven to 10 days and go away within three months, but they can persist for longer.

Matt Dauby was struggling physically and academically, as the cumulative effect of the blows kept him from focusing. His doctors kept him from playing baseball his sophomore season and basketball during his junior year.

Shortly after the diagnosis, Steve Dauby took his son to see Dr. Micky Collins, an internationally renowned expert in sports-related concussions based at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, on three or four different occasions. Collins agreed with the diagnosis of post-concussion syndrome, but decided to clear Dauby to play baseball in the spring of his junior year—provided he took his medication daily.

“He [Collins] told us that it [the effects] could go away or not go away,” Steve Dauby said. “But he was more worried about the depression [from Matt not being allowed to play sports] than he was about Matt getting hit in the head again. He didn't want him to play basketball, but he would let him play baseball. There was a risk, but the risk of depression was greater.”

The symptoms subsided somewhat, as Matt returned to the baseball field. He ultimately became a Division I prospect, receiving offers from most of the schools in Indiana and several outside of the state.

The Virginia Tech staff, led by Pete Hughes at the time, saw him at a baseball tournament in Atlanta. They liked what they saw and invited him for an official visit.

“I honestly didn't come with a lot of expectations, thinking I probably wasn't going to go here,” he said. “But when I stepped on campus, I was totally blown away. I loved it.”

He committed after receiving a scholarship

baseball spotlight **matt dauby**

offer. Everything went well for Dauby during his freshman season in 2013. He played in 39 games, starting 21 of them, and he made good grades. Things were looking upward.

But the side effects returned.

Steve Dauby noticed when he traveled to LSU to watch Matt and the Hokies play. He saw his son at the team hotel before the game and he almost told Virginia Tech coach Pat Mason, who had taken over for Hughes, not to play Matt. During warm-ups, Matt locked himself in the dugout bathroom and started crying. He told no one on the team.

“Weeks of hopelessness, not feeling right, all came out about 30 minutes to game time,” Matt said. “We were getting ready to play in front of 10,000 fans at one of the best stadiums in the country on national television. This is every baseball player's dream growing up.

“But 30 minutes from one of the coolest opportunities of my baseball career, I was crying my eyes out, wondering what was wrong with me and praying that the feelings I were having would be gone the next day, just like I did every night.”

Dauby pulled himself together enough to play in the game. He committed two errors.

The stress of being a shortstop in the ACC combined with the stress of taking high-level accounting classes only made the situation worse. He had tried a new medication, but that, too, wasn't helping.

He still tried to play and there were pockets of excellence. He notched two doubles and two runs against Delaware and three hits and a homer against UMass Lowell. He had two hits against VCU.

But his struggle with anxiety and panic attacks became apparent at the start of ACC play. He played all three games of the Clemson series, but Mason noticed something was amiss.

“I was very worried,” Mason said. “The first thing that I had told him early that fall was that I was here for him. I was the head coach then [in his first year], and I knew what he had dealt with. So we started that relationship. I wanted to break that ice and alleviate any stress that could be there for him. He did a good job of hiding some things, so I probably didn't see as much as I would have liked to.”

“We had an open communication process in which he'd let me know if he was having a bad day, but I don't think he was at a point where he could be honest every day.”

Dauby did not play the first two games of that UVA series, but Mason inserted him into the starting lineup for the finale. Steve Dauby watched that game on television and knew exactly what was transpiring.

After the game ended, he called his son.

“That was the last straw,” Steve said. “I told him, ‘We're done. You need to come home.’”

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CONFRONTING

Continued from page 25

Matt Dauby methodically drove through the night after that UVA game. He was driving home in hopes of driving toward a better future.

He arrived in Carmel shortly before dawn. His parents immediately called Mason and left a message. Mason returned the message a couple of hours later, expressing relief that Dauby was at home, offering support and resolutely assuring them that Dauby's place within the Virginia Tech baseball program would not change.

"He [Mason] was more than understanding," Dauby said. "Most coaches around the country would not have treated the situation the way Coach Mason did. He took the time to get educated on how serious of an issue this was becoming in athletes and supported me throughout my journey of finding myself again. He has shown that he is extremely passionate about winning, but also has the same amount of passion for assisting in the overall well being of his players, short term and long term."

In that conversation, Mason made a suggestion to Steve Dauby that probably changed Matt's life.

Dr. Gary Bennett works in the Virginia Tech Athletics Department as the department's sport psychologist. In 2000, he started working with Tech student-athletes, and in 2007, he became one of the nation's first sport psychologists of an athletics program when then-Tech AD Jim Weaver brought him aboard on a full-time basis. Bennett routinely meets with student-athletes for counseling sessions—he met with 244 during the past academic year—and he also coordinates educational sessions about issues related to various topics, including depression and anxiety.

In 2014, Bennett brought Will Heining,

a former Michigan football player, to campus to meet with a large group of student-athletes. Heining spoke about his struggles with depression and anxiety—though his issues were not related to concussions—and he encouraged student-athletes to seek therapy as a means of coping instead of hiding within oneself or abusing certain substances. A therapist there in Michigan had helped him turn his life around.

Mason suggested that the Daubys get in contact with Heining, so that he and Matt, two people of common backgrounds, could share their struggles.

"I was at the point where I'd try anything," Steve Dauby said.

They contacted Heining, and he strongly suggested therapy, telling Matt of how much it helped him. Until this point, Dauby's treatment consisted primarily of medication.

A hesitant Dauby, at his parents' urging, agreed to meet with a therapist—Jennifer Horn, the same woman who diagnosed post-concussion syndrome. He spent that week at home and met with her on three occasions. Though he faced a long road, he started feeling better about his direction.

At the end of that week, he convinced his family to let him return to Tech and they acquiesced, so he made the nine-hour trek back to Blacksburg, filled with apprehension. He knew his teammates and friends off the field had questions, but he dreaded answering them.

During that week in Carmel, nearly every one of his teammates called or sent a text message. Mason had informed the team that Dauby needed to step away from baseball for a while to take care of some personal matters, but he never got into specifics. When asked, he told people that Dauby was out with a hamstring injury, unapologetically lying to protect Dauby's privacy.

Some of Dauby's closest teammates knew of his problems stemming from the

concussions, but never fully understood the extent of those issues.

"I was eager to get back, but at the same time, I was nervous," Dauby said. "I was a younger guy at the time, so the juniors and seniors, I didn't know how they were going to take it. Nothing came of it, but in my own head, I wondered if they were talking about it when I wasn't there or thinking about it."

"I didn't want people to feel sorry for me or feel bad for me or try to help. It was something I had to deal with. I didn't tell anyone about it because I didn't want people to treat me differently or feel bad for me."

Things certainly didn't turn around all at once. He missed the remainder of that baseball season. He wanted to be on the team and hanging out with the guys. It pained him when his roommates went on road trips, but he knew he needed to overcome his mental issues first.

