

inside

HOKIESPORTS

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The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics

YOUNG PLAYERS *SHOW STUFF* THIS SPRING



Greg Stroman, who returned a punt 88 yards for a touchdown in the Maroon-Orange game, is among a group of underclassmen who have created excitement about the 2015 season with their play in spring practices

WHAT'S NEXT: Softball standout Kelsey Mericka is accomplishing big things both on and off the field

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SWEEPING BC OUT OF BLACKSBURG

Brendon Hayden's two-run walk-off home run in the bottom of the ninth inning lifted the Virginia Tech baseball team to a 2-1 win over Boston College and capped a series sweep of the Eagles for the Hokies. The win marked Tech's sixth of a seven-game winning streak heading into exams, including four in conference action. It also marked the Hokies' 12th conference win this year, tying for the third-most ACC wins in a season since the school joined the league for the 2004-05 season.

THE STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

"I am very appreciative of my scholarship and those involved who make it happen. I can't thank them enough because, without them and my scholarship, I wouldn't have been able to experience all of what Blacksburg has to offer and the great support and spirit of Hokie Nation."

Jon Woodcock
Redshirt Junior | Ojai, California

"I am very appreciative for my scholarship and for all those who make the Hokie Club happen. Their efforts help give student-athletes such as me the opportunity to come to a great university and compete for their school. Their support goes a long way, and I thank them for that."

Brendon Hayden
Senior | Twin Lakes, Wisconsin



The Donor File



Q&A

Q: A Hokie is ...

A: When Virginia Tech beat Texas in the Sugar Bowl in 1995, a TV reporter asked a friend of mine, "What is a Hokie?" He responded, "I'm glad you asked. A Hokie is an a--kicking turkey."

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because ...

A: Thousands follow the Hokies out of love and respect for Virginia Tech.

Q: What is your best memory of Virginia Tech athletics?

A: Virginia Tech beating the University of Texas in the Sugar Bowl in 1995. Bryan Still ran a kick back for a touchdown and scored another on a long pass from Jim Druckenmiller. The headline in the morning paper led with, "In the Still of the night."

Q: How did you get involved with the Hokie Club?

A: I became seriously involved when Bud Keever brought John Moody to my office in 1992 and asked for what I thought was a lot of money. Moody told me how much I was going to enjoy it. As it turned out, I gave the money, and I have enjoyed being a participant as opposed to a spectator.

Q: What caused you to become a fan of Virginia Tech?

A: Virginia Tech gave me a chance to get an education, and I have great love and respect for the university.

Frank N. Cowan

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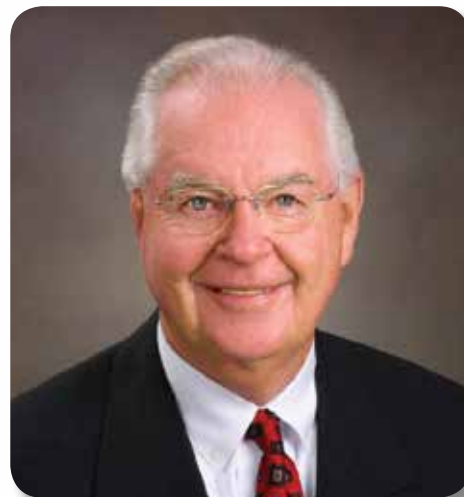
GRADUATION YEAR:

1959

FAMILY:

Marianne (wife);

Neil, Chris and Brandon (sons)



Q: Describe your perfect day at Virginia Tech.

A: A beautiful fall day shared with friends and the Tech football team winning.

Q: Please let us know what made you want to support our 110% campaign.

A: I believe in the concept and understand that to compete with other schools we have to step up in our individual support.

Q: I'm a Hokie Club member because ...

A: I want to participate in raising funds in order that we may compete with the

schools in the ACC and other top schools. It is not enough to be a spectator.

Q: My favorite Virginia Tech sports are ...

A: Football, basketball (men's and women's) and golf (men's and women's).

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech football player is ...

A: Michael Vick was the most exciting player and raised the interest in VT football.

Q: My all-time favorite Virginia Tech student-athlete from another sport is ...

A: Dell Curry, Virginia Tech basketball.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ...

110% HOKIE

Every day, Hokie coaches and student-athletes give 110 percent. Whether it's in the classroom, community, or in competition, they are passionate about Virginia Tech. Now we are asking you, the heart and soul of our "team," to do the same by adding an extra 10 percent to your annual Hokie Club gift from last year! Your investment will directly impact all of our talented student-athletes who work tirelessly every day to bring academic success, ACC championships and national recognition to their teams, the University and our fans. Now it's your chance to take the challenge ... and give 110 percent!!

KENDALL FULLER

Cornerback
Baltimore, Md.
Major: Finance



TARA NAHODIL

Center
Pine Grove, Pa.
Major: Human Development



TO GIVE CALL 540.231.6618 OR GO ONLINE HOKIECLUB.COM

Letter from Lu

Hello contributors,

I hope the spring finds all of you doing well! I have several topics that I want to address with this letter and encourage you all to read it through.

Here they are:

110% Hokie Campaign

You recently received some information explaining the cost of attendance for our student-athletes. New legislation passed by the NCAA in January will help student-athletes meet the incidental costs of attending college. The athletics department and the Hokie Club jointly launched the 110% Hokie Campaign where we asked for your support by increasing your annual gift by 10 percent to help us meet the rising costs of tuition, room, board and institutional fees. One of our longtime members sent a check for \$12,000! This is an excellent example of his Hokie spirit and how one Hokie has stepped up to help meet this challenge.

I am happy to report that the first two weeks of the campaign have produced good results. Each member sent a check for \$12,000! This is an excellent example of his Hokie spirit and how one Hokie has stepped up to help meet this challenge. I am encouraged by the early responses, and I hope that each of you will be able to participate in the campaign. Each gift helps, and collectively, they will make a difference.

Charles D. Phlegar

On April 20, President Timothy D. Sands appointed Charles D. Phlegar to be the university's first Vice President for Advancement. He starts his new assignment on July 1, and while I will not have the pleasure of working with him, I wanted to applaud the hire and welcome him back to his alma mater.

I knew Charlie when he was here at Virginia Tech in the mid-1980s and have followed his career at East Carolina, South Carolina, Johns Hopkins, and most recently, Cornell. He has demonstrated proven fundraising skills and will bring an "orange and maroon" passion to this important job. I am impressed with Tim Sands and Whit Babcock and what each has done during their first years on campus. Charles Phlegar is another excellent addition to the university's senior leadership team. Charlie will enable Virginia Tech, and in our case, intercollegiate athletics, to develop a more efficient fundraising model. Welcome home, Charlie Phlegar!

ACC meetings

On April 20-21, the athletic development directors from each of the 15 ACC schools met in Greensboro at the ACC headquarters. We discussed a number of topics, including how to pay for the full cost of attendance. I am proud to be associated with this group of outstanding people and professional fundraisers. Amy Yakola, senior associate commissioner and chief of external affairs, served as liaison for our group to the athletics directors. It is important that you know that our meetings are designed with you, our fans and donors, in mind. We frequently discuss how we can make the gameday experience better for you, including the ACC football and basketball championships. This past year, the 15 member schools raised a total of \$340 million in support of our athletics programs.

Spring sports snapshot

Virginia Tech played host to the 2015 ACC Softball Championship on May 7-9, and Virginia Tech was selected to play host to the first and second round of an NCAA men's tennis regional on May 8-9. Head coach Jim Thompson was named ACC Men's Tennis Coach of the Year. These opportunities to play host to these events bring new faces to campus, and it gives the athletics department the opportunity to show off its facilities, as well as sharing the experience with the local fans.

The women's tennis team traveled to California for an NCAA first-round match, and the men's golf team was the seventh seed at the NCAA Noblesville Regional held at Sagamore Golf Club in Noblesville, Indiana, on May 14-16.

Orange and Maroon Tour

The last stop of this year's tour will be in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, on June 7. Golf and dinner will be held at Wild Wing Plantation, with special guest Torrian Gray, the Hokies' defensive backs coach. If you live in the area, please come out and enjoy this terrific event. For more information, contact Dorothy Long at 843-448-4531.

Graduation

Virginia Tech held commencement activities on May 15-16. On behalf of the Hokie Club staff, I want to thank all of the senior student-athletes who have provided us with many exciting moments on the courts, fields, mats, pools and tracks during their stays here in Blacksburg. We look forward to following their careers and to the opportunity of seeing them back on campus as alumni. They have made Virginia Tech athletics better. Their service to the community has made a difference in the lives of many. Good luck, and God speed to all of them!

Get Your Tickets

On Sept. 7, the biggest game in the history of Lane Stadium will be played before a packed stadium and millions of viewers on national television. If you have not ordered your season tickets, please do so today. Plan to be here and support your Hokies, as they play host to the national champion Ohio State Buckeyes!

Lu Merritt

Senior Director of Development for Intercollegiate Athletics



@HokieClub



@StudentHokieClub



/HokieClub

Gobblers awards show recognizes Tech’s top performances of 2014-15

The Virginia Tech athletics department celebrated the athletics and academic accomplishments of its student-athletes and coaches on May 6 at the inaugural Gobblers awards show held at the Moss Arts Center on campus.

The Gobblers awards show took the place of the annual All-Sports Banquet, as the athletics administration changed the format. The new format is similar to the ESPY’s – ESPN’s awards show that recognizes individual and team athletics achievement and other sports-related performances.

Andrew Allegretta, the radio voice of the women’s basketball and baseball programs, served as the master of ceremonies for the event, and members of the Virginia Tech Student-Athlete Advisory Committee presented the awards. Here is the complete list of top accomplishments and of those recognized:

- **Best Game** (the team or individual with the best played game of the year) – football vs. Ohio State
- **Best Sports Moment** (the team or individual whose performance was both inspirational and memorable through either a single act or a broader storyline. This moment can be on or off the playing surface) – Hannah Young, game-winning buzzer beater vs. NC State at the ACC Tournament
- **Male Rookie of the Year** (this award went to one male student-athlete in his first year of competition who has made a tremendous impact on his team through his performance. Only freshmen and redshirt freshmen are eligible) – Isaiah Ford, football (also nominated: Zach Epperly, wrestling; Ricardo John, men’s soccer)
- **Female Rookie of the Year** (this award went to one female student-athlete in her first year of competition who has made a tremendous impact on her team through

her performance. Only freshmen and redshirt freshmen were eligible) – Klaudia Nazieblo, women’s swimming (also nominated: Madi Conyers, women’s soccer; Breanna Davenport, softball)

• **SAAC Member of the Year** (the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee is a leadership group consisting of student-athletes representing all sports at Virginia Tech and serves as a liaison between the administration and the student-athlete experience) – Carol Kahoun, women’s tennis

• **ACC Top Six for Service Awards** - Each year, the ACC honors student-athletes on each campus for their outstanding dedication to service. Virginia Tech, with its motto of Ut Prosim, is proud to have student-athletes involved in service projects annually, including but not limited to: volunteering at local elementary schools and participating in programs like Micah’s Backpack and Herma’s Readers.

This year, six student-athletes who have embraced the university motto and have dedicated countless hours to serving the community selflessly were honored. The six were: Ronny Vandyke (football), Katie Bean (women’s diving), Matt Dauby (baseball), Christian Beyer (men’s basketball), Michelle Prong (softball) and Scot Vincent (golf).

• **Best Breakthrough** (this award went to an athlete who has increased his or her performance dramatically) – Robert Owen, men’s swimming (also nominated: Christian Beyer, men’s basketball; Thomas Curtin, men’s track and field)

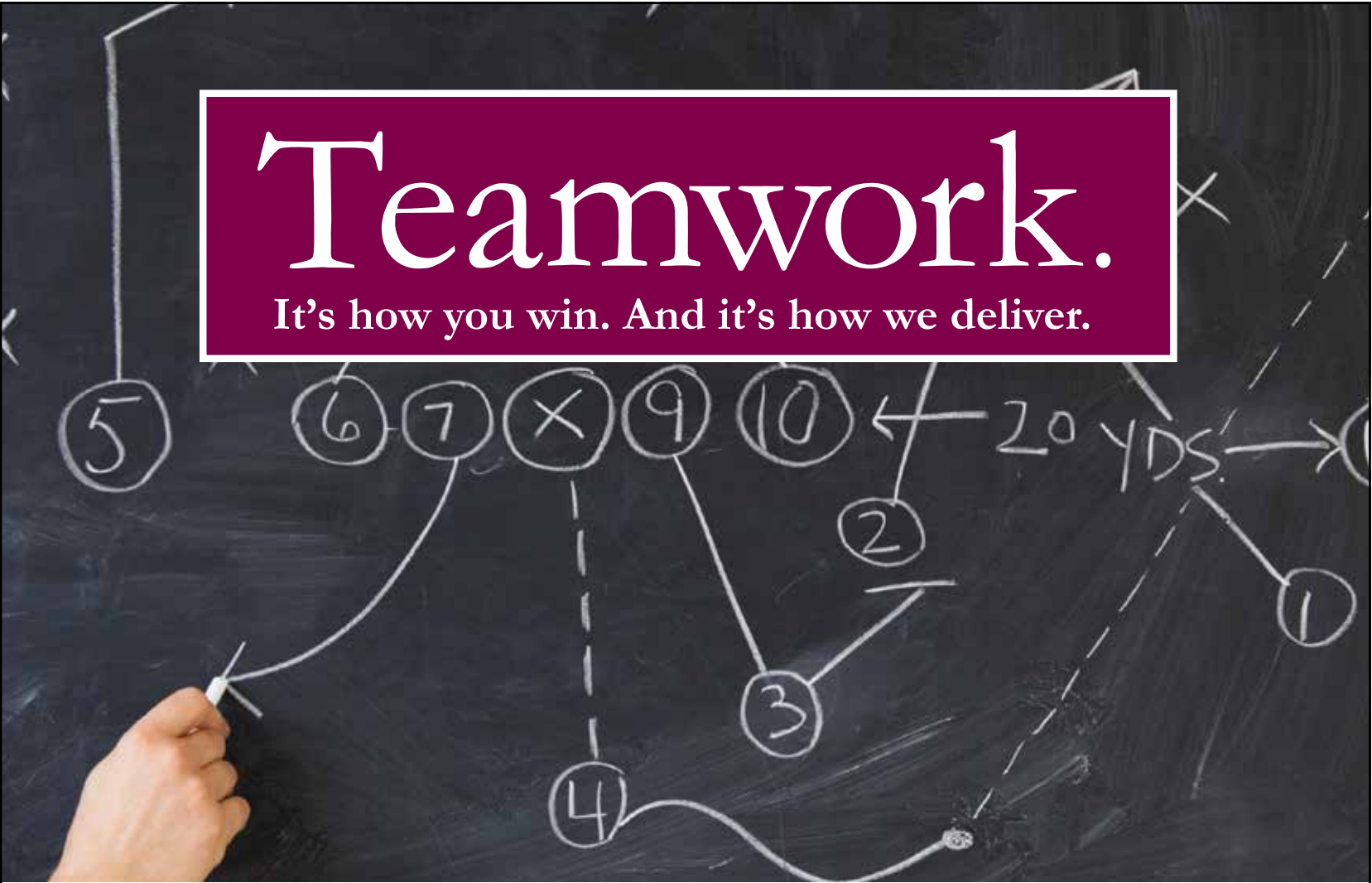
• **Best Upset** (this award went to a team that won a game or competition over an opponent that was either ranked significantly higher or posed seemingly insurmountable odds) – men’s tennis vs. No. 2 Duke (also nominated: baseball vs. Virginia)

• **Best Championship Performance** (this award went to the team that rose to the occasion and had an outstanding performance in an ACC or NCAA championship competition) – men’s track and field winning the ACC indoor championship (Also nominated: wrestling at the NCAA Championships; women’s basketball in the ACC Tournament; men’s basketball vs. Wake Forest in the ACC Tournament)

• **Best Male Athlete** (this award went to one male student-athlete who consistently led his team to notable athletics success throughout the season. In short, he was the MVP of all male student-athletes) – Devin Carter, wrestling (also nominated: Thomas Curtin, men’s track and field; Kendall Fuller, football)

• **Best Female Athlete** (this award went to one female student-athlete who consistently led her team to notable athletics success throughout the season. In short, she was the MVP of all female student-athletes) – Kaylea Arnett, women’s diving (also nominated: Murielle Tiernan, women’s soccer; Hanna Green, track and field)

The following student-athletes were named team MVPs: Alex Perez and Brendon Hayden (baseball); Justin Bibbs (men’s basketball); Vanessa Panousis (women’s basketball); Stuart Robertson (men’s cross country); Paige Kvartunas (women’s cross country); Willie Byrn (football); Trevor Cone (golf); Megan Will (lacrosse); Ricardo John (men’s soccer); Shannon Mayrose (women’s soccer); Kylie McGoldrick (softball); Robert Owen (men’s swimming); Weronika Paluszek (women’s swimming); Logan Stevens (men’s diving); Kaylea Arnett (women’s diving); Hunter Koontz and Andreas Bjerrehus (men’s tennis); Francesca Fusinato (women’s tennis); Thomas Curtin (men’s indoor track and field); Hanna Green (women’s indoor track and field); Manuel Ziegler (men’s outdoor track and field); Irena Sediva (women’s outdoor track and field); Lindsey Owens (volleyball); Devin Carter (wrestling); Cecile Nguyen (HighTechs); Andrew Stone (men’s cheerleading); and Kelsey Smith (women’s cheerleading). VT



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editor's desk | by Jimmy Robertson

Spring performances leave many feeling bullish about 2015 Hokies

On April 30, Virginia Tech President Dr. Timothy Sands and Robert Sumichrast, the dean of the Pamplin College of Business, rang the opening bell at the Nasdaq Marketsite in New York's Times Square, signifying the start of the day's trading action on the electronic stock market.

