

inside

Vol. 6 No. 9, April 2014 • \$4

HOKIESPORTS

The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics

WHAT'S INSIDE:

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to begin construction
on new indoor practice
facility this spring

BUZZ WILLIAMS COMES TO BLACKSBURG

Tech AD Whit Babcock tabs the former
Marquette coach as the man to oversee
the men's basketball program

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Published by the Virginia Tech Athletics Department

Inside Hokie Sports (ISSN 8750-9148, periodical postage paid at Blacksburg Va. 24060 and additional mailing offices) covers Virginia Tech athletics and is published 11 times annually - monthly from August through June. The publisher is the Virginia Tech Athletics Department, 165 Spring Rd., Blacksburg, VA 24061.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICES: \$37.95 for one year (11 issues) and \$69.95 for two years. You can get an online subscription for \$25 and both the online and the print version for \$50. Mail all subscription inquiries, renewals, address changes, written inquiries and complaints to Inside Hokie Sports, Jamerson Athletic Center, Virginia Tech, 165 Spring Rd., Blacksburg, VA 24061 or call (540) 231-3908.

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ATTN POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Inside Hokie Sports, P.O. Box 11101, Blacksburg, Va. 24061-1101.

Printed by Southern Printing Co., Inc., of Blacksburg, Virginia

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WALK-OFF WIN!

Brendon Hayden's three-run walk-off homer in the bottom of the ninth inning lifted Tech to a 9-6 win over Cincinnati on March 2. Hayden, a junior from Twin Lakes, Wis., has started every game for the Hokies this season and leads the team in four offensive categories (doubles, homers, RBIs and slugging percentage).



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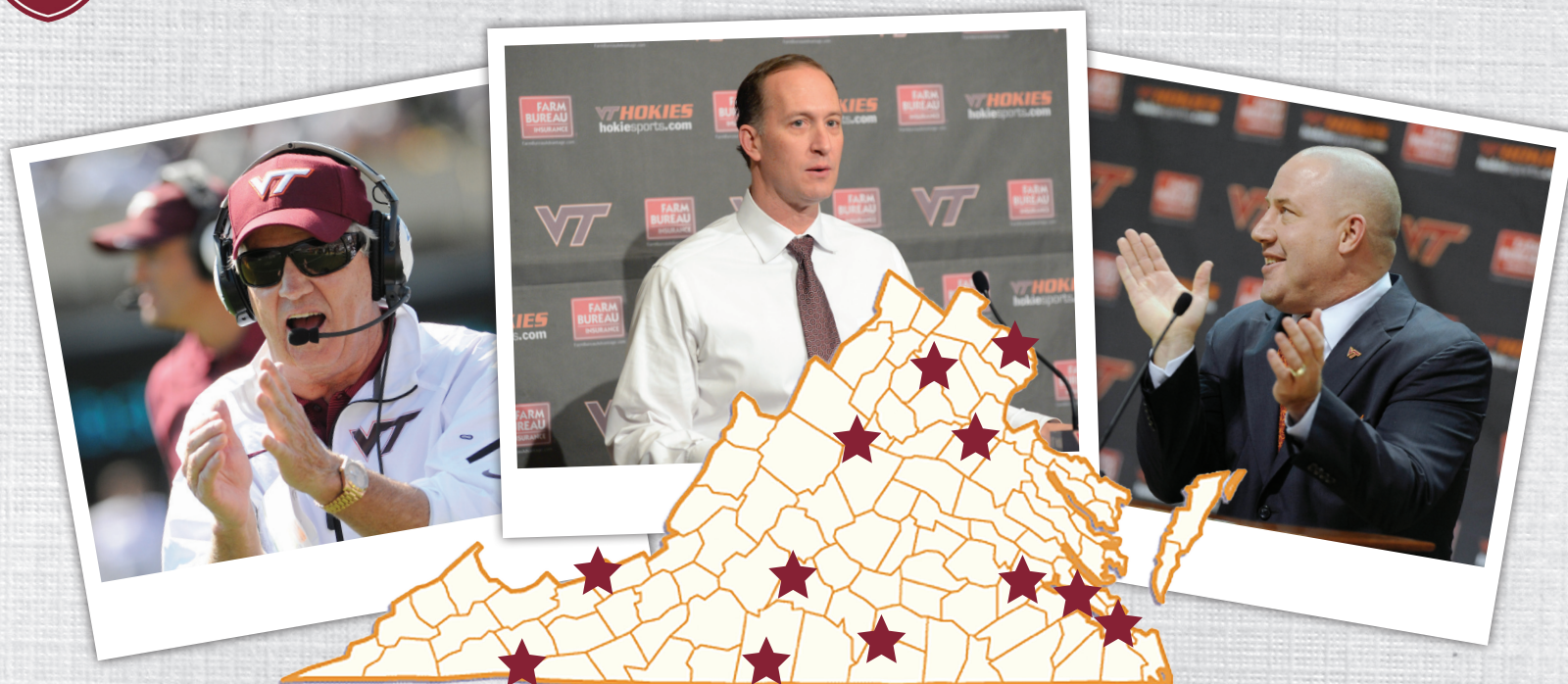
"I am very appreciative of what the Hokie Club has done for student-athletes like me to give me an opportunity to attend a great institution like Virginia Tech. Without these scholarships, many athletes at Tech couldn't live out their dreams!"

Alex Perez
Junior | Baseball

"I am very appreciative of the Hokie Club's efforts to raise money for scholarships. It helps give athletes who have put a lot of blood and sweat into their athletics a chance to earn something of meaning - a scholarship to a great Division I program such as Tech. The Hokie Club's efforts go a long way for us student-athletes, and we are very appreciative for that."

Brendon Hayden
Junior | Baseball





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APRIL 21

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APRIL 23

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LETTER FROM LU

The Virginia Tech Athletic Fund (Hokie Club), established in 1949, provides financial support to the student-athletes representing Virginia Tech. This aid is in the form of tuition fees, housing and meal costs, along with other institutional fees. In 2012-13 fiscal year, the Hokie Club provided \$9,882,124 to pay these fees for approximately 500 student-athletes. Hokie Club membership is open to all alumni and friends of Virginia Tech. Last year, 9,759 Hokie fans supported the athletics department through their gifts to the Hokie Club.

Each year, the cost of attending Virginia Tech rises. University officials do an excellent job of holding tuition and institutional fee increases to a minimum, but the cost of providing a high-value education is expensive. The projected athletics tuition budget for 2013-14 is \$11.7 million.

Your annual donation is very important to this equation. Eighty percent of the tuition bill is paid from Annual Fund gifts and 20 percent comes from earnings from endowed athletic scholarships. The most recent investment report revealed that the Athletic Scholarship Endowment Fund stood at \$49.9 million. These funds are invested by the Virginia Tech Foundation. Earnings from these investments are transferred twice each year to assist in paying the university for athletics scholarships and related fees. The Hokie Club is grateful to those donors who have endowed these athletic scholarships.

Donors give to Virginia Tech athletics for a variety of reasons, including ticket and parking benefits, away game and postseason tickets. Many enjoy the pure pleasure of philanthropy knowing that their donation supports the growth and quality of the Virginia Tech athletics program. Giving back to support more than 500 student-athletes is gratifying and worthwhile. Did you know the most recent academic results reveal that of 512 student-athletes on fall 2013 team rosters, 52 percent achieved a 3.0 or greater fall

semester GPA, while 48 percent maintained a cumulative 3.0 or greater GPA?

The average team fall semester GPA was 3.02, and the average team cumulative GPA was a 3.03. Eleven teams achieved a 3.0 or greater fall semester GPA, while 12 teams maintain a 3.0 or greater cumulative GPA.

Your investment in educating our young people is paying impressive dividends!

Each Hokie Club member has an annual anniversary month, which corresponds to the month they joined the Hokie Club. Each member receives a reminder, the prior month, that their 12-month membership is due for renewal. The membership becomes "inactive" if it is not renewed during that month. While Dec. 31 of each year remains as the priority deadline for benefits, I ask that you do not wait until December to renew your membership. An "inactive" membership loses benefits, including the monthly magazine Inside Hokie Sports. Frankly, it also helps our office staff when processing membership renewals to spread out the workload. This past December, our staff processed over 6,500 gifts which is a lot for one month.

The Hokie Club office is welcoming more new members who are joining to support the athletics program. They are responding to new AD Whit Babcock's call for all Hokies to get involved. They take pride in knowing that their gift supports an athletics program that is successful on the fields and courts of play and is graduating its student-athletes at a high level. Pure philanthropy at its best.

On behalf of the entire staff of the Hokie Club, I want to thank all of our members for their support, especially the new members who have joined or re-activated their memberships. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and our website. Go Hokies!

Lu Merritt | Senior Director of Development for Intercollegiate Athletics

Swimmers collect hardware from ACC

The Virginia Tech swimming and diving teams had a great season, and the league's head coaches certainly took notice.

Tech swimming coach Ned Skinner and diving coach Ron Piemonte received the ACC Men's Coach of the Year and the ACC Women's Diving Coach of the Year awards, respectively, in a vote conducted among the league's head coaches. Also, Tech diver Kaylea Arnett was named the ACC's Women's Diver of the Year, and Tech freshman Jan Switkowski received the ACC Men's Freshman of the Year honor.

Skinner led the Tech men to their first ACC championship and to a 20th-place showing at the NCAA Championship – their third straight top-20

finish. The award marks the fourth career Coach of the Year honor for Skinner and his second since Tech joined the ACC.

"I'm accepting my award on behalf of our staff," Skinner said. "In my opinion, it's truly a 'Staff of the Year' award. I know that sounds easy to say, but it really is the case in our sport, where all of our coaches are in this together. It makes me feel good that all of our colleagues acknowledged the success we had at Virginia Tech this season."

Piemonte earned his first career Diving Coach of the Year award after guiding the Tech divers to another historic season, as Arnett and senior Ryan Hawkins, who earned two All-America honors, enjoyed a fantastic year.

Arnett, a junior from Spring Hill, Texas, was named the ACC Championships' Most Valuable Diver after winning the 1-meter and 3-meter diving events and finishing third in the platform event. At the NCAA Championship, she advanced to earn a trio of All-America honors, including a bronze medal in the 1-meter event.

Switkowski, from Lublin, Poland, earned Tech's first conference freshman award since 1998. At the ACC Championships, he earned Tech's only gold medal, taking first in the 500 freestyle. After just one season at Tech, he owns a pair of individual school records (200 free, 500 free) and is a member of three school record-holding relay teams (400 free, 800 free, 200 medley).

Dresser, Dance earn top ACC honors

Virginia Tech won the ACC wrestling title a few weeks ago, and the Hokies reaped postseason accolades as a result.

Tech coach Kevin Dresser was named the ACC's Coach of the Year, and freshman Joey Dance was named the league's Freshman of the Year in a vote taken among the league's seven head coaches.

Dance, who posted a 28-10 overall record, finished third at the ACC Championship, and dropped his second match in the NCAA Wrestling Championships before winning five consecutive consolation matches to garner fourth-place honors. The Christiansburg, Va., native became the highest-finishing ACC freshman at the NAAs in Tech history.

Dresser, who just completed his eighth season at Tech, earned the ACC Coach of the Year honor for the second straight year. He guided the program to an eighth-place finish at the NAAs – its highest finish ever.

"Ten guys came together at the ACC Championship as underdogs and were ready to go," Dresser said. "They went out and won by a margin that was pretty significant and impressive. This award goes to those 10 guys, along with Coach [Tony] Robie, Coach [David] Hoffman and Coach [Eric] Morrill for getting Virginia Tech ready to go for the ACC Championship and then again for the NCAA tournament."

A reunion of sorts for Emelogu


All of the players on the Tech men's basketball roster had heard of new coach Buzz Williams from his days at Marquette, but only Ben Emelogu had been personally acquainted with the coach.

Williams, a native of Texas, attended a practice at South Grand Prairie High School in Grand Prairie, Texas, to check out Emelogu, a standout for South Grand Prairie. He met Emelogu's mother, and Emelogu said he would have seriously considered Marquette if not for the commitment he had made to Tech.

"They were definitely a top choice," Emelogu said. "He's a great coach and a great guy. I look forward to knowing him even more."

"I know all of Ben's people," Williams said. "They wanted me to go watch him. I knew his high school coach, so I went by his high school and watched him practice."

"Ben remembers that. He remembers the assistant that was with me that day. As far as did I do a home visit or did he come on campus? None of that happened. I just knew the people around him. He was a late bloomer. He's a really, really good kid."

As a freshman this past season, Emelogu played in 22 games, starting 12. He averaged 10.5 points, 3.1 rebounds and 1.9 assists per game. 

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editor's desk | by Jimmy Robertson

Williams up for the challenge of changing the fortunes of the Tech men's basketball program

If new Tech basketball coach Buzz Williams had his way, he'd still be sitting in Cassell Coliseum, eating pizza, drinking Coke and leading the couple of thousand fans who cheered his arrival on March 24 in the "Let's go ... Hokies" chant.

"The press conference is the easiest day of the job," he said. "This is perfect, to live in this world. I'll buy everyone pizza, and we can stay here. It's the easiest day. I'm 0-0."

"The real deal is Nov. 8, Nov. 9, when it's time to tip it up, then all that's over."