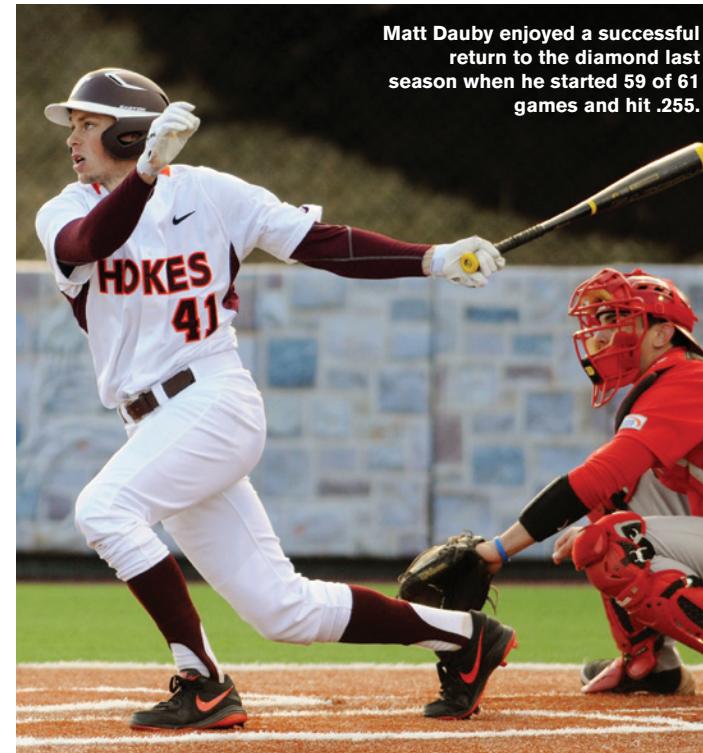
He also struggled with all the questions. People constantly asked him what was wrong, ignorant of his situation. He refused to open up and expose himself for the world to see.

"It [his mental struggles] was kind of embarrassing," he said. "And at the time, I felt like it was a weakness."

Dauby spent the rest of that spring going to classes, studying and visiting regularly with Bennett, who became his "Blacksburg" therapist. He worked on mental exercises and meditation, attempting to train himself to think differently.

Once the semester ended, he never gave summer baseball a thought, admitting to himself that he still needed time to work through his anxieties. He met with Horn three or four times a week and performed his mental exercises. This continued throughout the remainder of the summer.

In fact, 2014 marked the longest year of his life. He wasn't sure if he would ever see the baseball diamond again.



Matt Dauby enjoyed a successful return to the diamond last season when he started 59 of 61 games and hit .255.

The results of months of therapy started to pay off in the fall. Dauby returned to campus and met periodically with Bennett. He continued with his relaxation techniques and mental exercises. He even consulted with Horn in Indiana on occasion. He started feeling better and his demeanor reflected that, as he became a more positive person. He focused on his academics, and his grades improved.

There remained one question to answer, as he traversed this return path toward happiness—what to do about baseball?

He always wanted to come back. He liked the sport, obviously, but like most athletes at any level, he enjoyed the daily interaction with his teammates and missed that just as much. As he improved mentally, he decided to ask Mason if he could re-join the Tech team.

"I told him, 'There is no asking to be back on the team,'" Mason said. "That door was always open. He had made some progress during the summer. You could tell his focus was to try and play baseball again."

Dauby, though, struggled on the field in the fall of 2014. Missing the majority of the Hokies' season the previous spring and subsequent summer league action kept him from sharpening his skills.

He and Mason had a frank conversation after the fall season ended, and Mason offered to make him a part of the coaching staff just to keep him around the team and the game.

"All I was trying to do was to give him an out if he wanted it," Mason said. "I wanted to give him the opportunity to think about a new career, or be a part of the game of baseball without the stress of playing in the middle infield in the ACC and he definitely thought about that."

"The only thing I cared about was Matt waking up on a daily basis and enjoying his life. I focused my attention as a coach to do whatever I could to make that happen. Whether he played baseball again ... that was not my goal. My goal was to do whatever we could to help Matt enjoy waking up every day."

Dauby thought about Mason's offer. He thought about transferring and going to a smaller school, one with fewer distractions and less pressure. But he stuck it out and kept grinding, working to get back to the player he once was. He only played in 18 games as a junior in 2015, but he felt himself turning a corner—as a player, but more importantly, with his life.

His comeback took a huge step forward this past season, as Dauby earned the starting job at second base and started 59 of the Hokies'

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CONFRONTING

Continued from page 27

61 games. He hit .255, with three homers and 17 RBI.

The production occurred despite playing with a broken bone in his foot that required surgery following the season. Two years ago, maybe even a year ago, such an injury would have sent him spiraling toward a dark place.

Not any more.

"I trained my mind, knowing that I would have days that would be bad," Dauby said. "But if something bad happens, I learned not to let it control my life.

"I worked to change my thinking and took a step back and looked at what I had—the opportunities I had and the friends I had. I saw the good I had in my life that I hadn't been able to see. Ever since, I've been happier than ever."

The Virginia Tech baseball team opened fall practice on Sept. 16 and Dauby took to the field feeling better than he had in years. He returns for his fifth season—the NCAA granted a medical hardship waiver because of his bout with post-concussion syndrome.

Last year brought forth a newfound confidence, as he managed an injury and some intense situations that, in the past, would have paralyzed him. He continues to work with Bennett and Horn, following the protocol that got him to this point.

"I owe Jennifer and Dr. Bennett my life," he said. "I can't express in words my gratitude to both of them for help saving my life."

Follow-up visits to doctors have been positive. They have no concerns.

Of course, his parents, being typical parents, watch him with a bit of worry.



The only thing I cared about was Matt waking up on a daily basis and enjoying his life. I focused my attention as a coach to do whatever I could to make that happen. Whether he played baseball again ... that was not my goal. My goal was to do whatever we could to help Matt enjoy waking up every day.

**Virginia Tech baseball coach
Pat Mason on helping Matt Dauby.**



"I'm not very comfortable even watching him bat, honestly," Steve Dauby said. "But I'm very proud of him. He could have turned to drugs or alcohol, but that's not who he is. He's

not going to give up. He's not going to quit. I admire him so much for the way he's handled all this."

Matt Dauby grows more comfortable every day. He is excited about the upcoming season and his team—one that he says possesses a lot of the similarities of the 2013 NCAA regional squad. He also gets excited when talking about graduating next May with his degrees in accounting and marketing.

More importantly, he's excited about sharing his story in hopes of making a difference in someone's life.

"I know there are a lot of people going through similar things that I did," he said. "Obviously, everyone has their own particular situation, but I know people are going through it and are afraid or embarrassed to say something as a Division I athlete at a major university. I'd really like to be able to help people similar to myself.

"It [mental illness] can affect you on the field and off the field. It can paralyze you and make it impossible to play sports, or get good grades or go out socially. It can be a downward spiral if you don't try to get help. I am serious when I say that I'm there for a contact for anyone who needs someone to talk to."

Matt Dauby could have become another negative statistic, a victim of a tragedy beyond his control.

Fortunately for those who know him, he has become so much more. 



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The players on Virginia Tech's football team take competitiveness to its highest level. They compete in everything from bowling to video games to rapping, and more. Such a trait enables them to enjoy success both on and off the football field.

But competitiveness isn't limited to football players, or even athletes, as Chuck Clark witnessed this past spring. As an intern for Blacksburg Parks and Recreation, he set up a room for a group to use to play bridge, a popular card game, particularly among older adults. At times, the game became a touch heated.

Yes, bridge.

"It was pretty intense," Clark said. "People take it seriously."

The same could be said of Clark, a young man who takes everything seriously and who is quietly wrapping up an outstanding career this season as the starting free safety for the Hokies.

That the Suffolk, Virginia native concludes his career quietly comes as no surprise to those who know him. Clark is not much for idle chitchat, nor is he one to get crazy on weekends. Good luck to those hoping to find this 21-year-old perusing the establishments in downtown Blacksburg.

Clark instead prefers to stay at his place. Actually, one would be more apt to find him in Tech's indoor practice facility putting in some extra work. He enjoys his "happy hour" there.

"I'll go in there and work out and do drills, stuff like that," he said. "It's that important to me. We work all year for this period of the year. My life pretty much revolves around this."