The two of them visited the Marketsite with Virginia Tech alumni and other representatives from the school, including those from the university's Apex Systems Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, which promotes creativity, innovation and vision. The Nasdaq will be launching a similar center in September.

Their visit came four days after the conclusion of the Hokies' annual Maroon-Orange game, one that capped the NCAA's 15-practice allotment, and one that, in keeping with the theme, left Tech fans feeling rather bullish about the approaching 2015 season.

Frank Beamer, the CEO of this operation, certainly felt that way about his team's prospects.

"I think our coaches and players have gotten the most out of it that we could get," Beamer said following the spring game. "I like our football team."

This team certainly has some blue chip stocks — Kendall Fuller, Dadi Nicolas, Isaiah Ford, Bucky Hodges come to mind. Beamer hopes these pay handsome dividends this fall.

But what about the sleepers, or for the sake of this column, the "IPOs?" Which of these stocks are ready to explode? Attending all or parts of all 15 practices gives yours truly some insider knowledge.

That said, here are five to watch once the opening bell of football season rings next fall:

Chuck Clark — Did you know that defensive back Chuck Clark was third on the team in tackles last season? Or that he led all defensive backs with 8.5 tackles for a loss? Or that his 11 pass breakups ranked second on the team?

This kid possesses the lockdown potential of Kendall Fuller, only without the name recognition. He was dominant this spring, and the coaching staff took notice, naming him the defense's MVP. Known for being versatile, he may end up at free safety, or at nickel, pending the return of Brandon Facyson.

He's not a stock, but if he were, you'd better invest now. The price is only going higher.

Eric Gallo — In stock market terminology, Gallo went public last year, playing sparingly as a true freshman. But he took off this spring.

Gallo wears No. 64 and plays center, so the inevitable comparisons to Jake Grove pop up. He needs a little more seasoning before this writer goes down that road, but certainly Gallo displayed size, smarts and toughness this spring.

He looks like he could be the rare three-year starter on the offensive line. Not bad for a prospect whose only other offer was Temple.

Travon McMillian — Speaking of ridiculous comparisons, McMillian conjures images of David Wilson, the former electrifying tailback. He may be the best breakaway threat in the Hokies' backfield this upcoming season.

McMillian may play the same role that Wilson played as a freshman when he backed up Ryan

Williams and Josh Oglesby. Look for McMillian to get a few carries, catch a few passes, return a few kicks — and make something happen.

Vinny Mihota — There is a lot to love about Mihota, a big, physical, smart guy with better quickness than the staff originally thought. But his versatility gives him a distinct advantage over several of his defensive line teammates.

He can play any position, and play them well. The staff raved about him by the end of spring, and line coach Charley Wiles already has stated that Mihota is one of the top eight in the rotation.

Expect him to play a lot and to make plays.

C.J. Reavis — Like Gallo, Reavis went public last year, playing as a true freshman. He played sparingly on Tech's defense, but saw extensive action on special teams.

Don't expect any depreciation here. Reavis solidified the top spot at rover coming out of spring practice. He needs to tidy some things up in terms of coverage, but he plays downhill in the running game, and he may have been the best player on the field in the spring game.

The Hokies have a nice portfolio, as they head into the summer months preparing for the season opener against Ohio State. They possess the steady value plays in proven guys like Michael Brewer, J.C. Coleman, Ryan Malleck, Luther Maddy and Deon Clark. They own growth potential with the above-mentioned guys along with others such as Wyatt Teller, Seth Dooley and Greg Stroman. Such talent leaves Tech fans feeling a sense of optimism.

What will the returns be? Hokie Nation will begin to find out on Sept. 7.

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Bidding farewell is never easy, especially to a wonderful group such as Hokie Nation

This will be my final Kroger Roth Report at Virginia Tech, and I'm limited to 1,200 words to say "thank you" to so many people. Summing up 27 years and thousands of broadcasts in 1,200 words is nearly an impossible task. We've had so much fun over the decades, haven't we?

Leaving Virginia Tech has been the most difficult decision I've had to make in my life, and I've been blessed to have some great friends and advisors from both within and outside the Virginia Tech family to help me along the way, especially during the past six weeks. Still, it's been an incredibly emotional time for me, and I hope you had the chance to see the video that the HokieVision staff created – one that pretty much covers the story: <http://vthoki.es/roth>.

As as I mentioned on the air at the conclusion of our spring game broadcast, I'm not saying goodbye as much as I am saying "Thank you!" Thanks to our administrators, staff and coaches who entrusted me with delivering our institution's messages over the years. Thank you to our players – thousands of you who helped create the lasting memories over the past 27 years. And most of all, thank you to the amazing Virginia Tech fans who have been supportive over the decades. Thank you for packing the stadiums, and listening to, watching and attending our shows, from Blacksburg to New Orleans to Miami to Nashville to Atlanta and many other places.

You guys have been great.

I'll never forget the day at Kenan Stadium in Chapel Hill when the North Carolina quarterback had to call a timeout because the Virginia Tech fans were roaring so loudly prior to a third-down snap. I've never seen that happen before at the other team's place, before or since!



Mike Burnop (left) and Bill Roth shared many memories and called some of the greatest moments in Tech history. Their last broadcast was at the spring game, as Roth is departing to be the radio voice of the UCLA Bruins after 27 years in Blacksburg.

I'll never forget looking out over a crowd of 1,500 people at the Richmond Hokie Club Kickoff Dinner and feeling the tremendous support and Hokie love in the room. Or you Hokies in Virginia Beach who snuck out of the Kickoff Dinner to grab some Beach Bully BBQ, so we could enjoy it on the plane ride home. That was a special treat.

Enter Sandman, Skipper, key plays, the exuberance of getting into the BIG EAST and later the ACC ... all of it goes by in a blur when you try to recap in 1,200 words.

I loved saying at the end of a road win, when only Tech fans were remaining in the other team's stadium, that it's a "sea of orange, maroon and aluminum." And I loved that when our o-line opened up a hole as "wide as Fancy Gap," you got the joke and chuckled along with me.

I've been getting the following question a bunch in the last week, including from Roy Hatfield, who runs the Gobblercountry Tech site. He and others have asked "Who was your favorite player to cover and why?"

My response: Wow, first of all, that's a totally unfair question. Are you trying to get me in trouble? We're talking about thousands of athletes, and I'd hate to omit any of them. I loved watching Deron Washington dunk, especially when he sailed over Greg Paulus at Duke. I really admired the way he could leap, and I loved his smile. And I loved Jamon Gordon, who was tough and did great postgame interviews and talked about his grandma.

I guess I liked tough guys, like Jake Grove and John Engelberger and Jarrett Ferguson; guys like



George Del Ricco and Cody Grimm and Vince Hall and Kam Chancellor. See how you're getting me in trouble? I'm going to leave someone out.

I loved the way Michael Vick could scramble and leave guys grasping for air, and I liked the way André Davis would just zoom away from people. I loved the way David Wilson could accelerate and spin. Vapor trail. I swear I saw a vapor trail when he scored against Georgia Tech on that one touchdown at Lane. Ryan Williams, what a player. Kevin Jones. Can we please just YouTube the LSU game and watch him run? I could watch KJ run on an endless loop.

I always thought Damon Watlington had a third lung. And David and Jim Jackson? I'd go to battle with those two dudes anywhere, any time. I liked the way Tyrod Taylor was cool, like on the touchdown against FSU in Charlotte, where he casually walked into the end zone as if he had just blown out the flame on the Seminoles' spear.

Tyrod had the best penalty in 27 years when he flashed the "U" sign after scoring a touchdown against the 'Canes in Miami. It was worth every penalty yard on the ensuing kickoff.

I loved Corey Moore. I loved Lee Suggs. Still do. I cried when he tore his ACL. Eddie Royal. There's another dude who always smiled and then ran by you for a score. The Lewis brothers, and the Hopkins brothers, and the Fuller Brothers. I just want to hug Mrs. Fuller. Cornell Brown. Everyone loves Cornell, except folks in Austin, Texas, and James Brown (look it up, kids).

Blake DeChristopher ... well Blake's Beard. He always referred to his beard as another person, an alter ego. I'm leaving too many people out, and I'm going to get in trouble. Bryan Randall. When he's the governor, you'll be even more proud of him. I'm doing this off the top of my head, and I'm going to get some heat. I will get an email within 20 minutes from someone like Keith Short. Wayne Ward will show up at my house and block me like he did that guy from West Virginia in that Thursday night game.

But if you're going pin me down, I'm going with (broadcast partner) Mike Burnop as my favorite athlete to cover. I've been with the guy for 27 years, and he's going to be my all-time favorite athlete, No. 81!

Mike inherited a 22-year-old kid back in 1988 as his broadcast partner, and we've been together for every game since. Lots of wins, a few losses, and millions of miles traveled. You've heard most of the on-air stories, and some of them are even true.

But it's the off-air and travel stories that seemingly are the best, because, they're legit.

Yeah, we really did get left behind at Oklahoma in 1991 when the team plane left without us. Yes, he always calls me "Wrong-way Roth." I usually get lost because I know a shortcut in Quincy or Fairfax or Miami or wherever.

Yes, in 1995, at Navy, the pregame timing sheet confused Mike. It listed the pregame show (in military time) as beginning at 1100 hours and the kickoff at 1300 hours.

"Billy," he asked. "What are we going to talk about for 200 hours?"

He calls me "Billy" and "Billy Boy" because my family calls me that, and Burnop's been a part of my family.

He came with me to Laguna Beach, California, to visit my sister for Thanksgiving in 2010. Lynda was suffering from cancer and was hooked up to a long oxygen tube, very weak at that point. We had a wonderful Thanksgiving dinner, all things considered, before taking a red-eye flight home to call the Tech-UVa football game.

I don't think I could have gotten on the plane without Mike that day, and he'll always be more than a close friend to me. He's a brother. He's a good, strong, man who's a tremendous broadcaster. I'm lucky to have been paired with him, and I'm excited that we will continue our annual Florida vacations together.

Personally and professionally, Burnop's the best thing that's happened in my life in the past 30 years. You all should know that.

And finally, Whit, Buzz and Frank. I went to all three when this opportunity arose earlier this spring, and they were tremendous with their advice and guidance. Virginia Tech athletics is in such great shape under Whit's leadership. What a star! And although I only spent one full season with Buzz, we developed a really close friendship. #GetBetter. Tech's teams will. And Coach Beamer. I learned more about how to treat people, how to run an organization and how to care about others from this man. There is not a statue big enough or a road long enough that could justifiably honor what he has meant to the school, the football program or those lucky enough to call him a friend.

Thank you to David Braine and Jim Weaver for giving a young kid a chance to live his dream over and over and for giving me the privilege and honor of representing this school.

And so to the Hokie Nation, to all of you, I say, "Thank You!"

Oh, and in case you're wondering, as of this writing (5/1), Virginia Tech has now held the Commonwealth Cup for 3,806 days.

Don't worry, I'll be keeping track from the West Coast.

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Earlier this spring, Katie Bean (right) and Kaylea Arnett spoke to pre-school children about the importance of reading.



SIX Tech student-athletes receive TOP SIX for Service honors
by Reyna Gilbert-Lowry

The Atlantic Coast Conference annually recognizes student-athletes for their achievements in the classroom and in their respective sports. The conference also highlights the community service involvement of student-athletes on each ACC campus through its Top Six for Service award. This award emphasizes the continual opportunity student-athletes have to serve as role

models, as well as the impact they can make on their campuses and surrounding communities. A Top Six for Service award recipient is dedicated to serving others and shows a passion for enriching the lives of others. This year, the following six Hokie student-athletes set themselves apart through their commitments to service.

Katie Bean, a senior on the Hokies' swimming and diving team, volunteered her time providing athletics facility tours to elementary school students through the Kindergarten to College program, and she also helped collect food for Micah's Backpack, a local program that partners with schools to provide direct assistance to children and families who qualify for the free lunch program. Bean's most significant contribution to the community has been through her work with AmeriCorps, a federal agency that helps millions of Americans improve their local communities through service. This year, she organized weekly reading hours for preschool children and has contributed more than 300 hours of service to the AmeriCorps organization.

On Dec. 5, 2014, football standout Ronny Vandyke provided mentorship to Kipps Elementary children who were having trouble making good choices. Although he was only asked to go once, Vandyke took it upon himself to visit with the students every other week because he wanted to help in any way possible. Since his first visit in December, he has met with these students on more than 25 separate occasions and plans to continue working with them in the future. He also has contributed a significant amount of time to Cross Training, a collaboration between Athletes in Action and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, where he serves weekly as a group leader.

Michelle Prong, a softball player, participated in Herma's Readers Literacy Education Program this year to promote the importance of reading and literacy to children in kindergarten through third grade. She also volunteered for the local Color Me Rad Run benefitting the Special Olympics, and she spent time at a local children's hospital


student-athlete development

visiting pediatric patients and their families. Prong is currently pursuing her master's degree in public health and has goals of one day becoming a physician.

Junior infielder Matt Dauby has not only served the community through the Virginia Tech baseball team's 19 Ways program – he and his teammates participate in 19 different outreach initiatives annually – but he also has found time to help the community on his own time. Through his work with the Herma's Readers Literacy Education Program, Micah's Backpack, and other local initiatives, Dauby has dedicated more than 20 hours of service this year helping the community.

