RISING ABOVE THE COMPETITION

Sam Gostling is leading the way for the Hokies both on and off the court.

WHAT'S INSIDE:
Tech and Tennessee will try to set an attendance record when the two teams meet at Bristol Motor Speedway in 2016.
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The Tech women’s soccer team has been smiling a lot this season, particularly after notching the program’s first win at the ACC Championships since 2009. Jazmine Reeves’ header with 1:13 left in overtime propelled the Hokies past Notre Dame 2-1 in the quarterfinals - a victory that was their second over the Fighting Irish this season.
Side comments

**Q&A**

**Q**: When you drive into Blacksburg for a game, are there any “must-do” things for you and your family?  
**A**: We do our share of tailgating before the games. However, we also enjoy eating at West End Market. We remember with fond memories our great friend, John Price, who was the “brain child” of West End Market. He had some of the best tailgating get-togethers and was one of the best Hokie reps ever.

**Q**: How are you involved with the Roanoke Valley Hokie Club? Has it been a positive experience for you, and what is going on for Hokie members in Roanoke?  
**A**: I serve on the board for the Roanoke Valley Hokie Club and am vice president of events. I enjoy working with the other club members on the fall luncheons at Hidden Valley Country Club each Friday before home football games. We have our annual “recruit night” in February. Our biggest event is the “kickoff” dinner at the Hotel Roanoke in July. This event always draws a large attendance.

**Q**: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech student-athlete from another sport is …  
**A**: This would be basketball’s Dell Curry. Dell was a tremendous long-range shooter for Virginia Tech in the days when there was no such thing as a 3-pointer. My family and I drove to Charlotte, N.C., on many occasions to see Dell play professional basketball for the Charlotte Hornets. What a Hokie!

**Q**: Do you have a special moment when you realized that you were a Hokie?  
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Curtin finishes second at ACC Championships

Thomas Curtin, a junior from Leesburg, Va., finished in second place at the ACC Cross Country Championships held Nov. 1 at Benson Park in Kernsville, Va.

Behind Curtin, the Hokies – who won the ACC title last year – finished in fifth place. Syracasu won the event with 63 points, followed by North Carolina (84), Notre Dame (105), Virginia (108) and Tech (110).

Curtin finished with a time of 24 minutes, 2.2 seconds, approximately 25 seconds behind winner Andrew Colley of NC State. Curtin finished seventh at last year’s ACC meet.

Lee Dogar was the Hokies’ second finisher, ending the race in 23rd place. Jared Berman (30th), Stuart Robertson (32nd) and Grant Pollock (33rd) rounded out the Hokies’ scores.

On the women’s side, Courtney Dobbs and Sarah Rapp recorded top-15 finishes for the Hokies. Dobbs came in 11th in a time of 20:49.70, while Rapp wound up 15th in a time of 20:53.60. Shimam Morton (24th), Malalyn Nuckels (28th) and Karatina Smiljancic (62nd) rounded out the Hokies’ scores.

As a team, the Hokies finished in eighth place.

Florida State won the event with 52 points, followed by Virginia (65), Syracasu (88), Notre Dame (124), Duke (130), BC (151), NC State (183) and the Hokies (188).

Juliette Burt of Duke won the race on the women’s side. Curtin, Dobbs and Rapp all received All-ACC honors for the Hokies.

Graduation rates continue to rise for Tech programs

Seven Virginia Tech varsity sports had 100 percent Graduation Success Rates (GSR), according to an NCAA report released Oct. 24. The Tech teams included women’s basketball, men’s golf, women’s rowing, softball, women’s soccer, women’s swimming and diving and women’s tennis.

The Graduation Success Rate was developed by the NCAA as part of its academic reform initiative to better measure student-athlete academic success. It allows student-athletes six years to earn their degree, and this year’s results are based on student-athletes who entered college in 2003-2006.

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The Hokies’ GSR was tied for second among ACC schools, behind only Virginia Tech (120) which ranked fifth among ACC schools and eight percentage points above the Division I average. The Hokies’ GSR was tied for second among ACC schools, behind only Virginia Tech (120) which ranked fifth among ACC schools and eight percentage points above the Division I average.

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Virginia Tech’s GSR combined for all sports was 90, a number that ranked tied for 10th nationally and sixth among ACC schools behind North Carolina (93), Duke (95), BC (96), Wake (94) and Miami (92).

In football, the Hokies had a GSR of 78, which ranked fifth among ACC schools and eight percentage points above the national average of 70. In men’s basketball, Tech had a GSR of 90 – 20 percentage points above the Division I average.

The Hokies’ GSR was tied for second among ACC schools with North Carolina and behind only Duke and Notre Dame, both of whom had 100.

Four other sports at Tech finished with a GSR of 90 or higher – men’s swimming and diving (93), men’s track and field and cross country (93), baseball (93) and volleyball (92). The men’s track and field and cross country programs were tied for fifth among ACC schools, while the men’s swimming and diving program was tied for sixth.

The baseball program was seventh among ACC schools, while the volleyball program was 10th in volleyball programs in the ACC had GSRs of 100. The baseball program was seventh among ACC schools, while the volleyball program was 10th in volleyball programs in the ACC had GSRs of 100.

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The requirements for nomination include displaying courage on or off the field, including overcoming an injury or physical handicap, preventing a disaster or living through hardship.


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Steve Hill
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For a young man coming off the game of his life and playing not terribly far from his hometown across the border in Canada, Josh Stanford wasn’t in a particularly cheery mood.

The Canadian had just set career highs in receptions and yardage in one of the best performances by a Tech receiver in head coach Frank Beamer’s 27 seasons. He single-handedly torched Boston College’s secondary in the second half, accumulating more receiving yardage in 30 minutes than he had the first five games combined this season.

So why the glum face, eh?

“I’m bitter,” Stanford said. “We play for the W’s [wins]. I’ll take any game of the year where we got a W over this game. Offensively, we can’t turn the ball over. We’ve been coached that from day one. Whenever you turn the ball over, it’s hard to win games. We had a lot of production on the offensive side of the ball. But we turned the ball over. We’ve got to get it corrected.”

Stanford caught six passes for 171 yards, but even his terrific performance couldn’t overcome the Hokies four turnovers in a 34-27 loss to BC.

The Eagles scored 17 points off Tech turnovers, returning an interception for a touchdown and twice taking over inside the Tech 20 and coming away with points (a touchdown and a field goal).

It marked Tech’s second straight game with four turnovers – and thus a second straight loss. Stanford may be a Canadian, but football isn’t played much differently north of the border than it is here in the States. Like all American football fans, he knows the quickest way to a loss in the sport.

“When you turn the ball over, it’s hard to win games,” he said. “That’s just how football is at any level.”

“Turnovers equal losses.”

But good things can come out of a disappointing loss, and Stanford’s performance was the best thing that came out of the Hokies’ loss. In fact, most fans expected this type of performance from him from the beginning of the season.

A year ago, Stanford was the rage of August. He learned quickly, and he caught everything in sight. He earned the right to play as a true freshman, and he played early before a knee injury sidelined him. The coaches held him out, and he ultimately received a medical hardship waiver.

For whatever reason, he got off to a slow start in this season. He dropped several passes in the early going, and he hadn’t morphed into that go-to receiver whom the Hokies desperately needed.

Until, that is, the BC game.

Stanford’s 171 yards marked the fourth-most by a Tech receiver under Beamer and tied for the fifth-most in school history. He made his catches count, too. All six came in the second half and none went for less than 16 yards. In fact, he caught passes of 69, 27, 23, 18 and 18 yards.

“Offensively, they [Tech’s coaches] saw some things they wanted to exploit on their [BC’s] defense,” Stanford said. “This game, it happened to be me. Next game, it’ll probably be someone else. The previous games, it was other guys. It’s a team thing and whatever we can do offensively against their defense. Whoever’s number is called, it’s all about production on the offensive side of the ball.”

Stanford shows his potential with big game versus BC

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Virginia Tech’s top receiving yardage games

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Tyler’s emergence as defensive leader proves history has way of repeating itself.

This is a tale that seemingly has been written before, and some might say again.

It’s a story about an undersized linebacker from Oakton High School who walks on to Virginia Tech’s football team and becomes a star, leading one of the nation’s best defenses.

He never appeared on any recruiting lists before arriving on campus, but by the time he ran onto Worsham Field at Lane Stadium for his senior day introduction, he had completed a tremendous day introduction, he had completed a tremendous day.

But he dreamed. He saw what Grimm did. There was that 36-tackle game against Robinson High School.

The guy who replaced Grimm at linebacker for Tech was a walk on, of course.

Now, as a senior, he’s once again leading the team in tackles and directing a defense that’s been ranked in the top 10 all season long.

“We have the best defensive coaching staff in the country,” Tyler said.

For the record, like Grimm, Tyler was a terrific high school player.

“Walking on to Virginia Tech’s team in 2009.

The two remained tight during Tyler’s freshman year – when Tyler paid his own way to school.

But Tech coaches noticed Tyler’s potential and awarded him a scholarship in the spring of 2010.

Then, as a redshirt freshman, Tyler played in every game and started in the Orange Bowl. As a sophomore, he played more than 300 snaps and started four games, including the ACC championship game against Clemson.

Then as a junior, Tyler exploded. He started every game, led the Hokies with 119 tackles and five interceptions. And our defensive backs cover defensive line helps our defensive backs get those defensive stats like that for each other. Our defensive line helps our defensive backs get those defensive stats like that for each other.

Jack Tyler has followed a remarkable mentor and teacher in Virginia Tech defensive coordinator Bud Foster.