He takes that same businesslike approach to the playing field, where he has started the past 27 games (entering the North Carolina game). He delivers timely hits—he racked up 107 tackles last season—and big plays, yet provides little in the way of celebratory antics. Witness the interception against Virginia last season that sealed a victory for outgoing head coach Frank Beamer in his final regular-season game. Clark's celebration consisted of calmly walking over to the sideline and handing Beamer the football. No chest thumping or trash talking, but rather a simple and humble gesture that only added to the occasion.

"I don't celebrate much after big plays," Clark said. "That's not me. I get more hyped for my teammates when they make plays. They're always joking with me about when I make a play and how I'll get up and just clap or walk away, but that's [celebrating] just never been me."

"I've put in the work to be in position to make plays, and when they come, they come. It's not surprising. I've never been like that [someone who celebrates]."

Clark not only works hard on the practice fields and weight room, but also in the classroom. He is one of the rare players who nearly graduated in three years. In fact, he walked across the stage at graduation this past May because he had nearly met all the requirements for his degree in human development and minor in sociology.

LETTING HIS ACTIONS

DO THE TALKING



Chuck Clark is one of the quiet guys on Tech's football team, but the free safety's actions on the football field and in the classroom speak rather loudly
By Jimmy Robertson

He took advantage of a heavy course load as a freshman and multiple classes during the summers to put himself in that situation. He only needs to finish a criminology course this semester to wrap up degree requirements. He performs well in his classes, too, as his two-time appearance on the All-ACC Academic Football Team attests.

"It was always important to me," Clark said of academics. "I wouldn't say I love school, but I always pushed myself to a higher standard. In high school, I held myself to a standard of getting A's and B's and pushed myself to that point. It became a habit. You might see a 'C' here and there, but I'd always tell myself, 'OK, I've got to get this right.' I've always pushed myself to a higher standard."

Some of that philosophy comes from his parents. His father, Charles, Sr., just retired from the Navy after 20 years of service and his mother, Lashonda, works for the government at Fort Lee near Petersburg. They made sure he stayed out of trouble and made good grades. They even took his cell phone once because of an academic shortfall in high

school—the worst of punishments for teenagers in today's world.

Clark's mother once made him and his three siblings clean out their closets and place their unused clothes and shoes into boxes. They then drove to an impoverished area in Portsmouth and handed those clothes to the homeless.

That experience resonated with Clark. He wants to help people once football runs its course, albeit in a different way.

"I could work with juvenile delinquents, or family therapy or counseling," he said. "I feel that it's always important to focus on our youth. Sometimes they get overlooked, and sometimes they don't."

"Someone who has been in a position where people have looked up to

them before ... to have someone like that to be able to work with kids of all ages, it helps them out a lot. So I'd like to help the youth. They are who will be running the country. I just want to give them a helping hand."

But before diving into that career, or even a career in the NFL, he keeps his focus on the Hokies and doing his best to help this 2016 team record another winning season and another bowl appearance.

Tech had positioned itself well heading into its bye week, having won three of its first four games, including two of the blowout variety. Each win creates excitement about the possibilities, but Clark prefers to echo head coach Justin Fuente's mindset.


"We need to build confidence and not complacency," Clark said. "With wins, you can sometimes feel complacency, but I tell the safeties, 'Let's not build complacency. Let's build confidence. Let's take the wins and use them in a positive way.'"

"Like Coach Fuente says, let's take it one week at a time and go 1-0 each week. Just focus on the next week."

Much of Tech's future success hinges on Clark. It hinges on his ability to get the Hokies lined up properly from his free safety spot and on his ability to make big plays, such as the interception against UVA last year.

Such a play ranks as one of his most memorable moments—if not the most.

"I couldn't put it into words," Clark said. "To give that ball to Coach Beamer ... that meant the world to me."

Hopefully, there are more good moments to come. Just like the folks whom he saw in the bridge game this spring, he'll be competing at the utmost to make them happen. 

"I don't celebrate much after big plays. That's not me. I get more hyped for my teammates when they make plays. They're always joking with me about when I make a play and how I'll get up and just clap or walk away, but that's [celebrating] just never been me. — Chuck Clark"



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One doesn't need to dive deep into conversation with Murielle Tiernan to realize that this carefree young woman rebels against making definitive plans about ... well ... anything.

She only made her college decision because her parents practically forced her. She had no clue as to what she wanted to study when she arrived at Virginia Tech. She remains unsure about playing professional soccer when she concludes her career later this fall. She graduates next May, with no idea as to her next step in life.

"I like to pretend that I'm not graduating," she said, with a laugh. "When I was in high school, I wasn't going to go to college, and now, I'm not being a real adult. That's terrifying.

"Yeah, I get a little nervous when I make plans."

Yet Tiernan, a standout player on the Tech women's soccer team, possesses a perfect plan when she's out on the pitch—a plan lethal to her opponents. This simple strategy consists of two steps.

She wants to score goals. Lots of them. And she wants to win.

Tiernan has become prolific at the former and the Hokies have become adept at the latter during her career. Largely because of her production and leadership and that of her senior classmates, the Hokies have won 58 games the past four years and are trying to secure a ninth consecutive NCAA appearance.

Tiernan, a product of Ashburn, Virginia, holds the Tech record for career goals scored with 46 (as of Oct. 10)—a mark that she actually broke *her junior year*. She also holds the career records for game-winning goals (22), multiple-goal games (9) and shots (233).

"I don't think anyone comes expecting to break records," she said. "It's always great, but I had no idea. I didn't expect to start or play my freshman year. We had so many forwards when I looked at the roster coming in and I was like, 'Mom, I don't know.' She was like, 'Just go in and play.' That's what I did.

"I was lucky that I got to play with Jaz [All-American Jazmine Reeves] my freshman year [when she scored 11 goals]. She made my job twice as easy. A lot of times, I'm just in the right place at the right time. It's just trying to know the tendencies of your teammates. I think it's also being versatile and being able to get behind defenders. You can get a lot of different types of goals. I don't think there is one way to do it. A lot of it is just being in the right place at the right time."

Of course, none of this comes as a surprise to those with any soccer knowledge. They watch her on the pitch and see a formidable combination of size, strength and athleticism. At 5-foot-11, she stands as the tallest player on the squad.

Physical traits, though, only tell half the story. She plays with a ferocity rarely matched by her opponents, and she possesses an uncanny ability to find open pockets—something that can't be coached. She also knows how to finish, too, as nearly 40 percent of her shots end up in the back of the net.

Tiernan, an All-American last year and a three-time All-ACC choice, does all this while playing with a disease called cystic fibrosis in which a defective gene causes a buildup of mucus in the lungs and clogs the airways, thus making it hard to breathe. She was diagnosed as an infant, but refused to let it affect her while playing sports as a kid.

"When I was younger, I was pretty unaware," she said. "I knew I had it, but it wasn't anything significant. Once my club team started going to summer camps, I noticed. They were a week long and they were in August.

"I remember going to a camp, and my mom came up the second day.

She said that I looked like a zombie. I was so dehydrated that my body was shutting down. So I ended up sitting out a session each day."

Tiernan self-administers two treatments daily—one in the morning and one in the evening. Tech women's soccer coach Chugger Adair monitors her minutes, often subbing her out of the first game when the Hokies play two games in a three-day stretch. Tech's sports medicine staff keeps a vigilant eye on her, too, particularly during hot weather, as the heat tends to exacerbate her problems. She jokes that she's the only player on the team who likes colder weather.

