SUCCESS IN ST. LOUIS

Devin Carter closed his storied career with a third-place finish at the 2015 NCAA Wrestling Championships held in St. Louis, and the Tech wrestling team finished in the top 10 for the third straight year.
WHAT’S MAROON, WHITE AND GREEN ALL OVER?
HOKIE FOOTBALL IN SPRING!

LIFE FEELS GOOD when the Hokies take the field for the Maroon and White game on Saturday, April 25. We’re always cheering for you at Union. Get a sneak peek at the upcoming football season, then drop by Union and get a peek at a free checking account. It’s a winner. Just like the Hokies.
The Virginia Tech men’s tennis team recorded its best win since joining the ACC when the Hokies stunned then-No. 2 Duke 6-1 on March 8 at the Burrows-Burleson Tennis Center. Tech lost the doubles point, but came back to win all six singles matches.

“This was a great win for our program,” head coach Jim Thompson said. “We were down a player in singles [Amerigo Contini was injured], and for the guys to come in here and step up really shows our depth. I’m proud of this team and the work that these guys put in every day to be the best they can be.”

Tech started the season by winning 14 of its first 16 matches at press time, including a 6-1 mark in league competition. The Hokies have seven wins over ranked teams.

“I think scholarships give an amazing experience as a human and as an athlete. Even though costs can be high in order to get such a level of education, receiving a scholarship gives us this opportunity. Also, it brings a possibility to meet and play with all kinds of student-athletes with different backgrounds and really high levels of performance. Indeed, our team would probably not be at such national ranking without scholarships, with players from all over the globe. The help of the Hokie Club also brings an incredible personal experience. As I said, meeting all these nationalities broaden my view of the world, and I wouldn’t have had that anywhere else.”

Florian Nicoud
Senior | St. Marcellin, France

“I don’t think I could be more appreciative of people who donate. We have a bunch of donors who come to our matches, and the reason they come is because they love learning about us. We interact with them, and without them, a lot of us wouldn’t be here. It’s not possible without them, and we couldn’t be more appreciative of them.”

Hunter Koontz
Senior | Richmond, Virginia
**Bijan Peters**

**STUDENT HOKIE CLUB ROLE:** Leadership Council Member

**CURRENTLY RESIDES:**

Vienna, Virginia

**GRADUATION YEAR:**

May, 2015

**CURRENTLY RESIDES:**

Leadership Council Member

**STUDENT HOKIE CLUB ROLE:**

Bijan Peters

of Virginia Tech athletics? A:

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

A: My favorite memory of Virginia Tech athletics is the Virginia Tech vs. Georgia Tech game on Labor Day, Monday, Sept. 3, 2012. The Hokies were ranked 16th in the nation for the season opener. A heavy storm was traveling up the East Coast and was expected to hit Blacksburg just in time for kickoff at Lane Stadium. Virtually every fan in Lane Stadium was wearing Virginia Tech Student Government Association (SGA) “Orange Effect” shirts. The game was my first as SGA Director of the Hokie Effect Program, and seeing the stadium filled with Orange Effect shirts gave me chills. Even the Marching Virginia Tech was wearing Orange Effect shirts, as the impending storm would have made it impossible for them to wear their uniforms at the next home game five days later. By some miracle, the storm bypassed Blacksburg, and the rumors of a potential evacuation of Lane Stadium were put to rest. Metallica’s “Enter Sandman” blasted from the speakers, and on cue, the Hokie faithful started jumping. Little did these fans know they were about to witness the first ever overtime game at Lane Stadium. As the game-winning field goal crossed through the uprights, the Skipper cannon fired, validating the slogan of the Orange Effect shirt “The Sweet Sound of Victory.” Virginia Tech prevailed 20-17.

Q: What is your favorite Virginia Tech athletics tradition?

A: The football team’s entrance through the tunnel is one of the greatest traditions in all of sports. Each coach and student-athlete touches the Hokie Stone that reads, “For those who have passed, for those to come, reach for excellence” before they run onto the field during “Enter Sandman.” I was able to experience the walk through the tunnel firsthand after I won the “Coach ’em Up” video contest hosted by the athletics marketing department. I was invited to join the team on the field for warm-ups prior to the Virginia Tech vs. Marshall game on Sept. 21, 2013. I then met Coach Shane Beamer outside the locker room prior to the team’s march. He advised me not to trip as I prepared to lead the team out of the tunnel with his father, head coach Frank Beamer. The legendary Frank Beamer then appeared from the locker room after giving his pregame speech to the team. After a brief introduction, I walked alongside Coach Beamer into the tunnel and waited at the entrance with the team behind me ready for action as “Enter Sandman” blared. The tunnel was lined with camaraderies, and the Corps of Cadets and cheerleaders were jumping on the field ahead of me along with 66,000 fans in the stands. When I got the signal, I reached up, touched the Hokie Stone and sprinted onto the field. Behind me, the captains carried the flags and the rest of the team followed. Despite intense weather conditions, the Hokies went on to win the game 29-21 in triple overtime.

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

A: As a member of the UAC, Robena Hughes, her son, Scott Hughes, played football at Virginia Tech and spearheaded the creation of the Student Hokie Club. Since then, I’ve been working closely with Scott to help establish the program. While I will be graduating in May, I am invested in the success of the Student Hokie Club, as it will benefit future Virginia Tech students, including my younger brother, Arjan, who will be a freshman in the fall.

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**COST OF ATTENDANCE**

**WHAT IS IT?**

**SCHOLARSHIP COSTS**

at VIRGINIA TECH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Type</th>
<th>In-State Undergraduate</th>
<th>Out-of-State Undergraduate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Grant-in-Aid</td>
<td>$24,367</td>
<td>$40,738</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tuition & Fees**

- In-State: $12,077
- Out-State: $28,048

**Room**

- In-State: $4,834
- Out-State: $4,834

**Board**

- In-State: $12,017
- Out-State: $28,048

**Books**

- In-State: $3,436
- Out-State: $3,436

**COA “Gap”**

- In-State: $800
- Out-State: $800

For more than 40 years, the maximum allowable NCAA Division I athletics scholarship covered tuition, fees, room, board, and books but not the incidental, personal costs of attending college. Beginning August 1, 2015, that will change.

In January, the NCAA passed legislation allowing institutions to pay a student-athlete’s full cost of attendance (COA), essentially covering the scholarship “gap.” These scholarship enhancements (of $3,280 for in-state and $3,620 for out-of-state at Virginia Tech) will increase Tech’s total scholarship bill by approximately $950,000, to approximately $12.9 million annually. A student’s cost of attendance is an estimate of expenses designed to represent his/her projected actual cost to attend a specific college or university. Each school’s financial aid office determines COA, using broad federal guidelines originating from the Higher Education Act of 1965. The cost of attendance number serves as a maximum, and comprises only those expenses that are directly related to college attendance. Typical items include tuition, fees, room, board, books, and now, miscellaneous personal expenses, transportation home, etc.

The Virginia Tech Student-Athlete Pylons of Promise sets forth our commitment to student-athletes during their time at Virginia Tech and beyond. Further-detailed information may be found on the Pylons website at [www.hokiesports.com/pylons](http://www.hokiesports.com/pylons)
Former Virginia Tech president Dr. Paul Torgersen passed away

Former Virginia Tech president Dr. Paul Torgersen passed away on March 29 at the age of 83. He taught engineering courses at Virginia Tech in some capacity for more than 40 years and served as the president from 1993-2000.

Dr. Torgersen was a fixture at Tech sporting events during his time as president, preferring to walk along the sidelines at football games to be closer to the action and to soak in the sounds permeating throughout Lane Stadium. The beginning of Torgersen’s tenure at Tech coincided with the start of the Hokies’ current bowl streak, one which now spans 22 straight seasons. He confronted athletics issues head on during his time, overseeing the school’s departure from the Metro Conference in 1993 and then hiring Jim Weaver as the athletics director in 1997 after Dave Braine left to become the AD at Georgia Tech.

Torgersen and Weaver were instrumental in keeping head football coach Frank Beamer in Blacksburg, and Torgersen’s approvals enabled Weaver to start an unprecedented upgrading of Tech’s athletics facilities, including multiple expansions to Lane Stadium, the construction of the Merryman Center and renovations to Cassell Coliseum.

Dresser named ACC Coach of the Year for third straight time

Virginia Tech wrestling coach Kevin Dresser was named the ACC’s Coach of the Year for the third straight time after guiding the Hokies to an ACC-best 10th-place national finish – their third straight top-10 finish at the NCAA Championships. Tech also won the regular season ACC title with a perfect 5-0 dual match record in the league, but finished third at the ACC Championship.

Torgersen decided to retire as Tech’s president effectively on Jan. 1, 2000, but he delayed his retirement one week because he wanted to be the president during the Hokies’ appearance in the 2000 national championship football game played in the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans on Jan. 4. Even after retiring, Torgersen attended football games and basketball games, and he often stopped by football practice just to keep in touch.

“I’ve been honored to get to know Dr. Torgersen and his family since arriving in Blacksburg,” Director of Athletics Whit Babcock said. “His son, James, is a valued member of our staff, and our thoughts and prayers are certainly with him and the family during this time.

“I learned quickly about the impact that Dr. Torgersen had on our athletics department, and I’m certainly grateful and respect all that he accomplished. But more importantly, I’ve learned about his impact on people, one that cannot be measured. Fans, coworkers, coaches and former student-athletes speak so highly of him, and he’s someone whose legacy will never be forgotten.”

Former Virginia Tech wrestling coach Kevin Dresser

Dresser became the first coach to win three straight ACC Wrestling Coach of the Year honors since North Carolina’s Bill Lam won four straight from 1997-2000.

“I am honored to be recognized by my peers to receive this award again, especially in a year when the ACC made big strides as a conference,” Dresser said. “It takes a lot of great people to make a great program, and that is our goal each year. I feel it is only fitting to share this award throughout the department and especially with my immediate staff. Coaches [Tony] Robie, [David] Hoffman, [Jeremy] Johnson, and our trainer, Sean Collins, deserve to share this award.