Certainly, Williams knows what he's getting into by taking the Tech job. He has just embarked on his toughest challenge yet.

Tech AD Whit Babcock wanted a "grinder" and a "scrapper" for the job. So he worked within the university's and the athletics department's parameters to land the best possible person to run things.

Williams, a 41-year-old Texas native, brings a lot of passion to the position, as evidenced by the way he worked the crowd at Cassell on the evening of his introduction. His work ethic is well publicized, and he loves proving people wrong.

"I want you guys to come back, and before you plug in my quote, the slant of your story is going to be 'How did you guys turn this?' and that fires me up," Williams told the media. "That excites me. That engages me. Can we do it? We're going to do everything every day in every way to be the best we can be, not only in here, but also in the classroom, the weight room, the office and the community."

"I think it's going to end up being a really, really good chapter in the book you're going to write about Virginia Tech basketball."

The first few pages of that chapter on the Williams' era begins with hiring a staff and bringing in some players, the latter a simple task in theory, but one not easily executed.

As he hit the recruiting trail shortly after being hired, he left in search of versatile players – guys whom he likes because of their ability to play multiple positions. Tech's current roster possesses a little flexibility, but does it possess as much as Williams wants? Good question. Even he may not know.

Ben Emelogu is probably the team's most versatile player. Malik Mueller came to Tech as a combo guard, so theoretically, he possess the versatility to play two or three different positions. But he hasn't played a college game yet.

Devin Wilson can guard three different positions, but what about on the offensive end? Can Adam Smith be a point guard? Can Marshall Wood be the desired "stretch 4," a power forward with the ability to shoot? Can C.J. Barksdale? The answers remain unclear.

"How we play offensively and how we want to play defensively, you have to have interchangeable parts," Williams said. "To have interchangeable parts, you have to be able to guard multiple players and play multiple positions. You have to play offensively at multiple positions."

Current and future chapters to this story hopefully will center on re-establishing a recruiting footprint in Virginia. Tech's roster

this past season featured just four players from the state – Wood, Barksdale, Cadarian Raines and Will Johnston.

There are too many players from Virginia on other ACC rosters for Tech's liking. Duke's roster included Josh Hairston and Andre Dawkins. North Carolina's James Michael McAdoo hails from Norfolk. Maryland's Seth Allen calls Woodbridge home. Wake Forest's Travis McKie is from Richmond.

So the state of Virginia will be a focus for Williams.

"I think you have to recruit from the inside-out in any job," he agreed. "When you're in Texas, you need to recruit Texas, but not be solely reliant on that. The same thing when I was in Wisconsin, and I would say the same thing here. You have to be able to cover this part of the country, but you also have to have the ability to spread out. I do have relationships in this part of the country."

His top scorer at Marquette last season hailed from Suffolk. So hopefully, the exodus will end.

The rest of the chapter will feature hard work, unselfishness, chemistry and on-court execution. Those things get teams to the NCAA tournament, as Williams knows first hand, having been to the tournament five times as a head coach.

He no doubt has the coaching chops to turn around this Tech program. It just may take a little time.

When it happens, there may be another party in Cassell to celebrate.

The pizza will be on him – and he probably won't mind that a bit. 



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Tech football staff looking for answers– and may not find all of them this spring

Four months remain before Virginia Tech opens its 2014 football season, and between now and the opening kickoff, all eyes will be on the Hokies' quarterback –whomever he might happen to be.

"We need to find a starting quarterback. That's job No. 1," said Tech's second-year offensive coordinator, Scot Loeffler.

Record-shattering quarterback Logan Thomas is gone, and his replacement is ... well ... we don't know.

In fact, Loeffler likely won't even know at the end of these 15 spring football practices either since Michael Brewer, the transfer from Texas Tech, won't arrive on campus until late May. Another candidate, incoming freshman recruit Chris Durkin, won't graduate from high school until June and will arrive this summer.

For now, fifth-year senior Mark Leal, redshirt sophomore Brenden Motley, and early enrollee Andrew Ford have the first cracks to make an impression. Leal struggled in relief of an injured Thomas in the Hokies' Sun Bowl loss to UCLA, causing some concern.

Leal's biggest advantage is his experience. As a fifth-year senior, he's been around the Hokies' program longer than any other candidate.

"Whenever you have a guy who has been in a program for five years, he better have the understanding of how things are supposed to be done," Loeffler said. "He had the chance to watch Logan, who was a very good player here, and see how he worked and how he developed. So there are some advantages with age. Hopefully, he can use those advantages to help him become the



Dadi Nicolas' athleticism has the Tech staff comparing him to former great Corey Moore. Nicolas and Luther Maddy are the only experienced pieces returning along the Hokies' defensive front.

starting quarterback.

"But I've been in situations where I've had to play young guys, too. We're going to find out during spring football, this summer, and into fall training camp who our starting quarterback will be."

Other than finding a quarterback, Loeffler has three areas where he wants to see improvement this spring.

"No. 1, we didn't run the football well at all," he said. "When you only run for 120 yards per game, that is absolutely unacceptable. We were a 'D-minus' running the football. However you skin it, we were a 'D-minus.'"

"We got a little taste of how important it is and the success you can have when you run the ball effectively, like we did at Miami (183 yards). But when you can't run the ball effectively,



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you're going to struggle scoring points, being consistent and controlling the football. So the run game is No. 1.

"No. 2, while we did a very good job of not fumbling the football, we threw way too many interceptions (15). We have to focus on the elimination of turnovers.

"And third, we took a few too many sacks (33)."

Improved offensive line play will help in that regard, and first-year line coach Stacy Searels has some solid talent up front.

"We need to make a huge jump as a unit," Loeffler said of the offensive line. "[Center] David Wang has to have a great spring. He has to lead that group. We are really excited about our young guards, Wyatt Teller and Alston Smith. They need to play at a much higher level, and they're ready to accept that challenge. This is going to be their first time playing guard full time. They've both bought in, and I think they can both be big-time players if they continue to develop."

On the other side of the ball, the Hokies and defensive coordinator Bud Foster have some huge holes to fill on the defensive front.

"Our big piece of the puzzle is up front," Foster said. "We have to replace five of our top six – and all of those guys were playmakers. All were dynamic, all-league caliber players. That experience is going to be hard to replace."

Tech said goodbye to linemen James Gayle, J.R. Collins, Derrick Hopkins and Tyrel Wilson, but Foster is really intrigued by junior defensive end Dadi Nicolas.

"I don't know if we've had a guy like that since Corey Moore," Foster said. "He's very similar. He's athletic. He had an outstanding offseason. He can run and is so explosive. He had a great vertical jump and ran a 4.4. He's just a dynamic, special guy. He needs to be consistent in his play, but he's shown flashes of what he can be. He just needs to be consistent."

The Hokies like to rotate four defensive ends, and this fall, the playing time is there for the taking. Who's the next man up?

"Dwayne Alford has played a little bit. He's really come into his own and took the next step this offseason," Foster said. "Ken Ekanem is a guy who we are really counting on. It's his turn. Seth Dooley is a guy who really looks the part. He can run and bend his body, but he's just a freshman."

At tackle, the Hokies return Luther Maddy, who became one of the ACC's top linemen last year. After that, who?

"We have to develop the next playmaker," Foster said. "Nigel Williams and Woody

Baron ... that's going to be a good battle. Corey Marshall is back, and he gives us the luxury of a guy who can play at end, but as I evaluate him, he might be more productive at defensive tackle. He's quick and has that athleticism inside. If those young guys at end work out, then Corey can be a guy who can push to be a starter inside for us."

At linebacker, the Hokies lost Jack Tyler and Tariq Edwards, two of the most solid, dependable and consistent linebackers the Hokies have had. But there are intriguing prospects who could be future stars.

"Backer is a tremendous battle between Deon Clarke and Dahman McKinnon," Foster said. "Deon has to be consistent on and off the field, and Dahman missed every Wednesday last year [because of class], but both had great offseasons. They ran well and put up good numbers.

"Those two could be my two best linebackers when all is said and done."

At the mike linebacker position, Foster is confident in junior Chase Williams, who is a smart, cerebral player and has spent the past three years learning and watching.

"He can get the defense lined up and set the tone from where we set our shades and our run strengths," Foster said. "He's had a great offseason. He's been around it a lot, and I hope this is the year where everything kind of comes together for him."


Foster added that he is very excited about freshman Andrew Motuapuaka.

"He redshirted [last fall], but what I got out of him during some scrimmages and middle drills is that he's a thick kid who has good quickness," he said. "He's got a lot of power and a lot of pop and good football IQ. I'm excited about where he is right now, but more excited about where he can grow."

If you want to know if the Hokies will be exceptional again on defense this fall, keep an eye on the defensive end and linebacker spots. That's where Foster will be focused as well.

"Those are our playmaking spots," Foster said. "When we are good on defense, we usually have outstanding defensive ends and linebackers, like [Vince] Hall and [Xavier] Adibi, Tariq and Bruce [Taylor] and Jack. We need dynamic playmakers at those spots."

Neither Loeffler nor Foster will have all the answers they want this spring. In fact, all signs point to a mid-to-late August answer on the quarterback question.

But there's a lot of talent in this program right now, and that will make this spring and summer a lot of fun to watch. 

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Keeping up *with* Compliance

The compliance corner answers questions concerning the governance of intercollegiate athletics and its impact on our athletics department. Have a question? Please send it to inside@hokiesports.com and we'll answer it in upcoming issues. Now, here are a couple of questions that we've received from Tech alums and fans over the past few months, with responses from Tim Parker, Associate AD for Compliance:

Q: It seems that more and more schools are doing away with their football spring games. Why is that? It seems that the spring game allows young players an opportunity to play in a game-like environment. Thanks, Donna in Floyd.

TP: "It does seem like more and more schools are eliminating their spring games, but the causes are not related to any NCAA rule changes. NCAA rules allow 15 practice sessions during the spring and no more than 12 can include contact. Of the 12 contact sessions, only eight can include tackling, and of those eight, only three can devote more than 50 percent of the time to 11-on-11 scrimmaging. Spring games count as one of those three sessions.

"Coaches have precious little time to work with their team in the spring. In fact, compared to other sports, football coaches have less access to their team members to engage in 'skill instruction' outside of the playing season. Not only does a spring game take away from this time generally, but it also takes away from the most limited subset of this time – 11-on-11 scrimmaging that includes tackling. So it makes sense that coaches are moving away from a fan- or competition-focused spring game to an open practice, or doing away with the spring game entirely."

Q: So, am I right in saying that student-athletes and athletics department

personnel can't fill out brackets for the NCAA Tournament? Seems a bit excessive to me, but I believe that is the rule, right? Thanks, Bryan in Morgantown, W.Va.


TP: "Well no, not completely right. Bracket contests with no entry fees are permitted by NCAA rules. Athletics department staff members and student-athletes can fill out brackets and enter contests – even if there is a chance to win a prize at the end – as long as no money is paid up front. Here's the key: without 'skin in the game.' It's not actually a 'wager.' Any contest related to the NCAA basketball tournament (or any NCAA or professional sport, for that matter) that carries a cost to enter would be considered impermissible by the NCAA's gambling/wagering rules.

"NCAA bylaw 10.3 states, 'The following individuals shall not knowingly participate in sports wagering activities or provide information to individuals involved in or associated with any type of sports wagering activities concerning intercollegiate, amateur or professional athletics competition: staff members of an institution's athletics department, non-athletics staff members who have responsibilities within or over the athletics department (e.g. chancellor or faculty athletics representative, staff members of a conference office, and student-athletes).'"

Q: I understand the NCAA Convention was held last January. Is there anything new to report on the possibility that NCAA student-athletes will get paid in future years? It seems that this issue continues to be talked about, but nothing ever happens. Thanks, Paul in Pulaski.

TP: "Certainly there are a lot of moving parts to this issue. The initial attempt to provide some sort of compensation – \$2,000 per year – failed to navigate successfully the NCAA's legislative process mainly because many NCAA members feel they cannot afford that stipend, and many others feel that the concept doesn't align with the mission of college sports.

"I can tell you that no formal votes regarding student-athlete payment were taken at the convention. Instead, there were attempts within Division I to sort of 'take the temperature in the room' in an attempt to zero in on those options that would receive the most support. Additionally, there has been movement toward the five major conferences – the ACC, SEC, Big Ten, Big 12 and Pac-12 – gaining more autonomy to govern themselves in some limited areas, and one of those areas would likely be providing cost-of-attendance stipends for players.

"Obviously, this issue is going to continue to be discussed. It's hard to tell when a final resolution will be reached." 



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WILLIAMS HIRE HAS TECH BUZZING WITH EXCITEMENT

Tech AD Whit Babcock hired former Marquette coach Buzz Williams to be the Hokies' head basketball coach and hopefully turn around the program's fortunes

by Jimmy Robertson

New Virginia Tech AD Whit Babcock doesn't strike many as a gambling man.

But when it came to hiring a men's basketball coach, he certainly went all in.

Babcock appears to have cashed out in a big way, landing respected Marquette University coach Buzz Williams to be the head of the Hokies' basketball program. Williams comes to Blacksburg after having spent seven seasons at Marquette, including the last six as the head coach. He accumulated a 139-69 record while at Marquette and led the Golden Eagles to five NCAA tournament appearances. His 2012-13 squad advanced all the way to the Elite Eight, and on two other occasions under him, Marquette went to the Sweet Sixteen.