One would expect such a disease to cause her issues or perhaps even keep her from playing. After all, soccer requires running, which requires breathing. But there hasn't been a single incident since she arrived on campus.

Certainly, her production defies medical logic.

"I don't think I'd say surprised," Tiernan said when asked if she was surprised at her success. "I've never thought of it [cystic fibrosis] having any effect on my ability to compete as a normal person. I have to do a little extra here and there and take a little more time off, but it's never been, 'Oh, I can't do what someone else can do because of this.'

"It's not that I'm not surprised at how successful I've been. I just don't think CF is a factor."

Adair knew of Tiernan's cystic fibrosis diagnosis during the recruiting process. So, too, did all the other college coaches recruiting her. No one backed off. She scored more than 50 goals and dished out more than 40 assists at Stone Bridge High, so she looked rather healthy to college coaches. They were more than willing to overlook any potential future health problems.

Early in her junior year of high school, she picked Tech over Michigan and Pepperdine, near an area where much of her father's family lives. She wanted to wait, but her parents, Ed and Kathy, coerced her into committing before the scholarship offers dried up. Like many, she was tired of the process and practically committed out of frustration.

"It was the best decision I've ever made," she said. "I've never regretted it once.

KICKING ASIDE All Worries

An All-American and a three-time All-ACC choice, Murielle Tiernan has refused to let cystic fibrosis stop her from becoming the most prolific scorer in Virginia Tech history

By Jimmy Robertson

Everyone laughs at that story, but it's true. It's worked out, and I'm glad that I picked here."

Not long after Tiernan's decision, her house became divided, as her brother Eddie—a year older—elected to go to the University of Virginia to participate on the rowing team. That decision resulted in an influx of orange into the parents' wardrobes, making their attire suitable for both of their children's athletics contests.

While Tiernan rarely shows any empathy toward anything UVA, she also doesn't get caught up in the rivalry.

"He tends to care about it more than I do," she said. "I decided that I was going to Tech before he decided to go to UVA. I didn't create this rivalry. He did.

"He loves his school, but he would wear his Tech shirt whenever we played them. I'd always want to get a picture afterward with him wearing his 'VT' things because I knew he didn't like it, but he still supported me and my team."

Her brother now goes to graduate school at the University of Texas, where he continues pursuit of a master's degree in civil engineering. Murielle is just as smart, having made the All-ACC Academic Team each of the past three years. She graduates next May with a degree in residential environments and design.

Few know of this particular major, but it fits well with her interest in houses—something that started when she and her parents went searching for houses in the Northern Virginia area.

"Of course, we never moved once, but we looked all the time," she laughed. "Once, my dad was like, 'We're going to put an extension on the house. How do you want your room to look?' So I'd sit there with him and sketch out floor plans."

Then she paused.

"Of course, we didn't do that either," she joked again. "Then they moved two years ago after I was here at Tech.

"But that [diagramming floor plans] was always interesting to me, and I'd love walking through model homes. I thought it was so cool. I loved looking at the floor plans that the builders would give you. I took a couple of classes my sophomore year, and I liked it. I think it's been a good fit."

She doesn't have future employment lined up, which fits into her mindset of waiting until the necessary time. At the present, she keeps her focus on her team.

As Tiernan and the Hokies enter the stretch run of the season, they hope to play with a little more consistency. Graduation took its toll last season, as longtime standouts Ashley Meier

Continued on page 34



**KICKING
ASIDE**
All Worries

Continued
from page 33

and Jordan Coburn departed, and some of the younger players continue to learn their roles. Plus, injuries have hampered efforts to play with a little more fluidity.

The Hokies also have simply been a little unlucky at times. For example, in a September non-conference game against Longwood, they took 25 shots and only scored one goal—by Tiernan.

“I don’t think we’ve played to our potential,” she said. “It’s a lot of small things. We’re missing little passes or not finishing at the goal. If we get those things fixed, I think we have potential to go far.”

Once the season ends, she’ll sharpen her focus toward her future. She figures to have options, both in soccer and in the housing industry.

Her long-term future remains uncertain, as she deals with cystic fibrosis. There is no cure and life spans vary, according to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation website. Yet the research continues, and as a result, better treatments continue to emerge.



Murielle Tiernan will leave Virginia Tech with school records in at least five categories.

Tiernan and her family certainly do their part to help the cause. They participate in numerous walks to raise money for research, and her dad sponsored spaghetti dinners and is now selling t-shirts that say, “VT Alumni for the Cure.” Plus, for the third straight year, Tiernan and her teammates participated in the Great Strides fundraising walk in Roanoke, which takes place each May. This past year, they raised more than \$10,000.

“I don’t look into the future a ton,” Tiernan admitted. “If I sit there and do think about it, yeah, it’s kind of scary. It’s not a super positive

future, but it’s getting more and more positive. I have worried about it before, but I don’t sit around and think about it. I try not to think about the future.”

Such a philosophy fits into her breezy disposition. As John Lennon once said, “Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.”

Tiernan prefers to live her life in the moment—and that outlook has worked beautifully so far. She’ll worry about the future later.

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For most swimming and diving programs, a top-25 finish on either the men's or women's side at the NCAA Championships would classify as a solid season.

But what if both teams finished in the top 25? Well, that constitutes an outstanding campaign.

The Virginia Tech men's and women's swimming diving program were one of those teams last season, as both squads finished in the top 25 at the NAAs, marking the fourth time in program history and the fourth time in the past five seasons. Both registered an awesome achievement, but placing high at NCAA and ACC Championships is a place where head coach Ned Skinner and head diving coach Ron Piemonte expect the Hokies to finish year in and year out.

The 2016-17 campaign is no different, as both sides expect a lot out of themselves.

"We always want to be in the upper echelon of the conference and build our season," said Skinner, who enters his 18th season leading the swimming and diving program. "We go all in for the ACC Championships, where our men won in 2014 and the women have been runner-up. We always strive to be one of the

top three teams vying for an ACC title. On an NCAA level, we have returning All-Americans and a lot of swimmers and divers who have a lot of experience. A top-15 finish at NAAs and finishing in the top three in the ACC are the teams' goals."

DIVING

Eleven years into his tenure leading the Hokie divers, Piemonte, a two-time ACC Diving Coach of Year, knows the heights that can be reached by his athletes. His men's diving program ranks as one of the top-scoring programs in the ACC since the Hokies joined the league, while the traditionally strong women's divers gained valuable experience and go into this season with big aspirations.

Another year older is sophomore Ashlynn Peters, who comes off a strong freshman campaign in which she placed in the top 25 in all three diving events at the ACC Championships. Redshirt junior Ashley Buchter returns after taking a redshirt season and a sophomore campaign in 2014-15 that saw her earn 62 individual points at 2015 ACC Championships. Peters' potential progression and the return of Buchter's tough demeanor

excite Piemonte.

"I feel like Ashlynn Peters had a fantastic summer, and I think that she learned a lot as a freshman last year. She's very prepared for her sophomore campaign," Piemonte said. "Ashley's recovered and working hard. It's going to be nice to get her back on the boards because she's very competitive. She's a multi-time ACC finalist and two time NCAA qualifier, so I'm looking forward to having Ashley competing for us again."

The lone freshman diver on either the men's or women's side is Miranda Eberle, a Saline, Michigan native whom Piemonte praised for her athleticism at such a young age after qualifying for junior and senior nationals in the 3-meter event. Junior Savannah Padgett and senior Leah Piemonte round out the women divers and serve as the squad's veteran leaders. This season marks the final one for the coach's daughter, and he's excited for the upcoming season after she scored at the ACC Championships and qualified for the NAAs as a junior.