“We have the best defensive coaching staff in the country,” Tyler said. “I’m having a great time. I could’ve been just another special teams player here and nobody ever would’ve heard my name. I’ve been around.”

“Tidie has been around” Tyler said. “That’s what you do when you get hurt. I was out there from 6:30-11:30 a.m. and then had lunch and then came back for more ice.”

However, his ankle was severely sprained, and he was out for the game.

“After that, you live in the training room,” he said. “That’s what you do when you get hurt. I was there from 6:30-11:30 a.m. and then had lunch and then came back for more ice.”

“Yeah, I have to apologize to the trainers,” Rogers said. “I wasn’t nice to them. I just wanted to get back on the field, just tape me up and get me back out there because you want to be there for your team and show them that you do it all. You can get back on the field.”

“In that game, I just got pulled out hurt and I knew I wasn’t being myself. I had to come back out there.”

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On the field, Tyler tops the Hokies in tackles among the national leaders in sacks, tackles for loss and interceptions.

“Well, the first time you read this story was in years ago?” Tyler asked rhetorically. “This … is unbelievable.

“I look over at Coach, and I know what he’s going to call. He gets halfway through the call, and then came back for more ice.”

“Me and Kyshoen [Jarrett] call the defense because, whatever formation you see, we

“We’re having a lot of fun,” he said. “We love playing with each other and having those great thunderous roar from the crowd at Lane Stadium

“Definitely. Just the way he works. I noticed it

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Danny in Blacksburg.

Q: When can a high school prospect start taking official visits? Thanks, Heather in Blacksburg.

TP: “Prospective student-athletes in all sports except basketball cannot take an ‘official visit’ (a visit for which the recruiting school pays some or all expenses) until the opening day of classes during their senior year in high school. In men’s basketball, though, prospective student-athletes can start taking official visits after Jan. 1 of their junior year. In women’s basketball, prospective student-athletes cannot take official visits until the Thursday after the NCAA Division I women’s basketball national championship game during their junior year of high school.

Rules allowing for earlier official visits in men’s and women’s basketball were adopted in their junior year of high school.

‘Rules allowing for earlier official visits between college coaches and prospects, while also limiting the influence of third parties (specifically, shady AAU coaches) on the recruiting process.’

Q: I read recently where the NCAA is going to allow midyear enrollees to sign a letter of intent in January of their senior year of high school to sign a financial aid agreement with the school as early as Aug. 1. They are not signing a letter of intent. Also, keep in mind that this is for all sports, and not just football.

This interpretation gives many coaches some of what they wanted. They get unlimited communication with a prospect once he or she signs the financial aid agreement. However, this does not bind the prospect to the university. He or she still has the freedom to make a different choice.

‘The American Football Coaches Association has long pushed for an NCAA regulation that would establish an early signing period for football to reduce some of the recruiting madness. But there are drawbacks. A lot of coaches do not like to juggle official visits with games and prefer to bring prospects in for official visits in December and January, which allows them to spend more time with the prospect. Also, what if a prospect signs early and then the coach leaves his school? What happens then? And many coaches want to see a prospect’s first-semester senior-year grades before going deeper into the process.

So there are a lot of variables to work through in creating an early signing period for football. An NCAA football recruiting subcommittee is looking at the issue, but there is no timetable set to reach a final decision.”

Q: Why did it take so long for the NCAA to rule on Miami’s violations? It was nearly three years ago when the NCAA started investigating. That just seems ridiculous. Best wishes, Carl in Roanoke.

TP: “It did take a long time, but this was a fairly complicated case with multiple parties involved. In fact, it’s probably the most complex case in NCAA history. Factor in that the NCAA made some missteps in the gathering of some information, and you have the makings for a long process.

“One must also remember that this Committee on Infractions is filled with volunteers, which means they have to find agreeable dates to meet and then put together a long report. That isn’t always easy. These people have day jobs and summer vacations, and things of that sort, just like us ‘normal’ people.

“Miami had its hearing with the Committee on Infractions in June – four months ago – and usually it takes an average of 3.5 months for that committee to make a ruling, again depending on the complexities of the case. USC waited four months to hear back from the COI on the Reggie Bush case in 2005, and Indiana actually waited five months to hear back on the Kelvin Sampson case in 2006.

“Miami was put on three years probation. The biggest penalty came in the form of lost scholarships. The Hurricanes will lose nine football scholarships for the next three years and three men’s basketball scholarships.”
Amid confetti and fireworks, officials at Bristol Motor Speedway announced Oct. 14 that Virginia Tech and Tennessee will play a nonconference football game in 2016 at Bristol Motor Speedway. The game, scheduled for Sept. 10, will be played on the infield of the speedway, where NASCAR racing teams and their haulers reside on race days, and could draw a record crowd for a college football game. The speedway, which ranks as the fourth-largest sports venue in America and the eighth-largest in the world according to Wikipedia, possesses enough seats for approximately 160,000 people. The current attendance record for a college football game is 115,109 set in September when Notre Dame and Michigan played in Ann Arbor, Mich.

The idea for the game is not something new. Bruton Smith, the chairman and CEO of Speedway Motorsports, Inc., has wanted to do this for more than a decade, and a Tech-Tennessee matchup represents the best geographical fit for a game at the speedway.

“It really is amazing and fantastic to be here [Oct. 14] to talk about making this game a reality because I remember being in Jeff Byrd’s office [the former president of the Bristol Motor Speedway], along with my dad, Bruton Smith, and Jerry [Caldwell, the general manager of the Speedway], and we talked about this idea and thought it would be awesome if we could ever do that,” said Marcus Smith, President and COO of Speedway Motor Sports. “At the time, it was just a crazy idea, but if you know anything about Bruton Smith, he has a habit of making dreams a reality, and that’s come to fruition.”

Despite residing four hours from each other, Tech and Tennessee have not played football in the regular season since 1937, though the two programs did meet in the 1994 Gator Bowl (a 45-23 Tennessee victory) and the 2009 Chick-fil-A Bowl (a 37-14 Tech win). The Volunteers own a 5-3 advantage in the series.

“It’s very special to be here on this day that the announcement is made,” Tech Director of Athletics Jim Weaver said. “Seventeen years ago, I just came to Virginia Tech, and I remember talking to Doug Dickey [former Tennessee Director of Athletics] about the possibility of the game.

“Then, Dave Hart [current Tennessee Director of Athletics], a great friend for many years, and I engaged in some dialogue this past summer. We worked together with Jerry, and it’s a reality that’s as big as anything that’s ever happened in the world of football.”

Information on how to purchase tickets for the Battle at Bristol will be forthcoming in the near future.
Kevin Dresser remembers the phone call vividly.

It came in February of 2008, in the midst of his second season as the Virginia Tech wrestling coach. The man on the other end was someone with name recognition in Blacksburg and the surrounding parts – Tech football coach Frank Beamer.

“Coach, I’m down here in Bassett [Va.],” Beamer told him. “I knew there was more of a future in football,” Andrew said. “We had each other’s backs. Everybody just worked together, and we were there for each other when needed. It’s still tough for me to think about even now. Just losing someone that important to you in your life, that’s real tough.”

But Johnny Miller kept his two youngest sons on track. The oldest, John Jr., played offensive tackle at Duke from 1999-2002 and graduated in 2004. Tim Miller, three years older than Andrew, wrestled at Tech before getting his degree in finance in 2010.

“Of course, me,” Andrew said, smiling, when asked who was the best athlete in his family. “But if you asked any one of us, they’d say themselves just because we’re all competitive.”

That the four children became such good athletes and went to college is a testament to Johnny Miller, who raised the children after the tragic death of his wife and the kids’ mother, Linda. Andrew Miller passed away the summer before Andrew’s seventh grade year after a bout with breast cancer. Her death left a huge void in the family, one that could never be replaced.

“Almost two and a half thick, and the gravy for the biscuits resembled Jell-O, but Andrew and Tim appreciated the effort. Their biscuits and gravy are the best thing in this world. She treated us right. Every night, we’d have dinner with my granny and grandpa. Their heritage is almost as their uncle, Tim Moore. Miller’s grandmother worked with their uncle and their grandfather, who loved the work, and he loved being outdoors, with his grandpa lined his and his brother’s pockets with spending money.

“We didn’t get an allowance,” Andrew said. “We had to go out to work. They [his brothers] did it for the money, and I did, too, but I enjoyed it.”

The two kids became good athletes, thanks to their father’s coaching and discipline and the work ethic derived from their farm chores. It all added up to bigger things for them – and especially Andrew.

Dresser first came across the Miller family while serving as the coach at Grundy High School in deep Southwest Virginia. Following a regional match, Johnny Miller walked up to Dresser and introduced himself.

“He told me that if he had his older son [John Jr.] with me at Grundy, then who knows how good he would have been,” Dresser said. “Then I moved to Christiansburg in 1996, and Johnny started showing up with his two youngest sons.”

For two nights a week from March through the summer, Johnny, with the 30-minute trip to their uncle’s farm at home in Henry County, a plot of soil that his family uses to raise beef cattle and grow hay.

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“She is the best cook I’ve ever seen,” Miller said. “Her biscuits and gravy are the best thing in this world. She trusted us right. Every night, we’d have dinner with my grandpa. Their house is like a second home to us.”

The two boys honed their work ethic while working with their uncle and their grandfather, Eldean Moore, on the family farm. The chores consisted of fixing fences, plowing the garden, raking hay and any other task that comes up while living on a farm.

Andrew loved everything about the farm. He loved the work, and he loved being outdoors, with the freedom to roam where he wanted. He also liked the pay that came as a result of the work, as his grandpa lined his and his brother’s pockets with spending money.