“Lastly, I want to thank the athletes on this team. They are overachievers. The future is very bright at Virginia Tech.”

Cianelli brings in Coach of the Year honors

Dave Cianelli oversaw a men’s track and field team that won the ACC indoor title in late February, and he continues to reap the rewards.

Cianelli was named the ACC’s Men’s Indoor Coach of the Year roughly three weeks after his Hokies ran, jumped and vaulted their way past Florida State to claim the crown at the league indoor meet held at Beaver Field House.

The title marked the ninth by his programs since the school joined the league, including five by the men (three indoor, one outdoor, one cross country).

Cianelli also received the United States Track and Field and Cross Country Coaches Association’s (USTFCCCA) Southeast Region Men’s Indoor Coach of the Year award. It marked the 13th time that he has received the regional honor.

Tech’s Manuel Ziegler won the ACC Men’s Indoor Field Performer of the Year award after winning the ACC title in the triple jump, setting a conference record with a leap of 54 feet, 6 inches.

He topped a record that had stood since 1998.

Assistant coach Ben Thomas was named the USTFCCCA Southeast Region Men’s Assistant Coach of the Year, and Thomas Curtin was named the USTFCCCA Southeast Region Men’s Indoor Athlete of the Year. Thomas’ middle distance runners accounted for three ACC individual championships, and Curtin, a redshirt junior from Leesburg, Virginia, won the 3,000-meter race.

Thomas received the honor for the second time in his career.
Roughly a week before spring practice started, Scot Loeffler possessed the look of a man who hadn’t slept a lot recently. The circles under his eyes and a chin that hadn’t visited with a razor for a day or two said as much. The other assistants might joke that this is Loeffler’s standard look, but the man who oversees Virginia Tech’s offense certainly deserves credit for his work ethic. Not many offensive coordinators grind away in mid-March, five months before the season kicks off. But Loeffler understands the importance of the 2015 campaign, his third in Blacksburg, and also to his credit, he will tell you as much.

After two years of watching his offenses toil in inconsistency, he expressed confidence that the Hokies are on the verge of being able to win with offense for the first time in a while. “All the pieces and all the things we think it takes to play good championship football next year are in place, in my opinion,” he said.

Tech fans may scoff at that statement, and for sure, the Hokies struggled offensively the past two years. Loeffler readily admits that. In fairness, he inherited a difficult situation. In 2013, the Hokies returned a terrific quarterback in Logan Thomas, but little in the way of proven talent. Then this past season, Tech featured some good, young skill players and a few solid offensive linemen, but the quarterback was new, and injuries ultimately decimated the group.

So what went wrong? “When you watch it, it’s turnovers,” Loeffler said. “It’s penalties. It’s perimeter blocking – our perimeter blocking was atrocious. We lost so much hidden yardage through poor perimeter blocking. We’ve got to play better up front, and the quarterback has to play better.”

Tech went minus-3 in turnover margin in the three above-mentioned losses. Looking back, the numbers overall weren’t pretty. Tech ranked 12th in the ACC in scoring offense (24.1 ppg), 12th in total offense (365 ypg) and 12th in pass efficiency (118.7 rating).

But the turnovers and sacks really contributed to the Hokies’ struggles. Starting quarterback Michael Brewer threw 15 interceptions, the fourth-most in the league, and the 34 sacks allowed were the third-most. “If we improve in the area of turnovers and improve in the area of sacks, which I think we will, and reduce the negative plays – it’s amazing how many times we’ll move the football and then have a negative play,” Loeffler said. “So our youth and all the things that go into non-championship football, if we eliminate those, we should have a productive offensive, as productive as we’ve been.”

Loeffler admitted that the quarterback position needed to play better. He insisted the competition is open this spring. Brewer and Brenden Motley opened spring practice at the top of the depth chart, but only because “you’ve got to walk in with some type of pecking order.” He also wants to see depth emerge at the receiver spots. Willie Byrn departed, and Isaiah Ford and Cam Phillips played too much as true freshmen this past season – Ford played nearly 900 plays and Phillips more than 700. Can someone emerge? Demitri Knowles? Jaylen Bradshaw?

“One of the biggest tragedies of last year was that Isaiah Ford played almost 80 some plays a game,” Loeffler said. “That should never happen here. That’s ridiculous. I’m complaining about perimeter blocking, but when we’re not spelling those guys, a true freshman that is 18 years old and out there for 80 plays … that’s just ridiculous. Some guys in that receiver room need to step up, be accountable and play.”

If a quarterback emerges and some backups provide quality depth, then there is the potential for what could be a good offense. Some express worries over the offensive line, but the starting five looks fairly solid. The Hokies return some big-time skill talent in J.C. Coleman, Trey Edmunds, Bucky Hodges, Ryan Malleck, Ford and Phillips. Marshawn Williams’ return would add icing to the cake. Travon McMillan shows lots of promise.

Loeffler has been in those situations for the past two years. They kept him up at night, as he used every hour searching for answers. He may have most of them now. We’ll find out this fall. If those circles under his eyes disappear, then we’ll know.
"Dr. T" was more than a university president - he was a friend to us all

If you're an alumnus, student, constituent or just a Virginia Tech fan, there's probably a place on the Blacksburg campus that feels like "home" to you.

Maybe it's your freshman year dorm, or a classroom where you felt a special connection to your instructor. Maybe it's the Duck Pond or the Drillfield, or your seat at Lane Stadium. Whenever you're there, like a comfortable chair, it just feels like "home."

For Paul Torgersen, who passed at age 83 on March 29, there were many such places on Virginia Tech's 126-acre campus. After serving 20 years as dean of Virginia Tech's College of Engineering and eight years as the university's president, he visited and made an impact on nearly every place on campus.

Even moving up the academic ladder from instructor to dean to president, he insisted that he continue teaching because he enjoyed being around the students. Theory of Organization - that was his class, and anyone who took it loved and admired his style in front of a room filled with students.

Comfy in the big chair at Burruss Hall, speaking to the Board of Visitors, or talking to a group of students in SEE404, Paul was in his element. But perhaps no place felt more at home for Paul – we called him "Dr. T" - than when he was around the Virginia Tech football team, particularly at football practice. During his presidency, he would be a frequent visitor at Tech practices, and in retirement, he'd attend workouts, sitting in a folding chair while watching the Hokies practice. He was never without a witty comment about a player or coach. Goose, he loved the Hokies.

He had a beautiful, temperature-controlled private box, but Paul preferred to be on the sidelines watching the game. He wanted to be near the team, standing in the muck on the field.

On Fridays of road trips, Paul and Senior Woman Administrator Sharen McConkey would engage in a field-goal kicking contest at the visitor's stadium. That was until one day Torgersen unveiled a flat-toed boot to help him kick. "Unfair," shouted the competitive McConkey. The players, coaches and media always found the humor and irony of the university president kicking field goals (or at least attempting them) at the end of a road workout refreshing.

During the 1990's, Torgersen would play weekly handball games in Cassell with former trainer Eddie Ferrell (now deceased) and members of the faculty. At the end of the 1995 season, Ferrell's team won what Paul claimed was a "highly disputed" championship of their friendly series. That didn't stop John Baihlin, Tech's current associate AD for football operations, from having a trophy presented to Ferrell and put on display at the team's Sugar Bowl hospitality room in New Orleans. After a few days, however, the trophy was gone.

"Paul, where is Eddie's trophy?" someone asked.

"Check the river," Paul responded with a chuckle.

The president, evidently, had tossed the disputed trophy into the mighty Mississippi. Paul, a varsity tennis player at Lehigh, used the treadmills at Cassell during his engineering capstone project. Cassell so he could race in to his treadmill to get in a workout.

The truth of the story: "I left my watch on the treadmill," Paul told me later. "I just went back inside to get my watch." That's all that happened that day.

Since then, you'd see him behind the batting cage at softball practices, or sitting in his wheelchair at a Tech men's or women's basketball game. He loved being around student-athletes and cheering for his Hokies.

Personally, I'll miss his visits to the radio booth. Every game, home or away, Paul would swing by the radio booth before each game to say hello to Mike Burnop and me and shake hands with our entire staff. Even in retirement, "Dr. T" would make it to the booth, as he did this past season.

I've grown close to his son, Jamin, who is the facilities director at Cassell, and grandson Paul from our Sigma Chi connections. They're wonderful people and a true Hokie family. Each is incredibly smart, overwhelmingly warm and quickly and quietly-witted.

From Baihlin: "One other story that showed Dr. T's wit was all the time he borrowed my truck. I told him he needed to get his own old pick-up. He said that's not as important as knowing someone with an old pick-up.

Each year, at the end of spring and fall practice, Virginia Tech football hands out its annual Paul Torgersen Award. It goes to the player who shows a commitment to hard work and great effort every time he takes the field. Marshall Williams, Blake DeChristopher and John Grove have been among the many winners, all of whom are high-class kids and super successful. That award will take on even greater significance today (this year's honoree will be named on April 25 at halftime of the Maroon-Orange Spring Game).

This man's contributions to this campus and the history of Virginia Tech can't be encapsulated in a single story. The academic advancement under his leadership was unprecedented. The facilities on both the academic and athletics side exploded under his watch. The rankings, particularly in engineering, skyrocketed during his tenure.

But more than anything was his impact on people and his ability to communicate. That cerebral, quick wit will sure be missed.

And for generations of Hokies – kids who are here now and will be on campus in decades to come – please remember that Torgersen is not just the name of a bridge on campus. It's not just the name of a hall with classrooms and labs.

It's named in honor of a man whose impact goes far beyond Hokie stone and mortar. Burruss, Hahn, McComas, Pamplin, Lavery, Lane, Cassell, Merryman and now Torgersen … they're all great buildings, and each was a great man who helped shape the course of the school and Tech athletics.