"It's going to be nice to see her finish out her career, and it's been a great one," Piemonte

Continued on page 38



GETTING TO KNOW... ROBERT OWEN

Robert Owen, a senior on the Tech men's swimming and diving team, took the time to answer several questions about the Hokies' squad and about his future

Q: Head coach Ned Skinner has commended you on not only being a tremendous athlete, but also a tremendous student as an engineering major. How were you able to balance the two?

RO: "I just really have to stay dedicated to academics. Swimming is a huge part of my college life, but also, I mean, engineering is not easy. It takes up a ton of time. So I just really have to use my time management skills to get everything done in the short amount of time that I have."

Q: Have you always been a good student, or did you have to become one considering the program you're enrolled in?

RO: "I think I've always been a good student, but the experience of college swimming and being an engineering major has made me an even better student. I just had to develop skills that would get me through all of the classes and the training."

Q: Knowing all that you've been through in terms of the training and being a student-athlete, what was it like being named to the USA Swimming National Team last month?

RO: "It felt great. It felt rewarding to accomplish that goal that I had set at the beginning of the summer, and I thought it was a reasonable goal. It was rewarding to have all of the hard work pay off. It was definitely humbling to see that list, where there's a countless number of Olympians like Michael Phelps and others not just from this past year. It was really humbling to be on the same list as them."

Q: What's your timeframe like with the National Team? Do you know where they'll be sending you first?

RO: "I haven't really heard much yet. You get the invite to be on the team, and then they can select you to different championship meets."

Q: So the main focus right now is to finish your next-to-last year academically and your final year of eligibility?

RO: "Definitely. My last year in college swimming is definitely the

focus right now. I just want to have a great senior season and build off of last season and accomplish the goals that I've had for a long time. Last year, I barely missed the top eight in the 400 IM at NAAs. That's something that I definitely want to accomplish this year. I think I'm off to a great start. The scenario is also the same in the 200 backstroke. I want to be in the top eight at NAAs."

Q: You improved your time as the rounds went on at Olympic Trials, and you kept gaining momentum. Do you feel like you still have that same momentum, and what have you done to sustain it?

RO: "I think, as far as swimming goes, this summer was probably the best I've had. It's definitely a confidence boost going into the season, where the success I've had this summer gives me confidence going into the season. I think other summers have been solid, and I've always gone into the season with a good mindset, but this year seems a little different because I've had one of the best summers I've ever had."

Q: What's your class schedule like this semester?

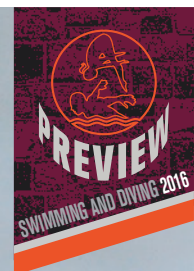
RO: "I'm taking mechanical design, material science in engineering, fluid mechanics and thermodynamics."

Q: Which one is your favorite?

RO: "It's hard to pick one."

Q: Which Hokie are you most excited to see compete this season?

RO: "Obviously, I love racing the guys in my class, like Brandon Fiala and Zach Switzer. They're always fun to race, and they really push you. As far as underclassmen go, Sean Workman is a backstroker, a rising sophomore who had a great freshman year, and I think, as he continues to improve, he'll challenge me a lot in the backstroke events, so that'll be fun to race him."



TECH SWIMMING AND DIVING SQUADS

READY FOR 2016-17 CAMPAIGN

Both the men's and women's squads are coming off top-25 finishes at the NCAA Championships and both are looking to do even better this season

*by Peter Long
Special to
Inside Hokie Sports*

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TECH

SWIMMING AND DIVING SQUADS *Continued from page 36*
READY FOR 2016-17 CAMPAIGN

said. "I'm very proud of her, and I'm excited to see how her senior year goes."

The Tech men's team consists of divers who once again are expected to be one of the top scoring teams in the conference. The Castro-Silva brothers, Eduardo and Mauro, return after both performed exceptionally well at the ACC Championships and sophomore Ben Schiesl returns after posting top-10 dives at the conference championship.

Piemonte noted that, in practice, any diver could beat the other on any given day. His athletes feed off of the competition with one another, and they pride themselves on being one of top men's diving units in the ACC. They refuse to boast, though, because they expect it from themselves every season.

"I think we've got some really strong divers on all three levels, and I think they showed it last year," Piemonte said. "There are no freshmen, so they're all returners, and they were all successful last season. I think our men's team is a really solid group of guys who are capable of being the highest-scoring team in the ACC on the diving end."

The program is also excited about once again being the hosts for the NCAA Zone A Diving Championships at the Christiansburg Aquatic Center from March 6-8. Historically, the Hokie divers have performed well at their home pool, where they feel comfortable with the lighting and equipment.

"It's great to be hosting the Zone A Championships in your own pool," Piemonte said. "It's better for the athletes from a visualization standpoint because you're there every day and it's one of the most important meets of the year when qualifying for NCAA Championships."



"I've been very fortunate with the group of athletes I have, and I'm looking forward to this season. There are always going to be ups and downs, but we're going in with kids who know what to expect and what they're capable of, and that knowledge goes a long way."

SWIMMING

The Hokie swimmers consist of a solid foundation of All-Americans, school record holders and 24 talented newcomers, many of whom expect to contribute right away. Skinner couldn't have picked a better time to bring in such a large haul of freshmen, though, as he feels that the strength of his group entering the 2016-17 season centers on its leadership.

"Both teams feature as strong of leadership as maybe in my time here at Virginia Tech," Skinner said. "These are the most accomplished swimmers, students, people and Hokies that I've ever encountered. They lead by example, they care in the locker room, and they look out for each other. That, as the starting point, helps me rest easy knowing that we've got the right foundation."

That foundation features seniors Brandon Fiala and Robert Owen on the men's side, and junior Klaudia Nazieblo on the women's side.

Fiala was named the Most Valuable Swimmer at last year's ACC Championships, where he earned two gold medals and set two meet records, including a time of 1:52.87 in the 200 breaststroke. He went on to earn All-America honors in the 200 breast, 100 breast and 200 individual medley, concluding one of the top seasons by a men's swimmer in the history of the program.

Before being the first Hokie to be named to the USA Swimming National Team last month, Owen registered honorable mention All-America performances in the 200 backstroke and 400 individual medley. He finished sixth overall in the 400 IM at the U.S. Olympic Swim Trials with a time of 1:57.48. Nazieblo earned All-America honors in the 200 butterfly and broke school records in the 200 backstroke and 400 IM last season. She is arguably one of the most versatile swimmers on the Hokies' roster.

The trio will help usher in a new era for the program. When

commenting on the newcomers, Skinner expects bumps in the road, but they possess the chance to become successful if they take care of the minute details.

"The learning curve is undeniable," Skinner said. "Every area requires attention, from eating habits, to sleep, to practice."

One of the women's swimmers facing a learning curve is Eleanor Matheson, though hers figures to be a tad easier. She recorded two trials cuts at the Olympic Trials. She arrived on campus in the second of half of summer, and she put herself in a position to become an immediate factor. Skinner also praised Grace Kowal and Centreville, Virginia native Chloe Hicks as two with the talent and tools to find success immediately at Tech.


They join Jess Hespeler and Adriana Grabski, two Olympic Trials participants this past summer and two veterans who expect to lead the Hokies in the freestyle events.

"Jess is world class in anything freestyle," Skinner said. "With that, she has brought up Grabski, who has started to emerge and will become a force to be reckoned with in the ACC and at the NCAAs."

As with the men, Skinner remains confident with his swimmers in the individual medley events on the women's side. Nazieblo and Fiona Donnelly, the school record holder in the 200 and 400 IM, lead the contingent, and he expects Matheson to be a factor in these events as well. He hopes Kelly Henry take over as a leader and performer on the rise in the breaststroke discipline, where the Hokies lack depth.