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from Bassett to Christiansburg with his two sons just so they could work out with Dresser and the wrestlers in Dresser’s mat club. He paid the fee for each son to join Dresser’s club’s team, and he paid all the expenses when Dresser took them to places like New Mexico and North Dakota to compete.

Tim eventually went on to wrestle at Tech with Dresser. Andrew morphed into one of the nation’s best wrestlers, eventually winning two state championships as a heavyweight at Bassett High.

“I was always into sports, lifting or wrestling or football you round,” Andrew said. “My dad always had us into something. I’d go practice wrestling in middle school with the high school team. I remember practicing football in sixth grade with the eighth grade team before they did away with it [the eighth grade team]. My dad was helping coach [the eighth grade team], so they [the coaches] fitted me up [with football gear] and I’d go and practice with them. ‘Wrestling started as just a way of helping me get better with football. Then it grew on me and grew on me, and I started getting better and better. I actually became better at wrestling than I was at football there for a while. But I’ve always had a love for football. I still miss wrestling, but football has always been the sport for me.’

– Andrew Miller on wrestling

As a redshirt freshman on the offensive line, he played in 10 games on the gridiron, gaining some valuable experience. He played well for the most part, but got a bit of a lesson in the North Carolina game against Quentin Coples, who ended up being a first-round draft pick in the NFL Draft. ‘It was ugly,’ he said.

Miller decided not to compete again in wrestling. He earned a starting role on the football team as a redshirt sophomore and wanted to keep his weight between 290 and 300 – above the NCAA’s 285-pound limit for a heavyweight wrestler. Plus, the football coaches understandably did not want him to run the risk of getting injured. He was looking to help out the wrestling program, though. The past two years, he helped in the wrestling room by getting heavyweight David Marone ready for the ACC Championships and the NCAA Championships, working out with Marone in various drills. Marone won an ACC title last year.

‘Both sports are really tough,’ Miller said. ‘You have to be mentally tough and be willing to beat yourself up in wrestling. You have to be smarter in football. In football, you have a lot of plays, and you have to learn a lot more. You put a lot of hours in watching film and studying the sport, and then the practices are longer, but not as exhausting. In wrestling, it’s just as exhausting. Wrestling is just a grind. You have to have a lot of endurance.’

Miller graduated last May with a degree in management. ‘I can change positions this spring, as new offensive linemen. The versatility not only helps the offensive line, though last season was cut short for him. The versatility not only helps the Hokies on the field, but it also helps Grimes by giving him an example to show Tech’s younger offensive linemen.

“You would certainly wonder if you’d have one guy who was your bell cow, so to speak,” Grimes said. ‘You’d like to have more. But if you have one guy that you can consistently point to and say, “See how this guys works?” That’s why he plays on Saturday the way that he does.”

“Andrew earns the right to play well because he practices hard every week, and he prepares mentally. He watches film. He studies. It’s important to him, and it makes my job easier.”

Miller’s decision to stick with football has paid off for him, and it may pay off more handsomely next May. Most of the NFL Draft “experts” expect him to get taken in May’s draft. Playing in the NFL would give him plenty of money to buy his own farm and own equipment, taking him back to his roots.

Giving up wrestling would have been a small price to pay if that dream pans out, though he may always wonder what the future would have held for him in that sport.

“If would have been interesting,” he said. Of course, one person thinks he knows exactly what Miller’s future would have held.

“If he would have concentrated on wrestling all the way through, he was definitely a top-four guy in the nation,” Dresser said. ‘He’d have been an All-American. There’s no question. I can say that without any hesitation.’

“This season changed positions, as new offensive line coach Jeff Grimes moved him to guard. The versatility not only helps the Hokies on the field, but it also helps Grimes by giving him an example to show Tech’s younger offensive linemen.

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GETTING TO KNOW ANDREW MILLER

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

Miller: ‘Chuck Norris. It would have to be him. He whips everyone’s tail. Plus, I’d like to feel the power of his beard.’

Q: What’s been your favorite moment at Tech?

Miller: ‘My favorite moment was the first time I came out to Enter Sandman. It was built up. Everyone talks about it and then you get there, and it’s a real moment. We’ve got some of the best fans in the nation and one of the loudest stadiums in the nation. It was wild. It really gets you into that mindset. If I hear someone playing Enter Sandman, I tell them to turn it off because that’s automatically going to get me fired up.’

Q: In 10 years, what will you be doing?

Miller: ‘Who knows? Hopefully, I’m settled down with a nice house in the country with a pond and a hunting dog. The NFL is a goal, but I like to take one step at a time and see where it takes me. You can’t put all your eggs in one basket.’

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Jack Simczak has retired and given up the game he loves

FOOTBALL STILL IN HIS BLOOD

Former Tech kicker and punter Jack Simczak has retired and moved to South Carolina with his wife, but he hasn't quite given up the game he loves.

by Jimmy Robertson

Jack Simczak doesn't spend much of his spare time on the Internet. So he was surprised when his wife informed him recently that one of his records at Tech had been broken.

“I was surprised that,” Simczak said. “She [said] punt yardage against Alabama on X amount of punts. I told her that wasn’t a really good record.”

Then he added, laughing, “The 55-yarder was nice for a while with our [52-yard] goal against Kentucky in 1969 was a school record at the time, but I don’t know how quite to take that one.”

The former Tech kicker and punter set a record with 594 punt yards punting in the Hokies’ game against Alabama in 1966, a record that stood until this year when A.J. Hughes’ 596 yards punting, coincidentally also against the Crimson Tide, in the season opener broke the record. Simczak’s record of 14 punts in a game, which also came in 1966 that Alabama game, still stands, as Hughes came up a punt short of tying that mark.

Simczak doesn’t remember much about that game, nor does he have any fond memories of playing the Crimson Tide – Tech and Alabama played three times in his career. On one occasion, he got injured, suffering a hip pointer that caused him to miss a few games.

“I do remember kicking off, and I do remember [Alabama coach] Bear Bryant wanted me out of the game,” he said. “He sent three guys at me, and they made contact, and I think each part of my body went in a different direction. I got a hip pointer. I was able to continue on in that game, but I missed three or four games after that. But I’m not remembering what year that was.

“I have a friend, and he can tell me about every play he played at Virginia Tech. Who he tackled, yardage, and things like that, but just didn’t have a whole lot of recollection on what I did or did not do at Virginia Tech.

What he did was become one of the best punters and kickers in school history. He averaged 41.2 yards per punt as a sophomore, breaking the school record, and his career average of 39.3 yards per punt also set a school record. Both have since been broken.

Simczak also served as one of the rare football players who both punt and kicked. He made 59 of 64 extra points and he also contributed on 21 field goal in his career, including the 55-yarder against Kentucky.

That 55-yarder made it to college and became a good kicker in a success story. The Highland Park, N.J., native sat the bench for three years in high school before leaving to begin starting quarterback job as a senior. By the end of the season, he started getting college scholarship offers.

But he had never thought about going to college. He always expected to work at the local General Motors plant, just like his dad did.

“My father talked to the high school coach, and we came up with the idea to send me to Ford Union Military Academy,” Simczak said. “My dad had to take out a second mortgage so I could go. I took the courses that I needed, and I was able to get my college entrance grades where they needed to be.”

Simpson was the starter for three years from 1968-70. In 1969, he graduated with a degree in physical education.

“That spring, the Denver Broncos drafted him and later released him. He tried to land on with the New York Giants, but that situation didn’t work out either. He later played for the Philadelphia Bell of the World Football League.

Simpson then went back to New Jersey and began a career as a businessman, starting up a few small businesses and making “a few bucks here and there.” But he missed football and took advantage of an opportunity that presented itself to all in physical education.

“I don’t know how many years later, but I got a call from my [former] roommate at Virginia Tech,” Simczak stuck. “He let’s me from New Jersey because I had run back against him. He got a head coaching job at Perth Amboy High School and called me and asked if I wanted a job coaching. I said, ‘Well, what do I have to do?’

He said, ‘You’re going to have to be a teacher. I didn’t know if I wanted to be a teacher, but I followed him and went out there. I became a full-time substitute teacher, and I coached football and track for three years. I pretty much worked with the special teams.

“I had some businesses and did what I had to do to survive. I got married, and I’ve got a great wife. She was influential in my coaching. She watched me and told me, ‘You see things that other people don’t see.’ So I ended up starting my own kicking camp. I’d do one-on-one coaching, and I’m still doing that this year.”

Three years ago, Simczak and his wife sold their house in New Jersey and moved to Goose Creek, S.C., near Charleston. Simczak had recovered from open-heart surgery, but as he pointed out, “Blizzards and open-heart surgery do not mix.”

Rather than play every day, he decided to talk to the coach at Goose Creek High School and offer to help as a volunteer. Chuck Beamer, a one-time head coach at Berkeley and current Goose Creek coach, accepted the offer, and Simczak has been working with the kickers and special teams players ever since.

Simpson is the former Tech player and assistant, and asked for a scholarship.

“I don’t know if there was anything he could do,” Simczak said. “A week later, he called me and told me that they had found me a scholarship. That’s how I ended up at Virginia Tech.”

When he arrived on campus, he immediately ran into Luke Linden, the equipment manager at the time.

Linden asked Simczak if he was the kicker. Simczak wasn’t sure. He expected to play quarterback, though he had done some kicking.

Linden wanted to see Simczak punt. So Simczak put down his suitcase and changed into his kicking shoes.

Gene Fisher, Tech’s punter at the time, was working on his punting, and Simczak joined in, kicking the ball just as far as Fisher.