Babcock introduced Williams at a press conference on March 24 at Cassell Coliseum. A throng of people, mostly students, enjoyed free pizza – 900 pies were ordered and consumed – performances by the band, cheerleaders and HighTechs and finally, a show by Williams himself, who promptly after his introduction led those in attendance in the “Let’s go ... Hokies” chant and recited the school’s old Hokie cheer, with a little help from the crowd.

“I’m very honored and very thankful to be here,” Williams told the crowd. “I’m humbled by the chance and excited about the opportunity. I think it’s a sleeping giant. There’s a lot of work to be done. I’m thankful that Whit and President [Tim] Sands believe I’m worthy of this chance.

“What I can tell you without promising anything is that you’ll have my heart and my soul, and I’ll work at it every single day. I’ll do right by this institution. I’ll do right

by this department. I’ll do right by this program. And I’ll do right by the alumni and the people in this community that support Virginia Tech. I thank you for that.”

The move by Babcock came just four days after relieving James Johnson of his duties as the head coach on March 17. Johnson was popular among the Hokie fan base, but Tech went 9-22 this past season and 22-41 during his two years as the head man, and the Hokies have finished in last place in the ACC standings for three consecutive years.

In fairness to Johnson, he dealt with a lot beyond his control – injuries, transfers, departures and an unfavorable NCAA ruling on Malik Mueller – during that two-year span. But in the end, Babcock’s decision came down to wins and losses and the program’s future.

“Do I think we could have been incrementally better next year? I do,” Babcock said. “But when I came to it in my own mind, I didn’t feel that this group [of coaches] was the one that could get us to the middle of the conference or higher. I felt we had to go ahead and make the change.

“It was a tough call. It was. Time will tell if it was the right one, but I feel that it is.”

Babcock wasted little time in finding his next guy. He discussed the job with many people in the basketball business, including Cincinnati coach Mick Cronin, whom Babcock worked with during his stint at Cincinnati. Also, it helped that Cronin and Williams share the same agent.

Babcock met with Williams on March 20, and the next day, consummated a deal that led to Williams being named the Tech head coach.

“Typically, the way I like to do it – and I don’t know if it’s right – but I like to go after a big hire in a short period of time,” Babcock said. “If it doesn’t work out, I walk away quietly and you guys [media members] don’t know that I ever talked to them. Then, I had some other very good coaches on my list that I would have gotten to when their season was over.”

Babcock certainly made a hefty financial commitment to get Williams, inking him to a seven-year deal that pays \$2.3 million the first year (base salary is \$500,000). Williams’ salary then increases by \$100,000 per year through the remainder of the contract. He also received a \$725,000 salary pool for his top three assistants.

No basketball coach at Tech has ever made this type of money, nor been signed to such a lengthy contract. But Babcock wasn’t afraid to be aggressive when it came to finding whom he viewed as the right person to rebuild Tech’s program.

“I do believe you have to spend to get some talent occasionally,” he said.

That Babcock lured Williams to Blacksburg surprised many in the world of college basketball. Williams made a great salary at Marquette and had an established program at a university and in a city that loves basketball.

Marquette is going through transition at the moment, with an interim president and an interim AD. Also, most BIG EAST coaches remain skittish about the conference’s future because of the impact of realignment. Williams refused to get into any of that at his introductory news conference, citing instead the positives

Buzz Williams told the crowd at Cassell Coliseum that he was excited about the challenge of the Tech job. "It's been done here before," he said. "And it's time to do it again."



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associated with the Tech job and how he relished the challenge of rebuilding the Hokies into an ACC contender.

"I really like Whit, and I met Dr. Sands," he said. "I'm attracted to the ACC. I'm attracted to, 'Man, we've got a mountain of work to do. Can we climb that?' I think that's just a demented coaches view, like 'Wow, man, that's so dumb to do that [take the Tech job]. Maybe it is. You're entitled to your opinion. But what if it's not? The risk-reward ... I like that."

Williams inherits a program that has suffered through some lean times of late. Since the Hokies beat then-No. 1 Duke on Feb. 26, 2011, Tech is 41-62 overall.

The Hokies have made just two NCAA tournament appearances since Dell Curry played in Blacksburg (1982-86) — a span of 28 years. Tech made appearances in the Big Dance in 1996 and in 2007. In contrast, every team in the ACC has made at least six appearances in the NCAA tournament in the past 25 years.

"The guys that are there have no idea the work that is going to be involved to move from last place and incrementally go up the ladder," Williams said. "It won't just be those guys. It'll be the players we add to those guys. It'll be the coaches on the bench. How long will it take? It's hard to say.

"Is there a certain number of days or years? It's hard to say. The only thing you can be accountable for is today and do as much as you can today. Then wake up and do as much as you can the next day. Then hopefully the cumulative interest of all that will allow us to progress to where we want to be."

Williams possesses a little bit of experience in helping rebuild basketball programs. At Marquette, he inherited an established program left by former coach Tom Crean, now the head coach at Indiana. But during a two-year stint as an assistant at Texas A&M (2004-06), he was part of a major turnaround orchestrated by then-coach Billy Gillispie.

The 2004-05 Aggie team improved its win total by 14 games compared to the previous season. In 2005-06, the Aggies made their first NCAA tournament appearance in 25 years.

"We were 0-16 [in the Big 12 in 2003-04] and went 8-8 our first year in the Big 12 and made it to the quarterfinals of the NIT," Williams said. "We signed a bunch of

guys, and in our second year, we went to the NCAA tournament. We signed some more guys, and there was a renaissance there in that program.

"I see some similarities between here and there as to what you have to do. I'm thankful that I was there. To be able to have been a part of that, I think I can lean back on some of those experiences."

Though sad to see Johnson go, Tech's players were excited about playing for the new coach. The team attended the news conference and saw the way in which Williams worked the audience.

More importantly, though, was the message they received from Babcock with the hire. He wants basketball to become a priority in Blacksburg.

"Any time you bring in a coach like him from an experienced program, that's a blatant message that we're ready to get this thing back on track," point guard Devin Wilson said. "We're ready to get back to some winning ways and back up in the ACC [standings], which is where we want to go.


"We're extremely excited. We can't wait to get back to work and get in the gym and have him teach us his ways. We want to learn something new and get back on that court and win games this year."

Tech returns three starters from this past season's squad, and the Hokies also get the services of Mueller, who sat out this past season after being ruled ineligible by the NCAA, and Maurice Kirby, who took a redshirt year. Plus, two incoming recruits are expected to remain firm to their commitments, though one never really knows in this sport.

At the least, that gives Williams a base to work with as he rebuilds. It will take some time to get the job done, and Babcock repeatedly said he would give Williams time to get it right.

But on this day, students and fans weren't ready to be worried about timetables. Gorged on free pizza and soft drinks, and giddy with excitement of seeing old standouts like Bimbo Coles and Ace Custis back in Cassell, they wanted to revel in the excitement.

This was a day about hope, and Hokie Nation now has a proven winner running its men's basketball program — and also a man certainly not afraid of a challenge.

"It's been done here before," Williams told the crowd. "And it's time to do it again." 

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Athletics department ready to begin construction on new indoor practice facility

by Jimmy Robertson



Expect to see backhoes and bulldozers, cranes and precast concrete, and construction workers galore this summer next to Lane Stadium in Blacksburg.

The Virginia Tech athletics department is going to begin construction on a much-anticipated and long-awaited new indoor practice facility.

The athletics department cleared the final hurdle on the new indoor practice facility project, receiving approval from the school's Board of Visitors on March 24 for the design of the project and the financing plan. The Board of Visitors met that Sunday and Monday on Tech's campus, and the approval allows the athletics department to begin construction as soon as possible.

"We feel this is going to be a dynamic facility that will not only benefit our football program, but a number of our other sports programs as well," Tech AD Whit Babcock said. "Jim Weaver [former Tech AD] and the Hokie Club did a

tremendous amount of work on this project and deserve the credit. I am appreciative of all their efforts. It is another big step in keeping our athletics facilities among the best in the nation."

Athletics department officials already have chosen an architect and a general contractor and expect to begin foundation work shortly after graduation in May. Plans call for the building to be finished by August of next year in time for the 2015 football season.

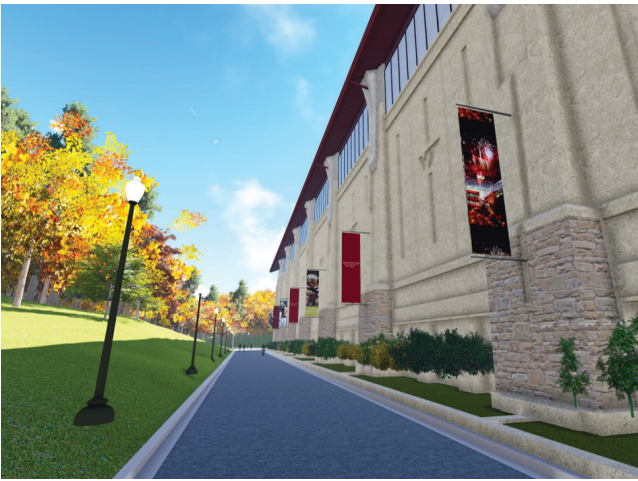
The project has been in the works for quite some time. In fact, Weaver identified a new practice facility as a need not long after being hired in the fall of 1997. In 1998, he received permission to build the facility from then-president Dr. Paul Torgersen, but other facilities needs took precedence at the time, thus putting the project temporarily on hold.

Over the next decade, the athletics department built the south end zone structure at Lane Stadium and then a new structure on

the west side of the stadium. The department also constructed a basketball practice facility, a new football locker room, a new Olympic sports weight room, and it embarked on several other smaller, but important, projects.

Movement on the indoor practice facility project began again in earnest two years ago, but finding a site proved problematic, as the university and the athletics department worked out issues related to finding a location. Last September, a building and grounds committee of the Board of Visitors approved the site, with all sides coming to an agreement that the best place for the facility was on part of the existing football practice fields – specifically, the east field adjacent to the football locker room.

Last fall, the athletics department inked an agreement with SportsPLAN Studio out of Kansas City, Mo., to serve as the design criteria consultant. This group put together and organized the criteria for the project, and HKS Architects, a global company with offices



throughout the United States, won the bid to design the facility and W.M. Jordan Company, based out of Newport News, Va., will be the general contractor.

Many may be unfamiliar with these companies, but both have been involved with major projects. For example, HKS designed AT&T Stadium, home of the Dallas Cowboys, while W.M. Jordan Company ranks yearly on Engineering News Record's list of top 400 contractors.

"Both of them are outstanding firms," said Tom Gabbard, Tech's associate AD and the man who oversees most of the athletics department's facilities projects. "They've both got proven track records when it comes to major projects such as this one."

Tech's much-needed indoor facility will be 210 feet wide and 400 feet long, with an artificial surface similar to the surface at English Field, the Hokies' baseball home. It also will be 85 feet high, thus allowing plenty

of room for punting and kicking. The facility's eight-foot padded walls, wide sidelines, full scoreboard and 40-second clocks on each end will allow the football team to conduct a full-contact scrimmage if it desires – something it is unable to do at its current indoor home, Rector Field House.

The facility will feature doors that roll up, so that if the football team is practicing outside and a thunderstorm approaches, then it can move quickly and easily inside. The facility also will have two observation decks, with the highest one for filming of practices and the lower one for head football coach Frank Beamer's observation of practices. Video photographers will be able to shoot video from six different positions.

The facility will possess stadium lighting both inside and outside. The outside lighting will allow the football team to practice on its outdoor fields late into the evening.

The construction of the facility does mean

that the football team loses two full-sized practice fields. However, the west practice field will be transformed into two smaller practice fields – one of 75 yards in length and one of 65 yards – and the field can be "turned" into one 100-yard field.

"I think this facility is great for several reasons," Beamer said. "Now track [the track and field programs] can take over Rector and that will help that program recruit and perform, and then the new facility will help not only us, but also baseball, softball, lacrosse and others."

"I also think it's going to look very attractive, and that always helps in recruiting. And then there aren't many [football] programs in the country where the head coach can stand in his office and see all the facilities. They're all right here together, and that's really a benefit in operating with your football team and also with recruiting."

As Beamer stated, the facility will benefit an array of sports, as athletics department

officials wanted an indoor facility for sports like baseball, softball, lacrosse and both soccer teams to use during inclement weather, particularly in early spring.

"That was always our plan," Gabbard said. "It's strictly for practices, not competition. You won't see games in there. But as many know, the weather this spring has really limited how much our teams could practice, particularly our spring sports. So on a day when it's snowing, lacrosse, for example, could have gone in there and practiced easily. So this is a project that is a win-win for a lot of our programs."

The price tag for the project figures to run around \$21.3 million. So far, the Hokie Club has raised close to \$13 million in private money for the project, but the completion of the design of the building now allows for the Hokie Club to be even more aggressive in its fundraising for the project. As most know, no taxpayer money can be used to construct athletics facilities.

Lu Merritt, the senior director of development for intercollegiate athletics at Tech, hopes to get most, if not all, of the money raised in the next six months.