Fiala leads the way in the breaststroke events on the men's side, and freshmen Luke Jones and Simon Shi, a Leesburg, Virginia product, look like they possess the ability to help the Hokies. Skinner expects the Hokies' success in the butterfly to continue, as sophomore Norbert Szabo, an Olympian for Hungary this past summer, sophomore Brent Benedict and newcomer Hassler Carroll add talent and depth. Skinner is also confident in sophomore Ian Ho and senior Caroline Buscaglia, the program's top sprinters on the men's and women's sides, respectively.

In addition to setting goals in the pool for this upcoming season, the men's and women's teams have set academic goals for the year. The Hokies' team GPA consistently ranks at the top among the other programs in the athletics department and their goals reflect the ideals of their head coach.

"To me, the academic component feeds into the athletics component," Skinner said. "If you're good in school, you're going to be good in swimming. That's how I see it." 

RAISING THE BAR Again

The Tech wrestling team returns six wrestlers who have earned All-America honors at some point in their careers, and the Hokies think they can improve on last season's program-best fourth-place finish at the NCAA Wrestling Championships

by Jimmy Robertson

For the past several seasons, the Virginia Tech wrestling program invested its time and work into "raising the bar"—a team motto that has morphed into the program's identity.

After three straight top-10 finishes at the NCAA Wrestling Championships, the program reached new heights this past March when the Hokies made it to the podium at Madison Square Garden in New York City, coming in fourth place. The finish marked the program's best and the best ever by an ACC team.

To raise the bar this season means finishing in the top three—or even win a national championship.

Kevin Dresser is down for the challenge.

"I'm one of those guys who always wants more and I'm an optimist, so our goal is to win a national title," Tech's coach said two weeks before the Hokies started workouts for the upcoming season. "That's what we're here to do. That's the goal of the staff and I think that's the goal of the team. We'll know more when we start competing, but I hope they have that sense of urgency."

"I've always said that the ultimate goal is to be a top-five program year in and year out. When you make that statement, you better be in it to win it all."

The ascension to the throne certainly will not be easy. No team outside of the Big Ten has taken home the crown in the past decade, and Penn State dominates collegiate wrestling these days, having won five of the past six national titles.

But of all the teams nationwide, the Hokies certainly appear on paper to be in the best position to break the Big Ten's dominance. Tech lost three-time All-American Nick Brascetta to graduation, but the Hokies return the remainder of their lineup. Seven of the eight who qualified for the NCAA Championships

return, including five All-Americans.

Ty Walz and Zach Epperly headline the contingent. Epperly, a redshirt junior at 174 pounds, won seven straight matches to finish third at the NCAAs after being upset in the first round. Walz, a redshirt senior, advanced to the semifinals at heavyweight before losing to eventual national champion Kyle Snyder of Ohio State. He ultimately finished fourth.

Joey Dance, another senior, earned All-America honors as a freshman. He gives the Hokies a total of six who have earned All-America honors at some point. Given that returning talent, Wrestling Insider Newsmagazine ranked the Hokies at No. 2 in its preseason poll.

Dresser, though, expressed concern about complacency coming off of the program's huge accomplishments this past spring.

"I see certain guys making a run at it. They're hungry," he said. "I also see certain guys that I think are going to get snuck up on. The notoriety and the target on their backs ... I think it's going to smack them in the face early. They're not going to be ready for that, but the only way to get ready for it is to get smacked in the face."

"Last year, Zach Epperly didn't know that the target was on his back based on what he did as a freshman. All of the sudden, everyone wanted to whack him, and you've got to be ready for that. You've got to fight fire with fire. Everyone is going to be gunning for us. We have to learn how to step out and fight every time because people are going to want to take our head off."

He also has other concerns. Certain guys need to move up a weight class because of added strength and physical maturity. How will they handle that transition? Who replaces them in the weight classes being vacated

by their move? Dresser wants to get those questions answered before the ACC slate begins in early January.

"I'm not sure where [Solomon] Chishko is going to go this year," Dresser said. "I'm not sure what weight [Sal] Mastriani is going to go. That's 20 percent of our team. I'm not sure if we're going to redshirt [David] McFadden or wrestle him since he's coming off an ACL injury. "We've got a lot up in the air right now."

Here is a complete look at the Hokies at each weight class, as they gear up for the upcoming season:

125 POUNDS

Dance, a back-to-back ACC champion, returns for his fourth season as the starter at this weight class. He went 28-3 a year ago, but two of his losses came at the NCAA Championships after he won his first-round match. It marked the second straight season in which Dance—who is 84-17 in his career—stumbled at the NCAA tournament.

"Joey's got to figure out a way to put more points on the board to separate himself from his opponent," Dresser said. "He wins a ton of close matches, so we have to separate ourselves. Too many close matches will bite you in the butt at the end of the year. It's hard to win close matches all year long. It's like a basketball team that wins by one every game. You can't do it. Someone will make a basket on you to win. But if you're up by 10 and they make a 3-pointer, you can still win the game."

"I think he can score more. He realizes what he has to do now. He's excited, and he's as disciplined now as I've ever seen him. Sometimes his discipline gets him in trouble. He's one of those guys who always thinks, 'I've got it.' He's got a false sense of security sometimes, but I think he has the right attitude right now."

The Hokies lack experience behind Dance. Sophomore Ryan Haskett, the Virginia Class 6A runner-up at 126 pounds in 2015, probably goes into the season as the top backup, but freshmen Kyle Norstrom and Joey Prata also figure into the mix.

133 POUNDS

Dennis Gustafson anchors this weight class, though he struggled through a disappointing redshirt sophomore season a year ago. Much of that disappointment came about because he was recovering from a torn ACL suffered the previous season. He received clearance to begin wrestling in January, but never seemed to get into a groove and went 9-7 overall.

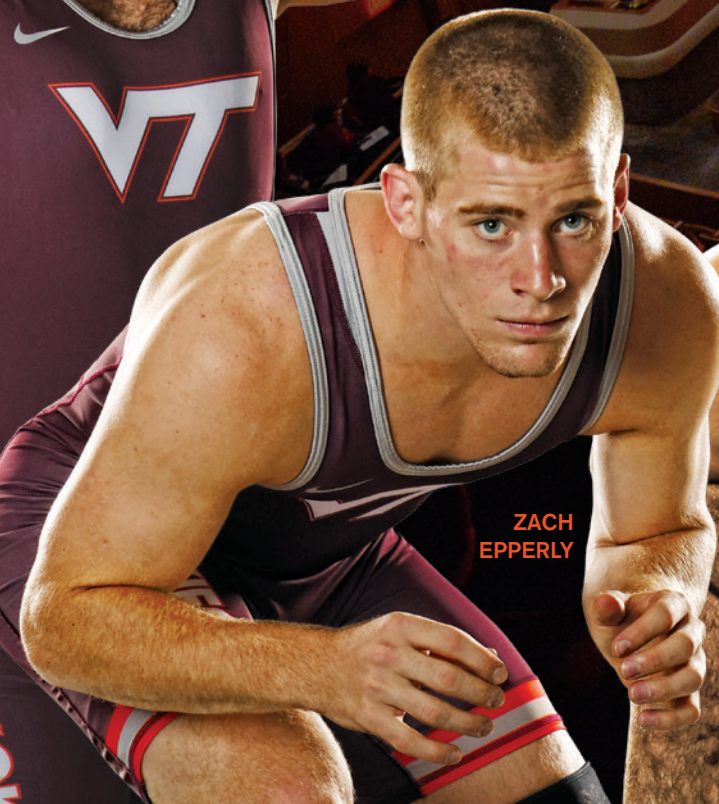
The 2014 ACC champion and NCAA qualifier at this weight class, though, looks to be ready to roll in 2016-17, according to Dresser.

