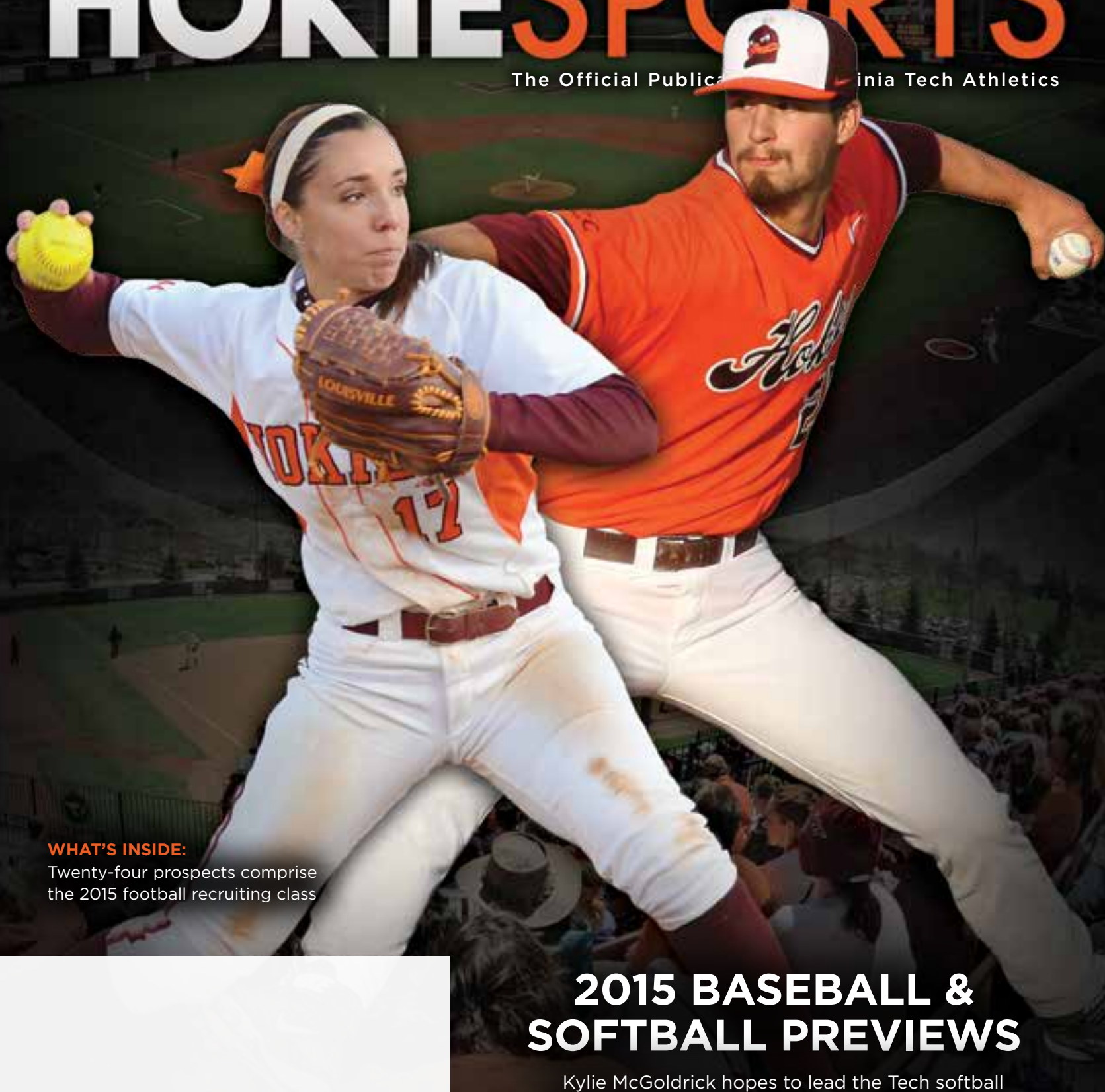


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The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics



WHAT'S INSIDE:

Twenty-four prospects comprise the 2015 football recruiting class

2015 BASEBALL & SOFTBALL PREVIEWS

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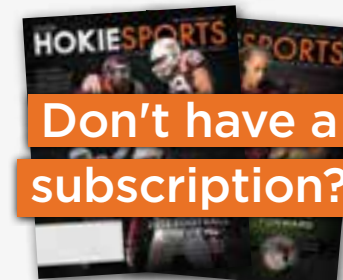
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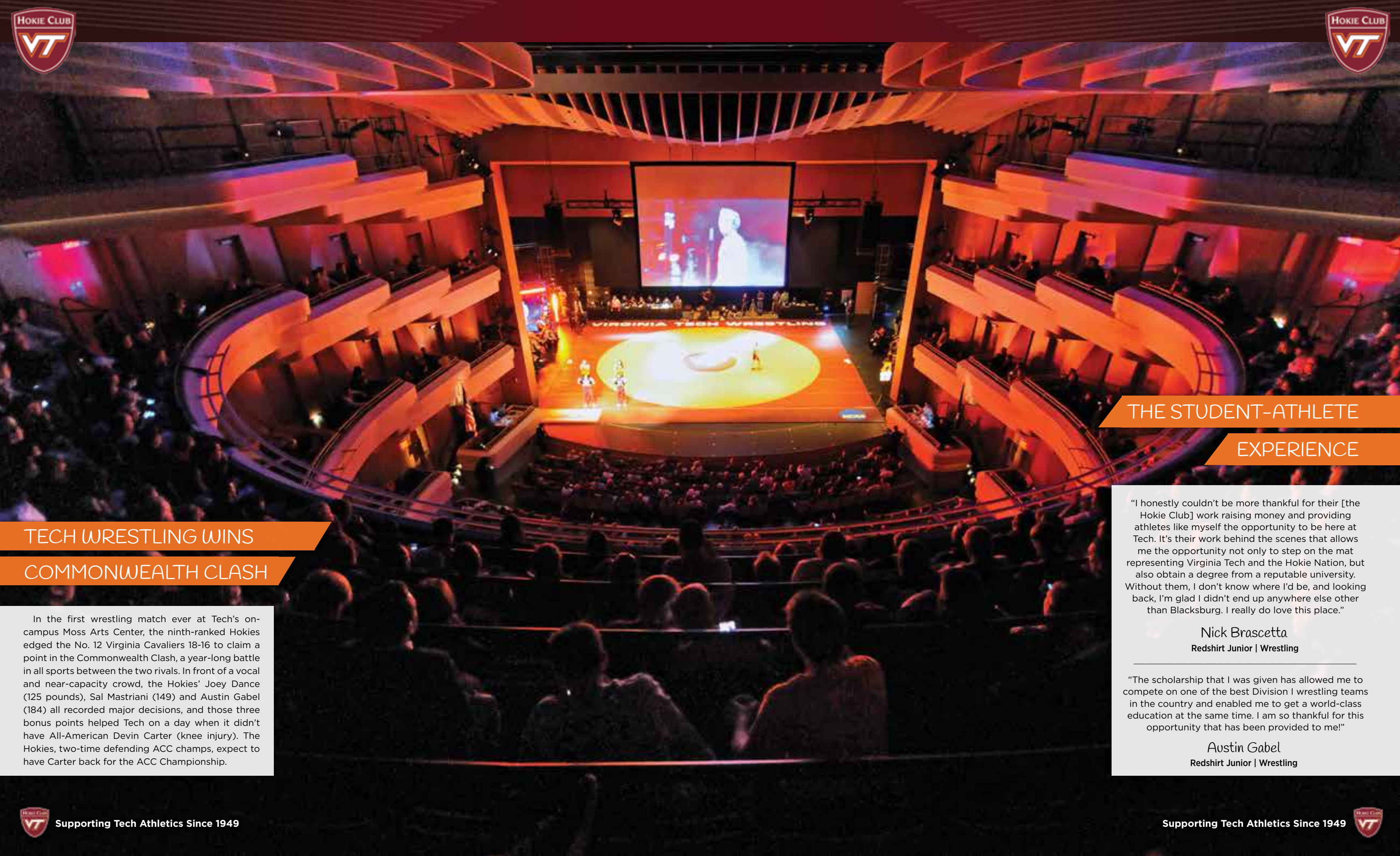
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TECH WRESTLING WINS COMMONWEALTH CLASH

In the first wrestling match ever at Tech's on-campus Moss Arts Center, the ninth-ranked Hokies edged the No. 12 Virginia Cavaliers 18-16 to claim a point in the Commonwealth Clash, a year-long battle in all sports between the two rivals. In front of a vocal and near-capacity crowd, the Hokies' Joey Dance (125 pounds), Sal Mastriani (149) and Austin Gabel (184) all recorded major decisions, and those three bonus points helped Tech on a day when it didn't have All-American Devin Carter (knee injury). The Hokies, two-time defending ACC champs, expect to have Carter back for the ACC Championship.

THE STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

"I honestly couldn't be more thankful for their [the Hokie Club] work raising money and providing athletes like myself the opportunity to be here at Tech. It's their work behind the scenes that allows me the opportunity not only to step on the mat representing Virginia Tech and the Hokie Nation, but also obtain a degree from a reputable university. Without them, I don't know where I'd be, and looking back, I'm glad I didn't end up anywhere else other than Blacksburg. I really do love this place."

Nick Brascetta
Redshirt Junior | Wrestling

"The scholarship that I was given has allowed me to compete on one of the best Division I wrestling teams in the country and enabled me to get a world-class education at the same time. I am so thankful for this opportunity that has been provided to me!"

Austin Gabel
Redshirt Junior | Wrestling



The Donor File

Robert Medler

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Chantilly, Virginia

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FAMILY: Wendy (wife)



Q&A

Q: A Hokie is ...
A: Respectful, resourceful, talented, tough as nails and not a Cavalier.

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because ...
A: The individuals who constitute the Hokie Nation are real. I remember someone once describing Blacksburg to me as a place where people ask you how you are doing and people really care and listen to your response. In today's society that is rare indeed, and I feel grateful to be affiliated with such a place.

Q: What is your best memory of Virginia Tech athletics?
A: I have been attending games since 1984, so I have several. One of the top ones that immediately comes to mind is the basketball game my freshman year against then-No. 2 and undefeated Memphis State. I sat right below the ceiling with one of my best friend, and I just remember how loud the Cassell was during the second half of that game.

A more recent one is the football comeback against Miami in 2011. My father had died a couple of days earlier,

and he was a huge Hokie fan, so I would like to think he was smiling down on Lane that day.

Another one that really jumps out is Dayle Colpitts impersonating a stone wall in goal for the women's soccer team against Santa Clara during the NCAA's in 2013. Considering what was at stake in that game, that has to be one of the top clutch performances by a Hokie athlete of all time. If I spent an hour thinking about it, I could probably name another 30 or 40 easily, but those are the ones that immediately come to mind.

Q: How did you get involved with the Hokie Club?
A: I briefly lived in Florida after graduating from grad school, and when I moved back to Virginia in 1996, I immediately joined.

Q: What caused you to become a fan of Virginia Tech?
A: I have always gravitated to the underdog, and growing up in Northern Virginia in the 70s and 80s, we were definitely the underdogs. Our presence

in Northern Virginia was nearly non-existent at that point. You couldn't go into any store in Northern Virginia and find any Tech stuff. The growth of the university from that time is remarkable.

Q: Do you have any gameday superstitions? If so, what are they?
A: Not sure I would call it a superstition, but if I don't have one of my Hokie Blazers and one of my cowboy hats on for an event at the Cassell, I do feel a bit like a fish out of water.

Q: What motivated you to give back to help Virginia Tech athletics?
A: I believe, as an athletics department, we are doing things the "right way" with respect to the student-athlete experience, and it gives me a sense of pride that, in some small way, I am contributing to that for future Hokie athletes.

Q: I'm a Hokie Club member because ...
A: It's the right thing to do. If we are going to get to where we want to be, it is going to take all of Hokie Nation to contribute in any way they can.

The following is a partial list of donors who upgraded their memberships in 2014. Room did not allow for the complete list, so the remainder will be listed next month.

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news & notes by Jimmy Robertson

Beamer names Burden to staff as receivers coach

Tech coach Frank Beamer recently announced the addition of Zohn Burden to his coaching staff as the new receivers coach. Burden takes the place of Aaron Moorehead, who left in mid-January for the same position at Texas A&M. “We are excited to welcome Coach Burden and his family into the Hokie Nation,” Beamer said. “He brings an enthusiasm for recruiting, and his knowledge and experience of the wide receiver position as both a player and coach will be a good fit. As a recruiter, his relentless approach and diligence will pay dividends for us as we work to attract the highest caliber of student-athlete here to Virginia Tech.” Burden comes to Tech from Old Dominion University, where he has worked for the past

Merritt announces retirement from VTAF

Lu Merritt, the longtime leader of the Virginia Tech Athletic Fund – better known to Hokie Nation as the “Hokie Club” – announced his decision on Feb. 3 to retire in July at the end of the fiscal year. Merritt, whose official title is senior director of development for intercollegiate athletics, began working in his current capacity in 1994, and he oversaw a fundraising arm that grew by more than 600 percent during his career. Behind his leadership, the Hokie Club raised money for projects such as the expansion of Lane Stadium, the Hahn Hurst Basketball Practice Center, the football locker room and the indoor practice facility currently being constructed. Merritt graduated from Tech in 1968 with a degree in management. The former Tech men’s tennis player worked in banking for 23 years

Hokies’ football schedule released

The ACC released the football schedules of all league teams on Jan. 29, and the Virginia Tech schedule features six home games, including five against teams that played in bowl games this past season. Ohio State, the defending national champion,

three seasons as a receivers coach. Prior to that, he spent the 2011 season at the University of Richmond as the receivers coach. Burden worked at ODU for four seasons before taking the Richmond job. Burden coached Antonio Vaughan to first-team All-Conference USA honors in 2014 and Zach Pascal to Conference USA honorable mention accolades. Vaughan led the league with 1,019 receiving yards, while his 12 touchdowns were tied for fourth in the country. Burden graduated from Virginia Beach’s Salem High School and later VMI. He was a three-time all-league receiver for the Keydets. At 31, Burden will be the youngest member of Beamer’s staff.

before moving to athletics fundraising. “I had a plan in mind that, when I turned 70, I would retire, and I will turn 70 in June,” Merritt said. “Virginia Tech gave me an opportunity to play tennis in college. It gave me an opportunity to be successful in my banking career. To have the opportunity to come back and finish the last 20 years of my career working for the school that I love has been special.” “He was, and is, a leader in our industry and has had an extremely positive and significant impact on the growth and success of Virginia Tech athletics,” Tech AD Whit Babcock said. “However, he also had time to serve as mentor to many, including me, who were coming up through the ranks of our profession. He is a good friend, an even better man, and a true Hokie. He will be missed greatly.”

serves as the headliner of the Hokies’ slate. Tech and the Buckeyes open the season on Sept. 7 – Labor Day – at Lane Stadium. The Hokies’ upset the Buckeyes 35-21 in Columbus, Ohio, this past season, which marked the Buckeyes’ only blemish.

2015 Schedule:

Sept. 7	Ohio State
Sept. 12	Furman
Sept. 19	at Purdue
Sept. 26	at East Carolina
Oct. 3	Pittsburgh
Oct. 9	NC State (Friday)
Oct. 17	at Miami
Oct. 24	Duke
Oct. 31	at Boston College
Nov. 12	at Georgia Tech (Thursday)
Nov. 21	North Carolina
Nov. 28	at Virginia

Renewal applications for Virginia Tech season ticket holders will be available beginning on March 2. The deadline for fans to have their renewals for season ticket orders in to the Virginia Tech Athletics Ticket Office is April 6. If any season tickets remain available after the priority renewal deadline of April 6, then the Ticket Office will offer them for sale to the general public on or near April 20. Those wishing to receive “Early Bird” renewal incentives are asked to renew by March 30 by 5 p.m. Details for this exclusive offer will be included in the renewal/new ticket order information.

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VIRGINIA



editor's desk | by Jimmy Robertson

Quarterback recruit Lawson brings talent and confidence to Blacksburg

Long before Virginia Tech became a destination for future engineers, a home for future business executives and a four-year stop by any number of 18- to 22-year-olds looking for future success in any number of fields, it was an agricultural and mechanical school. Today's generation tends to forget that.

Longtime traditionalists probably will be happy to learn that one of the Hokies' more acclaimed football recruits plans to pursue a degree closely related to this university's roots. He wants to pursue agribusiness as a career.

"I want to learn how to manage land and have land," said Dwayne Lawson, the lone quarterback recruit in Tech's 2015 recruiting class. "You can do a lot of things with that. You can have a farm, build houses ... do anything you want to do. Having land is a good investment. Knowing how to manage and knowing what to do when you have land ... that would be a great thing to know. We'll see how it goes. It's something I'm interested in."

Lawson, from Tampa, Florida, may change his mind once he gets to school, as many young men and women do. For now, he plans on this academic pursuit, and while Tech's coaching staff supports that endeavor, they also hope he comes to own the house known as Lane Stadium and the 100 or so yards of real estate within it.

Lawson was one of the most important pieces in Tech's 24-member recruiting haul. He plays the most important position – and it's a position where the Hokies need to find a long-term solution after starter Michael Brewer departs following the 2015 season.

Kudos to Scot Loeffler for a.) finding Lawson, and b.) going after him even though the Hokies signed two quarterbacks last season (Andrew Ford and Chris Durkin). For several years, the coaches came up short at the spot because no one wanted to sit behind Tyrod Taylor or Logan Thomas, and they felt other signal callers (e.g. Bucky Hodges, Travon McMillian) fit better at other positions. Now Tech goes into spring practice with four quarterbacks and Lawson coming in the fall.

He originally committed to Miami, making his signing even better for the Hokies because now they won't be playing against him. The 'Canes played a true freshman, Brad Kaaya, this past season, and he appears to have a bright future. Lawson insists, though, that Kaaya wasn't the sole reason for his change of heart.

"Just having a better opportunity for myself, that was really the main thing," he said. "I'm going to a program where I'll have an opportunity to start, an opportunity to produce right away. I felt like that would be the best place for me. Academics was a key to it, too."

Lawson also signed with Tech in part because Loeffler's Midwestern approach struck a chord. Loeffler's message in subjects beyond football resonated.

"Coach came in, and I wasn't doing so well, as far as academics," Lawson said. "He was telling me what I needed to do, and the next time he came down, I was right at that mark where I needed to be."

"By then, I was committed to Miami, but he came down for a brief conversation, and I felt

comfortable with him. The vibe was all good. I wasn't really feeling the same with Miami at the time and all they had going on. After talking with Virginia Tech for a while, after a week or two, I knew that's where I wanted to be and then especially after I visited."

In Lawson, Loeffler got a physically impressive young man. Lawson stands 6-foot-6 and weighs nearly 210 pounds. His film reveals a player equally adept at running and throwing.