"We're going at this pretty hard," he said. "We want to get as much of this raised as possible before the building is built because people tend

to say, 'Well, you've built the building. You don't need my money.' Well, we do because we haven't gotten it paid for yet. So we're going to go real hard at it for the next couple of months before they start working and see if we can get another \$5-6 million committed on this thing, if not more than that.

"Then we've got to continue to raise money past that for what they [athletics department officials] want to do in regards to renovating Rector for the track programs and for the building of the softball hitting facility. We want to try and raise all of it under the umbrella of the new practice facility.

"I'd love to get this [fundraising] done before September, but it all depends on the results we get. Our focus is right now. But without question, this is a building that Hokie fans will be proud of and that will serve a number of our athletics teams. We need everyone's support, however large or small, to get this facility built. It's going to be beautiful."


The second part of the indoor practice facility project includes renovating Rector Field House. Athletics department officials want to keep the indoor track up permanently at Rector (they take it down after the indoor track season ends in March), add much-needed spectator

seating, add halftime locker rooms for soccer and lacrosse matches and build a hitting area adjacent to Tech Softball Park for the softball team. A timetable for the second part of the project hasn't been established yet.

"We will start programming Rector right away," Gabbard said. "What that means is that we'll sit down with the two users, Scot [Thomas, Tech's softball coach] and Dave [Cianelli, Tech's director of cross country and track and field], and talk about what they want in this building and what we need to include in our plan. Then we'll get an architectural firm to put it together."

The football team may have to work around construction crews this fall as the workers build the facility, but Beamer and his staff shouldn't have any issues conducting a practice adjacent to the site. Plus, they will have full use of Lane Stadium in the event of any conflict.

A little inconvenience is a small price to pay for what figures to be a stunning facility.

"It's going to be a spectacular building," Gabbard said. "Imagine that building in a night game with this west side and all that glass and all lit up. It's going to be a signature building, which is great, and it's going to be extremely functional." 



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After backing up Logan Thomas for the past three years, Mark Leal has enjoyed the competition for the No. 1 spot at quarterback this spring.



SPRING Q&A WITH QUARTERBACK MARK LEAL

by Jimmy Robertson

After backing up Logan Thomas for four years, Mark Leal is excited about the possibilities of winning the starting job. He sat down and talked about that, about putting his Sun Bowl performance behind him, about the areas where he wants to improve as a player and about Tech's offense this spring.

Q: Talk a little bit about the first practice this spring. What did it feel like to be in the saddle as the No. 1 quarterback on the depth chart for the first time?

ML: "It felt really good. I feel like I've been waiting for this opportunity for a long time, and it's finally here. I'm out there just trying to have fun and lead and compete. The first practice went well. I was a little rusty, just trying to get back into the swing of things and doing things at game speed. But other than that, the first day went really well."

Q: How excited were you to get back on the field considering what happened to you in the

Sun Bowl (12 of 25, 130 yards, two interceptions)?

ML: "I was very excited. I think about that every day when I wake up. That's what drives me to work harder and get better and work on every aspect of my game to make sure that something like that doesn't happen again."

Q: Did you feel like that first practice was the first step toward putting that behind you?

ML: "Yes, of course. Something like that is always going to linger around until your next game, so I'm just trying to get better and make sure that it doesn't happen again."

Q: We understand that you watched the Sun Bowl film and critiqued yourself. What do you think needs to happen for you to take that next step as a quarterback?

ML: "Just watching the bowl game, my feet were slow. I was really slow. I was indecisive. That's what I've really tried to work on in the offseason. I've worked with Coach [Scot Loeffler, Tech's offensive coordinator] on my pre-snap

reads, so that I can be more decisive, and I've worked on getting my feet quicker and getting the ball out quicker. It's all about knowing the playbook inside and out and watching film every day. It's about breaking down your play and trying to understand defenses better. It's a little of everything."

Q: After the bowl game, you took it upon yourself to own how you played and use the offseason to get better. You're competing with two guys now for the starting job, and two more candidates are coming this summer. Talk a little bit about what the competition has been like and will be like.

ML: "Competition is good. It keeps pressure on you at all times, and it brings out the best in you, so the more competition we have, the better. It's going to make all of us better as quarterbacks."

Q: Andrew Ford, the freshman who came in back in January, received a lot of accolades as a

high school player. What's your take on him just from competing with him?

ML: "Andrew's a really smart kid. He knows football. He came from a really good high school, and his football coach is really good. He's picking up everything pretty well. He's just got to get used to the game speed and that type of stuff."

Q: Coach Beamer said the top priority this spring was finding the starting quarterback, whomever it might be. How much pressure has that put on you and the other guys to perform?

ML: "It does put pressure on us. Every day counts. Every rep counts. Nothing is set in stone. All of us are going out there and trying to make statements and trying to separate ourselves from everyone else. I'm a fifth-year senior. I'm the oldest guy. I'm listed as the No. 1 quarterback, but that doesn't matter. Nothing is set in stone. I've still got to work every day to get better and keep separating myself from the pack."

Q: What do you feel like you need to improve on to show everyone you deserve the starting position?

ML: "Really, everything. You can never be too good at your game. I'm just trying to improve on my leadership skills and learning to read the defense and understanding defenses better in general. I'm working on my tempo and getting my drops right, those types of things. I'm really working on everything. I want to be better in everything I do."

Q: How confident are you in holding on to the No. 1 spot going into the fall?

ML: "I'm confident. I like to go out there and compete. [Brenden] Motley and Ford are going to push me to get better, and I'm going to push them to get better, so the more competition, the better."

Q: You've been the backup for a few years now and have had time to learn, even last year with Coach Loeffler. Is it a lot different now?

ML: "It is a little bit different being the driver of everything and leading everybody. But I'm excited, and I'm ready to take on the challenge."

Q: You've been in Coach Loeffler's system for a year now. What is clearer to you now than it was a year ago?

ML: "It's everything. Our playbook is extensive. We have a lot of verbiage. Things are changing week in and week out. Being with Coach and working with him, and having Logan help me last year, I've really got the offense down now."



Mark Leal has spent this spring practice working on his footwork, learning defenses and on making quicker decisions.

Q: Do you feel like you're on page with your receivers at this point?

ML: "Yes, I think so. We had a lot of work in the offseason. I've been throwing to those same guys for a couple of years now. As far as our chemistry, it's pretty good, but it can always be better."

Q: How far along is this offense compared to last spring?


ML: "It's really night and day, to be honest. Last year at this time, we were all over the place. Everyone was trying to learn the offense because it was brand new. But we've got a lot of our older veterans back, so everything is able to run a lot smoother. Everything is more fluid. We're not out there just installing things, but we're out there moving quicker because people have a better understanding of the offense."

Q: How much do you think the offense will change? Logan was a 6-foot-6 dual threat. How does your game suit the offense, and what do you think will be different from last year?

ML: "With Logan, we relied on him a lot to carry the offense, probably more than we should

have. We had a lot of designed runs for him and those types of things. But with me, we're really trying to focus on establishing the run game. That's the most important thing for us right now. We need to get that run game down, and that will make things a lot easier in the pass game. I don't think Coach will have me running a lot of designed runs. I'm not as big as Logan. I'm more of a pocket passer. But our big focus has been on the run game."

Q: For so long, the defense has carried things around here, but this spring, the defense is rebuilding a little bit. How important is it for the offense to have more weapons this year and put up more points?

ML: "We've talked about that a lot. When you hear media and read newspapers, it's always about the defense. The past couple of years, we haven't gotten any credit. We were considered the weakest link, and that is true. We have been the past couple of years. We've really tried to put an emphasis on either matching the defense, or we're going to be the ones carrying things and leading everything. We don't want to rely so much on the defense, but rather play off each other more." 

HOKIES OWN FIRST QUARTER

Tech's four quarters of preparation for the 2014 football season began with winter workouts in the strength and conditioning program, and the Hokies got off to a good start

by Jimmy Robertson

The Virginia Tech football strength and conditioning area underwent renovations a year ago that included new flooring in both the weight room and the speed and agility room and new equipment.

This spring, a massive new digital display, paid for courtesy of a generous \$50,000 donation from the Roanoke Valley Hokie Club, adorns the back wall of the weight room. It allows for the showing of all Tech's weightlifting records and for the presentation of videos, presumably for any Tech players who break a record in a particular lift.

The display brings the strength and conditioning program into the digital era.

"They dragged me into it," Dr. Mike Gentry joked.

Rest assured, though, Gentry, the associate AD for athletic performance, and the Hokies haven't gotten away from the foundation of their program – hard work. The testing results from their six-week winter training session before spring break indicated that.

In all, 56 players earned honors in the strength and conditioning program, including six who earned Super Iron Hokie status – the top rung on the strength and conditioning ladder (the levels consist of Super Iron Hokie, Iron Hokie, Hokie, Orange, and Maroon). The six who earned Super Iron honors included Brent Benedict, Augie Conte, Wyatt Teller, J.C. Coleman, Chuck Clark and Donovan Riley.

Also, five position records fell, eclipsing the four set a year ago. Conte, a rising redshirt sophomore from Richmond, recorded a 380-pound power clean to set the standard for offensive tackles, breaking his own 375-pound record from last year. Dadi Nicolas, a redshirt junior from Delray Beach, Fla., also broke his own record by recording a 41-inch vertical jump. He set the record for defensive ends last year when he recorded a 40-inch vertical jump.

Coleman, Dahman McKinnon and Colton Taylor also broke position records. Coleman, a junior from Chesapeake, Va., recorded a 455-pound front squat, which is the new standard for tailbacks, while McKinnon, a redshirt sophomore from Hope Mills, N.C., ran the 40-yard dash in 4.4 seconds. That time is now the best 40 time for an inside linebacker, and it was the second-best time on the team behind Nicolas'



Wyatt Teller finished among the top five in four lifting categories during Tech's winter strength and conditioning program.

4.4 (Nicolas is considered faster because he weighs more than McKinnon).

Taylor, a walk-on from Salem, Va., who serves as a long snapper, recorded a 36.5-inch vertical jump. That is now the new record for a specialist.

Last winter, Gentry and his staff focused more on strength than on speed and agility because he felt the Hokies' young linemen needed to get stronger. This winter, he didn't deviate much from that plan.

"I doubled down on getting stronger," Gentry said. "We went back to the basics of strength. We didn't have as much variety because, honestly, it's just a six-week period of training and then a week of testing."

"We brought them back to good, old-fashioned hard work. We turned the music off [in the weight room] for six weeks and concentrated on getting stronger. I know it's the right thing to do. The closer you get to the season, the more variety you need and the agility work you need, but you first need a foundation to build a house."

The most notable performances came from a few of Tech's offensive linemen. Teller, a redshirt freshman from Bealeton, Va., finished in the top five in four categories (bench press, back squat, power clean and push jerk). He also bulked up to 295 pounds.

Like Teller, Conte finished in the top five in four categories. In addition to setting the aforementioned mark in the power clean, he led the squad with a 430-pound bench press and

380-pound push jerk. Benedict, a redshirt senior from Jacksonville, Fla., finished in the top five in four categories as well.

"We've got a core of offensive linemen that are strong and like being strong, and that's infectious," Gentry said. "They're taking it as an identity, and again, that spreads. That's what you want. There is nothing like putting a heavy weight on your back and moving it to make you feel better. You feel stronger and have more confidence."

At other positions, McKinnon stood out and not just for his 40-yard dash time. He recorded a 39-inch vertical jump and led the team in the 10-yard sprint, running it in 1.59 seconds. In the defensive backfield, Desmond Frye earned Iron Hokie honors, along with sophomore Brandon Facyson, redshirt freshman Deon Newsome and redshirt sophomore Greg Jones. On the defensive line, rising redshirt sophomore Ken Ekanem recorded a 340-pound push jerk and Corey Marshall recorded a 360-pound power clean. Luther Maddy had a 405-pound bench press.

"He had a really good offseason," Gentry said of Maddy. "He didn't max as well as he performed in the room. But he had a really good offseason."

Gentry also had good things to say about Facyson, Detrick Bonner, Josh Stanford and Andrew Motuapuaka, a freshman who took a redshirt year last season.


"I'm sure I'm leaving someone out," Gentry said. "I think, as a group, we had a good offseason."

There wasn't any one person pulling us back."

The Hokies went through their winter workouts after spring break with their 5:45 a.m. workouts for the two weeks leading up to spring practice. Tech's staff changed up the routine this season, splitting the entire team into eight groups and coming up with a scoring system for all the drills just to create a little competition. The workout consisted of four 10-minute periods and four stations, with two different sets of drills going on at two of the stations.

After the fourth period, the team gathered for the finishing segment, which consisted of perfect pushups, perfect sit-ups and perfect up-downs. If they weren't perfect, then the players had to do them again, not as punishment, but to reinforce the importance of concentrating when tired. Players and teams that scored the most points got rewarded with orange t-shirts to wear at the next workout.

Gentry and his staff consider winter workouts the "first quarter" of their strength and conditioning program, and he feels they won the quarter. The second quarter started with spring practice, and he hopes the team wins that, too.

"I don't know how good we'll be, but I like the way we're working," he said. "This is the first quarter of our four quarters of preparation. I think we won the first quarter. Spring ball is the next one." 