But the next time you walk across the Torgersen Bridge or sit down in Torgersen Hall, make sure you feel comfortable … and feel like you're at home. Because Paul certainly would.™
Nice of the NCAA to smack LSU, even though the school followed the rules to a T. Thought? Thanks, Tom in Christiansburg.

TP: “This question is in reference to LSU being banned by the NCAA from signing early enrollees (prospects planning to enroll in January, rather than June/July/August) to financial aid agreements. The football program lost 10 percent of its evaluation days for the current year and cannot sign early enrollees to financial aid agreements for the next two years. They also may lose a scholarship.

“By way of background, a school is permitted to sign a prospect who plans to enroll early to a financial aid agreement, and that gives the school unlimited contact with the prospect. However, it also subjects the school to retroactive penalties if the prospect does not eventually enroll in January or sign a national letter-of-intent since the school’s coaches have been contacting him outside the normal recruiting timeframe.

“In LSU’s case, a prospect signed a financial aid agreement with LSU, did not enroll in January, and instead signed a national letter-of-intent with Alabama on the initial NLI signing day (Feb. 4). Due to this, LSU was penalized for having contact with him outside of the normal access periods.

“So there is an inherent risk in signing a potential early enrollee to a financial aid agreement and reaping the benefits of unlimited contact. Coaches must balance that risk. I do think this is something that will receive scrutiny by the NCAA membership in the future.”

Q: From past questions, I’ve come to learn that student-athletes are limited to 20 hours per week of training (with a maximum of four hours per day), which includes practices, weightlifting, conditioning and watching film. But I was wondering if this also included the actual games themselves. Thanks for your time! Michelle in Christiansburg.

TP: “Great question. Actually, games ARE included as part of what the NCAA terms as ‘Countable Athletically-Related Activities.’ NCAA regulations count any competition as three hours, regardless of how long the competition actually lasts. So, for example, if a basketball team plays two games in a week, then that would be six hours that would count toward the 20-hour maximum limit. Also, keep in mind that the 20 hours comes into play while a sport is “in” season. More restrictive rules apply when a sport is not in season.

“Most people know that the 20-hour limit includes required activities such as practices, weightlifting, conditioning and watching film. But it also includes – among other things – any shootarounds before the game (e.g. in hoops) and walk-throughs (e.g. in football), as well as individual meetings with one or more coaches that are initiated by a coach.

“Some things that do not count towards the 20-hour limit include study halls, academic meetings, voluntary training or sports-related activities (without a coach present), medical treatment or rehab, compliance meetings and team meals.”

Q: What are the rules as they relate to football spring practice? They can’t go in full pads every day, right? Thanks, Anne in Pembroke.

TP: “Yes, that is correct. NCAA rules spell out exactly how football programs must conduct the 15 allotted spring practices. Of those 15, 12 may involve contact, but the contact cannot occur before the third practice session. The only protective equipment permitted during the non-contact practice sessions is a helmet. Also, tackling is prohibited in four of those 12 contact sessions.

“Spring practices can occur at any time during the winter/spring, but those 15 practices have to occur within a period of 29 consecutive calendar days.

“Another rule to keep in mind – a program may only have three 11-on-11 scrimmages during the spring. The spring game counts as one of those three, though spring games are optional. Some schools just have a regular scrimmage as opposed to a spring game.”

“Nobody Does It Better”

Grilling season is here! We have the grill to match any budget! Come check them out today!
Michelle Prong| starts for the Tech softball team and ranks as one of the team leaders in batting and home runs. She also excels off the field. She graduated from Stanford with a degree in human biology in December of 2012 and is slated to graduate from Tech later this spring with a master’s in public health. She plans on getting into coaching after she graduates.

Q: You graduated from Stanford with a degree in human biology. What led you to pursue biology?

MP: “I went in thinking that I wanted to major in history. I really loved history in high school, and I got into the classes that I was taking. I think it became something that I really like to learn about rather than a scholarly interest. The summer after my freshman year, my mom and I sat down and talked, and she said, ‘This human biology thing looks really cool,’ and I said, ‘Yeah!’ The major itself is really interdisciplinary. You get to design your own concentration within the major, which I thought was cool. It was flexible and applicable to a wide range of situations and topics, and biology was something that I was good at, so that helps. Once I get into it, I get the feeling that it was the right thing for me.”

Q: You graduated from Stanford in three and a half years and transferred to Tech to play softball and pursue a master’s degree. What led you to pursue a master’s in public health here at Tech?

MP: “I had taken some classes in my human biology major just out of interest. The first one was community health psychology, and I just liked, ‘Whoa, it just opened the doors to public health. I had never even thought of the field before as a potential career. My professor had her MPH [master’s in public health], and she was encouraging. I really liked her. After I took that class, I seriously considered getting my MPH. I had never thought about health on a more macro scale.”

Q: You’ve done a lot of internships and field studies related to your major. Tell us about some of them.

MP: “After my sophomore year, I spent the whole summer shadowing a doctor who works in a pediatrics ICU [intensive care unit]. I spent the following summer volunteering at a physical therapy clinic in New York City, and they worked with some Yankees players who came in and got their treatment there, so that was cool. In my junior year at Stanford, I was an assistant coach for an after-school program for kids that are overweight or obese – it was part of a study being done by a professor that was an obesity guru – and I was one of the helpers three days a week and encouraged the kids to enjoy sports and teamwork and learning to work hard, so that was an interesting experience. Then I spent last summer at the University of Rochester doing a summer research program, working with a doctor who did a lot of research on pediatric obesity. Right now, I’m in the middle of a practicum with the Virginia Department of Health.

“My experience is a little all over the place, but I think sometimes you have to figure out what you don’t want to do before you figure out what you do want to do.”

Q: Have you figured out what you want to do?

MP: “No! (Laughing). I’ve gone through these cycles thinking that I wanted to be a healthcare provider in some way. I thought about being a PA [physician’s assistant] because my mom was a PA for a long time. I’ve thought about doing PT [physical therapy] and came around to that. Then I was in the medical school phase, but the day came when I had to sign up for the MCAT [medical college admission test], and I thought, ‘I don’t know if I really want to do this.’ So I didn’t sign up.

“What I’m on right now is softball coaching. My short-term plan is to hopefully get some sort of graduate assistant position or some sort of coaching position. I think a lot of knowledge that I’ve gained from my public health degree will be applicable to coaching. There are two tracks offered in public health, and I’m in the public health education track. I think the stuff that we’ve learned from how people behave and respond to criticism and information and experts coming in and telling them what to do – I think a lot of that stuff will be valuable in anything I decide to do.”

A member of the Tech baseball squad, Kyle Wernicki has sometimes finished playing baseball and working toward a degree in engineering. Wernicki already has a job lined up when he graduates in May. He will be heading to Northern Virginia to work for Lockheed Martin, a Fortune 500 company.

Q: Why did you decide to major in mechanical engineering?

KW: “I decided to come to Virginia Tech because of the great engineering program and then walked on to the baseball team. I then declared mechanical as my concentration because I’ve always been interested in how things work. Mechanical is the broadest type of engineering, so I would get exposed to a wider range of material. It would also give me more options upon graduation because I get experience in many engineering fields.”

Q: What sparked your interest in engineering?

KW: “I’ve always enjoyed taking things apart to find out how they work. I also excelled in math and science classes mostly because I was always interested in those topics. For those classes, there’s always a definite answer. You are right or wrong – no gray area or interpretations.”

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

KW: “I have had a couple internships. The first was with Johnson & Johnson [in Skillman, New Jersey], where I worked as an intern to a local high school’s robotics team. The second was with Frazier Industrial Company [in Long Valley, New Jersey], where I worked as a design estimator. Frazier is a company that designs and builds structural steel pallet racks for warehouses and distribution centers. These experiences helped me realize what career path I wanted to pursue.

“I found the technology and innovation behind the robotics project much more interesting than working with static structures, like I did at Frazier. This led me to pursue the defense industry. The Department of Defense is always trying to improve what they have, trying to make things faster and more powerful, and I want to work on the most innovative technology.”

Q: How have you managed to balance playing baseball and studying mechanical engineering?

KW: “It’s been tough managing to major in mechanical engineering and playing baseball. I redshirted my freshman year, which helped me slow down the course load since I knew I had five years. Baseball actually helped me a little because I couldn’t procrastinate. I didn’t have much free time around class, practice, games and lifting, so whatever free time I did have, I had to spend on getting my class work done. I only have five credits this semester to graduate, so it’s a nice last semester. In the long run, it will all be worth it.”

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

KW: “I have accepted a job at Lockheed Martin in Northern Virginia after graduation. I will be working on cyber security. As for the more distant future, I have been advised to gain as much experience as I can early in my career. A large company like Lockheed Martin provides many different opportunities, and I intend to explore several of them so that I can see what job suits me best.”
Virginia Tech's offense struggled at times a year ago. At times, the Hokies moved the ball well, but penalties, sacks and turnovers affected overall point production. With eight senior back coordinator Scott Loeffler is optimistic about the direction of the offense. He took some time to answer a few questions about the spring practice period.

Q: Before analyzing the offense during spring practice, let's talk about last season. You looked at every single play that was run over the course of 13 games. What went right offensively, and what went wrong?

SL: "Well, in year 1, you knew you had a quarterback [Logan Thomas], and that was it. You were completely lost at who was going to run the offense. You're not walking into spring practice continuing throughout April.

In year 2, you had, and in training camp, we had a massive line because a few had played the previous year. Then you set the offense for what you thought you had, and in who you are. You're not walking into spring practice with a football player [Ryan Mallick], and we had to wholesale change everything we wanted to do.