“I guess that’s how the whole thing started,” Simczak said. “Then, when we played Navy, the placekickers (first-year students at the military academies) – we couldn’t play varsity football back then – and I was punting. We didn’t make a first down, and Coach [Dick] Broffing wanted me to go in and punt. I said, ‘Coach, let me try a field goal.’ He said, ‘No, it’s too far.’ I said, ‘But I think I can make it.’ He finally let me try it, and I made it. I think it was around 58 yards.

‘He said, ‘I’m not going to play football every day, I truly enjoy it. You can’t take the football out of the football player.”

Simpson keeps in touch with many of his former teammates and gets to Blacksburg on occasion. He plans on coming up next spring for the spring game.

Four former teammates get together every January in Myrtle Beach, S.C., to play golf, but mostly to reminisce about the old days.

Simpson may not remember vividly the specific plays and games, but he remembers the impact that playing football at Virginia Tech had on his life.

“Coach Claiborne was a disciplinarian. That was the best thing that happened to me – being able to work through things we went through,” he said.

“We had some guys come as freshmen or something like that, and out of all those players, only one or two made it. They really bucked accomplishment to do that because it wasn’t easy.”

Rather than play every day, he decided to talk to the coach at Goose Creek High School and offer to help as a volunteer. Chuck Beamer, a one-time head coach at Berkeley and current Goose Creek coach, accepted the offer, and Simczak has been working with the kickers and special teams players ever since.

Simpson works with kickers during the offseason and has his own website - www.jacksimczakmomentumkicking.com/default.html. Kickers from as far as New England have traveled to South Carolina to receive instruction from him.

“It’s been fun, and it’s got me out of the house,” he said. “I’m just not playing golf every day now, but I truly enjoy it. You can’t take the football out of the football player.”

Seeing is Believing...
Tyrel Wilson hasn’t gotten a lot of attention in his career for his role on Tech’s defensive line, but he has earned the respect of his teammates and coaches for his work ethic and unselfish attitude.

By Jimmy Robertson

He had spent four years as a football player and never done a radio interview. And of course, he received his first invitation to be on Tech Talk Live, the athletics department’s live Monday night radio show at Bull & Bones Brewhaus and Grill, only moments before he was scheduled to be there and on the air.

Tyrel Wilson managed to arrive on time. But he was nervous.

“There’s one type of person who likes to be prepared and know what’s going on,” he said. “But I had a blast doing it. I was cracking jokes, and even asked for Coach Beamer’s autograph as he was going on the radio. “I don’t mind it, but I don’t seek attention. That’s not my type of thing.”

That may explain why Tech fans know so little about this young man. Sure, they recognize his name, but for someone who has played in nearly 50 games (49 as of the time of this writing) and started a handful in his career, he generates little in the way of conversation among Hokie Nation.

That’s not to diminish his role. Yes, he doesn’t record the sacks of a James Gayle or the interceptions of a Kendall Fuller or the short yardage of a Jack Tyler. But he plays his defensive end position with the consistency and dependability that coaches love. He is one of those blue-collar, behind-the-scenes types of players, the type who help their teams win games with their play on the field and their contributions off the field.

Wilson grew up with in high school. He [Foster] was always one of those types of players, the type who help their teams win games with their play on the field and their contributions off the field.

He liked Foster’s scheme and expected to play for him at the backer position.

As his collegiate days wind down, Wilson spends his free time prepping for the final few games of the season and crafting his newfound hobby — longboarding. Coming out of Hampton High School in the Tidewater part of the state, he never expected to be playing for Wiles. He never expected to be a defensive end. He played linebacker for the Crabbers and helped them win a state championship in 2005, along with a name actually quite familiar to Tech fans — Tyrod Taylor.

In September of his senior year, he committed to Tech over Tennessee, choosing the Hokies primarily because of Bud Foster, Tech’s defensive coordinator. He liked Foster’s scheme and expected to play for him at the linebacker position.

“You have not only every sport I’ve played, I’ve started,” Wilson said. “That’s what I gave up with in high school. I [Foster] was always talking about your motor and 11 hats to the ball. I liked that mentality. It also beat that eight-hour trip to Knoxville. You could see Blacksburg loved Virginia Tech and loved football. It all just fit in together.”

Perhaps Wilson was destined to play defensive end, though. After all, his father, James, played the position, carving out a nice career at Tennessee and later going to the NFL.

James Wilson, who won three state championships at the same Hampton High during his playing days in the mid-80s, actually signed with Tech in 1989, but a series of circumstances, mostly beyond his control, led to him being released from his letter of intent by head coach Frank Beamer. He wound up at Tennessee, where he recorded 31 tackles and 10.5 sacks in his career.

Tyrel was born during his dad’s playing days at Tennessee, and he vaguely remembers going to some games. He remembers sitting in the end zone with his grandfather underneath a poncho watching his dad play in the rain.

After a stint with the Detroit Lions, James Wilson moved his family back to his hometown of Hampton. He later played in NFL Europe, but has been a firefighter for the city of Suffolk for many years, while his wife, Shari, currently works as a real estate agent. His father, James Wilson, is a firefighter for the city of Suffolk for many years, while his wife, Shari, currently works as a real estate agent.

After a stint with the Detroit Lions, James Wilson moved his family back to his hometown of Hampton. He later played in NFL Europe, but has been a firefighter for the city of Suffolk for many years, while his wife, Shari, currently works as a real estate agent. Together, they have raised their three sons admirably.

Together, they have raised their three sons admirably. For starters, he took care of things in the classroom, graduating last May with a degree in sociology. As a senior, he took an internship with the Virginia Tech Police Department, and he may pursue a career in law enforcement down the road.

On the field, he has given Tech solid reps as a reserve, playing in every game his first three seasons at Tech after taking a redshirt year during the 2009 season. This season, he has played in every game except for one, missing the Western Carolina game with a knee injury.

But my parents weren’t overly strict. I had my share of chores, but at the same time, they would let me experience things. As long as I did my part, I was fine.”

That’s what he has done here at Tech — his part. For starters, he took care of things in the classroom, graduating last May with a degree in sociology. As a senior, he took an internship with the Virginia Tech Police Department, and he may pursue a career in law enforcement down the road.

On the field, he has given Tech solid reps as a reserve, playing in every game his first three seasons at Tech after taking a redshirt year during the 2009 season. This season, he has played in every game except for one, missing the Western Carolina game with a knee injury. He also participates on special teams.

“He’s a great team member and a good player,” Wilson said. “He’s not a great kid, a great person and a big part of the team. I know he wants to play more, but we’ve fortunate to have a lot of good defensive ends this year and that limits reps for everybody. But I trust him. He’s been a great asset to the team.”

“Every sport I’ve played, I’ve started,” Wilson said. “I’ve never been the second guy. But at this point, I know my role on the team, and I try to help out as much as I can. It’s a team, not an T. It’s not an individual sport. I’ve learn to adapt and done what I needed to do.”

Wilson may not be grabbing the headlines every Saturday for the Hokies. He may not be directly under the glare of the spotlight. But when he gets on the field, he gets the job done.

For that, Hokie Nation should take notice.
GETTING TO KNOW TYREL WILSON

Q: It’s a Friday night in the offseason, what are you doing?
Wilson: “It depends on whom I’m hanging out with. Here lately, I’ve been hanging out with David Wang. We picked up longboarding, so I’d probably be longboarding or sitting around talking or laughing. We might stroll through downtown Blacksburg and see what’s going on. But it’s usually sitting around doing nothing.”

Q: Who is your favorite NFL player?
Wilson: “I probably shouldn’t say this because he’s been in some trouble, but Aldon Smith [San Francisco outside linebacker] is one of my favorite players. Also, Dwight Freeney [San Diego defensive end]. I like how they play. Everyone asks me if I have a favorite team, but I don’t really. I just like certain players from different teams. That’s more my thing. I don’t necessarily like the impact player, either. I like the player who goes out and plays hard.”

Q: What’s your favorite TV show?
Wilson: “I can give you a favorite network. I don’t know if I can give you a favorite TV show. It’s the Discovery Channel. I don’t watch anything but the Discovery Channel and the History Channel. I tell myself that if I’m watching TV, at least I’m learning.”

Q: Why do you wear the No. 66?
Wilson: “I wore No. 33 in high school. I wanted No. 45, but one of the older guys had it, so I couldn’t get it. I was going to wear 23 and then change to 45. I was only playing defensive end, and then the [high school] coach said, ‘We need you to play left tackle,’ and I said, ‘I don’t want to play left tackle.’ But then they started making those plays where I was cracking back on the lineman, and I started having fun with it. I was like, ‘Cool. I can do this all day.’ But I had to change my number. There was another number – I don’t remember what it was – and 66, and I took 66. I kept it, and when I got up here [to Tech], it was available.”

Q: If you could trade places with someone for a day, who would it be?
Wilson: “To be honest, I wouldn’t want to be anyone else. I like my life. I’d want improvements, but there is no one else I’d honestly want to be. Everyone has issues. I don’t know what their issues in life might be, and they might have it worse than me. My mom always says somebody has it worse. I’d like to add a couple of million to my bank account, but I’d rather just be me.”