STRENGTH & CONDITIONING TESTING RESULTS

BENCH PRESS

Augie Conte	430
Andrew Williams	425
Wyatt Teller	420
Brent Benedict	420
Luther Maddy	405

POWER CLEAN

Wyatt Teller	385
Augie Conte	380
David Wang	360
Corey Marshall	360
Brent Benedict	350

FRONT SQUAT

J.C. Coleman	455
Sam Rogers	410
Jerome Wright	400
Zach Snell	400
Charlie Meyer	400
Desmond Frye	400
Donovan Riley	400

BACK SQUAT

Wyatt Teller	600
Augie Conte	585
Brent Benedict	585
Alston Smith	540
Andrew Williams	540

NFL SHUTTLE

Michael Brainard	3.98
Brandon Facyson	3.98
Josh Trimble	4.09
Kendall Fuller	4.12
Greg Jones	4.12

VERTICAL JUMP

Dadi Nicolas	41
Dahman McKinnon	39
Bucky Hodges	38.5
Demitri Knowles	38.5
Terrance Travis	37
Deon Newsome	37
Detrick Bonner	37

PUSH JERK

Augie Conte	380
David Wang	370
Wyatt Teller	370
Ken Ekanem	340
Brent Benedict	340

10-YARD SPRINT

Dahman McKinnon	1.59
Dadi Nicolas	1.60
Brandon Facyson	1.61
Carlis Parker	1.63
Chris Mangus	1.64

40-YARD DASH

Dadi Nicolas	4.4
Dahman McKinnon	4.4
Chris Mangus	4.43
Kendall Fuller	4.45
Bucky Hodges	4.46

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While it's not commonplace at Lane Stadium, for instances when issues with unruly fans or disruptive behavior occur, you can access the 'HOKIES RESPECT HOTLINE'. It provides fans a method to report such issues so that stadium authorities can quickly act to resolve the problem and allow everyone in that area to continue enjoying the game.

If needed, text "RESPECT" followed by your issues and location to "71855" and have the situation resolved as soon as possible.

CARTER FINISHES SECOND AT NCAAS

Devin Carter, an NCAA finalist at 141 pounds, finished his season with an 18-1 record, and the two-time All-American is 89-13 in his career at Tech.

Devin Carter became the first Tech wrestler to make it to a championship match at the NCAA Wrestling Championships, and behind his performance, the Hokies finished in the top 10 of the team standings for the second straight year

by Jimmy Robertson

Years ago, William Shatner played Captain James T. Kirk, the commander of the Starship Enterprise on the show, “Star Trek.” He always wanted to “go where no man has gone before.”

Devin Carter wanted to go where no Virginia Tech wrestler has gone before – and he did exactly that at the NCAA Wrestling Championships held March 20-22 in Oklahoma City, Okla.

Carter, a Christiansburg, Va., native, became the first Tech wrestler in school history to make it to the championship final in a weight class and came up just short of becoming the Hokies’ first national champion, falling 10-1 to Ohio State’s Logan Stieber in the title match at 141 pounds.

“It feels good,” Carter said of his runner-up finish. “It feels good to have all the firsts that we had this year – first finalist, first freshman All-American [etc.]. It [the NCAA runner-up] feels

good, but it’s not where I want to be. I wanted to be at the top of the podium, clearly, but I wasn’t 100 percent going out there. I knew that going out there, so it wasn’t a huge surprise that I fell short.”

Carter’s runner-up finish, though, enabled the Hokies, who sent nine qualifiers to the Championships, to accumulate 49 team points. As a result, Tech claimed eighth place at the event, marking its second straight top-10 finish at the NCAAs. A year ago, the Hokies finished 10th.

The finish capped a remarkable season for the Hokies, who entered the 2013-14 campaign having lost All-Americans Jarrod Garnett, Jesse Dong and Pete Yates off last year’s team in addition to heavyweight David Marone, whose victory last season in the final match at the ACC Championship gave the Hokies their first team

title. Plus, Tech didn’t have Nick Brascetta, last year’s ACC champion and an All-American at 149 pounds. He elected to take a redshirt year this season.

“If you remember, I told you that I thought we could be really good at the end of the year,” Tech coach Kevin Dresser said. “I thought that, if some guys stepped up, we could be the same team we were last year. That was probably setting the bar high and maybe was a little unrealistic, but I truly believed that we had the individuals that, if they put it all together at the end of the year, they could give us a good team. Fortunately, we got Devin somewhat healthy, and our coaches did a really good job of getting everybody else coached up at the end and we got hot when it counted.”

Of course, none of it probably happens without Carter, who tore his hamstring in December and

yet came back three months after undergoing surgery – several months ahead of schedule. He won the ACC title at 141 pounds on March 8 in his first action since the surgery, helping the Hokies to their second straight ACC team title, and then he won his first four matches at the NCAA Championships.

The No. 4 seed at 141 pounds, Carter pinned Buffalo's Nick Flannery in the first round and methodically beat No. 13 seed Stephen Dutton of Michigan by an 11-7 score. In the quarterfinals, he escaped No. 12 seed Richard Duson of Franklin & Marshall 4-3 to advance to the semifinals of the weight class.

That match sent up a red flag that Carter wasn't quite right.

"I had really ugly wins," Carter said. "I had non-dominating wins. The first guy was a good match for me, but the round of 16 [against Duson] was awful. In any other scenario, I wouldn't have done as badly against him and could have gotten bonus point there. I was sloppy, I wasn't smooth, I wasn't confident and I was getting tired. It was something we anticipated going in."

In the semifinals, Carter faced a familiar opponent in No. 9 seed Evan Henderson of North Carolina, who had beaten the top seed in the quarterfinals. But Carter had beaten Henderson numerous times before and beat him again, this time by a 12-3 count.

That set up the championship match against No. 2 seed Stieber, a two-time national champion coming into the match. He got a quick takedown of Carter and then rode Carter for much of the first period. Carter couldn't manage any offense against Stieber, who went on to record four takedowns en route to his third national title.

"Even if I was 100 percent, he would have been hard to escape from and had good rides," Carter said. "The fact that my leg wasn't 100 percent and wasn't stable, and I didn't have confidence in it, just made it a lot harder."

"My offense was limited. It wasn't because of pain, but because of confidence. My timing wasn't down from not drilling all year. I hadn't wrestled live a lot. I never went [practiced] three days in a row before nationals, so we thought I was going in at 80-90 percent. As we progressed through the tournament, we could see that I was a little less, maybe 65-70 percent. I wasn't myself out there. I was pushing through it. My offense wasn't there. My stamina, my conditioning, my bottom work ... the whole spectrum was affected a little bit by it."

That didn't diminish Carter's accomplishment, nor that of the Hokies as a team. Tech saw two other wrestlers earn All-America honors – the top eight in each weight class earn All-America status. Joey Dance, a freshman from nearby

Joey Dance, the ACC's Freshman of the Year, won five straight matches in the consolation bracket to earn All-America honors in his first appearance at the NCAA Wrestling Championships.



Christiansburg, Va., lost to top seed Jesse Delgado of Illinois in the second round, but came back through the consolation round to make it to the third-place match at 125 pounds. The 16th-seeded Dance lost 6-1 to No. 3 seed Nico Megaludis of Penn State and came in fourth.

"He [Dance] surprised me a little bit," Dresser said. "I knew he had it in him, but I hadn't really seen it. The guy I recruited in high school had it in him. I saw him win big matches in pressure situations, but he hadn't done it much this year. He was seeded 16th and got fourth. That's overachieving. But he thought the whole time he was going to be an All-American. That's just how he is. He's got a tremendous amount of self-confidence."

Also, Chris Penny, from Virginia Beach, Va., finished in sixth place to round out his collegiate career. The fifth-year senior, who won the ACC title at 197 pounds, claimed victory in his first three matches at the NCAA Championships, including two wins over wrestlers seeded higher. The 14th-seeded Penny beat Pittsburgh's Nick Bonaccorsi 3-1 in the first round and then knocked off No. 3 seed Morgan McIntosh of Penn State 3-2 in a second-round upset. In the quarterfinals, Penny beat No. 11 seed Nathan Burk of Iowa by a score of 6-3.

In the semifinals, Penny lost 4-1 to No. 2 seed J'Den Cox of Missouri, who went on to win the national title. Penny was pinned in his consolation match by No. 5 seed Kyven Gadson of Iowa State and fractured his shoulder in the process. He forfeited his fifth-place match to finish in sixth.

He finished his season with a 28-13 record.

"Like I've said before, he's a rags-to-riches story," Dresser said. "Chris has always had the

talent, but early on [in his career], he struggled in believing in himself. The last month of the season, though, he was tough, and he believed."


Of Tech's other six wrestlers, Zach Neibert (149 pounds), Chris Moon (165), and Ty Walz (heavyweight) each won two matches before falling in the consolation rounds. Dennis Gustafson, a 133-pound freshman who won an ACC title, won a match at his first NCAA Championships, and Austin Gabel, a 174-pounder, won a match as well. Only 184-pounder Nick Vetterlein did not record a win.

The cumulative efforts of all of them enabled this Tech team to become the best in school history.

"I can say that this is the most I've ever seen a wrestling team overachieve," Carter said. "Wrestling isn't like football, where a couple of things can go in one team's favor and they can pull out an upset. Wrestling is more set in stone when it comes to team performance. But we had a lot of guys that stepped up and went way beyond what was expected."

"Flowrestling, a media company for wrestling, predicted us to finish 42nd based on our seeds. So coming in and getting eighth was huge."

Seven members of the 10-member lineup return for next season, and with three more returning from redshirt seasons – Brascetta, Zach Epperly (174 pounds), and Kevin Norstrom (133 pounds) – expectations loom. But Dresser welcomes that.

"Getting a trophy," Dresser said of next year's goal. "If you're in the top five [at the NCAA Championships], you get a trophy, and we need to get a trophy. That's the message. We've got to find 10 guys that want to get a trophy. Right now, no one is redshirting. Everybody is going. I want there to be a sense of urgency to get those spots." 



GOING OUT IN STYLE

Chris Penny's career at Tech got off to a slow start, but he closed it in grand fashion, winning an ACC wrestling championship and earning All-America honors in the span of a few weeks

by Jimmy Robertson

The life of a college student can be described as a maze, one filled with numerous twists and turns that must be navigated before coming to the appropriate destination.

The journey can be fraught with perils, and it can take a while. In some cases, life simply wins, and the destination never gets reached.

Chris Penny nearly got pinned his first couple of years at Virginia Tech, floundering around in a maze his freshman year and later trying to solve the riddle of becoming a good athlete. This is what makes his improbable run of career-ending successes so undeniably amazing.

A young man who nearly got booted from the university and never really had any success on the mat became an ACC champion and All-American within a month's span. And in early May, he will become a college graduate.

"It was the transition [to college]," Penny said. "I had a poor transition. I didn't know what to expect. It wasn't until my sophomore and junior year that I started to develop better habits. I just had a poor transition.

"That happens with a lot of college students. I could go on and on about a number of student-athletes who got kicked out of school because of a poor transition and couldn't turn it around. They weren't able to buckle down and focus."

To get a better understanding of Penny's story, one must go back to his freshman days. He came to Tech as a wrestler, though not a highly recruited one. Penny played football at Cox High School in Virginia Beach, Va., and only attempted wrestling after a strong suggestion from his high school coach, who, like many other coaches, see parallels between the two sports.

Penny comes from a wrestling family. His uncle, Greg, wrestled at Duke and was the Most Valuable Wrestler in the 1973 ACC Tournament. Chris enjoyed wrestling, but liked football better. That changed his senior year at Cox after he started having some success.

"The better I got at wrestling, the more I enjoyed it. I really didn't have a level of success



on a national or state level until my senior year. The better I got, the more wins I accumulated, the more fun it was for me. Also, I was interested in going to a bigger school, and Virginia Tech had expressed an interest in me."

Penny attended a wrestling camp at Tech the summer before his senior year, and his performance there caught the eye of Tech wrestling coach Kevin Dresser, who viewed Penny as a bit of a diamond in the rough. Penny ultimately decided to come to Tech and wrestle for Dresser.

But things started going awry not long after

he got to campus, as Penny got caught up in that maze. A neck injury limited him on the mat, and Penny admits he didn't rehab in the proper matter. Also, he got into some trouble off the mat, and a series of small incidents added up.

The one that got him in the most hot water came during an early morning fire drill when he and his roommate taped the fire alarm to muffle the sound, and then they went back to bed. The resident advisor for his hall came into the room, saw what had transpired and wrote both he and his roommate up for disobeying rules.

"There were a lot of small incidents that kind of



added up, and I actually almost got kicked out of school,” Penny said. “All the strikes added up, and I remember them [Tech’s Student Conduct Committee] telling me at the beginning of my sophomore year that I was on my last strike and last form of probation until the end of my junior year. Things didn’t go well. I had a lot of fun, but my focus wasn’t very good. Things didn’t go too well my first year.

“I wasn’t the bad kid. I was a good kid. I just made a few mistakes.”

Dresser and his staff gave Penny multiple warnings. They expressed frustration with him, particularly because they knew his off-mat shenanigans were hurting his on-mat performance.

Dresser joked after this year’s ACC Championship that Penny went about “2-27” as a freshman. That was a slight exaggeration. The truth is that he went a forgettable 3-16.