Continued on page 42

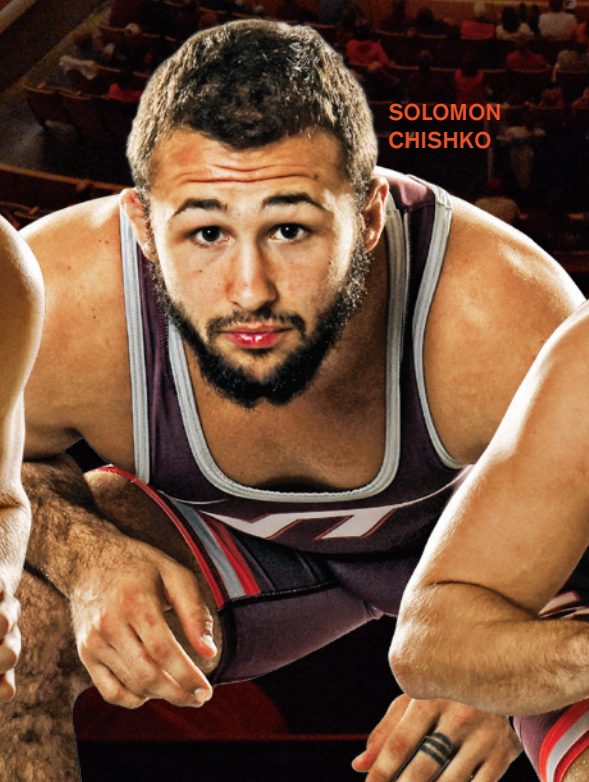
JARED HAUGHT



TY WALZ



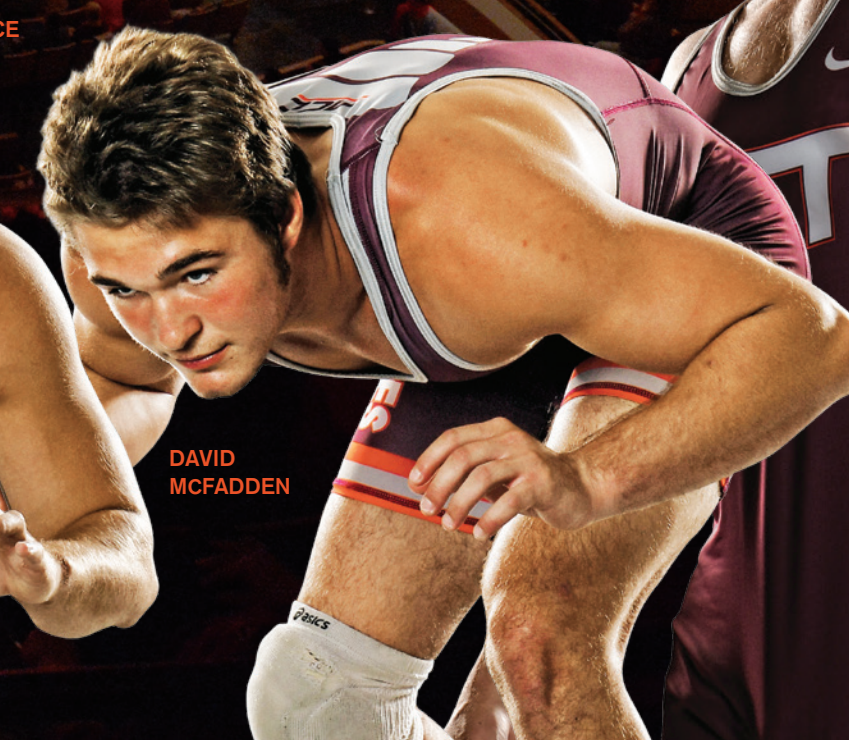
ZACH EPPERLY



SOLOMON CHISHKO



JOEY DANCE



DAVID MCFADDEN



“Dennis is similar to Joey,” Dresser said. “He struggles with being consistent in his discipline. They’re really good in the [wrestling workout] room, but they need to improve out of the room—everything from what time they go to bed to what they eat to when they eat it. They have to take care of their personal lives better.”

“But Dennis is a tremendous talent and a tremendous wrestler. The sky is the limit for that guy this year.”

Haskett could be the backup at this class as well, along with Dom Latona, a freshman from Alabaster, Alabama who won two state championships.

141 POUNDS

Herein is where the uncertainty lies for Dresser and the Hokies. Solomon Chishko enjoyed a fantastic redshirt freshman season at this weight class last year, going 30-7 overall and earning All-America honors at the NCAA Championships. He finished sixth in this weight class.

“He can really wrestle,” Dresser said. “He’s got such a feel. He’s got some go-to holds. To get sixth as a freshman says a lot about him.”

But Chishko may move up to 149 pounds, leaving Dresser in search for a 141-pounder. His options include three freshmen—Jarrett Degen, Brent Moore and Andrew Mehrholz.

Degen comes to Tech from Belgrade, Montana, where he won three state championships in three different weight classes and he also won two NHSCA national championships. Moore won two state titles for St. Paris Graham in Ohio—the same school that produced Braschetta—while Mehrholz qualified for the Illinois state tournament four times and placed twice.

149 POUNDS

Chishko will get the first crack at this weight, as last year’s 149-pounder, Sal Mastriani, also moves up a weight class. Mastriani, a fifth-year senior, qualified for the NCAA Championships as a redshirt sophomore, but suffered through a down season last year. He went 9-11 overall.

“Sal is up and down,” Dresser said. “He’s got to strive for consistency. We’ve seen the good and the bad. He’s wrestling well right now. I’m hoping that he can keep that mojo going.”

Whether Chishko stays at 149 pounds and Mastriani at 157 pounds hinges on how they perform in November and December. Dresser wants to give them both the opportunity at these respective weight classes before rushing to a decision.

“We’ve got to make that call by Jan. 1,” Dresser said. “The plan is to wrestle them and see how they do that first month of the season.”

We’ll wrestle them from Edinboro [on Nov. 5] to Vegas [the Cliff Keen Invitational on Dec. 2-3] and evaluate them and see where we are. There is no question that we’re a better team with them down a weight class, but physically, we just don’t know if that’s possible. Solomon had to cut a lot of weight last year to do what he did, and he’s going to have to decide if he wants to do that again.”

Mattheos Lozier could be an option at 149 if Dresser keeps Chishko at 141 and Mastriani stays at 157. Lozier, a redshirt junior from Stafford, Virginia, won three matches in limited action last season.

157 POUNDS

As previously stated, Mastriani will move to this weight class during the early part of the season. He will be one of three wrestlers vying to replace Braschetta, who graduated, at this weight. The other two include Ryan Bles, a transfer from Oklahoma State, and freshman B.C. LaPrade from New Kent, Virginia.

Bles, a former top-20 recruit, went 13-6 for the Cowboys as a sophomore and 22-10 as a freshman. He earned five Fargo National All-America honors and won the freestyle national title in 2013.

LaPrade won Virginia Group 3A state titles at 138 and 145 pounds during his career at New Kent. He went 52-1 as a senior.

“I don’t know that Bles got a lot of attention at Oklahoma State, so he’s got some catching up to do,” Dresser said. “He just needs to compete. LaPrade is very inconsistent, but we see some good things with him.”