Q: In 10 years, what will you be doing?
Wilson: “Ten years from now, I’ll probably be married and happy. Maybe I’ll have a kid. Career-wise, hopefully I’m doing a job that I can help other people. I don’t know what it will be, but hopefully I’m helping other people. I’m leaning toward being a U.S. Marshal. Or maybe sell some real estate. My mom is going to have her brokerage license. My dad is a firefighter, so if all else fails, I’ll go be a firefighter for a little bit to have a job. I don’t know anything else but football, so I can’t see what I would do every day.”
On Nov. 15, the Virginia Tech athletics department inducted six new members into the Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame at a banquet on the Tech campus. The new inductees bring the total number enshrined to 169. The Virginia Tech Sports Hall of Fame was established in 1982. Here’s a closer look at each new inductee:

**JOE SAUNDERS**

Joe Saunders has many memories of his playing days with the Hokies, but he said those days stand out because of his good times at Tech. He became the only Tech pitcher that wouldn't have been possible if I hadn't made as a player and I met my wife there. I have a good season at West Springfield High School. He

Saunders won nine games in each of his three seasons at Tech. He became the Hokies' highest draft pick

Saunders' 27 career pitching victories rank went 9-2 in 2002. He led the Big East in strikeouts with 102 in 97.2 innings, while walking just 22 batters. His 1.81 ERA in league games was the best of any Big East starter and his overall ERA of 2.86 was a personal best. He was a first-team All-Big East pick.

“I think my best memories are just traveling

His career at Tech almost didn't occur. The

Saunders, who

Students completed spring drills and

He spent the previous six seasons as the pitching coach at Oklahoma State, leading the Cowgirls to the Women's College World Series in 2011.

“Carolina had such a good tennis team at the

Saunders couldn’t exactly be classified as “fond.”

It's a great opportunity

There have been so many great players in

As a freshman, Milley posted a 12-13 mark, playing against the opposing team’s best players. That group included a couple of players whom Milley grew up admiring – North Carolina’s Bobby Langer and Maryland’s John Lucas, who were outstanding basketball player, too. Both of those players were All-Americans.

Jimmy Milley

Milley grew up in Danville, Va., and

Milley's only spot Brock. He won the first set 6-2 and the second set 6-4. But Brock won the next 10 games to win the match.

“Bobby Crowell, who graduated in 2002 with a degree in mass communications, Milley spent some time on the professional circuit, earning a spot named Milley as one of the top ten ranking points in singles and doubles, while playing in satellite tournaments on the East Coast and in Europe.

“I just started playing with my dad,” Milley said.

He immediately jumped from Tech with a degree in communications and

“Carolina had such a good tennis team at the

“I think my best memories are just traveling

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“Bobby Crowell, who graduated in 2002 with a degree in mass communications, Milley spent some time on the professional circuit, earning a spot named Milley as one of the top ten ranking points in singles and doubles, while playing in satellite tournaments on the East Coast and in Europe.

IHS extra | hall of fame inductees

**BOBBY BEECHER**

As a kid, Bobby Becher never harbored win and complete games against his Michigan basketball. He never gave up the game a second thought until his junior year, when he played basketball at Kentucky for legendary coach Adolph Rupp, talked him into it two years after the family had moved from New Jersey to North Carolina.

That was a surprise, when you have guys like

As a kid, Bobby Becher never harbored win and complete games against his Michigan basketball. He never gave up the game a second thought until his junior year, when he played basketball at Kentucky for legendary coach Adolph Rupp, talked him into it two years after the family had moved from New Jersey to North Carolina.

“It [basketball] didn't interest me,” Becher said. “We moved down from New Jersey when I was in the sixth or seventh grade and said, ‘I want to try basketball.’ I wasn't tall at all and it was quite a transition. I didn't think I was tall until the eighth or ninth grade when I really started growing. I asked him to try it, and I did and it turned out good.”

Thank goodness for fathers with a keen eye for seeing potential in their children.
When Coach [Tech coach Jay Hardwick] was showing me around, I was kind of whining, ‘Why didn’t we have this when we were around?’ He said, ‘Well, Junior, you guys built this place. It wasn’t for you all, we wouldn’t have this.’ That made me feel good, and it’s nice to see the Virginia Tech golf program on the up and up.” Wagner, who played at Tech from 1998-2002, was a big part in the huge rise of Tech golf. As a freshman, he recorded the lowest stroke average (73.79) on the team and ended up being named the Atlantic 10 Conference Rookie of the Year. As a sophomore, he led the nation in eagles made in the final NCAA regular-season statistics with eight. In 2001, when Tech moved to the Big East, he was one of the team leaders as the Hokies captured the conference title and finished eighth in the NCAA Championships. Wagner garnered All-Big East honors his last two seasons, winning the conference tournament individual title as a senior in 2002, while the Hokies repeated as team champs. Tech made another visit to the NCAA Championships, finishing 20th, and Wagner was named All-South Region and third-team All-America.

“There were so many,” Wagner said of his favorite memories at Tech. “We had such a good team my junior and senior year. We finished eighth my junior year at Duke [at the NCAA Championships]. My freshman year, we were one of the worst teams in the country, and in two short years, to go from one of the worst in the country to finishing eighth was huge.

“And, also, my senior year, I was selected third-team All-American. That was a huge boost of confidence. I never thought that would happen, and to get that honor was great.”

The 2002 Tech team graduated finished his career with a scoring average of 73.08, which was the best in school history at the time and still ranks 10th on the all-time list. During his time at Tech, Wagner became the first amateur ever to win all three major titles of the Metropolitan Golf Association (NY) in one calendar year (2002).

Wagner currently plays on the PGA Tour along with another Hokie and former teammate, Brendon de Jonge, who was a year behind Wagner at Tech. Both of them are married, live in Charlotte, N.C., and remain good friends. Their kids are close together in ages.

Wagner has won three events on the PGA Tour – the 2008 Shell Houston Open, the 2011 Mayakoba Golf Classic and the 2012 Sony Open in Hawaii.

No matter where he goes these days, he finds Tech fans cheering him passionately.

“I find it amazing that, every town I go to, there is always someone following me with a Virginia Tech shirt or hat,” he said. “The alumni are so loyal and proud. Virginia Tech fans come out for everything and proudly display their colors. I think that’s unique to our school that the case.”

“I was even in Malaysia last year and saw some Virginia Tech people! It’s pretty unique, and it’s always nice to see the maroon and orange.”

JOHN ENGELBERGER

John Engelberger made the most of his time in Blacksburg, going from walk-on, to four-year starter, to second-round NFL Draft pick, while earning All-America honors and his college degree along the way.

Engelberger, who came to Tech from Springfield, Va., joined the Tech football team in 1993 as a tight end. The coaching staff exhorted him that year, and during the spring, they moved him to defense and awarded him a scholarship. He played in every game during the 1996 season, including seven as a starter. His six sacks tied him for fifth in the Big East Conference and his 64 tackles the Hokies’ defensive linemen. Engelberger had a career-best 70 tackles in 1997 and contributed 15 tackles behind the line, including six more sacks. He followed that up with 7.5 sacks and 16.5 total tackles for loss in 1998, earning second-team All-Big East honors for the second straight season.

As a senior, Engelberger teamed with Corey Moore to give the Hokies one of the best pairs of defensive ends in the country and helped spark Tech to an unbeaten regular season and a berth in the national championship game. He contributed 53 tackles, seven sacks, six additional tackles for loss and 16 quarterback hurries on the way to second-team All-America honors and the college degree along the way.

Engelberger was selected in the second round of the NFL Draft by the San Francisco 49ers. He played in all 16 games with 13 starts as a rookie and went on a nine-year pro career that included five seasons with San Francisco and four with the Denver Broncos. He started 86 of the 139 games he played in the NFL.

Engelberger, who graduated with a degree in interdisciplinary studies, currently lives in Leesburg, Va. He followed that up with 7.5 sacks and 16.5 total tackles for loss in 1998, earning second-team All-Big East honors for the second straight season.
Sarah Rapp finished a career-best 13th at the ACC Championships on a course where she won a state championship during her senior season of high school.

This story is not really a redemption story because, last year, Sarah Rapp redeemed herself with All-Region honors at the 2012 NCAA Southeast Regional Championships held in Charlotte, N.C., two weeks after ending one of the worst cross country races in which she had ever competed.

And it’s not really a homecoming story for the junior, who hails from Raleigh, N.C., because Kernersville, N.C. – the location of the 2013 ACC Cross Country Championships – is about 100 miles west of the Tar Heel state capital city.

However, this story had the feel of both.

The 2013 ACC Cross Country Championships were being held at the same place, Beson Park, where Rapp had been three years earlier, a place where she won her third straight high school state cross country individual title. She said she even had flashbacks to that race while she and her Tech teammates were practicing there earlier this season.

She didn’t win the race this time around, finishing 13th against the ACC’s best female runners. Yet it’s a race she will cherish nonetheless.

“It was awesome getting to run at Kernersville, where I had success in the past,” Rapp said. “So I had a lot of positive vibes and thoughts going in. I stayed positive throughout the race and had it planned out [how to run it] for the past week.

“My mom came out and that added to my excitement and motivation, as well as all my teammates who were cheering me on from the side, and that pushed me to my finish. I couldn’t have done it without them.”

After the first 2,000 meters, Rapp was out in the lead, but just one second separated her from Syracuse’s Margo Malone, who was in 14th place. In the wet and rainy conditions, Rapp fell back a bit, but continued to push on.

She’s admitted to needing better mental toughness when it came to her races, stating that sometimes doubt wiggle their way into her mind when she’s competing. She stopped the clock in a personal-best time (6K) of 20 minutes, 35.60 seconds, to finish 13th and earn All-ACC honors for the first time in her Hokie career.

“The race was empowering, and I learned a lot from it,” she said. “I knew I had to get out and be with the top pack in order to have a good race, and I accomplished that. I led the race for a little while, but after about halfway, I fell back. But something inside me got me going again.