He struggled the early part of his sophomore year, too, but toward the end, sparks of his talent started to emerge. At the ACC Championship that year, he dominated top-seeded Mike Salopek of Virginia at 197 pounds early in the tournament and later finished as the ACC runner-up. His overall record was 14-21, but his performance at the

ACC meet created optimism about his future.

Penny got it going in the right direction during his junior year. He finished with a 12-8 record, including a 5-0 mark in ACC dual meet action, and he was the ACC runner-up at heavyweight that season.

“Things turned around my junior year,” Penny said. “That’s when I started committing more to wrestling and to school. It wasn’t some act of chance or luck. I got into reading a lot, and I was inundated with this wealth of knowledge and I was able to restructure and reorganize my life. I got a lot smarter, and I was able to apply that knowledge to a lot of areas in my life, including wrestling.

“I was never going in the wrong direction. I just wasn’t maximizing my potential. You hear things from other people, but nothing really sinks in until you discover yourself. That’s the beauty of self-discovery. I would hear things from coaches and family and ex-coaches back home, but it wasn’t until I self-discovered it that it really sank in and induced some changes.”

Dresser had moved Penny to heavyweight that year after David Marone, the projected starter in the heavyweight class, suffered a season-ending injury. He knew Penny lacked the bulk, but felt he could get bigger, and he

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thought Penny's athleticism made up for any weight disadvantage.

Marone's return the next season prompted Dresser to suggest Penny take a redshirt year, and Penny agreed to do so, seeing the season as an opportunity to get bigger. He tried, but the heaviest he ever weighed was 225-230. To be competitive at heavyweight, he needed to be at least 240-250.

So after last season, he and Dresser agreed that he needed to be moved back to 197.

"He just never could get big enough at heavyweight," Dresser said. "He did a great job. He started planning to get back to 197 last June. He was within 12 or 13 pounds of the weight when school started in the fall, which was really, really good."

Aside from a three-week stretch at the start of the new year, Penny lived a dream senior season. He finished the year with a 28-13 mark, though it nearly got derailed when he struggled in January and early February. He lost to wrestlers from Kent State, NC State and Pittsburgh.

Sensing a tired wrestler, Dresser held Penny out of some practice work, and Penny stepped away from the sport off the mat. He started hanging out with friends outside of the team, and he used some spare time to read for relaxation.

"I really got into it [reading] last summer," Penny said. "It's good for a couple of reasons. It's good for learning, and you always want to learn new things. It's also good to keep your mind off everything else. I really believe that detaching yourself is very important."

"That helped me out a lot. I think sometimes people look at failure the wrong way. It makes you feel bad about yourself and hurts, but if I

hadn't lost those matches in January, I don't think I'd have been an All-American or won the ACC. Failure is learning, and those losses exposed holes and gave me time to work on those before nationals and really improve my game."

Penny steamrolled the competition at the ACC Championship, gaining revenge over NC State's KaRonne Jones and Pittsburgh's Nick Bonaccorsi, both of whom beat him earlier in the season. In the championship match, he beat Zach Nye of Virginia 10-7 to claim his first ACC title.

"The one thing Chris Penny always had was the talent. He struggled in believing in himself early and maybe even late. Most of his career, his struggle was in his head, just believing in himself and staying tough in there when things got tough. The last month of the season, he was tough, and he believed."

– Tech wrestling coach Kevin Dresser on Chris Penny

He continued his great wrestling at the NCAAs, beating his first three opponents, including two who were seeded higher than him. A No. 14 seed, he advanced to the semifinals, where he lost to Missouri's J'Den Cox 4-1. In the third-place match, he got pinned by Iowa State's Kyven Gadson – and fractured his shoulder blade in the process.

But by finishing in sixth place at 197 pounds, he earned All-America honors – the first of his career. The top eight finishers in each weight class earn All-America status.

"It was pretty special," Penny said of his season. "It was cool. I didn't achieve what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a national champ. Looking back at it, I still ended on a high note, which I'm thankful for. A lot of seniors don't have a good end-of-the-

year performance. So even though it didn't end the way I wanted, I'm still happy that it ended on a good note."


"The one thing Chris Penny always had was the talent," Dresser said. "He struggled in believing in himself early and maybe even late. Most of his career, his struggle was in his head, just believing in himself and staying tough in there when things got tough. The last month of the season, he was tough, and he believed."

Penny is now preparing for the remainder of his life. He continues wrapping up his course work in human development, while also hanging out with good friends outside of wrestling in his spare time. Then he graduates and begins pursuit of a career. He has options, but nothing firm.

He may have wrestled for the last time, though he hesitates to say he's completely finished with the sport. To train, compete and sacrifice every day for five years and then drop it like a piece of Hokie stone isn't easy to do.

"I'm going to miss the competition more than anything," he said. "I'm going to really miss the fight and the fire. The training, I'm not going to miss as much, but I really enjoyed when I had tough matches and tough opponents. I thought my best performances came out when I was up against a lot of pressure and against tough opponents. I'm going to miss that, so I'm going to have to find something in my life to replace that – if I can."

At least at this point in his life, Chris Penny has found his destination. The twists and turns of the maze that is college life have been navigated.

It took him a while to get there, but Penny would be the first to admit – the ride has been worth it. 

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TECH SWIMMING AND DIVING TEAMS CLOSE SEASON IN STYLE

The men's team finished in the top 20 for the third straight season at the NCAA Championship, while the women's team recorded a top-25 finish for the third straight year

by Jimmy Robertson

An unbelievable season for the Tech swimming and diving teams ended in a fashion befitting of the year – strong performances at the NCAA Championships.

The Tech men's team recorded a 20th-place finish at the NCAA Championship held in Austin, Texas, on March 27-29, while the Tech women's team finished 24th at the women's NCAA Championship held March 20-22 in Minneapolis, Minn.

The 20th-place finish for the men's team marked its third straight top-20 finish. California took home the team championship, besting second-place Texas by 51 points.

"Three straight years in the top 20 is quite an accomplishment for our men's program," Tech

head coach Ned Skinner said. "Coach [Ron] Piemonte [Tech's diving coach] and our divers should be commended for an outstanding week. Ryan Hawkins has been so important to this program, and we're very proud of the emergence of T.J. Shinholser at the national level. To see Collin Higgins set an ACC record in the 200 backstroke was an especially thrilling moment for our team. This week capped a storybook season for our program, and we're so proud of this team and what they're all about, in and out of the pool."

Hawkins, a senior from Charlotte, N.C., finished in 10th place in the 1-meter diving event, 12th in the 3-meter event and a career-best fifth in the platform event. He earned All-America

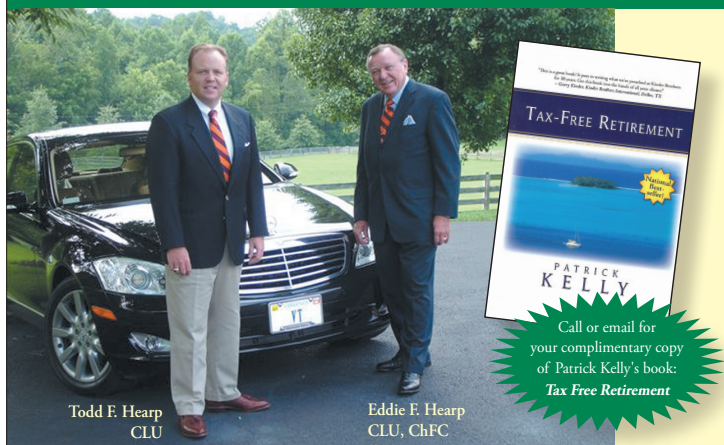
honors in the platform event, scoring 440.85 points, and honorable mention All-America honors in the 1- and 3-meter events.

A freshman, Shinholser made a splash at his first career NCAA Championship, earning All-America honors with an eighth-place finish in the platform event. He scored 316.10 points in the finals. Junior Kyle Butts took home 20th place in the platform event with a score of 302.45.

"What an awesome privilege it's been to coach Ryan [Hawkins] throughout his career," Piemonte said. "If you look at the top scores from this week, it's been such a close meet throughout, and he did an outstanding job on all three levels.

"As for T.J., I couldn't be more proud of him. Making the top eight and being an All-American

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in his first season is an amazing accomplishment. I was so proud of the divers at this meet, in all their events, and the way they finished off a great season.”

On the swimming side, Higgins, a junior, broke his own Tech record and set a new ACC record in the 200 backstroke, clocking 1:40.10 to win the consolation final. The performance earned Higgins ninth place and the first honorable mention All-America honor of his career.

On the women's side, Tech finished 24th, marking the third straight year in which the Hokies have finished in the top 25. Georgia took home the team championship.

Diver Kaylea Arnett paced the Hokies by earning three All-America honors. Arnett, a junior from Spring Hill, Texas, took third in the 1-meter event and 10th in the 3-meter event. In the platform event, she came in 15th.

Arnett's performance in the 1-meter event earned her All-America status, while her performances in the latter two earned her honorable mention All-America honors. Her third-place finish in the 1-meter marked the best finish ever, man or woman, by a Tech swimmer or diver at the NCAA Championship.


Sophomore Weronika Paluszek added to the team total with a 10th-place finish in the 200 breaststroke, earning her honorable mention All-America honors. She swam the race in a



T.J. Shinholser (left) and Ryan Hawkins claimed All-America honors in the platform event at the 2014 NCAA Men's Swimming and Diving Championship.

time of 2:08.51. She also finished 15th in the 100 breaststroke in 1:00.41, earning her honorable mention All-America honors in that event as well.

“We are very pleased with our third consecutive top-25 finish,” Skinner said. “Our ladies all

competed with gusto, and I'm very proud of their desire to perform for the cause. Kaylea had an outstanding week to score on all three levels, and Weronika had a very strong swim to secure a 24th-place finish for us.” 

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Torben Laidig has only been on Tech's campus a few months, but the Germany native claimed sixth place in the pole vault at the NCAA indoor meet to earn All-America honors.



HOKIES TRACK DOWN ALL-AMERICA HONORS

All seven Tech athletes who qualified for the NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships became All-Americans after their performances

by Jimmy Robertson

Dave Cianelli has been coaching track and field since 1985, but he thinks what transpired at this year's NCAA Indoor Track and Field Championships marked a first.

Tech's track and field teams combined to send seven athletes to the meet, which was held in Albuquerque, N.M., in mid-March, and all seven took home All-America honors, as the Hokies wrapped up the indoor season in fine fashion and got a nice jumpstart into the spring outdoor season.

"I was extremely happy," Cianelli said of his group's performance. "When you take a group where everyone scores and becomes a first-team All-American ... that's probably the first time that's happened in my tenure. It wasn't a huge group, but it was a young group. The only seniors were the Degfaes [Tihut and Lee] in the DMR [distance medley relay]. We're pretty young overall. I feel good about the next year or two because we have a lot of freshmen and sophomores who are new to the program. I think it's going to be a good outlook for the next couple of years with this group.

"But that group that went to Albuquerque

really performed well. At that meet, the quality is so high that you have to be on. You really have to bring your 'A' game."

For Tech, the national meet featured a mix of surprise performances and expected performances.

Martina Schultze, one of two women to qualify for Tech, continued her string of excellence in the pole vault. The ACC champion finished in seventh place in the event, posting a mark of 14 feet, 1.25 inches (4.30 meters). The junior from Uhingen, Germany earned All-America honors for the fifth time in her career, and she has yet to miss out on All-America honors since arriving at Tech.

"She had a little bit of a hip injury before Christmas, and it slowed down her development during the indoor season, so she wasn't quite as far along," Cianelli said. "I think that time off when she was healing put her behind a little during the indoor season. I feel like she's not going to hit her best until later in this outdoor season. She jumped well, and considering the time she missed, I think she performed well. But it wasn't her best."

The other Tech female in the contingent was

Amanda Smith, a junior from Chesapeake, Va., and she picked up where she left off from the ACC Indoor Track and Field Championship held in Clemson, S.C., on Feb. 27-March 1. Smith won the 800-meter run at the ACC meet with a time of 2:05.25, and at the NCAA meet, she finished fifth with a time of 2:06.53.

Smith earned All-America honors for the first time. Until this meet, she had never qualified for an NCAA meet.

"After what she did at ACCs, she was very confident coming off that win, and I was confident that not only would she get in the final, but also that she would have a chance," Cianelli said. "Being in the top five at her first NCAA meet is really outstanding. She's going to be right there in the outdoor season and continue to be a force in the 800 next year as well.

"Sometimes you'll get someone there for the first time and there will be some spectating going on. You don't get that kind of situation during the regular season. But I felt that everyone who was there for the first time performed at their best. For her [Smith] to run a smart race in the preliminaries and then put herself in position, I

mean, I felt she was running to win that final, and that's what I was looking for. I wanted her to be aggressive and not tentative.

"Getting fifth was a great performance, and now she knows she can run with anybody in the country and her confidence should grow. Until you do it, it's hard to convince yourself of that sometimes."

The Hokies' other individual qualifier was Torben Laidig, a freshman from Schwaebisch Hall, Germany who just enrolled this past January. He finished sixth in the pole vault, tying his personal best of 17 feet, 10.5 inches (5.45 meters). The ACC champion in the event claimed his first All-America honor.