As a senior this past season at Hillsborough High, he accounted for nearly 2,500 yards passing, nearly 900 yards rushing, and 38 touchdowns. He also played in a spread-option offense that did similar things that Tech has done.


He is a true dual-threat quarterback, but he makes it clear about what he likes to do.

"Pass-first all day," Lawson said. "A lot of people don't get that about me. I'd rather throw the ball, honestly. You get bigger plays when you throw the ball."

Lawson was one of the top five performers at the Semper Fidelis All-American Bowl played in Carson, California, on Jan. 4. He threw a 58-yard touchdown pass and ran five times for 53 yards. That came against some of the best recruits in the nation.

Now, he brings his goods to Blacksburg – and with confidence.

"I feel pretty good going up there to Virginia Tech," he said. "I still have stuff to work on, but I've got confidence."

His agribusiness professors certainly await his arrival – but Hokie Nation perhaps more so. 

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Hokies’ staff targets certain attributes with 2015 recruiting class – and feels confident about their haul

Size up front, and length on the back end. Those were the primary recruiting goals for Virginia Tech’s football program, and judging by the Signing Day *Vibe* on Signing Day Live, this should turn out to be a very solid class for the Hokies. Now evaluating a school’s football recruiting class is always an exercise in projection and hope. Like with the NFL Draft, there’s always some guesswork involved for teams when a staff brings in a bunch of new players.

“We improved on the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball,” Tech recruiting coordinator Bryan Stinespring said on this year’s edition of Signing Day Live, our annual recruiting web show. “That was our focus – to get bigger and longer. Our emphasis has been there, and it paid off for us.”

Half of the Hokies’ 24-member recruiting class was along the lines. Tech signed five offensive linemen and seven defensive linemen.

“It’s a needs-based deal,” Stinespring said. “We have to get better along the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball, and I think we did that.”

Size and length are the themes of this year’s class, but not only up front. The Hokies signed a 6-foot-6 quarterback, and tall, rangy defensive backs.

“We created length in the back end,” Stinespring said. “If you look at the defensive backs, they’re all over six feet. Our keys were to get better at the line of scrimmage, get depth in the back end and sign a quarterback.”

The quarterback is Dwayne Lawson from Tampa, Florida. He was a one-time Miami commitment who flipped to Virginia Tech in January.

“We started on him when he was a junior,” Tech quarterbacks coach Scot Loeffler said. “We watched him throw and go through practice



Tim Settle was the Hokies’ highest-ranked recruit, and he will provide overwhelming size and quickness to Tech’s defensive front for the next few years. (Photo courtesy of Kevin Lock/Rivals.com)

during spring football down there. He committed to Miami, but Brad [Kaaya] played so well last year, and that became a factor. Dwayne wanted to play, like most quarterbacks. You want to come in and have the chance to play.

“I think he’s going to be 235-240 pounds. He can make every throw. And while there are some things we have to correct with his mechanics to make him more accurate, I think he has pro quarterback potential.”

Along with a big quarterback, Tech signed bigger-than-normal offensive line recruits, such as

Lexington, Virginia’s Austin Clark (6-6, 297) and Winter Haven, Florida’s Mike Arnold (6-5, 280).

“Keeping with that theme, we need tackle-ready bodies,” Stinespring said. “We need guys with length who can play on the edge. Look at what Bud [Foster] is doing on defense. Well, other teams are doing some of that stuff against us, too, so we need guys with length who are able to play in space, perform on the edge, get to the next level and get down the field.”

Clark is an example of that type of prospect. So, too, is Arnold, a big body who spurned an SEC

school [LSU] at the last minute to sign with the Hokies. He’s a big get for Tech.

“Absolutely,” Stinespring said. “Keeping with the theme of bigger on the line of scrimmage, Arnold is one of those guys who can play on the edge. We withstood late runs by a lot of schools to get him.”

Tech’s staff projects three of the five offensive linemen to play tackle. The three include Clark, Arnold and D’Andre Plantin.

“It’s the toughest position to evaluate,” Stinespring said. “I talk with J.B. Grimes [a former Tech assistant coach now at Auburn] and Stacy [Searels] all the time about this. What we are looking for is body type – a 6-4 or 6-5 guy who has length and movement and flexibility. We got that in all five of these guys.”

Size was the theme on defense as well, particularly 6-3, 315-pound tackle Tim Settle from Manassas, Virginia.

“I don’t know if we’ve had a kid this size,” Foster said. “Tim can flatten out and chase the ball. We haven’t had a kid this big since Kory Robertson, with this kind of feet. This kid possesses that great quickness, and he plays on the other side of the ball.”

And there are plenty more on defense. In all, Tech signed seven defensive linemen, two linebackers, and five defensive backs.

“This was a good day for us,” Foster said. “I’m eager to build on our defense. We’ve got to take another step forward this spring, and we’ve added some parts that will make us even better when we get them all here in August.”

Here are five other closing notes about this year’s class:

1. Who can get on the field this fall? Mook Reynolds seems like a good bet here. The cornerback from Greensboro, North Carolina, enrolled early, and he will go through spring ball. The Hokies played true freshmen defensive backs C.J. Reavis and Greg Stroman in every game last year and Brandon Facyson as a rookie in 2013. That trend is likely to continue. Also, Searels is counting on Clark at tackle. Anyone on the offensive line could see the field this fall.

2. Tech is back in Florida. Tech signed four players from Florida, the most since 2003. In Lawson, the Hokies signed a quarterback from Tampa who had offers from the ‘Canes and numerous other big-time schools. In Arnold, Tech signed a lineman who had an offer from LSU. Throw in linebacker Carson Lydon from Tarpon Springs and tight end Chris Cunningham from Jacksonville, and Tech signed four really good prospects from

the Sunshine State. Stinespring’s take: “I don’t think we were ever out of Florida, but with the play of Luther Maddy, Dadi Nicolas and Isaiah Ford last year, people down there noticed. With the makeup of our staff, we were able to get Torrian [Gray] and Charley [Wiles] down there a bit more. And Lefty [Loeffler] from his days at [the University of] Florida had contacts. It’s helped the process to do a little more recruiting down there.”

3. Loeffler is a dynamic recruiter. The Hokies’ quarterbacks coach stayed on Lawson and in touch with Hillsborough High School’s legendary coach Earl Garcia even after Lawson committed to Miami last May. Kaaya had a tremendous rookie season – he was named the ACC Rookie of the Year – and Lawson opened his recruiting. And Loeffler closed the deal.

A year ago, Loeffler stayed on Chris Durkin after his initial commitment to Michigan State. Also, having the quarterbacks coach recruit quarterbacks – instead of having a more geographic-based recruiting focus – has been a plus for Tech. Not every quarterbacks coach likes to hit the road and recruit. In Loeffler, the Hokies have one who is closing deals.

4. Tech battles Miami. I found it interesting that several of Tech’s signees had offers from Miami. Traditionally, Virginia Tech and Miami haven’t recruited in the same pool, but this year, for whatever reason, we saw it frequently. Don’t feel bad for the ‘Canes, as they signed a terrific class. But getting Lawson and Arnold to come north to school was huge for Virginia Tech.

5. IMG Academy in Bradenton, Florida, is the new epicenter of recruiting. Thirteen players from IMG signed with Division I teams, including quarterback Deondre Francois, perhaps the nation’s top quarterback who inked with Florida State. As for next year, the top high school quarterback in California announced he’ll play his senior season for IMG, where former Florida State quarterback and Heisman Trophy winner Chris Weinke is the quarterbacks coach. Two of the top players in Tampa will do the same.

The IMG dynamic and influence is an interesting trend in all sports – not just football. The bottom line is that assistant coaches from every school, and every sport, will be spending a lot of time on Florida’s Gulf Coast.

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student-athlete development | by Reyna Gilbert-Lowry

Tech athletics holds Female Athlete Forum for Success



Panelists (left to right) Dr. Patricia Perillo, Desiree Reed-Francois, Rayna DuBose and Sapphire Anderson answered questions from Tech's female student-athletes at the athletics department's 10th annual Female Athlete Forum for Success.

"Behind every successful woman is herself." This quote kicked off the Female Athlete Forum for Success, which took place on Wednesday, Jan. 29. Organized by the Office of Student-Athlete Development, this event was created 10 years ago to provide guidance, inspiration and mentorship to female student-athletes. It also serves to enhance personal and professional development as they pursue success after their careers at Virginia Tech.

During the forum, nearly 200 female student-athletes listened to keynote speaker and former Hokie women's basketball standout Rayna DuBose and panelists, including Vice President for Student Affairs Dr. Patricia Perillo and Executive Associate Athletics Director Desiree Reed-Francois. DuBose opened the event with an HBO Real Sports feature presentation that highlighted her courageous journey. In 2002, during the spring semester of her freshman year, she was struck with meningococcal meningitis, a rare and often deadly bacterial disease. She spent three weeks in a coma, and when she eventually regained consciousness, she underwent several surgeries to amputate all four of her limbs.

After a long stint in rehabilitation therapy, DuBose returned to Blacksburg and earned her bachelor's degree in consumer studies in 2007. Since then, she has traveled nationally and internationally as a motivational speaker, sharing her thoughts on priorities in life, determination and perseverance.

"This [her illness] has opened up so many doors for me that I probably wouldn't have had before," DuBose said. "You never know how strong you are until you are thrown into a situation. You never know the struggle a person has gone through."

As Vice President for Student Affairs, Dr. Perillo encourages her staff to support students in discovering their talents, perfecting them into true strengths, and connecting them with the Division of Student Affairs' Aspirations for Student Learning. Perillo provided a brief history of Virginia Tech's relationship with Gallup, Inc. and how Tech is the first university to partner with the organization to make

the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment tool available to all students, faculty and staff.

"Use the skills and qualities that have made you successful as student-athletes and carry those over into achieving your professional goals," Perillo told the student-athletes.

Reed-Francois stressed the importance of mentorship in professional success. She attributes many of her professional opportunities to the relationships she has established and maintained with mentors who have positively impacted her throughout her career in intercollegiate athletics. She challenged the group to find a mentor and then pay it forward by becoming a mentor to other young women.


"Look at the person to your left, now look at the person to your right," Reed-Francois said. "Some day, you may need a job or reference, and these ladies will be your network."

Sapphire Anderson, a Kohl's Department Store Manager, rounded out the panel. At 25, Anderson is one of the youngest store managers out of more than 1,100 stores nationwide, and she divides her time between her store in Roanoke and her role as a Campus Team Member at Virginia Tech.

Anderson has firsthand experience in recruiting and hiring candidates and knows the qualities that are critical to success in today's workforce. She reminded the participants that employers are looking for the skills that they use each day to be successful as student-athletes – time management, dedication and communication to name a few.

For the final question of the evening, the panelists were asked what they would say if they could speak to all the women in the world.

Anderson said, "Be known for something." DuBose said, "The sky is the limit."

One student-athlete in attendance said, "My biggest takeaway from the program was it showing how women can be strong enough to go out and change the world. I took away a sense of feeling and belonging to the women on the panel, and this has taught me how I can be a better woman, inspire others and achieve anything that I want." 

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Fast-paced first year complete, Babcock touches on array of topics related to past, present and future of Tech athletics

by Jimmy Robertson

January 22 marked the one-year anniversary of the day that Whit Babcock accepted the position as the Director of Athletics at Virginia Tech. He recently took some time to answer an array of questions about Virginia Tech athletics, including the building of a new foundation for the department, the impact of recent NCAA governance changes and the future of facilities.

Q: So how was your first year on the job in Blacksburg? Was it what you expected?

WB: “It’s been a quick year, and I’ve really enjoyed it. Everyone’s been very welcoming, especially the fan base and the people on campus, and this is a great community. My family is happy. “Day to day, one thing that makes this job great is that it’s never the same, and sometimes there are a lot of challenges. It’s not easy, but every day, I’m honored and blessed to be in this role. I really want to continue working hard with our entire staff and make Hokie Nation proud. It was already rolling great here, and we want to take it onward and upward. I enjoy that challenge, but this will be a team effort. It’s not just one person. A lot of it is what I expected, but it’s never dull and never the same. Again, I’m honored, and there is nowhere else I’d rather be.”

Q: You’ve made some foundational changes to the department as far as a new mission statement, new core values – integrity, service, honor, excellence, strong together – and a commitment to professional development for departmental employees. What was your thought process there?

WB: “I just thought, ‘Let’s get back to the basics, and what’s our foundation going to be here? What are we going to stand for? What are all our decisions going to be based on?’ Whether it’s in life or business or athletics, everything starts with a firm foundation. “It wasn’t just me coming up with ideas. We vetted all of these through our staff, the president’s office, our UAC [University Athletic Committee] and our student-athlete advisory council. It describes our brand – here is our mission, here’s what we stand for, here are our values. If we do this right, every decision is going to tie back to that, as far as things like hiring and promoting. When we have tough decisions to make, it all stems off that foundation. “Before we took two steps ahead, I thought



Tech AD Whit Babcock has been proactive with his decisions in his first year, including the decision to release the “Pylons of Promise” document that states the ways that the department is committed to its student-athletes.

we should take one step back. While our mission statement was great, it was an entire page long, and I felt like it was gathering dust on shelves. So I thought, if we’re really going to have one, let’s streamline it and make it short and have our core values in there. It was a collaborative process, and I’m pleased with how it went. That’s our starting point.”

Q: At the NCAA convention in January, the Power 5 conferences passed a package of legislation, highlighted by the highly publicized cost of attendance to supplement student-athletes’ scholarships. Days later, you and your staff came out with the “Pylons of Promise,” a document that states the comprehensive commitment of the Tech athletics department to its student-athletes, a lot of which was based upon that NCAA legislation. What are your thoughts on what transpired at the convention?

WB: “I don’t think anyone would deny that the brand of the NCAA has been beaten up a little bit in the media, but I really felt like this convention was a win for the student-athletes and a win for the NCAA and for things getting back on track. I was pleased with that. “There are a lot of big issues still out there, but I think the NCAA got the first step right and knocked it out of the park. We’ll see how this new governance and autonomy works, but I feel good about it. I know it’ll be a new era of intercollegiate athletics. With this first convention, we passed four things, and I think that was smart. Let’s get the first few things right and then go on from there. I see this as a model that will benefit student-athletes, as it should, and also enhance the college experience, as it should.”

Q: The cost of attendance was the big piece of that legislation because that

measure puts more dollars into the hands of student-athletes. You were in favor of this. Why?

WB: “Well, I wasn’t in favor of a pay-for-play model because I do believe in the amateur model. Having said that, I’m certainly in favor of the cost-of-attendance measure. “In reality, we had an antiquated scholarship system that hadn’t changed in 30 years. It used to be room, board, tuition, fees and books, and it wasn’t an accurate reflection of what it cost to come to school here or anywhere else. So we’re happy to do it, and we’re going to find a way to do it. We’re going to embrace the change and try to be a leader in how we do it. I feel like we’re ready and prepared and put forth a good plan.”

Q: How much is this going to cost Virginia Tech athletics, and how do you envision paying for this additional investment in Tech’s student-athletes?

WB: “At every school, it’ll be a little different. Here, it will cost us between \$850,000 and \$950,000 a year. Our cost-of-attendance gap is approximately \$2,500 a year per student-athlete. That’s a line item that is a big one, but if we’re in this for the right reasons, which is the student-athlete experience and to compete at the top of the ACC, we’re happy to do it for our student-athletes and happy to do it from a recruiting standpoint. “The money will have to come from somewhere, obviously. Typically, we’ve been balancing our budget, and there is a little bit of cushion, but not much. Our Hokie Club staff will have to do a very good job of educating our fans as to why we need their help and the impact it makes. Scholarships are more expensive for us, and the Hokie Club is our primary avenue to do that [educate and raise money]. But however we can generate revenue – conference revenue, tickets, marketing, corporate sponsorships – we need to do it. It puts a little more pressure on you to be lean on the expense side and increase the revenue side.”

Q: How many student-athletes will be impacted by the cost of attendance?

WB: “We have 391 student-athletes who would be impacted by this. Of those, 195 are on full scholarship and 196 are on partial. That’s out of approximately 600 student-athletes. “Those on partial scholarship will receive a percentage of the cost of attendance. So if it cost \$25,000 for an in-state recruit to go here and there is a \$2,500 cost of attendance, then that’s \$27,500. If you are a 50-percent scholarship student-athlete, it would equate to half of that \$27,500. “Do we have to go full cost of attendance for every scholarship athlete in every sport? I don’t

believe the NCAA rule mandates that, but we feel like, to be a leader in the ACC, we want to do it across the board in every sport. How do you look at one sport and say they’re more important than the other? Then you have Title IX and gender equity responsibilities, but for us, we just believe philosophically that every sport is important, and we want to give every sport the best chance and every student-athlete the best educational opportunity. So we’re going to do it across the board in every sport.”

Q: Is it a concern that there will be a “bidding war” among schools for recruits because some schools will be able to offer more?

WB: “It is a little bit. The cost of attendance is calculated through a federal formula through each school’s office of financial aid, and yes, there are gaps at each school. Virginia Tech is in the middle or slightly above in the ACC. “Do I think it can be a competitive advantage for others? Yes, but at the end of the day, it seems to be about the fairest way possible. If we do just a \$2,000 amount across the board, I think that could be about capping opportunity, which is what some of these lawsuits are about.

“It makes sense to say the model for a scholarship has changed, and every school is going to take the value of a scholarship out to full cost of attendance. Now, the other side is if you have schools that have a bigger gap than we do, where it’s going to cost us between \$850,000 to \$950,000 to get in compliance with that, it may cost other schools \$2 million a year to get in compliance. It would cost them more to do that. “In the meantime, I compare it to democracy. Is it perfect? No. But it’s the best system anyone has come up with, so I’m pleased with it, and I feel like Virginia Tech already has a lot to offer to prospective student-athletes.”

Q: Speaking of recruiting, one thing that has come up in the past year on the recruiting trail is certain schools offering recruits their own dorm rooms (with bathroom) as opposed to living with a roommate or roommates. How much of a concern is this?

WB: “Not a tremendous concern because there are so many wonderful things about Virginia Tech. When people come on to this campus, it’s beautiful. It’s welcoming. The athletics facilities are very nice. The academic facilities are very nice. You don’t want to get complacent, and one thing that gets brought up is dorms and housing. You can’t have athletics dorms. It has to be a mix of student-athletes and students. There are just so many wonderful things here. The dorms are

fine, but down the road, just like with anything else, they need to modernize and come along.”

Q: The new indoor practice facility is on schedule to be completed in August. What is on the horizon in terms of facilities?