“It’s funny because, last year, I thought to myself, I have to do really well this year since it will be harder to do so next year because of all the new schools coming into the ACC. I proved to myself that I have grown an exponential amount as a runner – mentally and physically – and that I can compete with the best in the conference.”

The 2012 ACC race for Rapp was a nightmare, as she placed 53rd, 10 places worse than her 43rd-place finish as a freshman. Many factors were weighing heavily on her mind going into that race. The opportunity to win was one of them. The race being held in Blacksburg was another, as she knew there would be a strong home crowd there to support her and all her teammates.

Also, maybe there was the pressure of being the most experienced of the six Tech runners in the field, a group that consisted of four freshmen. Several proven Hokie runners were taking redshirt years, including All-Region honorees Paige Kvartunas (2010) and Madalyn Nickoles (2011) and 2013 All-ACC performer Courtney Dobbins.

“One of the things I struggle with as a runner is mental toughness, and I completely psyched myself out for the [2012] ACCs,” Rapp said, “I knew I was running on my home course, the home crowd, my mom came – I put way too much pressure on myself.

“I told myself I wanted to win and this was the year to win it because I knew, next year, there were going to be more teams in it. I remember I got out fast, and there was just something in my mind that just turned it [the race] off for me.

“It was hard, and even now, it’s hard to remember exactly what happened, but I just know that it wasn’t a good race, and I was just really upset after it was over. I had two weeks before ACCs and regionals to get myself together. Training wasn’t too hard, so I just focused. I just really worked on visualizing, and I got my act together and made it [All-Region]. So it was a good way to end the season.”

A view into her past would find that finishing and accepting a 25th-place finish as a good result at the 2012 NCAA Regionals showed great progress for Rapp.

Growing up, her dad started taking her on runs as far back as she can remember – and rarely lost a race while running for Durant Middle School.

“It wasn’t much different running for Cardinal Gibbons High School, as she totaled 13 state titles to her list of accomplishments. That list included six indoor track titles and four outdoor titles, mostly in the 1,600- and 3,200-meter races.
cross country spotlight | sarah rapp

races, with her three state cross country titles. “The only time I really lost a race in high school was when we would have big invitational races, with her three state cross country titles. “The only time I really lost a race in high school was when we would have big invitational races, with her three state cross country titles. “The only time I really lost a race in high school was when we would have big invitational races, with her three state cross country titles. “The only time I really lost a race in high school was when we would have big invitational races, with her three state cross country titles. “The only time I really lost a race in high school was when we would have big invitational races, with her three state cross country titles. “The only time I really lost a race in high school was when we would have big invitational

“Like for example, Foot Locker [the Foot Locker Cross Country Championships], I never won that. The bigger national races, I never won one of those, but I think a lot of that goes to show that my conference [2-A] had no competition for me.

“I was always in the newspaper, but it was because the conference was kind of easy, looking back. And I’m not trying to sell the conference short because it was a competitive conference, more so than 2-A or 1-A but not as tough as 4-A.”

Rapp said that she was never arrogant with all of her success, but never really truly understood exactly the progression of going from high school to, say, the Olympics. “I completely skipped this step [the NCAA level],” she said. “Everyone’s like, ‘Oh, you’re going to the Olympics,’ and I’m not really from a sports family, so I didn’t really understand the idea. You have to be an ACC champion, and you have to make it to the NCAAs. You can’t just go to nationals. You actually have to make it there, and you’re running with the best of the best.

“And then there’s a whole other level above that, and then there’s the Olympics. So I was kind of ignorant when I was in high school. I was not cocky. I would never, ever consider myself cocky. But I was always thinking, ‘Oh, yeah, the Olympics. That would be awesome.’ But I definitely don’t go around saying that now, obviously, because I realize that there’s another two steps before that.”

When she stepped onto the Blacksburg campus, she had one goal in mind. “I knew coming in that I wanted to get my butt beat. I wanted to. I wanted to get beat! Honestly, I got tired of winning. It was great, but I knew that there were people out there who were faster, people who could push me and make me better. That’s probably one of the biggest reasons for my improvements in my times coming down. Just knowing that I’m in a really good conference for running – to know that I’m running with the best of the best, especially if you make the NCAAs. That’s the best field for your age right now. You can’t find anyone faster than those girls.”

– Sarah Rapp on the process of becoming a good college runner

But Rapp pointed to someone with a similar background – Erik Spjut, her boyfriend of almost two years – as a person who has helped her with that. Spjut is a redshirt senior on the Hokies’ wrestling team. He was a three-time 4A Texas state champion and compiled a 65-0 record as a senior. Since coming to Tech, the two-time NCAA qualifier has lived through a series of highs and lows.

“He really adds a lot to me and is definitely a positive influence on my life,” Rapp said. “He’s an athlete as well. He’s a wrestler, and it’s such an intense and tough sport, and I can be like, ‘Oh, I had such a hard running workout.’ Then he’ll tell me what he did, and I’ll be like, ‘Oh, I’m just going to be quiet now.’

“‘He just reminds me that I have to stay tough, and I can’t let things get to me. He’s just a strong person, and he rubs off on me. I don’t think I would be as tough as I am if it wasn’t for him.”

A mentally stronger Rapp has one more cross country chance and two more years of both indoor and outdoor track to claim her first ACC individual title. She has been steadily improving on the track – she’s a multiple point scorer at the ACC Championships – and it’s conceivable that she can return the podium. She was there many times during her high school days – and it’s a place where she’d like to return.
Sam Gostling played soccer as a kid, but picked up volleyball in middle school, received a scholarship from Virginia Tech, and has developed into one of the Hokies’ best players.

She may not be playing in front of 60,000 fans or followed by thousands more on social media, and the destination of legions of disheartened Hokie fans in late December doesn’t rest on her shoulders. But senior volleyball player Sam Gostling certainly feels the pressure.

For her, though, it’s not really the pressure of having to win or perform at the highest of levels. For her, it’s the pressure of being a role model, having always to remember that younger fans look up to Virginia Tech student-athletes from all sports.

“I think the worst thing about being a student-athlete is maybe the pressure because you know you have younger kids looking up to you, and that’s difficult,” she said. “Because you always have to make sure you’re being such a good role model, and sometimes you might forget that.

“And that’s just hard to keep in your head at all times because people are always watching you. And some people want to see you fail, too. So I think it’s just the pressure you have from other people.”

Gostling knows first hand how much of an impact she can make on younger fans by playing volleyball. Thanks to the digital age, she can make a connection with all her biggest fans, including one who lives more than 500 miles away.

Charlize Delair, a 6-year-old girl who lives in Albany, N.Y., might be Gostling’s biggest fan. She makes her parents, Kris and Kirk, fire up the computer on Tech volleyball game nights and watch, when possible, as Gostling and the Hokies take on their various opponents.

“My little cousin, Charlize, she looks up to me so much, and she’s such an athletic little thing,” Gostling said. “She told me that she wants to try volleyball, and I was like ‘OK, go for it!’ I help her as much as I can, but I don’t see her that much. So when I do, I try to be with her as much as possible. I think it just makes me proud that I can be like an older sister to her.

“The past few games, they’ll sit and watch my games on the computer, which I know cannot be exciting because of how difficult it is to get it through the Internet. But she’ll say, ‘Yeah Sammie! Go Sammie!’ to the computer.

“And after one of the games, we didn’t have a game the next day, but my aunt texted me and said, ‘Charlize woke up and asked, ‘Is Sammie playing today? Does she have a game today?’ They are coming for my senior night, so I’m really excited for her to see a game in person.”

Being a role model to a younger generation is a way for Gostling to “pay it forward.” After all, numerous individuals have helped her get to where she is today.

For the 6-foot-1 native of Charlotte, N.C., volleyball was not her first choice when it came to athletics endeavors. She played soccer for nine years, absolutely loved it and thought that would be her pathway to college. And, of course, being from the state of North Carolina, she grew up idolizing Mia Hamm, the former North Carolina great and U.S. Olympian.

However, around the seventh grade, Gostling believed her soccer growth had reached a plateau and was looking to add something else.
“I just wanted to play another sport,” she said. “I was just such a tomboy growing up, so I think it was just that and my friends. They were trying out, and they wanted me to as well. And that was definitely one of the reasons why I did, but I just think it was to play another sport – to see what it was like and to see if I enjoyed it.”

In stepped Luke Hill, her stepfather who had decided to help her. He set up a string and worked on serving mostly, as they had decided to help her. He set up a string in the backyard and went out and practiced with Gostling. They worked on serving mostly, as they thought that was the most important thing to concentrate on at the time.

“So I tried out in seventh grade,” she said. “And I didn’t make it.”

Sounds like the plight of an even more well known Tar Heel state athlete – Michael Jordan, who did not make the varsity basketball team as a sophomore (he did play on the junior varsity team). Gostling recalled that only eighth graders who did not make the varsity basketball team as part of her freshman year and had no seniors. Gostling made the varsity team that season, and she met a very influential person in her life, a woman named Zoe Bell.

Bell was just hired at the school as the new volleyball coach and was a proven winner at her previous high school, Providence, guiding that team to 12 conference titles and four state crowns. It took her just two years to take Ardrey Kell from a new program in 2006 to the A-South state title game in 2006.

Led by Gostling, Ardrey Kell rolled to a 24-6 record while finishing second in its conference and running-up in the state tournament. In the process, the team knocked off three conference champions before being derailed by J.H. Rose High School, who finished the season with a 25-0 record, in the title game. “That season was awesome,” Gostling said. “I knew we had such a good team, especially with Zoe Bell being our coach. Her coming from Providence and having four championships… we were like ‘This is awesome!’”