In year 3, we knew that the guys we had recruited were talented and knew that they would be on the field. We expected to play a lot of freshmen. We expected Mark Leal [who left the team] or Michael Brewer was going to be the quarterback. The Michael Brewer deal, you stuffed a complete year of football into 30 days [in August]. So you walked into the season with youth and a lot of unknowns, and then disaster struck with injuries. I've never been a part of something like that ever. The running back situation was unbelievable. The offensive line situation was incredible. Losing Mark Leal, losing the linemen before the season even started [Braxton Burmeister and Shai [McKenzie] to play, and we expected two of the four receivers to play, the first three. And we knew that either Mark Leal [who left the team] or Michael Brewer was going to be the quarterback. That was the first time he had played in four years, and he was in a new system. That was the first time he had played in four years, and he was in a new system. It's a completely new system. It's time to play like a senior quarterback. Period, end. The tone has been set in this office with him. He knows it. He's embracing it. He will come to work and produce much better this spring."

Q: What are your thoughts on Braxton Burmeister going forward?

SL: "Motley is in the same boat as Brewer. It's the same mentality with him. He's been here long enough. It's time to step up and be a dude. The same pressure I'm putting on Brewer is the same pressure I'm putting on Motley.

If one of these two younger guys [Andrew Ford and Chris Durkin] want to step up and take one of their jobs, then so be it. "Then the new blood, Dwayne Lawrence, is coming in this fall. Lawrence, a very talented player.

Q: You've said before that you guys gave up too many sacks. What are you looking at from an offensive line that lost veterans like David Wang, Caleb Farris and Laurence Gibson?

SL: "Half of the sacks last year, in my opinion, were on the line, and the other half were on the quarterback or the skill guys. A lot of people don't get that a wide receiver not running routes properly or not creating the proper space can cause those sacks. A sack is an offensive negative, but not necessarily an offensive line negative. At times, the offensive line did better at some things than the previous year, but we need to reduce the mistakes. We need to become consistent and play better, just like the quarterback position needs to play better. That's the best way I can explain it. This piece is in place, in my opinion. We've got an opportunity to play better at that position. If you play better at that position, you play better at the quarterback, position. You reduce turnovers, and if you stay healthy, you've got a chance to do ok.

Overall, we want to see improvement, and we want to get back to the physical nature that was being coached extremely well. His knowledge of the game is far beyond a senior in high school. I know he's tough and understands the game. It's all about how fast he picks things up to see if he can put himself into a position to compete for a job. It's like with Brewer last year. He's got a month. He's in a very talented player. His best football is ahead of him. He's got at least another year and he's going to be a 245-pound guy. He's super athletic, and he can make every throw."

Q: Are you splitting the reps among the quarterbacks throughout spring practice?

SL: "You've got to walk in with some type of packing order. That packing order can change daily. Brewer and Motley were the highest percentage of reps compared to the two young guys, but if Ford or Durkin step up, than their reps will increase and the pressure will increase. We're going to be a pressure-liked spring for the two older guys, and the two younger guys. I'm going to develop. If one of these two younger guys [Andrew Ford and Chris Durkin] want to step up and take one of their jobs, then so be it.

It's an open competition, but you have to start somewhere. The frame is going to be hot with Brewer and Motley because I have a gut feeling that we have an opportunity to be a final team. If the quarterback position plays better, we'll definitely be a better team. So they're going to step up and start playing better."

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Michael Brewer threw for 2,692 yards and 19 touchdowns this past season, but coordinator Scott Loeffler wants to see him reduce the 15 interceptions he threw in 2014.

Q: How would you assess Michael Brewer's play last season, and what are you looking at from him the rest of spring practice and during the offseason?

SL: "For coming in and learning for a month, I thought, in the Ohio State game, he played exceptional. You look at the mistakes that happened earlier [in the season], we threw a ridiculous amount of interceptions early in the season. The biggest story was he had played in four years, and he was in a new system. Getting that full-speed rep on a particular play, he had only had so many of them. The mistakes that occurred were a complete lack of repetition of those plays against those particular defenses. That's not his fault. That's not my fault. That's called you only
this place has been built on. It’s critical how the quarterback goes, and I get that. But every place that I’ve been that’s been a championship team has five guys up front that are running the show. I think with Wyatt [Teller] and Angie [Comte] and Jon [McLaughlin], they’re tired of the crap we went through the last two years. They’re carrying themselves differently, which I 100 percent expected to occur in year 3. A decision has to be made about toughness at those positions, and I think it’s been made. They’ve made the decision that they’ve heard enough. We’ve been mediocre at best the past two years, and it’s time.”

Q: One thing you guys did well toward the end of last year was run the football, especially with J.C. Coleman. He entered spring as the No. 1 tailback, and just give us your thoughts on the kid.

SL: “J.C. was in a position where he had some talented guys in front of him, and injuries occurred. That guy finds a way to keep coming to work every day and never complains. He could have easily gone on the team. He could have easily given up. My hat’s off to him because I think he, at the end of the year, stepped up in a tough situation. We were beat to hell across the board, and he was able to do some really, really good things in really tough situations.”

Q: You return some good receivers, but they will be under the tutelage of a new receivers coach. How has the transition been between you and new receivers coach Zohn Burden?

SL: “It’s been great. Aaron [Moorehead] was very easy [the transition] in terms of the terminology he used at Stanford, which was very similar to the terminology I used for 10 years at Michigan. Obviously, we’re not completely using that terminology now, but we’re a hybrid of it. So communicating with each other and understanding what we were trying to accomplish was very easy. Zohn has not been a part of that, but conceptually we’re on the same page. Travon McMillian and D.J. Reid, for example, they’ve been using that terminology I used for 10 years at Michigan. Obviously, we’re not completely going to improve and Cam Phillips is going to improve. Isaiah Ford is the same, and Ryan Malleck is the same. We know what Marshawn is. It’s the guys that didn’t play last year that we redshirted and then the guys that we redshirted, we’re going to see if they can help us.”

Q: How do you go about replacing a valuable guy like Willie Byrn? He thrived in that slot receiver/third-down role.

SL: “We’ve got a couple of different things we’re going to try. We’ve got a couple of different personnel groupings. We know who we have, but we want to try a couple of new personnel groupings to get a different set of people on the field. We’re really intrigued to see if some of those young receivers or running backs can give us what Willie gave us last year. Can we move Cam Phillips to that role and move another receiver out to the Z? What can we do? That’s probably our only searching at the skill position. Where are we going to place Cam Phillips? Where are we going to place Isaiah? What’s Bucky’s role truly going to be? In terms of talent, though, we know what we are. For the first time sitting here, it’s refreshing to know who you are and what you have.”

Q: Will you guys as coaches go anywhere this spring and look at some different things that other coaching staffs are doing?

SL: “I don’t want to get into details. I normally do that in June. I normally go to three or four places every year. I have a specific agenda. We always do our professional development in May and/or June.”
The Virginia Tech football team took its athletics minor exams shortly before spring break, and Mike Gentry, who oversees the team’s strength and conditioning testing, didn’t need to look at the grades to determine the overall success of the group this semester.

“We’ve had a tremendous offseason,” Tech’s associate AD for athletic performance said. “We have the ‘it’ factor going for us in that we have good leadership, and we have enough talent to win. We have good chemistry within the team. When you have that, it usually presents itself in the offseason, and we certainly had that this winter.”

The numbers certainly support Gentry’s claims, as 28 players – more than half the team – earned some type of award following the team’s strength and conditioning testing in early March. That includes seven who earned Super Iron Hokie status, which takes into account the bench press, power clean, back and/or front squat and the overhead push jerk.

Those seven players are defensive backs Donovan Riley and Chuck Clark, running back Travon McMillian, wide receiver Rounny Vandyke, kicker Joey Slye, offensive lineman Augie Conte and fullback Jordan Homan.

In addition, nine others earned Iron Hokie Status, the second-highest level in the Hokies’ tiered levels of achievement. That group includes running backs J.C. Coleman, Troy Edwards and Jerome Wright, safeties Desmond Frye and Greg Jones, receiver Charley Meyer, rover Adonis Alexander, offensive lineman Wyatt Teller and tight end Jayden Wimbley.

As expected, Conte enjoyed a tremendous offseason. The redshirt junior from Richmond, Virginia, led the team in the back squat (375 pounds), the power clean (390) and the push jerk (405), and he finished third in the bench press (440).

(For a listing of the top five in each category tested, please see the chart on the previous page.)

Teller, a redshirt sophomore from Bradenton, Florida, also ranked in the top five in four categories, including the bench press, back squat, power clean and push jerk. Another offensive lineman who enjoyed a solid winter was Alston Smith, whose bench press (405) and push jerk (350) ranked among the top five on the team.

Smith, converted tight end Darius Redman were the only offensive linemen to break 480 pounds in the 40-yard dash. Smith ran it in 4.99 seconds, while Redman ran it in 4.96.

Receiver Demitri Knowles, a redshirt senior from Fsuport, Bahamas, dominated the speed categories, leading the team in the 10-yard and 40-yard dashes. Knowles sprinted the 10-yard dash in 1.6 seconds and he ran the 40 in 4.37 seconds. He also recorded a 40.5-inch vertical jump.

Two freshmen who enrolled in January also fared rather well – a surprise considering that it takes most freshmen a year or two to get their strength built up enough to challenge for honors. But Alexander, from Charlotte, North Carolina, led the team in the vertical jump (41 inches) and earned Iron honors, and Youssah Nijman, a defensive end out of Maplewood, New Jersey, by way of Fork Union, had a 550-pound back squat and earned Orange honors. Nijman also had a 36-inch vertical jump and ran the 40 in 4.84 seconds.

‘The Hokies’ plans for the timing of the 40-yard dash were disrupted by a late-winter snowfall, which forced the postponement of it until after spring practices had started. Workers took down the indoor track at Rector Field House for the Hokies’ annual Pro Day in which those departing work out for NFL scouts. That forced the strength and conditioning staff to test the current players in the 40-yard dash on the turf at Rector instead of on the track.

Still, the times were good. Five finished with times of better than 4.50 and nine others finished with times better than a 4.60. Those nine included Clark, Dadi Nicolas (4.53), Shaw Payton (4.51), Troy Edwards (4.51), Terrell Edwards (4.57), Alexander (4.57), McMillian (4.59), C.J. Reavis (4.59) and Curtis Williams (4.59).