Scott Vincent, a senior member of the men's golf team, volunteered more than 15 hours of service during the fall semester to the AmeriCorps Reading Hour Program, which was organized by Bean. Each week, he traveled to a local preschool and read to a child. His commitment to the reading hour program continued throughout the spring semester, and he also worked with Herma's Readers.

Christian Beyer, a men's basketball player, began volunteering his time with students in the physical education classes at Price's Fork Elementary in the fall of 2013. He saw firsthand the results that came from consistent physical activity at a young age and wanted to share that experience with others. Since then, he has visited the school twice a week to speak about the importance of being active and staying focused to achieve academic and athletic success. This year alone, Beyer will have devoted 75 hours to this cause.

These are just a few of the many Virginia Tech student-athletes who dedicate their lives to being young men and women of service. They are aware of their platforms and the opportunities they have to impact the Blacksburg community in a positive and long-lasting way. While the demands of academic and athletics responsibilities are many, these six Hokie student-athletes, and many others, live out Ut Prosim ("That I May Serve") on a daily basis. 



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VIRGINIA



PAIGE KVARTUNAS

TRACK & FIELD AND CROSS COUNTRY
Springfield, Virginia
by Jimmy Robertson

A member of Tech's track and field and cross country teams, **Paige Kvartunas** graduated in mid-May with a degree in human development. She always has leaned toward being an elementary school teacher and recently was accepted into graduate school at George Mason to continue her pursuit of that dream.

Q: Why did you decide to major in human development?

PK: "I actually came in as a human nutrition, foods and exercise major. I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do, but I've always wanted to be a teacher. My grandmother was an elementary school librarian for 30 years. I had a really fun elementary experience, and I looked up to a lot of my teachers. They led me to love learning, and I want to be able to do that for kids in the future."

Q: What was so fun about your elementary school experiences?

PK: "A lot of it was my teachers. I remember a few of the teachers had creative ways to teach. I remember journals that we had to do and coloring. They made learning fun. History isn't my favorite subject, but the way they presented the topics made me want to learn more about it and kept me interested in it."

Q: You've worked in a couple of local elementary school classrooms this academic year – with the second graders at Gilbert Linkous in the fall and the first graders this spring at Price's Fork. What have you been doing?

PK: "It's part of a field study, and you have to have so many hours. It's not a student-teaching opportunity, but I help out in the classroom a lot. I lead small groups. I've taught a few lessons to the kids. Whatever the teacher needs help with, I'll assist in the classroom, whether it's small groups or help an individual catch up or come up with activities if a student is ahead. I help with the differentiation of a classroom, so they [the teachers] can teach a whole class and yet cater to an individual student's needs."


Q: What have you learned in your experiences at those two schools?

PK: "I've really enjoyed working at two different schools in two different grades. You really see the developmental differences. The younger ones need a little more assistance. They're just learning to read and cut with scissors and all that stuff. In second grade, they can do more things on their own. Both experiences have been great. Working with different teachers, I've learned different strategies in classroom management and lesson planning and all that kind of stuff. Every teacher does it differently. I feel like by seeing lots of different teachers, you can pull a little bit from each and make it your own."

Q: How did you manage to balance running cross country and track and keeping up with your studies?

PK: "Playing sports teaches you time management. I do have a lot of busy days. I go to practice in the morning, and then on Monday, Wednesdays and Fridays, I have classes at 9:05 a.m. Then I go to the elementary school for most of the day. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, I don't have classes, so I usually go to the elementary school straight from practice. I then go to practice again [after school], and at night, you have to use your time effectively to do homework. With traveling, that makes it a little harder, too. You just find a way to do it."

Q: What are your future plans?

PK: "I recently got accepted into graduate school at George Mason and will be pursuing a master's degree in elementary education, and then from there, I hope become an elementary school teacher. The program is for two years, and I'll be going back home. I'm from Northern Virginia. I grew up in the Fairfax school district, and it's one of the best in the country. I would love to be able to teach there." 

Trevor Cone graduated in mid-May with a degree in marketing management, but the All-American on Tech's golf team has professional aspirations – and the realistic talent to achieve those. He and two others shared ACC medalist honors at the 2015 ACC Championships, and he has finished in the top 10 eight times heading into an NCAA regional. If a pro career doesn't work out, he plans on pursuing a career in sports marketing.

Q: What led you to major in marketing management?

TC: "Well, I knew going into college that I wanted to do something that involved business. I originally declared marketing management [as his major] as a freshman because I have always had an interest in products and how they are marketed and advertised toward the consumer. However, I did find finance as an interesting career path and thought about switching during my sophomore year, but realized I would rather be in a more interactive career after college instead of a job that was more math-oriented."

Q: When do you think you first had interest in that field?

TC: "I have always had an interest in marketing. Whenever I walk through stores, whether it be a sporting goods store, retail store or any type of store, I find myself looking at the products and wondering how the company is marketing it toward consumers and what kinds of strategies they use. I also find advertisements intriguing and look to see how they target consumers. I think it's compelling how creative some companies are in their marketing and advertising efforts now."

Q: Do you plan on pursuing a graduate degree?

TC: "At the moment, I don't plan to pursue a graduate degree. I'm not sure whether I will come back to school to get a master's degree, but it's definitely an idea that I'm not opposed to if the opportunity is there in the future."

Q: Have you done any internships, co-ops, field studies, etc.?

TC: "I actually haven't done any type of internship while at Virginia Tech. I looked into doing internships the past few years, but playing a sport like golf where you must play year round to compete at the highest level, I couldn't find the time in the summer to do an internship."


Q: How have you managed to juggle all the traveling with golf and maintaining solid grades in the classroom?

TC: "One thing most people don't realize about golf at the collegiate level is that we miss more days of class than almost all the other sports. I learned early on at Virginia Tech that it was going to be difficult to balance school and golf, but I had great motivation and set goals as a freshman pertaining to my GPA and focused more on academics. I realized how to balance my time well and just used the resources that the university has provided the student-athletes. Virginia Tech provides all of the necessary facilities to help you succeed in the classroom through SAASS [Student-Athlete Academic Support Services] and study hall."

Q: What are your future plans, both short term and long term?

TC: "In the short term, after graduation and after my collegiate career hopefully ends in making it to one last NCAA Championship with the team, I plan on playing amateur golf during the summer, traveling to tournaments across the country. Long term, I plan to turn professional around September of this year and go on to Qualifying School for the PGA Tour."

Q: And if golf doesn't work out, then what?

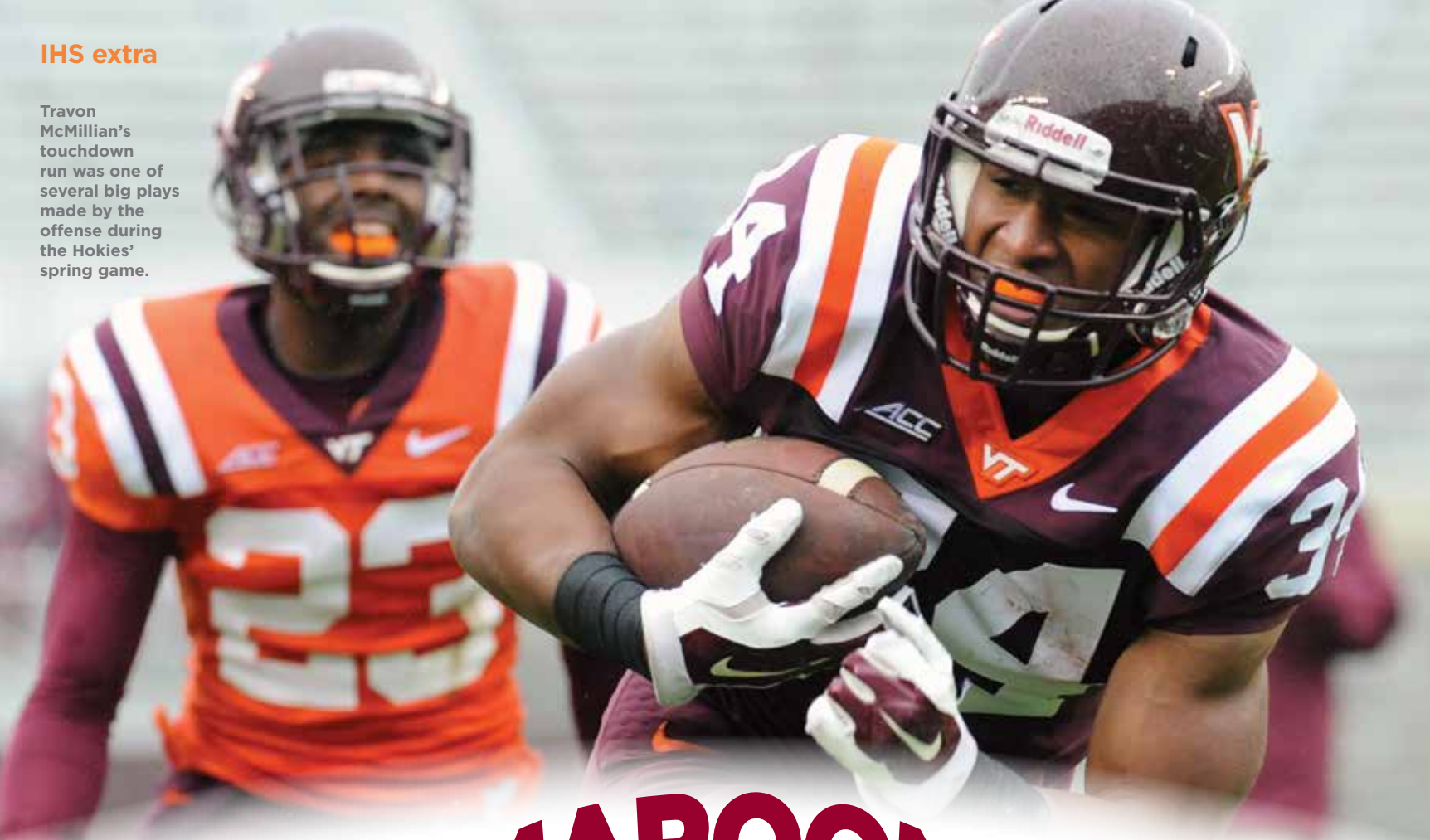
TC: "If golf doesn't work out, I'd like to stay in the sports industry and work for a sports marketing agency. Another route I'm interested in is staying in the NCAA and working in an athletics department at a university." 



TREVOR CONE

GOLF
Concord, North Carolina
by Jimmy Robertson

Travon McMillian's touchdown run was one of several big plays made by the offense during the Hokies' spring game.



MAROON ++ ORANGE GAME

CAPS PRODUCTIVE SPRING FOR THE HOKIES

Tech scored in all phases in its final outing of the spring, leaving head coach Frank Beamer and his staff optimistic about all that was accomplished

by Jimmy Robertson

names honored the university's Corps of Cadets and its military tradition.

Team Medal of Honor won the game 24-21, but the score of the game was irrelevant. The storylines, both from the game and from this spring, instead warranted the attention.

In the game, Tech's offense, maligned at times last season, scored four times in the red zone. On three of those occasions, the Hokies managed to get the ball inside the 5-yard line and then punched it in on the ground.

Travon McMillian scored on a 4-yard touchdown run, with Trey Edmunds scoring on a 3-yarder and J.C. Coleman on a 2-yarder. Those possessions served as a microcosm of the spring for Tech's offensive line, or at least the first-team unit. That group played well this spring and wrapped up spring ball by playing well in the game, helping the running backs get yardage in the toughest part of the field to get it.

"With Coach [Stacey] Searels, you get into that mindset that, 'It's only 3 yards,' or 'It's only 5 yards, and we're going to get a touchdown,'" left guard Wyatt Teller said. "Sometimes things happen, and you get stopped, but for the most part, especially today, we had that chip on our shoulder. We said, 'We're not going to play on our side of the ball. We're going to play on theirs.' For the most part, we did.

"With that being said, today was different than last year or years before. Maybe we didn't get what Coach Searels was saying, but now we're actually living what he's saying."

Beamer agreed.

"I think we're getting closer to where we want to be from a toughness standpoint," he said.

"They've [the offensive line] had a good spring. They've gotten better. With [Augie] Conte and Wyatt Teller, those are tough kids, and they're big kids. You look at them, and they're what you want as offensive linemen. I think [Eric] Gallo gives us something at center. He's tough and athletic. [Wade] Hansen is what our program is all about – work hard, keep your nose clean and it works out. We gave him a scholarship, and the team was happy for him. [Jonathan] McLaughlin has been around, and he's good. We've got some guys on the second team that we think will be OK. I think we're getting closer."

The scoring got started on an 88-yard punt return for a touchdown by Greg Stroman, who certainly looked healed from the balky hamstring that hampered him early in spring practice. That gave Team Pylon a 7-0 lead.

The special teams made another big play later in the first quarter when C.J. Reavis tackled punter Mitchell Ludwig for a loss before Ludwig could punt – Reavis would have blocked the punt if Ludwig had attempted it. Team Medal of Honor, which had gotten a 48-yard field goal from Michael Santamaria to cut the lead to 7-3, capitalized on the play with McMillian's touchdown, which gave Team Medal of Honor a 10-7 lead.

Reavis was arguably the best defensive player on the field. In addition to making the big special teams play, he also finished with a game-high seven tackles (three solo).


"He's got a chance to be really good," Beamer said. "I want him to continue to mature and be an all-the-time guy, and I think he will. I think he's going in that direction. He's going in a great direction on the field, and off the field, I think he'll follow and be a guy we're proud of."

Led in part by Reavis, the defense kept the offensive numbers in check, and that unit got a score when Donovan Riley returned a Brenden Motley fumble 36 yards for a touchdown early in the second half.

But Tech offensive coordinator Scot Loeffler kept the game plan basic in this one, and the quarterbacks weren't live. Michael Brewer completed 4 of 8 for 60 yards, including an 18-yard touchdown to Isaiah Ford. Coleman led all rushers with 25 yards on just five carries, while Edmunds finished with 21 on three carries.

The numbers were enough to leave everyone feeling optimistic.

"I thought the offense took a step in the right direction," Brewer said. "We're not where we need to be or where we want to be, but it's a step in the right direction. We want to be a team that makes that gradual climb through the spring and summer and then hit our peak at the end. Overall, though, it's been a success. Now we've got to continue it this summer."

That's certainly a must. Tech opens the season on Labor Day against defending champion Ohio State – and that day will be here sooner than anyone thinks. 