“We went into every match just believing that we can win this. We might be new and young, but we have a chance and we have the talent. So I think we were just on an adrenaline rush the whole season. Just playing each match and winning was awesome.”

Gostling holds Bell and Rick Kiser, one of her other coaches, in high regard and credit them with getting her to Tech. She also appreciates the relationship she still has with them, whether she gets a test of encouragement before a game or having one of them being a summer workout partner.

“My coaches, Zoe Bell and Rick Kiser, have always been there for me,” she said. “Heading from my sophomore year into my junior year at Tech, I went home for the summer, and we had these workouts. I knew I had to do them, but it’s just so hard to do workouts on my own.

“So my high school coach, Zoe Bell, was like, ‘I’ll work out with you, and I’ll make sure you do it.’ So each day, I had a set time to go to the high school where she worked, and we would do our lifts and workouts. She would have about an hour and half for lunch, but she took time just to help me get better, and I would go and practice with her high school team and club team. She has just always been there for me.”

“And my other coach, Rick Kiser, has tested me before every game since my freshman year, just to see how practice had been that week. Sometimes, I don’t respond because I just want to focus, but I’ll either call him or text him afterward. It’s just relaxing, and he always knows the right things to say. He always wants the best for me and always knows what’s best for me, and he always agrees with whatever I say just to make me feel better. I know he does.”

Once in Blacksburg, Gostling immediately gravitated and received the guidance from former Hokies Cara Baarendse, a two-time honorable mention All-American, and Jen Wilke.

“I learned a lot from them,” Gostling said. “Cara’s a very quiet person, and I’m kind of like her. She’s not a vocal leader. She’s more of a lead-by-example player, and I feel like that’s how I am, too. She probably doesn’t know this, but I definitely looked up to her like that because I felt like we kind of had that connection.

“And Jen, she was just so different, very vocal and outgoing. We had our talks and we had our times together and she gave me tips, and she was just really open about everything. We became really close, and I enjoyed that a lot.”

Gostling has experienced many things over the past four seasons at Tech, highlighted by the Hokies qualifying for their first NCAA Championship when she was a freshman and her and a couple of other teammates heading to Colorado Springs, Colo., to try out for the USA Volleyball national squad.

“That was nerve-whacking and awesome at the same time,” Gostling said of her Colorado experience. “Just being on that campus – the Olympic campus – it was crazy. I saw all these other volleyball players coming and knowing that UCLA had just won the national championship and their players were there and these girls are amazing… and I’m just a sophomore. It was incredible, and I learned a lot from it.”

Gostling is also learning how fast four years travels. The sociology major is considering going back to school for a master’s degree at some point, but she also is thinking about being either a counselor or a therapist. First, though, she knows that there is still work to be done during the 2013 season and some players to help along the way.

“Lindsey Owens, we definitely have a connection, like I did with those older players,” Gostling said. “She’s a very talented freshman, better than I ever was as a freshman. I just want her to get better. I’ll still give her any kind of tips, and they might not be the nicest… I mean, I can be critical of her – but she’s tough. She can handle it, and that’s what I like about her.”

But as seniors, we need to make sure the team understands how much work we need to put in to get back to NCAA. So we try to make sure that these underclassmen understand how incredible that experience is. We make it as freshmen, but haven’t been back, so you never know how many chances you’ll get. Don’t say we’re only our school, but we make them know. We try to get them to understand how important it is to us, and we want to make sure that it’s important to them also. We put it in their heads every game.”

Heading into the month of November, the Hokies’ volleyball team was three wins better than they were at the same point during the 2010 season when they reached the national tournament, and their RPI was in the mid-40s. But work still needs to be done if they want to advance to just their second NCAA Championship in school history.

Gostling will probably always remember her final game as a Hokie. It will either be in the NCAA Championship, which would bookend a tremendous college career – or in front of one of her biggest fans. Tech concludes the regular season at Cassell Coliseum on Nov. 30 against Pittsburgh on a mission.

Either way, a 6-year-old fan in New York can’t wait.
Midfielder Katie Yensen’s play this season is one of many reasons why the Hokies are having the program’s best season in school history.

The month of November will ultimately determine how successful the 2013 women’s soccer season is gauged, with results in the ACC and NCAA Championships being key components. Certainly, though, by anyone’s measure the regular season was the best ever, bar none.

The Hokies posted a 14-3-2 record, which included a 9-3-1 mark in the Atlantic Coast Conference. Their only losses were to then-No. 1 North Carolina (2-1), No. 3 Florida State (2-1) and No. 1 Virginia (2-0) – and the Hokies themselves reached a program-best No. 4 national ranking.

Tech was not shut out of a regular-season game until that Cavaliers’ loss at the end of the regular season. It marked the first time Tech had been shut out since Oct. 21, 2012 – a school-record span of 20 straight games.

Taking into consideration that, at the start of the year, head coach Chugger Adair was without two of his best offensive weapons, that last note seems almost implausible. Kelly Conheeney missed the entire season with an injury, and Shannon Mayrose missed some time early with an injury. Conheeney (26 career goals) and Mayrose (16) were Nos. 1 and 2, respectively, in active career goals scored and third and 12th all-time, respectively, in career goals at Tech.

Senior Jazmine Reeves and sophomore Ashley Meier, both pretty good goal scorers in their own right, were solid all year, helping fill the void. But it would be the emergence of freshman Murielle Tiernan and the timely goal scoring of junior Katie Yensen that proved to be the winning ingredients.

“I know for me personally, even in my club days, I have never been a huge goal scorer,” Yensen said. “I’ve never been a flashy player. I would just consider myself very consistent. I’m very good on the ball, very technical, but that doesn’t always get you noticed [during the recruiting process]. So it was hard, and I think that’s why a lot of schools didn’t see that [her goal-scoring potential], but some schools did.

“And, luckily, Chugger saw that. He saw the potential that I was a good player. He was looking for those aspects that I had. He was looking for a good possession player, which is what he saw in me. Coaches at this level, they have so much soccer knowledge. They see so much soccer knowledge. They are so soccer savvy, and they can see that, even though you aren’t scoring five goals every game, you are still a great player.”

She might not score five goals per game, but Yensen’s offensive contributions in 2013 – and in her time in Blacksburg – have solidified her status as a big-time performer.

The numbers are quite impressive. Entering the ACC Championships on Nov. 3, she had scored 10 goals in her career – of which seven were game winners. No other player with seven or more career goals in the school’s history can
claim a better percentage. She also has assisted on two game winners.

More impressively, the Hokies are a staggering 2-0 when Yensen tallies a point during a contest. That included eight victories during the 2013 regular season, a span in which she scored four game-winning goals.

Also, here are Tech’s records for some current players when they tally a point, again, heading into the ACC Championships – Colorado (39-4), Riverside (26-4), Marquee (30-2) and Meier (30-3). Even senior Ashley Manning, who has 11 goals and five assists in her career, has one blemish on her record at 12-1.

So, scoring goals in soccer leads to wins, but Yensen admittedly isn’t a goal scorer. Yet she possesses the knack to come through in the clutch.

Of all the game-winning goals Yensen has scored – the list includes one in a much-needed win at No. 7 Wake Forest last season, a penalty kick goal in a 1-0 win at Boston College and her first two-goal game in a victory at Pittsburgh – she was sitting at 4-11 in ACC play. The Clemson game was the last action they would see before a two-day layoff that would end with a visit from top-10 Notre Dame (then-No. 9).

A tie – or worse, a loss – was not what the team wanted to have heading into that time off.

“Throughout that whole couple of days leading up to the Clemson game, Chugger really emphasized us getting the win,” Yensen said. “Chugger was on our backs. He was really stressing to us that we needed a win. They’d gotten some losses, some ties. They had been doing really well.

“So Chugger wanted to make sure we came out fighting and definitely stressed that we needed a win. When we did go into overtime, everybody on the field just had the attitude that we are going to get three points here. We’re not going to come away with one, and we’re definitely not going to lose.

Yensen has come a long way since starting out playing soccer at the age of 4. It’s understandable, I can’t even put together words to describe the feeling. It was incredible. Just the energy in the stadium, the energy of my teammates, all rushing the field at the end – that made me incredibly happy. I just can’t even... there are no words to describe it.”

The importance of that goal now may be lost, but the Hokies had just come off a loss at Duke where they were sitting at 4-11 in ACC play. The Clemson game was the last action they would see before a two-day layoff that would end with a visit from top-10 Notre Dame (then-No. 9).

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Yensen has come a long way since starting out playing soccer at the age of 4. It’s understandable since she said she is always doing something and never likes to take breaks, not even from soccer. Over the past two summers, she’s played in the W-League for both the DC United and the Washington Spirit, teams that are about a 30-minute commute from her home in Falls Church, Va.

When she was in high school, she competed in a handful of triathlons and wants to continue that when she’s done with her soccer career. Despite many of the images she has pinned in the ‘bucket list!’ section of her Pinterest account, she’s “claiming a better percentage. She also has assisted on two game winners.

“Honestly, I came in as a freshman and my goal was to travel with the team. That’s just really what I wanted to do,” she said. “If you had told me before I came here that I was going to start my first 15 games, I would have said, ‘You’re crazy.’ So I was pretty shocked that that happened.

“I was lucky enough to come in and earn a spot for a little bit. I came in, I was very fit and I was very technical. I just wasn’t really that strong. I have always been kind of a smaller player, and throughout the years at Tech, I’ve worked a lot on that. I think it’s gotten a lot better.