But as Gentry always says, the numbers don’t always tell the story. He and his staff look at attitude and work ethic.

They like what they saw out of this group in those categories.

“A lot of what we do isn’t always measured by how high they jump or how much they lift,” Gentry said. “It’s also about their attitude and work ethic and how they either come together or not.”

“What I’ve seen this winter is, collectively, a group of guys that are committed to working hard and have good leadership and seem to like each other, which to me, spells good chemistry. In turn, if you have those things, you usually have better numbers. We had a great offseason, but more importantly, I think those intangibles are happening.”
INaugural season over, Williams and Hokies look ahead

Virginia Tech suffered a tough season under first-year men’s basketball coach Buzz Williams, but returning young talent and the addition of newcomers creates optimism for the future.

by Jimmy Robertson

Roughly 15 minutes following the Hokies’ season-ending loss to Miami at the ACC Tournament, Virginia Tech men’s basketball coach Buzz Williams walked onto the stage at the Greensboro Coliseum, with Will Johnston and coach Buzz Williams walked onto the stage at the ACC Tournament, Virginia Tech men's basketball season-ending loss to Miami at the ACC Tournament over Wake Forest and the effort in Tech won 11 times this past season. It lost seven games by three points or less and another game by five points in overtime. But it also lost eight games by 15 or more points.

Williams’ response. Certainly, those things in combination form a plausible argument.

But coaches view things through a different prism. In Williams’ eyes, playing hard should be a given, not a virtue to be celebrated following a win or loss. And no one compete just to be “in” the game at the end. A team competes to win.

Tech won 11 times this past season. It lost seven games by three points or less and another game by five points in overtime. But it also lost eight games by 15 or more points.

So where is the program right now? A struggling one trying to gain traction, or one trending in the right direction? It’s a tough question to answer.

“I think too many times – maybe it’s just society – you think that there’s going to be an event that’s a turning point,” Williams said. “And I think our – coaches, people, players – your ego is fighting when is that event going to occur that it changes.

“I think it’s a process, not to be Nick Saban [Alabama head football coach], but it’s not an event. You have to work with a passion level and an energy level that the turning point is this minute. The turning point is this possession. It’s this film session. It’s this road trip.

“There’s been a lot of really good stuff [this season], and I hate that it’s over because I think the turning point had not happened, but the trend was going in the highest angle that it had been going in thus far.”

There are multiple reasons for optimism, starting with the development of the Hokies’ five freshmen who combined to play more than half of the team’s minutes this past season. Ahmed Hill started 30 of 33 games and averaged 8.7 points and 3.7 rebounds per game. Justin Bibbs started 20 of 29 games this season, missing four games with a concussion, and he averaged 11.4 points per game, second on the team.

Bibbs seemed to hit the proverbial freshman wall down the stretch. He averaged just 8 points per game once he returned from the concussion and did not reach double figures in four of the final five games, but still, he shot a respectable 47.7 percent from the floor and 41.3 percent from behind the arc for the season. He put up solid numbers for a first-year player.

Malik Müller, a redshirt freshman, started 20 of 33 games and averaged 6.2 points and 2.3 rebounds per game. Satchel Pierce played the least amount of the freshmen, but still got in 31 games (seven starts) and averaged 3.2 points and 2.4 rebounds.

Arguably, the freshman with the most potential is Jalen Hudson. He averaged 6.9 points per game, but showed his immense potential with a 32-point performance in Tech’s ACC Tournament win over Wake Forest and a 23-point outburst against then-No. 4 Duke on Feb. 25.

“I’ve said since Thanksgiving that Jalen was our most talented player, but he didn’t play hard enough to be that every game,” Williams said after the Wake Forest game. “He knows that. He’s as smart as Christian Beyer is. When he plays hard, he’s really good, and when he doesn’t play hard, he’s just a 6-4 guard that doesn’t play hard.”

Continued on page 26.
Inside Hokie Sports

Season in Review | Men’s Hoops

Continued from page 25

If it was that easy to do every single day, then everybody would do it ... He’ll figure it out. He’s a great kid. I love him. He knows that. I coach him really hard, and sometimes that’s really hard to endure my coaching and to execute what I’m asking you to do.”

In addition to getting solid contributions from the freshmen, the Hokies also got solid contributions from leading scorer Adam Smith (13.4 ppg) – who, unfortunately, has decided to graduate and play his final season of eligibility elsewhere. That hurts, but University of Maryland transfer Seth Allen will be eligible, and Allen averaged 13.4 points and 3.0 assists per game his sophomore season at Maryland.

He’ll probably work in tandem with point guard Devin Wilson, who led the team in minutes (30 mpg) and assists (1.0 total) this past season. Those two, with Hudson, Hill, Müller and Bibbs, form a nice backcourt for 2015-16.

Collectively, the team shot the ball well this past season, ranking seventh in the ACC at 44.6 percent and second in 3-point percentage at 38.9 percent. Only Notre Dame shot better from beyond the arc than the Hokies among league schools.

But Tech desperately needs to improve its free-throw shooting and the rebounding situation. The Hokies ranked near the bottom of the ACC in free-throw shooting (14th, 64 percent), as only two regulars (Smith and Wilson) shot better than 70 percent. Also, Tech ranked at the bottom or near the bottom of the ACC in nearly every rebounding category (offensive rebounds, defensive rebounds, rebound margin, etc.).

Some of that was because of style, as Williams did not want to get beat in transition, so he and his players focused on that rather than attacking the offensive glass. But lack of size – not just height, but girth – was the primary problem.

The Hokies also ranked near the bottom in scoring defense (4th, 69.4 ppg). But that goes back to rebounding. Tech played pretty well defensively, but gave up so many second-chance points. Teams will score when given two or three chances to do so.

“Knowing we’re going to be undersized, we’ve got to be able to box out better,” Wilson admitted after the ACC Tournament loss to Miami. “I think that hurt us this year, but I think the last couple of games, we did a better job. I think we learned from it. We can’t give people second and third chances.”

Williams hopes to alleviate some of the issues next season. He and his staff signed 6-foot-9 Kerwin Blackshear from Orlando, Florida, and 6-6 Chris Clarke of Virginia Beach, Virginia – one of the top prospects in the nation – also figures to help. Plus, Zach LeDay, a transfer from South Florida, enters the mix next season and the 6-7, 235-pounder gives the Hokies some muscle. One would expect to see added improvement from current post players Pierce and Shane Henry.

Despite the Hokies’ warts as a team this past season, they grew on Williams, who expressed remorse that the season had ended. He loves the players, and he appreciated their efforts, even with their limited ceilings.

“Yeah, I’m really depressed, just to be honest with you,” he said. “I don’t handle it [the end of the season] very well at all. That’s not because it’s year No. 1. You just function on such a premium level of emotion, and your brain and your body is functioning at a very high clip.

“I’m not very mature at how I handle beginnings or endings. I don’t like saying hello. That’s why my first impression is typically bad, and I don’t like saying goodbye, and that’s why I don’t give hugs when it’s over because I don’t want it to be over because I want to keep fighting. So I don’t handle it very well at all, just to be very frank. Not a pity party. Just that’s the truth.”

At the very least, the Hokies are going to be interesting next year, with all that young potential. They may even be exciting. That’s a great thing because the alternative is to be irrelevant. And no one in Blacksburg is willing to settle for that.

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Most coaches do everything possible to keep expectations in check.

But Kevin Dresser isn’t “most coaches.” The leader of Virginia Tech’s wrestling program makes it perfectly clear what he expects from his wrestlers.

The goal isn’t to be good, but rather, great.

Following an NCAA Wrestling Championships in which four of his wrestlers earned All-America honors and the team finished in the top 10 for the third straight year, Dresser gave the expected response when asked his feelings following the meet.

“I’m never happy, but I guess we’ll take it,” he said.

“I felt like we left a little bit on the table.”

Only a little, though, as the quartet of Devin Carter (141 pounds), Nick Braackaert (157), Zach Epperly (174) and Ty Walz (heavyweight) wrestled strongly to the consolation round. Following two days to lift the Hokies into the top 10 in the team race at the event held at the Scottrade Center in St. Louis, Missouri, on March 19-21, Tech finished with 56 points, just ahead of Michigan, which needed a victory from heavyweight Adam Coon to claim the national title. Tech’s 1-2 finish tied them at third place with Oklahoma State, which earned All-American honors.

Coon has long been clearly what he expects from his wrestlers.

“Kevin Dresser isn’t ‘most coaches.’ The leader of Virginia Tech’s wrestling program makes it perfectly clear what he expects from his wrestlers. The goal isn’t to be good, but rather, great.”

Four-time All-American at least and two-time national champ,” Dresser said. “That’s the goal.

I showed it out there, the two guys in the finals, I’ve beaten them. Shows where I’m at right now as a freshman, but I’ve got a lot more work to do.”

Like Epperly, Walz also finished seventh. He lost on the first day to Northern Iowa’s Blaise Cabrera in sudden victory – wrestling’s version of overtime – but won three straight matches in the consolation round, including a 1-0 win over No. 4 seed Austin Mader of Oklahoma State to earn All-America status. He lost to Penn State’s Jimmy Lawson in sudden victory, which put him in the seventh-place match instead of the fifth-place match, but he dominated Minnesota’s Michael Krokov 6-2 to claim seventh.

“Now I know what it feels like to be an All-American,” said Walz, who finished the season with a 21-6 mark. “Now I know what it feels like to lose in the wrestlebacks [consolation rounds]. It’s interesting. You find the emotions that you hate and the ones you love, and you now know what you’re working for.”

“But it’s about figuring it out, and they figured some stuff out this weekend,” Dresser said of Epperly and Walz. “For Zach to come back and beat Blaise Butler after losing to him three times and then for Ty to battle back after being the only one of our guys to lose in that round Thursday night … to come back from Thursday night and be here Saturday afternoon, wow, that takes toughness.”