WB: “The indoor practice facility is a big one, and we need a final push on fundraising. We’re close, but we want to get the entire \$21 million raised, and the folks in the Hokie Club have done a good job with that. “We’re looking at a project that will renovate the interior of some of our facilities – the Jamerson Center and the Merryman Center. We’re going to remodel a little bit. Some of these areas haven’t been touched in 20 or 30 years, and we want to bring it up to speed to fit the brand of what we want the inside of our facilities to look like. “Looking down the road, I’d like to see some improvements at Rector Field House and some of the softball areas there that we’ve committed to do. Our baseball stadium is something we’ll take a good hard look at, and potentially tennis and our facility there. That’s not to say other sports won’t get a look, but those are the big ones. So there is a list with every sport, but the bigger bricks and mortar are Rector, softball, baseball, and tennis.”

Q: You mention raising money for facilities. Hokie Club membership dropped for a couple of years, though appears to be up a little for this upcoming year. As someone with a fundraising background, how involved are you and how closely are you monitoring this?

WB: “I know the staff is working hard on it. I know there is more pressure on them from a scholarship standpoint because the costs of scholarships have gone up, and they’ll go up even more with the cost of attendance. “I looked at it a good bit, but I wanted to watch the first year go. I wanted to watch and learn rather than come in and make assumptions. But in year No. 2, we’re going to have a collaborative effort between the Hokie Club, the athletics department and university development and look under the hood and kick the tires, so to speak, and make sure our Annual Fund is structured the right way. We want to have something that appeals to everyone from recent graduates to people who have been with us 40-50 years. We want to make sure options are varied and have something to fit everyone, and that our service is good. “I feel like we can make some improvements. I feel like the Hokie Club has done a good job, and if you look around campus, you can see their success. But just like everything, if you sit still long enough, you get passed, so we’re going to get together and take a good look at that in year No. 2.”

KELSEY CONYERS

Women’s Basketball | Chesterfield, Virginia

by Jimmy Robertson

Kelsey Conyers is the lone senior on the women’s basketball team and she graduates in May with a degree in human nutrition, foods and exercise. She hopes to participate in an internship in dietetics next year and ultimately wants to become a registered dietician.

Q: Why did you decided to major in human nutrition, foods and exercise?

KC: “I’ve been interested in nutrition probably since late middle school or early high school. I was really interested in reading the new health fads and I was interested in the whole health and wellness area, things like new findings they were having. Probably since the eighth grade, I’ve thought that this is what I could do for a lifetime. I’ve always had a desire to help people and want the best for people, and I think food and nutrition play a big role in helping people be the best they can be.”

Q: We understand that you already have a lot of experience working in dietetics. Please tell us about that.

KC: “I’ve done about 90 hours in a clinical setting. One summer [the summer before her junior year], I worked with a registered dietician through the VCU children’s hospital. She was in outpatient care, and she specifically worked with children who were diagnosed with diabetes. Because of that, I’m really interested in diabetes, and I’m kind of looking to pursue that in my career.

“I also have worked with a food pantry in Christiansburg called The Giving Tree Food

Pantry. I set up a stand at the food pantry and talked about a balance diet. There is this thing called “My Plate.” Half of your plate should be fruits and vegetables, a quarter of it protein and a quarter of it grain. I wanted to introduce this to the people coming into the food pantry.

“And then, last summer, I worked with the Montgomery County schools nutritionist, and me and a group of students created a new lunch menu because the lunch menus had new guidelines and we had to alter the menu.”

Q: What did you learn from all these experiences?


KC: “My biggest take was that I got to see firsthand what it was like to be a registered dietician every day. Every day is different, and I like that. Some of it is behind a desk and filling out logs and information on clients, but a lot of it is communicating with people and getting involved in the community and interacting with people from different backgrounds and cultures. I really enjoyed that.”

Q: What are your future plans?

KC: “To be a registered dietician, you have to go through a one-year internship through an accredited program. I’m getting married this summer, and depending on where my fiancé gets a job – he’s looking in the Roanoke, Blacksburg or Richmond area – I’m applying to Tech or VCU and Virginia State. Obviously, if he gets a job in Roanoke, I wouldn’t go to VCU. That’s the short-



term plan.

“Long term, I’m interested in pediatrics. I love kids, and I would love to be a clinical registered dietician and work with pediatrics. I’m also interested in diabetes. So if I have a job similar to that RD, I’d really love it. With the internship, you go through a cycle of different specialties, like diabetes, cancer patients, everything. I think that will give me a better idea of what field I want to pursue.” 

CHRIS UHLE

Men’s Track & Field | Powell, Ohio

by Jimmy Robertson

Chris Uhle, a pole vaulter on the Tech track and field team, is a two-time member of the All-ACC Academic Team for men’s track and field. He graduates in May with a degree in human nutrition, foods and exercise. He plans on taking a year off to try and make the 2016 Olympic team and then he’s leaning toward going to dental school and pursuing a career in endodontics.

Q: Why did you decide to major in human nutrition, foods and exercise?

CU: “Originally, I came in as a university studies major, planning on engineering. Honestly, I heard all the cross country runners talking about how hard it [engineering] was. HNFE is a lot of work as well, but I enjoy learning about the human body, and part of my career path once I decided to do that is to look into dentistry. My father is an endodontist [a dental specialist], and I’d like to follow his career path. So everything lined up toward me pursuing HNFE.”

Q: Have you done any internships, co-ops, etc., and what did you learn from those experiences?

CU: “This past summer, I did a lot of shadowing. Part of the requirement for dental school application is a number of shadowing hours – and the more, the better. So I shadowed a few general practitioners of dentistry in the Columbus [Ohio] area who work alongside my father.

“Growing up, I learned a lot, so when I went in, they said I was off to a good start, knowing what I

already knew. I learned a lot about just the social skills you need to be a dentist. You have to be able to interact with the patients and make them feel comfortable. I also learned a lot of different procedures that I had heard my dad throw around at the dinner table but never knew what he was talking about. I shadowed at four different offices and each one had something different to offer. I really enjoyed the experience.”

Q: What are your future plans?


CU: “As far as my career path goes right now, I plan on taking a year off after I graduate this spring. I want to pursue pole vaulting as far as I can take it, and while I’m doing that, I’ll be in the process of taking the dental admission test and applying to dental school. I’m thinking Ohio State since that’s right in my backyard, but possibly VCU. I haven’t narrowed it all the way down just yet. At Ohio State, I’ll get the in-state tuition, so there is the perk of that, and my dad teaches in the endodontic program there, so I’ll have his guidance as well.”

Q: How long is dental school?

CU: “Dental school is four years. Your freshman year of dental school starts at the same time as any other – in August – and after that, I don’t think you get a summer break. It’s straight through until you graduate. Your first two years are more classroom oriented, whereas the third and fourth years are more practical. You’re working with patients who come into the clinic.”



Q: Are you 100 percent committed to going to dental school?

CU: “I’m still kind of searching for what I want to do. The great thing about the HNFE curriculum is that it prepares you for a lot of different things. As far as the nutrition aspect of the curriculum, it’s not my most favorite part. I actually enjoy the life sciences, and I’m getting a minor in chemistry. But within my major, you are introduced to a lot of different subjects. Who knows? Maybe I’ll pull a complete 180 and become a physical therapist and go to physical therapy school. My window is wide open, but primarily I’m looking at dentistry.” 



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Dwayne Lawson was rated one of the top quarterback prospects in the nation, and Tech's coaches are excited about the skill set that he is bringing to Blacksburg. (Photo courtesy of Nick Lucero/Rivals.com)



The 2015 RECRUITING EDITION

INSIDE HOKIE
SPORTS'

5

TO WATCH



TIM SETTLE | The highest-rated of Tech's recruits, Settle brings tremendous size to the defensive tackle position for the Hokies. He displays quickness and makes plays, but he needs to be careful with his weight. Tech traditionally has defensive tackles in the 280-300 range, and Settle checks in well above that. But he has the skills to be dominant.

DWAYNE LAWSON | Lawson brings all the physical traits that a coach wants at the quarterback position. He's tall and rangy, with a frame to get stronger and bigger. He runs well and throws the ball with some zip, but he's raw. His favorite player is Cam Newton, and while there are some similarities,

he needs more coaching and reps. But he certainly possesses that type of upside.

TREMAINE EDMUNDS | The latest of the three Edmunds brothers to play at Tech, Tremaine brings size, speed and versatility to a linebacker group that needs an infusion of young talent. He was a man against the competition he faced. He played sideline to sideline and exploded into whoever carried the ball. He probably fits in best at the backer position for the Hokies.

AUSTIN CLARK | The big offensive tackle committed to South Carolina, but had a change of heart and came to Blacksburg. His development is

critical for a program wanting to develop depth on the line. Clark gets after it in the running game, trying to pancake everyone in front of him, but he admittedly needs to work on his pass blocking. He enrolled for the spring semester to get a head start.

MOOK REYNOLDS | It's hard to watch Reynolds' highlight tape and not think of Greg Stroman, the Hokies' punt returner this past season. Reynolds wasn't a high school quarterback like Stroman, but he returned a lot of kicks and punts and was electrifying in the open field. Tech's staff envisions him as a cornerback, and with his speed and ball skills, he could be a good one. He could be a great receiver, too.

RECRUITING  EDITION >> RECAP

Tech's staff loads up on the lines with 2015 recruiting class

by Jimmy Robertson

Virginia Tech's coaches got defensive in their discussions of the 2015 recruiting class.

Of course, that's not because they held reservations about the future of the program. On the contrary, the numbers simply dictated the tenor of the conversation.

Fourteen of the Hokies' 24 prospects who signed with the program on Feb. 4 – National Signing Day – are slated to play on defense, as the staff set about securing the long-term future on that side of the ball. It only made sense, too. After all, a year ago, Tech's staff signed 17 prospects who were projected to play on offense.

Half of this 2015 class was devoted to linemen, both on defense and offense.

"Every year, the key part of recruiting is filling your needs," said Bryan Stinespring, Tech's tight ends coaching and recruiting coordinator. "We had needs within our defense and within our offense. We signed seven defensive linemen and five offensive linemen. So the vast majority of our class was at the line of scrimmage where we needed not only immediate help, but also depth. We've got some guys we think can help us next year, and some guys we can develop to help us in the near future."

The recruiting services thought highly of what Tech's staff got done, for those interested in such things. Rivals ranked the class No. 24 nationally, while ESPN ranked it 25th and 247Sports rated it 29th. Rivals listed eight of the Hokies' recruits as 4-stars (on a 5-star scale), while ESPN rated one as a 5-star and six as 4-stars and 247Sports listed four as 4-stars.

Tim Settle and Dwayne Lawson serve as the headliners in this class. Settle, a massive 6-foot-2, 315-pound defensive tackle from Manassas, Virginia, headlines the influx of talent on defense. A five-star recruit by ESPN and a four-star talent by both Rivals and 247Sports, Settle registered 72 tackles, including 20 for a loss, as a senior at Stonewall Jackson High School.

Settle committed to Tech during the Under Armour All-America Game in St. Petersburg, Florida, in early January. He picked Tech over Southern Cal and Louisville.

Lawson, a 6-6, 207-pound quarterback from

Tampa, Florida, headlines the influx of talent on offense. A four-star recruit by Rivals and 247Sports, he threw for nearly 2,500 yards and 21 touchdowns and ran for an additional 867 and 17 scores as a senior.

Lawson originally committed to Miami last summer. But the emergence of Brad Kaaya as a true freshman prompted Lawson to reconsider, and he narrowed his choices to South Florida, Ole Miss, Tennessee, Ohio State and Tech before choosing the Hokies.

"I think any time you're trying to help yourself at the quarterback spot and can land a guy that brings excitement to the position, you're always looking to do it," Stinespring said. "We're really excited that we were able to get Dwayne into the fold at the quarterback spot. At the end of the day, I think that may be one of the bigger hits out there for us – and one of the more critical."

HOKIES STOCK UP ON DEFENSIVE LINEMEN, DEFENSIVE BACKS

A year ago, Tech's defensive line played a critical role in the Hokies' finishing third nationally in both sacks per game (3.69) and tackles for a loss per game (8.4), and defensive line coach Charley Wiles likes to rotate two units throughout a game.

So Tech's coaches again went after defensive linemen in this recruiting class. A year ago, the staff brought in Ricky Walker, Vinny Mihota and Steve Sobczak (Kevin Bronson signed as well, but did not qualify), and Walker played this past season as a true freshman after Luther Maddy went down with a knee injury. This time around, the staff signed seven defensive linemen.

Settle was the big one – literally and figuratively – but the coaches brought in two other defensive tackles in Harry Lewis from Hampton, Virginia, and Eric Whitehead, Jr., from Indianapolis, Indiana. All three are powerful guys, with Lewis and Whitehead resembling more the traditional Tech defensive tackle – a little shorter, but powerful and possessing quick feet.

The need at defensive end was a bit more



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NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	HOMETOWN	HIGH SCHOOL/PREP SCHOOL	RECRUITED BY	ALSO CONSIDERED	NOTABLE
Adonis Alexander	S	6-3	193	Charlotte, N.C.	Independence	Shane Beamer	Did not consider any other schools	The No. 27 overall prospect in North Carolina by Rivals
Jahque Alleyne	S	6-1	180	Virginia Beach, Va.	Ocean Lakes	Bryan Stinespring	Louisville, East Carolina	The No. 23 safety prospect nationally by Rivals
Mike Arnold	OL	6-5	280	Winter Haven, Fla.	Winter Haven	Stacy Searels	LSU, Florida State	A first-team all-state choice in Florida (Class 6A)
Xavier Burke	TE	6-4	250	Lawrenceville, Va.	Brunswick/Fork Union	Bryan Stinespring	Virginia	The No. 1 tight end prep school prospect nationally by 247Sports
Austin Clark	OL	6-6	297	Lexington, Va.	Rockbridge County	Stacy Searels	South Carolina, Clemson, Ohio State	The No. 8 offensive tackle prospect nationally by Rivals
Chris Cunningham	TE	6-3	225	Jacksonville, Fla.	Atlantic Coast	Charley Wiles	Louisville, UCF, Mississippi State, North Carolina	The No. 11 tight end prospect nationally by ESPN
Tremaine Edmunds	LB	6-4	220	Danville, Va.	Dan River	Bryan Stinespring	Maryland, Southern Cal, Wake Forest	The No. 15 linebacker prospect nationally by Rivals
Coleman Fox	ATH	5-11	190	Salem, Va.	Salem	Bryan Stinespring	ODU, JMU, Army, Harvard, Richmond	Roanoke Times' Offensive Player of the Year
Darius Fullwood	DE	6-4	240	College Park, Md.	Good Counsel	Charley Wiles	Kentucky, Maryland, Duke	The No. 22 defensive end prospect nationally by Rivals
Houshun Gaines	DE	6-4	220	Rocky Mount, N.C.	Nash Central	Charley Wiles	Vanderbilt, Virginia, NC State	The No. 31 strong-side defensive end prospect nationally by Rivals
Trevon Hill	DE	6-4	220	Virginia Beach, Va.	Salem	Bryan Stinespring	North Carolina	The No. 14 weak-side defensive end prospect nationally by 247Sports
Zachariah Hoyt	OL	6-3	291	Salem, Va.	Salem	Bryan Stinespring	BYU, Pittsburgh, VMI	The No. 22 center prospect nationally by 247Sports
DuWayne Johnson	CB	6-1	160	Washington, D.C.	H.D. Woodson	Torrian Gray	Clemson, Michigan State, Maryland, Purdue	The No. 8 overall prospect in D.C. by both Rivals and 247Sports
Dwayne Lawson	QB	6-6	207	Tampa, Fla.	Hillsborough	Scot Loeffler	Miami, USF, Ole Miss, Tennessee, Ohio State	The No. 6 dual-threat quarterback prospect nationally by ESPN
Harry Lewis	DL	6-2	260	Hampton, Va.	Phoebus	Cornell Brown	Duke, Georgia Tech, Wake Forest, Penn State	The No. 21 prospect overall in Virginia by The Roanoke Times
Carson Lydon	OLB	6-1	231	Tarpon Springs, Fla.	East Lake	Torrian Gray	NC State, Wisconsin	Tampa Bay Times' Defensive Player of the Year
Deshawn McClease	RB	5-10	185	Virginia Beach, Va.	Oscar Smith	Bryan Stinespring	Louisville, Maryland, Indiana, North Carolina	The No. 32 running back prospect nationally by Rivals
Yosuah Nijman	DL	6-6	268	Maplewood, N.J.	Columbia/Fork Union	Shane Beamer	Temple	The No. 1 prep school defensive tackle prospect nationally by 247Sports
D'Andre Plantin	OL	6-5	277	Norcross, Ga.	Norcross	Stacy Searels	Virginia, Illinois	The No. 123 offensive tackle prospect nationally by 247Sports
Mook Reynolds	CB	6-0	180	Greensboro, N.C.	Northern Guilford	Torrian Gray	Clemson, Ole Miss, Tennessee	The No. 29 cornerback prospect nationally by 247Sports
Tim Settle	DL	6-3	315	Manassas, Va.	Stonewall Jackson	Bud Foster	Louisville, Southern Cal, Washington State, Oklahoma State	The No. 17 overall prospect nationally by ESPN
Tyrell Smith	OL	6-4	290	North Brunswick, N.J.	Don Bosco Prep/Cushing Academy	Stacy Searels	UMass, Florida Atlantic	The No. 26 overall prospect in New Jersey by Rivals in 2014
Eric Whitehead, Jr.	DL	6-1	300	Indianapolis, Ind.	Arsenal Technical	Charley Wiles	Ohio State, Cincinnati, Bowling Green, Miami (Ohio)	The No. 51 defensive tackle prospect nationally by 247Sports
Adonis Williamson	S	6-1	190	Indianapolis, Ind.	Arsenal Technical	Torrian Gray	Missouri, Ohio State, Northern Illinois	The No. 64 cornerback prospect nationally by Rivals

pressing, as Tech entered spring practice with just five ends on scholarship – and Dadi Nicolas departs following the 2015 season. So the coaches inked four defensive ends to letters-of-intent.

Three of the four hail from out of state. That trio includes Darius Fullwood from College Park, Maryland; Houshun Gaines from Rocky Mount, North Carolina; and Yosuah Nijman, an intriguing prospect from Maplewood, New Jersey, by way of Fork Union. Trevon Hill from Virginia Beach, Virginia, rounds out the quartet.

Hill, Fullwood and Gaines all stand 6-foot-4 and weigh between 220 and 240 pounds. Nijman, who enrolled at Tech for the spring semester, checks in at 6-6 and 270 pounds and will move to defensive tackle if he lacks the quickness to play end.

“All of them move well,” Stinespring said. “These defensive ends have a little more length to them, and we wanted that, and they have to be able to run, and these guys can. They’ve all got a good first step. They’ve all got an opportunity to get bigger. So there is a lot of upside there.

“Inside [at defensive tackle], we’ve got some active guys that are quick. Then there’s a guy like Tim Settle that brings a physical presence with his size and strength, and he can move. All three of those guys can move, and you have to have that to play in our system.”

Tech’s staff also loaded up on defensive backs – another burgeoning trend. A year ago, the coaches inked four to letters-of-intent, and both

Greg Stroman and C.J. Reavis played as true freshmen. This year, the coaches brought five more into the mix.