2015 SPRING PRACTICE AWARD WINNERS

Paul Torgersen Award
(presented to the top newcomers during spring practice)

Offense – Eric Gallo
Defense – Mook Reynolds

President's Award
(given to the players who demonstrate the most outstanding leadership during the offseason program and spring workouts)

Offense – Jonathan McLaughlin
Defense – Dadi L'homme Nicolas

Dr. Richard Bullock Award
(goes to the players who show the most improvement during spring workouts)

Offense – Michael Brewer
Defense – Vinny Mihota

Frank O. Moseley Award
(awarded to players who exhibit the most hustle during the offseason and spring workouts)

Offense – Steven Peoples
Defense – Deon Clarke

Coaches Award
(goes to the players who had an exceptional spring)

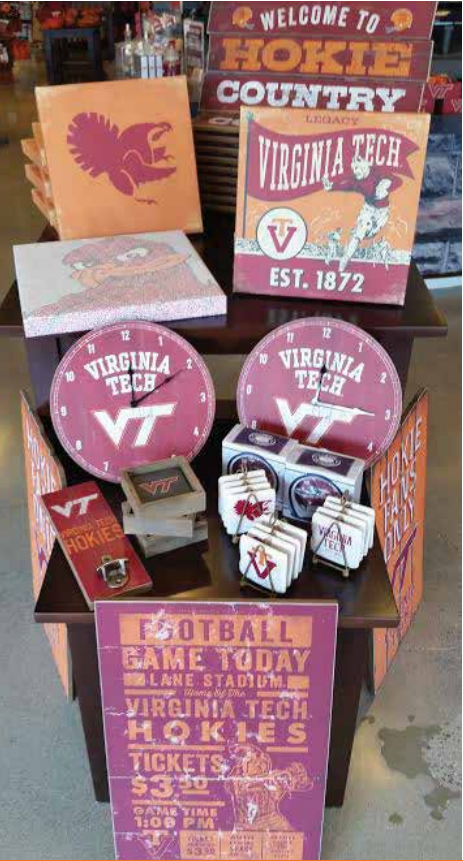
Offense – Isaiah Ford
Defense – Seth Dooley

George Preas Award
(presented to the most valuable performers of spring practice)

Offense – Ryan Malleck
Defense – Chuck Clark

Don Williams TEAM UNITED Award
(presented to players who put the team first during spring workouts)

Offense – J.C. Coleman
Defense – Woody Baron



BREWER and MOTLEY led an offense that put points on the board this spring

by Jimmy Robertson

Virginia Tech’s football team had 15 practices this spring, including the annual spring game. The entire spring practice sessions encompassed roughly 10 periods per session, three full-scale scrimmages and approximately 30 hours of on-field instruction.

In that span, quarterback Michael Brewer threw only two interceptions – none in the scrimmages or spring game. Brenden Motley threw only three.

Those numbers, probably more than any other, left offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Scot Loeffler smiling.

“There has been a huge emphasis on protecting the football,” Loeffler said. “If there was



something we didn’t do well last year, particularly at the beginning of the year, it was protecting the ball. We had way too many interceptions.

“There are a lot of excuses and a lot of reasons, but we’re to the point now that both guys have been in the system, and there are no more excuses. There is no reason not to know what we’re supposed to do, and they’ve embraced it.”

The emphasis on ball security came about because Brewer threw 15 interceptions a year ago. Partly as a result, Virginia Tech finished tied for 89th nationally in turnover margin.

In fairness, Brewer only had a month last summer to learn Loeffler’s complex system. This spring, he knew exactly what he was doing, and the additional knowledge resulted in better accuracy and better production.

It also resulted in him winning the Dr. Richard Bullock Award as the player on offense who improved the most this spring.

“I think he’s always been accurate,” Loeffler said. “He can make every throw. The things that hurt us were the turnovers, and we had way too many sacks [34]. It’s not always on the offensive line. It takes 11 people to create a sack. The quarterback has to be on rhythm and make the right decision. The backs have to protect, and the receivers and tight ends have to run the right route.

“But a lot of that had to do with having complete knowledge both inside and out. You’re making a decision in 1.7 seconds, with a lot of people running at you trying to kill you, and you have to be on. The margin of error is minimal. The overall knowledge has made him a better player.”

Motley came out of spring practice right on Brewer’s heels. Like Brewer, Motley exhibited better decision-making skills and better accuracy because of increased knowledge of the scheme.

Motley gives the Hokies a big-play threat as a runner. He showed that with two long touchdown runs in one of the scrimmages. But Loeffler wants to see a little more consistency with him.




2015 SPRING DEPTH CHART	
QUARTERBACKS	
12	Michael Brewer (6-0, 200, r-Sr.)
9	Brenden Motley (6-4, 228, r-Jr.)
17	Andrew Ford (6-3, 198, r-Fr.)
13	Chris Durkin (6-4, 242, r-Fr.)
16	Jack Click (6-4, 207, Fr.)

“He’s made a jump,” Loeffler said. “He needs to make another jump. He does some really good things, and he needs to get consistent with them. At times, he does exactly what we need him to do, and at times, he takes a step back, and then the next day, he looks great. Overall, consistency is going to be the key for him this summer and then leading into training camp [in August].”

Andrew Ford, Chris Durkin and walk-on Jack Click round out the group. Ford and Durkin looked like freshmen this spring. Occasionally, they made a great play, but more often than not, looked a little indecisive – which is partly attributed to playing behind a young second-team offensive line. Durkin missed the final couple of practices and the spring game with a separation of his left shoulder (non-throwing).

Those three, along with incoming freshman Dwayne Lawson, will need to continue to develop over the summer. But Tech fans can take comfort in knowing that Brewer and Motley looked good this spring – and even great at times – and the offense itself followed suit.

“We’ve had the best spring by far we’ve had here,” Loeffler said. “We’re scoring points. We scored in the scrimmages. The first couple of years, we were worrying about getting from point A to point B. So it’s exciting to watch this thing come together. If we stay healthy, we’ve got a chance.” 



Even with injured running backs out this spring, HOKIES’ BACKFIELD is in good shape

by Jimmy Robertson

The running backs’ depth chart above is probably more notable for the names not listed on it than the ones listed.

Marshawn Williams was on pace to lead the Hokies in rushing last fall before tearing an ACL in a November game against Duke. That injury put him out for spring ball. Then an off-the-field issue left Shai McKenzie suspended indefinitely. Fullback Sam Rogers also missed spring practice while recovering from a fractured elbow.

Still, the Hokies appear to be in great shape at the running back positions thanks largely to the return of J.C. Coleman, who saved the Hokies down the stretch, and Trey Edmunds, who appears to be fully recovered from a clavicle injury suffered last fall. Coleman rushed for at least 95 yards in each of Tech’s final four games of 2014, including a 157-yard effort that led to him being named the MVP of the Military Bowl.

Those two, along with freshmen Travon McMillian and D.J. Reid, eased some concerns of running backs coach Shane Beamer, who found depth with Williams and McKenzie out. Coleman

received the Don Williams TEAM UNITED Award as the player on offense who put the team first during spring workouts, and he came out of spring No.1 on the depth chart at tailback.

“If the season started today, J.C. would be the starter,” Beamer said. “In our minds, depending on Shai’s situation and Marshawn’s health, there is a next group, and that’s Trey, Travon, Marshawn and Shai.

“We’ll keep the competition going through the summer and into August. J.C. knows he has to keep competing and has to have a great summer because those guys are coming for the starting spot. I’ve told them they need to be working to be the starter.”

Edmunds appeared to run with a purpose this spring, showing the flashes that he has shown at times during his career. McMillian caught the eyes of the staff because of his ability to make big plays – witness the 52-yard touchdown run in the Hokies’ first scrimmage.

Beamer sees McMillian working in a variety of roles this fall.

2015 SPRING DEPTH CHART	
RUNNING BACKS	
TAILBACKS	
4	J.C. Coleman (5-7, 190, Sr.)
14	Trey Edmunds (6-1, 225, r-Jr.)
34	Travon McMillian (6-0, 194, r-Fr.)
48	D.J. Reid (6-0, 232, r-Fr.)
FULLBACKS	
32	Steven Peoples (5-9, 214, Fr.)
25	Jerome Wright (6-2, 231, Jr.)
19	Logan Adkins (5-11, 208, r-Fr.)

“I think he and Sam [Rogers] can do things in the passing game that maybe the other guys can’t do, or they do it better,” Beamer said. “They have the best hands of the running backs. We’re still trying to figure out our third and fourth receivers behind [Isaiah] Ford and [Cam] Phillips, and I think Travon and Sam can help that cause.

“Travon’s also got a chance to be our kick returner. Overall, my challenge to him is to be consistent. For every two or three great plays, he’d have an OK play. I want him to maintain focus on every play, and that will determine if he’s a guy who plays five plays a game or 30.”

At fullback, Beamer expects Rogers to be the No. 1 guy – and Rogers looked like a guy itching to be on the field this spring. Expect to see Rogers used in multiple ways, as he was a year ago.


Beamer and the staff found a gem in walk-on Steven Peoples, who came out of spring practice as the No. 2 fullback. Peoples, who rushed for more than 3,000 yards his senior season at Galax High School in Galax, Virginia, in 2013, went to Fork Union last fall and enrolled at Tech in January.

Peoples reminds some of Jarrett Ferguson, the former Tech fullback who now works in the Hokies’ strength and conditioning area. Like Ferguson, People can run with the ball and catch it out of the backfield.

“He’s got a really good feel for playing running back,” Beamer said. “When you’ve had the success he had in high school, you’re going to have a good feel for it. He got a lot better as a blocker, too. He worked at it. He plays full speed all the time and attacks people.

“He needs to stay attached to Sam Rogers’ hip this entire summer. Whatever Sam does, he needs to be doing as well.”

Ultimately, the questions surrounding Williams and McKenzie will be decided later this summer. Williams is practically living in the training room, trying to get that knee ready.

“It will be close,” Beamer said. “I’ve told him to work like he’s going to come back, and then we’ll figure out the plan as we get closer to the season. We’ll do what’s best for him and this team.” 

New receivers coach BURDEN focused on finding depth and improving blocking this spring

by Jimmy Robertson

A year ago, coming out of spring practice, Tech’s top three receivers were Demitri Knowles, Josh Stanford and Carlis Parker.

Times certainly have changed. Of that trio, only Knowles remains – and he played sparingly during the 2014 season. Stanford and Parker departed the program for unspecified reasons, and Tech also lost Willie Byrn, who graduated.

Outside of Byrn, Tech relied heavily on true freshmen Isaiah Ford and Cam Phillips last fall, and new receivers coach Zohn Burden spent the spring keeping those guys sharp, while also – and perhaps more importantly – developing depth behind them. He obviously felt he achieved that particular goal this spring.

“About eight or nine right now,” Burden said when asked how many of his receivers he felt confident in playing. “You hope to get it to 10 or 11. You want all those guys to feel like they have a role.”

That seems like a lot, but Burden came to Tech from Old Dominion, which runs a spread offense and uses a lot of receivers. Tech’s staff uses its tight ends more as receivers, but at least, according to Burden, depth started to emerge at the flanker and split end positions.

Knowles, who played just 56 plays on offense last season and caught only three passes, came out of spring practice as a backup behind Phillips. Kevin Asante, who played just 13 snaps on offense last fall, was listed as the backup behind Ford.

“Kevin Asante’s effort is improving,” Burden said. “His technique and fundamentals are improving. He’s getting his confidence back from not playing a whole lot last year and making some plays out there. He’s coming along.

“Demitri is improving. He’s a fast kid. He’s being more physical in the run game, so that is going to allow the pass game to get open, and he’s a guy that can run by you. He’s doing that out there. He’s made some big plays. These guys are coming along.”



Deon Newsome

So, too, are Deon Newsome and Jaylen Bradshaw, a redshirt freshman. Both of them battled minor injuries this spring – Newsome a hamstring, Bradshaw bruised legs. But Burden felt good about their progressions.

The wildcard in the receivers’ meeting room is Joel Caleb. Tech’s staff moved him from tailback to receiver early in spring practice, and it marks his second stint at the position. He started his career at receiver before being moved to tailback as a redshirt freshman, and he spent two seasons there in a reserve role.

“Joel is coming along tremendously,” Burden said. “He’s still learning the position. Wide receiver is a physical position here at Virginia Tech, and he’s a physical guy, so that part of it, he’s got down pat. He’s just trying to learn the offense and the pass game part of it.”

Burden and the rest of the coaches wanted to see more physical play out of the receivers this spring. Looking back at last season, coordinator Scot Loeffler called Tech’s perimeter blocking “atrocious.” So the receivers spent a lot of time in practices working on blocking in space.


The coaches liked what they saw. Tech’s offense ripped off some big runs, particularly in the second scrimmage when Brenden Motley scored on two long touchdown runs and when fullback Steven Peoples ripped off a 60-yard touchdown run. The coaches attributed blocking on the perimeter as a prime reason for those long runs.

“I think we have,” Burden said when asked if perimeter blocking had been addressed. “That attributed to some of the bigger runs we had in the one scrimmage. Guys were blocking their

butts off down field, and we hope to continue to build on that.”

Unless someone moves in from another position, this is Tech’s group of receivers. The coaches did not sign a true receiver in the 2015 recruiting class.

It is an interesting mix. Ford and Phillips combined to play 1,569 snaps on offense last season. The rest of the returning receivers combined to play just 217 – and 67 of those came from Caleb at the tailback position.

What do the Hokies have at the receiver spots? The coaches feel like they have some talent and depth. But the answer probably won’t be known until the season starts. 

2015 SPRING DEPTH CHART	
FLANKERS	
1	Isaiah Ford (6-1, 180, So.)
81	Kevin Asante (6-0, 189, r-Sr.)
15	Joel Caleb (6-2, 200, r-Jr.)
83	Charley Meyer (6-1, 215, r-Jr.)
38	David Prince (6-1, 180, r-So.)
3	Austin Jones (6-2, 193, r-Jr.)
SPLIT ENDS	
5	Cam Phillips (6-1, 196, So.)
80	Demitri Knowles (6-1, 177, r-Sr.)
20	Deon Newsome (5-11, 186, r-So.)
39	Jaylen Bradshaw (6-0, 188, r-Fr.)
22	Michael Brainard (6-0, 189, r-Sr.)
86	C.J. Carroll (5-7, 163, r-Fr.)
23	Alden Carpenter (6-1, 187, r-So.)

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First group of OFFENSIVE LINEMEN strong, but Tech searching for depth

by Jimmy Robertson

Tech’s offense put up some numbers this spring, and while many point to the improvement of quarterback Michael Brewer and the leadership of J.C. Coleman and the big-play capabilities of the tight ends, they would be missing the boat without acknowledging the play of the offensive line.

The Hokies may have a little something with this group.

Normally, the defense dominates spring ball, but not so this spring, as the offensive line played physical, and for the most part, pretty well. Coming out of spring, offensive line coach Stacy Searels had an established first unit, with Jonathan McLaughlin and Wade Hansen at the tackle spots, Wyatt Teller and Augie Conte at the guard positions and Eric Gallo manning the center spot.



The best part about this spring for the line was that none of the first-teamers switched positions. Searels did not move guys around, instead focusing on keeping everyone at the same spot and letting the group develop cohesion. It paid off, too. Fans witnessed that when the Hokies scored touchdowns on four trips into the red zone during the Maroon-Orange game, including three on short touchdown runs in which the offensive line opened holes.

“We didn’t move guys around because we really made our switches before spring ball,” Searels said. “We had a void at center, but Eric Gallo filled that void, which allowed me to be solid at the center position. Wyatt and Augie both had played, and at times, played at a high level last year, so I didn’t have to move them around.”

“The movement came when we moved Jon to left tackle. Jon went out last year [because of an ankle injury], and Wade stepped in and played right tackle, so it was easier for him to do that, and Jon had some experience at left tackle. So I thought that would be the best. The continuity of that group was good.”

The key to the entire group, though, was the play of Gallo, a rising sophomore who only played 14 snaps on offense last fall. After an offseason in the strength and conditioning program and hours spent watching film, he looked like a veteran at the spot.

In some ways, Gallo reminds many of former Tech great Jake Grove – a rather lofty comparison. But he wears the same number and possesses the same body frame. More importantly, he displayed similar toughness.

Gallo ended up being named one of the recipients of the Paul Torgersen Award, which goes to the top newcomers of spring practice.

“He came in and really studied in the offseason so that he could make the calls,” Searels said. “He understood that the center is the quarterback of the offensive line, and he has to get us all on the same page. So he studied hard, and he gives great effort. The kid has some toughness. He never says two words. I really like him.”