Tech’s other four wrestlers who qualified for the Championships each won at least one match. Danes. The No. 3 seed at 125 pounds, went 2-2, with both losses in sudden victory. Sal Mastriani, the No. 7 seed at 149 pounds, also went 2-2. Kevin Norstrom, the No. 13 seed, and Jared Hight, the No. 16 seed, went 0-2.

Dresser stated before the season that he wanted to see his program finish in the top five in the team standings. But that prophecies probably disappeared after season-ending injuries to Chris Moen (153 pounds) and Austin Gable (184 pounds). Nonetheless, Tech’s backups at those weight classes qualified for the NCAA.

So for this program to finish in the top 10 for a third straight year was quite an accomplishment."
He stood there on the mat, and the official grabbed his wrist, lifting his arm in victory one last time.

He shook his competitor’s hand, and then walked over and shook the opposing mat’s hand. Then he slowly walked toward Kevin Dresser, the Hokies’ head wrestling coach. Dresser did not shake his hand, but rather embraced him, as he would one of his three children.

The two shared a touching moment, and then Devin Carter looked at the roughly 150 Tech fans in the corner of St. Louis’ Scottrade Center who were giving him a standing ovation. He raised his left arm, a salute to them for their support. And a salute to the conclusion of an outstanding career.

“Right now, he’s the greatest wrestler in Virginia Tech history,” Dresser said.

Carter’s career came to an end in near-perfect fashion. On the final day of the 2015 NCAA Wrestling Championships in St. Louis, Carter pinned Old Dominion’s Chris Morace, and then in the final match of his collegiate career, he used a barrage of takedowns to record a 12-3major decision over overmatched Dean Heil of Oklahoma State. Of Carter’s 121 career wins, 93 of them — including these two — garnered bonus points.

For Carter, the only thing better would have been to win a national championship in his weight class. That was the only thing he didn’t win in his five years in Blacksburg. He finished second last year and third this year.

“I’ve won a lot of matches, but it’s not what I wanted to do,” Carter said in reflection following the match. “I was thinking two-time national champions going in [to his career at Tech], but obviously, you’ve got a guy like Logan Stieber [of Ohio State, who won four straight national titles, including two at 141 pounds] and it was rough being behind that, but I’m just as good as where I thought I would be.”

Certain athletes at Virginia Tech have transcended their respective sports. Bimbo Coles did this when he became an Olympian in the late 1980s. Angela Tinseler did the same for the football program in the late 1990s. And a salute to the conclusion of an outstanding career. Bimbo Coles did this when he became an Olympian in the late 1980s. Angela Tinseler did the same for the football program in the late 1990s. And a salute to the conclusion of an outstanding career. Bimbo Coles did this when he became an Olympian in the late 1980s. Angela Tinseler did the same for the football program in the late 1990s. And a salute to the conclusion of an outstanding career.

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Devin Carter

Continued from page 31

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“Everything that you do in life is easy after wrestling,” Carter said. “There is nothing that compares to the physical and emotional toll it takes on you. I can deal with books, computers, tests and research. That’s fine with me. This [wrestling] is a lot harder than anything in the academic world.”

Unfortunately, college careers rarely come by and cruelly come to an abrupt end. For the great ones, theirs will be remembered. Their legacies will remain intact.

Carter’s legacy will be one of working and winning—in everything.

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For Tech fans, their only regret is this—they won’t get to see him wrestle any more. And that’s a huge regret to overcome.

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Dave Cianelli already had eaten his cake, courtesy of his men’s team winning the ACC title at the league’s indoor meet in late February.

Anything beyond that to end the indoor track season would simply be icing.

The director of Tech’s track and field and cross country programs got a sweet sampling of exactly that, as middle distance runner Thomas Curtin led a group of 10 Tech athletes who earned All-America nods at the 2015 NCAA Division I Indoor Track and Field Championships held March 13-14 in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

The Tech men’s team finished tied for 28th in the competition with seven points, while the women’s team came in tied for 47th with four points. Only the top eight finishers in each event score points for the team total.

“The initial feeling, we were disappointed because we felt we had a shot at being a top-10 team, which we did, but things have to go your way,” Curtin said. “I’d rather have, a conference championship, but we felt we had a shot at being a top-10 finish at the nationals, I’ll take the conference championship any time.”

Curtin, coming off a thrilling win in the 3,000-meter race at the ACC Championships that sealed the team crown for the Tech men, competed in both the 3,000-meter and 5,000-meter runs at the NCAA meet. On the first day of the competition, the redshirt junior from Leesburg, Virginia, posted an eighth-place finish in the 3,000, earning first-team All-America honors after running the race in a time of 8:31.54. He dropped out of the top eight with a few laps remaining, but used a kick at the end to earn a point for Tech.

The next day, Curtin finished in eighth place again and earned first-team All-America honors, running the 5,000 in a time of 13:33.81. He led the field until five laps remained, but was unable to sustain his pace and ultimately fell to eighth.

“The conference meet is our No. 1 priority as a program, and after what the men accomplished, I really couldn’t be disappointed with anything that happened at the national meet. The bottom line is, if you ask me what I’d rather have, a conference championship or a top-10 finish at the nationals, I’ll take the conference championship any time.”

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The two All-America nods were the first of Curtin’s career. In fact, this appearance marked his first ever at an NCAA Championship.

“For the first time to be at the national championships and doubling up in these events, that’s tough to do,” Curtin said. “That’s one of the reasons we didn’t do that at the conference meet with him. He didn’t run the 5,000 at the conference meet. He ran the distance medley relay instead. We felt it would be better for him not to try and double up [run the 5,000 and 3,000].”

On the women’s side, Hanna Green, a sophomore from Latrobe, Pennsylvania, earned first-team All-America honors for her efforts. She’s now a two-time All-American, having finished in fifth last year in this event.

Oregon won the men’s title with 74 points, while Florida and Arizona placed second and third with 63 points. The Tech men had the second-highest finish of all ACC teams, placing just behind Virginia, which tallied eight points and came in tied for 23rd.

Both Tech programs began their outdoor season in late March. The ACC meet will be held May 14-16 in Tallahassee, Florida.

Where Living Meets Lifestyle...

NCAA Championships | Track & Field
The Virginia Tech men’s and women’s swimming and diving teams capped the 2014-15 season with some notable performances at the NCAA Championships, but the Hokies came up just a fraction short of continuing some impressive streaks.

The men’s team had finished in the top 20 at the NCAA Men’s Swimming and Diving Championships for the past three consecutive years, but came in 21st this time at the men’s national event held March 25-28 at the Campus Recreation & Wellness Center in Iowa City, Iowa. The women’s team had finished in the top 25 for the past three years, but saw that streak end with a 27th-place finish at the NCAA Women’s Swimming and Diving Championships held March 19-21 in Greensboro, North Carolina.

“Of course there’s some disappointment,” Tech head swimming coach Ned Skinner said. “I don’t like to use that word, but there is for all of us because we had a great team and a team that I thought were capable of maintaining those streaks. Things happened and I understand that. We fought hard and scratched hard. We had second swims and All-Americans and honorable mention All-Americans. We just didn’t come enough points.”

The Tech women’s team had two swimmers/divers earn All-America honors, brought home two honorable mention All-America honors and recorded 12 top-30 finishes. While they didn’t finish in the top 25, the Tech women did finish in the top 30 for the fifth time in six years.

Senior Kaylea Arnett concluded her fantastic career by earning All-America honors in the 3-meter diving event and honorable mention honors in the platform event. In the 3-meter event, she was in second place after the preliminary round, but finished in sixth place overall after scoring 329.80 points. The All-America honor was the third of her career. Thefunction, Texas native finished in ninth place in the platform event after winning the “B” final with a score of 296.25 points.

Arnett goes down as the most decorated diver in Tech history. In addition to being a three-time All-American, she received honorable mention All-America honors on six other occasions. She won six gold medals at the ACC Championships in her career to go with three bronze medals and a silver medal.

“I would put Kaylea Arnett as the most prolific athlete in the history of our program – female or male,” Skinner said. “It started with her continuous ACC performer of the year award (four-time ACC Championships Most Valuable Diver). It continues with our highest finishes at the NCAA’s (third in the 1-meter event last year). She’s our only medalist, if you will. She’s gotten as high as third and no one else has gotten in the top three, men or women. So I think her body of work makes her our best ever, absolutely.”

Also at the NCAA meet, junior Weronika Paluszek earned her first All-American honor when she finished eighth in the 200 breaststroke with a time of 2 minutes, 8.95 seconds. In the morning preliminaries, Paluszek, a native of Wroclaw, Poland, moved from the 21st to 17th to finish her spot in the “A” final, only 0.12 seconds slower than the school-record time that she set at last year’s ACC Championships. It was Paluszek’s second straight top-10 finish at the NCAA Championships in the event, as she finished 10th last year.

Junior Khadija Nteifoobu garnered her first honorable mention All-American honors when she finished 14th in the 200 butterfly with a time of 1:55.21. Also a native of Wroclaw, Poland, she set a school-record time that she set at last year’s ACC Championships. It was Paluszek’s second straight top-10 finish at the NCAA Championships in the event and earned the first honorable mention All-American honor of his career.

Owen grabbed his second honorable mention All-American honor of the event the next day. He finished 13th in the 200 backstroke with a time of 1:41.35.

“He’s still growing,” Skinner said. “He’s still hitting the weights. He’s really, really talented. He has an incredible feel for the water. He did finish ninth last summer at the U.S. National Summer Nationals, so he’s competing at the national level. We see it coming. But to go there and score 10 of our 17 points is outstanding.

“That guy is the real deal. He’s a Hokie, and he loves his life the way Whitt Bubba (Tech’s AD) and all of us would want to see that done. He’s a first-class young man.”