Mook Reynolds from Greensboro, North Carolina, and Adonis Alexander from Charlotte project at cornerback and safety, respectively. The two of them played for very good high school programs – Reynolds won two state championships at Northern Guilford – and both of them enrolled at Tech in January for the spring semester.

The other three defensive back prospects are Jahque Alleyne from Virginia Beach, Virginia; DuWayne Johnson from Washington, D.C.; and Adonis Williamson from Indianapolis, Indiana. Alleyne and Williamson project more as safeties, while Johnson projects as a corner. All stand taller than 6-foot. In fact, all five of Tech’s defensive backs stand taller than 6-foot.

“When you look out on the field and face three- and four-receiver teams, there is a chance that two or maybe three of those receivers have length,” Stinespring said. “For example, you look at East Carolina, and their receivers are 6-1, 6-2. When you face that, you have to recruit accordingly, so we wanted to get some length back there to combat some of these bigger receivers we’re seeing.”

The emphasis on defensive backs continues a recent trend by the Hokies’ staff. The coaches continue to see more spread offenses – with four and five wide receivers – and thus defensive

coordinator Bud Foster continues to play more nickel defense, with five defensive backs. A program now needs defensive backs in every class.

“There are two factors,” Stinespring said. “You’re running into more and more spread football teams that are also playing at a faster pace. So you’re not playing three or four secondary guys. In this time and age, you usually have five defensive backs in a game and maybe work in a sixth. The nickel package is almost more of a base defense now. You need more backups, too, so you need to carry more defensive backs [on the roster].

“Then you look at our roster and Donovan Riley is going to be a senior, and Kendall Fuller and Chuck Clark are going to be juniors. So you have to be conscious of your needs, too.”

The emphasis on defensive backs probably means less of an emphasis on bringing in linebackers, but the coaches added two when they signed linebackers Carson Lydon out of Tarpon Springs, Florida; and Tremaine Edmunds out of Danville, Virginia. Lydon enrolled at Tech in January, and Edmunds will join a program that already includes brothers Trey and Terrell.

ADDING MORE OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

Most of the staff’s recruiting attention on offense centered on the offensive line. For the third consecutive year, the coaches signed at least four offensive linemen, as they continue to add

depth and hopefully talent to the line.

In 2013, the coaches added Jonathan McLaughlin, Kyle Chung, Braxton Pfaff (who delayed enrollment) and Parker Osterloh. A year ago, they added Billy Ray Mitchell, Eric Gallo, Tyrell Smith and Colt Pettit. Smith is considered a part of the 2015 class because he spent this past fall at a prep school in Massachusetts and enrolled in January.

In addition to Smith, four other offensive linemen are a part of this class. The group includes Austin Clark from Lexington, Virginia; Mike Arnold from Winter Haven, Florida; D’Andre Plantin from Norcross, Georgia; and Zachariah Hoyt from Salem, Virginia.

Clark arrives as the highest-rated of the bunch and projects as an offensive tackle. He originally committed to South Carolina, but later changed his mind – with help from Stinespring, who coached Clark’s father at former Lexington High School in the late 1980s.

There is a lot to like with this group. They all possess height, ranging from 6-3 to 6-6 and all have long arms. Tech’s coaches hope that some tackles emerge because they find themselves short on tackles. This past season, converted defensive lineman Wade Hansen found himself in the lineup after an injury to McLaughlin and held up well, but there was definitely a lack of depth.

“We’ve got some guys with some length, guys we think can play out on the edge,” Stinespring

said. “You’ve got 6-5 guys out there that are 270 and more, so we’ve got size and length, and we don’t feel like we’ve sacrificed athleticism, or the foot speed you need to play out there. That’s one of the things we liked about this group. We felt we needed to bring in more tackle-type of individuals. We feel like we’ve got three guys [Smith and Hoyt figure more at guard/center] that give you the possibility of playing on the edge.”

Tech’s staff signed five other prospects to help on offense, counting Lawson, the dual-threat quarterback. The coaches love Lawson’s size and his potential. He gives offensive coordinator Scot Loeffler some of those Logan Thomas-type abilities.

“He’s always had a ton of raw talent, but you can see him getting better and better year by year and game by game,” Loeffler said. “He’s big, he’s athletic, he can make every throw and he makes people miss. You can run a traditional pro-style attack in the throw game with him, and then turn right around and go with spread football in the run game if you wanted. He’s very talented. He’s bright, and he has a high football I.Q.”

The other four prospects on offense include two tight ends. Like Smith, Xavier Burke from Lawrenceville, Virginia, actually signed with the Hokies last year, but spent the fall at a prep school (Fork Union) and enrolled in January. Chris Cunningham from Jacksonville, Florida, is the other tight end to sign. He lacks the bulk of the 250-pound Burke, but the coaches envision

using him more in a receiving role, as they did with Bucky Hodges this past season.

Deshawn McClease and Coleman Fox round out the group. McClease broke J.C. Coleman’s career rushing record at Oscar Smith High in Virginia Beach and finished the season with more than 2,000 yards rushing and 29 touchdowns. The coaches love his explosiveness, and given the number of injuries that the Hokies suffered at tailback this past season – and no one knows yet if Shai McKenzie (ACL) or Marshawn Williams (ACL) will be ready for the 2015 season – they probably needed to add another playmaker there.

Fox also played tailback in high school (and defensive back), but Tech’s staff listed him as an athlete. The Salem, Virginia, native, whose father played fullback at Tech under Beamer in the late 1980s, can play any number of positions.

“We’ll probably start him at tailback and go from there,” Stinespring said. “He’s a winner in every facet of his life. He’s a leader on his team. He’s a competitive guy. You want to get the ball in his hands because good things happen.

“So we’ll find out. We’ve got time, and we’ll take a look. You’ve heard me say this before, but when you have versatility, it bodes well for you and for the team.”

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Virginia Tech’s staff already has started the recruiting process for next year’s class. The coaches held a “Junior Day” the Saturday after

National Signing Day and know the direction in which they want to go with the 2016 class.

Tech fans hope to see the Hokies’ staff enjoy a little more success within Virginia next year, and certainly the 2015 class features more out-of-state signees than Virginia signees. But Stinespring and whip linebackers coach Cornell Brown fared well in the Tidewater area – a must for this program – getting four of the six players they offered. They only lost Josh Sweat, a defensive end from Oscar Smith High who signed with Florida State, and Jahvoni Simmons, a linebacker from Ocean Lakes High who signed with Virginia.

And it’s also not like Tech’s coaches didn’t beat out some big-name schools with this class either. Arnold turned down a visit to LSU late in the process. Clark backed away from South Carolina and mulled offers from Tennessee and Ohio State. Edmunds visited Southern Cal. Settle had everyone in the country offering him a scholarship. And Lawson turned down numerous SEC offers.

Plus, the coaches landed four prospects from Florida, arguably the top area for high school football nationally. Tech’s current roster includes six players from Florida. Guys like Dadi Nicolas, Luther Maddy and Isaiah Ford are three of the program’s best players.

“We have some ties in Florida, and we want

INSIDE HOKIE SPORTS' SLEEPERS TO WATCH

YOSUAH NIJMAN | Tech’s coaches really like Nijman, whom they plucked out of Fork Union. He stands 6-foot-6, and he runs well. They plan on trying Nijman at defensive end, knowing that, at the worst, he would be an athletic defensive tackle if things do not work at end.

COLEMAN FOX | In Fox, the staff nabbed a versatile player from nearby Salem, Virginia. He probably projects on offense as a tailback or a receiver. Not many FBS programs recruited him, but this is exactly the type of player whom the Hokies have enjoyed success with over the years.

CARSON LYDON | Lydon’s film shows a player who makes a lot of tackles in space. He times blitzes well, and he made some plays in pass coverage – a rarity for a high

school linebacker. He played against great competition in Florida and could be the Hokies’ next great one from that state.

ADONIS ALEXANDER | The Rivals website listed Alexander as a linebacker, and he certainly possesses the frame to grow into that. But Tech’s staff envisions him as an enforcer at one of the safety spots (think Kam Chancellor). He’s tall and rangy, with good speed.

D’ANDRE PLANTIN | Plantin, the son of a former Clemson player, played for a good high school program and against good competition. He also played on the defensive line and brings that type of mentality to his position on offense. The SEC schools may have missed out on a good player.

to use those,” Stinespring said. “Torrian has some ties down there, and so does Charley. Scot coached at the University of Florida, so he’s recruited that area.

“It’s playing to some of the strengths of your staff. We’re never going to stop emphasizing Virginia, but we have had some success in

Florida. Those guys have played well for us and done well here.”

In the end, it’s about finding talent to meet the needs, regardless of from where that talent comes. Tech’s staff feels that it has again found the talent. Now, it’s on to the next steps – developing that talent, and ultimately, winning games. **VT**

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**ADONIS
ALEXANDER**

6-3, 193, FS
Charlotte, North Carolina
Independence High School
Also considered: Did not
consider any other schools

Stats: Finished with 105 tackles and two interceptions as a senior.

Top honors: A three-star recruit by Rivals and 247Sports ... Listed as the No. 28 prospect in North Carolina by Rivals ... Ranked the No. 65 safety prospect nationally and the No. 27 prospect overall in North Carolina by 247Sports ... A first-team all-state selection in North Carolina as a defensive back by The Associated Press ... A third-team choice as a defensive back to the 2014 All-Observer team (Charlotte Observer).

Why he chose Tech: "It had the best engineering program in this area. I'm good at math and want to do that. They also had a good football program. They send a lot of players to the league [NFL] every year, and that impacted my decision."

On deciding to enroll for the spring semester: "I just wanted to get a head start and take advantage of the opportunities. I didn't need to stay back home and take classes that I didn't really need. It was an easy decision to come up here early."

On his position: "When they [Tech's coaches] first recruited me, they

compared me to Kam Chancellor [current Seattle Seahawks safety], and he's my favorite player, so that also had me leaning toward Virginia Tech. They would have me roll down [into the box], and do some of the stuff he did. That's exactly what I want to do."

On his strengths and weaknesses: "My strong points are coming down and filling alleys, and also my range. I need to work on opening my hips [in coverage]. In high school, not too many people ran by me because I was faster than most people, but I'm pretty sure in college there is going to be a lot of speed. So I'm going to have to work on opening my hips."

On his most memorable moment: "It'd probably be my sophomore year. It was the third game and I had two picks and one pick-six for 80 yards. Another would be when we lost in the second round of our playoff game to Butler, just seeing all the seniors' faces. That really hit me."

Personal: Born Nov. 7, 1996, in Charlotte, North Carolina ... Son of Debra Alexander and Harry Seymour ... Has two younger brothers ... Contemplated major is engineering.



**JAHQUE
ALLEYNE**

6-1, 180, FS
Virginia Beach, Virginia
Ocean Lakes High School
Also considered: Louisville, East Carolina

Stats: Senior season stats weren't available ... Tallied 62 tackles and seven interceptions as a junior.

Top honors: A four-star recruit by Rivals and a three-star recruit by 247Sports ... Ranked the No. 23 safety prospect nationally and the No. 14 prospect in Virginia by Rivals ... Listed as the No. 67 safety prospect nationally and No. 33 prospect in the state by 247Sports.

Why he chose Tech: "The coaching staff, the facilities, and I've heard a lot of good things from former players and from the players that are already there. I was talking to Bucky [Hodges] one time when he came back home, and he was telling me how much he liked it. Marcus Davis [a former Tech receiver] is an alum from my school [Ocean Lakes], and I talked to him about it, too. He told me it was a good school, and that if it was the opportunity that I wanted to take, then go and take it."

On his position: "At first, it was safety or corner. Then they [Tech's coaches] came to my last regular-season game against Salem and saw me play a lot of receiver. I made a spectacular catch down the field, and that's when Coach [Bryan]

Stinespring started talking about me playing offense and maybe playing both sides of the ball."

On his strengths and weaknesses: "My strengths are being tall and being fast, and having a little bit of strength as well. I think I get in and out of my routes well as a receiver. I think I have breakaway speed."

"I think I need to learn to recognize certain things, like the tendencies of what certain players might do on the field as they're on the field. I also need to put on a lot more weight."

On his most memorable moment: "Probably this season and us winning the state championship. My sophomore year, I was on varsity, and we came up short by a couple of inches for a first down. My junior year, we came up short again. So my senior year, I made sure the team stayed focus week by week and all the seniors made sure as well. It was a great feeling to win."

Personal: Born June 12, 1997, in Brooklyn, New York ... Carlo Davis and Ebony Theodis ... Has four younger sisters and a younger brother ... Major is undecided.



**CHRIS
CUNNINGHAM**

6-3, 225, TE
Jacksonville, Florida
Atlantic Coast High School
Also considered: Louisville,
UCF, Mississippi State, UNC

Stats: Had 241 yards receiving and four touchdowns as a senior.

Top honors: Listed as the No. 11 tight end prospect nationally by ESPN and No. 54 by 247Sports ... Played in the Florida Athletic Coaches Association North-South All-Star Classic in Orlando, Florida ... A member of The Times-Union (Jacksonville newspaper) All-First Coast team his senior season as a tight end ... A member of the Super 24 team by The Times-Union ... Rated the No. 21 prospect in the Jacksonville area by The Times-Union.

Why he chose Tech: "It was just the overall environment. The coaches have been there for a long time, and Coach [Frank] Beamer has been with the school for about three decades. It's an overall winning program. I know I can come in there and win and win bowl games and be successful. I'll get a good degree, and if I can get a degree from Virginia Tech, I can go pretty much anywhere and get a job. I liked the players and the environment, and it was just like a second home."

On his position: "I can play a lot of different positions, as far as being on offense. I'll be at tight end, but more flexed

out as a receiver instead of being just inside with my hand on the ground. I'm not that big as far as tight ends go, but as far as a mismatch on tight ends and corners, I have the size for that."

On his strengths and weaknesses: "I think my strong points are understanding the game. I use the size I do have to create mismatches, and I can read defenses, how I have to release against certain coverages, stuff like that."

"I need to work on my route running, just my release coming off the line and getting out of my breaks and just overall getting faster."

On his most memorable moment: "My most memorable moments were the rivalry games and just going out there and practicing with my teammates. Just going out there every day and having fun and trying to get better at the game of football."

Personal: Born May 28, 1997, in Jacksonville, Florida ... Son of Chris, Sr., and Marsha Cunningham ... Has a younger brother and an older sister and has an older stepsister and stepbrother ... Contemplated major is business or architecture.



**TREMAINE
EDMONDS**

6-4, 220, LB
Danville, Virginia
Dan River High School
Also considered: Maryland,
Southern Cal, Wake Forest

Stats: Senior stats not available ... Finished with 120 tackles, including 17 for a loss, and four sacks as a junior ... Also had two interceptions, two blocked kicks, forced a fumble and recovered a fumble as a junior.

Top honors: A four-star recruit by Rivals and a three-star recruit by 247Sports ... Rated the No. 15 outside linebacker prospect nationally and the No. 12 prospect overall in Virginia by Rivals ... Ranked the No. 23 outside linebacker prospect nationally by 247Sports and the No. 15 prospect overall in Virginia ... A first-team All-Group 2A selection as a linebacker by the Virginia High School League and Virginia Preps following his senior season.

Why he chose Tech: "I've enjoyed going up there every time. It's a good atmosphere. The coaching staff is good, and I wanted to have a chance to play under Coach Bud Foster [Tech's defensive coordinator]. I really like him as a defensive coordinator."

On his position: "They [Tech's coaches] told me the backer position. I like that. I

want to stay on the defensive side of the ball, so I like that spot. I like to hit a lot, and I think I can make big-time stops. Defense is the place where I think I play the best."

On his strengths and weaknesses: "I'm a physical player. I think I can run to the ball fast. I have good speed for the linebacker position. I can guard man-to-man if I have to. I'm physical - that's my biggest strength."

"I think I need to get stronger, and I think I need to learn the game more to get ready for the college level. I need to do more film work, things like that."

On his favorite player: "He doesn't play any more, but I used to watch Ray Lewis [former Baltimore Ravens linebacker]. He always had energy, and he was a leader on the field. I liked the energy he played with."

Personal: Born in Danville, Virginia ... Son of Ferrell, Jr., and Felecia Edmunds ... Father played seven years in the NFL (Miami and Seattle) and was a two-time Pro Bowler ... Brothers Trey and Terrell are on Tech's roster ... Likes to draw ... Also likes to dance ... Contemplated major is communications.



**MIKE
ARNOLD**

6-5, 280, OL
Winter Haven, Florida
Winter Haven High School
Also considered: Florida State, LSU

Top honors: A three-star recruit by both Rivals and 247Sports ... Ranked the No. 106 offensive tackle prospect nationally by 247Sports and the No. 132 prospect overall in Florida ... A first-team all-state selection (Class 6A) as an offensive lineman following his senior season.

Why he chose Tech: "I decided on Virginia Tech because of the coaching staff and the area. My mom likes the area. She helped me with the decision. And I think I can come in and play early as a true freshman."

On the impact of Kendrick Holland, a Tech receiver from the same high school, on his decision: "He made a big difference because we're, like, best friends down here. He came in and helped me out with the recruiting process. He redshirted this year, but he told me how the coaches were when he was around them, and he said it was a great atmosphere. He said it was like home."

On his position: "I'll be playing left tackle. I like to pass block and to down block. I'm just ready to get on the field and show what I have."

On his strengths and weaknesses:

"My strengths are down blocking and my footwork. Right now, I need to work on my pass set, knowing when to bite and stay up."

On his favorite player: "In the NFL, I like Jason Pierre-Paul [defensive end for the New York Giants] for defense, but on offense, it would be Russell Okung, the big guy for the Seattle Seahawks [a left tackle]. I like his pass set and how he never gives up. That's the way I try to play. I never give up during a play."

On his most memorable moment: "I would say all the road games. I just like the time we spent together on the bus as a group. We'd have fun before the game, just telling each other what our weakness was and what our strength was. We'd talk about how we should dominate and how we should come together as a team to beat our opponent."

Personal: Born Oct. 26, 1995, in Winter Haven, Florida ... Son of Michael Arnold and Shelby Baxter ... Has three older brothers and a younger brother ... One of his brothers played at Kentucky Christian ... Contemplated major is business or management.



**AUSTIN
CLARK**

6-6, 297, OL
Lexington, Virginia
Rockbridge County High School
Also considered: South Carolina,
Ohio State, Clemson

Stats: Graded out at 95 percent for his senior season with 35 pancake blocks.

Top honors: A four-star recruit by both Rivals and 247Sports ... Ranked the No. 8 offensive tackle prospect in the nation and the No. 4 overall prospect in Virginia by Rivals ... Listed as the No. 20 offensive tackle prospect nationally and the No. 7 overall prospect in Virginia by 247Sports ... A second-team all-state choice as an offensive lineman this season by the Virginia High School League (Class 3A) ... A first-team All-Timesland selection as an offensive lineman by The Roanoke Times his junior and senior seasons ... Chosen to play in the Blue-Grey All-American Bowl in Tampa, Florida.