McLaughlin returned to the left tackle spot after starting 13 games there as a freshman. A year ago, he started nine games at right tackle before suffering a season-ending ankle injury – one that left the door open for Hansen to start three games at right tackle. Hansen played so well this spring that he earned a scholarship for his efforts.

The questions with the offensive line center on the backups. Searels juggled guys around to get a better evaluation of the group, which makes sense. Of the backups, only former tight end Darius Redman is a senior.

Searels hoped to solidify some spots, but he probably came out of spring practice with more concerns than firm answers.

“We’ve got to find some depth,” he said. “The question is: who is going to be the next center, and who is going to be the sixth guy to play? If someone twists an ankle, who is going in next? Is it Parker Osterloh? Is it Darius Redman? Is it Yosuah Nijman? Is it Braxton Pfaff? Who is the next guy? That hasn’t been established yet.”

There certainly are some guys with potential in that second group, though. Tech’s staff moved Nijman, a true freshman who enrolled in January, from defensive end, and he showed a lot of promise, with a 6-foot-7 frame. Another freshman who enrolled in January, Tyrell Smith, struggled with snapping the ball as a center, but once he got the ball to the quarterback, he showed an ability to be a powerful blocker, with good enough footwork to be effective in pass protection.

Searels singled out those two and a couple of others.

“I think Darius Redman had a good spring,” he said. “Yosuah Nijman, in two weeks, made as much improvement as a kid could make. I think he’s got the makings of being a really, really good offensive tackle one day. Alston Smith showed some flashes and did some good things. Tyrell Smith was a mid-year guy, and he came in and showed some toughness. I liked the way he competed.”

“I like that we have more bodies to compete and that we have more depth. But someone has to separate from the group to show that we can trust them to move them in with the first unit and not have a drop-off.”

This summer, Searels wants all his linemen to get bigger and stronger and remain in good shape – and more importantly, good health. Then in August, he wants to quickly find a backup center and a third tackle.







But the Hokies appear to be in solid shape on the offensive line, at least in better shape than in previous years. That only adds to the excitement about the Hokies’ offense this season.

“What I like about it is that we’ve got enough people that if you’re not performing day in and day out, somebody else is going to take your spot,” Searels said. “If you come out and have a bad day, you’re going to be on the second group the next day.”

“When you’ve got a good offensive line and you’ve got guys that can compete, they put pressure on that first unit to perform every day. If a guy is playing as hard as he can every day and he needs a blow, and you’ve got someone on that second unit that you can trust, you can put him in. That allows everyone to play that much harder.” *VT*

2015 SPRING DEPTH CHART	
OFFENSIVE LINE	
LEFT TACKLES	
71	Jonathan McLaughlin (6-5, 310, Jr.)
69	Yosuah Nijman (6-7, 265, Fr.)
66	Billy Ray Mitchell (6-3, 284, r-Fr.)
LEFT GUARDS	
57	Wyatt Teller (6-6, 295, r-So.)
67	Parker Osterloh (6-8, 343, r-So.)
62	Andrew Williams (6-0, 275, r-So.)
68	Cody Rhodes (6-4, 285, r-Fr.)
CENTERS	
64	Eric Gallo (6-2, 293, So.)
79	Tyrell Smith (6-4, 280, Fr.)
58	Colt Pettit (6-3, 291, r-Fr.)
63	Andrew Moras (6-0, 238, r-Fr.)
RIGHT GUARDS	
72	Augie Conte (6-6, 297, r-Jr.)
75	Alston Smith (6-2, 294, r-Jr.)
74	Braxton Pfaff (6-5, 304, r-Fr.)
RIGHT TACKLES	
77	Wade Hansen (6-5, 300, r-Sr.)
52	Darius Redman (6-4, 285, r-Sr.)
76	Austin Clark (6-6, 300, Fr.)






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SPRING FOOTBALL *Review*

TIGHT ENDS expected to be a strength in Tech's offense

by Jimmy Robertson

There is no question that every member of the Tech coaching staff would want the depth chart at his position to look like the depth chart at the tight ends position.

The Hokies go three deep at this spot and lose very little with any of the three in the game. The fourth figures to contribute significantly in goal-line situations and on special teams, and the fifth is a cub with immense potential being molded for the future.

For sure, the spot has come a long way from a few years ago, when coach Bryan Stinespring was using converted defensive linemen, walk-ons and chewing gum to piece together a productive position.

Production shouldn't be a problem with this unit, as Ryan Malleck, Bucky Hodges and Calvin Cline are proven entities. Malleck and Hodges produced the most a year ago, and as a result, got used extensively and in a variety of ways this spring. Both came out of spring basically as starters, whether it be flexed out or at the traditional tight end spot.

When asked to assess Malleck's spring, Stinespring did not hold back.

"Malleck has been fantastic," he said. "Not good, but fantastic. He's become a major leader for us. He's done everything that you could ask a tight end to do - block in tight spaces, block out in space, get involved in protection, made plays in the passing game. Other than selling popcorn, I'm not sure what else he could do for us. He's done everything exceptionally well."

Hodges, though, represents the most intriguing talent. A freshman All-American, he caught 45 passes, including seven for touchdowns, a year ago, and now the staff wants to use the 6-foot-6, 249-pounder even more. They worked him as a receiver, both flanked outside and in the slot, this spring.

The work kept Hodges busy, forcing him to learn a large playbook from multiple positions. Not only that, he needed to put in work on his routerunning and his blocking on the perimeter.

2015 SPRING DEPTH CHART

TIGHT ENDS

- 88 Ryan Malleck (6-5, 245, r-Sr.)
- 7 Bucky Hodges (6-6, 249, r-So.)
- 89 Calvin Cline (6-4, 245, r-So.)
- 49 Dakota Jackson (6-3, 269, r-Jr.)
- 82 Xavier Burke (6-3, 261, Fr.)
- 87 Matt Hill (6-5, 239, r-Fr.)

"He's handled it well because it's exciting to him," Stinespring said. "It keeps him motivated to continue to learn and continue to be a valuable part. It's not an easy venture. He understands that. Sometimes, we have to understand that. It's not easy."

"He had an outstanding year last year, but there were some plays that he left on the field, too. We want him to recognize things and get him to play faster. There are times when they [the tight ends] have to play exceptionally fast, and there are times when they've got to know to balance it out with patience to set up routes. And you only do that by doing it over and over again. It's a fine line sometimes. When do I try to win with speed and athletic ability, and when do I have to set up a route and use some patience to be able to get myself open?"

Cline played in just two games last season before being shut down with a knee injury. He received a medical hardship waiver, so he goes into next fall as a redshirt sophomore.

He showed signs of being able to do what he did as a freshman. He caught 26 passes that season for 321 yards and two touchdowns. This spring allowed him to knock off the rust, so to speak.

"His legs are back underneath him," Stinespring said. "That's the big thing. Early on, even in our 6 a.m. workouts, he was very sluggish those first couple of days, but it just quickly came back to him. It's been a while since he's really played the number of reps that he's taken [this spring]. He's been a little banged up, but overall, he's healthy, and that's a big part of it. He's getting his timing back and his wheels back. He's going to pick up where he left off as a true freshman, just a little bigger and a little stronger."

Dakota Jackson came out of spring as the fourth tight end and gives the Hokies a physical presence as a blocker. Xavier Burke is a true freshman who enrolled in January, and he experienced some growing pains this spring. He brings size at 261 pounds, and he also ran a 4.81 in the 40 in winter testing - the second-best time among the tight ends.

This group has experience, talent and potential. It all should be on display this fall.

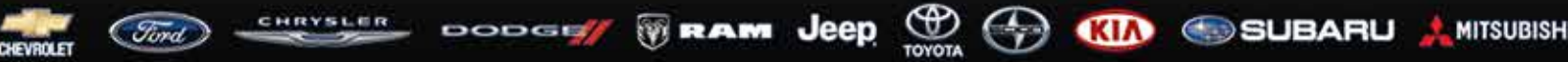


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DEFENSIVE LINE in good shape coming out of spring ball

by Jimmy Robertson

Tech’s defensive line group resembled the running backs unit this spring – a lot of talent was standing on the sidelines.

As with the running back position, though, the coaching staff worked in a lot of young players, and by the end of spring practice, Tech’s defensive line may have been the deepest unit on the entire team. One could argue the tight ends or the running backs as having as much depth and talent, but certainly defensive line coach Charley Wiles possesses some talent at his disposal.

Defensive tackles Luther Maddy (knee) and Corey Marshall (ankle) and defensive end Ken Ekanem (shoulder) all missed spring ball and are not listed on the depth chart on the next page. But Wiles expects those three back in the lineup this August.

This spring, he grouped Woody Baron, Nigel Williams and Seth Dooley with standout defensive end Dadi L’homme Nicolas, and that unit played fairly well, giving Wiles optimism about this fall.

“You hate to have injuries, but they were a good thing in a way,” Wiles said. “We kept all those guys out, didn’t get them hurt, and we were able to rep a lot of young guys that we’re going to depend on. From that standpoint, it was good. We should be at full go.”

How good was Tech’s defensive line this spring? Well, four of them won spring-concluding awards at the Maroon-Orange game. Nicolas received the President’s Award for the player on defense who exhibited outstanding leadership during the offseason program and spring workouts. Baron won the Don Williams TEAM UNITED Award for the player on defense who put the team first during spring workouts. Dooley received the Coaches Award for the player on defense who had an exceptional spring. Finally, Vinny Mihota won the Dr. Richard Bullock Award for the player on defense who showed the most improvement this spring.

Wiles went into spring practice concerned about depth at the defensive end spot. Nicolas certainly did his thing this spring, as he ranks among the ACC’s best defensive ends, but Wiles wanted to see someone emerge with Ekanem out. That turned out to be Dooley, who started playing up to his immense potential.

“Seth showed a lot of improvement this spring,” Wiles said. “He was tougher and faster. He played harder. And he still has a lot of areas where he can grow and improve. He wants to be a starter on this defense and be a guy that we’re playing 45 or 50 plays. He’s still got to keep climbing and keep getting better.”

Another end started to emerge toward the end of spring practice – Mihota. The redshirt freshman spent the first couple of weeks this spring at defensive tackle before Wiles started getting him some work at end.

Mihota worked his way into the rotation – somewhere. Wiles isn’t sure whether Mihota fits in at end or tackle, but he certainly rated the young man among Tech’s top eight defensive linemen.

“I like what Vinny brought to the table,” Wiles said. “He’s got quickness. He’s got good enough quickness to play outside [at end]. He runs OK. He’s like a Chris Drager [a former tight end and defensive end], only he’s bigger and quicker and he has more twitch than Drager. You can win with those kind of guys.

“Vinny’s within that top eight. If we started practice today, Vinny and Seth would be the backup defensive ends with Ken and Dadi.”

That grouping would leave Melvin Keihn as the fifth defensive end. Keihn played just five snaps on defense as a true freshman a year ago after the staff moved him from backer to defensive end. He struggled at times this spring and needs a little more time at the position before he can help the team.

“He’s a bit robotic, and he takes everything literally,” Wiles said. “He’s not as instinctive as he needs to be, and that comes with reps. It’s all new to him. This was the first spring he’s had. The ideal thing would be to redshirt him, but can we do that? I don’t know.”

The tackle spots are a bit more settled. Baron and Nigel Williams worked with the first team all spring, and Baron, in particular, opened some eyes.

2015 SPRING DEPTH CHART

DEFENSIVE LINE

STUD ENDS

90 Dadi L’homme Nicolas (6-4, 236, r-Sr.)

8 Melvin Keihn (6-1, 211, So.)

ENDS

43 Seth Dooley (6-5, 242, r-So.)

99 Vinny Mihota (6-5, 270, r-Fr.)

87 Harry Boston (6-1, 224, r-Fr.)

97 Laird Gardner (6-1, 232, Sr.)

NOSE TACKLES

60 Woody Baron (6-1, 265, Jr.)

98 Ricky Walker (6-3, 286, So.)

89 Dalton Roe (6-1, 235, r-So.)

TACKLES

95 Nigel Williams (6-2, 288, r-Jr.)

91 Steve Sobczak (6-2, 315, r-Fr.)

93 Jeremy Haynes (6-3, 221, r-Jr.)

Baron always possessed the quickness needed to play inside and now he’s up to 265 pounds with plenty of strength. He also remained healthy this spring – he missed last year’s spring practice with an ankle injury. So the factors added up to him being a force this spring.

“He just made more plays,” Wiles said. “This is his third spring. The light bulb is going off. It’s



becoming second nature, and he’s in tune with what we’re doing and what we’re teaching. He’s learned with reps. He’s 21 now, and there’s a lot of difference between 21 and 18. He was always close to making a play, always close. Well, he made those plays this spring.”

In his mind, Wiles sees Baron and Williams as backups to Maddy and Marshall heading into August practices. That leaves rising sophomore Ricky Walker and rising redshirt freshman Steve Sobczak fighting for time, along with Mihota.

Walker played as a true freshman a season ago, and Baron played as a true freshman two years ago. Could one or both take a redshirt season given the depth at the two positions?

“We haven’t even talked about that [redshirting],” Wiles said. “We’re going to play our best. We’ve got some time, but I can tell you right now that the future is now. If we end up playing them, we end up playing them.”

Overall, the Hokies look to be in great shape on the defensive line. Perhaps no group is more important to a team’s success.

This unit played well a year ago. The expectations now are even higher.

“With our two-deep right now, I think we’ve got a chance to be pretty good,” Wiles said. “I really do. But we’ve got to stay hungry and stay humble and keep working hard and always assume that somebody is trying to get your job. If we keep that kind of work ethic, then we’ve got a shot.”

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28 Inside Hokie Sports

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PROJECTED STARTERS at linebacker appear set, but Hokies need depth to emerge

by Jimmy Robertson

A year ago, defensive coordinator Bud Foster – who also doubles as the linebackers coach – spent a pensive spring worrying about finding replacements for longtime starters Jack Tyler and Tariq Edwards.

This spring, his worries were flipped. He knew what he was getting in starters Andrew Motuapuaka and Deon Clarke, but he wondered about depth – and it remains a concern.

“There is a drop-off behind those two guys,” Foster admitted.

The good news, though, for both Foster and Tech fans is that Motuapuaka and Clarke deliver in big ways and figure to be strengths of this defense in the fall. Motuapuaka, the starting mike linebacker, started four games

in place of the injured Chase Williams last fall and he played in 12 games overall – and finished with an impressive 54 tackles. Clarke, the starting backer, started all 13 games and finished second on the team with 74 tackles and third on the team with 11 tackles for a loss. He also added five sacks, an interception and a fumble recovery.

They carried their strong 2014 performances over to this spring. They not only performed well, but they also served as leaders.

“Both Andrew and Deon had really, really good springs,” Foster said. “I thought Andrew steadily improved. He could have been one of our award winners when it was all said and done. He had that kind of spring. He just improved in all areas.

“Deon was one of our award winners [Frank O. Moseley Award as the player on defense who exhibited the most hustle during the offseason and spring workouts]. He had a really good offseason and a really good spring. I’m counting on big things from him – from both of those guys, really – but particularly Deon because this will be his senior season. I have high expectations of him in a lot of areas.”

Unproven players, however, stand behind these two on the depth chart. At backer, the situation isn’t quite as unsettling because Jameion Moss showed improvement, and Raymon Minor showed flashes of his immense potential – he had two sacks in one of the scrimmages. With that extra year of experience, Moss knows the defense better than Minor, but Minor probably possesses a higher ceiling.