"He's been a surprise because he just arrived in January," Cianelli said. "We did not expect that he would jump this high this soon. I think he was the surprise of the season. He came in with a PR [personal record] of 17 feet, and once he started jumping, there was a lot more there. The fact that he was able to jump high enough to win the ACC and qualify for the national meet and jump 17 feet, 10.5 (inches), that's pretty impressive.

"And he's a young kid, too. He's only 19. It's not like he's got all this experience. Coming in in January, he's really adapted well to the training. He's been very consistent. There is more there. There's no question he's going to get better. As

long as he stays healthy, I think he could be the best we've had in that event, and we've had some good vaulters over the years."

The other Tech athletes earned All-America honors as a part of a relay team. The distance medley relay team of Tihut Degfae, Lee Degfae, Martin Dally and Grant Pollock finished in sixth place with a time of 9:42.82. Tihut Degfae became an All-American for the second time, while the others earned All-America status for the first time.

The Tech men's and women's teams began the outdoor season on March 21 at the Hurricane Invitational in Miami. The ACC's outdoor meet will be held April 17-19 in Chapel Hill, N.C.


Both teams finished in fifth at the ACC's indoor meet, and Cianelli remains optimistic about both teams' chances going forward, particularly the men's squad because that group sees Darrell Wesh and Thomas Curtin return. Both took a redshirt during the indoor season because of injuries. Both are proven, as Curtin won the 5,000-meter run at last year's ACC outdoor meet, and Wesh won the 200-meter dash and finished second in the 100.

An ability to win events has become of the utmost importance now that the league consists of 14 teams because the scoring has become more spread out among the teams. For instance, a year

ago, the Tech men's team won the indoor meet with 153 points. This year, Florida State won it with 96.

"The people who can finish in the top three are more of a premium because it doesn't take 150 points to win it any more," Cianelli said. "The 10-point guy [a first-place finisher accumulates 10 points for the team total] is huge. It kind of plays into the type of team we are. Most of our scoring is high-quality kids who tend to place pretty high, and I think that's what it's going to take. We just have to have enough of them.

"The kid who scores in eighth place is important. Don't get me wrong. But you're not going to be able to make a difference in the meet with just sixth, seventh and eighth placers. You're going to need those first, second and third placers to be in the mix.

"I think we can be in the mix this year, but I think we can really make a run at it next year. I'm excited and optimistic, both for the men and the women. Our women are young. We have some outstanding freshmen and a good recruiting class coming in, and we don't lose a lot as far as graduation. The group that competed at the conference meet during the indoor season did a great job. We were just light in numbers. We need a few more than what we have, but we're not that far away." 

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ATHLETICISM RUNS in the FAMILY



Several members of Amanda Smith's family have enjoyed success in college athletics, and the Tech runner has followed suit, having won an ACC title and earned All-America honors this season

by Marc Mullen

There is that famous quotation by Benjamin Franklin, one of our nation's Founding Fathers, who wrote "... in this world, nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes."

When it comes to the sports world, a third certainty could be added and that's "injuries." There probably isn't a student-athlete who can say that he or she hasn't suffered an injury of some sorts, whether it's a mild sprain of the ankle or a severe concussion.

Most student-athletes, though, would consider the minor ones a hindrance in the pursuit of playing time, while major ones can end a student-athlete's career. In the case of junior track runner Amanda Smith, she's suffered two injuries, both of which shaped her career path and paved the way for an ACC title and an All-America performance.

Smith, a native of Chesapeake, Va., or "the 757," as she and many from the area refer to it, became the first Hokie woman in almost 20 years to win a conference crown in the 800-meter indoor race when she bested the field at the 2014 ACC Indoor Track & Field Championships at Clemson, S.C., on March 1.

She turned around two weeks later and ran to a first-team All-America honor in the 800 at the 2014 NCAA Indoor Track & Field Championships held in Albuquerque, N.M. She joined a select company of Tech track and field student-athletes.

And how was she – a runner who had never finished any better than fifth in her 2013 ACC indoor or outdoor 800-meter runs – able to accomplish this? Consistency.

"Coach [Ben] Thomas always preaches that consistency is key," Smith said. "So consistently putting in the training over the past two or three years has really helped a lot. I haven't had too many injuries, and in college, with the amount of miles we run, it's really common to get injured and take a month off at a time. So just being able to consistently get the training in and continuing to develop and be able to up my mileage has helped a lot.

"And just getting older, being stronger and smarter when it comes to making choices outside of running, too. Definitely consistency, though. I've actually dealt with a couple of injuries, but

just cross-training through them. You learn, I guess, when you get older. I always knew it was there. It was just putting it altogether, in a sense. Consistency, though, that's what coach always says."

Smith was born in Chesapeake, Va., in 1993 and is the only daughter of Steve and Debbie Smith, who also have three sons, and all the kids are roughly three years apart. The family is littered with athletes, especially from her mom's side of the family.

Amanda's oldest brother, Ryan, played football at Princeton – he majored in operations research and financial engineering and is now living in Hoboken, N.J., and selling stocks and security bonds. Her second oldest brother, Brandon, played baseball at Old Dominion, and last year, played for the Lake Erie Crushers, a team in the Independent Frontier League. Younger brother Brett is currently in high school and also looking to play baseball in college.

Her aunt, Joanie (Kampen) Dunham, played volleyball in the late 1970s for Purdue and was named the team's MVP for three straight seasons. And one of her cousins, Emerson Kampen, played basketball for the Butler Bulldogs and was part of the team that advanced to NCAA Championship games in both 2010 and 2011.

"My dad was actually a runner in high school, and he was pretty good," Smith said. "He ran like a 4:15 mile in high school back in the day. So that was pretty solid, but back then, the recruiting process was harder. There weren't as many options to get recruited, with voice mails and emails, so he ended up going to Purdue. My mom played volleyball in high school. She didn't do anything in college at Purdue, but she came from a huge family that was very athletic.

"My uncle played football in college, and my aunt played volleyball at Purdue. There's a story that her and her coach took on two of the star athletes – I think it was a football player and a baseball player – in a two-on-two volleyball match, and they beat their butts, so that's a funny story she likes to tell.

"But I have the most supportive family ever. It's great. My whole family was watching the live ESPN3 feed of me running at nationals. When I got

home, there were edible arrangements waiting for me, and my aunt, for a congratulatory gift, got me an Eats gift card for Eats Natural Foods because she knows that I love Kombucha – it's a fermented tea. And I just thought, "This is the best family ever!"

Smith's journey into athletics came about mainly because of her older siblings. She would watch them and want to do what they and other older kids were doing. So she got involved in all types of sports. She actually started off by playing T-ball, soccer and basketball, and as she got older, moved on to softball.

But in the eighth grade, she suffered that first injury, and that started her on a path toward Blacksburg.

"I did running club in middle school and I decided I loved it, and it was then when I broke my thumb playing softball," she said. "I was a catcher, and it was supposed to be a pitchout and the pitcher didn't get it out far enough. So the girl swings and then my thumb ... I broke it. So I had a cast for a while and couldn't play softball. I was devastated at the time, but looking back, it was a good thing because I was able to focus on one sport and not try and do both. And from high school to here on out, I've just focused on running."

When the recruiting process began, Smith

benefitted from having two older brothers who had gone through it, albeit in different sports. They helped her weed out the schools, told her the questions she needed to ask when talking to coaches and schools, and helped her figure out what was most important to her as not to waste official visits.

Those visits included trips to Indiana and Georgia, and she had a Virginia visit scheduled as well. The trip to Blacksburg was the third stop, and afterward, she didn't need a fourth.

"I came here, and I just fell in love with the team and the Hokie spirit and just loved it," Smith said. "I went to a basketball game, and that was exciting. I just loved that the team here really supported each other where, at a lot of the other colleges, the girls' and guys' teams weren't really close. So I kind of liked that aspect of it, because in high school, you have the same coach for girls and guys, and I kind of liked that here it was pretty similar.

"So I came here, and Coach Thomas ... I like his training philosophy, and it just seemed like a good match. I called him two days later [after her visit], and I told him 'I'm signing!' It was a love-at-first-site kind of thing."

Smith was a competitive runner for the first two years at Tech, but never made a huge impact until six weeks ago. Those performances almost

didn't come about because an injury nearly derailed her season.

She suffered a hamstring injury in November, and that forced her to take two weeks off. Normally, injuries are a bad thing, but the added rest arguably helped her in the long run.

"Coach didn't want me to run on it until it was 100 percent, so I took a little time off for it," she said. "But in the end, it might have been good because the seasons are long – outdoor goes up until the end of May, beginning of June – so maybe it was a blessing in disguise, I guess."

Smith ultimately went on to capture her first ACC gold, as she finished in 2:06.69 in the 800, more than a second ahead of teammate Hanna Green, while Frances Dowd came in fourth. She joined Jen Chapman as the only two Tech women to win an 800-meter indoor title. Chapman won hers at the 1995 Metro Conference Indoor Track and Field Championships – three leagues ago.

Smith qualified for NCAA indoor meet, an incredible achievement in its own right. Only the top 16 times throughout the entire indoor season make the meet, as opposed to the outdoor season when student-athletes first qualify for the regional meet and then advance to the national meet from there.

At the NCAA indoor meet, she had just one goal in mind – to make it to the finals.



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“Because the top three in each heat advanced into finals, that race [her preliminary race] was a sit-and-kick race to try and get into finals,” she said. “And that was my goal going into nationals. I just wanted to make finals, because without a good day 1, there’s no day 2. So I just sat with them and kicked and made sure I allowed myself enough time to successfully kick.


“You don’t want to wait until the last 25 meters before the line. So it all just fell into place for me. The final was just go for it and get as high of a

place as you can. A girl took it out pretty decent, and a couple of laps were a little slow and you get boxed in, but that happens in those national meets. That was more a just run-as-fast-as-you-can race.”

With her fifth-place finish at the NCAA meet, Smith became just the sixth Hokie woman ever to finish in the top five of an individual event at the indoor meet, joining Kristi Castlin (60-meter hurdles, 2008-10), Queen Harrison (60-meter hurdles, 2008 and 2010), Kristin Price

(3,000-meter run, 2001), Martina Schultze (pole vault, 2013) and Saskia Triesscheijn (pentathlon, 2006).

The hamstring issue turned out to be a minor injury, but even so, the accomplishments by Smith during the indoor season certainly fit the bill for another, though not as famous, Franklin quote:

“Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing.” For sure, she did the latter. 

FIVE QUESTIONS FOR AMANDA

Q: The NCAA meet was held in Albuquerque, N.M. Did you notice the altitude there at all? (Blacksburg’s elevation is 2,080 feet, while the Albuquerque indoor track’s elevation is 4,958 feet).

AS: “I didn’t really notice a difference. Some of the girls said that they did. The race was kind of short, just two minutes. I don’t think it really mattered too much. I just know that Coach Thomas said – because everyone kept asking him what’s it going to be like running there – that we go out to Mountain Lake [elevation 4,363 feet] and do a run out there, and there’s one little hill climb that’s called Bald Knob. So when you get to the top of that, it’s the same elevation as Albuquerque.”

Q: What was one of your worst moments?

AS: “I crashed my mom’s car when I had my learner’s permit. I was not really paying attention, and I looked up and saw a car

coming and just drove my mom’s car into a ditch. My mom was in the car with me. It was bad, but we were all OK. The car was totaled. It was a Volvo convertible that my mom got from my dad for her birthday, and I felt terrible. I told her that I wasn’t shopping again for the next 10 years. I think I was shopping like two months later, but I felt so awful.”

Q: What do you want to do after college?

AS: “Well, originally coming in, my plan was to be a dietician. I’m really interested in sports nutrition and how food affects your body, performance and recovery. It would be awesome to get into developing power bars or something like that, healthier ones. They have 40-30-30 balance bars, but they are all full of chemicals. There’s this elite runner – her name is Lauren Fleshman – and she came out with these bars called Picky Bars, which is the perfect 4-to-1 carbohydrate-to-protein ratio for recovery and energy.”

Q: Do you have any interesting talents?

AS: “Back in high school, I started sewing my own clothes, but I didn’t bring my sewing machine to Tech. It was a little hobby. My grandma actually helped me sew my first pair of pajama pants, so from there, I started making high-waist skirts and tank tops and things like that. I used to go to Hancock Fabrics all the time. I used to joke that it was my favorite store, but I haven’t done that in a while and it was just for fun.”

Q: What do you do in your free time?

AS: “Go to Cookout on Saturday night and getting a milk shake after a long run. We [she and her teammates] always go to Our Daily Bread in the morning after our long runs, too. We also do a lot of movie nights together, which is cool because our guys and girls will all do that. We also bake together and cook dinner for each other. We’re kind of like a little family, and that’s why I love Tech so much.”



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Scott Vincent has won three times this season and is on pace to become Tech's all-time leader in career scoring average.

STAYING ON COURSE

Tech golfer Scott Vincent has lived through some turbulent times in his native country of Zimbabwe, but that hasn't kept him from swinging his way into the school's record books

by Jimmy Robertson

Most junior golfers grow up blessed, taking full advantage of affluent parents with large bank accounts. They use those benefits to play at exclusive country clubs, work under the best personal instructors and travel all over the country to play in prestigious amateur tournaments.