Why he chose Tech: "I just felt like Virginia Tech was a better fit for me. It had everything that I was looking for that I saw in South Carolina [where he was previously committed], but it was about four hours closer, so I felt a really strong connection to Virginia Tech. After about two months after I committed to South Carolina, I realized maybe I had rushed things a little. Then I realized that Virginia Tech was where I wanted to go to."

On why he enrolled early: "One, so I could get a jump on my academics, and two, so I could get in the weight room and the conditioning program a lot sooner than the rest of the guys in my class. I made that decision in the spring of this past year. I talked with some of my other friends who had enrolled early, and I talked to my parents and coaches, and decided it would be best for me."

On his strengths and weaknesses: "My strength right now is my run blocking. I pass block pretty well, but I need to work on my footwork and my quickness off the ball. Footwork is a big thing for me to work on."

On his favorite player: "I like Duane Brown [of the Houston Texans]. He played here, and he was an All-Pro selection. Plus, he wears No. 76 [also Clark's number], so I look up to him. He's really athletic for a big guy."

Personal: Born Dec. 17, 1996, in Lexington, Virginia ... Son of Steven and Kimberlie Clark ... Has a younger brother ... Likes to play pick-up basketball ... Contemplated major is business management or marketing.



**COLEMAN
FOX**

5-11, 190, ATH
Salem, Virginia
Salem High School
Also considered: Old Dominion,
Army, Harvard, Richmond, JMU

Stats: Ran for 1,500 yards on 167 carries his senior season despite not playing offense the final 2.5 games because of an ankle sprain ... Also caught 24 passes for 393 yards and six touchdowns as a senior ... Rushed for 1,819 yards as a junior.

Top honors: Named The Roanoke Times' Offensive Player of the Year ... Rated a three-star recruit by 247Sports and a two-star recruit by Rivals ... Listed as the No. 36 prospect in Virginia by The Roanoke Times ... Ranked the No. 43 prospect in Virginia by Rivals ... Rated the No. 50 prospect in Virginia by 247Sports.

Why he chose Tech: "I've grown up 45 minutes down the street, and I've always been a fan. Virginia Tech is a great place, and Blacksburg is a great college town. The coaches at Tech are great. They're competitors, just like me. I really felt the combination of football and the school was the best fit for me."

On the impact his father (former Tech fullback Rich Fox, 1986-89) had on his decision: "It definitely helped me decide on Tech, but he really helped me weigh the pros and cons of every single school that offered. Having

been a college football player, he knows some things that some recruits might not look into, and he enlightened me on those things. Ultimately, he showed me Tech was a great place, and I had no doubts."

On his position: "Every time I've asked them [the coaches], they're really not sure yet. They know it's going to be on the offensive side of the ball. I think it's going to be a situation where they see how much I weigh and see how I run and where I fit best. If it's running back, that's fine. If it's receiver, that's fine. I'm listed as an athlete right now."

On his most memorable moment: "Besides the two-a-days with my teammates, I'd say playing in the state championship game [a 41-16 loss to Lake Taylor High] with my teammates and battling. That's the most fun I've had. Not many people can say they've made it to a state championship, and that's something I can cherish the rest of my life."

Personal: Born Jan. 12, 1997, in Salem, Virginia ... Son of Rich and Jennifer Fox ... Has a younger brother ... Enjoys skiing and wakeboarding ... Contemplated major is finance.



**DARIUS
FULLWOOD**

6-4, 240, DE
College Park, Maryland
Our Lady of Good Counsel High School
Also considered: Kentucky,
Maryland, Duke

Stats: Senior season stats unavailable ... Tallied 11 tackles, including 3.5 for a loss, and three sacks as a junior before breaking his foot after four games.

Top honors: A four-star recruit by Rivals ... Ranked as the No. 22 defensive end prospect in the nation and the No. 9 prospect overall in Maryland by Rivals ... A three star recruit by 247Sports ... Rated as the No. 30 weak-side defensive end prospect nationally and the No. 14 overall prospect in Maryland by 247Sports.

Why he chose Tech: "I thought it was the best fit for me. I wanted to be a little closer to home, other than Maryland. It's not that bad of a drive for family, and I have a lot of family in Virginia, in Hampton and Richmond. Everyone is kind of in the same area, so it'll be easier for everyone to come and see me play."

On his position: "I'll be a defensive end. I've been playing defensive end my whole life, so it's good to be able to continue to play it. Out of the whole defense, I think that's one of the more important positions. Your job is to create pressure on the quarterback and create opportunities for defensive backs and linebackers to make plays."

On his strengths and weaknesses: "I think I'm a really good pass rusher, and I can also play the run. I think I'm good at working side to side and getting off of the [offensive] tackles. I can protect the gaps so that the running back can't get through."

"I think I probably need to work on speed and strength and getting better with my technique to get ready for the next level. Everybody will be strong and fast, but the best play with great technique. I'll be working on all that."

On his favorite player: "I definitely like watching J.J. Watt [defensive lineman for the Houston Texans]. I think he's one of the best defensive linemen in the game. He's a big dude, and he's quick off the ball. He can change a game, which he did all season."

On his most memorable moment: "I'd probably say my first sack. It came my sophomore year. It was early in the season against H.D. Woodson. I felt really good about it."

Personal: Born Feb. 12, 1997, in Cheverly, Maryland ... Son of Daron Fullwood and Angela Jones ... Enjoys photography ... Contemplated major is business.



HOUSHUN GAINES

6-4, 220, DE
Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Nash Central High School
Also considered: Virginia,
Vanderbilt, NC State

Stats: Recorded 78 tackles, including 15 for a loss, and 10 sacks as a senior ... Tallied 85 tackles, including 21 for a loss, and 11.5 sacks as a junior.

Top honors: A three-star recruit by Rivals and 247Sports ... Ranked the No. 31 strong-side defensive end prospect nationally and the No. 25 overall prospect in North Carolina by Rivals ... Listed as the No. 78 strong-side defensive end prospect nationally and the No. 48 overall prospect in North Carolina by 247Sports.

Why he chose Tech: “They [the coaches] always treated me like family. Coach [Charley] Wiles was my recruiter, and he’s also the defensive line coach. That helped out a lot that my position coach was recruiting me. I just feel like it [Tech] was the best fit for me.”

On his position: “I feel like I can play linebacker or defensive end. I just listen to the coaches, and wherever they feel like I can produce the most, then that’s where I’ll play. Obviously, they have more experience than I have. I just trust their judgment, and wherever they think I can make the most plays, that’s where I’ll play.”

On his strengths and weaknesses: “I

feel like I’m very versatile. I feel like I can do a little of everything. I can cover, I can blitz, I can rush the quarterback, I feel like I can stop the run ... I feel like I can make plays in a lot of different ways.

“I probably need to work on my explosion and shedding blocks. Just becoming a more complete player and perfecting my craft and doing the little things to become as good as I can be.”

On his favorite player: “My favorite NFL players are Julius Peppers [of the Green Bay Packers] and Von Miller [of the Denver Broncos]. Julius Peppers is right down the road from me [Wilson, North Carolina]. He’s a great player. He’s a freak of nature. He’s the only person in NFL history to have 100 sacks and 10 picks.”

On his most memorable moment: “My favorite year was my sophomore year because I got to play with my older brother, and that was a great experience. I really enjoyed that.”

Personal: Born on May 2, 1997, in Rocky Mount, North Carolina ... Son of Jeff Gaines and Tandra Hilliard ... Has two older brothers and two older sisters ... Contemplated majors are business or management.



TREVON HILL

6-4, 220, DE
Virginia Beach, Virginia
Salem High School
Also considered: North Carolina

Stats: Was hurt for much of his senior season and did not play ... Finished with 23 sacks as a junior.

Top honors: A four-star recruit by 247Sports and a 3-star recruit by Rivals ... Listed as the No. 14 weak-side defensive end prospect in the nation and the No. 12 overall prospect in Virginia by 247Sports ... Ranked the No. 21 defensive end prospect nationally and the No. 17 overall prospect in Virginia by Rivals ... A first-team All-Tidewater choice at defensive end his junior season by The Virginian Pilot.

Why he chose Tech: “My great uncle was the first African-American to graduate from there [Charlie Yates, Class of 1958], so I have a family history with the school. It’s a great school. I know all about it from my uncle. He was an engineer, and he taught there for years [from 1979-83 and 1987-2000].

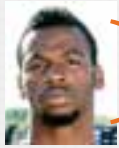
“From a football aspect, I’m playing for a great coach in Coach [Frank] Beamer, who has been there for 28 years, and a bunch of coaches that have been there 15-20 years. I know they’re family up there in Blacksburg. I know I’ll be in a stable environment. Also, playing for Coach [Bud] Foster, that’s

playing for one of the best defenses, if not the best, in the country. They led the nation in sacks with smaller players, so that just shows that our coaches can coach. Just the overall atmosphere, that’s why I picked Virginia Tech.”

On his favorite NFL player: “I don’t pattern myself after anybody, but I watch a lot of players. I watch Tyrod Taylor and Kam Chancellor [two former Tech players]. I watch J.J. Watt [of the Houston Texans]. He’s physical. I like to watch different players at different positions to see what they do and if I can pick up anything from them.”

On his most memorable moment: “It was my last high school game this year. It was a tight game. We were playing Cox [High School], and I had, like, eight tackles and a key forced fumble to lead us into overtime. Then in overtime, we won on the last play of the game. My teammate caught the winning touchdown pass, and we all ran on the field.”

Personal: Born Aug. 2, 1997, in Norfolk, Virginia ... Son of Joseph and Marketa Hill ... Has an older brother and two younger brothers ... Major is undecided.



DWAYNE LAWSON

6-6, 207, QB
Tampa, Florida
Hillsborough High School
Also considered: Miami, Florida,
USF, Ole Miss, Tennessee, Ohio State

Stats: Threw for 2,444 yards and 21 touchdowns his senior season ... Also rushed for 867 yards and 17 touchdowns as a senior ... Threw for 2,120 yards and 22 touchdowns as a junior ... Rushed for 1,068 yards and nine touchdowns as a junior.

Top honors: First-team all-state as a quarterback (Class 6A) ... Played in the Semper Fidelis All-American Bowl in Carson, California ... Listed as a four-start recruit by ESPN, which ranked him the No. 6 dual-threat quarterback prospect in the nation.

Why he chose Tech: “When I took my visit to Virginia Tech, I knew I was around guys that were hungry, guys that wanted to be champions. There are a lot of young guys on the team, a lot of freshmen, and they were excited about being there. They knew their role, and no one was cocky or anything like that. I knew it was a place where I could thrive, and it’s where I wanted to be.”

On his strengths and weaknesses: “Identifying defenses ... that’s what I do best. I know where to go with the ball and make the right decision. I let the game come to me. I don’t try to do all this


amazing stuff. I let the game come to me. I prepare and go hard.

“[As for weaknesses], there is always stuff to work on. You can always work on your footwork and being consistent, stuff like that.”

On his favorite player: “Most definitely, my favorite player is Cam Newton [Carolina Panthers quarterback]. That’s my favorite player of all time. I like what he brings to the game. He’s got size and speed and swag on the field. He’s likeable. He inspires me to do some of the stuff I do.”

On his most memorable moment: “My sophomore year, we beat Armwood 3-0. Finally getting a chance to beat them after I said I was going to beat them the first chance I got, it was great [Lawson had 219 total yards]. It was amazing for me and the team, and especially the way the seniors played. They just elevated my game.”

Personal: Born July 11, 1995, in Tampa, Florida ... Son of Wayne Lawson and Tiffany Boggs ... Has four sisters and two brothers ... State champion in the triple jump last year ... Contemplated major is agribusiness.



HARRY LEWIS

6-2, 260, DL
Hampton, Virginia
Phoebus High School
Also considered: Duke, Georgia
Tech, Wake Forest, Penn State

Stats: Registered 95 tackles and 15 sacks as a senior ... Had 60 tackles and 11 sacks as a junior.

Top honors: A first-team selection as a defensive lineman to the Daily Press All-Star team ... Listed as a three-star recruit by 247Sports and Rivals ... Rated the No. 21 overall prospect in Virginia by The Roanoke Times ... Ranked the No. 35 defensive tackle prospect nationally and the No. 25 prospect overall in Virginia by 247Sports ... Rated the No. 32 overall prospect in Virginia by Rivals.

Why he chose Tech: “There is a family environment there. They [Tech’s coaches] really care about the players and try to make their players succeed to their potential. They care about you more than just as a football player. They want you to succeed in life and graduate with good grades and do well after football.”


On his position: “I’ll be playing defensive tackle. I’ve got good hands and good feet. I’m strong, but I need to put some more weight on me. That will be the plan when I get there and get in the weight room. I love defensive tackle. I like it better than defensive end.”

On his strengths and weaknesses: “I think my strength is pass rushing. In high school, that’s what I was known for. They [his coaches] had a lot of plays for me to do certain things to get me back there.

“I need to work on having better hands, having more violent hands, and work on my reads. I need to stay in control more. Sometimes, I guess, I get too wild, get too hyped up.”

On his most memorable moment: “The Bethel game [this past season]. They were down by a point and in field-goal range. It was third down, and I knew I needed to make a tackle because they could hit a field goal and win the game. I knew I had to do something, and I got the sack. They had to go for it. It was, like, fourth-and-20. They went for it, and I got another sack. We got the ball back and won the game. I knew what I needed to do to help my team, and we were able to go out there and make it happen.”

Personal: Born Dec. 6, 1995, in Hampton, Virginia ... Son of Harry Lewis, Jr., and Latica Lewis ... Has a younger sister ... Contemplated majors are marketing and communications.



ZACHARIAH HOYT

6-3, 291, OL
Salem, Virginia
Salem High School
Also considered: BYU,
Pittsburgh, VMI

Top honors: Rated the No. 48 prospect in Virginia by The Roanoke Times ... A first-team All-Timesland choice as an offensive lineman by The Roanoke Times ... Listed as a two-star recruit by Rivals ... Ranked the No. 22 center prospect nationally by 247Sports ... Ranked the No. 49 prospect overall in Virginia by 247Sports ... A first-team all-state choice (Class 4A) as an offensive lineman his senior season by the Virginia High School League and Virginia Preps.

Why he chose Tech: “I felt like it was the best place for me to grow as a football player and that I would be pushed in every aspect. I thought it would be a tough environment and would make me a tougher person.”

On waiting until Signing Day to announce his decision: “I had my BYU visit scheduled for the last weekend [before Signing Day], so I knew I had to see that first. Then I got stuck in Phoenix for two days coming back. But I’ve always respected Tech as a program. There are so many fans down here, and as soon as I got the offer, I was leaning toward them, but I

wasn’t 100 percent sure, so I went to BYU.”

On his position: “I’ll be a center or guard, wherever I fit in best or whatever the need is. I love the interior, so I’m fine with that. I love the grind. You have to be fast to get to a linebacker and tough to block a nose guard or tackle.”

On his strengths and weaknesses: “I’m very fast for my size. Athletically, I move very well. I need to get stronger, and I need to work on a few technique things.”

On his favorite player: “I don’t really have a favorite player that I try to pattern my game after. I love Rob Gronkowski [tight end for the New England Patriots]. I love that he’s dominant and basically unstoppable.”

On his most memorable moment: “Definitely making the states [the state championship game] was the best feeling, just to finally win the semifinal game after losing two years in a row. It was tough to lose, but we knew they [Lake Taylor High School] were a really good team.”

Personal: Born Dec. 10, 1996, in Peterborough, New Hampshire ... Son of Jeff and Lisa Hoyt ... Has four sisters and two brothers ... Major is undecided.



DuWAYNE JOHNSON

6-1, 160, CB
Washington, D.C.
H.D. Woodson High School
Also considered: Clemson,
Michigan State, Maryland, Purdue

Top honors: A three-star recruit by Rivals and 247Sports ... Listed as the No. 55 cornerback prospect nationally and the No. 8 prospect overall in Washington, D.C., by Rivals ... Ranked as the No. 66 cornerback prospect in the nation and the No. 8 prospect overall in Washington, D.C., by 247Sports ... A second-team All-Met choice by The Washington Post as a defensive back following his senior season.

Why he chose Tech: “The coaches, Coach [Torrian] Gray and the others, recruited me harder than any of the other coaches at the other schools. I’ve been down to Virginia Tech a lot, so I’m familiar with the school and with the defense and what Coach Gray is going to run. The DB coach at my school [Roland Minor] played for Coach Gray, so that was a big impact on me going there as well.”

On his strengths and weaknesses: “I believe my mental game is my strongest aspect, just knowing receivers and studying film. I’ve got some good speed to be a taller corner, too.

“I believe I need to work on my tackling. I believe that will come when I add some weight on. I’ll get more confident. I can

tackle now, but I want to get better at it. I want to become a great tackler. I want to get better in everything.”

On his favorite player: “I don’t know if I have a favorite player. I pattern my game after a lot of guys. I like Kyle Fuller and Kendall Fuller, DeAngelo Hall, Darelle Revis [of the New England Patriots], Richard Sherman [of the Seattle Seahawks] ... I try to pattern my game after some of the top guys.

On his most memorable moment: “My ninth grade year, I was behind two pretty good corners, and I didn’t get much playing time. There was a game when we were up, I believe, three touchdowns at halftime, and they [the coaches] put me in and I had two interceptions and a couple of tackles. I showed the coaches that I could play. That was a big moment in my high school career.”

Personal: Born June 28, 1996, in Washington, D.C. ... Son of Wayne Johnson and Tarshea Smith ... Has a younger brother, an older brother and an older sister ... His older brother, Jerrard Hunter, plays receiver at Florida Atlantic... Major is undecided.



CARSON LYDON

6-1, 231, LB
Tarpon Springs, Florida
East Lake High School
Also considered: NC State,
Wisconsin

Stats: Recorded 93 tackles, including five for a loss, three sacks, two blocked punts and two interceptions as a senior ... Scored seven touchdowns – five as a fullback and two on defense – his senior season ... Finished with 149 tackles, eight sacks and two interceptions as a junior.

Top honors: A three-star recruit by both Rivals and 247Sports ... Ranked the No. 80 outside linebacker prospect nationally and the No. 151 overall prospect in Florida by 247Sports ... A first-team all-state selection (Class 7A) by The Associated Press as a linebacker following his senior season ... The Defensive Player of the Year in Pinellas County by The Tampa Bay Times as a senior ... A first-team All-Pinellas County selection as a linebacker both his junior and senior season by the Tampa Tribune.

Why he chose Tech: “Coach [Bud] Foster and just the defense in general and the history of winning here. This is a program built on defense, and that is why I chose here.”