2015 SPRING DEPTH CHART	
LINEBACKERS	
MIKE LINEBACKERS	
54	Andrew Motuapuaka (6-0, 223, r-So.)
44	Carson Lydon (6-2, 241, Fr.)
53	Trent Young (5-10, 218, r-Fr.)
45	Drew Burns (6-3, 219, r-Jr.)
56	Sean Huelskamp (6-1, 202, r-So.)
BACKERS	
40	Deon Clarke (6-2, 213, Sr.)
50	Jameion Moss (6-1, 211, r-So.)
18	Raymon Minor (6-2, 219, r-Fr.)
48	Josh Eberly (5-7, 220, r-Jr.)

Foster wants to see both emerge into players whom he can trust. That means working hard in the strength and conditioning program this summer and watching hours of film.


“It’s a toss-up between Jameion and Raymon,” Foster said. “Jameion was probably one of our more improved kids. He’s long, and he plays hard. He’s made big strides. He was a valuable member of our special teams last year, and it showed this spring.

“I think Ray has a little more ability, but he’s a freshman. He’s going through the same growing pains that Jameion went through in his first spring, but he has a lot of ability. Both of those kids need to have great summers – in the weight room and with film study. We need them. They’re a play away from being the guy, but I like both of those kids. I like their potential.”

Coming out of spring practice, two freshmen – true freshman Carson Lydon and redshirt freshman Trent Young – were behind Motuapuaka at mike linebacker. Lydon, a touted recruit, enrolled in January and struggled some this spring.

A player to watch at mike linebacker, though, is Sean Huelskamp, who tore his ACL last fall in the Ohio State game and missed the rest of the season. He worked in some individual drills, but saw no scrimmage work in spring practice. Foster liked what he saw last season and hopes to see Huelskamp work his way into the mix.

“He’s a lot farther along mentally than Carson and does some good things,” Foster said. “Carson is a ways away right now, but he should be because he should be a high school senior. He was a little inconsistent. He’s got to learn to trust his reads and all that, but I’m excited about his future.”

With only one senior among this group, the future looks bright. But for Foster, the future is now, and those young guys only have a couple of months left to impress before Ohio State comes to town. 

VANDYKE the only experienced player at whip linebacker

by Jimmy Robertson

Media members who cover Tech, along with Hokie fans, continue to ask questions of Tech’s coaching staff about the potential elimination of the whip linebacker spot within the Hokies’ defense. Truthfully, though, the staff plays that guy more than people think.

Derek Di Nardo played more than 300 snaps a year ago, and whip linebackers coach Cornell Brown hopes to see Ronny Vandyke play more than that this upcoming season. At 6-foot-4, 219 pounds, Vandyke brings size to the position. He also brings athleticism. He just needs to stay healthy, something he hasn’t done the past two seasons, including the 2013 season when he missed the entire year after tearing the labrum in his right shoulder.

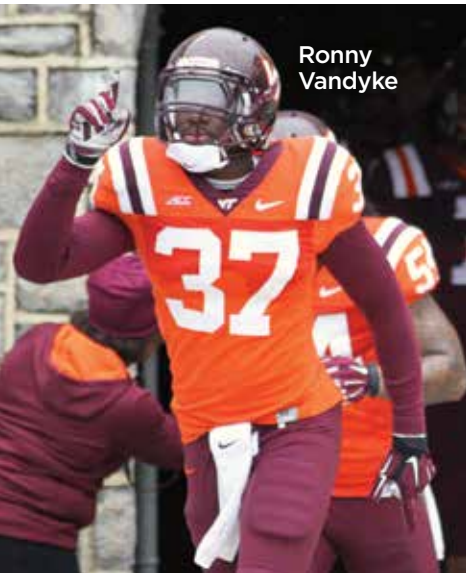
But Vandyke stayed healthy this spring and came out of spring ball entrenched in the No. 1 spot on the depth chart.

“Ronny has improved, and the one thing about it, he is a big kid that can run,” Brown said. “So that helps him out a lot. He has a lot of size, and he creates a tough window for quarterbacks to fit the ball in. He did a good job, and he went against some good guys in Bucky [Hodges] and [Ryan] Malleck. He also covered some receivers.”

There is a lot of the unknown behind Vandyke, though. The list starts with Holland Fisher, a former top-100 recruit out of Richmond. Fisher went to Fork Union, where he became the No. 1 prep school prospect in the nation before enrolling at Tech, and then he took a redshirt season last year.

Tech’s staff moved Fisher from safety/rover to whip before spring practice started, thinking that position would be better suited for his skills. He came out of spring practice at No. 2 on the depth chart.

“Being closer to the ball allows him to use more of his assets, being a guy that just hawks the ball,” Brown said. “It’s a matchup for us putting him on tight ends and backs and situations like that. We like that, and we like what he has brought and what he showed in his redshirt year. By moving him to whip, that puts him in a good position.




“He’s at a different realm from Ronny in that he’s trying to learn the defense from the whip position. That’s his objective right now.”

Following spring practice, Tech’s staff decided to move Anthony Shegog to the whip spot. Shegog spent most of spring bouncing around at defensive back between the safety spots and the nickel spot. At a glance, whip appears to be a good spot for him, but he needs to learn the position.

The rest of the whip position includes walk-ons – Quinton Taylor, Johnathan Galante and Mike Wandey.


Will the Hokies play the whip linebacker more this season? It depends on the matchup. A lot of Tech’s opponents play four receivers and run fast-break offenses, but Brown thinks his whip linebackers can match up with those offenses.

“That’s the way the game is going,” Brown said. “It’s more of a basketball game on turf or on grass. Physical guys that don’t have the ability to run facing smaller guys puts them at a disadvantage, especially in what we do.

“At the end of the day, you want to be a successful team, and how do you fit in making this team successful? Everybody wants to be the starter. Everybody wants to be the headline guy. But for a team to be successful, you’ve got to have role players. When your opportunity comes, you have to be ready to excel.” 

2015 SPRING DEPTH CHART	
WHIP LINEBACKERS	
37	Ronny Vandyke (6-4, 219, r-Sr.)
29	Holland Fisher (6-1, 180, r-Fr.)
24	Anthony Shegog (6-2, 212, r-So.)
35	Quinton Taylor (6-1, 220, r-Jr.)
42	Mike Wandey (5-11, 218, r-So.)
38	Johnathan Galante (5-11, 202, r-So.)


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Injuries create lots of moving parts in DEFENSIVE BACKFIELD this spring

by Jimmy Robertson



A few hours before the Maroon-Orange spring game, the Tech athletics department opened Hokie Village, a pregame festival spot with all sorts of entertainment for young children.

Torrian Gray was not a part of that entertainment, but he probably could have performed a juggling act for the masses. He did that all spring.

Tech’s defensive backs coach spent much of the 15 allotted practices shuffling his defensive backs into different spots and trying to get a feel for what each does best, and more importantly, where they fit in best. Kendall Fuller (wrist) and Brandon Facyson (leg) missed all of spring practice with injuries – they’re not on the depth chart above – and then Greg Stroman injured his hamstring in the first practice and he missed a couple of weeks.

Not only that, Tech went into spring practice looking for starters at the two safety spots after the departures of Kyshoen Jarrett and Detrick Bonner. So Gray was forced to look at a lot of young players this spring – and he didn’t mind that.

“Injuries build depth,” he said. “I’m not upset with those guys being out. You find out a lot more about some other guys. I think it will make us a stronger unit moving forward. You don’t call it [the injuries] a blessing because you don’t want

guys to get injured, but in some respects, we’re fortunate because I think it’s going to make us stronger moving forward.”

The one constant this spring was the play of cornerback Chuck Clark. Gray wanted to give the rising junior some reps at free safety, but the injuries at cornerback forced him to keep Clark there.

Clark ended up stabilizing the secondary. He also showed the ability to be a shutdown cornerback.

“He had as good of a spring as anybody I can recall since I’ve been here,” Gray said. “I’m talking about my defensive backs. He’s been that sound and that solid and that consistent. He had a big-time spring.”

At the other cornerback position, Mook Reynolds and Shawn Payne rotated with the first team while Stroman rehabbed his hamstring injury. When Stroman returned to the field, he worked his way back into the discussion.

By the end of spring practice, Gray listed Stroman as the No. 1 cornerback opposite Clark.

“Greg was very impressive the last week,” Gray said. “He was better than I anticipated. I rotated him and Mook between the first and second teams, but Greg really improved in the short time he was out there, and I was impressed.”

Reynolds, who enrolled in January, showed

2015 SPRING DEPTH CHART

DEFENSIVE BACKS

LEFT CORNERBACKS

- 3 Greg Stroman (6-0, 160, So.)
- 6 Mook Reynolds (6-0, 172, Fr.)
- 17 Shawn Payne (6-2, 191, r-Fr.)
- 12 Erikk Banks (5-9, 176, r-So.)
- 13 Gahrul Reed (5-9, 156, r-Fr.)

RIGHT CORNERBACKS

- 19 Chuck Clark (6-0, 206, Jr.)
- 36 Adonis Alexander (6-3, 193, Fr.)
- 27 Curtis Williams (5-10, 170, r-So.)

NICKEL DEFENSIVE BACK

- 23 Der’Woun Greene (5-10, 189, r-Jr.)
- 6 Mook Reynolds (6-0, 172, Fr.)

FREE SAFETIES

- 26 Desmond Frye (6-2, 196, r-Jr.)
- 2 Donovan Riley (5-11, 210, Sr.)
- 39 Elisha Boyd (6-0, 175, r-Fr.)

ROVERS

- 21 C.J. Reavis (6-1, 205, So.)
- 22 Terrell Edmunds (6-2, 195, r-Fr.)
- 16 Greg Jones (6-2, 207, r-Jr.)

enough potential this spring to get some playing time perhaps next fall. Gray wanted to work him some at the nickel spot – as a fifth defensive back – but the injuries forced him to keep Reynolds at cornerback.

He thinks Reynolds will play next fall.

“I think Mook will help us out in some form if we were to have an injury,” Gray said. “He’ll be in the two deep at either one of the corner spots or the nickel spot. He had a very good spring for a kid who could still be in high school. He made the adjustments and the coaching corrections. He did a great job. I anticipate him being in the two deep at the corner or nickel spot, and he’ll have a chance to help us moving forward.”

Another freshman who may play next fall is Adonis Alexander, who, like Reynolds, enrolled in January. Alexander started out spring practice at free safety, but Gray moved him to cornerback roughly midway through the spring.

Alexander suffered some growing pains – he played a hybrid linebacker role in high school. But Gray saw enough potential that he plans on keeping Alexander at cornerback for now.

“It’s something he hadn’t done before,” Gray said. “I see him in the two deep at the boundary corner spot [right cornerback]. We’re going to continue to bring him along. He’s got a huge upside. He needs to play the position more and more to become a corner. He has the ability, but he just hasn’t done it before.”



More pressing concerns were filling the two safety spots. Bonner started 43 games in his career, while Jarrett started 38.

A depth chart started to emerge at these two

spots by the end of spring practice. C.J. Reavis, who played in 12 games as a true freshman a year ago, solidified the rover spot, with Terrell Edmunds behind him. Desmond Frye was the

No. 1 free safety, with Donovan Riley behind him. “I anticipate C.J. continuing to get better and being a dynamic guy at the rover spot moving forward,” Gray said. “At free safety, we’ve had Donovan Riley and Desmond Frye rotating there, and Desmond right now will finish the spring there [in the top spot].

“We’ve got to have a plan with the pieces of the puzzle. It may still be Chuck Clark, or we may have another guy and Chuck will be the nickel. We have different scenarios that we’re going to play with, and all of it is contingent on whether we get Brandon back healthy.”

At the nickel spot, Gray listed Der’Woun Greene and Reynolds on the depth chart. But the names at this position may change. Clark played well in that role a year ago and may get a look if Facyson and Fuller come back healthy – and there’s no reason to believe they won’t.

So there are still some moving parts in the secondary. Stability won’t come until August.

“We don’t know how we’re going to shuffle some guys,” Gray said. “There’s still going to be an evaluation. You’ve got to have a long-term plan that if you get Brandon and Kendall back and they’re your corners, then maybe Chuck is your nickel or maybe he’s part free safety, part nickel. There are still some things we have to solidify. We have to figure out all the pieces of the puzzle.”

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Kickers and returners in **SOLID SHAPE** heading into summer

by **Jimmy Robertson**

As always, Tech head coach Frank Beamer placed a lot of emphasis on special teams with his program’s spring practices, and he got an evaluation of a new face at punter this spring.

Last year’s punter, A.J. Hughes, missed spring practice after undergoing back surgery – he’s not listed in the depth chart to the right, but should be ready for August practices. Hughes’ injury left the punting duties mostly in the hands of Mitchell Ludwig, who performed some kickoff duties a year ago, and Ludwig impressed this spring.

“Ludwig had a good spring, and he’s a very capable punter,” Beamer said. “I really expect competition between he and A.J. next fall. He needs to be more consistent in putting the ball where it needs to be. If he gets that down – and he has all summer to work on it – I could see him being a factor. I always like it when we’ve got competition.”

At the placekicker spot, Joey Slye returned after a freshman campaign in which he made 20 of 28 field-goal attempts, and he also kicked off 27 times. Beamer said Slye was the best kicker this

spring, but also liked the way that Carson Wise and Michael Santamaria pushed him, particularly as they all battle for kickoff duties.

“It’s [the battle to do kickoffs] been Slye and Ludwig, but Wise has gotten stronger and deeper,” Beamer said. “He’s a little guy, but he’s improved his strength and his length. Santamaria is a kickoff guy who is the most exact in placing the ball. If you can get it in the end zone, you want to go ahead and kick it in the end zone, but if you can’t or you’re going to line drive it, I’d rather position it and set the coverage.

“We’re really fortunate that we’ve got a lot of good kickers. The competition is really good.”

In the return game, Beamer expects the Hokies to be better this upcoming season. Greg Stroman returns after a freshman year in which he averaged 6.9 yards per return, and he returned one 88 yards for a touchdown in the spring game.

“He wants to be back there,” Beamer said. “He wants to take the ball and go, and that’s what you want back there. I would hope that that part of the game would continue to improve. With the formations going the way they’re going ... I think the drawback is their [the opponents’] ability to cover kicks. It’s harder to block a kick, but easier to return a kick. So we’re going to work hard and try to get our return game to be a weapon.”


Beamer said he liked what he saw out of Travon McMillian, who was among a group of candidates for the kickoff return job. J.C. Coleman and Trey Edmunds were in that group, along with fullback

2015 SPRING DEPTH CHART	
SPECIAL TEAMS	
PUNTERS	
30	Mitchell Ludwig (5-11, 194, Jr.)
2	Michael Santamaria (5-9, 168, r-Fr.)
37	Daniel Jones (6-1, 195, r-So.)
KICKERS	
46	Joey Slye (5-10, 221, So.)
35	Carson Wise (5-9, 160, r-Fr.)
2	Michael Santamaria (5-9, 168, r-Fr.)
SNAPPERS	
59	Eddie D’Antuano (6-6, 262, r-Jr.)
65	Colton Taylor (6-0, 212, r-So.)
47	Chaska Moon (6-0, 237, Fr.)
91	Joe Callas (6-0, 197, r-Fr.)

Steven Peoples. Those three, though, did not get many reps this spring.

“Travon is a guy that has speed,” Beamer said. “You’d like a guy with a little more size back there because the collisions are the biggest there. But after that, I’d say Coleman or Edmunds or maybe even Peoples. Some of them may work back there.”

The Hokies need to improve in this area – they ranked 100th nationally last season with a 19.5 average. Beamer, though, wants to see improvement in every area on special teams and for the obvious reason.


“It’s the quickest way to win a game,” he said. 