But I think that’s one thing that Chugger was looking for a little bit more from me, that tenacity, and the strength on the ball, and I think that’s part of it. Then when we got into the ACC schedule, it got a little harder for me. The ACC is very fast and very physical. So I definitely got a lot more playing time than I ever expected, and that was a very pleasant surprise.

Yensen still has one more Tech soccer season remaining, but has already contemplated her next step. As she said, “I think, just as an athlete, it’s just so hard to give up the sport just cold turkey after the season. I definitely see myself playing for as long as I can somewhere. I think there might be a chance for me to play overseas, and I want to pursue that if I can.”

But once that’s over, she is thinking about medical school and her ideal job would be as a doctor. She thinks maybe even some pediatric doctor, but, “I haven’t really explored a lot of the other options yet. I feel like there are so many different fields you can go into in health care, and the option is really open.”

Exploring her options, feeding her adventurous side and continuing her non-stop lifestyle, Yensen, who’s a biology major with a minor in Spanish, will be partaking in a 10-day trip to Costa Rica in January. Through the International Service Learning Organization, which was recommended by Anne Heph, her Spanish teacher, Yensen will use those attributes that she has been learning in the classroom to assimilate into the culture and work in clinics.

“I’m actually going to go to Costa Rica to work in clinics down there because, for one, it’s a good lifestyle, Yensen, who’s a biology major with a minor in Spanish, will be partaking in a 10-day trip to Costa Rica in January. Through the International Service Learning Organization, which was recommended by Anne Heph, her Spanish teacher, Yensen will use those attributes that she has been learning in the classroom to assimilate into the culture and work in clinics.

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“And two, I’m also going to provide health care to people, which is something that I ultimately want to do.

“I want to travel, maybe with the military or with Doctors Without Borders, and provide health care to people in other countries. So this is just kind of a really cool opportunity to do that. This trip is more with a focus on medicine, and I’ve heard so many amazing things about that program.

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“I won’t get the opportunity to study abroad, and my sister [Alex], she studied abroad in Italy for a semester, I was kind of jealous of that. So my parents (Dave and Tracey) thought this would be a cool opportunity for me to combine pretty much everything that I love – well, except for soccer.”

Right now, though, she and the rest of the Tech teammates are concentrating on some shorter travel plans. After securing their sixth straight NCAA tournament berth, the Hokies are hoping to get into some uncharted waters, as they have never advanced past the Sweet 16 in two appearances.

With Yensen along for the journey and with her knack for helping her team succeed, particularly late in matches, she could get them there.
HOKIES HOPE TO KEEP GRIP ON ACC TITLE

The Tech wrestling team won its first ACC championship last season and finished a program-best 10th at the NCAAAs, and the return of guys like Devin Carter, Chris Moon and Zach Neibert mean expectations are high again this season.

but the reason for optimism centers on the unique combination of returning starters, a terrific class of freshmen (ranked fifth nationally by Amateur Wrestling News) and the return of several key performers who took a redshirt year last season - a group that Dresser said is "flying under the radar." In that latter group is Devin Carter, a two-time ACC champion at 133 pounds and an All-American in 2012 after finishing fifth at the NCAA Championships. He took a redshirt year to get stronger and to work on his game, and the added bulk means that the redshirt junior from nearby Christiansburg, Va., will be moving up to 141 pounds this season.

"We felt he was between 133 and 141, so we focused on getting bigger and stronger, and we probably counted it a little bit less because now he’s a tweener between 134 and 147," Dresser said. "But Devin’s a tough kid, and he’s going to us it up. I’m excited to see how 141 goes for him."

"He’s obviously really special. He moved up a weight, and he’s ranked third in the nation [at 141 pounds]. Not many guys can pull that off. He’s wrestling the second-ranked guy [Edinboro’s Deon Cross] in the program but hasn’t been able to crack the starting lineup yet, and veterans who were up and down a year ago. Moon qualified for the NCAA Championships last season, while Spjut stays at 133. Neibert will move up to 141 pounds this season, while Spjut stays at 133.

The rest of the lineup will feature a smorgasbord of freshmen, wrestlers who have been in the program but haven’t been able to crack the starting lineup yet, and veterans who were up and down a year ago. Moon qualified for the NCAA Championships last season, while Spjut stays at 133. Neibert will move up to 141 pounds this season, while Spjut stays at 133.

"He’s a real tweener [between 149 and 157],” Dresser said. “But Devin’s a really tough kid, and he’s going to us it up. I’m excited to see how 141 goes for him."

Spjut cannot rest because Dresser has two more redshirt freshmen in the wings in Dennis Gustafson and Kevin Norstrom. Gustafson, from Woodbridge, Va., won a state title in New Jersey in 2010 in Virginia last season after his family moved to Northern Virginia. He was rated as a top-10 recruit by every wrestling
tournament. He’s going to have to make some adjustments. One thing when you’re that confident in yourself, you don’t understand the little things - keeping your weight down, getting the right amount of sleep, etc. He thinks he’s invincible. That’s what makes him good, but that also makes him vulnerable. He’s got his path up to 149 every week. Carter lacks depth behind him in this weight class, so keeping Dance healthy remains paramount.

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qualified for the NCAAs at 174 pounds.

"He had a great, great redshirt year," Dresser said. "He placed and won in a lot of open tournaments. He was an NCAA qualifier two years ago at 174, but I think 165 is more his wrestling weight. He's ranked in the top 20 in a couple of polls. I think he's under the radar, but he might not be under the radar for long."

"He's a guy we need to count on. If we want to achieve big things this year, Chris Moon is a guy who needs to help us get it done."

David Bergida, a sophomore from Belle Meade, N.J., backs up Moon. He went 10-12 in his first season with the Hokies.

• 174 pounds – Austin Gabel was solid at 174 pounds for the Hokies last season, going 22-15 and qualifying for the NCAA Championships. He went 2-1 at the Championships before suffering an injury in a match against Northern Illinois' Matt Mougin that ended his tournament. He gives Tech a veteran presence at this class.

"Austin Gabel really finished the season well. He's a great defensive wrestler," Dresser said. "He's a hard to score on. We worked on offense in the offseason. He needs to get some more offense. He lost a bunch of close matches to some really good wrestlers, and we've got to turn that around this year. He's got to figure out a way to win those."

Gabel will be pushed this season by freshman Zach Epperly, a teammate of Dance's at Christiansburg High School. Epperly won four state titles and arrived at Tech as the No. 26 overall recruit in the nation by InterMat (No. 4 at 170 pounds as a senior).

"Zach's had a great summer and great preseason," Dresser said. "I think giving him a redshirt year is the best thing. But we're in good shape there at 174."

Brooks Morrison, a sophomore from Dallastown, Pa., is also in the mix. He went 8-7 last season.

• 184 pounds – Nick Vetterlein returns at 184 pounds after a season in which he went 17-18 and qualified for the NCAA Championships. The redshirt senior finished fourth at the ACC Championships. Two years ago he was a heavyweight.

"Nick Vetterlein is super athletic, but he needs to get mentally tougher," Dresser said. "Dickson is real tough, but he is a little limited wrestling-wise. We've got a contrast in styles. It'll be interesting to see who gets the spot by the end of the year, but that's another weight class that I think will be up for grabs for a good portion of the year."

• 197 pounds – Dresser hopes this is the year for Penny, who finished second at the ACC Championships two years ago as a heavyweight.

"Penny tried to get big enough to remain a heavyweight, but his body structure limited his ability to put on weight, and the 197-pound class seems to be a better fit for him."

"We're excited to have Chris back after a redshirt year," Dresser said. "He experimented at heavyweight, but we couldn't get him heavy enough to make him effective there — not that he didn't try. It's not always easy to gain weight when you're frame is not well suited to do that."

"He's having to work a little bit, but he's doing a great job at maintaining his weight. He's super, ultra talented. It's his time. He's got a lot of experience. He needs to make a decision that he's one of the best guys in the nation. If Chris makes that decision, he could have a great year."

"Just like at 165 and 184, we need those fourth- and fifth-year guys to step up for us."

Bobby Lovello, a junior from Holland, Pa., serves as the backup to Penny, but four or five others add depth as well.

• Heavyweight – Ty Walz gets the first shot at taking over for Mareene, who was a sixth-year senior last season. Mareene went 91-48 in his career, but his most memorable moment came last season when he won his match to give the Hokies' the team title at the ACC Championships.

Walz, a redshirt freshman from Cleveland, Ohio, reminds Dresser of Mareene in certain aspects. He won a state title as a senior in Ohio — a good state for wrestling.

"He may be just a little bit bigger than David," Dresser said. "He had a good true freshman year last year, and he'll be a redshirt freshman. He's got a lot of ability. It's just a matter of him getting some confidence and winning some matches. He's going to be competitive for us right away. He's got a lot of tools. He just lacks the experience."

Dan Garwood and true freshman Dawson Peck add depth to this weight class. Garwood, a junior from Mullica Hill, N.J., went 19-12 last season. InterMat tabbed the Hokies as its top ACC team, with Maryland coming in at No. 6 in its preseason poll. North Carolina (No. 21), Pittsburgh (tied for No. 22) and Virginia (tied for No. 23) also made the publication's top 25.

But Tech needs to improve to get where it wants to go — to the top of the ACC by March 8, the date when the Hokies serve as hosts of the ACC Championships.

"Everyone needs to get 1 percent better every day," Dresser said. "It sounds easy, but it's easier said than done. We've got to continue to do that as coaches and as a team. One percent better means that you're learning consistency. There are a lot of days before the NCAA tournament. If we can get 100 percent improved between now and March, we're going to be right in the thick of it."

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