Morgan Latimer, a senior from Richmond, Virginia, finished his stellar career by becoming an honorable mention All-American in the 200 butterfly after finishing 15th with a time of 1:44.14. Latimer’s impressive career also included six ACC top-10 finishes, two ACC silver medals and six ACC relay medals.

“We’re going to miss him a lot,” Skinner said. “Thankfully, he’s going to be a student assistant for us next year, so I’m not saying good-bye yet. He’s just world class. He’s fun. He’s one of those guys who is fun to be around, but he’s super driven. He needs to work as hard as he did such a nice job for us in his career.”

Tech’s 400 medley relay team finished in 3:34.21 in 26th place on the first day of the event with a time of 3:08.30. The quartet of Collin Higgins, Brandon Fiala, Latimer and Owen Burns earned honorable mention All-American honors for the Hokies. It was the last swim of Higgins’ great career, as the sprinting sensation from Charlotte, North Carolina, earned free ACC top 10 finishes, one ACC silver medal and six ACC relay medals. While Burns won six gold medals at the ACC Championships in two events. He took 11th place in the 400 IM preliminary round and did not qualify for the “A” final but in the “B” final, he finished second with a time of 3:42.97. He claimed 10th place overall in the event and earned the first honorable mention All-American honor of his career.

But Skinner’s programs have always been consistent, and with swimmers like Paluszek and Nteifoobu on the women’s side and Owen on the men’s, that figures to continue.

“We’re going to be good,” Skinner said. “I never looked at Virginia Tech as a team that was going to go to the next level. But Skinner’s programs have always been consistent, and with swimmers like Paluszek and Nteifoobu on the women’s side and Owen on the men’s, that figures to continue.

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Technology affords Tech fans the opportunity to watch many of their favorite program’s Olympic sporting events through live streaming over hokiesports.com. They can sit in their cushy recliners, laptops situated perfectly so, and keep tabs on the action with the click of an electronic mouse.

On one particular Friday afternoon, the Tech men’s tennis squad took on Boston College at the Hokies’ Burrows-Burleson Tennis Center, and a mouse click on a link to court 3 revealed Hunter Koontz methodically destroying Kyle Childree, who fell prey to Koontz’s withering array of ground strokes. Childree didn’t win a game, losing 6-0, 6-0.

Two days later, on court 4, Koontz dusted Clemson’s Austin Amsel 6-0, 6-2. He hardly broke a sweat over that weekend, helping Tech notch two ACC wins, part of their best start ever in ACC play (6-1 at press time).

Koontz is one of just two seniors on Tech’s roster, and he usually works out of the No. 4 spot in the lineup. He won 12 of his first 14 matches to start the season, a prime reason why the Hokies have risen to No. 15 in the national tennis polls at press time.

The intriguing thing about Hunter Koontz is this – he plays this sport, one that requires the utmost in power and coordination within a player’s arms and shoulders, and succeeds in it without a pectoral muscle.

“It hasn’t affected me so far. If anything, maybe I have more rotation on certain things (tennis shots). I could see where it might affect power on certain shots. But there was never a time when I was hobbled or anything like that.”

Doctors gave no good explanation as to why Koontz was born without a pectoral muscle and a shorter right arm and hand because they really didn’t have a good one to give. Sometimes, such things in life, inexplicable things, tend to occur.

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The lack of that muscle never kept Koontz from doing all the things he wanted to do as a kid growing up on the outskirts of Richmond. He played sports, mostly gravitating from soccer to tennis. He never made his differences public, largely because he never viewed them as a big deal.

He and his parents, Greg and Nancy, talked with him about it when he was an adolescent. But they ended up leaving the decision on possible surgery up to him.

“I had talks with my parents when I was younger about maybe getting plastic surgery when I was older,” Koontz said. “But there’s really no point in that either. It’s not noticeable unless I say something or you look closely. So I didn’t see anybody about it.”

Yes, Tech head coach Jim Thompson knows. So, too, do Koontz’s teammates. Koontz knew he would be participating heavily in Tech’s strength and conditioning program, and the lack of a pectoral muscle obviously would influence the results in certain lifts.

Continued on page 40

Tech men’s tennis player Hunter Koontz has overcome some obstacles in becoming one of the Hokies’ most consistent players this season

by Jimmy Robertson

TAKING HIS OPPONENTS to Court
So he was up front about his situation. “I had to tell him [Thompson] my freshman year just because of the weight room,” Koontz said. “Benching [the bench press] is tough, and push-ups are tough. A few things are tough. It’s not like I can do them, but I can’t lift as much weight as everybody else.” Fortunately, tennis relies more on speed and endurance than brute strength. And while he may not toss barbells in the ilk of football standouts Luther Maddy, Koontz certainly does his share of heavy lifting on the court.

He’s been doing that ever since his parents built a clay tennis court in the backyard of their Richmond home. Greg Koontz is a Tech grad and an engineer by trade, and he co-owns his own firm, so he possesses the resources to build the court. He and his wife love tennis, and they got Hunter and his three sisters involved at an early age.

Hunter went on to win two state championships in singles and two in doubles while at Deep Run High School. His team also won the title twice.

But despite his prep accomplishments, he saw little in the way of attention from college recruiters. “I didn’t have much of a national ranking at all,” Koontz said. “I didn’t go around seeking out playing national tournaments. I played a couple. It’s hard with a lot of sisters, and we didn’t have the space for them on the tennis team here. I wanted to play tennis, and they didn’t have room for me when I was trying to decide on a college. So I went to Mary Washington, which is in Fredericksburg. Then I got the call from Jim asking if I wanted to walk on, and I said, ‘Of course.’

Koontz spent two years as a walk-on, paying his own way while working and practicing with the team. He saw limited action as a freshman, going 8-7 overall, but he never contemplated giving up the sport. On the contrary, he saw himself getting better in large part because he spent every day in practice working against players who might be better than him. When he started giving the regulars in Tech’s lineup a run for their money.

As a sophomore, he worked his way into the lineup, going 23-15 overall, including a respectable 5-3 in dual competition, with a 4-5 mark against ACC competition.

“I think the main thing was before coming to college, it was a little less structured and I could take days off when I wanted,” he said. “I was mostly playing high school tennis, and the level is definitely not near as high as it is here. Once I came here and had structured practice every day and hit with great players every day, it didn’t take long too improve. That was the main thing – hitting with great players every day.”

The turning point in Koontz’s collegiate career actually happened in Richmond. He played in a local tournament the summer before his junior year, and he found himself matched up againstsvt vs. Amerigo Contini of the University of Virginia. Jenkins, one of the best college players in the nation at the time, had just come off an appearance in the NCAA singles championship match.

But Koontz wasn’t in awe. He took it to Jenkins from the start – and won. “I beat him pretty easily, actually,” Koontz said. “I think he came out on the court thinking, ‘I’m just going to roll over this guy. My level is a lot higher than his.’ – which it is. But I played better than him that day, and he didn’t expect it. I played well and got him.

I played him later in the summer, and I thought, ‘He’s going to smoke me because I beat him earlier.’ But I ended up losing 7-6 in the third set. Two close matches against him have shown me that I can play against anyone when I’m on my game.”

Koontz’s sophomore season and the matches against Jenkins certainly caught the eye of Thompson, who obviously noticed the improvement. The team before Koontz’s junior year, Thompson called Koontz into his office and offered him a scholarship aid. “I thanked him a lot,” Koontz said. “I called my dad right after that.”

Then Koontz added, laughing, “Who also thanked him a lot. That was definitely a good day.” Thompson has certainly been getting his money’s worth this season. Seeing action in mostly the No. 3 and No. 4 spots in the lineup, Koontz has only played three sets in a match on three occasions this season, winning one and losing twice. He won his other matches rather handily.

The crowning moment – so far – came on March 8 when the Hokies took on then-No. 2 Duke at the Burroughs-Burton Tennis Center. Tech won all six singles matches over the Blue Devils, a victory one of his better matches, and he didn’t expect it. I played well and got him.

A summer internship in Richmond with Dixon Hughes Goodman, a national accounting firm headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, will go a long way toward determining his future plans post-graduation.

His tennis future after college is a little more murky. “I’d like to try or play one or two or three Futures [a professional tennis tour] just to say I did,” he said. “I’d like to get an ATP [Association of Tennis Professionals] point. That would be nice to say. As far as doing that for a living, there’s no chance at that.”

“I don’t want to throw away tennis as an option, but playing professionally is not something I really want to do. I don’t think I have the level to keep it up, and I’m not a huge fan of traveling – and that’s all that would entail. Certainly he’s traveled a long way to get to this point, and the road at Tech is reaching the end. But Hunter Koontz has served notice to people who doubted those with physical limitations. You don’t have to be perfect to succeed at this level. Just determined.”

The Hokies jumped out to a 6-1 start in ACC play – their best start since the school joined the league for the 2004-05 season. Tech hasn’t won an ACC title in men’s tennis, one of the most competitive sports in the league. In fact, the Hokies haven’t played for the title.

But Koontz feels this team possesses the potential. Contini and Andreas Bjerrehus rank as two of the better players in collegiate tennis, and with Koontz, Joao Monteiro and Florian Nicoud, Tech has some depth within its lineup. “I definitely think we have the team for it,” Koontz said of winning the ACC. “Everybody is playing better than last year. The practices are harder. The level is higher. Everybody is pushing each other. I think we can do it. We need to take one match at a time. ‘It’s going to be in the top 15 [ranking], but that’s just a number. The team is the same. If we take it one match, one time, I think we can do great things this year.”

Though his eligibility expires at the end of this season, he plans on being back at Tech next year, working as a volunteer coach and finishing up coursework on dual degrees in accounting and finance – two of the toughest majors at Tech. A summer internship in Richmond with Dixon Hughes Goodman, a national accounting firm headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, will go a long way toward determining his future plans post-graduation.

Hunt Koontz on Tech’s 6-1 win over No. Then-No. 2 Duke on March 8

“At the age of 13, Koontz’s dad took him to a tennis court. He was hooked. His twin sister, Hannah, his father graduated from Tech, and so, too, his grandfather. His twin sister, Hannah, was coming to Tech as well.