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**MERICKA,
WOODCOCK**
receive
**Skelton Award
for Academic
Excellence in
Athletics**

by **Jimmy Robertson**

Jon Woodcock and Kelsey Mericka hardly know each other, but they certainly have big plans for their futures.

Woodcock, a starting pitcher on Tech’s baseball team, will be pursuing a master’s degree in industrial and systems engineering next fall, while Mericka, the starting third baseman on the softball squad, will spend the next academic year wrapping up coursework toward a degree in industrial and systems engineering and finishing classes on minors in green engineering and statistics.

Their academic successes, along with their success on the field and in the community, led to both receiving the 2015 Skelton Award for Academic Excellence in Athletics – the highest designation handed out by the Tech athletics department. Both received the honor at the annual Athletics Director’s Honors Breakfast held April 26 at the Inn at Virginia Tech.

The Skelton Award, named after the late Dr. Bill and Peggy Skelton, goes each year to a rising junior, senior or fifth-year male and female student-athlete who has participated in intercollegiate athletics for at least two seasons at Tech and who holds an overall grade-point average of 3.40 or better. Each recipient receives a scholarship of \$5,000.

“I was surprised,” Mericka said. “There are a lot of other athletes just like me that have done well in classes and done a lot of charity service and stuff like that, and done well in their sport. I was honored and surprised.”

“I didn’t know how competitive and how prestigious an honor it was until I got the award,” Woodcock said. “Whit Babcock [Tech’s AD] called me, and Coach [Pat Mason] announced it at practice one day.

“I was pretty pumped. It’s a \$5,000 scholarship, so that will help out with school a good amount.

I didn’t know the extent of how tough it was to win it, so I was pretty excited once I learned more about it.”

Mericka, a native of Kennesaw, Georgia, is a two-time member of the All-ACC Academic Softball Team and a two-time member of the ACC Academic Honor Roll. Her original plan called for graduating this spring with her degree in industrial and systems engineering, but she tore the labrum in her shoulder a year ago and missed all of last season. Thus, she took a redshirt year, giving her another year of eligibility.

She then decided to spread out her coursework and get an additional minor in statistics. She worked as an intern last summer at General Electric in Atlanta, and this summer, plans on working as an intern for Lockheed Martin in Marietta, Georgia.

The daughter of a middle school science teacher, she gets her love for math and science honestly. In high school, she worked extensively in robotics, and her mom, while supportive of her softball career, kept her focused on the importance of good grades.

“I wasn’t allowed to play if I didn’t get good grades,” Mericka said. “I went to the middle school that she taught at, and all of my teachers were looking for more out of me, knowing that she was just down the hall if I didn’t do well.

“From middle school on, I just liked doing well in what I did. I liked being good in everything, so I put in the time and effort to get good grades, and I knew doing well would help me later on. My mom also told me, ‘Softball’s great. It’s a means to an education in college. You have fun. You play your dream. But after that, you’ve got to have a job.’”

On the field, Mericka leads the Hokies with 16 home runs and ranks second on the squad with 43 RBIs. In the community, she volunteers to

help with Micah’s Backpack, a local organization that packs lunches for children from low-income families. She also volunteers with Special Olympics.

Woodcock, a native of Ojai, California – north of Los Angeles – took a rather circuitous route to Virginia Tech. He started his career at Arkansas, where he didn’t play, and then transferred to a junior college in Missouri, where he spent a year before signing with the Hokies.

Woodcock’s coursework at his previous two stops led to him pursuing a psychology degree at Tech – and he graduated in mid-May. With a year of eligibility left, he wanted to take advantage of the opportunity. He researched graduate degrees at Tech and saw that the industrial and systems engineering department accepted those applying for a master’s with psychology degrees. So he applied, and now he plans on pursuing a master’s degree in that field.

“I did some research on the program, and it seemed like an applicable and interesting degree to get,” Woodcock said. “It’s not your mechanical or civil engineering, which is super heavy math based and I would need an engineering undergraduate background. It’s [industrial and systems engineering] more of the business side of engineering, how to engineer business processes to work as efficiently and as effectively as possible.

“I was talking with people about it. We have some managers who are in the undergraduate program, and they say it’s pretty well rounded for jobs after college, and I have no idea what I want to do. I just knew I didn’t want to go into anything with a psychological background. All of this came together really fast and worked out well.”

Woodcock relied on a rather prominent figure to help him get into graduate school at Tech – Babcock. He needed three letters of recommendation to send

with his application, and he wanted letters from people in a diverse group of fields.

So Woodcock got one from a professor, one from Mason and one from Babcock.

“I was thinking about my pitching coach [Robert Woodard], but he recommended asking

the athletic director. So I shot him an email, and he said yes right away. I knew if I had him, it couldn’t hurt. He said he knew some people in the grad school department, so I’m sure that helped my acceptance as well.”

Woodcock, who sports a 3.86 ERA in nine starts with 61 strikeouts in 65.1 innings, made the All-ACC Academic team a year ago and figures to make it again when the ACC announces it later this spring. He often participates in the team’s 19 Ways events – an initiative designed to help others within the community – and he recently helped with Special Olympics and read to children at elementary schools in Christiansburg and Radford.

Woodcock credited his parents, Chris and Stacey, for keeping him grounded as a kid and for making sure he stayed focused on his academics.

“I’ve always done pretty well in school,” he said. “I have a pretty good memory, and I’ve been able to memorize stuff I need for exams. My parents always pushed me to do as well as I could in school. They don’t like when I slack off or procrastinate, so they emphasized being organized and having a schedule and taking advantage of all the time I have and not wasting time, so that I could get ahead.”

Other student-athletes recognized at the AD’s Honors Breakfast included the more than 300 who achieved a grade-point average of 3.0 or better during one or both semesters in the preceding calendar year.

The department also recognized Courtney Dobbs from the cross country and track and field team and Devin Carter from the wrestling squad

as its ACC Female and Male Scholar-Athletes of the Year, respectively. Dobbs, a native of Glen Allen, Virginia, holds a degree in accounting and is wrapping up a second degree in finance. Carter, a native of Christiansburg, Virginia, owns a degree in psychology, is getting a master’s in instructional design and technology and plans on pursuing a doctoral degree in industrial organizational psychology starting next fall.

In addition, the athletics department recognized its Scholar-Athletes of the Year, an honor that goes to those with the highest GPA in the 2014 calendar year. This list of honorees included Alexandra Watt (women’s cross country), Maggie Mitchell (HighTechs), Shannon Mayrose and Katie Yensen (women’s soccer), Michelle Prong (softball), Kristen Lee (women’s track and field) and Brad Gross (video).

Finally, the department recognized the 2014 All-Academic Team, which includes the top student-athlete academically in his/her sport. The list for this all-academic team include Woodcock, Mericka, Ryan Mondy (golf), Meghan Macera (lacrosse), Hunter Koontz (men’s tennis), Francesca Fusinato (women’s tennis), Tori Repass (athletic trainer), Christian Beyer (men’s basketball), Kelsey Conyers (women’s basketball), Cody Bushman (cheerleading), Vincent Ciattei (men’s cross country), Ross Ward (football), Lauren Stevenson (managers), Patrick Conroy (men’s soccer), Brandon Fiala (men’s swimming and diving), Caroline Buscaglia (women’s swimming and diving), Torben Laidig (men’s track and field), Lindsey Owens (volleyball) and Carter (wrestling). 



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Hanna Green wasn't well known in recruiting circles coming out of high school, but the Tech sophomore is starting to attract a lot of attention thanks to her performances with the Hokies' track and field and cross country teams

by Marc Mullen

Who is Hanna Green?

Seriously, who is HANNA GREEN?

Yes, this article will help introduce the Virginia Tech sophomore out of Latrobe, Pennsylvania, to Hokie Nation, but those in the track and field world are probably asking themselves that very question.

Green was not a highly recruited athlete coming out of high school, and that was justified because she was only once a district champion in the 400-meter run and never finished higher than fifth at the state meet during her career at Greater Latrobe High.

However, Green has turned a high school personal best of 2 minutes, 16.39 seconds, in the 800-meter run into an incredible collegiate career so far, all in less than two full seasons. She's already earned a pair of All-America nods, won an ACC indoor title (defeating a defending national champion in the process), finished as an ACC runner-up and established five school records (three individual and two relays).

In her most recent 800-meter race, one at the Payton Jordan Invitational held in Palo Alto, California, on May 2, she posted a qualifying time for the 2016 U.S. Olympic Trials – a 2:02.62, which broke the school record again and is the seventh-fastest time in the nation (as of Inside Hokies Sports' deadline).

"As a freshman, it was like she had no idea or expectations of what she was going to do," said Ben Thomas, Tech's head cross country and distance coach. "By indoor at the ACCs, she was really, really good. But the way she went out and won the 800-meter title this year, against a defending national champion, she was ... whether she just keeps that all in, but from the outside, she just seemed remarkably calm. And in a sense, there was less pressure, too, because she wasn't a favorite even though she had finished second the year before and the other girl [Clemson's Natoya Goule] had been a national champion.

"She had run some nice times, so I don't think people were totally overlooking her, but for her to win the title was impressive. She's got that, 'Hey, let's go out and see what I can do.' I think she understands that, even though she ran as fast as she did at Stanford and it was awesome to do that as a sophomore, there are still women out there running faster, and she wants to go get those people. That's pretty rare to see in that much talent, a willingness to go outside of her comfort zone to get what she wants."

So how did a girl born and raised in Latrobe – most famous for being the home of the Latrobe Brewery (the original brewer of Rolling Rock beer), the hometown of pro golfer Arnold Palmer, the childhood home of actor Fred Rogers and the training camp for the Pittsburgh Steelers – become one of the fastest 800-meter runners in the country?

"It's more what she's been willing to bring to the table in terms of the willingness to go outside of what she had done before, what she knew before," Thomas said. "She had trained a lot more like a sprinter in high school, and even though she had done cross country, it certainly wasn't at a high level.

"For as little as she was running, she had some performances that caught my eye, knowing that she had that kind of 400 speed. But what she has brought is the willingness to train like a Division I cross country runner, and to be willing to do that and to do it as consistently as she has, that's what really makes her special. She's durable and has a durable mindset to work hard and do something that's she's never really done before."

Hanna is the oldest daughter of Timothy and Romi Green, who also have two other daughters, Halle and Sydney, and a son, Coby. As most adolescents do, Hanna tried almost every sport growing up – gymnastics, volleyball, cheerleading, softball, tennis and basketball to name a few. Soccer was actually her favorite until she started running in middle school.

Continued on page 40

“My parents really never forced me into anything,” Green said. “My mom used to play volleyball for fun, and both of them played sports in high school, but nothing more than that. They would just let me choose whatever I wanted to do, and they would just support me in whatever I wanted to do.

“I actually started running because my friend who I played soccer with was going to join the cross country team, and so I did it mostly to be with my friends. Then I realized that I was good at it, and I just kept doing it and ended up liking it a lot.”

When Green got to high school, she faced the challenge of having a different coach for all three sports seasons – cross country, indoor track and outdoor track. She was so good at many different distances that the coaches put her in as many events as they could. She normally ran four events at each meet – usually two relays (the 4x800 and the 4x400) and two individual races (the 400 and 800).

“They [her coaches] would have me run whatever they needed me to run, so I never got the chance to focus on any specific race,” Green said. “Also, we didn’t have a middle-distance group, so I would either practice with the sprinters or the long-distance group. I would be back and forth a lot.

“I think if I would have focused more on one specific event, then I probably would have done

better, but I never really did think Division I running was something I would have a chance to do. I would have been happy running at a Division III school. That was kind of what I was thinking back then.”

The recruiting process for Green, the oldest of the four children, was a bit hectic and also stressful for her parents. Knowing that her times weren’t jumping off the page at college recruiters, she put all her concentration into what schools offered her major – interior design – and she went from there.

“I’m kind of a go-with-the-flow type of person, and they [my parents] had no idea what to do,” Green said. “But I immediately eliminated a lot of schools because they didn’t offer my major. The major was the most important thing for me, and it was hard to find schools because my major is very limited in places.

“When Coach Thomas contacted me, it was definitely surprising and exciting. There were other Division I schools that I was talking to, and I was indifferent as to where I would go, but when I saw that they had it [interior design as a major] here, I started looking at Tech more. This was actually the only school I officially visited and applied to.”

Green stepped foot on campus in the fall of 2013, and by the end of the 2014 outdoor track and field season, she had already earned a silver medal at the ACC Indoor Championships in the

800 and was an All-American in same event at the NCAA Outdoor Championships.

She became the first true freshman at the school since 2007 to earn All-America honors on the track and just the fourth female. The first was Kristin Price in 2001 (3,000, indoor; 5,000, outdoor) followed by the Kristi Castlin (60-meter hurdles, indoor; 100-meter hurdles, outdoor) and Queen Harrison (100-meter hurdles, outdoor; 400-meter hurdle, outdoor) in 2007.

“When I was looking at the school, I was definitely doubting myself a little bit, because when I was looking at the times the girls were running, they were at 2:05, 2:06, and I was nowhere near the times they were running,” Green said. “I came in thinking I could drop my time to 2:10 in my first year, maybe a little lower. After my first race here, I think I ran a 2:08 in a relay, and I was just like, ‘Wow!’ That was eight seconds faster than my personal record. So it was just exciting going through the season, and I was surprised because I would never have expected to make nationals as a freshman.”

This season, Green became just the second sophomore (or younger) track student-athlete to win an ACC indoor title since Patrice Potts took gold in the 60-meter dash at the 2007 ACC Championships. Considering the field in the 800-meter race, it was truly a remarkable accomplishment. Goule swept the 800 at both



In a surprise, Hanna Green ran down the defending national champion in the 800 on the last lap to win a gold medal at the 2015 ACC Indoor Track and Field Championships.

the NCAA indoor and outdoor meets in 2013 as a member of LSU’s women’s track team, a first in that school’s history, and the Hokies’ Amanda Smith, the reigning ACC 800-meter indoor champion, was also in the field.

In the race, which was being held at Rector Field House on the Tech campus, Goule – who transferred to Clemson after one season at LSU – was in front with a lap to go (200 meters), while Green was in fourth. However, Green used a powerful kick in the last 50 meters to edge Goule by 14-hundredths of a second. The top four finishers all stopped the clock within a second of each other. Green’s time of 2:03.43 set both an ACC Championships record and the Rector Field House record.

“Everyone kept telling me that I could do it, and I was obviously going to try my best, but everything just worked out that day, and I passed her in, like, the last 10 meters,” Green said. “To win that was really surprising, but to have it at home and have everyone cheering for you, just slamming on the track, was amazing. My parents were there, and they were cheering me on as well, so that was helpful.

“My approach to the race was to sit on her until the end and then kick at the end if I could, and I was in fourth until the last 50 meters. I just wanted to stay in the top pack, and then when it came down to the end, I just kicked and finished as fast as I could.”

Green followed her ACC title with her second All-America honor when she placed fifth at


the NCAA Indoor Championships held in Fayetteville, Arkansas. She had to race Goule in both the preliminaries and the finals, and the Tiger ultimately defended her crown, getting the best of Green in both. But Green still set a personal record by a quarter of a second.

The ACC Outdoor Championships were held on May 14-16 in Tallahassee, Florida (after Inside Hokie Sports’ deadline) and were to be followed by the NCAA East Regionals in Jacksonville, Florida, on May 28-30 and the NCAA Championships in Eugene, Oregon, on June 10-13.

“My goals for the rest of the year are to win ACCs again, but I think it will be hard this time because she [Goule] knows me now,” Green said a week before the event. “I think, indoors, she didn’t really know I was going to be there, but she knows this time, and I think she’s going to take the race out really hard.