On why he graduated from high school early and enrolled at Tech: “I wanted to enroll early because there is a chance to


play as a freshman and to get early playing time. As soon as I started getting recruited, I made the decision that I was going to graduate early no matter where I committed because I wanted to get in and get stronger and faster and learn the system.”

On his position: “Coach Foster sees me as playing mike linebacker. As long as I’m playing, I don’t care. I like being a linebacker. You’re a part of the defensive line, a defensive back and the leader of the defense.”

On his favorite player: “My favorite player is probably Luke Kuechly [of the Carolina Panthers] just because he’s a great linebacker. He’s fast, he’s aggressive and he’s smart. He gets done what he needs to get done.”

On his most memorable moment: “I don’t have a memorable moment. The entire experience itself was memorable. I’m thankful for every moment that I had, good, bad or indifferent, because it all made me the football player that I am.”

Personal: Born Oct. 17, 1996, in Salem, Oregon ... Son of Justin Lydon and Jen Lydon and Bill Bernecki ... Has an older sister ... Major is undecided.



DESHAWN MCCLEASE

5-10, 185, RB
Chesapeake, Virginia
Oscar Smith High School
Also considered: Maryland, Louisville,
Indiana, North Carolina

Stats: Rushed for a school-record 2,015 yards and scored 29 touchdowns his senior season ... Rushed for 1,558 yards and 28 touchdowns as a junior ... Finished his career with 5,025 yards rushing and 82 total touchdowns.

Top honors: A first-team All-Tidewater selection as a running back the past two seasons ... Rated the No. 32 running back prospect in the nation and the No. 15 prospect in Virginia by Rivals ... Ranked the No. 48 running back prospect in the nation and the No. 23 overall prospect in Virginia by 247Sports ... Listed as the No. 17 prospect in Virginia by The Roanoke Times.

Why he chose Tech: “Honestly, it was because I felt most at home there. I knew a lot of people there already, and I’m close with a lot of the other recruits.”

On his position: “I’ll be at tailback. That’s the only position I’ve played all my life. I like making big plays. I like getting a feel of the game, a feel of the defense, and I feel like tailback is the best position to play.”

On his strengths and weaknesses: “I can run the outside zone and the inside zone between the tackles. I think I’m

pretty dangerous out of the backfield, like on swing passes and screens. I think I catch it pretty good. I think I’m a complete back.

“I need to get bigger and work on my blocking. I need to be a little more patient. Sometimes, I’m not patient as a runner.”

On his favorite players: “I like Melvin Gordon [of Wisconsin], and in the NFL, I like Jamaal Charles [of the Kansas City Chiefs]. Jamaal Charles is a complete running back. He can run the inside zone and outside zone. He’s real dangerous in the passing game, too. I’ve watched Melvin Gordon a lot. It’s pretty impressive when you can rush for 400 yards in a game [FBS-record 408 yards vs. Nebraska].”

On his most memorable moment: “I think my most memorable moment was breaking J.C.’s [Coleman] record [career rushing record at Oscar Smith High]. He texted me, ‘Congratulations.’ Me and J.C. are pretty close.”

Personal: Born July 16, 1996, in Norfolk, Virginia ... Son of Shawn and Tiffany Brown ... Has two younger brothers and two younger sisters ... Also runs track ... Contemplated major is business, with maybe a minor in communications.



**YOSUAH
NIJMAN**

6-6, 268, DL
Maplewood, New Jersey
Columbia Senior High School;
Fork Union Military Academy
Also considered: Temple

Top honors: A four-star prospect by both Rivals and 247Sports ... Ranked as the No. 1 defensive tackle prospect among prep schools and the No. 1 overall prep school prospect in Virginia by 247Sports ... Chosen to play in the North-South All-Star Football Classic following his senior season.

Why he chose Tech: “I guess I thought it would be a good experience. I thought I could come in here and fit in and help the team out.”

On his semester at Fork Union: “I went to Fork Union because my grades weren't what they should have been. It was a challenging experience. It was very organized, and you had to fit within the military system. It was tough waking up at 6 in the morning and going to study hall every night for two hours. But I managed to get through.”

On his position: “They [Tech's coaches] want me on the defensive line. They want to try me out at defensive end, and worst-case scenario, they'd move me to defensive tackle. I like playing defensive end. I like being aggressive, and for me, sometimes I tend to take plays off, but playing there, I think that would keep me focused and help


me reach my full potential.”

On his strengths and weaknesses: “I think I'm good at getting after the quarterback, but everything else, I need to work on. I need to work on using my hands, getting faster, getting more agile, all those things.”

On his favorite player: “I watched Jadeveon Clowney [former South Carolina star and current Houston Texan] in college, and I try to play like him, just getting after it. He's just relentless.”

On his most memorable moment: “I would say my most memorable moment was playing East Orange. That was one of our rivals. We hadn't beaten them in eight years, and my senior year, we got close to beating them, and I had a good game. I had, like, four sacks and a couple of tackles for losses.”

Personal: Born Jan. 2, 1996, in Orange, New Jersey ... Son of Hesdy and Astra Nijman ... Has an older sister and a younger sister ... His parents are originally from Suriname, a country in South America ... Was an good shot putter in high school and may pursue that at Tech down the road ... Major is undecided.



**D'ANDRE
PLANTIN**

6-5, 277, OL
Norcross, Georgia
Norcross High School
Also considered: Virginia, Illinois

Top honors: Listed as a three-star recruit by 247Sports and Rivals ... Listed as the No. 123 offensive tackle prospect nationally by 247Sports ... A first-team Region 7-AAAAA selection by the region's coaches as a offensive lineman his senior season.

Why he chose Tech: “I had a good bond with the coaching staff. They [the Hokies] also play in the ACC, and they win a lot. The tradition is good there, and they're on a bowl streak. But when I went on my visit, it felt like a home-type atmosphere. When I met with my parents, we all felt it was a great decision to make.”

On coming to Tech even though his dad is a former Clemson player: “He told me before that he didn't care where I went as long as I understood that the decision I was making would be for the next four years and that I wouldn't be de-committing. He told me to make sure I got it right the first time. He's always been one of those football mentors for me, and he's always led me down the right road.”

On his position: “I'll be playing left tackle. That's where I'd like to play. I've been training for it. I played it all my senior

year. In the league [NFL], that's really one of the good moneymakers. It's also the most versatile position on the offensive line. I'll be on the blind side and have to bring my 'A' game every time. I feel that my pass-blocking abilities will help me excel at that level, particularly at left tackle.”

On his most memorable moment: “Winning the state championship my junior year. The year before, we won the state for the first time in school history. So the next year, we had a lot of the same talent. It was my first year starting. I was a defensive tackle at the time. The first three games, we were 1-2, and everyone was doubting us. We came back on a long winning streak and played our rivals that we lost to earlier in the season. We were down 14-0 in the first quarter and then ended the half 14-14. Then we scored 17 unanswered and won the game.”

Personal: Born Feb. 25, 1997, in Clemson, South Carolina ... Son of Tony Plantin and Kiisha Gladden ... Father was a defensive tackle at Clemson (Class of 1996) ... Has two younger sisters ... Contemplated major is accounting.



ERIC WHITEHEAD, JR.

6-1, 300, DL | Indianapolis, Indiana
Arsenal Technical High School
Also considered: Ohio State, Cincinnati, Bowling Green, Miami (Ohio), Toledo, Western Michigan

Stats: Finished with 52 tackles, including 18 for a loss, and eight sacks as a junior.

Top honors: Listed as a three-star recruit by both Rivals and 247Sports ... Ranked the No. 51 defensive tackle prospect nationally and the No. 14 overall prospect in Indiana by 247Sports ... Rated the No. 53 defensive tackle prospect nationally and the No. 14 overall prospect in Indiana by Rivals.

Why he chose Tech: “I thought it was the perfect program for me. I like the plans they [Tech's coaches] have for me, and I feel like I fit the defensive scheme. I didn't have any concern about going so far away from home. I feel like, if it's the place for you, if you feel like you need to be there, then that's where you need to be. I don't think distance should matter.”

On his position: “I'll be at defensive tackle, either the 1 or the 3 [technique – basically either defensive tackle spot]. I like the position. I grew up playing the position, and I feel like I have an advantage playing the position.”

On his strengths and weaknesses: “I think I get off the ball fast. I think I'm a high-energy guy. I chase plays from behind, and I don't give up. I think I need to work on my hands and shedding blocks. I need to work on getting off blocks.”

On his favorite player: “My favorite player is Ndamukong Suh [defensive tackle for the Detroit Lions]. I watch him a lot. I like his attitude and the passion he plays with. I like him as a player. I try to play like him.”

On his most memorable moment: “It was my junior year. We played the top-ranked team in our state. They were ranked, like, 18th in the country. It was 6-2, and they were on our 10-yard line. I ripped the running back, and he fumbled. We got the ball back with four seconds left and won the game.”

Personal: Born Aug. 24, 1996, in Indianapolis, Indiana ... Son of Eric Whitehead, Sr., and Shunnek Green ... Has an older sister, a younger brother and two younger sisters ... Contemplated major is business.



**ADONIS
WILLIAMSON**

6-1, 190, FS
Indianapolis, Indiana
Arsenal Technical High School
Also considered: Missouri, Ohio State, Northern Illinois

Stats: Recorded 53 tackles and six interceptions as a senior, two of which he returned for touchdowns ... Also returned four kicks and three punts for touchdowns.

Top honors: A three-star recruit by both 247Sports and Rivals ... Ranked the No. 70 cornerback prospect in the nation by 247Sports and the No. 10 overall prospect in Indiana by 247Sports ... Listed as the No. 64 cornerback prospect in the nation and the No. 10 overall prospect in Indiana by Rivals ... A first-team all-state choice by The Associated Press and the Indiana Football Coaches Association (Class 6A).

Why he chose Tech: “Virginia Tech was the perfect fit for me, just the college, the town and how I play. I really wanted to stay close to home, but I was doing what was best for me and my family. I wanted to go to a place that could get me where I need to be. I want to go to the league [the NFL], and Virginia Tech is perfect for getting DB's into the league. So I thought it was best for me and my family.”

On his position: “Coach [Torrian] Gray said I could play anywhere on the field.

He said he could put me anywhere and I'd make something happen. I'd rather play corner because it's what I've played all my years in high school and middle school and little league. I have a good idea of what I need to do. I just need to learn the scheme. I like being on my own island, too. You've got to fight every play not to let the receiver catch the ball. It's fun to me.”

On his favorite players: “I like Kendall Fuller. I also like Kam Chancellor [former Tech player now with the Seattle Seahawks]. I like to play like him. He's physical, and he likes to hit. They are the two players I like to watch.”

On his most memorable moment: “My most memorable moment in a game was catching three interceptions in one game. That was in my junior year. But overall, my most memorable moment was being No. 1 in the state in interceptions [as a junior].”

Personal: Born July 9, 1997, in Indianapolis, Indiana ... Son of Ramone Denny and Lula Williamson ... Natural father is Andreco Williamson (deceased) ... Has two older brothers and two older sisters ... Major is undecided.



**MOOK
REYNOLDS**

6-0, 180, CB
Greensboro, North Carolina
Northern Guilford High School
Also considered: Clemson, Ole Miss, Tennessee

Stats: Tallied 65 tackles and an interception as a senior ... Also caught 54 passes for 1,230 yards and 13 touchdowns as a receiver his senior season ... Had 80 tackles, including 13 for a loss, and three sacks as a junior ... Caught 46 passes for 639 yards and 12 touchdowns his junior season.

Top honors: A four-star prospect by both Rivals and 247Sports ... Ranked the No. 29 cornerback prospect nationally and the No. 8 overall prospect in North Carolina by 247Sports ... Listed as the No. 39 cornerback prospect in the nation and the No. 13 overall prospect in North Carolina by Rivals ... A first-team all-state choice (Class 3A) by NCPreps.com.

Why he chose Tech: “I felt that the coaches were the most genuine, and I felt this was the place for me. It's not too far from home, and I thought, for my academic career and my athletic career, this would be the best place to extend it. I also want to be a part of something special. This is a young team. I know they didn't have the best year last year, but the future is bright, and I want to be a part of something special.”


On his position: “Coach [Torrian]

Gray has told me that, to get me on the field faster, he was going to try me at nickel [fifth defensive back] just to make an impact, much like they did with Kyle [Fuller]. Then they'll convert me to the cornerback position.”

On his strengths and weaknesses: “Instincts and aggressiveness are my strong suits. I want to work on my speed, so if I make a mistake, my speed can put me in a better position to make up for it. I want to gain some weight and get stronger, too.”

On his most memorable moment: “In my three seasons, I only lost two games. I won two state championships. My three favorite games, we lost two and won one. The most recent one was the state championship this year when we won. It was a defensive game. I like all the close games. It reminds you of college when people are ballin'. It was next-level kind of stuff, and those were the games I enjoyed.”

Personal: Born March 27, 1997, in Greensboro, North Carolina ... John and Dwana Reynolds ... Has an older brother and an older sister ... Contemplated major is business.



**TIM
SETTLE**

6-3, 315, DL
Manassas, Virginia
Stonewall Jackson High School
Also considered: Louisville, Southern Cal, Oklahoma State, Washington State

Stats: Recorded 72 tackles, including 20 for a loss, his senior season ... Also forced three fumbles and had three sacks as a senior.

Top honors: A five-star recruit by ESPN ... Ranked the No. 17 prospect in the nation and the No. 4 defensive tackle prospect nationally by ESPN ... Listed as a four-star recruit by Rivals and 247Sports ... Rated the No. 162 prospect nationally, the No. 14 defensive tackle prospect nationally and the No. 6 prospect in Virginia by 247Sports ... Ranked the No. 174 prospect nationally, the No. 17 defensive tackle prospect nationally and the No. 10 prospect in Virginia by Rivals ... A two-time All-Met choice by The Washington Post.

Why he chose Tech: “I wanted to get away, but it's not too far, and it's not too close. Also, a big factor for me was picking Bud Foster [Tech's defensive coordinator]. He's been there, what, 28 years? And he just signed another contract so I don't have to worry about a defensive coordinator leaving.”

On his strengths and weaknesses: “I think my strong point is awareness. Like on third-and-2, I'll try to stop the run. I just try

to cause chaos. I need to have that motor when I get to college, and when I get to Virginia Tech, I want to make sure that I'm destructive and I'm in great condition.

“I need to work on my conditioning. I'm in condition high school-wise, but college conditioning is a different level. I'm in shape now, but I'm not in college shape.”

On his favorite player: “I'd say my favorite is B.J. Raji [defensive tackle for the Green Bay Packers]. I also like Ryan Kerrigan [a defensive lineman for the Washington Redskins].”

On his most memorable moment: “I helicoptered someone after he tried to jump over me. It was the first game of the season, and they [Potomac High School] ran a reverse. It was me and him and we were going full speed, and he tried to jump over me. It was a great hit, and he didn't get up. He came back in the game, but he took two quarters off.”

Personal: Born July 11, 1997, in Philadelphia ... Son of Tim, Sr., and Paula Settle ... Has an older brother, two younger brothers and a younger sister ... Contemplated major is business or management.



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LIFELONG TEAMMATES

Kari, Will and Marie Johnston all play a sport at Virginia Tech, and the three siblings maintain a bond that not even their hectic lives can break

by Jimmy Robertson

Kari Johnston still has the photo, an old print taken 15 years ago. It was right around the time digital cameras started becoming popular, but well before iPhones practically became essential to the existence of the human race.

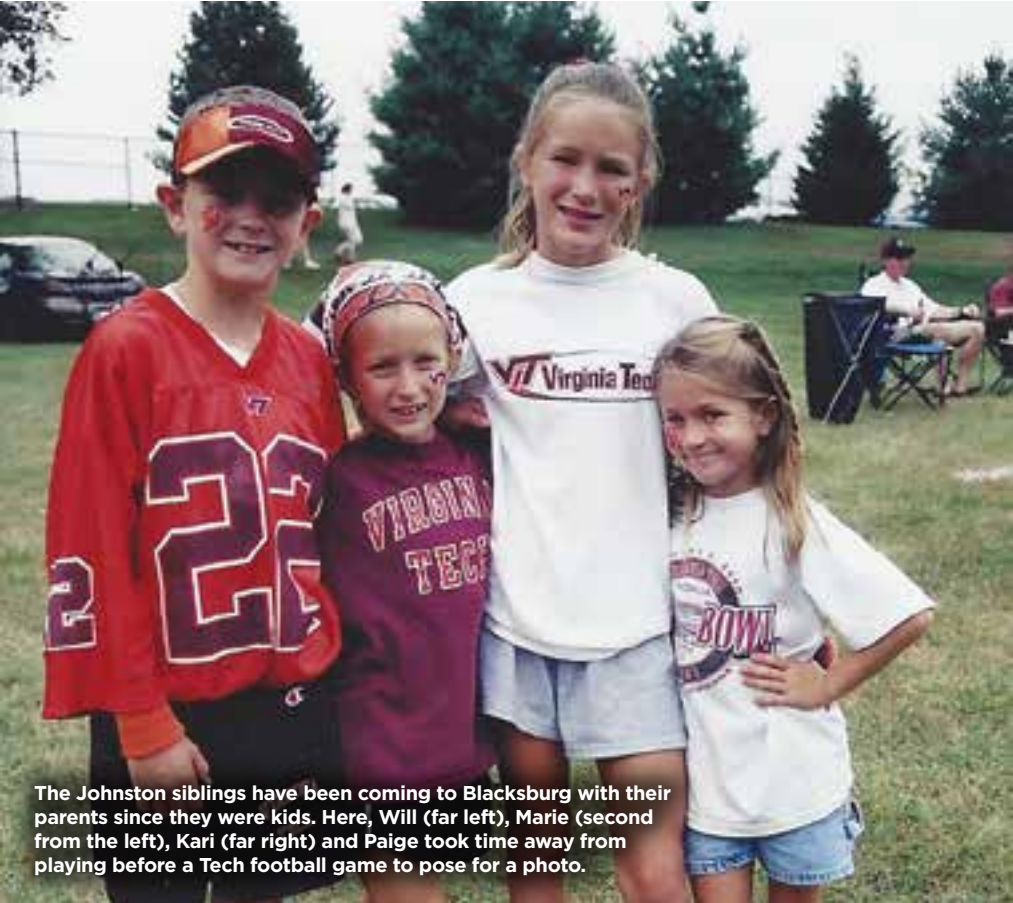
The photo is of her and her three siblings at Lane Stadium. The youngest child, she was around 4 or 5 years old, there with Marie, who is two years older. Will was around 8 or 9, while Paige, the oldest of the bunch, two years older than Will. Taking children such ages to football games strikes as much fear into parents as a Bud Foster blitz, and most refuse to make such a bold parental move.

But parents Billy and Susie – both Virginia Tech graduates – wasted little time in prepping their young children for the path they hoped each would take when the appropriate time came.

“We were all destined to come to Tech,” Will Johnston said.