Scott Vincent's background is a tad bit more modest. He grew up playing on the hardscrabble courses of his native Zimbabwe, a country in the southern part of Africa. Grass-carpeted fairways there were a luxury, and smooth, well-manicured greens were scarce.

So he chuckles when he hears his current Virginia Tech teammates grumble about a particular course.

"Don't get me wrong," he said. "There are times when I look at a course and think, 'Ah, this is wrong here and here.' But when I do think about what I have played on before, it does make me appreciate just what we have here."

Vincent, though, appreciates more than just pristine course conditions now that he's playing for the Hokies and living and going to school here in the United States. He learned a long time ago not to take simple things, such as food and fuel, for granted. Growing up in Harare, Zimbabwe – a city of roughly 1.6 million people – he and his family never knew if they would have enough of either.

For those unfamiliar with this nation, Zimbabwe is a landlocked country of around

13 million people that borders South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana. It serves as the co-home (with Zambia) of one of the most spectacular waterfalls in the world, Victoria Falls, which draws tourists from around the world, and the country possesses a rich sports history, with Nick Price having won three majors in golf, and Kirsty Coventry having won two Olympic gold medals in swimming. But lately, Zimbabwe has become more synonymous with government instability and economic hardship.

Vincent's father works in banking software, thus providing a good source of income for the family. But that doesn't mean they were immune to every-day issues.

"It was tough," Vincent said. "There was a point when we'd go to the shops and walk in a grocery store, and there wouldn't be a single bit of food anywhere to be found. The whole store would be empty. There were tough situations that my parents had to go through. Looking back, I don't know how they did it. God made a way, and we were able to get through that situation. He looked after us and so many families in that country."

"It was a bit unstable, but I managed to come through. It's crazy to think that a little kid from Harare, Zimbabwe is now playing golf at Virginia Tech. It's a cool story. There are a lot of others like me."

Tech golf coach Jay Hardwick knows that. He's coached five golfers from Zimbabwe during his time at Tech, including Brendon de Jonge, who currently plays on the PGA Tour. Most enjoyed success while in his program.

Vincent, though, may be the best of the bunch.

Vincent got his start in golf like many young kids do – by following his dad to the course and whacking around a few balls for fun. The fun became a passion. Then the passion became an obsession. Vincent then got serious about a potential future in the sport.

"The older I got, the hungrier I got for the game," Vincent said. "When I was about 14, that's when I made the decision that I wanted to take this seriously and turn it into a career some day."

As a teenager, Vincent got connected with a man named Roger Baylis, a noted golf instructor in Harare. Baylis serves as the head professional at Chapman Golf Club, one of the nicer courses in the country, and he has worked with numerous junior golfers over the years. He also serves as the national coach for the Zimbabwe Golf Association.

Baylis saw potential in Vincent and started working with him. Of course, that required Vincent to come to the course regularly – something much harder to accomplish than splitting a narrow fairway 300 yards long.

"It was hard to get gas sometimes, so it was hard to get to the golf course," Vincent said.

Under Baylis' tutelage, Vincent became a good golfer and received recognition on the junior circuit. Baylis drove him to tournaments and later selected him to play on the Zimbabwe junior team and national team.

Vincent's play earned him invitations to more prestigious tournaments, and he has played all over the world. As a teenager, he played in the Junior Orange Bowl International Championship held at the Biltmore Golf Course in Coral Gables,

Fla. – a tournament he would eventually play in four times. It was there where he received close scrutiny from Hardwick, the Hokies' coach.

"He was so little when I first saw him that I wasn't sure he could be a mascot," Hardwick said,

“There was a point when we'd go to the shops and walk in a grocery store, and there wouldn't be a single bit of food anywhere to be found. The whole store would be empty. There were tough situations that my parents had to go through. Looking back, I don't know how they did it. God made a way.”

– Scott Vincent on some tough times while growing up in Zimbabwe

with a chuckle.

But Hardwick trusted what he saw – a young golfer with tremendous hands. He also trusted Baylis, a man he came to know while serving as the coach of Team USA at the 1992 World Junior Team Championship held in Izumo City, Japan. The U.S. team and the Zimbabwe team, coached by Baylis, were paired together for a round.

"We struck up a friendship," Hardwick said. "For one thing, there were only three or four of us [coaches] over there who spoke English, so we

at that time, but Sean was a bright, young man, and things worked out. He was a terrific player for us."

That started the pipeline. Hardwick later got de Jonge, a heavily recruited player, primarily because Baylis trusted Hardwick and the way Hardwick's program and the school had treated Farrell. Later on, Hardwick signed Nick MacDonald, and a few years ago, Marc MacDonald.

Vincent wanted to come to Tech all along. He knew of Farrell and de Jonge, and he was friends with the MacDonalds, particularly Marc, who played on the Tech team the past three seasons.

"I heard about Virginia Tech through them and had my eyes focused on Virginia Tech, but hadn't been given the green light," Vincent said. "I played in that tournament four years, and Jay Hardwick saw me and eventually gave me an opportunity to play here, which I ended up taking."

"He was very smallish in size, but that never bothers me," Hardwick said. "Guys get bigger and stronger. No one really knew about him at the time. By the time he became a junior, we knew we really wanted him. By the time he played as a senior, he had signed with us."



Scott Vincent won twice in September to become the first Tech player to be named ACC Player of the Month, and then he fired a 13-under-par 203 to win the Bank of Tennessee Intercollegiate in Johnson City, Tenn., in early October.

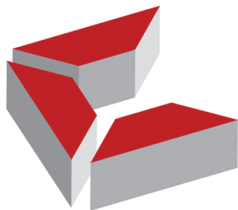
had to band together. We hit it off, and we played together [that round].

"Sean Farrell [a former Tech golfer] played on that team [from Zimbabwe], and I was very impressed with him. I talked to Roger about him and asked if he wanted to play golf in the States. They hadn't had anyone be able to do that, and I had never done much with international players

Vincent never took an official visit. He trusted the MacDonalds and trusted Hardwick.

He saw Virginia Tech for the first time only days before beginning classes for the fall semester.

Vincent's adaptation to American culture took some time. He needed to learn his way around Tech's campus, and he needed to adjust to simple



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things, like time management considering his course workload and Tech's practice schedule. He also had to adapt to the food and the people.

Marc MacDonald helped him, but he couldn't be with Vincent every minute of the day. So mostly what Vincent learned, he did on his own.

"It was a completely different culture compared to back home," Vincent said. "The people are very friendly, but still different. The food was different. The workload was different. A lot of things were different."

He felt a little more at home on the golf course, where, as a freshman, he earned the right to be the Hokies' No. 2 player in the lineup behind Mikey Moyers. Yet his confidence took a hit following his first collegiate tournament.

At that event – the Northern Intercollegiate played at Rich Harvest Farms outside of Chicago – Vincent finished in a respectable 14th place, and the team came in fourth. But he shot 8-over-par, not his usual high standard.

That prompted a phone call home to his dad.

"I said, 'I don't think I'm good enough to play college golf,'" Vincent said. "It was the hardest tournament, and I still think it was one of the hardest courses I've ever played on. I thought, 'If this is what college golf is, I don't know if I have the game for it.'"

"I'll never forget that. But he [his dad] was there to tell me to keep going and do my best and that was all I could do. Fortunately, I listened to that and didn't shoot off back home."

He finished his freshman year shooting a 73.3 average, second on the team. His best finish came at the NCAA regional when he came in third. Tech advanced out of the regional to the NCAA Championship held at famed Riviera Country Club near Los Angeles, and Vincent finished 45th.

Last year, he improved, shooting an average of 71.7 – tops on the squad. He posted five top-five finishes and three more top-10 finishes. His immense talent started showing, but he wanted to get that elusive victory.

That came in the opening tournament this past fall. He tied a school record with an 8-under-par 64 in the final round to claim co-medalist honors at the Golfweek Conference Challenge held at Spirit Hollow Golf Club in Burlington, Iowa. The tournament honored him with the champion's trophy because he had the lowest final round.

Vincent went on to win two more times last fall.

"The fall semester was crazy," he said. "Everything fell into place for me. It couldn't have gone any better, and it was really cool to experience that. It gave me a lot of confidence, but this semester [the spring semester] has put a lot of pressure on me and I haven't handled it

as well as I would have liked. But that's just a process I'm learning and going through."

It's not like Vincent has been a hack this spring. The young man shot 4-under-par in the spring-opening tournament in Puerto Rico, finishing in 16th, and he finished second at the Augusta Invitational in Augusta, Ga., seventh at the Furman Intercollegiate in Greenville, S.C., and 10th at the Mission Inn Spring Spectacular in Florida on a tough course.

But he has higher expectations of himself.

"I see a little frustration," Hardwick said. "Scotty didn't have his 'A' game at the Mission Inn tournament. He probably had his 'B' game, but he still finished 10th."

"We've got four guys who can play, and I think it would have been a lot tougher on Scotty had he not played as well and the team not played well. He would have thought he had to carry things on his shoulders, and he doesn't have to do that."

As he finishes his junior campaign, Vincent remains on course to become the school's all-time leader in scoring average. De Jonge fired an average of 72.60 per round during his career (1999-2003), and Vincent entered the spring with a 72.07 average. Of course, that's a moving target, but his 70.50 average through 26 rounds this season certainly keeps him on pace.

The two Zimbabwean and Tech greats have not met. But that will change after Tech's tournament in Augusta, Ga., in early April. Hardwick arranged for the team to take in one of the Masters' practice rounds, and de Jonge is competing in the Masters.


"I'm looking forward to that," Vincent said. "It'll be good to finally introduce myself to him."

School records and meeting national heroes are secondary to Vincent's ultimate goal – getting the Hokies back to the NCAA Division I Men's Golf Championship. His freshman season, he and the Hokies advanced out of the regionals to the Championship for the third time in school history. Tech finished 24th.

With three players ranked in the top 100, including Vincent, who is ranked in the top 25, the Hokies want nothing less than a return trip.

"We do have high expectations," Vincent said. "We've got a team top to bottom that is really strong. You have a bit of that pressure, and we have been able to step up and play to what is expected."

Vincent already has come a long way – literally and figuratively. The small kid of humble beginnings from Zimbabwe is now one of the best junior golfers in the United States.

His is certainly a great story to tell. Hopefully, getting to this point was just the beginning. 

GETTING TO KNOW SCOTT VINCENT

Q: You've talked about the transition to American culture and one of the differences being the food. Do you have a favorite food now?

SV: "I'm a big fan of Mexican. I like Chipotle, Qdoba, Moe's ... I'm a big fan of some American foods, but I try to stay away from the burgers and fries and things like that. I'm a big fan of Mexican. We don't have Mexican in Zimbabwe. Maybe that's something I'll open if golf doesn't work out."

Q: You usually go home over the summer and during winter break. How long is the trip?

SV: "The total flying time is about 22 hours, but the travel time is about 30 hours because of the waiting in the airports and that type of stuff. I usually fly from Roanoke to D.C. and then from D.C. to Johannesburg [South Africa]. We stop in Dakar, Senegal to refuel and then continue on. You have to sit on the plane for two hours while they refuel it. From Johannesburg, we'll fly to Harare. So it's a long trip."

Q: Have you ever been to Victoria Falls, which is on the border with your country and Zambia? It's one of the most beautiful places in the world.

SV: "I've been there three times. The most recent time was last summer. I had a friend from America come to Zimbabwe, and we went to Victoria Falls. It was unbelievable. Every time I've been, it just hits you, like, 'Wow.' It's truly amazing."

Q: Have your parents been over here to see you play?

SV: "They have not. They haven't had the opportunity, but they have talked about it. There is a good chance they will be here in December. Not that I'll be playing, but they'll have the opportunity to see the university. My dad has been to America a few times, but my mom has not, and neither of them have seen the university, so that would be good."

Q: Have you been to Lane Stadium for a football game?

SV: "Whenever we're not playing, we'll be




in there if there's a home game. I didn't know anything about football until I came here, but I've slowly picked up on it. I'm not 100 percent there. I enjoy watching football. It's my favorite of all the American sports."

Q: We understand that you had never seen snow before arriving here in Blacksburg. Is that true?

SV: "This was the first time. Zimbabwe is a lot warmer than it is here. That was really cool to see snow for the first time. But after a lot of snow, I've seen enough of it. It can go away now."

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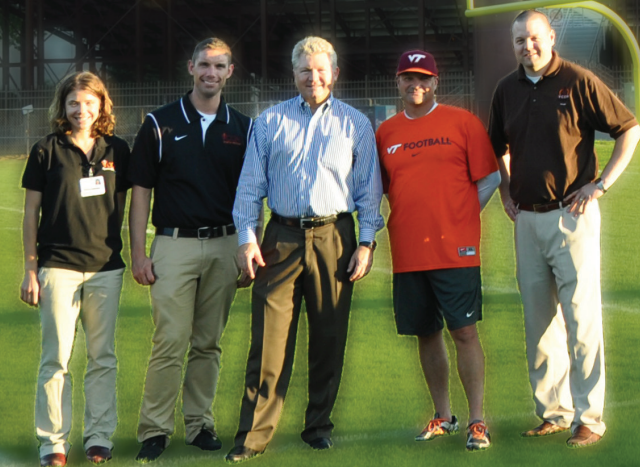
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