“But I’d like to win that, and I’ve already qualified for regionals, but I’d like to qualify for nationals and then place better than I did last year (13th) or actually better than I did at indoors this year (fifth). I’m also planning to run at the USA Championships in [late] June.”

Hokie Nation now has a little more knowledge on the latest phenom in Tech Director of Track and Field and Cross Country Dave Cianelli’s program. So, too, does Goule.

As for the rest of those in the track world, it’s time to start paying attention. Hanna Green is rapidly on her way to becoming a household name. 

A large advertisement for The Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center. The background is a night photograph of the hotel's Tudor-style architecture with many lit windows. Overlaid text includes: "YOUR HOME FOR GAME DAY" in large white letters, "LATE SUMMER & FALL RATES STARTING AT \$139" below it, the hotel's logo (a stylized 'HR'), "THE HOTEL ROANOKE & CONFERENCE CENTER", "A DOUBLETREE BY HILTON", the website "www.HotelRoanoke.com", and phone numbers "540.985.5900" and "800.222.TREE". At the bottom, it says "Based on availability. Rates may vary. Book early for best rates. For more information, visit HotelRoanoke.com" followed by social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and Instagram.

Logo for Capital Contractors, Inc. It features a stylized 3D geometric logo consisting of red and grey blocks forming a 'C' shape. Below the logo, the word "CAPITAL" is written in large, bold, black sans-serif font, and "Interior Contractors, Inc" is written in a smaller, grey sans-serif font.

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A photograph of a modern, multi-story building with a mix of brick and stone facade, identified as a Virginia Tech Athletics facility. The building has large windows and a prominent stone tower section. Below the photo, the text "Proud Partner of Virginia Tech Athletics" is displayed in a bold, black sans-serif font.

MERICKA

—*Model*—

Student-Athlete

Life hasn't always been easy for softball standout Kelsey Mericka, but Tech's starting third baseman has managed to be successful on the field and a superstar in the classroom

by Jimmy Robertson

“

I liked the cheers. I also liked the popsicles you got after the game. There were a lot of external factors that I liked when I was younger.

—Kelsey Mericka on why she liked playing softball as a kid

Kids pick various sports to play based on a number of reasons. Some simply like the sport. Others like being outside and simply running around. Many like being around a bunch of their friends. Kelsey Mericka chose softball for more important reasons.

“I liked the cheers,” she said, smiling. “I also liked the popsicles you got after the game.” Then she chuckled, “There were a lot of external factors that I liked when I was younger.” Who knew frozen water on a stick could be such a motivating force?

Fortunately those things kept her involved in a sport in which she now practically dominates as a college player. The Hokies’ starting third baseman, Mericka is hitting .275 in this, her redshirt junior season, and has cranked 16 home runs (as of Inside Hokie Sports’ deadline), tying the school’s single-season mark. More importantly, paced by her, the Hokies appear to be on the cusp of a fourth straight NCAA regional appearance.

Mericka, a native of Kennesaw, Georgia, has started every game in which she has played in her collegiate career – 139 heading into the ACC Championship. That makes her a rarity in college athletics, regardless of the sport.

She seems to be a natural at this sport, but don’t let the ease in which she plays fool you. She divulged a startling revelation – she wasn’t a very good player as a kid.

“I think I started in slow-pitch softball when I was 6 and then made the transition to fast-pitch when I was 10. When I was 10, I wasn’t very good at all,” Mericka said. “I was a base runner, honestly.

“I couldn’t throw. I was small. I had a very small build when I was younger, so I could bunt, and I was quick. I would always lay down a swinging bunt and get on, and that would be my contribution. My skills weren’t there.

“My coach loved me, but he wanted to win, and I wasn’t going to help us win unless I was running.”

Her coach, though, put her in touch with someone who could spend more time with her to help her advance her skillset. That marked the turning point in Mericka’s evolution from pinch runner to big-time player.

This coach, Phil Berry, who now is the head softball coach at Harding University in Arkansas, worked with her on throwing, hitting and catching. He ultimately moved her to the catcher spot, and Mericka took to the position. She liked calling pitches and running the show.

Her mother, Jacqueline, also played a role. Now Jacqueline Mericka-Brand, she was a great player in her own right, and she organized private hitting lessons with Don McKinlay, whom Mericka still visits when she returns home. She also called the pitchers’ parents to organize impromptu gatherings between the pitchers and her daughter.

Continued on page 44

“I would catch them for repetitions to get better at catching,” Mericka said. “It was a free way for me to practice.”

Life, though, wasn’t always softball and popsicles. Her childhood received a jolt at the age of 7 when she found out that her father, Michael Mericka, had been diagnosed with brain cancer. The real bombshell came a year later, when he passed away.

Shock more than sadness filled the mind of Mericka. Her parents had gotten a divorce a couple of years prior, so when it comes to her father, she really only remembers the weekend visits and the times when he came to her slow-pitch games. She remembers the expressions of joy on his face while he watched her play.

“It was hard at the time, but it didn’t really hit me until I was older,” she said. “The older I got, the more I would see other teammates’ parents at the games, and that’s when it hit me and I was more aware.

“My sister [Jaime] was super upset. She’s seven years older than me. It was hard on her because she grew up with him. He would take her to games because my mom was working, and my mom would take me to my games. It was hard watching her [her sister] because she took it hard. It helped that my grandparents were there, and my mom still let us visit every other week as if we were visiting our dad.”

Michael Mericka’s parents lived nearby and took care of him during that final year as he underwent treatments. They remained a part of his daughters’ lives once he passed away.

That included giving them keepsakes to remember their father. Today, Mericka keeps her father’s nameplate from one of his past jobs in her apartment. She also has two photos, one of him and one of them together, which she keeps close by as well.

Her grandparents helped her mom as well, as did many others.

“Everybody took care of us the best that they could,” Mericka said. “It’s kind of made me a stronger person, I think, and also more independent. My mom couldn’t be at everything, so I would travel with other players and their families. I had to grow up a little bit faster, and it’s benefitted me in the long run.”

Mericka ultimately became one of Georgia’s best high school prospects, earning first-team all-state honors her final two years at Kell High School. As a senior, he was the state’s Class AAAA player of the year after hitting .532, with 11 homers.

She planned on going to college close to home to be near her mom, her grandparents and her three sisters (two stepsisters). Georgia Tech was her top choice for a long time, and her love of math and robotics and Georgia Tech’s prestigious engineering programs made for the perfect match.

But then-Virginia Tech assistant Barb Sherwood emailed Mericka, expressing interest in recruiting her. Sherwood went and watched her play in a tournament in Colorado, and Mericka hit four home runs.

Needless to say, a scholarship offer came forth from Virginia Tech, whose own engineering programs take a backseat to no one’s.

“I think I had the tournament of my life,” Mericka said. “She invited me to come to Blacksburg, and I came up and I really liked it. It seemed like the best overall fit for me.”

Mericka became an immediate starter, though head coach Scot Thomas moved her from catcher to third base. He wanted to keep former catcher Betty Rose entrenched there, while also getting Mericka’s bat into the lineup.

In her 12th collegiate game, she blasted two homers and drove in six runs in a win over Wagner. She finished with a respectable .283 hitting average as a freshman, while clubbing nine homers and driving in 45 runs.

Thomas moved her back to catcher the following season, but that lasted all of 24 games. Mericka fractured a vertebrae in her back and missed the final 35 games of the season. Tech still received an NCAA regional bid, but finished with a sub-.500 record in ACC play.

Things went from bad to worse her junior year. She tore the labrum in her right shoulder, which forced her to undergo surgery. She took a redshirt year to recover.

Missing parts or all of two seasons gave her a new perspective.

“It gave me a new focus, just watching the game from the outside in,” Mericka said. “It was a good perspective for me. It was still difficult, especially when you have to watch everyone else play and you want to be out there so bad.

“But the year off helped me throwing-wise because I got to re-learn how to throw. It had been torn for a while and got to the point where it needed surgery. Instead of make-shifting a throw, I actually got to throw without pain. It gave me time to break down my swing and work on it. It was a refresher year, and honestly, it helped me coming into this year.”

Mericka found herself back at third base for this season primarily because of the emergence of Katey Smith last season. Smith started 57 games at catcher in 2014 and hit .317, with nine homers and a team-leading 49 RBIs. So Thomas decided to move Mericka back to third base.

The year off for Mericka proved beneficial in another important part of her life – academics. She had planned to graduate this spring with a degree in industrial and systems engineering and a minor in green engineering. But with a year of eligibility left, she decided to spread her coursework out and pursue a second minor in statistics.

“I’m going to take statistics courses [next fall] because I like statistics and want to go further in that. If I understand that a little more, I can maybe do risk analysis later on in the jobs I want

to do,” she said. “I did that with one of my projects in the classroom, and I really enjoyed that. I want to see if I can incorporate that in my job later on.”

The additional year also allows her to work on a research project with one of her professors. She’ll spend the fall – when her softball schedule is less hectic – working with a professor on biomechanics.

“It’ll be on the human factors aspects and biomechanics and how certain products move with the body,” Mericka said. “It’s kind of different than what I’ve done, but I did well in the one class I had with him, and I had a couple of other classes with him. This extra year gives me a chance to take what I want class-wise.”

Much in the way she has crushed it on the softball field, she also has crushed it in the classroom. A two-time All-ACC Academic Softball Team member, she recently won the Skelton Award for Academic Excellence in Athletics – the top honor handed out by the athletics department. She became just the second softball player ever to win the prestigious honor (Michelle Meadows, 2001).


Her attention to detail academically should present her with multiple future options. She worked as an intern at General Electric in Atlanta last summer, and this summer, she will be working as an intern for Lockheed Martin in Marietta, Georgia, before returning to Blacksburg for a final year.

Mericka received her latest award at the AD’s Honors Breakfast the Sunday following Tech’s spring game. At times like those, she thinks of her parents – a mother who is a middle school science teacher and takes care of two younger children from a second marriage and thus isn’t able to come to attend many of her games, and a father who left this world too soon more than a dozen years ago.

They seem so far away. And yet, not so far away.

“Before every game, I write, ‘For Mom and Dad’ on my hand,” Mericka said.

They’re the inspirations that have carried her this far, from a little girl who loved softball because of the popsicles she received after games to an ACC standout and academic superstar.

For sure, they’ll be the inspirations that carry her to wherever she wants to go next. 



Kelsey Mericka has started every game in which she has played in her career at Tech and already ranks in the top five on the Hokies’ career list in homers and slugging percentage with a year left to play.

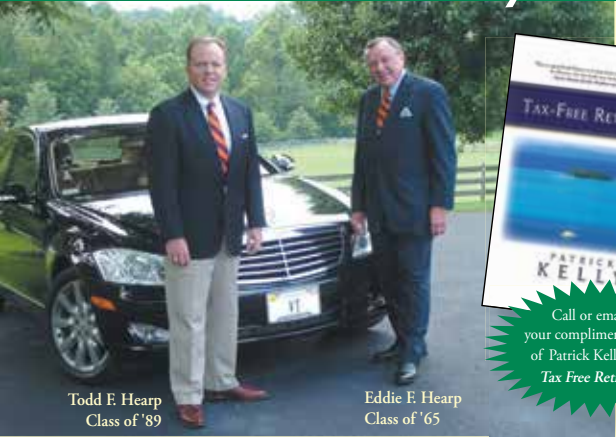
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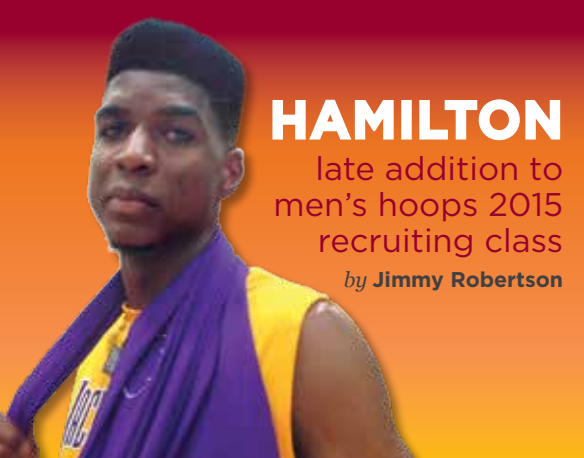
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HAMILTON

late addition to
men's hoops 2015
recruiting class

by Jimmy Robertson

Photo courtesy of TexasHoops.com.

Buzz Williams' 2014-15 squad lacked size inside, both in terms of height and girth, but the Hokies' head coach addressed that this spring, signing a seven-footer during the spring signing period, which ran for a couple of weeks in April.

Johnny Hamilton, a 7-foot, 215-pound post player from Trinidad and Tobago, joined the Hokies' program after signing his letter-of-intent. Hamilton played two seasons at Jacksonville College, a junior college in Elk, Texas. As a sophomore, he averaged nine points and 8.9 rebounds per game, and he shot 61.7 percent from the field for the season.

Hamilton also had 112 blocked shots for the Jaguars and was among the leaders nationally in blocked shots, averaging 4.3 blocked shots per game. He had a career-best 18 points and 19 rebounds to go along with five blocked shots in a February victory over Angelina College.

Jacksonville, which finished the season 19-12 overall, competes in the Texas Eastern Conference (TEC), one of the top junior college conferences in the nation.

"We are excited to add another member to our 2015 class," Williams said in a statement with the release announcing Hamilton's signing. "Johnny is still young to the game, but he has a high ceiling for improvement. More importantly, he has the character and work ethic to get there. As a former student manager in the TEC, I know that he has been well-coached the past two years and has played in one of the best JUCO leagues in the country."

Hamilton will become the first seven-footer in the Hokies' program since Luke Minor signed with Tech out of Hagerstown Community College in Hagerstown, Maryland, for the 2002-03 season. The 7-3 Minor, a Richmond, Virginia, native, spent just one season in Blacksburg and played in seven games. He scored just eight points and grabbed seven rebounds that season in what turned out to be then-coach Ricky Stokes' final year.

Hamilton became the fourth signee in Williams' second class – a class ranked No. 24 nationally by 247Sports, No. 30 nationally by Rivals and No. 33 nationally by ESPN.com. Chris Clarke, a 6-6, 185-pound forward from Virginia Beach, Virginia; Justin Robinson, a 6-1, 170-pound point guard from Manassas, Virginia; and Kerry Blackshear, Jr., a 6-9,

IHS extra

230-pound post player from Orlando, Florida, all signed in the fall.

All three of those fall signees enjoyed huge senior seasons, starting with Clarke, who was the Virginia Independent Schools Athletic Association (VISAA) Division I state Player of the Year. He averaged 15.8 points, nine rebounds and four steals per game in leading Cape Henry Collegiate School to its second straight state title. Behind Clarke, Cape Henry went 50-0 at home the past two years and 57-3 overall. Clarke was considered the top prospect in the state by most recruiting services.

Robinson was the Gatorade Player of the Year in the state of Maryland after averaging 22.2 points, 7.8 assists, 4.3 rebounds and 2.2 steals per game for St. James School. He led the team to an 18-8 record.

Blackshear, Jr., earned first-team all-state honors (Class 8A) and first-team all-area honors by the Orlando Sentinel. He averaged 22.6 points, 13.3 rebounds, 5.3 assists and 3.4 blocked shots per game. He played in the Florida vs. USA game, an all-star game pitting prospects from Florida versus prospects from the rest of the country as part of the state's Senior Showcase All-Star Weekend back in April. He scored 10 points in the game and made the All-Showcase team.

With the addition of these four, Tech's roster next season – barring any departures – will feature five sophomores, four freshmen, three juniors and two seniors (one walk-on). **VT**

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