Well, almost all. Paige, the adventurous one, deviated from the plan and struck out on her own, attending school and running track at the University of Arkansas. But the other three currently live in Blacksburg, and more amazing, all three are competing in sports for Virginia Tech.

Longtime observers of Tech athletics cannot say



The Johnston siblings have been coming to Blacksburg with their parents since they were kids. Here, Will (far left), Marie (second from the left), Kari (far right) and Paige took time away from playing before a Tech football game to pose for a photo.

with complete conviction, but they believe the three Johnston siblings – all from Midlothian, Virginia – are the first trio of siblings to play at Tech at the same time *in different sports*. Collin, Charlie and Caroline Higgins played at Tech at the same time, but all three were swimmers, and all three of the Edmunds brothers (Trey, Terrell and Tremaine) will compete in football this fall. No one remembers a trio of siblings, though, competing in different sports.

Most know Will, who went from walk-on to scholarship player to part-time starter on the men’s basketball team. Marie, who transferred from Wake Forest, runs track and cross country, and Kari, a freshman, played in four women’s soccer matches this season for the Hokies.

For the first time since Will’s senior season at Midlothian High School near Richmond, the three Johnston siblings are back together – and this tight-knit trio couldn’t be happier.

“We’ve always been close,” Will said. “Even when we were younger, we were close. So when they decided to come here, I was excited. Now, it’s like, ‘Let’s get dinner. Let’s hang out.’ It was just hard when Kari was in high school, and Marie was at Wake Forest. Now that we’re all here, why not take advantage of it and see each other as much as we can?”

Their schedules make it difficult, with practices and games on various days of the week. But they came up with a plan that worked fairly well in the fall.

They usually go to church together on Sunday mornings, and then on Sunday evenings, they try to get together for dinner. Chipotle is a popular spot for them, but they’ve been known to hit the Kroger deli from time to time. Occasionally, they even cook.

Their conversations, though, rarely center on sports.

“Usually, we try to get away from it,” Kari said. “We’ll listen to music, or watch The Office. We try to avoid our stressful lives. It’s always fun. That’s why I like hanging out with them.”

Perhaps more importantly than liking each other, the three of them have a mutual respect for one another and for their accomplishments in their respective sports.

Will gets the most notoriety because he plays a more popular sport. Also, his story is a compelling one.

He eschewed smaller schools because he liked Tech so much, and he planned to walk on at Tech, but then-coach Seth Greenberg and his staff had no open spots. So he played intramural basketball on campus to stay in shape, scoring 41 points in the championship game at McComas Hall his freshman year.

Word got back to Tech’s coaches, which prompted an email from then-assistant James

Johnson to Will, telling him to be at the Hahn Hurst Practice Center at 6 a.m. on Monday. He was camping with his dad on the New River at the time.

“He [Johnson] worked me out, and I did well in the tryout and made the team,” Will said. “He told me I might just be a practice player and might not even dress out. Back then, I was, like, ‘That’s cool with me. I don’t care at all. I’ll be a practice player all year.’”

After the season, though, Will decided to hang it up. He met with Greenberg, who tried to talk him into staying.

“He was like, ‘You’re going to miss it. You’re going to regret,’” Will said. “And he was right.”

Tech AD Jim Weaver fired Greenberg that April, but hired Johnson, who also tried to talk Will into coming back. Eventually, Will missed it so much that he decided to return to the squad. He ended up playing 29 games as a sophomore, starting four of them.

Before his junior season, Johnson called Will into his office. He put him on scholarship for the upcoming season.

“I couldn’t believe it,” Will said. “I went in the locker room and called my mom and dad immediately. I thought it was the coolest thing. I was on scholarship to play basketball in the ACC. I never thought it would happen.”

Last spring, new AD Whit Babcock fired Johnson and hired Buzz Williams to replace him.

Williams, seeking to replenish a roster decimated by attrition, took Will off scholarship.

But Will worked incredibly hard over the summer, and he took a leadership role with the Hokies’ five freshmen. Williams took notice and orchestrated a way to surprise Will with a scholarship offer.

He involved Kari, who involved Marie. They got their parents involved and their stepdad. All of them made short videos congratulating Will, and Tech’s video staff compiled those into one video.

At a team meeting, Williams used the video to inform Will that he was back on scholarship. His teammates mobbed him after seeing the video.

“I started getting emotional,” Will said. “My teammates were even more pumped than me. It was cool. When the video ended, everyone jumped on me and gave me a hug. They were really excited.”

“I called him afterward,” Kari said. “I knew when it was going to happen. I’m proud of him, just going from a walk-on to where he is now. I know how hard he has worked.”

Will also appreciates how hard his two younger sisters work. Kari played on one of the nation’s best club soccer teams while in high school and ultimately narrowed her college choices to Tech and VCU after visiting several in-state schools. Tech offered her a walk-on opportunity, and she decided to accept.

“I knew she was going to come here,” Will said. “Even when she was going on recruiting visits, I was like, ‘There’s no way she’s not coming here.’” “I always wanted to go here,” Kari admitted. “It was my dream. I’ve always gone to football and basketball games ever since I was a little kid, so going here was in the back of my mind. And just knowing that Will was here and that my parents went here made it easier, and then Marie decided to transfer here.”

Whereas Will and Kari are more extroverted, Marie is a bit more introverted. She decided to attend Wake Forest out of high school in part because she wanted something different than Virginia Tech. In addition to her family ties to Tech, a lot of people from her high school go here. Plus, she liked Wake Forest’s smaller environment, and the university’s nationally acclaimed School of Medicine intrigued her – she ultimately wants to be a doctor. But shortly into her first year in Winston-Salem, she started to have second thoughts.

“I remember coming here for a track meet, and some people were like, ‘These buildings are ugly,’” Marie said. “I’m like, ‘Hey, I love Tech.’ That’s when I knew a part of me was still a Hokie.”

Money played a role, too. Wake Forest is a private school, and tuition runs large, especially for an out-of-state student. But what she really

came back to was what transpired on autumn Saturdays. College football games at BB&T Field didn’t possess the same atmosphere that she grew up enjoying at Lane Stadium.

“I went to the first football game, and I was expecting the student section to be full,” she said. “I had come in a Wake t-shirt and shorts, and all the girls were in dresses and the guys were in nice slacks and ties. Half of the stadium was empty, and I was like, ‘Where is everybody?’ That’s when I realized how unique it is at Tech.”

Thoughts of transferring crept into her mind last spring, and even though she knew she would have to sit out this year in cross country and on the track – the ACC forces student-athletes to do this when they transfer within the conference – she made the decision anyway. By then, Kari had made up her mind to come to Tech. So Marie told both her and Will the news.

“She told me, ‘I’m thinking about coming to Tech,’ and I’m immediately like, ‘Yes, you have to do it,’” Will said.

Marie’s decision was the final one that brought the siblings together in Blacksburg, and they take full advantage, knowing that this is Will’s final year. The central location also makes it easier for their parents and stepparents to visit with them – their parents are now divorced. The group came down several times for Kari’s soccer matches


this fall, and they’ve been down on numerous occasions for Will’s basketball games. The postgame festivities usually involve dinner before leaving the kids and traveling back to Midlothian.

But they leave taking comfort in knowing that these three possess an unbreakable bond. That sense of sibling togetherness – and maybe this sounds corny, but also love – transcends societal norms these days.

“I thought it was, but I feel like the past few years that I’ve realized that what we have is pretty special,” Marie said. “I’ve seen other families. I don’t know if they’re as close. We’ve never really fought, and I feel like other siblings sometimes do. We didn’t really fight as kids, at least nothing serious. There were no grudges held or anything like that. So I think what we have is special.”

“Most people aren’t as close as I am with my siblings, and I’m thankful for that,” Kari said. “I think that’s the way our parents raised us. We’ve always done family bonding stuff, and I think our personalities are similar, so that helps. We all have the same goals and determination.”

One may struggle in a game. One may not do well on a test. One may need a pick-me-up at some point.

Rest assured, the three of them know they have people in their lives whom they can go to for help – each other. 

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Tech's coaches are expecting big-time production from Brendon Hayden, who hit .302 a year ago with seven homers and 43 RBIs.

EXPERIENCE AND DEPTH HAVE HOKIES OPTIMISTIC IN YEAR NO. 2 UNDER MASON

Veterans Sean Keselica and Brendon Hayden will need to be leaders for a 2015 Tech squad looking to move up in the ACC standings

by Marc Mullen

After what one could argue as the best season ever for the Virginia Tech baseball team back in 2013, last year's Hokies really had their work cut out for them. The team saw four juniors leave early via the Major League Baseball's first-year player draft, 17 newcomers join the program and three assistant coaches added to the staff who were either new to the school or in a new position. All of that faced Patrick Mason in his first season as the Hokies' head coach.

The outcome was a bit of a disappointing season, one that left Mason busy this summer evaluating every aspect of his program and planning feverishly for his second fall season – all while also preparing at home for the birth of daughter Anna, who was born in mid-August. Now, this first-time father is

set for his second year of guiding the Hokies and recently reflected on his initial season as head coach.

“There were definitely some growing pains,” Mason said. “We had a number of new guys – freshmen and jucos [junior college players] – but I think, if you want to be an elite program and you look at other programs, their rosters aren't necessarily old either. It's all about how quickly can you get back to where you were and sustain that success.

“It took a little bit of time to get our system in place, even though it isn't too different from the previous system. But I did take a lot of time evaluating myself, our staff, our talent, the players' strengths and weaknesses, and I put together a plan this fall pertaining to what we needed to be better at, which we may not have focused on in the first fall.”

Tech didn't bring in as many newcomers to this year's team as last year's. But just shortly after “The Ball” dropped to mark the start of the New Year, Mason did welcome two new assistants to his staff. The additions – Ryan Connolly and Robbie Price – really transform the Hokies on two fronts.

Connolly graduated from Notre Dame, spent some time at Tech as a volunteer assistant, and he returns to Blacksburg after two seasons away. He replaced Mike Kunigonis, who took the head coaching job at Northern Illinois. Price comes from a baseball family, as his father has been a head coach for 21 years, and he spent five seasons in the minor leagues after being drafted out of Kansas in 2010. He replaced Gabe Ortiz, the former volunteer assistant.

These coaches now make the Hokies' staff the youngest in the ACC, with an average age of a little more than 30 years old. Mason is the second youngest head coach in the league behind Boston College's Mike Gambino. Also, Tech now has two former minor leaguers, along with pitching coach Robert Woodard (three seasons), on its bench.

“I think you can see a trend that I have hired younger coaches who have some sort of pedigree that is sellable,” Mason said. “Ryan has been at tremendous institutions, starting with playing at Notre Dame. And I think that once fans get

to know him, they will immediately see that he has the ability to connect with recruits. He's a lot like Robert, who has done a tremendous job of recruiting for us. I think that Ryan is going to bring a lot more of that to the table.

“Then with Robbie, the major thing with hiring him is that he brings instant credibility to work with our infielders. That is so important for that position, and to have a guy like him in place who can help those guys is awesome. I think we are talented and deep at those positions and those guys are thirsting for a coach who has been to that next level and can help them get there.

“Collectively, these assistants bring a lot of energy to compliment what we are trying to do as a staff. They fit in perfectly, and you'd be hard-pressed to find another staff in the country that has more energy than us and can immediately connect with our players. They also help bridge that gap with the players and myself, and they have tremendous knowledge.”

The 2015 Hokies were a bit on the lucky side when it came to the 2014 professional draft. Sure, for the second straight season, Tech saw a junior selected before the fourth round (Mark Zagunis), but Mason was certain that two more juniors were going to have their names called as well.

The first is senior pitcher Sean Keselica, who has 123 career starts in the field and has pitched in

28 games, with 16 starts. He was recently named the No. 36th senior prospect by Perfect Game. The other, Brendon Hayden, enters the season with 141 career starts and had already been drafted once – out of high school in the 36th round.

Both of these men probably will be selected this June, as could seniors Alex Perez and Erik Payne. Those four, along with fifth-year senior Kyle Wernicki, make up a solid core of leadership that the program maybe lacked a little in 2014, when it had just two seniors.

“It was certainly a Catch-22 with those guys – Keselica and Hayden,” Mason said. “If we would have lost both of those guys to the draft, it would have meant that we, as a team, would have been more on the national scene last year, and that would have been a good thing. We would be having the conversation of how do we get back to that level and replace those two guys.

“To me, as a coach, right now, it's awesome to have them back. But last June, I felt terrible for both of them. With them, I've got two three-year starters who will be out to prove people wrong, and that could be pretty lethal.

“Then you add in Alex, who has been tremendous, consistent, a jack-of-all-trades – offensively, he does what's needed, he plays great defense and now he's pitching. Kyle has been here through all of our ups and downs and knows what

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it will take to get this team where we want it to be. I love this senior combination.”

Interestingly, with just two seniors on his 2014 roster and all those newcomers, Mason could really see what his program had moving forward. The numbers coming back for the Hokies in 2015 are ridiculous – 424 starts from last year (out of 477) in the field and 88 percent of the at-bats return, as well as 40 of the starts on the mound and 73 percent of the innings pitched.

Mix in the incoming freshmen, and there are plenty of position battles up for grabs. About two weeks prior to the season opener, Mason still wasn’t quite sure how the lineup and starting rotation would shake out, which, to some, could seem like a negative, but he sees it as a positive.

“We return eight of nine lineup guys from a team that led the ACC in hitting, both overall and in conference, for the first time in school history, and I feel confident we can build upon that,” Mason said. “Those numbers we return are rare, offensively and defensively combined, and we had younger guys who performed at a pretty high level near the end of the season, and we can certainly build off of that, too.”

“And knowing that we have Sean coming back as a No. 1 [starting pitcher], and all the experience our bullpen guys were getting, I think we are returning a lot on the mound. We went

from young to old in one year, and that’s about right in college baseball at this level.”

Obviously not locks, but these three players all started at least 50 games last year – redshirt sophomore Saige Jenco in the outfield (.323 average, 38 runs, 20 stolen bases), first baseman/designated hitter Hayden (.302 average, seven home runs, 43 RBIs) and second baseman Perez (.249 average, 104 career walks).

Nine other guys made at least 10 starts and appeared in at least 17 games, led by outfielder Wernicki (36 starts/49 games) and a number of sophomores – shortstop Ricky Surum (37/47), outfielder Tom Stoffel (24/42) and infielders Miguel Ceballos (24/33) and Ryan Tufts (24/31). The juniors include outfielder Phil Sciretta (21 starts), infielder Matt Dauby (17), catcher Andrew Mogg (13) and outfielder Logan Bible (10).

“In my mind, we are looking at about 14 or 15 guys for that nine-man lineup, and there will definitely be some platooning early as we try to figure out which ones work, but I feel good about our options,” Mason said. “We are going to continue to focus on the team and the team goal of that day, and that’s where our focus and energy will be.”

“We are trying to develop everyone individually, while growing collectively as a team, but the focus in all of our goals as a program are

team oriented. We have to continue to create that shared vision, and when guys aren’t playing – and there are going to be good players that won’t be in the lineup on a particular day – we’ll need to keep those guys ready and prepared because you never know when they will be needed.”

When it comes to the freshmen, there aren’t as many, and with how deep the Hokies are with returners, it won’t be as easy for these newcomers to see action as it was last season. However, Mason believes there are some who already are showing signs of breaking into the starting lineup or playing key reserve roles, especially in the pitching department.

“The one that will be the soonest on the scene for fans would be Joe Freiday, Jr., since I think he and Andrew will be sharing a lot of time behind the plate in replacing Mark’s absence,” Mason said. “Joe has incredible tools and incredible arm strength and has power in his bat.”

“And then Max Ponzurick, who had a great fall at the plate, is a corner infielder where we have a lot of depth. We’ll have to find a way to get his bat in the lineup because he’s got elite power similar to that of [former players] Andrew Rash or Tyler Horan. We’ll have to keep developing him.”


“Then on the mound, we have four freshmen who seem to be mentally and physically ready to handle a role. Left-hand pitcher Packy Naughton,

along with righties Chris Monaco, Joey Sullivan and Connor Coward all had pretty good falls, and their outings this spring have been good and they are developing on track.”

The Hokies will hit the ground running from the outset of their season. They open at Mercer (Feb. 13), a team that finished second in the Atlantic Sun regular season, and despite an RPI of 47, did not get an invitation to the 2014 NCAA Championship. Those are just three of the 38 games Tech will play against teams that finished with an RPI of 100 or better, while 23 games will be against teams that made the NCAA Championship.

Fans should be ready for a very entertaining home slate, as the Hokies will welcome Super Regional participant College of Charleston for a midweek series (March 3-4) and play host to ACC opponents Virginia, Clemson, Georgia Tech, North Carolina – all NCAA teams a year ago – and Boston College.

“There are really no days off when it comes to our schedule this season, not that we are looking for that, but we’ll be tested quick” Mason said. “It does remind me of the schedule that we played in 2013 in that our non-conference schedule is pretty demanding.”

“And I don’t really need to talk about the ACC schedule, that is always challenging.” 





Alex Perez has started every game since arriving on campus (170 straight), and his leadership will be important to the Hokies in 2015.



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Second-team All-ACC choice Lauren Gaskill anchors Tech's 2015 infield at shortstop and led the Hokies with 17 stolen bases last season.

TECH SOFTBALL SQUAD AIMING BIG ONCE AGAIN

Kylie McGoldrick, Lauren Gaskill and a bunch of veterans have the Hokies targeting an ACC title and a fourth straight trip to the NCAAs

by Marc Mullen

"The fresh, floral air energizes you. The warm, tranquil waters refresh you. The breathtaking, natural beauty renews you. Look around. There's no place on earth like Hawaii."

The official tourism site of the nation's 50th state certainly could appeal to anyone's sense of an ideal destination for a spring break trip. For the 2015 Virginia Tech softball team, its trip to the Aloha State in the second week of March is not just for pleasure. The Hokies want to take care of business there – and every other place on their 2015 schedule.

The Hokies do play five games in Honolulu, Hawaii, all starting after 7:30 p.m. EST, and those contests come right at a crucial time in their ACC schedule – they have UNC and Syracuse before flying out and Florida State the weekend after they return to Blacksburg.

Recently, Tech head coach Scot Thomas spoke about the trip he will embark upon with the team and guaranteed that the team will have the right mindset when heading west.

"We have a lot of big games leading up to that trip," he said. "And all those games are so important

early that we need to make sure we are taking care of business before going out there.

"We have North Carolina and Syracuse in conference, and we have Tennessee here before we even start thinking about going out to Hawaii. So we can't pack our bags for Hawaii too quickly because we will have a lot of business to take care of before that.

"But as far as the trip, we are probably the last softball team in the state that hasn't done this, and we've been trying to get out there. It will be a fun trip, but it will be both – we want to go out there and enjoy the environment, but it's also a business trip ultimately."