“All three of these guys are good, but all three are equally inconsistent. The guy that steps up and is the most consistent is going to be the guy.”

165 POUNDS

Dresser may not find his answer at this weight class until January. McFadden tore his ACL at the NCAA Championships, where he earned All-America honors as a freshman. Asking him to return in nine months—and be the wrestler that he was—may be a bit much. More than likely, McFadden will take a redshirt season.

His absence would leave several in contention for the job at this weight class, including David Bergida and Mike Ciavarro. Bergida, a fifth-year senior, won two matches in limited action last season, while Ciavarro won just once.

Dresser also hinted that Bles and LaPrade could be options at this weight class, pending what transpires at 157 pounds.

“They’re all going to battle it out,” he said. “There will be a lot of wrestling off at 157 and 165, but I think the exciting thing is that all of those guys could make the NCAA tournament. They have the ability. It’s just a matter of being consistent.”

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174 POUNDS

Epperly returns for his third season as the starter after his impressive run at the NCAA Championships. He missed much of the first part of last season while taking care of some personal issues, and he wrestled below average for much of the season upon on his return.

Epperly lost in the first round of the NCAA Championships to unseeded Casey Kent from the University of Pennsylvania. Yet he turned things around after that, winning seven straight matches, including four by major decision and one by technical fall. He rolled past Kent in a rematch, beating him 8-4 to claim third place.

“I think he was probably a little embarrassed,” Dresser said. “He was fortunate that he got a chance to fix it. He didn’t have to wait a year. Sometimes, when you have a bad match, you can’t wait to get back out there and fix it. I think he fixed it.”

“Zach is older and wiser now. I see a lot of consistency. He’s having a better time. For whatever reason, last year, he was struggling, but I see a different guy now. I’m very, very pleased with his fall, just his attitude and the way he is carrying himself. He’s having fun. That’s important.”

Three wrestlers are listed as backups at this weight—sophomore Brooks Wilding, sophomore Cody Hughes and junior Tae



With most of the wrestlers returning from a team that finished in fourth place at the NCAA Championships last March, the Tech wrestlers are looking to do even more this upcoming season.

Leary. Hughes saw much of the action during Epperly’s absence and went 15-8 on the season.

184 POUNDS

Redshirt sophomore Zack Zavatsky took control of this weight class early last season and enjoyed a terrific campaign. He was the ACC champion in this weight class and qualified for the NCAA Championships, where he wound up being seeded eighth.

Zavatsky lost in the quarterfinals and

then fell in the consolation round, but the experience served him well. Dresser goes into this season with big expectations of the Latrobe, Pennsylvania native.

“He is a super talented guy and had a really good year,” Dresser said. “But this is the deepest weight class and probably the hardest on paper. He got beat in the round of 12 by the NCAA runner-up the year before [NC State’s Pete Renda]. That just shows you how tough 184 is.”

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“But we really like Zack. He’s a guy who can wrestle in a lot of positions. He’s fun to watch. He has a lot of skill. Like I said, he’s super talented.”

The Hokies, though, lack depth at this weight class. T.J. Allen, a freshman from Mechanicsville, Virginia, goes into the season as the top backup option.

197 POUNDS

Jared Haught finally broke through last season and wrestled the way that the coaches expected when they recruited him out of Parkersburg, West Virginia. The redshirt junior qualified for the NCAA Championships for the second time and earned All-America honors for the first time. He went 22-10 on the season, including a four-match winning streak during the NAAs that culminated with him beating nemesis Conner Hartmann of Duke.

Dresser thinks that even bigger things could be in store for Haught.

“He was the most improved guy we had from December to March,” Dresser said. “To be honest, he might be the most improved guy from March to November, too. He’s a guy who is capable—and I never would have said this last year—of being in the finals. If I picked

up the paper and saw that he was in the NCAA finals, it wouldn’t surprise me. He’s definitely in the top three or four.

“It’s just a matter of confidence. He opened up a little bit. He decided that he was going to be there, and then, ‘Boom,’ he got there.”

Dylan Cook, a sophomore from Bluefield, Virginia, is the top backup at this class. He won three matches last season in a limited role.

HEAVYWEIGHT

Walz, arguably the leader of this team, holds down this weight class and is coming off the best season of his career—one in which he earned All-America honors for the second time. The redshirt senior went 27-4 on the season.

His weight class features the return of the national champion [Kyle Snyder], who also won a gold medal at the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. But Dresser expects another big-time season from his leader.

“Ty is the kind of guy who likes that kind of challenge,” Dresser said. “He’s definitely gunning for being a three-time All-American, and he’s one of the leaders on our team. For a heavyweight, he’s fun to watch. He’s a crowd favorite and a program favorite.”

Dresser also thinks highly of Walz’s projected backup—Andrew Dunn, a redshirt freshman from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Dunn went 49-0 his senior season in high school and won the state title as a heavyweight.

The Virginia Tech wrestling team opens the 2016-17 season Nov. 5 with two matches—Edinboro and VMI—at Cassell Coliseum. The Hokies’ schedule features the usual array of tough competition, as Dresser never shies away from testing his team. Tech goes to Northern Iowa (Nov. 18) and Missouri (Nov. 20) and wrestles West Virginia (Dec. 18) in Parkersburg, West Virginia—the hometown of Haught. Dresser thinks Missouri is a national title contender, along with Penn State, Iowa, Ohio State and Oklahoma State.

In the ACC, the Hokies wrestle last year’s tournament champion, NC State, at Cassell Coliseum on Feb. 11. They also face a rapidly improving North Carolina team on the road (Jan. 8).

This is a program that isn’t afraid of challenges. It’s one that isn’t afraid of expectations either.

This program possesses a ton of talent. But to reach the pinnacle of the sport, it needs for a lot of things to go its way.

“I say the same thing every year,” Dresser said. “If we want to make a run, three things have to happen—we have to keep improving and progress as wrestlers, we have to stay healthy and that was a big factor last year when we made our run, and last, we have to get a little bit lucky.”

“If we can do those three things, I think we’ve got a shot.” 

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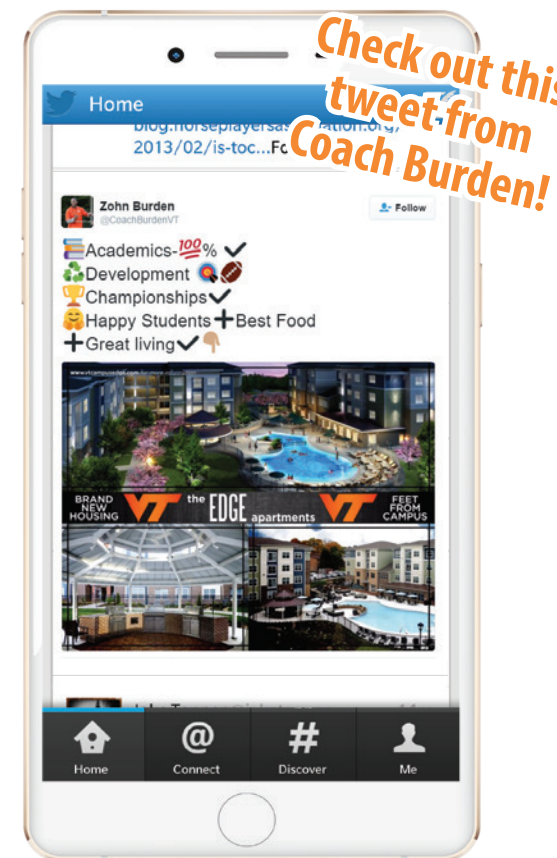


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