“Benching [the bench press] is tough, and push-ups are tough. A few things are tough. It’s said. “Benching [the bench press] is tough, and push-ups are tough. A few things are tough. It’s said. “Benching [the bench press] is tough, and push-ups are tough. A few things are tough. It’s said. “Benching [the bench press] is tough, and push-ups are tough. A few things are tough. It’s said. “Benching [the bench press] is tough, and push-ups are tough. A few things are tough. It’s said. “Benching [the bench press] is tough, and push-ups are tough. A few things are tough. It’s said. “Benching [the bench press] is tough, and push-ups are tough. A few things are tough. It’s said. “Benching [the bench press] is tough, and push-ups are tough. A few things are tough. It’s said.

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Jack Boissonneault had played in every Virginia Tech women’s lacrosse game through her junior year, a span that included 29 starts. She had scored 38 goals and added seven assists. The senior’s numbers pale in comparison to classmate Megan Will, who will finish as one of the top goal and point scorers ever for the Hokies.

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“I had already committed to Senegal and had my mind set that I was going to Senegal,” Boissonneault said. “Then it became one of the Hokies’ top players there, starting all 13 games on the back line so far this season (as of April 3).”

As part of a winter break class, Jack Boissonneault and a group of a dozen classmates took a trip to the Galapagos Islands (below), one of the most biologically diverse places in the world, and also to Ecuador’s Amazonian rainforest (above), where they experienced life while living in a rainforest.

Boissonneault’s life in ways that the Tech lacrosse player never could have imagined

Jack Boissonneault had played in every Virginia Tech women’s lacrosse game through her junior year, a span that included 29 starts. She had scored 38 goals and added seven assists. The senior’s numbers pale in comparison to classmate Megan Will, who will finish as one of the top goal and point scorers ever for the Hokies.

But that’s fine with Boissonneault, who, after playing three seasons as a middle, took a step back on the field to a defender position and has become one of the Hokies’ top players there, starting all 13 games on the back line so far this season (as of April 3).

That’s a role she might be a little more comfortable with, considering her future career plans once her Tech playing days end. Instead of stopping an opposing player from scoring a goal, she’ll be trying to protect the environment from the negative influences of humans on the ecosystems of planet Earth.

With that intent, Boissonneault, an environmental science major from Brooklin, Ontario, Canada, took a more unusual trip over the semester break, a trip that started on Dec. 26 and took her to the Galapagos Islands and Ecuador for more than two weeks.

“It was a course called Culture and Agriculture in Ecuador, Jack Boissonneault’s life in ways that the Tech lacrosse player never could have imagined

life-altering
experience
for
LACROSSE
PLAYER

A winter break trip to the Galapagos and to the Amazonian rainforest changed

Boissonneault filled her 80-page journal — front and back — almost completely.

“Throughout when we were there, we had group discussions at the end of each trip, and then we would write in these journals,” she said. “We carried these journals around, and they had prompts for us and we would write about them. I did it for school, but I would also just write things on my own. Anytime I had a chance to write, I would so that I wouldn’t forget.”

“I actually just got it back because the teacher was grading it. I did read it before this interview, and it’s just interesting to see what I thought before and after, and I feel it’s very emotional because, when I was there, I was in the moment. I just wrote exactly what I was feeling. So it’s very interesting to go back through and read it.”

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I haven’t completely decided what I want to do, but ultimately I want to find a job that involves traveling and implementing environmentally sustainable practices in developing countries,” Boissonneault said. “One of the things that we did when I went to the Dominican Republic was to go see about the sanitation and water-related issues that they had. While we were there, there was also an engineering group from Virginia Tech that was implementing a water treatment facility for their wastewater. So that was really cool to see. I know that there is a giant water crisis in the world right now, so that would be ideal to get some experience in that.”

For Americans, the thought of having the laps of luxury — running water, hot showers, cell phone and Internet service — might be the furthest thing from their minds when it comes to a winter semester break. It was nothing out of the ordinary for Boissonneault, though, other than being in a warmer climate.

“We have a cottage about eight hours north from where I live up in Northern Ontario,” she said. “And it doesn’t have electricity or running water that you can drink. You go to the bathroom in the outhouse, and there is a wood store. You wash your dishes by hand. There are no lights. So that is like our oasis. We love going there every summer and every other Christmas.

“At that time [at Christmas], it’s freezing cold. It’s probably minus-40 degrees Celsius, which is kind of ironic because my mom is allergic to the cold, but that’s where she grew up. So I think that just having that place to go and get away from society, or being isolated at this cabin ... it’s my favorite place to go.”

The cabin may be her favorite place to go, but the wonders she saw on her most recent trip sometimes took her breath away and gave her goose bumps. One of the assignments of the class was to carry around a journal, and the students were asked to write what they expected to see before heading to a certain area. Then students were to write about things while they were there and then reflect upon the experience.

From the negative influences of humans on the ecosystems of planet Earth.

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With that intent, Boissonneault, an environmental science major from Brooklin, Ontario, Canada, took a more unusual trip over the semester break, a trip that started on Dec. 26 and took her to the Galapagos Islands and Ecuador for more than two weeks.

“It was a course called Culture and Agriculture in Ecuador, which is originally where we were supposed to go, but with the Ebola [virus] crisis, they were nervous that the trip would be cancelled, so they drew up another destination, which just happened to be Ecuador.”

Boissonneault said. “They didn’t do the research every other Christmas.

“Being there, it's definitely not the same magnitude of impact as seeing it on a screen and actually seeing it,” she said.

Boissonneault filled her 80-page journal — front and back — almost completely.

“When I was there, I was feeling emotional because, after, and I feel it’s very interesting to see what I thought before and after, and I feel it’s very emotional because, when I was there, I was in the moment. I just wrote exactly what I was feeling. So it’s very interesting to go back through and read it.”

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Lacrosse Spotlight | Jack Boissonneault

Continued from page 43

you yourself … you really don’t get that whole body experience from seeing it on TV or seeing it in a magazine than when you are actually there."

The trip impacted her more than anything else to this point in her young life. It reaffirmed her career path, but more importantly, reaffirmed the way she wants to live her life.

Boissonneault answered a full array of questions in detailed fashion, and these give an idea of the depth and breadth of her experience over the winter break:

Q: What was your takeaway from this experience?

JB: “I think it reinforced that there is no other path that I would take for my future. Environmental science has a lot of opportunities, outdoor opportunities, and I don’t think I will ever be a person that sits at a desk. This just reinforced that this is what I want to do, and I just enjoyed it so much that I will go back to those places. I will change my lifestyle because I know what it is like in less-developed countries, and I want to make a difference. When I came back here, I made simple changes to my life just based on what I have seen, and I don’t think anyone can really understand what it’s like to live in an underdeveloped country unless you go there. I think that people should put in the effort to learn about other people’s lives, and I think that this trip definitely helped that for me.”

Q: What was your favorite part of the trip?

JB: “I think everybody would say the Galapagos was their favorite part of the trip, but for me, I think it was the Amazon. We went to this biodiversity station, and there are no tourists. In the Galapagos, it’s all tourists. The towns on all the islands cater to tourists even though they try to maintain the biodiversity. It was a lot more ‘touristic’ than I expected, so when we went to the Amazon, not just anyone gets to go there. There are just researchers and the people who are native to the forest but have been asked to work for the biodiversity station. So the kitchen staff, and the guides, who aren’t tour guides, but people who take the researchers and scientists out on the trails … I mean, if we didn’t have our guide, we would get lost, and you couldn’t go anywhere by yourself because everything looks the same. You would too percent get lost. So I think that the Amazon was my favorite because it was the most authentic experience … a place that is untouched by human influence, though there are some issues going on there because of the government is letting them drill for oil down there. But that was definitely my favorite part.”

Q: At any point, were you scared?

JB: “I was never scared, but I think that was a little naïve of me because, even though we were with guides and everything, there was poisonous stuff all over the jungle. If you stopped the wrong way and fell and touched something, you were bound to grab something that is spiky or poisonous and would be harmful to you. But nobody really had any terrible incidents by getting hurt or anything. One girl did get sick because she drank some water along the way, and she definitely got some bugs. In the Amazon, everything [animals] hides from you. So it’s obvious that they are not used to humans being around. I guess you don’t see very much because they are just as scared as you, so they run away. I guess I wasn’t really scared because I felt they were just as scared.”

Q: Did you have any moments that just took your breath away?

JB: “When we were in the Amazon, we went on a hike, and we went to this canopy tower. We climbed up this massive ladder that didn’t seem very sturdy. But when you got to the top, there were these wooden bridges that the people at the station had built themselves. We had harnesses on, and I climbed up this tree that had this steel ladder that was nailed to it. I went right up to the top, and I was looking over and I could see the Amazon for miles and miles and miles. It was like a picture I had seen in National Geographe, but you don’t get chills from looking at a picture in a magazine. It was like nothing I had ever seen before, and it’s just something so hard to tell someone what it was like.”

Q: Was it hard to come back to the States after this experience?

JB: “We definitely didn’t want to come back. It was really hard to settle back into your old ways. Things there were different. You couldn’t flush the toilet every time you went to the bathroom. You can’t flush the toilet paper down the toilet, so you get into this habit of stuff like that. You have to sterilize your water, or you have to wait for a blue water jug that you could get your water out of. When I came back, going to the bathroom and flushing, I had to get used to it. You kind of feel guilty, expecting a hot shower or drinking water wherever you go. A water fountain doesn’t exist in South America unless you are in the airport. Actually, it’s pretty funny. In the airport, there are signs on the door when you go into the stall that say flush your toilet paper down the toilet because anyone who is from there knows that you can’t do that. So it’s just funny to see that.

“Just feeling guilty of all the privileges you have in living in a developed country. The way they want to do, and I just enjoyed it so much that I just almost feel like you have to use them. And you really have to go out of your way to change, if you want to.”

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