The Hokies' staff will lean on its veterans to keep the team focused before, during and after the business trip. That group of veterans includes five seniors and two redshirt juniors, and they mostly solidify the infield.

Senior Lauren Gaskill, a career .312 hitter, has started in 181 games for the Hokies, including 59 at shortstop in 2014, while senior second baseman Kylie McGoldrick has a .316 career average in 172 starts. Both already have cemented their names among the top 10 in many categories in Tech's record book.

Senior Logan Spaw turned her career around as a junior, going from a .169 hitter as a sophomore to batting .319 last year as the team's designated player. Senior Bailey Liddle has started 95 games

for Tech in the field, mainly at first base, and redshirt senior Michelle Prong adds leadership in the outfield.

Then there are redshirt juniors Katey Smith and Kelsey Mericka. Smith, who broke her foot in 2013, was named third-team All-ACC and to the NFCA Mid-Atlantic Region squad after a .317 season with 49 RBIs as the team's catcher. Mericka, the team's projected catcher for 2014, missed the year with a torn labrum, but should be the starter at third base.

"This is a very talented senior class, and if you look top to bottom, it's probably one of the best senior classes we may ever have had," Thomas said. "We've had some standout players in certain classes, but we are looking at Lauren and Kylie, who have been strongholds in our lineup since they got here, and we count on them to be leaders.

"Kylie is more like a motherly leader, while Lauren is the energy-type kid. The rest of the class – Bailey, Logan, and Michelle – we are excited about all those kids and what they will do for us this year. They've already had big impacts on our program, and they've got one more year.

"Then there's Katey Smith and Kelsey Mericka, two of our redshirt juniors who should be in that class as well. So you are talking about seven players – a veteran bunch – and all of them factor into our success, and we are excited about that, too."

New to the 2015 Hokies will be hitting coach

Justin Miller, who comes to Blacksburg after spending three seasons at Presbyterian College, where he helped the program win the Big South Conference tournament in 2012. He replaced longtime assistant Al Brauns, who retired at the end of last season.

Miller takes over a strong offensive lineup that set school records for slugging percentage at .471 and home runs with 59. The team also came close to topping program marks for on-base percentage, total bases, runs scored and RBIs.

"Kelsey led our team in home runs as a freshman, and we didn't have her in the lineup last year, so those numbers could have been even better," Thomas said. "Coach Miller really has done a great job by doing his own thing, but he's been taking my philosophies and continuing them.

"Obviously, they're similar, or I wouldn't have brought in someone I didn't trust or believe in. And it's been working out well. I think this is the first time in my 20 years that I have turned the hitting completely over to somebody, and that allows me to step back and look at the whole program.

"That's really a nice thing to have, and I've heard nothing but good things from the players. They enjoy working with him."

The motto, though, is defense wins championships, and that's certainly true when it comes to softball. Success is always determined by how well the pitchers do in the circle and

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that’s where the question marks arise for the 2015 Hokies.

In the fall, the pitching staff looked impressive, welcoming back its top two pitchers from last year, juniors Kelly Heinz and Maggie Tyler, and adding highly talented freshman Chelsea Whitcomb.

The juniors had almost identical numbers last season. Tyler went 15-9, with a 3.28 ERA and 184 strikeouts in 192 innings, while Heinz was 21-14, with a 3.46 ERA and 175 strikeouts in 184.1 innings.

The addition of Whitcomb, a three-time Richmond Metro Player of the Year from Cosby High School with phenomenal numbers, would only help the Hokies. However, she suffered an ACL tear while trying out in California for the U.S. Junior Women’s National Team, thus ending her Tech season.

“I think losing Chelsea was a big deal because she was someone who was really going to factor in,” Thomas said. “What’s exciting is that both Kelly and Maggie are coming off of tough seasons, and I like where they are. I like their demeanor. I like their focus. They’ve both looked good in practice so far.

“And they have some great kids around them. This pitching staff should be very excited to pitch because of who they have around them, and that

should give them confidence in the circle. That being said, we have some other kids – Mikaela Aiken and Elizabeth Birle – I’m not sure how many innings they’re going to get, but they’ll factor in.”

Hokie fans will get plenty of time to see the softball team this season at Tech Softball Park, and the home slate is an exciting one.

Not only is Tennessee coming to Blacksburg, but also the Hokies will face Florida State, ACC newcomer Louisville and NC State and will close out the ACC slate playing host to the ACC Softball Championship.

“I think we can compete at the top of the league this year, but what is going to be cool about our schedule is that our fans are going to get to see a lot of good teams coming into Blacksburg,” Thomas said. “I think Florida State is the team to beat. Notre Dame could really hit the ball last year. NC State has a bulk of its team back and they have been solid in the league, and it will be interesting with Louisville joining the conference.


“There are several teams in this league that will compete, and top to bottom, this league is better than it’s ever been. But we’ve talked about hosting and taking advantage of having the tournament here. That’s a big deal for us. It’s an opportunity for us to take a home-field advantage and turn it into an ACC title.”

The team may be talking about winning an ACC title, but the main goal for Thomas and the Hokies every year is to make it to the NCAA Softball Championship.

Last season, the team advanced to its seventh NCAA tournament and third straight. The team also made it three straight times from 2005-07 before making a run to the College World Series in 2008. Getting to the NCAA this year will match the four-year stretch that the 2008 graduates enjoyed, but that has been the only season that Tech advanced out of the first round.

“Our expectation every year is to make the NCAA tournament, no matter what,” Thomas said. “There are going to be times where injuries and other things get in your way, but I think if we aren’t an NCAA tournament team, then we haven’t done our job. Period.

“I think we are the type of program that we should always be putting ourselves in that position, and I feel like, this year, we can do that. Losing Chelsea hurts us, but it couldn’t have happened in a better year because of what we have coming back in experience and senior leadership.”

The Hokies open their season with four straight weekends on the road before their first home game – that game with the Vols, which is slated for Tuesday, March 3, at 4 p.m. 




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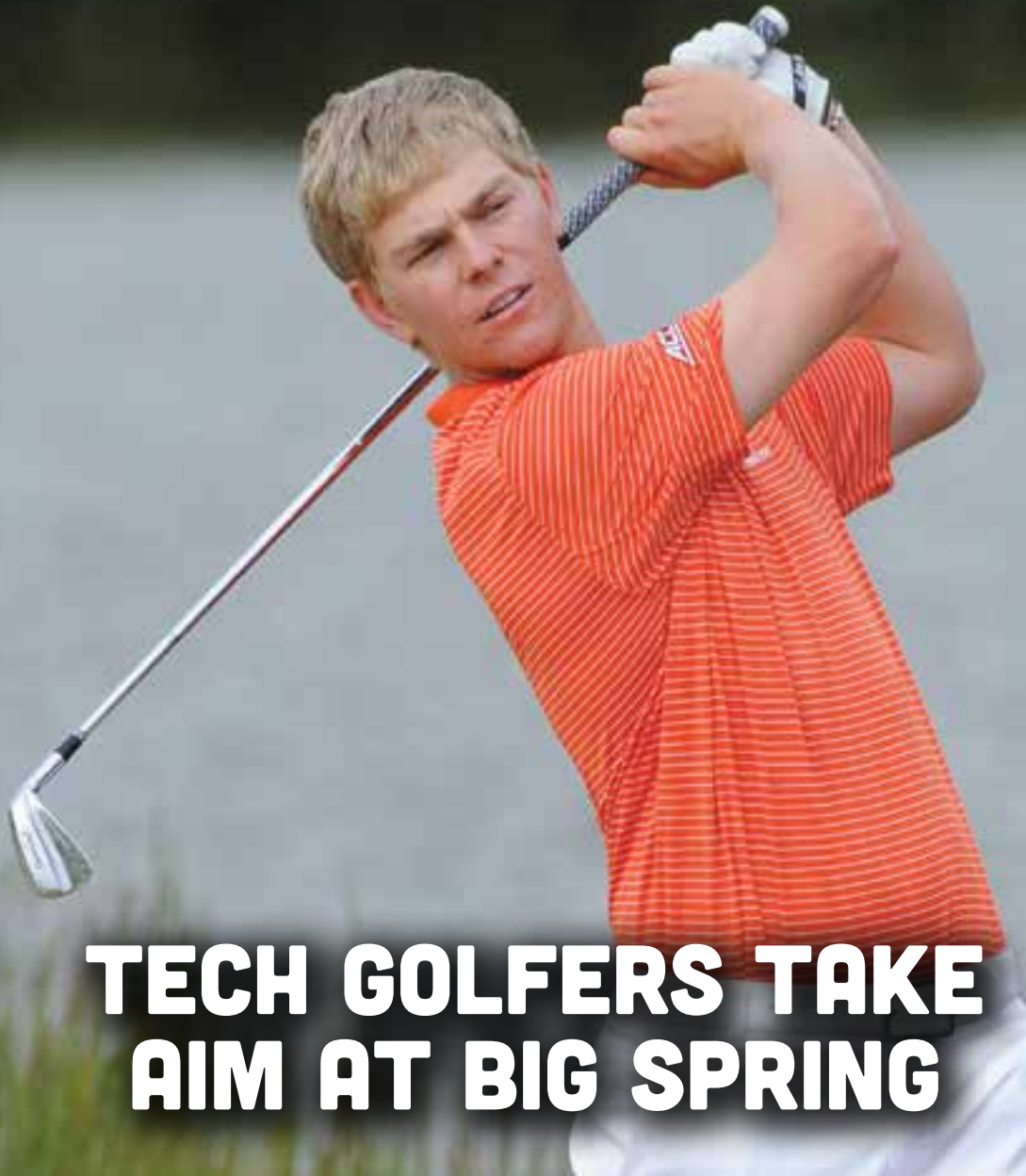




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All-American Scott Vincent won three times last season and will be looking to do more of the same for the Hokies this spring.

TECH GOLFERS TAKE AIM AT BIG SPRING

All-Americans Scott Vincent and Trevor Cone headline a Hokie squad with expectations of making the NCAA Golf Championships for the third time in four years

by Jimmy Robertson

The Virginia Tech golf team enjoyed a terrific 2013-14 campaign, and to describe it in golf terminology, the Hokies simply aced last season. They eagled it.

Tech won three tournaments and finished in the top five in every single event, with the exception of one. The Hokies finished fourth at the ACC Championship and advanced to the NCAA regionals for the eighth straight season. They made it to the NCAA Golf Championships for the second time in three seasons. They crowned two All-Americans

and one academic All-American.

But what transpired at Prairie Dunes Country Club, a golf course smack dab in the middle of the Kansas prairie and host of the NCAA Golf Championships, dampened their enthusiasm a little for what they had accomplished.

“We had a great year,” Tech coach Jay Hardwick said. “But the way we finished was bittersweet.”

Tech was part of a group that went out in the afternoon on the first day. But thunderstorms wiped out the round, a precursor of things to come.

Rain and lightning forced numerous delays in the event and made for difficult conditions, and the Hokies never got on track. By the time stroke play ended, Tech failed to advance to match play and ended up finishing 28th.

“We caught the wrong end of the weather,” Hardwick said. “All the teams that did, it got them all. It was quite a learning experience. That’s the way golf is. It’s not an excuse. We still had a chance. There were teams that got out of there that were in those waves like us. We were right there in every event until then.”

Those Kansas memories serve as motivation for the 2014-15 Hokies, who entered fall play with lofty goals and lofty expectations, and their play in five fall events did nothing to dissuade them. Tech won a tournament this fall, finished second in another, and finished no worse than eighth.

One of the Hokies’ goals this season was to finish no worse than fifth in any event. But their eighth-place finish in the Fighting Illini Invitational played at Olympia Fields Country Club outside of Chicago comes with a self-placed asterisk. The handpicked field was the strongest in collegiate golf – even stronger than the NCAA Championships held the previous June. Plus, Tech finished ahead of defending national champion Alabama in the event.

“Our goal is always to finish in the top five,” Hardwick said. “If you’re in the top five, you’re usually in a situation where you’ve put yourself in the position to play in the lead group on the last day. If you’re in the lead group, there is more pressure on your players, but you’re in that situation where you’ve got a chance to win.”

“If you’re ninth or 10th in college golf in the final round, it’s hard to come from that far back in one round. But it [being in the top five] also puts you playing better teams, and the more you put yourself there, the more you know how to handle it.”

Tech’s goals for this spring should be high, considering its lineup. The Hokies return all but one player, though steady Bryce Chalkley – the two-time academic All-American – will be missed. Chalkley rarely finished outside of the top 20 in events.

Most teams go into a season with a clear-cut No. 1 in the lineup, but the Hokies possess a No. 1 and a No. 1A in All-Americans Scott Vincent and Trevor Cone. Vincent, a senior from Harare, Zimbabwe, became the program’s first first-team All-American after leading the Hokies in scoring average (70.5) and winning three times last season.

Cone, a senior from Concord, North Carolina, won two tournaments last spring – the Mission Inn Spring Spectacular and the Furman Intercollegiate – in back-to-back weeks. He led the team in “crunch time,” or final round, average (69.6) and finished second behind Vincent in stroke average (70.9).

Last season marked a breakout one for Cone, considered the most naturally gifted golfer on the squad by Hardwick, and he carried his great play over to the fall, where he finished no worse than 12th in any event. He finished third on two occasions.

“Trevor has really played well,” Hardwick said. “He’s been really solid. He’s got so much talent, and after he won a couple of times last year back-to-back, he became a different player. We knew it was there all along, and we’ve been pushing him, maybe a little harder at times than we should be. We just see the potential there, and I think he realizes it now. His expectations are totally different. He expects to win every time he goes out there.”

Vincent got off to a bit of a slow start this fall, finishing 38th at the Fighting Illini Invitational. But he finished under par in his final three events,

coming in second in the final event of the fall, the UNCG Bridgestone Collegiate.

“Scotty did not play well at Olympia Fields, and I know he wanted to play well because that was the strongest field we’d ever been in,” Hardwick said. “At VCU [the VCU Shootout], he made a couple of double bogeys on his last hole twice, and that just killed good rounds. The first round at Primland [the Primland Collegiate Invitational], he didn’t play a good first round and then played really well the last two rounds.

“So he’s right there. He had a chance to win the last tournament, and he finished second.”

Behind those two is Maclain Huge, a junior with two NCAA appearances under his belt. He recorded five top-20 finishes a year ago, with his best finish being an eighth-place finish at the Furman Intercollegiate last spring.

Huge took some strides this fall, with a stroke average of 72.8. He nearly won the VCU Shootout, finishing second at 2-under-par, and he finished in the top 20 on two other occasions.

“That was big for Maclain,” Hardwick said of Huge’s second-place finish. “He played better each round. There was a marked improvement. That was the first time he’d put himself in the hunt, and he handled it well. He played well.

“He’s got all the talent in the world. With his length, he doesn’t have to hit driver everywhere and doesn’t give up anything. He was a little erratic [this fall]. He didn’t have quite as good of a summer as he did the year before, but then he got on track. Hopefully, he’ll have a good spring. We need everybody this spring.”

Hardwick’s concern heading into the spring centered on the fourth and fifth spots in the lineup. Tech did not have a top-20 finish in any fall event from any of the contenders at those spots.

Sophomores Drew Johnson and Joey Lane



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appear to be the frontrunners, with sophomore Ryan Mondy, freshman Ian Hildebrand and freshman Dan Woodbury in the mix. Johnson's stroke average of 73.8 bested Lane's 74.7, and Johnson rarely shoots a terrible score. His rounds usually run between 72 and 76.

"He's improved more than anybody," Hardwick said. "He's also shot some low rounds, which hasn't been his mantra. He shot some low rounds this summer. There's a big difference in shooting 70 and 69. To a player, it seems like a 10-shot difference. It's a different step.

"So many times, players get to 1- or 2-under-par, and they're protective. That's the difference with Trevor and Scott. They get to 1- or 2-under and they're thinking, 'How do I get 3 [-under], how do I get 4, how do I get 5 and so on?'"

A year ago, Hardwick knew exactly what to expect from the consistent Chalkley, which took the pressure off Huge, who spent nearly all of the season in the No. 4 role. Huge – and Hardwick – could relax, knowing that, more than likely, three good scores were coming from Vincent, Cone and Chalkley.

"When you've got a guy who is never out of the top 20, that's difficult to replace," Hardwick said. "We had a 1-2-3 punch last year. Any three of them could be No. 1 at any time. When you had

three great rounds like that every time, you only needed one more good round to go with it."

Hardwick needs for someone to emerge. Actually, he needs for a couple of players to emerge. Lane played in the NCAA Championships, giving this year's team four players with championship experience, and Johnson came on during the fall.

Every player played at least two tournaments in the fall, as Hardwick used the fall to evaluate. Unfortunately for him, that quintet didn't make things easy for him.

"I tell them not to leave it to the coaches," he said. "When we have to pick, or we have to go to qualifying [to make the lineup], that tells you we're not getting the performance we need. Make it easy on me. Go and shoot 65 every time, and get your spot and get it secured. As a coach, the hardest thing I have to do is tell a player he's not playing in the lineup. We know how much kids want to play, but we can only play five in a tournament, so I tell them to take that decision out of our hands.

"We've got good talent down the line. We've just got to step it up. Everyone has to get better."

The Hokies play a challenging schedule this spring. They go to the always challenging Puerto Rico Classic in late February, play at the Augusta State Invitational in early April, and compete


in the Yale Spring Invitational in New Haven, Connecticut – the site of an NCAA regional in mid-May. They play in that tournament the week before the ACC Golf Championship at the Old North State Club in Badin Lake, North Carolina.

Tech possesses a lot of pieces. This is an experienced team and a smart team – seven of the eight players recorded a 3.0 grade-point average during the fall semester and the team GPA was 3.30. It's also a talented team, and with those two All-Americans, the Hokies will be threats in every event.

If Tech gets more out of the bottom of its lineup, it could be much more than just a threat this spring.

"We made it to the national championship, but our goal wasn't just to make it. It was to compete," Hardwick said. "Trevor and Scott have now played in two of the past three national championships. Maclain played in it last year. Joey played in it last year. You have four guys who have played in a national championship, and the others have heard what it's like.

"They know the expectations and the excitement. It's not a matter of getting there. It's a matter of competing. Maybe that's a lofty goal for a school in this climate, but we've done it before."

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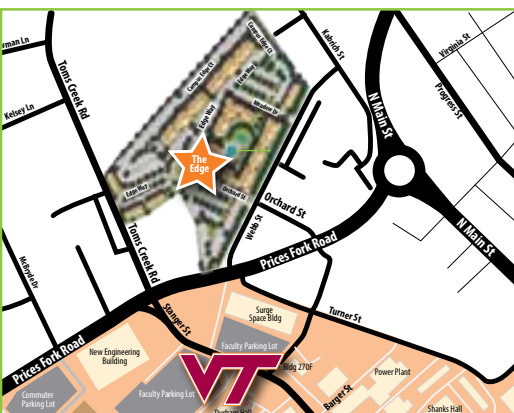
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